

Bushwa

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered here together to join this man and this woman freely in the bonds of holy matrimony.” Gary’s mind flitted back to the church and the opening lines of the ceremony as he drove with his wife, Carol, to the reception. “In the eyes of God and Bushwa,” he remembered the celebrant in the ten-gallon hat saying. How safe we are now thanks to Bushwa. Gary could remember when things were not so safe. He remembered that day in his childhood, Neinaleven, when the terrorists bombed America and tried to destroy its free way of life. Thank God for Bushwa, Gary thought, he saved us. Never again, thanks to Bushwa, would there be calamities wrought on the American public where thousands died. Sure, there were the little weekly bombings in restaurants, theaters and arenas, but nothing like Neinaleven. Some say ten-to-twenty-thousand died. Yeah, there’s still terrorism, he thought, you never know when it’s going to be your turn, but life’s exciting and there are police everywhere, who stop most of the attacks before they take place. Yes, things are good, Gary thought.

Gary had a good job. He worked for the Thought Monitoring Agency, TMA. Since Thought Monitoring and Sales used the same data gathering technology and infrastructure, they were both part of Hearken Home Oil’s marketing

department. Gary always marveled at how seamlessly President-For-Life, Bushwa, had over the years, combined government with big business.

The job paid well and had good benefits and, since the tax reform bill that eliminated taxes on large corporations, the higher he rose in income the lower his taxes were.

On his job, he sat in front of a computer where he listened to conversations. Also, he observed the books people read at the library and bought at the bookstore—Bushwa had decided it was better than burning them.

The hard part of his job was done by the computer, it screened millions of conversations for key words; screening the whole population for their safety. When a person uttered words like “bomb or “that f ___ing bastard” together and on a consistent basis, they would be ear marked for Gary to follow. He would have to make sure the words were about the government and not just a neighbor. Gary liked that part the best, like making a sale—only it was easier since he didn’t have to talk anybody into anything. He just had to be patient. It was like going fishing, everyday.

I’m damn good too, thought Gary. I can tell when I have a live one. They’re usually intellectuals, of the few that are left, waiting for revenge on Bushwa and the government for destroying freedom (saving it is more like it.)

I just have to know they’re a threat, Gary thought. It’s easy because it’s usually a discussion about the economy, health care, loss of freedoms (yeah, right) or about the impending war with Germany (those Nazi, Jew-hating bastards) and the guy’ll be arguing against the logic of Bushwa’s plan.

The connection is simple, they hate our policy, so they hate Bushwa, so they hate America. Bingo—they're a threat! The guy gets questioned and then detained for the security of our freedom. One less threat to our safety.

Cozy and warm in this train of thought, Gary pulled up in front of Kastle Karson with Carol and let the valet park his new car.

The bridal party was busy taking pictures, so Gary and Carol passed through security and went to get drinks and hors d'oeuvres (American for hors d'oeuvres). There were mini burritos, enchiladas with toothpicks in them, and freedom franks (German food)—little wieners with mustard on them.

"Hi Deb," Carol saw a friend from work. "How did you get here before me?"

"I came with my boyfriend, the photographer." Deb had a little heart button with Bushwa's picture pinned to her collar. "Wasn't the ceremony lovely?"

"Oh, it was beautiful," said Carol. "I loved it when the minister read the blessing from Bushwa!"

"I just love Bushwa." said Deb, "He's gotten the ugly people off the streets."

Gary smiled as he thought of how Bushwa had them put in resorts. "The Last Resorts". Poor people, crippled people, Arabs, minorities, the elderly, dissidents—all the irritants in society had a place to live with food to eat. Everyone's happy and safe now. They built about two million units, yeah, it was expensive, but they haven't had to build additional ones. No matter how many people we send, there always seems to be room for more. It sure has cleaned

up the streets. Not that I didn't like black people but there were so many of them, and they were always complaining about discrimination and wanting restitution. Well, not now. They're happy now. Gary smiled to himself. He was so fortunate to live in a time when the world was perfect.

