

Behold

Leviathan

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based on a true story

wh clark



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Forward

*“Oh that my vexation was actually weighed,
And laid in the balances
Together with my iniquity,
For then it would be heavier
Than the sand of the seas.
Job 6:2-3*

An attractive lady in a business suit knocks impatiently at the door of a small country home. A light goes on inside and the door is opened by a man in a faded knit sports shirt. The lady is dressed elegantly.

“This better be a damn good story,” she says before the door is even open all the way. “That drive out from Austin is an absolute nightmare!”

“Why yes, it IS nice to see you, Nikki” as her host holds the door open. “You’re looking fit and svelte as ever.”

Nikki slipped right past him at the doorway, pulled out her reporter’s notebook and clearing a spot on the cluttered sofa.

“Why yes, you DO go to such great ends to tidy up for your house guests.” Nikki crosses her legs in a forceful movement as if to say you make it impossible for a lady to be ladylike here.

“Kip, this is supposed to be your living room, not a health club. Just look at all these weights and machines.”

“How many times...” he starts to say but is cut off.

“Yes, you’re in training,” the lady reporter says sarcastically. “You missed the Olympics though, or hadn’t you heard?”

She glances around to see an antique television set covered with dust and a stereo with so many wires dangling from the back it had clearly not been used in years.

Kip scolds her. “Amateurs. Wimps. Besides, the government folks wouldn’t let me; Nikki, you know that! They think I’m dead and fully intend to keep me dead.”

He glares at her and then tried to make light of the situation, with a shrug of his shoulders. Nikki innocently changes the topic. “You said

something about a trillion dollar story on the phone,” wrapping a page over in her stenographer’s notebook, for a fresh start. Nikki was all business now.

“Cold soda in the icebox,” Kip says as if to thin air. “Help yourself..” Then he steps awkwardly over a few weights and eases painfully into a chair opposite

Nikki, resting a well-worn walking cane with a polished brass handle beside him.

“Sorry about the mess, Nikki. I didn’t mean to offend.”

“I know, Kip. I know,” she repeats sadly. “You know I love you. Too bad life had to get in our way, no?”

“Yes, life.” Then, hoisting the cane like a banner, “What would we do without it though? You been on the science beat at the Statesman long enough to hear about the Freon Ban?”

“Sure, Kip. Freon damages the ozone layer, so we had to ban it and use other, safe, chemicals. Right?”

“Sure, Nikki.” Kip tries hard not to say it like he was talking to a bubble-headed babe with air for brains, but didn’t succeed. “That’s the politically correct explanation, on which you’re well indoctrinated it seems.”

Kip adjusts himself in the chair to balance the placement of his knees, then slowly leans forward. He speaks with conviction.

“The truth is that Freon never had any effect on the ozone layer in the first place. The ozone hole is five times bigger now that it was ten years ago when the Ban went into effect. A trillion dollars for nothing.”

Nikki interjects flippantly, “You mean billion dollars, Kip.”

Kip waits until she has erased trillion from her notes and written in billion.

“NO, it’s TRillion. And not just one TRillion. The machines that use the new Freon are 25% less efficient - so everybody in the civilized world is paying at least 25% more on their utility bills.”

“You’re serious about this! You think this could have caused the California energy crisis - the collapse of Enron - the all-time high oil prices we’re paying right now?” Nikki is in high gear now, writing furiously on the notepad. “What hard proof do you have?”

Nikki relaxes noticeably when he says nothing for a short while. Maybe it’s just an elaborate hoax to get her out to visit him in the country. She eases the rigid crossed legs and gives him a coquettish look.

Kip enjoys watching the indecision play across her features, not to mention the long svelte legs. "I'M the expert, remember? The highly placed source? The author of two textbooks on energy conservation? Besides, the trillion dollar price tag is common knowledge in the industry." Taking a deep breath, "As far as the effectiveness of the Freon ban itself, NASA has issued several reports showing satellite photos of the ozone hole - it gets bigger and bigger every year. It regularly covers the tip of South America now."

Pausing for a moment while Nikki catches up with he shorthand, Kip continues sadly, eyes downcast. "Penguins regularly wash ashore as far away from Antarctica - the ozone hole is centered over the South Pole - as Rio de Janiero, in BRAZIL, for God's sake."

Nikki sits bolt upright on the sofa, a pursing her lips in concentration as she takes her notes. Kip continues the monologue.

"NASA was worried enough to send a satellite up specifically to study the millimeter-thin ozone layer a few years ago."

"Shouldn't we hold off of the story then," Nikki interrupts tentatively, "until the satellite data is evaluated?"

Nikki looks up almost desperately from her writing, to see Kip shake his head no. He sighs as if hoping it was all just a political mirage. He gathers himself together, avoiding Nikki's gaze, and picks up the discussion, somewhat regretfully.

"The satellite was launched in September 2001. It exploded before reaching orbit. NASA has no plans for a replacement - the Administration is worried about other things, obviously; like terrorism."

Nikki is writing in shorthand. She finishes her notes and looks up with a mixture of agony and exasperation. With raised eyebrows and a slight grimace, she ekes out a few monosyllables.

"But this is eco-terrorism! If they can gut the whole space program to plan for a manned mission to Mars, why can't they fund another ozone study satellite?"

Kip is looking down and toying with a weight on the floor with his foot absentmindedly.

"That's not your story, Nikki. That's only background information. These people covering up the ozone scam and the Freon Ban - They're powerful. They're rich. They're connected. They're dangerous. They've made a trillion dollars on this rip-off. They even sabotaged a NASA satellite to protect their dirty little secret."

Nikki replied hysterically, "Oh Lord. Why did you tell ME? You don't

need a reporter; you need James Bond. Why ME? You're a damned dissident; they KNOW to watch you. But ME?"

"They'll have one more person to follow now; thinner coverage means there's a chance we. . ." pausing, as Nikki is starting to tremble. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have imposed on you like this. If you can't handle the heat, I can get you out of here safe. No one will know."

An uneasy silence trespasses upon their friendship for the next few seconds. Kip picks up a spring hand exerciser and squeezes it repeatedly. A repetitious squeak punctuates the silence.

"NO, Kip; I'LL KNOW." Then, steadying her too loud voice, Nikki continued. "I'll do it. I shouldn't. But I will. I'll do it. Years you say? Damn, what a fool. But I'll do it."

Nikki is talking to herself while she gets her notes together and grabs her purse in a sudden, stumbling dash for the door. Twisting the knob and opening the door violently, she suddenly turns around to Kip, who is standing up courteously now, and leaning on his cane looking impossibly calm and vulnerable at the same time.

Nikki manages a brave smile, "You sure know how to show a lady a good time, Kip!"

"You're a goddess, Nikki."

"I'll be in touch," she replies with a blush.

"I know," says Kip, but she had already left. Kip gently closes the door, as bright lights from Nikki's car arc across the exterior of the homestead. They briefly silhouette a small greenhouse surrounded by unkempt shrubs and large cedar and oak trees. Nikki burns some rubber and speeds away up the steep incline of the road. Kip sighs as he watches the car leave and closes the blinds as the red tail lights fade in the distance.

Kip sits back down and picks up a cell phone from the end table, checking a leather wrist brace briefly, as though he measured time by checking his pulse. Then he dials the phone.

Nikki digs into her purse to get her cell phone, slowing down at a red light. It's a two-lane highway with faded stripes and markings. There's not another car in sight. Keeping one eye on the stop light, she picks up the phone.

Kip says into the phone before she has a chance to say anything. "Don't worry about the red light, Nikki. It won't change until I let it."

Nikki pounds her hands on the steering wheel in a fury; revealing for the first time a similar petite version of Kip's leather band on her own wrist.

"Damn you, Kip. Damn your stupid mentat brain control psycho tricks anyway. What the hell are you trying to do here?!"

"You're driving too fast, love. You're upset. You were above the speed limit before you even left the driveway here. Calm down."

Kip's voice comes across the phone line in the monotone enunciation of the federal agents in the Matrix.

Nikki was pretending to be hysterical, now. "Kip, there's a cop car!"

Nikki blinks in surprise; not quite believing her own two eyes. Then she gives a mischievous giggle as the police vehicle eases up to the light in the lane opposite.

"He's looking at me. At the light. Do something!" The cool, collected reporter facade has evaporated in a blaze of teenage indecision.

Kip replies a few long seconds later, talking very slowly. "Drive carefully, will ya?"

"Okay, Okay already. Get me away from this goggle-eyed cop will ya?"

Nikki twists to the side in her car, avoiding the peace officer's inquisitive stare, pretending to be looking for something in the passenger's seat.

"Dammit Kip, please."

Kip chuckles softly into the phone, "Behold - the power of the mind!"

The cop car inches closer to Nikki's car, obeying a green light from his direction. The police officer, now clearly investigating - is turning around to look at the light, wondering why she's still stopped. Just as he does so, the light changes to green going Nikki's direction. She throws the phone on the floor on the passenger side and slams her foot down hard on the accelerator. With a burst of speed, she's quickly out of sight.

"I'll get you for that one, you psychic freak out!" Nikki yells at the top of her voice toward the cell phone, her own leather bound fist clenched in the air; a wild grin putting cracks into the careful makeup at the corners of her eyes. Just as she does so the active red light on the phone blinks a few times, then goes offline.

"The bait's set. Just ya'll come and get us you jerks!" Nikki the intrepid journalist back in good form, although she drives nervously the rest of the way into Austin through the Hill Country, arriving at the offices of the Statesman on Lake Austin a quick forty minutes later.

Getting out of her car, Nikki pauses to look at the carefree tourists exclaiming excitedly at the cloud of bats exiting from under the bridge over Town Lake as dusk settles on the picturesque skyline. Then she purposefully clutches her purse and notepad and hustles into the big white building at lakeside, every window ablaze. An unmarked police

cruiser rolls ominously into the space next to hers, not even trying to be subtle. Nikki, watching from the entranceway, turns on heel and stalks into the building; but her head is shaking in consternation, and a crooked smile wavers unsteadily upon her quivering lips.

Meanwhile, back in his small country home, Kip is working out two lame legs with furious intensity, excruciating pain etching deep lines at the corners of his eyes. The windows are open now, and the light of a full moon filters into the unlit living room through the Venetian blinds. The chromium weights glisten in the dim illumination, while rhythmic sounds of iron weights rattling punctuate the still air.

The little red light on the cell phone blinks. It's Nikki, now looking out her window at the Statesman into the parking lot below, telling him of the overt police surveillance. He reassures her, clutching a worn gold frame photo of her in a white-knuckled fist as he tries to stay calm. She relaxes visibly and hangs up with a gracious smile and a kiss.

Kip collapses the cell phone halves with a snap, tears glistening his cheeks; teeth gritting in a grim visage. He's barely in control. Slowly, impossibly, he crushes the phone with his bare hand. Wires splay out of the little plastic box, and the phone suffers the same fate as had, it seems, the stereo receiver in Kip's living room. He tosses it atop the same pile, along with a half dozen other dead cell phones.

Kip is seething with barely restrained fury now. It shows in every fiber of his being, his intensity, his focus. He begins to exercise again, with doubled speed. After a few series of exercises, he gets up and tries to walk without depending on the cane so much; he collapses on the floor with a shout of frustration; pounding clenched fists on the furniture. He gets up and starts over again; and again.

One

*Then God answered Job
from out of the whirlwind, and said, “
Who are these men who darken counsel
By words without knowledge?
“Gird up your loins like a man,
I will tell you, and you instruct me!
Job 38: 1 - 4*

FIFTEEN YEARS PREVIOUS.

“Am I speaking with the Judge Advocate General’s Office?” “Yes, sir,” was the swift reply. “This is JAG headquarters.”

“Then may I speak to Captain Paul Franco,” said the voice. The sharp words said, each letter clearly enunciated. They were words spoken with the careful cadence of high authority.

“One moment, Sir,” replied the staff sergeant at the duty desk. Unconsciously, he sat straight up in his chair. He did so in deference to the voice on the line. Ten years he had been answering the telephone, judging people by a few hasty syllables. The NCO was quite certain the man on the line was to be handled with white gloves.

“I’ll forward your call. Sir,” he said with crisp efficiency.

“Franco here,” said the counselor after the first ring of his office extension line.

“Morning, Captain Franco,” said the officious voice. “My name is Nathan Belkind.” His tone stressed the rank as if to underscore the officer’s military stature, not his legal standing. Warning lights flashed in Franco’s quick mind. The attorney mused, this caller was about to claim that his own rank or status had precedence over the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

“Good morning, Sir. What can I do for you?” replied Franco, carefully. Closing the legal brief open on his desk, Franco concentrated fully on the caller. He was worried that this call was that One, among hundreds of telephone calls a year that could mean big trouble. More than the bold,

confident voice, the crackle on the line signaled a long distance line. That could only mean Washington: the Pentagon, or worse - a Senator's aide.

"My name is Belkind, Captain. I am attached to the Science Office of the Israeli Embassy, in Washington D.C." A few seconds passed without the expected reply,

"Captain, are you still there?"

"Yes, Sir," came the rattled reply. A moment's silence on the line and no further explanation from the foreigner was forthcoming, as he had expected.

"I'm sorry, but I'm flustered by your call - and, frankly, confused." Then, stridently, "Why are you calling me?" His voice cracked with latent stress. Still, the line was mysteriously silent.

There were noises in the background as the Army JAG officer stumbled out of his chair to reach across the small office to pitch the door closed. Settling back into his standard issue steel desk chair, he took a deep breath and, regaining some composure, concentrated completely on the caller. All the while, his keen mind was struggling to determine which of his dozens of clients had the kind of influence to warrant a missive by the Israeli Attaché.

There were no Jews among them that he knew of. Not many troublemakers among them either, except - then he had it, clear and sure. A Specialist Fourth Class had some trouble at the White Sands Missile Range. Now the brass was pushing a rush medical discharge, hard.

His superiors had asked several times about the case. That was quite unusual for an appeal by a junior enlisted. Full Colonels or Generals get that kind of special attention. NCO's might get it if they were Special Forces or Rangers; but not a lowly E-4 serving duty as a Chaplain's Assistant. The case, he recalled, was an expedited discharge near the final sign off. Not any longer, he mused with a smile, warming to what was shaping up to be a real battle.

"Sorry to have caught you at a loss, Captain," his caller was saying. "It's just that I've received a most disturbing communication from a client of yours."

"And whom might that be, Mr. Attaché?" he replied warily.

"Please, understand, I'm not trying to exert any influence here. My purpose in calling is only to express my concern and that of my government. We are concerned for the health and well being of a service member. He seems to be in some considerable distress."

"Who is, if I may ask?" rudely interrupting.

"Specialist Fourth Class Will Cleary," the embassy official volunteered,

too eagerly, “formerly assigned to the Headquarters Company at the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico.” Then he prodded impatiently, “Are you familiar with this case?”

“Yes, I am. Except little information is available to me,” replied the counsel apologetically, “Just the Inspector General’s records. Everything else is classified ‘Eyes Only.’”

“Are you saying, Captain, that you can’t discuss the details of this case with me?” inquired the Israeli, pronouncing each syllable succinctly as might one to whom English was not native. The effect was to magnify the significance of each statement. Every phrase was an individual, defensible fact.

“No, Sir,” was his ready response. “The documents ARE classified, and they ARE out of my reach. Even as his defense counsel, they are not available to me.”

“But how can you possibly represent this soldier properly, if important documents aren’t available?” inquired the Attaché with concern. What had begun, as a courtesy call now became something more.

“I do my best with what’s available to me, Sir,” he was almost ashamed of the position his government had imposed on him. Now he recognized it for what it was a test of loyalty. To petition boldly for the missing documents would imply he did not trust the system, or his superiors, to provide what is necessary to defend a service member.

He had convinced himself that his client was not important anyway and would not be a loss to the Service, even were he wrongfully discharged. Then, like a nagging conscience, this crafty Israeli happened on the scene, to disparage his precious preconceptions.

“Perhaps Cleary could get help from his U.S. Congressman here in Washington, to obtain the records you need?” suggested the Israeli, hopefully.

“No, Sir,” replied Franco, a feeling of unquenchable despair settling on his shoulders. “His Representative in Congress, it seems, is among those whose records are not available. In other words, Beavus and Butthead are sleeping in the same bed on this one.”

“I think I understand, Captain,” the Israeli swiftly interjected - proud of his command of Americanisms. “The civilian and political authorities are allied against this young man?” Then, in a little more serious tone devoid, though, of any official pretense. “It seems Cleary has gotten himself into some very bad trouble, in a very big way.”

“And,” continued the counsel for him, “No one wants to bother with due process, for a lowly enlisted man.”

“Let me assure you, Captain Franco. And caution you,” he said in sudden riposte. “Your client is no mere enlisted man. He is most certainly a man to be reckoned with, however lowly his rank may be.”

“I don’t understand,” he said slowly, mystified. He had to pinch himself - the guy HAD managed to solicit a long distance call from a high official of a foreign embassy.

“Your client, I am loathe to inform you, is a talented engineer and scientist. According to a reference letter written by NASA on his work, his ‘concepts about the Unified Field Theory appear to be so profound as to be years ahead of the current scientific thinking in the areas in which (he) delved.’”

“Sure,” Franco replied, rolling his eyes skyward and he gathered the patience to weather a bureaucrat’s lengthy monologue. “And my Mom is the Virgin Mary.”

‘He WAS posted to White Sands Missile Range,’ the Counselor told himself. This is no small accomplishment. White Sands is by far the most important research installation in the Army and an alternate-landing site of the Space Shuttle. Everyone on that post - even the cooks - had ultra top secret clearance.

“I beg your pardon for interrupting, Captain, but I think you do not fully understand,” said the Attaché, choosing his words with care. “Specialist Cleary is not just a well-educated man with a penchant for getting into trouble. He really is a scientist of quite respected acumen.” Yet, the calm confidence, far from lending his words a tenor of authority, only irked the military man.

“Let me tell YOU, Mr. Ambassador or whatever you are,” Captain Franco replied loudly. “Specialist Cleary is receiving the best legal advice the military can offer. He would, even if he was a private with an eighth-grade education.” Then, with a deep breath to take the edge off his voice, “I resent any implication you or your government might make to the contrary.” A couple of breaths late he added, “With all due respect, Sir.”

The Israeli wrestled with a bleak disappointment. Another too-proud Yankee, he despaired, his shallow sense of honor tarnished by the very hint that the venerable Stars and Stripes were not inviolate. The Israeli would have ended the conversation right immediately, if not for a slight doubt he perceived in the lawyer’s tone.

Had the Captain’s voice trailed off, even as the words he spoke were strong and forceful ones? Was it pretense? On the other hand, had the long distance line modulated the volume? Maybe the receiver just

moved, as the Captain spoke. He hoped for the former, gambled on it. He continued, with the most conciliatory voice in his repertoire.

"Let's understand each other, Captain Franco. We have a problem here, you and I," he began carefully. "We're both concerned for the welfare of a human being, each for his own reasons. Perhaps less obviously, our interest goes beyond our official obligations. Otherwise, this conversation would already have ended, no. And your high and mighty Justice would have been served," he concluded; though not without letting some sarcasm seep into his words.

"Specialist Cleary deserves more than justice, though," interrupted Captain Franco, invited to comment by his counterpart's protracted pause. "Is that what you are saying?" Again, the diplomatic silence between two parties sorting their options.

"Yes, in fact, I am," then added fearfully, "and I can tell you why." The long-distance line cracked its impatience as the Attaché paused shortly.

"I know little enough," he replied casually, deciding all pretense would be wasted on this gutsy lawyer. "As I said before, your client is expert in an obscure realm called Field Theory. That's the theoretical physics that goes beyond Relativity."

"You seem to know quite a lot about this Field Theory stuff," interjected Captain Franco, with sarcasm. Who did this guy think Cleary was, rolling his eyes; a modern Einstein? Shit, no wonder he's locked up tight in a padded cell.

It was obvious, though, from the high caliber of the written appeals made to date by his client, that he had a superior intellect of rare insight and intuition. It was even more amazing, for someone with no background in law or medicine. He had shredded the medical evidence in a nicely detached, legal briefing. The lawyer had been real impressed at first.

Then his Sergeant had said that sort of thing happens all the time - the troops hire a first-class lawyer or doctor to write their appeals, then pass them off as their own work; thinking that might better their chances on appeal. Franco felt like a fool, not to have thought of that angle. He didn't make that mistake again, all the grief his Sergeant gave to him for being so naïve.

"Excuse me, Sir," replied the attorney, exasperated. "Assuming what you say is true - what the Hell is this guy doing in the Army, of all places; and enlisted?" Maybe if he humors the guy, he will get to the point of this conversation.

"He WAS at White Sands, the main research laboratory in the whole U.S. military. Also - and I apologize if I know something I should not

- HELSTAF is there. That's the Star Wars missile defense system, the High Energy Laser Facility. What better place for a man of his intellect?"

"HELSTAF, Star Wars, lasers - you are sure about that?" said Franco, barely restraining the sarcasm from his voice.

"We Israelis have our sources, you know, Captain," responded the Israeli deadly serious.

Franco gulped in astonishment - good god, even at White Sands. Their security is stronger than Fort Knox. The security there makes the Oval Office an Open House on Realtor's new home tour by comparison.

"But the files show he's just a Weather Observer," said Franco. His voice faded as the receiver inched away from his mouth.

Drawers opened. Papers rustled. Captain Franco rifled through his documents on the case. Nathan Belkind, Israeli Science Attaché, waited patiently as the Army attorney scanned the thick file of medical and military records. He didn't have to wait very long.

"I have a confidential report here written by the Inspector General," Franco said a moment later. "It's not a pretty picture."

"I don't understand, Captain - what's been going on?" the Israeli asked a little later when the attorney did not reply.

"You mean, you didn't know? I thought he had contacted you." To which the Israeli did not reply, at first.

"All we got was an old letter from NASA with a message scrawled on top to contact you."

"Cleary got into some trouble at White Sands. Got an ARCOM," Franco continued a little later.

"That's your Army Medal of Commendation?" It was hard sometimes not to get aggravated at the annoying tendency of Americans to use acronyms.

"Yes, Sir, it's one of the highest peacetime awards given by the Army,"

"Quite an accomplishment for an enlisted man, you say?" added the Israeli, trying to focus on at least something that was positive.

"I'd say it's more in the miracle category," explained Captain Franco,

"The Army's super stingy with its awards, especially ARCOMS. Moreover, ARCOMS to junior enlisted. Especially during peacetime. Get my drift?"

"Yes, Sir. SP4 Cleary must have done something quite extraordinary, at your WSMR base," trying to sling a few abbreviations himself.

When the expected did not come from the pensive attorney, the

Israeli gently prodded, "Do you know that he did out there in your Wild West, Captain?"

"Wait one; I have an idea. Let me check something."

"Wow - here's another first," Franco added a moment later. "An 'Eyes-Only' transfer, by direct order, straight from the Department of the Army in the Pentagon. Never seen one of those." A few seconds passed as he read to himself.

"Only one person knew whom Cleary was when he arrived here at Fort Sam Houston: the senior enlisted man on post, the Sergeant Major." With a low whistle, he continued, "And HE was under orders to tell no one. Shit, that means whatever happened at White Sands was classified - otherwise, it would just be a change-of-station set of orders, which can't be made confidential."

"Captain, are there any documents there about what actually happened at White Sands?"

"I'm looking, Sir." Then the shuffling of papers stopped, followed by a few expletive deleted words, uttered beneath his breath. "Damn, nothing - absolutely nothing. Most of the words are marked out with a black marker. All I could find was an obscure reference to the ARCOM award certificate."

"Read it for me, please," the Attaché said impatiently.

"It's nothing much, really, just something about 'staunch individualism' and 'impeccable moral fortitude' for improving conditions for enlisted personnel. Canned text from the official U.S. Army phrase book."

"I don't get it," the Israeli agent said a moment later. "First he gets some big-time prestigious award, then the Department of the Army cuts orders getting him out of there, double time. They rush him away from the very people who gave him the award. I think you better have a talk with your client about all of this, counselor."

"Easier said than done, Sir."

"What are you saying, Captain?" a crinkle of concern creeping into his voice.

Franco took a deep breath, then responded. "Cleary's on a psychiatric ward, Sir. There by direct order of the Inspector General's office."

"Good God Almighty, how did THAT happen," asked the Israeli with a roar, then a dejected sigh of utter resignation.

"Filed a complaint."

Then, after a moment to regain his composure, he continued. "Cleary

gave a formal statement to the local authorities, claiming severe harassment at White Sands. It didn't go over too well."

"You understand me? He evidently pissed off some big-time Army Brass - Congress to boot! Some deep shit, fooling with that treacherous lot."

"Tell me about it, please."

"It's a single-spaced typewritten document. An official-looking document, as you could well expect. It was extremely detailed, with names, dates, and places galore. Must have been a beauty. Until they got hold of it."

"What do you mean, 'got a hold of it?'"

"They took his statement, Sir; they took that concise document, and marked out all the identifying terms with a thick black magic marker. All the names, places, dates; everything."

"They did it, quote-unquote, for purposes of confidentiality. No more than three unbroken words in a row, the statement was totally incomprehensible."

"I feel ashamed, Mr. Belkind, telling you this. Sick to my stomach in fact." Taking a deep breath, Franco continued. "It's different, telling an outsider like you."

"Around the JAG Corps, it's no big deal, the IG's policy. They railroad people out of the army all the time." Then pausing briefly to consolidate his conscience from the onslaught of feelings, "I shouldn't be telling you any of this."

"That's quite OK - we know all about it." "What?"

"Yes, my JAG Corps friend, even at Fort Sam Houston; no, especially at Fort Sam Houston, the main medical center in the Army, we have our sources."

"Whoa - just you wait one minute - what could your interest possibly be in all of this?" Franco asked with an edge reserved for a witness for the prosecution.

"Now it's my turn," responded Belkind obligingly, "To tell you a secret about Cleary's situation."

"Perhaps your all-knowing file has something about a meeting your naive and ambitious client had with the Chief Scientist and the Post Commander, Major General Niles Fulwyler, at White Sands this past spring? Go ahead, look for yourself." Then, trying to dull the edge of the interchange, "It's my quarter, for the long distance phone bill, you know."

A few moments later, "Yes, there is something - I can recognize it from

the doctored documents, now that I know what to look for. A technical paper WAS presented, but its evaluation wasn't favorable."

"My people think differently," the Israeli said.

"What do you mean, 'your people?'" Then it dawned on him with horror, "Have ya'll seen a copy of Cleary's presentation?"

"Indeed we have," the Attaché said with a note of triumph. "Saw it myself not more than a couple of months ago. It is quite good, too. No practical applications are evident, as they may have been looking for in New Mexico. It's all good solid research, nevertheless."

"I don't believe you, Belkind. Cleary is an E4, for Christ's sake. And you claim he's producing top-notch scientific papers?"

Franco continued, sheepishly, "We all figured it was a delusion. We could assume nothing else. Shit, no one at White Sands will even acknowledge our requests for information, much less provide it."

"He shouldn't have sent y'all that paper, you know. Still, it might explain why the brass was squared away to discharge him ASAP. Contact by a service member with a foreign embassy and all."

"You must ask him about that, among other things." "But why the big time cover up from Washington?"

"Treason?" Franco said, drawing in his breath as he did so.

"Absolutely not," he said categorically. "Not if his work wasn't sponsored by the Army. Moreover, I do not believe it was. Besides, the fundamentals of his Theorem were in place years before he enlisted, according to our records."

"That's a relief. A crazy dissident I might be able to defend, but not a traitor."

"Odd, isn't it Captain," the Israeli said pensively, "The fine line between a traitor, and his complete opposite, the patriot, who risks all to better the nation he loves? The one is without an ounce of honor; the other is the epitome of honor itself."

"Yea, but our man isn't even in the ballpark; he's way, way out in left field," protested Captain Franco. "He's delusional; obviously. He sees himself as the courageous patriot risking life and limb for principals. He insists the brass threw the book at him, thinking him a despicable traitor, or worse."

"By the way, did you by any chance ask Cleary about the ARCOM?" the Israeli asked conversationally a while later, fishing - for something.

"Drugs he said," he said sarcastically. "He said he turned in a half dozen users in the Headquarters Company. They were tested and

confirmed to be users. They got dishonorable discharges. A Senator's daughter was among them." Then with a chuckle, "The guy really went over the edge with that one, no?"

"All of this I suppose, happened after the cadre found out he contacted my embassy?"

"Yes, Sir."

"He claims the drug users found him out, then threatened his life and property. Six weeks in purgatory, goes the sob story."

"I suppose the stress of it all, and he just collapsed, no?" "A brave man," the Israeli said a moment later.

"Or maybe he's just a fool."

"Don't let your conscience get you emotionally involved."

"Yea, I suppose you're right," Franco replied - a little disappointed. "Yes, Specialist Cleary is history, as you Yanks say."

"OK, I concede. You are obviously right. Sir." "Good; then Shalom to you, my friend."

"Bye."

Two

*“Behold now, Behemoth,
Which I made as well as you.
“He is the first of the ways of God.
Let his Maker bring near his sword.”
Job 40: 15 - 19*

TWELVE YEARS LATER.

What an ordinary looking man, she thought upon first seeing Will Cleary. She was in DC for business and decided to take an afternoon off the negotiations with her clients to visit the Senate hearing room. It was a much-anticipated event in Washington. A political cartoonist had portrayed the event that morning as another Christian cast into the Coliseum. There, to be ravaged by the Senate Committee for the amusement of the audience, and the sanctification of the United States Senate.

Actually, Nikki did not even notice Cleary when she first arrived at the packed full auditorium-sized room. She slid right past him as she maneuvered to an empty seat a few chairs down the cramped passageway. Cleary had been sitting on the aisle. He had smiled pleasantly up at her as she begged his pardon, to enter the row.

He muttered something, lifting a cane with one hand and shrugging his shoulders, with an apologetic smile as if to say, “I’m sorry, but disability takes precedence over ‘ladies first,’ eh?”

Then he glanced down with a touch of shame, “Really do so wish I could though.”

What a charming fellow, and so considerate she mused, maneuvering past a few more folks. A few slips, slides and contortions later she flashed who he really was. Glancing back just as she sat down, Nikki saw Cleary looking around the assemblage bright-eyed and curious, like a kid in a candy shop.

Nikki’s kindly impression quickly evaporated, when she realized who he really was; as preconceptions crept into her mind, seeded there

by the media, the Senate, and political pundits nationwide. No longer a polite, gentle soul, he was a raging bull in their delicate china shop. Before this impression developed any further, the Chairman called the room to order. The Chair calls the first witness. Will Cleary, of course.

Nikki turned to look down the aisle at him. No one else in the room seemed to realize who he was. She had a direct, unobstructed view. He was happily relishing a few last moments of precious anonymity.

He didn't answer the summons immediately. Motionless, he remained - observing, calculating, as though planning a swift and ruthless attack upon weaker, unsuspecting prey. A rustle began to flutter through the room, as the Romans became impatient for the bloody show to begin. Even the gladiators on the podium had grave, consequential visages. Then Cleary turned and looked Nikki straight in the eye, winked. With a smile and a shrug he gracefully shifted his weight to the battered wooden cane and hoisted himself out of the chair.

There was a spark in the bright blue eyes, a flush to the full cheeks. It was obvious, at least to Nikki, that he was trying to suppress a shy smile of affection for her. His body energized, as though he had been in deep repose before.

She saw a blitz of emotions cross his face and then careen through his body.

Nikki smiled back to him, despite herself. There was a connection of sorts made between them. How utterly alone this man was. He was, at a very minimum, hated by every soul in the room. He was the epitome of pure evil to most of them, in fact. Nikki found herself wondering how a simple, honest engineer could evoke such ire for nothing more than speaking the truth. Just because that truth ran counter to the combined corporate, political, and military power of America - was that any reason for the ire ~ for the loathing that now pursed all lips, thinned all eyes and otherwise riled all in attendance, as people turned in their chairs and found the object of all their pent-up emotions?

It was almost a hysterical rancor, and it emanated from the great power of the Senators presiding, metaphorical swords at the ready and shields protracted.

Those in the audience near Cleary, they seemed to begin doubting their own strong feelings, finally to see the allegedly evil, oft-disparaged man in the flesh. He was not evil looking after all, at least by outward appearance. A furtive glance up to the podium, though, and the softening of sentiment vaporized - replaced by a renewed malevolence. Authority does that to people. Those in power are Right. All others are wrong. The Senators were the supreme Authority, especially in this place and on

this day. Cleary was the enemy. It did not take long for the overpowering filter of prejudice to make it so.

Cleary gained full stature, then balanced briefly, somewhat dramatically. With a casual look around the room, he seemed to dust the final hint of relaxation from his psyche, a kind of last checkout before liftoff. The runway was clear, though the skies may be cracking with static electricity, or arched with lighting.

Cleary was readying himself for the flight down the long carpeted aisle to the beckoning anvil-shaped thundercloud. All systems were operational, "Go." With a side twitch of his head to the right, favoring his bad leg, he pushed off. Momentum escalating indescribably, it was as though a steam catapult was propelling him forward, along the aircraft carrier deck to lift off.

My God, Nikki told herself, what a sense of control and confidence. He was a helpless gladiator in a Coliseum full of lions no longer. No, not the hunted, but the hunter. The remarkable transformation etched itself on his face, where a stern, even grim, look anchored a strong mouth and muscular neck. A carelessly manicured mustache gave Cleary a subtly wild look, a lion's mane tamed but not quite rid of the wildness of the steppes. An appealing hint of gray-tinged the mustache and sideburns with just enough authority to give his energetic youth a doubt of wisdom and maturity. The barest hint of stubble roughened jaws and chin, profiling clean lines careening along the edges of his mouth. The jaws were clenched, and the lines deepened, seeming from the stress of acceleration, irrevocably toward the seat of power.

Ever so slightly, over the course of a few paces, his head tilted back with supreme confidence. Oh, but he was enjoying the ride, the stress, the responsibility. His eyes settled into steady focus, from their earlier wanderings; straying to neither side but ever so intense in their preoccupation with the Senators.

Cleary's ultra-short hairstyle had been popular in the military many years ago, before the peacetime slackening of standards. Thinning on top, it contributed to the almost savage look of the man. He was a warrior, and he was visibly committing himself to the coming battle. If you thought, a little pattern balding was a sign of weakness, all the better for the unprepared state that would put you in. It was a palpable sensation, and nary a one who saw him could but catch their breath in a chest suddenly constricted - with fear.

Cleary made everyone in attendance witness that he, the accused, was ready. Damned be your preconceptions, he was the champion in this room. This was his moment. No, it was not the Senators' or the audiences' or the Peoples.' It belonged to him alone, to Will Herndon Cleary.

Elderly veterans of foreign wars stiffened in their chairs, at this vision from the past. Memories of war and discipline and pride straightened their backs.

Nikki gazed in open admiration at Cleary. She too was arching her back to get a better view as the distance between them increased.

Not a single word passed the lips of anybody in the assembly. Silence reigned supreme.

Only a few dozen heartbeats had passed, and this modest man had at once vindicated his reputation and his standing. It was a level playing field now, Nikki thought with a tinge of awe.

The Committee sensed their control ebbing, and the Chairman broke the spell with a crack of the gavel and a command over the shrieking intercom.

All eyes turned to the elevated podium, and obeisance bolstered obedience within the gathering of citizens. The veterans hunched their shoulders back, their admiration and memories turned defiantly against this man who was obviously a traitor to every vestige of their once common cause. The women, many of whom had begun to visualize romantic things in their conscious mind - of gallant and strong leaders, galvanizing men to feats of purest honor; well, they never even reached the blushing stage. Instead, their now pursed lips and downcast glances exuded a profound sense of shame and dishonor. The vision of dashing courage evaporated, quickly stanching from out of the subconscious.

