

SUDDENLY FREE, VOLUME 1

RISE OF EVIL

By Yvette Carmon Davis
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CHAPTER 5

THE THRONE ROOM - "I'll Fly Away." A hymn by Albert E. Brumley, 1929, published by Hartford Music in 1932.

"Called home." The Accuser was livid. "Called home. Is that it? That's all?"

"It's everything." The Omnipotent One answered mildly.

"How long has it been that way?" The enemy grimaced.

"Always," The Son answered.

"I didn't hear Him call You home when You were being crucified."

The Son reminded him, "You weren't listening."

"Now, look, this is a really fine point. You are always talking to them. How can I know which one of those conversations is 'calling' them home?"

The enemy stood before the Throne then, suited like a human barrister, arguing his case. "You won't let me eavesdrop on every single conversation. Sometimes I'm not even invited to the closing ceremony. I don't understand why You won't just let me read their one-track minds." He snorted.

"We have heard these arguments before. You know the answers," The Son responded.

"Have not!" The Dragon feigned indignation.

IVES OFFICE

"...the same cause as all the other unexplained deaths," Ives concluded.

DeMateo heard it with her ears, but simply could not make sense of it. That many deaths, all one cause. She was incredulous. She had to ask "Well what is it?"

"...the same cause as all the other unexplained deaths." George had reviewed all the raw diagnostic data, but he had yet to come to this conclusion on his own. He didn't think he was as brilliant as Ives, but he was more experienced. He immediately knew the truth of the assessment, and he knew the cause.

"...the same cause as all the other unexplained deaths." As Ives said these words, he knew that the moment of truth had arrived. He and George had not discussed the results of all the tests, but they had had a meeting of the minds regarding the comatose patients and the people with no "spark." Would George want to share this information with UEPD, right here, right now? It was his call.

Ives looked to George for permission to proceed. Instead, George looked intently into DeMateo's face, as if to determine the likelihood that she would accept the unscientific realities with which the science has presented them. "Lt. DeMateo," he looked at Ives then, "Arlene..." he looked back at her with a relaxed and open smile, "we have determined that all these people died of entropy. It was time to die." He anticipated her next remark.

"But I thought no one died of old age. The bots keep the body operating at optimum despite entropy, because the bots regulate cell replication, keeping the cell from aging on a molecular level."

"Until today, we believed that. I'm impressed with your understanding, Arlene." George was his most charming and disarming. "It is apparent to us, however, that something trumps the bots. The body quits working at an appointed time, despite whatever we might do to keep it in working order."

"I understand to some degree. It's the same as when the bots repair a spinal injury, but brain death and heart trauma still kill the patient."

"Analogous to that, Arlene. The additional factor is that, for some unknown reason," George swept Ives with his gaze, "three things have happened in the past few days that challenge our understanding of what constitutes life and death.

"One: the initial comatose patients. They were not ill and their bodies were functioning perfectly. They were not, strictly speaking, in a coma. Their EEGs were normal, but they were non-responsive. They should have been conscious, but they were not. The life force that normally animates human beings was simply not present."

DeMateo's brow furrowed. George held up his hand to interrupt her pending comment.

"Two: ambulatory comas. We discovered, independently of this investigation, that there were people walking around without life force. Their memories and personalities were fundamentally altered."

"Three: the deaths and the release from comas. Suddenly, all at once, all over the world, people in comas both died and woke up. Individuals, who were never in a coma, collapsed and died suddenly, as well. As the reports have come in, we have discovered that among those collapsing without coma, almost one hundred percent of them had experienced a recent, sharp personality shift. This leads us to believe that these were people without life force, who had already reached the end of their lives."

George fell silent to allow DeMateo to respond.

The three sat at the table in total silence. DeMateo's look was distant, pensive. Ives, relaxed at first, looked from DeMateo to George for some indication whether he should proceed. But there was nothing else to say. The report had been given.

George understood DeMateo's silent, pensive behavior, as hesitation that comes from the need to carefully craft her next response. Finally DeMateo shifted in her chair and met George's eyes. *Now that she has braced herself*, thought George, *she's ready for the challenge*.

"If I understand you correctly, Dr. Thomas," she said, using George's title to, she hoped, show the appropriate regard for his position even as she prepared to disrespect his theory, "you are saying that these people have lost their...souls?"

George was satisfied. He leaned in. "Souls, spirits, both maybe. It's not scientific to be sure. But Arlene, on the evening of the day that first comatose patient came to the ED, both Ives and I

witnessed two people – conscious, walking – without the human spark. We witnessed ourselves, one individual who seemed like the ordinary human being early in the evening, and who had no personality and no memory of our earlier conversation later.”

“How long had you known this man?”

“We met him that evening at the Gala.”

“So this man was not someone you knew personally before that evening?”

“Yes. I get your point. But there was another man, a man where we witnessed the change. Right before our eyes, Arlene. The light simply went out of his eyes. He was like a dead man walking!”

“I don’t know....”

Ives spoke up then. “Lieutenant.... Arlene, I had witnessed such an individual before the encounter with George. He was an old friend. In addition to the vacant look, he simply did not remember the details of our association at school. No one has a bad memory anymore, Arlene. It’s one of the therapeutic properties of the Treatment. The bots keep the brain in optimum condition.”

Arlene sighed. “Look, gentlemen, it’s because of your status that I don’t dismiss all this as pure fantasy, science fiction as opposed to science. So before I do that, get me one of these individuals so that I can run a profile.”

