

# Acolyte

*A Fictional Tale*

**Kevin Deeny**

This started as a few thoughts and kept growing. I sought to complete my thought within 5 paragraphs for each segment which I would then post. The sequence of the segments is as written – since each was posted I could not change the order and the story had to develop as a series. I found it fun to write in this style and I enjoyed watching it evolve; I never knew what I would write about from piece to piece.

Kevin Deeny

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# Acolyte

## ***Commitment:***

He watched from a distance on the tarmac as a light rain began to fall.

A protector raised an umbrella to shelter the candidate's coiffed hair as he rambled.

Faces in the crowd were rapt by every word while others were poised with questions.

A shiver ran through him in the cold wetness and he wondered where his soul would seek refuge when his own obedience to ambition took him to the lights, cheering crowds, and oblivion.

He sighed, shook off the cold and stepped forward.

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***Monarch:***

The candidate rose slowly with a deep weariness and felt the force of gravity in his bones.

His anger propelled him forward searching for the adoration that quelled and faded into memory.

He assembled his acolytes whose numbers grew fewer by the day and spewed his angry bile for them to go forth and do his bidding.

In time, lights came up and cameras focused on the angry candidate while he proclaimed his own glory.

And still they came to kiss the ring.



***Believer:***

The attention and interest in her every word was thrilling; personally powerful.

She was carried by the current of his praise and leaned her back into the stroke of the oar to keep pace with her ambition.

The candidate smiled knowingly; a true believer was a comfort. Yet, he knew it would not last, it never did.

In time, her ambition found resonance with his and she tasted the bitterness of his lies on her lips.

Yet she failed to understand that ambition is a singular track and those behind, coupled to the leader, will rise and fall together.



## ***Work and Worry:***

The tractor rattled to life and came to a smooth idle as he settled into the cab for the long day ahead.

Harvest time was the payoff for a years' work and worry; both were constants in his life.

He was grateful for the technology that enable him to do the work of 20 men, but it came at a cost that pulled him down deeper each year into debt.

The candidate came with promises of a better future and he trusted that a plan would emerge.

As he gathered the harvest amidst the thrum of the big machine, he thought about the promises made and broken, about the future of his farm, and family. But most of all, he thought about his children and how they would make their way in the world.



### ***Introspection:***

The speech ended and the cheers of the crowd drifted away into the night as he made his way to the waiting car. He barely notices the faces that line the road as the convoy rolls on to the airport.

His face is illuminated by the glow of the small screen he holds in his hand - his scowl etched in its flicker as he contemplates his reaction to the news.

As the miles click by, his fingers move in angry spasms along the keys as he casts his impulses into the murky darkness and beyond.

He fails to see the child on the sidewalk, flag in hand, whose face is aglow with the excitement of the momentary intersection with her life.

He is well attended as he steps down from the plane and considers the night ahead – alone with his thoughts. He is terrified of solitude and the introspection it brings and reaches for his phone.

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## ***Motivation:***

Thoughts of her mother and father serve her well now. As a teacher and a foreman, they both taught her the dignity of hard work and commitment to community.

She was fearful now – not about the day ahead, but about honoring the sacrifices her parents made for her.

Surrounded by law books and the promise of a comfortable life ahead, she watched in disbelief and sadness as children were warehoused in cages. And she grew angry.

She refused to live her life as a spectator.

As she laced up her running shoes and put the final touches on the placard she would carry, her thoughts drifted to the law. Sometimes, she resolved, it needs a push.

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## ***Resolve:***

He leaned on his broom until the suits were finished sifting through the trash strewn all over the street. An acrid smell lingered as he watched them pick up the small cannisters and put them in trash bags they carried away.

He was used to the mess having followed close behind all the events and protests for the past twenty years. He chuckled at the memory of the childhood cartoon character who would sweep up at the end of the show. He had become that character.

When the suits finally left and they were allowed to do their jobs, his crew got to work. They brought in the vacuum sweeper trucks and pushed debris to the open snorkel with their brooms and shovels. They worked through the night with a practiced rhythm.

As the grey dawn emerged and with his shift nearing its end, he noticed an empty cannister in the trampled flower bed. He had seen them before - in the army.

He paused and looked at the venerable building beyond the fence and shook his head. As he walked to his work truck, he noticed a young woman with credentials dangling from her neck and flipped the empty cannister to her. For a brief moment their eyes met, then with a nod no more than a tic, each turned and went their way.



