



The Klamath Writers' Guild challenged members to offer stories about the state of United States, using the 2016 election as their muse.

Against All Enemies

by William Huntsman

Neatly stacked on a coffee table scarred with gouges and rings from drinks left too long, was the latest issue of *The Crusader*, featuring Donald Trump's picture center page, above his image were the words *Make America Great Again* in bold red letters. The article embraced what made America great in the beginning, a country created by our founding fathers, a white Christian Republic that had been the subject of white genocide for far too long. In bold red letters across the bottom of the page, beneath a pitch encouraging people to write, call, and join today along with information about 24-hour KKK Radio & White Pride TV sites, the paper identified its followers as: The Few, The Proud, The Fed UP!

Lester Davis picked up the stack and put them in a wooden crate with an image of two golden peaches followed by *Georgia Peaches, God's Nectar*, on its side. "David Lee, get your butt moving, we've got work to do." Lester held the door open as his son ran past him into the screen door sending it crashing into the side of the house.

"Sorry." David Lee said catching the door before it ricocheted back and hit his dad.

"Shit!" Lester looked over his shoulder as screams echoed from the back of the house. "Lila! Get that girl to shut up or I will." He handed David Lee the crate, "Here boy, get in the truck."

Lester headed back into the house, turned right down a hallway and opened the first door on his left. Inside his wife Lila, wrestled with their daughter Missy. He walked over grabbed Missy's arm by the wrist, pushed Lila aside with his hip, and slapped the girl hard across the face.

Missy's eyes locked onto her dad and she started to scream when another blow from Lester's open hand silenced her. Before Lester could raise his hand again, Missy screamed through tears. The ten year old flailed her free arm and kicked her bare feet at her dad, hitting him in his face and legs.

Lester balled his fingers into a fist, reared his arm back to end the chaos when Lila stepped between them and shielded the girl with her body. She grabbed Missy with both arms and pushed her toward the bed.

"Let me handle this!" She shouted as she pushed Missy down on the four-posted bed.

The two struggled until Missy began to calm as her mother's body pressed her into the bed. Exhausted, the girl closed her eyes and submitted while Lila fastened the ropes to her wrists and ankles making sure the ends were securely tied to the bedposts.

Lester stomped back into the living room while Lila softly closed the bedroom door and followed him.

"We need to talk." She whispered but her husband didn't slow down. "Lester, we need to talk." Her voice was a little louder as they reach the front door.

"What do you want now?" He opened the screen door.

"You can't keep hitting Missy. She's your daughter. She can't help what she does."

"I'm beginning to wonder. My dad said nobody in our family has had that thing of hers."

"Autism," Lila said. "Missy is autistic and sensitive to. . ."

"Where did she get that from, tell me? Someone you shackled up with while I was working my ass off. Some salesman wanting to clean your house while David Lee took a nap."

Lila started to say something but stopped and took a deep breath. "Are you taking David Lee to work with you again?"

"At least he'll learn something there. His school is just as fucked up as the rest of this country. Eight years ago niggers elected a Muslim president and now a bunch of cuckservative politicians think a bitch is the answer."

Lila clasped her hands together trying to control her frustration. “The school secretary called yesterday wondering if David Lee was home sick. I said yes, but I can’t keep lying.”

Lester raised his left hand and pointed his index finger at Lila. “The next time they call, tell ‘em David Lee is gonna be home schooled.”

“But. . .”

Lester stepped back, slammed the screen door in her face, and walked to his tow truck where David Lee sat in the passenger seat with the peach crate in his lap. Lester could hear screams from inside the house until Lila closed the front door. He slid in the driver’s seat, started the engine, dropped the transmission into reverse and backed out of the driveway onto the gravel road. He revved the engine twice, slammed the truck into first gear and popped the clutch, sending stones flying.

Lila looked through the small window in the front door as her husband drove away. She was almost oblivious to the all too common screams from Missy when the sharp pitch of her daughter’s voice reached a crescendo then abruptly stopped. She took a deep breath as she replayed Lester’s claims of infidelity, how Missy must be someone else’s daughter.

Three years ago, Lester started beating Missy as her sensitivity to light and sound sent her into wild frenzies. She’d began acting out, pounding her fists into the walls, laughing wildly then releasing a scream that would chase demons away. His anger spilled over to their son who’d fought to protect Missy at school before her behavior worsened. Now he stood with his father calling her possessed and a freak.

Lila turned and headed to see why the screams stopped. She paused at a family picture of the four of them when life was different and even Lester smiled. She stared at the next photograph, her father-in-law, Jefferson Davis, when he was younger. Lester looked just like him, steel blue eyes, light brown hair that refused to look out of place even when it was messed up, neatly dressed in his Sunday best suit with Lester by his side. The picture was taken shortly after his wife disappeared, ran off some said, murdered and buried under six feet of concrete at one of Jefferson’s construction projects most believed. It wasn’t the first time

people thought he'd murdered someone. When Jefferson was nineteen, the police arrested him for murdering a black man. Several people saw him shoot the man, some black, some white but the police never found the body. After a brief trial, an all white jury found him innocent. Lila was sure they'd do the same if they'd arrested him for his wife's disappearance.

A familiar dull thud of Missy rocking her bed came through the walls. A chill ran up Lila's back as she remembered Lester's last threat, 'If you don't do something about that bitch, I'll take her out back and shoot her like the crazed dog she is! And no one will ever find the body.'

Lester turned the truck off the gravel road onto the highway and headed toward Davis Construction. "When we get to Grandpa's office I want you to give the crate to Billy. He'll make sure the newsletters get delivered around the county."

"Yes sir."

"Then climb back in the truck."

"Don't I get to see Grandpa?"

"I'm sure he'll come out to see his only grandson. But we have some business to take care of first."

"Yes sir."

By most standards, Davis Construction was a big company that built roads and poured concrete for buildings, foundations and bridges. Jefferson started his son up in a repair business when Lester graduated as a Heavy Equipment Master Mechanic. Lester could take things apart and put them back together but his greatest talent was as a machinist. Even as a young man he could fabricate almost everything he could conceive given the tools and materials.

Lester steered the tow truck past the iron-mesh gates and the ten-foot high fence with barbed wire on top that surrounded the main buildings. He stopped the rig next to his dad's bright red one-ton Ford crew cab, with a Confederate Flag covering the rear window. The Flag was a gift from Lester. He had the flag imbedded in the glass so that you

could see out from the cab of the truck but not inside, if you were following the vehicle.

As soon as the tow truck stopped, David Lee jumped out of the cab with his crate and headed off to find Billy. Lester stepped down and stretched his back before closing the door to his rig. He took the steps two at a time and headed into the outer office. “Hi Julianne,” he said to the twenty something secretary, the top button of her white blouse undone, giving the hint of an invitation as she looked up from her desk.

“Hi Lester, your father’s expecting you,” Her smile radiated as bright as her blue eyes and the rise of her chest. “Go right in.”

Why can’t Lila look at me like that, Lester thought as he walked past her desk into his dad’s office.

Jefferson Davis stood at the window and watched his grandson run across the yard carrying something when he heard the door open. “Come on in Lester. What’s David Lee carrying?”

“The latest edition of *The Crusader*. I told him to give it to Billy.”

Jefferson turned to his son with a gentle nod of his head and gestured to Lester to take a seat. The large office was divided into three areas: a drafting table with several bookshelves and large filing cabinets for blueprints, a six-foot leather couch that felt like velvet with a burl coffee table and two armchairs opposite. Next to an east-facing window was his father’s desk, handcrafted using reclaimed wood from a gallows that the KKK used to hang ‘white trash’ and niggers.

Lester sat in one of the armchairs as his father took the other nearest the window.

“I have a package for you to deliver to our Gibbet Cross friends on Saturday.” Jefferson said. “Trump will be having a rally in Tallahassee which should provide a reason for the trip. We need to make sure this opportunity doesn’t go unnoticed; that the country is aware a change is coming.”

“Yes sir.” Lester replied.

“The people in Kansas were foolish. Car bombs might work in Iraq but after Oklahoma and the first World Trade bombing we need to be more creative if we’re going to wake up America.”

“You’ll meet after the Trump rally to make sure no one is followed. If Trump is his usual self, he’ll be late and his mouthpieces will talk for hours trying to fire up the crowd. When he finally takes the stage, he’ll ramble on for another ninety minutes, minimum. By then everyone will be exhausted and ready to go home.” Jefferson looked over to the window then back to Lester. “Take David Lee with you. Exposing him to the hate will be good for his education. There’s a Billy’s Country Kitchen near the rally. Stop and get something to eat before you come home. When you’re done eating, look for someone on a Harley in the parking lot. You’ll know who he is once you see him.” His dad drew a swastika on the coffee table with his finger. “After you swap packages come by the house.” Jefferson took a brown wrapped box from the side of the couch and placed it on the coffee table.

“You can count on me.” Lester said.

His dad picked up a smaller box, about half the size of the first and set it on the table. “This one’s for you. I think you’ll find everything you need inside.”

A large grin stretched across Lester’s face. “So we’re gonna do it?”

“Step over to the drafting table.” Lester and his dad stood up and crossed the room. On top of the table were blueprints for a building, which his dad rolled up and secured with a rubber band, underneath a street map showed several places marked in Tallahassee. “Can you be ready on your end by Monday?”

“Oh yes.” Lester said. “I’ll be ready by Sunday.”

Jefferson pointed to two circles on the map. “Our friends will surprise the ragheads on the north side of town at nine o’clock Monday morning. At nine thirty, I want you to begin our revolution at the church here, but you need to be careful. Turn left off Orange onto Wahnish. When you cross the bridge over the creek you’ll see a vacant lot on the left. From there you’ll have a great view of the area. Do you have a truck?”

“I have a tan pickup with a shell on the back. It has a slide out that will be perfect and it’s bland enough so it won’t stick out.”

“Keep David Lee with you when you checkout the area. Best to do it before the rally, tomorrow if possible. A dad and his son are less likely to draw attention.”

“Yes sir.”

Jefferson rolled up the map and wrapped it with a rubber band. Lester picked up the boxes and his dad held the office door open. He followed his son through the outer office to the parking area where David Lee waited in the truck.

“Grandpa!” The boy shouted.

Jefferson approached the passenger door, “David Lee, get out of that truck and let me look at you.”

The boy jumped down from the cab and stood at attention, his back rigid, hands pinned to his sides. Lester crossed in front of the truck and placed the boxes behind the driver’s seat.

“It’s only been a week but I swear you’ve grown another inch.” Jefferson walked around his grandson. “And you’ve put on some muscle.” He grabbed David Lee’s biceps and squeezed.

“Yes sir. I’ve been working with dad everyday this week.”

