

Grandpa's Secret January 2021

The news had been a surprise to Perce, although maybe in retrospect it shouldn't have. His grandfather's health had been declining over the last year. Perce had hoped that it was only a temporary phase, and that with treatment he would bounce back to his regular active self. Perce had been looking forward to spending time with him this summer on the farm, doing some of their favorite hobbies together. The news of his death shattered all of those plans for Perce. He was 85 years old when he died, and while that meant he was not exactly a young man, Perce had hoped that they would have another decade or two together. Perce had always been close to his grandpa, and since his death Perce had been unable to think about anything else. That is what had brought him here.

A half day trip through the Tube, then a Lift, and finally a shuttle had brought him out to the countryside where his grandparents lived. Or rather, where his grandma now lived by herself. It was amazing to him that in the year 2100 there still existed remote places like this in the US, without a city or hub in sight. He had arrived late in the day yesterday, and had spent the evening just sitting with his grandma. Perce's parents were planning on coming the next day, but for now it was just him and his grandma. It was his grandma who suggested that Perce take the day to go through the attic and start organizing some of his grandpa's things. So here he was now, in the cool of the morning, standing in the dusty attic looking at a pile of boxes, bags, and furniture. "Where do I start?" Perce said to himself, then grabbed the nearest box.

Perce had found out about his grandpa's death the day after his last final. It had been quite a week. The third year of his university studies had been by far the hardest. It was his first year in the specialized training for the Empath program, and the coursework was much harder than either of his first two years of balanced education courses had been. He had felt the intensity and focus of cramming for his exams, and then the stress and subsequent relief as he got through each exam. He had planned to take a few days off to relax and do nothing, and then he was going to join some of his new friends from the Empath program out at a cabin for a week. Perce felt guilty now that he hadn't planned to see his grandparents until his summer break was almost over. Obviously he couldn't have dropped everything in the middle of his studies to go out and spend time with them while school was in session, but still he felt sad that he hadn't had a chance to see his grandpa one last time before he passed away. And the feelings of guilt returned each time he thought about all of the other things he had planned to do during his summer break before coming out here to the farmhouse to see him. Perce recognized his ongoing internal conflict between the rational and the emotional, and he took a moment to acknowledge and embrace both. That was the whole point of so much of what he had learned this year in his Empath program. There is no progress without a balance of rational thought and emotional feeling. He was glad he could put some of what he was learning into practice as he mourned his grandpa's passing.

Small piles were now starting to develop as he sorted through the boxes. He was surprised, but going through these boxes was helping. Every summer throughout his childhood Perce would come to the farm for weeks at a time to stay with his grandparents. He loved those memories of exploring the fields and woods on his own, caring for the chickens, ducks, and geese with his grandma, and spending hours and hours at his grandpa's side. They would tinker with antique engines together out in the garage, go fishing in the lake, and watch stars at night, and all the while they would talk. Perce's grandpa was one of those rare individuals that was equally great at talking and listening. Their conversations had spanned nearly every topic imaginable, and Perce felt closer to his grandpa than to anyone else, even his parents. Thinking back now,

Perce realized that a large part of who he had become was due to his grandpa. Grandpa was the reason he decided to become an Empath. Beyond this, though, there were many other similarities between them. He found himself imitating his grandpa every time he approached a new problem. He could almost see his grandpa now in his mind stroking his chin with a far away look in his eyes and saying "Well, let's think about this carefully now." Or, after reaching what Perce thought was a perfect solution, hearing his grandpa say "Now let's consider this from a different perspective" then dive back into his reasoned and thoughtful decision-making process.

