



THE ASYLUM

Volume II Issue V

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Asylum V is a special issue featuring one dialogue by Michael Anton. We are very honoured and pleased to be publishing him, and especially on the incendiary topics of civil war and secession. Not only are Anton's political credentials noteworthy; he is perhaps one of the only few who can claim the title "Advisor to the Prince" without inviting ridicule. But we are more grateful for Anton's contribution because he is one of the most astute and honest writers in "respectable society," eminently involved in shaping America's future. Anton is frequently published within American conservative media, including the Claremont publications, the governing institution of which he is a senior fellow. He is also the author of three books. Appropriately beside Anton's piece is a photograph of one of Fen de Villiers' sculptures, demonstrating once gain his staggering talent. We thank Anton and Fen (@FendeVilliers) for their contributions. The incredible front cover has been made by skinless_frank (@skinless_frank). We are grateful to have his talented design.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This is a special issue of *The Asylum*. It contains only one piece: a dialogue written by the very esteemed Michael Anton. The interlocutors are two former friends, one Republican (Tom) and one Democrat (Malcolm), who enter into dispute over America's potential for civil war, and especially the topic of peaceful secessionism as an alternative to violence. Tom and Malcolm mostly argue over the technical and legal (moral) obstacles while never reaching anything close to consensus. And there is universal acknowledgment over one fact only: the irreconcilability of their beliefs. Mitosis has begun!

The prospect of civil war in America is being received with less and less incredulity.

Some disagree, of course. The monotone Keep Calm Intellectuals think the whole proposition is overblown. These academics wear the regalia of reason ("No. No. It's all paranoia!"), cite Pinker-tier statistics of progress ("Things have never *actually* been better!"), and assure themselves with the inborn inertia of the Constitution (Impossible. It even says so on the Sacred Paper!). They are convinced that, even though nearly half of Americans think we are headed for civil war, war is unlikely, not observing the ironic prophesy that fear of the object is sometimes enough to create the object of fear.

Most of us feel that we are already in some kind of cold conflict. The "theatre of war" is online. It is the only battleground for competing ideologies. Some think of the rivalry as simply Right vs Left. But it is better to group the factions by the vision of life they promote: end-state egalitarianism, conservative-style libertarianism, and hierarchy-driven futurism. And maybe it's not so cold. Maybe the better adjective is "warm," since there are violent confrontations, though none yet taking on formal structure. We instead see disorganized standoffs between two factions who *feel* in opposition to the other, though, our political language is lagging behind political sentiment. The words will come later. There are indeed events that give temporary shape to these sentiments, such as: BLM, January 6th, Kyle Rittenhouse, COVID-19, and the Russia-Ukraine War. These may one day make up the "causes" or "pre-war events" that historians cleanly trace to find the origins of the conflict that looms in our future.

It does seem that some kind of conflict is unavoidable. Tensions feel high enough. Are we at the point when a spark becomes a blaze? Does the arc of history bend towards the prepper? Does this excite you, anon? I know that some of you are completely insane, and don't have any struggle of conscience – the conscience being the spiritual weapon of Judea against Rome – so for those mentally ill readers the answer is: Yes!

I admit to feeling tormented by my internal register, and I don't know how far I'd be willing to go. So perhaps I must heed Nietzsche:

“The more he seeketh to rise into the height and light, the more vigorously do his roots struggle earthward, downward, into the dark and deep - into evil.”

Of course, if we think about things practically, if war does happen in America, someone will have to figure out how to navigate the retarded composition of the so-called armies. Human capital is low everywhere. The People have been raised on a diet of democracy and egalitarianism. How to shepherd them high above, into the mountains, where the valley pastures make better meat?

Because there is nothing for certain that, as a consequence of war or isolation, our vision would be achieved. If only our cultural and political elements are changed, without creating the impregnating preconditions which give birth to civilization, then it won't be enough. A lot of political effort is as useful as taking a multi-vitamin on one's deathbed. But maybe the introduction of extreme instability would allow for something good. Maybe chaotic violence would also kill the stale and impotent “cherished values” still clung to by most Americans. At least in chaos new life is possible. Or is humanity too old and gray for new ideas?

This we cannot accept!

Welcome back to The Asylum.

Giles Hoffmann



Fen de Villiers
Struggle (2018)
Bronze

MALCOLM; OR, ON SEPARATION
MICHAEL ANTON

Tom Redmon the trucking firm accountant came once upon a time to Malcolm Bluestar the Twitbook executive. After Malcolm finished checking his iPhone 14 Pro, he said, “What are you doing here?”

“I thought we could talk as old friends,” Tom said.

“You’re not my friend,” Malcolm said, “at least not since you voted for Trump. Twice.”

“That’s what I wanted to talk to you about,” Tom said. “We’d been drifting apart for a long time, despite growing up on the same street and going to the same schools. Until, that is, you went off to Brown and I went to Grove City. But now it seems we have nothing in common.”

“How,” Malcolm asked, “could a cultured, accomplished person like myself have anything in common with a troglodyte like you?”

“How indeed,” Tom said. “That’s my point. Why do we live together anymore?”

“We don’t,” Malcolm said. “I live in Pacific Heights and you live in Fremont.”

“Actually,” Tom said, “I moved to Texas three years ago.”

“Well, then. What’s the problem?” Malcolm asked.

“The problem,” Tom said, “is that, not only don’t we have anything in common, we increasingly disagree about everything, in ways that can’t be reconciled. Wouldn’t it make more sense for us to live apart?”

“But as you just indicated, we already live apart,” Malcolm said.

“I mean politically apart,” Tom said.

“But we already live politically apart as well,” Malcolm said. “I’m a Democrat and you’re a”—here he shuddered—“Rethuglican. I live in progressive, enlightened California. You, apparently, live in backward, benighted, Bible-thumping Texas.”

“Yes,” Tom said, “but we still live in the same country.”

“Wait a minute,” Malcolm said. “Are you suggesting what I think you are? As long as I’ve known you, you’ve been a rah-rah ‘U-S-A’-chanting jingoist. Now you’re telling me you want to break up the country? Did moving to Texas turn you into a neo-Confederate?”

“No,” Tom said. “But it has made me reconsider the wisdom of staying together as a country. I mean, let’s think about it. What are the advantages?”

“Surely,” Malcolm said, “there’s an advantage in not having another civil war!”

“But why,” Tom asked, “would breaking up require a war? It doesn’t have to. Countries have split peaceably before, the Czech Republic from Slovakia being maybe the most famous case.”

“That may be the most famous case,” Malcolm replied, “but it’s hardly analogous to ours. In that case, all the Czechs lived in the west and all the Slovaks in the east, in territories that their two peoples had lived in for centuries. In America, everyone is scattered everywhere.”

“That’s true to an extent,” Tom said, “but getting less true all the time. I’m not the only Californian who moved to Texas. And a lot of people I know have moved to Florida and other Red states as well. I mean, when we grew up, California was a more or less evenly divided state, even arguably leaning Republican. Look at it now. The same is happening the other way—Blues leaving Red states—albeit to a lesser extent.”

“Maybe,” Malcolm replied, “but that still doesn’t make breaking up easy, or show where the new borders should be.”

“Who said it had to be easy?” Tom said. “Or, anyway, ‘easy’ compared to what? Would it be easier than living together now, in perpetual cold civil war? Wouldn’t splitting up be a way to *avoid* a hot war, whereas staying together, given how much animosity there already is between the two sides, makes war more likely?”

“Well,” Malcolm laughed, “you can fantasize about civil war all you want. But Joe Biden was right. If you yahoos try it, the F-15s and the nukes will make short work of you.”

“That statement right there is very revealing,” Tom said. “But let’s get to that in a moment. First, why do you assume that a second civil war would have to look like the first, with uniformed armies squaring off? It would be much more likely, it seems to me, to look like the Spanish Civil War, in which armed partisans engaged in assassinations and hid among the population. Second, you assume that I *want* such a war, when my point is that a separation is the best way to *avoid* one!”

“You’re the one who came over here proposing secession!” Malcolm scoffed.

“Again,” Tom repeated, “as a way of *avoiding* war. Or really, since I don’t think war is all that likely, just as a way of avoiding further strife and acrimony. The tensions, the temperature, the dislike, even the hatred—they’re all so high. Why do we live together? Take your statement a second ago. Isn’t it contradictory? You call me and my kind ‘yahoos’ and you threaten to use the military to destroy us. That clearly illustrates hate. Yet the threat also shows a determination to force us to stay together no matter what. Why would you want to force people whom you hate, and who want to leave peacefully, to stay with you?”

“Well, to be honest,” Malcolm said, “I don’t really care about you people at all. But if you threaten my country, you force me to care.”

“‘My country,’ Tom repeated. “Listen to you. A moment ago, you were mocking my patriotism. Now you sound a like a Rush Limbaugh listener circa 1995. What happened to the Malcolm who used to have bumper stickers that said ‘Question Authority’ and ‘Dissent Is the Highest Form of Patriotism?’”

“I don’t put bumper stickers on my Tesla,” Malcolm said.

“Of course not,” Tom said. “Anyway, the point is, you used to mock my patriotism as naïve at best and jingoistic at worst. In fact, you just did! But now you’re talking like one of those ‘America: Love It or Leave It’ hardhats from the ‘70s. It’s obvious why. Back when you used to ‘question authority,’ the authority was conservative and traditional, or at least that’s how you saw it. But now you *are* the authority, or at least your side is, so you support it. You’ve become a patriot—not for the old America as it was, but for the new woke America that it’s become.”

“You’re delusional,” Malcolm said, “if you think America has become ‘woke,’ whatever that term even means. Frankly, it’s just a rightwing scare-word at this point. But if Mr. Republican here is going to attack me for defending my country, I guess that’s clarifying. Didn’t you used to claim to be a big admirer of Abraham Lincoln?”

“Still am,” Tom said.

“Doesn’t it strike you as ironic,” Malcolm asked, “even hypocritical, that you—a self-professed Lincolnite—are now arguing for secession?”

“The situations are totally different,” Tom said. “Lincoln famously said of the two sides in the Civil War that they disagreed about only one thing. Granted, it was a *big* thing, but ‘both read the same Bible and pray to the same God.’ We today agree on nothing. One side reads the Bible and the other disparages it. One side prays to God and the other mocks those who do. We don’t even agree on the definition of ‘man’

versus ‘woman.’ You want to transition young kids with irreversible surgeries and put parents in jail if they try to stop it. Our differences are not merely widespread and numerous, but fundamental.”

“That’s a gross mischaracterization of the religiosity of Blue America,” Malcolm replied. “There’s a church only two blocks from here—”

“Flying a rainbow flag,” Tom said.

“—and another three blocks from that,” Malcolm continued.

“Well,” Tom said, “let’s just agree that both sides see religion in very different terms. Mine is more likely to be traditional and orthodox, and yours more likely to see religion through a lens of ‘spiritualism’ and to use established churches as vehicles for progressive politics.”

“I don’t see what’s wrong with that,” Malcolm replied. “Anyway, as Lincoln also said, the essence of democracy is abiding by the votes you lose. Once progress is made from bullets to ballots, there can be no appeal back to bullets. Your team always wants to overturn or ignore votes you lose. You’re a threat to democracy.”

“Well,” Tom said, “we can leave aside how many of those votes we actually lose.”

“You’re really going there?” Malcolm interjected. “Election denialism?”

“I said let’s leave it aside,” Tom repeated. “I’m not going to convince you and you’re not going to convince me. And I’m not even convinced any elections were stolen. I honestly admit I don’t know. All I assert is that elections are no longer conducted in ways to inspire confidence that they were entirely fair. If you wanted my people to be more confident that they were, you’d clean them up: ban ballot harvesting, require photo ID, and so on.”

“So you’re not just an election denier; you’re also for voter suppression?” Malcolm said.

