

*A fledgling nurse, his late heroic father, demented mother, gold-digging girlfriend, faithful wife, zany kids, and a full cast of other comedians, enjoy halcyon days, even as they lament from afar the ongoing calamities of war, starvation, disease, and oppression.*

## **THE DOWNTOWN FALLUJAH WATER-RATIONING PROTOCOLS**

by Mason Anfanger

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# THE Downtown Fallujah

WATER-RATIONING PROTOCOLS



MASON ANFANGER

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## Chapter 1

They'd been palavering in an 'aviary' setting, as Maria Torciada, elusive nymph who'd taught Toad the meaning of Baudelaire's "Tous ceux qu'il veut aimer..." - as *she'd* intoned, one memorable day. Now, 4 or 5 of them were yapping on some hoity-toity subject or other, when T realized there was a rope swing there! One of the longest, widest-ranging, and scariest he'd ever been on, & pretty soon he was swinging from shore to shore, or one side of the street to another, whatever it was, till he wondered if it'd been such a good idee to even grab it, 'cause he was getting scared of the heights & swings, but he hung on for dear life, & then got to the starting point again, at which point his brother Vince took over & repeated the gig, but then T noticed V was swinging out over *water* & T thought "*why* didn't I notice that?" 'cause then he could've just dropped into the drink – after all, it looked like a resort beach, & then when he was down below *on* that beach, he felt a need (was someone chasing him, like in a spy movie?) to get back up to the original cabana, so he was scurrying over some vendor's wares.

The real impetus was, though, that the cabana was in mourning. Toad & his mom met his brother Judge & J's daughter Vicky at a fastfood place in Nisenia, one of the ones T'd been identifying on a map or phone book. Mom

& T only saw their car at first, going in the opposite direction, so they hailed them, & they both stopped & met in the middle, & then ended up in an enclosed yard, like those condos over by Vince & Pietra's old Pisces Place, where Vince & T used to toss the football during TV-game halftimes. Judge said that Mom & T could stay at their place *tomorrow* night, but they already had guests tonight, so T said "Well Vince & Pietra maybe have place, or maybe (parenthetically) Marny", their sister, thinking as he said it that he might thereby be abandoning his wished-for neutrality in family quarrels.

Stress from domestic strife is maybe best relieved by spending time in Nature. The guitarist was playing alone, to an audience of none, in the Maidu village square, and T thought how strange no one was there to hear him ('cept T), where a few weeks ago, or maybe the last time dude played, there'd been crowds of people, but then he remembered that *that* time there'd been a public execution going on, which had occasioned the, uh, celebration. Into that sunlight now drove a luxuriant hippie van, with huge wheels. As it took a slow lap around the square, he could see that it contained at least 2 chicks, and they were soon talking about an expedition, & T needed to fetch his things & they said hurry up so T headed in one direction & the 2 girls sauntered off in the

## *The Downtown Fallujah*

other. He was glad to be back in the mountains, if only for a visit, so far away from the stench of the city.

He was climbing through oak trees and came to one limb which, though thick, seemed dank and rotten and liable to break. He didn't dare venture out onto it. Across the way, a few people had gathered in a parlor to watch sports on TV. A single black woman in her late 30's – early 40's maybe, was exchanging good-natured cracks with several of the others, from across the room, about some of the players that would be in the game. Later on, back in his own room, he looked out the window to see abundant snow on the ground below – much more, according to the local news, than the resort owners had dreamed of, which had to be good for business, what with all the honeymoon traffic, and T thought of jumping out the window right there, into the drifts, just for fun, except he didn't really know how deep it was, so he held off.

Instead, he started with a few people who were talking about the snowfall, & in particular how it was covering some outdoor furniture there in the corner; and one guy mentioned T's late father, saying "Charlie intended it to look like that", referring to a snow-covered chair, & making it seem (?) that maybe Dad had metamorphosed into the God of Snow – or something greater still? Dad & T had cornered Mr. Cressman, in a friendly way, out by the Indian River bluffs near Gordon

Baker's place, as he pulled up in his old station wagon, in the dark, at nightfall, & Dad said "*General Cressman....*" And then continued in his mock-formal mode to say things about "*Chateaubriand.....Cabernet Sauvignon....*" – a humorous but sincere invitation to a barbeque, and Mr. C said "The 5 of us?" & they agreed, so Toad knew it was going to be Mr & Mrs C., Mom & Dad, & him – steaks & wine on the patio – remembering Rick C, T's buddy at Tongva U, & their other dear departed, and of course the living.

Rick & T had been roommates at Tongva, until T left for Zagreb, where he would be treated almost daily to 3-egg breakfasts with green onions, soft bread, choice of teas, and on and on, by Andja, the lady of the house, a peasant girl from Daruvar. Now, it was like after one of those big doruchaks when he used to cruise down to the corner market (samoposluzhivanye – so much fun to say) for a chocolate bar, except this time he'd ridden past the flat – still a bit like the Sulekova place – but the entrance was blocked by some guy fiddling with his gear, and, admittedly, some of the junk *Toad'd* left standing in the alleyway. Anywho, T just kept going, on his bicycle, down to that grocery shop, where the aisles were so wide he could pedal around inside, still looking for a Kras semisweet, until it seemed for sure the proprietor was going to object, & T was thinking how similar this was to

## *The Downtown Fallujah*

the situation just awhile ago where he drove a BMW motorcycle (colored mustard-yellow; some might say puke- or snot-yellow) up to the marquee box office, where you could dial in (on speed-dial, only one digit) your favorite LA Lakers player, & enjoy some media experience wid' yo' fav'rit balla...

Cool, but not as good as: Her face was right up against his, this little southslavic curica, straight black hair; full, almost puffy face, and she wanted to kiss & caress in the darkening twilight park – T was a little nervous people'd see & take him for Chester, so pretty soon she was leading him toward the street & her home. Along the way, she morphed into Nico Mozarelli, another local urchin, who ended up showing T *his* family home, at a corner near John Holst school, & they went inside to where Nico's parents were sitting at a table – first time T had met Mr. M; & Mrs. M was saying how he'd fixed the chairs to that table – child's play for the master mechanic that he was, and that Nico was to become.

Also cool, as fixing chairs was always a good gig for Toad, too, reminding him of Moliere's and Lope de Vega's fathers, both of them upholsterers, and most of all, of a kinsman in central Illinois who was still cheerfully caning chairs at 95. He, and T, were descendants of the immigrant who came to Philly when George Washington was a newborn, on a boat from the Palatinate. Johann



Caspar probably floated down the Rhine, having gotten on at Karlsruhe, not too very far from where T was now holed up in a hotel, looking out over Kaiserstrasse in Schlappingen to the botanical garden on the other side, where a guy was sitting in a chair. Dude was holding a pistol, and took a shot. He clearly wasn't trying to hit anybody, but he accidentally came close to a woman, who got understandably irate.

