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**Minther
& Sklar**

“When the American spirit was in its youth, the language of America was different: Liberty, sir, was the primary object.”

-- Patrick Henry

Chapter 6 | THE SIGNATURE

I arrive home late and the house is dark. Obviously, they didn't expect me to be released so quickly. Quietly, I let myself in and head to my bedroom. Without a tablet there isn't much I am able to do. How I would love to chat with Dawn. I'm still a little shaken up so I sit on the edge of the bed and stare into the darkness. It's funny how sitting in the dark allows one to think. All my life I've been told that America is the home of the free. Somehow now I feel that the facts don't support the image. I'm free to do what the state allows me to do. But, step one inch outside the lines and the state comes down hard. In reality, America is the home of the tightly controlled.

Freedom is a funny thing. People define it differently but in many cases the term is misused. The Social Compensation Program is positioned as making us free from the rigors and fear of making a living. It's the trade-off that is ignored. You give up the freedom to earn what you are capable of earning only to receive a level of lifestyle decided by someone else. Then I find that the Globalnet is free as long as you don't visit websites that are considered unacceptable. Unacceptable by whom? In essence, you give up freedom of thought. Finally, what the hell do they care that my movements couldn't be tracked for a few hours? I thought the chip in my thumb was a wonderful key to so many great things only to realize it is a tether meant to keep me in line. I feel like a caged animal yearning to break free to take my chances and live my life on my terms.

A shadow drifts across my doorway. I focus and realize that Dee is standing there. Neither of us say a word. Then she runs into my room and hugs me. That's the second time we hugged this week. This nonsense has got to stop.

Dee whispers in my ear, “George, I was so afraid.”

“So was I,” I admit.

“What happened?”

“They asked me a lot of questions, kept my tablet, and then let me go.” Then as an afterthought I ask, “You didn't tell anyone about the book—did you?”

“No,” and, before I could ask, she adds, “You have my word.”

“Good. It seems it is more dangerous to have it than we thought.”

“Are you going to get rid of it?” she asked with concern.

“No way, but we are going to have to be very careful. I’m afraid they might have me under surveillance.”

“What can we do?”

“For now, we will be good citizens until I am no longer considered a threat.”

The next morning Red, uh Virginia, drops me off at STUS corporate headquarters rather than the Morehead Street office.

“What are we doing here?” I ask.

“Mr. Trufire wants to see you.”

Immediately, I know why, “Am I getting fired?”

“Twelfth floor. Go.”

On the ride up the elevator I feel like a condemned man heading to the Termination Suite. When I arrive at his office Mr. Trufire says, “I see you got arrested last night.”

“Am I being fired?” I ask timidly.

“What? Hell no!” He laughs.

At this point my head is spinning. All that has been going on is more than my underdeveloped brain can handle. One more surprise and my head will explode.

“Did they charge you?”

“No. They asked me a lot of questions and then just when I thought I was cooked they let me go.”

“They were fishing,” he comments as he walks around his desk and motions for me to join him at the table in front of the waterfall. “Did they confiscate your tablet?”

“Yes.”

He slides a new tablet over to me and says, “Here’s a new one. There’s no thumb lock. It requires a password.”

I look at it and recognize a familiar icon. “It has Suicide Queen.”

“That’s right. If the wrong password is entered three times in a row or the government runs a break-in program she goes to work. All they get are a billion zeros. It’s yours. I don’t want to know the password. The right to privacy is inalienable.”

“Thank you. But, I’m a little confused.”

“You’re a lot confused and that is understandable.” He stands and waves his hand over the monitors on the table. They come alive. “Someone wants to talk with you. I’m going to a meeting. Stay as long as you like.” Mr. Trufire leaves.

DAWN: Are you on parole?

GEORGE: Very funny. They just let me go.

DAWN: That's good.

GEORGE: Aren't you going to say that you warned me?

DAWN: I take no pleasure from the illegal acts of our government.

GEORGE: This is all like a bad dream.

DAWN: It's more like an awakening.

GEORGE: Awakening to a nightmare.

DAWN: Sadly so. George, you have a right to seek knowledge and do with your life what you choose—not what is chosen for you.

GEORGE: I'm starting to get that, but it's hard to do what you want from a jail cell.

DAWN: How did your parents take it?

GEORGE: As would be expected. My mother was horrified and worried about appearances. My father just shook his head and mumbled about me being on a path to destruction.

DAWN: If you choose to, you are on a path to realization of a dream that you have yet to have.

GEORGE: Do you take pleasure in confusing me?

DAWN: Absolutely.

GEORGE: Well, you're good at it.

