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The Golden Ticket

by Jamie Moore

Bryce Cannon was a man of withering optimism. Generations of Cannon had instilled a mantra of relentless positivity that had bequeathed a run of familial success. His grandfather made a moderate living selling rivets to the US Army Air Corp, managing to remain afloat throughout the great depression with a fierce perseverance since instilled by kool-aid candy to subsequent generations. He never tired of telling his sons it don't pay to get discouraged, that is until he received his first Cannon 'golden ticket'.

On the sunny morning of December 7, 1941, the Japanese surprised the US naval base at Pearl Harbor with an attack of stunning and simple ferocity, destroying the entire pacific fleet and 300 aircraft. It was Winston Churchill that once asserted that the optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty, and from that day forward the sequenced Cannon coda of optimistic infallibility was enshrined in riveting wealth and New Hampshire entitlement.

As the youngest of five successful siblings, a pre-high school Bryce Cannon had decided he would not be following his brothers into any family business or the law. Kicking off his shoes and reclining gracefully in the smooth buckskin tan of his Aston swivel chair, he recalled the point of inflection in his career that had led him to London. Clifford Clarke had made a nice line of business insuring south-east Asian ships of all varieties but was crippled by a series of three Philippine ferry disasters in the space of a year at the turn of the millennium that had led to its collapse; his golden ticket. With his father's connections, Bryce parlayed his burgeoning insurance career at Marsh McLennan into Chairman of Clifford Clarke for the price of a dollar.

The gradual transformation into personal insurance away from the volatility of corporate insurance had seen profits explode in the last ten years, and a key player at the heart of this growth had been Charlie Mazdani.

In Charlie he saw some of himself, the interpersonal ease and casual gravitas with which he carried himself was impressive, but not being as blessed by an upbringing rooted in positive values had sunk his motility, and Bryce felt a patriarchal responsibility to course correct him, to provide him with an opportunity that Charlie himself could look back upon as his own moment of inflection.

Bryce slid his silky feet off the polished teak table a little too quickly as Charlie walked in, the high chair back rebounding like a mule kick to the base of his neck. Charlie noted the effect but had already painfully learned not to make a joke of such matters; Bryce was gifted at laughing at anyone but himself. Hey Charlie, take a seat.

Thank you. The green velour sofa felt surprisingly soft and lumpy, the springs like loaded suppositories of manipulative intent.

I've been chatting with Heinrich and heard all about your recent meeting.

Ah yes. Charlie could not be bothered to explain himself to Bryce, nor gauge the potential impact.

No need to explain anything. You see, I understand what's driving you Charlie, really I do, and I'm in no rush to see you walk out of the business when you've done so much for us. Instead I'd like to make a suggestion if I may, it's more of an offer in fact.

If you're resigning Bryce I don't want the job. The quip was greeted by a mirthless silence, the pressure of the springs intensifying on his anus.

We have a client who's made a claim, a death claim as it happens, for a lot of money.

How much?

Four million dollars and change. Nothing so unusual about that. But she's based in Costa Rica.

Oh. I see.

You know Charlie, us Cannon's, as in my family, The Cannon's, we have a canon of our own. Bryce smiled like a brainwashed paladin while Charlie's head spun in confusion, was he about to be shot out of the window or inducted into a cult?

We call it the Golden Ticket. That point in life where everything changes, where opportunity presents itself and you never look back, moving forward into a future of unrivalled promise and success. His arm straightened toward the window, in doctrinal salute. This Costa Rica job is my gift to you.

I'm sorry, I don't understand. Charlie shifted to the end of the sofa, clinging to the armrest like driftwood.

I want you to go out there Charlie, investigate this claim, and while you're there, take a month off. Switch off, relax. If you feel the inclination, have a look at some of the business in the region, take a trip to Panama. I'm thinking of opening an office down there.

What just drop everything here?

Yes sir! This is your golden ticket Charlie. I recommend you take it.