## ***A Gloved Hand:***

She tried to find a rhythm to settle her racing heart, but it felt like she was suffocating; every breath more difficult than the last.

She wanted desperately not to be put on the machine; her odds would not be good. Yet she felt like she was drowning in her own body and the panic was rising.

She thought of her family, now beyond the glass, and the years of love they shared. They said good-bye, not knowing, but she now knew.

It is not the end she would have chosen; it was chosen for her miles away around polished tables and in cramped cubicles.

Despite the clamor of voices and machines around her, she was able to quiet her mind and a calmness spread through her and comforted her like a warm blanket. She was suddenly amazed to feel the strength of the love that flowed through the nurse's gloved hand. "I will rest now," she decided.



## ***Hands:***

He always thought that hands tell a lot about a person. As a kid he noticed his father's hands; rough from the workday, weathered, and strong. He turned his hands over to look at them knowing that he had become his father.

He would do his job today as he did every day and protect the candidate from those who would do him harm. But at the end of the day he would go home to build things; it was in his blood.

Today he would stand outside the door, in full view, but unseen by those who come to genuflect and seek favor in the never-ending flow of political currency.

Few seemed to understand that he did not serve the man – he served the office.

He understood that the candidate's outstretched hand did not come with work-weathered strength – his strength was projected, ephemeral, and untrue. For just a moment, he broke through his stoic demeanor and smiled as the memory of his father stood in contrast with this man. Sometimes, you just know.



## ***Old Soldier:***

His arthritic fingers traced the names engraved in the black marble panel.

He makes this trip every year to visit the bronze and marble monuments that honor those who served this country when the need was dire.

For him, it was the Vietnam War and the black marble “V” is his hallowed ground.

He knows he won’t be able to make these trips much longer, but he wants to honor the memory of his buddies who fought beside him and didn’t make it through. He is comforted in knowing that he will see them again soon enough.

His reverie is broken by distant sirens as the candidate is whisked to a near-by event. The old soldier paused to wonder if the candidate would someday stop to honor those who served in his stead. As the sound of the sirens drifted away, he returned to his reverie, head bowed, and felt the life that was.



## ***Family:***

She knelt beside her daughter to give her another hug, straightened her mask, and freed her curls from beneath the elastic band. She fussed, stretching out the moment a little longer, then gave her little girl a kiss and wished her well in school. She turned quickly once her daughter passed through the door and brushed back the tears.

Her mind would not be on her work today, but it had to be. Her shift at the hospital would begin soon and she needed to be focused. She picked up her pace and headed to the parking lot.

A mother, un-masked, stood at the curb as she too dropped her child off at school. She felt her anger rise despite her near total exhaustion, grit her teeth, and hurried by.

The day was long and grueling as they all have been lately, but she was thankful that her husband could pick up their daughter at the end of the day and work from home on the virtual days. For now, this was their reality.

As she changed her scrubs in the garage and tossed them into the hamper she kept separate from her family, she worked hard to control her fear and anger before she stepped into the house. She was grateful that another day ended with her family safe and well. Yet, she understood the truth in the numbers and she would rise again in the morning to face the monster.



## ***Neighbors:***

Sometimes you just get it wrong. His buddies at the volunteer fire department were all in – every pronouncement of the candidate was cheered and echoed in their conversations.

Yet he began to see things differently when he helped an older woman and her grandchild leave a burning apartment complex. They were deeply frightened and hugged him in their gratitude.

Days later, with the help of neighbors, the woman and her grandchild came to the station with baked goods and hand-made thank-you cards and it moved him. Their thankfulness was heart-felt and he realized that this was one of the moments in life that will be remembered.

He looked again at life around him and realized that the us and them in his perspective began to change to something more profound; neighbors.

Surprisingly, he became less fearful of the future. He knew there would be a place for him – it is important to belong.



## ***Future Passing:***

The boys played on the rocks in the cove doing what most do; looking beneath them to see what scurries out, digging for shells to keep in their rooms, and skipping flat stones into the surf.

The boys were busy being boys, not mindful of events playing out on city streets or in the halls of power.

In the distance, container ships transited the sea lanes destined for near-by ports and returned to their far-off locales with their futures.

The boys' parents had only recently begun to consider the future, which had marched ahead apace, waiting for none.

As the parents watched the brothers play with the persistent line of ships visible on the horizon, they took the time to think and talk about the things that really mattered; their boys and the world they would live in. There was hard work ahead.



