



TALONS OF THE CONDOR

John
Simpson

Sequel to Condor One

TALONS OF THE CONDOR



John
Simpson



Dreamspinner Press

Published by
Dreamspinner Press
4760 Preston Road
Suite 244-149
Frisco, TX 75034
<http://www.dreamspinnerpress.com/>

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Talons of the Condor
Copyright © 2009 by John Simpson

Cover Art by Dan Skinner/Cerberus Inc. cerberusinc@hotmail.com
Cover Design by Mara McKennen

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without the written permission of the Publisher, except where permitted by law. To request permission and all other inquiries, contact Dreamspinner Press, 4760 Preston Road, Suite 244-149, Frisco, TX 75034
<http://www.dreamspinnerpress.com/>

ISBN: 978-1-61581-031-4

Printed in the United States of America
First Edition
July, 2009

eBook edition available
eBook ISBN: 978-1-61581-032-1

This work is dedicated to the Obama administration.

May the president succeed in bringing peace and stability to the
American people and to the citizens of the world.

CHAPTER 1



As the sun began to rise, James, my valet, knocked loudly on the door, eliciting a verbal challenge from Mary, who had been sleeping peacefully on the pillow next to my head. Mary didn't like to get up this early any more than I did and she made her displeasure plainly known. It was just one more thing that my little Scottie and I had in common. She had also let me know in the past when she didn't like my boyfriend. That was a bit more difficult to deal with, but she appeared to favor Shane.

"Good morning, Mr. President. Shall I bring you your usual cup of coffee this morning?"

"Yes, please. It's going to be a long day, and I need to be wide awake from the moment I leave the bedroom. Also, could you see that Mary here gets a walk?"

"Of course, Mr. President," he said as he backed out of the room to get my coffee, calling Mary to follow. Mary looked at me for the okay to leave with this strange man, and I told her, "Go on, Mary. James is a friend. Be a good girl." Permission having been given, Mary bounded out of the bedroom wagging her tail.

I quickly showered, shaved, and returned to the bedroom to find my coffee sitting on my nightstand and the suit for the day laid out on my bed. The bed had also had been made. One thing I loved about

living in the White House was that it had the best coffee I had ever tasted anywhere. I got dressed, finished the coffee, and left the bedroom for the family dining room.

When I sat down, Henry handed me the morning papers and I saw the headlines screaming from the front page: “Speaker of the House arrested for treason!” The story recounted as much of the details as the press knew, including the arrests of the co-defendants. For *The New York Times*, the headline was, “Speaker of the House arrested and detained in Gitmo.”

Interviews with various people revealed a general sense of shock and dismay at such bold attempts to assassinate me and remove the vice president at the same time. Just as disturbing to many was the fact that I had all the conspirators shipped off to Cuba. This did not sit well with many people and became a central point in the controversy.

It had been a little more than fourteen hours since the arrests and already most of the nation was second-guessing my orders. At this rate, it wouldn’t be long before legislation was introduced reforming the Bush doctrine on foreign combatants and their lack of rights while sitting in a Cuban cell at Guantanamo Bay. My first policy goal might be achieved in record time for a new administration.

I put the papers back down and ate quickly. Leaving the table, I thanked Henry for a great breakfast as usual. Upon leaving the dining room, I found Shane waiting for me to begin the day.

“Condor One in motion to the Oval Office,” Shane said into his hand mic, alerting the rest of the staff that I was on my way to the office. As we got off the elevator, I found Andy, my chief of staff, waiting for me.

“Good morning, Mr. President. Did you sleep well?” he asked.

“Good morning, Andy. Yes I did, as a matter of fact. Ready for what promises to be an interesting day?”

“The calls have already been pouring into the switchboard. I can honestly say you’ve shocked the country. It’s like you kicked over a hornets’ nest.”

My only response was to smile and continue to head to the office, where I found both my Marys, feisty Scottie and the equally feisty secretary, waiting for me. “Good morning, Mary. How are you?”

“Fine, Mr. President, and you? I see you’ve put a crease on the collective forehead of America this morning.”

“Ah, yes, all in a day’s work, Mary!”

Little Mary followed me into the Oval Office and took what was to become her usual place behind the desk on the floor next to me. She looked so small there surrounded by the immenseness of the Oval Office. Or maybe it was the power represented by the office?

Andy had come in with Mary and me and sat down in front of the desk.

“The House is picking a new speaker this morning since you jailed their old one,” he said with a smile.

“Yeah, well, there’s the little matter of the ‘old one’ trying to call a new election out of cycle.”

“What do you propose to do with them if Congress sends you legislation closing Gitmo?”

“We’ll ship them all to a military prison here in the states. We can talk about where when the issue comes up, and I know it will. Now that one of their own is sitting down there, they’ll act quickly to take away the power they gave Bush on this matter. The sooner the better as far as I’m concerned.”

