



Kenneth J. Munkens

**Minther
& Sklar**

*“The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield
and government to gain ground.”*

-- Thomas Jefferson

Chapter 13 | THE GUN

“George, I’ve been thinking—there are different types of freedom,” Dee says as she sits on my bed. An interesting statement, to say the least. I want to hear more so I stop what I’m doing and look up. She doesn’t disappoint, “We all think of freedom as freedom of action. However, in a society, in order to protect the rights of others it has to be tempered action. That’s why we have laws. For instance, I can’t, all-of-a-sudden, say I want your room and take it. The law is meant to protect you from me.”

“I don’t need the law, I’m bigger than you.”

She huffs and adds, “The point is total freedom is anarchy.”

I point out, “Survival of the fittest or strongest.”

“There has to be a delicate balance.”

“So, Thomas Jefferson, how do you give freedom without allowing its abuse?”

Dee sits up straighter, “To begin, freedom is not given. No one can give you something they don’t possess.” She points at me and says, “I can’t give you the right to breathe air. The only thing I can do is protect your right to breathe air.” She rolls onto her back and stares at the ceiling. Suddenly, she pops up and states loudly, “That’s the secret! Government can’t give you anything. Instead, it should protect you from any infringement on your inalienable rights.”

“That hamster up there is really running on his treadmill today,” I say sarcastically.

“Her treadmill,” she corrects me as she stands and begins to pace around my room. “No one has the right to come into your home and take your property or attack you. That’s denying you the right to live in peace. We have police to protect that right.”

“But, what about when government tells us what we can do and what we can’t do?” I ask.

“If it keeps us from infringing on the rights of others that’s OK.”

“What if they tell you you’re not allowed to visit certain websites?”

“That’s wrong, unless the site is doing something illegal.”

“But, the government decides what is and isn’t legal.”

Dee gives me a frustrated look. After thinking for a short while she gives me her answer, “Right now, the government isn’t protecting our freedom its defining it. That’s wrong.”

“But, it keeps me from infringing on your rights,” I insist.

“What rights?”

“Well . . .”

“We were meant to be free to go where we want, do what we want, think what we want, not be kept in cages or shaped into what the government chooses for us,” Dee states. “It’s not right!”

I change the subject, “Well, it really doesn’t matter since the government controls most everything.”

“It does matter,” she insists. “It matters because we presently live under greater tyranny than the Pilgrims did under King George. The government not only controls commerce, they control our actions and lives.” She emphasizes her point, “Last week was dad’s birthday. He had to get his annual physical. His blood pressure was slightly high.”

“Probably my fault,” I admit.

“Absolutely,” Dee smiles, “Well, his numbers were outside the acceptable range so he was put on more pills and placed on the Limited Access & Use of Government Healthcare (LAUGH) list. Until he gets his numbers within their required levels his healthcare needs are low priority. We’re like animals in a zoo with no choice but to obey or die.”

“I have a choice,” I state defiantly.

“You do. And, how great does it feel?”

“You know, I’ve been so tangled up in all that has been happening and ultimately what is about to happen that I really haven’t had time to consider the incredible gift that I have received,” I admit. With that reality thrust in my face I feel a wave of guilt. Here my father has been cheated out of what he really wanted to do for a career, lived as a good citizen, certainly didn’t do anything to create his health situation, and at his age doesn’t have near the choices that I do. By the way, after Doctor Pace and his needles, I haven’t taken a DIRT pill for a long time and feel great. I wonder what my blood pressure is?

When I arrive at work, Walter Tize calls me into his office. He greets me, “Nice to see that you decided to show up today.”

“I’m early. What are you talking about?”

“Shut up!” He leans back and asks, “What’s the story on the car?”

“What story?”

“I asked you first.”

“It’s nice. I like it. Runs well.”

“No, asshole, I have no invoice.”

“I, uh, well, uh . . .”

“Well spoken. You were authorized a company car. So, where is the invoice?”

“I paid for it,” I confess.

“Feeling rich, these days?”

“Feeling stupid, this day.”

“Not to worry. Give me the information and you’ll be reimbursed,” Walter says in an unfamiliar tone that almost could be considered friendly. He continues, “George, as you know you have been reassigned. I’m no longer your boss. From the beginning I knew you were on a specific undefined track. I’ve been told that you have done well. We share the blue eagle of the EOTS, however, you are going to go through doors that are even denied to me. In some ways I envy you, while in others I don’t. I do applaud your courage and pray for your success. We each have our burden, responsibilities, and hopes. From now on you will be working out of STUS headquarters reporting to Virginia Morris. Let’s have a bite to eat at lunch at Candy’s Café. Then you can report to headquarters.”

