

Ordinance 93

L. Fabry

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Dedication

Too numerous to fit on a page, to all those who have supported this project and its purveyor.

If you're reading this, you are one of them.

The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is a different kind of poverty -- it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality. There's a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God.

— Mother Teresa

“A Simple Path,” 2007

FOREWORD

Disclosure: I hate forewords and rarely read them. You have my empathetic permission to skip this one.

The idea for “Ordinance 93” came about during my work as a freelance writer. A client wanted an article on the best in abortion blogs. After chewing my nails to the base, I made a list consisting half of pro-choice and half pro-life entries and breathed a sigh at dodging this most destructive of land mines.

I wondered if it was possible to find a middle ground between the two sides. Both seem to agree if the mother’s life is in danger, she can elect to have an abortion. Everything after disintegrates with abortion laws leaving a great deal of people unhappy no matter where they are set. It is not possible (at this time) to set abortion laws to a spot where most will approve.

But what about when they go too far? Would the people unite on that? The answer seems obvious in the name “pro-choice.” When abortions are forced upon families, the two sides would have something to agree on.

What circumstances would bring the law? What would it look like initially? What would the people who support it be like? Against it? What would the law lead to? The following is my best attempt at an answer.

Quotes cited incorrectly are my fault, not of the source.



Chapter 1

Before the weekend was out, Justin Winters would be idol, villain, husband, parent, criminal, seducer, killer. For now he was simply another pair of footsteps in a line. The weight of what he was about to do had never been so heavy or so immediate. Delaying registry only led to his stepping in a crowd that multiplied in all directions. He and the other men ambled in a complex, yet indiscernible trail where bland conversations served as an interlude between each step. It took him hours just to enter the fluorescent chill of the oversized lobby. It wasn't particularly hot outside, but the tension surrounding the registration process could be felt nonetheless. The other men in front and behind him did a combination of making small talk with him, turning to their mobiles, and complaining to whomever would listen about the wait as Justin's eyes dragged beneath the knees around him. Out of habit, he buried his hands in the pockets of his tan slacks, but the act seemed to attract the attention of patrol men even more. In the last hour or so, he perfected the art of going from crossing his arms to tapping on his mobile and back again.

The speakers in the building mumbled mostly notices and wordless music but recently switched to a speech by another new official. *"I cannot thank my colleagues enough for helping us reach this momentous point in our nation's history. You have all sacrificed tremendously and will be rewarded appropriately..."*

"Hey..." a voice interrupted.

Justin looked up to see a man twice his size and a fraction of his sobriety next to him.

"Can I get in here?" the man pointed in front of Justin.

"Absolutely not," Justin answered.

"Come on, the kids are waiting for me at home," the man's voice slurred enough to convince Justin the kids were better off without him.

"I've been here for hours and so has everyone else." The men

around Justin nodded in agreement, although no one else risked looking the man in his veiny eyes.

“I tried the nice way,” the man said before he pushed his way in front of Justin, “deal with it.”

A few of the men tipped as a new notch was added to the chain. One of the patrol men turned in their direction and lingered for a second before deciding he wasn't interested.

If Justin wanted to, he might have been able to come up with a better alternative. Instead, he placed his foot an inch to the side of the man's, grabbed the back of his shirt, and pulled with both hands. It didn't take much force at all to get the man to stagger and fall. The sound his body made as it hit the polished ground coupled with the combination of uninspired words directed towards Justin got the attention of all in the area, including the patrol men.

Before the drunk could grab at Justin, he sensed the attention around him and fled in a clumsy blur.

The patrol men gave chase, following him out the door. One of their gazes lingered on Justin, who could only give an innocent shrug.

None of them were prepared when the second set of screams began. The anguish in them was apparent from the first note. A few seconds more told Justin they were coming from a woman. Even though the line for the females was on the other side of the building, and far longer than the one for men, none of them missed a sound as she was brought in. Justin's eyes surfaced as he moved in her direction. He couldn't make out her words, but he wasn't trying to. Only whether he recognized the voice mattered. His unhidden panic tricked him into thinking he couldn't recognize the voice because he had never heard any of them scream like that.

