

It was 1945. Stalin had scraped together a modicum of health for the first of the peace conferences, this one in Teheran. But then he fell ill again. And, with our glorious Red Army sweeping through Europe liberating as it went, another conference was called; this one in Yalta, off the Black Sea. And guess who they ask to do it.

*Pause.*

Now, there were three things that excited me about this. First: it is a major symbol of trust. Peace conference, eye of the world's media and so forth. It was a major responsibility, and they trusted me to discharge that responsibility; and that trust bonded me to the Union. It was a big moment.

*Pause.*

Secondly, you know who's going to be there? Roosevelt. And Churchill. The big three. Roosevelt, Churchill and me. Little... erm... oh whatsmyname, I do know it, me humble Ukrainian potato farmer, and these giants of the world stage. What this meant was *not* that Yalta was some sort of Soviet in-joke. But that I, too, was now a major figure on the world stage.

*Pause.*

I'm going to meet Roosevelt and Churchill and everything!

*Pause.*

Thirdly and finally, though by no means least importantly, the underling told me that we were going to be meeting in Livadia, a little way outside Yalta, in the Tsar's old Summer palace. A real dacha! This for me finally wiped the slate completely clean, undid the foul treatment I received last time at their hands. Grudges cancelled, old water under old bridges. I mean, fair do's. Job's a job.

*Pause.*

Well, you can imagine, I was so excited. I went to the central bureau of information; I got everything I could find. Lots of big photos, news clippings. These people are achievers. Like me. People who, through some special gift, effect big changes in the world. Churchill's wit, his intelligence, Roosevelt's fine liberal imagination. Yes. It would be an historic meeting; a meeting of minds.

*Pause.*

I envisaged, after a hard day around the conference table, we would hide from the media stare, change into casual clothes, sit by the pool, talking, in a way that only the great can talk, about the pressures of power, anecdotes about subordinate inefficiency, that old bugbear 'popularity'. 'Winston,' I would lazily ask, 'how do you come up with those fine old ripostes in your parliament?'

'Joe,' he would counter, 'in the same way that you have kept your head, through all your difficult times, pushing through some of the most far-reaching reforms your country has ever seen. Joe. I take my hat off to you.' 'But Winston,' I would reply with a twinkling eye, 'you're not wearing a hat!' (*social laugh*) And we would laugh.

*Pause.*

I had a clear month before the conference to prepare. My advisors, for they are now *my* advisors, were briefing me. We prepared strategies, negotiating positions, counter positions. Occasionally, I just shut off, and stared at those photographs.

*Pause.*

I flew to Yalta. This was the first time I flew since they killed my mother, but now it all seemed natural. Of course I should fly. It seemed only a matter of accident that I needed a plane. I could fly myself. But my entourage: earthly, grounded people. (*laughs dismissively, shakes head*)

*Pause.*

Do *they* know I'm not Uncle Joe? They're hiding it pretty well if they do.

*Pause.*

My body was finally put into history when I stood at the airport between Roosevelt and Churchill and thousands, probably tens of thousands, of photographs recorded the meeting. There's one of me whispering some amusing remark in Roosevelt's ear.

*Pause.*

Churchill was grumpier than he looks in the photos, but he'll lighten when he gets used to us.

*Pause.*

The first day, we just met local dignitaries and ambassadors. There was a state function, which I was involved in. But not the planning, I just turned up, slotted my presence into the approved grooves, and it went like a storm. I retired to bed, with an aching head, ready to greet the day.

*Pause.*

My call was at 7.30. Into the old jacket; I have a feeling this star will soon be coming off. I had a short preliminary with my advisors, and then we left to go. I stopped them and retrieved a couple of the photographs of Truman and Churchill that I'd particularly liked, slipped them into my personal file and we went in. It was in a huge room, with a large circular table in the middle. We

introduced our assistants and sat down.

*Pause.*

The first item on the agenda was Germany. My army was poised on the outskirts of Berlin. The British and American forces were on the Rhine. We began by sketching out some possible methods whereby we could, through reparation and military presence ensure no repeat of Chancellor Hitler's expansionist dreams. We were all anxious to preserve harmony. Hitler could still snatch victory, if we leave this meeting on a discord. Roosevelt suggested something, leant forward. It's true, even these great men do not notice my star. My star does not function here. I am Joseph Stalin.

*Pause.*

We planned and bartered and countered for two and a half hours. And I have to say I was getting a little bored. On some minor technical point of international law, our assistants were arguing amongst themselves. So I leant back and opened my file. There were the photographs. Churchill in 1938. Roosevelt visiting some PWA project in Maine. Fine figures of men.

*Pause.*

And then.

*Pause.*

I looked a little closer at the picture.

*Pause.*

I noticed something.

*Pause.*

I looked up at the two world leaders, who were also sitting polite. Bored.

*Pause.*

On Roosevelt's left hand, on his fourth finger, a little way from the others was a plain silver ring.

*Pause.*

That's not in the photograph.

*Pause.*

And on Churchill's chest, a medal, small, unadorned. A little way from the others.

*Pause.*

Churchill saw me staring, and looked down. Then he looked up at me.

*Pause.*

Roosevelt saw us looking and his right hand moved instinctively to cover his left.

*Pause.*

And then he looked down and stared at my star.

*Pause.*

Churchill followed his gaze.

*Pause.*

We stared at each other.

*Pause.*

There was a silence.

*Pause.*

'General Secretary?' It was my principal advisor. They had finished.

*Pause.*

Roosevelt leaned forward, staring at me. 'Can we move on to the issue of vetoes in the United Nations?'

*Pause.*

Fine, I agreed, fine.

*Pause.*

Churchill offered that we must be ready to prevent any future attempts at world domination.

*Pause.*

I interrupted. Churchill smiled gently.

*Pause.*

I would like to ask Mr Churchill to name the power which may intend to dominate the world. I am sure that Great Britain has no such aims, nor indeed the United States of America - Roosevelt grinned sheepishly - so what powers are we protecting ourselves from?

*Pause.*

'May I answer?' chimed in Churchill.

*Pause. joe is trying hard not to laugh.*

We must merely make clear that world danger in the future will only be precipitated by conflicts between ourselves, between the three of us.

*Pause.*

I stopped. Churchill was laughing. Roosevelt began to laugh. I felt it bubbling up in me. And as our assistants watched in bewildered horror, great tears rolled down our cheeks.

*Pause. There is an explosion off.*