I smile. I’m not sure how to react. I really like Walter. Yet, if I say anything complimentary he’d probably curse at me. I get the feeling that I’m going to war and he is saying goodbye. Now, that’s not a comforting feeling. I also see an image of an older man standing on the dock watching a warship steam away wishing he were among the crew. Without question, I would welcome him aboard. In truth, I wonder if I have the courage to see this thing through. I am a speck among billions. What makes me think that I can have world-changing impact? Yes, I like Walter Tize.

“Get the hell out of my office.”

After lunch, I report to STUS headquarters. Virginia is in her office sitting on the raised Japanese style platform at a low square black enamel table. I enter, remove my shoes, and join her.

“How was lunch?” she asks.

“Very interesting. Walter Tize is quite a remarkable individual. When he’s not calling me names he has a lot of insights, memories, and opinions.”

“Walter was part of an earlier revolutionary effort that didn’t quite work out as planned. Luckily, he was never associated with it. He lost a number of friends.”

“I’m coming to realize there have been patriots fighting for freedom all along.”

“The struggle for control and power is a constant. From the very day the original United States of America was founded and its Constitution adopted forces to gain more and more authority went to work. There will always be those who

believe they know more and are better suited to make decisions for others. Life is a constant battle,” Virginia provides her perspective.

She continues with history that I have yet to read in my illegal history book. “A compromise had to be made with the original founding of the nation. In fact, there were 86 changes made to the original Declaration of Independence before it was approved by Congress. A statement that condemned slavery was omitted, in spite of Thomas Jefferson’s vehement protests. Even though he was a slave owner he despised the practice.”

I can’t help but wonder why Virginia started giving me a history lesson. Not that I mind. I find it all fascinating.

“Slavery has existed throughout history in many forms. Rome is said to have been more dependent upon its slave labor than any society. There are estimates that about a third of the population of Rome were slaves. They came from conquered lands, punishment for crimes, kidnapping, and even to pay debts.”

“Initial colonization of the New World by England occurred in the Caribbean and in Virginia. The first workers were recruited from England. To get to America they were lured by the promise of land at the end of their term of indentured service. As the colonies grew, more labor was needed. Dutch slave traders began providing enslaved Africans and by the 1650s the source of labor went from voluntary to involuntary. In 1660 the labor force was half free and half slave.”

“By the time of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, slavery in the United States was well entrenched. In the census of 1790, 3.8 million people were counted with 700,000 or 18% slaves. Many founding fathers expressed opposition to slavery, but it was a different time when the practice was widespread throughout the world. Patrick Henry stated, ‘I believe a time will come when an opportunity will be offered to abolish this lamentable evil.’ And, Thomas Jefferson wrote, ‘There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us.’ Many reasonable leaders of the time wished for the abolition of slavery but found opposition too strong. John Jay, author of The Federalist, wrote in 1786, ‘It is much to be wished that slavery may be abolished. The honor of the States, as well as justice and humanity, in my opinion, loudly call upon them to emancipate these unhappy people. To contend for our own liberty, and to deny that blessing to others, involves an inconsistency not to be excused.’”

What becomes clear to me is that the concept of individual freedom was still in its infant stage. Great Britain had a king and noble class and vassals and for all intents and purposes slaves. Every nation in the world still had classes from which one could not escape very easily. The Declaration of Independence changed all of that in America. Yet, such a dramatic change in the minds of men would not occur with a single piece of paper. Those in power do not give it up easily.

Virginia pressed on, “Even George Washington in a letter to Marquis de

Lafayette expressed frustration, 'Your late purchase of an estate in the colony of Cayenne, with a view to emancipating the slaves on it, is a generous and noble proof of your humanity. Would to God a like spirit would diffuse itself generally into the minds of the people of this country; but I despair of seeing it."

I remark, "I was taught all the founding fathers owned slaves, therefore what they created was racist and had to be destroyed for the good of the people."

"Many did own slaves. Yet, they recognized it was morally wrong in a new free society and wanted to eliminate it. Unfortunately, there were more voices and votes to keep slavery. When the Constitution was written, slavery was an essential part of agriculture in the south. It was feared that if any effort was made to emancipate the slaves the south would form their own nation. A compromise was reached. First, the Enumeration Clause defined slaves as 'other persons' and counted them as three-fifths of a whole person. This was for the apportionment of representatives in Congress. Then Article 1, Section 9 limited Congress from passing any laws that prohibited the importation of slaves until 1808—twenty years later. After that waiting period, Congress outlawed the slave trade effective January 1, 1808. President Thomas Jefferson, called the slave trade, 'violations of human rights which have been so long continued on the unoffending inhabitants of Africa, and which the morality, the reputation, and the best interests of our country have long been eager to proscribe.'"