Jefferson stopped in front of the boy. “What are you five-ten and. . .” He wrapped his arms around the boy and picked him off the ground. “And a hundred and forty pounds?”

“Five-ten and a hundred and forty-two pounds,” David Lee said when his grandpa put him down.

Lester came back around and Jefferson handed him the map.

“Up in the truck boy,” Jefferson said to his grandson with a wave of his hand.

“But when am I gonna see you again?”

“Ask your dad.” Jefferson took his son by the arm. “It’s in your hands son. I’ll see you when you get back Saturday night.”

“I won’t let you down.” Lester said as he opened the driver’s door.

Jefferson tapped the door when it closed and stepped back. He felt a real sense of pride as he watched them pull away.

Lila was exhausted after she wrestled with Missy all morning. Every day she’d clean up after her daughter who’d stand naked in the center of the

room and laugh as she peed on the floor or worse. Several times, she started to call the Autism Hotlines but froze when she realized she'd have to explain to them that she ties her daughter to her bed just so she can escape outside to her garden. Worst yet, how the yelling and pounding has become silent cries because she tunes her daughter out. How could she explain that over the phone? She could tell them that Missy liked rolls fresh from the oven with peach butter. The smell seemed to comfort her, which helped some. But other smells, disinfectants, bleach, air fresheners and perfumes would set her off babbling 'it hurts' followed by screams. Lila knew something needed to be done, that doing nothing wasn't the answer. Every day after Lester and David Lee left, every day after hours of wrestling with Missy until exhaustion took over; she'd stand in front of the bathroom mirror her body covered in bruises and bite marks, her life so hopeless that she'd curl up on the bathroom rug and cry until tears stopped falling wondering if dying would be easier.

The afternoon sun and humidity had Lila wiping the sweat off her brow with the back of her gloved hand. She was in the back yard tending her vegetable garden when she heard Lester's truck pull into the driveway. She grabbed the basket of collard greens and carrots she'd picked and by the time she'd made it to the side of the house, she saw David Lee loading boxes into the rear carrier of his Kawasaki ATV. "You're home early."

"We finished early and I wanted to take a few things out to the shack." Lester called out over the truck. He removed the small box his dad gave him and left the big one behind his seat. "Are those for dinner?" Lester pointed to the basket. He put the box in carrier on the back of his ATV.

"Fried chicken and collard greens with grilled carrots, sound okay?"

"Sounds great to me," Lester said. "Is Missy asleep?"

Lila looked over her shoulder at the house. "She's been down for about an hour. I thought I'd try to get her to take one of the sleep pills the doctors gave us. I have some bread baking and plan on crushing one up in the peach butter."

“Crush up a couple so we can have a quiet evening for once.” Lester replied then turned to David Lee. “Let’s push these behind the garage a ways before we start them up.”

“Yes sir.” David Lee put the four-wheeler in neutral and headed off first.

“We’ll be back before dark,” Lester said as he turned his Kawasaki and followed David Lee.

Lila stared at the two of them in disbelief. Five hours ago Lester was ready to kill Missy and kick her out for sleeping around with some make believe salesman, and now, he seems almost happy. “Men, go figure.” In the distance, she heard the ATVs fire up. Missy’s shouting drowned out the sound of the Kawasaki’s before Lila reached the front porch.

The shack that Lester talked about was more than a rundown building on its last legs. It was close to five miles into the woods near a clearing and almost 1,000 square feet of workspace. The building had two doors in the front, both steel, one of them a rollup. The walls were eight inches thick with steel shuttered windows on the two sides. The rollup door and shutters on the windows had steel rods imbedded for security that locked from the inside. The door had two deadbolts on the outside; one keyed, the other used a slide controlled by a combination tumbler with a twelve number sequence.

David Lee stopped in front of the rollup door and Lester parked his Kawasaki on his right. It took both of them about ten minutes to open the building and unload the boxes. Lester went to the back wall and opened a steel panel, three feet high that led to an outside propane generator. In a few moments, the Cummins generator kicked in and the lights and power strips on the workbenches lit up. David Lee placed the boxes on the bench away from the door and waited to see what his dad had planned. To the left of the generator doors was a shelf filled with ribbons and trophies won by him and his dad in the Georgia DRL (Drone Racing League). Above the trophy shelf were several of their first drones, UAV’s (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle), small prototypes that would fly for ten or fifteen minutes before gravity took them to the ground.

Disassembled models were set out on workbenches so his dad could create his own monster drones that could stay in the air for an hour, show 360 degrees views from mini cameras as it moved at speeds over 40mph. The newer models could avoid obstacles and be controlled from almost a mile away.

To the right of the generator door stood Lester's gun safe, all one thousand pounds of gunmetal grey steel, filled with two AK47's, three AR15's, an RPG launcher and boxes filled with bullets and grenades. Lester dialed the combination lock, opened the safe and placed the box he dad gave him inside. He closed the door and spun the lock.

Each side of the building had three windows with flags hanging between them. On the westside were two American flags with small swastikas instead of stars. Between the first of two windows on the eastside, a Confederate Flag hung, a Blood Drop Cross Flag covered the space between the last two.

"Bring the box of servos over here," Lester said. He set a large quad-prop drone on his center workbench.

David Lee set the box in front of his dad.

"What do we need now?" Lester asked.

His son looked around the room. "Gloves!" David Lee hurried to the bench near the trophy wall and grabbed a box of surgical gloves.

After two hours of tinkering, Lester put the final touches on the drone engine assembly and checked the camera positions with his touch pad. His calculations showed the drone could carry six kilos for half a mile and maintain an elevation of 400 feet. The cruising speed would be 42mph although the loaded speed might be less.

"Can we give it a test flight?" David Lee asked.

Lester stepped outside and checked the sunlight. "Not tonight boy, it's getting dark and your mom has fried chicken waiting."

"Can we fly it tomorrow?"

"No, tomorrow we have something important to do. Tomorrow we're going to Florida."

Thirty minutes later the generator was off and everything buttoned up. Lester took the lead going home as the woods darkened. His headlight bobbed up and down the rough road as David Lee matched his

trail. They stopped about fifty feet behind the garage and pushed the Kawasaki's the rest of the way. The smell of fried chicken filled the air and had Lester's mouth watering. Lila could be difficult at times but she made the best fried chicken in Southern Georgia.

"We're home," Lester said, his voice just above a whisper.

"Take your muddy boots off and wash your hands. Dinner is ready."

Dinner was quiet as both Lester and David Lee barely took a moment to breathe between bites. Lila was glad that she'd fried two chickens as her men finished the first one almost before she dished up the collard greens and carrots.

"Excuse me," Lester said as he grabbed a copy of *The Crusader* and headed down the hall to the bathroom.

David Lee cleared the table and helped his mom with the dishes.

"How was your day?" She asked.

"It was great. We went to see Grandpa and worked on a Freight Liner in the shop replacing the, um, oh yeah, the o-rings on the thing to keep oil from squirting. I don't know all the names yet but I can put them together."

"What were in the boxes you took to the shack?"

"Just some servos and drone parts Dad had at the shop. You should have seen the big drone we built." David Lee held his arms wide in a circle. "It can fly high and zoom through the sky as fast as a bird."

"Really? Did you get to fly it?"

"No, I wanted to but it was getting dark."

"Maybe tomorrow after school you'll be able to give it a test flight?"

"Dad said we can't 'cause we're going to Florida."

Lester entered the room as Lila put the last dish away. "Get ready for bed boy, tomorrow is gonna be a long day."

David Lee started to run down the hall when Lester reached out and grabbed him by the arm. "Quietly boy. Quietly. I'll be down to check on you after I talk to your mom."

"Yes sir."

Lila took a deep breath and stepped into the living room. “David Lee tells me you’re going to Florida tomorrow. What’s that all about?” She asked and sat on the sofa.

Lester sat in his chair and tossed *The Crusader* on the coffee table. “It’s about him.”

Lila looked at the picture of Trump on the cover.

“There’s a rally in Tallahassee Saturday morning. It’ll be good for the boy to experience politics up close. You know, improve his education, expose him to a presidential candidate. Who knows he might even get to meet the next president of the United States.”

“So why are you going tomorrow?”

“The rally is in the afternoon and I don’t want to spend all morning driving just to drive around for hours trying to find a parking place. They say ten or twenty thousand people, maybe more, will show up.”

“I don’t know. What about school?”

“If the school calls tell ‘em he’s learning what it means to be a patriot.”

Lila looked at the picture. “I guess so. Do you really think he might get to meet Trump?”

“Maybe,” Lester said as he stood up and headed down the hall.

At four in the morning, a bell went off in Lila’s head and she sat up straight. She blinked twice to focus her eyes and slipped on a robe as she stepped into the hallway. Everything seemed okay. She listened at Missy’s door. Nothing. Gently she turned the doorknob and pushed. The room was just the way she’d left it; seven nightlights in various outlets around the room gave everything a light glow. She tiptoed over to her daughter’s bed. Missy’s head was turned toward the wall. Lila removed a small mirror from her pocket and leaned over the bed careful not to touch it. She held the mirror in front of Missy’s face and saw her daughter’s eyes staring at her reflection. Her hand started to tremble as she slowly pulled the mirror back and placed one foot behind the other until she’d reached the door. Lila stepped into the hallway and quietly closed the door. It wasn’t until she exhaled that she realized she’d been holding her breath.

Lester woke his son at 6:30 AM, and helped him pack an overnight bag. By the time they'd reached the living room, Lila had a picnic basket with cold fried chicken and two sodas's waiting for them. At 7:30 AM, Lester quietly backed his tow truck out of the driveway and eased it down the gravel road.

Five minutes later Lila was back in bed praying that Missy would allow her to sleep in a little.

When Lester and his son reached the shop, they switched to an old Ford F100, super cab pickup with a shell on the back. Lester removed the large box from his tow truck along with the map he'd stowed behind his seat.

David Lee put the chicken basket and overnight bag behind the seat on the passenger side and climbed up. "Why are we taking this truck?"

"Better fuel economy and easier to park." Lester replied. "Do you want some breakfast? The smell of fried chicken has made me hungry."

"You bet. Can we go to Me Maws?"

"Sounds good to me."

After a breakfast of Me Maws famous pancakes with peach syrup and a side of sausage, Lester and David Lee headed for the truck.

"Look out boy," Lester said as he tossed the keys to his son.

"You're driving."

David caught the keys with his left hand. "Are you sure? I mean, is it okay?"

"You've been driving four-wheelers since you were five and trucks and tractors since you've been able to reach the pedals, I think you can get us to Tallahassee."

"But we're going on the highway?"

"Put that *Make America Great Again* hat on. Police will be too busy giving you two thumbs up to notice, besides you're almost as big as me."