Only Nikki, among the women, blushed at the rank, rude bravery of this strong man. She intuitively, no tangibly; felt the huge odds against him. She knew he would surely leave this room disgraced, dishonored and utterly ruined. Cleary obviously knew the odds too, but they seemed to fuel the fire of his determination. Undaunted, he paced slowly to the front of the room. Nikki's empathy escalated with every stride he made, away from her safety and warmth and compassion.

Cleary was obviously in great pain as he maneuvered with the cane down the isle. People along the way saw it too and reeled back from the passageway in denial. A little twinge cracked the corners of Cleary's deep sunken eyes with each step of his right leg. He quickly shifted the weight of his strong, lithe and heavily muscled torso to the other, but not before creases of agony traced back from the corner of his eyes. The overall effect was at first gruesome, then humbling - a man so ignorant of pain, what is he capable of? We, who have become ultra-civilized, cannot comprehend the supreme human instincts that still in some places predicate survival of the fittest and not survival of the most connected. How frightening, one who could be so alone, so

unsupported, and so utterly unafraid to be pitted against the awesome veneer of ultimate civilization.

Pausing briefly before his appointed chair, Cleary stood shortly. He then noticeably shifted all the weight of his body to the bad leg. With style and elegance, he gently placed the cane on the table. It was his sword, and with it, he was daring the Committee to mortal combat.

The Members saw this orchestrated action. They saw, too, enormous pain pass from eyes to the corners of his mouth. A horrendous grimace cascaded across his features briefly, shocking the seasoned politicians with the raw closeness of it. Just as swiftly it became a smile and slightly uplifted eyebrows as if to say. I am pain. I am agony. You can hurt me no more than I already am. Try.

The Senators were visibly flustered and stealthily glanced between themselves for the confidence of conspiracy.

The audience missed this innuendo. Every eye in the room had been glued to Cleary's back as if they could riddle all the pride and determination right out of him by the raw vehemence of their glares. These citizens displayed a menagerie of emotions among them: jealousy, hatred, animosity, rage, and betrayal. As the crescendo of pain coursed through his body, Cleary's back arched slightly, and convulsively he bowed forward then back.

The few Jews in the audience were surprised. Subconsciously, they recognized this concise motion. It was the traditional, measured bow of their liturgical service, to usher in the Sabbath; and they were ashamed suddenly, to be party to all of this. It was Saturday. Cleary had reminded them. They should all be home honoring the Sabbath. Instead, they were here to witness an intellectual crucifixion, and the accused - a non-believer, at that - had the gall, the temerity to honor the Sabbath in a way they could not. Stood up so, their shame coalesced into an even worse hatred borne of suppressed indignity.

Jewish law forbids any worldly activity on the Sabbath day, except in life and death circumstances. Cleary was obviously in such dire circumstances. He could break the Law. No other Jews in the room were so privileged. The fractional-second bow had practically shouted to them: you bow before the might of these earthly proceedings in defiance of Adonai. May God help you, and the vengeance that will be upon you.

A slew of emotions transfixed each of the dozen or so Jews in the Senate meeting room. They were all familiar with the Biblical injunctions, reinforced by rabbinical interpretations over the ages, calling each generation to renew the Earth. There were even a few Cohens among the audience, the traditional high priests of the matriarchal Jewish nation. All conscientious Jews were called upon to do their appointed

lot, to return the Earth and all of its creatures, back to their original pristine condition at the time of the Garden of Eden. The burden fell even harder upon Cohens.

Renewal is a powerful undertone to many of the most sacred rituals of the Hebrew faith. The planting of trees on Tu Bi Shevat, the Sukkot homestead during the fall and many other nature-enhanced festivals all reinforced this sacred obligation to "Repair the Earth."

Look how far we have come from the Garden, not a few of them pondered. Here is a man who epitomizes the very essence of our faith, respect and stewardship of the land. Here before us, he stands - alone against all of the entrenched forces that have pillaged the Earth in the name of profit for generations. Here we are, in unanimous support of the environmental harassment that promises to end in the utter destruction of nature's innocence. Look, here we sanction this lynching, savoring the moment.

The cursed rebel has the gall to use our own rules against us and to deny us this ultimate salvo of bloody victory: golden lucre.

With resolve on her face and shame in her eyes, a dignified Cohen left with great solemnity and care. To those who remained, the significance was too painfully poignant. As Cleary had ushered in the Spirit of the Bride of Shabbat, now the Shechinah, or womanly essence of Adonai, was abandoning them as well.

No sooner had the door closed upon her exit, another Cohen rose and left. Then, one by one, almost as if planned to maximize the disruption on the proceedings, the entire cadre of lesser Jews left. Many eyes they captured with their bleak glances as they stole from that place, from sundry distant parts of the room. In each person touched by their crass abandonment, resolve strengthened.

The small exodus took several minutes to run its course. The Senate committee become more irate with each slamming of the heavy chamber doors, as the proud Jews left to be home. There was agony in their faces though, to be missing the absolute destruction of this evil man, Cleary. An ancient pleasure, it was, and it not felt for many, many generations. Too many years, yes far too many they thought - each in their own way. It was good to be that way, but they left assured the lone rebel would mete his due punishment.

Grateful for the support of the Jews, the Senators on the Committee put their exodus to good use. Their reward would come, once the dissident disappeared. Damn, but they might have had a martyr on their hands. These clever Jews had saved Congress from that ignoble fate, and the Committee would need to toe the Party line no longer. So be it, time to

destroy the man whose very presence marshaled hopes and discontent among the People.

Indeed, the departure of the Jews bodes ill for Cleary. Even given their opposition, their renowned sense of honor and justice made others ill at ease and less confident in their shallow Christian consciences. In such marginal circumstances as this, the hint of doubt could have spelled a chance to emerge victorious had Cleary been able to sway emotions in his favor. With the Jews gone, though, thus went the conscience of the place.

Nikki sensed the almost palpable shift in the place as the last of the Hebrews left. At first, during the exodus there had been an escalation of anger and the darker emotions. The audience followed the Senator's lead and showed their dislike of this uncouth behavior by the stalwart witness. Impatience to get on with it heightened the emotions further, into an occult-like fervor.

Then, as the big wooden door closed one last time with finality, it was as though an ominous dark shadow entered the room in their stead. It was as though, collectively, the crowd in the Chambers had left their confessional behind, and with a clear conscience, they were henceforth free to follow their brutish collective will.

People who had been standing around the perimeter quickly filled the emptied chairs left by the Jews. The distraction was gone, of people trying to get comfortable, leaning against the walls or sitting squat legged there. Now everyone focused on the podium. A hush settled upon the entire assembly. A dark, sinister sensation filled up the high-ceilinged hall with its angst.

Nikki was frightened for Cleary. His bright, brave and optimistic entrance was long since forgotten by all in attendance. He was far away from her now, and could only make his case by the conviction in his voice and the obscure technical particulars of his case. The Senators faced the audience, spotlighted on their raised podium. They were the puppet masters of the people's emotions.

An indescribable panic grasped Nikki's heart then. It was wrong to stack the odds so greatly, against anyone - a foe of the state though he might be. The verdict was ensured, though not a word had transpired. Everyone was on the edge of his or her seat, though. This was a strong and noble opponent, and they were greedy in anticipation of the slaughter, anxious to see their own champions excel and supersede the upstart.

Nikki, trembling with a sudden chill, gathered her coat - making ready to leave this place. Unable to deal with the blatant hypocrisy and outright blood thirst clouding the eyes of those around her. . . perchance they would think her a tardy Jew, and she could leave this place relatively unnoticed.

Just as she leaned forward to get up from her seat, Cleary spoke for the first time.

"My name," he said in response to a query from the court reporter, "is William Herndon Cleary." The voice, with a lyric sense to it, was utterly unexpected. It was so different from the Senators' that were structured by a stoic confidence and practiced professionalism. Cleary's was cheery and unrehearsed, spoken by a man proud of his given name - and a little bit shy to hear it loudly over the p.a. system.

Nikki - now seated again firmly - found herself smiling, and hunching her own shoulders forward in shared embarrassment. It was the kind of emotion that, sensing at home watching TV, she would have reached quickly for the remote control to change stations. Here, though - there was no escaping it! She had to hug herself tightly to keep from bolting. Oh, to be away from this place and what they were doing to this man. No matter his offense, it was inhuman to exploit the humanity of any individual in this cruel place.

A tear glistened in Nikki's eyes. She had to swipe it away quickly, to keep from revealing her sensibilities to neighbors. A little snuffle and it was gone.

Lightness in her chest remained a reassuring sensation that warmed her, calmed her. Cleary's voice reinforced the sensation.

"I am here at the request of the Senate Energy Policy Committee to testify concerning my professional opinion of the Global Warming Treaty."

"We are aware of that Mr. Cleary," interrupted the Chairman.

"I am an expert in the engineering discipline of energy conservation," Cleary continued with a slightly louder voice, clearly enjoying himself now. "And author of several books, and many technical papers on the topic."

"Yes, and I am Chairman of this Committee," interrupted the Senator with an even louder voice, "And you will speak only when spoken to, Sir." With a quick little chuckle, Cleary made the Senator seem like an impatient parent chastening a child on an obvious lesson of in high etiquette.

"Well, yes, Senator," the defendant continued petulantly. "Thank you very much for inviting me here today - I am most grateful for your hospitality." The hint of irony was not lost on the Chairman, who had begun to get a little red around the collar.

"Mr. Cleary," intoned the Senator from Virginia. He had a southern drawl, heavy as molasses on a pancake griddle. He tried to smooth ruffled feathers, "We are happy you are here today, and we want to hear first hand why you are so opposed to the policies of this here Committee."

"Why, Senator," said Cleary, himself from Louisiana, in mock southern dialect,

"I am most pleased to be here with y'all; thank you." Cleary grasped his hands upon the top of the desk then, silent in response to what was an invitation by the Senator from Virginia to begin his testimony. Several long moments passed.

"What, pray tell is the matter, Mr. Cleary?" the Chairman said finally, with exasperation. His neck was a bright red now, and he reached up to loosen his tie.

"Mister Chairman, Sir, I haven't been asked a question."

"Oh, for crying out loud, Cleary - speak your mind," said the spunky lady Senator from Texas. "You have made your point - too well," she continued. With a big smile and a coy turning of the neck she tenderly reprimanded, "We are not your enemy - would your enemy ask you to come testify?"

"I may not be your enemy, ma'am" Cleary said very seriously. "But you all are most certainly my enemies. Please, ask your questions and let me go home."

The dame from Texas stared him down, and Cleary felt like a straggling longhorn on a long dusty trail ride. Best speak your peace or consider yourself defeated as far as I am concerned, said her best rattlesnake look.

"Fine," interrupted Cleary with an intrepid smile. "But first I would like to ask the Committee a question."

"Very well," the Chairman spoke quickly, relieved to have broken the deadlock. "What is it you would like to know?"

"One reason, why you oppose the Treaty." Then raising his hand with a single finger raised, "Just one, please. I would like to address each your concerns, to your satisfaction."

"Why, principally," said the Chairman, leaning back in his big chair and taking his glasses off. Despite the gruff exterior, Cleary was relieved to see that his mind open on the issue. "Principally, we believe it will cost American jobs."

"I can relate to that, Senator. I've been laid off a few times myself," silently counting on his fingers like a kindergartner practicing his new math skills.

"Let's see; my first job was in exploration drilling; lost that to the Arab oil embargoes. The second one, with the Army Corps of Engineers; peace killed that job.

Then I did some nuclear power plant design work; anti-nuclear

sentiment ruined that one. Next was consulting in the construction industry, first as a mechanical, then electrical, then plumbing engineer, etc. Hell - different idiosyncrasies of the construction industry killed all those good jobs," throwing his arms wide in pretended frustration.

"Mr. Chairman," Said like a supercilious adult now, "My point is this: entire industries come and go every year. Jobs are lost and created. Very rarely does it have a rat's damn to do with anything you do here in the United States Congress." They were listening now, and quite intently.

"You may not see it, Sir, but you don't really have much power at all," Cleary said rather matter-of-factly.

"Y'all are all the pawns of special interest groups, powerful marketing schemes, and influential industry representatives. They have lobotomized you all. Y'all don't make decisions, though you may think you do. No. You're automatons, little cogs in a great big machine that somebody else controls," with a hand on his forehead and a look of utter frustration.

Just as they were about to squash this blatant denigration of their Authority, Cleary deftly changed tact." You people do have one very nice function, though." The panel warmed to that, relaxing a little in their big leather chairs. "You can affect public opinion." Turning to look at the audience, tarrying an anxious moment before turning back to face the Chairman.

"And you don't even see the wonderful opportunity this Global Warming Treaty offers you." Seeing the doubts coming back on their brows, "And no, it's not an emperor-with-no-clothes kind of deal, either."

"It'll cost you nothing, to sway public opinion in favor of energy conservation - but the entire economy will benefit; and the United States Treasury as well!"

"I am sorry, Mr. Cleary," the Chairman said with a hint of compassion in his voice. "This panel thinks differently - the Treaty is going to be very bad for the American economy, and we oppose it unanimously," looking to this side and that to confirm this damning judgment.

"With all due respect, Sir," Cleary responded instantly. "I think you people are acting quite paranoid about this whole deal - like wild animals caught in the headlights of civilization." Immediately the Committee began to object as one. Their confusion in selecting the speaker that gave Cleary an opening to continue.

"Damn, Senator - you even think I'm the enemy, me!" He stood with his hands on his chest and looking, pleading at each Senator in turn. They were speechless, now. Cleary had stolen their fire.

"Me. The enemy," sitting down, with his head in both hands, elbows

leaning on the table. Then he dramatically reached into his trousers pocket for something.

"Take it - my Army Medal of Commendation - your highest peacetime award. You can have the god damn thing, for all the trouble it's caused me." The Chairman caught it and laid it gently on the table before him. "Ten damn years in Hell that stupid colored ribbon cost me," Cleary said quietly.

"Would your enemy put his life in jeopardy to help you?" he directed at the lady from Texas.

Shaking his head from side to side, almost snorting with disgust, Cleary continued. He was a raging bull, and they were not about to try to reign him in. Let him dig his own grave.

"Let's see." Breaking into a smile, Cleary stated mechanically. "Now where were we? The Treaty will cost American jobs?"

"Now, its obvious to me that you people have been spoon fed the official policy about this energy conservation business: 60,000 jobs lost. Gas prices are going up by sixty cents. Corporate profits are declining. Government income is plummeting."

"Seems to me, your idea of energy conservation is real, real primitive." "Don't use any energy, so you're conserving it, no?" said Cleary, reeking with sarcasm. "Damn lawyers," he said then, under his breath but loud enough for the hushed assembly to hear it clearly.

"It just is not true, I tell you." The crude language grated on their finesse, rankled their feathers.

"Is spending \$10,000 for equipment to save a school \$30,000 a year in utility bills going to lose jobs? No, but it'll give a couple thousand kids a nicer school and dramatically lower taxes for a whole community."

"Would you spend \$5,000 in engineering fees to have plans for a new Senate Office building reviewed by a consultant, to save \$50,000 a year in utility bills and \$5 million in construction cost?"

"Do you need a calculator to do that kind of math? Spend \$1000 today, get

\$3000 back over the next twelve months. Then the debt is paid. Now you have an extra \$3000 to spend on new things; an extra \$3000 each and every year, then 'till kingdom come. You have money to spend on jobs; let me say that again: J. O. B. S.?"

"Understand?"

"You people are guilty as sin," as a little of the fire and brimstone of the Old Testament prophet crept into his presentation. "Has this

government paid billions of dollars to create energy use standards - and entire bureaucracies to enforce them - only to have them totally ignored by every single entity under your jurisdiction?"

"I object to that, Mr. Cleary," interrupted the lady Senator from Texas. "The state of Texas has one of the best energy conservation offices in the nation." Her head tilted up a little in pride. It did not stay that way for very long.

"If I were you, ma'am," the witness said quietly, "I wouldn't brag too much on that organization."

Holding up his hands as she drew in a breath to object, "I've worked for your Energy Conservation Office - in fact, I was the program's Design Review Engineer for a few years."

Leaning far forward on the desk, Cleary continued. "And you know what? I reviewed dozens of multi-million dollar projects," banging a fist on the big wooden table with each of the words now, "And not a single one of my comments was followed." Hands grasped safely in his lap now, Cleary continued trying to control his white-hot anger.

"No, ma'am. Your people do not want to save energy. They only want to spend money. Oh, yes they are expert at them and their high life Consultants!"

"You know," he said then, with a smirk smeared on his face. "You fellows could learn a whole lot from them Engineering Consultants. Yes, I think so." Then pointing at the Senator from Texas, "You really should stop in for a visit. They will fall over you. You can sign up for their advanced course in Waste Management 101. Let us see, what would the course description be? How to look busy, spend billions, and create projects that look good but actually waste more energy than they save."

Just as she started to interrupt, Cleary turned to the rest of the panel. "Don't y'all look smug!" Pointing a finger at each one in turn, "I have worked for the Federal Government conservation offices too. They make Texas look like the model of efficiency by comparison!" Cleary's fists rattled the table.

Again, they got their privates in an uproar; but Cleary changed tact before they could organize a decent response. What fun, tying government committees into knots.

"Meaning no disrespect, Senators, but ya'll should know that energy conservation is about as high tech as you get in engineering. It uses the most sophisticated electronics, the most powerful machines, the most skilled workers, and the most highly developed construction techniques in the world."

"The most profitable division of Motorola last year was - guess what? Their building products division."

"You got it? Motorola - electronics - high tech?" peeling fingers back off his outstretched hand as he did so.

"Sure, you're going to lose a few jobs," Cleary continued more calmly.

"Raise taxes on gas to reduce consumption equals less gas pumped, plus fewer minimum wage attendants. Is that your modern math?"

"Where do we get seventy percent of the gas: overseas. So seventy percent of the jobs in production and transportation would be lost there. Guess what?"

Higher prices of gas mean more domestic exploration and drilling. That means LOTS of jobs - only one out of ten drill wells is productive - and highly skilled, technology-intensive jobs.

"Would you guys rather have American boys pumping gas or rough-necking on an exploration rig? Would you rather them swab the deck on an oil tanker or trip drill pipe out of a three-mile deep drill well in the Gulf?"

"Raise the price of fuel, and people look for smaller more efficient cars. Detroit has to retool all their plants, re-engineer all their cars, and develop a whole new technology. Sounds like lots and lots of jobs to me; good, high-paying ones at that."

"We must look at the big picture, Mr. Cleary," the Chairman said when the defendant paused to regroup. "A jolt to the U.S. economy at this time may throw us into a recession."

"Sure, and lose money for all the high living yuppies that contribute to your filthy rich campaigns," Cleary said before he could help himself.

"Yes, that too," the lady from Texas conceded with an all-knowing smile.

"How about we look at a little longer picture, Your Honors - like beyond the next elections?"

"I guess you all know the problems Japan has been having?"

"I guess you know too that Japan has been in a severe recession for the whole of the 90's?"

"Did you know Japanese pay about four times what we pay for gas?" "Makes you think twice about raising the price of gas, doesn't it?"

"Sure. But Europe pays the same amount for gas - and they are as competitive as the U.S. and getting more so!"

“Exactly where are you going with this?” interjected the lady from Texas.

“OK, I’ll lay it all out for you. In the near future, the U.S. may have to face the facts and pay higher gas prices ~ with no hope of relief, ever. That is a maybe, right. A big maybe, though, because it would mean perhaps a decade of severe recession, as Japan has been going through.

“Let’s see, now, how would our competitors be doing during this decade while the U.S. was in the doldrums? The European Union would continue its present economic expansion, getting stronger and stronger as more nations join.

Japan would have stabilized, and begun a solid, steady recovery, pulling other Asian nations into its sphere of economic influence. The result will be two economies far, far stronger than ours, and in a very powerful position to compete us into nonexistence.”

“All because America was too damn ignorant and proud and stupid to join the community of nations and sign the Global Warming Treaty.

“All because we refused to embrace the idea of energy conservation, and to pull this nation into equal terms with our competition on the use of energy in all of its forms.

“All because the United States Senate was too short-sighted to see beyond the next election, and its own selfish, short-sighted greed.

The Chairman interrupted Cleary then with a loud rap of the gavel and asked with a voice dripping in sarcasm, “This Committee thinks you are a little too wrapped up in this energy conservation stuff, Mr. Cleary.” With a charming smile, he glanced to either side of him; to indicate the other members of the Committee concurred. “We appreciate your enthusiasm, but we think your case is far overstated.”

It was Cleary’s turn to interrupt rudely. “I appreciate the Honorable Senator’s understanding, but I assure you your impressions are based on pure ignorance of the engineering facts.” Then he added with sharp sarcasm, “And that goes for the other members of the Committee, too.” Looking each in the eye, in turn, as he did so.

The Committee was properly subdued, so Cleary continued.

“OK, then let’s do an energy audit of the House of Congress right now then!” The Chairman started to protest, but Cleary continued undaunted.

“Take the main Chamber, where everyone meets for joint sessions,” then added to the lady from Texas, “Don’t worry it’s not too difficult, ma’am.” He looked away from her, but looked back a second later and said, “Just think of it as a small version of the Texas Legislature, OK?” With

a few odd face expressions, they shared a joke: everything is bigger, in Texas.

"The air conditioning system for the House Chamber is designed to provide 20 cubic feet per minute of air for every person in the space. That is the law. So, with a thousand people in the room, such as for a joint session to hear a State of the Union address; 20,000 cubic feet of air must be delivered to the space."

"What that means is that about 250 tons of cooling capacity are needed to cool that air. Maybe more if there is a lot of hot air passed within . . ." The panel was concentrating too hard on the technical details to notice the slight to their passion.

"I assume you all have an idea for air conditioning tons? A small house has about five tons of cooling in the hottest part of the summer."

"Please, Mr. Cleary - where are you going with this?" asked the Chairman, obviously strained by the hard numbers. Lawyers are great with concepts and slippery financial dealings, but make them use hard, responsible engineering kind of numbers, and they freak out.

"Bear with me, Sir," holding up his hands to stay the Chair. "About ninety-five percent of the time there are only about ten people in the room," holding up ten fingers to do the math for him. "A couple of senators giving a speech to the camera, and that's it - am I correct?" as he slowly peeled two fingers back, like a child's trick.

"Those few people only need about twenty tons of cooling, at the most."

"Yet, the air conditioning is blowing all that outside air in the space as though it were completely full - totally wasting 250 tons of cooling, for maybe nine months of the year."

"You want to conserve energy? Go ahead, right here in your own House; you waste on the order of \$30,000 a year just so you right honorable Senators can have a nice place to speak to the media."

With a jolly chuckle, the Chairman conceded. "I am sure, young man, you are mistaken in this." Then, with a supreme air of ultimate confidence, he pronounced, "There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that ours is the most efficient air conditioning system possible." The rest of the Committee nodded their unanimous agreement.

"Brother, where have I heard THAT before?" Cleary interjected with a roll of his eyes and head and then turning around to try to make a connection with an audience. He did so, but turned back in a snap, mumbling something to the committee, leaning forward across the table. "Why is everyone was so bloody serious back there; what, they think we're in Congress or something?"

“And I suppose you think all this technical stuff about Global Warming is so much balderdash, Senators?” Then lowering his voice so only the Chairman could hear him, ‘Let’s see if it can’t be explained in a thirty-second sound bite it’s not true because you can’t explain it to your electorate? (Pointing to the audience behind him) Is that what we’re talking about here?’

Then even more quietly, not intended for anyone to hear, Cleary continued. The whole assembly hushed swiftly to catch his words, though; most heard at least the last few. ‘Obviously, the fatheads don’t really want to learn anything at all about my business, or any other scientific or technical business; like some obscure Global Warming Treaty. Give me a G., and a W. then a T. What does that spell? Crispy critters, is what it spells, toast! Round ‘em up Martha; we’re going hunting.’ Yippee, like a Wild West cowboy in the movies.

Then, still totally oblivious that anyone had heard his soliloquy, Cleary said loudly into the microphone, with a sarcastic jeer. “I guess I won’t waste your time anymore with all these pie in the sky ideas, Senator.”

The Committee was gesturing amongst themselves, in an almost comic attempt to decide who would make the rebuttal. All the while in the background Cleary continued the rambling monologue as he gathered his papers and notes together on the table before him. Perhaps he thought the microphone was off, but everybody in the room heard him clearly.

‘Here I am, a guest of these nice people. Why, pray tell, did they ask me here anyway, but to teach them a thing or two about saving money, conserving energy? Where’s the beef? If everybody else thinks, I am an expert, why not them. Good grief, what the hell did they want me for - a damn celebrity roast? Why look here, Scarlet - there’s the marshmallows! Here, Brett let me help you roast some. Fade scene to plantation home burning while love simmers.’

Looking around and shuffling papers some more, in a kind of delaying action, hoping he could yet accomplish something here, the witness had lost their attention. His words were what had their undivided attention. “Just like Nero they all are, playing the fiddle while Rome burned, did he. Hear they are now, two millenniums later fiddling around themselves, while the whole Earth burns - totally oblivious of anything but their own petty circumstances. If somebody does not want help, who can help? O hell, this boy is out of here, gone. Adios amigos. Ciao.”

Finally, getting up from the table with some difficulty, Cleary, with a pirate’s smile on his face and a rascal of an expression, said into the microphones, eyes straining to focus on the Senators as he did so. Stress had crept into his voice, which came brokenly and with a strong accent. “You people are in for a REAL big shock, and soon. You are going to

need my help someday. And you know what, I'll let you stew in your own juices until hell freezes over."

Then standing in place for a moment, he mused out loud. "Or should I say until the earth boils over." Then he waved his arms a little, to simulate a pot boiling over. The Committee and the audience alike must have thought he had lost his mind. They literally backed away from him, eyes wide with this abrupt menagerie of emotions.

"Good Luck, Gentlemen. And LOOK (pointing directly at them, menacingly) - you're going to need it," said with great cheer and a toothy smile. Like a pirate dividing the spoils after a treasure haul.

Carefully smoothing his tie, Cleary buttoned his suit coat all the way down. With a spat of spit parlayed to the hand, he stayed the disheveled hair, and maneuvered as swiftly as he could from the room, without so much as a look back. He was the stern witness, slick and smooth, with a respectable cane that no polite citizen would take notice of, carefully making his businessman's expeditious exit after honorable kowtow to important powers on a high mountain.

Three

*He took a potsherd to scrape himself
While he was sitting among the ashes of his family.
Then his wife said to him,
“Do you still hold fast your integrity?
Curse God and die!”
Job 2:8 - 9*

After the hearing, Will Cleary was no longer the arch villain, though he was still far from vindicated. To the contrary, people always castigate the bearer of bad news. If anything, the hearing enhanced his radical reputation. The complete outsider, severed of all links to civilization per se, he had tried to shame them all into seeing the forest for the trees. No, he was still very much the prodigal citizen. Well, now he hoped they had many more things on their mind, and that he was not among them.

Will Herndon Cleary left the hearing room the same way he arrived, alone and completely unnoticed. The audience whispered about the theories he had unleashed upon them. Nary thanks to him, though, not even a passing glance of recognition or a smile; for opening their eyes to a fresh new perspective.

True or not, it was a global vantage much lacking before.

Just before leaving the meeting room, Nikki saw him pause briefly. Shifting weight to his good leg and leaning against a wall, with the cane for support, he looked around the room. With a deep sigh, it was evident. He did not really want to leave this place and these people. Did they no longer need him?

Sadly, Cleary stared down at the floor and poked the carpet with the cane, like some derelict homeless Viet Nam veteran on Main Street ignored by all passers-by as irrelevant and superfluous. It was a cruel fate, to have such insight, to have made such a sacrifice, then shunned because of it. He bore the fate gracefully though. He turned slowly, to return to the bleak wilderness from whence he had come. The heavy door slid shut behind him, with authority and finality.

A more melodramatic man would have felt some self-pity or a renewed loathing for a people who could treat another human being with such

objective disdain. He could have thought, 'tis the fate of prophets since ancient times - why should there be any difference in this modern age? He could have stayed, and helped sort out the confusion he had willfully fostered upon this assembly.

It could have been a moment of acceptance by his peers, Nikki was sure. The craven bogeyman, all had seen, was human after all. He had as many frailties as anyone, and the audience had begun to empathize with him. Their convictions shaken, victory was in sight. Why had he ended it so abruptly?

Driven by the mystery that enshrouded this strange man, Nikki stole from the room and rushed into the hall. Her haste was unnecessary because he had not gone very far at all.

Shocked, Nikki saw that the strong, proud gait in the conference room had slackened. No longer the spry veteran of honor, he was a hopelessly disabled citizen making progress down the great tiled corridor as best his disability would allow. People scurried past him going both ways with such haste that he had to maneuver to the outside wall, to be out of their hurried way. There, he had to maneuver around every propped open door, each doorstep and every other obstruction. The pace was so slow that Nikki found a hard marble bench and sat, waiting for him to make his way down the corridor.

It was a quiet spot and peaceful, after the chaos of the meeting room. The tapping of random footsteps and the soft echoes of hushed voices speaking in confidence were a pleasant, calming influence upon her frayed nerves. Even the cold, hard bench was reassuring; hard, earthly substance it was, veined like a pregnant woman's ankles. Odd, never to have noticed the beautiful intricacy of the designs etched in the smooth rock. How many eons had it taken? How many species had the land-borne, nurtured and raised to independence and pride? How many currents of cascading water, broken as the womb's miracles entered the warm sun's light for the first time; how many and what disparity of fluids had caressed this rock, each leaving its own signature upon the face of the rock? My God, what on Earth were we doing to this land, she thought.

Now she realized why he had made the kind of exit he did. Had the audience seen him now, the frail man who had trouble even navigating down a simple hallway, he never would have had a chance. He could have uttered God's own truth, and no one would have believed him, their cognition clouded with prejudice. Alas, you could believe only healthy, handsome, unblemished men went the current paradigm.

Glancing up from her reverie, Nikki saw Cleary just as the portals were closing behind him. One last time, silhouetted against bright

sunlight, she saw it beckoning him into its warmth and renewal. One last flash of blinding light and he was gone.

She was convinced that he wanted to be alone. Silently, she wished him all of the things he wanted: success in his war, relief from his infirmity and human warmth in his lonely life. What sort of man could thrive in this bleak world without any of these things? Yet, evidently, he had done so.

Was it the mystery of the man, or curiosity, or the heaviness in her heart? Be what it may, Nikki cast aside her own doubts and rushed down the hall in pursuit. Perhaps it was a little nudge from the Almighty, that pushed her from her seat. What prophet does not need help, so utterly exposed to the ruthless currents of raw time? What God can lack the compassion to tend the needs of His very Own?

Bursting through the doors, the bitterly cold northern wind blasted Nikki back to reality. It ripped at her coat and chilled her face, making her eyes water.

Blinking in the brightness of the sun, amplified and focused by the glistening snow on the ground and the icy coating on the trees; Nikki couldn't see much of anything, much less her quarry.

Blindly running down the great bank of granite stairs, Nikki took two at a time. Grace and propriety be damned. The ache in her heart focused all of her attention. Where could he be? He was crippled - he could not move that fast, much less on stairs such as these. My goodness, but it had not been that long since she lost sight of him.

Reaching the bottom of the stairs, in full panic now, Nikki wiped the wind-induced tears from her eyes and tried to see what she could. Still going at breakneck speed across the wide sidewalk abutting the street, a taxi door slammed and there before her eyes was the silhouette of Will Cleary leaning forward to give the cabby instructions.

"Oh thank God," she cried and hailed the next taxi in the stand and breathlessly told him to follow Cleary's cab. The driver uttered something about, "Have I seen it all yet in this town?" and pulled away from the curb, carefully onto the slick streets.

Despite the cold, the parks and passageways were alive with tourists and sightseers. It was the holiday season after all. School was out, and families were enjoying the holidays - frigid weather or not. It was cheering to see so many intrepid souls about in the nation's capitol, even on a day such as this.

Nikki's ride had only a short way to go. Cleary's cab had stopped by the Wall, the black, bleak Viet Nam Veterans Memorial. Oddly, alone of all the monuments near the Capitol, the Wall was completely bereft

of people. Nikki suspected that was exactly why he had come to this place. She told her cab to let her out a half-block before his stopped taxi.

The wind had calmed now. With the sky clear and the sun bright, it was a pleasant day after all. Nikki caught up to him, deciding deceit was very much the wrong way to approach this man.

"Excuse me, Sir," she said - suddenly a little shy, worsened by the cloud that frosted the air, as she spoke, "Aren't you Will Cleary?" Giving him the best smile she could muster chapped though it was.

"Yes. Ma'am," he replied, glancing sideways at her then quickly back to the sidewalk and its patches of ice.

A few steps later, having expected a reaction of some sort, he paused in his studied pace down the walkway, looked at her squarely. She was a pace beside him and had metered her gait to match his.

"Oh, you're the nice lady from the Senate Chamber!" he said as a warm smile caressed his face. A little patch of ice, she noticed, had formed at the tip of his mustache and he nervously reached up to melt it away.

"... Though I walk through the Valley of Death," he muttered with a smile. Then continued his measured pace along the treacherous walk, "I guess I'm the coward now, running away from the Lion's Den," said quietly without turning.

"No, not at all," Nikki replied. Looking around for a place to sit, she motioned toward a nearby park bench, and he nodded, heading that way. "I think they're more like a bunch of sheep needing a shepherd," she replied, somewhat proud of her shallow intuition and light empathy.

"Oh, so now I'm the wolf am I?" he said with a wry smile and maneuvered into the bench next to her. Then leaning a little forward, both hands clasped on the cane before him.

"I'd much rather be out here anyway," he responded not very convincingly; looking side to side, hoping for some people to be with, and letting out a deep sigh when there were none. With a shrug then a smile, he relaxed back into the bench, turned and looked at her. "Had I known you would be here, I would 'a left the room a whole lot sooner," with that totally disarming Irish accent.

"Are you Jewish?" she blurted out. The answer had her burning with curiosity. She was afraid that he was, but mystified by its possibilities.

"Oh, my - a bold lass at that," he replied much to her consternation, laying on the pure Hollywood accent heavy and rich.

"Straight to the crux of the matter, you go too," he continued then with no accent at all. There was a sturdy southern softness to it, with a hint of a European pace.

"Oh, your thinking about the Jews who left the meeting?" he said with a chuckle. It was the first she had seen him completely relaxed since seated by the isle before the hearing.

"That was very good of them, don't you think? Too bad they missed the action." Both hands now on the right knee, massaging it probably against the cold. "Not as if they hadn't done it before."

Nikki focused on his answer, and could not think of anything else to say. A few moments of acute embarrassment and her reply came.

"Well," shyly stuttering the words, "No; actually, no I am not Jewish," and with upraised arms and a look of consternation, "What - ever heard of a blond hair, blue-eyed Jew? Slavic features no less! Me, no; I'm pure pagan."

"My goodness, lassie - if you think that Senate chamber was hard on me; could you imagine how I'd be received in a Synagogue? The grim reaper of the

Holocaust itself come to make amends; talk about a sheep among wolves!" he said not at all convincingly. The oozing Irish accent keyed her in.

"No, 'tis a nice philosophy and has penetrating teachings, but it's not me," then gently tapping her knee in friendly jest. "Now what kind of question is that to ask a man just after he's left his own crucifixion?"

