



Kenneth R. Szulczyk

# The Second American Revolution

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The Building of an Empire

All characters, places, and situations that appear in this work are purely fictitious, created in the writer's mind. Although the places in the novel do exist, any resemblance to real people – living or dead – is entirely coincidental.

I apologize to my readers for the multiple versions of this novel. I wrote this novel during my spare time and didn't know what I was doing. Feeling obligated to my readers, I studied techniques to improve my writing. I decided to read and edit this book again after letting the book sit for ten years. Hopefully, this book is in much better shape.

The Second American Revolution – Building of an Empire  
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## Preface

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This book contains shocking and extreme material. Why did I write such a book? The mess we call a legal system has reached a point of critical mass. The U.S. economy teeters on the edge of a collapse. The 2008 Financial Crisis served as a warning sign to our leaders and government officials. Roll back the legal system, making it pro-business again. Our leaders need to simplify and reduce our tax systems and regulations for all levels of government.

If the politicians and elected officials do nothing to stop the government's growth, someone like Jerrick Ray Davis will stand up and take over. Then this dictator either cleans up the legal system or creates a much bigger mess involving gas chambers and concentration camps.

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The dictator in this book emulates Augustus I, the first Emperor of Rome. The Roman Republic destroyed itself with taxes, laws, and wars. History does repeat itself. Augustus grew tired of the chaos and stood up for what he believed. He inherited  $\frac{3}{4}$  of his adopted uncle's wealth, Julius Caesar, and funded an army to take over Rome. His reforms allowed the Roman Empire to last for 500 years despite being plagued by bad emperors for several centuries.

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## Introduction

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How did the greatest democracy on the earth collapse? Why did people lose faith in democracy and political leaders and allow one man to seize all the power?

It began during the final days of democracy after the 2008 Financial Crisis had struck a death blow to the U.S. economy. The government at all levels in the United States created a massively complicated legal system. The entire U.S. government had transformed into a giant lawnmower, mowing down every grass blade that grew too high. After a person had appeared on the government's radar, the government sent its stormtroopers, tax agents, regulators, inspectors, and attorneys. The government arrested many people for petty infractions of the law and seized their property.

Businesses could not survive under such a punitive legal system, and they fled to other countries, taking jobs and wealth with them. Across this great land, factory buildings shut down, becoming dormant and gradually rusting away from exposure to the elements. The unemployed couldn't find jobs, and mobs formed as people rioted for food and basic supplies.

In the Republic's final days, some powerful members of government, such as Richard Woodland, plotted to overthrow the U.S. federal government.

Richard was a tall, muscular man built like a marine. He had blonde hair and the coldest, bluish eyes. He sat on a chilly green bench overlooking the pond with a great view of Jefferson's Memorial, within two blocks of the White House in Washington, D.C.

Winter was brutally cold in 2016. Richard placed his gloved hands over his bright, rosy cheeks, keeping warm while he exhaled icy mists.

Richard was a government agent, not an agent, but a person who fixed problems for the U.S. President, Charles Gibson. Richard was an expert at hiding bodies permanently, ensuring the skeletons stayed buried inside the closet.

Richard watched a family of geese swim across the pond, scampering for food. The mother goose swam in the front with the young ones in tow. He wanted to pull his nine-millimeter out and have a little target practice. However, he kept his gun in his shoulder holster underneath his jacket because gunshots in this neighborhood would attract attention.

Richard pulled out his touch-screen cell phone, scanning for messages. Then he played a video clip of Jerrick Ray Davis.

Jerrick Ray Davis was a revolutionary who turned into a big pain in the ass. He formed a new political party, the National Workers' Party, and spoke about creating the American Empire. He claimed an empire would save the United States and attracted a large following, while his speeches hypnotized half the nation.

Richard stretched his legs out, preventing them from going to sleep. As he stretched his legs, the tensed muscles popped several joints in his legs. Then he relaxed and listened to Jerrick's speech.

Jerrick's voice rang out from his cell phone.

Enough is enough.

Our government is ruining our economy.

Our founding fathers had given us one of the greatest gifts one can bestow upon their children.

They gave us a system with great laws and a great government.

Now, look at the people in government today.

They are pigs!

They fatten themselves at the public trough.

What have they accomplished?

They keep increasing taxes, regulations, and laws.

They fatten themselves with high salaries and benefits as they feed off the hardworking and industrious.

Those fat pigs in government took over the economy, and nothing makes sense anymore, except the pigs are becoming fatter, literally. Meanwhile, the hardworking have become sick and are dying off like an extinct species.

Unfortunately, our government is broken, and Congress and the bureaucrats have become the people's enemy.

We must purge ourselves of these charlatans, thieves, and misfits  
to fix our economy.

We must unite and fight this common enemy.

We must rid ourselves of these people and create a new  
government!

A stronger government!

A more intelligent government!”

Then the audience chanted his name in unison: Jerrick! Jerrick!  
Jerrick! Jerrick!...

Richard abruptly turned the video off and returned the phone to his inside coat pocket. He rubbed his hands together, gently exhaling through them, keeping them warm.

Richard agreed that Jerrick Davis was right. The United States suffered from the Second Great Depression, and our leaders were not fixing it. Politicians denied the collapsing financial health of this great nation. All Americans were passengers on the Titanic, and the mountainous iceberg, the sledgehammer of death, floated just over the horizon. Someone must do something, or the United States would sink to the depths of a third-world country.

General Ninian Edwards appeared from nowhere and sat next to Richard. He towered at six feet one and packed 200 pounds of lean muscle onto his large frame. His hair was still light brown for his age, and his barber always cut it short. The general scratched at the ragged scar on his left cheek, a souvenir from the 1990 Gulf War when shrapnel from a grenade injured him on the battlefield. At that time, he was a captain.

The General quickly sat down on the bench before Richard knew it.

However, Richard didn't flinch in surprise. He possessed nerves of steel.

The General broke the cold silence, “I'm glad you made it to our meeting, Richard.”

Richard studied those geese with evil intent. The world would not miss them while his finger twitched for several shots. Then he turned to face the General and replied emotionlessly, “General, I

wouldn't miss this for the world. Besides, time is our enemy. If there are any delays, our plans will be finished."

The General asked ambivalently, "Do you think Jerrick Davis can pull this off?"

"I'm not sure, but what are our options? Can you lead this great country after a coup d'état and prevent a civil war from breaking out? Can you hold this nation together as we transform our government?"

The General reflected for several seconds in deep thought and then uttered, "No, my job is to win battles. I don't think I could lead this great country, especially since I swore an oath to protect it."

"That's precisely my point! Unfortunately, we have no other choice. I'm not a leader. I'm more the silent, deadly type if you know what I mean. The only other person who can lead is the leader of the Communist Party, Frank Gitlow."

"Like hell, I would shoot the bastard myself if he became President. I spent half my life fighting the Communists. Do you think I would hand power over to a Communist?"

"You see, we have no one else. Jerrick is critical to our plans. He must be the new President, whether we want him or not. Jerrick is a natural leader with a grand vision. People trust him and believe in him. Jerrick is the only one who can pull it off," Richard added decisively.

"But in some ways, Jerrick scares me. Jerrick's vision is about building an empire. An empire conquers other countries."

"Well, General, you said your job was winning battles. It sounds like Jerrick will create job security for you. Besides, if Jerrick is half as smart as we think he is, he could pull it off. We'll be at his side. We'll help guide him and keep him in line."

The General snickered at the prospect of job security because it had died in the last century. In the new economy, workers suffered at the whim of their employers. An employee could be a superstar today, but the next day, the boss fires the employee, and large, overbearing guards escort the employee off the employer's property.

The General replied, "Well, what kind of job will you do for the Empire?"

“Like I said, I will do what I do best. I’m good at tracking down troublemakers and helping them disappear, so Jerrick needs a strong leader for the Department of Homeland Security, which is perfectly suited for me. You know me. I like to stay in the shadows and do my bidding.”

“You know this is a dangerous course. What happens if we fail? What happens if the coup falls apart? We’ll all be traitors. We’ll face a firing squad.”

“General, does it matter? Look around you. We’re doomed. If we sit back and wait, nothing will happen. Do you think those damn politicians in Congress will fix anything? Do you see anyone else who can fix the United States?”

General let out a long sigh and then replied, “Damn, you’re right. It’s just that I dedicated my life to this country. No one has ever done this before in our history.”

“I know, General. I have faith. It can work. Besides, we have no choice. We must move quickly.”

“Why? Is there something you’re not telling me?”

“Jerrick is pissing off everyone in government. President Gibson is losing sleep over Jerrick. I think the time is nearing for the President to demand a hit on Jerrick. As you can see, we have little time.”

“Do you think you’ll be that hitman?”

“I’m the specialist, and I’m sure I’m at the top of the list.”

“So, you could prevent Jerrick’s assassination?”

“Ideally, but it’s hard to say. After the President issues the orders, I should have enough time to warn Jerrick.”

“Good, we don’t want anything to happen to our golden boy.”

“So, General, how’s the state of your troops? Will they follow orders?”

“To be honest, our troops’ state is abysmal. We’re still fighting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Then Congress cut their paychecks, so I know I can rattle our troops to attack Congress, but as I said, time is of the essence. Troops’ morale is falling faster than a missile falling from the sky. If I’m lucky, I have a year or two left until the troops stop following my orders.”

“Then general, we must plan quickly. I’ll set up a meeting with you and Jerrick. Without those troops, our coup will not succeed.”

“Okay, set up the meeting.”

Before Richard knew it, the General hopped off the bench and disappeared, leaving Richard alone with the geese. His plan was coming to fruition, and a revolution was imminent. Our democracy’s life was ending, and the greatest Empire was ready to be born.

The American Empire will dominate the world for a few more centuries.

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## Part 1 – The Final Days of the Democracy

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### *In the Beginning*

The powerful leader was born on January 7, 1979, in a tiny coastal town, Holland, Michigan.

Holland, a typical small town where nothing extraordinary happens, is located in western Michigan next to the shores of Lake Michigan. Although Lake Michigan is tainted with toxic chemicals, the waters emanate a pristine blue. Its waves crash softly on the light brown sandy shores. During the summer, warm waters attract the people. Occasionally, an alcoholic who drinks too much falls off the long pier and drowns.

Why was Jerrick born in this small town? Great leaders are born somewhere. Remember, it's not where you start but where you finish. Jerrick Ray Davis started from modest surroundings and grew into an influential leader. All great leaders are born somewhere.

His mother, Dorothy Davis, chose the name Jerrick despite protests from his father. Jerrick's mother didn't know the origin or meaning of his name. Somewhere, she heard the name, and the name stuck. Jerrick is of American origin and means "gifted ruler" or the "people's ruler."

Jerrick came from modest stock. His mother worked as a waitress. Dorothy Davis was a slim, petite woman with long, curly brunette hair. Although still attractive, the exhaustive hours as a waitress took their toll on her. Spider-like varicose veins crept up her legs and the constant exposure to cigarette smoke in the restaurant aged her skin with fine cracks and crevices around the eyes and mouth. Of course, a thin coating of makeup would hide the lines and cracks for another five years.

Jerrick's father, John Davis, worked as a truck driver, always on the road, earning a living for his family. He was the typical absentee father and was never around. Jerrick's father had three passions: drinking beer, watching football, and dishing out punishment to his son. If he thought that his son, Jerrick, had misbehaved, he slipped his belt off in seconds, lashing out like a

lunatic. Other than that, John didn't bother with the role of fatherhood. Luckily for Jerrick, he rarely saw the ferocious licking of his father's belt.

Jerrick Ray Davis was an unusual child. Although Jerrick was a healthy baby who rarely cried, he lay quietly in his crib, observing the world around him. He watched and observed everything with these strange, hypnotic, hazel eyes. His blonde hair would darken to a light chestnut brown when he reached puberty.

Everybody in the family loved Jerrick, a cute and well-behaved baby who only cried if he had a problem, but his family knew something was strange about this boy. He always played alone and showed no interest in the other kids. He also took things apart to study them or build things. However, he had trouble speaking and pronouncing words and continuously babbled syllables that made no sense, as if he spoke a foreign language only he knew.

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Jerrick started kindergarten at Old Bell Elementary School at age five. Since the 1940s, the school's halls and classrooms have seen thousands of screaming kids pass through. This school has seen several generations of tired, overworked, and underpaid teachers.

After four weeks of school, Jerrick's mom stood washing the dishes at the kitchen sink and occasionally glanced at a small TV set sitting on the counter, blaring a never-ending soap opera.

The telephone began ringing.

Tossing the dish into the sink, she grabbed the telephone receiver. Then she frowned when the caller identified himself as the principal.

The principal wanted to speak with Dorothy and John as soon as possible.

After she had dropped the phone receiver onto its cradle, her elbow knocked a coffee cup to the floor, exploding into large shards.

Dorothy arrived at school the next day while her husband drove a long haul to Nevada.

Jerrick's mother meandered to the reception desk and politely announced, "I'm here to speak with the principal."

The receptionist had a perpetual frown carved on her face as joy and life left her generations ago. The receptionist knew it was never good for parents to meet the principal, especially within the first month of school.

The receptionist replied formally and emotionlessly, “We were expecting you. Please have a seat, Ms. Davis.”

Then she pressed a button on the phone system to let the principal know Jerrick’s parents had arrived. Next, she called Jerrick’s teacher on the school’s intercom to request her presence in the principal’s office.

After ten minutes, the principal poked his head out the door.

The principal neared sixty years old, losing the battle with his hair as his hairline rapidly receded. He wore glasses with a thin silver frame. He impressed people that he was brilliant and knew what he was doing.

The principal said politely, “Oh, Mrs. Davis, please come in.”

The principal opened his door and gestured with his left hand for Jerrick’s mother to sit in a chair by his desk.

After a few seconds, Jerrick’s teacher opened the door and sat beside Mrs. Davis. She panted from the jog between her classroom and the principal’s office.

The teacher was Ms. Bauer, a young, attractive woman who had recently graduated from college. Filled with youth and vitality, she eagerly taught her children.

The principal closed the door and sat behind his desk. He leaned forward and placed both hands on his desk.

The principal started in a kind, serious tone, “Ms. Bauer, Jerrick’s teacher, has noticed some strange behavior from Jerrick. He never plays with the other children and has trouble talking. Further, he always daydreams when Ms. Bauer is teaching the kids.”

Mrs. Davis didn’t know what to say. Her worst nightmare came true. Something was wrong with Jerrick. She wanted to cradle her face into her hands and cry. However, Jerrick’s mom fought back those tears. She wouldn’t cry in front of strangers.

Ms. Bauer sat quietly. She wouldn’t be the harbinger of bad news. She neither added nor elucidated any points. She observed the meeting between the principal and the parent.

“Mrs. Davis, please permit our psychologist to test Jerrick. Once we have more information, we can plan a course of action,” the principal said cheerfully, dispelling the gloom.

The principal slid a consent form across the desk, resting in front of Mrs. Davis.

Without conscious thought, she grabbed the nearest pen and scribbled her signature on the bottom of the form.

“Mrs. Davis, where is your husband?” the principal inquired solemnly.

Looking up to see the principal’s face, Mrs. Davis studied the principal’s degrees on the wall behind him. A Bachelor’s degree hung to the left, while a Master’s degree hung to the right.

“He’s a truck driver. He’s delivering a long haul to Nevada,” Dorothy mumbled.

The emotional impact of today’s bad news made her voice crackle and rough. She wished her husband, John, was here so she could hold his hand and tap into his strength. As usual, he had left when she needed him the most.

“Thank you for coming in, Mrs. Davis,” the principal said.

Jerrick’s mom shot up from the chair and bolted for the exit.

The teacher remained in the principal’s office a little longer.

Once Jerrick’s mom inserted the key into the car door, the tears flowed down her face in tiny rivulets, smearing her makeup.

Dorothy sat in her car for 15 minutes until she had composed herself and drove home.

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The psychologist tested Jerrick’s IQ. He scored 80, placing him in the below-average intelligence category.

Jerrick’s mother answered the telephone while watching a talk show on TV. The principal informed her of the bad news. He said, “We think the best course for Jerrick is to place him in special education. There, he’ll get the attention he deserves. Don’t worry! Once he makes progress, we’ll switch him to the regular classes. We also have a licensed speech therapist, who’ll meet Jerrick twice weekly to work with his speech impediment.”

Hanging up the phone, Jerrick's mother sat on the couch and cried again.

Dorothy's tears drowned out the constant arguing from a TV talk show host and his rowdy guests. She drowned in her thoughts. What could she do? These educated people knew what they were doing. She placed her son's future into their hands. Perhaps the principal thought they could help him and make him normal. Jerrick would live a regular life and make a decent living someday.

The principal immediately placed Jerrick in special education.

The teacher, Kathy Brewster, hated the title Ms. Brewster because it made her sound old, so everyone called her Kathy. Besides, Kathy was more personable, approachable, friendly. Kathy taught in a classroom located at the end of the building on the far side of an L-shaped school. The school administration isolated the special kids from everyone else.

Kathy was a middle-aged woman. She worked, cared for her cat, and read hot, steamy romance novels. Sometimes, she dated younger men, but they were immature and afraid of a strong, educated woman. Kathy remained unwed and focused on her job.

Kathy noticed strange things about Jerrick. One fall day, she was reading to the children when the green leaves were turning into yellows, reds, and browns.

Children sat on the carpet surrounding the teacher, giggling and laughing at the funny story.

Kathy noticed Jerrick playing by himself in the corner. She let him play alone, avoiding a conflict with him. He could be a stubborn little guy with a bit of temper.

Kathy noticed Jerrick holding a Rubric's Cube, which had a mixture of different colors on every side.

After Kathy had read the book, she saw the happy faces who immensely enjoyed the story. Then she stared at Jerrick.

Jerrick tossed the Rubric's Cube onto the floor near his feet. He solved it! Every side had a solid color.

The teacher looked at the Rubric's Cube in disbelief. Perhaps she was working too hard and wasn't sleeping well. She imagined he had solved it! Even though she loved these children and loved her job, these kids were special, or in the old days, they would call

them slow. They were light bulbs that didn't shine as brightly as the other children in the regular classes.

Jerrick can't solve a Rubric's Cube in 15 minutes. The principal never placed children who can solve Rubric's Cubes in her class. The principal always gave her the special children who needed more help with their education.

Kathy Brewster noticed another incident with Jerrick in January 1985 during a mild Michigan winter. It snowed a lot in Michigan because the Great Lakes surrounded the state, creating the lake effect.

When children returned to their classrooms after a three-week Christmas vacation, they spent their free time making snowmen and throwing snowballs. They also sat at their desks and painted pictures with watercolors.

Jerrick played on the other side of the room and collected all the wooden blocks from the toy chest.

After 40 minutes, Kathy didn't hear a peep from Jerrick. He was playing on the side of the room, with a partition blocking her view.

Kathy stood up and rushed to the other side of the room, and lo and behold, she almost tripped over an elaborate city made from small wooden blocks. A city spanned half the floor.

"What's that?" Kathy asked sweetly.

"That ff-food ff-for people," Jerrick replied, stuttering a little, pointing to a large building on the city's edge. The building was sizable and square as if the building could feed thousands.

Then he pointed to the largest building in the center and added, "That's where KK-King lives." The building was not quite a pyramid because the blocks made it boxy, similar to an Aztec ziggurat.

The city also had a library, a car repair shop, and a school.

The teacher was in shock because Jerrick had put thought into the city's layout and ensured the residents had easy access to all the amenities.

Towards the end of the year, Kathy experienced the biggest shock in her life.

Kathy was reading a children's book about the Founding Fathers of the United States. She held the book up high so the children could

see the pictures. She read each sentence slowly, precisely enunciating her words.

Kathy glanced to her left, surprised to see Jerrick sitting with the group, listening intently.

Once Kathy finished, a commotion broke out.

Jerrick stood on one of the chairs above the other children. He said in perfect English, "Give me liberty or death. Tell the King no more taxes!"

Kathy was both amazed and shocked.

Jerrick always played alone and never showed interest in the other children. Now, he has become a politician, standing on his soapbox and giving a political speech. He would be a good politician. Heaven forbid, his low IQ would be perfect for the job.

After Kathy had guided her students onto their buses, she dashed to the psychologist's office.

The psychologist was bewildered, too, and retested Jerrick's IQ unofficially.

Jerrick left Kathy's room the following week and went to the psychologist's office after classes ended.

Kathy's curiosity tugged impatiently at her mind.

Kathy hurried to the psychologist's office and tapped on the psychologist's office door.

"Door is open; come on in!"

Kathy opened the door and walked in, "I hate to bother you, but I'm curious about the IQ results for one of my students."

The psychologist sat behind his desk, folding his hands behind his head, leaning dangerously back on his chair.

The psychologist grew a thick, dark beard with specks of white. He absently scratched his beard when he talked to people as if scratching boosted his intelligence. Unfortunately, the years behind the desk and little physical exercise took a toll on him, as his belly protruded from his abdomen.

Kathy noticed the psychologist's desk, which was littered with stacks of random papers, student files, and test results. On one stack of papers, a coffee cup lay in the center, with a mist rising from the cup.

"I have your student's results right here. That's why I just poured myself another cup of coffee. I'm relaxing and thinking about it," the psychologist stated in a mysterious tone.

Kathy's curiosity escalated, and she asked, "What do you mean? What do you need to think about?"

"Jerrick tested higher. His IQ increased to 120."

"What? What do you mean?"

Kathy's mouth opened wide in surprise, and she grabbed the back of a chair to hold her balance.

"That is why I'm sitting here, thinking. IQs are stable and change very little over a person's life."

"So, Jerrick is not only smart but gifted?"

"It does appear that way."

"Should he remain in special ed?"

"I talked to the principal half an hour ago. We believe Jerrick should stay in special ed. He hasn't developed the maturity and social skills to be in a normal class. If he improves socially, we'll place him in a regular class. Don't tell his parents about the new IQ results."

"Why?" Kathy asked, perplexed, adding, "That would put Jerrick's parents at ease because their son is smart."

"The principal and I concur that the best course of action is for Jerrick to stay in special ed. If his parents knew, they could sue the school. Besides, if Jerrick's parents think their son is slow, they'll be more motivated to help him succeed," the psychologist said mechanically in a calculated tone.

Kathy left the psychologist's office bewildered because special ed is for special students. Now, she had this anomalous child when attending her class.

Kathy, the principal, and the psychologist knew little about Jerrick because he was a creative genius. Creative geniuses are a different breed. Half of them showed their brilliance at a young age, while the other half appeared slow and even retarded as young children. Their brilliant minds needed more time to develop, but once their minds blossomed, then nothing could stop their brilliance and creativity.

If the psychologist had retested Jerrick as a young man, he would have discovered that his IQ had risen to 150. Jerrick was quite gifted, as the whole world would find out.

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Jerrick's mom suspected something was different about her son. One Saturday morning, she popped into his room unannounced.

Jerrick organized his room, with all the toys stacked neatly on shelves. However, on this day, Jerrick spread all his toys across the bedroom floor.

On one side of the room, Jerrick constructed a large city made from dominoes with an elaborate layout resembling Aztec architecture.

On the other side of the room, Jerrick constructed a modern city from children's blocks. Some blocks stood tall like skyscrapers, while others were short and long.

Jerrick lined all his little green, plastic army men and tanks between the cities. They faced the domino city. Jerrick placed several small toy airplanes on one side of the block city.

"Jerrick, sweetie, what are you doing?"

"Mom, the army goes there," he pointed at the domino city.

"Why?"

"Build, Mom. Bigger cities."

"Which city is that," his mom asked while pointing at the domino city.

"Mexico, mom."

"How do you know about Mexico?"

"A map, Mom," Jerrick said as he pointed to his bed.

On his bed, he sprawled a world map over the top of the bedspread. On the map, Jerrick circled Mexico with a crayon and scribbled an arrow pointing at Mexico City.

Jerrick's mom shook her head in disbelief because he had an active imagination.

"I made you a grilled cheese sandwich and cherry punch for lunch."

“Oh boy,” Jerrick screamed as he ran from the room to the kitchen.

Jerrick delayed the battle because the little Emperor was hungry. The Conquest of Mexico will wait for another day.

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The principal and psychologist placed Jerrick in regular classes by the third grade.

Jerrick floated through school and never completed any homework. He slid by with Bs and Cs in his classes. Sometimes, Jerrick became defiant and didn't listen to his teachers. He spent a chunk of his early education in the detention room, counting the number of bricks in the wall.

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By the fifth grade, the school administration combated Jerrick's classroom disruptions with Ritalin, believing he suffered from attention-deficit disorder. In the old days, teachers called it hyperactivity. Unfortunately, many people view hyperactivity as a disease that must be cured. However, as hyperactive children reach adulthood, they can channel the energy from hyperactivity into motivation and drive.

Around 10 o'clock, Jerrick strolled to the office to take his medication each morning.

Jerrick's parents went along because the school officials knew what to do. Besides, Jerrick's parents didn't have a choice. If they refused the medication, the school would turn the parents into Child Protective Services. The State of Michigan during that time treated families harshly if they declined to drug their hyperactive kids.

Ritalin reduced Jerrick's disruptions. Once the drug kicked in, Jerrick became drowsy, lethargic, and imaginative. He didn't mind because daydreams would flow through his mind.

As a creative genius, Jerrick Ray Davis kicked back, relaxed, and enjoyed his vivid daydreams. He sometimes dreamt of flying airplanes around the world and visiting exotic cities. In another

daydream, he stood on stage delivering speeches while crowds of people chanted his name after he had made a poignant statement. Then the crowd's roar rose to a crescendo, 'Jerrick! Jerrick! Jerrick!..'

If Jerrick weren't daydreaming, he would stare out the classroom windows at the clouds and trees, conjuring faces and images from them.

For example, one day in 5th-grade science class, Jerrick gazed out the classroom window at a group of oak trees bordering the school playground. He saw one oak tree that resembled a witch's face.

The witch had sunken, beady eyes and a long, crooked nose as green oak leaves cast the face in a greenish hue. Jagged shards of teeth jutted from a large, grinning mouth.

Looking at the witch's face, Jerrick saw her eyes turn a bloody red while Jerrick's heart beat faster.

The witch grimaced and opened her mouth broadly to blow a curse in Jerrick's direction as a wind rustled through the leaves.

Jerrick convulsed from his daydream.

The witch casting a curse on Jerrick had startled him. He twitched his arms and legs while his right arm collided with his books, crashing them to the floor and disrupting the whole class.

All the students stopped writing notes, and his teacher stopped his lecture in mid-sentence. Everyone turned to face Jerrick.

The teacher asked, "Jerrick, is there a problem?"

"No!" Jerrick replied firmly with a bit of cockiness in his voice, challenging the teacher, hissing like a cobra ready to strike.

The teacher returned to the blackboard and continued writing.

Jerrick picked up his books and returned them to their spot on the desk. He stared at the oak tree through the window. The witch had left, and Jerrick saw an ordinary oak tree.

Unfortunately, Jerrick's imagination would get the best of him. On some nights, he still checked under the bed for monsters. He didn't want any extra guests in his room at night, especially guests with beady red eyes, claws, and ragged teeth waiting for Jerrick to fall asleep.

## *The Teenage Years*

Jerrick hated high school and all his teachers. Who could blame him? Jerrick's high school was located at the end of a long paved road on the edge of town. A fence followed the property on the backside of the school, isolating the school from the four-lane highway and its roaring traffic speeding down the asphalt jungle. On some days, students heard the incessant howl of the traffic.

On the left side of the school was a dark, dense forest, while on the right were the football and baseball fields. Thick, dense woods bordered the other side of the sports fields. Many students felt the property was better suited for a prison than a school.

During high school, Jerrick's brilliant mind blossomed. He picked up a book in the 8th grade and couldn't put it down. One weekend, he devoured all 800 pages of Stephen King's *The Stand*. This one book led to stacks of other books. He branched into electronics, computers, psychology, mathematics, physics, and chemistry. Unfortunately, Jerrick's restless mind had trouble focusing on history and classical literature.

Jerrick's peers noticed. Although Jerrick didn't earn the highest grades in class, he brilliantly answered the teacher's questions, swimming circles around the teacher's head.

Jerrick loved mathematics, and his brilliant mind absorbed basic calculus by the 10th grade.

Jerrick stealthily approached and cornered the school principal one day while the principal was walking along the hallway.

The principal jumped in surprise and tried to walk around Jerrick.

Jerrick uttered, "Mr. Bastien, could I take calculus in the 11th grade?"

The principal stopped and glared at Jerrick, startled as if he stepped on some dog shit during a walk in the park. Then he searched for a discrete way to shake the shit off his shoe without touching it.

The principal retorted authoritatively, "I'm sorry, Jerrick, but you should take calculus during your senior year."

The entire school administration knew Jerrick, and he was a pain in the ass. The principal didn't want to torture the calculus teacher yet, granting the teacher another year of peace before Jerrick showed up.

Of course, one day, Jerrick showed his brilliance to the calculus teacher, defying authority.

One day in the 10th grade, Jerrick stayed late in the electronics lab, playing with an educational electric motor, where a person can adjust multiple settings. Jerrick tried various adjustments until he squeezed the most power from that motor as the motor's whine filled the classroom.

The bell rang, signaling the students to go to their next class.

Jerrick ignored the hustle and bustle around him as students shuffled in and out of the classroom. He disassembled the motor and wires and placed them in the box, oblivious to his surroundings.

As Jerrick looked up, the students in the calculus class began sitting down.

Then the tardy bell rang, and the calculus teacher started the lesson.

Jerrick stayed a little longer as his curiosity caught the best of him.

The calculus teacher explained, "When a function has multiple pieces like a function within a parenthesis raised to a power, then you use the chain rule to calculate the derivative."

The teacher then wrote the function on the blackboard:  $y = 3(x^2+1)^3$ .

Jerrick solved the problem quickly.

Jerrick rose from his chair and started to leave the classroom.

The teacher explained the steps to calculate the derivative.

Once Jerrick opened the classroom door, he turned to face the teacher and the class. Then he shouted, "The derivative is  $18x(x^2+1)^2$ ."

Then Jerrick closed the door silently behind him.

Unfortunately, Jerrick missed the calculus teacher's frown when he solved the problem; indeed, it equaled  $18x(x^2+1)^2$ .

Students gasped because a smart-ass sophomore just outsmarted the seniors in the calculus class.

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Jerrick expanded his social life during high school. He made new friends and hung out with misfits, whom you might call losers. They rebelled against authority and all of its representations. They were lazy, did poorly in school, and consumed copious amounts of alcohol and marijuana.

Jerrick rarely drank beer because the hops' bitterness was too much for him. However, the pot was different. Jerrick wasn't sure why he started smoking marijuana. Perhaps the school forced him to take Ritalin as a child. Nevertheless, he suspected marijuana represented the outcasts and misfits, and Jerrick wanted to belong to that group. At the heart of Jerrick's core, he was a rebel. A revolutionary leader never follows a crowd.

Of course, hanging out with misfits was interesting too. They did some of the craziest shit together. The usual suspects were Larry, Jerrick, and Tommy. If the three left town, the crime rate would drop in half.

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One night in the 10th grade, Jerrick, Tommy, and Larry snuck out of their parent's homes at 10 PM.

Jerrick, Tommy, and Larry met at the Black River under the Bell Road Bridge. The river's official name was the Macatawa River. However, all the locals called it the Black River because its waters were dark, turbulent, and shiny like black obsidian stone under the moonlight. If someone accidentally dropped something into the river, it would disappear into the murky waters.

Bell Road Bridge was on the edge of the city's limits, and there was little traffic. However, the boys didn't worry about the traffic. They looked for Holland's finest, the Holland City Police.

Small cities like Holland have low crime rates, so the police harass the drunks and teenagers. If the police caught the teenagers violating curfew, the state would go after their parents, assessing hefty fines while enriching the city's coffers.

Under the bridge, Jerrick, Tommy, and Larry isolated themselves.

During a cool October night, the chilly air turned the young men's breath into tiny clouds of mist.

The full moon reflected off the river's waves, breaking the moon's image into shimmering shards of light.

They lay their backs on the concrete foundation with Larry in the center. Jerrick lay to his left while Tommy lay on the right. The concrete's coldness penetrated through their clothes.

Larry was the oldest and the leader. Although Larry was not an athlete, he had a muscular build. He let his dark-brown hair and scraggly beard grow long. His rugged, good looks attracted women here and there.

On the other hand, Tommy was skinny and appeared to be underfed as a child. He let his black hair grow long. He grew a beard once, but his beard poked out in patches on his boyish face.

Jerrick's appearance was somewhere in between. He was not skinny but not as muscular as Larry. However, he was an average-looking guy. Nevertheless, ten women would find Jerrick attractive in a room of 100 women, especially capturing the hearts of the heavier ones.

Jerrick would get a scribble here and there in a lonely teenage girl's diary, while Larry would get several pages. Of course, once Jerrick said something too intelligent, those women would flee as if he had escaped from an insane asylum. Unfortunately, women in Michigan are attracted to the dumb, athletic types.

Larry pulled a joint from his pocket and lit it up, inhaling deeply. An acrid, pine-tree smell of marijuana filled the air around them.

Then Larry passed the joint to Jerrick while Larry coughed out the smoke. "This is some good shit," Larry replied in a muffled, harsh voice.

Jerrick eagerly grabbed that joint and asked, "What kind of shit is this?"

"Sensimilla! Supposedly, this grower used genetically modified seeds from Amsterdam," Larry replied.

"That shit is supposed to be the best," Tommy chimed in, fitting in with the group.

Then Larry pulled some tweezers and smoked the rest until it disappeared.

Larry, Tommy, and Jerrick were very high. Although the concrete foundation had an angle of 40 degrees, the boys thought they hovered several feet off the ground.

Tommy replied, wholly stoned, “Wow; look at the water, the moon in the water. Ohhhh! Wow!”

After an hour, the boys weren’t so high anymore.

Larry stood up, stretching his legs.

Jerrick rose slowly and asked, “What do you want to do?”

“I’m hungry and thirsty,” Larry replied. He coughed several times and added, “Let’s go look for something to eat.”

“Are you crazy? The nearest store is two miles away,” Jerrick argued as if this knowledge would stop Larry.

Larry pointed at a row of piers with boats, “What about over there?”

Although the piers were hidden under darkness, several white boats stood out.

“I’m hungry too,” Tommy said as he got up.

The boys glanced at the pier where the river had bent and changed direction. They saw the outline of several boats bobbing up and down from the small waves.

Then the boys began walking in single file. Larry walked first, Jerrick followed second, and Tommy followed last.

The boys walked a bumpy, treacherous path along the river. Larry tripped on a branch but quickly regained his balance.

If one missteps, one will get a cold, muddy river bath. Of course, Larry knew this path well. Indeed, two years ago, he tripped and fell face-first into the dirty water. Then he had a long, cold, humiliating walk home.

The boys, however, made it to the first short pier, bone dry; nobody took a dirty bath that evening in the river.

The boys walked on the pier and hopped into the speedboat that someone tied to the end of the dock. The boat gently swayed as each boy climbed aboard.

Then they saw several fishing rods and tackle boxes, but the boat had no munchies.

In a rage, Larry threw the fishing rods into the river. Then he glanced toward the boat's front, studying the controls.

Larry whispered, "You guys won't believe this. The keys are still in the ignition!"

Tommy and Jerrick both turned and stared at the boat's steering wheel. Under the moonlight, they saw the silver glint of a key.

Before Tommy and Jerrick had spoken, Larry untied the boat.

Jerrick asked apprehensively, "What are you doing?"

"Let's go for a spin!"

Larry sat behind the steering wheel while Tommy climbed into the front passenger seat, and Jerrick sat in the second seat behind Larry.

The boys let the boat drift a little down the river. Then Larry turned the key in the ignition. The engine made several loud clicks but refused to start.

Larry paused a minute and tried again. The boat's motor roared into life. The boat lurched forward as Larry increased the throttle, taking off across the water.

For a few seconds, Jerrick worried about their misdeeds. Someone near the river could hear the loud boat motor and call the police. In these parts, men often went fishing under a moonlit sky with a 12-pack of beer chilling in a cooler.

If the police caught them, the police would charge the boys with vehicle theft, marijuana possession, and curfew violation.

Jerrick looked around and saw no lights, commotions, or other human activity.

Occasionally, Jerrick heard a dog barking in the distance over the engine's roar.

Then Jerrick calmed down and stopped worrying as adrenaline pumped through his veins. Adding the high from the genetically modified marijuana from Amsterdam, they were gods, hopping across the water.

They took turns driving the boat.

When Jerrick drove the boat, the calm wind blew Jerrick's hair back as the powerful motor propelled the boat forward.

Then Jerrick turned sharply and made loopy figure eights while the boat bobbed up and down from the river's waves.

After an hour, the boys drove the boat to the Bell Road Bridge. Larry took it easy and turned off the boat's motor, steering it onto the shore as its bottom scraped the riverbank.

Tommy and Jerrick jumped off the boat and scampered home like scared rats.

Larry sauntered home, acting as if he did nothing wrong. He would be shocked if someone accused him of any crime that night. How could someone accuse Larry of a crime? He didn't do anything tonight except hang out with a couple of good friends and smoke a little weed.

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Jerrick and his friends started 11th grade. Before the first day of school, they planned to tee-pee the high school. In Michigan, schools start at the end of August, and summers are hot and humid, as temperatures soar into the upper 90s.

Larry, the ringleader, called Jerrick, Tommy, Brian, Richard, Tim, Ed, and so on, telling them to meet at nine o'clock in the woods next to the high school's baseball field. He said, "Bring as much toilet paper, bleach, and eggs as you can carry."

Everyone showed up.

Jerrick arrived a few minutes late, but he saw Bruce brought a large army duffel bag filled with toilet paper.

The group sat in a large circle on the edge of the baseball field, giving communion to their God, Mary Jane. All the malfeasants wore shorts while the tall, prickly grass made their legs itch. The malfeasants started the ceremony in good spirits. Several people pulled out joints, smoked them, and passed them around.

At 11 o'clock, they stood up, brushing the debris and grass from their legs. Then they formed a line like soldiers, picking up their arsenal in unison and marching single-file into the battlefield at the front of the high school.

Then pandemonium broke out.

Jerrick grabbed several rolls of toilet paper, flinging them high into the large oak trees.

Kids threw rolls of toilet paper everywhere.

Some kids wove toilet paper into the bushes as if they were decorating a Christmas tree.

Someone grabbed bleach and poured it across the lawn.

Larry used charcoal to scribble on the doors, "Seniors Rule!"

The group must admit. They were clever for a bunch of druggies. They were all juniors so that the school administration would blame the seniors for this act of vandalism.

Although the misfits brought many supplies, the mayhem lasted for 15 minutes. However, the rush and marijuana stretched from minutes into hours.

After the supplies had run out, the group began leaving.

Jerrick turned and glanced at the school. The giant oak trees in the front looked like weeping willows, with white vines swaying in the wind.

They threw so much toilet paper that it looked like it snowed on the school property in late August.

The next day, Jerrick woke up groggy as his alarm clock rattled his head with needles. Jerrick slid out of bed and walked to the kitchen.

His mom slaved over a stove.

"Mom, I don't feel good. Can I stay home from school?"

"You'll miss the first day."

His mom scrutinized him from head to toe as her hand moved the spatula in the frying pan, scrambling the eggs. Jerrick was a little pale and unkempt, so he must have been sick.

Then his mom added, "Okay, but no computer games. Also, no novels. Read something better."

"Okay, Mom," Jerrick replied while almost halfway to his room.

Although his mom's cooking filled the house with scents of eggs, bacon, hash browns, and toast, Jerrick needed more sleep than nourishment.

He awakened several hours later and ate a healthy breakfast that his mom had left on a plate on the counter covered in plastic wrap.

His mom left a note on the kitchen table, 'Jerrick. I went to the store. I love you, Mom.'

After breakfast, he headed into his room to read a book on social psychology that he bought last week at a garage sale. Jerrick scoured the garage sales for cheap college textbooks.

He read up to Chapter 4 when Larry called him.

Larry stated in his usual cheery voice, “Hey dude, what’s up?”

“Not much; I was just lying around.”

“I know; I didn’t see you in school. You skipped again.”

Jerrick asked, “What happened?” He knew the school principal was furious.

“The principal and teachers were mad. In the first period, the principal said over the intercom that all students must go outside and pick up that mess. If we do not clean it up within an hour, we’ll lose our open lunch and other privileges. So, all the students went outside and picked up the toilet paper. You missed it. It was great!”

“Ah, man, I shouldn’t have skipped!”

“What are you doing tonight? Let’s get high!”

“Larry, I can’t. My mom doesn’t work tonight. I must stay home because I told her I was sick.”

“All right. Later, man!”

“Later!”

Then they both hung up.

Jerrick’s mother quickly burst through the door, “Jerrick, who was that on the phone?”

Jerrick almost jumped because he didn’t hear his mom return from the store. She was in her bedroom when Larry called.

“That was Larry. He told me about the first day of school.”

“Larry? You know I don’t like you hanging out with him. Can’t you find better friends?”

“Mom, Larry is okay once you get to know him.”

“Your dad and I think something is wrong with Larry. That boy ain’t right!”

“Mom, Larry is my best friend.”

“Okay! Okay!” Jerrick’s mom didn’t want to argue and asked, “Would you like something to drink?”

“A Pepsi with plenty of ice.”

“You didn’t say the magic word!”

“Please, Mom, may I have a Pepsi?”

Jerrick's mom smiled and closed his bedroom door. She went to the kitchen and poured a soda for her only son.

The next day in school, Jerrick walked to his locker; a passing face here and there, frowned at him angrily. Some students weren't pleased to see Jerrick.

Then one student, Jimmy, walked by Jerrick and uttered, "Thanks, asshole, for the mess yesterday!"

Jerrick kept walking as if he didn't hear the student's comment. What could he say?

Strangely, every student knew who tee-peed the school except the administration. It was no mystery. When something happened, Larry, Jerrick, and Tommy were at the center of it somehow and in some way. A person didn't need a degree in rocket science to identify the suspects! However, the school administration never questioned them!

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Although Jerrick liked hanging out with Larry, sometimes Jerrick avoided him.

Larry was personable, friendly, charismatic, and the party's center. Unfortunately, he could be a nut. If Larry had too many beers at a party, he would turn around and punch the face of the biggest guy in the room. Although Larry wasn't a tiny man, he always picked fights with much bigger men, the size of a refrigerator with legs. Then of course, Larry would get his ass kicked. He had a growing collection of torn t-shirts with blood splatters on them. After the fight had ended, a beautiful woman would always help Larry off the floor and nurse Larry's wounds with kisses and hot passion.

Some nights, Jerrick stayed home and curled up to a good suspense novel, spending the whole night reading it.

Of course, Jerrick still daydreamed. He kept daydreaming, standing on a stage while millions of people stood in the crowd, savoring his every word. Jerrick spoke with great words and gestured with his hands to emphasize key points.

Then the crowd erupted into a loud chant, “Jerrick! Jerrick! Jerrick! ...” Afterward, the crowd’s cheers would die down, and Jerrick continued his speech.

At this point, Jerrick didn’t hear all the words in his daydream, but the words would flow out. He would rise and become an influential leader one day.

Jerrick knew Larry and Tommy weren’t going to college. Jerrick was surprised because Larry was smart and would make a good businessman.

Of course, Larry and Tommy planned to remain in their hometown and party as if they still attended high school. Although they became older, the high school girls were always the same age. Those two would plant themselves in Holland with IVs stuck in their arms, filling their veins with copious amounts of beer and marijuana.

Jerrick debated whether to go to college. He knew from history that all U.S. Presidents in the 20th century went to college, except Harry Truman. Some considered President Truman to be a great leader. Out of all presidents, Truman had both the highest and lowest approval ratings in history, at least until the presidents after 2000. After 2000, U.S. presidents competed for the lowest approval ratings as the U.S. economy sank, and chaos and riots erupted across the great land. Then hordes of homeless began sleeping in vacant lots and city sidewalks.

Jerrick had no choice about college. He knew something infected the Michigan economy because his grandmother told him many stories about old Michigan.

His grandmother grew up poor in rural Arkansas during the Great Depression, working hard in the rice fields to feed her family. His long-deceased grandfather married her and took her on a journey, starting a new life in Michigan.

During the 1950s, Michigan had it all. Employers were hurting for workers as the Michigan factories operated at full steam, producing cars and trucks for the whole world. Workers joined unions and earned high wages with generous health benefits and pension plans. The cities were clean. The government paved and constructed new highways and roads and instituted an excellent education system.

Jerrick didn't believe his grandmother. Comparing the new and old Michigans was comparing Ferraris to Fiats. The two completely differed. Did Michigan have the best roads and highways in the nation? Now, Michigan had the worst roads and highways, with more cracks and craters than the moon's surface. Did Michigan have the best schools in the country? Jerrick saw that most of his peers smoked pot or drank alcohol. His school was particularly terrible. The rival schools called Jerrick's school 'The Chemical Team.'

Jerrick knew Michigan had jobs during the 1990s, but these were non-union jobs. They were full-time and paid \$6 per hour, while the minimum wage was \$3.35. However, the union jobs disappeared a long time ago.

Jerrick heard rumors that a union job would pay a janitor \$20 per hour to push a broom. Everyone knew which factories were the union shops. When people drove by a factory, they saw a large parking lot that could hold hundreds of cars, but now only 30 cars were parked. The union shop employed few people, leaving large factory spaces empty.

Then Jerrick noticed something else. Occasionally, as he drove by the union shops, he saw no cars parked in the parking lot. The factories were abandoned, gradually rusting away.

Jerrick knew the reason. The United States opened itself to international trade. High-cost factories and union shops became the first casualties. Then the non-union shops followed, and finally, a massive financial crash put the remaining Americans out of work after 2008.

Jerrick knew the death of U.S. manufacturing came in three destructive waves. First, Japan kicked our asses in the 1980s, decimating our steel industries and denting the American car industry. Then Japan experienced a financial crisis in the 1990s and never rebounded. Second, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan kicked our asses during the 1990s. The whole electronics and computer hardware industries were gone. Finally, before the 2008 Financial Crisis, the Mexican, Indian, and Chinese corporations were kicking our ass. Mexico made our cars, the programmers in India wrote all our computer programs and

answered the telephone help lines, and China made all that cheap crap that filled the shelves in our stores.

Jerrick knew he couldn't stay in his small hometown in Michigan, even though he loved hanging out with Larry and Tommy. He knew the Michigan economy had only one direction—downward.

One day in September, Jerrick went to the library and pulled a thick, soft-cover SAT preparation book from the shelf.

Jerrick spent months devouring every problem in that book. He knew his grades were not great, but excellent SAT scores would give him an edge. Almost all college admissions dissected a student's achievement into grades and test scores. Access to a large cache of money helped, too, especially if a university needed a new library!

On a cold winter day in January 1998, Jerrick took the SAT.

Only half the juniors sat in the cafeteria taking the exam.

Jerrick knew where the other half was. Holland had no shortage of booze and drugs. Trillions of brain cells were dying that night in a small Michigan town.

Jerrick aced the mathematics section but needed help with the verbal section. Three weeks later, when he received the results, he almost fainted from shock.

Jerrick ripped open the envelope and accidentally tore a corner off the page of the test results.

His eyes quickly scanned for those two critical numbers. With the old SAT exam ranging from 200 to 800, Jerrick scored a 780 in math and a 490 for verbal. He missed two math problems, but his verbal score could have been better. He joked that he was a mathematical genius but couldn't speak English.

Of course, those eggheads said the SAT is not an intelligence exam. If a person had scored too high, they were called a genius. If a person scored too low, they were called a dumb shit.

Jerrick applied to several universities in the State of Michigan. Although they all accepted him, only one university, Northern Mackinaw University, offered a scholarship. Unfortunately, the university was located in the isolated, cold northern peninsula of Michigan, in the middle of nowhere. The iron mining industry left

the state decades ago and relocated to Asia, letting the community die slowly.

Jerrick didn't want to go to Upper Michigan, but where else could he go? He didn't come from a wealthy family. If he did, he would attend a party school, like Chico State or Arizona State.

Jerrick did his best and accepted the scholarship. He will have to endure the long, cold winters for four years in Upper Michigan.

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It was amazing how fast time flew by. Jerrick was already a senior in high school, and graduation was rapidly approaching.

Jerrick was never girl-crazy, but during his senior year, he thought about the opposite sex. Jerrick was shy and intimidated by women, but the Prom was two weeks away.

Entering the cafeteria, he saw his potential date, Sandy. He didn't know much about her, except that she was stuck in the 1980s and not a popular girl in school.

Sandy stood quietly in the lunch line, eating a late lunch.

The cafeteria had few students.

Jerrick deliberately stood in line behind her.

Sandy stood there as a dolled-up mannequin. She wore an odd combination of black tights and a pink top with a white sweater tied around her waist. She randomly highlighted her brunette hair while hair strands twisted in crazy directions.

Jerrick noticed she wrapped a scarf around her hair like a headband, puffing up her hair more. The Madonna look hadn't died in Michigan yet.

Jerrick was nervous, almost shaking. He lightly tapped her shoulder and mumbled her name, "Sandy."

Sandy turned and faced Jerrick with an annoyed look as if a wasp had stung her. She wanted to give someone, anyone, a bad day.

Jerrick blurted, "Prom is in two weeks. Would you like to go with me?"

"NO!" Then Sandy turned around, grabbed her tray, and rushed to the far side of the cafeteria. She put as much distance between herself and Jerrick.

The word 'NO' pierced Jerrick's heart like a spear.

Jerrick turned and walked away, showing no emotion, feeling a piece of Jerrick's humanity died with him that day. He received his first rejection, a gift wrapped by a retro-chick, stuck in the 80s.

Jerrick wanted to cry, but an ancient memory awakened deep in his subconscious. As a kid, he cried but didn't know why.

Then his dad rushed over and slapped him hard across his face with his lightning-fast hand.

The slap left a reddish handprint across his cheek for days, disorienting him a little.

Then his dad told him words of wisdom, "Men must be strong. Men don't cry. Only babies and women cry. Jerrick, are you a baby?"

Of course, he wasn't a baby. We live in a society where men must be strong. Nothing is more disgusting in this world than tears flowing down a man's face. Crying is a sign of weakness.

After his father had slapped him, Jerrick lost the ability to cry. Jerrick often wanted to cry, but the tears wouldn't flow. He must be a strong man who never cried.

On prom night, Jerrick stayed home. For the last two weeks, he didn't eat any food because he was hurting inside, as if Sandy had ripped out his heart from his chest and stomped on it several times. Then she surgically replanted his heart into his chest, half-broken, lopsided, beating erratically.

His mom pestered him, "Jerrick, aren't you going to the prom?"

"No, Mom, the Prom is stupid. I'm not going."

His mom sensed someone had hurt her boy. She continued, "I'm worried about you. You haven't eaten lately."

"I'm not hungry, Mom."

Then the phone rang, and his mother picked up the receiver. "Hello. Yes, he's right here," his mom said, handing the phone to Jerrick.

Larry asked, "Hey dude, what's up?"

"Not much. Why aren't you at the Prom tonight?" Jerrick inquired. Of all people, Larry would have no trouble finding a date.

"Are you fucking crazy? Do you know how many drugs I can buy with that money that would be wasted on the Prom?"

“I see your point.”

“You want to get high tonight?”

“Okay, where do you want to meet?”

“Let’s meet at Tommy’s house. His parents are at a relatives’ tonight.”

“Okay. Later, dude!”

“Later!”

Jerrick placed the receiver on the phone cradle and headed to his room to get his jacket.

“Jerrick, where are you going tonight?”

“I’m going to Tommy’s. We’ll watch a movie.”

Jerrick’s mom examined him. She suspected Jerrick was using drugs, but what could she do? At least he received a college scholarship that was 400 miles away from those troublemakers, Larry and Tommy.

Jerrick slipped on his coat and opened the door. He turned to his mom and said, “I’ll be back at 10 tonight. Okay?”

“Stay out of trouble, Jerrick.”

Jerrick walked out the door and hurried to Tommy’s.

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The day finally came, Friday, June 8, 1998. Jerrick Ray Davis graduated from high school.

Jerrick wore the customary black gown over his blue jeans and t-shirt, hiding his lousy taste in clothes.

The graduation ceremony started at 10 o’clock, and his mom was very excited and wanted to leave the house early.

As usual, Jerrick’s dad was driving another delivery across the country. Jerrick often wondered if his dad had another family in another state and spent more time with them. Besides, supporting two families is cheaper than divorcing one family and creating another. Divorce courts are particularly cruel to a man with a good job. Michigan’s courts were quite infamous for destroying men’s lives.

“Jerrick, are you ready? Let’s go!”

Jerrick used a comb to finish his hair. He would slip the black cap on later so it wouldn't mess up his hair.

Jerrick gulped the remaining Pepsi from his glass and returned it to its spot on the dresser.

Then he headed from his bedroom to the living room.

"Let's go, Jerrick. I don't want to be late picking up grandma!"

Jerrick glanced at the clock and saw it was 9 o'clock. They had plenty of time, but he replied, "Okay, Mom. I'm ready!"

Jerrick's mom picked up his grandmother and headed to the school.

The school held a plain ceremony in the gym. His mom and grandmother sat on the wooden bleachers with the audience while Jerrick sat with his classmates on the basketball court's hard, cold, metal folding chairs.

The staff aligned and arranged the chairs in rows, and Larry sat behind Jerrick. He leaned towards Jerrick and whispered, "My mom bought a keg for graduation. Come over. Let's get fucked up!"

Jerrick smiled, "It sounds like a great plan."

The principal walked onto the stage and started the procession, "Today, ladies and gentlemen, a bright new path emerges for our graduates...."

Jerrick and Larry looked around for Tommy and saw him sitting three rows behind them.

Jerrick wondered if Larry was high because he wished he was high. If the procession were more boring, Jerrick would fall asleep on this uncomfortable metallic chair, even with the cold metal freezing his ass.

After a while, the principal started calling out names, "Regina Angler, Sharon Beckman, ...Jerrick Davis....."

Jerrick stood up and walked to the stage. Then he approached the principal and shook his hand.

The principal turned to the table behind him, picked up a diploma, and handed it to him.

Then the principal grinned at him because Jerrick was graduating and leaving his school permanently.

Jerrick exited from the other side of the stage.

Once Jerrick sat down, he opened the diploma and saw a single sheet of paper tucked inside with the message, ‘Students can pick up their diplomas at the end of June when their grades are finalized.’

Larry leaned close to Jerrick, glancing over his shoulder to examine the diploma, and he began laughing under his breath.

The ceremony lasted for an eternity, but then it ended.

Jerrick headed to the bleachers, searching for his mom and grandmother.

They had giant, beaming smiles. Few Davises finished high school, but that would change with the new generation. A new generation of educated Davises will emerge and rule the world someday.

“Mom, is it okay for me to go to Tommy’s? His mom is throwing a party.”

“Okay, but no drinking.”

“Thanks, Mom,” Jerrick said, hugging his mom and then his grandmother.

His grandmother planted a large, wet kiss on his cheek.

Jerrick used the sleeve of his gown to wipe the lipstick off.

His mom asked, “What about your cap and gown, Jerrick?”

“I’ll stop at the office and drop them off. Bye, Mom, bye, Grandma.”

Then Jerrick trotted away.

After ten steps, Jerrick turned and waved to them. He felt terrible about lying to his mom, but she would refuse to let him stay at Larry’s house.

He slipped off his gown and removed the cap during his journey to the school’s main office.

Walking by a trashcan, Jerrick wanted to toss them into the trash, but the school would charge \$50 for replacements. He couldn’t be a rebel with a \$50 price tag. Besides, he found many ways to be bad for free. Why should he waste the money?

Jerrick returned the cap and gown to the school and headed outside to catch up with Larry and Tommy.

The three misfits meandered to the nearest woods by the school. Jerrick pulled a joint from his pocket and lit it up, taking a hit.

“Oh! School’s over!” Larry screamed.

Jerrick passed the joint to Larry.

Then finally, Tommy took a hit.

They sat on a log on the edge of the woods.

Jerrick gazed at the landscape. A breeze blew through the large oak trees, vibrating the leaves. His mind found peace as his internal dialogue stopped. He saw every individual vibrating leaf at the same time.

Jerrick glanced over at Larry.

Larry exhaled a massive plume of marijuana smoke, engulfing a giant, black bug flying in front of him.

After a couple of seconds, the bug fell to the ground dead. It lay on its back with its legs twitching in the air.

The boys erupted into raucous laughter.

After several hours, the boys arrived at Larry's.

Larry's mom prepared food and bought a keg of beer. On a large kitchen table, she placed potato salad, bowls of chips and tortillas, salsa, chip dip, a platter of cheese and crackers, and various types of finger foods.

Larry helped his mom and tossed ten hamburgers on the grill.

"You boys get you something to drink," Larry's mom said.

"Thanks, Mrs. Collins," Jerrick and Tommy chimed in unison.

Jerrick and Tommy headed out to the enclosed walkway connecting the house to the garage, where Larry submerged a keg of beer in a large tub of ice.

Jerrick grabbed a cup and the tap and began pouring a beer. "Here you go, sir," he said as he passed the beer to Tommy.

Then Jerrick pumped the keg several times and poured himself a beer.

Next, they headed into the backyard. Relatives from Larry's family and friends, such as Bruce, Ed, and Chad, sat on lawn chairs, eating food and drinking beer.

After three beers and two delicious hamburgers, Jerrick passed out in the backyard lawn chair. He awoke about two in the morning, disoriented and groggy.

Jerrick looked around and saw the party had ended. He saw Larry's and Tommy's silhouettes as they sat on lawn chairs across from him.

Larry said, “What happened, dude? What a lightweight?”

Then both Larry and Tommy began giggling.

“I know. I know. A couple of beers and a delicious meal and then lights out,” Jerrick replied, scooting his chair closer to the group.

“Keep it down; my mom is sleeping. You’re just in time,” Larry whispered and lit up a newly rolled joint, passing it around.

The pungent aroma of marijuana filled the cool night spring air.

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During the summer, Jerrick, Larry, and Tommy didn’t work. In fact, they partied all summer.

Somehow, summer flew by at light speed, and before knowing it, Jerrick packed all his possessions into two suitcases, placed them in the trunk of his mom’s car, and started the trip to Upper Michigan. Jerrick’s parents took turns driving the family car for the 400-mile trek to Upper Michigan.

Jerrick’s dad stayed home this weekend for this special trip. He was six feet tall and athletic. He played football in high school. However, the years he sat behind a steering wheel wore John Davis down as his belly protruded from his waistline. His large dad became rounder and less imposing than when he was young. He grew into the shape of a giant beetle rather than a muscular pit bull.

They dropped Jerrick off at the front entrance of the red, brick, three-story dormitory part of a complex on the main campus’s outskirts. He could stroll to a store or his classes within minutes.

As his parents dropped Jerrick at the dormitory, his dad first jumped out of the car and helped put Jerrick’s luggage on the sidewalk.

