

CALL TO VALOR

GARY BECK

CALL TO VALOR

GARY BECK

Excerpts from *Call to Valor* have appeared in these magazines:
The Smoking Poet, Atlantean Publications, Green Silk Journal, Underground Voices, Events Quarterly, Sugar Mule, Combat, The Moon Magazine, Pens on Fire, Blue Fog Journal, Coffee Cramp, and Type AB+

copyright © 2024 by Gary Beck

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, except for the purpose of review and/or reference, without explicit permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover design copyright © 2024 by Niki Lenhart
nikilen-designs.com

Published by Paper Angel Press
paperangelpress.com

SAMPLE CHAPTER

CALL TO VALOR

1

DOCTOR WILLIAM TECUMSEH CARVER, Carv to his friends, didn't completely conceal the annoyance he was feeling with his senior staff. At 6'6" and 235 pounds, he was still close to his playing weight in college, where he had wisely used his basketball ability on scholarship to develop a more important ability. He was very black, very big and could be intimidating in the confines of the conference room.

"Ladies and gentlemen. I shouldn't have to remind you that United Nations Day next Monday will be a major celebration for the Euro-Arab coalition. Since it falls toward the end of October, it's right after the beginning of Ramadan. When our foreign guests, particularly those of the Arab persuasion, visit us in Bellevue Enclave, you will all maintain correct decorum, no matter what the provocation."

"Chief?"

"Yes, Doctor Yi?"

The petite woman's huge, dark eyes fastened on him accusingly. "You told the female doctors that they didn't have to attend, which would spare them the sexual abuse they get from the Arabs."

"That's right. I did. But the Enclave Manager insisted that all staff physicians must be present."

There were murmurs of discontent from the female doctors, who made up more than a third of the medical staff.

“Shouldn’t we be allowed to say no to their sexual aggressiveness?” Doctor Yi asked.

A helpless look flashed momentarily across Doctor Carver’s normally stoic face. “I wish we could, Mei, but it’s not my call. All the other department heads agreed with the manager that there will be no complaints, and cardiology has to go along. I got a letter of rebuke from the Deputy U.N. Undersecretary for American Affairs, warning us not to repeat last year’s insults, even though I wasn’t in charge then. He complained that most of you wore old rags on your heads, which outraged the Arabs. He threatened to revoke our accreditation if there were any more incidents. Do I make myself clear?”

There was a general response of, “Yes, Chief.”

“Good. It’s time for some of you to accept the fact that we don’t have certain rights anymore, except those allowed by the U.N. If they didn’t need our medical expertise, we’d probably all be in a poverty zone.”

There was a tense silence as the doctors digested his harsh warning.

“How long can we go on like this?” Doctor Yi asked. “This makes me yearn for the tyranny of the HMO’s.”

“I don’t know, Mei,” Carver answered. “But we don’t have much choice.”

“I heard a rumor that the Army is secretly recruiting again, somewhere in Wyoming or the Dakotas, and they’ll support a government that will protect its people,” one of the doctors announced.

“I heard that the Saudi ambassador pinched President Beaumont’s breast at a state dinner, and she didn’t do anything,” another chimed in.

“What could she have done?” Carver demanded.

“She could have knocked his hand away, or poisoned his camel, or at least done something.”

“She’s as powerless as we are,” Carver replied.

“It’s her fault we’re in such a mess,” the same doctor retorted bitterly. “If she didn’t back down everywhere, we might still have a country that could defend us.”

“This is neither the time nor the place for political discussions,” Carver said with finality, ending the conversation. “It’s time for rounds.”

Dr. Carver led the staff that now included residents, interns and nurses to the wards. They started with the veterans they had accepted

when the U.N. evicted most of the patients from the Veteran's Administration Hospital on First Avenue, except the Marines. As per U.N. instructions, these patients received minimal attention, which galled Carver. They went on to the lower-level dependants of Enclave personnel. Then they worked their way up to the higher ranks of celebrities and important Americans. They saved foreign dignitaries for last, since the foreigners generally condescended to the very people who were saving their lives.

When they finished, Carver led them to the Veteran's Hospital to examine the Arab veterans and Saudi exiles. Carver paused as they reached the door of the private ward that some staffers deridingly called the 'pasha pit'. It was named for the twenty odd princes of the former ruling house of Saud, who were avoiding extradition by pretending to be ill. The doctors silently suffered the indignity of electronic search by the Saudi guards, who paid special attention to the female doctors, who were forced to submit to the intrusions on their persons and mask their resentment.

