

*Part I*

# THE FLAG BEARERS

A **Liam Grossman** SHORT STORY

BY **TAREK GARA**

[This short story is a prequel for \*Mortal Past\*. Get your eBook copy from Amazon today.](#)

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“Great men are products of humble beginnings.”

The two men stared at each other for what felt like an entire hour.

The uniformed man, with an aristocratic beard and posh haircut, took a deep breath, preparing to speak.

“Don’t say a word,” Liam Grossman said. “Just...listen.”

The man smiled, tilting his head ever so slightly, and nodded.

“This is a little crazy, I know.”

“It’s not just crazy,” the man said, gesticulating with his hands. “It’s suicide.”

“Just hear me out,” Liam responded calmly.

The man resignedly went silent. Liam could tell there was reproof coming his way. What he had suggested was not expected. It was indeed suicidal.

“My job as a Representative is to guarantee the government is working as it should be. Right now, there’s no government to supervise. The economic state of the country is going downhill if we don’t do something. I understand...it’s a cumbersome job.”

The man across from him was shaking his head.

“If I don’t go forward with mine, someone worse will go forward with his.”

“Being president is more than wearing a suit and smile-waving to citizens from a balcony. It’s a responsibility.”

“And it’s my responsibility. There are rumors in the House.”

“Liam, listen.”

“No, Vern. You listen. Do you want to see Richardson as President? He’s gathering votes, for Christ’s sake!”

“This country is doomed. Andrew Wilson left nothing of it. This...it—you can’t do this. You’re not made for this job.”

“Did you say that to Andrew Wilson at the time?”

Vern chuckled. “I wasn’t ministerial then.” He paused. “And I didn’t vote for Wilson. The man was ill.”

“I know his...backstory. They killed his son. I fucking get it. But what he did was plain dumb. Retaliation was supposed to be directed at the terrorists who killed his son, not civilians. Not his country.”

“As I said, you can’t.”

“I will.”

“Becoming President of Talienk will fuck up your life. This means no marital life. No friends, no family, no nothing.”

“I don’t need that. I have a duty.”

“Did you sleep on it, Liam?” Vern crossed his arms. “Because I see no point discussing this with you now. It seems to me that you’ve already made up your mind.”

Liam sighed. This was not how he had pictured it in his mind. He wanted to break it to his friend in a more celebratory way, although the state of the country was the exact opposite of celebratory.

“It’s just...I’m determined. I want your help—your support.”

Vern shrugged. “You know you’ve always got my support. But help is something I can’t give you.”

“Why?”

“Because, Liam. This isn’t running for governor of Lashinburg. This is the whole country. This is being in charge of the House, of the Palace.”

“And you think I’m not capable of that.”

“No. I think you’ll be a great President. But I’m trying to warn you. Of what’s to come. You’re...”

“Say it, Vern. Please.”

Vern sighed. Frustrated, he stood up and turned his back to Liam. “What can I say, Liam?”

“I’m the nice guy. The yes man. The pitiful politician who doesn’t know political monopoly. I don’t mind hearing it.”

Vern looked out the window. “Liam, you have my full support. If you do this, I’ll be the first to cast my vote. And I’ll encourage them to vote for you.”

Liam stood up and moved behind him. “Then what is it?”

Vern took a deep breath. He turned to face Liam.

“What it is, is that your loss is certain.”

When Liam had won the elections for the prosperous municipality of Lashinburg six years ago, it wasn’t because of his verbose personality. It wasn’t because of the promises he had made—he couldn’t remember he had made any

promises to anybody. His mantra was, if you see me fitting for governor, vote for me. If you don't, simply don't. And even when he had been told that this strategy would only make him lose, he hadn't budged.

He had dedicated his life for the citizens of Lashinburg. Everything that his job dictated a necessity, he had done. But after his term had ended, there was a need for something bigger. A wider circle where he could influence something more important than a municipal paddock.

Initially, the thought of becoming a Representative was stupid. Their work was tedious, and the effect they had on the country's decision-making was reduced to zero during the past decade.

When Andrew Wilson first became President, Liam could only imagine how things would become. He had known Andrew since high school. A nice guy; quiet, shy, and introverted. His voice always low, his movements restrained, but his brain more than lively.

When he had first heard the news on live TV, he had recoiled in his seat. Hey, is that Andrew Wilson?

Then the troubles began. And it was at that moment that Liam had decided to become a member of the House. Perhaps he could have become the legislator who would change things around.

And so he had filed his application to the Presidential Office. He recalled every minute of his meeting with President Andrew Wilson. Something was different about him. He wasn't shy anymore, and definitely not nice. Of course, as a President, he ought to have basic good manners, but when you're a part of a game, there are no secrets.

