

Rain

By Jack English

One Secret Service Agent pressed my face into the carpet, another one had his knee on my back and a third one held a gun on me. Two thoughts crossed my mind as I lay there on the floor of the Oval Office. First, these carpets are really soft; second, the President looks really tall from down here.

“Who is he?” President Theresa Brandt asked.

“Madam President, his license says he’s Layton Purdy.”

“Who the hell is Layton Purdy?” she asked.

The agent with his knee on my back looked me up on his phone. “He is a science fiction writer.”

“Madam President,” I said, “why does it rain so much in Florida and so little in Arizona?”

“What does he want?” she asked. “Did he just make a terrorist threat?”

Once my hands were bound behind me and they searched me, they stood me up. “I asked, why does it rain so much in Florida and so little in Arizona?”

She looked at the lead agent. “Is that some kind of riddle?”

He handed her a thumb drive. “I found this in his pocket. There might be a list of demands on it.”

“I have no demands,” I said. “I just want to make it rain.”

The President took the thumb drive and slipped it in the pocket of her suit coat. “He looks pretty harmless,” she said. “How did you get in here?”

“I was on a White House tour. I recognized the way to the Oval Office from the PBS special ‘Walk with the President.’ I got to your outer office. Your secretary was on her computer. The guard was texting someone and your door was open. I thought we could talk,” I said.

“About what?” she asked.

“The physics of why it rains in some places and not in others.”

“Are you a meteorologist?” she asked.

“No. I’m a writer.”

She felt the thumb drive in her pocket and said, “I’m busy. Try meeting with someone in the Interior

Department.” She jerked her thumb toward the door and they led me away.

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“And that was your first meeting with the President, Mr. Purdy?” Arnold Wotton asked. Wotton was a producer for the PBS show NOVA. Wotton thought back two weeks remembering how he found a note on his desk one morning. It said Louise Colton-Farber, the President of PBS, wanted to see him right away. *Oh, crap!* he thought. *She is my bosses’ bosses’ boss. This can’t be good.* He knocked on her office door. She waved him in and pointed to a chair opposite her desk.

“Got a story for NOVA and I want you to produce it,” she said.

“What kind of story?” Wotton asked.

“Some nutball has been blogging, tweeting, and doing the daytime talk show circuit claiming he can make it rain. It sounds like the perfect lead-in for a show on junk science. What do you think?”

“Who is he?” Wotton asked.

“His name is Purdy. He’s a science fiction writer. My guess is he’s seen one too many flying saucers.” She handed him a clipping from the Washington Post, “Rain Man Walks in on President.”

“Talk to Purdy. Talk to the White House staff. Talk to NOAA, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. Hell, talk to NASA for all I care. He’s a nobody so we can slice and dice him and hang him out to dry.” She dismissed Wotton with a flick of the back of her hand and went back to working on her computer.

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“Mr. Purdy, I’ve got to tell you that’s a hell of an introduction to the President,” Arnold Wotton said. “So, what’s your theory?”

“It’s all in the PowerPoint I sent you,” Purdy said.

“I went through it. Why don’t you just explain it to me?” Wotton asked.

"O.K. Start with the question, why does it rain a lot in Florida and very little in Arizona? To answer that question, you have to think about why it rains anywhere. When water gets warm it evaporates. The warmer the water, the more it evaporates. When the air is hot it can hold a lot of moisture. When the air is cold it holds very little. That's why it's so humid in the summer and so dry in the winter that it cracks your hands."

"There is an upper limit on the amount of moisture the air can hold at any temperature. If the amount of moisture in the air is right at that upper limit, and the temperature drops even a little, it rains. Ever see a weather map in summer? You have hot sticky air. A cold front comes in and it rains because the air is suddenly too cool to hold onto its moisture. Meteorologists turn all this moisture-in-the-air stuff around. They ask the question, for any given amount of moisture, what is the temperature below which it will rain? They call it the dew point."

"So, you want to lower Arizona's temperature? How are you going to do that?"

"I don't want to lower Arizona's temperature! That would be stupid! I want to increase the moisture in the air."

"And your plan is...?"

"Isn't it obvious? We have to raise the temperature of the Pacific Ocean!" Purdy said. "How can you produce a science show like NOVA if you don't know the most basic science?"

"True confession," Wotton said. "I majored in social studies and minored in art history and frat parties. I never took a science course that I wasn't forced to."

"So how did you get a gig producing NOVA?" Purdy asked.

"They needed someone who could type and had the 'right' point of view." Wotton did air quotes around the word right.

"You can type?" Purdy asked.

"Five words a minute. Tops! So, how are you going to warm up the Pacific Ocean? Solar panels? Nuclear reactors? Coal?"

Purdy shook his head and mumbled under his breath, "This is going to take longer than I thought."

"What?" Wotton asked.

"Nothing," Purdy said. "Do you know about ocean currents? They're like rivers, but in the ocean."

"The Gulf Stream, right?" Wotton said.

"Right. The Gulf Stream starts a little below Florida, picks up heat and flows north a few miles off the Eastern seaboard, arcs across the Atlantic just south of Greenland, bends toward England and then heads south again."

"O.K. What's that got to do with the Pacific Ocean?" Wotton asked.

"The Pacific current is similar. It starts south and east of Japan, heads north toward the Bering Strait, then flows down along the coast of Alaska, Canada, past Oregon, and finally to the coast of California. Ever swim in the Atlantic?" Purdy asked.

"Sure. Lots of times," Wotton said.

"Ever swim in the Pacific? Ever swim off the California coast?"

"No. Why?"

"It's really cold... all the time," Purdy said.

"The average water temperature off the coast of Los Angeles is 66 degrees in October. The October water temperature off the coast of Florida is 80."

"Oh..." Wotton said. "I get it. Warmer water means more evaporation which means more rain."

Purdy pointed at him and made a little cluck sound, like it was a box checked off.

"You still haven't told me how you plan to raise the water temperature off Los Angeles," Wotton said.

Purdy put both elbows on the table and held his head like he had a headache. "Honestly, I don't know why someone hasn't thought of this before. A ten-year old could figure it out."

"What? What could a ten-year old figure out?" Wotton demanded.

"Deflect the Pacific current," Purdy said. "You don't have to stop it, just push the cold water coming down from the arctic three or four hundred miles off the coast of California. There's plenty of solar radiation at the latitude of California. It would be easy to warm up the ocean if you could just get the water to lay there and not be replaced by cold arctic water all the time. Warmer water, more evaporation. More evaporation, more rain."

"Assuming you could deflect the Pacific current, how much warmer would the water get? How

much more evaporation would there be? How much more rain?"