"They were trying to change," I observe. "Not that it did those poor souls who were brought in over twenty years any good."

"Small steps. While not ideal the leaders were moving in the right and moral direction. Another compromise was the Fugitive Slave Clause. It said the law in one state could not excuse a person from service or labor in another state. It expressly required that the state in which an escapee is found deliver the slave to the state he escaped from 'on Claim of the Party.' As hard as they tried reasonable men could not eliminate slavery through legislation. War was inevitable." Virginia looked off into a distance—a distant past.

"For years, pro-slavery Presidents were elected, but times were changing. In the 1856 Presidential election Republican John C. Frémont crusaded against slavery. The Republican slogan was 'Free speech, free press, free soil, free men, Frémont and victory!' Democrats warned that Fremont's election could lead to civil war. Democrat James Buchanan was elected. This is when the anti-slavery folks received a devastating blow."

Virginia brings up her tablet screen. I guess she wants to get her facts right. She relates the events that occurred, "Dred Scott was born a slave in Virginia in 1795. His owner, Peter Blow, sold Scott to U.S. Army surgeon Dr. John Emerson. Emerson took him to Fort Armstrong in Illinois which was a free state. In 1836, Emerson moved with Scott to Fort Snelling in the Wisconsin Territory. Slavery in the Wisconsin Territory was prohibited by the United States Congress under the

Missouri Compromise. A year later, Emerson was transferred to Jefferson Barracks Military Post, south of St. Louis, Missouri. He left Dred Scott and his wife at Fort Snelling, where he leased their services out for profit. By the act of hiring Scott out, Emerson was bringing the institution of slavery into a free state, which was a direct violation of the Missouri Compromise, the Northwest Ordinance, and the Wisconsin Enabling Act."

"Man's inhumanity to man never ceases to amaze me," I say and can't help but think that throughout history the powerful always seem to take advantage of those who are weaker without any conscience at all.

"Dr. Emerson was reassigned to Fort Jesup in Louisiana, where he married Irene Sanford in February, 1838. Scott and Harriet, his wife, were sent for. On the steamboat on the Mississippi River their daughter Eliza was born while in free state territory. Technically, she was born as a free person under both federal and state laws. In Louisiana, the Scotts could have sued for their freedom and most likely would have won. Unfortunately, they did not. While Dr. Emerson was away in the Seminole War, his wife Irene returned to St. Louis with the Scotts. After Dr. Emerson's death his wife inherited his estate. She continued to lease out the Scotts as hired slaves. In 1846, Dred Scott offered to purchase his family's freedom, but Irene Emerson refused."

"Bitch," I say, "she just wanted to keep the income. Who cares about the poor Scott family?"

"Dred Scott sued Irene Emerson for his freedom in a Missouri court in 1846 with financial aid from the family of his previous owner, Peter Blow. Scott claimed his presence and residence in free territories required his emancipation. In June 1847, Scott lost his case due to a technicality. Grocer Samuel Russell had testified that he was leasing Scott from Irene Emerson, but on cross-examination he admitted that the leasing arrangements had actually been made by his wife Adeline. Russell's testimony, therefore was ruled hearsay and the jury returned a verdict for Emerson."

"I can't believe it."

"It gets worse," Virginia states. "Dred Scott was granted a new trial that didn't begin until January 1850. He and his family were placed in the custody of the St. Louis County Sheriff, who continued to lease them out. The jury found in favor of Scott."

"Hurrah!"

Virginia gives me a slight sneer, "Unfortunately, Irene Emerson didn't wish to lose the income. While she moved to Massachusetts, she transferred ownership of the Scott family to her brother, John F. A. Sanford. In November 1852, the Missouri Supreme Court reversed the trial court's decision stating they should have sued for freedom while living in a free state."

"Unbelievable."

“The case was taken over at no cost by Roswell Field, whose office employed Dred Scott as a janitor. They sued Sanford in Federal Court. As the Missouri Supreme Court held that Scott was a slave, the jury found in favor of Sanford. The case was then appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. Dred Scott v. Sandford, 60 U.S. 393 (1857), known as the Dred Scott case, was a landmark decision by the United States Supreme Court on US labor law and Constitutional law. It held that a negro, whose ancestors were imported into the U.S. and sold as slaves could not be an American citizen and therefore had no standing to sue in federal court and that the federal government had no power to regulate slavery in the federal territories acquired after the creation of the United States. In a 7–2 decision written by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, the court denied Scott’s request.”

