

The Methuselah Man

“Big Stick diplomacy ensures our safety for only as long as our side has the biggest club. The day those we would dominate obtain their own Big Stick, we should pray our past words were gracious and our past actions benevolent. If archaeology has taught us anything about ourselves, it is that we have been slow to learn this lesson.”

Prof. Robert Reid Clark
University of Edinburgh
Co-Founder, The Cloister of Akhenaton, 1926

1

“GOD, I NEVER KNEW A MAN who wanted so much to be dead...or deserved it more.”

Joe Rosenfeld gazed down into the shallow hole at the plain, unmarked, lead container, slightly larger than a cigar box. A thick marine layer hung tight to the ground, swirling a puff of foggy cloud as Rosenfeld tossed a shovelful of wet dirt into the hole and handed the shovel back to the groundskeeper. The funeral service—if one could call it that—was small, only three people: Dr. Joe Rosenfeld, his secretary Liz Charles, and Jefferson the groundskeeper.

“That’s it?” said Liz Charles. “An entire lifetime comes down to a dozen words or so, one sentence?”

“What am I going to tell God He doesn’t already know?” said Rosenfeld.

“I don’t know, but damn, that’s it?”

“Look around, Liz. Do you see throngs of people wailing? Have the masses gathered for a tearful farewell? Is there a wife overcome with grief at the loss of her dear husband? Children, grandchildren, their eyes reddened by the loss of the family patriarch? A business friend, a best buddy? No. There’s you, me, and the groundskeeper. And Jefferson there is on the clock.”

The groundskeeper remained silent.

“God, that’s sad,” she said.

“You know, for the first time since we met Jared Kennan Cain, I’m starting to think maybe he was right. Maybe God *can* abandon some people. I always used to think no one was beyond His reach; that even the smallest sparrow couldn’t pass without His taking notice. Now I don’t know. Is it all just a fairytale, self-delusion, a nice bedtime story to scare away the dark?” Rosenfeld looked down at the grave and asked the groundskeeper, “Do you believe in God, Jefferson?”

“Jus’ Jeff, sir. Do I believe in God? In this business? Yes, sir!” chuckled the groundskeeper quietly. “If I didn’t, I guess I’d be little more than a garbage man,” he said, hesitating a moment before giving a more considered answer. “Yes, sir, I believe there’s a good and righteous God.”

“Well, tonight when you get home,” said Rosenfeld, watching the fog swirl around the hole, “light a candle, or a novena, or whatever you do, and thank Him for making you imperfect.”

The groundskeeper didn’t really understand the suggestion, but acknowledged it.

“Yes, sir. Imperfect. We sure are that! Only made one perfect one.”

Rosenfeld lifted his eyes from the hole in the ground with an ironic smile but let the statement pass. “Jeff, you can wait till we’re gone to finish this.”

“Yes, sir. But what about a headstone, sir? I don’t have any instructions about a headstone or ground plate.”

“There won’t be one. Also,” Rosenfeld looked around the grounds, “are there other places available where this could be buried? Some remote out of the way spot?”

“Yes, sir,” said the groundskeeper beginning to point. “There’s a couple plots over....”

“No, that’s okay. I don’t want to know,” said Rosenfeld, pushing the groundskeeper’s hand down. “After we’re gone I want you to put this someplace else. You can put it anywhere you want. I just want to be able to say honestly that I don’t know where these remains are buried. Understand?”

Jefferson nodded.

“And if anyone should come around asking about this, you don’t know anything about it, right? You don’t know where the exact site is, you don’t know who’s buried here, you don’t know anything. Okay?”

“Well, on that one, sir, I’d have kind of a tough time. We keep good track of where we lay folks; got to, it’s the law.” Jefferson fidgeted where he stood, uneasy that he was being drawn into something that could only get him in trouble.

“Okay, okay, I understand,” said Rosenfeld. “I’m not asking you to break the law, Jeff. I just want to make sure those remains never see the light of day again, wherever you decide to put them.”

