



What Cost Stupid

By Richard Miller

Chapter 1

There was no school today. Nor was there an office to show up late at. For it was Saturday, and the only thing that mattered, according to Mom, was an attic filled with junk. Junk and dust. Fifteen years' worth, to be exact. The dust she could live with, never venturing into the attic herself, but the junk? It had to go.

Her thinking was that if they hadn't found a use for it by now, they never would, and this mission, to flush the attic toilet, so to speak, preempted any golf game or little league practice they might have in mind. In fact, until the attic was tended to, and tended to properly, all forms of recreation were now officially suspended.

Not much to ask for, really, all things considered.

...Mom said.

Besides, the successful completion of the task would not be without its rewards. If they did a good job, she says, and without complaint - emphasis on 'complaint' - they just might find her homemade lasagna on their dinner plates this week. And who knows, maybe even lemon tarts for dessert. Because mom knew, the way that all moms seem to know, that the way to her men's hearts was through their dinner plates.

And she was right, Mom was, and motivated they were.

Sort of.

The son watches from behind as Dad pulls the rope, and the retractable stairs unfold to the floor. The light switch is in the attic itself, making it impossible to tell from where they stood what, exactly, awaited them in the dark hole above. Maybe it isn't as bad as what they're thinking. Or, then again, maybe it's worse. Who knows. No one's been up there in years, so at this point, it's anybody's guess.

Dad looks at the son, who looks back at him and gives him a 'might as well get it over with, pop' shrug. Dad nods at the kid, mumbles something to the effect of 'yeah, right', and then proceeds up the rickety wooden steps.

The son follows.

The two make their way up the stairway and climb into the inky black of the attic, both wishing they had brought a flashlight, and both thinking that maybe this is how Indiana Jones got *his* start. Attics one day, Egyptian tombs and Nazis the next.

Could happen.

The father fumbles his way through the dark, groping the air in front of him, until finally, he finds what he is looking for. The pull chain for the attic lamp. He gives it a good yank, and instantly, light fills the space that, only a moment ago, remained a dark mystery.

But is a mystery no more.

They both stand in place and just stare. Shoulders slumped, eyebrows scrunched, mouths gaping like mounted fish, they look around them at what they are quickly perceiving to be... not a good thing. Neither says a word. Don't

have to. The wilted expressions on their face said it all - that they'll be lucky to finish this nightmare by late tomorrow night, if then, and it's clear to them both that next weekend could be in jeopardy as well.

They don't move. They just stand and stare, bleakly, if not drearily, at the disaster staring back.

Junk.

Piles and piles of it.

Fifteen years' worth.

Junk, in this case, being defined as things that once mattered but have long since been forgotten; items that might have once meant something to someone, but were now reduced to little more than dusty relics. Old reminders, perhaps, of a more youthful time in life. Like, maybe a time when the clothes had actually fit, or when kids actually played with things like Hula Hoops and Slinkys.

Whatever the case, one thing was certain: the stuff wasn't going to move itself. The father rolls his sleeves and lets out one final exasperated sigh. He then turns to Tommy, his fourteen-year-old son, and begins laying out his plan of attack.

Basically, Dad's idea was for Tommy to tend to the cardboard boxes while he tackled the tough stuff. Namely, the mountains of tangled Christmas lights and mini blinds. The 'boss' had made it all too clear that both piles were to be untangled and made instantly usable. No exceptions, no excuses, or else.

'Or else' meaning 'NO sex'.

... Mom says.

OK, so Dad added that last part. But that's because mom didn't actually say it. Didn't have to.

You see, in the Wilson household, there are the rules you are told about, and then there are the other ones. The rules nobody actually tells you. The unspoken rules. And while they may be unspoken, you know what they are just the same. So yeah, dad gets it. He's been around long enough by now to know *exactly* what time it is, so to speak.

Anyway, orders issued, plan in place, the two punch the clock and go to work.

Tommy begins going through the cardboard boxes one by one, while Dad, on the other hand, sits motionless, like a mannequin, and stares out at the overwhelming chaos in front of him - the mountain of tangled Christmas lights. He doesn't get it. He really doesn't. The fucking things are going to a Goodwill box, for Christ's sake! What the hell did it matter to homeless people if they're tangled or not? Like, what? Homeless people have standards now?

Sheez!

But it did. To mom, it mattered. Principals were involved, she says.

So anyway, while Dad honed his skills at profanity, cursing the institution of marriage as he did, Tommy busied himself with the work at hand, the cardboard storage boxes. The process was a simple one: grab the next item and determine its fate. It's fate being either the lawn bag to the left or the one to the right. The difference being that the bag on the left would find itself at the curb come trash day, while the other bag, the one on the right, would

eventually make its way to Goodwill. And from there, from Goodwill, the once treasured items would hopefully go on to find a new home. And with a new home, a second chance at life.

