

## A CLEAR VIEW

*When John Colton retired, he and his wife moved to the Jack Valley area. About two months after setting up residence in a condominium, they transferred their membership to St. Peter. Much of John's life is classified and will remain so until he meets his Creator and ultimate Employer. Two months ago, he received permission to release several case files for the greater good of mankind. The following is an account of the both tragic and redemptive case of Allen Forrester, who exemplified the premise that it's never too soon to clean the windows through which you look at life.*

*Pastor Fred Anderson*

Stepping out of the elevator onto the 42nd floor, John Colton cast his eyes toward the sign on the wall directing him to Suites 4201 thru 4210. An easy pace brought him to Suite 4208 on the left without passing anyone in the hall. Opening the door, he saw numerous people working behind a counter with a receptionist's desk on the right.

“Good afternoon, sir,” the receptionist said. “How may I help you today?”

“My name’s John Colton and I have an appointment with Jason Belle.”

“Yes, Mr. Colton,” said the young lady. “Mr. Belle just called me. He’s running a few minutes late, but he said you could just go back to his office and wait, if you don’t mind.”

“Certainly,” replied John.

“It’s the fourth door on the right.”

“Thank you.”

When John entered Mr. Belle’s office, he found a maintenance man cleaning the spacious window area that provided a magnificent view of the city.

“I’m sorry, sir,” said the maintenance man. “I didn’t think they were using this office today. I just need about another minute to finish.”

“Take your time, my friend. I’m just waiting right now anyway. I imagine you’ve heard your share of comments about doing windows over the years.”

“Occupational hazard, I’m afraid.”

“Well, there’s nothing like a clean window to clear up the view, especially one of such a beautiful city,” said John.

“If you want a clean window, there’s nothing like what I have in the cart over there to make it totally clear.”

The maintenance man and John nodded to each other and then the window washer left the office. John opened the middle drawer of the maintenance cart where he found a large brown envelope and a compact disk player. He opened the envelope, pulled out a picture, and turned on the disk player.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Colton. The man you are looking at is Allen Forrester, a wealthy businessman. He is a C & E, Christmas and Easter attendee only. Traditional religious organizations have been unable to access Mr. Forrester’s buried soul. Your assignment is to bring Allen Forrester back into the fold. There is one very important point in this case, John. You only have twenty-four hours to complete this assignment, because Allen Forrester will die in a traffic accident tomorrow. Good luck, John.”

John put the envelope and the disk into his coat pocket and walked out of Jason Belle’s office.

He quickly called his team and briefed them on the case. When he got back to his apartment, he found his team, Rudy, Jennifer, and Sean, waiting for him. They began to lay out the plan for the mission.

“There is a very key point we have to remember in our approach to Allen Forrester,” said the leader. “We can’t change him. That will require a greater power. What we can do, though, is to create a situation that may help him open up to that greater power. Unfortunately, we must work fast, and the situation must be one of desperation to succeed. Do you know what you’re going to use, Sean?”

“Yes, John,” answered Sean. “We’re going to use a derivative of sodium pertherachloride.”

“Are there any side effects to it?” asked John. “It is imperative that Mr. Forrester be cognizant and completely in control of his mind when the time comes.”

“Its effects are strictly limited to profuse sweating, a dry mouth, and the illusion of heat stress. We will also administer a knockout drug to move him from Jennifer’s apartment.”

“Good,” said John. “Can we manage the clothes in such a short time, Rudy?”

“We’re all set, John,” answered Rudy. “We have a special lead woven insert that can be stitched inside his coat in a matter of minutes. The insert will add eighty pounds evenly distributed throughout the coat’s structure. He’ll never know why he’s gotten so weak.”

“Okay. Now, Jennifer, Allen Forrester has a weakness for women. We’re going to use that as our set up. With his wife away at our arrangement, he will be at his usual table for lunch at Hulligan’s Restaurant. He will be alone, and you’ll be sitting across from him. It’s up to you to get him back to your apartment.”

“I don’t think that will be a problem, John,” the beautiful young woman said.

“What about his wife?” asked Rudy. “Will she be aware of anything that’s going on?”

