

The Life and Times of Uncle Sam: The Untold Stories

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The Life and Times Of Uncle Sam: The Untold Stories

**By
MDBruffy**

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...He came through the smoke and haze like a ghost slowly taking shape. His red and white trousers were smeared with both dirt and blood- there was even a hole in one knee. The sleeves of his dirty white shirt were rolled up, revealing long arms that were scratched and bleeding. His yellow vest flapped open as he walked, allowing a fellow to see the dark blue suspenders he wore. The red bow tie was in tatters, its ragged ends flapping in the breeze. His white goatee and long white hair were blown about by the same breeze that was blowing the smoke from the battlefield.

But his eyes and face were what caught your attention. His eyes were kind of haunted- like he was walking through a nightmare and as he rolled down his sleeves, you could see the sorrow and regret in his face.

I watched as he walked over to a tree and took a dark blue swallow-tailed jacket from the limb he'd hung it on. As he reached for that blue and white hat of his as it hung on another branch, I saw the stars that went around it and realized who this fella was.

I'd seen drawings of him in the papers most of my life- but never with the sadness I saw today.

As he settled his top hat on his head, he turned and surveyed the battlefield, covered with the bodies of both Union and Confederate soldiers. He turned, looked to the flag that flew overhead, then walked off, back into the smoke and haze until he was lost to view...

- From a Union Soldier's letter home

Dated 1861

The Witch and the Symbol

1

September, 1861. Somewhere in Wisconsin.

Fall was still several weeks away, but the trees were already beginning to turn various shades of brown and yellow. The maple was one of those trees. For several feet into the air, its leaves were a mix of green, brown and yellow with more than a few shades of orange thrown in for variety.

Yet, Sam- Uncle Sam that is- was oblivious to this as he stood by the graveside. The freshly dug ground was a rich brown and contrasted sharply with the green of the grass that surrounded it. Yet, this too, went unnoticed.

On the branch of that maple, above Sam's head, a bird was perched. This was no ordinary bird, mind you. With dark brown wings and a head of white crown feathers, this bald eagle would have stood out almost anywhere- especially since she stood a good 45 inches tall and looked every bit of it. Her name was 'Old Abe' and there was more to her appearance than most people knew.

"I'm sorry, Sam." Yes, she could talk- and would only to those she considered a friend. "If Jonathan had just listened to reason..."

"I know." Sam released a sigh as he looked out across the cemetery. There were a lot of fresh graves now. "But he believed in the Confederacy, Abe. And I refuse to condemn a man that stands up for what he believes in."

Abe watched as Sam reached out and rested a hand on the tombstone that marked Brother Jonathan's final resting place. Gently, the eagle cleared her throat, for while she could speak the human language, it

wasn't easy. "I should be getting back to Company 'C', Sam. They'll start to wonder what happened to me.*

"Take care."

"You, too, my friend."

Silence settled over the gravesite once more as Old Abe took to the air and Sam continued to stand where he was.

"Was he family?"

Sam turned at the voice to see a red headed young woman in her late twenties standing outside the cemetery fence. The brown dress she wore was trimmed in yellow and along with her yellow hat, complimented her. The bag she carried was another story however, in that it was nearly three times the size of bags Sam had seen other women carry.

"He was my nephew," Sam told her. "Died in a battle near here a few days ago."

She came through the gate and stood beside him. "Confederate or Union?"

Sam's expression showed his dislike of the question. "*American.*" He reached down to where he'd laid his hat on the ground.

The woman's eyes went wide once she saw it and realized who this tall stranger was. "I've seen your likeness in the newspapers. Those drawings don't do you justice, Samuel."

*Historic note. There was a real bald eagle named "Old Abe". She was the Mascott for Company 'C' of the Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment. She survived the Civil War, to die of smoke inhalation in a state house fire in 1881- after alerting everyone else to the danger. Her legacy lived on however. Company 'C' grew into the 101 Airborne- The 'Screaming Eagles'. The Eagle on their shoulder patch is Old Abe.

Sam looked at her in surprise. No one had ever called him “Samuel” before. He wasn’t sure if he liked it or not. “You seem to have the advantage, Madam.”

They stepped away from the grave and were soon back on the main street, talking as they walked. “My name’s Coral Wilson- closest thing there is to a doctor in these parts. In fact, I was just on my home from delivering a baby.” She nodded back toward the cemetery. “How’d your nephew die?”

“In the beginning, we both represented the country,” Sam answered. “But when the South seceded, he sided with them. A few days ago, we ran into each other in a battle south-east of here. I tried to talk some sense into him- get him to help me pull the country back together, but he wouldn’t listen. He was just about to shot me when a Union soldier shot him first.”*

“I didn’t think you could kill a symbol,” Coral said.

Sam nodded. “It depends on how much belief and faith the people have in you.”

The sun was sitting on the horizon as they walked towards it and into a red and gold sunset. “Do you really think the country *can* be reunited?” the woman asked.

Sam glanced at her and his words were firm. “It *has* to be. Split like we are, neither side can survive long on its own. There are too many wolves out there waiting to tear us apart.

*Historic note: The character of “Brother Jonathan” was originally adopted by the state of New England from 1783 to 1815. The term ‘Uncle Sam’ made its first appearance in 1812. In the beginning both characters were used to represent the country. By the last half of the 1800’s the job had fallen completely to Uncle Sam.

“We’re the ‘Grand Experiment’,” Sam continued. “We *have* to survive- to show the rest of the world that there’s something better than kings and tyrants.”

They had reached Coral’s home. A small house- almost a cottage- on the edge of town. She stared at the front door for a moment before she spoke, as if she were weighing the risks of her next question. “Do symbols eat?”

A weak smile came to Sam’s face. “Occasionally.”

She turned to face him. “Have you eaten lately?”

“No Ma’am.”

She looked down as if still considering her actions. “I haven’t eaten supper yet, myself.” Then she took a deep breath and nodded to herself before she faced him. “You’re welcome to share what I’ve got.”

Sam bowed to her and tipped his hat to her. “Thank you, Miss Wilson.”

“Coral.”

“Coral.”

She unlocked the door and led him inside. In the dim light of the setting sun, Sam could barely make out the fact that the cottage was divided into two rooms. The one in the rear was Coral’s bedroom, then there was a large fireplace- open on both sides- with the front room serving as kitchen, dining room and parlor. “If you’ll start the fire, I’ll see to the water,” she suggested.

Sam agreed and as she left with a bucket in hand, he turned to the fireplace, taking flint and steel from his pocket as he moved. Soon, his success was throwing a warm glow throughout the cottage and Sam looked around the front room with mild interest.

On one wall near the kitchen area, there were several shelves- all filled with as many jars as they would hold. Curiosity drew him toward

them and as he read the labels, confusion slowly grew on his face. He knew something about medicinal herbs and roots- he'd had to treat many a wounded soldier over the years- but the contents of some of those jars were far from medicinal.

The front door opened at that point and Coral returned with the water. Sam took it from her and set the bucket on the table. He spoke as he nodded toward the shelves. "A hundred years ago, the contents of some of those jars could have gotten you convicted as a witch."

Coral's eyebrows rose. She glanced at Sam, then toward the jars as she stepped toward the fireplace. "169 years ago to be exact, Samuel- and they *did*."

A lot of confusion was packed into Sam's one word response. "What?"

She turned to face him and the fire cast its light across her face as she spoke. "Being special yourself, I hope you'll understand when I tell you I'm a 'white witch' or 'sorceress' if you prefer that term. I don't use my powers for evil, Samuel- I'd lose them if I did."

Sam found himself interested despite himself. Other than Jonathan and Old Abe, he'd never known anyone other than normal mortals. "So what happened?"

Coral raised her hand and a soft glow formed around it. Sam's eyes went wide as two rockers moved across the floor- *on their own*- and came to a stop in front of the fireplace. "You might as well sit down," She told him as she did so. "It's a rather long story. To be honest, I'm glad someone even wants to hear it."

As Sam slowly sat down in the other rocker, Coral leaned her head back and closed her eyes for a moment before she spoke again. "It was September 21, 1692. I was living in Salem, Massachusetts at the time..."

2

...It was a small cabin, barely large enough for a bed and a fireplace. September had turned cold early that year and several people had come down sick while trying to get things ready for the winter. One of those people was a young widow named Anna Thomas.

At the moment, she was lying in the bed with several blankets over her in an attempt to keep her warm while Coral knelt by the fireplace, mixing one of her herbal brews into a broth. Filling a cup with the liquid, Coral brought it over and sat down on the edge of the bed. "Here, Anna, drink this. It'll help break the fever."

As the girl took the cup in both hands, the front door of the cabin was suddenly forced open and three men entered. Coral slowly rose to her feet as she took in the sight of these uninvited guests. "Reverend Paris? Reverend Hale? What's going on?"

The third man, younger than the other two, stepped in front of them. His clothes were more sharply tailored and his hat was in better repair since both had arrived from England only a few months earlier. When he spoke, his moustache twitched as if it had a life of its own. "As if you didn't know- *Witch!*"

Coral's eyes narrowed as she recognized this one. "Dr. Ketchum. I should have known. Because I helped the ones you gave up on, you've made accusations against me." She looked to the older Paris and Hale, hoping to appeal to their common sense. "I've done nothing wrong."

Paris' grey beard bristled. It was clear he didn't like what was going on, but he wasn't going to try to stop it on his own, either. "You're get your chance to say your piece, Miss Coral." He glanced at Ketchum and Hale. "Bring her."

Leaving Anna in bed, they grabbed Coral by both arms and dragged her from her cabin and down the street. They didn't release her until

they had her in the meeting house and clapped in irons in front of the entire town.

The meeting house was just a shell- a large room normally used for social events and town meetings. Today, it was clear, what with the powder-wigged and black robed judge seated at a table at one end of the room- that the building's function would be that of a courthouse. "You have been charged with the crime of witchcraft," the judge started as he checked some papers in front of him. "Who speaks against the accused?"

There was a murmur from the crowd and Coral knew it would be Ketchum without even turning to see. No magic was needed- he was the only one that hated her that much. The doctor removed his cloak with a theatrical swirl and laid it across a stool as he answered. "I do."

He stepped toward the table, then turned to face the crowd. Every step, every move was clearly that of a strutting rooster trying to score points with the hens. "I came to Salem seven months ago to set up a medical practice. When I got here, I found this woman giving people broth and *potions* concocted from herbs no educated medical practitioner had ever heard of." He looked to the judge. "I treated patients with raging fevers and illnesses for which I a mere mortal could do nothing." He turned and with an accusing finger, pointed at Coral. "But she and her *posions* claimed to have cured them. There is no sound medical explanation for their recovery. *Those people should be dead!* How else, other than some pact with the Devil, could she have saved them?"

Silence filled the meeting house as Ketchum finished and all eyes shifted to Coral, then to the judge. He in turn, looked upon Coral with clear disgust on his face. "How do you answer these charges, girl?"

"Does it matter?" Coral asked in a rational tone- one in sharp contrast to Ketchum's. "The hangman's preparing his noose even now." She looked around the room at the assembled faces. Her chains clanked

together as these people refused to meet her gaze. They had been her neighbors for five years, yet none of them had any intention of speaking on her behalf. Very well then. She'd speak on her own. "Ever since I came to Salem, I've done my best to help those that needed it. Most of the people in this room have come to me of their own free will at one time or another. Several came to me when this fakier-" She nodded toward Ketchum-" could only recommend a bleeding- *to release the evil spirits trapped in the body!*"

Coral met Ketchum's glare with an equally strong one of her own. It was clear she wasn't going to beg him for her life or anything else. "I'm *not* going to be another one of your victims, *Doctor.*"

She looked around the room again and her words were directed to everyone. "Did it not seem strange to you fine people, that all of your convicted witches were powerless to prevent their punishments? If they were *really* the Devil's handmaidens, would they have allowed themselves to be captured so easily?" She raised her hands above her head, there was a flash of light- and the shackles fell to the floor. "I think not."

The doctor found himself trying to swallow in a dry throat. When he finally spoke, his words came out in a whisper. "Saints preserve us."

Coral folded her arms across her chest in clear disgust. "The Saints would have nothing to do with *you*. You think the Devil's magic is the *only* magic?"

"In the last six months, you've killed 20 people in your search for witches." She turned her gaze to the judge, who was making certain to stay behind the table- as if that would have protected him. "Well, now you've found one. But before you start laying claim to the cause of Good, I suggest you search your own hearts for Evil."

She turned to Ketchum as the crowd watched and listened to it all. "Let's start with you, Doctor. Are you certain there's not an ounce or two

of jealousy in your heart because I know the local herbs and roots- and being fresh from England, you don't?"

She took a few steps around the cleared floor and couldn't help notice how skittish the crowd was. She stood still and they settled down once more. "I'd hope by keeping quiet, you'd never discover my secret and this idiocy would blow over. But 20 people dead tell me otherwise."

Coral stepped toward the table and the judge cringed, clearly frightened of her. "So now *I* am telling *you*: These trials end today- and the innocents in your jail are to be set free."

Angered by these demands, Ketchum grabbed her by the arm. "We'll do no Witch's bidding!"

Coral simply looked in his direction and Ketchum found himself flung through the air to slam back-first against a wall. The anger in her voice was now unmistakable as he slid to the floor. "You *will* do as I say, or I will return and burn Salem to the ground!"

Then in an explosion of fire and light, she was gone.*

* Historic fact: The Salem Witch Trials lasted from March to September 1692. By September 22, 27 people had been convicted of being witches. 19 had been hung and one had been squashed by stones.

It took Governor Phips to step in and order the release of all the surviving prisoners. But it would be another 19 years before the families of those killed would be compensated for their losses.

3

“...I stayed close enough for a year or so to check on them. But they seem to finally put it all behind them.” Coral studied Sam’s face as she finished her story. “Have I scared you to such an extent that you wish to leave?”

Sam looked surprised by the question. “No. Did you want to?”

Coral slowly shook her head. “No.” She shifted her position as she went on and her voice grew softer. “I cannot take part in the physical pleasures that mortal women do. I lose my powers if I do. But 169 years is a long time to have only neighbors as companions. An actual friend would be welcome.”

Sam turned his gaze to the fire as he nodded. “I know the feeling very well. The people of this country gave me life in 1812. But except for Jonathan- who was never that close- there is no other close family.” He sighed. “As sole representative of the country, my conduct has to be above reproach. Everything I say or do is reflected back on it.

“Yet, I too would welcome a friend.”

Slowly, Coral smiled. “Well then, I’d better put supper on the table before two friends starve to death.”

Sam leaned back in his rocker and watched as she lit a lamp before heading on to the kitchen area. “Where did you go after leaving Salem?” He asked.

“Wandered mainly,” Coral replied as she lit the wood in the stove. “I lived in Boston, Richmond- even Philadelphia for a while.

“Then in 1776 came the Revolution of course and I sided with the Colonies. I doctored the ones that needed it and used my magic to help when I could.” She looked up from preparing a pot of beans. “Nothing major- no spell to win the war. I’m not that powerful. Just a little bad weather here and there. A rain storm to bog the British in mud or calm

winds so their fleet couldn't sail. Just enough to tip the scales in the Colonies' favor.

"Course not everything went like I planned."

Sam watched as she put the beans on and began getting out other fixings. "Like what?" he asked.

"Like Valley Forge," she answered as she began peeling potatoes. "I'd planned a nice, gentle snow- just enough to give the Colonial Army a rest. Lord knows they needed one. I didn't know that Mother Nature had her *own* snow storm planned. Between the two of us, it turned into a blizzard that nearly killed the whole army." She put the potatoes on as she continued. "After that, I stuck to my doctoring. I'd stay somewhere for a few decades, then fake my death and move on. As the country came west, so did I."

"Are there others like you?" Sam wondered.

