

CLIMATE WARS:
A FICTIONAL APPROACH TO CLIMATE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

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Climate wars is a book that attempts to bridge the gap between those who speak the language of science, and those who don't. It is a linear collection of different stories to illuminate the existing and future climate crisis. It is cited based on the most relevant research from an inter-disciplinary field study to include: Climatology, Sociology, Social Ecology.

This book is intended to be accessible by readers from all backgrounds and serve as a launchpoint into climate science. It also serves as a primer for those with science backgrounds into how social movements struggle to change the world. These two communities need to talk to each other more if we seek an ecologically-just world.

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To Donald Trump, for making the building of a climate resistance movement that much easier.

To the climate movement for inspiration.

To the Mosquito Fleet, for resistance

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Introduction

Everything changed after Trump. It was such an impossibility. Until it was inevitable. Many don't remember it now, but the idea that a showman, a carnival barker, could become the most powerful man in the world, without some military coup or corrupt back-door deal, seemed less likely than hell freezing over. But the American people were sick and tired of being talked down too. They hated the elite. They could see that things were not alright, that America was changing rapidly and no politician was willing to tell them the truth. Then along came a member of the elite who didn't hide the hideousness of power. He embraced it. Used it like a lightsaber to strike down his foes. And fall they did. Dynasties that had survived so much turmoil were finally undone. And everything changed.

Asia

The North Koreans finally get the ability to hit back. Sometime around the end of Obama and the beginning of Trump, the regime perfected the Nodong 5 inter-continental ballistic missile. It had a range of 15,000 miles and could reach the West Coast between Los Angeles up to Vancouver BC. China was forced into a political situation upended by decades of support for the reclusive dictatorship of Kim Jong Un. While liberals in the Democratic party decried the US military pullback from the Korean peninsula during the early years of the Trump administration, North Korea never seemed to care which political party was in charge of "Imperialist America". The showdown with Japan has left lasting effects to this day. The world is lucky that we didn't come to a nuclear war. As it was hundreds of thousands died and the

regime is still alive and well, albeit having lost much more territory to the Chinese. Many of the northern prison camps, when Chinese troops “liberated” them, removed significant physical labor sources the government had used for years.

Long ago North Korea had made a decision to maintain political control within the workers party by force of arms. They saw conflict on the horizon, just as the world was exiting the cold war. They knew resource scarcity and had developed a brutal system to survive what would later be called “climate shocks” (the economic fallout after climate chaos). Their solution? Disconnect themselves from the global economy, keep everything within the regimes control and inside the state boundaries. No one allowed to leave. No outside media. A steady flow of propaganda and an externalized enemy. That’s how they survived the initial waves of economic global crisis that hit during the Trump presidency.

From the end of the cold war, certain forces within the United States struggled to find a replacement for the Soviet Union. A worthy adversary was necessary to sustain the military and scientific spending patterns that built the middle class following the end of hostilities with Japan and Germany. Without an enemy, what would be the purpose of all those weapon systems? While the west celebrated the “end of history” upon the dead carcass of state socialism, a greater struggle within the halls of capitalism foreshadowed a future no one was ready for. The binary thinking of the cold war led many in the defense analysis industry to believe China would become this new adversary. By the close of the twentieth century it had all the markings of a new superpower: growing birthrates, a major domestic production and consumption

market, increasing weapons expenditure's and stable political transitions. Most of all, the Chinese view of the world was a long one. Chinese civilization had survived since the time of the Roman Empire, passing down lessons and leadership as the rest of the world struggled through the dark ages. China was a logical competitor for the United States and every corner of the US defense industry viewed them as such. But that is not what happened. While China did experience some years of ten percent economic growth, their military prowess left much to be desired. With 9/11 in the United States, the military focus resettled on "terrorism" and the disjointed attacks led by decentralized religious extremists.

With Trump, the US brought its focus to bear upon China. His entire election campaign focused on the threat of China and its desire to steal American jobs. The Chinese, for all their faults possessed an ace in the hole. Their centralized government allowed them to change course rapidly when an outside threat was identified. While wary of the United States military adventures abroad by the middle of the Obama administration, China recognized the very real domestic threat of climate change. They had the twin problem of attempting to lift millions of their own people out of poverty, while avoiding the worst effects of climate catastrophe. Geographically the Chinese nation state was at severe risk of drought and pollution. The 2008 Olympics were a perfect example of this as Beijing shut down carbon outputs from cars and factories months before the opening ceremonies just to have a breathable space (CITATION 1).

Middle east

Increasingly dry conditions lead to mass starvation and conflict. Drought levels of unprecedented length caused Syria and Iraq to tear themselves apart sending millions of refugees streaming across borders. This migration pattern strains the European union and leads to further intervention from the United States and Russia. In a twist of fate, the relations between these two former super-powers improve during the trump years affording Russia the ability to build up its bases in the region and secure new routes for its pipeline dominated economy (CITATION 3).

Iraq has deteriorated into chaos following the collapse of the Mosul dam. It wasn't that Islamic state seized the Dam, although they did. The dam was never structurally sound. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers, long the heartbeat of civilization in the desert, were dammed in the 1950's in order to bring more predictability to water flows (CITATION 4). But the dam was never the highest priority. Saddam invaded Iran, and then Kuwait, draining much needed infrastructure money and equipment from the dam and into the war effort. Following the end of the first gulf war, the international community imposed sanctions upon Iraq and its infrastructure began to crumble. When the American's came back in 2003 they spent billions to repair Iraq. But the dam was unfixable. At best more cement could be jammed into the base of gypsum that rapidly eroded. It was a time bomb waiting to happen.

When the dam failed the Iraqi's blamed the Americans. It didn't matter that the State Department had been warning about this since the invasion and no one in Iraq wanted to hear it (CITATION 5).

A sixty-foot wave hit the city of Mosul, carrying people, unexploded ordinance,

livestock and buildings in its wake. Over one million people were killed in the first day. Scores of others suffered polluted water, destroyed livelihoods and spacial displacement. It destroyed the nation-state of Iraq. What was only dreamt of for generations became reality as Iran moved in. Bringing aid on military vehicles the neighboring Shia country was the quickest to react to the crisis, providing a caretaker role for the former Iraqi government. Fleeing officials in Baghdad were not welcomed back and the Trump administration refused to send more soldiers to help with the crisis. This effectively led to the Islamic union between Iran and Iraq.

European union

Under strain from climate refugees, technological innovation leading to job loss and the ossification of post-World War II political structures, the EU begins to come apart. Right wing populist governments sweep to success during the later parts of the twenty-teens led by France and Germany. Without any central leadership the Schengen agreement (open borders) becomes a symbol of what was lost from the imaginary golden years of the past (CITATION 6). Spain, Portugal and Greece never recover from the post-2008 economic banking crash and are abandoned by more stable political forces across the continent. The European Union comes apart amid an identity crisis of epic proportion.

Central/South America

What seemed like a rejection of dictators and strongmen and a rise of Bolivarian resistance comes crashing down after the death of Fidel Castro and the twin coups

overthrowing Evo Morales in Bolivia and Nicolas Madeiro in Venezuela. Powerful banking and tech/media industry leaders fuel and fund right wing resistance to what is perceived to be leftist anti-capitalist regimes throughout the continent. Storms and flooding sweep across Guatemala and Nicaragua with deforested regions hit especially hard. Mexico is hit with wave after wave of drought and crop loss increasing immigration attempts north towards the United States. Gang violence increases throughout the entire region as centralized state actors lose control over their populations.

Africa

With China buying up whatever oil reserves remained on the sub-continent, already scarce resources were plunged into a crisis (CITATION 7). Water wars spread from the horn southward collapsing governments that barely represented the people. Military dictatorships resume control and vast armies are raised to fight over the scraps. America's erstwhile military operations shrink and eventually are abandoned. European aid, once a sustaining force, dries up as columns of climate refugees reach Greek soil. Africa was once again on its own.

The Poles

The last summer with Arctic ice was in 2019. This passed with little fanfare among a global population continuously battered with bad news. It arrived seventy years ahead of prediction levels. Corporations threw silent board room parties as ships were able to make the Northwest passage crossing for the first time, cutting

millions of dollars off their bottom line. Polar bears slipped into oblivion along with the melting ice. The fresh water added to the ocean led to the first pulse, which greeted coastal communities with drastic sea level rise.

North America

The Trudeau experiment in Canada couldn't survive long by sitting on both sides of the fence. While they put a reasonable face on social issues, legalizing marijuana (effectively irrelevant in many places) and gay marriage, the economy was significantly run off of fossil fuels, primarily the tar sands of Alberta (CITATION 2). On his fourth day in office Trump used his executive pen to re-authorize the Keystone XL pipeline and the Dakota access pipeline. Environmentalists were demoralized. Having spent the previous eight years fighting these two projects and finally winning, they watched it all slip away with the stroke of a pen. Radicals who had claimed moral equivalency between the two major parties were shocked to their core and a scramble to identify the best way forward began. The liberals fell into depression. The radicals chose to fight. The right began to rise.

Leyla 2030

If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

-African proverb

Reality is what finally got them. In their arrogance they brought about the fall. It had all seemed so fast. The way the economy ground to a halt. How quickly the glaciers melted. The green had been so vast. The blue so full of life.

She started school with philosophy. Living on the west coast of Canada at the turn of the dead century. She thought education could lead to something. Not much need for that now. You can philosophize all you want and you are still living on a dead planet. She sat upon a rock overlooking Lake Garibaldi, what used to be a lake, and gazed through the mist. In this spot, if she positioned herself just right, she couldn't see the cooking fires from the refugee camp. Whistler had once been a home for rich vacationers hitting the slopes. Now only the tops of the twin peaks had any snow left. Water miners dotted the hills as ski lifts slowly collapsed into the rock.

She picked some nuts from her pack. Munching slowly she scanned the horizon looking for movement. There had been lights the night before and she had scaled the rocks to see what if any signs had been left. Scavengers would have moved through the area during the early morning. Picking up scraps. They always moved fast before the sun crested so you had to be alert. The sun was low on the horizon and the hazy smoke filled stratosphere was reflecting the last rays of today.

It had been so easy in retrospect. University had consisted of abstractly analyzing other people. Weighing decisions others had made in the past, judging them. Some scientists had spoken of this new world. Warned the industries and governments that things were

rapidly collapsing. That this world was unsustainable. Armageddon, they called it from their graves. But here she was, living it. There hadn't been a new radio contact for seven months. Not after that chopper landed and the camp tore them apart.

She'd heard stories from her dad, about the war, about how close humans were to chaos. Most people didn't have 1,000 bucks in their bank account. How could they have handled what happened? No money once the banks closed on a Friday and failed to open Monday. How could they have rationally navigated the future? What's a good decision look like if no one will join you?

It took three months for a local currency to emerge. It wasn't so much a barter system as redistribution. The rich got it the worst. Finally. They thought they could buy protection. Up until then, their money could buy them anything. They were on top of the world, and science didn't stand a chance against their wealth. Bailouts for banks and the fossil fuel industry had taught them they were safe. There was a belief someone was looking out for them. They were finally just like the rest of us: Alone.

Leyla stretched her feet out over the rock and began to put her socks on. Her big toe was working on a hole that could let her whole foot through. She had been slender, once. Rucksacks and daily fifteen-kilometer hikes had bent her body frame. Wiry and muscle-toned, she maneuvered her body with a purpose. She had no vices. Except tobacco. *They could still grow that.* She grinned as she shifted the homegrown chew in her lip. Spitting a big gooey gob that flew down the cliff-side and dropped into the lake. *Better get*

moving, she thought. Dinner was waiting.

Leyla had been from one of those rich families. Her gated community hadn't stopped a mob from climbing over their pseudo-French designed walls. The water shortages had made everyone angry. At eleven years old, she watched her neighbor Stewart sink his teeth into a crowbar wielded by someone in a Wal-Mart t-shirt. She'd only seen blood on the flex-tel before. Even after eleven years of blood that first image of violence was seared into her brain. It was early morning, the drought was in its seventh year and mandatory government water restrictions had proven heavily unpopular. A mob of people, remaining mysterious to this day, had gathered outside the compound demanding access to their private water reserve. Stewart, who had worked years for Monsanto before joining the compound movement, had been holding the hose over his grass lawn. Stewart hadn't seen the connection between their well-manicured gardens and starvation outside their walls. The Wal-Mart creep probably hadn't seen non-toxic water in months. The crowbar in his hands spewed Stewart's teeth across his front yard, fertilizing his rose bushes.

After the first major economic shocks many well-off families tried to buy security. Private military contractors were employed after they returned from the never ending War on Terror. She remembered how they used vicious dogs on protestors at a moments notice. The compounds featured concrete barriers with multiple checkpoints before entry. Vehicles were searched with high tech security scanners. Peace of mind purchased at the barrel of a gun. History had taught the rich that they could always buy protection and

retreat behind bigger walls. But people build ladders. And something different happened when the ATM's stopped spitting out money. For Stewart, who had always been a quiet American, that something "special" was a crowbar.

She was picking up speed now moving with a side to front hop-skip through the underbrush. She modeled her steps off the deer that used to roam this area. She moved fast through the woods for two hundred meters and then crouched down to a knee listening for signs of life. Venison had been one of her favorite meals when her father rarely cooked. Most of the deer had been wiped out by hunting in the final years of the economic crash. For a time at University she had been a Vegan. There weren't vegans around anymore. Mono-cultured soy had been utterly demolished by a virus in Brazil that spread across the globe causing mass starvation for diets that had shifted to soy products. With the rash of gluten allergies among the camps most people lived off a diet of greens, legumes and whatever meat could be hunted. She had changed her diet to one based on local foods and meat found a place for her. The amount of energy she felt after the switch surprised her. After the initial supermarket rush took all that was left, the entire Cascadia region feasted on the last generation of white tail deer. Now, Leyla was the closest thing left in these woods.

The mob didn't stop with killing Stewart. They weren't prepared for the opulence of the compound. Her neighbors had prided themselves on not giving up the imagery of wealth. This served to only provoke the worst possible behavior from those who stormed their walls. Moving from house to house they looted, stole and burned everything they came

across. If they couldn't live like kings than no one would be allowed to. Leyla barely made it out before her front door was busted in.

There were ten of them. Mercenaries. Kitted up in various gear they had stolen on their journey. Five shotguns and two rifles plus a couple knives. No telling how much ammo. Eight of the Mercenaries' were around the fire. The other two were patrolling the perimeter. These men were new to the area. No women. Not from the refugee camp down the riverbed near what used to be Vancouver. They wore red kefiyah's around their necks with no distinguishing marks. There was no chance of survival if they saw her. Probably take her equipment and kill her. Or worse. She felt her heartbeat climbing up her throat and she muffled the urge to vomit. The merc's were hugging the dried-up streambed that used to flood the lake. They were talking in low voices. Leyla knew she must backtrack around the ridgeline. Another five kilometers would be added to her journey. And she didn't know that area very well. Or she could go through the brush but that would be too loud for sure. Slowly she reversed her steps until she was far enough away to begin gliding again. The ground was soft and made for good running. She covered the four miles in 20 minutes. Thoughts of dinner took over her mind until the smell of turkey wafted through her nostrils. The smell of bird soon became cordite and burnt hair. She gagged as she rounded a large Douglas fir.

The helicopter was in two primary pieces, spread thirty meters apart. Supplies and equipment were lodged into the mud creating a sense of rupture with the landscape. Dark shapes protruded from the soil. The shadows of the last sun's rays rose like a nightmare

from her childhood. She knelt and flipped her bag around to the front, digging for her night-vision glasses. The green translucent screen flooded the area eerie green. Some of the shapes had recently been alive. She began to check the bodies for signs of life. The pilot was missing his legs. The helicopters rotors had clipped the ground during the crash and ripped the aircraft in half. The Co-pilot didn't have external wounds except for his crushed legs. He had probably sustained internal injuries and bled to death. The crew chief's body had been thrown from the bird and had a broken neck. Another two lay dead, their eyes open and searching. A fifth man was dressed not in military garb but in a corporate suit. No one had been through the crash site yet. This must have been the light she had seen the previous night. How had the scav's missed this? Didn't they have thermal heat sensors to find this stuff? Time was now itching up her spine like the first colors of an acid trip gone bad. She couldn't carry everything. She began to strip the bodies of anything worth keeping. There was no way of knowing if any of it would remain if she returned to the site in the morning. Triaging equipment, she threw magazines and ammo into a satchel that the crew chief wouldn't mind giving up. She counted as she went: Five Night Vision Goggles. Twenty-two 5.56 magazine's. LRRP rations and trauma packs. It was dark now. Even through the night vision, the moons ebbing provided little light for her eyes. She was about to leave but something pulled at her. Something was in the back of the aircraft. She needed to leave but it drew her steps toward the ruptured craft. The bottom of the copter hung along two large branches barely above her head. Grabbing twisted metal, she hauled herself up into the storage section. Bottles of water and paper were strewn about the cabin, sticky with blood and hydraulic fluid. A voice in her head guided her towards the flip-down medevac seat. That's where

she found it. Found what would change everything.

Dad had always left old military equipment around. Memories flooded back as she rifled through files that looked classified. *Fuck classified, this stuff is radioactive*, she thought. Only some of it was in English, the rest was in multiple languages and digital code. How had no one come here yet? Wouldn't those who lost the helicopter come looking for it? How long did she have before "company" came crashing down like a bad uncle's visit during thanksgiving? Her internal clock was ticking. She had to get as far away from this scene of death as she could. She stuffed what looked like documents on "safe zones" and "detention camps" into a duffel she cinched tight over her shoulder. Buzzing with excitement she dropped into the darkness and landed in a crouch. Her experienced ears opened for the expected sound of boots and shouting and bright lights bearing down on her. She heard nothing but the beating in her chest as she sprinted into the woods.

Four hours later

A council meeting had been called. These were not rare but they didn't happen every week either. Part of it was to talk about the helicopter. More of it was the red kefiyahs she had seen on her way back. Smoke from cooking fires permeated the air. To protect from seeing the camp from far away, the smoke was redirected back under the foundation of the living structures. This helped to keep homes warm but left everyone's clothing smelling like last night's dinner. Roast turkey thrust itself into her nostrils as she moved among the structures towards the fire. The wind was whipping the fire and flames licked at the sky out of the pit. A major change from yesterday. They had all become more

accustomed to these sudden weather changes. Temperature swings of fifty degrees within a day were now normal. Each house was circular and more or less a collective living structure. Children decorated the walls with chalk, which warped the images after it rained. Smiley faces became sinister. But change was a part of life, and the murals helped everyone remember that. There was a sharpness to the air, as if the earth was shifting. The community spoke less. Looked into each other's eyes more. There were 100 or so members of this community. They were warriors. They knew what it meant to be both soldier and refugee. To have traversed many borders, real and imagined. Though partially a para-military force there was no cohesion in dress. A boy might wear a dress, a girl could be found in children's shirts or tailored suit coat. The thing most held in common was pockets. Everyone had multiple pockets sewn into their pants or tops with various tools attached. Some of the younger twenty-something's, the primary foot soldiers and protectors of the community, wore military style webbing with pistol ammo. Most of them had once been Americans. Once. Before the fall. Now The United States, for all intents and purposes, was dead. It still "existed" in the form of the former colonial southern states as far north as Virginia. Everything north and west of that had split off into bioregions. Or had become massive devastation zones like the former city of Chicago. British Columbia was a mesh of small bands and the remnants of fossil fuel and logging infrastructure. Little centralized control had left the poor to fend for themselves and those with power attempt to increase it. Leyla raised the drumstick to her mouth and took the final bite, wiping her hands on her rough re-sewn pant legs. The meeting was starting.

The great fire swelled and sparks climbed towards the darkness. The stars looked as if they were straining to hear the impending conversation. Small talk was exchanged, everyone avoiding the reason they gathered together tonight. Information traveled quickly. At one time there had to be a firewall between the underground radicals and above ground organizers. That was less important now. They didn't live in urban areas and state repression had taken different forms. The struggle had become much more localized. Their survival was based on protecting what was left. Any species not wiped out had a chance to thrive one day again. All they needed was a chance. There were no more prayers to ethereal beings. Every survivor had seen what God had done to America. All discussions of this magnitude began with recognition of those who had gone before. Those who had suffered and struggled. Those who were real. Mistakes and weaknesses and all. They did not want martyrs or heroes. Only to remember. One person would be named and a story told. The words would be quietly repeated through the gathering like a wave rippling along the rocks ashore. The council of elders, all six of them, approached the fire. They began to speak. She strained forward, their energy drawing her close like a yoyo returning to its home. The world as she knew it came to an end.

Greg 2018

A starving man does not plant crops, anymore than a drowning woman builds a raft.

-Unknown

Greg stood on the floor of the mobile stock exchange and watched his life come

to an end. It had been so easy not to think about. Earth, a finite ball of oxygen and life. All of it, intricately tied together, dependent on each other. Capitalism, a system of economics centered on the consumption of products and commodifying everything. Trees, plants, the air and even human genomes. At the Chicago school of Economics he had learned the Greek root for Eco. It meant home. Economics was the management of home. And now over two hundred years of mismanagement was playing out before him. The Nikkei, Japan's stock exchange, had closed down ten percent. The earthquake in northern China had destroyed the city of Shenshing a week ago. A city with no people living in it (CITATION 1). The earthquake had laid bare how ridiculous it all was. After the great recession of 2008, China was able to continue economic growth only by playing the same old game with their housing construction. No jobs for work? Build cities. No people can afford them? No problem. Until the beauty that is Father-market got a major lesson from mother-earth. Investors immediately pulled stocks from all main Chinese construction firms. This fear ran through proposed construction projects like electricity in an execution chair. The Dow had lost 4,000 points in the last hour. Other traders had already left, most just sat at their computer consoles. Heads in hands and disbelief in their faces. *How did they not see this coming?*

He hadn't wanted this life. His sister had thrown a fit at graduation when he told her he would be going to Wall Street. She had held out hope he would join the racial justice movement and move out to San Francisco with her. He had avoided that conversation till the last minute. "Most likely to save Africa" announced his University graduation award. As if Africa needed more western "saviors". He had taken a job at a

smaller firm, not Goldman Sachs or anything! But sis would have none of it. If he went home for the holidays she wouldn't be there, "Just for a couple years" he had said. "I can pay off some of the family bills and help people out". His sister had cried. He hadn't seen her since graduation. The job was great the first year. Until he didn't wear a condom that one night. Eliza, he learned the morning of the pregnancy test, was Catholic. Not that it mattered. After Roe V. Wade was overturned by the new Supreme Court the government forced them to keep the baby. His parents, also Catholic, insisted that he help to raise it and try to make the marriage work. That had lasted a few months. So he kept the job. It kept him up at night. A steady diet of sleeping pills and Vicodin helped him through the weekends when he couldn't bury himself in work. They bought a house in Brooklyn that was protected by the new flood barriers. They bought a baby carriage.

The Dow Jones had reached a 5,000-point drop. President Trump hadn't said a word publicly since visiting the troops in Syria last week. Congress was out of session, not that they did much when they were in Washington. Lobbyists wrote all the bills these days anyway. Politicians had become actors reciting lines written by the directors and puppet masters of Wall Street.

Last night the lights had been on in the top levels of all the corporate firms in New York. He had stayed in the city. Waiting for the ball to drop. Had they been destroying evidence? Did the American people know what they did on a daily basis? Nestle had just announced insolvency. They had water-supply contracts for those new Chinese "cities" from the Selenga River in Mongolia(CITATION 2). Reports were

coming in that none of the contracts had been legitimate with Nestle taking the money and making a huge profit. They had been starving the people of Mongolia and screwing the Chinese government of its promised water supply. Reports were coming in of bombs and gunfire in Ulaanbaatar as rebels united against the dam projects rose up. Within forty-eight hours of the earthquake rebel forces had stormed the Nestle headquarters in the capital and began shooting people. Gunmen stalked floor to floor pumping rounds into corporate leaders. In the process of creating the dams, nestle had pushed the Mongolian government to close access to fresh water to over a million people. Multiple cities were shuttered and refugees forced away from the land as the water dried up. Clearly the rebels disagreed with this decision. Mongolian police forces were slow to respond and chaos seemed to be the common thread. Financially, any stock associated with Nestle was dropping like a meteor through the atmosphere.

Greg stood silently staring at the numbers as they ticked away like time on the scoreboard of a football game he was about to lose. He needed to get out of there. He had to wipe his hard drive. Someone would want access to the trades he did.

Karen had worked for him since the first year. They had been hired at the same time and partnered together when credit default swaps became acceptable again. Goldman had a bad history with credit default swaps dating to the middle Bush administration circa 2005. So, they created a subsidiary for Excessive Spending Re-Acquisition or ESR. At twenty-three Greg was its lead “operator”. *But they had told me it wouldn’t happen again! There was supposed to be oversight!* He had trusted his boss and

the research committee when they presented the ESR plans. How was that his fault? His palms were sweating and he knew he had to get Karen out of there along with himself. Get off the ship. He stepped onto the second floor and turned down the hallway towards his office. Something was wrong. His door was closed. Karen never closed the door. He knocked. She kept a change of clothes in the office; maybe she just needed to change quickly. No response. His hands clenched the handle and sweatily slid off. Staff were rushing up and down the hallway. Paper littered the floor. The door was locked. That's when he began acting strange. Hungrily searching around for something his eyes landed on a fire extinguisher. Every action movie he had seen coursed through his neurons as he smashed the glass with his elbow. Rushing back he could only act. Raising the extinguisher he brought it down on the handle separating it from the door. The door creaked and opened. Something was blocking it. He used his shoulder like a battering ram. *Why would she lock the door?*

“Karen!” he cried out. *What the fuck was behind this door?* Bruising his shoulder he was able to open it enough to slip his head through the crack. Karen’s body was blocking it from opening further. There was dried blood around her hands and pooled across the floor as if she had spilled something. He slipped on something and fell backwards. His breathing was rapid and he was sputtering words with no meaning. He let out a whine that sounded like a question and a cry at the same time. *Fuck. Fuck me! Why me? Why does this have to happen to me? What did I do to deserve this?* His hands and pants were covered in blood. A warm and wet sensation grew in his crotch and began running down his leg.

Maybe it was the crisis currently cascading through the country. Maybe it was because he wasn't on the tenth floor and couldn't jump. Or maybe it was the slow decay of American culture that had commodified everything including love. Everyone was too wrapped up in their own world to notice his crying. He was trying to wipe the tears from his face but only smudging blood onto his cheeks. They were too concerned with themselves. Karen had loved her job. She had used it to support a deadbeat husband and their two kids from his previous marriage. She lived for her job. She had known it was all over. Jail. Or worse. *Probably worse*, he thought as he picked himself up from the floor and pushed the door closed. *I'm not going to jail. Especially not in China. I have to get out of here!*

The shock hadn't settled into the rest of the ship. The liberty ship had multiple vessels ranging from helicopters to high-speed boats. He was almost running down the side stairwell towards the internal docking section. He brushed past some unusually amped up security contractors and showed his pass before entering the sealed hanger. Reaching for the keys he jumped into a vintage Sea Ray and aimed it towards the Macao mainland. If he could just make it to the airport he would be ok.

The storm surge barriers newly installed with the increased flooding flew by as he topped his speed out at 40 knots. His slicked back hair flowed behind him and bounced with the waves. There was a dock near the airport and he knew he could leave the boat there. He rounded the curve of fisherman's wharf and slowed towards the dock still

causing a large wake to precede his vessel. As soon as he was close he leapt from the port side onto the dock throwing a line to the nearest Chinese looking man he could find. They were yelling at him, probably about the wake, he hadn't even shut off engine, but he ignored them and raced up the dock. Flagging a cab he jumped in showing a large roll of cash to the driver. "Get me to the airport in five minutes and you get this!" The car shot forward and Greg lurched for the seatbelt. He pulled out his phone to get an update on the market. The Nikkei was crashing. *This could take down the whole economy*, he thought. He closed his eyes and took a deep, husky breath. *I just have to make it through security and I will be safe*". Casinos sped by the window.

In the late 1500s the Portuguese empire began using Macao as a trading base of operations for its larger imperial plans. They quickly maneuvered themselves into the sole possessors of the territory and forced the regional government to hand over administration to them. It remained this way until the final year of the twentieth century. When the Portuguese flag was finally taken down it had flown for over four hundred years. It was the last European colony to fall in Asia (CITATION 5).

Following provisional independence Macao maintained its capitalistic approach, building casinos and becoming the "Las Vegas" of China. It served as a beachhead for capitalism on the mainland and served as a getaway for the new Chinese urban elite. It also became a major trading center for business entrepreneurs from around the world. The liberty ship came to its water's in 2018 in order to take advantage of lax corporate tax structure. As long as the ship was ten miles from the Macao coastline, it paid no taxes.

Any trades done through the ship's mega-computer essentially took place in international water's. This is how Greg was able to create his algorithm that was taking down economies throughout Asia without any government oversight.

The airport was packed like sardines in a can. Throngs of people were having the same idea as Greg. He tossed the wad of cash over the driver's seat and jumped out, his passport in one hand, laptop bag in the other. Cars were being abandoned. The airport sat on reclaimed land made of garbage and waste jutting out into the ocean. The main entrance was two levels with arrivals on the bottom and departures on top. He made a quick choice, seeing the seething crowd in front of him, to make a stab at the arrivals gate. No one was trying to get into Macao at the moment. The police were nowhere to be seen on this level. Garbage and abandoned luggage strewn about the front gates as he raced towards the escalator. Running up the steps his Franceschetti shoe tip tripped on the final step and his computer bag went flying forward and skittered away from the escalator as he hit the floor. Bruised knees and ego, he hauled himself to his feet, looked around to see the Macao airlines booth line exceed both the turnstiles and the building itself, snaking out to the traffic lines of new refugees. He didn't even have a ticket. Pulling for his phone he tried to sign in on the airline website. It was crashed. Probably too many people attempting to leave. Eyeing the people in line he had an idea, *maybe he could bribe his way out*. Reaching into his bag he pulled out an envelope with cash and picked out a business man who had just checked his bag. Walking briskly towards him, Greg forced a smile to his face.

'Excuse me sir, I need to be on that plane and I am willing to pay you triple what that

'cost' Greg said with barely restrained anxiety.

The man turned and looking him up and down asked, 'Where is it you think I am flying too?'

'Doesn't matter I just need to get out of Macao, can we exchange tickets? Its very important that I get on that plane.'

The man sighed and looked back at the line, his checked bag ready to be put on the conveyor belt. 'Make it five thousand and I will do it'.

Greg made it through security with his special screening ID. The guards were wary of him but he was now in the lounge, awaiting the plane. It departed in thirty minutes. Taiwan. It wasn't his ideal location but at least he would get out of Macao. Screens of television banks covered the walls and were replaying horrifying numbers with graphs of lines falling off of cliffs. He nervously fidgeted with his computer strap. He was stuck in the middle of the word day, and for the first time in as long as he could remember, he had nothing to do. No algorithms to write, no money to be made. As he looked around the room, everyone was staring at him. A woman with a small child was clothing him close but her eyes bore into his head. He blinked and looked away; a bald man of Chinese descent was also watching his movements. That's when he saw it. His face. On every single television. He was surrounded by it. Images of him on vacation, in New York at the financial district, on his yacht. And then there it was. The algorithm. Or a cheap imitation of it. There was a large man coming towards him. He couldn't hear the television, his head was pounding.

'Aren't you the man on the Vid screens?' asked the large white man. 'Yea, yea you are that

son of a bitch, you took everything! You're the reason I have to leave!"

The man swung a small handbag and hit Greg in the jaw with enough force to throw him from his seat. He reached for his face but the man's shoe caught him in the neck. Greg choked as his larynx ceased to function. He tried to get to his feet. Another man was there. He began to kick him. Greg was surrounded. More and more travelers were ringing him, refugees trying to escape the damage he had done to their lives. Blow after blow, from fists and feet, someone stepped hard on his ankle, breaking it. He saw the airport police through glassy eyes turn around and walk through the entry doors, leaving him to his fate. He was bleeding, coughing to breathe and before he died, he thought of his sister, of how things could have been different.

Fox News January 2019

In the fall of 2018 the Supreme Court heard a case that came to be known as *State of Alabama versus Sam Harris*. It concerned blasphemy laws made by the noted author Sam Harris about certain elected officials in Alabama and their potential violation of religious restrictions in state institutions. The elected legislature and Governor's office had continued to direct funds towards public education programs that taught Christian Science in the classroom. This led to the "theory of evolution" as well as "climate change" being removed from textbooks. Despite a public outcry the Trump administration, under the leadership of Vice President Pence, gave covert support to this process. Sam Harris, during a speaking tour in Alabama to promote his new book, sharply criticized the state for its refusal to accept what he claimed was "settled science". The state of Alabama then sued him. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court.

The court, found once again that the First Amendment protects critique of public officials.

“Welcome to *The Sting!* with Max Peters!” (applause) “News is grim tonight with the violent deaths of ten people in Washington DC including the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Roberts and associate justice Anthony Kennedy.

(Introduction to the show as) The American flag flaps back and forth with different images of conflict flow across the screen. Americans shooting at Syrians. Anti-American protests in Saudi Arabia. Massive storm surges of water off some unknown coastline. Out of the chaos is the calm face of Max Peter’s sitting at his desk.

Max- Welcome to *The Sting*. As most of you know the first successful attempt on the life of a Supreme Court Justice has been carried out.. Justice Anthony Kennedy, a noted liberal, and Chief Justice John Roberts were killed in a heinous attack. A bomb, it looks like Syria here”

The screen shifts to initial distant view of smoke on a crowded street of Washington DC.
Max- now you can see the smoke there from about a mile away, thanks to our fox-cam brought to you by Starbucks. Our people were there on the ground, combat style, to bring you this new front in the culture war. I don’t want to say it, but this is the failure of the Obama Administration. They could have appointed more American justices while he was President. Kagan and Sotomayor, those lesbians, could have avoided this. Whoever the terrorists are, either Muslim fundamentalists or environmental crazies, the court could have supported the foundations of this country and taken the smirk off that leftist Sam

Harris's face. I'm not excusing violence. I deplore it. I'm just raising the fact that actions have consequences, you let these crazies get their way, whether the enviro-fascists, fem-nazi's or anarchists and this is the world you get. This is what happens. Ok, now if you have children in the room, this is the time to take them out. We have exclusive video from the scene of the bombing.

Max begins to get more intense as the video moves to full screen. It was a home video of an apartment. Sounds of rain coming down on the top floor. Max's voice in the background- "As you can see its an apartment of some sort and reports said that gunfire preceded the bomb.." POP! POP! POP! He was interrupted by automatic gunfire and the video began to jerk around. The sound of a man's heavy breathing and the camera refocused out the window and down the street. A convoy of vehicles was speeding towards the screen; the video was clearly taken from a balcony window.

Improvised explosive devices or IED's are a military acronym for a homemade bomb, not "legitimately" manufactured by Lockheed Martin or General Electric. Generally you have 3 main parts: The bomb, which is a standard dumb bomb ranging from 100-2000 pounds is coupled with a trigger which receives the go-signal from a transmitter, a car alarm, cell phone, garage door opener. Originating in the Irish resistance to British control, they were popularized by the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. The world came to fear them when they were used in Iraq to psychologically devastate the American occupation. By 2017 they had accounted for over 60% of American deaths (CITATION). They are usually buried next to roads in sabotage cans or bags of garbage for concealment. When

the enemy target is 5-7 meters away from your roadside marker you push the button and get the hell out of there. The signal activates a detonation device and the Semtex explodes providing the larger bomb its fuel.

There are several things that can kill you from an IED. As the bomb explodes a shockwave knocks out windows, blows out eardrums and throws anything close into the air. Then shrapnel flies outward penetrating flesh and ripping it apart shortly followed by a fireball that can burn up to 5,000 degrees. (CITATION) Very deadly. Anyone can download an army field manual to learn how to make one themselves. Evidently someone did.

The screen was dark. Max- “Oh god”. A bright flash had eclipsed the street just as the middle car had reached the bottom of the screen. Max- “Ladies and gentlemen, this is a despicable act of terror. We have only just begun to heal from the Obama tragedy and get back to traditional American values. Today the Trump administration is faced with terror as its number one priority. After pulling the pressure off of Muslim fundamentalists in the Middle East thanks to comrade Obama, this is what we face”.

His face was getting red showing an increasing rage. The fleshy part of his throat waddled like a turkey. The Camera panned back to reveal guests on the show.

Max-Joining us for analysis and reactions is Bruce Dickerson, distinguished author of more than three books including *Empire and its heroes*, where he showed us that colonial

governments did lots of good for their subjects. Thank you for being here.

Bruce- Great to be back Max.

Max- ..and next to me now is Elaine Bolter, a ferocious culture warrior, and author of numerous books including *Just kill yourself now: liberals and their desire to make pansies of us all*. Good to have you here Elaine.

Anne- Great. Just really great to be here Max (Her voice was eager, like a velociraptor that can smell blood).

Max- What do you think of all this? Now obviously, we don't have all the facts, and even if we did we haven't talked with many people on the ground (he was rushing through preliminaries) but..

Bruce- Well. You can see the utter hatred towards the freedom and benevolence of the United States. This is a democracy, and thus should respect the rule of law. If I were a terrorist I would pick a better target than the Supreme Court. With President Trump, it's just going to bring in new Justices who are tougher on terror. This was a stupid move, plain and simple. This is a last gasp of terror from the war in Syria, nothing more.

Elaine- this is what the liberals want!! Obama cut the defense of this nation and now we are under attack again. Democrats should be tried for crimes against America. Obama

was so concerned with men being able to sleep with other men that he didn't care at all about terror.

The temperature in the room had dramatically risen. Bruce was leaning back in his chair and letting the politicos handle this one.

Max- now lets be fair here. Obama did order the Bin Laden mission and put lots of money into defense spending. And Donald Trump has been in office now for some time

Elaine- Yea, most of that went into letting the fags marry and trying to take our guns. He pulled out of Iraq and look at it now! The country is basically another mullah run Islamo-Fascist regime. Talk about creating enemies!

Her anger spilled over the room through the video screens across America.

Max- and what about you Mr. Ferguson?

He looked calm in the midst as though he was mediating a crisis of lesser beings.

Just as Max was about to go into a special segment the sounds of yelling could be heard in the background. Max turns his head and the camera pans back. His face turns ashen and his big eyes grow even larger. His hands fly up as a hail of bullets hit his midsection sending blood spurting out his back and onto the green screen. The camera swivels to the

left as Elaine and Bruce shoot from their chairs. Elaine tries to make a run for it and just before she reaches the edge of the camera she is cut down, her body jerking with each round's impact into her sclerotic frame. Bruce is on his knees with his hands slightly raised; his body shaking and the high definition cameras capture the sweat and tears streaming from his face. There is yelling, a voice and then into the screen walks a man dressed in black military gear and an assault rifle. His face is clothed in a balaclava. Bruce is heard pleading, the man walks to him slowly, deliberately and raises the rifle to his face, pulls the trigger and a single round drives straight through Bruce's brain throwing him backward into the desk. His face explodes brains across the mahogany desk that has served as a pulpit for Max Peter's shortened career. The balaclava man turns, walks toward the camera, reaches into his pocket and produces a single piece of paper. He begins to read.

PFJ 2019 May 1st

Email

To: CNN, MSNBC, FOX, Reuters, New York Times, Washington Post, LA Times,

Dallas Morning News

From: Paladins for Justice

Today God has spoken. Our Father is proud. Today the Lords word has been done. Brave soldiers from Gods own army, Paladins for Justice, have struck a major blow against the enemies of faith. Believers, rejoice! The time is at hand to fight for your God.

You will recall the recent Supreme Court decision, *State of Alabama versus Sam Harris*. The blasphemous Sam Harris refused to teach Gods law and the ACLU sued the Christian government of Alabama. God gives us the free will to hang ourselves. He also teaches us to take justice into our own hands. Today we have done this. Chief justice John Roberts and Anthony Kennedy are dead. The rest of the court has learned that God watches their decisions. America has learned a great lesson about defying Gods word. Robert's, who until this morning considered himself a Christian, manipulated you with his goals of power and legacy over his obligation to God. Anthony Kennedy has long deserved a bullet. Today after leaving the courtroom, several of our dedicated brothers brought our crusade to American “justice”. The video you have now all seen shows their car being hit with a bomb. We can operate anywhere and can strike anytime. This country will be subservient to God or it will not exist. We have done this after the inauguration to show our power. God’s justice is infinite. We have carried out his word. Let this be the first salvo in a global cleansing of non-believers and heretics. All of you who deny the glory of a Christian God REPENT! Muslims, Gays, Hindus and especially those who twist the word of God under the guise of Christianity. You all will feel our wrath.

PFJ

Dr. Carter James 2018

Santa Fe New Mexico Los Alamos National laboratory for space and earth science

Dr. Carter James sits in his hermetically sealed work-study and plays with the end of his

mustache. He has worked on climate change his entire life. He came to the work out of accident. His childhood was full of hiking outdoors, kayaking the ocean and generally enjoying the beauty the world had to offer. It wasn't political at first. Even Exxon did some of the first climate research (Citation 1). Until their threatened profits made it political. They made science a partisan issue. Those who believed in math, and those who didn't. No one ever disputed gravity when they got on their private planes created from the massive mineral wealth they accumulated from drilling. Dr. James was a pragmatist. He never dealt in utopias. According to Thomas Moore who invented the term in 1516, Utopia referred to "no place" that is, *not an actual or possible place that does or could ever exist*. It wasn't real. James was interested in what worked. Compromise. Messy-ness. If it took people being stretched beyond their level of comfort he was very interested. Science to him was a process of working out problems with others. Someone came up with a theory. They put it into action and it was tested in the real world. The first time it fails, then you know it isn't true. Science, to him, was a religion that followed through on its predictions. And was honest when they were wrong. In the scientific method you must put all your information into the public eye so that others can examine it. To try and find flaws in the theory. This is how we trust a hulk of metal and a human to get us from Seattle to Nashville in three hours and minimal jet lag. This is how we have number two pencils and fighter jets, plush chairs and walking boxes. He kept things very simple. His office had only what he needed in it. Only what was necessary.