His father was smiling, which was a rare event.

Before Jerrick said a word, his father embraced him and whispered, “I know I haven’t been a good father, but I’m proud of you. The only good advice I can give you is that the world is cruel. If you are weak, then the world will eat you up and spit you out. You must be strong and find your place in this world.” Jerrick’s dad

embraced him tightly during that last sentence, emphasizing his previous point. Then his father released him, and his smile widened.

Jerrick stood with his mouth hanging open. When you think you know someone all their life, they throw a curve ball at you, shaking up your convictions. He didn't know what to say except, "Thanks, Dad."

Until tonight, Jerrick and his father were never close. They rarely spoke to each other throughout their lives. Jerrick mentally counted the number of conversations he held with his father and counted twelve. When his father was home, he surfed the internet or watched sports while drinking copious amounts of beer.

Jerrick never participated in sports. His dad beat up kids like Jerrick in high school, the nerdy, weak kids. For his punishment, God gave him a son whom he would despise, or at least until this day. Today, his dad was proud of Jerrick.

His mom came next and hugged him, then kissed him on the cheek, saying, "Son, do your best. Be the first Davis to graduate from college."

Then his mom let go and climbed back into the car on the passenger side. She looked at her son and waved goodbye to him, tears forming in her eyes.

His dad started the car and pulled away.

His parents stayed at a hotel. Early the following day, they drove home, completing their long journey.

Jerrick felt a tinge of sadness. He didn't know it but wouldn't see them again in four years. Unfortunately, a poor college student's reality is that returning to the parents' house is a luxury. Students spend many lonely Christmases at the university, pursuing their dreams in sadness and isolation.

### *The College Years*

One word can describe Jerrick's college years: lonely. He became isolated from everyone.

In Upper Michigan, everyone talked like Canadians and ended a sentence with AYE, such as 'How is ya doing, AYE?' Jerrick could

never speak that way and didn't make any new friends in Upper Michigan.

All the locals spotted and despised the outsiders. The locals wanted the outsiders to return to the other side of the Mackinaw Island Bridge and return to their caves. The Mackinaw Island Bridge spanned five miles over the Straits of Mackinac, connecting the two peninsulas of Michigan.

Upper Michigan residents circulated a joke – Lower Michigan residents are trolls who live under the bridge.

Residents of Upper Michigan even wanted to break away from Michigan and form their state.

Despite the intense loneliness of Upper Michigan, Jerrick expanded his mind at college. He poured over books and learned things he would never know. His mind became a sponge, soaking up massive quantities of information.

Unfortunately, Jerrick didn't make any new friends in college. He kept to himself, spending hours studying in the library on the second floor, where he had a nice view of the small woods outside the window, and he watched the sparkling waters of Lake Superior in the background.

Jerrick's grades reflected his hard work; he earned almost all A's in all his classes. Of course, Jerrick didn't shy away from challenging classes like calculus, chemistry, and economics.

Jerrick studied because college had a different atmosphere than high school. In college, the professors don't care if students come to class or spend the whole night partying and drinking. If students choose not to learn, then professors will fail those students. In high school, the teachers shackled their students to their desks and fretted over every insignificant detail about the student's lives.

In college, Jerrick fell into a routine. As clockwork, he awakened every day at 8 o'clock, showered, ate breakfast in the cafeteria, and left for class.

Jerrick always arrived early, sitting in the second or third row, usually dead center. That way, he saw everything on the blackboard.

Many professors noticed Jerrick. He wasn't the smartest kid in class, but his grades were always in the top 5%, competing fiercely with the Asian kids in math and science.

Asians were programmed automatons who spent their whole lives eating, sleeping, and shitting mathematics and engineering. Homebred American students rarely attained the top 10% in these challenging classes.

Unfortunately, Jerrick's college social life was pitiful. He often reminisced about his old friends from high school, missing the parties, booze, and weed.

Jerrick's hometown friends avoided hard work and ethics and continued freeloading off their parents like bed bugs coming out at night to quench their carnal thirsts. They even stole from their parents, friends, or acquaintances, pawning the stolen jewelry and power tools at local pawnshops.

Jerrick longed to be with his friends but knew his life would be limited. The party lifestyle always included a stint at the local jail, entailing the finest accommodations: bars on the windows and doors and a metallic bunk bed, where the metal would gnaw at the prisoner's ass.

Besides, Jerrick still had his aspirations, which he vividly dreamt of; he was a great leader who delivered powerful speeches to the people.

Then people would shout his name, "Jerrick! Jerrick! Jerrick! . . ."

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One weekend, Jerrick was particularly lonely and reached out to his old friends.

Jerrick tried calling Larry, but Larry was never home. Next, he called Tommy, and Tommy answered after the third ring.

"Hello," Tommy said sluggishly.

"Hey, Tommy," Jerrick replied cheerfully.

After a pause, Tommy recognized his friend's voice and hollered, "Hey Jerrick, what's up?"

Tommy didn't sound drunk or high, but the constant partying made him sound slow as if he had become stuck in an eternal stupor. Daily partying was reducing Tommy's intelligence.

Jerrick started, "What are you and Larry up to?"

“Ah, dude, you’re missing some awesome fun. Larry is crazier.”

“Crazier? What’s he doing now?”

“Ah dude, last weekend we were drinking, smoking, driving around in his old pickup truck.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Jerrick became excited as he clutched the phone receiver tightly.

“We drove by his old girlfriend’s house, Tanya. He saw a strange car parked in the driveway. Larry is so messed up. He thinks some guy is in there fucking her. I’m like, dude, she’s not your girlfriend anymore. He stops the truck and puts it in reverse, ‘he’s in there, he’s fucking her, he’s fucking her.’ He backs the truck up and rams the car.”

“You gotta be kidding?”

“He rammed the car several times with the truck’s back end. Then we got out of there fast.”

“Damn, that’s crazy!”

“It gets better. The next day, we went to Ed’s house. We wanted to smoke some weed. Ed is like, ‘Larry, did you hear Tanya bought a new car?’ Larry says, ‘Ah, I think I will get sick.’ Then he pucks in the bushes.”

Afterward, Jerrick and Tommy burst into laughter for several minutes.

“So Larry didn’t get caught?”

“No, we didn’t hear anything.”

“Damn, a guardian angel is watching over you two.”

“When are you coming home?”

“I don’t know. I’m so far away.”

“How’re the college parties? College women?”

“Dude, it’s great. Parties are awesome.”

“Ah, I must go. I must meet Larry at the pool hall.”

“Later.”

“Later,” and the phone went dead.

Jerrick felt sad because he wished he was home partying with his friends. He also felt wrong about the lies about college parties and college girls.

During his first semester at college, a burly guy always stopped Jerrick from entering the front door. Who could blame him? Guys

despise other men who crash their parties, disturbing the male-female ratio. More guys mean more competition.

Jerrick thought about joining a fraternity and attended several rushes, but he shook his head in disgust at paying membership dues to befriend a group. He also despised rushing because the inductees became slaves to the fraternity, satisfying every whim and fancy of the fraternity brothers.

Jerrick was no one's slave.

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During Jerrick's junior year, he learned about the world's dictators.

On April 3, 2001, Jerrick headed to his political science class. Although he didn't like political science, he had a brilliant professor, Dr. Szulcheck.

Towards the end of the last class, the professor said we would do an experiment. His experiments always turned the students' world upside down as the professor tore at their beliefs, shaking up their convictions.

Jerrick arrived early to class and sat in the second row, dead center. He would see everything unfold.

Fifty students attended this class, but half always skipped it. Most students found their way to class during exam time because professors rarely let students make up exams.

As the university's clocks chimed 9 A.M., Professor Szulcheck popped in, slamming the door behind him. He had taught at this institution for a long time; he knew when to leave his office and arrive at class at the exact time.

Dr. Szulcheck approached the podium with his long gray hair sticking up in all directions like a crazy, mad scientist. He wore slacks, a polo shirt, and brown leather shoes. At least he dressed better than the other professors. For example, the odd economics professor, Dr. Okins, wore t-shirts and shorts with his school colors, Louisiana State University.

Dr. Okins added a sweater and jogging pants when temperatures dropped below freezing in Michigan.

Dr. Szulcheck glanced at his watch, allowing for late students. Then he began his lecture.

“Today, class, we’ll begin with the Butler Shaffer’s election test.”

The professor turned to the board and used chalk to write Candidate A neatly on one side. The chalk screamed like an army of angry ants as the professor wrote letters on the chalkboard. Then he wrote Candidate B on the other side.

“Candidate A,” the professor began, rising to a crescendo, “Is a government critic. He was involved in numerous tax protests and evaded taxes. He wants to restrict immigration and limit the government’s power. He strongly supports the Second Bill of Rights, which states that all Americans have the right to own firearms. Candidate A is also a businessman who earned his money from smuggling tobacco and alcohol.”

As Dr. Szulcheck spoke, he wrote every point under Candidate A on the chalkboard.

“Candidate B is a war hero. He does not smoke or drink. He believes in using the government to foster medical research and to cure cancer. He opposes animal cruelty and wants stronger restrictions on gun ownership. Finally, Candidate B does not mind sending troops to a foreign country to establish order or enhance national security.”

After finishing writing, the professor turned to the class and stated, “Your task is to vote for one of these candidates and list your reasons why.”

A student in the background vociferated, “Doctor, that’s easy. Everyone hates the Republicans, which, of course, is Candidate A.”

Infectious laughter erupted in the classroom. Educational institutions were havens for liberal thinking. Candidate A would garner few votes on this campus.

“Now, let’s still vote,” the professor demanded.

Jerrick scanned the room and noticed several students scribbling in their notebooks.

After a pause, the professor stated, “How many voted for Candidate A?”

Jerrick looked around and only saw several hands rise hesitantly into the air.

The professor wrote seven votes under Candidate A.

“How many voted for Candidate B?”

Jerrick looked around and saw the majority of hands, including Jerrick’s, shoot up into the air like patriotic salutes.

The professor counted and wrote 28 votes under Candidate B.

“Congratulations,” exclaimed the professor. He wrote ‘Founding Father’ under Candidate A and “Adolf Hitler” under Candidate B.

The students’ mouths dropped in awe, and then they burst into nervous chuckles.

The professor snapped, “Why are you guys laughing? Didn’t you see the results?”

“Candidate B was doing more for his country,” one of the students exclaimed weakly, rationalizing her apparent lousy choice.

“Adolf Hitler did a lot for Germany. He plunged Germany into a world war, executed millions of German citizens, tried to exterminate the Jewish race, and almost wiped Germany off the face of the earth in the process.”

The professor looked around the room and asked, “Which one of you voted for Candidate A?” Then the professor pointed to one of the students in the fourth row.

“My parents would kill me if I had voted for the Democrats,” the male student mumbled.

Several students hissed and heckled in disapproval.

“Class, don’t worry. Everyone fails the Hitler test. I have given the Hitler test for 20 years. Everyone publicly hates and despises Hitler, but they don’t hesitate to vote for him as President. Hitler always gets 70 to 80% of the votes. Always!”

The professor paused, and the classroom became eerily silent. He pushed the students to think, which is difficult nowadays. Professors and teachers compete for a student’s attention among the myriad distractions of cell phones, rambling emails, violent computer games, bad movies, and profanity-laced music.

After Jerrick’s class had ended, he rushed to the library. He had read thousands of books but never read dictators’ biographies.

Jerrick immediately checked out the biographies of Adolph Hitler and Napoleon Bonaparte from the library, devouring these large books in two days.

Jerrick had no idea. Germany was a developed European country. Which crisis was so severe that the people voted for a non-German leader who dropped out of high school and spent his youth wandering the Vienna streets as a homeless man? That was equivalent to Americans handing the U.S. presidency to a homeless high-school dropout from Canada.

Jerrick snickered at his analogy because Michigan's citizens voted a Canadian for governor. She promised to turn the Michigan economy around, but the Michigan economy resisted and continued sinking into quicksand.

Jerrick noticed four things about these two dictators. First, they were brilliant. Hitler, the greatest orator in the 20th century, seduced audiences with his speeches, and Napoleon, a brilliant general, won major battles for the French Republic. Second, they were never career politicians. They founded their political parties but only held a political office after seizing power. Third, they beat the odds as if a divine hand of providence came down from the heavens and pushed aside their obstacles. Finally, most people didn't know this observation. These dictators rose out of republics that were destroying themselves. People turned to dictators as a last measure to save them. Nobody hands power to a dictator when times are good. People must be desperate to give power to one person.

The German government, for example, destroyed the German economy with hyperinflation in the 1930s. Prices increased a million percent in one year, drowning half the German people in poverty and homelessness. Thus, Hitler quickly seized power and blamed the Jews for all of Germany's problems.

The French Republic expropriated property, turned social classes against each other, and invaded its neighbors. When the war went badly, the French Republic turned on its citizens, accusing thousands of being spies. Then the French Republic executed the spies with guillotines. The French call this the Reign of Terror. Napoleon rose and stopped this insanity. Although the French Republic had noble ideas, Napoleon brought them to fruition.

Jerrick discovered the same pattern with other dictators, like Benito Mussolini and his soon-to-be favorite, Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, or Augustus I, the first emperor of the Roman Empire.

Removing the dates and names from Roman history, history was repeating itself. The same problems plaguing Rome 2,000 years ago are occurring in the United States today.

The Roman Republic was killing itself. Taxes became out of control as the Roman government taxed everything and anything, including every door, window, and column. Rome's few wealthy citizens controlled the machinery of government, bribing the corrupt Senate, juries, and judges while lawlessness erupted throughout the Republic. Bandits roamed the countryside, while pirates roamed the seas.

Augustus rose and saved his country by reforming his government and building the Augustan Empire, which lasted 500 years, even with several centuries of bad emperors.

Now, Jerrick understood his mission. Those daydreams mapped out his destiny, being similar to Augustus's.

Jerrick must rise and save his people, the Americans, creating an empire. Jerrick faced many obstacles and knew he must be cunning.

Augustus inherited his adopted uncle's wealth, his uncle, of course, being Julius Caesar. Augustus used his wealth to finance an army and crushed all opposition to his rule.

Jerrick's family didn't have the money to reform the U.S. government or to raise an army. Jerrick has little money to buy his lunch in the cafeteria every day.

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Jerrick started his senior year in college and enrolled in several challenging classes.

Then it happened two and a half weeks into the semester. On September 11, 2001, at about 9 o'clock, Jerrick grabbed his notebooks and left his dorm room. Locking the door, he saw a commotion in the TV room, which was unusual this early in the morning. Usually, half the residents slept until noon, recuperating from a night of drinking and partying.

Jerrick walked to the TV room and sat on the couch with everyone else, mesmerized by the images on the TV, showing black smoke bellowing out from one of the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City.

Then a Boeing Jet struck the other tower.

Jerrick squawked, “What in the hell?”

No one knew who did it. Did homegrown terrorists or radical Muslims hijack the planes and crash them into buildings?

Missing his morning classes, Jerrick remained on the couch, spellbound by the images sweeping across the TV screen.

Then the final images flashed on the TV screen as both the great towers crashed to the ground, spewing thick dust clouds into the air and destroying the surrounding neighborhoods. An icon of America’s greatest capitalistic institutions came to an explosive end.

Then another plane crashed into the Pentagon while another went down in the fields in Pennsylvania.

Jerrick walked around the campus in deep thought.

The attack impacted the whole campus. Women walked around with tears in their eyes while the men were in a state of shock. Occasionally, an angry fist shot up in the air as the men vented their rage.

Jerrick noticed the gas station prices had jumped to \$5.75 per gallon. The terrorists didn’t attack the refineries, but the gas station owners profited from the country’s misfortune.

Several months after the terrorists had attacked America, President Bush sent troops to Afghanistan as the U.S. military chased the terrorists. Then President Bush passed the Patriot Act, expanding the federal government’s surveillance powers and limiting our civil rights.

Although President Bush carried himself brilliantly in Afghanistan, Jerrick thought the President faced a special situation. A dictator utilizes an unfortunate event to seize the moment and grab all the reins of power. Dictators have also used less traumatic events to seize power, imposing their will on the people.

President Bush never grabbed the reins of power. Instead, he tarnished his reputation by opening another front in Iraq. The President threw soldiers and resources at the Wars in Afghanistan

and Iraq with little afterthought. Then the 2008 Financial Crisis struck the U.S. economy hard, marking the official beginning of America's Second Great Depression.

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After an extended, lonely Christmas of reading books, Jerrick's last semester of college had arrived.

Jerrick entered a small classroom and sat at the front of a long, large table in the center. The lengthy table followed the walls, and students had about two feet of clearance to squeeze in and sit in their chairs. The classroom had no windows, and it appeared like a storage closet had been converted into a classroom.

The class was History of Economic Thought.

Then she sat on the other side of the table in the front, too. Her name was Lidya.

Lidya had long, wavy blonde hair and a thin face with kind blue eyes. She didn't wear any makeup. Her beauty was 100% natural. At least she wouldn't give any men any rude surprises in the morning like a guy bedded down with a gorgeous woman at night and awakened to a nasty sea hag in the morning as her makeup smeared over her face and pillow.

Lidya was not drop-dead gorgeous, but she was a strong eight on a scale from one to 10. She was smart, too, and dated intelligent men. In Russia, women valued intelligence more than brawn and rugged good looks.

Lidya started the conversation. With a slight Russian accent, she asked, "Is this a History of Economic Thought?"

"Yes, and it'll be a small class."

Jerrick looked around at the empty chairs and continued, "No more than ten students will attend this class."

Jerrick looked at Lidya, being friendly and normal. He hid his desire to rip her clothes off and make love to her on that table. He played it cool and blurted, "Where are you from? Well, I mean, I can hear a slight accent. So, I know you are not from around these parts."

Jerrick felt beads of sweat form on his forehead, and his armpits became damp. He tried not to sound desperate.

Women possess a sixth sense, smelling desperation in a guy's sweat like cologne and avoiding him like the plague.

"I'm from Moscow, Russia."

"Russia! You're a long way from home. What brings you here?"

"I wanted to study in America."

"Wow, what brings you up here, to the backwoods of Michigan?"

"When I was a little girl, I saw pictures of Michigan with its beautiful lakes and forests. I also saw a picture of Lake Superior; the water was so blue and clean looking."

"You're right. Lake Superior is one of the cleanest and bluest lakes I have ever seen, but you cannot swim in it. It's way too cold, even on the hottest summer day," Jerrick said.

"I know. I already tried. I reached my knees and quickly ran out, shivering."

"Why did you take this class?"

"I thought this class would be an easy A. I grew up under the Soviet Union, and this class spends about five weeks on communism."

"Ahh, I see."

"How do you like Upper Michigan?"

Lidya frowned and politely added, "Let's say it's been interesting."

Jerrick detected her dislike for Upper Michigan, an outcast just like him.

Jerrick rubbed his sweaty right hand on his jeans, mopping the extra moisture. Then he extended his hand across the table for a handshake.

Lidya grabbed his hand lightly, shaking it.

"My name is Jerrick, Jerrick Ray Davis."

"My name is Lidya Karokina."

Jerrick withdrew his hand and scanned the room. Five more students sat down while he talked to Lidya, and one male student gave him a sly smile.

That smile said it all. You're the man! Congrats Comrade!

Then the professor walked in.

Jerrick glanced at Lidya and saw Lidya smiling at him.

Then Jerrick smiled. With both hands under the table, he used his right hand to pinch himself on his right leg, ensuring he was not daydreaming again. Sometimes, his daydreams were intense, but he had never dreamt up an utterly imaginary woman before, or at least with her clothes on.

Jerrick began arriving early to his History of Economic Thought class, and like clockwork, Lidya always sat there.

This became Jerrick's favorite class because Lidya and he always shared pleasant conversations.

After three weeks, Jerrick broke the ice, played it cool, and asked, "Lidya, we have a quiz for the next lecture. Are you ready for it?"

"I studied a little for it. How about you?"

"I don't think it'll be too difficult. Perhaps we should study together. We could meet at the library?"

"I think that's a good idea, but I don't like the library. I listen to classical music when I study. Why don't you stop by my dorm room?"

"Okay, that sounds great."

Jerrick glanced at Lidya and saw she had dabbed a little makeup, more than usual. Her blonde hair was long and straight. A few strands found their way to the front, but most of it draped along her back, looking quite delectable.

A large table separated them because Jerrick felt a warm sensation in his crotch area as his little monster was awakening.

Playing it cool, Jerrick asked, "Which dorm do you stay in?"

Lidya tore a blank page from the back of her notebook, writing her phone and dorm room number. Then she folded the paper and pushed it across the table to Jerrick.

Jerrick slid the paper towards him, opening it a little and peeking inside. Then he folded the paper and shoved it into his front jeans pocket.

"Cool, I'll be in touch," Jerrick said nonchalantly, like an expert player, as if he had received hundreds of phone numbers from women.

Then the professor walked in, standing in front of the class. He pulled out his lecture notes and started writing on the blackboard.

Jerrick glanced across the table at Lidya.

Both Lidya and Jerrick exchanged beaming smiles.

Thank God, the table's surface hid his crotch area. The little monster became so large that it wanted to rip a hole through his jeans.

That night, Jerrick sat in his dorm room, holding the paper with Lidya's phone number and address. He studied it like a treasure map. Jerrick wanted to pick up the phone and call her but knew there needed to be proper etiquette.

Larry always said you wait two or three days to call after getting a girl's phone number. If you call her within a day, she may think you're desperate. Larry said the secret was to make a woman want you and not vice versa. It was challenging to do, but if you accomplished that, then you can wrap her around your little pinky like a love slave.

The next day, Jerrick waited until 7 P.M. He showered and changed into a polo shirt and blue jeans. This was not a date but a study session. Then Jerrick grabbed his notebook and textbook and headed to Lidya's dorm room. He arrived at her door within several minutes.

Jerrick's heart began racing while he broke out in a cold sweat as perspiration cooled his skin.

Jerrick reached out to knock on the door but hesitated. Then he withdrew his hand and almost turned to walk away.

"Oh, Jerrick, you came to study," Lidya said as she walked out of the women's bathroom and saw him at her door.

"Oh yeah; I thought we could study together. The quiz is tomorrow."

"Great," Lidya said, and she walked to her room door and opened it.

Lidya gestured for Jerrick to enter.

Jerrick noticed Lidya wore a long, yellow t-shirt and short, skimpy pink shorts, granting a nice view of her slender, light, creamy legs. She pulled her hair into a ponytail.

Jerrick positioned his notebook and textbook over his crotch area. He didn't want Lidya to see any unexpected bulges.

Jerrick walked into her dorm room and noticed Lidya had few possessions. He saw books, makeup, a small radio on her desk, a bed, and clothes hanging in the closet.

Jerrick noticed a bare bed and asked, "Lidya, do you have a roommate?"

"No, I have the room to myself. I grew tired of messy roommates and their problems. I pay extra for a single room."

Walking in, Jerrick noticed a picture on the desk. He picked up the picture and saw a dark, middle-aged man standing with a blonde woman. The middle-aged, blonde woman was still attractive.

Lidya closed the door and noticed Jerrick holding the picture, "They're my parents."

"Your dad is dark. He looks Middle Eastern."

"No, my dad is Georgian, and my mother is Russian."

"That's interesting. You take after your mother. You're beautiful like her."

Lidya's face reddened, blushing a little.

Jerrick realized he had broken Larry's Rule Number 2. Under no circumstances do you ever compliment a woman. Ever! Jerrick thought, to hell with Larry because he's not here now. Larry is most likely passed out on a floor right now from heavy intoxication.

Jerrick sat at the desk while Lidya sat on the edge of the bed.

"Do you know how they met?" Lidya inquired mysteriously.

"Okay, I'm game. How did they meet?"

"My mom worked as a school teacher in Georgia, in the Caucasus mountains. The Soviet Union required teachers to start their careers in rural villages to fulfill the needs and duties to the state. My father worked as a manager in that district's provincial government. My dad fell in love with her at first sight."

"Then they dated, fell in love, and got married."

"Not quite. In Georgia and Central Asia, men must pay a dowry to the wife's parents."

"A dowry? What's that?"

“Families want sons to carry on the family name. Daughters do not. Daughters move away and start new families, so parents want compensation for raising someone else’s wife.”

“Interesting, so your dad paid a dowry?”

“No! It’s a long tradition to kidnap a girl to avoid paying a dowry.”

“Your dad kidnapped your mother? Wow! Couldn’t she run away and go to the police?”

“No, she lived in rural Georgia, and my dad joined the communist party. My mother could do nothing except marry him.”

“That’s interesting. I don’t know what to say. I have never heard of that tradition, especially in this century.”

Jerrick opened his textbook and placed it on her desk. Then he turned to Lidya and asked, “Okay, are you ready to study for tomorrow’s quiz, or do you have more interesting stories?”

Jerrick thought it a good thing we don’t have that tradition of kidnapping wives. There is no way in hell that Lidya would leave Michigan single.

Lidya reached over and turned on the radio as Tchaikovsky’s 1812 Overture filled the room.

Jerrick looked at Lidya, and she crossed her legs. He glanced down at her legs, looking soft, silky, inviting. He scooted the chair closer to her.

“Are you ready to study?”

She looked at him with strange, dreamy eyes.

Jerrick recollected something Larry had said a long time ago. Once a month, women go into heat. At that point, they want sex. Larry stated that the window of opportunity is small, but if you face it, go ahead. That opportunity may never surface again.

Jerrick took a risk by reaching out to her. With his right hand, he caressed her ear and neck. She felt so smooth.

Lidya closed her eyes.

Then Jerrick scooted closer. He used his right hand to turn her face gently in his direction, moving in for the kiss.

She kissed him.

After several minutes of kissing, Jerrick reached into her t-shirt. His hand became a fighter pilot flying into enemy territory, anticipating the shutdown, but it never came.

Jerrick felt her breasts while her nipples stiffened. Then he reached down into her honey pot.

Lidya uncrossed her legs and lay back on the bed.

Jerrick gently slid her shorts and panties off. Then he turned off the light, undressing himself.

Jerrick mounted her and made hot, passionate love to her as Tchaikovsky played silently in the background, rising to a crescendo of victory.

Jerrick wished Larry and Tommy could see this. They would be proud of him. His first lover was a high-quality specimen. Not those hood rats they always picked up at the pool hall.

Jerrick made love to Lidya several times.

Then Jerrick fell asleep with Lidya in his arms.

In the morning, after they had awakened, he studied Lidya.

She still looked good, even with her hair being disheveled from sleep.

Jerrick mounted her again and made love to her.

Then he lay back, feeling his little monster itch. The little monster was happy, eating a high-quality steak dinner.

Lidya kissed him on the cheek and whispered, "Sludky."

Jerrick asked jokingly, "Excuse me? You're not insinuating anything, are you?"

Lidya giggled and stated, "No, sludky means 'sweet' in Russian."

"Oh!" Jerrick said. He could adjust to 'sludky.' Of course, he could get used to the word 'slutty,' since it sounded so similar.

Lidya became Jerrick's first girlfriend.

Jerrick studied hard in the library until the clock struck eight. Then he would meet Lidya in her dorm room.

They were rabbits, making love three times a day: once at night, once in the morning, and once or twice sometime in between.

Larry said the window of opportunity was narrow for a woman in heat, but Lidya's window became stuck open. Jerrick was very

happy. He would chase Lidya halfway around the world if he had to.

One night, finishing making love to Lidya, Jerrick began probing, "Lidya, why did you fall for me? I mean, you are pretty cute. You can have any guy on this campus. Why did you choose me?"

Lidya giggled, relaxing on her fluffy pillow and staring at Jerrick. Then she blurted, "You're different from the other guys. In Russia, women love men who have potential. Men who plan to accomplish something in life."

A smile crept across Jerrick's face because he loved beautiful women complimenting him.

"Ah, I see. Looks are not important, but brains and potential are."

"Looks also count," Lidya said, rolling over and wrapping herself around Jerrick. Then she tucked her head between his arm and chest.

"I don't like people with that stupid Yupper accent. They say AYE at the end of every sentence. It sounds so unintelligent."

"I agree with you because I don't like it either. They are saying the punctuation mark at the end of a sentence. Sun is shining-period. How are you doing, question-mark."

Lidya whispered, "Jerrick, I must return to Russia at the end of May."

"May, why?"

"I will graduate, and my visa expires."

Jerrick glanced over at Lidya, feeling a small ping in his heart. May would be a lousy month when she leaves while he remains stranded in Upper Michigan.

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Not really. I miss my parents, and I miss Moscow. I have lived here for four, a very long four years in Michigan."

After several minutes of silence, Lidya whispered, "You can come with me if you like."

That statement bitch slapped him across the face. How can I leave Michigan, leave the United States? Focusing on Lidya's slim figure, Jerrick thought perhaps it was a good idea.

After several minutes of thought, Jerrick retorted, “Okay.”

Then Jerrick fell asleep with Lidya in his arms. He would travel to Moscow, Russia, leaving Michigan behind.

The next day, Jerrick called his mom from his dorm room.

Jerrick and Lidya sat on the bed. Lidya wanted to be with him when he dropped the bombshell of Russia.

After several rings, his mom replied tiredly, “Hello.”

“Hello, Mom.”

“Jerrick, how are you? Are you okay?”

“Yes, Mom. Everything is fine. I met a girl, and her name is Lidya.”

“That’s a great son. She has an unusual name. Which part of Michigan is she from?”

“Mom, she’s not from Michigan. She’s from Russia.”

“Russia? Another country? Why can’t you meet a nice Michigan girl?”

“Mom, stop it. Michigan women aren’t interested in me. I called because Lidya must return home, and she wants me to go with her.”

“You mean over there?”

“Yes, Mom.”

A long pause accentuated the static on the phone.

Then Jerrick said, “Mom. Mom, are you still there?”

“Yes, but it’s so far away from home.”

Jerrick heard the tension in her voice as a foreign woman was abducting her son.

“I know, Mom, but I want to go with her.”

“Do you love her?”

“I think so? I wanted to ask because I must get a passport and a plane ticket. It will cost about \$1,000.”

“Jerrick, I must speak with your dad. Will you graduate?”

“Yes, Mom, graduation is on Saturday, May 18.”

“Bye, Mom.”

“Bye, Jerrick. I love you.”

Then the phone became silent.

Jerrick felt uneasy, with butterflies fluttering in his stomach. He wondered how his mom took the news.

A few days later, Jerrick snatched a letter from his mailbox with a return address, Holland, Michigan.

He tore open the envelope and pulled out a money order for \$1,000 and a note. The money order was from the SuperSaver grocery store in Holland, a little independent grocery store that fought the big corporations for survival.

Jerrick unfolded the note and recognized his mother's fancy cursive handwriting with letters having exaggerated loops.

'Your dad took out a loan from the bank. He did that for your graduation gift. We both want to meet your friend before you leave in May. We'll see you at graduation. Love Mom.'

Jerrick and Lidya walked three blocks to Main Street, where all the major businesses in town were located. The city tried to lure the big chain stores, but they avoided this place because Upper Michigan had been dying since the closing of the iron mines in the 1960s.

The university is the only thing growing in this small, dying town. The university administration constructed a massive 10-story administration building, the tallest building in Upper Michigan. The building was encased in dark, opaque glass and visible from everywhere on campus. The dark tower projected its menacing presence over the campus, letting the students and professors know who was in command.

Jerrick and Lidya walked to the bank and cashed the money order. Then they stopped at the drug store for passport photos and ran to the passport office in the post office.

After the post office, Jerrick took Lidya to a restaurant.

"Nothing too fancy, Jerrick; you still have some expenses coming up," Lidya said sweetly.

"Expenses, like what?"

"You need to buy airline tickets and a Russian visa."

"Ah, I thought the hard part was over."

"Nope, it gets harder."

They stopped at Jay's Place, a relic from the last century. Jay's was popular with the students because it served the cheapest beer in town. After 10 P.M., students would fight the crowds to get into this place.

However, Jerrick and Lidya came in around two in the afternoon. Only a few patrons were there, including Professor Okins, who sat alone eating a hamburger and reading a book. He wore his school's colors, Louisiana State University.

Jerrick heeded Lidya's advice and ordered himself a burger and fries, while Lidya ordered a salad drizzled with honey-Dijon dressing and strips of crispy chicken.

Three weeks later, Jerrick received his passport in the mail. Next, Jerrick and Lidya quickly departed for the travel agency near the campus. Jerrick pulled out a thick wad of cash and counted \$700 for the airline tickets to Russia. Then they faced the challenging task of obtaining a one-year Russian visa.

Lidya wrote a letter in Russian and slid Jerrick's passport, a photocopy of her passport, and a money order for \$80 into a large manila envelope. Next, they paid express service at the post office to rush the envelope to the Russian Embassy in Washington, D.C.

Jerrick reduced his parents' graduation gift to a meager \$100. He looked at Lidya and asked, "Are you still hungry?"

"Yes, let's go. We can get a bottle of wine."

Jerrick learned his first lesson about Russia. It possessed the strictest and strangest immigration laws in the whole world. Although the walls of the Soviet Union crashed down, the Russian government remained suspicious of outsiders. Travelers can't hop on an airplane and enter Russia. Outsiders need a 'Preglashenia' or an invitation in English. A tourist agency, relatives, or a business must invite the traveler to Russia.

When arriving in Russia, the foreigner must register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, known in Russia as OVIR.

Before their visa expires, the travelers must leave. If they stay an extra day, Russian Passport Control won't let them leave as they fight numerous government agencies to get an exit visa.

Two weeks later, Jerrick pulled an envelope from his mailbox and noticed the return address was the Russian Embassy in Washington, D.C.

When he opened the envelope, his heart rate accelerated, and he became nervous because it was light and contained no documents.

When Jerrick tilted the envelope, his passport slid out.

He quickly scanned through his passport and spotted the Russian visa on page 11. The Russian government had approved his visit to Moscow. Jerrick would chase the woman whom he loved halfway across the world.

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It was the night before graduation, May 17, 2002. Lidya trembled and sat quietly on the bed's edge, picking her nails. She spent almost an hour in the mirror in her dorm room, dabbing makeup on her face and styling her hair. Meeting Jerrick's parents for the first time, she wanted to make an excellent first impression.

Jerrick's parents arrived at his dorm room at six at night. Jerrick and Lidya heard a soft tapping at the door and then a muffled "Jerrick! Jerrick! Are you there?"

Jerrick recognized his dad's voice anywhere.

Jerrick rushed to the door. He hesitated momentarily as he glanced at Lidya, ensuring everything was perfect. Then he opened the door, letting his parents walk in.

Before Jerrick had said a word, his mom grabbed and hugged him, "Son, I've missed you."

Then she planted a wet kiss on his cheek.

His dad came in second, shaking his hand, "You did it, boy!"

Then Lidya stood up and greeted his parents, "Hello; my name is Lidya."

Lidya shook his mom's hand first and then his dad's.

Then his dad turned to Jerrick and mouthed the word 'Wow,' making sure Lidya didn't see the exchange between the two men.

Jerrick's dad asked jovially, "Are you guys hungry?"

"Yes, I thought you would never ask," Jerrick replied.

Everyone left the dorm room and piled into the car. Lidya and Jerrick sat in the back seat. Lidya reached over and held Jerrick's hand as Jerrick's dad drove them to an old-fashioned steakhouse. Pulling into the parking lot, they saw an old ranch-styled building with old, sun-faded wooden paneling outside.

As Jerrick's dad pulled into a parking spot, he turned his head to look at Jerrick and Lidya and uttered, "You guys can have anything you want. It's my treat."

"Ah, right, I want a t-bone steak," Jerrick declared. His mom turned, shooting him a dirty look. Mr. Davis drove through the parking lot, searching for an empty spot. Then they exited the car and strolled into the restaurant.

Walking through the main door, they smelled sizzling hamburgers, grilling steaks, and bread baking in the oven. The group marveled at the 1950s advertising metallic signs that adorned the walls. The restaurant had a rustic, at-home feel, as if we were visiting Grandma and Grandpa's house in the country.

Although the restaurant was packed with patrons, the waitress found them a booth near the entrance.

Jerrick and Lidya never ventured into this pricey restaurant, which was beyond the means of a poor college student's budget.

Jerrick studied the old signs on the wall that advertised soda brands he had never seen before. Then he noticed the brand, Nehi.

His dad caught him staring and asked, "You never saw Nehi? You had it as a kid before they went out of business. They made grape, orange, lime, and other flavors."

The waitress returned to the booth and handed everyone a menu.

Jerrick ordered Jamaican chicken, Lidya a smoked salmon. His mom ordered lasagna, while his dad ordered filet mignon.

The waitress placed a plate of freshly baked bread in the center of the table and a bowl of Caesar's salad with homemade croutons and salad dressing in front of them.

Waiting for the main entrées, Jerrick's parents quizzed Lidya as if they were KGB agents, eliciting secret information.

Jerrick's dad began the interrogation and asked, "Where are you from?"

"Russia, outside of Moscow."

His mom inquired, "Where will Jerrick live?"

"My parents own an extra apartment. I'll stay with my parents and see Jerrick during the day at the apartment."

Jerrick glanced at Lidya with a sly grin. She was good, but she raised a good point. Lidya's parents might not let Lidya spend the night with him.

Mr. Davis persisted, "What will Jerrick do in Russia?"

"He can teach English. Schools pay okay while he works towards his Master's degree. We have an institute a few blocks over from the apartment."

Jerrick's mom shot Lidya a dirty look because she knew nothing about an institute or whether a Russian degree held any weight here in Michigan.

The waitress brought their meals to the table.

Lidya used the distraction to excuse herself from the interrogation. She stood and said, "I must go to the ladies' room."

After Lidya had left earshot, Jerrick's mom turned to face him and whispered, "Are you sure you want to go to Russia? I like her, but Russia is so far away."

His dad turned to face his wife. He stomped his foot onto the ground for the first time in a very long time and said, "Let him go, Dorothy. More factories are closing in Michigan. I heard rumors that more trucking routes may be cut. Perhaps he can have a good future over there. There isn't much over here for him anymore."

Then his dad faced Jerrick, adding, "Jerrick, if you get into trouble, we can't help you. We could scrounge money for a plane ticket, but you know we're not rich."

"Thanks, Dad," Jerrick replied. He knew his dad meant it, and from the male-to-male subliminal communication, his dad liked his girlfriend. If Jerrick only knew what his dad thought. Jerrick didn't know, but his dad was experiencing a mid-life crisis.

Each mile his dad drove on the road, he aged. Sometimes, on long hauls, he picked up the nasty street women who serviced the truck stops, reliving his youthful exploits. If he were just a little younger, he would buy a plane ticket and head to Russia with his son. If all Russian women looked like Lidya, he would never leave. Lidya would make a perfect trophy wife if she were a tad prettier.

The rest of the meal went smoothly.

Jerrick wished he had a camera. He never saw his dad pay a \$100 food tab. His father usually complained about a light meal at

McDonald's. Of course, it wasn't every day that your only son graduated from college and would chase a beautiful woman across the world. If anything, that made great conversation. It beats the ole, 'I had to bail my boy out of jail again.'

The group left the restaurant and climbed back into the car.

Mr. Davis arrived at Jerrick's dormitory, parking the car near the main entrance.

Mr. Davis turned his head to look at the back seat and asked, "If you want, we can drop Lidi off at her dorm?"

"Dad, her name is Lidya. Her name has a -ya at the end. You don't need to drop her off. Her dorm is right over there," as Jerrick pointed to a building in the distance and added, "I'll walk her home."

His dad smiled because he knew better. He wondered if his wife had bought that lie. His dad knew that Jerrick and Lidya would head up to his room once he had pulled away.

Both Lidya and Jerrick got out.

Before Jerrick had shut the door, his dad said, "I'll see you tomorrow, exactly at 8. We'll have breakfast." Then his parents drove away into the darkness.

Just on schedule, Jerrick's parents picked them up at eight, and they ate breakfast at the local diner, Shortcakes.

His dad pulled up to the old, worn-out diner, his favorite place. Jerrick and Lidya cringed because the restaurant was housed in an ancient trailer, but the best part was that breakfast for four was, at most, \$20.

Jerrick cut his omelet with a fork before shoveling it into his mouth, inspecting every nugget of food, searching for 'special' ingredients. Shortcakes were famous or infamous, depending on the customer. A dirty, run-down place infested with cockroaches served the best breakfast in town and probably the best in Michigan.

At nine, they headed to the university's indoor basketball stadium.

Both Lidya and Jerrick donned their caps and gowns. Then they entered the basketball court, where the ceremony graduated a class of 900 students.

Parents filled the balconies and bleachers, row after row of chairs lined across the basketball court.

Although Lidya and Jerrick studied in the school of business, Lidya sat five rows behind him.

The college graduation ceremony was much larger and longer than his high school graduation ceremony. A doctor from Chicago gave the opening speech. After he had spoken, the audience clapped loudly, and the university president handed him an honorary doctorate.

Then the President gave a speech. Then the announcer began calling out the graduates' names.

The ceremony was similar to high school. The announcer called Jerrick's name, and he walked down to the stage, up the three steps, and approached the university president. The president shook Jerrick's hand and then handed him a blank diploma.

Jerrick met the university President for the first time. He had only seen him in college and local newspapers. With the high school principal, Jerrick and he were on a first-name basis.

Jerrick graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor's degree in finance and a minor in mathematics.

Lidya earned high grades, graduating magna cum laude with a Bachelor's degree in management.

At about two, the ceremony ended, and Jerrick's parents were leaving the bleachers.

Jerrick and Lidya fought the crowds to find his parents. Then they walked to his parents' car. After they had reached the car, his dad turned to Jerrick and embraced him: "Sorry, son. I have a long haul tomorrow. We must return to Holland. Good luck, Jerrick and Lid-Ya."

Climbing into the car, his dad glanced at Lidya, scanning her from head to toe. His dad approved Jerrick's choice of women.

Then Jerrick's parents drove away. Jerrick turned and studied Lidya. Boy, did she look good!

### ***His Life Abroad***

Lidya first returned to Moscow, Russia. Jerrick arrived a week later.

Jerrick was nervous about leaving the United States because he never left the State of Michigan. Now, he hopped on a jet to fly halfway around the world, chasing after a Russian woman.

Jerrick viewed this trip as a way to further his education about the Soviet Union. Although the Soviet Union collapsed over ten years ago, he would witness first-hand the impact when a government-controlled a whole economy.

Lidya picked up Jerrick at Sheremetyevo International Airport in Moscow, located on the western outskirts of Moscow.

After Jerrick passed Passport Control and Russian Immigration, he saw Lidya standing in a waiting area. Boy, did she look good? She wore a skimpy blouse and fixed up her long, blonde hair. Her tight jeans outlined the contours of her long, thin legs perfectly.

If Jerrick could get away with it, he would rip her clothes off right there and make hot, passionate love to her on the bench, right next to the old Russian couple.

Jerrick grabbed his luggage and raced over to her. He dropped his luggage and hugged her tightly. Boy, did she smell good too? Then he let her go.

“How was your flight, Jerrick?”

“Boy, it was incredible. I sat on a plane for three hours from Michigan to Washington, D.C., and another 13 hours to Moscow. I am jetlagged but not tired. I had trouble swallowing the airplane food.”

“Let’s go to my parent’s extra apartment. You can change and shower there, and then we can get something to eat,” Lidya said, leading Jerrick from the airport to the parking lot.

Jerrick picked up his suitcases and trailed after Lidya.

Jerrick felt his crotch itch and thought, ‘Wait until we get to the apartment.’ My little friend wants to say hi to you, too.

Jerrick and Lidya walked a long distance until they reached the far side of the parking lot, where Lidya parked an old Lada.

“Wow, an old Soviet car from the 1960s.”

“Nope, my parents bought it new in 1989. Once a Soviet factory starts making a product, the planners rarely change the design.”

“I guess if it ain’t broken, then don’t tamper with it,” Jerrick replied, feigning cleverness.

Lidya stared at Jerrick, and she smiled slyly.

Jerrick put his luggage into the trunk and hopped in the passenger side.

Lidya sat in the driver's seat and started the car.

The engine turned over a couple of times as several plumes of black smoke coughed out the exhaust. Then it started.

Jerrick snickered a little because the engine sounded like a loud, weak lawnmower engine.

Lidya pulled the death machine onto the highway and headed south.

Jerrick stared in awe at the Russian architecture. Moscow was the center and capital of the Soviet Union, and the Russians built impressive public buildings that were over 500 years old.

Jerrick learned that the center of Moscow is the Kremlin and Red Square, the power center of the Soviet Union. The rest of Moscow emanates from the center in waves. Approaching the outskirts, the buildings become more modern and Soviet.

Moscow has three styles: pre-Soviet, early Soviet, and ugly Soviet. The pre-Soviet architecture mirrors the baroque style of Europe, while Soviet planners spared no expense in constructing buildings during the early Soviet architecture. They call this era the Stalin Empire Architecture. Theaters, concert halls, hospitals, and government buildings used tall, impressive Roman columns, marble steps, and ornamental terra-cotta designs complete with statues. If you were to peek inside these buildings, they had 10-foot chandeliers, elaborate crown molding, marble floors, and walls. The communist leaders impressed their citizens, showing how communism improved everyone's lives.

Jerrick felt utterly lost in Moscow during the first month. Lidya's parents had an extra apartment in a 1970s Soviet neighborhood far, far south of Moscow. All the apartment buildings were rectangular, five stories tall, and constructed from concrete that emanated a dreary, dirty pastel white.

Jerrick described late Soviet architecture with one word: boxy. Buildings were tall, square, and relatively simple, as if the Soviet planners had used giant concrete dominoes to piece those buildings

together. Inside, it became worse. Pipes and wires snaked along the walls, completely exposed to the outside world.

The small apartment had one main room, a bedroom and living room, a kitchen, a tiny hallway, and a bathroom from the Middle Ages.

After Jerrick had placed his luggage on the floor in the hallway, he entered the bathroom for the first time and almost tumbled to the floor in shock. Jerrick thought to himself, ‘What did I get myself into?’ The bathroom was small and had all the amenities: a bathtub, sink, and toilet. However, long pipes ran from the ceiling to the floor in two corners, and smaller pipes ran along the inside wall, connecting all the plumbing to the fixtures.

Finishing his business, Jerrick returned to the living room and saw Lidya staring out the window into the courtyard.

Jerrick was tired from the long flight from the United States, but he was not sleepy. He gazed at Lidya, and she was looking good.

He approached her and embraced his arms around her.

Lidya faced away from him, and Jerrick started kissing the nape of her neck, tasting the sweet nectar of honey.

She turned to him, and they both started kissing on the mouth.

Then they both quickly undressed, and Jerrick made hot, passionate love to her on the bed.

Afterward, Jerrick became thirsty and said, “Let’s get a Pepsi.”

They both dressed and walked outside.

Jerrick didn’t believe it. He was utterly lost and asked, “Lidya, how do you remember where you are? Everything looks the same. Everyone lives in these rectangular, five-story buildings, and all these buildings are white.”

“Don’t worry, Jerrick, you’ll get used to it.”

“Everything looks monotonous.”

“This was a gift from Secretary Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet Union in the 1950s. He started the large-scale construction of these apartments. Russians call them Khrushchev’s slums in his honor.”

As Lidya and Jerrick strolled towards the main street, he saw the stores. All the buildings on the main street were rectangular and five stories tall, but some were painted a dull yellow or dreary pink to

add a different hue. The first floor contained the stores and businesses, while the upper floors were living quarters.

Approaching the entrance to the store, Jerrick saw several old Russian people hobble out of the store.

Jerrick walked up the one step to the stoop of the door and grabbed the handle. He would open the door for his lady.

A middle-aged, heavy-set Russian woman locked the door from the inside and flipped the sign on the door. Afterward, she walked into the interior of the store.

Jerrick jerked on the door, but it wouldn't open, and he shouted, "What the fuuuu." Then he caught himself before cussing in front of a lady.

"Ahhh, I'm sorry, Jerrick. It's one o'clock. All the stores and shops close for lunch between one and two."

Jerrick muttered, "Really?"

Lidya and Jerrick would return when the store re-opened. They walked around the neighborhood, killing some time.

Jerrick noticed the Russian women, and they were drop-dead gorgeous. They could be models.

Jerrick brushed his lips with the back of his right-hand several times, ensuring he didn't drool on himself. He thought God's cruel fate would be born an ugly woman in Moscow, Russia.

Jerrick noticed the older Russian women. They hunched over and hobbled as they walked. They also had long, crooked noses and faces covered with warts and moles.

Jerrick blurted, "Why do the young Russian women look so vibrant and healthy while the old women don't look so good?"

Lidya stopped walking, turned to Jerrick, and said, "Russian life is hard on a woman. She must cook and clean for her family and care for the man. In America, you have all those conveniences. Life is easy and simple. Did you notice anything missing in the apartment?"

Scratching his chin, Jerrick paused in thought. What could be missing?

Then he asked, "I give up Lidya. Surprise me."

"Wait until you wash your clothes. I have a big surprise waiting for you."

Thinking about it, Jerrick noticed something missing from the apartment: a washing machine. Jerrick loved surprises, but surprises wrapped up in a box with a pretty bow, not surprises that entailed hard work.

They started walking again.

“Women in America used to cook, clean, and care for their men, but our grandmothers don’t look this bad.”

“Jerrick, when I mean cook and clean. Women make the food from scratch: flour, eggs, and butter. When I said clean, a woman gets on her hands and knees and scrubs the floor with a rag.”

“Oh,” Jerrick uttered, speechless, not ready for that surprise about washing clothes.

Lidya and Jerrick walked farther until they noticed three Russian men sitting on a bench, drinking vodka from a bottle.

“Damn, it’s only noon, and those guys are already drinking the hard stuff.”

“Welcome to Russia. Most men are alcoholics here. They drink all day and don’t work.”

In Jerrick’s hometown, most men were druggies or alcoholics, too, similar to Russia. So Michigan and Russia share many similar things.

Passing by, Jerrick smelled a strong order emanating from the men. They haven’t touched a bar of soap in centuries.

Jerrick noticed the dust and dirt caked into their skin, making the men look much older than they actually were. They looked worn down and beaten.

“Jerrick, you can learn your first Russian word today, Troyka!”

“Troyka, what’s that?”

“It means a group of three.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“How many drunks do you see over there?”

“Three.”

“Three men have enough money to buy and share a bottle of vodka. They have plenty of vodka for them to get drunk, but if they had a fourth person, they wouldn’t have enough vodka.”

“Wow, I see your point. Lidya, I don’t understand one thing. Young women look so attractive here. They fix themselves up. On

the other hand, Russian men look terrible. Why is that?" Jerrick asked, wanting an answer to this dichotomy.

"Competition! Women compete for the good men. You know, a man with a job who doesn't drink alcohol. They're hard to find around here. Why do you think I brought you here? I imported my own man."

Jerrick smiled because a man felt good when a sexy, attractive woman had thrown a compliment in his direction.

Jerrick added, "I wish American women thought that way."

"What do American women want in a man?" Lidya asked teasingly.

"I have no idea. Probably most American men are in the same boat with me, quite clueless."

At two o'clock, Jerrick and Lidya finished walking around the extended Soviet neighborhood. They stood in front of the store.

Jerrick hopped up on the step, and the door quickly opened. Then he held the door open for Lidya.

She sauntered in first, then Jerrick.

Jerrick experienced his second surprise of the day. He thought the bathroom was terrible, but the store needed improvement. The ancient store had old and worn floor tiles. He wasn't sure if the tile patterns were dirt or dark colors. The walls looked like they had not seen a coat of paint in a century. Perishable food was stored in old, refrigerated glass showcases and coolers, and the coolers' compressors rattled loudly.

Lidya noticed Jerrick's shocked expression and said, "Welcome to a Russian state store."

"You're kidding. Right, Lidya?"

"No, you're standing in an authentic state store outside the Soviet Union. The only difference is that this store has products on the shelves. When I came here as a little girl, I always saw bare shelves."

Jerrick noticed one cooler had sodas while the other four coolers had various beer and liquor drinks.

Both Lidya and Jerrick headed to the soda coolers.

Jerrick noticed one soda brand, a ½ liter soda with the Soviet Union's hammer and sickle blazoned on it. He asked, "What's that?"

“Soviet Lemonade. You wanna try it?”

“Sure, I’m game.”

Jerrick grabbed two bottles, and they approached the cashier.

Nobody stood in line.

The cashier sat on a chair, reading a book.

Jerrick and Lidya stood at the cash register.

Jerrick noticed the cashier needed a cash register. Instead, she had a box of money and an abacus that Jerrick had only seen in books. He stared at the old abacus, with years of dirt and grime embedded in the wooden disks on the metal racks.

A woman sat and read her book and didn’t show the slightest interest in her customers.

Jerrick glanced quizzically at Lidya. Then he cleared his voice. That way, the woman would know someone is in line.

The woman continued reading her book.

Then Jerrick hollered in English, “Excuse me, can you do your job!”

Lidya grabbed Jerrick’s arm, hushing him up.

The old woman thrust her book down and replied, “Nye ponimayyu tebye!”

Jerrick didn’t understand, and Lidya started speaking Russian to her.

The old Russian woman grabbed the abacus. Her fingers slid disks lightning fast, tabulating their total for two sodas.

Then she said something in Russian.

Lidya whispered, “5,000 rubles.”

Jerrick pulled currency from his pocket and handed it to the cashier.

Then they hurried out of the store.

Jerrick gulped down half the Soviet lemonade and was surprised. It was good, but it tasted like ginger ale! The brilliant Soviet planners didn’t get the correct flavor.

“Lidya, why did you grab my arm in the store?”

“I didn’t want you saying anything rude to the woman. They know some English cuss words.”

“I’ve never seen anything like it. We might still be in there if I didn’t speak up.”

“If you offended her, she wouldn’t sell us these drinks.”

“Really?”

“Is this how Russians do business?”

“Jerrick, you must remember that the Soviet state-controlled everything for 70 years. No one had any incentive to get anything done. If you get bad service in America, you can always go somewhere else. Here in the Soviet Union, you get awful service, then go to another state store with bare shelves and lousy service, too.”

Jerrick snapped, “How did the Russians get anything done?”

“They didn’t. That’s why the Soviet Union had collapsed.”

Lidya glanced at Jerrick strangely. He was supposed to be smart, and she taught Jerrick the obvious.

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Jerrick lived in Moscow for three weeks and would meet Lidya’s parents tonight for dinner.

Lidya stopped by the apartment at four to pick up Jerrick. Her parents lived farther out of town in the suburbs, approximately 10 miles away.

Jerrick became nervous because Lidya’s dad looked like a powerful, imposing man. A man used to getting what he wanted. Jerrick hoped he made a solid first impression.

As Lidya approached the neighborhood, the roads worsened, transforming into dirt, uneven roads filled with potholes. The car’s suspension creaked and groaned each time Lidya hit one of the potholes.

“This car is ready to fall apart,” Jerrick joked.

“Welcome to brilliant Russian planning.”

Jerrick noticed several homes. They were not mansions, but the homes were two stories tall and new. Then he saw the styles. One home looked like a castle with turrets and small octagon-shaped towers. Other homes were Italian style, two stories tall, and shaped like a box. Each side had exposed balconies with potted trees and plants scattered throughout the porches and patios.

Jerrick blurted, “Lidya, these homes are nice, but why are the streets so crappy?”

“This place was originally for dachas.”

“A dacha, what’s that?”

“During the Soviet Union, everyone lived in those cramped apartments in the city, but some owned land outside the city. They put up a hut, which we call a dacha. People would get away from the city on the weekends and grow vegetables in their gardens. When the Soviet Union collapsed, people built homes on their land. Then they moved here, renting out their apartments in the city. The Russian government never got around to paving these streets.”

“Ah, I see. That’s weird because rich neighborhoods in the United States have the best roads and sidewalks.”

Lidya suddenly stopped at one of the houses.

Jerrick didn’t see the house because a six-foot solid, blue fence hid it while apple and pear trees poked above it, displaying their unripened fruit.

Lidya and Jerrick climbed out of the car and approached the fence.

Jerrick asked in jest, “Look at this fence. Are you guys expecting robbers and thieves?”

“No, this is only what my father could find. Solid metal sheets for a fence.”

At one spot on the fence, Lidya grabbed a door handle and pushed the door open.

Jerrick glanced inside and saw a cozy, one-story house hidden behind the fence in the middle of the property. Apple and pear trees surrounded the house, and a garden of tomato and cantaloupe plants was growing in the far right corner.

Jerrick approached the house and saw Lidya’s dad sitting on a recliner on the front porch. The photograph didn’t exaggerate one bit. He was a large, imposing man.

As Lidya and Jerrick walked onto the porch, her dad quickly stood up, held his hand out for a handshake, and exuberantly said, “Zdrastivutye!”

“Hello,” Jerrick replied, reaching out and shaking his hand.

Her dad led them inside into the first room, the kitchen.

Lidya's mom slaved over the stove. Seeing the guest enter, she wiped her hands on a towel and approached Jerrick.

She reached out to shake Jerrick's hand and said, "Dobro pozhalovat nash dom."

Jerrick shook her hand.

Lidya translated, "Welcome to our home."

Lidya's dad led the kids to the living room, where Lidya's grandmother sat on the couch.

She didn't get up, but she glared at Jerrick.

After several minutes, the grandmother asked something in Russian.

Lidya immediately replied, "Nyet," or 'no' in Russian.

Jerrick asked, "What did she say?"

"Grandma wants to know if you work for the CIA, and she doesn't trust you."

"Oh, that's interesting. You should tell her yes; her name is in my file."

Jerrick saw a long table pushed against the wall with various types of food on it that Jerrick had never seen before.

Lidya's dad disappeared into the bedroom and returned with a bottle of vodka and two shot glasses. Then he sat at the head of the table. Next, the dad directed the guest of honor, Jerrick, to sit next to him while Lidya and grandma sat to Jerrick's left. Luckily, grandma sat on the other side of Lidya, away from Jerrick.

Lidya's mom brought in plates of food and placed them on the table. Then she trotted to the kitchen for more plates of food.

Lidya's dad opened the bottle and poured out two shots.

Jerrick noticed the label Smirnoff's Vodka.

Jerrick asked Lidya, "Why is he drinking American vodka?"

"Russians think American vodka tastes better," then Lidya translated this information to her father. Her dad nodded in approval and placed one of the shot glasses before Jerrick.

Lidya said, "It's a Russian tradition to share a toast with the father."

Jerrick and her dad picked up the shots, made a toast, and gulped down the vodka.

The vodka burned Jerrick's throat like liquid fire making its way to his stomach. Before the vodka settled in Jerrick's stomach, her dad poured another vodka and proposed another toast. Lidya noticed Jerrick didn't finish the entire shot and whispered into his ear, "Russians get offended if you don't finish the whole shot."

Jerrick swallowed the vodka, making a large grimace.

Lidya said something to her dad in Russian.

Her dad removed Jerrick's shot glass, and he just started pouring shots for himself.

