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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to God's inspiring creation, his great white pines, maples, and oak trees in Michigan USA, the exotic forage in Jalisco Mexico, our domesticated dogs, cats, and horses, wildlife birds and unassuming animals that have crossed paths with me as I write, but most of all, my wife Carmen, our 5 children by age—Manda, Justin, Nick, Don, Tessa—and next generation grandchildren and future great-grandchildren. For all that I have I am so blessed and encouraged.

Preface

One day in a philosophical mood I contemplated truth, knowledge, and faith. Sounds haughty doesn't it? LOL. But hear me out for a moment. I came up with this intriguing fictional story, as a result, to demonstrate a real human crisis.

Absent of human sensation (a material integration) we are totally isolated from one another; indeed seemingly from anything physical. However a word of warning when reading my book. I am a product of present times so please forgive me for any crudeness.

My hope is that you will conclude, other than my being a poor fictional writer, is that it is not possible for our human bodies to acquire nor retain unquestionable undebatable truth but what we can do is grasp knowledge but only knowledge that is propped up by our own personal pillars of perception and faith.

Know that Faith and Reason are indubitably intertwined, not exclusive by any means. Ultimately Faith, including any lack thereof, is every person's primal economy of life. And we go forth living our lives based on our primal riches.

Acknowledgements

My high school teachers might be proud of me, but probably more so perplexed. In those adolescent days I wasn't so concerned about school grades. And justifiably my grade point average reflected this.

With this project I am ever so humbled by my challenges and have a much deeper respect for education. Isn't it fortunate that my wife Carmen is an English teacher? Thank you Carmen for editing such scribble as initially presented to lovingly protect me from obvious embarrassment.

To all my family, all my close friends, and numerous others I warmheartedly thank so much for encouragement, hope, and constructive criticisms. To my friend Michael especially, who has freely and courageously extended ideas, some of which are incorporated within this story.

Introduction

Anita Drake's innocence vaporizes in an instance when she stumbles into the cusp of corruption protecting Michigan Governor Frank Tannin's self-coveted dream of becoming the President of the United States. Frank would have succeeded if it were not for recent MSU graduate Troy Silverton.

Prior to Anita's legal troubles she has unwittingly rekindled a pre-destined love story that examples the eternal cliché "Love Wins".

Anita met Troy while he was an on duty lifeguard. Troy saved Anita's life. Anita is just as courageous and as profound as Troy. They fell in love instantly.

Anita is energetic vibrant and beautiful. She is young and pure. Troy watched her every move. She would never be in any danger at this beach. Troy tall and thin has a chiseled aero about him, vying with few in the crowd. They matched.

When they embraced, there seemed no end. But they were young and still in high school. What could possibly keep these two together?

High school was a wonderful time. Anita and Troy were with each other daily. The beach, downtown hangouts, library, long walks, and on family vacations. They may even have found a time or two for sex. Love in those days however was never mentioned.

But today is a vexing age that is hinging on Frank's success in order to solve many of today's global challenges. An eroded middle class and severe ethical degradation, largely a

consequence of unfettered capitalism, has born gross acceptance of innovative government resolve.

Since year 2020 Goodwill Omniscience is enacted in the United States and expediently spreading to other countries thanks to the guidance of the modernized United Nations. This is fitting as 20/20 also signifies excellent eye sight. This and many other new programs would have been unthinkable before now.

*SOME writers have so confounded society with government, as to leave little or no distinction between them; whereas they are not only different, but have different origins. Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness **POSITIVELY** by uniting our affections, the latter **NEGATIVELY** by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher.*

*Society in every state is a blessing, but Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one: for when we suffer, or are exposed to the same miseries **BY A GOVERNMENT**, which we might expect in a country **WITHOUT GOVERNMENT**, our calamity is heightened by reflecting that we furnish the means by which we suffer. Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence; the palaces of kings are built upon the ruins of the bowers of paradise. For were the impulses of conscience clear, uniform and irresistibly obeyed, man would need no other lawgiver; but that not being the case, he finds it necessary to surrender up a part of his property to furnish means for the protection of the rest; and this he is induced to do by the same prudence which in every other case advises him, out of two evils to choose the least. Wherefore, security being the true design and end of government, it unanswerably follows that whatever form thereof appears most likely to ensure it to us, with the least expense and greatest benefit, is preferable to all others.*

COMMON SENSE ~ THOMAS PAINÉ

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Deep Sixed

The governor's office smells of freshly sawn wood. It is 8 AM sharp. The sun sending a beam of light onto an impressive antique mahogany desk and everyone who was invited has arrived and has taken their place around a huge dark thick wooded table. Each chair solidly made of mahogany and plush leather, the governor's office is simple yet grandiose. It conveys a sense of exceptional importance.

Frank Tannin opens. "Thank you all for coming. If you haven't done so yet," Frank points his finger outward toward the back of the room, "please help yourself to the continental breakfast. Restrooms are located in the foyer. We will begin in just a few minutes."

Upon first impression, Frank Tannin is an above average fellow. He is taller than the average man. His voice is deeper than the average man. He speaks clearer and more precise than most. And his arrogance and confidence combined tend to intimidate most people. No doubt, Frank Tannin is a successful man.

Frank came from a privileged home and he attended the finest schools. His mother was well known in the community because of her active volunteerism and his father was a career politician. Frank Tannin has been Governor of Michigan for nearly six years now.

This role comes naturally to Frank. The governor was raised believing it was his duty to solve the world's problems. His father routinely drilled into young Frank the inspiring

message “Change the world, son”. At the same time he lived life as a child should. He was often out with friends doing what children like to do, playing softball or watching a movie. The day his mother caught him smoking in the basement is brought up in family chats more often than he would like. But that’s life.

“Folks, let us begin,” announces a much older Tannin. “Michigan’s unemployment rate as you know is ranked 50th in comparison to the other states.” Frank pauses just for a second gazing directly into the eyes of Senator James, then breaking off his connection and continuing in a gravelly voice “Dead Last!” “This is not acceptable. Not for Michigan and not for me. Our tax revenue has dropped to staggering levels and with obvious predictability crime is on a rise. This is disgraceful. Until we can produce significant job creation, operating costs must be reduced. Reducing costs is the focus of this meeting.”

“I would like all of you to meet Bradley Scott,” introduces Governor Tannin. “Mr. Scott is the Vice President of Sales at Trent Pharmaceutical, Inc. Mr. Scott, the floor is yours.” Bradley nods in return.

“Thank you Governor Tannin,” responds Bradley as he relocates himself to the front of the room. A comforting scent of cologne following as he passes by. “Trent Pharmaceutical Inc. has been in business for 85 grateful years and we are proud to announce that our new headquarters is being relocated from Illinois to Michigan.”

“Welcome to our state Mr. Scott,” interjects congress woman Chandler. “I am sure that Trent Pharmaceutical will absolutely thrive here in Michigan.”

Janice Chandler's persona adds sunshine to the room not to mention her shapely dress and eye-catching cleavage. Frank's marriage for all practical purposes is arranged for posterity but his unrelenting infatuations lay with Janice who joyfully reciprocates whenever she is in town.

"Trent Pharmaceutical," resumes Bradley with a nod to Janice, "invests significant monies to research and development. This is what gives Trent its competitive edge. Over the course of the past year we have made outstanding progress in niche medicines involving human sensation and perception. Trent Pharmaceutical has recently developed a line of medicines that holistically manage human sensation."

"That sounds rather intriguing Mr. Scott," responds Chandler as she connives an advantage. "How do these breakthrough products work?" Janice has an ulterior motive as two of her dear family members are medical professionals. Perhaps she could benefit from her vantage point.

"Well," Bradley begins to describe, "The human body integrates with its surroundings through five discrete sensations. We can see and hear things. We can smell and taste things and we can feel things. Without these chemical signals successfully transmitted to the brain we are effectively disengaged from the physical world. Trent scientists have formulated drugs that control the human perception of sensation."

"Control?" pipes up Senator James with a disturbed look about him. Human rights are one of James' major agenda items, an unusual concern as of late, that helped him win his seat a few years back. Senator James, however, has a disastrous reputation of backing down when immediate quarrels flare up.

“Yes,” explains Bradley with greater detail. “We can selectively interrupt these signals with precision. For example a dose of prescription X20 renders a person effectively blind. The eyes are not physically harmed in any way but rather the signal is filtered or blocked if you will. Without repeated injections of X20 sight would be restored within about 24 hours. A daily shot maintains the disability. We can control all five of the senses with medicine in this same manner.”

“That is quite haunting,” gasps an alarmed James with his unstoppable imagination. The room anxiously explodes in numerous mumblings and neighboring conversations.

“Hear him out folks,” Frank reacting quickly with his hands in the air, palms turned out toward the group. It takes several minutes before Bradley is able to resume.

“Each dose will last a finite timespan but with repeated administrations these signals can be impeded for days, months, and even years.”

Bradley pauses for a moment to evaluate his audience’s demeanor. Everyone appears to be in a state of bewilderment. He continues nevertheless.

“Multiple senses can be managed simultaneously and there are no drug interactions between any of our products, nor side effects. All signals can be disrupted in parallel.”

“Would you to be gracious enough to appease our curiosities and describe this on a personal level Mr. Scott? What if a person were given all five of these impeding drugs?” asks Representative Susan Wellington. “Describe THAT person’s experience.”

Susan Wellington is a loving mother to three pre-teen children. A self-proclaimed moderate with a slight lean toward the liberal left, Susan inspires herself as protectionist to the less fortunate whether a result of choice or by circumstance.

“This person would remain actively conscious,” reveals Bradley, “but he would be mentally secluded from his world. He would not even be able to conclude whether or not he is breathing. He could recollect memories and reason with previously gained knowledge. He remains a thinking man. Emotion would likely be heightened. I imagine that to some degree he would feel claustrophobic likened to being trapped in a coffin, far removed from society. He is free to contemplate, especially his role concerning his ordeal.”

“Why are you presenting this information to us Mr. Scott?” asks a shaken Susan. “How could a person survive under such circumstances?”

“Mr. Scott,” interrupts Frank. “Would you please wait out in the foyer while I have a moment with my colleagues?”

Bradley gathers his effects, exits the room and sits in the foyer, which he finds just as impressive as the governor’s office but with an abundance of floral arrangements neatly displayed and sounds of tranquil music streaming from a wired audio system.

Derek Jenson had apparently arrived and was waiting patiently in the foyer when Bradley entered. Derek, an ambitious opportunist, is the city hospital’s current superintendent.

Bradley opens his briefcase and begins to put all the contractual papers in order. As he shuffles through the legality

forms a pager chirps and Derek abruptly leaves the foyer entering the governor's office. Bradley waits patiently to commence the promised partnership between Trent Pharmaceutical and the State of Michigan.

The governor begins to unfold his strategic vision. "With significant declines in auto industry revenues and considering the global recession currently at hand, Michigan has little choice but to reduce costs. Trent Pharmaceutical products offer Michigan a solution."

"Using the advancements in medicine being presented to us today, we have an opportunity to completely re-imagine our prison system and cut costs by an estimated 75 percent by subduing prisoners not behind bars but with drugs."

Known only to a few individuals including his wife Barbara, Governor Tannin is planning to run for President of the United States in the next election term and is counting on this pet project of his to provide the global notoriety needed to win.

Mr. Jensen, invited to speak next, explains the infrastructure and configuration necessary to sufficiently implement a care facility that is capable of supporting people who are under the influence of these new medicines. It is a boring depiction of monitors, oxygen tanks, evacuation tubes, and seemingly impossible complexity—at least for this group of listeners.

Wrapping up, Jensen summarizes. "Much like the care a hospital provides to patients in a coma, relatively inexpensive life supporting equipment can be implemented for the incarcerated." Frank thanks him for the presentation, gives him

a nod to signify conclusion, and then expresses an interest in meeting up with him later. Derek then leaves the room.

“Changes to policy are taking place as we speak,” ensures Governor Tannin once Derek has exited. “Incarcerated criminals under new policy shall automatically forfeit to the state of Michigan portions of their retirement savings and that includes social security benefits, 401k accounts, and any pensions available. This portion surrendered of course will be largely based on the length of their sentence and obviously their monetary stature. Consequently, our policies will help discourage crime and considering the state’s current predicament quite frankly I am confident that the public is ready to support it.”