He remembered once as a young teenager spending an entire day with his grandpa discussing what to do about the neighbor's dog. It had gotten through the fence into their yard and killed one of the ducklings. Perce remembered with fondness how his grandpa had guided his thinking with his thoughtful questions. At first Perce had been so blinded by his anger at the death of the duckling that he had wanted to have the dog killed and make the neighbor buy them a new duckling. Perce's grandpa had asked questions, listened carefully, and helped him to consider different perspectives. Throughout the day his grandpa helped Perce's thoughts and feelings evolve, and ultimately the ducklings ended up with a reinforced enclosure and the dog ended up with its own doghouse and food bowl in his grandpa's yard. From that day on the dog was treated as a welcomed guest instead of an intruder. Perce thought of how the dog had become like part of the farmhouse family after that. Perce had written a paper about that experience as part of his coursework a few months ago on conflict resolution. Some of his classmates had laughed when he told them he was going to write about a dog and a duckling, but he had gotten a good grade on it. Perce smiled, thinking of how, in a sense, he would always have his grandpa with him in the back of his mind whenever he approached a new problem. He turned back to the pile of boxes in front of him and picked a new one to go through.

The morning wore on, and Perce worked his way through the boxes of his grandpa's stuff. He now had separate piles for family photos and hologram chips, professional awards and accomplishments from Grandpa's days as an Empath, farm and house documents, other knick-knacks, and junk. It was getting warm outside and downright hot inside the attic. Perce watched as the first bead of sweat dropped from his eyebrow and landed with a tiny splash on the cover of the notebook on the top of the open box that he was leaning over. Perce wiped the drop of sweat away and examined the notebook. It was a log from his grandpa's garden. Perce flipped through the dusty journal and saw pages and pages of meticulous notes in his grandpa's handwriting about seed varieties, fertilizers, and garden locations. There were tables of numbers for soil pH, hours of daily sunlight by month, and many other measurements. They were complete with charts and grids of the farmyard garden space. He always was pretty organized with his numbers, Perce thought with a grin. It was strange that in some senses his grandpa had seemed almost like a Calculator, even though he spent his entire career as an Empath. It would be hard to find two jobs that were more different. Maybe he picked some of it up from all the time he spent regulating the Calculators, Perce thought. He considered for a minute what it would be like when he got out into the workforce and had to interact with the Calculators. It was not something he was looking forward to. "Calculators are regular people just like you and me, who can play an important role in our lives as long as they are appropriately regulated" one of his professors had told his class a few weeks before. Perce wasn't so sure.

He wondered where his grandpa had gotten the paper notebooks from. You could still find a paper notebook in the artisanal shops in town near his university, but they were pricey and small. The box of notebooks he had just gone through would have cost a small fortune. Perce suspected his grandpa had acquired the stack of notebooks decades ago when paper notebooks were common. At the bottom of the box of garden notebooks, Perce spotted a wooden case. Perce could tell right away that it was made from real wood, and that it had not

been replicated. *It must be at least 50 years old*, thought Perce, *maybe older*. He lifted the wooden case out of the box and sat down on a nearby chair with it. With the case in his lap, he opened the lid.

Inside were some rolled up papers and what looked like medals or awards. Perce lifted one of the papers out of the case and unrolled it. His eyes caught on the logo printed in the top corner of the paper, and he felt his stomach lurch. A sense of dread immediately filled his body, and a shiver ran down his spine. He knew what the symbol was. Everyone knew what the symbol was. It was one of the most feared and hated symbols in the country. He didn't understand what it could be doing there, on this document in a wooden case in the attic of his grandparents' home.

The symbol was a triangle made up of four smaller triangles, surrounded by a celtic version of the impossible triangle. It was the symbol of The Society.

Perce's chest tightened as he skipped a breath. His heart was racing and he felt sick to his stomach. Although it was now sweltering in the attic, he felt strangely cold. *What is this Society paper doing here?* Perce scanned the rest of the document. His eyes grew wider as he realized what he was looking at. It was a membership certificate confirming a leadership role in The Society. It belonged to his grandfather.

Perce's mind raced back to his history lessons, trying to make sense of it all. He had obviously learned about some of this at home and throughout his years of school, but he had recently learned much more in the History of Empaths course that he had taken at the beginning of this school year. He took a deep breath and tried to remember everything he knew.