Coral sat down at the table as she answered. "Well, there was my mother when she was alive. When a sorceress has a relationship that results in a child, the powers are handed down- in fact, I learned everything about whom and what I am from her. I've never seen or heard of any others, but I don't doubt that they're out there somewhere."

The conversation drifted back and forth, off and on throughout dinner and deep into the night. The sorceress and the symbol found themselves talking about everything and anything- and found in each other an understanding no one else could share.

In the weeks and months that followed, Sam watched over the Union forces as best he could. But even he couldn't be everywhere and there were losses. As for Coral, she continued to look after her neighbors, tend to what few wounded soldiers came her way- it didn't matter to her if they were North or South- and she found herself following the war much closer than she ever had before.

During those months, Sam returned as often as he could and his visits were welcome by both of them. She'd listen closely as he told her the latest news about the war and then he'd lean back in his rocker and listen as she told him about the latest goings-on in her life. As time passed, as 1861 became 1862, the friendship they had sought in each other solidified and grew. As 1863 began, their friendship was more like that of brother and sister than the friends they had started out to be.

June 30, 1863

The sun squatted on the horizon as the day slowly lost the heat it had provided. Coral stood some distance away, watching as Sam sat quietly on a tree stump. The result of his labor lay as firewood at his feet. Silently, she came up beside him and rested a hand on his shoulder. "The only time you go off on your own like this, is when there's a battle brewing."

He looked up at her as the setting sun cast a reddish tint in his white hair and she couldn't miss the concern in his eyes as he nodded. "I'm afraid there is."

Coral's gaze went to the sunset. "Where is it this time?"

"Lee's taking his army north again," Sam told her. "The Union's getting ready to cut him off at a place called Gettysburg up in Pennsylvania."

He reached out to her and took her hand as he stood. "I have to make sure as many survive as I can."

Without a word, she reached to the wood pile nearby and retrieved his hat for him. Then she watched as he put it on and walked off into the rising fog. "This stupid war's gone on long enough," she said to herself. "It's clear he needs help to end it- and its past time I gave it to him."

July 4, 1863

Outside Gettysburg

The fighting had been going on for hours and the Union line still stretched for over a mile even though the Confederate forces had attacked both ends of it. Tension ran high as Sam stood with the Union in the center of its line. Everyone knew the strongest attack would be there.

On a rise above the battlefield, there was a burst of light as Coral arrived in all her magical finery. As she stood above the smoke and haze, her arms held high, her hair and gown were blown about by a breeze only *she* was aware of.

Then the South's charge began and General Picket's men surged toward the Union's lines. Sam and the soldiers prepared to meet them. But as the Confederate forces neared the line, Sam sensed Coral's presence and looked toward the ridge.

A moment later, the back of his head exploded under a confederate rifle butt and Sam went down under a sea of grey. On the ridge, Coral's eyes went wide and Sam's name was torn from her throat.

Livid energy erupted from her hands and anger crossed her face as a blinding glare washed out everything...

Sometime later...

Sam slowly woke to find himself lying on Coral's bed in the midst of a spinning room. Gradually, things settled down and he reached up to feel the bandage round his head. Carefully, he sat up as Coral came into the cabin and dropped her armful of firewood next to the fireplace. "It's about time you woke up."

"What happened?" He asked. "What were you doing on that ridge?"

“Trying to help,” Coral answered as she stepped up to the foot of the bed. “Then when I saw you get hit, I...” She turned away and stood by the fireplace in silence.

Slowly, with every move feeling like torture, Sam rose from the bed and stepped to her side. “What happened, Coral?”

For a long moment, she didn’t answer. Then when she did, she spoke to the fire instead of Sam. “For the first time in my life, I lost control,” she whispered. “I only meant to slightly tip the scales in the Union’s favor.” She did turn to face him then and there a deep urgency in her voice. “You have to believe that, Samuel.”

He leaned against the fireplace and his voice sounded tired. “How’d the battle end?”

“The Union won,” Coral replied as she turned back to the fire. “President Lincoln even declared part of the battlefield a memorial and cemetery.”

“He had to *create* a cemetery?” Coral started to turn away, but Sam took her by her shoulders and looked at her face closely. “Coral...how many died?”

Unable to meet his gaze, she stared at his chest as she answered in a whisper. “All together...on both sides...5...51,000.”

Sam just stared at her in shocked horror.

4

“51,000...” Sam turned away in disbelief. His face a perfect example of overwhelmed shock. He then turned to face her. “Coral...”

“I didn’t mean to, Samuel,” she pleaded as she went to him. “I’ve dreaded having to tell you. I never intended it to go that far.” It was her turn to step away then, but not before Sam saw the memory of the horror in her eyes and the tears that ran down her face. “The papers were full of it for weeks.”

Coral wiped the tears away and swallowed. “But that eventually paled compared to what the Union did on its own.”

“What do you mean?”

She turned to face him, then waved a hand toward the kitchen area. In one corner, a tri-pod came to life and walked itself to the center of the front room. A dish then sailed from a shelf and fastened itself on top. With a snap of her fingers, a small fire lit upon the dish and she guided Sam toward it. Coral then went to the shelf and came back with a small pouch, from which she took a fine powder and sprinkled into the flame. “This is the Vison Flame. Look into it, Samuel- and look closely.”

As Sam did as she asked, she fueled the fire with more of the powder and said several magical words he didn’t understand. Gradually, images began to form in the flames. As Coral spoke, the images changed to match her words. “A few months after Gettysburg, the Union literally starved Vicksburg into surrendering. Then, just last year, General Sherman reduced Atlanta to *ashes* before cutting a wide path of destruction clear to the Atlantic coast.”

Sam’s jaw tightened at the sight of the images the flames showed him. Then his eyes narrowed slightly as he looked to Coral. “You talk as if Gettysburg was years ago.”

She nodded as she allowed the flame to go out. “Two years ago.” She clapped her hands and both dish and tri-pod returned to their places. She placed the pouch of powder on the table as she explained. “After the battle, I searched through the bodies till I found you. Once I had, all I could think about was getting you as far away from there as possible.”

Sam nodded. “So you used your magic.”

She nodded in return. “And brought us two years forward in time. It’s April 5, 1865- and the war is *still* raging.”

“What?”

“Yes,” Coral turned and stepped away as she spoke. “The Union has nearly won. General Lee and his men have been on the run for days. In a few more, General Grant’ll have him surrounded.”

Sam stepped up behind her and took hold of her shoulders. “Where?” Coral stared into the fire as she answered. “A place in Virginia called Appomattox.”

The night of April 8, 1865

It was quiet in the Confederate camp, for they knew the Union forces weren’t very far away. The quiet was like cotton, muting the sound of voices and movement. It penetrated everywhere- including the tent of General Robert E. Lee.

Lee may have been the oldest soldier in the Confederacy. His grey bearded face was recognizable anywhere in the South- or the North for that matter. But tonight, as he paced his tent in the light of a single lamp, there was a tired, haunted look in his eyes- a look that had grown and deepened almost daily since Gettysburg.

Not for the first time, he wished President Davis had accepted his resignation.

Quietly, Sam stepped from the shadows of the tent and for a moment, he simply watched the man the South had bet their survival on. Then, softly, he cleared his throat. “General?”

Lee turned, his sword half-drawn. “Who-?” Then he recognized Sam and slammed it back into its scabbard. “Have you come to haunt me in my final hours, sir?”

Sam stepped up beside the General’s desk and the tent’s one lamp as he spoke. “No, General. I came to suggest- to ask- that you surrender.”

Lee’s brow furled in frustration, then he turned his back.

“General, sir, I ask on behalf of your men. They’re sick, hungry.” Sam stepped toward the man. “How many have *died* in the last few days?”

For several moments, Lee’s back remained stiff with opposition. Then it all seemed to drain away- tension and all. “Too damn many.” He glanced at Sam, then at the walls of his tent. “God Almighty, I am tired of this war.” Then he shook his head. “But they expect to win.”

Sam shook his head- but for different reasons. “No, sir, they don’t- not any more. All they want is to get through this alive and get back to their families.

“Even now, Grant’s forces have you surrounded- There’s nowhere left to go.

“There’s nothing to be ashamed of. The Confederate States of America managed to exist for four years. It’s earned its place in History.” Sam took a step toward this great man. “Grant will deal fairly- you can count on that.

“Besides, what have you got left to lose?”

Lee turned and met Sam’s gaze squarely.*

*Historic fact: On April 9, 1865, at Appomattox, General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses Grant.

April 9, 1865

It was dark inside that Wisconsin cabin, but Coral seemed unaware of it as she stared into her Vision Flame and watched as General Lee led his men down the road away from Appomattox. Then, a Union officer called out and troopers on both sides of the street snapped to attention. They became an honor guard and as crisp a salute as any ever seen was given as the Confederate troops rode or walked by.

The War was over. Their Southern brothers were going home.

As Coral watched these proud men march away from their defeat, a tear ran down her face that she made no effort to wipe away.

An explosion rocked the cabin! Fire and smoke shot up out of a hole in the floor several feet wide. Coral turned and raised her hands in fear and defense- *and was slammed by a burst of energy.* A stench began to fill the cabin as a voice that was full of gravel echoed through the air. “You have used your powers to kill. I can feel your remorse and guilt! White magic used to *Kill!*”

“I didn’t mean to!” Coral screamed as she recognized the stench of Brimstone. “It was an accident!”

A presence was taking form out of the fire and smoke- a presence more powerful than any other that walked the Earth. “That’s what they all say.”

The presence solidified into a man-like creature with red skin that seemed to shine with reflected firelight. His horns and fangs were both white and sharp- while his eyes were large yellow orbs with no whites or irises in them.

In a final burst of flame, Satan stood revealed.

In stark terror, Coral tried her best to back away until she was trapped in a corner with the ruler of the underworld reaching a hand out toward her. “You are now *mine!*”

“What in the name of God- ?!”

An angered, hate filled hiss like that from a several ton cobra escaped Satan’s throat as he turned toward the source of that hated name.

Sam stood in the door- his face clearly showing the revulsion he felt at the sight of the creature before him.

“Stay out of this, Symbol,” Satan warned in gravel-filled echoes. “The Sorceress misused her powers- She is mine to claim. Her fate does not concern you.”

Sam took one step further into the room and closed the door. “Guess again. The fate of *every* American is my concern. You won’t keep her without a fight!”

Anger seemed to radiate from the horned beast and Sam was vaguely aware of a pointed tail slapping impatiently against the floor. Then Satan thrust a hand into the air and in a blinding explosion, the cabin was reduced to cinders!

Stunned, Sam struggled to his feet to find the beast standing before him with Coral trapped in some kind of fiery aura. “You’re will power is strong,” Satan admitted. “Mere mortals have died from less.

“Find me, Symbol. Come and find me- and *you* can name the challenge and the terms.”

Sam’s own anger now rose to the surface at Satan’s patronizing attitude. “*Your* terms are impossible! I walk the Earth- *You* have the Netherworld to *crawl* back to!”

A low rumble came from deep in Satan’s chest as his anger mixed with frustration. “Damn you. Her actions were already questionable- and your claim restricts me even more!

“All right! Search the world over! I shall amuse myself upon it till you find me!” Then, in an explosion of volcanic proportions, Satan was gone-
-and he’d taken Coral with him.

5

Sam began his search that night- pausing only long enough to gather some food. He knew the search would not be short- that unholy demon would want to stretch it out as long as possible.

Yet, even *he* had rules he had to live by.

Unfortunately, so did Sam- and those rules included representing the United States whenever the need arose. In the years of searching that followed, there was a lot of need.

Sam's stature as the symbol of the United States grew to world-wide status as the 19th century came to an end and the 20th began. On August 4, 1914, he was in New York and heard it on the radio when Britain declared war on Germany and its Kaiser- bringing World War One into existence.

On April 22, 1915, he was with the troops in France and anger flooded his face even as German forces flooded the trenches with gas. He watched as Old Abe's son, Abraham, flew into combat with something called the "Air Corps".

In 1918, he watched from a ridge as Abraham and a squadron of bi-planes hunted down the infamous Red Baron- and he was there on November 15 of that same year when a defeated Germany signed the Armistice, bringing World War One to an end.

Yet, throughout all of this, Sam's search for Coral and Satan continued. He traveled all over the world as the years passed. He visited every place on the planet that might have attracted that Demon's twisted attention.

The "Roaring Twenties" came to an end and Sam found himself in Britain in 1933 reading a newspaper article about a man named Adolf Hitler being elected Chancellor of Germany.

In 1936, Sam was in Los Angeles, listening to the radio as black American Jessie Owens shot down every Nazi lie about white racial supremacy with every Olympic record he set. Despite his own problem, Sam felt proud of Owens when news came of Hitler storming from his stadium box in a white hot fury.

Then came October 5, 1938. Sam was in Hong Kong, reading an English language newspaper. As rain began to fall, he read the headline with growing suspicion.

HITLER INVADES CZECHOSLOVAKIA

As he walked away from the newsstand, the concern in Sam's face was clear everytime the lightening flashed. Had he made a mistake? Was there more to the Kaiser's insanity than mere *mortal* madness?

By February of 1940, Sam was nearly convinced when news reached the radios and papers about Nazi U-boats sinking neutral ships. Yet, this-like the Civil War- was nothing that would require Satan to pull the strings. By year's end, however, something happened that pulled his attention in a totally different direction.

"...On December 7th, 1941, a date which will live in Infamy, the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan..."

Having seen the crowd gathered by the radio display in a department store, Sam had wandered in and listened. Now, his eyes narrowed.

He had to get to Washington.

Most of the lights were out in the White House. MPs were everywhere- and no one did anything without authorization. There were two exceptions to this however.

One was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, currently serving his seventh year in office. At the moment, he was putting in some late night

hours in that office. In many ways, he was a remarkable man, this president. Not only did he now have to guide his country through a Second World War, he had to do it from a wheelchair- or propped up in leg braces and using a cane.

The public didn't know this man- their leader- was a victim of Polio, or if they did, no one complained about it. He had pulled them through the Depression and most everyone believed he would get them through this new trouble as well.

The second person that was an exception to the rules, had been watching the President for several moments. Now, he softly cleared his throat as he stepped from the office shadows. "Mr. President."

Roosevelt looked up from the papers on his desk, then adjusted his glasses as he took in the sight of this late night visitor. "You're lucky I'm alone, Sam. If an MP had been present, he might've opened fire."

"Things have gotten that tense?" Sam asked as he stepped up to the desk.

"Very much so," Roosevelt stated. "So much so, I cannot help wondering what brought you to me."

"Your speech to Congress," Sam replied. "And a problem of my own." Sam then went on to tell the President of that day 75 years earlier, when Satan came to claim Coral- and his search for them ever since.

Roosevelt leaned back in his wheelchair as he listened to the entire story without saying a word. Only after Sam was finished, did he speak. "When you came into existence in 1812, no one knew who or what you'd become, Sam. You were a symbol for the country- a caricature for some political cartoonist to hang the country's name on." Roosevelt took a cigarette from the humidor on his desk and fitted it into the holder he used. He went on as he lit it. "No one ever expected you to take on a life of your own- or face evils on a scale only you could reach.

“Do you really think, the Devil himself is manipulating the Japanese Emperor?”

Sam shrugged. “He could be impersonating him- or even possessing him.”

Roosevelt reached down to the bottom drawer of his desk and pulled it open- Sam could hear it scrap against the wheel of his chair. The President then removed a folder. “Given who and what you are, I think I understand as best I can,” Roosevelt said. “And while I may agree with your basic idea, I think you’re looking in the wrong hemisphere.”

At Sam’s puzzled look, the President handed him the folder as he explained. “The French and German undergrounds have made some rather disturbing discoveries. British Intelligence- at Churchill’s request- was kind enough to send us a copy of the report.