Nikki, hoping he would think her sudden blush was a face chapped by the wind, responded, "I didn't really think you were much like them," and his eyebrow raised and questioned. "Well, you know - Jews are the Establishment if they ever were anything; you aren't, by any means." With a coy smile, she hoped he would not pry any farther. "Other things too. You are too proud, too independent. They are a family religion; belonging is everything."

"No, you're quite right there. I am more like Job. He wasn't Jewish - did you know that? Had his own Book in the Old Testament, one of the very best; and he wasn't even Jewish - a pagan, he was! Innocent man loses everything - family, fortune and land - no fault of his own. Even the Lord abandoned him at his moment of greatest need."

"No, I find it extremely hard to have faith in much of anything," Cleary continued with a rueful smile. "Religion only works if you already have the good things in life, you know: love, success, family, friends, happiness. Easy to have a strong faith then; to believe in heaven and all that."

"Me, all I've ever had is perseverance, pain, and a very hard and steep road just to survive." Then looking her straight in the eye, "No, I'm sorry if it offends you, but I have trouble enough being a good Irish."

Continuing with what she now recognized was a mock Irish accent, "Much less trying to foster belief in some greater good."

Looking far into the distance, the melancholy returned. "Just about the only fellow I can relate to in the Bible is Job."

Then, with a surprising burst of energy, "Did you know he was one of only three people in the Bible who actually spoke to God?"

"He got everything back, eventually: a new wife, new children. New farm too, plus respect and fortune. Still, new children, they might have been; but I'm awful sure he missed the original ones."

"Fairytale endings and false hopes are another reason why I am not very religious - not much belief in them. With what I have been through, I'd have to be a blithering idiot to believe in a compassionate Higher Power."

"It's funny, you know." Then, he looked at her playfully. "What's your name, miss?"

"Nikki," said with relief, to breach that small barrier to their one-time intimacy.

"My, that's a lovely name," then turning to look her up and down. A quick touch to her long amber locks, and he said, "It suits you, very nicely."

"Nikki," trying the name out again as if he had never heard the name before, and he seemed to like its character and style.

"I am very pleased to meet you; killer whale that I may be. I do have a heart, you know," said with a charming growl and a barring of teeth.

"It's obvious to me," she confirmed with a tender lilt of her own, "You have a warm and tender heart indeed," clasping his hand briefly in hers.

"You realize, do you not, Will," she said. Then, "Can I call you Will?"

"Yes, 'tis my name." Grasping her hand strongly, "Sounds nice when you say it. Sounds strong and proud, the way I always wanted it to be."

"Will?" Biting her lip from concern, "You realize, don't you - you must return." He pulled his hand swiftly from hers, pain etching the corners of his eyes.

"I cannot!" he said, arms clasped around his chest in frustration. "What do I owe them," pointing back from whence they had come. "... They, who have taken all that I ever had, and have disparaged and destroyed all that I could have had?"

"Spoken like a true Irishman," Nikki said with steel in her voice.

"Woman," he said, so loudly she was glad there was no one else about.

"I am no Irish." Striking the prone knee, "Hell, I'm barely a man," but still smiling as he said it.

"Now, Now. Self-pity is not your style - and you know it!"

"Why, Nikki," he said in a small boys voice. "Why must I return?" "Because you can make a difference."

He twirled one finger in the air, saying wow - big deal.

"Then because you owe it to yourself - to other veterans, to your family." None of which had the slightest effect.

"Will?" as she carefully sought his hand and clasped it. Waiting until he turned to look at her.

"You owe it to the land, Will Herndon Cleary."

"You owe it to the land," he said too, not yet convinced. But it brought a lump to his throat, and tears welled swiftly into his eyes. They rolled silently down his wind-reddened cheeks. He let them be, and they froze small treks in the lines of his face. Nikki reached up and brushed them away with slight fingers, cupped.

"It is only the wind," he murmured with a weak smile. Then she looked around and held it up the tear-moistened finger. Yea, right; the wind; indicating that there was no coolness on her moist finger - no wind.

"You don't really expect to win this thing do you?" Nikki inquired a short spell later.

Cleary just kept staring ahead, hunching his shoulders - just you try to stop me.

"What," she said sharply then. "I suppose you fancy yourself some sort of martyr willing to give all on behalf of the Goddess - Mother Earth?" Shaking her head in dismay, "Don't you realize that bizarre 'whole earth' movement went out with the hippies, way back in the 60's."

"No matter," was all he would say.

"Typical damn male stoicism - talk to me, Mr. Cleary! Who ARE you - what are you? Why are you here? What do you hope to accomplish with all of this?"

"Tinker, tailor, soldier, spy." Came the odd reply.

"Great - now he fashions himself a renaissance man, of all things," said Nikki, accompanied by a snarl. She was on the verge of getting up to leave.

"I will tell you who I am, dammit," the forceful words she had been hoping for.

"I am an expert in this arcane science called energy conservation

and its obtuse effect upon human ecology.” Nikki faltered for a moment, but unwilling to accept more of the same scientific psycho-dribble, she stood up and made to bid her farewell.

“Have you never had a friend, Nikki?”

“A really good friend - someone like, when they suffered, you felt just as bad or worse?”

“No, I suppose a political animal like you has no friends - well, how about a pet? A nice furry feline amigo?” She turned around and stood before him arms askance. Last chance, Bubba.

“When the kitty is sick you bring her to the vet? When it is time for her rabies shots, and you can’t get her to the vet for a month after the deadline - you worry, don’t you?” He was furiously trying to get to her, and this seemed to be working. “And until you can get to the vet, I bet you keep the cat inside, out of harm’s way?”

“So now you’re trying to tell me you’re the vet and the world is your patient?” Nikki said, her arms now braced to her hips, daring him to admit to this delusion. “And oh, you’re the only vet who knows the cure for the patient too - am I right?”

“No, lady - you’re the one who’s deluded. Why must you conjure motives for me yourself? Am I so hateful a person that you must give me the most outlandish of all possible motives?”

“The Earth is my friend is all I said,” he said solemnly, gripping hands in his lap. “I am only trying to be a good friend in return.”

“OK, maybe it’s more than that - the Goddess is my only friend; has been for many, many years now. And, yes, in fact, I do hate Washington and all it stands for.”

“Yes, I probably hate you too - because you are part of all this,” sweeping his arms out. “But at least I am willing to give you the benefit of the doubt.”

“At least I don’t get up and walk away at the slightest provocation to my comfy little world!”

“Sure, look at yourself,” was Nikki’s reply. “You couldn’t walk away even if you wanted to.”

Cleary smiled unexpectedly, slapping his knee hard with the wooden cane. “You might be surprised!”

Four

*“Have you walked in the Recesses of the deep?
“Have the gates of death been Revealed to you?
Have you seen the gates Of deepest darkness?”
Job: 38: 16-18*

FORT SAM HOUSTON, TEXAS

Cleary had been working night and day collecting documentation, organizing his thoughts and otherwise preparing the case. It was an extremely complex docket, and the Army Counsel did not have much time to help.

Cleary’s strong conviction was to disprove the diagnosis completely. It was an outrage without a shred of solid evidence, and he was quite confident of succeeding. He kept up the fight for almost four months, including two formal appeals, in which he shredded the medical evidence mercilessly. The attending physician and military counsel both thought he was receiving help from other professionals, doctors and lawyers.

It was just not so.

Cleary was completely on his own. The precious resources of his middle-income family could not help him. Neither the family attorney nor physician offered assistance in any way. Nor could any member of the large extended family, all of whom were within driving distance of Fort Sam Houston. To aid and abet his cause was unthinkable, so profound was their respect for authority - and their fear of him.

He was utterly alone.

The preliminary appeals cited medical evidence only. He received physician’s tests, and other documentation submitted to the Medical Board for review and confirmation of the attending physician’s diagnosis. No counsel had by this time been appointed by the Army to assist him.

Two times Cleary rebutted the medical board reviews, with medical documentation, personal testimony and other substantive evidence gathered on his own at the base library. He assembled it all in the few

spare hours of private time allowed him each day, on a hospital ward where the only possessions allowed had to fit into two small drawers.

By day he worked in the Occupational Therapy Clinic, by night he had to socialize with other patients to provide firm evidence of his mental fitness. Little time remained to build his case and write his rebuttals. Indeed, without any formal medical training or any prior knowledge of the appeals process, the medical testing methods, or the characteristics of the diagnosis itself, he had a great deal to learn. The entire medical appeals process took less than four weeks to be completed, from start to the end.

Each time his rebuttals were accepted, and then the case went to the next step. The third stage was a court hearing, similar to a formal legal hearing, with witnesses, and sworn testimony.

It was a tremendous strain, collecting the documentation from within a closed hospital ward, with no contact with outside resources. Eventually, the endless hours and steady strain of delving into complex legal and medical issues wore him down and took its toll. Fortunately, just about that time legal counsel was appointed to help him, to handle the final appeal before the Physical Evaluation Review Board members, who were not all physicians, themselves. He was a busy Army lawyer, but one Cleary came to trust implicitly.

The U.S. Army Physical Evaluation Board met in a small conference room at Fort Sam Houston, in San Antonio Texas on March 11, 1985. It consisted of three senior officers: two line officers and one medical officer. U.S. Army Captain Paul Franco, of the Judge Advocate Corps, represented specialist Fourth Class Cleary. The entire morning was set aside for the Hearing. There was a lot of evidence to present. Usually, the hearings were only a half-hour or less.

Has the member had sufficient time in which to prepare his case?
C: Yes, sir.

P: SP Cleary, has your counsel informed you of your rights to testify?
C: Yes, sir.

P: Are there any questions concerning them? C: No, sir.

P: Counsel, you may proceed.

C: Thank you. Members of the Board, SP4 Cleary has been on active duty since October 1982. Before entering active service, he attended three colleges, worked for Exxon Oil Company as a mechanical engineer and did extensive research and writing in the field of engineering, physics, and religion. At no time before entering the Army in October 1982 did he ever act or display activity resembling bizarre behavior. Today, he will present evidence to prove that:

The medical board's allegation that his illness existed before service is false.

That his original admission to Chambers pavilion was a result of command influence and pressure to silence SP4 Cleary's written comments on his treatment at White Sands Missile Range.

That he did experience trauma during his time in service, but previous military training was sufficient to prepare him for these extraordinary circumstances.

The medical board's diagnosis is without any substantial proof or firm documentation.

P: The contentions stated by Counsel are duly recognized.

P: I would like to question COL Saunders first, and then SP Cleary.

C: Very well, proceed.

P: (after being sworn in) Please state your name and rank.

WIT: Robert E. Saunders, Chaplain, COL, U.S. Army, Post Chaplain, Fort Sam Houston.

C: Thank you. COL Saunders, when did SP4 Cleary start working for you? WIT: The summer of last year around June.

C: Did you know at that time the circumstances that led him to Fort Sam Houston?

WIT: Yes.

C: Did you observe him in his work environment? WIT: Yes.

C: How well did he perform?

WIT: Exceptionally well. In fact, I had put him in for an Army Medal of Commendation.

C: Were you surprised when they admitted him to Chambers Pavilion?

WIT: Yes, I was.

C: Why is that?

WIT: I had seen no erratic or peculiar behavior. Even with the fact that he had come from a very stressful situation and he was having additional stress with having purchased a car that was having all types of difficulties, and he didn't have a lot of funds. He was unusually able to blend in with the staff that was already there. He did not seem to be having any difficulty interacting with people. It looked like he was under control.

C: I have entered into evidence a letter from the Chief of Psychiatry. This document is the evaluation of SP Cleary's state of mind at this same point in time. A psychologist writes trying to read between the

lines of a very detailed document, with all the names, places, and dates blacked out.

DATE: 27 JULY 1984

From: Chief of the Community Mental Health Service
To: Office of the Inspector General.

The enclosed typed statement dated 17 July 1984 is twenty-five pages in length, with names obliterated for anonymity. An official of your office provided it for appraisal. I reviewed it for its psychopathological implications as a sample of an individual's manifest behavior and thought processes.

I note that substantiation to the veracity of some of the alleged reported events is absent. Nor have I had an opportunity personally to interview the writer. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence indicating the necessity for further psychiatric/psychological evaluation to ensure the mental well being of the writer who was apparently experiencing considerable inner turmoil, distress, and desperation at the time of this writing. It is next to impossible to predict harmful aggressive behavior. Nevertheless, the psychological dynamics illustrated in this written sample are possible precursor conditions. They may precede behavior by some types of individuals who may not otherwise manifest occupational impairment and who may otherwise present him in social interactions as proper and exceptionally brilliant.

The writer of the provided statement should undergo a thorough psychiatric evaluation as soon as possible. This may involve inpatient observation. It is also necessary that future psychiatric appraisals have the benefit of the individual's statement. The availability of this particular statement by the writer is critical. Psychiatric authorities must have it to render informed assessments of the individual's potential for personal or public peril, medical care needs, and fitness of duty and retention in the service. I further appraise these matters as sufficiently important to warrant a recommended exception to the provisions of IG confidentiality in this action.

C: The defense counsel contends that this representation is extreme, biased, and extremely prejudicial. It obviously is erroneous, given previous testimony by COL Saunders, an expert witness intimate with SP5 Cleary at this time, and who has extensive training and experience in counseling people facing difficulties in their lives.

Furthermore, the defense counsel contends that neither the Office of the Inspector General or the Psychiatrist who wrote this statement had the authority to divulge any matters concerning SP4 Cleary, to anyone. The Department of the Army transferred SP4 Cleary to Ft. Sam Houston. It was a confidential transfer, and all service personnel are obliged to follow the very specific requirements in such circumstances. The Chief of Psychiatry circumvented this aspect of the military coda in collusion with the Inspector General. In so doing, they have breached the most intimate of confidences in the military; the sanctity of the Chain of Command. They have also abrogated the oversight by the United States Congress, who directly ordered this transfer.

I, therefore, recommend removal of this prejudicial statement from consideration. The medical authorities obtained it unlawfully.

The board acknowledged this request. They would take it under advisement. The testimony continued.

C: OK, COL Saunders, when did you hear of SP4 Cleary's admittance to Chambers?

WIT: It was the weekend. I visited SP4 Cleary and talked to the nurse that was in charge. It was a male captain, and we spoke privately. The male captain and his junior staff on the ward saw no evidence of mental problems. I said I had not observed any either. I visited with SP Cleary and assured him that from where I had seen him, I had not seen any mental disease. In doing that, I said we got horses tied outside and that we were ready to put him on a horse and bring him back - have a shoot-out here.

C: Let the record show, gentlemen, that COL Saunders, himself an expert mental health professional, and an experienced psychiatric nurse both confirm that SP4 Cleary was in good mental health at the time of his admittance to Chambers Pavilion. This admittance happened immediately after interviewing SP4 Cleary. The chief psychologist authorized a rush hospitalization for observation on the psychiatric ward.

WIT: The record should also show that I read the full statement by SP4 Cleary, and it was as lucid and concise an account as I have ever read. The statement was given for review to my NCOIC, who shared it with me. Neither of us thought anything like the opinion stated earlier in the doctor's letter.

C: Did you eventually speak with Dr. Durand-Hollis? WIT: Yes.

C: What did Dr. Durand-Hollis say to you about SP4 Cleary?

WIT: I went over with the NCOIC (Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge, the senior enlisted man at the Post Chapel) the first of the week, and I went in to see Dr. Durand-Hollis. I had gone over there asking to

be able to take SP Cleary back to duty and saw a Sergeant who referred me to a Captain who brought me in Dr. Durand-Hollis who said he wanted to see me. I said I wanted the NCOIC present, he agreed, and Dr. Durand-Hollis told me he had read only ... I'm either remembering 1-1/2 to 3 pages of his document ... and that he was the sickest of the sick. He categorized approximately five degrees of sickness, something and it wasn't psychological terms... it was like sick, sicker, and the sickest of the sick and that SP Cleary was the latter. I told him I have had some dealings with patients and some psychiatrists. I told him this had certainly not been at all obvious to me and appreciated his patience and could we talk about it. He said, "I've read it, I've read these few pages, I've determined that that's what's wrong with him, and now I'm going to go about proving that."

C: So before Dr. Durand-Hollis even examined SP4 Cleary, he believed SP4 Cleary was severely mentally ill and set out to prove it?

WIT: To the best of my knowledge, he had not even spoken to SP4 Cleary. (COL Saunders met the doctor early Monday morning, before doctor's rounds. All Dr. Durand-Hollis had were nurses' weekend observation notes, which COL Saunders said were favorable). He had only read very few pages; it was about 20 pages. 20 plus pages, single-spaced (the entire document)

C: Thank you, COL Saunders. You may step down now.

C: The defense would like to state for the record that Dr. Durand-Hollis was subpoenaed, but did not come to this hearing. In his absence, counsel would like permission to enter into the formal record written statements made by the doctor in various medical documents issued on SP4 Cleary.

P: That is a most unusual request. However, the board will approve, with the caution that you quote the doctor exactly.

C: Thank you, Sirs. I have an associate who will read from the official medical records pertinent replies to my inquiries.

P: Please swear in the witness.

C: Please state for the record the principle reason for diagnosing SP4 Cleary as you did.

WIT: He believes that he has developed a special formula of a scientific nature.

C: I would like to enter into evidence the following document, Exhibit B, from the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center, NASA. I will read it in part,

"Your work was reviewed independently by both an engineer and a

physicist. Although their backgrounds and scientific/engineering interests are different, both came to the same conclusion. Your concepts about the Unified Field Theory appear to be so profound that you are years ahead of the current scientific thinking in the areas in which you delved.”

Dr. Durand-Hollis, have you read this letter? WIT: Yes, I have.

C: Very well. Please continue with your diagnosis.

WIT: He believes he has found the true meaning of religious materials and concepts.

C: I enter into evidence the following letters in evaluation of SP4 Cleary’s religious writings.

Exhibit C, Letter from Rabbi Karff

Exhibit D, Letter from John, Wiley & Sons Publishers

Exhibit E, Letter from Rabbi Paul Tarlow

Please note that Rabbi Tarlow is a licensed psychologist, as well as having a graduate degree in Sociology from Texas A & M University.

Dr. Durand-Hollis, have you read these letters? WIT: Yes, I have.

C: Very well. Please continue with your diagnosis.

WIT: His thinking is manifested by persecutory thinking, with concerns about his safety after having made revelations about his peers.

C: So, you were you aware of the problems he had at White Sands, having turned in drug users and then had his life threatened? How would you categorize the stress he encountered at this time?

WIT: Moderate, routine duties.

C: Dr. Durand-Hollis, how would you categorize SP4 Cleary’s predisposition for this condition?

WIT: Severe. He had a history of marginal adjustment to personal, family, social, academic, and occupational demands.

C: Witness, please read from the Narrative Summary the items of SP Cleary’s educational history, for the record

WIT: He started school at the age of five and graduated from high school at 16. The patient, appointed to the US Naval Academy in June of 1974, resigned two years later when his father had a severe heart attack. He completed college with a Bachelor’s Degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Texas, cum laude.

C: Witness, please paraphrase from the doctor’s own Narrative Summary details of SP Cleary’s social, family, and personal life as exemplified by his military record.

WIT: At the Naval Academy he was 21st in his class of 1400, on the Superintendent's List, a Company Commander, Platoon Leader, and on the Deans List. He studied mechanical engineering while maintaining a 3.5 grade point average. In the Army, he was a Senior Student Leader and a Platoon Leader at his Technical school. He received an Army Medal of Commendation at White Sands Missile Range. While in the army, he has allegedly been able to get along well with his peers. He has not had any problems with his officers. He has not received any disciplinary actions or Article 15's.

C: Witness, please paraphrase from the Narrative Summary details of SP Cleary's professional life.

WIT: The patient began work at age 14 as a salesman and clerk for a small shop in his hometown. He remained in that type of work for a year. Then he attended the Naval Academy for two and a half years. His next job was as a carpenter doing home construction, for about six months. After graduation from college, he worked for Exxon as a drilling engineer for about two years. For the next year and a half, he was engaged in research and writing.

C: During which time he completed the two manuscripts evaluated by religious authorities, as well as the technical document reviewed by NASA?

WIT: That is correct. He continued research after enlisting, and in 1983 presented a paper to the Post Commander and Chief Scientist at White Sands Missile Range, on a portion of his technical researches.

C: How old is SP4 Cleary? WIT: 27

C: By any other measure other than Dr. Durand-Hollis' I would call SP Cleary an over-achiever.

P: How did the patient do in the hospital?

WIT: We gave him a Certificate of Appreciate for exemplary performance. I personally presented his case to the entire medical staff of the Brooke Army Medical Center, as a case study. Of course, his name and identity were confidential.

C: I see.

P: Was this presentation before the Medical Review Board his case?
WIT: I believe so, yes.

C: The physicians on the Review Board attended this presentation?
WIT: Yes sir, they all did.

C: If this is such an unusual case, is it not an exercise in futility to try to disguise the individual's identity? Three weeks later when these physicians reviewed your medical documents, what was the evaluation?

WIT: They were unanimously in agreement with my opinion. P: Yet, SP Cleary's appeal warranted this formal hearing.

C: The defense recommends striking from the record the medical review process preceding this formal hearing. It is prejudged and judgmental due to the unstructured and legally circumspect case presentation by Dr. Durand- Hollis before his peers at Brooke Army Medical Center

C: Sirs, the defense would like to call another witness, in the manner used for Dr. Durand-Hollis' word. He is CPT Mark Chapin, Community Health Worker at White Sands Missile Range.

P: Very well, counselor, but the same stipulations apply. C: Agreed.

C: Captain, how did you come to know SP Cleary.

WIT: He was referred to Community Mental Health Activity, White Sands Missile Range on 5 December 1983 by his commander for a mental status evaluation because of the service member's claims of a great scientific discovery.

C: Let the record indicate that at this time SP Cleary, after having been rejected by his commander, had gone to the next step in his Chain of Command, the Post Commander, Major General Fulwyler. MG Fulwyler reviewed SP Cleary's proposal and qualifications, and scheduled a meeting with his Chief Scientist and a mechanical engineer from the High Energy Laser Project, for early the next year. Now then, Captain Chapin, what did your evaluation show?

WIT: SP4 Cleary's mental status examination was within normal limits. He was oriented in all spheres, recent and remote memory intact, mood and affect were appropriate, thought content and form within normal limits. His eating, sleeping, and activity patterns were within normal limits and not recently deteriorating.

He had several friends in his unit, and there was no evidence of functional deterioration. There was little evidence of any overt psychopathology.

C: May the record show that SP Cleary had been at White Sands only a few months at this time. It was his first permanent duty station after AIT and Basic Training. White Sands is as an extremely remote duty station, which imposes special hardships on individuals.

Let the record show, further, that SP Cleary had Top Secret Clearance at this time, as do all service members on that post. Furthermore, he had special dispensation to work at the High-Energy Laser facility - the Star Wars site - which he did, being assigned by his Platoon Sergeant to assist in some atmospheric measurements within the laser generating facility itself.

Did you provide a copy of this evaluation to SP Cleary's commanding officer? What was his reaction?

WIT: The commander was not satisfied with the scope of the assessment, so I administered the MMPI. The evaluation report indicated some level of depression, passive-aggressive personality traits, and the needs for attention and recognition.

C: Would you not expect exactly this sort of evaluation, of any service member new to a remote post, at a difficult new job. After all, 93E is the most highly qualified Military Occupational Specialty in all of the Army. He was furthermore trying hard to contribute as a professional engineer to the betterment of his unit and the service?

I do not suppose it helped matters any either when an egotistical commanding officer ordered him to undergo a psychological evaluation.

I have no further questions for the witness.

Counsel summed up the balance of the evidence, provided by the personal testimony of SP Cleary.

Members of the Board, if the Disability Review Council is to adhere to its original decision that SP4 Cleary's condition is EPTS (existing prior to service), not service aggravated, it must rely on the medical board's analysis on this case. However, after careful analysis of the facts of this case, the foundation of the medical board collapses.

First, the medical board states that SP4 Cleary's three manuscripts, pre-dating his service, document his complex systematized delusional illness. It is obvious that Dr. Durand-Hollis, along with the entire medical review board are ignorant of the very respectable reviews obtained to date on SP4 Cleary's work. Furthermore, in order for that statement to be true, the examining psychiatrist must understand the technical works on their merits. That presumes that Dr.

Durand-Hollis is competent to comment on physics, laser technology, and theology. If Dr. Durand-Hollis was competent in these areas, he should have made that clear in the report. If he consulted others on the writings, he did not reveal that in the board either. If he relied on the comments made by experts in the field, he would have to give SP4 Cleary's work some merit. As the Evaluatee Exhibits show, SP4 Cleary has a BS in Mechanical Engineering and has worked in those fields for years. Furthermore, SP4 Cleary spent years researching the field. Do we want to let a psychiatrist's own views on physics govern the case?

Second, Dr. Durand-Hollis is not a theologian. SP4 Cleary's religious works are number one, fiction. More than one theologian who may have disagreed with some of his interpretations evaluated it. However, they did agree with some of it. If this FICTIONAL WORK did not offend the

theologians, why should the medical board tab SP4 Cleary mentally ill just because he chooses to write on religion?

Third, another psychiatrist, COL Johnson, also evaluated SP4 Cleary concerning his mental status last November. He was willing to state that SP4 Cleary's diagnosis may depend entirely on whether his ideas become refined in graduate school. You can see Exhibit J on that. And he also states the key point in this case: 'He (SP4 Cleary) deserves to be out of the Armed Services, where his scholarly ideas stand out like a sore thumb.' Therein lies the best hindsight in SP4 Cleary's case.

In retrospect, SP4 Cleary should never have pushed his ideas in the Army. His work performance and record were spotless. His peers and superiors liked him well enough, but he pushed the Army, he voiced his views. He, like any other scholar, was anxious at getting his ideas published and accepted. When the Army turned him down, he went elsewhere.

Furthermore, SP4 Cleary jeopardized himself by turning in his roommates for drug use. The anger and frustration in his letters to the various IG Offices was a response to the Army's lackadaisical attitude toward his safety. When threatened with harm from his roommates, SP4 Cleary had to get his Congressman to change his orders. That is what led him to Chambers Pavilion last summer. As COL Saunders swore today, Dr. Durand-Hollis already knew SP4 Cleary was 'the sickest of the sick' before he evaluated him. Is that how the Army wants its psychiatric evaluations done? Going out to prove one is mentally ill instead of ruling the diagnosis out?

Nevertheless, for the Army, SP4 Cleary was a nuisance. He pursued his technical manuals, voiced his personal views freely. He stepped on too many toes. It would be better for the Army to be through with SP4 Cleary because he caused too many problems.

At 1023 hours, 11 March 1985, the Board recessed for deliberation. Twenty-two minutes later it reconvened, and issued the following proclamation:

SP Cleary, the board finds you unfit to perform the duties of your rank as a result of physical disability incurred while entitled to basic pay and in the line of duty. The percentage of disability is ten percent. (a few months later modified by the Veterans Administration to zero percent) The board recommends that you be separated from the service with severance pay if otherwise qualified.

"Shit," Cleary said as soon as the Board and the court reporter had left the room. They were alone in the small wood-paneled room now.

"Boy, you sure screwed THAT up," he said to Captain Franco, then swiftly added,

"Sir."

"All that god-damned work I put into this case," Cleary continued, close to tears, "And you screwed me to the wall."

"I don't know what you mean," he replied innocently.

"You made it sound," Cleary picked up with gravity, "As though I were arrogantly 'pushing' my ideas in the Army. Hell, I talked to tons of people - a physicist at ASL, a couple of the meteorologists up on astronomy, and based on their encouragement sent a letter to the Post Commander. Then He set up a meeting, He invited his chief scientist, and after my presentation, They said they would give me all the equipment I needed."

"Jesus Christ, how else am I going to get feedback on my ideas? That's how science and research works - people spend years and years developing ideas; what, am I supposed to do it all by myself in a vacuum?"

"The only real mistake I made was sending a copy to the Israeli's, as any good scientist would do, to ask for a second opinion. No, actually the only mistake I made was telling my CO about that communication as any good soldier should. That's what blew the top of the kettle, wasn't it?"

"Wasn't it, Captain Franco?" Cleary insisted one more time. "Shoot, the only thing I did wrong anywhere was to be a better soldier than the rest. Everybody else hated me for it - the brilliant Captain here included," he muttered as Franco was gathering the scattering of evidence presented to the Board from the far end of the table.

"I'm sorry, Cleary - I really am," he said dejectedly. "Although I doubt it would have made much difference. You know what I mean."

"We did get what you wanted though - we disproved any trace of mental illness prior to your enlistment," Franco said with as much cheer as he could muster.

"Yea, right." Then Cleary put his head between his hands and spoke slowly. "Don't you see it, Sir?"

Obviously, the counsel did not.

"Dammit, their entire case was based on nothing but evidence derived from documentation prior to my enlistment. Everything else was complete hearsay. The entire medical portfolio focused on my manuscripts and their clear evidence of mental illness, and groundless accusations of my social, academic, and professional activities during that time.

"Take that out of contention, and - they - have - no - case." "And the Board's final decision did just that!"

"I'm sorry, but there are no further appeals allowed." Then cramming his papers into his portfolio, the Captain said he had an appointment, and whisked from the room. However, Cleary was in hot and angry pursuit.

"Who's this expert witness doctor at Wilford Hall you conjured out of nowhere? I never saw anybody over there - you made it sound as if he evaluated me thoroughly and agreed with Durand-Hollis. What kind of lawyer are you, anyway - not only making up evidence but using it to crater your client's case."

They had reached his second-floor office by this time, and heads were turning and ears straining to hear. "Since when," Cleary added with one last, desperate salvo, "Since when do psychiatrists base their decision on whether completely new, unproved theories are proven as true anyway? Why the fuck do you think we call them THEORIES? What kind of dead-beat medicine is that every scientist in the world would be in a padded room if their work were judged like that."

Safely in Franco's office, the counselor exploded. "You fucking naïve idiot - you got no sense at all." Raising the Venetian blinds, and remaining standing at the window as he talked on.

"Your smart, but you know absolutely nothing about the world, do you? Do you know the purpose of all the training the United States Army gives to its soldiers

or, at least, to those who have a little bit of faith in the system?" with a sarcastic snarl in Cleary's direction.

"No, you wouldn't would you? Your too selfish, too absorbed in your own bizarre world, your own motives, and your own absurd science. You are not a soldier or even a human being - you are a freak, that's what you are. The doctor was right; you know that don't you?" Cleary started to speak, and Franco practically shouted, "Shut up you moron - you'll talk when I give you permission!"

"This whole \$200 billion dollar a year system we call the Department of Defense has one sole purpose: to train troops to work as a unit, under adverse circumstances - the worse possible circumstances. Did you know that, did you- mister smart pants-know-it-all?

"NO, I'm sure you didn't." Franco turned around to look at him now, half expecting Cleary to have left the room already.

"Can't you see it, in your little crystal scientific ball? The Army, we are trained - over and over and over and over again - night and day and in between; we are trained to work together, in collective defiance of the enemy!"

"And you, son," pointing at him with a grimace etching deep lines of hate in his face, "You are the enemy!"

"Yes," seeing the hurt look in Cleary's face, and relishing the pain he had caused. "You are the enemy. We hate you, all of us. We taunt you, with just enough hope to keep you fighting; we practice on you - our verbal and legal bayonets are sharpened on people like you!"

With a raw laugh, Franco said with glee, "Isn't it just wonderful? You, who thought you were doing good and honorable things, have done absolutely nothing - worse yet, you have made the system better - to cope with the likes of slime like you." He took a couple of goose steps back and forth before the office window, then continued raving.

"When faced with an enemy - be it foreign, domestic, or like yourself the garden variety - we Army people join forces and drop our differences for the time, and smash the opposition. You are a bug, and we take immense joy in squashing you.

It is our job. You cannot possibly hope to overcome the United States Army. You are delusional just for trying to do so!"

"Ha," banging his hand on the desk, "I bet you think you will get political support to win this little war of yours on the outside?"

"Sorry, Bubba - wrong again!"

"Why the fucking hell do you think they call it politics? You do not think a big, powerful system - here since the time of Julius Caesar and long before THAT - squashes people like you? Rights, you think you have Rights. You are privileged to do nothing more than be a good citizen, a good soldier, and to have faith in the system."

"We gave you it all - the whole system was yours to explore, learn and win over; and you turned on it, you spit on our good intentions. Moreover, you think the Army or any branch of this government will give you the time of day after what you have done, and said, and thought? Boy, you're crazier than even they said in that room back there." Then he stepped across the room, grabbed Cleary by the elbow and ushered him through the door.

"Good luck, Soldier," Captain Franco said, and shoved Cleary out and slammed his office door with a smack.

Five

*I placed boundaries upon it; I set a bolt and doors,
And I said, "Thus far you shall come, but no farther;
And there shall your proud waves stop."
Job 38: 10-11*

"I'm scared Kip," Nikki said a while later, staring down into her coffee cup. Immediately, he regretted this confession of weakness. He had let down his guard and told her his nickname "Kip" which meant one thousand units, an engineering term. Well, he never could keep his bravado act up in the face of feminine wiles.

Cleary was a slight fellow, but strong. The sinews of sleek muscles pulsed beneath sculptured calves and forearms, hinting of a deceptive strength.

Sitting across from on the sofa in her hotel room, he was clothed casually in clean but well-worn tennis shorts and striped polo shirt carefully tucked into a trim waist. He looked every bit the professional of impeccable reputation and pristine ethics relaxing on a well-deserved vacation with his misses. As in fact, he was the wild man of the Senate chambers utterly subdued.

They had been talking about how he got into meditation in the first place.

"I remember now - it was a documentary TV show I saw on Irish history and culture back in the Middle Ages, that got me to thinking. Went and did some research on the Druid Culture. They were actually extremely advanced, you know - long before the time of Christ, and even before the ascendancy of the Jews. There were schools everywhere, a very sophisticated legal system, and the people were free and peaceable and quite cultured. The Druids ran it all." Then as Nikki began to show dire skepticism on her face, he retrenched.

"They weren't like you think - nature worshipers, heathens, uncultured, savages. They had schools of law and medicine and philosophy, libraries and a very fair system of justice. Druids ran it all. There were three main divisions of Druids: the leaders of worship services, the judges, and the antiquarians.

The Clan Cleary were the ancestral antiquarians - the keepers of tradition and history."

"And, yes, my grandfather is descended straight from the Cork County, Ireland Clearys."

"Couldn't find many authoritative books on the subject, though. Several old Ph.D. dissertations at the University of Texas library alluded to many, many similarities between the Druid religion and the ancient Hebrew religion. The Druids were monotheistic, had similar customs, traditions, and similar words to the Hebrews too. These hundred-year-old texts, yellow with age, claimed the Druid culture predated the Hebrew, and that the entire body of Hebrew philosophy was originally Druid.

"So instead of Moses receiving the books of the Old Testament, in a mental transmission from the Almighty, he did the much more human thing and just memorized the Druid texts?" Nikki said - and shook her head in dismay.

"I know it's outlandish and absurd," Kip replied with a smile. "Still, you can't ignore the fact that the Druids were a very advanced people, long, long ago and it's not right for modern history to teach they were a bunch of primitive country pumpkins."

Then he made one last stab. "There really was a Camelot, and a land of justice and chivalry and good deeds is what I'm saying. Ireland really was like that, and it was not a fable at all." Well, one more try - a little humor this time. Now, where's a good British BBC comeback when you need one?

