

As the adults sat back around the fireplace, the strain of politics eased back into the conversation. Leaning against a stocky cushion, Nat shuffled up the cards, as the grownups' focus shifted from the state of our union, here at home, to the international scene. I lifted my head abruptly at Admiral Ramsey's remarks about monks and nuns in South Vietnam, who had recently burned themselves to death as a protest against the mass persecutions by their South Vietnamese government.

Grampy listened intently, as Mrs. Ramsey made note of an expected troop increase to South Vietnam. Then, placing his coffee cup down on the bench in front of the fireplace, he sat forward: "Things in South East Asia aren't good. Unless we take a clear stand against the Communists, there is going to be real trouble." The tone returned to his voice.

"War?" Nat said, as he began to pass out the cards. My glance lifted from Grampy to the gallery of photos, pictures, and political cartoons that lined the walls of the Pine Room.

A photo of a spirited company of young soldiers drew my gaze. Seated in their midst on the ground, legs crossed, back straight, Captain S. Weeks held two alert drum sticks over a snare that was cushioned in his lap. The beat was nearly audible on his companions' lips, *Over there, over there, send the word, send the word over there....We're going over, we're going over. And we won't be back till it's over there.* In Grampy's words, "One of the most formative periods of my life," the flush of war had not yet touched the young captain's cheeks.

Gathering up the cards in my hands, my eyes continued along the walls. Cat Bow's celebrated rogues gallery offered a glimpse of our country's other, more peaceable, pursuits—along with a lively and instructive introduction not only to Grampy's many and colorful friends and associates, but to the Lord of Cat Bow himself. I breathed out, as the strains of the adult's conversation faded before my gaze.

Above the comrades-in-arms, an old-timer, text in hand and glasses peeking down over his nose, peered out at us from the frame, as he whispered excitedly into the kindly, but aghast face of an elderly woman, who, hand over her mouth, stood speechless before a microphone. Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wilson, the man of the family had been in the automobile business.

Continuing down the wall, a dapper gentleman, surrounded by a host of friends, beamed out at the world. A bit of homework was

required before I discovered that this personality was our grandfather, the newly elected “Boy Mayor of Newton,” Massachusetts. *Rome wasn’t built in a day*, was the slogan that fall, *AND IT WILL TAKE WEEKS TO BUILD NEWTON!* So the family history books recounted. From the pieces I put together, Grampy’s hard-fought campaign climaxed the night before the election with a huge 400-car motorcade, led by a shiny, open carriage in which the mayor-to-be sat back triumphantly with his wife at his side. The only vehicle preceding the carriage was a giant truck, flamboyantly decorated and loaded to the brim with Grampy’s American Legion comrades—each one of them, in particular a certain Benny Lane, in full voice. From what Grampy related, Benny’s vocal power was legendary, rivaling in both depths and decibels the bellow of a fog horn. All the way through, across, and around the outskirts (and inskirts) of Newton, Benny’s inspired chant could be heard: *HERE he comes . . . Here he comes . . . Look him over . . . Look him o-o-ove . . . EV-ry move a PIC-ture!*

Apparently, the parade was Benny Lane’s show as much as it was Grampy’s. Be that as it may, the two were to team up again, a few years down the road, in a rip-roaring campaign that pitted Grampy, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., and a group of young Republican stalwarts, against Boston’s legendary boss, “The Purple Shamrock,” James Michael Curley. With Grampy as Chairman of the Republican State Committee, Cabot Lodge became the only Republican candidate in the country during the “New Deal” years to replace a Democrat in the United States Senate—a feat about which we were to hear more in the years to come.

A neighboring photo caught the Lord of Cat Bow on the terrace of the Big House in more familiar and informal attire, pipe in hand. Gathered around Grampy, in what I later found out was a North Country political huddle, were three other men, Governor Harold Stassen of Minnesota, Senator Styles Bridges of New Hampshire, and Wendell L. Willkie, president of Commonwealth & Southern—in Grampy’s words, “a fine figure of a man, who radiated magnetism, intelligence, and a rugged sort of competence.”

Grampy and his colleagues (who were in the process of encouraging Willkie to join the Republican race against F.D.R.) had been impressed by the way Willkie had taken Roosevelt to task for the president’s suggestion that the government build and run the Tennessee Valley

Authority—to the tune of \$40,000,000, when all was said and done, plus another \$88,000,000 of interest to the financiers for their services. Private enterprise, Grampy and company staunchly agreed, could not only do the job more efficiently, but at less expense to the government—while generating a good bundle of taxes, as opposed to fees, in the process. Willkie was game, and, with Grampy and a small band of colleagues at the helm, one of the most exciting primary races of our century was soon to begin. Willkie won the Republican nomination, but, to Grampy's chagrin, Roosevelt, once again, took the grand prize.