Tommy opens the first box and reaches in. He grabs the first thing his hand lands on, which just happens to be his first BB gun, a Christmas present from his grandfather while he was still alive. Holding it in his hands again after all these years, he can't help but think back to all the wonderful memories this cherished part of his childhood has given him. In particular, the countless summer days he and his grandpa would spend wandering the woods in search of a blackbird or two. Or three. Or four. He eventually upgraded to something nicer and more modern, namely, the BB rifle he uses now. Nevertheless, he finds it hard to say goodbye to something that has given him so many lasting memories. But, hard or not, it has to be done. The gun has to go. Besides, surely there must be a young boy somewhere who has never known the joy of owning his very own BB gun - something Tommy has always viewed as being an essential part of every young boy's life. A rite of passage, even. So, into the Goodwill bag, it went.

And that was pretty much the story for every item he encountered in every box. Tommy saw a genuine value in each and every one of the once-beloved treasures. And why not? It was all perfectly fine things that were still in good, usable condition. Their exile to the attic, the land of the no longer wanted, came about - not because they were no longer useful - but, rather, because someone simply didn't love them anymore. At some point, the honeymoon had ended, and the romance simply faded away.

But not always. That wasn't always the case. Sometimes, it was simply a matter of growing up. Either too old for that toy or too big now for that dress. And, because the items were still usable, no one had the heart to throw them away. So, off to the attic, they went.

And this made Tommy's job all the easier, knowing that the attic junk, as treasured as it all may have been at one time, would never be used again. Not for as long as it stayed hidden away and lost in the confines of the Wilsons' attic. It made his job easier because knowing this meant there was no decision to be made. *Everything* would go into the Goodwill bag. *Everything* would get a second chance at life.

Meanwhile, Dad had finished with the Christmas lights, having solved the problem with an old golf club that happened to be lying around. A golf club that wasted no time in converting the tangled lights into a kind of plastic confetti. And seeing how, technically, you could call it 'untangled' confetti, Dad's job here was done. That task finished, he had since moved on to the mini blinds but wasn't having any better luck with them than he had with the lights. Same story - same profanity, same contempt for marriage, same golf club standing by at the ready.

The mini blinds had found their way to the attic because they had been replaced by newer and nicer aluminum blinds. But, because they were still usable, mom had mandated them to attic storage, saying something to the effect that 'they will come in handy one day'.

That was eight years ago.

But in all fairness to his wife, she was not specific as to the exact decade this usefulness was to occur or why. Like, maybe in the future, scientists will discover that aluminum mini blinds cause cancer in lab rats, in which case, the Wilsons would have the mini blind situation handled.

...mom said.

And poor dad. If he's learned anything in his fifteen years of marriage, it's that you don't argue with the boss. Not if you want your once-a-month obligatory sex, that is. It reminds him of a joke going around the office...

'If a man and a woman argue in the woods, and no one's around to hear them, is the man still wrong?'

Yeah. It's like that.

So, as the father wrestled with the 'still usable' blinds, little Tommy, with all the enthusiasm of youth, rummages through the large cardboard box the thirty-two-inch color TV had come in. The TV itself had been sentenced to attic storage when it was replaced by one of the new Plasma screens that had become so popular; the older TV's only crime being that it was an outdated picture tube model. One that, according to Dad's hernias, weighed something along the order of the stone blocks used to build the pyramids. The difference being that the blocks were easier to move. The Egyptians had aliens to help, while the only thing he had to help carry the TV to the attic was his back. A back that, according to him, now curved and bulged in unnatural, if not frightening, ways.

Now, while the father viewed the attic purging as something he needed to do if he ever wanted to golf again or have sex, little Tommy viewed the mission in a completely different light. To him, it was an adventure of sorts and one that grew more interesting and exciting with each new box he opened. For example, the color TV box. Something Tommy saw as a veritable time capsule in its own right. Inside were Dad's old helmet and shoulder pads from his college football days, Grandpa's iconic fedora that he wore until the day he died (some kind of Bear Bryant thing), some old baseball cards, a forgotten skateboard, a bundle of Silver Surfer comics, a Rockem Sockem Robot boxing game, and, of all things, his once treasured first baseman's mitt. The one he used in his first year of Little League. It was, in fact, the first baseball glove he ever owned. Over the years, there would be many more to follow, but this was the first. The one he learned to play the game with. So naturally, it held an extra special place in his heart.

He holds the glove to his nose and breathes in the sweet, familiar aroma of old leather and sweat. Just smelling it again brought back the fond memories of those days. He gives his old, forgotten friend a loving kiss and then sets it to the side. No way Goodwill gets this one.

The son then returns his attention to the box and resumes the excavation, carefully removing one timeless heirloom after another. He's about to grab the next item when he suddenly discovers something. Something quite unexpected. Something that, because of his fondness for geography, was of particular interest to him. It's a decades-old world globe. The one his dad had used when he was just a boy. He carefully frees it from the rest of the clutter and then gently lifts it out of the box. Using his shirttail, he wipes the layers of dust away and then sets it on the plywood floor next to him.

From his kneeled position in front of the globe, he lowers himself until he's sitting on his heels and then leans forward for a closer look at this most unexpected find. To his surprise, the old globe has somehow managed to retain its wonderfully colored surface, having neither faded nor yellowed with age.