THE THRONE ROOM - Isaiah 43:1 “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.” NKJV

For the first time in many eons, the Enemy of the souls of men was silent before the Throne of Grace. He stood with as much dignity as he could muster, under the gaze of the Father and Son, experiencing the breeze of the movement of the Holy Spirit throughout the room. He could never really stare at the Throne; it was too bright. He looked across the infinite platform, his line of sight missing the Godhead altogether. The end was near. He could feel it, but he couldn’t really put his finger on the reason why he knew.

He knew that Ives made him nervous. Ives had a quality that few humans had ever had. He did not know why the God had chosen him to be a part of the end of Time, a part of his defeat.

He knew that the humans were on the cusp of discovering his role in recent comas, deaths and other oddities on Earth. He did not know how these events fit into the coming end of Time.

He was never afraid of the humans although they had the power to stop his intrusions into their lives. He now felt a threat from their pending knowledge of his latest attacks. He did not know why.

He spoke almost respectfully. “Father, have you set the time?”

The Father answered with His usual equanimity. “The end of Times has always been set.”

“I mean, is it near?”

“Like everyone else, you must look to the signs of the times. I am the only One Who knows the exact moment. Do the signs tell you the end approaches?”

“Maybe.”

“What signs alert you to the end?”

The enemy had no patience for this conversation. It wasn't fair! The God knew everything, and HE had to figure things out for himself. He left his simulacrum in the Throne Room, and visited Brown. He did not take possession of Brown. He wanted to see what the humans see when they look at Brown with their juicy little eyes. Not so much his appearance, but his demeanor, when he answered his god's questions.

He appeared sitting in a chair in Brown's office, wearing a business suit, legs crossed, relaxed, directly across from Brown. “So tell me young man, do you know that you are special?”

Brown stood up and peered in the enemy's direction. At first, there seemed to be an apparition, slightly opaque. But when the enemy spoke, he came completely into view for Brown. Brown welcomed him.

“I know I am special to you, lord. But there is something else...?”

“Yes. Yes. You know me so well. If someone asked you to describe me, could you describe my appearance?”

“No, lord, not really. You have appeared to me only a few times in my life, and each time you have had a different appearance.”

“Good. Good. If you were asked to describe my...personality...what would you say?”

“If I were to tell the truth...do you want me to tell the truth?”

“I don't know yet. Give me your actual description first.”

“Okay. I'd say that your personality is actually unfathomable. You present yourself as whatever is necessary to accomplish your goals. You are completely self-interested and goal-oriented to a fault.”

“Thank you! I don't need to know what lie you would tell. I assume that it would be a creative response designed to meet your needs for the moment. Another question: do you acknowledge that you worship me?”

“Only to one person, lord, outside the coven.”

“Who is that?”

“Well, you know that it is the President, lord. He worships you as well.”

“Anybody else?”

“I reveal that you are my lord only to those whom I think I may recruit as worshippers, or at least, as workers.”

“Do you realize that you are being sought after?”

“Well, yes I do. I have been your operative for so long, worked for so many powerful people, used so many names and personalities, I am a bit of a legend...”

“Pride goes before a fall, Brown.” The enemy chuckled at the quotation. “Nevertheless, enjoy your pride. There are others looking for you who think that you are...possessed. Would you say that you are possessed?”

“Why yes, lord! I am possessed with admiration for you, with the desire to please you and live forever! I am possessed with....”

“Yes, yes, yes,” the enemy interrupted impatiently. “I’m not referring to your own emotions. Would you characterize yourself as filled with spirits that are not your human spirit?”

“Yes, lord. The spirit of greed, the spirit of the lust for power, the spirit of jealousy against the Godhead, to name a few. They give me the energy I need and the creative power I require to accomplish your goals.”

“Ahhhhhh. Good, that’s good. There are people hunting for you, Brown. You must not be discovered unless I say you are to be discovered. If you are asked, lie. If you are discovered, if you could be discovered, deny, no matter what happens to you. You will be richly rewarded, Brown, as always.” The enemy disappeared before Brown could respond.

POTUE turned as the enemy appeared in his bedroom on the other side of the Earth from Brown. The enemy knew POTUE well, even though the man would not allow himself to be possessed for even the briefest period. His allegiance to the enemy was real, but he would not allow his will to be compromised. He was useful to the enemy nonetheless. He could now see how he could use him for his denouement.

“Do you know that the ‘end is near?’” The Enemy asked POTUE without preamble.

“It is my intention,” said the President.

These humans! thought the Enemy. *They can still surprise me!*

“Your intention? The God says that only He knows the exact time.” The Enemy wondered at the man’s conceit.

“Yes, the Bible does say that. Then He has read my mind,” said Paul.

Blasphemy! The Enemy chuckled aloud at the notion. “Your plans?” asked the Enemy. “I know you have plans.”

“Yes. Not much different than the biblical account, really. I intend to be worshipped as a living god. I am a god, you know: I rule this world. I have complete control over the life and death of every person who lives on this planet. I intend to rule here forever,” POTUE turned toward the Enemy. “with your permission, of course.”

The Enemy hid his smile from POTUE. Of course he would not live forever! The enemy understood that this human was deluded, and he ran the whole world. POTUE believed that the Enemy would cause him to live forever on Earth. *What a fool!*

“Of course you are permitted to live forever here on earth. It is yours to rule. How will you get them to worship you—us?” the Enemy knew the answers to the question he posed.

“They have not seen miracles, signs and wonders for a very long time. They are jaded by technology. What they see and hear on the worldnet is more remarkable than the world they now live in. Life is boring. I will bring excitement back. I will perform miracles, give them signs and wonders for their everyday lives. Kill some of them and bring them back to life. I will convince many to worship me, just by these deeds. Others, I will have to force to worship me. If they don’t, I’ll kill them.”