David Lee jumped in the driver's seat, put on his red hat, and checked the rear view mirror. He smiled and watched his dad climb in the passenger seat.

“Reach back behind your seat and grab the rolled up map.”

His son felt around with his left hand. “Is this what you want?” He asked as he handed the map to his dad.

“Yep,” Lester said. “Start ‘er up. We’ve got some traveling to do.”

David Lee turned the ignition, put the transmission in Drive and released the emergency brake. He slowly pulled out onto US 19 South, checked over his left shoulder for traffic and pressed down on the gas pedal.

“Keep the speed around sixty.” Lester said as he took the rubber band off the map.

“Yes sir.”

The boy followed US 19 across the Georgia-Florida state line into Monticello where traffic slowed as he entered the city. The highway was easy but the busy streets made him uneasy and Lester noticed.

“Just follow the speed limits and keep about ten feet back as we make it through town. You’ll be making a right on US 90 West, up here so get in the right lane.”

His son put his signal on and eased into the right turn lane. When the light turned green he followed a blue sedan west.

“Stay on ninety and we’ll be in Tallahassee in a half hour or so.”

“Yes sir.” David Lee pressed on the gas pedal as they left Monticello. The route was easy enough, US 19 to Monticello, turn right on US 90 to Tallahassee.

Twenty minutes later, they approached the intersection of, I10 and US 90. “Don’t worry. It’s just like driving your ATV in the woods. Stay on the path and miss the trees.” Lester said as they went under the freeway. “If you peek to the right, that’s where the rally will be tomorrow, at the Tallahassee Auto Museum.”

David Lee took a quick glance then focused on the truck slowing down in front of him. “Where are we going to stay?”

“Not far from here. Just stay on 90 until we get to the 319 where we’ll make a left.”

His son moved the tan pickup into the left lane. David Lee gripped the wheel as he stared at the collision of eight lanes of traffic ahead. He

moved into the first left lane behind a white Explorer and took a deep breath.

“You’re doing fine. Just remember to miss the trees.”

The boy wasn’t afraid of the trees; it was all of the cars and trucks trying to get somewhere that had his attention. The light turned green and he followed the arrows to the left behind the Explorer.

“We’ll be staying at the Southern Inn. It’s on the left a few blocks up.”

“Do you want me to change lanes?” The boy flipped the turn signal and checked his mirrors for an opening.

“Just stay in this lane. We’re gonna make a right up here at Orange Avenue.”

David Lee flipped the turn signal off. They crossed the Apalachee Parkway just past the Southern Inn. The boy followed the highway as it curved to the right before coming back left.

“Orange Avenue is just up ahead do you see it?”

“Umm. . .yes sir, I see it.”

“Okay, once you get on Orange we’ll be following it about a mile or so. We’re almost at our destination. You’re doing great son.” Lester rolled up the map and tucked it under his seat. “We’ll be making a left turn onto Wahnish Way so keep your eyes open.”

Traffic continued moving in spurts, fast in open areas followed by a snail’s pace in others. “I see it, Wahnish Way, you want me to make a left?”

“Yep.”

David Lee turned the pickup left onto a quiet street. The lack of traffic finally allowed him to relax. He looked at his hands. His knuckles were white from gripping the steering wheel.

“See that vacant lot on the left just past the creek? Pull the truck in there and stop.”

The boy turned off the road, placed the transmission into park and pressed on the emergency brake. His body was tense and the muscles in his arms ached as he turned off the ignition.

“Great job son, now let’s stretch our legs.” Lester opened the door and walked to the front of the truck extending his arms over his head to get the kinks out.

David Lee’s legs felt heavy as he exited the pickup. He tried to get the numbness out of his butt shaking one leg then the other as he moved closer to his dad.

“This is where we’ll wake up the world boy. You see that building back by the corner?” Lester pointed at the brick church on the corner of Orange and Wahnish. “That will be a polling place on Tuesday. Do you know what a polling place is?”

“Where people vote?”

“Yep, except it won’t be there on Tuesday, do you know why?”

David Lee thought for a moment and said, “Because we’re gonna wake up the world?”

“Yes we are boy, yes we are.” Lester placed his arm over his son’s shoulder. “Let’s go get us a room and have some of your mom’s chicken.” Lester held out his hand and his son handed him the keys.

Lila sat close to the television with the sound so low that the growling in her stomach was louder. She’d give the last of the chicken to Lester and her son but she still had some collard greens and carrots. Not much of a dinner but she’d made some fresh bread for Missy which always tasted delicious. The news was on talking about the crowd expected in Tallahassee for the rally. Police were estimating twenty thousand might show up. The concern was the protesters. Trump had his followers good and bad. Lila worried about her son.

A dull thud started pounding in Missy’s room. Lila picked up her empty bowl of greens and carrots and headed for the kitchen. She could hear her mother’s voice telling her, ‘Idle hands are the devils workshop.’ Then she remembered when she was Missy’s age, her mom would say, ‘There’s no peace for the wicked.’

Saturday morning Lester stood in front of the mirror shaving when he noticed his son staring at him. “What you looking at boy?”

“The tattoo on your arm.” David Lee said as he pointed at his dad’s bicep.

“Do you know what it stands for?”

“The KKK?”

“Yes and no.” Lester said. “The Blood Drop Cross represents the crucifixion of Jesus and the blood he shed on the cross for the white Aryan race, people like you and me.”

“Grandpa too?”

“Yep. Its power is reflected all over the world in countries like Germany, France, Austria. People everywhere are embracing the white nationalist race as God’s chosen people.”

“When can I have a tattoo like that?”

“In a couple years, when you turn sixteen.”

“Two years?” David Lee dragged the words out as he complained. “Can’t I have one sooner?”

Lester rinsed off his razor, put it in his travel bag, and sat down on the bed next to his son. “The Cross ain’t an ordinary tattoo; it has to be earned by following a righteous path or doing something worthy.”

David Lee looked at the tattoo. “If I help wake up the world, is that worthy?”

Lester smiled. “Yes boy that would be worthy.”

Lester checked them out of the motel and finally found a parking space about two miles from the museum. Trump wasn’t even in town yet and the area was filled with people selling political stuff: T-shirts with Hillary behind bars with *Lock the Bitch Up* across the front, bumper stickers saying *Trump that Bitch*, everything from hats to cozies for beer cans stretched out for almost a mile.

David Lee wanted to stop and look at all of the stuff but his dad kept moving forward. By the time they got close to the gate, security had started to turn people back, because the event was full.

Lester looked over his shoulder, a mass of folks getting more irritated by the minute pressed forward. He grabbed his son by the shirt and pulled him to the side. “Let’s find a place back here just in case things get ugly.”

He found a spot under a tree close enough to see but out of the main flow. The music was loud and the crowd spread out like cattle in a stockyard.

“This is crazy dad.” David Lee said.

“Politics are crazy boy.”

Two hours after the same music played through a second time; Trump’s surrogates took turns at the podium and fired up the crowd. Finally, Trump showed up to cheers, as the crowd chanted his name. Within minutes, he bashed Clinton while the crowd shouted ‘Lock Her Up!’

It was dark when Lester stood up, pulled his son to his feet and said, “Let’s go.”

“Is it over?”

“For us it is.”

He led his son through the mass of people back to the pickup. Trump was still shouting when Lester put the Ford in gear and headed toward Billy’s Country Kitchen. He found a spot under a sign that read: Customer Parking Only and they went inside.

About ten minutes after they sat down at a table the rally ended and the streets were jammed with cars. “What a mess.” Lester said as he looked out the window. “See son, that’s why we left early.”

They took their time eating and it was almost nine o’clock when Lester paid the check. Traffic still moved slowly but at least it was moving. In the shadows of the parking lot, Lester spotted a Harley. “Get in the truck boy.” Lester went to the driver’s side, opened the door and grabbed the large box.

The man by the motorcycle took a package from the back of the Harley and walked toward the truck. “You have something for me Lester?”

Lester smiled as he recognized the soldier from Gibbet Cross. He’d met him at a gun show in March set up by the Neo-Nazi organization. “Wade, it’s good to see you again.” The two shook hands and exchanged packages.

Wade looked at the restaurant as a group of Trump supporters exited. Two of the men argued about how long it'd take their candidate to build a wall and rid this country of immigrants.

"It is our time to rise," Wade said.

"All we need to do is light the fuse," Lester added and slapped the biker on the shoulder.

Wade secured his package and kicked life into his motorcycle. The distinctive low rumble of his Harley Davidson followed him as he eased it out of the parking lot into traffic.

Lester put his package behind the driver's seat and climbed up. He looked over at David Lee who was half-asleep with his head resting against the window.

The drive back to his dad's house gave Lester time to think. Monday's awakening would disrupt the Florida elections enough that Trump will be able to use the chaos to boost his law and order movement. People around the country would be pointing fingers, fear would ignite hate and white America would stand together. Lester smiled as he listened to his son snoring.

Jefferson Davis sat on his front porch steps and sipped a beer. It was almost eleven o'clock when the tan pickup pulled up his driveway. He watched as Lester turned the truck off and removed the package from the cab. "Where's the boy?" Jefferson asked, offering his beer.

"Asleep in the cab," Lester said. He took the beer and exchanged it with the package.

"No problems with the delivery?"

"Nope, I knew the guy from the gun show back in March where I picked up the two AK47's."

"That's another thing they want to take away from us," Jefferson said.

Lester nodded then downed the rest of the beer and set the bottle on the porch steps. "I need to get the boy home."

Jefferson waited until the truck was out of sight before he opened the package. A smile stretched across his face as he looked at the box filled with hundred dollar bills.

The porch light was on when Lester pulled into the driveway. He tapped his son on the shoulder. “Wake up boy, we’re home.”

Lila opened the door as they climbed up the front steps. “Where did you get that truck?”

“Oh, we had it at the shop. I thought it’d be easier to drive into Tallahassee.” Lester yawned and followed his son into the house.

“Are you hungry? Do you want me to fix something?” Lila asked.

“No we’re fine. We had a late dinner at the Billy’s Country Kitchen after the rally.” Lester answered. “We just need some rest.”

Lila closed the front door and followed her husband and son to the bedrooms.