She walked over to him and started disassembling his gear, tossing it every which way. At first, T figured dude deserved it, but then it seemed she was going too far, exaggerating it, so he called to her, out the window, to lighten up. She didn't, so T went outside to talk to her. She wouldn't be persuaded, so he came back into the room, where several people were sleeping, to call the cops, but he couldn't find a phone & didn't want to wake up his companions. Then he thought "the day's a-wastin'" – it was sunny outside – so he started trying to gather up his stuff – in plastic & paper bags, which made a lot of noise – and he had all those stacks of loose coins which were heavy, bulky & noisy... Almost as bad as that paper bag full of hot cinders that that Mexican had next to him as he lit up *Toad's* joint & then handed it to him, so that T could take that first, righteous hit, but the cinder bag was (duh!) falling apart & burning up, while the tip of the joint (only about 10%) had fallen off.

## *The Downtown Fallujah*

Dad finally quit smoking in his later years, when the doctors warned him of the likely consequences. And it was just like he was back, standing there at the kitchen stove, chopping things for a salad or stir fry, and T was so happy to see him again that he couldn't stop hugging him & saying "Dad, we've missed you so much, we thought you were gone forever, but here you are back with us, like it's always been...." But alas, Dad had re-entered the Allsoul, as had Leona Kaye, T's middleschool sweetheart, whose best friend at the time, Katrina Hollerman, T comes to find out, has been an item for quite a while now with Carl Ellerman, the class clown from T's days at Nalgas Lindas High. T sits on the edge of the bed with Carl, and Carl says how he & Katrina like to listen to John Lee Hooker, & T says he has the album from Soledad prison if they wanted to listen to it.

Katrina was a beautiful blonde, as was Dolyana ("Dolly") Strichka, the statuesque Ukrainian nurse who lent T her Boney M tapes. She & T had ended up seated & talking together on some dizzying height over the ocean, and his acrophobia was going wild while she calmly talked about Paris – he guessed that she & her husband Dmitrov had been there recently. Just before this, they'd been at a party where T'd been tracing a design on a shirt as a greeting to someone, & Dolly had said "Where do you get those, that shop over in Menage?, referring to a quiet

town by Rumsen Bay. T said yes, & then they'd ended up on that vertiginous perch, where he could look over across the way & see a little yellow house, equally precarious it seemed, as he slid down in his chair and dreaded the final fall, the chute to oblivion, the steep death of the Muses.

Meantime, he could suffer the slower death of yet another theatre groupe, and another bit part, the prima-donnas ignoring him as they strutted their costumes & tuned up lines in anticipation of curtain. The Shakespeare bit had definitely worn thin, the stuff about being a bit actor like dude was, but the behind-the-scenes creator. Thespian egos were more boring now than ever. All the world's a stage, & we all have a shot at a walk-on part in the real Comedy, where now that Goofy swim mask wasn't fitting so tight as T swam submerged in Judge & Freya's private lagoon. He'd noticed that Vicky, their daughter, was also there, moving around underwater in her yellow ballet outfit. Moments before, he'd come down to their semi-indoor pool from up above where they'd been gathered, and Freya, with no clothes on and covering her breasts with her arms, had begun singing. It felt colder to T out in the air than he figured it would be in the pool, so he'd come down & jumped in. He evidently needed the swim, or some kinda stressbuster, because before that, they'd been watching a plane overhead, just a metal cage or casing with 3 engines attached to it, 'near as they could

see, and then it suddenly crashed at T's feet, & he exclaimed "it coulda cut me in half!"

Drone technology was still in its infancy, but plodding scholarship has a longer history. In the high-ceilinged library that reminded him of Salmoneater College in Miwokia or Schlappingen U, T closed his manila folder, because time was up. He hadn't dotted all the i's & crossed all the t's on that exam; he'd even thought some of the questions stupid, and either ignored them or put down mocking responses. But on the whole, he honestly felt he'd done his best, even though it'd probably get graded a C, or low B if he was really lucky. So he took his exam packet over to the female instructor, and asked her where she wanted his key to go, car ignition keys being used as means of identification. She smiled or even chuckled, as if this provision were actually optional. She was conferring with another student & said "Yes, that would be nice", meaning T should just put the key in his packet when he turned it in.

Fortunate are they who can alternate academic exercises with rolls in the hay. Down at the end of the hallway, in that end room, in the barely-lit darkness, Missy the cardiac nurse whose tight white dresses on her voluptuous curvy body, & full vermillion lips & flashy eyes & jetblack hair & offhand smartiness & touching vulnerability & so much more...*she* & T were making

honey, and must've been for some time, 'cause she murmured something like "You may as well finish, already", meaning, he guessed, that she'd already had *her* Vitamin O. It's not always obvious – of course, the screaming, sweating, biting kinds are nice, but sometimes it's more subtle, right? Like when T was practically a virgin, in the front seat of Mom's car at the drive-in, caressing Honey Bush's breasts, to where she seemed like she was seizing, and all T could think of was his middleschool chum who had epilepsy & would sometimes collapse, quivering on the playground. Honey was 18, 2 years older than T and already multiorgasmic. But even though she giggled, and sighed, kissed him again & again, breathing that she was fine fine, he, in his cluelessness, was still afraid for her, that she might be epileptic.

Honey was a cheerleader, which of course made T wannabe a football hero. Oh well. They were out in one of those wide-open parks in Nisenia, & T'd been trying to catch some passes that a black dude'd been throwing him, but dude was always leading T too much, or T wasn't fast enough, whatever, so that Vince joked "Toad, you're too fast for a white boy, and too slow for a black..." Sports being such an iffy career alternative, he figured the healing profession would be safer. He'd taken his break from work after doing just a few things – only assessed one patient, it seemed, but there he was at a concrete

## *The Downtown Fallujah*

street-side table, having a snack, when he noticed a gun under a newspaper – an old pistol - but it looked like it was still in working order, and the newspaper was in Arabic, so he hesitated only a moment (debating: petty theft or counter-terrorism?) before seizing it.

He walked to his car, parked a few yards away, got in, drove off into the darkness, but then, thinking *he* may've left something behind at that table, doubled back, making an illegal turn (looked back - no traffic, no cops, no problem), but then his objective changed – he had to get his car fixed. So he pulled up to a Nisenian garage, partly outdoor. It was 7 or 8 at night, and he had to wait for the customers ahead of him – there were Latinos with fancy rides that were all jacked up – nice paint jobs, but they looked like they'd been in a wreck. One was still on fire, and the mechanic (doubling as a narc?) said to the owner: "You've got some expensive stuff burning in there." T thought: "does he mean cocaine?"