A hand came and went on his shoulder. He separated a few others in line for a better view. He shouldn't have bothered. The patrol men were bringing the woman closer to him in their journey to the red door. Justin froze in tandem with the other men who turned to see the commotion.

Four patrol men each had a limb of the woman, who looked at

the end of her ability to physically struggle. Her blouse was intended to be large, just as it was intended to be torn from the bottom revealing an everted naval. If a fifth patrol man put a hand on it, another set of limbs would have joined in the protest.

“Step back!” the one in the lead screamed.

Justin leaned back against the crowd of men as his elbows kept any others from getting in front of him. She could only be seen for a second, her sweaty dark hair covering what could only be freckles. The sight of how young she was overcame his relief that he didn’t know her.

“Please,” the voice from the screams said, “I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Do you have to be so rough?” asked one of the men standing a few spots down from Justin.

“Step aside, sir,” the patrol man’s order could not be confused for a request.

Although they drew a crowd, the patrol men and their charge were able to make it to the red door in what was probably a matter of seconds.

“You don’t need to do this,” the woman screamed as she saw where she was going. “There’s nothing wrong! I feel fine!”

She screamed the last part a few times more before the door opened, swallowed, and shut, devouring her screams.

“It is my distinguished pleasure to address you all on this historic day. When the 55th President of the United States took office, it was with the goal of bringing what we hold most dear to us all...”

The crowd made it impossible for Justin to know what the other side of the door held, but men lingered as if they would see more. It also reminded him he was no longer in line with his head down.

Justin searched for the shoes of the men in front and behind him as the rest of the crowd retreated. Instead of wondering about the woman, Justin rotated thoughts of his parents and how much he was going to miss them. He thought of the time the line wasted along with the sheer mismanagement which kept it so long, and it brought

him a second of comfort as he forced his fears down by habit alone. He curled his toes inside his boots wondering how close it was to the feeling of sand on bare feet.

“After a long struggle, the Family Protection Act takes effect today, assuring everyone for years to come freedom from needless illness, no poverty...”

The rarity of the first new structure in years wasn't enough for Justin to look up. The newest community building was supposed to have a variety of uses, although Justin had no idea what they were. He saw a landscape of dark brown concrete walls and matching floor that looked as if they should last longer than Justin's trained eye knew they would. Since the divide, Baltimore had an ongoing dispute on where the Inside ended and the Outside began, creating volleyed arguments that resulted in land seizure. This domed building could be seen for blocks, and provided a clear border.

Neither of the men in line seemed interested in reporting Justin as he retook his place.

“What happened?” asked the man in the loafers.

“They brought someone in,” Justin replied, packing finality into the answer.

It didn't matter. The men finally had a worthwhile topic of conversation.

“A woman?” the guy in the sneakers asked.

Justin nodded.

“What for?”

“I don't know.”

“You must have seen something.” The tassels on the loafers jangled.

“I didn't.”

“Any distinguishing marks, ticks, or anything like that?”

“No.”

“Not possible,” sneakers challenged. “They wouldn't go to all that trouble for nothing.”

“Okay,” Justin said in the silence that followed. All the men in line turned to him in a mix of desire for answers and gossip to punch

into their mobiles.

It took him a second to notice men at various points in the line tapping them in frustration. The loafers man was one of them.

“Problem?” Justin asked.

“Unit’s jammed,” he answered with no surprise. “They do that when something happens.”

The conversation soon steered into why and how the signal was being jammed. Justin took his own mobile out to both see if it was true and to have something to hide behind.

He was about to see if he could send a message to the others to tell them he might be late when the patrol men came. Half a dozen materialized saying they were there for line integrity but gathered men out instead of ushering them in place. A second later Justin realized all the men being picked out for questioning had joined him in stepping out of line when the woman was brought in.

