

“ The Meeting.”

The Hilton Hotel on South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, had been chosen for two reasons. The first was that on its roof was a luxury suite in the form of a mock Roman villa, isolated from the rest of the hotel and providing the comfort expected by the participants. The second was that it boasted its own helicopter pad, permitting the same men, and they were only men, entry free from curious eyes.

The Russian had once been a communist party official, high up but of low visibility in the last politburo, and had slid easily across into the extreme capitalist robber baron world of the oligarch, leaving him a key player in the control of the New Russia's energy resources.

The Chinese was a native of Hong Kong, a man who had done well under the British, and signed up, despite his billions, as an enthusiastic member of the party when China took over in 1997. He was not a party official per se, but those who knew of these things knew that he spoke with the party leadership imprimatur.

The Arab Prince was the last to arrive, and the only one to wrinkle his nose at the surroundings when he entered the suite. He was used to every piece of furniture, every piece of linen and art and food being created at his personal whim, and showed his distaste for what he regarded as these vulgar and common trappings. To The Arab Prince, the genuine Rembrandt on the wall was also in that category. After all, it was not as if he had commissioned it himself.

The Fixer was a wealthy man in his own right, although not on the same level as the three billionaires he worked for. He had to lease his private executive jet, as opposed to buying a 747 outright. The three billionaires, whilst having regard for his considerable skills, did not regard him as a peer.

The Russian and the Chinese had been enjoying a drink and taking in the spectacular view of both the Chicago skyline and Lake Michigan. They nodded politely at the Arab Prince, who privately bristled at their lack of deference to him. He was, after all, of royal descent. Both the Russian and the Chinese regarded him as a powerful man whose power was a mere accident of birth, as opposed to their “earned” income.

Nevertheless, all three recognised their mutual need, and indeed that they spoke not just in their own interests but on behalf of huge interests behind each man.

All four sat at the large table, an orange juice sitting ostentatiously in front of the Arab Prince. The other three men knew of his devout Muslim façade, and the fact that later that day he would be engaged in carnal pleasures that would be frowned upon by even the most liberal of Ayatollahs. But the façade was respected.

The Fixer opened the meeting, with a respectful tone, summing up their situation. He was well aware that all three men would also be aware of these facts, but he found that it tended to be the most effective way to direct the discussion towards the decisions that needed to be made.

“ Gentlemen. Your royal highness.” The Fixer tilted his head almost imperceptibly towards the Saudi. He knew his protocol well. The Russian rolled his eyes.

“ The recent financial crisis has had an effect on our plans, but not to a significant degree. My people, in consultation with yours, have re-examined our projections. Despite the collapse in commodity prices caused by economic slowdown, the long-term reality remains the same. The world's supply of gas and oil is finite, whilst demand is not. We control a substantial proportion of that supply, and therefore our profits will, in the long term, continue to rise as supply dwindles.”

“ And alternatives remain limited.” The Russian said.

The Fixer nodded.

“ A vital issue. Despite the fall in oil prices, recent events and the new US administration mean that alternative energy supplies not under our influence are now receiving serious attention. We can continue to fight in the US to slow progress, opposing, for example, increases in car fuel efficiency standards. We still continue to confuse and cast doubt on the very question of climate change, despite the scientific facts to the contrary. It will not be as easy as it was in the last administration, where we could actually handpick our nominees to various state agencies, but we still have some friends. However, the other matter requires attention.”

The others nodded. It was the main focus of the meeting.

The Fixer gestured at the other three men.

“ You represent forces of great strength. You can, through sheer economic power, bend smaller nations to your economic interest. That is why solar power, wind power and other non-fossil fuels have been prevented from developing. That is why some small nations fear their natural gas supplies being physically cut off. That is why the United States has had both its political and military will sapped in the Middle East. It is also why we must continue to oppose any concerted effort by Western nations to coordinate a response to the growing energy crisis.”

The three men did not raise any objection to The Fixer's analysis.