Anyway, the old man – the senior service writer – finally got around to Toad, and by then T had his story down to its laconic essentials – i.e. exactly what was wrong with his rig, when he could get back to pick it up, etc. So dude handed T the repair order to sign, and he couldn't make out/understand what dude had written, especially as it was superimposed on his *previous* order, from the last time he'd been there, but he figured it was

OK, so he signed & they arranged the pick-up: T said he wouldn't be done with work till late (still worrying that he was way over his break time). So dude started circling, in pencil, a parking spot on a map which belonged to an adjacent, multi-level parking lot, meaning dude was going to leave T's car in that spot when the mechanics were done with it. Then the question was: how would T get to it after hours?

There was a group of young matrons standing by, also seeming to be customers, and one of them suggested that the entrance to the lot was from the side street (this being about 13<sup>th</sup> St. between G & H in Nisenia, where the old radiator shop used to be). As she was showing this to them, she almost fell from the roof where they were standing to a yard below, but Toad grabbed her by the arm, firmly but affectionately, saying "Be careful now, dear, ", or something similar, yeronner. So his business there was pretty much done. The service writer – or was it one of the mechanics? – had come to resemble – or be – Blowdry Fridge, the anti-Semitic Aussie thespian, as T took his leave on foot, walking around the building and uphill to the left – now it seemed more like afternoon – a warm Nisenia daytime where of course there were sprinklers going, and he got a little damp, maneuvering on the narrow sidewalk, going uphill and suddenly (or gradually?) finding himself in an interior living space, and up against a

bamboo/rattan façade where he raised a window to see his sometime squeeze, Soldiana (“Soldi”) Persempre, the Venetian cortigiana, talking with another woman. T said hello, but was anxious to get going – how long had he been on break from work? It seemed like hours, so Soldi & T took their leave & jammed.

Somehow he got through that shift without getting fired, & on his next day off, he could just sit there on the floor of a corral, with time & equanimity to wash his feet well, listening to “You Make Lovin’ Fun”, & reminisce on summers past. Soft yellow light, like the rarefied air of upper Maidu country – awhile ago there’d been visitors – a man & his 2 or 3 daughters had left their bicycles against nearby trees & gone walking. T’d heard him telling them that he’d lived here 29 years ago, and was glad to be back, if only for a visit. Before that, T’d remembered his own horse, & how he hadn’t ridden her in awhile – he felt guilty of neglecting a friend, and had decided to spend the afternoon with her.

Toad had gotten introduced to those mountains through a friend of Dad’s, Larry Irvine, CIA station chief in Nisenia for years before retiring up there, where he enjoyed a dozen years of peace and quiet before dying of hemosiderosis. Dad had done a little better longevity-wise, due in part to Dr. Vanetta, the surgeon who cleaned an infection out of his gut, born of a burst appendix that’d



festered a good long while under the ‘care’ of a quack named Dr Nutcase. Now, T was in Dr. V’s office, the waiting room, & there were Dr’s secretary & a few other patients, but T’s appointment was next, was supposed to be now, & so he asked the secretary “is he on time today?” & then doc showed his face, punctual as ever, and asked T what was wrong, & for a moment T was tongue-tied, thinking “What really *is* wrong?” & then relating the old hypochondriac story about LUQ (left upper quadrant of the abdomen) pain, but of course it’s been CT’d, so what did T expect *him* to do about it? That afternoon, they were shooting hoops in the gym when Dr. V said “You’re a prima donna” & T *did* feel a little wimpy, as he drained a few jumpers from the key.

The amateur ballplayer soon got an opportunity to watch the pros do their thing, as T came into a gym, & it seemed like maybe after the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of a game or so, ‘cause they weren’t collecting money anymore. It looked to be an exhibition featuring the Lakers, and there were courtside seats – Mr. O’Forgeron, his old coach from Nalgas Lindas High was there – so T sauntered in nonchalantly, circled the court – it was a timeout or some other break in the action – and found a courtside seat. It was still pre-season, late summertime, and he’d been living, as usual, down by Indian River, arranging his few items of goodwill clothing in fine morningtimes, prior to

## *The Downtown Fallujah*

stowing them in the brown, desiccated weeds & starting out on the daily stroll.

Life was easy – he'd been lucky – and it only seemed a little ironic that the main author of his comfortable youth would be his most feared critic. He was trying to avoid Dad's sight-lines – Father was in his study, or office, or workshop, and when, or if, he came out, T didn't want to be spotted, and perhaps be chidden, again, for laziness, as he was wanting to take a nap in the shed between Dad's office and the main house. This property, on Ocaso Blvd in Maiduville, had belonged to a stockbroker whose teenage daughters once gave T the most inappropriate hots. So he made a round, surveying the sightlines, and prepared to close door & window of the shed, but while he'd been in the main house, he'd found a joint & lit it up, smoked it down to a respectable roach, and ended up with the butt in one hand & used match in the other, opening the window to air out the room while closing the door behind him. Should he leave the light/fan on? yes? no? He still didn't want to make waves with Dad, & had an appointment to do some yard work over in Patwin – he'd been wheeling a rototiller through Friday afternoon traffic in downtown Nisenia – but now, stoned again, he was blowing that afternoon of honest, low-pay labor off, in favor of quiet, arcane scholarship.

Either alternative would've been better than his next foray into the Healing Arts. He knew he never should've taken a blood specimen from that guy's scrotum, but dude indicated the spot, so T went ahead, thinking, as the needle went in, that this was a lousy source of blood anyway, but lo & behold, he drew out 10cc easily – too easily, because when he pulled out the needle & covered the site with gauze, a bunch of gauze pads were immediately soaked with blood & he asked his assistant to please get more ASAP, as he applied direct pressure, figuring his name was now spelled M-U-D. The road to hell was paved with good, or at least harmless intentions, like the time he really didn't want to have to wing that thug, but dude & his buddies had pretty much invaded T's space, & seemed intent on intimidation, if not great bodily harm, so when T felt the gun in his hand, he gave dude fair warning before blasting him in the right shoulder. That changed the tune a little, but he had to get some other chump in the leg before they started clearing out. He urged the rest of them to get their buddies to the ER. Again, recalcitrance. But they finally split, & T was left gazing into the dark, which could've been the south side of Arcoiris Ave, east of Yosemite Street in Nisenia; but as he circled around his apartment building, which was in Rumsen Bay Village now, someone was in his parking space.

## *The Downtown Fallujah*

Oh yeah – he'd had to park in the street, - came around toward the mailboxes, & the "Two Girls from Ichxenta" housecleaners were in his place, spreading out their gear & getting ready to do a job on his bungalow, so he asked them, imitating a slick-haired gangster in an old movie, "Who sent you?", but they were evasive, as they set to work, having stripped down to bras & panties. T was interested, but got drawn to the party scene down in the yard where the swimming pool used to be. He was sitting with a few people, one of them a fat dude, & when the equally obese waiter came over to ask him to name his poison, dude ordered (surprise) some kind of beer.