The computer screen in front of him showed the latest public attacks against his credibility. The first line was an order to appear for a grand jury sent to him by his lawyer. He clicked on it.

Dear Mr. Hastings

I hope this email finds you well. As you know on the 4th of next month you are to appear in the district court of Virginia pending a grand jury. We have no further information on the subject aside from what has been speculated in the news. During your appearance you will be alone in a room with the Judge, prosecutor and jury. I will not be present. If you wish to have my council you will have to leave the room and go to the atrium where I will be waiting. You may ask me the question and I will give you feedback. You may then return to the Grand Jury room and answer the prosecutor or judge's question. Remember, you have the right to not incriminate yourself. You have the right to remain silent and request contact with your lawyer at any time. The judge has the right to refuse these requests. The judge can also hold you in contempt for failing to answer the questions. If you are held in contempt than you may be placed in prison for a length not to exceed eighteen months. Please direct any questions you have until our next in-person meeting on the third of next month.

Sincerely,

Jenine

Dr. Carter James

Dr. James snorted at the email. Contempt?! To hold science in contempt for helping an investigation into corporate cover-ups? He knew it was serious this time. It was one thing

back in the Bush years for climate denial to be an opinion that people had. Now the legal system was being used by the Trump administration to punish scientists for doing their jobs. They wanted the science community to take their stethoscope off the heart of the earth. Watch it die in front of them and do nothing. Well, he wasn't going to put up with this. If they were going to take him down then he would not go quietly.

He switched screens and pulled up his YOUTUBE account. He reached his hand forward to adjust the desktop microphone and noticed it was shaking with fear. A voice inside his head, *if you do this its over. No deniability. Obstruction of justice.* He waved away the thoughts and turned on the mic. A camera in the computer turned on and his face suddenly filled the screen. Clicking on the recorder he made the decision to tell the story.

He realized early on that there was a disconnect between what scientists were saying and what the public came to believe. He began speaking to high schools and business roundtables, hawking his ideas about climate change to the community. On-the-ground education. Personalize it. Make it real for humans. He found that people would worry about the climate but the spectrum of worries: War, jobs, food, housing were often more prevalent and in their faces. He had to find a way to make climate change something that people worked at every day. A true revolution of the mind that would have far lasting implications if enacted. If the world failed to implement this revolution, they were looking at extinction. His motto was “we can’t stop the weather, but at least we can prepare for it”.

"Good morning everyone. This may be the last time I speak to you for some time. I want to tell you how we got here. How a published scientist like myself could be brought to the brink of financial ruin by this administration." He can see in his reflection that he is nervous. He glances away, clears his throat, adjusts his glasses and looks back into the camera.

"I received a final notice today for my appearance at a grand jury trial. This trial is a sham. It is intended to intimidate and harass members of the science community for telling the truth about the Exxon-Mobil Corporation. Sometime in the 1960s Exxon began studying carbon concentrations in the ocean's and atmosphere. What they found was surprising. What they did with it was not."

He reaches to his desk and for a moment his head slides out of the camera frame. As he returns he is holding a file with papers on it. He slides it open and pulls out the top paper. Emblazoned along the top is the Exxon logo.

"In the 1980s Exxon scientists confirmed the scientific consensus that greenhouse gases or CO₂ emitted by human civilization was warming the atmosphere and the oceans. They also confirmed that if massive reductions were not undertaken, disastrous effects to the climate system and ultimately the human economy of life would result. In short, either we stop emitting or we destroy life as we know it on this planet."

His eyes are getting narrower as he gets angrier.

"They then made a business decision. Hide the evidence. Deny a consensus. And any

chance you get tell people there is "uncertainty". It was straight out of the big tobacco playbook ladies and gentlemen. In fact, they actually hired the same lawyers and experts who told us cigarettes didn't cause cancer (CITATION 3).

For over ten thousand years we have had a relatively stable climate. This has led to the flourishing of human civilization. The annual temperature fluctuations have remained within one degree Celsius. If that changes, everything we call 'normal' will fly out the window. We are changing the temperature of the planet and we already see mass die-offs, civil wars, refugees and floods. It's happening now folks. And these companies, Exxon in particular, have been lying to us and hiding the evidence."

His hands were moving fast and he was leaning in to the television.

"Now you might say, 'we didn't know we were causing these problems' but we have the papers. We have the documents written by the employees of Exxon, talking about how to pull the wool over our eyes. If anyone is directly responsible for the greatest single threat in human history to our society, it is them."

He leans back, slowly raises his left hand to his glasses, removes them as if to clean them but returns them to his face. He speaks slowly into the screen.

"We are not the first species on this planet to change the climate. Cyanobacteria led to one of the mass extinctions (Citation 2). The difference, the uniqueness of this change is our self-awareness. Our very knowledge of the problem is the same thing that created the problem. Earth is in our hands and we don't know what we are doing. I understand the desire to bury our heads in the sand. I wish more than anything this were not our problem

to solve. Our domain of influence is wider than our domain of agency. This is our world war now. This is our moonshot. Scientists must speak out and I call on you today, the students of science, those who put us upon the moon, who gave us penicillin, who taught us our limits and then went on to break them. I call on all who wish to build a better world. We must first rescue this one."

As he clicked off the recording, there was a pang in his chest. Not painful, but the kind you get when emotion overflows from your brain like a fractured dam. The kind you only get when you exhausted everything and come through the other side. For the first time in many years, Dr. Carter James smiled.

There was no knock on the door. There were splinters of wood flying through his living room. There was his dog, Ruddy, barking until she stopped. There were car alarms and rough men's voices. Pots of flowers and plants went smashing to the floor, the dirt mixing with tear gas and smoke. Lights up and down the well-to-do street blinked on at this early hour and sirens performed the rooster's role. There was confusion and fear, thick as oil spilling through the air. There was an old man, a scientist, rocking in his chair, his heart no longer beating. There was a call for an ambulance, then a coroner. And then as the beating sun drenched the hills of Santa Fe, there was silence once again.

Dahlia (Lummi tribe Northwest Washington) 2019

Her hands were rough from years of pulling rope. Water squirted through her

fingers and scattered thousands of dimples into the ocean, shattering her tired reflection. Dad used to do this before he gave me his boat 'sunshine'. Before he got cancer. He had become a vegan after being shown some compelling documentaries a certain daughter brought home from college. All he ate was soy. Processed, mono-cropped Cargill-manufactured soy (Citation 1). He had tried to fit in. He always listened to what she had to say and supported her by joining up. Had he known that it was dangerous? Was he doing it just for her? Was she responsible for his death?

The cancer had moved quickly. *It's all for the best*, the doctor had said. Dad was in too much pain. She had stood in the corner of the room, numb with guilt. One day he was there and the next he was gone.

She could see it rising in the water now. Pulling a crab pot alone takes balance and strength. A medium pot weighs about thirty pounds in the water plus whatever was in it. The deck of the boat was wet so she spread her legs wide and leaned over the side. Knees bent. Back straight. Boat wake makes you dance like a juggler. With a hiss as though gasping for air the pot broke the surface. Dahlia swung her leg over the starboard shoulder. Grabbing a handhold she leaned over till her ass was above her head. Like a seesaw rocking she grabbed the pot on its side and hauled it into the boat. There were three crabs. Three! Dad used to regale her with stories about pulling in fifty at a time (Citation 2). That was in the 1970's. She'd never seen such things but three crabs, all female so not to keep. Pathetic. The gas for her boat was barely affordable as is. *At least these beautiful sunsets were unchanged*. Especially one without many people on the

ocean. Native fishing boats had been replaced with tankers pulling oil to China and gas guzzling Carnival cruise ships going to Alaska. The tribes weren't fishing much anymore and that left individual's like her. They couldn't afford the fuel or licensing.

There was one boat on the horizon. It was hauling towards her general direction. Fast. Her heart sank as lights began to flash. Her mind immediately went into panic mode and she searched the boat mentally for anything illegal. Registration? Papers? Tabs? Guns? She had one but it was buried deep in duffel. They would need a warrant. Or they could just break their own laws. Her tribe had experienced white "respect" for their own law.

"*Turn your vessel off and move to the stern,*" boomed the loudspeaker. They were always so polite. Sarcasm had kept hope in her family for many generations since first contact. She wasn't about to stop now. This was a smaller Coast Guard vessel then she was used to. Drug interdiction? Immigration? "*Prepare to tie off*" the tinny voice barely traveled across the water. It was a RHIB-rigid hull inflatable boat. Her brother had served on one of these during the initial invasion of Iraq. The second time. He had boarded oil cruisers from Iran. Now these boats were protecting American oil tankers as they exported the project to their former enemies. The war always came back home. A young Chicano looking man threw a weighted rope onto the stern of her boat. She scrambled up to it, her bare feet gripping the wood. Another rope was thrown to the bow and she scrambled along the side to snatch it. Her eyes were looking down, following the side of the boat but still noticing the Coast Guard wearing boots. Land boots. She hadn't needed

soles on a boat since she was fifteen. A man wearing body-armor that didn't suit the humid weather began firing questions at her.

"What are you doing out here little lady? Isn't it about your bedtime?" The Coast Guard driver snarled at her through his dark sunglasses. The receding sunlight glinted off his shades making his grin a bit less scary. She ignored his cockiness.

"No sir, just checking my crab pots. Nothing to report." Her face was a mask. One could get into a lot of trouble by being snarky with the likes of federal troops. She had dealt with these guys before. On the horizon more coast guard vessels were rounding the San Juan Islands, about four miles away and speeding towards the mainland.

"Whatcha doin out here all alone? Yer boyfriend leave you for a white girl?" The Captain grinned, the corners of his mouth hairy with stubble. For a moment she imagined pulling his Glock from the holster and blowing his dick off. The blood would cover the nice orange and white coast guard vessel. Involuntarily she shook the thought from her head, and then stopped, afraid it might send the wrong signal.

"I'm just checking my crab pots and enjoying the sunset. How can I help you?
(Eat a dick she thought). The Captain took a step forward; his paunchy extended stomach came to rest on the edge of her boat. His head tipped to the side as if in confusion. He put his hands in the air as if to surrender.

“Wow wow, calm down little lady, don’t get your panties all wet.” The Captain was losing control. “You from the tribe?” She nodded yes. Why are you rez bitches always so uppity?” Her mind was racing. *Be cool. Be cool. Do what he says. Show no emotion.*

“How can I help you sir? The words somehow escaped through her clenched jaw. Her voice was more like a growl than any known language. The Captain looked over her boat and then turned to look back towards the Canadian border. “You cant. Get your sweet ass in to whatever land you come from. The bay is closed. There's been an accident. Don't be goin north at all.” His tone had become bored with her. *She wasn't who they were looking for.*

“What...happened?” Her voice trailed off and her eyes lurched northward. She could see a flurry of other boats. Big boats. And they were moving fast. There was smoke, and her worst fears began to take hold of her body.

“None of your damn business Indian. Get out of here! Chuck, grab those ropes off her boat.” The Chicano man at the bow yanked the ropes back pulling a loose plank of wood free from the top of Sunshine. Dahlia stumbled over to the keys and plugged them into the ignition. Sunshine's seventy-five horsepower engine roared to life. The Coast Guard boat turned towards Canada and accelerated. A man at the back of the boat was rapidly jerking his hand near his crotch. Pretending to masturbate. *Fucking pigs.* She

turned the nose of the Sunshine towards Lummi Island, one of the last local fisheries still catching salmon, and as the boat planed up to four degrees she ached to know what had happened to the Salish Sea.

-Three hours later-

The meeting was close to chaos. Sharon was from Ferndale, a small farming community north of Bellingham. It had been her turn to lead the *Salish Sea cleanup committee*. Ten years of protecting the waterfront had created a strong bond among the locals. They had cleaned up beaches, written letters and generally provided an alternative to turning the county into an oil-export terminal. Meetings in the past had been uplifting, the members finding ways to agree to action on a consensus basis. If you showed up to a meeting then you could speak out. Now, the outside pressure of an environmental disaster threatened that hard built trust. Sharon tried to open with introductions from everyone on how they were doing and what they have been working on. The group wasn't having it. There was an emergency! Some of the men had interrupted Sharon and tried to steer the conversation towards escalation. In 2018, after much controversy, MMP Marine, the largest regional had begun an Oil shipment program to China (**CITATION 3**). Oil was extracted from the earth in the Bakken shale of North Dakota and put on trains to the west coast. New proposals sprang up across the country after Obama lifted the oil export law in a bargain with the Republican's in 2016(**CITATION 4**). Ecologists fought tooth and nail, using legal tools to slow the permitting process with every legal maneuver possible. Multiple projects were abandoned due to environmental regulations but four new terminals were permitted in Washington, Oregon and British Columbia. The

terminal that was concerning their current meeting was at Cherry Point, ten miles from the Canadian border. From there oil was loaded onto super-tankers and shipped through the densely packed San Juan Islands towards open sea. Their final destination?

"Developing" economies in Asia.

Now, one of those boats had run aground and the entire shipment had spilled into the bay. An emergency cordon had been placed on the area and no boats were allowed into the ocean. The Salish Sea cleanup committee had organized against the oil terminal for eight years. Now their greatest fears were realized. Once a diverse ecosystem with the only salmon runs left in North America was now filling with oil. Dahlia watched as the group split into three factions with years of unspoken anger coming to the surface. The air was filled with tension, like invisible smoke from long extinguished cigars. The first group, filled with the majority of men, felt it was time to escalate tactics against MMP Marine. The second was exclusively concerned with the impact of the spill and access to the ocean. In the middle was a third group of emotionally exhausted and traumatized people. Those doing this work the longest, having given the most. After years of crying wolf, the beast had finally come to feed on their community. And all they could do was tear each other apart. Those who had been allies and friends just days before, now pointed fingers and accused each other of poor tactics and direction. They were turning on each other. Dahlia found herself in the third group. Consensus could be effective when you were all willing to work with each other but they were losing that now.

That's when Lindsey stepped in. With her smug, know-it all-attitude. Her body,

never one to exert energy without a reward, swayed up towards the front of the group. There was power in her walk, the way she occupied space and commanded silence. It wasn't that she always had an answer that made sense, it's that she inspired fear. She was always lecturing, telling people what they were wrong about. She never had anything of constructive value to offer, as far as Dahlia was concerned. Always tearing down other people's ideas. Their group had been knocked down with charges of patriarchy so many times that they now listened to "powerful" women who spoke their mind. In the vacuum that arose as men stepped back from running their mouths the space was filled with acrimony. Dahlia wondered if it wasn't a big game of "if you give a mouse a cookie." It was clear that no one really knew what they wanted, the vision was uncertain. Instead more angry, driven and vitriolic people filled the hole. Lindsey was at the front of that. Her back turned to the group she slowly shifted her head around to face the room.

"Now everyone's excited and I understand why. But we need to speak non-violently to one another. We can't use the masters tools to dismantle the masters palace."

Her eyes drove daggers towards the first group of antagonists.

Dahlia tried hard not to roll her eyes. *Yes, lets just ask nicely and the company will give in to us.* She knew that Lindsey's background was working class. She was a welder and raised a kid on her own. She checked the identitarian boxes and rose up the inverted "non-hierarchy" hierarchy pyramid that wasn't supposed to be there. Before you said anything to her, you were wrong. *Was this what we were fighting for?* Dahlia raised her hand to signal she wanted to speak next. Lindsey ignored her.

“Now, of course all the men want to go and blow something up.” Lindsey said with a sneer. There were grumbles in the room. Some women nodding their head. She continued, “What we need is to reach out to the religious groups in the community. I’ve been saying this for some time. We must ask them for help and guidance. They have been through this before and have fought battles against injustice.”

And been one of the greatest forms of injustice, Dahlia thought.

“And we need to reach out to more people of color”, Dahlia’s hand was still quietly raised, “if we don’t have people of color then all these white people in the room are going to do the wrong thing, like they always have.” Somehow Lindsey had still not seen, or chosen not to notice Dahlia’s hand in the air so she dropped it and shrugged. “As we have seen over and over with white people doing all the talking and none of the listening.”

Dahlia’s brow was percolating sweat. Her left foot was tapping. She was being driven towards action. She didn’t want to be on the side of Lindsey, but there was more to it than that. She needed to be around a functional group. People who were willing to take some action into their theory. To have some reflection instead of reaction. People without power take it out on those closest to them. Fighting over the scraps while the powerful sit at the table for the main meal and dessert. It was time to stop settling for the scraps and flip the damn table over. It was all becoming too much mental masturbation while

everything burned. They could find a way to have a meeting space where everyone spoke the same three sentences and no one created any conflict. But wasn't that where the learning was to happen? With conflict? How can you change without conflict? She realized that Lindsey was still talking. Scanning the faces of the room she could tell that people wanted it to stop but felt powerless to do so. She had to make a decision.

"And if there was any chance, ANY CHANCE of us being successful then we need to go about things non-violently. The state has all the power. They have all the guns. They have all..

Lindsey finally made eye contact with Dahlia who was now standing in the center of the room.

They don't have all the hubris and bullshit, that's for sure." The room burst into laughter but was quickly stifled as Dahlia continued, "And they don't have the hearts of the people. The reason we keep losing is because we are always attacking people and treating them like stupid children who cant think for themselves. We are abusive. No one wants to be a part of that. Credit to all of you who remain here but we care more about our moral purity than we do about a goddamn oil spill."

A standoff had occurred. A point of conflict. The lines were drawn and years of frustration and failure was now on the table. Lindsey tried to speak but was interrupted.

"How many times have we whipped ourselves? How many sub-groups have we formed in order to study ourselves? Pre-figure the future?" Heads were nodding around

the room. "Men's groups, Women's groups, class breakdowns, cultural differences? We talk more about privilege than those with all the privilege. We talk about the things we hate and want to destroy. This isn't working. They don't care about our analysis. They just go on exploiting everything. They take and take until there is nothing left. We sit here and meditate and hold hands. I want to talk about action. I want to focus on what we love and what we will build. And I want to start right now." The room exploded with claps and *Yahoo*'s and laughter as people rose to their feet. Dahlia felt hands on her back, warm hands of friends who had waited so long to hear those words. They had her back. And she had theirs.

Dahlia felt at peace back on the water. The light waves slipped along her kayak and her slight hips turned back and forth in tune, guiding her forward towards the spill. The first rays of sun were rising against her back, scratching at the tips of the cascade mountain range to the east. It was barely five in the morning and her heart was calm. Despite the spill. She hadn't slept the night before and it felt liberating to be doing something. Anything. Her hands were bare and droplets of salt water ran up and down her arms like conveyor belts each time she dipped her paddle. Her mouth open, she tasted the cool humid air as it brushed her cheeks and softly coated her skin with moisture.

There were twenty of them. All in Kayaks. Each one was equipped with a boom strapped behind the cockpit. Between her legs was a survival bag. Her body, to protect from any oil, was covered in a dry suit loaned from a neighbor at the last minute. Her arms were rolled up and her top was open but she would have to fully dress before they

reached the spill. It had been over twenty-four hours since the tanker ruptured and spewed its load throughout the bay. They had been "lucky" that an easterly wind had blown it towards shore instead of out to sea, completely preventing them from responding. *Lucky*, she snorted. *It's all about degrees of bad to worse in this world.*

They were part of four groups of five kayaks each. She was in bravo team. Each team would secure an outer part of the spill and spread their booms out to block it. The Coast Guard hadn't responded as quickly as expected. Budget cuts to pay for tax cuts. How many of those tax cuts were benefitting Chevron? How many spills had they been responsible for in the past? How often had they picked up their mess? Her team was getting ahead of her, she could barely see the chemlight attached to the rear of her team members. Dahlia shrugged off the feelings and shook her knees to keep the blood flowing. Wedging them back against the hull her strokes increased in force and her kayak picked up speed.

The crude oil ship had been loading Bakken fracked oil from North Dakota into hoses when the primary seal broke. The hose ripped backward, the force of oil pressure flinging it like a deflating balloon around the dock. Two Longshore workers loading food supplies for the journey to Singapore were immediately covered with the black stickiness and slid into the water. The hose crashed against the dock as alarms sounded across the refining facility. At the shoreline observation post, Jim Bagget jumped to his feet and raced towards the emergency shutdown. He was a part-time worker now that all new pipeline construction had been completed. The new oil export pipes and infrastructure

had promised many permanent, high paying jobs but only fifteen of those remained. And they were all company men from other parts of the country. Locals were offered lower wages and part-time work. Because he was part-time, they had only given him online training for this type of emergency. Scrambling towards the main computer he hit the all stop button and turned on the monitor. It refreshed and a sign-on screen greeted him. Quickly typing his password, the sweat from his fingers missed a key and he had to begin again. A loud crash that sounded like splitting wood stood his hairs on end. He glanced back towards the terminal dock just in time to see the last bit of oil from the hose propel it against the seal of the crude tanker, splitting a seam down towards the water. Oil began to drain from the ship's hull as the color drained from his face.

There were three tankers at the oil terminal when the Chevron ship ruptured its tank. They were all slated for departure within the 24-hour window, on their journey to Asia. In the last year of the Obama administration, a Congressional deal was struck to continue funding solar and wind subsidies that were previously committed to in exchange for Democrats supporting the lifting of the oil export ban. The ban had been in place for over forty years following the oil crisis of the 1970's. The decision to lift it was pushed by domestic oil companies determined to sell their product across the planet for increased profit. Few Democrats protested but some did question the hypocrisy of shipping oil out of the United States while continuing the troublesome oil relationship with Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Nigeria. The two tankers that were scheduled to leave were put on temporary hold while a recovery effort could be rendered.

Dahlia could see the dock and the black sheen of oil now lapping at the shoreline. They would have to modify their plan. The call came over the radio, Delta team needed to dissolve equally into the other groups, except for the team lead who would now serve as an intermediary with any Coast Guard vessels that tried to interfere. They could see a few ships to the north of the dock but they were about two miles out. *Why hadn't anyone responded to the spill yet?* She muttered through gritted teeth and slid her kayak next to her teammate. All five of her team members and their new delta team member were "rafted up" side by side down a line. Alternating front and backwards facing so they could all see each other. The radio squawked, "*Detach booms and link up, over*".

Dahlia leaned to the red kayak next to her and unhooked the bungee cords from the boom that was coiled up high like a snake ready to strike. She took the end of the boom and its waterproof carabiner, and slid it under the water of the red kayak, clicking it in to the modified tow link under the stern of the watercraft. She then rotated her body to the left and repeated the process with the green kayak next to her. Each boom would be deployed by two kayaks due to their weight. Then they would be attached to the Alpha and Charlie booms, which should encompass the entire spill. Then they would wait for the media, and hope.

When she was done she quickly drank from her camelback and gave a thumbs-up to the team leader. After all five kayaks were hooked in the radio call went back out "*Bravo team all go, over*". The other teams reported in quickly and the action lead gave a final check.

"All teams, all teams, all teams, at this time you are a go, repeat: you are a go, clear"

On the count of three the raft separated with all teams pushing forward to separate the booms from their craft like a wolves teeth bearing themselves for its prey. Dahlia felt an immediate shock to the rear as the boom pulled against her but she rocked her hips to stabilize and sunk her paddle deeper with each stroke, heading for the outermost point of the spill. Her teeth were gritted and she could see the coast vessels off in the distance as their red and blue lights began to spin, their engines roaring to life.

She had never actually done an action with the Mosquito Fleet. She didn't understand their command structure but she made up for it with a lifetime of boat skills. She had heard about them a few years before when they tried to block a tar-sands tanker from the new Canadian pipeline. They had been arrested and all of them deported from Canada. Permanently. But they had recruited her for some time and after the horrible meeting the day before a few members in the crowd had approached her. They were part of the fleet and were planning a response. In fact they had had this planned for some time. A number of members had attended oil spill response training in preparation for just this sort of thing happening. They had purchased the equipment and created plans for every major oil export terminal on the west coast north of San Francisco. They could be at a spill within eighteen hours.

The fleet had started as an ad hoc response to a Chinese drilling company trying

to dig up gravel from one of the most liberal islands in the Puget Sound. A group of Kayakers from the island used their boats to block some of the drilling apparatuses and the Mosquito Fleet was born. Harkening back to the early days of white settlement, "mosquito fleets" were locally run supply ships, transportation ferries and fishing vessels that served the remote outposts of the Pacific Northwest (**CITATION 5**). During prohibition they were used to smuggle alcohol across the border from Canada. They were even rumored to have helped refugees cross the border at various times. After the Vashon fight however, the fleet lay dormant for six years. It wasn't until the shell oil company bet big on drilling for oil in the arctic that the return of the fleet was necessary (**CITATION 6**). The fleet fought Shell with swarm tactics on land and sea, drawing more people to the fight and bringing a flexible host of pirate-like characters to the growing coalition against Shell. After nine months of growing opposition and harassment wherever Shell went, and significant corporate losses due to "unforeseen logistical hurdles....")(**CITATION 7**) Shell quit Arctic drilling. Shortly thereafter, due to overwhelming political pressure, the Obama campaign pulled the drilling contracts for the Arctic off the table effectively blocking American waters from drilling (**CITATION 8**). After that victory the fleet declared their "zero tolerance" policy against any new oil, coal or gas infrastructure on the west coast. Now, Dahlia was a part of the fleet on her very first action in her ancestral waters, not talking anymore but doing something about it.

"This is your final warning. You are in violation of the security perimeter. You are risking federal arrest felony charges. If you do not move you will be detained. This is your final warning". The Coast Guard man was standing on the bow of a large cruiser

with a megaphone. Even though they were 100 meters away the water carried his words to Dahlia's ears as clear as the water was dirty. She had gotten to her position at the head of the spill and connected her boom to Charlie team. They had surrounded the spill and were all linked together. Reaching behind her she unhooked the small anchor and slid it over her port side, the one facing shore. The anchor would hold her relatively in place and provide another impediment to her likely arrest. The fleet was explicitly non-violent in its tactical approach but that didn't mean she needed to help the Coast Guard. Under President Trump, the USCG had become much more conservative and focused around protecting energy infrastructure. Fill in...Arrest detention, violence.

She sat in the hull of the Coast guard ship, her lip bleeding into her mouth. She tried to roll onto her side to take the pressure off her hands, zip-tied behind her back. Through the clear doorway she could see the officers pulling another member of Bravo team onto the cruiser. They had tried to search her but the dry suit was difficult to remove. Instead they had thrown her into the hold and not taken the small camera on her lapel that was live-streaming the entire event. By now the other members of the fleet onshore would be sharing that image with the rest of the world. It was about time the drone was launched as well, to record the arrests from the air. She spit onto the floor and a line of mucus and blood clung to her lower cheek. Even if the Coast Guard was able to arrest everyone, and that was a big if, given their resources, each boom was now connected with a floating lockbox, to prevent them from being detached. The Coast Guard would need a skill saw to cut through it.

Introduction to Syria

Syria was the worst thing to come out of the American invasion of Iraq. The second time. The occupation served as a match that lit the underlying dynamite.

Modern Syria was born from empire. It would later be destroyed by it. Following the end of hostilities in 1918, the victors of World War I split the Middle East between France and Britain. France took control of the Syrian region in 1920, delegating control of the day-to-day occupation to local magistrates.

Following a second world war, Syria gained its independence in 1946. Damascus, the heart and political capital of the country is widely believed to be the oldest occupied city in the world. Much of the rest of the country is desert.

After the formation of Israel, and the resulting invasion by Syria, the Middle East entered a period of nominal stability. The Syrian government switched hands between internal military coups until Hafez al Assad took control of the country from his perch atop the Air Force.

The Assad family was Druze and thus a minority in a Shia dominated country. This forced the ruling family to consolidate power among other minorities, centering much of it within the military. By recruiting loyalists to fill many posts, Hafez secured a generation of support.

By the 1980s other social pressures were bearing down on the regime. An uprising began in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatilla. Hafez sent in the military and wiped out the entire camps leaving nothing but a smoldering pit. This quelled armed resistance. But it would return.

In the 1970s the first signs of trouble with the climate began. Large state run

companies began privatizing small-localized farms. Conflicts over water with neighboring Jordan almost led to war. The depletion of underground aquifer's and the closing of many rural farms led to millions of farmers moving to cities, which placed a social burden on human services that the Assad regime refused to address.

By the 1990s Hafez's health had deteriorated and plans for his son to take over were put into affect. Upon his death, Bashar al Assad, the oldest son, took over. At first this was hailed as a positive step by western governments. Western businesses flocked to Damascus to cut deals and enhance their relationship with the new regime. Once 9/11 occurred however the relationship with Iran and the direct support the Syrian regime provided to Hezbollah, put Syria into a camp it would never move out of.

The mega-drought began in 2007. It didn't take long for farms all over the country to dry up and close. Over a million refugees streamed into industrial centers looking for work. Once the 2008 economic crash happened it effectively silenced any chance at replacement jobs. Bashar put more money than ever into the military in order to secure its loyalty. The American invasion of Iraq sent millions of Iraqi refugees across the southern Syrian border and when a couple of youth spray painted anti-Assad messages in Daraa a city of one hundred thousand. The fuse was lit.

Assad's henchmen rounded up the children and tortured them. The families found their bodies in pieces, stuffed inside trash bags and sitting on their front doorstep.

At first the public gatherings were peaceful. They mirrored the large gatherings colloquially known as the Arab spring that were sweeping across the Middle East in the spring and summer of 2011. But they soon began to shoot back at government forces. What began as a secular political resistance was quickly overcome by Islamic

fundamentalist groups. Syrians had to rapidly pick a side of two bad options. Either you were a government loyalist or a fundamentalist. The country ripped itself apart along sectarian lines and a civil war stripped Assad of any legitimacy he once had. Islamic State quickly declared itself a caliphate and capitalized upon the drought stricken nation. Its central command consolidated power in Raqqah, the spiritual birthplace of its sinister foundation.

Once the United States bombed Iraq and destabilized another Middle Eastern country the desert regions between Ar Raqqah and Baghdad easily fell to IS.

The refugee crisis that followed directly led to the destabilization of Europe and the disintegration of the European union. But something beautiful also happened. And it all started with a former communist intellectual living in New York City until the time of his death in 2006. His name was Murray Bookchin.

Ar Raqqa, Syria

January 2021

When Aziz was a child he had watched the Humvee's burn in the street. The smell of gasoline acrid in his throat. Even today, ten years later, the smell would seep from his brain down through the lips and mouth, coating his teeth. Aziz would have to stop, wherever he was, and cough to get the awful taste out. At the current moment his coughing occurred while he was prostrated on the floor in mid prayer. Allah always hated it when you did that. Daesh believed so at least. Did he believe it? Was Allah so vengeful that he would have your hand cut off for smoking? Did Allah want all women to stay in

the home, and be considered a prostitute if they left the house?

“Lā ilāha illā-Allāh” came from the Mu’adhan and the men around Aziz began to rise to their feet. As quickly as they had arrived the two hundred men at the Al Unskar mosque in Ar Raqqah disappeared. Coat hangers swung empty, rocking back and forth ever so slightly. The only contact point was in the weapons center, formerly the section for the women. They didn’t go to mosque anymore. He couldn’t remember when that changed. As if it happened overnight. One day they were living in a modern country, the next..the next was less clear. Chaos? Fundamentalism? Fascism? He had heard as much before the fall. Between the time of the Americans and the fall of the Maliki government a few short years later. (**CITATION 1**) Syria should never have been a country anyway. The French just drew it on a map in 1920. Those were the days when empires could still tinker with countries as if chess pieces on a board. To the French, the people of “Syria” were no different than their most prized item: Algeria. If the British could divide Algeria or Vietnam, thus conquering it as its people fought themselves, then Syria could be governed in much the same way. For some time this remained true until the European powers unleashed their Second World War. Within five years the world of empires collapsed and what remained resembled little of the pre-war years. Colonized country after oppressed nation rejected colonialism, rising up, sometimes violently to rid themselves of outside control. As countries finally won their freedom, they found themselves deeply in debt to the very same colonizers. This and the added burden of governing a country where the institutions that did exist, which were few, were dedicated to extracting local resources for the Europeans, left each region teetering on the brink.

National health care or public education institutions barely existed and when they did were primarily for training security and military personnel. Throughout the fifties a battle of the minds was waged between the newly minted super powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Pressure rained down from both to choose sides, and no country in the world was immune. Aziz'z father had worked at the University before the latest uprising and had spoken of the missed opportunities of history. With the promise of development aid in turn for loyalty many countries did side with one empire or the other. Thus a series of proxy wars was waged throughout what had been known as “the third world.”**(CITATION 2)** This term didn't refer to a third tier of poverty or development, but a pool of countries that hadn't quite chosen sides. At times these proxy battles spilled over into general warfare, in countries like Korea and Vietnam, both superpowers fought each other through other forces. Never completely coming to American on Russian combat but for all intents and purposes it was war.

“Insert map of Iraq here”

Aziz made a living by driving supplies through IS front lines to the Turkish border and back. He would follow the Purattu River (Euphrates) as far north as possible and then swing west to Tall al Abyad where he would pick up supplies. Tobacco, foodstuffs, contraband he used to pay off the checkpoints. He had a run to make today. The route had become more difficult in recent weeks. While the Russians and Americans had ceased bombing months ago, the war on the ground continued to rage.

Iraq dodged some of the worst colonial bullets. Up until the First World War in

1914, Iraq had been controlled by the Ottoman Empire (**CITATION 3**). This rule dated back hundreds of years but Ottoman control had been slipping for some time. World War I put the nail in the Ottoman coffin. The victors of that war, in 1918, divvied up the conquered nations between themselves and set about continuing some of their past exploitative behavior. The British and the French debated where new lines on the map should be drawn, and after a few brandy's divide Iraq from Syria, thus the British came to decide the future of the new state of Iraq (**CITATION 4**). From the beginning the countries ecosystem and general population didn't mix. The Kurd's lost their hope for a country and were scattered across eastern Turkey, northwestern Iran, northern Iraq and eastern Syria. The Kurdish people became the largest human population without a homeland (**Citation 5**).

Aziz stumbled out into the heat. It was barely morning and the dust was rising, sticking to his sweat like gum under the school desks back in Primary. This summer was the hottest Aziz could remember. The thermometer near the exit was climbing forty-seven Celsius. His trips to the border were delayed more often by sand storms than checkpoints and military conflict. He looked at the sky, considering the possibility of one happening today. Between the drought and the Turkish military blockade of the Purattu River, his home was parched for thirst. (**CITATION 6**) Air conditioners were a necessity in every house but the constant drain on electricity sent the city into brownouts on most days. Generators couldn't be filled fast enough, and since the Americans continued to bomb whatever oil processing facilities were set up, heat exhaustion was almost as likely a cause of death as beheading. They were surrounded by oil with no way to use it. Like a

dehydrated body floating on the ocean. He lurched around the corner of the mosque and located his truck, a 2001 Toyota Hilux, from before the war, manual transmission diesel. The most reliable vehicle in the city. As a child Aziz obsessed over *The Empire Strikes Back* and often imagined his truck as the Millennium Falcon, outrunning the Empire but always one laser blast away from needing maintenance. He stepped up onto the running panel and slid into his Hilux. He exhaled as the cool and dusty AC kicked on and slid into first gear.

Aziz was Sunni and a native to northern Iraq. He had grown up on a small town at the turn of the century near Mosul. The family farm was no more. It had been decimated by the sanctions during the 1990s and then again by the American invasion forcing his mother to move into the city and his father to join the military and work for the Americans. The “new” Iraqi military was trained and funded almost exclusively by the Americans. It was more about numbers than well-trained soldiers. His father had fought the Iranians during the Iran/Iraq war during the eighties and had vowed to leave war behind forever. Over a million deaths in brutal face-to-face fighting, the artillery shells never stopped flying. When the family ran out of foodstuffs it was his father who again had to turn to the military to pay the rent. On boot camp graduation day, a Shiite suicide bomber attacked their formation. His father's body was never recovered. DNA tests couldn't distinguish his flesh from any of the other twenty-two dead martyrs. After that things got very difficult. Aziz's mother fell into a deep depression, never speaking, nor preparing basic meals for the children. He would wake in the night hearing his mother throw herself against the wall in her room, screaming to Allah to take her as well.

Religion took on new meaning in their household. Prayer, which had never happened under their modern minded father, was suddenly expected of all the children. Waking at the rise of the sun for first prayer and continually interrupting whatever they were working on to pray, at first seemed ridiculous to Aziz. He saw little evidence of a God, and even less belief that this God was interested in what he was thinking or doing. His father had been a good man, but Allah had allowed him to be struck down by infidels. Where was the purpose in that?

The dust trailed his truck as he headed north, following the Puratto River trench for as long as he could. The journey required him to navigate bomb-sized potholes, from the Russians, the Americans, Assad's government; it was difficult to tell anymore. No longer were there goats flooding the roads, causing accidents and slowdowns of traffic. In their place were drought stricken wadis, drained of water. He rounded a bend and was greeted with charred Turkish pine trees as the road curved away from the drying riverbed. He shifted into fifth gear and reached for a cigarette. He was now between checkpoints and had another twenty kilometers to go before the final hurdle. Although he made this trip weekly, he could never be sure which guards would be at a certain checkpoint. IS changed them by moving recruits around, which kept the locals more "honest". *Keeps us all more angry and paranoid*, he thought. With his left knee he held the wheel steady as he lit the American lucky strike and inhaled one of the few things that made him happy. He accelerated into the desert, churning a large dust cloud behind him.

As the American occupation of Iraq neared its fifth year, a civil war that had been

bursting at the seems, finally broke out, tearing communities in half. Shia in Mosul were forcibly removed from their living spaces and sent packing with only what they could carry. The bombing of holy sites of both Shia and Sunni origin resulted in generational neighbors turning on each other. Primary schools could no longer keep their doors open and one year of traditional schooling was supplanted with studying the Koran at home under the prying eyes of mother. She began taking her pain out on Aziz, beating him for minor infractions. With no man in the house, she must "*toughen him up*," she said. *He had to be prepared for a world that was dangerous.* Mother came from a more rural tribe and had grown up with both Sunni traditional Islam as well as Sufi mysticism. She believed in Jinn, or what the western movie industry called ‘genie’s’ that were evil and always out to trick humans. When she married Aziz's father he forced her to give up on some of the more ridiculous ideas, but it seemed the moment he died, the ideas came back. If Aziz stayed at the market too long, she would accuse him of torturing her. Of manipulating her into ups and downs of emotions. “Don't you care about the honor of this family?” she would say. “Think of what your father would say,” the irony wasn’t lost on Aziz as father would have pushed him to stay outside. To explore the world and make friends.

Things began changing as the American’s withdrew. The Iraqi flag came down. The black caliphate flag replaced it. Aziz liked a girl back then. Her name was Samira. They had grown up together, playing all the same games with the local kids. Kicking the futbal around. One day Samira didn't show up to play. When Aziz went to her house and knocked on the door, she answered with fear in her eyes.

“Why are you at home? Are you sick?” asked Aziz.

“I can't go out anymore. Mother says I'm now a woman and must cover up. Playing with boys is for children and it will hurt our honor” Samira said this as though she was supposed to believe it. Aziz didn't understand and when he moved to enter the house, Samira was replaced by the bulbous form of her mother, now veiled, bellowing for him to get away and never come back.

“You swine! You leper on the people of Mosul. May you rot in hell you treacherous little nymph.” She screamed and thrust the door into his face breaking his nose. He cried all the way home, a very un-manlike behavior, and received abuse from his mother once he got there. No attempt was made to explain the natural process of menstruation that his friend, Samira, was now going through. Only abuse rained down from his mother's lips and limbs. His nose was never set properly and never fully healed.

Aziz touches his nose as he nears the next checkpoint. The oppressive heat of early afternoon reflects off the black hood of his truck and he regrets breaking his sunglasses the week before. His eyes are blue with a round, full appearance. His lips drawn down into a half scowl that only living in a religious state can do to you. He prepares himself, downshifting as he rolls towards two men in military fatigues and Kalashnikovs. The checkpoint was once makeshift, but now concrete Hesco barriers ring the roadside and signs alluding to landmines checker the left and right sides of his vehicle. This is the last stop before entering no-man's land. It's easier to get in to IS territory than to get out. Reaching in to his dish-dasha he retrieves his IS stamped pass and a roll of American bills, still the global currency, and slowly extends it towards the

hard faced guard at his passenger window. The driver's side guard levels the assault rifle directly at his head. The inspection guard looks at his pass, counts the money, glances into the back of the truck, nods to the rifle guard and waves Aziz through. The bribes at this checkpoint are always straightforward, half the money to IS, the other half to their Turkish minders. Another twenty kilometers and he will be at his destination.

When the Maliki government fell from pressure on the streets and the US capitol, IS seemed to appear out of nowhere. It was 2013. It would later become clear that much of the leadership in the so-called Islamic State were not the *pure* Muslims they portrayed themselves to be. Many had been Baathists in the Saddam government, former military men with formidable skills. They saw which way the wind was blowing and retreated to their homes when the American tanks rolled into Baghdad. Much of the Iraqi military chose not to fight, believing the American's wanted only Saddam's top leadership. The Iraqi Generals waited to be contacted by the American's to keep order once the invasion was complete. The call never came. Instead the Bush administration declared all Baathist's "enemies of the state" and began a "de-Baathification" program to remove all influence of the former regime. Teachers, lawyers, doctors, anyone who had any type of job in the society prior to the invasion were considered to be Baathist. It would be like invading a pet store and firing anyone who liked animals. Then, the Americans disbanded the entire Iraqi army. Over one million men, with families, and military training, and guns were let go on one Friday afternoon. Two weeks later the first suicide bombing occurred (CITATION 7). That was the beginning of the end of Iraq. As the insurgency mounted, the American's began arresting men of military age and stashing them in makeshift

prisons. Hundreds of thousands flowed through these jails. Many were innocent. When they entered. But, much like prisons the world over, they served as a virtual university for terrorism. Many were tortured. Some of those who survived began to form cells and when they were released or escaped from prison, they began the roots of what would become Islamic State. Without the American invasion, there would not have been an Islamic State (**CITATION 8**).