“The Nazis are building some kind of slave camps outside Auschwitz and Belsen. Independent confirmation has obviously been hard to come by. But if that report’s true, then it’s not the Emperor of Japan you want-

“- It’s the Fuhrer of Germany.”

Sam looked through the folder, committing each detail in the report to memory. Then he looked up and met Roosevelt’s gaze as he tossed the folder on the desk. “Sounds like its time this report was confirmed.”

Roosevelt studied his face and could see the determination. “That could take months- they may even be in operation by the time you find them.”

“I’ll know that once I get there,” Sam answered.

6

Sam left that night and spent the next several months exploring the German countryside. If, in and around his search, he found a way to slow or delay the German war effort, he did so.

Finally, it was on a day in late summer, that he found Auschwitz- and the smell of the camp was enough to lead him to it. He could see row after row of flimsy buildings with a high barbed wire fence all the way around them. What prisoners he could see without showing himself were dying bags of bones with rags hanging from their bodies. Yet, it was not from them that the stench came. There was a long stone building set off to one side of the camp compound with several chimneys sticking up out of it. Two muscle-bound guards came from the building- talking and laughing as they walked.

The stench was over-powering as Sam stepped from the shadows created by the building's interior. There were some kind of furnaces- a whole row that ran the length of the building. Taking a wooden pole from where it leaned against a wall, Sam approached the nearest furnace and used the pole to lift the latch. Once it was clear, the door swung open-

-and open disgust overwhelmed Sam at the sight of the burning skull that stared back at him and the now powerful stench of burning flesh.

He shoved the door shut with a clang and flung the pole away. For a long moment, he leaned against the wall, his eyes closed in an attempt to close out the sight seared into his mind.

But then, those eyes opened- and intense anger leaped from them. He now knew where Coral was-

-Coral and Satan.

Berlin, Germany

The door of the office of Germany's Fuhrer slammed open- causing the man and woman inside to turn at the sound and sight of Sam marching into the room with anger clear in his eyes. "All right, you unholy *beast*! Only you could have conceived of a nightmare like those ovens!"

An insane, sick sneer crossed Hitler's face- then in a flash of hellfire, Satan and Coral stood revealed. "I was starting to wonder, Symbol." Satan's gravel-filled voice echoed around the room- not even the carpets or the tapestries could mute it. "You certainly took your time getting here."

"Samuel." Coral started toward him-

Satan point- *just pointed!* - and she screamed as she collapsed.

Sam stepped toward the demon in anger. "In the name of God, you promised!"

Satan cringed at the Lord's name and that cobra-like hiss seemed torn from his throat. Then he stepped toward Sam. "Very well. Name your challenge and state your terms- but they better be worth my time."

Sam nodded. "I think you'll find them very much to your liking. Terms: If I win, the Coral's free forever, the Axis Powers lose the war and you stay out of our lives."

Satan's yellow orbs narrowed. "And if I win?"

Sam glanced at Coral, then met the demon's gaze. "You can lay claim to me and everything I represent."

Coral stared at Sam in shock. Never before had anyone cared about her so much that they were willing to risk their own existence for her. Yet, in that same instant, she knew that if their positions were reversed, she would have gladly done the same for him.

As for Satan, he studied Sam's face for several moments. He seemed to take in every angle and curve of his opponent's face. Then he stepped

away, his tail thrashing about as he walked toward the office desk. Finally, he turned and his pupil-less eyes seemed to bore into Sam. “Agreed. Name your challenge.”

Sam had decided on that the moment he entered the room and pointed to it now as it sat on a nearby table. “Chess- one game.”

Satan’s eyes went wide and he almost laughed. “You *must* be joking!”

“Chess is a game of planning,” Sam stated. “Strategies and maneuvering- something you should be very good at. Don’t tell me you’re afraid?”

Satan’s eyes narrowed. He waved a hand and chairs made from skulls appeared on each side of the game table.

It was answer enough.

“Which color do you want?” Sam asked.

Satan hissed as he sat down behind his choice. “Black of course.”

And so, with the outcome of the war and the fate of the world hanging in the balance, a chess game began. Coral recovered and in the days that followed, she watched in awed silence, a meeting of minds that no mortal would ever lay eyes on.

Sometimes, they’d sit for hours, thinking and analyzing every piece on the board. They didn’t play by tournament rules- there was no time limit on how long they took to make a move.

A fact for which Sam was glad.

June 6, 1944

As allied forces landed on Normandy Beach, Satan’s rook took Sam’s knight, exposing his own knight which Sam promptly took with his bishop.

August 25, 1944

As General De Gaulle led his troops into a liberated Paris, Satan's rook was lost to Sam's second Knight, while Sam only lost a pawn to Satan's bishop.

October 20, 1944

As General MacArthur and his forces re-took the Philippines, Satan's bishop pounced on Sam's remaining knight, only to be lost in turn to Sam's queen.

April 30, 1945

Coral stood by Sam's side watching as a pawn was moved. Slowly, so as not to anger Satan, she wandered over to the office window. As she got there, the demon's gravelly voice echoed through the room. "Check."

She turned to see that Satan's remaining bishop had a clear shot at Sam's king- that is until Sam blocked it with one of his rooks- the only white rook to be moved the entire game. But Coral could see as Sam set it down, that it was more than a simple blocking move. "And check in turn."

It was true, his rook was now in direct line with Satan's king. The demon reached out, moving his king one block to the left.

Coral turned back to the window and a moment later, she heard the demon's voice again. "Check." She started to turn, but something in the street caught her eye. A moment later, an explosion blew out the window!

Even then, she was the first one back to it. "Samuel! There are Allied soldiers and tanks in the street!"

"Impossible!" Satan's roar of outrage was deafening as he rose to his feet.

"No," Sam stated calmly as he too stood. "While your concentration's been centered here for the last four years, the *real* Hitler's been trying to

run the war without you and he's lost- just as you have." Sam reached to his side of the chess board and took his king and the one rook- neither of which had been moved the entire game- and switched their positions- Castling and in the same move, pinned Satan's king where it stood. "Checkmate."

The Devil roared and bellowed as fire and smoke erupted all around him. "*Damn you!*" Then he vanished in a final burst of fire and Coral grabbed her head and screamed.

Sam caught her as she fell.

A moment later, the office door was flung open and two American soldiers charged into the room. One was a sergeant and the other was a corporal. Both stopped at the sight that greeted them. The Sergeant stepped forward. "Uncle Sam? Is she all right? Do you want us to call a medic?"

"No." Sam took Coral in his arms with ease as he stood. "I'll see to her."

The two soldiers watched in silence as the tall, white-haired man walked out, carrying his burden as if she were the lightest thing in the world. "Well, what do you think about that?" the corporal asked. "Uncle Sam with a girlfriend."

"So what's wrong with that?" the Sergeant asked in return. "Just because he represents our country, doesn't mean he can't have feelings."

"Now come on. We got a war to finish."*

*Historic fact: On April 30, 1945, Germany was defeated as Allied forces entered Berlin and Hitler shot himself in his bunker. Four months later, on August 8 and 9, atomic bombs were dropped on Japan. Five days later, Japan surrendered and World War II officially came to an end.

Epilogue

May 3, 1945

It was spring in Wisconsin. Most everything was in bloom or getting there.

Still the mental hospital had a cold feel to it as Sam followed the doctor through the halls to the patients' recreation room. The doctor indicated the redhead standing off by herself as he spoke. "I'm sorry, Sam. There's been no change since you brought her to us. She's completely withdrawn from everyone. We don't know how to reach her. Whatever Satan did to her when he left, just shut her down."

"Will she ever come out of it?" Sam asked.

The doctor could only shrug. "She could come out of it tomorrow- or fifty years from now."

Sam looked to the doctor and studied his face for a moment before he spoke. "Or never?"

The man sighed. "Or never."

Sam watched Coral as she stood against the wall. Then he walked over and kissed her on the forehead. As he turned and left, he didn't see the tear that ran silently down her cheek.

Encounters in the Sand

1

It was July, 1990 and the summer was only a few weeks old. In Wisconsin, it had been fairly dry lately, but in the shadows of Mount Rushmore, the trees and grass were still green. The presidential carvings were their own distinct shades of grey against a cauliflower blue sky.

The Veterans' Retirement Home was quiet and serene. How could it be otherwise with only one occupant? But the roar of a bus motor shattered the quiet and soon the huge white vehicle, with the name of a nearby summer camp painted on its side, pulled into the drive.

As the children- all third and fourth graders- disembarked, the Home's screen door opened and a tall man stepped onto the porch. The camp counselor smiled at the sight of him- just as she did the first time *her* camp counselor had brought her to visit. Then she turned to the children. "All right, Kids, straighten up. You're about to meet a very special person."

"Bart Simpson?" asked Billy Johnson from the back of the group. Stocky even at his age, the hopeful tone in his voice was reflected by the look on his face.

But the counselor was anything but pleased by the question. "No." She nodded toward the gentleman standing on the porch. "Uncle Sam."

But spikey-haired Billy was unimpressed. "Rather meet Bart Simpson."

Then everyone fell silent as Sam stepped onto the porch steps and the sun fell on his long face. There were signs of strain there, lines around his eyes that seemed to accent his age. As he looked the children over, it was clear he'd heard Billy's words. "Harder to teach and convince every year, aren't you?"

“You always succeed in the end, Sam,” the counselor- Karen Masters- stated.

Sam met her gaze for a moment, remembering when *she’d* first come on one of these visits and how her eyes had seemed to glow with interest. A dim shadow of which he had to strain to see in the children now standing before him. Finally, he turned and walked over to the porch swing and sat down. “Well, if you’ve got questions, ask them.”

Karen herded the children onto the porch and they sat down on the floor before him. “If you’re really Uncle Sam, how old are you?”

“188,” Sam answered and at that moment, Karen couldn’t help thinking he looked it.

Billy chose that moment to shoot his mouth off again. “Impossible. No one lives to be that old.”

“What about Santa Claus?” Sam asked the seven year old.

“He ain’t real,” Billy stated flatly- much to the shock of several of the children. “And you ain’t either- just some actor.”

The kids turned to watch Sam’s reaction and for several seconds he sat in silence, studying Billy’s face. Finally, he looked to Karen. “Ms. Masters, your campers act like they know everything already. I see no reason for this visit to continue.”

One little blond girl started to deny this, but Karen spoke before she could. “Not all of my kids are so disrespectful, Sam.” She reached down and took Billy by his arm. “I’ll see to Billy while the rest of you prove to Sam that I’m telling the truth.” Then despite Billy’s protests and demands to be released, Karen escorted him back to the confines of the bus.

“Uncle Sam...” the blond girl pointed past Sam as she spoke. “Is that a bald eagle?”

Sam looked down at her for a moment, then with a weak smile, he turned to see the bird in question on a tree limb nearby. "Yes, it is. In fact, that's Abraham."

"Named after the president, right?" another boy asked as he pointed toward the distant likeness of Abraham Lincoln on Mount Rushmore.

"His great-grandmother Old Abe was," Sam replied as he began to relax slightly and warm to the topic. "She lived during the Civil War- was Mascott to Wisconsin Company 'C'. She died in 1881.

"Now, Abraham's father- that'd be Old Abe's grandson- started the tradition of being associated with military flying. He was there at Kitty Hawk in 1903 when the Wright Brothers got that flyer of theirs in the air.

"From that day on, their family's watched over all American pilots like a hen watching over her chicks. Abraham's father- whose name was just 'Abe'- was there in 1918 when they shot down the Red Baron. He went on to take part in World War II, flying with all the services. He'd go up against the German Luftwaffe for a while, they fly to the Pacific and play tag with Japanese Zeros for a change of pace.

"He seemed to thrive on the war- the predator in him I guess."

"Was he killed?" a brown haired girl asked.

Sam shook his head. "No, he survived that war- although he was shot down quite a few times. Both the Japanese and the Germans came close several times to making Thanksgiving dinner out of him. But he always came back and fought on."

A red headed boy with freckles had the next question. "What happened to Abe?"

For a moment, Sam was quite, studying the young faces before him. They seemed to be genuinely interested. Was it possible he had misjudged them all because of Billy's big mouth? There was only one way to find out. He'd tell them.

“He died like he lived,” Sam said. “Flying in a war. It was 1963- none of you were even born yet- and I doubt that any of you have ever heard of a place called Vietnam...”

2

...The jungle was thick and hot. Sam had to use a machete to cut a path as he made his way through the humid air. After a moment, he looked to the sky. He and Abe had come looking for a patrol that had been ambushed by the North Vietnamese. So far, they'd had no luck and the day was half gone.

"Sam..." Abe's voice drifted down through the trees. "To your right. About a hundred yards."

Sam turned in that direction and hacked away for several moments before emerging into a clearing. "Dear Lord."

Bodies lie everywhere, some clearly dead. But three were still alive and Sam looked to Abe as the eagle landed nearby. "I can't carry all three," Sam stated.

"I'll go back for help," Abe replied. "Will you be all right?"

His friend nodded. "Just get back before nightfall."

With a nod of his own head, the eagle took flight-

- sniper fire filled the air-

- but the eagle flew on.

Several hours later, the sun was ready to set when two gunship helicopters landed. The crew of one began the grizzly task of collecting the bodies while Sam helped the other crew load the survivors. "Where's Abe?" he asked the pilot.

"In the ship."

Sam found the eagle sitting on the floor of the chopper. "Abe, are you all right?"

The eagle had been slumping- almost lying on the floor. But at Sam's voice, he sat up straighter and made an effort to fluff his feathers. "Course I am. Just tired. That's a lot of distance to cover round trip."

Within minutes, the helicopters were airborne and headed back to base. They were over halfway there, before Sam noticed the blood on the floor and traced it to its source. "Abe...?"

The eagle lifted his head and met his friend's gaze. "Not the first time, Sam. Don't worry about it. These guys need the help."

"How bad?"

The proud bird didn't seem to hear for a moment. "Bad enough." A fevered glaze came to his eyes and in his mind, it was another war he was fighting. "But the Japs won't win...We'll beat 'em back island...by island..."

"Abe- "All Sam could do was catch the eagle as he collapsed...

3

...There was a moment of silence on the porch as the children took in what Sam had told them. Then the same brown haired boy that had spoken before did so again in a softer voice. "Did Abe die, Uncle Sam?"

"I'm afraid so," Sam replied. "About ten minutes before we landed. I brought him home. He's buried at Arlington. They awarded him a Purple Heart and the Medal of Honor." Sam then nodded toward the tress where Abraham was still sitting. "Abraham took up the cause after his father died. He stayed in Vietnam for the rest of the war. He also went with our pilots to Granada and Panama."

The blond girl looked to the symbol. "What about you, Uncle Sam?"

For a moment, Sam didn't answer. He didn't think these kids were ready or would understand. But then, he decided to try. "After I brought Abe home, I retired. The country had reached a point where it didn't seem to need me anymore." He nodded toward the bus by way of meaning the exiled Billy. "Like Billy, they didn't want to believe in anything anymore."

"But you *have* to believe in something- yourself if nothing else."

From where she was seated on the floor, the blond girl reached up and touched Sam's knee. "Billy's an idiot. *We* believe in you."

The other kids were quick to back her up and that weak smile crossed Sam's face once more. "Thank you, Ma'am. But this is the 1990's. The age of cynicism and rational thought. Caring for your fellow American, believing in your country and what it stands for- all are as outmoded as I am."

"Kids?" Karen stood at the back of the group as she spoke. "I'm afraid it's time to head back."

Sam stood and the children followed suit. "Yes. You kids head on back to camp and get some dinner. Don't let an old symbol put ideas in your heads that no one cares about anymore."

He stood at the foot of the steps and watched as the children filed back onto the bus. Karen stood beside him. "Don't judge them too harshly, Sam. One or two will grow up to believe- just as I did."