Not that beer is always fattening – Ricky Argentina, T's highschool classmate, drank it like a fish and was skinny his whole life. Dude's way with girls was legendary, like the time he & Cheri Glen, cute, petite, and barely thirteen, were making honey in her bedroom when daddy came in, golf club in upraised & threatening hand, obliging Ricky to exit naked out the bathroom window, where the dropoff was high enough to at least sprain his foot so he had to limp home as best he could. That landing spot was now a choice piece of real estate, out behind the Argentinas' old place, up on a promontory – T was even going into raptures talking to Marny about it – how you could look right down the alley and see downtown Nisenia, which seemed just a short walk away. Awhile

earlier, they'd been at a gathering there, and when it broke up, some Latino guys were saying how the neighborhood looked like parts of San Jose, modelled however, in T's mind, on the neatly painted streets of Greenfield. He was ready to try to chime in something about Ramaytush, but then this one dude was talking provocatively to T's younger brother Vince, and T wondered was he going to have to bust dude in the chops a la 'Hud', but peacemaking came out of T's mouth, naturally, as dude didn't look that tough, saying 'hey, this was just a friendly get-together, why this?', & so on, so they split.

On what must by now be called Cheri's Playground, Vince & T were driving a mini-car along the narrow alleys, & they actually had to *enter* a house, drive in its hallways, and exit carefully out the back door to arrive at their supposed destination. When they got there, they met somebody Vince knew, who was all dressed up & had a couple of books in hand. He said he was going to a meeting, 'all federal agents', as he went out the gate. Dude resembled another guy who'd been in that bar with them, but meanwhile T had to get his car out of storage – they'd put it in a used car lot out on the boulevard, so T & this guy went out to get it, but then dude had to leave, so there was T, looking at the 2 books – one of them had to do with art – so he was thinking this might be a good time

to find a bathroom & take a crap. Cheri's Playground now encompassed Nisenia City College, the elevator shaft of Mutsun Teaching Hospital, where a guy's books resembled the used pharmacology tomes T had used years earlier. Her dominions extended down to the wide boulevards of south Nisenia, but her original fonts, in the old neighborhood behind Argentina's house – cool – with little cobblestone alleyways, like Schlappingen's, looking out on Old Nisenia, with Maiduville as close as ever.

May every princess have her castle, and be loved by as cool a guy as Ricky Argentina. Not so lucky in love, Toad fell into the working flunky mode. Damn, he hated it when this happened – he was emptying a urine catheter which had several ports and was almost overflowing, so he was balancing it gingerly as he tried to empty it, & one of the tubes flipped up, spraying him on his uniform, *in his face*, and soaking his worksheet. Shit. So he finished draining it, set his worksheet out to dry – all his notes were on it, so he was going to need it to chart. He didn't remember washing his face, as he went out front for awhile to wait for the worksheet to dry. It was a high-ceilinged place, canopied or with lots of skylights, a translucent ceiling, but cavernous like an airplane hangar. He started gossiping with 3 co-workers, & they were giving him the breathless low-down on something or other – he spent quite a few

minutes there, until a passer-by or his own internal clock reminded him/them that it was time to get back to work.

T headed back, encountering a shortish, dark-haired, street-clothed guy who looked like their new manager – T didn't say hi, just tried to look diligent as he strode along. He saw Massimo, an old colleague from the lab at Ghetto Caesar, plating bacteriology specimens at his bench, and some others at their tasks, before getting back to his poor, partly-dried worksheet. Later, he was at Manny Grange's bedside, draining a simpler device, as Manny asked about Herrmann Kurlz, T's teenage buddy, & others, wondering how they were doing & so on. Dude said something about them being gifted, talented...this from one who was very much so himself, Manny Grange, the two-sport pro athlete, suave gentleman & fierce competitor.

Or, as one cabin-dweller put it, dude relished both his civilized & savage instincts. Here's to it, gents, but T's present problem, as *he* slipped out of a cabin, was to take that palette off the train, a few cars back. He must've needed it for something; and then *imagined* or *changed the story*, to where none of his belongings would've stayed with the train as it moved onward. Few and simple as they were, he was hoping to keep them in a safer place than that hotel where the opposing, armed factions & militias were milling about & assembling, and it seemed imminent that the spark was going to be lit and the bullets

## *The Downtown Fallujah*

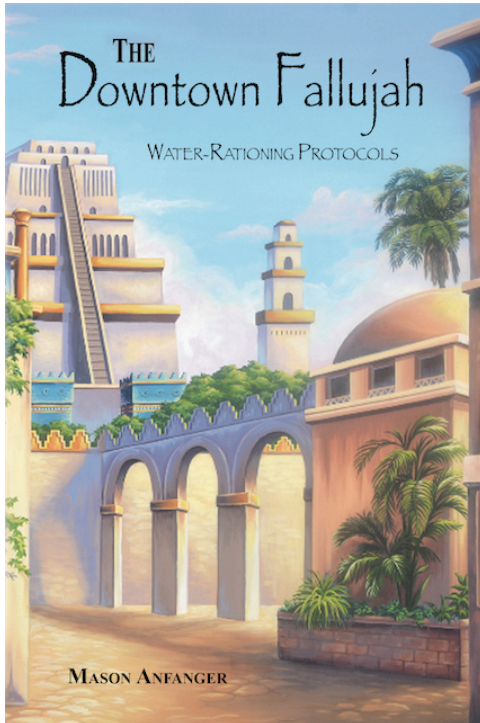
were going to fly, and that any poor unarmed non-combatants were going to perish in the crossfire.

So they herded themselves as much as possible to their respective rooms, hoping that there they might be safe. T waited until most or all of them were so sequestered, & then took a chance, went outside, down a staircase, trying to avoid the expected sniper sight-lines, and down into a convenience store where he wanted to (probably) get some milk & chocolate, since he figured to be holed up for an indeterminate time. When the siege *was* finally lifted, before he had to leave his room, with all the clutter & mess, he was trying to conceal any clues that he had anything valuable or contraband. Easily done, mate, because all he had on him was something that came in handy because it was really getting boring waiting around in that library, for whatever was going to happen, when he remembered he had the Frisbee on him, not a big one, but enough to toss around, so he flipped it to one of his compañeros, & he/she flipped it back, & then they decided 'better go outside with this', so they went along a bookcase, & T gave it a long toss to where it seemed to disappear into a side-room, but a secretary fished it out, or one similar, and they proceeded down a gangway, came to a door where T's partner, Gayle Sumners, the P.E. teacher's athletic, blooming, precocious daughter, almost got pinned behind it as she politely let some people who



were coming in the opposite direction pass, nimbly evading any trouble, seeming almost to pass through the crack where the hinges are (how'd she do that?) and then they were out in the yard.

There was even a cool basketball court where some guys were playing 3 on 3, at least one of them calvando, as Latinos might say, so T figured he might fit in, but now a guy started tossing him the Frisbee. Dude was good – straight as an arrow, and right at T every time, but T sucked – tried a couple of different methods, but couldn't get it to fly straight – out of practice – and the shape of the Frisbee itself was changing – not enough so that it would be an excuse, but it got bigger, then wider, then flimsier...



