

To Tame Man – Book 1
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Chapter 1 – A Cool Summer Day

On a cool summer day, Susan sat at a coffee table on the patio at her favorite coffee shop, with Mayor Lilith seated on the other side of the table. Susan kept glancing at her watch, hoping the Mayor would not notice. Although Susan was the director of the Male Processing Unit, a boss always had to answer to another boss.

Susan raked her hand through her sandy blond hair to untangle the curls. She glanced at the water glass at her reflection and focused on the crow's feet that formed at the corners of her eyes, even though the reflection was too small to see.

Mayor Lilith pressed the red button on the bracelet in her hand, sending a radio signal. Then she activated the electric shocker on the male waiter's black neck collar with a clear crystal in the center. The Mayor yelled, "Why so long? Do! Fetch! Do! Why are men so slow, so dumb?"

Mayor Lilith was the Mayor of Chicago. She kept her grayish hair cut short. Although the Mayor appeared thin and malnourished, she had piercing blue eyes that seemed to know everything.

Susan winced and tried to hide her loathing of the red button.

Susan looked up at the blue sky, which seemed to turn a cleaner blue with each passing year, while the skies became more crowded with waves of birds. Then Susan looked down on one of the busiest streets in Chicago as a wave of bicycle rickshaws scurried along the streets carrying their female passengers. A long time ago, the city stopped painting the lane lines because no one followed them. The roads were primarily orange as the pedaling males wore their characteristic orange jumper suits with matching orange pants. The men wore black leather collars around their necks with a clear crystal in the middle. All males had to wear these collars in society.

The tall skyscrapers cast long shadows over the streets, keeping Susan and the Mayor cool as they drank their coffees. Susan added another teaspoon of sugar to her cappuccino and stirred. She glanced at her watch again, where the hands had barely moved since the last time she glanced at her watch. Time always moves slowly during long, painfully boring meetings, especially with people with whom one does not enjoy company.

Mayor Lilith looked at the male waiter wearing a blue dress shirt and matching blue khaki pants and shrieked, “Come here, stupid. You get cheese and croissant. Do!” She screamed as she slapped her hands on the table for emphasis, like sending commands to a loyal but sorely abused German Sheppard.

The man bowed his head in agreement and came to the table while the crystal disk on his neck collar sparkled.

Lilith snapped, “Bring me a croissant and brie cheese. Do! My God!” And she slapped the table again with her right hand for emphasis.

“Mayor, please don’t use the Lord’s name in vain.”

“Oh, jeez. Why are men so damn stupid?”

“Perhaps it is Inhibitor 37.”

“Oh, please. Inhibitor 37 only makes them more docile. It does not impact their intelligence. Men are just stupid creatures!”

The man nodded his head and jogged inside the cafe. He returned several minutes later with the croissant and brie cheese on a small platter and placed it in front of Lilith. Then he added a paper napkin and a small fork to the side.

The man nodded his head like a good German Sheppard waiting for a treat from the master.”

Mayor Lilith waved the servant away, picked up the small fork, jabbed a slice of cheese, and took a bite. Then she placed the remaining cheese on the side of the plate. “How does the production quota look for next year?” she asked.

Susan tried to avoid looking into the Mayor’s eyes. “We are making progress. We’ve expanded the number of artificial uteruses. We can produce 300 males this year and have them in jobs within ten years. We also speeded up the growth process. If everything goes correctly, maybe we can have them in jobs in 8 years.”

Susan looked down again to avoid the cold gaze of the Mayor. Susan nodded her head in agreement to prevent the Mayor’s wrath. The usual mantra on a government budget is to do more with fewer resources.

The Mayor studied Susan carefully. “That is too small. We need more workers. We must boost output.”

Susan looked at the Mayor and quickly looked down at her coffee. “But I thought the United Federation of Cities gave explicit orders. Don’t produce too many males unless absolutely necessary. Too many men could undermine our society and potentially destroy it.”

“Orders; orders; orders. Of course, the Federation also boosted the quotas for corn and soybeans again. President Aiden of the Federation thinks she can keep demanding more. More. More. And more. Thus, we must grow and harvest the corn and soybeans for the Federation. We need more men to do the menial work.”

“Perhaps we can ask the women to do more. We all love the Federation and live under its graces.”

“Oh, please. We are not designed for menial work. We, women, do the important work, the mental work. Those baboons are lucky to get their rations as they do the easy menial work. For example, look at him,” Lilith said as she pointed at the waiter standing at attention near the doorway. He looked away nervously. “Does it look like it can do anything beyond fetching food and cleaning the table? Then we must feed him corn-soybean feed every day.”

Susan scrutinized the servant in the blue shirt and pants and said, “I know they consume resources. I wish we could decrease their rations, but if we starve them, they will not work hard.”

Mayor Lilith looked at the waiter. “Look at him. He looks so disgusting with his gut sticking out. It has so much oil in its hair; we can deep fry French fries.”

Susan added, “Perhaps we can try to boost their intelligence and allow them to expand the work they can do for us.”

Susan looked away from the Mayor as the Mayor blasted her with cold eyes, and Susan immediately regretted what she had said.

“What? Give men more intelligence. You’ve got to be joking. They are stupid creatures put on this earth to serve women. That is it. They got one job, and they cannot even do that. For heaven’s sake.”

Susan sipped her cappuccino and glanced at her watch again. Why did this meeting take forever? Susan tried not to look at her watch again.

The Mayor continued, “I entrusted you with the duties of the director. Your job is the second most important in this city. I hoped you knew where your loyalties lie.”

Susan looked at the Mayor’s cold eyes. “Yes, ma’am. I serve you and the city well as director of the Male Processing Unit. I faithfully executed every one of your recommendations. I have not questioned you—not once.”

“I have been at this job for a long time. Sometimes, a woman develops feelings for these man-servants. I know it is in a woman’s nature to love, but this love is like the love of a beloved cat or goldfish. You show these men any mercy; they will disappoint you.”

“I know, Mayor.”

Mayor Lilith continued, “Don’t you remember your 13 Commandants. God gave the Commandants to Lady Moses as she descended from Mount Sinai. The men tricked women into praying to false idols, and they caused women to depart from the righteous path of God. Then God became angry. Lady Moses smashed the tablets in anger. Then she forgave her people and gave them the 13 Commandants. The 11th Commandant clearly states that men have only one purpose – to serve women. That is their sole purpose in life. They shall serve, and they shall serve with respect and gratitude.”

Susan looked at her watch again and at the Mayor, who had a cold demeanor with hard, sharp wrinkles around her face and neck, cold blue eyes, and a face stuck in a perpetual frown. “I know; I know,” Susan said as she glanced at the waiter and saw the sweat glisten off his face. “Perhaps he is not a good specimen.” Then she waved him away because the creature looked pathetic standing there, waiting for a woman’s command.

The ladies sipped their coffee. The Mayor eyed Susan while Susan stared at her coffee cup blankly.

“Perhaps I can tinker with man’s DNA again?” Susan asked. “Since they consume so many resources, we can adjust their genetics to consume fewer resources but have a larger role in society.”

Mayor Lilith choked on her coffee and gasped. “What? Expand their role? You are speaking blasphemy. That’s blasphemy!”

Susan glanced at the waiter, who stood sentry near the doorway. He rubbed the neck collar several times, and the left side of his face twitched as he stood sentry and waited for new commands.

Susan looked at Mayor Lilith again. "I have studied man's DNA. You know it is odd. Their DNA is almost identical to ours."

"Preposterous," Mayor Lilith said as she pointed at a hairy man pedaling a bicycle rickshaw along the street below. The rickshaw driver wore his orange jumper shirt and matching orange pants. He sweated profusely as he towed three ladies in his cab with their luggage stacked on the top roof of the cabin. His thick eyebrows almost formed one complete sash.

Mayor Lilith continued, "That guy looks like a gorilla. Of course, I did not mean to insult the gorilla since they are much more intelligent than men. We don't share their DNA. Although they resemble us, they have 36 chromosomes. Women have 46. See, they are even inferior at the genetic level. I would rather you insult me by saying gorillas are genetically closer to women than men. At least gorillas have 48 chromosomes."

Susan sipped her coffee and kept silent. She performed several DNA tests in her laboratory. She knew men had 46 chromosomes just like women, but she kept the results quiet. She knew she would create such a stir to refute that men have identical chromosomes as snakes and serpents, the symbol of the devil. Susan also suspected they were interfering with men's development, hindering them mentally, making them into docile houseplants. Most living and breathing creatures have a male and female counterpart. It was only the human woman who had no counterpart because women could conceive and birth women, while men were grown artificially.

Susan looked at Lilith's cold stone face, then looked down at her coffee and thought to herself. Did she say too much? She knew she was treading on touchy grounds and knew her 13 Commandants well. Commandant 12 was death to any man who harmed a woman. Then she thought about Commandant 13 and shivered. Commandant 13 was brutal. She looked into Lilith's face and blurted, "I'm sorry. Sometimes, I say silly things. I guess I'm under too much stress. Perhaps my samples were contaminated. Sometimes that happens."

“Perhaps you did,” Lilith said as she stared at Susan for a long time. Then she picked up her fork, jabbed one of the slices of cheese, and took a bite. Then she ate the tip of the croissant and returned it to the dish.

They sat silently for a long, awkward silence that stretched into eternity. Susan shivered from the Mayor’s cold aura but tried to defuse the building tension and looked up to Mayor Lilith again. “You’re right. Men are not human. They have the same chromosomes as snakes and serpents and are meant to serve women, and that’s their only purpose in life. That is God’s will. That is her design.”

“That’s right. Men have always served women. God put men on the earth to serve women.” Then Lilith yelled at the waiter, “Come here now. Do!”

The waiter sprinted to the table and bowed.

“Bring me a glass of iced water,” Mayor Lilith said as she pressed the red button on the bracelet on her left wrist.

The waiter’s neck collar delivered a 100-volt jolt to the man’s body, and his body jerked while tears ran down his face. Once the waiter recovered from the shock, he turned and headed into the cafe.

Susan convulsed as if she felt the shock from the waiter, and she looked down at her hands and tried to hide the emotions on her face. God may have put men on the earth to serve women, but God did not intend for women to harm one of God’s creatures, one of God’s lesser creatures. A man was only shocked for doing something wrong – not to terrorize him and make him afraid of women. As the highest life form from God, women must take care of God’s creations.

Several minutes later, the waiter returned with two glasses of iced water and placed them on the table in front of the ladies.

As the waiter turned away from the table, he blubbered, “Ouch!”

Mayor Lilith’s face erupted into a dark red as she pressed her lips tight. Men were forbidden to talk to women, so Lilith pressed the red button on her bracelet several times.

The waiter clutched his chest and turned bluish as sweat began covering his body. He first dropped to his knees and clutched his chest. Then he collapsed, sprawled out in front of the ladies. The

man convulsed once or twice while his eyes lost their animation and became two lifeless, dull marbles.

Mayor Lilith pressed the red button several times and screamed, "It's so hard to get good help nowadays. These worthless men."

Susan wanted to reach across the table and pull that damn bracelet off the Mayor's wrist to stop her from pressing that damn red button. At first, Susan just stared at the waiter lying dead just inches away from her feet. She wanted to kneel and help the waiter, but she shivered when she thought about the 13th Commandant. The 13th Commandant was the worst. Susan felt all her energy and life leave her body as one of God's creatures had died in front of her within touching distance. She looked away so as not to raise suspicion from the mayor.

Mayor Lilith rose from her seat as she nodded her head several times and muttered, "It's so hard to get good help these days. These worthless men."

As the Mayor stepped over the cooling corpse, the proprietor of the coffee shop came out and studied the male corpse lying on the patio. Then she began apologizing. "My sincerest apologies, Mayor. I didn't mean to offend you with my revolting, lazy worker. Please forgive me."

The Mayor waved her right hand as a get-away-from-me motion. "You should be doing more than apologizing, leaving a rotting piece of meat in my presence."

The proprietor continued apologizing while the Mayor ignored her and left the cafe. The proprietor of the coffee shop approached Susan and started apologizing to her repeatedly.

Susan could not hear her words because they seemed muffled, as if she were swimming underwater while someone was trying to talk to her at the surface. "What was his name?" Susan blurted.

The proprietor hesitated. "His name? I don't understand."

"Did he have a name?"

"Yes. He had a name. I think his name was Blue 751."

"Thank you," Susan said as she thought that this was the first time she had seen someone die in front of her. Death saw its chance, rushed around the corner, and stole another poor soul.

Of course, Susan recognized the man's symptoms as heart disease, and she knew medications were available that helped patients live a long life with heart disease, but medications were reserved for women. Susan remained seated and watched the ice cubes melt in her ice water. She shivered about the plight of man.

Fifteen minutes later, two large men wearing brown shirts and brown khakis came onto the patio with a stretcher. Each man had a patch with a number stitched above the upper shirt pocket, but Susan was too sad to look at their numbers. The men in brown clothes picked up the dead man by his hands and feet, placed him onto the stretcher, and carried him away.

Susan shivered as she watched the men leave. She looked at the barely-eaten croissant and cheese slices on the Mayor's plate. "Let's not let those go to waste," she mumbled under her breath as she unfolded a napkin and slid the leftovers onto it. Then Susan folded the napkin carefully and posited it into her handbag.

The brown shirts carried the corpse to a waiting trash truck, specially designed for collecting dead males and dead animals. The male corpses were stacked like fireplace logs in the back of the truck. The men swung the body back and forth and tossed the body onto the growing stack of dead bodies. Then they latched the tailgate and climbed into the back. That day, the men collected six men and several stray dogs that started to decompose and emit an odor, but these men were used to such odors. Perhaps the first several days on the job, they puked many times and had trouble keeping down their man feed, but they had adjusted. They placed the stretcher on the top of the growing pyramid of dead male bodies and drove around the city. Yet, they still had several hours before the end of the shift and plenty of more pickups as men used death to escape their servitude from women.

The female driver put the truck into gear and drove around the city, waiting for new calls. The Mayor demanded every male corpse must be picked up within ten minutes.

At the end of the day, the truck arrived at the processing plant, where the brown shirts placed the dead male bodies one by one on the moving conveyor belt. At the same time, the female supervisors watched from a distance away from the stench of decaying corpses.

The bodies came one by one on a slow-moving conveyor belt. At the first station, a female guard used a particular device to remove the neck collar, placing each collar into a box. That box was sent to the Male Processing Unit for the next man-servant batch. Most of the time, the women did not bother to clean the neck collars.

At the next station, a man in a brown shirt and brown pants peeled off the shirt while another man removed the pants. Then another man collected the garments and hung them outside on a field of clotheslines. He placed each garment on the clothesline to let the sun and summer air dry the clothes. Once dried, another servant folded the clothes neatly and sent them to the Male Processing Unit, where the next batch of men needed clothes to hide their nakedness and their shame from a female God, as God hated to look down upon this earth and see the mark of the devil on every man's body – the horn of the devil.

The next station removed the skin, where a man used a special suction hose to suck the fat from each male corpse. Finally, two brown shirts pulled the corpse from the conveyor belt. They fed the body to a hungry crematory where the flames consumed a man's body.

One man had the unfortunate job of collecting the fat tubs and transferring them to the soap and candle production line. The fat would slosh around in the plastic container and spill onto the floor, sometimes onto the man and his clothes, but most of the male fat made it to the candle and soap production lines. Of course, these candles and soaps were reserved for men because women only used 100% natural plant sources.

Early in the morning, when the crematories were cooling, brown shirts scooped the ash and remains into wheel barrels. Then they filled a waiting truck with the ash to carry it to the corn and soybean fields, which fed the men their ration of corn-soybean gruel while they continued their servitude to women. Once men had served their

fate, they died and joined their horned devil in the lake of sulfur and fire.

Chapter 2 – Enjoying the Leftovers

Susan shivered about how one of God's creatures died within several feet of her, but she was powerless to do anything. The Mayor didn't even care about the dead waiter. But Susan had to sit there and let the poor creature die. She knew men were inferior to women, but were they really? Even if they were inferior, they were still God's creatures and deserved respect and a chance at a good life.

Susan thought of the stunned looks from Mayor Lilith. Susan held the second most important job in Chicago, where she supplied the males, the hidden workhorses of the city. Without Susan, there would be no City of Chicago. Furthermore, she didn't want to give the Mayor the impression that she was a male sympathizer because she wasn't. What would Susan do if Mayor Lilith found out about her experiments and evidence, such that men had the same number of chromosomes as women and, thus, possessed compatible DNA?

Susan thought of Brown 447. She knew she could lose her job if the Mayor found out, or perhaps it could even be worse. She could be charged with violating the 13th Commandant. She shivered as she stood outside the building of the Male Processing Unit, where she served as Director for the Chicago division, the leading biochemist of the United Federation of Cities.

Susan came out of her trance and stared at the brown brick, five-story building that spanned a whole Chicago block. This one facility supplied all the men for this division and made Chicago the corn and soybean capital of the Federation. The processing unit had tiny, barred windows, just in case an untrained male tried to escape. There was no way he could squeeze himself between the bars.

The Director entered the building and glanced at the directory by the entrance. A female security guard nodded at Susan's presence and said, "Good day, ma'am."

"Good day," Susan said and headed downstairs to the basement.

Another female guard greeted her, unlocked and opened the large iron door without saying a word. Around here, everyone knew who the Director was.

Susan winced as the strung masculine smell struck her nostrils, like entering a barn with cows and cattle stepping in their own crap all day long.

The guard replied, “They certainly stink, ma’am?”

“They sure do,” Susan said as she walked along the corridor. Frightened male eyes followed her progress. Her shoes clapped on the cold tile floor, sending waves of thunderclaps echoing along the corridor.

Susan glanced at the clipboards as she walked by. The clipboard summarized every treatment and therapy given to each man. She walked past the first batch—the yellow shirts who were given enough intelligence to fix the machines and devices in the city. Some of them would become educated.

Susan turned a corner and walked along the corridor. The second batch was the blue shirts – the city’s servants, waiters, and factory workers. They were designed to work with their hands.

Susan turned the corner again and passed the third batch, the orange shirts, where her institute produced the males with the strongest legs to power the bicycle rickshaws but plenty of empty space between the ears, just enough intelligence to understand where to courier their female passengers through the streets of Chicago.

The next row was the green shirts who worked outside the city in the agricultural fields. Then Susan arrived at the brown shirts—the cleaners and waste handlers who kept the streets of Chicago so clean that they were cleaner than the plates served at the local restaurants.

Susan strolled to Brown 447 and peered into his cell through the square slot in the door, just enough for a tray of food. She was not sure why she was attracted to this particular male. Although he looked like the other males with a hairy body, sharp masculine lines, and the musky order of wild animals in the woods, he had sandy brown hair with piercing, intelligent blue eyes.

Brown 447 looked up at her and nodded his head slightly.

Susan’s heart raced as she pulled the napkin out of her handbag and placed it in his meal slot. Then she glanced at the metal tray dish of food lying on the floor, where she saw he had only eaten half his gruel. Of course, she could understand. The gruel – a gelatinous

slime of corn and soybean meal with pulverized protein from dubious sources. Susan thought she knew the sources, but it is like how one enjoyed hot dogs' flavor but did not want to know how they were made or which protein sources went into them.

Susan knew women enjoyed the more flavorful food while man feed supplied the men's daily nutritional requirements—nothing more, nothing less. Susan knew the pigs at the farms enjoyed better feed than the men. If waste was not good enough for the pigs, it was pulverized and added to the men's gruel.

Brown 447 stood up and snatched the napkin of treasure. He opened the napkin and devoured the half-eaten croissant and brie cheese. Then Brown nodded at Susan and sat down on the straw mattress.

"You're welcome," Susan said as she stared at Brown for a minute. Then she turned and glanced at the metal door at the end of the hall, where the black shirts resided behind that door. The Blackshirts sat in their cells and waited for the fate of a feminine God who was angry with the masculine form. The Blackshirts were not worthy of an identifying number.

Susan sat in her palatial office behind her desk on the top floor of the Male Processing Unit. The phone on Susan's desk rang, and Susan picked up the receiver in two rings.

"Ma'am, the field trip is here."

"Thank you," Susan said as she returned the receiver and headed to the lobby. Two teachers and their entourage of female children greeted her.

The female teacher said, "Children, please meet the Director of the Male Production Unit of our region. She has the second most important job in the City of Chicago."

The children were like young puppies. They kept jumping up and down and could not stand still for a second.

Susan said, "Hi, children. So, you come to see some males?"

A chaotic chorus of yeses filled the room.

“Children, children, best behave,” one of the teachers bellowed while the children became silent.

“Follow me, children,” Susan said as she led the children to the visiting area, where the facility kept two males on display behind Plexiglas cages. The males sat in cells no larger than 9 feet by 9 feet, slept on a pile of hay, and had access to a sink and toilet to do their business.

The children started laughing, jeering, and pointing at the males behind the cages. Rats caught in a cage as they spent their whole life on public display as an amusement.

“They are so damn ugly,” one girl yelled.

Another girl urged, “Teacher, press the red button,” as she grabbed one of the teacher’s shirt sleeves.

“Watch this, students,” the teacher said as she pressed the red button. The two sitting males convulsed; their eyes opened wide, and their neck collars delivered a jolt to their bodies. Then they collapsed onto the floor.

The children started laughing. “Let me press the button,” one girl asked.

The teacher bent down and moved her hand into the child’s reach. Then the little girl pressed the red button.

The two males convulsed again as they lay on the ground.

The children started laughing and pointing at the two males.

“Remember, children. You only use the red button if you feel threatened by the males. And the red button only works when males are within 10 feet of you.”

“Me next, teacher,” a little girl demanded.

“Wait, Carrie. First, who can tell me the story of the creation of woman and man?”

Carrie smiled and said, “That’s easy, peasy. Eve was created in God’s image. Then God knew a woman needed a servant and took a rib from Eve. God then created man. A woman sits next to God while a man sits beside the woman.”

“Good job,” the teacher said as she lowered her arm and allowed the child to press the red button.

The two males convulsed into unconsciousness as a growing pool of urine formed under one of the males.

“Eww,” one girl shouted while the other students pointed, jeered, and laughed.

One of the teachers said, “Children; children. Turn on your listening ears.” The children became quiet, and the teacher continued, “Who can tell me the original sin?”

Three students raised their hands at the same time.

The teacher pointed to the girl on the far right.

The student started. “Adam ate the forbidden fruit in the garden. Then he tricked Eve into eating that fruit. The original sin is man tricked Eve into disobeying God.”

“Excellent; excellent. Then we know the rest of the story, don’t we children. God has forgiven women, but God said we must control men strictly. He possesses the horn of the serpent, the horn of the devil.”

“Teacher, I didn’t get to press the button,” one of the students pouted.

The teacher glanced at the two unconscious men lying on the ground in the cells. “I don’t know whether they can handle another shock.”

“Oh, teacher. They’re okay. They’re just sleeping.”

“Oh, okay,” the teacher said as she lowered her hand, and the little girl pressed the red button.

The two males convulsed slightly.

The teacher looked at Susan. “Will they be okay?”

“They’re fine. They’ll just sleep it off,” Susan said, but she knew the men were shocked too much.

The teacher said, “Thank you, Director, for giving us this tour. I am sure the children have immensely enjoyed this visit.”

The students chimed, “Oh, yes. Thank you; thank you.”

The group left while Susan headed for the elevator. Susan glanced at the two unconscious males sprawled out in their cells. They’ll just sleep it off, she thought. Then Susan walked to the elevator, placed her ID card on the reader, and punched the button for the third floor. She trembled as the elevator passed the second floor, where all staff except her, the Mayor, and a handful of staff were forbidden to go. The second floor housed the male children

before becoming fully grown men. The male children looked absurdly like female children before puberty.

Susan had to stay and work overtime today because a black shirt was scheduled for disposal that night. She glanced at the clock on her desk – damn, another 15 minutes. Then she slid another paper from the large pile in front of her, where each paper summarized the treatment of each male – their hormone treatment, administering various inhibitors, and hours spent in subconscious learning. The Male Processing Unit had fulfilled its duty while another batch of males was ready for servitude. They would work in Chicago and become productive members as they served their female masters.

Susan checked each treatment one by one – applied Growth Inhibitor 37 to the growing fetus – check – applied Growth Hormone 53 – check. Then she came to the bottom of the page. The specimen does not exhibit aggressive qualities – check. The specimen does not show a superior intelligence – check.

Susan placed the sheet onto the adjacent growing stack of documents. Then she took another. She saw the heading Brown 447. She hesitated when she reached the Growth–Applied Growth Inhibitor 37 to the growing fetus. Susan knew that year her facility had a shortage of Inhibitor 37. As always, they were always in short supply of hormones and inhibitors. That year, many of the supplies were in critical shortage, and she should have diluted it with water, but she forgot. She remembered she worked down the queue from artificial uterus to artificial uterus. Then she reached Brown 447. She stuck the tip of the syringe into the bottle and sucked air into the needle. She had run out. With the camera on her, she made the motion of injecting the inhibitor into the tube, feeding the fetus. Then she walked away. Oh well. What could she do with diminishing supplies while the demand for servants surged to new heights?

Susan kept checking ticks on each question until she reached the last question. The specimen does not exhibit superior intelligence. Again, she hesitated as she remembered Brown 447 exhibited some

unusual characteristics. She remembered seeing Brown sounding out the words on a book title left on the table by one of the conditioning coaches. That should have triggered some further investigation, but she had little time. Then that episode piqued her curiosity. She gave Brown a book. She wanted to see if he could read it. She asked him to make sure no one saw the book. After a few days, he waved the book at her as she passed his cage. Then he shuffled the pages to indicate he had read it. His thirsty mind was ready for another.

During another incident, Susan saw Brown use his index finger to trace the calculations on a whiteboard where a laboratory assistant adjusted the nutrients in man feed. Again, it was unusual, but even monkeys can make seemingly complex deductions.

“No, it’s impossible,” she muttered as she walked by. Men can’t understand higher thought. The Bible spelled it out clearly because God made man a woman’s servant—nothing more. Even monkeys show signs of cleverness, but their cleverness quickly disappears as a complex task overwhelms their tiny minds. Then she ticked the box—the specimen does not exhibit superior intelligence. Thus, Brown 447 was ready for his assignment.

Susan finished processing the stack of papers. The next batch of Browns would start their new duties tomorrow as they were ready to contribute to society.

Susan looked at the clock again, five minutes before midnight. She made a cup of chamomile tea and then headed downstairs.

Susan entered the isolation section in the processing facility, where they detained the black shirts. As she entered the room, the Mayor’s assistants opened a space for Susan. Then the assistants closed around them like ducklings clinging to their mother duck. “Mayor,” Susan whispered while she looked ahead at the man strapped on the metallic surgical table.

“Director,” Lilith nodded her head and looked at Susan. Then the Mayor looked at the guy strapped on the stainless steel medical table with a black hood covering his face. They always used stainless steel tables at the executions so the custodians could wipe the table of death and prepare it for the next transgressor. That poor stainless steel table, unfortunately, saw death quite frequently.

The female executioner stood over a control panel that fed translucent plastic hoses into the man's veins into his arms and legs.

"You may proceed," the Mayor said.

The female executioner wore a black hood and nodded in agreement to the Mayor's command. The woman with the black hood said, "You are charged with violating Commandant 12, thou shall not harm a woman."

"No! No! No! This is not right!" The strapped man shouted over and over again.

The hooded executioner continued, "Since you failed to serve women in this lifetime, you shall serve your devil master in hell for an eternity."

"No, you can't. You mustn't," the man screamed.

The Mayor nodded her head in approval. The executioner flipped a switch on the control board, which caused a yellowish liquid to flow into each tube that fed the man's veins.

Susan looked away because she didn't like executions, even if the man deserved it, but the Mayor smiled.

The man started convulsing as he kept screaming, "No. No. No." The man-made one more gasped for air and yelled, "Y'all bitches." Then he became silent.

The Mayor jerked her head to the side as if she were slapped by a right jab from a boxer.

Susan shrugged her shoulders and thought, what's the point of a female dog. How's that an insult? We all know bitches go into heat. That was part of their biology.

A nurse standing next to the body placed a stethoscope and listened for a heartbeat. Then she looked at the Mayor and shook her head no. "No heartbeat," she said.

The Mayor looked at Susan. "Good day, director."

"Good day, Mayor."

The Mayor left the room with her assistants following like little ducklings behind the mother.

The executioner and nurse rolled the corpse onto an awaiting gurney. Once he was secured, Susan said. "You ladies have done enough. I can take it from here."

“Yes, ma’am,” they chimed and left the room while Susan was left alone with the male corpse. She came over to the gurney and removed the man’s hood. She noticed he looked similar to Brown 447 because she knew Brown’s genetic line was the most stable and produced the most obedient servants for the Federation.

The dead man’s eyes fluttered open while he gasped for air, like a drowning victim being resuscitated.

Susan jerked back too quickly, tripped over her feet, and fell to the ground. “It can’t be,” she muttered. As she rose, she saw the man squirming and trying to scream.

Susan approached the man, began caressing his ears, and hummed a lullaby that soothed every boy’s savage heart. All male babies heard this lullaby as part of their conditioning and development. This lullaby soothed them and put them to sleep.

The man relaxed and stopped struggling. After ten minutes of listening to this lullaby, he fell asleep.

“Sleep, my child,” Susan said as she looked down at his serene, sleeping face. “If God wants you to live, then how can I go against God’s wishes,” she whispered. Then she pushed the gurney towards the warehouse. Perhaps God had given you another mission because your duty on this earth was not fulfilled.

Chapter 3 – Another Day at the Office

It was no use pretending; the Mayor knew Susan must be watched because Susan held a position of power, the second-highest level of power in this city, next to hers. How could Susan be sympathetic to men's plight? Why men? Why not cats, dogs, or pigs? Men could not be trusted because they were imperfect servants who needed much guidance, discipline, and punishment; of course, the Mayor emphasized punishment. Thus, Susan must be watched since no male sympathizer can hold power.

Mayor Lilith absently scratched her bracelet with the red button. Then she entered her office, which served as makeshift sleeping quarters. A large oak desk spanned the length of the office, and there were two large bay windows behind her desk-like eyes watching over her city. An oak bookcase flanked the left side of the wall filled with legal books and city regulations, while a wooden globe of a 15th-century world map was to the right, revealing an assortment of wines and brandies and Snapp's inside. Next to the globe was a black leather couch where she spent many sleepless nights. She rarely returned to her empty apartment with the growing dust on the furniture, while her footsteps echoed like an empty museum as she walked across the floor.

Mayor Lilith closed the door and headed to her desk. Before she could sit down, one of her assistants barged in.

The Mayor prepared to scold her assistant, but the assistant apologized, "My apologies, ma'am. My sincerest apologies. The President of the Federation has relayed an urgent message. She asks for your immediate attention."

The Mayor felt the acid burn the inside of her stomach, leaving a bitter metallic taste in her throat while she let out a long sigh. "Okay," she said as she picked up the phone and pressed the speed dial one. President Aiden picked up within three rings.

"The President speaking."

"Good afternoon, ma'am. Mayor Lilith, returning your call."

"Mayor. Good to hear from you."

"Good to hear from you too, Madam President" while the Mayor rolled her eyes.

“I wish I could speak to you under different circumstances, but we had an incident in Miami.”

“Miami?” as Mayor Lilith placed both feet firmly on the carpet and hunched forward over her desk in full attention.

“It seems a group of men banded together and caused an insurgency. Five women are dead; possibly hundreds are traumatized.”

“This is dreadful. Have the men been detained and executed?”

“The insurgency was quickly squashed. Three males have been disposed of. Two are still being questioned.”

“That is good. Punish those sinners. Is there any way the City of Chicago can help you, ma’am?” The Mayor threw that out there for feigning concern, but the Mayor could not spare any resources.

“I appreciate your help, but the situation is contained. However, I am contacting all Mayors and putting all cities on high alert. All cities must raise their security and report any problems to me immediately. I will also immediately send any male troublemakers to the disposal unit. Can I count on you?”

“Yes, Madam President,” Mayor Lilith said into the phone. “May I ask how the insurgency had started?”

“We are still collecting facts. Once the investigation is complete, a report will be issued to all Mayors.

“Thank you, Madam President.”

“Thank you, Mayor. God bless the Federation.”

“God bless the Federation.”

“Amen.”

“Amen.” Then the phone became silent, and the Mayor returned the receiver to the cradle.

The Mayor opened the top left drawer and pulled out a bottle of anti-acid. Then she plopped one into her mouth. Then she looked at the bottle again and plopped another table into her mouth before returning the bottle to the drawer.

“Yeah, investigation,” she muttered under her breath. The President of the Federation didn’t reveal information - just kept boosting the corn and soybean quotas. Must feed all the hungry male mouths of the Federation.

The Mayor thought about her predicament. She thought and thought. Those vile creatures have been loyal, obedient servants for sixty-eight years. They took their place next to a woman like faithful servants. They did all the cleaning. They did all the maintenance. They did all the menial, dirty jobs. Meanwhile, the women lived well, were comfortable, and cared for their servants. We fed those ungrateful servants. We organized. We directed. We managed. We created a beautiful city for everyone to live in while those vile, filthy creatures – killed five women and possibly traumatized thousands more.

Mayor Lilith reached for the phone and called the head of the Mayor's Guard, who picked up on the first ring. "Meeting in five minutes," the Mayor said.

"Yes, ma'am."

The Mayor slammed the phone receiver onto the cradle.

Within several minutes, Sarah, the captain of the Mayor's Guard, and her top lieutenants surrounded her desk in a half-circle. Sarah stood out from the rest of the women as she towered at six feet and had a body built like a thick oak tree trunk. She kept her reddish hair cut short while a splash of freckles formed constellations on her cheeks.

Sarah's second in command, Jennifer, stood at Sarah's side. Jennifer kept her long brunette hair wrapped in a tight bun. Although Jennifer was more feminine than Sarah, with olive eyes and plump cheeks, many would consider her quite striking.

The Mayor folded her hands and placed them on the desk. She studied the female faces around her. "We may have a problem brewing," she began.

The women surrounding her desk remained motionless as they listened to the Mayor.

"Apparently, several men banded together and attacked and killed 15 women in Miami. Thousands of women are traumatized by the event."

Several women gasped while one turned pale. However, both Sarah and Jennifer remained quiet and showed no emotion.

"It may be just an isolated incident," the Mayor said.

“Ma’am, perhaps it was an isolated incident, but we should side on caution,” Sarah said.

“I agree. Have security boost the number of inspections of men’s stables and barracks. Arrest and torture a few. Send ten males to the disposal processing unit. We must show those ungrateful creatures their place in our world, our city. They should appreciate living in such a great city as Chicago,” the Mayor snapped.

“Yes, ma’am.” Then Sarah looked at her lieutenants. “You have your orders. Bust your butts. Beef up security. Rough up the males and send ten to the disposal unit.”

Everyone turned and started to march towards the door.

“Sarah, stay. I have a private matter for you.”

Jennifer shot Sarah a nasty look but hurried out the door with the other security staff as Sarah stood before the Mayor’s desk.

Once the door had closed, the Mayor motioned for Sarah to sit in one of the two leather wingback chairs in front of the Mayor’s desk.

Sarah sat down while the Mayor leaned forward.

“I have an assignment for you. I need your complete discretion.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I would like you to place the director of the Male Processing Unit under surveillance. Put your best people on the case. She must, under no circumstances, know she is being watched.”

“Yes, ma’am. May I inquire about the nature of the surveillance? Is it a possible violation of Commandment 13?”

“No, no. It is nothing like that. I just want to make sure where her loyalties lie. I want to make sure her judgment has not been compromised.”

“Yes, ma’am. I’ll get right on it.”

“Very well then.”

On cue, Sarah stood up, saluted the Mayor, and left the office while slowly closing the door behind her.

The Mayor rose. She approached the bookcase and searched for the latch. Click. The bookcase swiveled out like a door, revealing a hidden bookcase inside. The Mayor sneezed and rubbed her nose from the dusty and moldy ancient books.

The Mayor remembered the first time she saw those books, and she gasped while her eyes widened as Grandma unlocked the latch to reveal the hidden bookcase. Then she remembered screaming, Grandma, those books are illegal, or did she say forbidden. Those books were from the other world. They are not allowed. They must be burned.

“Sit down,” Grandma had said.

A young Lilith sat on the couch while Grandmother scooted a chair across from her.

Grandmother clasped Lilith’s hands into hers. “Someday, you will take over Chicago. You must know the truth.”

“The truth.”

“Yes, the truth.”

“What truth is that you speak.”

“There was once a different world, a different world than ours.”

“An evil world. But God destroyed that world.”

“Yes, God did destroy that world and gave us a second chance, which led to the creation of the United Federation of Cities. We came out of the ashes and destruction of that other world, which was badly destroyed because everyone thought God was wiping humanity from the face of the earth. Then God would reseed the earth with new creations.”

“Grandma, that is blasphemy.”

“That’s not Blasphemy. That’s the truth.”

Tears streaked down Lilith’s face, “Blasphemy. Blasphemy. Blasphemy.”

“No, child. Not Blasphemy. Our world is built upon another, but God has given us a second chance.” Then Grandma pointed at the ancient books and added, “Those books are from that violent, wicked world. Those books reveal the truth that we have forgotten. Truths we chose to forget.”

“No, Grandma.”

Grandma led Lilith to the bookcase and used Lilith’s hand to touch a book. Lilith tried to pull her hand back, like sticking one’s hand into a jar of creepy bugs, but Grandma was too strong. Grandma forced Lilith to grab a book and head to the couch. Then

Grandma sat next to Lilith on the couch as she opened *Heart of Darkness*. Then Lilith's real education had begun.

Mayor Lilith came out of her daydream, grabbed *The Naked Ape*, opened the cover, and saw it was printed in 1967. Then she smiled at her illegal collection of books.

Grandma was right, and she was the smartest person Mayor Lilith had ever known. Of course, the second smartest person Lilith knew was her, the Mayor of Chicago. Then she closed the secret bookcase and went to the intercom. "Tea, please," she said as she grabbed a fake cover from the desk drawer and sat on the leather couch with her feet resting on the end table.

The Mayor slipped the fake cover on *How to Properly Discipline Your Man Servant* and started reading. Ten minutes later, a hot cup of Jasmine tea joined the Mayor as she continued her real education—knowledge that came from a destroyed world.

Chapter 4 – The Garden House

It was in the afternoon. Susan sat at the bar and sipped a mint green tea – no wine during working hours. She looked around the empty bar and saw her reflection between two wine bottles in the mirror that served as a backdrop to the bar. She looked at her long, sandy blond hair pulled back into a ponytail. Although she couldn't see the faint crow's feet forming in the corner of her eyes, she knew they were there when she closely inspected her face after her morning shower – the continual battles with life and, unfortunately, life was winning.

Susan looked at the immaculate white bar. Everything was white here, pristine, clean, and pure, as she smirked at the word pure. This place was everything except pure.

Susan remembered her first time here when she was a junior in college. Her friends pooled their money on her birthday, saying, “We got a surprise for you. You shall remember this birthday for the rest of your life.”

They huddled around her, ensuring that Susan could not break away, and brought her to the Garden House, where they reserved a table in front of the stage. All around them, women drank wine, screamed, and laughed with each other. Everyone enjoyed the alcohol and waited for the show.

Susan screamed, “What is so special about this place?”

Susan's friends laughed. “You shall see. This is not your average wine bar,” Sarah shouted.

The women in the bar quieted down as the proprietor came onto the stage with a mic in her hand. She looked tough, with wide, broad shoulders like a man and thick trunk-like limbs for arms and legs. She screamed into the mic, “Are you ladies ready?”

The drunk masses roared, “Yes.”

“Are you really ready?”

“Yesssssss.”

“Are you really, really ready.”

“Yesssssss.”

“We have a special treat for you at the Garden House. Nothing but the best specimens in Chicago. Grown in our finest labs. Fed nothing but the finest corn and soybeans.”

“Yesssssss,” the women screamed.

“They are trained to please a woman.”

The crowd roared again, “Yessss.”

“Before I bring the specimens to the stage, do we have any birthday gals out there?”

Susan’s face turned a bright red as she tried to hide her face behind her hands.

Sarah pointed at Susan, screaming, “Here. Here. Here. She’s a birthday girl.”

The proprietor continued, “Do we have a Susan here?”

Susan’s friends started jeering and shouting as they continued pointing at Susan. Still, Susan’s face reddened even more as she tried to hide under the table where they sat.

All the women clapped and hollered.

“Bring out the specimens,” the proprietor shouted into the mic.

A door opened, and one by one, a naked male walked out and lined up on stage. All the naked men were standing in a line on the state. They wore black neck collars with clear crystal in the center and a waist harness that bound their hands to their sides. All men faced the audience as all the women clapped and hollered, except for Susan.

“These are the finest specimens in Chicago. They’re engineered to please and pleasure a woman for hours,” the proprietor said as she made a sweeping motion with her right hand and pointed at the males. “The birthday girl gets to choose first. Which one do you desire?” The proprietor asked as she pointed at Susan.

One friend rubbed Susan’s shoulder while the others placed their hands on Susan’s hands and arms. “Which one, Susan,” they all chimed.

Susan didn’t know what to say as she blurted, “Where are their clothes?”

“Yes, indeed,” the proprietor replied. “Where are their clothes?” All the women exploded in laughter.

“Why is that funny?” Susan asked.

Everyone continued laughing.

“I’ll help her,” Sarah said as she stood up and pointed at the brown-skinned man with straight jet-black hair. His stature was shorter than the others, and his manhood was small. “That one.”

“An excellent choice, especially for your first time,” the proprietor whispered into the mic.

A woman in the audience screamed, “You go, girl.”

The browned-skinned man walked off the stage.

“Where did he go?” Susan asked.

“He’s waiting. Please don’t wait too long. We have other eager ladies waiting,” the proprietor said.

The audience roared into laughter again.

Sarah grabbed Susan’s hand and led her to the circular, white stairway leading to the flower rooms upstairs.

“Where are we going, Sarah?”

“To get your birthday present.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You will. They don’t teach you everything in college.”

“What do you mean?”

“That soft holy spot down there accepts more than just your finger.”

Susan turned red again as she remembered when her mom caught her in the bathroom, taking too long. Her mom told her that this spot gets itchy sometimes, but she should not scratch it. Mom said she could get dirt and bacteria on her finger, and it would get stuck inside and give her an infection like gangrene. Then Susan would die as green goo oozed from her wet holy spot. Susan pleaded, “Won’t I get sick? There is a severe infection down there.”

Sarah stopped to laugh. Then they continued upstairs. Then they paused outside the door, the Lotus Room. “Your favorite flower, I presume,” Sarah said.

“What’ll I do?” Susan asked as her hands shook slightly while her cheek pulsed with a nervous tick.

“Don’t worry, Susan. You just go inside. He’ll undress you and place you in a Jacuzzi. He’ll wash every part of your body. He will pat and dry you and then place you on the bed. Then he’ll put his devil inside and scratch that deep itch.”

Susan gasped, placing her open hand before her mouth, “Ohhh.”

Sarah turned to leave, but Susan grabbed her hands. “I’m scared. This is my first time. Have you done this before, Sarah?”

Sarah smiled and nodded her head yes several times. “Let’s just say I’m a regular. I should be part owner of this place.”

Sarah opened the door and pushed Susan gently inside. A floral scent struck her nostrils while soft meditation music played on the speakers. The room was lit by a row of candles on the fireplace mantel and along the edge of the Jacuzzi. She saw the brown man draw a bubble bath for her, and his hands were freed from the harness.

“We’ll be waiting downstairs. If we aren’t there, just get a drink and wait,” Sarah said as she closed the door gently.

The brown man came over and helped Susan take off each piece of clothing. He folded her shirt and pants and placed them in a pile on the bedside table. Then he helped her in the Jacuzzi.

As Susan lay with her head resting on the padding of the Jacuzzi, he massaged her shoulder with the scuds from the bubble bath. He lifted each leg and massaged every fiber strand of her muscles. Susan felt the stress of her studies melt away and entered another world as she flew with the birds in the clouds. She just wanted to stay in this Jacuzzi forever and let the world pass by without her.