DAWN: I know.

GEORGE: What is really going on?

DAWN: George, America was founded by brilliant men who cherished freedom. They created a free enterprise system that allowed every person to achieve whatever goal they were capable of reaching. To you capitalism is a dirty word because the government doesn't want you to think as an individual with unlimited potential. Capitalism is no more than an economic system where the means of production and distribution are privately owned. It rewards innovation, hard work, and effort. It is not greed driven—it is incentive driven.

GEORGE: If it was so good why did it fail?

DAWN: It didn't fail. It was a grand experiment that flourished for over one hundred fifty years and created the greatest nation on earth.

GEORGE: Then, what happened?

DAWN: America was a shining light that attracted immigrants from around the world who had a desire for freedom. Then she was raped by those she trusted most—the leaders who took an oath to protect her.

GEORGE: But, it was the big corporations that bankrupted the country.

DAWN: It was the politicians who wanted more and more control over the people, who abused their power, and destroyed the economy through fiscal policies that proved time and again to not work in nation after nation.

GEORGE: If they knew it wouldn't work, why did they do it?

DAWN: They were blinded by emotion, arrogance, greed, and lust for power.

GEORGE: Even if I am starting to understand the value of freedom and want more there is nothing I can do.

DAWN: The colonists faced a wilderness and a tyrannical government.

GEORGE: But, I'm just one small insignificant individual.

DAWN: George, do you remember the infamous Ice Age project that got you a reprimand in school.?

I remember the incident. It was a group project in Earth Science that examined the Ice Age of 2029. For years the government warned about global warming without any concrete proof that it existed. Then when the Sun's interior magnetic waves shifted, normal activity decreased by sixty percent. This hadn't happened for three hundred years. Yet, it was predictable if those in power weren't so focused solely on warming. From 2029 to 2044 summers were cool and winters were bitter cold. Because nations were unprepared, food supplies dwindled due to shorter growing seasons, energy reserves couldn't provide enough heating, infrastructure failures were common, waterways became unpassable, livestock perished, and most importantly over twenty million people died worldwide.

GEORGE: All I did was complain that the other four members of our work group did nothing while I did all the work. It didn't seem fair that we all got the same grade—that I earned.

DAWN: And, what happened when you complained?

GEORGE: I received an official reprimand and had to take a remedial Cooperative Attitude Group Education Development (CAGED) course.

DAWN: Group think and collectivism allows those who are not motivated to prosper by the efforts of others.

GEORGE: Bradford was right.

DAWN: Absolutely. George, you have a sense of right and wrong. In addition, you have the courage to stand up for your convictions. Don't underestimate the impact an individual can have.

All of a sudden it hits me, how does Dawn know about the Ice Age project? She would have had to do some investigating to turn up that little gem. What else does she know? I'm compelled to ask.

GEORGE: How do you know about the Ice Age project?

DAWN: Oh, George, it can't be a surprise.

GEORGE: Which shouldn't be a surprise, the fact that you investigated me or didn't answer my question?

DAWN: LOL. George, you have a job at STUS and you'll do fine. However, you are needed in ways that I cannot reveal at this time that go far beyond historic research. If you decide to become involved, things will become far clearer.

GEORGE: How can I make a decision about something that I don't know anything about?

DAWN: You'll know when the time comes.

GEORGE: More fog?

DAWN: LOL. Right now I have one request. I'm going to send you a replica of the original Declaration of Independence written in 1776 that you have never seen. It is against the law to have it. Please, read the entire document carefully—every word. After you finish we will chat, once more.

As though on cue, Mr. Trufire enters the office. I look up briefly and when I return to the monitor Dawn is gone. Hey that sounds like a song lyric. Dawn is gone and the day is here to stay. Pretty bad, OK, I'm sorry.

Mr. Trufire sits opposite me and picks up my new tablet. While he examines it he says, "This tablet doesn't have a thumb lock for a very good reason. It can't be tracked."

"And, it has Suicide Queen."

David Trufire looks up and smiles, "We created Suicide Queen. There are over a million lines of code. A prefix appears on each line that arbitrarily changes continuously. Because of this defense there is no way to access the code without setting the Queen in motion. Even we cannot defeat her. That's what makes her so beautiful." His pride in the technological achievement is obvious. To my surprise he adds, "No one knows we are the authors. That fact does not leave this office."

I nod.

