

The Facility
By Clifford Beck

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For My Wife, Sara

“The end may justify the means
as long as there is something
that justifies the end.”

Leon Trotsky

Chapter 1

The year is 2059. Most of the world's governments have collapsed and current estimates put the population at about 10.5 billion. The global economy has gone belly-up, while the European Union has become splintered into separate economic states – each reverting back to their own independent currencies. This was done as a last-ditch attempt to keep the planet from falling into the dark ages. Everyone thought it would work, but the damage had already been done and recovery seemed impossible. People were living from hand to mouth using whatever means necessary and society now teetered

back and forth somewhere between survival and a protracted war. Overpopulation, poverty and threats of war wasn't the worst that had occurred...fresh water had become a precious and rare commodity. It started in the developing nations. Fifty years ago, most third world countries were experiencing large-scale protests over water and power shortages. At the same time, 36 states were considered 'water stressed'.

Things were much worse now, with wars being fought over water and terrorist groups attacking any villages that were even suspected of having water. It was not unheard of to read about people in the third world

killing each other, even neighbors, to protect or steal a source of water. The only thing they were guilty of was trying to survive.

In the United States, whole cities had turned into deserts – Los Angeles, Dallas, Albany, St. Louis. The list grew every year while the states along the continental divide were still trying to suck the last few drops of water from the ever-dwindling mountain runoff. It wouldn't be long before even Denver would become an abandoned ghost town, another casualty of a planet that was slowly turning to sand. In Congress, the usual bickering and partisanship prevailed; finding a solution would be impossible without teamwork. No

one was willing to even consider that the human race was in the process of passing on, a victim of our own greed, selfishness and unchecked indifference towards a planet that gave us life – a planet that we had successfully managed to kill.

Due to conditions in the third world, the influx of illegal immigrants skyrocketed and in spite of new legislation designed to keep their increasing numbers in check, they just kept coming. Maybe they believed that they had a better chance of survival in the states – after all, anything was better than being shot for standing near a well. And if they couldn't get into the country through the airline

network, they'd sneak across the Canadian border. Eventually, the President was forced to close the borders and in time, Canada would follow suit. Even the wealthy began to feel threatened when their kitchen taps began to do nothing more than trickle out a few drops of discolored water. In the early twenty-first century, the most valuable commodity was information – data. Now, it was water.

But the American attitude had not changed and the country was still heavily divided into the haves and the have-nots. The poor were even poorer while the wealthy still acted like a bunch of spoiled brats, refusing to make any contribution to the nation's circumstances that

might be seen as selfless. This attitude would change when even they would experience the symptoms of the countries dehydrated condition. So, a project was organized by the development of a private corporation that was funded by the wealthy in order to construct a number of industrial desalination plants that would be built up along the east and west coasts, tapping into the oceans and using a pipeline system to feed the country's reservoirs. Most people believed that those who were funding the project did so out of selfishness. And even though we had essentially isolated ourselves from the rest of the world, the country seemed to take a long-awaited sigh of relief.

But with the U.S. population at 600 million, it was too little too late and reforestation was seen as a complete failure. No one was able to grow trees in the sand. So, out of panic and greed, the wealthy pulled their money from the project and the desalination plants remained as local industries. The outcome was that areas surrounding wealthy enclaves would benefit from this technology and because it had now been turned into privately owned utility companies, only those who could pay the high rates would water. This left most of the country, once again, without adequate water and Congress again began debating possible solutions. This time they consulted some of the greatest minds in

science and technology. They reached out to places like MIT, Cal-Tech, RPI and the Navy's marine research division and a 'water summit' was held. It was quickly determined – and to no one's surprise – that there simply too many people and too few resources. And when the country closed its borders, many countries cried foul, freezing trade agreements and threatening to go to war. Only one possible solution stood out. However, many – even Republicans considered it unthinkable. It was proposed by Dr. Simon Farnsworth, a demographics expert who stated that a page be taken from the internal policy of China's one child per family rule. This seemed like a viable solution even

though many in Congress complained that the U.S. was now modeling public policy after the largest communist country in the world. But after some time, people came to the belief that this radical departure from what was held to constitutional would be very good for the country. And miraculously, every member of Congress was on board with the idea, but the public was not. As a result, rioting escalated and protesters claimed that their constitutional rights were being violated and once again, America lay at the edge of anarchy.