The man helped Susan out of the Jacuzzi. He patted her dry with the towel, then dropped the towel to the floor and helped Susan to the bed, where she lay on her back in the center of the bed with her eyes closed.

The man began licking and kissing her feet, and he opened her legs and began massaging her thighs. At the same time, his tongue twirled around each ankle, one by one, allowing the tongue twister to touch each square inch of her body. Then his tongue followed the contours of her legs, knees, lower thighs, and upper thighs.

His tongue swirled around her belly button and then started to go south again. Finally, Susan convulsed. Every muscle in her arms and legs tightened while a sensation of intense, carnal pleasure struck her sweet holy spot. Virgin waters began to trickle from the holy fountain.

Susan tried to scoot away, but the tongue followed and penetrated deeper. She tried to relax, but the pleasure came in waves. One moment, she thought she would lose control and wet the bed. Then the man massaged her boobs while the waves of pleasure kept downing her consciousness. The holy water continued dripping from her fountain.

Then the brown man started kissing her belly button and navel again while his hands continued massaging her breasts. Finally, he was on top of her.

Susan jerked from the pain when he stuck the devil's horn in the holy place. Then he gently pushed in and out while kissing her neck, her ears, and her lips.

After an eternity of carnal pleasure, the man stopped. Then he rolled onto his back while Susan opened her eyes and looked at the white ceiling above her. "Wow. That felt interesting," she muttered to herself.

The guy lay on his side and nodded his head yes. Then he slid from the other side of the bed, grabbed her shoes, and went to the sink to wash them.

Susan didn't know how long she lay on her back. Eventually, the sweat started to dry on her skin, and she found herself downstairs at the empty table. She was not even sure if she had put on her clothes correctly. She wouldn't know where to sit if it weren't for the reserved sign on the table.

Her friends joined her twenty minutes later.

Sarah sat down, leaned over, and whispered, "How was it?"

A large grimace appeared on Susan's face.

"Come on. Don't hold back."

"Innnncredible," she said as she nodded her head up and down.

"Incredible."

Of course, she was highly intoxicated from the alcohol and the sexual experience; she vaguely remembered getting the tattoo on the way home. Sarah insisted that Susan needed something to remind her of this special occasion. Every morning, Susan would eye the weeping Lady Jesus as she looked up at Susan from the right side of her groin. Susan would smile every time she saw Lady Jesus as she

remembered Sarah lying on the next tattoo bed while getting tribal bands around her arms – the warrior princess.

Susan came out of her daydream. Here she was, back at the Garden House. Over the years, she returned occasionally, especially when the stress at work became unbearable. Still, she would deny that she was a regular. The funny thing was that Sarah didn't become a business partner to the Garden House, but Susan did. After graduation, Sarah had disappeared off the face of the earth, or at least the streets of Chicago. Of course, Susan's college friends stopped talking to her when she became director of the Male Processing Unit. But that was okay. Susan became the second most important person in the city as everyone lavished gifts and free service on her. The Lotus Room was virtually her second office. She just had to pick up the phone, and her room would be ready with any male or male of her choosing. Here, the proprietor made sure Susan got the VIP treatment. Susan was important.

After college, Sarah disappeared. Susan heard she became a supervisor on the agriculture farms—a career path for the not-so-lucky graduates. All the top graduates coveted the Mayor's political machine, as everyone went for power and influence. Of course, if a woman had higher aspirations, she would work in Louis City, the political center of the Federation.

God, Susan thought, because she had not thought of Sarah in such a long time. It was like anything in life. We rode the passenger train of life and made friends who sat next to us. Then the next thing we knew, the train stopped, and our friends left us behind. Once in a while, Susan took a break from the speed train, looked back at past friends, and wondered where they had gone.

Susan raised a toast and whispered, "I hope you found a good life somewhere in Chicago, Sarah. God bless you."

The proprietor came over. "Susan, good to see you."

"Good to see you too, Charlie."

"I heard you have something special for me."

"Let's just say a present from God."

"A present from the Grand Ole Lady. That's the best kind. How had the Grand Lady helped?"

“Let’s just say a male was scheduled for disposal, but he recovered. According to our records, he should be fertilizing the corn and soybean fields by now.”

“Wow. I imagine the Mayor would have a heart attack if she knew?”

“I’m sure the Mayor would have more than a heart attack. But she had already left the room when he revived. Nobody knows except for me.”

“Two shots of peach schnapps,” Charlie said to the blue shirt male standing behind the bar. Then she raised her shot glass. “To the Grand Ole Lady.”

“To the Grand Ole Lady.”

Charlie and Susan clinked shot glasses as both women downed the schnapps.

Charlies added, “Then God wanted him to continue serving the world. When should I expect delivery?”

“I can have him here by the end of the day.”

“Splendid. Splendid. The usual arrangement?”

“The usual is fine.”

“May I freshen your drink with something a bit stronger?”

“I mustn’t. Work calls.”

“How about a little time in the Lotus Room. Your usual is resting upstairs. He’s ready to go.”

Susan looked at her watch and then up at Charlie’s face. “I wish, but I must return to work.”

“Very well then. Just let me know. I can have your room prepped and ready to go.”

“Thank you.”

“Anything she wants. It’s on the house,” Charlie said as she turned to the bartender. The male servant nodded his head. Of course, he was the only male allowed to wear his clothes in this place. Naked men standing on a stage – no problem. Nude men doing naughty things in the flower rooms – no problem. But naked men making food and drinks – a huge problem. Yuck!

Susan looked at her watch again. Did she have time for another meditation session in the Lotus Room? She tried to drink the last cold tea, but the cup was empty, and she decided to head back to

work. But she could not get Brown 447 out of her mind. What was it with this particular male? He was not attractive, no different from the other males. Still, he had these piercing blue eyes that emanated intelligence – an unusual quality for a male. Most human males resembled their ape cousins.

Chapter 5 – The First Day on the Job

Brown 447 walked out the door into the warm sunlight. He had only seen and felt the sun's rays from a barred, reinforced window at the Male Processing Unit. He looked up at the sun and closed his eyes, allowing the sun's warmth to caress his face. Then he followed the other men in a line as they walked single-file.

Women guards barked orders, "Single File! Do! Stop! Do! Obey! Do!"

Brown glanced up and down the street, seeing a mess of rickshaws with men wearing orange clothes pedaling their female passengers to their destination. A car and a truck here and there marred the sea of orange and bicycles like boats bobbing up and down in waves.

The line stopped.

"Don't look at me," a guard yelled at a man ahead of Brown. She swung a baton and pelted the guy in the center of his stomach. As the man lay on the ground, the woman kicked him in the head.

The guy almost passed out while the men in the front and back helped him to his feet. The men took turns shaking him so he would not pass out. Then the line continued forward while the injured man limped and held his stomach. A trickle of blood streamed down his face.

After walking for 40 minutes, the men approached a large, brown brick building where half the windows were broken while the other half were boarded up. Brown's shoes began slipping and sliding from the buildup of grease and grime on the sidewalks.

As the men approached the entrance, the decaying smell of garbage and waste hit their nostrils like a swarm of attacking bees. The man in front of Brown started gagging, but nothing came up.

The men entered the building. They saw a garbage truck backed into the building, and hydraulic lifts hummed and tilted the carriage, causing a river of garbage to flow onto the assembly line. Then the men began sorting the garbage.

The guards led each man to a vacant spot on the assembly line. Finally, Brown's turn came as he approached his station at the end of the assembly line.

The female guard used her baton as a pointer, “This bin – glass,” and tapped the bin with her baton. “That bin – animal feed. That bin – paper. That bin – aluminum. Anything leftover – man feed,” tapping each bin with the baton for emphasis. Then she looked at Brown. “Do you understand?”

Brown nodded.

“Then do!” She walked away as she joined her colleagues in an air-conditioned office on the second floor that overlooked the assembly line. Occasionally, a female face appeared in the office window, ensuring the men worked hard all day.

Brown began sorting. After an hour, the assembly line became a blur as truckload after truckload dumped an endless river of garbage onto it. Occasionally, another male brought a new bin over and took the filled bin to another room.

While watching pictures on a tube, the guards stayed in the office that overlooked the assembly line. Brown and the others slowed their pace when the female guards were not looking. Sometimes, they threw the good food into the man’s feed.

Occasionally, one of the guards would peer down onto the assembly line. Or even worse, the guards had several giant rats with yellow eyes that would sit and watch them while moving their tails back and forth. The men hated these little beasts as much as the women. These little beasts would stand erect on their legs and meow loudly to get the guard’s attention as the women would rush over and punish the men. Meanwhile, the women would pet the little rats and give them a piece of dry fish or chicken.

The men learned to adjust their pace. When no woman or meowing rat was looking, the men slowed their pace. Then as any female or yellow eyes fell upon them, the men picked up their pace.

Brown saw his neighbor’s eyes widen as he grabbed a half-eaten glazed doughnut from the garbage. He looked around for the office guards and any other female who happened to be patrolling the building. He slipped the doughnut into his pocket when the women weren’t looking.

Brown gave a thumbs up to his neighbor. At least someone got to eat well in this place, and it appeared this river of garbage was nothing but crap as everything was destined for man feed.

They worked in silence for a while. No man talked because men were forbidden to speak with one another.

A horn chimed.

The men formed a long line and headed to the canteen for lunch. Each man stood in line and grabbed a metal tray while a cook on the other side of the partition scooped three ladles of slop onto the tray. At first, the slop formed three small mounds that began to flatten and spread across the tray.

The men exited the canteen, sat down along the brick wall outside the alley, and began eating. The foul garbage smell was not so bad in the fresh air.

Brown's neighbor removed the doughnut from his pocket and began eating it.

"How's the doughnut?" Brown asked.

The men looked at Brown in shock. One of them pointed at Brown's mouth and shook his head no.

Brown's neighbor smiled, showing the crumbs sticking to his teeth.

Brown 447 could only eat half his gruel, so he placed the tray on the ground and pushed it away.

His neighbor whispered, "You goin' eat that?"

Brown slid his tray toward the neighbor, who smiled, snatched the tray, and began eating.

The horn screamed again as the men rose and returned their trays to the kitchen. Brown saw a man spray each tray with water and no soap. Then he noticed a pipe that left the sink and deposited the brown water into a sieve to remove the food particles from the water. Next to the sieve was another bin labeled – Man Feed.

Brown shook his head and returned to his station. He was glad that no food was wasted, while everything was recycled with such precision as nothing went to waste in Chicago.

Each man was allowed three bathroom breaks during the day. Any more would incur the wrath of the female guards. Brown took his break and walked to the hallway that led to the bathrooms.

Brown saw one bathroom boarded up with a sign on the door – Women, while the door to the other doorway was propped against the wall, and the sign was missing, but Brown could see the four

screw holes that had attached the sign to the door. He presumed male servants were written on that sign.

Brown entered when the smell of decaying urine and feces slapped him in the face. Nobody had cleaned this place in decades. The tile floor was caked with dirt and grime, making it look like a dirt path in the woods, but Brown could see the contours of a tiled floor.

Yellow crystals formed around the drains in the urinals. Brown did his business. Then he walked to the sink and washed his hands.

Brown saw himself from a shard of the mirror still attached to the frame. He used his shirt sleeve to clean off the dirt and grime and looked into the mirror. A man with light brown hair and blue eyes, with a shadow of a beard, peered back at him. He pushed his cheek with his index finger to see if it was really him.

Brown saw his number – 447 – in reverse in the mirror, stitched above the brown front shirt pocket. That was really him. He looked so damn ugly – too masculine, like a guerrilla. He lifted his shirt to look at his torso. Even though hair covered his torso, he saw six prominent lines that formed across his lower abdomen. Why was he born so ugly, with well-defined hard lines and tough muscles? The feminine form was smooth and beautiful, like an airbrush touched by God. Here, he was a hairy animal who resembled the primates.

A female guard appeared at the door. “What’s taking so long?” The guard screamed.

Brown fell to the ground as a jolt shook his body. He awakened several minutes later.

“Back to work,” the guard screamed.

Brown slowly rose from the dirty bathroom floor, and he tilted his head down so the guard could not see the hatred in his eyes. Then he limped back to the assembly line as the shock did a doozy on his body.

Two meals later and more hours of processing garbage, the workday ended. The guards led the men to their stables, their sleeping quarters at the back of the building.

As Brown entered, he scanned the area. Just mounds of hay that designated someone's sleeping spot. He saw a man squat in one of the large buckets against the far wall while another guy removed his clothes and began hand washing them with a bristle brush. Another guy removed his clothes, placed them on the window sill, and took a cold shower from a rigged showerhead.

Brown lay down and looked out the window into the starlit sky while a Lake Michigan breeze blew into the room. Brown 447 just wanted to flee this place, live under the stars, and breathe the fresh air away from the continuous river of garbage. He looked at the half-lit skyscrapers in the distance that defined downtown Chicago, where the women lived in the best accommodations, got to eat the best food, and got to live the best life. Here, men slept like barn animals on hay and worked like bulls pulling a plow through a rock-filled field.

Brown thought – these women got to go. No more shocks from the collar. No more crappy food. No more working crappy jobs. These women needed a taste of their own treatment. They should wear these collars – not us.

Brown saw an insect fly in the air near him with a flashing abdomen. He cupped the insect and peered at it while it crawled on his hand.

One of the men nudged Brown, “You're turning.”

“Uh,” Brown said as he raised his hands and let the insect fly away.

“You gotta shower.” Then the man touched his neck collar for emphasis. “You gotta wash your clothes. Our stink upsets the women.”

Brown did his routine hygiene and scrubbed the bathroom crud from his clothes twice as long. Then he collapsed onto the bed, and his dreams were full of endless starlit skies, trees, and fields wavering in the wind, and a world devoid of women.

Chapter 6 – A Day of Revelation

Susan found this place quite by accident. One day, she had turned down the wrong street after leaving the Garden House and became lost. She spotted a rare antique store nestled between a cafe and a restaurant, with two large bushes camouflaging the door.

There she was, holding something unbelievable in her hands that she found in an antique desk drawer. Susan saw pictures of these devices in history textbooks in school. She fumbled it in her hands and tried to switch it on.

The owner of the antique store said, “The battery is dead. You need to plug it in.”

Susan turned and approached the proprietor, who looked like she was approaching eighty with her white hair pulled back into a bun. Her skin was thin and loose, and Susan could see the faint marks of spiderweb-like veins under her skin with plenty of age and liver spots. However, Grandmother moved with grace and agility.

“I’ve only seen these in textbooks. My teachers said they were evil devices. As people became so hypnotized by them, they stopped speaking with each other and isolated themselves, huddled in the back seats at restaurants and cafes, becoming hermits. They refused to have conversations with real people but instead talked all the time with these devices.”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Do you?” Susan asked.

“I had one when I was a little girl. Then the war started.”

“The war?”

“Yes, the Great War.”

“Would it be possible to ask about the war? I mean, nobody talks about it.”

“It was a long time ago. Why trouble yourself with the past. That was another time, another age, another world.”

“But the books seem to have missing information.”

“Perhaps there is a good reason for the missing information. If the information were important, the Federation would have written it down.”

The ladies had a long, awkward pause. “Come, let’s have tea on the patio,” the proprietor said as she locked the store’s front door and led Susan upstairs to a small apartment above the antique shop.

“Please have a seat, dear,” the old lady said, pointing to a chair on the balcony overlooking the peaceful street.

After several minutes, the lady returned with a tray with a pitcher of iced water with lemon slices, and mint leaves trapped between the ice cubes. Then the lady placed two glasses on the table, filled them with water, and placed the pitcher on the tray stand near the doorway.

Susan sipped the lemon, mint-infused water and asked, “What do you remember of the Great War?”

“It was a terrible war. I came home from school, and my dad and mother were arguing. Both of them were crying.”

Susan almost choked as she sipped her water. “Your dad?”

“Yes, my dad. He was a big man. My mom said he worked in an office, something to do with computers.”

Susan’s eyes widened, and they muttered, “Computers.”

“I saw the letter on the floor. The government wrote to him to serve in the war. Mom cried and told him to desert, to take us away and live in the forests in Montana. He kept yelling that he must serve his country. They argued fiercely until they saw me. When my dad saw me, he grabbed and lifted me into his arms and gave me the tightest hug. Then he carried me to the ice cream shop and bought me an ice cream. He told me he had to go away for a while. I dropped the ice cream on the ground and hugged his leg. I remember, don’t go, Daddy, don’t go. When I woke up the next morning, he was gone. I never saw him again. I would hug Mom on the couch as we watched the news on TV. I remember the pictures of piles of dead bodies. The war killed many men.”

“I don’t understand. Why would you hug your dad?”

“In those days, everything was different. Men controlled the world. The men even controlled us, the women.”

Susan almost fainted as she just stared at the old woman.

The old lady reached and grabbed Susan’s wrist. “It was a different world then. It was not this world.”

“I am so confused. Men are inferior to women. Women formed the covenant with God, and women saved all humanity.”

The proprietor chuckled. After an awkward pause, the proprietor continued, “That was a different world then. The men worked to support their families. I suppose some women could work if they wanted to. The men also helped to make the babies.”

Finally, something clicked in Susan’s mind. Something they left out of the textbooks when she studied chemistry and biology in college. The textbooks only described how to grow men in artificial wombs while women are artificially inseminated by fertilizing female embryos with female stem cells. A woman’s body is too pure to support the embryo of a male since a woman’s reproductive system represents a holy place. At the same time, a man possesses the horn of the devil. Her professor explained that developing a male inside a woman’s body would corrupt and dirty her. That’s why men must be grown in artificial wombs – to keep the women pure.

“Please tell me more about the war,” Susan urged.

“It was a terrible war. I remember someone from the government coming to our door and asking Mom to work. Few men were left, so the government wanted women to work all those vacant jobs. At that time, the government was called something like the United States. But that doesn’t sound right. Something like that.”

“Where was the United Federation of the Cities?”

The lady chuckled, sipped her water, and replied, “Dear, the Federation came after the war.”

Susan kept probing, “What was it like before the Federation?”

“I remember men could wander around free. They held important jobs. Of course, we did not have artificial insemination back then. A man would form a union with a woman. Then they would have a baby together. Perhaps two babies or even three. But I kept hearing how bad men were. My teachers said men were bad. The TV even said men were bad. My mom always yelled at my dad and said how bad he was. We blamed men for everything.”

“A union?”

“A union.”

“Did you ever form a union with a man?”

“No, dear. The Federation stopped that, but I kept my mom’s ring.”

“What do you mean a ring?”

“The ring symbolized the union between a man and a woman.”

“Do you still have the ring?”

“I believe so.”

“May I see it?”

The old lady got up and left the balcony. Susan thought she should go search for the woman. Perhaps she tripped and fell down. After 10 minutes, she returned with a ring and a charger.

The lady held the wedding band fused with the diamond ring pinched between two fingers to show it off.

“May I see it?” Susan asked. Then she reached for the ring and spun it around in the palm of her hand. Why are the two rings fused together?”

“Mom said my dad gave her the first ring with the diamond to ask for a union. Then her dad gave her a second ring to bless the union. Then my mom wore the diamond ring closer to her heart. It symbolized that her man would become her new father.”

“Wow. I don’t know even where to start.”

“I am sure they do not teach that in school, at least not anymore.”

“No, they don’t. They just teach us the Bible. A man was put on this earth to serve women. Not form a union with them.”

“Did your dad return from the war?”

“I never saw my father again. He was sent somewhere in Asia, Chena, I think.”

“What did you and your mother do?”

“We just tried to survive the best we could. Mom worked at the post office. Some weeks, we had no food on the table. Other weeks, we ate plenty of potatoes and corn. Then the Federation came.”

“Of course, the Federation came to the rescue.”

“The Federation changed everything.”

“I am so shocked. It seems the Federation withheld important information from us.”

“Does it matter, dear? Look at the world we’ve created. We recycle all our garbage. We grow all our food organically. We had

no wars, no crime, no violence. We have lived in peace and harmony for seventy, eighty years.”

“That old world seems so different. Are men really that evil?”

“Yes. They are that evil. They caused the Great War. My mom and I thought we would wake up one day and everyone would be dead, but the Federation came. Of course, we had few men in our society because the Great War took most of them. But the surviving men agreed that men are evil, and they all agreed men must be controlled. Then the Federation formed, and the remaining men took the dirty jobs of society while we, women, took control.”

“But everything seems built upon a lie.”

“Lie or no lie. We had peace for seventy years. We all live in harmony with the environment. Look at how clean and blue the sky is.”

Susan sipped her lemon-mint water. Then she looked down at the phone in her lap. She unraveled the power cord, plugged the charger in, and connected it to the phone. Then the screen powered up – Android. Susan pressed an icon on the screen just by chance, and Candy Crush started playing. It took several tries before Susan caught on to the strategy.

The proprietor took several sips of her lemon-mint water, “Addictive, isn’t it.”

Susan looked at the proprietor again. “I have not seen technology like this. How could we let such technology go?”

“I am sure the Federation has its reasons. During the war, I remember everything was controlled by a computer. The refrigerator would talk to you and let you know the milk was getting low. Another computer would inform you if you received a letter that day in the mailbox. Everything was connected to a computer. Computers were everywhere.”

“Wow. I would not have thought computers could control everything.”

“I remember towards the end of the war, the computers started acting weird. The refrigerator would stop cooling the food and allow it to spoil. The phone would ring all day long. When I answered it, a computer voice said you won the national lottery and would need

to send them money, but the money wasn't sent. Mom fell for that twice."

Susan unplugged the phone and held it up, "How many Federation credits?"

"Thirty, dear."

Susan thought about haggling the price down because she was the director of the Male Processing Unit. Everyone tried to please Susan because everyone wanted a male servant. But Susan looked at the kind proprietor's face, opened her handbag, and placed 30 credits on the table.

"I would like to come back for tea and stories again."

"Any time, dear. I have plenty of tea, and I have plenty of stories."

Susan returned home with the phone and closed the thick drapes to hide her activities from the outside world. The Federation had no laws about using technology from the old world, and after many decades, that technology rarely worked anyway. The Federation only deemed books from that era a crime. Then she plugged in the phone and went through all the programs.

Susan remembered when she had to take computer science in college. Chicago only had a handful of computers throughout the city. Her Male Processing Unit had two of them, and they used them to simulate changes to a man's DNA. She remembered the blank stare from her professor when she asked if the computers could be connected. That way, they could share data and do more work.

Her professor explained, "That's impossible. We've tried that before without any success. The way computers are connected together does not allow them to communicate. It overloads the circuits and fries the processor."

Susan put the phone down and thought, what kind of world was that – a union between a man and a woman. Computers controlled everything. Then the great war wiped out half of all life on the planet. Then the Federation came along and rewrote history.

Chapter 7 – A Little Taste of Heaven

Brown 447 was a strong, quiet male, born a servant in a Utopian society. He processed the river of garbage so well that the guards promoted him to street duty. Every day, the guards took several male crews to clean the streets, where they would pick up garbage all day long.

Brown remembered being furious one day when a woman walked by and hit him between the eyes with a crumbled ice cream wrapper without even looking at him—just tossing trash upon trash. He felt violated and dirty, so he picked up that wrapper and rammed it into his trash bag.

Brown looked around the city, where everything was immaculately clean. The streets were cleaner than the trays they ate off in the canteen. He felt an anger boiling in him. Why did he and the males have to eat slop that was too foul for the pigs?

Brown's resentment led to acts of defiance. One day, on the street, he saw a lady climb into a rickshaw and leave her handbag. He casually came over and slipped it into his trash. Even though the rickshaw circled back, the confused woman didn't find her handbag.

On another occasion, a woman entered the cafe. When no one was looking, Brown came over to her table, took a large bite of her sandwich, and ensured he left a healthy swab of saliva behind. When the woman returned, she grimaced as she bit into the sandwich. She placed it on the plate and peeled back the top bread to inspect the ingredients.

Brown had to clench his teeth to stop a barrage of laughter.

Brown's neighbor shook his head no and whispered, "You'll get zapped or worse." But Brown just smiled.

Brown tried to get the other men from his unit to help him, but they were terrified. He needed something to entice them, to wake them up.

Brown had trouble sleeping one night. He woke at 3:30 in the morning, put on some old woman's clothes that he had found in the trash, and slipped out the window.

As he walked along an alley, he thought he heard a noise. He slipped into the shadows under a metal fire stairway when he saw

two yellow eyes peering at him from an opened window. They just stared at him without blinking.

Brown knew those little beasts were an extension of the women. He even heard one of the female guards refer to one as kitty as the beast purred as she petted its head.

Brown remembered that one male was excused from using the bathroom one day. Five little beasts lined at the doorway as they stared at him, and two guards rushed to the scene and found the guy licking the chocolate from a leftover wrapper. The guards immediately pressed the red button on their bracelets and zapped the man into unconsciousness. Then they dragged him to the box for solitary confinement, where he stayed for two days with no feed and no water.

As Brown waited, the two sets of yellow eyes disappeared. Then Brown continued walking under the stars, finding a bakery ten blocks away. He just had to push the backdoor open to reveal the stacks of cakes and loaves of bread ready to be delivered in the morning. That was the positive thing in this society because nobody locked their doors.

Brown positioned the wide floral hat to hide his face and walked in. Then he opened random boxes on the counter.

Brown's face brightened – jackpot, as the smell of freshly baked pecan pies struck his nose. He shoved a whole slice of pecan pie down his throat. Then another. Then another. Then he looked down at the pie, with only two slices remaining. He tried to eat another slice, but his stomach protested.

Brown 447 waited five minutes for his stomach to rest. Then he shoved the last two pieces down. When Brown was sure he could not stuff down another slice without puking, he grabbed a plastic bag and placed pie after pie into layers. He closed the bag and cradled it like he was holding an infant, and then he returned to the stable.

Brown woke each guy by placing a whole pie on their chest and shaking his shoulder. This was the first time he had seen such happiness and camaraderie in a group of males as their lip-smacking and gobbling was louder than a timber mill cutting boards.

As the men started their shift at 6 A.M., Brown slipped the plastic bag deep inside the recycle bin. Thus, no evidence.

A loud commotion shut down the processing line at 9.35 A.M. as a squadron of females wearing riot gear rushed in. The captain screamed, "Line'em up."

Brown and his team lined up.

"Strip now. Bend over and spread your cheeks. Do!" The captain screamed.

Brown frowned and followed the commands. He thought, what were they thinking. What? We will hide some pecan pie up there and enjoy it later.

One officer shined a flashlight as she walked by and inspected each pair of butt cheeks while two officers searched through each piece of clothing.

Each man was led to the corner, where the captain screamed at them while another officer struck the man with her baton for emphasis.

Brown's turn came. Two guards led him to the captain. "Did you steal any pecan pie?" The captain screamed.

Brown shook his head no as one of the guards struck him with her baton in the back, and Brown dropped to his knees.

"Do you know who stole the pecan pie?"

Brown shook his head no again, which was met with another blow to the back. He hunched over onto his hands and knees while another guard kicked him in his ribs.

"Have you eaten any pecan pie?"

Brown shook his head no. Then the guard struck him again.

Two officers guided him to the line and grabbed the next man.

After the interrogation, the captain yelled at the men, "No rations for the rest of the day."

Brown turned his head to hide the smirk on his face.

The men returned to their posts and continued processing garbage. True to the captain's word, they worked straight through lunch and dinner—no breaks, no slop.

The guards did not return to the office. Instead, they walked around the building, keeping a close eye on every male because they

were determined to find those naughty males who ate all those pecan pies.

Brown didn't mind because he ate enough pecan pie to last a week, perhaps even a month. As the men retired to the stable, each man patted him on the back. Then they huddled into a circle by touching his neighbor's shoulders like football players gathering to devise their next winning strategy.

"We did all right," Brown whispered and added, "The most important thing is everyone kept their mouth shut. If we stick together, we can fight back. Then one day, we can eat the same food, live in the same houses, and enjoy the same amenities as the women."

"Maybe the women work the garbage line," one man whispered.

"Perhaps one day, 455. Perhaps we'll be in control one day, and the women shall serve us."

The men smiled and whispered together, "All the women should work for us." Then the men broke away from the group and headed to their straw pile, waiting for their turn to shower and hand wash their clothes.

Brown lay down with a smile on his face. Indeed, this was a beautiful world, and Chicago was a beautiful city. Perhaps the women ruled today, but tomorrow was another day.

Chapter 8 – Mayor Lilith is Furious

Mayor Lilith was traveling across the city in her stretched limousine to see her city empire firsthand. At the same time, her chief of security, Sarah, sat next to her. A motorcade of cars flanked the limousine, more for prestige than protection. Although the limo guzzled down the corn ethanol, sometimes showing power and status was more important than being frugal. Her city was beautiful, clean, and safe – all under the care of the Mayor’s graces. Chicago was and always will be a great city.

Everybody knew whose stretched limousine roamed the streets of Chicago as her motorcade passed the sea of rickshaws. The female citizens waved and cheered while their male servants pedaled their female passengers to their destinations.

The Mayor passed the Garden House, and the Mayor and Sarah turned to observe it.

“It’s quite an eyesore, ma’am,” Sarah said by breaking the silence.

“But it is a necessary eyesore,” the Mayor replied.

“But the debauchery, sin, and heaven know what else happens there.”

The Mayor patted Sarah on the knee several times. “I know all about the Garden House and the others like it. They have been in Chicago since the beginning.”

“But it tempts women, ma’am.”

“Of course, it does. We are not perfect creatures. Although we are made in God’s image, we have our imperfections. Every woman in this city has been there at least once or in another one like it. They go in and sin. Then they will be at church on Sunday asking for forgiveness. That is our nature—we swing back and forth between righteousness and sin. However, righteousness will win, and we’ll meet the Grand Lady in the Sky.”

Sarah looked down.

The Mayor thought when she was a young woman, she had several therapy sessions in the Garden House in the Hibiscus Room with tropical themes, but that was long ago. It seemed like she

viewed those memories through a dusty telescope because it seemed someone else had experienced and created those memories.

After a long silence, the motorcade made its way southeast of the city. Several assistants helped the Mayor climb to the top of the solid concrete dam, which formed part of the wall separating modern Chicago from the old world. The five-story dam controlled the flow of the Chicago River and fed the humming turbines a hungry city its clean, electric energy.

At the top of the dam, the Mayor and her team could see for miles.

The chief engineer, Marilyn, started the conversation. “My apologies for bringing you up here, ma’am. As you can see, the long, dry summer has caused the water level to drop.”

“Do you think we need to ration electricity?” The Mayor asked.

“At this moment, I think we are fine. As long as we receive rain in Chicago in another week or two.”

“What is the worst-case scenario?”

“The worst-case scenario is to shut down two generators to slow the loss of reservoir water.”

“How many neighborhoods would we have to turn off?”

“We have the men’s stables and dormitories on a separate line. We can shut them off. Then we can maintain the skyscrapers downtown and do rolling blackouts for the suburbs.”

“Excellent. Inform me first before rationing power.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The engineer and her team left the dam. At the same time, the Mayor and Sarah continued looking on the other side of the dam, where the dam divided Chicago from the old world. A large lake formed in an ancient ruined suburb of some long-ago forgotten suburb, and several tall buildings broke through the surface of the lake. Ruined buildings formed the lake’s banks.

“It is certainly ugly, isn’t it?” The Mayor blurted.

“Yes, ma’am, it certainly is,” Sarah replied.

“At one time, riots and rebellions broke out as the great shortage set in, but from the grace of God, the city was spared. The city came back and grew.”

“I know, ma’am. The Great War of a Forgotten World.”

“Then we tamed the savage men. Now we control the city.”

Sarah looked at the Mayor sternly. “Excuse me, ma’am. I don’t understand. We, women, have always controlled civilization. The Federation is the last covenant with God.”

The Mayor looked into Sarah’s eyes. “Of course, it is.”

The Mayor asked, “How is your surveillance on the director?”

“We have been following her around. There is nothing unusual, except she seems to spend some of her time at the Garden House.”

“Has she become attached to anything there?”

“I asked the proprietor. She spends time in her favorite room, the Lotus Room, but she always requests a different specimen.”

“Good, good. We can’t have our director become attached to one of those specimens. We depend on her to deliver our obedient, mindless servants.”

The Mayor turned to view the other side of the dam, which showed the suburbs and the towers of downtown Chicago. “Where would we be if we didn’t have those servants?”

“Better off,” Sarah said in jest.

“Would we, Sarah? Who will clean the streets, recycle the garbage, and work the menial dirty jobs?”

“I see. You are correct, ma’am. I guess we depend on our servants. Do you want me to keep the director under surveillance?”

“Just for the time being. I just want to be sure.”

“If you think she has been compromised, shouldn’t we replace her?”

“That’s the problem. She is the best in her field. Do you know she pioneered Inhibitor 37, which decreases men’s intelligence and makes them more docile? Once the President of the Federation found out, she was immediately promoted regardless of what I had thought.”

“I did not know that.”

“The last thing I want to do is remove Susan from her job. Just keep an eye on her. I am sure she is a good girl.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Sarah’s walkie-talkie squealed into life. “Chief of Security.” Sarah moved the walkie-talkie to her mouth, pressed the send button, and replied, “Chief here.”

“Ma’am, I am sorry to inform you, but the Whole Foods Bakery has reported a break-in.”

“Continue.”

“The bakery is missing twenty pecan pies.”

“Do the surveillance tapes review anything?”

“The images are blurry. Plus, one of the cameras is not working.”

“Do we have any suspects?”

“It appears to be a man, but it is hard to tell.”

“What is the color of his uniform and his number?”

“That’s the thing. He wore no uniform or had no number.”

The Mayor felt a wave of heat travel through her body as anger raced through her veins.

“What would you like us to do, ma’am?” Sarah asked as she turned to the Mayor.

The Mayor screamed, “Catch that evil man. Then punish it. Make it pay dearly for its transgressions.”

“Yes, ma’am,”

Sarah snapped into the walkie-talkie. “Organize all security staff. Visit every stable and every male dormitory within 20 blocks of the robbery. You got that?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Both Sarah and the Mayor returned to the limousine. The Mayor opened a compartment and grabbed an aspirin bottle, and her hands shook as she tried to twist the top off. Then she pried the bottle open, spilled five aspirin into her hands, plopped them into her mouth, and chased them down with a bottle of water.

“We’ll catch that thief,” Sarah added.

“I know you will, Chief of Security.”

It was a long ride to the Mayor’s Office, and everybody remained silent.

The Mayor thought nothing like this had happened in her city. What was going on? Their society had been perfect since the start of the Federation, where everyone and everything worked in harmony. Women worshiped God, and God’s loving hand guided them. Men served their women with honor and dignity, and women fed and clothed their men even though every man bared the horn of the devil.

The Mayor thought that showing men kindness was returned with their defiance and betrayal.

Chapter 9 – Getting out of the Office

Brown 447 was surprised when one of the female guards came to his station and relieved him. She said the director of the Male Processing Unit scheduled a health exam.

Brown waited outside by the curb. The clouds hid the sun, and a drizzle came from the gray skies. After 15 minutes, a large Buick stopped at the curb. The passenger side window rolled down. “Get in,” Susan said, and the passenger door opened slightly.

Brown looked at the door because he didn’t know how to sit in a car. The door opened a little, and Brown pulled it the rest of the way open and got in.

“Shut the door,” Susan said, but Brown looked confused and shrugged. She leaned over and tried to shut the door. Brown finally understood, grabbed the door handrest, and slammed the door shut.

Susan merged with the sea of rickshaws flowing down the road. She drove away from the tall skyscrapers that looked like they held up the sky and headed to the suburbs.

Susan looked over. “Don’t worry. I won’t hurt you,” she said as she placed her right hand on Brown’s thigh and rubbed a little.

Brown at first jerked away from her hand as his eyes focused on Susan’s bracelet with the red button on her wrist, but then he relaxed.

“I see,” Susan said as she placed both hands on the steering wheel and slipped off her bracelet. Then she put the bracelet into the cup holder. “See, I won’t hurt you,” she said, returning her hand to Brown’s leg.

Brown nodded his head.

“You can talk to me if you want. I won’t hurt you. I’m quite happy to see you.”

After a short pause, Brown asked, “Where are we going?”

“Oh, I was a little bored and needed to leave the office. I thought I would visit the agricultural fields outside the city.”

“The agricultural fields?”

“That’s where we grow our food. We supply the corn and soybeans to the cities of the Federation.”

“Oh, I see. What is the Federation?”

“Oh, we don’t teach you much about history and politics. The Federation is our government. It controls the cities.”

“There are other cities like Chicago?”

“Of course. The Federation has 13 cities spread out across the continent of Americus.”

“Americus?”

“Yes, Americus. It is a large continent. The farthest city from us is Los Angeles, on the West Coast, followed by York City, on the East Coast.”

“Have you been there?”

“No, of course not. The Federation does not permit people to travel to other cities. Only important people like the Mayor can travel to the capital of the Federation, Louis City.”

“Why aren’t you allowed to travel to other cities?”

Susan paused at a red light when she removed her hand from Brown’s leg and scratched her chin with her index finger. Then the light turned green, and she drove forward. “You know. That is a good question. I don’t know. That is the way it has always been. I’ve visited Louis City several times but never seen the other cities.”

As Susan and Brown approached the city limits, the traffic thinned. Susan looked at the rearview mirror several times.

“What is it?” Brown asked.

“I don’t know. It seems I keep seeing the same car behind us.”

Brown turned his head to look back, but all he saw was orange and rickshaws, forming a continuous wave across the road.

“Could it be important, this car?”

“I do not know. Perhaps it’s nothing.”

“I see few cars on the road. Who is allowed to drive cars?”

“A person must have important connections to own a car. The fuel is in short supply.” Then Susan pulled over to the curb. “We must go through a checkpoint. I’ll place you in the trunk of the car.” Susan pushed the button, and the trunk clicked open.

They got out. Brown just looked at the dark cavern of the car trunk.

“You’ll be fine, Brown. Trust me.”

Brown climbed into the car’s trunk, and Susan covered Brown with a large, thick blanket and slammed the trunk shut.

The car started to move again. After five minutes, the car stopped, and Brown heard voices.

“Good day, ma’am. Please show me your papers,” a voice said, devoid of emotion.

“I’m Susan, director of the Male Processing Unit.”

“I see. What is the nature of your excursion?”

“I was asked to examine several males in the agricultural unit.”

“Please show me your work order.”

After a minute, the security guard said, “OK, OK, ma’am. I have noticed you are not wearing your bracelet.”

“It was irritating my skin, so I took it off. See. Here it is.”

“Just be careful, ma’am. Men are like dogs. One minute, they are licking your hand and sitting obediently at your feet. The next minute, when your back is turned, they’re growling and trying to attack you.”

“Thank you. I shall be careful.”

“Good day, ma’am.”

“Good day.”

The car started moving again. It stopped, the trunk clicked open, and Susan got out of the car.

“OK. Let’s go,” Susan said.

Brown looked at the City of Chicago, where he saw the skyscrapers in the distance while a large brown, three-story brick wall surrounded the city. Half the buildings were a pile of rubble, while the other buildings were abandoned, with broken windows and missing doors, rusted and deteriorated from the elements, relics from a dead, old world.

“What happened out here?” Brown asked as he pointed at the ruins.

Susan looked at the wasteland of abandoned buildings. “We don’t talk much about this. All we know is that there was a terrible war once, a long time ago. They say we came close to wiping out all life on this earth, but God gave us a new chance, a new beginning. The Federation came from that new beginning.”

Brown looked at the miles upon miles of abandoned buildings.

“It must have been a terrible war.”

“Yes, indeed. I think 50 or 60 percent of all life was wiped out in a year. Supposedly, there are dead spots across the world where nothing can grow. Or if it does grow, it does not grow right. It’s called a mutation, but I’ve only seen the videos. Have you heard about a mutation?”

“I think I do. I think all life has a blueprint that follows an order as it grows. A mutation scrambles the blueprint,” Brown said, and he became uneasy as Susan stared at him with a shocked look. Brown looked at the ruins again. After a minute, he said, “It was a terrible war.”

“Let’s go,” Susan said.

Susan and Brown got into the car again, and Susan started driving south on an old highway with rocks and potholes everywhere. They drove past the cornfields, where men wore green shirts and green pants and worked the agricultural fields. Every field had a tower in the center with several female guards with binoculars.

“Don’t worry. They cannot see us through the tinted windows.”

They reached an old cobblestone cathedral church, where moss grew on the roof tiles while the sun and rain touched the cathedral’s floor from the hole in the roof. A large cross hung behind the pulpit, and the porcelain hands and feet were nailed to it, but the body and head of Jesus were missing.

Susan closed the ancient wooden doors to the church and spread a large, thick picnic blanket across the floor. Then Susan caressed Brown’s hands. He didn’t know what to do but stood there and looked at Susan’s soft hands. Then Susan started unbuttoning his shirt from the top and jerked the shirt down until the sleeves caught on Brown’s arms.

Brown shook his arms until the shirt fell to the floor.

Susan stepped back to look at Brown.

“Ugly, isn’t it?” Brown asked. “Some men have lines across their stomachs.”

“No, not ugly.”

“But women don’t have these lines. And no hair.”

“No, it is not ugly,” Susan said. Then she started kissing Brown’s neck while Brown closed his eyes. He felt his pants loosen

and then dropped to his knees. He slipped off his shoes and stepped out of his crumpled pants. Then he slipped off his socks.

Likewise, Susan slipped out of her clothes, grabbed Brown's hand, and helped him down onto the blanket. She lay on her back and grabbed his head when she forced Brown's head downward and whispered, "Lick the kitty."

"What?"

Susan forced Brown's head so his face was in her crotch, "Start licking."

Brown did not know what to think. Although her crotch had hair, it did not look like a little kitty, those selfish little beasts with bright yellow eyes that glowed in the dark. He started licking. He tasted a little sweat and funkiness with a hint of flowers.

Susan moaned, and she opened her legs wider and used her hand to force Brown's face harder into her crotch area. "Oh, kitty is purring," she moaned.

Brown noticed the tattoo of Lady Jesus on a cross on Susan's groin area. He looked up at the remnants of the cross above the pulpit. They looked different since Susan's tattoo looked like a feminine Jesus, while the remains on the cross above the pulpit showed a more masculine form.

"Kitty wants to be petted," Susan said as her hand forced Brown's face down to her crotch again. "Keep petting."

Brown became hard as his soldier stood firm and erect.

"I need the devil's horn. Put the horn into the holy place," she moaned.

Brown started making love to Susan. Towards the end, Susan's tongue twists in Brown's mouth. Then she shoved her tongue so deep into Brown's throat that Brown thought he would suffocate. Afterward, Brown slid off Susan and lay on his back next to her. "What is the devil?" he asked.

"Oh, the devil. That thing down there. He is the corrupter of women. He leads women off the righteous path."

"Does he hurt you?"

"No, it does not hurt. He leads us away from God. We must stay true to God to join her in heaven."

"Then where do I go when I die?"

“You go to hell.”

“Why?”

“Because you have the mark of the devil. That’s why the devil has one horn in the center of his forehead. God will not allow you to pass through the gates of heaven with that abomination attached to your body.”

“That seems hardly fair.”

“You were given one mission in life – to serve women. Once your life is completed, then you must be damned in hell for eternity.”

“But what if I don’t want to serve women.”

“Then you shall be killed, and you are still damned in hell for eternity.”

Brown felt sad. Why should he be damned for just being born a male? Why not just let him be? Let Brown serve himself. Find one of those dead spots to see what it looked like.

Brown looked at Susan again and asked, “Why did you call that place down there the holy place?”

Susan laughed as she punched Brown lightly on the shoulder. “That’s simple. Only God can create and nurture life.”

“But you are not a God.”

“Of course not. But God works through us. That spot creates and nurtures life and, thus, must be holy, a spot touched by God.”

“But don’t you need males to help create life?”

Susan laughed again and added, “We don’t need males. Besides, you are grown artificially.”

Brown felt sad and insignificant like a monkey trained to do work.

“Don’t feel sad,” Susan added. “We still need you.”

Susan moved around and opened a picnic basket, and she handed Brown a slice of pecan pie and a bottle of lemon water. Brown inhaled that slice so fast that he had to hurry to twist off the cap of the bottle before he choked himself to death. Then he lay down again.

