

# R E B E L S

B Y L E W I S S H I N E R

**G**UNFIRE AGAIN. His office was in the back of the main building, in what had been the laundry room back when it was a hotel. He was a good half mile from the street, and the rifles sounded like firecrackers.

It was the third time this week the *guardia* had opened up on demonstrators, nothing but warning shots so far, but the thought of it still made Thomas a little sick. Two days ago one of the kids, running away, had tried to climb the project fence and gotten hung up in the barbed wire on top.

His concentration was gone. He rolled away from the computer and picked up the letter again. It was on lined notebook paper and it said, "Need to see you. Where are you hiding out? Love, Lindsey." The envelope had been addressed to him care of the Anthro Department at UT Austin, Please Forward. It had come in with the morning mail. He put it back in the envelope and put the envelope in his shirt pocket.

The shooting stopped and now there was another noise, a roar that kept climbing and dropping in pitch. Heavy machinery.

Oh Christ, Thomas thought. A tank.

His intercom hummed. "Wake up, Thomas," Sarah said. "The sixties are over. Big Brother is here. They're coming in."

"What the fuck are we supposed to do?"

"I don't know about you, but I'm going to lie down behind my desk and chant some mantras."

Sarah was overweight and pushing fifty. "That's really funny," Thomas said.

"I wasn't kidding. Look, don't do anything stupid, okay? It looks like the entire Mexican National Guard out there. They *will* kill you, okay?"

Thomas kicked the screen out of his window and crawled outside. Straight ahead was the crumbling orchestra pavilion, its wall of solar cells glistening in the afternoon sunlight. The smell of manure and damp earth drifted off the gardens in front of it. To his left, running for hundreds of yards back along the hillside, were experimental permaculture and agriculture plots, animal compounds, ponds and stables.

To his right were the front gates and the *guardia*.

Thomas watched the tank come right over the fence. It had been a hell of a fence, eight feet high and topped with barbed wire, cutting them off from the hungry and the poor and the desperate. Now the poles snapped like toothpicks and metal treads ground the chain links into the lawn.

The tank crawled past the ruins of the casino and parked up against the fountain. The casino had been the namesake of the Hotel Casino de la Selva back in the twenties and thirties, when it had been the social center of Cuernavaca. The project had put a geodesic dome over it, an aluminum framework and triangular insulating plastic pillows. Next to it the tank looked

like a bloody-jawed Tyrannosaur.

There looked to be about fifty soldiers. They would outnumber the project staff two to one. Thomas sprinted around the back of the main building, toward the swimming pool and the scattered guest cottages. The humidity glued his shirt to his back and bunched up his underwear between his legs. Beyond the dark, algal green of the swimming pool were the jai-alai courts. The perpetually stoned botanists, down here from Texas A & M, had lost them to a new gene-spliced kudzu a year ago and been fighting to get them back ever since.

“Thomas!” It was one of the summer kids, out in the middle of the enormous pool on one of the ocean arks. He had his shirt open and was leaning off the boom. “What the hell is going on?”

“We’re busted,” Thomas yelled. “Head for the fucking hills.”

Between the pool and the back guest houses was a stretch of imported sand, with umbrellas and folding beach chairs. Weeds were slowing taking over, but the footing was still bad. Before Thomas could get across it he heard the slap of running feet on concrete and the unmistakable rattle that rifles make when they get lifted to the shoulder and cocked.

“*Alto!*”

Thomas stopped and slowly put up his arms.

THE SOLDIERS TOOK him into the mural room. Most of the others were already milling around in the middle of the floor, dwarfed by the 50-foot ceilings and the allegorical figures on the walls. The project had been using it for their main dining room. The soldiers had pushed the tables and chairs off to one side so they could herd everyone together. Every so often the doors would open and another two or three people would straggle in from the back woods, soldiers behind them to shove them if they slowed down.

Thomas found Judy Shapiro, the project director. She and Bill Geisler were the center of attention, but they didn’t have any answers either. Geisler was Shapiro’s roommate and lover. He was also the only person on the project who didn’t seem to know about her penchant for graduate students of either sex, the younger the better.

They were both in their early thirties, almost ten years younger than Thomas, both veterans of the New Alchemy Institute on Cape Cod and the Lindisfarne Hamlet in Colorado. They were sunburned, earnest, and wore odd clothes. Geisler was project secretary, which meant he greased palms and got permits and generally tried to maintain Shapiro’s supply lines to reality.