Gary spotted someone he knew at the bar. "Excuse me ladies, I'm going to get another freedom beer." Germany still made the best beer but since they had turned against the United States, people changed the name. Gary hoped when the troops went in to free the Germans they would secure the breweries first.

"Jeff, what's up?"

"Gary! Hey, beautiful woman, that Laura."

"Her husband's a lucky man, what's his name?"

"Jim, I think. He must be packing some big guns."

"Make no mistake."

"I think he works for the Education Ministry. He's connected to Enos Maniller."

"The comedian?"

"No, the Secretary of Education. I think he used to be a comedian. After Neinaleven, he became one of Bushwa's big supporters. He's somewhat educated, you know. There aren't too many educated people outside the resorts anymore. They had to choose someone. He's a funny guy, a little broken down and bitter, but funny."

"Does he still perform?" asked Gary.

“Enos?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, he does a sort of monologue when he gives a speech. I heard one the other day.” Jeff explained. “He was chastising people who complained that the Patriot Squads in the schools sometimes beat up teachers when they’re only supposed to beat on freedom-hating students. He said, ‘Yeah, it’s regrettable that the squads hurt those teachers but hey, who hasn’t wanted to beat up a teacher at one time or another?’”

“Yeah, he’s a funny guy ... Looks like people are moving into the pool area. We better get in there. Maybe you can sit with us.”

“Naw, I think they’ve got me sitting with my aunt, she works with the groom’s brother in radiation down at the port authority. I’ll come by after the main course. What are you having?”

“Sirloin and potatoes, You?”

“Grilled porterhouse and potatoes. Quite a selection, huh?”

“It’s what’s for dinner!”

“Yeah, ten types of beef on the grill.”

They could see the smoke rising from the rows of barbecue grills behind the pool house.

“It’s out of respect for Bushwa.” When the name was said both young men made the gesture of fist to heart as they headed into the tent.

The band was warming up. Gary looked for a table that had their place cards. All the guest’s tables were round. The wedding party had a long semi-

circular table that curved around the front of the pool behind the diving board, under a giant picture of a smiling Bushwa, waving with one arm while his other supported an eagle clutching a sword, hammer and a large yellow ribbon with “*best wishes*” printed on it in gold letters.

Gary wandered around the empty tables looking for his place with the other laughing excited guests. It reminded him of a game he’d played when he was a kid. He hoped they wouldn’t pull his chair.

“Gary, over here!” he heard his wife shout from across the pool. Her hands were on the back of a tall chair. “We’re over here.” His wife’s beckoning with her hands on the chair reminded him of something Bushwa had said the other day about the electric chair, a form of punishment considered outmoded. Now, thought Gary, all the states use lethal injection. Like that execution last week on TV, three men and one woman got it right after WWF.

With the reinstatement of the death penalty nationwide, criminals were being executed wholesale everywhere, not just in Texas. Bushwa talked about going back to the electric chair for terrorists because, while the crime rate was down, there was still a need to deter terrorism.

“Carol, is this my seat?” Gary stood to her left.

“No, Sweetie, over here, that one’s for Joanie.”

“I hope she ordered the prime rib. Otherwise we won’t get much to eat.”

Joanie was a little overweight.

“Don’t say that. She is the sweetest person.” Carol reprimanded him.

She's sweet from all the Danish, Gary thought. When is Bushwa going to do something about all the fat people? Half of all the people he knew were over 200 lbs. The rest were thin and buff. Bushwa, himself, was sometimes called "The Stair Master", after his favorite type of exercise.

"Ladies, gentlemen, and Bushwa ..." the emcee/band leader nodded preferentially to Bushwa's picture. "The bridal party...."

Two by two the groomsmen and bridesmaids were announced by the emcee who spoke ceremonially as if introducing royalty.

"John Bannister escorting Mabel Ionafred...., Earnest Woodraft escorting the lovely Leona Tanner..., Joe Blough escorting the effervescent Winnie Mane..." Polite applause greeted each couple recognizing the spectacular job they had done standing in a row at the altar.

The Maid of Honor and the Best Man were next. Then the parents of the bride and groom were announced with the same pomp and they took their places at the head table. Finally, with a loud fanfare, the emcee presented the bride and groom. The crowd went wild...relatively speaking.