Sunday morning was chaos as Missy woke everyone up with the morning sun, screaming and pounding on the walls. Lila ran towards her room to quiet her before Lester got dressed. She held the girl tight in a bear hug but Missy bit her on the shoulder and pulled away. Lila grabbed her from behind and tossed her on the bed. Lila was ready to pounce when she heard Lester shout, ‘Shut that bitch up!’ and the screen door slam. She started for the door and looked back at her daughter. Missy was off the bed and crouched on the other side. Lila arrived at the front of the house in time to see Lester and David Lee drive away on the Kawasaki’s. *Damn.*

By nine o’clock Lila had Missy calm enough to bathe her. Bath time often ended up with both of them soaked and bruised but this morning things were easier, until the bath ended. Missy pulled free from her mom and ran around the house naked as Lila tried to catch her with a towel. After a trip around the coffee table, Missy headed for the hallway, looked back over her shoulder then turned and ran headfirst into the doorjamb by her bedroom. Lila scooped up the dazed girl and carried her into her room. Missy had a big knot on her forehead the size of a golf ball. Lila watched her daughter blink her eyes several times. The girl looked at her mom, smiled and closed her eyes. When she opened them again, tears began to fall and she burst into laughter. Lila laughed with her as she rocked Missy in her towel.

David Lee waited as his dad took the large drone through a series of test flights. He banked the drone left and right, sent it high over the open field then dove the craft toward the ground before he leveled off.

Lester brought the drone back to the shack and landed it on a card table his son had set up next to the ATV's. He looked at his son and handed him the tablet. "Your turn. I have the cameras across the top and the flight controls in the bottom corners." He pointed to the bottom of the tablet. "Use your thumbs to move the horizontal and vertical controls. Use your index fingers to control the side buttons. The top button on the left side increases speed, the one below it slows it down. Tap the button on the right side to select the camera you want to use. It will come up center screen. Tap again if you want to switch cameras."

David Lee took the control tablet in his hands and tapped the button, bottom center, to start the drone. He took the UAV out over the field and hovered about two hundred feet. "It's a little slower to maneuver than our smaller drones."

"That's because we have it weighted with ten pounds of ball bearings." Lester said. "Take your time and get a good feel for the turns."

David Lee turned the drone to the right and started a dive. The additional weight caused the drone to accelerate catching the boy by surprise. "Wow, it sure dives quick!"

Lester watched as his son worked the drone through a series of turns as he climbed the UAV to about 300 feet then dove it toward the ground before he brought it back to the shack and landed on the card table. "Let's set a course."

David Lee followed his dad as they set up an obstacle course of poles, some with large hoops on top and two structures that looked like giant H's. The course was set up like a horseshoe. The first obstacle was the smaller of the two H's, followed by two poles about 15 feet high, the second with a large hoop. The course bent to the left through another tall hoop followed by three more poles that led to the taller H. All of the obstacles were staked to the ground with guy-wires. At the base of the taller H, Lester placed a cell phone.

When they returned to the drone, Lester handed his son the tablet. “Do you remember the vacant lot we went to in Tallahassee?”

“Yes sir.”

“I want you to imagine you’re looking away from the road. Take the drone below the first H, and stay to the left of the first pole. Pretend you’re following the creek as you travel through the first hoop. Maneuver it to the left around the next pole through the second hoop then climb to about 300 feet and hover.”

David Lee took the drone through the course using the cameras to avoid the sides of the hoops and climbed high above the field.

“Now imagine that the large H is the church. Below the crossbar is the front door. I want you to dive the drone under that bar through the front door then climb back up. Don’t start your descent until I say go.”

“Yes sir.”

Lester took a cell phone from his pocket and punched in the number to the phone under the crossbar. He held his finger above the call icon. “Go!” He watched as the UAV increased speed as it approached the crossbar. Lester brought the phone up to his ear and pressed the call icon. The drone passed under the crossbar as the phone rang in his ear. “Boom!”

The boy brought the drone back to the table and landed. He looked at his dad and they both smiled. “We’re gonna wake up the world, right dad?”

“Yes son and the world will never be the same.” Lester hung up the phone. “Let’s run the course a few more times. I want to make sure our timing is perfect.”

“Yes sir,” David Lee replied. *And then I’ll get my own tattoo.*

After an hour of test runs, they put the UAV back in the shack and took down the obstacle course. David Lee stowed the last of the poles under the benches while his dad opened the safe and grabbed the box from Grandpa.

Lester set the box on the center table next to the drone. “Get the gloves boy.”

David Lee snatched gloves and gave one pair to his dad. “What’s that?” He asked as his dad opened the box.

“Two pounds of Semtex,” Lester said as he removed the plastic explosive from the box, “and a detonator.” He pulled the small device from the box, set it on the table by the plastic explosive and nodded toward David Lee. “Remove the carrier from the UAV and warm up my soldering iron.”

The boy carefully unscrewed the wire-mesh container from under the drone that held the ball bearings. He brought the iron from the tool bench and plugged it in.

Lester opened a drawer under the table and picked up a larger mesh container. “Get my scales.”

The two worked in unison as they moved the bearings to the larger mesh container, covered them with an anti-static sheet, followed by the Semtex. Everything was placed on the scales along with the cell phone he’d put under the large H and the detonator.

“Twelve point seven pounds, perfect,” Lester said. He took a sheet of paper from the bottom of the box. “You got to love the internet,” he said as he unfolded a schematic.

“How does it work?”

Lester removed the cell phone back and battery and checked the schematic. “I’ll connect the cell phone ringer to these wires which will connect to one of the batteries on the drone. These wires from the detonator I’ll solder here. When I call the phone, it will connect the power from the drone battery to the detonator. The detonator explodes setting off the Semtex and BOOM! The blast sends ball bearings and drone parts everywhere.”

“Cool.”

“Yep,” Lester pointed to the bench beneath the Blood Drop Cross flag. “Empty out my red toolbox while I finish soldering. We’ll do our final assembly in Tallahassee.”

A storm from the Gulf brought little relief to the Georgia heat but Missy didn’t seem to care as she sat on the front porch swing with her momma. Lila looked at the gray clouds rolling in from the south with mixed emotions. The darkening sky dimmed the day enough that Missy could come outside but the promise of thunder and lightning always caused

concern. The two slowly swung back and forth, Missy tucked under her mother's arm her head resting on Lila's bosom, and Lila, holding her daughter close as she softly hummed *Amazing Grace*, Missy's favorite.

Missy sat up straight and covered her ears.

Lila strained to hear the approaching ATV's, their sound muffled by the woods behind the garage.

Missy bolted from the swing and ran barefoot into the house, her fingers glued to the side of her head as she screamed, "It hurts, it hurts!"

Lila stood at the screen door feeling helpless as her daughter's pain filled the air until Missy's bedroom door slammed shut and muffled her cries.

She turned in time to see Lester and David Lee pull up next to the tan pickup and start unloading a large drone and a red toolbox. She started to yell at them, ask them why they didn't push the Kawasaki's into the yard, when her heart stopped at the sight of the AK47, slung over Lester's shoulder. She stepped off the porch and walked toward her husband.

"What are you doing with the rifle?"

"None of your business," Lester replied. He put the rifle by the drone, closed the tailgate and dropped the shell top, then locked them both. "David Lee, get in the house and clean up before we eat."

"Yes sir," he answered.

Lester followed his son as Lila tried to keep pace.

"I didn't know when you'd be home so I didn't cook anything." Lila stopped when Lester looked over his shoulder; the rage from his steel blue eyes stole her breath and sent a chill up her spine.

David Lee stood at the screen door. "Dad, she's screaming again."

"Go on boy, I'll take care of that girl." Lester took the porch steps two at a time.

Lila ran after her husband. "Wait, you just scared her. Don't hurt her!" She grabbed Lester by the shoulder as they entered the living room.

He turned and slapped her hard across the face and Lila's knees buckled and sent her head first into the coffee table. "I told you what I'd do if you didn't get her under control."

Dazed, Lila reached out and dug her fingers into Lester's leg. "No!"

Lester looked down at his wife, balled his fist and hit her near her temple. He shook her hands off his leg and turned to see his son staring at him from the hallway. "Get in the truck boy."

"Are we going to Tallahassee?"

"I said, get in the truck!"

David Lee ran out the front, hit the screen door so hard it slammed against the house then bounced closed with a *crack*.

Lester leaned over his wife and pulled her up by her hair with his right hand. In a low measured voice he said, "I'll be back, Tuesday night, and I want you and that screaming bitch out of my house."

"Where can we go?"

He slapped her with his left hand and Lila screamed as she hit the floor. Lester looked at the clump of hair in his right hand and tossed it at his wife. "Go to hell for all I care."

Lila curled up in a ball expecting another slap, when Lester turned on his heels, crossed the room and headed down the porch steps. The memory of him loading the truck shook her. She crawled to the screen door praying he wasn't going to get his gun. She sighed when he drove away with her son. The sound of bare feet gave her a start. She turned and opened her arms to her daughter; Missy dropped to the floor and snuggled close. They both looked out the screen door as the dark sky finally opened up and rain began to fall.

After he'd left Lila, Lester drove around before he pulled into Boone's Roasted Pig & Gas, to gas up the Ford and eat. The rain had stopped by the time they'd reached his dad's home. Lester explained the blowup he had with Lila and Jefferson said it was probably best that they spend the night at his place.

David Lee showed his grandpa the drone and told him how he flew it through the hoops and how tomorrow he was going to help his dad wake up America. By nine o'clock, the boy was exhausted, asleep in bed.

Jefferson sat on the front porch sipping a beer when his son joined him. "The boy sounds like he's ready to grow up."

Lester sat next to his dad and took a sip from his long neck beer. “He’s eager to get a tattoo and believes he’ll earn it tomorrow.”

“If all goes well, he will.”

Lester stared at the tan pickup. “What’d think I should do about Lila and . . .”

Jefferson cut him off before he finished. “I never believed that crazy girl was family, Lila had to be screwing around on ya.”

“I thought about killing them both, if David Lee wasn’t with me, I might have.”

“With everything happening tomorrow it’s probably best you didn’t.”

“Probably.” Lester took a sip and looked at his dad. “Do you think Trump will win?”

“It doesn’t matter.” Jefferson said as he sat up straight. “We’re stronger than ever and win or lose; folks will be looking to us to make America white again.”

Lester nodded as his dad continued.

“The time is ripe for us to end the rape of our country by immigrants and the government that supports them. Militias are getting bolder, hell the courts in Oregon, acquitted the boys who took that refuge, and the cop up north who shot that nigger, a jury found him innocent.”

“So you think America is ready?” Lester asked.

“Not just America, in Europe the battle is heating up as ragheads fuel the fire with their terrorist attacks. Brexit was just the beginning. The National Front in France and National Democratic Party in Germany will be inspired by our resolve to shed the chains of white genocide, and unite with us. The European Union will be gone and countries that once opened their borders will be building walls to keep Muslims out.”

Lester took a deep breath. “And tomorrow we light the fuse.” He held up his beer and Jefferson tapped it with his long neck.