Thomas had his own title. He was project anthropologist. It didn’t mean much, except that Margaret Mead used to hang out at New Alchemy so Shapiro had wanted an anthropologist of her own. He was supposed to provide expertise on native shelters. In practice, when he wasn’t doing the shitwork that was expected of all of them, he had plenty of computer time to work on his own stuff.

That being the application of Ilya Prigogine’s dissipative structures to the Mayan collapse circa 900 A.D. He’d run out of funding at UT, the project had made him an offer, and now he’d been here two years and there was a tank in

the yard.

"I don't suppose you know anything," Shapiro asked Thomas. He shook his head. "Stay close. We have to put up a united front on this thing."

Thomas wandered off, found a chair and sat down. A *guardia* officer came in and stood for a while with his hands behind his back. He was bareheaded and his uniform hung loosely off his shoulders. He looked about sixty. His hair was brown, going to gray, a stigma of European blood. He was a captain and Thomas suspected he wouldn't go much further. Indian ancestry was the thing these days.

Thomas had seen him out here before, asking questions, pounding his fist into his left hand. His name was Espinosa.

"This is everyone?" he asked. Sarah, out of breath, came to stand next to Thomas' chair. Everybody else got more or less into a line facing Espinosa.

"I thought you were cowering behind your desk," Thomas said.

"They dragged me out," she said. "The fascists."

Espinosa walked slowly down the line. He pointed to Shapiro and Geisler and finally to Thomas. "You three will stay here." His English was accented but plain enough. "The rest of you will go back to the United States, to your homes and families. You will be searched and your belongings will be searched but you will not be harmed. We will bring a bus to take you back to Mexico City where you will take an airplane."

"Why you?" Sarah asked.

"Seniority, I guess." Shapiro and Geisler had been here three years, since the beginning. Outside of Thomas and the clerical staff, like Sarah, everybody else was pretty recent.

Thomas stood up and Sarah put her arms around him. She was crying. "I don't want to go," she said. "There's going to be concrete everywhere and chlorine in the water. The food's going to taste wrong and I'll get cancer."

"It's just temporary. Got to be. We'll get this straightened out and send for everybody again."

"Goddammit, Thomas, don't patronize me. It's over. The world's not ready for us, and so they're going to destroy us."

"Sarah..."

"G'bye, Thomas," she said, backing away. "Peace, love, and all that shit." She wiggled her fingers at him, and then turned and let one of the soldiers lead her out.

**I**T TOOK HALF AN HOUR to get the room cleared. Thomas was amazed to see how hard some of them fought to stay. Who was going to take care of the compost, who was going to check the pH in the fish tanks? What about aphids, what about nitrogen shortfalls?

One of the grad students, a thin girl from UCLA, tried to get loose. Espinosa signaled to one of his men, who slapped her hard across the face, jerked her arms behind her back, and marched her out.

But then, he thought, if they tried to drag me out maybe I'd be fighting too. The place was seductive. He'd gotten comfortable with the idea of being out of the power grid, politically and ecologically.

Espinosa kept three soldiers behind with him. They were just kids, Thomas thought. The older ones would be fighting in the eastern jungles or the streets of Mexico City and Zihautenejo.

“I want you to show me the weapons,” Espinosa said.

Shapiro let out a theatrical sigh. “Is that all? The weapons business again? We haven’t got any. How many times do we have to tell you?”

“It is known that you are supporting the rebels. We know this, you see. The rebels line up outside the gate. We don’t look for the guns or the mortars. We look for the nerve gas. The virus.”

“For God’s sake,” Shapiro said. “Those kids outside were protesters. They want us out of here as much as you do. In spite of the fact that your government asked us here in the first place.”

“I am not playing with games, here,” Espinosa said. “The rebels must be stopped. They are fighting against legal elected candidates. They are breaking the law.”

It was a bad year for the Institutional Revolution. The PRI had been continuously in power now since 1946, and counting a few name changes they went all the way back to 1928. Parties didn’t last that long by losing elections. Sometimes they just had to keep recounting the votes until they came out the way they were supposed to.