Jefferson wore a worried expression as he looked down at the hole.

“Look, Jeff, most likely no one will come nosing around anyway,” said Rosenfeld, taking a different tack, trying to find some compromise language that would put Jefferson at ease and still get him to comply with the request. “But if they do, try to take your own sweet time about finding the place, all right?”

“Yes, sir, I ‘spose I could do that,” said Jefferson, sticking his hands in his pockets, nervously stretching the coveralls. “Memory’s not all it once was,” he seemed to be rehearsing what he’d say if asked. “And with an unmarked grave this small, it could take a little

time to get the exact spot.”

“Good,” said Rosenfeld. “I have every confidence in you, Jeff. And here’s a little something for your trouble.” Rosenfeld extended two folded fifty-dollar bills.

Jefferson looked at the money. *A hundred bucks!* he thought. *They really don’t want this guy found!* He smiled and stuck the money in his coveralls. “Yes, sir, don’t worry about a thing, sir. I’ll take care of everything as soon as you and the lady are gone.”

Rosenfeld and Liz Charles took one last look at the grave, gave the groundskeeper a smile and a good-natured pat on the arm, then turned and walked back to their car.

Rosenfeld said “I’m glad that’s over” then went quiet. After a moment he said, “Liz, when we get to the office, we need to do a little cleaning up. I want you to take Cain’s file home with you tonight.”

“Then what?” she asked, shifting in her seat to look at him, curious at the instruction.

“Get rid of it.”

Rosenfeld’s eyes stayed glued to the road ahead in an effort to avoid eye contact with her.

“Get rid of it?” Liz was surprised by her boss’s order. In fifteen years she had never been asked to do anything like this.

Rosenfeld was adamant. “Yes, get rid of it. Don’t hide it. Don’t throw it away. Don’t shred it,” he said. “Just take it home and burn it!”

“Joe, are you sure you really want me to do that?”

She asked this half-heartedly. She already knew he was serious. And the truth was, if he hadn’t come up with the idea himself, she might have given him a suggestion along those same lines.

“Yes, absolutely!” said Joe, who then added a softer explanation. “I already started a dummy file; before we left for Vegas. I pulled the intake form and a couple of pages from the real file. That will now be the official version.”

Liz gave him a quizzical look.

Rosenfeld became somewhat defensive and annoyed—as much at himself and the circumstances as anything Liz might have said or done—so he feigned irritation at having to explain what to him was obvious.

“The Feds already know he was a client,” he argued out the car window to no one in particular, “so I have to have some record of treating him or they’ll pile all kinds of legal BS on me for tampering with—or worst case destroying—evidence.”

That thought made Liz bristle.

“I can’t believe they can just come in and demand to see your records. What happened to Doctor-Patient Privilege?”

Damn PATRIOT Act! thought Rosenfeld, his irritation churning inside over the misguided clarion call for heightened security, especially when it came at the expense of certain liberties and expectations of privacy. “National Security,” he fairly spat the words under his breath, “...trumps everything these days. In a post-nine-eleven-world, blah, blah, blah,” he said.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” said Liz, doing less than Rosenfeld to hide her anger. “It’s just a lot of trial-by-fear if you ask me! No patriot came up with *that* act!”

Rosenfeld had to smile at her passion. “I know, but for now it’s the environment we live in,” he said, as if surrendering, “so let’s at least keep up appearances. Besides, as far as the dummy file is concerned, if I ever did go to court, I’d have a much easier time discussing the dummy notes than the real ones.”

“You sure got that right! No one in their right mind would believe the truth.”

Rosenfeld said, “On the other hand, I think we’ve already established that the people who’d want that file aren’t necessarily *in* their right minds. Anyway, let’s just hope it never gets that far, that the Feds just drop the whole thing. I mean, the guy’s dead! Isn’t that enough for them?” He shook his head and tried to refocus on trying

to go about their business as usual. “Who’s on my schedule for today?”

