

MAIZE

by Sturla Grey

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by Amanda Garay

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I.

Flames announced a time of anarchy and unpredictability, the bullet proof Escalade had burned brightest and longest. The cars of three high-ranking executives had been blown up without people in them: St. Louis, D.C., Brussels. The idea was to send a message, not take more human life. Incinerated vehicles in driveways in front of the homes of those men who control the food supply assaulted their sense of imperviousness. Now, these explosions announced, political bribes and propaganda weren't going to be enough to push things through. There would need to be survival from blunt force trauma and fear tactics, a relentless forward march that took a high profile toll at least once a month in order to keep the demagogues of the world food supply balancing on one foot.

Fighting the Monstreet machine had become a paid career for Martina Cooley. It began in her twenties with breathless weekend campaigning for local legislation on ballots throughout her home state of California, pursuing a ban on genetically modified foods and the seed it sprang from. Despite the years of campaigning, only one county in the nation was coherent enough against Monstreet to ban all of its genetically modified seed from the local food supply: Mendocino. The land of hippies and independent thinking. The rural county's ban stimulated sixteen states of the union to pass preemptive legislation that would not allow its citizens any legal

protection against engineered food or the behemoth global dominator responsible for each manipulated seed.

Monstreet were creative in their movements to outsmart the activists and the masses, making up several different and helpful sounding names for itself around the globe: Western Plant Health Association, CropLife America, and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center. The activists tracked the little moles that would pop up in quiet places on the planet: Katmandu, Morocco, Oaxaca. They descended on these places and they blew up cars and set modified crops on fire in the middle of the night, between leafleting the dazed and blinking citizens and imploring local officials. Organic farmers and wealthy hippies provided the tax deductible funding to get it done. The creator of one universally indispensable computer platform bankrolled ninety percent of the war. In rural and some forward developing places overseas farmers would unite and throw Monstreet out of the country, seeds aflame. There were certain hold-outs against Bt delta endotoxin crops, many of them island republics, and those strong holds were the only places left on earth to get pure organic food. The endotoxin in the genetically modified organisms would explode the stomach of any insect that ingested it within an hour. In fact, Monstreet presented the insect as the enemy, for justification of its toxic onslaught against global humanity. In humans and larger animals the devastation of Bt endotoxin would take months, or years, leaving livestock sterile and without immune defense, and initializing a shut down of vital organs in the people.

Martina whipped a mental double take when she came in from the foyer of the hacienda with her surfboard and saw the white woman of about forty-five sitting with a tar-skinned adolescent in the hotel restaurant. The girl's hair was teased out in a bold afro and she wore the favored neon colored fashion for middle-schoolers. Once Martina had gotten her own child, Petra, rinsed off with fresh water and dried, they went back to the restaurant for lunch to find the dining patio empty. Their organic corn tortillas, fruits and

vegetables were retrieved from the refrigerator in their room as the food supply in Mexico had already been devoured by Monstreet and made one hundred percent genetically modified.

Installed on the beach in front of the hacienda after the scorching siesta, Petra retreated back into the warm waves and Martina relaxed inside a book she'd been trying to finish for a month. In her peripheral vision she saw the dark girl from earlier approach Petra with a boogie board in the waves, and they began to body surf together.

“Your girl is a strong swimmer?” the woman from the dining patio earlier spoke in a heavy melodic French accent. Martina lifted a hand to shield her eyes from the sun and saw the woman was fair, and exceptionally beautiful, with gold shoulder length hair, no make-up, straight alabaster teeth.

“Yes.” Martina answered. “She's been a surfer for years.”

They made their introductions of name — the woman was Geneva, here with her two children, Marielle the girl, and a boy named Maxim, and her husband, Bertrand.

“We live in Mexico City, well just outside of Mexico City.” Geneva offered, lowering herself onto the sand next to Martina's beach chair and watching the girls in the ocean. “We moved here from Ethiopia in September.”

“How do you like Mexico so far?”

“We absolutely love it.” Maxim, the boy, had just joined the girls in the surf, skin also pitch black, with lanky appendages swinging randomly about him.

“We are from Belgium originally.”

“What takes you around the world?” Martina asked.

“Bertrand is a food scientist — I work in public relations for his company”.

“What does he do in food? Manufacturing?”

“He improves seed — studies in maize and wheat for the private sector.”

In Martina a heat swept through, mind sped then surreptitiously slowed.

“Do you work for Monstreet?”