But Sam sighed. "I can remember when the whole group would have." He looked over at the counselor. "Take care of yourself, Karen."

"As long as you do the same," She replied. "You look pretty tired."

The kids were almost all back on the bus. Being last in line, the little blond girl was yet to board when she suddenly turned, ran to Sam and gave him a big hug. Then without another word, she ran for the bus and got on.

Sam watched as she worked her way to a seat and sat by the window. She waved to him as the vehicle pulled away. Sam watched till it was out of sight, then turned back to the porch to find Abraham perched on the rail. "Why didn't you tell them the *whole* story about why you retired, Sam?"

"Tell them what?" Sam asked as he paused at the top of the steps. "That I came back to the country that created me to find it burning flags- *and me*- in effigy? That hatred and discontent for Vietnam and the government was all thrown at me because I represented the government?"

Sam shook his head. "What was I supposed to tell them, Abraham? They're too young to understand that a symbol lives on belief and the public's faith in what he stands for. How was I supposed to explain to them that the constant hatred was eating away at me bit by bit? That the very government I was supposed to represent, *lied to me*?"

"How were those children supposed to understand all that? And what could they've done about it if they had?"

“You’ll never know till you try, Sam,” Abraham replied. “I sensed a lot of concern in that little girl that hugged you.”

“Abraham, they told me we went to Vietnam to win!” The growing anger in Sam’s voice was clear- as was the layers and years of resentment. “But then they changed the rules and all we accomplished was getting a lot of boys killed. The Government *used* me to sell their slaughter!”

“The *country* created you, Sam- *not the government.*” Abraham’s own voice took on an edge. “Maybe you’ve spent too much time with presidents and not enough time with paper boys. Yes, Congress recognized you in 1961- but it was a *beef supplier in Maine that named you in 1812!*”

Sam just nodded and waved it off. It was an old argument and he didn’t feel like putting up with it any more. Abraham watched as he picked up the evening paper and went back into the house.

Turning on the lamp beside his chair, Sam sat down and opened the paper. He paused as one of the headlines caught his eye.

IRAN-IRAQ WAR ENDS

As Sam read the paper, his thoughts kept going back to his conversation with Abraham. What good would it do to come back? Just look at the paper. Washington alone was on its way to setting another annual record as murder capital of the country. Crime was up everywhere and no one was talking about Patriotism. Sam threw the paper down.

The government had tried to talk him out of retiring- they swore to mount a major effort to prove to him that support was still there. But Sam knew better. After he left, the government brought in imposters in an attempt to have *them* spread their propaganda, but it didn’t work. The people would have none of it and gradually, the imposters became sick parodies- victims for the political cartoonists.

In 1976, Sam decided to do a little traveling- to test the waters more or less. Surely with the country's two hundredth birthday, there'd be some pride and patriotism somewhere? But there'd been so much publicity and build-up, people were tired of it by the time it got here.

Sam rose to his feet and stood at the window, looking out at Mount Rushmore. And what about the Statue of Liberty? All that time and effort to clean and refurbish her. The celebration was the biggest since the Bi-centennial. But the day after, people were acting like it never happened- just another day.

A yawn escaped Sam then and he noticed that the sun was setting. Used to be, he never got tired. But over the years of his retirement, it was like someone was draining his strength away. He sat back down in his chair and gathered the paper from the floor.

He never knew exactly when he dozed off.

August 2, 1990

Over the years, Sam had paid many visits to this mental hospital. It hadn't changed much since he first laid eyes on it back in '45. People came and went- some died of old age or illness. The staff changed every so often. But one person was always here. Like the building itself, she'd come to be considered a fixture. Looking to be in her early 70's, she sat on the sofa before the rec room's TV. With her once red hair now snow white and neatly combed back, she stared off at nothing even though the TV at that moment was tuned to a newscast.

"...Another new hotspot exploded in the world today as Iraqi forces invaded the southern, smaller country of Kuwait. On Saddam Hussein's orders, his men quickly crossed the border and laid claim to the country within hours. There are rumors- as yet unconfirmed- that Kuwait City has fallen..."

The woman's eyes shifted their focus and for the first time in decades,

Her attention was centered on a definite target: the reporter's face.

In the days and months that followed, the whole nation watched or read the news as everyone waited for something to happen. Sam especially, watched every new development as it happened. He read every newspaper or magazine he could get his hands on. His TV was set to CNN almost 24 hours a day.

As he watched and listened to reports about American troops and the support everyone was giving them, the drowsiness that had been creeping over him seemed to melt away.

1990 came to an end and '91 began with the Coalition Forces in position. On the morning of January 17, Sam stepped out to pick up the morning paper and his eyes locked on the headline:

COALITION FORCES BOMB IRAQ

GULF WAR ERUPTS!

Sam knew then, what it was he'd been feeling- it was a sensation he hadn't felt in 46 years- Pride. Pride and satisfaction. Patriotism. He stood for a long moment, staring off at the woods a short distance away. Yes. He could feel it from coast to coast. He'd almost forgotten what it felt like.

He'd given up hope of ever feeling it again.

Sam knew then, as he came back inside and tossed the paper on his chair, what it was time to do. As he claimed his hat and coat and left the retirement home, he knew what he *had* to do.

His nation had gone to war again. Not a 'police action', but an honest to god war. Without support a lot of young men- and this time young women- would surely die. Everyone was going to have to lend a hand if this war was going to be different from Vietnam.

Sam was determined to make *certain* it was different.

4

The White House hadn't changed much in Sam's 189 years. The Oval Office was practically the same as it was in Roosevelt's day. The only thing was, a different man laid claim to it now.

On this night in January, George H.W. Bush entered the office with a cup of coffee in hand. He no sooner sat down and set the cup on his desk, than another presence entered the room in his own unique way.

"I hope you can spare a few minutes, Mr. President. We need to have a talk."

Sam stepped from the shadows of the room and the President looked up in shock. "Who the- ?" Then he recognized Sam. "So you're back. What do you want to talk about?"

"The future," Sam replied. "I'm going over to the Gulf to support our troops as best I can. But this war won't last forever- It may even end before you leave office."

"Meaning?" Bush asked.

"Meaning, there are problems right here at home that need attention- problems that can't wait much longer."

The President set his cup down. "They'll be dealt with in time, Sam. We have several projects already in the works."

Sam leaned down, over the desk, forcing the President to look up at him. "I hope you're not lying to me, sir. Too many men that have held this office have lied to me over the years and I won't stand for it again."

One of the president's eyebrows rose and a hard edge came to his voice. "You won't- ? Sam, you *stand* for whatever this government *says* you stand for. It's either that, or you *don't* stand for this country."

Sam's eyes narrowed and his voice grew dangerously soft. "Mister, I realized something today, I should've known all along: I *am* this country."

He backed up then, away from the desk until he was completely hidden in the room's shadows. "I'll be watching, Mr. President- count on it."

Bush's hand went to a console of switches by his desk and he flipped one. The overhead light came on, flooding the room with light.

There was no sign of Sam.

In the mental hospital, she was seated in front of the TV again- as she had been every day since August. Leaning forward in her seat, every ounce of her renewed concentration was centered on what the reporter was saying. "...It has finally begun. Shortly before dawn today, an allied attack force flew into Iraq and began bombarding the country in an attempt to drive Saddam Hussein and his military from Kuwait.

"President Bush said, quote 'The liberation of Kuwait has begun'.

"As for Saddam, he gave a speech carried by Baghdad radio where he accused the President of being a quote 'Hypocritical criminal' and he promised to quote 'halt the satanic intentions of the White House' unquote."

The woman looked away at this. How...how could he say that? Her eyes narrowed as anger grew within her. He *can't* say that.

"This just in," the reporter announced. "The White House Press Secretary has just informed reporters that Uncle Sam has come out of retirement and after a short meeting with the President, is headed for the war zone..."

"Samuel...?" the woman stood, one hand pressed against her forehead. It was like a muted fog was slowly clearing from her thoughts. "Must help" then she shook her head. "No...no, must do what I can." She suddenly looked up and shot one hand toward the ceiling. In a flash a thirty year old red head stood where the seventy year old woman had

been. Her other hand reached up and in a second flash, her hospital gown was replaced by a uniform befitting a major in the Army Medical Corps.

A second later, as doctors and nurses came running, Coral Wilson simply blinked out of existence.

Quote: *“If you believe that Iraqi ground forces can be neutralized, then you are deluding yourself.”*

-Saddam Hussein

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia- US Central Command

The office wasn't overly pretentious, any more than the man that occupied it. An American flag stood in one corner with a Saudi flag. The man seated at the desk was somewhat larger than the average soldier, with years of training and hard lessons clear in his face.

“General.”

General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, US Commander of Operation Desert Storm almost reached for his side arm- not having heard the door or a knock. But then a sparkle came back to his eye and he smiled as he rose to his feet and shook hands with his visitor. “I was told you were on your way, Sam.”

“I'm here to help anyway I can, sir,” Sam told him with hat in hand.

“Glad to have you,” the General said. The relaxed smile never left his face as he nodded toward a map that hung on one wall. “You're a little late, though. Abraham's been in the theater since yesterday.”

Sam nodded as a smile of his own crossed his face. “I should have known.”

Barren land and sun-scorched sky stretched out in all directions. Only the gentle roll of a small hill or an occasional valley broke the monotony. In a sky that seemed bleached of all color, Abraham looked to one side at the pair of F-15s he was escorting. Suddenly, he turned and his sharp eyes picked out the two Iraqi fighters- French built Hurricanes- coming straight at them.

The F-15s split and prepared to attack. One of the Iraqi launched a missile and Abraham's eyes went wide as he dove to avoid it. Unfortunately, the F-15 behind him couldn't maneuver like he could. The missile struck and Abraham could only watch as the pilot ejected and the plane went down- exploding on impact.

As the desert sun reflected off his white head feathers, anger seemed to leap from Abraham's slate grey eyes. He let loose with a piercing scream that shattered the enemy's cockpit. Moments later, the surviving F-15 shot it down.

Then the remaining Iraqi got Abraham in his sights. The bald eagle dove and dodged the enemy's tracer fire as the Iraqi followed. Pouring on all the speed he had, Abraham did what came naturally- and dove as if he were hunting fish in his favorite Wisconsin lake. At the last possible moment, he pulled out and flew straight along the desert floor as the Iraqi fighter plowed into the desert and exploded in a ball of fire.

Quote: "American fighters have been annihilated by the eagles of our skies, backed by their comrades on the ground...Success is assured."

-Saddam Hussein

5

The following night found Sam walking past several tents housing the US troops. Soon, he was entering the one that the General had arranged for him. Turning on the one lamp, he removed his coat and hat and undid his tie as he sat down on the edge of his cot.

But a moment later, the flap of his tent was flung open and a low, dense fog began rolling in. Sam studied it for a long moment before a voice came from within the fog itself. “You haven’t changed one bit in the last ninety years.” The voice was female.

“Who are you?”

He watched as the fog seemed to change its shape and become more cloud-like. Then, within its banks a face formed. “Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten me, Uncle. I came all the way from Washington to see you.”

A scowl of frustration crossed Sam’s face. “What do you want, Deficit?”

The fog continued to condense and take on the form of an extremely shapely young woman. Blond, blue-eyed and despite the Saudi’s laws about what women could wear in their country, she wore a short, form-fitting skirt and a low-cut, sleeveless blouse. In all, she was a seductress that many a politician had fallen for over the years. “When I heard that you had come out of retirement, I was worried.” Deficit stated. Her voice was soft and throaty, alluring in every note and timber. “Do you really want to deal with our country and its problems again?”

Sam stepped away from her. Her voice and appearance had no effect on him- he was probably the only male on the planet she *couldn’t* affect. “Someone has to speak to them- and for them. Someone has to make them listen to what’s right before the country falls apart.

“They need something- someone- to believe in.”

“And someone to blame?” the female asked as she stepped up behind him. “Like they blamed you for Vietnam? It’s a lost cause, Uncle. No one can make them listen. Take my own life for exam- “

“I know all about your life, girl!” Sam snapped as he turned to face her. “You’re a vampire- draining the financial strength of every administration that comes along.”

“And that’s *my* fault?” Deficit asked with hurt clear in her voice. “I’m no more responsible for my existence than you are for yours. They haven’t made a serious attempt against me in years.”

Sam stepped away from his niece as he spoke. “Well, they are now. They’re taking their own good time about it, I admit. But at least they’re trying. Look at their defense budget.”

“I said a *serious* effort,” Deficit replied as she folded her arms beneath her breasts. “I know all about their silly little plan. It’s supposed to take six years, depending on who’s in office at the time and most likely the bloody weather!”

Deficit stepped back toward the tent flap and a glow began to form around her. “Face it, Uncle, unless they get serious, I’m not going to change one bit- and you know it!”

Then, in a flash of light, she was gone.

In the days that followed, preparations were finalized and tensions continued to mount. By the 23rd of January, Abraham and the Coalition Forces had the skies to themselves and the eagle flew proudly with the knowledge that when the Iraqi army looked up, all they’d see would be *Allied* warbirds.

Quote: “*After a week, no Iraqi airplane has conducted a single ground attack against any Coalition target.*”

- General Colin Powell

As January came to an end, Coral did her best to ease the suffering of the wounded. She had made herself part of a MASH unit near the border and found herself treating more Iraqi POWs than Coalition soldiers.

Quote: *“...Iraqi prisoners are so surprised at the conditions in the Allied POW camps, some have asked to stay...”*

- Major General William ‘Gus’ Pagonis

As February began, the first combat blood was spilled as 12 U.S. Marines were killed defending the town of Khafji from Iraqi invaders.

On February first, Uncle Sam himself led the assault to retake the city. A reporter summed up the results later that day. “...Four hundred Iraqi soldiers were reported captured when Allied troops cleared out the town of Khafji after a day of pitched battles...”

Finally, on February 23, 1991, it came down to the wire.

Sam was with several soldiers in a recreation tent, watching the TV news as a reporter delivered the word. “...President Bush and the Coalition Allies announced that Iraq has 24 hours to pull out of Kuwait or face a final, all-out attack...”

As the reporter went on, a low murmur rose from the gathered soldiers and Sam’s eyes narrowed slightly.

Baghdad looked like something from another time period. Government and military buildings were in ruin. At night, as green tracers lit the sky, the whole appearance was like that of looking upon some alien landscape. Yet, this was just the story above the surface. Underneath the city, there was another world- one where only the

military existed, where there was plenty of power and food- for the military.

At the moment, one man's eyes seem to be filled with rage as well as he stormed into his private suite and slammed the door shut behind him. "Damn those Devils!"

"Calm down, Mr. President," Sam suggested as he stepped from the shadows.

Saddam Hussein turned, the gun that had been in its holster, now in his hand. "Who- ?"

"Do I really need to answer that?" Sam asked.

Hussein stepped away from the tall figure before him. "Why are you here? To carry out your President's desire to kill me?"

"I don't do assassinations," Sam answered drily.

"Then what do you want?"

"I want to know why," Sam stated as he stepped toward the man. "Why invade Kuwait? Why take something that clearly does not belong to you?"

"Province 19 is ours," Hussein stated.

"Kuwait was *never* yours," Sam told him. "And spilling Iraqi blood to keep it is stupid. What do you hope to gain?"

"What we have already gained," The Iraqi dictator said. "Kuwait is ours and the Arab World now sees your United States for the evil that it is."

"Then why is most of that Arab World allied *with* the United States and *against* you?" Sam stepped away from the man then- apparently unconcerned about the gun Hussein held. "I'll admit I'm puzzled. You ransacked Kuwait- killed or slaughtered thousands and driven hundreds more from their homes. Yet the Palestinians see you as a hero. You have

the obvious blood of hundreds on your hands- yet, Jordan, Yemen and others still take your part.”