“So much for justice,” I conclude.

There was more, Virginia continued, “Democrat President James Buchanan pressured Associate Supreme Court Justice Robert Cooper Grier, a Northerner, to join the Southern majority to prevent the appearance that the decision was made along sectional lines. This was highly improper. Chief Justice Taney wrote that the Missouri Compromise of 1820 was beyond the power of Congress and unconstitutional. He concluded that territories or states where slavery had been abolished were not entitled to free slaves, because this would be a deprivation of a slaveholder’s property rights.”

“Property rights!” I bellow, “What about people rights?”

“The Dred Scott decision essentially allowed the unhindered expansion of slavery into the territories. It became clear that the southern slaveholders were going to cling to the inhuman practice using every possible tactic. War was inevitable if change was going to occur.”

I conclude, “The Revolutionary War was fought to free the colonies from England. The Civil War was fought to free those who were overlooked. Now, we are fighting a tyrannical socialist government. Does that mean another War?”

Virginia ignores my question and continues, “The election of the anti-slavery-expansion Republican Abraham Lincoln as President on November 6, 1860 was the turning point. Before he even took office on March 4, southern states began seceding from the union. The Battle of First Bull Run or Battle of First Manassas on July 21, 1861, was the first major battle of the Civil War.”

Virginia looks closely at her tablet and provides additional details, “The Civil War was the bloodiest conflict in American History—620,000 soldiers were killed, 476,000 wounded, and 400,000 captured or missing. Approximately, 360,000 federal troops died compared with 260,000 confederate.”

“The price of freedom,” I whisper thinking how all that suffering could have been avoided.

“After the Civil War, upset southern Democrats still clung to power by enacting Black Codes that restricted the rights of freedmen. Central to these laws

were stiff penalties for blacks possessing firearms. In fact, the first gun control laws were racist in their intent.” Virginia stops, looks at me, and asks, “Now, why did I tell you all this?”

“I’m sure you’re going to tell me.”

Virginia rises from her sitting position, walks over to a cabinet, and retrieves a box. I watch with curiosity. When she opens it, what I see is a complete surprise. Inside is a gun. Its dark grey color is unique unlike any I’ve seen before. Virginia reaches in and retrieves the weapon. She presses something and a long thin metal bar drops out of the handle. I can see bullets in the top of the bar. Virginia pulls back on the top of the gun a few times and looks inside. “This is a CZ 75B 9mm semi-automatic pistol. It was manufactured in Czechoslovakia before the reorganization. It was carried by Demarcus Shepherd.”

“One of the founders of STUS,” I acknowledge.

“He was quite a character,” Virginia smiles. “Obviously, I never met him but I have watched videos in the Ghost Room.”

“I look forward to a visit there.”

Virginia explains, “Demarcus Shepherd was a black man who served in the Army for twenty years. It is interesting that originally the government wanted all citizens to bear arms both as means of defense and as a deterrent to a tyrannical government. After the Civil War gun control was enacted to keep firearms away from free black men. Then gun control advocates tried to make it difficult for any citizen to own a gun.”

“That tyrannical government thing,” I suggest.

“Demarcus Shepherd and Jeffrey Eastwood were the two guiding lights whose vision established STUS and brought us to where we are today. Shepherd was a police officer after retiring from the Army. He lived to be 100 years old.” Virginia hands me the pistol as she explains, “It’s safe, I cleared the chamber and there isn’t a magazine in it.”

My first impression is that it is quite heavy. Also, I hold it like I’m holding a venomous snake. I don’t need to tell you that I have no experience with guns. “I thought guns are illegal,” I say somewhat nervously.

“The manufacture of guns is illegal,” Virginia states. “Two years after the reorganization, in 2026, a law was passed that made owning any type of firearm illegal. The first thing a tyrannical government does is disarm the population. Police were instructed to confiscate all guns. After several attempts were made to collect their guns armed citizens fought back. A good number of citizens and police died in ongoing confrontations. The government considered sending in troops but it was impossible for them to go everywhere. They tried to do it in stages in limited geographic areas but that proved disastrous for the troops. Remember during the reorganization Great Britain, China, and Russia purchased a large portion of America’s military assets. Faced with the potential of an armed citizenry uprising

the law was repealed. A new law was passed that essentially made manufacture of firearms or ammunition illegal."

"So, anyone can own a gun?" I ask in amazement.

"Generally, that's the case. The state found it was better to strangle gun owners with regulations and high prices rather than try to confiscate existing weapons. Tariffs were applied to imported guns to stop the flow. Here is where a funny thing happened. International manufacturers sued the United States for unfair trade practices in the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands. They ultimately won."

