

THE POETIC NARRATIVES 2
DID YOU NOT LEARN THE FIRST TIME?

INT SWANKY MOVIE STUDIO

TWO MEN walk in, chatting. It is a cool, fall day. One of them is JAKE RAMMOERSTOEN. The other is JJ SEGWIS.

JAKE

"Look, I'm just saying..."

JJ

"Fuck, writing this like a script is annoying. Never mind."

#

Jake and I walked into the swanky movie studio, the cool fall breeze blowing in through the door I carelessly left open.

"Look, I'm just saying, you didn't have to lie to my face about me dying." Jake was still a bit butthurt about... something, I was only partly listening.

"That's the sign of a great author," I said. "The use of plot twists must be carefully guarded, otherwise the audience will see them coming."

"My death wasn't a plot twist! It was heavily foreshadowed throughout!"

"I don't know what 'foreshadow' means, you know damn well that it's past my syllable limit."

We passed a few well-known actors as we walked towards our set. "Well, at least you agreed to my demands for the movie."

"Of course. You are the star, an action hero, and you get all the girls," I placed my hand on his shoulder and pointed him towards an 'x' marked on the floor. "Ok, you stand right there."

Jake strolled towards the x and looked around. "What is this scene again?"

"Just stand right there and... release the fucking snakes!" I ripped off the cover of a nearby barrel and began hurling handfuls of eastern diamondback rattlesnakes at him.

"You son of a bitch!" Jake shrieked as he crouched down to cover himself in vain.

"Fuck, that one bit me!" I glanced at the nearby snake wrangler, his eyes wide and his jaw slack. "Hey are these things poisonous?"

“Very!”

“Oh well, I drink a lot of alcohol, that should clear my system out.” I shrugged and reached back into the barrel to hurl a few more serpents at Jake’s flailing form, covered in puncture wounds and pissed-off rattlesnakes. I paused to catch my breath. The one minute of physical exertion had taxed my wrecked cardiovascular system. “Did you get all that?” I asked the director staring at Jake’s body, his hand covering his mouth as he retched.

“What the fuck do you mean did I get that?” He wheezed. “You never even said we were filming anything, you just wandered in with that man and murdered him with snakes!”

“Jesus Republican Voting Christ!” I threw my hands up. I paused to look at the snake bite on my right forearm, now some weird colors. A mix of yellow and purple... like, yurple. Or pellow. Nah, we’ll go with yurple. “Huh, my arm doesn’t normally do that. Anyways.” My attention returned to the director. “Do what I mean, not what I say!”

“You didn’t say anything!”

“Ugh, amateurs! Now I have to get the voodoo witch doctor to come and resurrect Jake again and have the hypnotist wipe his memory of all this—again—and figure out an amusing way to murder him... again!” I stared at the director. “You do realize witch doctors and hypnotists aren’t free, right? They bill by the hour?” I waved my hands around at the stage. “And after I’ve spent all my money on this!”

“Wait, you self-funded this? How?”

“Oh, I’m in sales.”

“What do you sell to have this much money?”

“I have no idea! But I sold a fuck ton of whatever it is, and now I got a fuck ton of money. And since I have no bills or obligations... hold on.” I paused as my phone rang, the name on the screen reading ‘wife’. Probably calling about our baby not having formula again. “Anyways.” I declined the call and stuffed my phone back into my pocket. “Since I have no other bills or obligations, I decided to spend it all funding a film of the Poetic Narrative.”

#

“He’s doing what?” Mattothy Northman screamed into the phone.

“Yeah, he’s actually moving forward on filming the movie,” Danson C Equestrian said.

“I’m on my way right now.” Matt lifted a well-polished, loaded elephant gun. “If he does this, then I have to participate in a whole new Poetic Narrative. It is imperative we do not let this happen.”

“Shove that ‘we’ right up your ass, buddy boy,” Danson said. “If you see him, let him know his wife is looking for him. She’s a bit pissed he hasn’t paid on their mortgage. Ever.”

Danson hung up and leaned back in the plush chair inside his campaign office, 'Equestrian For Governor' signs everywhere. "Mr. Equestrian," his assistant Clarice said with a huff as she walked in with a stack of papers in her hands. "There's a problem."

"What now?"

#

I tucked my wallet away, impatiently waiting for the voodoo witch-doctor's magic to resurrect Jake. "Thanks again, Dr. Cleo. You always get me out of these jams."

"A good customah always tips." He looked me dead in the eyes.

"Oh yeah, here." I pulled a few more ones out of my pocket. I started to count them, and remembered I don't know how. I shrugged and handed him the wad.

"Dis is good, it helps me remembah you. Take care of ya friend der, you know how dis goes—slowed reflexes, erectile dysfunction, all da bumbaclaaf in his head." Dr. Cleo strode off, his totem-adorned walking stick clattering with each step.

Behind me, Jake moaned. "What happened?"

"Oh shit, I still gotta get the hypnotist—" My phone rang again. Damn wife. I sighed and once again declined the call. "Seriously, there's hot pockets in the fridge, I don't get what she keeps complaining about." A pepperoni-scented burp emerged from my belly. "Oh, right." I helped Jake to his feet.

"So, bad news," I said. He looked at me with bleary eyes. "I think I'm out of money. We're going to have to find alternate sourcing for the film. What's your dental practice worth?"

"I feel woozy." Jake blinked, and dropped to one knee as he violently vomited voracious quantities of bitter black bile.

"Hmmm, I wonder what Danson and his credit cards are up to," I mused, ignoring Jake as he continued to spew more and more fluid behind me.

#

Clarice shifted her weight side-to-side, her knuckles as white as the papers she gripped. "Your friend, JJ Segwis—"

Danson held up a hand. "Friend is a strong term. And if that's about the fucktwit trying to film a movie, I've already been apprised."

Clarice frowned. "You seem awfully calm for the news."

"Wait... why?" Danson leaned forward.

"Well, sir, we received an advance look at the script. Since he's not very good at writing, he attempted to crowdsource it."

"I thought he got a lot of money with his sheer dumb luck at work?"

“No sir, not crowdsourcing the financing, I mean the writing. He posted some garbled, incomprehensible stuff online and asked for people to help him turn it into a fluid narrative,” Clarice said. “Of a poetic variety’, whatever that means. To speak with honesty sir, I should have known about this threat a week ago, but it took some top level global translators, linguists, and experts in the criminally insane quite a bit of time to make any sense of it.”

“What’s the threat?”

“He’s saying you are the mastermind behind... everything, sir.” Clarice paused, and the weight of her words settled onto Danson’s shoulders like a really heavy jacket. “He says that you were his legal counsel and advised him to do... well, everything he has ever done.”

“That’s beyond not true!” Danson bolted up from his chair. “I have repeatedly, and forcefully, advised him against doing everything he has ever done!” Danson slumped back into his chair. He looked out the window, where the dreary day now turned to gentle rain. “We need to handle this.”

“Yes sir. We’re reaching out to our donors—”

“No, money won’t work on JJ, he doesn’t know the value of a dollar because he’s never learned to count. He needs to be... handled.”

“Sir! But how?”

“The gentleman I was on the phone with... ok, gentleman is using the phrase loosely at best, but he is the perfect man for the job.”

“But what if they trace it back to you?”

Danson smiled. “This man is a Canadian. He doesn’t have to sell me out because he has... diplomatic immunity.” He picked up the phone and hit redial. “Matt? Yeah. So I’ve had a change of heart. What do you need to kill JJ?” His smile drooped. “Wait. You need to check with who? Since when did you care what your wife thinks?” Danson’s face paled. “Oh, hi Abigail. Nope, totally had no clue you were also on the line.”

#

Jake and I plopped back into his car. “So if you sell your dental practice, with your 10% share of the movie profits, I guarantee you could buy two more dental practices!” I explained happily.

“I don’t feel good.”

“Oh, we should get you some beer, that will help. There’s a bar that way.” I pointed randomly, because in Florida no matter where I pointed a bar was guaranteed nearby.