He leans even closer and begins a detailed study of the thing, using an index finger to trace the topography as he slowly rotates the sphere. He finds it interesting to see all the countries whose names have changed over the years. Names he, himself, is unfamiliar with. And, for sure, names his new, modern globe doesn't have. Names, for example, like Persia, Siam, U.S.S.R., Zaire, Czechoslovakia, and then, suddenly, a surprise. A BIG surprise. One

he wasn't prepared for. It's a landmass completely unknown to him. A large island of some sort with the name 'Japan' scrawled across it in bold lettering. It's a name that, for whatever reason, he has never heard before, and as such, has no idea what this...this...country? could possibly be. On his globe, there's nothing in that spot but empty water. So naturally, he becomes confused. He doesn't understand why the contradiction between the two globes, the old and the new, so he asks his father about it. After all, he should know, since the missing landmass was apparently still there when *he* was a kid. The old globe says so.

He calls out to his pop, who's just now finishing up with the mini blinds, having resorted to his trusty nine iron to untangle them as well.

"Dad!"

The father, having heard his son call his name, snaps out of his maddened beating frenzy and freezes in place like a polaroid, still holding the golf club over his head mid-swing. He turns and looks at the kid...

"Yeah, son."

"What's this?"

"What's what?"

"This island here."

The father drops the golf club, combs his madman hair with his fingers, and collects himself as he makes his way over to his son. He takes a seat next to him on the bare plywood floor, and he, too, leans toward the globe. He looks at the spot pinned underneath the tip of the boy's index finger.

"Oh, that."

"Well, what is it, pop?"

The dad ponders the question for a moment, massaging his chin with a thumb and forefinger as he considers the best way to explain that part of world history to his son...

"Hhmmmm. That was a long time ago, Tommy. Used to be a country known as Japan."

The kid's eyebrows furrow in confusion. He's still not understanding, so he probes the matter even further...

"Japan? Why isn't it on *my* globe?' What happened to it?"

The dad clenches his lips. How does he explain it? The instant - not to mention brutal - demise of an entire nation. A demise, no less, met at the hands of the United States.

The father takes a deep breath and lets out a somewhat apprehensive sigh. He knew this day would come sooner or later, just like the Santa and the birds and the bees talks; he was just hoping it would be later than sooner. But, what the hell. He figures the kid's old enough by now to know the truth, so he crosses his arms, takes in another deep breath, and begins to explain that episode in history the best way he knows how...

"Well, son, the best way I can think of to explain it is that Japan was a nation that harbored a race of stupid people. And, like most stupid species here on earth, they ended up extinct."

"But how? Was it like Atlantis or something?"

"No, not exactly. Nothing that romantic, I'm afraid. As I recall - and you must remember that I was your age when it happened, so my facts may be a little fuzzy - but I believe it went something like this..."

Chapter 2

Though diminutive in physical stature, the man wields unprecedented power that few world leaders will ever know or can even imagine.

He leans back in his plush, high-back leather chair, fingers interlaced and lying on his mid-section, and gazes out the window to a spot just beyond the ornamental gardens. His focus finally coming to rest on the majestic image of his country's flag as it waves and flutters in the Tokyo breeze.

And he thinks... It's a beautiful day.

In his mind, the decision was not optional. Not really, given his country's culture and long history of national and racial pride. It was, instead, a mandate of sorts. A mandate that fell squarely in his lap, and his lap alone.

He spins the chair to face the desk and pushes the phone's intercom button. A distinguished, mannerly voice answers...

"Yes, your Imperial Majesty."

"Rum rear, I wee wu."

A moment later, the door opens, and a man dressed in contemporary, political dark suit attire enters the room. There is a red satin sash wrapped around his waist, indicating that he is a person of significant diplomatic importance.

He stands erect and bows to the man behind the desk.

"How may I serve Your Majesty today?"

"I wee wone wook!"

"We have several, your Majesty. I need to know who it is you wish to call in order to select the correct one."

"Wesident Woonited Rates!"

"Yes, your Majesty."

The man then departs in the same manner in which he arrived: bowing first before making his exit. A few minutes later, he returns, phone book in hand, and again bows before handing it to the emperor. It is a phone book covering the Washington D.C. area.

The emperor sets the book on his desk and begins rifling through the pages until he finds what he's looking for: the Rs. His index finger travels down the list of names, column by column, flipping pages as needed, as he searches for the information he seeks...

Radner

Ratcliff

Randall

REAGAN!

Donald

Eric

Frank

George

Jack

Kerry

RONALD!

He begins stabbing the name with a pointed index finger...

"Rats wim! Rats wim! Wu caw! Ransrate fo we!"

He spins the phone book around, careful to maintain his finger on the correct spot.

"Yes, your Majesty."

And with that, the diplomat spins the outdated rotary dial of the desk phone the requisite number of times until finally, after a considerable delay, it begins to ring...

"Good afternoon, the White House. How may I direct your call?"

"We wish to speak to President Reagan, please."

"Who may I say is calling?"

"The Emperor of the Empire of Japan."