He went back to his phone and noticed for the first time how drenched his palms were. It took both hands to keep the mobile in its spot while simultaneously hiding their trembling. Even as he hunched over the device, he could see a drop of sweat descend from one of the strands of his sandy blond hair. His only thought consisted of steadying his breathing from the ragged, choppy ones he took. A thought of what would happen to him if caught sprang up, but he choked it down. Another thought told him that no matter what happened, he had only a few moments more of freedom to his name. But most of all he worried about what would happen if the others were caught.

He felt the mobile slide out of his hands as he thought of how easily the others would be connected to him now that registration was upon them. The mobile cracked as it hit the concrete floors along with any chance Justin had of calling the whole thing off.

The noise alone was more than enough to attract the patrol men, but he was already being pointed at.

“No injustice of any kind will be permitted to haunt us as it has in the past...”

In contrast to how long Justin had spent in his own thoughts, the moment in which the patrol men snatched him, said a few words about questioning, and took him to the red door passed quickly.



Purposely being last in line was easier today than in had been all week. The rest of the women were anxious to get it over with and start their weekend. If any of them were delaying as Spring was, they were hiding it better. She applied the finishing touches on an image in her tablet when the click of knuckles meeting foamed drywall came. Mr. Beasley and his redundant new coat of hair gel stood over her.

“It’s the last day to register,” he mumbled at her. “If you don’t, we’re going to catch all kinds of hell.”

“Can’t I do it Monday?” she asked even though she knew the answer.

“Do you have any idea how much we spent to have a registry done here? If you wanted to do it on your own, waiting until the last minute wasn’t smart. No way you’ll make it to the public registry in time.”

“Let me just finish this,” she turned to the image.

“Finish fast,” Mr. Beasley’s voice diminished as he left.

With only five minutes left, Spring put all her tools away with a disbelief at how much she already missed them. She nearly bumped into a woman from the accounting department on the way to registration. With no intention of going first, Spring stopped to tie the laces of her blue-spotted canvas flats. The line had only a few women left when Spring came to it. More time was spent confirming identities than the actual registration, and it would only be moments before Spring’s actions would make a criminal of her. Then he came around the corner.

Wes wasn’t much taller than she and hunched as if he were

leaning in to hear something. He also held a reputation as the office punching bag but never verbally expressed that it bothered him if it did at all. When they first met, she spent most of her time staring at him from behind a lock of her curly brown hair. She never curled it, the hair had a will of its own, and she didn't have one to change it. But it proved useful as something to peek through when she gazed at him.

It occurred to her this might be the last time she would have to talk to him.

"Hey, Wes," she said when he got near enough to see her over his stack of papers.

"Spring," he answered as if he hadn't seen her until now. "Still waiting?"

"Yeah."

"How are you supposed to get anything done when you're in this line all day?"

"I guess I don't."

"But what about the reports that 'must be done by Monday?'" Wes said in his best Mr. Beasley voice.

"Is that what I missed in the meeting?"

"And the usual. Plus, he's still mad about the missing film and feels the need to recite the quarterly numbers even though we've been hearing them for two months straight. I swear, if I could find another job..."

"Me too."

Wes seemed shocked to hear her agree with him. "You show more talent on one of your throw away sketches than some of these guys with ten pieces of software helping them."

"...no mother or father who is ill equipped to deal with their troubles. For far too many years, we have heard the cries of those who needed help, and we are finally answering them..."

A blush took over Spring and allowed the speakers to drone their speech. "If it wasn't for my parents, I wouldn't have even taken the job."

“You had something better?”

“I thought the job was a joke or scam. Who would believe there was a spot for professional doodler these days?”

“At least you’re useful,” Wes shifted his stack of papers. “The cost of today’s little test taker was pretty high and...well, my job will be one of the first to go if things don’t turn around soon.”

“You can have mine,” she said to him with a straight face.

“Very funny.”

His smile was contagious enough for her to return it.

“I know how crazy this sounds,” Spring told him as she tucked one of her curls behind her ear, “but I’ve always thought you were kind of cute.”

