

Assiduity Eighteen

by J. Mykell Collinz

My full size SUV quickly reaches capacity with Uzma's luggage, a trunk, and a dozen or so assorted cardboard boxes. Luv, Uzma's two year old daughter is exhausted in her mother's lap and both close their eyes as we enter the brightly lit expressway.

A convoy of military vehicles is heading into the city as we are heading out. According to a traffic news report on the radio, it's a national guard exercise planned months in advance and has nothing to do with the federal, state, and local law enforcement actions taken during the night against gangs and militias with a history of guns and violence.

Sunlight illuminates the eastern horizon as I turn into the driveway. In the house, I flash Uzma a welcoming smile, and say: "Use the downstairs bedroom. It has its own bathroom. Likewise, feel free to use the front living room and kitchen as much you like."

She leaves clothing and personal items laying around like she's marking territory. Her body scent and charming presence enlivens what has been a barren space since my wife passed away several years ago.

Shortly before sunset, Uzma gestures for me to follow her into the front room, saying:

"I just put Luv to sleep."

She sits on the plush floor carpet by the big front window viewing the crimson and gray western horizon and slides a large duffel bag from a cardboard box.

"This is six pounds of some really good medical grade marijuana," she says: "I hope you don't mind me bringing it here. It was in Rasheed's room and I didn't want to just leave it there for someone else to take. It's worth a lot of money. And the price will be going up soon. In the city, armed gangs are the only ones who can maintain a large indoor growing operation without being ripped off. And the feds are shutting them down. Last night's raids were about drugs and drug money as much as guns and violence."

"What makes it medical grade?" I say.

"The variety," she replies: "Then the way it's grown and cured. This weed is propagated by cloning, grown in dirt, using individual pots, fed organically, under high intensity lights. It's three different varieties, two pounds of each."

"What do you plan to do with it?"

"Give it back to Rasheed, I hope, but he won't mind if we smoke some of it."

The six again, my numerological number, it's a sign. I'm free to partake, as if I need more stimulation than having Uzma sitting beside me on the floor in the dim light of a setting sun.

I want to reach out and put my arms around her but I can't read the expression on her face. A younger me wouldn't hesitate, wouldn't give her a chance to speak another word before sealing her lips with a kiss.

"What was your wife like?" she says.

"I'll show you some pictures," I say, getting up from the floor to turn on the overhead lights.

"She's beautiful," Uzma says: "How did she die?"

"Cancer," I reply.

"You're still in love with her?"

"I'll always be in love with her," I say: "But it doesn't stop me from loving you, too."

"Love is strange," she says, reaching to complete my embrace.

I savor the sensation as she slowly brings her lavender scented body up against mine. There's a subtle fragrance of sandalwood in her chestnut blond hair, a cotton candy sweetness in the taste of her red lips.

"Luv's calling," she says, pulling away: "I need to give her my full attention right now. She'll be comfortable sleeping here soon. We'll have our time together."

I retreat to my studio in the basement. Basements, actually. This place was built by a survivalist. It's on a six acre plot cleared in the woods near the top of a rambling hillock with a southeasterly slope. It looks like an ordinary two story, four bedroom house and garage

yet the space underground covers more than twice the surface area on which the house sits. Plus, there's a shelter space below the basement which, supposedly, is hardened to withstand bombs and tornadoes.

Numerous projects await my attention as I sit anxiously at my computer workstation copying news videos for possible use in my documentary film. Videos from earlier in the afternoon show crowds gathering in the streets to protest the previous night's raids. Over two hundred protesters are immediately arrested. The swift response by police in riot gear with clubs and tear gas make it obvious the authorities had anticipated the protesters. One video shows national guard units camping at expressway rest stops. A justice department spokesperson appears in another video, saying:

"Those arrested last night are not unemployed workers as is being claimed. They are gang members who use threats and intimidation to terrorize their community."

It makes me wanna holler. Their crackdown tactics will prove counterproductive, will lead to more chaos. They are creating the need for gangs with their economic and social policies, their class war, drug war, terror war. GATT, NAFTA, WTO, globalized, privatized, maximized rate of profit for a small group of transnational investors: humanity and sanity notwithstanding.

I laugh at myself for relating emotionally with the protestors and gang members when I'm a relatively wealthy investor. At least I'm doing something constructive with my investments, directly targeting specific community needs, creating jobs with a livable income, turning gang members into taxpaying citizens. And, potentially, law abiding citizens given the laws make sense and are not designed to serve an elite ruling class.

Even if worse comes to worse in the city, and they send in the nation guard troops to quell riots, street violence, and destruction of property, it won't affect me too much. I'm sitting pretty out here in the woods.