“Well, I’d be careful with mixing them in with a general prison population. Our luck, an inmate would kill one of them before their

guilt could be proved beyond a reasonable doubt and we would be blamed for setting it all up.”

“You got a good point, Andy. Tell you what—I’ve been thinking on this for a bit and I’ve come up with an idea that will really get things hopping.”

Andy sat up straighter in the chair and looked a little alarmed. He had been around me enough to know that I could come up with some pretty wild ideas, but usually ideas that held merit.

“Okay, let me have it, Mr. President.”

“What would you think if I told you I wanted Alcatraz rebuilt and reopened as a federal prison?”

“Alcatraz? Are you serious? That place was known for its harshness when it was in operation. Hell, it broke Al Capone!”

“Well, prison isn’t meant to be a stay in a country club. We could reserve it for the worst of the worst, just like before. Terrorists or assassins would be two categories that would fit nicely, I should think. Of course, the current structure would have to be demolished and a new one built along with suitable support buildings. It provides security for the local civilian population as well as a secure environment for the inmates. In fact, as long as we have it, we could transfer the federal death house there also. Executions would be carried out only on The Rock. What do you think?”

“Well, Bobby Kennedy closed Alcatraz when he served as attorney general because of what it cost the government to house a prisoner, which, incidentally, was estimated at three times the normal cost of other prisons. Is cost a factor in your thinking?”

“Well, cost is always a factor, but in this case I would have to say no. We need a secure prison for these types of people and Gitmo is no longer an option. Here’s what I would like you to do: have someone from the Office of Management and Budget along with the Army Corps of Engineers put together a set of plans and cost

estimates to level the current structures on The Rock, and build administration buildings and a prison to house, say, a minimum of one hundred and twenty-five prisoners. Give them a time frame of six months. I'm sure that will increase costs, but I feel strongly that we need Alcatraz as a credible deterrent as well as a practical remedy. Get me preliminary estimates by the end of the week."

"Okay, Mr. President, if that's what you want."

"Good. Anything else that I need to know about?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary. Oh, the vice president is having her first social event at her residence tomorrow evening: a reception for some of the diplomatic folks. She seems to be settling into her new role nicely."

"Great. Very glad to hear that. What of her son, Darren? Is he adjusting to life in Washington?"

"I don't have any information on her son, but I can make inquiries if you like."

"Nah, I'll ask her myself when I see her next. It's a big change from what the boy is used to and I hope he's taking it well. He doesn't have any friends here and that has to be hard for a boy his age."

"Very well, Mr. President. That's all I have for now."

"Okay, Andy, lemme get to work here and I'll talk to you later. Oh, ask Mary to come in, will ya?"

When Mary entered, I pointed to the Mary on the floor and said, "She looks uncomfortable down there, don'tcha think, Mary?"

"Well, she's sound asleep, snoring like a lumberjack, and with her daddy. No, I'd say she is not only fine, but damned lucky, David. You spoil her so bad!"

“Well, I’m going to spoil her some more. Would you buy a doggie bed from somewhere and have it put in here for her to sleep in? Something that will go with the office though; nothing garish, maybe with her daddy’s seal on it?”

“David, you have got to be kidding. You want me to search for a doggie bed with the presidential seal on it? You’re not serious? You’re joking, right? I’ve watched Mary since you got her as a little six-week-old puppy and that dog could fall asleep on a tree branch in a wind-storm, and you’re worried that she can’t sleep comfortably on the presidential rug in the Oval Office, and within four feet of her daddy?”

“Mary, if you had to lie on the floor next to my desk, wouldn’t you want a little bed to sleep on?”

“With the number of hours I’m putting in here, I’ll take that bed!” she said as she walked out of the Oval Office. I just had to smile and look down to my other dear Mary, and say, “Don’t you worry, sweetie. Only the best for my baby! After all, you’re the First Dog!”

Before I knew it, it was lunchtime. I left the office followed by Shane and headed to the family quarters to eat. When I sat down at the table, I invited Shane to eat with me. The other agent waited for my return at the elevator .

“You hungry?”

“I’m always hungry; you know that,” Shane responded with a smile that made my heart feel warm. Our standard lunch consisted of a ham and Swiss on rye with spicy mustard, accompanied by coleslaw, chips, and a diet 7Up.

“I’m going to reopen Alcatraz; what do you think of that idea?” I asked.

“Why on earth would you do that? It’s not like we don’t have plenty of federal prisons as it is.”

“Because I want a domestic Gitmo-type facility for the real, serious threats to the public and to this country. Can you think of a better place than a rebuilt Alcatraz?”

“No. I guess that’s about the safest place to put those kinds of people. The public is going to be pissed at the costs to rebuild and run it though.”

“Really? I don’t think so. If we put these people like the former speaker of the House in Alcatraz, we can almost guarantee his safety there. How long do you think he would last in the general population of any other federal prison?”