"One moment, please, while I connect you."

A brief pause, some clicking sounds, and then a ring. The call's answered on the first one.

"Ronnie, here."

"Good afternoon, Mr. President. I'm calling on behalf of Emperor Ito."

The diplomat routes the call to the speaker sitting on the desk next to the phone. The President continues in his usual upbeat, boisterous manner...

"ITO! How is the old sod? Say, did he get the cowboy boots and hat I sent him? Quite a few hard-earned tax dollars went into those puppies, ya know!"

"RUCK WOW WOY WIT! WOED UM IN GAWEEGE!"

The diplomat continues...

"The emperor wholeheartedly thanks you for such fine, exquisite gifts and wishes you to know that he is wearing them even as we speak."

'Outstanding! Now, what can ole Ronnie here do for you folks today? You guys want me to send you a couple of Buicks so you got a real car to drive instead of those tiny toys you wanna send over here? Hell, I could have them there in an hour. Nice, big Buick Electras with A/C, AM/FM radio, and that fake leather stuff. Naugahyde, I think they call it.'

"RUCK WIM AN WIS WUNKY CAWS!", the emperor scowls. The diplomat continues...

"That is most generous of you, Mr. President, but I'm afraid that the emperor must decline your gracious offer due to the fact that there is not enough gasoline in all of Japan to keep the automobiles properly fueled."

The president rubs his chin and recalls Japan's almost complete lack of oil production...

"Yeah, well, I suppose that could be a problem. Damn, things only get two miles to the gallon, and that's going downhill with a stiff tailwind. Well, anyway, what else can the President of the United States do for your king?"

"WUPID RUDER RUCKER!"

"That's 'emperor', Mr. President. We don't have kings."

"No kings, huh. Well, jus' tie this ole cowpoke up and whip him like a prairie dog! My bad. The closest I ever get to the Orient is that Chinese takeout place Nancy likes. Kung Fu Dragon, or something like that."

"I understand, Mr. President."

The emperor is tugging on the diplomat's sleeve. He's becoming impatient and wants to get to the reason for the call. The diplomat nods and returns his attention to the phone...

"One moment, please, Mr. President."

He places a hand over the mouthpiece...

"What should I tell him, exactly, your Majesty?"

"FOWY WEAH ANUWUSSAWEE WUMIN WUP WEX WEEK! ATOWIC WOMB ATTACK! WAPAN WEMANDS FOWMUHL APOWOGY FWUM WOONITED RATES!"

The emperor slams his fist on the desk to emphasize the importance of the request.

"Yes, your Majesty."

The diplomat again bows and then returns his attention to the phone call...

"His Majesty would like to remind the President that this coming week will mark the fortieth anniversary of the United States' brutal and unwarranted nuclear attack upon the innocent, defenseless cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And, in accordance with international protocol, and in the spirit of global world peace, his majesty wishes to request a written, formal apology from you on behalf of your country and its citizens for these barbaric acts."

Reagan jerks the receiver from his head as if it just farted and stares at it in utter disbelief, wondering if he actually heard what he thinks he did. He looks down at Jojo, his pet cocker spaniel resting peacefully at his feet, and asks...

"Did he really just say that?"

The dog, without moving, rolls his eyes upward in reply. It, too, unable to wrap its mind around the sheer audacity of the request. Reagan nods his head in agreement with his best friend and then returns the phone to his head...

"Help me out here, cowboy. This IS Japan calling, is it not?"

"Yes, Mr. President, it is."

"Thought so. Humor me and refresh my memory here, if you don't mind. This IS the same country that, on December 7, 1941, launched three hundred and fifty warplanes in a cowardly, unannounced, and completely unprovoked attack on this country's naval base located in Pearl Harbor, sinking or damaging almost twenty naval vessels, destroying over three hundred military aircraft, and killing over twenty-four hundred American servicemen, while at the same time, wounding an additional thousand? I do have that right, do I not?"

"Yes, Mr. President. I do believe your facts to be in order."

"Hhhmmm. Thought so. And now, if I understand you correctly, you're demanding an apology from this country for having toasted two of your cities as a result of military action **your** country forced upon us in our effort to end the war and restore global peace?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. President. That would be one way to interpret our request, I suppose."

"Yeah, well, you know what? I think I can accommodate you on this one, ranch hand. In fact, I *know* I can. You can bank on it, or my name ain't Ronald A. Reagan! Of course, I'm going to need to consult with my advisors and experts on foreign policy, but that's just formalities. We'll get this done toot sweet, my friend. You can bet on it!"

"Excellent, Mr. President. On behalf of his majesty, the Emperor, the country of Japan and its constituents, I extend my most sincere, heartfelt gratitude, sir. Thank you."

"Not a problem, Kemosabe. It's what I'm here for. But I gotta tell ya, it's gonna cost. I want something in return."

"And what might that be, if I may ask?"

"Well, you know those little egg roll thingies, shaped like little squares? You know, the kind you can pop in the microwave and serve at parties?"

"I believe I do, yes."

