

## HURRICANE LAUREN

By Doug Gentile

White middle aged Tampa TV anchor Jerry Berger: “The most amazing and impactful story ever to cross my desk and cameras involved a gifted woman named Lauren Suyama. The saga of this public health researcher from Columbia, South Carolina, began when she visited Sarasota, Florida, to spend time with her close friends from Coastal Carolina University, Paul DeMicco and Sid Rockman. Lauren has a gift that very Christians have: discerning the spirits. In her case, quite spectacularly.”

Lauren, Paul and Sid approach a coffee shop in downtown Sarasota. Lauren, a short and thin woman in her mid-20s, is recognized by her dark, vivid eyes, a nicely sculptured face with full lips, light brown skin complexion and straight black shoulder length hair that partially covers one eye. Sid Rockman is a tall thin Black man with dreadlocks touching the shoulders. Then there is Paul DeMicco, very Italian to match his name, with slightly dark skin and wavy black hair combed back. Lauren, Paul and Sid approach a coffee shop on Main Street in downtown Sarasota. As they get ready to enter, they glance up with keen interest at a large TV screen hovering over the street. A black cyclone is visible, and the narrative below warns of a Category 3 hurricane charging up Florida’s West Coast, menacing Naples and Fort Myers, and heading for Sarasota. Ironically the hurricane is named Hurricane Lauren.

“Lauren, you will see her behind the counter,” Paul says in his baritone voice. “She is a middle aged Black woman named Molly. I’ve tried ministering to her a few times. But she made it clear she is partial to dope and alcohol, and she wears a pentagram necklace. She may be a prime candidate for your amazing gift, Lauren.”

As soon as Lauren walks in, Molly directs a scowl toward Lauren and ignores the two men. Lauren freezes as she beholds the image of a woman’s apparition sitting on Molly’s shoulders. This shadowy demon is a gray skeletal angry woman that apparently no one sees except Lauren. The demon points a bony finger at Lauren, apparently recognizing a spiritual presence on the other side of the spiritual divide.

Lauren points back at the demon—all while smiling brightly at Molly. Before she has the opportunity to attempt conversation leading up to possible exorcism, Molly, led by the demon, runs away from the counter and into the kitchen. Lauren and her friends wait a few minutes to no avail. No one in the coffee shop notices anything unusual; but Sid and Paul sense something deeply spiritual in the encounter between Molly and Lauren.

Later, Lauren is driving her friends and two new friends in her Cougar sedan she drove down from South Carolina. It is drizzling rain, and as she turns onto Route

780/Fruitville leading to the beaches, she dutifully yields to a pedestrian. Ironically, there are flashers and a siren right behind her. Confused, she complies as the large, imposing police officer approaches and asks her for her license and registration.

Officer Hatch examines her standard North American license.

“Ma’am there is no annual sticker on your license plate,” the Officer explains.

Lauren demurely nods. “So sorry, sir. It fell through the cracks back home due to heavy work schedule.”

Officer Hatch says sternly, “You are an Association of Christian States of America citizen, but this is the Libertarian States of America. I need your passport.”

Lauren’s infectious smile turns sheepish. “Sorry again. The passport is in my host family’s house over on Honore.”

“Failure to produce a passport is punishable by a \$100 fine, due to reciprocity agreements among the different government entities,” says the Officer. He places Lauren in handcuffs and takes her down to the police station. She is placed in a private room with a locked door.

Lauren has heard the horror stories. Refusing to yield to fear, she bows her head in prayer during the incarceration. An hour later the door opens. An older Officer, a White Sargent named McNeil, tells her she is free to go as soon as she pays the fine. He is very friendly and smiling. Lauren pays the fine.

Lauren thanks her four friends for accompanying her to the police station. Sid makes a joke about: “Not Driving While Black but Driving While Latina--DWL.”

Paul, the natural historian, walks Lauren and Paul through some phone-based records about the dynamics that brought about the slashing of America:

Jerry Berger narrates, and the words appear on the screen:

“The Democratic and Republican parties became so polarized that name calling, screaming and hate mongering became routine. There were strong movements in both parties to lovingly find common ground, while holding firm on certain moral standards. But these voices were overshadowed by the loud zealots on both sides, loyal to secular ideologies. Many of the more restrained leaders broke off and formed a third party based boldly on Judeo-Christian values. They tried hard for about a year to mediate between the extreme factions on the left and right—but were often ignored and called traitors and other nasty names.

“The hate mongering between the extremists escalated into physical violence such that riots broke out in different cities. The final death knell for the United States of

**America came after a brawl in Congress, where over a dozen Senators and Congress persons were seriously injured.**

**“What followed was a painful year of negotiating a physical and sovereign separation between the warring parties, where the extreme factions were able to secure wide swaths of land in the former Continental USA to pursue their agendas without resistance. A third swath of American land was given to the Judeo-Christian mediators who had broken away from the two extreme movements.**

**“After the three separate nations were established, they negotiated a system of free travel for citizens of the three new nation-states, based on a passport system.**

**“They needed to collaborate on national security. Thus, the military and national security apparatus was placed in the hands of a separate entity run by professionals chosen by the leaders of the three nations plus Canada. Each of the four nations pledged an equal amount of funding for the national security apparatus. Washington, DC became the hub of all military, national security and strategic International relations actions and decision making, as other government decisions were transferred to the new nations. Many of the regal, majestic government buildings in Washington DC stood vacant.**

**“State legislators decided by vote, which new nation they would join.**

**“All three of the new nations adopted Constitutions that embraced democratic processes and certain inalienable rights reflected in the original US Constitution.**

**“The three new nations states were:  
Libertarian States of America (LSA)  
Federated States of America (FSA)  
Association of Christian States of America (ACSA)**

**“Features of the Federated States of America: The Constitution was an open endorsement of democratic socialism and the intent to pursue equality. Abortion up until birth was guaranteed, as were LGBT rights. A large Justice Department enforced civil rights. Health care was nationalized, and religious freedom was guaranteed as long as it did not deprive protected groups of their rights or interfere with government laws and priorities. Laws were passed to provide income and housing to people who needed it. Law enforcement was de-emphasized toward a comprehensive approach to crime. There were strong environmental laws and climate change initiatives. There were strong governmental regulations governing business practices and anti-trust enforcement.**

**“What to do about the multi-trillion dollar American national debt was a huge bone contention among the three new nations. The FSA agreed to take the existing debt as long as the other two nations agreed to mint a small number of trillion dollar coins and transfer them to the FSA. The other two nations, although the cost was**

inflation that lasted two years, were happy to swallow a small number of trillion dollar coins to get rid of that monster. The FSA decided they could manage the existing national debt by a tax system which was: 0% for everyone under the poverty line; followed by graduated income tax rates of 30%; 50%; and 70%.

**“Features of the Libertarian States of America: The Libertarian States of America passed a balanced budget requirement. That was easy to reach since the Federal Government was limited to some federal level law enforcement, coordination with the 4 nation national security apparatus in Washington, and limited coordination with their own States. Most government decisions were made at the county level, with limited State involvement. Education and law enforcement were the main governmental programs—though private education equaled public education. Government interference with business and commerce was limited to health and safety matters. Health care was relegated entirely to the private sector. The LSA banned all racial distinctions and kept no records of race or ethnicity. Government decisions on whether to allow abortions were left to State governments. LGBT activities were generally allowed, but with no civil rights protections. Federal tax rates were under 5% in addition to limited State and County taxes.**

**“Features of the Association of Christian States of America: Abortions were outlawed, although some limited exceptions were still being debated. LGBT activities were allowed to exist, but with no sexual orientation civil rights laws to restrict religious liberty. The Constitution openly declared an allegiance to Judeo-Christian values, while protecting the civil rights of other religious faiths. Non-Christians were allowed to participate in government activities. Christian activities including prayer were allowed in schools and all institutions including businesses. Official policies strongly favored the nuclear family. There were strong anti-racism declarations, but the ACSA emphasized the role of churches to form cross-racial partnerships to address remaining racism and racial injustices, with some government civil rights protections. The size of government was smaller than the FSA, but not as bare bones as the LSA. Biblical justice was the standard for both the government and churches. Health care was run by Christian nonprofits run by panels of health care professionals and patients. Poverty was addressed by a partnership consortium of churches, NGOs and some safety net government, with the emphasis on creating opportunities. The ACSA took strong actions to stop modern slavery and stand up for Christians mistreated in other nations. Free enterprise was protected, with limited Biblical justice provisions regarding abuses or plunder.**

**“Most Christian Americans chose to live in the ACSA. However, Christians with leftist leanings mostly chose the FSA. There was a small percentage of Christians remaining in the LSA.**

**“LSA States:**

**Alabama**  
**Mississippi**  
**Louisiana**  
**Alaska**  
**New Hampshire**  
**Maine**  
**Texas**  
**Arizona**  
**Utah**  
**Wyoming**  
**North Dakota**  
**South Dakota**  
**Idaho**  
**Florida**  
**Nevada**  
**Montana**  
**Vermont**

**National Capital: Dallas, Texas**

**“FSA States:**

**New York**  
**Massachusetts**  
**Connecticut**  
**Rhode Island**  
**Hawai’i**  
**New Jersey**  
**California**  
**Oregon**  
**Washington**  
**Colorado**  
**New Mexico**  
**Minnesota**  
**Michigan**  
**Illinois**

**2 Capitals, West and East: New York City and San Francisco**

**ACSA States:**

**North Carolina**  
**South Carolina**  
**Georgia**  
**Virginia**  
**Maryland**

**Pennsylvania  
Ohio  
Indiana  
Kentucky  
Tennessee  
Missouri  
Kansas  
Iowa  
Oklahoma  
Nebraska  
West Virginia  
Delaware  
Arkansas**

**National Capital: Nashville, Tennessee, with a satellite at Charlotte, North Carolina**

**Some active debates still existed in some States: Alabama and Mississippi had mini-riots re: whether to join the LSA or the ACSA.**

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**Paul, finishing up his history lesson with Lauren and Sid, laments, “How much stronger a united USA would be, without the turmoil, violence and economic disruptions, if more Americans would have sided with the Christian political third force against the right and left extremists.**

**Sid says, “One of my closest friends is a Neil, a Black dude living in Orlando. Neil, a close Black friend that he grew up with in Orlando. Neil worked for a construction company and was called the N word and harassed by White coworkers, and had to endure racial jokes, nooses, and the like repeatedly. When his bosses refused to address the racial harassment, Neil asked some local government agencies to intervene. They cited lack of jurisdiction. Then the local police force got wind of Neil’s complaints—and in the racially neutral LSA, Neil was fined \$100 for playing the race card”.**

**Paul summarizes his history lesson: “Next month is the 5-year anniversary of the sad slashing of America. And the arrangement is teetering.”**

**Sarasota is standing still in anticipated terror as Category 4 Hurricane Lauren barrels up the Gulf of Mexico. Pictures of flooding; shredded buildings; wrecked boats, in Key West and Naples dominate the TV screens. Only hours away now.**

**It is late afternoon on Monday, and both the Florida and LSA authorities are ordering an evaluation of the Gulf Islands in Sarasota, Bradenton, and points south. Traffic jams are on all eastbound highways out of town, and gridlock grips the sole highway out of Lido Beach to the mainland.**

Yet Lauren, Sid and Paul are going nowhere. They sit on a deserted beach, as gale winds whip the sand; they are praying how they can be of help to those in distress. Paul says, “Pastor Whittle from our Hosanna Church told me about this Black and White couple who live in one of these tall condos here in Lido Beach. They are going to Sebring to stay with family, and have offered their condo as a ground zero to help with hurricane victims. They even told me where the spare key is hidden. We are in!”

The night rages on as the mean Lauren tears into Sarasota. Lauren and friends hunker down on the fifth floor of the Lido Beach highrise. First comes the constant sounds of multiple airplanes taking off, and outside the condo window loose items are flying through the darkness. Whitewater from the sea is lapping at the street in front. Then all goes dark from the power outage. There is nothing left to do except for the three friends to find a soft space on the soft carpet to sleep, and prepare the large water bottles they brought for future thirst quenching and hygiene.

A bright sun wakes them up the next morning. Lauren the storm is long gone, but the devastation remains—debris outside everywhere; broken windows in the cars outside; omnipresent pools of water. If they were not facing the Gulf, they would see the ravaged homes and downed trees toward the east.

They walk down the stairwell until they reach the lobby. The only light comes from the reflecting sun outside. The front glass door is completely shattered from launched chairs.

Human sounds come from the concierge desk. There is no concierge; just a middle aged White woman straggler from the street. She is shabbily dressed; unkept brown hair, eyes wild and mumbling random words as spittle runs down her cheek. Seeing Lauren and company, she unleashes a barrage of insults. Lauren backs up, and then recognizes that this woman is cursing God repeatedly.

“Do your thing, Lauren?” Sid asks.

Lauren says in her soft voice, “We need to be careful. Most of the time is it just mental illness—but oh my gosh, I see them! There is four of them, almost like Mary Magdalene before deliverance! They are just swirling around; these hazy hideous forms. Do you see them?”

“No,” they both reply.

“The Catholics have an exorcism ritual,” Lauren says. They may work sometimes, but real exorcism is just raw spiritual warfare. The power of the Holy Spirit and maybe accompanying angels, stronger than Satan’s minions.”

**The woman is now growling, and moving toward them aggressively, as if preparing for an attack.**

**Lauren takes the crucifix necklace off her neck and holds it in front of her. Lauren says more assertively, “It starts with this. Now, both of you just start screaming Biblical truth to the demons and let the angels and the spirit do the rest.”**

**The friends just start yelling paraphrased Christian verses, while Lauren yells repeatedly, “In the Name of Jesus Christ, I command you, Satan and your fallen angels, be gone! Get away from her!”**

**The truth just rattles out:**

**“Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.  
The stone is rolled away, and Jesus is risen!  
The Gospel is not a matter of talk, but power!  
The civil authorities never found Jesus’s body!  
Over 500 people witnessed Jesus’s resurrection!  
God is Lord of the universe, faultless, not limited in power.  
God is perfect agape love.  
The Apostles faced death rather than denounce Jesus who they saw after the resurrection.”**

**The woman matches the Christian yelling with loud growls and shouts of her own--- until there is a loud, visceral shriek—one final outburst. Then she falls to her knees.**

**Everything suddenly becomes quiet—so quiet that they could hear the breeze outside. The woman starts weeping. Lauren kneels down in front of her with an infectious smile.**

**“What is your name, Ma’am?” Lauren’s voice was now a whisper.**

**“Theresa,” she answers in a sweet voice unlike the voice of her previous rants. She continues, “I feel so different—so peaceful! I cannot explain it. It’s like this jello of pure love all around me.”**

**“Did you understand our words to you?” Lauren asks.**

**“Yes, I believe it was an encounter with God.” Theresa cries with joy, raising her hands high.**

**Lauren explains: “Right now, Theresa, you need to ask Jesus to come into your heart and dedicate your life to him. Can you please do that?”**

**“Yes! Yes!” Theresa cries out. “I believe! Jesus, please save me!”**



**“Usually God works more gradually in transforming people for Jesus,” Paul says in his baritone voice. “But other times He works very fast! He can and does!”**

**Lauren and her friends embrace Theresa in joyous hugs.**

**Then Lauren notices a police cruiser parked across the street—and a police officer walking toward the building. It is Officer Hatch, the same imposing Officer who had pulled Lauren over and took her downtown.**

**He walks sternly right up to the group, eyeing Lauren in particular.**

**“We had a call-in about loud noises and shouting in this building,” he says.**

**“Don’t know anything about it, Officer. Do you hear noises here? Must be somewhere else,” Theresa says, unable to suppress a giddy laugh.**

**Officer Hatch looks dubiously at Lauren. “Let’s see, Miss Suyama from South Carolina. What have we here, a serial criminal? Do you live here?”**

**Sid holds up a key. “Guest of the family on the fifth floor,” Sid says in his confident voice with a hint of a song. “Perhaps you should do your job and look for criminals.” Sid tries to smile at his own bold comment.**

**“Do you believe in miracles, Officer?” Lauren asks.**

**“No.”**

**“Well, after a conversation with Miss Theresa here, I believe you will,” Lauren answers with a warm smile.**

**Jerry Bergen narrates, “The bigger miracles came later in the day, as Lauren, Sid and Paul look for places to help with the cleanup, and console people. There is one house in particular close to Saint Armand Circle, where Lauren comforts a distressed senior citizen and helps with cleanup. Two days later she learned that the woman is the Aunt of Officer Hatch. Yes, God often arranges these little neat coincidences, for people who love Him and have a relationship with Him. Officer Hatch would offer a sincere apology and thank you to Lauren, together with a bouquet of flowers. Of course, Lauren would invite her new friend to Sid and Paul’s Hosanna Church.**

**“The ultimate miracle: the emergency restoration crews poured into Sarasota by the hundreds. There is limited response from the Federated States of America, due to recent budget challenges and bureaucratic barriers and mess-ups. There is also a limited response from the LSA due to the lack of sufficient government infrastructure. But the overwhelming numbers of emergency response personnel**

come from the Association of Christian States of America. That is in addition to hundreds of saints from local Christian churches in LSA-run Sarasota.”