Purdy pulled back in his seat. *Did he really want to tell this guy what he was thinking? Could he trust him? Would he be able to take it in? Would his head simply explode?*

"Let's make a couple of assumptions. Suppose theoretically we could deflect the Pacific current at Point Arena, that's about a hundred miles north of San Francisco, and suppose we could deflect it enough that, by the time it got down to San Diego it was 1,200 miles offshore. That would mean about two hundred eighty thousand square miles of ocean would warm up on its own just from sunshine. If the temperature got up to 77 degrees, about 34 billion cubic feet per hour would evaporate."

"Thirty... four... billion..." Wotton said it slowly as if to ask whether Purdy had slipped a decimal point or even slipped out of reality. "Where did you get these numbers?"

"The Engineering Toolbox. It's a website. You put in water temperature and a couple of other factors and it computes the evaporation rate."

"Are you telling me there's a website that predicts what will happen if you warm up the Pacific Ocean?" Wotton asked.

"Of course not. That would be stupid. The website computes swimming pool evaporation. I just scaled up the numbers a little."

"You used a swimming pool calculator?" Now Wotton was holding his head in his hands.

"Same principle," Purdy said. "The physics is exactly the same."

"So how much rain are you going to get out of this?" Wotton asked.

"Assume water evaporates ten hours a day, two hundred days a year, and half the evaporation comes back as rain over let's say Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada and Southern California..." Purdy gazed off into space like he was looking at some ghostly apparition.

After half a minute Wotton asked, "Well? How much rain?"

"It could be as much as thirty inches." Purdy looked at Wotton. "Yeah, maybe thirty inches."

"Thirty more inches of rain... over four and a half states. What would that mean?"

"The deserts would be gone. Over time, they'd probably end up as farms or forests, something like that."

"You still haven't told me how you intend to block the Pacific current," Wotton said.

"You can't block it. It's too powerful. The most you can do is deflect it," Purdy said.

"So how do you plan to deflect it?" Wotton asked.

"Build a breakwater," Purdy said.

"How big a breakwater are we talking about?" Wotton asked.

"Oh, I don't know, a mile wide at the surface, three hundred miles long, and of course the Pacific is about two miles deep along most of that stretch." Purdy said. "The base of the breakwater might have to be five or six miles wide. It would be a pretty big breakwater; a massive undertaking, but the payoff would be *huge!*"

"That's a lot of... concrete or rocks or whatever you make breakwaters out of. Wouldn't it cost a fortune?" Wotton asked.

"Sure, probably as much as setting up a Martian colony," Purdy said.

"I knew outer space was going to come into this sooner or later," Wotton mumbled under his breath.

"What?" Purdy asked.

"Nothing. I was just clearing my throat," Wotton said. "So... how would you build such a breakwater if you had the money?"

"It would take four or five thousand cubic miles of rock to build; that's four or five Grand Canyons. You know where mountains come from don't you? Push on a bed sheet and it forms ripples. Mountains are ripples in tectonic plates. You know what a tectonic plate is right? Mountain ranges are just plate ripples. I'd find a couple of mountain ridges in the Rockies, mine 'em out and use them to build the breakwater."

"Do you have any idea how much yelling and screaming there would be if you said you wanted to tear down a mountain range?" Wotton asked. "How many protests? How many pissed off politicians you'd have to deal with?"

"How many EPA permits I'd need?" Purdy asked.

"Exactly."

"Aristotle said everything in life is balance," Purdy continued. "What if you told the Governors of Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico that they could convert their worthless deserts to farms and forests. Think how much more tax revenue they would generate. What if you told land owners you could convert their barren, worthless land into a lush countryside and increase its value a thousandfold? All you have to do is make it rain. If the Feds put a two percent tax on the sale of land in the affected areas, they could get back the cost of the breakwater with money to spare."

"That's the craziest thing I ever heard of!" Wotton said.

"Go to NOAA, go to NASA, find a university weenie to look at the data. If they're honest, they'll tell you it will work." Purdy held a thumb drive out to Wotton who took it reluctantly.

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Wotton drove back to the PBS studio reviewing the outline of his show in his head. He had astrologers and flying saucer enthusiasts rebutted by astronomers and now he was looking for someone to tell the viewing public Purdy was a first-class nutcase. He slid his twenty-year-old Volvo into his parking space and retrieved his manbag from the front seat. He never liked briefcases, they were too corporate. Wotton wanted to make sure everyone knew he was a free-thinker.

He dropped his manbag on his desk and carefully placed his Starbucks Grande Mocha Frappo-gizmo next to it. He called Evan Inkwell, a contact at the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. He was a reliable guy. He could jump from anything to global warming in a heartbeat. Ten percent increase in traffic tickets? It's global warming. Robberies up in Chicago? It's global warming. Got squirrels in your attic? It's global warming.

"I've got a hypothetical question for you," Wotton asked Inkwell. "What if a patch of the Pacific Ocean off southern California warmed up to... let's say 77 degrees. What would happen... weather-wise?"

"That's a pretty specific question," Inkwell said. "Do you know something I don't? Are the oil

companies doing something off the California coast? Is it a Navy experiment? Is it volcanos? Tell me it's not volcanos!"

"None of the above. It's just a hypothetical question. What would happen to the weather if the ocean temperature off the coast of southern California reached 77 degrees?" Wotton asked.

"How long will the temperature be at 77? How big an area?" Inkwell asked.

"Think of 77 degrees as an annual average and say the area is somewhere around three hundred and sixty thousand square miles," Wotton said.

"Whoa! No oil company, volcano or Navy experiment could raise the water temperature over that big an area. What gives? What aren't you telling me?" Inkwell asked. "It's global warming, isn't it? It's finally hit! I'm finally going to get that research grant!"

"It's just a hypothetical question. Nothing is going to raise the water temperature that much in our lifetime. If the calculation is beyond your ability, I'll find someone else."

"No! No! I can do it. I'll just have to tweak some of my models. Give me two days." Inkwell said.

Wotton ended the call and took a sip of his mocha frappo-gizmo. *I better get another source*, he thought to himself and called Jake Garn, a contact at NASA. Garn was a no-nonsense ex-Marine pilot. He modeled weather systems from the Gulf of Mexico to Pluto. Modeling a warmer Pacific would be child's play for him.

In a week Wotton had gotten results from both Garn and Inkwell. There is an old saying: "Don't ask a question if you aren't going to like the answer." Wotton didn't like the answer he got from either of them. Garn said it would probably increase rainfall twenty-four inches in the Southwest; Inkwell said twenty-six. A week later he had Inkwell come to PBS for a meeting.

"Did I get it right?" Inkwell asked. "Is the extra rain going to be disastrous? Millions dead? Species going extinct? What's going to happen?"

Ordinarily, Wotton would tell the people doing research for one of his programs the answer he wanted. Then they could tailor research to cherry-pick data to fit into the narrative he was trying to sell. For some reason he didn't do it this time. He let them come to their own conclusions which was more intellectually honest. He

never in a million years dreamt Purdy's plan would make it rain. He sat there paging through Inkwell's report; Garn's report lay next to it.

