

# A Life of My Own - 7

by J. Mykell Collinz

Blue skies, white clouds, late afternoon sunshine, tall buildings throwing dark shadows on busy sidewalks, noisy traffic in the streets: downtown Detroit is active, atmospheric, and exciting.

On the west side of Woodward Avenue, Grand Circus Park has already been occurred, I'm surprised to discover.

"The general assembly must have rescheduled it or something," I say: "Date and location."

"Whatever," Patrick replies: "It's an impressive sight, a good beginning."

The park is filled with tents, tarps, and supporting structures, along with hundreds of diverse individuals seeking a common focus, wanting to make a difference, expressing an abundance of opinion, verbally and with signs. There's an information station, a library, a kitchen, a variety of food. They're serving hot coffee.

I agree with the occupy movement ideologically, I support their right to protest, but I'm not experiencing the same level of emotional anxiety, frustration, or discontent. Maybe it's because my father's an acolyte at the top and I get everything I want, on a material level.

I'm an outsider here, observing, collecting impressions, mental notes, thinking about how to write this scene in my novel. I'm interested in seeing how they react to me, an expensively dressed young woman, barely sixteen, holding hands with Patrick, a twenty something Lurch-like hunk, the manservant in the Adams Family, busting out of his undersized britches. He's mean looking, although he's really nice, and he's very intelligent.

I see race and ethnic diversity, all ages, many students and twenty-somethings, like at Occupy Wall Street. But Detroit has a unique set of neighborhood problems. I know this from back when my father owned and managed rental properties throughout the city but also from reading. Detroit has community organizations with years of experience advocating solutions in the face of apathetic and ineffectual city, state, and federal governments. These groups usually receive minor coverage in the media. Many are here now, I expect, eager for an opportunity to participate in a more widely publicized event.

"This is the civil rights of the twenty first century," a group of demonstrators chant as they march through the park carrying signs: "We fought racism, now we're fighting richism."

Patrick and I walk down Woodward Avenue to the Renaissance Center where the General Motors Corporation has its world headquarters. We stroll silently along the river at the RenCen's GM Plaza Promenade. It's part of the International Riverfront, an area of the city extending for over five miles along the United States side of the Detroit River.

Looking up at the impressive array of towers, Patrick says:

"The difference between the top spots in Detroit and the bottom neighborhoods exemplifies to me the idea that some people are doing well and on the rise while the majority are treading deep water with no help in sight. Yet the presence of an elite one percent at the very top isn't all that obvious, is it, even here?"

"Automobile corporations were among the first multinationals," I reply.

"Yes, they played a role in the beginning. But they're not at the very top anymore. They're reacting defensively to financial wizards with super computers who control enormous global resources."

"That's my father's goal. You know what his latest interest is, the for-profit higher education market. He claims it offers unlimited growth potential with virtually zero risk. The burden of repayment falls entirely on the students. Corporations are shielded from the consequences of default. When I hear him saying this I wanna scream. I'd be better off not knowing what he does for a living. And it's partly my fault. When I insisted on home schooling, that's when he saw the potential for education market profits."

"For-profits are like subprime education," Patrick says: "Their accreditation process mimics the credit agency's role in rating subprime mortgages. What's different is, they receive most of their tuition revenues upfront through federal loans and grants so, even if students are unable to find employment or pay back their loans, corporate profits are assured."

"I'm all for the development of online learning," I say: "But the purpose is to educate, not turn a profit."

"That's true of many social needs besides education," he replies, "including health care. It's a primary issue in my mind, at the core of the occupy movement."

On our way back up Woodward Avenue, we stop at the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center. It's the city and county administration building and there's a twenty-six foot tall cast bronze sculpture in front of it called The Spirit of Detroit.

Patrick says: "Its creator, Marshall Fredericks, did not actually name the sculpture, nor did he make money doing it, even though,

at the time it was installed here and dedicated in 1958, it was the largest cast bronze statue since the Renaissance."

The sculpture shows a giant man covered in a green patina sitting with his legs folded beneath him. He's naked except for a loin cloth. His head is turned to his right, he's looking down at a golden, gilt bronze family of three standing in the palm of his outstretched right hand.

The family consists of a bare breasted woman in a full length skirt, from the waist down. She's standing in front of a naked man. He's standing with both arms raised skyward, his head thrown back, looking up. She is likewise looking up with her head thrown back. She has one arm raised skyward while holding an infant on her hip with the other arm.

The green patina giant holds a golden, gilt bronze sphere in the palm of his outstretched left hand. The sphere emits golden rays of brilliance: symbolizing the force field of creation, I assume.

Behind the sculpture, there's a large wall with an inscription: "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." It's from the Bible, Corinthians.

In front of the sculpture there's a plaque bearing the inscription: "The artist expresses the concept that God, through the spirit of man is manifested in the family, the noblest human relationship."

It makes me think of my mother, why she left my father, why she never comes back to visit me. I wonder where she is, how she's doing.

