

Assiduity Twenty Five

by J. Mykell Collinz

I witness a brilliant sunrise followed by a clear blue sky during the short flight in a very light jet from central lower Michigan to Terra Haute, Indiana.

It's overcast with scattered rain along the Wabash River as I approach the federal correctional complex in a rented car.

The complex includes minimum security facilities, a high security penitentiary, and a special confinement unit for male death row inmates. The execution chamber is also located here.

Amanda Pool, Robert Jackson's lawyer, is waiting for me in the penitentiary's visiting area. She arranged the meeting at my request. I have never met him or communicated with him directly. Judging from his pictures, he looks like an older Don, tall and heavy set. He's doing twelve years for possession, manufacture, and trafficking of illegal firearms, ammunition, and explosives. He has served a third of his sentence and he is eligible for a parole hearing, which should be scheduled within the next six months, according to the lawyer.

"Robbie Jack can be intimidating," she tells me: "Don't let that throw you. He's basically a very good man."

The visiting room is like a big cafeteria with movable tables and chairs casually arranged. There's also an outside visiting area, visible through big windows on one side of the room, but it's closed due to the weather.

Visitors occupy a territory and then wait. Prisoners are released into the visiting room in small groups. They have been strip searched in an adjacent room, I'm told. I try not to look around. People are obviously wanting privacy. Although federal prisoners are not allowed conjugal visits, they can stretch that rule in creative fashion. Guards appear sympathetic, standing out of the way as much as possible, yet they are often forced to intervene, warning: "There are children present."

I recognize Bobby Jack immediately, given his height and girth. He's head and shoulders above the other inmates who enter the room with him. As he walks to our table, he looks at me without showing emotion. He nods in my direction when introduced and then sits, waiting for me to speak.

I'm impressed with his neat appearance. Dressed in khaki pants and short sleeve shirt with collar, pressed and creased, he looks like a military officer. Hair trimmed above the ears and well toned body add to that impression. Federal prisoners are not allowed to have facial hair or sideburns and most inmates in the visiting room appear to have dressed with care for the occasion. They are an impressive looking group of men. Many, like Bobbie Jack, obviously spend much of their time pumping iron.

"I don't want to sound stupid," I say.

"Then don't," he replies in a deep, resonate voice, scanning the room before continuing: "I already know who you are. I wouldn't have agreed to this meeting, otherwise. To set your mind at ease, I'll say this, if I were you, with that property and house available to me at that price, I'd buy it, too. So it's no big deal between us. I blame the government, not you."

"You're welcome to visit and walk through the forest any time you like," I say.

"I own more land nearby," he says: "We're almost neighbors. Your place is the only property they were able to snatch away from me. I'll make them pay for it eventually. Right now, I'm more concerned with soliciting your support. That would greatly enhance my presentation to the parole board."

"What form of support?"

"A letter of recommendation, testifying to my character with a long list of lies, most of which would be true if you actually knew me. I am an honest businessman, I play by the golden rules. Unlike congressional politicians and corporate executives who have no ethic beyond greedy opportunism."

To begin with, I feel I owe him something. And I'm charmed by his charisma. I want to help him. I'm excited at the possibility of almost being neighbors when he gets out.

"I'll send you the information and we'll go from there," Amanda says: "And now I must to talk privately with my client."

Robbie Jack stands to shake my hand as I'm leaving.

"We'll get together sometime," he says: "I appreciate your help."

The sky clears as I approach the airport. I'm satisfied with the results of my brief visit and, in the emotional aftermath of passing through the correctional complex, all that matters to me now is getting back to Uzma and Luv. I'm being tormented by an irrational fear they'll be gone when I get there.