“That’s a really good point, now that I think of it.”

“When we transfer that jackal and his merry band of traitors, we can tell the country that it’s for their own safety, and it won’t be a lie!”

Shane and I chatted about different things through the rest of lunch and we were back to work after only twenty minutes, Shane at the door to the Oval Office and me inside conducting one of those never-ending meetings. One day I counted how many meetings I had to attend and was astounded when the total reached twenty-nine. My last appointment for the normal schedule today was the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Keens. After Mary showed him in, he took a seat in front of the desk.

“Good afternoon, General. I trust you are well?”

“Yes, Mr. President, I am, thank you. I will be better, however, when you arrive at your final decision on what to do with the five former Marines who were convicted and sentenced to death for high treason and other offenses. As you know, I’ve signed off on the sentences but because they are terminal, you must also concur in writing.”

“Have any of them cooperated yet with information on the conspiracy?”

“No, Mr. President. I’m sorry to say that while I don’t think they are quite as brave and defiant as they once were, they are still choosing to remain silent.”

“General, when was the last military execution and what was it for?”

“The last one was April 13, 1961, for the attempted murder and rape of an eleven-year-old Austrian girl. I can have the case sent over if you wish.”

“No, that won’t be necessary.” I got up, walked over to the window, and looked out on the White House lawn. I was deeply torn as to whether or not to approve the sentences, but I had to remember that their crimes were not only against me, but also against the country and the Marine Corps.

“General, the alternative would be a life sentence living at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas, is that correct?”

“Yes, sir. If it helps, life in that prison is nothing to be yearned for, if you ask me.”

“But if we execute them, do we make them a Conservative cause or martyr of some sort? Do we help their goals by making them heroes in the eyes of their supporters? And isn’t a death sentence over rather quickly while life in prison must seem like forever?”

“There is something to be said for that, yes, sir.”

“General, you’ll have my decision by tomorrow, noon. How would a commutation be received by members of the Corps?”

“The feeling is pretty unanimous, Mr. President. These men dishonored the Marine Corps in the worst way possible. The Marine Corps, as you know, are referred to as “the president’s own.” Well, that does not mean trying to kill the president. The feeling is that they deserve to die.”

“Okay. Next topic is when to schedule my morale inspection of Parris Island Marine base.”

“Sir, any time you want. You’re the boss, after all.”

“Okay. I’ll try and clear two days next week. It will be an overnight and we’ll more than likely go by Air Force One and chopper. I’ll have Andy Carter get with you on that. If there is nothing else, that’s all I have.”

“No, sir, nothing else. Again, we appreciate your visit as a way of showing your continued support for the Corps. It’s important to the men that they know you don’t hold the dishonor of six Marines against all of them. At least one of them had the grace to kill himself when taken in Jordan.”

“I’ll do my best to make sure they know how proud I am of the Corps. Thanks for coming over today.”

As I showed the general out, I asked Mary to find Andy for me; I wanted to discuss this with my chief of staff. The lives of five men were in my hands and only I could make the final determination. As I glanced at my watch, I saw that it was almost 6:30 and dinner would be waiting on me shortly. One of my personal staff brought Mary back from her walk and she looked up at me as if trying to figure out if I was done working yet.

When I turned around and went back in, she had her answer. Resignedly, she walked over to her spot and settled in for nap number twenty-three of the day. I looked up as Andy came into the room and took a seat.

“Andy, I need to decide by noon tomorrow whether or not to commute the death sentences on those five former Marines. What seemed like a fairly easy decision weeks ago is rather weighty now. I fear making them martyrs for their cause of Conservative rule of the world and a very militaristic United States. General Keens is pretty

clear on the feelings of the Corps and he says that they back execution. What's your view?"

"I think that you have an excellent opportunity to show mercy to five men who conspired to kill you. You'll also be making a statement about the death penalty, and a majority of the public may end up backing you if you decide to commute."

"But what if the former speaker of the House and his bully boys are found guilty? They could be sentenced to death also for the same offenses without the extra military charges. What then? Do I commute those as well? This could be a slippery slope if I'm not careful."

"Well, unless they petition your office for a commutation or pardon, you don't have to get involved. The courts will handle all aspects of the case. If you did commute their sentences to life, where do we house them? Leavenworth?"

"Actually, Andy, I was thinking of Alcatraz. We'll make it an adjunct of the Bureau of Prisons, but staff it with MPs and run it like Fort Leavenworth. This way the costs will come out of the Defense Department budget as well. Have Bill Harkens draw up a press statement saying that I have commuted the death sentences to life without parole. I'll sleep on it tonight, and if I haven't decided otherwise by the morning, that's how it will go down."

"Does anyone else in the administration need to be notified of your decision, if it goes that way?"

"You can advise the attorney general and the vice president. Beyond that, it will come out in the press."