"Why apply for this shitty job, Liam?" he had asked.

Liam had regarded him with a smirk. "I don't think it's shitty."

"Well, what can I say?"

Andrew spun in his chair, and at that moment, Liam had realized that this wasn't an official meet-up with the President, but rather a friendly get-together.

Speak your heart, Liam had told himself.

"I want to help run this government. I can make change. As you probably know, I was governor for years, and in this kind of jobs, experience is vital."

Andrew had hesitated. "I know. I just have one question."

“Mm-hmm?”

“Did you apply because you thought I’d do you a favor as pals from high school? Or was it because you really thought, wait a minute, this country is falling apart, and I can change that?”

Liam’s answer had not been perfect. But he had been granted the offer.

A few months passed before Andrew Wilson had strengthened his grip on the Palace. Slowly, Liam had realized, this government will become the next Syria.

After Andrew Wilson’s last year of presidency, there was more to do than just sit in an reverberating hall with other men of varying ages and experiences and discuss the status quo.

This time, he knew he could do things differently if he were to become President.

The phone rang at exactly 8:00. Usually, Liam woke up at five in the morning for his sacred morning routine—something he had maintained steadfast for over a year now. And today started with the wrong foot.

God knows what can go wrong today.

He groaned, picking up the phone.

“Grossman,” he said.

“You’re still in bed, I presume.”

“Bingo. What is it, Vern?”

“Well, if you want to keep your presidency a dream, then keep on sleeping.” He paused, chuckling. “Let me tell you something, Liam. Presidents sleep two hours a day. They simply have no time for peaceful shuteye.”

Liam wiped at his face. His eyes burned, and his throat was stinging-dry.

“So, I’ve been thinking.”

“Mm?”

“I know someone who can help.”

Liam sat up straight. “Go on.”

“You want votes, right? And, while you can do what Eli is doing—”

“I can’t. I don’t have that kind of money.”

“R-right. You can influence the votes by doing something else.”

“I’m not breaking the law.”

“Nothing illegal, Liam.” Vern took a deep breath. “Diego Cooper. He’s fairly new to the House, just like you.”

“How is he going to help me?”

“I know he looks dumb—he is, but that’s not the point. He has contacts. He can pull strings around the House.”

“If I remember correctly...” Liam thought for a minute. “Cooper was on Wilson’s side. He bolstered all his sanctions.”

Vern sighed. “I told you, Liam. It’s what you do to win, man. You must make compromises. If you want to win, you do this. Speak to him. Make him buy your story. Money is not an issue for him. And, while you may hate the guy, you know as well as I do that people love him. Reps like him too.”

“Stop right there, Vern.” Liam shook his head as if to freshen up. He couldn’t think straight. “Someone like him will put my candidacy at risk. His ideologies...I don’t want to be supported by someone who endorsed Wilson’s government.”

“I was right when I said you weren’t made for this job.”

Liam sighed. “Vern...”

The line went out, and Liam lay on the bed with heavy thoughts fogging his mind. He didn’t know what to do. If he were to accept such proposition, his whole set of ideas was done. If he wanted to become President, he wanted to do it by following his philosophies, not those of the enemy.

And Liam could not think of a more dangerous enemy than Andrew Wilson’s regime.

Diego Cooper had agreed to meet with Liam under one condition: it was to happen in the Coopers’ residence in Talienkia. And no one was to come except him.

Liam had picked his finest suit to wear for the evening, knowing that whatever he wore, Diego would outclass it.

When he arrived at the brick building with high pine trees and a white strip of wall that surrounded the vicinity, Liam knew he was in for a treat.

He rang the bell twice. The door opened and behind it stood a gorgeous woman. Her smile was awkwardly lovely.

“Mr. Grossman,” she said, making way for him to enter. “Come in! Diego will be here shortly.”

She ushered him into the house, and then made a left to a high-class kitchen. Everything inside looked sparkling new, and Liam couldn’t spot a speck of dust in the expensive household. He envied the man.

“I’m Lynda,” she said, walking to the counter. “You have a reputation in the House,” she said, sending him a smile.

“Which house?” Liam asked dumbly.

“The House,” she laughed. “Diego has told me about you.”

Liam was taken aback for a second. “What did he tell you?”

“Lots of things.” She opened the cupboard and removed two glasses. She took a bottle of wine and opened it smoothly. “Drink?”

He waved it off. “Water, please.”

She shrugged, holding the glass and going for the tap. “He’s told me that you’re determined to change this shithole.”

He chuckled. “I’m planning to become President,” he said. Perhaps too early to go public with my announcement, he thought immediately. But then, he was determined. Sooner or later, everyone in the country would know.