The color in Geneva's face seemed to go drab, she smiled generously and without flinching — more and more people she ran into knew precisely what a genetically modified organism actually was and who made them. “Partly.” She said. “We do a lot of different kinds of projects.” Geneva lied.

What Monstreet did was create organisms that resembled food-stuff to the eye, but which were mutated DNA designed to maim insects, withstand the chemical onslaught of pesticides and deteriorate the brains and reproductive organs and glands of the humans who ate them at a steady pace so as to render the humans opaque to inquiry or second-guessing. The eradication of free-thinking was crucial to the corporate take over of all food-producing territories across the globe. In the dining halls of Monstreet, only organic foods were served, and the same in the White House down in Washington D.C. The concept was to neutralize the masses and take as much of their money as possible while doing it.

“Where do you live?” Geneva asked Martina.

“Arizona.” Martina replied.

Martina lied. She instantly realized not particularly well since she'd already admitted her child was a long time surfer.

II.

The children were exceedingly charming together, Marielle, Max and Petra. One afternoon of play in the ocean had created a sweet bond between the young girls. Max had a serene face with huge eyes and wide smile, thin shoulders poking up into the sleeves of his t-shirt. Martina found herself fascinated by his affability and intelligence. He was definitely the Emperor of them all, a bearing of regal stature without arrogance.

Sitting at the table in the café in town across from the three children, the parents watched the kids play a death match of Uno. They had all walked there along a dirt road for two miles, greeting the wayward packs of harmless dogs running in and out of the bush, swooning in turns over the bright moon in a cloudless sky. One of the dogs attached itself to Martina, he walked behind her the whole way to town, talking to her. The kids delighted in this.

“How did you two meet?” came from Martina.

Bert and Geneva looked at each other, asking with expressions which one of them would tell the story.

“Bert was a bad-boy.” Gen laughed, a sparkle about her that laid out the unmistakable truth that she was still in love. Bert had a look, he was delighted by his beautiful, light, funny wife.

“He would come around at eleven o'clock at night knocking on my door to see me, this leather jacket and dark Ray Bans and a cigarette. Papa hated him.” Gen imitated the cigarette hanging suavely from the corner of the mouth.

Bert was delighted with the story so far. Martina looked at the happy, round-stomached father with graying hair and wire-rimmed spectacles, loose bags under his eyes, sculpted hands with manicured nails. She out-pictured a Jean-Paul Belmondo type in the story Gen told, except darker, poorer, more scrappy.

“We would see each other once in awhile, and then Bert went to Utah after he got his PhD to work in agriculture. That's when the phone bills started. He sent me a plane ticket to visit him in Salt Lake when my boyfriend and I finally broke up, and he asked me to marry him as soon as I got off the plane.”

Bert's eyes laughed. “I had to have her.”

The conversation moved into a recent family outing to San Miguel de Allende, Gen pulled out her iPad and went through a photo album with Martina. There was a blanket of hominess that wrapped around her, she was comfortable, intrigued by the pictorial excursion that migrated into photos of the new house they had taken upon their arrival in El Batan, outside of Mexico City.

“This is our house.” Gen shared. It was a white marble modern with smart, glorious succulent landscaping around the façade and modern sculpture in the outside foyer.

“What a beautiful home.” Martina commented as they continued to flip through photos of the light, spacious interior, the kids making pizza in the large affluent kitchen, indigenous Indian house-servants appearing in certain shots, minding their own business.

“We adore it. The institute gave it to us, how could we refuse?”

The heat came into Martina's ears again as the tart flavor of Monstreet bit into her tongue. Bert was watching the kids have their innocent interactions, his natural facial expression was a happy

smile, his hands were intertwined over his affluent belly.

Geneva flipped to another photo, Marielle was in it with a thirty-something man, herself much younger, facing a political poster on the wall in a Parisian street, her middle finger raised toward the face of the politician.

“Here is Marielle and my brother, the photo is of Christian Vanneste, this conservative in France, just horrible, hates the gays and all that. Marielle is five years old, has no idea, I don't know how or why she decides to use her middle finger here, extraordinary.”

Then, the food arrived. Martina and Petra sipped their cold mineral water while the family dined on chile rellenos.

After the meal they returned down the same dirt road to their hacienda. Half-way back, two tawny Mexican fishermen pulled over in their rusted pick up and invited the families to climb into the back for a ride home. Warm wind silenced the children and an intoxicating stream of night blooming jasmine made them look up to the stars. When they got back Max got out his laptop and played some short films he had made starring his mom and sister and the family dog from Ethiopia who Martina reckoned looked like a wild coyote-fox. There was also a film animated from Duplo toy figurines. Max was a wonderful young man, pensive and thoughtful — but also hilarious. He and Martina had a long conversation about Martin Scorsese. Petra and Marielle retired to the second room that had been rented for the French kids and slumbered together.

