



# The People Love Their Goodies

Brittany Gates

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Cover photo by [Karolina Grabowska](#) on [Pexels](#).

An old man, appearing to be in his sixties, sits behind a grand wooden desk in his expansive office. Photos of himself in different stately poses in various locations hang from each wall in thin frames. Some of the photos are in color, while others are in black and white.

The old man sits cross-legged in the plush office chair, the jacket of his dark gray suit unbuttoned, revealing the white dress shirt tucked into the suit's matching pants. His arms rest upon the chair's armrests, and his fingers drum repeatedly at the end of each rest.

The old man stares at his grand desk, fixing his blue eyes on the intercom. Eventually it beeps and a male voice speaks:

"We're ready, Our Leader."

The old man comes to life immediately, leaning forward as he uncrosses his legs, to press the button on the intercom to respond.

"So am I. Bring in the troublemaker."

"Yes, Our Leader."

Silence overtakes the room again. The old man relaxes back into the plush office chair but doesn't cross his legs. About two minutes later the office door opens, and a middle-age man enters with two gruff-looking men behind him.

The middle-age man wears a light blue knit shirt tucked into dark khakis. The gruff-looking men wear green military uniforms. The middle-age man stops walking to look around the office with an inquisitive look on his face. His head along with his body turns around to take in the entire room, displaying his hands in handcuffs behind his back. He stops looking around once he sees the old man. The middle-age man's face grows hard, dissolving all the inquisitiveness.

The old man rises to his feet, buttons his dark gray jacket, and walks from behind his desk over to his new guest. His black, shiny loafers make light noise on the carpet.

"You're the troublemaker, huh? Looking at the pictures my Intelligence Team gave me prior you appear quite intimidating. Now, as we stand face-to-face, you look like a normal citizen."

"I would say the same about you."

One of the gruff-looking men punches the middle-age man in his left side, eliciting a quick yelp.

"You will address Our Leader as 'Our Leader,'" the gruff-looking man adds.

"I will not. I don't recognize his leadership."

The reply causes the gruff-looking man to attack again, this time dropping the middle-age man to one of his knees. He breathes heavy, his face twisted from the pain.

"You will address Our Leader as 'Our Leader!'"

"I...will not."

The gruff-looking man moves to strike again but Our Leader stop him with a wave of his hand.

"If the troublemaker will not afford me the respect I deserve that's fine. I never expected it from him anyhow. He spends all his free time trying to turn the American public against me."

“Yes, Our Leader.”

“Can you stand up?”

The middle-age man rises to his feet without fuss. He breathes normally now.

“Good. Now, you know why you’re here. And you know what is in store for you later. I give all the troublemakers this opportunity to tell me exactly how he or she feels about me, my government, and the nation as a whole. It’s only right since it’s the only change he or she has to do so. You may speak when you’re ready.”

“This office only proves what I thought about you.”

“And that is?”

“You’re incredibly vain.”

Our Leader smiles as he stares at his captive.

“How much of our taxes did you waste on this office? On those photos?”

“Not much. Most of the tax revenue goes into the various government programs and projects to improve life for each American citizen.”

“Oh, you mean the programs and projects to keep each American citizen under your control?”

“The citizens like for me and my staff to think for them. That’s why they elected me.”

“That election was in 2032, twenty-two years ago. We haven’t had another election since then. Not after you instituted authoritarian rule.”

“You troublemakers love to call my One Government process that.”

“You can dress it up however you like it, but America is under authoritarian rule.”

“And you would like to go back to the mess that was American democracy decades back? Back to politicians squabbling with each other, getting nothing done, then scramble to convince the American public to vote for them every two and four years? I wouldn’t. So much time and money wasted. And America was no better off.”

“At least we were free!”

“Ah, yes. I was waiting for you to talk about freedom.”

“That’s because it’s what makes America great! The ability to go wherever and say whatever without the government tracking you or interfering with you is what our Founding Fathers wanted. But you ripped that away. I aim to reinstall liberty and freedom back into America. I and my followers. I’m getting more Americans to wake up to the state of the country, and who you really are.”

“All you troublemakers are the same. You all go down the wrong path when it comes to your fellow neighbor, or the public in general. What you all fail to realize is the desire of the average American. He or she doesn’t seek liberty or freedom, but free stuff. And I give them that. All I ask for in return is total obedience to my leadership and my rules.”