Aziz could see the small village off to his right surrounded by Quercus Calliprinos or Palestine Oak. A tiny oasis in this forsaken country. The engine indicator light was on and he knew the truck needed to cool off in a garage soon. The heat was fouling his AC and his clothes were matted to his thin chest like wet cloth. The wheels turned off the highway and began the bumpy ride into town. He could see the checkpoint at the outskirts of town and he slowed to a stop twenty meters away. This was the more dangerous part of his journey. This area wasn't controlled by the militias and there was no Islamic State or Turkish presence here. This was a different country. Well, not a country, an autonomous area. Four guards approached the vehicle from two sides, their rifles aiming at his chest. This time he used a different pass, one he kept strapped to his inner thigh, in a plastic bag to protect against the sweat of the journey. Slowly he reached under his dish-dasha and ripped off the tape. No money was required here. He extended his hand out the driver's side window and handed it to the guard. After a close examination the guard handed it back to him.

"Welcome to the third Canton of Rojava" she said. "Its nice to see you again, Aziz". He smiled at the female guards and put the truck in gear. It was nice to be home.

When IS took Mosul there had been a mass exodus. It was almost funny, Aziz remembered, to think of the biblical exodus from Israel as an example of what was happening to the city he was born in. They had appeared out of nowhere with their black trucks and flags emblazoned with the words of the prophet. Young bearded men standing in the backs with rifles veering around the city streets recklessly. In any western country these men would be drinking on street corners, sneaking into bars, trying to pick up women, or men. Here they were savages, brutal and heartless. They rounded up what Shiites or Yazidi's they could find and executed them. Anyone not a Sunni was targeted and murdered. Aziz was Sunni and had the papers to prove it. Many could not find their papers. Especially targeted were inter-ethnic marriages. For generations the different sects had settled together, lived as neighbors. Iraq had been a modern state. In the old days the saying went, *the books are written in Syria, printed in Egypt and read in Iraq*. Universal health care and strong unions had defined Iraq before their bloody war with Iran. But years of war and sanctions had decimated what had once been the crown jewel of the Middle East.

They came for his mother after they captured the city of Mosul. Aziz had been at the market, selling phone chargers and batteries. All he found upon returning home was a ransacked house, the walls covered in Caliphate rhetoric. The neighbors wouldn't say anything, cowed with fear of possible retaliation. IS militants were stationed at every street corner and fear was as thick as the heat index. Aziz was able to find his uncle and together they canvassed quietly at night, searching for clues. All they found were rumors.

Others were being round up. Loyalty pledges extracted. Owners of foreign books, different religions, and sexual practices, all were killed by the new owners of Mosul. His uncle had an escape plan, but when the day came only Aziz was able to make it across the border to Syria. He had credentials for border crossing trade and was allowed through by the Syrian State border guards. Days later those same guards withdrew under the approaching onslaught of IS. The Syrian civil war was taking a new turn.

This room had been used as a sex trafficking jail before the YPG liberated it. The iron rings that once held Yazidi women and girls still hung from the ceiling. Daesh would take younger women from non-Sunni tribes and turn them into their personal sexual slaves. They even forced them to take birth control to prevent pregnancy. This way the women could continue to be raped without producing children the caliphate would have to feed (**CITATION 10**). After finding the building the YPG commander left no prisoners that day. Now it was to serve as the forward command post for the final assault on Raqqah.

Across the floor lay a large carpet overflowing with food. Rice and lentils spilled out of ceramic bowls, naan bread shaped like the waning moon lay piled high above large glasses of water. Goat meat sizzled on the pan at the center of the feast and cigarette smoke swirled in the air, driven by generator-powered fans. Spiced vegetables and chickpeas were mixed in colorful arrangements and the hands around the carpet eagerly dug in. A map on the wall showed IS and Turkish military emplacements around the Raqqah area with color-coded zones to denote how dangerous each section was. Aziz was

ravished and exhausted from his short journey to Kurdish held territory. He bit into the goat and naan covered rice and juice trickled down his lips into his beard. His tongue savored the rich traditional flavors and took another bite. Arrayed around his cross-legged frame were key leaders from the Syrian Defense forces, Arab soldiers fighting alongside the YPG/YPG peoples defense units of the Rojava revolution. In a full circle he counted more than thirty women and men, all in various forms of digital camouflage, the official uniform of Rojava. As his energy and hydration coursed through his body, Aziz considered the moment at hand. They faced an intractable enemy. After years of fighting IS and the Turkish military under President Erdogan, this was the moment they had been waiting for. Uprisings had exploded across Turkey, pitting the authoritarian dictatorship of Erdogan against the Turkish people. Bombings and occupations of public buildings, raids on political prisoner jails and refusal to participate by opposition lawmakers had driven the Turkish war machine to a standstill. In the beginning of the Syrian civil war, Turkey had secretly supported the Islamic State viewing them as an ally against the Kurdish people. As IS began to lose ground to the forces of Rojava however, turkey took a more hostile role, directly bombing the Kurds to slow their advance against Daesh. Despite airstrikes and killings of leftists across the region, Rojava was growing every day. The direct democracy of decision making appealed to the people after generations under military control. The people had had enough. And they were on the verge of capturing the last stronghold of Turkey and IS in Syria, uniting the opposition forces and truly creating an independent autonomous zone, where once there had been only death.

Aziz took a sip of his sweetened black tea and listened as the YPJ female

commander outlined the assault. If successful they would capture a large amount of Turkish military equipment, including anti-aircraft weaponry. The only open question, what would the American's do? The Turkish military still flew planes throughout Syria but with the no-fly zone instituted by the Russian and American militaries, it was a risk to the shaky peace accord. Signed without the YPG's participation, the coalition from Rojava had ignored it as long as President Trump was in power. With the election over and that era of American influence undergoing rapid political change, the people of Rojava hoped President Olivera would step in to prevent Turkish interference.

Aziz made the drive back to Raqqah that evening. The sun was still shedding light over the northern hills when he found himself alone tracing the Euphrates River towards the entrance of the city. The Hilux was jerking his hands off the wheel and he could tell the transmission was about to go. All he had to do was make it back to the city. A gurgle and popping sound greeted him as he turned the truck around an unusually large pothole. The engine light blinked on and the truck shuddered like a spasmodic animal in its last life throes. The truck came to a halt. Aziz shook his head. *Why tonight of all nights?* Opening the door he stepped out into the latent heat and removed the tool-bag from the back of his truck. The clock was ticking. He had to meet his contact within the hour to disperse the plan and let all the fighters in Raqqah know the time was nigh. The engine was overheating; coolant had sprayed all over the hood and was bubbling from the pressure. Aziz sighed, pulled the phone from his tattered neck wallet and checked the signal. Nothing. He couldn't call for help. And he was stuck in the middle of the IS patrol area. Everything could fall apart.

The Turkish Air Force composed of over 60,000 personnel and 700 aircraft was the most powerful in the Middle East save for Israel. The logistic trail connected directly to the United States, sending new equipment every year to a close NATO ally. For over forty years this military service had decimated first the PKK secessionist movement within the borders of Turkey and then the PYG/PYJ movement in Syria (**CITATION 9**). As Aziz was stuck in the desert outside the city of Raqqah, two F-35 Lighting fighter-bombers streaked across the border towards the northern city of Tal Abyad, their target a military gathering of Tev-dem militia leaders. The Turkish military had been searching for this target for some time and the impending assault on Raqqah finally put them all in one target rich environment. Onboard were four GBU-25 cluster bombs, delivering an anti personnel destruction area which covered over 1000 square meters. They would end the Tev-Dem leadership and thus the Rojava revolution with one strike.

United States Central Command picked them up as soon as they left Turkish air space. Traditionally any over flight scenario was coordinated between Turkish and US officials, but this flight was unplanned and not communicated. Cent-com commander scrambled two F-22's out of Manbij in northern Syria to intercept as she desperately tried to contact higher ups at the Pentagon. They were minutes away from the target. The US had been monitoring the potential advance on Raqqa by Tev-dem forces for some time though they were unsure when it would happen. It was early morning on a Sunday in Washington, and the Pentagon was lightly staffed as personnel were still adjusting to the Olivera presidential transition away from the Trump era. The new National security director and Defense secretary were yet to be confirmed so the Joint Chiefs of staff were holdovers

from the previous administration.

The cold was washing over Aziz. The sun had gone down and he had only the clothes on his back as he trudged towards the city. A noise behind him sent shudders through his body as lights rose up and illuminated the desert road in front. He stepped to the side of the road, not looking back, hoping the vehicle would pass him without incident. He could hear voices yelling and he stopped, turned to see a pickup with men dressed in black with assault rifles and a large black flag with Islamic writing in white flowing behind the truck. It slowed to a stop and the men jumped out. Pointing their rifles at him they challenged his presence “What are you doing out after curfew?” The man’s face was covered by a kaffiyeh and his eyes were wide with suspicion. Aziz slowly raised his hands into the air, he had no weapon, he was no threat to them. He spoke “As Salam alaukum brother, my truck broke down on the way back to the city, I am walking home.” The gunman strode forward lifting the rifle up to Aziz’s shoulder level and jabbed him in the chest with the barrel, knocking him down to the rocky earth below. A sharp pain in his back shot through him. A sick feeling in his stomach rose and Aziz vomited his lunch onto the ground. The men laughed and the gunman motioned toward Aziz. Two men moved quickly towards him, grabbing him by the arms and lifting him up. They dragged him towards the truck and threw him in the back. The gunman stepped onto the running board and thrust the butt of the rifle into Aziz’s temple blackening the stars above.

The Turkish jets were on their final approach, minutes away from their target when the first radio call came through. The pilots were trained in the United States and

spoke English, but when the US Air Force demanded they turn around, the pilots remained silent. They understood perfectly well the stakes of their mission. One final blow to the Kurdish resistance in Syria and perhaps the civil war in their own country would come to an end. The orders they received before the flight were clear, no matter what happened they must hit the targets. The Turkish pilots turned on their targeting systems. They began the countdown, flicked the safeties off their triggers and prepared to fire.

Decision-making at the pentagon was nonexistent. JCS wasn't responding and someone had to make a decision. The cent-com commander made the call. She would deal with the fallout from Turkey, but the loss of the assault on Raqqa was not an option. She gave the go order and the F-22's were notified they were weapons free.

The Aim 120C AMRAAM or Advanced Medium Range Air to Air Missile was first developed to provide a 'fire and forget' attack capability for the US Air Force. With a range of up to 65 miles it can destroy a hostile aircraft before its radar signature even picks up the weapon. Smart detection software within the missile itself allows it to maneuver and adjust its trajectory mid-flight with no assistance from the launching vehicle. Each F-22 Raptor was equipped with four missiles and when the American pilots received fire clearance they unlinked the safeties, opened the guidance systems and at twenty two miles away, let the missiles fly. Each missile cost over 500,000 dollars and within seconds the eight missiles reached supersonic speeds. The Turkish jets had no warning as four million dollars engulfed both F-35 jets just recently sold to the Turkish

military in a massive ball of flame. The F-22's did a final pass above the wreckage and confirmed both bogeys down (**CITATION 11**).

The smell of piss clung to his clothes and his beard itched like a sunburn. Aziz found himself in a dark room with fly's buzzing around his matted head of hair. It was nighttime and the flood of memories broke through the hazy dam, almost drowning him. He had failed. Unable to get the word out the entire invasion could be jeopardized. If the Asayish rebels within the city's walls didn't hear from him, they would be unprepared and a brutal house-to-house assault of the city could take months, years. They must capture the senior leaders of Daesh in one night or thousands of civilians would die.

Aziz shook his head to clear his thoughts. Taking a breath he tried to sense where his body was in pain, his back, legs and a growing headache responded like fire. He tried his legs and pushed himself from the sweat and feces soaked mud floor. A groan escaped his lips. Limping towards the door of his cell, ears pressed to the cold warped metal he listens for sounds of his captors. Nothing. Not a soul in the building. Trying the door the handle catches but doesn't open. Despair floods through him as the years of occupation, abuse and fear take hold. He believed they might be able to finally end the brutality.

Then his thigh started to shake, to vibrate. For a moment he was dumbfounded, and then it came to him. He pulled his dish-dasha up and ripped the packet taped to his crotch. The guards must have been so high on Captagon they didn't properly search him. He had no weapon so they must have assumed he was no threat. Pulling the flip-phone from its packet he called one of the two numbers in the directory. He let it ring five times and then hung up. Within seconds he received a text back.

You never showed. Are you safe? The asayish friend he was scheduled to meet that weekend was somewhere in the city. Now Aziz needed to be rescued, to get word to the militia's.

Daesh found me outside the city after curfew. Aziz typed furiously, his fingers numb from the abuse meted upon him over the last few hours. *Must find me, am in a cell somewhere in Raqqa, urgent tonight!*

Aziz waited hoping there was some way his old friend could find him and get him out. The next message took a long time to come through.

Our group is ready, send coordinates and wait for rescue. Aziz opened the settings tab and pulled the satellite coordinates for the Asayish cell, texted it and sat back against the wall breathing slowly. There was still a chance.

They couldn't use a vehicle at night with the curfew in place, so the four-man cell had to move amongst the trash strewn alleys as quietly as possible. Inside their minds was a map, which houses were friendly and which ones would call the local IS commander. The cell was fortunate with no moon on the horizon. It was dark and cold, with the last vestiges of light long gone down the horizon. Each of them carried an assault rifle strung to their backs and in their hands were small submachine guns, barrels sealed with silencers for any Daesh members they run across. They could see the building now, through a gate with high mud walls. The gate was sealed and the leader motioned for the team members to climb the East entrance. They moved silently across the street and took position by the lowest part of the wall. The first man falls to his knees and puts his hands to the ground, another steps onto his back almost reaching the four-meter height of the

wall. The next man climbs the two men's bodies, careful to avoid the sound of metal against hard mud. Once at the top of the wall the third man swings his leg to stabilize and pulls the other men up one by one and they drop silently to the other side. A single guard sits asleep in a chair by the front door. One of the Asayish moves quickly to him, drawing a knife and jams it into his trachea sawing rapidly as blood spurts onto the concrete and covers the limp and lifeless body. The Asayish rejoins the cell and they move to the back of the building. They try the door and it is unlocked. Flicking on their tac-lights they begin clearing the main floor of the one story building, searching for life.

Aziz awakens with a start. He can hear noise above him as his heart races. Involuntarily he moves to the back of the jail room pressing his body against the cold walls. A shout from upstairs calls his name. "Aziz! Where are you brother?" His mouth is dry as he tries to make the words work. Finally he is able to mouth a guttural sound. A door is kicked and lights splash the corner of the basement as foots pound down the stairs. Four darkly dressed men come to the door and the sound of metal on metal fills the room so loud the entire town must know something is up. The door to his jail clangs open and an Asayish moves quickly forward lifting Aziz from his knees. "Come we must move quickly!" The cell places Aziz in the middle and the leader hands him an AK-47. As they move through the house he sees bodies littering the main floor, most of them were still sleeping when the cell burst in. Outside the darkness is as thick as the basement jail he recently occupied. The Asayish leader breaks the lock of the main door and they escape into the city.

Aziz stood in the armory and placed the last charge of Semtex on a box by the door. The liberation of Raqqa was almost complete. Explosions and sirens could be heard across the city. Aziz feels nothing. He is exhausted from the war, from years of being afraid and alone. In this moment, when he is on the verge of seeing the change he has dreamed of for years, he only thinks of his mother. Of the woman who was dragged from her house for believing in the wrong religion, and disappeared. Aziz will never know her final moments before she was gone forever. He says a quiet prayer for her and lights the fuse as he walks out of the armory. A minute later the final Islamic State bomb factory in Raqqa explodes into blue and orange flame sending plumes of smoke billowing to the heavens.

Four weeks later

The fires have been put out and the bodies buried but trash still floats in the air on humid days. The drought has not lifted and Raqqa's thirst is not quenched. Patrols of the YPG/YPJ make daily trips to the Taqba Dam and bring water back to the city. Engineers are working on repairing both the Dam and the pipes that once flowed directly to the city. Fear is slowly giving way to exhaustion as refugees trickle back into an unrecognizable home. Many of the buildings are demolished, the guts of homes spilling out into the street. Ten years of war has left this portion of Syria a wreckage of its former self.

The Turkish military is in full retreat. Reports of clashes and violence are coming in from across Turkey. The United States evacuated Incirlik air base and removed all NATO nuclear munitions as the Turkish State fell into a civil war. Conflict had been brewing for years but when the military refused retaliatory strikes on Kurdish positions in

Raqqa the people rose up against the government. Key political leadership is in hiding and street clashes happen in every major city of the great republic.

Wasting little time the liberators of Raqqa set up communal governing councils to be quickly incorporated into the canton structure of Rojava. Each city block now meets weekly to discuss water and food distribution, trash and toxic material removal and taking the first steps towards universal education. The Red Crescent has visited the city for the first time since 2013, administering medical aid and inoculations against many seemingly eradicated diseases. Arab SDF forces have taken over primary day-to-day security as the YPG/YPJ advance on Islamic State stragglers to the South. Aziz is with them. He tried to stay in Raqqa but there was nothing left for him now. He believed that upon liberation he would find peace, but nothing came to his broken heart. The revolution, if it was to be successful, would be decided by how much land they could take before a final peace deal. Before the Russians, Americans and all the others tried to carve the country up again. He rides in the bed of a truck, looking out at the parched and dieing landscape, thinking of rain, thinking of his mother and believing that someday he will find a place to rest.

Amy

Dear Dad,

It is with a heavy heart that I write you this letter. I can no longer take your money for my studies. I can no longer do my studies. Things in the world just aren't right. You raised me to realize that. Now you fight the very idea. For three years you have payed for

everything. My apartment I live in. The books and supplies I need. Even the education you prized so highly in your own rise out of poverty. You have provided me the space I needed to grow my mind. I have come of age and I have not done this without deep resistance.

First, thank you for all your support and love. I could not have done this without you. Since I left Billing's to move to Missoula and attend University, I have had no greater supporter than you. After mom died, you could have quit and walked away but you did the opposite. You put even more love into me. You taught me to read books and trail signs. You showed me how to shoot hoops and guns. When I could dance you gave me away at high school despite your pride. Do you remember prom night? The rain was so bad and we got in a car wreck on the way to the dance? You came and pulled us out of the ditch and drove us to the dance, dropping us off a block away so no one would see. I was so embarrassed but you saved me. You wanted me to stay nearer to home and go to community college but when I decided to go to Missoula there wasn't any argument. You just planned a weekend to explore the campus. In most ways important, you have stood by my side through everything.

That's what makes this process so hard. You remember the divestment campaign at the university my first year there? The decision for me to get involved was the first major argument we ever had. It was modeled off of a history of non-violent struggle. Boycotts and divestments are tools that have been used from India under British rule to the civil rights movement and apartheid in South Africa. Its been going on at universities against

fossil fuels for years now. Montana has been an exception in northern states. Most universities have come around but it wasn't until our campaign started that it happened here.

Because you work for the Northwestern energy company you make your money from Fracking. That night I came over and you threw my friends out of the house for speaking their minds. You hung up on the phone. You stopped returning my letters. Then you threatened to stop paying for my education. This shocked me. This made me truly consider what I believe in.

As I grew up I observed every move you made. I listened to your words. I came to understand how to interact with the world. To leave it a better place. To love and protect nature. To enjoy a sunset. You gave me a passion for nature and the outdoors that burns like a brushfire in my heart. You are a future thinker in so much but you wont do anything about climate change. It ravages across our great state with fires of biblical proportion. You ignore the signs. The snowmelt doesn't come like it used too. You move up stream to where it hasn't run out yet. The beer you drink cant be made in Montana anymore. You switch to more mainstream beers. Your wife and my mother died of methane poisoning from a faulty frack well that burst. You buried her and moved on. I cannot move on. Your life is receding and my life is just getting started but the future I have inherited is not the past you lived. Your generation ripped this world apart and wants to continue doing it, refusing to leave your positions of power. You tell us it's our turn to run the world yet you wont stop voting and funding a war machine that destroys

poor cultures both overseas and here at home. We don't have much time. We don't have time for people like me to live like hypocrites.

This letter is to convey what I truly believe in. I am leaving school and not finishing my degree. I will not accept any inheritance. Spend it on a vacation for yourself. I am not going to put this on you. I will take responsibility for my future and for my choices. I do not want a college level job. There aren't any, anyway. I don't want to cover my ass in education as if that will protect me. The glaciers are almost gone and the snowmelt that gives us our rivers and our life is ending. Half our drinking water in Montana cannot be drank anymore. I love this world so much and I want to at least fight for something that is creative. Not destructive.

I have joined a group of people that will be trying to stop Fracking. To stop the very thing that got me through life up to this point. I have learned, after three years of this battle, that my ability as a spokesperson is not based on my ability to affect my family. It is about how well I can represent my heart. In order to do this I have to cut ties with anything that comes from the fossil fuel beast. I wish there was another way. But you raised me to be the woman I have become. I am now taking your values out into the world, even if you don't know it yet. I hope to someday see you on the front lines with me dad. Until then, I love you. Know that I am exactly where I was born to be.

Love

Your Daughter,

Amy Hetherington

FIFA 2022

Oscar was a soccer star at a young age. It came naturally to him and by his teenage years he was recruited by the national team. His entire family survived off the financial benefits of Oscar being a star. After the Qatari FIFA fiasco, he became an outspoken critic of the regime and the sport in general. He now resides in an undisclosed location.

Interviewer-Oscar, can you tell us a little bit about where this story begins? How did Brazil find itself in this situation?

Oscar-For years we had grown fast. Very fast. The American economic crash, the first one back in 2008? That wasn't seen in Brazil. It didn't affect us. There were many promises. Lula told us things would be different. We were patient. Most of us are poor, working people. Only because I can kick the Futbol do I have a job that pays. More and more people were becoming farther apart. When we were given the World Cup in 2008? We were happy! Parades in the streets and we were all celebrating. They told us they would improve everything. They said it would bring new roads and buses and transportation. That was a lie.

Interviewer-That was during the confederations cup, yes?

Oscar-Yes. For FIFA, it was trial run. For Brazil it was embarrassment. For many people the protests came out of nowhere. The government raised the bus fare by twenty cents and the cities exploded. Over a million in the streets. It didn't help that the police had new equipment. They like to test them out don't they? Yes, it was a beautiful sight. Of course I

didn't see any of this. I was in the Maracana. The stadium. It was not yet done with the renovations. We saw the increase of riot police as the game went on but we didn't know what was going on. Then we began to smell the tear gas. It was floating up and over the edge of the stadium. Some of the players, those of us who come from the favelas, we knew the smell instantly. The evictions and drug raids all through our youth smelled that way. Oppression smelled that way. We got a kick out of all those rich bastardos who were able to afford tickets to the games choking on the gas. What we didn't know was the police assault that was going on outside. They beat the people and shot them with rubber bullets. This brought more people into the streets.

Interviewer-Why were the people in the streets?

Oscar meets my eyes for the first time. Only for a moment. His eyes are steely.

Oscar-Lula and his people promised us they would rebuild the areas around each stadium. Sixteen stadiums meant sixteen cities that needed money. But they made a deal with FIFA and we lost our democracy. Then it was all down hill. It wasn't just our government. It was FIFA. They are so corrupt and they took us with them. They want everything their way. "FIFA-quality" stadiums. Which means we had to tear down all our stadiums and build new ones. We already had the best in the world. We breathe futbol. We are the home of futbol. We invented the concept of the beautiful game. But this isn't the way we wanted the World Cup. The construction of these stadiums displaced hundreds of thousands of people (**CITATION 1**). The riot police killed our citizens. The

more violence, the more people took to the streets.

Interviewer-Wasn't Brazil finally becoming a democracy though? Weren't people being lifted out of poverty by capitalism?

Oscar-Brazil did what it did on the pitch but the government and its corporate friends just used the occasion to grab more power. It's only a few families that hold most of the wealth in Brazil. They held even more of it after 2014. When the games were over, they began to clean up everything even faster. The military never left the towns where they were stationed. They just expanded their control. The Olympic games were two years away and the world's attention was no longer on the embattled Brazilian government. The elections didn't matter; who we voted for didn't matter. We were told if we didn't cut down the amazon for soy and beef we would collapse. We were told to grow or die. This made people angry. We could still remember before the companies came. We could see them trying to take everything from us. This became the rallying issue. We were all upset about the gentrification, the police brutality, and the continuing poverty. But the legacy and history of Brazil is one of respect and fear for the amazon. When the Portuguese came here and brought their slaves, they only lived on the coasts. Going inland was to risk annihilation. It was the indigenous people's power of the jungle that caused the fear. Even the military dictatorships didn't go out into the jungle without support.

But when industrialization came, with it came the ability to literally tear down this symbol. And make a lot of money doing it. Everyone, the corporations who profited, the

people who planned it and the governments who condoned it, all of them passed the responsibility on to someone else. They said, “No don't worry, it won't affect us, there is so much of it”. Then when there wasn't so much rain forest anymore, they said “We are but poor Brazilians, we need to cut down these trees to get money to feed and house the poor, to build our economy”. But this was just a farce. This never happened. The money never went to the poor. It went to build more airports and walls to keep the people out. By the time we only had ten percent left and the country was devastated, only then did people, regular people, begin to see what they were doing to the land.

With the trees cut down, there was nothing to keep the air clean. Everything inside the trees was taken away from the land and then we could taste the smoke from the factories. The rain fell harder and flowed heavily over the land, wiping out whole villages that had stood for over a century(**CITATION 2**). There was nothing to slow it down. Then we started getting droughts. No rain. The indigenous people, well those who were once indigenous people until the corporations came, they warned us this would happen. They said if we defied nature, we would pay a special price. We didn't listen until it was too late.

Interviewer-What finally changed it?

Oscar-It was the Yanno Mami. They were one of the last discovered tribes untouched by civilization and human “progress”. They weren't afraid of our jails, they couldn't comprehend them. They just began destroying equipment. First it was the cutting equipment, then Fracking and transport trucks. Soon there was construction equipment

burning all over the country. Some of those new whiz kids from Ecuador, you remember the ones who shut down the Japanese stock exchange over illegal fishing in their waters. Ya some of them came down to help with getting information out. They trained hundreds of activists. Showed them how to re-purpose large websites as communication funnels and get info out to the greater world while protecting people's identities. That was the start of it. After that, people refused to sell their land. If it was taken from them, they fought back for it. No longer did profit alone justify the destruction of the forests. Some non-profits in the western world, they raised money to give villagers considering selling their land, in order to offset their “potential” financial losses. This was the keystone. No one had any excuse anymore to sell their land for burning it all.

Interviewer: Talk about the heat?

Oscar: Well, we never thought much about global warming till the cup. We had record storms throughout, whether it was in the rainforest where the Americans played Spain, or on the coasts with all the heat and water (**CITATION 3**). It was the first time that FIFA, in all its wisdom, decided to have water breaks in a game (**CITATION 4**). To acknowledge that from FIFA shows how serious it was. Temperatures regularly over 100 degrees. The games were able to go off without the fans seeing much, but the lasting devastation from the floods, and their regularity is killing us all.

Interviewer-How did you organize against the games and why?

Interviewer-Do you think the Brazil games were a success for the rich? For the country?

Oscar-They thought so before everything fell apart. When Brazil lost to Germany in the knockout rounds, it destroyed any illusions that the games were a success. Its like throwing a party and passing out before all the guests leave. It lifted the veil on the country for the rest of the world. For the government, well they lost the next election so we know what they think.

Pakistan December, 2022

It is well that war is so terrible. We should grow too fond of it.

-Robert E. Lee

The dirt was caked to the windows of the Land Rover like brown toothpaste scum. The car careened around another corner, twenty kilometers over the suggested local speed. Farmers had brought their goats and cows inside for the night. The flowers were closed for the coming darkness. The man they called “Brian” sat in the back seat with a laptop flipped open and ear buds in his ears, furiously plugging away at the keys. He wore gray cargo pants with a pistol webbing hung low on his right side. His upper clothes resembled a mismatching of various military and tech equipment. Ammo for sidearm and primary weapon, grenades, pliers, maps, batteries and ethernet wire. He mumbled about the satellite being out of range and pulled out a sat-phone to call back to the staging area. There were over eight thousand soldiers involved in the assault across the country at the moment, in various stages of deployment. The long-term security deal with Afghanistan that had been signed in the summer of 2014 had provided a convenient

foothold and launch pad for just such an operation. No one in the car believed it would ever have come to this.

Pakistan had always been an unstable country. From its beginnings in 1947 as it split from Hindu dominated India, killing two million in the mass exodus of people across borders, it had participated in five wars with the Indian State (**CITATION 1**). Everything from its support of the Taliban, Madrasa-minded education for tens of millions of children, to the development of nuclear weapons was in preparation for a future war with India. Long ostracized as a more ignorant Muslim country compared to the middle-class minded states of Iraq, Syria and Egypt, and less rich than the oil infused Saudis, Pakistan saw itself as the underdog. In 1998 in response to India's second atomic weapons test, Pakistan detonated its first warheads five days later bringing the two countries to the brink of war (**CITATION 2**). Talked down by the international community both countries stepped back from the brink but the relationship would never heal. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 altered the landscape and the United States came to Pakistan with demands that carried a hefty price if refused. President Bush demanded the opening of military bases to funnel supplies into Afghanistan for the war effort, at one point almost ninety percent of war material flowed on trucks across the Hindu-Kush Mountain range (**CITATION 3**). Pakistan overtly cooperated but never lost sight of the real enemy, India. They continued to play all sides of the geo-political chess game. In the 1990s the Pakistani ISIS, or intelligence services had helped create the Taliban as a client state government that, in the event of a war with India, would be an ally they could retreat to (**CITATION 4**). This is part of the reason that Bin Laden was found to be

hiding in Pakistan, the Pakistani military never viewed al Qaeda or its Taliban allies as the major threat facing the Pakistani State. From time to time they would take military action in the Northwest frontier province, the site of most western drone strikes for the past 15 years. The Pakistani military would warn the locals they were coming, then do house to house searches, where no young men were present and call it a day. Around the end of the second Bush administration, satellite and drone coverage of Pakistan had reached a peak with strikes of Taliban positions a weekly occurrence and spy over flights of suspected nuclear locations became a major priority. This only made the Pakistani State more paranoid and added a new threat to their thinking; the United States was attempting to seize the existing arsenal of nuclear weapons in the event of a national emergency. While terrorist groups may not have the technical capacity and knowhow to build their own device, it was thought, they could more easily steal one and launch it at a target of their choosing (**CITATION 5**).

JSOC or the Joint Special Operations Command has had a rotating task force in the region since the outset of the American war in Afghanistan. The task force is made up of Navy Seals and CAG for direct action missions and Army Rangers for seizing air force facilities where the weapons might be stored. CIA officers on the ground have recruited a large network of informants and operators who can grease the wheels of access in the event of the need to seize the weapons. This is known as a “render-safe mission.”

The pit in my stomach was becoming larger as the driver went excessively faster. Hair splitting turns were leading up a dirt valley road. The potholes could sink a buffalo in them. It had not rained in four months and when the rains came the flooding had washed

away the local crops. Thousands had fled the area with no way to afford the drought; they ended up in regional refugee camps organized as Islamic Madrasas. Who knew where the funding was coming from? The net result for this mission was very few witnesses.

Colonel Layton was overseeing Operation Black Widow officially but the real commanders were the spooks on the ground for the last five years. The operation called for fifteen locations to be seized in a twelve-hour period. The world would look very different over the next moon cycle. The land rover hit a bump and everyone's head hit the ceiling. I could see the dusty camp ahead at the top of the bluff. The spook was closing his laptop flicking his eyes at me. A glint of crazy flashed across his face and was gone, the adrenaline fueling his system. I wanted to vomit. We turned the last corner and arrived.

I never served in the military. I was supposed to be doing vaccinations for polio and supposedly extinct diseases. As the region got warmer, long dead pathogens came back with full force (**CITATION 6**). I was supposed to stay in Law School at William and Mary, but when Obama was elected I felt a deeper calling to the world. I wanted to be the change I wished to see. So in 2010 I found myself in Pakistan working on polio eradication. Pakistan was only one of three countries to still have regular polio outbreaks (**CITATION 7**). I got involved in a USAID program in order to payback my student loans, in excess of 80K at that point. I thought I could do it for a year and get some credentials, then skip back to the states to finish my degree. Everything was going according to plan, till I fell in love. She was ten years older than me. She was a translator, had been born in Kabul but had fled during the Soviet invasion. She was only six when

her family made it to Hawaii. She was raised about as American as you can be. She spent long hours at the library. Consuming information. By eight years old she spoke four languages fluently: French, English, Pashto and Farsi. That would come in handy when two planes smashed into two buildings twenty years later.

The meeting felt like a training run. Everything was going according to plan. Like they had planned this. Well, they had been planning this hadn't they? For over ten years equipment had been moved to the region. Maps had been drawn up, workers recruited, enemies profiled. The whole thing had been war-gamed to death and war-gamed again. Now it was the Super Bowl. All the training came down to this. This was the reason the other men and women were in this room. Well, room was a charitable way of referring to the walls that looked like a horse barn put through a few earthquakes and droughts. The contrast with all the technology in the room was a mind-fuck. Spools of ethernet cable stretched all over the floor like a snake pit. There was movement everywhere. No chairs were in the room. Men and women moved with computers and assault rifles. Tables were covered with gear of various uses. Satellite phones with microphone headsets and night vision goggles. No specific weapon system proliferated; every soldier here had chosen their own personal favorite. The task force had such an important mission they were allowed to make their own choices about some things. This was the best of America, purpose, humility, discipline and love. Love for their country, yes, but love most for one another. They all in some way or another wanted to serve the world, to make it a better place. Some had been in this fight for years, others, like myself were newcomers but everyone was certain of one thing: if we fail...We can't fail.

I was amazed how many people we could fit in the sagging tent. Over two hundred individuals, some never having met each other, were required to function as a well-oiled team. A projector screen stood at the edge of the group forcing those in front to take a knee. An overhead satellite map showed the layout of the Khushab nuclear facility. It was a sprawling complex of research facilities and airport runways, barracks and storage depots. The heart of the Pakistani nuclear program. The crown jewel. A shiver ran up my spine. This was the ballgame; if we didn't take this facility in total then the entire operation would fail. Nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorists was an unacceptable risk. This facility was locked down airtight. It was gonna be a massacre.

Around the time of the Bin Laden mission the Pakistanis realized their internal security was not as good as they thought. Nuclear missiles that were stored in one place made it more likely that a mission to secure them by the United States would be successful. It was also more likely that a nuclear strike from India could knock out their response capability. It didn't seem to matter to the Pakistanis that India had vowed to never use nuclear weapons in a "first strike" attack unlike Pakistan who had continually threatened to do so (**CITATION 8**).

I was part of a new generation of the Nuclear Emergency Support Team. Traditionally they are the last line of defense against the use of nuclear weapons anywhere in the world. Made up of engineers, technicians and scientists who specialize in fissile material and its deconstruction, our history dates back as far as the 1960s when the fear of an American nuclear plane going down in the continental United States raised fears of contamination. In 1974 the FBI received a report that a nuclear bomb had been planted in New York. The culprit demanded a ransom of 250,000 dollars in order to not set it off.

The FBI scrambled experts to the area but their equipment was diverted to an airport in another state. The threat never materialized to gain the money for the handover and it was chalked up to a hoax. President Ford then created the NEST teams in order to avoid a similar crisis in the future (**CITATION 9**). Now, our team was looking at its greatest challenge in fifty years, nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists.

The briefing lasted two hours. It was strictly a tactical meeting. No politics, no strategy, just where to point and shoot. I liked those more than the other kind. Black and white rarely happened in real life, so I savor it when I can. Over four thousand military personnel worked at Khushab. The mission was unprecedented. Sure, they all had practice in responding to a meltdown back Stateside but working in a shooting environment was totally different. The outline was simple; two ranger battalions would parachute in near the facility and hike the five kilometers in with support from Delta. When they had eyes-on facility, coordinated airstrikes would hit the towers, gates and barracks to limit the response. Drones would provide constant over watch as the infantry began to raid the complex. That's where my team came in by helo. Working with the Delta's we would locate and secure the missile and artillery warheads. Once stable the munitions were to be destroyed on site, or loaded for evacuation. Assuming the airstrip wasn't destroyed in the initial air strikes they could fly in C-17's to load the munitions. Evacuation vehicles would carry what couldn't be destroyed across the border into eastern Afghanistan to the former military base outside Khost. There they would be decommissioned by American and Russian nuclear experts on a slower and safer time scale.

That's how it looked on paper. Reality was much different. Facing off with four thousand well-paid Pakistani troops, many of whom had sympathies for Islamic State. As I listened to the briefing wrap up I shook my head, wondering how I got to this point. I had simply wanted to help kids and now I was involved in the largest nuclear raid in world history. I looked at my watch; seeing that I had an hour before we spun up I decided to check in on Basil Rhodes, an old friend and expert on the colonial and political history of Pakistan. My gear was packed and prepped, and I could use some elder advice. My preparations were done and all my equipment on the tarmac ready to lift off. I trudged to a smaller tent with radio wires stretching through the roof. He was alone.

“Basil, my old friend, how are you?” I had kicked up dust upon entry and it now filled the tent. The temperature was hovering at ninety degrees, though the sun had set hours ago. The older man swiveled in his chair from a laptop that had multiple screens open. He nodded at me. “Long night, tonight Mitch” he always called me by a shorter incarnation of my real name. He knew I hated it, but did it anyway. I managed a mumble as I took a seat on the cot that looked like it hadn't been used in days. It would have another lonely night tonight, and by tomorrow none of us would ever be here, success or failure. He was up now, moving quickly to a fridge in the corner, returning with two glasses, filled with whiskey and a small piece of ice. I grasped it with both hands, thanking him for my last drink. I took a sip; let the cool liquid go through its four stages of taste. My tongue prickled and the back of my mouth seared at the sharpness. My throat carried the warmth down into my stomach and begged for more. He looked much older then when I met him in Syria all those years ago. That had been a much more simple

campaign to destroy Sarin gas under the Assad regime (**CITATION 10**). He had aged considerably. We all had I guess. Basil was pacing now and he began talking. He explained everything.

Four months earlier

Signals intelligence had been picking up new threats as multiple fundamentalist organizations went dark. Across northern Pakistan, message boards were dormant, meeting-rooms empty and border crossings flat. Fearing this would herald an imminent terror attack, the Pakistani military went on high alert and the United States put its forces in the region on notice. Nothing happened. No attack, no noise, not even the traditional community programs that the various groups used for recruitment. Then, two months later, a joint press conference announcement. The 3 main anti-Pakistan organizations were uniting into one powerful group. This included the Kashmiri separatists and the remnants of the Taliban and the Baluchistan independence movement. These groups didn't have the same social or religious backgrounds, but they had one thing in common, a desire to topple the Pakistani State. Alarm bells went off in Moscow and Washington. They had learned hard lessons in Chechnya, Iraq and Syria what happens when you ignore the Islamists as they unify against you. Sensing a moment of action, jihadists from all over the Arabian Peninsula, once again flocked to Pakistan to fight a holy war in the name of Islam. Meanwhile the Pakistani government was crumbling from within. Years of corruption and infighting among the elite left the education system in shambles; infrastructure was falling apart with roads deteriorating and public transit limited to oil-based infrastructure. And then there was the drought. One quarter of the economy was

based on agriculture and as the rains came less and less it forced farmers and their families into the rapidly industrializing cities. There were no jobs here of course, and people turned to crime to earn a scrape-by living. The police became more corrupt as their salaries couldn't keep up with the bribes people were willing to pay. Power outages began to reach Islamabad and Peshawar on a daily basis, while the ruling elite funneled more and more money into their own private accounts. Losing credibility among the people, the military had no choice but to use India as a scapegoat for all their problems. The region was a tinderbox waiting for a match.

The spark came in the fifth year of a devastating drought. Both India and Pakistan suffered but it was India that made the first move. Sensing weakness in Islamabad the Indian military seized control of the Indus River in Kashmir, the largest source of fresh snowmelt water from the Himalayas. Five dams run through the Kashmiri State, which is claimed by both India and Pakistan as a central dispute since 1947(**CITATION 11**). In 1960 a treaty was signed creating a power sharing agreement over six rivers, three to India, three to Pakistan. Two months ago, that agreement still held. Then Indian Special Forces seized the dams and diverted the water triggering an international crisis. Pakistan's government had no initial response and nationalists were emboldened. Nearly twenty percent of Pakistan's water supply disappeared overnight throwing food prices into an upward spiral. Within days, massive protests tore across the country. Foreigners were targeted; government buildings and military bases became ground zero for anger. The people wanted revenge. War seemed a distinct possibility and insurgent groups were gaining popularity.

That was when the JSOC commander was called to the White House. President

Olivera had gotten few military votes, her unwavering focus on climate change and reducing the active military proved an impediment. She hadn't touched the JSOC community however, viewing it like previous President's as an important tool in international "diplomacy". The meeting had been longer than expected and worst-case scenario plans for Pakistan seemed to be on the table. A US navy carrier was dispatched to the Persian Gulf and the possibility of nukes falling into enemy hands was on everyone's mind. That's when I got involved. NEST teams were traditionally a reactionary force. Working with limited information in a short time frame we tried to neutralize worst-case scenarios. Having two months to prep for a mission was like a godsend and almost complicated things for us. We had too much time to think.

The old man paused; the history in his bones was the history of this region. Too much time to think. The press were claiming that climate change could bring about the first nuclear war. We had to prevent it.