“A partnership with Trent Pharmaceutical, Inc. will facilitate our envisioned low-cost model prison system. Folks, we ARE going to re-vamp the state prison system and demonstrate to the whole country and to the world that they can turn to Michigan for answers. Derek Jenson will head our state’s prototype operation.”

In the foyer Derek and Bradley converse on some additional formulations being produced by Trent’s R&D efforts that Derek might soon need to plan and prepare for.

Frank and his team of colleagues spent the rest of this day and following weeks solidifying the required legal architecture.

Drinking the Kool-Aid

Greg Stanton's parents unexpectedly, and in short order, went on vacation to the Cayman Islands. The timing couldn't have been more perfect. The house was his. Greg threw a party and invited his closest friends—all 45 of them.

The music roared as guests mingled. Around 20 or so people arrived in all, one of them being Troy Silverton from the swim team. Troy, a straight "A" student with keen observation, is a habitual outdoorsman who is good at doing most everything he sets his mind to.

"Congratulations bro," shouts Greg as he walks over to talk with Troy.

"Same to you buddy," returns Troy cheerfully. "You called it, we took first place." High fives swinging in parallel with high impact.

"Don't forget pictures for the newspaper dude, Thursday at 6PM sharp," reminds Greg in passing. "I remember, I remember," replies Troy as he waves Greg off walking a short distance further to catch up with his friend Julie.

The rendezvous was brief but fairly typical of the two this evening. The truth of the matter is that Greg and Troy are the uncontested stars of the swim team who have doggedly returned the high school trophy back to its proper place. It has been a long time coming.

"Hey Julie. Long time no see," starts Troy. "It's a great evening," says Julie. "Congratulations by the way"

"Thanks," returns Troy. "Keeping busy?"

“As a matter of fact,” reveals Julie, “Yes. Several of us are going to the state park later this week to celebrate the coming of summer. Those of us brave enough are going to jump off the pier this year.”

“Be careful,” warns Troy. “There are a lot of rocks all around the perimeter there.” “Of course, says Julie dismissively.

“Is Anita planning to jump off the pier too,” inquires Troy?

Anita and Julie are close friends. Anita was invited by Greg but unfortunately she was not able to make it. This is Saturday and nearly every Saturday Anita spends her time at a nearby nursing home to provide company for the lonesome elderly.

“We’re counting on it,” ensures Julie. “When,” Troy prods? “Not sure exactly but before the weekend for sure,” confirms Julie. Just then the conversation is abruptly interrupted by a boisterous group of Julie’s friends. Troy simply moves to a neighboring conversation. By night’s end, he caught up with nearly everyone present at the party.

Noting Julie’s conversation Troy went to the park, having volunteered for lifeguard duty every afternoon for that entire week. As it turns out his picture never made it into the newspaper. On Friday, just as anticipated, there came Julie, Anita, and a couple of other girls jovially walking barefoot down the dunes and onto the beach. Mostly, Troy kept an interested eye on Anita.

What a beautiful girl. Anita seems to always be on the run or hanging out with friends and family, and surprisingly is

still able to keep up with school gymnastics and thespian activities.

“I’m so glad I was there to save her,” recalls Troy as he reminisces his high school years. “I miss her so much.”

Alone in his rented townhouse he continues looking out the picture window just for a moment longer, gulping his bourbon and with a sigh utters, “But that was then and this is now. I went off to college and Anita is with Greg now. That’s life.” He determinately snaps out of his funk and goes back to the kitchen table to complete his college assignments. Just as soon as he sat down the telephone rings.

“Hello, this is Troy Silverton,” announces Troy after scurrying out of the kitchen and across the living room to get to the phone. Friends and family call his cellular phone. With anyone else it’s the landline.

“Good afternoon Troy. This is Kris Howell from the placement office at MSU. Do you have a few minutes to discuss an internship opportunity?”

“Certainly I do,” responds Troy with excitement.

“This opportunity isn’t available until the spring. The State of Michigan is in the process of securing a team of sorts for an up-and-coming project. The Governor specifically identified you as a candidate.”

Troy muses, “The governor? How in the world does he even know me?

“Would you be able to come to our office tomorrow and discuss this in more detail, Troy?

“Yes, yes, when should I come?”

“Can you make it here after your appointment with the dentist, since his office is not far from here?”

Again thinking, “How does Ms. Howell know I have a dentist appointment tomorrow and how would she know which dentist I even go to? She must have heard this from one of my friends,” shrugs Troy.

“I can do that.” confirms Troy.

“Good. And Troy,” quips Kris, “Don’t come in here with a hangover.”

“Of course not, Ms. Howell. I’ll be there.”

Both hang up. “That was eerie,” ponders Troy.

Dancing Tissue

The sheets were tussling in a bed in an otherwise empty room at the hospital. Patti and her manager are thoroughly aroused. They hug and caress, kissing one another wildly. In her hair is a yellow bow augmenting the glow of her cougar complexion and the perfume is just too damn irresistible. His hand slides up the back of her neck lifting Patti's hair in a way that he will never forget.

He rolls topside and slowly leads in penetration and simultaneously they sink into deep intimacy. Every muscle in Patti's body relaxes in unison. Tom unconditionally surrenders a thought as their eyes lock together "You deserve to have anything you want Patti."

This power play excites Patti all the more and makes her feel beautiful. While he gazes onto her alluring face, she reaches her hand down and slowly squeezes his manhood letting him know she is taking charge. "I *will* get what I want," whispers Patti with her lips brushing against his ever so elusively.

"You make me so weak," groans Tom.

His expression tells all. She takes her other hand and scratches across his back. "Shhh, I'm in control now. Succumbing to her commanding authority he struggles to avoid pre-ejaculation. "I want your old position Tom. You'll recommend me won't you?"

Tom is frailly vulnerable now and concedes to her demand, "Yes Patti, for you anything." They soon melt through to completion. She and he are both gratified.

Patti sits up and grabs a few tissues from the box next to the bed. "I had better make my way back to duty," hurries Patti. "I don't want anybody to get any hints about us. Life would not be very pleasant around here if they knew what we just did."

Tom swung an arm around Patti's waist and reeled her back in. "Not yet," pleads Tom. "Let's just lie here for a moment longer."

"No, I have to go," strains Patti. She pulls away from him tossing all the bed covers aside and dresses as quickly as she can. "Clean up the room before you leave," barks Patti. Looking out the small window in the door it appears that all is clear, so she exits into the hallway as if she had just finished a job in that empty hospital room.

The hallway, however, was not vacant. Four other employees saw Patti exit the room, including Anita Drake and Leslie Barkley.

Anita is an innocently adorable young woman, a tad naïve perhaps. In her early twenties she could still easily pass for seventeen. At an average height she is fit, has straight hair down just below her shoulders, and dons a youthful smile. Anita has been employed at this hospital since graduating from high school.

Leslie, as most people would describe, has a girl-next-door stature and an uncommon sensibility.

"Did you see that?" whispers Leslie. Anita watched but didn't respond. Leslie continues, "That room has been empty for days. I think we should wait and see who else pops out of

there. So they dallied and maybe 10 minutes later, Tom exits the room hurriedly.

“I knew it, I just knew it, concludes Leslie as her hand shrouds her smirking mouth. “They just had sex in that room.”

“Tom was recently promoted,” Anita finally responding with her hands on her hips. “I submitted an application for his open position. “Is this what one has to do in order to get a job around here?” Anita was flabbergasted.

“Oh Anita, you would be the best choice hands down,” soothes Leslie. “The hospital couldn’t possibly base their decision on that kind of thing. You’re the kindest person I know and more so the team respects you. Besides, you are the one who fills in for Tom whenever he’s out. So you have experience to boot. For you to get the promotion makes the most sense.”

Mr. Olsen, rolling an IV cart with a tube attached to his wrist, slides his feet ever so slowly toward the nurses. He is determined to go for a short stroll. As usual when he passes the next room or two, he’ll be too tuckered out to get back on his own.

“Hi Mr. Olsen,” welcomes Anita while hiding her fresh anxieties. “How are you feeling today?”

“I’m surviving,” laughs Olsen. Anita chuckles with him. “Do you want to hear a joke I recently heard from my granddaughter Katelyn?” asks Mr. Olsen.

“Of course we do Mr. Olsen,” returns Anita touching his shoulder in jest.

As serious as he is able to posture himself he proudly verbalizes, “How do you make a tissue dance?”

“I don’t know. How do you make a tissue dance Mr. Olsen?” Her eyes roll up. “We give up,” hands thrown in the air.

“You put a little boogie into it.” All three spontaneously bust out in laughter.

“That’s a good one Mr. Olsen,” rates Anita with a pleasantly generous smile. “You’re a funny guy.”

“I still have it, don’t I?” Mr. Olsen questions rhetorically yet visibly coy.

“You certainly do Mr. Olsen, you certainly do,” smiles Anita. “Would you like some help getting back to your room now?”

“If you would please,” responds Olsen. “I would be much appreciative. All this joking around tires a guy out.”

Mr. Olsen was of course nearly out of breath just to come visit Anita and Leslie. He anticipates Anita’s daily presence and just so happens to appear at the right time. Anita courteously takes hold of his cart and assists him back to his room. Leslie seizes the cue and moves on to other duties.

At day’s end Anita goes home empty and mentally exhausted from her long discouraging day at the hospital. She bends down while approaching the cage in her living room, then sitting down on the floor next to Petie, her alluring bunny rabbit. The two are about to share a well-deserved pouting moment.

“I’ll bet you would like to stretch your legs, wouldn’t you Petie?” Anita asks affectionately. She reaches over to the cage door, unclasps it, and places Petie between her legs. “Petie, you are always the great comforter.” Anita sat there

insistently caressing her rabbit all the while trying to rationalize the events of her day today. In the end, Petie convinces her to find another job.

Tripping

“What a beautiful sunny day,” Julie says vivaciously as she turns onto a country road that is lightly flanked with a mix of deciduous and coniferous trees. On this road a person can view the scenery miles out. “I’m glad we decided to go out together.”

“And look at the barns and all that fencing. Isn’t that just gorgeous?” responds Anita. To the left are numerous farm animals, sunbathing cows in one field and a pasture full of sheep further down from there. On the right she sees horses and vast open hay fields where at this moment a tractor is pulling a wagon spreading potash in hopes of thickening his next cutting.

“For sure,” says Julie while momentarily gazing at Anita. “You will like this place. I went there once last year and they nearly emptied my pockets. The building is huge. They have a lot of merchandise for us to sift through.”

“In a silly tone Anita retorts, “It’s a good thing I brought my credit card then.”

“For sure,” returns Julie. “Okay here we are, Judd’s Antique Mall.”

The gravel parking lot was about half capacity. Julie parks the car, and both head into the building.

“Wow, you weren’t kidding Julie. This place is huge. You know, perhaps I will buy something after all.” Anita rushes straight over to the oil lamp collection not far from the front door. She picks up a peculiar piece pondering whether this treasure still works or not.

“Lacy found a job,” blurts Julie. Anita smiles. “Maybe I will too then. After all my first interview went well, I think anyway.”

“Oh I’m sure it went well,” counters Julie. “The question is, do you like the place?”

“I do actually. They have great benefits and reimburse for education. If I can get in there, I’m going to turn my certification into a nursing degree. That’s my dream anyway.”

“That sounds like a good plan. Let me know when you hear something.”

While studying a couple of the choicest oil lamps Anita makes her pick and with the decor in hand they move to the next long line of tables perusing some uniquely odd knickknacks, old silverware, pots and pans, and other kitchen gadgets from the day.

“I heard that Greg was checking out some schools,” shares Julie. Anita stops. “Where did you hear that?”

“Oh I have lots of friends honey and I belong to a very fertile grapevine,” quips Julie. “That’s just what I heard but don’t tell anyone that I’m the one who told you.”

“My lips are sealed. Besides that is something I would want to hear from Greg directly. Since I still don’t know for sure, the news will be just as special to me.”