She saw his eyebrows rise.

“Not just in the looking cute way,” she continued, “but in the ways that matter. You’re fun to be around, and for all the idiocy you take, I’ve never seen you be a jerk to anyone.”

“I didn’t think you were interested in me that way.”

“I was...I am.”

The door to the testing room opened and one of the secretaries from payroll stepped out.

“Next,” came a female voice from inside the room.

No one else remained. The jolt of fear drove Spring’s hand inside her jeans to feel for it. Relief and dread met with the touch of a small plastic tube against her finger.

Wes stepped in front of the door. “They’re bringing back the Russian orchestra. Maybe we could--”

“I can’t. I really wish I could.”

“Then why did you tell me all this?”

Spring had to look at the floor as she went around him. “I don’t really know.”



“I said NEXT!” the registration worker sounded just as irritated as everyone who was made to wait in her line.

“Just a minute,” Summer answered as evenly as she could.

The testing facility outside of her mother’s neighborhood produced a winding trail several blocks down resembling a wobbly line of dominos awaiting that first touch. But Summer had been able to stand in a separate, shorter line because of her mother. She was three figures over her intended weight with both blood sugar disease and heart issues. Even a few steps required her leaning into her metal walker, whose groans were getting louder. And she was exactly the sort of person who was allowed to go to the front of the line, along with someone who could aid her in the registration. Saving her mother from the sterile fingers of masked registration aides was the second reason she chose this option.

“We have stood by as poverty, decay, and worse have plagued our streets. Crime runs rampant in all corners, and many are afraid to even step out of their homes...”

Even through the blended chatter of women, the speakers could still be heard.

“Through here, mom,” Summer helped her mother into the tiny room.

“Name?”

Her mother needed to side-step to fit through the door, and only Summer’s arm was keeping her from toppling over. A snap of the worker’s fingers forced Summer to take out the two identification cards and hold them out. The worker blinked at them in frustration.

Summer looked to her struggling mother and back to the worker. With a sigh, the worker stood from her chair for what must have been the first time in hours and took the cards back to her desk.

“Is there a chair in here?” Summer’s mother asked between labored breaths.

“You won’t have time to sit,” the worker said, her eyes frozen on the screen as she entered their information.

Summer guided her mother into the only other chair in the room. The moan she gave as she sat was one of the worst Summer ever heard.

“Give me your hand,” the worker said as she wiped the device down.

Summer felt herself dry swallow as she stared at what was nicknamed the Gene Stapler. The metallic device was plum-sized and looked both new and worn at the same time. Smudges suggested the process hadn’t been well executed or received. The polished steel already showed signs of rusting along its hinges.

Summer was so involved in looking at the device she didn’t have time to stop her mother from absent-mindedly sticking her finger into it. The quiet slam of the device made Summer jump more than her mother.

“Fill this up,” the worker produced a cup with her mother’s information on it.

“Is that really necessary?” her mother asked through huffs of air. “I’m nearly sixty years old.”

“Then you’ve got a couple more years of testing in front of you,” the worker answered without a crumb of humor.

“Can you help me?”

It took Summer a second to realize her mother was speaking to her.

“No longer will officials stand by while these issues tear us apart. The people have entrusted us with their care, and that is what we plan to give everyone equally.”

“Yes,” Summer blurted to counter the speakers in the room. “I can help you.”

She helped pull her mother to the edge of the seat and took the lid off the cup. In the door’s shiny reflection, she could see her own green eyes staring back at her through a few strands of her nearly black hair. Its length was rooted in the lack of time and credits to have it tended to. She also saw the worker in the reflection looking on with undue interest.

“Do you mind?” Summer asked.

The worker shrugged her shoulders and went back to her screen. Whatever her orders were regarding those who needed help filling up the cups, she seemed all too happy to let someone else do it.

Now was the perfect time for a switch.

Summer turned back to the worker to get her finger prick and accompanying cup. With her mother’s health in decline, it wasn’t the first time Summer had been an accomplice to the upcoming task. After her mother’s cup was full, Summer took to filling her own cup and transferring them to the worker’s desk.