My phone rang again. My screen said ‘Mom’, so I answered.

“Hello? Yeah, I’m still alive. I know, I know! I can’t believe it either. No, I’m still in the Tampa Bay area, why? Formula for the baby? Uh... nope, JJ’s dead, this is his evil twin KK. What do you mean you would know if I had an evil twin? I mean, uh, I am the evil... I’m about to

go through a tunnel, might lose you!" I hung up and threw the phone out the window. "Jake, drive before they can track me!"

Jake grunted and drove forward. Three pedestrians shrieked and leapt out of his way.

"Jake! Stop!"

He slammed the brakes, and his body limply bounced forward and back again. Jake slowly blinked. His knuckles turned white on the steering wheel. He frowned and cocked his head as his jaw slackened. "JJ... did you kill me again?"

"There's a bar! Let's go get you buzzed, that'll have you right as rain." I clapped him on the shoulder and hopped out to cross the busy traffic between the dive and us.

#

"And I just want to thank our lord and savior Donald Trump, who most assuredly won the election, for singlehandedly beating the coronavirus forever," Florida governor Ron DeSantis announced, the maskless crowd going wild. Danson watched on a TV in the back of the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center, where he was to give his own campaign speech.

"Good god, I have to beat this man."

"Sir, you're on." Clarice leaned in through the doorway. "Your note cards are on the podium, and we have plenty of sustainably sourced, vegan approved water."

"I couldn't do this without you, I really want to express my appreciation for your efforts." Danson rose and headed down the tunnel leading to the auditorium, steadying his fluttering heart. He had always dreamed of running for office. He knew he could guide this state to a new period of prosperity and peace, and the time was now. Some had told him he was a fool to run directly for governor without holding any other prior office, and to do so as an independent. But he believed in America, and he believed in democracy, and he knew if he proved himself the best candidate that the people would elect him. He paused before the steps leading up to the stage, taking a few deep breaths. If he couldn't present his speech to an audience filled with the diverse peoples of Tampa Bay, then he had no right to even run. He took one more deep breath, and walked up the steps.

The lights flashed on as he entered, waving and smiling proudly, mindful of his posture. A few weak claps emerged, and as he shielded his eyes, he observed a dozen or so folk in the seats before him.

He sighed, then looked over to where the Bay News 9 camera crew was standing. Surely, people had just decided to stay and watch from home, to ensure that they were safely socially distanced. He gathered his notes in front of him, cleared his throat, and took a sip of the purest water known to man.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began.

"We all dudes, ain't no ladies here," a voice shouted from the 'audience'.

Danson ignored it. "My name is Danson C Equestrian, and I am running to become the next governor of the great state of Florida!" He glanced at his notes: 'pause for applause'.

There was an actual, goddamn cricket in the auditorium.

Nevertheless, he persisted. "This nation was founded on a promise. And that is something I hold dear to my heart. It has been said, and I paraphrase, that America is a shining beacon on a hill. And I know in my heart that can be a reality. But only if we keep our promise. Making a promise does not make a man great, and it does not make a nation great. Keeping a promise does. Many, many times in our nation's history we have failed at that. But we can still keep it. We can show charity to our less fortunate. We can come together in true brotherhood, regardless of race or creed. Just as we have failed in our promise, we too have shown shining moments when we have kept it, and those are the times we should cling to. Not as aberrations, but as what we are supposed to be, what our potential is to be!"

He pounded his fist into the podium. "And I am here to be a steward to that promise, a steward to that potential. My campaign is centered around us, as a people, entering a time of inward reflection, and emerging from that into unity. Let us face our own weaknesses—as individual men and women, and as a nation of people—and challenge them. Through this we will become strong, and great, and we will keep our promise—and in Florida, we will light our nation's beacon to the world!"

He folded his hands, and blinked in the blinding podium lighting. They dimmed and the overhead lights came on to illuminate a now empty auditorium.

He pursed his lips and glanced over at the camera crew. "Did you at least get that?"

#

"Did you at least get that?" Danson said to the camera before the feed went back to the weather on the nine's. I leaned back in my barstool, nodding my head thoughtfully. The bartender walked up.

"Can I put The Bachelor back on now?" she asked.

"That's my buddy! I know that guy! We're friends!"

She rolled her eyes and switched the channel.

"So that was a pretty good speech huh?" I looked over at Jake. He was staring at me, his beer bottle shaking in his tight grip. "You ok? You've barely drank your fourth beer."

"Honey, it's shift change, can I close your tab out?" The bartender asked. I glanced over to her as Jake took a hard swing with his bottle. My movement caused him to miss my head by an inch, and the bottle shattered against the bar.

"Sure, that's only the right thing to do," I said. "My buddy here owns a dental practice and is about to be a big time movie investor, so he can take care of ya."

I started to turn back to Jake, then saw a quarter on the ground. "Oooh, a dollar!" I happily reached down as Jake swung the broken bottle where my neck previously was.

“Alright man, we should actually head out.” I rose from the ground and stuffed my newfound bounty safely away in my pocket. “Come on, let’s go see Danson and congratulate him. He’s a few miles away. Like, five or something. I dunno, numbers are confusing.”

“He’s in Tampa, JJ.” Jake scowled. “We’re in Miami.”

“So... more than five miles?”

#

“What is my husband doing?” Matt’s wife Abigail asked, sitting next to her husband in Danson’s campaign office.

“He’s being hired to kill JJ,” Danson said. “Um, look, I don’t want to be weird, or to intrude on your relationship or anything, but since when did you become Matt’s...” He looked down at the business card Abigail had insisted he take. “Director of Decision Making’?”

“He kept coming home covered in hooker semen, so I told him he wasn’t allowed to do anything, ever, with anyone, without me clearing it first.”

Danson nodded. “That sounds like Ma—wait, covered in hooker semen?”

Matt chuckled. “Orlando has some crazy good attractions, you just gotta be a local to find them.”

“Right. So, um, Abigail?”

“Oh, yes.” She smiled. “I’ve actually been encouraging him to take this more seriously. You know, he talks all the time about murdering JJ, but after the first few dozen attempts failed, he got distracted by his...” She frowned and looked at him. “Drums?”

“Guitars, Abigail, I play fucking guitars!” Matt threw his hands in the air. “And I’ll kill JJ for you.” His eyes focused on Danson, his jaw firm. “But it ain’t gonna be easy. I’ll find him for three, but I’ll catch him, and kill—”

“Are you quoting Jaws?”

“Jesus Christ.” Abigail sighed. “He’s been on an AMC kick lately and every other goddamn word out of his mouth is a movie quote. Good luck with that.” She looked at Matt. “Ok, you go kill JJ, but I swear to god if I find a drop of hooker semen on you, you’re a dead man.”

“Don’t worry babe, there’s no hookers in the Tampa Bay area.”

#

Jake dropped me off at the seedy motel where I had been hiding from my wife, child, bills, mortgage, and job. Fifteen stab marks filled the headrest where I had been sitting. It had seemed like a new one popped up everytime I bent down to check the shoelaces on my flip flops.

“Thanks Jake! We should catch up more often.” I hopped out and headed to my room. Jake waited until I was in front of his car, then slammed on the accelerator. A large woman stepped in front of the vehicle, stopping it dead in its tracks.

“You just hit me with your car!” the lady screamed, doubled over his hood.

“It’s fine, I’m a dentist, you’ll live.” Jake rolled up his window, put the vehicle into reverse and let her fall to the pavement with a thud. He watched me enter my room and picked up his smartphone to try googling where he could find black market rocket launchers. His phone buzzed as he scrolled through the results, and the name ‘Matty Matt’ appeared.

“I’m kinda busy, what’s up?” Jake answered.

“Hey man, I’m in town, want to grab a drink?”

“What are you in town for?”

“I’m here to finally kill JJ. Uh, don’t tell him.”

Jake’s eyes narrowed. “Yes, Matt. I think I’ll have that drink with you.”

#

I sat in my room, watching Bay News 9.

“Local man Danson C Equestrian, recently announced as an independent candidate for governor, is under fire for a lack of diversity on his campaign staff,” the reporter was saying.