Lidya's mom sat at the other end of the table, and they began eating.

Jerrick became impressed with the simple, delicious food. Russian potato salad contained sliced apples, making it sweet. The salty, marinated red tomatoes were quite good. The main entrée was Monti: steamed noodles stuffed with ground beef, carrots, onions, and potatoes, a smart way to slip healthy vegetables into a good-tasting dish.

Lidya's parents wanted to talk to Jerrick, but they had a language barrier. They spoke only Russian, while Jerrick spoke only English.

Lidya did most of the talking and translating.

Occasionally, Jerrick nodded his head in approval.

After a few hours, Lidya drove Jerrick to the apartment.

Jerrick wanted Lidya to come inside, but Lidya pulled herself from his arms and returned home.

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Jerrick heeded Lidya's advice and went to the Moscow Institute of Business, which was a few blocks away from the apartment.

Approaching the building, Jerrick saw a dusty white building that looked more like an industrial complex than a place of education. However, he didn't speak Russian, which limited his employment choices.

Jerrick opened the front door and walked in.

A security guard sat at a desk near the front entrance. He spotted Jerrick and knew he was a foreigner, rushing him to the director's office on the second floor.

Jerrick didn't wait.

The director, Alexander Fedoseev, emerged from his office. He proudly showed Jerrick the building and gave him a grand tour of the facility. The institute taught courses in English, and native English speakers were rare in this part of Moscow.

They strolled through the corridors, inspecting various classrooms and computer rooms. Although the exterior of the building looked like hell, the inside was clean and modern, talking about a wrong first impression.

Although Jerrick only had a Bachelor's degree, he would teach business English.

The director insisted that Jerrick enroll in the Masters of Business Administration program. Instructors taught all the courses in English.

The institute paid Jerrick \$750 per month for teaching English and waived the tuition and fees for Jerrick's classes.

The director's reason was simple: Russian regulations were simpler for students, while work visas and permits were difficult to obtain. Through normal channels, even with the proper paperwork, the bureaucrats rejected all applicants; they always needed help with the documents. The only way to solve problems was for the applicant to pay a bribe, which could be as high as \$5,000. That was an ungodly sum for the poor colleges and poor students.

The Russian people became masters in circumventing the monstrous Russian rules and laws, an everlasting gift from the Soviet legal system.

Lidya and Jerrick scanned the documents they needed for a student visa. They needed certified translations of Jerrick's college transcript, a medical exam, an HIV test, a taxpayer's ID number, a rental agreement that covered the duration of his stay in Moscow, and many other documents.

Jerrick was dumbfounded.

Then the fun began dealing with the various Russian bureaucrats.

At each agency, Lidya and Jerrick waited in long lines. During their turn, Lidya always argued with the bureaucrats to get the documents.

The bureaucrats didn't do any work. They always shooed the people away.

Each time they received a document, Jerrick inspected it. The documents were simple. A bureaucrat completed a form and signed it at the bottom, then stamped his signature with a blue seal of the agency.

"Lidya, I have never seen anything like this."

"Welcome to the Russian bureaucracy. All this is left over from the Soviet Union."

"Lidya, it'll take weeks to get all our documents."

"I know that is how the Soviet planners designed the system. Remember Jerrick, nobody worked in the Soviet Union. People had plenty of time to stand in lines and collect these documents. I suspected many gave up."

"I wouldn't be surprised the people didn't protest their government."

Lidya laughed and added, "Jerrick, Stalin executed any troublemakers. I heard rumors from Central Asia where people disagreed with the bureaucrats about their nationality. Then during the night, they disappeared forever."

"Lidya, what do you mean over nationality?"

"The Soviet Union was composed of hundreds of ethnic groups. For instance, the Soviet government says a person is Kazakh, but he's Uzbek. Central Asian people are proud of their heritage. If this person argued with the bureaucrat and tried to change his nationality on his documents, he would disappear. Stalin didn't want any troublemakers around."

"Damn, that's harsh."

"Stalin united all people under the Soviet Union. He didn't want anyone to disagree with him. He designed the Soviet Union so it would never break up."

"How do you design something that could never break up?"

"For instance, workers assembled Soviet TVs in Moscow; the workers made tubes in Georgia, and they made the circuit boards in the Ukraine. If these countries broke apart, the TV industry would shut down because the factories couldn't get the needed parts."

"Damn, I must admit, that was clever."

“Jerrick, that caused many problems when the Soviet Union broke up. Russia’s recovery was a miracle. Our whole economy was thrown into chaos in the early 1990s! All our factories shut down!”

Consequently, Lidya and Jerrick spent weeks collecting all the documents.

Jerrick saw eight specialists for his gruesome medical exam.

Old Soviet doctors checked every hole and crevice on Jerrick’s body.

One doctor took a chest X-ray, another checked his eyes, and another inspected his joints. Finding no problems, the doctor signed his medical document and stamped it with a blue seal.

Finally, Jerrick saw the last doctor, who scrutinized his document.

The doctor asked Lidya several questions and stamped two more blue seals onto the document.

Afterward, Jerrick counted three blue square stamps and seven small blue circular stamps with numerous random signatures throughout the document.

Lidya and Jerrick returned to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and submitted their documents.

Jerrick noticed the bureaucrat carefully inspected each document, ensuring it had its requisite blue stamps and signatures.

After four weeks, Jerrick received his new visa to study at a Russian institute.

Both Lidya and Jerrick returned to the apartment, crashing on the couch, consumed by exhaustion. Jerrick’s mind turned over the day’s events about the accumulation of those damn blue stamps.

Jerrick thought, ‘Didn’t Americans realize that every law that Congress passed and every new bureaucracy they created brought the United States one step closer to this insane system of handwritten government documents with blue stamps?’

Afterward, Jerrick complained loudly to Lidya, “Damn, those Russian bureaucrats are unbelievable. You need a goddamn stamp for everything.”

“Welcome to the Soviet bureaucracy. Remnants of the Soviet machine still function in Russia.”

“But the Soviet Union collapsed over 10 years ago. Why can’t they change?”

“The Soviet Union had collapsed, but the Soviet law is the source of Russian law. Did you notice the bureaucrats are in their 40s and 50s? They started working in that agency when they were young and were trained to process documents in that way under the Soviet Union.”

Jerrick’s anger and frustration melted away as he replied, “Lidya, you’re right. That’s all they know, but it’s so frustrating. A bureaucrat handwrites all the documents. Then he signs and stamps it with a blue ink seal. If I knew what to write and had that damn stamp, then I can make my documents.”

Jerrick hesitated and added, “Thank God they did not ask me to prove I was a male. Then I would whip out the little monster and show it to them.”

Lidya started to giggle. Sometimes, Jerrick was coarse, but he differed from the Russian men she had dated.

Lidya replied, “Jerrick, it wouldn’t do any good. Not unless you have a blue stamp on the little monster and a doctor’s signature authenticating it.”

Now, Jerrick joined the laughter. Then he placed his hand around Lidya, pulling her closer.

Jerrick started kissing her on the mouth and massaging her legs. A good idea popped into his head about releasing his frustrations and stress of dealing with the post-Soviet bureaucracies.

\*\*\*

Lidya and Jerrick were driving back from her parents’ home in mid-October around 10 P.M., pitch black.

Jerrick always let Lidya drive because Russians were rude drivers.

During the Soviet Union, nobody had cars. Now, many Russians own cars, and they always speed to where they’re going. The Russians were determined to compensate for the deprived times when no one had cars.

Russian drivers would cut other drivers off, form three-car lanes on two-lane roads, and sporadically and habitually change lanes, always moving and swerving ahead of the other drivers. Michigan police and state troopers would have a busy day in Moscow as officers would write thousands of tickets daily.

Lidya turned on a side street to approach the apartment.

Before they knew it, a Soviet Jeep with four soldiers pulled in front of them, cutting them off.

Both vehicles stopped, and four soldiers hopped out of the jeep and surrounded the car.

The soldiers didn't draw their guns, but they slung AK-47s over their backs. They wore long, dark green trench coats and round, black fur hats with flat tops. An emblem or badge of some type was pinned in the center of the hat, and various badges and stripes decorated their lapels and left top areas of their coats.

Jerrick didn't miss the imposing, threatening AK-47s.

One of the soldiers said something in Russian.

Lidya turned to Jerrick and said, "Get out of the car."

They both climbed out slowly.

Lidya approached one of the soldiers, almost screaming something in Russian.

Jerrick stood there with his mouth hanging open.

One of the soldiers asked Jerrick something in Russian.

Jerrick understood the word, passport since it's the same word in both languages.

Jerrick tried to say in Russian, "My passport - in safe at work," but the soldier frowned in confusion.

Lidya climbed into the car, reached into her purse, and pulled out several documents. Then she tucked two new, crisp twenty-dollar bills into the folded pages of the car registration. The U.S. dollar is the currency of choice for corrupt Russian public officials and racketeers.

She exited the car and shoved the documents into one of the soldier's hands.

The soldier studied the documents.

Jerrick saw one soldier point his finger at him and asked Lidya something in Russian.

Jerrick didn't understand the conversation, but he recognized one word, American man, or 'Amirkanets' in Russian.

The soldier in command returned Lidya's documents. All her documents were in order, except for the money.

Soldiers piled into the jeep and pulled away.

Lidya and Jerrick climbed into the car.

Jerrick snapped, "What the hell was that?" He wasn't angry at Lidya but surprised.

"That was GUY."

"GUY? What is GUY?"

"State Automobile Inspectors. They are road police. They drive around and search for drivers violating the traffic laws."

"They looked like soldiers who carried some awesome firepower for street cops."

"GUY is a remnant of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had plenty of AK-47s and jeeps, which the police got – plenty of AK-47s and jeeps. When they pull you over, you pull over."

"What would happen if a driver didn't pull over?"

"Then they turn the driver's car into Swiss cheese with those guns."

Jerrick was not shocked, but the Russians didn't mess around regarding important business. He knew Lidya didn't joke about the police firing upon people, fleeing.

Lidya turned the car ignition on and pulled away to drive the last block to the apartment.

Jerrick realized that every day in Russia would be an educational experience. He was learning more here than he could ever learn from a book.

\*\*\*

In early November, Lidya and Jerrick wore winter coats with fur hats.

Jerrick didn't like his black mink fur hat, but this hat kept his head warm during Moscow's bitterly cold winters. Somehow, the Muscovites learned to adapt to these harsh winters.

"I have a treat for you, Jerrick."

“What do you want to do?”

“Let’s head down to the GUM, the State Universal Store. We can walk around and see what they have. Besides, New Year’s Eve is approaching. You are supposed to buy presents for your family and give them on New Year’s Eve.”

“You don’t give presents on Jesus’ birthday, December 25?”

“We celebrate Jesus’ birthday on January 7.”

“That’s interesting. That’s my birthday. Are you planning anything special for me?”

“Ah, Jerrick; don’t worry. I have a special treat for you on your birthday,” Lidya glanced at Jerrick, winking at him.

Lidya and Jerrick approached the GUM as shoppers dashed in and out of the entrance. They walked inside, brushing off the cold Moscow air. The place was quite warm.

Jerrick even removed his warm fur hat as beads of perspiration formed on his forehead.

They headed to the café section to order hot tea and cookies.

Then Jerrick saw her. A petite woman with long, luscious, jet-black hair stood behind the cash register. She used a scarf to pull her hair back. She had light, creamy brown skin with the brightest hazel eyes.

Lidya and Jerrick approached the cashier.

Jerrick stuttered, “I I I’ll have a hot tea.” He didn’t take his eyes off the cashier girl as his words stuck in his throat.

Lidya faced Jerrick, “Jerrick, are you all right.”

Jerrick turned to face Lidya, “I’m fine. I was caught off guard. She looks so unusual. She doesn’t look Russian.”

Lidya frowned and snapped, “She’s probably Tatar. Supposedly, Tatar women are gorgeous. Do you think she’s pretty?”

“She’s okay. She’s attractive, but she looks different, exotic.”

“Exotic? You like her, don’t you?”

“Lidya, no, I said she’s okay.”

Jerrick reached for Lidya, pulled her closer, and reassuringly hugged her. Of course, he lied. He liked that exotic-looking woman. If this woman told Jerrick to leave his girlfriend, he would drop Lidya like a sack of potatoes, but he would become homeless in Moscow.

The cashier glanced at Lidya and then Jerrick. She didn't speak English, but she knew they had a conflict. Of course, she suspected she knew the dispute had arisen over her. Jerrick shot her a strange look. Few Russian men dated and married outside their race, but some would salivate all over themselves when they looked at her.

"Two teas and some cookies, please," Lidya demanded in Russian.

Jerrick studied the cashier's chest, reading her name tag.

Lidya noticed and asked, "Jerrick, what are you doing?"

"I'm trying to read her name tag. Her name is unusual."

"Her name is Amaliji. Here, you can talk to her."

Lidya told the cashier that Jerrick wanted to know her name.

"Lidya, please stop."

Amaliji said in Russian, "That'll be 7,000 rubles."

Jerrick pulled out his wallet and passed the money to Amaliji.

As Amaliji reached for the money, she smiled at Jerrick.

Jerrick studied her. She was so cute; she could be Selma Hayek's younger, prettier sister. How could this be possible?

Then Amaliji placed a tray with the teas and cookies onto the counter.

When they sat down, Lidya snapped, "Honestly, Jerrick, do you like that girl?"

"No, Lidya. I love you," Jerrick said, reaching across the table to hold Lidya's hand.

Jerrick continued, "Besides, how stupid do you think I am to run away with a cashier from another country?"

"Lidya began smiling, "Jerrick, I guess you're right."

Little did Lidya know that guys are pretty stupid regarding matters of the heart. A guy simplifies his world. Is she cute or not cute? If she's adorable, is she worth marrying and taking home to mom? Of course, Jerrick would not hesitate to take Amaliji home to Michigan. Jerrick knew his mom and dad would approve.

Finishing their teas, Lidya and Jerrick stood up and strolled through corridors of the GUM, window-shopping.

Amaliji watched them leave, sneaking another peek at Jerrick. Several men have already proposed to her, whom she turned down,

but she has never dated an American. She probably would go out with Jerrick if he asked her.

Jerrick wanted to turn his head and observe Amaliji, but he knew this would spark an argument with Lidya.

Later that evening, Jerrick made hard, vigorous love to Lidya several times as images of Amaliji swirled in his head. The bed rattled so loudly that it almost collapsed.

Lidya noticed a difference.

Afterward, she asked, "What were you thinking about? This time, your loving making was stronger, more vigorous?"

"Nothing; I'm under much stress at school. I'm trying to release it."

"Are you thinking about Amaliji?"

"Who? No, Lidya. I already forgot her name."

"I must return to my parents."

Lidya rolled out of bed, dressed, and kissed Jerrick goodbye.

"Bye, Lidya. I'll be at school until 5 o'clock tomorrow. We can have dinner together."

"Okay, I'll see you then."

Before Lidya had left, she studied Jerrick, giving him a cold look.

During the next week, Jerrick thought constantly of Amaliji, and he pulled his Russian language book off the shelf to study it.

Russian was such a tough language, but Jerrick benefited in one regard. Jerrick's English improved significantly. Jerrick's brilliant mind stumbled over the convoluted, complex English grammar rules, and he once thought Englishmen were foolish in creating their language. Still, when you compare English to another ten times more complicated language, those Englishmen were quite clever.

If Englishmen kept their pronunciation consistent, then English would be the perfect language and the language of the world. Jerrick smiled because he thought in global terms.

Lidya arrived one day and saw Jerrick studying Russian.

"So, you want to learn Russian?"

"Hi, Lidya, I'm trying to learn, but this is so damn complicated."

"What's wrong?"

“A noun can be used in six ways in Russian. Each way has its method for making the noun plural. I must remember 12 variations for one word in Russian. The most common nouns in Russian, like mother, father, and chair, are exceptions to the rule.”

Lidya giggled.

“What’s so funny, Lidya?”

“All Russians go through this. We all know Russian is complicated. Wait until you start reading Dostoyevsky. He twists all the Russian words around. You don’t even put the words in order like in English,” Lidya said through laughter.

“What do you mean?”

“In English, the subject comes first, then the verb, the indirect object, and finally, the direct object. In Russian, you are free to scramble the order. Usually, you put the most important word last in the sentence, emphasizing it.”

Jerrick slammed his Russian language book down on the table. He used his right hand to massage his temple, feeling the tiny pinpricks in his head, signaling an approaching headache.

“Razdevaisya, ya hochoo tebya!” Lidya said to Jerrick.

Jerrick looked over at Lidya in confusion and asked, “What?”

“I said in Russian, Undress, I want you!”

Jerrick complied happily, helping to cure his impending headache.

After a week, Jerrick headed to the GUM for some hot tea and cookies. He approached the café, and lo and behold, Amaliji stood at the cash register again.

Jerrick approached the counter, trying to be calm, and said, “Hello, Amal-i-ji.”

Amaliji smiled at him.

“My name is Jerrick,” he said slowly in Russian.

She asked something in Russian.

“I don’t understand.”

She repeated slowly, and Jerrick recognized the word, young woman.

“Oh, we broke up,” Jerrick replied in English, spreading his hands apart, indicating that Lidya and Jerrick went in separate directions.

Her smile widened.

“I’ll have a tea with cookies, please,” he asked in Russian.

Amaliji arranged his order, placing tea and cookies on a tray.

“That’ll be 5,000 rubles,” Amaliji said.

Jerrick understood numbers, which was his first breakthrough in Russian.

He took the money from his wallet and handed it to her. He added an extra 2,000 rubles for a tip.

Amaliji tried to return the tip, but Jerrick insisted she keep it.

Jerrick thought what in the hell and said, “Goodbye beautiful,” in Russian.

She reddened a little and used her right hand to wave goodbye.

Jerrick sat down and drank his hot tea with cookies. Finishing the last sip of tea, he put the tray away and threw away his trash.

He glanced back at the counter and saw Amaliji helping a group of customers.

Before he had turned, he saw Amaliji bent sideways to glance at him and wave goodbye again.

Jerrick returned the gesture and waved goodbye to her.

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Lidya worked long hours as a finance specialist at a construction company in January 2003.

Jerrick rarely saw Lidya anymore. If lucky, he saw her once or twice on the weekend. On other days, Jerrick was alone and isolated in Moscow. Killing some free time, Jerrick spent time at the café and flirted with Amaliji every time. Of course, if Lidya found out, he would be in trouble. She would toss him out on the street, making him homeless in one of the world’s most expensive real estate markets.

\*\*\*

March 8 was International Women’s Day in Russia. All Russian men showed their appreciation for the women in their lives, whether they were mothers, sisters, wives, or girlfriends.

Following Russian tradition, Jerrick bought Lidya a bouquet of 11 red roses. An odd number of roses indicated romance, while an even number indicated a funeral.

This year, March 8 fell on a Saturday, and Jerrick prepared dinner for Lidya and bought her a bouquet of red roses.

It was late, and Lidya still didn't arrive.

Jerrick worried and picked up the phone to call her.

Lidya answered after the second ring.

"Hello, Jerrick. How are you?"

"I'm doing fine. I could show you my appreciation for you by making you dinner."

"Ah, Jerrick, that's wonderful, but I forgot to tell you. My company has a party tonight, and I plan on going. I'm sorry. I've been so busy at work. How about you make me dinner tomorrow night?"

"That'll be okay. I'll see you tomorrow then."

Jerrick slammed down the phone.

Jerrick was disappointed and heartbroken because Lidya went to a party without him.

Jerrick noticed Lidya was acting strange lately. She rarely came over anymore; if she did, she wouldn't let him touch her.

Jerrick learned a hard lesson about Russian women. When a Russian woman is in love with you, she puts you on a pedestal and worships you, following you around like a puppy-dog. When she falls out of love with you, she turns into the cold, icy waters of the Arctic.

Jerrick knew something bothered Lidya, but at this point, he didn't know what.

Jerrick glanced at the bouquet of red roses and recycled his present. He glanced at his watch and saw it was 3:30. He picked up the bouquet and headed to the GUM.

As fate would have it, Amaliji was working.

Jerrick proudly maneuvered to the counter and handed the bouquet to Amaliji.

Jerrick noticed the other women in the store cast evil, jealous eyes at Amaliji.

Amaliji blushed and reddened. She pointed at the clock and told Jerrick she will finish at nine.

Jerrick's Russian was limited, but he understood the number nine.

Jerrick returned to the GUM at 8:45 and saw Amaliji cleaning the counters and tables. He sat at a table and waited for her.

After she had finished, she removed her apron and the scarf from her hair. Her black hair flowed down and around her shoulders. Some strands found their way to her front while most draped along her back. She was gorgeous.

Amaliji put on her coat and grabbed the bouquet of flowers that Jerrick had given her earlier.

Lidya did not kid when she said Tatar women are famous for their beauty.

As Amaliji approached Jerrick, he stood up and shook her hand. Then they headed outside.

Being a perfect gentleman, Jerrick opened the door and let Amaliji walk out first.

Although Moscow was chilly, they didn't wear their fur hats as a light snowfall pelted the ground. Amaliji asked Jerrick to walk her home.

Jerrick saw Amaliji's petite figure. He stood at 5 feet 10 inches, and she was 5 inches shorter than him.

They walked side by side in the direction of Amaliji's apartment building.

Being a perfect gentleman, Jerrick walked Amaliji to the stoop of her apartment building. They both paused and stared at each other. Then unexpectedly, Amaliji stood on the tips of her toes and kissed Jerrick on the cheek.

Jerrick smiled and blushed. He didn't brush the kiss away and would not wash that cheek for a week.

Jerrick lightly grabbed her hands to pull her close, but she pulled away. She ran up the three steps to the apartment door.

Before she entered, she turned to face Jerrick and said in Russian, "I don't work tomorrow. If you want, you can take me out tomorrow."

Jerrick asked, "How?"

Amaliji pulled an old store receipt from her pocket and wrote down her phone number. She walked back to Jerrick and handed it to him. Then she disappeared for the night in her parent's apartment.

Sauntering home, he was in bliss; he could have walked home naked and not felt the stinging coldness of a Moscow spring. He thought only about Amaliji the next day, but he told Lidya he would make her dinner.

Jerrick waited and waited, but there was still no sign from Lidya.

At 2:30, he called Amaliji.

An older woman answered the phone with an angry, questioning voice. Then Amaliji snatched the phone away from her mother.

"Hi Amaliji, let's go do something."

"Okay, come over here."

Jerrick heard her mother's angry voice in the background, demanding answers in Russian.

Jerrick met Amaliji at the apartment door.

Waiting for him, she wore a short red dress with black poke-a-dots. She didn't button her coat, revealing her slim figure. She also dabbed a touch of makeup and used a curling iron to put a little weave in her hair.

Amaliji grabbed his arm and said, "Let's go."

They walked to the nearest Moscow substation, and Jerrick was at a loss for words. The Soviet engineers constructed an impressive subway station, and every station had a theme. Soviet planners dedicated one station to the Soviet cosmonauts and another to the Soviet scientists and writers. They spared no expense. The stations were constructed using marble steps and floors, tall columns, statues, and elaborate crown molding. Some stations had large, ornate chandeliers and painted murals.

Amaliji directed Jerrick to the center of Moscow, Red Square, the power center of the Soviet Union. They visited Lenin's mausoleum, the Russian Fine Arts Museum, and finally, the underground mall that bordered the Red Square outside the Kremlin walls.

Jerrick was surprised because Vladimir Lenin's body lay on display in his mausoleum, where followers could pay homage to the God of the Soviet Union.

Although Amaliji and Jerrick didn't speak much, this became one of Jerrick's happiest days. He skipped an extra step as his smile froze on his face.

Several Russian men exchanged dirty looks as Jerrick passed by with an extremely beautiful Tatar woman.

Jerrick could adjust to life in Russia. Every year, he could trade his Russian girl for a newer one, like some wealthy people who trade in their cars. Every year, he would date a younger, prettier woman with fewer miles and less baggage.

Jerrick returned Amaliji safely to her apartment. They stood outside the stairwell. Jerrick reached down to grab her hands and reeled her in. Then Jerrick bent down to kiss her.

Amaliji kissed him, and then she broke away. She ran up the stairs, turned to Jerrick, and said sweetly, "Thanks for the wonderful time." Then she disappeared into the apartment.

Jerrick waved goodbye to her and returned to his apartment.

Opening the door, he saw no sign of Lidya. He wondered about her as his intuition screamed at him that it was over. He asked if she even called him that day. He sat on the couch and opened a book to start reading. With Lidya acting strangely, what could he do?

The next day, Jerrick asked the director if he could rent a room at the institute to complete his studies in Moscow. He felt his relationship with Lidya had ended, and he doubted Lidya would let him stay in the apartment and see another woman.

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During April, Jerrick hadn't seen Lidya in weeks. Finally, Lidya unexpectedly called him and told him they must talk. Her voice was so cold on the telephone that Jerrick's ear caught frostbite.

When Jerrick returned to the apartment after work, Lidya sat quietly on the couch in the living room with a cold, mean look on her face. "Jerrick, I'm sorry to tell you, but we're breaking up."

"Why Lidya? What happened?"

"I met someone at work. He is a manager who owns his apartment and drives a new black Mercedes."

“A black Mercedes? Ah, I see. I guess I cannot compete with that. My Mercedes is just a remote-control car.”

“Jerrick, you and your stupid jokes. This guy is serious and has goals; he is building his career and wants to marry me. He has already proposed, and I accepted, of course.”

Then Lidya held her right hand and showed Jerrick the one-carat engagement ring. He spent a small fortune on her. The odd thing about Russia is that men and women wear their wedding bands on the opposite hand.

“ I guess you want me to move out?”

“I know I dragged you to Moscow. My parents and I decided to let you stay until June 1. Then you either return to the United States or find another place to live in Moscow.”

Jerrick was crushed. He sensed something was happening with Lidya, but damn, the guy already proposed to her? When a Russian man wants something, he reaches out and snatches it.

Jerrick was also hurt and wanted to tell Lidya about Amaliji but dropped it. She'd kick him out sooner if he reciprocated and hurt Lidya's feelings. At least she granted him two months to live rent-free in Moscow.

“Lidya, I wish you good luck. I mean it. You come by on June 1, and I'll hand you the keys. I'll clean up the place and leave it as I found it.”

“Thank you, Jerrick. I hoped you would understand.”

Lidya sprang up from the couch and dashed for the exit.

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Jerrick kept his promise. On May 31, he cleaned the apartment for the whole day.

He bought Lidya's dad an expensive bottle of Smirnoff vodka and left it on the kitchen table in the apartment.

He wrote a note thanking Lidya's father for his hospitality, tucking the note under a vodka bottle. Sometimes, he wondered if Lidya had ever given him that bottle.

Although Lidya broke Jerrick's heart, he felt guilty about dating Amaliji. However, it made no difference in the end. Lidya and

Jerrick fell out of love, and they must move on. One chasing after another will cause the other to run faster away.

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Jerrick and Amaliji were poor and trapped in one of the most expensive cities in the world. They both worked long, grueling hours.

During good weeks, Jerrick spent a whole day with Amaliji, exploring Moscow. Then he would often drop by the café several times a week for lunch.

Amaliji was always happy to see him.

Jerrick continually tried getting to second base with her, but she always struck Jerrick out like a pro baseball pitcher. She was a tough nut to crack, but in the end, Jerrick didn't care. He enjoyed her company. What difference did it matter if she never slept with him? He liked her draped at the end of his arm, and then he showed the public his beautiful girlfriend.

Of course, Jerrick must admit. He would never have studied Russian if he had never met Amaliji. Incidentally, his English language improved also.

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Jerrick's second year in Moscow ended. He finished his Master's Degree at the Moscow Institute of Business.

Drifting into sleep, Jerrick heard Michigan calling him home. He must tell Amaliji.

Jerrick's Russian improved significantly during his second year in Moscow. He spoke Russian with Amaliji almost fluently.

One day, they sat on a bench outside Amaliji's apartment building near the playground.

Jerrick blurted, "Amaliji, come with me to Michigan."

"Jerrick, I don't want to live in the United States."

"Why, Amaliji? That's my home. Come with me?"

"No, Jerrick. Moscow is my home. Mother Russia is my country."

“Amaliji, I love you. I want to take you with me to Michigan.”

“If you love me, then stay in Moscow with me.”

“But Russia is not my country.”

“It can be your country, too. I’m not Russian, but I was born and raised here.”

“Amaliji, I don’t expect you to understand. My whole life, I thought I was meant for something great. God came down and touched me, giving me a special gift. I lived a lifetime figuring out what that gift was. I think I know what God wants me to do. I must return to America, save my country, save my home state, Michigan, and leave my mark on humanity.”

Amaliji just stared at Jerrick blankly. She stood up and took Jerrick’s hand, leading him to the sidewalk.

“Show me your dorm room.”

Jerrick was surprised. Dating Amaliji for a year, Jerrick never showed her his dorm room.

Jerrick obeyed. He led her to his tiny dorm room with a single bed and a small desk.

Jerrick shared the community bathroom with the floor’s residents and prepared his meals in the community kitchen. If it weren’t for Amaliji, he would have fled this dump months ago, returning to Michigan under night’s darkness.

Jerrick closed the door, and Amaliji started undressing.

“Amaliji, what are you doing?”

She slipped naked under his covers and stated, “You’re a man; you figure out what to do?”

Jerrick undressed and slipped under the covers with her. Then he gently made love to her.

Afterward, Jerrick experienced the shock of his life.

“Jerrick, I don’t care that you’re not rich. I’m not rich, either. If I must be poor for the rest of my life, then so be it. Russia is my country. It’s my home. It’s the only home I know. You can stay here with me. I’ll let you marry me if you want, but you must promise to stay in Moscow with me. I only let you sleep with me, so you know what you would miss in Michigan.”

Jerrick thought how cruel God was. God gave him a mission, and, oh, by the way, God threw some kinks and curves along the

way to shake him up and ensure Jerrick was paying attention. God checked if Jerrick was sticking to the master plan.

“Amaliji, please don’t be that way. Try Michigan for a year. If you hate it, then we’ll return to Moscow together.”

Amaliji slid out of bed and quickly dressed. She turned to face Jerrick and said, “Jerrick, you have a choice. Stay with me, or return to Michigan. If you choose Michigan, then I never want to see you again. I was born in Russia, and this is where I’ll die. I can never call Michigan my home.”

She unlocked the door and walked out of Jerrick’s life forever.

Jerrick was crushed as he felt someone take a red-hot cattle branding iron and plunge it into his chest.

Jerrick knew he must return to Michigan as destiny called him; destiny can be a cruel mistress indeed.

Jerrick never saw Amaliji again as his second love walked out on him. He knew she was serious about her decision; Jerrick must choose between her and Michigan but not both.

Jerrick had returned home. It was time for him to build his empire and leave his mark on history.

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## Part 2 – The Collapse of the Democracy

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### *The Journey Home*

Jerrick finished his Master's degree from the Russian institute in 2005 and returned to the one place he called home, his birthplace, Holland, Michigan.

Jerrick drove to Larry's parents' house, searching for Larry and Tommy.

They didn't change; they still partied like there was no tomorrow. Tommy looked 40; the smoking and drinking dried his skin like cracked leather. The skin on his face was rough and covered with many fine lines and cracks, and he had dark circles around his eyes. He hadn't had a good night's sleep in a decade.

Larry looked 30 as the partying life hadn't severely hit him yet, but he had a beer gut as if he were already five months pregnant. His face became rounder, and gray stubbles poked from his beard.

Larry pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, lit one, and tossed the pack to Tommy.

Tommy offered the pack to Jerrick, but Jerrick shook his head no. He hadn't smoked anything in years, and he never smoked cigarettes.

After Larry's third puff from the cigarette, he went into a coughing spasm. The cough was liquidity as if he coughed up chunks of lungs while lung cells fled his lungs, searching for fresh air.

In an attempt to develop rapport, Jerrick asked, "What have you guys been up to?"

"You know, the same-o same-o," Larry replied, exhaling a cloud of smoke.

"I guess you, guys, didn't know, but I met a Russian girl in college and followed her to Moscow."

Both Larry and Tommy turned to stare at Jerrick in awe, thinking Jerrick was pulling their leg.

After Jerrick had met Lidya at college, she became the center of his world; he lost contact with everyone, including his mom and grandmother.

“Was she hot?” Tommy asked, feigning some interest.

“Oh yeah, she was super cute. You wouldn’t believe it, but her hometown looks like a dump. But damn, Russian women are hot!”

Larry sounded like a prosecutor ready to expose the defendant’s lie to the jury and snapped, “Why did you come back then?” Larry clearly remembered several fat skanks shooting Jerrick down at the pool hall. Now he claimed he dated hot Russian women.

Jerrick continued, “Well, she cheated on me, and then I cheated on her too, so we broke up. I couldn’t afford to live in Moscow alone, so I returned. Renting a cockroach-infested apartment for a month costs over a grand.”

Larry’s interest strengthened as he asked, “You cheated on her with whom?”

“She is Tatar and has long, straight brunette hair, a dark creamy complexion, and a tight, petite body. She has an unusual name, Amaliji.” A little drool formed on Jerrick’s lip because he wished he could reach out, snatch Amaliji from his thoughts, and hold her in his arms.

Tommy and Larry stared at their old friend or former friend. They remained in their hometown and accomplished nothing. However, Jerrick elevated himself. He went off to college and then to a foreign country, sleeping with hot, exotic women.

Tommy and Larry finished their cigarettes and plucked two more from the pack.

“You guys smoke too many cigarettes,” Jerrick stated the obvious.

“You know, we have no drugs, and we have no money for beer,” Larry added, making cigarettes the most logical choice.

“Larry, your cough doesn’t sound good.”

“Who are you, my mom?” Larry screamed as irritation invaded the undertones in his voice.

“Larry is always in trouble with his mom. She wants to kick him out again,” Tommy added meekly.

“Again?”

“Yeah, Larry lived in an abandoned trailer in the woods for a month last time.”

Larry turned to Tommy and shouted, “Fuck you!”

Jerrick sensed the tension in the air. Then the cigarette smoke bothered him, stinging his eyes. He coughed several times.

Then Jerrick glanced at the TV set to see which show they were watching. He shook his head in disgust as two grown men were watching cartoons.

Jerrick relaxed in his chair and watched about five minutes of the cartoon.

Larry and Tommy just stared at the TV in a stupor. However, the cigarette smoke kept bothering Jerrick. He sprang up and bolted for the front door. Jerrick turned to say goodbye but noticed Larry's and Tommy's eyes were glued to the TV.

Jerrick opened the door and walked out, gently closing the door behind him.

Tommy and Larry never noticed that Jerrick left.

Jerrick felt a little ping in his heart because he knew he would never see his two friends again. Three bandits, Larry, Jerrick, and Tommy, were great friends but had become strangers. Of course, Jerrick knew the reason. Tommy and Larry didn't change one bit. They acted like kids, living at their parents' house, always searching for the next party. Jerrick had changed and had grown up. Now, he wanted to change the world.

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Jerrick stayed at his parents' house for a week. As usual, his dad drove his truck again, making another long haul across America.

Jerrick's mom and grandmother were happy when he returned. He spent this week talking with his grandmother and asked questions about the old Michigan.

His grandmother enjoyed this immensely as she recollected the old days.

Jerrick didn't believe his grandma's stories about Michigan. Michigan sounded like heaven on earth, where hardworking people could find paradise. They could find a good job, build a family, and enjoy a prosperous future.

Jerrick would do something about it and move across the state to Detroit, Michigan.

Jerrick broached the news on the last day at his mom's house.

Mom, Grandma, and Jerrick sat around the dinner table, having a Sunday supper: roasted pork chops, mashed potatoes, green beans, and cornbread.

After Jerrick's mom had said grace, she started pestering Jerrick. "Jerrick, what happened to you and Lidya?"

Jerrick's face went blank, and he dropped his fork on his plate with a clank. Then he retorted, "Mom! I don't want to talk about it!" Of course, he never told his parents about Amaliji or explained what happened with Lidya.

Jerrick's mom stopped her interrogation. She sensed Lidya broke her son's heart, and he was too hurt to talk about it.

Then Jerrick picked up his fork and shoveled some mashed potatoes into his mouth. Between bites, he blurted, "Mom, I'm moving to Detroit."

His grandmother almost choked on her cornbread while his mom gasped, "What?" displaying the food in her mouth. His mom spent several minutes chewing her food and composing herself.

"Jerrick, of all places on earth, why Detroit? Don't you know about all the murders and shootings that occur there? Detroit is a dangerous city."

"Mom, I know. Everyone thinks Detroit is a dead city, but I see plenty of opportunities. "

The family ate the rest of their dinner in silence. In the end, what could Jerrick's parents do? Detroit was much closer than Russia, and he could return for the holidays.

After dinner, Jerrick's mom gave Jerrick a farewell gift; she handed the keys to her 1990 white Buick Regal. The old Buick didn't get great mileage, but the car was reliable. At least she wouldn't worry that Jerrick would become stranded in the wrong neighborhood in Detroit. Being stranded in the wrong neighborhood in Detroit could be fatal to one's health.

After Jerrick had packed his suitcases in the morning and placed them in the car's trunk, he went to hug his mom and grandmother goodbye.

His mother shed a tear that flowed from her right eye. She wanted Jerrick to stay in Holland.

Then Jerrick jumped into the car and drove east to the other side of Michigan.

Jerrick chose a dying, all-American city, Detroit. The race riots in the 1967 Detroit Rebellion sent the first death blow to this great city. The scared white people fled Detroit and moved outside the city to the suburbs, like Dearborn, Farmington Hills, and Sterling Heights. The white people took their wealth and jobs with them, leaving the poor stranded in a decaying city.

The second death blow came from international trade. More factories shut down in Michigan, especially the factories surrounding Detroit. As the jobs disappeared, more people fled Detroit. Detroit's population kept decreasing every year until it dipped below a million inhabitants in 1990.

Jerrick believed international trade, outsourcing, and a punitive legal system would bring all of America's great cities to their knees. Detroit was the precursor of what would come to America.

Jerrick still daydreamed about how he delivered great speeches to the people. In Detroit, they would listen. Detroit would become his launching platform for the nation. Then one day, the whole country would listen to him, and the entire world would bow down and tremble at his sight.

A revolution was imminent. Jerrick would rise out of the wreckage and ashes of Detroit, making Detroit a great American city again.

Jerrick drove across the state in his car, arriving in Detroit for the first time. Driving through the city, he was shocked to see that Detroit had become a war zone. Residents boarded up and abandoned every other house on every block. For the homes still occupied, homeowners covered every window with bars and strung barbwire on the top of seven-foot-high fences that surrounded their properties. Barbwire's razors reflected the sun's rays maliciously. The residents lived in prisons to protect themselves from outside criminals. In Jerrick's world, the criminals would live within seven-foot-high fences strung with barbwire, not the other way around.

On the outskirts of Detroit, between Dearborn and Detroit, Jerrick saw an abandoned Moose Club. The building was in good

condition and had ample parking, so he pulled his car over to investigate.

Jerrick stared through a dust-covered window in the front, cupping his hands around his eyes to block the outside light. Patrons hadn't entered the place in years.

Jerrick's heartbeat quickened from the excitement of his discovery. He saw plenty of chairs and tables covered in a thick layer of dust. Along the far wall, he noticed a two-foot-high stage.

The Moose Club was perfect because it could seat at least a hundred people; a hundred would listen to Jerrick's speeches.

Then Jerrick noticed an old, yellow sign, "For Lease," bleached by the sun. He barely read the phone number. The sun would completely fade the phone number in another year or two.

Jerrick's life plans were coming to fruition. He found a perfect spot to form a political party and needed a way to finance it.

Jerrick climbed into the car and began searching for a job.

He searched for a job in Dearborn, which was several miles from the Moose Club. Unlike Detroit, Dearborn was an affluent suburb with a low crime rate, brimming with employment opportunities.

He found a job at a small electronics store on 223 Main Street. Driving by, Jerrick almost missed the tiny store, which sold computers, televisions, and stereos. The one-story building was old but maintained well. Its facade was clad in light red brick, and large display windows without bars spanned the front.

As Jerrick walked through the front door, he literally bumped into the owner, Gary, who stood at 6 feet 2 inches. Gary was a heavset man in his 40s. He was honest, hardworking, and nice.

Jerrick suspected Gary could be mean if someone were stupid enough to piss him off. Although Gary was fat, weighing 350 lbs, his body was built like a grizzly bear minus the fur.

Gary's store didn't have a good location, and he sold a few electronics. He earned his income from fixing computers.

Most people could barely turn a computer on. If they have problems, they turned to the computer experts. Thus, everyone in the area brought their computers and laptops to Gary because he charged the best rates in town, and everyone knew it.

Jerrick returned to the Moose Club with a new job and called the owner.

The owner agreed to meet him at the club at 4 o'clock.

Jerrick sat on his Buick's hood and waited for the owner,

The owner arrived in an old Ford, mint-condition, '69 Thunderbird, as if he drove the car off the dealership's lot yesterday, brand new.

As the owner climbed out of the car, Jerrick rushed to the owner to help catch the old man in case he fell.

Jerrick broke the silence and stated, "That's a nice car!"

"Yeah, I repurchased it in '69. Ohhhhh, I had to be 32 back then. I drive it once a week, and the rest of the time, I park it in a garage."

Then the owner eyed Jerrick suspiciously from head to toe. He hoped this young kid wouldn't waste his time. He asked warily, "You want to rent this place?"

"Yes, this place would be perfect."

The owner didn't believe it, but he came. His hand trembled as he reached into his pocket for the door key.

Then the owner unlocked the door, and it moaned and screeched loudly as it opened, and flakes of rust fell from its hinges.

Jerrick saw a layer of dust covering everything, and fine dust particles floated in the air, illuminated by the sunlight.

Jerrick let the owner walk into the Moose Club first.

The main room was rectangular, long, 70 feet, and 30 feet wide. At one end, it had a two-foot stage, and at the other, near the two bathrooms, were two old pool tables. A long bar stretched along the long wall on one side, and on the other side, there was a row of windows. Behind the bar, the Moose Club had a small kitchen and office.

"How much?" Jerrick asked, barely containing his excitement.

"\$500 a month."

"I'll take it."

"You know you must pay \$500 each month for this place. If you are a week late, I'll toss you out."

"Sir, I think I can do it."

"Son, what do you plan to do with this place? I must approve all renovations."

“I’m concerned about Michigan’s future and want to start an organization to stop it.”

The old man walked hunched over, but then he stood straight, getting a better look at Jerrick.

The old man retorted, “Son, you’re too late. Michigan is old, like me. She had her glory days long ago. Now Michigan is returning to the dust from whence she came. You should have been here in the 70s when it mattered!”

“At least I want to try,” Jerrick persisted and continued, “Michigan was a great state once, and I believe Michigan can rise and become a great state again!”

The owner didn’t argue with Jerrick. Besides, he would earn several months of rent from him. The Moose Club destroyed his finances since he closed it 15 years ago. He tried to sell it numerous times, but nobody wanted to buy a business with a Detroit address. If the company were located 10 miles further west, he would easily fetch a million dollars for the place. He would burn the place down, but he knew the police would know better. They would check if the owner insured the business. Arson was a typical method of disposing of companies in Detroit.

“What kind of renovations are you planning?”

“I’m thinking about cleaning the place up and adding a new coat of paint. I’ll keep the bar, chairs, and pool tables but eliminate everything else.”

The owner would rent the Moose Club to Jerrick. Besides, what harm could he do? If Jerrick cleaned and painted the place, he’d put the property back on the market and try to sell it again. The US real estate market was red hot, and Americans made tons of money flipping houses.

The old guy stated, “Meet me here tomorrow at three. Then you sign a six-month lease. Bring your first month’s rent.”

Then he climbed into his classic Ford and drove away.

Jerrick returned to his motel, which was the usual kind that cost \$20 per night. On some days, the motel staff washed the bed sheets. As he turned on the room’s light, the cockroaches scampered for the dark corners and crevices.

Jerrick was excited and oblivious to his accommodations. He used three pillows to form a headrest. Then he lay in deep thought with a pad in his right hand and a pen in his left.

Jerrick wanted to build an empire, bring our factories back, and put Americans back to work, preferably in that order. Which name embodied all three ideas? Only one name made sense, and people rarely used it. Jerrick named his organization the National Workers' Party.

People formed the National Workers' Party in Great Britain and Spain. Although both parties were small, they were both pro-business and pro-labor, just like the nature of Jerrick Ray Davis.

Which ideas would distinguish his party from the others?

Jerrick began writing the mission statement. First, a state helps its workers find jobs. If a worker cannot find a job, he creates his job. Thus, government rules and regulations must be pro-business, which means the government must impose low tax rates and limit regulations and its interference. A government doing the opposite stifles businesses' growth.

Jerrick detested the large governmental bureaucracies. They reminded him of his life in Russia, fighting the Russian bureaucrats for those damn blue stamps and signatures.

Since taxes are limited, the government must limit its spending. The government should provide some social programs to help the poor and disadvantaged, but only temporarily.

Jerrick knew a few people from his hometown who abused the system. Some people intentionally injured themselves, slipping and falling at work, then going to a doctor, claiming they were permanently damaged. Every week, these charlatans collected a disability check from the state.

Fraudsters didn't know where this money came from. The state forces businesses to pay insurance for this program, which is another cost the government hurls onto companies. The government should call it a tax because paying the insurance isn't voluntary.

Jerrick continued his thinking. High-tech industries created jobs in the 80s and 90s. Thus, the government must support and maintain a strong education system, encouraging students to study engineering and the sciences.

Finally, the government should limit free trade. Jerrick wasn't against free trade per se as long as it was really free trade. Genuine free trade involves a mutual exchange of products. Americans made cars and sold them to the Japanese, and the Japanese made televisions and subsequently sold them to us.

Our politicians defined free trade differently. An American company shut down its factories in the USA and produced its products in Chinese factories using cheap corporate slave labor. Then it shipped the cheap products to the United States, making huge profits and even paying off the politicians. This free trade embodied no mutual exchange of products.

Jerrick knew profits from outsourcing were only temporary. Margaret Thatcher stated, "First we produce, and then we consume." The US politicians transformed the United States into a nation of consumers who financed their purchases with a mountain of debt. This system was not sustainable. Once Americans hit their debt limit, hell would release its fury upon the US economy. It would be cruel and unfathomable as millions of Americans fell into the pit of poverty, perishing into chaos.

Jerrick met the old man at the Moose Club the next day and signed the lease.

The old man gave Jerrick the keys, but he didn't know Jerrick planned to live there too.

Jerrick bought a twin-size air mattress that barely fit in the office. However, the mattress provided some protection from burglars. If a burglar entered the office, the door would swing inward, bumping the mattress and waking Jerrick up.

For the first three days, Jerrick slept in the dark because the City of Detroit took a while to turn on the water and electricity.

Accommodations were all right. Jerrick prepared his meals in the kitchen. He had a problem taking showers because the men's room had two sinks, two urinals, and a toilet stall. He used washcloths and a plastic pitcher to wash his hair and body in the sink.

Jerrick worked hard at the electronics store, and Gary paid him \$8 per hour. Of course, Gary worked Jerrick and his employees 39 hours per week, so he didn't pay for health insurance.

After work, Jerrick returned to the Moose Club. He cleaned and scrubbed the place, painted the walls, and rearranged the ceiling panels. The ceiling panels in the kitchen were in good condition, so he exchanged them with the broken ceiling panels in the bar area.

Then around 10, Jerrick lay on his air mattress for an hour and studied the speeches of famous Americans, such as President Ronald Reagan, the Great Communicator, and Malcolm X, the infamous troublemaker.

Sometimes, Jerrick thought of Amaliji. He wished she had come to Michigan, but Jerrick knew she wouldn't like his accommodations, sleeping on a floor in an old bar.

Of course, many Russians would consider these accommodations a luxury. At least the plumbing and wires were tucked neatly inside the walls, and swarms of cockroaches didn't scatter when one turned on a light at night.

After three weeks, Jerrick had cleaned the old Moose Club. He scrubbed the floors, wiped down the dusty walls, and cleaned all the chairs and tables. The Moose Club was ready to receive guests.

Jerrick called in sick on an early Saturday morning. Next, he arranged all the chairs into ten rows with eight chairs each. Along the long wall with the windows, he pushed three tables together.

Afterward, Jerrick donned a white dress shirt, blue slacks, and a red tie and spent the day at several shopping plazas, passing out pamphlets to the public.

Most people avoided Jerrick, but he was determined to get his message out. He designed simple pamphlets.

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The National Workers' Party

Building Michigan's Future

Putting Hardworking Americans Back to Work

The meeting starts at 7:00 P. M.

September 24, 2005  
The Moose Club, 1915 LaSalle Avenue

Refreshments will be served.

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Spending an exhausting day passing out pamphlets, Jerrick glanced at his watch and saw it was 5 o'clock. He returned to the Moose club and opened the club to the public for the first time in 15 years.

Jerrick set up a long table with an assortment of refreshments. At the beginning of the table, he neatly laid out small plastic plates, paper napkins, plastic cups, and disposable silverware. Then he placed several bowls of chips, a bowl of pretzels, cans of cold soda in a bath of ice, a box of cookies, and a coffee pot. Finally, Jerrick turned the coffee pot on, filling the air with freshly brewed coffee. Nothing stated a warm welcome better than walking into a cozy place and smelling the aroma of freshly brewed coffee.

Jerrick glanced down at his watch and saw it was 7:05.

Ten people sat in the audience.

Jerrick wondered if Augustus had experienced the same problem. Augustus planned his first speech, but only 10 Romans showed up. Augustus screamed, 'To hell with it,' I would raise an army and take the power.

Jerrick advanced to the center of the stage and started his first speech.

Global warming is a scam perpetuated by our political leaders.

Most people do not care if the earth is warmer.

That most of Florida will be underwater in 100 years.

We will not be around in 100 years.

Plus, I thought global warming made the earth warmer.

Why am I wearing a light jacket in Michigan in August?

Summers in Michigan used to be hot and humid.

People would go cool off at Michigan's beautiful lakes.

Even if global warming is true, most people do not care about it.

People want good-paying jobs to support their families.

People want to pay off their homes and buy cars.  
People want to send their children off to college.

Jerrick paused his speech when people shouted his name in approval. Today, nobody shouted his name, but two people yelled, "All right."

The government punishes the hardworking.  
The government is pushing for new regulations to stop global warming.  
The government is pushing for new taxes and fees.  
The government has punished our factories enough.  
The local government imposes high property taxes on them.  
The government even levies property taxes on their machines and equipment.  
The government taxes their products.  
The government taxes their profits.  
The government forces them to pay for unemployment insurance.  
The government forces them to pay for disability insurance.  
Factories must comply with numerous environmental regulations.  
No wonder why our factories are leaving and moving to China.  
The Chinese government does not impose all these taxes and regulations on their businesses.  
The Chinese government is happy that the businesses produce there.  
Our industries are creating jobs and wealth in China.  
Now, here is the real kicker.  
The government passes these laws to slow down global warming.  
Our factories head to China, supposedly creating even more greenhouse gases and making the earth warmer.  
Then those Chinese factories shipped their products to the United States.  
Thus, these stupid laws accelerate global warming!  
Our stupid politicians do not see the fallacy of their policies, making things worse in the US and putting good, hardworking, decent Americans out of work in the process.

Jerrick ended his speech and scanned his audience of 10 people. Eight nodded their head in approval, while two had blank expressions.

Then eight people, including the two with blank expressions, stood up and dashed for the front door.

The remaining two, Dan Bigler and Chad Hendricks became the core leadership in Jerrick's party and stuck with Jerrick to the end. Besides, what did they have to lose? Nothing else occurred in their lives, and they were tired of the regurgitated crap that talk shows and news reporters spewed on the people every day. At least Jerrick spoke the truth, unlike everyone else in the media.

Jerrick fixed himself a plate of pretzels, grabbed a soda, and joined the audience. He suspected they were using him because he had this excellent hangout pad, a place to hang out and party. Over time, they became true, close friends, forming a tight circle.

Dan, a smooth-talking law student, was a poster child for an attorney. He stood six feet tall with jet-black hair and dressed well, always wearing dress shirts and slacks.

Chad stood at 5 feet 9 inches and had curly brown hair and a muscular build. He participated in sports and had an unusual characteristic. Whatever one hand did, his other hand mimicked the same movements as if both hands were wired to the same spot in his brain.

Dan started talking about politics.

Chad blatantly disagreed with Dan on several issues at specific key points while Jerrick sat back and listened.

It was nice spending a Saturday night in the company of friends. A large, cavernous place like the Moose Club intensified the feelings of loneliness when no one was around.

After two weeks, Dan's parents kicked him out, and he packed all his possessions in his car and drove over. He arrived at the Moose Club on a Wednesday night.

Jerrick opened the door for Dan as Dan sauntered through.

He carried a large duffel bag filled with his clothes. He had a long look because he had nowhere to go.

Before Dan said a word, Jerrick said, "Dude, I don't have a problem with you crashing here, but no wild parties!"

“Thanks,” Dan said while placing his duffel bag in the corner.

Before the end of the night, Dan and Jerrick laid out their mattresses, placing them near the stage about two feet apart.

Dan and Jerrick became brothers, spending many nights talking.

Dan was neither a loser nor a druggie. He enrolled at the University of Michigan’s Law School and worked full-time. Unfortunately, his earnings went to the university.

A top-rated law school was expensive. The university took every penny and nickel from Dan. He would donate several pints of blood if the university would accept it for payment.

All universities promise their students. Pay your exorbitant tuition bills and then graduate. Good-paying jobs are waiting for you at the campus exits. That was partially true before 2008, but after 2008, a student needed a miracle to find a job, especially a job that paid enough to cover living expenses and student loan payments.

Dan’s parents disagreed with his decision to go to law school. They wanted Dan to drop out and find a factory job. High-paying factory jobs were everywhere in Michigan. Dan needed to get off his lazy ass and find one.

Dan explained, “Good-paying factory jobs are leaving Michigan.”

His parents were in denial and replied, “No factory jobs? How can that be?” You come from a very long line of factory workers. Those factories were always there, and they’ll always be there!”

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One night, Jerrick and Dan were lying on their inflatable beds, making small talk. They usually put their drinks on the floor between the mattresses.

Jerrick asked, “What are your plans after you have graduated from law school?”

“I’m thinking about going to California to practice.”

“California? You’ll ditch Michigan, your home state?”

“Yes, buddy; I’m going for the jobs. People are making tons of money from real estate out there. They need lawyers to help with the mortgage paperwork and title transfers.”

“This real estate bubble can’t last forever.”

“I don’t give a shit. When the bubble bursts, I will help people with bankruptcies and foreclosures. People always need attorneys. If people have no demand, then we as lawyers create a demand for our services.”

“Like what? Give some examples.”

“One attorney stole from his client. The client tried to dump the attorney, and the attorney turned around and sued his client. The attorney claimed his client wasn’t acting in his best interest.”

Jerrick and Dan burst out laughing. After several seconds, they quieted down.

“Dude, that’s dishonest,” Jerrick retorted.

“I’m studying to be an attorney. That’s what we do. We have a slow day at the office, and no clients are coming in. So I pull out the files and glance through the paperwork. Then I send my clients a bill for services rendered.”

Now Jerrick understood why he hated attorneys. Along with government bureaucrats, attorneys became a blight on American society. However, Jerrick liked Dan a lot, even though Dan wanted to become a scumbag attorney. At least Dan was honest about it and planned to twist the law for his financial gain.

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Jerrick established the pecking order for the National Workers’ Party. Jerrick became the chairman, while Dan became the vice chairman. They evolved into the driving force behind the National Workers’ Party.

Jerrick scheduled speeches every two weeks, and Dan helped and gave speeches.

Jerrick suspected Dan wrote speeches to hone his speaking skills to become a better attorney in court. Then he could brilliantly sway any jury or judge with his rhetoric. However, Jerrick must admit. Dan gave speeches from the heart. He came from a long line of Michigan factory workers and developed a rapport with his audience.

Over time, Jerrick improved his speaking and improvisation. He possessed an advantage over the politicians and political leaders. He believed what he said in his speeches because his words came from the heart.

Politicians and political leaders are used car salesmen. They tricked the customer into buying junky cars. As the customer drives onto the street, the car engine would blow up, or the transmission would fall out of the vehicle.

Jerrick noticed more people attended his speeches. One person, Jennifer Adams, in the crowd caught his eye.

Jennifer graduated from Indiana University with a Bachelor's degree in computer science. She would be attractive if she styled her long blonde hair, changed the style of her clothes, and added a touch of makeup in the right places. However, Jennifer pulled her long hair back in a ponytail and wore a t-shirt and blue jeans. Although tall and slender with small peach-like breasts, she wore thick, brown, horn-rimmed glasses that covered half her face, making her eyes large and buggy.

Jennifer was a typical nerd, a lost soul, a leaf at the wind's mercy. She had no friends and worked several jobs below her talents. She entered data into a computer for a warehouse supplier.

Jerrick knew something was special about Jennifer, but he didn't know what it was. Jennifer would become an integral member of the National Worker's Party.

Jennifer was the best computer hacker around. If you gave her ample soda, junk food, and a fast internet connection, she could break through any computer's defenses. She was known infamously in the dark world of computer hackers as the 'silent thunder.' By the time a computer administrator detected her presence, she was already gone, and the damage was immense.

Most people don't realize it. They think the key to a successful revolution is guns and soldiers. That's true. Guns and soldiers are essential, but a successful revolution relies on information. A revolutionary leader must know whom he can trust and not trust. Who will follow orders and not become a traitor at the last minute? A dictator appointing the wrong person at the wrong place and time could jeopardize a coup. The wrong person at the wrong time is

building a sand castle during a torrential rainstorm. The wrong person fucks everything up.

After the revolution, the dictator must keep his eyes on his people. He ensures an ambitious captain wouldn't push him off the hill and claim his power. The path to total control is treacherous and filled with many twists and turns.

During one of Jerrick's speeches, he noticed Jennifer sitting quietly in the audience. This was her third time attending.

Once Jerrick finished his speech, he rushed to her and broke the ice first, "Hello. My name is Jerrick Davis. May I get you a refreshment?"

Jennifer turned slightly reddish and replied, "No! I'm fine." She tried to tuck her head into her shell like a turtle.

Jerrick persisted, "I know this great coffee shop. Please be my guest of honor."

How could Jennifer refuse? Many men walked past Jennifer without a single glance. She felt invisible. In her sheepish voice, she said, "Okay."

Jerrick offered his hand to Jennifer, helping her out of the chair and leading her to his car. He drove to his favorite coffee shop, the Jitterbug.

The Jitterbug's owner, Cindy, restored a 1920s store to its original condition. She sanded and stained the dark wooden floors, painted the crown-molded ceilings a cool, light yellow, and restored the novel wooden glass display cases. The décor projected a friendly ambiance, giving it style and grace.

Jerrick and Jennifer sat at a table in the front, near the large shop windows, where they had some privacy.