“Very good. I hoped you hadn’t changed your mind. I hope Brown will be useful in this endeavor?” The Enemy more than hoped.

“Very useful, indeed! Brown is the perfect operative. Thank you for introducing us so many decades ago.” POTUE nodded toward the apparition.

“You know, of course, that I possess his very soul. He is a true worshipper. He is truly mine...” The Enemy attempted to encourage the President to become a worshipper.

“And I am truly yours, lord. I would not argue that Brown is not a true worshipper. But I, lord, worship you willingly, without the need for demon possession to keep me in line. I am completely at your disposal.” POTUE bowed his head this time, but peered at the Enemy through lidded eyes.

The Enemy let go a hearty, deep-throated laugh. The man was a liar, and truly, wonderfully and completely self-absorbed. His destruction is complete. The end of this world, these humans, was on the cusp.

In a twinkling, the enemy was back in the Throne Room.

“The signs of the times? There is one world government. The ruler of the Earth is a man after my own heart. He intends to ask people to worship him. There will be war, and destruction, and eventually, complete annihilation.”

THE HOSPITAL

After Arlene DeMateo’s request to examine a person with “no spark,” George and Ives put their heads together to devise a plan to locate such a person. The place to start was every person who awoke from a coma. Fortunately, there was an interview of every such person. It would also be necessary to interview every person who collapsed and lived.

This last was an enormous task, just because of the sheer numbers of persons. There were millions. George and Ives sat up half the night after DeMateo left the office, attempting to come up with factors that eliminated enough of the class to be examined, to make the examination manageable. If they had a lifetime, there would be no problem. POTUE, however, wanted a quick solution.

George theorized. “I don’t think we’ll find a zombie in those who woke up from coma.”

“Zombie?” Ives snorted a laugh. “Funny word. What’s a zombie?”

“It’s an old word I came across while doing some research on ‘living dead.’”

“You didn’t!”

“I did. I used ‘living dead’ as my search term. The very last usage was in the 21st century. Movies about people who died and were infected with some virus or bacteria, and reanimated to kill people. In the 20th century, movies about radiation or infection reanimating the dead. The origin of the whole idea came from the Caribbean Island population in the earlier centuries. The popular religion believed in men and women who could control a living person by taking their will away. They had their spirit or soul, but were unable to resist the will of the person who had given them a combination of herbs. This was the real original zombie.”

“Ahhh. Pharmaceuticals.”

“Yes and no. This was way before the refinement and purification of drugs that came from plants, let alone the creating and refinement of drugs made in the lab. These people were discovering what plant substances and matter would do to the human, alone and in combination. They had to grind and mash the plants, otherwise you’d have to consume a lot of plant matter to get even a small dose of the substance you needed. More often than not, so-called medicinal plants were used for healing and relief from symptoms. Sick people sometimes couldn’t consume a lot of matter by mouth. Naturally, some of the witch doctors...”

“Witch doctors?” Ives raised his eyebrows.

“An inaccurate and insulting term, I’m told, but yes, native doctors, medicine men and women, decided to do more with the herbs than just treat people when they were ill. In every generation, there have been individuals who want power over other people, for their personal gain.”

“But we find no pharmacology in these patients that could account for their condition.”

“True, we did not. We haven’t looked for transmissions. We have not investigated whether these people have associations in common.”

“Hypnosis? Suggestion?”

“Yes.” George paused. “Frankly, Arlene would be looking for all of those things and more right now if she had a smaller pool of people to look through. I don’t think she’ll find what she’s looking for.”

“No, she won’t. But it will evidence our theory.”

“My point exactly. Ives, who’s to say that some zombies exist in the population who have not been observed by our researchers, and who have not been in coma, and who were not among those who died?

“Is that our search group? Everybody else?”

“Yes and no.....”

“You have an idea?”

“A kernel of an idea.” George rose from his chair and pointed at Ives. “There’s no small pool of people who would likely yield results. So why don’t we just use the entire population.”

Ives yelped. He, too, left his seat. He grabbed the back of his neck with one hand and began to pace the length of his office and talk very, very fast. “You’re a genius! We have to build a survey. Generate lots of publicity. But not for the people we’re searching for.....”

“Exactly. For the people who notice changes in them!”

“Offer a reward.”

There was not much that the people of Earth really wanted anymore. This complacency, this satisfaction was at the root of Ives’ boredom and lack of fulfillment. Few people ever thought about working at becoming wealthy. Almost anything that life had to offer was already available to almost everyone. Health care is free. Education is free. No unemployment. Housing is free if you have employment. So....housing, free. No one starved. Food was free to the employed. Water, pure, and, of course, free.

If you felt like climbing a mountain, sailing an ocean, surfing the big wave or living on the ocean floor, there were no restrictions, nothing to prevent you. If invention or art or sculpture or writing is your thing, then you can explore your talent at will. Except for the real mountains, there were no more to climb, no obstacles to an individual's achievement. All you had to do was ask Global Government for permission. They never said no, and would pay your way to boot.

So what reward could you offer a species with everything? The one thing they did not yet have access to at all was outer space. In the 21st century, private companies began to offer very expensive rides into orbit, to the international space station parked there. At the turn of the 22nd century, there were no other orbiting stations, no colonies on the moon, let alone any of the other planets in the Sol solar system. In fact, as the population of the Earth stopped burgeoning, people almost stopped flying in commercial jet aircraft.