“I only have one person on my staff!” Danson was frantically explaining in a pre-recorded interview. “I assure you, the needs and unique struggles of our minority citizens are a paramount concern to me.”

I picked up a notepad and jotted down a reminder to look up what ‘paramount’ meant.

“As a white male American, I cannot speak to these concerns. I cannot fully understand them, not as intimately as I need to in order to make real change. This is why I have called out to our diverse communities for suggestions, for complaints, or even just for them to share their experiences with me.” He looked at the camera. “I promise you, as your governor, I will look out for the good of all Floridians. As my campaign has repeatedly stated—“

The feed switched over to a desk anchor. “We have decided to switch over to the weather on the nines due to the previous report being boring,” the anchor announced.

I folded my hands under my chin and nodded. “Danson is going to need some help. And I am just the man for the job.”

#

Clarice led Matt into the bunker under Danson’s campaign headquarters, briefing him on his mission. Matt idly stared off into the distance, not listening to a word she said, his mind rehashing Matrix quotes. He nearly ran into her when she stopped in the middle of the room.

“Killing JJ won’t be easy. Trust me, if it were, I would have succeeded in one of the fifty-seven other attempts already,” Matt said. “In fact, if you look at his life on the whole, his very existence at this point is a miracle. He has spent no less than three decades basically trying to kill himself.”

“He’s suicidal?”

“Oh, no. Sadly, he thinks he has some sort of purpose in living,” Matt said. “Plus thanks to his overpowering ignorance, he lives in a constant state of bliss. What I mean is his life is literally a series of incredibly stupid ideas that should have left him dead numerous times. But he has dumb luck. It’s like a fucking super power for him. Seriously, I have taken two shots from a sniper’s nest at him and a goddamned bird flew in the way both times.”

“So what will be different this time?”

Matt smirked. “His dumb luck is balanced out by his actual dumbness for once.” He turned and motioned, and Jake stepped out of a dark corner.

“How did you get in here?” Clarice asked. “This area is heavily guarded!”

“Garbage chute.”

“Jake here has a... grudge.” Matt’s smirk grew to a broad smile.

“The asshole has killed me multiple times! And each time he got a hypnotist to make sure I didn’t remember after his witch doctor friend resurrected me. But he forgot to get the hypnotist last time, so now I remember. And Jake... Jake will get his revenge.”

“JJ will see me coming a mile away, I’ve used just about every trick in the book at this point. But he thinks Jake is trying to help him get his stupid movie funded, so his guard will be down.” Matt reached to his belt and unsheathed a dagger with a flourish. It was rusty and aged, but it had an air of nobility to it nonetheless. “And when I attack and JJ inevitably survives, Jake will get him with this—the blade of King Tut!”

Clarice stared at the men for a long moment. “First off, why is... no, actually first off, how did you get the blade of King Tut? And second off, why is that going to be what kills him?”

“I robbed it from his grave when nobody was looking,” Matt said. “Funny story, JJ actually helped. We’ve had some good times.” He chuckled for a beat, and his face went stern. “But good times are over! And he must die!”

Clarice frowned. “But... why is that going to be what kills him?”

“Because it’s a fucking knife, lady.” Jake took the blade from Matt. “Do you not know how knives work? If you stab someone with one, they often die,” he mansplained.

“But why... never mind. I actually think I don’t want to know.” Clarice looked down. “Or speak to you two for any more than I have to,” she muttered under her breath.

“I have a plan,” Matt said. “Hold a campaign rally, and announce that you’re giving away free schnitzel.”

“What, will that lure him out in the open?”

“Maybe. I just want a schnitzel,” Matt said.

“Make mine pork,” Jake added.

Clarice cut the ‘men’ a glare. “You’re being paid enough to get your own damn schnitzel. What would lure JJ into a trap?”

“Booze,” Jake and Matt answered in unison.

“We can’t offer a campaign rally with free alcohol, that would give terrible optics.”

“You’re trying to win in Florida,” Matt said. “Have you ever actually met Floridians?”

Clarice stared at him for a moment and sighed. “We will host it at the Aks Gary Amphitheater. That should give you plenty of perches to take a shot, and then Jake can come up and finish him with...” She rubbed her face. “The blade of King Tut.”

Jake nodded while picking his teeth with the invaluable artifact.

#

The campaign rally was packed, nary a mask in sight. Several kegs were set up, and lines of bustling folks filled the amphitheater all the way to the grassy edges. As soon as they got their beer, they returned to their car and left.

Danson was onstage addressing two cameras. I shoved my way through the crowd towards him, brushing my shoulder when someone coughed on it. I glanced at my notepad to review my lines, then remembered I had never learned to read. With a flick of my wrist I tossed the pad to the side and pushed through the last group of people. Danson was depending on me. I could wing it.

“We wanted to bring everyone here for a good time, and more importantly, for a good dialogue,” Danson was telling the reporter from a respectful distance of six feet, his mask slung off his ear. “It’s critical for me to hear the stories of our—”

“Excuse me!” I shouted, and the cameras swung to face me. “My name is JJ Segwis. And I’m a white, straight man with something to say!”

#

“Goddammit Matt shoot him now!” Danson whispered into a walkie talkie. “Shoot him! Shoot him!”

“Shoot herrr...” Matt chuckled in his earpiece.

“...and another thing Danson thinks about the blacks...” I continued my speech to both the cameras and the growing crowd.

“You worthless bastard I said shoot him!” Danson tapped his microphone with his index finger.

“Ow, you asshole,” Matt’s voice chirped back. “Tapping that thing really hurts my eardrums.” There was a deep sigh. “Ok. Kill JJ. You can do this Matt, your whole life has been building to this moment. The man has haunted you since high school. Today, you are free.”

Danson rubbed the bridge of his nose while Matt continued to give himself repeated self-affirmations intermingled with occasional movie quotes.

“...and then there was the time he wore a paisley tie, so you know he will be a friend to the gays!” I gave the camera two thumbs up.

“Sorry sir, who are you again?” a reporter asked.

“I’m Danson’s confidant, I’ve known this man my entire life. Everything he thinks and says I—”

“He’s a special needs individual that I’ve been mentoring!” Danson rushed up and slung his arm around my shoulder. “As I really care about that community...”

“Seriously Danson?” Matt groaned. “I’m trying to shoot someone with a sniper rifle, and you think it’s a good idea to go and give him a hug?”

“We do all sorts of stuff together!” I continued. “Like that Halloween party we went to a few years ago, he went as in the most elaborate Indian chief get-up you’ve ever seen...”

“Stand down Matt, I’ll do this myself,” Jake’s voice crackled over the earpiece. Danson yanked it out and wiped his heavily perspiring forehead.

“Mr. Equestrian, do you care to respond to Florida’s Native American communities for your... uh, confidant’s assertions?” a reporter asked.

Danson began to openly flop-sweat. “I would like to assure all of you all of my highest respect for the Native American communities in Florida, many of whom have experienced poverty levels far beyond—”

“Danson spends a ton of money in the casino, he totally supports Native Americans!” I grinned and wrapped my arm around Danson’s shoulder, enjoying our special moment of bonding. “And not just at the poker tables, either. Man gets blackout drunk at the bars, rings up tabs like you wouldn’t... mmph!”

Danson clamped his free hand over my mouth. “Ah, the imagination of a child, huh?” He laughed.

The reporters looked from my face to his. “That man is at least in his late forties,” one said.

I pulled Danson’s hand down. “Nah, I’m mid-thirties, I just age like a motherfucker. Mostly cuz of all the nights I’ve gotten blacked out with my closest and most trusted friend here! Anyways, I forgot about Asians. Danson here will be the best friend the Asian community has had since FDR!”

There was a shout behind us. I turned to see Jake standing atop a row of seats, a rusty knife in his hand. "You die today, JJ!" The crowd of reporters and onlookers around us screamed and pushed away as he leapt towards me.

"Buddy!" I opened my arms to return his incoming embrace. Just before he reached me, a large bird flew in between us and knocked him to the side.