"Now wouldn't that be fun! If the Irish really were the original Hebrews; and it was they who stole the Ark from the Temple in Jerusalem, all those years ago - before the Romans burned it to the foundation! Rather like a big Hatfields and McCoys feud. You take our Laws; we're going to take your Ark! Then, bring it back home to Erin! Only now, it is in the mists, upstream of a ragged loch hidden in a cave known only to the ancient Druids, now gone. They would have called it the loch'd Ark of the Covenant!"

Nikki grimaced, and Kip laughed like a hungry hyena. "Please don't tell anyone I made such a bad pun; back home they'd start calling me after O. Henry the famous punster also from Austin, Texas. Imagine, you'll have to address me as Will O. Cleary."

"So you don't like the Jews for stealing the Old ways?" responded Nikki, changing the subject herself for a change.

"NO, not at all. If they had not preserved the teachings, the whole druid philosophy would now be gone forever. Besides, the Old Testament is a needle in the huge haystack of Jewish teachings now; they have

enriched it so much over the millennia that the original texts are almost inconsequential. No, I admire the Hebrew ways very, very much.

"I only object," he said solemnly a few minutes later, "To their objection to meditation in the way of the Kabbalah - I would be summarily excommunicated for doing it. . . ."

He talked some more, and eventually drifted into his ideas about being a Kabbalist, and delving deeply into the obtuse mysteries of spirituality long since lost to the technological undertow of history. It was a difficult calling, drawing heavily upon every aspect of one's humanity: mind, spirit, and body.

Indeed, he took quite seriously the ancient caution to don the mystic shroud only if in supreme physical condition. Though the spirit ravaged the evil from within, its effects were externally manifest upon the body. He was physically strong, yes, but much more.

They were sitting in a cozy living room of Nikki's office-away-from-the-office- bungalow-hotel room. It was a short walk from the Houses of Congress.

Nikki empathized when he spoke of having gravitated toward the sea all of his life, drawn inexorably as if urged by some higher force. Her second - and much favored - home was on a Carolina beach. His home was on a lake in Central Texas. Now, it seems he had found the great pulsing sea within, a gulf limitless and so deep as to defy even the imagination. The sea was there, for sure; but the means to traverse it had eluded him.

They had been talking honestly for hours, trying to find the courage to be themselves, in this city of pretense and vanity. Then he proposed an experiment: A return to the sea within, to explore it; he as the ship, she as the navigator.

A long spell of silence had just passed, as both tried to savor - the idea; and the bold flavor of the chicory coffee freshly brewed, too. However, even New Orleans' finest couldn't distract them long from the beckoning mystery at hand.

"Why?" Nikki challenged. That was her way - to quest by questions, to lead by demanding a logical explanation for everything he did. She suspected Kip was not one to duck away from a dare.

"I know you don't approve of meditation," he began patiently. "It's just that what I do is not really meditation per se," wringing his hands in an outward manifestation of the consternation boiling within. How to explain in mere words what had always seemed so obvious and self-evident?

The very mention of meditation raised her shackles. In that, she

agreed with the Jews. It was not a Christian thing to do. It was medieval, eastern and primitive; it led away from God and catered to Satan. Nikki was a staunch Southern Baptist, and she adhered to the party line: they forbade meditation. Still, there was just enough of an adventurer in her to entertain the alternative, that correctly done it could enhance - even expedite - the spiritual journey that is life.

"The Jewish mystics said you could experience the presence of God," Kip explained, as he had done a couple of times already during their afternoon séance, with varying degrees of success. "In the throes of deepest meditation, they say He is there!"

"But you've been there before, Kip," she pleaded with sudden gravity. "And you were alone - He wasn't there." His eyes downcast then, an abject loneliness was obvious to Nikki's discerning eyes. It was not a human companionship he was lonely for, but a heavenly one.

Nikki had heard of this peculiar affliction, and she supposed it was the reason why people became monks or priests, even rabbis. Still, she had never experienced it herself; at least to the extent evident in Kip's dejected manner. "What makes you think you will find Him this time?"

Kip just shook his head slowly, biting his lower lip as he did so. He could not explain his sense of loss or of spiritual need, especially at a time such as this. He started to say something, then just heaved a sigh and looked away.

"What," Nikki said, prodding him. She knew, however, there was no hope of talking him out of it. Not now, that he would not communicate.

In a sense, the journey had already begun for her new friend. Slowly, he was receding into himself already, gathering resources into his sturdy body frame, even as he looked steadily into her eyes for reassurance. Nikki's eyes left his swiftly; she could not bear to see him do this. She was almost jealous of their God, having such a strong hold upon this very special man.

"I don't want you to go," she said in her most commanding and officious tone. "It's too dangerous," spoken louder. "Why would you do any better than the last time you did it?"

A smile spread across his thin lips then, blending an impossible conglomeration of bliss and sadness across his rugged visage. Swiftly Nikki realized that Kip really was remembering, but what he recalled was the journey within. Not its outward domination of his corporeal being. With an agonizing anticipation, she watched helplessly, as he escaped swiftly inward - into himself, into his psyche, into the presence of the Lord.

"You must open the Ark," she had said earlier.

He had told her about his efforts at a frantic resurrection of the old ways, and they had talked at length about his technique. What had gone wrong? The mystic texts of the Kabbalah were no help - they were so abstractly symbolic that even Kip, who had actually been to the places they described, could make no sense of them.

There was only the warning, of a chance encounter with the Prince of Darkness himself, Satan. The Kabbalists offered no description of that evil but infinitely clever being, and no explanation of how to cope with such a dire circumstance. Hence, their Kabbalah was no help whatsoever. It offered only the ominous warning, an arcane premonition from the far distant past.

Nor could Kip recall any details of his trances, other than the trappings of the Holy Tabernacle that are elucidated so elegantly in the book of Exodus. He could remember no other presence within, not even of the Lord. Only the Laver, the Lampstand, the Tapestries, and the Ark. These were all accouterments of the ancient Hebrew house of worship as preserved so carefully by the description in the Old Testament.

It had all started innocently enough. He had practiced a simple meditation for years to cope with stress and to relax. A simple routine, he simply went to a quiet little room inside his mind, away from it all. Kip had started to furnish this bare little room, with Holy articles. They made the place into a personal Tabernacle. Down the stairs to the room, he would pace. Slowly and purposefully, he approached the pool of calm and reason within. Leaving all the worries and worldly tribulations behind, he would enter. Down Jacob's Ladder, into the place within.

Instead of symbolically placing all of his earthly concerns into a vase as in the prescribed self-hypnosis ritual, he would wash his hands with holy water from the Laver; purifying his soul before entering the Holy of Holies. Then, instead of lying comfortably upon a couch to meditate entranced, through the first tapestry he would maneuver then into the sanctuary itself. There the Lampstand illuminated the space, spotlighting the Ark, the residing place of Yahweh Himself.

Before, Kip would lie upon the couch and repeat the thoughts he had predetermined to embed into his own consciousness. Now, having been reborn, he prayed at the Ark, kneeling humbly in the presence of the Lord. The content of his prayers was usually predetermined before he entered the trance; sometimes derived from scripture, more often something of his own devices.

Despite the Old Testament slant, Nikki still thought of Kip's retreats to within as nothing more than elaborate embellishments on the old meditation routine.

There was nothing he could say to persuade her otherwise.

Her cherished Christian morality was solid, curiosity notwithstanding. First, Kip tried to quote chaos theory to her. It is a known fact that patterns repeat throughout nature, the cosmos, and human history why not spirituality as well? The ancient Hebrews were a sensitive people who played out their lives in the desert. It was a place of almost complete sensual deprivation. To such an intelligent people - could they have actualized in ritual, externalized in their place of worship the tabernacle within each of them? Chaos theory says this is more than a possibility, but a probability.

Nikki did not much believe in this abstract science either, much less its bizarre ramifications. To her, Kip's escapades were still just meditations, and his tabernacle was a personal place camouflaged in a few Biblical things to make it more palatable to his uniquely eclectic tastes.

Then she remembered him, as if in a trance, when she had first seen him in Congress. Meditation was one thing, but that self-imposed state of absolute stillness she had seen; that was something else altogether. Whatever it was he did, it works, she thought.

The most provocative mystery, he was saying, was this: He had never before during meditation completely lost visceral contact with reality, his worldly surroundings. This time, knowing she was there to come to the rescue, he could become totally immersed in the ceremony. He wanted to try.

Was it his trust in her, or was it a confirmation that two people must partake of the experience, a man and a woman together?

"Why not try the obvious," Nikki had said absentmindedly, caving into his persistence. "If God is in the Ark, as the Bible says, then why not just open it when you are in the Tabernacle, instead of kneeling at in and praying there?" Raising her eyebrows and tilting her chin upward ever so slightly, as if to say - what are friends for?

"He helped you before," she continued smartly, "Of that, you are convinced, no?" Then to the grudging acknowledgment of his slightly arched eyebrows, "What's to lose?"

"So true," Kip said impetuously, a sly smile on his lips. Then, more soberly, "So, you think He could help me from within?" He clasped his hands and smiled a big one.

"Reach out and touch the Faith," came the sudden thought, clearly to both of them simultaneously. Seconds passed. Turning, they looked at one another; neither daring to say what both knew: both had heard the words, but neither had spoken them.

Looking down with mock gravity at his coffee cup, Kip said pensively

with forced levity, "What'd you put in this stuff anyway?" Not long after that, his trance had begun.

Smiling to herself to recollect Kip's so-serious devotion to this quest of his, Nikki almost regretted humoring him, leading him to believe that she was convinced he was truly on to something. Everyone needed their escapes, their hobbies, and their mysteries. Kip had his meditation.

Glancing down at the wind-up timer Kip uses for his meditations. Nikki starts. An hour has passed. She shakes off a disquieting sensation. Glancing at Kip, a hint of a smile seems to betray events happening within. Nikki reaches impulsively across to grasp his hand in hers.

"My god," she screamed out loud. "He's burning hot."

Screaming again, Nikki pulls her hand quickly away. Swiftly, she reaches across to slap his face, hard. There is no reaction whatsoever.

"Oh no. NO!"

Nikki shakes his shoulders violently (Kip is rigid as a board) punches him in the chest with all her might - anything to raise him from the nearly comatose reverie. A response is not forthcoming. Nikki panics. In a frantic rush, she grasps him and drags him across the room.

Into the bathroom, then violently into the bath she casts him. Kip does not even flinch when his head bangs against the tile wall, shattering his whole body, now crammed into the small tub basin. She beats his chest with clenched fists, begging the slackened form to respond.

Turning, Nikki reaches the faucet and turns the cold water shower on full force. It splatters all over, drenching Kip and soaking her own hair and clothes. The T-shirt clings tightly to her torso and outlines firm breasts heaving with exertion. Reaching to pull the wisps of thick black hair from her eyes, Nikki notices that her own hands are shaking.

Pausing, she leans heavily on the side of the tub, elbows locked to keep her entire body from collapsing altogether, onto the slick bathroom floor. Nikki hauls herself up onto her feet. She rushes helter-skelter into the hotel hallway, soaking the carpet and slinging water from her drenched clothes everywhere as she goes, down to the elevator lobby and the ice machine.

Nikki tears the freezer door open, slamming it up on its hinges, and fastens her small - still shaking - hands upon the bucket of ice cubes beneath the automatic dispenser. Then, oblivious of a few startled patrons in the hall, she hustles back to her room, the bath and the cascading sound of the shower on full force, ignoring the puddle of water soaking the carpet outside the bathroom. Pausing briefly to catch her

breath, knuckles white with the strength of her hold on the ice bucket, she plunges into the crisis.

Terrified now, Nikki is moving as swiftly as her delicate body will permit. Her high cheeks are flushed with exertion, her lips pursed into a wrenching, scrawled line. Lines course her smooth forehead and crows feet walk beyond the corners of tender eyes, now grown weary from just a few moments of frantic worry.

She pours the ice cubes upon the lifeless figure. Thrashing her head to clear the showering water from her face and hair, she rips Kip's clothes off. Pressing the ice, even to his private parts, she looks anxiously for a reaction - any reaction whatsoever.

Nothing from Kip. He's gone. Then Nikki tears off her wristband; tears his off too - she presses their wrists together. The blood from her own stigmata oozes into the open wound; sealing the contact between their wrists. She wraps a towel around their two wrists to strengthen the bond. Then she waits.

Minutes later, just as she was resolved to accept her friend's demise, Kip stirs. A smile creases his puckered lips. Suddenly a huge tattoo materializes on his chest, of a swordfish jumping high above the surf; impossibly, it starts to ooze bright red blood from a myriad of tiny tattooed dots; darker blue in others. The effect is stultifying; a 3D image almost. His huge chest heaves a giant breath, and the swordfish moves like the ocean itself. Nikki pauses momentarily in her labors. She rubs her eyes, and scrubs his chest; the tattoo remains. It is real. Nikki sits back on her haunches, aghast.

"You're a goddess, he had told me," she muttered in soliloquy. "The Sea. Kip, it's your weakness. And your power. Oh my God," her voice getting weaker and weaker until a shot wells up inside her and she says ever so loudly, "Neptune."

"Can't walk, no balance. Not a creature of the Land. Can it really be?"

A burst of hope invigorates her, sending a charge of energy and determination through her exhausted body and weathered soul. Shaking off a faint shiver of high anxiety, Nikki renews her efforts with vigor.

Then, slowly, inexorably, a trickle of blood pales Kip's supine cheek. A deep gouge made by her diamond wedding ring as she had slapped him in the grip of the initial, maddening panic - ten minutes ago it had happened; only now did it begin to evidence blood.

Then a subtle movement out of the corner of her eye. One hand is trying to part from the other. Moving up and outward, the hand reaches out into the space before him. There is an uncommon grace to the motion.

An image flashed into her mind, then. It comes forcefully and without her acknowledgment. The hand of her friend, was Adam reaching across the Sistine Chapel roof; across, over to grasp the outstretched hand of another, God himself?

Inching closer to Kip, as if vicariously to witness the Divine, Nikki reacts to a presence unknown in her mind. She is quite terrified. Intuitively she knows. Then, with a certainty that is stifling.

“He’s found the Ark! He found it and opened it. The Lord is within, He’s reaching out, across the mystery of the epochs.”

Then the outstretched hand begins to shake, slowly then faster. It becomes uncontrollable, and a grimace of enormous pain etches agony on the face that had only seconds ago been full of ecstasy. It happens so swiftly that she is startled. Without thinking she steps over to Kip and grasps the shaking hand in both of hers, steadying it with all her might.

The arm, it is enormously powerful; jostling her whole body with superhuman strength. There is no grip in the hand at first, just erratic movement of the arm thrusting her this way and that.

Then a grip is there in the hand, and soon Kip is there with her too. Softly he presses her hands with his, with gentleness belying the horror that speaks in his countenance.

Nikki closes her eyes at the look to him, and says spontaneously, “He’s with me. He’s back... Hallelujah.”

Nikki carefully draws him to her, and they merge into an embrace. Kip grips her so hard, in his immense anxiety, she fears a rib will crack. Then the strength goes all out of him, and he is limp in her arms. He is obviously exhausted. She manages to brace him on her shoulders, dragging him out into the room proper and getting him onto the couch, and covering him with a blanket.

Then, running quickly back to the lavatory, she wrenches, uncontrollably. With great heaving spasms, her body wracked with a storm that must surely have shaken her soul. When the eye of the storm calms, she collapses, onto the cool bathroom floor. A thick stream of tears courses her cheeks and a mournful wail tries to bring life into her spirit. After a spell, she is quiet and gathers herself together to take a shower.

Back out in the room, shower sounding in the background, Kip gets up with an effort, reaches into his day bag and hoists out a battered, well-worn heating pad, wrapping it around his arm. Then he nonchalantly wonders aloud how long it would be this time before his body recovers. He only wishes he had two heating pads, as the other arm was only now recovering from the recent mystical battle.

Then he shouts, "Behold, Leviathan! There will come another day and with it another battle."

As he speaks the curse aloud, the bathrobe opens up to show his chest. The swordfish tattoo glistens red and green and blue, as though the paint had just dried.

Six

*There the wicked cease from raging,
And there the weary are at rest.
The prisoners are at ease together;
They do not hear the voice of the taskmaster.
The small and the great are there,
And the slave is free from the Master.
Job 3: 17 - 19*

Kip was deeper in a trance, deeper than ever, ever before. His training had been to go slowly, ever so slowly into the depths, like taking one step at a time down a spiral ladder, into the unconsciousness. Lately, he had started to go faster.

Now, he had discarded the spiral staircase altogether. He was in free fall straight down the middle of an endless maelstrom.

From the outside, he looked like a man on a railroad train, rocking back and forth, side to side. Inside, it was going deeper and deeper, down a smooth tunnel, and bouncing off the sides now and then as attention dimmed. Lights passed, as they would in a subway train passing stations on the way, an occasional sound hurried past. It was always, always faster, and deeper.

Ahead would be the Archangel, and the façade of the deep cavern - projecting the Prince of Darkness. He would be waiting. He would be ready. He would kill. Kip was making himself ready, relaxing in the free fall, gathering his strength. As the bottom neared the lightness of the tunnel dimmed, with only an evil, malicious glow emanating from the very bottom. The Prince was there, his eyes piercing the darkness, as the beast's hoary breath steamed the air before them. There was a snort, and the beast clawed at the earth, ready to do battle fierce.

A glint of light scattered off the Dark Angel's leathery body armor. Kip looked from whence the light came, and there; behold, it was the Ark. Strength and power came from it, indescribable but true. The Archangel came between Kip and the Ark then, and there was death in the musty air. Hearing water droplets, Kip looked down to see his feet in water, a heavy mist caressing his ankles.

There was a moment before the Beast, its Master began their charge, and Kip was able to conjure his own weapons for this, his final encounter. Instead of the heavy armored battle garb of the Angel of Darkness, Kip chose freedom and dexterity. Leather shoulder pads and arm guards were all he needed. He did not have a Beast of burden, but a sly and fierce saber-toothed tiger. His familiar was a stealthy creature with quick wits and deadly bite. They were a swift pair.

The Dark Angel charged. The battle was on.

The conflict waged on for what seemed like years, but it was really only seconds. Both men engaged grievous wounds, first the Evil One then Kip.

Their beasts were stricken down too, but valiantly continued the struggle at their master's side. Thunderous sounds echoed through the chamber. The gentle glow from the Ark became stronger and brighter. It became hot in the cavern, and the mortal foes had to squint to see in the great light.

Kip glanced to the side, at the Ark. It was unbearably hot in the place now, and now the extreme intensity of the light of the Ark blinded him. A double fisted strike on the side of his head and Kip was down. A lump by his side told him that tiger was down too. Footsteps approached, splashing through the now boiling water covering the cavern floor. Kip steeled himself for the end.

A strong, hand encased in mesh reached down and grabbed Kip by the collar. The hand set him on his feet in one swift motion. Then the arm dragged him away, towards a spiral staircase cut in the cavern wall behind the Ark. Kip reached out just at the last moment and grabbed tiger by the scruff of the neck. As the limping Demon neared the stairway, the ever brighter light showed the half-dead Beast close beside the Dark Angel, helping his master haul Kip and tiger out of that place.

Just as they got on the stairs, the liquid on the floor of the cavern burst into flames. With a blinding flash, the place exploded in a cauldron of seething fire. Swiftly up the stairs they went.

A few short paces and they passed through an opening.

It was cool now, Kip noticed with relief. Then, looking around, he saw to his great amazement, a wide river of light racing before them. It was deep, massive, and impossibly full of purest energy. The Archangel grasped a fistful and dashed it on his face. Then he poured a like amount on Kip's prone body.

Shocked from his slumber by this life-giving fluid, Kip scraped it off his face and reared up on his elbows, ready to wage war again. As

his vision cleared what he saw before him was almost as fearful as the battle itself!

The Evil One was beating his chest with massive fists, and issuing forth the deepest, hoarsest laugh God had ever given a man. It was not armor upon his torso at all; the thick-scaled plates WERE his torso! Truly, here was a frightening mechanism of war.

"I've not done battle like that in millennia!" The helmet was off, and long dark locks streamed sweat onto impossibly broad shoulders. He stepped over to Kip, reached down, and hefted Kip to his feet with one jolt of strength. Kip steadied, and the Angel let him become balanced on his own.

Then the Demon reached out and grabbed his arm. Kip looked down to see his arm grappled in a shake not seen since the days of Arthur. Kip responded automatically. The shake locked, and they were as one.

The raucous laugh again, and Kip noticed his own sharp sword in the Dark Angel's other hand. It was an ominous sight, indeed.

"Lad, had you not given me the right grasp, your head would've been floating down the river by now!" said with a gnarly smile to chill your spine.

"By God, I've done it a thousand times before!" Then he let go of Kip, who then collapsed on the ground with his back at the mountainside. The Archangel spent a few moments tending their beasts, reviving them with the river Styx' powers; then trudged over and sat heavily beside his onetime foe.

"Aye," he said as they both stared at the tumbling luminescent river. "I've done it before, and would have done it again for you."

Kip started to inch away, afraid of this superhuman creature even more than before.

"Stop! I say," the Evil One said. "I mean you no harm. Our battle is over." Then motioning to the animals by the river he said, "See there - our creatures are at peace; and so shall we be too."

"I am the Old One," he said to Kip's startled, still unbelieving face. "I am Metatron, the Guardian. I am the Lord's servant, and charged with keeping all who are unworthy, from the Ark."

"I will remain here, Metatron will," he continued. "You'll need me to protect you now, that the Lord has revealed himself to you." The unnerving laugh echoed again!

"Can you think of anyone better, Boy?" he continued with a Byzantine grace. "Who could protect you more loyally than I? I have been your

faithful servant since time immemorial? I have battled you always, constantly, and desperately

to keep you away until you are strong enough,” swinging a thumb toward the flames billowing from the face of the passage from whence they had come.

“You would be defenseless, were it not for me, while you are with the Lord!” “Yes, I see that you speak the truth,” Kip said slowly.

“I will protect your unconscious,” he said with savage intensity. “You will not be fooled again, whilst I am at your side!”

Kip thought demurely, no I suppose you’re quite right.

“Off with you, then, young master!” With a roar and a strong slap on the back, he thrust Kip straight into the flaming passage, back into the presence of the Lord. As the heat engulfed him, and the roar echoed in his ears, dizziness felled him, and he was back.

Seven

*“Behold, let that night be barren;
Let no joyful shout enter it.
“Let those curse the day,
Who are prepared to rouse Leviathan.
Job: 3: 7,8*

A little circus played out that morning, in Nikki’s swank hotel room. Both awoke about the same time. Kip, still curled up on the couch, pretended to keep his eyes closed while Nikki swept into the bathroom, trailing the white bed sheet behind. Actually, he really did keep his eyes closed, because she checked.

Then, while she was cleaning up behind a locked door (he checked that too), Kip got half dressed and had the room all tidied up by the time she was finished. No sooner had she left in a billow of steam, than Kip was in the bathroom, closing the door carefully.

“Tell me, Kip,” she said loudly through the - just slightly open - door a minute later. “Do you always get so efficient first thing in the morning,” with a huff.

“You didn’t have to make the bed you know, we ARE in a hotel.” Then to herself, I can handle it though.

“Thank the U.S. Navy for that little quirk,” he said just as the shower started. “Hospital corners and all.”

You got that right honey, she said after checking underneath the bedspread, not quite believing it when she saw them. A few minutes later the shower turned off, and Kip yelled out at her. “Old sailor’s trick after a night on the high seas, Lassie.” A mumble as he towed off vigorously. “You make the bed up good, like tidy and new, and the little lady can’t resist the temptation to muss it all up again.”

“Kip,” Nikki responded with mock consternation, “You’re hardly out of bed and your mind is already back there.”

Something like, ‘bed, hell - I was on the god damn sofa all night,’ reached Nikki’s ears; ‘warm bed right there too all full of pretty lady; shoot, coolie’s mind never got OFF bed.’ She blushed a little to hear it.

"Navy men, they got to be prepared to shove off at any time, you see." She could hear the smile behind his words. "Must make the most out of infrequent port calls, you know."

"A lady in every port, Admiral?" came the slightly distressed retort. "Oh, oh," he said seriously, loud enough for Nikki to hear.

"No, ma'am, No me. Too many distractions will get you shot in a moment. Then never make it home to sweet honey."

"Good grief, our little Navy man has an answer for everything." She offered a little up herself. 'We'll see just how sweet this here honey is,' she grumbled.

"Begging' your pardon, ma'am." Kip said gushing with courtesy, "But that one's from the United States Marines." Then when she seemed to be not impressed, "You know, the rough guys that always get us flamboyant sailors out of harm's way." Making aaack noises, and choking his neck so as she could barely see in the mirror.

"Counselor, you best check your notes," said Nikki in her most officious tone.

"It is the other way around: Navy pulling Marines off the bad beach." He took a long while to consider that one, and she expected some smart macho remark about her beach home. She got it. 'We're going to need a full amphibious landing to rescue this here dumb sailor.'

"OK, so you beached my whale on that one," he said like a naughty kid, a long, drawn-out moment later. As though he thought she would forget and forgive. "Had a rough night, didn't I."

"YOU had a rough night." She really let herself fume now. "I invite some kind a hurting, peace-loving man into my hotel room to nurse his poor frazzled nerves, and what do I get? Some kind of raging, high minded, mental crusader hell-bent on returning to Eden."

"Well, I got you there didn't I," said a fresh, innocent little boy face around the corner of the door.

"Brother, to quote one of your heroes," she said, hoisting her chest out and up. "We have met the enemy, and he is ours."

"OH, Oh; oh," he said after quickly backing around the door. "Best ring up the Army. We in heap of deep do-do now." Steps running in place rattled the whole room.

"Truce!" and he waved a white towel just outside the bathroom door as he slowly emerged, then swiftly picked up the hotel telephone.

"Room service," he yelled into the telephone as if he was calling in a strike in the DMZ. "Get us two BIG coffees," breathing heavily as if

he had just raced to the line. "Make that A.S.A.P, soldier." Kip hung up with a bang.

Looking around from the telephone, expecting an urgent request for an encore, Kip was crestfallen. Nikki was already busy on her laptop computer, working on the day's agenda.

"Doesn't look like I can make it to the hearing today, dear" she said coyly. It was quite silent in the room for a while, too long; and she looked up. Kip was still right close to the telephone, less than a pace from where he was minutes ago. The sunshine mood had evaporated, and a heavy overcast had taken its place. He was deep in thought, all the gaiety gone like a will-o-wisp in a thunderstorm.

"Don't worry," she muttered very business like, "I got you penciled in for dinner," suppressing a smile as she did so. 'If they don't kick your insolent ass out before then.' Then, not even looking up to relish Kip's relief, "Evening meal too." She went right back to her work, noticing out of the corner of her eye that he had at least started to tuck his shirt in tight. Tucked, as the military types do, to show a strong, small waist. Tailored pants showed strong lines of large thighs and bulges at the calves. Then he turned around to fasten his tie in the mirror, very attentive to his appearance all of a sudden.

Nikki couldn't help herself, but to admire his trim posterior - pencil to her lips and tilting her glasses down a bit as she did so.

"See there, bad girl," Kip chimed when he spied her from the corner of his eye, "See what you missed last night?"

"Well, excuse me, Admiral," she countered, "But does a poor sailor's girl ever get a second chance?"

"Yes," as he stood tiptoe to look back through the mirror at her generous décolletage. Then, standing back firm, he made a big deal out of adjusting his pants, especially in the waist. "Yea, we'll just call it an extended port-o-call, shall we?"

"You're absolutely incorrigible," she murmured. "I should pity the poor Committee this morning, how you're going abuse them with your attitude." By now, she had turned full around to watch him, admiring him openly from head to toe. Kip was so completely absorbed in his preparations for the meeting that he didn't even notice.

"Christ, you're in top shape today!" Nikki muttered to herself, pleased with what she was seeing.

Kip sat then, on a small bench in the bathroom alcove. Then he unbuckled his trousers and pushed them to the floor. Reaching over, he pulled a couple of bundles out of his medicine kit. Soon he had both

knees wrapped carefully with an ace bandage, making a neat, tight brace a couple of inches on either side of the joint. Then, with a screech, he yanked off a six-inch swath of duct tape and wrapped either end tight so they would not come loose.

Then he stood, pants still at his ankles, and tested his full weight on each leg. Satisfied, he hoisted the trousers and yanked the suspenders over his shoulders. A small circle around that part of the room, and there was no evidence of any disabling limp at all.

As Kip was testing his field dressings, Nikki noticed the plain bright belt buckle and wondered. Now, that does not look very business like. She was just about to say something when he pulled a freshly pressed jacket from a dry cleaner's plastic bag.

"Oh, my," she said, and her hand went to her lips in dismay. Kip turned, and it dawned on him that she had been watching all the while. With the most mischievous of smiles, he said, "Kip's going to be a United States Army soldier boy today!"

It was the dark dress green uniform, with a red white and blue White Sands Missile Range patch, with official Specialist-4 insignia: a golden eagle and a single chevron. There were several small hatch marks at the bottom of one sleeve, for time in service. The brass was spotless, the rows of ribbons clean and colorful.

Slipping the coat on, there was a startling transformation. The subtle tailoring made his already broad shoulders wider, and his waist trimmer. It was a sight to see, and Nikki caught her breath. Then he put on his beret, and the picture was complete.

"Jesus," was all she could say. "What were you, Green Beret or something; SEAL's?"

"Not," he said. "Wouldn't be caught dead with that bunch of wieners - excuse me, ma'am - make that hot dogs!" With no further elaboration, he buttoned up the blouse and turned for her to admire.

Nikki went up to him, expecting to help him tidy up some. Then she noticed the brass Specialist insignia on his lapels. The brass was clean, but the metal was burnished black around the embossed eagles. She reached out a hand to touch, but he grabbed it.

"Don't touch," and gently gave her had a kiss. "Just like they were when I went before the Medical Board twelve years ago - you like?"

"They make you look like a renegade," she blurted out before realizing it. "Yes," Kip replied, turning his head askew. "They do, don't they?"

Her own knees started to feel a little wobbly, and Nikki sat down on the bed. Looking up at him, she marveled at the transformation. He had

trimmed the wild, disheveled mustache of the day before to be neat and trim, elegant and military. The hair was lightly oiled, not a strand out of place. The uniform was heavily starched, crisp and spotless.

“Only the third time I’ve ever worn this uniform,” as he turned to show off a little. “First was for the Major General at White Sands, Second for the Medical Board hearing at Fort Sam, and...”

Nikki was looking down, making a business of fumbling with the tallies on her shirt, muttering, “I think I’m glad I’m not going to be there.”

“Me, too,” Kip said and gently kissed her on top of the head. Then, reaching down to tilt her head up he kissed her again, gently on the forehead.

“Don’t worry, love. Everything is as it should be!” There was a sudden conviction in his voice, and Nikki was mesmerized.

‘He’s either nuts or a genius,’ Nikki said. Then her neck snapped up.

“Damn it, Will Cleary - you’ve got me talking to myself just like you.”

“Stop it,” and she folded her arm across her chest and tried to hold the pounding heart still in her chest.

Fancying the captive - and captivated - audience, Kip took a few paces around the room. “Look, Grandma Moses - no sugar cane!”

“The miracle of modern medicine. A fist full of Motrin will cure anything,” he said with a greatly exaggerated swagger like a drunken sailor in Bangkok. “Motrin, plus some well-applied field wraps!” Then he started to drag his legs, knees stiff, like a penny actor in a Frankenstein movie.

“I’ll make a deal with you Kip,” Nikki said as she got up and started to get her things together. “I won’t ask what you’re up to, if you have breakfast with me.”

“However,” she said loudly and held out her hands, “You’ve got to promise you won’t tell me either - is it a deal?”

“Signed, sealed and delivered.”

Nikki was out of the room, the door swinging closed before Kip scurried after her like a country kid going to the department store.

“God damn it, William Herndon,” she was saying as the door closed, “Act your age will you?”

“Aye, Aye” came the deep-throated reply through the heavy oak door. “You’re driving me up the wall!”

On the way down to the lobby in the elevator, Nikki turned to him, a little off- balance from the quiet. The long walk down the heavily

carpeted hotel hallway and not a word passed between them. Kip, a few paces behind, was silent as a church mouse. She watched as he worked at getting the military walk and attitude down right. The hardest part, she smiled heartily, was the facial expression. It looked as though he had brushed his teeth with super glue, and was trying to adjust the set of his jaw permanently, with just the right lines.

The eyes much harder to calm, she saw. Concentrating mightily, Nikki slowed, and she was walking even with him. Hunching shoulders, rubbing his eyes and craning his neck from side to side did not seem to result in the right feel. The eyes were indomitable. Then, just as they reached the elevator lobby on their floor, he huffed and pulled a pair of pilot issue sunglasses from his inside breast pocket. That will take care of the eyes; he murmured gleefully. Then he donned the maroon beret at a rakish angle and looked himself up and down in the mirror.

The elevator bell rang, and he hustled to take the cap off, still fumbling with it as he walked through the closing doors of the elevator.

A couple floors down, after a few well-dressed businessmen had entered, Nikki said to no one in particular, "On second thought, I think I like you in uniform SP4 Cleary," which he tried to ignore. "You're much better behaved."

Noticing a few discrete smiles cracked on the other people in the elevator Kip shuffled his feet a little. Looking up to the elevator display he said demurely, "Yea, Nikki - that's exactly what the Army thought - see where it got them!" adding a few seconds later, "And the Navy too."

"Maybe you should call in the Marines," contributed a passenger.

"No, Sir," came the subdued reply, "They absolutely love people like me!" Then Kip turned and tilted his head down to peer over the shades; and graced the ingrate with the look of a remorseless killer. The businessman shrank back.

Kip leveled his head carefully, then turned mechanically and stared steadily at the little peephole in the middle of the elevator door for the remainder of the ride down. A little hunch went through the shoulders, at one point. Nikki had the feeling he had become totally imbued to his new role.

"Go figure," Nikki replied with a sigh of resignation, glancing at the object of Kip's scorn. A crooked smile touched the man's lips, and Nikki thought, "Wiener probably wet his pants."

The people in the elevator practically ran out as soon as it reached the lobby floor and the doors opened. Nikki and Kip were the last to leave. They were both smiling as their fellow travelers scurried away with nary a glance back. Nikki was waiting for him to take her arm

and lead her off. Kip, though, was absorbed in taking the shades off so he could be the proper gentleman and look her straight in the eye. The elevator started to close; he reached out, and the electric eye bumped it open again. Glaring at one another then, each tried to kowtow to the other. Then, just as the doors were closing, again they scurried through in a very awkward fashion.

Kip pulled up short outside the electromechanical behemoth, to get his new act together, while Nikki looked around to see where the dining room was located. She set off shortly, Kip in undignified pursuit. They settled at a brightly-lit table, remote from any other. No sooner, than Kip had helped her into her seat, than he was seated across from her; the Washington Post splayed out all over in front of him.

"Damn, how did he do that?" Nikki murmured. Then, held up a hand. "No, please - No more Navy tricks, OK?"

"Marine trick this time, Ma'am," Kip said while still reading. "Mater D slid it under my arm as I walked past." Then with a huff, "How's that for respect, no?"

"Yea," Nikki responded, still studying the menu hard. "How's that for a spiffy disguise, Mister."

"Oh, nuts," he sighed.

Pulling the shades from his pocket with great fanfare, he adjusted his seat a little back from the table and tried to look relaxed. Hum, here's the contented husband taking his new wife on a tour of the big city Washington DC, he thought.

Here's the demure wife trying to cater to huge male ego, to keep it from being horribly bruised by the grindstone politics of the city he knows absolutely nothing about, she thought.