Gary was busy drinking and thinking of his steak. "Let's get the toast over with so we can eat," he said to no one in particular.

Everyone was seated. The head table was behind the diving board (diving boards were making a comeback because Bushwa limited lawsuits against corporations to \$1,000 a suit.) A portable dance floor ran alongside the pool situated to the right of the head table. The band sat on risers behind it. All the guests were at round tables on the deck area, bordering the rest of the pool.

There was some question as to why the bride and groom wanted the reception to be around water. Some wondered if the plan was to jump in after everyone was drunk.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you John Ritzsheimer, the best man

As the emcee said this, the wait staff scurried around filling glasses with champagne.

“Laura and Jim, Mr. and Mrs. Giltpeeler, the Rubberstamps, guests—I’ve known Jim all my life. I remember when we went to our first Bushwa Youth Camp together in New Hampshire, the “Live Safe or Die” state. We went to learn Bushwa’s “Four Nobler Truths”. I remember a conversation we had one night in our tent. Jim said to me ‘I love America, John. I want to help Bushwa kill terrorists.’

I tell you that gave me chills. Here was a guy who knew what he wanted and now he’s doing it in Bushwa’s army. I say, comeback from Germany with 100 notches on your assault rifle and God Bless America, Jim.”

Thunderous applause! Go get ‘em, thought Gary as he lifted his “freedom beer” to his lips.

Then there was a clacking as people hit their plastic utensils against their plastic cups—the bride and groom kissed.

The groom’s father rose to give a toast. “I’ve been Jim’s father for his whole life, and I couldn’t be prouder of him. I remember when the young men went off to fight the Tallyband in Afghanistan. They made us proud to be Americans again. Before Bushwa there was nothing. No war for peace, just

people whining about the poor, but now we control the world, not just Afghanistan, not just Iraq and Iran, but the whole cussed thing because young men like Jim and young ladies like Laura here made a difference to set us all free. Now there are no more terrorist countries, no more poor, no more minorities to clog up the landscape and suck up our hard earned dollars..."

While he talked the food began to arrive. Gary got himself another beer from the bar and a wine cooler for Carol. I couldn't agree more, thought Gary, but what a windbag!

"Hon", he said to Carol, "let's name the baby after Bushwa."

"What?" she said, with a slight hint of incredulity in her voice.

"Let's name it after Bushwa, what do you think?"

"Bushwa Bunter? Are you nuts?"

"Now don't go all "anti" on me, I'll have to have you detained," he said kidding her, "not Bushwa Bunter. I mean like "Stairmaster Bunter".

"I don't like that either."

"What about Gorgeous Bunter?"

"Well, that's a possibility if it's a girl but if it's a boy we might just name him after you."

Gary smiled and kissed Carol on the cheek, "That would be nice."

The band finished off a jazzy little Texas Swing number. The Emcee addressed the company of revelers putting his fist on his heart, "That was one of Bushwa's favorites. Always brings a tear to my eyes. And now, to break with

tradition, at the bride's special request, there will be a toast by Sarah Smiles, the Maid of Honor."

"Laura, Jim, bridal party and guests, I'd like to take this opportunity to say a few words about Laura, my deepest and dearest friend."

The guests became silent and shifted restlessly in their seats. Women did not give toasts, *ever*, especially not at a wedding.

"I've known Laura since she was twelve. I was the new kid at school and she went out of her way to befriend me. She chose me as her partner for a project on Germany ..."

Boos came from the crowd at the mention of Germany, a country directly in-line for invasion.

"Deutschland is a beautiful country of peaceful loving people ..."

More boos! Some people started getting out of their seats.

"The Faderland never would build weapons of mass destruction, why, Bushwa's own grandfather helped ..."

Shouts "Shut off the mike." "Call the police." Then suddenly, before anyone could do anything, armed men came running from the adjacent building towards the reception. It was hard to discern what they were saying.

"Wir geben Ihnen
das Projekt für ein neues
Amerikanisches Jahrhundert!"