"Well, Nancy and I like the hell outta those rascals. We'd be much obliged if you could see your way to sending us a box or two. So, how 'bout it, chief, we got ourselves a pow wow here?"

"Pow wow, sir?"

"DEAL, MAN. DEAL! We got ourselves a deal?"

"I think we do indeed, Mr. President. Is there anything else that I can do for you?"

"Nope, that's about it. But I gotta tell ya, once I tell Nancy about the egg roll thingies, she's gonna be chomping at the bit just itching to get her hands on the little devils. That's the way she is. So here's what I'm gonna do. As soon as I hang up, I'm gonna send one of our Blackbirds to your palace airstrip to pick 'em up, and as fast as those buzzards fly, you should be looking at it in...oh, I'd say (lifts his arm and checks his Rolex, Presidential model) in

about twenty minutes or so, give or take. So, if you could have somebody on the runway waiting for it, why, I'd appreciate the hell out of it. Just have them hand 'em to the pilot if you don't mind."

"Yes, sir. It would be my privilege and honor to do so."

"Great! Anything else ole Ronnie here can do for you today? Sure, I can't send you a couple of Buicks? I could send 'em with the Blackbird. They gotta way to attach payloads to the bottom, you know. Amazing stuff, those spy planes."

"WUPID RUDER RUCKER! RUCK WIM!", the emperor chimes in.

"Your gracious generosity overwhelms us, sir, but we must again decline the offer based on the reasons previously mentioned."

"Understood."

The diplomat adds...

"And one last thing. The emperor asks that I convey his utmost admiration for the many fine films you've made. He is a big fan and suggests that perhaps you should make more."

"Fat chance, honcho. No time. Hell, I can't even find enough time to walk my own dog, Jojo. Got one of those creepy secret agent guys with wires in his ears does it for me."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Mr. President. The world's loss, no doubt. I will inform the emperor of the unfortunate situation. Again, we extend our gratitude to you."

"So not a problem. You just have those egg roll thingies waiting on the runway."

"Yes, sir."

"Oh yeah, while I'm thinking about it. How 'bout giving me your direct number so's I can call and let you know when you can expect the apology."

"Certainly. My name is Minister of Interior Osmo Harada, and my direct line is 11-00-474-39."

"Mucho gracias, Osmosis. Should be hearing from me in about (checks his Rolex again), oh, I'd say two hours, give or take."

"Yes, Mr. President. I will be anxiously awaiting your call."

"Good enough. You have a blessed day, now."

"Yes, sir. You as well."

They hang up.

The time is 10:05 am.

Chapter 3

Much larger in physical stature than his Japanese counterpart, the power he wields, being the most powerful man in the world, is disproportionately larger. To the point of being exponential, even. Power on a scale no other world leader has ever seen or can even imagine.

He is POTUS, President of the United States.

He gazes out at the stately grounds of the White House, the president does, until his focus comes to rest on the majestic image of his beloved country's flag as it flutters and waves in the brisk Washington D.C. breeze.

And he thinks... It's a beautiful day.

In his mind, the decision was not optional. Not really, given his country's sense of patriotism and national pride. It was, instead, a mandate of sorts. A mandate that fell squarely in his lap, and his lap alone.

Jojo remains comfortably catatonic, curled in the president's lap, as Reagan strokes the dog's head and gazes out the window. He watches the huge American flag as it flutters and contemplates the gravity of his next actions. He peers down at his beloved pet...

"Whacha think, Jojo? Should I do it?"

The dog rolls its eyes in reply, its answer clear and understood. The president clenches his lips and nods in return. He continues the one-sided conversation, still looking down at his trusted confidante and companion...

"Can you believe the nerve of those rice-eating midgets? It's bad enough they want us to buy their stupid circus clown cars, but this?"

He shakes his head in disbelief. He massages his forehead with a thumb and forefinger, as if trying to ward off an oncoming headache, and then continues...

"And another thing - what kinda people live on rice? Maybe if they'd eat a steak and potato every once in a while, they might grow big enough to drive a real car, like a good ole American made Buick. You know, one with A/C, AM/FM radio, and that fake leather stuff? Naugahyde, or whatever the hell they call it?"

He gently lowers the animal to its previous spot on the floor and then pats its head before returning upright in the chair. He swivels the high back to face his desk and says to no one but himself...

"Welp, time to roll the ol' sleeves up and earn my keep around here. Nancy'll be showing up for lunch any ole time now."

He presses the first speed dial button on the presidential 'bat' phone, and instantly, the direct line to CIA Director William Casey begins to ring...

"Casey speaking."

"Bill, Ronnie. Look, you got that emergency Blackbird ready to go?"

"Always. 24/7, Mr. President..."

"What's its status?"

"Sitting on the tarmac, fueled, pilot and REO sitting in their seats awaiting orders to fly."

"Outstanding. Do it."

"Where to, if I might be so bold as to ask?"

"Oh yeah, sorry. Landing strip behind the imperial palace."

"Mission?"

"Japanese takeout."

"Excuse me?"

"I'll explain later. Should be someone on the runway waiting with a couple a boxes of those little egg roll thingies Nancy likes, the little square ones they serve at parties. You can microwave those things, you know."