^A smiling Lauren Suyama opens a glass door and takes a seat in front the desk of middle-aged man with tan suit matching wavy gray hair. Beside him in a side wooden chair is a petite young woman; babyface, long blonde pony tail, and brown dress.

“Glad you can join us, Ms. Suyama. I’m Jerry Berger, the man who called you. This is Taylor Henning, my Intern. Welcome to Tampa.”

Lauren, jerking her head to cast her black hair from the corner of her right eye, reaches into an ample red bag and pulls out five small nicely wrapped gifts. Sets them on Berger’s desk.

“I want to show my appreciation not only to you, for this interview, but to any other staff who made this happen. I pray that I brought enough gifts. And please call me Lauren,” she says, beaming.

“Before we discuss the dramatic event,” Berger says in his projecting voice, “Today is not the actual TV interview. This is a pre-clearance interview before broadcast. The producer Marjorie Hammer lets me work independently, but has veto power that she can wield any time.”

“You mean, Nurse Ratched?” Taylor blurts out, referencing the character from the decades old Hollywood movie. “And her last name is no accident.” Then Taylor flinches and ducks suddenly at the thought of hidden cameras in the office.

Berger continues, “It appears that we have two famous Hurricane Laurens: the air and water Lauren, and human in flesh Lauren. I reference this smiling photo of you in a Sarasota journal, with an image of a cyclone in the background. Apparently the human Hurricane Lauren is cited for the heroics of leading a cleanup team, even being cited by Black pastors for work your team in Sarasota’s north side inner city.”

“Miracles from God brought thousands of selfless people into this wonderful city for restoration,” Lauren adds graciously. “I’m sure they picked me out from the raw coincidence of my name and hurricane’s name. I will tell you what I told the magazine and they refused to print it. And I will say it again on your TV interview. The cleanup team was not my idea. It was organized and led by my dear friend, Sid Rockman.”

Taylor is gazing at Lauren. “I don’t know where you get your kindness and grace, Lauren. But I want some of it.”

**“Nothing from me.” Lauren points a finger toward the sky, then touches the cross on her gold necklace.**

**“Again, before we jump into the dramatic event,” Berger continues, “Just so you know I’ve done my homework---apparently during your graduate program at the University of South Carolina, some of your friends jokingly penned a writeup about you being Miss United Nations.”**

**Lauren’s smile turns sheepish. “Yes, it has to do with my ethnicity.”**

**“Yes. Please fill in some gaps for a human interest twist.”**

**Lauren says in a lively voice, “My surname Suyama comes from my father who half Japanese on his father’s side. My paternal grandmother was a mix of ethnicities, with small percentages of Jewish and African blood. My mother, an immigrant from Ecuador, is full blood Mestizo: White from Spain and Native blood.”**

**“You may have figured out where I am going with this Lauren,” Berger says, pointing. “You have quite an amazing relative.”**

**“God has reminded me that I am not my relative. I would prefer that remain the case on any TV interview,” Lauren says with a flat smile.**

**“That reality will hunt you down, Lauren, whether speaking publicly or finding the dark side of a rock—now, back to you. How many languages are you fluent in?”**

**“Spanish, of course, since I consider myself a Latina American,” Lauren says. “Plus passable Japanese and a third language. Can you guess?”**

**Berger strokes his chin. “Well, uh—maybe a wild guess—”**

**Lauren jokingly holds a finger to her lips. Then she leans slowly toward Berger’s ear, to accentuate the dramatic. Then she whispers loud enough for everyone to hear: “English.”**

**All three break out laughing. An amused Berger asks, “Lauren, with all your years in South Carolina, I don’t detect the southern drawl.”**

**“Oh, I can pour on some syrup if I want to.” Lauren adds, “Paul, my historian friend taught me that if I were living in Louisiana in the Jim Crow Antebellum South, I would have sufficient African blood to be stigmatized and segregated. According to my ancestry report, I have only six percent African blood. But it’s above the ridiculously low Louisiana threshold for the N word.”**

**“Very interesting.” Berger nods and smiles.**

Now Lauren is not smiling. Her prominent dark eyes are pinned on Berger.  
“Interesting sir? I would rather call it quite vile.”

Berger shifts in his chair. “We do share something in common that I want the TV broadcast to touch on. That is our common faith. Please tell me how you became such a serious Christian.”

Lauren’s warm smile returns, reaching up to her eyes. “I was raised in a Christian family, especially my Mom. My birthplace was Ecuador, but my parents immigrated to the US when I was just 6. They settled in South Carolina as students at the University of South Carolina, and eventually became naturalized citizens as my father pursued an IT career.

“My childhood was one of nominal Christianity. I went through the motions, tried to be a good person, and checked the boxes on morality. But I did not have a strong faith; it was more of a cultural loyalty.”

“Doesn’t that describe much of the Americas?” Berger interjects.

“Yes. And many of the friends I grew up with were the same; reinforcement of sleepwalking Christianity. So when I went away to Coastal Carolina University and joined a sorority, I was engulfed in the Greek culture. My gods were the kind of lipstick I wore; makeup; and clothes, with my all-consuming obsession with landing the perfect mate; the knight on the silver horse. My biology studies were an afterthought and church attendance was nonexistent.

“Then I met Cal, the rich fraternity brother who was my dream guy; an answer to prayers that were never spoken. In the middle of my sophomore year, he dumped me unceremoniously. I became very bitter and angry. I started to abuse alcohol and hang around with other people who aired grievances constantly, as false salve for hurt. One of these students dabbled in witchcraft, insisting that she could get what she wanted and counter the hardships with appeals to the supernatural. Not thinking straight, I felt a perverse comfort hanging out with her. Over the weeks I felt a strong sense of dread and darkness. One night in her apartment I will never forget—I mean in a good way. While she was chanting to her unknown pagan authority, I actually saw cups and bowls move. Then I caught a glimpse of this hideous figure, kind of smoky, but with human features. What I remember was teeth, all very sharp.

“I ran out of there, all the way home. Thank God I had a Christian roommate, Emma Torres, one of my Spanish language partners. Emma had been showing me love through my crisis. Never attacking me or judging me and giving me the truth of the Christian Gospel without overwhelming me with it. I told her what I had just witnessed with my witch friend. She hugged me and started praying. And praying and praying.

**“I called it a God-sanity moment. Every truth my parents had taught me all these years, and the Gospel truth of Emma’s current and past words just swept over me. Mercifully. Gloriously. I fell on my knees and cried out to God and shed tears. Emma asked me if I would accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior. I said yes. She kept asking me, and soon I began shouting it, because the transformation was instantaneous. All the dark thoughts and emotions were turned to a sense of wonder I had never felt. The hope; the anticipation; the peace. Simultaneous and dramatic.**

**“I never turned back on Jesus after that. But there came a life-changing incident about a month after my salvation. I was visiting a friend who was struggling with drug abuse, to help her get her life on track, and share the Gospel with her. Again, I saw some ugly smoky apparition near my friend. I left soon after that, shaken and trembling. I fell on my knees before God and asked, Lord why are you still letting me be tormented by demons?**

**“Then came a soft, quiet message: ‘My child, you are on the other side of the spiritual divide now.’ Over time God let it be known that discerning the spirits in a powerful way was a spiritual gift, from God to me. When I encountered a demon, I was never to fear—but use the power of the Holy Spirit to cast the demon away, and in some cases, deliver people from Satanic possession.”**

**Lauren leans closer to Berger, as her voice rises. “See these hands, sir? When I first saw those abominable beings, these hands could not stop shaking. Do you see them shaking now? Never! There is no fear in love. What does the Bible say? Jesus dispatches Satan with the breath of His mouth. Followers of Jesus have that power, sir.”**

**Lauren quiets her voice with a soft smile returning. “I’ve been riding that spiritual tsunami ever since. Opportunities for great fellowship and Evangelism, Christian charity and occasional spiritual deliverance as a gift, accompanying my other life of finishing my degree at Coastal Carolina, and then returning to Columbia for my Master’s Degree and now working as a public health researcher for a health care company.**

**“That peace even accompanied me during the hardships of breaking my leg in a bicycle accident and losing my best friend to cancer. I cannot explain it adequately. Sure, there was emotional pain and grieving. But underlying it was a sense of peace—stability—assurance.”**

**“This is nothing personal against you, Lauren,” Berger says. “But certain aspects of you I find a little scary.”**

**Taylor emits a little gasp at the remark, confused while coming to the meeting cold without background. Lauren scary? Taylor beholds this kind, peaceful face with vivid features and a thin body as Taylor metaphorically wonders if she could wrap**

her shoelace around Lauren's waist. Scary? Lauren's not flashing anything either, with her designer jeans and maroon sweater hugging the neck.

Then Taylor notices Lauren nodding quietly, as if to say, I understand.

Suddenly the glass door opens hard, and in walks a grandma figure with gray braided hair, specks and black pants suit. Except this grandma is walking assertively, eyes hard. Right over to Berger's desk.

Berger and Lauren both rise. "Lauren Suyama, meet my show's producer, Marjorie Hammer." Lauren offers her hand, but Marjorie retreats about ten feet and then whirls around.

"Jerry, the last comment you made is the wisest thing you said all day," Marjorie says wryly.

"You spying on us, Marge? Some creepy camera in here?"

"Gotta protect the brand, Jerry, and you from some of your dubious moments. Now Ms. Suyama, tell me, do you believe in ghosts?"

Lauren shows a quiet smile in spite of the aggressive voice. "Yes and no, Ma'am. Yes because these apparitions do exist. Some people have the ability to see them. Most people do not. No, because the term ghost is misapplied. What people call ghosts are mostly demons. There are no neutral spirits. No fuzzy-wuzzy friendly ghosts. There is a clear spiritual divide."

Ms. Suyama, could you please wait outside?" Marge asks, eyes arched. Lauren quietly departs and closes the door.

"Sit down, Jerry, and hear this clearly," Marge is almost yelling, as Berger shrinks back. "The show with her in it is not happening, as long as I am alive. I don't want that sorceress within 100 feet of this building. Do I make myself clear?"

"Lauren is about as nice and harmless of a person—"

"That blood was real Jerry! Human blood!"

"Did you see the whole video?"

"And you, cockroach of Nurse Ratched, you are fired. Taylor, you have one hour to clear out your desk, before security escorts you out of the building." Marge storms out of the office leaving behind a pale faced broadcaster and a weeping intern.

Five minutes later, Lauren receives a text from Berger, with an address of a coffee shop about three blocks away, close to the University of Tampa downtown campus.

A few minutes later, Lauren walks into the quiet establishment. Drinks, pastries and cold sandwiches behind a counter, and Berger and Taylor are already sitting at a table a few feet from the counter. Berger had already set a plate of pastries on the table. Lauren sits down to join them.

Berger opens up a laptop, then raises his eyes. “Marge’s empire is limited to the one hour show. I have strong connections to the station’s owner. We are doing this somehow, believe me. And Taylor, we’ll take care of you, don’t worry.” Taylor is dabbing her tear dried cheeks with a napkin.

“And Lauren,” Berger continues. “You probably don’t know that I’ve met your famous relative. Before coming to FLA, I was a TV anchor in Santana, California, you know, what they used to call Santa Ana. I saw your relative in action. And all I can say is, he spun some heads back then, too.”

Lauren is just sitting there with a blank expression, saying nothing. So Berger says, “Okay, moving on to the dramatic event, can we recap the video?”

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The video starts with Sid Rockman, dreds flowing down the back of a brown leather jacket, and standing next to a tall, big boned young woman with blue jogging suit and ash blonde hair flowing almost to her waist. They are in hallway of a condo building.

“Where’s Lauren?” Comes Paul DeMicco’s voice from behind the camera. Sid checks his watch.

“Wait. You’re recording this? This is a very sensitive and private family matter,” says the tall woman.

Sid says, “If this is live spiritual warfare, we want the whole world to see the power of God, and this demonic deliverance stuff is not hokey-pokey.”

“No, no. You need to promise me that this video will never be shared,” she says.

“Well, alright. It will stay between the four of us.” says Paul behind the phone camera.

“Let me control this show.” The woman walks toward the camera, disappears, and then Paul emerges, standing next to Sid. “Hey, twins!” The woman laughs, noting Paul’s brown leather jacket identical to Sid’s.

Heads turn toward the video’s left, and Lauren appears in a bright red dress, and she’s heaving a little from running. “So sorry. The video conference from the health care meeting went way over.”

**“Lauren Suyama, meet Carly Williams,” Sid says. “Carly attends our Hosanna Church. You may have seen her in the church choir. She does not mind being called Volleyball Carly.”**

**Lauren sounds a laugh as she extends her hand. “Nice to meet you, Volleyball Carly. Now, what we got here?”**

**Carly says, “It is about my brother Tony. We live together, although I own the condo. He has always been rebellious, and resistant to the Gospel. But always respectful to me. Then, a month ago I noticed him hanging out with all these goth people, and he was blasting heavy metal music from his room. He became very unkept, smelly, and I mean really bad. His language became obscene, and he flashed a pentagram and announced he has joined the Church of Satan. He made it clear it was not the political paganistic Satanic movement, but worship of the real Satan, including animal sacrifice. What made me suspect demonic oppression is how aggressively hostile he became every time I would mention God or Jesus. The last encounter, Tony physically attacked me.”**

**“You were physically assaulted?” Sid says. “Did you report it to the police?”**

**“No, there was no evidence of physical injury, so I didn’t think the police would do anything. I just moved out.”**

**Lauren reaches out and gently touches Carly’s arm. “Please understand something, Carly. I just don’t rub a bottle and expect God to jump out like my personal genie. Even if this is real Satan possession and not mental illness or sinful rebelliousness, only God decides in His timing when He wants me to confront evil spirits. It doesn’t happen that often.”**

**“My first instinct is to pray that it is God’s will that you intervene, Lauren,” says Paul. “But now I am regretting that I suggested this encounter. To put you in physical danger, Lauren.”**

**“Well, let’s pray right now,” says Lauren.**

**For about two minutes the video captures the ceiling of the hallway as there are inaudible mumblings. Then they all stand as the video refocuses.**

**Lauren sighs deeply and closes her eyes for a final quick prayer. “Okay, let’s do this.”**

**Tense bodies precede Carly inserting the key into the lock and opening the door. They step inside and hear the loud rock music. The stench of body odor is strong. There are papers and clothes strung out on the floor, and half eaten food on a table in this spacious den.**



Carly says, “Tony plays that same tribute to demons song at the same time every evening, like he’s under some kind of spell.”

Suddenly the music stops. Tony wanders harmlessly out of his room. His shoulder length brown hair is straggly, and his beard unkempt. Suddenly he fixes evil eyes upon his sister. “What do you want? Why are you here?”

“Tony, we are still family, and I thought it appropriate to introduce me to some of my friends.”

Sid and Paul slowly approach Tony. But they stop as Tony’s arms are stiff and eyes hard. And suddenly his eyes fixated on Lauren.

“You have no chance, my little pretty!” The voice was a loud, high pitch growl. Not his natural voice. “Look at us! Count us!”

“Oh my God, what are you doing? What are you allowing?” Lauren calls out. “Okay, God, you got this. It’s all on you, Lord.”

“Lauren?” Sid calls, alarmed.

“Legion!” Lauren yells.

“What?”

“Mark 5”, Lauren responds. “Satan must have known how God has anointed me with this gift—and is throwing the nuclear option at me. Do any of you see them?”

“No,” comes the chorus from the friends.

“Kind of blue shadowy, not human not dragon, kind of a mix. Swirling around Tony. Sharp hundreds of teeth, and I’ve never seen hate so rawly manifested. They are kind of lunging and retreating. Menacing gestures.”

Meanwhile Tony, eyes wild, keeps calling out indecipherable words in a growling monstrous voice, not human. And it causes Sid, Paul and Carly to back up.

