

## *Vanity's Tooth*

Joseph Adams was an ordinary man. Somewhat more intelligent than most, but crippled with a strong sense of doubt which had curtailed the nurturing of his not inconsiderable mental gifts into something more vainglorious than his current post at the university. His most distinguishing and predominant personality trait was a phobia, a fear of irrational proportion, which unbeknownst to Joseph had its roots in a childhood interruption by his father of some most natural boyish activity, and now, manifested itself in an iron clad prohibition against seeing a certain type of doctor. Joseph had a rock solid phobia concerning dentists. Joseph never saw the dentist. Never. He was a superb candidate.

On the morning of June 24th Joseph awoke, and found himself a changed man. His typically accommodating, vacillating, insecure, doubting personality had vanished. Now, as he chewed down his breakfast, his thoughts were clicking resolutely and inexorably along new paths, sure and unwavering in their deductions, and the conclusions he drew from them. Now he found in his possession an effortless certainty, and saw within his grasp the very means to make his vision onto a tangible truth. No longer satisfied with being a sociology professor in search of tenure, Joseph Adams had found a new goal: He would purchase the government, charm and dominate all of mankind, and in so doing, save the human race. It would be easy.

By that afternoon he had collected his entire net worth on paper, presented it to the bank, and received ten times the amount in loan. He made the necessary investments and within a week's time the result was an ample two hundred-fold increase in value, which he invested in defense stocks, all sure to benefit from the now blossoming world crisis. Everyone had the new weapon—the super-cheap hyper-energetic fusion conversion algorithm and its variants were no longer secret, and any dictator with a slide rule knew enough, and indeed, the threat was now universal. Defense stocks tripled every ten minutes, and if the products these companies hawked worked, mattered little—money was to be had, and fear called the tune.

By the month's end Joseph was a trillionaire twice over, and he began to buy things: TV studios and internet news organizations—all of them. The money, and hence, the election... was his. Now in the presidency, Joseph Adams was the head of our United States, and was the most powerful of impotent men. You see, the president of our country is the most visible and powerful man on the globe, but himself has no power, only the means to collect it. So Joseph had divined a sure way to do just that.

He would collect the splintered vanity of Man under a single banner, a single phrase. He would assemble its pieces and attach them to this handle, and with it, he would steer the world. Each country had assembled its best minds for the world peace convention, an urgent affair of the most dire sort, each of the delegation invested by their respective governments with the full powers and rights necessary to make decisions—the gears and levers which made the world move and tremble were in but one hundred hands, and in these fifty souls the fate of the world and its full dynamism lay ready to spring. Now Joseph had but to assess each man in turn, and weave the deception which would save us

all.

To the French ambassador, a man vainglorious and insecure, Joseph lavished all manner of praise, and held him spellbound, until he believed it was he alone who had devised the plan, now forever glorious in bearing his name: "The Lufleheir stratagem of reconciliation." "Oh sir," said Joseph, "only in this way can the truth be known, and mankind be saved, only if we all sign on to surrender the weapon and honor you, as all should, let them sign and be proven as wise as you—only this is enough...let us do *what is needful*."

The Englishman was a delegate most modest and reserved, prudent and retiring, so as to conceal his wish to rule the world himself, from a quiet place—with a whisper. So Joseph did speak to him, "Only by consulting such modest and wise council as yours, might the world be run best. Who but one so well schooled in the workings of the world as to oil them rather than boast of them, who else is fit but you? I need your advice and council—indispensable are your views. How else might I find my way? Only you are worthy. Let us whisper under and into our sleeves, ever so quietly, who runs the world, and who alone knows, and understands, *what is needful*."