The PRI had tried that in Zihuatenejo and Taxco back in December and people had started turning over cars and lighting matches. Half of Zihua had burned to the ground before the *guardia* shot enough people to quiet things down again.

“Okay, we hear you making all the right noises,” Shapiro said. “What is it you want? *La mordida*?”

Thomas flinched. There was plenty of corruption in Mexico, but a certain style was expected. One didn’t haggle over bribes in public.

“No lady, I don’t want you money. I want to see the things you have keep hidden from me. Everything, you understand? Everything.”

A COUPLE DOZEN of the soldiers were searching the staff cottages. Thomas could hear drawers slamming and furniture being pushed around. They’d even dragged a couple of mattresses out onto the lawn and ripped them up with bayonets to make their position clear.

Thomas felt sorry for Espinosa. What was the old man supposed to make of windmills that looked like toy rocket ships on top of miniature oil rigs? Five and six foot high columnar fish tanks with giant water lilies floating on top? The glass walls and aquaria on the south sides of all the bungalows?

The worst was the solar wall, troughs of hyacinths inside a long, louvered greenhouse. It ran straight out from the main building to the fountain where the *guardia* had parked their tank. The project’s sewage ran through troughs to get rid of the organics, then out to the fountain and a series of sand filters to clean and aerate it. But the greenhouse itself stank of shit.

Espinosa hesitated at the door, wrinkling his face.

“I’m with you,” Thomas said. “But these folks don’t seem to mind the smell of their own shit. All part of living in harmony with the planet.”

“Fuck you, Thomas,” Shapiro said.

“These people?” Espinosa said. “Are you not one of them?”

“That’s something Thomas was never good at,” Shapiro said. “Making up his mind. Committing himself.”

“Could we maybe have a little less dissension in the ranks?” Geisler asked.

“I want to see inside,” Espinosa said.

“What in hell for?” Shapiro asked.

“What better place to hide weapons?”

“Oh Christ. Go ahead. Make yourself at home.”

“You,” Espinosa said, looking at Thomas. “You come with.”

They went in. Thomas breathed through his mouth. He felt like he was getting shit on his tongue and gums. Espinosa made out that it didn’t bother him, poking at the rubbery plants, bending over to check the undersides of the bracing under the troughs.

“There aren’t any weapons,” Thomas said.

“I want to believe you,” Espinosa said. He rolled up one sleeve and felt around in the murky water. “Maybe I do believe you. But I don’t trust you.” There was a certain dry humor in the slant of his eyebrows. “You understand?”

“*Los requisitos*,” Thomas said. Formalities.

“*Claro que si*.” Espinosa dried his arm thoroughly with a handkerchief and then dropped the handkerchief on the floor. It was like they had sealed some kind of bargain, though Thomas wasn’t sure what it involved.

They went back outside. A soldier came running up with a three-foot marijuana plant, dirt still crumbling off its roots. “*Mira, capitan! Marijuana!*”

“It’s not ours,” Shapiro said. “Goddammit, I told everybody no dope!”

Espinosa told the soldier in Spanish, “Go talk to the sergeant. See if he’s found any drugs in the rooms.” Then he looked at Shapiro. “You could go to jail for this, all of you. Smuggling the drugs and helping the rebels.”

“I already told you—”

Geisler put a hand on her arm. “Judy, take it easy...”

Espinosa wasn’t bluffing. The plant was more than enough to get them into jail. And if their paperwork got lost and they spent months or years there, even died there, well, it had happened before.

Thomas’ skin felt clammy. “Look,” he said. “We’re trying to cooperate. We didn’t know about the marijuana.” He was lying, of course, and so was Shapiro. The A & M gang was famous for their killer hybrid pot. If Espinosa tried to burn the plants he would stone all of Cuernavaca.

“*Sargento!*” Espinosa shouted. The sergeant came running back, knees high, British army style. “Lock them up,” he said in English, then repeated it in Spanish.

The sergeant looked confused. “Where, sir?” he asked in Spanish.

“Everything is glass.”

“Think of something,” Espinosa said.

**T**HE SERGEANT SHUT them in the kitchen. One door led into the mural room and the rest of the main building, and the other door led out

by the pool. Espinosa put guards on both of them. "It was time for supper anyway," Thomas said. He made himself an avocado sandwich and sat down at the long, grease-soaked table.