“You’re a sweetie pie Anita. Take a look over there... flamingos.” Immediately they rush over giggling along the way.

Anita casually sneaks her question in, “Do you ever hear anything from this grapevine of yours about Troy Silverton?” as

she coolly caresses a pink flamingo's neck and over its back from head to tail.

“Well, well, well... who do you think you are fooling?
You don't think I know that you still have feelings for Troy?”
Anita expresses some visible embarrassment.

“I hear things,” confides Julie. “But I love you Anita. I have no inclination of distracting you from your current relationship with Greg. Julie had emphasized the word “current” by raising her hands and using her fingers as quotation marks. Anita accepts the discernment and quietly continues to peruse the merchandise.

A couple of young men were scoping out the girls as they meandered here and there. Now seemed like a good time so they approach the girls and solicited them for a date. With foot in mouth one of the guys point out Julie's fine curvatures as if forgetting that attractive women know who they are.

Julie, if alone, would have fallen for such attention but at this moment she and Anita are fully engrossed in the sisterhood. “Sorry, we are not available. Both of us are happily taken.” The girls then turn around back toward the tables and the guys take the hint leaving immediately.

After expending a great deal of time at the store the girls leave to visit their next stop-- the botanical gardens. Julie and Anita having a close friendship generally do not hide anything from one another. More discussions concerning Greg, and Troy will be had before this day is over.

Let's Go Crazy

“Hi, my name is Anita Drake,” announces a very nervous Anita. “I have an appointment with Derek Jenson.”

“Welcome Anita. Please come this way.” The receptionist leads Anita into a nearby conference room. “Have a seat in here and I will let Derek know that you have arrived.”

The table and eight chairs nearly fill the small room to capacity. There is nothing hanging on the walls except a whiteboard full of notes and scribblings. All one can do in here is wait... and think. “Oh I hope I get this job,” dreams Anita. “That would teach the hospital, now wouldn’t it?”

Derek soon enters the room. “Good morning Anita. Thank you for coming back out here to meet with us again.”

“My pleasure,” replies Anita in a rather cordial tone. “As I mentioned before, I am very interested in this position.”

“I do happen to recall that and I would say then that I might have good news for you,” says Derek. “We would like to make you an offer. The job comes with a competitive salary and a very good benefit package.”

“I am very pleased to hear this Mr. Jenson,” responds Anita grinning and adjusting her posture unconsciously in reaction to her excitement.

“This facility,” Derek describes, “is the first of its kind. It is truly groundbreaking. This Michigan adult detention center is a prototype and Governor Tannin is taking the time to personally oversee its operation. Even now this Michigan model

is quietly reaching global exposure. We need people just like you to demonstrate its success.”

Derek hands the offer to Anita. “Sign this if you accept and let’s select a start date.” Anita immediately signs the form then slides it over the surface of the table toward Derek. “I can start in two weeks.”

Anita beams with enthusiasm as she leaves the building. In her mind she was already preparing her resignation at the hospital. Anita’s new manager Patti was jealous of her for several reasons but mostly because Anita was more popular with the staff than she.

The next morning Anita went to the hospital and shared her news with some close friends. Inevitably Patti and Anita crossed paths and Anita wasted no time to hand in her prepared letter of resignation, which was neatly folded and placed in her uniform apron, ready for this moment. Patti read the brutal, yet honest, letter right then and there and then stormed off. Anita couldn’t help but snicker just a little.

Anita glowed all day. During lunch break she calls Greg Stanton. Greg and Anita have been together since the fall after high school graduation several years back. Greg is ruggedly handsome with a thick skinned appearance due to some premature wrinkling. Anita has tried to tie him down on multiple occasions. He just doesn’t seem to know what he wants. He is not nearly as motivated as Anita.

“Let’s go out to dinner tonight,” suggests Anita.

“Sure,” answers Greg who is presently at home bingeing on a series of back-to-back episodes of a television program that went viral. I’ll pick you up around 5ish.

“Perfect,” accepts Anita.

Later that evening at the Crazy Horse Saloon, their preferred steakhouse; “I did it!” announces Anita.

“What’s that,” asks Greg?

“I told Patti to shove this job up her nether regions. Let’s order some wine; my life is changing,” exclaims Anita, “and for the better.”

“So wait, you are leaving the hospital?” questions Greg. “Let’s hear some more.”

“I was offered a new job today, a better job with the new adult detention center that was recently built.”

“Good for you Anita,” responds Greg. “So what exactly did you tell your manager?” Greg asks anxiously.

“I told Patti many things but to name a few I let the cat out of the bag and told her that I know how she got that promotion and that everyone else on the team knew it too.”

“That’s hilarious,” reacts Greg. “It’s her bed so to speak and she has to lie in it. She earned that. Good for you”

“Have you given marriage any more thought?” chimes Anita out of the blue. “Things are moving in the right direction for both of us and we have been together for a long enough time now.” There was a definite uncomfortable pause in the conversation. “Well,” appeals Anita, obviously disturbed by the delay?

Greg was undoubtedly troubled. Sure, he loves Anita but he felt like he had a pretty good situation going for himself. He is still living at his parent’s home so his expenses are low.

With the money he currently earns he is able to pamper himself more than his other friends are able to. If they marry, he thought, this could change.

"Are you sure that now is the best time?" voices Greg. "I want to offer you my very best. As it is I am still trying to figure out whether I should go on to college or perhaps join the military."

"When do you think you'll have it all figured out?" scowls Anita.

"Soon," promises Greg.

Anita's heart dropped. Greg has disappointed her yet again but she isn't going to let this ruin her day, no indeed.

Flutter Eyes

Two weeks have passed and today is Monday. The alarm rings and Anita wakes up from a sleep that never really achieved the hopeful category of REM. She stretches a couple of tight spots out of her back and heads for the shower. Softly she begins singing to herself. “Today is the day... today is the day... today is the day that I start my new job. Today is the day... today is the day... today is the day that I start my new job. Don’t be late... don’t be late... I better not be late for my important date.”

Anita thought, “I am supposed to be there at 7:30 am, but I’ll be early today. Fifteen minutes early seems appropriate to me. That’s what I’ll do.”

Instead of cooking breakfast Anita decides that she will pick up some fast food on the way to work. “I had better be careful not to spill anything on my clothes.”

Arriving to work, Anita surveys the new brick building with greater intensity. It was recently erected and they were still putting final touches to it. Entering the reception area beyond the two sets of double doors, Anita announces her presence. “Hi, my name is Anita Drake. I have an appointment to see Guy Mandrel.”

The receptionist acknowledges Anita through the bullet-proof glass pane that shrouds her, and notifies Guy of her arrival. Within minutes Guy enters the lobby and greets Anita. Guy, like many of the other people employed at the detention center, is relatively new. “Let’s go to my office,” prompts Guy.

“Today is devoted to your orientation. Tomorrow you report for duty.”

Waiting in Guy’s office is Governor Frank Tannin. “Anita, this is Governor Frank Tannin,” introduces Guy. “Governor Tannin, this is Anita Drake.”

“Welcome Ms. Drake,” says Frank. “It is nice to meet you in person.”

Unbeknownst to anyone hired in, the governor having clearance through the Goodwill Omniscience Act of 2020 is secretly monitoring each and every employee at the detention center.

“This is a unique facility Anita,” states Governor Tannin. “Within the next twelve months or so we expect that this facility will receive a lot of publicity. As you will soon witness, this place represents a new approach to criminal management. It is a model for the progressive age... Michigan’s model adult detention center,” voiced the prideful governor.

“I hold a special interest in its operation Anita, and I personally invite everyone on our team to contact me directly with any problems. I maintain an open door policy and I invite you to use it. After all, we will be in the spotlight soon enough and in fact on the world stage.”

“Let me assure you sir,” responds Anita, “that should something come up I will let you know right away, definitely.”

“Well, it was nice meeting with you Anita,” says Governor Tannin. “I’ll let Guy take over now. Remember I’m just a phone call away,” reiterates Frank. “Guy,” continues Frank, “she is all yours. I will see you in the tomorrow’s meeting, right?”

Governor Tannin quickly slides through the text messages delivered to his smart phone and exits the room.

“I appreciate your attitude Anita,” conveys Guy. “This facility is radically different than what you might expect to see in a correctional facility. In the past we needed to lock down prisoners. In a traditional prison there are many rooms, a whole lot of bars, and a large crew of prison guards. Basically a lot of wasted space with huge labor costs.”

“Here, we administer highly specialized medicines to maintain necessary control. Our residents are assigned to beds and are not able to leave them by their own will. Each prisoner is connected to sophisticated life supporting equipment. As a result our crew of prison guards requires just two who primary support the reception and discharge of residents. Mostly we rely upon nursing aids like yourself, and a team of candy strippers to perform the necessary tasks that ensure the highest health standards for our residents.”

“Let’s take a walk and I’ll give you the dollar tour,” Guy continues. From the office they proceed through a connecting hallway and into a long corridor. It is brightly lit and eerily absent of people, notes Anita. Sets of wooden double doors line each side every 100 feet. The entryways are sequentially numbered. Behind every door is a hall that contains residents. Friendly muzak warms the ambiance through a speaker system.

“They aren’t called prisoners here,” says Guy. “Here they are residents. Female residents are placed in *even* numbered halls and *odd* numbered halls house our male residents,” describes Guy. “This is due to the equipment needed. You are assigned to Hall 26, starting tomorrow.”

Guy and Anita then walk over and enter Hall 26. Each room is identical, housing 150 beds. There are three rows of 50 beds and in Hall 26 every bed is taken. As they begin meandering down one of the aisles and moving closer to the beds, Anita notices that each person is lying motionless on their backs, their eyes closed and a tube entering their nostril. There is a slight respiratory sound by each bed.

“Are they all sleeping,” asks Anita puzzled. “Not exactly,” answers Guy. “They are quite awake and fully conscious. As I mentioned earlier, we confine them here using drugs. They are justifiably incapacitated, so to speak.”

Anita becomes flush but stays on point regardless. “They are intravenously nourished,” explains Guy, “and their bodily excrements are evacuated through this complicated equipment over here next to their beds. Your job is to monitor the equipment and care for these residents while they fulfill their sentences. Supplies are located in the back room over there,” gestures Guy.

“Can I read to them,” asks Anita? “For your own benefit feel free but they cannot hear you,” states Guy. “This is not like being in a coma. The most important priority is to keep this place sanitary.”

“Okay, where do I report tomorrow,” asks Anita. Guy pulls a magnetic badge out from his pocket. “Use this badge to get into the building and be here in Hall 26 by 7:30am. Sometime midday I will come visit and see how things are going.”

Anita’s primary duties as directed by Guy are to monitor the equipment making sure to notify Guy immediately

should any malfunctions occur, sponge bath the residents daily and keep her hall proudly sanitized. Guy warns, "A few of our residents continue to be involved in legal appeals. Doctors and lawyers may visit from time to time."

"That's it," concludes Guy. "If there are no more questions you are free to start organizing the hall now as you see fit. I will be in my office if you should need me."

"Thank you Guy," expresses Anita.

There is a temporary assistant in the hall today while Anita acclimates herself. Anita walks over to a resident. The resident is lying still except for a rise and fall in her chest in tune with the oxygen dispensed. Her eyes are fluttering under the lids and her skin is pale. There are contraptions next to each bed and tubes running from each person out into a restricted area.

Anita spent the remaining hours observing the assistant and asking detailed questions. There were no emergencies today. Five minutes before the shift ended, an aid came in to relieve the assistant. Anita thanked her and then went home.

Nice Rack

Winter arrives. In Michigan's Upper Peninsula noon has come and gone; the sun drifting away early as it always does this time of year. The temperature is falling noticeably and the brisk air is becoming more and more frigid.

"Perfect weather for rut season," strikes up Rick. "Say Ronny, is Troy going to make it up here this year?"

Rick has been drinking his own brew of distilled moonshine as soon as he arrived to camp. This is the perfect time for him to celebrate this coming year's good fortune—retirement. Rick and Ron both meet at camp every year and have done so religiously over the last 15 years. Senator Ron Silverton bought this land long ago so he and his son Troy could bond doing what they enjoy most, spending time outdoors.