“The people aren’t that shallow. You tricked them into giving up their freedoms.”

A cunning smile forms on Our Leader’s face.

"You're right. And it was incredibly easy to do. All I had to do was dangle free healthcare, free daycare and college, a monthly cash stipend, a set amount of free food per month, and other goodies."

"I could reverse your trick," the middle-age man says defiantly.

"How so?"

"If I had the ability to speak to a large section of the public at once instead of dropping little crumbs of truth here and there on the controlled Internet, I could convince Americans what they lost."

Our Leader mulls over the statement, bringing his right hand up under his chin as his face narrows in thought. Then his smile returns.

"I'll give you exactly what you want. Today is Friday, which means at eight pm Eastern time I will give my weekly report at the Nation Report telecast. Instead of me on the stage talking about America's financial strength and answering the public's questions, you will speak. Say whatever you want to convince the American public to oust me out of office and follow your path to liberty."

"This has to be one of your tricks again."

"It's not. I will allow you to speak to your fellow citizens without any interference from myself or my staff. I will tell the Central Censors to allow your speech to reach the public without censoring, edits, or filters."

"I need some time to prepare. And a pen and paper to write my speech."

"You have eight hours until tonight's broadcast. I'll have my staff provide any and all materials you need, including food. I wanted you to be totally prepared for tonight. You have no idea what you're in for.

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"And we're live in one minute," the director says as he stands to the right to the cameraman. Both stand on the small set for the Nation Report show, along with Our Leader and the middle-age man. The latter hurries to his seat setting directly in front of the camera several feet away.

"Here," the director says while throwing a hand towel to the middle-age man, "wipe the sweat off your face. We cannot have you looking that way on camera. The people want to see strength, and sweating like that shows the exact opposite."

The middle-age man wipes his entire face with the towel, then wipes his sweaty hands. The director motions for the towel and the man throws the moist cloth back to him. The director catches it and instantly discards the towel onto the floor. He checks his watch.

"Ten seconds!"

The director counts down the seconds, pointing to the middle-age man when he reaches zero. The man opens his mouth to speak but freezes up. Then he remembers his speech in his pant's pocket and grows confident.

"Good evening, America. Our Leader will not be speaking to you tonight as Our Leader allowed me this unprecedented opportunity to speak to all of you at one time. I wrote down

my thoughts,” the middle-age man finishes the sentence by removing the folded pieces of paper from his pant’s pocket. “And I want to read them to you and answer any questions afterwards. Let’s begin.

“My name is Nathan Holloway, and I’m originally from Annapolis, Maryland, but I live in Mt. Airy, Maryland now. My grandfather served in the U.S. Navy and ended up retiring from the service. My father wanted to follow in his father’s footsteps but couldn’t due to medical conditions. When I came of age I thought about joining the Navy but went to college instead, and got a business degree. I ended up working at a corporation just like many of my peers.

“I tell you this because I want you to know I’m a normal person just like you watching. However, you will be told later I’m a troublemaker. That I hate Our Leader and want to overthrow him. The government is right to say I want to end the authoritarian rule here in America but I do not hate Our Leader. The only thing I do hate about him is addressing him by that title. Because I want to end his harsh rule my actions lead to my arrest three days ago. I thought I would be killed shortly after my arrest but to my surprise I wasn’t. And I wasn’t tortured either. I found out later I was kept alive because Our Leader wanted to talk to me. He wanted to know why I don’t fall in line like the other citizens. I told him because he tricked Americans out of their rights and their liberty.

“I am fifty-four years old now. I remember when the seeds of authoritarian rule was planted in America. That happened in 2022. I was twenty-two at the time, and just graduated college. I thought nothing of the talk from certain people and politicians. Most Americans back then weren’t interested in authoritarianism. They cherished their rights and liberties. But as the years passed the number of interested Americas grew. More politicians pushed the idea. Then in 2032 America elected the president who soon became Our Leader and seized total control of America. I voted against him but I was in the minority. It’s insane to see how fast your rights can be removed.

“I just knew America wouldn’t stand by and allow this man to take total control. There would be riots, possibly even a civil war, but to my surprise nothing major happened. There were protests in some cities but overall America accepted the change in exchange for free stuff.