A gleam of triumph came to Hussein’s dark eyes. “They come to our aid even as the West invades and dictates- “

“*You started it!*” Sam shouted as he turned to face the tyrant. “*You could have ended it months ago!*” He stepped toward the Hussein, towering over the Iraqi. “What do you hope to accomplish? Why *do* this?”

“We will fight till the infidels are defeated,” Hussein replied with equal force.

For a moment, Sam was taken aback. How did he go from invasion to religion? “I didn’t come here to debate religion with you- that’s not the issue.”

Hussein stood his ground. He never made a twitch or a change in expression. “We are a peaceful people.”

Sam took another step toward him. “Then why did you *invade* a neighbor? Why did you *kill* hundreds of people? If you’re so peaceful, why didn’t you stay home? Maybe Baghdad would still be standing.”

Hussein calmly turned his large form away with all the control of a corporate business man. Sam watched as he moved and never saw him hesitate. “We have claimed what is rightfully ours, “the dictator said. “And we will fight to our deaths to keep it.”

The Symbol of the United States nodded. “And death is all you’ll get out of it.” Sam’s voice took on an almost pleading tone as he tried to get through to this man. “Don’t you understand? You’re facing a force that’s better equipped and better trained than yours. *Your* military’s in *ruins*- there’s no way you can win!”

Hussein turned and Sam realized he'd finally gotten under the man's skin for the control was gone- open rage seemed to leap from eyes that were far from sane. ***"No! We will prevail! We will defeat the infidels!"***

Sam shook his head in disappointment. "You're hopeless. You're living in a reality that's all your own. You're leading your people down a one-way street to destruction and you can't see it. "Sam backed up into the shadows as he spoke. "I feel sorry for you, Saddam. Because after tomorrow, you won't have anyone to blame but yourself."

Rage slowly built behind the Iraqi's eyes until it exploded in a maddened scream as he fired into the shadows- again and again.

His aides came running and overhead lights were turned on, flooding the room with light.

But there was no sign of Sam.

6

The MASH was busy that evening. The number of Iraqi POWs seemed to grow almost by the hour and all were in need of some kind of medical care.

The Major completed the dressing on one soldier's wound as she spoke to the orderly assisting her. "All he needs now, is a good night's sleep and a decent meal. Get him to a bed and we'll get him that meal in the morning."

They were the only ones in the tent at the moment. The orderly had watched her work with undisguised wonder. She handled every medical task with a joy and a pleasure he'd never seen. "The fact that he's the enemy doesn't seem to bother you, Doc."

She actually looked puzzled by the question. "Why should it? He's a human being- that's all that matters."

"I wonder if the Kuwaitis would agree with you?"

He watched as the portable lights in the tent sent high-lights through her red hair and her brow furled in annoyance. "I'm aware of the stories about atrocities coming out of Kuwait City, Corporal. But this man was part of a foot patrol a hundred miles away. He never laid eyes on the city.

"Now get him to bed and get on with your duties."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Weren't you a little hard on him, Coral?"

The Major turned in shock- and then smiled. A moment later, Sam held her in his arms as they shared a long over-due hug. "Are you all right, now?" He asked in a whisper that didn't carry beyond them. "Last time I saw you, you weren't too aware of things."

“I’m fine, now,” Coral replied as she gave him another hug. “I had 46 years to heal, Samuel. When I saw the news reports about the war- and you- it was like someone had given me a jump start.”

As the sun neared the horizon, they left the tent, these two who had become as close as brother and sister. “Are you really part of this MASH?” Sam asked.

“Yes and no,” Coral replied. “I’ve been here since January- but I conjured the records and papers. There was no time to do it the normal way.” She put her arm through his as they walked and for the two of them, it could have been a hundred and thirty years ago and a summer walk in the woods of Wisconsin. “It feels good to be active again,” she said. “And wanted. They really do need the help, Samuel.”

He placed his hand on hers. “I’m glad you’re here. It’s only a few more hours till the President’s deadline and Hussein’s as bull-headed as he was six weeks ago.”

Coral looked up at his face and she could see the concern there. She listened as he told her about his encounter with the Iraqi dictator. “...Sounds like there’s going to be a ground war after all,” she said when he’d finished.

Reluctantly Sam had to nod. “I’m afraid it’s unavoidable. Which is why I need your help.”

Confusion colored Coral’s face as she tried to understand his meaning. “In what way?”

“Hussein has an obstacle course of barriers erected at the border,” Sam explained. “Sand berms, oil-filled ditches, barbed wire, mine fields- you name it. If his men open up with their tanks or artillery while the Coalition’s trying to get through all of that, they’ll be cut to pieces.”

“I won’t kill anyone, Samuel,” Coral stated flatly. “I can’t- you know that.”

He stopped their walk and turned to face her. "I know- and I don't want you to. All I want you to do, is convince them to give up- or scare them into going home, that's all."

"Where will you be?"

Sam's gaze went to the horizon. "With the Marines as they work their way through those barriers. We have to get to Kuwait City as soon as possible. Those atrocities you heard about are mounting by the hour- and we have to stop them."

February 24, 1991

This part of Saudi Arabia was almost a moonscape. There was nothing here but flat land and sand. The horizon was a flat line in the distance with a blood-red sun squatting almost upon it.

Sam walked among the soldiers that stood ready on this side of the border until he reached the officer in charge. "Any word yet, Major?"

The man shook his head, his dark brown skin nearly hiding his features in the growing dark. "No sir. No withdrawal, no nothing." He turned and looked out towards the horizon. "You've known a lot of military men over the years, sir. Did any of them ever look forward to battle?"

Sam glanced at the officer, then he too, looked to the horizon. "Only the mad look forward to war, Major. The sane would be just as happy never to lay eyes on it."

The major looked at Sam, then around at his men. "If that's true, then I must be the sanest man in the world."

On the other side of the border, beyond the sand berms and oil-filled trenches, Iraqi soldiers waited in their positions. Coalition planes had been bombing them for weeks and most would have deserted long ago,

except for their commanding officers standing guard over them- one hand resting on their holstered pistols.

The threat was clear.

Yet, one soldier had had all he could take. Throwing his rifle aside, he jumped up from his position and ran. His commander didn't even bother to call his name.

He simply shot him in the back.

As his victim fell, there was a burst of light in the sky. At first, the officer thought it was a flare, but then it expanded to take on the ghostly, transparent form of Coral in all her magical majesty. With anger at the shooting clear on her face, she dove toward him, reaching for him.

The man's scream sliced the air as she landed in front of him and he fell to the ground. He actually tried to crawl away from her. She pointed at him and when she spoke, her voice had an unearthly, echoing quality to it. *"Butcher, murderer! Remain to fight and you are doomed- **Doomed** to a hell even Allah's never dreamed of!"*

The officer could only stare at her in sheer terror. Then he scrambled to his feet and tried to run- only to have a ball of energy trip him up and send him face first into the sand. He rolled over to find Coral floating above him. *"it's time, Butcher- time to decide."* She came at him, one hand reaching for him-

-and the officer's scream shattered the night.

Back on the Saudi side of the border, the Major turned from the radio. He looked to Sam, then to another soldier standing nearby.

"Lieutenant...it's time. Move them out. Our next stop's Kuwait City."

7

Quote: *“The defeated have abandoned their tanks, vehicles and equipment...and fled. Tripping over their own feet while seeking a way to escape the lethal Iraqi fire.”*

- Baghdad Radio

With the deadline passed and the President’s order given, the Coalition Forces began to move, out across the Saudi- Kuwait- Iraqi border and into the barriers erected by the Iraqi army. Bull dozers took out huge sections of berm while tanks and minesweepers detonated the minefields and soldiers cut their way through the barbed wire. As time passed, it all went quickly and smoothly- too smoothly for a very simple reason.

As they reached the Iraqi positions, the Major looked all around as Sam stood beside him. Evidence of the Iraqi were everywhere, with only one thing missing. “Where is everybody?” the Major wondered. “Looks like they just dropped their weapons and ran.”

A private came from a bunker a few feet away. “Major, they left their food on their plates- even left their candles lit.”

The Major slowly did a complete turn as he surveyed the area and a cold chill ran down his back. He was no coward. He had expected to fight- and fight hard- to reach this point. But the absence of the enemy after all the anticipation was a more successful terror tactic than all the scud missile attacks combined. “This doesn’t make sense.”

Another voice was raised in a shout that caught the attention of both the Major and Sam. “Look!”

On the horizon, against a background of near total blackness, were clouds of even blacker and denser smoke. Beneath them, and the cause of them, were an army of fiery hurricanes, reaching hundreds of feet into the air. Even at that distance, the soldiers and Sam could see waves and waves of heat radiating out and away, across the desert.

“Dear Lord,” Sam whispered. “They’ve torched the oil fields.”

Quote: “...It’s a look into hell.”

-Corp. Rick Rushart, 2nd Marine Division

For the next two days, Sam and the Marines moved deeper into Kuwait- quickly putting down what little resistance they encountered. February 26 found Sam riding with the Major in a Humvee. Sam suddenly pointed up the road. “Someone’s coming toward us.”

“They’re Iraqi,” the Major noted. “And they’re waving a white flag.”

The convoy came to a stop as they waited for the prisoners to approach. As the Major and Sam got out of the vehicle, Sam felt a hand on his arm and turned to find Coral- now dressed once more in her uniform- standing beside him. “How’d I do?” she asked in a whisper.

“Just fine,” Sam replied in kind. “They’re surrendering all over the place- to anyone that’ll take them.”

“It didn’t take much,” Coral replied. They kept their voices down so the Major wouldn’t hear them. “All I did was make their officers desert. The air strikes did the rest.”

Sam didn’t answer for a moment as he studied the approaching soldiers. “Looks like you’ve got some patients to see to.”

Coral nodded and started toward the Iraqis- but then she stiffened and her eyes went wide. She turned back to Sam. “Samuel, do you know an eagle named Abraham?”

He gently took hold of her shoulders and watched her face. “Yes. Is he in trouble?”

Her eyes were unfocused- it was clear that her powers were allowing her to ‘see’ whatever was happening. “He’s with the 28th Airborne and the 7th corps outside Basra.” Then her eyes focused and she met Sam’s gaze. “Samuel, the Iraqis will be slaughtered. They have 300 tanks against 700 of the Coalition’s. Abraham’s right in the middle. His concerns about how to help were so strong...”

Sam nodded toward the Iraqi prisoners now surrounded by Allied guards. “You go see to your patients. I’ll join you when I can.”

She watched as he started to walk off, then stepped after him. “Where are you going?”

“Basra.”

The countryside outside of Basra consisted mostly of low hills and flat plains. Centuries ago, wars would have been fought on camels or Arabian Stallions. Not today.

Today, armored cavalries clanked and rumbled over the land with each side trying to position themselves to out-maneuver the other.

Over it all, Abraham glided on the thermal currents, trying to figure a way to help the Coalition and shorten the battle to come. He wasn’t having much luck. Being built the way he was, he couldn’t carry anything over four or five pounds- which crossed out most artillery shells.

Then he spotted Sam off to one side of the battlefield waving to him. The eagle had no sooner landed then Sam handed him a belt with

several grenades attached to it. “Pull them and drop them,” he told the bird.

Abraham nodded and took to the air, the belt held tightly in one taloned claw. Sam watched as he climbed into the sky, then he made his own way toward the Iraqi ground forces as American M1A1 Abrahams opened fire on Iraqi T-72s.

Within minutes, the world had dissolved into an exploding, ear-shattering nightmare. Far above it all, Abraham pulled one of the grenades loose, used his beak to pull the pin, then let it fall. The resulting explosion sent Iraqi soldiers in all directions.

On the ground, Sam was surrounded as he bodily flung soldiers aside. He was so busy, he never noticed when the Coalition ground forces arrived and joined in. After that, they all lost track of time as the battle became a montage of images; tanks firing, shells exploding, men shooting and men dying.

Quote: *“The gates are closed. There was no way out of here. To date, we have rendered completely ineffective 29 Iraqi divisions...”*

-General H. Norman Schwarzkopf

February 27, 1991

The Battle of Basra was over for the moment. Leaning against a damaged Allied tank, Sam surveyed the battlefield, thinking of all the others he’d seen over the years. Abraham was seated on the tank, his feathers ruffled and his white head feathers turned grey from the smoke of the battle.

A Soldier approached and saluted Sam. “Sir.”

“Yes, Sergeant?”

“My lieutenant’s compliments, sir. He thought you might like to know that the First Marine Division is pushing on toward Kuwait City while Second Division is engaging resistance at the airport.

“He said, if you wish to join them, feel free to do so. We’ve pretty much got things under control here.”

Sam glanced at Abraham as he straightened. “No choice. Coral’s still with the First Division.”

The eagle stood as well and settled his feathers into place. “Let’s go then.”

Quote: *“Shout for Victory, O Brothers; Shout for your Victory and the Victory of faith have triumphed over the soldiers of wrong...”*

- Saddam Hussein

Kuwait’s international airport was in ruin. The terminal building had been bombed inside and out. Most of the hangars were just skeletal ruins while the burnt remains of various planes littered the airfield and cratered runways.

Sam and Abraham arrived as an Allied tank fired on a T-72 and the Iraqi tank exploded in a blinding fireball.

“Uncle Sam!” Sam turned as the Major reached him. “You’re a little late for this one. We’ve just about got them beat.”

“What about Coral?” Sam asked. “The doctor that was with us?”

“The Major? She went on with First Division,” the soldier answered. “She said to tell you, she’d meet you at the American Embassy.”

8

Ruin as far as the eye could see. Burnt out cars and trucks, ransacked stores, shattered windows, collapsed buildings- and behind it all like a backdrop out of Hell, the burning oil wells sent fire and smoke thousands of feet into the air.

Coral and the soldiers with her could only stare in shocked silence. It was several minutes before she found her voice. "Dear Lord."

There was a flutter of wings and Abraham landed on the roof of the Humvee. Coral glanced up at him. "Hello, Abraham."

"Dr. Coral, I presume?" the eagle responded with a gleam in his eye- a gleam that faded as he took in their surroundings.

Then there was a hand on her arm and Coral turned to find Sam standing beside her. "Samuel- "She indicated the view- unable to put her feelings into words.

"I know," he replied. "Let's check the Embassy."

Getting into the Humvee, Sam and Coral took in the ruins in silence as the sergeant drove and Abraham flew overhead. The desolation they saw as they drove through the streets was overwhelming and only silence came from the Embassy as the convoy pulled up in front of it.

As Coral and Sam got out of the vehicle, Abraham landed on the roof and pointed with one wing. "Sam. Look-!"

"I see it."

Coral's eyes went wide when she spotted it. "Samuel, how- ?"

The Lieutenant came up alongside the vehicle and spoke to the sergeant. "Break out the flag and get it up."

"There's no need, Lieutenant," Sam stated. Then he pointed. "Look."

And there, waving from the top of the pole as it had since last August was the Flag of the United States of America.

Quote: *“...The bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night,
That our flag was still there...”*

-The Star Spangled Banner

*By Francis Scott Key**

Conclusion

On February 28, 1991, after one hundred hours of intense fighting and lightening swift combat, President Bush called an end to the fighting.

Quote: *“ Kuwait is liberated. Iraq’s army defeated...”*

-George H.W. Bush, President of the United States

* Historic Fact: Once at the American Embassy, Allied Forces did indeed find the American flag still flying. But it was lowered so as not to upstage the raising of Kuwait’s flag later that day.

The Bureacratic Mind

1

The Gulf War- for all intents and purposes- had been over for a week now. During that week, Sam and Coral had stayed in the region to make sure the fighting was really over. Only when they were certain the surrender terms would be accepted, did they decide to return to the States.

Abraham, on the other hand, chose to remain in the Middle East until the fighter pilots were sent home. He promised to give a yell if things heated up again.