As they waited for admission, Carver recalled the events that led to the sudden fall of the House of Saud. After years of the royals paying Islamic fundamentalists to practice terrorism anywhere but in Saudi Arabia, the oil wells started to run dry, and they couldn't afford to buy the extremists off anymore. With incredible swiftness and efficiency, which indicated long term preparation, terrorists bombed the remaining producing wells. This led to the immediate loss of funds to pay the soldiers of the National Guard, the bulwark of the House of Saud, who disappeared overnight. American troops tried to save the kingdom, but the leadership faltered, then abruptly fled, leaving everyone else to their fate. Thousands of princes, spoiled by years of huge allowances and worldly indulgences, were captured before they could escape. After a sham trial, they were beheaded in the Riyadh soccer stadium in the biggest public execution spectacle in the history of Islam, shown live and in color all over the world, courtesy of Al Jazeera TV.

The ward door opened, ending Carver's musing. His entourage followed him into the luxurious penthouse quarters, and he proceeded with the pro forma examination of one of the few groups of princes who escaped the bloodbath of Riyadh. He didn't understand how they managed to get sanctuary from the great Satan that they had tried so hard to undermine. He assumed that it was another instance of

convoluted U.N. policy that was so often slanted against America, but it didn't stop them from taking advantage of the republic's generosity. He greeted the princes courteously, never forgetting to maintain a professional attitude with his pseudo-patients, no matter how much he disliked them. The prince who had been selected for this day's token examination carried on a monologue in Arabic, while Carver applied his stethoscope. There was no doubt that he was insulting the doctor, judging by the smirks from his fellow princes.

Carver ignored the rudeness, thinking instead about his recent appointment as head of the cardiology department. The unexpected elevation, which he wasn't allowed to refuse, compelled him to be a politician and severely limited his time for his duties to his patients. He consoled himself with the thought that he was at least able to practice his profession.

He still had a modicum of freedom, unlike lawyers, who had been banned from holding government office and were mostly restricted to clerical jobs. This was the result of strong public reaction after their endless lawsuits significantly contributed to the collapse of the American economy. Despite all the novels glorifying lawyers as heroes, the public finally realized that they were being leeched by greedy parasites. Like many doctors, he blamed the lawyers for the outrageous malpractice suits that had disrupted the medical profession.

He finished his distasteful chore, nodded to the haughty princes and gestured to his staff that they were leaving. They went back to the cardiology department's main conference room and reviewed the results of morning rounds.

After the last case was presented, Carver addressed the group. "My recent appointment as department head came as a surprise to some of you. I know we haven't had much time to get to know each other in these new circumstances, so let's keep things simple for the moment. Perform your duties properly and give me your loyalty, and I'll look out for you to the best of my ability. There should be no doubt that my appointment was political.

"When the New York University medical division agreed to join the Bellevue Enclave one of the stipulations was that they would be the senior medical partners. The municipal hospital doctors, regardless of where they studied and trained, would be junior. Being an N.Y.U.'er is one of the main reasons for my appointment, but I assure you that I'll

Gary Beck

treat all of you fairly. As you know, our proximity to the U.N. makes us their medical service station, so we must satisfy their needs, regardless of our personal feelings. I hope we understand each other ... By the way. All senior physicians are invited to a Kobe steak dinner Wednesday night at my house." Then he grinned disarmingly. "Attendance is compulsory."

After the meeting, Carver walked the short distance to the townhouse on east 37th street that was one of the perks of being a department head. His fifteen-year-old daughter, Mavis, was watching Al Jazeera when he walked into the living room. As usual, he couldn't help feeling amazed at her uncanny resemblance to her deceased mother, who died in the great flu epidemic of 2013, along with their two other daughters, when the country ran out of vaccine and the U.N. refused to approve vaccine donations. Mavis was as dark-skinned as her father, an athletic 5'11", and distinctly sexually developed. She even sounded like her mother.

"What are you doing home so early, Dad? Playing hooky?"

"Very funny. I just wanted to see if the place was presentable. The doctors on my staff are joining us for a Kobe steak dinner Wednesday night."

