Grace and Elli,

Curiously-shaped Stacking Dolls as a motif in a mystery, circa the year 2184. Each stacking doll has a code painted into its design - a code that cannot be understood until the outer doll’s code is discerned. The dolls are scattered around the globe. And we have ourselves a scavenger hunt!

The smallest doll contains a whopper 20mm round white South Seas pearl, with deep lustrous nacre that looks like one can see inches into. Its value on the jewelry market is astronomical. But it is not just any pearl.

The world has devolved since the demise of Western society. The Golden Age of The Cause (of Progressive ideology) of the 2040s imploded under its own economic weight and a population weary of the spiritual oppression of the Humanist Project. By 2058, the workers of the Americas were begging their ruling citizens to join The Caliphate, a government system that promised the return of spirituality and honor to Allah.

The Progressives had been effective at marginalizing people of faith, starting with the Judeo-Christian religions, methodically debunking and denuding every other theology (though leaving Wicca and Gaia worshippers who had been extremely useful at helping advance the cause until the bitter end when even they had to be sacrificed for The Cause), and ultimately removing all scripture and references to spirituality from libraries, public and private, and closing churches and burning or deleting their literature.

The Interrogatives of 2055, assisted by liberal use of waterboarding and truth serum, were highly effective at ferreting out stashes of papers and data repositories, leaving the Library of Congress of the North American Zone - Consumers Collective Cooperative of Progressives (NAZ-CCCP), as the sole repository of religious documentation, but it was there only for display as a collection of historical relics. When the Caliphate came in, the repository was simple to find and the burning of the building was almost as uneventful as it was completely devastating to anybody interested in spirituality.

Collective humanist thinking had been taught in western schools since the early 1900s, and almost exclusively since the 1950s. A hundred years of this complete domination with only momentary interruptions by the Glorious Al Qaeda Attack on the Zionist World Trade Center (which caused a reactionary surge of religion among the weak minded workers) and the resurgence of libertarian patriotism within the former United States of America that spiked in 2024, meant that original thought and outside-the-box initiatives were all but drummed out of the human psyche.

Evil capitalist health care insurers were squeezed out of their profiteering businesses by a lower out-of-pocket-cost Federal Benevolent Exchange Cooperative (FBEC), and membership in the FBEC soon became mandatory for all workers and their families. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) raised documentation and reporting requirements on doctors, whose patient roles, time spent with patients, maladies treated by patient, and viability/value/quality of life assessments (VVQs) were all subject to inspection and inquiry by the IRS Public Health Activities Team (IRSPHAT). Doctors were not allowed to perform any procedures outside The Matrix of Approved Medical Procedures and Authorized Recipients (MAMPAR), and could be directed to forward patients to CDC-approved care centers (converted from outdated and mis-managed Veterans Administration hospitals) based on conditions the IRSPHAT or Approved Delegates of the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services saw appropriate. Medical care providers from pharmacies to surgeons to acupuncturists and yoga gurus could not take any payment except by approved insurers. IRSPHAT officials frequently posed as uninsured patients attempting to access scarce government-controlled resources without holding a policy or being tracked to ensure the public benefit of their existence. That eventually meant only the government could pay for health care. It should be free, after all. Nobody should be able to benefit for keeping someone healthy.

The unanticipated early retirement of tens of thousands of health care providers resulted in an alarming reduced availability of service providers. The government of the ex-USA benevolently stepped in, deeming all Central and South American and Asian Pacific Island nations’ medical and dental schools suitable for work in the US without need for further board certification. Immigration Cooperation Enforcement (ICE – converted from the earlier racist organization by the same acronym) published a plan under which they accepted 98% of applicants (some were just too old to have much value or

quality of life left) to a new immigration program wherein a degree from any Central American or Asian Pacific nation’s universities or private institutions of higher education, or signed promise to acquire such a degree, satisfied requirements; and a permanent Visa with voting rights was issued on the spot. The influx of over 500,000 degreed health care workers in the first year alone proved the program a resounding success – so much so that US-trained providers were able to be made available for the hard working federal executive servants. The Centers for Disease Control quickly issued authorization for these individuals to work for any health care provider in the USA. The National Labor Relations Board convinced the AFL/CIO and SEIU to create an affiliate, Pan American Care Providers, to ensure a collective bargaining unit was in place to establish wages consistent, adjusted for inflation, with doctors and surgeons in the system prior to the passage of the PPACA.

In the ensuing years, the population of the last democratic republic saw their medical care providers’ capabilities plummet to appalling levels. Waiting in line for everything from cough syrup and aspirin to hip replacement could take days or weeks, based on availability. There were, of course, no government panels deciding who gets care or not, or who dies or not. However, it could take months or years in some cases, to get an application heard or a review scheduled in a Selective Access Rights Authorization Hearing (SARAH), which was a function of infrequent meetings of the subject administrative zone’s Patient Availability Logistical Inventory Network (PALIN). These SARAHs and PALINs operate under the PPACA in a portion that was not yet written when the law was passed, but later added, as directed, by the office of the Secretary of Health and Human Services. Any allusion to actual persons in the acronyms is purely incidental and shall not be called spiteful under penalty of having one’s access to SARAHs under the PALIN permanently revoked, precluding the need for any health care provider to spend any valuable time with one silly enough to be so spiteful and full of hate.

There was no truth found, by an approved internal review process delineated in the PPACA three years after passage, to the claim that these PALINs delivered or withheld SARAHs based on political or contra-consensus scientific ideologies professed by individuals. The PALIN’s database of Tweets, Facebook, and blog postings was only ever used, according to the internal commission’s exhaustive report, to assist providers in diagnosing causes of hypertension, sleep disorders, and occasional schizophrenia. Besides, the PALIN only ensured scarce health care resources were distributed fairly to all those whose value to society and anticipated quality of life justified the expense and time. The PALIN was found in full compliance with the mission delineated in the title of the PPACA, to perform Patient Protection – ensuring worthy patients are protected and have equal access to affordable care with all who are equal to them.

The health care riots of the early 2030s devolved into the Survivalist’s Rebellion of 2034. Appalling losses among National Security Force workers were acceptable due to the recovery and/or accounting for of the last of the personal firearms in the NRAA (National Recovery of Armament Administration) databases, not to mention every one of the 3D printers used to print the firearms the rebellion relied upon. This ensured that the new federal cooperative government would be able to efficiently care for its workers without needing to worry about them reaching above their stations.

The renegades in the former USA were put down by the Government is Righteousness Movement under the brilliant leadership of Citizen METO (More Equal Than Others) and her Chicago Conformist Crusaders or ChiConCru, many of whose parents and grandparents were instrumental in imposing the PPACA back in the 2010s. The act, left basically dormant for the first 15 years after its passage, provided the framework for the transformation of society into a homogenous, harmonious hegemony; where the more equal class ruled their workers benevolently and retained harmony.