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# THE Downtown Fallujah

WATER-RATIONING PROTOCOLS



MASON ANFANGER

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## Chapter 1

They'd been palavering in an 'aviary' setting, as Maria Torciada, elusive nymph who'd taught Toad the meaning of Baudelaire's "Tous ceux qu'il veut aimer..." - as *she'd* intoned, one memorable day. Now, 4 or 5 of them were yapping on some hoity-toity subject or other, when T realized there was a rope swing there! One of the longest, widest-ranging, and scariest he'd ever been on, & pretty soon he was swinging from shore to shore, or one side of the street to another, whatever it was, till he wondered if it'd been such a good idee to even grab it, 'cause he was getting scared of the heights & swings, but he hung on for dear life, & then got to the starting point again, at which point his brother Vince took over & repeated the gig, but then T noticed V was swinging out over *water* & T thought "*why* didn't I notice that?" 'cause then he could've just dropped into the drink – after all, it looked like a resort beach, & then when he was down below *on* that beach, he felt a need (was someone chasing him, like in a spy movie?) to get back up to the original cabana, so he was scurrying over some vendor's wares.

The real impetus was, though, that the cabana was in mourning. Toad & his mom met his brother Judge & J's daughter Vicky at a fastfood place in Nisenia, one of the ones T'd been identifying on a map or phone book. Mom

& T only saw their car at first, going in the opposite direction, so they hailed them, & they both stopped & met in the middle, & then ended up in an enclosed yard, like those condos over by Vince & Pietra's old Pisces Place, where Vince & T used to toss the football during TV-game halftimes. Judge said that Mom & T could stay at their place *tomorrow* night, but they already had guests tonight, so T said "Well Vince & Pietra maybe have place, or maybe (parenthetically) Marny", their sister, thinking as he said it that he might thereby be abandoning his wished-for neutrality in family quarrels.

Stress from domestic strife is maybe best relieved by spending time in Nature. The guitarist was playing alone, to an audience of none, in the Maidu village square, and T thought how strange no one was there to hear him ('cept T), where a few weeks ago, or maybe the last time dude played, there'd been crowds of people, but then he remembered that *that* time there'd been a public execution going on, which had occasioned the, uh, celebration. Into that sunlight now drove a luxuriant hippie van, with huge wheels. As it took a slow lap around the square, he could see that it contained at least 2 chicks, and they were soon talking about an expedition, & T needed to fetch his things & they said hurry up so T headed in one direction & the 2 girls sauntered off in the

## *The Downtown Fallujah*

other. He was glad to be back in the mountains, if only for a visit, so far away from the stench of the city.

He was climbing through oak trees and came to one limb which, though thick, seemed dank and rotten and liable to break. He didn't dare venture out onto it. Across the way, a few people had gathered in a parlor to watch sports on TV. A single black woman in her late 30's – early 40's maybe, was exchanging good-natured cracks with several of the others, from across the room, about some of the players that would be in the game. Later on, back in his own room, he looked out the window to see abundant snow on the ground below – much more, according to the local news, than the resort owners had dreamed of, which had to be good for business, what with all the honeymoon traffic, and T thought of jumping out the window right there, into the drifts, just for fun, except he didn't really know how deep it was, so he held off.

Instead, he started with a few people who were talking about the snowfall, & in particular how it was covering some outdoor furniture there in the corner; and one guy mentioned T's late father, saying "Charlie intended it to look like that", referring to a snow-covered chair, & making it seem (?) that maybe Dad had metamorphosed into the God of Snow – or something greater still? Dad & T had cornered Mr. Cressman, in a friendly way, out by the Indian River bluffs near Gordon

Baker's place, as he pulled up in his old station wagon, in the dark, at nightfall, & Dad said "*General Cressman....*" And then continued in his mock-formal mode to say things about "*Chateaubriand.....Cabernet Sauvignon....*" – a humorous but sincere invitation to a barbeque, and Mr. C said "The 5 of us?" & they agreed, so Toad knew it was going to be Mr & Mrs C., Mom & Dad, & him – steaks & wine on the patio – remembering Rick C, T's buddy at Tongva U, & their other dear departed, and of course the living.

Rick & T had been roommates at Tongva, until T left for Zagreb, where he would be treated almost daily to 3-egg breakfasts with green onions, soft bread, choice of teas, and on and on, by Andja, the lady of the house, a peasant girl from Daruvar. Now, it was like after one of those big doruchaks when he used to cruise down to the corner market (samoposluzhivanye – so much fun to say) for a chocolate bar, except this time he'd ridden past the flat – still a bit like the Sulekova place – but the entrance was blocked by some guy fiddling with his gear, and, admittedly, some of the junk *Toad'd* left standing in the alleyway. Anywho, T just kept going, on his bicycle, down to that grocery shop, where the aisles were so wide he could pedal around inside, still looking for a Kras semisweet, until it seemed for sure the proprietor was going to object, & T was thinking how similar this was to



## *The Downtown Fallujah*

the situation just awhile ago where he drove a BMW motorcycle (colored mustard-yellow; some might say puke- or snot-yellow) up to the marquee box office, where you could dial in (on speed-dial, only one digit) your favorite LA Lakers player, & enjoy some media experience wid' yo' fav'rit balla...

Cool, but not as good as: Her face was right up against his, this little southslavic curica, straight black hair; full, almost puffy face, and she wanted to kiss & caress in the darkening twilight park – T was a little nervous people'd see & take him for Chester, so pretty soon she was leading him toward the street & her home. Along the way, she morphed into Nico Mozarelli, another local urchin, who ended up showing T *his* family home, at a corner near John Holst school, & they went inside to where Nico's parents were sitting at a table – first time T had met Mr. M; & Mrs. M was saying how he'd fixed the chairs to that table – child's play for the master mechanic that he was, and that Nico was to become.

Also cool, as fixing chairs was always a good gig for Toad, too, reminding him of Moliere's and Lope de Vega's fathers, both of them upholsterers, and most of all, of a kinsman in central Illinois who was still cheerfully caning chairs at 95. He, and T, were descendants of the immigrant who came to Philly when George Washington was a newborn, on a boat from the Palatinate. Johann

Caspar probably floated down the Rhine, having gotten on at Karlsruhe, not too very far from where T was now holed up in a hotel, looking out over Kaiserstrasse in Schlappingen to the botanical garden on the other side, where a guy was sitting in a chair. Dude was holding a pistol, and took a shot. He clearly wasn't trying to hit anybody, but he accidentally came close to a woman, who got understandably irate.