"And you're sure these calculations are correct?" Wotton asked.

"Positive," Inkwell said. He was bouncing around on his seat like a puppy and grinning from ear to ear.

"Would you mind explaining your work on camera?" Wotton asked.

"I brought a suit with me just in case you asked," Inkwell said.

So, Wotton got Inkwell to lay out on camera the effects of raising the temperature of the Pacific Ocean off the coast of California; the increased evaporation, and the increased rainfall over the Southwest.

When they were done, Inkwell asked, "Who is going to explain the disastrous consequences of all this rainfall? If you want I could spitball a few scenarios with you."

"Thanks," Wotton said, putting his arm around Inkwell's shoulder and steering him toward the door. "We have other experts coming in for that."

And so, Wotton's program on junk science took an unexpected turn. Maybe Purdy wasn't a nut after all. Little by little the philosophical ground shifted under Wotton's feet.

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Things were shifting in Washington's halls of power as well.

President Theresa Brandt was at the firing range in the basement of the White House, safety glasses on, ear protection on, standing with her feet spread apart a little, holding her 9mm Colt 1911 at shoulder height and squeezing off a couple of rounds when her Chief of Staff tapped her on the shoulder. She slid her hearing protection off so she could hear him.

"What are you doing, Madam President?" her Chief of Staff asked.

"I'm keeping in touch with the common man; the people who elected me," she said. "We need to get moving targets in here. Stationary targets just aren't challenging enough."

"With all due respect Madam President, I think you're taking your 'Texas Gal' persona a little too seriously."

"Give the people what they want. Isn't that what you said during the campaign?" Brandt asked.

The Chief of Staff frowned. "Madam President, did you see this article that said the U.S. wouldn't be able to grow enough food to feed itself by 2050?"

"How come?" Brandt asked.

"Even if all our arable land is in full production, we won't have enough water to irrigate it. Crops will fail, farmers will go bust. A big chunk of California will dry up and blow away."

Brandt released the empty magazine from her gun and a secret service agent dutifully handed her a new one. "Wasn't there a guy here a couple of weeks ago saying something about making it rain?"

"Yes, Ma'am," the Chief of Staff said. "We had him pinned down on the Oval Office rug. He was babbling something about making it rain."

"My predecessor let the economy drift sideways for eight years. I need to do something big and bold to jumpstart it. It's never too soon to think about reelection. Right? Maybe we ought to quietly talk to this rain man and see what he has to say."

"Madam President, with all due respect, the man is a nut! People have been trying to make it rain for a hundred years and no one has had any luck!" the Chief of Staff said.

"People dreamed of flying for two thousand years and the best scientific minds said it couldn't be done... until the Wright Brothers did it."

The Chief of staff dropped into a chair, spread his legs a little and dangled his arms alongside the chair as he whined, "But this guy was on daytime talk shows last week. Should we take policy advice from someone who's been on gossip TV?"

"Just do it," the President said.

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The President of PBS, Louise Colton-Farber called Wotton. "How are you making out on that junk science piece?"

"We have five or six good examples of junk science lined up," Wotton said.

"What about the rainmaker?" Colton-Farber asked.

"We had experts from NOAA and NASA dig into his data and they said he was basically right. He

could make it rain,” Wotton said. “We’re building a show around it.”

“You what? You were supposed to squash this guy. What are you doing?” Colton-Farber asked. “I thought this guy was supposed to be part of the aluminum foil hat, CIA conspiracy, flying saucer brigade.”

“His science is sound.”

“Tell me again what he wants to do?”

“Basically, he wants to build a breakwater, or peninsula or something from Point Arena, California that’s a hundred miles north of San Francisco, three hundred miles south and west into the Pacific.”

“Why, for god’s sake?” Colton-Farber asked.

“He wants to push the cold Pacific current offshore. That will let the water closer to California heat up. Warmer water evaporates faster. With more moisture in the air, Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and Utah will get about twenty-five more inches of rain each year.”

“Is that a lot?”

“In a typical year, L.A. gets about fifteen inches; Arizona and New Mexico get about twelve and a half inches. Another twenty-five inches could transform deserts to grasslands and forests.”

“Look, even if this guy is one hundred percent correct and even if it works perfectly, we’re not in the business of solving problems. And can you imagine how our environmentalist donors would react? They’d have a stroke! They’d picket us! They’d demand government funds be cut off. Bury the story. Delete it. Scrub the files.” By this time Colton-Farber was standing over Wotton, practically between his legs, poking her finger down to within an inch of his nose. “I don’t want any trace of this story to have ever existed. Got it!”

Despite Wotton’s assurances he would ditch the program, the files weren’t scrubbed. Instead the video was leaked and once leaked, it went viral.

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And it came to pass, in the city of Phoenix, a conference was held to discuss allocation of the Southwest’s scarce and dwindling water resources so that all the Southwest could be taxed.

“Ladies and Germs, I’d like to welcome you to the Seventieth Annual Southwest Water Rights

Conference.” Dabney Somes, the chairman of the conference waited for laughter at his use of the word germs instead of gentlemen. It was an old Milton Berle joke. But, the crowd was stone-faced. He pressed on anyway. “I see we have delegates from Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah and Southern California. As you know the population of our region outstripped the water supply long ago. So, I am recommending new, and much more dramatic water rationing measures. For example, we might ban agricultural irrigation in affected areas.”

A chorus of boos arose from the California delegation.

“And we should forbid watering golf courses...”

A chorus of boos arose from the Arizona, New Mexico and Nevada delegations.

“One alternative to water rationing is to put a five-hundred percent tax on water.”

A man in the middle of the auditorium stood and shouted, “No more taxes!” Then he threw his conference material toward the speaker. It missed by a mile but bopped a guy on the second row in the back of the head.

The man who was hit jumped to his feet and spun around. “Who did that?”

Somes banged his gavel to get everyone’s attention. “Gentlemen, ladies, we’re running out of water. We have to do something!”

The guy who got hit in the back of the head was still standing. “I agree,” he said. “But what?”

“What about Purdy’s plan?” the man who threw the conference notes asked.

“Purdy’s Plan! Purdy’s Plan! Purdy’s Plan!” the delegates chanted.

“Purdy,” Chairman Somes said, “is a nut! His plan is stupid! It’ll never work!”

The guy on the second row, the guy who got hit with the conference book said, “Oh, yeah? Have you seen the PBS video? It makes a pretty convincing case for Purdy’s Plan.”

“PBS never authorized release of that video!” Somes said. “That video was supposed to have been destroyed!”

“Purdy’s Plan! Purdy’s Plan! Purdy’s Plan!” the audience chanted.

“Quiet down!” Somes banged his gavel. “Quiet down! These demonstrations aren’t doing any good. Let’s get back on topic, which is a new water rationing plan.”

