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### **The Night the Plowshares Entered the Rabbit Run**

“Rejoice, rejoice, again I say rejoice,” the chorus resounded on repeat, echoing its way through the winding linoleum lined floors of the courthouse. The song spread, surrounding the fifty bodies in the main courtroom.

“Rejoice, rejoice, again I say rejoice!”

Seven defendants, having just received their verdict, exited the well of the court one by one, greeted by a chorus of hugs. They embraced under the gaze of a portrait of Sir Thomas More, also a devout Catholic who found himself on trial.

Clare Grady turns to one of the U.S. Marshals.

She thanks him, shakes his hand and moves towards the crowd, which is still rejoicing. She hugs everyone within reach, including the press bench, until she reaches her daughter, the only one in the room noticeably shedding tears through deep set Irish Grady eyes.

The two hold each other for several seconds, and part. Her daughter resumes singing, attempting to harmonize. It’s not her first time singing the song, and the choir is quite familiar as well, they’d been like family to her while growing up.

One of the matron saints of her family, Elizabeth “Liz” McAlister, passes by, standing erect with a proud complexion chiseled by many courtrooms before. She had been part of the Plowshares movement since its inception, with her late husband Phillip Berrigan. He and his brother Father Daniel broke into a selected services facility in 1968 and burnt hundreds of draft records. They protested Vietnam, and haven’t stopped.

The Berrigans and the Grady’s, along with their nationwide network of Catholic Workers turned their attention toward nuclear weapons— protesting their existence as a sin against god’s creation. They’ve completed “symbolic disarmament” actions at nuclear facilities, including most recently at the home of the atomic bomb at Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Every time, their action is precise and well-planned to be non-violent and littered with biblical analogy, but every time their religious arguments don’t make it to the courtroom.

The slightest curve at the corners of Liz’s mouth reveal a stoic grin. Deliberately but slowly she parades through hugs and pats on the shoulders, whispering into the hallway which has now been lined with dozens of her children.

“Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice,” they continue spilling out onto the sidewalk outside the Anthony Alaimo courthouse, the quintessential federal building, an ugly child of an architectural dark age. It matches most of its neighbors, exasperated stucco, stone and brick bathed one too many times in South Georgia storm surge.

Alaimo himself was a certain pride of Brunswick, Georgia, a town which isn’t proud of much. He escaped Mussolini’s Italy in 1940 to university in the U.S. where he became an aviator during World War Two.

He returned to earn a law degree from Emory and spent 38 years on the bench in U.S. District Court Southern District of Georgia until he died in 2009.

Besides Alaimo and the University of Georgia Bulldogs, the only thing Brunswick takes pride in is the military. Thirty minutes south is one of the largest naval installations in the western hemisphere, Kings Bay Base, home of the Strategic Weapons Facility Atlantic, and the Trident weapons system: “America's sea borne deterrent to strategic war.” The facility employs thousands of people, directly and through contractors, including 900 security force personnel and a battalion of marines. They can't confirm nor deny what it is they're guarding.

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Eighteen months earlier, on the anniversary of Martin Luther King's assassination, Liz places her back against the chain link fence, inching her 79-year-old body down to the ground and through the three-foot hole as Father Stephen Kelly holds back razor-sharp concertina wire with a set of U-Line bolt cutters. Carmen Trotta helps Liz through to the other side onto a packed-down gravel road, cold blue light slashing through the calm April night.

Tired after an hour-long hike through forests and marshes, this is as far as they'll go. Another fence.

They unfurl their banner, take their picture and have just enough time to send it before an armored personnel carrier rolls up on the other side. Almost as if on cue, the three sing out.

*“Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”*

A soldier gets out of the car. The three refrain.

He's 30 feet away, rifle pointed downward when Carmen cries out as if rehearsed, “Soldier we come in peace, we're not harmful.”

“Sir, can you turn off your recording device? Can you turn it off?”

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The Assistant District Attorney calls for the next exhibit. Back in the Anthony Alaimo courtroom, encircled by deep chocolate wood paneled walls and gazed down upon by portraits of More, Marshall, Cardozo and the Honorable Lisa Godbey Wood.

Her hair, dyed like the walls and split with a center part, she's a child of the south, her drawl, not slackjawed nor abrasive, like she swallowed cotton with the diet-coke and lemon that always accompanies her to her high-backed chair looking over courtroom.