Further down the wall, my eye was caught by a picture of the Lord of Cat Bow in conversation with a real live Queen (by the name of Elizabeth), adorned in satin and topped off by a demure gold crown. If Grampy's presence hadn't been unmistakable, I would have sworn that the scene was out of a modern-day fairy tale.

With the following picture, the plot thickened, as Grampy, America's chief spokesman for free enterprise, posed with a no less alive and animated Communist, Marshall Tito of Yugoslavia. Despite their considerable differences in ideology, both men apparently had a pragmatic bent, sharing one thing in common—a dislike of Hitler and The Führer's aspirations for world-wide domination. My glance returned for a moment to the adults. The drift of the conversation had shifted to more worldly affairs—business, big and small alike.

In the midst of the highbrows, a side-kick of Grampy's poked his Basset Hound head out of a dilapidated dog house atop a piece of stationery. The expression on the downcast creature's face matched his humble abode. The logo belonged to THE SONS OF BUSINESS, and the message on the letter lamented, *Sin, I thought you should know about this organization. The way things are going, this is likely to be the largest club in the U.S. We SONS OF BUSINESS must stick together.* At the bottom of the page, a parting postscript bayed, *Nothing happens in this country until somebody sells something!* So it was.

Interspersed among the assorted faces and scenes, my gaze lingered on a number of political cartoons, which, upon first encountering, threw us grandchildren for a loop. To find our esteemed grandfather, along with a fellow named Dulles, peering sheepishly out of a coliseum dungeon onto an embattled scene was a specter with which we were unfamiliar. In the center of the arena, a hefty, scornful legislator, bran-

dishing a hatchet above his head, triumphantly ground his first victim, a beleaguered Cabinet head, into the dust with his foot, while our progenitor awaited his turn. Above the spectacle, equally picturesque members of Congress reveled in delight, their thumbs turned defiantly down as they roared, *Bring on the Foreign Aid Bill!*

Apparently, Grampy survived the debacle. The neighboring cartoon showed a considerably more sanguine Cabinet head, "Sec. Weeks," playing a merry tune on a cash register that recorded *prosperity* at its top. Casting us a wink over his shoulder, Grampy prominently upstaged a disgruntled bird, perched silently above the proceedings, in a cage that bore the letters, PEACE. The cartoon's refrain was a fleeting one: *A couple of cheerful notes from the bird would help.*

The cartoon that astounded me the most depicted our grandfather transfigured into a soothsayer, complete with a long flowing robe, elegant curved slippers, and a gem-studded turban atop his head. Leaning over a crystal ball that held sway on an ornately cushioned table, Grampy was busily at work, fingers spread apart, conjuring dollar signs out of the crystal's dark interior. In the background, a familiar donkey looked on skeptically, gesticulating toward Grampy with one hoof, while his other held a newspaper that bore the headlines, *I see no profit in that prophecy!* A picture is worth a thousand words. So it was. Years passed, along with many viewings, before I gained a fuller appreciation for the drift of these depictions.

My sights settled on an old, framed, newspaper clipping that had found a prominent niche among the proceedings. *Ike Signs Treaty at Weeks' Farm.* The paper's bold headlines went on to describe how Austria's struggle to win back its freedom from Russia at the close of World War II was sealed with President Eisenhower's signature at *Weeks' rambling North Country home.*

Beside Grampy's desk, the assemblage concluded with a last photo. A friendly looking man, dressed in simple attire, stood at ease. The words John J. Pershing were penned at the bottom of the picture. Stepping up behind us one afternoon as we scanned the gallery, Dad told us that Black Jack, as Pershing was referred to by his countrymen, was the head of the A.E.F. (American Expeditionary Force) during World War I. At the victorious gathering at Versailles, Dad went on to recount, all the allied commanders arrived regaled in their military splendor—uni-

forms, medals, ribbons. The last to appear was the man who had led them all. Entering the hall dressed in a simple uniform without decoration, General Pershing silently acknowledged the startled applause. Black Jack had worked closely with Great-Grandfather, who ended his own political career as Secretary of War under Presidents Harding and Coolidge.