A waiter stopped by a little later. They ordered breakfast and a big pot of coffee. When the coffee arrived, Kip poured her a cup, then filled his up and unconsciously kept the pitcher on his side of the table. Nikki frowned and reached over to get it. Suddenly Kip crumbled up a page out of the paper and threw it violently at the floor.

"Damn cartoonists," reaching out absentmindedly to warm his cold hands around the steaming pot. Nikki pulled her own hands back and watched as Kip took the shades off and rubbed his eyes and temples.

"Crummy political satire in the paper," he explained. "Got me dressed like a Neanderthal in a groin cloth, limping toward a coliseum full of Senators and lions all about."

"That's loincloth," Nikki corrected, nasty thoughts filtering into her mind despite her best effort.

"They be going to get some primitive rage, I guarantee," spoken in a new accent to Nikki - Cajun/French brougham.

"They're going to have their show for sure," he said, and the tears of frustration glistened. Nikki's heart went out to him.

"But not the show they expect - this is my sea today, and even the seals will do my bidding!"

Breakfast arrived then, and they had to muster some pretense of domestic tranquillity for the all-eyes waitress, who had obviously heard the last quips of conversation.

They thought all was in order. The waitress saw clearly how completely their lives were intertwined and mingled. She lingered a little longer than usual, letting them regain a semblance of composure in her respectful presence. Kip, still flustered, gave her a big tip already and waved her away in his utterly abashed embarrassment.

They ate the meal swiftly and in contented silence. Kip poured her coffee full when it got empty, but kept the pot on his side of the table, still using it as a hand warmer. Nikki understood and secretly marveled how sensitive he really was, to her slightest need.

As they got up to leave, Kip noticed the gravity in her expression. Will I see you again? Can you manage? Can I come? A hundred other questions etched her endearing countenance. Seeking to put her at ease, he slicked back his hair, punched out his chin and cocked up a fisted hand, holding the breakfast bill.

"Hasta la vista, baby," he said better than Arnold the middle-aged Terminator, and he was off. Nikki watched him saunter from the café.

As he left, she stepped over to pick up the newspaper page he had trashed earlier. Crinkling it open; well, the cartoon was crueler than most, but not too much so. Kip had much to learn. She wondered sadly if he would lose all the charm and spontaneity as his skin got thicker under the onslaught of the mighty power brokers of DC.

Suddenly weary, she sat back down at the table. Then reached over with a smile, got the coffee pot, refilled her cup and - with great pantomime - placed it squarely by her place setting. So there!

A few sips of blank-eyed staring later, she put the cup down. Opening her purse, she pulled a very small, but very powerful, cellular telephone out and punched an automatic dial number. A voice responded immediately, and they had a brief conversation. All the softness was gone from her then, and Nikki found the inner strength to get on with her day.

Eight

*Then they sat down on the ground with him
For seven days and seven nights
With no one speaking a word to him
For they saw that his pain was very great.
Job: 2:13*

The Committee came to order at a loud bang of the Chairman's gavel. "This Committee is hereby in session," said a too loud voice.

"The open hearing on the Global Warming Treaty is the current topic." Then turning to the committee secretary, "Any more witnesses?"

"No, Sir. Mr. Cleary was the final witness scheduled."

"Well, seeing as he quit it out of here with his tail between his legs yesterday, I hear by determine this hearing is closed." He hoisted the gavel and was finally going to put this ugly matter to rest.

"Not so fast, your Honor," said a military man getting up from the end seat on the far side of the front row. Everybody looked to the side, to see about this brash intrusion.

For the last hour and more, as the meeting room had slowly filled to peak capacity, Cleary had been totally absorbed in reading the newspaper. Most noticed the military regalia and figured he was staff security and didn't give him a second look. There wasn't a walking cane in sight, this time, though he did sit there a little stiffly if anybody had bothered to observe.

"I haven't finished testifying," Cleary said as he walked toward the tribunal, brass uniform implements glittering in the bright committee room lights.

To a person, the committee's jaws dropped in surprise. Before they knew what was happening, Cleary had introduced himself to the court reporter, and charmingly coached her in swearing him in as a witness to the hearing. Then he sat right down in the witness chair, all bright-eyed, waiting respectfully for the questioning to begin, as though nothing at all had happened.

"Very well, what more have you to say?" said the Senator from Texas, lightning bolts in her eyes.

"I'm sorry to have been so petulant yesterday, and I'll try to be more calm and respectable today." With a clever smile, "I promise." Only a man with nothing left to lose would try to charm a United States Senator. Only a lunatic could succeed.

"You can have one more chance," she said with a roll of her eyes and a mock seriousness.

"I would like to discuss a very similar situation to this one, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee," Cleary began. Pulling a yellow legal pad out of a breast pocket, he quickly reviewed a few notes and then continued.

"The Committee will recollect a decision made about ten years ago on a related issue: the Freon Ban." He looked up to see them nodding, and continued.

"To give the audience a little background, there was a worldwide environmental meeting in Rio de Janiero a few years back. The discussions centered on the alleged harmful effects of Freon on the ozone layer. Freon, ladies, and gentlemen, (turning half around to address the audience, knowing he would desperately need their support this day) being what we use in refrigerators and air conditioners and hair spray cans and all sorts of other innocuous things.

The meeting produced a treaty to ban all production of Freon, and every nation in the world except the United States ratified the treaty.

"This had been a hotly contested issue for years - similar to present debates on the effect of atmospheric pollutants on global warming. In fact, several hundred Nobel laureates and other esteemed scientists signed a petition that the Rio Accord had inconclusive, incorrect scientific evidence.

"Shortly after the treaty was finalized, NASA presented to this committee a report from a recent fly-by over the South arctic pole, which is where the ozone hole is worse and biggest. Their data showed the ozone hole in the upper atmosphere was extremely large and was thus a very real menace. This committee quickly recommended ratification of the Freon ban and soon thereafter, the entire Senate ratified it by an overwhelming margin.

"That, ladies and gentlemen, is the official story. A very different story was made public in a bestseller by Dixie Lee Ray, a former member of the establishment here in Washington DC. It showed the whole treaty to be a total fiasco, using very uncommon sense, unscientific reasoning, and the kind of blatant political gerrymandering that the public laps

up.” By now, he was practically addressing the audience alone, back to the Committee.

“Mr. Cleary,” the Chairman interjected, getting a little hot under the collar.

“I see no pertinence to this discussion. If you are leading somewhere, get there quickly.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Now, this treaty would really be no big deal except for a couple of important ramifications. First, you need other chemicals to do the same job as Freon, but not deplete the ozone layer. Second, existing equipment designed to use Freon had either to be retrofitted to use the new chemical or replaced out altogether.

“The total cost, for the more expensive Freon replacement, the retrofits to existing machines, plus the new equipment where retrofitting was not economical, has been estimated to be one trillion dollars - that’s a Thousand Billion dollars.” The last three words said very clearly, very slowly. “The entire

U.S. annual budget is only One point Five Trillion Dollars.”

“Not a tax, but an expense that has to be borne by every single person in the industrialized world. In fact, mostly by people in the northern hemisphere, which is where most air conditioning is in use; and that equipment itself is mostly in the United States. IE, the treaty was passed by the global community, but eighty percent of its cost and its impact is right here on you and me.”

“Mr. Cleary,” said an ominous voice from the Committee table.

“The pertinence is very clear, Mr. Chairman. I am describing how special interests influence the Senate, which consequently does not make the best decisions for the people of the United States of America.”

“Mister Cleary,” said the lady Senator from Texas, more loudly. Kip Cleary knew his time was running out.

“Yes, ma’am.” This time he turned to look her in the eye, a hint of desperation beginning to shadow his attitude. Quickly, Cleary turned back to speak to the room. His voice carried well, without the need for the p.a. system. It easily reached the farthest corners of the room. More so than any amplifying system could accomplish.

“OK, I believe the evidence is quite clear that Freon does not damage the ozone layer at all. Allow me to paraphrase the very eloquent remarks by Ms. Ray.

“First, the ozone hole naturally gets bigger, then smaller, every year.

The NASA flight happened to be at a time when the ozone hole was at its maximum

but why panic and pass the bill on that basis; why not get a good annual average and make the right decision?

"Second, volcanoes emit chemicals that have the same effect on the ozone as Freon does. One of the largest volcanoes in the world is located a stone's throw from the center of the big arctic ozone hole. It has emitted more chlorides in the last year than all the Freon ever used in the history of civilization. You don't suppose that might have a little, tiny effect, making the ozone hole larger?

"Third, ozone is about ten times heavier than air. How can such a heavy fluid make it several miles high into the atmosphere? The proponents of the treaty claim winds do it. Yet, how can winds bring many thousands of tons of Freon all the way from the Northern Hemisphere, all the way to the arctic? Any grade school student knows the prevailing trade winds surround the equator, extending several thousand miles, blowing east-west all year long. How's our flood of Freon going to split that Red Sea to make it to the other side?

"Finally, there are legumes and other microbes in the soil that break down the Freon within a day or two." Then, looking from one Senator to the other, he continued hesitantly. "I see y'all aren't getting it. Let me paint the picture for you."

"Heavier-than-air Freon escapes into the atmosphere and pools on the bare ground. It must now go twelve thousand miles to the Arctic, overland. It makes that trek within twenty-four hours or the earth will naturally decompose it.

Ladies and gentlemen, that Freon would have to catch a ride on a jet aircraft to make that trip in a day - no can do."

"What I am saying is that the Freon ban is a total farce. It is an indirect tax upon the people of the United States, made without our consent or approval, and covered up via political pressure in order to profit a few select industries."

Suddenly, there was a small commotion on the hearing table, as the Senator from Texas got off the telephone, got up and walked over to stand behind the Chairman, and whisper something to him. Cleary thought, 'Oh hell, there goes the shooting match - they found me out.' Undaunted, he continued amidst the mounting confusion.

"What kind of influence will make the Senate pass overwhelmingly a trillion dollar tax upon the good, trusting people of this country? Why, greed, money, clout - you name it, but however you do phrase it, I call it pure and insipid evil!"

The Chairman quickly leaned forward and grabbed the microphone, almost slobbering into it he was in such haste to speak. "It has come to our attention that you are not an active member of the Armed Forces, Mr. Will Herndon Cleary."

"And this committee is the very group that sanctioned the treaty, recommending it to the entire Senate for passage..."

"Just what in the world do you think you're doing here, dressed like that? It's a felony to impersonate a member of the military, were you aware of that?" Cleary, desperate for one last chance to drive his point home, carried on his rhetoric, hoping at least someone within hearing would pay heed. "Why, then has the Committee been so circumspect in its investigation of this global warming treaty - because it's just the same . . ."

"Mr. Cleary, you are no longer recognized by this committee." "Who paid you people off, Senator?"

"MISTER Cleary, you are to vacate the witness table and report to the bench, right this moment!"

"Who was it, Senator," Cleary said pleadingly to his onetime ally from Texas. She looked away, lips pursed tight, a scandalized expression on her face.

"Who was it - Dupont?" back focusing on the Chair. "Or was it a collection of all the manufacturers and suppliers who stand to profit from this trillion dollar fiasco?"

"You're out of order, Mister," said the lady Senator from Texas, in a throaty and menacing rage.

"So it really was a conspiracy - your expression says it all, Senators." "Bailiff!"

A burly looking fellow, who'd been standing unnoticed to the side, materialized in Cleary's vision, a policeman. He cleared the Committee table in a fast trot, heading straight for Cleary, one hand unbuckling the pistol restraint of a menacing firearm bouncing on his hip as he ran.

Cleary just sat there, real quiet. His act was over, and - exhausted, all his energies spent - he could only be totally dumbfounded. The policeman was pulling metal handcuffs from the back of his utility belt, and Cleary found himself starting to hold his hands out for them.

"That will not be necessary, your Honors" spoke a voice loudly; strong and true. Cleary blinked; looked back, then to the side; catching only a glimpse of a tall Army officer in dress blues. Cleary swiftly yanked his hands off the table and out of the cuffs, when the policeman looked to the side. The Army officer paced swiftly up to the hearing table.

The Chairman reached forward to cover the microphone, and treated the audience to a muffled, but obviously heated conversation, for a few tense moments. Cleary saw the officer had a sidearm, in a gleaming well-worn leather holster: army-issue Colt-45. The restraining strap flapped loose already, with brash bravado. There was an "MP" band around this new man's arm.

After consulting with the Committee Chair, the Army officer approached Cleary at the witness table, shooing the policeman away. The Army MP officer eased into the chair beside him. Cleary saw him clearly for the first time.

"Captain, I mean C - Colonel; good grief, . . . Franco?"

"Sit down you idiot, and for God's sake take that god damn Post Office jacket off."

"Yes, Sir," Cleary said out of reflex and before he had a moment to think, the jacket was off, and his sleeves comfortably rolled up.

"Mr. Chairman, will you please allow me a few moments with my client?" said Franco, still standing. Looking up at him, Cleary noticed he had a quite impressive rack of medals. The Colonel's eagles looked swift too. A little gray at the temples, and it was the same Paul Franco. Hell, this was the damned JAG lawyer who had screwed up his army discharge case!

"Your client? WHAT?" Cleary blurted out and jumped up in his chair, but Franco grasped his hand over the soldier's mouth. He grabbed a shoulder with the other hand, and through sheer, brute force pushed Kip back in the seating position.

"You better shut the hell up, Spec-4 Cleary," he murmured threateningly, "Or your ass is going to jail right now, for Contempt of Congress," craning his neck toward the Chairman to indicate the still livid Senator. That calmed Cleary quickly, and - convulsively - a cold shiver ran down his spine.

"Let's just say," Franco said to all the questions on Cleary's face. "I was in the neighborhood," and drew a Pentagon with his finger on the oak table.

"Fulwyler - remember the Post Commander at White Sands - has five stars now; found me at JAG and sent me over." Then, like a seasoned staff sergeant pinned under enemy fire in hostile territory, he looked around at the audience; but held back a grimace to avoid startling his wet-behind-the collar-apprentice.

"Boy, you got friends, after all, see?"

Then, with a totally disarming smile, he hugged Cleary and said,

"Well, now - didn't I tell you it was best to take the rap and fight it from the outside?" Then he swallowed so hard, to muster the nerve to overcome his own very real fears; Cleary saw his Adam's apple jump. "What, aren't we having fun yet?"

Cleary nodded affirmatively; not quite sure what to do or think or say or feel.

"Well, then. Get on with it will you?" Franco said loudly, followed by an "OoHh ah," made famous in a flick about a disabled veteran; not caring who heard him or what they thought.

"I've been waiting twelve years for this day," exclaimed Colonel Franco and sat down in a chair and pulled himself up the table, as though he was another late- invited guest to a dinner party. If there had been a napkin in sight, he would have snatched it up and tucked it into his shirt collar like some countrified hillbilly. Then, turning, he urged Cleary, "Come on, boy - get on with it . . . that's an order!" Would have had his elbows on the table, too. All these high society folks, they wouldn't know what to do with him.

"But," Cleary started to protest, leaning over - still caught in reverie.

"What's with the MP armband, Sir?" he said then, finally coming to his senses.

"Borrowed it from some GI Joe security guard at the Pentagon - looks good doesn't it?" Well, it takes a rascal to know one - or to advise one, as the saying goes. Holding his right hand in a tight fist, he made the strong-arm salute, MP armband and all.

"You're the expert witness, man - do your job." Then Franco, eyes widening, and making a show as if to roll up his own sleeves for a fist-n-cuffs, Cleary finally got back into gear.

'Hot damn.' Franco said to himself, finally relaxing back into his chair. This is going to be good!

A dramatic interchange occurred among the Committee members then. Finally, the Chairman held up his arms in consternation, and pointed to the Senator from Texas as if to say - I disown this cavalier man. He's your damn constituent, deal with him.

"Mr. Cleary," the lady from Texas began with a quiver in her voice. "Has it occurred to you that we might be as surprised in this as you are?"

"No," came the small reply.

"Or that we might even possibly change our minds?" "No," Cleary reiterated.

"Do you realize what a charade you have made of these hearings?" the Chairman said with a flurry.

"Shut up, Mr. Chairman," the Texas lady said. "Let me handle this." "OK, Cleary," the lady continued. "Let me rephrase that."

She took a moment to find the right words. "Let me say that I am personally surprised at these accusations. Speaking, now, for myself alone; and that I am contemplating a change of position," With a not too pleasant smile, she asked for his cooperation. "Can you at least accept that?"

"This conversation has gone on long enough," the Chairman said and slammed down the gavel. "Arrest that man, bailiff."

"Sorry, Mr. Chairman, that dog don't hunt." Came the steely reply. "Committee members have rights too, and I insist you recognize them; i.e., my right to question a witness as I please."

"OK, Senator," Cleary said in the middle of the spat. "Why would you be interested in what I have to say?" He swallowed audibly. "Give me one good reason why I should believe you."

"It's a deal," as she turned to listen to a whispered few words from an aide.

"OK, Mr. Cleary," she said with renewed strength and confidence. "Here's your answer."

"You probably know that Texas has the highest per capita energy use of any nation or state in the world. You know, biggest cars, longest distances, all that crap?"

"Not me, I drive a Geo Metro," Cleary said with a smile, despite himself.

"It is, therefore, the state of Texas," ignoring Cleary completely, "That will bear a very disproportionate percentage of the Freon replacement costs, am I correct?"

"Well, maybe - but all of the southern states have very high air conditioning costs - especially the ones along the Gulf Coast, where it is real hot and real humid." At which point the Chairman, himself from Carolina, showed a renewed interest. 'Probably be the same for the Mediterranean nations, as far as that goes,' Cleary continued quietly, in what was becoming a running commentary for the audience.

"What do you mean?" the Chairman interrupted. "Are you saying that the southern states have been slapped with a trillion dollar tax, all by themselves?"

"Think about it, Sir," Cleary said. "Think for a moment who uses air

conditioning the most? Where are the hottest, most humid nations that have the most advanced civilization? First, forget about the Southern Hemisphere - discard South America, Africa and most of Asia, right? ... Well, keep Australia."

"Now, what remains is North America, Europe, Russia, and Japan - am I correct?"

"Russia and Northern Europe and Japan all have pretty cool summers, so 'X' them out. Canada and the northern United States are quite cool too, or at least very dry. So they use a fraction of the energy we do to keep their homes and offices air conditioned, right?"

"So you're left with all of the Old South, and maybe a few major cities in Japan, southern Europe, and the northeast U.S. These are the only people who will have to pay the trillion-dollar cost of the Freon phase out. These are, by and large, essentially areas that had absolutely no say in the Freon ban vote too; present company excluded."

"Oh," glancing aside to COL Franco, who was now bolt upright in his chair. "The military pays a steep price too; the U.S. Navy because all vessels at sea are air-conditioned, mostly for all the electronics; the Air Force and Army for lesser reasons." Then he added, "Not that I give a rat's ass that the military is the single biggest consumer of fuel in the whole world; who, me?"

"So, ladies and gentlemen, what we have is a huge international treaty, pushed mighty hard by the Third World. Then all the developed nations swiftly sign off on it. Mind you; it's a treaty that will seriously restrict economic growth, profits and competitiveness of a major portion of the United States - especially the Old South - over the course of the next decade.

The Chairman started to speak, but Cleary held up a hand and continued. "Not only that, Sirs; but the phasing out of Freon-12 is only one part of the plan. The replacement Freon chemicals are to be phased out within seven or eight years; to be replaced by another chemical; which itself is phased out in ten or twelve years; and so on.

This time the lady from Texas started to ask a question, unnoticed - and ignored - by Cleary. "And with each phase of this plan, more than the chemicals will need to be replaced - but the equipment as well; at huge expense. Probably on the order of another trillion dollars with each step of the process."

"My simple question in all of this, people," Cleary said with a sigh. Then looking from side to side, he paused to collect his thoughts.

"My only question to this Committee - my only concern; is this."

"There seems to be substantial and credible evidence that the Freon is not a danger to the ozone layer at all. If that is true, then the whole world will be laughing at us; and competing us into extinction, over the next few decades. That is, the Japanese, the Southern Europeans and us."

"That is a very, very unpleasant thought to me - I don't know how y'all feel about it. It makes me just a little bit scared, to think of it."

The gavel rang out loudly, and the Chairman called for a recess. Then, amiably and for all to hear said, "Mr. Cleary - you aren't going to run out again on us are you? Please, Sir, your testimony is of utmost importance - do you understand?"

Cleary had that wild look in his eye, feet tapping the floor impatiently. Noticing this, the Chairman said to Franco, "See that your client is here after the recess, will you Colonel?"

"Yes, Sir." Came the very subdued reply from counsel.

"In fact," the Chairman said, glancing to the bailiffs scattered around the meeting room, "See that Mr. Will Cleary does not leave his room."

"Or COL Paul Franco, United States Army; for that matter." And he was gone to Chambers, with the other Committee members. Just as he was leaving, a bailiff came over to COL Franco, still in stunned silence, and asked politely for his cell phone and beeper.

"Welcome to the Mickey Mouse club, Colonel," Cleary replied jauntily, trying to find something cheerful in the context. 'Comfy, padded room and all!'

"By the way, Sir" he continued, trying to draw his attorney into the conversation, "Shouldn't you be more than a Colonel by now - it's been over twelve years."

"No thanks to you, bud," was the reply. "After what I said in your hearing, it was nothing but trash cases and backroom partition offices."

"What about everybody else - COL Saunders?" "Yea, him too."

"He got transferred soon after to Fort Polk, Louisiana - from the frying pan into the fire."

"I can see you've never been to Fort Polk, Counselor," Cleary responded. "More like from the frying pan into the boiling water pot - the mosquitoes are so big there poor people fry 'em up instead of crawfish. The seasonings are so hot most folks can't tell the difference!"

Franco laughed a little.

They both thought for a moment about Saunders' fate - from the country club post of the whole army to the armpit. Not a very pleasant end to a strong career.

“Heard he retired not long after,” COL Franco continued. “His wife was a Chaplain too, in the Air Force. He retired and moved with her to her next post, here in DC I believe. That was years ago. “

“Damn,” Cleary said a long while later. “I didn’t mean to cause so many people so much grief.”

“It’s OK; soldier,” Franco said to him with a strong hand gripping his shoulder. “Your good people, and you were wronged. We couldn’t but help.”

Then Cleary made a few crashing kind of sounds, ‘O no, its mister steamroller, rolling right over poor play-dough Mr. Bill . . . spat.’ Like the old Saturday Night Live skits that were still so popular.

“Yea, something like that.”

“We didn’t know there was a steamroller; or that someone was actually driving it.” Still don’t know who it was, in fact.

Nine

*My groaning comes at the sight of food,
And my cries pour out like water.
For what I fear comes upon me,
And what I dread befalls me.
I am not at ease, nor am I quiet,
And I am not at rest,
But turmoil comes.
Job: 3: 24 - 26*

CHAMBERS PAVILION

"I've come to take you to pick up your things at work," the Nurses Aid said, stopping by Cleary's bed. He had only been on the ward for a few days. All he had to his name had been taken. Now he was clad in blue, sheer pajamas and foam slippers.

"OK, you lead I follow!" came the cheery reply.

They walked the half-mile across the main boulevard, to the Main Post Chapel, a beautiful and imposing structure surround by big ante-bellum oaks. Halfway there the slippers disintegrated, and he continued on barefoot. The nurse's aid noticed a minute later, then asked if they should return. She was years Cleary's junior - an E3 - cute and perk.

"No, it's OK," he said simply with a smile. "The warm grass feels good!" and picked up his pace a little. She scurried to catch up with him, and they made their way across the wide Commons.

When they arrived at the administrative offices of the Chapel, everyone gathered around and asked how he was doing. Cleary said his hellos and stepped over to get a few personal things from his desk.

"Why, look who the cat drug in," said the golden voice of Colonel Saunders. Cleary turned and faced the beaming, cheery man. He was a jolly, congenial fellow, with a charming southern accent. He was completely bald, and every bit the full bird colonel, in the most honorable sense of the grand army tradition.

It was a warm moment, and both fought to hold in check their strong

emotions. Cleary felt quite humbled to be the sole focus of the older man's attention.

"My goodness," the Chief of Chaplains exclaimed in his holiest pulpit tone, "But you've no shoes!" Indeed, Cleary looked down to see his feet were beat up.

There were sticker thorns stuck in the loose pants sleeves. Mud and dust caked the tops of his feet. It was good, to be free and in the open again, was all his expression said.

"Its OK, Sir" Cleary said happily. "It's so nice, to see you again!" Not a word about how bad things were, how shocked he was. It was just a simple, warm welcome.

They chatted for a while longer. Then the cute little Nurses Aid said, I am very sorry, but it really is time we got back to the ward. Cleary was on his way out but stopped to shake the Chaplain's outthrust hand. It was a strong, warm hand. The Chaplain held his, clasped the other on top.

"My God, " he said with a hurtful sincerity, "But you're the bravest man I've ever seen, son."

"Thank you, Sir" Cleary replied, not knowing yet what the Chaplain had meant. He was sad to leave, though, because he had started some good things around the Chapel, and wanted to carry them through. It had been a nice sanctuary for a while, this place at Fort Sam Houston. He would most miss setting up the Jewish sanctuary for services every Friday, laying out the fresh twisted loaf of bread and cleaning up the podium and the rest of the Synagogue for services. Yes, there were many memories to be treasured. They would be sustenance for his spirit, in the trying times ahead.

"Man, what in the name of Hell are you doing in here, anyway?" Asked a big - no, make that a Huge - black First Sergeant one afternoon, back on the psych ward. Kip had seen him on the ward a lot recently, rather keeping to himself. Still, Kip had made a real effort to be friendly with him, and eventually, the troop opened up.

"You are saner than any of us - staff included," the Viet Nam veteran told him sincerely. It was comforting, coming from a person a lot older than Kip and with real, live combat experience.

"Same as you, I guess," Kip replied. "Stepped on one too many toes."

"Yea, isn't that the gospel truth," came the sad reply. "A lot of First Sergeants I know are getting out. It's all gotten way too political. A lot of us went through real Hell in 'Nam. A lot of it happened because of incompetent officers. They try to make amends, especially for the men who went down; and this is what happens," waving his arms all around.

Then, seeing the look of concern in Kip's eye, "Oh, don't worry about me. I'm getting out soon. Going home to my wife and kids, for good."

It was a happy statement, but there was no joy in his expression. This man had given his life for the good of the service. Look how this devotion was rewarded. Kip traded a little more small talk with him, then shuffled around to find somebody else to visit - maybe to cheer up, if he had the chance.

Later he learned that the Pavilion, with many wings, but with only a few still occupied, had been full throughout the war in Viet Nam. It was a sturdy building, especially the lock upward. Built and appointed more like a high-security prison, than anything.

So, you went to the Naval Academy, did you?" asked a tall male officer nurse as he and Cleary were playing a game of air hockey in the ward activities room.

"Yes, Sir. Class of '78."

"I bet you did well there," was the sarcastic challenge back.

"Yes, Sir. 21st in my class, Company Commander, Platoon Leader." "Sure, I bet you were," was the reply, dripping with incipient violence.

"Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned," said a deep voice with a soft accent from across the metal veil of the confessional.

"Tell me, my Son, so that you may be absolved." "I am a psychiatrist of the mind, Father."

"I understand. I know who you are, Dr. Durand-Hollis."

"I have given a malo diagnosis; I mean a false one. Or, at least, I have been given informations by our superiors to cause me to render this same false diagnosis."

"This disturbs you?"

"My profession is to help people get mejor, not to destroy them altogether." "You believe your superiors have coerced you into doing something contrary to your Oath?"

"I was given flawed informations. I was given inadequate information," the confessor said impatiently. "I was told to act upon it immediatamente. I believe My medico license was abused."

"Your patient, he has suffered?" "Si, senior. Yes, I believe he has." "I see, doctor."

"You are an officer and a member of the United States Army.

Sometimes duty overshadows your medical responsibilities. Duty takes precedence over your Oath. It is not your fault. Do not waste any further thought on the matter. It is in the hands of the Lord now.”

“Small consolation that is,” came the bitter reply “Bless you, my son.”

“Gracias, Padre.”

A few weeks later, they released Cleary off the ward during the day, to work in the Occupational Therapy Clinic at Brooke Army Medical Center. He and several other long-term patients were bussed to the main hospital in the morning, then reported for work. Cleary was a Nurse’s Aid. He brought arts and crafts to patients around the hospital, picking up and bringing wheelchair-bound patients for therapy, and assorted other duties for the medical staff.

Then one of the RN’s gave him a copy of a Stress Table, one slow afternoon. He took that Xerox, and many others on similar topics, back to the ward that night and began a serious study on the subject. He sensed this was a most important topic, and he learned all he could.

It did not take him long to realize that he was in a deep hole, and the hole was getting deeper. Not that there was anything he could do about it. The Table of stressful events told him this, in very clear and frightening terms.

Any person has a stress limit, in the course of a given year. After that point, various illnesses - up to serious ones - will happen. It is a scientific fact; it is inevitable. A quick analysis and it was obvious that the past few months had racked up a serious toll in very major life changes for Will Herndon Cleary.

First, there was the trauma at White Sands. Then the new job as a Chaplain’s assistant at Ft. Sam. Next came the hospitalization on a closed ward. Then work assignment to a new job. Each episode took about six weeks of time, each a tough battle zone in its own right. Every major life change in the book was covered, some of them several times each:

23 A lot more trouble with the boss

64 Major change in sleeping habits (16 x 4 EA) 45 Major change in eating habits (15 x 3 EA)

45 Revision of personal habits (dress, associations, family gatherings, social outings?)

19 Major change in the usual type of recreation (volleyball?)

16 Major change in social activities (watch TV night and day?)

16 Major change in church activities (every Sunday & several services?)
 38 Major change in financial state (car repossessed, pay withheld)

38 Sexual difficulties (on a hospital ward?) 53 Major personal injury or illness

80 Change in residence (20 x 4 EA) 63 Detention in jail or other institution

38 Major business readjustment

28 Outstanding personal achievement 45 Retirement from work

80 Major changes in working hours or conditions (20 x 4 EA) 94 Being fired from work (47 x 2 EA)

75 Major change in living conditions (25 x 3 EA) 16 Taking on a mortgage or loan

28 Foreclosure of a mortgage or loan 13 Vacation

72 Changing to a different line of work

The grand total was almost 1000 points. The great majority of which were attributable to the hospitalization, its routine, and other facets of the activities there.

The RN nurse's chart said individuals with over 300 points in the past twelve months; eighty percent would get sick. Furthermore, stress is cumulative. Oh, that's quite bad news.

"Join the Army!" Derrick said brazenly in his best Prince pantomime. A wicked smile garnishing his expressive black face. "Be all that you can be!" Gesturing all around him with a grand sweep of his arms, he implied to his delighted audience - alas, but look: we are there!

If not for the bars on the windows and the heavy gauge metal doors bolted closed, the friendly game of Risk between the patients could be happening in any recreation room on a military post. The two "psychos," as they fondly referred to themselves, had a lively game in progress and several other patients had gathered around to follow the action.

"You know, Kip baby - you play one mean game of Risk," Derrick said loudly. Derrick did everything loudly. Even when silent he was loud, projecting himself by his body language and manner.

"I don't know, man - you sure you as crazy as they say?" Then he looked all around their table with pretended paranoia, searching out the staff who were sure to arrive soon to break up their lively afternoon banter. Outfoxing the staff was as much of a game to them as implementing a fiendish strategy on the game board.

Derrick always got really frustrated when the ebb of the game was going against him, so sometimes Kip thought he was more afraid of success than of losing. After all, success against a patient commonly considered as sane as they come would mean he was sane too, and his peaceable coexistence with the staff would end. Instead of an ill person rating all of the attention and compassion the staff could muster, plus the comradeship of his fellow patients, he would become like Kip, a pariah.

From the day he came on board Kip was a fighter, Derrick had seen. Always bucking the staff, critiquing their policies and arousing the patients to stand up for their rights. Yes, that Kip was a rebel - very much so. The light mental combat and verbal jousting stayed on a friendly level in the beginning, between Kip and the staff.

Then Kip got himself a lawyer, and everything changed. Only an idiot would call a lawyer so they could not put him on medication, Derrick figured. Captain Franco had kept him off the drugs, though.

Kip stayed friendly enough, if not more so; he had won the first round, had he not? The ward staff got very moody, though: mean. They all acted as if Kip had them cornered and outnumbered. Kip, outnumbering them - and he didn't even hallucinate. Derrick figured it was like the staff had only one territory remaining on the Risk board and only a handful of armies left to defend it.

Trying to draw Kip into a trap, he supposed. Then they could put him under, but for good. Only Kip was too smart for them.

One thing, though, for sure came of it all. No more patients sought legal counsel, or hardly even protested their medications or anything else about their situation, specific or in general. Derrick supposed they made an example of a patient regularly, to keep the others under their thumb.

He was just glad Kip was their scapegoat just now, otherwise for damn sure Derrick would have been the goat himself.

Ten

*And the Lord said to Satan,
“... And he holds fast his integrity,
Although you incited Me against him,
To ruin him without cause.
And Satan answered the Lord and said,
“Skin for skin!
Yes, all that a man has
He will give for his life.”
Job: 2:3,4*

“Mr. Chairman,” Cleary began, “Need I remind you that I took the oath of an Officer in the United States Military.”

“I hold that oath sacred, Sir.” Cleary turned to directly face the audience. “Especially the part to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign - or DOMESTIC.”

It was a bold challenge cleverly spoken, and the Committee was a little bit cowed. This was an offensive tactic that they had not had seen, ever before. Go figure - an ex-officer standing behind the Constitution, even after he resigned his Commission; and although he never graduated from the Academy? Any citizen had the right to defend the Constitution, however, and that’s what the Committee feared. This man, as a full citizen in good standing, had far more rights, privileges, and protections than any mere member of the Armed Forces. He had the best of both worlds, and they feared him for it.

Yes, Franco was right all those years ago, Cleary thought. Appealing a controversial case from within the military was a losing battle. Not that doing it as a civilian was any easier. At least there is more flexibility, in the preparation and execution of a plan of battle - and, damn, but it sure was a hell of a lot more fun.

The audience looked at Cleary a little differently, now. A few in the audience remembered the days when Annapolis was a superlative institution that built strong men, devoted men. Could this be one of the few, from those halcyon days? It brought shivers to the spine to witness how true this one man was to his training and to the country

that spawned him. Yes, even if that great nation remained only in this one man's strong mind; well, others were getting a glimpse of it now.

We used to be a nation among nations. We were a good country, a good people. We had a destiny. We were a land all others could aspire to be like. Yes, it brought fire to the soul and clarity to the senses, to conjure it up in the mind. Is this what it was like in the bygone days before Viet Nam? Were we good then? Can we be again? What about Iraq?

Alas, Cleary considered, 'twas high time to test these choppy seas with a shot across the bow. Batten down the hatches, his expression said. Call General Quarters. Turn this aircraft carrier into the wind. We're going to War. Yes, now! Launch the first strike; on my command. Go.

"Members of the Committee, (turning around) Ladies and Gentlemen," Cleary began. Then he took a long deep breath and spoke in his very best diction and deepest voice. "It is my sincere contention that this Committee's position on the Global Warming Treaty is a blatant, subversive, but very real and totally sanguine attempt to destroy the United States of America completely, utterly, and for all time."

Then Cleary sat back in his chair to plan his next stratagem.

The entire room burst into an uproar. Cleary was trying to remain as calm and collected as he could. Colonel Franco beside him was furiously writing on his yellow legal pad, totally oblivious to the frantic reactions of those all around. 'Bless him,' Cleary thought. It serves the Army right for assigning him endless dead-end cases. He's well prepared for this adversarial role. Then Franco looked over and caught Cleary's eye.