"Troy is coming," answers Ron as he reaches for his cellphone. "He always comes. He needs to wrap up a few loose ends concerning his upcoming internship. Oh look, a text from Troy, good. He says that he is on his way now, should be here in less than an hour."

Ron and Rick became friends as a consequence of their sons' friendship. In junior high, Jon privately fought depression. He longed for deeper love but in his mind could not witness it very well in his social world. Troy's intuition drew these two together. As it turns out Jon is a good person and a great friend, perhaps the best of friends.

"Troy graduates next year, right?"

"Yes he does," says Ron with a flattered grin on his face.

“You must be really proud,” responds Rick.

Ever since he was a little boy, Troy was firmly set on helping others, Ron remembers fondly. He was especially impressed by Troy’s actions on the beach when he saved that girl Anita. “His mom and I have always been proud of him.”

The truth is, Troy loved Anita and it was no coincidence that Troy happened to be there at the beach.

“Let’s go inside and fire up the woodstove,” suggests Ron. “It’s getting pretty cold.”

“Sounds like a plan,” responds Rick’s son Jon who had arrived with his dad.

In November the days are short and chilly but the sights are utterly magnificent. White snow blankets the ground and dresses the evergreens like royalty. Aside from the wisps of wind and a few squirrels barking at a distance it is quiet and surreal today.

“Jon, grab some more wood from that stack and bring it inside,” requests Rick pointing to the wood pile. “Enough to keep us warm through the night.”

As Jon was gathering the split red oak onto an old rusted out dolly Troy arrives eagerly. Both Jon and Troy grinning from ear to ear embrace in the customary deer camp bear hug. “Glad to see you Troy.”

“Same goes to you Jon. How is life treating you these days,” asks Troy “and how are you doing with school?”

“Good,” replies Jon. “I have decided to continue on and pursue a Master’s degree.”

“Excellent,” expresses Troy. “Have you heard, I graduate this next year,” tells Troy.

“Yes I’ve heard. Congratulations my friend. Help me with this wood and let’s go inside,” prompts Jon. “Your dad is inside waiting for you.”

Both Jon and Troy enter the toasty cabin, Troy welcomed by warmhearted bear hugs. The room fully decked out in the typical Yooper décor. There are numerous antlers hanging on every wall. Blankets and canned food piled to one side and every snack one could possibly imagine tossed on the other side. It’s a mess.

In the center of the cabin, there is an old cast iron woodstove keeping everybody warm and providing a dim flickering light. With the beer tub set off to the side of the room, topped with icicles from the cabin’s eves and mother nature’s snow to keep the beverages cold, they reminisce for hours as usual, making up for lost time.

“It’s time for bed,” prompts Rick. “Up at 4 am. I’ll have pancakes and sausage ready.” Both Rick and his son Jon retire for the evening while Troy and his dad continue talking in front of the radiating fire.

As Rick and Jon exit the conversation room Rick turns back with his index finger waving at Ron and Troy, “Don’t stay up too late now.” And with that, Ron and Troy are alone.

“I missed you dad,” confesses Troy. “How is mom doing?”

“She’s fine. You’ll see soon enough when you stop over,” dad suggests firmly with eye to eye contact. “I’m proud of you son. Your future awaits.”

“Dad, do you want to hear something... something weird? I have this eerie feeling at the university. They seem to know a lot about me and my private life frankly. No glaring red flags but just a lot of little things that come up in conversations and email correspondences. I’m starting to wonder if I am paranoid.”

Ron with a sullen look on his face shakes his head and leans into Troy’s ear. “Oh dear God, it sounds like the universities might now have access too.”

“Have access to what,” questions Troy?

“I have something to share with you Troy but this is not the place.” Ron continues but much quieter and leaning inward toward Troy. “There is an undisclosed policy in America pseudo-named Goodwill Omniscience. I can’t talk about it right now. For now my advice is this; don’t jeopardize your education or your future. I suspect that you are being reviewed for the internship.”

“Shake it off and just be smart. Stop by the house when you have a chance. I will explain everything,” promises dad. “And don’t mention any of this to anyone. Now let’s get some sleep. Tomorrow comes quick.”

Morning comes and after breakfast each went their own way packing choice snacks. This was Jon’s lucky day. While sitting patiently, just as the sun begins to break, a buck moves into his line of sight. Today he was using his scoped 30-30 and down went the deer. It was a clean kill right through the heart, his signature shot.

Later, back at camp, Troy and Jon spoke while field dressing Jon’s prize. “Lucky shot,” jokes Troy. “And on the very

first day you lucky dog. But on a more important topic how is your mother doing?"

"She is healthy and still active," answers Jon while tying a rope around the prized 8 point rack of antlers. Dad is retiring this year and the two have plans to travel some."

"That sounds like a lot of fun. Good for them. Is your dad still planning to come here to deer camp every year?" asks Troy.

"I'm really not sure. They mentioned selling the house. We'll have to wait and see I guess but I'll definitely come," answers Jon.

Troy could hear laughter and faint sounds of conversation coming from the cabin. Neither Rick nor Ron saw any deer this day. They were presently in the cabin wiping down their rifles and chit-chatting while Jon continued preparing his prize.

Troy looks back at Jon and suggests, with steamy fog bellowing from his mouth, "We should see each other more often, don't you agree?"

"That's a great idea. What are you doing on New Year's Eve?" inquires Jon.

"I'm free," says Troy.

"Great. Let's meet at The Borderline in the Soo," proposes Jon.

"I'm in," returns Troy.

Northbound Trolls

It is News Year's Eve. Jon and Troy meet up at The Borderline as planned, Northern U.P.'s popular hip micro-brewery. The Borderline is a usual hangout for locals and is a frequent visit for everyone familiar with Michigan's Upper Peninsula. A mutual friend and his band are scheduled to perform on stage tonight.

"Have you been here before?" yells the waitress above all the noise.

"Yes," says Jon. "Bring us a couple Manhattans."

"No, please," shouts Troy while quickly gesturing with his hand. "I'll just have a glass of lemonade. Make that a pink lemonade."

"Troy," a jovially Jon rouses. "It's New Year's Eve and our buddies are playing on stage tonight right over there man."

"Honestly I don't really like the taste of alcohol," divulges Troy. With the waitress waiting for a sign, Troy motions to her and she walks off.

"I must admit... you definitely have your life in order," concedes Jon. "Let me ask you Troy. You are obviously devoted to God now. Why? What is it that has you so convinced that God is for real?"

"Look, first of all I have nothing against drinking. It's not that. But when my attitude is in check the world seems to demonstrate and accentuate what is right and good. Truth is proved right by her actions as they say. I am convinced now more than ever that it is *purpose* and *meaning* that brings value

and joy to my life, not merely survival as the secular world sometimes impresses upon us. That's my truth. Look, one thing I know Jon—the deeper I have been in the Word lately the more fruitful and refreshing my mind becomes, whereas the deeper I contemplate the nooks and crannies of atheism the uglier and darker this world is. There isn't a better alternative for me Jon."

Jon falls into deep thought just for a second or two. "You're a good man Troy Silverton," admits Jon with a renewed spirit of hope. "Thanks for sharing man." The waitress then interrupts to drop off their order.

"So, tell me about the internship" prompts Jon after taking a swig of his Manhattan.

"All right," says a relieved Troy. "My internship is with the State of Michigan. Michigan is apparently redesigning the state's prison system and I am assisting their legal team."

"THAT should look good on your resume," says Jon. "What's changing in the prison system?"

"You'll see soon enough. This program is going to become quite public in a few months. I just hope I don't screw anything up."

"You will be fine Troy," reassures Jon. "I have confidence in you. Where will you be working?"

Troy answers, "At that new facility in Gaylord near where we graduated high school."

Jon's eyes widen. A couple moments pass as he quickly surveys the growing crowd. "Say... Do you remember Anita?" inquires Jon with his prized smile.

Troy perks up recalling fond memories of Anita when dating one another during their high school days. Back then young Troy didn't realize how deep-seated love could get. Troy rashly ended his relationship with Anita after leaving to attend Michigan State University, thoroughly convinced that his studies would consume all his time. That simply would not be fair to Anita, Troy thought. To college he must go and earn his degree.

Culture dictates that young adults first seek a career, then love. Neither one of them were strong enough to overcome such an expectation. So when Troy left for college, they also abandoned their teenage relationship. Troy loves Anita deeply, he realizes that now. You can see it in his eyes whenever she comes up in conversation. Of course Jon knew.

"I remember her," pouts Troy. "If I weren't such an idiot I would have asked for her hand in marriage before moving away."

"Well guess what?" Jon continues. "I met Anita's parents at the grocery store not long ago. We began talking and you are not going to believe this but guess where Anita works right now?" Jon excitedly asks.

"She left the hospital?" inquires Troy.

"Yes," says Jon, "Both of you are going to be working at the same place. Perhaps this is the purpose and meaning you mentioned, heh?"

A renewed sparkle enters Troy's eyes and his heart starts to beat a little more rapidly. "Can you believe that?" exults Jon. "Maybe it's true, things happen for a reason."

Jon finishes his Manhattan and orders a second. As the waitress comes back with more refreshments, the band starts

their performance on stage. It was too loud to hold any sort of conversation.

Jon and Troy gestured regularly throughout the evening while the band screamed but Troy's mind was elsewhere. He wondered if Anita nurtured any harsh feelings after they separated. He felt paths would eventually cross someday. Many scenarios ran through his mind. Could they get back together? He'll have to wait and see. Spring is just around the corner.

Wired

“Mom... Dad... Are you home?” calls Troy as he peaks his head through the front door of his parents’ house.

“Troy,” screams Jamie from the kitchen in an animated voice. Ron, in his favorite lounge chair, puts down the newspaper and hurries to the front door and then shakes Troy’s hand with a prolonged grip.

“So what honor do we owe this impromptu visit?” queries dad. “Don’t tell us that you just happen to be in the neighborhood. We know better than that.”

“Maybe I just miss you... isn’t that enough?” answers Troy. “Your timing is excellent,” says mom. “Dinner will be ready in less than 30 minutes and there’s plenty of food for all of us.”

“Great,” exclaims Troy. “Do you need any help?”

“No dear, it’s mostly all prepared and just needs to simmer now.” Troy’s mom then exits to the kitchen excitedly to set the table and prepare the meal.

“Say dad, can I speak with you privately?” asks Troy in a soft-spoken voice. “I’d like to finish the discussion we started back at deer camp, concerning Goodwill Omniscience.”

“Okay. Let’s have this talk in my office downstairs,” whispers Ron with his finger over his lips. “We’ll be downstairs,” hollers Ron to Jamie and both go down to the basement where they can talk.

“When did you build this office?” asks Troy inquisitively.

“About a year ago,” answers Ron. “What do you think of it?”

“Well, it could use a decorator’s touch,” jokes Troy.

“Check this out Troy.” Ron points him to a wall plate and then he removes it. “Look here, inside the wall. Do you see the tightly woven copper wire mesh?”

“Interesting but why,” asks Troy. “The entire office is enshrouded with it, including the door connected through its hinges. We can talk safely in here,” affirms dad. Ron then puts his hand on Troy’s shoulder and ushers him into the room and closes the door tightly.

“So why the mesh?” repeats Troy with his eyes somewhat squinted. “Why is this necessary?”

“Have a seat son. What I am about to share with you is classified. You cannot repeat anything said within the four walls of this room. If you do, your safety and ours including your mother’s safety will most likely be in jeopardy. Do you want me to continue?”

“Yes... certainly,” prompts a baffled Troy.

“Terrorists and other deviant entrepreneurs thrived because they were protected by previously outdated privacy laws,” explains Ron. “The law abiding government with their hands tied couldn’t really be as proactive as the offended public tended to expect of them. It’s not so much that the government cares about victims, because that helps them control population. That’s another subject.”

“The 2020 Act of Goodwill Omniscience was passed by Congress to expose such activities confidentially. This act

separates governmental and civil privacy requirements, creating double standards if you will. These provisions were not made public and are highly secretive. As a state senator I am privy to this confidential information. Do you know what a data warehouse is?" asks Ron.

