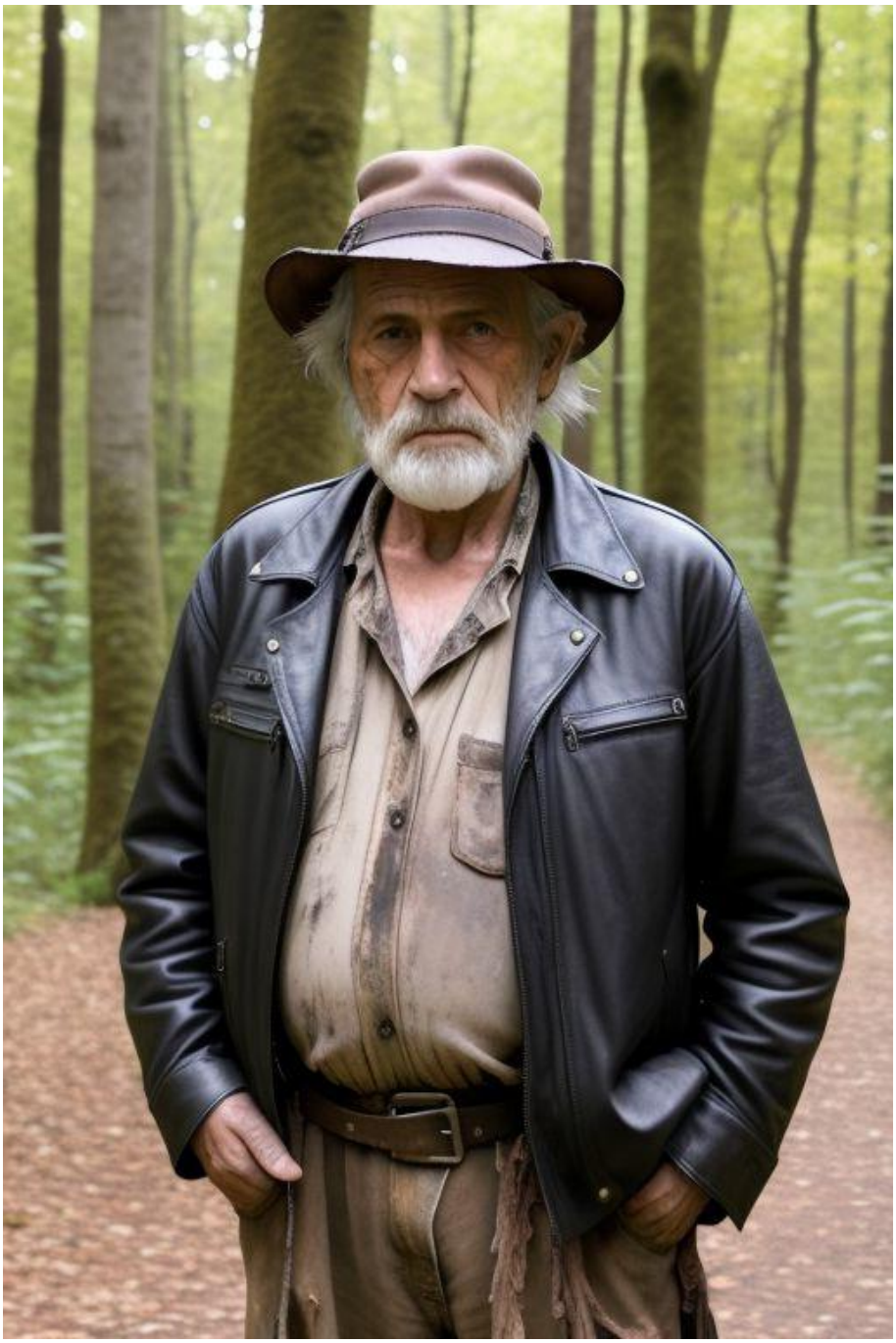

Don’t mess with me!