Shapiro ranted for ten or fifteen minutes about how none of this could be happening. Finally she got hungry too and Thomas made some more sandwiches.

Thomas hadn't worn a watch in over a year, but he'd gotten pretty sensitive to the cycles of daylight. Close to sunset the goats and chickens and parrots got restless and let out more than their usual amount of noise. He made it to be about eight o'clock when they heard the tank start up and drive away. A few minutes later Espinosa came in. He was slumping a bit, looking his age.

"You can sleep in you same places tonight. There will be guards at the doors."

"You want something to eat?" Thomas said. "We'll just have to throw it out if you don't."

Espinosa looked uncomfortable. "We meet here tomorrow morning. Seven o'clock." He turned and walked out again.

**N**ONE OF THE COTTAGES had locks. Thomas waited until dark to open his door and look outside. There were two guards, neither one over 18. They started to raise their guns, then saw the bottles in his hands. He gave them each a beer and asked in Spanish if he could sit by the pool for a couple of minutes. It was only a few yards away.

"If you try to run," one of them apologized, "we'll have to shoot you."

"Claro," Thomas said.

When they saw he just wanted to sit by the water they faded into the darkness and left him alone.

The pool was gigantic, the largest Thomas had ever seen. It was the center of the project, not just physically but metaphorically. The project was a model of the world, and the pool was its ocean. It was stocked with mirror carp, who made imitation tides when they thrashed their tails. It had tilapia instead of whales to eat the algae and clean the water. White amurs ate the bigger plants and the project ate the amurs and the talapia.

Thomas was far enough into the metaphor that listening to the patter of the murky water against the tiles had become like listening to real waves. It cleared his head, relaxed him.

Eventually he noticed an orange glow off to his right, on the hotel side of the shallow end. About the same time he smelled the smoke from the cigarette. It had been so long since Thomas had actually seen anybody smoking tobacco that he was a little horrified.

"I think," Espinosa said at last, "my men have not much discipline."

"They trusted me," Thomas said. "Don't blame them for that."

"You are believers in trust, you Northamericans. True?"

"What do you mean?"

"Tell me about you boats."

"You mean the ocean arks?" The ark was anchored in the deep end.

Thomas could hear it scraping gently against the edges of the pool. It was a hell

of a design, strong, light, simple, made of balsa wood and epoxy. It was twice as fast as the gasoline-powered boats it replaced, silent, needed no fuel or engine repairs.

“They use them on the south coast now, true?”

“There’s two of them in Zihuatenejo. The people down there love them. They’re catching twice the fish they used to.”

“No,” Espinosa said. “The rebels have you boats now. One is sunk. The other they sail around in the bay. It is a weapon now, you see?”

Stupid bastards, Thomas thought. They’d sunk a boat that could have fed hundreds of people for the rest of their lives. For politics.

“You trust too much,” Espinosa said. “You trust the money and the tools and you think people are stupid that don’t speak English as good as you.”

“No,” Thomas said. “Maybe I used to think like that, before I came here. But people can change. People can learn. That’s what this place is all about.”

“I would like to believe you.” The orange light of the cigarette flew out over the pool and sizzled into the water. Thomas heard a second splash as a carp struck at it. “But I don’t trust you.”

**T**HOMAS WENT BACK to his room. The guards, who must have heard Espinosa complaining, looked nervous as he shut them out. He stuck a doorstop in the frame to wedge the door closed.

He didn’t want to think about Espinosa any more. He spread out Lindsey’s letter on the bed next to him and tried to decipher it. She had signed it “love”—that had to count for something.

What he wanted to believe was that she’d developed, after all these years, a physical passion for him that she could no longer deny. None of the other men she’d had, and God knew there had been enough of them, had worked out. Now Thomas would get his shot.

She was his brother’s wife, which had always been a problem. Even though his brother was legally dead, had disappeared from the Timberlawn Psychiatric Hospital in Dallas back in the late seventies and hadn’t been heard from since. In those eight years he’d seen Lindsey maybe twice, written to her a couple of times a year.

But he hadn’t forgotten her. The first time he’d ever seen her was backstage after one of Eddie’s concerts. It would have been in the early seventies sometime. She was hanging all over Eddie. She had on a thin white tank top and no bra, leather jeans, eyeliner all the way around her eyes, boots with three-inch heels and zippers. A cigarette hung out of her mouth, the smoke not as strong as her perfume. Her hands rattled with too many rings and her hair was brittle from bleach.