Without a word, Summer rose, took her mother by the arm, and led them out with far more speed than they entered.

“Did you do something to the samples?” her mother asked when they were clear.

Summer rehearsed the words many times but had never been more insincere when she said, “I don’t know.”

No matter what the future held for her, what she just did could never be undone.



“I didn’t ask you to tell me where to wait.”

Fall was set to cram her stack of papers down the assistant’s throat as her red-tinged brown hair fell over her forehead. The assistant got the point, stood from his desk, and went into the office. Fall made sure to keep her eyes on him as he walked out of the greeting area and behind the closed door. She continued to stare at it as she bent down, dug into the bottom of a waste basket with her fist, and released its contents.

The expense for a private registration was as astronomical as it was unavoidable. But the worker seemed happy to be free of the registration lines and even accepted her story about being queasy

around the stapler, allowing her to make the necessary and unseen adjustments, the evidence of which now lay in the bank's waste basket.

She couldn't remember the last time her temper peaked to this degree despite all the opportunities. When time out prioritized money, Fall was ill-prepared for the swap and noticed every second as it vanished. Now every pair of steps at the bank seemed to be away from her in infuriating contrast to her first visit an archaic ten years ago.

Back then it had the appeal of a gift wrapped with care even though the circumstances of her first visit held a certain solemnity. Her grandfather's death meant the loss of her model when it came to salvaging pay from useless purchases. He came from hard times and saved wherever he could, often wearing second hand clothes and limiting trips to those that could be taken by the written page. The entire family knew he sat on quite a bit of wealth, his wife having died some time earlier. Fall expected his estate to be split in thirds among his three children but was shocked to find herself and her cousins included in the will. None of them received as much as her parents, aunt, and uncle, but it was a life changing amount. At least for her it was. A year after earning their inheritance, everyone else was living an identical life and were maybe a new vehicle or some fancy vacations the better. Her own parents made the respectable, yet misguided, choice to donate a considerable sum to a charitable foundation which vowed to end the disease her grandfather died from. She objected, reminding them the foundation didn't so much as send a greeting card for her grandfather when he was alive but couldn't be gotten rid of now that his wealth was in their pockets with more out there for the asking. The foundation also showed no signs that reflected the handsome sum they were awarded and instead continued with promises of a cure for which they were never held accountable.

She would have never let herself do anything that foolish. And up until now, she hadn't. After her required education, she made the

choice to attend a university. Her family didn't have enough money for it, as most others didn't either. Fall spent her years at school dividing time between odd jobs and study, rather than choosing to take out the entire tuition in loans like her peers. Her goal in entering school was the exact same as it was when she left: to learn how to make money. For the first two years she simply read homogenized books, regurgitated figures, and attended public service courses where pretty words overcame meaningful action. After she was chided for pointing this out, Fall lost interest in learning and treaded until business courses began. Lessons in theory, supply and demand, profits and losses came, but were little more than poster slogans. She never learned how to set a price, wage, or turn a real profit. A finance class forced her to gather a virtual portfolio, yet she was unable to do anything more than read reports generated by the companies themselves. Fall equated it to buying a house after seeing only one picture. Rather than continuing the useless course, Fall quit investing her time and money in education and opted to research companies herself under the guise of a student. She studied the workers, the managers, and even sat in on meetings. Her ability to predict what the numbers would be for the next quarter earned her an administrative position where she began by making coffee and ended by getting double digit returns when the inheritance check descended.

She used it to invest into several companies and took a position of leadership at one of them. It wasn't long before her investment multiplied, was sold, and others emerged. It took even less for others to beg her to parent their finances. Before she knew it, her only job was to make money. She found no shortage of those who doubted it, but her contentment at amassing what was normally thought of as shallow made her happier than any of them.