“I cleared your morning appointments. I thought you might like to ease back into it.” Liz studied Joe’s face and watched it tense up at each name. “You’ve got Betty Murphy at one, Jill Edwards at two, and Jo Haggerty at three. I left four o’clock open in case you’re exhausted by then.” Liz could see him struggling with it. “If you want I can call and cancel them all.”

Rosenfeld took a deep breath as if to brace himself against an onslaught of reality.

“No, let’s keep things at least looking normal.”

Liz laughed. “Normal! Nice word for a shrink!”

Rosenfeld gave her a cynical smile. “Yeah, well, don’t worry,” he teased, “it’s no term I’d ever apply to you!” Rosenfeld had to laugh. She could see right through him.

Their fifteen-year relationship was, to say the least, atypical. It was strictly platonic; there was never anything physical between them. Their feelings were familial, not sexual, and had been like this since day one. In front of the clients, they were consummate professionals, always on their best behavior, tended to communicate in full sentences. But when it was just the two of them, they seemed to slip easily into characters out of the screwball-comedies of the 1930s and ‘40s; if Joe threw out a line from a Spencer Tracy movie, Liz would be right on top of it with her best Hepburn; if Joe gave her Bogey and asked if she knew how to whistle, Liz was right there with a pretty good Bacall and the perfect response, “Just put your lips together and blow.”

She was priceless! And almost always right!

Liz fluttered back a coquettish smile. “Hey, sweetie, I keep your life interesting, so don’t knock it!”

Liz Charles was, by all standards, a very attractive and engaging young woman. Blonde hair, blue eyes, a thin nose set against soft lush lips, and a thirty-six year-old body that wouldn’t quit—

generally draped in a wardrobe of dubious business acumen that tended to advance that notion. She routinely wore thick black mascara that ovaled her eyes then flared to a point where someday she would have—from a lifetime of smiling—shallow crows' feet—but not yet! Her eyelids were always painted blue, a soft blue. But the combination of that soft blue and heavy black outline, which would have screamed *whore* on the average woman, appeared on Liz Charles more like the understated elegance of an ancient Egyptian queen, the royal consort to a pharaoh. She was, all things considered, probably the perfect synthesis of both.

And where competent secretaries were concerned, Rosenfeld didn't know what he'd do without her!

Joe Rosenfeld turned left out of the Hills of Eternity Jewish Cemetery, aiming the Prius south on El Camino Real for the thirty-minute drive from Colma to their Menlo Park office. It would have been faster to take 280 or 101, even at this time of day, but he wasn't in any particular hurry just now. In fact, after the last five days, he just wanted the whole world to slow down again. And a quiet drive back would go a long way toward meeting that objective.

"Can you believe it's been less than four weeks since this all started?" He glanced over at her and half whispered, "How's your shoulder?"

Liz Charles stretched and twisted her right shoulder, testing it. "It's fine," she said, massaging it with her left hand. "Unbelievably fine, actually." And after giving it some due consideration, she gave her final judgment. "Better than new, I think."

Rosenfeld took in the answer absently, his thoughts already drifting back to early November and the first time he set eyes on Jared Kennan Cain.

2

GEORGE S. AUSTIN WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN President Treem's first choice as Vice President, wouldn't even have made the short list, except that the party needed a victory badly and George S. Austin was the one man who could deliver it. A brutal intra-party primary fight had all but made certain there would never be a *President* Treem without a *Vice President* Austin, and as distasteful as that proposition was, both to Treem's campaign team and party elders, politics was politics. Treem, an altruist at heart, was also a pragmatist at politics and acceded to party demands.

