

## Frank

*A Candid Re-Telling Prompted by Everyone's not having Paid Attention the First Time*

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Based on "Candide", the famous novel by Voltaire from 1759

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for Richard Grigsby, who first caused me to read "Candide"

and for Sammi Chappra, who still has not done so

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## Chapter 1

*Wherein Frank loses his mansion*

Frank hunched in worry. Prevarication was impossible for him, so much so that every nuance of emotion showed in his face, indeed in his very bearing. Thus his worry loomed over the proudest of all possible desks, reading the frightful e-mail from Mr. Gladstorm once more. Frank worried about what had caused Mr. Gladstorm to send the e-mail, and what effect it might have on his career. As the worry overtook him, he stood and stretched and made a tour of his mansion, widely regarded as the finest on the cul-de-sac, perhaps in all the suburbs of Indiana.

He gazed from an expansive window at the dark gray stone slate path to his front door. That particular dark gray color had only this season been made available at the stores, as had Frank's new refrigerator with its brushed-steel finish. These refinements provided sufficient reason to label him as an up-and-comer, and object of envy among his peers.

Moving to the kitchen to admire his becoming refrigerator, Frank exchanged a kiss with his becoming wife. Melissa to everyone else, Frank thought of her as Missile-Tits, and felt candidly lucky to have married her. His best friends (Dip-Shit and Fart-Box, if you must know) had married Thunder-Thighs and The Six-Footer, respectively, so the pet-name felt natural to Frank.

He shared his worry concerning Mr. Gladstorm's e-mail with Missile-Tits, and together they determined to seek broader counsel before taking action. To this end, Missile-Tits called her mother, and was answered by a nurse who informed them in a detached and concise manner that her patient had again contracted COVID, and was unable to speak. The nurse hung up before they could request more information. Missile-Tits immediately sprung up and shouldered her purse, packing an overnight bag with her left hand as she ordered a ride-share from her cell with the right. In minutes, Frank was alone with his worries inside the mansion.

He called his former academic advisor, and heard that strident and reassuring voice incant a highly professional out-of-office message. He considered calling his co-workers, but then thought better of announcing these details to persons who might not wish him well. At length, Frank sought the counsel of Les Payne, a barman with a reputation for helping people raise their spirits, whose wisdom had often been praised by Missile-Tits' brother.

"Welcome", shouted Les, as Frank entered the bar, "to the best of all possible bars!"

Beneath his bartender's license and a sign announcing "Free Beer Tomorrow", a circumspect diploma on the wall behind the barman conferred unto him a doctorate in metaphysico-theologo-cosminology.

"What've ya got for a worried soul?" asked Frank.

Les poured a finger-width of brown liquid into the bottom of a gleaming tumbler and slid it across the bar to Frank. "An end to all worry, in the form of a deeper wisdom. You see, by applying sufficient reason, we find that cause and effect have brought about a world of pre-established harmony. In this world, all components are absolutely necessary and could not have been otherwise, for *this* is the Best of All Possible Worlds!"

Les grinned and clinked glasses with Frank, and they drank. Frank never concealed what was in his heart, and immediately told Les all about the frightful e-mail from Mr. Gladstorm.

Les counseled, "Surely this e-mail is for the best, as its enactment allows your superiors to solve their problems. You would be wise to take comfort in suffering the difficulties to come, as your tribulations will certainly relieve the corporation at large of a great burden." Frank took these words to heart, and had resolved to do just that, when he found himself beset by conflicting advice.

Upon the porch outside the door of the bar, a man stood indulging in the vapors provided by a device kept in his pocket, which he repeatedly brought to his mouth. "You should go over his head."

"Huh?" Frank felt astonished at being so addressed, but he had raised enough spirits with Les that he found himself agreeable to any conversation.

"That Thunderin'-Trunk fella."

"Gladstorm?"

"Whatever. You should go over his head!"

"Perhaps the machinery of your employ works differently from mine, sir, for I know well that to do so would incur my instant dismissal!"