As such, Coral- who had traded her Army jumpsuit for slacks and a blouse, stood with Sam at the Retirement Home as he collected his mail from a very full box. She looked out toward Mount Rushmore in the distance and took a deep breath. "Oh, Samuel, it's wonderful to smell trees and grass again, instead of sand and smoke."

"Well, there are five other rooms here that no one's using," Sam told her. "What the- ?"

Coral turned from the scenery at his call. "What is it?"

He indicated the letter he was holding. "According to this, my retirement benefits have been canceled."

"What?" she stepped up beside him to see the letter. "Why?"

"It doesn't say," Sam replied. "This is just a form letter."

She looked up at him. "Then you'd better go see someone."

Sam nodded as he headed for the porch steps. "Come on."

Washington D.C.

The Veteran's Administration

It was a typical office- everything was in shades of grey and tan. The man seated at the desk was in his mid-50's with less and less hair on his head every day. He never looked up, never even knew someone else was in the room until Sam tossed the letter in front of him. "I need some answers," Sam said.

The V.A. representative leaned back in his chair as he looked up at Sam. "What are the questions?"

Sam pointed at the letter. "I want to know why my benefits were canceled. I'm a veteran of every war since 1812. I'm 189 years old. I'm fully entitled to any retirement program I qualify for."

The representative nodded. "Yes, you were."

One of Sam's eyebrows rose. "Come again?"

"In 1970, you officially retired," the man behind the desk said. "All the paperwork was filled out and completed. As a retired veteran, you received all the benefits you were entitled to.

"21 years later, came the Gulf War and you came *out* of retirement."

"Are you saying that because I did what I was created for, I lose my benefits?"

The representative reluctantly nodded. "Partly. They're cutting the budget everywhere, Sam. Someone in this crazy, bureaucratic menagerie we call 'Washington' decided that a symbol is a concept- a creation of thought. As such, it doesn't need the benefits designed for mere mortals."

Sam watched the man for a moment. "You said 'Partly'. What's the rest of it?"

“like I said, they’re cutting the budget everywhere- trying to reduce the deficit. That means a lot of Federal locations are being closed or consolidated.”

“And?”

The representative looked down at his hands as he spoke. “And, some bean counter looked it up and found out that you were the only resident of your retirement home. Since you came out of retirement, you don’t qualify to live there anymore so... they’re closing it the first of the month.”

Sam took a step toward the desk in shock. He couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “Forcing me out in the street?!”

The man looked up at Sam’s face, then lowered his gaze. “I’m sorry.” He looked up again and spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness. “There’s nothing I can do.”

Coral had waited in the outer receptionist’s area. Now, she rose from the chair she’d been sitting in as Sam left the office. “Samuel?” She had to hurry to keep up with him. “What did he say?”

Sam answered as they left the building. “To make a long story short, I’ve been evicted- budget cuts.”

“That’s crazy,” Coral replied as they headed down the sidewalk. “How can they evict a National Symbol?”

“That’s the very reasoning they used to do it,” her friend replied. “A Symbol doesn’t need a roof over his head or food on the table.”

The growing anger in Coral’s voice was clear. “That’s stupid. Treating you like this makes the whole country look bad.”

Sam shook his head as they reached an intersection. “No. It’s the government that has problems- not the country.”

They crossed the street and Coral shook her head as they continued. “But, where will you go?”

She watched him shrug. “I could ask you the same thing. With the retirement home closing and your recovery, you can’t go back to the hospital.”

Coral stared off for a moment, then she shrugged, too. “I hadn’t thought about it. With my magic, I can blend in anywhere- but that doesn’t solve *your* problem.”

“I’ll solve it,” Sam replied. “Somehow.”

That night at the retirement home, Sam was nowhere to be seen. But the flag had been taken down and several packed boxes were now stacked against one wall.

The only person in the house was Coral, who at the moment, was leaning over her brazier, watching the flames as she added various powders. “Figure of concept, image of thought, younger than the One and who stands for loss. Come to the one who summons you and stand before me now.”

The front door slammed open and a dense fog flowed into the living room- a fog that slowly took on Deficit’s face. “Who are you?”

“My name is Coral Wilson- and I would speak to you about your Uncle.” The redhead added one last touch of powder to the flames and there was a burst of light.

When it faded, Deficit stood before her in Human form. “How do you know my Uncle- and where is he?”

“I have known Samuel for over a century- since the Civil War in fact,” Coral replied. “And at the moment, he’s out watching over an ungrateful country.”

“Thanks to what *you* represent, the government has cut off his livelihood and is kicking him out of his home.”

Deficit's eyes went wide at this and her voice held a definite tone of disbelief. "I have no say over any of that. Who and what I am is not my choice- I have no say in the budget cuts used against me."

"But you *can* have a say if you want one," Coral told her. "Politicians have a habit of adding personal projects to one bill or another- projects that are so worthless, they can only pass when they're buried in the bodies of other projects."

"Deficit, you don't have to be a silent partner to what you represent. Speak to those politicians- work with them or against them as the case may be."

Coral stepped toward her. "Being what I am, I care for your uncle as much as I can care for anyone- and I'm asking you to help me find a way to help him."

2

While Coral was enlisting Deficit's help, Sam was in Madison, Wisconsin- drawn there by a growing injustice.

He approached an apartment door with Detective Jennifer Susan Lawton and two uniformed officers. Detective Lawton had known Sam for some years. Like Camp Counselor Karen Masters, she had been one of those summer camp kids that visited Sam. Only Jennifer, like Karen, had come away from that visit with far more than just a social studies lesson. The hallway lights gave her dark brown skin a slight sheen as the four reached the apartment door they were looking for.

"I said do as you're told- on the floor!"

The shout brought everyone's attention to the apartment.

"David, please- !"

There was the sound of a slap and someone falling.

Sam reached for the door knob, the lock clicked and he shoved the door open. They entered to find the husband standing over his wife with his hand raised. "Don't you think you've beat her enough?" Sam asked.

The husband turned at the voice, saw Sam- and the Police and stepped back. "What are you talking about? No one hit anyone."

"What'd she do then?" Sam asked as he took in the sight of the woman's battered face. "Go three rounds with the coffee table?"

"Ma'am?" Jennifer nodded toward the man. "You say the word and we'll arrest him right now."

The wife's unswollen eye went wide in shock at the idea. "No. No, I won't put him in jail."

The shock on Sam's face was crystal clear. "But- "

The detective silenced him with a hand on his arm. "At least let someone treat your injuries. They look pretty painful."

The husband did step toward then then. "She's not going anywhere. Now I want you *out* before I file harassment charges."

Jennifer studied the man's face for a long moment. Then she nodded to her officers and left- leaving Sam with no choice but to follow. The husband's slamming of the door drew no attention from anyone else in the building. "Jennifer, he did beat her- the proof was right in front of you!"

"I *know* that," she replied as they walked toward the elevator. "But unless she files a complaint, we can't touch him."

"But he could kill her next time!"

She looked up at him as the elevator arrived and the doors opened. "I don't like it any more than you do. But unfortunately, that's the law."

All the next day, Sam was quiet as he continued his packing. He told Coral the situation and she agreed that the woman was crazy not to press charges.

That evening found Coral back in Washington D.C.- arriving on the steps of the Library of Congress. She looked around and then headed into the building. As she entered the legal section of the library, she found herself alone. She glanced around once to make sure, then she raised her hands and energy flowed around them.

Several books responded to her summons by flying from their shelves and hovering in the air before her. At the snap of her fingers, they

opened and pages began turning slowly on their own as she sought the information she needed.

Elsewhere in Washington, Deficit assumed form on the steps of the capital. As she entered and headed down a hallway, she was thinking through a list of congressmen she might be able to sway.

But as she laid her plans, two senators walked by. "...The Gulf War really blew the Pentagon's budget. Have you seen their request for next year?"

"I know. Some of the others are already talking about a tax to pay it off."

"It'll never go over. He'll veto it like he has everything else..."

By then, they were out of ear-shot. But Deficit slowed her walk and turned to watch them walk out the door as a different idea began to take form. "Taxes..."

Sam paused outside the apartment building. He nearly cringed as he sensed each blow the husband struck. He spotted Jennifer and two officers coming toward him. Then Sam's eyes went wide and he ran into the building.

Detective Lawson and her men followed- only to find an empty lobby and the elevator doors open and waiting. "I'd love to know how he does that," Jennifer swore as she and her men entered the car.

They found Sam pacing outside the apartment door. He looked up as they approached. "It's about time."

"I'm sorry," Jennifer replied. "But us *mortals* have to do things the *normal* way."

She pressed the doorbell and after a moment, they heard someone unlock the door.

Sam and Jennifer exchanged glances, then he pushed the door open. "Dear God," Lawton whispered.

The wife stood to one side, bleeding from her mouth and nose- one eye swollen completely shut as she held one side of her body.

Her husband lay on the floor, staring up at the ceiling in eternal disbelief. His hands were wrapped around the handle of a kitchen knife which was currently imbedded in his chest.

Even as Sam and the police entered the room, his body slumped, his hands fell away from the knife and his eyes glazed over.

Jennifer knelt beside him and felt for a pulse. "He's dead."

She rose and met Sam's gaze as one of her officers called for the morgue detail. "Then it's over," Sam stated.

"I wish it were," Detective stated. "We've got to arrest her for murder, Sam."

"But it was clearly self-defense," Sam protested. "Look at her."

"I don't doubt it," Jennifer replied. "But the law says I still have to charge her."

"That doesn't make sense."

"I know that," she stated. "But I can only work with what's available to me. The Law says I have to arrest her for murder and she has to stand trial."

"And her chances of being cleared?" Sam demanded as the morgue detail arrived.

"Not good."

"Why not?"

The Detective sighed. He seemed so knowledgeable about so much. "Because of the circumstances." They stood aside as paramedics arrived to see to the wife. "If this had been a barroom brawl, then she could

claim self-defense and probably win. But we're talking *domestic violence* here- and that's a whole different ballgame.

"As things stand, only the evidence pertaining directly to the murder will be allowed. Did she do it? Nothing about his being an abusive husband and beating her to death will be allowed."

Sam scowled. "Then there's no way she'll get the fair trial she's entitled to."

Jennifer had to concede the point. "Not in this case."

3

The next morning, found Sam up and gone by the time Coral left the room he'd offered her. She reached the living room to find Deficit waiting for her. "Any luck last night?"

"Some," the blond replied. "You?"

"A little," Coral answered as she led the way into the kitchen. She continued as she opened the refrigerator. "According to the legal texts at the Library of Congress, the Government has to help re-locate anyone they displace."

"But they can get around that by claiming he's a creation of thought," Deficit noted as Coral began frying her breakfast on the stove. "The same reasoning they're using to kick him out in the first place."

The red head sighed. "Well, there's also the fact that Samuel *is* an American Symbol- a national symbol like the Liberty Bell or the Flag- it's the nation's responsibility to see that he's cared for.

"What about you?"

Deficit watched as Coral began to eat the eggs she'd fixed. Being the kind of creature that she was, Deficit's only hunger was financial. "I started to go to one of the more pliable senators- to try to get him to pull out some of those pet projects you mentioned. But I think I found something better."

"Like what?" Coral asked. "Where?"

"In the IRS's records," Deficit replied. "Something they've all but forgotten about."

The courtroom was empty except for the defendant, her lawyer, the prosecutor, the judge and Sam in the gallery. He sat there, quietly,

listening as the defense lawyer entered a plea of guilty to Second Degree Murder.

A scowl of disapproval crossed Sam's face as the prosecution and the judge accepted it. He practically marched from the courtroom as the trial date was set.

There was a burst of light and Deficit watched as Coral took in their point of arrival- and surprise filled her face. "It's a manor house," Coral noted with a smile.

The building was a brick 2-story structure with windows that were once trimmed in white. Five chimneys rose up out of the structure, connected to fireplaces located throughout the building. There were four rooms, a bath and a balcony upstairs. A den, living room, formal and informal dining room, kitchen and pantry downstairs with windows and a pair of double glass doors that opened onto a spilt-level flagstone patio with a fountain.

"It was built sometime in the 19th century," Deficit said as Coral took it all in- including the circular drive and the two old-style hitching posts. "It's been updated somewhat of course," Deficit said. "The IRS seized it forty years ago when the heirs couldn't pay the taxes on it. It's been buried in their records ever since.

"It's a little run-down of course. But between you and Uncle Sam, it shouldn't take much to fix it up."

Coral nodded. "Now it's just a matter of paying for it."

But Coral never got the chance to speak to Sam for several days as he stayed at the courthouse and followed every aspect of the trial. With jury selection completed, it was almost two weeks later that the trial

itself finally began. He sat in the back of the gallery and watched as the Prosecutor turned to the jury.

“Ladies and gentlemen, the Defendant has already admitted of her own free will that she did indeed kill her husband- that point has never been debated.

“What you are going to be asked to decide, is did she do it on the spur of the moment, which is what Second Degree Murder entails- or did she plan it?

“That is the only issue this court is legitimately concerned with. All other questions are either irrelevant or they’ve been answered.”

Disapproval was clear on Sam’s face as he listened to the Prosecutor spin his case. By the time he finished, it was clear the Defense was facing an impossible situation.

His opening statement sounded good- he came as close as he could to the abuse and beatings without coming right out and talking about them. But it was clear by the end of the day, that the jury was nowhere near convinced.

As Sam left the courtroom with Jennifer, a reporter came up to them with a camera crew in tow. “Uncle Sam, you’ve been following this case pretty close- any comments or opinions?”

Sam thought about it for a moment, then nodded. “This young lady is being tried for killing her husband. But the court has refused to allow her to say *why* she killed him.”

“Why did she?”

Jennifer looked to Sam. “The Six o’clock news is *not* a court of law.”

“Which means it may be the only place where she’ll get a fair hearing.”

She grabbed his arm. “If you say *anything* you’ll turn this trial into a mockery.”

“It was already that, the moment you arrested her,” Sam replied. He then turned back to the reporter. “Her husband was beating her to death- it was a clear case of self-defense. Kill or be killed.”

The reporter looked from one to the other. “Why has this information been suppressed?”

“Because,” Jennifer stated, “The ‘Battered Woman Syndrome’ is not recognized in most states as legitimate defense. Many prosecutors and judges consider it a license to kill and refuse any evidence of it in court.”

“As such,” Sam concluded, “the defendant gets railroaded on a murder charge when she should be congratulated.”

“...With that, Detective Lawton almost forcibly led Uncle Sam away from this reporter and away from the courthouse.”

The District Attorney turned off the TV with a frustrated sigh. “That’s just *great*.” He turned to where Sam was seated nearby. “Now, thanks to you, I’ve got to ask the judge to move the trial- probably clear out of the state.”

“Fine,” Sam stated firmly. “I’ll voice my opinion anywhere the trial’s moved to.”

“No you *won’t*,” the DA replied. He looked to the only woman in the room. “Detective?”

“Do you know what a ‘Gag Order’ is, Sam?” Jennifer handed him one as she continued. “This forbids you from speaking about the trial till it’s over.”

Sam rose to his feet and stared at the DA in disbelief. “You’re determined to railroad this woman- !”

“I am determined to convict a murderer.”

“And what about Freedom of Speech?” Sam demanded as he towered over the DA. “You can’t silence me any more than you can silence this country. My opinion has and *will* be heard.”

“And if you keep on, National Symbol or not, it’ll heard from inside a jail cell!”

Sam stepped away and then turned back. “Are you going to ‘gag’ every newscast and newspaper in the country, too?”

Jennifer’s eyebrows rose and she looked to the DA. “He’s got a point. Videotapes of his interview probably exist all over the country by now- and the newspapers’ll probably have transcripts by morning.”

The DA sat down at his desk in disgust and threw his pencil across the room. “Get out of here. But don’t think you’re going to win, Mister. I’ll have the judge isolate the jury- they won’t see or hear anything except this trial till it’s over!”