No, really, they did.

The planet was no longer overcrowded at the end of the 22nd century. Exponential population growth had ceased. At the turn of the 23rd century, every person could replace himself. The life expectancy grew from 100 years to 200 years and beyond. No one was in a hurry to do anything, so more people used automobiles (electric or solar) to get from place to place, or cruised on ships, or hired small flying things like Lear jets or helicopters (solar). Anyone who had to travel to the other side of the world—like POTUE—could apply for an orbital round trip. Such a ride was faster than a sub-orbital transcontinental flight. It was like rising so high that the planet actually moved under the orbital craft, which then re-entered the atmosphere in time to land at its destination! A total orbit at low Earth orbit could be as short as 89 minutes and as long as two hours. So a person could conceivably travel from North America to Australia in as little as 45 minutes. Most non-governmental pleasure trips took about two hours, from anywhere to anywhere on planet Earth.

Humans were not thrilled by “fast” anymore. They had enough time. They lived long enough to get everything done. Having time means that some of the desperation of human life is removed. You don't have to decide today; tomorrow will do. If you make the wrong choice, you have time to make it right, make reparations, forgive and forget. Heal, move on. Everything does not have to happen today.

In this atmosphere humans were no longer rushing to get off the planet. In the 20th century, the planet was overcrowded and resources were being depleted. Simple mathematical models showed that humans could not sustain themselves on planet Earth for more than a few more generations, at most. Scientists were planning to inhabit more orbiting space stations, colonize the moon and other planets to relieve the Earth of its burden. Instead, serendipitously, it seemed, the Treatment came along and solved every problem.

Were there other civilizations on other planets? Nobody cared, except for scientists and people who were thrilled by science fiction. Since humans were not exploring the solar system and the galaxies for other places to live, nobody cared about what went on “out there.” At least not officially.

POTUE simply would not fund any off-planet explorations. Becoming the god of this world meant that he did not want any competition. He had scientists scanning the heavens for space craft 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The official spin on this activity was defense against incoming space rocks big enough to be a life-ending or planetary catastrophic event. POTUE really wanted to forestall meeting any envoys from any planets that might exist. He didn't care what happened on their planets,

so if other people existed, he didn't want them to come to Earth and interfere with his world. He believed he had all the resources required to fend them off.

George was not in possession of this information. He left Ives' office with a plan to present to POTUE that included a trip to outer space for the winners of his contest. This is the perfect ruse for the survey to look for people with no spark. Getting these people off the planet after they have been thoroughly debriefed would be a bonus for POTUE. All of them. The zombies AND the ones who know and love them.

George emailed the details of his plan and used his direct phone number to POTUE. "Did you get my email?"

"Yes, George, I did."

"It occurs to me, Mr. President that you could simply order UEPD to act on the conclusion that Ives and I have presented to you. After all, Lieutenant DeMateo is a lower-level operative."

"I know George. We both know, however, that we avoid backlash from the populace if government follows through and gives them a completely transparent process."

"I anticipated that..."

"I know you did."

"...so I came up with this proposal to satisfy DeMateo's need to present an explanation for our findings and to present a solution that you might find satisfying."

"Yes. You know it would be satisfying for me to put this whole matter to rest once and for all. If you can pull this off, my friend, I will owe you."

"You're okay with outer space? Is there a resort, a playground, a new development we can tout?"

"Things are in development," POTUE lied. "I'll put some finishing touches on and let you know what you can offer the 'winners.'" POTUE really only wanted to shoot them off into the direction of Sol. He could. Despite what "rewards" he might offer, in the end, POTUE would REALLY just shoot them off into space.

"Prepare to owe me, my friend. I WILL collect in due time," George replied with amusement.

"*Adieu.*" POTUE hung up his personal phone. He owed much to George. George could ask almost anything of POTUE. His only friend on Earth. The only man he could trust beyond his operative Brown. George would certainly become a demi-god in POTUE's divine economy.

THE PLAN

With Lt. Arlene DeMateo's assistance, Ives and George devised a plan and hired an advertising agency. Immediately, the whole project threatened to spin completely out of control.

Television and the world wide web/internet fused in the early 21st century. Everything visual happened on the worldnet. Placing video on the worldnet had become relatively cheap and easy, but there were still individuals and companies who made millions by placing just the right video on the worldnet at just the right time. When the advertising agency heard the plan, they....

"So basically you're wanting to find the world's strangest people."

Arlene, Ives and George looked at the agency's representative with puzzlement.

"No." Ives leaned forward in his chair. "Well, maybe." George thoughtfully focused on the air. "Yes," replied Arlene with a broad smile. "Yes we want to find strange people who meet our criteria. As we said, we are doing a study," the agency rep did not know that Arlene was UEPD, "and we need to identify people who have exhibited certain behaviors and ask them some questions. We want to ask them all the same kinds of questions, but only after people report them for exhibiting the specific behaviors. In a sense, I guess they would be the world's strangest people." Neither George nor Ives were quite sure where Arlene or the advertising rep were going, but decided to let it play out.

Dan Mathers, the account representative from American-Global Advertising Services (A-GAS), asked a question. "Can you have them send in video of the subjects?" He looked from face to face.

"I don't see why not. But we would want to capture the answer to at least one question on video. The first question." The trio had decided that the first question would be tailor-made for the zombie, after they had been identified as a possible zombie by an acquaintance or family member, to a medical professional. The Plan entailed asking small segments of professionals to look for people who had memory and/or personality shifts coupled with vague or no recall of significant life events. Prior to this meeting with A-GAS, the Plan was to have each medical professional who identified a possible zombie, provide to the study panel the life event(s) or situations that the zombie could not respond to, consistent with the zombie's known personality. The answer to these questions could be observed and evaluated by Arlene and her psych-sosh assessment teams.