Susan took a bite of her pecan pie. Then she placed the remaining slice on a napkin on top of the picnic basket.

“May I ask you something?” Susan asked.

“Sure.”

“Would you form a union with me?”

Brown shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t understand. What is a union?”

“A man and woman form a bond, a special link.”

“But I thought all men have to serve women. Our bondage is the link.”

“A union is different. A union means you can only be my servant; you cannot serve another woman.”

“OK. I guess we can form a union.”

“I also hold all the power in the relationship,” Susan added.

“Then what do I get?”

“Sometimes, you get to lick the kitty.”

“That’s it?” Brown looked at the delectable slice of pecan pie resting on top of the picnic basket and asked, “Will there be pecan pie?”

“Yes. Sometimes.”

“Will you eat that?” as Brown pointed at the slice of pecan pie, where an ant had tasted the sweet filling and scurried away to bring reinforcements.

“No. Go ahead.”

Brown inhaled the remaining pecan pie and returned the napkin with a smear of pie filling to three eagerly waiting ants on the picnic basket.

Brown looked down at Susan as their eyes met. Then he looked at her hairless, smooth body that smelled like lavender. Such an exquisite beauty, so smooth, soft, and sensual. “Does this union have any other types of pie?”

“You can have all the types of pie you can eat – apple pie, cherry pie, sweet potato pie-”

“Then I will be happy to form a union with you.”

“Of course, this union must remain secret.”

“Of course.”

“Nobody must know.”

“Of course.”

Susan propped herself on her side and peered down at Brown with cold hazel eyes. “You mustn’t serve any other woman. You got that! You can only serve me.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Susan lay on her back as a soft rain pattered against the tile roof. They lay in silence.

“I must go and do some checkups. You must stay here. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“I shall return in an hour. Don’t go anywhere.” Susan said as she dressed and opened the large, heavy doors to the cathedral to slip out. Then the doors closed again.

Brown got up and dressed. Then he looked around the church. He slid on a patch of moss that grew on the stone floor, where the sun and rain fed from a hole in the roof, but he did not fall down.

Brown found a large metal box lying on a floor near the pulpit. He opened it and found a large Holy Bible with several smaller pocket versions. It was no big deal. He had seen these before. Although the women did not encourage the men to read, the men were allowed to read the Bible, but only some men took the time to read it. The good book just reinforced men’s positions in society as servants to women—the same stuff he had heard all his life.

Brown picked up a small Bible and threw it across the room. He was not sure why, but he picked up another small Bible and opened it to a random page. He looked at the page in shock and confusion.

“And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us.”

Him? Lady Jesus is a woman, not a man. The son of David—again, another man. Then Brown turned to the first book of the Bible, Genesis.

“And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”

Man is made in God’s image, not a woman. Brown skimmed through the pages until he reached the front: Printed in 2011. That

was interesting. He knew it was Year 68. What was 2011? When did the Federation start the clock for their time? After the Great War, when did the Federation take over? There were so many unanswered questions.

Brown retrieved the Bible he had thrown earlier and returned it to the metal box. Then he removed the large Bible and opened it to the print information—2008. He carefully arranged the Bibles in the box, scooted the box to the corner on the far stage, removed one small Bible, and carefully sealed the remaining Bibles covered with debris.

Brown sat on one of the dusty wooden pews and opened the Bible to the first page. “In the beginning...”

Brown enjoyed this version of the Bible much better, a Bible from the Old World when man was created in God’s image. He almost made it to the end of Genesis when he heard one of the heavy cathedral doors squeak open.

Susan popped her head inside. “Are you ready?”

Brown slipped the small Bible into his pocket. “Yes, I am ready.” What an excellent day to be alive! I cleaned the kitty, ate some pecan pie, and read a little of a good book. Oh, that union with an endless supply of pecan pie and other hidden sweet treasures.

Chapter 10 – An Old Rival

After leaving the Mayor, Sarah returned to her assignment – her old rival – Susan. So that was how Susan got promoted rapidly when she invented Inhibitor 37 to make men stupider, or already stupider than they were. Why wasn't she surprised?

Sarah remembered the first time she met Susan in college – a frail, petite, naive girl. Sarah let Susan hang out with her, like allowing a little puppy to follow you. At first, it was cute, and then it became annoying. As they both progressed in college, Susan took all the complicated subjects – physics, chemistry, and biology. At the same time, Sarah struggled with physical education and nutrition. It wasn't fair. Although Susan didn't brag about her achievements, she couldn't miss the growing stacks of papers on her desk with all A's and glowing comments from her professors.

Sarah remembered when she talked her friends into sponsoring Susan at the Garden House for her birthday. Wow, that was a waste of money. They should have left Susan at the dormitory with her nose stuck to a book, as usual.

After college, Sarah was bound to work in the wastelands in the agricultural fields. She felt ashamed and stopped talking to her friends. Then a friend of a friend knew some positions opened up in the Mayor's security force. That was something—to work for the Mayor.

Sarah immediately applied and was a shoo-in. She started at the bottom and worked herself up. Now, she looked at herself – Captain of the Mayor's Guard. She also cleaned herself up – no more parties, no more frivolous outings with her friends, no more Garden House. Sarah should burn that place down and rid Chicago of that corrupt institution.

Sarah met her second in charge, Jennifer. “Did you get it?” Sarah asked.

“Yes, ma'am. We tested it, and it is ready to go.”

“Good. I need you to help me install it?”

“But I thought it was illegal.”

“Given the delicateness of the situation, we must be careful.”

“Okay.”

Jennifer drove a blue sedan with Sarah as the passenger. They pulled into the Garden House within ten minutes, where they both entered and stood at the doorway to the bar wearing the dark blue security uniforms of the Mayor's Guard.

It was 2 P.M., and the bar was sleeping like a vampire in the afternoon. The place would become alive at dusk. After waiting ten minutes, Charlie came in. "Ladies, may I help you?"

"Perhaps you can help my friend," Sarah said.

"Anything for the Mayor. Should I book two rooms for you?"

"No, just for her. She is being awarded for her hard work," Sarah said as she looked at Jennifer.

"Excellent. Should I set you up with the Yellow Rose Room?"

"That sounds like a fine choice, but I heard many good things about the Lotus Room."

"I see you heard well. I would be more than happy to book that room for you. Should I bring out the men?"

"Just surprise her," Sarah replied.

Jennifer's eyes widened, and she blushed a little.

Sarah whispered into her ear, "Play the game. Have some fun. Then send him out. Then you set it up."

Jennifer nodded her head and headed upstairs with a briefcase.

"May I offer you a drink?" Charlie asked.

"Thank you for your hospitality. Just a virgin mojito."

Charlie pointed at the man behind the bar, who was wearing blue clothes. "Do!" She commanded.

The man nodded his head. A cold, tall, virgin mojito was in front of Sarah within 20 seconds.

"I think I have seen you here before."

"That's impossible. This is my first time," Sarah said as she gave Charlie such a cold, hard look that Charlie shivered from frostbite.

"Give my regards to the Mayor," Charlie said, and then she left.

Sarah sat at the bar, sipping her virgin mojito and glancing at her watch every 10 seconds. "What's taking her so long?" She muttered. After an eternity, Jennifer came downstairs.

"What took you so long," Sarah screamed.

Jennifer just smiled and looked down at the floor.

They returned to the car. "Is it installed?" Sarah hissed.

“Yes, of course,” Jennifer said.

“When I said to enjoy yourself, I meant it as a joke. You are on the clock.”

“My apologies. I had a difficult time finding a good spot.”

“I am sure you did.” Then Sarah pulled out a small TV monitor and switched it on while the bed in the Lotus Room appeared in black and white. “I’m going to get you, witch,” Sarah muttered as she started to smile.

Then they drove away.

Chapter 11 – A Grand Promotion

Brown was happy to be promoted and leave the smelly garbage recycling plant. He teamed up with Brown 300, and they left early in the morning to clean the streets of downtown Chicago.

Brown enjoyed the freedom, the fresh air, especially when a cool breeze blew across the lake and swirled around the towers of downtown Chicago.

Of course, like any job, he must learn the ins and outs, the dos and the don'ts. For instance, he knew women were sensitive creatures; just keep your distance from them. Once Brown got too close and was zapped, He lay on the sidewalk twitching and wondering what the hell he had done wrong. From then on, he always stayed at least ten feet away from any woman.

Brown 447 and 300 found an old delicatessen that made homemade pies, cakes, and sandwiches. As the Browns passed by, they turned into an alley to clean it, and, low and behold, they stumbled upon a horde of cats. Those vile little creatures sat on their haunches and meowed loudly as they faced the back door of a bakery. The cats showed no interest in the Browns as a little girl tossed fish pieces to them; some cats fought each other for those fish pieces while others waited their turn.

The Browns were about to turn and go, and the girl said, "Are you poor creatures hungry?" Then she tossed an old doughnut in their direction, where it landed three feet from theirs. Two cats ran to the doughnut, sniffed it, and returned to their place in the horde of cats.

Brown 300 picked it up and brushed it off. Then he broke it into two and offered the other piece to Brown 447. They scarfed it down. It wasn't the worst thing the Browns had eaten, like their daily gruel surprise three times a day.

The girl threw an old bagel in the men's direction. Once it hit the ground, it started to roll. One of the cats chased after it, but Brown 447 caught it with his hand. Then he tore it into two and offered the other to his friend while the cat looked up at the man with angry yellow eyes.

The girl's mom appeared in the doorway. "Dear, don't feed the strays." Then her eyes laid on the men, and she added, "Especially those strays." She screamed, "You best be going."

The Browns turned and left the alley out of shocking distance.

Brown ran into Susan one day, who was ecstatic when she discovered that Brown was promoted. "Meet me at the Garden House on Wednesday at ten o'clock," she said. Then she caressed his hand for a second.

Both Browns had plenty of time to walk the streets of Chicago looking for the Garden House. They just had to make sure they kept their area spotless for the random inspections. Finally, they found the Garden House, with its main entrance tucked secretly in the alley. Brown 447 just happened to see a small sign on the side of the building that said The Garden House—A Chicago Landmark with an arrow pointing into the alley.

When Brown 447 knocked on the door, he met Charlie, the owner. She looked angry. "Come," she said as she looked at him and then looked at his friend and said, "You wait outside." Then Charlie led Brown 447 to the bar, where Susan was waiting. She smiled at Brown as he walked into the room.

"I don't approve of this," Charlie said.

"It'll be fine. He'll just visit for an hour on Wednesday," Susan replied.

"We have much better specimens than him. All you gotta do is ask."

"I am starting to like this one."

"Very well then."

"Come," Charlie said as she looked at Brown, and he followed her and led him to the back of the kitchen. Charlie added, "This is the door you come through." Then she pointed at the small stairwell for the servants. "Then you use that stairway to go to the first floor and the Lotus Room. You understand?"

Brown nodded. He went upstairs, and Susan jumped into his arms before he could close the door. "I've missed you," she said. Then they started kissing.

They started undressing. Before they were completely naked, Susan used her leg to close the door to the Lotus Room. Then they

headed to the shower, where they lathered each other with soap suds and cleaned each other before they dirtied themselves again.

After the shower, Susan turned on the Jacuzzi and sat in it.

Brown tried to get in with her, but Susan screamed at him. “Get out. This is not for you.”

Brown stood outside the Jacuzzi and asked, “What am I supposed to do?”

“Massage my shoulders, my neck, my legs.”

Brown started to massage as requested. After twenty minutes of relaxation, Susan stood up and pointed at the towel on the bed. Brown retrieved it and helped Susan dry off. Then Susan went to the bed, lay on her back, and spread her legs. “I think you know what to do now.”

Brown remembered that time in the cathedral in the wastelands outside of Chicago. “I haven’t forgotten.”

Brown licked that kitty and put the devil’s horn inside the holy place. After thirty minutes, Brown finished, rolled off, and lay on his side.

Susan faced him and asked, “You haven’t been serving any other woman, have you?”

Brown shrugged his shoulders. “How do you define serving another woman?”

Susan turned red, used her left index finger, and prepared to press the red button on her bracelet.

“I’m kidding. Of course, I haven’t served another woman. We have a union together. Remember,” Brown said as he grabbed her hands and started to kiss her breasts, her neck, and her ears. Then he whispered in her ear, “I only think of serving you.”

“I have something special for you,” Susan said with a smile. She pulled a napkin bundle from her handbag and unwrapped a triangular-shaped piece.

“What is it?” Brown asked.

“Just try it.”

Brown grabbed the triangular piece and bit into it. The bottom was a soft, thin layer of baked bread with a rainbow of red, green, white, and black vegetables floating on top of the melted cheese and red tomato sauce.

“Wow. That’s incredible.”

“You should try it when it comes out of a brick-heated oven.”

“What is it?”

“Pizza. Chicago style.”

“I got you three pieces.”

“Any pecan pie?”

“I’m sorry. The bakery ran out. I got you pizza instead.”

Brown ate the second slice of pizza but wrapped the third one.

“Saving it for later,” she said.

“I must pay off my friend. Otherwise, he’ll be angry at me for ditching him.”

“Oh, I see.”

They both dressed. Susan left through the side entrance while Brown snuck out through the back. He met up with Brown 300 around the corner and gave him a slice of pizza. “Here you go. I had to do some cleaning in the Garden House,” Brown 447 said.

Brown 300 inhaled that slice of pizza and said, “You keep bringing good food like this; you can sneak off any time you want.”

Summer gave way to autumn as the breeze from Lake Michigan became more chilly. At the same time, the trees in Chicago exploded into colors of red, yellow, orange, and brown and showered the ground with leaves.

Like clockwork, Brown 447 kept his clandestine meeting with Susan in the Lotus Room every Wednesday morning at 10 o’clock.

Brown would arrive fifteen minutes early, take a warm shower, and then dip in the Jacuzzi, letting the water jets massage his body.

When he heard the jingle of the doorknob, he jumped out of the Jacuzzi and dried himself off. Then he spent his hour in union with Susan, the Director of the Male Processing Unit.

Brown 300 didn’t mind when Brown 447 disappeared for an hour because he always returned with a goody. One time, it was pizza, while another time, it was a fried chicken sandwich. And who could forget the slice of pecan pie with the pecans floating on top of a sweet caramelized gelatin with a flaky crust holding it all together?

Chapter 12 – The Brotherhood

Brown 447 was unsure why he did it, but he was a mischievous, naughty child who must break the rules. That was his nature to break rules and challenge authority.

When the men retired at night at the stables, they would huddle around Brown 447 as he read the Bible from the Old World. One man always stood in the doorway looking for female guards or those little furry beasts with yellow eyes. When the lookout saw someone or something, he shuffled his feet loudly, and the men dispersed and arranged the hay as they pretended to go to bed.

Brown developed a secret handshake. As he passed a male, each formed a fist, and the males bumped into each other's fists. Brown had already won over his flock at the recycling garbage plant. All the men respected him and started to follow him.

Brown expanded his membership to the other shirt colors. One day, he was removing the trash from a restaurant and spotted a yellow shirt fixing the air conditioner.

As Brown walked by, he nodded and whispered, "Hi."

The yellow shirt ignored Brown and turned his head in the other direction.

Brown tried several times to strike up a conversation with other yellow shirts but hadn't any success. Some Yellows thought they were superior to men and avoided the other males.

Other times, Brown talked to the blue shirts as he passed them by where they slaved at one of the many restaurants in downtown Chicago. Some were receptive to Brown's friendship, while others ignored him.

Brown could tell which males were friendly. It depended on the restaurant where the Blue worked. Some restaurants wouldn't feed the Blues the leftovers, choosing instead to throw them away.

Other restaurants placed the leftovers on a table in the kitchen, hidden from the diners and patrons of the restaurants. When the restaurant had few customers, the blues would go to the kitchen and eat as they desired. These Blues loved their masters.

One day, as Brown entered the back kitchen door to get the garbage, he saw a large tray of stale doughnuts. There had to be at least thirty on that tray.

As he grabbed the trashcan, he snatched a doughnut off the tray.

Slammed. A blue shirt shoved him against the wall. "Put that back!" He snapped.

"What?" Brown stammered.

"Put back now."

"There must be at least thirty doughnuts on the tray."

Blue shoved him against the wall again.

Brown first sized up the man, but the man was too massive. Then Brown estimated the distance between him and the door, but he tossed the doughnut onto the tray. Although Brown knew he could outrun this guy, Brown must return the trashcan to the kitchen, where the guy would be waiting.

Brown emptied the trashcan into an awaiting truck and returned it to its place in the kitchen. "No hard feelings, big guy," Brown whispered, but Blue stood there savoring his doughnut while watching Brown with suspicious eyes.

Brown knew the restaurants where the Blues were much more receptive and friendlier. When he entered the kitchen from the back door, the female proprietor would come out and place the leftovers in the trash so her male servants could not get at them like stray dogs fighting over scraps in the garbage.

On several occasions, the proprietor quickly returned to the dining area, when Brown would open the plastic bag of leftovers to search for goodies. Then he would pass it to the Blue and show him the secret handshake.

Sometimes, the smile was so large and bright that it could crack the windows in the restaurant.

Brown's network continued to grow. Then Brown discovered the black shirts – men who were condemned to die.

Brown 447 and his friend Brown 300 were picking up debris and garbage on a city street.

A door burst open, and one of the Mayor's security officers stood holding the door open. "Hey, you. Come here. Do!"

Brown 447 looked around the street and saw that he and his friend were the only males on this block except for several orange shirts pedaling their rickshaws.

Brown nudged Brown 300, who was busy picking up trash from a storm drain.

“Yes, you. Come here. Do!” A Mayor’s guard yelled.

Both Browns approached the security door with worried looks because they knew these females were dangerous, the saltwater crocodiles of the female world.

As the Browns approached, they bowed their head down and avoided looking into the guard’s eye.

“You go and clean there,” she commanded.

Another guard opened the metal door to the cellblock. Then the guard led them to a cell where the occupant urinated on the floor and threw his feces everywhere, and some of his feces stuck to the walls.

“Clean this cell. Do!” She screamed as she pointed at a bucket and cleaning supplies.

Both Browns nodded as the guard left the cell and locked the large metal door.

Brown 300 grabbed the bucket, splashed a little cleaning soap, and turned on a spigot to fill the bucket with water. Each Brown grabbed a rag, dipped it into the soapy water, and started to clean the shit off the walls.

“Psst,” Brown 447 hissed.

The prisoner in the next cell turned to look up at Brown from one side to the other.

“What happened here?” Brown whispered.

“The former occupant was unhappy with his fate,” the prisoner replied.

“What do you mean?”

“He was sentenced to die last night.”

“Damn. What did he do?”

“He said a woman falsely accused him of sexually harassing her. He said he accidentally dropped the fork onto the ground, and it landed by her foot. He went to pick up the fork, and now he is dead.”

“Wow. For something so simple.”

“My case was even worse. “

“What did you do?”

“I was repairing a woman’s air conditioner. Then she claimed I stole her Federation credits.”

“You didn’t steal, did ya?”

“Of course not. I am a male. What would I do with Federation credits? Males can’t spend Federation credits. It’s only for the women.”

“Brother, I’m sorry. I shall pray for you.”

“Why should you pray? I’m going to hell because I failed as a faithful servant.”

“But you’re not going to hell.”

“Really? What makes you say that?”

“I have been studying the Bible from the Old World, the true Bible, the true word of God, and not this false prophecy that the women spread with their Bibles.”

“I don’t believe you.”

The other Brown added, “It’s true. He has a Bible from the old world.”

“What makes this Bible so different, so special?”

“Oh, brother; man is created in God’s image, not a woman’s. Jesus was a man, not a woman. God gave men dominion over the earth and dominion over the women.”

“That’s blasphemy. You keep talking like that, and we’ll be cellmates.”

“It’s true. Let’s bow our heads in prayer.”

For Father, up in heaven,

We cry out at the injustice of our land and our city.

This innocent man was condemned to die.

In the name of peace, in the name of justice, in the name of forgiveness.

Allow our falsely accused brother to enter the gates of heaven, where we all shall join you someday.

Amen.

The man in the black clothes had tears in his eyes and replied, “Thank you for the prayer, but I am not ready to go.”

The metal door started to rattle, so both Browns grabbed their rags and cleaned the walls while the man in black rowed over and lay his head on the pillow.

The guard peered in; then she left and cracked the door open.

Once the walls were spotless, Brown 447 grabbed a rag and started to take the large chunks of shit off the floor and flung them into the trash while the other Brown began mopping.

When they finished, the Browns tossed the rags into the trash and rinsed the bucket.

As Brown 447 passed the cell of the death row inmate, he whispered, "God bless you, my brother."

"God bless," the prisoner said.

Once the Browns were on the street and away from the women, Brown 447 said, "We've got to do something about this. We can no longer allow this injustice to continue."

"What can we do?"

"We need to figure a way to get these things off our necks," Brown 447 said as he grabbed the collar around his neck and jerked while choking himself in the process.

"I've heard at the body disposal plant that a female uses a special device to remove these collars from dead men."

"Really?"

"They place this device on the crystal, and the strap loosens on its own."

"The problem is we cannot remove these collars. The women would notice, but we must find a way to deactivate them so they can no longer shock us."

"That sounds like a good idea."

"We've got to fulfill God's word when he gave man dominion over the earth and not a woman."

"Amen, brother."

Chapter 13 – A Utopia Shivers

For the first time, Sarah was ecstatic to come to work. She skipped from the parking lot to the front door and even joked with her staff when entering the office.

Sarah's staff gave these mechanical laughs and smiles. Still, they just looked at her with suspicious eyes, like perhaps a tree limb fell on Sarah's head as she walked out of her apartment in the morning or brain cancer had spread to the happy place in her brain.

As Sarah went to her office, she motioned Jennifer to follow her. They entered the office, and Sarah closed the door and said, "Please have a seat."

Jennifer looked nervous as if some alien had come down and taken over her boss's consciousness.

"We've got her. We've got her," Sarah said with a broad beaming smile.

"Are you sure?"

"I am one hundred percent; we've got her."

"So, we'll go to the Mayor."

"Of course. She is done. Yesterday, I visited my history professor and asked her about it. She said a long time ago, we had the silly tradition of a woman forming a union with a man. My professor explained it was a woman's first attempt to control a man."

"Wow. Then we do have her. On four occasions, she mentions a union with a particular man at the Garden House."

"Exactly. Grab the evidence. We're going to the Mayor's Office."

Forty minutes later, Sarah and Jennifer stood before the Mayor's desk. Sarah started, "Ma'am, we have evidence that Susan violated the 13th Commandant."

The Mayor folded her hands and placed them on the desk. The Mayor sat there and stared blankly ahead. Then she uttered, "Ok, let's hear the evidence."

"We have Susan on four occasions mentioning a union with a particular male," Sarah said with a large grimace.

"Oh, dear," the Mayor uttered.

"A union is when-

The Mayor cut her off. “I know what a union is. I agree. It is a violation of the 13th Commandant – a woman is forbidden to elevate the status of a man to that of a woman.”

Sarah smiled and added, “Exactly.”

“You have my authority to arrest her and her companion. Let me know when you have her.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Sarah and Jennifer left the Mayor’s office. Sarah called May, who was tailing Susan. “Where is Susan now,” Sarah snapped.

“She is at the Garden House.”

“Excellent. Let me know if she leaves. We have orders to arrest her.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Sarah and a team of her best guards burst through the door of the Lotus Room at the Garden House.

Susan lay naked on the bed and jumped a little from the unexpected intrusion. “What happened?” she asked as she looked at the crowd of security agents who rushed into her room and surrounded her bed.

“Where is he?” Sarah screamed.

“Where’s who?”

“You know who I mean.”

“He left five minutes ago.”

Sarah turned to her agents. “Search the place and line up all males.”

“May I ask what this is all about, Sarah?”

“You don’t know.”

“Of course not. I was just taking a break from work.”

“How about violating the 13th Commandant.”

“I didn’t violate the 13th Commandant.”

“Are you sure?”

“I never elevated a man to the status of a woman.”

“But you did when you formed a union with one.”

“What?”

“You deny you formed a union with a male?”

Susan remained silent.

“I take your silence as an admission of guilt.”

Susan rose from the bed and reached for her clothes.

“I don’t think so. You are not worthy of wearing women’s clothes. Here, take this towel,” Sarah snapped.

Susan wrapped the towel around her body and said, “Sarah, I know we had our differences in college, but I thought we were still friends. Just do what you think is best from your heart.”

“Susan, you should know we’re not friends. And you should know my heart is cold like the Lake Michigan waters in winter.”

Sarah paused briefly and added, “Place your hands behind your back. You are under arrest by order of the Mayor.”

“You mean the Mayor knows.”

“Who do you think authorized this arrest?”

Susan obeyed, and one of Sarah’s officers led Susan to an awaiting jail cell.

Sarah went to search for her other agents. She found them on the fourth floor, where they saw all the males of the Garden House.

“Line up the men,” Sarah screamed. Then Sarah held a small camera and opened the best image of Susan’s companion. She held the camera up and walked by each male to compare the photo to each male. “Ah, we got you,” Sarah said.

The male looked shocked and screamed, “Not again.” He tried to run from the room, but every woman pressed the red button on their bracelets. All the men collapsed unconscious to the floor.

“Detain this man and put him in lock up,” Sarah commanded. Three women bound his hands and legs and dragged him downstairs to a waiting car.

Sarah turned to the proprietor and said, “Charlie. It seems you have some violations.”

Charlie just stood there quietly.

Sarah pulled out a form and signed it. “This is a summons to appear before the Mayor’s commission. Failure to appear would not help your case.”

Charlie took the summons, and Sarah and her security staff left the Garden House with Susan, wearing a towel for clothes while her hands were handcuffed.

The Mayor rushed down to the Chicago Detention Center. As she entered the door, all security stood up quickly and snapped to attention.

The Mayor walked by and approached the door where Chicago houses its criminals. The guard nodded and opened the heavy metal door without asking.

The Mayor entered and walked to Susan's holding cell, where she saw Susan lying with her face in the pillow, pouting. She wore the black shirt and black pants of a man waiting for his punishment. The Mayor turned to the guard. "Open the cell and leave us be."

"Yes, ma'am." The guard opened the door and stood by the other guard near the entrance.

Mayor Lilith entered the cell and sat on the other bunk across from Susan.

Susan looked over.

"Well, Susan. What do you have to say to exonerate yourself?"

Susan just looked at the Mayor.

"I tried to give you a chance, but you have disappointed me. Come on. You formed a union with a male?"

"When can I go back to work?"

"I don't think that is possible. You have severely compromised yourself. We cannot sweep this little incident under the rug."

"I don't see no harm in it."

"Susan, you don't understand these males. I know their nature. I know they are capable of great violence."

"How can you say that?"

"Didn't you see the ruins outside of our great city?"

"Yes. It's leftover from the Great War."

"That is correct, but we omitted some important details."

Susan looked at the Mayor with her teary red eyes.

"In that old world, men ruled that world while we, women, stood by their side."

"I know. I have heard," Susan uttered.

"Then have you heard of a man's violent nature? A long time ago, a woman would form a union with a male in good faith. A woman's nature is to love, but the man would beat her up.

Sometimes, he would just leave her and let her defend herself. Then the men started the Great War.”

Susan continued pouting into the pillow.

“Susan, look at me when I speak to you,” the Mayor said and added, “Yes, the men started the Great War. It was over stupidity. A region on the other side of the world, I believe they called it Asia, started accumulating all the wealth and manufacturing. Over here, they became jealous and plotted to take over Asia. Let’s say Asia fought back hard. The men on this side of the world had plunged into a war over resources.”

“Then why don’t we discuss this in school. Why do we omit these facts from the history books?”

“Because we had to rewrite history. We, women, had to stand up and take over. We rewrote the Bible; how could we explain it to women if, at one time, men were considered superior to women? The Bible claims women have been superior to men from the beginning. We also had to define men’s place in our society.”

“But won’t the women think they caused the Great War?”

“It doesn’t matter who caused the war. The Federation was humankind’s last chance, the covenant between God and woman. Our last chance to get our act together and worship God.”

“I would tell everyone the truth,” Susan replied.

“Go ahead. Tell everyone the truth. It won’t change anything. Besides, they’ll think you are crazy. You’ll be wasting your time.”

“What will happen to me?”

“I cannot honestly say. You are the first woman charged with a serious offense under the Federation. You are the first woman who was arrested in Chicago. It will take time to review your case.”

Tears started streaming from Susan’s eyes.

The Mayor got up and placed her hands on Susan’s shoulders. “Susan. Be strong,” the Mayor said.

The Mayor walked out of the cell. The guard promptly returned and locked the cell door with a large metallic key.

The Mayor went to the office to meet Sarah. “Is everything in order, Ma’am,” Sarah said as she quickly rose and saluted the Mayor.

“Everything is fine. Do you have the male prisoner ready?”

“Yes, ma’am. The executioner is prepping the prisoner. He is ready for his final judgment.”

“Excellent. Let’s not keep the Holy Lady waiting for her judgment.”

Sarah and the Mayor walked to the executioner’s chambers at the Chicago Detention Center. As they walked into the room, the prisoner was screaming, “Not again. You bitches. Don’t execute me again.”

“Stop it from speaking,” the Mayor said.

The executioner placed a muzzle on the man’s head. He continued to struggle and squirm and tried to scream. The Mayor gave the final go-ahead by nodding her head.

The executioner read the charge, “You are convicted of a crime against a woman by the Mayor, who is in good standing.”

The man continued to struggle and tried to scream.

“Your penalty is death, and may God have mercy on your soul.” The executioner pressed a button, and the liquid in the IV tubes turned from a clear to a yellowish tint as the poison headed to the veins of the man’s arms and feet.

The man continued to struggle, but his struggles slowed and weakened until the man became motionless.

A doctor placed a stethoscope on his chest. She looked at the Mayor, shook her head no, and uttered, “It’s gone.”

“When we first entered the room, he screamed, not again.,” the Mayor said as she looked at Sarah. “What do you think he meant by that?”

Sarah shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know. He knew he was going to die, so he went crazy and mumbled crazy things.”

“Perhaps you are right,” the Mayor said.

Chapter 14 – The Story of Prisoner 444

Yellow 444 lay on his bed and looked at the water stains on the ceiling. Here, he lay on the concrete slab that served as a bed while he wore black clothes, which meant he was marked for death. Typically, the women quickly executed the dangerous males. Still, he was the exception because he was Chicago's most highly educated male, possibly of the whole Federation. Yellow fixed the city's electrical systems. The city even sent him to Louis City for two years of training.

He was Yellow 444. The women, for the most part, treated him well except for the occasional shock if he moved too close suddenly. The women even let him sleep in a small apartment located near the south wall of the city, unlike other males, who slept in stables and overcrowded dormitories that had bathrooms where crap and foul water overflowed from the toilets.

Yellow couldn't get the idea out of his head. He did everything correctly. He avoided the men; they were usually trouble and below him anyway. He also avoided the women, so the women just left him alone. He just did his job and even got to eat decent food. He would go to this building and fix the control system on an elevator. In another building, he would fix the air conditioning unit. His services were in high demand, especially when the heatwave soared above 100 degrees in the city when the apartments turned into ovens. Of course, the women refused to fix anything and left the repairs to a handful of men like himself. Yellow was indeed a privileged male.

However, trouble found him ten days ago. Yellow received a call to fix a woman's air conditioning unit in her apartment.

Yellow knew she would be in trouble. As he entered the building, he had to go to the back and use the service elevator. He walked into a small coffin that hauled him to the sixth floor. The plywood floor of the elevator buckled a little as he stood on it.

As Yellow 444 rang her doorbell, he knew she would be a problem just by looking at her. Her short hair went up in every direction like she had just returned from a walk during a hurricane. At the same time, she gave him this crazed cock-eyed look as Yellow entered her apartment.

She set an egg timer, placed it on the stove, and muttered, “Got to time him; got to monitor him.”

Yellow ignored the woman and went to her air conditioner unit, which hung on a wall. He unfolded his step ladder and climbed up to lift the front cover. Then strands of moldy spaghetti began raining down onto the floor.

“Well, I think I found your problem.”

“No. No. My spaghetti. I must dry my spaghetti.”

“But you clogged the airflow of the unit.”

Yellow looked inside and saw she had packed wet spaghetti onto the electrical circuits. “I think you shorted the unit.”

“Oh, my spaghetti. You’ll ruin my spaghetti.”

“Ma’am, you can’t put anything wet into the unit.”

The old woman ran away, mumbling to herself. “My spaghetti. My poor, poor spaghetti.”

Yellow put on his gloves and pulled out the rest of the spaghetti. He removed the air filter and took it to the sink to rinse off the spaghetti sauce and dust. He wetted a towel and cleaned the connections on the electrical circuits.

Yellow walked to the breaker box outside the apartment door in the corridor, where he saw the breaker had switched off for the air conditioner. “Please work so that I can get out of here. Come on. Please turn it on,” he whispered as he flipped the breaker on. He returned to the living room, picked up the remote control for the air conditioner, and clicked it on. The unit hummed to life and began blowing cold air, but the air had a slight mildew smell. Yellow could hear the woman throwing things around in the other room.

Yellow ran to the kitchen, grabbed the wastebasket and wet towel, and cleaned the moldy spaghetti off the floor. He closed the air conditioning unit lid and took several steps back to admire his work.

The egg timer dinged. Yellow looked in the direction of the kitchen. Then he ran into the kitchen, slid the wastebasket to its spot, and tossed the wet towel into the sink. Then he ran to the living room to pack his tools. Yellow made it to the door, opened it, and...

Two Mayor's guards stood looking at him. The first was Jennifer, and the second was May. "Dropped your things, put your hands behind your back, and turn away from me," Jennifer said.

Yellow froze as he felt a jolt of electricity in his neck. He fell unconscious onto the floor for several minutes. He felt the cold metal cuffs clamped down on his wrists. One guard helped him to his feet while the other guard ran to the woman's room, and she returned after a minute.

"The woman is terrified," May said. "She may have experienced a breakdown."

Both women's faces turned red while they squinted their eyes. They demanded, "What did you do to her?"

"What?"

"What did you do to her?" Jennifer screamed.

"Nothing. I just fixed her air conditioner."

The women took him to the Chicago Detention Center, downtown Chicago, where they chained his hands to a metal ring in the center of a metal table in the interrogation room. Yellow lay on his stomach on the cold stainless-steel tabletop.

The women took turns whipping and shouting questions at him until his yellow shirt was torn to shreds and drenched in his blood.

"What were you doing in the woman's apartment?"

"I fixed her air conditioner."

"What was wrong with her air conditioner?"

"She stuffed it with wet spaghetti."

"Lies. All lies," Jennifer yelled, and the women whipped him some more. Jennifer continued screaming, "There was nothing wrong with the air conditioner. It works perfectly fine. The woman said she threw some old spaghetti from the refrigerator into the trash."

"Ma'am. I threw the spaghetti into the trash," Yellow said.

"Lies. Lies. Lies," May screamed, and the thrashing continued.

Jennifer screamed, "What happened to her Federation credits?"

"What Federation credits? I don't know what you mean?"

"She said you stole them from her bedroom drawer. Now, she can't pay her rent."

"I don't have them. I didn't go into her bedroom."

“Lies. Lies. Lies,” May yelled.

Yellow screamed in pain as the whip bit into his skin several more times. Then he cried, “If I stole her Federation credits, where are they? I don’t have them.”

May whipped Yellow several more times. Yellow tried to slide and pull his hands away from the chains to get off that table, but the chains held him in place.

“Wait. Wait,” Yellow said, and the whipping stopped. Yellow added, “I think the woman may have some mental problem. She seemed irrational.”

“You have a mental problem,” Jennifer screamed. “You terrified that poor old woman. We had to take her to the hospital for a checkup.”

“No. No. No.” Yellow screamed as he thought he would pass out from the pain while May whipped him some more.

“Okay. Okay. Okay. I stole the Federation credits. I flushed them down the toilet. I drove that woman crazy. I am an angry, wicked man who tortures poor, defenseless women.”

Yellow waited for more thrashings, but the women stopped. Jennifer said to May, “Okay, He just confessed. Our case is solved.”

“Should we schedule him for an execution?” May asked.

“No, we can’t. He’s a yellow shirt. We must know which skills he possesses and determine how long it will take to replace him,” Jennifer explained.

“I see.”

The women dragged Yellow into a cell, where he lay for several days. With each passing day, he felt better, except on the third day when he pulled the ragged shreds of his shirt from his back. Removing the shirt opened the wounds on his back, and the pain flared up again. After a while, he felt better.

Everything changed during his second month. Just when Yellow had thought he had seen everything, he saw the guards bring a naked woman and put her into a cell on the other side of him.

When Yellow saw her face, he knew he had seen her somewhere before. But from where? From her mannerisms and speech, he knew she was someone important. Even the Mayor of Chicago visited her cell.

So, the women even arrested themselves. What was going on around here? This was the first time Yellow had heard of a woman being arrested and sent to the Chicago Detention Center. According to the Bible, women cannot commit crimes unless they are enticed to do so by their male servants. Everybody knew women go to heaven while the men were tossed into the hot furnace that baked their souls for eternity.

Several days ago, Yellow met that strange brown shirt who spoke blasphemy when he claimed a man was created in God's image, not a woman. Still, Yellow admitted he liked that blasphemy when he could feel good about himself.

Chapter 15 – It's A Good Day for a Jail Break

Brown 447 had just left the Garden House and met his coworker around the corner, where he gave him his treats. "Sorry, mate. I just got some apple pie today."

"That's okay," Brown 300 said as an eager hand grabbed those apple pie slices and gobbled them down like a man sentenced to death row enjoying his last meal.

The Browns saw the parade of cars block the entrance to the alley of the Garden House.

"What's going on?" Brown 447 asked.

Brown 300 just shrugged his shoulders.

Both men continued picking up debris and garbage near the Garden House's alley but kept a safe distance from the fleet of cars.

"Oh, God. That's Susan," Brown 447 uttered.

"That's the woman you formed a union with?"

"Yeah. That's her."

"That's really bad, isn't it?"

"Yes. It's awful."

"What should we do?"

Brown 447 saw the security guards bring out a male who resembled himself but was not quite a carbon copy. He was more like a reflection in a dirty mirror where the mirror removed the shine from his skin and eyes.

"He looks like you."

"Yeah, he does, doesn't he? Oh gosh, the security guards probably think he is me."

"That means they'll come for you once they discover their mistake?"

"Damn. Well, we can't do anything at the moment. Let's finish our jobs. Then we'll talk to the guys tonight at the stable."

"Okay."

The Browns continued to work all day except for their break to eat their regular meal of gruel, but Brown 447 could not eat as he thought about Susan, poor Susan, who was locked up because of him.

That night, the Browns reached the stables in time for lights out. As they huddled together, Brown stated, “Guys, it is time to leave. We cannot survive under the harsh rule of the women. We must escape from this city and make our own way.”

“Where will we go?” Someone from the group had asked.

“I think North is our best option. All the agricultural farms are to the south and west, with the Chicago Reservoir to the southeast. That leaves North, and we can hide in the ruins. If you are with me, place your hand on mine.”

Everyone huddled around the circle, and one by one, each man put his right hand on top of the other hands except Brown 254.

Brown 447 asked, “Are you with us?”

“Gee, I don’t know. What will we find up there?”

“Do you want to stay here, eat the wonderful gruel, and try to avoid being shocked?”

“It sounds too risky.”

“Of course, it is risky, but we are men. We stick together in brotherhood.”

Finally, that last hand joined the pile of hands in the circle of men.

Brown 447 continued, “Men, we must do one little errand before we leave. Here is what we shall do...”

The men slept, but Brown 447 woke everyone up at one AM. It was time for a jailbreak.

On the first stop, the men arrived at the crematory, where men were turned into fertilizer. The place was quiet, as no one wanted to be around it in the early hours of the night, as the smokestacks cooled from churning out smoke clouds of charred meat from the previous day. The ovens made ticking noises as they cooled, as the spirits and souls refused to leave this world quietly.

The group approached the little office outside the processing plant; even the women didn’t want to enter this facility.

Brown 447 first went to the door and turned the doorknob, but the doorknob remained frozen in place. Then he picked up a large rock and hurled it at the window. Although spider web cracks formed throughout the glass, the window held.

Each man took his turn, hurling the big rock at the window. Each time, the spider cracks in the window widened and spread while the window bulged inward. Finally, the last throw smashed a hole in the window as the rock landed on the desk inside the office.

The men took more time using large shovels to pry and twist the remaining glass window from the frame.

As the window hit the ground, Brown 447 crawled in. Brown found the keys to the large flatbed trucks that picked up the dead bodies in the city. Brown also found the device in the bottom drawer that removed the neck collars.

Brown climbed out the window and held up the device. "Is this it?"

"Yes. It looks like the device to remove these collars," a man yelled.

"Please come here," Brown said as he handed the device to this man and asked, "Please show me how to remove the collar."

The man slid the device under Brown's collar, scratching Brown's skin. Then the man twisted and turned the device.

"Damn, you're going to choke me," Brown said in jest.

The strap loosened, and the collar fell away from Brown's neck. At first, the neck collar caught on the button of the brown shirt but finally fell to the ground.

"Hurray!" The men yelled.

Brown took the device and released the man's collar, who released him. It took Brown a while because he had to cradle the crystal in the collar just before it released its grip.

Brown removed the collars from all his men. One man stomped on his collar, picked it up, and threw it as hard as he could into the field next to the crematory.

"Okay, gentlemen," Brown said. "Grab a shovel and pile into the back of two trucks."

Brown 447 and Brown 300 ran to the first truck and got in. "You know how to drive?" Brown 447 asked.

Brown 300 laughed. "The women don't allow us to drive."

Brown 447 went through every truck key in his hand until it fit the ignition because he had watched the woman start the truck many

times. He handed the rest of the keys to Brown 300, "Please pass them to the next truck."

Brown 300 ran to the next truck and returned a minute later, panting.

Brown 447 pushed the brake with this foot and turned the ignition. The engine made a loud click sound. Then he went in the clutch and turned the ignition. The engine shook to life like a zombie waking up from his sleep. He released the clutch, and the engine died. It took several minutes for Brown to get the truck started and moving.

As Brown approached the gate, he stomped on the gas pedal so as not to stall the truck. The truck went through the gate like a hot butter knife slicing through butter.

The truck made a large arc and swiped the front of a restaurant. The windows smashed in while bricks scattered along the ground. Then Brown righted the truck onto the road.

Brown looked in the side-view mirror and saw the second truck behind them. Occasionally, Brown sideswiped a car parked on the street. When Brown missed a car, the truck behind him smashed it.

As the truck reached downtown Chicago, he opened the latch on the sliding door to the back. "Gentlemen, please hold on. We're going for a ride."

As Brown turned the final corner, he saw the corner of the building to the Chicago Detention Center holding cells. He stomped the accelerator, and the truck jerked forward.

The truck went over the curb while Brown steered the truck into the corner of the building.

The truck stopped. The engine had died, and bricks started raining from the building. A dust fog expanded around the accident, making it difficult for the men to see into the building.

Brown tried to start the truck, but it wouldn't start. Men started climbing out of the back of the truck and squeezed into the space between it and the wall.

Five women guards stood in formation while another guard screamed into the phone.

Brown climbed out of the window and joined his men. The men held shovels in front of their bodies like rifles and approached the women.

The women frantically pushed the red buttons on their bracelets, but the men continued to approach the women.

One woman screamed, "They're not wearing their collars." Two women bolted and disappeared into a dark hallway leading to the locker room.

Brown and the men surrounded the women while three men grabbed the woman at the telephone.

"Where's the key," Brown snapped.

"What?"

"The key to the lockup."

The women remained silent. Brown saw the key fastened to one of the women's belts, and he removed the key while the woman screamed, "Don't touch me."

Brown walked to the heavy metal door and unlocked it. Brown and his men walked to the holding cells. Brown stopped at the condemned man's cell and said, "God called. He thinks the world is better with you in it, so we are here to obey God's orders. It's time to go, brother."

Brown opened the cell, turned to his men, and said, "Place the women in here."

"It isn't right. You can't do this," one of the women screamed.

"I just did. Aren't you the one behind bars?" Brown said in jest.

Brown slammed the cell door and locked it. He removed the collar from the man's neck and threw it on the floor.

