

# THE GREAT RIGHT HAND OF YESTERDAY

Many in the upper echelon of the medical field considered Dr. Fletcher Adams to be the finest surgeon they had ever seen. Regularly called upon to do what others thought impossible, he always entered the operating room with dignity and an air of supreme confidence. Every difficulty that he faced succumbed to his masterful right hand.

On July 15<sup>th</sup>, in a matter of seconds, screeching tires and crunching metal changed the world of Dr. Fletcher Adams. On July 16<sup>th</sup>, he woke up in a hospital bed and his right hand was gone.

As Travis thought about his career as a soldier, spy, and pastor, he tried to imagine how he would have coped with such a loss. Without question, some paths could not have been taken. He would have liked to think he would have the inner strength and fortitude to adapt and move on, but sometimes you just don't know unless you've been there yourself. In the hardness of battle, he saw guys run the gamut from joking about it to rarely missing a beat, but more often to the other end of

the spectrum of falling prey to alcohol, drugs, or suicide.

Today, he was running solo. Already having some knowledge from newspapers and the internet, Bill gave him a file full of additional information on Dr. Adams. He looked at his watch – 8:00 am and Dr. Adams walked into Roscoe’s Saloon on 5<sup>th</sup> Street. At 8:30 am, Travis walked into the same joint. Sitting at the bar, Dr. Adams had his head down staring at a glass of whiskey. Travis ordered a beer and nursed it for a half hour studying the man at the other end of the bar. Then he got up, walked down to the doc, and sat down on the stool next to him.

“Look, Doc, I know you’re not stupid,” said Travis.

“Who are you?” asked the man.

Travis didn’t answer him. He stared into the man’s eyes, looking for some avenue into his spirit.

“What do you want?” asked Dr. Adams.

Travis leaned close to his ear and whispered, “I’m the ghost of yesterday.”

The clergyman was not sure if the doctor felt confused or shocked, but the distraction allowed

him to slip a little something into the man's drink. After taking a couple of sips, Dr. Adams slumped to the bar. Travis cradled his head and said, "Let me take you home, Doc."

The bartender could have cared less.

The doctor's destiny required a new home, a home shrouded in secrecy – both for his sake and the team's. That new home offered no pleasantries of wealth or power. Situated on an abandoned farm fifty miles from nowhere, it could have been a very lonely place. The first phase of his isolation required a nurse or doctor by his side every day for a month. For the first week, Dr. Adams mustered all the belligerence expected. His daily swings went from anxiety to hallucinations to tremors. As time plodded its path for the man, his body and his mind gradually subdued the bitter enemy of alcohol.

The time had come for a first visit from Travis. He sat next to the doctor on an old wood bench overlooking a shallow valley of overgrown wildflowers.

"Guten Morgen, Doctor,"

"I know you," said Dr. Adams. "You were in the bar."

“You are correct, sir. And now I’m here.”

“What is this place?” asked the man. “And how can you get away with keeping me here against my will?”

“Well, Doctor, we don’t always play by the rules. But don’t worry, you will have all your civil rights restored in short order.”

The doctor raised a question that Travis had raised within his mind at times. It can be a slippery slope not playing by the rules. Were it not for his past friendship with Bill and many of the other team members, he might second guess some of the things they did. Bill had always been above board with everything, and Travis always had the option to back out of a project if he had strong moral objections. So far, though, he felt that traversing that slippery slope had been the right thing to do.

“Now, tell me, Doctor, what else are you thinking?”

“What’s it like playing God?” he asked.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, what gives you the right to interfere in my life? Only God has that right. How do you

know that God doesn't want to take me now? You know, maybe He's saying my time here is over."

"Ah, I see you haven't abandoned God then. Well, if God had wanted you dead from that accident, we wouldn't be having this conversation, would we? ... How do you know God didn't tell us to save you from yourself? As I said before, we work just outside the line ... In a couple of days, the bulk of your detox treatment will be complete. Then we will give you an opportunity to refill a void in your life. After listening to what we have to say, you can choose to accept the challenge or decline it and walk out the door a free man. But listen to the challenge, you will."

The doctor did not say anything, but his eyes did pierce his surroundings searching for some understanding.

"Now, I'm going to leave you to the rest of your day. Listen and think. Think hard about what your eyes see and what your ears hear. I will talk to you again."

When the medical staff gave the all-clear, Bill introduced the doctor to Clive Armstrong and Emily McBride. The two young scientists specialized in the field of bionics. While there were

numerous projects on hand bionics out there, Clive and Emily had developed a system that held the potential for the finest motor control possible.

The doctor listened to what they had to say. He gave serious thought to the possibility their project could restore something he thought forever lost. He stayed of his own free will for a month. When Clive and Emily felt they had done everything they could from the remote location, Dr. Adams packed his bags and headed to the car where the two scientists waited to take him home. Before he stepped out the door, he turned and gave Bill and Travis a clean, crisp salute with his right hand of tomorrow.

For their own security, Clive and Emily stepped out of the picture. They gave him the name of a prominent research facility for follow up study. With his extensive medical background, they felt the doctor would provide the critical field testing necessary to validate their work.

After they left, Bill turned and asked, “Do you think he’ll make it, Travis?”

“He’s a lot smarter than me, Bill. I think we gave him a purpose ... Yes, I believe he will still do some remarkable things.”

“But sometimes you just don’t know, do you?”

“No, you don’t. Not that he was ever out of God’s hands, but now I think he realizes that he wasn’t.”

Two months later, Travis received a letter from Tom Ferguson, a teammate that lived in the area where Dr. Adams resided. Tom included a clipping from the front page of the city’s newspaper – “Local Doctor Saves Four on Scene of Horrific Crash”. It went on to say that Dr. Fletcher Adams happened to be near when a drunk driver crashed into a crowd of people. The doctor stabilized and saved the lives of four people until the ambulances arrived. The irony dripped off the pages.

Travis shook his head and smiled. Yes, the doctor would still do some remarkable things.

As missionary-at-large for the region, Travis always liked to stay abreast of what was happening at the churches in the network. On the first Sunday in May, he gave a sermon at St. Luke’s, the church in the medical building. When the service was over, Pastor Reston stood with him as they greeted

the parishioners filing out. Pastor Reston had something he had to do, so Travis finished with the line. He saw many old friends and quite a few that he didn't know, which he liked to see because that meant the church was growing.

The last man in line shook his hand with a firm grip and said, "I always thought there was something different about you."

"I suppose it was inevitable," said Pastor Sawyer. "That is quite a firm grip you have. How is your grip on the rest of life?"

"Shall I say that I'm no longer haunted by the ghost of yesterday?"

"I'm glad to hear that, Doctor. What brought you to St. Luke's today?"

"I recently took a position at St. Matthew's Hospital. I was talking to a colleague by the name of Dr. Frederick Peterson, and he suggested I might like it here."

"I like to hear that, too ... Now that you know who I am, if there is anything I can do for you, please let me know."

"I appreciate everything that you have already done. But I do have one question for you?"



“What’s that?”

“Does the veil of secrecy ever lift long enough to let someone new in?”

“Are you speaking for yourself?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, it does from time to time, provided that person is properly vetted.”

“And what does it take to get properly vetted?”

“Well, Doctor, you are already ninety-nine percent vetted.”

The doctor smiled and said, “I should have figured.”

“I will have Bill give you a call.”

When the doctor walked out the door, Travis smiled and said to himself, “Sometimes you just don’t know.”