#

"See!" Matt shouted from the oak tree just outside the amphitheater that he had converted into a sniper's nest. "I swear that dumb shit always happens!" He pounded his fist onto the branch that he was precariously perched upon. A crack sounded. "Uh oh." He looked down. The branch broke and sent him sprawling face-first into the dirt below. The rifle hit the ground next to him and fired, and screams rose up from the amphitheater.

#

Danson stared as Jake wrestled for his life against the pelican. It whipped its beak down into his face, and with a single beat of its wings lifted and flew away.

"I think this went well." I nodded as I observed the panicked mass flooding out of the amphitheater, everyone sure to grab one more free beer before running for their lives. I frowned and looked at Danson. "Oh crap. I forgot to tell them how much you like children!"

Danson turned and walked away.

Jake groaned and covered his face where the pelican had hit him. I walked over and observed he had dropped his dagger. "Hey, don't forget this, buddy." I picked it up, set it on his stomach, and gave his shoulder a pat. "You'll be alright champ. Just go get some of the free beer they're offering. Speaking of..." I trotted off to redeem my coupon.

#

Several hours later, Danson slumped in his campaign headquarters, his face planted on his desk. Jake and Matt sat across from him, playing the stupidest game of tag ever played.

Danson lifted his head and reached up to remove the paper stuck to his face. "JJ must die."

"Oh yeah, we're all over that," Matt said before tagging Jake again. "You're it."

"We were going to discuss that over dinner tonight, courtesy of your campaign credit card." Jake tagged Matt.

"We were thinking Berns."

"I don't have a campaign credit card!"

"Then why does it say 'Danson C Equestrian' on it?" Matt reached into his pocket to pull out the card he had stolen off of Danson.

Danson leaned back, his empty stare fixated on the ceiling. "I promised Emily we would get married the day before my inauguration, so that the happiest day of my life would be followed by the second happiest day."

"Wait, where is Emily, your fiance we haven't mentioned until now?" Matt asked.

"She's in Africa. There was a recent famine in the Sudan and she's helping to feed the children there."

"Ohhhh." Matt nodded thoughtfully. "Fattening them up for the slaughter."

"What? No! These aren't the Irish!"

Matt frowned, his head cocked to the side like a lost puppy. "So... why?"

"To help the hungry kids!"

"Wait." Matt jerked back like he had taken a punch. "You're actually helping people?"

"Yes! It's been my life's work for the past decade."

Matt's eyes narrowed. "So... you want to become governor... to help people?"

"The American people have been suffering. Floridians in particular have faced skyrocketing unemployment coupled with mounting pandemic cases. I need to do something about it. I used to try working within the community, doing the little things, you know? Then I realized that what was really needed was something on the macro level."

Matt lurched up, his chair toppling backwards. "I, uh, have to go." He stormed out of the room.

"What was that about?" Danson asked.

Jake looked back to the doorway and shrugged. "Maybe all the schnitzel we ate on your campaign card earlier got to him."

"Oh shit, I forgot to get my card back from the bastard!" Danson picked up his phone.

"Yeah, that fried German meat really gets the butt squirts going, ya know?" Jake squirmed in his chair.

#

Matt paced back and forth in front of Danson's campaign headquarters. "Goddammit, Goddammit!" He stopped and crossed his arms. "I must stop this, and there's only one way to do it."

#

"Oh god it's like the Niagara Falls!" Jake groaned, sitting on Danson's personal toilet. As he gave it his fifth courtesy flush, I collapsed out of the nearby oversized medicine cabinet.

“Jake!” I looked up at him. “I finally found you!”

“What the fuck are you... how did you get in there? Wait, never mind, garbage chute.”

“Garbage chute.” I nodded.

“What do you want?”

“We gotta help Danson! They’re saying that he doesn’t care about minorities, and we gotta change that!”

Jake slowly lowered a rusty knife. “Shit... if I don’t help Danson, I won’t get any more schnitzel. Ok, what’s your bright idea? It’s not dressing in black face and going around speaking to his credit, is it?”

“Hmm.” I stroked my chin, sat up and crossed my legs. “I didn’t think about that. Maybe for future reference.” I patted my pockets, looking for the notepad I had discarded earlier.

“Listen, I think he’s fine. I mean, this state voted for a governor that called his black opponent a monkey. Florida isn’t a problem. Er, well, it really is... but you get what I mean.”

“That’s it!” I snapped my fingers. “Remember how our country is so racist that Trump referred to himself as ‘America’s first black president’ and nobody even blinked an eye? We just convince everyone that Danson’s the black candidate!”

Jake opened his mouth, hesitated, and sighed. “I hate that this absolutely awful idea could actually work.”

“Get your pants on and let’s go!”

#

A storm raged outside of the five windows adorning Danson’s office. He faced them, surrounded by three keyboards that he simultaneously played, Phantom of the Opera echoing through the room.

“Sir, sir, there’s another problem!” Clarice was breathless as she burst into Danson’s office. He zipped up his pants and spun around to face her as a lightning bolt flashed behind him.

“What now?”

“The man you hired to kill JJ Segwis, he’s... running against you!”

“What!” Danson grabbed a remote for the TV mounted on the wall.

“That’s right, I, Mattothy The Northman, First and also Last of my name, am here to be your next Prime Mini... I mean, lord... I mean, governor or whatever the hell you yokels call him!” Matt stood in front of several rednecks waving an American flag and holding large guns. “Come see me tomorrow at my campaign rally, and you’ll hear all about my plan for fixing this great nation of yours... I mean, ours! It’s a great plan, and it’s very... permanent! A permanent plan!”

Danson slammed his fist into the desk. "Where is that campaign rally? I must stop him!"

#

The next day...

"You want me to do what now?" the random black dude Jake and I had accosted on the street asked, warily looking at us as he kept his distance.

"Just run for governor. Danson C Equestrian will insult your intelligence because obviously he's already the black candidate, just white," I explained again. "You'll apologize after we threaten your loved ones and then back out."

"Why wouldn't we just agree for me to back out in the first place? Why even threaten my loved ones?"

"Listen motherfucker, we're threatening your loved ones whether you like it or not." Jake crossed his arms.

"I'm... I'm calling the police." The man slowly pulled his cell phone out, keeping his eyes on us.

"Good luck buddy, this is Florida!" Jake laughed. "We're just standing our ground!"

The man paused. His face drooped into a frown, the lines from years of oppression and inequality creasing deeper. "Dammit." He put his phone back into his pocket. "I still don't want to do this."

"Holy shit!" I shouted, looking across the street. A nearby bar showed Matt's campaign announcement. "Now Matt's running too? That's great, all my buddies are gonna be governor!" My ADHD having taken full control, I walked across the street to get a better view, several cars missing me by inches. I sat in a bar stool and stared at the screen with a wide grin on my face.

"It's a great plan, and it's very... permanent! A permanent plan!" Matt concluded, the screen going back to Price is Right.

"I know that guy! He's my buddy! And the other governor is my buddy too!" I told the bartender.

"Listen, dude, if you're going to hang out here you have to get a drink."

"Obviously I want a drink." I put a few twenty dollar bills on the table. "How much is this and what will it get me?"

The bartender stared at the cash, then at me. "Well, uh, Bud Light is on special for \$1, which is..." He hesitated, staring at me a moment longer. "Exactly what you have here!"

"Aww man, Bud Light? Alright, if that's all I can afford. But wait, I won't be able to tip you," I said. "That would be rude." I reached to take the money back.

"No, no! It's ok! Really! I, uh, I get a great base pay here, I'm just happy to serve you a drink." He smiled and yanked the cash back out of my hand.

“Oh dude, I really appreciate that!”

He placed the beer down in front of me and walked off with a whistling tune. I tilted the bottle back and took a swig, failing to notice Jake behind me. He snatched a chair and lifted it, then slipped on a banana peel and crashed to the ground.