There were fifteen simultaneous missions. Fifteen nuclear targets that needed to be secured before dawn if there was any chance to avoid a war with India, China or Pakistan itself. The American President was moved to a secure location, leaders of the Senate intelligence committee were made aware of it only hours ago. All worldwide units were at Defcon two, imminent nuclear war. The entire defense structure of the United States was focused intensely on this country of 210 million people. JSOC was facing the largest air assault since Normandy in World War II. The majority of the special operations community would be on the ground in Pakistan for a ten-hour period. Every trick in the book had been used to smuggle personnel into Pakistan over the preceding

month. Aid programs and education visits, cross border trading vehicles and plain tourism. Staging in the various regions where the nuclear sites were dispersed, they checked on contacts, conducted reconnaissance of their locations and waited. Half of the sites were located close to civilian populations which presented its own problems. The isolated locations were built to survive aerial attack, not a direct assault. Getting to every location without a missile launch was next to impossible but if they could take Khushab, the nuclear command center, they could shut down the command and control procedures for the other launch sites. Pakistan had over two hundred known nuclear warheads and a quarter of these were primed for launch (**CITATION 12**). Those were priority number one. More dangerous were the battlefield tactical weapons. It was thought some regional commanders, especially near Kashmir, had been authorized to use them in the event of a command and control breakdown. That was at best a guess and what was sticking in the back of all our minds. If a regional commander decided to launch against India, it could bring on a nuclear war between the former countrymen.

Indian military commanders had been briefed on the need to not show any “hostile” actions towards Pakistan for fear they might trigger something unstoppable. The Chinese were standing by in an unprecedeted show of support with aid helicopters in the event of catastrophe. Of course, their country bordered the conflict zone of Kashmir and thus were probably at most risk of nuclear fallout should it all go to shit. There was also the pesky issue of the Uighur Separatists fighting the Chinese government and having a safe training haven across the border in Pakistan. They could launch military operations against the Chinese State and retreat across the sovereign border to safety. The Russians were a surprise participant in the raid. Providing air support against possible Pakistani

military flights, they would secure all airspace over the targets Russia had provided nuclear experts that were at the Khost military base waiting to disarm some of the devices should they prove impossible for the NEST teams. I didn't expect to need them. If we got to that point we were all in trouble.

Basil got up to get another drink, turned and looked at me with a bushy eyebrow raised, I signaled I had consumed enough already. We had met in years following the Bin Laden raid, when American's were particularly unpopular, and struck up a friendship. The man had few social skills but his analytical brain and penchant for good whiskey was more than enough to build a relationship. I checked my watch. We had twenty minutes before departure.

Basil had stopped pacing and was looking out through the tent flap. It was unnervingly quiet. There was little movement, as if they floated into a mist, not knowing what awaited on the other side. He took a deep breath and turned to me. His voice conveyed his years of experience and it cracked as he explained how this was the last time we would see this beautiful country. No matter how it went tonight, United States personnel would never be permitted to step foot in this country again. The State Department had advised all non-essential personnel to evacuate the country over the last few months. We were all that was left.

The coup came from the same place they always do, the military. This time it was the Army, those who had fought the Taliban and its incestuous cousins. There were sympathizers within each military unit but the majority of support for Islamist militias lay within the officer corps. The politicians had failed to make any decision regarding the

Indus River incident, so when the twitter alerts from military handles began showing politicians in the backs of trucks hogtied, the country celebrated. Quickly all operations against the Islamic State were canceled and the Pakistani military was deployed to the border regions with India. It was never clear how much communication took place between the militia's and the military, but the world held its breath.

Pleas for cooperation and calm streamed in from across the globe, even the Pope weighed in, but Pakistan was ready for war. If they had to go out in a nuclear holocaust they were going to take India with them. The United Nations was unable to come to any resolution, and NATO wrung its hands about possible military action. The American president began quiet conversations with a few key leaders around the world, and activated the quiet professionals back home.

I took the last drink from the lowball whiskey glass and rose to my feet. Basil extended his hand and I took it with mine. We said nothing and I nodded goodbye. My feet began the brisk walk towards my gear outside the tent. I grabbed my assault pack just as the first helicopter was spinning its engine up. Grabbing my sensor bag and my night vision I slipped it over my padded helmet and hooked up with my team. Basil wouldn't be going with us. He would be helping to run communications from the forward operating base and then destroying the site. Once the mission was over he was on his own to find his way across the border.

Our helicopters had Pakistani call signs and had been cleared for a training mission for the evening; at least we wouldn't be shot down on our way to Khushab. There were no guarantees after that.

A brusque, audible voice rang out and we loaded onto the MH-47. I climbed into the back and was met with the camouflaged and rugged faces of thirty rangers. The nest teams were dispersed between various helicopters so if one went down there would be others to finish the job. I didn't want to do it all myself but if we had too I thought it was possible. We just had to disable the warheads and then our airstrikes could finish the rest. My stomach lurched as the chopper rose from the ground, swinging its tail back towards Basil's tent and slid forward to Khushab. I slid on my headphones to hear the pilot's communications. *Forty minutes to target.* A female ranger next to me was already asleep, her head against my shoulder. How the heck could you sleep before something like this? I spent the time staring out the window at the darkness. It was almost midnight, and I could see very little. *Four hours on location.* The Ranger Captain complained this was an unsafe amount of time on target. It couldn't be helped. Disarming nuclear warheads wasn't easy, like shooting someone. That was straightforward; my job required a lot more discernment.

Ten minutes to target. The rangers began to wake up. At the same moment they racked their rifles loading a round into the chamber. Night vision goggles were switched on. Equipment was checked. Bodies swiveled towards the one exit at the ready and final thoughts were pushed aside. *One minute.* The Chinook began to descend towards the target. I could see lights from the city out the porthole. The base was running on auxiliary power. This was it. I pulled my pistol and chambered a round. Grabbing my nuclear sensor I switched on the frequency elevator. Everything was working properly. The wheels hit the ground and the back door was already open. Like a stream of fish, the rangers flowed out of the chopper, rifles up pointed at whoever would oppose them. I

followed as the last of them left. It felt like minutes but probably lasted 15 seconds and I found myself lying in the grass next to a ranger with a huge machine gun pointed toward the gate. No lights were on in the city, the power had been cut and the diesel back up generators hadn't come on line yet. I was attached to second squad, our bodies painted in a pastel color only seen through night-vision so I knew who to follow. Someone grabbed my body armor from the back and lifted me to my feet. A grinning ranger nodded for me to follow and we took off in a run towards trench outside the main gate. My feet pounded the pavement trying to get as close to the man in front of me as possible. Suddenly the lights in the facility began to come on and search lights stabbed out into the darkness. Everyone around me went prone and slid to the edge of the ditch, making it right before a light panned across my previous position. My heart was pounding and I suddenly felt extremely dehydrated. I fumbled for my camelbak and droplets of water spilled over my lip down my chin as I sucked hard. Fear was pulsing through my body. I rolled onto my stomach and reached for the pistol I had dropped. I grabbed it and peered over the edge. There was movement inside the compound, what had happened to the airstrikes, I thought. The ranger next to me was staring intensely through thermal goggles. Flashing his hand he counted out twelve security forces he could see. Pulling down the goggles, his hand moved to an earpiece and then he was motioning me down, deep into the earth.

That's when the night lit up like so many Fourth of July fireworks. The guard-posts exploded one after another, shrapnel thrown in every direction. Fire erupted towards the sky from inside the base, and I could hear ammunition exploding from a direct hit. The dull pop of sniper rounds lit up beside me as the security forces were taken down one after another. Expended bullet shells, like a fireplace landed on my skin and

burnt hot flesh. My headset keyed the ‘go order’ and we all rose as one to sprint towards the gate. Two rangers were already prepping a detonation charge on the locks. We swung around a pillar and the charges went off, blasting the door inward towards the now burning towers. The rangers moved slowly into the compound, their rifles scanning back and forth. Through my night vision I could see the PEC-4 lasers moving across the courtyard. I knew from the mock-throughs that my building was on the left after the first access point. Our squad moved to it and busted the door open. Two guards moving up the windy stairs from below were executed with two rounds each and we proceeded down to the bottom level. I was breathing heavily but it felt like my feet weren’t even touching the floor. It was as if I was being carried. Reaching the ground floor we found a technician being subdued by the lead gunner and a door with the international nuclear symbol on it. I braced myself; behind those doors was our first target. A keypad was placed next to the existing one and it began scanning for patterns of fingerprints left on the keys. The technician’s keycard was slid into the slot and the door opened. A whoosh of air and we were inside.

We could hear screaming and explosions up on the roof but nothing was left alive down here except for us. My heart was pounding and sweat slicked my fingers like my prom night. There was a control panel that our computer guy immediately jumped on and connected his portable laptop to. Informing us we had communication with the other facilities, I moved towards the warheads to manually disengage them. These missiles were linked and thus armed. All they needed was a target. We had to shut them down quickly.

I was drenched in sweat. Even down below the earth, the heat was excruciating. The generators had gone off line after the airstrikes on the towers. The warheads, about the size of a kitchen table, were being loaded but we were unable to locate ten of the tactical nuclear weapons. The artillery shells that were easy to move. They could have been removed anytime over the last month, but it was anyone's guess as to where they were. I stashed the rest of my equipment and looked around for my assigned ranger team. The woman who had slept on my shoulder was in a crouched position behind a concrete barrier meant to stop truck bombs. She was bleeding down the left side of her face. I motioned to her and she rose, limped towards me.

"Where is the rest of the team?" I asked.

She shook her head, not meeting my eyes. They were gone. I looked at my watch; we were scheduled to pull out in fifteen minutes. I could still hear small arms on the other side of the facility. My adrenaline had left and a cold sickly feeling was flowing over me like a river. I exhaled deeply and tried to concentrate, ten artillery rounds still missing. The silos were all open and the missiles were being raised up to the surface. A perimeter of rangers had encircled every one and began to attach linking cables to help mount them to the Chinooks. It was still inky black and the only illumination was the chem-markers laying around each silo for the coming hero's. The warheads would be taken first then all personnel would load out on the other black hawks and leave this country. I tried the sat-phone and got no response. Someone higher up needed to track the missing warheads. Could we have been wrong about the inventory at Khushab? Were these warheads ever really here? Pakistan was known for disinformation. During the second invasion of Iraq, everyone believed Saddam was making nukes because he continued to state behind

closed doors that this was true. We never thought he would bluff the world in order to intimidate his regional allies (**CITATION 13**). We had been wrong. Very wrong, and millions had died for that mistake. How many would die for this one?

We had lost most of the rangers in my squad and their bodies were laid out in olive drab bags near our gear, awaiting their last flight. The thwop-thwop of our deliverance could be heard over the incessant barking of dogs. Almost home. That's when the sky lit up in an orange haze of rocket fire.

RPG's and small arms with tracers struck out at the incoming helicopters and the rangers around me swung their weapons towards the end of the compound. Pakistani troops were pouring into the compound. They sprinted off towards the shooting and I heard the radioman screaming to the helicopters to break off. One of them turned too late and provided a fat juicy target for the unmanned rocket that slammed into its back rotor. The Chinook quickly lost power to its rear engine and the back sagged downward pulling it into a violent death spiral. Flesh and metal were sprayed outward as it came down on the outskirts of the city, a giant flame ball licking up towards the sky. I was screaming to my team to prep the rest of the warheads for destruction. If we couldn't get them out then they would be incinerated with this place. It would contaminate the entire area and could have lasting effects on the city five kilometers down the road but that was orders. Don't let them fall into the hands of anyone else. My team, with little military experience, and much less in a combat role worked hard and fast. My nervousness was gone, replaced with anger and determination. The firefight was withering and the call went out over our radio's to take cover. F-35's were on station and would be taking out the stragglers. The

NSA had sent a computer virus through the Pakistani air defense system the previous evening and they were still trying to figure out what was a bird and what was an aircraft. On top of that the Russian air force had mobilized a massive wave of air to ground missile strikes to target radar and anti-aircraft installations.

The explosions ricocheted noise between the buildings and smoke billowed up from what were the remnants of the Pakistani security forces. Rangers were sprinting back to the warheads and the helos were called in for extraction. As the rotors buffeted me like waves off the California coast, I reached up to grab the chains lowered to me. Scrambling to strap them in I watched as twenty-ton nuclear warheads were hoisted up to the protective beds designed specially for this mission. Waving them off we watched the Chinooks rise into the night back toward the Afghan border just as the Blackhawks came in to take us away. The bodies were loaded first. Too many to count but we couldn't leave anyone behind. I checked my NEST team, all accounted for, and stepped into the last Blackhawk. The helo rose and its nose dipped forward towards the base in Khost. The crew chief looked at me with relief and I just nodded my head back against the bulkhead and passed out.

Khost, Afghanistan

The flight only took a few hours. We touched down on the runway and no one was there to meet us. They had already had plenty of flights; we had one of the longest commutes across the border. I hopped out and headed toward what looked like the command tent. Injured rangers were being carried towards a medical hut that had been quickly set up. I went to the TOC to report and see if we could tell what had happened to Basil. Did he get out of there? What about the other teams? I needed information. I had slept the entire trip

and felt like the mission had been days ago instead of hours. The sun was beginning to come up over the mountains. The rangers had been reliable, but had lost a large amount of men and women. The tactical operations center was filled with military personnel from all branches and civilians as well. My boss saw me and waved me over. He was talking excitedly, not even acknowledging the mission we had just completed. Thirteen of the fifteen targets had been successfully hit. The last two were still in massive firefights and extraction was looking less plausible. One of them was near Kashmir. I looked up at the big board with all the colors denoting our forces and those suspected to be Pakistani or civilian. We had gotten there too late. An Islamic State cell had arrived at the facility before our operation and was moving the warheads when the raid started. I wanted to talk about the missing tactical nukes at our facility but my boss wasn't having it. There were too many other things going on to focus on that right now. I just sat back and tried to stay out of the way. My mission was over.

In the end it was the human penchant for revenge. An emotional response to legitimate anger. America had been the bigger kid on the playground for as long as anyone could remember. Pakistan was the nerdy weird kid with his brain stuck in a book. Until that kid grew up and outsmarted the USA. Kashmir had been a flashpoint since partition, giving a physical example of the enmity between two great nations. The Islamic State seized upon this hatred when they raided the Kashmir nuclear facility. At first they were fought off by the Pakistani military, but wave after wave of suicide attackers breached the walls. The militants took the base but had no way to access weapons systems. There was only one thing that could bring the militants and the beleaguered

Pakistan military together. It was their hatred for the American's. As the outskirts of the facility burned, a small group of technicians, with the nuclear codes made a fateful decision. The Shabab-7 intercontinental ballistic missile had a range of four thousand miles. With the American strike force closing in on their underground compound, three technicians programmed the missile for atmospheric detonation, turned the keys for activation, and with bearded militants looking over their shoulder, they pressed the button.

The American Delta teams had barely reached the second concrete ring of barricades when they heard a deep roar like the shuddering of a giant machine. The missile exploded out of its silo and streamed straight into the sky leaving a white trail behind. Back in Khost, the computer screens all blinked rapidly, tracking the rogue missile. At the pentagon alarm bells wailed and satellites began to track the missile as it left the stratosphere and arched towards North America. Anti-missile systems launched their rockets but it was too late. The missile reached the border of North America and all satellite feeds at NORAD went dark.

Kazakhstan

The flags of all nine countries hung at equal height saying much about the power of the agreement. For the first time in world history, all existing nuclear powers had agreed on massive reductions in their genocidal stockpile. Standing in front of each flag on a raised platform adorned with microphones, was the political leader of each nation. They wore their best dresses and suits, stoic figures holding their breath for the future.

The Russian president walked to the dais and placed his hands upon the podium. His thinly opened eyes danced across the crowd, taking in a packed auditorium in the former Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan. The talks had begun the moment hostilities had ceased within Pakistan. The nuclear explosion had wiped out the forward military post that had served as a command hub for the joint Russian-American Operation Black Widow. The Russians, being closest to the crisis in a physical sense, had also suffered the most. Surprising everyone, the Russians had not only sent troops to the raid to seize nuclear weapons from the extreme militants that formed the coup, but they had led the push to abolish nuclear weapons. The President cleared his throat and began to speak in Russian as the translators hopped to their role:

"Since the beginning of the so-called "Cold War" we Russians have never wanted to possess these weapons. Nevertheless we felt so much fear for our own safety, we found it necessary in order for survival that we built them. We built many and by this action, contributed to our own economic crisis. Let it be clear, we are a country that has never used these weapons against another nation of the world. With this agreement, we will destroy a great many of these weapons and take the largest step towards never repeating these mistakes again."

In attendance were survivors of the only three nuclear battlefield survivors still alive. Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Kazakhstan. Media from every imaginable source leaned in to every word from the Russian leader. The world was slowly letting out its breath after six months of nuclear poker.

"With so much at stake, our nations cannot continue to invest so much energy towards violence. These resources that have been diverted to keep the world at war must now be diverted towards the greater threat, the dangerous storms and droughts gripping our lands. These changes threaten us all, and only a planet-wide approach has any hope of getting us through this dangerous time"

The room rose to its feet, cheers and yelps of hope rained down from the upper levels of the large auditorium as if the heavens were opening for only a moment. Even the other leaders standing behind the Russian president were smiling, clapping, many of them never believing this was possible. Only a few years before this scene would have been laughable. The American's and the Russian's agreeing on nuclear arms reductions, let alone a global agreement to destroy existing stockpiles and ban future research. Along with that a last minute deal to ban the weaponization of space had been inserted by the French government after a multi-month occupation of the parliament by determined citizens. Demanding the restriction of earth's atmosphere as the barrier upon which weapons could cross, these students and scientists, farmers and workers had opposed the new weapons spending taken on by the conservative French government. This government had fallen and a new coalition framed around protecting space for the peaceful exploration of space.

The agreement would last twenty-five years and money saved from maintaining the weapons would flow into a global pool to help remediate climate change. It was a far cry from the negotiations of the 1980s when Reagan sat in the White House. It was a lasting

agreement. And the best possible thing to follow such a disaster.

Maggie NFL Child 2023

“Why does no one like football anymore dad?” Her voice interrupted the advertisements. Hugh Jacobs, father for 13 years, let out a sigh of frustration and distraction.

“That’s a long story I don’t think your generation has the patience for” he mused. They sat on the leather green couch frayed and used, purchased before she was born. The Green Bay Packers were having a particularly difficult time with the Monsanto Vikings this frigid Sunday. The snow was falling in Minnesota. Being an indoor stadium was supposed to prevent the “elements” from coming inside. However the generators had tripped again, pausing the action and leading to an ever-increasing amount of commercials. NFL games, which used to stretch into the three-hour range, were now pushing four and the fan base had reacted by reliably decreases in viewership. Only two days before the weather had been in the seventies and the clim-cast for Sunday had been a bright sunny day. They had been wildly off the mark yet again. There was no predictability for the weather anymore, Hugh thought.

“Please dad! I promise I’ll listen. You don’t even yell at the TV anymore. Do you remember when your friends used to come over to watch?”

He did remember. Before all the rule changes. Back when things hadn’t been so bad. Now there was too much to distract people. It had gotten hot everywhere and the football season, which traditionally had been fall weather became like summer more often. Then

in the depths of the Christmas fairytale the weather swung to below freezing temperatures. 70-degree shifts within hours made it impossible to predict a Twenty-four hour cycle. More games were canceled. They had just opened up Tuesday Night Football(TM) for games that were canceled on Sundays. Indoor stadiums had regulating systems, but the few outdoor stadiums that were left; well they were for the crazy fans that had nothing to lose. Two fans had already died of frostbite at a Packers game this season. No one sold out their stadiums anymore. The television experience was just too good, and football wasn't worth dying for.

“Alright Magdalena” he said, rolling up the magazine. Might be a good chance to bond with Maggie, since she was always at her mother's.
“Describe what you see on FLEX-TEL. What are the players wearing?”.
Maggie sat for a minute, not understanding the significance. She glanced over at their new rollable smart TV that was plastered onto the wall. The wind whipped outside. The droning sound of the announcers explaining a new product that the quarterback uses to be great at his game. For years now corporate profit had taken over the sport.

“Well, I remember the last time the Packers won the Super bowl back in 2019 and then the strike the next year. That seemed to be the start of things. I remember when they used to wear those weird helmets...” her voice staggered off and was interrupted by her father's laughter.

“Ha ha ha, they wore those helmets for over 70 years and there wasn't a problem.

That's something your generation doesn't remember" The first smile grew on his lips in some time. The whiskers of his mustache curled over his teeth. Maggie, not being used to this, quietly urged him to go on. He rarely laughed or talked much, his breathing apparatus got in the way of too much movement and exertion.

"Ok, so they had these helmets that worked, then they changed em, and the players went on strike, and then football sucked?" Her voice was teeming with sarcasm. "Is that what happened Hugh?".

He sighed. She was using his name instead of "Dad". This happened when she was annoyed. He could never have referred to his father by his first name. He would have gotten the belt. *Times change*. The power was still out at the stadium. Might as well try to bond with his daughter. It was clear that she was trying. He didn't have much time left. Why was this so hard?

"Okay" he leaned forward. Staring into the wall, as if searching for a long lost thought, he began:

"Long before you were born, way back in the 1990's, football was entering its golden era." He coughed hard into his arm and then resumed.

"It's hard to imagine now but there weren't many things a family like us was worried about. Not like today." He grimaced and breathed short fast jerky breaths. "Of course we still had to work to get by and pay bills but it was a lot easier. I don't remember worrying about much aside from when the next game was on. I'd look forward to it all week and then settle down on the couch and cheer for the Pack or the Badgers. You had to have

cable back then to see the games, NETFLIX hadn't purchased the rights yet."

She was making eye contact and had settled down for one of his longer stories. He paused to sip his homemade moonwort beer. The Halftime was topless women of every color, the NFL's attempt to show its diversity. "FLEX-TEL OFF" he said and the wallscape smart screen folded in on itself to conserve energy.

"Back then, everything seemed sky high. Like it could never end." She had seen videos saying as much. "The Internet had just been invented and people still didn't have cell phones. Getting together on the weekends provided a welcome distraction from work. College players weren't even paid back then." He gulped down a third of the beer, pausing as if lost in thought. "The sunsets were not so ominous."

She rolled her eyes. "Dad, they are still pretty, all pink and purple, and they last a long time".

"Well a lot of that has to do with the pollution my dear. But, you are missing the point. To those of us who lived through those days, they were better days". She winced at that slight at her future on the planet. And her generation. "Sorry", he said. "I just miss the old days". She nodded and he continued.

"The first big thing was the concussions. It started when our quarterback, Brett Favre was injured seriously after he played too long. Then other important players got injured and the social pressure to hold players out of games for medical reasons took hold. It called into question the fundamental safety of the game. If any particular hit could cause a concussion and end a player's career, then how could the excitement of the sport overrule

the safety aspect?"

"But couldn't they just design different helmets? And why did those injuries just start in the 1990's?"

"Well like I said, they had helmets that worked for over 70 years. It wasn't the equipment that was the problem. The game changed. Instead of defensive games there were rule changes that favored offenses. Faster. More points. That's what the American people wanted. Or that's what the NFL told the American people they wanted."

He rose slowly from the chair and moved to the refrigerator for another beer. "You want something to drink honey?"

"No I'm fine thanks." He was walking slowly and she tried to hide the concern on her face as he shuffled back. "Are you feeling okay?" her voice almost broke at the end of the words.

"Yeah I'm fine. Just getting old. Now where was I?" He wasn't *that* old, he was simply suffering from lung problems, everyone in the town was after Governor Walker had opened another toxic waste dump just down the street.

"You were telling me about what the American people wanted."

"Right, so the NFL changed all these rules which made the game quicker. There had always been injuries in the game, but with the rule changes and the fact that players were getting bigger than ever it made for a perfect poison. We didn't know it at the time but most of the players were using steroids of some kind. Performance enhancing drugs, they were called. You can't really blame them. Millions of dollars on the line. Most players only got two or three years to make money and then they were out of the league. Of course, you had some playing until forty but that was rare."

“Like Brett Favre?” She had never seen him play live but had seen all the highlight tapes at Christmas when the family got together and sports highlights were the only thing they could all agree upon.

“Yeah, like Brett. He’s a good example of the pressure to succeed. All these players now, they don’t know how to do anything other than play football. When their career is over their life is over. Sure, some of them can get a job announcing or something like that but for most of ‘em, it’s being a bouncer at a strip club or talking about their careers to anyone who will listen. It’s not like they have great financial advice on how to save money. Most of ‘em spend it all before they leave the league.”

“So, when did the steroids become a problem?”

“Well” he said as he scratched his head, “Congress started investigating in 2018 and it was only a matter of time before it took the whole thing apart. Football was more about getting an edge or passing a physical then it was about becoming bigger. A lot of players were already incredible athletes but they were pushed by 70,000 screaming fans to go to their limits. When you start throwing three hundred pound players at high speeds against each other it will cause damage. The human body isn’t meant to have bones deal with that kind of stress.” He coughed again, this time sounding like a dog spitting up garbage. He wiped his mouth on his sleeve and continued. “People wanted to see it, needed something violent to take their minds off their crappy wages, off the job cuts and the stupid wars.”

“But we still have wars going on dad” she had that smirk on her face again. “Well, yes we do, but these are smaller, a bit more desperate now. But that’s not the point. The point is that we were all looking for a distraction, sports provided that for people, among other things, and steroids brought the end. Everyone was cheating on

some level, that was the whole problem with all this technological development; we started to know everything wrong that people were doing and our morality couldn't evolve fast enough to deal with it. But with football, that was always something we could count on, no matter how bad things were, even if you were a Cleveland Browns fan, you could look forward to Sunday.

“Then they signed the corporate sponsorship deal and specific teams began advertising for oil companies on their team logos. The play calling in the first quarter was put up for auction and just like American Idol; people could vote in the plays that they wanted to overrule the coach. When the best players were found to be cheating, and Congress, which was eager to deflect attention away from all the natural disasters, began investigating, it screwed up the whole sport. People began to walk away. It wasn't about morality; it was about the rule changes and the betrayal. People felt truly betrayed by the commissioners of the league and by the players themselves. Once that happened and college players began to get paid, this was to keep them in college as long as possible, the NFL just collapsed from the inside.”

He paused to sip his beer, lost in thought.

“It's like everything else in this country, the trick is to convince everyone that we can just keep growing, keep getting bigger, that there aren't any limits. So everyone invests their money, time, energy and their emotions into the project and they find themselves strung out, hung out to dry, if you will, and the whole bubble bursts. It blows up and the working people are left to clean up the mess. Or drown in it.”

Magdalena was sitting crossed legged on the floor, leaning towards her father; they hadn't talked like this in years. Mom had told her she had better speak to her father

more before the end came. Her mother was always so abrupt and awkward, Maggie hated that. Her mind wandered as her father continued to speak.

“The whole thing was compounded by the sexual assault scandals. It wasn’t news that big men who are trained in violence on the field might perpetrate it when they get off it. It started with just a few players. The NFL had enjoyed immunity from prosecution; after all, these guys were our real hero’s, until one specific video from an elevator changed everything (CITATION RAY RICE). With all the cameras and media it went viral very quickly. Suddenly women who had been quiet for years came out of their silence and began telling about physical and sexual abuse that had happened to them. This coincided with greater scrutiny of the university education system and the military as well. Really the NFL was the beginning of awareness on that issue. I didn’t realize it. I denied it for a long time. Your mother knows about that”. He said this last sentence ruefully; Maggie wasn’t quite sure how to take it.

“At one point the rates of abuse were something like fifty percent of women in our society. It was such an overwhelming number and there were so many brave women that stood up, there was nothing that could be done by the institutions but to agree to radical changes. Counseling was enforced from the moment people were drafted into the NFL. Military personnel were finally screened for domestic violence and entire universities came to a standstill until those administrators and board members responsible for dragging their feet were fired. For many people they just stopped watching the games. Sponsors dropped out of the picture and revenue fell. When some NFL owners got caught abusing women the whole thing blew up. In a league that was used to incredible growth every year, this threw a wrench into the whole thing. The collective bargaining

agreements that had governed the league for over twenty years were scrapped for a more money making scheme. Before, all the teams had the same amount of money to spend on players. The winner of the Super Bowl was always punished the next year, which led to parity and the belief that on any given Sunday any team could come out victorious. Certain wealthy owners argued that a privatized league could be more flexible during the economic crisis of 2018. This led to certain teams always dominating. It's also why there was a player's strike."

"For all its nationalist hype, the NFL functioned as a socialist institution for over twenty years and during that period it was the most successful business model in the United States. They were even a 501-c3 non-profit until the crash. They could write off billions of dollars in taxes. They also had a strong players union that held the corporate execs accountable. Once the league started charging television money for every individual game, many bars couldn't afford it. Programming blackouts occurred in places like Green Bay, which had a sixty-year history of selling out all its games. The American people aren't stupid and they knew they were getting hosed. There is only so much people will take before they walk away."

"But you still watch football" her eyes wouldn't leave his lips.

"Yes. Yes I do. Football still brings back memories of Dad. My dad, your Farfar (Norwegian for grandpa). Watching it was the only thing that we could do together without arguing. It was the way that we bonded and shared time together. It was our family."

She was still looking at him, but her face had changed from confrontation to sympathy.

He had really found happiness in this retreat from chaos. Football wasn't just a game to him and he was still loyal to it, even its current incarnation. She reached out her hand and put it on his knee.

"I'm sorry dad, I wish I could have seen football the way it was when you grew up" she squeezed his leg, showing the first compassion they had shared since she was a toddler.

"Yep, it was something, it was something." He sighed and layed back in the chair. The FLEX-TEL had unrolled and turned itself on and the power in the stadium had returned once again. The quarterback was at the line of scrimmage yelling out his officially sanctioned cadences.

"BP OIL DRILL, BP OIL DRILL! Set HIKE!"

PART II

Olivera 2023

The journey was political as much as it was personal. The President was responding to yet another climate crisis in Colorado. This is the state that had put her over the top in electoral votes. Now, the University of Colorado State was gone. Half of the city of Fort Collins had burned to the ground. The firefighters, trying to protect some of the wealthier suburbs unwittingly turned the fire back on the student's structures. Many young people lost their lives. Over a thousand now. The President was going to announce new plans around rebuilding. Then after that she would take a trip up to the mountains to look into cloud seeding at the ski resorts that were so popular. Vice

President Bob Davis had been picked to balance the ticket, but was sidelined once in office. While a climate denier before the campaign he had focused on Libertarian values and avoided any major missteps. He had been a compromise for the ticket in order to defeat the Trump phenomenon then sweeping the world. People wanted change and they saw their institutions as the primary enemy. They were willing to choose anyone that hated the elite, and that's something the President and her unusual choice for VP had in common. Neither came from the elite.

The headwind buffeted the VC-25 and the engines whined against the storm. Rain slashed against the windshield as Lt. Colonel Sherry Lewis, today's pilot for Air Force One, squinted into the clouds and shook her head. The jet-stream had changed so much in the last few years that it took almost twice as much gas to get from Washington DC to Denver now. A new Air force One was being designed but currently they had to refuel on any flight that left the continental United States. It didn't help that Boeing had reached a financial meltdown during the Trump years. Today, they were just doing an overnight to Denver. They would be back in DC the next morning. Trained by the United States Air Force over two decades ago, she had been one of the last human pilots. Everything was drones with the exception of troop transports now. However, there was no substitute for human touch when it came to flying the President. Air Force One dated back to the early days of World War II, when the first plane was used to shuttle President Roosevelt to Morocco for a meeting with Churchill.

Under no circumstances was Sherry to leave the cockpit but she knew the President

would be reviewing her speech in the room directly aft of the cabin. Sherry liked this President. She didn't assume she would at first. Her policies sounded so out there and impossible in the polarized political atmosphere. No nonsense and driven as if the world was on her shoulders. The speech was another new proposal. This marked a record for the Presidency. Thus far Olivera had proposed and passed a record level of climate legislation, some against the advice of her closest advisors. Instead of negotiating with Congress she had gone straight to the American people. Every time there was a climate event, she was there, speaking in her empathic way about why it happened and how we can change the future. That we don't have to live this way. For Lt. Colonel Lewis, a strong bond had developed with the President. The first woman elected, and the first Latino, she had to go past Congress which was still packed full with old white men who were out of touch with what the American people actually wanted. Olivera had chosen to be a great one-term President and put everything on the table. Lewis respected that. In fact President Olivera was the first non-republican she had ever voted for. Because the President would propose a specific bill, and the leadership in the House and Senate declared a voting date, she could spend her time directly appealing to the people, who in turn stormed the offices of Congress all over the country. It was a wonder that no one had ever tried this before. Due to the Supreme Court being stacked after the successful assassinations, nothing that was passed by Congress and signed by the President ever reached their hallowed halls. Because of this, momentum had built up, first the new CCC which employed over five million Americans, many of them republicans. It changed so many lives after the second financial crash. Then she was able to pass the first price on carbon. But it was the combined efforts to end coal extraction completely and a

moratorium on Fracking of natural gas that was really spinning the political wheels.

None of these ideas were Olivera's to begin with; they had come from the people who had been building a movement for years. By the time she had proposed most of her ideas, many of the environmentalists were saying they were too small. That it was time for a complete corporate shutdown. Of course this wasn't possible. This was still a country of the haves and the have-nots after all.

Olivera had tried her best so far and it looked like the President had a decent shot at reelection. The coalition of progressive democrats, libertarians, anarchist's and socialist's was holding against the statist members of the former Democratic Party and the corporate Republicans. The Tea party was still eating itself alive. People could see the climate was getting worse every day and the government jobs programs were all that was keeping a faltering economy from flat lining. The question on everyone's mind was: what will the voters do this time?

Air Force One was coming in on the outskirts of Denver now and Lewis shook the thoughts from her head as she focused on the task at hand. She radioed the tower and confirmed landing in five minutes. She could see the Rocky Mountains with the last rays of purple light shrinking behind them. Running through her checklist she was interrupted with a shout and what sounded like shots in the cabin. Warning lights appeared like stars after a hyperspace jump. An alarm was blasting through her headset and the display covering her eyes was showing multiple breaches in the hull.

Airlock two was red. It had been severed and was depressurizing the entire plane. Lewis barely had time to glance over at her copilot who was staring out the window at something. Hitting the emergency alert function she announced over the intercom they were taking abrupt maneuvers. She reached for the controls to take the plane off autopilot just as she saw the stinger missile flash into the right wing. Disintegrating into thousands of small pieces the wing flung the plane into a violent spiral towards the eastern suburbs of Denver. Alerts were screaming through the cabin as the pilot radioed out the emergency as she desperately wrestled with the controls. The fireball could be seen far away up the Rocky Mountains. The world held its breath.

Port Townsend

Hank O'Leary FBI

He was still working on his tradecraft. A couple months at the farm in Langley, Virginia. Then a few more working in Turkey developing assets on the ground. He hadn't spoken a lick of Arabic when he got there but the new translation earpieces that Google had produced proved more than enough for survival. If he could make it in the heart of the Middle East he could make it in America. Growing up in Boston had its perks for toughness but he was out of place on the West Coast. He was the first federal officer in his family but law enforcement went all the way back to the Civil War for the O'Leary clan. Deals had been struck. Unofficial and unspoken but a deal nonetheless. As new arriving immigrants the Irish were at the bottom of the white identity pyramid. In order to move up a rung they were allowed to permeate the police force. With one caveat. Put the

pressure on those below and protect those above. Blacks, Latino's, Russians. The Chinese. They were the new immigration threat and the Irish were tasked with keeping them from joining the American dream (**Citation 1**). Hank wasn't one of those racist types. Hell, his family had fought valiantly in the civil war for Christ's sake. On the side of the Union!

His eyes strained through the binoculars. Wrapped in a wool blanket against the unseasonably cold summer he stared out the back of a Ford Econo-line van. The tinted windows worked both ways. He lay down the glasses and rubbed his freezing hands together, wishing he had brought a hand warmer. It had occurred to him over the last week with the fluctuations of the forecast; those weather people could never get it right, that he should prepare more for the night. Tomorrow. Tomorrow ill change this he thought. There was no predicting a hundred degree night that could drop eighty degrees in a matter of hours (**Citation 2**).

His target was a collective of houses, well they could barely be called that, huts were more apt, nestled on the outskirts of Port Townsend. Famous as an old Victorian art community populated by old liberals it always voted blue. Not a place one would think to find radicals in the Northwest although that had all changed. Now they were spreading, breeding like rabbits. It was like the 1930s without a Roosevelt to give them hope. Satellite imagery showed nothing out of the ordinary, pigs and goats and a few chickens. Shapes of movement, coming and going. No one had been fingered yet but this was prime drug area and members of the collective were known to violate the federal 2200 hours curfew.

The radio blinked and vibrated on his tactical vest. "Liberty two this is liberty six over."

His frozen hands clicked the talk button and he confirmed his attention.

"Liberty two we have a car full of *drags* headed in your direction. Be advised they are moving fast and have left our coverage area. Over."

"Drags" was their common term for those who didn't fit traditional gender norms i.e. queer, gay and mostly transgender lefties looking to break any and every cultural rule no matter what the consequences. The Farm had warned him about this.

"Roger, any change in behavior? Over."

"Liberty two, continue surveillance but do not, repeat do not leave your vehicle. Clear."

He could see the vehicle moving down the dusty road kicking up a trail. They were rolling hard. Way too fast for normal. He thought for a moment about getting back on his radio. There was a knock on the front windshield and he snapped his head around to look. Birds had been known to fly into it from time to time. The back window exploded with shards of glass slicing into his cheek and chest. His head snapped back and connecting with the recording equipment. Out of the darkness and through the broken window emerged a black-gloved hand. It carefully avoided the glass and opened the door from

within. Two female shapes stood facing him. Dressed in plaid and black. Hair tied to their heads. One pointed an assault rifle at his chest. The other had a small device that looked like a star trek phaser. Pointed at his dick.

“Hey piggy piggy its time for you to pay the piper” said the one with the Taser.

Hank had a split second before she jammed the Taser into his crotch finding the soft spot between his balls and his Johnson and pumping 50,000 volts into his manhood. His body convulsed into the fetal position and jolts of pain wracked his body.

“I didn't know big brother had such a small dick” the redhead one laughed with pleasure. “Take that you fascist fuck, that's for all your patriarchal oppression. You'll never see your family again”

He couldn't move as he was pulled feet first out of the van. His head smacked the bumper and warm liquid ran down his neck. The other woman, (he thought it was a woman) tossed something into the van and a small fire began next to the driver's side. On her way back toward his body she kicked him in his hip making him roll over and spit deep purple blood into the mud. He couldn't think. His brain was swimming. *Who were they? Where did they come from? How did they know..?*

Another kick to the head put him over the conscious limit and he slipped into oblivion.

Hank awoke with a horrible taste in his mouth. Blood and puke mixed together.

Caustic stomach acid was caked to his teeth and wrapped around his kisser. Trying to spit he realized he had bit through half his tongue. He had seen this from all the convicts he had tazed in Boston. They always ended up biting their tongues. One had bitten straight through it when two officers had tazed him to the point of seizure. Random traffic stop. Shouldn't have been driving. At least Hank hadn't bitten completely through. His head felt like a vodka night gone bad. He was on the floor in a small wooden paneled room. Dirt below him and a broken fan above. His hands were zip tied together in the front and he had shit himself. His sense of smell came back suddenly and he was overcome for a tick. His legs were free. Could he stand? He had too. Rolling onto his stomach he pushed up with his hands to a kneeling position. He wasn't in perfect shape but much better than most of those on his FBI task force. They had all gotten fat in the past years. The room swirled around him and he took a moment to get his bearings. Nothing in the room. Except a table. Rising slowly to his feet he waddled over to it. His balls were on fire. He reached down to check. Still there. Both of em. On the table were three things. A folder with his name, rank and home address. *How had they gotten that?* A butter plate with what looked like tofu. And a pill with a note under it.

“If life gets too tough then you can quit anytime”

The soy could be poison but he was overcome with hunger at the site of the tasteless white brick of bean paste from the former amazon. He shoveled it into his mouth. Leaving the pill with its cynical note he picked up the folder and retreated to the corner. Sliding down the wall for support he slumped onto his bruised ass. Opening the folder his

breathing rapidly accelerated.

The first picture was of his house. His car was in the front next to that of his mistress. *They must have gotten it when his wife was on that trip to DC!* A small note on a pasty said “we know what you did last summer”. *Had they been following him? Spying on him?* This was too much. He turned the page. It was every piece of personal information about him. Birth weight, gender, taxes paid and unpaid, his dropout from college, political donations (all republican and one tea party way back) and a list of every legal infraction he ever had. Even the hit and run in high school that was supposed to be expunged. *What was this? Who the fuck had access to stuff like this? This was private!*

He was so overcome with anger his pain had temporarily receded. The next page was his wife. The color drained from his face. His heart beat like a broken alarm clock. They had everything. *What did they want?* The last page slipped out of the jacket and floated to the floor like a wounded butterfly. It was 8 x 11 white paper. In bold black letters the message was as clear as his rapidly returning pain. He collapsed to the floor and just before the black whole swallowed him he read:

NOW YOU KNOW HOW IT FEELS

He awoke from a nightmare he couldn't immediately remember. From one nightmare into another. There was more soy on the table and a chair had been added. His mouth felt like the deserts he had seen in southern Turkey. He grabbed at the bottled

water, popped the top onto the floor and drained the whole thing. He hadn't had any since...since when? How long had he been here? His mind wandered through his injuries. Shoulder feels real sore. A wave of pain washed over him as he touched the back of his head. Dried blood flaked off from the base of his short-cropped hair. He needed to disinfect that soon or there would be trouble. He reached down to touch his member. Still there. But bruised and purple. More than usual. He cringed at the thought of whether he would ever get to use his prick again. As he felt sorry for his predicament thoughts of his wife and the file flooded back. Tears of unfairness and betrayal stained his mud-streaked face.