It was 9 o'clock at night, so Jerrick ordered a black tea with no sugar or milk while Jennifer ordered herself a hot chocolate.

Jerrick fidgeted like he was on a date, and Jerrick didn't want to give any wrong impressions. "Where do you work?" Jerrick asked.

"Wooden Instruments Industries," Jennifer mumbled as her face reddened.

"What's wrong? You don't like your job?"

"The pay is low, and I must sit at a computer next to a conveyor belt all day. As a package goes by, I scan the label and check the

contents. Then compare the contents to the customer's order on the computer."

As Jennifer completed her sentence, the barista brought their drinks.

Jerrick saw a hot mist rising from his tea, so he left it on the table to cool.

Jennifer picked up her hot chocolate and tried sipping it.

"Why are you ashamed of your job? You're doing honest work," Jerrick replied firmly but softly.

"It's not the work, but I graduated from college with a degree in computer science. I was the best programmer in my graduating class. I wanted challenging work. A high salary is nice, too!"

Jerrick's eyes brightened as if a gold prospector studied a nugget of gold at the bottom of his pan. He whispered so the other patrons didn't hear, "Have you ever hacked into a computer system?"

Jennifer started blushing again and giggled. Jennifer would make a horrible poker player. Everyone sitting at the table would know if she held a royal flush.

"I asked because I'm curious. I know some things about a computer, but a computer expert must eat, sleep, and shit computers 24 hours a day. I don't have that dedication. I have other interests, like expanding my political party."

Jerrick and Jennifer sipped their drinks, and Jerrick continued, "I designed my party's website, and I think it's okay. However, I need someone to assist me with computer security and data mining."

"Data mining?" Jennifer asked as her voice strengthened with interest.

"Information is power. I listed all the political leaders in the United States. I want to know who is corrupt or honest. Who can be trusted or not?"

"They're all corrupt!" Jennifer yelled and began laughing.

Jerrick joined her.

A couple at the following table glanced in Jerrick's direction, frowning at the laughter. The couple was on a date, and they resumed their intimate conversation.

Jerrick continued, "I don't think they're all corrupt; some are honest, but a corrupt system entraps them."

“How much information do you have?”

“Right now, I have little information. Good information is hard to find. News reporters are scared of the politicians and never challenge them or their policies. The only time a reporter will say something negative about a politician is if the politician is arrested for a crime. Then the reporters will report the dirt and shady business dealings.”

“You can use a robot from a search engine to search through blogs and complaint websites,” Jennifer replied cheerfully.

“That’s true, but I need accurate information. Anyone can post a negative blog or complaint. Some people lie or seek revenge because the politician voted against a person’s favorite bill or law.”

“The only way is to hack into a government’s computer system, like the FBI’s or Inspector General’s computer systems....”

At that moment, Jennifer stopped talking because she realized what Jerrick wanted.

Jerrick had a sly smile draped across his face.

“How much can you pay me?” Jennifer asked.

“Right now, I can’t pay well. I can afford \$5 per hour under the table in cash. I can help you locate fast, untraceable internet connection points. That way, you don’t compromise your identity.”

Jennifer reached across the table with her right hand, gesturing for a handshake.

Jerrick reached and firmly shook her hand, sealing the business deal. He noticed her limp handshake, feeling like a wet noodle, but he didn’t mind.

Jennifer knew the pay could have been better but grew tired of her data entry job. Besides, she would earn money for something she did at night anyway.

They finished their drinks, and Jerrick dropped Jennifer off at her house.

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Jennifer and Jerrick met at the mall’s food court two weeks after the coffee shop at 2 P.M.

The mall was in Dearborn, an affluent suburb of Detroit. It was a pristine white mall with large, wide-open spaces spanning two floors.

In the morning, the elderly walked back and forth through the mall for exercise, and in the afternoon, teenagers invaded it after school.

Jerrick and Jennifer sat at a table in the far corner of the food court, opposite the children's play area and the food counters. They wanted to be as far away from the crowd and the screaming children as possible.

Jerrick, being polite, pulled the chair out for Jennifer. Then he sat down across from her.

"How are you?" Jerrick asked politely.

"I'm doing well; how are you?"

"Not bad. I brought you a present."

Jerrick reached down into his duffel briefcase and pulled out a new laptop.

Jennifer's face brightened as if she were a good child being awarded an unexpected present. She grabbed the laptop and opened it.

"I worked at an electronics store and used my employee discount to buy that for you. I read this laptop has the best battery life with three hours surfing on the internet."

Jennifer turned the computer on. Next, she pulled out a CD case, opened it, and started flipping through CDs.

Jerrick saw the homemade CDs and DVDs with weird names and codes scrawled using a permanent marker.

"Jennifer, would you like something to eat and drink?"

"Are you buying?"

"Yes, of course!"

"I'll order French fries with mayonnaise on the side and mineral water."

"Mayonnaise? Did I hear you correctly?"

"Jerrick, believe it or not, it's quite good. I read in a Dutch magazine that they ate it that way in Amsterdam, and I tried it. Since Then I'm hooked. Besides, all the Dutch women are tall and slim, so mayonnaise can't be bad for you."

Jerrick uttered, “OK,” turned, and walked to the food counter. He ordered Jennifer’s unusual snack and a pastrami sandwich with everything on it, including the mayonnaise.

Next, he headed to the coffee shop counter to buy a tea and get the Wi-Fi code. This coffee shop changed the Wi-Fi code daily, stopping the freeloaders from using its internet service without purchases.

Jerrick placed the food and drinks on a tray and glanced around. He had already scoped this place and didn’t see any cameras. This mall was located in the affluent suburbs of Detroit and rarely had any crime. Although he didn’t spot any surveillance cameras, they were so small now that agents could hide them anywhere.

Jerrick knew the KGB recruited smart, average-looking people. If an agent were too handsome or ugly, people would notice and remember. If a person is average-looking, people cannot recollect anything about them. Average-looking agents slip in and out of the crowd unnoticed.

Jerrick approached the table, carrying the food and drinks to Jennifer’s table. He knew he was average-looking, but Jennifer fixed herself up today. Although she pulled her hair back in a ponytail, she wore a pink blouse with eye shadow and a dab of blush on her cheeks. She looked attractive today. Thus, people in the mall might remember them if agents had questioned anyone.

Jerrick dispensed the food and placed the tray on the other table.

He sat down and gave her the Wi-Fi code. Next, he nibbled several bites from his sandwich and sipped his tea several times.

Jennifer hadn’t touched her French fries yet. She became engrossed with the computer.

After several minutes, she emerged from behind the notebook computer and asked, “Do you have any names?”

“Names?”

“Like a Congressman or governor?”

The only name Jerrick remembered was Margaret Hayworth, the influential US Senator from Arkansas. She chaired the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee.

Jerrick remembered her because he saw her picture in his college textbook, and she looked like his dear, sweet grandmother.

Margaret was nearing 65, with short gray hair, a round face, and 40 lbs of excess weight. She wore loose-fitting suits to hide her wide girth.

After several keystrokes, Jennifer said, “Look at this,” and turned the laptop so Jerrick could read the screen.

Jennifer started eating her fries; she grabbed a French fry, dipped it in mayonnaise, and ate it.

Jennifer hacked into the Inspector General’s database. The Inspector General monitors federal employees and traces federal grant money.

Margaret was involved in everything. She brought tons of federal money to Arkansas, helped school districts expand and build more school buildings, helped police departments get grants for squad cars and equipment, and helped organizations get grants for community development.

Of course, this was not free money. The Inspector General believed Margaret earned kickbacks from these grants.

If Jerrick only knew who Margaret Hayworth was. She hid behind a facade, being polite and acting as everyone’s best friend. Underneath, she was freezing, calculating, and ruthless. If you crossed her, she struck back, but not like a cobra directly. She waited and plotted and schemed for 20 years if she could destroy her opponent.

Margaret expected her constituents to donate money to her campaign fund and shower her with gifts. For example, a school district in Little Rock wanted federal funds to renovate and expand a high school. Margaret worked hard and secured a \$250,000 grant. What did the ungrateful school do? They donated a meager \$1,000 to her campaign. By Margaret’s calculation, the school should have donated at least \$5,000.

Margaret still talked to the school’s superintendent and always accepted his grant proposals. However, she ensured the committee tabled the proposals, and the committee never saw them. Whenever the superintendent called and asked about the grant, she said the committee was studying it. It takes time.

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Jerrick and Jennifer hung out more, and as promised, Jerrick paid her for services rendered.

Jennifer became a wealth of information.

The American people suspected corruption, but they didn't know the extent of it. At least half the state and local politicians were outwardly rotten, while 60% of the Congressmen and federal judges were dirty. Our political leaders did anything and everything to supplement their incomes, all at the taxpayers' expense. They were maggots feeding off a dead carcass, picking it clean.

Jerrick understood why a system flourished in America. Politicians loved other dirty politicians. First, they don't feel bad doing dishonest stuff themselves. Second, the politicians used the dirt to keep party members in line. If a junior politician gets out of line or ticks off a senior member, the party would feed the out-of-control politician to the wolves. The press would expose all the dirt and corruption on them while the FBI and federal prosecutors would convict and imprison the politician.

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Jerrick still delivered speeches at the Moose Club every two weeks and experimented with the topics and delivery of his speeches.

One particular speech upset his political party as Jerrick started:

Americans are the superior race on the earth.

The reason is simple.

Americans are a mixture of all cultures and all peoples.

We are a melting pot of the whole of humanity.

Americans studied the vast cultures of the world and took the best from them.

Americans took Britain's Common Law System.

And her traditions of Justice, Laws, and Equality.

We took the hardworking spirit of the Germans and Polish and used their talents to build our factories and engineer high-quality products.

We took...

Jerrick started to stammer, which he hadn't done in a while. He saw the shocked expressions on the audience's faces.

Jerrick didn't develop rapport with them and stopped his speech.

"I'm sorry. I don't feel well today. Let's welcome Dan, the vice-chair of the National Workers' Party."

Jerrick left the stage with his head bowed down and dashed to his office.

Tonight, Jerrick thought he had written a good speech but failed. He placed his elbows on the desk and tucked his face into the palms of his hands.

In the background, he heard Dan's booming voice as he made key points in his speech about putting Americans back to work. After 20 minutes, Dan opened the office door and sat on the chair across from Jerrick.

Dan had a perturbed look and snapped, "What was that about, Jerrick?"

"I thought I wrote a good speech," Jerrick said as he lifted his face from his palms and looked at Dan.

"Superior race? Where did that come from?"

"I believe it to be true. I thought I wrote a good theme for a speech."

"Whenever a person says the superior race, they think of only one man, Adolf Hitler."

"Dan, I'm not a racist. I don't hold any prejudices against any race."

"That doesn't matter. Your enemies will compare you to Hitler and scare everybody. Then members of our party will think you are crazy and leave."

"You know I'm not a Nazi. If I must emulate a dictator, I choose Augustus, the first Emperor of Rome."

"Jerrick, not that crap again! Although Augustus was the greatest ruler of the ancient world, he ruled over 2,000 years ago. Today, we live in different times."

Dan glanced at Jerrick and noticed his words had sunk in. Dan hoped Jerrick would bury that speech in a deep grave, ensuring it

would never be exposed again. Then Dan stood up and rushed out before Jerrick started outlining Augustus's achievements. Please, we live in different times!

Before Jerrick had started his discourse on Augustus, he stared at an empty chair that Dan had occupied seconds ago.

Jerrick knew better. People confuse technology with human development, but the human mind has yet to evolve. People's psyche today is the same as it was 2,000 years ago.

Families from ancient times wanted jobs to feed themselves and start families. They wanted the best for their children. They gossiped and spread vicious rumors about relatives and foes. Ancient people always struggled with their governments as the government seized property, assessed taxes, and recruited soldiers to fight in wars.

Technology allowed armies to kill more people and granted governments the means to monitor and control their people. Technology extended the human mind; it didn't help the mind evolve and grow. It only confused people, making modern people think they were better off than their ancestors.

Dan's criticism perturbed Jerrick, but Jerrick encouraged it. He didn't surround himself with yes-men. He wanted different viewpoints as he weighed the pros and cons of each decision, choosing the best course of action. Dan was right. Jerrick shouldn't use the superior race so people wouldn't confuse him with Hitler.

Jerrick noticed Dan had used the words 'our party.' Jerrick should keep a close eye on Dan.

Dan could be one of those ambitious captains.

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Jennifer called Jerrick urgently one day and needed to talk to him immediately. They met at the Moose Club at five o'clock.

Jerrick sat behind his desk. The rest of the party, like Dan and Chad, played billiards in the common area of the Moose Club.

Jennifer entered Jerrick's office at five exactly, leading a young teenager by the hand.

The teenager looked like a typical teenager: too skinny, with a rash of pimples on his face, and he didn't tuck in his Metallica black t-shirt.

"Hello, Jerrick."

"Hi, Jennifer. Who's your little friend?"

"His name is Mikey."

"Hello, Mike."

Mike didn't say a word. He leaned close to Jennifer, and Jennifer wrapped her loving arm around him.

"He does not talk much."

"No, he's had a tough life. His mom left him when he was a baby, and his dad was a tyrant who beat him severely."

"Okay, he had a tough life. What can we do for him?"

"He's the best computer virus writer."

Jerrick studied the boy closely. He would have never guessed. The boy looked average in every way, except he didn't speak.

"What damage has he done?"

"Remember that computer virus last year? You open your email, and, BAM, your hard drive is wiped clean."

The boy began smiling with a mischievous glint in his eyes.

Jerrick laughed and added, "That was a nasty little computer virus. Jennifer, what do you have in mind?"

"He needs a place to stay."

"I think I can find a place for him. What about school?"

The boy started frowning.

"I don't think he likes school," Jennifer replied.

"Oh, I see. What other computer viruses have this kid dreamt up?"

"You wouldn't believe it. He wrote a virus that hits cell phones."

"What? Are you kidding?"

"No, it's true. A cell phone sends a signal to a cell tower every five minutes. That tells the computer where the cell phone is. The tower can also send text messages to the cell phone. Mike thinks he can embed a simple program into a text message that infects the cell phone with a virus."

"Unbelievable! We have no protection from a computer virus for anything with a computer chip."

“If it has a computer chip, then someone can write a computer virus that messes it up.”

Mikey started to giggle. Jerrick joined in and laughed a little, too. Then he said, “Jen, you can take him to the farm. I know this old man who is helping us. He has plenty of room.”

Then Jerrick studied the boy, “I only have one condition. You’re not to release any computer viruses without my approval. I don’t need the federal government breathing down my neck because someone in the National Workers’ Party unleashed a nasty virus across the world that disrupted computers for a day. The government can use that as an excuse to imprison me and dissolve my political party.”

“Thanks, Jerrick. I’ll see you later.”

“Bye, Jen. I will see you in a couple of days. I’m curious about your progress. Please check back with me.”

Mikey waved goodbye and left with Jennifer.

Jerrick sat back in his chair and began thinking. What would he do with a computer virus writer? It can’t hurt to have too much talent in one’s organization, but Jesus, a virus that wipes out the cell phones. What’s next?

## ***The 2008 Financial Crisis***

Jerrick waited and waited for the collapse of the U.S. economy. He didn’t know when, but he knew it was coming. The U.S. economy experienced the greatest housing bubble that humanity has ever seen. Eventually, this bubble would become a tsunami wave that would drown the U.S. economy. Most people would never spot the wave until it was too late. Then chaos would inundate everything.

Jerrick was working on a typical September day. He was still an assistant manager at the small electronics store.

He went to the break room to eat his lunch. He opened the door to a small room containing a tiny table with three chairs and an old Frigidaire refrigerator in the corner. The fridge hummed gutturally as it cooled the food.

Discarded food containers littered the table and the floor near the trashcan. An old color tube TV was mounted low on the wall so workers could change the channel. As usual, the previous viewer switched the channel to MTV, the channel of choice in this place.

Jerrick walked to the TV and switched the station to CNBC. He stopped halfway to the refrigerator because a sound bite from the news reporter caught his attention.

“The U.S. government will not bail out Lehman Brothers today. Wall Street is jittery, and investors are selling off their stocks. The Dow Jones has fallen almost 500 points.”

Jerrick sat down at the table, flabbergasted. It finally happened. His chance had come. Don’t misunderstand Jerrick. He didn’t want good people harmed, but without a major financial crisis, nobody in their right mind would hand all the power to one man and follow him on his mad quest to build an empire.

Jerrick had much planning and thinking to do.

The 2008 Financial Crisis became the springboard, launching the National Workers’ Party into the spotlight. More and more people noticed Jerrick Ray Davis because he was right. Factories were a source of wealth, and Jerrick Ray Davis would put everyone back to work.

Jerrick planned his following speech for Saturday, October 25, 2008. As Jerrick suspected, the people were listening. As he stepped onto the stage, he saw 70 people in the audience, occupying all the seats. The crowd’s curious eyes fell upon Jerrick as he stood in the center of the stage. Then the murmuring of the crowds died down, and Jerrick started his speech:

Mexico is a mess.

Kidnappings and mass murders occur daily along the border towns. Thousands of Mexicans are jumping the border fence to escape the chaos.

They come here searching for food, shelter, and jobs.

It’s just that Mexico does not have any jobs, and the jobless

Mexicans come here, searching for work.

Don’t get me wrong.

I am not anti-Mexican.

I do not blame the Mexicans for coming here.  
Mexicans want the same as Americans.  
They want to own a house, start a family, and own some  
possessions.  
They are Americans, too.  
They want to live under the flag of freedom and belong to  
something great.  
They escaped the poverty of Mexico because Mexico is a mess.  
Mexico has 31 states.  
Mexico has resources.  
It has petroleum, minerals, and vast agricultural lands.  
Instead of Mexicans jumping the fence, we should be sending  
tanks and troops down there, annexing Mexico to the American  
Empire.  
We bring Mexico up to our standards.  
Institute an excellent legal system and build highways, roads,  
bridges, dams, and schools.  
Bring law and order to a country riddled with violence and drug  
wars.  
Then Mexicans and Americans will live in harmony.  
We are not invading Mexico but developing it.  
Mexicans will not be prisoners of war but citizens of the American  
Empire.  
Mexicans will have the same rights and obligations as other  
citizens of the Empire.  
Imagine all the jobs and wealth we will create.  
Instead of being an Empire of 50 states, we become an Empire of  
81 states.

As Jerrick finished, he scanned his audience.

Most people hooted and hollered, shaking their angry fists in agreement. Then Jerrick saw his second in command, Dan, sitting in the first row, the last chair on the left, with a blank face and a stern look in his eyes.

Dan became upset with his speech again. It was not the first time, nor would it be the last. He warned Jerrick about projecting himself as a conqueror.

The audience was growing. More and more people were dissatisfied with their government and angry at President Bush's and President Obama's bank bailouts.

In the meantime, the U.S. economy continued shedding jobs. The 2007 Great Recession was the worst recession since the Great Depression. However, the experts claimed the U.S. economy would turn around in 2010 and start creating jobs again. Of course, the economy never recovered. Stagnation and resignation settled in, and the U.S. economy sank lower and lower.

After the speech, Jerrick and his top National Workers' Party captains walked to the bar across the street.

The bar was old and rustic, and it had not been painted in 10 years. It probably had a name, but the sign hanging above the door faded years ago. The place attracted the rougher crowd.

As Jerrick and his Party walked into the bar, a jukebox played Lynyrd Skynyrd's Freebird while several stocky patrons with scraggly beards and tattooed-covered bodies played pool.

Jerrick and his captains scooted several tables together. Jerrick sat at the head of the table. Dan sat in the first seat to Jerrick's left while Jennifer sat on the other side to his right. Then Jerrick bought several pitchers of Budweiser, the beer of choice for Michiganders.

Jerrick and several party members poured beer into everyone's steins.

Jerrick raised his stein for a toast and started, "Here's to the Party's prosperity. May God look down upon us favorably and allow the National Workers' Party to grow into a force to be reckoned with. Cheers!"

As Jerrick finished the toast, everyone clanked their steins together, drinking large gulps of beer.

After Jerrick had sat his stein down, he blurted, "Dan, I noticed you didn't enjoy my speech this evening?"

"It's not that I didn't enjoy it. It's just that the speech has the wrong timing. We have troops dying in Iraq and Afghanistan, returning in pine boxes. When you talk about invading Mexico and building an Empire, the people will think you'll start another messy war. Then American families will lose more sons and daughters to the casualties of war."

“I see your point. You made a good point, but I have two reasons for invading Mexico. First, Mexico is easy pickings. Mexico’s military is weak, and Mexicans are tired of their political leaders, the gang violence, and a corrupt government. If we made Mexicans full citizens and restored law and order, then they wouldn’t mind being invaded. Second, and most important for success, we must create jobs. Adding 31 states and investing in their infrastructure would create a massive economic tide that would raise the economic boats for all Americans.”

Chad, Jerrick’s third in command, sat next to Jennifer. He raised his stein and proposed a new toast: “Amen, brothers.”

Beer steins clanked again, and people gulped their beers.

Jerrick grimaced as the second gulp of beer went down the hatch. He didn’t drink much.

One of the party members at the far end of the table piped up, “But doesn’t the invasion create a temporary expansion? Look at the crash of the housing bubble.”

Jerrick continued his discussion, a professor teaching his pupils, “That’s true; all economic expansions are temporary. We had a housing bubble for the last seven years. Then we saw the rise of the internet and communications industry in the 1990s and, finally, the adaptation of computers in the 1980s. Technology kept the U.S. economy afloat, even with a large, stupid government intent on regulating, taxing, and destroying it.”

Jerrick raised his stein for a toast, “However, we don’t have the luxury of new technology or voodoo financing to grow the U.S. economy. The only method we have is to build the American Empire! Cheers!”

Everyone at the table hollered, “To the American Empire! To the American Workers!”

Steins clanked so hard together; it was a miracle that one didn’t shatter.

The other bar patrons turned, searching for the source of the raucous.

The bartender, who doubled as the bouncer, looked over. He weighed 300 pounds and kept an observant eye on his patrons. A ragged scar twisted from his left eye down the center of his cheek, a

souvenir from a drunk as he broke his beer bottle on the table and jabbed the ragged bottle toward his eye. Luckily, the bottle missed and sliced open his cheek.

The bartender stared at Jerrick and his crowd, then began washing beer steins in the sink. The 2007 Recession both blessed and cursed the bar. More people were drinking and getting drunk at his bar, but they were mean drunks. The bartender broke up more fights, tossing the rowdy drunks onto the streets.

“What is voodoo finance?” Chad asked, perplexed.

Jerrick started, “Investment banks created a variety of exotic securities that nobody understood or comprehended. Then the banks dumped money into the housing mortgage market, accelerating housing prices. Unfortunately, this whole system is predicated on homeowners paying their mortgages. When the economy soured in 2007, many people defaulted on their mortgages, causing this entire system to collapse. Of course, one could argue that banks shouldn’t have loaned some homeowners, but the banks loaned money to anyone with a heartbeat and paycheck stub in his pocket.”

Jerrick took another sip of beer and added, “Consequently, the banks artificially created the housing bubble. This whole process I call voodoo finance. Its power is mysterious and powerful, but, in the end, quite deadly to everyone involved.”

Dan wanted to add asset-backed securities and Collateral Debt Obligations to the conversation, but Jerrick’s definition would suffice. Dan didn’t want to trigger a heated debate about complicated financial securities with many drunks.

Dan lifted his stein and gulped his beer.

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The 2008 Financial Crisis wreaked havoc on the U.S. economy as the unemployment rate soared to the stratosphere, climbing from 10% in 2009 to 15% by 2013.

The recession hit Michigan the hardest because its economy was stuck in a perpetual recession since 2001.

However, the other states quickly joined Michigan. After 2009, all state economies collapsed, imploding under the weight of their bureaucratic governments and a shortage of good-paying jobs.

Many people didn't know that the federal government was worried about the financial crisis. The U.S. government secretly built large internment camps hidden in the countryside, located near the largest cities in America. The federal government would detain millions of people when protests, riots, and chaos erupted in the cities.

Unfortunately, the corrupt politicians refused to change the system or relinquish their power. Only one outcome was imminent; a revolution loomed over the horizon.

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As Jerrick predicted, the financial crisis promoted the National Workers' Party as membership soared and donations poured in.

Dan burst into Jerrick's Office at the Moose Club.

Jerrick hunched over his desk, writing a new speech. He placed a cup of Jasmine tea with honey on the desk's corner. The scent of Jasmine flowers filled the office air.

"Jerrick, I have some good news and bad news," Dan began excitedly, panting from the brisk jog from the other room.

"What's the good news, Dan?"

"Eighty more people signed up for the National Workers' Party. I could have signed more, but they don't want their name listed as a member. They're afraid the government will find out and go after them."

"I see. We can solve this problem."

Jerrick opened the bottom drawer of his desk and grabbed a stack of thick, heavy paper.

Dan saw the top sheet with ten business cards in five rows and two columns. Each card had a Roman column on the left-hand side, and Jerrick wrote Augustus across the center in large block letters. Below Augustus, he numbered every card, starting from one and ending at 10,000.

“I have 10,000 business cards printed on a thick, cotton paper with a distinctive watermark.”

Jerrick removed the top paper and held it in front of the window. The watermark was visible on the business cards. Appearing as a small, lit torch, the contours of the image softened and became indistinguishable over several decades. It could have been anything.

“Augustus, I should’ve known,” Dan said with laughter. Then he asked, “Where did you get the paper?”

“A long time ago, I bought textbooks at garage sales. This old lady had this old paper and said they no longer make it. I liked the style and the distinctive watermark, so I bought it.”

“You know that’s not a bad idea, Jerrick. We can raise our membership dues to \$25 annually and hand them a membership card. That way, we’re not listing their name; we have proof that they joined our organization. By the way, why did you number them?”

“I figure we’ll reward our party members once we get the power. We choose the most talented first and then go by seniority. These numbers list the seniority.”

“That’s great,” Dan said.

Dan’s excitement strengthened, “Jerrick, you should sign each business card on the back, making it difficult to duplicate.”

“Okay, I can do that. Could you take these cards to the copy center and cut them neatly?”

Dan grabbed the large stack of business cards and retorted, “Okay, buddy, get that signature hand ready. You have many signings to do.”

Dan and Jerrick exchanged laughter.

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The State of Michigan noticed the National Worker’s Party in December 2011.

Jerrick, Dan, and Chad were hanging out at the Moose Club on a Saturday night. Three were drinking wine coolers, talking about politics, and playing a friendly game of billiards.

They were having a great time, although they used crooked pool sticks to shoot the cue ball over the felt surface, which had many tears and stains.

BOOM! The front door banged open and slammed against the wall.

Before they blinked their eyes, four Michigan State Troopers rushed in with their revolvers drawn.

“Freeze,” the first officer yelled, pointing a gun at Jerrick.

Jerrick put his drink down slowly on the pool table and put his hands halfway up, level with his shoulders, showing the officers his empty hands.

Dan and Chad followed suit.

The officers slowly approached the three.

The first officer watched the three while the other officers scanned the club for more perpetrators.

“Sir, do you have a license to serve the public?”

Jerrick answered, “This is our National Workers’ Party organization. I didn’t know we needed a license to operate.”

“Are you serving alcohol?”

“No,” Dan said firmly, adding, “Sir, we’re just playing pool. We’re not open to the public.”

“This address is zoned business, and you need a permit to operate,” the officer said and demanded, “Please put your hands up. You can talk to the judge tomorrow.”

The first officer circled behind the suspects, pulling their hands behind their backs and snapping on the handcuffs.

The other three officers kept their guns pointed at Jerrick, Chad, and Dan. Then they led the suspects to the police car in single file.

The police escorted Jerrick last. Passing the front door, Jerrick turned his head and asked politely, “Sir, could you please lock up for us? The keys are on the bar.”

One of the troopers retrieved the keys, turned off the lights, and locked the front door.

The police parked two large Ford Crown Victorias near the door, flashing red and blue lights. Michigan’s finest was keeping the violent Detroit neighborhoods safe.

Before Jerrick climbed into the squad car, he looked at the officer and said, "Thank you."

Jerrick, Chad, and Dan sat comfortably in the back of one of the squad cars. A black steel mesh separated the prisoners from the officers while Steppen Wolf's *Born to be Wild* filled the car as the troopers drove the guys to the Detroit city jail.

Two officers climbed in the front while the other two got into the other car. The other squad car drove in the opposite direction, protecting the citizens of Michigan; they had more crimes to solve and more people to arrest.

After the police had checked the three in, an officer led them to a small drunk tank. The police separated Jerrick, Chad, and Dan from the dangerous Detroit criminals.

As the officer grabbed the door handle, the metal door hummed, filling the corridor with a buzzing sound. Then Jerrick, Chad, and Dan stepped in while the large metal door slammed shut.

They stood in an 8-foot-long and 6-foot-wide cell with concrete benches following along the long walls. Although the walls were freshly painted, the place reeked of urine and dirty sweat. A filthy metallic toilet and sink were in the corner adjacent to the door.

Jerrick, Chad, and Dan sat on one side while another occupant lay face down on the other.

Jerrick scrutinized the occupant. He looked mean, raised, and bred on the tough streets of Detroit, definitely not a stranger to the Michigan Penal System.

"What are you in here for?" Chad blurted to the stranger in a friendly manner.

The stranger turned on his side and glared at Chad with his mean eyes, focusing his hatred, frustration, and anger on him. He said, "Murder! I tried to kill a cop."

Chad's eyes widened while his mouth hung open in awe. Jerrick and Dan turned to face the stranger.

Then the stranger erupted in laughter and said, "I'm kidding. I tried to steal a six-pack of beer. What are you guys in for?"

"Operating a business without a business permit," Dan stated in a dry, emotionless tone.

"Say what?"

“Operating without a business permit,” Dan stated again, in jest, with a wide grin.

“What kind of business do you have?”

“We don’t have a business. We live in a former business.”

“That’s fucked up,” the stranger replied and laughed again. Then he added, “That’s Michigan for you. The state follows its citizens around, looking for violations.” Then the stranger put his head down on the concrete slab and fell asleep.

Dan turned to Jerrick and said, “Thanks, buddy, for the trouble. I hope it doesn’t prevent me from taking the bar exam and becoming a lawyer.”

“Don’t worry, Dan. I’ll tell the judge tomorrow that it’s my business. I’m responsible for my actions. You guys are innocent.”

The following day, Chad, Dan, and Jerrick awakened.

Sometime during the night, the police released the other occupant.

Jerrick stood up, stretching his back. “Damn, guys, my back is killing me.”

“Chad,” Chad mumbled with a blank stare on his face. He lay on that concrete mattress, an animal caught in a trap, waiting for a hunter to put him out of his misery.

Dan sat up with a giant frown on his face as he moaned and rubbed his lower back with his hand.

Jerrick tried to be cheerful as a deputy brought breakfast: soggy toast, dried leather strips of bacon, reconstituted eggs, and day-old cold coffee from the Sheriff’s Office. The state serves nothing but the best for Michigan’s criminals.

Dan, in his usual cocky manner, added, “This jail food should be ruled cruel and unusual punishment.”

However, nobody smiled or laughed during breakfast.

At 9 o’clock, two sheriff duties lined the three men before Judge Fields.

Jerrick glanced behind him and saw another twenty inmates of the Michigan Penal System. They wore bright orange sweatpants and orange T-shirts with the backs spray painted in large black letters, Detroit City Jail.

The judge neared 60 and was bald with puffy, reddish cheeks. He wore glasses and glared at the defendants. The judge hadn't experienced joy in his life for decades.

Dan, Chad, and Jerrick stood before the judge, and two large bailiffs stood behind them.

The judge read off the charge, "Operating without a business license."

"Not guilty, your honor," Dan firmly stated.

The judge glared at Jerrick and demanded, "How do you plead?"

Jerrick started, "Your honor, these two have nothing to do with a business. Sir, I take responsibility for my actions. I rented the Moose Club to start my National Workers' Party political organization. I want to return the factory jobs to America and Michigan and limit free trade. I believe every hard-working American deserves a good job. A good job defines a man and elevates his self-esteem. Then he can marry a woman and build a future with her. Only good-paying jobs can make this happen and are the backbone of a rich, enlightened society."

Jerrick paused a second to catch his breath.

"Guilty," the judge declared and uttered, "Bailiff, release those two," while pointing at Chad and Dan.

The judge scrutinized Jerrick as if he were studying a bug under a magnifying glass. Then he yelled, "Your fine is \$200 or 20 days in jail." Next, the judge slammed the gavel hard on this desk.

The bailiff let Chad and Dan go.

Dan turned to Jerrick and said, "Don't worry, we have money in the Party's account. We'll get you out." Then the bailiff led Jerrick to the holding cell next to the court. In the background, he heard the judge sentence other criminals for their crimes.

After several hours, the bailiff brought Jerrick two bologna sandwiches. Before the bailiff left, Jerrick snapped, "Sir, when will I be released?"

"Your friends paid your fine, but the judge set your release to 6 o'clock tonight."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"What time is it now?"

“It’s three.” Then the bailiff turned to leave.

Jerrick heard another large door slam shut and echoes from a large key locking it.

Jerrick heard his growling stomach echoing in the cell. He grabbed one of those sandwiches and forced it down. The bread tasted like a sponge, while the bologna was aged luncheon meat from a can.

He hiccupped while starting on the second sandwich, and that nasty bologna sandwich tried to escape up the esophagus and into his mouth.

Jerrick kept that food down and patted the aches of his stomach.

He sat in the cell alone and heard the sounds of silence.

Jerrick waited an eternity for 6 o’clock until the bailiff had returned. He led Jerrick from the cell and opened another door to the inside chamber.

“Where are we going?” Jerrick asked suspiciously. It was too early for the government to assassinate Jerrick. He wasn’t powerful enough yet.

“The judge wants to speak to you.” Then the bailiff led Jerrick to the judge’s tiny office directly behind his court.

The judge sat behind an old, worn wooden desk with a stack of papers. Behind the judge sat with his back towards a window, and Jerrick sat in one of the two vacant armchairs in front of the desk.

“Bailiff, please leave us.”

“Sir, are you sure it is okay?”

“Yes, I’ll be safe. His friends paid the fine so he could leave after our conversation.”

The bailiff obeyed and closed the judge’s door.

The judge stared at Jerrick and began, “When I looked down at you in the court today, I saw myself 35 years ago. I just graduated from law school then. I loved the law; the law burned a passion in my heart. During the 1960s, I worked on equal rights for women and minorities. Sometimes, I was so poor that I didn’t have money to pay the rent, but it didn’t matter. I believed in what I was doing. I was helping people, making a difference.”

The judge paused, collecting his thoughts.

“What happened, sir?” Jerrick asked softly.

“At one point, the passion died; the fire burned out. I became concerned about making money. I’m not sure when the transition happened, but it did. I’m partly responsible for some of the job losses in Michigan. I sued many corporations and factories. They were easy prey. A client would come to me and claim they were injured at the factory. Then I filed a lawsuit. If a company fought it, a jury always ruled in my favor.”

“Do you regret it, sir?”

“In the beginning, I didn’t. I was helping people. However, over the years, I suspected many of my clients greatly exaggerated their claims or they hurt themselves somewhere else. Then they lied about their injuries and claimed they were hurt at work. I made easy money. Then I noticed some factories declared bankruptcy and shut down. Then the jobs started leaving Michigan.”

“If you knew the outcome, would you have stopped?”

“It would make no difference. If I didn’t sue, a dozen lawyers would take my place and do it anyway. It was inevitable. I love the law; it is my life, but the law grew into the 500-pound gorilla in the room, beating everyone up.”

“Sir, why are you telling me this?”

“I need to warn you, Jerrick. I’m required to report troublemakers to the FBI. This financial crisis worries everybody, and the FBI monitors the troublemakers. I won’t report you because this was a business permit violation, but watch your back. On your NCIC report, you have a weird code that I had never seen before. You’re not being watched, but you’re nobody either.”

“It must be for living in Russia for two years.”

“Ah, you lived in Russia? How interesting? That’s probably what it is. An American has friends and connections with a former enemy state.”

“Thank you for the warning, sir.”

“Jerrick, words are circulating in the Michigan state government. You talk about creating jobs and creating an empire.”

“Sir, this is the only way we can save our state and country. If we take any other course of action, we’re doomed.”

“I see; it’s hard to say, but you’re right about one thing. Something must be done.”

“Sir, you can join us, the National Workers’ Party.”

The judge chuckled and continued, “Jerrick, I have already fought all my battles. I’ll remain here in this court until I die. Even if the State of Michigan runs out of money and can’t pay me anymore, I’ll still be here every day. That is the reason I must find you guilty. The governor’s office told all state agencies to collect as much money as possible. The budget is much worse than we anticipated. Unfortunately, the budget is going in one direction – down.”

“Thank you, sir, for this information.”

“Wait,” the judge said while he opened the top drawer of his desk, pulling out a homemade CD case.

Then the judge placed the CD case in front of Jerrick on the desk. Jerrick grabbed the CD case to study it.

“Like I said. I love the law, and I spent a lifetime studying it. That CD has a legal system for a new country with a balance of powers between the federal, state, and local governments, a fair tax system, and strong rights for citizens and businesses. Rules and regulations for all government agencies are well-defined. I took the best laws, starting with Emperor Justinian.”

“When he codified all Roman laws in the sixth century,” Jerrick interrupted.

“I see you know your Roman history. I also took the best from British Common Law and the Germanic and Napoleonic Legal codes. If I were to redesign a country’s legal system, I would use that legal system on that CD.”

“Your honor, why are you doing this?”

“For my grandchildren’s future. I can only give them my house and money, but I can’t give them a future. It’ll be too late when the politicians in Lansing fix our problems. Who knows, one of Michigan’s brightest could stand up and fix everything, and Michigan can rise and become a great state again.”

“Thank you, sir,”

“Jerrick, watch yourself. The government will put you on the watch list. If you and your Party ever make it, give me credit for my legal system if you’ll ever use it, of course. We also didn’t have this conversation.”

Jerrick stood up and offered his hand for a handshake, but the bailiff returned.

“Escort him out,” the judge snapped.

“Thank you, your honor,” Jerrick said and turned to leave. The bailiff led him outside.

Dan and Chad stood on the sidewalk right outside the door. As the door opened, they saw their friend Jerrick emerge.

“Jerrick, what happened?”

“I spoke with the judge. He’s nice once you get past his cold exterior.”

“I was worried,” Chad replied, adding, “I thought they’d do something to you.”

Jerrick replied, “No, they were nice, but you are right. We must be more cautious. By the way, I’m starving. All I have eaten was a lousy breakfast and two crummy bologna sandwiches.”

“I hear you; let’s go for pizza,” Dan said as Jerrick’s stomach growled.

The next day, Jerrick and the top members of his Party stood inside the Moose Club.

Jerrick scanned the stage and then the bar and pool tables, reliving his memories of the last five years.

Then Jerrick faced his captains and said, “We must say goodbye.”

“I know; this place was too awesome. We had some good times here,” Chad replied.

“Jerrick, what will we do?” Dan inquired

“Thank God our Party is growing. We have some party members helping us. One owns a farm in the country. We’ll put our technical support out there.”

“You mean Jennifer and Mike,” Dan asked.

Jerrick noticed Dan was a little perturbed by this decision. He had another reason to separate Jennifer from Dan. He saw Dan occasionally flirting with Jennifer, so Jerrick was a little jealous.

Jerrick can’t have a relationship with Jennifer because the First Lady complements the Empire, defining its feminine character. Jerrick didn’t think Jennifer would make a good First Lady. Besides,

Jerrick already knew what his future wife looked like; she wouldn't have blonde hair or fair skin.

Jerrick continued, "Yes, then another party member will let us use their house in Farmington Hills. It was his grandmother's house until she died. He'll not sell it unless he offers a good price."

"Not likely in this economy. Housing prices have been falling since 2008," Dan added.

Jerrick persisted, "We can organize our activities there and do a blitzkrieg for speeches. We'll spend two days passing out fliers and posting messages on Twitter, Facebook, and our Party's website. Two days should be enough to get the message out."

"Our government may be stupid, but agents and police know how to surf the internet," Chad added, imparting some reasoning into the discussion.

"That's the best we can do. Let's hope our government has better things to do than follow me around."

"Jerrick, be real. You're talking about building an empire. The only way to build one is for a revolution to take place. A revolution demotes or fires all the government leaders. I use the term 'fire' loosely. Usually, mass executions occur during a revolution," Dan said firmly.

"Your point is well taken, but I must deliver speeches. Our Party is still small, with 10,000 strong members, and we need dedicated party members to follow our orders. Once we take over, we'll replace our party members in all leadership positions in government. We start at the top and work our way down. We'll fill Congress and the top federal agencies first, then the state governors and state legislatures, and finally, the mayors and county commissioners."

"That's many people. How long will it take to get all those people?" Chad asked.

"To be honest, I don't know. We first capture the largest states, like New York and California, and then work down the list. The last states we take are Alaska and Hawaii. It depends on how much resistance the state governments give us."

"In theory, a governor can call up the National Guard, but I hope the people are so sick of their government that they'll never stand up to protect it."

“You’re right, Jerrick. People complain about their government, especially after the 2008 Financial Crisis. People are furious about the bailout package for banks and financial institutions. Many people hate their representatives, and they stop voting. People also hate all those damn taxes and complicated laws,” Dan elucidated.

“Congressmen have some of the lowest public opinion polls ever recorded,” Jerrick said with a beaming smile and continued, “We’ll use that to our advantage!”

“I know. People may want to see public executions of their representatives,” Chad added.

“Benito Mussolini stated best, ‘Democracy is beautiful in theory; in practice, it is a fallacy.’ Now, we must be careful. Eventually, the federal government will notice, and they’ll try to stop us,” Jerrick whispered as if government agents had already hidden in the bushes outside the Moose Club.

Dan changed the topic, “Jerrick, I almost forgot to tell you. A new party member signed up yesterday, and he looks like you. At first, I thought you were playing a joke.”

“Really, how close does he resemble me?”

“At first, I thought he was you, but some of his facial features differ. He has puffy cheeks with blue eyes. His hair is slightly darker.”

“Perhaps we can use him as my double.”

“Do you think the police and agents are that stupid? The state knows my eyes are brown from my driver’s license picture.”

“It could be enough to create confusion. If the state came after you, this double creates confusion so that the state would grab the wrong person.”

“Let’s talk to him. Having a double isn’t a bad idea. Then I can be at two places at once.”

“Maybe we can throw in an aura of mystique. Sometimes, the leader’s eyes are brown; other times, they’re blue. It depends on his mood,” Chad added in jest.

The group roared with laughter. Then they walked out.

Jerrick examined the interior for the last time before shutting the door. If Jerrick Ray Davis ever attained power, he’d convert this Moose Club into a museum.

Later that night, Jerrick crashed at the safe house in Farmington Hills. He pulled out the CD the judge had given him and inserted it into the laptop.

Jerrick sat on the floor with his back against the couch while the other party members gathered around Jerrick. Some sat next to Jerrick, while others sat on the sofa behind him.

The CD contained thousands of folders containing administrative laws, state laws, municipal laws, city charters, and more.

Chad pointed to one of the Bill of Rights folders and uttered, "Let's look at that one."

Jerrick clicked on it and opened a folder filled with text files. Then he said, "It looks like the regular Bill of Rights, but they differ. Look! There are 12 rights! Judge added two more."

Jerrick clicked on Amendment 11 and read, "Citizens have the right to a fair and just tax system. The government can only impose one tax on an activity, whether it is the federal, state, or local government."

Jerrick continued reading the comments at the bottom out loud: "Federal government should take the lead and collect an income tax; the state government collects the sales tax, and local governments collect the property tax. The tax rate is set by law and requires a 2/3 vote of the people within its jurisdiction to change it."

"Wow, that's interesting. The judge advocated a flat, simple tax system. The government sets the income tax at 15%, the state sales tax at 6%, and the property tax at \$200 per residential home."

"How many lawyers will lose their jobs over this tax system?" Dan replied in a pretend, angry voice at the injustice of a flat tax.

"Ah, that's too bad. Putting all those scum-bag attorneys and IRS agents out of work," Chad bellowed loudly.

The whole group erupted in laughter.

Jerrick added, "I guess the IRS and lawyers will find a real job and produce something a society really needs."

"What does the 6th Amendment state," Dan asked.

"This amendment hasn't changed, but it's much longer. Under the speedy trial, the state must start the trial within six months for a misdemeanor and within one year for a felony charge. The judge

automatically dismisses the charges if the state cannot do so. If a court appoints counsel to the indigent, counsel must have the same workload and compensation as the prosecuting attorney.”

Dan bursts out laughing, and then Jerrick.

“What’s so funny?” Chad asked with a perplexed look across his face.

“Prosecutors will hate this amendment. Courts usually pay the lowest salary and hire incompetent attorneys to defend the poor defendants. So prosecutors easily win these cases,” Dan explained.

“Courts overwork the court-appointed attorneys. Moreover, the courts will make these defendants wait years in jail for their trials. Most give in and take a plea bargain,” Jerrick added.

“But if we already had these rights, and the government found ways to circumvent them, what’s to stop our government from circumventing these new rights,” Chad asked intelligently.

“That’s a good point. It all comes down to the people whom we place in government. They must believe in these laws and imbue a set of ethics,” Jerrick explained.

Dan laughed again and stated, “Ethics? A revolution has no ethics!”

“I know that’s the only paradox I cannot resolve. We violate everything and turn around and impose a new legal system. Subsequently, we expect everyone to follow it, even requiring them to be ethical,” Jerrick uttered.

“In reality, we’re no better than the people we have thrown out of power?” Chad asked.

“That’s not necessarily true. We’ll change the system. We’ll return the manufacturing jobs to the United States. We’ll take our government and chop it in half, making the U.S. legal system friendly to businesses again,” Jerrick explained and then added, “We’ll jumpstart the engines of economic growth...”

“Then we’ll raise an army and expand our empire, creating even more jobs,” Dan added, cutting Jerrick off.

The group laughed again.

Then Jerrick closed the screen to the notebook computer and began, “Everyone, the day has come. Each passing day becomes

more dangerous. It's time we begin building an armed force, not an army but a contingent of armed security guards.”

“That's a good idea, but where do we recruit guards,” Chad asked.

“We have a variety of people in our organization. One, a former sergeant in the Army, believes we can train the homeless people as soldiers,” Jerrick continued in a serious voice.

Dan laughed sarcastically and stated, “We're going to arm homeless people and ask them to fight and protect us.”

“We shelter and feed many homeless in our organization, so it's time to put them to work. Everyone contributes to the organization,” Jerrick said.

Dan stopped laughing because Jerrick was right.

They must start somewhere. Did it matter that their soldiers were once homeless? A soldier following orders is a soldier. He is a pawn on a leader's chessboard.

## ***The U.S. Economy Collapses in 2016***

Some people sensed it silently in 2016, as if birds and animals sensed an imminent earthquake.

If only the political leaders were honest with their constituents and prevented panic. The U.S. government was broke. Every year since the 2008 Financial Crisis, the government collected less tax revenue. The U.S. government kept dumping massive amounts of cash into the economy, resuscitating a dead economy that was beyond resuscitation.

Leaders and politicians didn't understand the fundamental problems with the economy. They didn't want to reform the system. Thus, only a revolution could solve these problems and could jumpstart the economy again.

The reason was simple. The U.S. legal system became sick, discouraging people from working hard or building a successful business. If someone had beaten the odds and started a successful business, then government regulators, tax inspectors, and scum-bag attorneys appeared, like schools of sharks, who thrashed out and bit

anything that moved in the waters. Then once a shark tasted blood, the other sharks descended on the prey, devouring it alive.

Some people found protection from the government by working for the government.

Every year after the 2008 Financial Crisis, the economy worsened. By 2015, the unemployment rate reached 20%, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a measure of the size of the U.S. economy, contracted again by 3%; the federal debt reached \$20 trillion, and the Dow Jones hovered around 7,000 points. Real estate prices remained in free fall, and investors stopped holding the U.S. government debt.

Then 2016 arrived as hell released its fury upon the U.S. economy. A revolution was galloping towards Americans at a breakneck speed.

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Prices have been steadily dropping in the economy since 2008. Anyone with a job became wealthier. However, finding a job in today's economy was finding a virgin in a whorehouse – a daunting and impossible task.

Pete was driving to work, and he was addicted to gourmet coffees. He knew he should save money, but at least he didn't smoke or drink or gamble. These fantastic coffees became a bright spot in his rather dull life. That first sip in the morning was a smoker's first puff of a cigarette or a gambler's high from his first pull of the lever on the slot machine.

Pete worked for the government, was single, and was thirty-five years old. He held a flag for his job, cautioning drivers to slow down as the crew worked on the roads and highways. He saved several thousand dollars in his bank account.

Pete saw his first surprise of the day as he pulled up to the drive-thru at 'Coffees are Us.' He fished in his pocket for \$2.50 for his cappuccino.

"Sir, may I help you," a young, feminine voice asked politely.

"I'll have a large cappuccino, please," Pete retorted politely as his lips moistened in anticipation.

“That’ll be \$3.03.”

Two quarters fell from Pete’s fingers onto the truck’s floor as he asked in disbelief, “What?”

The young voice replied firmly with undertones of irritation wavering in her voice, “Sir, that will be \$3.03!”

Pete approached the pickup window and asked, “I was paying \$2.50 for that coffee. Why is it over \$3.03 now?”

“Sir, I do not know why. The regional manager came in today and raised all the prices.”

Pete scrounged for the extra money for his coffee by fishing more cash from his pocket and collecting those quarters off the floor.

Pete handed the barista his money and snatched the coffee away from her. He usually said thank you, but not today. The higher price definitely irritated him. If prices keep going up, he will reduce his gourmet coffee consumption, the one bright spot of his day.

Pete took the first sip, feeling a little lightheaded while his irritation faded. Then he put the car in drive and pulled onto the street.

Driving to work, Pete noticed prices were higher everywhere. He drove by Cheap-o-Gas and saw gas had risen to \$3.94 per gallon for the lowest octane, up from \$3.25 per gallon yesterday.

Americans complained about the higher prices but didn’t think about them as prices kept creeping upward.

Pete made his first morning stop at Coffees are Us a week later.

He pulled to the drive-thru and blurted, “How much for a cappuccino?”

The girl replied, “\$3.67.”

He paused for a second, thinking about the higher price.

The girl asked, “Would you like a cappuccino?”

Pete inquired, “No, how much is a small regular coffee?”

“\$2.20”

“I’ll take a small coffee with extra cream, please,” Pete responded mechanically with his voice devoid of emotion.

Pete shook his head in disgust because he was drinking regular coffee again. No way in hell would he pay \$3.67 for a cappuccino, even if the barista was naked and added a free lap dance.

Pete didn't know, but price hikes began accelerating. At the end of the month, the price of a cappuccino soared to \$7.93, and by the end of the year, it was \$5,500 per cup. At the end of the year, the price of one gallon of gas had risen to an astounding \$71,586.

Hyperinflation struck the U.S. economy like lightning, striking and destroying a healthy oak tree. The inflation rate accelerated to 1,000% yearly, becoming a ravenous cancer coursing through an already sick body. The U.S. economy began collapsing.

Many people like Pete gave up.

Although Pete still worked, his salary needed to catch up to inflation. It rose to \$300,000 per year. Oh boy! He could buy 55 cappuccinos or four gallons of gas, as high inflation robbed Pete of his wealth and hard work.

One day, Pete stopped working and didn't bother to pick up his last paycheck. The cost of gasoline vastly exceeded his meager paycheck.

Pete packed all his possessions into two suitcases and all his camping gear into a backpack. He fled his apartment because his rent had risen to astronomical, incomprehensible numbers, and he was several months behind.

Pete carried all his worldly possessions into the back of the truck, leaving his apartment with the front door open.

He pulled onto Highway 59 and headed to the countryside with half a tank of gas.

As Pete drove from the city, he saw that every other business was closed and boarded up. Then thousands upon thousands of homeless people meandered along the streets.

Homeless people strolled along the streets like zombies, begging for food. They formed homeless camps under bridges and on vacant lots as they scrounged wood, cardboard boxes, and old tires to make themselves a home. These homes had no running water, waste disposal, or electricity, but the homeless had no other options.

They had no jobs, no money, and thus no future. A stench of death, rot, and misery surrounded the homeless camps as they waited for God to call them home, ending their miserable existence on the earth.

Pete ran out of gas 10 miles outside of city limits. He hopped out of his truck, slipped on his backpack, and carried a suitcase in each hand. Then he walked along the abandoned road.

He would live in the country and off the land, hoping someday he would return to civilization after the chaos had ended.

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Hyperinflation devastated the U.S. economy as the unemployment rate soared to 50%, shoving the middle class into despicable poverty.

The U.S. dollar became worthless as people dumped their money onto the streets. A person couldn't buy a stick of gum with a one-dollar bill.

Everybody was hurting except the wealthy and the politicians.

The U.S. banking system also collapsed in 2016. If anyone had money in a bank, then their savings eroded to nothing overnight. Fixed bank loans became worthless overnight. Homeowners paid their fixed-rate mortgages with worthless dollars, but the banks had closed and stopped accepting loan payments.

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Jerrick's party grew fast overnight, with membership rising to 1.5 million. Then he closed the membership, attaining enough party members to fill the major government offices.

Jerrick, however, had faced fierce competition, not from the Republicans or Democrats. Many Americans had given up on those two political parties years ago. If anything, those two parties were responsible for creating the mess of our economy.

Jerrick competed fiercely with Benjamin Gitlow, founder of the American Communist Party.

Benjamin Gitlow sat behind his desk, listening to Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony.

On the wall behind him, he hung a large red communist flag that spanned the whole wall like wallpaper. In the flag's center, the

infamous golden sickle and hammer form an X—the symbol of the Soviet Union and how the government cares for the workers.

Benjamin was a short, stocky man with dark, sunken eyes and short, black curly hair. Sometimes, he wore glasses that enlarged his eyes, so people thought he disguised himself as a raccoon or a bandit.

Benjamin taught finance at a small college in Texas. He remembered the day the university had laid him off in 2011. Benjamin sneered at his PhD diploma, hanging on the adjacent wall in his office, as bad memories drifted into his mind.

Many students drop out of college because they become pessimistic about the economy and future job prospects. They stop wasting money on excessively high tuition.

Most parents had no money to pay for their children's tuition. Instead, they paid for the mortgage and food. Life's necessities outweighed the prestige of a college diploma.

In regular times, Benjamin Gitlow would quickly find another job because employers demanded finance specialists. After 2008, no one studied finance anymore. Thus, Ben has yet to find another teaching job in his field anywhere. He never saw a job in anything, not even collecting aluminum cans along a highway. Hordes of homeless people have already done that.

Ben did a complete 180 degrees. He hated business and all its representations. The antithesis of business was communism. He devoured Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* and disseminated its teachings publicly.

Although Benjamin Gitlow was fat and downright ugly, he spoke with a large, booming voice that emanated intelligence. The destitute, homeless, and disenfranchised flocked to his party.

On Ben's desk lay a newspaper with Jerrick Davis's picture on the front page.

Jerrick became Benjamin's roadblock to power. If he eliminated Jerrick, then he can take over.

As the classical Soviet music soothed his troubled mind, he began thinking of ways to rid himself of his enemy and planned the communists' takeover of the United States.

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General Ninian Edwards sat behind his desk. He was the United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) General at Fort McPherson, Georgia.

General Edwards was the poster child of a general. He was a natural leader and commanded respect. Even if he was in public and out of uniform, people still respected him. He never shouted at people or soldiers. Everyone automatically obeyed him and never interrupted him when he spoke.

Staff Sergeant Ralph Brumitt abruptly entered his office, disturbing the General's thoughts.

"Sir, we found more pamphlets," the Sergeant said as he placed the pamphlets on the General's desk.

The General glanced down at the pamphlets for the National Workers' Party. Jerrick Davis would speak next Friday night in East Point, Georgia.

"Do you know anything about this Davis character?"

"Some of our soldiers support him. Jerrick Davis promises to put Americans back to work again. He also talks about building an empire and expanding the empire to the south."

"Not another one of those."

"Sir, I do not understand."

"No, no. I was thinking out loud, Sergeant."

The General paused and asked, "Sergeant, how does he plan to return Americans to work?"

"Davis will bring the factory jobs back to America."

"Factory jobs?"

"Yes, the factory jobs. They pay well, sir."

"Thank you. You're dismissed, Sergeant."

The Sergeant quickly snapped his heels together and saluted the General. Then he left the General's office, quietly shutting the door behind him.

General Edwards relaxed by putting his feet on his desk and tilting back on his chair. The General started thinking about Jerrick. He did relate to Jerrick Davis in one detail: the factory jobs.

The General grew up in a small Virginia town. He remembered the textile factory closing in 1999. Then times became hard there. Several years later, everyone made a killing in the real estate market. That escapade ended in 2008. Now, everyone was hurting everywhere in the country. Jobs began disappearing off the face of the earth.

His parents still lived in that small Virginia town. He sent them money until the money had become worthless. Now, he shipped them containers of army food, building a cache. Once the army stops feeding him and his soldiers, he will desert the army at night and join his parents. At least they will have plenty of food to survive during this crisis.

The General hated thinking this because he had spent his whole life in the army. The army became his adopted family but those damn politicians in Washington. They screwed everything up.

The soldiers became demoralized and fatigued after 15 years of war. President Bush started the War in Afghanistan in 2001 and the War in Iraq shortly after. We claimed victory in 2003, but the U.S. military stationed soldiers there. Soldiers kept returning in pine boxes. How did the United States win when soldiers were still dying? We continued fighting a war on two fronts.

Congress reduced the military's budget every year. Then, politicians in Washington asked the military to do more with fewer resources, squeezing the military's resources to the brink.

President Charles Gibson initiated the first draft in 2013 since the Vietnam War because we had lost too many soldiers in the wars, and riots erupted in the large cities.

The General ran around the towns, ensuring teenagers signed up for Selective Service and that if they were selected, they came to a military recruiting station.

Many youths rebelled and refused to come. Consequently, the military wasted resources, building internment camps for rebellious young men who refused their duty to their country.

Now, in 2016, hyperinflation struck the economy, reducing soldiers' pay to nothing. With their monthly salaries, they couldn't buy a soda at the military store.

The soldiers became so demoralized that some fled during the night.

The General tripled his staff for base security, not to keep the outsiders out but to stop his soldiers from deserting during the night.

The General didn't blame them; the military needed those soldiers to protect America. Their first duty was to serve their country. Everything else came second.

The General planted his feet onto the floor while a grimace swept across his face. He never had seen such a deplorable state of the troops. The General couldn't respond if a major crisis broke out.

The General then picked up a pamphlet from the National Workers' Party, reading it carefully before dropping it onto the pile of pamphlets.

Next, he shoved the whole stack of pamphlets into the trashcan next to his desk. The pamphlets fell into the trashcan like an avalanche, rolling down a mountain.