"Yes," answers Troy, "generally."

Ron continues. "Criminal records, medical records, educational records are all stored in disparate data warehouses. So too are financial records, credit card records, loyalty retail card records, telephone call records, Internet search records, social networking records, and on and on and on."

"Under the 2020 Act of Goodwill Omniscience, no business license shall be issued or renewed unless the business provides unconditional data mining access to their privately built electronic data warehouses. All firewalls must provide government access through IP port 666. Businesses must sign nondisclosure agreements if they want their desired tax deductions."

"The government is able to mash up all this information and holistically profile each and every citizen," summarizes Ron.

"Creepy," responds Troy. "I had no idea that the government had such power. But what is the harm to law-abiding folks like us? It's not like the government is going to purchase illegal goods using my credit card, right?"

"You should be concerned Troy. Information can be used to manipulate and spin situations," explains Ron. "A person's health insurance policy may skyrocket to absorb costs generally associated to lifestyles. Somebody's garbage bill might increase because they don't recycle. Simply because they

know who you voted for, unexplainable repercussions could result and frankly have.”

“And there is more. Technology is extremely advanced now. People marvel at the thought of satellite imagery these days but I tell you, these satellites equipped with audio surveillance can hone in on selected people and eavesdrop on conversations. Dialog is recorded and added to a profile. Did you know that raw audio is searchable?” Troy’s dad asks rhetorically. “It doesn’t need to be converted into text anymore.”

“The copper mesh that lines these walls prevent the government from detecting our conversion,” says Ron. It distorts and suppresses signals rendering them as noise.

“Oh, I get it,” deduces Troy. “So the university now has access and is using this data to evaluate me?” catches Troy.

“Yes,” affirms dad, but only state sponsored universities.”

“Is mom aware of any of this?” asks Troy.

“No she’s not and let’s keep it that way,” petitions Ron. “This is our little secret.”

“Dinner is ready,” shouts mom. “Get it while it’s hot.”

Creepy Pricks

It's Thursday evening and Greg has been anxiously waiting all afternoon for Anita to come home from work. He has some thrilling news and this wasn't something Greg wanted to share over the phone. He got there before her and sat in his car waiting.

Within seconds after Anita arrived, Greg suddenly appears.

"What a surprise," says Anita as she shuffles through her purse looking for her keys in front of the entry door. Greg has an unusual glow about him and a dramatic sense of confidence. "Is everything okay?"

"Yes, I just want to share some good news with you," voices Greg.

Both head into the kitchen. Greg sits down at the table while Anita grabs a couple of wine glasses. She fills the glasses with her preferred label and joins Greg at the table, sliding a glass of wine toward Greg.

"I have awesome news," announces Greg. Greg gazes at Anita to catch her facial expression.

"Well, out with it," pressures Anita as she cracks a smile in anticipation.

"I have enrolled at the local community college," blurts out Greg.

"Good for you," returns Anita satisfied. "Tell me all about it. What have you decided to do?"

“Well, you know that I am good with my hands,” says Greg.

“I sure do,” snickers Anita. Anita recollects Greg’s incessant drive to reach third base. Greg simultaneously embellishes a huge smile.

“You know, I like to tinker around with stuff and I enjoy spending time in my woodshop,” continues Greg. “My dream has always been to start my own company where I can sell unique products that I craft myself. I am interested in getting a degree in business administration,” states Greg. “This will give me the edge I need to start and run a business successfully.

“Impressive... and I couldn’t agree more, this fits you well,” responds Anita. “Are you enrolled full time?” asks Anita.

“Yes, at least this semester. This means that I’m going to be pretty busy. Are you going to be okay with this?” asks Greg.

“You have made a very wise decision Greg Stanton,” responds Anita. “There are holidays, there is spring break and many other times when we could get together. And there is e-mail and we have phones, right? This will work, you’ll see.”

“What do you say we celebrate this Saturday, have breakfast and play a game of putt-putt golf afterwards?” inquires Anita.

“Sounds like a plan,” answers Greg.

“Then afterwards hang out at the indoor pool,” continues Anita. Anita loves the water.

The next day Greg and Anita have an enjoyable breakfast while further discussing his future then afterwards

they tackle a round of putt-putt golf and are now at the pool sharing a towel on artificial turf next to the pool. It's the weekend but nobody is around.

"Next time maybe I'll let you win a game Anita," condescends Greg.

"Perhaps I need more practice," whines Anita.

"You look beautiful in your new bathing suit though," whispers Greg. "This gives me new material for tonight if you know what I mean... unless you know, you think our relationship is far enough along?"

"Umm... no, I don't think so. Not until marriage. For now all you get are these images burned into your brain." Anita playfully wisps her tongue across Greg's lips and sends him a taunting smile.

Greg leans closer to Anita and begins caressing her back ever so softly, his hand occasionally transgressing over to more southern territories. Anita closes her eyes and dons a welcoming smile.

"Are you still enjoying your job at the new detention center?" asks Greg.

"I have mixed feelings," answers Anita. "I'm grateful for this job but it also creeps me out a little too."

"Creeps you out in what way?" inquires Greg.

"I couldn't say for sure but in my hall it is as if they are experimenting on one of my residents," explains Anita. "They come in at about the same time every day and inject her with an non-prescribed drug, all while monitoring a series of metrics on her. After they leave I check on the resident and I can tell that

she is experiencing some form of distress. Using the open door policy I contacted the Governor but I'm having a hard time reconciling his explanation with the reality of my observations. Something isn't right. Do you know anything about that law that protects whistleblowers?" asks Anita.

"Not really," responds Greg, "but that would be some serious shit. Can't you just look the other way? I mean, are you sure about this?"

"Did you know that our facility has a street name now?" mentions Anita. "Purgatory. They call the place Purgatory."

"Purgatory?" inquires Greg. "Why is that?"

"A former resident who was later released after being acquitted on appeal published a book about this place and somewhere in the book he compared it to purgatory. I guess the word stuck. I can tell you that the Governor certainly does not like that moniker."

"Leave it alone Anita, responds Greg. "This is none of your business."

Agonizing Plot

Today a brief meeting is being held in the governor's office with Bradley Scott and Guy Mandrel invited.

"Guy," says Frank, "we are initiating a supplementary treatment program. Derek Jensen is aware of all this. New prescriptions are being provided to some of your residents. Our Michigan Model is proved very successful thus far," says Frank. "It is time for us to start encouraging rehabilitation. This will be done with prescribed medications that you and your team administer according to new individualized instructions."

"Mr. Scott is from Trent Pharmaceutical," introduces Frank. They, in partnership with the state of Michigan are supplying the drugs for this new program. Bradley, please describe these new treatments to Guy. But Guy," stresses Governor Tannin, "do not share this information with anyone outside of this room. Your employees need only know what prescriptions to administer. Just have them do their job as they are expected to do."

"You have my word," responds Guy.

"In the realm of perception," begins Bradley while continuing to sit informally with his legs crossed, "we have, as you can attest to, successfully developed products that detach people from their liberties." Guy nods in agreement.

"With continued R&D, and funding provided by your wonderful state of Michigan, we have produced a supplementary line of products. Using similar techniques we now have the ability to induce the controlled perception of pain. At this time, pain may be applied in the form of acute sensations

including sharp headaches, menacing starvation, asphyxiation, drowning, and burning or freezing. Soon we will be able to manage the mental state of your residents by initiating severe bouts of depression, paranoia, and hopelessness. Within the year many other optional forms of rehabilitation will become available for dispensation.”

“If these perceptions cannot rehabilitate a person,” chimes Governor Tannin with a childish smile on his face, “then nothing will.”

“I would say not,” complies Guy. “How long do the supplements last?

“We have designed these products to perform quite consistently,” explains Bradley. Every milliliter adds a single hour. One milliliter delivers an hour of pain for example. Three milliliters deliver three hours of persistent pain, and so forth.”

“These changes will commence next month Guy,” pronounces Frank. “Instruct your team to expect updated procedures but none of them need to be aware of what these new drugs do to the residents. For now, this addendum is undercover. Let the world first amaze at the success of our system. When we have accomplished what is desired, then we can share our methods with the world.”

Car Wreck

Rummaging through her closet, Anita was looking for the perfect pair of shoes to match the outfit she has chosen. She grabs a desired pair and slips them on, looking into the full dress mirror that is affixed to the closet door. "These won't do," critiques Anita. Back into the closet she goes and pulls out another pair. "That's better," she decides.

She then hurries over to the phone and calls Logan. Logan always answers the telephone on his birthday. "Happy birthday Logan," explodes Anita!

"Thanks," responds Logan somewhat apathetically.

"This is your aunt Anita. I'm running a bit late but I'll be there soon. Don't have any birthday cake until I get there unless you want Aunt Anita to sing your Happy Birthday song solo," Logan laughs. "Tell your mommy and daddy that I will be there in 20 minutes. Happy Birthday!"

After hanging up the phone Anita scurries to the closet at the end of the hall gathering up some wrapping paper, a bow, some ribbon, and a tag. On the living room floor with all the stuff scattered around her in front of Petie, she picks up Logan's gift and evaluates whether it is appropriate or not for a 10 year old. It's a model kit. Not a snap-together but a complicated kit that requires glue and paint. "This will be fine," decides Anita. After wrapping the present, Anita grabs for her car keys and rushes out the door.

In the car while on her way to the birthday party Anita receives a phone call on her cellphone.

“Hi Anita, this is Lacy. I’m just going to come right out with it and tell you. Troy is back in town.”

Anita pauses just for a moment to clear her head of the day’s present chaos then responds staggered, “What? What did you say?”

“I said Troy is in town. I heard that he is finishing school and is back here.”

“You know I am with Greg, right?” Just saying that causes Anita to choke up a just a bit.

“Oh come on, you have to go see him. You’re not fooling anybody,” pokes Lacy. “Go see him.”

“Is Troy with anyone?” asks Anita.

“I don’t know. You’ll have to find out for yourself sweetie. I have to run. Keep me in the loop. Love you. Bye,” ends Lacy.

Anita sets down the phone and decides to take a less direct route to the party, giving her some time to think. “Troy,” she privately admits, “You, I love. Are you in a relationship? I hope not.” Eventually as she must do, she arrives to the party.

“Happy birthday Logan,” shouts Anita as she enters the home with her arms stretched out. “Aunt Anita, Aunt Anita, yells Logan running from the kitchen. “Close your eyes and hold out your hands,” instructs Anita. She places his present from behind her back into his hands. “Okay Logan, open your eyes.”

Logan falls to the floor and rips off the wrapping paper like a wild boy. “A model. Awesome.” He stands up and hugs his Aunt Anita saying “Thank you.” Then he tears off back to the others in his age group with present in hand.

Anita spends the next hour or so chit-chatting with relatives, eating cake and enjoying other comfort foods.

"How are you doing Anita?" asks Logan's mom. "Are you keeping busy?"

"Oh yes, in fact, a friend of mine and I are going shopping in Chicago this weekend," confesses Anita. "It's going to be a lot of fun."

A few hours of shallow conversation passes by.

"Well I think it's time for me to go," says Anita. After hunting down Logan to say goodbye and give a final happy birthday wish, she exits the home and takes off down the road.

While driving back home she notices a police car coming up from behind with flashing lights blaring. "I'm not speeding," she assures herself. "Do I have a broken taillight or something?"

As she pulls onto the shoulder of the road, two other police cars dart out from nowhere and soon all three police cars have her boxed in. They all storm out of their cars with guns drawn shouting and yelling. "Step out of the car."

At this point Anita sheds tears of unprotected fear. Alone and somewhat in shock her hand quivers as she reaches for the keys to turn off the engine. As she opens the driver side door and takes her first step out one of the officers grab her by the arm pulling her out and then force her to lean up against the car. Anita involuntarily wailed, not knowing what was happening. They handcuffed her and took her away, leaving the car on the shoulder for the wrecker to retrieve.

Footboard Fetter

Troy anxiously waited for his internship to begin and the moment has finally arrived. He wastes no time getting ready, rushing out the door hurriedly. Into the lobby he comes reporting to work.

“Hi, my name is Troy Silverton. I am here to see Derek Jensen.”