"You don't say."

"Also, you might wanna get your people outta Japan within the next hour or so."

"Operation Samurai Sword?"

"Yep. They just gave me the excuse I've been waiting for."

"Outstanding, Mr. President. They want us to import those tiny clown cars?"

"Yeah, they do, but that's not it. Something better than that, even. Tell ya all about it over lunch tomorrow."

"I'll be there."

(click)

Next, he pushes the intercom button.

"Yes, Mr. President."

"Sally, we've known each other for what? Six years now?"

"About."

"How many times have I told you to call me Ronnie, for Pete's sake!?"

"Sorry, sir...er, Ronnie."

"Much better. Look, get me Rickover on the phone, and don't spare the gas."

"Spare the..."

"FAST! GET HIM FAST, WOMAN! I'm in a hellfire hurry here!"

"Just a moment."

The phone rings. Once.

"Rickover here."

"Jimmy, Ronnie."

"Yes, Mr. President."

"OK, tell me again. We got what, fourteen Ohio class subs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Status?"

"Thirteen on active patrol and one in port for routine maintenance and crew change."

"The one in port, can it still launch?"

"I don't see why not."

"So that gives us what? Three hundred ICBMs?"

"Three hundred and thirty-six, to be exact."

"Outstanding. Here's what I want you to do. Have your people re-target the warheads to form an evenly spaced grid spanning the entire Japanese mainland."

"But Mr. President, you realize..."

Reagan cuts him off, abruptly. He's had it with this utterly pompous, insolent, self-righteous ass ache. He bolts to his feet, stabbing an angry finger in the air at an imaginary Rickover standing in front of him...

"DAMMIT, MAN! Do you not understand that I am the Commander in Chief here, for God's sake? In other words, YOUR BOSS. And as your boss, I'm asking you - no, I'M TELLING YOU - for once, as a public servant to this country, DO - YOUR - JOB! Which means do what the hell I tell you to without all the usual bull crap you always seem to want to hand me. AM I MAKING MYSELF CLEAR?"

Crystal, Mr. President."

"Good!"

He calms himself, runs his hand through his hair, re-tightens his tie knot, and sits back down...

"And something else. Get someone on each sub to get a can of white paint and, in big ass letters - and I do mean BIG ASS - write 'WE SAWWEE' down the side of each missile. I want the letters as big as you can make em."

"How do you spell that?"

"We, W-E. Sawwee, S-A-W-W-E-E. Got that?"

"Yes, Sir. Anything else?"

"Yeah. I want you to stagger the launch times so that each missile arrives on target at precisely 12:10 our time. What I want is to see one enormous mushroom cloud, Jimmy. Just one, that's all. Not two, not three, not five, just one. One big one. You got that?"

"Got it, Mr. President."

Reagan pauses for a moment and then adds...

"And Jimmy, get this one right, and I'll approve your proposal for the four new subs you've been pestering me about. We got us a deal?"

"Absolutely, Mr. President."

"Good. Remember - 12:10, precisely."

"Yes, Mr. President."

(click)

He reaches down and strokes the head of the still dormant pet...

"Well, old buddy, we did it. You, me, and some three hundred angry, rice-toasting warheads."

He sits back up and checks the time...

"Guess I'd better get a little shut-eye while I can."

He presses the intercom button again.

"Yes, Mr...er, Ronnie."

"Sally, I'm gonna take a short nap. Gonna have a press conference in a bit and wanna be at my best. How about give me a wake-up buzz in, oh (consults the Rolex), say, an hour? Also, call Tom and have him standing by in the press room about that time. Tell him NO media. I repeat, NO media. You got that?"

"Yes, Ronnie. I got it."

"That's my girl."

He clicks the intercom off.

The time is now 11:01 am.

He leans back in the presidential high back, fingers laced and resting on his stomach, and slowly lets his eyes drift shut. He takes a deep breath, relaxes, and lets his mind wander back to the good 'ol days. To a time when he once rode tall in the saddle of his favorite horse, Shadow Dancer, and galloped off into a beautiful, golden-rust red sunset.

Yeah. The good ol' days.

And with that fond memory in mind, he gently slips off into a peaceful, presidential slumber.

Chapter 4

He wakes to the sound of the intercom's buzzer and pushes the blinking button.

"This is your wake-up call, Ronnie."

"Much obliged, Sally. Thank you."

"You're very welcome. Also, Director Casey stopped by to drop off a package from Japan. Said you would know what it is."

"Excellent. Just hold it for me, will ya? I'll pick it up on my way out."

"Will do."

The blinking light goes off.

The time is now 12:01 pm.

As a one-time matinee idol movie star, Reagan fully understands the importance of timing and is a tradecraft he mastered long before he was ever a president.

Again, the intercom.

"Yes, Ronnie."

"Sally, I need you to make an international call for me, if you don't mind, and route it to the bat phone, please. The number is 11-00-474-39."

"Yes sir, right away."

He returns the handset to the cradle and waits. Fifteen seconds later, the bat phone rings.

"Osmosis, that you?"

