

# Becoming August

*by* Victor Emmanuel

# I

“...And so my fellow graduates, this is the conclusion of a chapter in our lives. But it is not the last, nay, I say it is the first chapter. We have finally finished our introduction. Now comes the hard part: following through. I congratulate you all, class of 2012. May your success in life reflect your academic success.”

“What the hell was that bullshit?” said Baron.

Knowing both the voice, and that it was directed at him, August turned to his friend, cake in hand. “I have no idea what you are talking about.”

Baron punched his friend in the shoulder nearly causing him to drop his paper plate. “The speech, retard. The one you gave me was great. When did the word ‘chapter’ get put in there? You know how cliché that is.”

August sighed. “The Principal didn’t like the first one and made me rewrite it. She said it was too provocative and that I shouldn’t denigrate the education system.”

“What a load of shit. It’s your speech, she shouldn’t have messed with it.”

“You seem a lot more mad about this than I am.”

“Well I just didn’t want my last memory of you to be so lame.”

“Last memory? I’m not dying, I’m just going to a different college than you.”

“May as well be the same thing. We won’t see each other anymore.”

“We’ve been friends since kindergarten. We can see each other on breaks and talk online. We’ll still interact, it’ll just take more effort.” August saw that his friend wasn’t so convinced. He placed a hand on Baron’s shoulder. “Listen, I promise you there isn’t a thing the world could do separate us.”

Baron smiled, but said: “Don’t be so fucking gay, man.”

August woke with a start. His first sensation was a headache. He closed his eyes and gradually it dulled but didn't go away. He opened his eyes again. The room was dim, but in the way of an early dawn. As his eyes adjusted, he realized he was in a hospital bed. There was a sleeping woman in a chair to his right who he didn't recognize. Sitting in a chair next to the door was a sleeping man he did recognize: it was Baron. August tried getting out of the bed, but the movement caused a wave of nausea. He tried to think of a way to wake Baron without waking the woman. August remembered that childish skill he had developed back in elementary school, where he could use the gap in his front teeth to spit accurately and at distance. He did so now and Baron woke startled and confused. Then he saw August. Tears began to well up and he opened his mouth wide.

In response August put his finger to his lips. He didn't think he would be able to handle loud noises at the moment. Baron obediently shut his mouth so fast that it surprised August. He then gestured for his friend to come to his side. Baron did so, quietly.

"What happened. Why am I in a hospital?" August whispered.

"There was an assassination attempt. You were shot in the head. I don't know how you survived," answered Baron mimicking August's whisper.

"Assassination? Why would..." August's question was cut off by the now clear sight of his friend. Baron was much older, by perhaps twenty years, and his face had scars August had never seen before. "Why are you so old?"

"Old? I didn't think stress would affect me that much."

"You look to be in your forties."

"I am in my forties." Baron's confusion was then replaced with concern. "What's the last thing you remember?"

"My valedictorian speech."

Baron's confusion was then replaced by panic. He fought to keep his voice low and level. "Please tell me the concussion gave you a sick sense of humor."

August shook his head. "I genuinely don't know what's going on Baron."

"The year is 2038."

"Wow, I've been in a coma for twenty-six years?"

"No it's only been a month. You just don't remember the last twenty-six years."

"Well that's bad."

"You have no idea," Baron said handing August a newspaper. The date was November 14, 2038. The headline read: *Doctors say The Emperor's condition has stabilized; The Imperial Guard continue their hunt for the assassin.*

"The Emperor's condition?" asked August

"That would be you, August. You are Emperor of America."

"How is that possible?"

"Your experience at college radicalized you. You gradually lost faith in the democratic process. When you found what was known as the dissident right at the time, they were a fractured mess, but you managed to unify them. Then in 2029 you lead a revolt against the previous regime. The war lasted three years. So, you've been the supreme ruler of America for six years now. I have followed you all that time."

"Wow, that is a lot to take in."

"I don't think you understand how bad the situation is right now."

"Have there been riots against me or something?"