The audience jumped to their feet chanting “Purdy’s Plan! Purdy’s Plan! Purdy’s Plan!”

One of the conference organizers, Nicolas Gant, walked onto the stage holding a thumb drive high over his head. “How many of you want to see the PBS video *Purdy’s Rainmaking Plan?*”

The crowd roared with a chorus of approval and as it did. Chairman Somes tried to wrestle the thumb drive out of Gant’s hand. “You have no right to show that!” Somes shouted. “It’s contraband! It’s illegal! It’s...”

“...it’s what’s needed!” Gant shouted, pushing Somes out of the way. He popped the thumb drive into the computer on the lectern and started the video, projecting it onto the huge conference room screen.

As soon as the opening music started, the crowd calmed down and returned to their seats. Purdy calmly discussed why there was so much rain on the Gulf Coast and so little rain in the Southwest. He put it down to the difference in water temperature. The water in the Gulf hardly moves, laying around all day soaking up the sun. But the Pacific current pulls icy water from the Bering Strait and Alaska down along the Southern California coast. The warmer the water the greater the evaporation. As more water evaporates into the air, there is more moisture available to condense out as rain. Purdy backed up his claims with facts and figures and graphs and maps and expert opinions from NOAA and NASA. Purdy’s case had all been expertly edited together by Wotton, at PBS expense, before Colton-Farber pulled the plug on it.

Forty minutes into the fifty-minute video, twenty protesters broke into the room carrying slapped-together signs that said, “Ban Purdy-Stop the Rain.” They chanted the slogan on their signs. “Ban Purdy-Stop the Rain! Ban Purdy-Stop the Rain! Ban Purdy-Stop the Rain!”

Several of the protesters rushed the stage and tried to yank the thumb drive out of the computer. As they ran on stage, a few people in the audience saw what was happening and ran on stage after them. There was a snow squall of reaching hands, shoving, slaps,

and fists. There was also a biting incident. The biting was blamed on the protesters, but who could tell? As more and more conference attendees reached the stage, the protesters were overwhelmed and forcefully escorted out of the hall.

CNN was the first network to pick up the story. “Peaceful protesters, brutally assaulted by representatives of BIG WATER; people who want to destroy our precious deserts!”

The Interior Department held hearings. Thousands of Purdy Rain Makers, as they called themselves, demanded implementation of Purdy’s plan. They were met with dozens of protesters determined to protect the prairie cockroach. The Green Party argued the Southwest should be kept brown and lifeless, but not everyone agreed.

Hell! Once people found there was a realistic plan for making rain, they demanded it. The Arizona and New Mexico Assemblies held hearings on the benefits of rain. Nevada and Utah held a joint conference on ways to implement the plan. And of course, California politicians demanded a ban on discussing Purdy’s Plan while also insisting that their allotment of Colorado River water be increased. California politicians went so far as to call those debating Purdy’s Plan “Natural Climate Deniers.” Of course, as soon as they finished speechifying they jumped into their air-conditioned limos and went back to their air-conditioned offices where they drank water piped in from the Colorado River.

Despite the protests and demands of four hundred Hollywood stars that Purdy be arrested for ecological treason, Congress was quietly moving behind the scenes to implement his plan. The working title of the bill was the “Native American Education Adjustment Act.” Who could argue with anything having to do with native Americans or education? It was a boring piece of legislation over two thousand pages long. And it was meant to be long and boring. How else to keep Congressman and Senators from actually reading the bill?

It all went off without a hitch. Those in favor of all social programs and giveaways voted for the bill, along with Congress-people and Senators from the Southwest. Those who oppose all social programs and spending voted against the bill. And nobody read it.

It wasn't until page nineteen hundred six that the real purpose of the bill became apparent. It provided for construction of a mile-wide breakwater starting from Point Arena, California southwest for three hundred miles. A secret treaty was worked out with the governors of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah and Nevada. They agreed to donate hundreds of mountains to be used as fill to create the breakwater. Of course, most of the mountains were on Federal Government land. General Electric and General Dynamics were secretly contracted to build a new generation of mining and construction equipment. Railcars the size of houses were built and rails the width of kitchen chairs fabricated. Routes to take mountains of rock from Southwestern states to Point Arena were laid out, largely avoiding California, only crossing into California at the last minute, then making a beeline for Point Arena.

Under the surface and in the shadows, where most everything in the world really happens, deals were being made and wheels were set in motion. There was only one problem. President Brandt had publicly come out against Purdy's Plan and called Purdy a nut more than once to appease the environmentalists. How were the Congress-people and Senators from the Southwest states going to get her to sign the bill?

They hurriedly staged a signing ceremony in the Oval Office complete with photographers from the major networks and remaining newspapers. Two Indian chiefs were there in full headdress and moccasins. There were plenty of costume shops in Washington but damned few American Indians. At the last minute, they recruited a Pakistani and an Egyptian from a Senator's IT staff and dressed them as American Indians. The signing went off without a hitch.

The strategy was to keep the public in the dark as long as possible. The right of way for the railway that would ultimately carry several thousand cubic miles of fill to the breakwater was designated Interstate 111. Signs were posted around Point Arena that said, 'Future Home of the U.S. Eleventh Fleet.' When anyone asked why mountains of rock were being dumped into the Pacific, the standard answer was, "We are creating a breakwater for the new port," or some such nonsense. There had been less secrecy around the Manhattan Project. To keep the California legislature

from poking their noses in, they were told the new port would create thirty thousand new taxpayers, I mean, jobs.

The cover story held for a year; but as the peninsula grew, people started asking questions. That attracted an avalanche of environmental lawsuits. Judges tried to issue restraining orders to protect the snail darter, Bodega sea gull and a dozen other species hurriedly listed as endangered. They found that they couldn't. The legislation had included language that said that no Federal law could be used stop, slow or restrict construction. The Supremacy Clause of the Constitution said no state law could be used to restrict or halt construction either. Every day, protests at the construction site grew, and every day hundreds demonstrated outside the White House.

"What are we going to do?" the President asked.

"What can we do?" The Chief of Staff asked.

"We have to undo this. We have to stop Purdy's Plan."

"Can't you veto it or something?" the Chief of Staff asked.

"Once legislation is signed, it takes a life of its own," she said.

"Can't you order the Secretary of the Interior or somebody to stop work?" he asked.

"Did you read the bill?" the President asked. "It sets up a separate agency to oversee construction. It's out of my hands!"

"What about EPA permits? We'll just bog them down in the permitting process like we do any other business."

"The bill waves all permits," she said. "And, the courts haven't been any use either. The statute changes the Rules of Civil Procedure for this project.

Complaints have to be heard in ten days, no injunctions can be issued until a hearing, and plaintiffs have to post a bond for the cost of any delay and for defense legal costs."

