

DRAGONFLY

By

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OTHER TITLES

Miss Match - 2015

Grace – 2015

The Dragonfly

In ancient lore

The Dragonfly

is the symbol or spirit of
transformation.

The juveniles are quite ugly and live in the water of ponds and lakes.

After one year, they emerge from the water and change into the
beautiful and graceful adult.

The change is absolute and complete,
leaving no remnant of the shape and form of the juvenile...
...yet it is the same creature.

DEDICATIONS

To Pat Tillman, Todd Beemer, Tyrone Woods,
Glen Doherty, and all who serve.

“Every sailor, soldier, Marine, and airman gives
his life for his country the day he signs his enlistment papers.
If he lives through his tour, he gets it back.”¹

With special appreciation to Hamilton Hanson,
The Cantankerous old Curmudgeon

¹ Thomas R. Cuba, 2010

CHAPTER ONE

Election Day

Tuesday - Nov. 1st, 2016

Madison Thompson was awash in emotions as he stood before the cheering crowd with his arms raised over his head. Thousands of faces and thousands of flashing lights from cameras and cell phones was all he could see. Only moments ago, on the big screen behind the platform on which he stood, the Fox News blonde of the week had announced that 58% of Americans had chosen him to be their next president.

Even though he was not what women would call handsome, he had an intangible charisma about him that made people like him instinctively. His short stature and muscular build had contributed to his being selected to be on the Oregon State University gymnastics team. The physical training he had obtained there, and subsequently in the U.S. Army, had become habit and he had maintained himself well over the years. At forty-four he would be the third youngest man ever to be inaugurated. Arguably, though, he would be the most physically fit.

The emotions swirled inside him much as the crowd and lights did in front of him. He was terrified, overjoyed, proud, ecstatic, and confused all at the same time. Pride did not come naturally to him and he was well aware that unlike his forty-four predecessors, he was not thinking *I WON* or even *WE WON*. Madison was thinking *My God, look what the people have chosen*. He was very happy with that because of the way he had run the campaign. He had steadfastly refused to promise a chicken in every pot or free stuff of any kind. He had instead promised that he would be a president for the people. He had alienated a lot of the big money and a lot of the party regulars in doing this, but apparently the people had been roundly educated on the topic of false hope and destructive change by the soon to be former resident of the White House. Madison's sole promise was to do a good job and uphold the Constitution. Presidents shouldn't really promise much more. He had enjoyed sniping back at a reporter who asked him what he would do for the American people. "I won't make promises I can't keep. Hell, Gitmo is still open and we still have pots with no chickens."

He remembered one instance in particular. MSNBC had arranged a presidential debate very early during the primary. Madison was the new man in politics and had a firm grip on his position as a distant fifth behind the big name republicans who already had careers as representatives or

senators. During the event, the question of jobs came up. The moderator habitually tended to ask the questions of the front runners and leave the losers like him to wonder how they were going to get a message across if they never got the microphone. He had tried not to telegraph his displeasure with this as he stood at the podium at the opposite end of the stage from the moderator. But, he thought, maybe his failure at hiding his annoyance was what ultimately prompted the man to look at him and ask. "Mr. Thompson? What is your plan to create jobs?" Madison scanned the audience of about ten thousand before answering. "My plan is simple, sir. I intend to rely on a core of 535 existing jobs right here in Washington. These people have the responsibility for creating an economic and social environment which will allow the 100 million business owners in this country to grow their enterprises and flourish. These aren't new jobs. They are jobs I intend to invigorate. These 535 jobs are known to you as the Congress of the United States. You see, the job I seek is that of president, not king. According to the Constitution, the job description of the president is to implement the laws of Congress, not to drag Congress along on some fantasy of promises for a better America. The job of the president is to look to the Congress to do their job as described in the Constitution."

Unlike the cacophony of cheers he was experiencing now, at that now far away moment, in the same hall and on the same stage, there was dead silence. The moderator finally asked. "So you would do nothing?"

