

Assiduity Fourteen

by J. Mykell Collinz

Don reports everything to Uzma and Rasheed, I'm aware of that. It doesn't bother me. I'm not hiding anything from them or anyone else. I'm glad I wasn't responsible for breaking up their relationship. But it makes me wonder if they think I'm unaware of their intrigues. I sometimes feel I'm viewing them from another dimension. I can almost read their minds. Maybe it's a generational difference. Being older and more experienced, I have a broader perspective with a more complete idea of who I am and what the world is all about. Their approach to reality is underscored by a vaguely defined mysticism, an irrational belief in a holy alliance with spiritual righteousness: a general characteristic of reformers, perhaps.

We're together again in Rasheed's room like we were on the first day we met. I'm sitting in the same chair looking out the same window but I'm seeing a different landscape. A treeless garden park covers the whole block across the street in front of the three big houses, allowing morning sunlight to shine in through the front windows, fulfilling Uzma's desire.

On this bright sunny morning she seems agitated.

"They calculate productivity by divide the output with the number of workers," she says.

"Yes, of course they do," I say: "Using fewer workers to reach the same output means higher productivity. With automation and robotic technologies, productivity will continue to increase using fewer and fewer workers."

"Exactly," she says: "And what happens to the workers?"

"The economy grows in other directions to create new jobs," I reply.

"Workers left unemployed in the wake of this automation and robotics revolution need help," she says: "We should be taxing the record levels of profit being generated by this new means of production, to fund education, create small business opportunities, build a modern, human friendly infrastructure for the future. But no,

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instead, we have congressional lobbyists spending hundreds of millions of dollars funding opposition to anything vaguely resembling such an idea."

I'm fascinated by the intensity of her emotional, sensual, sexual, mystical vibes.

"What would you do if you had absolute power?" I say: "How would you go about solving the world's problems?"

"Do me a favor," Rasheed interjects: "Toke on this joint and kick back, listen to some special music, the whole album. It was recorded in nineteen seventy one, long before I was even born, yet it speaks to me today, as fresh as the day it was written and recorded by Marvin Gaye. He did all the voices himself during a legendary session at the Hitsville USA studio just blocks from here. What's going on, brother."

I'm already pleasantly high from breathing marijuana smoke in the air and, at this point in our conversation, silently listening to Rasheed's choice of music seems like an excellent idea. I've heard of Marvin Gaye, of course, his music is still being played on the radio but I'm not actually familiar with it or the circumstances of his life, and the album blows me away, I mean blows me away. I'm staring at his picture from the album cover illuminated on Rasheed's computer screen and I feel his living spirit dwelling within me.

"True genius," I exclaim as the album concludes.

"Plus," Rasheed eagerly responds: "He was going through heavy emotional changes at the time. His singing partner, Tammi Terrell, collapsed in his arms on stage during a performance together. She had a brain tumor. It ended her performing career. It made him question his own career. She died in nineteen seventy after an extended illness. He stopped performing and went into seclusion. But he returned to the Hitsville studio later that year and recorded this album. Berry Gordy, the boss at Motown Records, didn't authorize the album and he didn't like what Marvin had done. The master tapes sat on the shelf for almost a year before a copy leaked to a radio station in LA where 'What's Going On' became an immediate hit sensation forcing Gordy to reconsider. After having it

remixed in a state of the art studio on the west coast where he now resided, Gordy put it out for distribution and it became a number one hit, Motown's top selling album, ever."

"The world was going through incredible changes at the time," Uzma chimes in: "Many performers were searching for ways to express their feelings about issues like the war in Vietnam, civil rights, and urban social harmony. His contribution carries the additional weight of his personal and performing career experiences. It's a brilliant summation."

"And it's still relevant today," Don adds emphatically.

Indeed, I'm thinking, what is going on? And who really does care? Who is willing to try to save a world that is destined to die? We care about ourselves but we don't seem to care enough about others or the world in general. Attempting to save the world is a righteous activity, I conclude, and I feel obliged to continue supporting my young friends, even if I don't completely understand their motivations.