"Very well, Mr. President."

"Thanks, Andy. Unless you have something else this evening, I'm going home."

As we left the Oval Office, Mary was just putting her coat on to leave for the day. I said good night to her and continued to walk. "Oh,

Mr. President,” she called after me.”You’ll be happy to learn that I found the item you asked for earlier today. The seal has to be put on by hand, but you’ll have it within a week.”

“Why thank you, Mary. Little Mary thanks you as well, and I’m sure she’ll offer to share a biscuit with you in thanksgiving!”

“Great. I can use it for a snack when I can’t get away for lunch again! See you in the morning.”

“Good night, Mary.”

Andy said good night and I entered the elevator with Shane. “Condor One in the residence,” Shane said into his hand mic as we ascended.

“It’s been a long day today, Shane, and I have a decision to make tonight that will kill five men or allow them to live. I’d like your input since you’re involved in the case.”

Shane didn’t immediately get what I was talking about. Then he remembered the general’s visit and the light bulb went on. We exited the elevator and nodded to the agent on duty in the hallway. I went into my bedroom to change and get comfortable. I was not big on ties, having grown quite sick of them in the corporate world, and I relegated them to the trash can except for special occasions.

Shane and I sat down to dinner and chatted through the meal. I felt so at ease with this man and had a hard time recalling any such relationship like it from my past. I trusted him with my life, my secrets, and—I was beginning to think—with my heart. As I looked into his eyes while he spoke, I became lost in a fluid world where just the two of us existed and making each other happy was the only requirement of life.

“David, did you hear me?”

“Sorry. I kinda spaced out for a moment.”

“I was saying why don’t we go up to Camp David soon for the weekend? It’s so peaceful up there and it seems like there is greater privacy.”

“I think you like that place as much as I do. Yeah, sure, why not? As I said to you before, I want to use the camp as much as possible.”

“Yeah, I do like it there. I don’t feel like there are eyes everywhere like here at the White House.”

“If you’re finished, let’s go into the living room.”

We walked into the living room and sat down on the sofa; Mary jumped up and laid down between us. I flicked the television on to catch some news and during the commercial, after Henry served us more coffee, I turned to the subject that was bothering me.

“Shane, how do you think my commuting the death sentences of the five former Marines would go over around the country? And do you think it’s the right thing to do?”

“That’s a decision only you can make. I’m nowhere near being qualified to talk on that subject.”

“Don’t wimp out on me now. You are qualified; more so than almost anyone else is. Not once, but twice you saved my ass from these fools. Your life could have easily been lost along with mine. So, I do feel you have a dog in this fight.”

“Okay. I think your commuting their death sentence might be seen by your adversaries as weak on your part. In this case, your adversaries are also adversaries of our democracy and you have a responsibility as president to attend to both, but even more so to the country.”

“What about signing off on the sentences for any of them who had a leadership role in the plot, and commuting the followers?”

“Well, that’s splitting the baby in half, but, yeah, that could work. Why are you hesitant to send them all to the gallows?”

“I am not a big fan of capital punishment. I recognize that in certain circumstances, it is appropriate, but in general, I detest it as a relic of the past. Look at the nations who still use it: Afghanistan, China, Cuba. You know the list. Are these countries that we want to be in the same class with?”

“I see your point. As a compromise on this particular case, I think if you commute the followers and allow the execution of the leaders, it would send the same message as executing all of them. Where would you jail the others, by the way?”

“Alcatraz.”

“I think I would rather be executed than sent to The Rock.”

“Good. I’ve made up my mind then. Thank you for your counsel. Now, I can hope that the phones won’t ring and we can enjoy some television tonight. God knows I need some diversion.”

CHAPTER 2



Andy Carter entered the Oval Office through one of only two doors that lead into my inner sanctum and came to the sofa where I was reading a briefing paper. “Good morning, Mr. President. I have the schedule for your visit to Quantico for your approval.”

“Hi, Andy. Sit down,” I said, taking the folder from his hand.

As I read the file, I saw that we were presently scheduled to fly down to Parris Island on Monday morning and spend the night. We would return to the White House after lunch on Tuesday. The visit would be an inspection tour with the goal of learning what life was like for the average Marine during boot camp and afterward. Meetings were set up with the base commander and his senior staff. Coming along on the trip would be General Keens as Commandant.

“This looks good, Andy; please confirm it all. Also, let Mary know and make sure that there are no vital appointments during that time frame.”

“Yes, Mr. President. I will be with you, of course.”

“Of course. I wouldn’t think of leaving you here unless you were going to take care of Mary!”

“I think Mary is old enough to take care of herself, Mr. President. She might resent a babysitter.”

“Ah, my secretary and right arm might resent it, but not my little Mary!”

Andy laughed as he realized whom I was talking about just as the two-legged Mary walked into the office. “Excuse me, Mr. President, but you have a Cabinet meeting in ten minutes. And why is Andy looking at me and laughing? What are you two up to?”