Lila looked at her face in the mirror; the bruise around her left eye had turned a bluish-black and the four red stripes across her right cheek made

her shudder as she remembered the beating. She thought about the knot on Missy's forehead and smiled. *We do make a pair baby girl.*

She wondered if running into the doorjamb had caused something to change inside Missy's head. After Lester drove away, she seemed to stay calm. The patter of the rain didn't bother her, although Lila was grateful no thunderstorms came through. Dinner was uneventful. Afterwards they cuddled on the couch and watched dog videos on TV. Lila kept the sound low and Missy seemed fascinated as she pointed at the screen and laughed. They fell asleep in each other's arms.

The morning sun filtered through the window in the front door. Missy was wide-awake when Lila felt the urge to go to the bathroom. Lila was surprised when she saw 9:35 on kitchen clock as Missy followed her to the bathroom. They took turns on the toilet and stood in front of the mirror to wash their hands.

We look like we were in a car crash, Lila thought as she grabbed a hand-towel and offered one end to her daughter. "What are we gonna do?" She asked herself.

"Bake bread." Missy said and smiled.

Lila smiled and took a deep breath. "Okay." She put her arm around her daughter. "Let's bake bread."

The house felt different, *quiet*, Lila mused as she took a carton of eggs out of the refrigerator. She almost dropped the carton when she heard a man in the living room. The voice unnerved her until she remembered the television. She put the eggs on the counter and went to turn off the set when big red letters appeared on the screen, SPECIAL BULLETIN!

Police and FBI officials are on alert as two bombs exploded this morning in Tallahassee, Florida. The first explosion happened around 9:00 AM, where witnesses say a white van with the words, White Knight Catering, pulled up in front of The People's Mosque on Bainbridge Road, and threw a package at the front door. Shortly after the van pulled away, the package exploded, destroying the front of the Mosque and setting fire to the building. By the time first responders arrived,

flames had engulfed the Mosque. An unknown number of people were inside at the time of the explosion.

Thirty minutes later, on the Southside of Tallahassee, the Gospel Church at Orange Avenue and Wahnish Way was also bombed. A passerby said he saw what looked like a drone fly into the front of the church before it exploded. The building collapsed on members of the church who were setting up for tomorrow's election. Residents on Wahnish Way said they saw a tan pickup with a shell parked in a vacant lot up the street from the church and two men appeared to be flying something just before the explosion. The men jumped into the truck and drove away southbound on Wahnish Way after the explosion.

Police are asking the public if anyone has information about the White Knight Catering van or the tan pickup truck to call the FBI hotline. The make of the van is undetermined at this time but the pickup is believed to be a Ford Supercab. If you have any information about these vehicles please call the number at the bottom of the screen.

Lila stared that the 800 number as the reporter continued with the story. She looked at Missy waiting in the kitchen then back to the number. She picked the phone up from the table by Lester's chair and dialed the number.

She stood and stared at Missy as the phone rang three times.

A female's voice came over the receiver. "FBI hotline."

Lila stood silent holding the phone in her right hand. The woman had startled her. Lila's body started to tremble and she reached up with her left hand and touched her bruised face.

"I think my husband and son blew up the church in Tallahassee."

One More Brick in the Wall

by Jean Lamb

"It will cost you, my friend, to find your way across the border," said the heavyset, Mexican man with a couple of gold teeth.

No doubt he could afford them, with what he was charging. I sighed, and we sat down with beer and did some serious negotiating. I knew it was going to be worth leaving this place and starting a new life somewhere else, though. Since the wall was built, making such a move was harder than ever.

But not impossible. Some managed it through tunnels, others through ghastly areas where no wall could ever be built. Some managed it through hiring a plane and pretending they were a shipment of drugs. Some took to boats. Some managed it just by discussing matters frankly with those in charge of visas, and carefully discovering which officials were more reasonable than others.

I had heard of people using all these methods, but this man was a professional, with hundreds of crossings to his name. Oh, yes, I had also heard the stories of those abandoned in the middle of their quests in waterless hellholes, but people were desperate enough to take any chance.

The wall. That horrible, damnable wall...and the sad part was that Mexico actually *had* paid for it.

Finally, we finished setting the price and where I would start. The gentleman then warned me. “Bring extra water to carry, in case we are delayed somewhere. Also, bring more valuables along with you to prove you’d make a good citizen.

“After all, Mexico only has so much room for you gringos...”

Jane's As*****ks

by Ed Silling

Clark Fennimore was leaning in the kitchen doorway when Ellen came home from work. She could read his eyebrows like a barometer, up for sunshine, down for...

“What's the matter?” she said. “Dog die?”

“We got a call from Sister Felicity. Jane's done something. Sister

didn't want to talk about it over the phone.”

“Oh Jesus. Did she say Jesus again? Or did she drop the f-bomb? I'm always telling you to watch your language around her.”

“Sister wants us to come in tomorrow morning. Jane, come here. Did you drop the f-bomb at school today?”

“What's the f-bomb? Is it like the a-bomb I saw on tv?”

“No, honey,” said Ellen, kneeling to look Jane squarely in the eyes. Good parenting. “The f-bomb is a bad word that starts with *f*. It's much worse than the a-bomb.”

“Oh, you mean *fuck*?”

“Honey, we don't use that word in this house.”—with a significant look at Clark.

“Billy across the street says it.”

“Well Billy's an older boy. We don't want you playing with him any more.”

“But he's my friend. Who else can I play with?”

“Don't you have any other nice friends your own age? Any invisible friends like your father when he was in school?”

“Clark took the good parenting position in turn. “What did you do in school today? Why did sister call?”

“I don't know. I didn't do anything.”

“Please don't lie to us.”

Jane turned away. “I didn't do *anything*!”

The principal's office had the odor of sanctity about it and the look too, paneled wood, stained glass windows. Father Fitzfealy sat in the big chair behind the desk, the back raised and pointed like an alcove, under the eyes of popes in gilt-framed pictures—Pius XII with a face thin and saintly, as if by El Greco, the Polish John Paul II, the Ayrian Benedict XVI, a joyful Pope Francis with a bird. Across the room were Jesus in agony, Mother Mary, Mother Teresa and John F. Kennedy.

Sister Felicity stood at Father's shoulder. Father and sister, unlike the portraits on the walls, were living models of Americana, all Grant-Woodish, he serious and clerical down to the wire rimmed spectacles, she his severe counterpart. Not to suggest that Father Fitzfealy and Sister

Felicity were conjugally connected like Mr. and Mrs. American Gothic. No, they kept properly to their own cells.

Their puritan severity was not a thing of Rome, but rather of America. After all, 'when in Rome' do as the Romans do but in America do as the Puritans do. And what better model than American Gothic? The farmer held a hayfork, but it might well have been a rod that doesn't spare the child. You could see cringing children in his look, not to mention a bit of cringing in the woman at his side. But Father Fitzfealy, to his credit, though he was no Daniel Berrigan, Roy Bourgeois or Oscar Romero, didn't punch nuns and truly wanted to set children on the right path.

There's quite a bit of humanity in the pope's people and in the *Good Book* too, feeding, clothing, comforting, justice, not judging, giving children room to fling themselves about disrespectfully (as long as they don't use starry words as we'll see). There's boozy weddings, rainbows, unicorns. But Father Fitz and Sister F. hadn't the time for that sort of stuff in St. Flanigan's Parochial School.

Sister took a quizzical angle. "Has Jane told you what she did?"

"She says she didn't do anything," said Clark. "We kept hounding until she cried, so we tend to believe her."

"Did you question her firmly?"

"Well we didn't waterboard her or shine halogen lights in her eyes..."

Father leaned forward. "Parents are no match for today's children. But"—he drummed his fingers—"let's not waste time. I saw what she did with my own eyes. I was there. Sister, tell them."

Ellen, unlike Clark, hadn't gone to Catholic School. So she wasn't afraid to cop some attitude.

"First, Father Fitzfealy—Mike is it?—what experience do you have as a parent?"

Clark shuddered.

"Second, you say you were *there*. Are you teaching Sister Felicity's class? Third, this is America, not inquisition Spain. We have a right to know what we're accused of. This innuendo is disgusting. What could a little girl do that you're afraid to talk about? Sticks in your throats, does

it? Don't induce vomiting. Call parents immediately?"

Clark was almost afraid of this rising outrage coming from Ellen. "Honey, if you're not a Catholic school kid you don't get it. When the people in black are pissed, you have to fix it, even if you don't know what *it* is. Jane must be guilty."

Clark was sure that all the portraits on the walls, Jesus himself—history—demanded it, even that grinning family man JFK, master of myriad f-bombs and h-bombs, if not quite so omnipotent as haberdasher Harry, who only had two but wasn't afraid to drop them.

Ellen could see the fire burning in Clark's brain. She patted his knee. "Honey, I'll take it from here." She gave the gothics a quizzical hard stare. It was their serve. They dithered in silence until father, with a gesture, passed the job to sister, for even in God's Holy Church it trickles down.

She sighed and turned half away, distancing herself, as one might hold at arm's-length a trap with a long-dead mouse. "It was Monday in art class. I had them draw their favorite animal. Jane's a very good artist. Father was observing to help my teaching, to give a few pointers. And since Jane's such a good artist, I wanted to impress him with her drawing..."

It was taking a long time for the crime to unfold. Ellen made the *keep rolling* move with both hands. "What did she do?"

"Please, I'm getting to that. Don't rush me. Well,"—sigh—"she drew a beautiful cat, sitting, tail wrapped round it, perfect whiskers, slotted pupils, like little cupped hands..."

Ellen sighed, raised both her hands, palms up, "What?"

Sister shuffled. "You know, she has such beautiful handwriting, and father being there, I asked her to write the cat's name."

"She doesn't have a cat," said Clark, "She *wants* one but you know they get up on the kitchen counters after using the litter box..."

"Clark, please. Let her finish."

"Point is," said Clark hurriedly, "She doesn't have a cat so it doesn't have a name."

"However that may be," said father severely, "she gave it a name. Sister..."

“Please father, you say it.”

He sighed a most exasperated sigh, inhaling, then deflating and collapsing with a weary groan, in fact a very Catholic groan of heavy obligation and sacrifice, as Jesus might have when he got the bad news about crucifixion. “You don't have to, really. It's Your own free will. But if You don't all those poor mortals will go to the devil. I suppose I could do it Myself....”

Father repeated his supernal sigh. “Under the drawing she wrote, 'p-star-star-star-y', just like that.”

Clark whistled. “Did she use hyphens and everything? That's quite advanced for a fourth-grader.”

“Hyphens are beside the point,” growled father.

Ellen cleared her throat. “Are you saying that she wrote 'pussy'? That's natural enough, isn't it? It takes”t—with a hard look at father and sister—“dirty minds to vulgarize a sweet word like that.”

Palpable hit. The goths winced.

Sister said, “We wouldn't have taken it as vulgar if she hadn't made it vulgar by putting stars in it.”