4

Frustrated and aggravated, Sam led the way as he and Jennifer left the DA's office.

Coral was waiting for them in the outer office. "Samuel, I saw your interview."

"I hope everyone else did," Sam replied.

Jennifer shook her head in frustration of her own. "You're determined to cause trouble, aren't you?"

"its trouble that needs to be caused," He told her. "I just wish I could talk about it."

They left the building as the detective watched him closely. "Then you *will* respect the gag order?"

"My opinion's already on record," Sam reminded her. "And despite what the government's done over the years, *I've* never broken the law."

Coral spoke up then. "Samuel, if you can't talk about the trial, I know something you *can* talk about."

"What?" he asked.

"Your eviction."

Jennifer looked from one to the other in surprise. "What's this?"

Sam quickly explained. "...They 're supposed to close the home on the...first of the month." He looked to Coral and she nodded.

"That was last Monday," She said. "I've been trying to contact you-" She looked to the detective, then back to Sam. "Is it safe to talk in front of her?"

He nodded. "Detective Jennifer Susan Lawton, this is Dr. Coral Wilson." He looked to the redhead. "Jennifer is one of the few you can talk in front of."

“Doctor.”

“Detective.” Coral then turned back to Sam. “Well then, like I said, I’ve been trying to contact you, but there’s been too many people around. I wanted to tell you what Deficit and I found out.”

“Deficit? What’s she got to do with this?”

“A lot.” Coral then went on to explain about how the government had to help Sam relocate- and how as a National Symbol, it was the government’s responsibility to see that he was cared for.

Sam shook his head. “But to do that, they’d have to take funds from other programs. And knowing this administration, probably domestic programs and I can’t allow that. They’ve slashed too much from them as it is.”

“Right,” Coral agreed. “And Deficit came up with something else.” She looked to Jennifer, then glanced around. “He’ll be back, Detective.”

Then, in a flash of light, Jennifer stood alone.

What seemed like only a moment later, Sam and Coral were standing in the drive of the Manor House. Coral quickly filled Sam in on where Deficit had found it. “...It’s almost 200 years old,” she added. “We might be able to get it on the Historic Register. Then *we* could offer to maintain and look after it. Between us, there shouldn’t be any need to supply funds for it.”

Sam turned to look at her. “Us?”

“There’s more than enough room, Samuel,” Coral pointed out. “There’d be no chance of anything being misunderstood- and it would solve *both* our problems.”

Sam looked down at her for a long moment. Then he nodded. “You do whatever you need to do.” He looked over at the Manor House. “It sounds like *this* problem at least, is close to being solved.”

Coral hugged him. “Now if only that girl were free.”

Sam nodded. “If only.”

The next morning, Jennifer was walking toward the court house and Sam met her at the top of the steps. “You hang out with some interesting people,” the detective stated. “So what exactly is Dr. Wilson- a witch or a sorceress?”

Both of Sam’s eyebrows rose at the question. “You seem to accept the possibility of either one pretty easily.”

Jennifer nearly snorted. “Any world that has *you* walking around in it, must have one or the other.”

Sam shrugged at that. “Well, she was tried for being a witch in 1692. But actually, she’s probably closer to a sorceress.”

“As long as she’s on our side, I don’t guess it matters,” Jennifer said as they approached the courthouse doors. “Just don’t let her go too public or the government may try to find some kind of military use for her.

“Is she a real doctor?”

Sam glanced over at her as he answered. “She’s practiced the Medical Arts for 314 years and never lost a patient.”

The detective nodded. “Good enough.”

At that point the same reporter that Sam had spoken to the day before approached. “Uncle Sam, the judge has ordered the jury for this case to be isolated from all outside contact. What’s your opinion on that?”

Sam glanced at Jennifer as he answered. “Unfortunately, I’ve been ordered to keep my views and opinions to myself.”

“A gag order- *You*?”

The National Symbol nodded. "Certain parties feel that if I exercise my right to Free Speech, I'll damage a case that should never have been brought to trial."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning, that not only does the government insist on denying people the right to a fair trial, they'd rather force people into the street than cut some of their frivolous little pet projects from the budget."

The reporter looked from Sam to Jennifer and back. "Who's being kicked out?"

"I am," Sam replied. "Have been. Someone in Washington decided that since I'm a National Symbol, I don't need a roof over my head."

"So they kicked him out of his retirement home and cut off his benefits," Coral said as she came up behind the reporter.

Jennifer checked her watch. "The trial's starting, Sam."

But Sam nodded to Coral as he spoke to the reporter. "Dr. Wilson can talk to you- about anything you'd like."

Sam met Coral's gaze, saw her nod and headed for the courthouse doors.

5

All across the country, people watching TV learned of both the trial and Sam's eviction as the reporter talked with Coral. In small towns and large, people thought about these things and talked them over. In schools, the children were more concerned about Sam. Where would he live? How did a house get on the Historic Register?

Various organizations met all across the country to discuss both the trial and Sam's situation.

In the days that followed, postcards and letters were mailed and petitions began to circulate as phones began to ring.

As the trial came to an end, a nameless bean-counter in Washington was out of a job and the reluctant wheels of government bureaucracy were forced into motion...

It was the final day of the trial. The gallery was full as the jury came in and sat down. The judge looked toward them as a lady in the front row of the jury box stood. "Has the jury reached its decision?"

"We have Your Honor." She handed a folded slip of paper to the bailiff, which he in turn, handed to the judge. Everyone watched as he unfolded the paper and read what was written upon it. "It is the jury's decision, that the defendant is guilty of Second Degree Murder."

Sam didn't stick around for the rest- he was too angry. Jennifer had to run to catch up to him. "Sam!"

"What is it?" He demanded. "Your DA won. He put away a woman whose only crime was self-defense!"

She grabbed his arm and stopped him. "You been so centered on the trial, you have no idea what's been going on *around it*." She handed him the morning paper. "Dr. Wilson and that reporter had a nice, long talk

the other day- *just like you planned*. Her interview no sooner finished airing than the Governor's office and the statehouse were flooded with mail and phone calls- all demanding the woman's release.

"The Governor wants to be re-elected next year, so you know what he's going to do."

"Fine," Sam replied sarcastically. "His greed gets this one off- But what about the next one that comes along?"

Jennifer pointed at the paper. "Several senators are already preparing bills and proposing changes in the law.

"You wanted change. It's going to take time, but it's started. In the long term, you've won."

"Samuel, Detective." Coral joined them at a hallway intersection. "Your...discussion could be heard clear down the hall. Is it over now?"

"As over as it's going to get," Sam replied.

"Good," Coral stated. "Then there's something I want you to see."

There was a flash of light then that stretch of hallway was empty.

When Jennifer Lawton could see again, she was *not* standing in the hall of the courthouse. "Where are we? How did- ?" Her gaze fell on Dr. Wilson. "Never mind- I don't want to know. Just tell me we're still in the same state."

Coral smiled. "In fact, we're just a few miles from the courthouse."

They were standing in front of the Manor House- where a lot of people were working, both inside and out.

"What's going on?" Sam asked.

"After you two left, that reporter and I just started talking," Coral replied. "We talked about that wife- *and you*, which in turn led to the Manor House.

“As soon as the newscast was over, people began calling the station wanting to know how they could help.”

All around, people were hard at work scrubbing walls, trimming bushes, painting window frames, repairing wood work.

Coral continued her story. “Once the location of the house was known, people just started showing up. Before I could figure out how to contact the Historical Society, there was a whole crew at work.”

At that point, the work stopped and everyone gathered round as an older gentleman in an army hat and uniform approached. “Uncle Sam, on behalf of the American people, the National Headquarters for the Veterans of Foreign Wars is honored to present the deed of this house to you- and we’ve made arrangements so the government can never take it away from you.

“We also apologize for the way you’ve been treated.”

Sam slowly took the deed in hand. “Thank you, Colonel. But the *people* of this country have never intentionally mistreated me. I have represented this country for 189 years- and I’ve never been more proud of that fact, than I am right now.”

“Sam.” Jennifer pointed and everyone watched as a new flag pole in front of the Manor House was put to use-

-and the American Flag was raised above them all.

The Forest Upheaval

Prologue

The gravesite was a quiet one in the shade of a large oak tree. The being that stood beside the grave was equally quiet as he looked down at the final resting place of the man that had raised him- and thought back over their years together...

... The fire had rolled across the land like a tidal wave, laying waste to over a hundred acres.

The Ranger had been a handsome man back then- the classic hero in both looks and actions.

He heard the cub before he saw him. He looked all around thinking he was trapped under some brush. Then the cub cried out again and the Ranger looked up- spotting the small bear high in a tree with the fire only a few hundred yards away.

Ignoring the shouts of his co-workers to forget the cub, the fire was too close, he grabbed a climbing belt from a truck and ran for that tree. Soon he was climbing it like some utility worker would an electric pole.

The cub tried to back away from him until they both ran out of limb, then he could only look at the Ranger in fear as the man took him in his arms.

By then, the fire was licking at the base of the tree. To climb down- or jump- would mean a fiery death. Yet, even as the Ranger watched, the tree itself caught fire and began to burn.

Then the other rangers and fire fighters were there, using what water they had along with shovels of dirt, to beat the fire back. The hose was aimed, soaking the Ranger and the cub. Then the man jumped, holding

the bear close to his chest. He landed, rolled and ran- neither hurt by his actions.

Moments later, the rangers retreated, the fire surged and the tree was consumed.

With his small claws buried in the Ranger's shirt, the cub was a witness to all of this and would never forget it.

Hours later, the fire was beaten and the cub found himself going through another new experience- a bath. The Ranger had brought him back to headquarters and was doing his best to see to his needs. "You're really covered with smoke and soot, aren't you little guy?"

The cub growled and shook himself- sending water everywhere. Soon the Ranger was as wet as he was. "Okay, okay, enough already." The man reached for a towel and tried to hold the cub still as he dried him. "Come on you smokey little devil. If you don't like the water, let me dry you off."

The days passed and the name stuck. Smokey became a fixture at headquarters as the Ranger took on the roll of mother bear as best a human could. The other rangers teased him. "When are you going to give up on him? If you want a mascot, get a Dalmatian."

"You just go ahead and laugh," The Ranger replied as Smokey sat in his lap, the story the Ranger had been reading to him, rudely interrupted. "Someday, Smokey'll put you all to shame. The day'll come when he'll be the greatest Ranger of them all..."

The weeks and months mounted. Smokey thrived and grew. He also went with the Ranger whenever he could. They became all the family each had- or needed.

At look out stations deep in the national parks, Smokey's keen sense of smell usually spotted the fire before the Ranger did.

Then came the day, almost two years after that fateful fire. The Ranger and Smokey were driving through a park on patrol when Smokey grabbed the man's arm. "Ranger, I smell smoke." The nearly grown bear pointed. "That way."

Leaving the truck, they soon located the source of the smoke- a campfire that hadn't been put out properly. Smokey watched as the Ranger smothered it with shovels of dirt. "There was no excuse for this."

"Ranger?"

"Smokey, remember the Fire?" the Ranger didn't have to specify which one. Smokey nodded. "It might've taken two or three more minutes to put this campfire out right. But the campers were in such a hurry, they rushed it.

"If you hadn't smelled the smoke, it might have re-ignited and turned into a tragedy as bad as that one was."

The Ranger then turned and headed back to the truck. But Smokey hesitated. He stared down at the now harmless campfire as the Ranger's words ran through his mind and his face grew thoughtful.

More years passed as Smokey reached his full size and the Ranger moved up the chain of command. They moved from one post to another and with each one, Smokey's existence became more widely known.

Smokey was a Brown Bear and as such, he now weighed several hundred pounds- and it was all muscle. As for the Ranger, he was now in command and was taking his turn in the radio room when news of the brush fire came in.

Soon everyone was at work. Both the Ranger and Smokey were with one crew cutting away brush to form a fire break. There was a noise

above the sound of the fire and Smokey turned as a tree that had burned through began to fall. *“Ranger!”*

The man looked up- and had no time to run. The tree fell across his leg, breaking it and pinning him down. The tree was large enough that no human could have lifted it.

But that didn’t stop Smokey. Taking one end in his paws, the bear let out with a roar that shook those woods as he lifted it off the Ranger- then covered him as brush and limbs fell.

The work crew soon got them both clear.

A few days later, there was a special ceremony at headquarters as the Head of the Forestry Service presented Smokey with his Ranger hat and his own shovel- one slightly larger than a normal human could use.

The Ranger was there, too. And although he stood on crutches, he stood with pride...

From then on, Smokey became known all across the country. At the Service’s request, he made personal appearances at schools throughout the nation, speaking to the children about the dangers of fire. But he never forgot his more important work. Whenever a call came in- even if he was in the middle of a school visit- He’d break it off and come running. He’d go back to that school and finish the visit *after* the fire was out.

Slowly, gradually, Smokey’s life became mixed with legend as the Ranger’s words came true and he did indeed become the greatest Ranger of them all.

Then came that black day only a few days ago. The Ranger was near retirement age. He was still a big, heroic figure of a man, but government bureaucracy would soon force an end to his life’s work.

They were living in Minnesota, up near the Canadian border. The Ranger- in command of the station- looked up from the paperwork his days now seemed to consist of as Smokey entered the office with a message in his paw. “Ranger, a brush fire’s been spotted about ten miles inside the park. As dry as it’s been lately, those trees’ll go up like match sticks.”

“Let’s go,” the man said as he reached for his hat.

Ordinarily, the Ranger could have sat this fire out- or simply stood back and supervised. But a soaring deficit had forced the government to cut everyone’s’ budget. Positions that needed to be filled were left empty and when men *did* retire, the vacancies were never filled.

The Forestry Service was not immune. Shorthanded and chronically understaffed, even management was forced to take a hand when it came to fighting fires.

As such, both Smokey and the Ranger were soon hard at work once more. The Ranger was forced to pull double duty as he sent crews where they were needed one moment and set to work with shovel in hand the next.

He turned from taking a short break to see Smokey clearing away some brush nearby. There was a snapping, breaking, shredding sound and the Ranger broke into a run.

He dove-

Shoved Smokey clear-

-and was crushed to death by the tree moments later. Smokey quickly had the tree off of him, but it was clear there was nothing he could do.

The sound of laughter and jeers brought his head up and around quickly to see a bunch of teenagers on a nearby ridge cheering the fire. He stood and pointed at them- his roar echoing from the hillsides. “*You!*”

The kids tried to run, but no one's ever been able to outrun an angered bear and Smokey soon cut them off. "How long have you been here?"

They were typical, cynical teenagers in over-priced tennis shoes and walkmans hanging from their necks. "Two, three hours," one of the three said. "We saw the jerk that started it."

"And you did *nothing*?" Smokey demanded. One paw was pointed back toward the fallen tree- and the Ranger's body. "A man died just now from a fire you could have stopped!"

"That ain't our job!" another kid protested. "Fightin' fires is *your* job."

Smokey growled in anger deep down in his throat. Unconsciously, his claws extended. "I can't be everywhere. There are going to be times, *when only you can prevent forest fires...*"

...The words echoed through Smokey's mind as he stood by Ranger's grave. He'd had to threaten to charge the kids as accessories to both arson and murder before they'd give him a description of the arsonist he could give the police.

And even though the man now sat in a jail cell, it didn't ease Smokey's pain.

He finally turned from the grave and slowly walked away. As he did so, he looked down at the letter he'd received that morning.

It was from the Department of the Interior- the parent office of the Forestry Service.

He was wanted in Washington.

He glanced back at the Ranger's grave, then walked on.

1

The sun shone down through a clear morning sky as Sam ran the American flag up the pole in front of the Manor House he and Coral had shared for the last year. A morning breeze sent the flag waving and fluttered Sam's long white hair as Abraham, now home for the last five months, landed on one of the hitching posts. "Morning, Sam."