"Osmo, and yes. It is I."

"Good. Look, Bill - well, you probably know him as William. William Casey, Director of the CIA. Anyway, he tells me your office has a window in it with an eastern view. Is that right?"

"Yes, Mr. President. That would be correct."

"He also told me that he gave you a pair of high-powered binoculars as a gift a few weeks back."

"Yes, sir, that is correct, as well. In fact, I have them here on my desk."

"Outstanding. Here's what I need you to do. Grab the binoculars and walk to the east window. Find a cloud you can use to adjust the focus and then watch the sky."

"One moment."

Osmo puts the call on speaker, grabs the binoculars, and then makes his way to the window.

He adjusts the binoculars' focus as suggested and begins scanning the mostly clear sky. He looks but sees nothing of interest...

"Can you tell me, Mr. President, what it is, exactly, I should be looking for?"

Mr. Reagan checks his Rolex.

12:09.

"Keep looking. You should be seeing it any ole time now."

"I'm looking, sir, but I don't... Wait. I see something. Coming over the horizon..."

He adjusts the focus...

"It looks like...like...a thin stream of smoke of some sort. Like a contrail, maybe."

He zooms in even closer and readjusts the focus...

"Yes, it is. It's a contrail. From a rocket, I think. Wait. There's another one. And another, and another, and... OH MY GOD! There are hundreds of them! They're missiles, and they're all headed this way!"

The missiles are so close now that binoculars are no longer necessary to see them. He's about to put them down, but something catches his eye. Some type of markings on the missiles themselves, but still a little too far away to make out. Osmo grabs the binoculars and returns them to his eyes. He zooms in on the cluster of incoming ICBMs...

"I see something else. Some kind of writing on them. In English, I believe."

He adjusts the focus, and the writing becomes perfectly clear.

"Yes. English, and they all appear to say the same thing. They all say 'WE SAWWEE'."

He lowers the binoculars.

"We sawwee? I don't understand, Mr. President. What does..."

But the line goes dead. Reagan pulls the receiver from his head and looks at it, then places it back again...

"You still there, Osmosis? Hello? Hello?"

Silence.

He blows into the mouthpiece a few times - phoo phoo - and then listens again. But again, there's nothing there. Not even static. He returns the receiver to its cradle...

"Shoulda taken the Buicks when you had the chance, hombre. Now look at your stupid, rice-eating, midget ass. Give my regards to Buddha while you're there, why don't cha."

And with that, he stands, grabbing his jacket from the back of the chair as he does. He slips the jacket on and fastens the front button. He looks down and tells his beloved sidekick...

"Well, Jojo, ol' boy. Guess I better mosey on down to the press room and let the American public know what we just did. No sense putting it off."

He does a quick hair and tie check in the mirror and then turns to leave when the First Lady walks in...

"Lunch time, Ronnie. You ready?"

"Almost, mother. Gimme fifteen minutes. There's a little something I gotta do first. Wanna come?"

"Certainly."

She loops her arm in his, and together, they exit the Oval Office.

The President and First Lady walk the short distance to the White House Press Room just down the hall. As previously requested, the room was absent of any media, completely devoid of any reporters, photographers, and journalists, leaving only a minimal PR staff comprising the press secretary, a director, a producer, a cameraman, a sound engineer, and a few miscellaneous technicians.

And no one else.

Reagan takes his place behind the podium and waits for the red light to turn green.

With the familiar White House emblem mounted above and behind him, the American and presidential flag on either side framing his stout figure, and the ever-majestic presidential seal on the front of the podium, Reagan looked to be the very icon of American strength and patriotism itself. The poster president. The symbol of the American way of life. And, as this icon and symbol, he acts as the collective voice of the country - a voice that was about to be heard across the nation.

The director gives him a three count...

Three...two...one...

Green light.

The 'ON AIR' sign lights up. The director points his finger at the president and mouths the word 'GO!'.

Then, on every TV set across the nation...

"We interrupt your normally scheduled program for an important message from the White House. And now, the President of the United States."

Reagan stands behind the podium, tall and handsome, and brandishes that iconic, stern look of confidence he's so well known for, the kind of look you only find in the truly great leaders of the world. He places his hands on either side of the podium and directs his gaze straight into the camera's eye.

Then, as if he could see each individual watching the broadcast, he begins delivering the address as if speaking directly to each and every person...

"My fellow Americans, earlier today, I received a phone call from the Imperial Majesty of Japan, Emperor Phoen Li Ito. The purpose of his call was to demand a written, formal apology from this country for the nuclear attacks we were forced to launch against the Japanese mainland during WWII. Namely, the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Both, attacks that not only ended a world war and restored global peace, but saved an estimated 1.2 million American lives in the process by avoiding a conventional invasion."

He looks down for a moment, pausing for mainly effect, and then looks back into the camera and continues...

"Well, I'm happy to report to you, the American public, that the United States honored the emperor's request. To expedite the matter, the apology was sent via Trident I Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles that arrived in Japan at approximately 12:10 this afternoon, Eastern Standard Time."