As the great-great-great-grand nephew of Stephen F. Austin, the Vice President's roots in Texas lore went all the way back to the early days of the Texas Republic and counted as much in western history as having ancestors on the Mayflower did for the eastern establishment, maybe more. George S. Austin, as shrewd and calculating a power force as Washington had ever known yet somehow endearingly charming to his constituents, could guarantee the entire southwest; meaning Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, plus Nevada and Utah, Colorado, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho; a total of 87 electoral votes that

Treem needed to win. But perhaps as important as Austin's ability to deliver those states on a cold November Election Day was his ability to withhold them if he didn't come away from the convention with his self-declared birthright—the Vice President slot. At seventy-two, the Presidency had already slipped out of reach, would never be his. He was resigned to that 'personal failure' but had loudly proclaimed behind closed doors at the party's convention, "By-God-in-heaven, I will not be denied the number two position," a declaration the party leadership rightly perceived as a valid threat.

George S. Austin had been an Annapolis graduate, a naval aviator, and a much-decorated Vietnam War hero. Six times an ace, he rose to the rank of Lt. Cmdr. in five short years on the strength of his air combat prowess: two Purple Hearts, a Navy Cross with oak leaf clusters, the Distinguished Service Medal, and the Congressional Medal of Honor. By his thirtieth birthday his heroism had made its way to the silver-screen starring a young Paul Newman. Austin was an American legend by the age of 27, but far from being proud of his achievements, he felt the underachiever because he was already two years older than the minimum age to be a congressman. Elected to the Texas 10th Congressional District seat three days after his 27th birthday, George S. Austin was already guaranteed a comfortable life in politics. But George S. Austin wasn't interested in comfort; he had a destiny to pursue, and he was determined to legislate his way to immortality.

And destiny was fully prepared to cooperate in that endeavor.

A year and a day into his second congressional term, George S. Austin left the House of Representatives forever when six-term Texas Senator Ellis Watson died suddenly of a massive heart attack and it fell to Governor James Whitfield to appoint Watson's successor. What followed for George S. Austin was a nearly *Faustian* rise through the congressional hierarchy. He was appointed to prime subcommittees, subcommittee seats that more-senior party loyalists would have died for—more to the point, would have killed

for. He became the chairman of the two most powerful senate subcommittees through the death of one senator and the early retirement of another, and was eventually made Senate Majority Leader. George S. Austin was a perennial favorite on the Sunday morning talk show circuit, which provided him the perfect springboard to the ultimate national prize: President of the United States of America.

Then came Treem. Seemingly out of nowhere. And the dream was over. Treem was to the political world what the band Revolver was to the world of pop music: a phenomenon. Sinatra, Elvis, The Beatles, U2, and now Revolver transcended all others in their genre, had an inexplicable attraction for the masses. In politics it was Washington, Jackson, Lincoln, FDR, JFK, Reagan...and now Treem.

Now the best George S. Austin could ever hope for was second best, a position he had never been satisfied with. To his credit, he threw himself into being the best No. 2 man he could be, learning everything he could about being the world's most powerful understudy on the world's most prominent stage. It was in this effort that knowledge and opportunity collided with fate once more, and the brass ring of power appeared within his grasp for perhaps one last grab.

George S. Austin, barely into his first term as Vice President, discovered Dr. Cornell Bridger and the Genetic Discovery Corporation, a front for an ultra-secret military operation in Palo Alto, California, whose covert mission it was to know everything there was to know about biogenetic and chemical weapons in the world—and to develop the next generation of those weapons.

3

THE TRAINS IN THE UKRAINE STATION hissed and creaked like a cacophonous, industrial orchestra quietly tuning up as dozens of passengers climbed into the vibrating coaches. Even now, in mid November, an unseasonable arctic cold front had the people bundled up tight; gloves, scarves, and hats holding off the chill as they huffed and puffed clouds of human steam, making their way quickly from the station-house to the warmth of the cars. The smell of cold diesel fumes hung in the air, stinging their nostrils with each frozen inhalation. At irregular intervals along the platform, pairs of uniformed police slapped at their arms and breathed hot air into their cold, cupped hands, dancing in place to generate some heat, joking with each other as they perused the crowds for nothing in particular. No one gave the police much thought today; it was too cold even for the most ardent of officers to hassle anyone without real provocation. This suited Taras Ostrovsky just fine.