“How is it ‘voter suppression’ to require proof that you’re eligible to vote and that you are who you say you are?” Tom asked. “But like I said, let’s not go down this road. We’re not going to agree. You want a loose system that favors your side; I want a tight system that everyone can have confidence in. Your side has the power to get your way. Mine doesn’t. It’s a lost cause as far as I’m concerned. You got the voting system you want and it’s not going away. But it’s ridiculous of you to turn around and insist that we affirm that these loosey-goosy ‘elections’ that your side can ‘fortify’—i.e., rig—are all totally fair and on the up-and-up. But anyway, none of that even matters. Even if I were to stipulate that all recent elections were fair, in the sense that there was no outright fraud, the electorate has still been fundamentally transformed by immigra-

tion.”

“Here comes the xenophobia!” Malcolm said.

“It’s not xenophobia,” Tom said. “It’s fact. The highest correlative for whether a city, county, region, or state votes for your party is the percentage of foreign-born. The higher that is, the better Democrats do.”

“Can you really be surprised that immigrants don’t vote for the racist party that hates them?” Malcolm said.

“My party isn’t racist and doesn’t hate immigrants,” Tom said, “but you just implicitly admitted my point. Immigration skews the electorate Democratic.”

“So what?” Malcolm said. “You can’t compete for immigrant votes because of your party’s terrible record and reputation. How is that *my* fault? Why don’t you instead try to do better?”

“We *are* trying to do better, actually,” Tom said, “but making progress is all but impossible when the flow of new immigrants never slows. That’s why, or one reason why, your side keeps the border open: to preserve and augment the electoral advantage you get from immigration.”

“Obama deported more undocumented migrants than Bush,” Malcolm said.

“Doing more than Open Borders George Bush isn’t actually a high bar,” Tom said, “and, anyway, it’s the net inflow that matters, not the number of deportations, which is always relatively low no matter who’s in charge.”

“More xenophobia,” Malcolm said. “Diversity is our strength. Immigrants enrich us. They’re the backbone of this country and keep it going. You don’t like immigrants because you can’t compete with them—”

“Wait,” Tom said, “I thought you guys insisted that immigrants never take away anyone’s job?”

“—and because they see your racism for what it is.”

“Now we’re going in circles,” Tom said. “OK, fine. Stipulate all you say about immigrants, although I disagree with a lot of it. Combine that with everything you said about elections. That just means that my side will lose elections forever.”

“Now you’re being histrionic,” Malcolm said. “You guys just won back the House! You won the presidency in 2016! You may again in 2024.”

“Wait,” Tom said, “are you acknowledging that the 2016 election wasn’t fixed by Russia? Anyway, even if we did win elections, what difference would it make? Your side controls the entire bureaucracy, which simply does what it wants in direct defiance of elected officials. Or, to be more precise, it obeys Democrats, with whom it already agrees, and it defies Republicans. Plus, you have the media, the corporations, Big Tech, the universities, the foundations—all the power centers. Winning elections does almost nothing in the face of all that power. And, still: we won’t win *any* elections if you guys get your way! What was all that business about ‘fortifying’ the election really about? It was you guys bragging about rigging the system so that my team can’t win. That’s what you really want. You say so all the time. In the rare cases we do win, you say we stole it—”

“Pot, kettle,” Malcolm said.

“—and you say that we’re all fascists and a ‘threat to democracy.’ What are we supposed to conclude from that? There’s only one thing: that you think we’re illegitimate and should never have any share of power.”

“Well,” Malcolm said, “the way your side has been behaving lately, yes: you should not be anywhere near power.”

“How do you expect us to take that?” Tom asked. “You demand that we lie down and accept ‘You are fascists who must never have any share of power again’ and then you call us fascists and insurrectionists when we object!”

“How about if you, I don’t know,” Malcolm said, “*stop being fascist, racist, election-denying insurrectionists?*”

“See?” Tom said. “This only further proves my point. We agree on nothing. What you call ‘fascist’ we think is simply ‘normal.’ Fascism is what they did in Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany. You apply the term to people who want something like Eisenhower’s America.”

“With Jim Crow, naturally,” Malcolm said.

“As ever, you default to gratuitous accusations of racism,” Tom said. “The point is, our political and social opinions really haven’t changed. But suddenly—or I guess not so suddenly—opinions that used to be mainstream are now declared rightwing extremism.”

“That’s because they are,” Malcolm said. “The world has made a lot of progress beyond your outdated opinions which, frankly, were always a disgrace. They just used to be shared by a lot more people, including people at the top. Now we know better. Just because you haven’t adapted with the times, that doesn’t mean the whole structure of society has to bend to your outmoded and frankly racist-sexist-ageist-ableist-ho-

mophobic-transphobic views.”

“It’s actually you who’ve changed, immensely,” Tom said. “You’ve always been to the left of me, but you didn’t used to be down with trans-mania, much less forcing it on the whole country. On that, we will never agree. So we’re back to square one. Why do we still live together?”

“Yeah,” Malcolm said, “we’re back to Abraham Lincoln morphing into Jefferson Davis. It didn’t work out so well for that team the first time, and it won’t this time.”

“You know,” Tom said, “I could point out that your team has long denigrated Lincoln as a racist, said he never cared about slavery, there’s nothing to be proud of about the Union winning the Civil War, and all that. But let’s skip that. How about this? If you don’t want a war, why not just ... let us go peacefully?”

“Let you *steal* part of my country?” Malcolm thundered. “Let you violate the sanctity of elections and destroy democracy? Are you seriously asking why we won’t just let you do that?”

“I think we’ve established that for you, democracy is simply your side winning all the time,” Tom said.

“We’ve established nothing of the kind,” Malcolm said. “But we did establish that your side wins as often as mine.”

“I dispute that, but even if I didn’t, your side considers our wins illegitimate,” Tom said.

“And vice versa,” Malcolm said.

“OK, if each side sees the other as illegitimate,” Tom said, “isn’t that further reason not to live together?”

“Like I said,” Malcolm replied, “people live all over. I have relatives in Red states. I want to be able to visit them.”

“That’s a trivial point,” Tom said. “You go overseas, don’t you? You can easily visit people in foreign countries. You could still visit your relatives.”

“People aren’t going to want to have to take a passport to go home for Thanksgiving,” Malcolm said.

“Isn’t Thanksgiving a racist-imperialist holiday anyway?” Tom asked. “But whatever. Taking a passport is hardly any trouble. Still, I’ll tell you what. The two countries can make a deal like the U.S. used to have with Canada, where you could cross the border

with a driver's license."

"Why would we want the hassle of crossing a border compared to what we have now?" Malcolm asked.

"It would be minimally more hassle than what we have now," Tom said. "Relatives in East and West Germany used to visit one another all the time. There were hundreds, even thousands, of border crossings daily. In *very* difficult circumstances—much more difficult than we would face. They managed it. We can too. Anyway, to the extent that there would be a greater hassle, the reason we would choose it is for all the good things that separation would bring, and the bad things it would avoid."

"OK, just to play along for a bit," Malcolm said, "even though I find all of this abhorrent, you are still underestimating the practical problem. Suppose I stipulated that the population is more sorted than I initially let on. Yes, there are many deep Blue and many deep Red states, and most have only gotten more Red or Blue. But there are also many closely divided states. Purple states, if you will. What about them?"

"What about them?" Tom replied.

"Well, which way do they go?" Malcolm asked.

"Whichever way they vote," Tom said.

"Suddenly you're a friend of the franchise!" Malcolm said. "But have you considered, Mr. Lincoln, that you're setting those states up for a repeat of Bleeding Kansas? In thoroughly Blue or Red states, the choice of which way to go will never be in doubt. But in Purple states, that vote will be extremely contentious and might lead to violence."

"Oh, I doubt that," Tom said. "People have lost their taste for war and political violence. People in the West, certainly. Look how few wars there've been in Europe since 1945. Even the Ukraine war is kind of the exception that proves the rule. Putin is having a hard time rallying Russians to the cause. Aging demographics and declining populations also make countries less warlike. Societies teeming with excesses of young men go to war. Societies teeming with golf courses, nursing homes, and early bird specials do not."

"Weren't you the one saying a few minutes ago that we need to separate to avoid war?" Malcolm asked. "Now you're dismissing the very possibility of war? I wouldn't be too confident on that score. Once this process gets going, who knows where it might lead?"

"But war is up to us," Tom said. "All we have to do is not fight and there won't be war."

“Wow,” Malcolm said, “and you say we Blues are naïve. Listen to you, sounding like a ’60s peacenik. ‘Give peace a chance.’ But we both know that human nature and hence human events are unpredictable. Passions will run high. The attempt at secession could easily lead to violence in evenly balanced states, where each side believes it will win, or at least has a chance to win, and doesn’t want to give in without a fight.”

“We’ll just have to manage that as best we can,” Tom said. “What’s the alternative?”

“The alternative is not to split!” Malcolm said. “Not to take the risk in the first place!”

“But we have to!” Tom said, “in order to survive!”

“Excuse me?” Malcolm said.

“Well, let’s get into that later,” Tom said. “Isn’t it enough for now to know that we don’t want to live with you? Why do you insist on ruling us?”

“Wait—who says we ‘rule’ you?” Malcolm said. “Your anti-democracy mania is oozing out of every pore. I guess you think every time you lose an election you are being ‘ruled’?”

“And even when we win,” Tom said. “Our preferences never get made into policy. When we win, your side goes into ‘resistance’ mode and uses all your powers to stop what we want.”

“That’s paranoia,” Malcolm said.

“Really?” Tom said, “There was no ‘resistance’ to Trump?”

“‘Resistance’ is just another word for ‘opposition,’” Malcolm said, “you know: part of democracy.”

“Why did you need a new word?” Tom asked. “And let’s not kid ourselves. ‘Opposition’ is organizing to vote against legislation and the like. ‘Resistance’ is using all your powers in the bureaucracy, media, and private sector to stop anything and everything, to completely sabotage the incumbent administration. That ridiculous low-level lackey who wrote that op-ed and later that book explained things well. ‘Resistance’ from inside the government—by people who are supposed to be loyal, or at least follow orders—means sabotage and insubordination.”

“‘Follow orders’!” said Malcolm. “Where have I heard *that* before? But, look: you can’t expect moral, conscientious people to carry out immoral, unconstitutional orders.”

“What are we talking about here?” Tom asked. “The Holocaust? Of course not. But it’s a leftist fever-dream that anything like that ever happened, or threatened to happen,

in America. Your side compares everything it doesn't like to the Holocaust. A border wall is Nazi to you."

"I would think a right-winger like you would see that a border wall is literally Communist," Malcolm said.

"That was a wall to keep people *in*, not *out*!" Tom said.

"No human being is illegal," Malcolm said.

"That's just a slogan," Tom said. "And some human beings are *illegally* present in places where they're not supposed to be, because they *illegally* crossed a border they weren't legally allowed to cross. That's the whole point. Trump was elected to build a wall and enforce the border. Yet your 'resistance' blocked him at every turn. There's nothing unconstitutional about a wall—not that your side even cares about the Constitution—"

"That's a ridiculous slander and you know it," Malcolm said. "Anyway, a wall is definitely immoral."

"We totally disagree on that," Tom said, "and, again, will never agree. So why, again, must we live together? But more to the point, you talk about 'democracy.' According to 'democracy,' winning elections is supposed to matter. It's supposed to change policy. But when we win, nothing changes. When you win, you get what you want. When we win, you get what you want. How is that 'democracy'?"

"There are Constitutional guardrails that delineate what can and can't be done," Malcolm said. "You were always the Constitution-worshiping conservative. When did that change?"

"What's unconstitutional about a wall?" Tom replied. "And you keep shifting terms. One minute you object to something as unconstitutional, the next you admit that's not true and instead say it's immoral."

"I never admitted any such thing!" Malcolm said.