It was when she earned too much money to keep it in one place, she had come to this bank for the first time. They courted her with the ease of experienced cads but offered more than the neon smiles of the others. Even subsequent visits were pleasant enough. Although she was the only one who knew today could very well be

her last visit, she couldn't help but think back to the time when the staff was falling over themselves to help her. Of course, she had never visited at the end of business on a Friday and hadn't seen how eager everyone was to be done with the work day. Now as she stood alone in a waiting room, she felt just like she did when she inherited the funds in the first place. It wasn't her they were ignoring, it was her grandfather's legacy.

Fall looked at the stack of papers in her hand, representing all the normal activities she missed and years of her life spent at her task, and found it all too short. The public speakers interrupted her thoughts.

“And what good are we if we can't provide even the most basic of care to those who need it most? And how just are we when only those with the funds get adequate care?”

“You can go in.” The assistant inched into the waiting area and seemed all too happy as Fall passed and went into the banker's office.

Paul Merrit and his folded hands looked as if he were about to be challenged to an arm wrestle. In all the years they exchanged currency, Fall realized this was her first visit to his office, and she didn't care to discuss his family pictures now.

“Sorry for the delay,” he began, “if only you came earlier--”

“I didn't have time to come in earlier, and I don't have time now.”

With difficulty, Fall buried the thought of how much money he personally made off her assets.

“Yes, gone are the days when there were lines for doctors, crippling price tags for prescriptions, and the many other obstacles to a happy, healthy life that the average man and woman cannot afford.”

“I have the documents for asset relocation here,” Fall began stacking papers on his desk. “The first are for domestic assets to be put into a trust under this name--”

“We should be able to process this in a few weeks to--”

“This needs to be done now. As in today.”

“I don't see how we could possibly...”

“Get everyone you can in on this,” Fall said as she slid a rectangle of paper towards Mr. Merrit.

“What is this?”

“A substantial check made out to you personally. If you can move all the assets in time, it will be honored.”

Merrit shuffled through the papers. “Asian assets, retirement...is this every account you have? Please tell me you have assets elsewhere.”

Fall didn’t bother to shake her head.

“You realize liquidating your retirement accounts over twenty years before you can touch them carries stiff penalties? Not to mention the viability of your investments.”

“No more children will go to bed hungry or without a proper education and the guarantee of a prosperous future.”

“I’m aware,” she whispered.

“Then why are you doing this?”

“You don’t want to know.”



“Are you done?” Justin’s voice sounded as if it were coming from a stranger.

Behind the red door was a maze of hallways. He was taken down the one marked “Interview” and soon found himself in a small, grey room with tinted glass walls and two patrol men. The older one with a gray moustache had pricked Justin’s finger before he set both feet in the room and now stood to the side. The one whose red arm hair lent the only color in the room gave Justin his full attention. An attempt at courtesy was made when this patrol man made a show of the dull latex gloves he put on before pushing his palms on to Justin.

It now seemed like an eternity had passed since Justin refused their offer to remove his clothes in exchange for a quicker search. He

pushed aside the thought they might purposely be extending their search as payback and noticed the craters his fingernails had imprinted on the mortar in the wall.

“But only by working together can we truly put the bad days behind us. Every citizen must be willing to put aside our differences, misinformation, and hatred so that we can all work as one.”

Justin couldn't sense a stitch of clothing between him and the patrol man. The filmy hands were practically inside him.

Justin closed his eyes in need to remember as little as possible.

He went back to the house he lived in with his parents and sister, although she had moved out years ago. They lived in a fading blue row house which was one of fifty. Its descent was so slow Justin barely felt it. It began with a few tear drops from the ceiling. Justin and his dad were able to fix it before the Efficiency Board noticed it. But not all of the neighbors had been so quick. Every time Justin went up to the roof to look around, the wet spots, missing shingles, and crumbling chimneys had multiplied.

The real trouble began when the back door couldn't be opened or shut without a shoulder pressing into it. It was the foundation, and it couldn't be fixed from their home alone. Justin's dad was liked and had even gathered repair estimates to share with anyone who doubted his motives. But it was all for nothing. While the houses on the edges of the row agreed, the ones in the middle had no foundation troubles and weren't interested in repairs, even though it wouldn't be long before the sag expanded to them.