He was still used to thinking of Eddie as a little kid, but seeing Lindsey changed all that. Her image was primal. A little kid wouldn’t have been able to live up to her.

It was bullshit, of course. Under the blatant sexual propaganda she was like anybody else. She watched soap operas and read *Cosmo* and ate canned peach halves wrapped in a slice of Wonder Bread. But Thomas had imprinted her as some kind of bush league sex goddess, the way ducks imprint their mothers,

and his left-brain logic had no power over her.

Thinking about her, even now, made his dick hard as a piece of lumber. He pulled musty-smelling drapes over the fish tanks built into the south wall. "This could get ugly," he told the fish. "You wouldn't want to see it." He masturbated, picturing Lindsey stretched out on her back, arms reaching up for him, breasts flattened a little toward the sides, eyes a little crossed. Kid stuff. Then he drank a beer and took a shower and went to sleep.

**E**SPINOSA MET THEM in the kitchen for breakfast, *heuvos motulenos*. "This is good food," he said. "Very rich."

"Thanks," Shapiro said. "Since you sent our dishwashers home yesterday, you can do your own dishes."

"Forget the dishes," Espinosa said. He looked at Thomas. "Today I want to see what you do with the computer."

"Today," Shapiro said, "is Thomas' day in the gardens. There's nobody to trade out with him."

"Tomorrow," Espinosa said, "maybe there are no gardens. Today I look at the computer."

"Suit yourself," Thomas said. He put his dishes and Espinosa's in a sink full of water. They went to his office and Thomas turned on his PC. "You want to see my stuff or the project stuff?" He was networked to the project database and could call in any of the monitor programs.

"You," Espinosa said.

Thomas logged on and called up his mapping program. He was suddenly conscious of his open window, of the screen lying out on the lawn where he'd kicked it. Espinosa didn't say anything about it so neither did he. But the memory of the tank, the rifles, the men pawing through the cottages, was a physical presence in the room.

A graph scrolled down the CRT. It looked a little like a topographic map, the various regions shaded with dots, brackets, plus signs, asterisks, and rectangles. "This is a trend surface analysis of Mayan sites," Thomas said. It came out fast and harsh. "It's a kind of regression analysis, using the region as a response surface."

"Trend...surface...analysis," Espinosa said. He looked like someone was explaining to him why his children were dead. Sad, frightened, unable to understand. Thomas suddenly saw the deliberate sadism in what he was doing, slapping Espinosa around with words and machines that were as alien as he could make them. He swiveled around in his chair.

"Look," he said. "I understand your position. You don't want to be here. The government's scared, you're scared, you're grabbing at straws. *Es decir, asirse a un blede*, OK?"

"Just talk English. I understand you."

"Maybe you're afraid of this place. Because you don't understand what's going on here. But there's no big mystery. I can show you how to use a computer this afternoon."

"My son, he uses the computers at the University City. We don't afraid of computers."



“Okay, fine. But what I’m saying is, this isn’t what you’re looking for. This is ancient history. This is about the Mayan collapse, a thousand years ago. It shows when the cities died out. We’re still trying to figure out why it happened.”

“Maybe they had rebels,” Espinosa said.

“Maybe they did.” It was, in fact, one of the models he was testing, and consistent with Prigogene’s work.

“The dark areas, they are the most recent?”

“Kind of,” Thomas said. “It’s showing a lot of different things at once. Population, economy, what the land is like, government.”

Espinosa was nodding. “My son is study the what you call it. Science of politics.”

“Probably a real good idea,” Thomas said.

One of the soldiers knocked on the open door and came in. “There is a woman,” he said to Espinosa in Spanish. “A *gringa*, blonde. Looking for him.” He tilted his head toward Thomas.

“Lindsey,” Thomas said, his throat closing up on him. “*Se llama Lindsey.*”

The soldier looked at him. “*Si, verdad.*”

“OK,” Espinosa said. “Search her. But be careful with your hands, you understand me? And bring her to me.”

Thomas got up, sat back down again. Espinosa was watching and he seemed to relax a little for the first time. It’s the first weakness any of us have let him see, Thomas thought. We’ve been holed up here like some kind of pale foreign gods, doling out favors and expecting to be loved in return. No wonder they resent us.