“Oh nothing, Mary. Andy just thought I was asking him to babysit you while I’m away next week, that’s all.”

“Babysit me? And just exactly who would babysit Andy? He’s thirty-three years younger than me, if anyone needs a babysitter.” As she walked indignantly out of the Oval Office, I looked at Andy and began to laugh.

“Well, let me get my file for the meeting and I’ll see you in there in ten minutes.”

I walked back to my desk and pulled out a file marked “Cabinet meeting.” It was time to get updates from the various agencies of the federal government and learn of any progress toward administration goals.

After another couple of minutes’ reflection, I went to the President’s meeting room that is typically seen on television.

As I entered the room with Shane on my heels, everyone rose from the table and greeted me. “Hello, everyone. Good to see you all,” I said as I took my seat and poured some water. “You’ve all had some time now to settle in at your respective departments. I would like a brief report from each of you on what you found and any concerns that you may have. Let’s start with the Department of State.”

Secretary Gutierrez started off and the rest of the Cabinet quickly provided reports on their agencies. No one had any big concerns other than former political appointees that had burrowed into their agencies. These appointees were typically loyal to the last administration and not to the one in power. Before President Scalia

had left office, all of these employees had converted over to civil service so that they could not be fired at will.

“If any of these employees become troublesome and cannot be removed using personnel rules, then isolate them. Cut them off from everything and see that they cannot do any harm to our progress and work for the American people. The rules might say they can’t be fired, but the rules mention nothing about what they have to be doing.”

“But if they really foul up, we get rid of them?” asked Margaret Howell, Secretary of Energy.

“Yes, just like any other employee, if they foul up, get rid of them. And in your department, Margaret, make sure that none of them have anything to do with any of the nuclear labs or anything classified as defense-related.”

“Yes, Mr. President.”

“Okay, for everyone’s information, on Monday, I will be going overnight to Parris Island on an inspection tour. I will be back the next day, but of course, you can reach me if you need me. One more thing, Margaret: I want your proposal for reducing our dependence on foreign oil as quickly as possible. As soon as you come up with something sound, I’m going to reduce our relationship with Saudi Arabia. They’re rotten to the core and America is better off without them.”

“Of course, Mr. President.”

With that, the meeting was adjourned and I headed back to the Oval Office.

Just as I sat down, Mary buzzed me. “Mr. President, King Abdullah of Jordan is on line one for you. It’s not a scheduled call and he says it’s urgent.”

“Thank you. I’ll take it.”

“Good morning, Your Majesty; at least it’s morning here in Washington.”

“Good morning, Mr. President. I trust you have fully recovered from the unfortunate events that transpired while you were my guest here in the kingdom?”

“Well, one doesn’t soon get over a massive attack to kill one while trying to bring peace to the region, but I’m recovering nicely. And you? Have there been any repercussions against you or Jordan?”

“Nothing directly, Mr. President, but that is why I’m calling. We are close allies, are we not?”

“Yes, Your Majesty. I’ve considered America and Jordan as being close allies for a number of years now. Why do you ask?”

“I ask because I wish to be sure that I am doing the right thing. I am sending one of my brothers to you with information that I do not wish to trust to any other means. It is very sensitive intelligence and it is crucial that you have it. Will you receive my brother, the Crown Prince?”

“Of course. This sounds serious if you are taking such precautions. Are you sure that the security for your brother is adequate?”

“He will travel on one of the palace fleet jets and fly directly to Washington. Would your people be able to secure him while in the United States?”

“Yes, of course. When will he arrive?”

“We are working out the details now, Mr. President. I hope he will arrive no later than Monday.”

“Monday. Very well. I will be happy to meet with him, but not in Washington. I’ll be visiting the Marine base at Parris Island. Have one of your aides contact Andy Carter, my chief of staff, with all the arrangements.”

“Very well. I will be waiting for your reply to the information.”

“Thank you. I will speak with you early next week.”

When I hung up the phone, I began to feel tension in the pit of my stomach. What could possibly be so important that the King of Jordan would only entrust the information to a family member rather than sending it through normal state department routes? I punched Andy’s intercom number. “Can you come in here, please?”

A moment later, Andy was standing in front of my desk. “King Abdullah of Jordan is sending his brother to me on Monday with vital information. Since we’ll be at Parris Island, have him ferried there for a meeting. The King’s people will contact you with the flight plans and so on. Have the Secret Service take him into their protection while he’s on American soil.”

“Of course, sir. Did the King give you any hints?”

“No. But it must be something important for this bit of cloak-and-dagger stuff.”

“Well, the fact that the King isn’t trusting normal state department channels is troubling. I guess we’ll have to wait to find out what’s so urgent.”