"Bullshit! Your boss fucked up, and he's trying to put the blame on you. If you can find out what he did, and bring proof to *his* boss, you'll take over his job, or better!"

Frank found himself deeply troubled by these revelations. How could they pertain to the best of all possible corporations, which had been so gracious as to employ him, keeping him in mansions and brushed-steel refrigerators? Yet this was certainly the best of all possible bars, and this gentleman enjoying the best of all possible vapors was surely the best of all possible patrons, adding prodigious weight to his counsel.

Frank pondered these notions as he made his way home, and sorely wished to discuss them with Missile-Tits, but she had enough to worry about this evening. He determined to take no action, awaiting developments. Yet Frank was unable to sleep, and in the wee hours found himself leaning over his proud desk, effectively pouring through the year's accounts from his department in search of the cause that had brought him Gladstorm's e-mail.

There it was! A dip in accounts received during the middle weeks of November, closely matching the shortfall laid at Frank's feet in Gladstorm's e-mail. There the trail ended, however, as Frank's limited clearance effectively denied him any further details. He logged out, then in again using credentials given him by a wonderfully friendly secretary. She had them from a dotting IT administrator, for she had provided him with sufficient reason. Administrator-level access served as the simplest means of working around the conflicting demands of her careless boss.

With his ill-gotten credentials, Frank discovered that Mr. Gladstorm had re-directed some of the funds received in the second week of November to an unlabeled account owned by "N.A." Frank remembered the week that followed, when Gladstorm had been away and therefor unable to approve the requests necessary to resolve customer concerns in a meaningful time-frame, resulting in a considerable dip in new sales. Frank had felt compelled to document these events when they occurred, and had the records at hand.

This was it! The gentleman outside the bar had been right! Frank assembled the applicable documentation into a single folder and saved it to a thumb drive. He had no real intention of going over Mr. Gladstorm's head, but the idea of having those documents available in his brief-case allowed Frank to put aside some of his worry, and at last he slept.

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The next morning, Frank found Mr. Gladstorm looming over his desk even before he had sipped his coffee. "Frank!" barked Gladstorm, "I'm disappointed in you. I expected a direct response to my e-mail, yesterday! What do you have to say for yourself?"

"My apologies, sir." Yesterday, Frank would have been terrified by these developments, but given what he had learned last night, Gladstorm's behavior left him feeling disgusted, instead. "I thought it best to have full recompense in order, rather than answer you with bluster and dubious promises." There must have been something new in Frank's face, as Gladstorm's eyes narrowed in suspicion.

"By the end of the day!" Gladstorm demanded as he strode away.

The evolution of the text document on Frank's screen that day unfolded like an example in a twelve-step seminar or psych 100 class, perfectly invoking the stages of grief:

1: (denial) FUCK YOU, GLADSTORM! You Great Big Stinky Fart! YOU did this, not me, and I can prove it! Give me \$10

million plus a full pension, or I'll squeal!

2: (anger) How DARE you attempt to lay your malfeasance at MY feet? MINE?!? I married Missile-Tits, you dumb son-of-a-bitch! I've a mansion with a dark gray slate walk and a brushed-steel refrigerator! Likely I'll win out just as well if you try to tangle with me!

3: (bargaining) LISTEN, we all know this is the best of all possible corporations. That makes you the best of all possible supervisors, and myself the best of all possible employees. This being true, how can we fail to realize the best of all possible solutions?

4: (depression) With DISGUST, I feel compelled to resign. Assigning my professional efforts to your vulgar enterprise incurs soaring debts against both nature-at-large and my own soul. I would rather starve than serve your wickedness!

5: (acceptance) \*delete \*quit \*shutdown.

Pocketing the thumb drive from his briefcase, Frank stood and left his station as though he meant to use the restroom. But once outside of Mr. Gladstorm's purview he made straight for the offices of Gladstorm's own superior, a Mr. Prisse-Buldge. Frank had never met any personage who claimed such nomenclature. Even so, he had every reason to imagine that his own countenance and grace would serve well enough to see him shine through any encounter.

Frank approached Prisse-Buldge's office door with a self-assurance duly inflamed by righteous indignation.