"No, in fact there has been peace and the people are quite happy with your rule."

"I don't get what the problem is then."

"Damn, I'm not sure how to explain this. The problem is I never had the same grasp of 'power politics' as you did. I'm a bad student trying to teach his master...the one part of power that I was able understand from you was that showing weakness is bad."

"I'm sure I'll recover from this concussion soon enough. I don't feel particularly weak other than that."

“You don’t get it. It would be better if you were paralyzed instead. Then you could at least give coherent orders. But with amnesia, You don’t know how to rule. In fact, you might hate the system you’ve made. When people find out you don’t remember the past twenty years your time on this earth is numbered, everyone you know and trust will be gunning for your position.”

“Then we need to keep my condition a secret.”

“And how can we do that? And for how long can we keep up the act? Not to mention the assassin is still out there.”

“We don’t need to hide it forever, just long enough for me to relearn how to be emperor.”

“That will be one hell of a task, but then again you are the man who defeated the greatest military in history with an army of rednecks armed with AR-15s.”

“The first thing on our agenda should be to figure out who we can trust.”

“August!?” said the woman sitting next to him.

## II

The woman sitting next to August leaped from her seat and embraced him with all her strength. As she cried into his chest August looked to Baron expectantly. Baron rolled his eyes and mouthed "*Your wife, Catherine.*"

"Praise the Lord, you're awake." Catherine loosened her embrace enough so she could look at her husband through tear flooded eyes. Behind her Baron mouthed "*Cathy.*"

At first August didn't understand, but then he realized that "Cathy" must have been the pet name he used.

"It's alright, Cathy, I am awake, and I am alive." said August.

"Oh, Auggie. I was so...I don't have the words for it...when you were shot, then you wouldn't wake up and I was so scared. Baron here told me that I would need to choose a successor." Catherine's speech was shaky from trying and failing to hold back tears.

August turned to look at Baron.

"Listen man, this is what happens when you don't have succession planed out in advance. I was just trying to avoid another civil war." said Baron giving August the info he needed.

After a moment of thinking how an Emperor would respond August said, "I wasn't planning on dying so soon. I had thought that assassination wasn't possible, but I suppose I should have determined succession sooner. As events have shown, that was clearly a miscalculation."

"How long were you two talking before I woke?" asked Catherine. "I don't think I will be able to forgive you for not speaking to your own wife first." Despite her words she was smiling.

"I was awake at the time, and it wasn't long. Just enough to tell him about the assassination and it's been a month." explained

Baron.

Catherine furrowed her eyebrows. "What do you mean 'tell him about the assassination,' he was there."

Baron began to panic but managed to hide all evidence of it.

"I don't remember the assassination." said August covering Baron's blunder. "One minute I'm signing an order the next I'm waking up in a hospital bed."

"Ah." said Catherine. "I had hoped that if you had woken up you could tell us what the assassin looked like."

Outside August's room a nurse was walking by and saw through the gap made by the window and Imperial Guards to see that the emperor was upright and speaking. She shouted, "Emperor August is awake!"

Immediately Hospital staff began a stampede to the emperor's room. This caught the Guards flat footed, as they had turned to see if the nurse's exclamation was true. Baron, who heard the noise, came to the door, and spoke with authority. "None are to pass through without my say so." Immediately the guards regrouped and pushed the medical personnel back with the threat of their rifles.

From the crowd of nurses and doctors an admonishment came. "You have no right to deny the emperor medical treatment."

Baron answered, "As Master of Security I very much do." Baron then scanned the crowd and found the doctor he was looking for. He ushered him forward and before shutting the door on the rest, "I suggest you disperse."

"I believe I have some calls to make." said Catherine stepping outside. While the doctor got to performing his examinations on August, Baron got to thinking. He had to get August caught up on the development of political thought from the past twenty-six years. August, as of now, was running on neoliberalism. Baron remembered August saying that *The Prince* should be the starting point for anyone interested in politics. August had also told him that *The Doctrine of Fascism* had radically altered the way he saw the world. Baron then began to think of a good excuse to get those

two books into August's room, when he realized there was a bigger problem. Right now, August believed in the [1940s event]. It had taken years for August to rid himself of that mental shackle. If it remained, then August would surely destroy everything he had dedicated his life to building.