“True, but I like the King, and his family has worked hard for peace in the Middle East and, of course, he has connections to America. After all, his mother *is* an American. Let State know that this is happening, but don’t give out any details just yet. Let’s find out what the information is first. I do, however, get the feeling that the conspiracy against me and our government is not yet over.”

Andy turned around and left the office. A thousand possibilities ran through my mind as to why the King would use this method of conveying information, but I felt it best to not speculate. For all I knew, it could be a new recipe for dark chocolate chip cookies that the King wanted kept top secret!

Before I realized it, it was 3:30 in the afternoon and I had worked through lunch. There was so much to do in correcting serious problems left by the old administration that it would be some time before life would settle down. I was due on Capitol Hill in one hour for a meeting with Congressional leaders, and then back to the residence. I decided to go up to the residence and rest for a few minutes and freshen up.

“Mary, I’m going to the residence for a bit and then I’ll be leaving for Capitol Hill.”

“Have fun, Mr. President; I know how you love the Hill after the reception you got up there on inauguration day!”

I smiled at Mary and kept on walking. “And thanks to you, Shane, I’m here to go back there today.” Shane’s only reaction was to smile back at me.

Little Mary hopped right onto the elevator along with Shane and I and another agent. When we got off, Mary and I turned left while Shane and the agent turned right toward a little office the Service kept at the end of the residence hall.

“Good afternoon, Mr. President,” Henry greeted me. “Would you like your usual diet 7Up?”

“Yes please, Henry. Thank you.”

Once in my bedroom, I took off my jacket and went into my beautiful bathroom. I splashed some water on my face and quickly shaved off whiskers that were beginning to show a little. Once I was satisfied, I dried off, grabbed my coat, and headed into the living room. There I found my soda waiting for me and I took a sip as I heard Mary lapping water from one of her numerous bowls. When she was finished, up on the sofa next to me she bounded. I put my head back against the pillows and closed my eyes for a moment, going through the agenda of the meeting that was to take place shortly.

The phone rang next to me. “President Windsor, Attorney General Steiner here. I hope I’m not interrupting anything?”

“No, Eric, go on. What’s up?”

“We’re being inundated with court filings in the form of motions from defense attorneys on behalf of the men who were arrested in the plot to assassinate you. They’re doing their very best to get the courts to order you to release their clients, stating that the ‘enemy combatants’ classification does not apply and therefore, you had no legal right to confine them as you did. Frankly, sir, they’re right.”

“Well, what exactly was the definition used by the Bush administration when they were locking up everyone under the sun that they classified as an ‘enemy combatant?’”

“Their definition was actually ‘any person the United States regards as an unlawful combatant in the war on terror and a category of person who does not qualify for prisoner-of-war status under the Geneva Convention’.”

“And the courts let them get by with that, huh?”

“Yes, Mr. President.”

“Well, please tell me how our prisoners at Gitmo don’t fit that rather broad definition?”

“Well, sir, they do fit the definition if you interpret it broadly.”

“Then choose to interpret it that way. Defend the decision in court. I want Congress to pass legislation disallowing this from ever happening again. They gave Bush this dangerous power, now they need to take it away from the president. I just need enough time to open up the new prison.”

“New prison?”

“Yes, Eric. I’m going to reopen Alcatraz. It will take at least six months to rebuild it, so get me that time. There really is no other place

to safely keep them until then. Do you want to see any of them killed in a stateside prison by the inmates?”

“No, of course not. But we don’t have six months. I can’t make this work longer than say twelve weeks at the most. They are going to be subject to habeas corpus, sir.”

“As well they should be! That’s part of the point I’m making here. Look, Eric, defend me on this decision and we’ll get them relocated to the U.S. as soon as possible.”

“Very well. I take it the Alcatraz situation is confidential for the moment?”

“Yes, indeed. Keep it under your hat.”

I PUNCHED the button for Andy.

“Yes, Mr. President?”

“I need you to speed up the whole Alcatraz thing. I need that prison rebuilt. Find me some executive authority to begin demolition and construction forthwith. Justice has to defend my decision to send Gorski and his cronies to Gitmo. Eric Steiner doesn’t think he can hold them down there very much longer.”

“Certainly, sir. I’ll have an answer for you by the end of the day.”

“David, it’s time to head to the Hill. Are you ready?” asked Shane as he came into the room.

We left the residence and went to the motorcade, fully twelve vehicles long. I got into my new armored limousine, with my specially trained driver, Special Agent Ed Spence, behind the wheel, and the special agent in charge of my protection detail beside him. Shane got into the follow car and off we went. My new limousine had

been specially built by Cadillac and had never been used prior to my inauguration day. It was so tough; I was told that it could withstand a direct hit from a rocket-propelled grenade. The inside of the car was completely sealed so that even noise could not penetrate the passenger compartment. It had the latest in communications and entertainment equipment for those rare long trips. If the vehicle came under attack by a gas or biological weapon, the passenger compartment would seal itself so tight that not even a molecule could penetrate the shield. The door alone was more than six inches thick.