"It's not fair!" He yelled to no one in particular. "I did everything right! I never hurt anyone, why are you doing this to me?"

He banged on the walls and wailed a guttural scream of desperation. He sounded like the rabbit's he used to hunt as a boy, their cries of pain before they exhaled their final life. He was fading mentally, cracking under the isolation. His training had never incorporated this. No one got abducted from the FBI. Where were his fellow G-men? How had they not found him yet? When was the hostage rescue team going to burst in the door? He whimpered in self-delusion.

The scratching sound of keys from the other side of the door woke him. A booming muffled voice, asexual, called from the looking screen:

"Move to the corner of the room and kneel down. Put your hands on your head and do

not speak.”

His body complied without thinking. His knees ached as he pulled himself on all fours towards the center of the room. The door opened slowly behind him, the metal hinges creaking in search of lubricant. Soft footsteps approached until he could sense a body standing over him. The lights went out as a hood was thrust down upon his head. A hand grabbed his right arm and jerked him roughly out of the room. He could sense a clear change in temperature and pressure. *Much colder out here.* He stumbled for what seemed an eternity down stairs and around corners. He met a few walls along the way. There was no possibility of finding his way back to his cell. At last he was sat down on a stool and the hood was taken off.

In front of him was a woman he hadn't seen before. He suddenly realized how bad he smelled. He hadn't been cleaned up since he was captured. He could feel the squishy mess in his pants. The anonymous women in front of him didn't seem to notice.

“You are our prisoner” her words were matter of fact, devoid of emotion.

“Prisoner of who”?

“The Free Cascadia Army. You are no longer in what you call the “United States”. We have taken you away from the state of Washington and you are now in northern Cascadia.”

That explained why it was so cold. *Canada. They were in fucking Canada!* How had they crossed the border? The seriousness of all this suddenly hit him. His men wouldn't find him this far away from his operating region. He was on his own. She seemed to understand where his thoughts had taken him.

“You are not alone. We have taken others as well. None of you are in the same place. If you ever hope to get home your masters will have to value your life over their pride.”

“What do you want from me”?

“Nothing but the truth. You are just a soldier in a war beyond your own comprehension. You are expendable and replaceable. We want your government to be abolished. We want your values to burn. We want your culture to never hold sway over anyone for as long as there is still life left. As long as your culture exists we are all doomed.”

He said nothing. There was nothing to say.

“Tomorrow you will begin an education program. We give everyone a chance to acknowledge their mistakes and change their lives. The others don’t think you have a chance but we will treat you in a way that we would never be treated were the roles reversed. And be clear about that, every day the roles have been reversed. We have lived under your tyranny for too long. For you that ends now.”

A hand grabbed him from behind and the bag went back over his head. He heard the door close behind him as he was dragged back to his cell. His new home.

Aida (Hacker) Utah-Vancouver 2023

The wind whips the rain into frenzy. It hits the windows with force. The weekly climate storm claws up the eastern side of Deseret Peak. She is glad to be in a hotel room. She stares at the computer screen. The video is fuzzy but she can make out a truck entering the North end of the airport. The red carpet repair van goes slowly to the corner of the screen and disappears. The tape ends there and another security camera picks up the van fifteen-seconds later as it comes to a halt next to a shed. Two men get out of the vehicle and immediately go into the shed. Its about twenty feet long and is used to store tools for fence repair and emergency fires on the runway. The Denver International Airport recently expanded with five more runways. Construction was still underway when the assassination took place. Expansion of the airport was part of the massive migration west to Denver from Indiana after the pipeline spill. The door of the storage shed opened and a single man opened the van door and drove away.

Aida takes a drink of water and rewinds the tape. Again. *There must be something here.* She shifts in her Carhardt cutoffs and hits the play button. The President had been dead for five days. Not just the President but her whole advance team, two leaders of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Army and Air Force Chiefs and the head of the EPA and

Department of Energy. In total eighty-eight people were dead. En route to a statewide funeral for yet another wildfire that claimed over a thousand lives and the city of Fort Collins in Northern Colorado. That was old news now as all focus in the world was centered on the first death of a President since 1963.

The only reason Aida was looking at this information was because of an old friend. Jenine was her mole in the NSA who had slipped her the feeds. She had been one of the good ones that stayed on during the Trump administration. That source had gone dark but before they did there had been a suction of internal files that had been sent to her. Aida had no idea where Jenine had gotten the information in the first place. She hadn't slept much since then. There was too much information to process and she couldn't share this with anyone. The implications could change the world. There was a vibration on her 'Flex-Arm' and she looked at the only device in the room connected to the Internet. Opening the message her heart stopped.

GET OUT-BURN ALL

Like the de-thawing of skin after an ice storm, her body prickled. Never had she received a message from the emergency alert system. How could they know where she was? She had changed hotels twice in four days and had only used cash. Her phone had been used twice to call ahead and arrange hotels on a stolen credit card. Her mind scrambled to think. *Grab the bag and get out!* She shot to her feet and then tumbled to the floor as her feet tangled with the chair. Pushing herself up she grabbed her go-bag that had been laid

out days ago. Containing a full head beanie, full urban pants/shirt, neck scarf, face makeup, duct tape, her .40 caliber Glock and four, thirteen round magazines. It also had identification cards, cash, extra supplement pills if she couldn't eat for a few days and a water purifier. Slinging the diagonal pack over her shoulder she quickly disconnected her laptop and slid it into its faraday protector and hit the lights by the door. She peered out the window and saw two vehicles idling in the rain, steam smoking from the engines. They weren't there the last time she checked. She scanned the room and swung the pack back onto the bed. Unzipping the bag she grabbed her laptop, opening it and accessing the police scanner. Pablo built a back channel and she smiled thinking of the first time he brought up the idea at that college after-party.

They had just finished a dub-step concert that was too loud, fast and impulsive. Discussing ayahuasca and its potential healing properties led them to pontificate how different the world would be if everyone alive experimented with psychedelic drugs. The debate raged, half on the side of forcing the issue, the other half wanting people to decide for themselves saying "the experience wouldn't be genuine if you weren't open to it". Then Pablo asked the question: "*What would it look like if we could invade the governments mind?*" A few people laughed. Some stared at him dumbly, most just waited for the inevitable next sentence. Pablo smiled and finished sucking in smoke from the roach that was well past finished. He leaned forward "*I've figured a way to tap into the police radio and Internet programs. I can make it look like I'm posting or speaking from any specific unit down to the officer on the street*". He leaned back into the bamboo wrap chair. Blank stares. Everyone at the party was an activist of some sort. All had some

understanding of white supremacy and opposed the police state. But actually fucking with the police? That was pushing it. It was also a big violation of operational security. If anyone were subpoenaed by a Grand Jury, well, they would have to lie or face jail time. The silence in the room was so deafening that Jordy came out of the kitchen where he was cooking to see what's up.

“You guys all right”? Pablo looks at him and laughs. “Yea, I was just fucking around with them”. The room echoed with nervous laughter.

“Well, food is ready, come in and help yourselves” Jordy said and he disappeared through the Mayan beads hanging in the doorway.

Later when we were the only ones left, sharing a bottle of wine, I asked him what that was all about. “A test” he said.

“What do you mean a test”? I said with exasperation. “You want to scare people don't you?”

He looked at me as if was missing the point entirely. That's not an impossible possibility.

“It's a test to ask a question, and to offer a challenge” he said. I looked at him with dumb eyes.

“I want to know where people are at. I want them to think about possibilities. I want them to know that not everyone is comfortable with consuming information and holding it so they can smugly say I told you so.” I was no longer looking at him.

“We have been doing the same thing, every day, for almost five years. Disseminating information to various political groups, providing research so others can do the real work, calling ourselves impartial observers. IT’S. NOT. WORKING.”

I had never heard him so forceful before. My eyes rose to his, they were intense, staring through me.

“They are killing the world, and we are covering our own middle class asses by pretending to be impartial. This isn’t the first thing I have created that could actually help people” He takes a breath. “This is the first time I’ve ever told the collective.”

He was serious, I thought. This is happening. Up to that point I hadn’t been forced to make a choice. I had to make a choice.

“Tell me more,” I said.

The sirens are blaring outside now. She is typing fast. The keys pound out the words to be uttered over the police radio. She hits the enter key and closes the laptop. She pulls a micro-earpiece out of her pocket and puts it into her left ear. Then she clasps the Glock and slides it into her belt-line where a holster holds it to the small of her back.

She moves to the bathroom and steps on the toilet to pull open the window. It’s barely large enough to fit her small frame. Smoke is pouring from the garbage can filled

with any evidence of her presence. She had checked this before she had entered the hotel. Her legs scooted out first and her lithe form slipped through and dropped eight feet to the trash dumpster below. She slunk to the corner of the alley and peered out the side. There were two new police vehicles along with the original two undercover vehicles. The radio in her ear sprung to life.

She is a small woman. Maybe 5'2 if you give her an extra inch. Her hair is knotty and cropped on the left. The longer lengths hang down her right side. She is in the back of a semi-truck heading... where? She does not know. The road has been smooth up until now. Her back has had trouble adjusting to the bumps she is now experiencing. They must have turned off the main road. They are a ramshackle rescue crew. It is made up of two auto mechanics and a girl who works at a pottery store. At least in their daytime jobs. On the wall of the van is the symbol of the CLA(Cascadia Liberation Army). When she had first stepped outside the world of Internet hacking she was shocked to find an entire network across North America that was putting into practice the things that she had blogged about for years. They had built self-help networks to barter and share products on a sort of less-than-legal black market. They were people who didn't want the rat race. They didn't want fifty-hour workweeks and credit card and student loan debt. They found ways to break the rules. Break five rules a day she was told. They can be political, social or legal but make sure you are challenging normality and yourself at the same time. Never become comfortable no matter what you do.

Well, she was very uncomfortable at the moment. No internet, no ability to communicate with the outside world or check on her own wanted level. It was clear that

she was a threat to someone at this point. The question was who? If the police were involved then that meant there were charges against her. Or maybe they were not really cops? Why hadn't they just used Sandstone? They were already hunting CLA members all over the PNW. They could easily cover the finances without reporting them to Congress. A particularly deep rut in the road threw her body into the air and she came down on her tailbone. She shivered next to frozen stalks of corn, destined for an ethanol project (**CITATION 1**). It was a perfect cover for a group that opposed the concept of biotech. She was alone. Lack of human contact had never been the definition of being alone for her, only being disconnected. Now she was headed to someplace that was supposed to be safe so she could reveal the evidence she had discovered. What evidence? They sure thought she had figured out something but she didn't know what that was. She had searched the feeds over a hundred times at this point and she couldn't find a pattern. But deep down in her heart she knew that there was something there. That she had discovered something. *I need to figure this out or I go to jail for nothing.*

The truck came to a stop and moments later the back door was flung open. “*Time to get out.*” said a gruff voice from the darkness. She pulled herself to her feet and grabbed her go-bag. It still held her supplies including her laptop that would be the only tool that she could use against them. Whoever “them” was. The air was crisp as her black boots sunk into the earthy ground. She took a deep breath. She had been traveling for well over twelve hours. She tasted salt on her tongue. Ocean? Maybe. Which coast? Looking around she saw no discerning marks. The man who had put her in the back was nowhere to be seen. The gravelly voiced man pointed his hand towards a running Subaru

wagon. She strode towards it and the right side passenger door swung open. She got in, no questions asked.

Pakwan was a man of exactly the opposite qualities of Aida. He was gregarious, and loud even when they were alone together. The Subaru bounced along down some forlorn road. They were going somewhere she was sure of it. Or he could be driving her out to kill her. But why go out of their way to hurt her? Why all the fuss just to bury her in the middle of some field? Well, a field wasn't likely, they were surrounded by trees and winding downhill. The smell of the ocean was getting stronger. She had asked him where they were going initially but he had ignored the question. She had never actually met anyone from the CLA. Only exchanged data and contacts. Saba had been the one to connect them. Before she had disappeared in the initial roundups of undocumented immigrants under Trump.

Pakwan was rambling about the trees in this region. How they didn't change even with the winter and the rain was always falling. How climate change had added stresses to the region but they were still able to gain enough snowmelt to fuel the rivers in the spring. She knew where she was. Where she had never been before. The Northwest, she thought as the sun crept below the tree line. *It was beautiful.* And then that thought was blown out of her brain as they crested the hill and the entire ocean spread out before them. She had only seen pictures of things like this! The sun splashed up off the waves and glistened through the dirt stained windshield. It was like a splash of cold water after a long sleep. Exhilarating. The car wound its way down a windy road to a house at the bottom of the ocean. Next to the house was a small dock and a boat bobbed up and down

with the waves. She stepped out of the car and without a word the Subaru drove away.

The sun was going down when they finally settled into reclining chairs on the beach. The only clouds were on the horizon and the sound of birds finishing their rounds was all she could hear aside from the slowly crashing waves. She felt strangely comfortable for a girl from the Midwest. They didn't have sunsets like this in Iowa. The purple and orange reflected off the water ever so slightly. Herons came in to land just beyond the breakers and immediately went searching for herring. There were two of them that had welcomed her. A man wearing an American flag bandana and a woman with short brown-cropped hair. The woman pointed to the North and they could just make out an oil tanker with a barge attached to its hull.

"It's been there for a week" the woman said. "We think it's disabled. No idea what happened to it but there's no port within fifty miles so there has to be something wrong. We haven't picked up any radio traffic so we know that no-ones coming. By now they should have been able to ask for help".

"Maybe it's just waiting for orders," Aida said, unconvincingly. The man to her left said nothing. He had not spoken since she arrived. The driver had given him a bag and then gotten back in his car and headed back up the windy road. Aida felt like she had been left at summer camp by her parents and they weren't coming back. The herons had gotten their fish and they took off with little fanfare, barely making a ripple in the waves.

The woman introduced herself, "I'm Sandy and I run the search and rescue for the southern British Columbia coastal region". She smiled knowing that meant little to Aida.

“I am friends with your contact at the Agency.” Aida's brain brought her back to the moment. “S and R is my day job. At night I look through information and decide what people need to make difficult decisions. We help people cross the border among other things.” Sandy had been the one who met her with the small zodiac boat and had scurried her over to the island that they were now on.

“Are we still in the United States?” Aida's voice broke just a little.

“Officially, yes. But we are about ten nautical miles from Vancouver Island and when we think its safe we will get you across. Your data will go separately in case you are stopped. We will go by Kayak sometime in the next week we hope.” Sandy said this with a matter of fact statement that couldn't be questioned. Aida looked at her with questioning eyes.

“There was an oil spill some time ago and these areas ceased to have much traffic. The Port Angeles dock was shut down along with most civilian traffic. It was an ecological disaster and wiped out a number of animal populations (**CITATION 3**). The community is very supportive of our movements and has sheltered us. Still, we have to be careful. You will move when it is safe. You will be comfortable here while we wait.”

Comfortable was an understatement. She had barely had a chance to look around but from the quick tour she had taken this place was wired up enough to support a Google hub. Before Google went under, that is. There were gardens everywhere and mini-satellite dishes clustered around every hut. This was a command center. You couldn't see it from the sky as the Douglas firs covered everything from above. Aida could live here if she had to.

The first meeting with what would become known as the BC-12 was in a shipping

container buried underground on Vancouver Island. There were several different people, all of them white. They were all under 40 and they looked like they hadn't slept in days. Most of them hadn't. Each introduced themselves and Aida was sure they weren't using real names. She used her alias as well. Partridge after the Partridge Pea native prairie plant from back home. Some had been systems administrators, some journalists or aspiring journalists and some were just plain organizers. But they were all from the United States at one point or another. This was the team that would piece together the events surrounding the Assassination of the President over two weeks before. Each of them had evidence and each would present. It started faster. A short fat slightly balding man spoke first and made it clear he had been the one to assemble everyone here. It seemed a large amount of money had been stored in banks across the border by various sympathizers over the years for just such an occasion, the evacuation of activist's across the border for the purposes of supporting a resistance.

"We do not have much time. We needed to gather everyone to speak in person and since we lost our contact at the NSA, we had no choice but to make this effort. Many assets have disappeared in the last two weeks." The fat man spoke rapidly without blinking.

"We need you all to share the information that you have willingly and completely, then we will make many copies and release them in a global event. Make no mistake, this will be transformational. If what we believe is true then the information will lead to a crackdown throughout the United States, but it might prevent a civil war, which is the direction things look right now. Please be honest, succinct and listen to each other."

He turned to leave the room but a younger man interjected before he reached the door.

"What about our safety? We don't even know where we are right now. How are we going

to get home to our families?" He was nervous and the feeling spread like wildfire throughout the rest of the room. Murmurs of agreement flared up.

The fat man turned. He took a deep breath, looking all twelve in the eyes.

"You will not be able to go home until this whole process is resolved. No matter what you do here the United States government views you as a threat. From their perspective, anarchists and CLA members attacked the President's plane, shooting it down and killing everyone. If you are arrested before you complete this task you will most likely be disappeared. Until we have definitive proof that we weren't involved and can finger those who did it, we will remain across the border in Canada."

The fat man left the room and the door clanged loudly after him. The smell of sweat and tension enveloped the room and the darkness came quickly.

We spent the next week hashing over everything we knew. The evidence was broken down into two parts. It was the personal computer information of all those the government was accusing of participating in the attempt, a group called the Cascadian Liberation Army. They all used PGP encryption (**CITATION 2**) on their computers but if they could be persuaded to turn over some of their records it could show that they had nothing to do with nor did they participate in the assassination. It made no sense. Olivera was the best president they could expect in the capitalist system. Radical reform was better than nothing. People were suffering and climate change needed action, even if it came from the White House.

Her arms felt like broken noodles. She had never kayaked before. It had taken longer to

get the green light to cross but that time had been used wisely, and to no avail. Some of the smartest people she ever met had been gathered together and now they were splashing their way across the open channel to Canada. Despite their gathering, the codes at the NSA surveillance program had been changed and they couldn't access what they needed. They were hitting a firewall and no amount of hacking could get them in. The search for the alleged assassins was underway and borders had been locked down across America. The new Davis administration had declared a national emergency and every National Guard soldier had been activated. The Coast Guard was somewhere out here among the oil-drenched waters, looking for them. Salt water stung her face and she was cold, despite the wetsuit clinging to her body. Her kayak rose and fell with the waves and she could just make out the landing sight over a mile away. Her partner was just ahead of her, with a small chem-light attached to the tail. They hadn't told her much about where she was going but something had changed. The camp had suddenly closed down and members of the CLA had arrived to pack up all the communications equipment. They didn't share where they were taking it, only that she and her new friends had to cross the border while there was still a chance. She wedged her knees against the cockpit swung her body forward, faster towards the unknown.

Her kayak crunched as it left the water and slid onto the rocky beach. They stowed their kayaks in the woods and mounted bicycles to ride along the forest trail. The lights were powered by pedaling which was particularly difficult with all the roots in the ground. They arrived at a large longhouse with wood smoke rising from the chimney. Inside, they removed their wetsuits and moved to a large communal shower area. Steam pored off her as she rubbed salt water and dirt from her exhausted body. She thought nothing of

standing naked next to what had so recently been strangers. Now they were collaborators. With her head pressed against the wall, tears mixed with the dirt and sweat collecting around the drain.

One week later.

They all sat together at a circular table, illuminated by the green glow of their laptops. Most of the team had made it over the last week and had begun combining all the data and evidence of the Presidential assassination. The new administration of Bob Davis was tearing through what was left of the liberal environmental groups. Sierra Club. Greenpeace. National Resources Defense Council. FBI agents had raided everyone at this point. Armed National Guard soldiers were patrolling every major city from Salt Lake to Seattle. The burnt remains of Air Force One had exposed the deep divide between East and Western America and conflict seemed unavoidable. The shock to the nation wasn't wearing off which enabled the troops to take key positions with little pushback. The traitors were getting closer to the truth but were hitting a wall with administration pass codes. Aida really missed Jenine at the NSA. *What had happened to her?* They couldn't get past the firewalls to access internal links that would tell them who knew about the course Air Force One would take into Denver. They needed someone on the inside. They needed a snitch.

Aida was sitting in what looked like an interrogation room. There were stains on the wood floor and it was sparsely decorated with a table and two chairs, one of which she was sitting in. The door opened and a hooded man was brought through the opening

towards her. He was helped to a seat and the hood was removed. Aida had been briefed on who this was and what she needed from him. Login codes. They had to hope the codes remained unchanged. The van this man had been taken from had been burned beyond all recognition and a block of houses had gone up with it. No one had reported the Agent taken, just killed in the fire. The missing persons were not a priority given the massive investigation into the assassination now currently underway. He was a man without a home and no one was looking for him.

Aida began, "We need something from you. If you cooperate you will be released and your family unharmed" she tried to keep her face neutral. Her stomach knotted and fought the question of whether this group would actually harm his family. His face was bruised and his left eye was fused shut. Tortured?

"I'll do anything you want. But I don't know how I can help. My codes have already been changed. There is nothing I can do" The man tried to spit but it landed on his knee. Aida leaned forward and dabbed it up with a napkin.

"You may not know it but your bio-metric makeup is part of the fusion center database. In the event of an emergency we can use it to log into the system. We just need a blood sample, an eye scan and the emergency vocal code you trained with."

The agent's face changed from ignorance to fear as he understood what was truly happening. He had no way out. Hands grabbed his arms and lifted him up from the chair. He was pulled towards a blood analysis machine and as the tubes filled with red his secrets poured out of him.

Michael Haystock 2023

It's strange, the way bagpipes sound on a rainy day. On this day, a great day for a funeral, the rain was edging out the sunshine. The bagpipes weren't playing, no one from the family would cover the cost, and so the casket made clunking sounds without the supporting fire of history. The body, formerly Irish, now joined the irrelevance of the dead. Countries mattered less when you no longer had a passport. This body should have had more bodies with blood still coursing through the veins in attendance. Just ten days before, an event like this would have heralded a procession of the rich and famous from Time magazine and its rich luminaries. Now, only two people stood over the grave. Being seen here was toxic. And it scalded anyone it touched.

Michael Haystock worked his way up through all kinds of difficulties. He is a recovering alcoholic who put all his energy into his work. He was a lover who continually lost his partners to larger world events. One to a firefight in Afghanistan, another to an overdose. Cutting his teeth through the war and betrayal of the Bush years, he made a career out of being the smartest and the quietest in the room. He had a drinking problem, one that was always worse when he wasn't drinking. He liked Scotch. And red wine. Or whatever was free. He had a rule, when he was drinking, to not be drinking until after 11 am. That's when all the important meetings in the magazine business were over. That's when the "real" work began. He hated the office. The smell of styrofoam and sterility. Lies auctioned off like they were the work of epic historical poets just waiting to be discovered. Why had he chosen this work? Why had he become a reporter? History he told himself. To be a part of history. To try and get it right, while it was happening.

instead of writing about it years down the road, detached with no personal stake. He would rather be a blog post than a part of the Bible. Right in the thick of things he threw himself. Born in Jersey, raised in New York, he always had to fight to get his foot in the door. Then it was a battle to keep it there as everyone already inside tried desperately to shove the door closed. The better to protect their careers he supposed.

It is three in the morning and Michael wipes his blood shot eyes. The fan is going. The air conditioning is not. Its summer. Hot. Like the walls were bleeding sweat, hot. He is thirty-four. He is writing the story of his life. He is days away from death. He knows this. Not intellectually, but deep down inside himself on a biochemical level, he knows this. His hair stands up. Skin prickles as the fingers fly across his keyboard. His back hurts. He has been hunched over the computer, trying to get the words right. He lets out a sigh and leans back in his chair, saving his work. The wheels under him roll with the added wait. As the chair rotates he finds himself face to face with the only other human in the office. Dolly. They had a fling over the Christmas break but that ended the moment they came back to work. Her breasts are spilling over her undersized brassiere barely encased in a tank top. He rises to use the bathroom. Their eyes meet briefly and quickly dart back to reading the economic report currently providing a paycheck. The bathroom smells of mold. You can't see anything but its there. Slowly killing us all, he thinks as he shakes hands with the wife's best friend. Looking at himself in the mirror he cant help but notice how much older he is. The job has required seventy hours a week for the last five years and his last vacation was to Syria. Spending his time between different sources of trauma, war and the workplace, hopping back and forth as if to be always running toward,

or away from something. Popping a mouth candy and dropping artificial tears he clears his throat and exits. Dolly is no longer at her desk. She is sitting at his, scanning his work. There is a sense of panic in him. He wants to cry out, to yell at her for violating his privacy. Nothing comes to his lips. She is beautiful, with her back turned, black hair curling around her neck, glasses drooping over her nose. She will be beautiful for a few more years, till she gets knocked up to start a family and move to the suburbs. Now she is typing furiously and then, she stops, slowly swivels to face him and a look of shame creeps across her face. Or is it mischief? He takes a step forward.

The walls of his apartment are not well insulated. The neighbors are awake tonight. Dolly has been making more noise than a gang fight on east 14th. There are two condoms on the end of the bed, like dead snakes, coiled and leeching their life force. The third one is currently deep inside dolly, creating a blistering friction between their hardened bodies. He dealt in truth. And the truth was, he loved sex. Addicted to it even. Every part of it. Before. During. After. Thinking about all the angles, the words said and never uttered. That feeling of coming close to cumming. He was there now. He let out a cry and filled the third condom with what little fluid was left inside of him. He immediately went soft and dolly rolled off him. He began to say something. He passed out.

Dolly was on his computer for an hour. She slipped a USB into the hard-drive, Eight gigabytes, and left it there for over a minute. Then she ejected it. Sent some emails to cover her tracks. Then she put her clothes back on and ambled out of the apartment.

She wouldn't see him again until she was standing at his funeral.

The connections weren't apparent at first. The company names were subsidiary's buried within subsidiaries. There was so much money and it was difficult to assess where it originated. The financial companies were involved of course, but the real threat came from fossil fuels. Ever since Obama had targeted coal as the primary CO₂ causing agent, the coal and natural gas industry had declared war back. Every politician either received money or threats from the fossil fuel industry. So when he began to track down every donation, every communication about the assassination, none of it really stood out. Until he put it all together.

Michael is standing in the rain. He is looking upwards. The rain is splashing his face. He should be afraid. He is not afraid. He feels a deep sense of calm. He squints and tries to see the top of Trump tower. The low clouds and heavy rain make it difficult. The south part of Manhattan is flooding again. Up to 15th street. The businesses are all basically closed during hurricane season. There is no point when the floods rise and fall with the weekly changes. Michael used to frequent Barney's pub. He enjoyed the overpriced drinks and the Wall Street stories. That was back before he worked for the Telegraph. Before the Trump crash. Before the planet really turned on humanity. He is soaking wet. Another casualty of the war, planet earth waged daily against them all. Michael allowed himself a smile at that. As if humans were somehow separate from humanity. Those types of assumptions had given them Trump. Had assassinated a president. Had set human's back just when they found the ability to control their destiny. Michael's hand rose to the sky, an electric Subaru swung to the curb, its lights fracturing

the solar road as it filled with rain. The driver is instructed to go uptown. He complies.

Michael remembers the way it rarely rained in Syria. He could see the cracked and salted earth breaking apart like a calving iceberg. There was a field, one could imagine a historical field, and outside the small shack he spent time in during his second journalist tour near Homs. Michael has a friend who would sit with him, in that shack, looking at that field, and share his drink. The friend is a soldier. Michael is not. He is so far from not. War interests him but to be a trigger-puller? This was never a future for Michael. He says this, out loud to his friend. His friend nods. They will go on to very different careers, Michael to win the Pulitzer (posthumously) and his friend to found a climate escort company. The company would become the most elite of the Military Security Contractors that proliferated after 9/11. The company is the first non-military force to bring private policing to America. The company would make millions. The company would come to be indicted. The company would be torn apart. But none of that is relevant to the sweaty, hot men, sipping cheap vodka stolen from dead Russians as they stare at an evaporated field. They toast the future. The concept of possibly having a future. They drink.

Michael is still in the rain outside the friend's apartment. He is pressing the bell. His friend told him to meet there. His friend has apartments in all the major cities. Dubai (during the three livable months), St. Petersburg (despite the dictatorship there was still property rights), New Sydney (the rising tides hadn't yet reached it) and Vancouver (he was one of the last white billionaires in that city). The door screen lights up and asks Michael for a retina scan. He obliges. He passes. The door slides sideways and he is

inside a vacuum-sealed elevator. A smaller window opens and mini-bottles of Scotch greet Michael. He remembers, as the Scotch burns his throat, how his friend had been so impressed with Middle Eastern opulence. They had once entered a former Assad family home near Damascus, after Bashar was found hanging from the barrel of a tank outside, and the gold inlaid floorboards had caught his friend's attention. For weeks afterwards his friend would speak about them, how they gave a 'don't give a fuck attitude' to the whole place. His friend was always planning the house he would build once they got back from the sandbox.

Michael is finishing his second bottle of Scotch when the tube arrives. His friend is leaning against the wall, a loose tie and brooks brothers top. His friend is not smiling. He waives for Michael to enter a dark room. There are Flex-tels wrapping the room and his friend pulls one off the wall, resizes it to hold comfortably in one hand giving it to Michael. The screen flashes then a shaky video image comes forward. He can see peoples dress pants and slacks, more money than his yearly paycheck. A boardroom? The sounds are muffled. Except one.

Michael is in the rain again. He stands at the edge of his life, looking out over the roiling storm. The winds buffet his face, like a sail flapping, soon to break free. He is thinking about throwing himself over the railing, letting the sea claim his body. He takes a step. Hesitates. He shouldn't do this. Michael often has arguments inside his head. He is thinking about Dolly. Wondering if she would answer a call this late at night. He pulls out his phone. Tries her. Straight to voicemail. He can't go back to the office. Not after what he has learned. He tries another number. Amber usually has coke. He wants

something to lift the weight of action he feels weighing down on him, spilling over his shoulders with the rain. She picks up.

It took all night and much of the next day but its finished. A manifesto, of sorts. The pieces almost making a complete puzzle. The images shoot from the page like a snake released from a shoebox. Michael is a traitor. His writing is treason. The topic is treason. Everything about Michael in this moment is dangerous. Blurring the lines he laid out for himself as a journalist. As an American. Michael is unsure of what to do with this information. Michael knows everything is about to change. He knows his life, such as it is, will never remain in his control again. Michael knows who killed the president. And next, the whole world would know.

Michael is sending an encrypted message to an old hacker friend. He is sure she can figure out the rest. He has the details of who was behind the coup. He doesn't know how they did it. If she can open the documents before they were intercepted then they would be home free. Michael is hitting send. Michael lets out a deep breath.

Michael's friend is on the news. It is not good news. Michael's friend is laying face first on the pavement. Blood is strewn about like a thousand rotten tomatoes no one has bothered to pick up. Suicide. Suicide? It had only been a few days since they last spoke. Michael is angry. Michael is afraid. Michael closes his laptop and heads for his electric motorcycle in the basement. It's the only signature free technology he has. Michael has a protocol for things like this. Well, the theoretical things like this. Dump

your phone. Change your clothes. Grab the go-bag. His friend had always had a protocol. His friend was dead. Michael started the silent battery and swooped out of the apartment for the last time.

Michael got to the north of the city fairly quickly. He encountered none of the military patrols that constantly plagued north Manhattan. He is squeezing his legs into the bike, accelerating towards the forest. What little is left. Every twenty miles he reaches into his breast pocket and retrieves a small powdered stick. Michael needs something to keep his energy level up as he rides into a third night without sleep. First the President. Then his friend. He has to get out of the city. There are headlights. He swerves. Michael can feel himself leaving the road. His front tire is catching. His body rises. A tree is in the way. There is a crunch. There is darkness and silence.

Dolly stood above his grave. She couldn't shake the feeling that she was responsible. She had shown the documents to her boss. She had stolen documents from Michael for years. Who had her boss told? A man she didn't know stood closer to the tree near the gravesite. He was watching her. She averted her eyes. Walking to the car she could feel his eyes following her. She hit the unlock button. Sliding in she breathed a sigh of relief. She pulled out in her fourth generation Prius. It was so quiet; she barely registered the red and blue lights in her rearview. Pulling to the side of the road, the black Explorer slid in behind her. Suddenly, a grey van pulled up beside her driver's door. Sliding open three silhouettes spilled out like a broken jar of jam. Dolly was struck across the face and her body went limp as she was dragged into the van. One of the men injected her with something and her eyes rolled back in her head.

Michael's boss didn't make it to the funeral. A gas leak in his new home had met with his morning cigarette in a brilliant fluorescent dance of explosions. The sound reverberated down the block of his north Manhattan villa. Neighbors would say he was such a nice man. Quiet. Kept to himself. What a horrible event to befall such a man.

Weekly Standard 2024

After the assassination of President Olivera, Vice President Bob Davis assumed the office. One of his first non-Cabinet appointments was the newly created department of Freedom and Justice. Carlton Jeffries, a former World Bank executive and systems administrator for the NSA took on this new position with zeal. Broadly mandated to use JSOC to begin operating against separatists and terrorists within the Homeland, his position has been controversial from the beginning. Charges of ignoring "Posse Comitatus" have rung out, especially throughout the Northwest.

We sat down with Mr. Jeffries on the eve of President Davis's first State of the Union. He is under a lot of stress with the recent assassination and the elections only months away. Rumors are swirling about the location of the Vice President as well as a delay in elections.

Interviewer-Thank you for sitting down with me during this difficult time, Mr. Jeffries.

Mr. Jeffries- Um hum.

Interviewer-Most people don't know much about you or the agency you now lead. Could you tell us a bit about the project and how you are adjusting to this new job?

Mr. Jeffries-Well I come from the military, see. I was a bad kid. Got in lots of trouble with the parents when my dad was away. Never could focus much in school and just wanted to get out and do something with my life. By 1988, when I finished high school, all I could think about was President Reagan and his heroic victory over the Evil Empire. I wanted to be a part of that, ya know? So after I went to law school I joined the Army, yea? And I didn't want to be a lawyer in the Army. I wanted to see the action. To prove myself against an enemy force. So I became an infantry officer. And just when I was about to deploy to the first Gulf, the war was over. Just over a month. Those were the days, ya know? When we really just kicked ass and showed the world American strength. That's what we are trying to do here, bring back American strength into the world.

Interviewer-President Olivera brought our current President onto the ticket in 2020 to balance out the platform and appeal to more American's. Is your administration making an effort to reach out to those Americans who voted for President Olivera?

Mr. Jeffries-This is a whole new world. With the assassination of the President by leftist extremist Muslim sympathizers, you can't expect us to worry about a bunch of tree-hugging America haters who want us to be more like Europe. You can see the Union

collapsing over there. Do you want us to be more like them? I hope not, see?

Interviewer-Well, Mr. Jeffries, we don't quite know who assassinated the President, are you saying that you have information the American people haven't seen yet?

Mr. Jeffries-Believe you me, you people have no idea how dangerous these terrorists in the Northwest are. Every day our brave police are overwhelmed. This is why the president is finally stepping up and sending in the big boys. Our military, they are so brave aren't they? They are going to find these terrorists and make them pay. We need them in our streets to protect real America.

Interviewer-What are the new platform ideas you will be unveiling in the State of the Union and what will the Office of Justice and Peace be responsible for?

Mr. Jeffries-I am not going to speak for the President, but I can say our office is taking the gloves off. No more of these anarchist protestors and socialist agitators hiding behind the First Amendment. This country is designed for reasonable people working together, not for extremist entities using intimidation to scare the rest of us into doing their bidding. They have had their governments and they have all failed. Clinton, Obama, Olivera, all of them took advantage of the American people, made us feel guilty about ourselves, about who we are. They told us men should be allowed in our daughter's bathrooms, that we shouldn't love and respect the troops. I can make one promise, ya see? That ends with the Davis administration.

Interviewer-I hate to pry but I am hoping you could tell us a little about the office you are now leading? There are reports of mass arrests and people being questioned everywhere...

Mr. Jeffries-We live in a time of crisis. We are going to do everything in our power to stamp out the left in this country. It has done nothing but stab us in the back. My office will oversee the integration of the United States military into domestic policing operations, to root out these terrorists and find the killers behind the assassination. You can see it in the Northwest now but soon we will subdue these insurrectionists and bring stability and peace back to America.

Interviewer- And you believe that the assassins came from some anarchist or socialist backgrounds? They seem to have appreciated what President Olivera was up to with all her climate work and jobs programs.

Mr. Jeffries-Olivera made successful Americans an unfair target. She went after our corporate community leaders and made them pariahs. Friends who couldn't even leave the house were calling me, telling me their businesses were being targeted. Military members complained their funding was cut and they weren't able to fight terrorism properly. America has had enough of being weak. We are going to go after the terrorist funding at the Universities, from these liberal think tanks that pretend to sit on the sidelines. If you support these people financially, politically or any other way we are going to find you and bury you. This is a war for the soul of America. A new civil war,

and we intend to win this time.

Interviewer-Now I have to bring up a controversial topic. Clearly the weather has been acting strange over the last few years. We are experiencing more and more heat waves and drought including the super storms that continue to hit the East Coast. Washington DC, where you are now working, has been hit multiple times in the last year alone. Your predecessor in President Olivera, talked a lot about climate change, but we haven't heard that from your administration. What would you say to that?

Mr. Jeffries-No one denies the climate is changing. It's clearly not human beings that are doing it. You can see this written in revelation, through the books and such. This is God telling us that we have used up our time on this earth and must prepare for the second coming. Our job is to really just manage this, make sure the right people are elevated and the wrong people are punished, you see? Our country has tolerated the intolerant for too long. Those on the so-called left who tell us good Christians that we can't believe in truth. Can't speak about reality. Well, they have brought us to the brink of disaster. God's hand can be seen all over this great land and HE is telling us to stop our wicked ways. The good book tells us that a struggle will take place at the end of days and those who are righteous will be borne of fruit that will grow and those who are evil will be buried amongst the bones and discarded.

Interviewer-Mr. Jeffries, thank you for your time. For all our sakes I will pray for you and us all.

Salia Mason Interview 2024

Salia Mason does not show much emotion. She is wearing a worn sports coat over an un-tucked and low-buttoned street shirt. Her eyes don't meet mine. She has never given an interview about the catastrophe, or the years after. She served as chief of staff for President Olivera the entire three years. The Davis administration, which followed the catastrophe, removed Ms. Mason from the White House and eliminated any input she had on policy. She shifts back and forth on the fold out chair and brushes the black bangs away from her eyes.

Interviewer-Why don't you start at the beginning?

Salia- The beginning? You mean the beginning of corporate takeover of politics? Or do you mean the Cold War and the creation of nuclear weapons and the security state? Or maybe you are talking about industrial civilization and the formation of the nation-state, but then that would miss the whole creation of agriculture thing and that would be missing the point wouldn't it?

Her eyes shift slowly around the dirt floor and refuse to meet mine.

Interviewer- I was thinking maybe the first campaign?

Salia- The only campaign. She was killed, remember?

She fumbles in her pocket and pulls out rolling papers and tobacco. Her hands flutter to the work and I am surprised to see this from a former full-time political strategist.

Salia- We met during the first Obama campaign. Late 2007. Everyone was going nuts for this weird sounding guy who did or didn't come from Kenya, but when I met Lola I was star-struck. She was the first to say that Obama wasn't a progressive. Everyone wanted to believe in Obama. We had just finished what felt like a century of George W. Bush and now were trying to recover. Obama was the best we could hope for. Lola was twenty-eight years old but experienced beyond her years. She had been a cultural advisor in Afghanistan. You remember those provincial reconstruction teams? Meant to merge the US military with the civilian population? Yeah, well she spent three years over there. Had been a true believer in the beginning. By the time she came back she had changed her entire political philosophy.

Interviewer-And this was because of the war?

She snorts, a kind of half laugh, half sadness.

Salia- The war, the military, the Afghans, the entire fucking thing. By the time the war started in the 1970's most of the millions of trees in the country had been cut down to dig for minerals that weren't there. Rivers had been diverted, the heat lasted longer and the rains became more severe. They washed away crops that were already hard to grow. The Soviets destroyed what infrastructure existed for agriculture, the Afghan civil war

destroyed the cities and we destroyed everything that was left. Oh, I don't doubt that there were good things we did, built orphanages, schools, dug wells and built roads. All of that doesn't matter when you destroy the only crop that grows in a climate ravaged dirt-poor country: Poppy.

Interviewer-This is of course before full legalization in the United States?

She glares at me as if I've brought up a dead relative.

Salia- Lola...., President Olivera had the Justice Department declassify all schedule 1 and 2 drugs. This essentially made it legal. It opened everything to research and allowed states to regulate it based on their needs. It effectively neutralized the opium trade coming to the US from Afghanistan. It didn't end the war; nothing could with the climate changes there. Afghanistan was an environmental sacrifice zone before the Soviets invaded. We couldn't change that. We never tried to change that. There was a desire to kill the people who attacked us and it couldn't hurt to have a regional hub to buffer Iran and Pakistan, we've seen how dangerous those states can be. That's all it ever was. No one in a position of power ever really cared about the women. If they did they would have done something about Saudi Arabia.

Interviewer- You are referring to the coup and twenty day nuclear scare?

Salia-Yes. We dodged a bullet there. That was the only military excursion that President

Olivera authorized. They got in; the spec-ops people, and out quickly. It was a zero sum mission. We thought we had a twenty percent chance of success. Even if we secured the weapons there was still a question about what kind of government would emerge and how it would be managed. As it was we were able to secure the weapons sights in range of Laashkar e Taiba soldiers and evacuate them to be dismantled in Uzbekistan and then later in Germany. This was all part of the security deal with Russia that reduced our nuclear weapons down to 200 each. That was a coup of its own.

Interviewer- The campaign was never about any of this?