The receptionist reaches for the intercom to announce, “The intern is here.” Seconds later a voice responds. Turning her attention back to Troy she paraphrases, “Derek will be right with you, please have a seat over there.”

“Thank you,” replies Troy.

The furniture is new and invitingly comfortable. He picks a spot and sits down.

As Troy waits he is consumed with thoughts of bumping into Anita. “Will she be surprised?” wonders Troy. “Will she be excited... or perhaps even angry?”

Troy’s mind wandered to the day they last spent together. They were at a drive-in theatre watching a double feature late into the night.

“I don’t think I’ll be able to sleep tonight,” exclaimed Anita on that night. She scoots in close and begins to kiss Troy profusely, drawing his attention away from the screen. “You are leaving tomorrow,” sighs Anita. “Let’s make love.” She begins to grope him, gently squeezing and fondling him. Troy reciprocates her affection. Their inhibitions melt away and they passionately became one in the back seat of the car.

Derek suddenly appears and Troy resets his mind back to the present. "Hi, I'm Derek Jenson. You must be Troy Silverton?" Derek extends his arm and the two shake hands.

"Yes," answers Troy. "Thank you for giving me this opportunity."

"Let's show you to your work area and introduce you to the rest of the team."

Troy is introduced to several people along the way. Lastly, Derek introduces Troy to David Sotes. "David will be your professional mentor. If you have any questions or need any assistance, ask David."

"Here is your key fob," says David. "You'll need this to enter the building. Let's take a walk." With that said, Derek welcomes Troy again and then dismisses himself.

They journey through the office area. "The bathrooms are over there and all of the conference rooms are down this hall. Management sits over here. We call their aisle Mahogany Row. Let's show you the main floor," continues David. As they roam the building Troy's wandering eyes are actively looking out for Anita.

David and Troy expediently hop from department to department. Troy is shown the cafeteria but alas no sign of Anita yet. David and Troy make their way to the long corridor that lead the entryways to each hall. As David outlines the operation, they pass Hall 26 and enter Hall 27, a hall containing male residents.

"Your primary duty Troy is to audit the Judge's sentences for residents and verify compliance of their treatment instructions," explains David. We do this to make sure that

defending lawyers do not find any issues with the care of our residents while conducting court appeals.

Troy notices that there is a nameplate for each resident and a clear plastic pouch next to it containing the resident's instruction card. Troy walks over to the closest resident reviewing the medical equipment. He then pulls out the instruction card and reads it.

“Resident #37268 – Convicted of Involuntary Manslaughter February 5, 2022, Parole Date February 4, 2026. XA20-21-22-23-24 Medicate Every 24 hours. Three (3ML) BRN First Day Each Month.”

Without an explanation of the sentence David directs Troy to the filing cabinets back at the office and they look up Resident #37268. “This file contains the legal documents from the trial,” shows David. “Review all the documentation and search for any discrepancies between these records and the resident instruction card.”

Back in Troy's assigned cubicle he takes an opportunity to ask David, “Do you know Anita Drake?” With a perplexed facial expression David answers, “No, I don't know of an Anita Drake working here.”

“A good friend of mine told me that she is employed here. I haven't seen her in several years,” explains Troy.

“There are 200 halls in this center,” states David. “How about you focus on this list here. If Anita works here you will bump into her eventually. All the residents on this list need to have audits completed this week.”

“Yes sir,” affirms Troy conformingly.

On the second day of the internship Troy is pretty much on his own with no supervision. He reviews the assigned list, which contain 20 names of residents that need to be audited this week. Yesterday he completed the audits for two of them. He has four days to complete 18 audits so he surmises that he'll need to finish 4-5 per day.

Looking back at the list he notes the third and retrieves their folder from the cabinet. The file contains a briefing of the conviction, sentence instructions, and medical emergency contact information. Troy takes the packet back to his desk and begins analyzing the mundane data.

After reading this information he then gets up and walks down to the main floor in search of the resident, reviewing the instruction card placed on the footboard. One by one Troy audits the records for each resident.

Troy observes mentally, "This is a large and growing building complex, already having twenty distinct buildings that are each filled with residents. And a new one is under construction right now. Instead of completing this list from top to bottom I should group up these residents by building number to avoid all this wasted time spent walking. Otherwise I am going to have a very hard time completing my assignment."

By Thursday Troy is beginning to feel pretty confident about his performance though he couldn't be sure until after he reviews all his work with David this coming Monday morning.

Troy walks out of his office in search of Hall 166. It is in building H. After getting there he finds his target, grabs a chair and sets it by the bed so that he can relax a bit while reading the card. The instructions are correct as written, Troy surmises.

Then shockingly, as he grabs the chair to return it to its rightful place, he notices the name “ANITA DRAKE” in bold letters on the nameplate of a neighboring bed. “Oh my god,” shrieks Troy.

Troy takes a quick look around and moves in closer. He pulls the bed sheet away from her chin and becomes gripped with distress. “It’s her.” He grabs the instruction card swiftly.

“Resident #81575 – Charged with Capital Murder 2 Counts March 12, 2022, Parole Date N/A. XA20-21-22-23-24 Medicate Every 24 hours.” Troy knew what N/A meant. It means never to be released. He noticed a subtle difference between this card and all the others. The term Charged was written on it instead of Conviction. “Why would anyone be in this place on an open charge?”

Copy Cats

Distraught, Troy made plans to visit with Anita's parents, Dan and Rachael Drake.

"Hi Mrs. Drake," announces Troy as the front door opens.

"Troy?" questions Rachael. "Sorry but Anita isn't here." Rachael began to sob suddenly.

Troy props open the screen door and warmly takes her into his arms saying "Yes, I've heard. That's why I am here. May we talk?"

"Come in please," replies Rachael. "I don't know what is happening but Anita has been arrested. We haven't seen her in several weeks now," cries Rachael in a frazzled clump of emotion.

"I saw her this afternoon," says Troy, "at the detention center."

"What?" weeps Rachael. "Why? They won't tell us anything. Is she okay?" Rachael shouts for Dan. The urgent shriek induces Dan to come quickly. Together they move to the living room and Dan turns off the television.

"Anita is fine right now. I'll get to the bottom of this I promise," proclaims Troy. Dan and Rachael listen intently.

"I work at the new detention center as a legal assistant and found Anita when investigating other residents," explains Troy. He spends the next 15 minutes or more sharing every

intricate detail to this point in time. “I have read everything that is on her file there. Tell me what the two of you know.”

“We were not told much,” says Rachael. She left Logan’s birthday party and somewhere along the way the police stopped her on the road and took her away. “Dan and I have been incessantly hounding them for answers since but the only thing they keep repeating is that Anita has been booked for a serious crime. There hasn’t been any trial that we know of and we haven’t been able to see her. We have a court appointed attorney but he isn’t any help at all.” Raising her index finger for a quick pause Rachael then rushes to the den, retrieving the attorney’s business card to give to Troy.

Troy grabs onto Rachael’s hand and says rather solemnly, “Anita has been charged with Capital Murder.”

Hopelessness pours over Rachael who becomes noticeably weak in despair. She starts to tremble, grasping her husband as if to reap some hint of reassurance from him. Dan had none to offer.

Troy’s resolve dramatically inflates upon witness and his mind begins racing for ideas.

Rachael composes herself so as to keep the dialog flowing. “How long will she be detained?”

Troy answers bluntly, “Until we can clear her of these charges.” Dan and Rachael who are at this point just totally drained, connect heads and weep.

“Anita is such a caring person,” cries Rachael. “This isn’t right, I just know it’s not. I’m so glad you are here Troy. We have no one else to turn to.”

“I am going to fix this Mr. and Mrs. Drake,” reassures Troy in all the strength and determination he can muster. “In the meantime I promise you that I will check in on Anita every day. You can count on that.”

“Can you get us in there so we can see her?” asks Dan.

“Visitors are not allowed,” responds Troy as he stands up. This prompts Dan and Rachael to also stand.

As they walk toward the front door Rachael reveals “Anita still loves you Troy. Oh how proud she is of you.”

Troy’s heart lodges into his throat and his eyes well up a little bit. While turning back to the door he cracks, “I love her too” and heads out the door.

Troy’s next stop is to see Greg Stanton. Driving off with his phone to his ear he calls Greg to let him know that he was on his way over there. Greg was home. It takes but a few moments to arrive.

“Long time no see Greg,” says Troy.

“Uh yes, this is true,” welcomes Greg as they walk through the door. Greg quickly surveys the living room and promptly picks up some paper plates from tonight’s dinner and a bag of chips that sit on the coffee table.

“Have a seat Troy. What’s up?” questions Greg with a tinge of nervousness. Greg’s intuition tells him that this visit has something to do with Anita.

Troy is curt. “When was the last time you have heard from Anita, Greg?” asks Troy.

Greg's inadequacy resounded internally within his soul. "The weekend before she was arrested," cracks Greg's voice feeling embarrassed by his lack of abilities.

Troy recognizes Greg's guilt ridden conscience, signifying that Greg has done nothing in resolve this. "Listen Greg, I am going to do whatever is necessary to get Anita released. I could use your help."

Greg trustingly accepts his lead. "What do you want me to do Troy?"

"Tell me about all the conversations you had with Anita, leading up to your last encounter with her."

"I love her Troy."

"I'm not here to win Anita, Greg. I am here to liberate her from this... this conspiracy, that's all."

After several hours of dialog, Troy gleaned all the information he can from Greg and then departs.

It is now past midnight. Troy calls his dad next. His mother answers. "I know it's late," asserts Troy, "but I need to come over tonight and talk. It's extremely important."

Jamie shakes Ron awake, "It's Troy and he needs us. Yes dear, please come over."

Troy's parents get out of bed and put on a pot of coffee. Troy arrives anxiously.

"Mom, Dad, do you remember Anita Drake?"

"Of course, what a sweet girl" responds Jamie. "She is dating Greg Stanton now isn't she?"

“She is in Purgatory,” informs Troy. “But I know she was framed.”

Jamie was fraught with Troy’s message. Ron halted the discussion instantly and directed Troy and Jamie downstairs to his office.

“I need access to all the data warehouses,” demands Troy after they close the door. “Anita is arrested for murdering two people. They will not release her unless I can prove she is innocent dad.”

“Now just hold on son. Give me a second to take this all in,” responds Ron. “Tell us what you know so far?”

“On New Year’s Eve, Jon mentioned that Anita had changed jobs. She quit the hospital and according to Jon she is currently working at the detention center. I found Anita in Hall 166, but as a resident. There is no conviction, only a charge and arrest. She is resident #81575 in Hall 166 building H.”

Jamie asks, “Is she okay Troy?”

“She seems alright mom but how can I know for sure,” answers Troy apprehensively.

Ron looking for more information interrogates Troy further. “Is there anything else you are not telling us Troy?”

“I have reviewed the court documents concerning her trial. Neither of the presumed victims are named but the date of these alleged crimes occurred on February 23, 2022.”

“Are you able to retrieve copies of all the files and bring them here?” asks Ron.

“Use of the copy machine is monitored but I am sure I can sneak the files out of the center for a day without them knowing,” answers Troy.

“Great, you bring the files here and let’s meet back tomorrow night,” directs Ron.

“Be careful,” adds Jamie.

Purge Appeal

After a restless night Troy goes to the office and immediately checks up on Anita to make sure that she is okay. Returning to the office he goes to the filing cabinets to remove the organized folders on Anita. Just as he reaches in for them David walks up behind him.

“Good morning Troy. Can I help you find something?” Troy looks back at David and notices that his eyes are peering into the open drawer.

Troy quickly grabs a folder and shuts the drawer. “No Mr. Sotes, in fact I’m ahead of schedule.”

“Who is this?” asks the boss referring to Troy’s selection in hand.

“This is Diana Johnson,” Troy answers.

“May I see your list?” pressures David.

With a slight hesitation Troy says, “Sure, it’s at my desk.”

Together they walk over to Troy’s desk and Troy hands over the list. Mr. Sotes scans it over seeing Troy’s check marks next to individual residents and noting Diana’s name toward the end. After returning it he says, “Nice job Troy” and leaves as suddenly as he came.