DC police blocked off intersections as we rode up Pennsylvania Avenue. The ride to the Capitol took only six minutes. The limo pulled under a portico for VIPs, and I waited for Shane to appear at my door. After a minute or so, the door was opened; I climbed out of the car and was greeted by the Congressional leadership. I was then escorted into the Capitol Building on my first visit since that fateful day when I almost took my last breath.

As we chatted on our way to the caucus room, I noticed that a veritable army of agents and police officers surrounded us. It was quite evident that the Service was taking no chances of anything going wrong on my return to the Hill.

After we entered the caucus room, it was sealed tight. We took our places and I looked around to see exactly who was in attendance. As expected, I saw the new speaker of the House, the minority leader of the House, and the majority leader of the Senate along with the minority leader. The president of the Senate, Vice President Wilson, was also present.

“Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to attend this meeting. I’m here, as you know, to go over some more legislative initiatives that I wish to put through Congress and I hope that I can count on all of you to assist with that goal.”

“I think I speak for everyone present when I say that we are eager to hear what you plan to send up to the Hill for consideration,” the new speaker of the House said.

“Yes, but before we get into any of that, I would like to address another issue,” the Senate minority leader stated.

“And what issue would that be, Senator Mayborn?”

“Well, sir, the great big pink elephant in the room is the former speaker and his detention in Gitmo. How long do you propose to keep him there?”

“Senator, I didn’t realize that you placed a time limit on detention for those declared as ‘enemy combatants’. Am I mistaken?”

“No, Mr. President, you are not. But how can you possibly justify putting Gorski and his colleagues down there? After all, they’re American citizens!”

“Senator, you and the rest of your party had no problem with this definition of ‘enemy combatant’ until now. If you don’t like what I have done, then send me a bill eliminating that classification, and I’ll sign it.”

“Very well, we’ll do exactly that! Will the House support such a bill?” the senator asked.

“I believe the bill wouldn’t face any substantial opposition,” replied the speaker.

“My office will begin work on the bill tomorrow,” finished the senator.

“Now, let us move on. First, the labor bill amending the Mine Safety and Health Act, to create tougher enforcement tools; where are we on that?” I asked.

“We are encountering opposition from some members who have campaign backing from the coal industry. The coal people are not

happy with your proposal to shut down the mining operation unless their civil penalties are paid. But, with a little work, I believe we can get it through and onto your desk by early fall at the latest.”

“Thank you Mr. Speaker. That is good news. I’m up to date on the status of the other bills we sent to the Hill. Now I wish to discuss something new in light of the senator’s objection to Gorski sitting in Gitmo. I will be authorizing the demolition of Alcatraz and the building of a new prison on that site to be operated by the military. Terrorists and others that are dangerous to the security of our nation, as well as certain military prisoners, will be sent there for incarceration or for other disposition, including the death penalty. The death house at Fort Leavenworth will be closed and the operation transferred to The Rock. I have asked that this be done within six months, and I am transferring the island back to the military and away from the Interior Department.”

While there was a great deal of shock and mumbling, there were no serious objections that weren’t budgetary in nature. “Mr. President, that prison was closed by Attorney General Bobby Kennedy as being too expensive to operate. What has changed?” asked Mayborn.

“Two things. One, as I said, it will be run by the military. There will be limited housing on site for troops, and many will be housed on the mainland. Second, the budget for Alcatraz will come out of the DOD appropriations and not the Bureau of Prisons budget. If we are going to close Gitmo, we are going to need an alternative. Some have suggested military bases around the world. I don’t like that idea. It makes those bases potential targets for terrorists. The Rock has a good history and one that is not finished yet.”

“While we are on this subject, Mr. President, I’d like to ask you when the legal matters regarding the former speaker and his friends will be resolved?” asked the House minority leader.

“Congressman, the case is in the hands of the Justice Department and they will proceed with all due haste to ensure a fair

and speedy trial of those charged in the plot to eliminate me. As I am the victim, so to speak, I will not put pressure of any kind on the attorney general in this matter. I have total confidence in Eric Steiner, and I will allow him to do his job.”

The rest of the meeting passed quickly in discussions about pending legislation. The final topic now rose to the top of the pile.

“And finally, I wish to address a hot-button issue. The gay community and their issues are due for attention. There is no basis in Constitutional law to treat homosexuals any differently from any other American citizen. Therefore, we need to bring to fruition the most famous phrase from our Declaration of Independence: All men are created equal. The term ‘men’ is gender inclusive and certainly applies to women in every respect. Permit me to repeat the entire line for clarity. ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’.