D.A.Sanford

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Warning: Contains adult content due to graphic descriptions of any or all of the following:

Battles, Language, Sexual

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I live out in the deep woods for a reason and I don't have to tell you why. But I will. People are irritating. They are like dogs when they see a squirrel. Chase and bark, never quite grasping that they are being played for the fools by the squirrels.

That is people's nature. The other part of the equation is that, if you don't agree and follow them like sheep, you are not only wrong, you are a pariah that needs to be driven off. Sometimes just the thought of your existence will cause them to froth at the mouth and demand that you need not to exist.

Living out here, I am one with my land. That is because I am so far off the map that even planes do not fly over . I love my peace.

There is a good stream for water. A nice cave with a cavern for my home. There are small areas that I grow my vegetables and I hunt. This is the way I like it. Actually, I do eat well. Plenty of food and wood for heat. The opening of the cave now has a very good, very tight door to keep out the cold during the winter.

Winter, any good day, I do go hunting. My stores are for those days that I cannot go out because of the snow. Once the cave rocks heat up, I only have to have a small fire to keep them warm to keep me warm. I have my books to read and I do write books for my own enjoyment,

It is actually a rather pleasant life out here. At the very least, I don't have to put up with others.

You see, I can think for myself. I did not need someone to tell me how to think and how to act. Especially what to say. I have always been like that. That is the reason others had problems with me.

I remember my mother. As a child, I was loud, she would always tell me to watch what I was saying. "Someone will hear you." As I grew, she would agree with some of the things I would say but would say that I needed to be quiet, "The neighbors will hear."

As an adult , I spoke my mind and lived by, never say something that you wouldn't want the person you are talking about to hear. Now however, there is another reason to be out here.

It started as a noble cause. There was a research group that developed an implant for the brain of individuals that for whatever reason could not talk. The implant allowed thoughts to be translated into speech. All that person had to do is think the words and a receiver would convert the signals into speech.

As I said, a noble idea but it was embraced by groups that, shall we say, had other uses in mind.

Social media started to have anonymous videos showing how that chip would improve your life. No longer would you need a cell phone, just think. No need for a tablet, just think because the old ways were no longer acceptable.

What the sheep did not realize is that constantly having your thoughts being readable, that now added the hidden agenda of thought police. That is what started because they were able to find “bad” people. I left because I knew what was coming.

We know what is best for all. All need to get the chip implant. It is for your own good. The sheep followed. I do not have the chip and so far they are not rounding people up for chip implants. As far as I know. As far as I care because I will defend myself.-

Now, after a few years I am curious. What is happening out there? I wander through the woods towards a small village I know of. On the outskirts there are a few houses. I see overgrown lawns and actually no signs of life. I decide to take a chance and knock at the door. No answer so I look into the window and see desiccated bodies.

This was the case in the other houses. I opened the door on one and there was absolutely no food in there. Did they starve to death?

In the village, it was a ghost town. The same thing. There were no living people anywhere. The grocery store still had good canned goods so I filled up a few carts and retreated back to my hide. What the hell is going on.

This is bothering me even though I did not care for them, what has happened. The only thing that I can think of is that there was a call to gather. That would be for better control and those who did not listen to the call had something done to them. The horror drove me back to the first house I came upon.

I apologized to the corpses then split open the skulls. There was the chip and it showed all the signs of a massive burn out. Not quite an explosion. More like a giant electrical overload. The other body showed the same. I knew that it was, if you did not comply, you would have your brain fry.

Maybe it was people with bad thoughts. I don’t know but I also thank God for my stubbornness. I told many, before I left, that it is only paranoia until you are proven right. In this case, looking at those shells, I both hate and love to be right. At lease I think I am safe.

I once again leave for my hide but, as I approach, I hear people. I always prepared for this and had plans in place. Never leave the hide unlocked and never leave without enough protection to take most of them out before they kill me.

I see a rag tag group just huddling by the door. It looks like they tried to get it open but I built it so no one could get in.

“WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE?!” I yell. They are stunned but do not answer before I exclaim, “You all have those damned implants. They now know where I am. Damn you. Now I have to run.”

One of them speaks, “Please do not leave. We have had the implants removed. The people that pushed it started to eliminate those who thought they were wrong. We had a doctor in our village that was able to remove the implant and put it on an animal that we later slaughtered. That way, they were presumed to have died. They got wise to us and we fled. It was only luck that we found your cave. We just want to live.”

This is something that I did not have a plan for. I did plan on the fact that I may have the need to flee. I had a few hides in the surrounding area. What to do? I show myself and immediately, I am fired upon by them. Ambush. I fire and take down most. I did get a few flesh wounds but unfortunately some got away.

Now there was an urgency. I needed to bug out. I had one of my changes of clothes. I dressed one of the dead in them and blew away the face so people would think it was me. I did remember to take the implant and smash it. Then I hid the pieces in my out house pit.

Taking only essentials, it hurt that I had to leave most of what I gathered but I needed for them to think I was killed in the battle. My other hides were now not safe. I cleared out a few and then went further into the wilderness.

It was quite a few days of walking with only a short nap until I found another remote cave. It was not as big as mine but I figured that it had to do. I needed to be able to revisit the other hides and bring those supplies here. That took almost a month to do. There was not anything that was from that village that I brought here.

I figured that the goods that I took from that store must have had some sort of tracking device. Something tipped them off that there was someone out here. The only way they could have found my hide is if there was a tracking device on one or all those cans.

Now I knew that I could only trust those things that I grew, hunted or originally brought but I made sure that everything I brought here was thoroughly searched. All were clean. I now needed to prepare for them to be hunting me.

Once again I found alternate hides but this time I found small places that I could not live in that I could use as escape staches. All were in the direction away from my first hide and this one. Think and listen. I did not get a full nights sleep for quite a few months. I have determined that I need to move further out.

My biggest fault was to get complacent. I settled In one place for too long. Now I move every four months max. The time I stay, I am exploring my surroundings for recent activity. Even if I don't find any I still move.

Move or be caught.

Now over a year since the ambush and again no sign of anyone. Do I take a chance and investigate? I decide that I need to go up the highest hill in the area and use my binoculars to survey the distant areas. I need to make sure the sun is at my back so it will not reflect in the lens. That will require me to spend almost a full day.

I am not comfortable with that but it needs to be done. I was not prepared for what I see.

There before me is nothing. There are a few towns in the morning distance. All I see in distance is nothing. There is no movement of people in my view. The afternoon has a small city in sight but again no movement. Only birds and animals. There is no evidence of people living.

One last test. I will go back to my first hide. Any reasonable person in control would tear the site apart to see what type of a person I was. Then they would be able to possibly predict where I would go. As much as I already regret it, I go.

It is a shock, there are some skeletal remains still there and the others show signs of being dragged off. The hide shows no sign of being entered after I closed and locked that door. Nothing inside has been touched. This really has me spooked.

What the hell is happening?

Now I really know that I must look at the city. That took a few days of stealth walking but I am now at the outskirts. I see the first signs of what happened. Posters on walls mostly saying "Think right and comply or die" scrawled by it was "We did and still we died." There was bones of a person that defiled the original writing on the ground with a can of paint near it.

This is a city of bones.

Looking at the posters, I find that they all have one common address under the we are listening. It is in this town.

Cautiously I approach the address. The sign says "Regional Office of Public Thinking." There again there is no sign of recent activity. I say recent because there are broken windows and bones all around. Inside is just as ravaged as the outside.

I find the director's body at his desk. It looks like his skull exploded. On his desk are reports saying that he needed to watch for rebellion and, when needed, fry their brains. They go on to say that, as a warning, other communities have been totally shut down and the directors have been taken care of for not maintaining proper thought.

People were revolting the control with consequences they never were told until the population had the implants. I was so engrossed with what I was reading, I did not notice that there was a man and woman behind me.