The screen cuts to video footage taken earlier by an SR-71 Blackbird and shows an ICBM streaking to its target at a speed in excess of Mach 2, the words 'WE SAWWEE' clearly visible across the missile's length.

The screen returns to Reagan...

"In all, we apologized three hundred and thirty-six times in a language I'm sure the Japanese clearly understood. Now, the result of this operation, code name 'Get Real', is this: the rogue nation of Japan will never again attack this country or its people, or any other country, for that matter. There will never be another Pearl Harbor, Iwo Jima, or Bataan Death March. Those days have ended."

Again, he pauses. He clinches his lips and slightly nods a few times, then continues...

"Today, we sent Japan a message that I hope any other country thinking of doing us harm will take note of, and that message is this: while the good people of this great nation will always be quick to forgive, we will never be so stupid as to forget. In other words, you hurt us; we hurt you worse. It's as simple as that."

Another pause. This time to allow the gravity of his words sufficient time to sink in, and continues...

"And to the warmongers of the world who would gladly inflict their evil upon us, I say this to you - we will never forget the Alamo. Nor will we ever forget the beaches of Normandy. We will remember the jungles of Vietnam, and we remember that dreadful and reprehensible day in Pearl Harbor. And finally - and most importantly - we will forever remember the atrocities suffered by the brave, young American POWs at the hands of the Japanese."

Another pause...

"Other than that, the only thing I have left to say about the matter is that today was Japan's dirty laundry day, and by God, I sent the Maytags."

Every pair of viewing hands across the country begins to clap and fist pump the air. Hoots, hollers, and whistles fill every living room across the nation. People stand on their lawns, blasting air horns, while others fire pistols and rifles into the air. Once again, Reagan has managed to make every person in the country proud to be a red, white, and blue American, and to be a citizen of the best nation on Earth.

The president continues...

"Now, for those of you who made the mistake of buying one of those tiny clown cars and are now concerned about parts and service, I have instructed Congress to allocate the funds necessary to replace every Japanese car with a nice, new, American made Buick Electra, fully loaded with A/C, AM/FM radio, and fake leather interior. Compliments of your hard earned American tax dollars."

And then, one final pause...

"In closing, I say this to you, the American people - that as your president, it is my sworn duty to not only protect and defend the American way of life we all cherish but also to keep you, the citizens of this fine nation, safe and out of harm's way. That's my job."

And with that, I bid you so long for now and wish each and every one of you a blessed evening."

The screen cuts to an American flag waving majestically against a clear, blue sky.

"This has been an emergency broadcast by the President of the United States. We now return you to your regularly scheduled program."

Reagan steps down from the podium and shakes the press secretary's waiting hand...

"Excellent address, Mr. President. Excellent, as always."

"Thank you, Tom."

The press secretary steps aside and makes way for the first lady, Nancy Reagan, who slings her arms around her husband's neck and plants a firm kiss on the presidential lips. He asks her...

"How'd I do, mother?"

"The best, Ronnie. You are always the best!"

"You keep telling me lies like that, and I just might have to fall in love with you all over again, woman."

They maintain the embrace for a moment and then separate just far enough to allow them to gaze into each other's adoring eyes, no differently than they did in their youth - partners for life.

They break the embrace.

She loops her arm in his, and side by side, the two exit the press room and begin making their way back to the presidential section of the White House.

"You hungry?", he asks.

"You know it.", she replies.

"Good. Gotta surprise for you."

"What?"

"Know those little egg roll thingies you like so much?"

"Uh huh."

"Well, I gotta crate of em waiting for us. All the way from the Orient."

"A whole crate?"

"Yep. Folks that sent them won't be needing them anymore. Was gonna bring them home tonight and surprise you, but what the hell. Who am I fooling? I'm just a sucker for my favorite cowgirl. Always have been, always will be. What's say we go find ourselves a microwave?"

She swoons...

"Oohhhh, Ronnie. You *are* the best. And you know what?"

"What?"

She stops, and then he stops and turns to her. She finishes the thought...

"You're always going to be my leading man."

"Then my work here's done."

He smiles that million-dollar movie star smile of his, and they kiss.

And then they continue on their way.

Arms looped, her head resting on his shoulder, the two slowly fade down the White House corridors and into the halls of history.

Author's Note

No doubt, a lot of people will find this story objectionable, and to them, I have but one reply - you have never read the book *Girocho*, otherwise you'd be mailing me your donations for having written this piece.

Girocho was written by a survivor of the Philippines campaign during WWII. In this campaign, the American and Philippine forces finally surrendered, but did so only after having completely run out of ammo. They literally fought to the last bullet and mortar shell, having run out of food and provisions long before then. For four long, brutal, and bloody months, they fought the superior Japanese force, surviving, only to have to suffer the infamous Bataan Death March. And after the march, three years of unimaginably inhumane imprisonment as Japanese POWs. Misery beyond anything you or I can ever imagine.

Read the book. That, and *Ghost Soldiers*. And, after having read one or both books, you still find this story offensive and disagreeable, catch the first flight out of this country. You don't belong here, and we don't want you anyway.