The Society was an actuarial organization that could trace its roots back to the beginning of the 20th century. Up through the early 2000's it was only a professional organization, and the actuarial profession was a little known career choice for those that were mathematically minded and interested in working in the insurance industry. Then came the chaos of the 2020's. Perce had found his History of Empaths class so interesting because it put the rise of The Society into the larger historical context. For the first time he had understood how it all could have happened to otherwise reasonable and caring people here in the US, and so much of it was due to the chaos of the time period. First came the dual pandemics: The first in the human population and the second among animals. The death toll was unprecedented, and led to an economic crash and a worldwide famine. Wars broke out around the world as neighboring countries fought for scarce resources and old stabilizing alliances crumbled. Income inequality skyrocketed, with the rich leading increasingly isolated lives inside of fortress-like compounds, and the poor fighting for survival in the desolation of urban America. The strength of institutions in government, education, and communities decreased. The countries of the world were being torn apart, and the US was no exception.

The turning point in the US was 2032, when the first actuary, Eff Essay, was elected president. Under his presidency, stability and reason returned in large measure. Economic stimulus and incentive programs were thoughtfully implemented, leading to the stabilization of the food supply and the beginning of the economic recovery. Social safety nets like healthcare and universal income were established and were funded into perpetuity with a reasonable combination of modest benefits and appropriate tax funding. People were thrilled with the results and President Essay became wildly popular. Under the leadership of the US, global relations were normalized to a large degree.

It wasn't until President Essay's successor, Anna List, was elected in 2040 that things started to take a dark turn. President List was also an actuary, and rode to a landslide election victory based on the new perception the public had of actuaries as pragmatic and rational problem solvers. After the 2040 elections, traditional political parties ceased to exist. At the time, everyone had been happy to join the actuarial party, since they had been the ones to bring back peace and prosperity. California was peacefully re-admitted to the US, which restored the US to its status as a global superpower. Political gridlock and partisan division disappeared, and the federal government became smaller, yet more efficient than ever. In these years, the insurance sector began to expand rapidly, and actuary was the fastest growing career. The entire education system was restructured as actuarial science became the most popular major throughout the country. Liberal arts programs virtually disappeared, but trade schools remained to support those interested in more mundane jobs like accounting. With so many newly minted actuaries, actuarial principles began to permeate all areas of public life. In business, actuaries became leaders in virtually all industries. Actuaries also began to control all aspects of federal, state, and local government, as well as education, research, and even entertainment. The actuarial organizations were consolidated under a single existing entity, the Society of Actuaries, which came to be known simply as The Society. Their symbol, so unexpectedly discovered in this attic, would forever after be associated with the cold-hearted and ruthless legacy of The Society.

The Society reshaped the social structure of the country. Everyone was stratified into one of three groups. The first group was the credentialed actuaries, known commonly as Acts. These people had actuarial science degrees and passed a grueling series of convoluted and pedantic exams. Being an Act opened up many opportunities, including access to the best jobs, the best homes and neighborhoods, and other privileges not available to the rest of the population. The Society leadership was made up of a small, select group of Acts that were the most committed to the task of remaking the country using actuarial principles. The next group were those certified as actuarially literate, or the ActLits. These people also had to pass a series of exams offered by The Society. These exams were not as focused on mathematical or actuarial principles. Instead they were focused on how to best support Acts. There were only so many Acts, so they couldn't do everything. The purpose of the ActLits was to carry out and implement all of the ideas and programs that the Acts designed. As long as they kept their heads down and obeyed The Society and their Act superiors, they were also assured a comfortable life for themselves and their families. Others that couldn't pass these exams fell into the lowest class, the non-actuaries, or NonActs. While there was no true poverty anymore, the NonActs lived in the closest thing to it. Their basic needs were met, but only just so. They were also prohibited from socializing with Acts, and could have only limited approved interactions with the ActLits. Their children could only attend college or otherwise break out of this class by renouncing their NonAct parents and severing all ties with them. This three-tiered system was tied into The Society's logo. The large triangle represented the country, pointed upward for progress and development. Inside this larger triangle were the three smaller triangles, each pointing up as well, which represented the Acts on top and the ActLits and NonActs below. The downward facing triangle represented all of the inefficiency and non-rational aspects of life that The Society was determined to weed out and eliminate. This entire triangle of triangles was nestled inside the impossible triangle, which represented The Society itself, with all of its corresponding programs, ASOPs, NASOPs (which applied to non-actuaries), and other rules and restrictions. The whole thing made Perce sick to think about. *How could they have taken their hyper-rationality to such a terrible extreme?*