Salia- No. It was still all about the economy. Jobs jobs jobs. It was clear that the climate was getting more volatile every day. It was clear that the US was no longer the uni-polar power in the world. Lola ran on a campaign of action. Call it socialism, progressivism, whatever. It was a campaign to enlist the people in a struggle. Call it a populist presidency. She was the first to connect our technological growth with our dieing planet. At least as politicians go. That resonated with the people. They had been waiting to hear that. Enough with FEMA planning to fix problems after they happened. She wanted to challenge the foundational elements that were causing this pain. She formed, essentially, a new political party. She brought anarchists and statists together around the need to protect the earth. That none of our problems could be separated from each other. Challenging individualism was her greatest strength. She questioned everything. But it was never about her; it was just a way to give the American people a voice. After the utter failure of the Obama administration to empower the American people they had lost

faith in the system. Olivera had her own questions about the functionality of capitalism by that point as well. She channeled the outright hatred of the Trump administration into a people powered movement.

Interviewer- How did she come to run for President?

Salia- Well, she was barely old enough. 35 in 2019 so that made her just old enough to run. There were only 3 other viable candidates. One drugged themselves too much during a debate and that ruined them. One was for nuclear power as a plant melted down and the last one lost head to head in multiple debates. He claimed that she was too young and he thought America would agree. They didn't.

Interviewer- How much did the extreme elements of the right wing help her?

Salia- The Republican Party by that time was a dead dog. The tea party took the religious freaks into the 14th century and became a breeding ground for separatists and racists. Economic conservatives abandoned the social issues of the last fifty years and tried to save capitalism. The Libertarians had enough of both and formed their own local groups or tied in with anarchist elements of our campaign. That made it an interesting race from the perspective of the media. When the Supreme Court assassination happened during the May primary battle the right essentially lost the election.

Interviewer- You have drawn parallels to the mass shooting in Norway with Anders

Brevik?

Salia- Yes. After 9/11 Americans still believed in retribution and revenge. Fifteen years of war changed that. When Brevik shot up the people on that island many believed that Norway would respond by increasing its police and military surveillance state. They didn't. They responded with more openness. More love. Questions about how they could be better. I think the Supreme Court killings did that. Our country was ready for a small-r revolution. President Trump was a lame duck and couldn't get anything done. They weren't interested in taking risks. Our candidate promised to re-think everything. She won in a landslide.

Interviewer- So, walk us through the policy battles and approach as you came into office.

Salia- Well, the Supreme Court was the most pressing issue. There had never been new appointments. Congress had rejected everything Trump had put forward. It was the first time in American history that the court had missed its fall sessions. No reviews had been done in almost a year. We put up a number of good folks, and with our super majority we were able to push through two younger women onto the court. For the first time it was dominated 5-4 by women.

Interviewer- Took long enough.

Salia's lips curl up in a half smile, like Han Solo before he's frozen into carbonite.

Salia- We did so much in three years. It wasn't enough. It never could have been, I see that now. But we believed. If only we had come to power twenty years before, maybe we could have held off the corporations. Maybe we could have led the world in addressing climate change.

Interviewer- Instead of being the lead contributor?

Salia- Aren't you supposed to be the impartial journalist? No. By the time we came into office we were right on the edge and we didn't know it. Didn't want to know it. We had all the numbers, statistics, but when you have been living this way for so long how are you supposed to change? No one ever explained it to the American people. At least from the White House. Sure they made comments about it. Empty promises. We tried to deliver. We shut down Fracking in all states. We canceled pipelines that had been years in the making. President Olivera believed in getting the backs of environmentalists. They had been shit on for years. We made the new CCC for Christ's sake.

Interviewer- That's something I'm really interested in. It was the first major attempt at national service not based on war. Can you talk...

Salia- It was a war! Just not the traditional kind. Our culture was the enemy. Our consumption the attacking force. We had to reduce everything without destroying our economy in the process. How is that possible with a system, capitalism, that requires

infinite growth on a finite planet?

She stops suddenly, stares at the floor. Takes a deep breath as if she's been holding this for years. Finally lights the cigarette she has been twirling in her fingers.

Salia- The Climate Change Corps came from a coalition of environmental and veterans organizations. It was the combination of a need for service and a problem in need of service. You wouldn't think that these groups would get along but they worked together beautifully. When Olivera joined with them during the campaign it created the biggest coalition outside of the civil rights movement of the 50's and 60's. All the anti-war, anti-globalization work of the 90's and 00's combined into a movement that prioritized healing the planet and thus, ourselves. The idea was simple. Stimulate the economy by hiring millions of unemployed and underemployed workers to fix our damage.

It was modeled after the conservation corps of the 1930s under President Roosevelt. More people served in that than did in Afghanistan and Iraq. Did you know that? Anyway, we hired over five million people. Put them to work outside Chicago and Atlanta, Los Angeles and Boston. Decommissioning buildings that were condemned. They cleaned up rivers, putting nutrients into the water that had been sapped from farming. Taking down dams in the northwest and returning the salmon. Making every day earth-day. Every state could put forward suggestions of projects to be worked on. We had projects in every state except Mississippi and Arizona. Louisiana was the worst. So many pipeline spills. That's where all the tar sands was shipped out of when the Keystone pipeline was canceled.

Interviewer- What was the political climate like?

Salia- Well, the election was a split decision as far as the Presidency went. We won the house just barely but took a ten-vote lead in the senate. More importantly we took back many state houses. This was huge because whoever won that election won the right to redistricting. But even the Democrats who were elected, most of them didn't share our radical view of governing. The environment still wasn't sexy, but we were able to make the case around investment in jobs to clean up the country. We had no more surplus in physical labor jobs. The housing market had crashed again after all that crazy Chinese investment, so we were looking at 15% unemployment and people were willing to try anything. Sure the CCC was called a "make work" project, derided as socialism, but that was old news and no one was listening to that shit anymore. People just wanted dignity and a chance to dig themselves out of the mess we were in. And you know what? People enjoyed the work. They learned valuable skills and got to put their hands in the dirt. There is something special about having a stake in your community, seeing it improved in front of your very own eyes. You saw the polls, before Bob Davis took over. New CCC members had a higher respectability level than American soldiers!

Interviewer- President Olivera looked poised to win a second term and continue her fight for system change...

Salia- Then she was assassinated. Yes. That was the end of reasonable discourse and

solutions based on debate. After that, well, it was a civil war between people and corporate profits.

Ben and the tar sands, 2024

He couldn't shake the nightmare. It woke him in the darkest of night. 0300. The same time he used to interrupt Syrian's sleep during the war. Ten years behind him, no amount of alcohol could get the helpless feeling out of his mind. His dreams were nothing like the movies. They started something missing. On patrol, scanning his sector, platoon mates in front and behind him, nothing abnormal. He would reach for his camelbak, nothing. Throat began to parch. Desperately looking around he realizes he doesn't know the men around him. They have blank faces. A truck rounds the corner ninety meters to the front. He raises his rifle and sights the driver in the chest. Stance. Breathing. Trigger squeeze. Nothing. Jam? He desperately slaps the magazine, pulls the charging handle ejecting a hot round. Raises the rifle. Trigger pull. Nothing. The truck is twenty meters away gaining steam. His platoon is firing everything. His heart stops.

He always woke up as the vehicle exploded and felt the shrapnel ripping through his body. His body drenched like a swamp. Still didn't help his back. Thirty-three airborne jumps had destroyed that and his knees. He stumbled into the kitchen and searched for coffee. *Still cant shit without it.* His squad leader had made sure all of them make a bowel movement before every patrol. Said he didn't want to smell like shit when he carried our dead asses to the helicopter.

The walls of his house were empty, save for a few individual pictures of a world long gone. A world in the summer of 2001 before everything changed. He had been planning for a career in writing. Something kinda dangerous and far away from bosses. Indiana

Jones with a laptop. Seventeen years old sitting in college prep, that's when the teacher got a call. In retrospect you could see all of this happening. The dominoes falling in succession. The changes to come. That it was all downhill from that moment sitting in high school history class. Her face changed from rosy to ashen. Her trembling hand replaced the phone as she explained that a plane had crashed into a building. Shortly after we learned new words. Homeland Security. Terrorism. Climate chaos. Torture. War crimes. Fascism. Words never spoken in La Crosse, Wisconsin. After that day, even a small farming community like La Crosse, Wisconsin couldn't escape those words. And we took the world down with us.

Benjamin lay awake in bed, debating the value of rising from the sheets. He wanted to do something. Somehow shake this feeling of helplessness. He glanced at the inside of his arm; the Garmin watch told him he had an hour until sunrise. The stress in his shoulders and back ached to be cleared out. He shifted to his feet. In the kitchen he found the coffee in the freezer, pulled a cup and dropped the grounds into a grinder. A pot on the stove served as his only cooking utensil and as the water boiled he trudged into the basement to find another bottle of whisky. The downstairs was still full of boxes left from his parent's death. He didn't know if he should throw them out or leave them. So he did nothing. In the back, behind a particularly scary plastic stuffed Santa Claus his mother had always put out on Christmas Eve, was a box of bourbon, bought wholesale in Illinois before the road's closed. *Before the plague*. He pulled it out with his good hand and reached in to see what was left. *A bottle. A single fucking bottle.* He would have to get more later today. He stomped back up the stairs to mix the whiskey in his coffee and

begin the day.

It sounded like a robot cat. Incessantly purring the same monotone “mmmmrrrghhh”. Over and over, for an hour now. He hadn’t hung up the phone. Just sat there waiting for a human voice. Ben was simply attempting to speak to a mental health counselor. He had lost himself in thought staring out the window. He had nothing else to do. Nowhere to go. He had heard that there might be counselors available for him. But with the privatization of the Veterans Administration he had seen little evidence. He had been part of the initial fight in Syria and had come home to dreams he couldn’t awake from. Part of a special forces scouting team he had found locations to drop bombs and done battle-damage assessments afterwards. He could remember the children especially. The sound of the ringing put him into a trance.

He was running through the desert. Trying to get there before....Something. Something was supposed to happen and he had to stop it. His mind was cloudy. He could see a vehicle in front of him. A minivan. There was a family eating lunch. His boots struck the sand faster and faster, spraying particles aside. His muscles straining against the pain. Sweat poured down his face. And then he heard it, like a screech and then silence. The van exploded outwards and vaporized the family. Bloody chunks of flesh pelted him and kicked up dust around his now floating body. He slammed backwards into a rock and his back flared with pain.

“We apologize for the delay. Your call is important to us. If you are thinking about

harming yourself, please hang up the phone and dial 911.”

He glanced at his watch, seventy-two minutes. He always kept time of everything. *Fuck this.* He pressed end. The sounds of silence flooded back to him and he began to focus on his breathing. Visualizing each breath as a wave crashing upon the beach. He had enough of this. This was the fourth time he had tried this week. He couldn't drive down there, too many cars on the road, he wouldn't make it. Sitting on the phone was the extent of his options. *Fuck the VA.* He jolted up from the chair, almost knocking it over.

They had promised him health care when he joined. He could never afford it before. His parents died early on so he couldn't be on their plan. He had been denied social security multiple times. Joining the Army was a way to get a steady paycheck in a shoddy economy. He thought he had been making a good choice for his future. His hands rolled a joint as he stared out the window. Muscle memory over the last few years had changed his perspective on marijuana. Before the war he thought weed was for idiots. Alcohol and cocaine was where it was at. Marijuana made you lazy and slow. *Cant do that and survive.* When the nightmares started, sleeping lost all its pleasure. He would dream even when he was awake. Weed stopped the shakes. It slowed his mind to be able to deal with one thing at a time. It allowed him to close his eyes and not see little children blown to bits. He could go to a bar or do his shopping without thinking someone was following him. It allowed him to admit that he had a problem. He had a lot of problems. His masculinity told him to keep everything to himself. When he was still in the Army he at least had a support structure despite the harassment. Even the women who entered after

Obama changed the rules on gender discrimination. They were the worst. Women trying to prove they were tougher than men. Hilary Clinton's with machine guns. *Nothing scared the Muslims more than that*, he laughed to himself.

And then Trump started targeted raids against states that had legalized it. Colorado, Washington, Oregon and California were the first. Not surprising they were also states that had voted against him. It looked like a vendetta. But nothing could stop them from growing and selling weed. Sure they could send out raids and kill people and hire more cops, but it would still come back to the question of power and control. The government could never control it. Prohibition never worked. He was proud to roll his joint in his own house with a pistol on his belt for any DEA agent stupid enough to visit.

He rose from the chair and walked to the stubby wooden door. He placed the marijuana cigarette behind his ear as he pulled on a black hoodie with his military unit insignia on it. Pulling a match from his pocket he savored the first sweet drag off of Guava-Nova, a splice blend of weed from a farmer outside La Crosse. His brain chemicals began a happy dance and sent signals to the rest of his body that allowed his muscles to relax. The smoke curled over his lips like a boiling cauldron to join the polluted air above. Leaks from the tar sands plant just down the road had changed the air around his house. The front yard, once populated with flowers and native grasses when his parents were alive, had all withered and died from the belching of methane and noxious gasses. Many of the locals had moved away before land prices plummeted.

Now, what to do with the rest of the day? Hit the bar. Two choices between the hen house and upstairs. Upstairs was a hollowed out old mill turned brewery during the

rise of the hops craze. The hen house was a cheap strip club. Cheap booze and low lighting. He decided on the darker, cheaper option. It was three miles down a winding wooded road with no sidewalk so his jeans were soaked with water eight inches up by the time he got there. Twenty minutes on foot. He liked walking everywhere. Even though the weather was so chaotic lately he preferred the freedom of being on foot to stuck in a car or an airplane. He had jumped out of enough perfectly good aircraft for a lifetime.

The rain was shooting down like fallen stars by the time he reached the waterfront bar. It was an old building, used to be a dirty pictures place back in the nineties but this old couple had bought it and turned it into a pub for cheap beer and perch from the lake. By 2020 the perch were too contaminated to eat so they switched to just beer. It was on the verge of falling into the lake or being closed by the state. Probably the former because the state had bigger fish to fry. On the top level was a low-key strip joint that serviced the fishing industry, what was left of it. Prices were higher here though as they had to provide health insurance to any sex work in the state of Wisconsin. He had never seen Democrats so split over an issue. On the one hand wanting to support women who chose to work and on the other not wanting women to choose *that* kind of work. *Their morality was still all bundled up in Christianity same as the republicans*, he thought. He snorted, tossing the joint towards the rain soaked concrete and ambled up the steps. He could skip the fish tonight.

It was a low-key vibe inside with the music turned to a six on the dial. “Please please me” by the Beatles was coming through the speakers. As he entered he moved to

the side of the door and let his eyes adjust to the dim light. Scanning from one corner across the room he counted sixteen people. Five dancers and eleven consumers. He moved to the bar and took a seat with his back against the wall. This way he could see all the entry-ways. Multiple colored lights adorned the stage. Ben sat under a single sixty-watt bulb and a lava lamp at the cash register. It was a Tuesday so there was no cover at the door. The Beatles were over and something that sounded like the underwater Caribbean music scene picked up the pace. The bar shook with each bump and two Latina women entered from behind a curtain. Movement out of the corner of his eye and he switched to the bartender. An upraised eyebrow.

Bartender: "Same?"

Veteran: "As always."

The bartender pulled the Makers Mark from the shelf, snagged a single ice cube and dropped it into a lowball glass. Tipping the bottle he filled it to the brim and slid the glass over to the veteran. He turned and tipped the tap of India Pale Ale which flowed into a curved glass leaving just enough head for flavor. Not too much or the beer went bad fast. Not too little or it wouldn't have its best taste. The bartender signaled twenty dollars for both. *Fuck*, Ben thought, prices have gone nuts, he could barely afford to treat his PTSD. Beer was still cheaper than therapy, though. He slugged back half the glass of whiskey and took a sip of the beer. He nodded thankfully to the bartender. Turning his attention back to the stage he could feel himself settling in to the moment and not being a

thousand miles away. The weed focused his thoughts onto the moment and the alcohol calmed his nerves. The two girls were kissing each other and grinding their hips together. He had always been attracted to girls. In the Army, young men with years of pent up aggression took it out on each other with homoerotic behavior. He heard it had been worse before they had accepted women into all jobs. *They were actually better on long-range missions* he admitted silently. *They had more endurance.*

The girl's bikini-tops were laying on the stage now and they had separated to do cartwheels towards customers in for a closer look. He never sat at the stage. He didn't want to talk with anyone, just to look. The girl on the left seemed strangely like a girl he had seen before. He couldn't place the face but he was sure he had seen her naked before, with that tattoo on her left thigh. Like a spiraling helix that broke off and formed its own way. He scratched at his week-old beard and searched his memory. Too foggy right now. The girls escaped to backstage as noiselessly as they had entered and Eminem began blaring through the speakers. He drained the rest of the whiskey.
“Lets hear it for the Sorenson twins” blared the speaker at the stage. He hadn't thought they looked like twins at all. Marketing. *Why the fuck cant they leave things alone to be what they are.* His beer was half full and he was steadily downing it. He ordered another whiskey.

Bartender: “You a veteran?”

The veteran nods. The bartender nods back. Turns around and hands the whiskey glass to him.

Bartender: "This ones on me. Welcome home."

Ben didn't think this place qualified to be called "home" but he nodded his thanks and sipped the glass. *Less ice in it this time.* The bartender moved away from him and walked out from behind the horseshoe ring. Ben lazily kept an eye on him, wondering where he was going. The boy on stage didn't interest him much. He had nothing against guys; he had his life because a gay kid named Sal had jumped on a grenade. It had flown over the top of the mud wall they were leaning against. No time for thought, just reaction and Sal had thrown his body onto it. His guts were ripped open and the whole squad was covered in human waste. But Sal had saved their lives. Sal got a purple heart and an Army commendation medal for that. The Lieutenant in charge got a silver star for calling in a Blackhawk for his lifeless corpse. So it goes.

The boy on stage was wearing a cop uniform. Ben didn't know who that was intended to turn on but maybe that was a fetish for some people. This bar always featured straight men and women as well as the occasional trans dancer. Most people just came to watch like children at a zoo. Sick, really. *But what was he doing here judging?* He could see the bartender behind a half curtain talking to someone. Talking intensely. Ben had been here before and never seen the bartender utter more than a sentence at a time. Now he was talking, pausing, turning his head as if the other speaker was quiet, then he threw his hands up in the air and walked back to the bar. He refused to make eye contact and began wiping down the opposite bar with his back to Ben.

That's when she appeared. Wearing a thin black jacket with white lines down the sides and black spandex with a short skirt. Her t-shirt hid the breasts that had been bared onstage only moments before. *The things people can do when the stage lights are on*, he thought. She was headed right for him. Her heavy black boots made no sound as she slid onto the stool next to him. She made an effort to smile. He made an effort not to touch her.

Ben: "What...whats your name?" he stammered.

Dancer: "No names tonight." She put a finger to his lips and whispered, "Welcome home".

His head was pounding. All the sheets were wrapped together like a knot at the base of his bed. *Nightmares again*. What day was it? Friday? Sunday? Sitting up he was aware that he wasn't alone in the apartment. His left hand shot to the bedside table and reached into the drawer. Wrapping his fingers around the Glock it felt light. Someone had taken the magazine. *Fuck. FUCK! FUCK! FUCK!* How did he let this happen? He slowly slid off the bed and moved silently to the door. Opening it he smelled smoke. Food cooking. He stepped into the living room and there she stood. Thoughts flooded back to him. After she had sat down at the bar with him and bought another drink they had spoken about his service. She had led him back to the alley where she asked if she could go home with him. She had a diesel Toyota Hilux and had driven the stick to perfection

the four miles back to his place. Once there she had rolled a joint from his personal stash and had smoked through it fast. That's when the clothes came off. Slowly. Starting at his feet she pulled each sock and massaged each foot like she knew where his pain was. Moving to his lower back she hit pressure points that released yelps of pain and pleasure from him. He had never been touched like this before. It felt so familiar, as if her body and his were in rhythm without any movement. She rolled him over and pinched the inside of his shoulder blades working out a knot that had been with him for years. That's when he first tasted her lips. They were hot and soft. Smoky as a grilled oyster. They didn't part at first, exploring the texture and tenderness she pulled away to look into his eyes. Hers were green like an Egyptian cat, natural he would learn later. They plunged his depths with a kindness and curiosity for more. She was kneeling over him, her skirt hiked up to her hips and her cunt pressed against his jeans. The tightness of his pants pressed against him, his mind eager to tear away his belt. She slid his shirt over his head and kissed his neck down to his stomach, hovering over a shrapnel wound as if she was studying it. Her hands worked their way to his belt and pulled the restraints away.

There was no time for talking. No words that would fit the moment. The lights dim with a flicker of cars passing by every few minutes. The shadow of their bodies moved across the ceiling as if they were gravity-less beings rolling across the sky. She on top at first didn't bother with her tight black shirt. Pulling her stockings off her hips she grasped his shaft and pulled him inside of her. She let out a squeal and he gasped breathlessly. She was incredibly wet from rocking on top of him and he stiff as a tent pole. They fit each other like a broken eggshell put back together. The condom she had

put on him with her mouth tasted of strawberries and had ribs in it that massaged her insides. Breathing faster, shorter breaths it was quick to bring herself to the edge, hovering there as if balancing on a bowling ball till she hit the pins and they both came together.

“Good morning” she said.

He couldn't remember her name. Had she told him? She was wearing the skirt with nothing underneath. The black t-shirt hung around her shoulders as if it had been stretched and ripped. Her eyes were still wearing traces of black and red mascara, what had made it through their marathon all-nighter. He thinks they had sex at least three times. He was gonna need to get more condoms.

“And how is your back this morning?” She asked, a wry smile spreading across her face.
“Mmmnnnhh. Better, I think? How did you know?” He moved towards the chair, thought about sitting down, decided against it. She spoke.

“I’m a trained kinesiologist and I do a lot of body work. I can tell by the way you move that you have back problems. Infantry?” He nodded yes. How did she know so much about him? “I was a medic for four years” she mused. “Joined the 75th Ranger regiment. You look like someone from JSOC.”

Her eyes were studying him from across the kitchen. JSOC was the Joint Special

Operations Command. It included the Army's Delta Force, Green Berets and Rangers, the Navy's Seals and the 160th Special operations aviation regiment among other assorted "dark" groups. People in JSOC usually had bad backs. Lots of jumping out of perfectly good aircraft and hiking around perfectly horrible mountains and deserts. Evidently she had been one of the first women to integrate the combat elements of the special operations community. Maybe that's where he had seen her before. Somewhere in passing. An airport in Manas, somewhere in Pakistan or Yemen?

"Were you in Syria?" He hesitated to ask but had too. She nodded. "Did you know me there?" She shook her head no. This was all happening too fast. Too weird. He realized he was standing there holding an empty pistol with no clothes but his boxers in the living room with a stripper who just blew his mind all night long. She saw the look on his face.

"Why don't you take a shower, get yourself comfortable and we can answer some questions?". She nodded towards the bathroom as if giving an order. "I'll make us some coffee and see what we can do about some food". She turned her back signaling the conversation was over.

In the bathroom he opened up his medical bag. Fumbling through the orange bottles he found the Hydro-codeine for his back and plopped three down his throat. A couple b-vitamins for the hangover. Paxil for the anxiety. He would smoke a joint after he washed up. He flossed, brushed his teeth and swished some mouthwash around and stepped into the shower.

After the shower he felt much clearer as he slipped cargo pants over his scratched up legs. He remembers her dragging nails up his inner thigh to tease him before round three. A black t-shirt rounded out his wardrobe and he walked bare-foot back to the living room. There were eggs, sunny-side up the way he liked them. Bread with a small bit of butter and a large steaming cup of coffee on the table. He sat down and she joined him.

“How do you know so much about me?” he asked. She arched an eyebrow as if to say, What? No foreplay?

“How did you sleep last night?” she had changed the equation. What to do? He shrugged as if to say it was neither good nor bad.

“Maybe we should start with names. I’m Marisol”. She said it like the r was a d. He had never been able to roll his R's in Spanish class.

“Thats an interesting name...” He said. The unsaid part of that was the fact that a white girl shouldn't have a Spanish name. “I changed it when my dad died. I wanted to be a new person.” His face automatically went into a mechanical change that displayed some version of empathy he had seen on TV. “Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. How did he die?” Did he really want to get this deep? He had just met this girl. Ben began to feel uneasy.

“He died of cancer. Never smoked. Lived next to one of the tar sands pipelines up north near the border. The cancer rates are through the roof near any of that toxic shit. He was

thirty-eight. Died when I was thirteen. I had no other family. I joined the Army to just to get away." Ben smiled for the first time and asked, "To meet interesting people?"

"Yes. And then to kill them". She smiled turning her back to him and went on cutting onions on the cutting board. He brought the subject back to her father.

"Did the doctors say the cancer came from the pipeline?" Her back tightened and she stopped cutting.

"They couldn't say anything. They were scared for their own jobs and stability. No one stood up to stop it before it was too late (CITATION 2). Have you seen photos of where they mine that stuff in Canada?" Ben had not. In fact he had avoided just this kind of focusing on the worlds collapse intentionally. It made all his symptoms worse.

They spent the next night together. She showed him the tailing ponds where waste was dumped into perfectly good streams of river. The hundreds of thousands of acres of land destroyed to begin mining. The freshwater reserves that were being depleted. The growing cancer rates at each part of the pipeline. He was horrified. The oil that was extracted didn't even come to the United States. It got sent overseas. It brought back all the memories of Halliburton and KBR making money off his friend's deaths. The soldiers would protect the oil facilities so Exxon and Total and Shell could make their profits. It was selfish rich assholes screwing everyone else. He felt the anger coursing through him. Emotions that had been dormant arose within him. Feelings he had long buried were overtaking him. As Marisol told her life story and how the drive for oil had led her to join the military, Ben began to cry.

Marisol left to check in at work but was back before bar-close. She told the club she was sick. They gathered their things together quietly and slipped out the door at three am. A car was parked a half mile away and they found the keys on the back tire. In the trunk was a new set of ID's for both of them. She took out two packages and unwrapped them once they were seated in the car. One had file information on where they were to go to pick up the next drop. They both read the information, memorized it, then lit it on fire. Rain pelted the hood and fogged the windows. The second package contained four packaged MRE's (meals ready to eat) and two chicken sandwiches that seemed fresh. They chowed down and he opened what looked like a large glasses case. In it was a pen-like device and a large amount of ground marijuana. He looked up at her. She smiled. "No more smoking joints until we get there" she said. "We need our lungs and we don't need attention".

He knew it would be a long drive as she pulled onto I-90 and headed west. The southern border with Illinois was still closed after the MERS outbreak but Minnesota was wide open. They would take the northern route through North Dakota and Montana then swing south to Wyoming before getting their next instructions. There they would switch cars and head to their final destination. Their new lives.

During the drive Marisol explained more of her story. She had been angry when she got out. Depressed. She had explored the bottom of every bottle she could find. As the war's got worse and the American people became more complacent, more ignorant, she began to look for some other way to serve. She had found it in a growing anti-war movement. It started with rallies and marches but soon escalated to organizing soldiers to

refuse unlawful orders. But when the economy crashed there were more than enough people willing to take shitty jobs for health care. The movement died under Obama. Liberals didn't have a problem with a Democrat dropping drone strikes on wedding parties. She had been at a park when the team first approached her. It was a small group of former JSOC personnel. Well-trained, angry veterans who were sick and tired of seeing their friends die for energy companies. All they were doing, it seemed was providing stability for them in unstable areas. And that's when she first learned about climate change. About how the Syrian civil war was heavily influenced by drought (**CITATION 3**). How the Nigerian genocide started from heat waves and collapse of stable Eco-systems (**CITATION 4**). The unit was going to do something about that. They had all sworn an oath, against enemies foreign and domestic. And there was nothing conscionable about profiteering off of war like Exxon Mobil, Shell and BP did every day as American soldiers bled and died for their profits. The unit would bring the war home and make the true enemies of America feel the same fear as those people the unit once occupied in desert sands five thousand miles away.

They recruited Marisol, not only because of her anti-war political work but the death of her father. The Tar Sands were the greatest carbon bomb on the planet and it had ended his life, changing hers irrevocably (**CITATION 5**). She signed up after the first meeting.

One month later

Saskatchewan, Canada

The training was difficult. They were all veterans of one war or another. After 9/11 there were so many conflicts and small wars in which to train. After they came

home there wasn't much for them. No jobs. Limited health care. When they went to claim their disability and receive financial support for their injuries, they had to make their case to a government appointed doctor who tried everything to prove that they were liars. This left hundreds of thousands in the lurch without health care or a way to buy food and housing. Those who didn't turn to alcohol and drug use chose between suicide or illegal activities. Many began growing marijuana to sell as multiple states made it legal. Cross-country trips from Colorado, California and Washington brought marijuana to prohibition states like Mississippi and Florida. Many of the soldiers surrounding him on the hill after a long run had found ways to cheat the system that had cheated them. Now they were training to actively overthrow it.

Each training day required a different leader to command them. This was an effective way of teaching everyone how difficult it is to lead. Everyone would learn the difficulties of command. No one had rank here. They had to learn to overcome their socialized hierarchies. Many veterans didn't like being told what to do by people perceived as less competent than themselves. There was an ongoing attempt to cross train skills with medical and weapons training at the top. They were encouraged to read in their spare time and the camp had a library larger than the mess hall. Real books along with electronic hard drives compiled everything from Dostoyevsky and counter-insurgency, to Adam Smith and Emma Goldman. Understanding culture and history became paramount to any armed rebellion being successful. If they were going to attack the fossil fuel industry they had to address what would come after. They had to provide an alternative.

Ben stood, bent over at the crest of the hill. Hands on his hips, breathing hard. This was his first day as team lead. He had pushed the group of twelve hard up the hill. He had pushed himself. Sweat was streaming down his newly shaved head. It tasted like salt water. He hadn't had a drink of alcohol in a month. Straightening his back he breathed out the pain and pulled some scraps of paper for the briefing he was about to give. Every week each member of the squad was required to give a research presentation on a possible target. At the end of training they would all con-sense to where their efforts were most needed. Today for him was the history of the Canadian Tar Sands. Many of the veterans had gone to some college after their tours, but learned little in the way of research and public speaking. They had the passion inside them; they just needed to learn to hone it. To point the gun at the right motherfucker. He had practiced his talk alone many times and was ready. He removed his boots and socks to let them dry in the warm Saskatchewan sun. According to locals it was warmer than usual. The rest of the squad did the same. He began to stretch as he dropped the rucksack from his back and unfolded a yoga mat. Everyone mirrored him noiselessly. Unlike their training in the military, this involved no yelling, no berating and striking down others. They worked as a unit. A family. They inspected each other's feet for injuries. It had been an eight-mile run mostly uphill. They loved each other, even after only a month. Each group was split along gender lines with six men and six women. This allowed each group to split apart if the mission should need. Each person had been extensively recruited, some going back years. Many people had served together at one time or another. They all had combat experience.

After stretching enough to feel loose he closed his feet in a lotus and opened the notes. This signaled his readiness to begin. "All right men, I mean folks, I'm going to

brief you on the Tar Sands.” They waited. He went on “Ok, so you will have some info packets with citations on your beds when we get back home but right now I’m just gonna give you some background to think about as we walk back.” They would take a more treacherous route back to camp that ended up being twenty miles long but was good for endurance and scenery. “Here goes.” He cleared his throat and spit, remnants of his former life still releasing from his body.

“What I want to talk about today is the largest industrial project on earth. The main deposits of what the Canadian government calls “oil sands” lies about four hours north of Edmonton in the province of Alberta. The deposits were first discovered in 1900, but didn’t receive much attention until the 1970s. The process of extraction is the dirtiest and most expensive of any type of oil on the planet. It requires intense amounts of fresh water to be pumped through the oil in order to remove sand and other filaments. The transportation of the bitumen through pipelines is destructive to the pipes themselves. Like sandpaper being dragged along the inside, it deteriorates the stability of the pipes and leads to more spills.”

Ben stopped and looked around the circle. This was not a group of people who lost focus. They sat on his every word, rapt attention that met the gravity of the topic. It was understood this information would be key to their training, and ultimately their work together. Ben took a breath, feeling the tightness in his chest, and continued speaking.

“To top all this off, most of the product is never used in domestic markets. It’s for foreign consumption. They ship it overseas to make a profit, mostly for corporations like Exxon, BP and Conoco Phillips, not the taxpayers who pay for the whole operation.”

The size of this destruction is larger than the state of Florida. It covers boreal forests, rivers older than the tribes who subsist upon them. Tailing ponds of waste, just piles of toxic shit, fill up over eighty square kilometers. Birds have been known to land on them and disintegrate (**CITATION 6**). Many of the local mega-fauna, animals like deer and elk have become carriers of poison. When they are hunted or fished they then transmit that cancer to the humans who eat them. The many nations of the Cree tribe who have hunted and lived upon these lands for countless generations, have cancer rates that rival Fallujah (**CITATION 6**).”

Some of the men in the group had served in Fallujah. The house to house fighting, munitions and unexploded ordinance, burn-pits. That was the worst because everyone was exposed. They burnt everything from plastic MRE boxes and computer parts, to metal ammo casings and depleted uranium. Many veterans, when they got home began diving of cancer. It was nothing compared to those who had to remain in Fallujah (**CITATION 7**).

“When white Englishmen first appeared, treaties were signed. Promises made to avoid war. Central to this was the ability of the Cree nation to retain their natural hunting and fishing grounds. Enshrined within the Canadian constitution was the promise that the Cree would always live their natural existence. But the Supreme Court of Canada failed to uphold these rights. The tribes sued, and lost. Petitions failed to make a difference and every party that took political power failed to address the carbon bomb that is the Alberta Tar Sands.”

The wind was picking up now and a chill was sticking to their sweat drenched layers. Looking over the rolling hills as the sun fell to the West, the conversation was

coming to a close. Ben cleared his throat and rose to the climax.

“I believe this is the greatest threat to the climate and our future. We can focus on pipelines; export terminals or the consumers themselves. But, if we target the heart of the entire infrastructure project, it could inspire resistance all up and down the chain. Instead of cutting off the limbs and watching them grow back, let’s go to the roots of this problem. Native people have been fighting this for years and the corporations have rolled over them at every step. They have done everything right. They have been non-violent and asked nicely but still they are ignored and shit on. As veterans we have a special responsibility to step in when people are oppressed. We saw what happens when you let corporations run a country. Iraq. Afghanistan. Syria. Many more we can’t even fully know. They are unelected and unaccountable. Someone needs to say so and do something about this. Native communities are being murdered. It’s time for us to get their backs.”

Ben finished reading and paused, the enormity of the obstacle’s in front of them hanging in the air. Some were nodding their heads. Some looked at the ground, while others met his gaze. Everyone had a determined look in their eyes. “Fucking right” said Elyiana.

She was sitting to his left and put her hand on his shoulder. He exhaled slowly. “Thank you for listening to my message to share” he said looking over their heads towards the border. “Thank you for sharing” a few of them echoed. He let the silence envelop them. Ben looked to Alberta; over the rolling pastures he could imagine the massive destruction of land going on near Fort McMurray. Nothing had changed over the years, despite protests and evidence, lawsuits and blockades. And it was all for foreign

consumption. Nothing for America. Or Canada for that matter. That was all about to change. This small group of people would alter the course of history.

The hike back to camp was quiet. Intensity rose from their shoulders with the steam from their sweat. A fast moving thunderstorm came and went, leaving them drenched and refreshed. As they walked into their ten-acre farmhouse camp, Ben went to get the cited research papers to hand out. Elyiana stopped him.

“Before we break bread together tonight, I want to call for a vote. We have been here for some time. We have heard all the different threats to our existence. I believe what ben shared with us today is the greatest, and is begging for action. Let us go around and tell us your vote.”

Ben couldn’t believe it. This was breaking protocol. But as the circle came together and thumb after thumb pointed to the atmosphere they were trying to protect, it became clear. He was home. And they now had a target.

One week later

Fort McMurray

They were now deployed in Alberta. Calgary was by no means a one-horse town but after the Chinese financial crash it had greatly shrunk. They were on the south side of the city, a former shopping district that took over from a former rodeo facility. Ben was not the team lead for the operation. The twelve sappers from Charlie would sit this one out. Bravo was in Alberta, readying the final heavy equipment. Ben sat on a bar stool, his legs lazily curled around the base, sipping a Molson in this tiny townie bar. He debated

whether to play another game of pool, inevitably losing to Sadie.

“What’s going on in that head of yours”? Sadie, the unquestioned computer genius and language extraordinaire asked.

“I don’t know, my head is kinda hitting a stuck point”.

“You mean like how our war PTSD can all be traced back to one single event?” she smiled wryly. “Don’t get so worked up about it. We are all trained well. We know what we are doing. No one is going into it blind. It’s been six months. The military didn’t even train us this well”.

She was right of course. Basic training lasted two months and that was mostly repetitive tasks. Learning how to march and structure a unit. Advanced training could take longer depending on your skill set but everyone here had been infantry. Because the military had changed its policy on allowing women to serve openly in combat around 2013, they could structure the teams to be equally female and male.

“Come on” said Sadie. “I’ll grab this pitcher and we can play for the next one”. She turned in her used Calgary flames sweatshirt; the flaming C faded just like the former team, and marched to the bar. The TV was on in the corner, turned to local news and as he rubbed blue chalk on the end of the warped pool cue he began to pay attention. The announcer had a squeaky voice and thin wire rimmed glasses.

“The train derailment near Glasgow, North Dakota has sent thousands of gallons of crude oil into the Yellowstone River and a mandatory evacuation is in place.” Ben shot a look at the bartender who was busy getting their drinks and turned up the volume on the TV. “Activists have begun arriving in the town and plan a vigil tonight for the victims of

the spill.”

That was three spills this week. Between all the new pipelines and increased rail traffic, plus truckers doing twenty hour drives now that health inspections no longer mattered, he was surprised it was only three. He scoffed at the vigil. They needed a cleanup plan, not a prayer service. The announcer was still speaking. “Protesters allege we should not be shipping oil within the United States, but where do they want it to come from? The Middle East? Do they want to buy it from the war zones of Nigeria and Venezuela?” Ben shook his head, more in resignation than anger. His entire life, these had been the same arguments used against doing something. Anything. These people had no imagination.

“That shit should stay in the ground” Sadie’s voice brought him back to the bar as she set down the pitcher of Kokanee. Then she placed two shot glasses of Canadian Club whiskey on the bar next to him. “You know that whiskey should never be blended right?” Ben stated without expectation of a response. “Just drink it,” said Sadie. “I’ll break”. He swallowed the poison and turned off the TV. “Well, at least someone’s gonna do something about it” he said. She met his eyes, briefly, then sent the ball cracking into the triangle.

That night, Ben was able to be with Marisol again. It had been some time since they all slipped across the border separately. Due to the Chicago MERS outbreak, border crossing was as difficult as ever, and they had to use the tunnels built during the Trump immigration fiasco. She entered the small bedroom at the back of the farm house quietly, her footsteps silent against the creaking floorboards. The wind had settled down along the

prairie, and the spare heaters were on their last solar power from the hot water heaters. Dropping the cargo pants they all wore now, she lifted the deerskin blankets and slipped into bed.

“I missed you honey” Ben mumbled from the purgatory of sleepy wakefulness. They kissed, the taste of beer still on his lips, hungry for her. Her legs unshaven, she let them caress his thighs. Now the fear of losing each other drove their passionate intensity. As he slipped inside her, they made no attempt to quiet their animalistic desperation. Ben’s hands found her long, braided hair, pulling hard as Marisol’s hips thrust upward taking all of him. The night closed around them. A brief moment before the final darkness.

Math Teacher Evergreen State College

Al Westerfield stood at his desk and his hands dug into the cheap wood. *They were at it again* he thought. *Those damn kids care more about protesting than getting an education. Sorry lot to hand the world over too.* No one had showed up for his Introduction to Statistics with an emphasis on political economy. He began picking up the folders so neatly laid out on the table. Sliding them into his bag he plucked his trusty laser pointer from its perch near the NET board and stuffed it into his breast pocket. As he closed the briefcase he glanced one last time out the LEED certified climate friendly window. Over two hundred of them now. Milling about a fire in red square near the library. *Why didn’t the campus police stop them* his mind raged. He thought back to his time in school in the 1970s. Now that was when they knew how to crack skulls. Get

things in order. Under Governor Reagan, he had put a stop to that nonsense. *Schools were a place for learning about the world. Not changing it. What could these teenagers know about governing society?* He grunted, lifting the suitcase and stomping out the door towards his car.

The engine wouldn't start. He got out of the car. Popped the hood. Looked inside. Nothing. *These damn new cars, couldn't fix the motor if I even knew what was happening.* Something crunched behind him and Doctor (PHD) Al Westerfield, whirled around almost losing his balance. A young girl, couldn't be more than twenty years of age, stood before him, her head cocked sideways. A strange smell, she hadn't washed in days he thought, wafted past his nose.

"You can't leave," she said with a cheerful voice. She just stood there after that. Al's face twisted downward to make his already present scowl stronger. "What did you say my dear"? She just looked at him deeply, as if there were secrets behind the childish eyes. Her hair wrapped into itself and fell around one shoulder making its way down her chest. The thin flowery dress that stopped at her knees lifted and fell with the strong breeze. It was going to be another stormy night. Al studied the girl, not knowing why he was considering her at all. *Friday night. Late. Campus police probably busy with protest or some other disorder. Buses no longer running due to budget cuts...* He abruptly sensed the two of them were not alone. Another woman, older, and a young man were now standing next to him. "You had better come with us" said the woman. She gripped his outer arm. His legs were weak, spongy, he felt himself sinking towards the concrete. Greta had

always told him his anxiety was his worst feature, till she left him. He fell to the grass.

The trees above seemed to cave in on him. The silence echoed through his skull.