Arlene realized right away that the use of video would eliminate the need for an in-person interview of each one. She could use the video to eliminate those who were not candidates at all, and focus on those who required a face-to-face to do a complete assessment.

The Plan did *not* entail releasing the survey to the whole world. Medical professionals loved to win trips, too, and they would understand why WHA would engage in such a study. The Element became the foil for this study.

"We'll hint that the Element is kicking up a fuss again about the Treatment." This was George's idea. "They have complained that the recent spate of deaths is due to the Treatment, and some side effect that we have not disclosed to the public. This is a perfect time to get the medical community to buy into a study of any kind."

Ives was uncomfortable, at first, with the idea of "hinting" at things in any announcement that was not completely straightforward. He trusted George on this process, however, because he understood that the real aim of this study could not be revealed as such.

Before meeting with A-GAS, Arlene had posed the question, "Why would medical professionals believe that the Treatment would fail to deal with every single medical problem that would cause memory failure or memory loss?"

"Well," said George, "The medical community wouldn't believe it! But if we tell them that we are responding to the Element to put this whole idea to rest for good and all, I think we'll get enthusiastic responses. But I still think we have to bring all our expertise to bear to frame the campaign in such a way to appeal to members of the medical community."

Ives yawned. "Yes, because we need a couple of groups: a control group. We need 'normal' people to use as a comparison for our statistical model."

“Uhhh, um...” The men turned to Arlene at the sounds. “We don’t need to create a control group. I have the largest known behavioral database.” Ives perked up. “Everybody on earth. I have files you don’t know anything about, which include every tribe, racial group and nation.”

Ives and George waited patiently for Arlene to proceed. “The security cameras and pickups. Granted, they take only snapshots and are not thorough enough, alone, to capture significant behavior for our purposes. But for purposes of comparison with a longer, more detailed video that’s been through evaluation and assessment, it will have probative – and scientific – value.”

George leaped from his chair and waved his arms in the air. “Ha ha! What a great idea! I knew all of that surveillance would come in handy some day!” Ives shot him a puzzled look. “We need another session. Let’s discuss crafting the video announcement for worldnet as entertainment, but yield scientific information regarding the efficacy of the Treatment. Somebody call Mathers and tell him to have his people send our people a contract. Let’s make this happen!”

IVES - “John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” “John 16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” NKJV

The coffee was good. The view was spectacular. Ives’ Bible lay open on the table in front of him. As the aroma of his coffee wafted up into his nostrils, he read the last verse of his study for the day. He had already read his morning devotions and felt nothing but peace. No anxiety about the last few days. He had put it all in God’s hands. He had asked Heavenly Father to intervene, to “fix it.” He didn’t know how God would arrange it, but he had utter confidence that he didn’t have to worry about trusting George.

When the first comatose patient came to Ives’ attention, he was thrilled that something had occurred that altered the pattern of his flat and dismal existence. By the time the hundreds of thousands had died world-wide, he was almost in a panic at the state of affairs. Panic inexorably dissipated, though, because of Ives’ dreams, in which he was reassured that God was still on the Throne. He knew God would never leave nor forsake him as he negotiated the coming events.

And he has maintained his peace even after a mild confrontation with George at the conclusion of yesterday’s meeting with Arlene and George. After Arlene left the office, Ives stepped up to George, hands in his pockets, but eyes fixed on those of his friend.

“George, how did you know about the UEPD surveillance snapshots? Who *are* you, man?”

George did not blink. He had been waiting for this moment, “Who do you think I am, Ives?” There was no amusement in his demeanor.

Ives looked away, then turned away from his friend. George approached Ives and stepped into his field of vision. “You don’t know what to say, I’m sure.” He paused. “Because you really don’t know what words to use, eh?” He gave Ives a slap on the arm. Amusement once again flavored George’s eyes. “I’m a spy, Ives, nothing more.”

Ives smiled at George. “Spy? For whom? About what?”

“POTUE. About any and everything he might want. Spy is such an ugly word. Let’s use ‘operative’ instead.”

“Well, you said it.” They sat down, threw themselves comfortably on the upholstered office chairs and fell into comfortable conversation about what George really did for a living.

“I’ve known POTUE since we were both boys. He’s as familiar to me as if he was my own brother, as you are to me, Ives. He asked me to work for him, so I do. I went to medical school when he went to graduate school. I worked on his campaigns when he first ran for local office in France, then the European Union. When I graduated from medical school and he was in the Global Cabinet, he put me on his payroll. Since then, no matter where I have worked, I have reported to him, and him alone.”

“I’m not as surprised as I thought I would be about this. I realized little by little that you were not just a doctor around here, especially after the appointment of Hughes. So you work for POTUE....”

Before Ives finished this thought, his intercom buzzed. “Dr. St. Jacques, Lt. DeMateo is in the outer office. She has no appointment, sir.”

SMITH

“Show her in!” Both men stood as Sandra ushered Arlene into the office. Arlene looked excited, eyes sparkling as her gaze shifted from Ives to George and back. “Are you two ever separated?”

“No.” George responded with a twinkle in his eyes before Ives could take a breath. “You look like you just dug up a ton of gold. What’s up?”

Arlene walked over to Ives’s desktop terminal. “May I?” Ives held out his hand as Arlene crossed to the laptop and typed in her access information. Soon she had the dialog box she wanted and she asked the men to make themselves comfortable.