Grampy's earliest and most incisive political lessons were learned from his father. Starting out as a farm boy in Lancaster, Great-Granddad retained an appreciation for his simple beginnings, to which Grampy often referred over the years. Atop Grampy's desk, set off by a docile herd of miniature elephants, my glance passed over a number of valued remembrances, including a framed epistle from Senator John Wingate Weeks that offered free fatherly advice to a son, who was embarking upon his first elective office as alderman. That letter, I also returned to over the years, as my steps began to take me on out into the world.

January 3, 1923

Dear Sinclair,

There are two or three things I want to impress upon you as it is your first experience in a legislative body. Success in such a place, more than in almost any other, depends on knowledge. A man is a leader, legislatively, when he knows more than those who are serving with him. He does not need to be an orator, have wealth or any other qualifications than to have the facts; and therefore you ought to take some part of the work, perhaps all of it if you have time, and know all about what is going on.

Study the rules that are used, so that you will be entirely familiar with them. Attend committee meetings, so that you will be entirely familiar with the work of the committee, and, above all things, do not attempt to speak unless you know exactly what you are talking about.

There is no place in the world where you get sized up quicker than you do in a legislative body. If you are on your feet every few minutes talking about something which all the others know as much about as you do, you do not acquire but lose influence.

If you get the reputation of knowing what you are talking about, then everyone will listen and will be likely to accept your views.

Do not get into the habit of quarreling with men who do not agree with you. They are entitled to their opinions as much as you are to yours. The thing to do is to convince them that they are wrong, and that will apply in general politics as well as in the Newton Board of Aldermen. The way to cure a communist is not to suppress his speech but to argue him out of his position. If you cannot argue him out of it, he may be right and you wrong.

Above all things, because you seem to be an opposition alderman, do not disagree unnecessarily with the mayor. Personally, he is an agreeable man, who has been mighty nice to you in the past and during the last campaign. Agree with him when you can, and when you cannot, tell him so frankly and the reasons why.

You are in an unusual position which will attract attention. It is of advantage in some ways and a handicap in others. Fortunately or unfortunately, you have a father who is conspicuous. That will make it incumbent on you to try to live up to a standard and will cause you to be criticized if you do not. And then there are others, who are not favorably disposed to me, who will criticize you because you are my son.

Do not get the idea into your head that you are working for the future or for future political preferment. That will take care of itself, if you make good in the present. I am certain that people will say to you that you will be something else, you will follow your father's course, or things of that kind. Let such remarks go in one ear and out the other. If you are fit and wish to have them, you will be given higher political honors. But, they will come not because you are scheming for them or dreaming about them, but because you impress yourself sufficiently on others to lead them to follow you and to want you to have such honors.

So, in the final analysis, you have to make good on your own account. That I am sure you will do if you follow the above precepts and any other which your commonsense will indicate. Good luck to you.

*Affectionately,
Father*

Great-Grandfather's letter found a thoughtful postscript in an accompanying precept, off to the far side of Grampy's desk, penned by a godfather of sorts, Abraham Lincoln:

If I were to try to read, much less answer, all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the very best I know—the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out right, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference.

* * * * *

"How's Jane's health?" The adults' conversation touched delicately on more human affairs, as the evening wore on. Glancing up from my cards, I noticed that, eyes closed, Grandma Jane's head was resting against her lord's shoulder. Grampy placed his hand tenderly over hers, which had released its grip from the shawl, "It's hard to say. . . ." He sought for words, "She's not herself. We've got an appointment with the doctors next week." An awkward silence filled the room.

Grampy eased Grandma Jane gently back upright, before leaning forward and, as the old grandfather clock sounded the ninth hour, patting a yawn. In unison, the two gents had become well tuned with the years. "Come on, children, time to turn in," Grampy said, glancing over at us.

Gathering together our cards, we concluded our game of War and rose with the adults. As I said good night to the Ramseys and gave Mom, Dad, and Grampy a kiss, my glance rested on Grandma Jane, whose eyes had opened and were watching us silently. I paused a moment, and then turned and followed Nat, Bea, and Brad upstairs. Our destinations were new bedrooms and an open window, which made the heavy quilts and comfortable mattresses just that more inviting.

Climbing into my pajamas, I checked under my bed to make sure I was quite alone. Then, hopping in, I pulled my knees up to my chest, my blankets over my ears, and, emitting a deep breath, reviewed the galaxy

of faces—birds and beasts, friends and foes, lords and ladies that filled the nooks and crannies of the Big House—as I lay my head back, my sleepy gaze came to rest on the picture of the old frontiersman, coonskin cap, moccasins, and rifle in hand. As old Davy took his seat in the House chamber, I nodded silently off to sleep and to a dream that began to stir within me: *America is great, because America is good. . . .*