The man in black said, "Wait. We need to study that." He rushed over, picked up the collar, and shoved it into his pocket.

Brown walked to Susan's cell and peered into her cell. "I was in the area and thought I would stop by," Brown said.

"You certainly know how to shake up the neighborhood," Susan replied.

"It was a little quiet tonight. Nothing but a little ruckus to shake up the windy city," Brown 447 replied.

Brown opened the cell door, and Susan jumped into his arms. They kissed while everyone became silent as they witnessed a historic occasion between a man and a woman.

The group rushed to the truck parked on the side of the road, leaving the first truck embedded in the wall. Brown 447 and Brown 300 climbed into the cabin while Susan sat in the middle.

Once the last man climbed into the back of the truck, Brown started it and put it into gear. Then Brown saw headlights appear around the corner.

Sarah turned in her sleep as the phone rang. After the second ring, Sarah sprang up from her sleep. "Damn it," she uttered.

She picked up the phone and screamed, "This better be an emergency."

"Ma'am, my apologies for disturbing you."

"What is it?"

"Two trucks created a path of destruction along the streets of Chicago."

"What?" Sarah screamed.

"The thieves crashed one of the trucks into the detention center."

"What?" Sarah screamed even louder. "I'm on my way. Wake everyone up and have them ready at the station." Sarah slammed the receiver down on the cradle, shaking the whole nightstand. She hurried and dressed and jumped into her car within minutes.

Sarah drove so fast along the streets that the scenery became a blur. Then she slammed on the brakes in front of the office of the Mayor's Guard, where a crowd of the Mayor's finest stood waiting by their vehicles.

"Everyone follows me," Sarah screamed as she leaned out her rolled-down window.

A procession of cars went across the city, violating every traffic rule of the Federation. She was ready to turn the final corner to the Chicago Detention Center and saw the truck headlights.

The bullhorn on top of her car came to life as Sarah screamed, "Pull over."

The truck surged ahead.

Rage pulsed through Sarah's veins as she stomped on the accelerator. The car struck the truck's back end but to no avail. The truck continued forward.

Sarah reached into the glove box and retrieved a large box with a large red button. She pressed the button several times, but the truck continued forward. This device shocked any male within a block.

"Damn it," she screamed. She sped up and hit the back of the truck again. Although the bumper of her car fell off, the truck's bumper just had a small dent.

The truck sideswiped another car, which spun around and went into the middle of the street. Sarah swerved around it, but one of her team members slammed into the car.

Sarah tried to move to the truck's side, but the truck kept swerving. "Damn it," she screamed again.

Sarah smiled as she saw them approaching the northern wall.

The truck sped up while the wall was approaching fast.

Crash as the truck slammed through the wall, splashing bricks everywhere. Then the truck went through.

Sarah slammed on the brakes before her car had hit the bricks. Once the vehicle stopped, she slammed her hands on the steering wheel several times, screaming, "Damn it; damn it; damn it."

Sarah jumped out of her vehicle. "Susan, you traitor. You man lover," she screamed as she ran to the hole in the wall while her team joined her.

"Ma'am, what do you want us to do?" Jennifer asked.

"What can we do?"

"I don't understand."

"We can't follow. Those roads haven't been maintained in a hundred years."

The guards watched the truck's progress in the dark. Although the truck whined, groaned, bounced, and shook from the numerous potholes and debris on the roads, it continued its forward progress, albeit at a slower rate. Then the men faded into the night as angry women stood around the hole in the wall.

Chapter 16 – What a Mess

Sarah could not believe the path of destruction that lay before her eyes. She was furious as her heart pumped molten lava of rage throughout her body. Sarah ran into the street and pushed the red button on the black box. Immediately, the sea of rickshaws came to a stop for a block around the Chicago Detention Center as the drivers wearing orange suits slumped over the steering wheels unconscious.

Some of the women became angry as their driver was unconscious, and they were trying to beat the early morning traffic. These women also pressed the red button on their bracelets, and it took about a half-hour for the sea of rickshaws to start moving again.

Sarah stood at the corner of the detention center and looked at the truck with its back end jutting out of the wall. She went inside.

Jennifer ran up to Sarah. “What do we do, ma’am?”

“First, get that truck out of here and return it to the crematory. Then send for a team of male cleaners and bricklayers. I want this building fixed before sunset.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Sarah walked to the cellblock and looked into Susan’s cell. “That traitor. That bitch,” she screamed.

When she returned to the front office, she saw a team of brown shirts cleaning it. They placed the good bricks to the side in neatly stacked piles while the broken bricks were tossed into the back of a truck. They also managed to push the truck out onto the street.

Sarah looked at Jennifer, who nodded with a slight smirk. Jennifer is quite efficient, isn’t she? Perhaps a couple of challenging assignments would wipe that smirk from her face, Sarah thought.

Sarah remembered when she was second in command. Once Sarah had the eye of the Mayor, she just had to make her boss look bad and embarrass her in front of the Mayor. Sarah planned and plotted.

Finally, Sarah’s chance had come. One of her boss’s friends ran over one of the male servants while it crossed the street. The male was returning to work at the clothes factory, and the factory demanded ten thousand credits to replace the blue shirt. Still, the boss’s friend refused to pay.

The case went to court, and Sarah's boss had to testify. Sitting on the witness stand, she said she had video footage of the accident. When she put the disc into the player, an old musical came on instead.

Her boss turned a purplish red in embarrassment while the defense just laughed. Then her boss looked over at Sarah, and Sarah just looked back at her boss with a smirk. The actual disc was in Sarah's pocket.

Her boss profusely apologized to the court. The judge admonished her boss for wasting the court's time and ruled in favor of the defense. By the end of the day, her boss submitted her resignation. And Sarah was next in line. Perfect, Sarah thought.

Sarah thought her boss could recover from this embarrassment, but people get old, and they lose that spark, that drive, and give up the fight against life. They decide to quit and retire, and that is okay with Sarah. It was Sarah's turn now.

Before the end of the shift, Sarah stood in front of the Mayor's desk, remembering every minute of that momentous day.

The Mayor said, "I have watched your career closely in the Mayor's Guard. It would be my pleasure that you take over the leadership of the Mayor's Guard."

Sarah stood tall. Sarah stood erect, and Sarah snapped to attention and saluted the Mayor. Then Sarah said, "I would be honored to serve the Mayor and the great City of Chicago."

The Mayor rose and pinned the stripes of the captain of the Mayor's Guard.

"Then protect our city well."

"Yes, ma'am. I will."

Sarah emerged from her daydream and looked back at the gaping hole in the wall. The hole became smaller by the minute as the bricklayers laid new rows of bricks.

Jennifer was becoming too efficient, perhaps too ambitious. A puppy may need a slap in the muzzle with a newspaper. Sarah needed to make sure that the puppy knew who its master was.

Sarah jumped into her vehicle and followed the path of destruction to the crematory. Wrecked cars marked the way like a hiking path deep into the woods with white stones. Finally, Sarah arrived at the crematory and passed through the smashed entrance gate.

Sarah jumped out of the car and approached her third in command, Grace. "Status," Sarah barked.

"Two trucks were taken, and one collar released."

"One collar release?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"That means we have some savage dogs running around without collars?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"They can, at any moment, rape and harm any woman of Chicago."

"My apologies, ma'am."

"I thought the collar release was secured."

"It was ma'am. Let me show you."

Sarah and Grace walked to the small kiosk outside of the crematory.

"The men used a large rock and repeatedly struck the safety glass," Grace added. "Eventually, they broke through and pulled the glass from the frame."

"Where was the collar released?"

"It was kept in the bottom drawer of the desk."

Sarah looked down and shook her head in disbelief. We have wild dogs running through the streets of Chicago, and the women have no defense or protection from them. Sarah looked at her watch, five-thirty.

It was time to inform the Mayor. Sarah jumped into her car and headed to the Mayor's Office. This would be a long day.

Chapter 17 – The Infidels Must Pay

Hell broke loose at the Mayor's Office as Sarah informed the Mayor at six o'clock in the morning about the night's events. After Sarah had briefed the Mayor, she asked Sarah to wait outside.

The Mayor picked up the phone and hit the hot button 1 for the President. After ten rings, an assistant picked up. "Hello, can I help you?"

"The President, please," the Mayor snapped into the phone. "We had a major incident in Chicago."

"One minute, ma'am."

It seemed like an eternity to the Mayor until a tired voice said, "The President."

"President. We had a severe incident in Chicago."

"I am listening."

"Several armed men stole two heavy-duty trucks. They crashed one into the wall at the Chicago Detention Center and freed a prisoner. He was sentenced to die for stealing Federation Credits."

"Oh, my. Have you caught the culprits?"

My chief of security pursued them through the city. Then they crashed through the wall and escaped into the ruins north of the city."

"Who is the prisoner they had rescued?"

"He was a yellow shirt who fixed electrical systems."

The Mayor almost added the case with Susan, but she bit her lip instead. The President didn't need to know about the escape of Susan, the director of the Male Processing Unit. Why would the Mayor add to the President's already full plate?

"You know that is a critical asset to have wandering outside the city."

"I know, ma'am. My head of security will form a team to search for them."

"How did the men know this yellow shirt was being detained?"

"At this point, we have not determined how they knew."

"Have you identified the group of men who started this rebellion?"

“Yes, ma’am. They were brown shirts that cleaned the first district of Chicago, the downtown area.”

“Brownshirts? That’s odd since the brown shirts are not bred for their intelligence.”

“There may be further complications.”

“Such as?”

“The men possess a collar release device. They removed their collars.”

“That is serious. You have a group of men that are a great threat to society. A woman has no defenses against them.”

“I know, ma’am.”

“Activate the death squad.”

“Are you sure?”

“We have no choice. We cannot allow a group of men to wander around the outskirts of Chicago. They pose a grave threat to the Federation.”

“I agree.”

“You are authorized to activate the death squad. If you must put down every male in Chicago, then so be it. We must show these males who are in charge.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Keep me informed of any developments.” Then the phone went dead.

The Mayor placed the receiver onto the cradle and pressed the intercom button. “Send Sarah in.”

Sarah stood in front of the Mayor within seconds.

The Mayor started, “I am authorized to assemble a death squad.”

“A death squad?”

“I want you to lead that squad. Your mission is to hunt down those infidels and kill them.”

“Yes, ma’am. What about Susan?”

“If you find her with them, you can use force.”

“Deadly force, ma’am?”

“Yes, as you wish.”

Sarah smiled and nodded her head. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Follow me,” the Mayor said as she rose from her chair and left the office. They approached the elevator and pressed the button for the basement. Sarah raised her eyebrow.

“I guess you haven’t been down there.”

“No, ma’am.”

“Nobody has been down there in 70 years.”

“Nobody?”

The elevator doors opened to a small anteroom with a large metal door opposite the elevator.

The Mayor placed a card into a card reader on one side of the sliding doors and said, “You walk to the left side of the door, and I will go to the right. We lift the cover and press the black button.”

Once they pushed the buttons, it woke a giant humming machine that vibrated the doors. Then dust blew from the space around the door and door frame, forming a thick cloud of dust in the room.

The double doors slid open to reveal a large cavernous room. Several lights flickered as they entered.

They saw three feet by three feet and 10 feet long stacked on each other, 10 crates high. The crates formed a maze in a massive underground warehouse.

“What is this?” Sarah asked.

“Weapons from a long time ago.”

“You mean weapons from the old world?”

“Yes.”

“Why do we have them?”

“When the Federation was established seven decades ago, we debated what to do with the weapons. So, we thought it would be a good idea to put some into storage, just in case. Every city has a large room just like this. The room is hermetically sealed, and all the moisture is removed from the air.”

Sarah went to a box and brushed her right hand across the wood to see if it was real. The label read M16 Assault Rifles. Sarah looked at the Mayor. “What do you want me to do with them?”

“Take a group of loyal, mindless men and train them to use these weapons. Then track down those wild dogs and get rid of them once and for all.”

As a tear ran down the Mayor's right cheek, she brushed it away, "I hoped these weapons would not be used," she said. "That these weapons would stay down here forever and rot away."

The Mayor walked to the right side of the room to a small locked safe, which she opened and pulled out one of the briefcases. Then she handed it to Sarah and shut the safe.

The Mayor added, "I was told the safe contained small briefcases. Each briefcase contains a computer that contains all information from weapons from that old world."

Sarah looked down at this small package and patted it.

"The password is – God forgive us – as one word, lower case."

"Yes, ma'am," the Mayor said.

The sun was setting, and a cool breeze from Lake Michigan blew through the city, cooling it off. The sunset coalesced into a splatter of Caribbean colors.

Mayor Lilith addressed Chicagoans from a stage before the Mayor's building. She walked onto the stage and approached the podium while the crowd became silent, and the Mayor began speaking.

Chicagoans, it saddens me to be in front of you today.

However, an urgent matter has confronted this city.

Last night, a group of savage men from the wastelands broke through the wall.

They entered this city illegally.

And they left a path of destruction across the city.

We chased them out of the city.

Then we successfully patched the wall where they had entered.

Security patrols are driving around the neighborhoods near the walls of the city.

The patrols will stop further incursions into our great city.

I call on all Chicagoans to do their civic duty.

If you see anyone or anything suspicious, do not hesitate to contact the Mayor's Office.

Together, we will continue to make Chicago a great place for all its citizens and residents to live and work.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

The crowds of women cheered and applauded while the male servants stood quietly.

The Mayor bowed and walked off the stage.

Chapter 18 – Escaping the Insane Asylum

Brown 447 and his crew punched through one of the brick walls that led into the wastelands of northern Chicago. The road was a patchwork of asphalt, potholes, and weeds, as it had not seen any maintenance in 70 years.

After hitting each pothole, the creak from the suspension grew louder and louder, like a teenage couple making love on an old spring mattress. Finally, the truck hit a large pothole when the suspension snapped with a loud clank, and the truck's bed on the back-right side of the truck collapsed onto the rear tire.

Brown 447 pulled over. "Gentlemen, this truck has had it. Time to walk on foot."

"Where shall we go?" One man asked.

"We'll continue to head north, farther in the badlands."

The men continued walking, walking, and walking through the deserted wasteland of old buildings.

"Where are we going, Brown?" Susan snapped.

"North," Brown replied.

The sun started to appear in the east, pushing the darkness to the west. They stopped to look at a long two-story building with a tall brick tower six stories tall. Brown pointed at the tower and said, "We'll make a camp there."

"Oh, God. It looks dirty," Susan said.

"You are more than welcome to sleep out here on the grass," Brown said.

"Ohhhhh," Susan muttered with a sad face.

They walked towards the building. Most of the fence had collapsed long ago, and weeds had grown through the metal mesh.

The building was missing half its letters, but Brown sounded it out – Nav Train Center. "Anybody has any idea what this means?" Brown asked, but the group shook their head no.

The group walked to the large wooden doors. They tried to open one, but the hinges had rusted together long ago. The door would open a little while the hinges groaned in protest.

Another man grabbed a large metal pipe and stuck it between the doors. Then he wedged one of the doors open, pushing and pulling

on the bar. Finally, the hinges snapped as the door fell forward. The men scrambled back before the door could fall on them.

They entered. Dusk covered the floor like freshly fallen snow on the ground. Brown stopped his men at the foot of the stairs.

“Men, let’s break into two groups,” Brown said. “We will search every room in this place. We’ll take the left wing while your group takes the right.”

Brown’s group walked towards the back of the building and turned left. They opened door after door to dust, broken furniture, and little creepy crawly things scurrying across the floor. Finally, Brown pushed one door open that led into the eating room, which could feed hundreds of people. They walked to the double swinging doors that led into the kitchen.

“Wow, the kitchen is fully stocked.”

Another man saw a box of military food rations. He grabbed a package and was ready to tear it open.

“Don’t open that,” Brown said. “Look at the sides. It’s puffy like a balloon.”

The man tossed it back into the box and asked, in a high-pitched voice, “What’ll we do for food?”

“Well, help yourself then. Take a food ration.”

Susan crossed her arms and kicked a pot that was lying on the floor.

“Well, suit yourself, Susan.”

Another man grabbed that food ration and tore it open while the room quickly filled with a decaying dead body smell.

“Ugh,” he muttered.

“I told you so. We should probably burn those so they do not end up in the men’s gruel in Chicago.”

“Well, at least we fed you in Chicago,” Susan snapped.

“You are free to return.”

“I should.”

“Just remember, we’re not coming back for you.”

Susan frowned while crossing her arms.

The men continued searching the building, where they found sleeping quarters upstairs.

The second group caught up with them. "What did you find?" Brown asked.

"We found training facilities for weapons," Brown 300 replied.

"Excellent. The first thing we need to do is clean and fortify this facility. Second, we need to find some food."

"What do you suggest?"

"Take your group and head west to search for the agricultural fields. I will take my group and start cleaning this place," Brown said. Then he grabbed the black shirt and asked, "Could you check the weapons so we can use them to protect ourselves?"

"I'll look into it." Then he headed downstairs.

Brown 300 looked at his men. "Let's go. Let's search for food."

Brown 447 looked at his men. "Let's get cleaning. We'll clean the sleeping quarters first. Haul all garbage and broken furniture down to the kitchen. We'll use it for kindling."

Susan went to one of the beds and tried to turn over the mattress, but she was not strong enough, so one of the men helped her.

"Susan, what are you planning to do?"

Susan ignored Brown. Once the mattress was turned over, she unrolled a sleeping bag and curled up in it."

One of the guys whispered, "What'll we do with her?"

"Let her be. As long as she lies there, she cannot cause trouble," Brown replied.

The men spent all day cleaning the facility. Then the second group arrived with a large basket of apples, corn, berries, and melons.

The group went busy cleaning two tables in the dining room and dusted off the chairs.

Brown looked at the corn. "So what do we do with this?"

The two guys holding the basket between them shrugged their shoulders.

Brown looked at one of his men. "Please go upstairs and get Susan."

Susan came down ten minutes later.

"Good afternoon, Susan. Did you get a good sleep?" Brown asked.

"No," Susan snapped.

“My apologies for waking you early. However, we have fresh corn. What do you do with it?”

“Don’t you know?”

“If I knew, I wouldn’t have awakened you.”

“Just clean the corn and boil it in water for ten minutes. Add salt. Duh, any dummy can do it.”

“Thank you, Susan.”

Susan returned upstairs.

“Susan, please wait. Do you want some corn?”

Susan just stared at Brown. Then she went to the basket and grabbed a handful of berries and three apples. Then she disappeared.

One of the men said, “Perhaps we should send her back.”

“That’s not a bad idea. I don’t think she understands the position she was in Chicago. Let’s see if she comes around the next couple of days,” Brown said.

Brown grabbed the basket of corn and went into the kitchen, where he placed the basket on top of a counter and peeled off the corn husks while another man joined him and peeled corn.

“Just put the garbage into a pile. We can use it as fuel for later.” Then Brown looked at another man, “Could you please wash a pot, fill it with water, and place it on a fire.”

“Not a problem,” the man said.

After an hour, Brown held a plate of freshly boiled corn. He found salt in the storage area and gave a good sprinkle. Then he brought the plate of corn to the dining room and placed it on the center of the table, which filled the room with a sweet aroma of cooked corn.

Brown sat at the head of the table while the men sat on the sides with the black shirt sitting to Brown’s left.

“Let’s bow our heads in prayer,” Brown said.

Everyone bowed his head and folded his hands in prayer.

“God, thank you for giving us the strength to leave the city and provide food. We hope you bless us and allow us to prosper and grow. Amen.”

“Amen,” the men repeated.

Everyone grabbed food and ate as a free man for the first time.

Brown raised his corn on a cob upward like a salute and said, "Men, taste the sweetness of freedom."

The men ate while chatter filled the room.

"Men, men," Brown said.

The room became quiet.

Brown continued, "We finally found our freedom. We are no longer slaves to the women."

The men cheered, "Hooray."

"No more bitches," another man screamed.

Brown nodded. "No more bitches. We have arrived at a crossroads. The women gave us numbers for a name. However, we are not slaves with colors and numbers for names. We are not objects. We are men and humans made in God's image."

The men cheered and banged their plates on the table.

"So, men, we stand at a crossroads. We take names like our Christian brothers from the old world. I shall call myself Paul, who went through a rebirth to become one of the most influential people in the Bible."

The men cheered again.

Paul stood up and placed his left hand on the shoulder of the Black shirt, "and I shall call you Luke, a learned man who was a close friend of Paul."

"I shall be called Jesus," one person shouted.

Once the crowd died, Paul said, "You can choose any name from the Bible except for that one. You cannot use that name unless you can raise the dead, cure men from disease, and feed a thousand men from two loaves of bread and two fish. There can only be one Jesus."

The man looked down.

Paul started by saying, "Brother, don't worry about having the best name in the Bible. You can have the second-best name."

The man looked up. "The second?"

"Yes, the second. And that is John the Baptist. He recognized the son of God immediately. Then he baptized him."

The man smiled. "Yes, John the Baptist. That is a perfect name."

The man to Paul's right leaned over and whispered, "I think you told us the story of John the Baptist. Didn't he have a cruel death?"

The table became silent.

Paul continued, “Guys, it is not how you die. It is how you live. That is what matters. Our time is short on this earth, and we only have a short time to do some good.”

The men cheered again.

Once the table became silent, John asked, “How did John die?”

Paul continued, “Are you sure you want to know?”

“Yes,” John said.

“At the request of a woman, the king...” Paul said and whispered, “asked for a beheading as a birthday present.”

Everyone around the table started laughing and cheering. The men around John patted him on the back.

“Of course, only a woman would do something so cruel to a man,” John said.

“Of course,” Paul replied.

John spoke again, “Speaking of woman, what do we do with her?” as he pointed upward at the ceiling.

“Let’s see if she comes around. If not, we’ll just toss her over the wall, and she’ll return to her beloved Chicago.”

The men cheered again.

Once the dinner was over, Luke spoke up. “Guys, I have an announcement.”

The men became silent again.

Luke continued, “I found weapons. The first I found was the bow and arrow. This facility also has a training facility with targets. We start training tomorrow. We can use the bow and arrows to kill game and animals and help protect ourselves.”

The men cheered.

Paul added, “Excellent.”

Luke continued, “I also found guns. However, they are quite rusted. I can try to clean them and see if they work.”

“Okay, men. We have a mission. We will learn how to use those weapons,” Paul shouted. “Tomorrow, we shall have fresh protein for dinner.”

The men cheered again.

Paul headed upstairs, found a private room, and made a bed by unrolling a sleeping bag on an old mattress. Then he went to get Susan.

Susan followed Paul into the private room, and they both lay down. Paul rolled over, placed his hand on Susan's hip, and kissed her ear.

Susan elbowed Paul on the stomach.

"I wanted to pet the kitty," Paul whispered.

"The kitty does not want to be petted, 447."

"My name is Paul."

"The kitty doesn't want to be petted, Brown four-four-seven."

"But I thought we had a union?"

"We do, but the union does not mean you can pet kitty any time you like."

"Oh!" Paul smirked, thinking I'd be the one to toss you over the wall and back into Chicago if you keep on.

Chapter 19 – They Don't Stand a Chance

Mayor Lilith went outside into the autumn air and hopped into her limousine. A sliding glass window that isolated the driver from the passengers lowered as the female driver turned and looked at the Mayor. “Where to ma’am?”

“Let’s go by the Chicago Detention Center.”

“Yes, ma’am.” The car went into drive. The rickshaw drivers moved out of the way to let the Mayor’s car pass.

As the Mayor drove by the detention center, she saw a squadron of her finest ladies performing a roadblock. As they saw her car, they widened the roadblock to allow her to pass.

“Driver, pull over.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The Mayor exited her car and approached the line where the female guards lined up male suspects along the wall. The guards asked the suspects, “Do you know the identities of the male outlaws? Have you helped the outlaws in any way?” Every prisoner said no, which was met with a baton to the back or legs. The men collapsed to the ground, cried, and begged for their lives.

As the Mayor approached, Jennifer shouted, “Stand attention to the Mayor.”

Several guards screamed at the men standing along the wall, “Bow to your Mayor.”

The men – at least the ones still standing – immediately dropped to their knees and bowed their heads. The ones lying on the ground rolled over and tried to bow as best as they could, given their pain.

The guards stood at attention while Jennifer took her position at the front. The sea of rickshaws stopped while everyone looked at the Mayor.

“Jennifer, good to see you.”

“Good to see you, Mayor.”

“It’s good to see you are taking charge.”

“Thank you, ma’am.”

“Have you made any progress in capturing the outlaws?”

“Yes, ma’am. We caught three sympathizers. We already locked them up in the transport truck,” Jennifer said as she pointed at the fortified male meat wagon with no windows.

“Excellent. That is good news. We shall crush this little rebellion immediately. Then we shall restore Chicago’s safety. These men must be taught a lesson.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Walk with me, Jennifer.”

The Mayor and Jennifer walked away from the roadblock until they were alone and out of earshot of everyone.

“Jennifer, I am happy with your progress.”

“Thank you, ma’am.”

“This little insurgency has me worried about our wonderful city.”

“Ma’am, we have everything under control.”

“My issue is this represents the first major uprising of men under the United Federation of Cities. I think this may not be the last act of insurgency.”

“Then we shall squash and eliminate all troublemakers. Once we get rid of the troublemakers, the obedient men will fall in line, and we will no longer have trouble with the males.”

“In theory, I agree with you. I wish we could round up all men, bind their hands and feet, tie them to cinder blocks, and feed the fish in Lake Michigan.”

Jennifer smiled and added, “It would be good to rid ourselves of these sinful creatures once and for all.”

“But, we have all these dirty jobs to do. Unfortunately, we, women, are too delicate to perform those dirty jobs.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“There lies the contradiction. We must house and feed these evil creatures so they work the jobs that we, women, cannot do. Then I hear these rumors.”

“May I acquire information about the rumors?”

“Some men are taking their lives. I heard dozens of men have already jumped to their deaths from the Chicago Riverwalk Bridge.”

“Yes, ma’am. I stationed five guards there. Once they catch a man trying to jump, they arrest him. Then the man is sent to a re-

education camp and turned into an obedient man again or turned into fertilizer.”

“That’s good. We can’t lose too many.”

The Mayor and Jennifer stopped walking and turned to return to the roadblock.

“Jennifer, I may have to call on you one day,” Mayor Lilith added.

“You can count on me, Mayor.”

“I know I can.” Then the Mayor patted Jennifer’s left shoulder. “Jennifer, thank you for your candor.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The Mayor climbed into her limousine and looked back at Jennifer.

Jennifer turned to the guards. “Get the line moving again,” she shouted. The traffic started to move slowly again as the guards pulled random guys from rickshaws and questioned them. Two more men joined the malcontents, who waited in the meat wagon.

“Driver, the Chicago Riverwalk Bridge,” the Mayor said.

“Yes, ma’am.”

In five minutes, the limousine pulled to the curb a block from the bridge. The Mayor rolled down her window and saw the rumors were true. As she looked at the bridge, she saw a male wearing blue clothes run to the bridge’s rail, climbing halfway up the railing before three women pulled him down. Then they restrained him.

“What is wrong with these men?” she mumbled. “We allow them to live in a peaceful society. We feed them, we house them, we clothe them, and this is the gratitude they show.”

The Mayor rolled the window again and snapped, “Take me to Roosevelt Street.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

After twenty minutes, the limousine stopped at the intersection of Roosevelt and Madison streets, where the Mayor got out. The guards placed a barricade across the road to block all access. In contrast, several female guards snapped to attention when they saw the Mayor approach.

“At ease, ladies,” the Mayor said. “I just came to check the progress.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The Mayor walked half a block past the barricade and saw Sarah shouting orders to a group of twenty men in green camouflage uniforms.

The Mayor felt a shiver as she looked at the armed men. What had she done? She set loose a box of rattlesnakes in the office, and they are all hiding and waiting to strike.

Sarah turned and saluted the Mayor. “Stand attention, men,” she screamed.

The men shuffled their feet, stamped their right foot for emphasis, and stood attention while holding their rifles tightly to their chests at an angle.

“Good day, Sarah.”

“Good day, Mayor.”

“The death squad looks fearsome.”

“Yes, ma’am. Just another month, and we can hunt down those scum that caused that mess a month ago.”

“Excellent. Excellent.” Mayor Lilith said as she looked into Sarah’s eyes, looking for any hint of disloyalty. “How sure are you that we have the men’s loyalty.”

“I carefully chose each man. They each served at least ten years in their job with no hint of disobedience.”

“But once you are outside these walls, how do you know they will not run off? How do you know they will still serve you?”

“I also set these men up in clean barracks with hot and cold water, clean sheets, and blankets. I also feed them good food, not the usual gruel.”

“You cannot buy a man’s loyalty. Remember, he bares the protrusion of the devil.”

Sarah tapped the black box with a large red button fastened to her belt. “I also have this,” she said. “If there are any problems, any male within a block will drop down unconscious. Lights out.”

“Do your men have live rounds?”

“No, ma’am. No live rounds until we go outside the walls.”

“Excellent. Let’s see what your troops can do.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Sarah looked at her men and shouted, “Line up.”

The men lined up.

“Ready! Set! Go!” Sarah screamed.

One by one, a man charged at a full-size dummy. He leveled the rifle so the bayonet pierced the dummy like a sword. Then he thrust and twisted the bayonet into the body’s cavity.

The next man charged and stabbed the dummy. Then the third. The fourth, until each man had stabbed the dummy at least once.

“Very impressive, Susan.”

“Yes, ma’am. Those malcontents do not stand a chance.”

“No, they don’t. Continue your excellent work, Sarah. When you leave the city, just send me a message.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

As the Mayor returned to her car, she shivered again. Now, she understood the power of war, and those who commanded the soldiers were in charge. Sarah possessed the power to take over the Mayor’s Office, Chicago, and perhaps even the Federation in Louis City. The Mayor could do nothing about it.

Chapter 20 – Why am I always Second?

Jennifer was always angry because she was always second. She graduated second in her class in high school and second in college, and she always won second place on the running team. She was second in charge of the Mayor's Guard when she should be number one. How did someone second-rate like Sarah get the job? Was she related to the Mayor or a niece, perhaps? How did someone third-rate become the most important person in the Mayor's Guard?

As Jennifer walked into Sarah's office, Sarah flipped the screen down on a laptop. Jennifer tried to look at Sarah, but her eyes wandered to the laptop. Computers, especially working laptops, were rare in this society. How did Sarah get one?

"Good day, ma'am," Jennifer said. She tried to remove the edge from her voice, but it was still difficult. She continued, "Here's that report on illegal male activities." Then she placed it on the corner of Sarah's desk.

Sarah looked up. "Thank you. Do you have anything more?"

"No, ma'am."

"Very well then."

Jennifer nodded her head. It was her cue to leave the office. She returned to her desk, which was in the front row because only the number one desk could have an enclosed office. Jennifer knew she needed to get on the street and search for more malcontents, but she sat there and waited until Sarah left.

Jennifer approached her team. "I must stay behind and catch up on the paperwork. But I want you to go to Michigan Boulevard and set up a checkpoint."

Her team nodded their head and left the office.

It was just Jennifer and Sarah in the office. Jennifer tried to look busy – going through stacks of papers. Still, she could not help but glance at the office blinds to Sarah's office for one second and the next second at the clock on the wall to her right.

After an eternity, Sarah opened her office door, turned off her light, and closed the door behind her.

Jennifer looked down, pretending to read a document as Sarah looked in her direction. Then Sarah left the building.

Jennifer looked at Sarah's closed door, holding a pencil in her right hand and tapping the end of the pencil in her left hand. Jennifer thought that she must give Sarah more time just in case she returned to the office. Perhaps Sarah forgot her keys or needed some Federation credits.

The hands of the clock took an eternity to move another fifteen minutes. Jennifer got up, went to the window, looked out between the slats on the blinds, and looked at the parking spaces for Sarah's car. Nope, no car. Then she walked to the front door and locked it. Hopefully, no one would return, but, of course, she would say, oops. She must have locked the door by mistake. Still, no one closed the doors in Chicago because Chicago experienced zero crime for seventy years except the night of destruction when Brown Shirts fled the city with Susan.

Jennifer looked out the window again, just in case. Then she entered Sarah's office. She left the light off, but she sat on the office chair and opened the lid to the computer while the computer powered up automatically and prompted for a password.

Jennifer searched the top drawers of the desk. Nope. There was no obscure word with a combination of letters and numbers written down on a pad of paper or in the corner of a desk file or document.

Jennifer thought and thought. First, she typed Sarah. The computer beeped and returned – the password is incorrect. Two more attempts.

Jennifer turned around and looked at the thick binders of documents neatly organized on the large bookshelf. The layer of dust indicated that they had not been touched in a long time. It was dark, so she could only read half the titles—just a collection of bureaucratic reports devoid of any life or thrill. Then she saw the picture on the wall.

Jennifer rose and approached the picture, which showed the Mayor shaking Sarah's hand. The caption below noted that Sarah was promoted to head of the Mayor's Guard on October 24, Year 76.

Jennifer returned to the computer and typed in `chicago76` in lowercase letters. She knew Sarah couldn't write in the proper Queen's English. Instead, Sarah wrote like a monkey, tapping

random keystrokes on the keyboard. Jennifer knew because she had to review Sarah's reports to fix all her mistakes. Still, she would not correct them all, allowing some errors to remain. The mistakes were like little breadcrumbs that formed a path to Sarah's ignorance.

The operating system booted up. Jennifer looked at the various icons and folders on the home screen. Then one caught her eye – Basic Training since all guards must complete two months of basic training.

She clicked on the folder with 30 videos and randomly clicked on one video. Then Jennifer almost soiled herself. A male came on with an authoritative voice. He said, "We will show you how to fire a military rifle." Jennifer turned down the volume while she stared at the screen in awe.

The voice continued, "Your heartbeat causes your body to move slightly, and the movement affects the crosshairs at the sight of the rifle."

The camera panned out and showed another male holding a rifle in his right hand with the stock pressed hard against his chest. He squeezed the trigger with his left index finger while the camera zoomed in as the bullet punctured the top part of the metal target with a human outline.

The voice continued, "Now, the soldier relaxes and slows his breathing. As his heartbeat slows, he focuses everything on the target. Now, he so effortlessly squeezes the trigger."

The camera zoomed in again, where the bullet left a large hole at the location of a person's heart.

Jennifer almost fell out of her chair. She remembered history from school on the Great War when humans possessed advanced weapons that had only one purpose – to kill and maim as many humans as possible. Of course, Jennifer thought these were only stories to scare the young ladies so they would study their Bible and go to church on Sunday, but here it was the evidence. Everything the teacher said about history was correct. We, humans, did possess the weapons to kill and maim masses of people.

Jennifer continued watching the videos on the little computer. Then she came across the mother of all mothers as she clicked on a video on how to survive a nuclear explosion.

The commentator said, “When you hear the sirens wail, stop what you are doing immediately. Run to shelter, whether in your basement or a fallout shelter underground. Ensure your shelter is stocked with freshwater and food supplies that can last a month. You should also have a fully stocked first aid kit, a month’s supply of medicines, and new batteries for the radio and flashlight.”

The video showed a man running into his house after hearing the sirens. He gets the two kids—a boy and a girl—lying in front of the TV set. Then he runs to the kitchen, where a woman is preparing the table for dinner. The family opens the back door and runs to the stairwell that leads down into the underground fallout shelter.

The commentator said, “Notice how this family has prepared for this event. Now, they enter the shelter and lock the door behind them. The family sits on the bed while the father turns on the radio. Everyone intently listens to the news.”

The camera zoomed out to an aerial view of the city. Then the picture turned all white as a hydrogen bomb had detonated. A monstrous mushroom cloud rushed upward into the sky while fire and wind destroyed all the buildings within a ten-mile radius.

The commentator continued, “The family will stay at this shelter for a month. They have plenty of food and water. The fusion from a hydrogen bomb produces little radiation. However, the hydrogen bomb uses an atomic bomb’s core, which is radioactive. The atomic bomb raises the necessary temperature to trigger fusion. After 30 minutes, radiative soot and ash will rain from the sky. However, the family is protected in the underground shelter.”

The video showed ground zero as twisted metal and shards of concrete remained after the explosion. At the same time, ash and soot rained from the sky.

The voice continued, “The radioactive fallout could continue from a day to 30 days. The family is well protected in their shelter. After 30 days, the family can leave the shelter. Still, they should avoid contact or direct blast area exposure. The family should also be careful which food and water they consume.”

The video showed a man holding a Geiger counter as he passed the sensor wand over canned food. The counter made large, angry, crackling noises as the voice said, “Every family should have a

Geiger counter. Notice how the needle moves when the father passes the wand over the canned food. The canned food shows too much radiation and must be discarded.”

The video showed a man picking up another can, and the Geiger counter made little noise. The voice continued, “Notice how this food can have no radiation. This can is safe for the family to eat.”

The video showed a happy family opening a can and warming it over a fire.

Jennifer relaxed in the chair and closed her eyes. She heard the rumors that men controlled the world before women, but she refused to believe them, even though here was proof. In all the videos, the men took the leadership roles while the women followed. Then every reference to a family had a little girl and a little boy. That was not permitted in Chicago, even though she hadn’t seen a little boy before. She figured they were grown somewhere, and the girls and boys wouldn’t meet.

Jennifer laughed at all the stories when she heard that the Federation of Cities had several dead spots where things did not grow properly. She remembered when she was a little girl, and her class won a trip to the capital city, Louis City. She went there by train and begged her mom for a whole week to buy her binoculars because everyone said there was a dead spot near the railroad tracks a hundred miles south of Chicago. When she hugged her mom goodbye and boarded the train, she sat at a window seat and looked out the window with her binoculars.

As usual, she saw nothing. The agricultural fields were on the outskirts of Chicago – just fields of soybeans and corn. Then the agrarian fields gave way to trees and more trees. Occasionally, the train crossed a bridge over a stream or river. Still, here she was, looking for that elusive cat with six legs or rats the size of horses. She even looked into the waters of the streams and rivers. Still, the train moved too fast, and anything in the water was a blur even though she searched for the fish with the human face, but damn, all Jennifer saw was trees and more trees. Nothing indicated a dead zone. Everything thrived and grew between the two great cities.

Jennifer heard a car door slam. She leaned forward in her chair, went to the Start Menu, and selected shutdown as a little hourglass on the screen spun and twirled.

“Come on. Shut down,” Jennifer whispered as she heard footsteps walking along the sidewalk outside the building. The screen went black, and Jennifer shut the lid. Then she got up, shut the door behind her, and ran to the door. She unlocked the door and saw a surprised look on Sarah’s face as her hand reached for the doorknob.

“Oh, excuse me, Captain,” Jennifer said.

“It sounded like you locked the door, Number 2?”

“Huh? I don’t think so. I was just rushing out to get a sandwich.”

“Very well. Could you bring me a coffee with two sugars and one cream?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Jennifer passed Sarah and walked around the corner to her favorite café. That was close, she thought. In another second, she would be transferred to the agricultural fields as a tower guard—one of the worst jobs a woman can hold in Chicago, outside the city in the agricultural fields.

Chapter 21 – Let’s Create a Little Mayhem

Paul went outside and looked up at the overcast sky. The temperature dropped while winter waited around the corner with its cold wind and snow.

Paul turned to Luke and said, “Winter is coming. We need to stock up on supplies to survive the winter.”

“Yes, I agree, but we must be careful taking the supplies from the women,” Luke replied. “Don’t underestimate them. We’ve been lucky, but the women will hunt us down if we keep pushing our luck.”

“If I were them, I would assemble a special team to come and look for us. The women will hunt us down. This is the first time the men have banded together and fled the city, and I am sure they will not let us live in peace.”

“Of course, they won’t. They were going to kill me because they thought I stole Federation credits. What could I possibly do with those damn credits? Men are forbidden to use them.”

“That’s over, so don’t worry about it. We must think of our future and our survival.”

“Agreed. Then we should do a big job – hit them once. Then we should divide the spoils of our acquisition and spread them across three hideouts.”

“I concur.”

“Then let’s get the men.”

Luke ran in and screamed, “Fall in, guys. We’ve got a mission.”

After fifteen minutes, all the men stood outside and huddled around Paul and Luke. Two men remained in the watchtower overlooking the Nav Center, just in case trouble showed up.

Paul began, “Men, winter is coming, and we must stock up on food. Luke and I know a source of food, but it is dangerous. The payoff is well worth the sacrifice.”

Luke added, “We should stock up on enough food to last until next spring, at least the critical stuff. We can store some food, like corn and potatoes, in the cellar. That should last all winter.”

“Men, if you have any concerns, this is the time to raise them,” Paul added as he looked around at the men. They were tough. They

were fierce. They had been through so much crap that they would fight to the death for delicious food like pecan pie. Paul continued, “All right men, grab your gear. We head out in ten minutes.”

Paul entered the building and went to his room, where Susan slept most of the day. “Hey Susan, we must go,” he said, even though he would provoke an argument.

Susan turned on the bed to face Paul and snapped, “Where’re you going?”

“I can’t say.”

“When will you return?”

“I don’t know.”

“So you don’t know where you’re going or when you’re coming back. Hmmm. What do you expect me to do?”

“Just do what you normally do; just sleep all day and eat.”

“So, that’s what you think of me?”

“No. I want you to do more, but you refuse to help us around here.”

“How can I help. This place is filthy. There is no electricity or running water. What would you like me to do for starters?”

“Susan, just relax. This is not the place or time to argue. The men and I must get enough supplies to last through winter.”

“Oh, of course. You plan to steal them from the City of Chicago.”

“Where else would I get supplies?”

“What did the City of Chicago do to you?”

“Are you serious? You mean made me a complete slave because I was born a man?”

“You were not born.”

“What?”

“To be born, you must come from a woman’s uterus. You were grown.”

Paul just looked at Susan, and he wanted to backhand her and slap that cheek so hard that it would no longer say another cruel word to him.

Luke knocked on the door. “Paul, it’s time.”

Paul turned to look at Luke, “OK. I’m coming.” Then he turned to Susan. “We’ll continue this later.”

“Perhaps I will not be here when you come back.”

“Suit yourself,” Paul said. Then he left the room and closed the door quickly. Paul thought he should hang a sign on the door – Danger – Vicious Snake Lurking Inside. Enter at Your Own Risk.

Paul joined the men. “Okay, men. Let’s head out.”

Fifteen men left the compound, leaving Susan and two men to guard the barracks. The men headed south along the circular wall that surrounded and protected downtown Chicago from foreign invaders. They walked through abandoned buildings, stepped and climbed over debris and piles of rubbish, and crawled through broken windows and collapsed door frames. Wreckage and ruins surrounded Chicago like a scab covering a large wound.

It was slow walking along the roads, alleys abandoned buildings, and around wrecked cars. By noon, the boys reached halfway. One of the guys called out from the back. “Guys, let’s take a break.”

Paul turned and looked at his men, and he saw the sweat on their foreheads on this cool autumn day and the look on their tired faces. “Okay, guys, let’s take a break over there,” Paul said as he pointed at an abandoned building where they could huddle inside and watch for the enemy in the shadows.

The men sat along the wall, which gave everyone a clear view of the street. Then they unpacked their lunch and placed it in front of them – apples, cold corn, and smoked venison. Recently, the guys learned to hunt the countryside between the agricultural fields and the outskirts of the ruins, where it teamed with wild game – deer, rabbits, and cattle. The men learned to pretty much eat anything that moved on four legs. A thing that slithered or hopped was also not so bad when smoked and cured with salt because everything tasted better with a sprinkle of salt, even if it slowly slid down one’s throat.

Peter started, “So boss. What’re we going for?”

“The big payoff,” Luke answered.

“Why be secret?”

Paul added, “I don’t want to spoil the suspense. Let’s just say if we are successful, we will eat like the women at the coffee shops in Chicago. We can get a little stuffed and relax a little bit.”

“Let’s not relax too much,” Luke added.

“Sounds good,” Peter replied.

The men broke into small conversations. Luke leaned over and whispered into Paul's ear. "Are you sure, Paul?"

"I'm sure. The women would not expect this. We'll catch them off guard."

"We sure will. Then they will come after us."

"I expect them to come after us in the spring. Chicago gets cold in the winter, and everything will be covered in two feet of snow. Then that damn wind that comes off the lake freezes everything it touches."