Meanwhile, Lauren takes steps forward, removes her cross necklace and holds the gold cross in front of her. “You cannot touch me. Greater is the spirit in me than what is in the world; or in hell with you. In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you Satan and you fallen angels, depart from this man and this place! Get out! Get Out!”

The heavy pink couch beside Tony begins to shift, making loud grounding sounds against the floor. Then the couch begins to rise, inch by inch, and twirl slowly.

**Lauren lowers the cross as her breath begins to quiver. Then Tony suddenly charges Lauren, tackles her hard and they crash to the floor. Lauren tries push him and squirm away, but Tony lands two punches to her face. As Paul and Sid race in to intervene, Tony releases his grip on Lauren, stands up, and backs up rapidly, heaving, growling all the way. Paul and Sid are dazed by Tony's unexplained retreat, as if it was involuntarily.**

**Lauren stands up with an air of confidence. "Praise God. You probably didn't see them. I didn't either. God's unseen minions have just saved me. I think God allowed that physical attack because of my five seconds of fear. It is gone now." She retrieves the gold cross tied to the necklace and waves it.**

**"The demons are gone?" Sid asks.**

**"No, they are still hovering, menacing. But they still cannot touch me because of the power of the Holy Spirit within me. They are chanting Blood! Blood! To remind me of my current weakness."**

**Lauren holds up her right forearm to display a bloody gash. She touches her mouth where a stream of blood oozes from a small cut on the corner of her lip. "Tony, if you can hear me, I love you. We love you. Jesus loves you."**

**Now Tony is rushing at Paul, tackles him hard. Sid immediately intervenes and jumps on the twosome. Lauren also joins the scrum, and at that point the camera quivers and takes a recurring video of the ceiling as Carly also helps out.**

**The next two minutes feature a bedlam of voices as the Christians scream over and over again, "In the Name of Jesus Christ, I command you Satan and you demons, leave Tony," as Tony's growling, menacing voice competes with the Christians' cries. Occasionally there are groans and thumping sounds, as a physical struggle continues.**

**The camera then captures a gradual reddening of the ceiling. The square inch section becomes redder and redder, and then a liquid begins dripping in rapid drops.**

**Carly's voice: "What the—up there!"**

**Paul: "Lauren, get on top of Tony's back and push hard against his shoulder blades."**

**Lauren: "I can't—like a horse."**

**Sid: "Go! We got his arms pinned. Well, almost."**

**Carly:** “Tony quieted. But still moving.”

**Lauren:** “Paul, don’t punch him! We’re not muggers.”

**Sid:** “Tony seems to be submitting but—what the—that liquid dripping on us.

**Paul:** “You got leaky pipes up there, Carly? Dirty water. Real dirty.”

**Carly:** “No! I have no idea.”

**Lauren:** “Ahhhhhhhh! Praise God! I think they’re gone! I don’t see them! Yes! Yes!”

**Sid:** “But what’s that red stuff hitting us?”—As the camera continues to film the dripping red liquid.

**Carly:** “Tony’s not moving. Is that good or bad?”

**Paul:** “Stigmata?”

**Lauren:** “Oh Lord I’m so tired. Yeah, what is that? Stigmata is from the palms, not some freaking ceiling, right? Heck, I don’t know. All I know is that the demons are gone and Tony is quiet. Angelic blood maybe? God can do anything—man, the stuff’s in my eye now.”

**Carly:** “Tony’s puke is all over me.”

**Sid:** “Lauren, you did it! The exorcism lady strikes again!”

**Lauren:** “Sid, it’s not me. It’s all God, and a definite angelic presence.”

The camera rotates as Carly grabs it. The video shows Lauren, Sid and Paul hovering over Tony, with Tony’s face to the floor. Tony begins to groan softly and squirm.

“He’s moving,” Sid says. “Keep pinning him, just in case.”

Sid and Paul are kneeling on Tony’s arms as Lauren mounts him and pushes against his back below the neck.

Lauren says, “Never done this before. Not a skill I want to repeat.” Tony continues to squirm.

There is a loud knock on the door. Continuous knocks.

“Oh crap, not now,” says Carly.

**“Don’t answer it,” says Sid.**

**“Police! Open the door now!” Come the muffled voices from the other side.**

**The video retreats from the other people as Carly backs up toward the door. But before she can open it, the door flies open loudly from the electronic lock picking equipment. Four blue-clad police officers charge in, guns drawn.**

**“Put your hands up. Let me see them!” Lauren, Sid and Paul comply. Two of the officers, a Black Officer and a sturdy female Officer displaying Sarasota Police insignias descend on the threesome and Tony, guns still ready.**

**“Hey phone lady! Get down on your knees,” The female Officer orders Carly.**

**“She’s filming, let it go for now,” the Black Officer orders. “This scene is something else. Larry, keep her in her sights.”**

**A third White male Officer bends down over Tony. “He’s semi-conscious, bruising on his face, likely concussion.”**

**The Black Officer says, “We need backup. We’ve got three suspects here, White male, Black male, woman of unknown ethnicity, re: vicious assault against White male victim. A fourth suspect, White woman, filming this obvious abusive situation.”**

**The third Officer shines a flashlight into Lauren’s face. The Black Officer continues, “The two male suspects have bruising on hands and traces of a red liquid, most likely blood. The female suspect’s face covered with blood and vomit.”**

**“Up there,” the female Officer indicates. “Red spot on ceiling. Not sure how that fits in.”**

**“We’ll lab it,” the Black Officer sighs.**

**Lauren, stained face and all, tries to smile. “Please, can I explain all this?”**

**“You will. Downtown. Now I need all of you face down on the floor to cuff you.”**

**At this point, the video ends.**

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**Back at the Tampa coffee shop, Taylor’s mouth is agape. “So what happened?” Lauren and Berger exchange glances, and Berger takes the lead:**

**“The evening anchor on our station ran the broadcast that night—with the headline, four people arrested for vicious assault in Sarasota. We did an update broadcast after forensics confirmed that the dripping from the ceiling was human blood. The initial charges against Lauren, et. al., were felonious assault, unlawful restraint, and suspicious of murder. By the next morning, this is how it ended up.”**

**Berger pulls out a newspaper. There is a smiling Lauren, walking out of the jail with a smile, and her fingers pointing toward the sky.**

**Lauren smiles quietly. “I was tired of the personal publicity, so I let Sid and Paul explain the circumstances to the police and the media.”**

**Berger says, “Yeah, the media that morning branded them the Hosanna 4, because of their connection to the Hosanna Church, and because of witnesses saying that the foursome, while languishing in a holding cell for hours, kept singing the song Hosanna over and over again.”**

**“Along with the Martin Luther King Jr. anthem, we shall overcome,” Lauren adds.**

**Berger continues, “The burning question for Taylor is, how can the Hosanna 4 just walk, the very next day? The answer: Tony Williams refused to press charges, and also the video showed him initiating the violence. As for the blood, the District Attorney said there was no evidence of any connection of the Hosanna 4 to any identified murder victim, so murder charges were out of the question.”**

**Lauren says, “Tony now is in his right mind. He quickly understood what a mess his life had become, including his physical condition. Carly strongly urged him to accept the Christian Gospel, warning him that the demons could return if he does not have the protection of the Holy Spirit through a relationship with Jesus.”**

**“Why aren’t other Christians able to do these deliverances?” Taylor asks.**

**“The Bible says that every Christian if given unique spiritual gifts. I am so blessed, not because of my own virtue, to be endowed in this special way,” says Lauren. “Spiritual warfare is more routinely waged by Christians simply understanding the Word of God and living it out. Some Christians weaken their spiritual power by getting caught up in un-Godly secular worldly activities.”**

**Taylor looks hard at Lauren. “You have no idea where that blood came from?”**

**“No, really I don’t.”**

**“And that question has launched the Hosanna 4 into fame, not only in the several North American nations, but around the world,” Berger says. “The questions are: Is this a sick cult that staged this whole episode? Is there a real murder victim out there tied to the blood? It has even divided the Christian church between those who**

say that these types of miracles ceased after the Bible, and those who say that these wildly charismatic events are still possible.”

“Let me add in defense of Lauren and the Hosanna 4,” Berger continues, “Anyone who watched the video and witnessed Tony’s radical behavior and the frightening change in his voice—and still thinks the Hosanna 4 staged the whole event, needs to get their head examined.”

Taylor says, “Lauren, this must be hard on you. Calls from strangers everywhere. What do you say about this?”

“Acts 2, verse 17 says in the last days God’s spirit will pour out miracles. Some teachers believe it is intended solely to Pentacost, but the term ‘last days’ make it an open question. There have been countless previous exorcisms and deliverances in various parts of the world, but most have been low key. Maybe God chose this deliverance to be very high profile, as a warning that we are approaching the last days. I cannot say for sure that the blood on the ceiling was a Godly miracle. But I believe God is still capable of those miracles and will do them, to demonstrate His power.” Lauren flashes a genuine laugh, “Please raise your hand if you think you can put God in a box.”

Berger smiles back, “Please raise your hand if you think anyone can prevent Lauren’s mother, Maria Viruet Suyama, from discussing Lauren’s famous relative on my show—since Lauren refuses to do it.”

Lauren folds her hands with flirting eyes. “Good luck getting her, sir.”

“Wait,” Taylor lights up. Did you say Viruet—as in Jude Viruet?”

“Bingo!” Berger lights up. “As in Jude Viruet, candidate for President of the Association of Christian States of America. And with the election just a week away, most polls have him winning. Say hello to Jude Viruet’s niece.”

“And I want to know more about the Hosanna Church,” Taylor says to Lauren, before she can respond to Berger. “I want to attend.”

“I will text you the address,” Lauren says happily. “And give you a VIP once you come.”

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## TEN YEARS EARLIER

The sign on the one-story stucco building reads HCCC—Hosanna Christian Church Consortium. It is tucked behind a small parking lot along Highway 41 in Sarasota, Florida. Inside a small modest office sits a middle-aged man with tan face, shaggy

black hair streaked with gray. His blue khaki outfit is punctuated with a white clerical collar. Yet his body is hard and sturdy, more like an NFL defensive back. The sign on his desk reads, Reverend Tyler Miranda.

The front door opens for a thin, attractive young woman with black pants suit and long brown hair hugging her ears and shoulders. She takes a seat in the cushioned chair next to Miranda's desk.

"I'm so sorry to bother you, sir. But I would not be a loyal assistant if I did not report some feedback I am getting from Consortia associates."

"Brandi Huerta, one of my favorite people in the whole world—whose words are always gold to me," says Miranda.

"Thank you, sir. I've heard comments that people don't think Tyler Miranda is your real name. They don't have specifics; just a vague suspicion—"

"Oh really?" Miranda says openly amused. "I am some kind of pedophile or escaped criminal hiding his identity?"

"No sir", Brandi laughs along. "I was reminded to raise the subject by those two black limos and rough looking guys with dark suits out in the parking lot."

"Here is my answer. I am not a sir. I am Tyler to you. We are all family here. Now, about your question, I could lie to you and say it's crap. But the truth is—don't ask, don't tell."

Brandi laughs again, "Yes sir—I mean, okay. And on the subject of important information, two Consortium elders, Mr. Brock and Mr. Jewell, said they will leave the consortium if you allow Mr. Taylor or any other gay or LGBT persons to continue to attend your church services."

"Yes, I've already gotten wind of those two Elders' concerns. Brandi, right now I want you to pretend that I am a gay person. Please explain how you are going to approach me in the ministry."

Brandi squirms for a few seconds, then raises her head confidently. "I would treat them like anyone else. I would be kind and focus on Gospel truth; that we are all sinners from a broken relationship with God, and since God is perfect, we can never be good enough to be reconciled to Him. But God in His mercy sent his son Jesus Christ to die on a cross to take all of our sins upon himself, and give us His perfection, so we can be reconciled with God, and be transformed and have eternal live in heaven with God, by simply putting our trust in Jesus as our savior."

"And?"

**“Oh, yeah. We don’t focus on their sexual sins, any more than we would focus on our own sins. We simply invite them to explore Gospel and Biblical truth, including the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Then let their relationship with Jesus work on their sexual behavior.”**

**Miranda picks up a dart and hurls it toward a dartboard on the far wall. “Bullseye, Brandi! A-plus for you. I would only add that, when Rod Taylor or any other LGBT person comes to a Consortium church service, we lavish the love of Jesus on them non-stop—together with truth of what the Bible teaches on sexuality. While they may define their identity on sexual orientation, we will define their identity on being God’s creation; and we will look for areas of agreement and common ground, to affirm their humanity to help them break away from their sexual stronghold--- Now Brandi, could you please explain that to our two esteemed Elders, so that they hear that Biblical truth from someone other than myself?”**

**“Sure, I would be glad to,” Brandi answers. “You trained me well, sir, I mean okay.”**

**Miranda sighs, “We are decades into this LGBT controversy, and how is it that much of the Christian church still doesn’t understand that we Christians have contributed to much of the cultural and legal persecution we experience, because of our hate and lack of Biblical nuance when addressing our LGBT friends?”**

**“On the other side, Missus Williams told me that if Mr. Brock and Mr. Jewell don’t want to accept gay people, they can leave the Consortium and find another church.”**

**Miranda rises and says in an enunciating voice. “No one is leaving this church Consortium. I will speak to all three of these individuals. With prayer and God’s help, we will resolve and reconcile this situation. Everyone, no matter what background, are welcome in the HCCC.”**

**There was a loud knock on the front door. “Brandi, could you please excuse me?” Brandi starts for her office beside the desk, but Miranda interrupts, “No, I mean take a walk, please? Consider this administrative leave for the rest of the day. Have fun.”**

**Brandi gives him a wry smile and then squeezes her way past two beefy, suit-clad men at the doorway. The two men, one Black, one White, step inside.**

**The Black man takes the honors, “Former President of the United States Jaime Velasquez is here for his appointed visit.”**

**“Former President? You mean, President Velasquez. He will always be my President.”**



**In steps a slightly heavy featured man with wavy gray hair and a brown blazer over a Hawai'ian shirt. Miranda goes out to shake his hand.**

**“Mr. President. Welcome.”**

**President Velasquez jerks his head, and the two Secret Service Officers step outside and close the door. “Jude Viruet, the kool kat with nine lives and countless identities,” President Velasquez says. “You know, your early honorary retirement and all those Special Achievement Awards for saving our great nation, still locked in impenetrable vaults, don’t erase the reality when I quoted that decades old Eagles song to you.”**

**“You can check out anytime you like. But you can never leave,” Miranda says.**

**“Jude, as long as you live, you will never escape the shadow of your former employer.”**

**President Velasquez takes a remote out of his pocket. One the agents outside opens the door for a flatbed silver robot. Mounted on the robot is a two-foot-tall golden sculpture of a helmeted warrior raising his sword toward the heavens. The President lifts the sculpture and hands it to Viruet.**

**“Wow, Mr. President. You remembered my hobby of admiring sculptures. Thanks to the prodding of my former CIA colleague Belinda Lansford. But I never owned one. Until now. Thank you so much, sir.”**

**“Can you interpret that?”**

**“No sir, I will let you do it.”**

**“His attire is one of a warrior. But with his head and sword lifted, and the ephod, he is also a Priest. That is what you are, Jude. Will always be. A Warrior Priest.”**

**“Wow, you are going to make my head so big I’ll need a pin to pop it, like a balloon,” Viruet says. Then he moves the sculpture against the wall. Directly under a portrait of Jesus Christ. “Now, that is the proper alignment.”**

**“How old are you now, Jude? And you’ve never been married? Ex-Presidents, you know, attract lots of people and have plenty of women colleagues. How about I introduce to some?”**

**“The curse of Colavito,” Viruet moans.**

**“Come again, Jude?”**

**“Back in the 1960s, the Cleveland Indians traded their best and most popular player over the fans’ objections. They were cursed for many years after that with teams that never won a World Series. My curse of Colavito, from God, I believe is when I was sexually disobedient with a college student. It was my only overt sexual failing, but what does the Bible say? To whom much is given, much is required. God forgives sins, but there are still consequences for sins. I believe that those who are entrusted with Biblical leadership are held to a very high standard by God for conduct, especially sexually, and God will allow the exalted leaders especially to fall hard when they willfully sin. I have been blessed many women friends and experiences—but never anything permanent.”**

**“Yes, but God often relents from punishment,” President Velasquez answers.**

**“Yes sir. But if you are going to compare me to David in the Bible about his virtues as Warrior-Priest, you need to also compare me with David’s failings—and serious consequences of those failings.”**

**“Tyler Miranda. That was not a name that we gave you,” the President muses. “Do you remember your every alias?”**

**“The only aliases I acknowledge now are those given by the Holy Spirit:” Loved, forgiven, empowered, cleansed, graced, et cetera.”**

**President Velasquez points to his head. “I have memorized every one of your aliases. My two terms in office were successful, mostly because I learned to recognize the talented people working for me, and pour my life into them, and know important facets of their lives.”**

**“You did not come here just to give me a sculpture,” Viruet says knowingly.**

**“Yes, getting back to the Eagles song, I came with a message, and a lucrative sheet of paper, from US President Amy Swanson and Director of National Intelligence Cora Vernice. Your talents are not unknown by them.”**

**“Thanks to you, sir. And you trained them. Amy Swanson started out as one of your Interns, and Cora was on your Presidential staff. Part of your legacy.”**

**President Velasquez places the paper on Viruet’s desk. The Top Secret stamp is visible. “Jude, these are very generous financial terms for you to remain on “on call” status. Payment is contingent on your activation, of course. We bother you only in national crises, not routine intelligence matters, or the ongoing challenges and threats to our Republic. And these leaders are not Bullock. They will not try to coerce you into service. The choice will always be yours.”**

**“Yeah, just a constant fly in my ear. Out of respect for you Mr. President, my swatting of the fly will be gentle.”**

Velasquez chuckles, “Maybe I’ll just call that old flame of yours from the Roackaseen Valley nation. I betcha all those pleasant memories will spur you.”