When I did, I spun around and tried to shoot but found myself paralyzed.

The male said, "This world is nothing but a world of the dead. They followed what was told and suffered the consequences of their actions. You are the only one that did not."

The female then said, "We do not interfere with voluntary choices, that included yours. We are the gods of all. You won't need this." She takes the pistol from my hand and then releases me from the paralysis.

""I'm sorry" I say, "Even though you have shown that you are able to freeze me, you are not gods. You would have prevented this."

She is a little perturbed with my statement. "I told you that we do not interfere with voluntary choices."

I stop her right there. "Where are all the children?" I say but point to the obvious children's bones lying around. "Even though you cannot see, I'm sure that there are babies that did not have a choice. These bones of children did not have a choice! This is why I will never accept you as gods. In my sight, you are nothing but sheep following some ancient rule without any concern for the innocent. Now show me the wrath of the gods. Strike me dead for insolence. Isn't that what the leaders did here? Independent thought. I don't conform with what you demand I think like. All you are saying is exactly what these reports say. READ THEM!"

I hold out a fist full and shake it in their faces. Now I expect to die or be tormented but I turn and start to walk away. They do nothing so I walk out of town and back to my hide. All the while hearing me telling off those two.

"God, if that is what you allow to be called gods of all then I think that all I believe in has been shaken to the core."

I make it to my hide, pack up and leave that one for the wilderness. I decide that I will stop at a village and use up what I can scavenge. Once I pick it clean, I will just move on. This was my pattern for a while and soon I dismissed that encounter as just my way of coping with the situation.

Those children, those babies, all were allowed to be killed? How dare I try to make up those figments as a solution just to satisfy my anger.

“You did not make us up.” They were back with others. “What you told us, shook us to our core. We always follow the rules set out by the Supreme Creator to the letter but you made us realize that we ignored the spirit of the word. Both the gods of all said.

I am told that the others are also gods. Mercy, Fate, the Watcher and Time. The Watcher comes over to me. “I was an orphan who became a demigod. My position is only given to an orphan. I must now apologize to you for not doing my job. In the history of the gods, there has only been one group that has been classified as failures and removed from their position. The argument you gave the gods of all shook us all to the core. Those children were mine and I ignored them. I am a failure.”

One by one, they all say the same thing.

Now the gods of all tell me that they are going to resign. “We all, including all those who were in our positions before us, are failures. We let people die because, ‘we can’t save them all’. We now realize that we really did not save those we could have. These bones of those children and those bones of those who revolted bear witness to all of our failure. We all will go to the final life with this failure.”

“Pity party” I have had enough, “You are proving just what I told these two. Oh we did not do anything, we will just go and have a ball in the final life. If you really believed the diatribe you just spouted, shouldn’t you and all those who retired be sent to oblivion? I’m sure that you have sent others that were just like you to oblivion. You choose the fluffy, the smooth, the silky , the easy way out. Put on your adult pants and tell me what you are going to change going forward.

Watcher, you say that those children were yours, tell those bones what you are going to do to make their short lives into a goal for future children. You others do the same. Don’t wuss out. All of you go away and don’t come back to this world you created until you can prove to me that gods do exist. Right now you all are just ordinary people with grand delusions.”

“Well said.” Is all we hear.

They are visibly shaken and leave. That voice tells me that they will not be relieved of their positions to go to the final life. It is now their task to change then show you what your words have shown them. Prepare to be shown other worlds. I think that you will make a wonderful sage. One that has no fear of putting a god in their place will not be bothered about putting royalty in their place.”

I knew that I have just had something that only a few in history have had. That was the Supreme Creator. Now I see why they were shaken. He is one that I will not talk back to but the thought enters my head of a t shirt I saw in my past.

“I’m not arguing, I’m just explaining to you why I am right.”

That t shirt is now in my hands and I hear, “Wear this and know that this will be yours for eternity when you become a sage. The universe will know that you only tell them what they need to hear.”

