

Anxiety Wave

by Martha A. Hood

Nolan spread the gemstones across the black velvet like a Vegas dealer spreads a deck of cards. His sausage fingers and thick hands evoked uneasy feelings in those he encountered, and his imposing bulk effectively discouraged questions as to the exact nature of the entity he represented, the Liberty Research Institute.

Angelo Park, CEO of Barbara Pharmaceuticals, swallowed hard, as if in danger of drooling at the sight of the rocks. Gemstones were a hobby of Park's, a factoid he had previously shared with Nolan. Gemstones distracted him from any troubling examination of the role he and his company played in the production and distribution of a product Barbara Pharmaceuticals had not researched and developed itself.

He liked gemstones. He also liked expensive clothes.

Nolan realized in his very bones the importance of hobbies. Knowing a person's hobby was key to determining effective payment. In this case, gemstones. In the case of the appropriate FDA official, it might be a car, rare baseball cards, or just plain old cash. In any event, it was always important to find the hobby, for that personal touch.

"I can't thank you enough for your help," Nolan told Angelo Park. "Your country will not know of your actions, but if it did, it would thank you."

Park picked up an emerald, and cradled it in his palm. "For Fabienne's birthday. A cocktail ring, I think. Perfect."

The local news droned from Danika Eggers' television while she set the small dish of pureed carrots on the high chair tray of her daughter, Lori.

The TV news said, "Tragically, again today, we have another baby, left in a car, resulting in that child's death, the fourth such incident this month."

While Lori stabbed the pureed carrots with a plastic baby spoon, Danika emptied the dishwasher.

The TV newswoman said, "A fire erupted in an apartment complex in the community of Springbrook yesterday evening, when an elderly resident left candles burning while she drove to the store. In her absence, draperies ignited."

Danika gave Lori a beaker cup of apple juice, and ran to pull some clothes from the dryer. Her favorite thing about moving to this condo was having a washer and dryer right there, off the kitchen.

The TV news cited a study conducted at a prestigious university, which showed a significant increase in the incidence of dementia and Alzheimer's over the last five years. Whether the increase resulted from an increase in the numbers of aging Americans, more diagnoses, or an actual increase in the incidence of dementia in its various forms could not be stated with certainty.

While Lori chewed on a soda cracker, Danika phoned the dealership and made an appointment to take her car in for an oil change, and to look at that light on the dashboard. The moment she hung up, the phone rang. It was their mortgage company, wondering where their payment was. She told them, truthfully, she had emailed it off the night before. Nonetheless, the call rattled her. Every month's bills were an ordeal.

She wiped down the high chair. It was hard, so hard, dealing with all this, while Scott was overseas, at the war. The sheer number of things to remember. She felt like a gibbering idiot most of the time.

As a man of God, Nolan could weep with nostalgia for the Middle Ages.

Religious institutions in particular had it made back then. They held the reins of the media of the times, the dramas and the comedies. They used guilt and the