“Nice try, Mr. President. Although it is close call, mentioning Vonda.”

President Velasquez gives Viruet a long look and then leaves.

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**Back to Present:**

Lauren is seated at a table at the Hosanna Church making sandwiches. It is in the gymnasium, and there are several rectangular tables with homeless people and other economically disadvantaged Sarasotans waiting for the church saints to bring their food. Sid Rockman and Paul DeMicco walk up to her.

Lauren swats her hair out of her right eye as she greets them with a smile. “Please don’t try calling me or e-mailing me yet. I’m changing both. I’ll update you tonight.”

“So how many requests for exorcism from strangers prompted that move?” Paul asks.

Lauren smiles, “Zero because of the switch. The last request I think was from Nigeria.”

Paul points, “See the older guy in plaid shirt, third table down on the left?”

“Don’t go there, Paul,” Sid says not too seriously.

Paul continues, “Seriously, Lauren, who is he talking to? No one! Except maybe some smoky blue mean floaters. How many, Lauren?”

“Cut it out, Paul,” says Sid. “That’s Ralph. He just needs to take his meds.” Lauren playfully pretends to throw a sandwich at them. “A little church history, Lauren,” Sid continues. “When you gave the five-dollar bill to the homeless guy down on Main Street yesterday, you would have at one time violated Hosanna Church Pastor Whittles’ command: Never give cash to a homeless person! They will use it for vices! Then we found Nate the wheelchair guy so disabled that he can do nothing for himself—but he has a sound mind, and no vices! With a tiny social security check, without the cash donations he wouldn’t make it. So Pastor Whittle changes his tune: Let the circumstances decide whether to give cash to a homeless person.”

**“Well, I am not a member of your church, anyway.” Lauren sticks her tongue at them. “And besides, I did pray on the Holy Spirit before flashing the cash.” She sticks out her tongue at them again.**

**Sid and Paul sit across from her at the table. Paul says, “We are your Christian brothers and dear friends, Lauren. After the food is served, please meet with us over in the Q room. Talk to us about this situation with your family that has you reluctant to mention them in public conversations. We are here for you. Always.” Lauren nods.**

**An hour later, Lauren, Sid and Paul are seated at a roundtable in a small closed church room. “Thank you for your concern. I love your love.” Lauren begins kindly. “When my grandparents in Ecuador bore Uncle Jude, they also bore my Mom, Maria. Uncle Jude was always this very healthy, virile, Latino machismo kind of guy right out of the womb. My Mom was born with mental disabilities. My grandparents were struggling low-paid teachers, and they thought that they could never pay the cost of rehab from Mom’s conditions. So out of pure love for my Mom, they found a wealthy Christian family, the Clementes, and put Mom up for adoption.**

**“They thought it best not to tell anyone. When my grannies emigrated to America, here in Sarasota, and Uncle Jude was a teenager, he thought he was an only child. The Clementes not only helped my Mom recover in Ecuador, but prayed and prayed, and Mom was miraculously cured of her disabilities. She grew up a normal child, and one with great faith that she has.”**

**Lauren pauses to wipe away a tear. “Mom and Uncle Jude grew up well into adulthood, totally unaware of the other person. Then, when Mom and Uncle Jude were well up in age, and I was already an adult, Mom connected with some Ecuadorians who told her the whole story. When she found out about Uncle Jude, after they had both been the US for a long time, I remember she told me with the excitement of a child finding her favorite toy. She was so encouraged that she changed her name from Maria Clemente Suyama to Maria Viruet Suyama.**

**“The problem started when she contacted Uncle Jude with the news. He did not believe her and rejected her. My maternal grandparents had already passed, so they could not verify. Uncle Jude, who was doing some deep cover national security work, suspected she may be an enemy plant to derail his career. Mom was very persistent, but Jude was just as resistant. He even got a restraining order against Mom.**

**Finally, after a detailed inquiry including DNA, Uncle Jude was finally convinced that Mom was his long-lost sister. One day he came to our home, and tearfully apologized to Mom, Dad, my brother and me. We all became close after that.**

**“The issue exploded again once Uncle Jude announced he is running for President in the ACSA. His opponents and the media found out about Uncle Jude’s meanness toward my Mom and used it to cast him as an ogre not trusted to represent family values in the ACSA. It is now a live wire.”**

**Sid and Paul hugs Lauren and she hugs them back.**

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**The bright camera beams on Jerry Berger sitting behind a desk. “Good day, sunshine state! This show is called the pulse of Tampa Bay and the pulse of North America. I am your host, Jerry Berger.” A photo of a middle-aged man, rugged tan face, with shaggy brown and gray hair pops up on the screen behind him. “It is exciting times for our sister nation, the Association of Christian States of America. The Presidential election is just a week away, and we have witnessed the meteoric rise of Jude Viruet, who just four months ago was a low-keyed Pastor using an alias, Tyler Miranda. Viruet as Miranda headed up a Christian consortium down in Sarasota, but when the ACSA was formed, he moved to Nashville and started the Revival Church there, which eventually grew into several hundred members.**

**“For most of the past year, the ACSA, which bans the designation of political party on ballots or the holding of primary elections, featured as its Presidential contenders, two Christian attorneys, James Watson and Martin Rahman. Then unnamed persons exposed Miranda as Jude Viruet, and then all kinds of accounts of Viruet’s CIA heroics while under the USA umbrella came to light. Although only shadowy details emerged about Viruet’s heroic feats, the ACSA population became enamored with such a hero in their midst. He was soon drafted to run for ACSA President.**

**“Interestingly, since all three candidates are serious Christians with the standard ACSA public policy agenda, with few major differences, the race became the comparison of two career politicians with political actions going back to the former USA, with this exciting new shining star, politically unstained, with a James Bond like resume.**

**“Viruet then took the risk to describe his Bridge Initiative to study more ways the three nations and Canada could find common ground together, in spite of the ugliness and violence that led to the fracturing of that former great nation. The reaction was varied. President Steve Jones here in the Liberation States of America called the common ground idea a pipe dream and a threat to freedoms. Federated States of America President Jenny Roem called the idea worth studying. Canadian Prime Minister Wilson, a professed Bible believing Christian like Viruet, called it an important first step toward further understanding and harmony.**

**“Just last week, ACSA President Amy Swanson, the only current leader who served both as United States President and the President of a breakaway Republic,**

**endorsed Viruet for President. The ACSA Constitution limits its President to one term, so President Swanson cannot run again. Additionally, former US President Jaime Velasquez, who remains very active in ACSA political circles, strongly endorsed Viruet. These two powerful endorsements helped propel Viruet from a longshot candidate to a slight lead in most polls.”**

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**The next day, afternoon. Lauren is seated in a sprawling grassy yard of a townhouse subdivision. It has a slight grade, and below her is a pond. The setting sun reflects off of the pond, and a stiff 70-degree breeze causes tiny wakes in the water.**

**A ten-foot alligator sits on the bank of the pond. Lauren, dressed in shorts and tank top, is about 15 feet away from the gator. Lauren is looking at the gator and the gator is looking back. Lauren is making funny faces at the creature, and little waving motions with her hands.**

**A 40-ish man, with close cropped black hair and surf shirt, approaches Lauren from the townhouse complex. He speeds up, then stops.**

**“Lauren! Can you come up here, please?”**

**“Sure.” Lauren, beaming, jogs up to join the man.**

**“First of all, young lady, I am not accepting your payment check for your stay at my place. This is free accommodations, for your wonderful work for the Lord here in Sarasota.”**

**“If you insist, Mr. Carson.” Lauren smiles. ‘I’ll getcha back some other way.”**

**“I don’t know about South Carolina. But here in Florida we do not get close to alligators.”**

**“I have strong family roots in Sarasota,” Lauren says. “So I know about gators. I also get a sense of assurance from the Holy Spirit about interactions with animals. With this friendly beast, who I’ve named Yawnee since he has been yawning a lot, I felt a sense of peace and assurance. Maybe angels surrounding us, too. Isaiah 11: lions, wolves and lambs lying down together.”**

**“Lauren you are such a blessing,” Carson says. “But sometimes you scare me a little.”**

**“Yes, the Gospel can be scary. And I don’t think we’ve yet seen the extent on God’s power here on Earth, before the rapture and tribulation.”**

**“Lauren, you have a visitor from Nashville. A stretch limo is parked outside my house.”**

**Carson and Lauren go into the modern townhouse. Sitting at a table in the den is a beefy man with slick brown suit, gold cuff links and brown hair with tight curls. He is not smiling.**

**“Lauren. Can we go outside?” He deadpans.**

**They step outside into the parking area bordering the townhouse. “I am Wilbur Flores, high level political consultant to your Uncle, Jude Viruet. That is, ACSA Presidential candidate Jude Viruet.”**

**“Nice to meet you, Mr. Flores. How is Uncle Jude?” Lauren says in an upbeat voice.**

**“Lauren, do you have any plans to go to Nashville, or make any public appearances?”**

**“Uh, no for Nashville. Public appearances to be determined.”**

**“I’ve already got an understanding with your brother Dom. I will be meeting with your Mom and Dad in Columbia soon. Here is the deal: This Hosanna 4 issue can sink your Uncle’s candidacy. Under no circumstances are you to contact Reverend Viruet—by phone, email, or visit—or discuss anything about him in any public forum. I need your assurance to me right now, Lauren.”**

**Lauren hesitates. “That decision will be up to God and Uncle Jude.”**

**“I don’t know if you are hearing me right. I am dead serious, and I have certain leverages at my disposal.”**

**“Respectfully, sir, I think you heard me the first time.” Lauren reaches into her shorts pocket for a calling card. “This is my new contact information. Can you please give this to Uncle Jude, so he knows where to find me?”**

**Lauren assertively hands the card to him. Flores rips the cards into about eight pieces and walks away, and says in retreat, “Eyes will be on you, young lady.”**

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**The following day, Lauren, Sid and Paul, casually dressed in jeans, are walking slowly down Main Street in Sarasota passing out one page Evangelism sheets. At the corner is a white-haired Black man tearing through an ancient Jimi Hendrix song on an amplified guitar. He stops playing at the approach of the threesome, who drop some small bills in the open case.**

**“The Hosanna 4!” The man exclaims. “Or is it now the Hosanna 3? Where is your relay anchor?”**

**“Carly? She is actually in a recording studio now. Her talent is amazing!” Lauren says.**

**“Just playing with y’all. I actually talked to her yesterday. Right here.”**

**“Sid, Paul and Lauren,” Sid introduces, pointing.**

**“Call me Guitar James.”**

**“Okay, Guitar James, we’ll play together. Your talent and my invisible notes,” Lauren says, doing some air guitar riffs.**

**“You down with Hosanna 4? And Jesus’s truth and promises?” Paul asks.**

**“I believe in God, and Jesus was a great person. I think God is present in different religions and does miracles that way. Like with you cats.”**

**Sid says, “How do you explain that Muhammed, Buddha and other religious leaders never claimed to be God? Only Jesus did, saying before Abraham was born, I am. Yahweh, God almighty. How do we know he resurrected? The Roman and Jewish authorities never produced a dead body of Jesus. How is that possible if Jesus’s resurrection claim was false? There here over 500 witnesses to Jesus’s resurrection as cited in thousands of early written accounts, more prevalent than any other written authority in history. How do you explain his disciples choosing a torturous death rather than just telling the authorities that the Gospel was all a lie? How do you explain the Prophet Isaiah describing in detail the crucifixion of the Jesus Christ, more than 700 years before it actually happened? Or the millions of transformed lives that cannot be explained by human effort? Do you want more?”**

**“I got a gig goin’ right now here on my street pad,” James replies.**

**Lauren interjects, “Can we meet with you later, and explain God and Jesus in more detail? Here, please read this, and you can call any of us with questions at the phone numbers listed. Here are a few more sheets, you can share with your posse.”**

**“How can we pray for you, James?” Paul asks.**

**An expression of appreciation flashes across James’s face. “Well, type 2. I’m on insulin.”**

**Lauren, Sid and Paul lower their heads, place hands on him and mumble quiet prayers. Including for his salvation.**



Two blocks away, a short young Black man with a black suede jacket and crewcut, reaches into his jacket pocket for a switchblade. He clicks it open, and the blade shines.

Sid says, “Let’s spread out, each taking a corner.” He divides the Evangelism sheets between them.

After a few minutes, the pedestrian traffic slows, so there is temporarily no one to hand the sheets to. Suddenly the young Black man is running toward Lauren from the other corner. Lauren sees the fist pumping the knife, and menacing eyes fixed on her—and she backs away, clutching her red bag.

Just as quickly the Black man stops about ten feet in front of Lauren. Now he is slowly backing away, eyes wide. Lauren glances behind her. No one. Soon the man turns and begins to walk away.

Sid and Paul, sensing possible danger, come to the rescue.

“Did you see that?” Lauren says, almost breathless. “I could make out the borders of a possessing apparition over that man. Something—it had to be angelic intervention, made him stop. His eyes were like a deer in the headlights.”

Lauren begins to follow the man.

“Don’t push it, Lauren,” says Paul.

“I get a strong sense that the Lord wants this spiritual warfare waged,” she calls behind her. She picks up her walking speed. Sid and Paul reluctantly catch up to her.

“Well try it, just a few blocks,” Lauren says.

The young Black man does not pay attention that he may be followed. He is walking stridently, until he crosses Fruitville. Lauren and friends keep at least a block away from him.

Finally, he ducks into a small bungalow home two blocks north of the highway. Lauren and friends jog toward the house. They slow down as they hear an echo of a man shouting inside the house. The wooden front door is closed. The angry shouting continues. They walk around to the back. There is an open screen door.

“Lauren!” Sid whispers loudly, but Lauren opens the door and walks right in. With trepidation, Sid and Paul follow her in.

Into a musty old den, and the knife wielding man is facing them on the other side of the room. He angrily raises the knife, but does not move.

