

Assiduity Seventeen

by J. Mykell Collinz

In the darkness, as I awaken, an orange glowing 3:45 greets me and, since I'm a numerological 6, I feel compelled to immediately climb out of bed. My eyes adjust to find the toilet without the aid of electricity as I stumble into the bathroom. Through the window, I see a waning crescent moon peeking down at me from behind low, fast moving clouds and, as I reach for the light, I conclude: "This could be the day I die."

"You say that every morning," the face in the mirror replies.

It's cold, I'm shivering, and my naked body is a sobering sight.

"Nobody stays young forever," the mirror image consoles.

I dress in warm winter clothes not worried about being overdressed inside the house since the heat hasn't been turned up yet and I'll be going out later to shovel snow from the back patio, the driveway, and the front walk.

In the dark and narrow hallway leading to the stairs, I feel my way carefully. I'm fearful of falling as I blindly reach into the stairwell to find the light switch. Even with the light on, I take the steps with caution, using the handrail for balance. At the bottom, I stand in the entrance hallway by the front door and extinguish the stairwell light in order to look outside at the quiet snow covered landscape surrounding the house and the dense woodlot beyond. Memories of my deceased wife, of lost opportunities, of heartache and grief assail me and I quickly turn to find my way in darkness towards the back of the house. In the kitchen, I turn all the overhead lights on.

There's oatmeal and coffee, milk and honey, bananas and blueberries, walnuts and almonds, a bountiful harvest from nature's garden. I'm inspired to think positively again.

The telephone rings. It's Don.

"You're still awake, too, huh?" he says.

"No, I'm not still awake," I reply, "I just got up. Why, what's going on?"

"The feds, they're coordinating a massive raid throughout the city, targeting street gangs and militia groups. Our neighborhood's not included, so far anyway, but Rasheed was arrested in another part of the city. Others from the coop, some employed by us, were also arrested at various places during the raid. Details are a bit sketchy but this might be a good time for me to take a vacation."

"What about Uzma, have you heard from her?"

"No, but she's not directly connected with guns and violence. She has nothing to fear from this personally."

"She's on record opposing violence."

"Right. Anyway, I need to get some sleep before I do anything else. I'm just calling to let you know I might disappear for awhile. You don't really need me anymore anyway. All the construction work is done. Most of the units have been leased, both residential and commercial."

"We'll talk about that," I say: "For now, just stay in touch. You have all my numbers."

"Yeah, I'll do that, bye."

I can't resist the urge to turn on the kitchen TV. I'm alarmed at the counter terrorism context in which the raids are framed to justify the use of military tactics at various locations throughout the city. I have an uneasy feeling it's just the beginning of a major offensive to establish and exercise local control of privatized law enforcement resources by global authorities. With the TV off, I return to the quiet early morning.

The cat's meowing at the back door. She's a big ball of thick gray fur, a long fluffy tail, and a sweet little face with large, expressive, blueish green eyes. She makes a guttural sound as she enters and goes directly to her food bowl beside the refrigerator. As I reach down to greet her with a pat on the head, she reaches up vigorously to meet my hand. She came to live here as a young stray several years ago and, other than sleeping at various spots in the house during the day, she still spends most of her time outside, especially at night, except when it's bitter cold or raining. I don't know her breed. I've thought about ordering on line for the genome test kit.

The probability of matching a randomly bred cat to a special breed is very low but, she seems special to me.

The phone rings again. It's Uzma.

"Have you heard?" she says.

"Yes," I say: "How are you doing?"

"Not very well," she replies: "Without Rasheed and Don around things are getting pretty wild here. I'm glad my parents are out of the country right now. And I'm wondering if Luv and I could come out and stay with you for a couple of days until I can figure out what to do next."

"Sure, you can stay here," I reply: "I'll drive into the city and pick you up. Be there in about an hour."

"Thanks, John. That would be great. I really appreciate it. See you when you get here."

I quickly shovel the driveway, warm up the car, and hit the road, feeling on top of the world.