They started firing into the crowd with their automatic weapons, and then at the wedding party. Women screamed, men screamed, red blood blossomed

on the chests of party goers who fell with agonized faces full of disbelief. The groom's father was shot and fell across his plate. He flipped forward over the table and onto the ground.

From behind a table that he'd turned over, Gary hid holding his wife. He peered around the side to catch a glimpse of the attackers. To his alarm the terrorists, all of whom wore military uniforms with swastikas on them, were headed in his direction.

Then someone shouted defiantly from the head table, "You dirty, Nazi bastards, you're not going to kill my people and get away with it."

It was the groom. In one movement he stepped up on the table and lunged at one of the attackers, simultaneously seizing his weapon and knocking him into the pool. Single handedly he started mowing down the assailants who then started to scatter. Their leader, who was already firing one gun, grabbed a rifle from one of his downed men and strode right for the groom firing both guns. The groom was shot.

As he fell, the bride, train and all, leaped over the table screaming, "Jimmy!" and held her dead husband in her arms. "No, Jimmy, no, oh God, Bushwa", she screamed. Then her voice trailed off. Her eyes filled with menacing rage. She grabbed Jimmy's gun and shot the laughing Nazi leader eight times in the chest. He fell, the last of the Nazis to die. Then she fell upon her husband sobbing inconsolably.

Beyond the sobs of the grief-stricken bride, not a sound could be heard. The maid of honor, still holding her microphone, began to speak in grave ponderous tones, "This is why Germany must be stopped."

At this, the cowering musicians, who were now back in their seats, played a very loud, "Ta Dah!" Then all the bloody uniformed assailants and their formally dressed victims got to their feet. The newly married couple rose also, and covered with fake blood, embraced. Everyone could see how much they cared for each other, appreciating, now more than ever, that the other was alive.

As the performers bowed, the audience burst into applause and the band struck up "The Anthem". All rose to their feet, faced Bushwa with a hand over their hearts and began to sing, "Oh, say can you see"

To Gary this was a beautiful moment. Hearts were swollen; eyes, teary; voices, off key and loud. They all should be like this, he thought. He squeezed his wife's hand. What a great world to bring a baby into. Bushwa had done it again. The earth was getting safer and more beautiful by the day. Sure, there was a price to pay; the oceans were radioactive so you couldn't swim or sail on them except in specially protected boats, but there was still some fresh water that wasn't connected to the oceans. And, of course, no saltwater fish, but as Bushwa said, the radioactive waste had to go somewhere. The air was hazy all the time and sometimes difficult to breathe, not to mention the occasional radiation alert. All the parks were now either being harvested, mined, drilled or "developed". There was always a price to pay for freedom. But if you had a good job like Gary, connected to the government, you could afford a house in the country and

periodic trips to the mountains where it was still clean. Gary was taking Carol up to Lake Louise in Canada, the 51st state, next month for vacation, one last Hurrah before the baby was due.

The band started playing Rock 'n Roll and people started dancing with abandon. Those staged terrorist attacks really loosen people up, thought Gary.

The people, who had gotten wet during the melee, changed into green flight suits with the American flag over the pocket. Everyone was in high spirits. A river of alcohol flowed through the crowd. Tables were tipped back onto their legs.

More food was brought in for those whose steaks had fallen. The bride and groom, now dressed in orange and green flight suits, visited each table to "meet and greet".

"Hi, Carol, I'm so glad you could come," said the glowing bride.

"Oh, Laura, I wouldn't have missed it for the world. Laura, this is my husband, Gary," said Carol.

"Pleased to meet you," she said with a warm smile and a light in her eye.

Gary smiled, stammered hello, and got to his feet. He reached across the table to shake the groom's hand, "That was some show you put on. When you going over?"

"Day after tomorrow," Jim said enthusiastically, pumping Gary's hand, "Day after tomorrow."

"Doesn't leave much time for a honeymoon," said Gary.

“Well,” said Jim, “We wanted to get married before I had to shove off. We’ll go on a honeymoon when I return.”

“Where you going?”

“Oh stop, Gary. Don’t tell him, Jim. He’s so rude.”