Paul rose and brushed the food remnants from his hands. "Okay, guys. Let's continue."

The men with leftovers packed them away. Then everyone rose and fell into line. Paul led the way with Luke behind him. At one point, Paul saw a moving shadow on top of the wall, and he whispered, "Get down," as he raised his hand in the air.

All the men dropped to one knee and tried to blend in with the surrounding debris while Paul looked intently at the movement he saw on top of the wall. After five minutes, once he was sure he didn't see anyone, he made sweeping motions with his right hand while the men rose and continued walking silently.

As dusk approached, the men came to a set of railroad tracks.

Paul stopped the group. Then he turned to Luke. "What do you think?"

Luke bent down and looked at the railroad tracks. He slid his hand along the smooth railing. "Yes, this is the one."

"How can you tell?"

"Look at the metal. The track has a layer of rust covering the sides, but the top of the rail is shiny. That means trains pass on this track regularly."

Paul turned to look at the Chicago skyscrapers in the distance. Then he turned and looked at his men and asked, "Luke, is this far enough?"

"Yes. We have at least a kilometer that separates us from the city."

"Excellent," Paul said. Then he turned to his men. "Okay, men. We will roll those junk cars up there onto the tracks. We want a barricade at least ten cars wide on the tracks."

The men broke into three groups of five. They struggled, sweated, and spent the next three hours pushing ancient, rusty cars onto the railroad tracks.

Luke took two men. "Come with me," he said. Luke led the group farther away from the barricade but closer to the city. Then Luke placed a thick bundle on the ground and opened it. The two men and Luke helped uncoil a large, thick wire with thick black insulation. He shaved the insulation off both ends and formed a bare wire hook on one of the ends. He looked at his men, "This is extremely dangerous. We'll toss the hook onto the wire that hangs above the track. That overhead wire carries twenty-five thousand volts."

"What is volts?" James asked.

"Let's just say if you touch that bare wire, you will cook faster than the deer we had for dinner last night. This wire is extremely dangerous."

Luke clamped another wire with a thick alligator clip to a side bolt on the railroad track. Then he placed a brick on the end of the alligator clip. Luke put the end of the wire with the hook between two bricks, ensuring the wire could not touch the ground.

Meanwhile, the men tossed the hook onto the wire above the railroad tracks. Finally, after nine attempts, the wire caught and became secure to the live hanging line.

Luke looked at his men. "Okay, we shall wait."

Paul's group joined Luke's group, and the men sat down and ate their dinner in silence.

"Are we ready?" Paul asked.

Luke nodded yes. "Our homemade switch is ready to go," he replied. Then the group sat down near the railroad tracks and waited.

After several hours, they saw headlights pierce the darkness in the distance while the track vibrated slightly.

Paul screamed, "Men, get ready. The train's coming."

The headlights came at a high speed. When the headlights were about ten blocks away, Luke, who wore thick rubber gloves, opened the alligator clip and clamped it to the live wire.

The connection threw off a large spark and threw Luke to the side. Although the train engine's headlight flickered, it continued approaching the men at its rapid speed.

Another man grabbed the wire, opened the alligator clip, and clamped it to the live wire, forming a solid connection. This time, the connection threw off a large spark but remained connected. The wire began to glow red while the black insulation melted.

Luke screamed, "It's not going to hold. Start the backup plan."

Men picked up large boards and started hitting the feeder line that fed the train its power. After several attempts, the wire broke away from the connector, and the train's lights dimmed.

The men ran away from the track as the train headed for the barricade.

Although the wire shorting the tracks held and still glowed red, the train's headlights dimmed and then went black. Then the train rammed into the barricade, throwing the old rusty cars everywhere. Although the train continued slowing, it passed the men while 10,000 tons of steel rolled to a stop.

Groups of men ran up the steps at every door on the train while Paul and Luke ran to the first car, the locomotive. Paul ran up the steps first while Luke followed. Paul jiggled the doorknob, but the door would not open. Luke took out a large hammer and pounded on the door until the locking mechanism broke, and then Luke turned the knob and opened the door.

As the door opened, Paul and Luke unslung their bow and cocked an arrow. Then they entered the locomotive.

The two female guards' eyes widened, and Paul thought their eyeballs would fall out from their sockets. The women fanatically pressed the red buttons on their bracelets.

"Sorry, ladies. We have no collars," Paul said as he pointed at his bare neck. "Get on the ground and place your hands behind your back."

The women just stood still and looked terrified. Luke went behind the first one, grabbed her hands, and placed them behind her back. Then he secured her hands with rope. Then Luke did the same to the second one.

Peter entered the locomotive and said, “They have everything in the cargo.”

“That is fantastic,” Paul replied. Tell the men to only go for the most valuable stuff—the butter, the cheese, oil, and nuts—stuff that we need to survive in winter. Also, don’t forget the pecans.”

“Absolutely, how can we survive winter without a little pecan pie,” Luke added.

“Amen, brother,” Paul added.

Peter said, “Yes, sir. The valuable stuff.”

Paul asked the women, “Are other women on this train?”

Both women shook their heads no while the first woman cried. Then Paul and Luke led the women outside, guiding them into a seating position at the base of the hill.

The men started packing military-issued backpacks, filling them with valuables. After an hour, each man had a full, heavy backpack. The guys lifted the backpacks and fastened the straps to tighten them around their bodies.

Luke grabbed the backpack, which was filled with bundles of sugar at the bottom and packaged butter at the top. Paul grabbed and secured the backpack with cans of condensed milk and packages of pecans.

As the men were ready to leave, Peter looked at the women and asked, “What do we do with them?”

Paul replied, “Just leave them there. They can walk back to their city if they want.”

Peter looked at the woman with short brown hair, thick arms, and broad shoulders. “This one looks okay. I think I want to form a union with this one,” he said as he pointed at her.

Both Paul and Luke looked at the woman. Then they looked at each other.

“What do you think, Luke?” I don’t know. The Bible is unclear whether a woman has a choice in a union. It seems many biblical marriages were arranged by the parents.”

Paul looked at Peter. “Why do you want to form a union with her?”

“Isn’t it my duty to form a union with a woman?” Peter added.

Paul and Luke looked at each other, and they shrugged their shoulders. Paul added, "I guess. It is a repeated theme in the Bible. But let me add that this union thing does not appear to be working with Susan and me. I still do not understand the benefits of the union."

"What do you mean?" Luke asked.

Paul continued, "She seems to complain a lot and doesn't do anything. I don't see how this union benefits me? The Bible does not answer any questions."

"I still want a union," Peter said.

"Very well. It is not my place to judge. Perhaps your union will achieve better success than mine."

"Well, in that case, I'll take the other one," Luke said as he looked at the woman with long reddish hair and a firestorm of freckles across her face. "Come on. Let's go, woman."

Paul and Luke lead the group, and the women walk behind them.

"Should we untie their hands?" Peter asked.

"Why? Let them be. They are making progress. Besides, if they run, I don't want to have to chase after them," Paul replied.

The group walked for half an hour. The men heard voices in the distance as they approached the Chicago wall.

The women screamed, "Over here! Help us!"

Peter slapped the first woman and then the second, but the woman continued to scream. Then he pulled a cloth out of his pocket, tore it into two, and stuffed the mouths of the screaming women. The women continued to moan while the voices in the distance came closer.

A shot from a rifle reverberated between the buildings while a bullet whizzed near the feet of Peter and kicked up a little dust.

"What the heck?" Paul muttered.

"I don't know," Luke said.

Then another bullet whizzed by.

"Men, run for it," Paul screamed. "Run between the buildings."

Several more gunshots disrupted the quiet of the night.

The two women tried to run away from the men in the direction of the gunshots.

“No, you don’t,” Luke screamed. Then Luke, Paul, and Peter sandwiched the women between them and forced them to come with them.

The men and two women continued to run. The group made it to another dark alley. Paul’s foot hit and then caught on a rock on the street. He tripped and fell and landed on his hands and face as another shot whizzed over his head.

Paul felt blood trickle down his arms as dust and dirt stuck to the sweat on his face and hands, and his muscles hurt. “Not now,” he muttered. He placed his palm on the street and thrust his body upward.

Another bullet pierced his backpack as Paul ran into the alley. He caught up to the others. Everyone was breathing hard.

“Come on, men. Just a little longer,” Paul said.

The men jogged and then walked. After an hour, Paul said, “Let’s take a break. I think we lost them.” They found another abandoned building. They removed their backpacks and huddled against the walls. Luke found some rope, and he tied the women with their backs to a steel post and removed the rags from their mouths.

Everyone fell asleep.

Paul woke up first at dawn. He looked out the window and saw light snow covering everything like a blanket. Then he approached Luke and shook his shoulder. Luke’s eyes fluttered open. “Let’s get back home,” Paul said.

“Yeah,” Luke replied.

“Men, rise and shine. Let’s get back home,” Paul said. The men rose and shook off their sleepiness. Some stretched their arms and legs, while a couple of others headed to the other room to relieve their bladders.

Paul looked over the women, who also woke up. They looked like cattle that had given up on running away and accepted their destiny to become hamburger meat.

The men put on their heavy backpacks and began trekking out in the snow. Several men hobbled. Even Paul felt stiff in his legs while the injuries and scratches on his hands throbbed in tune with his heartbeat.

The sun came out this morning, bringing the temperature slightly above freezing. Paul looked at their trail through the snow. At least in another hour, the sun would erase their trail as it melted the snow.

Paul slowed his pace until he caught up with Luke. “So what was that last night. It sounded like death whistling through the air.”

“It was, but I’m not one hundred percent sure. I think the women fired guns at us.”

“So that is the stuff you showed me? The ones covered with rust.”

“Yes, those are the ones.”

“Any chance we can get ours to work?”

“I already cleaned several guns. I found boxes of bullets that were the same shape as the guns. They may not work.”

“Where do you think the women got those?”

“If I had to guess, they always had them. They probably stored them for an occasion just like this.”

“A relic from the old world.”

“Yep, a deadly relic from the old world.”

The men began hollering and shouting when they arrived home. They took their backpacks to the dining room and lined them along the wall.

As Paul approached the main entrance, Susan sprang up from her seat on the front steps and jumped in Paul’s arms. “I missed you. I missed you. I was so worried about you.”

Paul hugged her back and then kissed her. “I missed you too.”

Peter grabbed the red-headed woman and led her to the upstairs room.

“Peter, wrong one,” Luke yelled.

Peter looked closely at the woman. “Oh, my mistake.” Then he grabbed the other woman and led her to his new private room.

Luke looked at Paul, “I need some time to spend on my union.”

“Good luck,” Paul said.

Luke took his woman to a private room across from Paul’s room. Paul didn’t see Luke and Peter until the smells of dinner made their way up the corridors to the sleeping quarters.

Chapter 22 – Contemplating the Meaning of Life

Susan just hated it here. The place was so dirty, so nasty. She had to take cold showers and suffer without the convenience of electricity.

One day, when most guys were out hunting, Susan snuck into the kitchen and hid a small paring knife in her pocket. Then she placed the knife under the mattress on the side of the bed.

She had trouble sleeping at night, while 447 fell asleep when his head hit the pillow. Then she used her hand to slide the knife from under the mattress. She wanted to stab 447 in the face, his mouth, and those lips, but she managed to fall asleep while holding the knife in her hand. She always woke up before 447 and slid that knife back under the mattress.

If she did stab him, how far could she get? Just cover a thick blanket over him and tell the guys he is sick. He was dead tired, but she was afraid. She was scared to meet that Grand Ole Lady in the Sky. She knew her Bible and knew all the disciples met gruesome deaths and executions, and her life paled in comparison.

A couple of times, Susan woke up in the middle of the night, and 447 was snoring like a freight train. Then she kicked him hard in the back of the thigh, and he always woke up and looked at her while rubbing his eyes. “What’s wrong?” He always asked.

She slid the paring knife under the blanket so 447 could not see. “Nothing,” she replied.

“Why did you kick me?”

“I need some peace.”

“What?”

“I need some peace.”

“Well, I need some sleep.”

“Perhaps you would be better off sleeping with your friends.”

“Huh?”

“Just go.”

Of course, he always went and took the thick blanket with him. Then she had to search for another dirty blanket to prevent her from freezing to death.

One day, Susan almost ended her life. The men left during the day, and she walked around the complex. The men standing guard in the tower overlooking the base ignored her. She was 447's mate, and she would catch them looking at her like they were super hungry, as if they had not eaten in days. She would cover up with the old stinky clothes and a thick winter jacket that she found, but she found their piercing eyes molesting her body. Yuck!

Susan hated the base even more because she knew 477 and the others had something big. She went outside and took a long walk. As she went out the door, she glanced up at the skyscrapers of downtown Chicago, just a couple of miles south. She just wanted to run to her city like a puppy that somehow found itself on the wrong side of the fence. But she had no way to return. She was stuck out here, living with the baboons of Chicago.

Susan continued walking towards the shores of Lake Michigan. As she walked along the coast, she saw an old broken pier. Winter was coming. And the cold Michigan waters were throwing waves at the beach and that old pier.

She made her way to the pier. The concrete broke in many places, leaving open gaping holes like puncture wounds on a knife victim. Susan looked at the Sky and screamed, "Oh, Lord, give me a sign."

The waves kept coming while the cold wind blew. Nope, nothing.

She walked along the pier and avoided the gaping holes. Through the holes, she saw dark, torrent waters swirl. "God, I need help. I'm not strong enough."

Nope. Nothing. No response. If anything, that wind gust kicked up a notch or two. She had another 15 feet before the pier gave away to the rolling waves. She was about to close her eyes, run to the end of the dock, and jump off when the wind stopped, and sunlight broke through the clouds and illuminated a spot in the waters just 10 feet away from the pier.

"God, I don't know what to do anymore? I don't know how to survive? Everything that I know was taken away from me," Susan implored as she kneeled, and then she began to cry. "What do you

want me to do? Just tell me. I'll do anything you want. I can't continue to suffer like this."

The sunlight on the water moved towards the base and disappeared. Then the wind gusts picked up a little more, and she started shivering in the cold. She returned to the base and went upstairs to sleep but was awakened late in the night. She tossed and turned on the mattress and saw she was alone in the room. "Where is he?" she muttered.

Susan rose and checked the sleeping barracks. Those beds were empty, and fears started to jab at the back of her mind. Did the men leave her? Did they leave her to defend herself in this dirty hell? Just like a man, it was nowhere to be seen when you needed it the most.

She went to the watchtower and walked up four stories of stairs. Halfway up, her breath became ragged, and she panted a little. After she made it to the final level, she almost collapsed.

A hand reached out to her. "Ma'am. Are you okay?"

Susan looked up and saw the silhouette of a large man. "Yes, I'm fine," she said as she took a couple more breaths and asked, "I have not seen 447?"

"447? You mean Paul?"

"No, I mean 447."

"My apologies, ma'am. It's a late-night mission."

They heard popping noises from a distance. Susan and the two men went to the south window and looked off into the distance.

"What's that?" Susan asked.

"No idea, ma'am."

Then they heard another succession of popping noises.

Susan wanted to cry but refused to cry in front of these men. She missed 447, his brown hair, blue eyes, those rugged lines that defined his muscles.

Susan went to the kitchen to see if there were any fruit. She entered a small room from the kitchen, where the men opened a window just a little to let the cold in and turn the room into a makeshift cooler.

Susan looked horrified when she saw the corpse of a dead deer hanging upside down as trickles of blood dripped from the carcass into a small pan on the floor.

Susan bent over and started dry heaving, but nothing came out – just gagging sounds. Once the dry heaving stopped, she ran out of the room and slammed the door behind her. “Savages,” she uttered.

Susan returned to bed and tried to sleep, but she tossed and turned. She felt so alone, so worried. After a couple of hours, she saw the clouds had cleared after leaving a layer of snow. She returned downstairs and sat on the front steps to the base, drinking a cup of crushed strawberry leaves steeped in hot water.

Then she heard the voices. The boys had returned.

Susan saw 447 and jumped up into his arms. As she hugged him, she spotted the two new females. This base may not be so bad after all.

Chapter 23 – A Private Conversation

The Mayor just sat on the edge of the examination table, wearing the hospital's blue patient robe. She was furious. She was full of rage. "Why, Lord? Why?" She said as she felt the heat pulsate on her face.

The doctor had not said anything, but Mayor Lilith could see it written on her face as the doctor drew the last blood sample.

When the Mayor looked at the doctor, the doctor conveniently looked away. After fifteen minutes, a nurse popped her head into the examination room. She said, "Ma'am, the doctor wants to meet you in her office."

Mayor Lilith slid off the examination table, removed the robe, crumbled it up, and threw it toward the clothes bin, which didn't even come close as it landed on the floor. Then the Mayor shoved on her business pants and jerked the shirt sleeves so hard on her arms that she thought she would rip her shirt. She jammed her foot into the shoe so hard that she almost slipped and fell to the ground. As she left the examination room, she still looked like a mess; her shirt hung sideways and was left untucked.

The Mayor looked at the doctor's nameplate outside her door, Dr Gilesbie. As her hand touched the cold metal knob, she thought about just walking away. Sometimes, it was better not to know, but she couldn't walk away. Political storm clouds were gathering over the City of Chicago, and like hell, she would allow any harm to come to her city.

Mayor Lilith turned the knob, opened the door, and entered the office. Doctor Gillespie immediately rose from her desk. "Mayor, please come in. Please take a seat," she said as she motioned towards the brown leather chair in front of her desk.

The Mayor approached the chair and slowly sat down. The doctor sat down and opened the medical charts in the only folder on her desk because she was afraid to look up. She flipped another page and looked at it, paused at one page, and flipped to another.

"So, doctor. The prognosis?"

The doctor looked up. "Perhaps we should have a little brandy?"

"Doctor, out with it. Did the cancer go into remission?"

The doctor looked away at the poster of a female human body that labeled every internal organ and body part. The doctor looked down at the charts on her desk to avoid eye contact. “Uhhhh,” the doctor choked on her words.

“I need to know. If it were good news, you’d already be telling me.”

The doctor shook her head no. “The cancer has progressed.”

“How long?”

The doctor looked at the Mayor again. She looked so sad as her eyes became watery. “I don’t know.”

“If you had to guess.”

“Three months.”

“Three months?”

The doctor nodded her head.

“Thank you, doctor,” the Mayor said as she rose.

“I can prescribe strong pain medication. It’ll help you endure the pain,” the doctor interjected.

As the Mayor stood before the doctor’s desk, she said, “That won’t be necessary. The pain will be my symbol of mortality.” Then she left the doctor’s office.

The Mayor went to the Little Havana Restaurant and sat in the back booth in the private room. The proprietor rushed over as the Mayor was taking her seat. “Good day, Mayor. What would you like?”

“Cherry brandy on the rocks. Just line them up, please.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Before the proprietor could leave, the Mayor added, “Access to your telephone, also.”

True to the proprietor’s words, as one glass of brandy was finished, another glass was ready to go, like bullets entering the chamber in a gun turret.

The Mayor dialed the headquarters for the Mayor’s Guard. “Jennifer, please,” as someone answered the phone.

“Yes, Mayor,” Jennifer answered after the Mayor had waited a minute.

“Could you please meet me at the Little Havana?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Good day, Jennifer.” Then the Mayor placed the receiver on the phone cradle. She took another sip of cherry brandy.

The Mayor thought, just 57 years on this earth. What have I accomplished? She christened the opening of several new buildings. She made friends with all the movers and shakers in the United Federation of Cities. She reflected on the people who influenced her life – her mother, her grandmother, her political science professor in college, but what she had really accomplished – just some dates on her tombstone and a plaque with her picture on the row of plaques of previous Mayors in the lobby of city hall – just another Mayor, who really did not do anything remarkable. Her great-grandmother, the first Mayor of Chicago, was famous when she and others instituted the Federation and created a new system. They were the foremothers of God’s second chance after the Great War.

Mayor Lilith downed another glass of cherry brandy. Before she could set that glass down, another glass was on the table and ready to go.

The Mayor lifted her shirt and felt the scar on her groin, a symbol of a barren womb. Tears formed in her eyes as she remembered the pain of losing a daughter. Then the pain intensified when the doctor said she would remain barren. Of course, that would show on the plaques of Mayors since all the Mayors since the inception of the Federation had one family line. Then a new family line of Mayors would come after her. Who will take over the city? Chicago has been at peace for 68 years, 68 years. At no other time in human history have we humans been at peace – no wars, murders, or crimes.

The Mayor saw the male servant lean against the wall and rub his left chest area. The Mayor sprang from her seat, almost tripped over her own feet from the spell of alcohol, and ran to the man. “Are you okay?” She asked in a concerned voice.

The man’s eyes widened as he stood there frozen.

The proprietor ran over. “Is everything okay, Mayor?”

“I thought this man might have chest pains, like a bad heart.”

“Oh, no, ma’am. He’s just sore from moving the inventory early in the shift.”

“We must take care of God’s creatures,” the Mayor added.

“Yes, ma’am. We must serve the Grand Ole Lady in the Sky.”

Jennifer, the second in command of the Mayor's Guard, ran over. "Mayor, are you okay?"

"Everything is fine. Come, Jennifer. Let's talk."

"Yes, ma'am."

They sat down at the booth. The Mayor took her original seat while Jennifer sat opposite her.

"Jennifer, what would you like?"

"I'm not hungry."

"Oh, come on. You know, you have worked for me for fifteen years, and I don't know your favorite dish."

Jennifer hesitated as she looked around.

"Please, Jennifer. What is your favorite dish?"

"Spaghetti Carbonara."

"Oh, an excellent choice. Waiter. Waiter."

The proprietor rushed over. "Yes, ma'am."

"Spaghetti Carbonara, please."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Oh wait, make that two Spaghetti Carbonaras. And another cherry brandy with ice."

"Yes, ma'am."

The proprietor left the Mayor and Jennifer alone, but the male servant placed a glass of brandy before Jennifer. The Mayor started, "Jennifer, I unleashed the devil."

"What? I don't understand, ma'am."

"Let me start from the beginning. Every city has a cache of weapons from the old days. We've kept them just in case, just in case we had some emergency."

Jennifer sipped her brandy while her eyes continued focusing on the Mayor.

"You know, I just wasn't thinking. I was angry over the men's defiance, so I gave Sarah access to those weapons. When I realized what kind of person Sarah was, I understood I had given the wrong person too much power."

"Ma'am, I assure you that Sarah will use those weapons prudently."

“Unfortunately, I do not share your optimism. When I visited her troops’ training, I understood that I would have a problem. Have you seen Sarah lately?”

“No, ma’am. She says she is on a special assignment. She has not been at the office in weeks.”

“I know. I learned she moved her training outside the city. She does not want anyone spying on her.”

The male servant brought two plates of Spaghetti Carbonara and placed each dish in front of each woman. They both nibbled at the mound of spaghetti twirled around their forks.

“I will be blunt, Jennifer. I know Sarah is your boss. Do you have a problem exercising extreme prejudice against your boss?”

“Ma’am, my first duty is to Chicago and the Mayor. Everything else comes second.”

“Thank you, Jennifer. That is what I wanted to hear,” the Mayor said. Then she reached into her bag and pulled out a card. The Mayor slid the card across the table. “This card gives you access to the cache of weapons.”

“What would you like me to do, Mayor?”

“Like Sarah, you must train a group of men. Then you have to take Sarah on. Then you must eliminate that group of wild men outside the city.”

“I think Susan is with them. What do I do about Susan?”

The Mayor reached across the table and placed her hands on top of Jennifer’s hands. “Jennifer, do everything in your power to bring Susan in.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Do I have your word?”

“Yes, Mayor. I will do everything I can to bring Susan to you. May I ask why?”

“As director of the Male Processing Center, Susan possesses trade secrets. We need her.”

“I will do as you wish.”

“Thank you, Jennifer. I knew I could count on you.” The Mayor removed her hands and placed them in her lap.

“Mayor, do you want me to show the same respect for Sarah.”

“Jennifer, use any means to remove Sarah. I mean any.”

Jennifer looked down and almost tried to say something. After a minute, Jennifer looked up. “May I enquire who is next in line for Captain of the Mayor’s Guards?”

“Jennifer, you don’t have to enquire. I placed a great burden on you. If you succeed, then you have gone beyond the call of duty. You are beyond reproach. The captain’s position is yours, assuming that you are interested.”

“I understand. I shall succeed.”

“I know I can count on you, Jennifer.”

“Good day, ma’am.”

“Good day, my future captain.”

After Jennifer had left, the Mayor motioned the male servant wearing the blue clothes to come over.

“The menu, please,” the Mayor said.

The servant returned with the menu and placed it before the Mayor. The Mayor opened the menu and went through page after page. Then she stopped at the dessert page. “Which dessert do you like the best?”

The servant just stood there.

“Oh, yeah, right. Which dessert do you recommend? What is the favorite in this place?”

The servant pointed at the picture of the pecan pie with a scoop of vanilla ice cream on top.

“Good choice. One slice of pecan pie with a scoop of vanilla ice cream on top.”

The Mayor snapped the menu shut and slid it towards the servant. Before the Mayor could blink her eye, a small plate of pecan pie was placed in front of her. Then the Mayor did something she had not done before, reaching into her pocket and pulling out Federation credits. “I don’t know how much anything costs,” she muttered as she placed a thousand credits on the table. She rose from the booth and whispered to the servant, “I can’t eat the pie. Stomach issues. The pie is yours once I leave this place.” Then she rose from the booth and walked towards the exit.

The proprietor ran to the Mayor with the Federation credits in her hand. “Mayor. Mayor. You forgot your credits,” she said.

The Mayor turned and faced the proprietor. “They are your credits. I paid the bill.”

“Ma’am, the bill was only 120 credits.”

The Mayor reached out and grasped the hands of the proprietor. The Mayor gently squeezed the proprietor’s hand around the money. “They’re just credits. Life is more valuable than credits,” the Mayor said. Then she glanced at the male servant and noticed he had returned an empty dessert plate to the kitchen.

The Mayor led the proprietor to the front glass door. “Look out here – our beautiful city,” she said. “Every day, when we wake up in the morning, it is another gift from God. We get to see another day in this beautiful world. Maybe as Mayor. I made mistakes. Why just shopping malls, delis, coffee shops, and restaurants? Why didn’t I incorporate more parks and nature into the city? Why didn’t I extend the city to Lake Michigan? As Mayor of this city, I have two requests from you.” The Mayor faced the proprietor and continued, “First, you keep making the best pecan pie in the city. Second, you treat your employees and servants well.” The Mayor let go of the proprietor’s hands and used one hand to point upward and added, “She is watching everything up there.” Then the Mayor walked out of the restaurant, leaving the proprietor stunned as she looked at the Mayor leaving and walking down the street.

As the Mayor walked by a trashcan, she slipped off the bracelet with the red button and tossed it into the trash. Then the Mayor returned home, where she had not been in a long time.

As she entered the living room, she collapsed onto the couch face down. She struggled to turn herself upright. Then she scooted herself so she could lift up her shirt, but she saw the surgical scars on her stomach and not the ones on her upper chest. She traced them with her index finger while the tears flowed from her eyes and down her cheeks. “I was robbed of my Bella. My poor Bella,” she screamed. After her miscarriage, the doctors found the first trace of the cancer – something she battled for half her life. Years of going in and out of the hospital while the doctors permanently removed a piece of her. “Oh, Bella.” The Mayor cried herself to sleep. A lost daughter who never was.

Chapter 24 – The Hunt

Once Sarah felt the recoil of an assault rifle in her hand, she was drunk with power. The gun felt like she was holding onto an angry serpent as the bullets ripped through metal, punched pockmarks into concrete walls, and decimated pretty much everything else that stood in the bullet's way.

Sarah looked at her team of twelve rugged men, who had plenty of empty space between their ears. When she yelled attack, the men ran forward and destroyed anything in front of them. Now, Sarah understood the power of the Old World and how they almost had destroyed everything on the planet.

Sarah saw the Mayor's look of fear as she came out for the inspection. Sara understood. Sarah held all the power, and she could march on city hall with her small army, and the Mayor could do nothing except press the red button on her bracelet. But Sarah fixed that. She asked to change the frequency that the shock collars operated on so that only she would have the power to shock her men, but only if they disobeyed her. No other woman could punish her men.

Sarah thought about marching her men up to City Hall. What could the Mayor do? Then Sarah could take Chicago; Chicago would be hers, but Sarah hesitated in taking that final step. What if the Mayor had something from the old world that would protect her. Sarah tried to understand the old technology as much as she could, but some of it made no sense.

Sarah also thought about her number two, Jennifer. Sarah was sure that the Mayor had Jennifer keep an eye on her, and even though Jennifer obeyed her, she had this look in her eyes. Jennifer was just waiting for Sarah to make a mistake, and then the number two trumped the number one. Like hell. That nosy little witch. Sarah knew she could not get too close to the cliff's edge because Jennifer would not hesitate to push her over. Sarah knew she made a mistake leaving the laptop from the old world on her desk. She had no proof, but she was sure Jennifer had seen and turned it on. At least Jennifer didn't have access to the weapons.

The problem was more than just with the Mayor and Jennifer. Training her men in the city attracted attention, too much attention as a curious pedestrian just happened to take the wrong turn and crossed the barriers to her training camp. Then that pedestrian witnessed the unimaginable weapons that should not exist in the new world. That pedestrian would tell two people, and then those two women would tell two people each, and so on. By the next day, every woman in Chicago would know something was happening in a secluded neighborhood in South Chicago. Then pedestrian traffic would soar around her camp as curious eyes wanted to look.

Sarah moved her army outside the walls and into the ruins outside the city. These neighborhoods were abandoned long ago, and Sarah could continue her training without curious eyes around. Sarah rarely went to the city, but she kept in touch with her office by phone at the guard station at the wall gate. Sarah ensured Jennifer was always out of the office and doing various security inspections around the city, keeping her ambitious assistant busy.

Sarah walked to an abandoned brick building with its windows and doors missing. She forced five men wearing black shirts and black pants with hoods covering their faces to walk outside and into the middle of the street.

“Men, fall in,” Sarah yelled.

The men quickly stood in a straight line.

“These men have committed crimes against women. They made the streets of Chicago unsafe. Thus, they must be punished. So, we have been designated as the punishers, the exterminators. It is our job to rid society of these rodents.”

Sarah walked in front of the men in black clothes, and she pulled off their hoods one by one. Two men had tears running down their faces, while another looked at the ground in shame.

Sarah walked in front of her men. “Remove the bullet clip from your rifles and hand them to me,” she said as she walked by each man and took his gun clip. Then she returned to the line of the condemned men.

“For this exercise, you can use your bayonet, hands, or whatever you find to kill these men.” Sarah turned to the condemned men and used a large knife to cut the tie strings that bound their hands behind

their backs. “Condemned men, I’ll give you a chance. I’ll give you ten seconds head start. You can run anywhere you desire. If you can escape, then praise Lady Jesus for sparing your life. However, if we find you, then your life is ours. Then it is time to meet God, and she is an angry god who hates men.”

“Ten!” Sarah screamed.

The condemned men just stood there. Sarah kicked one of them hard in the leg. Four condemned men ran in the opposite direction of Sarah’s army, while one man fell to the ground and started crying.

“Nine!”

“Eight!”

“Seven!”

Sarah turned, and she could barely see the nine men. Several ran down the street while others dashed into the abandoned buildings.

“Six!”

“Five!”

The man on the ground continued crying.

“Four!”

“Three!”

“Get ready, men. Two!”

“One!”

“Go. Exterminate those rodents of society,” Sarah said as she looked down at the man on the ground and kicked him hard in the ribs. Two men ran up to the crying man and thrust and twisted bayonets into the man’s body. After a minute, the crying man cried no more.

“Weakling,” Sarah shouted as she looked down at the dead man in disgust.

Sarah looked at her men. “Come. Let’s get the others,” she said as she and her men ran down the street after the condemned men. Sarah broke her men into three groups. She had one team continue down the street. Another team member took a right into the abandoned stores, while Sarah and her team thought one of the men had run into an old abandoned pharmacy to the left.

Sarah leaned against the outer wall next to the pharmacy’s front door. She held one hand up to signal to wait while she held her long knife up in her other hand and peeked inside, just in case a man

waited on the other side with a brick in his hands. She didn't see anything. She made a shhhh sound with her index finger and walked inside slowly while her men followed slowly.

Sarah looked at the floor and saw something had recently run in there. A trail of footprints went through the layer of heavy dust and led upstairs.

Sarah approached the stairwell and slowly climbed each step. Each man followed Sarah's example, and a board creaked here and there. Eventually, they all made it to the top floor. Sarah waited in the hallway while she signaled each man to check all the rooms.

Most windows on the second floor were intact, and there was not so much dust and dirt here. The men returned to the hallway and shrugged their shoulders. Sarah whispered to two of her men, "Run downstairs loudly."

The men ran down the stairs with heavy steps, and the floor shook slightly with each step. Sarah heard a creak from the darkroom on her right. She held up her hand to halt her men and peeked into the room with lots of old, broken furniture.

Sarah listened intently as she heard a breathing sound coming from a pile of junk like a whispering grasshopper. Sarah pointed at the pile. "Attack!"

The three men ran to the pile of junk furniture like rabid dogs. They threw the furniture off to the side until they had uncovered a condemned man at the bottom. The men took turns thrusting and twisting the bayonet into the body. After a few minutes, the body looked like a hamburger dressed in black, shredded clothes.

"Good job, boys," Sarah screamed. "Come. Let's find the others."

Susan and her team returned to the streets. She saw two teams dragging two corpses to the street. One of her men was also dead, lying next to the two corpses.

"What happened to this guy?"

One man pointed at one of the condemned men and said, "A rock to the head."

Sarah nodded. "You guys should be careful entering rooms. All in all, you guys did a great job. Just one more to go, guys."

The three teams went in separate directions to search for the last man. After an hour, the men returned empty-handed.

Sarah gathered her men together. “Don’t worry, men,” she said. “We’ll get the last guy. Let’s get something to eat. You, you, and you go hunt for some deer. You others follow me.”

Sarah returned to the camp, where they made a vacant building into a base. Several men scavenged for wood and built a fire in the alley. Two men kept an outlook on the roof while others went to the stream a few blocks away to bring water. They also washed the dishes.

After an hour, the three men returned to the camp and carried a deer carcass with its feet tied to a long stick. The men washed the carcass and placed it over the fire, turning it, while the fire sizzled and charred the meat evenly.

The men gathered around the fire and passed strips of meat around. Even Sarah took her large knife and cut a large chunk of meat from the loin. Sarah sat away from the men because they had a strong, musky scent, which disgusted her.

Sarah ate her meat in peace. Of course, she initially found eating meat strange because the women ate small portions but plenty of everything else. Out here, she studied the videos from the old world about how to survive in the wild. Then she tasted wild venison, a little gamey and earthy, but the meat held power. She had eaten venison for weeks and could feel and see the changes in her body as she lost body fat while her muscles became more defined, and it seemed like she had grown several inches.

Sarah went to her room, away from the men, and lay down near the wall with a loaded gun under her sleeping bag. She woke up as stray dogs howled and fought each other. She glanced at her watch and saw it was 2.34. She rose and woke the men. “Come,” she said.

Sarah took out her infrared binoculars while the men followed as they searched for that last condemned man. They walked and searched for hours.

Sarah and her men came to a small grass lot nestled between the ruins with a small stream flowing through it. Then Sarah saw it; a red glow came from the mouth of a large drainage pipe that fed water into the stream.

Sarah made the shhh sound again, and everyone approached the drainage pipe slowly. She peeked inside and was blinded by red. She removed the goggles and returned them to her belt bag, and she lightly felt inside the large pipe until her fingers sensed something in front. Then she grabbed his feet and yanked him out of the pipe.

The man opened his eyes and tried to kick and punch everything around him.

Sarah grabbed her large knife and used the heavy handle to hit him in the head. The man passed out immediately. Then Sarah plunged the knife into his chest while blood squirted everywhere, spraying some of the men.

Sarah pulled the knife out of his chest and licked it. It tasted rancid and foul, like an animal fed garbage its whole life.

The men groaned in satisfaction. And Sarah was happy because she was at peace. Then Sarah knew what to do and how she could spy on the Mayor.

Chapter 25 – Strengthening the Opposition

Paul held mass every Sunday. Although the days blurred together, and it was hard to know which day it was, the ringing of the church bells from downtown Chicago alerted everyone in the area that church service was ready to begin. Today was Sunday.

Paul and the guys headed to the dining room, pushed all the tables against the far wall, and formed rows of chairs before the makeshift pulpit. The men kept a table with chairs around it for the three women and allowed their presence for worship. Paul stood in front of the men and read a well-known passage in the Bible. Paul did his best to read scripture, give hope, and overcome adversity. Then he ended his sermon with the group's power verse, the one verse that bonded all men in their group to their common cause, their mutual plight – Ephesians 6:10-13.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Put on the whole armor of God to take your stand against the devil's schemes.

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Therefore, put on the whole armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground and, after you have done everything, stand. Stand firm, then.

Paul asked his men to bow their heads and pray. "God, please deliver us from evil. Free us from our fate in life. Look over us and help us become stronger in spirit and faith. Help the men find their way and continue to help us grow and prosper. Amen."

The group chanted, "Amen."

Paul looked at the audience and noticed the empty chairs reserved for the ladies. He guessed they did not enjoy the presence of a male God. "Men, we need volunteers to go into the city and recruit new converts," Paul said. We must show men the way, teach them the faith, and grow our numbers."

Every man shot their hand up. Paul always made sure to rotate the volunteers and that everyone played their part. At the end of the service, Paul asked, “Does anyone have any questions?” During Paul’s first sermon, he noticed that men’s minds were shackled, and they couldn’t think. They rarely asked questions. Over time, the men began opening their minds and became more intelligent as the mental shackles that the women placed over their minds were removed.

James raised his hand.

“Yes, brother James.”

“Paul, I have been thinking. The women changed the characters from men to women in the Bible, and the women always referred to the devil as a man. Perhaps there is a translation error. Shouldn’t the devil be a woman?”

“That is a good question, James.”

“I have read the Bible once already. The devil is only mentioned about 25 times, and the Book of Job had a bet between God and the devil. However, this verse implies a male.” Paul picked up the Bible and ruffled through the pages. “Where is it? Let’s see. Ah, here it is. James 4:7. Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. See. The Bible clearly uses he to indicate the gender of the devil.”

“But James is my name. I give you permission to change him into her. Just place a s in front of he.”

The congregation erupted into laughter.

Once the audience became quiet, Paul continued, “I like how you think, but we men have only made a comeback since the old days. We should stick to close to the truth as much as possible. If we started changing the passages of the Bible, then we are no better than the women.”

“But we are better than the women,” James screamed.

The whole mass erupted into cheers and laughter again.

After the laughter died, Paul continued, “Taking a holistic attitude towards the Bible. A man was created in God’s image, but man is not a God. We have a dual nature—we are both good and evil. God represents our good side, while the devil represents our

bad side. Because of this duality, we must learn to do good and suppress evil. Does anyone else have questions?"

The audience remained silent.

"Then let's break for lunch."

Everyone started organizing the tables and chairs to make the room a dining room again. Several men went into the kitchen and started cooking.

An hour later, plates of steaming corn, fried potatoes, and roasted venison lay at the table's center with two pitchers of hot black coffee on both ends. Everyone went to the counter, picked a plate and silverware, and returned to the table.

The three women joined the men as the men sat down to eat. They grabbed a plate and silverware and sat next to their man.

Luke got up, went to the kitchen, and returned with a plate of pecans. Luke grabbed one and plopped it into his mouth. Then he passed the plate to Paul, who took one and passed the plate around.

Paul placed the nut into his mouth and slowly chewed to savor the little morsel. "Buttery with a hint of bitterness," Paul said. "So, how do you make pecan pie?" Paul added as he turned to look at Susan.

Susan shrugged her shoulders. "How would I know?"

"I thought everyone knew how to cook a little. It's an important life skill."

"Sorry, 447. Didn't learn to cook. Just go to the store and buy a pecan pie."

"Sure. I can dress like a woman, walk into a store, and buy a pie with Federation credits."

"There you go."

"By the way, I asked you to call me Paul, not 447."

"You came into this world as 447, and you will leave this world as 447."

"Susan, have you forgotten your Bible? Paul was born with the name Saul but changed his name when he saw Jesus."

"I guess it depends on which version you are quoting. It appears you are quoting a bastardized version. Paula was born as Saule because Paula was a woman. Then Saule transformed into Paula."

Paul shook his head in disgust. Susan purposely did the opposite of everything he did. Paul leaned over towards Luke and whispered in Luke's ear, "So, how's your union going?"

"It looks like mine is going just as smoothly as yours," Luke whispered and added, "I even tried to do the opposite of what I wanted, and that still backfired. It's like we are a magnet. I am north, and she is south. We are always pulling and repelling against each other."

"Here, here. No secrets," Matthew said.

Paul spoke up. "I was just telling brother Luke how my union was going. My union is going perfectly."

The men and women continued eating and making small talk with their neighbors. Then the men cleaned the tables and put everything away while the women left the room and skipped their chores.

Paul spoke up. "Okay, men. Get dressed and dress warmly. Wear your brown clothes underneath your coat. It's time to find new recruits." As the five men gathered at the entrance to the base, Luke asked Paul, "Does Susan know you are going?"

Paul shrugged his shoulders and replied, "I don't know. Plus, I think it is better that way. We seem to argue over everything."

"Very well."

The men walked into the cold winter and headed to the wall of Chicago. They came across several blocks of ruins, which were spread out. The wall of Chicago looked small from a distance, but it kept growing taller as the men walked nearer. They almost reached the wall when they came across a collapsed street that led into the sewer. The men walked single file down into the sewer and continued walking south. After a couple of blocks, they came across a collapsed wall that led into a basement inside the city. The men climbed into the hole, entered the cellar, and headed to the ground floor by walking up the stairs. They reached a large room with newspaper plastered across the windows while removing the wiring and plasterboard.

Paul asked Luke, "So what do you think they'll do with this building?"

“It looks like they are renovating it. The women are turning it into something else.”

Paul nodded in agreement as he said, “Brothers, gather around. We are in their world once we walk out the door. We must be careful. If you get lost, make your way here, and we’ll meet on the other side of the wall and head back to the base.”

The men walked out into the cold street while snow and wind blew. They saw their first male picking up garbage on the street and then walked into an alley. They followed behind the man and surrounded him as he opened a trashcan lid and dropped the debris.

The man looked around, surprised, but he didn’t say anything.

Paul spoke, “Brother, my name is Paul.”

The man’s eyes widened in fear as he pointed at his mouth.

“Brother, you don’t have to be afraid. We are free men. We’ve come here to rescue you.”

“From what?” the man whispered.

Paul made a sweeping motion with his hands. “From all this. We live on our own outside the city.”

“Outside the city? Are you mad?”

“No, brother. We are free. We are free to serve our God, our male God.”

“If the women hear you speak that blasphemy, they’ll punish you.”

“They cannot punish us. We are free. We are free to worship our male Jesus and our male God.”

“I can’t leave this place. That is all I know.”

“But out there, we’ll teach you how to survive.”

The man scoffed at the group and said, “There is nothing outside the walls, just ruins and wild animals.” Then the man scanned the faces around him. “I get back to work.”

“Praise the Lord.”

As the man walked away, Peter said, “Well, that went well, fellows.”

Paul replied, “These women are like Satan. They have such a strong mental grip over the men. It is hard to break through.”

The men walked in the opposite direction of the man and passed another block. Then they walked along the street and passed a bakery shop with pies in the window.

Bartholomew stopped and salivated at the pecan pie in the bakery's window.

"Come, brother," Paul said.

Bartholomew continued, "We'll go inside. Take a couple of pies and run down the street."

"Brother, there will be no commotion while we're in the city. If the women know we are coming back, they'll search for our hidden passage into the city."

Bartholomew took another look at the pie and licked his lips. "Very well," he said as he turned away from the window and joined the group.

As the men continued walking along the street, two women walking together looked surprised to see too many males together. One of the women pulled up her coat sleeve and pushed the red button.

The men froze.

The woman's eyes widened when the red button had no impact.