"So how is a border wall unconstitutional?" Tom asked.

"Well, what Abbott is doing right now in Texas definitely is," Malcolm said. "Immigration and the border are federal responsibilities and the states have no authority to do what he's doing."

"Leaving aside whether the states really have no authority over their borders," Tom said, "and also whether it's really true that states are obligated to sit back and do nothing while the federal government refuses to meet its responsibilities, you're making

an apples-to-oranges comparison. I asked how a border wall is unconstitutional and you reply with some state action that you disapprove of. But of course, Trump was trying to build the wall at the *federal* level. How was *that* unconstitutional?”

“It’s immoral,” Malcolm said, “and it’s bad policy. Demographically, our economy and our social safety net need more people—”

“You’re changing terms *again*,” Tom said. “Look, let’s just agree to disagree. We’re never going to agree on this or anything else. So I keep coming back to: why do we live together?”

“And as I’ve said,” Malcolm said, “we don’t. You live in Texas.”

“But that hardly matters,” Tom said, “since, as I also said, California always gets its way. There is no real ‘federalism’ any more in any meaningful sense. Anything you want done, you impose nationally. Anything you don’t want done, you forbid.”

“‘Federalism’ is just code for states’ rights, which is code for we-all-know-what,” Malcolm said.

“Gimmie a break,” Tom said. “There hasn’t been slavery since 1865. There hasn’t been Jim Crow since 1964.”

“The legacy of both is everywhere,” Malcolm said. “Systemic racism defines this country.”

“What you really mean is it defines white people,” Tom said.

“Well, it certainly doesn’t define Blacks!” Malcolm said.

“That points back to my larger point,” Tom said. “You people—”

“‘You people’,” Malcolm repeated.

“You know what I mean,” Tom said. “Liberals. Democrats. Elites. Blues. You think we Republicans are all horrible, irredeemable racists. Why then do you want to live with us? Why would you expect us to want to live with you? You offer us nothing. You present no positive vision for a united country, and certainly not for our parts of the country or for any of our concerns. You spew nothing but hatred and insults at us and then you get angry when we don’t return your insults with love.”

“More crazed paranoia,” Malcolm said. “What are you even talking about? All the hatred in this country comes from your side. The FBI has totally had to shift its focus to rightwing domestic terrorism. We’re the ones fighting hate.”

“The FBI is cooking the books to find ‘domestic extremism’ where none exists as an excuse to persecute conservatives on behalf of the Democratic Party,” Tom said.

“Do you realize how crazy you sound?” Malcolm asked.

“This is exasperating,” Tom said, “but still proves my point. We disagree, of course, about which side is truly hateful. But your counter-accusation that we’re the hateful ones is only more evidence of your hate for us. You hate what you see as hateful.”

“Really?” Malcolm said. “You think we’re hateful; that’s what you’re saying, right?”

“Yes,” Tom said.

“So by your logic, doesn’t that mean that you hate us?” Malcolm asked.

“No,” Tom said, “we just want to be left alone. And we want to leave you alone.”

“How are we supposed to sit idly by while you oppress women and BIPOCs?” Malcolm asked.

“How are we oppressing anyone?” Tom countered. “We don’t even have the power to do so, even if we wanted to, which we don’t. You control everything!”

“Your persecution complex is amazing,” Malcolm said, “especially for someone so privileged.”

“How am I privileged?” Tom asked. “You’re the tech exec. You’re rich. You live in a beautiful, expensive house. I had to leave my hometown—even my home state—because I couldn’t afford to live here anymore.”

“You’re privileged because you’re white,” Malcolm said.

“So are you!” Tom said.

“I reject my privilege,” Malcolm said. “And, I use the part of it I can’t get rid of, to be a good ally and work for social justice.”

“What does that even mean?” Tom said. “If a seven-figure income and a house in Pac Heights, plus another in Carmel Highlands, is ‘rejecting privilege,’ what does accepting it look like?”

“We’re going in circles again,” Malcolm said.

“Finally, we agree on something,” Tom said. “Look, let’s get back on track. Why don’t you tell me why it is that you so strongly reject any kind of separation.”

“OK,” Malcolm said. “Well, first of all, it’s impractical. Like I said earlier, everyone lives all over. Even the least diverse states, politically, are still a quarter to a third people of the other party.”

“True,” Tom said, “but so what? Republicans right now live in Democratic states, and vice versa. They must not hate it, otherwise they would leave. Why should that change after a separation? And, anyway, surely part of the arrangement should be a right of emigration. Blues who feel trapped in a Red country should be allowed to move, and vice versa.”

“But,” Malcolm said, “there are a lot of people who can’t move their business or jobs because their livelihoods are tied to certain geographic locations. There’s no way around this, as far as I can see. So that would mean that within both the Red side and the Blue side, there would remain a marginalized but politically motivated group of people who would not cease to pose many of the present problems you seek to address with the two-state solution.”

“Maybe,” Tom said. “But that shouldn’t mean that two politically and culturally incompatible peoples should have to live together forever. Like I said, if after the separation someone who’s not politically aligned with the new country wants to stay, he can stay.”

“He’,” Malcolm repeated.

“Or she,” Tom said. “Geez. The point is, anyone who wants to stay can stay, and anyone who wants to leave can leave. I realize leaving won’t be easy for everyone. Each person (or family) will have different priorities. But the way you’re presenting it, if only one person says they can’t leave because of work or whatever, they get to have a veto over the whole process for everyone else.”

“What about Purple states?” Malcolm asked.

“I don’t see that as nearly as much of a problem as you do,” Tom said. “But, OK, if you think referenda in those states will lead to violence, then we can just not hold any there. Let only the really Red states go their own way.”

“I like how you studiously avoid the word ‘secede’,” Malcolm said. “However, it’s not so easy as that. Once a secession movement starts anywhere in the country, Blues and Reds everywhere are going to take sides. Even if Purple states are not formally contemplating joining one side or the other, their populations will divide. It will be like two bitter groups of fans at a soccer match, each looking for a fight.”

“All you do is raise objections—”

“That’s what you told me to do!” Malcolm said.

“—without admitting any of the possible benefits,” Tom continued.

“Benefits are your department,” Malcolm said. “I’m against this, remember? But OK, suppose you can pull off what you’re saying. There will still be Blue pockets in your Red country, and vice versa. And not like one or two people, either, but millions. Even if those people are a minority, millions is a lot. What are you going to do about them?”

“One obvious thing,” Tom said, “is that the division doesn’t have to fall along current state lines. States have divided before over political reasons; that’s how West Virginia was created. Right now, Illinois—for instance—is politically divided. Downstate has more in common with rural Missouri, Kentucky, and Indiana than with Chicago. Western Maryland has more in common with West Virginia than with Baltimore; same with Western Virginia versus the DC suburbs. There’s nothing sacred about current state lines. The choice on which way to go could be made county-by-county. Hell, even county lines aren’t sacred. The point is, a political sort is more practicable than you let on, once you start thinking past current state and county lines. As for any people left in an area they no longer feel politically at home in, as I said: they can stay if they want or leave if they want.”

“But if they stay,” Malcolm said, “what then? This is a problem from both directions. The majority will be tempted to tyrannize the minority. And the minority will likely radicalize against threats—real or perceived—to its interests. Polarization and instability will rise.”

“Well,” Tom said, “if I had my way, any Blues who remained in a Red state would be given a fair amount of autonomy. It couldn’t be complete; after all, the point of separation is to control our political destiny. But things that don’t impinge on sovereignty or some fundamental principle would be allowed. I would hope—but not expect—the Blue country to give the same autonomy to Red communities within their borders. Since I expect they won’t, I expect most Reds would leave Blue-controlled areas, but many Blues would remain in Red areas. As for tyranny of the majority, how is that not what we have now? A Blue majority having its way with a Red minority? Assuming we even *are* a minority and not a majority ruled by a hostile elite.”

“Paranoia again,” Malcolm said. “And peevishness. Since you keep losing elections, by definition you’re a minority.”

“A moment ago,” Tom said, “when your purpose was to mollify me and blunt my argument, you denied we lost elections. I see you’re being more truthful now. You should also admit, then, that for you, all ‘democracy’ really means is Blues outvoting Reds, forever.”

“Is it our fault that you can’t compete?” Malcolm asked.

“When you rig the rules, yes,” Tom replied.

“More election denial,” Malcolm said.

“It’s not denial,” Tom said. “Your side brags about ‘fortifying’ elections and ‘expanding the franchise,’ by which you mean changing the rules to favor your party. Elections for you are nothing but performative shows to generate a patina of legitimacy for your undemocratic rule. When you call us ‘fascists’ and ‘extremists’ and illegitimate, that means you think we ought to lose every time, that it’s a moral imperative that we lose.”

“Well?” Malcolm said. “If your program is so extreme and threatening, how can we not feel that way? How can we not take steps to stop you?”

“But how,” Tom asked, “is our program ‘extreme and threatening’? Wanting to have a border is ‘extreme’? In what way do we threaten you?”

“You’ve gutted reproductive rights,” Malcolm replied.

“We’ve done no such thing!” Tom exclaimed. “The court simply returned the issue to the states! All the Blue states immediately passed laws that are, if anything, more pro-abortion than before! This is all just further proof that we’ll never agree on anything. How can we have ‘democracy’ if one side is forever shut out of the process and the other side thinks that’s justice? That’s not ‘democracy’; that’s a one-party state.”

“We wouldn’t feel this way if you weren’t so extreme,” Malcolm said. “If you’d be reasonable, things could go back to normal. Republicans used to be reasonable. Ford. George H. W. Bush. Hell, *both* Bushes. Even Reagan by comparison.”

“That’s not what you said about them at the time!” Tom said. “This is typical of your side. Demonize as literally Hitler whoever is in office from our side. Then, as soon as he’s gone, start praising him as a reasonable moderate in order to demonize the next guy. When you know full well that, based on the positions they took at the time, all of them would be beyond the pale today. Bush was against homosexual marriage. So was Clinton, but we can leave that aside. Today, being for gay marriage is, in your worldview, an absolute requirement for being a decent human being and a non-fascist politician. But you have the gall to sit here and tell me that Bush was OK after all! It’s infuriating. Anyway, *you* get to define what is ‘reasonable,’ not us. That means that only those opinions or wishes of ours that you approve of, are the ones we’re allowed to hold. How is that not one-party rule?”

“Let’s get back on track,” Malcolm said. “What are you going to do about the cities? They’re almost entirely Blue.”

“So what?” Tom said. “They’d have autonomy, just like I said.”

“Do you really think that will work?” Malcolm asked. “Having these pockets of relative wealth and sophistication amidst, let’s face it, huge swaths of backwardness and poverty?”

“Your snobbery is something to behold,” Tom said. “You think that just because we’re more rural and less educated that we’re inferior. And let’s put ‘educated’ in quotes, since what you really have is less an education than a credential.”

“Stooping to personal insults, I see,” Malcolm said. “But you still haven’t confronted the core problem. A split would leave the most important human capital in the Blue country, or at least in Blue areas, primarily in cities. Red areas might be ‘free’ in some sense that seems important to you now, but they would be unable to conduct sophisticated finance, capital formation, or administrative services. They’d be at a disadvantage with respect to manufacturing and have an advantage only in resources, which they would need to hire outsiders to extract.”

“Well, that’s a lot to unpack,” Tom said. “But a disadvantage in manufacturing? In the Rust Belt?”

“Key word being ‘rust’,” Malcolm said. “And most of the Rust Belt is Blue.”

“At the state level, maybe,” Tom said, “but that’s just the product of big-city dominance. Once you get outside the cities, those states get very Red. Anyway, with a corporate leadership not addicted to outsourcing, and political leadership looking out for the common good and not just donor service, I like our chances on that score. One of the main differences between Red and Blue, it seems to me, is the relative importance we each place on finance. Your side seems to see it as the highest occupation and a kind of natural aristocracy, or at least second to tech, whereas ours sees bankers as arrogant and even parasitic.”