She walked over to him and started disassembling his gear, tossing it every which way. At first, T figured dude deserved it, but then it seemed she was going too far, exaggerating it, so he called to her, out the window, to lighten up. She didn't, so T went outside to talk to her. She wouldn't be persuaded, so he came back into the room, where several people were sleeping, to call the cops, but he couldn't find a phone & didn't want to wake up his companions. Then he thought "the day's a-wastin'" – it was sunny outside – so he started trying to gather up his stuff – in plastic & paper bags, which made a lot of noise – and he had all those stacks of loose coins which were heavy, bulky & noisy... Almost as bad as that paper bag full of hot cinders that that Mexican had next to him as he lit up *Toad's* joint & then handed it to him, so that T could take that first, righteous hit, but the cinder bag was (duh!) falling apart & burning up, while the tip of the joint (only about 10%) had fallen off.

## *The Downtown Fallujah*

Dad finally quit smoking in his later years, when the doctors warned him of the likely consequences. And it was just like he was back, standing there at the kitchen stove, chopping things for a salad or stir fry, and T was so happy to see him again that he couldn't stop hugging him & saying "Dad, we've missed you so much, we thought you were gone forever, but here you are back with us, like it's always been...." But alas, Dad had re-entered the Allsoul, as had Leona Kaye, T's middleschool sweetheart, whose best friend at the time, Katrina Hollerman, T comes to find out, has been an item for quite a while now with Carl Ellerman, the class clown from T's days at Nalgas Lindas High. T sits on the edge of the bed with Carl, and Carl says how he & Katrina like to listen to John Lee Hooker, & T says he has the album from Soledad prison if they wanted to listen to it.

Katrina was a beautiful blonde, as was Dolya ("Dolly") Strichka, the statuesque Ukrainian nurse who lent T her Boney M tapes. She & T had ended up seated & talking together on some dizzying height over the ocean, and his acrophobia was going wild while she calmly talked about Paris – he guessed that she & her husband Dmitrov had been there recently. Just before this, they'd been at a party where T'd been tracing a design on a shirt as a greeting to someone, & Dolly had said "Where do you get those, that shop over in Menage?, referring to a quiet

town by Rumsen Bay. T said yes, & then they'd ended up on that vertiginous perch, where he could look over across the way & see a little yellow house, equally precarious it seemed, as he slid down in his chair and dreaded the final fall, the chute to oblivion, the steep death of the Muses.

Meantime, he could suffer the slower death of yet another theatre groupe, and another bit part, the prima-donnas ignoring him as they strutted their costumes & tuned up lines in anticipation of curtain. The Shakespeare bit had definitely worn thin, the stuff about being a bit actor like dude was, but the behind-the-scenes creator. Thespian egos were more boring now than ever. All the world's a stage, & we all have a shot at a walk-on part in the real Comedy, where now that Goofy swim mask wasn't fitting so tight as T swam submerged in Judge & Freya's private lagoon. He'd noticed that Vicky, their daughter, was also there, moving around underwater in her yellow ballet outfit. Moments before, he'd come down to their semi-indoor pool from up above where they'd been gathered, and Freya, with no clothes on and covering her breasts with her arms, had begun singing. It felt colder to T out in the air than he figured it would be in the pool, so he'd come down & jumped in. He evidently needed the swim, or some kinda stressbuster, because before that, they'd been watching a plane overhead, just a metal cage or casing with 3 engines attached to it, 'near as they could

see, and then it suddenly crashed at T's feet, & he exclaimed "it coulda cut me in half!"

Drone technology was still in its infancy, but plodding scholarship has a longer history. In the high-ceilinged library that reminded him of Salmoneater College in Miwokia or Schlappingen U, T closed his manila folder, because time was up. He hadn't dotted all the i's & crossed all the t's on that exam; he'd even thought some of the questions stupid, and either ignored them or put down mocking responses. But on the whole, he honestly felt he'd done his best, even though it'd probably get graded a C, or low B if he was really lucky. So he took his exam packet over to the female instructor, and asked her where she wanted his key to go, car ignition keys being used as means of identification. She smiled or even chuckled, as if this provision were actually optional. She was conferring with another student & said "Yes, that would be nice", meaning T should just put the key in his packet when he turned it in.

Fortunate are they who can alternate academic exercises with rolls in the hay. Down at the end of the hallway, in that end room, in the barely-lit darkness, Missy the cardiac nurse whose tight white dresses on her voluptuous curvy body, & full vermillion lips & flashy eyes & jetblack hair & offhand smartiness & touching vulnerability & so much more...*she* & T were making

honey, and must've been for some time, 'cause she murmured something like "You may as well finish, already", meaning, he guessed, that she'd already had *her* Vitamin O. It's not always obvious – of course, the screaming, sweating, biting kinds are nice, but sometimes it's more subtle, right? Like when T was practically a virgin, in the front seat of Mom's car at the drive-in, caressing Honey Bush's breasts, to where she seemed like she was seizing, and all T could think of was his middleschool chum who had epilepsy & would sometimes collapse, quivering on the playground. Honey was 18, 2 years older than T and already multiorgasmic. But even though she giggled, and sighed, kissed him again & again, breathing that she was fine fine, he, in his cluelessness, was still afraid for her, that she might be epileptic.

Honey was a cheerleader, which of course made T wannabe a football hero. Oh well. They were out in one of those wide-open parks in Nisenia, & T'd been trying to catch some passes that a black dude'd been throwing him, but dude was always leading T too much, or T wasn't fast enough, whatever, so that Vince joked "Toad, you're too fast for a white boy, and too slow for a black..." Sports being such an iffy career alternative, he figured the healing profession would be safer. He'd taken his break from work after doing just a few things – only assessed one patient, it seemed, but there he was at a concrete

## *The Downtown Fallujah*

street-side table, having a snack, when he noticed a gun under a newspaper – an old pistol - but it looked like it was still in working order, and the newspaper was in Arabic, so he hesitated only a moment (debating: petty theft or counter-terrorism?) before seizing it.

He walked to his car, parked a few yards away, got in, drove off into the darkness, but then, thinking *he* may've left something behind at that table, doubled back, making an illegal turn (looked back - no traffic, no cops, no problem), but then his objective changed – he had to get his car fixed. So he pulled up to a Nisenian garage, partly outdoor. It was 7 or 8 at night, and he had to wait for the customers ahead of him – there were Latinos with fancy rides that were all jacked up – nice paint jobs, but they looked like they'd been in a wreck. One was still on fire, and the mechanic (doubling as a narc?) said to the owner: "You've got some expensive stuff burning in there." T thought: "does he mean cocaine?"

Anyway, the old man – the senior service writer – finally got around to Toad, and by then T had his story down to its laconic essentials – i.e. exactly what was wrong with his rig, when he could get back to pick it up, etc. So dude handed T the repair order to sign, and he couldn't make out/understand what dude had written, especially as it was superimposed on his *previous* order, from the last time he'd been there, but he figured it was

OK, so he signed & they arranged the pick-up: T said he wouldn't be done with work till late (still worrying that he was way over his break time). So dude started circling, in pencil, a parking spot on a map which belonged to an adjacent, multi-level parking lot, meaning dude was going to leave T's car in that spot when the mechanics were done with it. Then the question was: how would T get to it after hours?