"Well done, Pilgrim," Franco said in his best John Wayne. With a look of wild abandon, they got ready for the main assault. There was much to be said, little time to say it.

A few moments later, when the ruckus subsided, Franco tapped Cleary on the shoulder and offered, "Hey, trooper, why don't you let me take it for a while - you look bushed."

"Yea, I am kind of tired." Then he nodded yes, and Paul Franco was running up the score some more.

"Members of the Committee, I would like to offer some comments of my own on these issues."

"By all means, Colonel," the Senator from Texas said, quick out of the blocks before the rabid Chairman could start his misinformed raving and take control again.

Franco walked around the witness stand, and went right up to the Committee table and started pacing as he elaborated on his points. He had a voice that carried well in the room, and a manner that calmed

nerves and brought a modicum of order to the place. It was a stark contrast to Cleary's combative, intense style and it everyone in the whole room breathed a sigh of relief.

"Senators, what my client was trying to ask of y'all is nothing more than any good patient would ask of his or her personal physician: determine the best prognosis. In so doing, to make this judgment with full and complete knowledge of the patient's health in mind. His contention was nothing more than a request to solicit a second opinion, in such a severe and life-threatening diagnosis as this."

"It's no crime, Senators, to ask for a second diagnosis. It's not wrong either, to use modern technology or new techniques, to re-visit old issues and try to see them in a new light. Is it now?" Now that frayed nerves were a little calmer, he got the frontal assault back on its intended course.

"Mr. Cleary," Franco said, leaning on the Committee table, standing at one end, so he did not block anyone's view. "Can you tell this Committee whom else might be responsible for propagating your supposed fiasco on the likes of the United States Congress?"

"I suppose," the witness said wearily, "The professional organizations would have something to do with it - most notably the Association of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-conditioning Engineers, or ASHRAE - would have offered the most conclusive evidence. To a lesser extent, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers or ASME would have been involved."

"And whom might these organizations represent - ASHRAE especially?"

"The manufacturers of the large and expensive machines that would have to be changed out everywhere, to accommodate the new Freon."

"Can you name any specific firms?"

"Trane, Carrier, York, McQuay, Lennox," Cleary said.

"But, wait," the witness said thoughtfully a second later. "These firms wouldn't make a very substantial profit; not at all. They would have to re-engineer their entire inventory from the ground up. That's no small undertaking. It would probably use up any profits they might earn from selling more machines."

"Who then, would profit?"

The witness started to speak. Then a wave of indecision caught Cleary in its grasp. He fumbled some with his fingers and looked uncomfortably from side to side.

"Mr. Cleary," intoned the Chairman. "Please answer the question."

"Well, Sirs." Cleary began, then said to himself, oh what the hell. "The group that would benefit by far the most are mechanical engineers - design engineers at the major companies I mentioned, but mostly consulting engineers and engineering firms everywhere," his voice getting lower and lower with each word.

"You are an engineer yourself, are you not?" inquired the Senator from Texas.

"Yes, Ma'am. Bachelor's Degree with honors from the University of Texas at Austin," he said as a little pride and confidence crept back into his voice. "I am also a licensed Professional Engineer in Texas, in mechanical as well as electrical and plumbing design."

"Mr. Cleary," said Franco now. "Why do you say engineers - in particular, engineering consultants?"

Again, Cleary looked quite indecisive and a little bit scared. Biting his lower lip and taking a good hard swallow, he continued.

"Well, I assume it is obvious that having to redesign thousands of extremely complex machines would put tens of thousands of designers to work, for a long period of time."

"That is a relatively minor consideration, though. By far the greatest beneficiaries would be the consulting firms."

"How so?"

"Well, chiller retrofits are just about the most profitable jobs in the construction business. The contractor works like hell and barely breaks even, but the consultant makes a large profit. The firm typically charges a ten-percent fee for services as a flat rate. In Texas, this is a given because the Licensing Board prohibits competitive bidding for services. A large chiller job would cost a total of up to half a million dollars. The plans and specifications for all the work can be generated in a couple of days."

"So," Franco helped, "That means a well-run engineering firm stands to make

\$50,000 dollars for two days' work?"

"Well, there are other expenses, but if a good contractor gets the job and does good work, then there's not much more for the engineer to do."

"Excuse me, Counsel," interrupted the Senator from Texas. "Mr. Cleary, why are you so hesitant to speak out about consulting engineers?"

He shook his head and looked down at the table. 'Can't do that. Just can't.' To himself, but everyone heard anyway.

Franco walked over to the table and spoke a few words to him. Cleary

continued to resist, and Franco sat down next to him, and they talked some more.

"It seems," Franco said a few moments later, "My client has been blackballed in his hometown." Then, after that soaked in, he said, "I would guess it is a racketeering type of conspiracy, subject to federal investigation under the RICO Act."

"You will testify to this effect, Mr. Cleary?" asked the Chairman.

Cleary nodded, but Franco motioned him to speak.

"Yes, Sir. It is true. That, and a whole, whole lot worse."

"Have you contacted the authorities?" the lady Senator from Texas said, with increasing concern in her voice.

"Yes Ma'am, have." Then he counted fingers, "The Engineering Board, the Texas Employment Agency, the FBI, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the local County and District Attorney."

"With serious, documented evidence?" Franco inquired. "Yes, Sir."

"Jesus Christ," the Chairman said. "Son, when did all of this begin?"

"Couple of years ago, about the time I signed a contract for my first books with McGraw-Hill."

With a chuckle, the Chairman said, "I suppose you are known in your hometown as an outspoken and honest individual?" Cleary smiled an affirmative.

"So it is logical to assume these people figured you would blow the whistle on the whole deal?"

"I did blow the whistle on them, Sirs - Ma'am." Then, in response to their querulous looks, "The final authority in all engineering matters is the Professional Engineering Licensing Board in Austin. I gave them formal statements, with evidence. They never investigated anything, as far as I could tell. In fact, eventually, I was the one who got into trouble. They kept all of my whistle-blowing letters in MY file, not in the accused'. When there were enough of them, it made ME look like the one who was off."

"What kind of activities are you talking about here?"

"Slander, misrepresentation, theft of services, and retaliation." "Are you sure of this, Mister Cleary?" Franco said intensely.

"I'm under oath, aren't I? When a P.E. is asked in confidence about another engineer, he is obliged by the Rules to give his honest, sincere appraisal; you the Congress have asked me about another engineer, albeit the Board which really acts like one. By Law, I must answer truthfully."

"Anyway, I'm sure this sort of thing happens everywhere. Texas is no different from any other state. These kinds of actions are common, almost standard practices in the profession. And the P.E. Board is staffed by just more engineers - what, are they going to risk their own jobs and government contracts and industry contacts by going against the grain?"

'Only idiots like me would be so foolish.'

"Have you had an attorney's counsel, Cleary?" asked Franco again, a little concern in his voice now. It didn't suit a prosecuting attorney to show emotion, Cleary thought.

"Yes, Sir," then he added bashfully. "Turns out my attorney was friends with the head of the firms I worked for. They all move pretty much in the same social circles: lawyers, architects, and consulting engineers. When I needed advice the most, he quit."

"On two separate occasions," he elaborated, "I turned in separate lawyers for divulging information I gave them in confidence; they tattled to my employers - and got me in a whole lot of trouble. The Texas Bar twice asked for me to testify against them in their investigations."

"You didn't?"

"I may be brave, but I'm not suicidal, Colonel."

"Why do you say that, Mr. Cleary?" asked the Chairman.

"It's hard to explain right out - can I use an example to illustrate?" and they nodded yes.

"Well, I started my own firm a couple of years ago, not being able to get any decent work elsewhere. Many owners around town liked my work and wanted me to keep working for them. I did very well for a while and was quite successful.

"Then, once the designs started getting installed, inspected by the City, etc. I had extreme problems, far out of the ordinary. It was obvious to me, and some friendly architects I worked with, that my jobs were being dealt with viscusly by both the City review authorities; contractors, and equipment suppliers too."

"It was scary, and I had to quit. As a Professional Engineer, I am obliged to provide quality, worthwhile installations for my clients. I was not able to do so, given all the grief and harassment I was getting from all corners."

"And you attribute that to people putting a bad word out on the street against you?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I am not a bad engineer, Sirs. I have received many honors, and

am on the Board of Directors of a leading industry magazine, among other things. Also, I have a couple of books with McGraw-Hill on the construction business.”

“What are your plans now, Sir?”

“Well, I’ll never do engineering design work again, that’s for damn sure.” Then, with a chuckle, “Especially after this hearing - probably lose my P.E. License, for this. Since the Board will not even reply to any statements I make, having their license is useless. If I ever get in a contested case with a client, if the Board will not back me, then I’m dead in the water.” Despair crept into his voice.

“No, I’m in graduate school now, in aerospace engineering; but more of astrophysics than anything. Don’t want to do engineering anymore. Ever.”

“Mr. Cleary,” asked the lady Senator. “Has it dawned on you that this supposed ill-treatment may be due to your disability?”

“No. I have contacted the EEOC and other federal agencies on that matter - no help from anyone; no case. Discrimination can be proven, but nobody gives a hoot in hell.”

“I was thinking,” continued the Senator, “More like in terms of a mental illness, causing you to see things in this way.”

“Had occurred to me, yes.”

“But not to the two therapists I have been seeing at the VA Clinic for the last few years, ever since all this grief began. They have written appeals for me, stating there is no evidence of any mental disorder whatsoever - present, or past. My medical record, at this point in time, is completely clean ~ probably more so than anybody in this room.”

Cleary started to say something more, then sensed the walls were closing in again. They had painted him into a corner. What credence he may have had earlier was gone now, vaporized in this brief dialogue so carefully marshaled by the Committee.

“Bailiff,” spoke the Chairman, “Will you remove Mr. Cleary from this room.” The same burley fellow approached again, and Cleary was sick with anticipation. His stomach churned, and his head got light, and he felt very bad indeed.

“Dios Mio,” said an elderly man sitting right behind Cleary. He got up with a start and said loudly. “Please, Mr. Bailiff, you can very well stay where you are for a few more moments.”

They were very soft words, with a foreign accent to them. A trace of fire was there, though; this man was used to getting his way. “Jesus

Christo, but these idiotas are gone too darned far this time," he said as he walked behind Cleary, patting him on lightly on the head as he passed.

The Bailiff was still approaching the witness, but the man cut him off with an extended walking cane. "You go back to corner, Mister Guardia Civil. Sit yourself down and wait and watch for un poco while longer."

"What is this outrage," the lady from Texas yelled out. The man was still walking slowly toward the bench purposefully, and he stopped in front of the lady and gave a little curt bow, uttering "Begging your pardon, I will be myself clear shortly."

The stranger walked up to the Chairman then, and made his introductions and demurely asked for a few moment of the Committee's time. The Chairman, regretfully, granted him permission to speak. Cleary was shocked when the man turned around to face the meeting room, hat in hand and a weak smile on his Hispanic features face. It was Dr. Durand-Hollis, from the Pavilion. The doctor gave Cleary a short little smile, motioning with his head a pleasant greeting and with a little dance of the head-and-shoulders said, you sit tight; is OK.

"Ladies and Gentlemens, my name is Doctor Gabriel Durand-Hollis." Bowing his greetings to either side, he spoke out. "I am Chief of Psychiatry at Brookes Army Medical Center in San Antonio Tejas at Fort Sam Houston."

"Especialist Cleary was a patient of mine a few years ago," then with a warm smile, "And a very good one too."

"I am meaning to say that I am intimately familiar with this individual here before you. Plus, I have observed him all today, and I testify that he is as sane and lucid and logical as anyone in this whole room - and - with especial people in mind too." Then he turned to glare fiercely at the lady from Texas.

"I will furthermore stake my professional reputation upon this statement." "I will also give you one more definitive statement for the record here now today. I am tired of letting the political authorities used my profession to harm such good people as this man here. And I will not stand at all mute to see it done here in this most honorable place of Congress in the United States of America."

Then he walked around the witness table, reached out and shook Cleary's hand. "I am very, very proud of you," he said. "I have always been proud of you, even if you did not really know it."

"Now, now - is OK to cry! Is therapy, see?"

Cleary lay his head on the table, gently helped there by the Doctor's beckoning hand. He heaved a few times, but a few moments later sat

back up, wiped his face, sniffled and sat still. Afraid, utterly; to say a single, solitary, additional word.

The Chairman called a recess, overcoming protests from the still livid lady Senator from Texas. Mexican-Americans were not well thought of in her offices, and she did not like this doctor in the room; not at all.

While making the Senator from Texas even angrier, with his politeness and persistence, the Doctor reached over to touch Colonel Franco on the hand. When Franco reflexively reached out to shake his hand, the Doctor swiftly placed a small cellular phone in his palm; covering it up quickly, as he grasped Franco's hand in both of his own.

Franco played out his respectful part in the introductions; then meandered off to the side of the room. The Doctor continued to be incredibly irritating to the Committee members, going up to beg the pardon of each and every one of them as they left to chambers. Every minute or so, he would glance Franco's way; then move to block the Committee's view of him, as he made an assault on the next Senator leaving.

It was a masterful performance. Who would suspect such a kindly doctor of duplicity?

"So, Mr. Cleary," the Chairman inquired as the Committee went back into session. Franco and the Doctor were on either side of Cleary, and his confidence was renewed.

"You believe the engineering societies orchestrated the Freon ban?" When there was no reply, he had to prod the witness to get his blood boiling fast enough to blast out a reply.

"I find that really hard to believe."

"Why?" came the hoped-for retort. "It's in the charter of every professional society in America."

"What is that, Sir?"

"To promote and promulgate the profession, in this case, engineering. Every state licensing board follows the same premise."

"I don't follow you," shouted the Senator from Texas. She was sensitive to her turf, evidently.

"I'll use a Board you may relate a little better to, than the Engineer's Board . . ."

"I served on the Psychological Associates Advisory Committee in Texas - a subordinate board to the Psychologists Licensing Board - and learned a thing or two about how that profession works."

Dr. Durand-Hollis perked up at this and became suddenly attentive.

"Well, Sirs. It's simple, really. Written clearly in the Charter, and

discussed frequently in Board meetings is the very simple premise that a significant reason for the Board to exist is to promote the profession.

"Which sounds like a pretty innocuous statement. What it really means, is that a major responsibility of the Board is to ensure full employment of all its members. They are an elected organization - from within themselves - and who will get elected who does not promote full employment?"

"You're going in circles again, Mr. Cleary," the Chairman said. "Please make yourself a little clearer - can you give us a concrete example?"

"Yes, Sir. Can do."

"Right about the time I was appointed to the board by Governor Bush, I had a feature article published in Engineered Systems magazine, a national magazine catering to the air conditioning industry. The article proposed the existence of a possible connection between indoor air quality and psychological illness."

"Mr. Cleary," the Doctor interrupted. Then, "Begging your pardon Mr. Chairman - may I question the witness in this matter?"

"Please?" and the Chairman nodded his approval.

"You are saying that bad or improper air quality can contribute to mental illness?"

"Doesn't take a genius to figure it out. People spend over eighty percent of their time in conditioned places - the office, stores, the bus, the car; everywhere the modern cosmopolitan citizen goes, it MUST be air conditioned, no?"

"The air we breathe is no less important than the food we eat, is it not? Dietary deficiency in certain chemicals can contribute to mental instability, is that not so?"

"Why, yes. It is a very basic consideration. Yes, it is."

"My, but we are being so cooperative today, Dr. Durand-Hollis," Cleary said, scoffing his witness as only he could do, and get away with. It was his circus, again.

"Doctor, what are some of the symptoms of oxygen deprivation?"

"Dizziness, nausea, headache, mental confusion, diminishing of short-term memory - all the way up to psychosis and death, in very extreme circumstances."

"Doctor, would these effects be felt by an individual at a very high altitude - such as Machu Pichu; or to a lesser extent White Sands Missile Range?"

"Yes, that is when the symptoms become most manifest."

"And would any or all of these symptoms be more prevalent when an individual first is introduced to the conditions? For example, a service member arriving at White Sands for the first time?"

"Why, yes. Again, you are correct."

"And that these symptoms might persist further if this individual just happened to have a lower than normal red blood count, which is what collects and distributes oxygen within the body?"

"Yes, Mr. Cleary that is correct."

Then Cleary did a little twist-and-shout on his ankle, ending it with a good strong, "Yes!" Soldier boy is free finally. 'Now we can get down to the real business of this hearing.'

"OK, Doctor. Am I correct in saying that a similar range of psychological manifestations have been shown to result from carbon dioxide poisoning - or an excess of carbon dioxide in the air we breathe."

"That is a proven fact, it is."

"Now lets put two and two together, shall we? People breathe. Oxygen is extracted from the air. It is replaced with carbon dioxide."

"With me so far?"

"Why, yes I follow you just fine."

"Think about a room with many people. The more people per fixed area, the worse the breathing air is, no?" Dr. Durand-Hollis nodded his agreement.

"Thus, if no fresh air is provided to a space, then the occupants will eventually begin to show signs of mental illness. The more people, the smaller the space, the sooner the symptoms?" Again, the doctor nodded, not quite able to speak.

Cleary took a break, looking from each Committee member to the next, being sure they were all following his reasoning. They were, maybe too well. The Chairman's hands gripping the edge of the table in front of him were white from the exertion. Cleary thought cheerfully; maybe the old codger will have a heart attack and save me the trouble.

"Is it not odd that ASHRAE, the association responsible for the maintenance of air quality in every building and every conditioned space upon this entire continent - is it not odd that this connection has NEVER been made by them? That there have NEVER been any papers published on the topic? That ASHRAE has never sponsored any research into even the possibility that air quality might affect psychological well being?"

"Colonel Franco, why do you suppose that is?" and he turned to the Army counsel now.

“Liability,” he said very weakly.

“Please speak a little louder, so everyone can hear you.” “Liability, I said damn it,” he repeated.

“Indeed, how very interesting. Liability.” Then he said to the Committee. “Why would ASHRAE’s new standards have drastically REDUCED the outside air requirements in all of our buildings?” Then he waved his arms to each side, being sure they all realized this very hearing was happening in a crowded room, in a conditioned space.

“But is there no insurance to cover this sort of thing?” turning to face Franco. “No, Sir. It would be hugely expensive, even if there were any available.”

“Wait, let me guess. That would take profits out of the pockets of consulting engineers. And, since their fees are more or less fixed industry-wide; it would take PROFITS out of their pockets.”

“Now I think I understand,” Cleary said acting as though he were thinking hard.

“Big little man gets bright idea that indoor air might affect mental illness. Big little man publishes story to this effect in international magazine. Six weeks later big little man is without a job, and six weeks later the firm has hired three people to perform his duties - for a cumulative additional salary five times what they were paying big little man.”

“And the poor little guy is so naïve that he thinks the Psychology Board will be interested. He lobbies a little support among other members. He puts the subject on the board agenda, submits interesting facts.” Then turning to look the lawyer square in his eyes, “And what do you suppose happened, Colonel Franco?”

“How should I know?”

“You shouldn’t,” Cleary apologized. “I was just checking to see if you might know.” A few people chuckled, but not many - not nearly enough Cleary thought, to make it to the end of this reasoning with any amount of grace.

“The answer is that the subject was soundly rejected by the Board’s legal counsel and never mentioned again.” Turning to the lawyer again, he reiterated,

“And why do you suppose that happened, Colonel Franco.” Moreover, ‘little man Cleary promptly resigned his public board member seat, in protest.’

“The Psychology Board is charged with maintaining full employment of its members. Bad air quality that invisibly causes mental illness keeps the doctor’s couches full, and the doctor’s bank accounts fat.”

“Now I have a question for you, Doctor.”

“Think before you answer this question, it’s tricky: what are generally the most densely occupied buildings in terms of people per square foot of floor space?” Then he turned to motion the Bailiff to turn down the room thermostat, indicating he was getting a little hot under the collar. Nobody missed the significance of his gesture.

“Well, it would have to be classrooms in schools.” “Very good, thank you, doctor.”

“Would you consider this a matter about which a competent Professional Engineer, being charged with maintaining buildings in the interests of the public’s health, should be concerned about?”

“Mr. Cleary, I think it is a problem we should all be very concerned about.” Then, looking around them, “Especially those of us with children in school.” A little murmur started behind him, and Cleary swiftly asked his next question.

“DOCTOR, you did so well on the last question. Here is another for the \$64,000. Why do you think ASHRAE is lowering the fresh air standards?”

“I would guess that it will save them energy,” he replied after a while. “It would seem that the less efficient Freon equipment will need more energy to handle extra outside air. So, in order to keep the whole issue from surfacing at all, they reduce outside air standards and no one is the wiser.”

“. . . no pun intended, Doctor?” Then he turned to Franco.

“Now, Counselor - here’s YOUR \$64,000 question: what single industry is a trillion dollars behind in their facility maintenance, according to a study made during the Clinton Administration?”

Franco motioned that he needed another hint, “What industry, on the one hand, is dependent upon public support, but must pay out any excess funds to keep its professionals happy and working?” No more hints he motioned. The Committee were starting to show displeasure at this little charade.

“OK, one more: what industry is high-occupancy, and public, and extremely strapped for funds, and whose buildings are falling apart at the seams in every, single community in this nation?”

“Public schools?” Colonel Franco said with dawning horror.

“Need I say more? Schools are full, over capacity. Schools are always broke. Reducing outside air intake is the single, easiest way to reduce the fiscal plant operating budget.”

"And, god damn," Cleary gestured, "Wouldn't you know it. The incidence of mental illness in school-age children has gone up tenfold in the last five years alone. It has gone up twenty-fold in inner cities, where the air is already of poor quality to breathe."

"Ladies and gentlemen, I rest my case." One or two mouths were open, and slowly more and more people caught the gist of Cleary's reasoning.

With that, Cleary turned to face the audience and violently slammed both fists down hard on the table top, making a tremendous sound. It was just the shock needed to loosen all the tongues in the room, and suddenly everyone was talking at once.

Just as the crescendo of the uproar was gaining speed, the Senator from Texas caught Cleary's eye. "Shoo, y'all" she yelled at the top of her voice. "Get the hell out of here you idiots!"

Cleary and his two fellow conspirators collected their wits and split the witness stand, swiftly making their way toward the exit. The lady Senator from Texas kept the Committee; for that matter, the entire room distracted with a tirade, lambasting the crazy witness and his flimsy testimony. Cleary was so impressed that he turned at one point, wanting to see her sterling performance; the Doctor grabbed him by the tie and yanked him forcefully back to the group, now nearing the door. All Cleary could think of was; damn, I hope CNN gets that Dragon Lady on the news tonight.

Franco's associates from JAG were waiting impatiently at the door. Evidently, Franco had gotten through to them on the doctor's cell telephone. The Army officers in working uniforms were engaged in conversation with the bailiffs. As they approached, Franco paced out ahead of them and said, "Boy am I glad to see you guys!"

"Well, come on - let's get out of here!" However, the JAG staff was ashen-faced, and the bailiffs had moved to block their exit from the doors.

"I'm sorry, Paul," said the ranking member of the delegation from the Pentagon.

"We have orders to take you people into custody," said in a very New York brash rude in-your-face accent. He held up his arms, palms outward to say it's out of my hands; please, just come along peaceably it will be OK. The same old I am only following orders excuse that had become the norm rather than the exception in America lately.

Franco started to tackle the guy, but the Doctor held him back. The three fugitives were out of aces. The door was too far away to make a dash for it, and the bailiffs were armed and appeared quite willing to

avail themselves of a few slugs. Cleary especially had caused them more than his share of trouble, this day. They would have gladly plugged him several times, given half a chance.

Suddenly, the main doors to the courtroom opened, and a big group of people came hustling in. There was a stir among the audience. Cleary turned, hoping for a seam in the security, for a chance they could escape.

All he saw were marines. Armed, god damn marines, doubling up on the exit doors and fanning out around the perimeters of the room. That's just great. See if Cleary makes any more funny jokes about them again. What the hell were they doing anyway, following orders? Thirty more hot, heavy-breathing meatheads to burden the room air-conditioning.

Doe!, hitting his head with his fist - now there's a Bart Simpson kind of idea for you.

Wiping the victory right off his face, Cleary turned swiftly around to join politely in an animated conversation with his captors, the picture of civility and garrulousness. Soon they were all talking up a storm, as they waited for the Committee to return from the recess in chambers. Their captors became increasingly suspicious of this radical change in behavior and exchanged worried glances between them.

Just then, the doctor came over to Cleary and asked very seriously, "I answer question right; I want my \$64,000!"

"Yea, me too!" Franco chimed in, and they all had a good, loud laugh. That did it; the head JAG man gave the signal, and their minions sealed off all exits from the room. They allowed absolutely no one to leave the room while the Committee was in recess.

"Got to go potty," Cleary exclaimed to his captor in his best Forest Gump. The buzz-head troopers looked terrified and totally ignored him. 'is OK, can hold' Cleary said in a little tiny voice. The marine cracked a smile despite himself and obliged Cleary's request. Just as they returned, caught up in animated conversation, the Committee was calling the meeting back to session.

The plot thickened, and with it, the air.

Eleven

*Lay your hand on him;
Remember the battle;
You will not do it again”
Job: 41: 7,8*

RUSK STATE HOSPITAL

“Doctor, do you believe this individual is suited to live on his own, outside of this institution?”

“No, Your Honor. I categorically do not. The documentation proves it,” pointing to a three-inch stack of paperwork on the table beside him.

“Is the patient on any medication?” “No, Sir. He is not.”

“And you want to keep him here, at state’s expense?”

“He is on Social Security Disability compensation, your Honor.”

“So, then he is here at his own expense - since the money comes out of his Social Security benefits?” Shaking his head in dismay at the physician, he looked Cleary up and down.

“Mr. Cleary, have you no legal representation?”

“No, Sir. I didn’t know I could have any,” he said shyly. “But I’ll be happy to answer any questions you may have!”

“Are you aware of the significance of this hearing, Mr. Cleary?”

“Yes, Sir. I’m told it is to decide if I will be permanently remanded to the custody of this institution.” Then he made a real hard swallow. “To decide if I will stay here forever.”

“You don’t want to stay, do you?”

“No, Sir. I don’t much like it here. It’s not a very nice place to be.” “Do you know why you were brought here?”

“Yes, Sir. I think about it night and day.”

“Do you want to go back home, Mr. Cleary?” That earned the first smile from the patient.

"Oh, God, Your Honor - Can I?"

"Yes, you can. But I don't want to see you back here again - hear me?" "Oh, Yes Sir."

"I mean, No Sir!"

"Thank you, Sir. I won't let you down."

"No, I don't believe you will at that," he said with a smile, and he went back to work.

The physician who had come to testify was thoroughly livid.

"What's this cut on your hand, Mr. Cleary," inquired the duty physician.

"A lady in my apartment complex was getting beat up by her boyfriend last night. She was screaming bloody murder. A chair crashed through the front window, and she was reaching out to scrape her wrists on it.

"I had come out to see what was going on - I knew her some, and she had problems with this guy before. This was a bad night, even relative to his usual treatment of her. I'm glad I showed up because I was able to grab her hands and keep her from hurting herself real bad. I cut my arms a little trying to stop her; she was so strong.

"The police arrived soon after that. They arrested the bad boyfriend. An ambulance came. They fixed up her bruises and gave me a bandage to stop the bleeding, then brought me by here to get stitches for my hand.

"Our records show," glancing down through the file in his lap, "You were brought in a few weeks ago, for suicidal ideation."

"Yes, Sir. I was having a hard time in school. They brought me in, and I talked with the duty doctor for a while. He sent me home OK." The physician got up and, standing in the doorway said, "Stay put, and I'll be back shortly."

"Wait," he said as the doctor made to leave. "I'm telling the truth," but it was too late, he was gone out the door. "You can check the police blotter - ask the ambulance guys that brought me here," Cleary said to the closed door.

Cleary never saw that doctor again.

He did see a mean policeman a few minutes later. They handcuffed and manhandled him into the squad car. Ten hours later they admitted him to Rusk State Hospital.

No family came. No friends called.

The only people around him were patients. Most of them were in

very bad, bad shape. They helped each other and passed the time as best they could.

Eventually, his Social Security sponsor, a graduate student in civil engineering at Texas A & M University - a born-again Christian trying to do a good deed - brought some clothes and a few personal things.

He was the only person who showed any care whatsoever. was his name. Kip had ceased to associate friendly names to people. They just turned on him and tore his heart apart; they did not deserve his trust, so he just did not give them names like humans ought to have.

Initially, the diagnosis was mild depression. They promised he would be on his way home in a few weeks.

Just before his time was due to go home, his Army medical records arrived from Fort Sam Houston. (they never arrived that swiftly any time since, when he needed them for appeals.) Then everything changed.

Immediately, they wanted to put him on medication, like everyone else. Somehow, Cleary managed to get out of that one.

Then, came the hurried legal hearing. They wanted to put him in the barbed wire ward. It was the Holocaust museum, a restricted ward with all of the criminally insane people inside. He was scared. When _ came to pick him up again, he was a saint. A nameless saint, but most of them are, anyway.

Who wouldn't be depressed, after what Cleary had been through in the last six months?

Sensibly, he agreed to regular counseling sessions at the university clinic. They were free and graduate students, under the supervision of a professor, were administering them. They were a blessing, and Cleary made very rapid progress.

By days, he worked at the local Synagogue. He was adopted by the whole staff; the Rabbi in particular. Rabbi Tarlow was a psychologist himself, and Kip made a great deal of progress, indeed.

Cleary spent a lot of his time doing yard work and chores around the Synagogue, painting the place from top to bottom, inside and out. He made many friends with the students and staff. He was even studying for Conversion.

"Hey, Kip," _ asked him one afternoon right before spring break. "My brother in Vermont is starting up a dairy farm - how'd you like to go and help out?"

"Oh, I'd love to!"

"It's really, really hard work and we can't pay you," said. Kip was not thinking about money. He was thinking about work.

"You'll have to sign over all your Social Security check to pay for room and board," still Kip did not hear him. Money was of no concern at all.

It was sad parting from the Rabbi and his friends at the Synagogue. The Rabbi gave him a big, thick blanket to keep him warm. The kids gave him a little Buddha with a big belly. He didn't much like the latter, having studied so hard and long to reach Conversion, he considered it almost an insult. The Rabbi's blanket went with him to Vermont. The Buddha went right into the trash, a few tears right along with it.

There had been absolutely no contact with his family, since leaving the Army eighteen months ago. He was a pariah. There was no sadness, then, in leaving Texas to go all the way north to Vermont. Just excitement for a new beginning in a strange land.

"There's no need to disprove the Army diagnosis," Chaplain Saunders wrote. Kip had found him several years later and told him how he was doing. "Don't waste your energy fighting the system. You'll never be able to get those egomaniacs to change anyway," continued the handwritten scrawl. "You have already disproved everything, by your success and your accomplishments.

Best of luck!"

Heartened, Kip gave the Chaplain a call. Contrary to his expectations, the conversation was strained at best. The Chaplain was cordial, but not very supportive.

"What," Kip finally asked him, "Do you think I was wrong to turn people in for doing drugs at White Sands?"

"Well, you just should have been more careful for your safety," was the noncommittal reply.

"Oh, I see. The Army did nothing wrong by keeping me in the middle of the whirlwind there, getting daily threats to my life, getting my car blown up and..."

"You misunderstand," interrupted the Chaplain.

"No," Cleary said. "I think you're just a part of the system like everybody else. You and your doctor and lawyer friends work like hell to make every mental quirk a sign of severe mental illness. Eventually, there's so damn little originality left in people they have to turn to alcohol or drugs to muster any creativity whatsoever. Then along comes someone like me who's a little off but creative as hell, and you see all the drug moneys going down the drain."

Cleary paused a moment to catch his breath, only to discover that the Chaplain had hung up on him.

Twelve

*And the Lord said to Satan,
“Have you considered My servant Job?
For there is no one like him on earth,
A blameless and upright man,
Fearing God and turning away from evil.
Then Satan answered the Lord,
“Does Job fear God for nothing?
Job: 1: 8,9*

“Good Morning, America,” Cleary said into the microphone just like the wild and crazy DJ Robin Williams in the movie. His was Cleary’s last chance before the Committee. It was obviously a token encore required by the expediency of the damned Constitutional system of due process to prove before all that he was nuts and that his accusations were groundless. Example of him, they would make.

He pretended that the crowd was a friendly one, to bolster his confidence. They were on his side! When he turned to catch their eye, there were admiring, friendly looks and cheery faces. Quite a few clashing colors and patterns, too; so Cleary did not stay looking very long.

Here he was, Kip Cleary, master of that most obscure and much-feared force in Washington called Pure and Unadulterated Rhetoric. He could shake, he could shine; he could make ‘em cry, and he could make ‘em whine.

“Mr. Chairman,” Cleary said after the raucous clamor died down inside his head.

“Sir, may I continue my testimony before this august Committee?”
“Please, Mr. Cleary.”

“It all comes down to a pretty simple question, Mr. Chairman. “Why is Freon more important to Congress than Oxygen?”

“Why, Sir,” Cleary continued, “Did Congress act with such haste on the Freon ban? In fact, you voted for a faster phase-out schedule than was approved at the Rio Accord. THEN, a year later, you voted to expedite THAT schedule by a substantial margin?”

“What, did your accountants tell you the noose wasn’t tight enough?”

“Oh, I suppose its something you can’t talk about in public,” wheeling around to bring the Committee back into the action. Good, they sought answers now, too.

“Let me guess; it’s a matter of National Security?” ‘Yea, where have I heard that one before.’

“I’m really very sorry, Sir but Freon may be a national security issue - but you’re going to be hard pressed to make Oxygen one too. “

Strangely, the committee was silent, with a smug let-the-fellow-dig-his-own- grave attitude in their expressions.

“Why IS oxygen such an issue,” said the lady from Texas, breaking the mold and drawing some irritated glances from her peers.

“Global Warming is not just a matter of carbon dioxide, ma’am.” Then with a frustrated waving of his hands, Cleary decided on another tact.

“OK. The world uses natural fuels to generate electricity, run automobiles, and otherwise fuel the engine of civilization. Right? These fuels are predominantly coal, oil, and natural gas. The Global Warming advocates claim the burning of all these fuels puts extra carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. This and other pollutants, create an insulating blanket that acts like a greenhouse, causing it to warm up.”

“You with me so far?” The lady Senator looked up from her notes and nodded yes.

“OK. The problem happens because the natural air fresheners - plants - cannot convert the carbon dioxide into oxygen swiftly enough to maintain equilibrium. Civilization tends to denude the land of trees. The Old South was the first vast region to suffer the consequences of industrial progress; if memory serves me, during the Roman era Spain and Italy suffered much the same fate across the big lake.”

“Cotton wastes the land of its rich minerals, and the South clothed the world with her own heart and soul. A monkey used to be able to tour the entire South without ever touching the ground. Now? It has to swing from derrick to derrick, if at all. No trees.”

“Anyway, that is the end of the chemical process - what’s on the right side of the equals sign. Nobody thinks very much about what is on the left side of the equation. Actually, it is more than half of the effect; far more.”

“Combustion of any fuel uses an enormous amount of oxygen. That little sedan you drive to work? It sucks in oxygen like an elephant after a marathon in sand. The engine is only about five percent efficient too:

for every twenty gallons of fuel, only one actually does work - all the rest is lost as heat.

"Trees are good, but not *THAT* good - to make up for all the oxygen all our machines operating all the time suck from the air. You wipe out the rain forests at the tropics, as is happening at the rate of an area the size of a rural county each day; and you lose Mr. Clean, and the effect escalates.