**There are four young women lounging in old chairs. They are scantily clad, with short shorts and some cleavage. Their expressions range from despair to confusion. Bruises on their faces are evident and one of the multi-ethnic women has a bandage on her forehead.**

**“What do you want? The man demands. “These are my ho’s and you can do nothing about it.”**

**“Lauren, this is a police matter,” Sid says.**

**“You do that, Sid, and I’m gonna do this. A Godly presence is still with us, or else he would probably be attacking me.” Sid dials 911.**

**Lauren continues, “What is your first name, sir? I think we may be friends one day. Please just remain still.” Lauren takes off her cross necklace and holds up the cross. “In the Name of Jesus Christ, I command you, Satan and your evil forces, to be gone. Get out!” Lauren repeats it three times.**

**“My name is Max,” he says almost trance-like. Max appears disoriented. He quietly sits down.**

**“It’s gone,” Lauren says, beaming. “We had extra Godly intervention, I think—Max, how do you feel right now?”**

**“A little confused and my mind has gone blank, for some reason. I feel a little bit of a high. Weird, because I didn’t shoot any smack today.”**

**Lauren says, “Max, whatever is going on here, we are not angry at you. Ephesians 6 says our struggle is against the spiritual authorities of the dark world, not against people. But you are doing very terrible things here, helped by evil spiritual forces.” Lauren hands him an Evangelism sheet. “Please read this and make the most important decision of your life. It will not only save you for eternity, but protect you from diabolical possessions.”**

**Sid approaches one of the dark-skinned girls. “Are you okay?” He touches one of the facial bruises.**

**Her eyes are pleading. “We had to ho for him,” she says demurely. “Otherwise he beats us. Worse, he’s tied to gang bangers, and says he will hurt our families if we get out of line.”**

**“Listen to me,” Sid says. “You are going to be free from this. Okay?” Sid hugs her, and Lauren and Paul give gentle hugs to other girls.**

**“I think I understand now why God wanted this to happen and sent some spiritual fire power,” Lauren says. “There is nothing God reviles more, I think, than slavery. The Holy Spirit within us will make us revile slavery just as much.”**

**An echo of a siren sounds outside. Then louder.**

**A half hour later Lauren is driving her South Carolina-plated car east on Bee Ridge. Her cell sings, and she picks it up.**

**“Hi Dom.”**

**“Lauren, it’s Ma. She just suffered a heart attack. She’s alive and recovering at the hospital in Columbia.”**

**“Oh gosh.....oh crap. I’ll be at the airport in an hour.”**

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**The ID on the hospital bed says Maria Suyama. Prone with a gown and hair tucked away, her slightly aging, slightly hued face seems peaceful, as the IV drops liquid into her vein. Lauren walks in, slightly heaving. Her father, a stout man with black wavy hair and a vaguely Asian appearance, sits beside his wife’s bed. His corporate green khaki shirt carries a stenciled: Joe Suyama, Regional Supervisor.**

**Lauren gives her father a hug. “You came straight here, Pa.”**

**“Never left your Mom, honey. That padded bench over there will make due tonight—Also, Dom will be late. Snow in Boston and some stupid FSA bureaucratic messup in their cross-national travel system.”**

**Maria begins to stir. Her eyes begin to open and a pleasant smile grows on her face. “Is that my Rennie? Rennie, is that you?” Her voice sounds strained.**

**“Yes, Ma, your Rennie is here,” Lauren answers. “Rece por ti cada minuto en el avion. Gloria a Dios!”**

**Maria joyously spreads her arms wide, IV and all, and Lauren reaches her for a hug.**

**“Not too hard, honey,” Joe Suyama says.**

**A young Black nurse steps inside. She is smiling. “She is doing much better. I think she will make it fine. She may need some quiet time soon.”**

**“Thank you so much,” Lauren says, bowing.**

There is a rapid knock on the door frame. In steps a brown clad man, white clerical collar, rugged tan face and physique and shaggy brown hair with noticeable streaks of gray.

“Uncle Jude!” Lauren explodes.

Viruet walks up to Lauren and takes Lauren’s hands in his.

“How is my favorite niece?”

“Your only niece,” Lauren says.

“Then I can’t lose, right?”

“Uncle Jude, I am sorry if my spiritual activities are hurting your political career. I hope you are not mad at me.”

“You know the rules, Niece Rennie. Come on, let’s have the syrup, the multiethnic dixie chant.”

Lauren curtsies and bats her eyelids. “Well, I declauh, sah, how a noble lak you can evuh fine tahm to evuh, evuh say a word to this lowlaff piece of trash down heuh in Sout Ca’lahna—oh my gosh, I cannot even do it. Uncle Jude, hardly anyone in South Carolina talks like that anymore.” Lauren breaks out in infectious laughter.

“Juju! Quit harassing my Rennie!” Maria calls from the bed as the laughter continues.

“Sis Mari! Niece Rennie hasn’t lost a beat!” Viruet jokingly crows. “Now I need to answer Niece Rennie’s question. Her spiritual gift she has passed on to me—and I see it! There it is! A halo over Niece Rennie’s head! I know you all can’t see it; it’s my special gift from the Almighty. Seriously, I am honored to be in the presence of the new Hurricane Lauren. We all love you, Ren.”

Lauren is covering her face as her father claps.

Viruet leans over to hug Maria. “Mari, eres una mujer dura y bendecita y estaras bien.” He kisses both of her cheeks. Maria clutches Viruet, maybe a little too hard given her condition.

“Juju, it means so much to me for you to be here,” Maria says.

“BroJoe,” Viruet says to Lauren’s father, hugging his shoulders. “How is your gout, man?”

“Better. I feel all your prayers.”

**“I’ll keep praying. And BroJoe, I know you are smart enough to know why I keep wearing this clerical collar.”**

**“Yes. It’s because, with all the attention on the action-oriented national security stuff in your past, you need to accentuate the Priest side of your Warrior-Priest nickname.”**

**Viruet high-fives Joe Suyama. “Yes, the key to winning this election is pouring on the luhve!”**

**An older White doctor appears at the doorway. “Excuse me. We do have visitation rules here. For the safety of the patient. There are two more gentlemen outside, connected to the pastor-politician, which I assume is you,” nodding at Viruet.**

**Viruet approaches the Doctor with his hands folded contritely. “Please. Just 20 minutes and we’ll be gone. Promise.”**

**The Doctor nods and beckons toward the door. In steps Wilbur Flores and a short White man in a green suit and slick brown hair with a duck tail.**

**Flores’ demeanor is dire. “Jude. I could not get on an airplane fast enough over here, and if I had a private jet, I’d be here faster. I would have called you, but before I could sneeze, I hear you are in Columbia! Jude, what are you doing?” He snatches a sheet from the White man behind him and holds it up. His voice rises, “Right now, as we speak, you are slated for a speech at the Gaylord Center in Nashville. Are you out of your mind? This could cost you the election!”**

**Viruet responds calmly, “There are more important things than elections. Like family. Especially in a crisis moment.”**

**“Your own campaign manager, Fernando, didn’t even know about you coming here.”**

**Viruet shrugs. “I left him a voice message. If he doesn’t check it, it’s on him.”**

**“Kyle, given me that other sheet,” Flores growls, and snatches it from the young White man. He waves it with wild eyes. “This is your schedule in Nashville for tomorrow morning. You being here means you are stiffing Amy Swanson, the President of the Association of Christian States of America!”**

**“I called Amy and explained the family situation,” Viruet responds.**

**“And how do I not know about it? And your niece Lauren over here. If the press gets wind of you with her—half the Christian population thinks she is a quack and a fraud.”**

**“You have one minute to back up that statement with facts. Or I will physically throw you out of this room. “**

**“Alright, sorry, let me rephrase that. There is a division in the Christian church about whether these spiritual antics still occur. And we don’t want these doctrinal divisions accentuated five days before a national election—in a Christian nation.”**

**The Doctor reappears. “That is enough. This is an institution to save lives, not some raucous campaign headquarters.”**

**“Mr. Flores is just leaving,” Viruet says sternly. “He will be on a plane to Nashville soon. And Wilbur, when you arrive at your office, clean out your desk. Because I am severing relations with you on my Presidential campaign. And Doc, if Mr. Flores is not out of this hospital in five minutes, you have my permission to have security escort him out. For the rest of us, just five minutes, please.”**

**The Doctor waves in exasperation.**

**“Kyle, you can stay. I want you to take a picture of our family together. And release it to the media. Let the ACSA voting world see the importance of family values and family love.”**

**As they are posing around Maria’s bed, a brightly smiling Lauren stands next to Viruet and hugs his shoulder firmly.**

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**The following afternoon. Jude Viruet, clad in brown khaki with white clerical collar, is standing behind a podium on a raised stage with Christian murals in the background. He addresses the microphone:**

**“Brothers and sisters in Christ, we love that you have chosen to come to my house, or more specifically, God’s house where I am just a prayerful steward, lost without His daily directions to me.” Viruet’s tenor voice pulsates loudly. “Look at this wonderful sea of glory, starting from ten feet in front of me, reaching the back wall. Where today we unmask a secret known by us, and now pronounced to the outside world: The backbone of the nascent nation Association of Christian States of America, success, prosperity and positive spiritual energy—and yes the undeniable political successes—is the churches in the ACSA coming together across racial lines—that’s you out there, Christendom’s multi-racial leaders, meeting together, praying together, serving people in need together, and sharing ideas about Bible-based public policies. Yes, the church was slow to embrace racial unity and inclusion, and that sadly contributed to the breakup of the former United States of America. I mean, how was a weak and divided church supposed to counter secular cultural corruption, and hate mongering and constant personal attacks as the**

standard fare of politics in the former USA? But you, brothers and sisters, got it right, God's heart for racial unity, reconciliation and Biblical standards for justice, to bring resounding success to the ACSA. Isn't God great?" Loud applause follows.

"Now, how far are we from the country music hall of fame? Is that music just tied to Nashville and the ACSA? No! You will hear it in New York, Michigan, Mississippi and all across the 50 States of North America. The same can be said for the Memphis blues, Cleveland rock, New Orleans jazz. Don't you get teary-eyed remembering how much we former USA Americans had in common? On holidays, we would drive hundreds of miles to visit dear family members and carried the assumptions of values tied to the former United States of America. Most of you have read accounts of my national security actions in service to the former USA. Those details are and will forever be locked away in confidential vaults. Somewhere. You think I'm going to tell you?" Laughter follows. "But those experiences in service to the United States of America will forever stay close to my heart—Because I was close eyewitness to the United States of America rising up gloriously, like an eagle."

"You are running for ACSA President, not the President of the dead USA. Traitor!" Came a catcall from the audience. Several of Viruet's supporters loudly boo.

Viruet calms the crowd. "Show the man some love. While I answer his concern. I have joined most of you in visibly supporting the Amy Swanson Administration. What has our Christian values brought to the ACSA? Compared to the Libertarian States of America and the Federated States of America, we have the lowest rates of poverty, the least amount of wealth differential because of the Christian labor relations concepts that our churches and government have embraced—even compared to the socialism of the FSA. We have the lowest crime rate among the three nations, the highest GDP, and our race relations are a model for the entire world. Is all that an accident? Can we be surprised about these successes when we passionately follow Biblical solutions for all of societal functions? By corporate obedience God has rewarded the ACSA as a prosperous, peaceful and positive nation. And we are no Christian ISIS. The Christian population in the ASCA is only about 79%, and we work closely in common ground with our Jewish and Muslim friends, many of whom have similar values to ours.

"Now, Mr. Traitor accuser: I am running for ACSA President because I support those successes and want to build on them, for the benefit of the entire ACSA. But do I want to export these values to Americans outside our national borders? And beyond that in the world? A resounding yes! Did God tell the Apostle Paul to stay in Jerusalem and build a four walls church with holy huddles? What's the Great Commission? Don't offend people by talking about Jesus? Hardly.

**“So yes, I appeal to the many Christians still living in the Libertarian States of America and the Federated States of America. Yes, we will have political differences. But let us just appeal to the Gospel and the Bible together, because Jesus is above politics, something many of the former USA leaders never understood. Embrace God over political ideas and cultural differences, and just let God sort it out—as He has done spectacularly here in the ACSA.**

**“I back up my own rhetoric with a bold proposal: As President of the ACSA, I will not only greatly enhance ACSA successes by a daily walk with God—But I will also propose that the Governments of the LSA and the FSA agree with us to hold a national vote, in all three nations. The question on the ballot: Should we reconstitute the former United States of America? The logistics would be a one-year transition to adopt a new Constitution. This Constitution would be a modern version but would contain the human rights protections and freedoms in the original Constitution.”**

**There is sustained applause, but also some noticeable murmuring.**

**“Let me close with a statistic and a Biblical reference: In the former USA, where much of the church was racially divided, politicized and often mean and judgmental, there was a noticeable percentage of young adults abandoning the Christian faith. In addition, there were fewer young adults accepting Jesus. The American church of that time was often accused of hypocrisy. And for much of the church, the accusations were sadly valid. Now, however, young adults are seeing a revitalized church in the ACSA, getting it right on positive and compassionate race relations, and doing a better job visibly rising up in support of people who are marginalized, mistreated or suffering. The result according to stat gurus is a slow uptick of young adults and youth giving their lives to Christ. And that is not just in the ASCA. It is also happening in the religiously neutral FSA and LSA—and Canada!—Well, and we already know how God is working south of the borders.**

**“Now the Bible reference: Can anybody show me where the United States of America, or the current 50 States, is mentioned in Biblical descriptions of the last days? No? I can’t find a Biblical reference, either. I am not God and cannot give you a solid answer to that. What I strongly suspect is this: The Christian remnant in America will be so strong and so visible, and so connected to high governing authority—that when the rapture comes, all of these wonderful Christ-following people will be gone, leaving just a pagan mess incapable of exerting any reasonable influence. America—and I mean all three former US States—would just be like a third world nation, easily absorbed into a European agenda, where most Biblical scholars believe that the anti-Christ will evolve from.**

**“So I say, Christian revival now! Not just in the ACSA, but all across America.”**

**The crowd stands and roars with applause.**



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The same afternoon as Viruet's speech: Lauren, Sid and Paul are seated on a blanket on their favorite Sarasota beach, Lido beach. They are dressed in bathing suits with accompanying towels and bags. The Gulf of Mexico beckons to them from about 50 feet away.

Seated with them, near the lifeguard stand, is a lanky young man with long bleach blonde hair.

Flicking the hair out of her right eye, Lauren displays a dreamy smile at the visitor. "Early November in Sarasota, so warm and so peaceful, and all I want to do is praise God for his blessings. We are just sojourners in this temporary, thorny existence, and our mission is to prepare everyone for the next wonderful, perfect eternal life."

The man responds, "I've been lifeguarding here for two years. In all my assignments, I've never seen the Gulf turbulent. I was in New York for the last hurricane. It is positive karma from my focusing on positive thoughts all the time."

Lauren says, "I see those soft waves. Gentle, licking my toes. The beautiful shimmering sunshine reflections. Waves emitting a blissful spray. I just want to bask in it for hours. But I know at some point a tsunami will hit. Maybe a cancer diagnosis, betrayal by close person, a devastating criminal act—maybe losing a job and having no income. When that tsunami hits, we will need more than positive thinking. We will need the power of the supernatural, from a sovereign God, to get us through these tsunamis."

"I am happy for you Christians, that you get satisfaction. That's the beauty of our culture. Everybody can get along when we respect everyone's choice to follow their own destiny and beliefs."

"Existentialist dilemma," Lauren replies gently. "The logic of everyone defining their own morality is like trying to climb a mountain on ice. Please consider, Tom, that if there is no objective moral standard, then what right do we have to question anyone's behavior? A pedophile would say, hey, that's my thing! On what basis could we criticize even Hitler? Moral relativism leads to moral anarchy and defines hell on Earth. But our consciences tell us there's got to be something better."

Sid adds, "I am encouraged that objective moral authority from God exists. If not, I might go crazy, seeing all these bad people seemingly getting away with their horrible acts. I remain peaceful and positive, knowing that there is a God of perfect justice, who will eventually call evildoers to account, even if we don't see it."

Paul takes an Evangelism sheet out of his bag. "Hey Tom. Why don't you read this. Only take a few minutes. Call us with any questions, okay?"