“Sit down before you fall down. This is going to knock your socks off.” With the screen positioned so they could all see it, Arlene hit “enter.” She narrated as the slideshow played.

“These are snaps of Smith as he goes into and out of zones, the dead zones, on his way home and to work and running errands for the last six months. Notice anything?”

“Yeah, Arlene, they seem to be looped. There are just two snaps on some days. Where are the rest?” Ives was puzzled. Arlene looked at George, who was stone-faced. “Care to explain Dr. Thomas?”

George blinked once, twice then “This guy is off the grid!”

Ives: “Huh?” and Arlene: “Exactly!” Arlene looked at Ives. “All of us are supposed to be observed every hour of every day everywhere. As you know, this observation keeps crime down to almost zero. In addition, there are sound pickups in places that are sometimes dark or just not observable, and finally, there is the sub dermal GPS so that we know where everybody is in real time, in case of emergency. Still, there are dead zones, zones where people are not seen or heard. We rely on the public to report them, but not everyone does.

“Smith has never reported a zone at all. Yet, he managed to get to work and back every single day without being seen or heard except entering and leaving the Hospital, and entering and leaving his home. This is six months’ worth of snapshots. He’s been to the dry cleaners, the grocery store, all the places we all go routinely, yet we never see him.

“When I checked his GPS tracking....”

“Don’t tell me...” said George while Ives said “You’ve got to be kidding....”

Arlene continued "... THERE WAS NONE!" She leaped from her chair. "Can you believe this guy? He has no GPS."

"How's that possible?" asked Ives. George responded. "He's a doctor."

"He works here." Ives understood. Arlene nodded. "Yep. But I'm not done boys. Now for the main attraction."

She instructed the computer to bring up another slideshow.

"Who is this?"

"Remember the pharm rep Brown that you said accompanied you two to the Gala?" Nods of assent.

"Well he came up in our files as someone who had been reported to UEPD time and again over the last hundred years or so. He was assessed only one of those times, and never assessed again even though he was reported again. Not just for going through zones without reporting them, but because of his personality changes."

"Let's see this." George leaned in and concentrated on the playback. It played fast, like a movie, and showed Brown as a very young man, just out of secondary school, going back and forth to his part time job, then to college in the fall: the library, the classrooms, public transportation, hamburger joint, and home. Nothing out of the ordinary at first.

In fact, everything seemed ordinary until he went to graduate school in his mid-twenties. He was seen going to some religious ceremonies in the evenings, and then in the daytime. Not just on Sundays. In fact, never on Sunday at all.

"Stop right there!" George stood and peered intently at the screen. "That's my hometown, and THAT is POTUE." Sure enough, Brown and POTUE were seen eating pizza. "That's the Parc de La Tete Or. I didn't know they had a pizza place there." Something tickled the edges of George's mind.

Both Arlene and Ives shot George a look of exasperation. He said "I know this is serious. Is there more?"

"You bet your bottom Euro." She hit play and the slideshow sped through another 50 years or so of devil worship, graduate school, marriage, fatherhood, the death of a child, divorce, remarriage and...

"Something's missing. He was blond and 30-ish and he skipped to black-haired and 50-ish. Did you guys lose some snaps?" A conclusion was forming in George's mind against his will.

"I don't think so. I think they were never there. Sometime in his thirties he just disappeared. His GPS shows that he was in France, but there are no snaps of him coming and going. What's interesting is that he was, indeed, coming and going! All the pickups and cameras worked, but there is nothing in his files anymore.

"I decided to interview his neighbors and friends. He had neighbors, but not many friends, except POTUE. Immediately before his 'disappearance,' he still lived in Lyon. Had just finished his graduate school thesis. I talked to a next-door neighbor who said he was a great neighbor when he first moved in. Typical guy, didn't bother anybody, really pleasant. But right before his 33rd birthday, something happened.

“In the previous year, he and his wife had lost their son. A kidnapping. Can you imagine? The child’s body was never recovered. This incident didn’t hit the worldnet at all, and the local coverage was sketchy and brief. The UEPD was never called in and the case was closed without even a suspect.”

“That never happens, does it?” Ives asked. George shook his head, and lights came on; he had come to a conclusion.

“Not now. In those days, UEPD didn’t get involved unless invited by local law enforcement, or the crime was international in nature. Shortly after that, he and his wife agreed to dissolve their marriage. But get this....”

“You can’t find the divorce records.” George.

“How did you know? Can’t find ‘em, can’t find the ex-wife. No one ever, and no one HAS ever reported this woman missing.”

“What?” “How’s that possible?” Arlene continued. “I’m not done yet. It’s possible if you’re an orphan, or both of your parents are dead and you have no siblings. For Brown’s ex-wife, all of the above. Without her husband, there was no one to say she had gone missing. He was paying her spousal support when she went missing, so she had no job. By the time her neighbors noticed they hadn’t seen her for a while, anywhere from a few weeks to a few months had gone by. Her trail was cold. Nobody ever turned up. Her apartment contained all of her personal belongings, including her purse, her car starter, her personal phone, her credit cards and her cash. It was like she stepped out to empty the trash and just disappeared.

“How did you know she was receiving spousal support if you can’t find the divorce records?” Ives asked.

“Neighbors. She talked to them when she moved into the neighborhood. She was sad. They described her as melancholy and lonely. Brown stayed at the marital residence. His neighbors said that he changed from a kind of friendly, affable guy to a cold, distant and almost unfriendly kind of guy. They believed it was as a result of the loss of his child and wife. Nobody seemed mad at him about it.