Troy became much more cautious when approaching the file cabinet next time. As he opens the drawer to return Diana’s folder, he looks around first then brazenly pulls Anita’s folder quickly stuffing it into his leather portfolio. Nervousness

isn't going to stop him from doing what he needs to do. He finishes out his day and checks in on Anita once more.

Anxious as he is, Troy decides to surf the web at his apartment before driving back to his parents place. He finds a frightening story of one person's account as a previous resident in the detention center. It is written by a hapless fellow named Jason Brooks, a former resident of Purgatory who, through appeal, was evidently acquitted.

Jason's story begins to unfold on December 31st. Troy remembers meeting his friend Jon on that very same day and learning that he might again meet Anita. In Jason's words—

"A group of buddies and I were out having fun that night. On nights when alcohol is involved we have a longstanding gentleman's arrangement within our friendship. We alternate designated driver duties. On the following day as a thank you we pool money together and provide our designated driver with a meaningful surprise gift.

On that particular night we were bar hopping and while traveling from one tavern to the next, a large dog darted across the road. We swerved but my friend who was driving lost control and the car began to roll. None of us were wearing seatbelts. By the time the car stopped flipping around I ended up in the driver's seat while the driver was thrown from the wreck. I was unconscious while my buddy lay dead in the street. The others survived.

Upon arrival the police found me in the driver's seat thoroughly intoxicated. Eventually they convicted me of manslaughter and I was sentenced to Purgatory.

After the sentencing I was escorted out and chauffeured directly to Purgatory from the court house. Two guards were waiting at

the doors. I was taken into a room similar to those rooms at the doctor's office. The room contained stainless steel cabinets, stainless steel disposal containers, a rolling chair and one of those beds with a layer of paper covering it.

Inside the door were the two officers, a registered nurse, and myself. After removing the handcuffs they forced me to lie down on the paper lined table, handcuffing me to the bed this time, and giving me an exam.

After the exam the nurse informed me that they were ready to incarcerate me using a series of injections. My heart started to beat heavily. I could feel it. I was scared. The nurse then attached an IV. It felt as though I was there getting a lethal injection.

The nurse shows me a syringe and informs me that my sight will fade. I turned away in defiance and then felt the prick from the needle. I started to tear up as my vision began to blur. The nurse just stood patiently and waited. Within about 10 minutes I was totally blind, yet I continued to feel the tears running over my cheeks. I could feel the nurse opening my eyelids.

The nurse calmly tells me that I am about to lose my hearing. I felt another prick of a needle. My ears started ringing almost instantly then the ringing faded and things became very quiet. Now I was deaf and blind. I started to scream, "I'm innocent! Let me go." or at least I prayed that I was that clear.

I felt additional pricks and a great numbness came about me. I have never felt so alone. How could this be happening to me?

Everything went through my mind, from my childhood experiences to family gatherings, to my girlfriend, and to my conviction. I had no perception of day or night nor concept of time. Waking moments seemed eternal. Sometime within this

period I began to experience horrible migraines. They nearly drove me crazy.

One day to my surprise I began to ache all over my body. My vision and hearing slowly returned. They gave me a sedative to relax me. My mother was standing in the room with me crying out that we won the appeal. They freed me, returned my belongings, and sent me home. That was it. There were no apologies, no amends, and no damn empathy.”

“Purgatory. Damn straight,” agrees Troy sitting back. He quickly leaves his apartment, files in hand, and races to his parent’s home, calling them to let them know he is coming.

As soon as he gets over there, they run downstairs to copy and study the information and brainstorm plans.

“The data warehouse has enormous volume and depth,” reasons Ron. “It contains data on everyone including our own family members, friends, and neighbors. Troy, you go about your business and act normal as if nothing has happened. Jamie, you go upstairs and remain calm. Let me do some mining and I will let you know when I find anything.”

Troy, initially arguing for more involvement, knew his dad was right. He took his father’s advice and left as instructed.

Face of GOD

The courthouse work load circumstantially is on a decline these days. Case planning was once a daily routine. Lately the attorneys need only meet two or three times a week to facilitate jury selection. Today is one of those jury selection days.

The application that accesses information made available through the Goodwill Omniscience Act of 2020 is referred to as xGOD – the Goodwill Omniscience Data interface.

For jury selection state attorneys will often utilize this system to request lists of preferred jurors based on specific criteria entered. Simple Views provide immediate data but more intensive reports are generated overnight and delivered to private inboxes by SOD, or the next start of day.

With xGod, court outcomes are largely stacked in the state's favor. Some citizens are recognized as excellent candidates and become preferred jurors while others never seem to get called into jury duty. Friends and family often joke about how someone in the group is called more often than others.

The jury selection of higher profile cases require the governor's authorization. The governor too has several reports of his own that are generated by xGod waiting for his review every morning and this morning is no exception.

After signing piles of attorney documents he begins to review the cyclical reports he personally requests daily using

custom parameters and hints. His preferred content narrows in on public transgressions.

His assistant arrives earlier than he to prepare for the day and organize. “Good morning governor,” welcomes Jan. She sets down a steaming cup of coffee on his desk and leaves the room, closing his door behind her. While on her way out Frank acknowledges her with a responsive thank you. He then leans forward and begins to study his first report.

This report reads more like a summarized dashboard of sorted activities with depicted warnings next to individual names. Today’s dashboard highlights a glaring concern. One person emerges above all others, Troy Silverton. The governor rushes to call the Information Technology hotline requesting expedited detail on Troy. The Help Desk confirms that it will be delivered later this afternoon. After hanging up the phone Frank leaves to make a surprise visit at the detention center.

In Derek’s office the Governor arrives intending to debrief Derek subtly concerning Troy. “Good morning Governor Tannin, what brings you here today?” inquires Derek. “Is anything wrong?”

“No no,” reacts Frank as he casually leans back in his chair to indicate that he has time to spare. My schedule was light so I thought I would stop in and see how the intern is doing.”

“Troy Silverton?” queries Derek.

“Yes, that’s the name... Troy Silverton. Is he performing to expectation?”

“David Sotes, Troy’s mentor, tells me that Troy is a brilliant person. Even as an intern his knowledge of law

outshines many of the others. When Troy passes his Bar exam we intend to offer him a permanent position.”

“Is that so,” responds Frank. “You haven’t noticed anything peculiar about him? I’ve heard that he has developed an interest in one of the residents, Miss Anita Drake.”

At this moment Troy, having just visited Anita, enters the office area and notices that Derek and the Governor are conversing. He surreptitiously returns Anita’s information and quickly ducks into his cubicle with great apprehension.

“May I see her records,” summons the Governor in his active conversation.

“Sure thing,” responds Derek.

Frank and Derek exit the room and make their way to the long row of file cabinets. Derek scans the labels affixed to each drawer and finds the appropriate drawer. Watching from his cubicle, Troy becomes even more nervous.

“Now where is that folder,” mutters Derek seeing that it is not where it should be. “Oh wait, here it is. It’s just out of place, discovers Derek. Frank is quickly disinterested and now asking for a moment to speak with Mr. Sotes.

“Mr. Sotes, I have been informed by Mr. Jenson that you are recommending permanent employment for Troy Silverton.”

“That’s true sir,” confirms David. “Troy’s intelligence is a hard find and his work ethic is actually quite diligent. He thoroughly understands our policies and practices, and stewards our mission and vision. And he has incredible rapport with all the staff.”

“Would you stake your position on this recommendation David?” challenges Frank with a hint of intimidation.

Startled but resolute David affirms, “Yes I would sir.”

“Good David. I trust your judgement. But hold off on making any offers until I have had a chance to personally interview Troy myself.”

Troy being worried by what he is seeing sends a text to his father warning him that the governor is asking questions and that time is short.

Ron was reading through Anita’s replicated files when Troy’s text came. With the files thoroughly studied, he then sits forward and logs into xGod again. He decides to enable the session recorder before continuing his research. Ron retrieves a menagerie of factual data through various points and clicks.

Anita was born to Dan and Rachael Drake on October 14, 1996. She had a bout with chicken pox at the age of eight. Throughout her school years she rarely missed any days and received above average grades. Anita has never been married but is now dating Greg Stanton.

Ron stumbles upon something unexpected, based on his experience and knowledge of the system. There are absolutely no records on Anita beyond February 22, 2022, one day prior to her alleged crime. It is as if nothing else has transpired in her life from then until now. This is extremely odd.

Ron then focuses on Greg Stanton. He selects and plays the most recent audio of a conversation between Greg and Anita.

“I couldn’t say for sure but in my hall it is as if they are experimenting on one of my residents. They come in at about the same time every day and inject her with a new drug, all while monitoring a series of statistics on her. After they leave I check on the resident and I can tell that she is experiencing some form of distress. Using the open door policy I contacted the governor but I’m having a hard time reconciling his explanation with the reality of my observations. Something isn’t right. Do you know anything about that law that protects whistleblowers?”

Ron sinks back into a reclining position and crosses his legs. He begins to ponder the notion of conspiracy. Alternate scenarios begin to play through his mind while he carefully considers the actors potentially involved.

Returning to the computer screen he inquires on the governor himself. He finds no incriminating data but ascertains that there is missing data concerning Frank too. History is missing at various periods throughout his incumbency as governor. The system doesn’t ordinarily work this way.

Unsettled and being more convinced of an actual conspiracy, he decides it is time to contact Senator James. Mr. James helped bring the governor’s project to fruition but only because his responsibilities dictated it. In the end however he did not really accept the plan.

James tends to steer away from direct confrontation but nonetheless he cherishes his values dearly. Many clever inroads have been established to drive his ideas of right and proper. Ron was well aware of the Senator’s power.

Fingered

Governor Tannin has been nominated for the Noble Peace prize as a result of his successes. At this point Michigan has erected several other detention centers throughout the state all with good reputation. Other states across the U.S., in response, are reactively following suit in order to gain such cost savings.

Trent Pharmaceuticals, Inc. is raking in huge profits and other companies are experiencing good years as well. The economy is beginning to boom. Frank Tannin has now received the notoriety that he desperately sought to achieve.

Frank and Barbara are hosting a celebration tonight at the governor's mansion. There are more than 175 people present, including several governors, state congressional members, and of course the media. Musicians with stringed instruments play poolside while champagne, wine, and hors d'oeuvres are catered back and forth through the crowds of guests.

Frank notices that Dan Ellison isn't present. This is more than a little embarrassing because Dan is the Lieutenant Governor and well-liked by the majority of Michigan. Recently learning of Frank's upcoming announcement Dan had asked Frank to endorse him for the governorship in the next run. Frank refused to commit. He was set on endorsing Janice.

Small groups of 3 to 5 people are spread throughout the home and balconies this evening. Everyone of importance is having their pictures taken by the press and accommodating interviews.

Barbara mingles her way from room to room speaking to each guest and eventually meets up with Janice Chandler in the library. "Congratulations to Frank on his nomination," expresses Janice. "I'm sure you must be very proud."

Today Janice is wearing a conservative dress with a matching hairpin. The two are alone.

"Let me be frank Janice," scoffs Barbara. "I know about your sexual rendezvous' with Frank. They need to stop. Frank's reputation cannot be tarnished by such immature tomfooleries."

Janice was flabbergasted and caught off guard. She was speechless. To escape the conversation before it escalates into total embarrassment, she reactively gives Barbara the finger and exits quickly, avoiding her for the remainder of the celebration.

A broadcast comes over the loud speaker directing the crowd to join Frank at the pool. A low key commotion set in amongst those making their way over as to what will happen next. Barbara rushes in to stand next to her husband. Frank gives a nod and several attendants begin clanging on wine glasses to quieten the group. The area becomes still allowing Frank to speak.

"Thank you all for coming. I promise that my message will be succinct. Isn't it good news that our recession has passed." The crowd cheers. "I'm proud of Michigan and I am proud to be a part of all this. Let us toast to our success." The roaring attendees then raise their glasses in unison.

"The momentum is strong and I possess a well-planned roadmap for success, the United States citizens of America. And

I will not let you down.” The crowd roars again as Frank pauses. Frank smiles at Barbara then turns back to the audience. “This is why today I am publicly announcing, formally to the media, my candidacy for United States presidency in the up-and-coming 2024 election year.”

