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JANUARY 7, 2017

After a restless night thinking about the prior day's hardware store encounter, Jeremy grabbed his cell phone from the nightstand and began to text.

Han, this is Luke, R U OK?

Hey, Luke, yeah, I'm good. Is something wrong?

No, not really. I had an interesting visitor yesterday. I think it was a false alarm. Just wanted to make sure everything was good with U.

Was it a storm trooper?

Yeah, but like I said, everything is OK.

OK. Keep me posted if you have any more visitors.

Will do.



“Yesterday was the culmination of countless hours of work by everyone in this room. You should be proud of yourselves; your hard work finally paid off. I am honored and humbled that the American people selected me to be the 45th president of the United States.”

In addressing his campaign staff, Mitch McCoy was technically correct. American people did select him to be president; however, it was only a few dozen—specifically, a few members of the U.S. House of Representatives. Eight weeks earlier on Election Day, McCoy garnered only 39% of the popular vote and 41% of the electoral votes. In an election unlike any other, the traditional Democrat and Republican candidates were challenged by an independent candidate named Elijah Mustang.

Although his campaign as an independent candidate started too late, had too little money, and had no political party infrastructure to rely on, Mustang still won both the popular and the electoral votes. However, the campaign fell two electoral votes short of the magic 270 required to be elected president. The electoral stalemate sent the decision to the House of Representatives, who eschewed the voice of the voters and just yesterday selected Senator Mitch McCoy, Democrat from Connecticut, to be the 45th president of the United States.

“Of course, I would be remiss if I didn’t welcome to the

stage the next vice president of the United States, my trusted confidante and running mate, Sally Naughton!”

The staff cheered as Naughton greeted McCoy with an embrace. The only problem was that in an electoral situation as in 2016, the vice president is selected by the Senate and is not the de facto running mate of the president selected by the House of Representatives. McCoy would soon discover that his presidency would face an unexpected challenge.



A lush snow covered the majestic summits just a few miles south of Walland, Tennessee’s Blackberry Farm. The magnificent retreat, located in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains, hosted the gathered dignitaries. The team had reserved Bramble Hall, named for the prickly vine upon which grew the farm’s namesake fruit. Designed after timber-framed barns of a simpler time, the hall boasted equal parts luxury and comfort. Its massive stone fireplace was roaring, providing comfort from the sub-freezing temperatures just outside the door. It was debatable whether the fire or the intensifying discussion was supplying the most heat.

“Somebody needs to explain why we’re here because I sure don’t know.”

“As soon as you figure it out, please let me know,” another disgruntled attendee echoed.

“I know we’re all still disappointed with the election’s outcome, but we must press on to bring this chapter to a close. We owe it to those who supported this campaign to

end this the right way.” Admiral (ret) Jackson Adair had ascended through a series of campaign roles, including an initial position as volunteer, then member of the leadership team, then leader of the leadership team, culminating in being selected as Elijah Mustang’s running mate. On this day, Admiral Adair was doing his best to quell the leadership team’s simmering frustration with the requisite responsibility of closing out the failed presidential campaign.

“I just don’t understand why we have to handle this. Can’t we just hire someone to tie up the loose ends?” One leadership team member’s sentiment was shared by many in the room.

Another team member responded, “I agree; the voters had their say, and they said ‘no.’ I invested my time in the campaign, but it didn’t work out. Now I need to get back to running my business.” The leadership team was comprised of successful men and women from all walks of life, who put their professional and personal pursuits on hold to serve in this most unusual campaign.

“Leadership doesn’t just walk away after a loss. Leadership shakes the victor’s hands, puts the shoulder pads and helmet on the shelf, cleans up the locker room, and turns off the lights on the way out. That’s what we’re here to do.”

Although Adair could still sense resistance in the room, he pressed on. “One of our first agenda items is to ensure we thank the many people who sacrificed their time, talent, and finances for this campaign. That acknowledgement starts with the people in this room.”

Comprised of nine men and six women, the leadership

team included former congressmen, CEOs, a retired federal judge, a former secretary of agriculture, the bass player for a 70’s rock band, a professional fisherman, an electrician, and a talk-radio host. Adair walked around the room announcing each member’s contribution. “I’ve never seen such a diverse group of individuals mesh so well in such a short period of time. I know each of you backed Elijah 100%.”

“Speaking of Elijah, has anyone heard from him recently?” a team member asked.

It was a question everyone was thinking, but no one had found a way to work into the conversation. Shortly after the election, just over two months before this meeting, Elijah left the country to serve with Promise Ministries, a non-profit he started to serve the neediest in Central America with a recent expansion to South America. Reports had surfaced of Elijah sightings in Honduras, El Salvador, and Brazil; but he had not appeared publicly since the election.

As Adair continued pacing, he nodded in agreement that it was a question that needed to be addressed. “I spoke with one of Elijah’s daughters last week; she hears from him every few days. As we all witnessed firsthand, the campaign took a toll on Elijah. He deserves some time away from the limelight.”