“She is you girlfriend?” Espinosa asked gently.

“No,” Thomas said. “Just...she’s just a friend.”

“*Si, claro,*” Espinosa said. “Of course.” It was the way he might have smiled at his son, at the University in Mexico City.

The guard brought her in and Thomas stood up again.

“Nothing, sir,” the guard said in Spanish and Espinosa nodded him away.

Her hair was darker, not quite brown, and some of the long strands had gone white. She still wore eye makeup but the eyes looked softer, set in a web of fine lines like the ones that had come up at the corners of her mouth. No other makeup except a little pale lipstick. Nothing to hide anymore. She wore a simple knit dress, navy blue, loose enough to fit local standards of modesty. Flat shoes, no jewelry.

Except her wedding ring.

“You look wonderful,” Thomas said. “I can’t believe how good you look.”

“You too,” Lindsey said. She had trouble meeting his eyes. She held on to her bare upper arms, forearms crossed over her chest. Thomas saw she wasn’t going to hug him. The rest of his fantasies crumbled and blew away like fairy dust.

Your whole life has been like this, he told himself. You’ve been sitting around waiting for someone or some idea to come along and sweep you off your feet. How much longer are you going to wait?

He offered her his chair and she settled cautiously, tugging on the hem of

her dress, fiddling with her purse. Finally she looked at Espinosa and then at Thomas. "What in God's name is going on here?"

Thomas shrugged. "Up until yesterday we were trying to save the world. New energy sources, new food supplies, new shelters, the whole bit. Now it looks like the world is not interested in being saved." He wanted a reaction from Espinosa but he didn't get one.

"Are you, like, under arrest or something?"

"I don't know. *Digame*, Capitan Espinosa, am I under arrest?"

"Not officially. Not right now."

"Can we talk?" Lindsey asked. "I mean, in private? It's... it's a personal matter."

"Ah," Espinosa said. He put his hand around his chin and looked away. After a few seconds he said, "We go outside. You sit and talk, far enough away we don't hear you, but we can see everything."

"So I don't give her any microfilm."

"No film, no virus, no nerve gas." Thomas could no longer tell whether he was kidding or not.

"I have to show him a picture," Lindsey said. "Is that okay?"

"Show to me."

Lindsey passed him a three by five black and white print. Espinosa looked at it very hard for a few seconds, then turned it over a couple of times. He shrugged and handed it to Thomas.

It showed three Mayans in robes, laughing and smoking dark conical cigars. A fourth man, with equally long hair and the same kind of cotton robe, looked like he was trying to get out of the picture.

The fourth man was his brother Eddie.

THEY SAT ON folding chairs by the pool. Thomas shifted from side to side, listening to the sand crunch under the runners of the chair. "Do you want to talk about it or not?" Lindsey asked.

"Sure," Thomas said. "Where did you get the picture?"

"Some kid reporter took it. He's on assignment for Rolling Stone, trying to get an interview with the rebels. He did a feature on the Lacondones while he was waiting. His editor knew Eddie in the seventies and recognized him."

"So now what happens?"

"So now I go up there and look for him. What else?"

Thomas shrugged.

"For Christ's sake!" Lindsey said. "What the hell's wrong with you? If this is Eddie then it means he's okay! He's alive! He's your brother for Christ's sake! Don't you care?"

"I care," Thomas said. "Maybe I care more than you do. I care enough to leave him the fuck alone if he wants. Look, even if I could get away from here, even if we could talk Espinosa into letting me go, who says Eddie even wants to be found?"

"Maybe he has amnesia."

"Amnesia. Shit. Maybe it's not Eddie at all, maybe it's his evil twin. You watch too much T V."

“What do you want me to do, just forget about him?”

“That’s exactly what you should do. The entire country is coming down around our ears. Those mountains are full of rebels and the *guardia* is going nuts trying to find them. If you get caught up in that you’re going to need somebody to rescue you.”

“That’s why I want you to come with me.”

“You’re chasing the past. Eddie chucked it all ten years ago. He cut his records and said what he had to say and got out. He’s finished. He’s retired. If he wants to play Indian for the rest of his life, he’s entitled.”

“What about you? Are you retired too?”