The African nations, so exploited, and yet, so badly abused for their insignificance fell under his shaded, nuanced, diplomat's truth, flittering and hypnotizing the delegate's bruised vanity with damp imploring eyes Joseph cast upon him, as if he alone was the only significance in the universe, and if he might choose to will it, even this great man, Joseph Adams, might be moved, even to tears, to behold the sight. So damp and imploring were Joseph's diplomat's eyes as he spoke, "Oh please sir, do grant us the only vote which lends true authenticity and worth—your vote—please sir, I beg and beseech you, not to rise up for glory, but to help all of mankind, and do *what is needful*." So did Joseph stitch fast the vanity of each delegate to the phrase, until the speech was given, and each heard but his own meaning.

"And so, to the whole hopeful community of man, and the community of nations, I do implore your support for our noble cause of peace. Let us all find the strength, to do—*what is needful*." So did each find the self-interest in nobility, and under human vanity, a common and noble cause.

As Joseph looked over the room filled with delegates, each a festering den of hungry insecure appetites, so poorly hidden under these well groomed approving faces, Joseph beheld all that panders in insecurity, and struts in vainglory, stepping in time to his music, a silent, vain and inexorable music, subtle and irresistible as his will, the will to which they all feigned their pantomime of noble pretense. And Joseph saw all that was hollow in man brought to a single point before him, a single name, a vote he might call up, and all the while, those who speak the word are themselves ignorant of its true author, or the greater purpose under which that word was conjured.

As Joseph lay in bed that evening he could not sleep. It was not because his speech had been poorly received, oh no, it was being broadcast far and wide as the single hope of

mankind...and all had signed on, much to the strains of public approval fitting to any politician who can even half rightly claim to have saved the world. Joseph was not awake from any pathological excess of energy, no, he was quite exhausted. It was his tooth. The hammer blows of pain splitting his soul open, ripping his head in two in time to his pulse—he couldn't stand it anymore. It had to stop.

So in a frigid clenched blue panic shattered and split by red waves of pain, he got into the taxi, and spoke the address. His eye was all but swollen shut. The dentist handed over the pills which were to keep him until the surgery, a root canal which was scheduled in a week's time. "Hey, Joe...loved the speech!" cooed the dentist as he handed over the prescription—the newest antibiotics. "Don't worry boss, you'll be feeling like yourself in no time." Now, Joseph could afford the best in medical care, and unfortunately, his new doctor was right.

At the noon meeting with his upstaged vainglorious, bloodthirsty generals, Joe felt unsure, uneasy and doubting, vacillating and weak. Didn't this general seem to know better, he was so very sure of himself, hadn't Joe better listen? After all, the general was an expert! Yes, Joe was feeling much more like himself. The general smelled blood, and moved in.

On Elanra Prime, the home of the Elavion race, one moment the connection to Joseph was felt, and the next—it was gone: their precious mental input severed. The Elavions are a race of energetic beings which exist as entities in lower organisms. But far from being parasitic, they always seek to improve the lot of their hosts, whose futures are so inexorably intertwined with their own. The first contact with a suitable host-being on Earth was accomplished in forming a union with a disagreeable and unkempt, but highly intelligent Athenian known as Socrates. The cultural footprints of the Elavion race can be found throughout human history, from Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo, to Goethe, Nietzsche, Martin Luther King and Gandhi, Einstein and Richard Feynman—all these men and so many more throughout history had been infected with true excellence. So many leaders, scientists, citizens and artists who found the essence of what power *preserves and strengthens* in man had been brought to full flower in this most gracious symbiosis, a symbiosis so necessary now that the power of destruction was grasped firmly in the fist of every tinkering ape foolhardy enough to fear. In this modern day of Earthly science, the Elavions had been identified and named: staphylococcus bacterium 1-A- 26.

In a gasp, a thermonuclear shudder of primal horror, loss and pain, the Elavions felt the shock, as the entire skin of the Earth was burned away in an impossible brutal instant, a flash of stupidity so deep and tragic, it consumed our fragile feeble world, ruptured in a thunderbolt of petty arrogance and bruised vanity that eradicated the host species named mankind, and hence, the bacterium within him—bringing an abrupt and permanent end, to the small smear of intelligent life on Earth.

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