“He didn’t move from Lyon for ten more years, though. It was during this time that he disappeared from view. The next time we see him, he’s living in London. He’s fifty, he’s a brunette, and had some plastic surgery.

“POTUE was in London during that decade,” George mused aloud.

“Then, of course, there’s lots of activity. We can see everything the guy does. And he’s openly working for the then-Prime Minister of the EU...now POTUE. But you and Brown never crossed paths then.”

“I was in London. Saw POTUE sporadically. He was busy. I was busy.” George spoke in muted tones.

“All was really pretty normal with him for the next thirty years. He rose with POTUE’s political career. But when they moved to Switzerland right around the time Brown turned 100 years old, he went through another swift personality change, and had some more plastic surgery. He went from bad to worse. His Swiss neighbors near Lucerne observed him come and go from his condominium day after day. He never spoke to them or engaged in any small talk at all. Everyone had assigned parking. Occasionally, someone erroneously parked in his space.

“The first time, he threatened to have the trespasser killed if he ever did it again. But he wasn’t a neighbor, just a visitor. Brown was reported to local law enforcement for that, but there was never an investigation.

“Hmmmm.” George glanced at Ives.

“Did I mention the name changes? I know I keep calling him Brown, but he was born Daniel Cates. After the death of his child and the disappearance of his wife, he was calling himself David Caldwell in London. In Lucerne, he was David Brant.”

George was beginning to see the pattern. “It’s not against the law to change your name...after all, we are all so easy to track.”

“Yes. And it only looks suspicious if something happens. If you stay under the radar, and no one ever investigates you, there are no consequences to simply changing your name.”

“If no one investigates you.”

“Then someone parked in his space again. This time Brown waits until the trespasser gets into his car, and he comes out with a firearm and puts it to the driver’s head. Witnesses say he was calm, didn’t raise his voice at all, but shot the guy’s car. Paid for it to be towed to the person’s house. Told him not to come into his neighborhood again.”

“This is bizarre,” Ives said as he squirmed uncomfortably.

“Local law enforcement...”

“Was never called, I betcha.”

“He moved to Spain. We can’t tell if he still worked for POTUE. He taught high school. Name was Richard Agassi. He took frequent trips outside of Spain, but we don’t know where he went.”

Ives chuckled uncomfortably. George was stone-faced. “He was off the grid from the moment he boarded a plane, train, or drove an automobile, until he landed, detrained or parked his car back home. Every trip. All the kids he taught said he was the nicest, friendliest and approachable person you would ever come in contact with. Finally, these last 50 years, he has lived in or near New York City.”

“POTUE has been in London, the UK, running the world, just six hours away.” George nodded in agreement.

“If Brown has been working for him, we can’t tell. He has been Dan Brown ever since he moved to New York. He lives in a Manhattan condo with a view of Central Park. Many days there are snaps of him as he comes and goes. Many days not. On the day he visited the hospital as a pharm rep, he was off the grid all day.”

“Yikes.” Ives made a quiet comment. “Who IS he?”

ARLENE

After George excused himself, Arlene asked Ives, “What do you think this means? Are these two men connected to one another, to these recent events? To POTUE? What is going on?”

Ives shook his head. "You're asking me? All I know is that something has gone wrong with Brown and Smith. Remember, I don't travel in the rarified atmosphere that you and George occupy." He poured two glasses of water, offered one to Arlene.

"Yes, I forget that sometimes." She peered over the top of her water glass at Ives. "Briefly, both Brown and Smith have done something with impunity for hundreds of years that no one is supposed to be able to do at all."

"I understood that much."

"And one or both of them have some connection to POTUE."

"There's no evidence that Smith ever met POTUE, although anything's possible."

"But Brown definitely has. Since they've engaged in the same illegal behavior, it's better to look at all possible connections for Smith, if for no other reason than to eliminate them as possibilities."

"I can accept that analysis." Ives smiled a relaxed smile at Arlene. He noticed that she was in uniform, but with a casual flair. He was surprised at his comfort in her presence. He now realized that he was being hunted, but he no longer felt like a victim. He had himself under control, thank God, so she was really no longer a threat to his concentration, his commitment or his sanity.

THE THRONE ROOM - James 5:16 "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." KJV

"I asked You NOT to listen to his prayers."

"We always..."

"Yes I know. You always hear the prayers of the faithful. But he wasn't faithful."

"Yes he was," said the Father.

"And he asked in My Name," said the Son.

"And having heard, You have to answer. And on top of that, You gave him more than he asked for. What's up with that?"

"To glorify Me." As the Father and Son both spoke, the Holy Spirit whispered His agreement.

"What difference does it make now, that the End is so near?" The enemy still believed he could pull victory from defeat if he could just get a little more information. Right now, if he could just cause Ives to stumble and fall..." So you answered his prayers and gave him peace. So what good does that do? It doesn't make him any smarter. That Arlene is smarter than he is."

"Perhaps in the flesh. And We don't say that she is. But in the Spirit, he has great understanding and wisdom." The Son defended one for whom He died.

"Wisdom? What does HE understand?" The enemy snorted derisively. He held up a human hand and started to tick off points on its fingers. "He's sad. He's bored. He doesn't really trust You...and You...or You. And he has NO idea at all what's happening around him. Does he know that the end is as near as it is? Hmmmm?" Before They could answer, the enemy left the Throne room. In a twinkling, he was in Brown's presence.

Brown was sound asleep as the enemy entered his dreamscape. He pushed aside Brown's dream images and took their places. Brown addressed him. "Hello lord. How can I serve you?"