Thomas remembered the look on Espinosa’s face when he talked about his kid. For the first time he saw through to something that he doubted Geisler and Shapiro had ever seen. Espinosa’s kid, the son of a career military man in a third world country, plugging away on his CRT. If that wasn’t the future, he didn’t know what was.

“I don’t think so,” he said. “I think maybe I’m just getting started. I’ve been standing around here for a couple of years with my thumb up my ass when there’s real work to be done. Changing people’s heads. People like Espinosa. Stopping shit like Chernobyl and Bhopal before we kill off the whole planet.”

She shook her head. “You tell me I’m living in the past, and then you start up with all this Woodstock Generation shit. You’re not going to change anything hiding out down here.”

“Who’s hiding out?” Thomas said. “They’re right up against the future every day here. They’ve got close to a thousand sensors all over the complex, feeding a central computer. They’ve got plans to retrofit entire cities with solar technology, to teach poor villages how to build boats like that one there—”

“Listen to you. You keep saying ‘they.’ I hear everything you’re saying but I don’t buy it. I think you’re kidding yourself. People aren’t going to tear down all their beautiful ranch style homes and start living in greenhouses. Things are just going to go on the way they always have.”

Thomas looked down at his sneakers, tapping the sides together. “You know what they say about me here? They say I’m *sanpaku*. It’s Japanese or something. It means I show too much white along the bottoms of my eyes. It’s supposed to mean I’m out of balance or something. Well maybe I am. I’m 41 years old. I’m divorced, no kids, no house, no car, no pension. It’s time for me to start believing in something.”

“Thomas...”

“No,” he said. “Maybe we can’t change everything overnight. But we can get started. A little at a time. Retrofitting, rebuilding. When the ranch houses fall down we can put up something better. Even just getting the information out there would be something.” Finally he looked at her. “It’s time for me to do this,” he said. “It’s what I want.”

They both got up. She put out her hand and Thomas took her in his arms, just because he wanted to. He held her until she relaxed and put her arms around him too. The smell of her hair was sweet, intoxicating, but when he tried to concentrate on it, it went away. It was like he was already trying to remember it. He was the first to let go.

“I’m at the Hotel Capitol,” she said. “Calle Uruguay, near the Alameda. If you change your mind.”

“Not this time,” Thomas said.

She stopped once by the far side of the pool and looked back. Thomas sat down and stared into the water and finally she went away.

**E**SPINOSA SAT IN THE CHAIR next to him, the one where Lindsey had been sitting. “She want you to leave with her?”

“Yeah,” Thomas said. “That’s what she wanted.”

“She is a very beautiful woman. Very handsome.”

Thomas nodded. He picked up a thumb-sized chunk of cement and tossed it at the nearest carp. The water killed its momentum. It drifted slowly past the nose of the fish, who had backed up two inches to watch it. Fuck you too, Thomas thought.

“I could let you go,” Espinosa said. “To go with her. You don’t need to be here.”

He means it, Thomas decided. No ulterior motives, no bullshit. It made him painfully self-conscious. “No,” he said. “Thank you. But no. I want to stay here.”

“It is so important to you? This work?”

“Yes,” Thomas said. “This work.”

“**D**O WE GET our people back?” Shapiro asked. They were in the mural room again. Espinosa had brought two of his men along, but their rifles were slung over their shoulders, out of the way.

“No,” Espinosa said. “We are not responsible for so many Northamericans all in one place.”

“Then what’s the point? The three of us can’t run this place by ourselves.”

“The Republic will be you partner now. We bring in people to help you.”

“Great,” Geisler muttered. “We’ve just been nationalized.”

“What people?” Shapiro asked. “The army?”

“No. I think maybe my son like to work here. He can bring others from the University City to help him.”

“Your son?” Shapiro said. “What kind of bullshit stunt—”

“Judy,” Thomas said, “just shut up for once.” He nodded to Espinosa. “I think that’s really a good idea. I look forward to meeting your son. I think we’ll all have a lot to learn from each other.”

“Thomas...” Shapiro said.

He held up one hand. “Not right now, okay? Maybe later.” He walked over to the door. His footsteps were very loud on the parquet. “I think you guys can get along fine without me, and I’ve got a lot of work to do.”

There were parrots in the trees behind the gardens. They had the intonations of speech but none of the sense. Thomas found their cries somehow comforting as he knelt in the damp black earth and started pulling weeds.

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