“It’s okay, Carol. We’re going to France, to the new capital.”

“Paris?” said Gary.

“No, Vichy.”

“I thought it was Paris.”

“No, they changed it last year in commemoration of twenty five years of freedom. Don’t you remember from history class how grateful the French were when we liberated them after their government opposed our greatest step to fight terrorism by freeing Iraq? Well, they were so grateful that on the 25th anniversary they moved their capital to Vichy. Remember the “Great Collaboration?”

“No.” said Gary who was no history buff. After all, all that bull was not a requirement for working at the TMA.

“Don’t you remember”, said Jim, “how, after we had to nuke Iraq to get the Iraqis in line, France erupted in protest so we threatened to nuke them too? You need to go back to your American History and read up”, said Jim. “You probably don’t even remember that the Constitution was modernized either.”

“Well, I remember something about it, but didn’t think it was all that earth-shattering.”

“Are you kidding? The old Constitution was so out of date, even Patriot Act IV was not enough – it kept us from being free. So Bushwa rewrote it.” Jim, overwhelmed, paused for a couple of seconds, and then said with devotion, “Yeah, Bushwa fixed it—and I’m fighting for it!” planting his fist over his heart.

“You are an inspiration, brother!” Gary shook Jim’s hand again. “If there were more guys like you defending our country, there would be less to fill up the resorts.”

“Those guys make me sick,” Jim said angrily. That’s why I left the Education Ministry to fight. Education’s not the answer...”

“OK, boys,” cut in the bride, “enough politics, this is supposed to be fun.”

“Sorry,” said Jim, “it’s just that I see those bastards leaching off the government or joining “The Pall”, after all the money we spent teaching them True American Values, and I want to shoot them.”

“Well, maybe you’ll get the chance soon, Honey, come we have more people to see.” She gently took Jim’s hand and led him off to the next table.

Gary thought to himself, Boy would I like to be the one to catch “The Pall” or at least catch one of the Wellys who knows where “The Pall” is. That would be awesome!

That was one thing Gary did remember from history class. He remembered how the Wellys, lead by “The Pall”, had been a thorn in the government’s side since “The Pall’s” faked death in a plane crash before the liberation of Iraq. Gary even remembered his name; Paul Wellingstone, a teacher gone mad and into politics. He threatened Bushwa and the “Way to

Freedom” and had to be silenced for the good of the country, no, the good of mankind. Well, the NSA botched it up, thought Gary. It just looked like he died in that plane crash. Really he went underground, that was his plan all along.

Every car bombing or exploding nightclub, every ambush and murder of government personnel was attributed to him. Whole cities had martial law because of him, whole families *detained* in the middle of the night, yet there was never enough information to find the man. He proved to be so elusive, so clever as to make the link to his whereabouts undiscoverable. Several times his captives had been captured, admitting under “Terrorist Truth Questioning” who they were, but their confessions about “The Pall” always led nowhere.

Gary wanted to be the first to solve this mystery and bring the maniac to justice. Someday, I will, he thought. He’ll slip up and I’ll be watching.

He smiled as he ate a piece of cake. “Well, I think I’ll have one more slice. I love the chocolate, the whip cream, the vanilla pudding filling, the cherries...I could live on this stuff.”

“I don’t think you should have anymore, Gary,” said his wife, “I don’t think it will mix well with all that beer.”

“Naw, it’s okay, I’ve already had three pieces and I feel fine.”

Carol’s words proved prophetic. Later that night, in bed, he was unable to sleep because of the volcanic activity in his stomach. He thought back to the reception... That was great cake, he remembered, and that Laura—Wow! His mind meandered to the war. If Jim gets killed she’ll be needing a friend to

console her. Someone who understands the true value of his sacrifice. I'd take care of her, he thought, Oh Baby! And you never know, Carol could die in a terrorist bombing...A tear came to his eye and something caught in his throat as he thought about losing Carol. Then that thing in his throat subsided, leaving an acid, burning sensation; Laura, scantily clad and smiling at him, flitted across his mind—like Bushwa, he thought, a gift that keeps on giving.

THE END