“So,” said Ellen, “if I spelled *Felicity* with an 'f' and five, no, six, stars and a 'y', would that make you vulgar?”

“Or,” said Clark, inspired by Ellen's in-your-face-non-Catholicism, “and by the way, let's call them what they are, asterisks, if I spelled *father* 'f***er...?’”

F***er Fitz wasn't used to being set back. He leaned forward with his fists on the desk. “When you willfully insert asterisks, innocent wholesome words become abominations. We don't teach asterisks until senior project, do we sister? So she must have gotten them from *somewhere* besides St. Flanigan's.” He returned a triumphant glare at Clark and Ellen. “Perhaps in a home tainted by mixed marriage.”

Father didn't usually go on like this and neither did the Fennimores. But once you get into it you have go for the gold, as when a car runs from a dog, Fido must chase it full bore, slathering, fangs out; can't help it. And thanks to the Fido effect it was now two points for God and Church.

Long silence. Match point TBD.

“There are no asterisks in our home,” said Ellen.

“None whatsoever,” chimed Clark. “But from your own lips there are asterisks upstairs here at St. Flanigan’s...”

Sister seemed to double her size. “Our seniors would *never* supply asterisks to elementary children.”

“It may go on behind your backs in the playground,” said Clark, “it’s common enough. We don’t blame you.”

Ellen was still back a few lines. “Mixed marriage? What century are you in?”

“Jane, come here. We need a family talk.” For Jane, talk meant sitting quietly while they chew you out, laugh at your excuses then take away your freedom, send you to your room for a month or whatever. But they wanted to hear her side of the story and by the way, Ellen asked, was it true what father and sister said?

Clark shot Ellen another of those Catholic glances. Only a non-Catholic could imagine that father and sister wrong.

“They’re telling the truth,” Jane said.

This small point shows how massive a historical shift has occurred in recent days. Time was when the credibility of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church didn’t need to be validated by a ten-year-old girl; two thousand years of apostolic tradition could stand on its on two sandals, thank you. The great rock of Petrus, one with imperial Rome, the conduit of providence, terrestrial pier of the firmamental rainbow bridge, under the capable expertise of the pope, Pontifex Maximus, bridge-builder, the greatest civil engineer second only to the God Himself, Engineer of Heaven and Earth, who had forgotten the connecting bridge between Yaweh Land and the earthly parking garage on the other side of the universe. So he gave the contract to the pope.

The third greatest engineer was Noah, with the ultimate concept in cruise ships. Instead of using a boat to tour the world, he put the world in a boat and sent it off. Then there’s Ezekiel, the most forward-looking of Old Testament geezers, aerospace engineer, who created the flying saucer. None of that needed validating by a ten-year-old girl, not until now, anyway, at the Fennimore’s kitchen table.

“So if father and sister are telling the truth,” said Ellen, “why did you say you didn't do anything?”

This was turning out to be more than just a family talk, more of an inquisition, and by a non-Catholic, too.

“Well, I did *something*. I drew a cat and spelled its name.”

“Really? That's all there is to it?”

“Yes.”

“Its name was P****y.”

“Yes.”

“We're not stupid, Jane. We all know that's a very naughty word, which is why you put stars in it.”

Oh innocence. We all had it once and know what it looks like: wide eyes staring forthrightly at strangers, sucking the business end of a fly swatter, putting toes in your mouth, and so on. Innocence is being drawn to pretty things like stars, three or four in a row, Orion's belt, that can destroy a sweet word. Innocence is loving bunnies that can destroy a continent.

Jane eventually got to her story. “I was walking home with Billy and we saw a sign, 'Lost cat. Puffy, our kitten. Reward for returning her. \$50.00.’”

“Yes,” said Ellen, “I saw that too. It's sad when you lose a pet. That's three in the last month. Someone must be taking them.”

Clark shook his head. “What sort of low-life would steal a family pet?”

“Me and Billy know.”

“You do? Who?”

“The man on tv. The orange man with pretty fingers and gold hair. He said he grabbed Puffy, but he spelled it with those little stars so nobody would know. So he's got the cat and it's not the only one. A lot of women are saying he grabbed theirs.”

Deleted Scenes

*1. The Tao of As****ks*

“You know, Ellen...,” Clark began.

Ellen knew that *you know* signaled three things. First, he assumed she *didn't* know. Second, *he* didn't know either and was just putting stuff out there. Third, the stuff would be delivered with magisterial authority, in spite of point two.

“What?” she said warily.

“Jane's got a gift for abstract substitutions.”

Ellen wasn't expecting this, rather some string of platitudes: *Jane shouldn't be watching television unsupervised. They don't make programs like they used to. And these politicians....*

“Go on,” she said with piqued curiosity.

“I mean, she's ready for algebra: this asterisk thing is like a plus b , which is any two numbers you can think of and x the one you can't think of, the unknown that you know is hiding there somewhere.”

“I think I see where you're going,” said Ellen.

“Well,” Clark continued, “an asterisk is just an x with a plus sign on top of it. The unknown of the alphabet.”

Jane poked her head in. “And you can't use x as the unknown of the alphabet because you know it's there right near the end of the alphabet song.”

Clark was nodding excitedly with a look at Ellen that said, *see how brilliant my daughter is!*

“So,” he continued, “in English words you can't use x because it's a letter, so you have to use an asterisk. And if English teachers were smart as math teachers and saw the magic of substitution, you wouldn't have rules like, i before e except, except. You could just spell neighbor $n**ghbor$. And for that matter, why do you want gh ? In fact gh doesn't even want itself because it's silent, just a trip wire in the middle of a word right. I mean, what's the point except to humiliate you in a spelling bee and let some pointy-headed little snots get national awards by spelling words your phone already knows.”

“Please Daddy, can I have a phone like that?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Why?”

“Because they explode.”

2. Billy gets it too

Across the street Billy's mother Erica comes in from her union meeting.

Billy senior speaks. "We got a call from Sister Felicity today."

Principal's office as described. Father Fitzfealy and Sister F. as before but with darker looks. The darker looks meant that Billy's crime was gr*vious beyond their competency, as drywall to a neurosurgeon or hairstyling to a roofer. Jane's case had been easy, simple pussy-grabbing. It was the darkest look the goths of St.Flanigan's could manage.

Terrifyingly dark.

The look was so severe that Jim almost expected Miranda rights.

Father began. "Has Billy told you what he did?"

"No."

"He brought a magazine to school."

"Indeed he did," said sister, "and showing it to children on the playground."

Father fixed Jim with a man-to-man stare. "It was obviously one of *your* magazines, Mr. York. I caught him red handed showing, to little Jane Fennimore, who is in trouble enough—THIS." He held up a journal, titled in Roman all-caps, MONTHLY REVIEW, and below, "Marxism and the Dialectics of Ecology."

Erica blinked in astonishment, "That's stiff reading for middle school, wouldn't you say?"

Jim nodded. "St. Flanigan should give himself a pat on the back for producing such prodigious readers."

"There are certain words we do not use at St. Flanigans," said father with such severity that those certain words must, if present, fly for cover, perhaps to the public school across the street.

Erica took out a notepad. "Please, give me those certain words so we'll be sure Billy never uses them."

Father reddened and hesitated.

"*Shit*," said Erica.

Father blanched.

"*Shit*," said Erica again. "You don't say *shit*."

“No,” said sister, “we certainly don't.”

“Or *pussy*,” said father.

“*Fuck?*” said Jim helpfully.

“No.”

“*Tit?*”

“No.”

“*Dick.*”

“Well, it depends, Cheyney, Nixon, yes.”

Erica was scribbling away industriously. She paused and nibbled the end of her pen. “C**t?”

“Oh yes. We use it all the time when referring to Episcopalians, Mormons, that sort of person.”

“I'm, shocked,” said Jim. “Is that the kind of thing Jesus would say?”

“Well, they are all *cults*, aren't they?”

“We're losing the point, here,” said father impatiently. “The worst word of all, the one we absolutely never under any circumstances say, is...”

Erica and Jim leaned forward expectantly to hear this arch-fiend of all words.

“...*M**x.*”

A longish silence. “You mean *Marx?*”

Father and sister covered their ears and scrunched their faces.

“What if,” said Jim, “we compiled all these words—Erica's written them down—and do it right here on the desk?”

“Do what?”

“An exorcism. You still do that, don't you?” He gestured round at all the popes, saints, candles, holy water cruets, crucifix, the *Liber Necronomicus* on the shelf behind. “You've got all the stuff. As uncle Phil used to say, 'just do it,' here on the desk. Send these profane words back to hell where they belong.”

This holy principal's office, besides being a *pussy-Marx-and-smoke-free* zone was also an irony-free zone. Father rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

“Not so simple,” said Sister Felicity. “The problem isn't just profane

words but profane ideas.”

“True, I didn't just pounce on Billy in the playground. I wanted to hear what was going on,” said father. “I approached softly and heard Billy reading these words: *Clinton...has been associated with imperialist war and regime-change around the globe, rivaling the misadventures of war criminal Henry Kissinger....Surrounded by warmongers, she brings doomsday that much closer. Nor should anyone doubt that both Clinton and Trump are equally the candidates of financial capital in this election.*”

“Well,” said Erica, “we should chuck *Monthly Review* on the exorcism pile too.”

The goths could detect some flippancy in this comment and, as Jim and Erica were leaving, father shot, at their backs, “The problem with the world today is not our good national leaders, but ideas like this, children like yours and parents like you.”

Excerpt From A Private Political Journal by S. Leggett

Morning, Thursday, February 9, 2017

Being Hillary Clinton's personal aide has been the most demanding job I've ever had. Once she won the election, getting situated in among the White House staff was excruciating. I wasn't sure I'd even have a job left. She has made sure I have plenty of details to keep me busy, though. She still has me write her personal correspondence, but now I do a lot of what might be considered personal maid duties that I didn't do before, since she doesn't want the White House people to know about her leg brace and things like that. I mean why does anyone need to know she uses enhanced support on the leg? Look at Franklin Roosevelt for Pete's sake - he was a total cripple and the nation didn't even know it. A little electronic assist to a weakened knee should be like a girdle - a private undergarment.

So, I have a meeting to take with the congressional interns this evening. It's late, but they all work the day shift, so there's no other time. Mrs. Clinton hasn't been in office a whole month yet and she's busy writing up

ideas for Congress that she hopes will get passed while they still like her. She actually did make a few friends while she was a Senator. Yes, most were only useable contacts, but there are one or two who still have positive feelings about her. Mostly men. The women can see right through her so they were tougher to bamboozle. But she hasn't burned every bridge.