There was a group of young matrons standing by, also seeming to be customers, and one of them suggested that the entrance to the lot was from the side street (this being about 13<sup>th</sup> St. between G & H in Nisenia, where the old radiator shop used to be). As she was showing this to them, she almost fell from the roof where they were standing to a yard below, but Toad grabbed her by the arm, firmly but affectionately, saying "Be careful now, dear, ", or something similar, yeronner. So his business there was pretty much done. The service writer – or was it one of the mechanics? – had come to resemble – or be – Blowdry Fridge, the anti-Semitic Aussie thespian, as T took his leave on foot, walking around the building and uphill to the left – now it seemed more like afternoon – a warm Nisenia daytime where of course there were sprinklers going, and he got a little damp, maneuvering on the narrow sidewalk, going uphill and suddenly (or gradually?) finding himself in an interior living space, and up against a



bamboo/rattan façade where he raised a window to see his sometime squeeze, Soldiana (“Soldi”) Persempre, the Venetian cortigiana, talking with another woman. T said hello, but was anxious to get going – how long had he been on break from work? It seemed like hours, so Soldi & T took their leave & jammed.

Somehow he got through that shift without getting fired, & on his next day off, he could just sit there on the floor of a corral, with time & equanimity to wash his feet well, listening to “You Make Lovin’ Fun”, & reminisce on summers past. Soft yellow light, like the rarefied air of upper Maidu country – awhile ago there’d been visitors – a man & his 2 or 3 daughters had left their bicycles against nearby trees & gone walking. T’d heard him telling them that he’d lived here 29 years ago, and was glad to be back, if only for a visit. Before that, T’d remembered his own horse, & how he hadn’t ridden her in awhile – he felt guilty of neglecting a friend, and had decided to spend the afternoon with her.

Toad had gotten introduced to those mountains through a friend of Dad’s, Larry Irvine, CIA station chief in Nisenia for years before retiring up there, where he enjoyed a dozen years of peace and quiet before dying of hemosiderosis. Dad had done a little better longevity-wise, due in part to Dr. Vanetta, the surgeon who cleaned an infection out of his gut, born of a burst appendix that’d

festered a good long while under the ‘care’ of a quack named Dr Nutcase. Now, T was in Dr. V’s office, the waiting room, & there were Dr’s secretary & a few other patients, but T’s appointment was next, was supposed to be now, & so he asked the secretary “is he on time today?” & then doc showed his face, punctual as ever, and asked T what was wrong, & for a moment T was tongue-tied, thinking “What really *is* wrong?” & then relating the old hypochondriac story about LUQ (left upper quadrant of the abdomen) pain, but of course it’s been CT’d, so what did T expect *him* to do about it? That afternoon, they were shooting hoops in the gym when Dr. V said “You’re a prima donna” & T *did* feel a little wimpy, as he drained a few jumpers from the key.

The amateur ballplayer soon got an opportunity to watch the pros do their thing, as T came into a gym, & it seemed like maybe after the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of a game or so, ‘cause they weren’t collecting money anymore. It looked to be an exhibition featuring the Lakers, and there were courtside seats – Mr. O’Forgeron, his old coach from Nalgas Lindas High was there – so T sauntered in nonchalantly, circled the court – it was a timeout or some other break in the action – and found a courtside seat. It was still pre-season, late summertime, and he’d been living, as usual, down by Indian River, arranging his few items of goodwill clothing in fine morningtimes, prior to

## *The Downtown Fallujah*

stowing them in the brown, desiccated weeds & starting out on the daily stroll.

Life was easy – he'd been lucky – and it only seemed a little ironic that the main author of his comfortable youth would be his most feared critic. He was trying to avoid Dad's sight-lines – Father was in his study, or office, or workshop, and when, or if, he came out, T didn't want to be spotted, and perhaps be chidden, again, for laziness, as he was wanting to take a nap in the shed between Dad's office and the main house. This property, on Ocaso Blvd in Maiduville, had belonged to a stockbroker whose teenage daughters once gave T the most inappropriate hots. So he made a round, surveying the sightlines, and prepared to close door & window of the shed, but while he'd been in the main house, he'd found a joint & lit it up, smoked it down to a respectable roach, and ended up with the butt in one hand & used match in the other, opening the window to air out the room while closing the door behind him. Should he leave the light/fan on? yes? no? He still didn't want to make waves with Dad, & had an appointment to do some yard work over in Patwin – he'd been wheeling a rototiller through Friday afternoon traffic in downtown Nisenia – but now, stoned again, he was blowing that afternoon of honest, low-pay labor off, in favor of quiet, arcane scholarship.

Either alternative would've been better than his next foray into the Healing Arts. He knew he never should've taken a blood specimen from that guy's scrotum, but dude indicated the spot, so T went ahead, thinking, as the needle went in, that this was a lousy source of blood anyway, but lo & behold, he drew out 10cc easily – too easily, because when he pulled out the needle & covered the site with gauze, a bunch of gauze pads were immediately soaked with blood & he asked his assistant to please get more ASAP, as he applied direct pressure, figuring his name was now spelled M-U-D. The road to hell was paved with good, or at least harmless intentions, like the time he really didn't want to have to wing that thug, but dude & his buddies had pretty much invaded T's space, & seemed intent on intimidation, if not great bodily harm, so when T felt the gun in his hand, he gave dude fair warning before blasting him in the right shoulder. That changed the tune a little, but he had to get some other chump in the leg before they started clearing out. He urged the rest of them to get their buddies to the ER. Again, recalcitrance. But they finally split, & T was left gazing into the dark, which could've been the south side of Arcoiris Ave, east of Yosemite Street in Nisenia; but as he circled around his apartment building, which was in Rumsen Bay Village now, someone was in his parking space.

## *The Downtown Fallujah*

Oh yeah – he'd had to park in the street, - came around toward the mailboxes, & the "Two Girls from Ichxenta" housecleaners were in his place, spreading out their gear & getting ready to do a job on his bungalow, so he asked them, imitating a slick-haired gangster in an old movie, "Who sent you?", but they were evasive, as they set to work, having stripped down to bras & panties. T was interested, but got drawn to the party scene down in the yard where the swimming pool used to be. He was sitting with a few people, one of them a fat dude, & when the equally obese waiter came over to ask him to name his poison, dude ordered (surprise) some kind of beer.

Not that beer is always fattening – Ricky Argentina, T's highschool classmate, drank it like a fish and was skinny his whole life. Dude's way with girls was legendary, like the time he & Cheri Glen, cute, petite, and barely thirteen, were making honey in her bedroom when daddy came in, golf club in upraised & threatening hand, obliging Ricky to exit naked out the bathroom window, where the dropoff was high enough to at least sprain his foot so he had to limp home as best he could. That landing spot was now a choice piece of real estate, out behind the Argentinas' old place, up on a promontory – T was even going into raptures talking to Marny about it – how you could look right down the alley and see downtown Nisenia, which seemed just a short walk away. Awhile

earlier, they'd been at a gathering there, and when it broke up, some Latino guys were saying how the neighborhood looked like parts of San Jose, modelled however, in T's mind, on the neatly painted streets of Greenfield. He was ready to try to chime in something about Ramaytush, but then this one dude was talking provocatively to T's younger brother Vince, and T wondered was he going to have to bust dude in the chops a la 'Hud', but peacemaking came out of T's mouth, naturally, as dude didn't look that tough, saying 'hey, this was just a friendly get-together, why this?', & so on, so they split.