"How did the Bar Association let that get through?" Chief of Staff asked.

"Beats me!" The President picked up her tablet computer. "I've had twelve hundred emails opposing Purdy's Plan this month and twenty-eight hundred tweets."

“Holy crap!” the Chief of Staff said. “Is anybody in favor of his Plan?”

“Let me see. There’s a footnote to this report.” She clicked on it. “There have been twenty-seven thousand emails supporting the plan and thirty-one thousand tweets. About a third of the emails were job requests.”

All expression suddenly dropped from the Chief of Staff’s face. “Is that true?”

The President nodded. “Seems to be.”

The Chief of Staff inched closer to the President and whispered in her ear. “Madam President. Is it possible we’ve been on the wrong side of this thing?”

“What do you mean?” the President asked.

The Chief of Staff spread his hands in exasperation. “Look at the numbers!”

“Any idea how many jobs Purdy’s Plan is creating?” the President asked.

“May I?” The Chief of Staff held out his hand toward the President’s tablet and she handed it to him. He ran his fingers back and forth over the device for a few minutes. “Thirty-one thousand manufacturing jobs, twenty-two thousand jobs associated with the railway, thirty-three thousand jobs in mining and nineteen thousand jobs actually building the breakwater. That’s a hundred and five thousand jobs. Madam President, you wanted to jump start the economy, I’d say you found a way.”

“What are you saying? Are you saying we shouldn’t stop it? We should embrace it?”

“Madam President, thanks to your brilliant leadership, a hundred and five thousand people who didn’t have jobs before now have jobs. I think we can run on that!”

And so, it went. While the environmental community, the protest community, and the nutball fringe continued to protest, most of the rest of America found something to like in Purdy’s Plan. The only question now was, would it work?

~

It took six months to build the first mile of the breakwater. The second mile was completed in three months and it took a month each to do the next three miles. In the second year of the project, things sped up considerably. The breakwater was advancing a mile every two weeks. By the third year it was advancing a

mile a week. It wasn’t all uninterrupted success. A year in, the weight and vibration of the trains caused so much subsidence, the breakwater began sinking back into the sea. One section sank twenty feet in four months. Designs were changed, plans updated, and the fill used to build the breakwater was more carefully selected. Forward motion was halted until the ground level was built back up, graded and new track laid. Then things pushed forward again. Larger, more robust rail cars were built, more efficient means of dumping carloads of rock and gravel perfected, and the mining operations which were systematically mowing down mountains in Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and Utah steadily improved. Four years into the project, the peninsula stretched a hundred and forty miles out to sea.

The water temperature off San Francisco rose five degrees, but the water temperature off Los Angeles barely budged. It turned out the Coriolis effect, an effect caused by earth’s rotation, tended to bend the icy Pacific current back toward shore just south of the end of the peninsula. But by this time, few politicians cared. All they saw were jobs and the additional tax revenue those jobs brought in.

~

Ethan Beckerson ran his hands along the edge of his oversized antique desk. He had been the Attorney General of New York State for three months and he was bored. He looked up at his Chief Deputy. “We need to do something that will capture the public’s imagination! Something big! Something bold... Something...”

“That will put you in the governor’s mansion.”

Beckerson frowned, “That, too.”

“There’s always Wall Street. We could find some investment banker who has made a little too much money and throw his assets in jail. Or we could sue some bank for... something and squeeze money out of them.”

“It’s been done.” Beckerson waved his hand in the air. “I need to find some new cause. Something I can make my own. Something that will make me a...”

“Hero,” his deputy suggested.

“I was thinking household name,” Beckerson said.

“Have you seen this report from the State Treasurer’s office?” He slid a thin report across the

desk to Beckerson. It had a lovely cover with a New York State seal on it.

“What does it say?”

“It says New York State is losing population. Some eight hundred fifty thousand people moved to other states in the last six years. And they took their tax dollars with them. The rich are moving out, most of the people moving in are poor or illegal immigrants.”

“Why are they moving out?” Beckerson asked.

“High taxes, over regulation, excess litigation and a lot of people are just tired of shoveling snow. The report projects that if Purdy’s Plan actually makes it rain, we could lose half a million people a year to the Southwest. You know you can play golf in Arizona eleven months a year?”

“Damn Purdy! Who the hell does he think he is? Why couldn’t he leave well enough alone?”

The Chief Deputy reached over Beckerson’s desk and poked the report with his finger. “Less population means less taxes. Less taxes means cuts in every department, including ours.”

“Is there any way to stop Purdy’s Plan?” Beckerson asked.

“It’s been tried a hundred ways, protests, lobbying, injunctions. The enabling statute foresaw all of it and set up the law to deflect every attempt to shut it down.”

“Options?” Beckerson asked.

“The only option I can see is...” The deputy let his thought hang in the air for a moment.

“What?” Beckerson demanded. “What’s our only option?”

“We can discredit Purdy.”

“What do you mean?” Beckerson asked.

“We can’t stop the project directly. But if we can discredit Purdy, prove his whole theory is a hoax, maybe we can turn public opinion against him and get Congress to repeal authorizing legislation.”

“But it’s working, isn’t it?” Beckerson asked. “Didn’t I read somewhere that L.A.’s rainfall was forty percent above average?”

“One good year! That doesn’t mean anything! A good lawyer should be able to find a way to twist that back on itself... make it seem like it’s no big deal. And you, sir, are a great lawyer! Don’t tell me you’re going

to let a nutball science fiction writer to get away with this!”

“He’s not getting away with this!” Beckerson slammed his hand on his desk. Then he said in a low voice, “What do we do?”

“We’ll convene a grand jury and indict him for criminal deceit, false swearing, risking a catastrophe, failure to provide services, environmental crimes, obstruction of justice and perjury.”

“Perjury?” Beckerson asked.

“Sure. We’ll comb through his public statements; find someone who disagrees with him and claim he lied. It worked on Martha Stewart and Scooter Libby. It’ll work on Purdy.”

So, the Attorney General for the State of New York impaneled a secret grand jury which indicted Purdy on a grab bag of charges. The next time Purdy attended a talk show in New York City he was arrested.

“What’s the charge?” Purdy asked.

The arresting officer read the indictment. He didn’t know whether any of it was true. He only knew it was his job to bring him in. Purdy’s bail was set at ten million dollars. Of course, there was no way Purdy could raise that kind of bail, so he sat in jail for nearly a year while the Attorney General built his case.

In that year, construction on Purdy’s Plan continued apace. That was the year that the engineers decided they didn’t need a breakwater a mile wide to deflect the Pacific current; a half mile wide breakwater would do just as well. That meant each mile of breakwater used a cubic mile less of rockfill. Construction sped up. The breakwater advanced two miles a week.