The General clicked a button on the intercom and uttered, "Sergeant, please have Captain Erickson from the intelligence division meet me ASAP!" Then he clicked the intercom off before the Sergeant responded.

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Jerrick arrived in East Point, Georgia, on December 4, 2016.

He received a strange note. Opening the letter, command stripes for an army general fell to the ground. The note said, 'Meet me at 9:00 at Mad Murphy's, a small bar on the outskirts of town. Come along, and don't be late.'

Jerrick showed Dan the note and stripes and asked, "What do you think, Dan?"

Dan examined the stripes in detail, turning them over in his hands at various angles, and replied, "I don't know. It could be a setup. The U.S. government knows you and could shoot you an 'attempted robbery.'"

Dan emphasized the words 'attempted robbery' by holding up his hands and using his fingers to form double quotation marks.

“I know, but that’s one of the reasons I must speak in towns with Army and Air Force bases. I’m appealing to our soldiers. We need to win the soldiers to our cause.”

“I know, but buddy, you’re pissing off the wrong people.”

“As Lenin said, ‘You can’t make an omelet without breaking some eggs.’”

“But I think the government wants to break you,” Dan bellowed seriously.

Later that night, despite protests from Jerrick’s top leadership, Jerrick would meet this stranger alone. He knew a strange woman wasn’t trying to hook up with him. Women usually sprayed perfume on the letter and planted a luscious, red lipstick kiss on the envelope, imbuing a mysterious aura of future hot passion.

Jerrick arrived early and walked into the bar, scanning for agents. He saw six patrons drinking beer. He sat at a booth in the back, in the far corner.

The waitress came by, “What can I get you?”

“I’ll take a beer on the tap, please.”

The waitress asked suspiciously, “How do you plan to pay?”

Jerrick reached in his pocket and pulled out a thick wad of bills with at least six zeros.”

“Hon, that money won’t do you any good in here. What kind of commodities do you have?”

Jerrick reached in his other pocket and pulled out a new box of cigarettes, Winston’s.”

“That pack will buy you two beers.”

“Okay, please bring them.”

Jerrick didn’t smoke. After the hyperinflation, nobody accepted money anymore. The almighty U.S. dollar became fancy toilet tissue. Small valuable objects like cigarettes became their weight in gold. Gasoline also became precious, but Jerrick rarely carried it because of the pungent smell.

The waitress brought two brews and sat one in front of Jerrick and the other in the empty seat directly across from him.

Several minutes later, a man with a grizzly beard jumped quickly into the empty seat across from Jerrick. A homeless man sat down to snatch that unattended beer.

However, Jerrick noticed the guy's physique and intense eyes. He knew this guy was athletic with firm, lean muscles beneath those rags of clothes. Then Jerrick looked into the man's strong eyes, which commanded respect. Jerrick knew this man gave orders; he didn't receive them.

The guy asked, "Are you expecting company?"

"Yes, I was waiting for you?"

"I take it this beer is for me?"

"Help yourself."

The guy gulped half of his tasty beer. Although the army still fed him, he hadn't drunk a beer in months.

The guy drank another swig before returning the beer to the table and said, "We have a mutual friend, Richard. He recommended that I should speak with you. So, Jerrick, how do you plan to save America?"

Jerrick spoke for 15 minutes, laying out his plans for rebuilding America and creating an Empire.

The guy listened intently.

Occasionally, Jerrick paused and glanced around, ensuring no one eavesdropped. Jerrick avoided particulars but outlined a generic version of this plan.

"Very interesting, but how do you plan to seize the government?"

Jerrick sat back and stared at the guy, searching his intuition. Sometimes, when something terrible happens, he gets a funny sensation. Today, his mental radar remained silent.

Jerrick knew if he spilled his plans in front of the secret police, they would arrest and execute him for treason. Of course, this person knew the first name of one of his secret contacts in the federal government. Jerrick knew Richard Woodland was very careful, and he was sending an important military person to speak with him.

"Waitress," Jerrick hollered, "Please bring us another round."

Jerrick fished in his pocket for the other pack of cigarettes.

Then Jerrick faced the guy and replied, "Operation Troyka."

Guy asked, "Operation Troyka?"

"Operation Troyka has three parts: Power, Communication, and Seizure," Jerrick began.

Jerrick explained every detail about Troyka, taking over 20 minutes to explain everything.

The guy listened with total concentration. Finally, he spoke, “Your plan could work. However, I can only guarantee five Army bases and about 200,000 soldiers, but if your plan fails, then we will plunge our country into a bloody civil war.”

“I know, but I’m willing to risk that chance. If we don’t do something now, those bastards in Washington will turn our nation into a third-world country. “

The guy asked, “I agree. Those bastards in Washington put us in a bad spot. How do we plan to communicate?”

Jerrick reached into his coat, pulled out two satellite cell phones, and added, “One cell phone is mine, and I’ll give you the other one.” Then Jerrick slid the cell phone across the table to the guy.

Jerrick continued, “I have a computer specialist who put a special chip in these phones. She told me it was impossible to decrypt any phone conversation without those chips.”

The guy took the phone, slipped it into his pocket, and muttered, “I see you found some military encryption-decryption chips.” He knew the military and CIA could decrypt their conversation, but a supercomputer would take a week or two to decrypt it.

“Do you have a date in mind to begin Operation Troyka?”

“Yes, Thursday, July 27, 2017.”

“Why that particular date?”

“Scientists are forecasting a scorching day for that day.”

“It will be a scorching day indeed.”

The guy finished his second beer and said, “Thanks for the beer.”

He stood up and turned to leave.

“See you later,” Jerrick said.

Jerrick’s plans were coming to fruition. He had set a date for his power acquisition, July 27, 2017. Meteorologists had no idea how hot that day would be.

The next night, Jerrick delivered his speech in East Point, Georgia, attracting a crowd of 50,000 people. The homeless people in the area meandered to the auditorium.

The temperature hovered above the freezing mark while the skies remained cloudy.

Driving to the back entrance of the auditorium, Jerrick saw large crowds of people waiting to get inside. Some people dressed nicely, while others were covered in dirt and grime. Jerrick's message appealed to everyone, not just one social class.

Jerrick's security helped direct the crowd, clearing the road for Jerrick and his political party.

One homeless man wore a dark-brown hat and a dirty green flannel jacket. Years of homelessness and decades of beard growth blackened his face. Although it was impossible to determine his race, the whites of his eyes showed through all those years of misery. The man's eyes brightened as Jerrick's car drove by.

The homeless man shouted, "Jerrick! Jerrick! Jerrick! ..."

The rest of the crowd picked up the cue and joined the chorus.

The crowd began shouting Jerrick's name, and he had not spoken yet.

Driving by the homeless man, Jerrick saw his face brighten, and hope glinted in his eyes.

If this homeless guy had showered, worn new clothes, and started a job, he would become a hardworking, tax-paying citizen again. Unfortunately, the U.S. legal system tossed this guy to the side as if he were garbage.

Jerrick stood on the auditorium stage behind the curtain, hearing the raucous sounds of thousands in the audience. The crowd started cheering as he poked his head through the tall, golden drapes and walked to the stage's center.

Jerrick waited for the crowd to become silent. Then he started his speech,

The information economy was a scam.

Politicians knew we were losing our good-paying factory jobs.

They dreamt up the idea that high-paying jobs would become plentiful.

These jobs deal with information and high technology.

Let's analyze that!

Name a high-tech industry.

Hmmmmm, the internet.

Where are our computers made?

In Asia, like China, Malaysia, and Taiwan.

Where are the computer parts, such as memory and processors made?

In Asia, too!

Who writes the programs that run on these computers?

American corporations outsource these jobs to people in India, China, and Russia.

If you have trouble with your computer or a problem with your internet connection, whom do you call?

American corporations route your phone calls and emails to call centers in India.

You get broken Hindi English as a response.

Where does your money go when you pay for your computer and internet services?

Money goes to American Corporations.

The CEOs and high-ranking corporate officials pay themselves high salaries and extravagant benefits.

They pat themselves on the back for a job well done.

Some of the money flows to Asia.

They pay the workers slave wages in the corporate prison camps.

Then they pay the corrupt politicians their cut.

The corrupt politicians are the key to the process.

They could have changed the laws at any time to stop this insanity.

The crowd began roaring as they shouted in unison, their voices rising in a crescendo, "Jerrick! Jerrick! Jerrick! ..."

Jerrick stretched his hands out as the shouting crowd became silent. He became the master orator, seducing the crowd and commanding them to follow him.

Jerrick continued his speech.

Politicians and CEOs tell you that outsourcing and international trade benefit our economy.

They can offer their services for cheap prices.

That is all true.

But how can people pay for these services if they have no jobs?

The crowd began shouting Jerrick's name again, even louder. Jerrick paused until the shouting had stopped.

You are unemployed with no job.  
You sleep on a park bench and dig through the garbage for your next meal.  
Then you beg and scrounge up a couple of dollars.  
And pay those bastards at the corporations to surf the internet.  
At least the service is cheap!

The crowd's shouting intensified, "Jerrick! Jerrick! Jerrick! ..."  
Then it quickly died down as Jerrick continued his speech.

The information economy is a ruse.  
Economies throughout any civilization are all the same.  
First, people and businesses produce and then consume the fruits of their labor.  
Production creates incomes that consumers can buy their production.  
Somewhere down the line, businesses earned massive profits from outsourcing.  
To relocate our factories in developing countries.  
Our political and business leaders transformed our economy into a nation of consumers.  
The problem is where people earn incomes to sustain consumer spending.  
The government and the public solved the problem by accumulating a mountain of debt.  
Now, we have hit our debt limit.  
That is why our economy is in shambles.  
We can get production going again through a radical change to our legal system.  
All those bastards in government need to be demoted and tossed out into the streets as yesterday's garbage.

The crowd exploded into another uproar. They shouted Jerrick's name so loudly that people heard the shouting from miles away.

Jerrick continued his speech for another 15 minutes. Unknown to Jerrick, the U.S. government placed him on the watch list. Several agents stood in the crowd, disguising themselves as protesters. They joined the chorus of chants but recorded everything for the government.

\*\*\*

President Charles Gibson sat behind his desk in the Oval Office in the Whitehouse. He became lost in deep thought because he knew he had problems with Ben Gitlow and Jerrick Davis as their popularity grew quickly.

President Gibson pondered his choices. He could have an agent assassinate them, but the public would know better. This would add gasoline to a campfire as riots erupted in the cities while people struck back at their government. Besides, democracies shouldn't be murdering their citizens because of their political views.

Other alternatives included arresting them and placing them in internment camps for inciting a riot or trumping up criminal charges against them and tossing them into a cold prison cell, cutting them off from the world.

President Gibson pressed a button on his desk phone, "Please send in Agent Richard Woodland."

A few minutes later, the door to the Oval Office opened, and Richard walked through.

"Please give us a few minutes," the President told his staff.

The staff collected their things and dashed out of the office.

"Please have a seat," the President said, gesturing for Richard to sit on a chair near the fireplace.

President Gibson sat in the opposite seat. He pressed a button on a remote control, turning off the surveillance camera and tape recorder.

"This Jerrick Davis is worrying me," the President began.

"I know; the people like him," Richard said coldly, devoid of emotion.

"What do you think is a good course of action?"

“We could neutralize him, but we may experience complications!”

“Complications; what do you mean?”

“The CIA and FBI investigated Jerrick for several years, but he possesses a sixth sense. We believe he uses a team of computer hackers to hack into our computer systems but never contacts them directly. Jerrick always knows where we are. Plus, we think Jerrick has doubles.”

“Doubles? This guy thinks he’s a dictator already.”

“It gets better.”

The President’s interest intensified as he asked, “Better?”

“We think some of our agents have been compromised. Many agents and government workers believe our government is doomed and Jerrick is the only one who can save us. These agents and government workers secretly send Jerrick information. We intercepted several e-mails, but we have never identified the sources. An agent walks into a coffee shop, uses the free Wi-Fi, sends an email using his netbook, and leaves, slipping the netbook inside his jacket. Agents use untraceable email accounts once. We almost caught an agent two months ago because he kept using the same email account. We traced the account access to a large mall. By the time we had arrived, the agent blended and disappeared into the crowd.”

The President asked, “What would happen if we arrested Jerrick?”

“We could. Jerrick is violating hundreds of federal statutes. We can use a federal prosecutor to charge Jerrick with wire fraud, tax evasion, inciting a riot, and so on. Then Jerrick would fight these allegations for years, but his supporters would know. His supporters could riot.”

The President leaned forward, tucking his thumbs under his chin and cupping his hands like a prayer. The President didn’t pray, but he was thinking deeply. This Jerrick guy had turned into a pain in the ass. The President thought he could squash Jerrick like a bug, but now, he felt he had better odds of catching a bullet with his teeth.

The President leaned back and asked, “What if we brought Jerrick on board and gave him a high government position?”

“I don’t think Jerrick would want it. Jerrick wants your job, sir; I believe he’s honest about reforming the government and creating an empire. People would have given Jerrick all the power to reform our government, but that empire stuff scares them. When people think of empires, they think of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin.”

“I see. Find a federal prosecutor and have him trump up several charges against Jerrick. Make sure some of the crimes are tax-related. That way, Jerrick doesn’t get a jury trial. Then we can put him in prison for a while. We can shut him up and dismantle his political party, member by member.”

Richard stirred a little, ready to stand and start his new mission.

The President continued, “Richard, please stay. I have another mission for you.”

Richard relaxed again in the chair.

“What do you know about Benjamin Gitlow?”

“Benjamin Gitlow’s real name is Frank Gitlow, the great-grandson of Benjamin Gitlow, the famous socialist whom New York state arrested in the 1920s. Frank legally changed his name to Benjamin and became the leader of the Communist Party. He was a college professor before he lost his job. He is a loudmouth and not a bad public speaker.”

“Do you think he poses a threat?”

“It is a long shot, but yes. If something happened to Jerrick Davis, the people would turn to Gitlow, but it’s hard to say. People don’t like the idea that the government would own all the property. Americans owning property is embedded into their psyche. Owning property is as American as apple pie.”

“Okay. Then it’s settled. Make sure Gitlow is neutralized.”

Both men stood up.

“Thank you, Mr. President,” Richard said, leaving the Oval Office.

The President clicked a button on the remote, repeatedly turning on the camera and tape recorder. Then he returned to his desk, sitting down.

The President was happy that Richard Woodland had left because those cold blue eyes gave him the creeps, but Richard was

helpful and expendable. He proved himself thousands of times since his days as an army sniper and as an agent in Homeland Security.

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A couple of days later, Jerrick returned to the safe house in Michigan, sitting at his desk behind his notebook computer and typing his next speech.

Jerrick improved his style and deliverance. Occasionally, he paused and opened video clips of his previous speeches. He studied his gestures, how he articulated his words, and how he developed a rapport with his audience.

Jerrick didn't want to be good. He wanted to be the best. He wanted history to record him as one of the most powerful men who walked the earth, standing proudly with the other giants of humanity.

Jerrick placed a small TV on the bookshelf and set the station to CNN News. He turned the volume down low but just enough to hear it.

If an exciting story came up, Jerrick quickly turned up the volume using the remote on his desk.

Several words caught Jerrick's attention.

"...was shot today..."

Jerrick quickly grabbed the remote, turning the volume up.

A news reporter continued with her story, "Benjamin Gitlow was fatally shot today in an apparent carjacking."

The screen then veered towards the crime scene, where Gitlow's blue Nissan Altima stalled at an intersection. A dozen police cars had surrounded it. The driver's car door was wide open, and viewers saw the blood splotches on the seat and headrest.

Another reporter asked, "Do the police know who did it?"

"No, they believe he was involved in a failed carjacking. Mr. Gitlow tried to fight his attackers."

"Is this the same Benjamin Gitlow, president of the American Communist Party?"

"Yes, the police do believe it is the same person, but this shooting is not politically motivated."

Jerrick was enthralled while his mouth hung wide open.

Then Jerrick mumbled, “Bullshit!” under his tongue, “Not politically motivated.”

His special satellite phone started ringing. His cell phone encrypts and decrypts any voices and text messages. If eavesdroppers intercepted his transmission, they would hear garbled static.

Jerrick gave only a handful of these phones to several influential people.

Jerrick quickly snatched the phone and answered it, “Hello.”

“Mr. Davis, I’ll be brief. The government plans to arrest you. Protect yourself and go into hiding.” Then Jerrick heard a click as the caller hung up.

Jerrick knew the caller wasn’t joking because he recognized the caller’s voice, a high-ranking agent named Richard Woodland, or should he say a double agent.

Jerrick shook his head back and forth, marveling over his stupidity. The government had murdered Benjamin Gitlow, and Jerrick definitely would be next.

Jerrick saved his speech and turned his laptop off, packing it into his briefcase.

Jerrick would go underground and confer with his top party members to boost security and his protection. He had waited for his revolution for a lifetime, and he would not miss it.

## *The Coup*

It started as any typical day on Thursday, July 27, 2017, when the United States experienced a heat wave.

Jerrick Ray Davis awakened at 5 o’clock. He hadn’t slept well during the night as he kept tossing and turning. This was his day of reckoning. Today would determine if he stepped into the history books as a revolutionary leader or faced a firing squad for treason. This day could become the new national holiday for his Empire.

Jerrick headed downstairs and made a pot of coffee.

After the coffee had percolated, he poured himself a cup and headed outside to the porch.

Jerrick knew it would be a hot day. Even at five in the morning, the humidity suffocated him. He felt he opened an oven door as he walked outside. His armpits dampened, and a growing spot of wetness appeared on the back of his dress shirt.

Jerrick rocked back and forth on a rocking chair, admiring the countryside at his safe house. The farmers' fields spread out in all directions. The sky transformed into red, orange, and yellow bands as the sun peeked over the horizon. In the distance, roosters crowed while the farm animals stirred.

At about 6:30, Jerrick saw the door open, and Jennifer came outside, too.

Jennifer carried a cup of coffee.

Sitting on the swinging bench beside him, drinking coffee, Jennifer asked, "How are you, Jerrick?"

"To be honest, I didn't sleep well last night."

"Are you nervous about today?"

"Am I nervous? I waited my whole life for this day. I feel like a prisoner on death row, and I'm waiting for the governor's last-minute phone call to halt my execution."

"Luckily, you're not in the State of Texas. Otherwise, you would never get that phone call."

Jerrick and Jennifer exchanged nervous laughter. Then they quieted down.

Jennifer continued, "What if your plan doesn't work?"

"Well, I'm a dead man, and I'll be marked for the rest of my life. It would be better for the government to execute me."

"What will happen to us?"

"I packed provisions for you, Dan, and the others. Before the hyperinflation, I cashed my money in, bought gold, and buried it on this farm. It's not much, but if it ends badly today, you guys take the gold, head to Canada, and start a new life."

"You'll allow the government to execute you?"

"What choice do I have? I'm ready to poke a hornet's nest with a short stick. If anything goes bad, where could I go? My mug shot will be posted everywhere in the world. The government will find the money to put a bounty on my head. I will be a wanted man."

Jennifer put her coffee cup down and reached for Jerrick's hands. She embraced his hands and added, "Jerrick, we have faith in you. We're also putting our lives at stake. By the end of the day, everyone will be bowing down to you, calling you Emperor."

"Jen, you know I don't like that title," said Jerrick. He liked that title, but somewhere deep in his heart, Jerrick thought he could live with the title, Mr. President.

Jennifer and Jerrick sat quietly on the porch, thinking.

At 8:30, Jennifer and Jerrick returned inside. The coolness of the air conditioning chilled their sweat, and they smelled the fresh aroma of hash browns, scrambled eggs, and toast with dollops of butter and strawberry jam.

Jennifer and Jerrick headed into the kitchen, where Dan and Chad made breakfast for everyone. One cannot start a revolution on an empty stomach.

At 8:50, Jerrick and his team went into the family room, where they established their command center.

Jennifer sat behind the computer screen and logged on.

Jerrick sat behind a desk with two satellite phones lying on it. The phones had special military encrypt-decrypt chips. Jerrick reached for the first phone and picked it up. He thought it would be ironic if he picked up the phone, but it didn't work, as the cell phone company's service was down the day his revolution would begin.

Jerrick flipped the satellite phone open with his left hand and dialed a number. Satellite phones were working today.

After two rings, General Edwards picked up.

"Sir, are the troops ready?"

"Yes, sir, we're waiting for your command."

Jerrick picked up the other satellite phone in his right hand and dialed a number to a small contingent of soldiers.

"Sir, are you ready?"

"Yes, sir; just say the word."

Jerrick stared at Jennifer and asked, "Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir; I hacked into the military's communication center. I'm waiting for your command."

Jerrick thought for a moment.

Jerrick carefully placed the phones on the desk, picked up his coffee mug, and sipped it. Then he returned the mug to the desk.

Tension was high as Dan and his top leadership sat in the room. The Second American Revolution was imminent, and everyone was silent. They heard a breeze rustle through the cornfields outside.

Jerrick mumbled a famous quote from Vladimir Lenin, "Sometimes – history needs a push."

After silence, Jerrick commanded, "Go, Jen!"

Jennifer sent a command through the military communication center. 'Police expect riots and terroristic activities in Fort Knox, Tennessee, New York City, and Washington, D.C. Fort Knox will dispatch troops to Fort Knox, and Fort McPherson will dispatch troops to New York City and Washington, D.C. President Gibson authorized and approved this order.'

Jennifer turned to Jerrick, "I sent the command and confirmed it."

Jerrick picked up both phones in each hand. He held one phone against his ear and asked the General, "Sir, do you have your orders?"

"Yes, sir, the orders came through the FORSCOM command center. President Gibson dispatched our troops to Fort Knox, Washington, D.C., and New York City, ASAP."

"That's Good. Please have a helicopter pick me up. Then we'll meet in Washington at 11:00 A.M. this morning."

"Yes sir," and the phone went silent.

Jerrick turned to Jennifer and said, "Okay, release it."

After several keystrokes, Jennifer turned to Jerrick, "It's done."

"How long do we have?"

"The worm should infect all computer systems within two hours. The worm will grind all systems to a halt. Then Mikey's nasty little cell phone virus will destroy the whole phone system. Within two hours, email and cell phones will not work in the United States and the world for a day or two."

Jerrick sat there as the room remained silent. Is this all a revolution needed, a computer virus and a couple of phone calls? Something this simple can topple the world's largest and greatest country in the world. It also helped to have the country's troops

demoralized from two wars that stretched 15 years. Unfortunately, the President and Congress ignored one of Sun Tzu's important rules *On the Art of War*. A long-extended siege drains both the government's treasury and the morale and energy of the soldiers. If only our political leaders had read some of the great books of humanity and made rational decisions.

After five minutes, Jerrick brought the other satellite phone near his ear and uttered, "Blow it."

Then Jerrick flipped the phone closed and turned it off.

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That last command went to a small platoon of 10 soldiers stationed on the outskirts of New York City. The platoon surrounded a small electric substation, placing explosive devices around the transformers that they packed with finely ground carbon.

The lieutenant shouted, "Men, stand back. I have orders from the President to blow these transformers."

The men retreated to the surrounding countryside.

One soldier pulled out a radio control, "On your command, sir."

"Blow those transformers, corporal!"

Then the soldier pressed the button.

The team saw the devices explode, engulfing the substation with a sizeable dark carbon cloud.

ZZZZZZHhhhhhhh, as explosive lightning struck the station. The 100,000 volts zapped through the carbon cloud and grounded all the transformers' connections. Then all the breakers clicked off. The station became dead, while the humming transformers became silent.

Many people who still lived in their homes had their air conditioners on. It was another hot July day, and the power grid operated at total capacity. The power grid connected all cities and electric utility companies to the grid on the Eastern side of the United States.

The soldiers overloaded the system by taking down one substation, creating a cascading blackout. Once one substation blew, then another would go, and then another.

Companies generate all that power, but they can't deliver it to anyone. Then the power companies did emergency shutdowns, keeping their boilers from blowing. Consequently, the blackout plunged all the cities on the East Coast into darkness.

Power companies would need a day to restart the system, but it would be too late. Then that nasty computer virus hit everyone else who still had electricity.

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The President of the United States dispatched the troops to Fort Knox, Tennessee, Washington, DC, and New York City via hacked orders.

The army utilized all its resources. It filled cargo trucks with troops, flew helicopters through the air, and carried tanks in large trucks. The army unloaded the tanks after they arrived in the cities.

Two battalions surrounded Fort Knox, which contained 150 million troy ounces of gold bullion.

Ten battalions headed to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, which held 175 million troy ounces of gold. After the army had surrounded the Federal Reserve, three battalions headed to Albany, New York, to capture the state capitol. The remaining 140,000 troops headed to Washington, D.C.

Jerrick Ray Davis planned to capture the head of government and cut the head off the snake. Then with the gold, he would have the resources to build his Empire and, more importantly, to pay his troops for their services. Jerrick did not expect anyone to work for free.

Congress was in full session as it devised ways of dealing with the financial crisis. Their foolish expansion of the money supply sent a destructive wave of hyperinflation through the economy, and then riots erupted in the cities.

As the Congressmen were working, the lights flickered and then went dead. Many Congressmen fished in their pockets for their cell phones but didn't receive any signals.

The Congressmen remained sitting. They must deal with this financial crisis, even without electricity. Besides, they had read

intelligence reports that several electric utility companies teetered on bankruptcy. Power failures were imminent.

Several hours later, the Congressmen felt the ground shaking, like a small earthquake, but the shaking didn't subside. Several guards ran into the congressional chambers, shouting, "Tanks are surrounding the building."

Our political leaders didn't know that tanks and soldiers surrounded all the major government buildings in Washington, D.C. Regiments of soldiers surrounded Congress, the Supreme Court, and headquarters for all the federal agencies.

The political leaders became petrified as they realized their worst fear. They lost their power in one swoop as one man grabbed all the power. They suspected Jerrick Ray Davis, but no one knew. The U.S. government neglected and mistreated the military for decades so that it could be anyone.

Then the Congressmen heard someone scream over a large bullhorn, "We have the buildings surrounded. Walk out single-file. If you do not start leaving, then we will blow up the building." Jerrick Ray Davis stood atop a truck with the bullhorn in his hand, taking command.

The Congressmen and their staff didn't know what to think. They dropped their things and quietly formed lines. Their faces became blank as soldiers led cattle to the slaughterhouse. The Congressmen knew their lives would end shortly but wanted to see the sky and sun again.

As the Congressmen and staff walked out the main entrance, soldiers and tanks surrounded the buildings everywhere.

As Margaret Hayworth, the corrupt Senator from Arkansas, left the Capitol building, she saw a large cargo truck parked at the bottom of the steps.

As her line approached the cargo truck, several soldiers shoved her staff to the side while one soldier screamed, "Get the hell out of there!"

As Margaret approached the truck, the soldiers forced her up a ramp into the back. She felt claustrophobic as she squeezed in with her colleagues, standing room only.

After the soldiers filled a truck, ten soldiers with M16s climbed in the back. One yelled, “We have orders to shoot anyone if they escape or cause problems.”

Many Congressmen were sobbing with tears in their eyes, while others would stare blankly into space as if in a trance. Then the truck pulled away.

Margaret didn’t know it, but the soldiers rounded up the top leadership of the U.S. government. As one cargo truck filled up, a driver would pull away, and another empty truck would take its place. The soldiers utilized 25 trucks to round up the top echelon of the federal government, taking less than two hours.

Cargo trucks drove to the foothills in the countryside of Virginia.

Soldiers forced the Congressmen and top government officials to exit the trucks and form lines again.

Then Jerrick Ray Davis began speaking on the bullhorn.

You pieces of shit did this to yourself.

You ran our beautiful legal system into the ground.

We fought for 16 goddamn years in two wars in Iraq and  
Afghanistan.

You sent our soldiers to fight and die in wars that we could never  
win.

You starved these fine young men and women who stand behind  
me here in full uniform.

Now, look at the position you have gotten yourselves into.

The soldiers would help and reform our corrupt political system.

Exiting one of the vehicles, Margaret Hayworth saw soldiers everywhere. Then she saw the line pass through a tent with a blonde woman sitting with a laptop computer. Then the line was divided into two. In one line, people ran as fast as possible through the clover fields.

Soldiers directed the other line up and over the hill, where sounds of large machinery came from the other side.

Jerrick Davis continued his speech:

Not all of you are corrupt.

Half of you became trapped in a corrupt system.  
You did the best you could do, given your surroundings.  
I cannot fault you for that.  
You will be free to leave.  
You can flee the country and take your families with you.  
However, I will not excuse the other half.  
You stole, bribed, and extorted money from everyone.  
You evaded taxes and violated your own rules and regulations.  
You perpetuated this corrupt system for the last 50 years.  
At any time, you could have changed and avoided this.  
Now, I must come along and clean up all your shit.  
Now, I will punish you for your misdeeds.  
Soldiers will lead you up and over the hill, and you will finally  
meet your creator.

Some of the government officials began sobbing again. They knew what Jerrick Ray Davis meant.

Margaret came within 30 feet of Jerrick. She glanced at him but then quickly looked down. She spent a lifetime looking down upon people. Someone bigger and stronger came along and put her in her place.

Margaret meandered slowly to the tent. A woman with long blonde hair wearing thick glasses sat at a table. Margaret did not know the woman's name, but it was Jennifer. She was typing on a laptop and said only one word when she looked at Margaret, "Left."

Then the soldiers directed Margaret up the hill, where she heard the sounds of heavy machinery. The sound became louder as she approached.

Margaret thought this could be a beautiful day. Although it was hot, the sky was clear and blue while the sun shone brightly in the sky. If it were not for Jerrick and his coup, she could have sat down right over there on the tall, luscious grass.

Margaret's heart skipped a beat after reaching the hilltop. Her heart almost fell out of her chest as she spotted the source of the sounds.

Several bulldozers excavated a large, bottomless pit on the other side of the hill.

Soldiers lined up the government officials along one edge.

Margaret began crying. She hadn't cried in 40 years, and the tears stung her eyes as she softly mumbled, "Dear God, what have we done?"

The soldiers directed Margaret to the pit's edge.

Margaret glanced at the hilltop and saw the end of the line.

Then the soldiers lined up all the corrupt politicians along the pit's edge.

Margaret mumbled again, "God, forgive me for my sins."

A soldier shouted on a bullhorn, "Aim! Ready! Fire!" The soldiers filled the quiet countryside with machine gun fire.

Margaret felt something hot hit her in the stomach. She looked down and saw a large gaping hole in her suit that quickly reddened. Then she felt dizzy and fell into the pit dead.

An era of American corruption came to an explosive grisly close.

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President Charles Gibson attended a conference in Geneva, Switzerland, to appease the European Union. After the American hyperinflation, the value of the U.S. dollar collapsed. International trade halted, and international investors were furious that they held worthless American debt and U.S. dollars.

It was 3:09 in the afternoon, six hours ahead of Washington, D.C.

The President sat in a large room at a long table shaped like an elongated U. The President sat in the middle of the U while the less essential people filled the legs' ends.

The door opened, and the President's assistant scurried in and approached the President. The assistant bent downward, cupping his hands over the President's ears, and whispered, "Mr. President, we just got word that the East Coast lost power at this moment. The National Guard was put on standby. Furthermore, the army was called to Fort Knox, Washington, D.C., and New York, where riots are erupting."

The President nodded his head in understanding.

The President sat next to the Prime Minister of England, who inquired, "President Gibson, are there any problems?"

"No, my aid was informing me on current events," the President said coolly and calmly. He didn't want to worry the delegates today. Every day, the United States looked more and more like a third-world country. Why worry them about the electricity going out on the East Coast and the eruption of several city riots?

At 5:00, the meeting adjourned for dinner as servants wheeled in carts filled with food. The conference wasted no expense on food.

All the delegates ate filet mignon with lightly fried rice and saffron, the President's favorite. Although saffron was worth more than gold by weight, it added an excellent reddish tint to the rice, imbuing it with a flowery flavor.

Around 5:16, a commotion erupted as aids began pouring into the room.

The President's aid quickly approached and whispered into the President's ear, "Sir, we think a huge riot has erupted in Washington, D.C., but we cannot get through to anyone."

One of the staff members wheeled a large, 52-inch flat-screen TV into the room, plugged it in, and switched it on.

A news reporter filmed large tanks and truckloads of soldiers heading into Washington, D.C.

The President started to think. This wasn't good. Here, I am negotiating with these Europeans, and riots are breaking out in the capitol. Don't those lousy, no-good Americans know that I am helping them? America's problems are the world's problems. I cannot solve any problems if people will make trouble.

The President slammed his fist against the table in frustration.

The meeting was adjourned for tomorrow, and the President's cavalcade headed to the hotel at seven. The President reached his room and relaxed in a recliner; his anger subsided as sleepiness invaded his thoughts.

The President thought about those riots in Fort Knox and New York City. Why Fort Knox? He picked up his cell phone and tried to call several Congressmen, but he couldn't get through.

The President felt a deep, sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach, a growing sense of imminent danger. Something was not right. Everything felt dead wrong.

At around 3 A.M., the President stirred and awoke from a bad dream. His perspiration dampened the pillow and sheets.

His cell phone ringtone, Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, woke him up. He also heard the cell phone vibrating on the wooden surface of the bed stand.

He groggily reached for his cell phone and flipped it open.

"Hello," the President said, shaking off his sleepiness.

"Mr. President, thank god I got a hold of you."

The President immediately recognized the voice of Sandy Witakker, the only honest politician to step into the halls of Congress.

Sandy began sobbing, "Mr. President, there was a coup." Her sobs and tears strengthened, but she persisted, "Jerrick Davis staged a coup. It was awful! Soldiers and tanks were everywhere." Then Sandy cried harder.

"Sandy, please calm down. Tell me everything you know."

"Mr. President, I don't know anything. Soldiers rounded up all the Congressmen in cargo trucks and took us to the country in Virginia. Jerrick Davis commanded the troops there and wore a general's uniform. He let some of us go."

Sandy paused a minute to collect herself and then continued, "I ran and ran, getting out of there. Then I heard machine guns. Then I... I... I ran faster. I ran to the nearest town and waited for the electricity. Then I called you."

The President sprawled himself across the bed, feeling as if someone sucker punched him in the gut with all his wind knocked out of him. He didn't believe Jerrick Ray Davis took over, as he had said he would. Jerrick had just demoted President Gibson.

Sandy's sobs ebbed while her voice strengthened, "Mr. President, I must go. Jerrick Davis said we could leave the country. I need to return to Arizona to get my family. Then we'll flee America."

"Thank you, Sandy," the President said, closing his cell phone.

Then his cell phone began ringing again.

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## Part 3 – Building the American Empire

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### *Restructuring the U.S. Economy*

Historians recorded this day in infamy. Jerrick Ray Davis staged a successful coup against the United States government and executed over half of the corrupt Congressmen and the top management of the U.S. government.

Jerrick Ray Davis' hands became drenched in blood, which he could never wash off. No matter how much good Jerrick Ray Davis will do, this day will follow with him as a dead weight shackled to his ankle. History will never forget this day.

Jerrick Ray Davis must address the nation quickly and woo the citizens. He must hold the nation together and prevent the outbreak of a bloody civil war. He will lay out his plans and inform the people about how he will restructure the economy.

Jerrick will create jobs again and put everyone back to work. The citizens will thwart him if he fails, rising and fighting back. He hoped the citizens would remain on the sidelines as he captured the state and local governments, consolidating them securely under his control.

Jerrick Ray Davis and General Edwards flew together in a helicopter to a TV station in Albany, New York.

Electric power companies restored power to the east coast at 8 o'clock that night, and the troops captured the state capitol.

Jerrick Ray Davis delivered his presidential address to the nation for the first time as the new President by default. His speech started at 8:15 P.M. on July 27, 2017:

As you have suspected, I staged a coup in Washington, D.C.

I succeeded.

I rounded up the corrupt Congressmen and top management of the

U.S. federal government and let the army execute them.

I had to do this.

I had to save our country.

I sat on the sidelines my whole life and watched those bastards in Washington, D.C., run our beautiful country into the ground.

I could not take it any longer and took over.

Now, I have all the power.

At this moment, I declare that I am the new President of the United States.

However, I cannot do this alone.

I ask you to help me.

Together, we can make a change.

I plan to take over all the state capitals and major cities.

I appointed National Workers' Party members to all the political offices in the United States.

Then we will chop our government in half.

The first order of business is ending the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

I am shocked that the three previous presidents refused to admit defeat.

Instead, they continuously dumped soldiers and resources into wars that we could not win.

They wanted to win those wars at any cost.

They did not care about how many soldiers would die.

Now, I declare that the Afghan and Iraqi wars are officially over.

We will not sacrifice more soldiers' lives in that region of the world.

Further, I end President Gibson's national draft.

I will not force military service upon our young people anymore.

The second order of business is that I will deregulate many industries.

I will decimate the Environmental Protection Agency and the state's equivalent.

Other government agencies like the U.S. Postal Service will remain the same size.

I am getting the government out of the education business.

You, as parents, know what is best for your children, not the government.

I will privatize all schools, universities, and colleges.

Parents can decide which school or university to send their children to.

If you want to send your child to a religious school, so be it. All public money earmarked for the schools will be put into a voucher fund.

Parents can use these vouchers to pay for their children's education.

Further, low-income university and college students will have access to these vouchers to pay for their education.

I will not enslave poor college students with a mountain of debt and college loans.

Further, I know the United States has the most extensive prison system in the world.

We lock up almost 3% of our population, and that does not include the internment camps.

As of today, I close the internment camps.

Those camps must release detained persons, allowing them to rejoin society.

I also will execute all murderers and child molesters.

I do not see the need to feed and house this scum of the earth.

I realize some courts railroaded innocent people to prison.

For court cases with shoddy evidence or overly zealous prosecutors, those defendants will get a second trial, a second chance at freedom.

The prisoners' days are numbered for the court cases with overwhelming evidence; make your amends with the Almighty above.

You will talk to him about your future housing accommodations for eternity.

I am also de-criminalizing marijuana and low-level barbiturates and amphetamines.

You are also free to smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol.

However, do not drink and drive.

I will allow the police to arrest suspected drivers under the influence.

Hard-core drugs like cocaine and heroin will still be illegal.

I also reintroduced the gold and silver standards.

I seized the nation's gold from Fort Knox and the New York City Federal Reserve Bank.

We will use this gold to mint our new coins.

Our government will initially issue one-ounce gold and silver coins, but we will eventually expand to other denominations. A one-ounce gold coin will cost \$2,000, and the silver will cost \$400.

If my government issues paper money, the Federal Reserve must hold the appropriate amount of gold or silver in the vault. Any citizen can convert their paper money into gold or silver on demand.

By putting our nation on sound financial ground, we can get our banks and financial markets up and running again.

I will take our manufacturing jobs from China.

American-made products will fill U.S. stores' shelves once again.

I have three strategies to accomplish this.

First, my government will impose escalating tariffs.

The government assesses a 10% tariff rate on raw materials and agricultural products.

This is purely for government revenue.

The government imposes a 15% tariff on intermediate goods.

Finally, finished goods and products are subject to a 25% tariff rate.

This higher rate protects the manufacturing industry.

The more processing a product has, the more valuable it becomes, and of course, the workers earn greater wages.

The second strategy is to protect the manufacturing industries from local government.

All manufacturing buildings, land, machines, and equipment are exempt from local property taxes.

Manufacturing is exempt from many environmental laws and regulations.

This was one of the fatal mistakes of the American Republic.

They destroyed U.S. manufacturing through excessive property taxes and regulations.

Their policies caused an exodus of our good-paying manufacturing jobs.

As of today, I end this foolishness.

The third strategy is for our new government to finance the opening of new factories.

Thus, I welcome the wealthy capitalists to our country again.

Please do not resent or hate them.

We need their talents and hard work to get our factories operating again.

I am not the kind of person who holds resentment.

I aim to put all Americans back to work with the quickest means possible.

Returning the experts will speed up our recovery.

Finally, I arrive at the last piece of my economic policies: taxes.

It is universal; everyone hates taxes.

This was another fatal flaw of the American Republic.

They destroyed the economy with a large, confusing tax code perpetuated by the federal, state, and local governments.

Further, they stacked taxes upon taxes until our economy had snapped from the dead weight.

As of today, the tax code has become simpler.

The U.S. federal government imposes a 15% flat tax on all incomes; each state collects a 6% sales tax on all final goods and services sold; and finally, the property tax is set in stone at \$200 per residency per year and \$400 per non-manufacturing business per year.

Two-thirds of the people in the appropriate jurisdiction must approve a tax increase for a government to increase taxes.

I believe in this fair tax code so much that it becomes your 11th Bill of Rights.

The citizens of the United States are protected from unfair and unjust tax systems.

I know we already have an 11th amendment to the Constitution, but I am imposing a new legal code on all levels of government.

I am adopting the Field's Code of Law.

This new code has a fair balance between the government and its citizens.

And this new code is much simpler.

The whole legal code is written into one thick book.  
We are jettisoning the old Republic code of law that occupied a whole floor in a large library.  
I am introducing dramatic changes.  
Thus, I declare this a new beginning for the United States.  
We will create good-paying jobs again.  
A simple, streamlined government works with its citizens.  
A government helps its citizens prosper and builds a better, stronger future.  
I call this change in government a new era, a new beginning.  
At this moment, I call the United States the new American Empire to distinguish this new government from the old.

After the speech, President Davis spoke to General Edwards alone in a small conference room at the TV station.

A silver tray with a water decanter and a pot of coffee, cream, and sugar was on the conference table at the edge.

The President poured the general a cup of coffee and placed the coffee in front of the General. Then he poured himself a cup of coffee and added a drizzle of cream.

The General sipped his coffee, pitch black, of course, and said in a worried tone, "Mr. President, you know we don't own that gold. The soldiers only surrounded the buildings. It'll be hell breaking inside."

"I know, General. I wanted my speech to be positive and give the people hope. Besides, I have faith. We will succeed. Get the word to your soldiers and tell the employees inside Fort Knox and the New York Federal Reserve that we will not harm them. After I mint the gold coins, I will personally hand them \$50,000 in new coins each as long as they do not resist us."

"Mr. President, what about the troops?"

"Tell your troops that I will pay them five gold coins each immediately after they are minted. Then another five gold coins when I control the state and local governments. Furthermore, extend this offer to the Navy and Air Force and the other soldiers who are not under your command. If they do not resist me, I will compensate them."

“You know, Mr. President, you may not have any gold left after you pay the troops.”

“I know, General. That is the price I am willing to pay for a revolution. Besides, I never owned that gold to begin with. I stole it from the American Republic.”

The General squinted a little, ready to laugh. Then the President started laughing, and the General joined him.

Once the laughter died, the President continued, “I believe the U.S. economy will stabilize within a year and start growing again. Once the people and businesses believe in me and my intent to make the U.S. business-friendly again, they will work hard and invest in the U.S. economy. Now, I want you to start reducing the troops and cut our armed forces in half.”

“In half? Why, Mr. President?”

“I am not punishing the troops. I want to ensure their loyalty to me. You are to fire any commanders and soldiers not dedicated to our cause. Do not worry. We will build the armed forces up once the tax revenue starts filling the coffers again. I give the military the highest priority in the budget. Besides, I have some important missions for the troops. I plan to rebuild our military to be the best in the world and dedicated to the new Empire.”

“So, you still want to invade Mexico?”

“Yes, but I would not call it an invasion. We will not enslave the population. I will make them equal citizens in the Empire. In addition, we will build and develop Mexico and bring them up to our living standards. Mexico will become a continuation of the United States.”

President Davis reached into the inside pocket of his navy blue suit and pulled out the insignia for a five-star general. Then he placed the insignia in Edward’s outstretched, eager hand.

Next, President Davis congratulated the General, “General, just as I promised you. You are now the General of the Army. You are a Five-star General of the American Empire.”

The General’s face turned a reddish hue. He looked admirably at the insignia and replaced his old command stripes with the new one. General Edwards never thought he would see the day the

President elevated his rank to the General of the Army. Then he graciously replied, “Thank you, sir.”

He stood up to leave.

President Davis continued, “Before you leave, please leave me a battalion of troops under my command. I want to ensure I am well protected.”

“Yes, sir, Mr. President.”

The General left while President Davis remained seated. He didn’t believe how easily things went his way. Indeed, Providence was looking out for him, and his destiny was to create the American Empire.

President Davis drank his coffee, and a smile appeared as the caffeine jolt kept his sleepy mind sharp and focused. He had a long night ahead of him.

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After President Davis’s speech, the citizens of the United States became dazed and afraid. No American President held as much power as Jerrick Ray Davis. No one staged a successful coup against the U.S. government or executed the Congressmen and the top bureaucrats. Now, President Davis held the power. He talked about how he would rise and save us, and he did just that. Will he keep his word and save us, or will he become a tyrant?

The stoners became ecstatic as they ran into the streets and smoked their marijuana. Little did the potheads know President Davis’s true intent. Jerrick Davis did not legalize marijuana because he smoked it as a rebellious teenager. He deregulated it because he did not want the government to waste resources arresting and incarcerating people for smoking it. He had other plans for society’s resources. Jerrick Davis would utilize all available resources to build his Empire.

Of course, if the workers labored 8—to 10-hour workdays, then let them smoke, drink, and pop pills. Working long hours wears people out. Let them have their artificial means to stay happy and content in their spare free time. Jerrick Ray Davis wants all Americans to work long and hard and be happy. If citizens need

drugs to be happy, then so be it. Let the pharmacies work around the clock, pushing their assortment of happy pills.

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President Davis headed to the best hotel in downtown Albany and stayed in the Presidential suite with a battalion of troops surrounding the building.

Some soldiers camped in the lobby while others patrolled the outside neighborhood, keeping the President safe.

Top National Workers' Party officials flew to Albany to meet with the President at a conference room at 10 o'clock at night at the hotel.

The top members of Jerrick's party became his new cabinet. He promoted Dan to vice president, Chad to Secretary of Education, and Richard Woodland became Secretary of Homeland Security. He appointed Jennifer to a newly created department called the Department of Information.

The President began his discussion by saying, "Behind these closed doors, you must be honest with me. If you think I am doing something wrong, I must hear your opinions. I may change my decision if you prove me wrong. However, to the outside world, we present a united front."

Dan took the President up on his offer and challenged him in front of the group. He began, "Jerrick, I think we shot ourselves in the foot when we reintroduced the gold and silver standard."

"Ah, the gold and silver standard. I want people to have faith in the financial system again. We need a strong financial system to keep the economy growing. Besides, the previous financial system was based on paper. It crashed in 2008, and then we had that nasty hyperinflation in 2016," the President explained softly.

"But Jerrick, Dan is right. How will we build the Empire? Our financing is limited. You tied our ability to increase funding. In addition, any tax increases require a 2/3 approval from the citizens. That is excessively high! Taxes will never go up," Chad added in a concerned manner.

The President smiled slyly and began, "I am imposing a new legal system. It appears the system can be changed, but I never want it to change. Everyone must trust me. I thought about it long and hard and had a back door to finance the Empire."

His cabinet scrutinized President Davis closely. Of course, Jerrick Davis was a genius, and his brilliant mind found a way to finance his Empire.

"Jerrick, please tell us. What are you planning?" Jennifer asked sweetly.

"The first source is from natural resources. I will not nationalize our natural resources. However, our government partners with the petroleum, coal, and electric companies. We split the profits 50-50 with the industry. We will keep energy prices at a moderate level, where the people are happy, but we can earn substantial profits. These profits became a source of finance for the Empire. Of course, the companies must pay taxes on their share of the profits, too," the President stated cunningly.

Dan laughed and added, "Boy, I thought I was slick. We are double dipping on the money. What is the second source?"

The President sighed and continued, "The second source is even better. Our government has entered into partnerships with the silver and gold industries. As you know, I set our coins' value twice the gold market value before the hyperinflation episode. A one-ounce gold coin has a \$2,000 value, while a one-ounce silver coin has a \$400 value. We believe it costs our mines \$400 to extract the gold per ounce and \$10 to extract the silver. Thus, we create from thin air \$1,600 from each gold coin and \$390 from each silver coin. Then we split the profits 50-50 with the mining industry."

"Damn, you are a genius," Chad roared.

"Damn, Jerrick. If we can get our mining companies operating at full steam, that will dump money into our coffers," Dan stated in admiration.

The President continued, "The Republic had the best scam for government financing. They built the whole financial system on paper, storing the numbers in computers. That system imposed almost no cost on the government, so their system crashed. At least with gold and silver, the people would never lose faith in the

financial system. Gold and silver will always have an intrinsic value, and they always convey confidence and trust.”

“What will we do with the money, Jerrick?” Jennifer asked.

“We will dump the money into the economy. I have two plans. First, the government will use its financing to create corporations. Once the company becomes financially sound, we will auction half the corporate stock to the public and give the other half to the citizens. That should be a nice surprise to them,” the President proudly stated.

“What kind of companies are you talking about?” Dan asked.

“For instance, we start a company that makes insulin and other medicines. We sell it for a good price to our citizens, creating a strong consumer demand for our corporations. That is one thing I like about Russia. Medications were very cheap and widely available,” Jerrick exclaimed.

Jennifer asked, “Won’t that put some pharmaceutical companies out of business?”

“That is the nature of competition. You either compete or go into another business. Besides, I am not talking about cutthroat competition. Prices will remain high enough for the companies to earn profits.”

“What about the other plan,” Dan asked, “I got to hear this.”

“The other plan is to start a massive construction spree. We will use our money to build and renovate schools, highways, hospitals, public buildings, and parks. We will redevelop poor neighborhoods, so we care for the little people too,” the President stated emotionally.

Then with his voice rising in a crescendo, he continued, “Our construction boom will be so grand; it will make the housing bubble in the early 21st century look like child’s play.”

“But Jerrick, the housing bubble crashed badly. Don’t you remember the 2008 Financial Crisis? We went into a decade-long crisis. Won’t the same happen to us?” Chad asked with concern in his voice.

The President had a giant grin on his face and retorted, “Chad, you have a perfect point. All economic booms are temporary. The boom will probably last seven years. At the end of the sixth year, we start our invasion. We annex Mexico to the Empire. Then we invest

and redevelop the infrastructure in Mexico, creating another economic expansion. Our American companies will reap substantial profits when they supply the machines and materials for redevelopment. We also go after Mexico's petroleum, gold, and silver mining operations. These industries will help pay for redevelopment."

Jerrick paused for a minute to sip water to relieve his parched throat. Then he continued, "I do have some reservations about Mexico. We only have one chance to get it right. My idea is first to invade Cuba. Cuba will be our experiment. We will do all our learning there. Once we find some good strategies that work, then Mexico is next."

"Mr. President, what will happen with the social programs and welfare?" Jennifer asked. She wanted to ensure that all citizens benefited from the change in power.

The President began chuckling and stated, "I am old-fashioned. I believe in self-welfare. It involves a punch card and a time clock. Workers punch in to start work at the beginning of a shift. Thus, the government will not be generous in welfare and social programs. Everybody must work."

The whole group burst out laughing except Richard. He tried to feign a smile, but his smile was not natural. He sat quietly, observing the group suspiciously with his cold blue eyes.

After the laughter had died, the President continued, "I am not cruel. I will give money to help people with true disabilities and the elderly. Being an enlightened society, we are obligated to help people who are less fortunate than ourselves. However, I believe many disabled people would work if given the opportunity. Thus, we should use our power to create that opportunity."

Once the President stopped speaking, the room became silent. He was serious when Jerrick Ray Davis told them they would build an Empire. He would create one hell of an Empire.

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The next day, July 28, 2017, President Davis watched the news in his hotel room in Albany, New York. As he sipped his coffee, the

Governor of Texas, Peter Hansborough Bell, appeared on the TV next to the reporter.

The governor was a middle-aged man with full black hair that he parted to the right side with a neatly trimmed beard and mustache. He also had a rough, dark face that worked to his advantage. He could wear a suit and portray himself as a leader, or wear blue jeans and a cowboy hat and step into the role of a Texan rancher. He used this trick to garner as many votes as he could get.

On this occasion, the governor wore a dark suit and red tie.

“Mr. Bell, what do you think of President Davis?” The news reporter asked.

“First, I will not call Jerrick Davis President. He did not win the election, and he is not the official leader of the United States. Second, I dare Jerrick Davis to step on Texas soil. We are waiting for him. I called up the Texas National Guard. We have tanks and soldiers waiting for him in Austin.”

“Aren’t you worried that you are outgunned? President Davis controls most of the army.”

“Outgunned, don’t you understand? Our state slogan is ‘Don’t mess with Texas.’ I am confident many Texans will come out, fight for their freedom, and protect their state. President Davis is not the leader of the free world.”

The news reporter ended with the sound bite, “There you have it. The State of Texas is standing against President Davis. Texas vows to fight him to the end.”

President Davis started laughing, almost spilling his coffee onto the floor. He remembered the poll numbers for Governor Bell that consistently hovered around 30%. The Republicans maintained a stranglehold over the polling stations in Texas, scaring away all the Democrats and minorities, which, of course, were a large segment of the population. Bad leadership has cursed the State of Texas for the last 30 years.

However, the governor played a poker bluff, and President Davis needed to squash the governor and prevent opposition to his rule. If one state could rise and challenge President Davis, the others would follow.

The President reached for his satellite phone and called General Edwards.

The General picked up after the first ring, "This is General Edwards speaking."

"Hello, general; this is Jerrick Davis."

"Yes, sir, Mr. President. What can I do for you?"

"We have a problem brewing in Texas. The governor is challenging my authority, and I want several battalions dispatched to Austin, Texas. Let's take the state capitol."

"We can be there in 24 hours."

"General, minimize the damage to the city. We must turn around and rebuild any buildings you destroy. However, our soldiers are the priority. If you must destroy the city to save our soldiers' lives, then so be it."

"Yes, sir. I have your orders."

"Call me before takeoff; I want to be there for the battle," the President said, hanging up the telephone. A large grin formed on the President's face. No one challenges President Davis.

General of the Army Edwards dispatched five battalions to downtown Austin, Texas, from Fort Bliss, 520 miles away.

Army truck after army truck filled with soldiers, forming a convoy heading straight for Austin. The convoy reached the suburbs of Austin early the following day.

As the trucks drove along the streets, the battalions of troops noticed the people deserted Austin like a ghost town. Most citizens fled the city. The city had no traffic, no cars, and no people.

As Jerrick Davis suspected, most Texans were sick of their state government, and they would not protect it. They would let Governor Bell challenge President Davis alone.

Two battalions broke away from the main convoy and headed to the southern outskirts of Austin. Large army trucks carried the troops and pulled ten covered trailers. Once the two battalions stopped, the soldiers began removing the covers from the trailers. The army had a little nasty surprise for the Texas National Guard.

As Governor Bell stated in the news, snipers from the Texas National Guard scattered themselves among the State Capitol Buildings on the upper floors. They had a panoramic view of the

wide-open spaces of the state government complex. They planned to shoot as many soldiers as possible.

Edwards's soldiers unloaded and prepared for combat at the University of Texas campus, across the street from the state government complex. Then the soldiers advanced in formation towards the government buildings.

The Texas National Guard fired the first shots as gunfire disrupted the quietness of the city. The Empire's soldiers took positions behind buildings and returned fire.

Windows were shattering, and shrapnel of brick and mortar flew everywhere in the air. As the battle dragged on, the soldiers on both sides shot and hit the state government buildings, covering them with holes and pockmarks from the powerful M16 bullets.

General Edwards called in air support.

Ten AH-64D Apache Longbow Attack Helicopters flew in. They were dark and sleek, and from a distance, they looked like malicious black dragonflies. However, their tactical weapon systems were unmatched and quite deadly to enemies.

Apache Helicopters broke out of formation and flew around the government buildings. They used M230 machine guns that rained down 30-millimeter bullets upon the national guards. Bodies began falling from the gaping holes of the buildings, sprinkling the lawn around the buildings.

They also launched Hydra-70 rockets at the buildings, destroying the facades and annihilating the snipers.

One helicopter flew to the Governor's mansion, a beautiful two-story white home. It had six majestic Roman columns that held the front of the mansion, creating a porch on the first floor and a grand balcony on the second.

A helicopter launched four rockets at the Governor's mansion, reducing it to rubble. Then the ruins ignited and began smoldering and burning.

Another helicopter launched several rockets at the Texas Legislature building. Rockets blew large chunks from the building, and one missile hit the majestic white dome, collapsing the dome.

The Texas National Guard launched its secret weapon: ten F-16 Fighting Falcons took off from Kelly Field Annex in San Antonio, Texas. They flew north to Austin, traveling 900 miles per hour.

As the fighter planes reached the outskirts of Austin, the Empire's soldiers switched on the Patriot surface-to-air missiles. A new generation of rockets used the PDB-6 software that recognized different aircraft types and locked them in for deadly accuracy.

The Patriot battalion had 10 mobile trailers with launchers attached; each launcher held 20 computer-guided missiles.

As the Falcon aircraft approached, the Patriot missiles accelerated insanely to 3,800 miles per hour, destroying nine of the aircraft.

The surviving Falcon turned and headed to the Air Force base.

The surviving Texas National Guards saw the massacre, and they fled.

The General ordered the troops to search and clear the buildings, looking for hostile enemies, but the Texas revolt had ended. Texas lost miserably and became firmly integrated into the Empire.

The troops searched for Governor Bell but found no trace of him.

A typical U.S. politician, Governor Bell was all talk and no bite. Unknown to the troops, the governor fled before the first shots rang out. He scampered towards the Mexican border like a scared rabbit.

A news reporter captured this 40-minute battle on camera, and the whole nation and the world watched with alarm. The almighty State of Texas did not stand a chance. It fell fast and hard.

President Davis continued taking over, and no one could stop him.

Both General Edwards and President Davis watched the whole battle from the command center on the northern edge of Austin.

The President was pleased that the battle ended quickly and decisively. Now, all resistance to his leadership should melt away, and other states would not revolt.

President Davis controlled the state governments. Once his troops entered a state capitol, the governor and legislature fled like scared rats. They would not die for what they believed in, so they let President Davis take over and appointed his party members to the state leadership.

President Davis kept his promise. He decimated the federal, state, and local governments, cutting them in half; he imposed his simple tax code and greatly deregulated the economy.

The new law of the land became Judge Field's Codification of Law, a pro-business legal system with a fair balance of power between the people and her government. The United States became pro-business again, just as President Davis had promised.

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The President took refuge at the White House in Washington, D.C., where he met Richard Woodland, the new Secretary of Homeland Security.

Richard walked through the familiar door into the Oval Office. He was there many times and always sat across from the President on the couch near the fireplace.

"Richard, let us get down to business. How is our international status?"

"Many countries remain in a state of shock. President, or the former President Gibson, is in Europe convincing the European Union to invade the United States and restore his presidency."

"Does an attack look imminent?"