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Prisse-Buldge's concierge greeted Frank's sudden demand for an audience with artlessly concealed lust. He was shown in immediately.

Prisse-Buldge loomed like an elephant seal at the end of a long carpet, behind a wide desk. His head leaned back so that the fat upon his neck stuck out beyond his chin, and his thumbs played together in a manner that suggested a dearth of competence.

Frank took in these surprising details and determined to press forward. After all, within the shining gears of the best of all possible corporations, this man must be the best of all possible department heads. He came to meet Prisse-Buldge across the desk, and presented his findings. Last November, Mr. Gladstorm had siphoned money from accounts receivable into a special, hidden account. With those very funds, he had then taken himself on vacation.

Frank believed this would be enough for Prisse-Buldge to dismiss Gladstorm, and even reward Frank's valor in exposing the matter. Yet Prisse-Buldge demurred. He asked to see the evidence, and asked how Frank had come by it, and even touched upon the sensitive topic of Frank's prowess in accessing these files. He accused Frank of spying for other corporations and threatened to have his bank accounts audited for suspicious activity.

Up and down, Frank insisted that he was innocent. He had been made the scapegoat of Gladstorm's larceny, and here was the proof! Prisse-Buldge's thumbs twiddled ever faster, and his chin sank even deeper into the fat of his neck. Frank felt as though the man must be frowning, but his mouth was hidden within the mountains of cheek and waddle.

At length, Prisse-Buldge left off speaking altogether, and blinked wide-eyed at Frank, goading him into more and more verbal indulgence on the subject of Gladstorm's larceny. Believing that he had finally gotten through to the wise and honorable head of his department, Frank held forth with every detail and impression to which he could earnestly attest.

Prisse-Buldge continued to hold eye contact, appearing attentive, as a great beeping forklift came and lifted the man, his chair, and his desk all as one and began to drive them away. After the looming shadow of Prisse-Buldge receded, Frank noticed that the office had grown thick with security staff. They walked with him back to his desk, which had been thoughtfully emptied and packed into two humble brown-and-white boxes.

Frank examined the desk and the boxes and indicated his satisfaction to the security staff, who escorted him off premises and left him and his boxes at the lip of the road. In a daze, Frank hailed a ride-share and gently set his brown-and-white boxes on the clean blue carpet of the empty trunk, sitting in the back seat and letting his eyes unfocus. Had he just been fired?

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Frank smiled with gratitude for the universe when he noticed that someone happened to be passing before his home as his ride-share pulled up. They could help him carry his boxes! This small blessing lifted some of the weight of having probably just been fired, restoring his faith in the best of all possible worlds.

When Frank asked this person if they might share his burden, they immediately accepted and took up one of the boxes while Frank lifted the other. However, as Frank made his way up the dark gray slate path toward his front door, his neighbor set the other box upon the ground. Lifting the lid, they rifled through its contents, tossing out the rubbish and pocketing the gems

according to their own preference.

Before he could object, Frank noticed that other persons were performing similar desecrations inside his garage and upon the wide green lawns of his mansion. Missile-Tits maintained her absenteeism, but a lawyer from his former employer pointedly made his presence felt.

Poor Frank could never have imagined that Mr. Gladstorm's ill-gotten safari had been a trip for two, or that Gladstorm's companion had been himself a Prisse, and nephew to Mr. Prisse-Buldge. Even further from Frank's scope lay the supposition that these two might yet retain some (wildly illegal!) powdered rhinoceros horn, and choose to secret it within Frank's own desk at the very hour of his sudden firing, conflating his demise.

The lawyer looked on in satisfaction as the people milling about Frank's lawn confiscated his cell, his wallet, his remaining brown-and-white box, the brass cigarette lighter his grandfather had considered lucky, and a gold tooth-filling that shook loose in agitation during this disgrace. It came to light that Prisse-Buldge had done the honors of his office with dignity and profound esteem, going so far as to inform Frank's creditors of his sudden re-classification.

Frank fled with only the clothes on his back, unsure of his destiny.