"Alright my Emperor. Be sure to get plenty of sleep," said the doctor, "Avoid physical or mental exertion."

"I'm not sure I can promise no mental exertion. My job requires a lot of thinking," said August.

"You will not be doing your job in here," said the doctor.

"He's been out for a month, doc. The nation needs him," argued Baron.

"Well, he needs to recover. Just because he's awake doesn't mean he isn't still injured," responded the doctor.

"Speaking of, how long until the amnesia goes away," asked Baron.

"Hard to say. It may never come back. I'm sorry, Master of Security, but you may have to catch your culprit without your primary witness," answered the doctor getting up to leave. "I'm not joking about the sleep." Then closed the door behind him.

"Ok, before Catherine gets back, I need you request three materials are sent to your room. *The Prince, The Doctrine of Fascism, and The Greatest Lie Ever Told.*"

"The *Doctrine of Fascism*? Why would I want to read that?" August asked a little scared about what the answer would be.

"Before you were shot you were a fascist and had established a fascist state. You need to understand how fascism works in order to rule properly."

"Well maybe I don't want to oppress people."

"...If you from a month ago were here, he would know how to respond to that. It is necessary for your survival, if you start acting like a liberal, I can guarantee you will die. I could be the greatest bodyguard in history, and you would still have a knife in your back."

The door opened and Catherine stepped into the room. Baron looked at his friend with pleading eyes. August hesitated. This



was all to surreal for him. How is it that he had come to adopt an evil ideology? How had he become so obsessed with power? He looked at his friend again. If nothing else, he could trust that Baron wanted to keep him alive. Perhaps he could become a more just ruler instead of the tyrant he had become. But to do that he would need to understand the system he had made.

August sighed and spoke to his wife, "Dear, could have some things brought up to my room?" Baron relaxed the tension in his shoulders that he didn't know was there.

"Sure honey, what do want?"

"*The Prince, The Doctrine of Fascism, and The Greatest Lie Ever Told.*"

"Sure, but why?"

For a moment August thought using his authority to shut-down the question, then he realized that might not work on his wife. "I just want some light reading while I'm resting."

"Ok, and what's the movie for?"

"Hmm?"

"The movie, *The Greatest Lie Ever Told*, what's it for?"

Baron stepped in, "To remind him what he's fighting for."

After some waiting for about half an hour there was a knock on the door. Baron opened it only for the man to barge in. He was carrying a laptop and bag.

"Nathaniel, what are you doing here?" Asked Baron

"The request for reading material came before the news that the emperor was awake. So..." Nathaniel brought the requested items out of bag and set them on a table, "I decided to kill two birds with one stone by playing both delivery boy and messenger."

Nathaniel then gave a small bow to both August and Catherine. "My Emperor. My Empress."

Catherine gave a small nod in return "Head Secretary Fernández."

"If you will permit me to give you a report on the past month, I..." Nathaniel was cut off by Baron.

"Absolutely not. He hasn't even been awake an hour yet."

"I believe that is his decision to make," snapped Nathaniel.

August looked at his friend who was giving that same pleading look. August knew why Baron didn't want him to hear the report. It would be so easy to make a mistake. But he needed the information, may as well get it now.

"If the whole country is on fire, I don't want to hear it," said August "Otherwise tell me what's happened."

"Based," Nathaniel sat down on the hospital bed and opened his laptop. "So Foreign or Domestic?"

August wondered if America was the only country to turn fascist or if others had as well. "Foreign," said August

"Master of Propaganda Eren Hitter has been beating the war drum so hard it would make the old neocons blush," said Nathaniel looking up to see August's horrified expression.

"Oh, do not worry," said Nathaniel, "He isn't actually trying to start a war. It's just a show of strength to deter the Liberal powers from declaring war on us. It would have been disastrous if ZOG declared war on us without you to lead. Here, look at this."