After his announcement Frank secretly flagged Janice and the two located to a private area. Janice Chandler originally thought Frank wanted her help with his speech but he had an ulterior motive for inviting her.

“A loose end is unraveling Janice. His name is Troy Silverton.”

“Isn’t he Ron Silverton’s boy?” Janice asks rhetorically. “If Troy is a loose end, Ron would be a noose.”

Frank’s face remained cold and indifferent. “Let me worry about the senator, Janice. I need a favor from you.”

“What is it darling?” asks Janice while she pours a couple of stiff drinks in his parlor. “How can I help?”

“I want Troy dead and I want you to destroy the Silverton family name in the process. Embarrass the family with manufactured escapades that should publicly disgrace them all.”

With a smooch on the governor’s cheek when handing him a drink she whispers, “Let’s make Barbara disappear too darling.”

“If you’ll do this one thing for me Janice, there will be no reason to worry about Barbara anymore,” assures Tannin.

“By the way, I learned the other day that Anita was not prescribed any supplemental prescriptions. That minute detail

stands out like a sore thumb, a case of Capital Murder without pain prescriptions?”

“I will take care of that as soon as I return home darling,” eases Janice with her tone.

Stacking the Deck

ACCESS DENIED. PLEASE CONTACT THE SYSTEM ADMINISTRATOR, the blinking message reads. Ron reenters his credentials. No luck. He calls the I.T. department.

“Hello, this is Senator Ron Silverton. I seem to have forgotten my xGod password. I need this reset right away.”

On the other end of the line the voice responds, “Sorry sir, your ID has been disabled by the governor.”

“Re-enable it please,” scowls Ron.

“No sir. The governor has given explicit orders not to enable this ID.” This is not good. Ron pauses to consider his next course of action.

Troy’s day does not fare any better. When checking in on Anita he finds that her instruction card has been updated. A near lethal combination of supplemental persuasion drugs begins tonight.

He loses hope instantly, his knees go weak sending him to the floor with his hands gripped together against his forehead. “Oh Anita I’m so sorry. I failed you.” He knew that there was no possibility of carrying her out the door. So he turns in determination, sitting on the floor now leaning against the bed to think of a viable escape.

“Wait,” stops Troy suddenly. He remembers that there is a card maker upstairs. He can forge a new card. “But how can I do this without drawing any attention?”

He runs upstairs and finds that the card maker is in Jenson's office. He goes to the supply room and grabs some empty card stock. "How am I going to get this machine?" he contemplates.

On the door frame Troy knuckle taps for Derek's attention, who looks out from his desk with inviting eyes.

"Sir, I am in the process of preparing my application for the Bar exam. I am also collecting letters of recommendation. Would you be willing to provide me with one?" appeals Troy.

"I don't see why not," says Jenson. "Give me a few days to draft one up. I'll email it to you when it's done."

Suddenly a disturbing commotion arises just outside Derek's window. He turns to witness the disorderly conduct taking place. As he does, Troy covertly places a concealed strip of clear packing tape to the door jam, with kudos owed to his dependable friends outside.

Troy later retrieves an empty box from the mailroom, one that is large enough to cloak the card machine. Today he'll work late, much later than anyone else.

After everyone has left he wastes no time. He enters Derek's office placing it into the box and goes into an empty conference room to fabricate a new card.

When done he returns the card machine and peels off the tape from the door frame. Next Troy rushes to Anita's room with the upgraded instructions. As he opens the door he finds a nurse standing next to Anita. The nurse, having already reviewed the official prescription, was preparing to administer the sentence.

Troy enters the room pleading and shouting that he is the auditor for Anita's case. After gaining the nurse's attention he makes the claim that Anita's card is not compliant with state judgement and must be replaced with the one Troy has just corrected. The nurse launches a skeptical examination but eventually accepts Troy's clever argument.

Early Birds

BREAKING NEWS.

A leak perpetuates on live broadcast by the infamous LEAKER organization. The media announces that evidence is surfacing purporting that Frank Tannin, governor of Michigan and husband to Barbara Tannin, is actively in a long-standing affair with state Senator Janice Chandler.

As the announcement continues, a stack of revolving pictures shuffle across the airwaves of the governor, the governor with Barbara, the governor with Senator Chandler, and Barbara with Janice, none of which are very flattering.

Caught off-guard and mortified by the scandal, Barbara Tannin picks up the remote control incessantly flipping through other various news channels on the television. On the front lawn at the Tannin mansion, reporters are gathering like clouds of locust.

Janice was slow at the draw. She hadn't yet started her diabolical retribution against the Silverton's. With the current events at hand it wouldn't now work well. Her opportune moment has passed. Senator James, a close friend to Ron Silverton, has secretly sponsored the Leakers organization since its inception. New developments are forthcoming, James will ensure it.

An incredibly damaging bombardment of damning leaks further blast the airwaves over the next several days, all exposing Frank Tannin and his ugly agenda. It is purported that Michigan is euthanizing their citizens for the sake of money.

Strategized by James, this has aggressively created division within the public eye, who like everybody is, have always been held hostage by biased media chatter. Human Rights Groups demand justice as do a majority of citizens.

While this all plays out Ron and Troy have called a private meeting with Lieutenant Governor Don Ellison. If anything should happen to the governor, Don would naturally assume his chair.

“Don,” says Ron, “Frank Tannin must be indicted.”

“Did you discuss this with the Attorney General, Ron? You know that I cannot indict the governor.”

Troy asserts, “The message would be greater if you were the one to recommend indictment sir. The people want justice.”

“Is this your son, Ron? Why is he here?”

“Troy was hired by Tannin to audit the records at the detention center. After turning up this clear case of corruption, his additional research has uncovered a great deal of evidence that I am sure you will be interested in.”

“Troy,” asks Don, “What evidence do you have? And do you think it is enough to stick?”

“We have enough to pressure an investigation,” answers Troy. “I have a list of residents who have undeniably received unwarranted experimental medication. Furthermore I have convinced some of the Candy Strippers to testify that they has given illegal medication to residents under Governor Tannin’s direct orders.”

Ron inserts, “Pertaining to the list of residents in Troy’s hand, we have recorded xGod sessions that show a clear pattern of unauthorized data manipulation and data deletion. These recordings include the xGod signature of authentication.”

“Would you swear under oath that it was you who recorded these sessions, Ron? Your political party isn’t going to be thrilled should you do this.”

“I think it’s high time I retire then, Don.”

“One of the residents, Anita Drake, is there now and I have proof that she has not been convicted of any crime yet is being held in Purgatory as we speak.” Troy reaches into his pocket and pulls out Anita’s card, the one he replaced. “Here, check it out please.”

“She should be released immediately, Don. You can be confident that she will provide us with all the missing pieces needed,” reassures Ron to Don.

“Ron, Troy... there is substantial evidence here indeed.” Don reads the card and looks over copies of Anita’s record. He makes a phone call to the detention center with orders from the Lieutenant Governor to release Resident #81575. “She is to be placed into witness protection under the guarded custody of Senator Ron Silverton immediately.”

Troy stands promptly and offers a hand shake to the Lieutenant Governor, thanking him for his honesty and integrity. Don picks up the phone again to speak with the attorney general, waving off his visitors for some private dialog with the AG.

The Silverton’s head straight for the detention center. On the way Troy makes an important phone call.

“Hi Rachael, this is Troy. Are you and Mr. Drake home?”

“I am yes but Dan is still at work.”

Troy pauses for a moment to overcome the heavy emotions being felt. In a firm voice he continues “Call him and tell him to come home now. We are bringing Anita home. We will be there in about two hours.”

Poetic Justice

The investigation ensued. It took approximately two months. With overwhelming and irrefutable evidence, the attorney general successfully indicted Frank Tannin. He is convicted on corruption charges, tampering with evidence, unauthorized destruction of data, and the illegal use and sale of narcotics.

“Frank Tannin,” declares the court, “You are sentenced to 15 years in the Michigan adult detention center. A future hearing will be set in your absence to determine what supplementary means may be necessary for rehabilitation.

Incessant flashing strobes the room and a horde of competitive reporters scuffle to secure their blood-prized interviews. Nearly everyone in the packed court room jump off their seats standing or swarming around much like a provoked beehive. Head tilted down and face contorted, a distraught Frank Tannin is escorted away to experience the wrath of his own policies.

Lieutenant Governor Don Ellison is immediately sworn in as acting governor. He and Frank have never agreed on political issues and truth be told they did not like one another on a personal level either. Call it sour grapes or what have you, Don had no intention of pardoning Frank.

A struggling Frank is directly ushered to the detention center where two officers await. He was brought to the small room and then strapped down on the table while the nurse detailed what will happen next. Frank barks out, “Please don’t, what have I done to you... let me go, I’m innocent.”

The nurse plunges a needle into his arm. Life quickly goes dark for Frank but humiliating squeals of laughter resonates blatantly. “No, please,” pleads this frightened has-been.

The nurse and these guards have long-standing grievances against the governor who has done nothing in their favor. With access to all available drugs in this facility they decide to alter procedures in this special case. He will receive the greatest lesson for rehabilitation yet.

Satisfying the team’s frustrations with their employer, Frank’s remaining perceptions will not be disabled until after his penance is paid allowing them to view a vividly expressive display. Rules are not necessarily followed to protocol in this small private room.

“He’s never going to be released,” shouts the nurse as she squeezes in more than 6 ML from a veil that induces a drowning affect. “Who the hell is going to tell anyone anyway?”

He skirmishes in agony desperately inhaling and coughing violently all the while trying to break the restraints holding him securely to the bed. Before this shift is complete, Frank endures lengthy doses of each and every pain currently administered.

Finally Frank’s remaining perceptions are turned off to stop him from visibly reacting to the pain anymore and new resident #92665 is placed in a hall with 149 other residents. He will be visited by the nurse daily for his non-prescribed doses of education; she vows every day until she is no longer working in Purgatory.

Earned Credit

After the media coverage has died down Troy and Anita meet at the beautifully secluded Tahquamenon Falls, just north of the Mighty Mackinac Bridge.

Standing on massively steeped rocks by a stream of draining water Troy whispers to Anita, while nose to nose with his eyes gazing into her soul... "I love you Anita."

Anita wells with pride in Troy, responding with her arms wrapped tightly around Troy and pressing her ear against his heart. "Thank God you love me Troy, thank you so much for rescuing me again."

Next Steps

Trent Pharmaceutical, Inc. meanwhile continues to experience great success with focused governmental interests. They hold separate partnerships with nearly every state of the union. Michigan is now added to their portfolio. This dawdling was one of the initial reasons why Michigan has fallen so behind economically.

The healthcare industry truly possesses great opportunity. Trent solutions currently exist that prolong certain health problems and inclusions that complicate matters. These products are widely sought throughout the healthcare industry, including hospitals, nursing homes, doctors and therapists to boost revenues. Such practices are further encouraged by the recent implementation of an effective economical credit program.

The federal government has also solidified a contract to help manage the country's own population. This provides an ability to dispense chemicals through the atmosphere to increase incidences of heart failure, various cancers, and the like. It can be done broadly or with concentrated focus. Some families are thoroughly convinced that their genes carry hereditary problems when in fact it is a result of controlled dispensation.

The United Nations is also in negotiations with Trent Pharmaceutical Inc. in an effort to reclaim their significance for global cooperation.

Summarizing Trent's driving success the CEO emphasizes, "The shareholder is our only concern."

The Author

Young William was born into an American Indian tribe that was still grappling with poorly administered treaties effected by a coarsely manufactured privilege perceived by many as Manifest Destiny. William is ultimately etched into history through a court-ordered roll taken in 1904.

As a grateful ancestor, this author respectfully assumes William's surname as his pen name for this book to honor his prestigious legacy. Sha-Sha-Gway continues to live on the old stomping grounds of his forefathers around the Great Lakes territory of history's Old Northwest.

"I am a full-blooded Christian and I am eternal. Christ is in me because His Truth is wholly credible, has far-reaching integrity, is consequentially relevant, and holds great promise."