I put that shirt on.

Knowing that I am going to be shown other worlds, I go to one of the stores and grab a tablet. I make sure that I have plenty of memory cards and a charger. Somehow I know that I will be able to plug it in but I do take a small solar panel to be able to charge it.

I want a record of what I see. I know that I will need it for future encounters.

I first make a complete record of my world as it is now. Bones, posters, even the exploded head of that field director. All this is to show those that I will encounter in the future what background I come from. I also write down what I experienced and what I have done. No sugar coating, I even killed.

As expected, the first god showed up. I knew that it was the Watcher but it was a different person. She tells me that due to internal circumstances, the Watcher that was here had to be replaced. ”I was given the memory of all that you said to us and I am here to take you on a tour. We will be using what we call a door. The first world we will visit is both our greatest shame and the greatest solution.”

She opens the door and we are on a field that has a long wall that has what looks like tens of thousands of names on it. There before me are dragons guarding that land. They bow to the Watcher and allow us to go to that wall.

“This wall has all the names of those children that were cast out as useless, extra mouths to feed. Thrown out to die. Also here are the names of orphans that made it to orphanages that were left to die by those who were responsible for taking care of these little ones. Instead, they took the funds for themselves and let them die.

These are the names of the children that we failed on this world alone.”

I take pictures of that field and close ups of all the panels so I could see the names.

She then took me to what they called a dragon tower. It was next to a place they call Clan of Martin Mannor, Cannerten. I am introduced to the leaders and shown the orphan books.

It was explained that they have solved the problem of children being cast out to die. They showed me the laws and that book. The population now can just drop off the unwanted with no questions asked and that child would be placed in loving homes.

I took pictures of them placing a child with a loving family and were introduced to grown children that were placed. They were happy but told me that they make sure to visit the wall and tell them that they are remembered.

The Watcher brought me to worlds that had the demigod systems to show how they were now helping reform the thinking and actions of the world.

Finally I have seen enough. “I need to tell you that all this is great but what have you done for those who are lost in spite of what you are showing me.” She smiles and I am on a world in a terrible building. There are orphans at the point of death.

“Even you have said that we cannot save them all but the ones we can, Watch and see. This is something wonderful.”

I see a child being tenderly washed clean and warmly dress. Placed in a comfortable bed, given some spoonful’s of warm soup. That child had such a beautiful smile as the thick blanket was pulled up to their necks to cover them. With that smile on that face, their head on a soft pillow, that one drifted off to the final sleep.

Now I see that god of mercy reach in and take the still sleeping soul out of that body and tell me that it is now healed. “I will place it in a new body and it will be reborn to a very good life.”

She disappears.

That scene was, out of respect, not photographed.

I am impressed with what has been done but I need to ask her what about the circumstances that happened on my world. “I realize that you only have taken the job but have you thought about how you would handle another situation like what happened on my world?”

“The Supreme had set up an alert system that would alert the gods of an event years, your time, in advance. My predecessor had other things” she stopped right there and then said, “that is strictly a god level item. I‘ll just say that I have a device on me that will alert me now when that event will take place. I have coordinated with the god of time

and he will stop time on that world until I finish removing all the children. Mercy will also be there to remove the adults that are innocent, including those who take arms against the oppressor."

I tell her that I am satisfied with that. "As long as the majority of the innocents are not left to the mercy of the evil. It is good."

The gods of all introduce me to a sage groups. They are a hardy group that really help the people but take no shit from the people in charge. I can empathize with that one old man who sat through a nuclear war without even knowing it. We sat on his porch, he drank a few beers and talked with his protectors, a set of three mated pairs of gargoyles. The thing I loved was each pair has one natural child and two adopted children.

I was told that all have had orphans come to beg food but stole each females hearts. All grow up and all have chosen to stay on their birth world. They all rejoice when those grown children go off and finish what they started.