Simba was putting the ashes of the fire out. It was no longer necessary to demonstrate resistance in such an artistic way. There are many things that need burning but we are not there yet she thought. The old man from the parking lot had been the last of them. Only four police on duty tonight, it had been easier than anyone had planned. They took the first one in the office, so no backup would be called. After years of students fighting the police to keep weapons off campus the police, naturally, had won the battle after the University of Washington shooting that killed the provost and a police officer. Killing police always made them multiply faster than rabbits. They were worse than the military. They beat their own people for fucks sake! Her hands trembled as she held the water filled gas can washing away any embers. *They had done it!* Taken the school away from the administrators. The moments that had led to this one were tinged in tragedy. Closing down the ecology department under pressure from the marine oil-shipping corporation, which owned half of Olympia, the nearby capitol of Washington. They had their slick fingers on everything, from transportation to who sat on the local school board. Or the Board of Regents at the Evergreen State College. It had not taken the corp long to realize Evergreen was nothing if not a radical political training center, spewing out minds of resistance into the wider world. Closing the school itself proved difficult, but with some moving around of donations and funding, there were budgets to cut everywhere, they were able to attack different disciplines of study.

Simba looked at her hands, covered in grime and spit. She rubbed them together then

wiped them on her dress. Her hands were always dirty. If anyone ever needed to find her they could trace the thousands of black fingerprints over the pages of books at her small house. To make organizing a lifestyle she fixed bicycles for people. Or more accurately she taught them to fix their own bicycles. Initially she was derided for having such a “horrible business model” that constantly reduced her “customer base”. She snorted. As if all the members of the community she had met were “customers”. Not only did she make enough money to pay the maintenance on her home, but she was able to spend three days a week working on building a new society. Or that’s how she thought of it. Her eyes lifted to the third floor of the library building. The center of their defense of this sacred land. She could see figures moving rapidly, windows being covered with single direction shades. They could see out but no one could see in. The theater department, or rather its radical students, had supplied that extra protection. The principles for success had galvanized the student body bringing together groups that had never thought of anything but their own needs. Now the students were all in this together. Almost four thousand. Simba still had work to do before she could join the others in the Council of Temporary Leaders (COTEL). Her hands reached for the tool-bag sitting on the nearby bench. The dedication plaque plastered to the plastic wood leaped out at her as she shouldered the bag.

DEDICATED JAN 20 2020

“Towards a better tomorrow”

MARINE OIL SHIPPING COMPANY

Her lips curled into a smile then with her teeth showing she arched her head to the sky and let out a howl like that of the wolf. The moon was full.

The old man became aware that he was alive. He was laying vertically on something...felt like a bed of some sort. He lifted his head, looked around. His heart was pattering at a vastly exponential rate. Numbers swirled around his brain. How long had he been sleeping? Sleeping. That's what he was doing was it? The room looked like a cheap medical clinic. He became aware slowly that he was lying in the student medical center. Signs of venereal disease and abortions littered the walls. He rose to an upright position. He felt disgust. A headache suddenly demanded all his attention. Unsteadily at first, his old shaky arms lifted off the semi bed and his feet found the floor. He was only wearing the socks he had put on that very morning, Kashmir, from before the war when you could still find it. Slowly he moved to the sink and commenced drinking straight from the faucet. Uncouth of him to do this but the circumstances warranted it he thought. His headache slightly subsided and the empty space in his brain was filled with anxiety. He remembered everything, suddenly as if the water had washed over him like a wave. There was a knock at the door. It opened and a man in glasses, Asian perhaps? Stepped into the room and help out a tray with vegetables on it. "They are fresh, I assure you" the man said. He wasn't a man, al thought shaking his head. Just a boy. Looking down the old man realized he had already taken the tray and begun eating. "When you finished, you will come with me," said the man-boy. The old man stared at him with questions swirling. He continued to eat. Slowly.

Simba was in the Bravo parking lot at the local power control for lights and security onto the campus. They had already taken the first guard gate that allowed primary access to the campus. They closed the gates and then burned the control panel, sealing them all inside the campus, and the police on the outside. None had showed up yet, but it wouldn't be long. She clipped the wire for the lights and the parking lot went dark. Time for the sentries to turn on their night goggles she thought. She wouldn't need them, not yet. Years of living off the grid, aside from saving her money, had honed her ability to move through the darkness like a second nature. She did night walks, listening to the critters around her in the capitol forest. The area was large enough to get lost in it, providing you didn't run into rural cats shooting off their guns. Lack of police sometimes had its drawbacks. She cringed at that thought and almost spat out-loud. *That's only because we have an individual community. If everyone were more interconnected they would see that their behavior affects others. Take care of their needs and people become more receptive.* Her mind was wandering. If they were successful tonight then they might be successful tomorrow. One day at a time. We can only control the end by making a choice at each step. She had made her choice. Once again she grabbed her bag and headed to her final assignment before unity with her tribe.

The library was four stories and the headquarters of this higher education coup de tat was on the top floor. Antennas and mini re-creations of local prairie land dominated the outside of the fourth floor. The inside was draped with maps and political slogans. *Political action is cognitive therapy for society” and “if your life’s work can be accomplished in your lifetime than you aren’t thinking big enough”.* The maps were

local. The greater Olympia area. Certain locations were marked with red or yellow stickers marking targets that needed attention. As Simba entered through the glass doors she was met by a third security culture appointee. Well, she thought, "Its good that we finally found a role in the movement for the paranoid conspiracy theorists. Put them to work checking peoples identity. She reached inside her Carhardt jacket, it had gotten cold outside as the storm entered the area, and retrieved her passkey. The SC passed her onward. Students were moving everywhere. Standing at the gate of a different world, Simba looked over her comrades once more. She was proud, happy even. In many ways, they had already won. The first successful seizure of a college campus since Columbia in the 1960s. Back then it had been about only one war. Now it was about all of them. And they weren't done yet. She walked to the security table to check in. Seeing her security card, Andy the dry humored swim team captain turned and checked off the final name on the wall sheet. Everyone had reported in safely. All their cell watches were rigged securely to a network that should provide them communication outside of NSA wiretapping. For a time. It would eventually crack, but by that time they would be done with the plan. The briefing would be soon. Simba then grabbed some locally ground coffee and took a seat in the roundtable discussion area. The lights dimmed, students began to move towards the seating area. 24 chairs ringed an oak table setup for collages and repurposed for revolution tonight. Each person was a consensus agreed upon organizer of their respective group. Security, Food, Communication, Political development, Direct Action, Weapons, Medical etc. This would be the final meeting before operations kicked in. First to speak was Propaganda. For this role they had chosen Joseph Papono who looked more American than Ronald Reagan. He would be there to

speak with the press and issue statements. Negotiate from a position of power if that became necessary.

Joseph looked around the table and began to speak. “Working with the existing computer arrays around campus we have rigged our own “extranet” to work around the Internet blocking the police will use soon. We have a small amount of time before we are raided. If we can hold out for another few hours, we can make our mark and end shipping through the port forever. You all know what you need to do.”

Koch Brothers

Caity Knowles was a legend in the journalism business. She had cut her teeth on the NSA spying revelations of the early 2010's. Following a government crackdown and fearing for her own safety, she fled to Argentina. One of the new breed of journalists following the collapse of the mainstream media, she chose to report with a clear bias towards human rights and libertarian views. Her writing has influenced academics and social movements with her analysis and criticism. She believed the individual was the key component to a healthy society. She created a following that was defiantly supportive of her. Her “enemies” list stretches from corporate America all the way to the White House. I reached her by flying to Argentina.

Interviewer-I'm particularly interested in some of the “money in politics” pieces that you did after all the NSA releases. You were one of the first to doggedly pursue connections

between the big money donors and the “climate denial” industry.

Lisa-Well it was no secret, the first thing to do when you are a journalist is to follow the money. We learned that from Nixon. And the money was going from all these mega-corporations that were profiting off the oil and gas booms into politics. Exxon was at the head of it all. In the 1960s they were at the head of climate research and came to the conclusion that rising carbon in the atmosphere would lead to drastic climactic changes. They made a tactical choice to hide this information (**CITATION 1**). It started to affect all the races, even in places where the politics were decidedly one side or another. Nothing was taken for granted. The House of Representatives was stuck in the Republican column for a decade due to the redistricting process and..

Interviewer-Can you explain that? Because I think that goes a long way to..

Lisa-Sure. So, every ten years in the United States there is a census. The Constitution calls for it. Basically, we try to count all the people, race, sex, religion, job, where they live.. It helps with planning everything from our tax and revenue streams to public school funding. Then that information is taken by the state legislature's and used to update all the Congressional districts, you know, to “more accurately” represent the people of a region. So whichever political party controls the state legislatures at the time of the election, say in 2020 or 2030, controls the new “re-districting”(**Citation 2**). So in the election of 2010 the tea party exploded onto the scene and took over state houses across America. This meant that they controlled the demographics of each district. They then set

out to create districts that favored the Republican Party. So all the people of color were thrown into one section, and then the white areas were more spread out, thus making it possible to continually have the House of Representatives be in the Republican majority. This then, affected everything national from health care, to immigration reform, to climate change and the military. Because the house controls the purse strings of Congress you couldn't de-militarize any parts of the armed forces. A plane is made in many different states, a tank broken into multiple pieces that covers across all boundaries (**Citation 3**). If you try to cancel a project you have different members of the house crying foul. So basically our country was stuck in neutral. Once in a while the President or the Senate would try to rev the engine but it didn't go anywhere.

Interviewer-Doesn't sound like the system that the founders envisioned?

Lisa takes out a cigarette and lights it with a match, almost absently.

Lisa-Well that depends on your perspective of which founders. Everyone wants to claim that the founders of the United States had THEIR ideology in mind. That's preposterous. They were mostly rich white men but that didn't mean that they held the same views. Some owned slaves, some didn't. Some believed in a Christian god and some were deists. Hell, Thomas Paine was an atheist, although that word hadn't been invented yet. There were people who believed in big government and some wanted a monarchy. They *definitely* didn't believe in democracy. The rule of the ignorant non-property owning masses? That was chaos! (**Citation 5**), The only thing uniting the founders was the opposition to the King in England. Even that was difficult cuz people like Alexander

Hamilton wanted to replace him with an American king, but mostly there was a desire to limit the powers of the executive. To retard the power of the executive branch so that it couldn't act like a despot with no restraints. In that aspect our existing congress is very effective. Not only have they restricted the power of the executive to do anything, they have also neutered congress. Of course the founders didn't plan on computers or nuclear weapons either, so it's difficult to say what they would have thought.

Interviewer-There is also the problem of Congress not restricting war. Can you talk about that?

Lisa-The history of war in this country is both straightforward and complicated. Congress is the body that was supposed to declare war. The executive branch was intended to put civilian control over the military. The legislative branch, specifically the Supreme Court could rule upon the legality of a declaration of war and the hope was these relationships would prevent most conflict from occurring. Originally fears of war were directed at re-invasion by Britain or other European powers. It wasn't until the 1898 war with Spain that the United States became an Empire...

Lisa holds up her hand to stop me from interjecting.

Lisa-I know, we don't like to use that word: Empire. But an empire is simply an extensive group of nations or people ruled over by a single unified authority. The United States uses different tools than the British or French empires to control large swaths of the planet but they control it nonetheless. We have sold our war debt to the rest of the

planet for protection, stability and military support since the end of the American revolutionary war. It's why there is a central banking institution. It's why America will always be in debt. It's why we can't stop building a military infrastructure. It's why our primary export is guns and ammo. (**Citation 5**)

Interviewer-So how does all of this connect to the “Koch brothers” and climate denial?

Lisa-Well the same people who directly benefitted from the redistricting of Congress were intertwined with the founding of the tea party. They bankrolled it and had direct interest in an extreme agenda. They aren't conservatives in the traditional sense. Conservative means to protect the status quo, lift up existing institutions and protect the way things have been. The Koch brothers sought to dislodge the existing structure and destroy regulation and oversight of their profit making empire (**Citation 6**). They wanted to make money and have no one tell them what to do. They were libertarians after all.

Interviewer-Can you explain how this affected climate change in any specific way? I mean this seems more about economics and elections.

Lisa-Elections matter. Yes, the politicians can be bought and sold. They generally are. But it's not black and white like either you are with us or against us. As long as votes still determine who sits in the office, there will still be some power within the electoral process. I'm not saying its even approaching enough. I'm saying its just another wrench in the toolbox. We need to throw everything at those in power. Everything around

climate was framed through economic reform. If you wanted to improve the environment, well it couldn't cost us any money. You want to stop pumping coal ash into the rivers? That's jobs up river that you are trying to ruin. That goes against our principles, that we have the right to pollute or kill or do anything we want to the Earth. We were given dominion over it in the Bible, remember? Now all of that is only what we could argue about when we were actually able to agree that climate change was happening. And caused by humans. And could be averted. Like a child with memory problems, the climate denial segment of Congress would jump from one excuse to another. These are people with tons of coal, oil and natural gas money in their election coffers. With the Citizens United ruling followed by McClellan four years later the entire campaign financing system was eviscerated (**Citation 6**). Money became free speech. This meant that the corporations, excuse me, people, who had all the money were able to continue to protect their money, whether it was through tax cuts or extending their nineteenth century energy companies past any reasonable deadline for closure. They were able to stay open and continue lobbying Congress, read paying people money to do their bidding, up until the current day. Of course it's a bit different now with all the violence, even some of the richest of them have been affected by mother earth's revenge. So basically the decisions by the Supreme Court were able to allow so much money into congress that even as the American people began to see the very real effects of the climate around them, and public opinion swerved sharply into the column of wanting to do something about it, their so-called representatives did nothing (**Citation 7**).

Interviewer-Why couldn't grass roots organizing do something? Or individual acts? By

the time of these Supreme Court decisions you had a “strong democrat” in Barack Obama and people were trying to reduce their personal use of fossil fuels. I remember all the light bulbs and new technology coming out at the time?

Lisa-Okay that's the problem. Where to start...

She is tapping her foot faster on the floor now and I can tell I have annoyed her.

Lisa-First off, Obama was never a democrat. At best he was a nineteen fifties Eisenhower Republican. He was an utter failure at such a critical juncture in our most pressing moment in history, and he didn't just drop the ball, he never picked it up. He is the reason that Trump was elected. It wouldn't have been so bad if he hadn't gotten our hopes up so much. I mean how good did he need to be after King George the second? All he had to do was complete his sentences. But that's been talked about at length and that's not why you are here for this interview.

She lights another cigarette before the previous one goes out. Takes a drag and exhales, the green smoke blows into the camera as her eyes re-focus.

Lisa-Grass roots organizing requires a theory of change. You develop an idea of how change happens in society. Theory. You then go apply it in the world. Action. Then you spend some time thinking about whether or not that works. Reflection. That process is called praxis. It's the foundation of critical thinking and grassroots analysis. In a crisis it's hard not to constantly be reactionary. If you don't follow this process then you are

bound to repeat your failures. I can't tell you how many times movements or THE movement has failed to apply these lessons. It's why they keep trying the same tactics that didn't work in 1968, expecting the power structure to bend to it. Let me be clear: the United States government knows more about social movements than we do. It has studied them with think tanks and dropped billions into analyzing how change happens. Then they prepare so that it can't have an effect. They buy off politicians or particularly effective organizers. They negotiate with key leaders and create a shared story of nationalism. And when this fails they send out the police. What really challenges them is when things happen "spontaneously". Of course nothing happens in a vacuum, it takes years of work to move people from passivity to action, but if you aren't paying attention it can catch you by surprise. So that's not to say grass roots can't or doesn't work, but it does take patience, bravery and discipline to execute campaigns effectively. Organizers need to pick a target that you identify as being able to give you what you want. This can be a head of a corporation or a boss of a company all the way up to the President. But, your goal should be the lowest person on the chain who can give you what you want. Then if they push responsibility up the power chain you can redirect pressure on the next person. But again, this requires the target to be willing or able to give in. With the Supreme Court, the American people's ability to have any leverage through the ballot or through movement organizing was reduced to almost zero. Both of these avenues highlight the two choices for political involvement: Individual and Collective. Collective is always better because it means you have more power, it is also more difficult because different people have divergent perspectives and views. Individual is what the power structure wants us to do. Individuals can be neutralized, ignored or placated.

Individualism is the foundation or our property rights owning society (**Citation 9**). The cold war was essentially a battle over whether society should be organized by collective (Soviet Union) or individual (United States). Individual is more efficient in terms of bureaucracy. Organized groups of people are more difficult to oppress. What I am trying to say is that damage from organizing is the same as damage from corporations. The more people you have the more power you have. If you changed every light bulb in your house, or everyone in your group of friends, or even if you became carbon neutral it would have little to no effect. The real reasons we have climate change is not because of your personal choices in your house. Or your job. Its corporations slashing down every last tree in our rain forests. It's the military fighting wars over oil and water, wasting massive amounts of both in the process. It's about our transportation infrastructure. It's about meat production and how much grain and oil you have to pump into cows, chickens and pigs to provide meat for every meal. *It's about systems.* Individual change never had a chance to effect climate change. The other reason was that individuals drive the market. The market is what the power structure wanted us to employ and as long as every American, Australian and Canadian house needed its own lawnmower, hot tub and SUV then we could never address the real issues. It's no surprise all these countries adopted a very individualistic perspective when it came to these problems. That way systemic change could be funneled back into the marketplace.

Interviewer-you sound very pessimistic about the future.

Lisa-Well when I was young I believed the primary problem with our world was that

people didn't have accurate information from their media. If only they could have access to unbiased information then they could make choices based on rationality. This was a big mistake. I thought people acted rationally when they received information. But you have to train for that. Most people's initial response is based on emotion. If I told you that you would die next week, it's highly unlikely you would immediately move to a position of rational thought. David Hume talked about this a long time ago. We are emotional beings who try to justify it after the fact with rationality (**CITATION 10**). So that's what I did with my career, I tried to provide people with the truth. But they don't want the truth, at least in America. They are so accustomed to having access to all the resources, never dealing with crisis aside from all their "first world problems". It was a mistake to think that meaningful change could come from the heart of the empire. I'm just sorry it took me so long to figure it all out. Information and education don't automatically lead to action. You need alternatives to offer when you challenge the existing order. Then you need a story.

Interviewer-Can you tell us a story then?

Lisa smiles for the first time and her shoulders roll back. She turns around and looks at her bookshelf, which is just out of shot with the camera lens.

Lisa- Let me tell you about Niria.

Chicago 2024

The American's travel only lasted a few hours. He never expected to leave the airport but when his contact failed to materialize at the meeting point, a guard had been sent in the man's place. His contact was sick, the guard said. The American decided to attend the meeting at the contact's hotel room. Their meet up in Dubai could not have come at a better time for the American's company. They had lost their domestic contract with the US government and were bleeding funds. President Olivera, had gone after the contracting community with a vengeance and any sign of misused taxpayers funds or illegal activities was enough to shut down even the most powerful companies. The American had been in the business since the second Iraq war. There was just too much money for a man who hadn't finished high school. He came in on the ground floor. Hard work. Unlike all those liberals who wanted to give everything away for free, to help those who won't help themselves, he had earned every penny. He rose through the ranks at Triple Canopy. Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan and Russia. Unofficially. After losing a leg in Chechnya he had to take a more managerial position. Thanks to DARPA research, he was able to get a joint replacement for his knee that was close to good as new (**CITATION 1**). It had ached once he got off the plane, whenever it was hot, he was in pain.

The meeting had been quick. His contact wasn't able to get to his feet, he was so sick. They had been friends for some time. Where they had first met had been long forgotten.

Biological warfare hasn't always been intentional. Its first known use was during the crusades when forces sacking a castle would catapult dead, plague filled corpses over the walls into the structures they wished to take over (**CITATION 2**). The British, in an effort to force Native American's to sign unfair treaties, handed blankets infused with small pox to the native population. In two documented cases, the population was reduced by 400,000 people (**CITATION 3**). Over fifteen million were eventually killed. Its most famous and destructive use was in World War I. All the major countries used it. Mustard, Cyanide, Phosgene. Its use was a small percentage of total deaths, but their indiscriminate violence and the fact that you couldn't always know you were being attacked, caused participant countries to sign the 1972 biological weapons ban. Indeed this, and the personal experience of Hitler in the First World War made the Nazis refuse its use a quarter century later. Ebola was the most feared of the "organic" types of biological weapons. Killing 40% of those it infected and having no cure, it was scary, but its short incubation time made it difficult to become a mass pandemic. SARS and the avian flu changed the game. While it had a low death rate (10%) it could spread rapidly by cough or touch. The bug lived for longer periods. It was just a matter of time.

The American landed in Chicago after a long flight home from Dubai. He had taken Quaaludes secretly labeled as anti-depressants before the flight took off. It had been an adventure staying awake. The pills were developed as a sleeping pill but people learned that if you stayed awake long enough it could be an illuminating experience. Touching down at the packed airport he barely noticed all the Flex-tel screens showing news footage of the latest bug in the Middle East. Some kind of Chinese pig strain or

something. Killed off a whole elementary school of girls in Saudi Arabia. Very virulent. Over a thousand dead throughout five countries. Then a commercial lost his attention as he rode the horizontal elevator. He grabbed his checked bags from the automated kiosk and walked out to the waiting hybrid taxi. He shook hands with the driver as he got in the cab. "Take me home" said the American.

One week later

There was a fire outside the Americans home. He could see it through the window. The flames were licking up the side of the plaster and were visible through the glass. His portable grill was taking the worst of it. The American couldn't move. He had thrown up for a week. Near the end he began pissing in an old orange juice jug. His muscles ached badly. Headaches and throat parchement were made worse by an inability to move. He had gotten pneumonia the night before. Hot and cold the temperature had fluctuated wildly. He took his last breath as the windowsill began to catch fire. Patient zero was dead.

The first thing to go was the grocery stores. Just like every horror movie you have ever seen, the smart people rushed to grab everything they could. The isolated individual nature of Chicagoans made it less likely that people had community networks to rely on. The disease didn't discriminate from rich and poor. In fact it had a higher likelihood of spreading through the rich because of where patient zero had returned to. Working in the defense industry he had first-class everything. When he had finally gone to a hospital and sought care, he had infected everyone in it. Not before he infected his staff and his maid.

It took a week from patient zero landing at Chicago O'Hare to the CDC recognizing that it was the same virus as that in Saudi Arabia and the United Islamic Republic (formerly Iran and Iraq). No vaccine existed at that point. There were 456 cases in Chicago after seven days. The first press conference went horribly as a panic spread throughout the city. A run on all the pharmacy stores had led to fighting and assaults. Women by themselves were severely beaten and a death had been reported. The police stayed on the sidelines. When they were truly needed they were nowhere to be seen. The mayor, a political insider from a well-connected family, wasn't even in the city when it all hit the fan. He was vacationing on Hawaii during the non-storm part of the year. Because of the severe heat waves buffeting Chicago, he generally left town at this time. It had taken his political team a few days but the damage had been done. Literally. He arrived in a leer jet to riots with burning tires and barricades, smashed windows and broken camera's. The black areas had been hit lightly compared to the more affluent suburbs, but the care had been poor to nonexistent. All available doctors had been called out to the rich areas to stem the proverbial bleeding. City hall had to call in private military contractors to supplement their police forces, many who were becoming sick themselves. When the Governor declared a state of emergency and asked for help from Wisconsin and Indiana he was surprised to find their state legislatures moving to close the border. Missouri and Iowa were closed a week after. Only Kentucky was unable to agree as their own Governor was facing indictment charges on embezzlement and was unavailable to make the decision.

The President cancelled a trip to Chicago for a fundraiser and the Department of

Health and Human Services could no longer ignore the issue. They issued a travel ban to Illinois and began a quarantine effort with mitigation cases for the surrounding states. Trains going through Chicago were immediately stopped. Amtrak, having only one southern train route had to shut off shipping service between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. Trucks were called up to duty to take on the crisis. The Coast Guard occupied Lake Michigan to prevent people crossing the lake. National guard troops set up at multiple state border checkpoints to prevent escape. Chicago was on its own.

Because of the virus's spread throughout the Middle Eastern region it had now found a foothold in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, UAE, Jordan and Syria. Those countries that were oil-producing states immediately slowed production driving a barrel of oil well over three hundred dollars. The price of food skyrocketed with the transportation industry thrown into chaos. The Canadian government began plans to shut down the border. The greatest fear was a wave of infected refugees making it across the border. The CDC didn't know what the virus was and the State Department was saying that it was working on a cure. The United Nations Security Council held an emergency session but few of the affected countries came. Only adjuncts could show up. Things were spinning out of control.

What saved everyone wasn't a cure. It was isolation. Like a fire that needs to burn itself out, Chicago was left to its own devices with little support aside from airdrops of food. No medicine could fix the bug and people weren't being allowed out of the area. There were a few instances of National Guard members shooting civilians at the border to

prevent escape. Calls for the Governor and later the President to resign rang throughout the legislatures. When the junior Senator from Illinois, a blue dog democrat, died of the disease there was a national mourning in the Federal Capitol building. Most of the country paid little attention to this, as by that time over 300,000 cases were reported and 110,000 approximate deaths had happened. Not all from the bug but, at least passively from its existence. Law and order had broken down.

Roberto grabbed his chemical suit as the alarm bells sounded through the fire hall. Sliding down the pole he landed awkwardly and an arm grabbed his full 6'4 frame. He nodded thanks and reached for his gear. The engine was already running on the fire truck. He stepped upon the side platform and the truck roared out of the garage towards city hall. The streets were littered with trash, the garbage collector union was on strike, and some of it was large enough to damage even a vehicle this size. Swerving back and forth the driver told everyone to hold on. Reports were coming in over the radio. There was a fire near city hall. A protest had escalated to Molotov throwing and when contractors had fired into the crowd, members of the crowd fired back. The contractors abandoned their post. The fires had started. No one at the site had reported the breadth of the fire yet. They were racing in blind. The truck hit something that sounded like a large animal. The truck kept moving. This wasn't how Roberto had envisioned things in this job. Being a firefighter was supposed to be safe and respected work. Work he could raise a family on and bring his parents north from Mexico. The family had crossed under the first Bush administration when he was a child. His parents were deported under Obama. His salary had supported them ever since. He had tried to get them visas but with no immigration

reform, hope was becoming less of a commodity. The last few years had provided lots of stable work for Roberto but since the virus things were degenerating. It was horrible to be in the middle of a city tearing itself apart while the rest of the world watched on the internet.

Through the truck's windshield they could see the smoke before they ever saw the buildings. It was deep black, roiling over itself like a mushroom cloud. They turned the corner and there it was, the old city hall building that had stood over a hundred years, belching flames like a vomiting drunk. There was no way to save it. The surrounding buildings were engulfed as well. Hopping from the back seat, Roberto sprinted with the advance team toward the edge of the fire. They had a helicopter on the way to help fight the blaze and give them an idea as to how big it was. That's when the call came round over the radio. The Mayor was still in the building.

The season before, Roberto had tried out for the smoke jumpers. They were adding more members every year as the fires in the west of the country began to spin out of control. It was a private company that filled in the gaps in Federal spending, but charged three times the cost (**CITATION 4**). The fires were growing closer to the prairies and pushing west towards all the settlements on the ocean. Montana had been hit particularly hard that year. Roberto wanted to get away from Chicago; after all he had never been raised on concrete, coming from a small farming village near the coast of Belize. It had not served as a vacation. Indeed he had almost died. Caught up on a spur one forgettable weekday, the fire they had been tracking had switched directions rushing

back towards their position. He was with fourteen other men and women as the whistle's went off, alerting them that they had to duck and cover. Literally dig into the ground, pull out fire retardant blankets and cover themselves hoping the fire would sweep over them and no one would be harmed. He had laid there, praying to the Virgin Mary, hoping against all hope he would make it as the fire swept over their position. It burned and licked and sucked at the covering but he had secured it, so he lived. Thirteen fire jumpers died that day. All of them veterans of many fires before. Only him, on his first days out in the woods, survived. He had laid awake for what seemed like days, struggling with heat exhaustion, waiting for someone to find him. The rescue teams had been overwhelmed by the ferocity of the fires and how quickly they were spreading. On the brink of delusion, he had felt the sting of air circling around him as a rescue chopper hovered above his position. Once picked up he had stayed in isolation until the doctors could clear him. He had little physical damage but the nightmares would never abate. That fire killed over a hundred people including twenty-two firefighters. A decade before it would have been unheard of. Now it was routine. Every summer, firefighters would unwillingly give their lives to protect other people, mostly just other people's property. The New York Times, writing a week long expository on the subject, had explained that the droughts were making it hard to moisten the soil, which led to erosion, which led to more fires starting. The pine beetles, surviving the warmer winters ate out the heart of the trees and killed them off, placing kindling in the middle of once majestic forests (**CITATION 5**). The building of houses in the forests far away from city centers kept the fire departments at work constantly stopping any fires that started. This led the fires to be even bigger and hotter in duration when they did happen. Of course no one wanted to say it. They wanted

to go on believing that everything was separate. That humans could control everything. The rugged individualist had a God-given right to build a house wherever he damned well pleased. Roberto knew better. The only one in control was God. And he was punishing the people of Earth. The time of judgment was coming.

They had to try a rescue despite not having the equipment for it. Roberto sealed his headset and mask, checking his respirator was working properly. A nervousness was crawling up his windpipe from his stomach, the taste of fear and history. He took a step towards the firefighters in front of him and his feet took him towards the open door of an adjacent building. The smoke billowed out and as they entered their automatic lights clicked on illuminating a deteriorating situation. New equipment was one of the benefits of working for a private company. They only responded to those who pay for the services.

“Roberto, this is base, do you read me” the radio in his ear was fuzzy but he could make out the liaison at the PMC headquarters.

“Go ahead base”. Roberto was moving through the bottom floor of the city hall staff building, looking for a stable entrance. The ‘heads up display’ on his mask screen showed a steadily increasing temperature gauge. Soon it would be too hot for their Darpa-designed suits. They had a few minutes to get the mayor out or they would all perish.

“Roberto, we have a cancellation order on your permit for this fire. Records report recent default on payments from City Hall. You are to stand down and remove all PMC personnel from the area.”

Despite the tight fitting mask his jaw dropped in shock. “Base, we have possible lives on the line here, are you saying we should let them die?”

“Roberto, remove all PMC personnel from the fire area, and return to headquarters. Do not attempt any further assistance, as this will be a violation of contract.

Roberto looked around the room at the other members of his fire department. They were all on the same radio net. They had heard the entire conversation. A few members began to move back towards the entrance.

“Wait” said Roberto; “we have people inside there! We have to try!” No one stepped forward.

The PMC’s unwillingness to address the fire at city hall led to severe challenges. The mayor and his staff perished, first of smoke inhalation, finally as fires melted their flesh into the concrete. The fire spread with no one to put it out. Jumping from block to block, it ultimately ravished the entire rejuvenated downtown Chicago core. Gentrification met privatization as those who couldn’t, or wouldn’t pay private fire fees, watched their investments succumb to the indifferent blaze. The Federal government, primarily concerned with the spread of the MERS outbreak, simply secured the borders of the Illinois, watching the literal fire destroy the second largest city in the United States. As the fire burned, the first cases of MERS began to show up in Kentucky, the only state unable to close its borders.

Monsanto Niria

1970s to present

I'm sick of the fear. I've been living with it since I was a child. It started with nuclear drills. 'Get under your desk children. This is a simulated nuclear attack.' *As if the desk would save us.* At first it was a sort of game. The teachers didn't like that so we started getting detention if we laughed. Then someone started crying. They got detention too. I grew up in Missouri. Not like there was much reason for a nuclear strike on the cornfields. But there I was, a small girl huddled under my shoddy plastic and wooden desk, waiting for Armageddon. The adults eventually acted like this was normal. It never felt normal to me. As I got older fear of the bomb was eclipsed by fear of graduating. The more successful in school the more fear to achieve. What if I don't get into the right school? Fear of my parent's disappointment. Fear of my father's anger at his own failures. My failures.

Then I got into the right school and that wasn't enough. Then the fear turned to Billy. He was my first love. Holding hands on the lake during summers. Dances with all the other teens at the local grange. For the first time I felt free. Felt loved and appreciated for who I was. Then, when we turned eighteen, a new fear: What if Billy gets drafted? We were from different sides of the track. My Father was a farm worker, mother was a secretary with the ford motor company but when she got pregnant they fired her. She never forgot that pain and took it out on us with anxiety and high expectations.

Billy was poor. His family was chronically underemployed. They couldn't survive on one

salary like my parents. His mother was always working and dad had to work three jobs, before that was normal, just to keep food on the table. Billy was never going to college. My mother went to great pains to explain this to me. First it was forbidding me to see him. Then, through her network of Catholic gossiper friends it was to bring over more “appropriate” suitors. I didn't like any of them. Then, the universe made a decision for me. Billy got drafted.

I got four letters from Billy. Then they stopped altogether. It was another month before another letter, this one from my mother telling me it was time to move on. MOVE ON? She spent the letter talking about their new garden they were working on back home. There was a new boy who had moved in up the street. He was a lawyer and he was looking for a wife. Wouldn't it be nice if I moved back there and got to know him? Oh, and Billy was dead. There was a parade for him down Main Street; it was so nice to see the flags, weren't they pretty?

Mother was never interested in what I wanted. It was always about the family, her image of the family and how I could not fuck it up. She didn't care about Billy, she didn't care about what I was doing at college, why didn't I find a man who could support me and I wouldn't have to wiggle my brain about anything else? All of her fears about her own life were being brought out on me.

Billy died not as a hero in some grand battle. He died doing what he did at home in a matter of speaking. Billy was a part of Operation Ranch Hand. He died from exposure to DIOXIN in a nifty little invention called Agent Orange (**CITATION 1**). It was like DDT

but worse.

I cried for a month. In the middle of class I would break down and sob and have to leave. At night I would be thrown awake from nightmares, my muscles wracked by spasms, my bed sheets wet with sweat. Then, the cries abruptly stopped. I wandered around as if in a dream. I felt as if there was nothing left to lose.

I picked myself up, numbly, and completed my schooling. I cut off contact with my parents and didn't date anyone for the rest of college. I took a class my senior year on the history of women. It changed everything. I left college with a deep appreciation for how powerful women could be. That they could shape the world around them instead of just being shaped by it. I read vociferously: Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, and Virginia Woolf. I started spending time with women of my own age and found similarities that I thought only I was feeling. The loneliness, the fear of being rejected, of not doing the right thing. I got a small job in a publishing house that was starting a women's newspaper: to '*deal with the real*' as we called it. Only eight pages to begin with it involved three other women in their late twenties. There was urgency to our writing in the Seventies. The left that had been united in the Sixties around the Vietnam War fractured along ideological, sexual and tactical lines birthing the Environmentalist, Feminist and Gay rights movements. Everyone trying to reinvent the wheel on their own. Cooperation was deemed to be collaboration and the best efforts of leaders to bring us all together were thwarted with calls of hierarchy and sexism. To be sure elitism abounded and our movement of women was primarily a movement of privilege. We didn't have poor working women come to our meetings or buying our newspaper. They couldn't afford it,

either with time or their money. By the time Reagan was elected our paper had run its course and we couldn't make enough to continue doing what we loved. Some of us drifted into families, others into suicide and depression. I moved to San Francisco. I fell in love.

Her name was Esmerelda or Essy for short. I met her at the market, picking up dinner for another night alone with my cat. The moment I saw her my jaw dropped and so did my groceries. I babbled an apology as oranges rolled to her feet and came to a stop. She grinned and bent down to pick them up. The clerk was ranting about how I had to buy them now because they were bruised but my eyes were locked on her golden brown skin. She was dressed in a long overcoat, open, with a flowing flower dress inside. She introduced herself and said she had just come from the theater in the park, and wouldn't I like to join her for the next show?

As we sat together on the grass, watching the jazz music flow through the willow trees of the mission district, it all suddenly made sense. When a certain song came on, we both looked at each other and her hand found mine. She squeezed it and looking into my eyes said "Very nice to have met you this evening". The wine flowed faster than the conversation and I was falling deeper down the rabbit hole. No words came to me but I was in love.

Two months later we were moving in with each other. I had never been with a woman. Never even dreamed of the idea, but there I was living with the new love of my

life. Essy, had a job in the mission district working with new immigrants to the area, specifically women who came from Asia and needed access to language skills, health care and access to employment. She especially focused on abusive husbands and fathers. The physical abuse was staggering. Maybe it was the stress of being in a foreign country, or maybe the cultural tolerances but when I raised the issue to Essy she got angry with me for the first time. She said it had nothing to do with people being from China or Sri Lanka, that our culture, here, in the ‘good ol USA’ was just as bad if not worse but you would never see that on television. At least these foreign communities had someone to lean on, at least they had a family or community that they could go to share their problems. That didn't exist for most American families as they were expected to have their own house, with a yard and all your own supplies. You should be self-contained, able to handle everything without being vulnerable. Don't look weak and don't ask for help, she said. That's what's expected of you in America.

Living in San Francisco felt like going through a black hole to another universe from Eureka, Missouri. There was public transportation; the BART train even went under the ocean! The food was fresh, from salmon and mussels to oranges and fruit of all kinds. Rolling hills produced forests that was the exact opposite topography of the flat corn state in which I was raised. Something dawned on me during this time, the idea that your physical space determines a lot about who you are and the way you live your life (**CITATION 2**). It seems obvious, but it was as if, being near the ocean opened people's minds. I couldn't explain it until later in life but the fact that it didn't matter where I was from; just that I treated others with respect was so revolutionary. My love for Essy

wouldn't have been tolerated in Missouri, especially by my own family, but out west, my love could shine as brightly as the golden gate bridge. Or so I thought.

Tuesday, September of 82 I came home late from work. I had been getting two days a week in at the San Francisco Chronicle, writing about Reagan's not so secret war in Nicaragua. The paper was unwilling to go on the record with its reputation even though we had proof that members of the administration had sold missiles to Iran, through its enemy Israel, to release hostages in Lebanon and fund the contra's in Nicaragua (**CITATION 3**). The paper thought it was too confusing for Americans to understand, better to let Congress deal with it they said. I wanted to puke up all the times I had to hold my tongue at the office and I couldn't wait to vent to Essy. But when I found the door unlocked and someone else's shoes by the door, I stopped, not knowing what to do.

He came at me from the kitchen and hit me in the side of the face. He was big, broad shoulders and a mustache. He hit me again throwing me into the wall and I crumpled to the floor. He was screaming at me, telling me I was a dirty carpet licker. That I had stolen her from him and now no one would ever have her again. He kicked me in the stomach. I tasted blood. He told me to go back to Kansas. He grabbed me by the hair and pulled me into the bedroom. I kicked and screamed when he hauled me onto the bed. I began choking when he stuffed bed sheets into my mouth. My dress was thrown up above my waist and his groping hands ripped off my underwear. As he entered me, all the fear came rushing back like a broken water main. It hit me hard like his fist against my

face as he held me down, choking me. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't see, all I could feel was this incredible force of hatred and fear coursing through my limbs, urging me to run, to fight, to do anything at all. But I didn't. I just lay there. And then it was over. He was gone. I was crying. Rolled into a ball, violated at the foot of my own bed of my own apartment. Raped by someone I had never met, but who seemed to know me quite well. I had almost choked on the bed sheets. When I reached down to feel myself my hand came back with blood. After what seemed a lifetime, I stood up and staggered to the bathroom. The pain was unbearable. There, in the bathtub, lay Esmeralda; her hands slit vertically, a pair of steel scissors lying on the floor, her skin white as snow.

The police ruled it a suicide. They said I must have been lying about a man in the apartment and that the forensic evidence showed Essy cut her own wrists. As for me, I was dressing a certain way for a reason wasn't I? Where was I from? Maybe I should go back to Kansas. Who was I living with? Lesbians shouldn't be living together, that's how people get aids. I didn't know where to turn. I cried for days. I couldn't go back to the apartment, the site of all my newfound fears and nightmares. I didn't sleep. My eyes took on a hardened view of everything. I had lost the one person who understood me. Who had cared to love me just the way I was.

I took the money we had saved and went north, along Highway 101 and found a cabin being rented for one hundred dollars a week. It was small and on the ocean, the waves crashing at all hours of the day. At first I couldn't write. I just stared out at the sea. Day after day I waded into the surf, the tips of cresting waves impacting against my bare

chest. As the sand suckled my toes and receded I imagined myself being drowned in the waves, my body disappeared with all of my pain. Each day I made the long climb back up the cliff to the cabin, ashamed at being alive, ashamed at thinking of death.

I had left my job without telling anyone. I didn't think I would go back. Then, suddenly, it all came to me. Furiously I pumped out page after page, questions about my childhood. Why god could create such a fucked up world. Why does everyone I love need to be taken from me when I'm starting to figure life out? How am I supposed to trust anyone? Why was there no justice?

I wrote and I wrote with my pen, only stopping to get new ink. I filled up notebooks I had collected for some years and finally ran out of them. I hadn't been eating for days. My hands were calloused. I was dehydrated and needed a break. Walking to the only convenience store nearby I found some frozen dinners; Essy was always the better cook, and a large bottle of gin. I threw down twenty dollars and went back to writing. I didn't know where the thoughts were going but after I had thrown down all the emotions I began answering my own questions. Why is the world so fucked up? Because not enough people stand up and say so. Why did Essy get killed? Because no one had told that fucker it was wrong to call a girl a slut when he was thirteen. And no one had stopped him from groping girls at eighteen. And no one had said anything when he locked that girl in her room with him at twenty-one. Every step of the way, there were no repercussions from society. "That's just how boys are" had been a common refrain during my childhood. How many other women had suffered at the hands of that phrase? How many had died? I had experienced oppression all my life, but this was the first time it had exploded like a

nuclear bomb in my world. How alone was I? How many other people was this happening to?