Justin had never seen his father so defeated. Talk about moving began, but Justin's dad wouldn't sell the problem to another family. He began to save money to pay off the house early and use the former mortgage payment as funds for foundation repair for the whole row. As if sensing a new source to tap, the local assessor raised property values. It was only a percent for the first year, two for the second, then five for the third. And then the Efficiency Board passed new regulations regarding the sale of homes. What Justin had understood is that one of their inspectors would need to assess the

home's efficiency and make citations which would have to be corrected to the new code before any sale. The foundation alone would be expensive enough and repairs would dwarf whatever price they could get for the house. Justin could only watch from the inside as the home he was to inherit unfurled its cracks and sank even deeper into the ground.

"Just tell us what you're hiding, and this stops," the patrol man's voice sounded miles away from his hands.

"I'm not hiding anything."

"Use the wand again," the other patrol man suggested.

The latex hands released him as Justin turned toward the wand without having to be asked. They ran it over his waist and thighs.

"Tell us your story again."

"My name is Justin Winters. I work as an electrician, and I'm here to register like anyone else."

This time Justin held up his finger with the prick mark.

"The results won't come back for a while. So why don't you just tell us what we'll find on it so we can all get out of here?"

"You won't find anything."

"Please," the patrol man with the red arm hair snorted. "Some of your pretty blond hair is going grey and you still live with mommy and daddy? You don't even have an electrician's license."

"Too expensive. And only public contractors are hiring."

"Then you know how to run wires?"

"Yes."

"But it's all wireless now."

"I started running when I was a kid." Justin stared at his palm. "My hands were smaller, and it was easier back then."

"So you don't know anything about wireless power?"

"I know if you have it in your house, someone next door or even down the block can tap into it within minutes."

"That so?"

"Have you noticed your power credits don't stretch as long as they used to? Have you seen your neighbor's homes go black even

when there's a week or two left in the month?"

"How much do you get for pirating power?" the patrol man tapped his fingers over his bicep.

"I don't. If you want to go back to using wires, give me a call."

"A real electrician would know that's against regulations."

"Only on the Inside."

"Take me through your mobile again."

Justin nodded his head even though he didn't want to. "I use it to make calls."

"Tell me about who you're calling."

Justin's fingers shook as the patrol man held up the phone and went through the call records. "This one is a call home, this one is to your sister, but these others..."

"Just friends," Justin felt as if every bit of moisture was being pulled out from inside to drench him on the outside.

"Then why are you so nervous about it?"

"Are any of the people you bring in here not nervous?"

"You'd be surprised," the older one said back evenly as Justin put his trembling hands in his pockets.

"I told you not to do that!" snapped the younger patrol man.

Justin again held his hands up, "you took everything out of my pockets already."

"That doesn't mean --"

"*Dispatch to 4641,*" a voice came from nowhere.

"4641," answered the older patrol man.

"*Another inbound. A biter. Back up requested.*"

"En route." The older patrol man opened the door to the room. "You can go now, Mr. Winters. The results of your registration will be in soon. Would you like to tell us why you're so nervous before you go?"

"I don't know," Justin whispered as his feet went for the open door. A red-haired hand stopped him.

"Don't you want your mobile back?"

Justin didn't so much as brush the man's finger as he took the

device, left the room, and kept his eyes on the exit sign that would lead him out.

A push against a solid slab led him into daylight, a pair of speakers crowned the door.

“I will make it my mission to see that the Act benefits all men, women, children, and families for the better from here on out.”

The vomit came a few breaths later. The truth was he hadn’t done anything wrong. But that would change before the evening was over.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

L. Fabry attended the University of Houston where she was overwhelmed by the talent of her faculty and peers. She now writes about everything from reaction injection molding to sex robots in between indulging her need for creative outlets including novels and screenplays. Find out more at www.lfabry.com

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