"From our reports, which are quite limited, he wasn't successful. The European Union doesn't want to intervene. They have their problems right now. The collapse of the U.S. dollar last year sent all the world's economies into a severe depression. However, the European Union will impose a trade embargo with the United States."

President Davis laughed and added, "I see they are thinking. Last year's hyperinflation destroyed international trade. A trade embargo would have no impact on us. At least they will not attack us yet. The last thing I need is an outside country to interfere with us."

"Mr. President, what do you want Homeland Security to do with the potential troublemakers?"

"I need Homeland Security to do some housecleaning."

"What do you have in mind?"

“We need to eliminate people who will stand in my way. I compiled a list of outspoken judges, governors, and mayors who could pose problems. Even if I replace them with my party members, they could cause future problems. I want them retired.”

The President handed Richard a detailed list of 1,243 names with complete addresses.

“Joseph Stalin once said, ‘Death is the solution to all problems. No man - no problem,’ Richard said with a pernicious smile.

“He also said, ‘Death of one man is a tragedy. Death of millions is a statistic.’ Richard, I do not want statistics.” Then the President continued, “This purge is a one-time event.”

“Should we purge the political party?”

The President sat back and closed his eyes for a minute. He did not want to make this decision, but Richard was right. President Davis must strike fear in the people. He does one purge to establish his authority. One purge would squash all opposition to his rule, and then the people would line up and follow him. Of course, he would splash more blood onto his hands; Historians would write another dark chapter of the President’s history. If President Davis ever lost power, these evil actions could return to haunt him.

“Mr. President, I have a list of party members who may present problems.”

Richard handed the list to the President.

President Davis opened his eyes and scanned the list. He met many of these party members. One name stuck out: Glen Roane, an economist from Oklahoma. The President appointed him regional director of the southern states.

“What has Glen done that makes you suspicious of him?”

“We caught him defaming you behind your back. Another party member has reported he made derogatory comments about you, and you should be eliminated and replaced.”

“Okay, you have my authority. Purge the party.”

“What should we do about Dan, the vice president? We believe he is very ambitious. We believe he’ll try to assassinate you and take over.”

President Davis closed his eyes again and thought about Dan's loyalties. Although the President and Dan are best friends, people quickly forget friendship while pursuing absolute power.

"No, leave Dan out of it, but I grant my approval for everyone else. Do it quickly and efficiently. Before you go, I want Governor Bell's head. What is his status?"

"We're not sure, but he probably fled to Mexico after the troops took Austin."

"Okay; put a \$50,000 bounty on his head. The rest of the body is optional. I will pay the bounty in gold coins, of course."

"Sir, that bounty is too much. Many Texans hated him."

"Okay, let's lower the bounty to \$20,000 payable in gold."

"Yes, sir; I'll get the word out. You'll have half the State of Texas looking under every rock and crevice in Mexico, searching for him."

The President laughed and concluded, "Then so be it. He must suffer the consequences of being hated and vilified."

Richard Woodland had a giant grin on his face. He wavered momentarily and blurted, "Mr. President, have you considered my proposal to establish a secret police?"

"Yes, I have. Let us not establish a true secret police but a network of spies. I know we are playing with definitions, but take the recommendations from Sun Tzu and develop five classes of spies who do not know about each other. You and I will be the only ones who will know about them."

"I see you are well-versed in the classics. Few people study the classics anymore."

"I must study the classics because people have already thought up all ideas. I must figure out how to apply those ideas to our circumstances today."

"Very well; I will get on it."

"Oh Richard, don't leave yet. The Department of Homeland Security has become a powerful agency. I fused and merged the DEA, FBI, Secret Service, and CIA into your department. Just be careful with that power. I do not want you harassing loudmouth college kids. Make sure you only harass true threats. Furthermore, it divides Homeland Security into three divisions. The first division

examines outside threats to the Empire. I grant my authority to infiltrate foreign governments. The second division searches for internal threats and violations of federal laws. The third division protects the top officials of government and the National Workers' Party. Then create those divisions of secret spies who do not know about each other."

"Sir, what about funding?"

"Your department is the second most powerful department in my government after the military. Your agency has the second priority in the budget. Thus, you can hire plenty of agents to hunt down troublemakers in the Empire, or anywhere in the world, for that matter. Besides, once I start creating good-paying jobs again, the people will stand behind me. Troublemakers will be rare. I expect you'll have many boring days in your office."

"Yes, sir; I understand."

Richard was very pleased, with a giant grin on his face. As he stood up to leave, the President stood to shake Richard's hand.

The President glanced into Richard's cold, blue eyes. At least the President picked the right man for the job. When the President asked for speed and efficiency, he knew Richard Woodland would deliver with ice-cold efficiency.

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Glen Roane was a middle-aged man with short blonde hair seasoned generously with gray hair. He was on the heavy side with a gloomy personality. Of course, Glen had basic-looking features that were common to both genders. One must study Glen to determine whether he was a man or a woman.

Several days after the President had met Richard, Glen Roane walked out of a restaurant in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma.

Glen walked along the sidewalk to his car. The sticky sweat drenched his polo shirt as the glaring Oklahoman sun baked the landscape, making the morning air humid and suffocating.

Suddenly, a black sedan slowed down by Glen, and one man in the front passenger side and another in the back seat fired Glock 22 handguns, filling the morning air with gunshots.

Glen glanced at the vehicle before he fell to the street dead as a pool of blood grew around him. God had called him home.

### *Invasion of Cuba*

Fort Knox and the New York Federal Reserve employees came out without any resistance, giving President Davis complete control over the nation's gold supply.

The President personally handed them \$50,000 in newly minted gold coins. When President Davis gave his word, his word was as good as gold.

By the end of the year, President Davis controlled all levels of government. With the nation's gold, he minted 325 million one-ounce gold coins. He paid each soldier ten gold coins and rewarded the officers with extra coins for their dedication.

The U.S. active military enlisted 1.5 million soldiers. Then as he promised General Edwards, he cut the armed forces in half.

When the government's tax coffers filled with money again, President Davis would rebuild the armed forces to record levels, and the soldiers would be dedicated to President Davis and the American Empire.

Finally, the President dumped the remaining gold coins into the economy to jump-start it. The President's pro-business solid policies took root, causing the economy to sprout and grow furiously. Once again, the mighty U.S. economy roared at full steam, creating good-paying manufacturing jobs again.

After the first year, the unemployment rate fell from 50% to 40%. Gradually, businesses opened again, and customers started spending and buying. People trusted the banking system and deposited their money into banks.

By the end of the third year of President Davis' administration, the unemployment rate dropped to 15%, sinking like a rock into a lake. The unemployment rate fell fast.

President Davis also went on an investment spree that the country had never seen before. He built roads, highways, schools, dams, parks, and housing for the working class and the poor. He reclaimed industrial properties and re-opened the factories.

President Davis knew he frightened the people after executing the Congressmen, the Texas Revolt, and purging his party. He would show his kind, forgiving side and rescue homeless dogs and cats. He opened large kennels in the countryside, allowing places for the animals to run around. The President granted several pardons to death-roll prisoners.

One prisoner's name was William Spry. As a young man, William became addicted to drugs and robbed stores to feed his addiction. During one robbery, he shot and killed two people.

William Spry lay on his bed on death row. He discovered Jesus 20 years ago and turned his life around. He hung a cross on the wall above his head.

He lined several books neatly on the bookshelf in a roll he had written. He wrote children's books and books for teenagers, warning them of the dangers of street life. The books shared a common theme – the underworld pulls people in like an undertow and drowns them in drugs, misery, and destitution.

William helped prison officers scare rebellious teenagers.

A correctional officer would leave a scared, rebellious kid in his cell for an hour, and William would sit down with him and scare the hell out of him. He told them how it felt to sit on death row. Every morning, upon awakening, he wondered if this were his last day on earth.

After an hour, the rebellious teen would be pale white with trembling hands. Occasionally, a teenager would piss his pants as he lost control from the intense fear.

William quickly scooted off the bed and kneeled to pray.

After he had made the sign of the cross over his heart, a guard stood at his cell.

“Good news! William. President Davis signed your pardon. You are a free man.”

The tears of joy began flowing down William's face. After 20 years on death row, President Jerrick had freed him.

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President Davis traveled extensively across the Empire. He inspected his grand projects and formed a strong bond with his people, proving he kept his word to the people.

President Davis traveled to South Bend, Indiana, a major industrial city at the turn of the 20th century.

In the early 20th century, the downtown landscape was dotted with large manufacturing complexes that produced Swinger sewing machines, watches and clocks, and Studebaker cars.

Remnants of the Studebaker factories stood on the south side, adjacent to the downtown area, but the other factories were demolished long ago.

South Bend, Indiana's decline started with the 1963 shutdown and bankruptcy of Studebaker factories. Thousands of highly paid factory workers filled the unemployment line overnight. The high unemployment struck South Bend as the good-paying jobs fled while crime soared.

All the wealthy once lived on the Westside along Lincolnway West Boulevard. They constructed magnificent, two-story Victorian-style homes. After the factory closed, the wealthy fled, and the poor flocked in. Then violence, crime, and poverty plagued the Westside.

A small revitalization occurred during the 2007 Housing Bubble, but after 2008, the Westside continued declining and worsening.

President Davis would change this as he checked the progress of two projects.

President Davis allocated \$50 million for the first project to renovate 2,000 new homes on the Westside.

Old Victorian homes had style and class and were worth saving. Unfortunately, the destitute and homeless came along and stripped the homes of all the wiring and pipes, making them expensive to renovate.

The President's cavalcade left the South Bend Regional Airport. He rode in his bullet-proof limousine surrounded by 20 Crown Victorians, keeping him secure.

The South Bend police and Indiana State Troopers stood at intersections, directing traffic around the airport.

In his limousine, the mayor of South Bend, Stephen Tallmadge, sat with the President. Stephen was a tall, large-framed man nearing 50 years old. His hair and mustache were still black. He was a hardworking, honest man who wanted to make a difference. The President always found the best people for vital jobs.

The mayor would show the President the project's progress.

As the procession headed to the Westside, the President became pale. Some of the neighborhoods barely survived a war zone. Residents boarded many homes up while empty lots were filled with weeds and abandoned cars.

The mayor saw the concern on the President's face and said, "Mr. President, we haven't started on these neighborhoods yet. As you can see, the scope of our problem is quite large."

"I see. I had no idea. How many homes have been renovated?"

"So far, 500, and ah, here we are. We finally arrived at the neighborhood."

As the procession crossed the intersection, the President saw teams of busy builders and workers. Carpenters were cutting boards, workers were carrying drywall into homes, and two were burying electrical cables underground.

Although the Victorian homes were over 100 years old, they appeared new and beautiful. Most were two stories tall, with wooden shutters on the windows, wrapped around porches, and painted in two bold colors: avocado greens, browns, and pastel yellows.

As the procession drove by, the workers and builders turned, saluting and cheering the President.

The President waved to them.

The procession stopped at a large, yellow Victorian home with the trim and shutters painted brown.

"Here is the main construction office," the mayor extolled proudly.

They filed out of the limousine while the President's security climbed out, surrounding the house.

A few agents walked with the President and mayor, forming a human shield.

Walking to the house, the President shook workers' hands as he passed.

The President saw the workers' stunned faces. Not every day did you clock into work, and the President, i.e., the big boss, walked up to you and shook your hand.

Once inside, the project manager, Chris Hammer, immediately stopped working and came to greet the President and mayor.

"May I get you any refreshments, sir," Chris asked politely, even apologetically.

"I will take a Vanilla Dr. Pepper, please," The President asked.

Within seconds, a clerk retrieved an ice-cold Dr. Pepper for the President.

The President broke the ice first and began, "I popped in to check the progress of our projects."

"Yes, Sir, the projects are going well. We have already rehabbed 500 homes and sold 300 of them, and we have another 200 homes ready to be occupied."

"Did you use my policy that 75% must be given or sold to households with working family members?"

"Yes, Sir; we believe in your policy, Sir. Hardworking, family-oriented households make neighborhoods strong. Filling a neighborhood with poor, unemployed people guarantees failure and urban blight."

"Good! That is exactly what I wanted to hear."

"We'll hold our first raffle for the homes. The workers are excited. We'll raffle 100 homes for the workers."

"Excellent. That should be a good surprise for the workers. I want to inspect some of these homes," the President said meekly.

"Yes, sir, right away," the manager said to the clerk. Hold my calls. I'll be with the President for a while." The manager was excited and wanted to impress the President.

The manager, mayor, and President walked through the neighborhood while the President's guards followed in formation.

Every worker turned around and cheered the President.

The President waved to them as he strolled by.

The group entered the first Victorian home on the block's corner. Then they checked several homes on the same block.

The President was very impressed to save these old Victorians. Every house had beautifully stained wooden floors, high 10-foot ceilings, winding staircases, and classic crown moldings.

Somewhere down the line, Americans lost their style and elegance, cheapening it with plastics and synthetic materials.

After the inspection, the President and mayor headed to the old Studebaker buildings on the Southside. The President used the money to start an electronics corporation. The business owners retrofitted the old Studebaker buildings to produce flat-screen TVs.

The President was happy to see a parking lot filled with cars while factories' smokestacks emitted white smoke and steam into the atmosphere.

The President and mayor met the corporation's president outside the main entrance. Word traveled fast when the President came to town.

The corporation's president gave them a grand tour of the facility.

Before they entered the production facilities, they donned masks and white suits, protecting the sensitive electronics from dust and dirt brought in from the outside. As the group entered the cavernous room, the President frowned when he saw the automated production line.

The President asked, "I see a lot of machines and equipment, but I don't see the workers?"

"Mr. President, this facility is quite large. This is the automated circuit board production. Workers assemble the flat screens in the next room. Many workers also build LCD screens across the street," the corporation's president proudly said.

"Good, let's see the workers," President Davis said excitedly.

As the group entered the assembly room, the workers turned to see who entered.

Then they began clapping and cheering.

As he walked by, the President shook the workers' hands, bestowing respect and admiration on each worker.

At the end of the tour, the President turned to the mayor and company president and stated, "I am very pleased with your progress."

“Thank you, sir,” the mayor and company president said in unison.

“However, I see much work ahead of us. The Republic neglected South Bend for over a half-century; it will take at least two decades under the Empire to bring her back to her former glory.”

“Yes, Sir; I know, but at least we’re making a difference. Every job we create and each home we rebuild, we move one step closer to our goal,” the mayor added.

“And, of course, homes and jobs go hand in hand. Without the good-paying jobs, any effort into rebuilding the homes would be futile,” the President concluded.

President Davis expanded his economic plans to the other great American cities, transforming their economies. Businessmen reopened factories and employed workers while people renovated their neighborhoods.

America’s greatest cities were coming back. One of the most brutal hit states, Michigan, began a massive revival. She rose and became an outstanding state once again under the American Empire.

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President Davis firmly believed in science and the arts and started the President’s Award for Excellence program.

Any inventor, writer, or artist who created a masterpiece or invention that greatly benefited society was eligible to apply.

President Davis arrived in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, to pass out this year’s award in 2020.

He stood on the stage behind an oak wooden podium. Behind him, one platinum medal, two gold medals, and three silver medals lay on the table’s top, while envelopes containing checks lay next to the medals.

President Davis began his speech:

It pleases me to stand in front of these esteemed scientists,  
inventors, and artists with the whole nation watching.  
As you know, I firmly believe in technology and human progress.

I want to advance civilization, elevate our standard of living, and give people new sophisticated toys to play with.

The President paused as the crowd erupted with laughter. Then he continued,

So today, I reward these innovators for their hard work and creativity.

Six lucky people earned these awards.

I am a person who does not like to waste time.

So, I begin calling out names.

The top award goes to Michael Felton for inventing a new technology that purifies salt water.

Saltwater flows along a long tube, and special electrodes and magnets on the sides pull the salt ions from the water, purifying water.

This new technology gives coastal cities unlimited, cheap fresh water supply.

Michael Felton, please come down and claim your award.

He wins the Platinum medal in excellence and receives a \$5 million-dollar check.

Of course, minus the 15% deduction for income taxes.

The crowd laughed, and then they began to applaud.

A heavysset man with a grizzly beard and jolly cheeks stood up and began walking down to the stage. The man wore large, black-rimmed glasses.

Michael walked up the stage and shook the President's hand. Then the President handed him the platinum medal and his check.

Next, Richard Caspian wins a gold medal for advancing macrophages' role as antibiotics.

His new technique allows him to engineer phages to attack specific, harmful bacteria.

Phages fix some of the problems with traditional antibiotics.

The second gold medal goes to Ron Kenniston for developing the universal cell phone.

Here is that new toy I mentioned.

Ron has integrated a computer, phone, GPS locator, TV, computer games, and radio into a tiny unit.

The units even have Windows 12 installed on them.

The President held up an electronic device slightly larger than an iPhone. The crowd stared in awe at the device.

This unit allows people to write documents, balance their checkbooks, and locate their current position on the earth with a detailed map; of course, someone told me it could also make and receive phone calls and emails.

And it gets better.

The Windows 12 Operating System is guaranteed not to crash.

The crowd erupted in laughter again. The President continued after the laughter had died.

Although these types of phones are not new, Richard has incorporated a quad-core 64-bit microprocessor into them, ushering us into the sixth generation of cell phone technology. Will Richard and Ron please stand up and come down to get your medals and prizes?

The crowd applauded.

The President shook the scientists' hands and handed them their medals and three-million-dollar checks.

Finally, Aretha Jones wins a silver medal for writing a beautiful play filled with hope about how three inner-city youth kids growing up triumph over poverty and urban decay.

The youths formed a bond where they promised to help each other fight the temptation of joining urban gangs, abusing drugs, and working themselves out of the ghetto.

When I first saw this play, I almost had tears.

It greatly affected me.

Alexander Sasha wins a silver medal for his biological filter that converts carbon dioxide into oxygen.

These filters look like beehives.

As air passes through them, algae-like organisms create oxygen from carbon dioxide.

Vladimir Kaichovski wins a silver medal for developing the artificial kidney.

Will Aretha, Alexander, and Vladimir please stand up and come down to claim your medals and prizes?

Three people stood up and claimed their prizes. The President shook their hands and handed them their silver medals and \$2 million checks.

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A week after the President's Awards in Excellence, the President met the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Agent Harris, a new face in the crowd, was a young man in his mid-twenties with light bronze hair and light brown eyes. He wore a red tie, a white long-sleeve dress shirt, dark trousers, and a black dress jacket. He was clean-cut and the poster child for a federal agent.

President Davis asked Secretary Richard Woodland to send over his best agent, and he came.

General of the Army, Edwards, began, "Sir, we believe the Russians are developing a new influenza strain that is deadlier than the H1N1 strain that hit the United States heavily in 2010."

"What do we know about this new strain?" The President asked.

Agent Harris spoke up, "Mr. President, we believe the Russians developed this new strain that is fatal to 30% of the population. The other 70% will survive but be sick for two weeks. The sickness at some points is so bad and painful; many want death to come swiftly."

"The Russians must have invented a very nasty strain," the President added.

“What makes it worse is that the Russians have a vaccine for this strain. From our reports, this vaccine is 99% effective. The Russians could potentially knock out our troops and invade the American Empire,” General Edwards said cogently with a worried look on his face.

“We need to get our hands on this vaccine. We need it for defensive purposes,” The General of the Air Force exclaimed.

The President began his discourse by saying, “Generals, the only difference between a defense and an offense is who attacks first. The military develops technology for defensive purposes and can easily switch it to an offensive one. However, you are right. We must get on that new virus strain and the vaccine.”

“Sir, what are your plans?” General Edwards inquired.

“That is why Agent Harris joined us today. He speaks Russian fluently and knows how to sneak secretly in and out of Russia. Agent Harris can locate a key scientist who works on the project.”

The President looked at Agent Harris and continued, “You can offer the scientist up to \$10 million, and I will guarantee him citizenship to the American Empire. He can live anywhere he wants. You guys know my motto. If we cannot buy it, then we steal it. I want my military to have the best weapons and technology in the world so our armed forces will be superior and impregnable. Gentlemen, we cannot rule the world with a second-class military. We must be number one in technology, education, and military weapons.”

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Agent Harris returned three months later, bringing Joseph Yelkatrin, his wife Tatiana, and his daughter Svetlana to the Whitehouse.

Joseph Yelkatrin was a Russian scientist and the chief creator of this new strain of influenza. He was the epitome of a scientist, with white hair with a highly skinny build; his white eyebrows almost formed a continuous sash across his forehead.

His wife was slightly overweight and appeared 20 years younger than her age. Svetlana was a typical Slavic woman with long golden hair and a sleek, chiseled, and exquisite hourglass physique.

They met President Davis in the Oval Office, and he directed his guests to sit on the couch near the fireplace.

As his guests walked by, the President shook their hands.

The President sat down and began, "Well, Agent Harris, did we get it?"

"Yes, Sir, I am happy to report that we have Russia's new biological weapon. Dr. Yelkatrin, the main scientist, developed the new strain and vaccine. He spent three weeks at Fort Detrick, showing the military how to grow the virus and vaccines. Sir, we underestimated the nastiness of the new strain, but at least we have it."

"Good, I am very pleased," President Davis turned to Joseph and said, "Sir, I owe you much money. How do you want me to pay you?"

"Mr. President, thank you kindly; a bank account will be fine. My lovely wife and daughter want to live in Hawaii, but I want to remain active in my field."

"Sir, you helped me and the Empire. I will help you in any way I can. I will have my computer expert create new identities for you. They will also hack into the computer system at Harvard University and enter a record that you earned your doctorate there. Then I will write a letter of recommendation for you and send it to the University of Hawaii. I am sure they will hire you. You and your family will be pleased there."

Joseph, Tatiana, and Svetlana radiated giant beaming smiles.

Joseph said, "Thank you, Sir. Oh, thank you, Sir."

The President stood up, walked to his desk, and pushed a button on the intercom, calling his aid to his office.

The aid appeared several seconds later.

The President said to him, "Please show my guest here to their room. They can stay at the Whitehouse for several days. Once they are situated, take them to the bank to transfer \$10 million into their account and then set up an appointment with Jennifer at the Department of Information."

Joseph and his family stood up.

The President approached them and shook their hands again. As his guests were leaving, he said, “Thank you for helping the Empire.”

The President shut the door and walked to the couch near the fireplace.

He sat across from Agent Harris and said, “I see you are a rising star in my government. I am thrilled with your progress.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“I also have a surprise for you. I have a 10% finder’s fee. Give my aid your bank account number on the way out. I will wire the \$1 million in your account by the end of the day.”

Agent Harris was pleased. The most powerful man in the world approved of him and, at the same time, made him rich.

Both the President and Agent Harris stood up. The President shook his hand, and Agent Harris left the Oval Office.

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Everyone knew this day would arrive. On Friday, October 1, 2021, the President sent the troops to Cuba.

The invasion was easy as if the President had sent demolition experts to implode a skyscraper because the building had several rats.

President Davis kept the naval base open at Guantánamo Bay.

The Empire’s navy sailed across the bay to Miami, Florida, picked up battalions of army troops, and dropped them off on the shores of Havana.

The President chose Havana, Cuba’s largest city and capital. Cuba’s military didn’t show up because it was outgunned and outmatched.

Platoons of American soldiers carefully walked through Havana’s bare, empty streets. The people closed and shuttered all the windows and doors, cowering inside, afraid to peek at the soldiers through the windows.

The President ordered the soldiers not to shoot at anyone unless the enemy shot first. The soldiers marched to the government

complex, and the soldiers and government workers had again abandoned the buildings.

Government officials fled as American troops were landing on the shores of Havana.

The President promised the troops that once the Empire controlled Cuba, they could return for Christmas, which is why the President chose October 1 as the invasion date. The invasion went so well that the soldiers could arrive home before Thanksgiving.

President Davis was delighted with the good news. He granted citizenship to the Cubans and made Cuba the 51st state. He appointed a new governor of Cuba, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes.

Carlos escaped Cuba with his parents as a child and studied business in college. Then he started a construction company in Miami, building extravagant homes for the rich. He became very wealthy and converted his wealth into gold in 2008. In 2014, he became a member of the National Workers' Party, impressing President Davis.

The President gave Carlos three missions. First, Carlos will lead the new construction boom in Cuba. Second, Carlos will introduce the Empire's laws, which could be challenging. The Cuban government transferred all state property and unoccupied land to the people. Families inherited the property where they resided, while collective farm workers gained shares in their newly-created businesses after the government had converted them into corporations. Finally, Carlos found three citizens who espoused the views of the National Workers' Party. Then Cuba sent those three as two Senators and one Representative to Washington, D.C.

President Davis wouldn't re-shuffle the seats for the House of Representatives. Instead, he added new members to Congress.

Of course, Congress became similar to the United Nations. Translators strolled along the halls with the multilingual congressional representatives and support staff.

President Davis kept many pieces of the federal and state government intact, preserving the institutions of Congress and state legislatures and giving the appearance of democracy. However, President Davis ruled behind the scenes with an iron hand. Without his approval, no one could change the law or make a major decision.

Consequently, Congressmen spent their time in their districts, watching the federal projects and staying in touch with citizens.

The Congressmen and state legislators extended President Davis's eyes and ears. If a problem occurred in a congressional district, President Davis would know about it immediately.

President Davis addressed the nation that evening after the Empire's troops had conquered Cuba:

The Communist Party held Cuba hostage since 1959.

Since that time, the Communists closed Cuba to the world.

Their government held its citizens under lock and key.

Today, the American military liberated Cuba.

Today, I have opened Cuba to the Empire and the world.

It joins the Empire as the 51st state.

Cuban citizens become citizens of the Empire.

Cubans are free to move anywhere within the Empire or in the world.

The Empire will redevelop Cuba's cities, especially the largest, Havana.

Before the communists took over, Havana was one of the most beautiful cities in the Caribbean.

They once called Havana the Flower of the Caribbean.

Now, Havana will rise and become the most beautiful flower of the Caribbean again.

She will now flourish and grow like the remaining states and cities of the Empire.

The Cuban descendants were ecstatic in Miami, Florida. They had sailed across the dangerous waters from Cuba to Florida on homemade rafts and boats, escaping the Communist government. Now, many have returned to visit relatives, and some have opened new hotels and restaurants.

Cuba added a rich heritage and a fantastic vacation resort to the Empire. Although its climate was tropical, temperatures rarely soared above 90 degrees in the summer. Furthermore, Cuba possessed beautiful beaches with white sand and clear, blue waters.

Cuba possessed large petroleum reserves located along the northern coastline. The Empire used this petroleum to invest in Cuba, fostering its growth.

Havana was the capital and was an old, rustic city that Christopher Columbus had discovered. Under the Communist regime, the government ignored the maintenance of Havana's buildings, where most buildings had fading and peeling paint for 70 years, but the structures remained in excellent condition.

The Empire rehabilitated Havana into a strikingly beautiful city, competing with Paris and Venice. Indeed, Cuba became an excellent addition to the Empire.

President Davis greatly expanded the size of the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers because it became the Empire's redevelopment agency. The President elevated the corps commander to a general and expanded the staff from 35,000 to a half million.

The President put Robert L. Williams in charge, who tackled the challenging public works projects. President Davis often said, "If the military can knock it down, then it can turn around and rebuild it again."

Several days after the invasion, the President walked with Carlos and Robert along a street in Havana as a contingent of soldiers and guards surrounded and protected them.

The day was beautiful. The sun was shining, and the temperature hovered at 70 degrees. A calm, salty breeze blew through the city.

"Havana is wonderful, stunning," the President stated.

"Yes, Sir, we can be thankful the Communists didn't destroy these beautiful buildings. Everything looked the same when I escaped Cuba as a child," Carlos said.

"How fast do you think it would take to renovate these buildings, repave the streets, and upgrade the infrastructure?" The President asked.

"Sir, the Corps of Army Engineers can finish construction in three years. These buildings look sturdy and are structurally in good condition," Robert concluded confidently.

"Ensure the Cubans understand we came here to renovate and redevelop Cuba. Soldiers can only shoot at Cubans if Cubans shoot

first. Also, find those stupid House Books and use them to transfer property to the residents,” the President stated.

“Sir, I do not understand,” General Robert asked, perplexed because he didn’t know about the house books.

“Cuba is probably like the Soviet Union; bureaucrats created documents for everything. All family members living in a residence must register in the House Book. We can utilize these books to establish property titles,” the President posited.

“Oh, those house books. I remember my parent complaining about them. They said you needed a document from the Cuban government for everything, even if you were going to take a large dump in the toilet,” Carlos replied jokingly.

They exchanged laughter as they walked down the street.

President Davis loved surrounding himself with movers, shakers, and doers, especially those who had a sense of humor.

After touring several neighborhoods, the President, governor, and general visited several schools and the University of Havana.

The group rested by the entrance, where a large fountain sprayed a three-foot water stream in the air.

The President glanced at the sign written in Spanish, ‘University of Havana, 1728.’ The group stared in awe at some buildings because the early buildings used the Roman style with impressive columns and facades.

Although the communists screwed up most of the country, the communists did fund higher education, producing a few good teachers and medical doctors.

President Davis privatized the Cuban education system and subsidized the schools, colleges, and universities for five years. He ensured that these institutions grew and flourished. Unfortunately, capitalism is cruel to people who do not know how to compete.

President Davis granted Cuba five years to adjust to the new system. Then he would unleash the cruel, cold forces of a competitive, efficient market system.

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Jerrick Ray Davis knew he had become a powerful man. Total power reared its head from time to time, even in small, subtle ways. One day, for example, he stood on the Truman Balcony on the third floor of the White House, examining the Whitehouse lawn. He did not see the Washington Monument because a large oak tree obscured his view.

A staff member rushed towards the President, “Sir, Senator Hacket called and wants to speak with you. He wants you to join him and several other Senators for lunch tomorrow.”

The President did not look at the staff but kept studying the lawn. Then the President said, “Come closer, young man.”

The young man stood next to the President while the President directed him to look over the south lawn.

“Can you see the Washington Monument? Trees are obscuring the view.”

“Yes, sir; you can barely see the top of the monument over that tall oak tree,” the staff member replied, pointing to the tree blocking the view.

“I guess my eyes are getting old. I can barely make out the top. Very well. Tell the senator my schedule is free tomorrow. I will have lunch with them.”

“Yes sir; I’ll let the senator know,” then the staff person trotted to the interior of the Whitehouse.

Several days later, President Davis wanted some fresh air, and the beautiful Whitehouse lawn and gardens relaxed and soothed him. Stepping onto the Truman balcony, the President noticed something strange. He saw the whole Washington Monument. Someone had removed that pesky oak tree. Where the tree once stood, the President saw a perfectly green, manicured lawn as if the tree never existed.

The President realized he had just gained total power. His staff and workers complied with every wish and desire. Any hint, suggestion, or comment became a command.

Jerrick Ray Davis cannot crack any jokes or make playful comments. Otherwise, someone can take these jokes out of context, transforming them into commands that harm innocent people. Innocent people could vanish as if they never had existed.

## *Invasion of Mexico*

The President met Jennifer and James Gordon at Jennifer's Office, located at the end of a spacious work area. Workers arranged a hundred desks like an elongated classroom, and Jennifer placed her office where a teacher would stand if she were teaching her pupils.

In Jennifer's department, everyone shared the same facilities. To the left of Jennifer's Office, workers used a small kitchenette with a microwave, refrigerator, and sink, while the bathrooms were on the right.

At each desk, a person sat and stared at a computer screen, occasionally typing something on a keyboard.

As President Davis passed a desk, he greeted the worker.

Jennifer stood and watched the President, wondering how long he needed to reach her office.

The President would meet everyone because that was his nature. He treated everyone with dignity and respect. After several minutes, the President strolled to Jennifer's Office.

Jennifer closed the Venetian blinds and shut her door. She usually kept both the blinds and door open so any employee could talk to her at any time.

President Davis was anxious and started, "Have the military contractors finished the Star Wars Program?"

"Yes, NASA began launching the first rockets at Cape Canaveral. Astronauts will assemble the first Star Wars satellite. Then they will assemble two more by the end of the month. They will place the first satellite along the U.S.-Canadian border above Detroit-Windsor. Another satellite will hover above the Gulf of Mexico, 100 miles off the shore from Miami, Florida, and the third will be off the West Coast, 100 miles away from San Francisco."

"What is their predicted accuracy?" The President inquired.

"We predict the satellites have a 99.9% accuracy when activated. Special intelligence chips control the weapons. Satellites use two defenses. First, a powerful, computer-guided X-ray laser locks onto a rocket or satellite and blasts it. Second, each satellite

contains 500 fast rockets that can destroy any satellites in space. Rockets have a range of 1,000 miles. You can also use the Star Wars defense system as an offensive weapon. Satellites can blast their weapons down onto cities and armies, destroying dams, electric power plants, or battalions of soldiers.”

“Those intelligence chips are very accurate. How do we know these chips will not malfunction? Do you trust these chips to control these powerful weapons?”

“Occasionally, these chips go haywire. We have an override that disables the rockets and lasers when this happens. Override first resets the chip. If a chip still has problems, the override permanently disables the chips and the weapon.”

“Why do the chips go haywire?”

“These are analog difference chips, which are different from the regular computer chips. Regular computer chips use two states: on or off. These chips, in theory, have an infinite number of values between 0 and 1. It introduces randomness into its calculations?”

“Why would we do that?”

“These chips process 100,000 times the information as a standard 32-core processor that most computers use today.”

Then James reached into his pocket, pulled out a small clear plastic case containing a small square-shaped black chip, and handed it to the President.

On the bottom side, it had 100 gold pins. The President removed the chip, gently turning the chip over in his hand and inspecting each side. Then he handed the chip to Jennifer.

The President stated, “Amazing! What do you think, Jennifer?”

“I have seen the specifications. They do work. They process 100,000 times the same information as our standard computer chips. Some psychologists are experimenting with these chips to form intelligent neuronal systems.”

The President chuckled and said, “So, you think we are on the verge of mimicking human consciousness?”

“We believe in another 50 years, we’ll be able to replicate the brain.”

“God, help us,” the President said amidst several chuckles.

Jennifer and James were puzzled.

The President noticed the confused expressions on their faces and added, “Don’t you guys remember the classic movies, like the Terminator and Matrix series? Those movies came out 25 years ago. Man invents robots and machines with intelligence. Then they decide a man is the problem and attempt to exterminate humankind.”

Then Jennifer and James joined in the laughter.

“I know I work everyone to death, but you guys need to get out more,” the President chuckled.

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President Davis made the military the highest priority in the budget. He expanded the U.S. military to 3 million active troops by 2023 and promised the military the best toys, like his Star Wars Defense System.

The President promised he would plan his invasion of Mexico. He built new army bases in San Diego, California; Tampa, Florida; and Laredo, Texas. He also expanded the naval base in San Diego and constructed a new one in Corpus Christi, Texas.

President Davis knew Mexico’s capabilities because he had studied them for years. Mexico enlisted 200,000 troops, dispersed among 12 military regions. The government stationed most soldiers at the Mexican army base in Mexico City, the Distrito Federal, Mexico’s capital and largest city.

The President would capture each region individually until he controlled all Mexican states.

Although the Mexican government was modernizing its armed forces, the 2008 Financial Crisis struck Mexico hard like a sucker punch to the stomach. Consequently, the Mexican government never modernized its armed forces and used ancient equipment and hardware from the United States. Some equipment was relics of World War II. Thus, these aging weapons should be displayed in a museum, not on a modern battlefield.

President Davis remained suspicious of Canada and kept a watchful eye on them. The Canadians didn’t have a large military but were stationing troops from other countries.

The President placed new military bases outside of Detroit, Michigan, and Watertown, New York, and greatly expanded the army base in Fort Lewis, Washington. He also developed the naval bases in Brunswick, Maine, and Everett, Washington.

President Davis greatly expanded the Empire's navy. He wanted the best navy in the world and added 20 amphibious assault ships. These ships appeared like aircraft carriers but with no airplanes. Decks held battalions of soldiers and equipment, and the ships transported them across the oceans and seas. Then the ships carried the soldiers so they could complete their missions. The Empire had 30 of these monstrous ships.

President Davis added 21 new Nimitz-class nuclear aircraft carriers, giving the Empire 32 mighty floating fortresses. He also expanded the Los Angeles-class nuclear submarine fleet to 146. These submarines carried the infamous Tomahawk missiles, which strike fear and terror into any opposition.

Finally, the President split the Navy into two: one for the West Coast and the other for the East Coast. The navy protected the Empire's coastal waters as these metallic beasts sailed up and down the coast, searching for enemies.

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President Davis invaded Mexico on Monday, January 9, 2023. The troops spent Christmas with their families and rested before the invasion.

The President believed the invasion would be quick and decisive, but complications could arise. He planned carefully, but unexpected problems always popped up.

President Davis showed his big stick to the world, when he stood in full uniform on center stage in Laredo, Texas, on the day of the invasion. He saluted the troops as they marched in formation.

Government officials sat on bleachers along the stage's back wall.

Large 50-foot American flags draped downward on the stage's back wall, flapping in the wind. Spotlights illuminated the stage and flags, impressing the spectators and audience.

The President stood in a firm salute as the soldiers marched across the border into battle. This marked the day President Jerrick Davis joined the ranks of the great conquerors. The President sent the Empire's troops near Mexico across the U.S.-Mexico border.

Soldiers from the army base in San Diego crossed into Mexico at the base of the Baja Peninsula. They conquered their first city, Mexicali, which was next to Tijuana. Mexicali, the capital of the state of Baja California, is one of Mexico's military districts, with a million residents living in this urban sprawl.

The army traveled along Interstate 2, known as the La Rumorosa Highway. This scenic, magical highway cuts through mountainous plateaus and desert terrain. On clear days, the sky is a beautiful, pure blue.

Soldiers crowded on benches on the large Light-Medium Tactical Vehicles (LMTV). Thick camouflage tarps covered the truck beds, protecting the soldiers from the sun's intense rays.

Other trucks transported the Paladin tanks, the weapon of choice for President Davis. These tanks were fast, mobile, and used computerized weapons. Computer-controlled guns locked onto unfriendlies with precision and fired. Furthermore, these tanks could quickly stop, fire their artillery guns, and speedily move again, thwarting attacks.

Army transport truck after truck drove through the customs stalls on the border. On the U.S. side, the customs stalls were empty as the customs officials received a warning not to report to work.

As the army drove through the stalls, the Mexican customs officials scrambled and ran away. Small buildings shook as the procession of large army trucks passed.

The Empire's army headed straight to the government complex buildings, flanked on both sides by Blackhawk helicopters.

Mexican soldiers stood behind makeshift barriers and started firing at the Empire's army trucks with FX-05 assault rifles, the choice of rifles for the Mexican army. Mexico produced its weapons, the FX-05, so Mexico didn't rely on foreigners.

Soldiers of the Empire quickly unloaded and took positions behind buildings, returning fire.

Other soldiers unloaded 20 Paladin tanks that approached the government buildings menacingly. They fired artillery shells at the buildings, causing massive chunks of the buildings to fall as the powerful shells punched large gaping holes into them.

As the Blackhawks approached the buildings, they broke formation and surrounded the buildings, firing their M230 machine guns and Hydra-70 rockets.

Blackhawks continued firing their powerful rockets and guns, blowing large chunks in the buildings like Swiss cheese. After an hour of mayhem, the Mexican government buildings lay in ruins.

The Empire's soldiers did a last sweep, cleaning the buildings for hostile fire. Once the soldiers cleared the buildings, they reloaded onto the trucks.

Unfortunately, 20 soldiers of the Empire were shot, while Mexico suffered over 1,000 casualties.

A battalion remained behind to control the state government until President Davis appointed a new governor for the State of Baja California.

A procession of army trucks drove along the Trans-Peninsula Highway through the Baja Peninsula. After 8 hours, they reached La Paz, the capital of the State of Baja California Sur. The empire's soldiers approached the abandoned government buildings.

Government officials fled hours ago and hid after they had heard the news that the United States invaded Mexico, and Mexico was losing badly.

A battalion of soldiers remained at the state capitol, maintaining control. The remaining troops drove to the southern tip of the Peninsula, Los Cabos, a famous resort for Americans on the Pacific coast. Los Cabos has a large harbor that can dock massive ships, usually cruise ships. Today, it docked the Empire's naval ships.

The Empire's army rendezvoused with the Empire's Navy, where five amphibious assault ships were waiting for them.

Sailors quickly loaded the army's trucks, soldiers, and tanks onto ships.

By the next morning, the army had unloaded at Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. The Empire's soldiers would then take Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city.

The Empire's army kept its position five miles from Mexico's base.

Occasionally, the Mexican army fired artillery rounds from Howitzers, ancient artillery guns used by the U.S. during World War II. Howitzers were extremely reliable and lethal, although not accurate.

The Empire's Army returned fire with M252 Mortars, firing high-explosive rounds with extreme accuracy from 3.5 miles away.

The Empire's army had besieged Mexico's army base and waited for their commands from headquarters, staying out of Mexican Howitzers' range.

President Davis ordered soldiers not to be heroic. He would take Mexico with as few casualties as possible.

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Battalions after battalions of soldiers at Tampa, Florida, loaded onto 15 amphibious assault ships. Then President Davis sent the troops across the Gulf of Mexico to Veracruz, a picturesque coastal city with half a million residents.

As these mighty ships departed, they formed a v-formation.

Nuclear submarines sailed further ahead, clearing a path for the ships, hiding in the deep murky waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The Mexican navy consisted of several Bronstein frigates and several old-class destroyers, which were ships made in the good old United States. Both ships were 400 feet long and equipped with torpedo launchers, anti-submarine rockets, and large artillery guns.

The Mexican navy usually sailed the Gulf of Mexico waters, protecting Mexico's petroleum resources.

The Empire's navy reached its destination early the following day.

The waters and skies were clear, and no ships were sailing today. The word spread fast that the American Empire had invaded Mexico.

As the Empire's formation of submarines and ships approached the city of Veracruz, two Mexican destroyers guarded the entrance to Veracruz Bay.

Massive explosions echoed in the air as Mexican destroyers fired large artillery shells at the Empire's navy. However, the two ships never stood a chance. The Empire's submarines returned fire with several rounds of torpedoes that punched large, gaping holes into the hulls of the ships. Plumbs of smoke billowed from these holes as these old, mighty ships descended to their resting place at the ocean's bottom. Mexican sailors began jumping into the gulf's waters.

President Davis ordered not to kill or harm unarmed soldiers. Building an Empire is not about destroying and killing people. It's taking over and consolidating governments and putting people back to work.

After the ships had docked at Veracruz, the Empire's soldiers unloaded their equipment and vehicles.

Veracruz housed one of Mexico's military districts.

A procession of the Empire's soldiers and vehicles maneuvered to the military base. Along the way, people hid in their homes; dogs didn't bark, and no one drove their cars. The streets of Veracruz were deserted, like a ghost town. A soft, salty ocean breeze blew through the town, evoking an eerie feeling of loneliness.

As the troops approached the base, the Mexican army deserted the base and transferred the soldiers to Mexico City.

The Empire's troops headed west to Puebla, Mexico, 131 miles west and the fourth-largest city of Mexico. As the Empire's Army approached Puebla, the Empire's army broke into three sections. The middle section headed straight for Puebla. The other two broke off at diagonals as one section headed northwest while the other headed southwest.

As the middle section of the Empire's army reached the outskirts of Puebla, the Mexican military fired their assault rifles and launched artillery shells.

The Empire's army returned fire.

Both armies kept firing at each other for 30 minutes, staying out of range of the Howitzers and M262 mortars. Then the Empire's army began retreating.

The Mexican army thought they held the upper hand and pushed forward.

The Mexican army didn't know that the other two sections of the Empire's army were encircling them and approaching from their rear. Before the Mexican army realized what had happened, the Empire's army surrounded them on three sides.

The Mexican soldiers knew they must fight to the death or to surrender. The Mexican soldiers threw their guns down, raising their hands high in the air. They wanted to see their families again rather than have the Empire's soldiers slaughter them like cattle in this war.

The Empire's army stopped firing, and an announcer said in Spanish over loudspeakers, "Soldiers, please put your hands in the air and walk towards us. If you comply, then no harm will come to you. Our war is not with you but with your government. Once we take over your government, you will be citizens of the American Empire. We will be brothers under one flag. You can even join our army and earn better pay."

The announcer repeated the message over and over again until the last Mexican soldier surrendered. Half the Empire's army remained outside Puebla, detaining the Mexican military.

The Empire's army pitched tents and let the Mexican soldiers sit inside while the Empire's soldiers guarded the outside. They also fed the Mexican soldiers and gave medical care to their injured.

After the Empire had captured Mexico City, the President would let the Mexican soldiers go home.

The other half of the Empire's troops marched to Mexico City, which was 70 miles further west from Puebla.

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Troops from the Laredo army base headed to Monterrey, Mexico, the country's industrial base and third-largest city. Troops drove along the Inter-American Highway, which started in Laredo, Texas, and ended in Panama City, Panama. They would drive along this highway to capture Monterrey and Mexico City.

Monterrey didn't prepare for the invasion, and the city government fell quickly.

A battalion of the Empire's troops remained, controlling the government.

The rest of the troops loaded onto trucks and headed to Mexico City, the grand prize of the Empire. It was Mexico's largest city and the seat of the National Mexican Government. The troops would reach Mexico City by the following day.

The Mexican army waited outside the northern suburbs of Mexico City at dawn.

Sunrise emanated bands of yellow, orange, and a bloody red as gunfire erupted early in the morning. Machine guns and the explosions of artillery shells deafened the calmness and peacefulness of the morning air.

The Empire's troops dug trenches about four miles from Mexico's front line.

Several Mexican tanks, the Lynx Armored Fighting Vehicles, approached the frontline. The Lynx, a small French armored vehicle, looked like a Ford Pinto dressed in armor. However, these tanks fired the powerful 90 mm rounds.

Several Lynxes appeared and drove within the firing range of the Empire's army. The Empire's troops annihilated these vehicles with the M252 Mortars.

The Mexican army retaliated by firing with Howitzers, halting the Empire's troops' advance.

A battalion used 30 trailers to set up a launch site for the Patriot missile system farther north. Each trailer held a launcher that fired 20 deadly surprises.

As the satellite honed over the battlefield, the Empire's soldiers launched 100 cluster bombs into the sky.

Several minutes later, death fell from the sky as the cluster bombs broke apart into a hundred little bomblets. They exploded once they hit the ground, sending metal shrapnel into the air.

Cluster bombs struck fear into the Mexican soldiers' hearts as the bombs killed their comrades or severely injured them.

Cluster bombs rained down upon the Mexican armies in Guadalajara and Mexico City.

The Mexican Air Force entered the battlefield. They flew the U.S.-made Blackhawk helicopters and Northrop F-5 Freedom Fighters. The Freedom Fighters were light and traveled at supersonic speeds around 1,000 miles per hour.

A formation of 9 Mexican Blackhawks maneuvered around to the east side of the front while 5 Freedom Fighters flew in from the western side.

Both carried pods of cluster bombs and napalm. However, the Mexican Air Force couldn't match the Patriot Missiles System. Missiles appeared from the sky, honed in, and destroyed the Mexican fighters and helicopters.

Rain droplets of metal began falling from the sky.

An hour later, the Patriot System launched another wave of cluster bombs against the Mexican army in Mexico City and Guadalajara.

The Mexican soldiers had enough as survivors packed into their High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (Humvee) and fled.

By noon, the U.S. Army smashed through the Mexican army's defenses, defeating the Mexican army.

The Empire's soldiers climbed onto trucks and drove to the federal government complexes to claim the grand prize.

As the Empire's army traveled through the battlefields, the soldiers coughed and gagged from the stench of death and carnage clinging to the air.

Three Empire's army divisions converged and descended on the federal government's complex in Mexico City.

The Empire captured Mexico. Meanwhile, the Empire's medical corps trailed behind the army, sweeping through the battlefields and searching for injured soldiers and victims.

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The American Empire added 31 states and 100 million citizens.

President Davis dissolved the Mexican federal government and appointed the governors of the new Mexican states.

The President expanded the House of Representatives to 581 members, the original 435 members of Congress, a representative from Cuba, and 145 from Mexico. The U.S. Senate rose to 164 members.

On the eve of Mexico's defeat, President Davis addressed the nation:

Yesterday, the American Empire invaded Mexico.  
She fought back bravely, but she fell.  
We lost a total of 1,200 good men and women to this invasion.  
Their blood and sacrifice are not lost in vain.  
They become heroes of the Empire.  
We will never forget the fallen soldiers' hard work, sacrifice, and  
dedication to the Empire.  
Now, we integrate Mexico into the Empire.  
All Mexican people living anywhere within the Empire now  
become her citizens.  
We will treat them somewhat under the law.  
They are as equal as you and I.  
Although the Empire claims victory, unfortunately, her  
schoolchildren must suffer.  
I remember the pain as a child when I had to memorize all 50  
states and their state capitals.  
Now, our children must know 82 states and their capitals.  
Casting all humor to the side, we were victorious today.  
However, we must be cautious.  
The American Empire has entered dangerous times.  
The world is nervous about a strong Empire.  
I believe the world will strike back at us.  
I am putting the whole American Empire on red alert.  
Thus, keep a close eye on your surroundings.  
Remain vigilant.  
If you see anything suspicious, do not hesitate to contact the  
authorities.  
After the Empire controls the Americas, we will be safe.  
We have a sophisticated satellite system, aka Star Wars Defense  
System, that shoots missiles out of the skies.  
Great oceans surround us, making any invasion into the Empire  
impossible.  
Do not be afraid.  
This red alert will be short.  
The American Empire will grow and prosper, becoming more  
powerful.

The American people have become more prosperous under the American Empire.

We have united all Americans under one flag.

As a new symbol of the Empire, we redesigned the American flag.

The 13 red and white stripes still sweep across the flag from left to right, just like the old flag.

However, the blue rectangle is placed in the center, and 82 small silver stars lie on top, forming an outline of a larger star.

Each small star represents a state in the Empire, while the giant star's outline represents the Empire's aggregate power.

The American Empire will become one of the most powerful empires the world has ever seen.

As the President concluded his speech, all the Empire's citizens stood up and started clapping and hollering. President Jerrick Ray Davis pulled it off.

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The President kept the U.S. military branches intact, and each branch had its general: the General of the Army, the General of the Navy, the General of the Air Force, and the General of the Marines. In the map room at the White House, President Davis sat at the center of a table with four generals sitting on the sides.

Although the President wanted to combine all the military branches, he knew the consolidation would undermine soldiers' morale. Soldiers are proud of their branch, and they would resent the President.

The President stated, "I will expand the military using Mexican citizens. We will reopen and rebuild the 12 Mexican military districts."

The President promoted General Edwards to the General of the Army after he had helped President Davis take over the federal government. The General's face reddened, and he uttered, "Sir, may I interject? We need more soldiers, but isn't this a dangerous policy? New Mexican recruits may not be loyal to you, sir. Their hearts and minds are loyal to Mexico. They could resent you and the Empire.

If we had placed traitors and saboteurs in the wrong positions, they would wreak havoc on our military.”

“You raise a good point, but we must build up our military at any cost. However, we will spread the recruits among the army bases to reduce sabotage. I am worried Europe will invade, and I want to be ready for them. I can feel a bigger battle brewing on the horizon.”

“Yes, sir, we’ll get right on it. We’ll reopen Mexico’s military districts.”

Although the President was worried, he displayed his poker face, emanating strength and intelligence. However, the General raised a good point. Recruits may not be loyal to him because he invaded a free and sovereign nation.

President Davis continued, “What is the status of Europe? We must be prepared for them.”

“Sir, it’s not looking good. We have reports that Europe is stationing troops in Canada. Canada and Europe think you’re becoming too strong, and you’ll invade Canada and then cross the ocean to Europe.”

The President sighed and added, “This is something I did not want to hear. I would leave Canada alone. Don’t the Canadians understand that?”

“Mr. President, Canadians don’t know because our troops are busy in Mexico. This is the perfect time to strike us at our moment of weakness. We must open two fronts. The Canadians know that they can’t stop us after the Empire conquered Mexico and South America. The Empire will be undefeatable,” General Edwards stated poignantly, adding, “We’ll become invincible.”

“What about Europe using nuclear weapons against us? Will Star Wars protect us if they launch missiles from Canada?” The President asked.

“Sir, our scientists believe we’re vulnerable to a nuclear strike if the Canadians launch them close to the border and fly them low. Otherwise, the Star Wars satellite can blast them out of the skies,” the General of the Air Force said with a beaming smile.

“Mr. President, what do you think our course of action should be?” The General for the Navy asked.

“We have no choice; we must invade Canada.”

“Invade Canada? Sir, then we’ll open two fronts. We don’t have the resources,” the General for the Navy added. He felt acid building in his stomach, like the feeling at a mechanic’s garage when a \$30 oil change turned into a \$600 engine overhaul.

“Yes, I know. Fighting multiple fronts led to defeat as we spread our resources too thinly, but we halted our expansion at Mexico’s southern border. We will station 25% of our troops there, maintaining our authority and protecting the border. We should have enough troops to thwart any approaching armies from South America. We secretly and subtly stationed at the army bases along the US-Canadian border for the remaining troops. After we had invaded and conquered Canada, we break it up into small states,” the President stated while he pounded his fist on the table, emphasizing his words.

The President inquired, “Do we have any reliable intelligence from Canada? Does Quebec want to secede from Canada?”

“We believe the Quebec Sovereignty Movement is serious, and they support Quebec’s succession from Canada. The movement’s leader, Pierre-Marc Johnson, has always supported succession,” General Edwards stated.

“Good, send our diplomats up there to talk with them. Quebec would become an autonomous country free from the Empire if it were serious. This meeting is adjourned.”

The President stood up and dashed out of the Map Room.

The generals created a commotion as they gathered their things and departed. The President gave them a new mission: They must defeat Canada quickly. Otherwise, the American Empire would become vulnerable to an invasion.

Hell would freeze over before President Davis allowed such a thing to happen.

## *Canada Collapses*

President Davis mobilized the Empire’s troops and invaded Canada to prevent Canada from invading the Empire.

The President used his Navy to form a blockade around Canadian waters. His fleet of 20 aircraft carriers sailed along

Canada's east and west coasts, isolating Canada from the rest of the world.

Submarines filled the waters as they traveled up and down the coast. They would shoot anything that resembled a military vessel. The President distributed the remaining battleships along the United States and Mexico coastlines.

Europe or any other country would be foolish to send ships near North America because the Empire's Navy protected them nicely.

President Davis activated the Star Wars satellites and blasted the Canadian communication satellites from orbit. Powerful X-ray lasers burned large, gaping holes in the satellites, causing them to fail. The President wanted Canada and Europe to enter this war without communications, leaving them in the dark.

The President ordered the Empire's troops to march. Troops from Everett, Washington, headed straight up, taking Vancouver, British Columbia, while soldiers from Detroit, Michigan, crossed the bridge into Windsor, Canada. Finally, the troops from Watertown, New York, headed north for Ottawa, the capital of Canada.

The Detroit army planned a rendezvous with the Watertown army just south of Ottawa. After Ottawa fell, Canada would be defeated.

Unfortunately, the President's advisors were wrong. The European troops protected Ottawa well, waiting for the Empire's army. Canada and Europe wouldn't repeat the same mistake as Mexico. They planned to thwart President Davis and stop his growing Empire.

Toronto and Detroit were separated by 244 miles, and the troops would be there within half a day to capture Toronto. Then they would merge with the other army division just south of Ottawa.

Trucks carried troops and tanks through Detroit, crossing the main bridge to Windsor, Canada. Troops traveled through Windsor until they reached Toronto, where Europe stationed thousands of soldiers.

Unfortunately, the United European armed forces constructed deep trenches with metallic covers for their trenches. Soldiers fired

their rifles through the slots, but then they could slam the slots closed, protecting them.

The covers protected the soldiers from the cluster bombs. A direct hit from a cluster bomb would take out a soldier directly underneath a cover, but neighboring soldiers were protected well from the shrapnel.

The Europeans fired an assortment of weapons. The Germans fired the Heckler & Koch G36 assault rifles; the French shot their FAMAS popup-style rifles, and Canadians fired the Colt Canada C7 rifles, a copy of the M16.

The Empire halted its advance, and the soldiers dug trenches out of the range of European artillery shells, holding their position. They waited for instructions from the Empire's headquarters.

The Empire's troops from the Watertown army base moved along I-81 into Canada to take Ottawa, Ontario. The distance was only 130 miles.

A half-mile bridge connected the two countries on the northern tip of Lake Ontario.

The February air was still frigid. Upper New York State was scenic, with woods and beautiful lakes. Leafless trees cast an ambiance of loneliness and isolation. The trees wouldn't come to life until the end of March, a month away.

As the Empire's armies approached the bridge, they saw the wreckage of the bridge in the water.

Although the Canadian side of the bridge appeared to be deserted, the sounds of machine fire erupted the quietness of the woods.

Through binoculars, the Empire's soldiers saw the armed forces using the same metallic covers that protected the troops from the cluster bombs. The European forces also hid within the forests across the border.

The Empire's troops hunkered down and set up trenches out of range of the enemies. They waited because exchanging gunfire would do no good.

The U.S. Army set up their Patriot missile command 20 miles south of the Watertown troops. The command received reports that the Canadians and Europeans used metallic covers to protect

themselves from the Patriot missiles. However, they fired 10 test rockets.

Troops on both sides of the border heard the supersonic whiz of the Patriot missiles flying through the air.

Several Empire soldiers with binoculars watched the missiles strike the targets on the Canadian side. As they suspected, a direct hit penetrated the covers, but the neighboring soldiers were well protected.

After the battlefield had become quiet, the Europeans and Canadians began firing their machine guns. The French launched their 120 mm Mortars. Soldiers dropped 41-pound chubby mortars with fins into the launch tubes, blasting them 8 miles over the river to the Empire's side of the battlefield.

Luckily, the mortars didn't hit the Empire's troops.

The Empire's troops from the army base in Washington succeeded because Europe concentrated its forces around Ottawa, Ontario, leaving Western Canada unprotected.

The Empire's troops drove across the border to Vancouver, the third-largest city in Canada. The troops reached their destination within half a day, and Vancouver fell quickly as the soldiers surrounded the city's government buildings.

Half the troops descended into the bay to rendezvous with the Empire's Navy. The Navy transported them across the bay to the southern tip of Vancouver Island, Victoria's provincial capital. Victoria fell quickly with no loss of life for both sides of the war.

President Davis was not shocked, but South America joined the Europeans.

Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and the Presidents of Brazil and Colombia teamed up. Although Chavez was nearing 71, he kept an iron hand over his people.

Three countries struck at the Empire in the south. Their combined troops headed north through Central America and upward into North America. They hoped the Empire's resources were scattered thinly so they could bust through. Then they would force the Empire's troops to retreat north.

Venezuela sent 100,000 troops, while Brazil and Columbia each sent 50,000.

Four Nimitz-class nuclear aircraft carriers were waiting for them off the coast of both sides of the Panama Canal.