“Meredith Forrester has known about her husband’s weakness for years. She’s a very loving and forgiving woman, even if he’s never openly asked for that forgiveness. The only thing she’ll know about what we’re doing is what she sees in the end. We’ve arranged for her to be present when he breaks.”

“Do you think he will break, John?” asked Sean.

“I hope so, Sean. His eternity depends on it.”

Sean and Rudy stayed at Jennifer’s apartment to finish up a few things, while John and Jennifer left to go to Hulligan’s Restaurant. Jennifer had little trouble persuading the host to seat her across from Forrester’s table. Once the businessman arrived, the host seated him, and from that point it fell into Jennifer’s capable hands. When Jennifer and Forrester left the restaurant, John alerted Sean and Rudy as to the timing.

“Why don’t you get comfortable on the sofa while I fix us some drinks,” suggested Jennifer. “What’s your pleasure, honey?”

“Scotch,” said Forrester. “On the rocks.”

“Okay, sugar. Coming right up.” Slipping the drug into his drink, Jennifer continued, “Now, tell me what you like to do for fun, Allen.”

“Well, for starters, I ... I ...”

When his head fell back, Sean and Rudy came out of the bedroom and John came in from outside the apartment. While John and Rudy removed Forrester’s coat and gave it to Jennifer to sew in the liner, Sean administered the sodium

pertherachloride derivative injection. As soon as Jennifer finished stitching the liner in Forrester's coat, they packed up and headed for the van in the parking garage. After driving for an hour, the team and their subject arrived at the edge of a small patch of desert near the Fillagree Mountains.

“Okay, let's set up over there,” said John. “We can use that cactus and we can stay out of sight behind those rocks. It's far enough away from the road that he won't hear the car that's bringing his wife. How's he doing, Sean?”

“He's doing fine, John. Once I wake him up, I'll have about thirty seconds to get back behind the rocks.”

With everything set, Rudy and John got Forrester back into his coat and laid him on the hot desert sand. Sean brought him around and joined the rest of the team at their observation point.

Trying to get oriented, Allen pushed up onto his knees and tried to stand, but the extra weight made him sink back to the ground. “How did I get here?” he thought. “I'm so thirsty. Sand. All I see is sand. I need water. A long, tall drink of water ... I'd give everything I own for some water.”

The businessman looked ahead to see what appeared to be the wreck of an old dune buggy. Crawling the fifty feet to reach the wreck, he desperately hoped there would be some salvation there. He grabbed the side of the rusty carcass and pulled himself up. Again, the weighted coat bore heavy on his frame, and he sat back down, leaning up against the body of the dune buggy. He looked straight ahead to see what appeared to be a canteen at the foot of a tall cactus. He crawled over to the cactus, picked up the canteen, and shook it. Hearing something inside, he unscrewed the cap and poured a little into the cap. After detecting nothing unusual in its appearance or smell, he took a swig. After a few wild gulps and a splash on the forehead, he looked up at the tall cactus with a broad horizontal branch. Somewhere in his mind, an image emerged, perhaps brought to the surface by the cross-like shadow of the cactus on the sand or the sheer improbability of finding an old canteen still full of water at the base of that cactus. He did not question why the image emerged, for his mind could only grapple with the image itself. The image cast a light into his past, something he had never fully faced. As the path he had taken in life became visible, he could see the litter of his actions.



“What have I done with my life? God, I am so sorry. I know I don’t deserve your love. I beg your forgiveness ... and my wife, what have I done to her? I betrayed her so many times. How could I have been so blind? I only hope she will forgive me.”

Meredith Forrester came out from behind the rocks, walked over to him, and knelt down beside him.

“Meredith. I am so glad to see you ... I am so sorry, Meredith. Please forgive me for all those times I betrayed you. You had to know and yet, you stayed with me. I will change. Somehow, God has spoken to me out in this desert. He has called me back. Next Sunday I will go to church with you. I will go to church with you every Sunday for the rest of my life. I realize how wrong I have been. I can see things so clearly now. I love you, Meredith.”

“I know, Allen. I know. I love you, too.”

When Meredith looked back towards the rocks, she saw a cloud of dust rise up behind them; she watched as the wind carried it away.