“ In particular, we cannot permit the European Union to gain an acceptable level of coherence in its aims. It is the sleeping giant that cannot be permitted realise its own strength. We have quietly worked, funding diverse elements within Europe to call into question the very concept of European unity. We have stoked nationalist feeling, both far right and otherwise, even indirectly aided extreme left wing elements who would, I suspect, be quite horrified if they knew of our involvement.”

The Russian smiled thinly. The Fixer elaborated.

"Then came the Lisbon treaty. Despite the best efforts of our French and Dutch pawns, who hilariously believe themselves to be fighting in the defence of national sovereignty, we failed to prevent the treaty in its entirety. It was then that our Irish operation was begun.

Our proxy has outshone himself. Incredibly, he has managed to unite a, let us be honest, surreal coalition of Thatcherites, Marxists, liberals, feminists, Catholic conservatives, environmentalists and ultra-nationalists into delivering a defeat of this treaty. Amazingly, each element of this coalition revels in the belief that the defeat of the treaty in the referendum was an endorsement of their beliefs, even though they fundamentally disagree with each other!"

"This is the Irish we are speaking of!" The Chinese said.

The Fixer continued.

"Indeed. The Irish government, realising how vital other European governments regard this treaty, look set to announce a second referendum."

The Arab Prince harrumphed.

"What is the likelihood of this second referendum passing?" He asked.

"It all depends on how the debate is shaped. The Irish are inherently a pro-European people. Unlike, say, the British, the Irish tend to see Brussels not as a threat but as a sport to be conquered. The Irish are good at their sport. They tend to learn the rules, and then how to bend them to their own advantage. If the Irish people come to understand that the rest of Europe will respect their right to opt out of further integration, but will expect its right to move on to be respected by the Irish.....then, in that case, I believe the Irish will endorse the treaty. They are not an insular people, and know that they must be willing to fight their interests at the highest tables of state."

The Chinese slammed the table with the palm of his hand.

"This outcome is not acceptable! The Lisbon treaty could permit a united Europe which could, with the Obama administration, start to free the western world of its addiction to the fossil fuels we control. We are paying you far too much money to tolerate that outcome."

The Fixer raised both hands to calm his employers.

"I agree. That is why Ireland must be made to vote no a second time to this treaty."

The Russian took a sip of coffee, and tapped the file in front of him.

"To be quite honest, we must demur to our friend in Ireland. He has managed to deliver Ireland, the very model of European Union success, into the anti-Europe camp. As I read his reports I am quite amazed at how he did it. He managed to raise fears about issues that are not even mentioned in the treaty! He has had citizens marching on the streets demanding guarantees that are actually already in the document!

It is like watching a master conjurer at work, savouring the misdirection. I read of abortion, and conscription, which he pulls from his magician's hat and waves before his audience, apparitions of smoke and sleight of hand. It's extraordinary."

"He is an extraordinary man, one who has not played his trump card yet. This treaty will stand or fall on a single premise: If the Irish people vote on a cold measured analysis of their own self-interest, it will pass. But if our friend, with our help, manages to activate their anger and insecurity, then...if he convinces them to vote in a bloody-minded manner, to ignore the rational pondering of consequence, to activate the hate, if you will, then the treaty will fall."

"We are providing the help he needs?" The Arab Prince asked.

"We are. Our media friends, particularly in the UK, are slowly stoking the issues that need to be lit. Nationalism, pride, a sense of indignity, creating a belief that Ireland does not need to be part of anything bigger, that all Ireland's problems are internal caused by the same politicians who support the Lisbon treaty. That if they are all given a bloody nose, that Ireland's problems will magically go away. Already, our friend is cautiously creating the belief that the Lisbon treaty is not Ireland's treaty, but the politicians' treaty, and that therefore only the politicians personally will suffer. Quite ingenious, really."

The Russian nodded approval, and rapped his knuckles on the table, signifying that he believed they had heard all they needed to know. A subtle signal was given to a silent aide in the corner, who carried over a tray with three glasses of an obscenely priced wine and a glass of orange juice for the Arab Prince.

He stood up, and raised his glass. The others joined him.

"A toast. To the Irish people. May they vote in fear and anger." He said.

"And give us the world." The Chinese replied, and their glasses chimed together.

The End.