The mountain range between Brigham City and Logan, Utah was knocked flat. It contributed some forty cubic miles of fill to the project. In return, the project created some fifteen thousand acres of nearly flat farmland between the two cities. Everyone was making a profit off of Purdy’s Plan.

The peninsula reached two hundred and forty miles. The water temperature off San Francisco rose another three degrees. The temperature of the water off Los Angeles rose eight degrees. The rainfall in Los Angeles was sixty five percent above average. Arizona was well on their way to getting thirty inches of rain for the year. Creek beds that were bone dry ten months a

year had at least some flow all year round. Hearty grasses spread across what had been windswept desert sands. Pine seedlings crept down mountain slopes, taking advantage of the additional moisture. Shallow lakes appeared where there had only been mudflats. The same thing was happening in New Mexico. Hearty grasses and scrub brush pushed back the edges of the desert. Nevada took on a greenish hue that had been missing for decades. Sugar beet farms in Utah had bumper crops. A handful of eager beavers talked of starting vineyards in New Mexico. It was all going very well. Too well to suit Beckerson.

"I want you to call Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, Friends of Earth, I don't care who and get me solid evidence of ecological disasters caused by Purdy's Plan," Beckerson said.

"I've been looking on-line for disaster stories and haven't found any," his Deputy said. "Most of the real damage seems to be coming from protesters."

"If you can't find facts, then get me opinions! What was the name of that goofball who went on PBS and claimed Purdy's Plan would make it rain? What was his name?" Beckerson asked.

"Garn? The NASA guy?"

"No, not him. The other one, the one who is always talks about global warming. What was his name?"

"Inkwell, Evan Inkwell."

"Get him to testify that the Purdy's Plan is causing global warming. I read somewhere he blames everything on global warming from parking tickets to canned peas. Line him up as a witness. Maybe he can scare the crap out of the jury," Beckerson said.

"We just don't have a lot of facts," the Deputy Attorney General said.

"Facts be damned! I want to nail this little prick!" Beckerson said.

"One more thing, and you're not going to like this."

"What?" Beckerson demanded.

"It's been raining in Los Angeles for a week."

"Floods? Drownings?" Beckerson asked.

"Not that I can find. It seems to be more like a drizzle than a pouring rain."

"What about the fact Purdy orchestrated a gigantic fraud on the taxpayers? Last estimate I saw

was the project would cost a hundred billion dollars. That's what... three hundred million a mile?"

"Three hundred thirty-three million per mile."

"Shouldn't the taxpayers be outraged? For a project that doesn't work? Can't possibly work? It's the very definition of a boondoggle. And, we're going to crack it wide open!"

"How?"

"We'll prove it doesn't work!" Beckerson said.

~

Layton Purdy's supporters did their best to raise his bail. Contributions poured money into a foundation set up specifically to fund his defense, and just when it looked like they were going to raise enough money to get him out of jail, Beckerson successfully argued bail should be increased to twenty million. Beckerson said that anyone who could raise ten million dollars was a flight risk. And, while Purdy was in jail, Beckerson and his crew slammed him in the press. They trotted out Inkwell and his global warming theories. They trotted out the Sierra Club and their claims the desert moss and prairie cockroach were being decimated; and they trotted out Greenpeace who claimed vital cancer fighting soil microbes might be destroyed if Purdy made it rain. But the thing Beckerson hit hardest on was cost. Tax dollars that could have gone to other projects, like funding government pensions, were being poured down the rathole of an unproven technology. Public opinion was beginning to turn against Layton Purdy.

The anti-Purdy sentiment stirred up by Beckerson did not go unnoticed in the White House. President Brandt sat on the edge of her desk, her arms folded. "Is this Purdy thing going to blow up in our faces?" she asked her Chief of Staff.

"Well, Madam President, there's risk in everything. Whether something is good or bad depends on how you spin it."

"Beckerson keeps hitting us on cost and lack of results. How do we spin that?" Brandt asked.

"A clever opportunist, I mean strategist, would use one problem to solve another one," the Chief of Staff said.

The President unbuttoned her suit coat. "It's been a long day. I don't have the patience for riddles. If you have something to say, say it."

"You know the Federal Government owns most of the land west of the Mississippi, right?"

"I know most of what the government owns is worthless mountains and deserts," Brandt said.

"But if Purdy can make it rain, it won't be worthless anymore."

"What are you getting at?" Brandt asked.

"Madam President, I have a Treasury Department Report here," he tapped his tablet computer, "that says if Purdy can make it rain as he claims, the value of the government's land will skyrocket."

"And?" Brandt asked.

"If we sell off just five percent, we can fully fund Social Security and Medicare for the next twenty years. How's that for a presidential legacy?"

~

On the day Purdy went to trial in Albany, five thousand environmentalists from all around the world were camped out around the courthouse. They were a wild and noisy bunch who tended to drop McDonalds and Taco Bell wrappers right where they finished eating. Some carried signs demanding the death penalty for ecological genocide. Surrounding them were some thirty thousand Purdy supporters. Most of the Purdy supporters were from the Southwest. The environmentalists tended to sleep in tents and in their cars. Those from the Southwest rented hotels and ate in restaurants which boasted the economy. The police did all they could to keep the environmentalists and the Purdy supporters apart. But it was difficult. Since this was the Attorney General's show, the police allowed the environmentalists close access to the courthouse and allowed them to camp in the surrounding public parks. Purdy's supporters were kept half a mile from the courthouse, except for those who had passes to actually attend the trial. At least once, and sometimes twice a day, the environmentalists would rush Purdy supporters, yelling and screaming, and kicking and biting and calling them intolerant, desert phobic fascists. It took a while for the press to figure out what a desert phobic fascist was. It also wasn't clear whether the protesters had ever spent any time in the desert. If they had, maybe they wouldn't be so enamored by it.

By the time of the trial the breakwater reached two hundred forty miles. Water off the coast of Los

Angeles was up another four degrees. Rain was up in Arizona, up in New Mexico, up in Nevada, up in Utah and up in L.A.

The Foundation, set up to raise Layton's bail, hired Julie Cox to defend him. She specialized in First Amendment, free speech issues and dabbled in white-collar defense. She was a tall thin string bean who wore impeccably tailored suits and was half a foot taller than Beckerson.

The trial was destined to be a circus with an international audience because the President of the United States, her Chief of Staff and half a dozen Secret Service Agents sat in the second row.

"The People would like to acknowledge the presence of the President of the United States, Theresa Brandt." Beckerson held his hand in Brandt's direction. Everyone in the courtroom, including the judge, stood respectfully.

"Welcome to New York," the judge said and motioned for everyone to be seated. Then he motioned for Beckerson to get on with the trial.

"The People call Dabney Somes," Beckerson said. "What is your position, Mr. Somes?"

"I am, and have been, Chairman of the Southwest Water Rights Association for the last twenty years," Somes said.

"Would you say that makes you an expert on water supply and water use?" Beckerson asked.