“‘Parasitic?’” Malcolm said. “Adding anti-Semitism to the mix?”

“You racialize everything,” Tom said. “The point is that bankers are rent-seekers. They accumulate tremendous fortunes without producing anything.”

“That just shows your naivety,” Malcolm said, “as there can be no progress or sophistication without finance. Capital allocation is the key to economic growth. That’s what bankers do. You’re an accountant, and you don’t realize that?”

“I get that,” Tom replied. “But its overall value depends on how much one prioritizes ‘progress’ and ‘sophistication’—and even on how one defines those terms. Anyway, sure, banking is to some degree essential. Are there really no bankers in Red America? Or no people capable of banking? Or no culturally Red bankers currently in Blue

America who would move after a split? So I think this problem would solve itself. We'd have a banking sector, but a reduced one. If we need access to capital or services we don't have domestically, we can always travel to New York—the same way business people from all over the world do now. You can keep your banker-über-alles economy, thank you very much.”

“Well,” Malcolm said, “I still maintain that your little Red rump state will be small and poor. All the really productive industries are and will continue to be in Blue areas.”

“So?” Tom said. “Why is that your concern? If we'd prefer to be smaller and poorer without you, do you really think it's your place to force us to stay for our alleged benefit? Also, there's something incongruous about your assertion. Like all Blues, you paint the Red States as horrible, blighted places. But net population flows suggest otherwise. Blue states are losing population to Red ones, not the reverse. If we're so bad, why is that happening?”

“I may as well ask this now,” Malcolm said. “You keep saying ‘we,’ as if there is some Red consensus, and more to the point, as if you were some sort of Red leader. Haha. ‘Red Leader.’ Are you an X-wing pilot? Hahaha. Anyway, *is* there a Red consensus? If there is, which I doubt or anyway don't see, surely *you* are not its leader.”

“I never claimed to be the leader of anything,” Tom said. “I'm just speculating as to what might happen. I don't know if there is a Red consensus yet. But one may be emerging.”

“This plan of yours,” Malcolm said, “as I've already noted, effectively amounts to some of you stealing a part of the country. How is that moral? And why should you expect the rest of the country to go along?”

“We've already addressed that,” Tom said. “This is a proposal to secure civil peace and avoid conflict. The way we see it, the only way to stay together is for one side to rule the other. In practice, that means for you to rule us, since we don't have the power to rule you and wouldn't want to even if we did. We've already established that, for you, ‘democracy’ means you outvoting us forever and ruling us, effectively, without our consent.”

“Voting *is* consent,” Malcolm replied.

“In a fair system,” Tom said, “in which elections actually have consequences and change the government, yes. But not in a system in which elections are pre-rigged by ballot-harvesting, propaganda and censorship, and in which victories are routinely overturned in the courts, blocked by bureaucracies, and fought by the media and all the corporations. Nobody consents to any of that. But we keep getting off track. Please continue with your objections.”

“What about the currency?” Malcolm asked.

“Easy,” Tom said. “We have two choices. First, we could keep the dollar. It wouldn’t be the first transnational currency, so there’s precedent. Keeping it involves the least amount of difficulty, at least at first. The new countries’ largest trading partners—by far—would be one another. Remaining on the dollar would make such trade vastly easier and less expensive. Both sides might also, for the time being, conclude that the dollar’s worldwide reserve status is worth maintaining. For quite a while after any split, the resulting new countries would continue to function in global markets as one united economy. At least, if we could avoid silly quarrels.”

“My, my, aren’t you the optimist!” Malcolm said. “But you’ve been saying all along that the country is on the verge of war. Now you say that war can be easily avoided. Which is it?”

“My argument,” Tom said, “or my fear, is that living together raises the prospect of war. If we could get some distance, tempers might cool and the prospect might go down. That’s my hope, anyway.”

“But they may just as well rise,” Malcolm said. “Isn’t that the argument of your beloved founders in those early *Federalist Papers*? That the thirteen colonies need to unite, because if they remain separate countries—whether thirteen or two or some number in between—their quarrels will inevitably lead to war? Doesn’t your other hero George Washington say the same in his Farewell Address?”

“He does,” Tom conceded, “but circumstances were different then. The North American continent was being stalked by great European empires. The nascent USA was very vulnerable. And it didn’t have the same divisions as now. If we’re going to cite the *Federalist*, let’s also remember *Federalist 2*, in which Jay remarks how fortuitous it is that the American people by and large share the same ancestry, the same customs, the same language, the same religion, and the same principles of government. We can’t say that about the USA today!”

“Earlier you were also railing against financial interests,” Malcolm said. “I assume you’re one of those people who believe the Federal Reserve is a conspiracy of bankers to keep Middle America down? So why would you, or anyone else on your team, want to stay on the dollar when the dollar will still, from your perspective, be controlled by your enemies?”

“Maybe we wouldn’t,” Tom said. “I’m just saying it’s an option. Another option would be to create a new currency. That’s what the Czech Republic and Slovakia did in 1993. Or, since you’ve already called me a neo-Confederate—a charge I deny, by the way—I may as well also mention that the Confederate States of America created a new currency within weeks.”

“One that declined precipitously thereafter,” Malcolm said.

“But that’s because it was a fiat currency that lost value as Confederate military fortunes declined,” Tom replied. “One advantage, from the Red point of view, of having a separate currency is that we could back it with a real asset. The founders were so disdainful—and fearful—of currency not backed by some physical standard that four separate provisions of the Constitution actually ban the government from issuing paper money! That’s all gone by the wayside, like so much of the Constitution, but we could get it back in our own country.”

“Really?” Malcolm said. “You have enough gold for that?”

“Maybe,” Tom replied. “I honestly don’t know. But why would the currency have to be based on a gold standard? Red America would have a lot of natural resources, including at least some gold and silver, with which to back a currency. We could tie a new ‘Red dollar’ to a basket of commodities, indexed to things Red America produces in abundance. If foreign markets viewed the new ‘redback’ skeptically, overseas transactions could for a time still be made in dollars, the same way that today the entire global oil market is conducted in U.S. dollars. Anyway, the point is, none of this is insurmountable.”

“Here’s where your side’s lack of human capital and financial expertise would be a real detriment,” Malcolm said. “Where are you going to find the people to create this new currency?”

“Why should that concern you?” Tom asked. “It seems a like a lot of your objections are paternalistic. ‘Here’s how this will go badly for you.’ Well, we appreciate your concern, but the main question at issue is that we don’t want your paternalism. We want to be free to make our own choices, including our own mistakes, and to stand or fall on our own.”

“But if we gave up the dollar,” Malcolm said, “American dominance over global finance and commerce would end.”

“What’s that to us?” Tom replied. “We Reds don’t benefit from that; you Blues do.”

“You benefit from it more than you know,” Malcolm said. “And once those benefits disappear, you’d feel it. Higher prices. Less purchasing power. Lower standards of living. We’d *all* feel it.”

“Maybe so,” Tom said. “But that’s a price I’d be willing to pay for liberty, and I bet millions of Reds would agree with me.”

“It may not be a price *we’re* willing to pay,” Malcolm said. “Did you ever think about

that? Anyway, what about the debt? There's an obvious source of quarrel. Neither new country is going to feel responsible for the totality of it, and so neither is going to want to pay it. Your side, I would assume, will be especially eager to shirk it."

"Well," Tom answered, "if we do, the consequences would be on us. Under successor state doctrine, a new country assumes the debts of its predecessor. If it tries to repudiate it, it can—and will—be locked out of the markets of debt-holding countries. I suppose this is a matter for each new country to decide. Blue America, with its heavily financialized economy, will not want to lose access to markets."

"But the Reds might be willing to risk that," Malcolm said, "possibly because they lack the financial sophistication to understand the consequences. I could see a Red government saying 'That's banker debt incurred by coastal snobs and we won't pay it.' The problem is, the consequences won't fall just on Red America but on all of us."

"We could work that out if we wanted to," Tom replied. "Divvy up the debt based on population, GDP—some formula. What happens today is that both sides—well, really, your side, but for the sake of comity, let's say both sides—seek to plunder the Treasury for their private good. If we split and we're both responsible for our own spending, the idea of government budgets as an infinite resource would change. A collection of like-minded states under a new government could elect to pay off their allocated debt, and/or refinance it at lower rates, once fiscal prudence is established. Again, this may be complicated but it's not insurmountable."

"Water," Malcolm said.

"No, thank you." Tom replied.

"Water," Malcolm repeated. "No one can live without it, but for the most part, Red America has more than Blue. Many Blue cities—New York, San Francisco, L.A., Vegas—get their water from Red areas. This would conceivably give the Reds the potential for resource blackmail against the Blues. You were asking why Blue America won't just let Red go. That's one reason."

"I guess there are two options or possibilities," Tom said. "One would be for those Blue cities to persuade the rural areas from which they get their water to stay with them, politically. Your core argument is that unity benefits everyone, right? I would put it differently—that you believe Blue rule benefits Red subjects—but either way, if the argument is correct, then persuading the rural watersheds to stay with the Blue cities should be a cinch, no? If not, then both sides would have to negotiate an agreement, some kind of mutually beneficial exchange. Water would be a big leverage opportunity for Red America, to be sure, but as you keep pointing out, Blue America has much leverage of its own. Each side would have reasons to make a deal."

"Contiguity," Malcolm said.

“Yes, I figured we’d get to this sooner or later,” Tom said. “In a way, we’ve already touched on it. It’s the same basic issue as population distribution, and the differences between the cities, suburbs, exurbs, and rural areas. I admit there’s no easy answer here, but let’s think it through a little. I expect—and expect you’ll agree—that every state, county, city, and community would be pulled in two contrary or at least hard-to-reconcile directions. On the one hand, each will want to align with and even formally join other communities that share its own social, cultural, economic, and political profile. On the other hand, people will want whatever new political entity they join to be as territorially large *and* contiguous as possible. Obviously, not everyone can have both. Certain groupings or clumps are easy enough to predict, though. California, Oregon, and Washington—at least their western, coastal halves—make an obvious, cohesive state, as do New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and likely the rest of New England. You could also see another cluster emerging around the Great Lakes—not of entire states, perhaps, but of cities, suburbs and connecting counties. But that does force the question: would Blue America be one country or two? Or even more? The way things look now, Blue America is going to have a hard time maintaining coast-to-coast contiguity. The only way that’s even conceivable is if you somehow take Texas—which some believe is possible with enough Latino immigration, though even that is no sure bet, with Texas Hispanics starting out more conservative than, say, California Mexicans, and also trending right. So assuming no contiguity, the question for the Blue clusters would be whether to try to remain one united country—like the original Pakistan—or separate formally into distinct sovereignties. There really aren’t many great examples of non-contiguous single-sovereignty states. Pakistan failed, after all. I guess there is Kaliningrad today, but it’s very small. To the extent that this used to work in the past, it was under inherited monarchies where the people were used to having no say in who ruled them. Still, just because examples are rare doesn’t mean it’s impossible. The pressures from the big interests in the Blue sections to stay together would, I expect, be immense. Wall Street would not want to give up Silicon Valley, nor vice versa. Staying together, noncontiguously, would be the ultimate test of the techie boast that physical contact is meaningless when technology can so seamlessly ‘bring people together.’ Then again, splitting up would be the ultimate test of the globalist boast that nations and borders don’t matter—all that matters are the talents that individuals bring to the table.”

“That’s all very interesting,” Malcolm said, “but entirely fanciful. None of that is going to happen. Think about it from the perspective of your own argument. If America is really controlled by Blue elites who rule solely for their own self-interest, why would those elites ever allow, much less agree to, a breakup that would reduce their own power?”

“I was hoping they’d do so out of the goodness of their hearts,” Tom snickered.