Another possible solution was debated. This was such a radical idea that any discussions were held at a secret location, far from the

prying eyes and ears of the press and without the approval of Congress or even knowledge of the president. Republican congressman Stanley Rhye organized a secret meeting to be held outside Washington at the now abandoned Andrews Air Force base. He had contacted a small group of the country's top genetic scientists who proposed an idea of their own – a national birth control program. This program would be operated under the guise of a new 'well baby initiative' and completely funded by the federal government as a way of screening both new and prospective parents for genetic anomalies that might affect their offspring. The details of the plan seemed flawless, but there was one small

issue that needed to be resolved. What about those who failed the screening process?

Chapter 2

Congress Street was noticeably busier than usual and people filled the street as well as the sidewalk. They quickly walked around moving cars and ran across traffic – everyone seemed to be in a hurry. If you stood in one place and just listened it was easy to notice that the typical Maine accent was no longer part of the Portland human-scape. Outsiders and the passage of time had rendered it

extinct. Fifty years ago, Maine had a hard working mostly white population. Over the years, there was an influx of immigrants, people of a races, creeds and colors from far off places. But when the world fell apart, Maine, for all its' hard- working ethics, slid downhill with it and many people found themselves living well below the poverty line. In the downtown district - every hour on the hour - every person would stop, their eyes rising up to the Key Bank jumbotron. Congress Street would become frighteningly silent, save for the one voice that everyone wanted to hear. The news was not only broadcast around the clock but streamed live by satellite. Everybody watched in horror as

the video played out on the immense screen. The images had been distributed to the entire world by Al Jazeera, an Arab television station with several broadcasting sub-stations scattered throughout the middle-east. They were always trying to make some grandiose statement that usually amounted to nothing more than a bit of saber rattling. But this time was different. This time, the country would be sent into a state of shock as the jumbotron displayed the scene of a small well somewhere in Yemen. It was surrounded by children as well as women clutching their infants – all had been shot on sight. The area was crowded with armed men wearing scarves around their faces and angrily

babbling in Arabic. One held up a half-filled bottle of slightly sandy water and pointed a pistol at the camera lens while yelling threats to a, more or less, civilized world. He then turned back and fired on the dead women and children, as if words were somehow not enough.

Everyone was frozen in place as the horrific images and the sounds of gunfire deeply engraved themselves into the minds of all who watched. But as disturbing as it was to watch, many were unable to pull their eyes away. As the video came to a close and the news anchor tried desperately to maintain his composure, the silent air of Congress Street

gradually became overshadowed by quiet weeping. Humanity had somehow managed to achieve a new low point that many saw as a portent of the future. One of those people was Edward Blake, who was standing near a hotdog stand when the video footage began. He watched with both amazement and horror as the images unfolded before his eyes. Tears slowly ran down his face and he became so involved in what he was seeing that, for a brief moment, he forgot where he was. Near the end of the video, he suddenly gasped as though he'd seen the devil himself. And perhaps he had, but now he realized with blinding clarity the direction the world was truly taking and what some people were

willing to do for half a bottle of dirty water. “Jesus Christ!” he said to himself. “What the fuck is wrong with these people?” “I’ll tell ya what’s wrong!” a voice answered. It was the hot dog vendor. He preferred to be called ‘Teddy’ and appeared to be about forty-five years old.

Teddy had worked this part of Congress Street for years, right across from what used to be the Portland Library. You wouldn’t have thought so, but he actually made a livable income from selling hot dogs, sausages, and soda. Bottled water was expensive so he didn’t usually stock it. Edward slowly looked over at Teddy – his thoughts still haunted by

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