Eventually The Society grew to eclipse all other structures or organizations in the US. In politics, the electoral college was replaced with the actuarial equivalent college, where votes were

weighted based on which of the three tiers the voter was in, with Acts' votes weighing as much as 1,000 times more than NonActs' votes. This essentially made the small group of Acts the political ruling class. Acts controlled and revamped the education program, from early childhood education through advanced college degrees. Community organizations were retooled to align with actuarial priorities and sanctioned leisure activities. Every facet of life was to some degree or other directed by The Society.

With a relentless focus on rationality and quantification, The Society resolved many stubborn problems. Through mandated insurance products and pricing controls, externalities began to be priced into all activities and products. The skyrocketing cost of meat, fossil fuels, and any manufactured product that created pollution led to a quick and total shift to green energy, renewable resources, and a plant based diet. They found that many of the problems that had plagued much of the last several centuries were solved by simply asking those that wanted to enjoy the harmful activities to pay the full price for them. Similar changes occurred within the realm of personal health choices. Tobacco use disappeared. Alcohol and drug use was greatly reduced. Movement and exercise were embraced like never before and opportunities for natural movement were included in building design and city planning. And yet, amid all of this progress, cracks began to emerge in The Society's vision for the country. Insurance products were designed to smooth out more and more of life's uncertainties, but some people (especially the NonActs) saw these products as increasingly restrictive and even punitive. Overall a sense of unrest and discontent began to grow amid the NonActs. Enough time had passed from the initial tiering of the population that the NonActs began to see the long term impacts that these policies and restrictions were having on them. Many of them watched their children grow up to either have no opportunity for advancement or choose to leave their NonAct families behind so that they could rise into the ranks of the ActLits or even the Acts. The Acts had overlooked and underestimated the power of the NonActs. *You Acts should have considered things from their perspective*, Perce thought. It was a core tenant of his Empath training, but maybe it was too much to expect from people who were essentially early Calculators.

The final straw had been the implementation of the complete life insurance product. It provided a person with comprehensive medical, death, income, and casualty protection from birth through their anticipated life expectancy. Since it covered all conceivable problems in one's life, it essentially cost one's life's wages. The Society took nearly the full income of all citizens, and in return provided them with everything they would need in life. And the life The Society provided its citizens was completely predictable and protected. Paying the new premiums was a dramatic change for everyone, but it hit the NonActs the hardest. With the lowest wages and none of the favorable rating discounts enjoyed by the Acts and ActLits in the complete life insurance product, paying these premiums was a major challenge for them. And worse still, the Society didn't just require adults to be covered. Parents were required to purchase coverage for their children. In the most extreme application yet, The Society began issuing policies at birth, with underwriting being performed on unborn children during pregnancy. A few NonActs were brave enough or poor enough to refuse payment for themselves or their children. In those cases, adults were incarcerated and forcibly sterilized, children were seized and became wards of The Society, and unborn babies were aborted.

The 2050 revolt occurred as a backlash against the rollout of the complete life insurance product. It was quick and merciless. Perce had read some historian opinions as part of his class that suggested that The Society might have even been able to survive the complete life insurance requirement if not for the way the military joined the NonActs in the revolt and helped overthrow The Society. The Society frequently changed the exam syllabus and qualifying

criteria to become an Act and ActLit. A few weeks prior to the requirement to purchase complete life insurance, an exam restructuring had reclassified a large number of military members from ActLits to NonActs. These soldiers had no interest in risking their lives to protect The Society and the Acts that had just downgraded their social status. They were only too happy to join the rest of the NonActs when the opportunity emerged.