He continues, "Once you enter your password this device becomes only yours." He stands up, walks over to the window, and looks out over Charlotte. With his back to me he reveals more confidential information, "That tablet operates on a different satellite network—not the government network. It's called the Black Pearl Satellite Network." He turns to face me and admits, "I don't name these things. The beauty of being on Black Pearl is that you can't be tracked, traced, or turned off. Whatever website you visit has no idea that you are there. You are invisible. On a website that requires an IIDC identifier to enter, you activate a program called "Back Door" and you're in. As I told you previously, we designed the IIDC technology. What is not known by anyone is the fact that we included a universal over-ride. So, when a website is created and locked only allowing access to certain approved IIDC individuals they place their thumb on a reader to register. Their IIDC code is saved along with the universal over-ride code. The locked website maintains a list of approved IIDC identifiers and one hidden digital key."

"Wait," I interrupt, "I don't want to know any more. The responsibility is too great. If I get arrested again they might find a way to get all of this information out of me. That can't happen!"

David Trufire grins and walks over to me. "Son, they could pull out your fingernails and you won't reveal what you know."

"They even suggest pulling my fingernails out and I'm singing like a canary with its ass on fire."

Trufire laughs. “George, you underestimate yourself. In time you will realize that.”

I’m not sure what he means, but somehow the way things have been going it sounds pretty ominous. I consider that all I did was find a book. Now I’m knee deep in intrigue.

“If you ever get arrested again,” Trufire continues, “and they take your tablet and ask for the password give them the “Queen’s Revenge” password that you will have saved that sets her in motion. In the blink of an eye all zeros.”

“Mr. Trufire, I have to ask,” I say with as much seriousness as I can muster, “What is going on?”

He stands and leads me to the door. As he ushers me out he says, “The redcoats are coming.”

The rest of the day is uneventful and I’m glad to be home. Dinner is quiet and awkward. No one has anything to say and my parents have trouble looking at the jailbird. After dinner I go to my room, shut the door, and download the Declaration of Independence that Dawn sent me. I have to admit I do so with a little fear and trepidation. In my mind I imagine ten huge police storm troopers blasting through my bedroom door. You just shouldn’t mess with the government. They have the money, the weapons, the manpower, the laws, and the ability to ruin your life—or end it.

OK, I’m not a scholar as any school that I attended will attest. So, reading this document isn’t as easy as you might think. After all, it was written in the eighteenth century. Those characters spoke and wrote differently. For example, run-on sentences, was there a shortage of periods in those days? I feel a joke coming on but better be prudent. Anyway, I find the ideas expressed to be compelling. It begins by explaining why they have to “dissolve the political bands” with England. I’m surprised that they mention God and Creator. Those are not allowed in government documents, today. Now, bear with me as I try to work this concept out. Every human being has certain rights that come from nature or God. Like a bird has a right to fly and a fish has a right to swim—it’s natural. No government can pass a law that prevents the bird or fish from doing what they are meant to do without becoming illegitimate. In fact, governments are supposed to exist to protect individual rights. Tom Jefferson stated that these rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I Really like the way he put it, “Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—”

I hear something outside and quickly hide my tablet. Are the police here? Should I hide? I clench my fists to protect my fingernails. Thanks Trufire! When no one comes crashing through my window I return to my reading.

The Declaration of Independence goes on to list the many grievances the colonists have with King George III. As I read these my mind starts listing the grievances that I have with my government.

- They control what I am allowed to read
- Determine how much I'm allowed to earn
- Misrepresent history
- Constantly lie to the public
- Control my healthcare
- Tell me what car I'm allowed to buy
- Censor entertainment
- Arrest people without cause
- Threaten and intimidate citizens
- Control who can run for office
- Regulate everything
- Tax everything
- Elite live like a bunch of King George IIIs

In conclusion—I AM NOT FREE!

I come to a word, consanguinity. What in the blue hell is consanguinity? I hit define and find that it means having the same ancestors. OK, I'm smarter now. Then I read the actual declaration, "... declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States. . ." For a moment I sit and think about that sentence. It's another run-on sentence, but indeed is the ultimate act of treason in the eyes of the king while a consummately brave act that set in motion the founding of a free nation. What incredible people these colonists were. What divine forces came together at that exact time to cause them to recognize the natural right of every individual to pursue their destiny as a free unencumbered citizen protected by their government rather than threatened and coerced by those they entrusted to its leadership. Hah, a run-on sentence. I've been reading Jefferson's document too long. These brilliant men took the first step in creating a ship of state for free men. Unfortunately, it is a ship that has run aground.