Seeing this, seeing that that old sage is just like me, I now know that I would like that as my mission. Help, guide but never rule. Move every twenty or so years but leave a support group of adults that have been raised in that environment. Actually doing something.

I now look at the gods of all and ask if I could address their group. We are now in their realm. I do see everybody looking very cautiously at a row of around fifty six inch people just sitting there. Both males and females are dressed in commando gear but are not doing a thing.

The gods of all are just staring at Time.

"We are going on an assignment after this. They want to show what they do."

I look at them and like it was almost rehearsed, they, all in a synchronous move give me the thumbs up. I really found that it did break my mood but then I did ask if I could speak to them.

"The reason I wanted to talk is because I need to apologize to all of you. I, when this was going down on my world, did nothing. I retreated far into the forest and did nothing. I found a village decimated, I did nothing. A group came to my hide and they tried to kill me, I killed them and then ran away. All this time, I could have saved some, at least those innocent children. I did nothing. After it all went down and I found all dead, did I do something. I blamed all of you.

Yes, you share the blame with me but those who died fighting did something. For that, I also must apologize to them. I now see my course to make up to them. Make their death mean something greater. I will accept the sage role if it is still offered. I want to go to worlds before they reach that point."

The Supreme is now with us but he addresses me. "That is what I knew you would finally realize. All here are separately and equally to blame, including me. Now after you go on a mission with these fine people, we will set you up with that old sage that you visited. He has asked to go to the final life. He has already told his family and they have expressed that they would like to still travel with you. Make the role yours. You are just the tough S O B that can handle the tough assignments.

As for the rest of you keep improving your awareness. Find ways to intervene before things get out of hand. Just remember his observation. Don't just follow the letter of the law, look at the spirit of the law.

Now you have your first assignment. I have rolled back your world to the point that that group is brainstorming the idea of the implant. The imps here will be helping you to convince them to change the program so that it can only be used for it's original use."

With that he is gone. Now the imps are in mated pairs, the male is driving a jeep straight out of those world war two movies. The females are manning the machine guns. We cannot hear anything because they are revving the engines and music it playing.

The gods of all motion to Time for us to go.

I guess I get a redo and I am extremely happy. This time there is no running away.

Time opens the door and I am in my world but now everyone is frozen. I see all the imps lined up and all look formal. Time then shoved me and they all cheered. "You have just been shoved out of time. You are now immortal. I see times people running around but I do not believe what I am seeing.

There is a construction crew and the boss has a coffee in his hand. It looks like he is yelling at some youngster on his crew. The youngster looks scared. They are climbing up him and both peeing and shitting in his coffee. The last one stirs it, then they jump down. Time asks me if I would film it with my tablet. I do and he starts time. Time and his group disappear but I hear laughter coming from a bush.

The man takes a sip but spits it out as he is choaking. He falls to the ground and appears to be having a heart attack. The youngster jumps into action giving C P R and saves him.

We see that man in a hospital bed and he was looking at the one that he was berating. That now man who saved his life. That man who, his wife is crying while thanking him for saving her husband's life. He is now very humble.

His rescuer comes over and tells him that "You scared me. Please be careful about how you get excited." Then he invites his boss to join him in walking for his health. "It will help you to wind down."

I am truly impressed.

Now comes our original task.

The think tank is meeting on the chip design when they all star to spit out their drinks. They hear laughing when we open a door and the imps spill out. Time and I step out. I walk over to their big screen and plug in my tablet.

"I am from the future. The future that you have created." I start to show the photos of the ruined world. The imps are sitting on the large table watching the photos. They get really angry when they see the children's bones. They all are getting in the faces of those who are trying not to look at the screen. The imps make sure that they keep looking.

"The chip you are thinking about making is a very good idea but you fail to think this through. People who want to control the world take advantage of your failure to look at what some people could do to pervert your wonderful idea. You built in no control. You allowed them to exploit the fact that there was no restraint in application. They made it so they could fry the brains of whole communities. From old to babies, they killed whole cities without a care in the world. This world is dead and we will not allow it to happen.