Madison did his best to avoid looking stern but still replied rather seriously. "That is not what I said. What I said was that I respect the Constitution and after having read it, I understand that the legislature is supposed to legislate and the president is not supposed to dictate what is legislated. A president is not supposed to be able to create new law by policy or executive order. The job of president is to advise the Congress of the state of the nation and to operate the machinery of government as it is created by Congress. Why would anyone in their right mind think that one man can better solve the problems of the nation than the collective intellect of these 535?"

He paused and looked out over the audience. "If thinking like that had prevailed in 1773, we would still live in a monarchy."

Once more the silence was deafening, but then a solitary clapping echoed through the room. It was joined by another. The sound grew like a tidal wave. Slowly, but unstopably, the reaction of the crowd was one of approval as what he had said had begun to sink in.

It was this memory, and others like it, which had led to his feeling of

confusion as he stood there. Had the people really understood the message? Or had they just selected the next guy promising big change?

After that debate, the opposition started to call him *Empty MT* because they couldn't find a good retort. They had resorted instead to a lower level of campaigning. He had successfully parried this attack by saying that he only appeared empty to some people because he wasn't as full of himself as the more typical candidates for president. He enjoyed this little memory in the midst of the cheering that he found himself immersed in now.

It was the fear, though, that kept rising to the top of his emotional teapot. Fear is natural, he told himself. He recalled his first time snow skiing in Denver. He was just a kid then in his early twenties and was not supposed to be afraid of anything, but there he was at the top of a very long snowy and steep mountain. Looking down the slope the fear rose up from his stomach, through his chest, and he thought at the time that it would blow the top of his head clean off. By the time he inched his way down, the fear was gone and he was able to go back up and do a proper run. That fear on that mountain was nothing like what he felt now. He had tossed his hat in the ring and the people had chosen him. Like before, it was a fear of failure that gripped him. Unlike before, if he failed this time, he would fail a nation not just himself.

He never heard his Vice President-elect coming up beside him, but he felt the footfalls in the platform and turned to greet her just as she arrived. Janice, like himself, was not a product of Yale or Harvard but both of them had long resumes filled with experience in the private sector, sprinkled with volunteer public service and military credentials. Madison was a mechanical engineer who started his career in the Army, first as a demolitions expert and then as a member of the Corps of Engineers. His civilian career was centered on inventing things. He didn't invent great huge things like people read about in books. Almost no one did that. Most engineers solve day to day small problems with a new gear design or material application. These small things get collected into bigger and more complex machinery like fancy cars, airplanes and moon rockets. Madison took simple pleasure in knowing that these big machines and projects would never have gotten anywhere without little solutions like the ones he provided. His designs were for the simple things, like a gear box that didn't get too hot to function.

Janice Edmonds was as much of an opposite to Madison as she could be while still being the same. She earned a degree in English Composition from a strong, but not famous Midwestern college and joined the Air Force. Her job was to prepare operations manuals that were technically

accurate and could be read and understood by enlisted and officers alike. The result was that her communications skills were very precise, if not flowery. After her service, she put these skills to use in a sort of hybridized combination of journalism and creative writing. She was not in Michener's league, but her stories and novels were historically accurate and a good easy read. What she and Madison had in common was a clear understanding of the Constitution and a resume full of getting things done. They both knew people and knew that one of the best ways to motivate people was to work with them, side by side, and not just direct them from above. These two were trained in the trenches and had learned leadership by being well led.

Madison took Janice's hand and they both spread their arms wide, in a symbolic embrace of everyone in the room. Together they walked to the podium for a few remarks. When they reached it, Madison stood aside to let Janice speak first. The Twitter world exploded with reports of the break in protocol as Janice stepped to the microphone. The tall and slender Puerto Rican born woman lost no time getting to the point.

"WOW!" Applause and cheering.