Taras Ostrovsky was two days away from becoming a very wealthy man as he boarded the train in Kiev. Rich despite the fact

that of the men involved in this particular business deal, T.O., as he liked to be called, was at the bottom of the money pile, a mere courier in a world of CEOs. For the next two days, T.O. would zigzag his way from Kiev to Bucharest to Istanbul to deliver his oversized briefcase to a trio of Arab entrepreneurs in exchange for a Swiss account number and password worth fifty-million Euros, ‘earnest money’ against future such shipments. Ostrovksy’s share would be in the neighborhood of one-million Euros, a nice neighborhood by any measure, a neighborhood where a twenty-seven-year-old Ukrainian boy with little education, strong, handsome masculine features, and an iron-sculpted body would be sure to get a bit of culture and respectability; a respectable front for his occasional courier duties.

Ostrovsky surveyed the platform for anything out of place as he stepped onto the coach. His eyes swept the people in the seats, as well as the activity out the windows, as he made his way down the aisle toward the next car. He registered a couple of men who he’d pay close attention to during the trip, but nothing set off any particular alarms. He crossed into the Club Car, the air smelling vaguely of stale cigarettes. The bartender, his back turned, wiped and stacked glasses, preparing his station for the inevitable rush once the train got underway. Once across the Club Car, Ostrovsky crossed the coupling transom to the First Class section. Hugging the windowed wall past the common lavatory, he made his way through the narrow corridor to his room four doors up on the left.

Taras Ostrovsky was traveling First Class, though in this instance that merely signified privacy not luxury. He slid open the door and stepped into the small compartment where for the next couple of days, except for meals, a drink or two, or an occasional stretch of his legs, he had been instructed to spend most of his time alone. The appointments were simple: to his immediate right, a small sink and built-in counter for his briefcase and travel bag; to the left, twin padded couch seats hiding a pull-down bed and an overhead storage

bin. The sink comprised a small basin with hot and cold running water, above which was an arched mirror outlined by two red tube lights and flanked by four electrical plates bearing switches and outlets. A red towel bar near the door rounded out the presentation. The padded seats were covered in a light gray bottom cushion and dark gray back, each with horizontal one-inch accent stripes of white, blue, red, and orange. The walls—simulated wood paneling—approximated some designer’s idea of pine or oak. The azure blue curtains on the windows were open.

Ostrovsky placed the briefcase and travel bag on the counter, turned back to close and latch the door, then quickly went to the window and closed the curtain. He stripped off his overcoat and scarf and laid them on the counter. He pulled down the seat back exposing the bed, put the briefcase on the mattress, and closed it up tight again. Ostrovsky reopened the curtain, lit a cigarette, and sat looking quietly out the window at the diminishing activity on the platform. At 9:26 the train began to move and wouldn’t stop again till they reached Cernauti at 6:56 that evening. It was safe to assume no one was getting on or off this train for the next nine hours or so. As they cleared the train yard and headed for open countryside, Ostrovsky exhaled the last drag, stubbed out the butt, and started for the club car. It was time to toast himself, his future, and this wonderful undertaking.

In two days T.O. would be a very wealthy man.

4

WES FRANKLIN STOOD QUIETLY reading the names of the dead, waiting for the friend who had asked to meet him here. The list seemed to go on forever. Fifty-eight thousand two hundred sixty names; men and women; some shot, some blown to pieces, some tortured; twelve-hundred still missing, probably dead; all the rest, definitely dead, irrevocably dead, eternally dead. Many of them had been mere teenagers or barely in their twenties when they were savagely killed; others were fathers, some mothers; all sons and daughters. And no matter what anyone said, no matter what euphemism was applied, there could be no mistake: these dead did not give their lives; for these dead their lives were taken from them, wrenched from them, forcefully, brutally, horribly. Wes was stunned by the magnitude of the cataclysm, the sheer stupidity and waste of it all. Of the fifty-eight thousand two hundred sixty names listed, all were important to someone, but only one had special significance for Wes, though he had only been three-years-old when the man was killed. Dennis Greenwald was a cousin once or twice removed—Wes wasn't quite sure how the whole family-tree thing worked. Dennis Greenwald had actually been his father's cousin, which

probably made Dennis a second cousin. The man had been three days shy of his nineteenth birthday when his body was recovered, *MULTIPLE FRAGMENTATION WOUNDS* neatly typed on the meticulous report form.