#

“Matt, you fucking fetid fartsicle, what the hell are you doing?” Danson grabbed him by the arm behind the campaign stage, where Matt was set to announce his campaign. “You can’t even run for governor, you’re not a citizen!”

Matt grinned. “Who the fuck cares? I’m running as a Republican. Well, sorta a Republican. Ok, not a Republican at all. More like a super Republican! All I gotta do is get these people to believe I’m going to give them literally one dollar in less taxes and keep minorities ‘in their place’, and they will threaten the Supreme Court with revolt if they don’t change that rule!”

“But why oppose me? I thought you were on my side!”

“I was so consumed by my desire to kill JJ that it completely escaped my attention: your campaign actually made sense, Danson. It would actually help Florida. But this state doesn’t deserve help. It deserves destruction. So I’m gonna unleash a whole can of chaos on this flaccid penis-shaped state, and its people are gonna do the rest for me!” Matt yanked his arm free.

“But you live here! Why would you destroy it?”

“This country elected a fucking New York City con man believing he cared about the same thing as the goddamn South, and then this state elected a man who’s entire campaign was ‘it would be an honor if Trump plowed my wife’. This state needs to sink into the ocean, and despite everyone’s best attempts, global warming just isn’t happening fast enough.”

“I won’t let you do it.” Danson crossed his arms and snarled. “I don’t care if Floridians roundly reject the most basic and easy life-saving measures like wearing masks. I don’t care if Floridians routinely destroy national elections because our officials have the same inability as JJ to count. I don’t care if people here do insane shit so frequently that we are collectively reduced to a meme. I still believe—in us.”

“Good lord you’re lame.” Matt snorted and showed him his cell phone. “Check this out.”

Danson took it and frowned. “It’s... your Facebook page. Wait, why is hashtag-help-the-children trending?”

“My campaign got it going.”

“But you hate children! You even held up a food bank after we told you they feed poor kids!”

“Pfft.” Matt took the phone back. “So? I don’t have to actually do anything. I just have to make sure everyone associates me with helping kids. How are you going to argue that, hmm? What’s the matter Danson, do you not want to help the children?”

“That’s...” Danson worked his jaw around, then clamped it shut. “Goddammit.”

“Yeah, good luck buddy. This state is mine!” With that, Matt stormed off to the stage, and the crowd went wild.

“My friends! My... fellow Americans!” Matt announced proudly. “You have a lot of problems. But we can fix them! I have an answer! A... complete answer! Let me tell you more!”

Danson buried his face in his palm.

#

I strolled through the gated neighborhood, clipboard in hand, joyfully humming a death metal tune. “Excuse me, miss!” I called out to a woman rushing three children into a minivan. “Do you have a moment?”

“No,” she snapped.

“Fantastic! This election is one that will literally define our nation. May I ask who you are voting for?”

“What, are you a pollster? How did you get in this community?”

“Garbage chute. And no, I’m not a pollster. I’m a salesman!”

She paused after shoving one of her brood by his shrieking face into the back of the minivan. “Wait, what do you sell?”

“I have no idea!”

“Get off of my property.” She pressed a small button on her keychain.

“Wait, first, I just need to know who you’re voting for.”

“Mattothy promised my husband no more taxes on his sixteen figure paycheck. So he has our vote.”

“Fantastic! America will be a better place for your contribution!” A golf cart with two heavily armed men inside rushed up to us. “Uh oh.” I pulled an M80 firework shell out of my pocket. “Smoke screen!” I lit and tossed it into the lady’s perfectly manicured lawn. It exploded and left a charred patch of earth with a quickly dispersing wisp of smoke.

“What the hell are you doing?” she screamed.

“That usually works much better if there’s dust on the ground,” I mansplained, and turned and ran as fast as my flabby ass could go.

#

“Ok, so we have announced that Matt is Canadian and therefore ineligible for the presidency, despite his... diplomatic immunity?” Danson asked.

Clarice nodded.

“And we have an outreach program in place in disenfranchised neighborhoods, with a visiting schedule?”

She nodded again.

“Excellent. The only thing that remains is to kill JJ Segwis.”

“Sir, he’s actually been canvassing the streets on your behalf, maybe he’s not a threat after all?”

“He’s actually been working for both me and Matt,” Danson said. “He doesn’t understand how governments work so he thinks we can both be governor. In fact, he tried to get Jake to run too.” He shook his head. “No, JJ must die. Honestly, it’s something that has needed to happen for some time anyways.”

“Wait, he thinks three people can be governor at once? And he’s both incapable of counting and reading? How is this man a functioning member of society?”

“Who the hell said he was ‘functioning’?”

“Sir, I don’t know how we can kill JJ if Matt is now actively opposed to your candidacy.”

“That’s actually not an issue,” Danson said with a smile on his smug liberal face. “Matt is opposed to my candidacy, but he is still heavily invested in killing JJ. Literally. His wife Abigail wired him ten thousand dollars the other day to help him continue his mission. And my rectally inserted tracker on Jake shows him still hunting JJ as well, which is a damn miracle considering all the fluids he’s been excreting. It’s only a matter of time before they manage to kill him.”

#

“Who are you voting for?” I asked random passerbys as I walked down the street in Seminole Heights, clipboard in hand. Thanks to my inability to read, I didn’t know where to put the checkmarks, so I was just guessing as I went.

“Do what?” A man stopped and gave me a quizzical look.

“We have two fantastic candidates, Danson C Equestrian and Mattothy Northman, and I was curious who you were voting for.”

“Well first off, there are more than just those two candidates. And the truth of the matter is neither one can win. So it doesn’t matter.”

“Ok, but which one of them are you voting for?”

The man sighed. “You’re asking if I will vote for the man who seems so consumed by the tiniest scandals that he could never actually mount a real opposition to Governor DeSantis, or the man who, and I quote, yesterday said ‘we need to bring more of the right people into our country, or else we will face a wave of darkness in our population’?”

"I understand how that quote sounded like a racist dog whistle, but what he was referring to was just the impending population crisis where we simply aren't having enough babies to sustain ourselves."

"He actually whistled after saying it."

"So... you're not voting for Matt?" I nodded and marked an 'X' where I guessed it said Danson.

"I'm not voting for anyone."

I gasped, and the clipboard clamorously clattered to the ground. "But voting is the only right we have that upholds our other rights!"

"For you, maybe," he said. "Do you think having had a black president suddenly made this a not-racist country, specifically built around ensuring white success? Hell, if anything, the way people reacted to that absolutely proved it.

"I live here because I was born here, my family is here, and it's all I know, but this ain't my country. My ancestors were brought here as captives, and we helped build it, but only under the bullwhip. And after we were freed we were rewarded for that effort by having our rights completely stripped away and turned into second class citizens who could be killed with impunity. We've never once won a right with a vote, we've won it with struggles. With marches in the heat, with blood on our foreheads from police batons, with martyrs. Politicians use us as bargaining chips. Our very 'emancipator' first used us to try to get Southern states to cease their rebellion!

"And sure, now we can vote, but for who? One blip on the radar and we're right back to a bunch of white faces to choose from. How can they possibly know what's needed to actually bring equality to our people? Trump drums up one or two Uncle Toms, signed a bill that allowed his buddies to start building in a black neighborhood for their own profit, and all his supporters can claim that the most blatantly racist modern president isn't racist.

"And try even having a conversation with those supporters—the second you mention 'white privilege' you get discounted because God forbid they actually had to work a job in their lives, ignoring the institutional and systemic realities that have made their lives easier and better than ours. Right now if a cop car rolls through here, you'll wave, and I'll duck. A vote ain't changing what's broken in this country. It won't change a damn thing for me, so why would I do it?"

I blinked a few times, the amount of multisyllabic words having overwhelmed me. I slowly bent over and picked up the clipboard. "So... you're voting for Danson? He is the black candidate, after all."

A gunshot rang out through the air. Everyone on the street except myself shouted and fled. "Call the police!" the man screamed as he ran away.

I looked back to see a cloud of feathers near my head. "What the hell was that?" They floated away, and I saw Jake sitting in his car, staring at a gun with a look of confusion on his face. "Jake! Buddy!"