As the combined troops crossed the Panama Canal, the Empire's military launched the Tomahawk missiles with the BLU-97/B. The missiles moved at a snail's pace of 500 miles per hour. After they had reached their destination, they separated into clusters of bomblets, raining down to the earth. Then the bomblets explode on impact, filling the air with shrapnel – a cruel, crude device to kill masses of people or soldiers.

Around the Panama Canal, screams filled the night as monstrous missiles killed, hurt, and terrified soldiers.

Some soldiers fell into the canal dead as shrapnel left gaping gashes in their flesh.

Other soldiers lost legs and limbs.

The surviving soldiers turned and fled home; some helped their injured comrades, dragging them to safety.

The battlefield with South America quickly ended. Soldiers didn't bust through the Empire's defenses unless they wanted to suffer massive casualties.

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The President, generals, and several advisors hunched over a large map of North and South America sprawled over a massive maple table.

The President rubbed his chin with his thumb and index finger, saying, "I see the plot thickens."

The General of the Air Force asked, "Sir, what should we do?"

"The naval blockade placed a protective curtain around North America. I am not worried about the Navy. Our army should take over British Columbia with no problems. I am still debating whether to send them inward to the state of Edmonton, but it is too remote. I see South America made their last stand, but I am not worried about them. It's taking Ottawa. I think the Europeans want to wear us out. Then they can march their troops into New York and head down to take Washington, D.C. How long do you think their military forces can hold out?"

“Sir, I imagine they are similar to ours. They probably have enough supplies for a year, even though they cannot get any new supplies through the blockade,” General Edwards said.

The President continued his plans, “Good, here is what we will do...”

After President Davis had stopped speaking, the generals and advisors smiled gleefully. This plan could work.

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After a week, the battlefield didn't move an inch. Then the Empire's troops received orders to retreat from the battlefield five miles. The President had planned something wicked.

Then it happened. Invisible lighting came from the sky.

Soldiers saw wavy distortions in the air as something strong, violent, and invisible traveled through the air at light speed with tremendous heat energy.

The Empire used a new weapon. After the beam had hit something, the object disintegrated. Metal turned into red-hot lava while trees and people burst into flames.

Occasionally, a breeze drifted over the battlefield towards the Empire's troops, carrying a burnt meat smell. A fine mist of soot rained down upon the Empire's soldiers and equipment. Soot was the infinitesimal remains of soldiers struck by the invisible death ray.

President Davis launched a new Star Wars satellite into space above the battlefield.

The satellite used two powerful X-ray lasers to fire down upon the troops. One laser shot while the other stood on standby. The satellite pummeled one battle front outside of Toronto for 15 minutes, then cooled for half an hour. Afterward, it blasted the other front for 15 minutes.

The satellite kept firing until it burned up or the enemy surrendered. After several hours of torture and death from these wicked lasers, the Europeans began retreating. They ran from the battlefield, screaming.

The Empire saw the European troops break formation through binoculars. However, they waited for the scientists to turn off the powerful lasers before they could follow.

The troops from Detroit headed into Toronto. Passing the trenches, they saw they released hell upon the earth.

As the X-ray laser touched a spot, it burned that spot into a black char, destroying every trace of life. Tanks and those metal covers had large holes melted through them. In some places, the molten metal formed metallic icicles as it cooled.

President Davis ordered them to help any survivors.

Scores of soldiers lay dying on the battlefield as the laser grazed them, burning a limb or two cleanly off.

Army medical units followed behind the Empire's soldiers, scouring the battlefields for survivors. The medical units stayed with the fallen European soldiers and aided the sick and dying.

The war with Canada had ended, and she belonged to the Empire.

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General Edwards ran into the President's office, screaming, "Sir, you won't believe our good news. Canada and Europe have surrendered. We got them, Sir."

"That is excellent news. I guess they did not like our new weapons system," the President retorted, smilingly.

"Sir, if you give the command, we can have the Navy cross the Atlantic Ocean and start landing troops in Europe. We can take them."

"General, please sit down. Remember, our war is a poker game. Now, we are ahead and have beaten the house. Eventually, we must rise from the table, cash in our chips, and go home. If we continue to play, we can lose everything."

"Sir, please come out with it. Don't use any analogies."

"All conquerors have faced the same situation we are facing. When do you stop expanding an empire? I do not think we have the resources to annex Europe to the Empire. We could take several countries but only temporarily. If the people revolt and have armed

protests against us, then we will lose them. A nation's spirit can rise and unite against an invading threat, and then they kick us out. Then we cross the ocean with our tails between our legs while all our work unravels."

"What do you want to do then sir?"

"Let Europe take her troops home. They may land any vessels except military airplanes and warships. We will show them respect, feed them, help their injured soldiers, and let them return home."

"Sir, the troops can retrain and then return."

"That is not going to happen in our lifetime. After we control the Americas, two great oceans will protect us, along with one hell of a network of Star Wars satellites. The Empire's borders are well protected."

The President stood up and approached a mini bar hidden in an old globe of the earth. The globe was a dark brown map from the Middle Ages when explorers started crossing the oceans.

The President opened the globe and pulled out an old bottle of Dom Pérignon. A frosty mist rose over the sides of the bar, dissipating into the air.

The President grabbed a couple of Champaign glasses and returned to his desk. He pried the cork to the bottle and poured some Champaign for the General and himself.

"Let us celebrate our victory, General."

The General grabbed his glass and raised it for a toast.

"We give a toast that the big battle is over. Now, we can start building. Cheers," the President replied,

They both clinked glasses and drank the sweet, bubbly contents.

"Don't worry, General. I still need you. After we develop Mexico, Central and South America are next."

"Yes, sir," the General exclaimed. Then he gently placed his Champaign glass on the desk and turned to leave the office.

The President began working and unraveled several large blueprints of new buildings he wanted constructed in Mexico. He laid the blueprints over the desk's surface and studied them.

The blueprints soothed and quieted the President's mind. He needed to relax because tonight, he would address the nation and tell the citizens that we had won—the Empire had succeeded.

On the evening of Canada's surrender, President Davis addressed the nation:

Today is a glorious day for the American Empire.  
The Canadian and European armies surrendered.  
Canada has six provinces and three territories.  
The territories are free to join a province or become an independent province.  
They will become independent states of the Empire.  
They will be just as they were before the war.  
The only difference is that we eliminated the Canadian federal government.  
Further, the provinces cannot build a military or station troops from a foreign country.  
As I promised, the Empire is at peace.  
We have much work ahead of us.  
The Empire will develop Mexico, bringing them up to our standards.  
Mexicans are full citizens of the Empire.  
They may work, live, and study in any state within the Empire.  
Mexico will adopt our legal system, but they can retain their language and culture.  
They will grow and prosper as we unite two significant cultures in America under one flag.  
Now, we are true Americans.  
We are free to travel between any region in North America, and eventually, we will also include South America.

The nation rejoiced, and the invasion had ended. Canada fell, and the Empire firmly controlled Mexico.

Canada was already a developed country, and the Empire didn't need to develop it. The provincial governments were always strong and large, providing most services to their residents. On the other hand, the Canadian national government was small and weak; thus, eliminating the national government would have little impact on the Canadian provinces. Then each province was too weak to stand up to the Empire.

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The economy grew furiously at 8% per year before the invasion of Cuba. Then it started slowing down.

Adding 31 states to the Empire, the economy grew at a phenomenal 30% per year for several years. Furthermore, the Empire's population climbed from 300 million to 400 million.

President Davis jumped started the Mexican economy by investing trillions of dollars. The President would build new roads, schools, hospitals, and bridges. He would upgrade the fresh and wastewater treatment plants, the electric power lines and distribution system, and remodel abandoned buildings.

Unfortunately, President Davis did something dishonest by allowing the Federal Reserve to inject more money into the economy, exceeding the amount of gold and silver in the Fed's vault.

The President knew Americans would remain faithful to the financial system and not convert their money into precious metals.

Unfortunately, the conquest of Mexico came with a hefty price tag, but after the Mexican economy had rebounded, the tax revenues would flow into the Empire's coffers. Then the government would shore up the gold and silver in the Federal Reserve's vaults, hoping the citizens would never discover his financing scam.

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After the successful invasion of Mexico, the President met with the top officials in his government. All cabinet members sat in the conference room next to the Oval Office in the Whitehouse.

Agent Harris, who handled secret projects, attended.

Everyone quickly sat down, and President Davis began, "The invasion is going well. Now we come to a crossroads, where I must take a Mexican wife."

Everyone in the room was blank because the President never talked about marriage.

Jennifer was angry, but she hid her anger well. She wouldn't hesitate to marry Jerrick if he had asked.

The President continued, “I must prove to the Mexican people that I am honest about integrating Mexicans into the Empire, granting them as full citizens. I do not want the people to think a superior race conquered them and will enslave them, forcing them to work the crappy jobs in the Empire. One way I can prove I am serious is by taking a Mexican wife.”

Dan asked, “Mr. President, what features do you want your wife to have?”

“I am open to outside appearances. I want her to be beautiful, but a natural beauty. If she is not wearing makeup, she is still attractive, but the important thing is that people must love her. When she enters a room, everyone brightens up and becomes excited, electrified, and hypnotized,” the President stated.

“What about love?” Jennifer asked.

“It would be nice that she would love me, but love is optional. Unfortunately, I am a very powerful person, and 99% of the women in the world would marry me because I hold a position of power and large reserves of wealth.”

Chad asked, “What do you want us to do, Mr. President?”

“I want you to select her. I want her to be perfect. She must represent the softer, feminine side of the Empire. She must be my complement, and all people of the Empire must love her, not just Mexicans.”

The room became silent because they knew President Davis was right. He must unite two cultures.

The President uttered, “Why are you guys silent? I brought you here for feedback. That is why I pay you the big bucks. Agent Harris, what do you think?”

“Sir, I’ll have agents scourer Mexico and find your perfect wife.”

“Thank you, Agent Harris. I have confidence in you. The meeting is adjourned.”

The cabinet members collected their notebooks and began departing.

“Agent Harris, please remain seated,” the President asked.

The room cleared as everyone scrambled for the door.

President Davis closed the door and returned to the head of the table.

Agent Harris remained seated.

“This must remain confidential between us.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I understand you speak Russian.”

“Yes, Sir. My parents emigrated from Russia 20 years ago. We still speak Russian at home. I also majored in Russian in college for an easy A.”

“Good; like I said, this information must remain confidential. A long time ago, I fell in love with two Russian women. One was Russian, and the other was Tatar. Your mission is to find out what has happened to them. Under no circumstances are you to talk to them. I want to know how their lives turned out. Some pictures would be nice, and this assignment is off the record. I will pay you for your expenses and a \$100,000 bonus for a well-done job. Is your mission clear?”

“Yes, Sir; I’ll take a personal leave and sneak into Russia. I’ll find out what happened to them. What are their names and addresses, Sir?”

The President wrote down their names and approximate addresses and drew a rough map of the neighborhood and apartments’ locations.

“Hopefully, this will be enough information for you to find them.”

Agent Harris took the maps and information and exited the room. He must complete two missions for the President.

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After the meeting, Jennifer escaped to the ladies’ room, struggling to hold back her tears.

She rushed into a stall and sat down on the toilet, crying. She always wanted to be with Jerrick and stand beside him as the First Lady.

Now Jerrick is talking silly. Please, a Mexican wife! What is Jerrick thinking? How can a woman hold together an Empire? Why

are men such stupid creatures? Which century do they think they're living in?

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A month later, Agent Harris returned to the Oval Office.

President Davis invited him in and asked, "Would you like a tea or a coke."

"Sir, I'll take a Coke."

The President opened his small refrigerator under his desk and retrieved an icy cold can of Coke for Agent Harris. Beads of moisture formed on the can.

Agent Harris began, "I found Lidya easily. She married a construction manager and then divorced him six years later. She still lives in a small apartment in south Moscow. She has one son and one daughter."

The agent pulled out a photograph of Lidya and handed it to the President.

Jerrick recognized her, but she had aged. Mother Russia was still cruel to her women. She almost transformed into one of those decrepit Russian grandmothers who hobbled along the streets as they walked.

"What did you find out about Amaliji?"

"Sir, please don't be mad."

"Why would I be mad?"

"I talked to her."

"Really; what did she say?"

"I had trouble tracking Amaliji down. Her parents still live in that apartment you gave me directions to, but Amaliji moved away and married a rich Russian businessman. She still lives in Moscow and caught me taking pictures of her house. She knew I worked for you."

The agent lay several pictures on the table in front of President Davis.

Jerrick studied them. Amaliji was still beautiful, even after all this time.

“She is still married but doesn’t have any children. She told me to give you this letter and made me promise that only you would read it.”

The agent passed the President the sealed letter. On the front of the envelope, she wrote, ‘To Jerrick from Amaliji’ in Russian.

The President opened the letter and saw she had written it in Russian. He handed the letter to the agent and asked, “Please translate it. It has been a long time since I studied Russian.”

The agent read the letter aloud,

“Dear Jerrick. It has been a long time. After all these years, I still love you. That offer is still open. You can still join me in Moscow, or we can compromise. We can run away to a tropical island. I’m tired of the long, cold Moscow winters, but I know it is too late. Michigan reclaimed its lost son. You kept your word. You wanted to make Michigan and the United States great again, and you did it.

I tried to get a visa to enter the United States in 2005 and again in 2006, but the U.S. Embassy rejected my request. I tried twice to come and get you, but I failed. A wealthy Russian businessman proposed to me in 2007, and I accepted. I try to love him, but I can only think of you, and that particular year we had together. I stay with him because he is a good man and has been good to me. In time, I’ll love him with all my heart. If I never do, I still plan to stick with him.

Then I got a surprise in 2017. I saw your picture in the news when you overthrew the government and declared your presidency. I cried for you because I knew you would never return to me. Russian agents combed through all the neighborhoods that month. I know they found Lidya and talked to her. The Russian government wanted to know everything about you, but I slipped through. As far as I know, nobody knows about us except you, me, and your agent friend. I plan to keep it that way.

Now you have grown up, and you made everyone scared in Russia. Our government believes that once you are done in America, you’ll cross into Russia through Alaska. The government is doing everything to thwart your future attack. I know the government probably will never let you enter Russia again.

Whenever you finish building your Empire, you can return to me. I'll be waiting for you. I'm sharing a picture of me here so you will remember me always.

Love Amaliji”

The agent handed the President the picture.

The President examined Amaliji's picture in the café when she was a young woman in 2005.

The President placed the picture next to the recent pictures. Amaliji gracefully aged. According to these photographs, she looked five years older, although the pictures were 15 years apart.

“She's a beautiful woman, Mr. President.”

“Yes, I know. I wondered what life would have been like if I stayed in Moscow with her.”

“Sir, you're the President. You can do anything you want. If you want her as your wife, say the word. Several agents and I will have her in your office in three days.”

The President chuckled lightly and said, “That is a tempting suggestion, but I must marry a Mexican woman. I must unite two great cultures. I will spend time in Mexico, ensuring the transition goes smoothly.”

“Yes, sir, I understand.”

“You are dismissed agent.”

The agent left the letter, pictures, and documents behind.

The President placed Lidya's pictures and documents into the shredder because he harbored bitter feelings over their break up. Then he placed Amaliji's pictures and her letter in the top drawer of his desk.

The agent did make a good point. He is the ruler. He could marry Amaliji, but she needs to speak English, and Americans may not fall in love with her.

The President knew he must marry a Mexican woman. He wanted to ensure his Empire stayed intact for at least 500 years. He did not want it to crumble when he lay on his deathbed. Jerrick wanted to build something that would stand for centuries.

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Agent Harris and his agents found President Davis' perfect wife. The President sat behind his desk in the Oval Office when Agent Harris brought in Thalia for the first time.

Thalia Morales was beautiful and intelligent. Her long, black, curly hair almost reached her waistline. Her complexion was a light creamy brown, and her eyes were the brownest olive. Her personality complemented her beauty. She was a powerful magnet, emanating excitement and radiance as she entered a room. Everyone would turn and notice her.

As they entered the Oval Office, the President stood up, walked to the door, and greeted them.

The President took Thalia's hand and lightly kissed it. Then he gestured for the agent and Thalia to sit near the fireplace on the sofa.

The President sat across from them in a dark leather armchair.

"I must say, Agent Harris, you found exactly what I wanted." Then he turned to Thalia and added, "You know why Agent Harris brought you here?"

"Agent Harris explained everything to me, and I accepted the proposal."

"Good! Let me ask you one question: why did you agree to marry me?"

"I wanted to ensure no harm comes to my people," Thalia said nicely, but the President detected a slight coldness in her voice.

"Good, then it is settled. My staff will move your things into the Queen's Bedroom for now."

The President stood up and walked to his desk to call for his staff.

Several staff members arrived and guided Thalia to her accommodations, where royalty once slept in the Whitehouse.

Agent Harris remained seated.

The President sat down and began, "Where did you find her?"

"We found her in Mexico City. She completed an MBA at the Universidad of Mexico. She comes from a rich, powerful family. Her father owned several maquiladoras along the US-Mexican border, but then he went bankrupt after the 2016 Hyperinflation."

"Does she have any personality flaws?"

Agent chortled and stated, “She can be a little feisty.”

“Feisty, uh?”

“Yes, Sir, I guess she always gets her way. She doesn’t hesitate to give her opinion, whether or not you ask for it.”

The next day, Jerrick Davis and Thalia ate their first formal dinner in the Family Dining Room in the Whitehouse. The dining room emanated wealth and status. Yellow silk curtains hung on the windows, a large crystal chandelier dangled above the dining table, and the fireplace had a white marble mantel carved with eagles and festoons.

The dining table was small, and they sat across each other while Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* played softly in the background.

One servant stood by the door, who kept their drinks full.

Another servant brought in the food and removed the dirty dishes.

“I thought it would be nice to have a Spanish dish. So, how do you like the paella?”

“Paella is not bad. I see the chef added saffron, which adds a soft, flowery aroma to the dish.”

“How are your accommodations?”

“Room is charming. I see you wasted no expense on me. The room is fit for a queen.”

“Good! I want to ensure you are well taken care of.”

“Should I call you Mr. President or Jerrick since we’ll be married?”

“You can choose, but Jerrick is fine.”

“Jerrick, what are your intentions for Mexico?”

“I thought my intentions were clear. I am uniting two great cultures.”

“Come on, Jerrick. I know from history that when two cultures clash, the superior always takes over and assimilates the weaker one. Then usually the weaker culture becomes slaves.”

“Thalia, I am being sincere with you. I plan to develop Mexico. People can keep their language and culture. Besides, didn’t your father own several maquiladoras? I thought those were Mexican slave factories that forced young Mexican women to toil hard on products shipped to the United States.”

Thalia started blushing and lowered her face in shame. Then she raised her face again, and her facial expression softened. She stared at Jerrick, “I’ve never seen a maquiladora. My father forbids me to come near one.”

Jerrick interjected, “Thalia, do not get me wrong. I am not here to pass judgment on you. We made mistakes on both sides of the fence. Before the 2008 Financial Crisis, we used illegal Mexican workers to build our houses and to cut our grass. We paid them meager wages for their hard work. After the Financial Crisis, we rounded the Mexicans up by the millions and deported them to Mexico. Then the geniuses in Washington, D.C., constructed a fence along the border, like a fence would stem the tide of illegal workers coming to the United States. Some blamed the Mexicans for the financial crisis, which is ludicrous.”

The President sipped his wine and continued, “Let’s put these mistakes behind us. I plan to build a great country. All citizens will be equal in the Empire, and you will be their queen.”

The President noticed that Thalia reddened again.

Everyone treated Thalia well, like a princess, but no one had ever elevated her to a queen’s status.

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The President set his wedding day on Friday, March 8, 2024.

They held the wedding in the Virgen de la Asunción, Veracruz, Mexico. The cathedral was built in the 17th century. In the center was a large dome or cupola that loomed three stories above the church. Under the dome, the audience could stare upward at the religious murals and frescoes of God and Jesus or glance at the stained glass mosaic windows during sermons.

A large crystal candelabra that held 82 candles dangled from the ceiling in the foyer near the entrance. A narrow tower with a small dome stood next to the church with five levels, complete with Roman arches and columns.

Thalia and the President chose the wedding to start at 5 P.M.

All top leadership of the National Worker's Party, the state's governors, and the Empire's federal government officials paid homage to this grand event.

Thalia wore a long white wedding gown designed by Yumi Katsura, a famous Japanese designer. The gown was modern, and the arms and shoulders were exposed. A light-blue sash wrapped around her waist while her veil had a slightly bluish hue.

The President was dressed in a traditional morning dress reserved for British royalty. He wore a black tailcoat, white waistcoat, and brown-striped trousers.

His best man, Dan Bigler, stood to the President's right. He wore an identical, tailored British Morning suit.

In the corner of the church, an orchestral began playing the famous bridal march from Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin*.

The audience and the nation watched as Thalia and her father meandered slowly down the church aisle.

Her brides' maids followed close behind.

Everyone turned to stare at the bride.

The dress complemented Thalia's natural beauty. The wedding gown had several expensive gems that sparkled as Thalia strolled to the altar.

After a minute, Thalia joined Jerrick Davis at the altar.

A Catholic priest started the ceremony, "Father, today in heaven, may we join this couple in holy matrimony. Do you, Jerrick Ray Davis, take Thalia Morales as your lawful wedded wife, whom you will love and cherish? Who will you care for through sickness, health, joy, and sorrow? Who will you face your life's experiences with and share one another's goals and dreams with for as long as you live?"

"I do," President Davis said.

"Do you, Thalia Morales, take Jerrick Davis as your lawful wedded husband, whom you will love and cherish? Who will you care for through sickness, health, joy, and sorrow? Who will you face your life's experiences with and share one another's goals and dreams with for as long as you live?"

"I do," Thalia said.

“Then I may pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.”

President Davis gently lifted Thalia’s veil and kissed her sweetly for the first time.

Then President Davis led Thalia outside the church.

The orchestral began playing the wedding march from Felix Mendelssohn’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

The guests stood up and started applauding.

An old-style Landau royal carriage waited outside. Two white horses pulled the 19th-century British convertible carriage.

Two aids helped the First Lady and the President climb into the vehicle.

The driver thrashed the horses, signaling them to start walking. He drove the carriage to the wedding reception.

A battalion of soldiers in dress uniforms walked in formation on all sides of the carriage.

The military marked this special occasion, honoring the Commander and Chief of the Empire’s forces. Off to the side, military soldiers fired a five-gun salute. Several naval vessels fired large canons along the shoreline of Veracruz, exploding massive booms into the air.

As dusk approached, fireworks lit up the skies.

The carriage pulled to the front of the Municipal Palace in downtown Veracruz, one of the oldest buildings in Mexico. The architectural style was Baroque, and builders constructed it in 1608.

An entourage led the President and Thalia into the interior courtyard. Many looked at the impressive arches along the courtyard’s perimeter, which had expansive balconies. The group entered a five-story tower and the dining hall.

The guests began filing in.

The President and his wife sat on the stage’s head table with his cabinet and top party leaders. Dan sat to the President’s right and raised his champagne glass for a toast.

Jennifer and Chad sat at the table’s end. Jennifer squinted at Thalia a few times, but Thalia never noticed.

The guests quieted down and raised their Champaign glasses in unison.

Dan began, “May today be a glorious day. Our leader has married a beautiful, intelligent woman. May they live happily together and prosper along with the Empire, and as a side note, to my best friend, Jerrick, buddy, you did it. Some moments, I had my doubts, but you pulled it off. You did something that very few leaders of all humanity have done. History will record you as one of the greatest leaders of all humanity. You’re the best of the best. Cheers.”

The guests raised their Champaign glasses in a salute, and they sipped their Champaign. Then they cheered.

After the toasts, everyone ate a magnificent meal fit for a king. Servers brought several entrées, starting with a light-green salad, then plates of veal, steaks, and shrimp with couscous, wild rice, and roasted potatoes.

Then everyone topped off the meal with a wedding cake that stood three feet tall and resembled the Tower of Pisa. The cake had five levels, and white, snowy frosting covered the cake with pearl-like beads outlining the edges and sprinkled with white and red roses. Every piece of the cake was edible.

Jerrick and Thalia were honored to cut the cake and distribute pieces to their guests. Then the party danced the night away in the wee hours of the night.

After the wedding, the President and First Lady spent their honeymoon in his small hometown in Michigan because the President knew they would spend much time in Mexico. Mexico needed their presence to ensure a smooth transition to the Empire.

The President and First Lady stayed three days on the upper floor of a hotel overlooking Lake Michigan.

The President and First Lady rented the whole floor. They occupied one room while their security took the other rooms.

Thalia loved the sandy shores and view of Lake Michigan. Unfortunately, the waters were too cold for a swim in March. However, Michigan’s shorelines offered a breathtaking, panoramic view. The water was a beautiful blue, while the beaches had light brown sand that looked clean and inviting.

The President and First Lady attended a grand feast at the Hotel on the first night. They invited Holland's mayor and party officials from the regional office of the National Workers' Party.

They attended a pig roast, a Hawaiian tradition that caught on in Michigan. A cook built a large fire in a pit. After the fire turned into hot coals, he placed a pig on top, buried it in the pit, and roasted it for several hours, ensuring the pig's meat became tender, succulent, and delicious.

On the second day, the limousine driver drove the President and Thalia around his old hometown.

Memories flooded Jerrick's mind as he described everyone and everything in his hometown.

At the end of the tour, the President asked the driver to drive to the Bell Road Bridge that spanned the Black River.

The driver stopped halfway on the bridge. Jerrick quickly got out, and Thalia trailed behind him. He looked over the rail and at the water, recollecting the good times.

"Jerrick, what is it? What is so special about this bridge?"

"I have many memories of this bridge. I used to drink and party under this bridge with my two best friends from high school. Their names were Larry and Tommy."

"What happened to your friends?"

"They disappeared in 2016 without a trace. They could still be alive. With all the chaos, people could re-emerge in society with new identities. With all the government's information stored in computer systems, those systems became useless after the programmers had fled and stopped working. The government couldn't verify people's identities and histories. After I had restructured the government, we got those systems back up. Luckily, most people were honest, but some people slipped through."

"Jerrick, I had no idea."

"Thalia, don't worry about it. We grew apart after high school. I grew up, and they didn't. I had dreams while their dreams were to act like children and mooch off their parents."

Jerrick walked to the end of the bridge and peered underneath it, scanning the area where the gang once hung out and partied. Then they returned to the limousine and climbed in.

Towards dusk, Thalia and Jerrick walked along the shores of Lake Michigan, holding hands.

The setting sun cast yellow, orange, and red bands over the land, while clouds on the far horizon were pinkish.

The President's armed security walked ahead and behind them.

Jerrick paused for a moment. Then he pulled Thalia close, embracing her tightly, "How do you like the view, Thalia?"

"The view is beautiful, almost magical. You grew up in a lovely and scenic area."

"That is one thing you can say about Michigan. She is in a beautiful state if people would stop and enjoy her beauty. When I was young, I didn't care. Now that I am older and more mature, I can stand here in awe over her beauty. Of course, it helps when a beautiful woman accompanies me."

Thalia began blushing.

Then they started kissing.

All the armed security guards turned their heads away, granting the couple privacy.

On the last honeymoon day, Jerrick went alone to see his hometown. Opening the hotel door, Jerrick turned to Thalia and said, "Thalia, go ahead and pack. I want to take the last cruise to my hometown. I probably will not see it again for a long time.

"Okay, I should be ready in a couple of hours."

Jerrick headed out the door and bought a large bouquet of red roses in the flower shop in the hotel's lobby. He instructed the driver to drive to Morning Glory Cemetery.

Jerrick instructed the driver to stop as they were going around a hill. Next, he jumped out with the bouquet in his hands.

The driver almost followed him, but he didn't see anyone around. He wished the President would be more cautious about his safety.

The President walked to two flat headstones and looked down.

He read the first stone, 'Here lies Dorothy G. Davis. Born on December 2, 1959, and died on May 20, 2016.'

Then he glanced down at the other headstone and saw 'John B. Davis. Born on September 25, 1946, and died on May 20, 2016.'

Jerrick brushed the dirt and debris from the headstones with his hand, then placed the roses on his mother's grave.

He visited their graves for the first time. Then he whispered, "I am sorry, Mom and Dad; I did not mean to get you killed. My dream was to become a great leader. I wanted you to hide underground, but you would not listen. I knew those bastards were dirty, but I did not think they were that dirty."

Jerrick made the sign of a cross over his heart and turned to leave. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket to dry one of his eyes, where a half tear had formed.

Then he returned to the limousine to pick up Thalia and return to the Whitehouse. He had much work to do and so little time.

He glanced at his parent's grave as a tinge of sadness invaded his heart.

After the honeymoon, the President spent little time with the First Lady. He sent her off to the corners of the Empire to speak at opening ceremonies for new schools and hospitals. She also spoke at numerous colleges and universities.

As President Davis predicted, the people loved the First Lady. She was a natural who projected confidence, strength, and charisma. He could not have asked for a better, more perfect wife. She represented the feminine side of the Empire, and the people loved her as a queen.

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On one occasion, the President invited the First Lady to inspect a maquiladora on the border.

The President invested with Thalia's father, and they re-opened his factories, re-tooling them to produce electric cars.

The President was not an environmental leader, but he portended the future. The Empire grew furiously, rapidly consuming its resources. The President allowed petroleum companies to drill offshore in the Gulf of Mexico, but the Empire's petroleum production kept declining, even after capturing Cuba's and Mexico's petroleum reserves.

The President would wean the Empire off petroleum. Petroleum would be available for large transport trucks and machinery, but he encouraged Americans to drive electric cars in their communities and gas-powered vehicles for long distances. He upgraded the electric transmission system by investing trillions in building brand-new coal and nuclear power plants. He wanted nuclear energy to supply at least 70% of the Empire's electrical energy needs.

President Davis had other motives. The Empire's strong demand for energy fueled large petroleum imports from the Middle East. He did not want the Empire's gold to leave the Empire and accumulate in the coffers and vaults in other countries. He also did not want the Empire at the mercy of foreign governments. A supply disruption can wreak havoc on a society, cracking the foundations of a strong Empire.

The President, the First Lady, and her father inspected the father's factory in Matamoros, Mexico.

The First Lady became horrified because she had never seen such large, noisy machines. They paused in front of a large machine.

A worker placed a flat sheet of steel into the machine's die. He pushed a button, and a two-ton press came slowly down, molding a car part.

Thalia saw the worker's hands fastened to cords. As the press lowered, the chords removed the worker's hands from the machine.

"That worker is chained to the machine," Thalia stated with a surprised expression as her eyes widened.

"He is chained in more ways than one. That worker works hard at this job to feed his family. Plus, those chords ensure the machine doesn't crush the worker's hands," Jerrick explained.

After the press had risen, the worker removed a new panel for a car door.

The worker noticed the viewing guests and waved.

The President gave the worker a salute while the First Lady smiled. Then they strolled to the manager's office.

The factory manager stood and greeted the guests, offering everyone a seat in front of his desk. Then he sat behind the desk and opened the bottom right drawer, pulling out three shot glasses and a bottle of exquisite tequila.

Thalia frowned angrily. She hated it when the important men in her life drank the hard stuff.

The manager began, “These cars are hot commodities that people are buying faster than we can make them. Thus, Mexican custom dictates that we celebrate our success. Gods are looking down upon us favorably.”

The manager poured everyone a drink and placed a shot glass before the President and Thalia’s father.

They raised their shot glasses, clinking them gently so the valuable contents would not spill, and then gulped down the fiery brew.

The President winced and glanced at the First Lady.

Thalia had a large, angry frown on her face.

Jerrick shrugged and thought, what could he do? He must respect the powerful forces of culture and traditions. Disastrous consequences like uprisings and rioting can erupt if the government alters or opposes culture. For instance, he allowed the Mexican states to retain Spanish as their language.

Two southern states, Chiapas and Oaxaca, repeatedly rebelled against the Mexican federal government. Thus, President Davis allowed them to speak their native tongues as their state’s official language and granted concessions to the law. The President respected culture and traditions and wanted everyone to be happy and, of course, to build his Empire.

### ***The Expansion into South America***

President Davis inspected a new saltwater treatment plant in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. This plant converted millions of gallons of salt water into fresh water for the residents of Guadalajara.

The water desalination plant also pumped water farther inland, converting barren deserts into thriving, green forests and agricultural lands.

The water plant had several large storage tanks that towered five stories tall. Several large box-shaped structures that were two stories tall filtered the salt from the seawater.

The whole plant resonated and hummed from the sound of the powerful electric pumps.

The President strolled with the company president and an engineer along a network of large metal pipes.

The company's president was tall and quickly overshadowed the other two. He wore an impeccable black Armani suit.

A short, stocky engineer wore a yellow helmet and orange jumpsuit.

The First Lady ran to the group with several bodyguards trailing behind her. She approached the President and hopped into his arms. Then she pulled Jerrick away from the group.

The engineer and company's president stood, watching silently.

She cornered Jerrick near an extensive network of pipes and, out of earshot, shrieked, "Jerrick, I just returned from the doctor's office. I'm pregnant."

Thalia was smiling and very happy.

"That is great! Is it a boy or a girl?"

"I don't know. Does it matter?"

"Well, yes and no."

"Let me guess. You need a boy, an heir, for the Empire?"

"Well, a boy would be nice."

"What happens if she's a girl?"

"I will still love her, but a boy carries the father's name."

Thalia began frowning.

Jerrick tried to be wise, adding, "I am happy for you. Go ahead; return to Washington, D.C., and rest. You can invite your mother and sisters. Just put them as far away from my room as possible."

Jerrick noticed Thalia was smiling again.

Jerrick became good at defusing the explosive mixture of a woman's emotions. Then Jerrick pulled Thalia close, hugging her tightly. He caressed her abdomen. Then he bent down and kissed it.

Jerrick's company noticed because no one could mistake that gesture in any culture.

The First Lady strolled to her limousine while the President rejoined his group again.

The President motioned with his hands for a staff member to come over. He whispered in his ear to bring a bottle of Dom

Pérignon, several Champaign glasses, and Cuban cigars. He always kept a couple of bottles of Champaign and cigars in the limousine for special occasions, and this was a special occasion.

The President just blurted out, “I have good news. The First Lady is pregnant.”

The engineer asked solemnly, “Is it a boy or girl?”

“Unfortunately, the First Lady would not tell me.”

“Hopefully, she has a boy, thus establishing a bloodline for the Empire,” the water company’s president said poignantly.

The company’s president did raise a good point. Eventually, the President must choose a successor to his Empire. Whom could he trust to lead his Empire? Who would be strong and smart enough to do it? If the President had a daughter, could she become a good leader for the Empire?

The engineer added, “These Mexican women today are strong and independent. They want to be superior to men. Of course, they don’t hesitate to take money from a man’s pocket when it suits their interests.”

The men exchanged laughter at the engineer’s joke.

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Seven months later, Thalia bore the President a son born on February 21, 2025. The First Lady named him Aric Benito Davis.

Aric derives from Old Norse, which means forever, alone, or ruler. Aric looked just like his father, except he was a little darker and more Mexican. Aric would gaze at everyone from his crib with hypnotic, fiery brown eyes. The baby was another Jerrick Ray Davis.

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Several months later, Thalia caught an exhausted, tired Jerrick hiding in the Map Room. As she entered the room, Jerrick sat in an armchair, reading a novel. He placed a hot mug of cocoa on a stand next to his armchair. The marshmallows had melted into a layer of white foam while wisps of steam vaporized into the surrounding air.

Jerrick tilted his book, getting a better view of the First Lady.

"I see you're hiding from everyone up here," Thalia began.

"Thalia, I am just tired. I have been traveling and traveling, and I am exhausted, and I had to get away from everyone and curl up to a good book. I am so tired of reading economic reports. If I see another report, I'll scream."

Thalia sat on Jerrick's lap, and he wrapped his hands around her, still holding onto the book.

After her first child, Thalia still possessed her attractive, slim figure. She remained a beautiful woman, even though the slavery of motherhood tugged at her daily.

"What are you reading?"

"I am reading 1984 by George Orwell. It's an oldie but a goody."

Thalia spotted a French article on the floor by the chair with the translation into English lying next to it.

"What's that?"

"An article from a French tabloid claimed an alien flew down to earth and impregnated my mother. Thus, I am half-alien. You are married to a human-alien hybrid."

Thalia laughed so hard she almost fell from the President's lap.

"Don't laugh. Richard at Homeland Security is furious. I told him to let it go. Who cares about France? We have plenty of problems here to fix."

"What is Richard going to do?"

"Who knows? He would feed the journalist into a meat grinder, feet first, and slowly grind him into hamburger meat. Richard can be quite cruel if he is upset."

"Why do you keep that creepy guy around?"

"He helped me before I took over the government. Without him, I would not be sitting here on this chair with you."

Thalia glanced at the article and saw the standard photo of an alien with an elongated head, bald, and large black, buggy eyes.

"Then I guess that's supposed to be your father?"

"That is what the article said. The alien is more handsome than my real father."

"What happened to your parents?"

“During the chaos of 2016, a burglar broke into their house and shot both my parents. It was very tragic. I could not go to their funeral.”

“Why?”

“I thought the government purposely killed my parents to draw me out so they could assassinate me.”

“Jerrick, I’m so sorry. I didn’t know.”

“You shouldn’t apologize. That is the price. I had to pay. Any government will murder its citizens if a government can maintain control. I knew the U.S. government would resort to dirty tricks, but murdering a person’s family is low. Creepy Richard told me about their dirty plans and set up the meeting with General Edwards, which led to the revolution. Richard was instrumental to my plans.”

Thalia rested her head on Jerrick’s shoulders and mumbled, “Jerrick, I had no idea.”

After several minutes, Thalia poked her head up and added, “Jerrick, you’ve been through a lot. I know you are working way too hard. You have been a leader for nine years, 24 hours every day. You have much responsibility. Let’s you and me sneak out for the night. We’ll pretend we are regular people and go out for hamburgers and then to a dance club.”

“I don’t know if that is a good idea.”

“What? Do you need permission from Richard before you can go?”

“No, of course not.”

“Okay Then let’s go! Take me out. You never take me out anymore!”

Thalia stood up and pulled Jerrick from the armchair by his hand.

Jerrick let the book fall to the floor and followed Thalia to his bedroom to change.

Jerrick found his blue jeans, buried at the bottom of his drawer, which he hadn’t worn in years. Luckily, he slid into the jeans, which were a bit snug around the hips. Next, he dressed in a simple polo shirt.

An agent helped the President comb his hair differently, and the President put on a fake mustache.

Thalia changed into a simple, long black dress and pulled her hair back into a ponytail. When she appeared in public, she always styled her hair, never in a ponytail. She touched a little makeup on her eyes, cheeks, and lips.

Before they headed out, Thalia and Jerrick checked on Aric. He slept soundly in his crib with grandma standing sentry nearby. Thalia and Jerrick both bent down and lightly kissed Aric on the forehead.

Little Aric stirred a little and kicked his feet. Then he went back to sleep soundly. Thalia and Jerrick left the Whitehouse and passed through the guard shack.

The guards immediately stood up and saluted the President.

The President said, "You guys can sit down. The First Lady and I are going out for a hamburger."

The guards were stunned. One of them stated, "But sir, shouldn't you have some bodyguards with you?"

"No, I think we'll be okay."

"Sir, we are concerned about your safety."

"Okay, send one guard with us, and please fit in. I do not want to draw attention to us."

"Yes, sir," one guard said while grabbing the thick coat that hid the bulge of his firearm.

The guard stood at 6 feet 2 inches and packed 300 pounds of lean muscle onto his frame. He was still young, in his 20s, with a well-trimmed black mustache and beard, and he slicked his jet-black hair back.

The three walked down Pennsylvania Avenue three blocks from the Whitehouse. They walked into Fat Burger, an old-style mom-pop shop. The owners converted an ancient gas station into a small restaurant. The restrooms were still located outside in the back of the building. Rumors abounded that Fat Burger made the best hamburgers in town and on the East Coast.

They smelled hamburgers cooking over a grill containing smoldering wood, imbuing a cherry flavor into the burgers.

The group strolled to the counter.

The sales clerk asked, "May I help you?"

“Yes, I will take a cheeseburger, fries, and a Pepsi,” the President stated.

“I’ll take a chicken salad and a diet Sprite. Please put the dressing to the side,” the First Lady said.

Then the President gestured for the bodyguard to order.

“I’ll take a double cheeseburger, French fries, and a strawberry milkshake,” the agent said. Then he reached into his pocket for money, but the President shook his head no.

“Your total is \$25.30.”

The President reached into his pocket and pulled out a new, crisp fifty-dollar bill.

The sales clerk took the money and returned the change to the President.

The President searched the girl’s face for recognition, but the girl didn’t watch the news channel. She had no idea who stood in front of her.

The President and First Lady sat in one booth while the bodyguard sat in the adjoining one, keeping a watchful eye.

The President took a large bite of his hamburger and chased it down with a swig of Pepsi. Thalia stabbed at her salad with a fork, eating one piece at a time, ensuring every shred of food had a drizzle of salad dressing on it.

A few tables over, a little girl piped up, pointed at the President, and said, “Mommy, the President and First Lady are sitting over there.” Then the little girl waved, and the President and First Lady waved back.

The mother continued eating her French fries and hamburger. She never glanced at the people her daughter said were the President and First Lady.

The mother replied, “Oh, sweetie, don’t make things up. The President and First Lady live down the street in the Whitehouse. They have a gourmet chef who cooks them delicious food. They would never eat here in this restaurant. You can write a letter to the President or First Lady and invite them to your school. I hear they are nice and buy all the kids ice cream.”

The little girl peeked at the esteemed guests.

The President and First Lady smiled at the little girl.

Finishing their meals, they headed outside and walked across the street. Then Thalia pulled Jerrick to a side street. She stopped and pointed at a shop window. Although the shop owner closed the store, they peered through the display window.

“See Jerrick. The people love you. Look at the oil painting of you hanging proudly on their wall. Look at the inscription on the bottom, ‘The People have a right to pursue their dreams unhindered by their government.’”

Jerrick studied the painting representing a strong, powerful President in the portrait. Then he added, “That is a nice painting.”

“I agree. The shop owner spent \$1,000 for it from his own money, unless you have a law making everyone buy paintings of you?”

“No, of course not. They are free to paint whatever they want.”

Then the three continued walking down the street.

Thalia pointed across the street to an opened laundry mat and another portrait hanging on the wall. From this distance, they couldn’t see the exact details, but they knew the person in the portrait. The President wore a military uniform in the portrait.

“See, if the people didn’t love you, they wouldn’t be spending money on these expensive oil paintings. In Mexico, you opened some deep wounds in the Mexican psyche. In time, if you keep doing well, they’ll forgive you. Those wounds will heal, and the Mexican people will love you too, just as I love you.”

Jerrick turned to face Thalia, using his hands to reel her in. Then they started kissing on the street.

Jerrick rarely displayed public affection, but he made an exception. He stood on a dark, deserted street with Thalia and a bodyguard, and no crowds of people chanted his name.

The bodyguard looked away as the President and First Lady kissed.

Jerrick and Thalia strolled to the nightclub, with the bodyguard following behind. As they approached, they heard the thumping bass of an extremely loud music system pumping out Cuban salsa.

The nightclub was one story and spanned over half a block. The owner painted it in pastel yellow, bright orange, and an occasional

red. Several fake palm trees lined the sidewalk outside the building, and red neon lights illuminated it.

They stood in line to enter the discoteca.

Approaching the bouncer, the bouncer stared coldly at Jerrick and then Thalia. Next, he snapped, "Sorry, we have a strict dress code. We don't let men wearing blue jeans enter the place."

"Please, he's my husband," Thalia pleaded with a large, radiant smile. Then she showed him her wedding band and engagement ring containing a sizeable sparkling diamond. Thalia can charm anyone. People never say no to her when she turns on her sweetness and charm.

The bouncer studied Jerrick and then his giant companion. Then he stated, "You should have married your own kind, but I'll let you in. However, if you guys cause any trouble, I'll personally toss you onto the streets."

"Thank you," Jerrick said. Then he smiled and handed the bouncer a new crisp fifty-dollar bill.

The President's bodyguard sized up the bouncer and considered who would be throwing whom out. However, the bodyguard displayed his best behavior in front of the President.

They entered the dark place with flashing lights, and people were everywhere, reeking of alcohol and hot, sweaty bodies.

They approached the counter, and Jerrick shouted, "I'll take a margarita, and the lady will have a wine cooler." Then he looked at the bodyguard and asked, "What do you want?"

"Sir, a Coke will be fine."

"Don't you want any alcohol in it?"

"No sir, I'm working. I must return you home safely."

"Okay Then my friend will have a Coke."

"That will be \$15.50."

The President handed the bartender a \$20-dollar bill and added, "You can keep the change."

They sat on bar stools near the dance floor, sipping their drinks. The bodyguard scanned the crowds, inspecting everyone and anyone nearby. Then Thalia pulled Jerrick onto the dance floor, teaching Jerrick to dance.

Occasionally, a Latin woman would bump into Jerrick and smile at him when Jerrick looked at her.

Thalia squinted at her and placed herself between Jerrick and the woman, daring the woman to continue.

Around midnight, Jerrick fished his phone from his pocket because someone kept calling him. He glanced down at the cell phone's display and saw Richard Woodland calling him.

Thalia giggled, and Jerrick returned the phone to his pocket. Then he danced with Thalia again.

Thalia and Jerrick returned to the Whitehouse at three o'clock in the morning.

Unfortunately, Aric was crying because he missed his mother. Thalia retrieved him, gently rocking him to sleep in her arms. Then she placed Aric between her and Jerrick on the bed, and they all fell asleep.

Around seven, Aric, the natural alarm clock, woke everyone up, crying furiously. Thalia carried Aric into the bathroom and emerged 15 minutes later. Aric was happy and all smiles.

Thalia placed Aric on the bed between them again.

Jerrick leaned over and said, "Hey, little guy, you sure cry loudly." Then Jerrick kissed him lightly on the forehead and tickled his belly.

"He's fine now. I changed his diapers and breastfed him. He should be good for a while. "

Jerrick continued tickling Aric's stomach. Aric giggled, moving his arms and kicking his feet.

"I guess I would be happy too if I wore clean underwear and filled my belly with fresh food."

"So, how do you feel, Jerrick?"

"I must admit, I feel great even with little sleep. I feel I am ten years younger."

"You know, Jerrick, I've been thinking. One way to appease the Mexican people is to relocate the capital to the border of Texas and Mexico. That way, both peoples can share you."

"That is a great idea, but we thought about going further. After South America joins the Empire, the federal government will become too large, and we'll need help administering the Empire. We

thought about breaking the federal government into three districts. One government represents the English-speaking people; the second represents the Spanish-speaking people in Mexico and South America, and the third for the Portuguese-speaking Brazilians. Then we build the headquarters for the top layer of government in Mexico City, towards the Empire's center."

Are you thinking about moving the whole capital to Mexico City?

"Yes, that puts the top piece of government at the Empire's center. We considered building the government campus around the Aztec ruins so two great Empires can stand proudly next to each other."

"I see. That means you're returning to work, aren't you?"

"Of course, I must check the progress of my Empire. I am like Charlemagne. He traveled across his kingdom, keeping everyone in check. He always traveled on the road."

"Charlemagne? I guess you are a history buff?"

"Not really. I only studied the famous dictators, emperors, and kings. I wanted to know what worked and what didn't work."

"Did you learn anything?"

"Of course, the power went to their heads, and they started stealing property and money from the aristocrats. Finally, they started mass executions of their people?"

"Do you ever get those thoughts?"

"No, of course not. I keep my mind occupied. I build things, like my large public works projects and buildings. I have no time to think how many pennies the wealthy squirrel under their mattresses. My tax agents ensure they pay their taxes. That is it. I also do not worry about rivals or troublemakers. I let Richard at Homeland Security worry about them."

"Well, Jerrick, Aric, and I'll wait until you return. If you return too late, then I can't promise you that I'll be in a good mood. Besides, if you are gone too long, I'll have your creepy friend Richard track you down and return you."

Jerrick laughed and replied, "I am sure Richard will love that. He will do the job personally."

Then Jerrick leaned over Aric and kissed Thalia, and he kissed Aric on the forehead again.

Jerrick slid from the bed and rushed to the bathroom. He showered, changed, and headed to work. He felt like a new man again and must continue building his Empire.

\*\*\*

In 2030, the First Lady and Aric sat in an armor-plated limousine. Aric was already five years old, and they would meet the President at a ceremony in Monterrey, Mexico.

The President spent \$1 billion to build a state-of-the-art hospital with thousand beds and an impressive intensive care unit.

The board has christened the Davis Medical Center hospital after the President's honor. The President peered at the ten-story building, shaped like a bracket. One end held the doctors' offices, while the emergency rooms were on the other. The President believed strongly in training and education, ensuring the hospital had plenty of classrooms to train the next generation of doctors and nurses.

As the limousine approached the hospital, Aric stood in the back seat, pushing his face against the window and watching the crowds of people standing on the sidewalks.

People cheered and waved at the limousine as they drove by.

"Look, Mommy! People are waving," Aric said. Then Aric waved at the crowds.

Crowds went ecstatic.

"Yes, I know, son. You are sitting in the President's limousine." Then the First Lady smiled and waved to the people as they passed.

"Mom, what does the President do?"

"You read about kings. A President is like a king; he leads a country. Your dad is the leader of our great country."

"But Mommy, I do not see Daddy do anything. He only talks to people."

Thalia laughed and replied, "Your dad does a lot. You see that new hospital there. Your dad gave money to help build it."

"Wow, I guess that's why Dad is always gone."

"Yes, he is always working."

“Mommy, will I ever be President?”

“Of course you will. Your dad will become too old to lead someday, and you can take his place.” Aric smiled widely. Then he sat down next to his mom.

Thalia wrapped a loving hand around Aric, hugging him. Then she planted a soft kiss on his forehead.

“Mommy, the president’s job is the best in the world!”

The guards let the limousine through, and it parked near the hospital’s main entrance.

The First Lady and Aric climbed out of the limousine. Then Thalia walked to the main entrance while Aric ran to his dad.

Jerrick scooped him up and held him in his arms. Then he handed Aric a pair of scissors and said, “Aric, will you do the honors and cut that large ribbon on the door.”

Aric cut the ribbon in one snip, and the crowds cheered.

“The Davis Medical Center is open for business,” the President exclaimed to the crowd. Next, the President grabbed his son and embraced him. Then he held his son high above the crowds while Aric waved to them.

The President had the best job in the world.

\*\*\*

On May 14, 2030, the President’s cabinet called for an emergency meeting in the Cabinet Room in the Whitehouse.

The Cabinet Room contained a long, colossal mahogany table with rounded oval corners. The table was set on top of a large red rug speckled with yellow stars. Surrounding the table were dark, reddish leather armchairs.

The meeting started at nine o’clock at night, and the President sat at the head of the table. His generals sat in a row to the President’s right, and his other staff sat to his left.

Off to the side of the room, the President had an assortment of drinks, snacks, and simple finger food for his staff.

After everyone was seated, the President began, “Okay, folks, you got me here. What is the emergency? What is going on?”

Agent Harris started, “Sir, our agents just returned from South America. Chaos erupted in Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama. They knew the Empire was coming, and their governments stopped providing services. Government officials are stealing all their country’s resources.”

The President retorted, “This situation is dire. Mexico drained our investment funds. We are not ready to annex new states.”

The President’s face reddened, and he pounded his fists on the table and screamed, “Damn it.”

Everyone at the table jumped because the President rarely used profanity. He never had to.

Everyone became silent, sneaking glances at one another.

The President inhaled several times and cooled down. Then he began, “My hand has been forced. I wanted to wait a while before we add South America. We do not have a choice. We cannot let their countries erupt into chaos and violence that would immensely increase the development costs. Protestors will destroy the buildings, and workers and managers flee their employers. We must invade, whether we want to or not. Does anyone here have other ideas on how to fix this situation without an invasion?”

The room remained quiet.

The President turned his head to study each face around the table.

Everyone remained silent.

Scanning around the table, the President continued, “Then invasion is. Tomorrow, generals, let’s meet in the Map Room at 7:00 AM. I want detailed plans for the invasion. At 8:00, I want the cabinet and your best and brightest financial wizards. Unfortunately, we will win the war but then become bankrupt.”

The President stood up from the table and ran out.

The staff collected their things and scrambled to leave. They had a long, sleepless night in front of them. No high-ranking official would sleep that night in the Empire.

At seven in the morning, the generals and the President met in the Map Room.

The President hunched over a massive table, studying a large map of South America as a hot cup of coffee lay on the edge with wisps of steam floating from the top of the coffee.

The President noticed his generals and invited them in.

“Generals, come right in and join me. Unfortunately, I had a sleepless night, so I have been here all night. Get yourself some coffee. A chef long ago hooked me on Indonesian Kopi Luwak.”

The coffee maker was on a table near the corner of the room next to a large leather armchair. Coffee mugs, sugar cubes, and fresh cream were placed on a silver tray beside the coffee maker. On the other side, the President stacked several large, ominous-looking books on the Empire’s finances that would intimidate any reader.

The generals grabbed themselves some coffee and joined the President at the table.

“The troops are mobilized, and they’ll be in South America by tomorrow,” General Edwards stated.

“Good; how do you plan to invade?”

“We will load the amphibious warships with equipment and soldiers and sail them right up to the capitals and see what happens,” the General of the Navy added.

“That is a good strategy. If they do not shoot, then no one should die.”

The President sipped his coffee again.

The generals also drank theirs.

“Generals, I am not worried about the invasion. It is paying for the cost of redevelopment. I expect little resistance, but you never know. Let me know if you experience any complications. Oh, by the way, how do you like the coffee?”

“Coffee is excellent, Sir. It’s the best I ever had,” the General of the Air Force stated loudly.

“Good, my chef turned me onto this coffee years ago. I thought he was crazy, but he was right; this is the best coffee in the world. We are drinking coffee made from the excrement of a weasel-like animal, the civet. Their digestive systems remove the bitterness from the coffee beans, adding flavor.”

General Edwards smiled and added, “Sir, I had eaten and drank much worse when training for the Army Rangers.”

Other generals smiled because they remembered some of their military training as young men and learned to subsist on raw food from the wild that would make a wild dog sick.

The generals finished their coffee and returned their coffee mugs to the silver tray.

“Do you men want some breakfast?”

“Sir, we can’t. We have a long day ahead of us. We must go.”

“Generals, let me know immediately about any complications.”

“Yes sir,” the generals stated in unison, then filed out of the room.

The President poured himself another cup of coffee, adding a slight drizzle of cream and one sugar cube. He stirred the mixture and sat down in his armchair.

He sipped his coffee, put it on the table, and grabbed one of the thick books of the Empire’s finances. He had plenty of time before his next meeting.

At eight, the President ran into the Cabinet Room and sat at the head of the table, scanning the faces. Everyone had a sleepless night with dark circles surrounding their eyes.

The President announced, “Ladies and gentlemen, how will we pay for this expansion? We do not have the money.”

“Can’t we call the new states - territories and insert exceptions into the law? We can issue special money that people and businesses can only use there but not in the Empire. Some day in the future, they can exchange this money for real money from the Empire after we have shored up our finances,” Chad stated.

“I do not like it because we mimic the democracy we replaced. We start bending and shaping the laws to what we want. The danger is that they lose meaning if we bend and manipulate the laws too much. Nobody will understand them and eventually not follow them,” the President explained eloquently.

“Couldn’t we pass a temporary tax to pay for the expansion? The people of the Empire will benefit from it, too,” Jennifer added.

“That is the last option, but you know me. Taxes are never temporary. We become used to that money flowing in and never want to give it up.”

A sheepish, feminine voice spoke up and uttered, “Sir, we’re assuming we must pay for the expansion of the Empire. Why don’t we force the world to pay for our expansion?”

Everyone turned to see who had spoken.

A new face sat at the table, hidden in the corner. She was petite with short brunette hair. She parted her hair to one side and wore a dark, navy business suit with a white dress shirt underneath. She wore polished shoes somewhere between high heels and hush puppies. Her name was Lauren Woschiff.

The President stared at the new guest because he did not recognize her.

“Go on, I want to hear this,” the President said calmly.

“Can’t we counterfeit other countries’ money like the Euro, the Chinese Yuan, or the Russian ruble, or have hackers open bank accounts in those countries? Then we use their money to buy our materials and equipment. Finally, we use dealers in small countries like Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey to buy the equipment and materials and deliver the materials to us on their ships. Of course, we cut them in on the profits. Then we face the labor costs of development. However, they work indirectly for the Empire and must pay income taxes.”

“Your plan is devious, but I like it. The Empire has no friends, so we need not worry about anyone being angry with us. First, find some of those small countries and enter agreements with them. Second, scrap Russia but add South Africa because it supplies the world with gold. We can buy their gold at a discount and add it to the gold in our vaults. Then we can legally expand the money supply. Finally, Venezuela’s petroleum industry should help pay some of the cost. It looks like we can finance the expansion of the Empire. Now, ladies and gentlemen, I am exhausted. I am going back to bed.”

The staff gathered their things, returned their coffee cups, empty plates, and silverware to the serving table, and rushed out the door.

The President waited until everyone left. However, Dan, the Vice President, remained seated.

After the room had cleared, Dan started, “So, how do you like my new financial wizard?”

“She is brilliant and original. I like her. What is her name?”

“Her name is Lauren Woschiff. I know she’s brilliant; I saw her do some amazing stuff.”

“Where did you find her?”

“She was an intern from an Ivy League School. She worked for one of my managers, who always turned in mediocre reports. Then one day, his reports became good with specks of cleverness. I knew he didn’t do it. All I had to do was look at the employment records. His intern had started a week before he turned in his first good report. I stole her and put her to work for me.”

“Good, let’s create a new position for her where she can attend our cabinet meetings regularly. We can expect good ideas from her. I also give you the authority to raise her pay. As you know, I pay good money for good talent. I want the best and the brightest working for me.”

“Great! I knew you would like her. That’s why I snuck her in today.”

The President gathered his documents, slipped them into his leather folder, and rose from his chair.

“Ah, Jerrick,”

The President sat down in his chair because Dan rarely used his first name anymore.

The President looked at Dan in surprise.

“She also found out something else. She developed an algorithm that cross-referenced our budget numbers. We found evidence that someone skimmed billions of dollars from the budgets, a million here and a million there? After a while, those millions add up.”

“Oh, I see she is very clever. Yes, Dan, I did skim the budgets. I needed to fund several projects off the books. You know I am a firm believer in technology. I used a slush fund to pay for new inventions. I do not want anybody to know about them. I want the Empire to develop the technology first before anyone else.”

“Is there anything I need to know?”

“Most of these projects were duds, except for three.”

“Really,” Dan said with a hurt tone in his voice. His best friend had kept secrets from him.