"Tell me something, Brown. Do these humans know that the end of time is upon them?"

"Some believe so, lord, simply because the God's Book says that it will happen someday."

"I know that Brown." He thought Brown could often be too much of a sycophant. "But do any of them realize that the end is imminent; that the signs all exist, the time is counting down..."

"Is there a specific human lord?"

"Yes, Brown," he said with a chuckle, surprised and pleased at Brown's presence of mind, "there is! That Dr. St. Jacques at the Hospital, and Paul's toady George. Those two specifically. Do they know?"

"To my knowledge, George has not accepted the Son as Lord and Savior, nor does he really believe in the God of the Bible. I'd say he is not looking for the end at all, and therefore not aware of its approach. Dr. St. Jacques will not be surprised, but doesn't give it much thought."

"That's how they all are right now, isn't it Brown? They don't believe, not really. They don't look forward to the God's victory or His return. If they did, I wouldn't be as powerful, would I Brown?"

"You are all powerful lord!"

The Enemy, Lucifer, Satan, old slew-foot laughed his deep, throaty, loud laugh as he appeared in the midst of his demon horde. Clapping his hands together, he said in a booming voice, "Lust!! Front and center." No one moved. "I don't like repeating myself. Lust, step forward or I'll drag you and everyone around you up here with me." Lust flew from the crowd of demons as if shot by a gun, and landed at his master's feet. "That's better."

The spirit of lust croaked pitifully, "I am at your disposal lord."

His lord replied, "So you say. But you have failed miserably with your assignment, the human Ives. Explain."

The demon croaked a fractured reply that no one understood. He didn't know that his master knew that he changed places with Distraction.

"WHAT!" The enemy's voice reverberated like as sonic boom throughout the chambers of Hell's cavern, causing the demons to cower in their places.

"It was Distraction's job, lord, not mine." Lust managed whine his response.

"No. You both disobeyed me and you took the job. So answer me! Why have you failed?"

"He loves the God. He asked the God in the Name of the Son to help him, so the God..."

As the spirit of Lust explained, an unpleasant vibration with a tooth-gritting undertone began to build in the surroundings, bursting into a disconcerting crashing that felt like an explosion in the chest of every demon spirit present.

His voice sounding like the rush of the gales of a million hurricanes, the enemy replied, "I don't want to hear the obvious from you!! Tell me why YOU could not coax this man to sin."

As the booming, crashing and blowing continued, the demon continued his explanation, "...answered his prayer by giving him something else to think about, another problem to solve and occupy his mind...."

The commotion began to subside. "...to give him an opportunity to remind himself of his commitment to celibacy, to gather himself and use the self-discipline he already had. And finally, he used the Word of the God to remind himself of what he could receive from the God. I just couldn't keep the guy's attention after all of that." The demon could not look his master in the eye. Instead, he lay prostrate before him, whispering the last few words, as silence fell among the demon multitude.

"Okay then." Satan looked around at the poor demon's compatriots and pointed down at the pitiful spirit being at his feet. "This is what you all will become – pathetic – if you cannot fulfill my commands. And you will all be destroyed." Murmuring from the crowd. "I know, you've heard it all before. But I've just heard from the Throne Itself that the time is very near. Very near. Very, very, very near!" If he had palms, they would have begun to sweat. But the Fallen Angel went on with swaggering confidence. "We are at the finish line. If you don't bring these humans down now, we are all doomed. Lust, you are not dismissed."

"I am adding the spirits of pride to the team and re-assigning distraction." He did not care that Distraction had been disobedient. He just wanted to win. "The three of you ought to be able to bring this one human down. His destruction will accomplish a great deal for our cause."

Pride piped up, "Uh, master, excuse me, but I don't really need their help. I'm good enough to do this all by myself. After all, "Pride clucked self-indulgently, "the God's own Word says that I go before a fall. And boy, have I made 'em fall...pastors, presidents, super-models, soap-opera stars..."

"Yes, Pride," the Evil One interrupted, "and that's why I want you to team up with Lust. And Distraction. You three have been very good at bringing down the high-minded, the so called 'intelligentsia,' the powerful. I don't know why this human is so special to the God, but I will....what the??" The Accuser of the brethren turned in the direction of a commotion in his multitude.

The crowded crowd of demons in front of Lucifer looked like they were boiling. Some of them had even turned their backs on their master. There was a babble of voices emanating from the crowd as they jostled and pushed one another in every direction. What had been a few brief whispered exchanges now became a hum of loud angry voices. As demons began to fall down and become endangered by the trampling hooves of their fellows, Satan bellowed, "Distraction! Front and center!"

The spirit of Distraction leaped over the heads of the demons that separated him from his master. He landed on top of Lust, who still lay prostrate. Lust shrieked and grabbed Distraction and they began to tussle right there at the feet of their master. The other demons shouted encouragement to the two combatants, their attention completely re-directed from the Adversary.

A toothy grin split the Adversary's face. "See how good Distraction is at his calling?" Above the din of the hubbub, the uncountable congregation of demons was left with his parting words, "Get busy. Redouble all your efforts. The end is at hand!"

A smile was still upon his face as he returned to the Throne Room. "Don't bother answering. It doesn't matter what he knows, does it? It is what it is. Your humans keep saying that I am defeated. But You know that I will see a good many of them in my Hell. Ives will be among them." He left again without ceremony.

The Deceiver reappeared. "And I won't be back!" He disappeared again.

The Father and Son exchanged glances. “He’ll be back.” The Holy Spirit whispered His agreement.

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