"Fifty-eight Percent!" Applause and cheering.

"Did we touch a nerve?" Applause and cheering.

"Do you think America is ready to stop hoping and start working?" Applause and cheering.

"Do you think America is ready for repairs instead of change?" Applause and cheering.

"Alright. Alright! Settle down a minute." Janice held her arms out in a gesture to calm the crowd. "I know tonight is supposed to be about celebration, but I need to make one very important statement." The crowd became reasonably quiet and she continued. "If we do the math, that means that if 58% of Americans voted for us..." The crowd started to cheer again, and she had to calm them. "If 58% of Americans voted for us, then that means that 42% of Americans voted against us. I want to make sure that 100% percent of Americans know that Madison and I feel that we were elected by some of the people to manage a nation for ALL OF THE PEOPLE! WE ARE ONE PEOPLE, AMERICA!" The applause and cheering was deafening.

Madison moved closer to Janice at the microphone and with subtleties practiced throughout the campaign, she knew it was his turn. Quieting the crowd again before she spoke, Janice waved Madison in saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the President-elect of the United States of

America.” Janice smiled and clapped, stepping back so Madison could approach the microphone.

“With my apologies for cutting in.” He smiled at her, and then at the sea of supporters. When the cheering died down, he continued. “Please forgive me for interrupting what I am sure was going to be at least a 45 minute speech about my character.” This was followed by laughter and applause. “The fact is that this night is not about me. It is not about Miss Edmonds. Tonight is about you, the American citizen. Tonight is about a choice that you made about your future and the future of your country. Tonight we celebrate and affirm your choice to commence a reinstatement of governance consistent with the Constitution. Tonight you have exercised your power over the formerly powerful political elites. Tonight WE begin the process of putting things right. Like others before us, this will be a process of redistribution, but we shall not forcibly redistribute wealth. Tonight we begin the process of redistributing power. In the next four years we shall demonstrate that a distributed power assures us all that no one man, or small group of men, can control this nation ever again. This is the process of Repairing America. It is the process of realigning our government with our Constitution.” Here Madison paused a long time while the crowd cheered and then added. “So, like my grandpa used to say, *it’s a big job so we’d best stop jawin’ and get after it.*”

Madison and Janice joined hands again, raising their arms with big smiles and then retreated from the stage. Just out of sight behind the curtain, stood the campaign manager, Jason Barnes, and a few higher level staffers. “How was that?” Madison asked Jason.

“It was perfect.” Jason replied smiling. “Blaise Whitehead is on the phone. He wants to congratulate you.”

Blaise was a regular party supporter who was on the inside track with Madison. Like Madison and Janice, Blaise had seen the coming disaster that decades of ignoring, twisting, and bending the Constitution had brought to America. He had helped develop a campaign strategy that resonated with the people’s very vocal rejection of the policies of his predecessors: Not just the most recent one, but all sixteen of them since the election of Woodrow Wilson. Blatantly unconstitutional practices had become so commonplace that no one even noticed anymore. Not until America stood at the edge of the cliff and had begun her descent into chaos had the people realized what was happening. Madison, Janice, Blaise and the team they had put together hoped that it was not too late.

Madison and Janice both spoke with Blaise for a few minutes even though

it was almost impossible to hear over the noise of the crowd. When they disconnected, Madison turned to Jason and said “Tell everyone to enjoy the evening and take three days off. I don’t want to hear from any of them. Then at 8:00 AM Saturday have everyone in the conference room at the Holiday Inn. Now go have fun!” He slapped Jason on the shoulder. He and Janice turned and went back out on stage to more cheering. Each of them went to different sides of the stage and down into the crowd. For the next two hours they would just wander through the mass of people like it was a big cocktail party, not an election. The Twitter universe exploded again with this second break in protocol. These two were not off to private parties with big money donors. They were partying with the people in the cheap seats who had worked so hard to put them here.