

Assiduity Ten

by J. Mykell Collinz

I'm using a 16mm motion picture camera with sound on film, equipped with a magazine holding six hundred feet, giving me approximately fifteen minutes of continuous shooting. Uzma has changed her cloths again. She's dressed for working in the garden, wearing a white tee shirt, loose denim coveralls, and heavy boots. Her youthful beauty, with walnut blond hair tied back in pigtails, greenish blue eyes, and ruddy complexion, reminds me of the farmer's daughter in a classic role, although I'm unsure of which film.

She looks into the camera, and says: "With drought conditions increasing throughout a large portion of the country, food and drinking water have become major concerns. The city's big supermarkets are selling food items from all over the world. Fruits and vegetables are being shuttled in regularly by air freight, mostly from Central and South America. It is our goal to become independent of this corporate controlled, international food supply chain."

"Act like the camera's not here," I say: "Just go about your normal routine."

Even though I tell her to ignore the camera, I know she will not be able to resist glancing in my direction repeatedly until she has seen herself on film or video and has become comfortable with the idea of being watched.

Don is becoming familiar with my professional video camera, a high priced portable with all the latest digital features.

"Zoom in, get some closeups of our leading lady," I tell him.

"I'm nobody's leading lady," Uzma says, looking directly into my camera.

With the six hundred feet of 16mm film running out, I place the camera back into its case. I'm anxious to see how she looks on color film and I intend to develop it as soon as I get home.

Rasheed gathers young farm workers who respond enthusiastically when asked if they want to be involved in the creation of a movie. Don makes use of the tripod to keep the video camera steady while Uzma interviews people from the group.

"Let's do some shooting out in the field," I say.

Rasheed responds by directing the group to a large open area beneath a clear blue sky where long rows of green leafy plants are shimmering in the haze of reflected sunlight. Crumbling industrial buildings off in the distance offer a stark contrast to the neatly organized gardens.

"This is an impressive sight, Rasheed," I say: "What have we got here?"

"Mostly cabbage family plants," he replies: "There's lettuce, spinach, onions, peppers, carrots, and tomatoes in similar plots all around. It's labor intensive, all done by hand."

"Is this happening in other places?" I say: "Are you in touch with people doing similar things?"

"Every place is different, of course." Rasheed replies: "But, yes, we have contacts with like minded people around the globe, mostly made possible by the Internet, yet we've had visitors, and we've done some visiting, especially Uzma's parents. They have long term relationships with progressive leftists and Marxists, mostly in Europe but also in the Americas, Australia, Russia, India, China, and other parts of Asia."

"Do you consider yourself a Marxist?" I say.

"Well, yeah, kind of," he says: "But there are many different ways to interpret Marx. I'm reluctant to apply the term to myself, although I have read Marx and Engels and Mao and I don't see a whole lot to argue with in their writing if looked at objectively. Marx especially is twisted by both right and left to fit any and all agenda. What happened in Russia and China with Stalin and Mao can not correctly be call Marxism or communism. Yet the corporate controlled media today continues to proclaim that's what it was."

"Where did you get your education, Rasheed."

"I'm from a black community, in the ghetto, but my parents worked extra hard in order to send me to Catholic schools in other neighborhoods. I had nuns teaching me in grade school and Jesuit priest in high school. Being tall and strong, I lettered in basketball and football. I lost my college basketball scholarship last year when I was busted for possession of marijuana while living on campus."

"That's quite a resumé. You're hired. For us to become a legal, transparent business, we need to formalize a salary structure, do bookkeeping, keep records. We also need a name. Any suggestions?"

"Not off the top of my head, no," Rasheed replies: "We've been trying to stay away from naming things in order to maintain a low profile. The bigger the front the bigger the back."

"Talk it over with Uzma and Don and the rest of your people. Try to come up with something interesting."

"We have a lot to talk over," Rasheed says: "I'm just beginning to see the implications in what you've been talking about. Before we begin any construction using heavy equipment and labor, we'll need to surround that area with a cyclone fence topped with bobbed wire and electrified."

"Landscape the area first," I say: "Do some underground plumbing, wiring. Build sheds, garages, a pole barn warehouse to store supplies and equipment. When we're ready to dig a big hole in the ground for the foundation and basement, that's when we'll need the fence."

"What will happen to our gardens and the rest of the property in the neighborhood when, like you say, the real estate market is alerted to something's brewing here?"

"I'll need to purchase almost all of it," I say: "That's the only way I see to do it."

"You can pull that off?"

"I'll be going way out on a limb using credit but it could turn out to be a very smart investment. Land values in this neighborhood will skyrocket if we develop it right. And still leave room for food production. We might even experiment with indoor growing facilities powered by renewable energy sources. And, when the studio gets

humming, we can make money with music videos as well as movies."

"This isn't all going to happen overnight, is it?" he says: "It's going to take Uzma a while to get used to the idea of development."

"You need an engine of growth, money to grease the wheels. You have a nice little vegetable garden here, Rasheed, but it's not going to be enough, by far, to make a difference. You need to move faster, on a broader scale. I hadn't intended to do any of this when I first purchased one block with the three houses on it just the other day. But since I met Uzma and the rest of you brilliant young people, I've become obsessed with the idea. And it fits right in with my original plan to produce and direct the filming of my new screenplay, which would have cost me a bundle of money, anyway."

The doubtful expression on Rasheed's face does not surprise me. Nor will it deter me.