"So, with so many people owning guns how did the government take over everything?" I ask as I hand the gat back to Virginia.

"Economics, social engineering, psychology, lies, education, and more." When she observes the lost look on my face she adds, "Think about it. You have two firearms in your closet. If the government adds a 10% tax on your smart phone who you going to shoot? You need your phone for just about everything. You'll complain and bay at the moon but you'll pay. Then they outlaw peanut butter because it represents too much risk to the 2% of the population that is allergic. How will your guns help you change that? Today, with the Social Compensation Program the government could entice people to relinquish their firearms or face receiving a lower level of payment. However, they won't do it because they just don't have the staff to implement it."

I come to find out that there is a shooting range in the basement of the STUS headquarters building. Virginia and I arrive for my first lesson. Before we actually go to the range we sit in a small conference room where I get basic training in gun safety and operation. The thinking and design of these things are quite remarkable. No electronics at all! I'm disassembling and assembling a Smith & Wesson M&P 9mm semi-automatic pistol. This one is quite a bit lighter than the CZ pistol because it is made of a polymer frame with stainless steel components. The barrel is also shorter.

"That particular gun was made in the U.S.A." Virginia informs me.

I load the magazine, it's not a metal bar, with fake bullets. Wait, I was told the lead part that flies at the target is called a bullet. The brass and lead combined thingie is called a cartridge. So, I load five fake cartridges, called snap caps, into the magazine. I feel like I'm back in school. I pull back the slide which moves a cartridge, in this case snap cap, into the chamber where it sits waiting to be smacked on the ass by the firing pin. Virginia teaches me how to aim, operate the safety, and pull the trigger. Pull, click, pop—nothing to it. On to the range!

We don these headphones which are ear protectors. They really are quite amazing. All outside noise is muffled and yet I can hear Virginia as clear as day through the electronic system. I'm compelled to ask, "If we get into a gunfight how fast can I put on these ear protectors before firing?"

"Not fast enough," is her deadpan response.

Anyone who has fired a gun knows what I mean when I say you always remember your first time. There's a lot of things in life like that. Ah, but I digress. I stand on the firing line, pull back the slide, take aim at the human form target, and pull the trigger. Wham, that's bam through the ear protectors, my hand flies upward and I inadvertently pull the trigger again sending a bullet at the ceiling.

"I hope there's nobody upstairs in the men's room," Virginia comments.

I put down the pistol and ask with concern, "I didn't mean it. Do you think there might be?"

"Don't worry the ceiling is bulletproof," Virginia reassures me as she runs the target back to the firing line.

I look at the target and to my surprise there isn't any hole. Confused, I look at Virginia. She nods her head a few times and points out, "You didn't squeeze the trigger, you jerked it back pulling the muzzle to the right." After sending the target to twice the distance I was firing at, Virginia picks up the pistol, and rapid fires five shots. When the target returns to our position there are five holes right where the bullseye is printed on the human form. Even more impressive, they are grouped so tightly if a glass were place on the target it would cover all five holes. "You need to be able to do that," Virginia states unemotionally.

By the time practice is over I'm hitting the human form. OK, some of the shots wouldn't kill my opponent, only piss him off. Then I learn the important part of shooting—cleaning the firearm. This is important because a dirty gun will jam, misfire, and leave you as an unarmed human form target.

After dinner at home I contact my guardian angel.

DAWN: George, how are you?

GEORGE: Exhausted from the events of the day, as usual.

DAWN: Get a good night's rest. It will help.

GEORGE: I shot a gun today.

DAWN: Did you hit anything?

GEORGE: Eventually, I hit the target.

DAWN: Remember to hold your breath. Your heartbeat will cause the sights to move slightly. When they are in the lowest position pull the trigger.

GEORGE: I'll try that. Thanks.

DAWN: Happy to help.

GEORGE: I said goodbye to Walter Tize, today.

DAWN: He's a fine man and real patriot.

GEORGE: I like him, even when he's cursing at me.

DAWN: LOL

GEORGE: I'm being trained for what I don't know. Yet, you keep telling me I must lead while I'm completely in the dark.

DAWN: Close your eyes and you will see the light.

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Novels by Kenneth J Munkens



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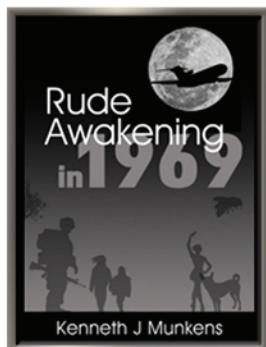
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