**Tom takes the sheet and walks back to the lifeguard stand.**

**“Thank you for not kicking us off your beach, Tom,” Lauren calls jokingly, waving.**

**Lauren pulls a worn, black covered Bible from her bag. She turns the pages for the right passages. Her dark eyes grow heavy, and her head drops a little.**

**Paul uses a finger to flick hair away from Lauren’s right eye. “You okay, my sister?”**

**Lauren ventures a smile. “Very little sleep last night.”**

**“Right! You were going to tell us about something that happened yesterday.”**

**“Sorry, it’s been painful to talk about it and I wanted to focus on something else. Well, here goes. While I’m in Ma’s hospital room in Columbia, my boss calls me via video. He needs an emergency fill-in for an important health meeting in Tampa this morning. My Mom and Dad are all around when this call comes in. Pa says, Ma will be fine. He is very insistent that I go to Tampa and do my duty as a loyal employee. Ma also encourages me to go.**

**“So I get off the plane in Tampa last night. While I am at the baggage claim, I get another video call. This time from the owner of the company, Mr. Giles. He says don’t worry about the Tampa meeting. Your services are no longer needed in our company.”**

**“Just like that?” Sid says. “No request for face-to-face meeting to discuss it?”**

**Lauren shakes her head as a tear appears. “Such a sweet voice.” A note of sarcasm. “He says, Lauren, this is nothing personal. You have been a great employee and a person of great character. But the controversy surrounding you may threaten our bottom line.”**

**“Who have you told about this?” Paul asks.**

**“Just my Dad so far. He was very encouraging, as always.”**

**Paul says, “Anything you need from us. Anytime, when you’re ready.”**

**“I need your prayers. I couldn’t sleep well because I am so angry. So disgusted with myself.”**

**“Lauren!” Sid says pointedly. “Don’t beat yourself up, you are going through grieving and it is natural.”**

**“No, Sid. The Bible is clear about feeling hate. I can’t believe how weak I am. I am looking up passages on forgiveness as a reminder, to spiritually slap myself in the face. One thing you can both do for me. Could you please join me right now for a prayer for my repentance and that I would forgive?”**

**They bow their heads in prayer.**

**An hour later, Volleyball Carly has joined them on the beach. They are singing repeatedly the Hosanna song, the anthem of Hosanna 4. Occasionally people walk by, and the Hosanna 4 wave and smile as they sing.**

**As they take a break, Sid says, “This may uplift you a little, Lauren. Last night I had an amazing dream. You were in it. And the voice in the dream was, God will use Lauren to build unity across North America. No details. But it was a recurring message in the dream. Genesis 37?”**

**Lauren’s eyebrows furrow. “You are comparing me to Joseph in the Bible? Come on, bro, it’s just a crazy dream.”**

**“Lauren, look at me---what makes you think that God uses only you to deliver spiritual blessings and miracles?”**

**“Whew, it’s been a bad day. I’m so sorry Sid. Please forgive my sinful attitude.”**

**“The dream was all in living color,” Sid says lightly. “And I saw turquoise, your favorite color.” That makes Lauren laugh.**

**Lauren’s cellphone rings, from the pocket of her shorts she put over her bathing suit. She excuses herself, walking about 20 feet away.**

**It is a video call, identified as coming from Jude Viruet.**

**“Uncle Jude?”**

**Instead, she sees a Black man, middle aged with thick black and gray hair. “I am using your Uncle’s system for your familiarity recognition. My name is Terry Fowler. Do you have a couple minutes?”**

**“Yeah, sure.”**

**“Your Uncle heard about your recent employment trauma. He and I just talked. Former USA President Jaime Velasquez and I are heading up the Bridge Initiative, a foundation that works closely with ACSA government officials. The mission of our NGO is to study, you know, like a think tank, issues that may be common to the five North American nations, including Canada and Mexico. We brainstorm, we research—and your Uncle Jude is a major player with the Bridge Initiative. One of**

**the issues we will be studying is health care. And it is just God's providence that you have training in health care that can be helpful. Would you consider coming to Nashville to work for us? Do you need time to think about, Lauren?"**

**"Yes, I mean no, I mean, I thought about it, and I am definitely interested!"**

**"We love your spirit and integrity, Lauren, and we would be honored if you could visit Nashville in time for election day, when we expect to be celebrating your Uncle Jude's election as President of the ACSA. Can you be in Nashville by the morning of November 7<sup>th</sup>? We will take care of your accommodations from here."**

**"Yes, yes. I cannot thank you enough, Mr. Fowler."**

**"Call me Terry."**

**"Yes, Terry, and please thank Uncle Jude for me. Before I give him a rousing personal thank you in Nashville."**

**Lauren runs back to her three friends, and after about 30 seconds there is joyous whooping, and the Hosanna 4 leaping in the sand.**

**A soccer ball lands at their feet from kids at a neighboring blanket. The tall, big boned Carly starts to kick it, but instead lifts it and spikes it hard, like a volleyball, back at the beach kids.**

**"By coincidence, or God's providence, I got a call today," Carly says, voice excited. "There is an Internet group from Alabama that wants to put us on TV to talk about the Hosanna 4 event. I already have the address and time."**

**"Why not? That's thousands, at least, to hear the Christian Gospel," Sid says.**

**"Here is the best part," Carly says. "They have given us a broadcast date. Evening, November 5<sup>th</sup>. That is just two days before your Uncle's election."**

**"Good," says Lauren. "Why don't we all drive to Alabama together? Then you can all join me in Nashville, okay? It's only a short drive from Alabama to Nashville. I don't know about the accommodations yet, but if we have to, we'll just grab some sleeping bags. And then sing and preach!"**

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**November 5<sup>th</sup>, mid-afternoon. Carly is driving her silver Pulsating Panther sedan as it approaches the Florida-Georgia line. Sid is shotgun, with Paul and Lauren in the back seat. In preparation for the promised TV broadcast, they are dressed to the gills. Lauren wears a knee length blue dress covered by her gold cross necklace. Carly is wearing a bright green dress. Red lipstick for the women, and Lauren gave**

her hair a little frizz. Paul and Sid have designer shirts with cufflinks, black pants, and suits carefully stretched out in the trunk.

**Their fast-moving vehicle approaches a large sign, reading in big black print, YOU ARE LEAVING THE LIBERTARIAN STATES OF AMERICA. LEAVE UNDER YOUR OWN PERIL: TO YOUR FREEDOMS**

**The next sign, right after it, reads, WELCOME TO THE ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN STATES OF AMERICA. And below that in smaller print, JUST A REMINDER TO KEEP YOUR VALID PASSPORT HANDY. Below a black line is a Welcome To Georgia sign, together with the Georgia State flag.**

**Jerry Berger is seated in his throne of a chair as the lights blare and the cameras role. “Good day Sunshine State! This show is the pulse of Tampa Bay and the pulse of North America.” A heavysset bearded White man with brown jacket is seated to Berger’s left. “They are calling this the 48 hours of chaos in North America. Following Jude Viruet’s provocative speech pledging to reunite the fractured States of America, extremists in the other two nations have risen up to create havoc that border on mass domestic terrorism.” Fiery buildings appear on video behind Berger. “This is the scene in downtown Portland, where Marxist radicals have firebombed buildings, reminiscent of the unrest of the 20’s decade.” Another photo shows several police cruisers, sirens flashing. “This is a ravine near the Idaho-Washington border, where White Nationalist and Marxist militias fired automatic weapons at each other. Local authorities say 11 are dead and scores injured. LSA President Jones accused the FSA of sending some of their citizens into the LSA to start trouble.”**

**Another photo is in Times Square, New York. Against a highrise is a huge white sign with the letters, JUDE VIRUET SAVED THE USA MANY TIMES. NOW SAVE IT AGAIN! There is a huge police line protecting about 30 people from a raging mob of Marxists, many waving red flags, and throwing debris at the sign barriers and police officers. “In the LSA, White Nationalists, obviously well organized underground, have firebombed more than two dozen properties of suspected Viruet and ACSA sympathizers, most of whom are people of color. There have been two terrorist attacks of unknown origin in the ACSA, including one in Charlotte that killed seven people. Violent protests of Marxists in FSA and suspected radical militias in the LSA are gripping many cities in those two nations.”**

**From the moving car in Georgia, Lauren, Sid and Paul are live streaming the Berger broadcast on their advanced phones.**

**Berger continues, “I have invited expert on politics Harry Cannon to comment on these sad developments in the last two days. Dr. Cannon is from Toronto, Canada, and I want to get an independent assessment, not tied to any of the three American nations—Dr. Cannon, what do you make of this two-day explosion?”**

**Cannon clears his throat, “These violent troublemakers are on the fringe extremes of their respective nations, and they are leveraging the violence not only to gain visibility for themselves, but to burn every bridge they can, to show the world a mockery of Jude Viruet’s unity proposal. The more havoc they raise, the more they believe they will show the futility of unifying these nations. They carry the sentiments of millions more, nonviolent, in the LSA and FSA concerned about any attempts to encroach on their new nations. The Presidents of the two nations haven’t done a whole lot to chill this violence. President Jones has publicly denounced Viruet, stating that any ACSA incursion into the LSA will threaten their freedoms, and that Viruet will reimpose civil rights and racial justice policies that were outlawed by the LSA Constitution. President Roem is rattling on about how Viruet and the ACSA will try to ban abortions in the FSA. The Marxists in particular are raging against the ACSA. They don’t want God, traditional family, restrictions on women’s right to choose, or the third wave free enterprise policies in the ACSA that run counter to socialism. I think LSA President Jones crossed a line with a dog whistle, saying that if Viruet is in control of three of the nations, illegal aliens from the large Latin American nation of Aztlan will be encouraged to flow up through Mexico into the American States.”**

**“I find that statement a little ridiculous, if you believe respected media accounts,” Berger says. “Apparently, many years ago, when Viruet was a USA undercover CIA agent, his actions actually helped neutralize some of the radical posturings of Aztlan.”**

**“When you are in power, you get away with scandalous lies more than if the common streetcleaner slanders someone,” Cannon says.**

**“Okay. What do you make of Viruet’s bold call for cross-national reunification?”**

**“It is a heartfelt and valiant idea. I’m not sure the timing is right, coming right before the election. I’m also not sure that the LSA and FSA citizens are quite ready to put humpty back together again. Viruet’s comment on the LSA’s racial policies did not help the situation.”**

**“In what way, sir?” Berger asks.**

**“Well, Viruet commented that the legally enforced racial neutral posture of the LSA just reinforces racial inequality. He cited that Whites are 70% of the LSA population, and they are very conscious of their own race, even if quietly. Viruet used the term, race neutral underlying injustice. Many Whites would adopt racially neutral on its face, but in actions would be subtly helpful to Whites, to the detriment of Blacks and people of color, says the Reverend. Viruet cited statistics showing wide social-economic gaps between Blacks and Whites in the LSA, and several attacks on Black people where Whites were careful not to use the N word or to display overt racism.”**

**“Is Reverend Viruet wrong? He cites the ACSA as a positive example, where there are racial justice standards, and much great equality and positive relations between the races.”**

**Cannon responds, “Reverend Viruet is wrong to the extent that he would expect to win over more LSA people to his cross-national unity cause. The whole LSA was formed from a mindset of color blindness to accompany their limited government mantra. Viruet calls racism a deep sin, and that it is a default sin pattern of many if not most people. I don’t believe he is that far off when he says that each of us is naturally comfortable being around people who look and act like ourselves. Viruet the Pastor cites Romans 13 as a societal authority of accountability, to limit racist and sinfully racially selfish actions.”**

**“Thank you, Dr. Cannon. How will Viruet’s bold proposal impact the ACSA election?” Berger asks.**

**“When you look at Viruet’s solid electoral base, probably 90% Are Rah! Rah! Speak the truth, leverage the Gospel. Don’t compromise! But the 10% may blame Viruet indirectly for stoking the American unrest. The 10% can cost him the election.”**

**“Recent polls bear that out,” Berger says. “Today’s polls show Viruet 5% behind the frontrunner, Martin Rahman. That’s a drop in Viruet’s support over the last two days. Just outside the margin of error.”**

**The intern Taylor hands a sheet of paper to Jerry Berger. “Okay, we have breaking news. Within the past hour, there was a video conference among the three national Presidents, ACSA President Amy Swanson, LSA President Steve Jones and FSA President Jenn Roem. The meeting can be summarized as follows: Both the LSA and the FSA President announced that they are mobilizing their national law enforcement offices to confront the violence. Jen Roem has denounced the Marxists in her nation. President Jones admitted that the militia terrorists in the LSA were White Nationalists in spite of using non-racial language in most cases. President Jones denounced these groups. In return, these two Presidents asked ACSA President Amy Swanson to muzzle her loose cannon, meaning Jude Viruet. President Swanson reportedly responded that she had talked to Viruet, but could not put words back in his mouth.”**

**A heaviness fills the Prowling Panther sedan, navigating down a narrow road indicated by GPS. Oppressive darkness envelopes them, with no streetlights and very little population. They come upon a large sign reading, “WELCOME TO THE LIBERTARIAN STATES OF AMERICA, THE WORLD’S BASTION OF FREEDOM. Below a black line is smaller print: Welcome to Alabama, together with the Alabama State flag.**

**“I don’t feel comfortable about this,” Carly says. “We are going into some kind of low-grade war zone. The LSA is burning, with violence and apparent antebellum style hate. How do we know we won’t cross the paths of these crazies?”**

**“Should we put it to a vote? Go or not to go?” Paul says.**

**Lauren says, “This is a consensus trip. If one person feels unsafe, we turn around. I can always fly to Nashville later.”**

**“I agree,” Sid says. “It’s not the end of the world if we miss this TV show.”**

**“I can’t believe I just said that,” Carly says. “I live in the flippin’ LSA! What am I thinking? Don’t let my silly paranoia wreck this fun trip. I’ve never been to Nashville, and can’t wait to experience it.”**

**“Are you sure, Carly?” Sid and Lauren say simultaneously.**

**“Yeah, I’m sure. I’ve been in Alabama many times, never a blip of a problem. Let’s do this.”**

**7:45 Central Time. Sid says, “Slow down. GPS says we’re almost here.”**

**“I haven’t seen anything for several minutes on this dark road,” Lauren says.**

**“A few old shacks. Nothing resembling a TV studio,” Paul adds.**

**“Okay, it says 100 feet. Up there on the left, a restaurant,” Sid says.**

**“Their message to me says we will just meet them there. We don’t do the show there,” Carly explains.**

**The restaurant is just a small wood-framed diner. With darkness everywhere, worn pickup trucks take up the dirt lot. The Hosanna 4 go inside, grateful for the lighting, and find porcelain tables along the near wall, and a glass counter across from the tables with various food behind it. Casually dressed persons take up about half the tables.**

**A slightly plump server in blue jeans and permed brown hair seats them near the door and drops off menus. She is hacking away at gum. She walks away and attends to other customers. The Hosanna 4 kill time by exchanging Bible passages.**

**Lauren flicks hair away from her right eye and looks around for the server, then says, “No other Black people in here. Probably means nothing.”**

**Carly says, “I’ve extended family in this state. I’ve been to Montgomery, Mobile, Birmingham, Huntsville, Florence, Tuscaloosa. They are very diverse places, people**



are friendly, and I didn't notice many racial issues. But there is Alabama... and there is Alabama."

Sid laughs, "Sarasota is kool, I don't think of it as LSA. Way up north FLA? A different story."

"8:00. Our contacts should be here now," Lauren says.

Finally, the server approaches. Paul says, "Coffee, black, for one two three"—pointing at Carly, Sid and himself. "Tea, sugar," pointing at Lauren.

Sid says to the server, "Isn't that a Confederate flag on the wall over there? I thought the LSA banned racially specific designations."

"Where have you been? The LSA does not consider that flag racial. Look at the history. Confederate groups were mostly real Americans, but a few of the other people could join." There are stunned looks from the Hosanna 4. "What y'all looking at? Did I say something racial? I always obey the law." She looks at Lauren. "Where you from, honey?"

Lauren answers measuredly, "Columbia, South Carolina."

"No, where are you really from?" Lauren looks to the side. The woman is amusing herself. "I didn't ask you anything racial, did I?"

Lauren reaches inside her purse for an Evangelism sheet. "Actually, I consider myself multinational because Jesus is Lord of all nations. Here, this is for you, Ma'am."

The woman leaves the sheet on the table and walks away.

Paul stands up. "We're out of here. Carly, call that cell number and ask for directions to the studio." As they all stood, suddenly Carly's phone sings.

Carly holds one finger up. "It's them," she whispers. She puts the phone on speaker. "Hi, Mr. Sexton!"

"Call me Grube. I apologize for the delay. You got the whole clan with you, right, Carly? It's right next to the church, where we shoot the show. Just GPS Limestone Brethren Church, Alabama, two miles from you, then we drive a mile."

A few minutes later, Carly's sedan is at the small church. There is darkness all around. No sign of the other party.

