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CHINKAPIN PARK
(A Dan Smoot story)

“He seems peaceful enough,” Jan said.

She was talking about the old man we’d picked up. We brought him to my house and he was in the back yard. Jan and I were at the sliding glass door looking out at him.

He was running a hand over one of the limestone blocks I’d scattered among the acre or so of oaks. The blocks are called butter sticks because that’s what they look like. They’re about five feet long and two feet high and wide. I’d put them in the yard for decoration and to serve as benches.

“I don’t want to call the law yet,” I said to Jan. “I’ll try to talk to him again.”

“He won’t talk. You saw his eyes. He has Alzheimer’s.”

We’d found him walking along a shoulder of the county road my house is on. It was a beautiful spring day and he was kicking through knee-high weeds and wildflowers. He looked as out of place as he could be. In a land of jeans and cowboy hats he was dressed in tan slacks and a long-sleeved paisley shirt. I slowed my truck and asked if he needed a ride, but he didn’t answer. He just turned his vacant eyes toward us and stumbled a bit as he continued forward. So I pulled ahead, parked and got out to stop him. I checked for I.D. but he didn’t have a wallet or a phone. Jan suggested we take him with us and decide what to do after lunch.

He was the first one out of the truck when I parked in front of the house. He headed to the back yard while Jan and I went inside and to the

door.

“He won’t talk,” Jan said again, then she turned and went off to work her magic in the kitchen. “I imagine he’s dehydrated,” she called out over her shoulder.

I grabbed a bottle of water and stepped outside. The world was cloud-spotted blue overhead and bright green underfoot. I’d mowed the yard a couple days before and the smell of freshly cut grass still lingered.

The old man didn’t seem to notice me as I approached. He’d settled onto one of the blocks and was blinking at the wild growth of mesquite and cactus that borders the yard on two sides. I stood a few feet away and studied him. He had a slim build and looked to be about eighty. His thin gray hair was neatly trimmed, which showed that somebody was taking care of him. I moved in close and bent down to look at his Alzheimer’s eyes. To my surprise they were alert and fixed on mine.

“This is like a park,” he said.

I jumped back, startled.

“What kind of trees are these?”

“They’re, uh, Chinkapin oaks.”

“They’re young. Did you give them names when you planted them?”

“As a matter of fact . . .” I started to tell how I named them after old girlfriends, but I stopped myself when I thought of the FedEx delivery man. He overheard me reminiscing about romance once, while I was watering Karen, and he still asks if I’ve had any good woodies lately.

“We thought you had Alzheimer’s,” I said, changing the subject.

“The dementia comes and goes, and it’s not Alzheimer’s. It’s a prion disease caused by crystals from the Covid shots they gave the old guy. The disease is everywhere now but the news media won’t report on it.”

“Did you just refer to yourself as ‘the old guy’?”

“Yes I did, Ed.”

“How do you know my name?”

“Because you and I have met before.”

“Really? I don’t remember.”

“The last time I saw you we talked about the Fabian Society.”

“The Fabians? We never . . . Wait a minute. Are you Mr. Smoot?”

He nodded.

Dan Smoot had been a conservative political commentator during the Cold War. I have several bound volumes of his newsletters from the 1960s. He’d operated out of Fort Worth but I met him in my house, twice, as a disembodied spirit.

“So you’re a ghost with a body now?”

“I’m not sure. I woke up in Mr. Fairchild this morning, in a nursing home, and after breakfast I decided to take him out for a walk. He’s stiff and I wanted to loosen him up. And I wanted to see you. So I hitched a couple of rides between demential episodes, and then you found me.”

He stood up and stretched. His joints popped while the shadow of a small cloud slid across the yard. He walked to one of the oaks. “Amazing,” he said, reaching up to touch a budding leaf. “God’s handiwork.” He looked at his bony hands. “I never thought I’d be inside a body again.”

“But I thought you could see the future. You could when we talked before, so why didn’t you see this coming?”

“I did, but it was just one of a thousand futures.”

“I don’t understand.”

“God allows us to make choices, and each choice creates branching possibilities. I saw this future but didn’t expect to experience it.”

“Well, it’s good to visit with you again. The last time we talked you convinced me to continue

writing political stories. I think I've produced some good ones since then."

"I think so too. I still check on you from time to time, to make sure you're posting your pieces online. That's especially important right now. Webscraping programs are gathering data that will be used to shape Artificial Intelligence, and the developers want AI to have a leftist slant. So they're banning conservatives from the internet."

There was movement at the back of the house. Jan waved through the door and held up five fingers. I waved back and she walked away.

"Five minutes to lunch," I said. "I'm sorry to rush you, Mr. Smoot, but why did you want to see me?"