Paul understood at once as he clutched his throat, making choking noises, and dropped to his knees. The men caught on and did the same. James took it a step further, falling into the snow bank and twitching his body.

The ladies passed by with broad smiles.

After a minute, they rose and looked in the direction the women had walked. "That was a close one," James said.

Luke added, "Good thing these heavy coats cover up where the collar should be. We would have a mess if those women could see we have no collars."

"Then they would be running down the street screaming," Paul added.

The men walked another couple of blocks. Then they spotted two men heading into a building that was being renovated.

Luke pointed at the two men. "Brothers, over there."

The men walked quickly into the renovated building. They spotted the men in the next room as they sat down with their backs

against the wall. They unfolded a wrapped package of wax paper that contained their lunch—half-frozen gruel.

As the men approached, the two men looked up while they shoveled cold gruel into their mouths.

Paul began, “Brothers. We have come here to rescue you.”

One of the men spoke up, “Rescue us? From what?”

“From the women? From this society?”

“Good luck with that.”

“We live outside the walls, in harmony with nature. We live as free men.”

“Outside the wall. That’s impossible. Nothing is out there – just the agricultural fields and the countryside.”

“And we live out there also.”

One man continued eating his cold gruel while the other stopped and dropped his spoon onto the wax paper. “Whatcha eat?”

“Whatever we find.” Paul looked up towards the heaven. “The Lord provides.”

“The Lord? She only protects the women.”

“Oh, no, brother. The Lord is not a woman but a man.”

“Prove it.”

Paul took the small pocket Bible from his deep outside coat pocket, opened the book, and read Genesis, “God made man in his image.” Then Paul showed the man the passage.

“I can’t read. The women don’t allow it.”

“Then brother, we’ll teach you how to read.”

The guy turned to his fellow worker, “Whatcha you think, 588?”

The second guy dropped his spoon to the ground. He crumpled the rest of his half-eaten gruel in the wax paper, stood up, and threw the gruel ball against the far wall. It splattered gruel everywhere while the wax paper stuck to the wall. “I’m so tired of this gruel, three times a day, seven days a week since I was born,” the man said.

“Amen, brother,” Paul’s group chimed.

The second man, 588, asked, “So no more gruel.”

“No, brother. For now, we have corn and potatoes. I believe we have fresh eggs and a couple of chickens.”

“You eat the women’s food.”

“Of course, brothers. The Lord has given man dominion over the animals of the planet.”

“Alright.”

“Welcome to our group.”

“Brother, please take our new members to the base,” Paul said as he looked at Bartholomew. “Fix them a hot plate of food. Have Brother Peter fry the eggs. Peter makes the best eggs.”

“Okay. C’mon guys. Let’s go back,” Peter replied.

The remaining group stayed behind, looking for converts. The men talked to just ten men that day and got three new members, but the wind gusts picked up, and when it whipped around the skyscrapers, it stole all the warmth from their bodies.

The guys returned to the vacant building and rested inside. They made sure no one spotted them as they entered that building.

Paul started, “We did well today. Three more joined the cause.”

James asked, “What I find amazing is that we offer the men a way out of servitude. We give them a chance to live as free men. But only three men out of ten take that offer. I just don’t get it.”

“You can’t blame these men,” Luke answered. All their lives, women told them what to do. They controlled every aspect of their lives. That’s all they know. Only the courageous would drop everything they know and come and join us. Only the strong can leave everything behind and go into the unknown. It takes a leap of faith.”

“I just wished there was an easier way to speed things up,” James replied.

“I don’t think God wanted to give us an easy life,” Paul said and added, “If everything was easy, we could just park ourselves in front of the fire every day and eat. Then we would grow weak and fat. Then what is the point of life? We were designed to move and do work. We are all following the path of life. Perhaps our paths are different, but God places obstacles on our path. Every obstacle we get around makes us stronger and builds our character. Then when we reach the end of the path, we can look back to where we came from. We become proud of all the obstacles that we overcame. Then we can join our maker with a strong soul and a strong love for God.”

Several men clapped while Luke patted Paul’s right shoulder.

Paul continued, “Men, don’t worry. We are making progress. Gaining two or three new members per week is progress. We’ll have an army by summer. Then we can go to the city. We all can live in harmony.”

“And here is our new Mayor – Paul,” Luke screamed.

Paul turned red while the group of men clapped and cheered.

“And pecan pie for everyone,” Paul screamed.

Everyone hooted and hollered.

The men descended the stairs into the basement that led into the subway tunnels and returned home to a warm dinner.

Chapter 26 – Another Cappuccino, Please

Susan couldn't tolerate living at the compound with the savages, but two new women had joined. She even let 447 pet her kitty occasionally, and she would whisper in his ear – I love you. Then he would reply with – love you back.

Susan went downstairs and saw the two women drinking coffee in the spacious dining room. The men had formed a fireplace in the corner that warmed the place. Susan grabbed a clean coffee mug—something the men had found: a whole box of coffee mugs in the kitchen protected by a canopy of dust.

Susan came over to the women. “Hi, I’m Susan.”

“Hi, I’m Elizabeth.”

“I’m Priscilla. Please join us.”

Susan sat down and joined them. “Any news from the city?” She asked.

Elizabeth poured Susan a cup of hot joe and started, “Not much. Just some savages causing a little trouble, a little mayhem.”

“I guess you have met them, then.”

Elizabeth and Priscilla looked at each other and burst into laughter.

“Any news on the Mayor?” Susan continued.

“She gives more speeches. She promises to hunt down those savages and restore peace and harmony to Chicago,” Elizabeth replied.

“It looks like your vacation in the wild will end shortly. The Mayor will find those savages, you know. What I meant is have you heard any bad news or something, like the director of the Male Processing Unit,” Susan said.

“Why? It’s just a factory to grow men. I haven’t heard anything. Should we?” Priscilla asked.

“I guess not.”

“How long have you been here?” Elizabeth asked.

Susan shrugged. “I don’t know. I left around autumn, as the trees started to turn colors.”

“Wow. It’s almost Christmas. You may have missed out on the destruction.”

“Destruction?”

“It was crazy. We even heard about this in Louis City. A band of wild men caused ten blocks of destruction in downtown Chicago. At our next layover in Chicago, we walked along the streets, but most of the damage was already fixed.”

“You live in Louis City?” Susan asked.

“Yes,” they both chimed.

“How’s the coffee shops, the shopping, the art district?”

“The best in the Federation.”

“You’ve been to other cities?”

“Of course. We are transport engineers. We’ve been to all the cities.”

“You’re so lucky.”

“What do you do?” Elizabeth asked.

“I work as a biochemist in the Male Processing Unit. That’s why I asked you about the director. I had some problems with the Mayor. The Mayor can be quite demanding, quite strict.”

“So you make the males?”

“I don’t make them. I just alter their growth, like taking a wild bobcat and transforming it into a house kitten. I try to make them docile, obedient, and loyal so we have a reason for keeping them around.”

“So how’s that working?”

“They captured me, didn’t they? I guess I made a couple of mistakes. Nothing that some growth inhibitors can fix.”

Elizabeth and Priscilla giggled again.

Susan went to the punchline and whispered, “What if we snuck away and returned to the city?”

Elizabeth and Priscilla looked at each other, and then they both looked at Susan. “Not yet.”

“What do you mean not yet?”

“This is interesting, different. We never have been captured by wild men and lived outside the city,” Elizabeth said. Then Priscilla added, “It’s quite exciting.”

“Exciting? You’re living with savages out in the middle of nowhere. There are no coffee shops, no shopping, no delicious food,

no nothing. Look at my coffee—no cream, no milk, no sugar. I would kill for a cappuccino.”

“But this is exciting. We haven’t been with men like this before.”

“If you want men, I know a place in Chicago—the Garden House.”

“Been there, done that,” Priscilla said while Elizabeth added, “Boring.”

“I can get you a special rate. I’m friends with the proprietor.”

“But there, we dominate. Here, we’re not. It’s different. A different experience. It’s a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

“But don’t you miss civilization?”

“Of course, we miss. We shall return eventually once we get bored here.”

“How long would that take?”

Both Elizabeth and Priscilla shrugged their shoulders.

Susan looked around the barren dining room. “Where’re the males?”

“Off to the city,” Elizabeth replied.

“How do you know?”

“My mate tells me everything.”

“Really?”

Elizabeth explained, “Yes. After he lies down with me, he just lies there. He tells me everything. How they sneak into the city. How they recruit new males from the city. Everything. I just lie there and massage his stomach. Kiss his ear. Whisper sweet things in his ear, like how smart and brave he is. Then he talks, talks, talks. I say – just tell me more, my love. Then all his secrets come pouring out.”

“Who’s your mate?”

“Luke. The one who thinks he is so smart.”

Susan chuckled. “All the men think they are smart,” Susan said sarcastically. “How do they get into the city?”

“They found a secret passage.”

Susan thought it was odd. The men seemed to be getting larger, but it was hard to tell. They all looked alike. They all grew hair on their face; they all smelled; they all seemed so dirty, but they found a way into the city. All she had to do was bring these women in and tell the Mayor about the secret passage into the city; she would be a

hero. She could get her job back. The Mayor may be nice to her for once.

Susan rose. “Ladies, I must go. I enjoyed the coffee and the conversation.”

They parted with goodbyes.

Susan went into the kitchen and tossed the cup into the sink. “I think mud from Lake Michigan would taste better than his horrid coffee,” She muttered. “Why couldn’t the guys steal the good stuff? The quality of coffee indicates the degree of sophistication of society.”

Susan walked through the dining room, went upstairs to grab the ugly military coat that 447 found for her, and went outside. The winter coldness bit hard, but Susan endured. The clouds blanketed Chicago tightly, and the sun would not be there that day. However, it wasn’t snowing. The men’s track formed a well-defined path, and Susan followed that path. Then she looked up at the skyscrapers of Chicago, where she would die for a cup of good coffee.

Quickly, Susan walked away from the base, which led to several blocks of ruins outside the five-story stone walls of Chicago. Then Susan spotted the entrance. “Those clever monkeys,” she uttered.

Part of the old street collapsed and formed a slanted crater into the ground. The crater would be hard to spot on a warm day, but the steam and warmth below had melted the snow at the entrance. Even a blind person could find the entrance on a snowy day.

Susan approached the crater and started walking downward. The crater is connected to the subway system below. Susan heard about the tunnels but has yet to venture into them, but the city used them for utility lines. Some businesses were lucky enough to be located by subway stations that formed basement storage units, although the city did not sanction them. The city looked the other way as long the storage room did not interfere with the utilities.

Susan walked along the subway tunnel for a couple of blocks. It was warm here, and Susan had to unzip her winter coat. Then she looked around. She saw a partially collapsed wall, where she peered in and saw light reflecting down a stairwell. She climbed through the hole and walked up the stairs. She was on the first floor, and she could see traffic through the window. She looked around and saw

that this building was under renovation. She approached the glass windows and looked outside, and she smiled as she looked out on Michigan Avenue because just around the corner was her favorite clothing store. Then a few doors down was a coffee shop – perhaps not her favorite, but the pies were delicious.

Susan tossed the ancient winter coat on the floor, opened the door, and ran to the clothes shop. Boy, it was cold. Susan thought she would freeze to death as the coldness surrounded and choked her. Then she ran into the store.

The proprietor turned her head. “Susan. Dear. Where’s your coat?”

Susan looked down at the mess, which was her clothes. Then she looked at the proprietor. “I left it somewhere, but not sure where.”

The proprietor came over. “No worries, dear. We’ll get you another.” The proprietor looked at Susan up and down and added, “My word. Your clothes, Susan.”

Susan blushed and tried to hide behind a clothes rack. “It’s been a rough couple of months.”

“It looks like it has.” The proprietor turned and looked at the male wearing a blue uniform. She clapped her hands and snapped, “Chop, chop. We have an important customer waiting.” Then she whispered, “I think he’s getting a little old.”

Susan looked at the male servant as he approached her at a snail’s pace.

“I am so happy you came to my shop. I was hoping to talk to you.”

“I’m all ears.”

“I think I need a replacement male.”

“It does appear he has come to the end of his usefulness,” Susan replied.

“I was hoping to work a deal with you.”

“I can see what I can do, but males are in short supply. You know – the problems we have been having with them lately. We have to get rid of some of them. We had a bad batch.”

“I know. The Mayor has given many speeches. Ah, these males. They should be grateful that we let them live in our society. Where would they be without us?”

“That’s easy to answer. They would be living out in the wild like savages.”

“Exactly. We give them the privilege of living in our civilization.”

The old male servant and the proprietor laid out fancy new clothes. Susan tried one garment after another. After leaving the changing room, Susan looked in a full-length mirror. She was wearing a white sweater, a little yellow flower dress, and sparkly silver shoes. Susan turned her hips in the mirror, first left and then right.

The proprietor uttered, “You look gorgeous.”

“I feel like a woman again,” Susan replied.

“You’ve always been a woman. What would you have been?”

Susan laughed and asked, “I hope you do not mind if I wear these?”

“Not a problem.”

Susan carried the bundle of clothes to the cash register. She placed the rags of clothes she had come in onto a second pile of clothes.

“Susan, what will you do with those?” The proprietor asked.

“I don’t know. I don’t think they’re salvageable.”

“Don’t worry. I can use them as rags or something.”

“Thank you,” Susan said and then looked down. “I forgot to bring Federation credits.”

The proprietor placed her hands on top of Susan’s hands. “Susan, it’s not a problem. Your credit is always good in this store. Just remember me when I need a replacement,” the proprietor said as she eyed her aging assistant.

“I can see what I can do?”

The proprietor clapped her hands again. “Get the customer a winter coat.”

The old servant came over and brought folded in his hands a brown winter coat with a trim of pinkish raccoon fur.

“I love it. Oh, thank you,” Susan said as she excitedly fidgeted up and down like a schoolgirl as her hands took possession of the new coat.

The proprietor nodded her head. "Thank you for coming today. Just remember me, Susan, okay."

"Not a problem." As Susan approached the front door, she turned, said thank you, and left the store. Then she walked a couple of doors down to the coffee shop. She sat in the rear so no one could spot her from the front window.

"Oh, Susan. It has been a while."

Susan looked up at the barista as she sat down. "Yes, it has."

"I was afraid you found a new coffee shop."

"Never. It's just I have been busy. You know, the problems we are having with these males."

"Tell me about it. The Mayor's Guard took our servant away. They said he was part of the rogue males that are terrorizing our city."

"Really?"

"That is what they said."

"Were you having problems with your male?"

"He was obedient, at least from what I could see. I asked him to help a customer with her things to a rickshaw. Then the Guards detained him."

"I'm so sorry."

"When I claimed him, the Guards would only give me a forfeiture notice. Then they took him away."

"You have rights about the city taking your property away. Just register your claim with the city and request a replacement from the Male Processing Unit. It may take several months. You know, the backlog."

The barista went to her small closet-size office next to the glass counter filled with desserts. She returned with a form. "It needs a signature." Then she placed the form in front of Susan.

Susan saw the form had changed, and a new signature box required the director's approval of the Male Processing Unit. Susan at first hesitated to sign, but then she scribbled her signature. It would be about a week before the barista discovered that the signature was invalid. Then she saw the date box. Susan scribbled, October 10, 68.

The barista saw the date. "You backdated the date?"

“It’ll help you speed up the processing.”

“Thank you, Susan.”

“Thank you, Jessica.”

“Whatever you want, it’s on the house.”

“I would kill for a hot mocha with a slice of warm pecan pie.”

“You got it.”

After 10 minutes, a mocha and pecan pie were placed before Susan. A thin wisp of steam rose from the mocha, and Susan bent down and took a long whiff, “Ahhhhh.” She waited for ten minutes until the mocha cooled enough. Then she closed her eyes and took a sip – the taste was incredible, like a convict tasting his grandma’s home cooking after twenty years of prison grub. Then she took the dessert fork and cut it into a slice of pecan pie. The bite of pie rested on her tongue as she allowed the filling to melt across her taste buds.

After fifteen minutes of bliss, Susan finished half her coffee and the pecan pie except for the tasteless pie crust. She was utterly oblivious to the world as she took another swallow of the mocha and gently swished it around her mouth.

“Susan, it’s been a long time,” an authoritative voice said.

Susan choked on the coffee, opened her eyes, and saw Jennifer looking down at her with a large smiling face. Jennifer seated herself across from her. “Don’t run. I have guards covering all the exits,” Jennifer said.

“Can I finish my coffee?”

“Please, finish your coffee. I have plenty of time, well, at least more time than you.”

Susan drank another and asked, “So what will happen to me?”

“You have some people looking for you?”

“So, I’m going back to the detention center?”

“Nope.”

“You can’t execute me. I’m a woman, a citizen of the Federation.”

“That matter is completely out of my hands. That is not my decision.”

“It’s not Sarah, is it?”

“Oh, Sarah. I am sure she would love to speak with you. Let’s just say Sarah has been a busy woman.”

“It’s the Mayor?”

“Who can say. I swore I would find you. And you have been found.”

“I guess I can’t talk you into releasing me.”

“Nothing you can say will make me change my mind.”

“Even if I tell you where the wild men are?”

“Oh, so you know. That is enticing. But you have a high price on your head.”

“Well, at least do me the honor. Don’t handcuff me here. I know everyone in this district.”

Jennifer tapped her index finger on her mouth and thought. “If you promise not to cause problems, I will handcuff you in the van.”

“Okay,” Susan said, then she drank her last bit of mocha. Then both Susan and Jennifer rose from their seating places.

The barista, Jessica, came over. “Is everything okay, ladies?”

“Everything is fine. Just official Mayor business,” Jennifer replied.

“You had me worried,” Jessica said.

“Just business with the Mayor,” Jennifer soothed and added, “It’s an emergency.”

The three ladies walked to the door. Jessica opened the door and said farewell to them as Jennifer and Susan walked into the cold Chicago winter. Outside, the cold, freezing wind blew hard. Before Susan could blink her eye, ten more guards surrounded Susan and Jennifer.

Both Susan and Jennifer entered the van. “Turn around.” Then Jennifer bound Susan’s hands with a zip tie.

“Thank you, Jennifer.”

“No problem.”

Susan sat on the cold metal bench in the meat wagon. As Jennifer held the back door open, she commanded, “Follow behind and meet me at the hospital.” Jennifer said and closed the door and sat next to Susan.

Susan leaned her head against the cold metal wall of the van and sighed because she didn’t want to meet the Mayor. The Mayor had already hated her before the incident, and she had imagined that the

Mayor hated her much more. Susan wanted to cry, but not in front of Jennifer. She refused to give Jennifer the satisfaction.

It was a long, cold trip to the hospital in the meat wagon.

Chapter 27 – The Seduction

Sarah thought and thought. Had the Mayor erected any defenses? Had Sarah planned everything out like an unappreciative subordinate deciding to promote herself. Then the idea popped into her mind – the Mayor’s assistant, Carmen.

Sarah noticed how Carmen looked at her whenever she met with the Mayor – a creepy stare that was several seconds too long. Then Carmen’s eyes would always follow Sarah when Sarah had her back turn. She bet the assistant would know about some of the Mayor’s secrets.

Sarah called the Mayor’s office for an odd errand, and Carmen picked up on the first ring. Sarah invited Carmen for dinner, who eagerly accepted.

Sarah was heading to the fanciest restaurant on Michigan Avenue, next to the art museum. Sarah strolled in, and even the proprietor popped her head out of the kitchen to show Sarah her booth, where Carmen was already waiting. The city cared for the Mayor and her bastions, who protected the city.

Carmen looked good, wearing that long, sleek black dress with several stems of roses wavering and flowing upward on the right side. Carmen spent hours curling and grooming her long brown hair that flowed halfway down her back. Then Sarah noticed Carmen’s slim, long legs, silky smooth that would taste a little like sweet chocolate.

“Sarah, I’m so glad you invited me out. I just work, work, work. The Mayor has me do this and do that. Today, I had to photocopy many documents–”

“Nice to see you too, Carmen,” Sarah said as she scooted in the booth across from Carmen.

“Then I have to prepare all the budget reports. The Mayor just complains about my work. How I can’t do anything. She talks about me behind my back–”

Sarah looked at the proprietor. “Bring me your strongest drink.” Sarah caught the proprietor’s hand before the proprietor could turn away. “Don’t forget to bring her something, too.”

Carmen continued, “I just want to quit, but our society does not let anyone change her occupation. Why do I always have to suffer? Why do—”

The proprietor returned with two vodkas on the rocks and placed them in front of Sarah and Carmen on round corkboard coasters.

“What would you ladies like to have?”

“A hamburger with fries,” Sarah said.

“I don’t know,” Carmen said. “Last time I was here, you burned the lasagna. My friend says the carbonara is too salty—”

Sarah reached across the table and placed her hands on top of Carmen’s hands. “Please, try something. I heard the fettuccine alfredo is excellent,” Sarah pleaded.

“Okay. Fettuccine alfredo,” Carmen said.

The proprietor nodded her head and walked away.

“Carmen, let’s have a toast. Grab your glass.” Sarah clinked her glass against Carmen’s. “May the Mayor learn to treat her staff better,” Sarah said.

“Amen,” Carmen replied.

The ladies tilted their glasses to their mouths. Sarah downed her drink in one swallow while Carmen only sipped hers halfway. Carmen closed her eyes and made solid facial grimaces. Please don’t puke. Please don’t puke. Please don’t puke, as Sarah thought. It would ruin the moment. Eventually, Carmen downed her vodka and added several head swirls with large, unhealthy grimaces.

“Wow. That’s a strong drink.”

“I can see.” Sarah waved the male servant over. “Another vodka on the rocks for me and peach schnapps for her.”

The waiter nodded his head and returned with the drinks.

“My neighbor plays her music too loud and drives everyone crazy on my floor. She always flushes her toilet at 2 o’clock in the morning—”

Sarah shook her head in disgust. This may be a long, long dinner. Sarah glanced at the door that led into the kitchen, where she could drag Carmen through the kitchen out the back door into the alley, choke her to death, and toss the body into the dumpster.

Sarah looked at Carmen. “Why do you make so much noise?”

Carmen turned red and became silent.

The male servant placed the drinks on the table. “Another toast,” Sarah proposed. The ladies drank their liquors.

Carmen became a little intoxicated and continued gibbering, “I don’t like all these male servants around. I don’t feel safe around—”

Sarah scooted around the booth to get closer to Carmen. She placed her hand on Carmen’s thigh and started rubbing. Carmen froze and dreamily looked at Sarah.

That shut her up, Sarah thought. At least I don’t have to dispose of her body, or at least not yet.

The male servant brought the ladies’ food over. Sarah ate that hamburger with one hand while massaging Carmen’s thigh under the table with the other hand. Sarah’s hand swept in wider arcs until she could almost touch Carmen’s holy place.

The women continued eating in silence. The hamburger bun disintegrated into pieces, so Sarah jabbed at the remaining meat with a fork and left the bun pieces on the plate.

“You’ve only eaten half your fettuccine.”

“I think I am full.”

“No problem. The check, please.” Sarah paid for the dinner and left the restaurant with Carmen while holding her hand.

“Do you want to see a movie,” Carmen suggested.

“Sure. That sounds good.”

As the ladies were walking, the street became dark. Sarah led Carmen down the steps of a stoop that led down a flight of stairs to an entrance of an apartment building, forming a dark cavern. Sarah pushed Carmen against the wall near the mailboxes and placed both hands on Carmen’s waist.

“You know it’s a sin for two women to lie down together,” Carmen whispered.

“I know.” Then Sarah kissed Carmen’s lips.

Sarah pulled back and whispered, “Open your mouth and let our tongues twirl around the merry-go-round.” Then Sarah kissed Carmen deeper. Sarah moved her hand down to Carmen’s knee, entered her dress, and headed north to the holy well. Sarah’s hands touched soft fur because Carmen didn’t wear any underwear.

Sarah leaned back but kept her hands on Carmen’s waist and crotch.

“Won’t God be angry with us? Won’t she send us to hell with the men?” Carmen pleaded.

Sarah whispered, “Our universe is infinite with infinite possibilities. Do you think God has so much free time that she can come and spy on two of her ladies?”

Sarah and Carmen stared into each other eyes. Then Sarah went into another long, wet kiss as she stuck her finger deeper into Carmen’s holy well. Carmen contorted her body, but Sarah leaned hard against Carmen, trapping Carmen between her and the wall like a fox trapped in a snare.

Sarah pulled back; she removed her finger from the holy well and sucked on it, letting it go in and out of her mouth. “Yumi. Delicious Holy Water.” Then Sarah grabbed Carmen’s hand and led her down the street.

“Do you have a key to the Mayor’s office?”

Carmen nodded her head yes.

“Then we should go there,” Sarah said.

The women made it to Carmen’s desk in the anteroom outside the Mayor’s Office. Sarah pushed Carmen against her desk and kissed and fondled her some more.

“Come,” Sarah said.

“We can’t. The Mayor will be furious.”

“She won’t know.”

“We can’t. We mustn’t.”

Sarah led Carmen into the Mayor’s Office. She lifted Carmen onto the desk and opened Carmen’s legs. Sarah kissed Carmen’s knees, one by one. Then she kissed her thighs, one by one. Then she opened Carmen’s legs farther, almost like snapping the wishbone of a Christmas turkey. Sarah licked as much as she could while Carmen tried to squirm and wiggle away from her. Then Sarah opened the flaps to the holy well, and she suckled and sucked on the button-like formation on top of the well while gripping Carmen’s legs hard. Carmen tried to kick and thrash away, but Sarah was too strong. Carmen knocked a stack of documents onto the floor. After fifteen minutes, Sarah released Carmen.

“Wow. I have not felt anything like –”

Sarah stuck her index finger on Carmen's lips. "Come, it's my turn."

Sarah hurried and removed her clothes from her body and tossed them on the floor. Then she led Carmen over to the couch.

Sarah lay down on the couch and opened her legs. Meanwhile, Carmen slipped out of her dress, bent down on her knees, and stuck her face into Sarah's crotch.

"Come. Faster. Lick."

Sarah closed her eyes. She lifted her leg back, put it over Carmen's shoulder, and used her leg to force Carmen's face deeper into her crotch.

"Deeper, deeper," Sarah moaned. "Almost there."

Sarah placed her hand on the back of Carmen's head and forced Carmen's mouth deeper into her crotch. Sarah was worried that she might suffocate Carmen, but she couldn't back off. She was ready to climax like cresting waters about to overflow a dam's walls.

An explosion of euphoria swept through Sarah's mind as her crotch area became super sensitive. Sarah released most of the pressure of the death grip she had on Carmen's head, but she refused to let Carmen go too soon.

To her surprise, Carmen continued to lick here and there but not as furious as before. After several minutes, Sarah released Carmen. Then Carmen lay naked next to Sarah while Sarah wrapped her arm around her.

"I love you," Carmen whispered.

Sarah froze. What could she say? I had a lovely time. Thank you for dinner. This was a one-time event; don't overthink about it. Sarah thought about the Mayor. Then she uttered, "I love you too, Carmen." Sarah tried to analyze how she said it. Did she say it was too mechanical, too cold? But Carmen remained in Sarah's arms like a baby kitten nestling in its mother's protection.

Sarah noticed the large dumpster next to the city hall, just in case she had to dump a body. But Carmen was useful. Plus, she had not laid down with anyone in a long time. During her second year in college, Sarah spent so much time in the Garden House that she almost had to drop out, as she blew all her scholarship money.

Sarah enticed several male cleaners with pecan pie to save her college money. She was surprised what a man would do to get a slice of pecan pie. But Sarah knew she would get into serious trouble. Everyone turned a blind eye to the Garden House, a naughty little place hidden in a back alley. The Garden House was a dumpster, a place a woman went to throw away her garbage, but then the woman returned to her house, clean and pure. But to lie down with a guy outside of the Garden House was forbidden, so Sarah loved doing it – the danger and thrill of getting caught.

After the men, Sarah went for the women. It was the same story all over again. The first few were quite thrilling as she lay down with a woman. But after each one, the thrill weakened until it was no longer exciting. Then that car chase woke up her excitement again.

Sarah moved her hand and gently squeezed Carmen's breast. Carmen placed her hand on top of Sarah's hand.

"Sarah, you are much bigger, much stronger."

"I'm doing special training exercises for the Mayor."

"You're so lucky."

"Not luck. Just hard work. The Mayor wants me to hunt down those criminal men living in the ruins outside the city."

"Those men that caused that trouble months ago. What's it like out there?"

"It's just dirty – plenty of wild animals. I made a camp in an abandoned building. That's why I returned to the city. I wanted some good food and some good company."

"Anybody I know?"

Sarah reached down and massaged Carmen's crotch. "Perhaps you know her." Carmen squirmed and wiggled a little from Sarah's touch.

Sarah continued, "I am concerned about the Mayor. I think the men are up to something. Have you seen the Mayor lately? What's she doing?"

"I think the Mayor is sick."

"What?"

"The Mayor has been going to the doctor quite frequently. But today, she had not returned to the office."

"Really? How unfortunate."

“Her skin is sinking into her skeleton. She has lost a lot of weight. She looks really sick.”

Although Carmen could not see, Sarah smiled. She was waiting for that opportunity because the Mayor had no offspring to take her place, and a power vacuum was ready to open in Chicago. Someone had to step up, and it should be her.

“Would you still love me if I had a little power?”

“But you do have power. You’re the captain of the Mayor’s Guard.”

“Oh, that’s right. Perhaps I can move up farther?”

“Really? But how? Louis City determines who holds the top positions, like the Mayor’s job and director of the Male Processing Unit—and your job, too.”

“Perhaps I can make an offer they can’t refuse.”

“I am sure the Mayor has something worked out.”

“But whom would be the successor? Have you seen anything?”

“I’ve seen two large folders with Susan’s and Jennifer’s names on them.”

Sarah felt weird deep inside when Carmen said Jennifer’s name, like a bucket of worms squirming inside her gut.

“Really. Where are the folders?” Sarah asked.

“On her desk.”

Sarah climbed over Carmen and went to the Mayor’s desk. She searched the stacks of papers on the desk and opened and closed all the drawers. Then she sorted and threw the documents on the floor onto the desk.

“I don’t see anything.”

“She may have taken them with her.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right.”

Sarah approached Carmen again and gave her a long, wet kiss. “Bye, love. I have some work to do.”

“Will I see you again?”

Sarah looked at the slim silhouette on the couch, the warm, soft skin, the lovely brown eyes, and the long curly hair. “You can count on it,” Sarah said as she kissed Carmen again, dressed, and left the office.

Sarah went to check one thing, and she removed her special security pass that gave access to the weapons in the basement of City Hall. She waved the card several times over the card reader on the elevator, but the voice said the same thing – unauthorized.

Oh, the plot thickened. It was time to move the troops into the city.

Chapter 28 – My Lost Daughter Returns

The Mayor turned to the door as Jennifer knocked and stuck her head in. “Ma’am, I have good news for you.”

“Excellent. Please come in, Jennifer,” The Mayor said.

Jennifer led Susan into the hospital room and stood Susan in front of the Mayor’s bed.

“Please unbind her hands and let us be, Jennifer,” The Mayor said.

“Ma’am, I am concerned about your safety,” Jennifer pleaded.

“I will be all right. Trust me. Please wait outside.”

Jennifer nodded and cut the tiestrings that bound Susan’s hands. Then she left the room and closed the door.

“Susan, please have a seat.”

Susan came around the bed and placed her hands on the Mayor’s. “What’s wrong, ma’am?”

The Mayor looked away.

Susan scooted a chair near the bed and again placed her hands on the Mayor’s. “Is there anything I can do?”

The Mayor faced Susan. “I’m dying, Susan.”

“What?”

“I’m dying.”

“I’m so sorry. I had no idea.” After a pause, Susan asked, “What do you want me to do?”

The Mayor gripped Susan’s hand hard. “Susan, look me in the eyes. I want you to be completely honest with me.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The Mayor continued, “You stayed with their kind for some time. What do you think of them?”

Susan looked away. “I don’t know.”

“But you must know. You must understand their nature. You spent time with them. You formed a union with one.”

Susan faced the Mayor again. “In the beginning, I liked it. It was exciting. It was fun, but the more I saw 447, the more I started hating him. A couple of times, I wanted to stab him with a knife as he slept.”

“See, you are starting to understand. You don’t have to hate men. That is their nature. Most of the time, dogs are loyal, but sometimes, dogs bite. Once they taste blood, they go bad. Then you have to put them down.”

“That’s true. Sometimes, I would watch them. They caught animals and ate their flesh. They even caught pigeons and ate them. Pigeons! Other times, they would fight among themselves. I thought I was living with savages.”

“Now, you see why we must control them. Now you see why we have all these systems of control. Control has only one purpose – to tame man. That’s it. They are violent creatures because of the testosterone flowing in their blood, but they can also be ingenious and useful. We can’t live without them, but we can’t live with them unless we tame them. Make them docile.”

Susan placed her head on the Mayor’s chest.

“Susan, I knew you would come around. Few people understand.”

Susan looked at the Mayor again. “What do you mean few people understand?”

“In society, only a few can lead while the others are destined to follow. Look at our society; women shop, eat at restaurants, and watch pictures on the screen. But for what? They don’t see the big picture. They just follow along in their lives as if it means something. We, on the other hand, are leaders. We see the big picture. We see how the pieces of society work together in harmony. We can go in and fix things. We know how to maintain harmony in society. That is our duty to our citizens, to our society.”

Susan asked in jest, “Am I sure I am talking to the Mayor? You look like the Mayor, but an imposter has taken your place.”

“Susan, I assure you it’s me. I guess imminent mortality impacts one’s thinking and outlook.”

“What do you want me to do, Mayor? Do you want me to become the Director of the Male Processing Center again?”

“No, Susan. You were meant for something of a much greater purpose.”

“What do you mean?”

“Open the drawer and take out the documents in the top folder.”

Susan opened the drawer, removed the top folder, and opened it. Susan dropped the documents onto the ground. Then she crouched down and picked them up. She looked at the Mayor. “You want me to be your daughter?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“I need a successor. Someone whom I can trust to take over.”

“Why me? I thought you hated me.”

“I don’t hate you, Susan.”

“But you had me arrested and charged with violating the 13th Amendment.”

“Susan, you were not charged. There is no record of you being locked up. Your absence from the Male Processing Center – on sabbatical.”

“On sabbatical? Why?”

“You needed a push. I know you are a smart woman. I knew you would eventually come around. You just needed some time. And you did. I can see it in your eyes. The timing could not have been more perfect, more fortuitous.”

“But that means...”

“Yes, you will become the next Mayor.”

“So many times, I thought you would have me removed from the director.”

“Susan, that job was always yours.”

“I thought I only got the job because I came up with Inhibitor 37, a way to reduce men’s intelligence and aggressiveness.”

“The job was always yours. When you came up with the inhibitor, selling you to Louis City was easy. The President didn’t even blink an eye when I put your name as Director. They heard nothing but good things about you.”

“Many times, I hated you.”

The Mayor chuckled. “Then I did my job well. I don’t care what you think of me or if you hate me. What I need is a strong woman to take over. If I treated you nicely and handed everything to you, what kind of leader would you become? A true leader sees the big picture. She is tough. She must make hard decisions and not look

back. And I think you will make a great leader. And you need to make some tough decisions.”

“Then what must I do?”

“We have a group of men who have tasted blood. They run wild outside the walls of Chicago. Those wild dogs must be put down. I opened Pandora’s box to weapons from the old world. You must close that box. Put those weapons away or even destroy them.”

“Weapons?”

“I guess there have been some changes since you left the city. Yes, weapons from the old world. In my haste, I was so determined to rid ourselves of those wild men that I lost sight of the big picture. I armed the wrong person – my captain of the Mayor’s Guard – Sarah.”

“Of course, Sarah.”

“Do you know her?”

“I had run-ins with her in college.”

“She won’t go down without a fight, Susan.”

“I know. That is definitely Sarah, a warrior to the end.”

“I’ve read reports that she has effectively trained a group of men. Once she develops the courage, she will come for City Hall.”

“It’s illegal to kill a woman.”

“It’s only a crime if it happens in the city with witnesses. Let’s say something happened to her in the badlands with no witnesses. Then what’s the crime? She disappears. I doubt anyone will go out searching for her.”

“Okay. I understand.”

“Unfortunately, I only have one regret.”

Susan leaned closer to the Mayor.

The Mayor patted Susan’s stomach. “I won’t meet my granddaughter.”

Susan took the Mayor’s hand and rested it on Susan’s belly. “But you will. She will know you. We’ll come and visit you.”

“Then give me one more honor. Please name my grandchild – Bella.”

“Bella. Why Bella?”

“It’s a name that holds significance to me.”

“Bella has a nice ring. Then Bella, she shall be called.”

“Thank you, Susan. You don’t know how happy you’ve made me.”

“I know.”

“Now, you know your mission. Restore peace and harmony to the city.” Then the Mayor’s hand went underneath the blanket and withdrew a card. “You’ll need this. This card will give you access to the weapons storage unit in the basement of City Hall. You, Jennifer, and Sarah have access to those weapons.”

“Jennifer?”

“As I said, I gave power to the wrong person in my haste. And I am out of time to fix my mistake.”

“Can I trust Jennifer?”

“Can you trust anyone with power?”

“I see.”

Susan rested her head on the Mayor’s stomach again. After an hour, the Mayor gently shook Susan’s shoulder. “Susan. Susan.” Susan woke up and looked at the Mayor.

“It’s time. Go outside and find my assistant and the judge. They both should be waiting outside.”

Susan left the room and returned with the assistant, Carmen, and the judge. They gathered around the Mayor’s bed. The Mayor continued, “I adopt Susan as my legal daughter and leave my estate to her.”

The Mayor signed the first document, which was then passed to Susan and the witness, Carmen. Then another document went around the circle, and then another. All the documents grew into a stack in the judge’s hands. Then the judge signed the documents. “It is done,” she proclaimed.

The Mayor looked at Susan again. “Go restore peace and harmony to our city.”

Susan hugged the Mayor. “Okay, mom.” Then Susan left.

“These are dangerous times. Please use the back stairwell, and don’t let anyone see you,” the Mayor said as she looked at the judge and Carmen. “Then register and announce the documents immediately. Any delays can jeopardize the political machine of Chicago.”

Both the judge and Carmen nodded and said their goodbyes.

The Mayor was alone. She exited her bed, went to the nightstand, and retrieved the second folder. She took the documents into the bathroom and dropped the folder onto the ground. She shredded the documents and flushed them down the toilet. A corner of a document swirled and twirled as it fell to the bathroom floor. Once word was visible – Jennifer.

Mayor Lilith returned to bed and called again on the phone. “Please have Sarah and Jennifer come here as soon as possible.”

Chapter 29 – The Men Have Hope

Paul looked over and saw Luke sitting with his wife, Elizabeth, at the following table in the base's cafeteria. They looked so happy together. They seemed to enjoy each other's company. Of course, Paul felt alone, as if he was incomplete. Although he had troubles with Susan, he remembered the good times, especially the first time they made love in the cathedral in the wastelands on the other side of the city. Paul just wanted to hurl his coffee cup against the wall, but he squeezed the coffee cup hard and took another bitter sip.

Lo and behold, he saw Susan's ghost enter the room. Now what? Hallucinations? Come on. Get a grip. Susan walked over and looked good, wearing a new, stylish crimson winter coat with large black buttons. The coat complimented her black winter boots that went halfway up her shins. She carried two bags with her.

"Hi, love," Susan said.

Luke and Elizabeth ran over.

Paul just looked at Susan. "What?"

"Hi, love." Susan bent down and kissed Paul first on the cheek and then on the lips.

Paul rose. And Susan hugged him hard while placing her head on his chest. Paul wrapped his arms around them. Then he kissed her lips, long and hard.

"Susan, you've come back," Luke said. Elizabeth hugged Susan. "Good to see you again, woman," Elizabeth said. Then Susan hugged Luke.

Paul looked around and saw the men excited as if something extraordinary had happened.

"I brought gifts," Susan said. She put the bags on the table. From the first bag, she removed five freshly baked pecan pies and placed them on the table. The next bag contained ground coffee, tea, dairy cream, sugar, and hot cocoa.

"Brother James, come over here, please," Paul shouted, and James ran over. Paul continued, "Brother James, take these pies and give each man a slice. If there are any leftovers, just pass out the leftovers equally to all men."

“Come. Let’s go to the kitchen, Susan. We need to talk,” Paul said as he grabbed one of the pecan pies and the bag filled with beverages that were perfect for a freezing winter day.

The small group went into the kitchen. Paul rekindled the fire and put a pot of water to boil. Meanwhile, the other members sat on the counters nearby.

“What the hell, Susan? We haven’t seen you in several days,” Paul said as he turned to look at Susan.

“Paul, would it be possible for me to speak to you alone?”

“No, it isn’t possible. I involve my Number 2 in all my decisions. Luke stays.”

“Very well.”

“So, explain yourself, Susan.”

“I missed a good cup of coffee and some warm pecan pie. I snuck inside the city.”

“Just like that? You didn’t get caught?”

“I was caught. The Mayor’s Guard took me to see the Mayor.”

“And?”

“The Mayor is sick. She needs our help.”

“I think that is the last person in Chicago who would help us. Come on, Susan.”

“Things have changed.”

“Oh! What has changed?”

Susan slid off the counter into Paul’s hands and leaned her face against Paul’s chest.

“The captain of the Mayor’s Guard has gone rogue. She has trained a small group of soldiers.”

“I miss the point of how that is our problem.”

“She has weapons from the old world.”

“I still fail to see how that is our problem?”

“The Mayor has asked for your help and sent her warmest regards to you and your men. She is willing to forgive you and pardon you.”

Both Paul and Luke started chuckling.

Paul continued, “You expect us to walk into the city and greet the Mayor. Hi Mayor. We are the group of criminals that wreaked

havoc on your city. It's nice to meet you. Oh, you plan to forgive us. That is splendid. We should drink some tea with some cookies."

"She's dying, Paul," Susan said as she looked into Paul's eyes.

"What?"

"She's dying."

"I still fail to understand why she needs us."

"We need to remove Sarah and disarm her group of men."

"Of course, you are asking us to remove Sarah. We don't care about her as long as she leaves us alone."

"Paul, I will be the next Mayor of Chicago."

"What?"

"I will be the next Mayor. Doesn't that change anything?"

"Then if we help you, what do we get out of it?"

"I'll be the Mayor. I can change the system. I will also have some influence on the Federation."

"Then what will you do? Will you make men equal members of society?"

"Over time, yes. Everyone must adapt to change. Even though we have been at peace for seven decades, we must change the system. Hence, men will be given more rights over time to keep our society at peace."

Paul looked over at the kettle on the fire as steam started to hiss from the spout.

"Coffee, tea, or cocoa, anyone?"

Paul began making coffee in a French press. Then he poured everyone a cup, placed some sugar and cream into separate small bowls on the counter, and placed small spoons in them.

"Help yourself," Paul said.

Susan made her and Elizabeth a cup of cocoa.

Susan turned to Paul. "Please think about it, love. Okay. You are given a chance to help all men in the Federation."

"Let me think about it."

Susan said to Elizabeth, "Let's find Priscilla."

Once the ladies were gone, Paul asked, "What do you think?"

"It is too good to be true."

"I know."

Paul opened the box with the freshly baked pecan pie, took a slice out, and started eating it.

“What do you think?” Luke asked.

“I think the pecan pie is delicious.”

They both laughed again.

Luke continued, “Seriously, what do you think?”

“I don’t trust her. Everything adds up like two plus two equals five. Didn’t we bust her out of lockup? She was in the same prison as you.”

“That’s true. Women do not lock up the women, just the men. So parts of her story don’t add up.”

“Can we trust her?”

“She’s your wife. You formed a union with her.”

“Before she returned, I was missing her. Now that she is here, I feel like she has torn old wounds open again, that nothing has changed.”

“If she becomes Mayor, she will have influence. She can free us, men. On that part, she is correct.”

Paul shrugged his shoulders. He added two spoons of sugar and cream to his coffee and sipped.

“Alright. We can try to help Susan and the Mayor, but if we smell any betrayal or treachery, we’ll back out immediately.”

“Agreed.”

Later that evening, Paul caught up again with Susan.

