

ROAD TRAUMA NIGHTMARE

- Adrian M. McGlinchey

I WAS DRIVING HOME from work when it all started. Things would never be the same again. As I turned into my street, I remember thinking such things as... *'When are they ever going to finish this road-widening project? It does seem to have gone on for a long time – at least a year – with no end in sight. Certainly, the road needs widening because the ever-increasing volume of traffic just bottle-necks at this busy T-junction, but the contractors never seem to make any progress. Perhaps I should contact the road construction company, and register my dissatisfaction.'*

Just as I had cleared the corner, the driver of an oncoming vehicle came too far over the centre-line. This made me swerve to the left to avoid collision, but then I veered from my lane and hit the curb, which sent me into a roll with my vehicle ending upside-down in the ditch at the side of the road.

Feeling somewhat disoriented, I crawled out of the upturned car and dragged myself out of the ditch, in which a road-crew had been working. There was much panic and confusion as two unrecognisable corpses were dragged out of the mud. *'Oh no... Oh my God,'* I said to myself. *'These must be workmen who were hit by my car, and I hadn't even realised it at the time.'* All eyes turned accusingly on me, and I found myself being mobbed and reviled, much to my incomprehension.

In sheer panic I broke away and ran from these people. After all, my parents' house, where I lived at the time, was only a few doors further up the street. As I arrived, my mother was in the front garden tending her flowers and shrubs. I breathlessly tried to explain to her what was going on, but obviously I was making no sense at all to her. By the time my father had come out through the side gate to help my mother, the angry mob was gathering in our driveway. I turned to my father and told him that I had been involved in a terrible road accident, and I pleaded with him to save me from the wild mob that was at my heels.

"It wasn't entirely my fault," I whimpered. "Another car forced me off the road!"

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One of the road-crew foremen stepped forward and had serious words with my father. Despite my incessant pleading, my father accepted the foreman's counsel, and father conceded...

"It's clear that the boy should pay for what he's done," Father agreed in a solemn tone. "Take him away!" he said, turning his back and walking to the gate, with head hung low. Mother was in tears and followed after my father.

Two men grabbed me by each arm and dragged me away while I was in a most bewildered state, with the taunts of the crowd reverberating in my head. The men unceremoniously shoved me into the back of a transit van, presumably to be taken into custody.

Having spent a few days and nights in a prison cell, my mind was entirely in a daze... I wasn't sure where I was or even what day it was. It was difficult to recall everything that had happened since the accident. The memory of the accident and the confrontation with the angry mob was still vivid in my mind's eye, although everything else since my arrest had melted into a haze. I had regained my sense of self-awareness when two guards came for me one morning. The odd thing about these prison guards was that they were both dressed like labourers, in safety vest, hard-hat, and steel-capped boots. '*Most unusual,*' I thought to myself. '*Shouldn't they be police officers, or prison wardens in official uniform?*'

These *guards* led me across a courtyard into a wing of a much larger building complex, which had the appearance of a municipal courthouse. As they ushered me inside and into what I surmised was a courtroom, I noticed something very strange, even though the appearance of the guards was odd enough. In a court of law, you may expect to see the national coat of arms displayed, along with some reference to the Department of Justice. However, in this courtroom, mounted on the wall, behind and above where the judge would sit, there was a large bronze disc bearing the relief-image of a workman operating a pneumatic hammer. The inscription around the circumference of the bronze relief read: **THE ROADS CORPORATION " IN TRUTH WE JUDGE.**

I was led to a seat and made to stay there by the two guards, who sat one on either side of me. The other people in the room were preparing themselves with the reading of documents and with the whispering of indistinguishable utterances.

The bailiff then announced, "All rise for *The Director In Supreme Council.*"

Respectfully, everyone stood in silence.

"Please be seated," said the bailiff.

'*This gets more bizarre at every turn,*' I mused. '*Shouldn't I be facing a magistrate; not a corporate director?*' I was almost about to scream, '*What kind of masquerade is this?*' when, anticipating my agitation, one of the guards sharply

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elbowed me in the ribs, and gave me a stern cautionary look. I decided I'd best co-operate, until I at could least hear what someone in authority had to say to me.

The proceedings began, as in most criminal trials, with the reading of charges, except, instead of using my name, the *Clerk of Court* referred to me as '*Defendant 7325-B6*'. I thought I might at least be entitled to be called by my real name, seeing that my guilt or innocence had not yet been established. The reading began with a litany of charges ranging from culpable driving to cold-blooded murder. By this time my head was spinning, and, once again, I had a memory lapse, and I don't remember much about the rest of the trial. I don't even recall them allowing me a defence attorney to argue my case, and I certainly don't believe there was a jury present. It seemed as though *The Director* simply heard the charges and pronounced sentence.

The last thing I do recall is yelling at *The Director*, "If this is justice, then it is justice from hell!"

I'm sure I must have blacked out at this point because I have no idea of how I got from the courthouse to where I am now, a penal colony, where convicts are sentenced to hard labour. Perhaps they had to carry me here while I was unconscious.

Lying in my bunk, in my prison cell, I pondered the traumatic events of the past few weeks, and I asked myself, '*Did I really deserve such a fate?*' and '*Why did no one help me to protest my innocence?*' My thoughts went around in conundrums, until I finally sank into the forgiving arms of sleep.

"Aargh!" I groaned, sitting bolt upright in my bed; raging rivers of sweat gushing down and cascading over the rapids of my skull.

I was in a cold fever, but I was in my own bedroom, in the relative safety of my own home, where I was before this terrible nightmare began. It was a dream, an extremely horrible nightmare, but only a dream nevertheless.