Most of The Society leaders were killed, along with a portion of the Acts. Many other Acts were captured and tried for crimes against humanity. Some US citizens that had been living in exile returned from countries like Mexico and Sovereign Quebec, while a handful of Acts who escaped the violence of the revolt fled to countries sympathetic to the actuaries, like United Canada and Singapore. While Perce couldn't condone the methods used in the revolt, he also recognized that he didn't have to live through the horrors of life under The Society's rule. *I wonder how I would have reacted to all of that if I had been there*, Perce thought. This thought led to a less comfortable thought; his grandpa had been there, and he'd been on the wrong side of history. The paper in his hands proved that his grandpa was an Act and, worse than that, a leader in The Society. Perce took a quick look through the rest of the items in the wooden box. It was all related to his grandpa's time in The Society. There were awards for meeting minimum requirements, achieving actuarial excellence, and participating in various committees. This wasn't the story that he knew about his grandpa.

His grandpa had been one of the first Empaths. The Empaths emerged as a new profession immediately after the revolt, as part of the effort to create a new national culture of equal opportunity and empathy. The Empaths were the antithesis of the actuaries, rejecting their stark efficiency, cold-blooded calculations, and hyper-rationality. The Empaths' job was to help make important decisions affecting the nation's citizens. They did this by considering the impacts that any changes would have on all affected parties. Quantification and analysis still existed, although these were now performed by the Calculators under strict regulation. While there were no more social classes, being classified as a Calculator was not something anyone aspired to. Calculators were mostly people that found they had no other marketable skills besides mathematical aptitude. Empaths monitored all of their work. To make decisions, the Empaths took the results from the Calculators, and then weighed that against other important considerations including social and emotional impacts to reach a final decision. Perce had heard hundreds of stories from his grandpa about his time working as an Empath. His grandpa had also talked about his life under The Society, although much less frequently. He had told Perce about what things were like but, as Perce thought more about it, he realized he didn't know much about what his grandpa had actually experienced during that time.

"Perce!"

Perce startled and banged the lid of the wooden box shut.

"How about a break for lunch, dear?" his grandma's voice called up from the bottom of the pull-down stairs that led up to the attic.

"Yeah, I'll be right down" Perce replied. His heart was pounding, and he felt like this secret that had just become his had almost been discovered.

And what about grandma? The thought slowly and ominously rolled into Perce's mind. *Did she know about Grandpa's past? Had she been an Act herself?* The way his world had just been turned upside down, at this point anything seemed possible.

No, Perce thought, no, she doesn't know. He thought about how his grandma would secretly call him before his birthday each year to tell him what was in the gifts they had sent him. She couldn't keep a secret. She could never have kept something like this secret for all these years. *But how had their lives connected then?* He knew his father was born in '53, and that his grandparents had met a few years before that, in the immediate aftermath of the revolt. *I bet she doesn't know anything about this,* thought Perce.

Suddenly Perce felt very alone. He was the only one that knew his grandpa's secret. He could tell her, or he could report this to the authorities. If he did, there would be an investigation and possibly even a trial. Even though his grandpa was dead the trial would still be held, and would be a highly public event. It promoted healing and reconciliation to make these things public. Perce saw these trials occasionally in the news, and in recent years as more and more time passed since the fall of The Society more and more of the trials were held for former Society leaders that were now dead. Going through something like that would ruin his grandpa's reputation and rip his family apart. His grandpa would be posthumously stripped of his honors and accolades from his time as an Empath.

No, Perce thought, I can't do that. This was my grandpa's secret that he carried with him through his entire adult life, and now it has become my secret. I can't let that kind of embarrassment and shame fall on my family.

Perce picked up the wooden box and stuffed it into a bag. He hid the bag in the corner of the attic. A plan was already forming in the back of his mind. He would leave the box hidden there until tonight. After his grandma was asleep he would get it down and take it into town. There was a public recycler there. No one would be around to see him dump it. The box and all of its horrible contents would be destroyed, everything reduced down to its molecular components which would then re-enter the manufacturing stream to be used to replicate something new.

"Are you coming?" his grandma's voice called up again. "I have your lunch all ready for you."

"I'll be right down. I'm just cleaning up some of grandpa's stuff" Perce called back.

Perce knew what he had to do. He would destroy this evidence and carry his grandpa's secret for the rest of his life. No one else could ever find out that his grandpa had been an actuary.