A deep but quiet voice reached out from behind Franklin. “Know anyone?”

Wes turned to see Crandall Forsyth standing behind him. He looked back to the list of names. “Yeah, Dennis Greenwald, panel 30E, line 48, Southfield, Michigan,” said Wes. “You?”

“Dale Plote, panel 18E, line 6. From South Elgin, Illinois.”

“How’d he die?” asked Wes.

“Small arms fire.”

“Where?”

“Thua Thien, south of Hue. Dennis?”

“Dak To, Kontum Province, 173rd Airborne Brigade.”

“Ah, the Skysoldiers. When was he killed?” asked Forsyth.

“November 20, 1967.”

“That was one hell of a mess, probably the bloodiest November of the whole war.” Crandall Forsyth shook his head in disgust. “We should have pulled all our people out of there and just nuked the whole damn country.”

Wes, stunned, turned back to the man. “You’re kidding, right?” Forsyth said nothing. “You can’t possibly be serious. Nuclear weapons? The Secretary of State of the United States of America thinks nuclear weapons are a viable option?”

“Everything’s on the table, Wes. That means in the final analysis, we win or they lose.” His expression was as cold as the autumn air. “Why, you have a problem with that?”

“Oh, c’mon Crandall, you can’t possibly mean that.” Wes studied his friend’s expression for a hint of sarcasm but saw none. “You’re telling me that if you had been Secretary of State back then, you would’ve advocated nuking Vietnam?”

Forsyth said, “Take another look at the Wall, Wes,” nodding

toward the endless stretch of names etched in the black granite panels. “You know,” he reflected, “more than twenty thousand of those names wouldn’t be up there if, on the day McNamara finally understood we couldn’t win, he had done everything he could to convince Johnson to pull all our people out of there and just bomb the whole damn country back to the stone-age like some of our politicians and generals wanted to?”

“That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard; and probably the scariest thing I could ever imagine coming out of the mouth of America’s chief diplomat! My god man, you’re the final line of rationality, the last bastion of civilized thought to protect us little guys when all around you have lost their minds! What could you possibly be thinking? You weren’t like this in school!” said Wes, referring to their days at Harvard some twenty years earlier. “If your great-great-grand-uncle—who you were always so fond of quoting, as I recall—could hear you now, he’d rise up from his grave and smack you with his boney, decomposed fingers, slap some damn sense into you!”

Crandall Forsyth smiled at the image. “Come on, Wes, let’s walk a bit. It’s getting cold standing here.” He took Franklin by the arm and led him off toward the Lincoln Memorial. “Nuclear weapons are our strength, Wes. It’s the ‘super’ in super-power. Why shouldn’t we use them? And if we aren’t going to use them, why do we keep them?”

“We don’t use them because they shock our sensibilities to think of the destruction they cause. We don’t use them because the fallout would make us all glow in the damn dark for ten thousand years. We don’t use them because we used them twice on human beings and we’re revolted by the misery and suffering they left in their wake, or should I say crater? We don’t use them because we’re Americans, Crandall, and Americans are better than that.”

The two shuffled slowly along the cement path, the leafless branches of the now-dormant trees wagging cold tendrils at them in

the fall breeze.

“And the other question?” said Forsyth.

“What other question?” asked Wes.

“*Why* do we keep them?”

“Hell if I know! If it were up to me, I’d get rid of every damn one of them tomorrow.”

“You’d leave our country unarmed, vulnerable to our enemies?”