## ***Ground Truth:***

His face was familiar and he took a risk of notice in his travels. He moved through the country in well-worn clothes, a sweat-stained baseball cap, and sunglasses. The stubble on his face belied the clear bright eyes hidden beneath the mirrored lenses.

He had to see for himself what his advice and council had wrought.

His wanderings took him through Texas border towns, damaged Puerto Rican cities, southwest wild fire areas, mid-west farm country, the manufacturing muscle of Michigan, retirement communities of Florida and the boroughs of New York. He was awed and moved by the grit and determination of everyday people.

His last stop before returning to the Capitol was to Philadelphia where he stood before the statue of a man he admired; Benjamin Franklin. He was seldom remembered for the titles he held, but for the wisdom that flowed from his life. He needed to be close to that now.

He knew of numerous famous quotes from this man, but the one that resonated with him most at this moment was, "Whatever is begun in anger ends in shame." He understood that now and vowed to set his anger aside and find a path back to himself.

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## ***Wisdom Waning:***

She has seen a lot of life and has been around longer than expected. She married at the end of WWII and started a family, soon to be followed by college and an academic career. But she is tired now.

She has run out of questions and academic pursuits. The one question she asked so many times has never really been answered: Why? When peaceful harmony was within our grasp, why do we choose otherwise?

She is heartened by the youthful pursuit of justice and fairness that has taken so many into the streets. Yet she fears that the tools used to remove the cancer may cut too close to the bone and undermine the foundation that so many have sacrificed to build.

Wisdom is required at a time such as this, but so few seek it.

She will soon lay down the burdens of this life and move on. But there is a near goal she hopes to achieve; to vote. This final legacy will live on.



## ***Family Stories:***

She is happy to be back in the classroom but fearful at the same time. In the best of times, a classroom full of elementary students is a petri dish, - colds and the flu have always passed as waves through the school. This virus is something else entirely.

She hates the thought that she has to protect herself from her students; it runs contrary to her concept of a teacher. But she is determined to be there for them and to be there for her own children at the end of the day.

She worries about the burden placed on their little shoulders to follow rules that keep them apart from their friends and require them to be defensive at a time when school is supposed to be a nurturing and open social setting.

She wonders still how the family stories will be told.

It may be inevitable that some will become unaware carriers that seed a chain of contact that may impact loved ones. How will their families tell that story? How will we all?



### ***Turning Point:***

The candidate set forces in motion without care for the ideological outcome. He was not a student of history, philosophy, or political science. He was instead a student of human weakness and he sent forth his willing servants to probe every cultural chasm.

He approached the microphone and unleashed a torrent of historical grievances in a long incoherent stream of dark consciousness. His followers cheered.

The acolyte shuddered in the chill that the dark ramblings cast among them. His cultish cataracts, now excised, no longer prevented him from seeing the candidate in the light of reason. He was now confident in his decision, turned away from the magnetism of the moment and slowly walked from the arena.

He wondered if his father still needed help getting the crop in as he started his long trek home.

The candidate looked at the empty seat on the plane as they travelled back to Washington. Out of fear, no one told him about the acolyte, but he knew. He was alone again. As the minutes passed, he mused about who would fill that empty seat and he reached into his pocket for the phone.



## ***Dawn:***

The candidate rose early and sampled the chatter on the airways. His servants only knew of his wakefulness as their phones began to ping with alerts. The daily churn had begun - chum had been tossed into the pond and the feeding frenzy had begun. It would be a long day.

A seasonal chill set in, the air crisp and clean. Leaves gathered in swirling clusters as she approached the polling station. She patted her pockets crammed with snacks and energy bars. She was prepared for the wait. It would be a long day.

Images of long lines at polling places were broadcast throughout the country. His attention moved from one flickering image to another as his fingers danced across the keypad in a frenetic pace.

He was confident that his base would be there for him. Like lemmings, they will follow, even to oblivion.

Church bells rang as he stepped out of his pickup and he paused to check the time. The acolyte, having traded his suit for jeans and work boots, smiled. Work, especially hard physical work, had helped purge the remnants of his ideological fever. Today would be a long day, but a good day.

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### **About the author**

Kevin Deeny is a life-long resident of Levittown, Pennsylvania where, with his wife Marcia, raised four daughters. He is an environmental engineer, amateur photographer, and tinkerer – curious about most things. (kdeeny57@gmail.com)

### **Other Publications:**

A Patch of Light – Reflections from Levittown

Bending to the Light – Musings on Issues of Citizenship

Questions for GOD – Respectfully Submitted

Snow Pictures – A Novel