

Assiduity Thirteen

by J. Mykell Collinz

My relationship with Uzma exists on several levels, from basic to abstract, from animal magnetism to spiritual journey. When we're alone, we get along fine. When Rasheed is with her, she becomes combative.

Her lustrous chestnut blond hair is finely combed and hanging down to her shoulders. She reminds me of Veronica Lake with the peekaboo look, a cape of hair partially shrouding her right eye. Every now and then she tosses her head to put the hair back in place and flashes me with those big, greenish blue eyes.

"This land, that's what I'm talking about, John," she says: "It's history, its karma."

"You want to go back to the American Indians for karma?" I say: "Before the first European settlers arriving here in the seventeenth century?"

"Yes!" she replies: "Yes, I do. And even further back."

"To the end of the last ice age when glaciers retreated from this region about fourteen thousand years ago?"

"Further back still."

"To over a billion years ago before movements in tectonic plates caused rifts in the earth's crust producing deep valleys which filled with fresh water and became great lakes?"

"Don't laugh, John. I believe there was life, even back then. Not human life, of course not, but even the earth is a living organism with karma, even the universe itself is alive and is conscious of our existence, of our karma. It's watching us, waiting for us to use our minds and our hearts more constructively, waiting to unlock its mysteries so that we may discover our mission here."

"Our mission may remain a mystery, Uzma," I say: "But this much is clear. Regulated capitalism along with participatory democracy are essential to a free society where people have the ability to choose if they want to share and cooperate or not."

"I'm talking about people with nothing," Uzma interjects:
"Nothing to share, no choice in the matter."

"Capitalism and democracy go hand in hand," I continue: "They have proven to be the most effective producers of wealth and innovation in recorded history. But they are methodologies, not ideologies."

"You don't start a forest fire to cook a marshmallow," Rasheed interjects: "It's not a good methodology. And you don't mortgage the future for short term benefits. Prior to the housing bubble we had union busting, outsourcing, deregulation, wage reductions, loss of benefits, the whole capitalist system came crashing down on the middle class. I blame the need, the greed, to maximize profits. It's not a good methodology."

"Cooperation and sharing are imperatives," Uzma adds.

"You can't force people into that," I say.

"Yes, you can," Rasheed replies: "And, eventually, you must. It becomes unavoidable."

"We're a long way from that," I say.

"That's how you see it," he replies: "We are like strangers passing in the night, going in opposite directions."

"How are we going in opposite directions, Rasheed? I'm creating jobs, offering new housing units to low income families, supplying goods and services where none previously existed, at reasonable prices."

"We don't need your jobs, John," Uzma responds: "We've been jobbed enough. We need to share in the record levels of profit, profits being generated by automation and robotic technologies. We need to share in the billions of dollars worth of treasure locked away in the art museum's vaults. There is no good reason for this city to be going bankrupt. It's disaster capitalism, a big power grab by transnational speculators to privatize and profit from everything they possible can. And you take part in that, in its karma."

She goes out to dinner with me later in the evening dressed like, and acting like, a totally different person. The previous conversation isn't even mentioned. I want to take her home with me, get her in

bed, make love. Yet I know the reason she feels comfortable going out with me, a man old enough to be her father, is because I don't come on to her about sex like all the young men in her life. And I'd rather be with her than anywhere else in the universe.