“What *enemies* would you use them on?” asked Wes. “Russia? The cold war is over and they have more to worry about than some ridiculous fear the US will attack them. They’re too busy trying to get enough food, trying to stay warm, trying to overcome nature. North Korea? What are they going to do, blow up a bunch of fish? Who could they reach even if they had an arsenal of nukes? They have no delivery system,” flashed Wes. “They might as well be lobbing nuclear hand grenades! India, Pakistan, Israel, France, Britain? It’s a small club, Mr. Secretary. Which of them should we fear most, which of them should we allow to make us so paranoid we’d risk our own destruction? And by *our*, I mean the whole damn planet!”

“You left one out, Wes,” said Forsyth impassively.

“Who?”

“China. How long you suppose it is before it’s their turn to be the world’s dominant culture?”

“I don’t know but they sure couldn’t screw it up any worse than the west has!”

“What about terrorists, Wes?”

“All right, what *about* terrorists? If a terrorist group sets off a nuke in New York, who are you going to launch against? They aren’t a nation-state, Crandall; they’re a group of street thugs with the ultimate Saturday-night-special.”

Crandall Forsyth lit up in a cryptic smile. “You always were one hell of a bright kid, Wes. I knew that the first day I met you. And not just because you were one of the youngest doctoral candidates

Harvard had ever seen. What were you, seventeen? Eighteen?”

“Nineteen,” said Franklin, almost embarrassed to admit it.

“Oh, *nineteen*, excuse me. What took you so long? Had a little set back in preschool?” said Forsyth in a warm, wry drawl. “Couldn’t quite get the hang of milk-and-cookies and nap time so they held you back a year?”

Wes Franklin had been one of those true rarities: A child prodigy who seemingly came out of the womb already knowing more than most people could learn in three lifetimes. It was like he had been born with the Encyclopedia Britannica uploaded in his head and a direct software link to the Ethernet for everything else. The only thing he seemed *not* to know was just how smart he was. Crandall Forsyth, on the other hand, had gone through Harvard pretty cocksure of himself, ready to take charge of the world. Ready, that is, until the day he was summoned to the chancellor’s office, introduced to a teenage doctoral candidate named Wes Franklin, and told the greatest thing he, Crandall Forsyth, could ever do for the world was to take young Franklin as his charge and make sure nothing bad happened to him. This he did with relish, taking an instant liking to the young Wes. Wes Franklin seemed anything but a prodigy; an engaging young man, far from a burden to Forsyth, who was some eight years senior. And rather than be an albatross to Forsyth’s social life, Wes was actually an improvement; a curiosity everyone wanted to get close to, and a real charmer once they did. Forsyth chaperoned Franklin into adulthood and Boston social life, and Franklin, for his part, served as escort and liaison to Forsyth’s higher self, his true intellect, not just the academic stuff they both excelled at.

Crandall Forsyth thoroughly enjoyed his role as mentor to this amazing youngster, imparting life-lessons to Wes through quotations he attributed to his ‘great-great-grand-uncle’ John Forsyth, the first Secretary of State in the Forsyth family, who served in that capacity for both “*Andy Jackson* and *Marty Van Buren*,” as Crandall Forsyth familiarly referred to the past Presidents as though longtime friends

of the family. *The* John Forsyth, whose thirty-year career in service to his country was pure Georgian legend. In reality, most of the quotes Crandall Forsyth used to inspire Wes were probably just made up, had never really been uttered by his famous relative, but Forsyth expressed them with such a wonderful southern charm and flare that the young Wes was always an attentive, appreciative audience, nonetheless.

So it was even more troubling to Wes that his friend could have wandered so far from his roots, so far from one of the greatest statesmen Georgia ever produced.

“I just can’t believe what you’re saying, Crandall. Was Lord Acton so right that even *you* have become tainted by power—and after just one year?”

“Now, don’t jump to too many conclusions, my friend. Things aren’t always what they seem; maybe I’m not quite as corrupted as you may think,” said Forsyth. “Tell me, you ever heard of Nash Equilibrium?”

“Yeah, John Forbes Nash, game theory. Why?”

“Well, that’s a start. But what do you know about his theory on equilibrium,” asked Forsyth.