“In your telling, there *is* no goodness in our hearts,” Malcolm said. “Anyway, what about coastal access?”

“I don’t see that as much of a problem,” Tom said. “Both countries would have ample access to the sea. Yours would have an advantage, to be sure, with most of the important ports in solidly Blue areas. But we’d still have ports on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts.”

“But not on the Pacific,” Malcolm said.

“Maybe not,” Tom said, “but maybe. Not Seattle, San Francisco, or L.A., certainly. But possibly San Diego. It would depend on which way the city, and surrounding county, wanted to go. It’s one of the most conservative parts of California and its military roots keep it right-leaning. It wasn’t that long ago that Republicans had a 4-1 majority on the Board of Supervisors. They still have two seats even today.”

“The city is solidly Blue,” Malcolm said. “And the county went overwhelmingly for Hillary and Biden.”

“Well, look,” Tom said, “if it doesn’t want to come with us, it doesn’t have to. That means we won’t have a Pacific port. So be it. The USA didn’t have a Pacific port for the first 72 years of its existence—241, if you start the clock at Jamestown. There’s nothing magical about a Pacific port. It would be better to have one, but hardly fatal not to have one.”

“Now we’ve come directly to the biggest problem of all,” Malcolm said. “The military.”

“That’s a tough one, admittedly,” Tom said. “But if we were committed to resolving this peacefully, we could solve it. The easiest way, of course, would be not to break up the military in the first place, but allow for more distance between the two sides. Call it ‘radical federalism.’ Maximum domestic autonomy in exchange for continued political unity for the purposes of defense, like one of those ancient defensive leagues.”

“And what would you do with that ‘domestic autonomy’?” Malcolm asked.

“Well, we would—” Tom started.

“I’ll tell you exactly what you’d do,” Malcolm continued, “you’d discriminate against BIPOCs, women, immigrants, and anyone who doesn’t fit your narrow-minded, bigoted, racist worldview.”

“We absolutely would not!” Tom said. “We would treat everyone—”

“Your track record here is terrible,” Malcolm said. “Federal intervention has been consistently required to force you to treat people of color with equity, dignity, and respect. It’s still required now. So there’s no way we’d go along with that.”

“Well, then, that leaves total separation,” Tom said, “which would require splitting the military.”

“Good luck with that!” Malcolm laughed.

“I’m not so sure it’s impossible,” Tom said, “at least, it wouldn’t be if there were a good faith effort on both sides to find an equitable solution. Now, I haven’t fully thought it through. But just spit-balling here—first of all, we could say that bases go with the surrounding territory. Bases in deep Blue areas go with the Blues, and vice versa. Assets might be trickier. But possession-is-nine-tenths might help here: whatever is on one of those bases goes with the base.”

“This just shows me how unserious you are about all this,” Malcolm said. “I thought you Reds were supposed to understand the military better than we Blues. The most important things on those bases are people, and they don’t come with the base. They are constantly rotated off and on.”

“Yes,” Tom said, “that’s true. But, like everyone else, they could be offered a choice.”

“That’s fine with me,” Malcolm said, “as the military has been trending Blue over the last few decades: more urban, more coastal, more Democratic, more diverse.”

“I see your point,” Tom said.

“Even worse for you,” Malcolm continued, “from an asset perspective, the most important pieces of equipment the military has are its eleven aircraft carriers. The only one of them that is not homeported in a Blue state is in Japan. That means you would end up with zero of them.”

“If we were serious about a peaceful resolution,” Tom said, “we could negotiate over them. Also, while it’s true that they’re in Blue states, they’re not exactly in Blue areas. San Diego is still fairly Red by California standards. Norfolk, apart from the central city, is quite Red by any standard.”

“True,” Malcolm said, “but still, it all comes down to personnel. The only way you can claim those assets is via the sailors who operate them. Leaving aside the fact that military personnel aren’t reliable partisan Republicans any more, they’re also pretty reliably apolitical when it comes to their oaths of service. They just won’t sail a ship into some Red port in order to support your revolution.”

“Maybe not,” Tom conceded. “But you’re forgetting something. Some assets can’t be moved. Like the 450 nuclear missiles in the ground. Those are overwhelmingly in Red states.”

“But, again,” Malcolm said, “the people who control them can be and are moved, all the time.”

“But what’s more important?” Tom asked. “The staff or the weapons’ physical locations?”

“Without the people with the codes,” Malcolm said, “the missiles can’t be launched. A weapon that can’t be used is not a threat.”

“That assumes,” Tom replied, “that no one in Red America will be able to figure out how to launch them—indeed, that there won’t be any former military men loyal to the Red side who already know.”

“*And* who have the codes?” Malcolm asked.

“I suppose that, in your mind, codebreaking is like banking?” Tom said. “One of those things that Red Americans just can’t do? Anyway, the missiles can’t be moved. Reds would control the areas around them, which means they would control access to them. Which means not only could they deny Blues access, they could permit access to Red engineers and codebreakers who might figure out how to launch them. At the very least, Blues could never be sure that Reds hadn’t solved that problem. But why are we even discussing this? As if we intend to nuke one another. Would you really do that to us? We wouldn’t do it to you.”

“I’m not so sure you’re as peace-minded as you here insist, but fine,” Malcolm said.

“The point is,” Tom said, “the possession of virtually any number of nuclear weapons, no matter how few, all but guarantees the security of the possessing state. Nuclear-armed states simply do not get attacked, at least not by other states. It just hasn’t happened in the nuclear era, for obvious reasons.”

“Supposing that’s true,” Malcolm said, “you’re still skipping over an obvious objection. What makes you think the military would go along with any division? Wouldn’t it be at least as likely to view what you’re trying to do as secession and fight you?”

“My whole proposal presumes peaceful negotiations,” Tom said, “not some armed rebellion. Like Ashley Wilkes, I hope the Yankees will let us go peacefully. Kidding aside, presumably some nontrivial percentage of the military will support the effort *and* want to live in a Red country.”

“Maybe some of them,” Malcolm said, “but a majority? These are people whose whole lives are defined by patriotic attachment to the USA as a fifty-state country and global superpower. It seems much more likely that the majority of them will see it as their patriotic duty to hold the country together.”

“Or will simply be loyal to the Blue regime,” Tom said.

“Put it however you want,” Malcolm said. “As far as the outcome is concerned, what’s the difference? And you’re overlooking self-interest. Smaller countries mean smaller, poorer, less capable militaries. When you’re already number one, you don’t trade down willingly. The people currently in the military certainly won’t want to, nor will the most influential retirees.”

“I guess we have to count the military as a great unknown,” Tom said. “But like all the other issues, this one too is hardly insurmountable, if the will is there to find a solution.”

“But it isn’t,” Malcolm said. “I mean that both analytically and normatively. As an analyst, I can tell you right now that the coastal regions and nearly all highly educated Americans, wherever they live, will oppose this idea. For myself, I oppose it too, for all the reasons I’ve already stated.”

“See, this is what doesn’t make sense to me,” Tom said. “You hate us—”

“Still with the paranoia,” Malcolm interrupted. “We don’t hate. *You’re* the haters.”

“OK, fine,” Tom said. “You don’t hate us. Perhaps ‘hate’ is in fact the wrong word. You can only hate something you envy or fear. You certainly don’t envy or fear us.”

“You’re wrong that we don’t fear you,” Malcolm said. “We certainly fear what you might do. You tried to overthrow the government on January 6th.”

“Again with this?” Tom said. “Anyway, ‘contempt’ is a better description of your attitude toward us. You look down on us. You think we’re lesser beings. Dumb. Prejudiced. Racist. Backward. Uneducated. In a word, ‘deplorable.’ I ask again: why do you insist on living with us?”

“If you want to leave,” Malcolm said, “and can find anywhere that’ll take you, go.”

“That statement oozes with contempt,” Tom said. “You want to hear my theory?”

“Haven’t I been listening to nothing but your insane theories?” Malcolm said.

“I think you need us,” Tom said. “You need us, first, to do the scutwork that you look down on and don’t know how to do. Second, you need us as a villain, an enemy, to hold your coalition together—someone you can point to as the cause of all problems. Like ‘wreckers’ in the Soviet Union. Third, you need the contrast. There’s no beauty without ugliness. You’re convinced you’re beautiful, but you need us around as the ugly so that your beauty can shine.”

“Your imagination is truly dazzling,” Malcolm said.

“I’m not quite finished,” Tom said. “The last thing is the most important. You think two contradictory things at once. On the one hand, you think we are heretics, retrogrades, irrational, Nazis, haters, cavemen, etc. On the other hand, you have universal ideals. You hate us for being heretics, and you want to force us into the one true faith as you see it. You’re like the Spanish Inquisitors. You believe that by persecuting us, you are saving our souls.”

“I’ve never heard anything so astoundingly paranoid and fantastical,” Malcolm said.

“I knew you wouldn’t accept that,” Tom said. “So let’s stick with what your side already says on the record. You say we’re unproductive.”

“And that’s true, however much you deny it,” Malcolm said. “All the numbers show it.”

“Also not innovative,” Tom continued.

“Yep,” Malcolm said.

“Not creative, not dynamic, a net drag,” Tom said.

“All true,” Malcolm agreed.

“You’ve been saying for the longest time that we’re leeches,” Tom said, “that we consume more in resources—tax revenues, government spending, welfare benefits—than we produce.”

“The numbers don’t lie,” Malcolm said.

“Wouldn’t you benefit from getting rid of us leeches?” Tom asked.

“Some of my friends think so,” Malcolm admitted, “but most of us think the costs or dangers outweigh the gains. We would all suffer from a breakup. True, you’re a burden, but, in a sense, a necessary one—our cross to bear, so to speak.”

“We’d happily relieve you of that burden,” Tom said. “Anyway, lately you’ve even added a new wrinkle, accusing the Red states of having more crime.”

“The numbers don’t lie,” Malcolm repeated.

“But that statistic is deliberately misleading,” Tom said. “I won’t even go into how. The point is, if we’re this bad, why do you *want* to live with us?”

“Well,” Malcolm said, “I suppose we don’t, per se. I mean we certainly wouldn’t object if any—or most—of you emigrated away. But what you’re talking about is stealing land. We can’t allow that.”

“It wouldn’t be ‘stealing,’” Tom said. “I’m talking about a negotiated settlement that ceded some land—from your side’s perspective, inferior land. You guys are always boasting about how you have the best, richest places: most of the Eastern Seaboard, all of the West Coast. Fine, we stipulate that. We ask for none of it. All we want are parts of the hinterlands that you despise.”

“Plus the Gulf Coast,” Malcolm said, “and much of the Southern Atlantic coast. No, we can’t let that go. Think of the economic and infrastructure integration that’s been achieved. Why would we give that up?”

“No one would have to give anything up,” Tom said. “Plenty of bordering countries have tightly integrated economies. Just look at the U.S. and Canada.”

“The U.S. and Canada have friendly relations,” Malcolm said. “These two new Americas, Red and Blue, would be gripped by great animosity.”

“We’ve been through that,” Tom said. “Separation would be a means of *reducing* that animosity. Also, you seem to want to have it both ways. Depending on which suits your argument in a given moment, you either say that we get along fine or that we hate each other.”

“We certainly don’t love each other,” Malcolm said, “but things could be worse. Let’s not take steps that would increase the dislike.”

“That’s just another area where we disagree,” Tom said. “I don’t see how putting some distance between us would increase rather than decrease the bad blood.”

“But dividing the continent up into more countries opens us all up to foreign incursion,” Malcolm said. “Your precious founders were worried about that, you know.”

“I know,” Tom said. “But when they were worrying, the USA was small, underpopulated and undeveloped. It was facing far richer and militarily stronger European empires. None of that holds today. Even divided, the two American successor states would be among the most powerful in the world. We’d each have—if we could work out a deal—a nuclear arsenal sufficient to deter any attack. Europe is not a threat. Russia may be hostile. I actually believe we could have better relations with Russia. But even if we couldn’t, Russia is not a threat to this continent. Neither is China. Both are deterrable.”