“So I’ve heard,” she said. She filled the glass and offered it to him. “Good luck.”

Liam smiled, nodding as he grabbed the glass from her. “Thank you. You seem to know politics. What do you do for a living?”

She chuckled, gulping down the wine. After she put down the glass, she gestured to her body. It wasn’t until she spoke that Liam realized she had gestured to her dress.

“I’m a fashion designer.” She wiped at her nose. “In this country you ought to know politics if you want to survive. You guys make it harder for us to live the simple lives we want to live.”

“I wish for one,” Liam said.

“Lawmakers want nothing but money and reputation.” Before he could answer, she promptly added, “Don’t try to deny that. Hell, it even applies to Diego. Who you think built this mansion?”

Liam couldn’t fathom the idea that he was being hospitalized in a mansion by none other than a renowned member of the House. Someone with a list of contacts so big he could become President tonight.

Money did buy everything. Including happiness? Liam didn’t know for sure.

“Well, it is nice indeed,” Liam said, although it was more than nice. It was...otherworldly. “But we wouldn’t be what we are today if it wasn’t for the lawmakers that changed things around here.”

“Oh,” she snorted, “Liam! Please, Andrew was an idiot. However...”

“However,” Liam said, taking over. “You still voted for him?”

She tilted her head. “I mean, yeah. It’s not like I had any other choice.”

At least she did not deny it, thought Liam.

“And who did you vote for back then?” she asked, finishing her drink.

“He didn’t.”

Liam turned around and froze. Diego Cooper, the slightly short, medium-built, quirky-looking politician stood in his nightclothes with a Cuban cigar between his lips. He smiled widely as he continued to slither down the stairs.

“I...didn’t.” Liam smiled, looking Diego up and down. “Mr. Cooper, hi.”

“Ugh, please, call me Diego. And I know you are a few years older than me, but I’ll call you Liam, is that fine?”

“Uh, sure, sure.” Liam chuckled.

“Welcome to the Coopers’ residence. How you like it?”

“It’s...great. Thank you.”

Lynda poured a second drink for herself. She stood by the counter and snorted at Diego.

“I’m sorry I look this way,” Diego explained. “I just...can you believe it—I’m out of suits! And ties. Ha ha.”

“That’s fine.” Liam sipped his water and watched as Diego puffed smoke out of his round mouth.

“Please follow me into my study.” Diego walked slowly as Liam followed, both men leaving Lynda do what Liam assumed she did best: lurk and drink.



“So, how many years do you think we still have to still keep calling ourselves Talienkian Congressmen? Is that even right? For some reason I still associate ‘congressman’ to the US. Talienkian Reps, if you may.”

“It’s still...early. Plenty of time.” Liam sat down across from Diego, who went for the counter, where a vast collection of spirits was at display.

Unlike his wife, Diego poured into two glasses without asking. He placed them on the low table and sat down with a grunt.

Liam looked around the study. Neat desk, no clattering paperwork, or dusty shelves with miscellaneous junk, and, quite surprisingly, nothing that made it personal. A man with Diego Cooper’s prosperous history was ought to have his achievements framed and hanging on his walls. For some reason, Diego had not done that. Perhaps the bragging was just spoken, emitted only by words. Or this just was not his house.

“So, out with it, Liam. What’s up?” Diego sat comfortably in the other chair and crossed his legs.

Liam hesitated; not because he was afraid—or mind you, ashamed—of the offer. He was a man without backup solely heading into a battlefield of armored forces. His words would make no sense to Diego.

“As you know,” Liam started, “the government has collapsed. And we, Representatives, have a duty toward our people. Now, you may as well know that Richardson is gathering votes. He’s going public with his candidacy very soon.”

“Uh-huh. Yes, and my party isn’t liking it.”

“So, I have been thinking for a long time. And I’ve come to you with a tightknit scheme to return to Talienk its glory.”

Diego rubbed his hands together and then took hold of his glass. Sipping, he gestured for Liam to continue.

“We need an independent, reliable candidate. By we, I of course mean the whole Talienkian nation. And that’s why I’ve come to you.”

Diego chuckled ever so slightly. Without pausing, he said, “You know...you’re not the first one to come with this offer. And quite frankly, I can’t express how delightful I am for this opportunity. I—I am honored, I really

am. I've come to realize there's plenty of people who've shared the same thought."

*What thought?* Liam hoped he was not being misunderstood. He said nothing, but listened, praying that Diego Cooper was not thinking about...

"Yes. I will happily run for President. And I'd very much appreciate—and later even reward—your support."

Liam could not do anything except force a smile on his face.

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