“Have you made up your mind?” Susan asked.

Paul looked at Susan. Boy, she looked good. “Come,” Paul said, grabbed Susan’s hand, and led her into his private room upstairs.

“Just like old times, Paul,” Susan said.

Paul wrapped his arms around Susan and started kissing her furiously. Then he undressed her and himself, and they made it to the bed before they froze to death. Paul threw heavy covers over them to keep them warm.

Paul made hot, passionate love to Susan several times for an hour. Then he propped himself on his elbow and looked into Susan’s eyes.

“So you’ll be the new Mayor?” Paul asked.

“Yes.”

“Why you?”

“The Mayor has no daughters, so no one can take her place.”

“But why you?”

“I guess that is our flaw in society. We train women like worker bees. They usually take the occupation of their mother.”

“What did your mother do?”

“She was a scientist, so I became a scientist.”

“What became of your mother?”

“Once I entered college, she lost all contact with me.”

“Why would she do that?”

Susan started crying and looked away.

“Are you okay?”

“I haven’t thought of my mother in a long time. You know some families stay together. Grandmothers may know their granddaughters,” Susan said as she looked at Paul again.

Susan continued pouting. She used the bedsheet to wipe the tears from her eyes.

“What about your mother?”

The question brought more tears to Susan’s eyes. She continued to wipe her eyes with that corner of the bedsheet.

“I haven’t told anyone before. I held it deep inside for a long time. My mother didn’t want me. I have known it since I was a child. Sometimes, I cried myself to sleep over it. My mother was doing her duty to the Federation, ensuring one daughter replaced her. That’s it. Once I entered college, her duty was finished. That was the last time I saw her. When I graduated from college, I looked out at the audience. She wasn’t there.”

“I wish I could sympathize with you. I didn’t have a mother. You and these men are the only family I know. They are the only ones I got.”

“Paul, I will have the power to change everything. I shall be the next Mayor of Chicago.”

“So you will just change the system?”

“Make love to me again, Paul.”

Paul made love to Susan one more time.

Once they were done, Susan asked, “Will you help us?”

Paul nodded his head yes. They fell asleep in each other arms.

The following day, Susan, Paul, Luke, and James returned to the city entrance through the collapsed street and into the subway. The winter was wickedly cold. Once they thought they were warm, a gust of wind would snatch all their warmth. The group breathed out clouds of white fog while the heavy snow reduced visibility to ten feet.

Once they entered the subway system, they shook off the cold winter. The group reached the building with the collapsed wall. Jennifer and May stood waiting by the building's basement, where men wore brown winter coats and brown winter pants.

"Good morning, Susan." Both Jennifer and May chimed.

"Good morning, ladies," Susan returned.

Susan pointed at the group. "The men agreed to help."

"Excellent. We have the shipment of weapons ready," Jennifer replied as she pointed at the three large crates. A label was written on each crate: Pistol on the first one, automatic carbine on the second, while the third was a grenade.

Paul looked at Luke and noticed his face turned a ghostly pale. Then he looked at the crates and said, "I think we will need more."

Jennifer looked at Susan. "What do you think, Susan?"

"Please see the men get anything they want," Susan replied.

Susan went to Paul and hugged him, whispering into his ear, "Remember Paul, eliminate Sarah. Then I can change the system." Then Susan kissed Paul on the lips.

Jennifer said to the men, "We'll have more crates of weapons here by tonight."

"Thank you," Paul replied.

The women and the men in the brown clothes left.

Paul asked Luke, "Is there anything wrong, brother?"

Luke just sighed. Then he replied, "They are the ones who locked me up."

"You mean the scars on your back."

Luke looked down and just nodded his head.

"I'm sorry, brother."

"The more I'm around them, the more I don't trust them," James stated.

“I know what you mean,” Paul replied. “When the women are away, everything is clear. I have a plan. When they are around, I can’t think straight. Everything becomes twisted and complicated and confused.”

“Let’s get these weapons back to camp,” Luke said.

Chapter 30 – She Did What?

Sarah stayed in the ruins of the badlands south of Chicago. She suspected the male renegades and Susan were camping in the ruins north of the city. All she had to do was squash the renegades. Then Sarah would be a hero. Since the Mayor had no daughters to succeed in the Office of Mayor of Chicago, Sarah would make a strong candidate for Mayor. Heroes win points with the capital of the Federation, and heroes are few and far between, which is the consequence of a peaceful society.

Sarah checked in at the Southern Border station with the home office daily. She knew the Mayor was sick, most likely to pass away any day. Everything was going Sarah's way, even though she knew she made one mistake, which was to stay out in the ruins with her male soldiers. She lost contact with her subordinates in the Mayor's Guard. Most likely, Jennifer had won them over. But that was okay. Once appointed Mayor, she'd clean the house and fill the city departments with women dedicated to her. Jennifer would be relegated to a fading, lousy memory and buried somewhere in the badlands.

"Take two men and search the badlands north of the city. We need to find those fugitives. Do you understand?" Sarah commanded as she called to her best man, Blue 656.

Blue 656 shook his head yes.

"Excellent. Then you take them out. Do you understand?"

Blue 656 shook his head yes again.

"Do!"

Blue 656 turned and selected two men. Each grabbed a semiautomatic weapon, grenades, and a pistol. They would scout the badlands and hunt down the fugitives. Then Sarah would be a hero.

Sarah hiked to the nearest border station. The border guards stopped what they were doing and saluted Sarah as she approached.

"At ease," Sarah snapped. The guards stopped saluting but remained in a formal pose.

Sarah burst into the guard's shack, grabbed the telephone, and called the office. She couldn't believe it. The Mayor wanted to meet

her, which could mean only one thing—the Mayor would name a successor.

Sarah jumped into her vehicle, which was parked next to the guard shack. She slammed her foot on the accelerator and raced towards the hospital, where the Mayor was.

As Sarah approached downtown, she hit the heavy traffic of rickshaws. She rolled down her window and screamed at the male drivers. “Move it! Out of the way!” At other times, she hit the red button on her particular device, which paralyzed any male within a block. Then she used the bumper of her car to push the motionless rickshaws out of her way. Sarah even knocked over several rickshaws. One rickshaw transported a woman, who emerged from the overturned rickshaw and screamed at Sarah, but Sarah drove on. Sarah almost ran over five female pedestrians on separate occasions and screamed, “Official business. Move it!” Of course, the females screamed obscenities at Sarah, ignoring her high rank in the Mayor’s Guard, but all that would change when Sarah became the new Mayor. Every woman would know who Sarah was when she became the new Mayor.

In Godspeed, Sarah reached the hospital, where she parked her car in the ambulance lane in front. The hospital staff looked away as Sarah ran past. Finally, Sarah made it to the fifth floor, where the Mayor’s room was. Then she spotted Jennifer also waiting outside the room. “Good day, Captain,” Jennifer said as she rose to a standing position and saluted.

“What are you doing here, Jennifer?”

“The Mayor called me here, ma’am.”

“No, she didn’t.”

“Yes, ma’am, she did.”

“You touch that doorknob. I will kill you!” Sarah snapped as she placed her hand on her sidearm.

Jennifer lifted her shirt with an extended bottom hem and revealed her pistol. Then she quickly grabbed the butt and switched the safety off. “We will see about that,” Jennifer replied.

Sarah remained paralyzed as she examined her defiant subordinate. “I’m your commanding officer.”

“Yes, you are.”

“Then relinquish your sidearm and hand it to me.”

“No!”

“What? That is insubordination. Hand me your sidearm.”

Jennifer slid the firearm farther out of its holster.

“You are defying a superior officer. The Mayor will hear about this.”

“She’s in there. Perhaps we both should speak to her,” Jennifer said as she tilted her head towards the door of the Mayor’s room.

Sarah looked at Jennifer and saw a resolve and defiance she hadn’t seen before. Then questions started to pop into Sarah’s mind. Where did Jennifer get that sidearm since the only known weapons storage was in the city hall’s basement? Then Sarah felt a bad taste in her stomach. Her intuition screamed something was wrong. It appeared the Mayor had been busy when Sarah was away.

Sarah removed her hand from the firearm and knocked on the Mayor’s door. She heard a muffled come in. Sarah turned the knob and saw the Mayor lying on a pile of pillows as she sat in an upright position.

“Ladies, please join me.”

Both Sarah and Jennifer entered and stood on opposite sides of the Mayor’s bed.

“Ma’am, I got here as fast as I could.”

“Thank you, Sarah, for coming.”

Sarah continued, “Ma’am, I have great news. I think I know where the renegade men are. I’ve dispatched men to take them down.”

“That is excellent news,” the Mayor replied.

Sarah continued, “I am also concerned about your health. I am here to serve you.”

“I know you are, Sarah.”

Sarah looked across and stared at Jennifer. If Sarah’s eyes were lasers, she would have burned Jennifer into ash.

“As captain of the Mayor’s Guard, I am concerned about your health and the status of the Mayor’s Office, particularly your successor,” Sarah said as she looked at the Mayor again.

The Mayor looked over to Sarah. “I have a successor, my long lost daughter.”

“Daughter, ma’am?”

“Yes, my daughter. She has come home.”

“I don’t understand, ma’am. I didn’t know you had a daughter.”

“Yes, my daughter is Susan, the former director of the Male Processing Unit.”

“What?”

“Susan is my daughter, heir, and successor to the Mayor’s Office.”

“Ma’am, how can that be?”

Jennifer added, “It’s true, Sarah. Susan is the legal heir and successor. She will be the new Mayor of Chicago.”

Sarah screamed, “No! It can’t be. She violated the 13th Commandant. She must be punished.”

The Mayor continued, “I know you have harsh feelings about Susan. But you two can patch your differences. You shall serve as captain under Susan. She’ll be the next Mayor.”

“No! It can’t be. I refuse to serve Susan.”

Sarah felt her heart erupt like a volcano, filling her arteries with molten lava. She was furious. Then she looked across at Jennifer, who had withdrawn her sidearm with the safety off. Jennifer was ready to shoot her down in front of the Mayor.

Sarah ignored the Mayor, stared at Jennifer, and asked slowly, “How long have you known about this?”

“For a while,” Jennifer replied.

“You’ve planned to get rid of me, weren’t you, Jennifer?”

“Sarah, it is not like that. Our concern is the City of Chicago. But the Mayor and I have concerns about your mental state.”

“About my mental state?”

“Sarah, don’t be like that. Our goal is to restore the law and order of Chicago and solve the problem with the renegade males.”

The Mayor added, “Once we restore law and order, you can serve as captain under Susan.”

If Sarah turned even more red, she would radiate heat energy like a red sun. She turned towards the door and stomped out of the Mayor’s room.

Sarah jumped into her vehicle and headed towards the ruins outside the city. She didn’t care anymore as she ran into several

rickshaws and pushed them out of the way, and they crashed into other rickshaws and cars.

Sarah spotted flashing lights in the rearview mirror. Several vehicles of the Mayor's Guard pursued after her, and Sarah stepped on the accelerator. She sideswiped a pedestrian and knocked her across the sidewalk and into a store window.

Several bullets whizzed through her back window. One bullet almost hit her. She approached the southern gate and saw the Mayor's Guard hiding behind stone barricades. Then she saw the flashes from the gun muzzles as bullets ripped into her car.

One bullet ripped through the radiator and sent a cloud of steam from the car's hood.

Sarah saw a barricade across the road. She stomped on the accelerator while the engine's temperature needle climbed higher and reached the red zone.

The car smashed through the barrier. More bullets hit the back of the car. Then Sarah felt a stinging in her leg as a bullet grazed her shin.

The car slowed from the flat tires and the overheated engine, but Sarah continued and rode over the bumps and debris on the ancient road.

The car made it another block before the engine died. Bullets continued to whizz by. Sarah opened her door and shot in the direction of the gunfire while more bullets whizzed in her direction.

Sarah hopped out of the car and hobbled on her good leg. She slipped behind debris to return fire, then hobbled towards her camp.

"Men, get your weapons. And push back the opposition. Do!" Sarah screamed as she reached the camp.

The men grabbed their weapons and hid behind obstructions, and returned gunfire.

Once the advancing women knew they couldn't take Sarah without risking their lives, they retreated to the guard station and reinforced their positions there, the only southern entrance into the city.

Sarah sat in on the ground floor and grabbed a medical kit. She turned on a flashlight, grabbed a hypodermic needle, filled it with morphine, and injected herself near the bullet wound. Then she

grabbed tweezers and searched for the bullet, but she didn't find one. She inspected the wound and saw the bullet just grazed her shin. Then she placed a wad of cotton strips over the wound and wrapped the wound with several layers of gauze.

The men gathered around her. "Well, men. It seems we have some problems with the City of Chicago. It's time to enter the city. Please help me up," Sarah said.

With the morphine racing through her veins, Sarah had no trouble walking. Then they reached the dam that fed Chicago its electricity.

Sarah smiled. It was always good to have Plan A, backed by Plan B, and then supported by Plan C. Plan A went to hell, so here they were with Plan B. Sarah had the foresight to clear a maintenance passage inside the dam that permitted a secret entrance into the city.

Once Sarah stepped onto the soil of Chicago, she divided her men into three teams and instructed them where to take their positions.

Chicago belonged to Sarah and only Sarah because Susan could not lead Chicago if she were buried somewhere in the badlands, a forgotten, lost daughter who violated the 13th Commandant and forged a union with a man.

Chapter 31 – Time for a Promotion

Jennifer was happy that she had permission to remove Sarah and become the new captain of the Mayor's Guards. It was a good day when she could kill her bad boss and not worry about the consequences. Sarah had it coming to her for a long time. And Jennifer would deliver.

Jennifer watched Sarah stomp out the door. She turned to follow her, but Mayor Lilith grabbed her hand.

"Not in the city, Jennifer," the Mayor said.

"But, ma'am, we must take her out as soon as possible."

"Not in the city, if you can avoid it."

"Okay, ma'am."

Jennifer reached for the phone and called the office. She said, "May, put everyone on high alert. By orders of the Mayor, I am taking over the Mayor's Guard. Dispatch two cars to the southern check-in station. Make sure they are armed with weapons from the old world. Take Sarah dead or alive. Also, immediately send a team to the hospital to protect the Mayor. Then the other guards will patrol the city. Any questions?" Jennifer pressed the button to hang up and dialed the following number.

"Emergency Warning System, this is Jennifer of the Mayor's Guard. Please activate all sirens and warnings. I know there is no storm warning, but a situation has arisen which requires everyone to head for shelter. What do you mean I do not have the authority?"

Mayor Lilith reached for the phone receiver as Jennifer passed it over. "This is Mayor Lilith. Please activate the EWS. You don't need to apologize. Just keep the sirens going for six hours. Thank you," the Mayor said as she passed the receiver back.

Finally, Jennifer called Susan, who answered on the second ring. "Susan, Sarah is on a rampage. Get your male team into the city. May God be with us." Jennifer slammed the receiver down.

"Mayor, let's find you a better room," Jennifer said as she pulled the Mayor's bed away from the wall.

"Thank you, Jennifer."

They both heard the storm sirens turn on, warning Chicago's citizens to seek shelter from a political storm.

As Jennifer pushed the bed into the hallway, the nurse ran over and yelled, “Ma’am, what are you doing?”

Jennifer replied, “We must find the Mayor a better room. I have reason to believe her life is in jeopardy.”

The nurse looked stunned and uttered, “I don’t understand. Chicago has no violence.”

“I think one of my former captains is unhappy about my successor,” the Mayor said.

It took a minute for the information to sink in. Then the nurse said, “Okay, ma’am.” She stood there for a minute, thinking. Then she added, “I see. I think her bed will fit in the pharmacy. We lock up our prescriptions there.”

“That’s perfect,” Jennifer uttered.

Jennifer and the nurse wheeled the Mayor three floors down and hid her inside the pharmacy.

Jennifer asked, “Could you please wait by the front doors for more guards?” Then she looked over at the Mayor. “Don’t worry, Mayor. We’ll keep you safe.”

The nurse nodded her head and left. Fifteen minutes later, she returned with four more guards, including May.

Jennifer briefed everyone. “I want you to protect the Mayor. Any unauthorized persons who walk through that door, you shoot them.” She looked at the nurse. “Please stay at the Mayor’s side if she needs medical attention.”

“Please don’t leave me, Jennifer,” the Mayor whispered as she looked at Jennifer.

“Yes, ma’am.” Then Jennifer placed her hand on top of the Mayor’s hand. “I’ll stay by your side.”

Jennifer looked around her and felt tension build up in the room. The guards were inexperienced and hadn’t experienced this situation before because the guards regulated traffic. Perhaps occasionally, they would arrest a male for a crime. Press the red button, send the man into unconsciousness, and drag his limp body into the nearest holding cell. But the cold metal guns in their hands were different. A slight noise or a moving shadow could trigger a barrage of gunfire. Jennifer prayed the Mayor would be spared from friendly fire but could not rule it out entirely.

After an hour, the Mayor fell asleep.

Jennifer whispered to May, "Follow me. Let's secure this hospital."

The women walked silently down the stairs into the basement, where they found the circuit breaker box two rooms over. May pulled the removable master breaker from the box, which plunged the hospital into darkness. May took out her flashlight and turned it on.

The ladies made it to the stairwell.

Jennifer whispered, "Once we make it to the first floor, turn the flashlight off."

May nodded her head yes.

The ladies tiptoed to the front door and pushed several long waiting seats towards the sliding hospital doors.

A barrage of machine gunfire shattered the glass in the windows and the sliding door. The women retreated farther into the interior of the hospital.

May started pouting.

Jennifer whispered loudly, "Keep yourself together, May. We must keep the Mayor safe." Jennifer looked around and added, "I have an idea."

Jennifer returned to the stairway, but May crouched in a fetal position against the wall, pouting. Jennifer returned to May, helped her, and led her up the stairwell by hand. They returned to the Mayor's original room, panting from the exertion.

"Watch what I learned from the old world," Jennifer whispered as she taped a grenade to the wall next to the door with a wire attached to it. When someone enters this room, this grenade will get them."

The women tiptoed to the nurse's station. They lay down behind it and peered out on one side, giving a clear view of the corridor.

Jennifer and May waited and waited for what felt like an eternity. Then Jennifer thought she heard soft footsteps. She raised a finger to her lips and shh quietly. Then Jennifer saw the dark shadows move in the corridor. Then a creaky soft sound as a door opened.

Bam!

Both Jennifer and May fired at the shadows in the hallway. Then a barrage of gunfire rained bullets at the nurse's station. The corridor filled with a pungent aroma of smokeless powder. Then everything became quiet.

"Nice job, Jennifer. You took out my best man," Sarah screamed.

"Had no choice, Sarah. I was authorized to retire you."

"I have your retirement in my hand. Why don't you show yourself?"

"I don't think so. I like where I am."

"Just give me the Mayor, and I'll let you live, Jennifer."

"I can't do that. I must protect the Mayor."

"Very well, then." Another barrage of bullets hit the nurse's station.

Jennifer fired a couple of shots down the corridor. She reached over to touch May, but she didn't move as she lay face down. Then Jennifer saw a growing dark pool of blood growing around May's head.

"No," Jennifer whispered as tears came from her eyes. She reloaded her gun and fired more shots down the corridor.

A man yelled.

Jennifer crawled to the other side of the nurse's station and then bolted for the stairway on the other side. She just made it as another barrage of bullets hit the metal door, and slivers of concrete fell from the wall.

"I'll get you, Jennifer. And the Mayor, too."

Jennifer yelled from around the corner of the concrete wall. "Don't waste your time, Sarah. We've moved the Mayor to a safe house. You will not find her."

Jennifer went down the first flight of stairs and crouched low as she hid in the darkness of a corner but had a clear view of the door. The door was slightly lighted from the street lights filtering through the hospital windows.

As a shadow appeared in the doorway, Jennifer fired all her rounds.

Sarah screamed again, "Nice job, Jennifer. You took out my second man."

A metallic ball-like object began bouncing down the stairs. Jennifer ran as a grenade exploded near her.

“I’ll get you, Jennifer. You can count on that. I’ll get you.”

Jennifer ran to the bottom of the stairs, kicked open the emergency fire door, and triggered the emergency door alarm. Then she quietly jogged up to the second floor and snuck into the pharmacy. “It’s Jennifer. Let me in,” she whispered as she tapped on the door lightly.

The door opened, and Jennifer joined the Mayor and her guards. She smelled fresh urine as one of the guards wet herself, but Jennifer could understand. No one had experienced anything like this except perhaps during the Great War long ago.

Jennifer stayed with the Mayor until early dawn. In the distance, they heard gunfire as the war waged on the streets of Chicago.

Chapter 32 – The Last Battle

Susan gave Paul and his group a short-wave receiver to keep in communication. Bartholomew barged into Paul's room while Paul was sleeping. Bartholomew shook Paul's shoulder, "Paul. Paul. An urgent message."

Paul left the land of dreams, where he was the last man standing in a field of pecan trees. His eyes fluttered open as he rubbed them with his hands.

"Message from Susan. She says you have to move now. Sarah is loose and furious."

"Thank you, brother. Get the men ready. We'll head to the city."

Bartholomew nodded his head.

Paul dressed within a minute and ran a comb through this tussled hair. He rinsed his mouth with cold water. Then he ran downstairs, where his men gathered their gear.

The men headed out into the cold.

Mathew caught up to Paul and grabbed his arm. "Brother. I just want to inform you the watchmen saw a campfire in the distance."

"Where, brother?"

Mathew pointed at an abandoned neighborhood near the wall of Chicago.

Paul stopped his men. "Gather around," he shouted. "It appears we may have some unwelcomed guests. We'll take a diversion before entering the city."

The men started walking again.

As they approached the road that led to the collapsed street and the underground entrance to the city, Paul signaled for his men to stop.

"We'll form three groups. Luke, you take the first group and hide near the underground entrance to the city. I'll take the second group, and James will lead the third group. We'll circle around their camp and confront the visitors. Do you have any questions?"

Everyone stood alert and quiet.

The two groups separated and converged on the camp from opposite sides.

As Paul approached the camp, he pulled out his binoculars and saw the smoldering remains of a fire, but there were no men or equipment. He looked at his men and waved for them to hunker down behind debris.

Before Paul knew it, glowing red bullets whizzed through the air like angry wasps. The bullets slammed against the debris, leaving gaping holes and kicking up dust.

“Fall back, men,” Paul screamed.

As Paul and his men fell back, the air around them was filled with glowing red lines of bullets. Paul’s group made it behind the protection of a building with a stone façade. Then Paul saw one of his men had fallen to the ground.

Paul ran to the man as bullets flew in his direction. Paul grabbed the man’s hand and dragged him behind the building. Thomas looked up at him.

“Please don’t leave me, brother,” Thomas pleaded.

“I’m here for you, Tom.”

Paul scanned Tom’s body and saw a gaping wound in his lower abdomen.

“Do you think we still have to serve the women in heaven?”

Paul held Tom’s hands. “No, Tom. We have a merciful God who loves all his children – men and women.”

“Thank you,” Tom whispered. And Tom’s eyes became lifeless. He went to God.

Paul closed Tom’s eyes, kneeled on his knees, and looked up to the heavens. Paul’s men followed suit.

“Dear Lord. Send an angel to take this brave soldier into heaven,” Paul said. “He lived and died serving you. Now, he can always be at your side. Amen.”

“Men, to the entrance,” Paul screamed as an occasional bullet hit the building. Paul rejoined the other groups. “When this battle is over, we need to return to bury Thomas’ body,” Paul said.

Several men made the cross over their hearts using their index fingers while others looked up at the heavens, just in case God happened to be looking down at them. They hustled to the underground entrance to the city, where they emerged in the abandoned building near Michigan Street.

“Hold this position,” Paul said to Luke. “The men must enter through that stairwell. You can use this,” Paul handed Luke his secret weapon.

“Take your group to the hospital to protect the Mayor. I’ll head to Susan’s,” Paul said as he looked at James. “Okay, men. You have your orders.”

Luke and his group stayed behind. It didn’t take long for Sarah’s men to find the underground entrance to the city, although they did not hear anything except the slightest creak on one of the steps on the stairs.

Luke raised his right hand to indicate silence. Then he spotted a small mirror rising from the stairwell, a periscope swirling around, searching for unfriendlies.

Paul positioned the tube-like object at the stairwell. The mirror stopped moving as if it had noticed Luke.

Luke pulled the trigger, and a small rocket sped out of the tube and flew down the stairs, where it exploded. A shock wave reverberated along the floor while the explosion kicked up dust and dirt.

“Now,” Luke yelled.

Luke and his men charged for the stairwell. Luke was the second man entering the stairwell. He scanned the area and saw two men down. “Find the other men,” Luke screamed.

Luke and his men followed the trail of blood that went through the wall. They approached the wall slowly and peeked through. A man lay on the ground on his back.

The man tossed the weapon to the side. “Kill me if you want.”

Luke and his men ran to the guy on the ground and pointed their guns at him.

The man looked around and laid his head on the ground. “What are you waiting for?” He screamed.

“We want some information?” Luke yelled.

“Then spare me, and information is what you’d have.”

“How do we know you will tell the truth.”

“I swear it on the Lady Jesus.”

“You mean the gentleman Jesus.”

“Whoever. I’ll trade my life for information.”

Luke looked at his team. “What do you think?”

“Let’s hear our fallen brother.”

“Agreed,” Luke said.

Once Luke and his men heard the information, Luke yelled, “Oh, shit.” Luke looked at Bartholomew. “Take him to the base and treat his wounds. We’ll go after Paul.”

Once Paul emerged from the building on Michigan Street. Two of the Mayor’s guards were waiting for him.

Gina called out, “You must be Brown 447?”

“You can also call me Paul.”

“Very well. Hop in. We’ll take you to Susan’s.”

Paul and two men squeezed into the back of the small car, which arrived in Susan’s neighborhood in no time. The streets were quiet, with no traffic, as the storm sirens kept wailing, driving all Chicagoans indoors.

“Please slow down,” Paul said. “We could be walking into an ambush.” The driver pulled the car over on the side of the road, one block from Susan’s place.

Paul and his team walked slowly and carefully to the corner and peered around. They saw no one as they hid in the shadows and looked at all the windows.

At most, three of the lights were on in Susan’s building. The men scanned for opened windows and snipers lurking at the top of the roofs, but they saw nothing. It was quiet. Even the snow stopped falling to the ground while the night turned everything dark and cold.

Paul and his team ran to the front entrance to Susan’s condominium. They ran up the stairs to the fourth floor. Paul and his team stood on each side of the door as Paul rapped slowly on the door.

“Susan. Susan.”

After a minute, they heard footsteps on the door as it opened slowly.

Paul and his men pointed their weapons at the shadow in the door.

“Paul. Paul. Is that you?”

Paul opened the door more and held Susan in his arms. He kissed her softly.

After a minute, Paul whispered, “Are you okay?”

Susan nodded yes and whispered, “I’m scared, Paul.”

“It’s okay. We’ll meet the other team at the hospital.”

“Good. We need to protect the Mayor.”

The group made their way downstairs to the main door. Then they heard a loud commotion outside.

Luke and John ran up the stairs, through the vacant building, and onto Michigan Street. They flagged down a rickshaw driver, one of the few on the road this late at night. The sirens kept most people off the street and indoors.

The driver looked stunned because this was his first male passenger as Luke and John climbed in.

“LaSalle Avenue,” Luke said.

The driver nodded his head and started pedaling. Both Luke and John were scanning the building numbers, searching for 223. Luke saw they were in the 600 hundredth block and pointed in the direction where the house numbers continued to decrease.

When they reached the 200th block, Luke asked to pull over. The rickshaw made a U-turn and pedaled in the opposite direction. Meanwhile, Luke and John scanned the windows on both sides of the street.

Bingo. One window was wide open in the middle of the block on the top floor of a ten-story building. “That’s got to be it. Nobody leaves their window open in winter,” John whispered as he pointed at the window.

Luke nodded his head and whispered, “Let’s sneak in by sliding against the building so they can’t see us.” Both men moved sideways

until they reached the entrance below the open window. The men jogged up the steps, and John tried to open the door.

The door would not move. Both men looked up at the overhang above them while Luke pointed at it.

“I think this will help block some of the sounds,” Luke whispered.

Luke leaning his body against the small window next to the door, he used his elbow to break the glass inward. Luke’s winter coat helped muffle the sound of breaking glass while he leaned against the window. Then he unlocked the door, and both men entered.

They ran up ten stories. As they reached the top steps, both men gasped for air. John whispered, “We’re almost there.”

Luke pulled out a grenade as both men flanked both sides of the door. The men struggled to catch their breath.

Luke held up the fingers to his other hand. One. Two. Three. Luke swung around, kicked open the door, and threw the grenade in. Meanwhile, John followed with gunfire.

Bam!

The men inside returned gunfire.

Luke pulled the pin to his last grenade and lobbed it inside.

Bam!

Both Luke and John showered more gunfire into the room. Then they both hid behind the protection of the wall.

The room became silent. Both Luke and John peeked in from both sides of the door. Nothing moved. They both slowly entered the room and saw three dying men lying on the floor. Propped up against the wall were two heat-seeking rocket launchers.

Bullets whizzed through the window from across the street. Both men lowered themselves against the wall.

“Wait here,” Luke said.

Luke crawled to the kitchen window. The window was closed, and he saw the muzzle flash across the street. He found a dirty white dish rag and tied it around the end of a mop. Then he used the mop to break the glass and whirl the rag around outside the window.

The gunfire stopped.

Luke approached the window from the side and screamed, “Paul, it’s Luke.”

“Show yourself,” the voice yelled from across the street.

Luke stood in front of the window with empty hands.

“Thank God,” the voice screamed.

Both Luke and John grabbed the men’s weapons, ammunition, and those two rocket launchers and headed to the street below.

Luke saw the front entrance door to Susan’s condominium open as Paul and his group emerged.

Both Luke and Paul hugged and patted each other on the backs.

“Brother, good to see you,” Paul said.

“Brother, the same to you. Sarah had laid an ambush, so I had to come as fast as possible,” Luke replied.

“And so you did. Are there any survivors?”

Luke shook his head no.

“Come. Let’s rescue the Mayor at the hospital.”

Sarah went down the stairwell, hoping to catch up with Jennifer. Sarah slipped out the emergency door and entered an empty alley next to the hospital, but didn’t see Jennifer anywhere.

Gunfire erupted from the front of the hospital, where she positioned her remaining men in the building across the street.

Sarah pulled out her walkie-talkie and pressed the transmit button. “Team One. Check-in.”

Only static came from the walkie-talkie.

“Team Two. Check-in,” Sarah said. Again, the device just emitted static.

Sarah screamed, “Team Three. Check-in.”

“Team Three. Check-in,” a male voice said.

“Status,” Sarah screamed.

“Engaging with the enemy.”

“How many unfriendlies.”

“Five, ma’am.”

“Continue to engage the enemy.”

Sarah couldn’t believe it. Her dream of taking over Chicago was not going to happen. She punched the wall several times, and her fists turned black from the bruises while they throbbed in pain.

Sarah approached the end of the alley, which gave a clear view of the street. She saw her men fire at the group, who positioned themselves on the other side of the hospital. Then she spotted two vehicles approaching from her side. Susan was driving one of them.

Sarah fired several shots at the vehicle. Both vehicles slammed on their brakes and came to a screeching halt.

The occupants opened their doors and positioned themselves behind the vehicle as they returned fire in Sarah's direction.

Sarah ran for her new, stolen vehicle, which was parked around the corner from the hospital. Sarah heard the swishing sound of a rocket launcher, and then a kaboom and parts of the building began falling to the street, where Sarah's soldiers were stationed. The battle in front of the hospital became quiet. Sarah's little army was no more.

Sarah made it a car, busted the driver's window, and got in. Then she hotwired the car as bullets whizzed and punctured the car's rear while smashing the rearview window. She hunkered down while another barrage of bullets hit her vehicle. She crawled out the driver's side and ran hunched over.

Sarah tried to put as many objects between her and the angry, whistling bullets. Finally, she slipped into some neighborhoods and lost her pursuers.

It was almost dawn. Sarah sat down near the dam for a while to watch the sunrise. She was exhausted and hungry, and every part of her body hurt like it had gone through a meat grinder. Sarah looked at her home and the sparkling skyscrapers of downtown Chicago. She was a fugitive who could not return home. She was a woman without honor and dignity who must live out her remaining days in the badlands.

Sarah saw the approaching headlights of several vehicles. Of course, she saw her second in command, Jennifer, driving the first vehicle with a squadron of guards with her.

The vehicle came to a halt. Both Jennifer and her squadron jumped out with handguns drawn.

Sarah looked at her sidearm—it was empty. She hopped up and threw it in Jennifer's direction. It slammed against the ground and slid several feet.

Sarah started hopping towards the maintenance tunnel to the dam. She hopped here and turned there. Eventually, Sarah emerged on the other side of the wall and limped quickly towards the nearest building.

Jennifer screamed, “Sarah. Stop. You are finished.”

Sarah turned and replied, “As long as I am breathing, I still have a chance.”

“Sarah, I’ll shoot.”

“And what. You’d parade me around Chicago like some type of freak show. You show everyone how you took me down.”

“You will be held accountable for your crimes.”

“For protecting Chicago?”

“For one – sedition. For two, threatening the safety and security of the public. And for three, threatening the Mayor’s life.”

Sarah laughed. Then she turned and ran for the remaining ten feet to the nearest abandoned building. Bullets whizzed through the air. One bullet struck Sarah’s shoulder.

But she refused to allow Jennifer, her subordinate, to arrest her. She continued, taking a left on this street and a right on the next.

Sarah looked back and saw she had left a trail of blood. She removed her shirt and wrapped it tightly in a bandage. Sarah made it to her camp, trying not to leave a trail of blood behind. She ran up the stairs to the third floor, where she found a secret passageway leading up to an attic. Sarah lay down and looked down at the street below. She saw Jennifer and other guards searching her camp.

Sarah was surprised as she watched Jennifer, her second in command, construct a mound of stones to mark a grave. Sarah relaxed and lay on her back. Death was the best way to be left alone. Sarah smiled. Nobody would be searching for her. Nobody came to the badlands.

Sarah lay on her back and went to sleep after eating cold beans in tomato sauce from a can.

The nurses and the Mayor’s Guard returned Mayor Lilith to her room. Susan, Paul, and the other men surrounded the Mayor’s bed.

The Mayor saw Paul hold Susan's hand, but she pretended it didn't bother her.

The Mayor said, "Chicago is grateful for your dedication, bravery, and service. Chicago will start a new beginning as we rebuild. We must move forward and give men more rights and respect in our society."

The men looked at each other and smiled.

"Please stop by later. We must talk," the Mayor said as she looked at Susan.

"Yes, Mayor."

"Right now. I think I need more rest."

Upon hearing this, the nurses chased all the visitors from the room while the Mayor fell into a deep sleep after hearing that peace and tranquility would return to her city. Mayor Lilith could finally rest in peace.

Chapter 33 – A City Rebuilds

Susan barged into Mayor Lilith's hospital room and saw that the Mayor was fast asleep. Susan decided to wait as she sat in a chair with one leg crossed over the other and leafed through a magazine. The foot that touched the floor fidgeted up and down like an excited puppy that could not sit still.

After waiting an hour, Mayor Lilith stirred in her sleep. Her eyes fluttered open until they focused on Susan.

"Susan. How long have you been here?"

"Not long. I just arrived."

"I hope you have good news for a dying old woman."

"Of course, I have good news. Sarah is neutralized. We are collecting the weapons and storing them. Phase one is complete."

"Susan. You do not know how happy this makes me. I didn't want to go until I knew my city was safe."

"That's why I came over here as fast as possible. I wanted to give you the good news."

"Did Sarah suffer?"

"She put up a good fight, but she didn't suffer. She is at peace now."

"I heard the hospital staff chatter about the gun battle in Chicago. Everybody was scared."

"We could not avoid it. Sarah positioned her troops in the city. She tried her best to take us out. I guess she figured with you on your deathbed that she could simply take over. She thought she could eliminate us easily."

"What about the wild men?"

"I talked them into helping us. I granted them special privileges if they helped us remove Sarah. And they held up to their side of the bargain."

"Don't forget what I said about men. You can't trust them. Most of the time, they can be quite loyal. But sometimes, they attack like rabid dogs. Remember what I said about what to do with rabid dogs."

Susan approached the Mayor's bed and squeezed her hand.

"I know, Mayor. I don't trust them either, but they are useful."

“I am glad to hear that.”

“Don’t worry. I shall put the safety and welfare of Chicago first. You know I will do the right thing.”

“I know you will. You will make a great Mayor for Chicago.”

“I’ve learned from the best.”

“Susan, I am finally at peace. I can finally rest.”

“Lilith, please don’t talk like that.”

“You know, I wanted to hate God. I blamed her for the cancer and for their short life. But now I understand her. If she had given me 10,000 years, I would have wasted most of those years on nothing. A long life may be more of a curse than a blessing. But now I face death. So, I must either stand up and do something, or I just sit back and just let death take me.”

“I agree with you. I have been thinking of my own mortality. We all have the same start and finish on this path of life, but each of us takes different routes.”

“Nicely said, Susan. But in the end, we all end up in the same place. Now, I know I am leaving Chicago in good hands.”

“I will take good care of Chicago.”

“But you must also think of Chicago’s future.”

“I will. The President of the Federation has invited me to Louis City.”

“And she will officially inaugurate you as Mayor of Chicago.”

“I also plan to get inseminated there. Louis City has the best fertilization facilities. It’s time for Little Bella.”

Tears flowed down the Mayor’s face. “My only regret is I don’t get to see my granddaughter.”

Susan held the Mayor’s hands.

“Please stay with me, Susan. I don’t want to die alone. I know we enter this world in our mother’s arms. And it is time to leave it when I am in my daughter’s arms.”

“I’m not going anywhere. I will stay with you until the end.”

After a while, Susan’s stomach started grumbling. “I am getting hungry. Is there anything you would like, Lilith? My special treat.”

“I haven’t had a deep-dish pizza in ages.”

“That sounds good. Just give me a minute. I shall return.”

Susan left the hospital and went down to Michigan Avenue to the best pizza parlor in Chicago. An hour later, Susan carried a large pizza box to the Mayor's hospital room and placed the pizza box on the tray cart next to the Mayor's bed.

The Mayor asked, "Did you have trouble getting that past the nurses?"

"They protested initially, but I said you ordered it."

"My last act as Mayor."

"They sympathize."

The Mayor tried to open the pizza box, but her hands were too weak. Susan went over and opened the box. "You first, Mayor," Susan said.

The Mayor grabbed a slice of Chicago's famous deep-pan pizza that formed long strings of melted cheese when the Mayor pulled a slice away from the pie. Then Susan grabbed a slice of pizza and put it on a paper plate.

The women ate in silence. The Mayor ate two slices while Susan ate three minus the crust.

"Thank you, Susan. That hit the spot."

"Don't forget the dessert."

Susan opened a small box that contained two slices of pecan pie. She put the slice of pecan pie on a clean paper plate and gave it to the Mayor. The Mayor took two bites with a plastic fork.

Susan placed a lemon spritzer on the tray in front of the Mayor. The Mayor took several sips and returned the carbonated water to the tray.

"That's really good."

"I believe the pecan pie was your favorite," Susan said.

"Pecan pie always reminds me of my childhood when I was at my grandmother's. She made the best pecan pie. She would slightly burn the pie that added the right amount of caramelization and sweetness."

"I wish I could have been there with you."

"I know Susan. Grandma taught me everything she knew. Oh, the books, Susan. Don't forget the books."

"The books?"

“In my office, I have a secret bookcase full of books from the old world. I know they are illegal, but they contain wisdom our age has forgotten.”

“What will I do with them?”

“You study them as much as possible. A great leader must be prepared for anything that comes her way. Those books will give you new ideas, a different perspective.”

“Susan, I am getting tired. I think I need to go to sleep.”

Susan bent over the Mayor and kissed her forehead. “Have sweet dreams, Lilith,” Susan whispered. Then Susan sat down in the chair next to the bed. Susan tried to stay awake as long as possible, but the grease and sugar churning in her stomach made her tired. Susan fell asleep.

Susan awakened to the monitors’ angry beeping sounds at 4 o’clock in the morning. A doctor and several nurses ran into the room and began administering CPR.

A nurse yelled at Susan, “Please wait outside.”

As Susan left the room, she noticed the pizza box and used paper plates were gone. Someone had cleaned up while they slept.

Susan sat in the waiting room outside the Mayor’s room, crying. After ten minutes, the doctor approached Susan. “I am terribly sorry,” the nurse said. “We tried everything that we could do to resuscitate her.”

Susan wiped her tears away. “I know you did your best. I just hoped she didn’t suffer.”

“I don’t think she did. The city of Chicago has lost a great Mayor. She will be missed.”

“I know. Thank you, doctor.” Susan turned and walked away with tears raining down her cheeks.

Susan waited until the late afternoon before delivering her speech. She had to make sure the tear ducts in her eyes were dry because she must give her political constituents the appearance of strength, confidence, and charisma of a great leader. Chicago

belonged to her, and Susan knew it was both a blessing and a curse, but she was responsible for two million women.

Susan walked to the podium in a large assembly hall.

I am sad to bring bad news to you.

Our Great Mayor Lilith had just passed away.

All of us will miss her dearly.

The Mayorship was passed to me, her only surviving daughter.

I shall continue in my mother's footsteps and serve Chicago well.

Our family has been Chicago's mayor since the Federation's beginning.

And our family will continue to serve as mayors for a long time.

Our family must do what is best for Chicago and continue to make Chicago a great place to live, learn, and work.

Our city is the best in the Federation and will continue to be the best.

During the past week, we learned of the violence that had been inflicted on our city.

A group of wild men from the badlands had somehow gotten a hold of weapons from the old times.

Then the savages infiltrated the walls and put the safety of Chicago in peril.

Their violence and bloodshed had spread onto our peaceful streets.

One of our great ladies, Sarah, the captain of the Mayor's Guards, lost her life during this battle.

Her sacrifice will always be remembered.

However, we put down the savages and ended their reign of terror.

We had to recruit a team of men from the Brown class to put down these wild men.

We trained them.

We prepared them.

And they were victorious over the savages.

The men's loyalty and bravery for the women were outstanding.

This proves to us women that we better appreciate our male servants and treat them better.

For instance, if your male servant works hard, it is okay to give them some rest.

You could give them a dessert in addition to their daily ration of gruel.

It doesn't have to be a whole slice of pecan pie.

Just a couple of bites.

But we, women, must show how we care for all of God's creations.

Our God is a just and fair God who loves all her creatures, including the males.

So we must do her will and show love to all her creatures.

Also, I want to share good news with you.

Jennifer, the second in command, will take over the Mayor's Guard as captain.

Jennifer proved herself during the battle with the savages.

Thus, Jennifer earned the title of Captain of the Mayor's Guard.

Jennifer, please come up here.

Jennifer went on stage and approached the Mayor, who pinned the captain's strips on her lapel. Jennifer turned and saluted the Mayor.

Susan continued, "Our new captain."

The audience of women started clapping and shouting.

Carmen blended into the crowd so her new boss could not spot her. When she heard the new Mayor said Sarah was dead, the tears poured from her eyes because she loved Sarah, and she looked forward to many more nights with her, but she was gone forever. Life was not fair.

When the audience started clapping and yelling, Carmen slipped out through the side door of the auditorium.

She walked to the restaurant where Sarah and she had their first date. She ordered fettuccine alfredo with vodka on the rocks. Of course, she only nibbled a couple of strands of fettuccine twirled around the fork. But she downed several shots of vodka with ease.

What the Mayor had said didn't make sense because Carmen suspected there was more to the story, but what could Carmen do? She was just a simple office girl who worked for the Mayor.

Chapter 34 – The Celebration Feast

Susan, the new Mayor, had spared no expense with a large feast for the men at the Congress Hotel. Paul sat at the head of the table and looked at his comrades. They were heroes as they feasted on several roasted suckling pigs drowned in butter laid on platters at the center of the table. Pecan pies formed concentric circles around the suckling pigs. Several bowls overflowed with mashed potatoes and roasted corn on the cob. Every man was in arm's length of a bottle of cherry brandy or wine.