“Basically, it’s a solution concept,” answered Wes.

“Go on.”

“All right, you have two or more players in a game, and each has his own strategy for winning—or at least for not losing—and each player knows and understands the strategy of the others. Nash says that, if each player has a specific strategy and no player can benefit by unilaterally changing his strategy if the other players don’t change theirs, then the universe of choices and possible payoffs is frozen, constitutes equilibrium, if you will. The question Nash poses is, ‘Knowing the strategies of the other players, and treating the strategies of the other players as set in stone, can I benefit by changing my strategy?’ Right?”

“Perfect,” said Forsyth. “I wouldn’t have expected anything less

from you, Wes.”

“So?” puzzled Wes. “So how does that change the fact that you’d have to be a raving, friggin’ loon to be willing to launch nukes on the world?”

Forsyth laughed openly. “A ‘raving, friggin’ loon’! Good one.” He shook his head, smiling. “But I’m *not* willing to, Wes. And neither is President Treem. I just had to be absolutely certain you were in accord with that belief before asking for your help.”

Wes looked at his friend, relieved a bit, but curious.

Forsyth asked, “Why do you think I asked you to meet me at the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial?”

“I don’t know; you needed to get some fresh air? All those power people around you were sucking all the oxygen out of the office?”

Again Forsyth smiled. He knew Wes Franklin had a deep, abiding mistrust of the Washington power brokers and wannabes. At the same time, Forsyth believed Wes had a greater love for the underlying philosophies at the foundation of this city than almost anyone Forsyth knew; the same core values both his President and he shared.

“The 1960s were a dynamic, dangerous time for the world,” said Forsyth. “The Wall *is* the decade of the ‘60s, Wes; all the horror, all the tribulation, all the honor and sacrifice, all the best and all the worst we could be. At the beginning of that decade, we raced to build missiles with the potential to destroy us all; by the end of it, we built missiles to take us to the moon, to the stars, and beyond; there was seemingly no end to where we could go and what we could achieve. And always—*always*—we were willing to pay the price.”

Wes watched and listened to his friend, happy to see the man he once knew and loved resurfacing, though he still wasn’t certain where this was all leading.

“Do you remember what our nuclear policies were called back then, Wes?”

“Yeah, mad!” said Wes.

Forsyth smiled at the double entendre. “Right. M-A-D, Mutual Assured Destruction.” Forsyth's whole face lit up, “Now *there* were some raving, friggin’ loons for you; the people who came up with *that* concept.” He paused a second, looking pensively at the icons of history all around them. “But maybe that acronym helped to keep things sane, you know? I mean, what better deterrent to the use of such horrendous force than to know its futility, to know that one wrong move and this beautiful blue planet would be reduced to a cinder? That’s all changed now, Wes. The surreal threat of a thousand ICBMs raining down on us from the sky is gone, replaced by the nightmare scenario of a briefcase full of Plutonium left in a New York waste can on Broadway and Seventh and detonated at the height of rush hour by a lone fanatic with a joystick ten miles away.” Forsyth shone a worried, almost helpless look to Wes. “You were right, you know. Who do we attack with our missiles when *that* happens? The threat is no longer the nation-state, or the city-state; it’s the state-of-one! It’s a fringe lunatic with a pound of ²³⁹Pu—weapons grade Plutonium—strapped to his chest.”

“What do we do then?” asked Wes, almost rhetorically.

“Then? Nothing,” said Forsyth. “Now, Wes. NOW is when we do something.”

“I’m listening. What did you have in mind?” asked Wes.

By now the two had ambled their way over to where Lincoln was sitting, vigilantly keeping watch over the Union he had preserved.

“He said it best,” Forsyth threw his chin toward the marble President. “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” He looked back to Wes. “I’m afraid we have a severely divided house, Wes. The President and Vice President are no longer on the same page on this one. I’m getting worried how and where this rift will end.”

“What’s going on Mr. Secretary?” asked a concerned Wes. “How can I help?”