“Hilarious that you right-wingers, who used to be Sinophobes, now dismiss the China threat entirely,” Malcolm said.

“I say it’s hilarious that you panda huggers, who never met a trade giveaway to China that you didn’t like, have suddenly become China hawks,” Tom retorted. China is an economic threat, one which your side makes worse with outsourcing and lousy trade deals. There is no threat of China crossing the Pacific and invading.”

“You can’t know that,” Malcolm said, “and surely the threat would rise, not decline, if the Chinese knew they were facing a divided rather than a united America. Which brings me to another point: a disunited USA could no longer maintain its global responsibilities.”

“What responsibilities?” Tom asked. “Or, let me put it this way. What responsibilities that are actual obligations? I get that we *choose* to do a lot of things. But how many of those are things that we really have to do?”

“The maintenance of global order,” Malcolm said, “and the protection of global trade routes depend on the U.S. military and our alliance structure. If we stop doing those things, no one will do them. Or worse, an adversary will fill the gap. Our commerce would be restricted and we’d get a lot poorer. Even worse, areas of vital interest might fall to enemies.”

“What areas?” Tom asked.

“The Persian Gulf, for one,” Malcolm answered.

“Why do we even care about the Gulf, except for the oil?” Tom said. “We could produce more at home. We *were* producing enough at home until your party regained power and restricted everything. Anyway, you guys want to get the whole global economy off oil!”

“Until we do,” Malcolm said, “and maybe even for a while after that, we can’t be indifferent to who controls the world’s largest oil reserves. Nor who controls the highly productive industrial zones of Northwest Europe and Northeast Asia.”

“Why is that any of our business?” Tom asked.

“Because our security and economy depend on it,” Malcolm said.

“As long as we have good relations with the countries in those regions and can trade freely,” Tom said, “I don’t see how any of this matters.”

“That’s my whole point,” Malcolm said. “Good relations and free trade depend on American leadership. Or at least on *someone’s* leadership. And it’s better for us if that leader is us rather than someone else.”

“And this is sufficient reason to keep the USA together despite all this current bad

blood?” Tom asked.

“It is to me,” Malcolm said.

“Well, it isn’t to me,” Tom said, “and not, I’m guessing, to tens of millions who agree with me. That means that to ‘keep it together,’ you’ll have to rule us by force.”

“What are you even talking about?” Malcolm said.

“I mean that if my side can never get what we want, and you will never let us go despite holding us in complete contempt, then the only way we stay together is if you rule us by force.”

“It’s not force!” Malcolm said. “It’s democracy!”

“It’s not democracy if we never win, if voting is just a performative exercise,” Tom said.

“If you’re losing, change your message to be more broadly appealing,” Malcolm said.

“Change to be more like you, you mean,” Tom said. “Then there’s no real choice. We either get outvoted, or we vote for what you want. Heads you win, tails we lose. *That’s* tyranny of the majority. You can only maintain that over the long term by force.”

“I don’t see any force happening at all,” Malcolm said.

“What about the response to January 6th?” Tom said. “There are dozens languishing in pre-trial detention for nearly two years over nonviolent offenses.”

“They were insurrectionists!” Malcolm cried. “They assaulted the very citadel of democracy and tried to overturn an election!”

“They were, at worst, a misguided mob of almost entirely nonviolent protestors,” Tom said.

“Five people died that day!” Malcolm said. “Including a cop!”

“A cop did *not* die that day,” Tom said. “He died the *next* day, of a preexisting medical condition. But a cop *did* shoot an unarmed protester that day.”

“One who was illegally breaking into the Capitol!” Malcolm said.

“So the party of ‘defund the police’ wants believes it’s OK to kill unarmed protestors for illegal entry?” Tom said. “You know how many times the left has occupied buildings, including capitols?”

“But not the *U.S. Capitol*, as the Congress was about to certify a presidential election!” Malcolm said.

“Look,” Tom said, “like I said. We’re never going to agree. On this or anything else. So why do we live together?”

“Now *you’re* going in circles,” Malcolm said.

“So let us go,” Tom said.

“You’re free to leave,” Malcolm said. “Flee to whatever country you want. But you’re not free to steal parts of *my* country.”

“The longer this goes on,” Tom said, “it plays out in only one of two ways. Since there’s no way for us to get any part of what we want politically, our discontent will rise. That will require further crackdowns from your side. Essentially, more force in the name of ‘protecting democracy.’ That might, eventually, provoke a reaction.”

“Now you’re threatening violence?” Malcolm demanded.

“No,” Tom replied, “I’m speculating as to what might happen. You may not feel you’re mistreating millions of people, but if millions feel mistreated, they may react. Condemning that reaction as ‘insurrection’ or whatever won’t stop it. It will have to be stopped by force. Force might prolong the life of your regime for a while, but even if it does, force is expensive. It will cost you a great deal of legitimacy and breed a great deal more resentment. That’s if you succeed. If you fail, then your regime falls. The other possibility is that your continued dominance just convinces Red America to give up, to disengage, to die off.”

“That would be your choice,” Malcolm said. “Sometimes certain people can’t adapt with the times.”

“It doesn’t sound like you’d be too unhappy with that outcome,” Tom said. “But have you really thought it through? Red America may not produce an abundance of bankers and coders, but it does produce farmers, truck drivers, road-builders, oil drillers, and other workers you need to keep this economy going. Plus the soldiers you need to maintain your empire.”

“‘Empire’ is just another scare-word, as if the United States has a territorial empire like 19th century Britain or ancient Rome,” Malcolm said. “We take the lead in upholding the rules-based international order for the benefit of our allies and partners—and, of course, ourselves. Anyway, you’re talking about easy tasks. Anyone can do them. In fact, Americans’ refusal to do these jobs over the last generation or so has required high levels of immigration.”

“Refusal to do them at the wages offered,” Tom said, “and in direct competition with immigrants who undercut native-born workers.”

“Capitalism is competition,” Malcolm said.

“Sure,” Tom said, “the point is, it’s not obvious that the alleged ‘refusal’ to do certain jobs is the *cause* of more immigration, or the result. I would say it’s the latter.”

“*My* point,” Malcolm said, “is that these are low skilled jobs. If your people don’t want to do them, others will.”

“You mean more immigrants,” Tom said.

“If necessary,” Malcolm said.

“I thought the Great Replacement was a conspiracy theory that’s not happening?” Tom said. “Now it’s necessary and good. What about all the ways immigration changes the culture and politics? Those don’t bother you?”

“First of all, what’s necessary is necessary,” Malcolm said, “so whether it bothers me or not is irrelevant. But, no, it doesn’t bother me. Immigrants bring new life, new talents, new vibrancy to moribund societies.”

“It’s precisely this change that my side objects to,” Tom said. “We want to continue to recognize the country we grew up in.”

“Then do these jobs so we don’t need more immigrants,” Malcolm said.

“If we did, would you secure the border?” Tom asked. “No, you wouldn’t, because you *want* the societal change and, in the nearer term, you need the votes.”

“Whatever,” Malcolm said. “Immigration is really a side issue because all those jobs will disappear anyway because of automation.”

“You’re not exactly denying my point,” Tom said. “In fact, you’re affirming it. You intend to create conditions in which we won’t have a place, and so have no choice but to—what? Die out?”

“Like I said,” Malcolm replied, “some people can’t adjust to the times. It’s always been this way. Do you think the people alive today in Europe or the USA are literally the descendants of *all* the people who lived 100 years ago? Of course not. Some couldn’t adapt and died out.”

“So you’re a social Darwinist?” Tom countered.

“That’s just another scare-term conservatives trot out when they confront an unpleasant truth that contradicts their simplistic worldview,” Malcolm said.

“Funny,” Tom interjected, “I remember when it was liberals accusing conservatives of ‘social Darwinism.’”

“But it’s just a fact,” Malcolm continued, “that some bloodlines do disappear from the gene pool, and that’s nobody’s fault.”

“Except it *is* someone’s fault when they create conditions that cause or speed up that disappearance,” Tom said. “Which is what you’re doing. Given what has been said, I have to assume deliberately. But what if we don’t want to die?”

“Then you should adapt,” Malcolm said. “Straighten up and fly right.”

“But what if we don’t want to ‘adapt?’” Tom replied. “What if we want to live as we always have?”

“There’s nothing stopping you,” Malcolm said. “Except, I don’t know: modernity, change, progress—”

“*You’re* stopping us!” Tom said. “You impose new mandates on us constantly! You change the rules at will! And, to repeat, you insist on creating and perpetuating conditions in which we *can’t* live as we have. No, I’m more convinced than ever that if our way of life is to survive—if *we* are to survive—we must separate. And, again, since you think we’re useless, why not just let us go?”

“Haven’t we been through that?” Malcolm asked. “So let me ask you this instead. You’re a big Lincoln guy, or at least you used to claim to be. Lincoln opposed secession—fought a war to stop it. Now you, the self-professed Lincolnite, want secession. How do you square that?”

“Back to this, eh,” Tom said. “But OK, sure, I’ll answer. The first point, I already made, but since you ask, I’ll repeat it. The nation was divided on one issue during the Civil War: slavery. And more specifically, the expansion of slavery into the territories. Lincoln and his followers hated slavery, but everyone except the most radical abolitionists were willing to tolerate it where it existed. They just didn’t want it to expand. They had three basic reasons. First, they thought that slavery is simply morally wrong. It’s one thing to tolerate it where it exists when it’s very difficult to get rid of, but quite another to choose it for its own sake or as a ‘positive good.’ Allowing it into the territories amounted to the latter and they couldn’t abide that. Second, they were concerned with slavery’s negative effects on free labor. Basically, slave labor undercuts free labor and harms the free citizen—makes his labor economically uncompetitive. It’s the same basic issue with immigration today, to be honest: it serves the inter-

ests of an elite at the expense of ordinary citizens. Third, the territories were jointly owned land of the whole American people. As such, the whole American people had the sovereign right to decide what would happen in them, in the same way that the people, through their representatives, excluded slavery from the Northwest Territories in 1787. The fact was, the anti-expansion side had more political strength—more votes—than the pro side. In a democratic process, they should have won. The South could not accept that and so seceded—even before any vote to block expansion was taken.”

“But Douglas proposed ‘popular sovereignty,’” Malcolm said. “So the will of the people would have prevailed. But Lincoln opposed that.”

“But remember the first reason I just said,” Tom said. “Popular sovereignty is not meant to decide every issue. A majority cannot simply make a bad policy good, or a moral wrong right, by voting for it. A popular vote could no more make slavery right than it could make murder right. Also, the practical effect of popular sovereignty was political violence: the same ‘Bleeding Kansas’ you mentioned earlier. Finally, and this is the most important point, there’s no reason why popular sovereignty is somehow sacrosanct at the territorial or state level but impotent at the federal. The fact is, the anti-expansion side had the votes to ban slavery in the territories. That’s also popular sovereignty, which secession was an attempt to undercut. Lincoln shows, in the Cooper Union speech, that the anti-expansion side also had the Constitutional authority to ban slavery in the territories.”

“Well, you’re just reversing my argument,” Malcolm said, “and hypocritically, or at least inconsistently. Now you say that federal popular sovereignty should rule, whereas your entire prior argument was that federal rule is tyrannical and should give way to state and local. Except, it seems, when federal power furthers your goals!”

“I suppose now we’re getting to the heart of the matter,” Tom said. “But first, let me reiterate a fundamental point. In 1860, we disagreed on one thing. It was a big thing, but it was only one thing. Today we disagree on everything. Basic things, like what is a man and what is a woman.”

“‘Man’ and ‘woman’ depend on the self-identity of the—” Malcolm started.