I'm not going to tell you what you need to do. Not my job but I will tell you that these fine fellows love children and are now mad. They exist out of time. When they want to, they can operate between tick and tock. I've been there and all of the rest of the world is frozen. Don't do anything that will hurt those children.

One last thing, I am a sage. My fortress will appear within view of this place. I will not tell you what to do. I will show you the folly of your actions. I require you to notify everyone in charge that we are coming."

Time opens the door again and we leave but this time, we are now in the old sage's home.

For introductions, but I was given the knowledge, Bedda tells me that she is Garez's mate, Dedra is Chulka's mate and Freske is Chaz's mate. They are my gargoyle guards. They all protect but those women, do not get in between them and their children. They will go full gargoyle and make you soil yourself.

Out of respect to my predecessor, I do ask Bedda, Dedra and Freske if there is anything that they would like to have changed. I explain, “If it was just us males, the floors would get swept once a year whether they need it or not. You women make this a home.”

The only thing they tell me is they would like a heated pool. One big enough for them to go full size and soak. They get a darker shade of black when they say that it needs to be large enough for two.

They are over joyed when they see the pool. It is everything they wanted. I made two pools. The second is our normal size. One end of the pool is waist high with a ledge on two sides so you are neck deep. The depth tapers so that on the other end, it is imp walking depth with sit down ledges for them.

I was taken aside and was told about the dead imps in the pool gag. I’m waiting. I was told that if I wanted to, I can fain worry and dive in to save them. They will get a thrill.

We all go out to the porch and sit. They reach into the cooler and pull out a beer. I never developed a taste for it. Freske gets up and goes inside. She comes back out and hands me a flask.

I look at it and then open it. Absolutely no smell then I take a sip. It is something that I have missed since I ran away. This is a flask of almost ice water. It actually has some ice crystals in it.

I ask her, “How did you find out that I liked ice water?”

“That water, even on the hottest day will never get any warmer and will never run out. The gods know all your favorites and some of the dislikes. We all must eat both for the children’s sake. We adults cannot tell them to try all if we don’t show them that we at least taste it.”

Dedra sits and just sighs, “I just can’t wait for the children to appear. It is my turn to adopt the first two. It is too quiet without them.”

Casually Chaz says that the last sage could spray skunk. “Those with true intensions will not smell it but those who you should not believe a word they say, will choak with the stench. Just so you don’t ask, we don’t smell it or of it. The children never smelled it.”

After I am told how he did it, I tried and fluid shot out of my hand. Could not smell a thing but we heard choaking coming from a man in a suit. “Why would you do such a thing? I am only here on behalf of the government to hand you some papers.”

I go down and get them from him, then start to laugh. “Garez, would you please take this gentleman out of our sight but don’t hurt him, this time.”

He does that by growing big and walking so close as to imply that he could squash him like a bug if he wanted to.

I waited until he got back and handed him a beer.

“So you know, I have the knowledge of the encounters with royalty and how lame they can be. They didn’t, pardon me ladies, have the balls that these ones do but also they were not as dumb. I’ll read you the paper

By order of the circuit court of this state, due to a complaint by the Society for Proper Thinking, you are hereby ordered to withdraw from this world and return to where you came from. You have been declared a threat to our freedom and way of life. If you do not leave within twenty four hours after receiving this notice, the full extent of the law will be taken to take you into custody and deport you.

It is signed by the judge and also gives the complainant’s names. That court is in this city. Why don’t the seven of us just go and turn ourselves in to the court. You six would need to go in your full size of course.”

They are laughing. Not at me but because it is just what is needed to show them just how absurd they are in sending this to a fortress that just appeared in seconds. Not built.

With all of us ready, I open a door to the street in front of the court. We did hear and see several car accidents because of it. The three ladies went over to the wrecks and ripped off the roofs.

“Are you okay?” They asked. All were, so they told each that they needed to have better control of their motor vehicles. Laughed and then came with us.