III.

There was an excursion with the kids and a truck full of surfboards, Martina rode in the back with the boards while the guide kept the kids in the front. They rolled through a swamp populated with peaceful crocodiles and over hilly dunes to reach this surf spot of pristine white glowing.

Martina waded out waist deep in the low rolling waves of tropical ocean to shoot photos of the kids surfing. The girls would get up on the same wave and make faces and gestures at the camera to be silly. Martina was immersed in the blessing of such a joyful pastime and forgot where she was for a moment. She turned at one point and saw that Bertrand had driven up in the family SUV and was wading out toward them holding his camera aloft. Snared by this sight, Martina gazed at him longer than what may have been polite. His hair was blowing in the trade wind, his gracefully formed legs came out from faded softly-washed Bermuda shorts. The smile was in the eyes, as he went deeper in the water his mouth curled upward and she could see he was laughing a little and then he arrived where she was stationed.

They stood there in quiet for quite awhile taking photos of the kids surfing. The wordlessness created a funnel of silence though communication was open. A bubble formed about them and Martina thought she could hear him thinking. He was light, devoted to his children, totally relaxed, totally present. Martina was thinking about the war. Bert's proximity stirred her, sent her thoughts sprinting off in a roar of colliding voices and chatter.

Max was the first to paddle in and they all turned and went back to shore for lunch. In Bert's SUV on the way back to town the girls chatted in low-toned conspiracy so the adults couldn't hear.

IV.

For the past ten years Martina and Petra had lived in relative secrecy inside the façade of the physical world. Every year since the death of Petra's father, they moved to a new county in the same state, a new house, a new school, and Martina changed her last name when they moved, their phone numbers, their email addresses and naturally their IPs. Petra was fully aware at every occasion of

knowing exactly what her food was comprised of, all the way down to the type of lethicin, the origin of the guar gum, the presence of pesticides. Martina was fortunate to have had a child who was an intelligent partner in crime, who understood what was at stake and why it was important to fight the Monstreet machine. Whether Petra would be as involved in the underside of things when she gained her majority was not clear but Martina knew there would be some kind of activity related to taking back control over the food supply chain.

Martina had had one lover for quite awhile, Rafe, Rafael, who she'd see a few times each year in between operations. His base was in Colombia and the territory he oversaw was Latin America. She believed what they shared was the closest thing she had ever had to boy-girl love, it had loyalty and intense sexual components, and it never seemed to change no matter how long the interval between meetings or the intensity of the actions they were pursuing against the corporation.

While Petra slept in the French quarters, Martina and Rafe had their nighttime rendezvous on SKYPE. Rafe asked Martina to take off all of her clothes, which she did obediently in the hot night air. She laid across the bed beneath the mosquito net so he could see all of her. Martina asked him to show her his hard cock and she admired it while he directed her where to touch herself. Together they came several times doing this, once while Rafe detailed lewdly how he would tittie fuck her if he was there, and how he would take control of her body and torture her.

"I miss you." Martina said when the fucking portion of the call was finished and she took in Rafe's peaceful face.

"You look amazing. You need to stay in a place where you can be tan all year." He said.

“So, you won't believe who's in the resort with us.” She started to explain. She let him in on the dramatic coincidence, and he silently marveled at it. They spoke in lowered tones and a code language of the current operation in Mexico City, the coordinates, the timing.

“It was strange this afternoon.” She told him. “We were at this surf spot with the kids.”

“He has kids?” Rafe interrupted her.

“Yes, two, they are obviously adopted, and a lovely wife.”

“Obviously, how?”

“The parents are white and the kids are black.”

“Ok.”

“So we were at this surf spot when he came wading out in the ocean where I was taking photos. We stood there for awhile. I had this overwhelming urge to kiss him. To fuck him.”

“You're due for a tune up, my love, that's all.”

Martina never cared to ask who Rafael was servicing in Bogota, it didn't matter to her in the least.

V.

In the late afternoon the mothers took their girls out for a horse ride along the beach, to the estuary on the north coast, whose infinite greenness rattled the eyes. White exotic birds and flamingoes pierced the jungle background with light, even the girls were hushed by the paradise, its gorgeousness, its wild music.