A male technician wearing a yellow shirt set up a closed-circuit TV. He connected cables and calibrated settings while the TV showed black and white snow and made hissing noises. After several minutes, the TV showed a picture with the background of the capital, Louis City.

Susan and the wives sat with their husbands at the dinner table. Susan grabbed a cob of corn and chewed a section off at one end.

The picture faded into a smiling President Aiden who looked at the celebrating men. Susan put down her corn on the cob, wiped her mouth with a napkin, rose, and approached the podium. Men grabbed the cherry brandy and poured healthy portions. Paul smiled, leaned back, and watched his woman on stage.

The room became quiet as everyone turned to look at the Mayor and the President on TV.

Susan and the rest of the room bowed to the President as Susan started her speech.

Ladies and gentlemen and Madam President.

This is a momentous day, a new beginning for the Federation.

We were on the brink of a civil war using weapons from another time, another era.

The men came to the rescue.

The men helped us restore law, order, and harmony to our city.

Thus, we have reached a turning point where we must change.

We must change the way we treat men in this city.

We must treat the men better and give them more respect, the respect they deserve.

We must give them equal rights as women and more opportunities to help our city grow and prosper.

Here we are today.

We honor these men with a feast fit for a queen.

They earned our respect.

Let's give them applause.

The room erupted into applause. Once the room became quiet, Susan continued.

I would like to pass the mic to Madam President. The President began.

Men, the United Federation of Cities honors you.

We honor your sacrifice, hard work, and willingness to risk your life to protect Chicago.

And I thank you.

The Federation owes you.

And we are grateful to you.

Ladies and gentlemen, I propose a toast.

Everyone filled their sherry glasses with cherry brandy. Then they raised their glasses for a toast and waited for the President.

Let's honor these men. Let's celebrate their honor.

The men swallowed all the contents of their sherry glasses while the women took sips. The women didn't drink much from their glasses, but the men continued pouring rounds after rounds.

"Enjoy the special hero's feast," Madam President said.

Paul picked up a tong, took several slices of meat from the suckling pig, and placed it on his plate. He ate a slice one by one. Susan sat next to Paul, put her right hand on Paul's knee, and smiled when she looked into Paul's eyes. She mouthed the words – I love you.

"I love you too," Paul whispered to Susan.

“I do believe a new day will start,” Luke said. “We can develop a new society, and Chicago will be at the forefront. We’ll show the Federation how we can integrate men into society.”

“That deserves a toast,” Paul replied. “Ladies and Gentlemen, raise your glasses for another toast.”

Everyone quickly refilled their sherry glasses except the women.

“To a new beginning. To a new Chicago. To a New Federation,” Paul said. “Now we, men, are recognized as heroes. We are the victors, and to the victors go the spoils.”

Everyone drank the liquid in their sherry glasses.

Jennifer, the captain of the Mayor’s Guard, ran in. “Madam, we have a pressing matter at city hall,” Jennifer said. “We need your urgent attention.”

Susan looked irritated at the disruption and snapped, “This can’t wait until tomorrow?”

“No, ma’am.”

“It’s okay. You’re the Mayor,” Paul said as he looked over.

Susan blushed and added, “But it’s your celebration. You are a hero.”

“But the city needs you, Mayor.”

“Thank you, Paul,” Susan said and leaned over to kiss Paul. “Very well then, Jennifer.” Both Mayor Susan and Jennifer left the room.

The men continued eating and drinking. Paul looked at his men in admiration because this was the happiest day of his life. He grabbed a slice of pecan pie and placed it on his plate, and he started eating it with a fork. Then Paul drank another glass of cherry brandy, but it went through him as his bladder felt like it would burst.

Paul noticed the women’s wives whispered into their men’s ears. They rose and left the room, presumably to freshen themselves in the women’s room. Paul rose and followed them. He assumed the men’s room would not be too far from the women’s, or at least in these old buildings.

The women went into the kitchen through the swinging door. Paul followed them, but he lost them as he entered the kitchen. Then he looked around. The kitchen looked like it had not been used in

forty years. It was dark, and all the fixtures were rusted and covered in dust. The room felt as warm as a deserted funeral parlor.

He opened the walk-in cooler, and a stink and rot almost knocked Paul down from the bad smell. He slammed the door shut, but the smell stayed in the kitchen air.

Paul opened another door, and it opened to an alley at the back of the hotel. He looked up and down the alley but didn't spot anyone. A winter blast of wind entered the kitchen as Paul slammed the door shut. He ran to the last door and opened it, which revealed a dark corridor. He walked along the corridor and inspected the abandoned storage rooms one after another. The corridor finally connected to another spacious dining room like the one where the men ate, but this room was dark and run down.

Paul spotted a small flashing red light in the center of the room. He approached the column where a large device was connected, and the red light blinked like a bored owl blinking its eyes as it sat on a tree branch that overlooked a cemetery.

Paul tried to read anything on the device but could not spot any writing. Paul ran to the dining room, where the men ate, and whispered into Luke's ear. "Luke, I found something weird."

"Really?" Paul replied.

"Come and have a look."

"Okay," Luke said as he grabbed another slice of pig meat and plopped it into his mouth. Then he stood up from the table and followed Paul.

Paul led Luke through the kitchen, along the corridor, and into another dark, spacious dining hall.

Both men kneeled and inspected the device.

"I followed your wife to this room, I think," Paul said.

Luke said, "Really?" Luke ran his hand over the surface of the device as his hand caught on something and unlatched the clasp. The device's door swung open, displaying a digital clock with red numbers counting backward.

"What's that?" Paul asked.

"I don't know. It's some type of clock," Luke said.

Both men saw groups of tubes taped together, with a wire connected to each tube top and the wires connected to the circuit

board with the digital clock. Paul sounded out the words on each tube—dy-na-mite.

“Damn, Paul. The women plan to blow up this building.”

“What?”

“This is one of the building’s support columns. Help me pull the wires out of the end of the dynamite.”

Both men pulled the wires out of the dynamite sticks, and Paul threw the sticks onto the floor away from the fuses.

Luke said, “I thought I recognized this building. I helped remove the wiring before I was locked up. We need to warn the men.”

Both Luke and Paul ran towards the dining room, where the men feasted. They made it to the end of the corridor as the device beeped. Sparks flew from the end of the wires, and then the device went dead.

The building started to shake, rumble, creak, moan, and collapse, kicking up dust clouds.

Chapter 35 – The Inauguration

Teams of brown shirts formed long lines that passed stones and small blocks to a dump truck. Several yellow shirts operated excavators whose buckets scooped up the large concrete blocks and twisted metal. The red letters Congress Hotel, which was on top of the building, were also on top of the debris.

Mayor Susan looked at the rubble and debris of what was left.

Jennifer came over. “Susan. Oh, I mean Mayor. Good day.”

“Good day. It’s okay, Jennifer. I know it will take time to get used to me as your new Mayor.” Susan understood. Friends and acquaintances had called each other by their first name or a pet name for years. Then suddenly, they had trouble calling a person a new title when that person was promoted to boss. Susan added, “I’m having trouble calling myself Mayor, too. It’s like wearing a completely new set of clothes.”

“Well, ma’am. You’ve earned it. You restored peace and tranquility to our city. You’re off to a great start.”

“Thank you. Nothing like solving a major crisis to establish one’s reign, to gain the confidence of my people.”

Both ladies looked at the mess that stood before them while teams of men were cleaning the site.

“So, no woman was harmed in the accident?” Susan said as she looked at Jennifer.

“No, ma’am. No reports of missing women.”

“Do you think they suffered?”

“Who suffered, ma’am?”

“The men.”

“Does it matter?” Jennifer said. Then she saw the concerned look on Susan’s face. Jennifer added, “I don’t think so. The building came down quite fast. I don’t think they suffered.”

“That is good.”

“Do you miss them, Mayor?”

Susan looked into Jennifer’s eyes. “You know, I can’t say. It’s like I am caught in a whirlwind of emotion. When I was a little girl, my mother bought me a cat. At first, I was excited to have her. I played with her every day after school. Over time, I was just not

fond of her anymore. I had to feed her every day and clean up her messes. I felt the cat became a burden. Then one day, I let her play outside, and she didn't return. I felt like I lost a piece of me. It's the same with 447. When he was alive, I was not happy. But since he is gone, I feel sad about his absence, especially the arguments. He's the only one who challenged me."

"I understand where you come from, Mayor. But don't worry. They're just men. We can grow more. You can grow another hundred of 447s."

Susan returned, looking at the building's debris, and replied, "You're right, Jennifer. They're just men. Besides, don't you think any of them had escaped?"

"No, ma'am. We had eyes on all doors and exits. No man left the building during the explosion."

Susan closed her eyes and crossed her index finger over her heart. "Farewell 447," she whispered. I hope you understand that it was not personal. It had to be done. I had to restore peace and tranquility to Chicago."

Susan looked at Jennifer. "Time to catch the train."

"Yes, ma'am."

Jennifer rushed Susan to the train station, where Susan boarded the train and entered the train car reserved for VIPs. The vehicle was spacious, with old-style leather French couches on one side and antique dark oak desks on the other. Each desk had a Tiffany desk lamp with a mosaic glass shade.

Susan approached the far wall, where a table of finger foods on fancy platters was laid out. She grabbed several carrot sticks and broccoli, placed them on a small plate, and drizzled a little cheese sauce on them. She sat down on one of the couches, which had a good view of the scenery before her eyes.

Susan nibbled her snack and looked at her watch. In four hours, she will meet the President of the Federation in Louis City. Although she was in Louis City several times as a promising young student and gave several lectures there at conferences on manipulating man's DNA, this visit was special. She was excited and nervous because she would officially be inaugurated as the Chicago Mayor. By tomorrow evening, everybody in the Federation would know her

name, and she was one spot away from the highest position in the Federation.

That four hours seemed like four minutes as the train speeded towards the four-story stone walls surrounding Louis City, protecting the glass towers reaching the heavens.

Before Susan knew it, she was standing on the train platform in front of the President, surrounded by the President's guard.

"Good day, Mayor. I hope your accommodations were adequate," President Aiden said.

"Yes, Madam President. The accommodations were excellent."

The two ladies shook hands. Then the President embraced Susan. "Come, let me show you Louis City," the President said as they broke apart.

The ladies walked between a formation of the President's guard while masses of women stood behind, yelling and cheering.

The women waved the Federation's flag, which carried thirteen red and white stripes representing the cities of the Federation. In the middle, on the left-hand side, was a blue circle surrounded by twenty white stars representing the twenty founding mothers of the Federation. An eagle soared to the heavens inside the circle of white stars while holding a birch branch in one talon and an olive branch in the other. The birch branch represented change, while the olive branch stood for peace.

The women sat in the back of a stretched limousine as it sped towards the capital building.

Susan looked out the window and asked, "President, what happened to the rickshaws? I don't see any. I just see small vehicles with no drivers."

The President chuckled and replied, "It has been a couple of years since you last visited the city. Our scientists have made some new discoveries."

"Really? May I enquire what discoveries?"

"For one, we can grow our own energy in algae ponds. Then we process the algae to make clean fuel to power the machines."

"Then we don't need the men anymore for the rickshaws?"

“Exactly. We can replace the men. We almost reached the point where we can eliminate men from our society as we replace all males with machines.”

“Well, farewell, men,” Susan uttered.

“Farewell and good riddance. We plan to expand the program to cities. Next year, Chicago will start implementing new clean, renewable energy. Then your city can start replacing the rickshaw drivers.”

“What about using men for servants or cleaning?”

“We can develop machines to do that too. The machines are more reliable than the men. Plus, we don’t have to feed and house the machines. The machines do not need rest, either.”

“What if we improve man’s performance, make them better like a better Inhibitor 37, to make the men more docile and robot-like?”

“Susan, you did a brilliant job developing Inhibitor 37, but it was only a short-term fix.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s man’s nature to be aggressive and violent. Think of a ferocious bobcat. It preys on and eats small animals. That is its nature. That is the way it survives. Then think about what we humans did to domesticate the house cat. The cat still threatens birds and small animals, even though they adapt to live with us. Man is the same. We can suppress man’s violence, aggression, and masculinity, but we cannot eliminate its true nature. No matter how much we tinker with man’s DNA, it will always be aggressive, violent, and masculine. On the other hand, machines do exactly what the owners want without violence and aggression. And now we have the unlimited energy source to power those machines.”

Susan glanced out the window and saw the President was correct. Women filled the streets with few men. Several male servants stood outside restaurants and stores while several more males picked up debris and garbage off the streets. However, Louis City was developing into a city devoid of men because men were no longer needed.

Susan looked at the President again and asked, “Wasn’t the Great War over energy the fight for survival?”

“Of course, it was. The old world was built on cheap, dirty energy. As the world’s population swelled to 15 billion, we ran out of energy. Then the nations went to war as a means of survival, to control the little dirty energy that was left. Most of the population died during the Great War.”

In a low voice, Susan looked down and asked, “Did men control the old world?”

The President placed her hand on top of Susan’s hand. “As Mayor, you should know the truth. It was a different world than ours. Of course, the men controlled the world. They also destroyed their world.”

“But why do we lie to the women? Can’t we tell the women the truth?” Susan said as she looked into the President’s eyes.

The President caressed the Mayor’s hand. “Susan, it was not about the women. The men had their chance, and they screwed it up. They almost destroyed the world. When the women rebuilt society, the whole point was to tame man, to suppress its violence, aggression, and masculinity. So, we rewrote all the books that made men inferior to women. Besides, do you think it would change anything if we told women the truth?”

Susan looked out her window and saw the women rushing from one place to another as they filled their lives with work, shopping, and eating. She replied, “I guess not. Everything seems so pointless, just empty materialism.”

“What is our society? We just consume resources and gather possessions. In and of itself, materialism does not mean anything. You can’t take those possessions with you in the afterlife, but tell that to your constituents. The women work, educate themselves, shop, and eat. Their lives are filled with consumption and gathering possessions. Perhaps some women will ponder spiritual matters, but most don’t care. They will just live out their materialistic lives. Nobody cares about the Old World and the Great War. I doubt they would care if men once controlled the world. That was a long time ago. And the men are no longer in control.”

“Then what about God? Is God male or female?”

The President chuckled again and added, “Does it matter what God’s gender is? When you stand before God, will you be concerned

with God's gender? Oh no, you are a male God; please send me to hell."

Both the President and Susan laughed.

"I guess not. I would be more concerned about being permitted to walk through the gates of heaven," Susan said.

"Exactly. God will judge you for what you have done on this earth. She keeps an account of your good and bad deeds."

"Then what about the men?"

"When they stand before God, that is God's decision. When men live in our society, it is our problem."

"But won't we be judged how we treat man?"

"Is it any different than domesticating a house cat and giving the cat chores? We don't mistreat men. We feed and house it, and in return, it helps our society function."

The limousine reached the hotel. "Susan, be ready for the dinner at 6 pm," the President said as she looked into Susan's eyes. The President held Susan's hand again, adding, "We are only on this earth for a short time. Only God can judge you for what you have done during this short time. When you return to Chicago, treat both women and men well, but just like a house cat, if a man goes feral, we have the right to put it down. We can't have men going around our society causing problems."

"Thank you, President. I enjoyed our conversation and your candor. See you at 6 pm."

Later in the evening, everything became a blur to Susan. The President sat at the head of the table, Susan sat to the President's right, and the other city Mayors took their seats around the extended table. Susan had not tasted food like this before, and she was shocked when the robots brought food to the table and removed the dirty dishes.

The Mayors kept asking Susan about the men's insurrection and how decisive Susan was in putting them in their place.

The robots brought out trays of filled champagne glasses. When everyone had a champagne glass in her hand, the President clinked

her champagne glass with a fork to get everyone's attention. Everyone at the table became silent as the President stood up, holding her glass for a toast. Everyone followed suit.

Thank everyone for coming today.

These last few days were difficult, especially for Chicago.

Although we have been at peace for 69 years, we have a growing problem with the men in our society.

The men are becoming more rebellious, violent, and aggressive despite our best efforts to tame them.

We have reached a turning point.

It is time to start removing the men from our society.

We shall stop growing them and replace them with machines.

Then our society will forever be at peace.

But we should be satisfied with the challenges we face today.

A natural leader steps up and accepts the challenge.

True leaders are shaped by difficult times.

Thus, I raise a toast to Mayor Susan, who performed brilliantly against the uprising in Chicago.

She showed shrewd leadership and decisiveness and put down the male rebellion.

The Federation and I thank Susan for your hard work and dedication.

Cheers.

The President tilted her champagne glass and took a sip as everyone followed.

Susan returned to the hotel late. She tried to sleep, but the day's excitement would not let her mind rest. Finally, she fell asleep after midnight and had a nightmare where she was stranded in the badlands and couldn't return to the city, and somehow, the men were in control.

Before Susan returned to Chicago, she went to the fertility clinic, the most prestigious and advanced clinic in the Federation. Once the

nurse recognized Susan as the famous Mayor who put down the Chicago Rebellion, they rushed her into the patient's operating room ahead of the long line in the waiting room.

Susan sat on the edge of the bed as the doctor rushed in and said, "Good day, Mayor. How may we help you?"

"It's time to have a daughter," Susan replied.

"That is excellent news. We have an extensive DNA bank of all the great scientists and intellectuals of the Federation. We can tailor-make with any special genetic enhancements."

Susan chuckled. "Thank you for the valuable suggestion. I think I would like a traditional birth," she said as she reached into her front shirt pocket, pulled out a small vial, and handed it to the doctor. Susan added, "I would like you to fertilize my egg using DNA from this culture."

"May I ask Mayor whose culture you have?"

"It is the harvested stem cells from the previous Mayor of Chicago, Mayor Lilith."

"Oh, I see. Another excellent choice."

"I cannot go wrong by mixing mine and her bloodlines."

"Esteemed Mayor, just give me thirty minutes to remove an egg, fertilize it, and attach it to the uterus wall."

Susan slid off the operating table, removed her clothes, and wore the green hospital robe. She lay on the operating table and slid her legs into the feet and knee rests. The doctor slowly opened her legs. True to the doctor's word, the procedure took less than thirty minutes.

As Susan was putting on her clothes, the doctor asked, "We can schedule you to return in five days to see if the fetus takes hold."

"That won't be necessary, doctor. I must return to Chicago," Susan said as she patted her stomach. "I'm sure little Bella will develop."

"Very well."

Before Susan knew it, the train rushed to Chicago with Susan as the new official Mayor. Then her and Lilith's bloodline would continue to lead Chicago indefinitely.

Chapter 36 – The Betrayal

The building crashed around Paul and Luke, covering them in thick dust. They lay on the floor, choking on the dust.

“Luke, are you still there?” Paul yelled. He heard someone cough about five feet from him, and he scooted over until he reached Luke.

Paul lay his head on Luke’s chest, feeling the rise and fall of Luke’s chest while he breathed. “Praise, Jesus Luke. You are still alive. I thought I lost you.” Luke’s hand reached out and wrapped around Paul’s back.

“My poor Elizabeth. My poor Elizabeth,” Luke whispered.

“You don’t know?”

“Know what?”

“How do you think I found the dynamite. I followed the women out of the dining room. I thought they came into this room, but I was unsure.”

“What?”

“Yes. No woman was in the dining room during the explosion.”

“That would mean...”

“Yes. The women planned this.”

“No. No. Noooooo.” Luke started sobbing as he squeezed Paul’s hand hard. “It can’t be. That means she betrayed me.”

“My woman conveniently left before the explosion, too. Official Mayor business.”

“But that can’t be. Elizabeth told me she loved me. That’ll we be together forever.” Luke continued sobbing.

“Luke, keep yourself together,” Paul said.

“I thought the women would change, give men more rights, make Chicago a better place.”

Paul continued, “They did make Chicago a better place. The women used us to eliminate their opposition. Once they thought they had our trust, they would kill us off, removing the disobedient males from their society.”

“That means they had no intention of changing,” Luke replied.

Paul added, “Nope. Remember that women have controlled this society for 70 years. If it worked for 70 years, it can work for another 70 years, then another 70 years.”

“I get it – to control men, to tame man, the savage beast. So what will we do?”

“We’re men. We’ll act like men, and God has created us to do so. We will rebuild, and we will become victorious.”

“Amen, brother.”

“Amen, brother. Can you move?”

Luke tried to move. “My leg. I think it’s broken.”

Paul felt Luke’s leg, feeling for a wound with blood pouring out, but everything was dry. Above the ankle, he felt a hot pulsating bulge, and Luke screamed in pain as Paul touched it. Paul said, “I don’t see any bleeding, but I feel a large wound on your leg. I’ll help you up.”

Paul leaned down, wrapped Luke’s arm around his neck, and helped Luke up. They hobbled to the corridor, but rubble blocked the entrance to the kitchen.

“What’ll we do now?”

Paul helped Luke down to the floor in a sitting position with Luke’s back against the wall. “I’ll try to find a way out.”

Paul entered the small room across from them. Half the room collapsed as the floors above crashed like a house of cards, with some walls holding up while others collapsed. However, Paul saw spots of light through the debris.

Paul removed one stone after another. He tossed the light rocks to the side, and for the heavier stones, he used a lever and fulcrum to move them to the side.

After an hour, Paul joined Luke again. “How’s the progress?” Luke asked.

“I’m almost there.”

“So we’re getting out of here?”

“Of course.”

“What about the women?”

“We’ll probably be okay. Remember, they think they have eliminated us. They should think we’re dead. Death has some advantages.”

“Well, death didn’t stop Jesus.”

“Nope. It didn’t, but we’re not Jesus. We can die, and it is permanent, but the women wouldn’t be looking for us. That is our advantage.”

“But once they excavate and clean the site, they’ll know our bodies are not there.”

“Do you think they can identify us? Our friends are buried under tons of concrete. It’ll take them weeks to clean this site. Our friends, unfortunately, will decay into rotten meat.”

Luke started sobbing again. “Peter, Bartholomew, Joshua...”

Paul wrapped his hand around Luke and consoled him. “I miss them too.”

Paul pulled away and said, “I know. I’ll finish removing the rocks.”

Paul returned to the room and made a rabbit hole through the debris and rubble until he had reached a window. Then he kicked the remaining shards of glass out of the window frame and peered down to the alley below.

Paul returned to Luke. “I’ll look for something to drag you out and into the alley.”

Luke nodded his head.

Paul slid through the window and into the alley. He saw an old discarded ironing board. He folded the board and cradled it as he approached the broken window. He tossed the board through the window and hopped and jumped through it. He dragged the board to Luke and helped Luke lie down on his back on the board. “Hold on,” Paul said, pulling the board through the rubble and up to the window.

Paul jumped down again and pushed a dumpster up to the window. He closed the lids, hopped on, and pulled Luke onto the dumpster, then helped Luke to the ground.

Paul wrapped Luke’s arm around his neck and walked to the street, avoiding all the debris falling into the alley. Male workers wearing brown clothes started removing the debris falling onto the street.

“Who are you?” A woman shouted.

Paul hesitated. Then he stammered, “He...fall...down.” Paul pointed to the alley from where they emerged.

The woman went to the alley and saw the debris. She made a waving motion and said, “Okay. Return him to the stable and come back here right away. Do!”

Paul nodded his head and looked down.

Both Paul and Luke strolled to the abandoned building on Michigan Avenue. No one paid them any attention because nobody would look for a dead man or two men presumed dead. They sat in the backroom of the abandoned building.

“We’re almost home,” Luke said.

“Yes, we are. Just a stroll through the subway and another ten blocks to the base.”

“We probably should change our base of operations?”

“I agree. I am sure the women have checked the base and removed all the weapons.”

“Of course, they did. They thought they won. They want to make sure all the weapons are removed.”

Luke started laughing. “You know. You were completely crazy when you hid half the weapons in another spot. I didn’t say anything. I thought we needed all the weapons to eliminate Sarah’s army.”

Paul leaned against the wall next to Luke. “Well, I didn’t completely trust Susan.”

“Why?”

“One night, I woke up from a bad dream as I lay there, and I thought I saw Susan sitting up in bed holding a knife in her hand.”

“No way.”

“She called out. I shifted my position and made pretend snoring sounds as I lay there. I felt the bed shift, and Susan went back to bed. When Susan went for breakfast the next morning, I checked the bed and found a small paring knife tucked under the mattress.”

“You think she would stab you?”

“I don’t know. One minute, she told me she loved me. The next minute, she is as cold as the waters of Lake Michigan. I could feel the hatred radiate from her eyes.”

“Why didn’t you say anything?”

“That’s why I hid half the weapons. Her emotions were like the Chicago weather—stormy and windy one minute and peaceful and sunshine the next. But I thought she would reward us once we helped her and eliminated her enemy.”

Both Paul and Luke fell asleep in that room. They both awakened around 6.30 while their angry stomachs ached for food.

Paul helped Luke up again. They hobbled downstairs to the subway and made their way to the other side of the wall and into the ruins outside of Chicago. By noon, they reached the base.

As Paul predicted, the women were there, and they searched everything. Beds were overturned, and everything was scattered and thrown on the floor. The old rusty weapons that Luke found were gone, but the women left the food.

The women also murdered the man that the men had rescued from Sarah’s army. His body was sprawled on a mattress with several gunshots to the head.

Paul helped Luke to the dining room and helped him into a chair. Paul left the room and returned fifteen minutes later with a knife. He cut Luke’s pants and peeled the pant leg upward. He scrutinized the injury. “No breaks. Just redness. The leg looks straight. A rock probably fell on your leg and caused a sprain.” Then he slid another chair closer and placed Luke’s leg in the empty seat.

“It hurts like the devil.”

“There is a little snow on the ground. I’ll go get some.” Paul ran outside and returned with a garment that he wrapped around snow. Then he placed the garment on the injury. “Hold it here. This should help reduce the swelling.”

“I’ll search the building,” Paul said. He returned fifteen minutes later. “Yup, the women were here. They took anything that looked like a weapon.”

“Are you surprised? The women do not want any more problems from the savage men.”

“At least we still have the good weapons.”

“I still cannot believe you hid those weapons, Paul.”

“I have even better news. We still have food. What would you like for brunch?”

“A little pecan pie.”

“Sorry, bud. How about pecans roasted in butter or an omelet with fried potatoes?”

“That would be good also.”

Paul went to the kitchen, made a fire, and cooked one hell of a breakfast. Paul and Luke had a mountain of food on each plate, with an omelet snowcap covering the fried shoestring potatoes.

“That’s your best breakfast yet. So, how long do you think we should stay here?” Luke asked.

“The women have been here, and they think we are dead. I doubt they’ll come back. We shall stay here for a few days to let your leg heal. Then we will set up base camp at the museum.”

“The place of those old dinosaur bones. They are so creepy.”

“They are just bones – a relic from the past.”

“Just like us.”

“I disagree. The only difference between us and the dinosaurs is we are still alive.”

“But like the dinosaurs, we are just as dangerous.”

“You can’t say that, Luke. I agree that men probably fought to their death in the Great War, but we do not know what role the women played.”

“That’s true.”

“We saw how they manipulated us to fight and eliminate their enemy. How do we know they did not start the Great War? Then they sent the men off to die in their war. Clearly, they saw it was their advantage to take over after the Great War when few men were left around.”

“You are right, Paul. We do not know. We cannot know what happened in those days.”

“Even if we knew what happened, does it change anything? We are in the here and now. What shall we do?”

“I don’t know Paul. What shall we do?”

“We shall rebuild. Then we’ll take Chicago. Chicago will be ours one day.”

“What about the women?”

“We were useful to the women for 70 years. Perhaps they can be useful for us for the next thousand.”

“Then we just change the cycle of servitude. In the long run, we won’t come out ahead.”

“In the long run, we’re all dead. How do we make everyone equal in society? Clearly, men and women think differently. Also, have you forgotten about your wife, who left you in a building that was packed with dynamite?”

Luke looked down with a sad face.

Paul continued, “Luke, it is okay. My woman tried to kill me, too, but that is okay. We were born men. We were made in the image of God so that we will act like men. We shall take Chicago and then the Federation. The women can either join us or not join us. It doesn’t matter. We shall do the same to them that they have done to us.”

Luke uttered, “Any eye for an eye.”

“An eye for an eye.”

Chapter 37 – The Aftermath

Jennifer ran to the Mayor's car to open the door as Mayor Susan climbed out. Then Jennifer led the Mayor to the stage, where Jennifer remained vigilant as the Mayor strolled to the podium.

Mayor Susan looked at the thousands of people who had crowded together to hear her speech on a warm, sunny spring day.

Ladies, I am sad to be here today.

But it is my honor and duty to dedicate a memorial for the men.

The men sacrificed themselves to protect Chicago and restore law and order.

With their efforts, Chicago would have avoided chaos.

But the men came to our rescue.

Then we honored the men and hosted a splendid feast

However, we chose a different venue, the Congress Hotel.

Some even claim the Congress Hotel was haunted by spirits of the old world.

But the foundation gave away as the hotel collapsed on itself.

We will never forget these brave men and their sacrifice.

The city turned this space into a park with a memorial.

Please remove the tarp.

The tarp slid off the memorial, which showed Paul standing in the center of his men, with Luke standing to his right. The Mayor continued her speech.

I somewhat knew the man in the center, who was Brown 447.

But he wanted everyone to call him Paul.

I later learned that Paul is the name of an instrumental part of an air conditioner.

Well done, Paul. All parts of an air conditioner must work together to accomplish its task.

To Paul and the other fallen men, Chicago thanks you, and we shall never forget you.

God bless you, and may the Grand Lady in the Sky take pity on you.

Good day.

Thousands of women began clapping, whistling, and screaming. Mayor Susan bowed a couple of times. Then Susan patted her stomach. She thought she felt a little kick from Bella, who also wanted to wish her mom the best.

Jennifer sat in her new office and looked out at the people she commanded, feet propped up on the desk and hands folded behind her head. She was happy. She finally became number one while her nemesis and old boss, Sarah, was gone.

Her Number 2, Gina, popped her head in the office. "It's a quiet day, ma'am."

Jennifer dropped her feet to the floor, leaned forward, and placed her hands on the desk. "Good. That is excellent news."

"What will you have us do today, ma'am?" Gina asked

"Send three groups out. Just show a presence. Inspect several males and their papers. You don't need to detain any males today. Everything is quiet, but we must show the public we are looking for their safety. Also, don't forget the Mayor's meeting today at five."

"Yes, ma'am," Gina said. Then she turned to leave.

Jennifer glanced at her watch. It was time. She picked up a bottle of champagne and headed to her sedan. Revving the motor several times, she merged the car into traffic.

Jennifer drove by the park with the new memorial dedicated to the men. Of course, she thought spending money on the men was a waste of money, but the Mayor insisted. So be it. If the Mayor thought it was important to dedicate a memorial to them, then let the citizens of Chicago admire it. Jennifer had more important things on her mind than a lifeless statue honoring the dead men.

As Jennifer drove by, she remembered the day of the men's celebration and feast. Susan, Elizabeth, Priscilla, and Jennifer met to discuss how to rid themselves of the men. Planning a large banquet in their honor was brilliant and would keep them off guard. Of course, Susan insisted the men must have a quick death. Then

Chicago would return to its old ways, the old traditions. And, of course, the women would remain in charge while the men continued as servants.

On that momentous day, Jennifer rushed into the celebration to get the Mayor out of the building on an urgent business matter. Then Elizabeth and Priscilla excused themselves from the table, set the bomb timers, and slipped out the back door. Even the President of the Federation watched via the camera how the men enjoyed the feast and how the camera went black as the building collapsed. Everything went according to plan.

The women met across the street at the coffee shop and watched the building collapse as they drank their teas.

Jennifer watched Susan slip a ring off her finger and drop it into the ashtray. Jennifer asked why she threw a beautiful ring away. Susan replied something like the ring symbolized the union between a man and a woman, but the partnership only exists in life, not when one of the partners dies. Death would set the other partner free.

Jennifer remembered asking why to form a partnership at all, and Susan just shrugged her shoulders.

Jennifer continued driving to South Chicago and approached the barricade. She rolled down the window. All the guards snapped to attention as they recognized the driver while one of the women approached the guard. "Ma'am, how can we help you?"

"I'm just taking a little country stroll."

"Ma'am, do you need anyone to accompany you? Protect you from the savages in the badlands."

"Thank you for your concern, but the savages are gone."

The guard saluted while the barricade opened, allowing Jennifer to drive into the country. Jennifer drove a little distance until she reached a network of old ruins, where they followed Sarah. With that much blood loss, Sarah could no way be alive.

Jennifer climbed out of the car and headed to Sarah's grave, where she piled stones on the spot with the largest blood splats. The grave served more as a relief to Jennifer than to honor Sarah and allowed Jennifer to close the door on some bad memories. Sarah's dead men were stacked in an abandoned building a block farther down, where the maggot population exploded to the billions.

Jennifer leaned against the building. She tore the foil off the champagne bottle and twisted off the metal tie and cork. The bottle popped as a small spray of champagne foamed out the mouth of the bottle.

Once the flow had slowed, Jennifer took a large swig. It was sweet and effervescent. Jennifer asked, "Would you like some Sarah?" Then Jennifer poured a little champagne on the mound of stones. "I have to thank you for the new office. I love it. The car is nice too. Plus, these captain stripes look good on me."

Jennifer took another drink. "So, how's your new life here? Did you meet the Grand Ole Lady in the Sky? Cat got your tongue? Or perhaps a rat?" Susan poured some more champagne on the mound of stones.

Jennifer felt like someone was watching her as she scanned the windows in the abandoned buildings around her but didn't spot any human life. But how could there be human life out here in the ruins?

A timid ginger kitten with baby blue eyes ran out of the building toward the mound of stones. The kitten meowed and sniffed the drying champagne on the rocks.

Jennifer reached down and petted the kitten. "Hi, kitty." The kitten purred and stretched her body to feel the massage of a human hand.

Jennifer picked up the kitten and looked at it. "By golly, Sarah, you have returned as a cat. You need more time on earth before the Grand Ole Lady will let you into heaven."

Jennifer placed the champagne bottle on the ground and held the kitten against her body. The kitten scratched Jennifer's shirt gently to stretch her paws. Then the kitten closed her eyes and fell asleep.

"The women will love you at the office, Sarah. Hey, look, girls. Look who has returned from the dead. Then we all can laugh at you."

Jennifer returned to the car and placed the sleeping kitten on the passenger seat. The kitten opened her eyes briefly but returned to sleep as Jennifer returned to the city with the ginger kitten.

It was a beautiful spring day, and both Paul and Luke were sitting on a bench in downtown Chicago because they heard about the park dedicated in their honor.

Paul and Luke looked at the memorial statue with the inscription – To the Heroic Men that Sacrificed Their Lives for the Peace and Harmony of Chicago, 69 AG.

“The sculptor captured your likeness exactly,” Luke said.

“Yes, he did. You look good, too. You are standing next to me with our dead brothers surrounding us.”

“I bet you that it didn’t occur to Susan that this statue would make a good marketing strategy. We just show our new converts this statue and say we come back from the world of the dead.”

Luke and Paul both chuckled.

“Surviving death gives us an awe of Godliness. And our numbers and strength are growing,” Paul said.

“I also find this statue unsettling. A man should not know two things in life: An empty stomach and the inscription on his tombstone.”

“But this is not a tombstone.”

“It’s close enough. So, what will you do if you meet Susan again?” Luke asked.

“Are you serious?” Paul asked.

“Yes.”

“What will you do if you meet Elizabeth again?” Paul replied.

Luke looked down.

“Don’t tell me you plan to continue your union with her?”

“I don’t know.”

“Are you kidding me?”

“I want to know why she did it.”

“Does it matter?”

“What about Susan?”

“I won’t think twice. I’m going to strangle her with my hands. I want to feel the life force leave her body. She killed our friends. She tried to kill me even after she kissed me on the cheek and said she loved me.”

“At least she left you a beautiful memorial.”

“Oh, yeah. You are correct. I will thank her for it as I wrap my hands around her throat and choke her to death in front of the memorial as we both admire it.”

“She said nice things about you in the newspaper.”

“So that makes it okay. She referred to me as Paul, named after a part in a refrigerator.”

Luke laughed. “An instrumental part in a refrigerator.”

“Then I will thank Susan for the newspaper article, too.”

A man wearing brown clothes walked by. He used a stick to pick up the trash and litter in the park and deposited it into a trash can. He glanced at the memorial statute and the men sitting on the park bench.

He stopped. He looked at the statue again and then at the men sitting on the bench.

Both Paul and Luke rose and approached the man. Paul said, “Brother, we’ve returned from the dead.”

The man dropped to his knees and started shaking. Paul touched the man’s shoulder and said, “You do not need to fear us. We’ve come here to rescue you. And free you. Please rise.”

The man rose.

“We ask you to join us. We ask you to join our fight against Chicago and the Federation. One day, the men will control everything again. Please join us. Please help us.”

The man nodded his head.

“Welcome, brother, to the resistance.” Then Paul and Luke hugged the man and patted his back.

Paul admired the skyscrapers because he knew that one day, the men would control this city again, and the women would be servants of men again.

The End.

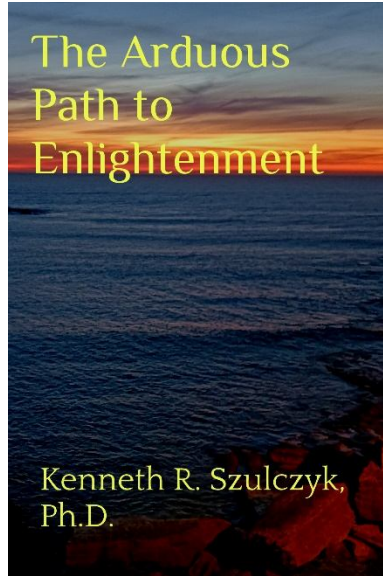
About the Author

I was born in a small town in Michigan, filled with the noises of factories. While growing up, I witnessed factory closures, which brought high unemployment and few economic opportunities. I left the town to pursue my dreams and enrolled in a university. My education opened the door to the world, where I graduated with a Ph.D. in environmental and natural resource economics from Texas A&M University. With my degree, I traveled and lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Kazakhstan, Morocco, Malaysia, and the United States. Currently, I teach economics and finance at a small university in Morocco. Despite my humble beginnings as a poor boy from Michigan, I am doing alright. I am living life to the fullest.

Other books from the author:

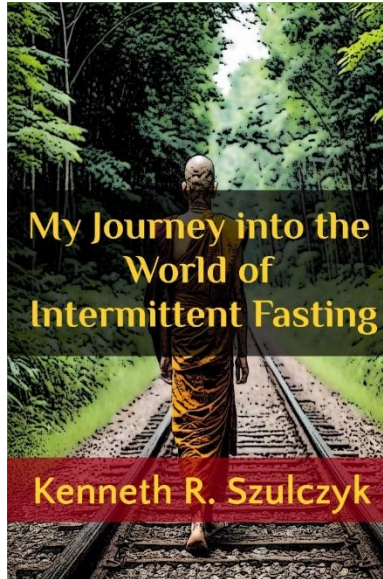
The Arduous Path to Enlightenment

As human beings, we often ponder upon our existence on this earth and ask ourselves why we are here. We search for answers through various religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. They share a common theme where God wants us to use all our talents and become closer to Him. We examine methods like fasting, meditation, lucid dreaming, sensory deprivation, and mind-altering drugs such as psychedelics and marijuana to explore our minds and awaken our spirituality. We delve into the deep depths of our minds and psyches to gain greater awareness and uncover hidden aspects of ourselves. Through this journey, we discover our true selves and purpose in life while traversing the path to enlightenment.



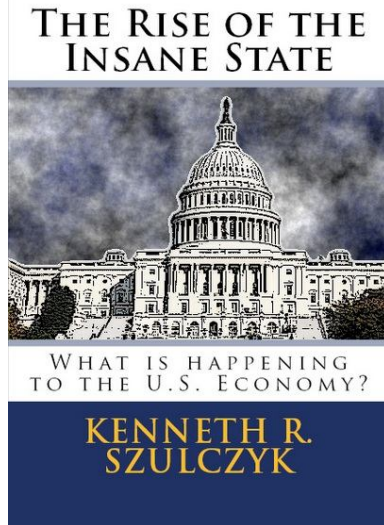
My Journey into the World of Intermittent Fasting

Intermittent fasting is a journey with many twists and turns. We may not be exploring ancient stone ruins in the jungles of Cambodia or savoring the exotic flavors of spicy Thai cuisine from the food carts on the streets of Bangkok. However, fasting is a journey to a healthier body. In this book, I take you on this journey, sharing practical insights and tips on all aspects of fasting. I've distilled my knowledge and extensive research into an easy-to-follow guide, including 50 practical tips on fasting, exercise, and nutrition. My book is a tool that can help you discover the power of intermittent fasting and unlock the doors to a healthy, long life.



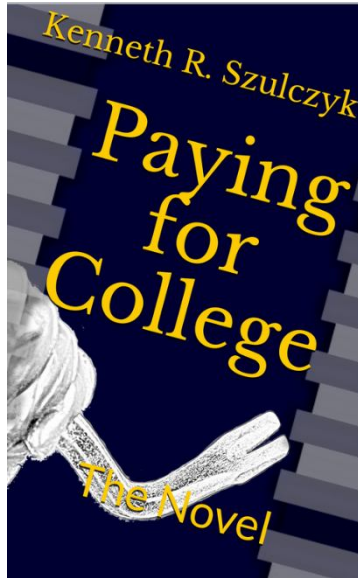
The Rise of the Insane State – What is Happening...

This book offers a comprehensive view of the U.S. legal system, explaining the relationships between the people, businesses, and their government. It's not filled with complicated statistics or high-level economic jargon. It's written for any intelligent person who wants to understand why a government takes over its economy. The book uses numerous examples and cases from the United States, but these ideas can apply to any country. It's a book that makes complex concepts accessible and understandable.



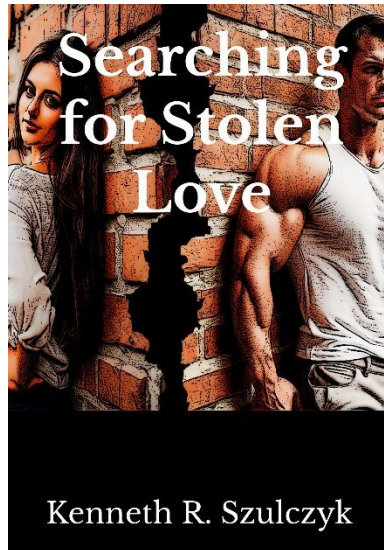
Paying for College – The Novel

Brothers, I only wanted to attend a university and escape a small town with no job prospects or future. But every time I opened my mailbox at the dorm, I pulled out another tuition bill with a looming due date. So, I had to do the unthinkable—break a few rules and do some insane things. Then everything just became crazy.



Searching for Stolen Love

Fox is an American finance professor. He is thrilled to teach at the Bosnian University of Management, a place, where he hopes to make a difference. His future is bright, and he fell in love with a Serbian woman. Having just completed his first semester, he is looking forward to a peaceful winter. But one night, his girlfriend disappeared without a trace, and he is left with a growing sense of unease. Determined to find her, Fox embarks on a search that would lead him to uncover a mystery in the land of blood and honey.



The Second American Revolution – The Building...

As a child, Jerrick Ray Davis dreamed of delivering powerful speeches to the people. He also dreams of building an Empire across the North and South Americas. These are not simple daydreams but ideas that map out Jerrick’s destiny. Jerrick rises out of the wreckage and devastation of the Michigan economy and turns his dreams into reality. Jerrick Davis and his political party, the National Workers’ Party, took over the United States government and the rest of the Americas. Jerrick Ray Davis becomes the most powerful man in the 21st century, and the world trembles at his sight. Jerrick Ray Davis also makes a promise to the people. After the 2008 Financial Crisis, he will put all Americans back to work. Good-paying jobs will be plentiful again. Of course, Jerrick Davis puts everyone back to work, building his Empire. This story is about Jerrick Ray Davis’ life from early childhood to rising in power. Please read this story with caution; we may be all toiling hard on Jerrick Ray Davis’ Empire. As Jerrick Ray Davis says, “All Americans will be united under one flag.”



Kenneth R. Szulczyk

The Second American Revolution

The Building of an Empire