“I know what you think,” Tom interrupted. “That’s not the point. The point is— Well, there are two points. The first is that you, personally, have changed enormously—”

“So have you,” Malcolm said.

“I haven’t changed my views at all,” Tom said, “but thanks for admitting that you have.”

“You used to be a hawk; now you’re an isolationist,” Malcolm said. “You used to be a

free-trader; now you're a protectionist. You used to be pro-immigrant; now you're a xenophobe."

"First of all, I've been absolutely against illegal immigration since before 1994," Tom said, "and started opposing high legal immigration shortly after that. Wanting a secure border and sensible levels of immigration doesn't make me a 'xenophobe.' Your side can never state an argument without reducing it to name-calling. True, like many, I was quite hawkish after 9/11, but the experience of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars turned me against that position. It had the opposite effect on your team. You were against those wars when they started, but came to support them the longer they dragged on. That's crazy to me. As for free trade, you're right, but, again, it depends on the context. After decades of outsourcing that decimated American industry, is more free trade really what we most need right now? Anyway, all these are mere policy questions, second-order or downstream from the major philosophical principles, on which my views have never changed. Meanwhile, your team turns on a dime and you demand everyone go along, or else. When and where does this end? Marxism had an end-state: the End of History. Perfect communism. The end of scarcity and oppression. Every man a farmer, shepherd, critic, and all that. What's *your* end state? Where do you go after transgenderism?"

"Trans rights are the civil rights imperative of our—" Malcolm started again.

"I *know* you believe that," Tom said, "the point is, *we* don't, and you force it on us anyway."

"What does it say about you," Malcolm responded, "that you have to be forced to respect basic human rights?"

"What does it say about *you*," Tom replied, "that you constantly change the definition of nature itself and then require coercion to force millions of dissenters to go along with you? Where do you go next? Polygamy? Pedophilia?"

"More rightwing scare-mongering," Malcolm said. "More 'slippery slope' nonsense."

"Every so-called slippery slope we've identified up to now has turned out exactly as we predicted," Tom said. "But this only further illustrates the point. We agree on nothing, not even the most fundamental things. The situation today is thus totally different than the Civil War. But your question is, why was secession wrong back then, but today separation would be right. You seem to think that this is some great 'gotcha' that proves my hypocrisy or something."

"You said it," Malcolm said.

"But it's not," Tom continued. "First and most fundamentally, secession was wrong because slavery was wrong. Any action taken in an unjust cause is wrong."

“But, as you just admitted, your hero Lincoln was willing to let slavery remain in the South,” Malcolm countered. “If it was so wrong—which of course it was—why would he do that?”

“Because he didn’t believe he had the constitutional authority to curtail it where it existed,” Tom said, “and he was right; he didn’t. But we’re getting off-track again. The answer to your question is, first, because for an action to be rightful, it must be undertaken for a good cause, or at least a not-bad cause. Second, there is no constitutional right to secession. The Union is explicitly said to be perpetual—”

“Where does it say that?” Malcolm asked.

“In the Articles of Confederation,” Tom replied.

“Which were repealed by the Constitution,” Malcolm said.

“Superseded, not repealed,” Tom said. “The Articles are still considered one of the organic laws of the United States, second only to the Declaration of Independence. And the Constitution itself speaks of a ‘more perfect union’; that is, it declares that union is the purpose of the document and that the union should be perpetual. ‘More perfect’ hardly implies a breakup; it implies the exact opposite. The states could theoretically break up, but to do so they’d have to agree. Even if the Union were merely a compact among states, that compact cannot rightly be unilaterally broken by one side. Andrew Jackson—a slaveowner—made this same argument during the Nullification Crisis of 1832. Unilateral or one-way secession means nothing other than overturning the results of elections. Bullets replace ballots, which you cited earlier. The result is anarchy.”

“You’ve just outlined excellent reasons why secession by your side would be illegal and wrong,” Malcolm said.

“I wasn’t finished,” Tom said. “‘Secession’ is just a term. What does it mean? Any form of separation? But if that’s so, then the breakup of the Soviet Union was wrong. The ‘Velvet Divorce’ between the Czech Republic and Slovakia was wrong. The division of Sudan was wrong. The creation of East Timor was wrong. Do you believe all those were wrong?”

“No,” Malcolm said, “but they happened amicably, through negotiation.”

“Exactly,” Tom said. “And why couldn’t that happen here? Because you won’t let us go. *Why* you won’t let us go remains mysterious, since you despise us so much.”

“Haven’t we been through all that?” Malcolm asked.

“Maybe,” Tom said, “but you haven’t given a straight answer. All I know is that you think unilateral separation would be illegal. I disagree on that, which I’ll explain in a moment. You haven’t explained why you refuse to hold a good-faith negotiation.”

“Well,” Malcolm said, “you presume that I have the power to open such negotiations, which of course I don’t—”

“I know that,” Tom said, “we’re just speaking for the sake of argument, using one another as proxies for the other side. We’re seeing if any common ground can be found. Given that we’re old friends, or old ex-friends, if anyone could find some, it ought to be us.”

“I’ve said repeatedly,” Malcolm continued, “that breaking up is impractical, and even if it could be achieved, it would be harmful to both sides.”

“I see why it would be harmful to *your* side,” Tom said, “but not to mine. Anyway, who are you to say what’s best for us? Why don’t *we* get to determine that?”

“When your actions negatively affect us,” Malcolm said, “as secession would, then we get to have a say. Just like Lincoln said.”

“So you get to rule us, without our consent, for your good and not ours, in perpetuity?” Tom said.

“We’ve been through all this, too,” Malcolm said. “It’s not without your consent when everything is voted on. You just keep losing. But bullets cannot replace ballots, remember?”

“Right,” Tom said, “so your idea of a just regime is importing ringers via legal and illegal immigration to rig the electorate, plus ballot harvesting and outright voter fraud—”

“There’s no evidence of voter fraud!” Malcolm interjected.

“—to ensure that we lose every vote, never get any policies we want, while you get everything you want, at least half of which harms us—intentionally so!” Tom said.

“That’s a paranoid delusion,” Malcolm said.

“You’ve admitted it!” Tom said.

“I have?” Malcolm said.

“Yes!” Tom said. “You said we lose because our ideas are not popular, we’re ‘racist,’ we can’t adapt to the times, etc., and so it’s only natural that we lose. Obviously, if we

always lose, we can't get anything we want."

"But you don't 'always lose'!" Malcolm said.

"We're going in circles again," Tom said. "The point is, even if you're right, to us it *feels* like we never get any of what we want. We certainly didn't get a secure border."

"You got trade deals cancelled and renegotiated," Malcolm said, "to the detriment of our economy. You got the disastrous Afghanistan withdrawal."

"True," Tom said. "But those are drops in the bucket in the grand scheme. And immigration is by far the most important issue of all. Anyway, the point is, even if you're right that you treat us like kings, or favored pets, even if you're right that we win all the time, and we have everything we should want, we don't *feel* that way and you're not going to talk us into feeling that way. I might ask, if you really think we have it so good, then shouldn't you think we're crazy for feeling so persecuted and put-upon? And why would you want to live with crazy people?"

"Do I need to repeat my anti-secession arguments?" Malcolm asked.

"No," Tom replied. "Getting back to the main point, 'secession' as understood in the context of 1860 is wrong, but the right of revolution is a fundamental natural right enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. It's affirmed twice, actually. The fact that secession is unconstitutional (and illogical) doesn't mean that a people is required to submit to a tyranny in perpetuity. In one sense, the American revolutionaries 'seceded' from Britain, but of course they didn't call it that. They justified their action on the basis of the right of revolution, the 'Right of the People to alter or to abolish' a tyrannical government, 'their right ... their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.' Now, the South in 1860 could not appeal to the right of revolution because the ground, the basis, for the right of revolution is human nature, the twin principles of equality and consent. Obviously, those are incompatible with slavery. The founders knew that, but they had to make compromises with slavery in order to keep the South in the Union. It was those compromises that Lincoln meant when he said he had no constitutional authority to do anything about slavery in the states where it existed. The Southern leaders of 1860 knew it too, which is why they rejected the principles of equality and consent. This is explicit in Alexander Stephens' 'Cornerstone' speech. He was vice president of the Confederacy. Anyway, I don't mean to give a history lecture. The point is ... really, there are two points. First, separation is not secession as you mean it. Second, whatever you want to call it, separation today would be justified on the basis of the right of revolution while secession in 1860 was not."

"So now you're threatening ... what?" Malcolm said. "Insurrection? Civil war?"

"I'm not threatening anything," Tom said. "I'm simply talking about what would be

justified on the basis of fundamental natural rights. I'm answering *your* question about the differences between today and 1860."

"You have to know that if you tried it, you'd be crushed," Malcolm said.

"Totally," Tom replied. "And, to be clear, I'm not calling for anyone to take any action, much less a suicidal action. But what does it say that you'd have to crush us? I know what it says to me. It says your rule is tyrannical."

"So you're OK with Lincoln crushing the South but not with the present government putting down an insurrection," Malcolm said.

"I just explained why it's different!" Tom said. "Your rule is unjust! Lincoln's policy of leaving the South alone but preventing the expansion of slavery into the territories was fully just!"

"So you say," Malcolm said. "But even supposing you're right. Does it even matter if you are? That is, don't you have an eye-of-the-beholder problem here? Once the precedent is set, what's to stop further secession? This was Lincoln's point in his July 4th, 1861 message to Congress. You may think you see a bright line between this just 'separation' over here and that unjust 'secession' over there, but later separatists won't. Once you have no Blues to unite against, various intra-Red divisions will come to the fore and millions who are now on your side will want to go their own way—potentially ad infinitum, over any and every conceivable issue."

"Yes, that could be a problem," Tom conceded, "but if the alternative is submitting to your rule forever, I guess we'll just have to take our chances. Also, just because you're no longer part of our state doesn't mean you won't still be there as a foil. The existence and example of Blue America—with its crime, disorder, drugs, degeneracy, censorship, propaganda, double-standards, political persecution, huge wealth gaps, dystopian cities, anti-white racism, and all the rest—will likely keep Reds unified. Beyond that, we just have to manage our politics well and make good arguments."

"You keep coming back to this crazed assertion that the U.S. government is a tyranny," Malcolm said.

"Well, to be more precise, I think the present *regime*, of which the U.S. government is but one part—granted, the largest part—is a tyranny," Tom said.

"That's crazy," Malcolm said. "Would a tyranny let a person like you talk like this? Would it allow Tucker Carlson on the air?"

"As for me," Tom said, "I doubt I matter to the regime. Too small-fry. Plus, unless you report it, this is a private conversation. You make a reasonable point about Tucker. I couldn't say what accounts for that. Either the regime doesn't feel that threatened by

him, or it calculates that the means necessary to get him off the air would look bad and put them at risk.”

“Or, duh, the ‘regime’ as you call it is *not* a tyranny!” Malcolm said.

“Look,” Tom replied, “a regime doesn’t have to be Stalin to be a tyranny. You would say that Pinochet was a tyrant, no?”

“I would!” Malcolm affirmed.

“Well, he was way less bloodthirsty than Stalin,” Tom said, “but still, he usurped power, ruled without consent or elections, jailed opponents, even killed people.”

“We still have elections and consent,” Malcolm said, “and the government doesn’t jail opponents or kill people.”

“We have elections, but not consent,” Tom replied. “And the government absolutely does jail political opponents! Right at this moment, there are people who have been in jail for almost two years for peacefully demonstrating at the Capitol.”

“That was a violent, insurrectionary riot!” Malcolm said.