**“Carly, give me your phone,” Sid says. “I am calling that cell back.” Sid waits. “Message says phone not in service. Carly, turn this car around and get us out of here. We’ll go to Montgomery and find a hotel before our Nashville trip.”**

**Carly follows Sid’s request. Then, about a minute later, a van comes up behind them, blue flashers and siren.**

**“Now what!” Paul says. “Lauren, are you a magnet for these police officers?”**

**The van driver approaches, wearing some kind of brown uniform. “Are you the Hosanna 4?”**

**“Yes. I’m Carly.”**

**“Yeah, I’m Grube Sexton. We just need to verify first.” A second man approaches, gun drawn. “Let’s see your hands, all of you.”**

**“What?!” Several echoes of the word.**

**“I said we need to check you out first, to make sure who you are. We’ve had terrorist activity up here. We are auxiliary police here, Todd and I, and we are taking you in for ID check. Step out of the van and we’ll cuff you.”**

**All four of the Hosanna 4 are crammed into the back of the van, eyes closed, praying, taking deep breaths, as Grube and Todd exchange small talk in a mild Southern drawl. The van pulls into a driveway leading to a large wood framed, multi-room house. Todd and Grube lead the cuffed visitors through a large musty den and into a small back room. Todd and Grube, both wearing the brown uniforms, are polished and wear close-cut, well-groomed hair, and now are recognizable as twins.**

**The Hosanna 4 still cuffed, are seated together on a white sofa. Two more rough looking men wearing plaid and also carrying pistols, join Grube and Todd.**

**“We need to take all your electronics, for the verification process,” Grube says casually, as if lecturing a class. Todd collects all of their cell phones and takes them into a different room. Grube says, “You don’t want to make friendly conversation with us?” They are too shocked to speak.**

**Lauren begins taking very deep breaths, eyes closed, and the other three follow.**

**The door opens for a very large and rugged White man wearing the same brown uniform. He is bald with a bird tattoo on his head and has narrowed eyes. A smile grows on his face.**

**“We have indeed verified that you are the Hosanna 4.” His baritone voice projects loudly. “That is good news—for us, that is.”**

**“If you are police, as you say. Then we are entitled to lawyers.” Lauren says unevenly, venturing bravado.**

**“Here is how this works,” the large man says. “There are two government authorities in these parts. One is the official Alabama government. Totally corrupted, worthless, who have no understanding about the Real American Movement. The other ruling authorities is us, the Real American Militia. You can call me General A. We understand what is necessary to restore America to its original purpose. We never compromise with any of these cultural corruptors in power. This is the sole purpose of our lives, live or die. We have sponsored two suicide bombings in the ASCA within the past two days. And we are very efficient; we believe in very speedy trials.**

**“We are on trial? For what?” Sid calls.**

**“The trial is already over,” the bald leader says sourly. “Jude Viruet has already been found guilty of actions opposing the Real American Movement. He is Enemy Number 1. We are now in the execution stage. We have ordered summary execution for Jude Viruet, all of his family members, and many of the mud people and White traitor fellow travelers.**

**“So let me give the execution orders: Lauren Suyama, we sentence you to death by firing squad. Sid Rockman, we sentence you to death by firing squad. As far as you other two White traitors go, one of you will face the firing squad, and the other we sentence to hard labor. We keep one of you alive and in prison to demonstrate that we have power to do anything we want, to begin a slow transition from underground to the official governing authorities. Now which one of you is volunteering to stay alive?” Before either Paul or Carly can answer, General A says, “Thank you Paul for volunteering! Carly, since you were so excited about broadcasting this Hosanna nonsense to the whole world, we are reserving some special bullets for you.**

**“Executions to be carried out immediately. Move Prisoner DeMicco to the cage. Miss Suyama, look at me!” Lauren refuses, keeping her head down. “Well hear this: Tomorrow will be the greatest day in the history of the Real American Movement. One day before the election, Jude Viruet will behold his dead niece. The shock, the trauma will surely overwhelm him and wreck any plans he has to be President. Moreover, it will instill a special terror in these super-woke scum, when they see these so-called angels useless in protecting their Christian dollbaby.”**

**“Put the three condemned prisoners in the holding vault while we prepare the ammo.”**

**Todd pushes the Hosanna threesome into a windowless room, illuminated by a weak bulb on the ceiling. There are no chairs, so they sit down against the far wall, with their hands immobilized behind them in handcuffs.**

**Nothing is audible except uneven breathing. The cruel speed of this terror is overwhelming. Finally, Sid speaks up. “Lauren, if there ever a time to use your incredible gift and spiritually deliver one or more of those monsters, it is now.”**

**“There was nothing, Sid. No apparitions. Sometimes sin can make us so deprived from that nature within us, that demons are not necessary.”**

**“I don’t think they will actually kill us,” Sid calls out. “They are just threatening us. They said they are independent of the Alabama police. They must know there are too many capable law enforcement officers to nail them.”**

**“Chaney, Goodman and who else?” Carly says sourly.**

**“Carly, please,” Sid says.**

**Lauren says lowly, “The Apostle Paul called himself the worst of all sinners. I cannot imagine how he can say that, considering how filthy I am. I am cold, I need to go to the bathroom, I am gripped with numbing fear. There is nothing positive in my brain right now.”**

**“You are not alone with those feelings, Lauren,” Carly says. And she begins to weep silently.**

**Lauren adds, “I remember all the times that Christians, including myself, told people going through hard times just to reach out to God and trust Him. That’s easy to say when you are not the one suffering. But when faced with something so diabolically terrifying, it feels different. This is real hard for all of us--But we need to do it anyway. We need to obey the Scriptures and cry out to God even when we don’t feel like it.”**

**Lauren lowers her head toward the floor and mumbles prayers, weeping along with Carly. Then she begins screaming prayers. Sid and Carly follow. These passionate prayers last for several minutes, then quiet down.**

**“There is no Acts 12 tonight; no miraculous opening of those prison doors as happened to Peter,” Lauren says. “But I feel my spirit stronger. God always answers, just not always like we demand.” A smile appears. “God has reminded me who I am. I am a child of God, anointed by Jesus Christ. God turns every tragedy into good. I believe all of your promises, God. And God, we give to you this situation.” Lauren begins to sing the Hosanna song. Sid and Carly follow.**

The door opens. They are taken into another room. The singing continues. There is a thickly padded wall with bullet holes, and two closed windows on either side of the padding. Four uniformed men come behind Todd, carrying long barrel rifles. The singing continues.

Todd shuts the door behind him. “Shut up!” He yells. The Hosanna singing continues. “Shut up!” He yells again. The barrels take aim, and now the singing stops.

“Hey goillies,” Todd mocks. “Let me see the terror on your faces, before the bullets do their duty. I betcha you even peed your pants from terror.”

“Not a chance,” Lauren responds. “You cannot kill me because I am going to live forever. I am so blessed at the thought of seeing Jesus real soon face to face while you sir, are mired in slavery. I feel sorry for you. Hosanna in the highest!”

Sid shakes his head as an image rivets him. Eutychus!

“On the count of three, fire your weapons, men,” Todd orders.

“One—”. Sid does a quick twirl and then hurls himself through the window. The glass shatters, as his body drops hard about eight feet. Sid feels the pain from impact, ripping through his body. He rolls a few feet and is able to squat. It is pitch black outside. Sid sees a monstrous head looking out the window. He prays that no one is carrying a flashlight. He stands. He stumbles. Then he begins to run as fast as he can, with his hands immobilized behind him. He feels the brush under his feet.

From a distance he sees Todd leaning out the window. But Todd is not jumping. “Hey boy!” Todd’s voice is like an echo to Sid now. “You know what your stupidity did boy? It got your friends two extra bullets. Wanna hear?”

Crack, crack, crack—crack, crack, crack, crack---crack, crack, crack.

“That’s ten bullets, boy. And ten bullet holes!”

No, God, this cannot be happening. Lauren! Carly! No, no, please no! These horrific thoughts keep pouring over Sid. But deep down inside he knows he has to keep moving. Each step brings a riveting pain to his back and ribs. He would occasionally stumble. Trees would knock him down; he could see nothing, not even the stars from the cloud cover.

It is a torturous journey, seemingly without end. He loses track of time. He is praying for a house, or some semblance of civilization. But not a road. They could be hunting him down via vehicle.

About one half hour later, he gasps. There is a light coming from a window. He runs harder toward the light. A vague shape of a barn on his right, and a house in front of him, take form. He runs closer to the house. Two stories. The light becomes more prominent from the window. A door to the right of the window! Breathlessly, he knocks on the door with his foot. And knocks again.

Sid reminds himself, don't act frantic as to scare people. But the horrific fates of Lauren and Carly come to mind, almost bringing him down.

A porch light comes on. A frail man, over 70, with gray hair and pajamas, stands in the doorway.

"Please, sir. This is an emergency. Several people have been kidnapped and I think some were shot. I just escaped." Sid turns to show his hands cuffed behind him.

The older man hesitates. "How do I know you are not an escapee from prison, with those cuffs?"

"Because I want you to call the police," Sid replies.

A similarly frail older woman with gray hair in bun, joins her husband. "Now Cal, how is that man going to hurt us with his hands tied like that? Where did all this happen, young man?"

"I don't know, a mile or two out, maybe. In some farmhouse," Sid answers.

"The Wilkins estate," she says. "That farm has been technically vacant with the Wilkins moving to the ACSA. But there have been shenanigans over there, I know. Cal, you should have called the police when I asked you earlier."

Cal takes an older version of a cell phone, dials. "Jimbo, you need to get here. Got a situation."

Sid takes a much needed rest on Cal's worn couch. He is pleasantly surprised to hear sirens so fast. Two young White Officers come in briskly. These are real cops, Sid surmises, seeing the crisp blue uniforms.

"He the problem?" The Officer identified as Miller asks Cal, indicating Sid. "Hey gang banger, where are you from?" Miller asks Sid, flicking his dreadlocks. "I need to see some ID."

Sid twists his body to display the handcuffs. "A real irony: A handcuffed Black man asking help from the Alabama police. Don't blow it."

Miller says to the other White Officer identified as James, "Check for escaped inmates."

**“Let’s talk to him first,” James says. “Tell me your name.”**

**“Sid Rockman from Sarasota, Florida. On my way to Nashville, when we ran into some real mean White Nationalists. Killer mean. They cuffed me, took our IDs and phones, threatened to kill me---” Sid breathes hard with a silent prayer for calmness. “May have killed friends of mine.”**

**A beefy Black cop, a Sergeant identified as Shannon, steps in. “Where did this happen, sir?”**

**“I don’t know, just visiting—”**

**“I would bet all my bonds that it’s over at the Wilkins farm,” says Cal’s wife.**

**Sid says, “A two-story wood framed house with several rooms with an insert home attachment?” Cal and his wife both nod. “That’s it.”**

**Sergeant Shannon lifts the radio to his mouth. “We need lots of backup at the Wilkins farm. And medical help.” Shannon nods at Sid. “You ride with us.”**

**Within minutes, several police cruisers, sirens blazing and flashers lighting up the sky, swarm on the Wilkins farm. Sid, riding with Sergeant Shannon, feels his stomach tightening at the sight of this house from hell.**

**About two dozen Officers, guns drawn, are on the house like bees on honey. Shannon helps Sid out of the back seat, and they walk slowly toward the house, as the danger seems to have passed.**

**Shannon’s radio squawks. “No assailants on the premises, and no vehicles on the property. Looks like they got away, sir.”**

**A screeching ambulance arrives. Two med techs, male and female, race into the house.**

**Sid’s stomach tightens more as they walk into the den of the house. Sid feels dread, turning to the left, to those rooms overlooking an eight-foot drop as the yards slopes on the side.**

**Sergeant Shannon addresses his radio again. “A missing male identified as Paul DeMicco, Sarasota, Florida. Presumed to be kidnapped. A possible trafficking scenario.”**

**Sid’s heart rises to his throat as they approach the execution room. There are two med techs inside and two police officers.**

**Sid sees both Lauren and Carly prone, lying in blood. He collapses and begins to weep.**

**The middle-aged male med tech leans over Carly. “White female, multiple gunshot wounds.” He checks her pulse. He shakes his head. “This is odd, though. Her mouth is reflecting what looks like a smile.”**

**The pixie-haired female med tech leans over Lauren. “Female, unknown ethnicity, maybe Hispanic. Multiple gunshot wounds.” She checks her pulse. “I feel a beat.”**

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**November 6<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 AM.**

**Jude Viruet is sitting at his desk at his Nashville campaign headquarters when he answers his singing phone. “You heard right, Fernando. No live appearances today. Just run some videos of old speeches. I’ll call you this evening.”**

**Sitting across from Viruet in an opulent chair is the Black middle-aged Terry Fowler with his thick salt and pepper hair.**

**Viruet takes a Bible, flips it open and begins to read: “Ecclesiastes 3. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to tear and a time to mend. A time for war and a time for peace. The personal application for me, the so-called warrior/priest, is a time for priest.” Viruet removed his white clerical collar. “And a time for warrior.” Viruet reaches into his desk for a blue headband and stretches it over his head.**

**Fowler, dressed in a sharp black suit says, “Some of your former CIA posse, you know, guys who would throw themselves under a train for you and I, reached out to me, after last night’s travesty.”**

**I’m ahead of you,” Viruet responds. “Starting at 4:00 this morning, I energized my most trust former lansmen. Some were carried over to the ACSA Intelligence Agency, and they don’t care. They’re in. Final instructions, then it’s rock ‘n’roll.”**

**“You advising President Swanson of your operation?” Fowler asks in his quiet but firm voice.**

**“No. This is strictly a deep cover, plausible denial campaign. Frederick Adams, AKA General A, head wahoo of the Neo-Nazi Real American Militia. He thinks he’s so slick he can hide from us, with all the mid-century 21 national security gizmos; signal intercepts; and how many times did they lay their sick little hands on my Lauren, Sid Rockman and Carly Williams?”**



Viruet displays a large fancy cell phone with buttons on the bottom. “Renland GPS Model E. The latest update.”

Fowler’s eyes are wide. He chuckles, “Standard equipment at your church, Reverend?”

“My most trusted former agent, we’ll call him Teddy, because he loves the first Roosevelt, didn’t hesitate to bring this puppy over. Right out of the ACSA-IA inventory. He didn’t bat an eye.”

Viruet shows a GPS image on the Renland screen. “The Real American Militia compound, located about 5 miles from the Wilkins farm. The tiny white dots are the eight members that we have identified by name. They are all hole up at the compound.”

Fowler says, “Why not give what info and evidence you already have to LSA law enforcement?”

Viruet replies seriously, “There is probably at least a 90% chance that everybody is clean in the LSA Bureau of Investigation. But if there is just one compromised LSA agent tied to these White Nationalists, these terrorists could slip through my hands. I would never forgive myself. This operation is critical for the safety of all North Americans; it is personal; and it is my show.”

“Jude, you are taking a big risk going down there. The day before the freaking election,” Fowler says. “But with all those years we’ve confronted multiple Normandies together, I am going with you.”

“Okay,” Viruet says. “We take ten vehicles so we don’t look like we are invading the LSA. I’ll send the GPS coordinate rendezvous location. 4:00 PM.”

4:30 PM, rural Alabama. Viruet and another agent are perched in a high wooded area overlooking a cement compound. They are wearing camouflage, with masks, goggles and blue headbands. Sheer gloves help protect their secret identities.

“Ever use this Renland before, Frank? Teddy or anyone else at the ACSA Intelligence train you on it?” Viruet asks the fiftyish agent by his side. Frank shakes his head no. “The black button of the Renland sends a laser that kills them within in 1 second. Since we are not murderers or assassins, we push the red button. That sends powerful waves that disable brain activity. The objects are unconscious for about one hour. These backwoods racist yahoos trying to outsmart the national security apparatus is like a high school football team trying to take on the Super Bowl champs.”

“What happens if some of them aren’t in the compound?” Frank asks.

**“If there are four or five in there, that’s enough, especially with the evidence we collect. We can do the vermin mop-up of the rest of them later. Fortunately, all eight of those Nazi terrorists are inside—Go ahead Frank. You have the honors.”**

**Frank pushes the red button, then looks at Viruet. “Do I push it eight times?”**

**“Here is the beauty of it,” Viruet says. “Names and identifying info are already programmed in the Renland system. As long as they are in a five-mile radius, the wave hits them all simultaneously. We now have eight sleeping enemies, and we are free to take the compound---Terry, are you catching this?”**

**“The ten backup men and I are right above you, in a semi-perimeter, ready for action just in case,” Fowler says in Viruet’s earpiece.**

**“Teddy, bring the van up,” Viruet says into the tiny transmitter. “An easy job because all of these terrorists are in one large conference room, likely planning the next mayhem.”**

**The van appears next to the compound, and two similar ninja-clad warriors join Viruet and Frank at the bottom of the hill. During the next 10 minutes, Viruet’s warriors briskly drag the eight unconscious perps outside and lay them across a cement patio next to the compound, then apply handcuffs and ankle locks.**

**The four warriors take a seat on the patio next to the prisoners. “Let’s not waste time collecting the evidence,” Viruet says.**

**There is the sound of a siren. First faint, then louder and louder. Viruet and his minions react with concern, and then alarm, as two police cruisers roar up the driveway leading to the compound.**

**“Mayday! Mayday!” Viruet yells as the cruisers screech to a halt. Four Alabama Officers step out of the vehicles. They cautiously begin to circle toward Viruet’s men. They draw their pistols. “Terry, how did these cops penetrate our Renland communications blackout?”**

**“We must have been spotted,” Fowler says. “Some nosey citizen. Dang! Jude, I’ve got numbers and firepower up here. I think we can disarm these Officers without causing any casualties.”**

**“No, Terry. I will not risk killing or injuring an Officer in blue. I will let myself be exposed first.”**

**“I’m coming down. Through the back of the compound,” Fowler says.**

**“Okay.”**

The guns of the cops are now aimed at Viruet and his men. The lead Officer is the husky Black Sergeant Shannon, starting his new shift after the previous night's adventure.