“Most of you forgot what freedom feels like. You youngsters never got the chance to experience it. Life in America before the new regime was much different. You could go anywhere you wanted without having to give a reason like you do today. You could enter just about any building without having to scan your phone or go through a mandatory check-in screening. Anyone could own a car back then, not just certain individuals now. Oh, and cars had combustible engines requiring gasoline. Now all we have are electric cars. When I was young you could choose to stay single or get married. And you could choose whether to have kids or not. Now the government forces couples together by taxing single people heavily. And they force those couples to procreate by taxing them heavily if they do not. I used to complain about taxes when I was younger. Do I wish to have those tax rates now.

“That’s why I fight against our government. That’s why I do my best to convince others to join me. I want to bring back the old America, the good America. Yes, it had its problems but our current version has worse problems. I hope my speech makes you ask questions about Our Leader, about America’s past freedoms, and what our Founding Fathers fought for. I believe when you do you will join me in my fight to bring liberty back to America.”

Nathan folds his speech and slips it back into his pant’s pocket. He looks at the director and the cameraman. Then he sees Our Leader walking across the studio toward the stage. He

stands to the right of the chair Nathan sits in with his arms folded at the wrist and resting against his waist.

“Thank you for those remarks, Nathan. The public has many questions for you and it’s time for you to answer them. Please pick up the tablet sitting on the table to your left. The Talkr app should be open already. To the viewing public I suggest you get in your questions now using Talkr, which is America’s one and only official social media platform.”

Nathan picks up the tablet and views the comments and questions.

“Just click on a message and it will appear on the screen for our viewing public to read. However, you should read the message or comment our loud for our sight-impaired viewers.”

Nathan taps on a message.

“Shut up, old man. No one cares.”

He looks over to Our Leader who shrugs in response. Nathan choose another message.

“This guy is so boring. Our Leader should have killed him instead of letting him talk.”

“I suggest skimming through and find a question related to your remarks.”

Nathan follows the suggestion, scrolling down the app with his right index finger.

“Ah, here’s we go: ‘How is liberty going to feed me and my family when the government does a great job already?’ Well, I’ll tell you how Bob Allen from Scranton, Pennsylvania: By working. And I don’t mean working in one of the government-approved jobs, but by working with a private company of your choosing or through self-employment. Either way you’ll earn income you are free to spend. That money won’t be tied to a specific category making you shop at a particular store or for specific items.”

Nathan goes to search for a new question to answer when the screen refreshes with a batch of new comments and questions.

“Your response made even more comments to come through. You’re turning out to be a polarizing person, Nathan.”

Nathan skims through the new messages, growing forlorn as he reads them. Suddenly, he stops scrolling and looks directly into the camera.

“All you people care about are goodies? That’s what you call the free stuff you get from the government. You don’t care about freedom at all. Just, just getting free stuff!”

“The people love their goodies,” Our Leader says with a smile. “And that’s all they care about. Anything that will affect obtaining their goodies will cause the people to negatively react.”

“Listen, everyone,” Nathan pleads to the camera, “I know what I’m asking you to do is new. I know you are scared. You’re scared of leaving an easy way of life to one full of sacrifice and work. But once you push through and get to the finish line all that sacrifice and hard work will be worth it.”

The screen refreshes again and many new abusive comments appear. Nathan sees them, sighs loudly, and places the tablet back onto the table.

“As you can see our guest is finished answering your questions, but I will continue this conversation for the remainder of the broadcast.”



After the broadcast ends Our Leader walks over to Nathan with a soft smile on his face.

“Don’t look so defeated, Nathan. I think you did rather well.”

“All these people care about is free stuff and living an easy life.”

Our Leader nods. “Don’t you realize the vast majority of previous generations of Americans wanted that too? They were liars when they said they would never give up their freedom. Because when I suggested to them all the free stuff I wanted to give them in exchange of their freedom many were fine with the deal. That’s when I knew I could get them to elect me. I would have no problem instituting my new rules and my One Government. And I didn’t for the most part. Oh yes, troublemakers like you, Nathan, pop up from time to time but each one of them fail in their battle against me. You know why now. Because you can’t win over the entitled and slothful public with talk of sacrifice and discipline.”

Nathan waits a long time before responding.

“I was so excited for this opportunity. Now I wish you killed me just like you did the others.”

“I was going to but I’m glad I didn’t. This experiment worked out nicely for me. I broke your spirit, and probably the spirits of other troublemakers out there. I think I won’t be bothered by any new troublemakers for quite some time.”