The team agreed with Admiral Adair; Elijah had put everything he had into the campaign, which he never really wanted to enter. The team accepted that he was now due some solace from the chaos.

“One of our primary agenda items is campaign finance. As you know, we’ve secured the services of Taylor and Blue

out of Nashville to manage campaign funding. I've asked Brett Taylor to give us a report of where things stand. Brett, the floor is yours."

With Elijah's campaign having unfolded so rapidly, finances were one facet that the team outsourced to an experienced firm. Taylor and Blue had managed the campaign finances of two presidential hopefuls, over a dozen senate and congressional candidates, and close to 100 state-level contenders.

"Thank you, Admiral. I must start by saying what an honor it has been to be part of this historic campaign. What you have done will rewrite political science textbooks for years to come."

Taylor clicked the remote to start the presentation.

"Let's talk about timing first. Most presidential campaigns begin planning up to three years in advance. They are supported by major political parties that are in perpetual campaign mode with hundreds of staffers. You started from zero, six months before the election. You had no party backing you, yet you won the popular vote by a wide margin and came within two electoral votes of winning the presidency. I sense you're all dejected, but you need to understand that what you did doesn't normally happen in American politics."

Although Taylor was hired to be the numbers guy, he embraced the Mustang for President campaign's channeling of the nation's frustration with the two mainstream parties' gotcha politics. He wanted to instill a sense of accomplishment in the Mustang team.

"Let's talk numbers. In six short months, your campaign

raised \$90 million by Election Day. With no organization and no party, that's impressive. Let's compare that to the two major party candidates. Ireland, the Republican, raised \$875 million, almost ten times what you spent. McCoy, the Democrat, raised \$985 million. And yet you got more votes than either of them!

"Here's an impressive stat for you. Ireland raised \$27 for every vote he won. McCoy raised \$19 per vote. Elijah Mustang—your guy—spent \$1.38. A BUCK THIRTY-EIGHT!! Like I said earlier, you guys are rewriting the political history books!

"And here's what's really exciting. I said that you had raised \$90 million by Election Day, which was over two months ago. Since then, you've raised another \$40 million. People are continuing to give. They are expecting you to keep this movement going. You all seem to think this gathering is the end of something, but the people are telling you it is the beginning of a movement. The people rose up and spoke on Election Day, and now they are calling on you to keep the movement going."

One of the leaders responded, "The election is over. It is great that people are contributing, but what are we supposed to do with the money? We have no power. Exactly *what* are we supposed to keep going?"

It was a question that would have an unexpected answer within minutes.



“Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye! All persons are commanded to keep silent, on pain of imprisonment, while the Senate of the United States is sitting for the election of the Vice President of the United States.” The Sergeant at Arms, Reginald Z. Honeycutt, made the proclamation as the sitting Vice President ascended to the podium.

“Per agreement from the leadership of both parties, today’s vote will be held without debate or discussion. A roll-call vote is required. The clerk will call the roll.” The Vice President promptly began the proceedings.

On December 9, 1803, Congress passed the 12th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. That amendment provides the remedy for a situation, such as the 2016 presidential election, in which no candidate garnered the majority of Electoral Votes. While this Amendment guided the process whereby the House of Representatives elected Mitch McCoy to be the 45th president, it decrees that the Senate must elect the vice president.

In 2016, the Republicans held the Senate majority 54-46. According to the 12th Amendment, the Senate may only select between the two candidates receiving the most votes. This situation complicated the selection process because the Republican candidate came in third. The Republicans in the majority had the unenviable task of choosing between the Democrat candidate, their bitter rival, and a completely unknown outsider. It was a historic selection.

“Mr. Abernathy, how do you vote?” The clerk began.



“Because this team chose to spend only the money you had raised, you avoided going into debt; therefore, you finished the campaign with over \$5 million in reserve. Adding that to the \$40 million raised since the election, this movement now has \$45 million.” Brett Taylor’s voice raised an octave, revealing his genuine enthusiasm.

“So, what are we supposed to do with \$45 million?” a team member asked.

Taylor continued, “You’re supposed to find a way to keep this movement going. The House probably thought selecting McCoy would quell the voice of the people, but it had just the opposite effect. The National News Service just released a poll showing a 74% approval rating for Elijah Mustang. As I said earlier, this is *historic*.”

“Look, I understand that the people are behind this movement. They’re donating money; approval ratings are up. I get it, but what are they supposed to rally behind? Elijah isn’t even here. We have no power. We have no voice.” Noticing Taylor with his head down looking at his cell phone, the team member’s aggravation was piqued. “Come on, Brett; you’re not even paying attention! Get off your phone!”

Taylor slowly looked up from his phone; a huge smile engulfed his face. “So, you have no power?” Taylor sauntered toward the head of the large oak table. “You have no voice?” He then put his arm around Admiral Adair, smiled at him, then back at the team. “Ladies and gentlemen, I’ve just received some interesting news. You want power and a voice? OK, I give you the next Vice President of the United States, Admiral Jackson Adair.”