On what must by now be called Cheri's Playground, Vince & T were driving a mini-car along the narrow alleys, & they actually had to *enter* a house, drive in its hallways, and exit carefully out the back door to arrive at their supposed destination. When they got there, they met somebody Vince knew, who was all dressed up & had a couple of books in hand. He said he was going to a meeting, 'all federal agents', as he went out the gate. Dude resembled another guy who'd been in that bar with them, but meanwhile T had to get his car out of storage – they'd put it in a used car lot out on the boulevard, so T & this guy went out to get it, but then dude had to leave, so there was T, looking at the 2 books – one of them had to do with art – so he was thinking this might be a good time

to find a bathroom & take a crap. Cheri's Playground now encompassed Nisenia City College, the elevator shaft of Mutsun Teaching Hospital, where a guy's books resembled the used pharmacology tomes T had used years earlier. Her dominions extended down to the wide boulevards of south Nisenia, but her original fonts, in the old neighborhood behind Argentina's house – cool – with little cobblestone alleyways, like Schlappingen's, looking out on Old Nisenia, with Maiduville as close as ever.

May every princess have her castle, and be loved by as cool a guy as Ricky Argentina. Not so lucky in love, Toad fell into the working flunky mode. Damn, he hated it when this happened – he was emptying a urine catheter which had several ports and was almost overflowing, so he was balancing it gingerly as he tried to empty it, & one of the tubes flipped up, spraying him on his uniform, *in his face*, and soaking his worksheet. Shit. So he finished draining it, set his worksheet out to dry – all his notes were on it, so he was going to need it to chart. He didn't remember washing his face, as he went out front for awhile to wait for the worksheet to dry. It was a high-ceilinged place, canopied or with lots of skylights, a translucent ceiling, but cavernous like an airplane hangar. He started gossiping with 3 co-workers, & they were giving him the breathless low-down on something or other – he spent quite a few

minutes there, until a passer-by or his own internal clock reminded him/them that it was time to get back to work.

T headed back, encountering a shortish, dark-haired, street-clothed guy who looked like their new manager – T didn't say hi, just tried to look diligent as he strode along. He saw Massimo, an old colleague from the lab at Ghetto Caesar, plating bacteriology specimens at his bench, and some others at their tasks, before getting back to his poor, partly-dried worksheet. Later, he was at Manny Grange's bedside, draining a simpler device, as Manny asked about Herrmann Kurlz, T's teenage buddy, & others, wondering how they were doing & so on. Dude said something about them being gifted, talented...this from one who was very much so himself, Manny Grange, the two-sport pro athlete, suave gentleman & fierce competitor.

Or, as one cabin-dweller put it, dude relished both his civilized & savage instincts. Here's to it, gents, but T's present problem, as *he* slipped out of a cabin, was to take that palette off the train, a few cars back. He must've needed it for something; and then *imagined* or *changed the story*, to where none of his belongings would've stayed with the train as it moved onward. Few and simple as they were, he was hoping to keep them in a safer place than that hotel where the opposing, armed factions & militias were milling about & assembling, and it seemed imminent that the spark was going to be lit and the bullets



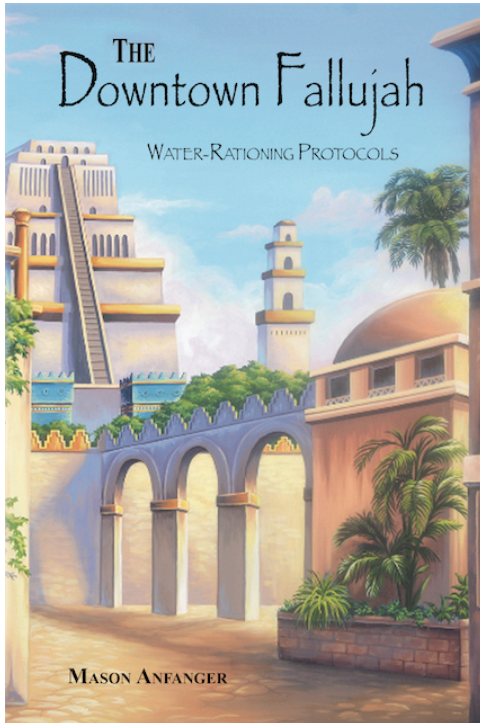
## *The Downtown Fallujah*

were going to fly, and that any poor unarmed non-combatants were going to perish in the crossfire.

So they herded themselves as much as possible to their respective rooms, hoping that there they might be safe. T waited until most or all of them were so sequestered, & then took a chance, went outside, down a staircase, trying to avoid the expected sniper sight-lines, and down into a convenience store where he wanted to (probably) get some milk & chocolate, since he figured to be holed up for an indeterminate time. When the siege *was* finally lifted, before he had to leave his room, with all the clutter & mess, he was trying to conceal any clues that he had anything valuable or contraband. Easily done, mate, because all he had on him was something that came in handy because it was really getting boring waiting around in that library, for whatever was going to happen, when he remembered he had the Frisbee on him, not a big one, but enough to toss around, so he flipped it to one of his compañeros, & he/she flipped it back, & then they decided 'better go outside with this', so they went along a bookcase, & T gave it a long toss to where it seemed to disappear into a side-room, but a secretary fished it out, or one similar, and they proceeded down a gangway, came to a door where T's partner, Gayle Sumners, the P.E. teacher's athletic, blooming, precocious daughter, almost got pinned behind it as she politely let some people who

were coming in the opposite direction pass, nimbly evading any trouble, seeming almost to pass through the crack where the hinges are (how'd she do that?) and then they were out in the yard.

There was even a cool basketball court where some guys were playing 3 on 3, at least one of them calvando, as Latinos might say, so T figured he might fit in, but now a guy started tossing him the Frisbee. Dude was good – straight as an arrow, and right at T every time, but T sucked – tried a couple of different methods, but couldn't get it to fly straight – out of practice – and the shape of the Frisbee itself was changing – not enough so that it would be an excuse, but it got bigger, then wider, then flimsier...



*A fledgling nurse, his late heroic father, demented mother, gold-digging girlfriend, faithful wife, zany kids, and a full cast of other comedians, enjoy halcyon days, even as they lament from afar the ongoing calamities of war, starvation, disease, and oppression.*

## **THE DOWNTOWN FALLUJAH WATER-RATIONING PROTOCOLS**

by Mason Anfanger

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