“One is we can reverse aging. The pills work great, and they make everyone turn back the clock to 20 years old. Unfortunately, the medicine does not stop and continues working on the body. Then it starts unraveling the body’s cells, and their bodies begin to fall apart. After figuring out a method to shut off the medication, we will call it a success.”

“What are the other two?”

“You would not believe me if I told you. Let’s say the Empire is not confined to the earth’s surface. Many new possibilities will open up for us in twenty years.” Then the President gathered his things and returned to the bedroom, trying to fall asleep.

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On June 1, 2030, the Empire sent its naval ships to Caracas, Venezuela first. This invasion differed from the previous invasions.

Crowds started celebrating as the Empire’s soldiers unloaded tanks and equipment. The army slowly drove its procession of trucks through the streets.

Crowds formed parades and moved to the sides of the street, allowing military vehicles to pass. People stood on balconies, throwing confetti, while crowds tossed flowers at the troops.

The stress and tension racked the Empire’s troops because they scanned the crowds, looking for unfriendlies with assault rifles. The soldiers didn’t want to shoot at the civilians because one or two gunmen hid in the crowds.

As luck would have it, no gunmen hid in the crowds that day, and no innocent people were shot.

The procession of soldiers reached the main campus buildings of Chavez’s government. The buildings were vacant, and all offices were empty. Here and there, a dead body lay on the ground or occupied a chair in the office. They were high-ranking officials in Hugo Chavez’s government.

One squadron cautiously made their way to Hugo Chavez’s office.

Chavez’s assistants worked in a large anteroom before the President’s Office. El Presidente didn’t spare any expense. The

room screamed wealth and opulence. The floors were marble, and the room was painted a soft red pastel. The doors, desks, and crown moldings were reddish mahogany.

The squadron carefully entered the President's Office, which was identical in style and size to the first room. In the center of the room was a large, dark wooden desk. Then the troops spotted a person sitting in a chair on the balcony. They saw only the chair's back.

A person sat in a chair, looking out the balcony.

"El Presidente? El Presidente?" A soldier called out.

The person didn't move.

As the soldiers approached slowly, they saw why. Hugo Chavez was dead as his right hand fell to his lap, holding the gun with a rigor mortis death grip. He had a small hole in his right temple, and a large exit wound at his head's back.

Hugo Chavez committed suicide hours before the invasion. He sat on this chair, watching his country from the balcony. As the Empire's troops landed on the port, he stuck the gun to the side of his head and pulled the trigger.

As the soldiers turned to leave, a corporal approached Hugo Chavez's desk, which was large, at least 4 feet long and 2 feet wide, and made from darkly stained wood. Along the front of the desk were four carved lion heads jutting outward in a row, and the sides had one lion head. Draped around the lions' heads were banners carved into the wood. Then a soft dark-green velvet covered the desk's surface.

Another soldier turned and asked, "What is it?"

"This desk is quite exquisite, carved by hand, and must be 100 years old."

"You know Chavez had contacts with Russia. This could be a gift from the Russians. This desk probably came from Russian royalty passed down in a family for hundreds of years."

The corporal announced on the radio, "We found Chavez. He committed suicide. We also found a gift for President Davis. Get some movers here ASAP."

"Smart move! I heard the President collects knickknacks from dictators and kings. I'm sure he'll love this desk."

“Yes, corporal, the President will be pleased.”

\*\*\*

Although President Chavez’s policies caused an economic disaster, he had many dedicated followers.

President Davis granted Hugo Chavez a hero’s burial because one dictator admired and bestowed respect on another. President Davis paid to construct a massive granite mausoleum for El Presidente, granting his followers a place to respect their fallen leader.

President Davis hid Hugo Chavez’s suicide, claiming El Presidente fought honorably to the end.

\*\*\*

Colombia and Panama fell just as quickly. The Empire’s naval ships docked at the ports and unloaded the army.

One army sped toward Bogotá, Colombia’s capital, in jeeps and cargo vans, while another rushed to Panama City, which lies on the southwest tip of the Panama Canal.

Along the way, the people stood on the streets, hollering and cheering as the Empire’s army passed by. The Empire had arrived, bringing jobs, wealth, and prosperity. Their lives would improve.

\*\*\*

Kahil Kafkas, the ship’s Captain, was a typical Turk. He was tall and thin, with black wavy hair and a dark complexion. As is usual for Turks, Kahil was also handsome.

The ship and crew were waiting for dockworkers to load the cargo in Istanbul, Turkey. A crane carefully stacked 9,200 metallic 20-foot-long containers on the deck like piles of bricks.

The Captain hired a new first mate, and they stood in the control room, watching the activity on the deck.

“Captain, will we take this freight to the American Empire?”

“Yes, we are. We’ll drop this shipment in Venezuela, South America.”

“Aren’t you worried about sailing into the Empire’s waters? I heard President Davis has a large fleet of naval ships and satellites that blast ships out of the water.”

“They do, but we’ll be safe. They only fire upon military ships. We’re delivering freight for the Empire?”

“Aren’t you worried that we are supplying the enemy?”

“No, a job is a job! Plus, they pay well! That’s why I hired you. You’re supposed to be a good first mate. Besides, I inspected some of those shipping containers.”

“Really! What’s the Empire buying?”

“Just plain old construction materials: power tools, metal and wood studs for walls and ceilings, nails, screws, drywall, and furniture. I found no guns or computers. It’s all construction materials.”

“That’s odd. I thought the Empire manufactured its products. I thought the Empire isolated itself from the world?”

“You got me, but they pay well, so I’ll deliver this shipment on time. That’s why my conscience doesn’t bother me. We’re not shipping tanks and guns. Besides, I plan to use my savings to retire someday. Oh, I have a special treat. After we deliver our cargo, we’ll dock at Cuba.”

“Cuba, I heard about it. People claim Havana is one of the most beautiful cities in the world.”

“It’s a nice bonus for a job well done. The nightlife is fantastic too. In the clubs, they dance a neat salsa, where all the couples form a circle. Then you dance with your partner, twirl her around several times, and pass her to the guy behind you. Then you get a new girl from the guy standing before you.”

“It sounds complicated.”

“It isn’t once you get the hang of it. Then the best part is after the evening is over, you grab a woman you like and take her home with you.”

After silence, the Captain asked, “So, do you still think we’re traitors?”

“I guess not. It sounds like you found a good thing.”

“The best part is the Empire pays in brand new Euro bills with sequential serial numbers.”

“Wow, where is the Empire getting all that money?”

\*\*\*

On October 20, 2032, Arthur Wellesley, the President of the Governing Council of the European Central Bank, called for a special meeting with all the top European leaders.

Arthur began, “Dear ladies and gentlemen, let’s start this meeting. I called you here today because we found irregularities in our monetary system.”

The French Prime Minister, Léon Blum, asked, “What kind of irregularities are we talking about?”

“Someone is counterfeiting the Euro on a massive scale. Something we have never seen before.”

“What are you talking about, a few million?” The Prime Minister of England, Ramsay MacDonald, asked.

“No, minister, we’re talking about billions or trillions. The counterfeit money is an exact copy. We only know it is counterfeit when we destroy our old money and register the serial numbers. We have destroyed money this year that we had destroyed years ago. Our experts examined the money, and the copies are perfect. We also discovered evidence that computer hackers broke into banks’ computer systems and open accounts with millions of Euros.”

Everyone paused to ponder the speaker’s words.

Several ministers sipped water from their glasses.

The President continued, “Have you noticed something strange about our economic expansion? All our construction industries have rebounded strongly. They are hiring workers. Yet, I examined our construction permits, and we are not building anything in Europe. New construction remains flat. Where are all these construction materials going?”

The President paused for a minute to allow this information to sink in.

“Well chap, please continue,” the Prime Minister from England replied.

Arthur Wellesley of the Central Bank continued, “I asked the European Council of Foreign Relations for satellite photos. The construction materials are loaded onto barges and shipped to ports in the Mediterranean. Then the cargo is transferred to other ships, delivering it directly to the American Empire. Our satellites cannot see the destination point, but their destination is South America. The number of cargo ships is astounding, forming almost a continuous line of ships that stretch from Europe to South America.”

The British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, quickly stood up and hurled his empty glass at the wall behind him. Sharp shards of glass exploded along the wall.

“God damn him,” Ramsey screamed. Then he sat down and regained his composure. Then he added, “I apologize for my rude interruption, but Jerrick Davis had turned into one pain in the ass. He has a stranglehold worldwide, and we cannot do anything about it. If we shut down the cargo export, then we hurt ourselves. Our construction industries shut down, and we throw many people out of work. If we allow Mr. Davis to continue, then he plays us like a bunch of suckers, building his damn Empire with our workers, with our own money.”

Arthur Wellesley continued, “The Prime Minister is correct. We face that dilemma. We have more disturbing news. Many unemployed Europeans sneak onto the ships heading to South America, searching for work. They think construction jobs will be plentiful for a long time because the blasted Empire will add more countries in South America.”

The Prime Minister from France, Léon Blum, asked, “What do you propose we do?”

“Right now, we go along with it. We tax the construction industry and our exports of construction materials, And we use that money to expand our armed forces. Ladies and gentlemen, I hate to say it, but the Empire will expand into Europe sooner or later. We take this bad situation and use it for our gain. If we do nothing, then we’ll be working for Mr. Davis. Eventually, Mr. Davis will set his sights on Europe.”

The President studied the stunned faces sitting in the room. He warned them that he would toss lousy news into their laps. They

thought it would be a hot potato. Instead, it was a red, hot piece of molten steel.

\*\*\*

Colombia has been a hotbed of terroristic activities since the 1960s. The radicals used guerrilla warfare against the Colombian government. They hid in the thick, dense jungles and, occasionally, crawled out to assassinate government officials or blow up a government building.

One infamous group was the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as FARC by its Spanish acronym. The commander of FARC, Manuel Marulanda, sat behind his desk in his jungle hut and stared at everyone with fiery hazel eyes. He stood at five feet five with black curly hair that touched the lapel of his green military uniform. He constantly donned a Green Beret cap on his head and regularly trimmed his black beard and mustache.

Towards his right, a poster of Che Guevara hung from the wall. The jungle's humidity and dampness caused the poster to blister and blemish.

Manuel Marulanda looked exactly like Che Guevara, while his followers thought he was Che Guevara's reincarnation.

Manuel was not angry about the invasion per se. He became furious that President Davis harmed his organization financially. After President Davis had legalized marijuana and low-level barbiturates and amphetamines, FARC lost its primary income source because Manuel controlled the illegal cocaine drug trade and supervised the drug labs scattered throughout the jungle. Now, Americans avoid cocaine and use legal drugs instead.

His Captain burst into the hut, "Sir, I have great news. Our contact in the Colombian government has just confirmed President Davis's visit to Colombia. Sir, he's coming to Colombia."

Manuel just sat there, his eyes becoming fiery, and crazy ideas swam in his head. A large smile crept across Manuel's face, and he uttered, "Captain, you know what to do."

The Captain saluted Manuel Marulanda and dashed out of the hut to round up his men.

FARC had planned a nasty surprise for the President.

\*\*\*

On Monday, April 4, 2033, President Davis arrived in Bogotá, Colombia, to inspect his projects. The President's procession left the Tequendana International Airport in Bogotá. The Empire's army surrounded the President's limousine with jeeps and trucks, forming a protective shell.

Colombia's paramilitary organizations circulated rumors that they would strike and kill President Davis if he came to Colombia.

The President's procession rushed by a neighborhood filled with abandoned buildings.

KABOOM! A large explosion filled the silent air.

FARC planted explosives inside one of the buildings. They also constructed a metal wall inside the building that directed the blast outward into the street. They also placed boxes of nails on one side of the bomb so the explosive force would fling these nails into the air, converting them into debris of death.

The jeep to the left side of the President's limousine took most of the impact. The explosion killed four soldiers instantly and shredded the jeep into ragged pieces of steel.

Flying shrapnel injured and killed several soldiers sitting in the other jeeps. Pockmarks and dents from the flying shrapnel covered the left side of the President's limousine. However, the President sat safely in his bullet-proof limousine.

After the explosion, the procession turned around and sped to the airport.

The President's phone immediately rang, and the President picked it up.

"Mr. President?"

The President recognized Richard's voice immediately.

"Yes, Richard."

"Are you okay? I just heard about the bomb explosion."

"That was fast. It happened 30 seconds ago. I am okay, but my ears are ringing badly."

"Mr. President, please get on a plane and return home."

“Richard, I cannot do that. I must oversee Colombia’s development. Please do not tell my wife.”

“Sir, it’s too late. Everyone in Washington, D.C., knows about the attack. Word travels fast about your safety.”

“Richard, I’m okay!”

“Mr. President, please return to Washington. You’re our leader. Your safety is important to the Empire because you’re the Empire. What will become of us if terrorists kill you?”

The President sighed long and mumbled, “Okay, Richard, I will return.”

Richard was right. He was the leader who kept everyone and everything together. The American Empire would have been doomed if the leader had perished.

Richard asked, “What do you want us to do?”

“Put a \$10 million bounty on the heads of those who did this. Then have the military systematically sweep the jungles with infrared cameras and detain anyone they find in the jungle. If they shoot at the soldiers or helicopters, then I grant you the authority to shoot back.”

“Yes, sir; I’m coming down there as soon as possible and personally oversee the mission.”

“Thank you, Richard,” and the President hung up.

Then the President’s phone rang again.

“Hello.”

“Jerrick, are you okay?”

Jerrick heard the First Lady’s voice, which crackled from fear and tears.

Jerrick tried to soothe her, “Thalia, I am okay, except my ears are ringing.”

“Jerrick, please come home.”

“Okay, I’ll come home. Please stop worrying about me. I’m okay.”

“Here, Aric wants to talk to you.”

Thalia passed the phone to her son.

“Hey, little guy, I’m okay.”

“Daddy, are you coming home?”

“Of course I am. I should be there in 15 hours.”

“Daddy, Mommy, and I are worried about you. Come home, Daddy!”

“I know. That is why I am returning home. Just hang tight, and I will be there in no time. I love you, Aric. Please put your mom back on the phone.”

“Jerrick?”

“Thalia, please do not worry. I am fine. Richard will come down to search for the culprits. Okay! Everything will be fine!”

“I love you, Jerrick.”

“Yes, I know, Thalia. Ditto! I will be there shortly,” the President said, then hung up the phone.

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Richard Woodland arrived in Colombia and combed the jungles for the armed guerrillas. He always shook his head at their stupidity. Richard conducted night raids, commanding a fleet of 20 helicopters and flying in tight formation over an area.

The jungles provided a dense protective cover for them because the Colombian government couldn't afford infrared technology. However, the Empire didn't have a problem. Rebels made their worst decision by hiding in the jungles.

Infrared cameras were sensitive; any warm object brightened up the dark screen of the camera with a red dot. If a jungle cat crapped in the woods, the cameras would pick up the steam from the excrement.

Occasionally, the helicopters flew over an area where a group of men camped out. For some reason, they continuously fired up at the helicopters as if this act would bring down the almighty flying death machines.

Then the helicopters returned fire with their M230 guns as the 30-millimeter caliber bullets left large, cavernous holes in their body.

That suited Richard just fine. He admired their courage to leave the world fighting. At least the Empire wouldn't waste money on their court trials. The Empire's troops slaughtered the rebels like pigs for attacking their Great Leader.

Richard sat at the gunner's bay and fired at the rebels. After he had shot the insurgents, the helicopters would land, and the Empire's troops would search the area. Richard saw that the dead never had identification. They photographed the rebels' faces and confiscated their weapons. Then they buried the insurgents in the jungle in unmarked graves.

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One night, Manuel camped with his soldiers in the jungle because it was too dangerous to stay in his hut in the jungle. The jungle was pitch black. Birds chirped in the trees while small animals scurried along the ground.

In the distance, Manuel heard a strange buzzing sound, becoming louder as a group of helicopters approached his camp.

In Spanish, Manuel screamed at his soldiers, "Get your guns! The Empire is coming!"

Next, the Empire's soldiers filled the dark jungle night with rifle fire as bullets rained down on Manuel's soldiers. Bullets whizzed angrily through the air, illuminating their path with a red glow.

As Manuel turned, he saw the chest of his Captain explode as a large 30-caliber bullet penetrated through his flesh.

Manuel dropped his rifle and ran.

He ran miles on a humid jungle night until he hid in a small cave. Occasionally, those fiery eyes peeked from the hole, searching for signs of the Empire's troops.

President Davis had won this round because he was alive and still breathing.

\*\*\*

After a month, Richard gave up. No one turned the culprits in to get the reward money, and they no longer found gunmen roaming in the jungles.

Jerrick's special force shot and buried 111 gunmen in the jungles of Colombia that month.

It didn't matter. An organization like FARC was finished because they earned no income from the illegal drug trade. They couldn't import illegal guns anymore because the Empire controlled all trade coming in and out of the Americas.

The FARC soldiers left the jungles and searched for good-paying jobs. Economic prosperity always chills the violence and hatred of men, converting them into hard-working citizens again.

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After three years, President Davis invoked his policy of hacking into Europe's banks and counterfeiting the Euro, and the Europeans shut down their construction industries.

The European leaders became sick to their stomachs because they didn't want to finance the expansion of the American Empire. They collected taxes to fund their military expansion, but a recession swept Europe after their construction industries shut down.

President Davis did not mind one bit.

Mexico grew fast and started contributing tax revenue to Davis' government. The American Empire's brush with bankruptcy disappeared as the Empire's finances grew strongly again.

The President no longer needed European products to fund their expansion and added Costa Rica, Guatemala, and El Salvador to the Empire.

Similar to Venezuela, Panama, and Colombia, Latin Americans liked the change in management because they grew tired of their corrupt politicians, who always said things would get better while they stole everything that wasn't nailed down.

With the new leaders, they did not steal or expropriate other people's property. President Davis paid his people well, and in return, he demanded dedication and hard work.

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On December 23, 2034, the President returned to Washington, D.C. for Christmas. He sat on the sofa in the center of the Yellow

Oval Room, a private room for the President and his family. His wife and son sat with him.

The logs in the fireplace hissed and crackled as the fire consumed them.

The President observed Aric and was surprised to learn that he was already nine years old and quite inquisitive. He always asked questions.

“Daddy, what’s an Empire?”

That question threw Jerrick Davis off because he never considered an empire’s definition.

He paused and scratched his chin. Then he answered, “An empire is a country with a strong military that adds more land and people from conquered countries. I guess an empire is a school bully who beats up the weaker kids.”

“But Dad, my teacher says bullies are bad. They shouldn’t do that. My teacher says it’s wrong.”

Jerrick glanced at Thalia, and she smirked.

Jerrick continued, “It is wrong, but that is what an empire does. It expands so it can grow and become bigger. It becomes a means of survival.”

“A bigger bully means it can beat up on more people.”

“I guess it does.”

“Dad, does an empire ever get weak?”

“Yes, they do. Our Empire will crumble in time, but hopefully, that will happen centuries after our deaths.”

“Mom says you’re the king of the Empire. What do you do?”

“I tell other people what to do, and they do it?”

“What happens if they don’t do it?”

“Let’s just say I do not have a problem in that area.”

“But, Dad, some kids in class don’t listen to the teacher.”

“What does your teacher do?”

“She punishes them.”

“There you go. I can punish people too, but people are afraid of my punishment.”

“How do you punish people?”

“Let’s just say some years ago, I did some terrible, evil things. Everybody knows about it, and they are scared of me.”

“Do you want people scared of you?”

“Yes and no. Fear is there, but I can also be kind and generous too. That way, they love me like a strict father who looks out for them.”

Aric slid off the couch, opened a large, translucent plastic box containing hundreds of dominoes, and started arranging the dominoes to construct a small city.

Thalia scooted next to Jerrick, laid her head on his shoulder, and said, “He takes after you.”

“I do see a strong resemblance. He was just like me when I was a kid, except for the problems I had in school.”

After Jerrick and Thalia had watched their son put together a small city, Thalia said, “Jerrick, I know you are always busy, but why don’t you take Aric outside and play in the fresh snow? He wants to build a snowman.”

“I guess you are right. I am always away or always working. Come on, Aric, let’s go outside.”

His boy was excited and ran to his room to get his jacket, hat, and gloves.

After 15 minutes, a sniper from Homeland Security announced into his microphone, “Sir, we have activity on the South Lawn at the Whitehouse, Roger.”

The dispatcher sent a message to all agents in the area: “Please be advised of suspicious activity on the Whitehouse lawn.”

The sniper looked closer through his binoculars and added, “Sir, it’s the President and his kid. They’re throwing snowballs at each other. Ooh! Kid nailed the President in the face with a snowball.”

“I wish I had seen that,” the dispatcher replied, then continued, “End the alert. The President is playing with his kid.”

The dispatcher thought that if anyone else had hit the President in the face with a snowball, that person would never see the next sunrise. No one can disrespect their leader and then live to talk about it.

If the President did not want that person harmed, people have a way of disappearing around here.

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The American Empire continued to thrive and grow.

President Davis added the remaining South American countries to the Empire, except Argentina and Chile. He kept these last two countries as a gift.

As the President predicted, the government had trouble with the administration of the Empire. He divided the Empire into three districts based on language. Brazil formed its district; Mexico and Spanish-speaking countries became the second districts, and the third district became the English-speaking people of the former United States.

President Davis opened a new chapter in history by building a new government capitol in Mexico City encircling the Aztec ruins. He also relocated the top level of his government there.

President Davis considered moving the White House from Washington, DC, to Mexico City but decided against it. The Whitehouse had historical significance to US-Americans, and he left it there. Besides, he loved roaming the hallways and corridors of the Whitehouse, lost in deep thought as he passed portraits of famous U.S. Presidents.

The President's top people aged, and some died. General of the Army Edwards died in 2040, and Secretary of Homeland Security Richard Woodland died in 2043. They both died of natural causes. The President conferred both of them Distinguished Citizens of the American Empire and gave his companions a hero's burial.

Although the Empire had achieved peace, the rest of the world was building up their militaries. Eventually, the Empire's military would cross the oceans, expanding the Empire.

World leaders put their countries and militaries on red alert as they waited for the first signs of the American Empire's ships to appear on the horizon. The world would try to constrain the American Empire to the North and South American continents.

### ***The Great Leader Dies***

President Davis lay on a doctor's examination bed, wearing a hospital gown, on August 4, 2058.

Jerrick saw the best doctor in the country. The doctor managed an upscale clinic that only saw the top party officials of the National Workers' Party.

For his annual checkup, the doctor performed numerous tests on him. Then the doctor requested that President Davis dress and wait in the VIP lounge.

The lab needed an hour to perform the various tests. After 40 minutes, the doctor quickly popped into the lounge with a concerned expression. He politely requested, "Mr. President, please come with me."

President Davis stood up and followed the doctor into his office.

The doctor sat behind his mahogany wooden desk and gestured for the President to sit opposite the doctor in a beautiful, dark red leather armchair.

Sitting down, the President smelled the foul, subtle stench of death circulating in the air. The President slowly exhaled and said, "From the concerned look on your face, you are about to give me bad news."

"Yes, Mr. President. I do not want to be the one to inform you, but we found a cancerous growth."

"Okay; spill the beans; is it treatable?" The President's voice crackled from the obvious bad news.

"We found a growth on the pancreas. Unfortunately, we have not had much success in treating pancreatic cancer."

"Is it treatable?"

"No, Mr. President. I wish I could tell you differently, but this cancer is particularly nasty. I wish I could treat you."

The President bowed his face into his hands. He did not want to hear this bad news. After several minutes, President Davis raised his head with a sad grimace spread across his face.

"Okay, doctor, tell me honestly. How much time do I have?"

The doctor's hands trembled a little as he told the most powerful man in the world how much time he had left. Then he stated in a wavering voice, "Sir, you have anywhere from a year to two years."

The President asked softly, "Will I suffer?"

“In the beginning, you’ll appear normal. Once the cancer has almost consumed the pancreas, then the cancer will become painful. Then death is imminent.”

The doctor’s eyes became watery while tears were ready to flow. He wanted his famous patient to live.

Then the President exclaimed, “Doctor, thank you for this news. You do not need to shed tears for me. It means my mission on this earth is almost over, and I still have time to prepare for my death. I must pass the leadership of the American Empire to the next generation.”

The President jumped from the chair and shook the doctor’s hand. Then he added, “Please keep this a secret from everyone. I want to appear strong and potent until the very end.”

“Yes, sir, I understand. This conversation will remain strictly confidential between us.”

President Davis exited the doctor’s office with his head bowed down.

A few days later, a strong, healthy President addressed the nation.

It saddens me to give you this speech today.

I was your ruler for 41 years.

Unfortunately, I will not be here forever.

I am only a man because God gave me a limited time.

Now I know I am approaching the end of my life.

Thus, we must prepare for the day when I will no longer be your ruler.

It would help if you were not sad.

We did many great things.

But we also did many terrible things.

I used this limited time prudently and built this almighty Empire.

However, in all honesty, it was never my Empire.

It was always the people’s Empire.

I only sat at the helm and told people what to do.

Your hard work and effort allowed this Empire to grow and flourish.

I could not have done this alone.

That is why I am going to let you decide.  
I give you the right to vote.  
You have two choices.  
You can vote for a republic.  
If most people support the Republic, I will allow the political  
parties to form again.  
All public offices are opened to the voters.  
If the majority wants me to appoint my successor, I will abide by  
your choice.  
I will caution you.  
Choose your decision wisely.  
After I have relinquished power, I will lose it forever.  
I am too old to get it back.  
Furthermore, cast all your emotions and feelings to the side.  
Base your decision on which will give you the longest prosperity  
and the brightest future.

The country was in an uproar. Members of the National Workers' Party were shocked. Has our leader gone mad? He wants to bring back the Republic. If the Republic returned, the new government would go after the National Workers' Party members. This party never legitimately held power; it seized it. The new government would lock them up and charge them with crimes against humanity.

Jerrick sat in the Oval Office on the couch near the fireplace. He stared at a stack of documents before him, gathering dust. He poured a tumbler of scotch that sat precariously on the table's edge.

His furious wife entered the room and immediately started in on him. She screamed, "Jerrick, what are you doing? I thought we agreed Aric would be your successor."

Jerrick looked up at Thalia with a blank expression and replied dryly, "Thalia, I never agreed to that. Besides, I do not know why you are worried. I believe the people will make the right choice."

"What do you mean? What is the right choice?"

"Thalia, trust me. I know what I am doing. When times are good, people never like change. For people to want change, they must be unhappy with their current circumstances. They must be unhappy

with the current leadership. People in the American Empire are happy and content.”

“But Jerrick, what about Aric?”

“Aric resembles me; he talks like me; he is smart and has half my DNA. If people cannot have me, then they will choose the next-best alternative, which is my son. I am sure my son will be an excellent ruler.”

Thalia approached Jerrick menacingly as if she had prepared to attack him.

Jerrick continued, “Besides if the people approve of Aric, he has legitimacy. I never was a legitimate ruler. I never asked the people for their approval. I just seized power and never looked back. Then I expected the people to fall in line and obey me.”

Thalia stood two feet away from Jerrick. She was a cat ready to pounce on its prey.

“Thalia, I’m dying.”

Thalia’s anger melted away, and she asked, “What?”

“I’m dying. My doctor thinks I have from one to two years to live.”

Thalia sat next to Jerrick on the couch and rested her head on his shoulders. Then Jerrick slid his left arm around her to pull her in close.

“Jerrick, why didn’t you tell me sooner?”

“I did not want anyone to know. I want to appear strong to my last breath.”

Thalia whispered, “Do you think the people will vote for our son?”

“Thalia, have faith in me. I put much effort into constructing my Empire. Do you think I would allow someone else to come along and screw it all up? I am serious about my Empire lasting for five centuries. I built something that will stand for centuries.”

The President picked up his scotch and sipped it.

Thalia wrapped her loving arms around Jerrick and scooted her head closer to Jerrick’s face. Then she sobbed with tears running down her cheeks.

Jerrick returned the scotch to the table and caressed Thalia’s back as she cried in his arms.

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President Davis allowed all Americans to vote on the first Tuesday of November 5, 2058. Over 90% of the citizens voted on that historic Tuesday. Poll lines stretched several blocks away from the polling stations. People stood happily and calmly in lines, waiting for their right to vote.

The American Empire came to a crossroads, and the President allowed the people to choose their fate.

As the President expected, the people of the Empire were happy. Good-paying jobs were plentiful, and the great cities of the North and South Americas flourished and grew rapidly. Eighty percent of the people wanted the American Empire to continue.

Aric Davis won by a landslide with 70% of the votes; Dan, the Vice President, got 10%, while the rest went to the third-party candidates. People wanted the American Empire to continue and thrive, and Jerrick's son would take over. The second generation of Davises would rule the Empire.

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The President's doctor was correct. By September 21, 2059, pancreatic cancer hit President Davis hard. He remained solid and potent until September. After September, the cancer just sucked all the life from him.

The President appeared pale and weak and aged 20 years over one night. Prominent deep wrinkles formed over his face as his strength and vitality surrendered to the cancer.

doctors segregated the President into a separate wing by himself, giving the best medical care for their most prestigious patient.

President Davis lay weakly on the hospital bed with various tubes and wires connecting him to a stack of machines surrounding his bed.

Jennifer, Dan, Chad, and others stood around the leader's bed.

“Jerrick, you can’t die,” Jennifer shrieked as tears streamed down her face. She grabbed the President’s right hand, holding it in her hands.

“I’m sorry. This cancer is ravaging my pancreas; my body becomes weaker by the day. Doctors cannot do anything about it. Plus, I’m old,” Jerrick stated apologetically.

Chad asked, “What will become of us?”

“A transition of power is imminent. You guys are marked. A new leader can purge the party members. Most likely, my son will replace me, but the military could stage a coup and appoint one of their own as President. Thus, all of you are in danger. That is why I gave you all new passports with new identities. You can go anywhere in the world, and you will be forgotten. You can disappear and live the rest of your lives in peace and tranquility.”

“Do you think your son will start a new purge?” Dan asked because he was concerned about their safety.

“I do not know. I utilized a purge to establish my leadership and strike fear into people’s hearts so they would obey me. He may do it as well to define his leadership.”

Chad asked, “Do you think your son will be a good ruler?”

“I do not know. Only history can answer that question. I raised my son right and taught him everything I know about leading. However, he is not me. My son grew up in luxury and privilege. He had everything handed to him. I grew up with modest means. Having little money defines a person. Poverty defines a person’s character.”

Dan persisted, “Jerrick, you didn’t answer the question. Do you think your son will be a great leader?”

“You know, I think he will be fine. If my grandson or great-grandson becomes ruler, then probably not. My family tree will forget its roots. They will forget where they have come from. Eventually, my family tree will start producing bad leaders who become too rich and spoiled.”

President Davis looked around the room and saw everyone’s sad faces.

The President continued, “Everyone, don’t be sad! We accomplish something great! We did something few people could

accomplish in their lives. We built something that will last for centuries. Don't worry about my imminent death. Remember all the things we have accomplished when we built this magnificent Empire. We have made history together!"

The President grabbed a tissue and wiped the tears from Jennifer's cheeks.

After his cabinet and top officials had left, his wife and son entered the room. They ran to Jerrick's bed and hugged him.

Both his wife and son were crying as tears flowed down their cheeks.

"Aric, do not cry. You must be strong."

"Dad, I don't want you to die."

"I know, but my time has come. I cannot do anything about it. You must be strong. You will be the ruler. People have elected you."

"Dad, I do not know what to do. I do not know how to lead?"

"I prepared you for this day. I taught you everything you needed to know. Besides Aric, you have one thing I never had: legitimacy. People never elected me as ruler, but they elected you. It would help if you continued my work. I also drenched blood on my hands. This blood will never wash off. I executed people, innocent people. Your hands are clean. I will be a controversial leader, but you can become a great ruler with clean hands. All your deeds can be good while my misdeeds do not become yours."

His son leaned down to hug his dad while Jerrick hugged his son.

Then Jerrick continued, "I love you, son. Take care of my Empire, or should I say our Empire. Be strong! Tomorrow, you must give a speech in front of the Senate. Then they will confirm you as the legitimate ruler of the Empire."

His son pulled back. His eyes were watery, but the tears stopped flowing. Then his son turned to leave.

Before his son had opened the door, Jerrick shouted, "I left you two South American countries you can easily conquer: Chile and Argentina. Add those countries to the Empire. Remember, be strong; you will make a fine ruler. Remember everything I taught you. Then history will record you as a great ruler."

Then Aric left the room and returned to the Whitehouse to prepare his speech.

Thalia stayed in the room, sitting on the edge of Jerrick's bed, leaning over to hug him.

"I love you, Jerrick," she whispered, tears streaming down her face.

"I love you too, Thalia."

Thalia pulled back and looked at Jerrick, surprised.

"This is the first time you ever told me," She replied while she studied him to see if he had made a cruel joke.

"I know, but I was never sure you loved me."

"What? Jerrick, how can you say such a thing?"

"I never was sure because I represent wealth and privilege and power. Many women would marry me, but few would love me truly."

Thalia laid her head on his upper chest and whispered, "In the beginning, that was true. I married you because of your power and prestige. I was also angry with you because you invaded my country, but then I fell in love with you. I saw you were doing good. You built new schools, hospitals, and housing for low-income people in Mexico; you restored law and order and brought plenty of good-paying jobs to Mexico. Then I madly fell in love with you."

Thalia just lay there for several minutes until Agent Harris entered the room.

"Mr. President, I have some important information for you."

That was Thalia's cue to leave the room. She kissed Jerrick on the cheek and strolled out of the room. She turned to look at her husband before she closed the door.

Jerrick never allowed Thalia to be around when the boys talked shop.

Agent Harris began, "Sir, I have one last guest for you."

"One last guest? Who could it be?"

"Sir, please give me a couple of minutes."

Then Agent Harris left the room and returned five minutes later, helping an older lady enter.

The President looked at the old lady, and his face brightened. He said, "Amaliji, what a surprise. I thought I would never see you again."

Then the President turned to Agent Davis, adding, "Aren't you full of surprises?"

"Jerrick, I wanted to see you one last time. Agent Harris came to Moscow to get me and told me about your condition. I came as soon as possible."

"Amaliji, you are speaking English. It has been a long time since our days in Moscow."

"After you had left Moscow, I took courses in English. I tried to come to Michigan twice to get you."

"I know Amaliji. I received your letter a long time ago. I still have it with your pictures."

"Jerrick, I just want to know if you are done building your Empire?"

The President became silent for a minute as he closed his eyes, pondering that question. Then he answered, "In all honesty, I think I am done. I accomplished everything I set out to do, but Amaliji, we cannot run away. I am dying. God is calling me home. I had fulfilled my destiny."

"I know, Jerrick," Amaliji bent down and hugged the President, resting her head on his chest. The President wrapped his arm around her.

"What about your husband?"

"He died four years ago."

"Amaliji, I'm so sorry. Did you ever love him?"

"Yes; when I realized he would be gone, I fell in love with him."

Amaliji became silent for a few minutes, and then she asked, "Jerrick, have you ever wondered how our lives would have turned out if you hadn't left Moscow?"

"Yes, some days I was quite alone at the top. I dreamt of you many times. Several times before I married Thalia, I thought about sneaking out of the Whitehouse and never returning. Then I would sneak into Russia to find you." Then the President began crying. He stored a lifetime of tears for this occasion.

Amaliji pulled a handkerchief from her pocket and wiped some tears away.

“If you did make it to Michigan and asked me to return to Moscow, I would have done it.”

“I know, Jerrick. Fate would not let me take you away. When I first saw you in the café with Lidya, I knew something was special about you. God would not let me keep you. Now I see why. He had a mission for you.”

Agent Harris looked at the President and saw him crying. The most powerful man in the world was reduced to an old, dying, crying man. If the world only knew, Agent Harris would never tell anyone. He would take this secret to the grave with him.

Agent Harris didn't believe in divine Providence, and God touched the President. The answer was simple. Jerrick Ray Davis wanted to build an empire, which he set out to do. He fought for his ideas and plans, and he won. Jerrick Davis had beaten the odds.

History only remembers the winners, while everyone forgets the losers. Nobody remembers the leaders who almost snatched total power; people only remember the dictators who grabbed complete power.

President Davis became a dictator who took total power. He used his power to put Americans back to work, and Americans built Jerrick Ray Davis's Empire. Building empires requires hard work, and it created plenty of good-paying jobs for everyone.

Amaliji bent down and kissed the President on the cheek.

As Agent Harris helped Amaliji leave, the President stated softly, “You have made an old dying man happy. Goodbye, Amaliji.”

“Bye, Jerrick,” and Amaliji left for the last time.

Agent Harris returned 15 minutes later.

“Agent Harris, thank you. I feel I completed my life and have come full circle.”

“Mr. President, please don't talk that way.”

“You often went beyond duty and proved yourself to me. I left you a gift.”

“A gift?”

The President reached over to the side table, opened the drawer, and pulled several documents out.”

“I own several properties throughout the Empire. I kept some properties secret, like my small house on a tropical island just south of mainland Cuba. They call the island the ‘Isle of the Youth,’ and the view is spectacular. I left the property deed as a gift to you.”

“Mr. President, I don’t know what to say.”

“You do not say anything. You have earned it. I have one question and one more mission for you. My question is, what will you do after I die?”

“Mr. President, please don’t talk that way.”

“Please, Agent Harris. I want to know.”

“If your son renews my commission with Homeland Security and allows me to work with him, I’ll do it. If not, then I will start a private security business. I could start my business in Cuba.”

“I wish you the best, Agent Harris.”

“My last mission for you is to sneak into Russia and find the first love of my Lidya. Give her this bank account information, which contains several million dollars. If she is not alive, then give it to her children. If they refuse it, then the money is yours. After all these years, I finally forgave her. I have finally found peace with myself.”

Agent Harris accepted the property deed and bank information. Glancing down at the property title, he noticed it was already in his name. He should go to Cuba.

Agent Harris tucked the documents into his jacket pocket and sat in the chair, reading a newspaper. He kept a good eye on the President.

After a little while, he heard the President sleeping soundly.

At 3:33 in the morning, Agent Harris awakened to a loud shrieking noise from the heart-rate monitor. The President’s heartbeat stopped.

All the doctors and nurses ran into the President’s Room, resuscitating him, but to no avail.

Jerrick Ray Davis died.

Agent Harris ran into the hallways screaming, heading straight for the men’s restroom. He cried in the toilet stall and thought he should retire.

God made only one copy of Jerrick Ray Davis; now he was gone. He will complete his last mission for the President and sneak into Russia before returning to Cuba.

The next day, the Empire mourned its emperor.

Many people missed work, and they gathered in street parades. Crowds walked along the streets, holding candles and grieving the loss of their leader. In the parks, people stood behind pulpits and proclaimed the leader's accomplishments, including how he rescued America and brought good-paying jobs back to America.

Elsewhere in the world, leaders and heads of state were meeting. They were happy President Davis had died, but now his son held the reins of power. They knew they had little time before the Empire sent ships across the ocean to conquer new lands and people.

Everyone knows empires constantly expand until they hit their limit. After they had peaked, they rapidly disintegrated and disappeared into the sands from whence they came.

The world's leaders knew the American Empire had not attained its limit. It had plenty of room to grow.

Jerrick Ray Davis constructed his Empire to last for centuries. Historians would record him as famous, and several chapters would be devoted to President Davis and his American Empire.

A strong, vibrant Aric Davis stood before the Senate with the nation and the world watching as he delivered his first speech to the country. He resembled his father.

It saddens me to stand here today.

Like all citizens of the Empire, we loved President Davis.

He was a great ruler.

He brought back manufacturing jobs, strengthened the Empire's military, and added many new states.

However, the Great President Davis is gone.

God called him home.

Citizens of the Empire elected me to take his place.

Now, a new chapter opens for the Empire.

A new age is born.

The younger generation is taking over the leadership of the American Empire.

Unfortunately, my father left some huge shoes to fill.  
However, I will continue his work.  
Under my leadership, the American Empire will thrive and grow.  
She will become mightier and stronger.  
No one can stop the American Empire or the strong working  
values of the American people.  
The first business order is to establish a holiday to honor President  
Davis.  
Every citizen takes a day off on January 7, his birthday, to pay  
homage to the first great leader of our glorious Empire.  
We owe our lives and future to President Davis.  
Without him, the United States would have collapsed into a third-  
world country after the 2026 Hyperinflation.  
Now, Americans will dominate the world for centuries.  
Honoring President Davis on his birthday is the proper thing to do.  
He made Americans great again and united them under one flag.  
Now, we are genuinely all Americans!  
We are the most powerful people in the world, and nobody can  
stop us.  
Americans will rule the world for centuries.

After Aric Davis' short speech, the members of the Senate stood up and clapped vigorously. The Chief of the Supreme Court and head of the Senate trotted to Aric Davis. They started the ceremony to swear him in as the second President of the American Empire.

Aric promised the citizens that he would fulfill his father's destiny. The American Empire continued growing and prospering for several centuries.

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## Epilogue

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Agent Harris traveled to the Isle of Youth, Cuba, to see his new home. President Davis did not exaggerate one bit. His house was built on a hill overlooking the bay. He saw palm trees covering the hill, which descended to a rocky shoreline along the Caribbean Sea.

When he first saw the house, he opened the front door, ran across the living room, and stood on the deck.

Harris watched the waves of the Caribbean Sea softly crashing on the rocky shore below. The water was a light blue, pristine, and sparkling under the sun's rays.

Agent Harris stayed at his home for two weeks. Every morning, he sat on the patio, drinking his favorite coffee, French roast coffee with two spoons of sugar and cream. Then he watched the morning sunrise, savoring his favorite brew.

Agent Harris completed his last mission, sneaking into Russia and finding Lidya. He could steal the money from the bank account, but it never crossed his mind. He loved President Davis like a father. Besides, Agent Harris became rich working for the Empire and already stashed several million dollars away at his bank.

One thing about the American Empire is that it continually created new billionaires by the day. President Davis was not upset as the people of his Empire became rich. Wealthy people indicated that everyone was working hard and creating wealth.

Besides, Agent Harris remembered the old stories. He remembered when he was a teenager when the U.S. economy collapsed in 2016. Then times became tough. Agent Harris showed his parents his acceptance letter during one supper as a young man. He started working for the Department of Homeland Security. His parents were so proud and always said that America would have collapsed if Jerrick Ray Davis never came along. Americans would fade from history, but President Davis ensured Americans would dominate the world for centuries.

Agent Harris snuck into Russia for the last time and found Lidya with no problems. Lidya was alive and happy that Jerrick Ray Davis remembered her. Of course, she snatched that bank account

information. She planned to give her grandchildren a bright future where they could someday travel and study in America like her.

Before Agent Harris returned home, he visited the café at the Universal State store, GUM, one last time. Strolling through the door, he shook his head in disgust at the old, ugly, Soviet concrete buildings that would stand for centuries.

Agent Harris went to the place where President Davis found love and where he first met Amaliji. He sat down, drank his coffee, and peeked at the beautiful Russian blonde working behind the counter.

Agent Harris looked under the table to see if President Davis had carved his initials because everything in the café appeared ancient. Then the agent's eyes returned to the counter, studying the woman who took his order of cake and coffee.

She glanced at him occasionally as he sat at the table, sipping his coffee.

Agent Harris went to the counter and flirted with her. Besides, if their relationship worked out, he owned a beautiful house on the beach that he could share with a lovely woman. Besides, she would be crazy to turn down a chance to live in luxury and tranquility in the Caribbean, and a beautiful woman adds to the dream.

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Dan, Jennifer, and Chad retired after President Davis' death. Assuming new identities, they lived in Cabo San Lucas in Mexico, in the State of Baja California Sur. San Jose Cabo was located at the bottom tip of the Baja Peninsula on the Western side of Mexico.

All three fell in love with the mountainous desert climate, surrounded by the Pacific Ocean.

One night, all three went to Dan's million-dollar condo on the west side of the mountains. They sat on the balcony, drinking Coronas with a perfect panoramic view of the deep-blue waters of the mighty Pacific Ocean. If a tsunami wave rolled onto the shore, the wave would never touch his condo.

As dusk approached, they watched the sunset over the Pacific Ocean.

Chad asked, “So Dan, tell us the truth, did you ever want to assassinate Jerrick and take over the Presidency? You were the second in command.”

“Many times. As you know, total power has no friends, only enemies. After each time, I came to my senses,” Dan explained mysteriously.

Jennifer asked succinctly, “What do you mean you came to your senses?”

“Have you ever noticed everything went Jerrick Davis’s way? He stayed three steps ahead of everyone. Everything he did, he used little effort,” Dan uttered poignantly.

“I know what you mean; it was always eerie in some ways. A million things could go wrong at any step, but they never did for Jerrick,” Jennifer added.

“Jerrick Davis was always meant to be a leader. He became the key to the revolution and the building of the Empire. Without Jerrick, we would never see the American Empire. That was his destiny and sole purpose in life. He saved the United States by converting it into an Empire.”

Dan paused to take another swig of beer and continued, “If I assumed power, I was afraid I would fuck it all up and everything would collapse.”

Jennifer uttered, “Yeah, I know; you would have screwed everything up, but you’re right. Everything worked out for Jerrick. Jerrick stopped his bus before us, and we all hopped on. Then Jerrick drove us to the top with him.”

“Do you think history will remember us?” Chad inquired softly.

“We stood next to Jerrick as he built the American Empire so that we will be remembered. However, everyone will know Jerrick Ray Davis while we’ll be footnotes in history,” Dan explained.

“We do have hospitals, schools, and airports named after us. We’ll not be completely forgotten,” Jennifer bellowed.

Chad asked, “What about his son, Aric? It’s hard to believe that little boy grew up to become the Empire’s second ruler. Do you think he’ll be a good ruler?”

“I do agree with Jerrick. I think Aric will do well. Jerrick designed the Empire to survive several bad rulers, but we’ll never

see one. Aric probably will be President for at least 30 years, and he'll do well," Dan concluded confidently.

Jennifer asked, "Do you think the Empire will ever crumble?"

"Of course, it's inevitable. All empires will fail, but we will never see ours fail because that's at least two centuries away," Dan explained.

Chad asked, "Did you ever think that Jerrick might have us purged when he assumed control of the Presidency?"

"I'm sure he considered it. Remember, at the top, you can't trust anyone."

Dan paused briefly and added, "I'm sure Jerrick had everyone watched, too. I heard rumors that Jerrick planted spies everywhere, hiding them deep within our government."

Jennifer became exasperated and asked, "But Dan, you were second in command. You would have seen all the budget reports."

"I did see all the budget reports, but one of my bright assistants accidentally found traces where someone skimmed money from the budgets. At first, we thought we had found a mistake that had added to several trillion dollars over 30 years," Dan added with mystery and awe.

Jennifer asked in complete surprise, "Wow! You don't think Jerrick stole that money?"

"Of course not! Jerrick was the leader. He could ask Congress for that money, and they would have given it to him without questions. One day, after meeting, I just blurted out my discovery."

Chad's voice rose in pitch, "Well, what did Jerrick say?" Chad was anxious and wanted Dan to answer.

"He laughed it off. He said he was funding some important projects that will lead the Empire into the 22nd century as a technological leader."

Jennifer stated in a hurt tone, "If he didn't tell us, then he had to tell someone. I thought I was his key person for technology?"

"He told his son," Dan said sternly.

Both Jennifer and Chad asked in surprise, "What?"

"One day, I was waiting for Jerrick. His son was seven and played with some toys. He had this weird aircraft. I asked him what

it was. He said his dad and he are making new spaceships to take the troops to outer space.”

Jennifer stated in surprise, “What? Are you kidding me? Jerrick told his boy his secrets?”

“That meant Jerrick always planned for his son to succeed as ruler. The election was a complete ruse,” Chad stated.

“Of course it was. Jerrick always meant Aric to be the second ruler of the Empire. Jerrick gave the appearance that the people had a choice, but he was the consummate poker player. He was the best of the best,” Dan said with admiration.

Dan raised his beer bottle to propose a toast, “To Jerrick, buddy, may you rest in peace. Thank you for taking us on your journey, saving America, and building something that would never be forgotten.”

Bottles clinked together, and they took large swigs of their beer.

Tears started to swell up in Chad’s and Jennifer’s eyes. Then Chad held up his bottle for another toast and added, “Jerrick, I wish you were here with us. Thank you for being our friend. Perhaps you found peace in the afterlife.”

They clanked bottles again and drank more beer. Then Dan added, “May Jerrick be in heaven, helping God build his Empire.”

“But Jerrick did many misdeeds, too. I’m sure he’s resting in a hot place now,” Jennifer retorted.

“Well, wherever he is, I’m sure he’s taking charge and building something. That’s Jerrick’s nature. Jerrick gives commands; he doesn’t take them,” Chad said sadly, remembering his good old friend.

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Thalia Davis moved out of the Whitehouse after her husband died, returning to Mexico City to retire. She kept busy speaking at public events or reading books to school children. People still loved her and called her the First Lady of the Empire.

In her palatial home, Thalia always walked past the portraits of Thalia and Jerrick Davis hung prominently on the walls. She felt a

tinge of sadness, glancing at Jerrick's portraits. His death left a void in her heart.

Thalia wished she had spent more time with her son, but he was always busy. Aric was always working. If he weren't working, then he paced in his office in deep thought. Like his father, Aric was a workaholic, dreaming about a bigger and better Empire.

Thalia moved out of the Whitehouse because she didn't want to pester Aric. Besides, if she needed him, she knew she could pick up a phone and call him. Aric would answer his mother, no matter where Aric was. Once Aric marries and fathers children, Thalia would return to the Whitehouse, raising her grandchildren and preparing the next generation of rulers.

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President Davis the Second paced around the Oval Office in deep thought, pondering his next course of action. He considered purging the malcontents in his government and the National Workers' Party but decided against it. His dad made the Empire's government one fast and efficient working machine, and Aric did not want to interfere with it.

Now Aric knew what he must do. During the elections, opponents crawled under the rocks and voted against the American Empire. Aric would follow them and make them examples, solidifying and establishing his authority. No one dares question the President.

Aric wondered if his dad granted a free election to help Aric find dissidents and protesters of the Empire, placing their heads on silver platters. He knew his dad was quite clever.

President Davis trotted towards his dad's desk to the Whitehouse's Oval Office. As Aric approached the desk, he lightly patted the head of a carved lion that jutted out from the side. This desk was his father's favorite, a former possession of Hugo Chavez and even a Russian Czar.

Aric loved the hand-carved lions and banners and the dark green velvet top. As a kid, his father let him sit behind this desk on his lap

while he pretended he was a ruler. Now, he had become the new ruler of the American Empire.

Aric already sent the military to conquer the last two South American countries: Chile and Argentina. They were easy pickings, just like his father said. They fell within hours of the invasion if you can call it that. As the armies strolled onshore, the people celebrated in the streets with parades and parties.

Aric kept his dad's staff and professionals. They were experts at annexing and developing invaded countries, turning it into art. After each conquest, the Empire added millions of more citizens, and the Empire's military became larger, creating more jobs and redeveloping the large Latin cities. The Empire constructed new housing, government buildings, schools, highways, and dams.

However, President Aric Davis wanted history to record him as a great conqueror like his father. His picture would lie across the page in history books from his dad, who was recorded as a great ruler and doubled the size of the American Empire.

Aric unrolled a map of the world, sprawling across the whole surface of the desk. His finger slid over the map, searching for new conquests.

Aric settled on Africa, a continent brimming with natural resources and minerals. However, violence and civil wars have plagued Africa for the last century. After annexing Argentina and Chile, he would send the Empire's military across the Atlantic Ocean to Nigeria and South Africa.

The Empire would pursue Nigeria's petroleum and South Africa's gold and diamond mines. Then Aric would spend his remaining life conquering and developing Africa, forming new rich states of the American Empire.

Afterward, he would send armies to the Middle East, seizing their petroleum. In time, the Empire would own the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

After that, who knew? If Aric married and had a son, his son would lead the Empire's armies north into Europe. Europe would make a fine addition to the American Empire. Since many Americans' roots originate from Africa and Europe, the mighty son would return home to care for their aging, ailing parents.

One day, everyone will be united under one flag, under one empire.

The End

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## About the Author

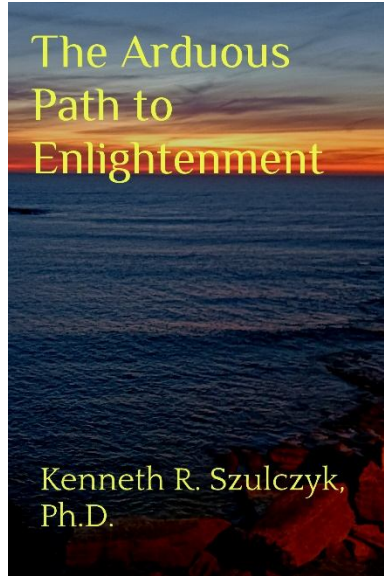
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I was born in a small town in Michigan, filled with the noises of factories. While growing up, I witnessed factory closures, which brought high unemployment and few economic opportunities. I left the town to pursue my dreams and enrolled in a university. My education opened the door to the world, where I graduated with a Ph.D. in environmental and natural resource economics from Texas A&M University. With my degree, I traveled and lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Kazakhstan, Morocco, Malaysia, and the United States. Currently, I teach economics and finance at a small university in Morocco. Despite my humble beginnings as a poor boy from Michigan, I am doing alright. I am living life to the fullest.

Other books from the author:

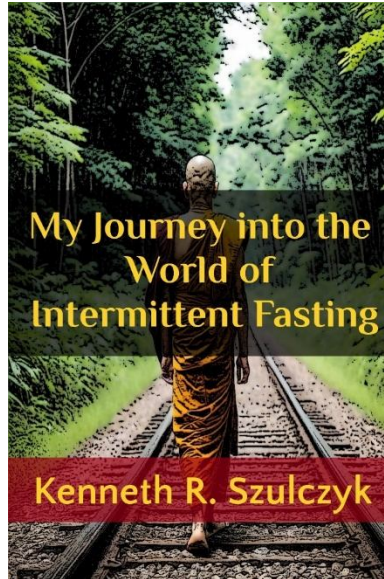
### *The Arduous Path to Enlightenment*

As human beings, we often ponder upon our existence on this earth and ask ourselves why we are here. We search for answers through various religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. They share a common theme where God wants us to use all our talents and become closer to Him. We examine methods like fasting, meditation, lucid dreaming, sensory deprivation, and mind-altering drugs such as psychedelics and marijuana to explore our minds and awaken our spirituality. We delve into the deep depths of our minds and psyches to gain greater awareness and uncover hidden aspects of ourselves. Through this journey, we discover our true selves and purpose in life while traversing the path to enlightenment.



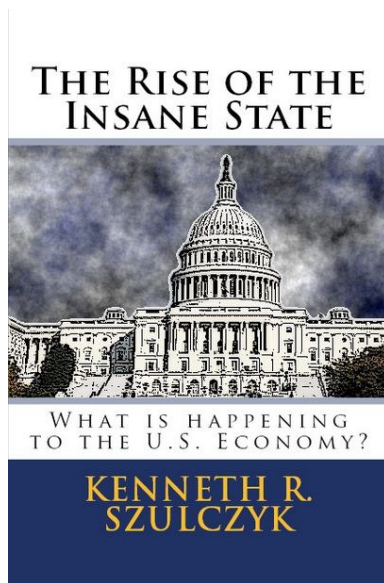
### ***My Journey into the World of Intermittent Fasting***

Intermittent fasting is a journey with many twists and turns. We may not be exploring ancient stone ruins in the jungles of Cambodia or savoring the exotic flavors of spicy Thai cuisine from the food carts on the streets of Bangkok. However, fasting is a journey to a healthier body. In this book, I take you on this journey, sharing practical insights and tips on all aspects of fasting. I've distilled my knowledge and extensive research into an easy-to-follow guide, including 50 practical tips on fasting, exercise, and nutrition. My book is a tool that can help you discover the power of intermittent fasting and unlock the doors to a healthy, long life.



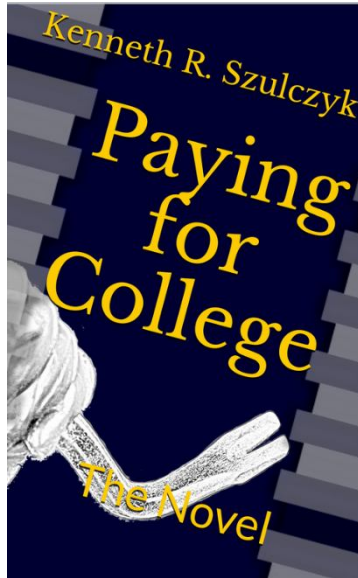
***The Rise of the Insane State - What is Happening...***

This book offers a comprehensive view of the U.S. legal system, explaining the relationships between the people, businesses, and their government. It's not filled with complicated statistics or high-level economic jargon. It's written for any intelligent person who wants to understand why a government takes over its economy. The book uses numerous examples and cases from the United States, but these ideas can apply to any country. It's a book that makes complex concepts accessible and understandable.



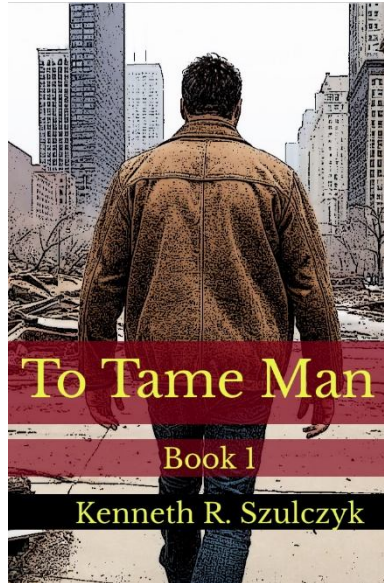
*Paying for College – The Novel*

Brothers, I only wanted to attend a university and escape a small town with no job prospects or future. But every time I opened my mailbox at the dorm, I pulled out another tuition bill with a looming due date. So, I had to do the unthinkable—break a few rules and do some insane things. Then everything just became crazy.



### ***To Tame Man***

The United Federation of Cities has been at peace since the Great War, and one of its great cities, Chicago, has experienced no violence, no crime, and no murders in 68 years. Then Susan, the director of the Male Processing Unit, ran out of Growth Inhibitor 37, and several males, including Brown 447, didn't get their treatment. Unfortunately, Brown 447 shows an uncanny intelligence and rises up and challenges the society of Chicago. Mayor Lilith and the Mayor's Guards must restore the social order and return law and order to Chicago.



### *Searching for Stolen Love*

Fox is an American finance professor. He is thrilled to teach at the Bosnian University of Management, a place, where he hopes to make a difference. His future is bright, and he fell in love with a Serbian woman. Having just completed his first semester, he is looking forward to a peaceful winter. But one night, his girlfriend disappeared without a trace, and he is left with a growing sense of unease. Determined to find her, Fox embarks on a search that would lead him to uncover a mystery in the land of blood and honey.