**"Identify yourself!" Shannon calls.**

**"We are friendlies. We are the LSA counter-terrorism strike force, sent by President Jones to counter the deadly militia groups." Viruet pulls out an ID with a badge. Shannon takes it, then walks slowly back toward his cruiser.**

**"Keep an eye on them," Shannon says sternly to his Officers.**

**"Terry, this cop is good. He's calling in our fake IDs. I need something out of that compound, and quick."**

**"Almost there, Jude."**

Soon Officer Shannon walks back sternly. **"There is no one with your name in our strike force. Right now, tell me who you are, and why you are here. I ain't playing."**

**"This is a top-secret operation, and we are not allowed to say who we are. That's why there's fake IDs. I told you, we're to crack down on the violent White militias."**

**"Here? This is the LaFollette Hunting Society of Alabama. Been knowing about this place for years!" Shannon says incredulously.**

**"Well, apparently they are hunting more than wildlife," Viruet answers.**

Shannon examines the men prone on the sidewalk. He takes special interest in the very large bald man with the bird tattoo on his head. **"Freddy Adams? Some Nazi? Freddy and his wife babysit my kids!"**

Viruet answers, **"It's all just a dangerous distraction, Officer. To hide their violent underground activities. Haven't you been following the terror activities last night at the Wilkins farm?"**

**"I was there! And I saw absolutely nothing to tie those events to this Hunting Association! You and your Ninja army sweep into our quiet county, messing with our people. I'm about ready to rip that mask off your face and throw your butt in back of my cruiser."**

**"There is an easy way to resolve this. Let's have your men and my men go into that compound, and see what kind of evidence is there," Viruet says.**

**“I have no jurisdiction to violate the rights of these people! I would need a search warrant or evidence of a crime being committed. I am a law-abiding Officer, and strictly follow the laws of this County, and of the State of Alabama and the Libertarian States of America.”**

**“The violent acts right next door give you wide investigative latitude, Officer,” says Viruet.**

**Shannon looks back at the prone men on the patio. “What did you do to these men? The only active crimes are those you have committed here. I am placing all of you under arrest for assault and unlawful restraint. First, empty your pockets. I want all weapons on the ground.”**

**Automatic pistols from Viruet and his men kiss the dust below. Viruet quietly reaches for the Renland in his left pocket.**

**“Now I want all of you on the ground, face down. I am not playing.”**

**Viruet drops to one knee, his finger finding the right button on his pocketed Renland—He then rises at the sight of Terry Fowler and a wavy-haired White man emerging from the side door of the compound.**

**“Both of you identify yourselves!” Shannon calls. One of the guns is pointing at these two emerging men.**

**“Thank God! Thank you, thank you!” The White man gushes. He approaches Shannon, who steps back. “I never thought this nightmare would end.”**

**“I found him locked in a 6 by 9 room,” Fowler says in his lowkeyed voice.**

**“Monsters! Animals! Look what they did to me!” The man pulls up his shirt, and Fowler helps him. There are red whiplashes, with fresh blood.**

**“What is your name, sir?” Shannon asks.**

**“Paul DeMicco, from Sarasota, Florida. I was kidnapped and brought here. They may have killed some of my close friends, too. Oh God, please say it didn’t happen.”**

**Shannon is stone cold. Viruet leans closer, “Do we have evidence of a crime yet, Officer Shannon?”**

**Officers from both groups are examining the main conference room and several side rooms. There is paper everywhere. Viruet prints out an e-mail exchange. “Do you recognize the name Walter Higgins, part of this exchange?” Viruet asks, and**

Shannon shakes his head. “Walter Higgins is the suicide bomber on the blast that killed seven people in Charlotte.”

Fowler’s heavily armed ninja men join the party, and Shannon’s eyes grow wider.

They start packing documents in boxes. They find several photographs with red X’s slashed through them. One Xed photo was of the smiling face of Sergeant Walter Shannon. Viruet shows it to Shannon. “Kind and gentle babysitter, right, Officer?”

By the end of the afternoon, darkness falling, there are additional police cruisers. Boxes of evidence and the cuffed Real American Militia members fill the back seats.

With the successful operation winding down, Sergeant Shannon approaches the Ninja-clad Viruet. “My sincere thank you goes to you and your men—whoever you are. And please accept my apologies for the misunderstanding.”

“Christmas is coming early for you,” Viruet says. “We are letting you take 100% of the credit for this big bust that will reverberate across all three American nations for positive publicity--because we are not here. There is one caveat, that I trust will not have to be invoked. If anyone in your operation tries to suppress any of this evidence, be assured that we have photocopies of key evidence, and we have videos of this entire operation here. Any evidence suppression moves will be met with vigorous criminal prosecution.”

“I am a straight shooter, sir, you can count on it. Me and my men, and the prosecutors here. I just have one favor to ask you,” Shannon says. “I am very impressed by your professionalism, and you have my undying curiosity because I want us all to be friends, and know that I can call you in a future crisis. What is your name? I promise I won’t tell anyone else.

“Santa Claus,” Viruet answers. “And these are my elves.”

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Lauren Suyama’s eyes are fluttering. Open and shut. Then dark marbles drenched in white, as she reaches for the radio on the table beside her hospital bed. There is Christian music playing softly. She changes the station to find a different Christian song. A worn black-covered Bible rests next to radio.

Lauren is smothered; first with blue plastic bouffant enveloping her hair, then with a pink gown up to her neck and white covers on top of that. A large white bandage appears on her forehead just below the hair cap. An IV constantly drips liquids into her.

To the right of her bed are a pile of get well cards and an assortment of wrapped gifts. There is a large blowup of Santa Claus. A big white sign on the wall displays black letters: **REN'S RESURRECTION.**

A friendly olive-skinned nurse with the nametag Hassan steps into her room. "The news just gets better for you, Lauren. The Doctor says you are now strong enough to see multiple visitors."

"Thank you!"

"And they're here!"

"Nurse Hassan," Lauren calls. "Was there any time that I was pronounced clinically dead?"

"No. There were some really close moments, but you always had a heartbeat. You were never flatlined."

In walks her father with the company monogrammed shirt. Dom, favoring his father's looks, but shorter and tanner, follows him, along with Lauren's mother, cherubic face with a wide smile.

"My Rennie!" She gushes, and plants a big kiss on her daughter's cheek. "What an answer to prayer."

"My company has given me a week off, so I can spend it with you," her brother says.

"Thank you so much, Dom."

"Merry Christmas, honey," says her father. Then he looks at the nurse. "Is it okay to discuss the incident?" Nurse Hassan nods then walks out.

"Lauren, what do you remember about what happened on that farm?"

"There were some really terrifying men threatening to kill me, and ready to do it. I remember being prepared to meet Jesus. There was brief commotion. Next thing, I am zoning in and out in this hospital bed."

"Lauren, you took a head shot," her father says. "Another bullet missed your heart by an inch. Excellent technicians halted your blood flow. There were scary moments, because your lack of responsiveness for weeks hinted at permanent brain damage. You had multiple surgeries. We had you airlifted here to Vanderbilt Medical Center. We were delirious with joy when you opened your eyes and spoke. It was like encountering a newborn child again."

**“I am deeply grateful to all the medical people, and to you all for your prayers. I am also grateful to God, because I believe He had something to do with my recovery.—How about my other three friends?”**

**“Sid and Paul are fine. Carly didn’t survive,” says her father. A sad paleness creeps over Lauren’s face, and her family members respect it with silence. “The irony is, Carly already made it. I am still waiting.”**

**Terry Fowler peeks in. “Can a boss visit you?”**

**“Hi, Terry! You haven’t fired me yet?”**

**“How can I fire you when you haven’t yet worked your first day?” Fowler shows her his wrapped gift and candy, and tosses them into the pile.**

**“He’s my boss, too,” Jude Viruet says, walking in. He throws a large package on the pile. “Merry Christmas, Niece Rennie.” He leans down and kisses both of her cheeks.**

**Lauren gasps, “Oh Uncle Jude! The election! Must have been too groggy. I didn’t hear anything during these zoneout two days.”**

**Viruet sits on the side of Lauren’s bed. “Well, niece Rennie. You became an instant celebrity. Media outlets all over the world carried news about how you were almost killed by terrorists; a vicious act of retaliation obviously aimed at her candidate Uncle. All these outpourings of sympathy made you a martyr of sorts. That, and a terrorist bombing that killed five toddlers on the same day, really turned Americans in all three nations against the extremists. I got a nice little electoral bump from all that, and defeated Rahman by seven percentage points. So meet the new President of the Association of Christian States of America.”**

**Lauren struggled to sit up just a little. “I wanna kiss you.”**

**“Would I trade me being President for you not being shot and hurt? Every time I would,” Viruet says.**

**Again, Lauren gasps and then briefly covers her mouth.**

**“Rennie, are you okay?” her Mom calls to her.**

**“I just remembered the dream that a good friend of mine shared with me before the shooting.”**

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**One month later. Lauren sits on the balcony of her new highrise home overlooking downtown Nashville. It is an unusually warm winter day, as Sid Rockman and Paul DeMicco appear on Lauren’s laptop screen for a virtual meeting.**

**Lauren flicks her hair out of her right eye and engages her friends enthusiastically. “Hey guys! I thought Sarasota is warmer than Tennessee. Wrong. Check out these shorts,”**

**“Are we the Hosanna 3 now?” Paul asks.**

**“No, we are still the Hosanna 4. Carly is with us in spirit. Sid, any more dreams for me?”**

**“Actually yes, my sister. I had the same dream last week. Meaning God may not be done with you on that score.”**

**“Scary, in a good way,” Lauren smiles.**

**“Listen, remember Officer Hatch?” Sid asks.**

**“Yeah, how can I forget?” Lauren says. “A nice ending though.”**

**“It ain’t over,” says Sid. “He asked if he could patch into our call today. He wants to share something important. I sent him the link.”**

**A few minutes later. Officer Hatch appears on the video. He is wearing his police uniform and cap. It is statement on officialdom.**

**“I’ll be brief and to the point, because you all need to know this,” Hatch says over the video. “Florida Staties broke up a Satanic ring that had practiced human sacrifice. Five of them were charged with murder. Interesting, during the interrogation, one of them said that they occasionally used the vacant apartment above the Hosanna 4 apartment. They knew the person below them was a Christian—Carly Williams—and they wanted to harass her. The Florida police went back to that apartment, where apparently there was no holes in the floor above where the blood came out. The second time found that one of the tiles was removable, and there was a hole there. Large enough for liquid to soak through the ceiling.”**

**“Did the Satanist actually tell the authorities that they poured blood down there?” Sid asks.**

**“No, he did not,” says Hatch.**

**“So, all this immaculate blood stuff is an open question,” Sid answers. “Sometimes God just wants some things to be a mystery. The lesson for me is, Christians should**



not battle each other on these secondary issues, about what God is doing and what he doesn't do. He wants us to focus on the fundamentals of the Gospel, and that's where the unity begins."

"Right on," say Lauren and Paul simultaneously.

"By the way, I'm getting baptized next Sunday at your Hosanna church," Officer Hatch says with a note of excitement. "And I just love you guys—especially Lauren, for being patient with me."

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One month later.

Jerry Berger is sitting on his dais as the lights blare and the camera rolls. "Hello, Sunshine State, to the pulse of Tampa Bay and the pulse of North America. People around the world have expressed deep concern about the mental condition of Steve Jones, President of the LSA. Staffers say he has been increasingly erratic. There have been anonymous quotes from his national security staff about keeping him away from some sensitive weapons systems. They say that Jones has been prone to cursing and screaming, and staffers have run out of his Dallas office scared for their physical safety.

"Jones has railed incessantly against Jude Viruet's proposal to hold a referendum in all three former US nations about reunification of the USA. Polls in all three nations show that a majority of citizens support the referendum and the return to the USA glory days. President Jones is the only holdout President of the three, saying he will never agree to the reunification. FSA President Jen Roem has endorsed the idea, echoing Viruet by saying that we can build on common ground while respecting regional differences on some policies. President Jones has railed on social media against Roem, calling her a charlatan who just wants to steal the wealth of the other two nations to finance her failed welfare state. He criticizes Jude Viruet too, saying that the LSA is not a Christian nation, but a nation of individualism. Viruet has emphasized that any groundswell toward the referendum will prompt citizens to embrace respect and kindness and avoid the toxic negativity that brought down the USA. Viruet has called the three American nations, the bastard child of the previous hatemongering in USA politics, and that the bastard child needs to grow up. There have been rumblings among officials in the LSA to involve the fitness to remain in office clause for Jones. That clause exists in all three Constitutions."

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The next evening, Lauren is sitting on her couch at home in Nashville, watching a current events channel. She sips her tea as the different Presidents of the three American nations address their constituents at different times. Vivid brown eyes

then become riveted, unblinking, on the screen. Without looking away, she picks up her cell and dials.

“Niece Rennie, how is everything? How is your boss Terry?” Viruet says before Lauren can get a word out.

Lauren smiles, “Terry is wonderful. He even offered to send me down to Aztlan, all expenses paid, to take notes about their health care system for Bridge.”

“Before you board any plane to Cartagena, let me give you the names of some Aztlan friends for you to pass on my best regards.”

“Sure—Uncle, uh, I got a spiritual message that maybe you and I need to go to Dallas.”

Viruet hesitates. “Ren, are you reading my mind? The LSA asked me for some important information. You probably read that I am an expert on confidentiality. I am going to share a confidential prayer request with you. But you must promise me you will never share it.”

“I promise, Uncle.”

“The 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment and other Bible passages say that lying is a sin. Yet deception is critical in undercover national security operations. A Christian colleague told me that Romans 13 makes certain types of deception okay in God’s eyes. If official deception is key toward maintaining a safe and civilized society, and keeping evil at bay and protecting innocent lives, then it is not only okay, but necessary—from a Christian moral position. As the President of a sovereign nation, I may be faced with that important question. Ren, please pray that I can recognize where that clear line is.”

“I have no idea where that line is. But I will pray fervently on that request, Uncle Jude.”

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Ten days later, Dallas, Texas. LSA President Steve Jones sits at his tank of a desk in the Presidential compound. He is a portly man, impeccably dressed in a brown designer suit, with a round face with receding hairline and handlebar moustache. His office is massive, with mounted animals and plaques on the panelled walls.

He is reading a report with an agitated look, and his foot is tapping the floor rapidly. His telecom buzzes, and a nasaly woman’s voice sounds: “ACSA President Jude Viruet is here for your scheduled meeting, sir.”

Viruet steps inside, carrying a heavy satchel bag. He is wearing blue cotton with his white clerical collar. Jones rises and points to the empty chair next to his desk.

“Reverend Viruet, or should I say, President Viruet, I deeply thank you for the donation of appreciation for the LSA actions to break up that White militia terrorist group in Alabama.”

“LSA law enforcement heroic actions benefit the ACSA, too. We promised you the plaques too, Mr. President. And here they are. For you personally and key LSA Law Enforcement officials.”

“Oh, they are beautiful,” says Jones. “I know people call me a narcissist. But really, I believe our LSA law enforcement leaders are well deserving of these.”

“I agree.”

Jones furrows his eyebrows. “You know about the rumors of those shadowy ninja like figures who supposedly helped the Alabama police with terrorist cell breakup. Man, there were eyewitnesses! I thank you for agreeing to use your former CIA expertise to try to find out who might be responsible.”

Viruet says, “As promised, here is the report where I summarize my expert theories on the possible invaders.”

The report is in a blue binder, and Jones hugs it like a little child.

“Thank you again, President Viruet. I will read it, and if you have any more leads, please let me know.”

“One more item for you,” Viruet says as the door opens. In walks Lauren Suyama. “This is the woman whose life your Alabama people helped save. She is also my niece.”

Lauren is wearing her knee length blue dress covered with the gold cross necklace. She smiles widely, “Here is my gift of appreciation to you, President Jones.” Lauren hands Jones a wrapped gift as Viruet walks to the door and makes sure it is closed.

“Here is my other gift to you, sir,” Lauren says, and suddenly Steve Jones is out of his chair, backing up with quivering lips and little growling sounds.

Lauren removes the necklace, and holds the cross in the front of her. “In the Name of Jesus Christ, I command you Satan, and your fallen angels, leave this man! Get out!”