#

“My fellow Americans,” Matt began, using air quotes when saying ‘fellow’. A massive crowd was outside his campaign headquarters, the Facebook posts about saving children and free beer having drawn them in. “These allegations you have heard about me, they are entirely true.” The crowd gasped. “Yes, I am Canadian, born amongst the Canucks. But let me ask you this. Who better to love this great country than a foreigner who has escaped a hellish socialist state to see the bounty of this land?” Matt shook his head. “Every day in Canada thousands live thanks to universal healthcare. Thousands! And a man can barely step foot inside a mall with his own personal assault rifle without being accosted mercilessly by the gestapo-like police. And don’t get me started on the wendigos!”

“But then how come you didn’t become a citizen while living here?” Someone in the crowd shouted.

“Oh! I wanted to! But let me tell you, every time I have tried to apply, do you know what I am told? That I have to wait in line... behind Mexicans.” He finished with an ominous hiss. The crowd recoiled in horror, murmuring amongst themselves. “And let me tell you, that wouldn’t have happened if we had just—say it with me!—BUILT! THAT! WALL!” The crowd chanted the final three words with him before erupting into cheers. “Just remember this at the polls! Do you want someone who knows the horror of socialism and will never allow it to touch your lives, or do you want Danson C Equestrian?” The cheers turned to boos, and then broke out into chants of “Matt! Matt! Matt!”

“Now let me tell you about the next part of my plan! The... resounding conclusion!”

#

“I just think it’s awful how a good Christian like Matt Northman couldn’t join our citizens because of those foreign Mexicans,” a lady said to the resident Bay News 9 reporter covering the campaign rally.

“Yeah! I mean, Canadians, they’re basically Americans anyways, just look at a map, they’re right there in ‘North America!’” another added next to her.

“Them Canadians sure do talk funny like, but they a’right people I s’pose,” a man joined in, pushing the ladies out of the way. “I mean, they fought with us in the Revolutionary War, don’t that count for nothin’ these days?”

Danson flipped off the TV. Clarice was perched in the chair across the desk in the dimly lit office. “That’s it then,” he said.

“Sir, you’re going to concede?” Clarice gasped. “But he can’t even constitutionally hold the office of governor!”

“What? No, that’s not what I meant at all. I meant that I am going to have to eliminate both JJ and Matt.”

“But how will you do that? Do you know someone else with psychotically murderous tendencies who has... diplomatic immunity?”

“No, that won’t be necessary. I think it’s time to fulfill the prophecy.” He leaned back. “You see, JJ and Matt are diametrically opposed forces of madness. JJ is dumb luck personified, and Matt is chaos in the shape of a man.” He bumped his fists together to illustrate. “It’s long been said that one day, they would have a showdown in which they destroyed each other.”

Clarice sat silent for a moment. “Long said by who?”

“Mostly by them.” Danson pursed his lips. “Ok, only by them.”

“So, you’re going to get them to kill each other?”

“Exactly. Get JJ on the phone.”

#

“What a lucky coincidence you were here,” I said to Jake, who was banging his head against the steering wheel. “It would have sucked having to walk back... hold on.” I checked my ringing phone, and seeing for once it wasn’t my wife, I answered.

“JJ?” Danson asked.

“Who is this?”

“Wait. How do you not know? I know my number is in your phone, you won’t stop texting me pictures of black penises and suggesting I send them to various women to show my solidarity with... never mind. It’s Danson.”

“Hey buddy!”

“Listen, I need you to stop by my campaign office. We have something important to discuss.”

“The polls are going great, I have several marks down by what I think is your name, even though everyone has said they’re voting for Matt!”

There was an audible groan over the phone. “Just get over here. I can send an Uber if necessary.”

“Nah, I can have Jake drop me off.”

“Wait! You’re with Jake? Jesus Christ, put him on the phone!”

“Here, Danson wants to speak to you.” I handed the phone to Jake.

“Hello? Yeah, I’ll drop him off. No, I won’t kill him. It doesn’t fucking matter, I’ve tried so many goddamned times but his dumb luck keeps getting in the way,” Jake said.

“Wait, you’re trying to kill someone? I wanna help.”

“Alright, we’ll be there in five minutes.” He hung up and handed me my phone, giving me a strange glare before we sped off.

#

“Listen honey, I know you didn’t approve me in advance for running for governor, but trust me there’s no hooker semen involved,” Matt told his wife on the phone. His campaign office, funded entirely by wealthy plutocrats and staffed by heavily armed, angry white men, was bustling with activity. A portly, sweaty man approached his desk. “Honey, I gotta go, my 3:30 is here. Can you do me a favor and make sure you feed Mr. Slithers? I think Jake’s original body has digested by now, I don’t want him going hungry. I don’t know with what! Just throw the dog in the bathtub with him, nature will figure it out.” He hung up and looked at his new campaign manager. “Cletus, my friend, how are things going?”

“Great, sir.” Cletus wiped his forehead with an old McDonald’s napkin. “I’m sure glad you had already prepared that there acceptance speech.”

“That’s fantastic! Who knew that building a party from the ground up would lead to me, its founder, being nominated as its inaugural gubernatorial candidate?”

“Well sir I don’t know what half those words meant, but it sure is here excitin’ times for us forgotten folk,” he said. “Ya know, jes’ the other day, my daughter came home from school and she said the teacher wanted to cover ‘black history month’. Now let me tell ya what, I got right heated, what the hell is black history month? They already learned ‘bout the war of northern aggression, but these here liberals, they just want to muck up all our nation’s good history with a bunch of mess.”

“Well it’s my turn to not understand half of what you’re saying, but let me tell you this Cletus, I support you, your family, and whatever the fuck it is you want me to say to get your vote.”

“It’s jes’ real nice to have someone listen and care about us,” Cletus said. “You’re truly one of us, and boy, is that special to me, sir.”

“Oh yeah, you and me, we’re the same. So, is the camera crew ready?”

“Yessir, they’re all here.” Cletus waved a bustling crew of local cameramen over.

Matt leaned back at his desk, a broad smile on his face. The cameras all zoomed in, and a boomboy gave him a thumbs up.

“I am honored, as the chairman and founder of the New American Zone of Independence party, to accept the party’s nomination for governor of Florida!”

The room burst into applause. “I’ve been teasing at what I think is the cure for our ails,” Matt said. “Questions of taxation abound. Questions about our population abound. Questions about NASCAR abound! But let me tell you, I have the solution. And one that will work—forever! I am here to tell you about my final solution!” The room’s applause turned into a roar.

“He’s really for us!” Cletus beamed.

#

"I need to kill Matt? But I like Matt." I sat across from Danson as Jake fiddled with some old dagger next to me.

"He's been trying to kill you for years," Danson said. "So you should kill him first."

"Well, Jake has been trying to murder me, and I haven't killed him because of it," I replied.

Jake dropped the dagger, and his and Danson's jaws went slack. "Wait, you know Jake has been trying to kill you?"

"The other day he literally screamed 'I'm going to kill you' and ran at me with—and I shit you not—a goddamned lance," I said. "Then this Wawa's shopping cart came rolling into his path, and he tripped and fell right into it, and it carried him into the middle of a busy highway." I chuckled. "Funniest thing I've ever seen. Of course, I had to get Dr. Cleo and the hypnotist back 'cuz he got fucking annihilated by a semi, but what's a little horseplay amongst friends?"

"Wait, I fucking died again?" Jake shouted.

"Dude, like 13 times yesterday alone."

Danson held up a hand, squeezing his eyes closed and looking down. "Wait. A Wawa's cart? Wawa's doesn't have shopping carts."

"I know! It made no sense!"

Danson slumped backwards in his chair. "How do I convince you to kill Matt?"

"I mean, if you're offering schnitzel, a man will do anything, ya know?"

"Fine. Go murder Matt and I will buy you a schnitzel."

"Ok."

"Wait." Danson stopped me as I started to rise out of my chair. "You can't have Dr. Cleo bring him right back afterwards."