"Abraham. How's the hunting this morning?" Sam tied the rope in place for the day as he spoke.

"Not so good, "the bald eagle answered. "There are some so-called campers in the woods and they've scared all the fish away."

"So why don't you talk to them?" Sam asked as he leaned against the hitching post Abraham was perched on.

"Actually, I was hoping *you* would," Abraham replied. "I may be better known since the Gulf War, but you still carry more weight."

Sam nodded. "All right."

It was still early in the summer by the calendar, but temperatures and rainfall made it feel more like the middle of the season. As Sam followed Abraham through the woods, he couldn't help notice how dry everything was even here by the eagle's favorite lake.

Sam's boot kicked against something and he looked down to see an empty pop can. Bending to pick it up, he also found candy wrappers and other trash as well. Shaking his head, he had no trouble following the trail of trash right to the campers. As he stepped into the clearing, one of the boys finished a bag of potato chips, wadded the bag up and threw it into the brush. "Do you always go around polluting the environment or is today something special?" Sam asked him.

The boy turned, startled as another popped his head out of a tent and a third came into the clearing and paused with his arms full of fire wood.

But Bernie- the potato chip connoisseur- just shrugged it off. “Don’t have a cow, man. I’ll pick it up.”

“What?” Sam asked.

“Don’t mind him, Uncle Sam,” the wood carrier- Andy- said as he laid the wood aside. “He OD’d on the ‘Simpsons’ at an early age and never recovered.”

The boy in the tent- his name was Mike- came out as he spoke. “What rates us a visit?”

For a moment, Sam simply looked at them in startlement- the pop can and other trash still in his hands and in plain view. He stepped up beside the campfire and dropped the trash beside it. “You boys have turned this forest into a trash heap. One match or spark from that fire and the whole place’ll go up.”

“You sound more like Smokey the Bear than Uncle Sam,” Andy stated as he sat down on his camp stool.

“Well, I’m sure if he were here, he’d tell you the same thing,” Sam replied.

“I’m glad he’s not,” Bernie replied as he reluctantly picked up his potato chip bag and other trash. “There’s already enough rules in the world.”

“Well, here’s one you’d better remember,” Sam told him. “In most states, there’s a 500 dollar fine for littering. Also in every state, if you can’t pay a fine, you’ll spend up to 30 days in jail.

“Can any of you three afford either one?”

“What do you suggest?” Mike asked.

Sam pointed at the trash bag Bernie now held. "The obvious." Then he looked to a nearby tree. "Abraham, let me know what they do."

The bald eagle nodded. "Right, Sam."

"I bet Reverend Guzzler wouldn't punish us," Andy protested.

Confusion was clear in both Sam's face and voice. "Who?"

"You never heard of Reverend Conrad Guzzler?" Mike asked in disbelief.

"He's on every Monday night," Bernie added. "He says the world's gifts are here to be enjoyed and we should do so. He says we've got plenty of time to clean things up- and not to worry about it."

Sam released a sigh of frustration. "Well, the good reverend's not here right now and you're just visiting." He nodded toward the eagle. "Beings like Abraham live here and your garbage is a threat to their existence, so pick it up."

He watched till they started in doing just that, then he looked to Abraham, saw the eagle nod and left.

Washington D.C.

The Department of the Interior

The receptionist looked up as the door to the outer hallway opened and Smokey entered. "Assistant Secretary Daniels asked me to come in."

She nodded. "He's expecting you." She pointed off to one side where a short hallway began. "Third door on the left."

"Thank you."

He reached the door within a few steps, knocked and entered to find the Assistant Secretary seated at his desk and another man seated in one of the visitors' chair positioned in front of that desk. "Come in, Smokey," Daniels invited. "This is Mr. Barney Hollen. He has a proposition for you."

“And just what is this...proposition?” Smokey asked as he stood by the other chair in the room.

“I’ve just concluded a deal with the Secretary to cut some thousand acres of Federal forest and I’d like you to act as consultant,” Hollen told him.

A low growl issued from Smokey’s throat as shock gave way to anger. “Consultant to what? The creation of more wasteland?”

“Smokey!” The Assistant Secretary scolded. “Mr. Hollen came to us for guidance in doing the job right. Now that’s a lot more than the other logging companies do and you know it.”

Smokey nodded, accepting Daniels’ statement. “I apologize, Mr. Hollen. But I’ve seen what those other companies have done. They cut a mile-wide path right through the heart of the forest- old wood, new, doesn’t matter- cut it down, move on and they never look back.

“You *do* intend to re-plant as you go, don’t you?”

Hollen glanced at Daniels. But when he spoke, it wasn’t in answer to Smokey’s question. “We intend to go in and take out selected trees- only those ready to be cut.” He met the bear’s increasingly hostile gaze. “Surely you can see this will allow the younger trees that much more room to develop?”

“Excuse me if I’m not impressed,” Smokey replied. He looked to the Secretary. “Where is this whole-sale strip-logging supposed to take place?”

The man looked down at his hands and spoke to his desk. “Yellowstone.”

Smokey stood straighter and his English was nearly lost in a roar that shook the office. “*Are you crazy?* That place is still pulling itself back together from that fire a few years back.

“It’s not enough that these money grubbers are slashing private forests left and right, you have to give them public land that’s already hurt so they can finish killing it!”

“We’re not going to kill anything,” Hollen said.

“Just the trees,” Smokey replied. “And all the creatures that depend on them for their survival!”

The Assistant Secretary shook his head. ‘Smokey, we can’t continue to protect every sub-species on the planet.”

“*Man is a sub-species!*” Smokey roared. “Homo Sapiens are *not* the only primates on the planet- Humans are not the only *mammals* on the planet!

“Just because Man builds cities and wages war on a planetary scale, does not give him the right to wipe out the rest of us!”

The bear then turned and headed for the door. The Secretary rose to his feet. “Where are you going?”

“Yellowstone,” Smokey replied. “And I suggest *Mister* Hollen stay away from it.”

Hollen also stood with growing anger. “Is that a threat?”

“Take it any way you want,” Smokey growled. He then left the office- *slamming* the door shut behind him.

2

Three days later

Seated in his den, reading his mail, Sam looked up as Coral knocked and entered. "Samuel? Interior Secretary Miles is here. He asked if he could see you for a moment."

"Show him in, Coral." Sam rose from his chair as the sorceress showed the visitor in and then left the two men alone. "Mr. Secretary."

"Sam. "Miles indicated four large bags of mail leaning against the desk. "Looks like you're keeping busy."

"Most of it's from children," Sam explained, "Which I don't mind. But some of them seem to be under the impression that I'll be delivering presents on the Fourth of July."

They both shared a gentle laugh at that. "Maybe their own flag and a copy of the Constitution?" the Secretary suggested.

Sam shook his head. "I send them those now. I think I'll leave the gifts to Santa- he's already got the organization in place.

"Now, what brings the Head of the Department of the Interior to me? If there's a problem I usually go to Washington."

"Have you seen the news this morning- or the morning paper?"

"No, not yet," Sam answered. "Why?"

The Secretary had brought a paper with him. He now held it up so Sam could see the headline.

VANDAL STRIKES AT LOGGING COMPANY

PLAN TO LOG YELLOWSTONE STYMIED

"Log Yellowstone?!" Sam looked up from the paper in shock and anger. "Whose bright idea was this?"

“One of my assistants,” Miles replied. “A Graduate of the James Watts School of the Environment. I fired him this morning. Granted our record hasn’t been that great. What few improvements we *have* made have gone virtually unnoticed.”

Sam folded the paper and tossed it on the desk. “Maybe that’s a sign you haven’t done enough.”

Miles’ look was one of pure exasperation. “Now don’t *you* start! Having Smokey on the rampage is bad enough.”

“Smokey?” The confusion in Sam’s voice was clear as he leaned against his desk. “Maybe you’d better start from the beginning.”

Miles nodded and did so, explaining how Smokey had been called in as a consultant. “... I fired Daniels as I said and immediately canceled the contract with Hollen- the whole deal was illegal from the start. The department’ll be taking the heat for it for years to come. But all of that’s beside the point.”

The Secretary had been pacing the den as he spoke and now turned from the framed flag Sam had hanging on one wall. “Hollen says my actions don’t matter. He’s planning to go right ahead and log Yellowstone while his lawyers challenge my actions in Federal Appeals Court. He also intends to hunt Smokey down if he doesn’t stop destroying Hollen’s equipment.

“Sam, the logging can be stopped- in court. But if Smokey isn’t stopped, he’ll ruin his own reputation. He’ll be grouped in with all the other eco-terrorists and ignored.”

“How did he act when he was at the office?” Sam asked.

“According to our secretary, when he came in, he was calm, quiet, polite- and a fur-covered express train when he left.”

Sam nodded. “All right, Mr. Miles. I’ll try to find out what’s gotten into him.”

Once Sam had escorted the Secretary out, he turned toward the stairs and the second floor. On this floor, at one end of the hall were his bedroom and Coral's. At the other end, was the guest room and the room Coral used for her magic. It was in this direction, that he now turned.

Knocking, he entered to find Abraham on a perch, watching as Coral worked. Every inch of wall space was filled with shelves- most of which were equally filled with jars. There was a closet across the hall that was hers for storage as well. "Am I intruding?" he asked.

"Not at all," Coral replied as she mixed some of her compounds in a boiling pot. "Abraham knows a doe in the state park with a touch of bronchitis and asked me to whip something up for her."

Using a ladle, she dipped some of the liquid from the pot and poured it into a water tight container. "All right, Abraham. She has to drink this as soon as you can get it to her. It loses its potency very quickly."

The eagle gently took the container from her and held it in one claw. "Thanks, Coral. Sam."

As Abraham flew out the balcony doors, Coral turned to the *other* male in her life. "Now, what can I do for you?"

Sam had brought the newspaper with him and showed it to her. He explained about Secretary Miles' visit and Smokey's rampage. "...I've got to find Smokey before Hollen hunts him down like a rapid animal. Can you help?"

Coral gave him one of those 'Are you kidding?' looks. "Is the President a Republican? I was hoping you'd ask for something hard. Other than Abraham, it's been a slow day."

She waved a hand toward the hall door and snapped her fingers. Out in the hall, the door to her closet opened and like those famous brooms in *Fantasia*, Coral's tri-pod and brazier came walking into the room under its own power and assumed position by itself.

Sam watched as she started a small fire in the brazier and then gathered four different jars from which she took a pinch of the powder each held. These, she tossed into the flames.

Her eyes seem to glaze over and her voice became a whisper. "The image is becoming clearer." Sam could see it happening. A flickering blur that might have been a trick of the fire, solidified into a crystal-clear image of Smokey. "He's at the edge of a clearing," Coral said, "Listening to something..."

The picture in the flames moved as Smokey did- as if it were the bear itself. "It's a rally," Coral realized, as her powers allowed her to see more than Sam could. "It's being held for the loggers by a man- a man of the cloth- No. No, he was never formally ordained, yet he calls himself Reverend. Reverend Conrad Guzzler.

"The more he listens, the angrier he's getting." She looked up from the flames and her eyes focused on Sam. "You've got to go to him. He needs someone- someone to talk to."

She pointed a hand at Sam-

-and in a flash of light he was gone.

3

Smokey stood just outside the clearing, listening as Reverend Guzzler spouted his spiel. "... And I say to you my friends, that if the Lord did not mean for us to cut these trees down and use them in our own way, he would never have put them here.

"This planet's treasures are bountiful indeed. We have oil, coal, tress to last for centuries. The Government has no right to dictate how we make use of it all!

"Why is everyone so concerned with the environment? So what if the air's a little gritty? These days, with air-conditioned offices and block-long shopping malls, who's going to be out in it long enough to notice? A few more trees won't make it any cleaner."

"He's right. They'd be killed first by the acid rain produced by your factories." Everyone turned as Smokey walked toward them. He met their gazes and stares without hesitation as he spoke.

"This forest and all the others are home for a lot of beings that can't speak up like I can, Reverend. They can't tell you how the one tree that provides the nutrition they need is practically an extinct species. They can't tell you how the pollution is killing off all the other plants as well- or how the junk in the air makes it hard for them to breathe."

The crowd parted as Smokey approached the back of the truck Guzzler was using as a speaker's platform. "It has to stop, Reverend. The planet's resources are *not* unlimited- *Life* is not unlimited- and if I have to destroy a piece of machinery to preserve both, then from now on, that's what I'll do."

"That's not the answer, my friend."

They all turned once more as Uncle Sam entered the clearing. "Once they've shot you or locked you away for destroying private property,

they'll just bring in another piece of machinery and go on like nothing happened."

"Then what's the answer, Sam?" Smokey demanded. Tears began to fill his eyes as he spoke. "It's not just a simple case of preventing forest fires anymore- the problem's gone beyond that."

"An arsonist set a fire last week, There were witnesses that could have stopped him and put it out before someone got hurt- " the tears drifted down his fur covered face. "They didn't raise a hand to stop him or put it out- *and Ranger died because of them!*"

"*What's the answer?!*" There was total silence in the clearing as the tension and frustration Smokey had been feeling burst out of him as he slowly dropped to his knees and cried.

Sam glanced up at Reverend Guzzler, then around at the others gathered in the clearing. But no one would meet his gaze. When Sam did speak, his voice was soft, yet everyone in the clearing heard him.

"I don't know what the permanent answer is, Smokey. But I do know that you've always led by words and deeds- and one of the greatest freedoms a person can have in this country is the guaranteed Freedom of Speech."

"So use it. You keep fighting with *words*- and you back them up with concrete examples no one can ignore. You grab hold of anyone who'll listen and push for *any* measure that will protect the environment and you keep pushing till they give in."

Sam knelt and reached out a hand to wipe the tears of the bear's face.

"He shoved me clear as the tree fell," Smokey whispered. "He was all the family I had, Sam."

"Not anymore," Sam answered.

The silence that settled over the clearing was shattered by the cocking of rifles- and both rose and turned to see Hollen and several of his men-lined up like a firing squad.

“You better think about it long and hard, Mr. Hollen,” Sam stated. “Your contract was illegal from the start.”

“That maybe,” Hollen replied. He nodded toward Smokey. “But he wreaked a lot of expensive equipment. I figure the *least* I’ve got coming to me is a bear skin rug- and if you don’t move, I’ll just add your star-spangled hide to the tally as well.”

He and his men raised their rifles to their shoulders as the crowd backed away in shock.

Sights were lined up and hammers pulled back.

A shot was fired-

-and Hollen’s rifle shattered under the impact of Detective Lawton’s shot.

Sam turned to see her keeping aim on Hollen. “Jennifer- ?”

“Dr. Wilson,” the policewoman said as other officers- Rangers in fact-took Hollen and his men into custody. “When that lady wants a cop, she doesn’t fool with 9-1-1.”

“Sam, I-“Smokey began.

Sam waved him off. “We’ll talk about it later,” He said. “We’ll talk about all of it.”

A few days later, found Smokey and Abraham at the Manor House watching as Sam raised the flag for the day.

As he finished, the paperboy brought the morning edition and Sam soon had it unfolded and the headlines in plain view.

SMOKEY BEAR CLEARED OF ECO-TERRORISM

ACTIONS SAVE YELLOWSTONE

Sam looked the article over as he spoke. "Says here that several senators are proposing tighter environmental bills."

Smokey gave an impolite snort at the news. "By the time all the special interest groups and business lobbyists get through with them, how watered down will they be?"

Abraham fluffed his feathers. "So you take up where these end and push for more."

Sam looked up from the paper. "I agree. You're one voice facing the walls of Jericho. Eventually, there'll be enough voices to bring those walls tumbling down."

Smokey still wasn't convinced. "But can we do it in time?"

Sam could only shrug. "That I don't know. I wish I did."