

## Foreword:

Fear is a monster of a disease. It blights our minds. It blisters our hearts. It boils our souls. This infection oozes from us. We pus out greed, and hate, and war; the rot driving us mad. Fear compels us to shatter everything human. Pillage charity. Kill love. Rape peace. That is what fear does.

Fear, it learned to destroy us by simply buzzing in our minds, placing little white lies in our heads till fear became the loudest thought. Fear lays hate in our hearts to fester, forcing us to divide and infect our own flesh. Yet we do not stop spreading this virus, no, we can't. Not until the rift forces the abscess to rupture, and hate becomes war.

So we war in our pus ridden fields, and we do not care who gets caught in our bloodshed. Our only desire to kill white lies floating in our vision. We're fueled by the sight of red, we're moved by the pitch of our fervor, we're entrapped by the sound of fear. So while the bodies rot, and the mothers mourn, our contagion spreads to massacre.

But it's not all bad you see, no, others profit from this rot. Those rapacious men stare at the world with glassy eyes, worshipping a wealth fueled by fear. So in the name of their newfound God, these diseased men keep the gears of war greased in hate.

**Thursday, February 23rd, 2660**

**Country: Phoenicia**

**Odell Dawood:**

### **The Day of the Viable Candidate**

Ash tickles my nose and screams scratch my ears while flames kiss the sky. And I know the smell of gasoline will stick on my hands, on my clothes, on my hair. I know their eyes will linger. That their cheers will loiter. That the feelings will sear into my flesh. Neighbors turn feral, illuminated under flame—their hungry eyes and empty hearts mirrored in the blaze. They're excited to be here, but I don't want to be here, not again.

But I am here. It's all here again the jeering crowd, the withering man, the callous guilt; it's too bright to push away and too real to deny. I can touch the flames. I feel them burning him, I smell his skin popping.

I see it, I hear it, I smell it. It's right here. I stroke smoldering embers, I hear him dying, I smell him peeling away. I see how proud they are of me. I taste the soot. I hear that first click as the lighter roars to life and tumbles from my hand. I see it. I see the driftwood lighting up. Why'd you let go? Did I want to smell it? To hear it? To see the flesh bubble? Did I? Did I!

It's not real—it's not. I try to convince—I do. I promise, I do. But, the smell it burns my nose. The crackling buzzes in my ears. The fire heats my skin. It was real. It was here, I was right there, a moment ago. It was all right here...

I never figured it out, you know? How you wash away guilt? I mean, I tried, I tried to scrub those godawful scents from my hands. I tried to bleach them from my clothes. I tried to wash it from the courtyard for hours! I scrubbed my hands raw! I cleaned that shirt useless. I scoured the pavement till I saw my reflection, but I saw his too. It all stayed! It wouldn't go away. Can't they see? The gasoline stuck to my hands, the ash stuck to my clothes, the soot stuck to the pavement outside my home! I couldn't erase it, but I had to.

I had to do it.

I had to be a leader. It was what he wanted, but that first flash. It was red and bright. It slammed against my face, and I can't get the sound of popping flesh out of my head. How can I forget the flames? How?

I stare at dilated eyes reflected in the mirror while a shaky breath escapes my lips. I don't like remembering. I don't like sweating out memories. I don't like the fear

plastered on my face. I don't like the tremors in my hand. There are too many for me to handle. Too many dead. I had to. I know I did. All of them. Every one of them. The old, the young, the innocent, the guilty. All of them. I shouldn't be scared of the dead, but they claw at me from the grave. They want me to know I never wavered when ordered. They want me to remember the things that should stay buried.