"That's not fair!" I slouched back down into my seat. "He's my closest and most trusted friend!"

"How about this. You can bring him back after I win the governorship."

I pouted. "Can we go to New Orleans afterwards too?"

"Yeah, sure, whatever." Danson looked down and muttered, "Not like I'll have to keep any promises once you two kill each other."

"Yay!" I jumped up. "C'mon Jake, let's go murder Matt!"

#

The door had barely shut behind Jake and I before Clarice entered. “Sir, I have an idea, and I don’t think it’s one you’re going to like.”

“If it involves killing someone, at this point I might as well.” Danson shrugged.

“No... uh, no. Matt has extended an invitation to a debate, and I think you should accept.”

“What? Why? We’ve already publicly confirmed that he can’t even be governor! Constitutionally!”

“Apparently based off some recent polling, voters in Florida don’t rank being ‘constitutionally eligible’ as important.”

Danson stroked his chin. “You know what? This might actually be brilliant. Two birds, one stone, all that.” A grin drew across his face. “A debate would give me a chance to speak directly to a core group of voters that aren’t currently in favor of my candidacy, and it lures Matt into a single spot for JJ to publicly attack. Even Floridians won’t cast their vote for someone who is on camera simultaneously murdering and being murdered!”

Clarice shrugged. “If you say so.”

“Let Matt know I accept. And go fetch JJ and let him know of the update.”

“I think he’s already left, sir.”

“Don’t underestimate his lack of direction. Jake is long gone, but check the closet. JJ is most likely face first in a corner, confused why it’s dark outside and he can’t move forward.”

#

The Aks Gary Amphitheater was filled to capacity, the rowdy band of Floridians eager to hear more about Matt’s “Final Solution”. Coughs and heavy breathing mingled with the cheers and hollers, and smoke billowed out from the destroyed free mask and hand sanitizer station, an American flag planted in its ashes.

The lights dimmed, two spotlights illuminating the competing podiums on the stage. The crowd went wild as Matt strode to his spot. Their clamor turned sour, cheers twisting to boos and hisses, as Danson walked out next. Chants of ‘Go Home Foreigner!’ erupted, ironically directed at the American-born citizen.

“Ladies, gentlemen, thank you!” Matt shouted into his microphone. “The National American Zone of Independence party appreciates your support!” His smile faded, and a serious look overtook his face. “Perhaps its fate that today is the Fourth of July, and you will once again be fighting for our freedom... Not from tyranny, oppression, or persecution... but from annihilation. We are fighting for our right to live. To exist. And should we win the day, the Fourth of July will no longer be known as an American holiday, but as the day the world declared in one voice: We will not go quietly into the night! We will not vanish without a fight! We’re going to live on! We’re going to survive! Today we celebrate our Independence Day!” The crowd went ballistic.

Danson stared at Matt. “Uh, ok then. I look forward to a thorough debate that weighs the various options...” his words were drowned out by the angry shouting of the crowd. He sighed, and glanced downstage where Jake waited.

“Are you tired of stupid taxes!” Matt screamed, and the crowd erupted.

“For Christ’s sake we already don’t even use a state income tax for revenue. We have a ballooning deficit in Florida thanks to the pandemic, and cutting existing taxes further will exacerbate that problem!”

“Well, we don’t need no stinkin’ teachers enforcing liberal agendas on our kids anyways!” Matt snapped, and the crowd hooted and hollered.

“I didn’t mention teachers! They may be criminally underpaid, but that’s not actually a function of the state government—government you’re not even allowed to be part of!”

“And Mexico will pay for that government!”

“What are you even talking about?”

“I’m talking about the Final Solution!” Matt thumped his fist into the podium. “The Final Solution for the Florida Problem!”

Danson glared at the shrieking crowd. “If you all had paid more attention to those ‘stinking teachers’ you would get what the hell he is saying!” His temper flew forth, and his decorum went out with it. “Nobody is suggesting that your taxes will increase! We want to tax the wealthy, the billionaires, the elite, the ones who are crushing your lives under their heels for their excess! We want them to pay their fair share for living in this state and taking advantage of all its benefits! And that revenue gained will be used to your advantage!”

“Then why are the Cambodian immigrants not fleeing to Vietnam, huh comrade?” Matt shouted.

Danson surveyed the unruly crowd and knew he had vastly overestimated their ability to understand logic or words with more than two vowels in them. He looked back over to Jake, leaned away from the microphone and tucked his chin to the walkie talkie receiver on his shoulder. “That’ll do it. Get JJ out here. Let’s finish this.”

Jake glanced back at him and nodded, then looked around frantically. Danson's shoulders slumped. “Jake, did you lose JJ?”

“...and another thing about the Biden crime family...” Matt continued.

“Goddammit Jake find him!”

Jake gave Danson a thumbs up and hustled off.

#

“...and I’m in sales!” I exclaimed gleefully backstage.

“Why are you talking to me, and why do you keep saying that?” Clarice leaned away, her arms crossed tightly over her chest.

I held up my clipboard. “Oh, I just want to know who you’re voting for.” I yelled as Jake appeared, grabbed me in a chokehold, and drug me up to the stage.

“There! There! Matt, look, it’s your mortal enemy!” Danson waved frantically at his opponent and gestured at me as I stumbled into the spotlight.

“Oh, hey JJ,” Matt said, looking over.

“Hey Matt! Good luck with your campaign today!” I grinned and waved.

“JJ!” Danson whispered, minding the microphone’s pickup range. “You’re supposed to go kill him!”

I looked at Matt, who stared back. I looked at Danson, back at Matt, over at a random stranger in the crowd, then back at Danson and Matt again. “But I don’t wanna.”

“For Jesus Shitting In A Bush... Matt! Don’t you want to murder this man?”

“Nah. This is more fun right now. I got his whole life to kill him. JJ, aren’t you trying to fund a movie or something?”

“I totally forgot about that!” I frowned. “But this story has gotten too long already. Oh well, it’s fodder for a third Poetic Narrative.”

“What!” Matt boomed, and the crowd grew silent at his outrage. “This political satire is barely hitting the point, is terribly written, has implausible character arcs, a weak if even existing plot structure, and you want to write another story?”

“I mean, sure, maybe in a few months. If I get bored again.”

“I’ll never let that happen!” Matt lifted an AK-47 generously donated by some kind Russians and opened fire. Utterly improbably, a beam above the stage dislodged and dropped into the path of the bullets, causing a shower of ricochets. Nearby, Cletus grabbed his chest and collapsed.

“Cletus no, my closest friend!” Matt cried out.

“Wait, I thought I was your closest friend! How dare you replace me!” I charged across the stage.

“Fucking finally!” Danson cheered.

“You’ll die!” I shouted.

“No, you’ll die!” Matt cleverly shouted back. He stepped away from the podium and opened his arms in a challenge as I slammed head-first into him.

The crowd grew to an uproar as we grappled across the stage. “The communist is trying to get our governor killed!” a man shouted.

“He’s not your governor! He can’t even become your governor!” Danson shouted back at him.

“Danson wants all the children to die!” someone else in the crowd screamed.

I leaned out of Matt’s grip and grabbed his microphone that had fallen nearby. “Danson’s the black candidate, you should all vote for him!” A full riot erupted.

“Oh shit, I need to go.” Danson whipped his head around. “Clarice? Jake?”

#

“And that’s why you really need to let me give you an oral examination, trust me, I’m a dentist!” Jake explained to a woman desperately trying to get away from him.

#

“Fuck it.” Danson fled the stage. He saw Clarice and grabbed her arm. “We need to go, now!”

“Already on it. An Uber should be pulling up any second!” She stared at the screen of her smartphone. “I need to update our GPS coordinate. Hold on.”

Danson looked back as the crowd surged through the meager security to where Matt and I were engaged in a vicious battle, both of us swinging batons pilfered from fleeing guards, the sticks clacking harmlessly against each other with each strike because we’re dumb.

“Be on the lookout for a white Prius. The driver’s name is Umayyad.”