I'm in charge of her "wake-up and think" pills. They are actually medication for ADD, but in her case they are prescribed for when she travels so she doesn't have to deal with jet lag, but they sharpen focus in general so she takes them before things like major speeches. We have to be careful, though, if she takes them too often, she could blow a blood vessel. She tried one once before a cocktail party with foreign ministers, so she could really seem connected and together, but all she found out was how boring cocktail parties are, no matter how influential the people are who attend. She said she was about ready to jump off a balcony to get out before it was over.

I'm glad I'm not in charge of typing up her proposals to Congress. She's working out a way to close down all the coal mines without putting all the miners on food stamps. After the storm that idea whipped up during the campaign, she's proposing trade training for the men that will put them into factory work. Not that there are any factories, but she's hoping no one will bring that up. It will keep the men in schooling for two years and by that time, maybe she can convince a company to open a factory or two in the area. Maybe making parts for space stations or something. The precise wording that goes into papers like that drives me nuts - nothing that anyone can pin you to - no real promises - no money for it of course, or senators won't vote for it. I hate that.

The only other thing I really hate about my job is dodging Bill. He gives me the creeps. As long as it's a room full of people it's not too bad. I can always duck into the crowd, but to get caught in a hallway or trapped next to a table where there's no way out gives me a panic attack.

I was working on a centerpiece once where I had to trim some poster board. I was leaning over the table making the layout and he came along behind me. I pulled out the exacto and threatened to shorten him by three inches, but he still didn't get the point. I never wear short skirts anymore. He's disgusting.

There were Tea Party demonstrators outside the White House right after the election, but the weather has been so cold, they just couldn't hold out. I'm glad of that. I've been a Democrat all my life; crossing a picket line is against my DNA.

Morning, Friday, February 10

Wow, that meeting with the interns was an ordeal. Geez, was I ever that young? Hard to remember. Well, only two weeks back on the Hill and Bill's hit on almost every one of them. Between him trying to corner the females and the gay congress men trying to corner the males, it's like a reality TV show: "Humping on the Hill, Fridays at 9 pm, season premier - Bill does the rotunda."

I feel sorry for them. They were expecting an honest job where they learned DC politics. For most of them, the honest job has already gone out the window and they are actually learning DC politics. It's tough to find out that greasing the wheels of the political machine only takes a tube of K-Y Jelly.

The interns have elected a spokesperson and I'm taking a meeting with him tonight. I don't know what he thinks can be done, but there should be something. My favorite idea is saltpeter in their food, but not all of the congressmen eat in the same restaurant, otherwise . . . that thought makes a happy daydream.

Hillary is making progress on the coal mine legislation. She thinks she can get a Gates Foundation education grant to pay for the re-education so she doesn't have to raise any taxes to fund it. Too bad she can't get the Gates Foundation to pay to have her husband re-educated. That would be a gift to the nation. And the interns. And the personal aids. However, in his case it would probably have to include reassignment surgery.

Mrs. President has told me ahead of time that she will want one of her special pills before she takes the coal mine proposal to Congress. She wants to be sharp and ready to take on any arguments that come up from the floor. Instead of just sending it over, she's going to present it herself. She'll do fine. Whether the Congress will go along or not is always a horse of a different color. Over half of the country uses coal for at least part of their power needs. It's gonna be the fight of the century.

Evening

I met Stony at the AppleBees across town. We found a good corner, but the noise level was still high.

"Do you find you get teased about your name?" I asked.

"No. Not any more. My full name is Hermiston. That got a lot of teasing. Stony beats that by a mile."

Wow! I sure walked into that one, "I'm glad things have improved. So what were you hoping could be done about the sexual harassment? Short of trying to take the entire congress to court for making an oppressive workplace, I'm not sure anything can be done."

Stony took a folded paper out of his suit pocket. "Everyone got together a list of ideas. Some are more colorful than others. The one I like is to just give out color changing hand sanitizer to all the members. It starts out clear and as it dries, turns black. That would point out that what every member does reflects on all the members. The drawback would be trying to find a time they all are there at the same time. That's like, you know, never.

"Anyway, another idea was to put invisible, glow-in-the-dark ink on the people who say something or touch you inappropriately. We could all carry a little squeeze bottle with us. Then you shine a black light on them to embarrass them in front of everybody. As though it was possible to embarrass a member of congress.

"The last idea was to just put something really objectionable in a paper bag and put the name of the harassing person on it. We could put them on their desks in the House and Senate. A note inside would just say, "You stink." Two problems with that, though. One - a lot of us would have to go to the dog park and make the bags up. Two - we'd have to get cooperation from the Sergeants of Arms in the House and Senate to be able to plant the bags.

"The biggest problem with all those ideas is that none of them would work on the President's husband and he's the worst offender, honestly."

I was laughing quietly from the first idea. By the last, I could just picture those desks with their little brown bags of doggy poop. It beat the socks off salt peter. "Gee, you all put a lot of thought into this. What were you

expecting me to do?"

"Couldn't you talk to the Sergeants of Arms and explain what we're trying to do?"

"I'll do what I can over the weekend and let you know on Monday."

Saturday, February 11

Had a couple hours to myself this morning while the Clinton's went to play racquet ball. Spent a little down time reading. Then I counted the pills I watch over. One was missing. When Hillary got back, I asked her why she took one just to play racquet ball. She said it made her feel younger and Bill liked it. I tried to remind her of the risky side effects, but she ended the conversation when a message came in.

Evidently the last of the insurance companies that were in the Marketplace groups to insure the poorest people had medical coverage, pulled out. Now there are big gaps of uninsured again and she's gonna have to find a way to force the companies to get back on line. That's liable to make them pretty unhappy. It was supposed to be a voluntary group so the costs were shared evenly. Of course, once one company leaves, the sharing isn't so even anymore. Then everybody else jumps ship - and that's exactly how it's gone down.

She had lunch and laid down to rest her weak leg. The support had to be recharged anyway and she could access all her work files on her tablet. She typed for maybe half an hour and then fell asleep. Those "wake-up and think" pills burn up energy like crazy. But they do make you feel wonderful while you're burning. (So she tells me.)

Later, while she was dressing for dinner, I did finish my spiel about how risky it is to take those pills too close together. She assured me she wouldn't take another one until Monday before her presentation to Congress. She sent me home for the weekend. I took the pills out of my locked desk drawer and took them home with me. I also took the phone numbers of the Sergeants of Arms that I intended to speak with.

Monday, February 13

I counted the pills before I took one out for Hillary to take before her presentation. The bottle was one short. She must've had someone pick the lock on my desk and take one before I left Saturday night. Or maybe

she did it herself. She is a woman of many talents and has been hanging out with the Secret Service for at least half her life. I wonder what the point is of me even keeping track of the bottle for her if she's gonna swipe them whenever she wants.

No. Wait. Plausible deniability. I remember taking a crash course in that at some point. Probably a good idea I'm keeping a journal, then. I don't want to be the one they blame things on. Ha-Ha. Probably too late to think about that.

So I helped her with the leg support enhancement after breakfast and gave her the pill for today. I skipped the lecture. This job does pay really well and won't last forever.

When she went to the Hill to make her presentation, I called and left a message for Stony. I was pretty sure he would get back to me pretty soon, so I just turned on the TV in my office that showed the action on the floor of Congress to see how Hillary did.

She was dynamic as hell. So sincere and convincing. She had them really eating out of her hand. When she finished, she went out the door that led to the small waiting room. It was a comfortable space with pitchers of ice water, a bowl of fruit, chairs and a couple chaise lounges.

The call came from Stony and I made a lunch appointment with him to tell him what all had come up in the discussions with the Sergeants at Arms on Sunday. I just hung out in my office waiting for Mrs. President to call me in to her office or her quarters when she got back.

No call came by one o'clock, so I went to lunch with Stony. The gist of things was that the interns would have to wait at least a week, what with schedules and such, but the Sergeants at Arms would not interfere.

When I got back to the office, the whole floor was silent. It was creepy. I went downstairs to the conference room. Most of the political staff was there. The household staff was absent and the Secret Service was gone. Everyone was watching the monitor that showed the Congress building, but all it was showing was the waiting room. It was focused on one chaise with a pillow and a light afghan draped over one end. Pretty boring.

Finally I asked, "What's going on?"

The receptionist answered, "Where have you been? The President died. They found her on that chaise in the waiting room. Her Secret Service man thought she was busy with her tablet, but he eventually went to ask her if she wanted lunch and she was already gone. It was too late for resuscitation, but they did it anyway, of course. She's at the hospital now."

I sat down in shock. "Where's the White House staff?"

The Senior Aide answered me. "They are getting ready for a funeral. They have protocols for that. I have no idea what we're supposed to be doing, so we're here in case somebody thinks of something for us to do."

I had a random thought. "Hadn't we better lock up everything just in case? You know, to make sure nobody digs through drawers for souvenirs or something? I mean, probably nobody would, but shouldn't we close it all up just in case?"

"Surely the Secret Service will do that," he replied.

"Nevertheless . . ." I said.

A few of us left the room to do that. I went up to my office and checked the locked drawer. I took the bottle of pills and locked it into my own briefcase. Then I went to the President's office. Her secretary was locking everything up and straightening up a little. I went to Hillary's bedroom. I checked the medicine chest in her bathroom. There was an old bottle of the ADD pills there, but it only had one pill in it. I knew that was the "for show" bottle to make sure it looked like she hadn't used any since her last long trip. She had explained that to me last year.

I glanced through her lingerie drawers. Everything was in order. Her charger for the brace was there and an extra battery she took on trips. I closed the closet and found the tiny key for it. I locked it up and her jewelry, too. By that time, a Secret Service man arrived and I told him what I had done. He was pleased enough. He asked me to wait downstairs, so I did.

Monday, February 27

Mrs. President's lying in state and funeral are finally over. The nation is in mourning, but President Kaine has been sworn in and is making headway with the problems that have come up.

Congress passed his request that the insurance companies that pulled out of the Affordable Care program be fined. The money is going into a new branch of Medicare called Equal-Care. It will take on all the folks who got dumped by the insurance company pull-outs.

President Kaine has stopped the shut-down of the coal mines and has merely funded more pollution filtering where it is needed. Then he has talked Congress into a new Peace Corp here in the US that takes all eighteen-year-olds and puts them to work for two years unless they want to go into the military instead. It is just a branch of the regular Peace Corp so there won't be a new office or bureaucracy. In big cities they can be taken in as young as sixteen if they haven't been in prison.

It is expensive, but it is cheaper than paying for them to be in jails all across the country and the roads will get cleaned up and new trees planted in the woods after forest fires and weeds will get cut in cities on empty lots and burnt out buildings will get cleared away. On property that is not owned by cities or the nation, the private owners have to pay some, but it isn't all on their shoulders if they can't afford it. And it isn't a free-be to millionaires. (That's new.)