"Its funny, too, that there is far more evidence to support the Global Warming scenario than there ever was for the depletion of the ozone layer. Yet, Congress is the complete opposite - it is far more opposed than it was to the Freon ban. Not only that, the evidence for Global Warming is much easier to understand than for the Freon ban. Yet, again, Congress stumbles over itself to go to the opposite extreme - voting unanimously, far in advance of the ratification of the Global Warming Treaty by the Kyoto Conference; unanimously, to *NOT* ratify it.

"That is very unusual behavior in my book. It's like a doctor diagnosing an illness before he has even seen the patient," with a dark look at Dr. Durand- Hollis.

"What more can I say to convince you people?" Cleary said, a tone of desperation creeping into his voice. "That the Treaty has a very nice provision to allow credits to nations that plant extra trees, to offset the pollution they create? That the United States, of all the industrialized nations, has more land that can be reforested than any other - especially the Old South?

"Can you people, for just a moment, imagine a forested America, the land of majestic skies once again? I, for one, find that to be a very pretty sight - oh, I forgot, I am not right in the head, is that it? To be able to imagine America as it was, the Indians back home, and the wonderful spirit of the frontier rekindled in people's hearts?"

"And what of the millions of people who are now being thrown off the welfare rolls, competing for only a few available entry-level jobs? Do you, who caused their addiction to the Red Cross dole in the first place; do you not now owe them to help them become good citizens again? They want very, very badly to do you want too?

"What better job than to plant trees? It will make them hearty and strong people again, or maybe just for the first time. Does not that give you a warm, fuzzy feeling . . . No, I suppose it wouldn't . . . And best yet, the welfare rollers will not have to be paid a penny - because they will be earning credits, under the provisions of the Global Warming Treaty!

"UNCLE SAM WANTS YOU," he yelled in sincere rage, pointing at each Senator in turn. "You people have the notion that criminals should

be treated better than poor United States citizens? Those criminals deserve air conditioning and four square meals, TV, jobs, and weight rooms and pay and comfortable probation and job training and job quotas for government work?

Then, glaring Franco's way, "Well, perhaps some legalese; some nice fire and brimstone rationalizations will help to make things more imminently clear to the Honors? That seems to be the dialect you understand the best."

"Or would you prefer to continue," then turning around very dramatically. "Will you excuse if I ask just one rhetorical question today?" With a little bow of thanks, "Do you read the newspapers?" Then he held up his hands, motioning that it was his one allowed rhetorical question - 'no objections allowed!'

"Well, if you did," Cleary continued undaunted, "You would have noticed some mighty peculiar goings-on around the world. You should try it," with mock compassion, "It would give you a little perspective - that all roads don't really lead to Rome."

The Chairman was starting to get purple around the ears he was so mad, so Cleary decided a few facts were the antidote. "The papers are full of incredible weather stories; have been so for over a year: droughts covering entire continents, while floods rage on others. There have been ice storms a thousand miles long, rain where there is usually snow, and doldrums where there should have been hurricanes. And you people can still sit there and claim that Global Warming is a figment of our imaginations?" 'Oh, I forgot - it IS our imagination - because THEY don't read the papers,' to the audience.

"The latest theory is that Global Warming will cause the polar ice caps to melt. In the Northern Atlantic, the cold meltwater will reach further south and push the Gulf Stream with it. The warm current will not be able to reach Europe and warm it. The sunny Mediterranean will act more like its true latitude: chilly Chicago. The wet but warm British Isles will become frigid and barren, just like Newfoundland at the same latitude across the big lake."

"That's a bunch of bull," yelled the lady from Texas. "It'll never happen - it's just some pie in the sky theory by some Ivy League professor trying to get published."

"Maybe," Cleary conceded. "But they said the same thing about Relativity Theory."

"I suppose none of y'all made it to the five hundredth anniversary of the settlement of our continent this past year?" Noticing blank looks all

around, Cleary hunched his shoulders and lectured them. "Too bad - the Queen was there!"

"Newfoundland - first settled five hundred years ago. Made their living off fishing ever since. The Grand Banks, where the Gulf Stream takes a right turn when it meets glaciers drifting south. The most plentiful fishing ground in the world; until recently, that is. The authorities forbid even sports fishing now; there are so few fish left. The whole island has almost fifty percent unemployment."

"Claim is, the area was overproduced. At least that is the story the government gives. It all sounds somewhat fishy to me. Odd, is it not, that the same did not happen to the Peruvian bounty in the Pacific, despite far more prolonged abuse? Odd, is it not, that this plummet in fish count happened right when the debate about Global Warming was starting to heat up? You don't suppose that Newfoundland has lost its fish for all time, do you?"

Pausing to take a sip of water from a mug on the Conference table, Cleary waited a few breaths until he could calm down a little bit. He decided it was time for a new tact because it was obvious the Committee did not give a damn about what happened in Canada. In fact, from the smirks, it seemed they took a modicum of pleasure, in the grief they had caused.

"Thirteen," Cleary began again, in a very formal and studious tone, "Has the stigma of being such a bad number. Do I make myself clear?" Good.

"But it's just another number, a simple combination of two abstract digits. Why do you suppose we associate it so strongly with bad luck? There are many socially endowed prejudices. Some are harmless. Others are an abject tragedy." Yes?

"Captain Kangaroo over there," motioning to the Marines stationed all around the room, "Is totally superfluous in this post-detante age. We spend \$200 billion dollars keeping this Leviathan in working order, and our most threatening competition - still the Soviet Union - spends \$2 billion a year. Why?"

"The U.S. has spent \$200 billion on the military for twenty years and more - what did the American people get for it?"

"Take one little, small example: the computer modem!" You all know, those gizmos that plug into the box that has the TV screen that plays something other than 'As Washington Turns' soap opera?

"A marvel of modern technology researched, created, tested and perfected for use by the military. Who makes the profit from this swift little device? Why, it's Rockwell Corporation!"

"I call that corporate welfare: The taxpayers pay for the product development. Then private industry sells it for the profits. Sometimes, like with Chrysler, it is even more convoluted. The government bails Chrysler out of bankruptcy.

Afterward Chrysler becomes one of the most profitable corporations in America, mostly based on its lucrative contracts to build all of the Army's heavy vehicles - tanks, etc. Then Mercedes-Benz buys Chrysler, with it all our military hardware and expertise. Suddenly the American taxpayers are bailing out the German economy. All of a sudden, the Germans have the best tanks in the world, compliments of Uncle Sam.

"There are millions of such deals, large and small and in between. Virtually every major corporation in America has designed for the military - a.k.a. foreign nations - and kept the rights for their own profit. Ladies and gentlemen, they were ALL paid for with your money.

"Yes, my fellow Americans," in a parody of Nixon, "The I R Us gave all your money to Toys R Us at the Pentagon, who then gave it to Bucks R Here on Wall Street."

"Oh, my I have a headache, do we have to do it tonight, honey bakes?" came the strong Southern accent. Cleary acted weak and submissive to the whiles of a spouse. "We NEED these weapons. There are DANGERS, and Terrorists; and Sadam Husseins; and bad chemicals - they're everywhere, under every rock!" in a max headroom blur." Hell, and they thought I was paranoid. .

"Why, blow me away," in a shrill Ross Perot voice, "Remember the Gulf War? Do you? Do you really? No matter how our history books may be written to glorify the American troops, that WAS A joint military expedition with international leadership!" using his hands to pick out his years like Perot; Cleary paraded around the floor.

"Americans love a good fundraiser," with a Nixon "V" on his fingers and accent in his voice; but parading like Patton with the big American flag behind him on the podium.

"Jesus, who the hell do you think you're fooling anyway? You people trying to ruin corporate America as well? Get them used to sucking egg for all the nifty inventions than any other corporations in the world must pay for out of their very own pockets? 'Why, honey child, you should be ashamed of yourself. Right this minute, go wash your mouth out with toothpaste - the "Freonated" kind, if you will.'

"Mr. Chairman, and you wonder why the gap widens year by year between the poor and middle-class Americans, and the wealthy Americans? Why decent health care is available to fewer and fewer

people each year, with more middle-class households finding themselves in this category?

“Mr. Chairman, do you really give a god damn?”

“Mr. President,” Cleary said all hunched up around the microphone, in a very shrill voice. “We, well; we need a war. Can you arrange it for us? Well, we got some new weapons to field test. ... Yes, sir, we do. OK, sure we can be ready in six months. You can arrange it then? Oh, swell, Mr. President. You are a super guy. OH, and I owe you one, Mr. President.”

“Mr. Chairman, when all else fails; when all other groups have equal representation and equal rights, it is the United States Congress that is supposed to set things right. Otherwise, these organizations are in violation of the Constitution. You are the ones who are supposed to be the restoring moment. You are supposed to keep the delicate balance of the American system functioning as it was designed by our forefathers; the pendulum to keep this great nation from being cast into the pit.

‘Food fight!’ now with a little John Belushi pacing on the stage. ‘Ha, Samurai Congressman come to big city Washington to slash big bad budget; holds out a top hat to catch bucks as they are shaved from the budget by voluptuous lady assistant; stuffing them into his own pocket then. Bonzai ! Now there is an idea! Let’s all go have sex over at Mr. Bill’s place - the taxpayers will pick up the tab - coffee’s free too!

“You boomers are not only the ultimately selfish generation - the ME generation

but you have fostered a selfish nation. You have created a glass ceiling, beyond which no one can pass. Your treacherous system has held a thousand points of light. They were YOUR beacons along my journey through the Valley of Death, a journey that was supposed to lead not into the light, but into perpetual darkness. Clearly, they were pointing the way to the bottom of the pit.

“The American way has always been a use-em-then-throw-them-away society. But the pendulum is sharp, it is getting closer, and America is tied to the torture table by the grandiose delusions of Congress. First, it was the Old South, use the land then conquer it. Now it is more modern but the same nevertheless.

Just ask the Tiger Economies in Southeast Asia, where all their profits went? They will just meow at you and say they are so much in debt they are totally dependent upon America now. Ah, so Master wants shoes shiny; o pendulum very sharp; yes, coolie can do.

“And who can say no? The United States has the foremost military machine in the world - no one can challenge it and survive.” ‘Uh, uh

excuse me butthead sure, yes Beavis? You need to, like; uh - pay more for your gas; hahahah.

Yeah - more; OK? Yea, thanks. And, you know too; then, Sir. Got to please like, yeah; - hand over the cannon. Sure? That one, so we can all like, uh live in peace.'

"How much longer do you suppose you can hold the world hostage with your mighty military machine, as your prosperity escalates and theirs plummets? Eventually, you know you're going to have to USE that military to back up the extortion. Then the truth will come out that not everybody is going to be a pushover sand-devil like Iraq; who you really did not defeat anyway. Gulf War? Sir, you're heading straight for a war in a Gulf much nearer home, if you don't mind your business and get this nation back on track. Then, mighty America's military will be totally inadequate, ill-prepared, and defeated.

"The rest of the world will be a trash can for your schemes no longer. Or a resource for all the powerful too-late-vested yuppies in your puny electorate. You have super-charged the economy to buy their votes with an economy way over-reaching its true value, courting depression in the process. The Global Warming Treaty could put a very calm and automatic transmission type of halt to that. The rest of the world has offered us a dove branch.

"Anybody who challenges your sacred authority you call crazy, stigmatize, and sanction with extreme prejudice. Good grief, Senators, China treats her dissidents with a LOT more humanely than America - at least they go to prison, instead of to hell. At least they use due process to do it, America uses subterfuge and guile to truly destroy dissent - especially by example. 'Here little pretty dove bird. Here chickie - off to Hong Kong with you, splat - off with your dissident head. Oh, poor Mr. Bull market dissident, it's out to pasture with you now. Too bad about the moo cow with mush for brains.

"Of all the cotton picking' ruses," he continued. "Y'all got to use SCIENCE to do your dirty deeds? Science, what made this nation great - you manipulate it, manage it, and dirty it, with your power, influence, and greed. Don't you realize the dissidents are going to be like gofers on the golf course, that you will have to blow up the whole golf course to get them all? Either just call it a gofer course or hang up your game and play tennis.

By this time, JAG men had surrounded Cleary and his friends. Angry and armed United States Marines backed them up. Their leader grabbed the microphone violently, ripping the cords out; then like Bill Murray stalking the golfing gophers, he yanked the entire base stand from its pinning, right off the table."

"Well, Pilgrim, so much for freedom of speech," Paul Franco said in his direction.

Cleary kept taking, his voice growing hoarse. It didn't really matter what he said anymore. The crowd parted before him like the Red Sea before Moses; except they were the Communist kind and not the salty kind. They were able to make a little progress toward the door, their only viable means of escape. The Marines saw this. They were maneuvering through the crowd, to cut them off at the door.

People move a whole lot faster for a mean armed Egyptian than for a raving Hebrew prophet yelling at the top his voice; so the Marines were definitely going to win this one; again.

Just then, the heavy wooden doors to the meeting room burst opened, and a dozen people crowded into the already full room. Cleary saw them from out of the corner of his eye, but the JAG men and their thugs had surrounded he, the doctor and Franco by this time. The marine's fearless leader in a pinstripe suit said threateningly, "Don't even THINK of trying," reading the thoughts of escape right off Cleary's forehead. Damn.

Franco nodded his agreement, as one of his so-called friends reached down to draw the firearm from the holster on his hip. Then they frisked all three of them and pulled handcuffs from somewhere. Now isn't that just like a baby boomer yuppie anxious to lick his master's hand. Well, dear, here's a chicken peck on the cheek; time to shove off for work. Got the car keys, the wallet, tie clasp - oh, can't forget the handcuffs; makes me sick in the stomach.

Suddenly a big, bald elderly fellow in a totally obnoxious combination of suit jacket and pants burst into the group like a tourist hell-bent on getting the inside scoop. A skinny, Telly Savalas sans lollipop, Cleary thought. The small group splintered as this fellow barged through them. The JAG men quickly hid the handcuffs away, for fear of offending the sensibility of this crew of unusually rambunctious tourists. Nobody much noticed the cocked M16's slung from every other marine in the area.

The big guy said in a wonderfully southern voice, to no one in particular but to everyone at the same time too, "WHY EXCUSE ME, Sir" in a voice that was embarrassingly loud, as tourists are wont to do. They think that if you speak loud enough and get enough attention, then people will give you anything you ask for, just to get rid of you. Actually, they're usually right.

"Why, Glory Hallelujah!" said the big voice as a couple of bear arms reached out to grasp Cleary by the shoulders - shaking him a little bit, "Lord, if it isn't Specialist Cleary!"

Slowly getting focus, as he was being shaken, Cleary caught this

obnoxious fellow-with-the-pepperoni-pizza-breath's eye, and startled; Ceasar I, mean Col - Colonel Saunders? He was a little older, but no gray hair (actually no hair at all, Cleary marveled) but the same spiritual cheer and gregarious aggressiveness. Evidently, the doctor and Franco had recognized the Colonel already because Cleary saw in his peripheral vision that they were exchanging some kind of looks.

Finally set steady on his feet, Cleary saw that all of the JAG men and the bailiffs were being engaged in extreme questioning from a bunch of persistent, horribly dressed retired elderly tourists with disgustingly courteous southern accents.

The Pentagon JAG men were reeling back from all this unsolicited goodwill. The poor double breasted Wall Street Yankee lawyers were totally outclassed; hopeless victims to these proselytizing southern Baptists, hell-bent - on something; lead by the fearless, full-bird Colonel (retired) himself.

No sooner had Cleary started to figure out what was going on, then he and the doctor and Franco were outside in the hallway. Right in the middle of a small phalanx of oldsters who were moving with incredible speed and dexterity. This was no walking cane, bridge-playing bunch; no, they were American citizens - probably the only decent ones left, Cleary thought on the hoof. Probably in a lot better shape than most Americans, too; as he struggled to keep his footing.

He wanted to ask someone for a cane; but figured, best not offend any of these good, brave solid folks. They got pain too; might as well get used to it all the time too.

Halfway to the big outside doors, the Colonel caught up to Cleary. Grabbing his elbow as they both hustled toward the doors and freedom, "A little late with the troops," Patton on the Rhine, waving his free arm to take the group in scope; which didn't nearly satisfy Cleary, who was hesitating. No not convinced yet, at all.

"After all, boy - we are SOUTHERN Baptists, and we Love a Rebel Hero!!" That did it, Cleary nodded assent, and they were off and running after the others.

They exited the building and bustled down the stairs to a waiting tour bus.

Everyone jostled inside, and the bus jolted to a start. No sooner were they underway than cell telephones materialized, in every single palm of the passengers. Several had laptop computers, and one enterprising old buzzard even had a portable fax machine. The language spoken among them would have put Microsoft corporate offices to great shame; modems, Internet link ups, downloading files, intersecting chat rooms, satellite

links, file transfer protocol, and on and on. This was one savvy bunch of folks, and Cleary relaxed for the first time; well, in over twelve years.

The President's Big Bird itself would have been outclassed by the communications that transpired from that yellow church bus. It trundled down the crowded Washington streets, making its escape complete - into the obscurity of the midday rush hour in the nation's capital. It was a good story, they were angry, and they called every public official, every news agency, and quite a few wrong numbers of people who got to hear the whole complete story anyway.

The three brave men were fugitives no longer. Were any government flunky stupid enough to cause them any harm whatsoever; well, it's not a pleasant thought to consider the repercussions. The mystical and mythical specter of Public Opinion is a much-feared ogre, even in the remotest, darkest corners of the House of Congress.

"Book 'em, Danto!" Cleary cringed from a punch to the arm of the doctor sitting next to him.

"Hey, Bones," again, to the Doctor in the seat ahead of them, "How do you like the show so far!"

"Rock and Roll, hombre!" came the spirited reply.

"We in the Bad Lands now!" chipped in Chaplain Saunders, pretty radical for an old bird.

"Oh my God," Cleary muttered with a start as they were nearing the outskirts of Washington, "Damn, I have a dinner date tonight!"

"To hell with God; you are gonna have to call and cancel it," Franco said as he handed Cleary a telephone.

"What? Are you kidding?" Then as Franco pushed the telephone into his face, "No, I guess you're not."

Dialing Nikki's hotel, the worse look of grief on his face of all that day, he solemnly asked for her room number. The telephone rang a few times, then the operator came back and asked if he wanted to leave a message. "OK," as he thought of a nice way to say it. The operator asked if he was still there, please?

"Just say," as he cleared his throat, "I'm on my way and will be there as fast as the traffic allows!!"

Kip snapped the halves of cell telephone back together with a crack, and shoved it right into Franco's lap. Then he got out of his seat and hurried up to the front of the bus to tell the driver to let him off at the next light. He had that give me liberty or give me death look back in his face again.

"Do me a favor, Franco," he yelled back to the still startled lawyer, "Call a taxi service and have 'em pick me up!"

"See ya'll in hell!" to everyone else in the buss, and he was off and running. Looking out of the window as the bus waited at the light, Franco craned his neck out the window to see Cleary haggling with a street vendor for some flowers.

"Oh, what the hell," he said to the empty seat beside him. Slamming up the school bus window, he tossed a fist full of wadded up C-notes in Cleary's direction, yelling as he did so, "Have yourself a good time, soldier!"

"And that is now a doctor's order!" Gabriel Durand-Hollis added from the seat in front of him, just as the bus started to pull away. Fumbling with his own wallet and then trying to get some bills loose from the fold he muttered something that sounded like, 'Caramba, if Christ isn't on a crutch,' and tossed the whole damn wallet out the window.

Then he turned to the lawyer and said, "Save sex tonight!" and settled into his chair with a great big smile on his face.

A few minutes later, as Cleary faded in the distance - clutching the money, the wallet, and a big dozen red roses, Franco started to lean forward to chat with the doctor. Only to see him pulling a straw hat he spied from out of the overhead rack. Then the esteemed psychologist adjusted it over his face, and slid comfortably sideways and a little down in the chair. Then he squirmed a bit to get just the right angle of the bright sun in his face, filtered nicely through the weave of the sombrero. He was sound asleep by the time the bus made a turn east, careening the sunlight from out of his slumbering face.

Franco looked around then, to see that everyone on the bus was still frantically making telephone calls and otherwise doing troublesome things. Amazed at the cool doctor's attitude, and the persistence of this elderly bunch, the Army lawyer smiled and a minute later picked up a phone to make a call of his own.

Just as he hung up, Colonel Saunders maneuvered down the aisle and sat beside him. They shook hands, commented on the events at Congress then spent the next little while exchanging pleasantries, and a few Army stories. After a while, the rocking motion of the bus and the noise and the warm afternoon sunlight lulled them too into an afternoon nap.

A few miles later the big bus slowed to a halt at a nice little roadside park. Everyone put their telephones and computers down and went out to have a picnic lunch. Cleary's three friends were asleep, and no one had the heart to wake them, though sandwiches and sodas were set aside for them. They needed their rest, was the consensus.

Later, full of lunch and brand new energy, they piled back on, and the bus started up again, but this time heading back into DC. They had canceled the confederate Bull Run battleground tour. They had another battle to do on that day. Soon, the telephones were busy again, and a purpose and contentment settled into the atmosphere. It was good, to have something to fight for again. Besides, most of them saw a little of their own children - and grandchildren.

Thirteen

*Can you draw out Leviathan
With a fish hook?
Or press down his Tongue with a cord?
Job: 41: 1*

The dairy farm was almost a hundred years old and looked like it hadn't been in use for almost that long. The barn was the most interesting thing. They had built the barn with wooden pegs, not nails. It was designed to be disassembled easily, then rebuilt at any location. What a marvelous thing it was. Kip spent a great deal of time helping to restore it to working order.

They on weekends, worked night and day fixing the place up. Cleaning, painting, cutting grass; more painting. Soon the farmhouse was OK to live in, and the barn was in decent shape too. It was time to get a family to live in the barn.

They hauled in a truckload of cows one Friday night. My, they were big - friendly, too. Just like cats too. Cows like to rub you with affection, but if you are not careful, they will crush you. Cows are funny, and each had its own pattern of white and black, its own personality - and soon its own name. Smart too - they showed up at the barn door at exactly the same time each day; utters full and hurting to be empty of milk.

The routine became more complex and involved with each week. At first, the cows were upset. They were unruly and totally unused to their new home - which was not a very nice new home, yet. The veterinarian said it was very stressful for them to move. So much so that their milk had to be thrown away for the first few weeks, until they calmed down. (People are not much different, you know.)

It seems as though every piece of equipment on the whole farm failed, several times. It was all old and second hand and makeshift equipment anyway - the tractor, the plow, lawn mower, and all the other farm and barn implements. Kip got a chance to drive the tractor and plow, but his furrows were not very straight, and there was no more plowing after a few tries.

The only break in the routine was church on Sundays. Church felt

funny to him, and it was a stressor more than a relaxor. That upset Rick's family a great deal. They thought he had Jewish tendencies and had saved his soul by taking him away from the Synagogue in College Station. They were extremely devoted Baptists. Kip hoped they would stop being so insistent on his conversion. Anyway, once Sundays were gone, the rest of the time it was hard, stressful work from waking up until going to sleep.

Kip's life became one of constant derision and bothering by Rick's family, who did not really approve Kip being there. Must be what it used to be like as a slave. Work your bones until their numb and aching, only to be chastened for your hard, honest, decent labor. If they did not need his Social Security money so bad, he would not have been there at all.

Towards the end of the summer - about six months after arriving - everything on the farm was in good repair. The cows were happy, the barn was pretty ship-shape, and the house was better than livable. Any decent foreman would have given his hard-working hand a day off, or even a few days off. Certainly, he had earned it.

Instead, his boss - the new and now prosperous big man on the block - told Kip he would have to move out of the main house. He had to move to a small extremely run-down shack far away: they were awful quarters. They had no water, electricity, barely even walls or paint. It was a horrible place, but Kip spent all of his free time fixing it up. If a slave is all you are, might as well be a good one.

In the beginning, Rick would kindly bring Kip by for counseling every other week to a small clinic in town. Now, the farm was so busy with more cows coming all the time; Kip had to walk to the sessions. It was a good fifteen-mile walk one-way, but he did it without complaining. Kip was on a mild anti-depressant by this time. Evidently, he had exceeded a thousand points, sometime that summer.

It was really rest and relaxation Kip needed not drugs. Of course, his counselor did not see it that way.

Then Rick wanted to move Kip off the farm altogether, into a group home in town. By this time it was obvious that Rick was anxious to take forcibly from Kip all of the thousands of hours of "sweat equity" that Kip had poured into the place. Kip may have been a little slow because of the medication, but he was still an experienced engineer, carpenter and mechanic. Those and many other valuable and otherwise expensive skills he gave, all for free.

Well, he and Rick visited a group halfway mental health home one afternoon, and it was not much better than Rusk State Hospital in Texas. It was a very depressing place indeed, and underserved; because Kip had done an extreme amount of work getting the farm ready. It was

obvious that Rick and his family wanted Kip gone, and they became increasingly cruel.

Then some small argument happened, it was inevitable; Rick lost his temper and tossed Kip in his truck and carted him up to Vermont Medical Center in Burlington. He was hospitalized there, and Rick went home to his nice, painted, clean, well-kept farm with well-trained cows and many thousand dollars richer from Kip's Social Security checks.

All of the hope and promise that the dairy farm represented to him, it was gone; abruptly and cruelly.

A day later Kip swallowed a whole bottle of his anti-depressant pills, the staff having negligently allowed him to keep them in his bedside table. He collapsed and blacked out. The medical records show the dosage of pills Kip took was fatal. He should have died. At a minimum, the staff should have brought him to the emergency room and pumped the medicine out of his system before it was all absorbed. They did not. This greatly prolonged Kip's recovery.

Eventually, they put Kip on a big Greyhound and sent him back home to his Mom in Texas.

It is somewhat peculiar that Kip was in far, far worse shape now than ever, ever before. The medications were much stronger, and he talked funny, was numb in the head and all over, and otherwise was practically a vegetable.

No protests, no written rebuttals, no legal conferences to organize a defense.

No lucid conversations, no technical skills to speak of, not much of anything. Yet, the Texas mental health people could care less.

He was good for the trash bin or a black body bag.

The Gods cannot hold a candle to Moms. He is remote. They are there. Mom found Kip a small apartment near her own house. A friend of Mom's sold him a small beat up baby-shit colored Datsun, his sisters called it. Yes, they helped too: three big sisters with six growing kids between them and a stalwart little brother. You cannot ask for a better family. They all grew up together, Kip again with the six kids.

The thousand point glass ceiling started to disintegrate slowly; time and constancy being the most sanguine weapons.

Kip got a job at a grocery store doing night stocking. It was a jolly but very hard working crew. Then he got a second job working at a Sonic fast food joint. He made Assistant Manager at the drive-in within a few months, so he quit the night job. A few months after that, he stopped the medication, to no ill effects. His restaurant bosses were very good

people, and all the high school kids - oh, and the other warm and friendly staffs - all worked hard, and played hard.

Six months later, Kip and Mom were having dinner out at a Country Club in Lago Vista, and a diner nearby heard them talking about Kip's engineering degree and experience. He leaned over, begged their pardon for eavesdropping, but said he needed an engineer at his plant in Austin. Kip should go see his hiring manager. Mom said the Lord was dining with them that night. It was such a totally unexpected, unusual, and fortuitous meeting.

Even then, Kip would not have gone to the interview at all, without his younger brother's insistence. He did go, though, and he got the job. He was in Technical Sales for a steel fabricator that, among other things, supplied equipment for the two Texas nuclear power plants. A few months later Kip transferred into the design group; then all the way up into engineering.

They laid off the whole engineering staff one Friday afternoon a year after he started at the firm. The whole engineering staff - fifteen experienced engineers, fired because a single engineer using a well-designed computer program could do the work of all fifteen; and better. Kip got a good job with a consulting firm before he got the first unemployment check. The thousand points were down to zero by this time, and he was back to ground zero. Yet, the meter was running again . . .

In this firm, Kip learned what it must be like being disabled in the professional world. Several women who worked for this firm confided in him about how they had been treated very bad, felt harassed by coworkers (superiors too, mind you) and many other unspeakable things. They had a glass ceiling. Kip's was a reinforced concrete ceiling. The ladies were good friends, though, and they encouraged Kip to get the hell out because they saw him going through the very same thing - but alone. None of them lasted more than a year. It is very hard to persevere when your ambition has nowhere to go.

Other so-called friends at the firm frequently asked why he put up with the hell, said he should leave for his own peace of mind. Well, Kip knew better: they were anxious for their competition to leave. They eventually convinced the higher-ups that Kip was a bad, bad engineer; and the firm fired him.

They fired four individuals: a psycho, a homosexual, a dyslexic and a pagan. They hired four new people, within a few weeks: a white boy, a white boy, a white boy, and a white boy. Now these were extremely experienced individuals, very hard to come by in a tight, even anorexic labor market as it was then. The last engineer the firm hired took six months to find. He came from way up north somewhere.

They called it a house cleaning; it seemed more like a purge to Kip - the firm became so bulimic.

The lawyer led Kip into his office conference room where they sat and had small talk for a while. You should go into business for yourself, Mark Levbarg told him. After looking over Kip's resume, the counsel said he would call in Kip if he ever needed an expert witness. Then Kip pressed the matter, can we sue the firm for discharging him the way they had?

"There are no laws against firing someone if they're too good," Mark said. Kip said, why that is absurd. It is true, Mark replied. No laws against discriminating against individuals who are very smart."

"I know a top-notch architect out in LA," Counsel continued, "He did some awesome work, best that his firm had ever done. Once it was complete, they fired him - and now his bosses, and the firm have exclusive credit for all his fine work. Happens all the time."

"That's about the extent of it."

It was a disgrace, but Kip soon found a job with another firm.

That job did not last more than five months. His old "friends" told his new "friends" about his medical history, and after five months of eighty-hour weeks in extremely stressful situations and daily bereavement, belittlement, and extreme harassment there; well, life is just too damn short. He quit.

Now, you would understand if Kip was extremely upset and discouraged at this point in the story. Yet, he just started his own firm and kept working toward a bright future. The five months of horror had been another thousand-point episode, and he had passed with honors. Plus, it had been preceded by almost seven years of ultra-stressful events that were much worse than the treatment of his last few months in the Army, so the residual stress was greater - still, the thousand point peak was achieved. Not back on a psyche ward this time; but hustling night and day to get a sturdy little business going.

Then came a gift from heaven. A book contract with McGraw-Hill; then a second, and a third. It was time to go for the gusto. He applied to graduate school and was accepted. He now has good grades and good standing.

Kip has by this time done more work on the original theories presented in the Army. A leading authority read his work and encouraged him to get published. A second, related, international engineering conference accepted another paper. He had made it past the reinforced concrete ceiling. He was free.

Fourteen

*And it came about after the Lord
Had spoken these words to Job, that
The Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite,
“My wrath is kindled against you
And against your two friends,
Because you have not spoken to Me What is right as
My servant Job has.”
Job 42:7*

“Well, how was it?” she inquired.

“Oh, just another day at the office,” Cleary said nonchalantly.

“Oh Good!” Nikki said with a sigh of relief. “No more fireworks then? Oh, I’m so happy for you! Did you get your way?”

“Oh,” Kip replied, “You know how it is - getting there is half the fun!”

They were having a pleasant, intimate dinner in a quiet corner of the café. The table linen, Kip observed a little self-consciously, was crisp and starched, silverware was shiny, and the dinnerware china exquisite. Just outside the window was a small garden with those Japanese Belushi trees. Yes, it was a special place for them both.

Then Kip noticed, from the corner of his eye, three uniformed men approaching. Like a tsunami out of season, they looked very awkward in the ritzy joint. Then he started, as they came into focus. Dammit, uniforms. Brother not again!

They came up quickly. Noticing the abrupt change in Kip’s expression, Nikki turned to look too.

“Federal Marshals,” one of them said and presented them with a warrant with less courtesy than the Ancient Mariner feeding the hungry Albatross. “We have orders to take Mr. Cleary into custody,” motioning toward Kip with a crook of his neck.

“Sorry, mate,” Cleary replied in his most swank Australian, shaking his head, his eyes remaining locked on Nikki’s.

“Nope, been there, done that,” Kip reiterated to the stoic doldrums

expression in the policeman's face. Totally ignored them, then; Kip turned and pressed onward with his romance. The officers didn't move. Pouting almost, they made little squirrel sounds and pawed at the ground like a cat looking for a clean spot in the litter box.

"Sorry, I'm not interested! Can't you take a hint?" Acting put out himself, now. "Come with us please, Sir" as they tried to hoist Cleary out of his chair.

"You heard the gentleman," Nikki chimed in. "We're not interested - bug off!"

"I beg your pardon, have you no manners?" Cleary said, the perfect English butler scandalized by their frontier Texas manners.

"You could please apologize to the lady!" Cleary said, wringing his arms from out of the grips of the musclemen. By this time, Nikki was giggling, at the insane brashness of her dinner companion.

It brought Cleary's heart joy to see the sparkle in her beauteous eyes. 'If this is it, then prison will be worth every second of it,' he said with a Groucho Marx cigar twist of bread between two fingers, and she laughed a little bit more.

Then the thugs tightened their grip, and his attention left her. They were strong and wanted him to know it. Cleary expected a pistol butt to the back of the head at any time.

Nikki put her wineglass down then, sobering up a little after their laugh. Very carefully she took a napkin and dabbed a speck of food from her lips. Then she reached down at her side to grab her purse, the model of domestic acquiescence. Standing, she pushed the chair aside and left to the powder room.

She was walking over to the U.S. Marshals, now; Kip saw curiously. One of them saw her approaching and said something rude.

"Fuck you," was the unexpected statement - from Nikki! "And you're whole kind!" Then to Cleary's great amazement she brandished a badge and spoke with a bitterness worthy of Job himself.

"FBI - butt out, boys." Nevertheless, they continued to pry Cleary out of his chair. Cleary could be heard murmuring to himself, 'well, shit-fuck-hell-god- DAMN, if this don't beat all.'

"This man is under house arrest on the authority of the espionage act!"

With a sneer, "Sorry, You got no jurisdiction here. This is Washington D. C.," Enunciating the last two letters like a Writ of Habeas Corpus. Then, while two of them were holding Cleary, a third got a good wind up and punched him square in the stomach. Cleary recovered then

gave him a good spat in the face. The officer reeled back and motioned the third thug to take his turn while he cleaned the muck from his face.

They still ignored Nikki; until now. One of them turned and said something like 'Yea, bitch; just you try and stop us.' She rolled her head and said to Kip, prone on the carpeted floor; 'Bitch you want? Bitch you get.' If Kip had been a dog he would have buried his head and covered his ears with his paws; her tone was so strong. 'Render unto Caesar. '

Dropping her badge as if to say, so much for this piece of plastic, she said to Kip, 'When are these macho pricks going to learn, anything?' only to have one of the Marshals grab her purse away. Kip could see she was getting angry now; he cringed at the thought. They went as if to grab her wrists and she gave the fellow a move that would have flattened Godzilla. The second one tried to follow suit, and he was down on the floor, even faster. Neither one moved a joint after that; for quite some time, Kip noticed.

The third Marshall had pulled his weapon by this time and looked very anxious to fire. He was backing warily away from what was a long reach of her dangerous limbs. "Can't you see you're outgunned, big boy?" she taunted him as she followed his retreat, with not a thing in her hands, or a weapon in sight.