Gathered around one small table to her left is the U.S. Government. Karl Knoche and Greg Gilluly, assistant district attorneys complete with short kempt hair, dark grey suits, white pressed shirts and dark blue ties. Their mission is as simple and straightforward as their mannerisms.

“So these are the exhibits,” Knoche said that morning pointing to four plastic tote bins, four chairs and a cart teeming with boxes and bags and backpacks full of cartons wrapped in plastic and marked “EVIDENCE.”

“And these are the bolt cutters,” he added, holding up what is unmistakably a pair of bolt cutters.

On the stand is Special Agent Thomas Kenney, a young NCIS investigator caught somewhere between a frat party and having a child seat on his bicycle. Beaming a grin now and then, probably thinking about how nailing this easy case will get him a new promotion, the latest career move since he left NOAA Fisheries Law Enforcement five years ago.

A suit at the prosecution’s table switches to the next GoPro video as all the defendants sit expressionless. Knoche stops the video and focuses back on Kenney as the lights come up.

“All this property that they’re... fiddling with is on the base, is property of the U.S. Navy right?”

“Yes,” Kenney answers with a smirk.

He’s asked to go through all of the exhibits the prosecution has brought with them from an evidence locker at the Jacksonville Naval Air Base. Kenney opens up the bags of evidence like a child on Christmas morning.

Kelly’s medication, iPhones, money, hammers, a “mattock” gardening tool, a pry bar, more hammers, a chisel, spray paint, a pair of glasses, a tissue, a Kind Bar wrapper, fencing, banners, and, of course, a pair of bolt cutters.

They return to the videos. One of the “reporters” on the press bench nods off, taking a 15-minute nap during the movie before the defense begins cross examination. Stephanie Amiotte, the pro-bono lawyer for one of the seven defendants takes point. She’d just made partner the year before at a firm in Brunswick, and was earlier rated one of the top 100 trial lawyers in South Dakota.

“Do you believe displaying that banner was the purpose of entering the area?” Amiotte asks.

“I believe it was one of them, yes,” replies Kenney.

“Would you agree, are they of a religious nature or moral statements?” Amiotte fires back.

“Yes.”

“Is this graffiti?”

“It’s when you spray paint on property that’s not yours, yes.” Kenney replies not playing into Amiotte’s attempt to slither out from two of the charges— destruction of property on a naval installation and depredation of government property both of which require that the actions be carried out “maliciously.”

But the Kings Bay Plowshares seven didn’t come to act maliciously. They came as pacifist Christians. They knew their message wouldn’t be popular. Just as Jesus expelled the money changers and merchants from the temple in Jerusalem and Moses smashed the golden calf at the base of Mt. Sinai, the lord

commanded that they “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks” by symbolically disarming the nuclear missiles at Kings Bay.

“I came to Kings Bay nineteen months ago as a messenger,” Patrick O’Neill told the jury.

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He sat in the bushes across the road from the missile display, a memorial at the entrance of the base recognizing the history of launchable weapons produced there. Pat and the others prefer to call it a shrine.

“We’ll be addressing the idol for what it is, an abomination in the eyes of the lord,” Pat whispers to what he assumes will one day be a crowd of people gathered in a federal courtroom. Adrenaline pumping, and fearful for his life, he’s praying for help from Jesus as Mark Colville starts putting tape on a banner next to him.

“Oh shit. I did this upside down,” Colville whispers.

They make their move, sprinting across the road to the display. Mark hangs the banner at the base of the d-5 missile, a 44-foot-tall concrete monolith on a half-moon concrete base. Flanking it are its predecessors, some shorter, smaller missiles including a white tomahawk and back lit lettering spelling out: “Strategic Weapons Facility Atlantic.”

Mark hangs the banner then goes to work on chiseling the fins off the tomahawk, while Pat makes his way to one of the brass seals, a blasphemous depiction of a submarine, a trident and a d-5 missile in the shape of a cross. He stands several feet away from the seal and takes the cap off a baby bottle. With two swipes of his long lanky arm he splatters Liz’s blood on the seal. It drips down several feet onto the brick wall turning the brass into a rose gold.

He steps back to admire his work, then pulls out an oddly shaped hammer, custom-made by a Quaker in Philadelphia from melted down guns. He starts with the “S” in strategic, swinging the hammer at each letter until it falls from the wall, grunting and gasping for breath with each strike. The hammer head falls off by the time he reaches the “W.”

“Boy, this is formidable stuff,” he says before continuing by using his hands.

Out of the silent night, Mark yells “swords into plowshares, swords into plowshares, swords into plowshares, swords into plowshares.” Pat takes a break to go inspect Mark’s work.