"I'm glad you didn't wait until the last minute to tell me," she said, hands on hips, with that look of exasperation that daughters reserve especially for fathers.

"Sorry, Mav."

"That's alright, Dad," she said matter of factly. "How many?"

"Fourteen."

She thought quickly. "I'll call the commissary for what we'll need and arrange for more help in the kitchen and for serving."

"Thanks, Mav. We'll go into details later."

When they finished lunch Carver walked back to the hospital, confident that Mavis would be a capable hostess. He wondered for a moment if he was letting too many responsibilities fall on her young shoulders, then dismissed the thought, reassured by her competence.

He went to his office, summoned his secretary, Ms. Bellini, and Ronnie, his personal assistant, and reviewed the preparations for U.N. Day. They made a priority list for what still had to be done and set goals for what they hoped to accomplish for their political agenda during the various ceremonies and meetings. His assistant reminded

him that the Enclave manager had stressed the need to lobby the U.N. Energy Commissioner for an increase in their power allocation.

"How do I do that, Ronnie?" he asked plaintively. "I don't know anything about power needs."

"Don't worry, Chief. Just tell him that the new MRI equipment requires more power," she explained. "And that is the equipment that will help save our U.N. patient's lives."

He shook his head in frustration, knowing how awkward he generally was in social situations, especially when there were important consequences at stake. Social skills were not crucial at the Bellevue Enclave, which had run from east 25th street to east 30th street, and from First Avenue to Second Avenue. When N.Y.U. joined the Enclave, it was expanded from 23rd street to 40th street, and from First Avenue to Fifth Avenue. This made them direct neighbors of the U.N.

They were now the closest American service center to the U.N., with new obligations and responsibilities. His appointment as a department head signaled other changes. At N.Y.U.'s insistence, a company of Marines was requested to back up the private guard force that provided security in the Enclave. This created ongoing tensions between the two groups. The employees of Guardwell were poorly paid and resented the well-disciplined Marines, who in turn despised the barely trained rental cops. This was one more complication for Carver in running his high-profile office, which required him to be a tightrope walker, always feeling on the verge of falling.

He shook off his doubts and resumed the review of preparations for U.N. Day. First there would be a morning ceremony in Madison Square Park, honoring the Euro-Arab freedom fighter volunteers who gave their lives to free Saudi Arabia from the American aggressors. Then there would be a visit by heads of state to the Veterans Hospital on First Avenue, to decorate the crippled Arab soldiers who helped drive out the American crusaders. The formal luncheon given by the victorious Arab nations would take place at the former Armenian church on east 34th street, that had been ceded to the U.N. and converted to a mosque. Then there would be the Parade of Nations, with troops and delegations from the victorious nations that had defeated the United States, marching from 23rd street up Fifth Avenue, to 42nd street, then east to the U.N. Events of the day would conclude with a Nations for Peace rally, designed to remind Americans how much they had offended the world. He could just imagine the anti-American venom that would pour out, but attendance was mandatory.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary Beck has worked as a theater director and an art dealer, when he couldn't earn a living in the theater. He has also been a tennis pro, a ditch digger, and a salvage diver. His original plays and translations of Moliere, Aristophanes and Sophocles have been produced off-Broadway. His poetry, fiction, and essays have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines, and his published books include 37 poetry collections, 14 novels, 4 short story collections, 1 collection of essays, and 7 books of plays.



Marine Major Sam Hanson refuses a presidential order to surrender his battalion to be butchered by ISIS when they overrun the Mid-East. He is reduced in rank and transferred to a company of Marines that provides security to the hospital complex in New York City where he becomes friends with Dr. Carver.

A deadly terrorist attack kills Hanson's son and Carver's daughter. They make a plan to identify the terrorist cell and target a safe house in Brooklyn. There they discover nuclear material intended for a dirty bomb. When government agencies downplay the threat of more nuclear material, Hanson pledges to help the new President avoid a nuclear disaster.

Gary Beck has worked as a theater director and an art dealer, when he couldn't earn a living in the theater. He has also been a tennis pro, a ditch digger, and a salvage diver. His original plays and translations of Moliere, Aristophanes and Sophocles have been produced off-Broadway. His poetry, fiction, and essays have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines, and his published books include 37 poetry collections, 14 novels, 4 short story collections, 1 collection of essays, and 7 books of plays.