Nathaniel turned the laptop so August could see the screen. On it was an image. It was of a rabid wolf with its leg caught in the jaws of a bear trap. Its teeth were bloody and its eyes wild. On the wolf itself was text that simply read "America".

"I told Eren that it was bad optics to associate us with a mad beast," explained Nathaniel, "But propaganda is his job, so he had this one and several variants made and sent them to our guys living under Liberalism. They then spread it, and now more than ever the Liberal powers fear us. Whether that's good or bad is up to you."

"Better to be seen as strong than weak," said August.

"As you say. Moving on," continued Nathaniel, "There have been quite a few prayers around the world for your recovery. President Assad and The Supreme Leader of Iran have lead prayers for to wake. Assad even went so far to say, '*Neither Allah nor Christ would allow for his earthly servant, Slayer of the Great Satan, to leave this life with work unfinished*' ...you seem surprised."

"I just...I never," said August unsure how to respond.

“You never expected the Aryan-Arab axis to be this strong?” interjected Baron.

“Yeah, this is exceeding my expectations. I’ll have to send him a thank you,” said August, thankful for the save.

“Several Orthodox Patriarchs and Catholic Bishops have led their own prayers for the same outcome, although the Pope has remained silent on the issue,” exposted Nathaniel.

“Why has the Pope remained silent?” asked Augustus.

“Well, several Bishops have lead prayer for your death. So, I think he is trying to avoid a Schism.”

“Seems like a small thing to cause a schism over.”

“On the surface whether a specific leader should live or die isn’t something that should cause a split, but the reason for why you should live or die are. Is racism a sin? Is God a nationalist? Is it bad to persecute sinners? Is tolerance a Christian virtue? Things like that. Your rule in general, and near death in particular, has brought a lot of hidden disagreements to the surface.”

“So, what have the Protestants been doing?” asked August.

“An even more mixed bag than the Catholics. I think they are in a contest to see who has the hottest take.”

“Anything else happen in wider world this past month?”

“No that about covers anything of relevance, except of course the fact that no one has come forward claiming credit for your attempted murder. Moving to the domestic sphere, your approval rating hasn’t really budged still sitting at 71%. What has happened is that your already fanatic supporters have become even more fanatic. Some have even sent in requests to donate their organs and blood to you, not that it would have helped, but this had led to some of them instigating violence against your critics. This has in turn inflamed their hatred of you.”

Nathaniel then saw the disappointed look on August’s face. “I know you thought that forgiveness should be given those who weren’t directly responsible for conditions of the previous order, but that has had its consequences.”

“Give me the details later.”

“Very well, moving on to the military. The Modern Infantry Combat Armor finished its development and Master of the Military Timothy Russell approved its production. I know you want to witness the tests firsthand, but Russell decided that it couldn’t wait and approved it anyway.”

“That was the correct thing to do.”

“As you say. The MICA has been shown to consistently withstand a .50 caliber armor piercing round from a M107 at 100 feet. Although the joint areas aren’t guaranteed to provide such protection. I can have Timothy send you the exact test results.”

August nodded his head.

“Very well. By now this is out of date, but we have produced around a thousand MICA units. You didn’t specify who should get priority.”

August thought for a moment. “First will be Spec Ops, then commanding officers in the field, then front line infantry, the rest by lottery.”

“As you say. Last, we have Master of the Economy Mark Powell’s report. Sales of pregnancy tests are down by 22% which is disappointing, but not unexpected. GDP has dropped by 5%, but Mark has managed to keep real wages from dropping.”

“Have there been any bank runs?” asked August

Before, when August had made a mistake Baron had been able to keep his emotions under the surface, he failed to do so now. The look on Baron’s face was of absolute terror.

Nathaniel blinked twice in confusion. “What do you mean ‘bank runs’? Bank runs haven’t been possible since you nationalized all of them. A bank run now would mean we have collapsed which we clearly haven’t.”

Baron reached for his knife.