“Oh good, good.” he says approvingly looking at what Mark painted on the other statues. “Idol, blasphemy. Good.”

A car drives by, but doesn’t stop to sound the alarm

“I want to say thank you to Jesus for letting us through their midst,” Pat says.

They continue on, tearing the letters from the wall, unsuccessfully attempting to pry the other brass seal from the bricks, and painting more “messages,” until Pat sees a police cruiser pull up and park across the street about a football field away.

“I guess the gig is up,” he says walking towards the center missile. “I think we should go stand in the light. He’s calling for backup I think.”

Mark begins to pray: “The author of life you put to death, but God raised him from the dead; of this we are witnesses.”

Two of the others appear out of the darkness from their own mission at the engineering services building.

“And by faith in his name, this man, whom you see and know, his name has made strong, and the faith that comes through it has given him this perfect health, in the presence of all of you.”

The car remains still. Nobody emerges. The four stand like statues themselves under the d-5.

“Now I know, brothers, that you acted out of ignorance, just as your leaders did,” Mark finishes.

Again, nothing from the cruiser. It just sits there with the lights on, ominously.

“That’s really passing through his midst if he didn’t see us,” Pat jokes.

Pat gets back to work. While Martha, one of the others, spray paints “abolish nukes now” at the base of the statue.

“So what’d you guys do over there Clare?” Pat asks.

“We poured two bottles of blood,” she answers listing off the rest like a grocery list. Spray painting, putting up crime scene tape, leaving “Doomsday Machine” a book by renounced nuclear planner Daniel Ellsberg, and taping the plowshares’ “indictment” of nuclear weapons to the engineering services building door.

“That’s going to make the commander of this base look bad, and heads will roll,” Clare says proudly.

After about two hours on the base, they stop. Exhausted and now worrying about their friends at the limited area, sure they’ve been apprehended, hoping they haven’t been killed. Clare wants to go there to somehow watch as they’re arrested and then be arrested with them.

The cruiser still waits in the parking lot. They all lounge back on the ground in the light beneath the d-5, legs stretched out, crossed, hands back as if waiting for the tide to come in and take them away.

It eventually does.

Officer Lee Edward Carter pulls up and steps out of his patrol car. He saw the four sitting there, inert, and unthreatening. Gibbs and Hernandez had watched them, unable to intervene since they were contracted security with no arresting power.

Carter strolls up and from about thirty yards he says to the four, “Now you folks realize you’re in a bit of trouble don’t you?”

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“We were so non-violent that the first thing the officer said to us was a joke,” Pat tells the jury in his closing statement.

The room had frozen over in silence. To them, they had always been innocent in the eyes of the lord, but not yet in the eyes of the 12 jurors they’d been face to face with for the last four days. Each of the seven defendants preaching in their own way. Pat, with humor. Steve, with silence. Clare with affection. The government, with exhibits.

“What you have is a state of anarchy where people pick and choose the laws they want to follow,” Knoche exasperated speaking slowly, deliberately, powerfully.

The jury is released around 2:00 p.m.. The defendants and lawyers mingle about the courtroom. Patrick holds court with some supporters in the back corner, explaining that they’re praying for a hung jury. One of the lawyers laughs and jokes, the most lucid he’s appeared all week. Clare’s daughter falls asleep slumped against her father’s chest in the back row.

Two hours later, a U.S. Marshall slaps the door twice and Judge Lisa Godbey Wood whisps back inside and the rest of the room scurries back to their seats.

“I am told there is a verdict,” she says. “Let’s bring in the jury.”

The courtroom deputy reads out the verdict, for each of the seven beginning with Liz who stands again erect, holding the same complexion, the long straight stoic face which has been read these guilty verdicts before.

And now again.

Her face unchanged. Her lawyer wraps his arm around her. Clare looks down, shutting her Irish eyes tight. Patrick bows his head and begins reciting a prayer. They’re not crying.

Instead, they rejoice.

Such is expected in the service to the lord.

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The group gathered that night at St. Athanasius church for dinner and mass. A simple church on what appeared to be a predominantly black side of town. The ceiling was entirely wood, a creaky floor made it incredibly difficult to sneak to the back. A wood stove and electric heater flanked either side of the room, probably never used.

A state of pride, unity and acceptance hung in the old church.

“We pray for the jury that can’t see the evil that we see... God hear our prayer.”

“We pray for many seven more... God hear our prayer.”