“Again, we’re never going to agree,” Tom said. “But if you were being honest, you’d have to admit that when leftists do things like that—literally occupy government buildings—they get slaps on the wrist, at worst. They certainly don’t get two years of pre-trial detention for nonviolent offenses. Anyway, yes, I stand by my claim that the present-day USA is a tyranny. It rules without consent. Elections are fake, or rigged, and anyway have no consequences. Unelected bureaucrats rule far more than the people’s elected representatives. To the extent that bureaucrats don’t rule, corporations—which are even more unaccountable—rule. The right to free speech is in the hands of a few companies, which censor and de-platform disfavored views. They do so in full cooperation with, even at the behest of, ‘security’ agencies like the FBI. The Twitter files established that. The banks will cut you off from the financial system if they don’t like your views. There is double-track justice. Pro-life protesters are arrested in predawn raids while people who burned cities to the ground walk free and aren’t even investigated. The natural right of self-defense is now punished—at least if you’re the wrong race.”

“Finally getting to the heart of it!” Malcolm said. “It’s all about race for you.”

“I wish it didn’t have to be,” Tom said, “but your side made it all about race when you blatantly violated the letter and spirit of the Constitution and perverted civil rights law by creating a hierarchy of races and making anti-white discrimination government policy.”

“Amazing to hear someone with so much privilege complaining about being discriminated against,” Malcolm said. “I mean, I knew there were people who believed this, but it’s still amazing to hear it firsthand.”

“You can’t have it both ways,” Tom said. “I mean, I guess you can, because you do, but it’s totally contradictory and bad faith to say at the same time ‘You are privileged, you are not discriminated against, and you have no just complaints’ and then in the next breath, ‘Because of historic injustices and gaps, we need these policies that help certain groups at your expense’.”

“I assume you mean affirmative action and the like,” Malcolm said, “but they don’t help anyone at your expense. Studies have shown that.”

“Oh ho!” Tom laughed. “‘Studies have shown’! Who writes the studies? Anyway, it’s logically impossible for us not to be hurt. Many of the things affected by preferences—jobs, contracts, college admissions slots—are finite. If one group is favored, another must be disfavored. That’s simple math. But, look, again—we are never going to agree on any of this! So why do we live together?”

“Suppose, for the sake of argument, that you managed a separation,” Malcolm said. “What would happen in your country to all the minorities the right has so shamelessly mistreated throughout history?”

“No one would be mistreated,” Tom said. “The law would be applied and enforced equally and impartially.”

“But there would be no policies or programs to rectify past injustice,” Malcolm said.

“Not the way you mean,” Tom said.

“See, right there: that’s unjust,” Malcolm said. “You want us to agree to a separation so you can oppress minorities! How can you expect us to agree to that?”

“We wouldn’t be oppressing anyone!” Tom said. “No special treatment. That’s all.”

“But no attempt to rectify structural racism, entrenched privilege, the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and redlining,” Malcolm said. “The mere absence of any such attempt is itself unjust.”

“Anyone who doesn’t like our regime could leave,” Tom said. “The right of emigration would be absolute.”

“So your answer is to ethnic cleanse people out of their homelands?” Malcolm said. “I always suspected that you wanted an all-white country. Thanks for confirming.”

“How do you make these huge leaps?” Tom asked. “Who said anything about an ‘all-white country’ or ‘ethnic cleansing’? No one would be forced out. But if people didn’t like it, they could leave.”

“Just like the Nazis!” Malcolm said. “‘If you don’t like our anti-Jewish policies, emigrate to Palestine.’ How enlightened!”

“There wouldn’t be any anti-*anyone* policies!” Tom said. “That’s the whole point!”

“You so-called ‘color-blind conservatives’ are the ones who are truly blind,” Malcolm said. “You think you can dress up racism as ‘equal treatment’ when the truth is that genuine equality requires a range of programs and efforts.”

“That’s another area where we fundamentally disagree,” Tom said. “So why do we live together?”

“Here’s one reason,” Malcolm said. “To prevent you from imposing your racist utopia.”

“What ‘racist utopia’?!” Tom exclaimed. “I’m talking about a country in which everyone is treated equally before the law!”

“And we all know,” Malcolm said, “that that kind of formal equality does not produce real equity—equal outcomes. It’s a cover for racism and oppression.”

“OK, if you’re so worried about how we’ll treat minorities, here’s a simple solution,” Tom said. “You take them all.”

“So we’re back to ethnic cleansing?” Malcolm said. “You just denied you were going to do that! Now the truth comes out! This is, I have to say, truly monstrous: the creation of an all-white state through ethnic cleansing.”

“Now you’re just being obtuse,” Tom said. “My proposal was that anyone who wants to stay could stay. But if equal treatment is for you such a stumbling block, well, here’s one way to solve it.”

“Solve it by expelling millions from their homes?” Malcolm cried. “And you expect us to just go along with that? Crazy. Here’s another problem. The responsibility for closing gaps and rectifying past injustice is shared. In fact, I would say the responsibility is more yours than ours because, historically, white conservatives have been the drivers of most injustice. But you want a totally free pass. You want to avoid paying what you owe and stick us with the bill. That’s totally unfair and there’s no way we’d agree to that.”

“We don’t think we owe,” Tom said. “Again, that’s the whole point. Or if we did owe,

the debt has been paid with the Civil War and now decades of government programs and redistribution.”

“Stereotypes about people of color and welfare,” Malcolm sighed. “It must be nice to be able to let oneself off the hook so easily. You look at the state of America today and you think you’ve done all you can to redress the past and create an equal country?”

“Mostly, yes,” Tom replied. “Millions—tens of millions—believe that. And I predict that they won’t lightly accept some reparations scheme. Maybe the surest way to provoke a war is to begin that kind of expropriation. Is that the plan? Are you *trying* to provoke one?”

“Your paranoia is so over the top, I don’t know how to respond,” Malcolm said.

“Well, as you pointed out, I’m not the leader of anything,” Tom said, “or anyone. So I can make no promises on this score. But just for the sake of argument, hear me out. Suppose I or someone could convince Red America to pay some kind of reparations, as the price of separation. I think it’s a terrible idea, and expect most Reds would hate it, but just suppose. What then?”

“How much?” Malcolm asked.

“That would be a matter for negotiation,” Tom said.

“I suppose you’re proposing some one-time payoff?” Malcolm said. “But why should you get off that easily? Centuries of racism can’t be paid off with a single check.”

“OK,” Tom said, “we’ll make it ongoing.”

“You say that now,” Malcolm said, “But once your new country is established, what’s to stop you from stopping the payments?”

“You’ll have leverage,” Tom said. “The two countries would need to cooperate, and if you felt we weren’t meeting our obligations, you’d have ways to pressure us.”

“OK,” Malcolm said, “I’ll keep playing along. To whom is this supposed money to be paid?”

“To whomever you think deserves it,” Tom said.

“You mean to people in our half of the country?” Malcolm asked.

“And from ours,” Tom replied. “That is, all those who choose to leave ours and go to yours, you can pay with our share of the reparations.”

“Again with the ethnic cleansing!” Malcolm said.

“You keep saying that, but it’s nonsensical,” Tom said. “You say we’re horrible racists cretins. I’m proposing that these people live under your enlightened rule, *and* get paid to boot. What’s not to like?”

“That you’re kicking them out of their homes?” Malcolm said. “That you think an all-white country is anything but a horrid Fourth Reich!”

“Their leaving or staying would be totally voluntary!” Tom said.

“Your odious proposal places people in a horrible position,” Malcolm said. “To receive their just compensation for centuries of injustice, they must uproot themselves? How is that fair? No, this is just another reason why your ‘separation’ can’t work. But one last question. Suppose we went along with your ethnically-cleansed ‘whitopia.’ You’d still have women. Can’t live without ’em, as the saying goes. You expect us to tolerate your imposing some kind of ‘white sharia’ on them?”

“Now you’re the one using scare-terms,” Tom said.

“Some of your people say it unironically,” Malcolm said.

“Just a fringe,” Tom said. “Anyway, there would be no discrimination. I mean, none that we would recognize as such. I realize that for you, the absence of full-blown feminism 3.0—full-on anti-male sex discrimination—equals horrible sexism. But that’s what separate countries and sovereignty are for. No one-size solution for everything. Women who hate our practice of nondiscrimination could leave. On the flipside, women who want to live more traditional lives could leave your country and come to ours.”

“So what you’re proposing, in addition to new Nuremburg Laws, is a kind *Handmaid’s Tale* sexist dystopia,” Malcolm said, “and you expect us just to go along with that?”

“That’s an utterly ridiculous, bad faith characterization,” Tom said, “which, again, demonstrates why we shouldn’t live together.”

“OK,” Malcolm said, “here’s one last consideration, absolutely non-negotiable. Climate change. Emissions will kill this planet, and all of us with it. Your Red rump state will be a gigantic polluter. That will kill us. We can’t allow it. There is no ‘live-and-let-live’ with you on that issue.”

“So much to unpack,” Tom said. “First, ‘climate change’—which you used to call ‘global warming’—is at best unproved.”

“First election denial, and now science denial,” Malcolm said. “What’s next?”

Flat-earthism? Geo-centrism?”

“Second, even a separated Red America would be far, far cleaner, with respect to emissions, than India or China today,” Tom said. “Those are the world’s two biggest polluters, which you exempt from all your ‘climate change’ treaties and regulations. Why? I assume because you know you have no power to coerce them, but you dream of the power to coerce us, which, I admit, is far more within your grasp. So, really, it’s all about control, about forcing us to wear the hairshirt, to endure lower standards of living.”

“Tell yourself whatever fairy tale you want,” Malcolm said. “The truth is, climate change *is* real, it *will* destroy the planet if not stopped, and we can’t let you do that.”

“But what about India and China?” Tom asked.

“Diplomacy will continue,” Malcolm answered. “But we can’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good and just give you a free pass while we keep negotiating internationally. You know, I say again, if you hate it here that much, you could just leave instead of fomenting some new civil war. Just go somewhere else. Hungary is trending fascist. You might like it there.”

“Do you really plan to leave Hungary untouched by your worldwide, one-size-fits-all agenda?” Tom asked. “And, anyway, those are my choices? Abandon the country of my birth, where my ancestors have been for generations, the only country my kids have ever known, or submit to your tyranny?”

“Your hypocrisy is truly astounding,” Malcolm said. “A moment ago, you were daydreaming about ethnic cleansing people out of their homes, and now you complain that you might have to leave yours! Anyway, I was trying to help by suggesting a way out for you.”

“I can think of another way you could help,” Tom said.

“What’s that?” Malcolm asked.

“Support my idea,” Tom replied. “Join me in writing explanations on why this is the ideal solution for both sides, yours from the left, mine from the right. We publish them. We start a campaign. We build public support so that peaceful separation can one day become a reality.”

“You know I can’t do that,” Malcolm said.

“I know you *won’t*,” Tom said. “So how about radical federalism? A new constitutional convention, called under Article V, to amend the Constitution to give states a great deal more regional autonomy, so the country can stay together, but with more

'live-and-let-live'."

"We already covered that," Malcolm said. "It just means all of the racist, sexist policies you want to achieve via separation, but without separation, and condoned by the Constitution to boot."

"I was hoping that, maybe after all this discussion, you might have reconsidered," Tom said.

"Nope," Malcolm said. "So where does that leave us?"

"With you tyrannizing us in perpetuity, if you can manage it, or until your regime breaks, or until we're all dead, or until you provoke a reaction," Tom said.

"Threats again," Malcolm said.

"Just laying out the possibilities," Tom said. "I make no threats. I don't even make any predictions. I don't know what's going to happen."

"You're totally paranoid," Malcolm said, "and have a ridiculous persecution complex."

"I know you think so," Tom said, "which is yet *another* reason why we shouldn't live together."

"There's certainly nothing to be gained by you and I talking any further," Malcolm said.

"Finally, we agree on something," Tom said.

"Back to Texas then?" Malcolm asked.

"Yes," Tom said. "Probably forever this time."

"Until it turns Blue," Malcolm said. 🐸