The next few weeks I pondered that question. The small local library didn't have much in the way of history but the librarian was able to help me track down graduate papers on the concept of rape. I knew what I was good at, finding answers to the world's largest problems. Now I trained my thoughts towards my own experience. I looked at the Romans, and Greeks, who were more worried about property being, damaged than real effects on the individual (**CITATION 4**). The Christians all out denied it unless it was witnessed by others then it became a woman's fault for asking for it (**CITATION 5**). The Muslims, well let's just say they still are dealing with major issues (**CITATION 6**).

I found a trail that walked along the ocean; it provided me the time I needed to mourn. To ask the questions I had been running from my whole life. I had always assumed there was something wrong with me, that I had done something to deserve my mother's hatred. That I had caused Billy's death. That my relationship with Esmeralda provoked her ex-boyfriend and because of that I was raped. The ocean and its vastness allowed these questions to be asked without need of an answer. They could float out there swirling in the wind and waves. I didn't want to be afraid anymore.

I stayed at the cabin for some months. Waking in the morning I would turn my attention to the stone fireplace. Trudging up the path from the woodshed, I shook out the soreness in my back and body. Tending the fire and then turning to my own nutrition

caused me to learn to cook for myself. Everything was much more simple. Wake, Heat, Food, Write. Then I would collapse in bed at the end of the day, giving in to the nightmares. They would haunt me for the rest of my life; much of my days would be attempts to escape sleep at all costs. My pain produced good work and when I was ready to reenter the world I had written an expose on sexual assault and rape that could cover multiple issues of the chronicle if they were willing to take it. I was not healed, but I was ready to fight again. I closed up the windows, cleaned the whole cabin and thanked the owners. I was going back to civilization.

I walked into the old apartment complex and asked for my mail. They hadn't held it for me because I hadn't returned their calls. Angrily I left and went to the post office. They only had a few bills and a letter from my sister. I tossed the bills and waited till I was in my Volkswagen rabbit to open the letter from my sister. It was short, poorly written and to the point as always. My dad was dead and my mother was sick. I was needed at home. I placed a call from the pay phone to the house and only got the voice of my father on the answering machine. I began to tear up so I quickly hung up the phone. I had enough money for a flight back to St. Louis which was only about twenty miles from my parents place. First I had to finish up with the Chronicle. I headed downtown and found a place to park quite quickly. I ran up the stairs and when I got to Joe's office he looked surprised to see me. He said he hadn't expected to see me again what with the death of Essy and all the "drama" as he put it. I let that slide over my shoulders and sat down on the poofy out-of-style 1970s red chair.

“I have an in-depth report for you. It can cover five days of paper. It’s around 20,000 words.” I was trying not to seem eager. I really needed this to cover expenses while I was gone.

“Well this is rather unorthodox. You don’t call, or respond to runners we sent to your apartment. I had to find out about your “friend” from some of our reporters who were digging around. That was three months ago. Now you drop by my office and demand that we print something we never asked you to report?” He was looking down at some newspapers on his desk and not even making eye contact with me. I stood up and put both my hands on the desk, my eyes searing into him.

“My girlfriend was killed. I was attacked. My father is dead. Forgive me if I’m having a bit of difficulty adjusting to the situation. You have published everything else I have ever written and you have constantly praised me about my resourcefulness and my accuracy. I put all my resources over the last three months into writing this. I have to go home to tend to my father so you can print this or you can fire me.” With that I turned on my heel and stormed out of the office, taking the stairs so I didn’t have to wait for the oft-broken elevator. By the time I got to the bottom floor I was focused on Missouri. Time to go home.

The flight was bumpy so they never served food. It was all for the best as I needed to be drunk for my arrival. I hadn’t spoken with anyone in the family since college with the exception of my sister Mary. Mary had stayed close to home, working in St. Louis for the local chemical company as the only saleswoman. She had married a local farmer and they lived on the outskirts of the city. Mary had been even less a favorite than me, which was

surprising because she had tried to do everything the way our parents wanted it. You always want what you can't have I suppose. I took another swig of the warm white wine from the mini bottles I had grabbed on the way to the airport. The alcohol only served to make me more anxious of what was to come. The guilt of not talking to my dad was trumped by the fear of my mother holding it against me. My father was a quiet man. Worked for a farming company that did research on seeds and had retired a few years back. I still didn't know how he died. I wanted to leave San Francisco as soon as I could and not think about it till I got on the ground. The pilot came on and told us we were coming in to St. Louis. I finished the bottle of wine and put my shoes back on. You don't want to be in a plane crash with your shoes off.

The plane landed without incident. I found my sister and we drove the twenty minutes to the outskirts of the house. We sat in the car, me not wanting to go inside and Mary feeling she needed to console me. I couldn't cry. There had been too much of that in the last three months. Hell, my life had been about crying and waiting to cry. I did the only thing I knew how to do well, I started asking questions.

"What happened to Dad?" I asked the most obvious question there was.
"He fell in the river. We think he drowned. It was last week. They's still doing the autopsy and we ain't got a report back yet" she said in her "aw shucks" voice she brought out when she wanted to be sensitive and not cause alarm.

"What river? What was he doing swimming in a river? He's supposed to be retired." This was all I could think of. He wasn't supposed to be there. What had happened? Mary wouldn't look me in the eye. She just stared out the front of the

windshield. "We better go in and see Mom" Mary sounded unconvinced. "She knows we were sposed to be here ten minutes ago. You know how she is, always keepin time and such." I nodded my head in resignation. There was no use in putting it off any longer. I grabbed my backpack, the only bit of luggage I had, and opened up the car door. The house was red as she remembered, but the American flag was hanging low and touching the ground. Dad would never have let that happen. A World War II veteran, he prided himself on taking the flag in at night and putting it out in the morning. It was the clearest sign of all that my father was dead.

Two weeks later

It was clear from the beginning that something was wrong. Mom said that she didn't know anything about where Dad had been going for the past two months and he never brought it up. Not hearing anything from the editor at the San Francisco Chronicle, I assumed I had been fired. I wouldn't be going back to the bay anytime soon. The folks at the local bar remembered me so I spent a few nights hanging around the pool table and shooting the shit. I learned that Dad had been doing some work on the side, Mom wanted a new kitchen, over in Times Beach Missouri. There had been some cattle and horse die-offs that no one could explain. On one occasion almost sixty horses were killed overnight (**CITATION 7**). So dad had gone over to help haul away the carcasses and clean up some of the barns, the owners were pretty well off and didn't want to touch it themselves. People were keeping their mouths shut about *why those animals were dieing, however*. I decided to go on over and have a look for myself. I took Mary's car. Told her I was just in need of some time away. She had moved in with Mom to help calm the crazy out of her

now that Dad was gone. I didn't see why she wasted the time. Mom was just using this as an excuse to get sympathy from everyone. She had gone door to door telling everyone that her husband had died and she just wanted them to know about it. When they told her they would help in any way they could she told them that they were in debt (they weren't) and that she needed to raise money to get out of it. A potlatch was being planned at the local bandstand. It made me sick to think of the way she just used people, but Mary reminded me that is the way she was raised, to try and get ahead as best she could climbing on the shoulders of others. Grandma was even crazier than our own mother.

I parked down the road and walked through the trees to the back of the horse ranch. There was police tape on the doors of the barn and I ducked under them. The carcasses had been removed but the stench hadn't gone anywhere. I poked around a bit but there wasn't much to see. I looked in a few cabinets, being careful to use a glove so as not to leave prints. No medication, nothing that could have poisoned the animals. I came upon a checklist for the portable toilet cleaning and hay delivery. At the back of the sheets there was a winter spraying notice, for when the roads froze. Growing up I knew they sprayed the roads with oil round here to melt the ice. But that had never killed horses before. As I walked back to the car I couldn't wrap my head around it. I looked at my watch, seeing I had at least another hour to kill before my sister had to go to work. I headed for the library to ask some questions.

I was sleeping when the brick came through the window. I jolted out of a dream and frantically tried to get my senses. I yelled for my mothers voice but got no answer.

My room was on the second floor so I scampered down the stairs and into the living room where my feet found glass. I toppled to the floor and let out a yelp of pain as my right foot was pierced. There was a brick with twine wrapped around it holding a note in the center of the living room. Glass was embedded in the springy 70's carpet. I hadn't been there a moment when my mother came into the room asking about the noise. There she stood, over me like I was a little child again with the shocked look of an elderly woman.

"What... What's happened?" Her eyes were climbing backwards into her head, trying to get away from this moment.

I pulled the glass out of my foot and it immediately started poring all over the carpet. I ripped the arm off my sleeping t-shirt; it didn't fit me anyway, and wrapped it around my disabled foot.

"Mom! Go get the first aid kit. And get dad's gun. Do it now!" It was rare for me to yell at her so without thinking she just began to move. I was pinned against the wall next to the broken window now and was trying to collect my thoughts. Who would have done this?

A tire squealed outside and lights dashed like fireflies across the ceiling. Mother came back with bandages, her hands shaking.

"What happened? Who were those people?" She was wondering across the living room, pacing back and forth. I couldn't deal with this right now. I wrapped my foot. Limped to the kitchen and grabbed the bottle of tequila I had left for just such an emergency. Well, maybe not just this such emergency. Taking a swig, I looked down at the 30-30 action rifle on the kitchen table.

Lorena Fusilado

2025

The hot sun beat down in the land of her birth. Lorena Fusilado had lived in Phoenix almost her entire life. Her parents had been born across the border and come up during the Clinton years. After NAFTA. They had been a fishing family. Fishing licenses became too expensive, the boats too inefficient. The big corps bought everyone out. Americans with massive dragnets came down to harvest the rest. For generations corn grew everywhere. Now it came by train from Iowa. The family had no choice. They dreamed of finding something better for themselves to the North. To live and breathe somewhere free. NAFTA was the final straw but it hadn't been the first. They paid a coyote to bring them across. A whole week it took going from safe houses to the actual border and then crossing by foot into Arizona. They had been so scared. She had been young but remembered her father being very serious; telling everyone to listen closely to the coyote about everything. One day they awoke and the coyote was gone. He took their money, and their water. Lorena remembered her parched throat. The sweat poring off her with no replacement. Just when she could walk no more, a group of white people found them. Her family was taken to a camp. There was water, and beds. A fresh stream from the best mountains one could ever expect. The camp existed; she was told, to provide support for those crossing the border, to keep people alive. They had a tenuous relationship with the border patrol. Until Trump won. Then they saw the camp raided. Patients deported, activists arrested. But they came back, these young people only interested in

helping to support other humans. Such is the world. Some destroy, and the rest of us pick up the pieces.

They had come to Phoenix in hope of work. They had found plenty of it, none ever enough to pay the bills. Dishwashing and food making, they missed the sea and its bounty. They found public schools that taught them of American history. They learned the language, assimilated to the culture. She was a hard working student, kept to herself. She loved sports and played football. The real football, not that ridiculous American brand. *They hardly even used their feet.* Starting in goal throughout high school and into her first years at Arizona State she excelled. It paid for college. That was until the heat waves began. Phoenix had always dealt with temperatures in the 90-100 degree level for much of the year. When the La Nina spread across the ocean that summer of 2024 temperatures rose up to 130 degrees. The Colorado River dried to a trickle. Emergency water was shipped in from around the country but the problem wasn't just Phoenix. It was the entire American southwest. It was apocalyptic. Edward Abbey would have called it revenge. She read his work that summer as the bodies were piling up. The blackouts hit on day three and when that happened it caused most of the deaths. Five thousand on the first day. Thirty thousand over the next several. And it got much worse. With no water and the air conditioning off there was nothing to protect the elderly. They died in droves. The city of Phoenix began to resemble a war zone. Every bottle of water in the town was commandeered by the Police if it wasn't already stolen. The MERS outbreak had ratcheted gas prices through the roof so those that couldn't leave were likely to be most vulnerable. Violence increased with the heat (**CITATION 1**). The National Guard, in a fit of irony had been sent to Montana and Wyoming to fight forest fires still raging. Thus

riot control was left to the police. And the police didn't have the training or the temperament for what was needed. They just used live bullets. Lots of them.

Lorena sat holding her mother's hand. The old woman's chest rose and fell to the beat of a very slow clock. A tear fell down her cheek and Lorena wiped it away with a handkerchief. Mother was at the end now. The heat would take her this night. There wouldn't be energy for a funeral dance and the family was scattered. An ambulance siren sounded in the distance. Lorena sighed and rose to her feet.

"Mother I need to make a phone call" she expected no response and despite her hopes, her mother didn't move.

Lorena left the bedroom and upon meeting the kitchen stretched her arms up high. Sweat rolling down her arms slowed to a stop, and reversed themselves towards her shoulders. It felt unreal. All of the death, the city falling apart. It had seemed gradual at first but was now approaching a precipice. Her mind was swimming. She sank to the ground and began to sob. First the tears flowed from her eyes, but as she bent her back and knelt forward her body began to convulse. Every dream she had, evaporating, like the Colorado River. The University had closed due to the heat and power issues. Her parents were dieing or dead. Her scholarship had disappeared with the newest round of budget cuts. The weight of the world pressed her body into the floor and she let out a shriek before she could think twice. There was no sound from the bedroom.

Gathering herself together she stumbled to her feet. She grabbed her bag and reapplied her Flex-pad. Her mother never had liked Lorena's acceptance of technology. Her mother's death was permeating the walls with its ripe taste. She made sure to lock the

door upon leaving. Never to return.

Over the next three months Lorena moved north. The city of Phoenix was no longer a city. It was only a substandard refugee camp. Word was the government had resettlement plans for some citizens, but no one was holding their breath. Many tried to flee north. Colorado still had snowpack. Utah as well. Nevada was facing a drought similar to Arizona, albeit with somewhat lower temperatures. Some had fled north. Most of the towns had no available housing. The state legislature had commandeered all foreclosed homes and used them as shelter for the initial waves of climate refugees, as they were now called. She stayed on the outskirts of Grand Junction for a month trying to find work to pay transit farther towards the mountains. The only options were toxic waste cleanup, stripping and sex work. Plus she was told that her brown skin was not in demand what with all the supply and she should expect less than the white girls. As quick as she could she found a ride out of town.

When she finally crossed the Idaho border she began to see the presence of federal troops decrease. She had heard it was dangerous for them near the new borders. The flags changed as well. Instead of the red white and blue she saw more trees of blue, green and black. Her ride was shuttling fuel and precious metals up to Sandpoint, Idaho. This had at one time been a resort town, most famous for its abusive childhood “emotional growth” schools. This, she learned, was where well off white families sent their ignored, socially awkward, drug addicted, culturally inept children to be reformed, sans religion, into well adjusted capitalists, with a leftward social tinge. The town was

beautiful, nestled in a forested valley along an immense lake.

Leaving Sandpoint was a conscious decision. She was heading into a war zone. The federal government had declared the former states of Washington and Oregon: hostile actors that had terrorists in their places of government. Currently it was a standoff but Lorena was conscious that at any time things could change. She had heard of the new regional laws, anti-corporate and equity based housing and employment laws. How under Trump Latino's and other undocumented communities flocked to the ocean states for salvation. There were rumors that people of color could live safely in the Northwest, that they were being treated equally. If she could just get across the border, past the feds and their militia lackeys.

As she sat on hay bales in the back of an old 2002 Toyota Tundra, she could see the lights of Spokane, Washington in the distance. It was the last major city before she got to the mountain borders of what people were calling Cascadia. During the drought, these farms had been hit hard. Although the Snake still flowed from Wyoming it was a shell of its former self. Although the struggle to remove the dams did reap some success, the salmon never fully returned (**CITATION 2**). Without salmon, the trees couldn't grow and the forest ceased to hold its bounty. The city of Spokane was struggling. The farmer she had hitched a ride with had been nice enough, asking no questions. She was eager to get somewhere, she didn't know what that was, but soon. After leaving her dead mother she had tried to contact some of the family but the phones had been down again. Amazing that a city of 5 million could be made out of the desert with no one asking if it could meet everyone's needs. They just kept building. Well, at least it hadn't been

Mexico City. She had seen how that turned out. Food rationing, water issues. Rioting. They hadn't had consistent contact for months. The Mexican government had been usurped by the military and now people on the ground were fighting. For what, she didn't know. She was just glad to get away. Anywhere.

The truck stopped outside the city at a farmhouse. Music was coming from the barn. She hopped out and stretched her legs. The driver shut the door and pointed to the barn. "That's where you'll be stayin, I imagine the riffraff will have some beans cookin" And with that he walked toward the farmhouse. Lorena grabbed her bag and trudged over to the barn. Knocking on the door it swung open to reveal an elderly woman. Behind her a number of younger people of various colors sat on hay bales around a lantern-playing guitar, singing and laughing. The old woman looked her up and down and then stepped out of the way to let Lorena enter.

They played music all night, finishing off a bottle of whiskey which she reluctantly took sips of. Her family was full of alcoholics. There were twelve in total. All refugees from various parts of the us. All looking to get away. She felt like she was home for the first time in a long time. They all planned to cross the border, into Cascadia, the next day. They would take two vehicles and load with extra gasoline; the gas stations along the i90 corridor had all but closed. They would get to the old ranger station near the crest of the mountains and stay the night. There was a forecast of tornadoes near Yakima, an old army installation abandoned because of the climate. They would have a window and had to make it in time to be accepted across the border. It seemed more daunting and filled with unproven rumors but in the company of these others she felt ready to take it

on.

The border to Cascadia was experiencing some problems so the trip was delayed for a few days. Finally their guide decided to take a more northerly route to get over the mountains. Highway 20 would take them through the cascades but along an older trucking road that swung through mostly dead towns that used to be tourist destinations. They made the drive through Winthrop, stopping for one of the last eastern breweries that were left in Cascadia. The snowmelt had been primarily diverted towards the West and thus the amount of beer had diminished and was expensive. She sipped on the warm lager as they traversed the mountains that continued to rise. The Cascade Mountains are so vast that they encompass multiple elevations and many different ecosystems. In a ten-minute span of driving you roll through 3 different soil types. The back of the truck was covered but it was open in the rear so they could see the mountains climbing around them. It was cold. They sped past multiple checkpoints of militia soldiers milling about. The scanner in the truck alerted the patrols that there was a vehicle that checked out on its way. They had come a long way from traffic jams and shootouts at checkpoints. If you drove past without a pass, claymore mines would rip apart the vehicle. Not without multiple warnings of course. By the time they reached the peak camp she had fallen asleep against another woman's leg.

Dawn was both the sun rising and woman next to her in the sleeping bag. As her eyes fluttered open, memories with jagged edges entered her brain. The hand on her head she had awoken too. How soft and comforting it had felt. The lack of bedding that girl

had not brought. The conversation by the driver about how cold it would be. The words coming out of her mouth before she could think. How good it had felt to be naked with another human. Hands fluttering over each other. Exploring crevices and curves. Judgment slipped away in the cold mountain air. Soft grunting as their bodies ground against each other. Her muffled cries of orgasm as she buried her face into dawn's breast. Now she was awake and no other sounds were stirring. The sun was barely cresting the mountains.

The militia's rode into camp with the rising sun. A firefight began between border guards and Christian soldiers. Caught in the crossfire were the refugees. Neither side of the antagonists seemed to notice. Blood filled the former fields of wheat and those looking for shelter found their final resting place. Lorena's body found its place curled together with Dawn, a single bullet taking both of their lives. They died miles from the border, the last safe haven from the rise of Christian militancy. They died seeking freedom.

Unknown Veterans Journal Recovered at protests during 2025

INTRODUCTION

By 2025 budget cuts had destroyed the VA as a health care system. Disabled veterans were homeless all over the United States. When protests began to erupt, police repression was immediate and police and National Guard quickly surrounded the camps. We are Veterans from many different American wars flocked to the camp. Some as far

back as Vietnam converged as their benefits were cut. The Veterans Administration reached its pinnacle in the pre-crash years of the twenty teens. Responding out of obligation to nationalist tendencies, the American people supported health care for all returning veterans from the various post 9/11 occupations. The costs of taking care of one veteran with PTSD for their shortened lifespan eventually exceeded two million dollars per person (**CITATION 1**) Constant cost overruns and massive public scandals shamed the government into providing limited homeless assistance and temp jobs to put on a good face. The suicide rates among veterans skyrocketed to over fifty a day by 2020.

May 29th Memorial Day

All I ever heard when I came home was “get on with your life”. I was told that the World War II generation won the war and came home and moved forward. Wasn’t that war tougher then these ones? I still wonder this. Every generation it seems the suicide rates go up. The more war we have the more national trauma we carry. Those World War II veterans came home and beat their wives and children. They continued a cycle of violence that is now standing around this camp with Billie clubs and tear gas waiting to crack our skulls. No one in America seems interested in asking why our veterans are so traumatized. They assume it must be just about health care. No one challenged the inherent contradictions of a war without trauma. This shit is ridiculous. Only 70% of those who served qualified for benefits (**CITATION 2**). The rest were discharged because of infractions ranging from drug use, failure to follow orders, physical/sexual assault. The camp is full of people who got fucked on their discharge. “Failure to follow

orders" is a famous one. Once Syria really got going, those were a dime a dozen. I guess America was pretty happy about the discharges though. It spared the taxpayers trillions of dollars. These guys didn't have shit for benefits to adjust back into civilian life. Many found themselves homeless, unable to work and fighting depression and anxiety on a daily basis. Separating civilians and veterans from each other makes the possibility of stopping these wars impossible. I know it was intentional.

May 30th

I came to this encampment because I had nowhere else to go. I saw my fellow service-members crying out for help and no one was actually listening. The only thing I know how to do is fight. So I'm here to fight.

May 31st

This is the culmination of 10,000 years of military trial and error. Millions of deaths spilt the ink that wrote military training manuals. No one is born to kill. You must be trained to de-humanize other people. Or never consider them human to begin with. Military training understands this and at the turn of the Nineteenth century there was no country better at this then the United States of America.

June 1st

I had a conversation with another veteran today about why we are here. His story brought back my own memories from when I joined. Immediately upon arrival to boot camp my

name is re-appropriated. I became a number. My clothes were taken and I was given a uniform. Uniformity. My hair was cut. My language was corrected and reshaped to fit with everyone else. My individuality was taken away. No longer human I become a *pussy, shit-bag or a commie-faggot*. Iraqis, Afghans and Syrians, became *goat-ropers, camel jockeys and sand niggers*. The targets I learned to shoot at were dark silhouettes of human form. “What makes the grass grow green?” shouted my infantry drill sergeant. “Blood! Blood! Bright red blood!!” scream nineteen-year-old boots, as they jab bayonets into haystacks. You name your rifle. You sleep with it. Solutions to problems come to be viewed through the barrel of a gun. Literally.

June 2nd

I had nightmares last night. The hard concrete we sleep upon provides little shelter from the heat. The heat that is increasing with every day, that creates drought. The heat that is making more wars and refugees and fucking up everything. I can't stop thinking about it. No army is ever at peace. Much like the old idiom. You break it you buy it. If you make it you use it. Being in an environment where you are constantly training to kill takes a toll on everyone, regardless if you deploy or not. I read about a DOD report after World War II to find out why high percentages of soldiers either broke down during long periods of combat or refused to engage the enemy at all. The study found that fifty days was the threshold for psychological breakdown (CITATION 3). Given sustained contact with the enemy, ninety-eight percent of the troops shut down. What they needed was a training regimen that allowed soldiers to stay in the field. With a healthy dose of airpower and

more alienation from what they were actually doing, this became the policy of the future.

June 3rd

Veterans were always a hard group to unite. Organizations directed at them, ranged all over the place in terms of membership and issues. Some were made up of all women, women who deployed, men who didn't, sexual assault, or combat, declared wars or not, they were put together haphazardly and solidified around their own identity. Ironically this made them unlikely to expand, they were untrusting of civilians and others who didn't fit their exact specifications. But when the benefits began to get cut and the wars that had needed their service so badly came to an end they were tossed aside. Everyone assumed they would just be the drunken homeless vagrants, easily ignorable and able to forget. America was wrong. We have come for our promises.

June 4th

They fired tear gas for the first time today. We got it all on 3d cameras. Blasted out to the world. We drove them back with numbers. I feel we can stay here till we win.

June 5th

At first it was peaceful. We occupied public space in Washington DC just like the bonus army of the 1930s. The National Mall. The Washington Monument. Back then the protests were based on a simple financial promise that had been made to returning World War I veterans about getting a bonus. When the Great Depression smashed the American economy, these veterans, many who couldn't work, demanded they be paid their bonus

early. President Hoover refused. When he was defeated by Franklin Roosevelt the same policy was adopted by the new White House. A young General Macarthur was ordered to clear the camps and he attacked the veterans with impunity and relish, killing many and driving the rest away from the Capitol. When Congress finally approved the bonuses, FDR vetoed the bill, only to be overruled by a Congressional majority (**CITATION 4**). Thus the legal framework for veteran's benefits was created. Veterans have always had to fight multiple wars, the ones overseas and then the ones when we come home.

June 5th

Our new occupation isn't about bonuses; it's about war itself. First and foremost it's about who goes to war and how they are taken care of when they come home. In the past it was based around who was poor enough to not avoid war. But with the advent of intelligent weapons systems like drone soldiers, there was no need for stupid working class kids to join up. Now they could use Ivy League graduates to sit in air conditioned rooms and control the robots doing the killing for the American people. Robots don't get traumatized. Robots don't need health care. And robots, unlike American boys and girls, weren't accountable for war crimes. The advent of drone warfare actually made war more likely because the American people cared even less about foreign people executed by killer robots. This new technology greased the gears of war and increased the public's detachment towards it.

June 6

Today in American history marks the date of the American invasion of Normandy. Our finest hour. In recognition of that history we have created our own D-Day. Demands Day.

Here is a list of our demands:

- The return of “citizen soldiers”. If we are going to fight a war then there needs to be humans making the decision to pull the trigger.
- Full health care for the rest of our lives no matter what job we did or what type of discharge from the military we received. Many service-members receive “other than honorable” discharges and this prevents us from receiving health care as we deteriorate.
- Full reconciliation with our former enemies to include reparations for the innocent people we damage in our conflicts overseas.
- War crimes tribunals for all the leaders who sent us to war if they violated international law.
- Any future wars require a unified America that votes on the decision to go to war directly, not through our “representatives”.
- Reconciliation with the American people. No more “Thank you for your service” and using veterans to sell your product but not listen to what they have to say. We need a national conversation about trauma and the true physical and psychological effects of war.

June 7th

The protest camp is structured like our military units were. I sit under a disheveled tree and all around me are tents. Things are constantly moving. Supplies to here, food to there. There is a central location with a library around DuPont circle. Vets shut down the

streets and even enlisted the help of shop owners to provide shelter. The corporate area tried to kick us out. That was expected. Anything that gets in the way of them making money. They couldn't care less about us. The sun is behind the clouds today and it's almost bearable. We should have done this in the "winter" whatever that means anymore. As to decisions, everyone is treated equally despite rank from the past. We have temporary team leaders who take on tasks every day. No one gives orders. It's refreshing. I am worried about decision-making though, we take a lot of time to decide things.

June 8th

Today we set up a verification system so we know who are veterans and who aren't. We are getting a lot of civilian support at least here in DC. The new Internet laws are blocking our websites but we have something up on the dark net. I don't know much about that shit. We are hearing reports of other camps around the country. It's like Occupy but for veterans. We could take the controls of this country if we tried.

June 9th

We are having problems with government agents or reactionaries screwing things up. These guys are used to punks and liberals, they don't know how to take on their own kind. Most of us interacted with FBI or CIA d-bags overseas. We can smell a fed a hundred meters away. Our meeting this morning debated whether to allow families or civilian friends to join us. It would swell our numbers but it makes us less safe, I think. We need to verify who people are. During the bonus army, families moved into the camps with the veterans, they had nowhere else to go. It made them less flexible and

when the invasion took place, they were sitting ducks. We have gotten calls from different movement groups asking to “support” and participate. We met to discuss this. Where were these people when we came home? Why do they suddenly care about our situation? I am hoping we reject their “help”. We have to fight this battle ourselves. The reason they haven’t invaded yet is because it would look bad. If we invite the hippies than we are no longer protected. We have always been on our own, how is this any different? None of these liberals had supported us when we came home. It may not be strategic but fuck it. We survived a war, we can survive this.

June 10th

We named our encampment “camp liberty”. Its funny cuz some of the guys were stationed at Camp Liberty in Iraq. The second time. Irony is powerful I guess, but I doubt most Americans understand it. They sent new police today to talk with us. Well, talk is a nice way of putting it. They threatened to raid us, charge us with felonies and put us away for a long time. We told them to go fuck themselves. They backed off. Johnny was there with me. He and I never got along in the service. He was a tree hugger. But we get along on this. Both of us never got our GI Bill in time and had to drop out of college. He got cancer that he's been fighting but the military lost his paperwork and then said he had it before he joined so he lost what little medical care he had left. I've been homeless nine months now. Had to pawn my dad's rifle for food. All I got is my pistol left. Ill put it in my mouth before I give it to a pawnshop.

June 11th

President Bob Davis isn't happy with us. There is enough drama around the assassination and I guess a bunch of pissed off veterans isn't fun for him. Not the time to be demanding things. Too bad. Its never a good time to be demanding. Everyone is telling us to adopt a single demand. As if that's what is keeping us from winning. Lack of clarity. And then when we get that demand should we just go back to our alleys, under our bridges? Go back to what? I am trying to leave my past behind, not return to it. Our lives were stolen in places like Somalia and Iraq, Syria and Pakistan, Afghanistan and North Korea. We have nowhere to go and nothing left to lose. I refuse to believe the National Guard that got called out today, will shoot us. They are us. If they keep pushing us, god forbid what happens.

June 12th

We faced off against the police today. They came dressed in riot gear. They had some of the new mobile drones that are as small as a paper airplane from grade school. Bearcat mini-tanks were placed at all the entrances except one, they intended to use a show of force to push us out of the area. We all stood in formation in our groups. I'm in group three. The cops shot some teargas but we had our gas masks and the order went out to fix them in place. All of us had been gassed before and it was actually the cops who retreated. Evidently they didn't know how to put on their masks properly. A few of those in group nine got arrested or beat up and the liberals didn't show up with their cameras like we expected. The new cell phone jamming equipment is being used here because none of us can turn on our phones. We have to use old school camera's to get any footage and we can't track the news so who knows what is getting out in the world. The cops sent

an emissary later in the evening to talk with us but we saw them using it as a distraction to move forces closer to us. We have set up makeshift barricades around the circle and they should hold a dismounted assault. Tomorrow will be a new day. We have runners who reported three other occupations, even one at the Jefferson memorial. He would be proud if he were here today. I sleep another night tonight with my sisters and brothers. I am proud of my service for the very first time.

June 13th

They came in the morning. The same time I used to kick in doors during Syria. They used overwhelming force. Just police, no National Guard. We got reports that military units activated, refused to participate in the raid. I was thrown on a school bus commandeered for the arrests. I am still here, squatting between seats near the back. We have been driving for hours. No idea where to. They didn't search us well. I was able to keep my journal and some spare cash. I don't know why we weren't sent to the local jails but they are taking us somewhere else. Somewhere south.

June 16th

They are torturing us. I was stuffed in a hole. I think we are somewhere in Georgia. I was blindfolded when they loaded us off the buses and was put in a large open-air fenced area. There are people here I don't know, other veterans. They weren't in the DC camp. We aren't allowed to talk to each other. There are guards patrolling the outside and we each have dog collars that shock us when we act up. I was removed after a day and interrogated. A man in a suit and a foreigner asked me a bunch of questions about who

planned the protests. They seem to have no fucking clue what is going on. I told them so. They stuck me in a hole. I don't have much paper left to write on. And I am afraid they are going to take it from me. They beat me with a rubber hose yesterday. They don't seem to care about leaving marks.

June 20th

People have started disappearing. They aren't in camp, camp is pretty small. They are leaving us outside in the direct sunlight. With no water. Guys are collapsing. There is no relief. I am so dehydrated I'm only urinating once a day. It hasn't rained in a long time. The guards beat us if we ask for water. My tongue feels like a dry saltshaker. I don't know how I am going to get out of here.

Afterward

This journal was recovered after the Georgia internment camp was shut down. It details a period when veterans around the country were rounded up as possible participants in the assassination of President Olivera. They were viewed as capable of killing the president and being a part of the conspiracy. The author of this journal was removed from the camp after the last entry and no government documents show where he was taken too. His body has not been recovered. During the summer of detention, catastrophic heat waves covered the United States in crisis, tens of thousands died. It was the largest natural disaster since Hurricane Katrina. Within the detention camp a mass grave was discovered containing the bodies of one hundred and seventeen veterans. Many of the veterans are thought to have died of heat exhaustion. Investigations are ongoing.

Z (Danae) 2024
Moab

The warm air curled up the river canyon like a cat's tail. Jagged clouds shot fast across the sky. The air pressure was rising as a great storm descended on the Colorado River. Orange rocks turned black as rain poured over the ancient cliffs.

They were squatting in a hole carved in the last ice age. No fire tonight. An old native blanket was wrapped tightly around the woman's torso. Droplets of water trickled down the opening of the cave. Pools were forming in the thousand year ruts that lined the floor. Partial fish fossils were exposed from the years of erosion, their ancient eyes taking in these scrawny travelers. Fifteen thousand years before the entire area was covered with an ice age and then thawed to create this valley. During the twentieth century it had been a vacationer's dream. River rafting and mountain biking. Recreation. The only people on the river now were survivors. If the river wasn't too low. You had to move by night most months of the year. One hundred and ten degrees was a good day. Most of the elderly and weak had moved or died. Now it was just locals. No one came to visit. Until last week.

Moab had always been different than Utah's other cities. Primarily dominated by Mormons intolerant of new ideas Moab had a sizable effect on the Utah legal system. Oppression always inspires resistance. Thus after the post 2020 market crash, Moab became a place for queer folks to gather.

Soon word got out through the underground. Trans people began going to it as a safe

haven. Moab was isolated enough and it required you to have working vehicles and gasoline, or some sort of electric equivalent. Vehicles were in high demand. The mountainous terrain was relatively defensible. The trans-community built a tiny Harlem renaissance for anyone challenging the gender binary. After the purges that swept the southern portion of the United States, Moab became a safe zone. Soon, the growing numbers of outcasts began a radical re-design of living units. Underground. Much like Minneapolis in reverse. Houses were dug out of rock faces and connected with depleted aquifers. One could walk kilometers between storage sheds of food and community. *One happy result of the turmoil was eco-terrorists dynamiting dams further up the Colorado River.* Their prophesies of the Colorado reaching the Pacific Ocean again provided a real life ecological benefit. Water. Tons of it. Despite the melting glaciers in Colorado, there was still plenty of snowmelt during the summer. The underground lifestyle flourished. With shielded greenhouses along the ravine just north of the former city of Moab, they grew avocados, tomatoes and peppers of all kinds. Because of the bee die-offs, hand pollination was required for anything to grow. They dreamt of a day when the bees would return. Ten thousand people, give or take, inhabited the hills and tenements and lived a rather collective, loving lifestyle.

The woman was shivering, her hands losing their grip on the crusted, old blanket. It was rough and made of some unknown fiber but could protect against the moisture surrounding the group. Danae, the lead perimeter sweeper, rubbed their hands inches from the small fire set with twigs stored at the back of the cave. Danae had been here as long as they could remember, before the migration even took place. The hands were

curled, from years of use, the fingers gently touching the palms. The hands spoke through the smoke “You had better come closer to this fire, Ma’am, it’s going to get colder before we can move you”. The woman stiffened. Relaxed. She scooted forward in jerky motions raising dust from the ancient cave. The other scout behind her took a step forward, still not trusting what he had heard and who this woman was. Danae, cracking their fingers, leaned back against the sitting rock and crossed their arms. “So you said that you have been on the run for days now?”

The woman sighed, dropped her head as if to nod and said nothing. “And you said that these...what did you call them? Christian missionaries? Were following you from Telluride?”

Danae glanced over at the other scout, “What do you think that is Trailor, about two hundred and twenty kilometers? The scout named Trailor nodded spoke in clipped sentences “Two-twenty at most.”

The freezing woman nodded. Her hair slowly lulled forward as droplets of sweat fell off her brow. Her face was scraped with closed wounds, some more recent than others.

The new information hung in the air like an approaching storm over the desert. Without vehicles that was a couple-week trip for a determined group. The roads were iffy at best but there were many go a rounds in this sparsely populated region. This woman was all that was left of whatever group she had started with. The rest hadn’t made it.

“So, what happened to the rest of you?” Trailor’s voice was impatient and edgy. He didn’t trust strangers.

Danae waved him back with a flick of her fingers. Outside the cave, lights flashed by the opening and the radio crackled to life.

“Scout one this is home stretch, we got a pickup, over”. Danae rose to their feet and motioned for the other two to rise from the fire. Trailor grabbed the deer sack full of water and poured it over the shallow fire, then reached to help the stranger to her feet.

“Time to go home”.

In the tunnels it was a balance of uniformity and order warped by artists into a working, always shifting cornucopia of ideas. While primarily anarchist in theory they accepted democratic structure in practice. A four hour limited workday came from a desire to fight economic institutions that had led to so much division and destruction. Team building and character development were encouraged through sport and play. To be human....again. Meetings to decide everything from water use to food storage to what would be the motto of a sports team. It mirrored the early days of the last America, with participation in direct democracy, but this time everyone participated. And looking nothing like the “founding fathers”. Theirs was a community structured on consensus and listening. Every voice was to be heard thus people didn’t feel the need to always talk. This took time to adjust into but was valued as a core of the new community. New voting processes allowed every issue to be weighed in on before discussion took place.

Before the crash, the home they all knew had been a military base. Built during the Obama administration it was a secret training location for JSOC personnel in the ever-expanding war on terror. Helipads were the only way in to the base and even these were difficult to see unless you knew what you were looking for. The base was far enough from Moab that locals didn’t run into it during their tourist outings, and military

personnel were prevented from going into town. There were no roads or personal vehicles to take them in any case. The base was self-contained, with water wells tapped deep into the prehistoric watersheds deep beneath the surface. There was a movie theater, public computer room, library, multiple kitchens and a massive recreation and weight lifting center. Danae had been one of the first refugees to come here. They had run into a small patrol of heavily armed mercenaries and thought it was the end. It turned out the mercenaries were actual soldiers, left behind during the final war with Pakistan. They had kept the base running as best they could but needed additional help and had begun hunting for survivors from the crash. Federal authority was focused on the East and West coasts and when orders didn't come from military command, the soldiers just closed and locked the doors.

Electrical power was not a problem for Fort Moab. They had plenty of sun and the military, seeing climate change as a national security threat as early as 2007, had installed a massive two kilometer wide solar updraft tower (**Citation 4**). Like an inverted ice cream cone, the base of the tower was covered in massive glass panels that absorbed sunlight into a buffered greenhouse. The flooring was recirculated water pipes that continued to hold heat when the night fell. Giant fans at the base of the tower fed into an electrical battery storage grid to store energy generated when the trapped solar heat rose, looking for a chimney to escape through. As it did the passive heat traveled through multiple fans turning them into the light Danae was now using to power their satellite tracking system. Danae was beginning to feel real fear for the first time since the Supreme Court assassinations. Now only twenty-five kilometers away, was a massive

encampment of vehicles. Tents had sprung up into a makeshift camp. *It must be the Paladins*, Danae thought. They are after the woman we found in the caves.

Two days later

The alarm was blaring and lights flashing throughout the cavern. Emergency lighting on the floors showed the way to exits but there was chaos throughout the catacombs. Practice drills don't prepare you for crisis no matter how much you practice. Danae was running to the weapons locker before the invaders could enter the facility. They had lost contact with two of their frontier outposts over an hour ago. A search and response team of eight had been sent to verify it wasn't just the storm interfering with the radios. That had happened before but never to both checkpoints at once. That search team never came back. Then the mortars had erased all doubt of the weather. It was an invasion. Danae had been in the interrogation/introduction chamber, where they brought all refugees before allowing them full access to the community, when the explosions first landed. There was a limited military command structure with a few people who had experienced combat during the Pakistan crisis but most of the community eschewed violence. They survived more from being not seen or heard, then by any defense tools they utilized. They were sitting ducks.

The mortars lasted no more than fifteen minutes but there were over a hundred explosions. The first ones had knocked out the satellite towers still connected to what was left of communication satellites. This kept them aware of the rest of the world's struggles. Now they were literally in the dark. Some of their solar array had taken a direct hit.

Danae faced a decision: evacuate or shelter in place. She chose the latter. They had planned for this. If they left the safety of the caves there was no telling who or what was out there. Without adequate training and very few firearms it could be a bloodbath. Danae ordered the different sectors to lockdown their blast doors.

Conclusion

The helicopter contained the proof, long disputed of the direct connection between corporate America and the assassination of the last elected American President. The final battle over who owned that property took place not far from their mountain refugee camp. Having stolen the top secret documents, private contractors had infiltrated the CLA camp and executed the hacking collective just as they broke the codes. But the sacrifice of those men and women was not in vain as the same type of missile that killed the president was used to down the contractors in the BC forests. As Leyla stood near the secure hard drives and waited for the details to be uploaded to the cloud, she grimaced at all they had overcome to this point. Millions of deaths, a civil war for the soul of North America and the acceleration of climate change to unprecedented levels. She wondered if all those deaths were worth it. The war was finally turning. These documents would lead those on the fence to side with the rebellion. What began as “extremist” attacks by the Cascadia Liberation Army, would now be seen as the revolutionary steps necessary to a new world. Their call for complete de-carbonization of the world economy, of the complete re-structuring of transportation, agriculture and housing would be met with cries of support across the nation. Science would become central once again. The sand of

the climate hour-glass was close to running out. Only a complete transition in record time would give the people of the world a chance to survive and build a new world.

As the evidence was transferred to every corner of the world, statues of every kind would be torn down. The old leaders had failed and only a collective effort would overcome the chaos. There were battles to still fight and those of the old, stagnant world views would not go quietly into the dumpster-fire of history, but they had given themselves a chance. Its all they ever really wanted.

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