"You are correct." Somes waved at the jury.

"What is your opinion of Layton Purdy and Purdy's Plan?" Beckerson asked.

"Layton Purdy is a law-breaking anarchist bent on disrupting the economies of Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah and California." He counted off the states on his fingers. "His plan is nothing short of junk science. He is a confidence man, a scoundrel, and a thief."

"Thief?" Beckerson asked.

"Thief!" Somes said. "He's stealing a hundred billion dollars of taxpayer money. That's enough to build twenty thousand high schools and vaccinate ten billion children."

Beckerson stepped close to the witness box and in a low voice asked, "Do ten billion children need vaccinating?"

Somes leaned against the rail of the witness box and whispered to Beckerson, "I was trying to make my point more dramatic."

Purdy's lawyer Julie Cox spoke up. "Your Honor, we didn't get that last bit of testimony and I don't think the jury got it either. May we have it read back?"

The judge nodded to the court reporter who read back the testimony. "Witness: That's enough to build twenty thousand high schools and vaccinate ten billion children. Counsel: Do ten billion children need to be vaccinated? Witness: I was only trying to make my point more dramatic."

"Why," Beckerson asked, "do you think Mr. Purdy is a lawbreaking anarchist? How is he disrupting the economies of the states you listed?"

"People have been fighting over water rights in the Southwest for three hundred years. Sometimes they did it with guns and rifles and dynamite to blow up dams. Over the last hundred and twenty years, the Southwest Water Rights Association put an end to all that violence. We did it by negotiating peaceful treaties among those possessing water and those who need it." Somes turned toward the judge. "Over that time the Association negotiated hundreds of agreements and arbitrated thousands of disputes. Layton Purdy wants to throw that all away. If Purdy is allowed to continue, I fear treaties will collapse and there will be a return to violence."

"Thank you Chairman Somes. No further questions. You may step down," Beckerson said.

"Hold on there, partner." Cox waved Somes back into the witness box. "I have a couple of questions if you don't mind."

Somes was half out of the witness box and looked at Beckerson to see whether he could go or had to stay for Cox's questions. Beckerson used a hand wave to shoo Somes back into the witness box.

"How many members did the Southwest Water Rights Association have twenty years ago?" Cox asked.

"I couldn't tell you," Somes said.

"Would it surprise you to know it had eleven thousand members?"

Somes shrugged. "I wouldn't be surprised."

"Would you be surprised if I told you the Water Rights Association had twelve thousand members five years ago?"

"No," Somes said.

"How many do you have today?" Cox asked.

"I couldn't tell you," Somes said.

"The records indicate you have seventy members. Does that sound right?"

"I guess," Somes said.

"To what do you attribute the decline in membership?"

"Bad economy, bad weather," Somes said.

"By bad weather you mean it's raining too much. In fact, didn't Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and Utah get ten more inches of rain this year than last year, and didn't last year's rainfall break all prior records?" Cox asked.

"Random chance, that's all. Purdy's Plan had nothing to do with it," Somes said.

"Isn't it true that your membership has tanked because there is no longer a need to ration water in the Southwest? Isn't it true that the Water Rights Association is on the brink of financial collapse because so many of its members dropped out. Isn't true you are going to be out of a job in a month because the Association is bankrupt?" Cox said.

"I want to get out of here!" Somes pounded on the rail of the witness box.

Julie Cox glanced up at the judge. "I have no further questions for this witness."

"The people call, Evan Inkwell," Beckerson said. After swearing in Inkwell, Beckerson asked. "You figured prominently in the unauthorized PBS program about Purdy's Plan, is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you said Purdy's Plan would make it rain, right?" Beckerson said.

"Yes sir."

"And was there anything you told Mr. Wotton, the video's producer, that he edited out?" Beckerson asked.

Inkwell turned toward the jury and grasped the edge of the jury box with both hands, a look of desperation in his eyes, his voice high and squeaky. "I asked Mr. Wotton who was going to do the segment on the disastrous consequences of Purdy's Plan." Inkwell

leaned forward a little. "I even offered to spitball some of the Plan's catastrophic effects."

"What did Wotton say?" Beckerson pressed.

"He said he wasn't interested in the other side of the story," Inkwell said.

"Can you tell us some of the disastrous consequences you had in mind?" Beckerson asked.

"Flooding; there are a lot of dry creek beds throughout the Southwest. With more rain, there could be water in them all year."

"What else?"

"More rain means native desert species like tumbleweed and the desert cockroach will be replaced by other species. And of course, rain will contribute to global warming." Inkwell turned toward the judge. "In the big picture, global warming is the big downside to making it rain."

"What makes you think Purdy's Plan will contribute to global warming?" Beckerson asked.

"The ocean water off California is dramatically warmer than it has been and well..." Inkwell turned back toward the jury, gripping the witness box with both hands as he did. "Everything mankind does contributes to global warming. Doesn't it?"

"No further questions," Beckerson said. "You may go." He motioned for Inkwell to leave the witness stand.

"Cross, Your Honor?" Cox asked. The judge motioned her up and she approached Inkwell. "Why did you do computer simulations for Mr. Wotton?"

"Well, I knew he was with PBS and I figured..."

"Didn't you say you thought you'd get a global warming research grant out of it?"

"Well, yes but..."

"And you were disappointed when he didn't play up the global warming angle, weren't you?"

"We have to be open to science. I mean, how are we going to get social justice?" Inkwell asked.

"If you have to qualify the word justice with the word social, it isn't really justice, is it?"

"Object!" Beckerson said. "Mr. Inkwell isn't qualified to discuss the law."

"No further questions," Cox said.

"The People call Beulah Tweedle. Ms. Tweedle. You just heard our expert Evan Inkwell predict disastrous floods. Do you have any first-hand knowledge of actual floods you can share with the court?"

"Yes, sir. I was camping with my husband and his two brothers and their wives on the banks of the Oak Creek in Red Rock State Park," Tweedle said.

"Please tell the court where that is," Beckerson said.

"It's in Arizona, near Sedona," she said.

"Can you tell the court what happened?" Beckerson said.

"We were camped on one side of the creek. There was a Boy Scout troop camped about a mile downstream on the other side of the creek. It had been rainy off and on all week, but the sun came out so we thought the worst was over. Around seven o'clock in the morning it began to rain pretty hard. The creek started to rise. By nine o'clock our camp was flooded. We left the cars and tents behind and started to climb. The rain came down in torrents and washed everything away."

"What do you mean everything?" Beckerson said.

"The next day, when my husband and I were rescued, they said forty Boy Scouts and two Scoutmasters had been swept away, twelve other campers further down the river vanished, and we lost my husband's brothers and their wives," Tweedle said.

"Does this fit the description of the disaster described by Mr. Inkwell or not?" Beckerson asked.

