



Revolution

Kelly Bargabos

Charlie Miller was a federal agent who decided when people died based on how much they cost taxpayers. An employee of the Federal Office of Asset Management, Charlie was responsible for the cost-benefit analysis that determined when a person reached a point of diminishing return. Charlie loved her job. Not in a power-mongering kind of way, but in a proud-to-be-serving-her-country kind of way.

The Gray Laws, a set of rules for those aged seventy and older that dictated the hours they could drive, shop and use public services, also added their name to a database that tracked their health and related costs as well as the benefits they received. As a result of the efficiencies gained from this new policy, healthcare was finally affordable, and families had money in the bank and more time to spend with their children.

Charlie settled in at her kitchen table and checked her phone again to see if her mom had texted while her laptop booted up. They spoke every morning and so far today she hadn't been able to reach her. Charlie texted WHERE ARE YOU???? and then got to work.

Although she didn't miss the traffic, working from home had been harder than she thought it would be. She didn't realize how much she would miss the energy and buzz of the office, and other people.

Before Charlie looked at the clock again it was almost noon. The world had stopped for all intents and purposes, and yet the days flew by faster than ever. Her phone finally buzzed with a message from her mom. "What the hell?" Charlie exclaimed.

Charlie moved her thumb and forefinger across her phone to zoom in on the pic her mom had sent. Her seventy-four year old parents had taken a selfie surrounded by a group of people with gray hair and masks, holding signs.

Her phone buzzed again with a text from her work friend Jill. CHECK THE NEWS. WEIRD STUFF HAPPENING.

The first video Charlie clicked on said, "As you can see, chaos has erupted across the country. Patients are leaving nursing homes and hospitals on foot and in wheelchairs . . . streets and highways are jammed . . . people have left their vehicles and started walking."

Charlie kept scrolling and clicking. Facts were scarce and the usual players were quick to jump in and speculate all kinds of scenarios from the rapture of Christians to an alien invasion. She saw an interview with someone who looked like her mother who

said, “The time is now for the Gray Revolution . . . my life is not a formula.”

A notification popped up with an email from Mr. Post that explained what was at the root of it all. Apparently, the President had signed an executive order that would require the *permanent retirement* of anyone over seventy who contracted the Coronavirus, regardless of their health and potential to recover. Charlie froze. She took her job seriously. Her decisions were solid and based on proven return on investment models. Now they were being told to ignore the facts and just eliminate people, regardless of the numbers and analysis? *What about the ethics they had sworn to uphold as federal agents?*

Charlie texted, MOM! HAVE YOU BOTH LOST YOUR MIND?

Her mom responded, WOODSTOCK.

Charlie hadn’t heard that word in years. When she was a little girl, it was their inside joke and safe word. It was a promise, a rescue when needed, or a hug. When they were at a boring adult dinner party it meant they’d be leaving soon. When they dropped Charlie off at Kindergarten, it meant they’d be back to get her, and when Charlie was at a slumber party that took a mean-girl turn, it meant, “I’ll be right there, I’m on my way.” She used to sit on her dad’s lap and he’d tell her stories of the music festival. “It was half a million lost souls who found each other . . . who knew they wanted to find their way to a new world . . . different from the one they’d been handed. They had no idea how to get there, but they believed they could get there together.” It was comforting when she was young, but by twelve or thirteen she saw it as silly and childish.

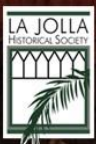
The President’s order went against everything Charlie believed in. If the numbers didn’t matter, then what did? The analysis, the spreadsheets, the certainty of it all gave order to Charlie’s unpredictable life. This job had saved Charlie, or so she thought.

Mr. Post had recently shared the administrator password that gave Charlie full access to the national FOAM database. At the time, she didn’t understand why she would ever need it, but with the pandemic and resulting lock down, Mr. Post wanted someone else to have it, just in case.

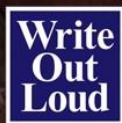
Charlie refilled her coffee cup and paced around her small living room. Her shelves and walls were filled with picture frames—frames decorated with beach umbrellas and flip-flops and captions, like “Live-Laugh-Love.” They held snapshots of the motorhome trip to Florida, her birthdays, and the weekend concerts and protests her parents had dragged her to. She couldn’t imagine her life without these two people who had been there for every field hockey game, every broken heart and who had worked so hard to send her to college. *How do I put that in a spreadsheet?* With the President’s new order, they could be eliminated like they were nothing. Deciding who gets to live and die doesn’t belong to any human, certainly not a government.

Charlie moved back to her table. She clicked on the FOAM icon and logged in as administrator. She searched and found her parents’ names, then selected and deleted their records. Charlie held her breath for a moment while the spinning hourglass moved across her screen. Then she highlighted and hit delete on pages and pages of names before she closed her laptop. *A revolution indeed.* Charlie grabbed her keys and mask and texted her mother one word before she headed out.

WOODSTOCK.



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