Gen and Martina sat alone and coated with sweat in the dining patio that overlooked the bronze sun setting on the ocean's horizon.

"I've been meaning to ask you, about the kids, how they came to you." Martina ventured.

"Max came to us first, he came from Haiti, Marielle came two years later when we were in Ethiopia."

This was the narrative that made up the pinnacle of Geneva's life. The odyssey of getting Max, how it had sculpted her husband into a softened, protective, fierce father. They had tried having children for more than ten years, and finally came to understand it would not happen. Gen had looked into the orphaned children of Haiti after Bert's job was terminated there and they were exiled to Africa for his new gig engineering rice. There were tens of thousands of babies to adopt from the human disaster zone of Port-Au-Prince.

Gen recounted how they had adopted Maxim sight unseen except for a few blurry photographs on the website of the adoption agency. Her eyes grew light and soft telling Martina of the day they met him, an event that took twenty-six months to complete. They had not slept for the week prior to Maxim's arrival in Addis Ababa, their emotions were jangled and raw as they paced at the airport gate pending the arrival of their son.

As passengers disembarked from the flight, Gen remembered Bertrand, moving from foot to foot, observing each childless adult who emerged from the gangway toting carry-ons. Then, they each caught sight of their boy, a small toddler, gaunt, with huge white eyes. Gen watched as Bert descended on the petite Haitian nun carrying Maxim on her hip, how he gently moved from foot to foot, imploring her quietly to turn over his beloved son. There had been a much too long gestation of yearning, not the customary nine months, Bertrand craved to hold his boy.

There was a pause in the story while Martina wept in silence. The awesomeness and impossibility of Maxim's rescue took her over.

Geneva started on Marielle. In an orphanage just outside Addis Ababa where they lived, Geneva had volunteered for several years. Within a month of Maxim's arrival in their household, she had received a five-month old baby girl from a mother who trailed four other young male children behind her, all malnourished and with green mucous coming from their noses. The mother asserted she was not going to return, that she wanted a good family to take her female child.

Geneva knew on sight that Marielle was her daughter. She spent every hour at the orphanage with the baby having expressed her intent to adopt. The Ethiopian government spent eighteen months trying to entice the birth mother to reunite with the child, to no avail. The waiting and visiting Marielle in the bare stone and tile institution day after day had carved out a hard place in Geneva where she learned to endure heartbreak for the first time in her life. Bert and Geneva finally received the little girl into their home a week before her second birthday.

Now, they educated their children in the finest private school available in Mexico City, sent them to town each dawn wearing crisp white uniforms, and received them home at night with great joy and a bottomless pride.

VI.

When Petra and Martina arrived at the hotel in Mexico City the day after New Year's there was a control HQ set up in a suite on the top floor. They had a satellite television hook up but Petra preferred to

read her novel stretched out on the sofa while the quiet pow-wow amongst the adults unraveled there.

Shortly after four AM the phone in Martina's room went off. It was command control, Rafe's voice on the other end.

“I'm here.” He said, low.

She hung up and pulled on a hotel robe and took the elevator to the higher floor. When she entered, her colleagues were huddled by the television watching a news report of a high-powered explosion under the unmanned SUV of a Monstreet scientist and Director General in El Batan, 45 KM south of Mexico City. Martina saw the burning car in front of the white marble façade of the home, recognized the cactus and succulent vines. Rafe walked over to her, pulled her in, kissed her on the forehead. They wordlessly left command and went back to his own room next to hers and Petra's on the lower floor.

The room was close, he pushed open the window to let in fresh air and got out of his clothes which smelled of sage and underbrush and the country. The traffic of Mexico City hissed and moaned outside, an eternal river. They both laid down on a chaise near the breeze, his legs around her, she buried into his hairless chest and they fell asleep. When her eyes opened morning sun was already inching over their limbs, a place on her leg was frying in the light. Rafe stirred, let his big hand go inside her robe and cup her tit. He fingered her nipple and spoke single words in her ear- “you”, “come”, “suck”, “baby” and she grew wet quickly. Before the sex got fully underway she saw his eyes looking at her face, the top of her head a though he could read the future by counting the hair, with such a tenderness.

In the hotel, in the streets, through the nations of South America, North America, Europe, Asia, Africa and the poles, trillions of dollars bled into the hands of Monstreet on this third day of January,

trillions more would bleed the next day, and the next, cycling the poisonous seeds into poisonous food, with the masses at large having no idea they were being executed, slowly, simply by eating.