I think once the Congress wakes up from all the sadness, things will be going along quietly improving on the home front and they will have to keep cooperating. Overseas is another matter, but foreign countries have given us a short break to mourn and get settled. Maybe that will help.

For myself, the loss of the job could only be expected and I don't think I'd want another one like it, but I have a friend in publishing who has said any book I could write about my time with Hillary could be worth a sizable chunk of change. I have an outline in my head, but I think there are several things I can probably edit out.

State of the Union

by Jaelyn Nott

The Day After

Good evening, America. We report now on the repercussions of the impromptu and explosive State of the Union Address, which aired on

ABC network television October 27, 2016, resulting in the murder of the entire body of Congress and our current President, Barack Obama (may he rest in peace), as well as his entire cabinet.

All, that is, save for one - the *designated survivor*, [Julián Castro](#). Castro, the current HUD Secretary, and now acting POTUS, had just polished off the *dim sum* he ordered from his favorite Cantonese restaurant in D.C., *Da Hong Pao*, while sequestered in the secret bunker at the time of the massive explosion that was heard throughout D.C. The current FLOTUS, the always distinguished, poised, intelligent, articulate and empowering Michelle Obama, was in bed at the White House with a nasty case of the flu when the horrific event took place. She has asked the nation for their prayers.

Coincidentally, and equally catastrophic, the two leading candidates for the 2016 Presidency were *also* in attendance. Former Senator of New York and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, upon an invitation by POTUS himself, sat near the President's cabinet as one of his former staff members, smiling stiffly yet amiably, clapping awkwardly at all the right moments. Donald Trump, decidedly *not* invited by POTUS (or anyone else for that matter), had allegedly snuck in through the service entrance, making racial slurs to all of the kitchen and building maintenance staff as he passed through, making a pitstop in the bathroom to presumably touch up the plug-job (performed exclusively by his own personal car repair serviceman) - when tragedy struck and no lives or hair-plugs were spared.

With Acting-President Castro at the helm, the country set about dusting the blood and grime of a PTSD-inducing presidential candidate season and what is now speculated to be a *domestic* terrorism event off its collective self. Reports initially stated that ISIS had assumed responsibility for the attack in D.C., but direct communication from leaders of ISIS have responded recently saying, "Shit, man, we didn't do that. That's super fucked up."

The Tampa Bay Times reported this morning that Glinda Lipton, a professional mermaid from Weeki Wachee, Florida (population 12), was said to have pulled the underwater air plug from her mouth and warily

spoke (in bubbles) what we're all thinking to the audience of two peering down into her "natural habitat":

"I think maybe I willed this to happen..."

The candidates left alive to continue the run for President in the November 2016 elections include the [Third-Party Candidates](#) that, up until now, hardly anyone has heard of:

Jill Stein, Green-party candidate who is currently facing misdemeanor charges for spray-painting Dakota Access Pipeline construction equipment in North Dakota with non sequitur messages like "*I approve this message*" and "*we need decolonization*", as well as "*I'm with [insert your non-cis-gender pronoun here]*"

Gary Johnson, stoner Libertarian candidate who doesn't know "what Aleppo is". *Jesus, Gary.*

It's all making our Acting President Castro sound downright dreamy. But, seriously...

Who the Hell Is Julián Castro?

The nation has been wondering this very thing since the cataclysmic finale of the current presidential election cycle. With tensions particularly high this year between the two main candidates, many were doing their best to ignore the news, uninstall news and social feed apps on their phones, plugging their ears with their fingers when the dreaded topic of *politics* reared its ugly head during happy hour or at their local *Fro-Yo* joint. Now that all tension has been removed (along with the offending parties), the nation has awoken in a daze to find that their great nation is indeed staring straight at their *first Hispanic POTUS and FLOTUS*. This is cause for great celebration if you aren't a racist asshat.

Former President Barack Obama (may he rest in peace) once said after Castro's [confirmation](#) as HUD Director that "Julián is a proven leader, a champion for safe, affordable housing and strong, sustainable neighborhoods. I know that together with the dedicated professionals at HUD, Julián will help build on the progress we've made battling back from the Great Recession - rebuilding our housing market, reducing

homelessness among veterans, and connecting neighborhoods with good schools and good jobs that help our citizens succeed."

Can a young lawyer who manages a back-ass-ward government housing department from San Antonio take on the demands of the Office of POTUS?

No less than an orangutang-megalomaniac-womanizer/alleged rapist or a woman who, though very qualified, presents a steady stream of shady business dealings that are always *just above* straight-up corruption in a way that makes you feel as if you were hesitantly giving your car keys to someone who winks at you through a twitchy eye and says *trust me, it's fine*. Just as she pulls away you stepped into her sticky past of car-jackings and insurance scams like a hot mess of grape Bubblicious gum on your scuffed and worn rubber sneaker, and then you're *not so sure*. But by then, she's long gone with your car and the 12-pack of Pilsner in the backseat.

When you look at it that way - with your throbbing head in your weary hands - Castro looks like a *goddamn angel* compared to any candidate the country has entertained this past political cycle.

If Castro can manage to maintain his current upstanding role in the community as the Leader of the Free World without wetting himself before the inauguration of the 44th POTUS, we'll be just fine. Let's face it, he probably *will* wet himself when he meets Vladimir Putin - who, it turns out, we have just received an anonymous video from inside the Kremlin showing a shirtless Putin *high-fiving* himself upon learning of the bombing in D.C. last night. As you can see, viewers, he gleefully addresses himself in Russian-coated English through his life-sized gilded mirror saying, and I quote, "*Holy Shit! It's like I WILLED it to happen!*"

But what about the fact that, after all this time, our nation *finally* seems to be ready to witness the ultimate shattering of the so-called *glass ceiling* and reclaim that special room in the White House as the *Ovary Office*? It is said to be whispered above the geothermally-heated toilet seats in Capitol Hill, in darkened junkie-infested alleyways, hair salons, butcher shops, Fedex stores, and to be confirmed by both *Ellen* and

Oprah simultaneously in just a few moments - the grieving and still nauseous **Michelle Obama is adding her name to the ballot for Election 2016!**

It's like we all willed it to happen!

Thankfully, America, you can stop taking the antidepressants and anxiety prescriptions the election has lead us towards like rats to the sound of a cracked wooden flute played by a Fox News douchebag. There is no longer a need to flee to Nova Scotia or Antipodes Island to escape a presidency that could destroy everything we as a planet hold dear. *It is true* that Trump supporters have been throwing colossal temper tantrums since the loss of their beloved demagogue, but the nation has really stepped up to the plate and have taken matters into their own hands. From state to state, citizens' arrests have gone up dramatically, dealing Trump supporters much needed *timeouts* with only a handful of actual bitch slaps needed. As my momma always said, "When you're beat, you're beat. So, shut up and eat your beans."

Plans for a new building are being confirmed at this very moment to be erected on the very spot where the Capitol once stood in honor of all the fallen who had to *take one for the team* last night. The chosen design is a giant, inflatable bouncy-castle with a Class A barbecue joint just outside - because, as we all know, it's impossible not to play nicely with others and *get 'er done* than by jumping around in stocking feet and sharing kick-ass family-style barbecue. Everyone will feel compelled by honey and butter-slathered cornbread to say *please* and *thank you*.

Because *America has always been great* when politicians and gunmen weren't fucking it up for everyone.

Thankfully, America, *we're gonna be alright*.

Encyclopedia Britannica 2021 Vol. STU S. Leggett

United States of America

Trump, Donald

President; incumbent.

Political party: Republican

Domestic policies: the Affordable Care Act or as it is commonly known 'Obama Care' has been restructured to provide more competition among suppliers, however there has been added a hefty fine on companies refusing to participate.

The border with Mexico has been reinforced and drone supervision provided where a physical wall is not feasible. This has provided jobs to disabled veterans and is a popular program.

A continuing program of encouragement to the public and companies to 'Buy American' has helped move the economy toward more growth. All government contracted jobs must now use American products or make special applications for exemptions.

All youth aged 18 are required to work two years in the military or the Build America training program which puts them in jobs such as reforestation and reconstruction following floods and earthquakes. Federal government supplies directors and supervisors. States provide room and board.

All lottery programs of any kind must allot 1% of income to rebuilding infrastructure - highways and bridges first.

Heads of companies are encouraged to invest in their own companies and resist hoarding money. Corporate greed is now a felony charge 'Golden parachutes' are illegal for people who work for companies less than ten years.

Foreign policies: Following President Trump's inauguration, North Korea fired off several ballistic missiles. South Korea's protective system installed by the Obama administration functioned well. Trump ordered a retaliatory mission to the one area known certainly to be producing material for atomic war heads. One 'salted bomb' was dropped by drone and hit the target exactly. Shortly thereafter, Kim Jong-un, leader of North Korea, became ill and health issues have continued to plague him.

Trump had meetings with Putin and they seemed to go very well. Any Russian jets buzzing US ships are now fired on while both Russia and the US have withdrawn from Syria, declaring it a civil war to be dealt with inside its own borders.

The US, when delivering aid to foreign countries, now fires on anyone delaying the delivery. It has sped up delivery and allowed supplies to be

given to the ravaged populaces rather than the oppressing governments.

The United Nations has been highly vocal regarding the new policies, claiming they are human rights violations. President Trump states that the US goals support the rights of the ravaged people and that those who intervene are the violators. There are threats that this will be taken to the World Court.

US citizens who make over a million dollars per year and decide to live in a foreign country are now at risk of losing their citizenship. If two-thirds of each year is not spent in the continental US, after five years, their citizenship can be revoked.

The US companies that move overseas face serious penalties and may also lose their US status.

Products from US companies in Mexico are now taxed and the money applied to expenses incurred by enriched border enforcement. Illegal immigrants with criminal records are given the death penalty. Illegal immigrants who are law-abiding are sent back to Mexico where they can apply for entry to the US legally. Children of illegal immigrants (anchor babies) may go back to Mexico with their parents and without their citizenship, be adopted by American citizens, or spend four years in the Build America program before their citizenship will be re-certified.

China has been watching President Trump carefully and though they are relieved that North Korea has settled down, they were not happy about how it was achieved. The trade imbalance with them has been steadily working toward equilibrium and their pressure to extend their territorial waters has eased off.

Japan has agreed to take on more of the expense of their own defense and the US has allowed them the first use of the newly produced bacteria that eats radioactive materials and neutralizes them. Scientists predict that their nuclear accident area may be clean and safe in a matter of only ten years.

All meetings with the British Prime Minister have been held on American properties since the British Parliament has kept its pre-election promise to deny President Trump entry to Britain. Their first meeting was held in Doonbeg, Ireland at the Trump International Golf Course and Hotel, but subsequent meetings have been in the continental US for security reasons as the Prime Minister's car was egged as he left the meeting.