Cleary was getting up off the floor and trying to catch his breath. Looking to the side, he noticed a couple of suits in the background; FBI, they flashed their badges. Odd, he thought, they do not come help the little lady; more egotistical Neanderthals, it seems. Have to be from Texas. He started feeling a little desperate then, and hoisted some more, trying his best to come to his friend's aid. Unfortunately, the knees wouldn't cooperate, and they buckled. He could only watch helplessly, all crumpled up on the floor.

Nikki swiftly grabbed a wine glass. She dashed the wine in the Marshall's face in a blur of impossible swiftness. A few painful crunches and a little shrill sound from Nikki, and now the number one Marshal was down too. Cleary, hunched as he was regaining his footing and equilibrium, blinked dramatically a few times.

Then looked at her, and gave a "V" made with his fingers, plus a great big wink for effect.

Nikki supposed that was high praise from him. Oh, well, I'll settle for that, she thought.

They spent a couple of minutes then, still standing, each tidying up their clothes. Cleary tucked in his shirt and straightened his tie. She

snapped open a cosmetics thing-O and deftly applied a little dab powder to obscure a speckle of sweat on her brow.

Cleary went up to her, to ask if his tie was straight; she yanked it a little, then he grabbed the excuse to kiss her square on the lips. She acted outraged and slapped him lightly with a glove. He smiled, wiping the lipstick off his mouth with the back of his white shirtsleeve. The backup FBI agents were dragging the Marshals out of the vicinity, by now; then, remarkably, themselves faded into the surroundings like chameleons.

"Bloody cowards," he called after them, brandishing a fork high in the air. Nikki giggled at the ridiculous sight but felt a little better anyway.

Kip gently grasps her elbow, then; and leads her to her chair. Pulling it out for her, he settles her in. Grasping her gloved hand gently, he gives her wrist a gallant kiss just above her leather wristband, then goes back to his own seat.

"Waiter," he yelled before he had sat down. "Another bottle of wine if you please," like Hagar in a foreign land. The waiter arrived with the chilled wine before he had even sat down. 'Damn Spankey service, these FBI types.' Nikki smiled, and all was well between them.

Leaning over the table, he said, "Well, where were we, beautiful lady?"

"Oh, just another day at the office, I suppose," she responded with a most endearing blush.

Grasping a book of matches, she struck a light and lit the candles on the table. The room lights faded a little, and the candles became more prominent. 'Now that is a darn good trick, love,' he said, motioning with his eyes and eyebrows the special effects. Nikki hunched her shoulders as if to say, what you expect - the pit and the pendulum?

"You have cute ears," Cleary said a little later, disarmingly.

"Oh, my," Nikki said abruptly. The words bubbled forth, hands cupped to her mouth in a whisper said, "You give my ears a little TLC and I'm putty in your arms."

"Ha," Cleary replied, leaning forward and obviously conjuring bad things in his fertile mind. 'Superagent Nikki, in the throes of ecstasy succumbing to dissident Kip in big bouncy bed.'

"No way, Mister," she replied boldly. 'You think I move fast in this skirt and high heels - sans clothes you be dead.'

"Oh, but what a way to go!" and leaned back in his chair, elbows outstretched and hands clasped on his neck, to unselfconsciously savor the thought.

Nikki bundled up her napkin and threw it at his face, then. He almost

tumbled over backward in the fragile chair. Arms flailing and legs splayed, he most ungracefully caught himself and bounced back forward.

Then he pushed off from the table, slapped his hands on his legs and just plain laughed, deep and long, tears streaming down his cheeks. Nikki watched a little amazed at first, grabbed another napkin and tossed it his way, then joined in too with a hearty cheer of her own.

“You know what, Nikki?” Kip said, gasping for air, “My ears are the same way.” They both leaned forward, holding their chests to contain the most uncouth uproarious laughter.

“Yea, like that little big eared fellow on Deep Space Nine,” Nikki said between heaves. “Quark, quark - what’s a duck yell when its having an orgasm?” She lost it completely.

Then Kip sucked in a deep breath, leaned forward and said very seriously, “You aren’t a Vulcan are you - with those super sensitive ears?”

“Why,” came the tear-drenched rejoinder, “You met too many women who need sex only every seven years, have you?”

“Yea,” he said as the laughter started up again. “I mean no!”

One more, “Wait, I mean - Yea,” and he lost it completely.

Fifteen

*Who can strip off his outer armor?
Who can come within his double mail?
His strong scales are his pride,
Shut up as with a tight seal.
One is so near to another,
That no air can come between them.
They are joined one to another;
They clasp each other and cannot be separated.
Job: 41: 13 - 17*

Later in the evening, FBI types in tow, Nikki and Kip retired to her room. The agents searched the place, and carefully. Then they left and stationed themselves in shifts at the door outside in the hotel corridor.

As she was bidding the agents good night, Nikki felt a cold chill. Turning around swiftly, she saw Kip seated on the sofa, in repose. At first, he looked asleep, but then she noticed something very odd. The lights of the room were bright, and uniform; but Kip seemed was cast in darkness. A little scared, Nikki started to call the agents but decided against it.

Slowly she approached Kip on the sofa, passing her hand before him. A part of him really was in permanent shadow. It was subtle but quite real. She screamed a curdling scream that would have woken the dead. Two agents were there immediately. There was nothing to do but watch.

At the end of the journey, Kip stopped and gained his sea legs. It seemed to be bigger than before. An eerie mist careened off the wet soggy bottoms, and time was thick with primitive smells and forest sounds. A shadow materialized from the mist, and Kip started.

"Tis only I, young Master," said the deep voice of Metatron. "And this day I am not your enemy. We have trouble brewing. Best we reserve our resources - fight we will, though, on another day!" Then he swept the distance with his armored arm; the Ark was there, and it gave a dim light, like a full moon on a dewy spring evening.

From out of the sinister mist, before the Ark, a multitude of heathen

warriors emerged, mounted atop beasts just as fierce. They were silent to a man, waiting.

Kip looked down to his side, to spy the saber-tooth tiger; and suddenly felt the heft of his sword at his side and the construction of strong but supple leather armor on his person. Metatron's beast gave a snort, and he was off headlong at the ugly cadre just ahead. Tiger swiftly followed, spraying water and making a real show if it.

"I reckon we best beat feet after the animals, don't you think?" Metatron said as he hefted a huge spiked club into his hands.

"Aye, best we should - else the beasts will show us up before our own kind!" "Show us up maybe, but not before our own kind," Metatron replied.

"Them are the Devil's host," yanking the club off his shoulder to point in the general direction of the Ark, "Make you no doubt about it." Then, "And they be bad."

"This is going to be ugly," Kip said. "Ugly is, is ugly does!"

"Id is going to scout them out for us, he is," said Metatron, holding Kip back as he tried to advance on the host.

"What you say, man?"

"Id - 's name of my beast, it is. Your little-furred buddy answers to ego." "You mean you know Tiger?"

"Yea, we been buddies for a thousand years, have we! Ego years, that is. Where none dare go, he go." Hunching his huge shoulders, a little embarrassed by the name source. "Is where the name come from, honest Indian."

"Id, he too stupid to know where it's not wise to go; so got tired of calling him idiot. He minds better to one-syllable words, he does."

"The Lord, he call me Super. You know, like I'm the superintendent of His place. It great honor and I do good job," lifting his chin up and hoisting the armor breastplate higher.

"You mean you've been in the presence of the Lord?" "Hey, bud; I live there! Don't I?"

"Then what's with the ghoolies out there?"

"They never bother me, 'cause I'm like them. They only show their nasty faces when someone like you shows up; you know, an out-of-sider person."

"They never did anything," the Dark Angel of the Lord continued. "Cause I always defeat you before you can get passed."

"Is my job, said so by the Lord," he added apologetically. He was looking down at his feet with embarrassment - shuffling them in the muck.

"Suppose, I do, that He wants us to have a fighting chance." "Against that horde? You got to be crazy!"

"Yes, some have said that so too."

"You got to admit, though - no battles for a thousand years, they be a little rusty? Maybe?" Kip added hopefully.

"No, they practice amongst their selves. Always fires lit out there in the distance, swords clanging, beasts' hooves rocking the underground. Awful hard to sleep sometimes."

"Devil himself showed up once, long; long time ago. BIG fellow, bright red eyes and ugly as they come. He fought the whole horde of them - his own ghoolies - felled 'em all single-handed. God, what a time I had cleaning it all up. You think they smell bad now; whoa, is perfume compared to decomposed ghoolies."

"New one shows up every now and then. But on that side of the place, they welcome, instead of fight and send back like a good servant of the Lord me."

"They are many; we are two." Kip was still quite skeptical of Metatron's optimism at challenging them all. He tried to be just a little bit braver than he felt.

"But if the Devil defeated them, there's a chance we can too?"

"Don't bet your bootie on that one - is that still an in word with you? If we engage them, Satan himself will surely be with them. Usually, he waits at the back until we tired out, then make his job easier. Coward, is he."

"Then you've fought them all before?" Kip asked incredulously.

"Yes, the Lord and I, we did. He got sent away - as you can see," motioning toward the Ark, glowing softly in the far distance. "His buddy number one arch- angel Metatron got hard labor for eternity. I was only NCO. He was Commander. Some kind of deal, no?"

"Devil beast won us that time. Lord and I not tried since. We were waiting for just the right moment. He is very insistent, too much, so Metatron thinks.

Solitary must be getting to him." Then, glancing surreptitiously at Kip, "Damn, but I wish someone would put some sence into his head. I am tired of all this endless work - he rest nicely in that Ark over there, all covenanted up. I got to work, night and daytime too."

"Look, beasts return!" Kip interrupted excitedly, to the sound of muffled hoofs and growls.

"I do have plan, though, really I do!" Metatron was saying.

"We get them riled up like last time. The Lord catches the place all on fire for us. We escape up Jacob's latter over there. The bad host gets all burned up .

. . Is good plan, no?"

"Too bad, the Devil no burn," as the Archangel mulled it over to himself. Kip was petting and ruffling their beasts. "At least Satan, he be without allies and he no put up a fight for very long time until get some ghoolies back!"

"Then again, the Lord no get out either. But I think that OK?" Looking for reassurance from Kip, who was still tending to the critters. "At least then he have someones to talk to. He like that; until you," batting the side of Kip's head with his fist, "Can figure out way to do in the Devil for a spell."

"OK, then; what're we waiting for?" Kip said with a thrill in his voice. Metatron thought he had not a single word said; but no matter, was good plan.

"Well, one problem there is." He grabbed Kip by the shoulder, stopping him cold in his tracks.

"Yes?"

"Well, you got to help me clean up, you do. The Archangel Metatron is tired of working days and nights too; need rest - is it a deal young Master?"

"Indeed, yes, is deal!" as their arms locked in agreement. "Swell!"

"Let us do it then - right?" Metatron nodded his agreement.

Kneeling down into the primordial muck, Kip grabbed a fist full of the stuff. Reaching up to his face, he made up the war paint: two fingers of black under each eye. Turning to glare at the Archangel, even Metatron had to keep the fear from his heart to look at this creature.

What is it we have created, the Lord an I, the Dark Angel thought; but too late. The Last of the Clan O'Cleary was off at a gallop, onward to do the vengeance of his Ancestors.

Nikki watched. The darkness became stronger. The shadow began to grow, moving around Kip, from the back to envelop the front of him. Thin streams, strips of the shadow snaked around and then merged and grew thicker and darker. He spoke in ancient tongues, groaned,

and grasped first a shoulder then an arm. An unearthly growl escaped his lips, then a deep line of scratches creased the darkened side of his face, and deep, dark crimson blood began to ooze out. Nikki started to help the injury, but the agents held her back. The air was full of static electricity, and there was fear in the air.

The small force advanced on the horde. They pretended to battle between themselves, as always they had done before. Some blood flowed too, for authenticity; you know. Because those ghoulie guys are no idiots; don't you ever think that, no Sire.

As they got within spitting distance of the vast - and getting vaster - horde, they could see that the place was getting warmer. The Lord was doing his thing.

Then they split ranks and stood before the horde; four brave warriors, or at least three of them and a fourth who was too dumb not to be anything else but be brave. Id charged, full of rage and vengeance. They were off.

The battle waged for a very long time. Id had many injuries, and so did fierce little ego. Id and Ego had to withdraw from the battle after a spell, barely able to make it to the base of Jacob's ladder. There they waited, not having the strength to go further. Their hearts were still very much in the battle, though, and each gave a whimper every time one of their Masters took a hurting.

Kip was the worse off. Metatron had many dints than dimples in his armor, and he was starting to get all out of shape. The whole place was getting very warm too. The Devil's hosts had tired, though, and were falling easier and easier!

Just as victory was nigh, a mighty thunder came into the place. Kip and Metatron looked at each other, across the mighty battlefield strewn with countless corpses and parts of corpses. Satan himself was there, and they were very much afraid, indeed. The future did look very good to them; not at all.

Swiftly making a retreat toward Jacob's ladder, what was left of the horde followed - the bloody fools - and Kip and Metatron were able to kill them all to a man; or at least to a ghou. Only the Devil himself remained, and he was swiftly approaching. The coward was all fresh and rested; they were bloodied and utterly exhausted.

Then the Lord happened. A burst of flames erupted from the Ark and fire was everywhere. Which of course Satan did not mind at all; darn it. What he did mind, though, was that the fire ate up all of the oxygen in the cavern. He weakened. Collapsing on one ugly knee, the

Demon disappeared into the mists of the place, giving Metatron and Kip the time to drag their faithful beasts up the stairs the short distance to the river Styx.

They rested for a spell. Back against the wall, the effervescent river was again an awe-inspiring sight. The current was hugely powerful, as the antediluvian river was wide and deep. Then Kip saw a fin slicing through the current - it was a huge creature, moving upstream with such strength it made the torrent look like a calm country lake. "Look - it's a dolphin!"

"No, Sire," said Metatron, following Kip's pointing finger. "Is killer whale; orca. They have already done ate all the dolphins. Seals too." They both watched mesmerized. Then Kip remembered the cavern and got swiftly up to go and check it out.

Kip stayed at the portal as long as he could; ready to do battle to the end to protect his friends.

He saw Satan arise impossibly from the ashes, and He was coming toward the rock stairs carved up to the portal. There was horrible Death writ in his eyes. Then a stream of fire emerged with a huge hissing sound from the Ark. It grew, and coalesced, and then it dashed toward the demonic presence, coursing around him, and through him. It caused grievous harm, and Satan was hurt badly. He got up and another, though weaker, arc burst beside him. Again, Satan fell. Again, he got up. His strength was ebbing, though, and the Lord had not much strength either. It seems his fire needed oxygen, too. It was far too hot for Kip to dash in and finish the job. So he had to leave ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

This day their battle was over.

Opening his eyes, they focused just as a bucket of ice water was en route to a rude and chilling destiny on his face. Yelling his dismay, he jumped up and saw the startled agents arrayed around him.

"Stop that," Kip yelled, and hoisted himself from the sofa. Stepping over, he grabbed Nikki by the waist, and gave her a wet kiss, until she gave in and returned it. Motioning to the other agents with a hand behind his back - get the hell out. They did. Just as they dimmed the light and inched the door to a close, Kip - still engaged in the now passionate kiss - was gently lowering the helpless Nikki onto the bed.

A little while later - not nearly long enough of a little while later, in Kip's mind - he was back on the couch, adjusting the covers and pillow for

the night's slumber. Arms behind his neck, looking up at the city lights below playing out on the ceiling of the room, he struck up a conversation.

"Why is it," he began, then gave a quick look over to the big bed to be sure Nikki was listening.

"Why, do you suppose the whole world catches their breath when a football player is downed on the field, with a spinal chord injury. Then we call a mortician when a top scientist falters. Just think, an intellect honed by over twenty solid years of intense academic schooling. Moreover, an equal amount engaged in intense research. What's the deal?"

"Our culture is more concerned for tail than for technology," was her caustic reply, to which Kip - guilty as charged - could not respond for several minutes.

Just as he was winding up for the fastpitch, Nikki interrupted him with a weary voice. "Kip, be quiet."

Hearing an unusual amount of rustling, a little later Nikki looked up from the bed only to see Kip hustling around putting on his jogging gear - ankle braces and all. Glancing over to see that she was still awake, he called to her over his shoulder. "Watch this!"

The last tennis shoelace tied, he crept up to the door, flung it open and took off full speed down the hotel corridor. As Nikki watched this impromptu show, obviously staged for her benefit, two dazed FBI agents in suit and tie took out after Kip as best they could, limping on tight patent leather shoes, loosening ties as they did so. Kip stopped at the elevator, turning around to laugh his heart out - and waving at the embarrassed Nikki through the still open door - as they came huffing and grumbling up to him. The elevator bell rang, the doors opened, and they were gone.

Exhausted, Nikki got up wearily, closed the door, and went back to bed, thankful at last that they worked in teams. Her last thought as she drifted off was how on God's green earth are they going to keep up with this guy.

Then, with a start, she got up, took her shear negligée off, and put on long-sleeved flannel pajamas. Never know what that devil's going to do, as she smiled and slept; halfway hoping he would still have some energy left when they returned. Damn regulations she thought. Then it dawned on her rapidly receding consciousness that this dude didn't much believe in regulations. At last she slept, with a soft smile turned on her full lips.

Sixteen

*"Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
Or loose the cords of Orion?
"Can you lead forth a constellation in its season,
Or guide the Bear with her satellites?
"Do you know the ordinances of the heavens,
Or fix their rule over the earth?
Job 38: 31-33*

TWENTY YEARS LATER

"A sweat lodge," remarked Zake, "You mean like an Indian wigwam, one of them triangle things made from poles?" The idea disgusted him. The Colonel, seated across from him, looked even more dubious. "You want us to sit and sweat in our briefs like a bunch of pelicans in a God damn teepee?" Zake reiterated.

"Oh come on, man" implored Blade. "It's an ancient tribal tradition. An Indian thing, native to the Land." Rolling his eyes up and sighing audibly, he let the silence speak for him. The others were content to follow his lead, and a heavy quiet descended.

A small cadre of veterans had taken to meeting at Kip's place now and then. He had a nice spread out in the country, distant from all civilized things they were so suspicious of. "Cajuns Anonymous" they called themselves. They used the name as a cover - and then rarely - afraid to even suggest the slightest connection to their old unit in the War.

They spoke out against environmental harassment by the hundreds of chemical plants dumping their poison into the Mississippi, the deltas, and the swamps and into the people's diets. Hundreds of square miles of the Gulf off the coast of Texas and Louisiana were, in fact, a Dead Zone. Not a single, solitary living creature existed in those once teaming waters. There were no shrimps, no fish, and no algae. This Dead Zone was growing every day, by dozens of square miles.

No one cared.

Back during the war, the cadre had battled in a different kind of dead

zone; this one was on land. They were all in Navy Intelligence, detached there from various elitist Pentagon teams. SHAMU's they were to the ranks, named for the killer whale that was famous before the War: "Special Human Armored Mental Utility" troops. They were the best the union could put on the battlefield. They were better prepared than anyone else to handle the bizarre psychological terror that happened in the Delta.

Word was, very few survived even the first week of SHAMU camp. Most got an automatic promotion two pay grades just for trying. That is, if they could still be certified mentally competent for duty afterward. Came from all the service branches, the candidates did. They were the pick of the litter.

They didn't win the war or create much havoc on the field, as far as the media could see. Our own people, though, were terrified of them. Odd individuals to a man, they never carried weapons or strapped on the kevlar body armor - not even going into the hottest firefight. Funny thing, though: no one had ever heard of a SHAMU casualty. There were few enough rumors that one had ever even been injured. Hospitals were not their kind of place. They survived even the biological strikes, but no one really knew for rock-solid sure.

No one could deny they were the ultimate survivors, though; the Universal Soldiers to whom defeat was unthinkable, death simply unacceptable. They survived even the tactical nuclear weapons dropped by the enemy. Apparently, nuclear radiation had no effect on them; none whatsoever. Scuttlebutt in the ranks had it, if you can believe it, the SHAMUs even called in friendly nuclear strikes on their own position!

Everyone has heard of Navy S.E.A.L.s; well those guys eat seals for breakfast. They never bragged. They were far too proud, too well trained, for that. In fact, they never even let on how and why their training had made them so special.

The medicos were mystified, and the shamus were not about to let themselves be hospitalized, lest anyone find out for sure.

Yet, though they had survived the battlefield, and the nuclear-biological- chemical weapons; a few years after hostilities were over, they were not doing so well. Their physical health was good, but mentally they were starting to disintegrate. It was not the residual radiation, either; but something far more sinister - and debilitating.

The old Regiment disbanded long ago, its thousand members reassigned to their original units. They were not heroes by any means, because folks had not much respect or understanding of their battle tactics.

“Suicidal kamikazes,” said some, “subversive radicals,” said others. Those even less well informed simply labeled the SHAMUs a S.H.A.ame to the U.niform.

No one really knew just how much they had sacrificed to the effort, though; except maybe for the Pentagon brass. To a man, the brass awarded Purple Hearts to the Delta survivors; their mental wounds so recognized. That helped to dispel the stigma, a little. Respect is a great antidote for psychic pain. The two officers of the corps - the Commander and the Colonel - got Medals of Honor as well. Live Orcas those two were, tough as the tarmac.

Still, a medal does not guarantee respect. Had other troops known the full story, they would have willingly given their respect. The unit “shamurai” were prohibited from discussing it all, by law. Peer pressure was such a powerful incentive, though; to brag a little of their exploits on the field of battle. Well- trained, disciplined and loyal though they were, imbued in the habits of secrecy, the authorities could take no chances. After all, these men were borderline sane, and a threat to the National Security.

The U.S. Congress offered a bounty to anyone who confirmed the identity of a SHAMU. To the informant: fifty million greenbacks. To the offender: death, by slow dismemberment.

They broke the Code of Silence. They contacted the Colonel. They could go nowhere else. The authorities had ferreted out the Executive Officer. They had brutally mutilated her, while still fully conscious. It had taken several hours, even after hacking off entire limbs, before the brave soul had passed on. Not once, did she cry out. It only made the authorities fear their kind more.

The Colonel had barely escaped with his life, in that ambush. As it was, the attack left him crippled. Three months in the bush, without food and water, and the federales had stopped the search. The Colonel's legs were far gone by that time, and the pain was a coon's breath away from driving him totally insane.

Nevertheless, he persevered.

The Colonel had found himself a nice little place in the Texas Hill Country. A hundred-acre spread with a few happily overfed longhorns and a couple of big ponds he used to grow crawfish in season. Did some consulting in Austin, to pay the bills. Mostly, he was mending his body, to take on the goddamn federales.

The Colonel, he was very quiet as the NCO's told him, the fate of the Commander. He had not known, and he shed soft, silent tears when they

told him. Then he asked, quietly, for the rest of the story. His Sergeants, they were relieved when at last their report was complete. It was a bleak story. The authorities had found hundreds and destroyed them all. The Colonel, he was calm as a country lake at dawn. In such a state, they knew, he was death to the enemy.

Not that he was any too well himself, even by his own reckoning. It was the blind leading the blinder. At least they had the good sense to seek counseling for themselves. A trained psychologist, that was out of the question given the penalties. They could offer protection. What physician in his right mind would accept the sort of protection a bunch of disturbed patients could offer?

A few months after Kase had returned to south Louisiana they approached him. His degree had been in psychology. His record was well known. They had fully investigated his bitterness and disdain. In every sense of the word, he was a rebel to the cause, bereft of any shred of loyalty to the Union.

"Smells like a set-up to me," complained Zake. "Some roughneck with a paper degree in psychology from the Academy gets a dishonorable discharge; comes home disgraced and starts putting feelers out... Can't you see the setup? The kid's an agent-in-place, it's obvious!"

"This guy, he shows up just when we need him - and you have the nerve to call it luck? Dammit, the federales would like nothing better than to off us all... we talk to this kid, and they got us by the bootstraps."

They were at the Colonel's place, the three of them. Zake, now the Exec of their unit; and Blade, now First Sergeant.

"What the hell, do we have any choice?" implored Blade, a slight man but with almost inhuman strength. One of the engineers in the old cadre had once calculated the tensile strength in his arm muscles when the Blade battered the special-made nautilus equipment back in the old days. Had to have heat-treated high-carbon steel for tendons, according to the numbers. No one who had seen him in action doubted it, and survived.

"We got guys need help. And they need it NOW." Blade continued, "Any longer and they'll be no good anyway. The way I see it, the risk is equal to the reward."

The CO took a deep breath, grimaced.

"OK, here's what we do. Find this guy, name of Kase. Bring him here. We interview him, best we can. If he's clean, we set up some help for the troops."

"No can do, Sir" came back Zake, turning for some moral support

from his old comrade. "Blade - this guy rats on us, then what? While we're alive at least the Regiment has a chance for survival." The strain of the moment was evident, the concern for his men almost overwhelming the Executive Officer. He had made the tough decisions before, even sacrificed lives when necessary. A big, burly man, hair white at forty; yes, his counsel was wise.

"Got to figure this guy is himself a little off-key," continued the Colonel, heedless of their objections. "He'll be looking to trust us too, seeing as his skin is at risk as well." Looking at the others in turn, "You know what that means, don't you?"

When they shook their heads, the Colonel said quietly, "All of the senior staff will have to be here, when he comes. Otherwise this guy Kase will think it's a set-up and scrabble away like a scared buck through the brush."

"Sir, that's suicide," Blade said quietly, hands absentmindedly twisting a three- quarter inch bar of steel as if it was rubber.

Zake didn't say anything. No one did, for the longest while. They all just sat silently, mulling it over. Three brave men, no thought of their own dangers weighing their ruminations; thinking only of their duty to men who had once trusted them with their lives, and their sanity.

"Action this day, men." Spoke the Colonel, at last.

"OK, Sir; I'll pass the word to the senior NCO's." Zake said, head held high and proud. "We meet here one week from today, midnight."

"I'll bring Kase," said Blade then, a little reluctantly.

"I'll reactivate the rest of the Unit, to cover our trail," added the Colonel. The decision made now, he was eager to begin. It was a good feeling, giving proper orders again.

Zake and Blade hustled out into the night, good men and true. Neither noticed the Colonel's bleak visage, though.

"Armageddon," he murmured to the sounds of their vehicles retreating down the gravel drive. "Boys, this is going to be the battle of our lives, I fear; good, evil, dark, light - all that balderdash!"

"It's about time, too," he said strangely, then stepped out into the night himself. It was a crisp, clear evening full of stars and hope.

"Damn, it's good to be back in action!"

By stealth and secrecy what remained of the old Regiment arrived, drifting through the countryside like so many waifs returning to a mystical source. They were in splendid spirits, excited to be together

again. Alone among them the Colonel was subdued, jumping at every unexpected sound.

Blade arrived near midnight, appearing quite suddenly at the country house with Kase at his side.

The federales were not far behind. A whole Corps of elite, Special Forces choppered in from Fort Hood, at rooftop level, ready for the kill. Couldn't have arrived more than fifteen seconds after Kase had by radiosonde verified the site and the presence of the entire SHAMU Command. Primed for the fight of their lives, the Forces found instead the completely unexpected.

An X-shaped cross was blazing orange in the front of the Colonel's yard. They had impaled Kase upon it, upside down. He was alive but terrified. A few berets stopped to douse the flames and minister to his superficial burns. They would quickly heal, but the psychic horror of what had just happened to him would be years in healing.

No one saw the Colonel and his Death Commandos that night. In the confusion of the moment, Kase too disappeared. The federales never saw him again.

Sixty seconds later the mission was confirmed a loss. Then, surprised, the Rangers looked up into the night sky as a star shell whistled through the silent night. With a bright orange burst, a theater nuclear weapon lit up the sky. In an instant, the nuclear weapon eradicated the Colonel's place of all human life.

In the eye of the firestorm that followed the detonation, life persevered.

"Used to be a missile silo," the Colonel explained as Kase awoke hazily. "Built my place right above it after the war. Figured something like this might happen."

They were in a small dispensary, medical things all around. They had bandaged the burns on Kase's wrists and ankles with field wraps. Were it not for those wounds, and the dull pain emanating from them, he would have thought himself in a trance, dreaming.

"Federales don't know it's here, you know," continued the Colonel proudly, with a wry smile. He was a pretty average looking man, Kase noticed, not much special about him. Medium build, well muscled but not to be obvious; simple features otherwise too, except for his eyes. Kase could swear they changed color with his emotions, from a dark, angry blue to bright twinkling mischief.

Just now, they were the latter, and Kase relaxed.

"We best get on with it, boy. Your jury awaits." The Colonel grasped Kase' elbow and ushered him out the emergency room, and down a

short hallway to a small amphitheater. It was normally an operating theater. Now it held all that remained of the Colonel's outfit; perhaps twenty-five soldiers.

"Well, gentlemen - and ladies - we got ourselves a shrink!" he called cheerfully out to the gathering. "He don't look like much, but he comes highly recommended."

"College boy" muttered somebody. "Academy brat," said someone else. Then, much to everyone's surprise, Kase spoke. "What about the Special Forces, my backup?"

"All dead - it's a Zone up there, boy," answered the CO. "We fried them."

"You all - you couldn't possibly have been inside this silo before the nuclear shell burst," then after thinking for a moment, as if to himself, "me either, for that matter. I saw it, felt the heat... My God, I .. I .."

The Colonel, standing at the podium in the focus of the room, responded to his audience with, "See, now - I told y'all he was a smart one! Like a deer caught in the headlights now, though, is he not?" to chuckles all around.

"Actually," turning back to Kase, "The silo is about a half-mile from my house - or what used to be my house. Couldn't plant my garden or any shrubs in that damn reinforced concrete, top of the silo. Had to have a proper home, you see; else they would've suspected, no?" he reminisced.

"Colonel we should by all rights be dead!" interjected Kase.

"According to plan, no?" as his eyes turned ominously bluer.

"NO - the Plan was to capture you all alive. I'm talking about the nuclear strike and the radiation up there..."

"Didn't brief you too well, did they son? Never told you about our training, how our kind can manage the radiation," indicating the cadre with a sweeping gesture.

"But, but - sure, I remember the stories from when I was a kid, video clips. Even some rumors at the Academy; you mean, they were TRUE?"

"You got a lot to learn, kiddo. A lot to learn."

"Then who called in the strike - the nuke?" Kase fired back at him.

"Still got clearances and codes dating from the War," said the Colonel quietly, head downcast. "Called in all my debts, for that one," reaching deep into his pockets, to hide his shaking hands from the Company.

To a man the cadre looked confused, glanced worried to one another, getting real peeved at their predicament. Wasn't like the Colonel, some said; must have lost it, after all, said others. He's nuts.

Before the consternation got beyond control the Colonel spoke loudly, "Hear me out, folks; hear me out. Then do what you will."

"Y'all took the Oath, accepted a Commission, no?" to a group of nodding heads. Good, they were starting to simmer down. "And a part of that oath went, 'to defend the Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic'? Remember that part?" They remembered, all too well, he knew.

"Y'all know what's been happening since the war, how we've been suffering and ignored; hunted down like rabbits and tricked into this here God damn ambush?" He said, rage barely simmering beneath the surface.

"You don't suppose something of that scale happened all by its lonesome, do you? NO, boys - that dog don't hunt... takes a whole lot of gumption to fool our kind; a whole lot of planning to shake possums like us all out of the tree." He was glaring at them now. "Now just y'all think on THAT one." With pause for effect, he waited for tempers to cool, for his men to collect their wits.

"OK, let's get our little yellow rubber ducks in a row." Then with a grumble and some scratching the stubble on his chin, "I can see the damn headlines now:" The Colonel was holding out his hands as though he were reading a newspaper headline, "Armadillos in a herd o' possums."

Then, he pretended to look over the paper at them as if he had granny glasses on. "War heroes give their all to victory, but have some special training makes 'em better than the rest..." Then, making as if he were shredding the paper, he said much louder, "But they wouldn't have given the abilities to us unless they could trust us, no?" Despite themselves, some of the troops began to nod, a few even smiled.

"Now, we're hurting inside and need help to cope. We earned it. The people owe us. We aren't all THAT proud, not to ask - are we? Instead of helping, though, they leave us for the buzzards. They abandon us, you and I - who were trusted with the highest secrets of the Land; WE who were entrusted with the fate of a nation. Why would they abandon us? How could that sort of thing possibly happen, here - in the United States of America?" He had heads nodding now, like a preacher on the stump.

"You know, Eisenhower once said that the tide of an entire battle; even an entire war, often hinged on a very few people. A squad of men, holding a crucial bit of turf, can change the whole throw of the dice."

"I don't know about y'all," pointing upward to rubble and chaos the surface, "But THAT's war, and we're in a battle for our very lives."

"And more than that, we have something that they are very fearful

of: like a coon dog run into a skunk.” The Colonel looked straight at Kase. The young man rose to the occasion.

“Patriots,” Kase said quietly, speaking what was in everyone’s mind already. “Y’all believe!” He exclaimed with a rush of recognition.

“No one else does,” as he broke into deep, wracking sobs, tears rolling uncontrolled down his sunken cheeks.

Not a man in the room was untouched. More than a few felt a dampness come to his or her eyes. Well, except maybe the Colonel - he just looked angrier.. Kase believed too, they all figured; had been willing to give his life for the Cause, however, skewed the mission given him had been. That, they respected.

“But the nuke - why the nuke?” asked Zake, ever the doubting one.

When the Colonel, struggling for the right words to answer with, tarried to answer, Blade did. “No one knows we are alive, the heat will be off,” he intoned with, a glimmer of hope in his voice. The Colonel nodded his agreement, though he still would not look any man in the eye. No one noticed, but Kase.

“Our families and friends will be safe now,” said another. “They can live without fear, be free,” someone else said. The mood of the group lifted perceptibly.

They found more and more reasons. Then the Colonel spoke before spirits got too outrageously high.

“Don’t forget,” he said with a gruesome excuse for a grin, “We have a no-man’s land up there - it’ll be declared off limits for a thousand clicks; even to satellite over-flights! And we are immune to the radiation. It shall be your training ground.” He looked at each of them in turn, long and hard.

“And while we few are alive, the war has not been yet lost!”

No need for him to continue, ask for their support, or approval. Their silence said it all. He was their Commander, simple as that.

“The war goes on,” Kase said, unable to suppress the smile. Only the look of death in the Colonel’s eye stopped the brave soul from giving a war cry.

The Colonel took Kase to the side a short while later. Kase figured to be reprimanded, and severely. He had broken the spell of the Colonel’s high-and- mighty speech. He should be reprimanded. Alas, a good commander would scold only in private, too. Kase was proud to have such a leader. A lashing was worth it.

Looking the strong, brave man straight in the eye, Kase soon had to look away; he felt terribly guilty and ashamed. The Colonel looked awful displeased, and Kase could feel a bolt of fear strike within.

A crooked smile broke on the Colonel's lips, like a bright orange sun showing up finally; at sunset, streaking through the clouds. "Tell, me boy, how's Nikki?"

"She sends her love, Pop!" Came the mature response, with an oddly crooked smile of its own. "She's just fine!"

Epilog

It has been written in the Holy Books of the Hebrews, and it is believed to this very day, that God and Satan had a third Brother and his name was Neptune. Throughout the ages, God and Satan conspired to destroy every last vestige of Neptune from out of the human psyche and to remove every last mention of him from out of the entire lexicon of knowledge.

Neptune was more clever than they thought. He did more than survive; he managed to have his very own Book in the Bible. Moreover, he betrothed a Goddess named Isis and together they were a match for most anything that God or Satan could send against them. It took Neptune and Isis many millennia before they had gathered their powers up from the disparate corners of the Earth. Now their time has come, and they are resolved to taking on the combined forces of God and Satan and anybody else who gets in their way.

Their followers are Legion.