“Pretty sure I can pick out an ‘Umayyad’ here pretty quickly,” Danson said just as the Uber arrived. “Quick, get in!”

Clarice jumped into the front passenger seat and Danson leapt into the back. “Drive! Drive!” he shouted.

“How was your evening sir?” Umayyad asked politely, checking his phone.

“Not great! We really need to go!”

“Sorry sir, these apps sometimes take a few minutes to update. What kind of music would you like to listen to?”

“Buddy, you do not want to be here when the crowd catches up to us.”

Matt and I leapt into the backseat, huffing and puffing. “Holy shit we need to go!” Matt said.

“What the hell are you doing?” Danson shouted. “I thought you were killing each other!”

“That mob is really dangerous,” I said. “We’ll get back to killing one another once we’re both safe.”

“Matt! They’re your crowd!” Danson glared at him. “This should make things easier for you!”

“I think I underestimated those bloodthirsty savages,” Matt said, not a hint of regret in his voice. “I’ll be honest, my plan may have been shortsighted.”

“I have our destination ready.” Umayyad placed his phone carefully on a holder in the middle of his dashboard. “Did you decide on a radio station, Mr. Equestrian?”

Jake threw open the door on Danson’s side, diving headfirst onto all three of our laps. “Hey, so where are we going?”

“Go!” Danson shouted, and Umayyad gently placed his car into drive and calmly headed away.

“Quite a night! I hear there were two exciting candidates having a very spirited debate!” Umayyad smiled as the crowd behind us completed their destruction of the now burning Aks Gary Amphitheater.

#

We cruised along in awkward silence, a Justin Timberlake song playing on the radio.

“JJ, please stop stroking the back of my head,” Jake muttered as he laid supine across us.

“Sorry, it’s just very calming.”

“Hey Danson.” Matt glanced over at him. “I was going to ask, what are you doing next weekend? There’s a band in town that I wanted to check out.”

“What? You literally have spent the last three days trying to destroy my life!”

Matt shrugged. “Business is business. You free?”

Danson was quiet for a moment. “Yeah, I guess I’m down.” He frowned and looked out the window. “Where are we going?”

“To your new destination sir, the updated drop-off point was entered a few moments after we left,” Umayyad answered.

“I didn’t enter a new drop-off point—”

“No, but I did!” Jake held up the cellphone and credit card he had pilfered off Danson. “To an open field where I can finally kill JJ!”

Umayyad stopped the car and unlocked the doors. Jake squirmed around on our laps for a moment, struggling to grab the door handle next to me. “JJ, open the door so I can push you out and murder you.”

“Ok, buddy!” I opened the door, and remained seated as Jake shoved on my face in vain.

“Just... get out of the car you immovable blob!”

“Ok, buddy!”

I stood outside of the car for a few moments as Clarice and Danson filed out, Matt shoving Jake’s body off of his lap and following suit. A few more awkward moments passed as Jake found his footing before collapsing out of the car. “Ok, I’m ready to kill you... whoa shit, head rush.” He leaned back to steady himself on the Prius, but it took off and he collapsed onto the ground behind it.

He rose to his feet and dusted himself off as Danson snatched the phone and credit card. Danson frowned as he looked at his phone. “What the hell is this ten thousand dollar charge on my credit card?”

“Did you get some coffee or maybe a delicious schnitzel?” I asked.

“I made sure I used your credit card to give a generous donation to DeSantis’ campaign,” Jake said.

“I’ll kill you!” Danson lunged forward.

“Not before I can kill JJ!” Jake lunged at me.

“Pile up!” I yelled for no reason and lunged at Matt, also for no reason.

“America can not actually become great!” Matt lunged for Danson.

The four of us tackled into each other at once, hands wrapped around each other’s throats. Clarice stood over us, ignoring the furious... uh, fernlike? fracas as she listened to the live feed on her smartphone.

“And the results are in!” the feed announced. Danson released his chokehold on Jake, who, nearly unconscious, let me out of his own grip. Thinking we were doing a thing, I let Matt go too.

“It is now official—Ron DeSantis will retain the governorship of Florida for four more years.” Danson let out an audible groan while Matt laughed hysterically. “In second place came independent candidate Rando R. Richman, whose campaign slogan of ‘please don’t tax me more’ really struck a chord with low and middle income voters. On the local scene,” the reporter continued, “Matt Northman, who ran on a campaign entitled ‘The Final Solution’ and is constitutionally ineligible to actually become governor, won 95% of the Tampa Bay area’s votes. His local opponent Danson C Equestrian won 3% of the votes.”

Danson leaned back and uttered a low, grumbling noise.

“I’m sorry, I’ve just been corrected. Danson C Equestrian won 3 votes total.”

“Who were the three votes?” I asked. “I would have voted for you, but I never learned to read, so those ballots confuse me.”

“Ah, they were his parents and his fiancé,” Clarice said.

“Shit! I was so busy trying to kill you two fuckers I forgot to vote!” Danson lifted his head and stared at his assistant. “Wait. Clarice! You didn’t vote for me?”

“To be honest, your fixation with murdering these two men kind of turned me off to your campaign.”

“But you kept working for me!”

“The checks never bounced.” She tucked her cell phone into her pocket and walked away.

Danson groaned, covering his face. “My greatest dreams are ruined—”

“I’m fucking killing JJ!” Jake leapt off the ground and pulled a blowtorch out of nowhere.

“That is what we were all originally doing!” Danson, following not leading, also rose and now swung a baseball bat.

“The prophecy!” Matt roared and leapt into the darkening sky before coming down on me with a fence post.

I cried out and stood as I tried to defend myself, blows and burns covering me. Jake dropped his blowtorch after marking an ‘X’ across my chest and dug a dental drill deep into my eyes. Matt crushed my skull open with the fence post while Danson shattered both my femurs with his bat. I covered my empty eye sockets, shrieked in agony and fell to my knees, as Danson grabbed the blade of King Tut from Jake’s belt and began stabbing me repeatedly. Matt lifted a flamethrower and lit me on fire, and as my screams turned to gasps the blaze rushed into my lungs. Jake snatched the blade from Danson’s hand, braving the flames now consuming my body to slash my innards onto the ground in front of me. At last, I saw a bright light, and then nothingness.

#

My corpse—gutted, eyeless, head crushed in, and burnt to a crisp—collapsed in front of my closest and most trusted friends.

Jake, Matt, and Danson wheezed as they looked down on my desiccated body. “Well. Ok then.” Matt said between deep breaths.

“So who wants a beer?” Danson looked to the other two.

“I could use one. But should we bury him first?” Jake asked.

“Jake, you want to respect his dignity now?” Matt wondered.

“What? No. Just worried about leaving evidence.” Jake pointed to their left. “Especially with that group of children that just witnessed this.” Matt and Danson looked over to see several horrified school children standing behind the chain link fence that enclosed their playground a few dozen feet away.

“Maybe we should kill them too.” Matt lifted his fence post.

“Whoa,” Jake put his hand on Matt’s arm. “That would probably be too far for this story. Let’s just get rid of the evidence.”

“Alright, I have a few shovels handy, just hang on a second,” Danson said.

“Wait, why do you have shovels on you? And how was that not previously brought up?” Matt asked.

“No less than five weapons just randomly appeared in our hands, and you’re wondering about this?” Danson opened a duffel bag and handed the shovels out.

A few minutes later, they had buried my body a good, safe one foot under the earth.

“Should we piss on it?” Jake asked.

“DNA evidence.” Matt shook his head. “Trust me, I’ve been waiting forever to piss on JJ’s grave, but I’m afraid we’ll have to let that dream go.”

“Alright, first round is on me, let’s go,” Danson said, and the three headed off to a bar most certainly nearby.

“Hell yeah the first round is on him.” Matt nudged Jake and showed him Danson’s credit card.

THE END

A clattering sound in rhythm with heavy footsteps approached my shallow grave. Dr. Cleo strode up, looked down and gave it a broad, toothless smile. “Good ting ya tipped, boy.”

“Now that’s foreshadowing!” Jake shouted from a distance.

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