

Chapter 23

Now Frank and Martin learned of events in England, and what was revealed there

Their route took them to a crowded intersection where six hallways dumped into a concourse of shops. François advanced their carriage by jolting, inches at a time, through the milling throng as they watched a breaking news program on the television screens. The Prime Minister of Great Britain, third to occupy that illustrious and steadfast seat in the space of a single year, was expected to lose a no-confidence vote in parliament, and suffer ouster.

“Preposterous!” Declared Martin. “He’s a viper, but at least his economic policies have begun the process of bailing and righting a ship badly compromised by the foolishness and sensationalism of his predecessors.”

“It matters not!” replied François. “The spineless charlatan neither barks loud enough, nor bites hard enough, to please his constituency. Had he doubled the cache of the Crown Jewels and restored the breadth of the British Empire, he would still lose his ass, simply for his lack of pluck!”

Martin frowned, breathed, and said quite forcefully, “Are you sure? Because it seems to me that his pluck has proved more than sufficient, though his last name and his skin tone remain threatening.” François groused under his breath, and drove ahead.

The conversation turned to the tumult of Brexit, and whether meddling from the Russian propaganda machine had influenced that event, and to what extent. François shut this down. “Propaganda was but one element of that storm, and Russia but one of its agents. The forces that conceived and enacted the plot to divide our union and impoverish England managed to build a layer-cake of lies and distractions so effective that it caused a majority to act against their own self-interest. It was a master work! The same undertaking took the church twelve-hundred years, yet these have managed to push their will through the most well-heeled population in human history, in only two! Our hidden masters have become fearsomely adept in their plotting.”

Frank pointed his index finger at his own ear, twirling it about and mouthing, “Is he crazy?”

Martin’s eyes filled with pain, and the corners of his mouth clenched in misery. “No,” he mouthed back. He made a series of gestures and genuflections that Frank understood to mean, “We’re all in very deep trouble, and it terrifies and saddens and infuriates me every hour, waking and sleeping.” Frank took Martin’s hand in reassurance, and matched his breathing, then slowed his own, as the Shangri-Lama had done, so many times, during their conversations. Martin proved a quick study.

Freed of the teeming mall and on the move once again, François reengaged his penchant for observation. Frank and Martin learned that the yellow-vesters had devolved into an opportunistic shambles, but that Macron was much worse. “He is the pants of the suit. Without him, our masters could never stand. He chooses this role. He chooses to be the *only* one with less than them, but more than us. He chooses to serve greed, and vilifies and infantilizes everyone who refuses such vulgarity.”

Frank reached out and put a hand on François’s shoulder, and felt him relax. “Have you come to help?” asked François.

“I hope so,” said Frank. They arrived at their gate, and François whipped his cart in toward the boarding desk with a jaunty flourish.

“Mbip Mbip Mbip! B- vingt-cinq!” declared François, by way of farewell. Frank and Martin departed his cart well-jolted, and mildly informed.

The flight to Venice passed without incident, and Frank found his heart inventing sophomoric fancies to fill the void. Missile-Tits would know of his coming, and await him at the baggage claim. Surprise!

Wait, no. That would be ridiculous. After all, Frank was traveling under an assumed name with a person she had never met, from a point of origin she had no reason to suspect. In the best of all possible scenarios, she would be waiting for him in the lobby of his hotel, and rise from an overstuffed divan to meet him across the plush carpet and polished marble flooring, clicks in her heels and fire in her eyes.

Yet what if Mahmud had run into difficulty? No! No good ever came from dwelling on the negative possibilities. Frank would inquire, and discover, and move on from there, as the lamas would do.