"So I can tell you that something's coming. Something big. I wanted to let you know so you can write about it."

His voice had grown a little raspy. I gave him the bottle of water I'd brought with me and he drank. Then I asked what big thing was coming.

"Well, actually there are two things. Branching possibilities. And I want you to know about both."

A butterfly landed on one of his hands. He studied it until it fluttered away, and then he let out a heavy sigh. "The most fundamental American right is the right to be left alone, but that will soon be a thing of the past."

He walked to a limestone block and sat. I followed and waited for him to continue, but he just stared at the ground. I wondered if he'd slipped back into dementia.

"Are you still there, Mr. Smoot?"

"Yes. I'm just organizing my thoughts." He sighed again and looked up at me. "America has always been a problem for globalist politicians. They can't take over the world with us in the way, so they've replaced our government with a system

they can control. Corporations and unelected bureaucracies now run the country. They've been busy too. At the moment they're rushing foreign troops across Biden's open border. Soon those troops will be in position to attack. I can't say exactly when the attack will occur, but the day will begin like any other. Once the country has settled down to a morning of business as usual, gunmen will open fire from coast to coast. Their primary targets will be schools and transportation hubs. Other troops will poison air circulation systems and detonate radioactive dirty bombs. Thousands will die. Most of the nation's power grid will be knocked out too, along with the telecommunications networks. The only contact the average American will have with the rest of the world will be emergency radio saying to stay home until the authorities can restore order. Then after a while you'll be told that the terrorists were able to work undetected because the government couldn't monitor their spending. The fix for the problem will be a digital currency to replace cash. Americans will embrace the new monetary system and from then on you'll be required to have a GPS tracking device on you whenever you leave home. If you refuse to carry one you'll be locked out of your bank account and your property will be seized. You'll die broke and alone because no one will help you, for fear of sharing your fate."

I said, "Damn," but Smoot didn't seem to hear. His gaze had drifted to the mesquite brush in the distance. He said, "The U.S. Constitution is the flowering of more than two thousand years of western political progress. A string of democracies and republics leads from ancient Greece to America. The earlier systems tipped and fell like dominos, and now it's our turn. The biggest and strongest has been left for last. It will be a great tragedy when we fall, a tragedy for both the country and

the world.” A shadow from a passing cloud blocked the sun. The yard darkened slightly and Smoot said, “Demonic forces are about to topple civilization, and our descendants will never know the blessings of freedom.”

I blinked, and the old man was back at the tree.

A butterfly landed on one of his hands. He studied it until it fluttered away, and then he let out a heavy sigh. “The most fundamental American right is the right to be left alone, but that will soon be a thing of the past.”

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“Are you still there, Mr. Smoot?”

“Yes. Just organizing my thoughts, Ed. And I regret to report that the globalists are going to wreck the world’s economy.” He looked at me and shrugged. “It’s too late to stop it. Humanity will soon pitch headlong into a bloody downward spiral, but the good news is that the bad times won’t last forever.”

“They won’t?”

“No. The U.S. Constitution will come to the rescue.”

“You’ve always been a big supporter of the Constitution.”

“Of course. It was a gift from God. Jesus wants us to follow Him, but we must make a conscious decision to follow. So by giving us the Constitution God made sure we’d have a country where we could make that decision in peace. We were doing fairly well too, as a Christian nation, until the globalists hijacked our infrastructure and dragged us into World War One. Since then we’ve been used to overthrow foreign governments, install dictators, assassinate, bankrupt and plunder.”

“But you think we can break free of them? The globalists?”

“Absolutely. First though America will have to admit that it’s become a collectivist cesspool. That will be made painfully clear during the coming collapse, when critics of mob rule are put to the sword.”

“So how will we bounce back?”

“By remembering that the Constitution is based on Christian respect for individual rights. A respect which, ironically enough, makes for the strongest collective of all. An army of thugs is no match for an army of true believers. And they’ll rise up by the millions, the true believers. When America finally grows tired of being held captive by godless bullies, there will be a recommitment to Jesus Christ and a return to Constitutional law.”

I thought of the people I saw everywhere, people with dull eyes glued to glowing palms. They craved diversion rather than salvation. I doubted that the country could save itself.

My thoughts must have shown on my face. Smoot said, “Have faith. The United States will recommit to Christ, and the second American Revolution will liberate the world.”

Jan and I ate lunch on the back porch. We watched the old man move among the oaks and stones, and I thought about the two possibilities for the future. Smoot wanted me to write about them, but would it do any good? From what I could see America was a nation of people living separated from God and sleepwalking to the eternal separation that is hell. Could anything I say change that? Should I even bother to try? I had to make a decision.