"Object!" Cox said, "Calls for a conclusion."

"Your Honor, may I recall Mr. Inkwell to the stand?" Beckerson asked.

The judge nodded yes and Beckerson put Inkwell back in the witness box. "In your expert opinion, are the circumstances described by Mrs. Tweedle the kind of consequences you foresaw with Purdy's Plan and are they the type of circumstances you urged Mr. Wotton to incorporate into his presentation on the Purdy Plan?"

Inkwell faced the jury gripping the rail of the witness box with both hands. "The facts as presented by Mrs. Tweedle are exactly what I predicted, to the letter."

"Mr. Inkwell," Cox asked, "couldn't this flood be the result of natural weather patterns?"

"No, absolutely not," Inkwell said. "This disaster was directly caused by diverting the Pacific current as the result of Purdy's Plan," he said.

"Isn't there even one percent doubt in your mind? Mr. Inkwell?" she pleaded.

"There is zero doubt in my mind," Inkwell said. "See that stack of computer reports in front of Mr. Beckerson? That's the computer model that exactly predicted what happened to Mrs. Tweedle and her family and those poor Boy Scouts."

"Thank you," Cox said and recalled Mrs. Tweedle to the stand. "Mrs. Tweedle, we are a long way from Sedona, Arizona. How did you end up here as a witness?"

"Mr. Beckerson ran newspaper advertisements all over Arizona asking people to tell him their flood stories," Tweedle said.

"Did you bring the advertisement with you?" Cox asked.

Tweedle nodded yes.

"Can you read this part to the court?" Cox asked.

"The Attorney General of New York is looking for people to testify about catastrophic flood situations they have witnessed. Under certain circumstances such an event might entitle them to compensation."

"Have you received any money?" Cox asked.

"Not yet," Tweedle said. She pointed to Beckerson. "I have to testify first."

"Can you tell us when this flood occurred?" Cox asked.

"I'm not exactly sure. It was right after my husband and I got married, so that would be what? Twenty years ago?" Tweedle said.

"Twenty years ago?" Cox looked up at the judge. "Your Honor, I move to strike this testimony on relevance grounds since all this occurred well before Purdy announced his Plan. I would also like to strike Mr. Inkwell's testimony. If he can't tell the difference between naturally occurring flooding and flooding that may or may not be caused by Purdy's Plan he has nothing to offer the jury."

"Mr. Beckerson," the judge said. "I am reluctant to strike firsthand witness testimony and I am reluctant

to strike the People's expert testimony. But I have no choice. I am not going to impose sanctions on the People's counsel this time. But, in the future, you better vet your witnesses more thoroughly before bringing them to court."

The judge's ruling spread through the crowd surrounding the courthouse like wildfire. Protesters shouted, "Stop Purdy! Kill the Plan! Stop Purdy! Kill the Plan!" They pushed over the metal detectors at the courthouse entrance and used their protest signs to batter the security guards trying to keep them out.

The protesters flowed like an unstoppable river of molten lava down the hallway and into the courtroom. By this time the chant had taken on a more ominous turn. Now they were chanting "Kill Purdy! Stop the Plan! Kill Purdy! Stop the Plan!"

The protesters beat the courtroom guards with their signs just like they beat the guards at the entrance to the courthouse. A couple of protesters surged down the main aisle toward the judge and swung at him with their protest signs. Fortunately, his bench was high enough that when he rolled his chair back they couldn't reach him. He banged his gavel until it broke demanding "Order in the Court" to no avail.

More protesters surged into the courtroom shouting, "Kill Purdy! Make him pay! Kill Purdy! Make him pay!" One of the protesters saw the President sitting a row behind the defense table. Despite the best efforts of half a dozen secret service agents, the protester was able to reach the president with his sign and conk her in the head.

She touched the spot on her head where she had been hit and found blood on her fingers. "That's it!" President Brandt said turning to the agent closest to her. "Give me your gun!"

"You can't..." He started to say when she gave him "the look," the look that said you better pray you never find out what I will do to you if you don't obey. He handed her his gun.

She stepped from her chair to the rail separating the visitor's seating from the rest of the courtroom. Then stepped up onto the defense table. Once there, she fired a shot into the ceiling. The shot thundered around the courtroom and most people ducked. A fist-sized chunk of plaster slammed to the floor followed by a slow rain of plaster dust. "Stop!" She fired another

round into the ceiling removing another fist-sized chunk of plaster. “I said *stop!*” She pointed her gun around at the people in the courtroom. The Secret Service Agents with her backed her play drawing their guns.

A police officer assigned to courtroom security had his hand on his gun. It was still in its holster. He looked up at the judge, who nodded no. The officer removed his hand from the gun.

“I came here to testify, and by God that’s what I’m going to do. So, sit in your damned seats or get down on the floor! Everybody! This means you!” the President said, waving her gun at the crowd. “You!” She pointed to the police officer who had just removed his hand from his pistol. “Collect those protest signs! And pile them in the corner.”

The officer glanced at the judge who nodded, yes.

“Where is Layton Purdy?” she bellowed.

“Right here ma’am.” He stuck his hand out from beneath the table she was standing on.

“Get out here,” the President said, “You need to see this.”

“Damion,” she said. “Show us what you’ve got.” Damion was the White House IT magician. He was only twenty-three. He got on the computer and pulled up some video.

“Give us number one.” The President said.

Damion pulled up a view of a wide concrete channel with water rushing through it. “That is the Los Angeles River,” the President said. “For the last fifty years, it’s been bone dry except for a few days a year. This year it had water in it for two hundred days. Damion, give us number two,” she said.

Number two was a live shot of a broad river flowing swiftly into the Sea of Cortez. A tug boat was pushing a barge up river. “This is the Colorado River. So much of the Colorado’s water has been syphoned off for agriculture and drinking water that in the past sixty years, it only made it to the Sea of Cortez once. That was until we started Purdy’s Plan. Now it flows all year round.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you can convict Purdy of anything you want. But, let’s be clear. I think he’s a national hero and I’m going to give him an immediate pardon.”

Cheers went up from Purdy’s army and boos went up from the Friends of Earth.

“And!” the President shouted, “And, Layton Purdy’s has made it rain on a hundred and sixty million worthless desert acres owned by the federal government. Now that worthless desert is changing over to grasslands and the very beginnings of forests. It is worthless no more. Layton Purdy has given the people of this country an eight trillion-dollar asset. I’m going to ask Congress to give Layton Purdy a hundred thousand acres of what was worthless Arizona desert and is now ready to grow any crop he wants to plant there. Let’s hear it for Layton Purdy!”

Applause grew slowly into a roaring thunderclap along with cheers for the Plan.

“The President walked back and forth on the defense table, patting her gun against her thigh, bellowing orders,” Purdy said. “That was the second time I met her, and from where I stood she still looked tall.”

--- THE END ---

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