The final sentence of the Declaration of Independence reveals a level of patriotism that I have never witnessed in my lifetime, "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." Who were these remarkable men? They voluntarily risked everything for a cause that they so valued. People like that don't exist, today. I scroll down and start to read the signatures on the document. I have to remember that they were using a quill tip pen dipped in ink. However, the signatures are clear and bold. For the most part each man's signature is unique and expressive with many having flourishes. A part of me wonders what went through their mind when they placed their name upon that document. Did they know what they were starting? Were they afraid? Or, did they have a vision of a better future?

As I scan through the signatures I come to one that is familiar—it's mine!

There on the Declaration of Independence is the signature of George Clymer representing Pennsylvania. Even more disturbing is the fact that my actual signature is a lot like the one that I am staring at. In school we were taught to write our signatures with a stylus on our tablet. It was done just in case there wasn't any electronic device available at the time. My signature has many of the characteristics of my ancestor without the final swirls. I continue to stare at the paper and wonder who was George Clymer.

Naturally, I've searched my name on the Globalnet to see what comes up and never has there been any mention of George Clymer signer of the Declaration of Independence. As a matter-of-fact if you put in Declaration of Independence what generally comes up is "a document used by wealthy businessmen to steal the colonies from England." That's about all we were taught in school.

Then it hits me—the book. No, I wasn't hit by the book, come'on. I sneak out to my hiding place and retrieve my history book. In the index I find George Clymer. Literally, my hands are shaking as I leaf to the indicated page. And, there it is a part of American history—of my history.

George Clymer (March 16, 1739 – January 23, 1813) An American founding father. He was one of the first colonists to advocate independence from Britain. As a Pennsylvania representative, along with five others, George Clymer was a signatory of both the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution.

Holy crap! I've got to know more about this man. But first, I have to contact Dawn.

DAWN: George, it's late.

GEORGE: Did you know?

DAWN: Know what?

GEORGE: No more evasion—did you know?

DAWN: What do you think?

GEORGE: I think I deserve a straight answer!

DAWN: You do. Yes, I knew.

GEORGE: Why didn't you just come out and tell me?

DAWN: Sometimes discovery is more effective.

GEORGE: I keep getting this feeling that I'm being played.

DAWN: You are.

GEORGE: I am? And, you're admitting it?

DAWN: Yes.

GEORGE: What is the purpose? What are you trying to accomplish. Why me?

DAWN: Slow down—tiger. Right now, it is important to take our time and be cautious.

GEORGE: Don't you think I have a right to know why and how I'm being manipulated?

DAWN: What did you learn from the Declaration of Independence?

GEORGE: DON'T CHANGE THE SUBJECT!!!!

DAWN: That is the subject.

GEORGE: Not to me! I am tired of being a pawn. What the hell is going on?

DAWN: Good night, George.

The link goes silent. Now, I'm angry and confused and amazed and frustrated and hungry. I sneak into the kitchen to look for a snack. Out of nowhere Dee joins me. Together we look at a nearly empty refrigerator and cupboards that aren't any more promising. Finally, we grab an almost empty bag of peanuts.

"Come with me," I whisper.

Once we are in my room with the door closed I show Dee the Declaration of Independence and the signatories. To my surprise she doesn't react. She sits there looking at the screen. I don't say anything. In silence, we sit in front of the glowing display. After a few minutes she sits back and surprises me by saying, "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—" She looks at me and asks, "Is that even possible?"

"I don't know," I answer honestly.

"Wouldn't it be nice to not worry about all the rules we have to follow? To be able to make our own decisions. To . . ."

"To be free," I interject.

"Yes," she smiles thinking about the unthinkable.

I show her the paragraph in the book about George Clymer. There is an intensity in her eyes as she reads about our ancestor. When she finishes she looks at me and states, "Let's write a Declaration of Independence!"

"What?"

"It's a family tradition. We are born rebels. Our tyrannical government is treating us like the King treated the colonists."

"You're kidding. We'd end up in jail."

"We are in jail, only there aren't any bars."

Now, keep in mind this is my fifteen-year-old sister. She's starting to sound like Dawn. Albeit, she is correct about our government, but the danger is too great to even consider. When I look at her I come face-to-face with an angry young woman ready for a fight. There is something about all of this that lit a fire deep inside of her. She is hungry, better yet, starved for something and I know what that something is—freedom. It is clear that I have underestimated her. Darsey Patricia Clymer has a depth of character that, until now, has gone unnoticed. I want to hug her, but, damn, that would be three times in a week. Instead, I say, "Dee, this isn't a game. I've already seen the inside of a jail. The government plays for keeps."

"Then we'll work underground. We can start by spreading the truth about the history of the United States and the Declaration of Independence."

"You're going to get us killed."

Once more she surprises me. This time by her memory, as she says, "Remember that quote that we read by Patrick Henry, 'Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.'"

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