I opened the door for my six but let go when their size broke the whole opening. The guards were just in wet uniforms and stepped out of the way. I look at the board and the judge’s courtroom is on the second floor.

They did not hesitate, The three men opened up a passage to the second floor through the ceiling. They lifted me up to the second floor as I comment that the planners did not factor in all the special needs of our group.

By now, this building is in an uproar. We get to the courtroom and I walk in but the six just plow through where the door used to be. There, still on his seat at the bench, is the judge.

With my six just standing there in a pose of a clasped hands secret service person standing behind a dignitary, I approach the judge.

“Your honor, we came here peacefully to protest this outrage, this order for us to leave. We are here, again peacefully, to throw ourselves on the mercy of the court.”

Now that I have had my levity, I get to the point.

“We are immortal. These six beautiful people can never be injured. No weapon known to the universe itself has been made that can hurt them. I heal faster than I can be injured. Do you think that you a mortal can order a group that have been sent by the gods to prevent that group from killing all of you?

Just so you know, I am from our future. If the Society for Proper Thinking gets its way, there is a group of outstanding people who I would bet are here right now. You do not see them because they can operate in the space between tick and tock.

Time would you please show these kind folks what would happen if they harmed those future children.”

Suddenly there is a flurry of destruction in that room. There is no one moving but everyone is affected. Some of the lawyers take a drink of water and spit it out. I tell them that the imps love to pee in the drinks. The judge smells his and gags.

“Okay, Time would you please stop and show yourselves.

Time shows himself but all the imps are now on the judges bench. They have their arms crossed and are giving him the stink eye. Their spokesman steps forward. She yanks the gavel up and hits the bench with the force strong enough to break the top where she hit. “We went light on this room. Let those morons get their way and you will see what we are like when we are angry.”

All are now showing their claws and teeth.

“Your honor,” I say as I throw the notice at him, “We are here to help guide this world to a brighter future. You can either be a part of that bright future or one that opposes. We will leave now but know this, we are not here to rule. Far from it. When we are no longer needed, we will one day just not be here. You will wake and find the fortress has disappeared. Use us wisely.”

We had discussed this. The six go to their small size which Is still taller and more muscular than most humans. We opened a door and all of us, including Time and the imps were now in our home. The imps went straight to the cooler and pulled out a few beers.

I am still amazed with their strength. A single six inch person hefted a can of beer that is his size and Time has the pumps and cups for them. In front of them, Time reminds us that imps cannot drown. All we hear is a round of boos coming from them. I say that there is always a first.

“I hope I never see that.”

What the hell. They did very well today. I’ll fall for it.

It was only a day or two before the god of mercy shows up. She has children with her. These are children from this world but from poor countries. Their parents have died and they were left on their own. I would like to ask if you would take them in.”

All three women answer that they will, There are six children and a boy, girl pair run to each hug and cry when they were told to come inside. Mercy tells us that there are more but we will be taking them to our realm and all will be place with loving couples.

“They will live happy lives like yours will.”

With that she leaves.

After a reasonable time has passed and the commotion inside has died down, we men go inside. There are three doting mothers, fussing over their children. Those children are clean, in new clothes and being groomed while eating their first good meal.

The three fathers go over and introduce themselves but call me over and say that I am their grandfather. We all get hugs but not before they finished their seconds.

I stand there with crossed arms and speak. “In this house there are three rules. The first is that we have three meals a day. Breakfast, lunch and supper. You are required to eat all three each day. The second is that we are the adults. For your safety, we may stop you from doing something. Can you live with that?”

They all say that they can but one informs me that I said three rules but only mentioned two. “What is the third?”

“Only two?” I laugh and pick the child up, smiled and said to the group, “The third rule is laugh often and be a child for as long as you can. Children are meant to have fun. You are now our family and family protects family.”

We are surprised, that think tank has shown up. All are carrying what looks like all their files. They are frantic. We see that they are being pursued by a group that does not want them here.