“Thomas Jefferson, the author of that phrase, thought it so important that he opened the Declaration of Independence with it. Now, some two hundred and thirty-three years later, we still have not achieved that goal for all Americans. Gay Americans do not have the same unalienable rights as non-gay citizens. Why? The answer is simple: in this case, the majority deems the minority undeserving of those same rights. Much of the opposition to equality for gay people comes from the religious right, who use God as their reason for opposing equality. We have often in these great halls of democracy heard the term unalienable rights. But what exactly does that mean?

“An ‘unalienable Right’ is a right that is not contingent upon laws, customs or beliefs of a particular society or polity. Now, the other definition of rights is one obtained through legislation, or the granting of said rights by the legislature or codified into laws; these are deemed legal rights. Please observe where Jefferson placed the

right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness: unalienable rights. So Jefferson would say that there need be no special laws passed to allow gay people to marry, for example, for surely that is the pursuit of happiness which flows from said unalienable right. The same can be said for liberty: the liberty to marry one who you love. Marriage is but one issue. We must work towards total inclusion of the gay community into the life of America by extending the rights of Americans, both natural and legal, to all citizens. In due time, I will be sending up to the Hill legislation to correct the injustices committed in this area.”

The Republican members immediately began to protest any attempt to modernize the legal rights of gay people. I chose to not acknowledge the same old arguments that had been in use for decades. I thanked everyone and my escort took me out to the motorcade. Once inside the protective cocoon of my limo, I began to breathe once more. I had begun to get angry at the continued ignorance of some of the members at the meeting. As the motorcade took off to go back to the White House, I relaxed for the short ride. The day was over and I could look forward to dinner and some time to spend with Shane.

CHAPTER 3



As we got out of the motorcade, I told Shane that we were finished for the day. Shane notified the network that Condor One was en route to the residence. Just as we got to the private presidential elevator, the two Marys appeared, one jumping up on my leg as a way of welcoming me back to the house. The Mary capable of human speech smiled and said, “Well, the news is already around that you shook up some of the old dinosaurs on the Hill with your intended legislative initiative for gays. You’re going to have a battle on your hands.”

“When have I not had a battle on my hands with what I am trying to accomplish? I am determined to make progress on this front along with all of the other priorities that we’re dealing with.”

“Well, just so you know, you already have three phone messages from senior Republicans that were not in the meeting, but went off like firecrackers over this bit of news.”

“Yes, well, I’m done for the day. Why don’t you go home a little early for a change? You really do work too hard.”

“Well, someone had to babysit your daughter,” she said with a smile and headed back to her desk to get ready to go home.

“My daughter? Oh, you mean the little girl who just jumped on my leg. My only question is who babysat who?”

“That would be whom!”

Shane laughed as we entered the elevator. “I hope there will be no calls tonight, and we can spend some time together,” I told Shane as we reached the residence. “It’s been damn busy the last couple of weeks.”

“I would enjoy that very much. Any guests for dinner tonight?”

“Nope. Just you and me for once.”

AFTER dinner, Shane and I went into the living room and actually had a drink for once. After Shane fixed a screwdriver for me and a scotch on the rocks for himself, we sat down on the sofa and turned on the television. I told Henry to take off. We were alone with the exception of the agent on duty at the elevator, and he was far enough away so that he was unable to hear us.

“David, do you think I should leave the Service so that I could openly be your partner? You know, so that we could actually sleep together without me sneaking through Truman’s passageway where I seem to always end up with cobwebs in my hair.”

“I’ll be President for at least four years and if the American people see fit to give me a second term, then eight years. But then it’s back to private life. What then for you? Wouldn’t you be bored out of your mind?”

“Well, it’s not like you don’t get a government allowance for staff. I could take over duties for you as chief of staff. You’re going to be young still no matter how long we’re here, so you should have a long career as a speaker. Hell, you could even run for the Senate or something if you still wanted to stay involved in politics.”

“Don’t you like being in the Secret Service?”

“Sure I do. I love the Service. But I’ve also fallen in love with you and want us to be more of a couple. I have to sneak around everywhere we go. Everyone is watching trying to figure out if we’re making it or not. It gets tiresome after a while.”

“But think of this also: I’m entitled to Secret Service protection for ten years after leaving office. If I’m President for eight years, and you add ten more to it, then you have eighteen years of service. If you add the years you have been in the Service before me, you will be able to retire after twenty years of service. You’ll have your own money, the camaraderie of being a retired agent, and then we can be open about who we are.”

“If it’s about money, I can still work for you, as I said.”

“No, money has nothing to do with it. I had more money than God does even before becoming President. I make four hundred thousand dollars a year while in office, and I get a pension when I leave this gilded birdcage. Money is not the issue. You are welcome to as much money as you might need from me, freely given.”

“I can’t do that. I won’t be a kept man.”

“Isn’t that a bit archaic? This whole concept of masculinity that won’t allow a man to be looked after by another man is so last century. If you were a woman that I was in love with, there wouldn’t be any question about me supporting you, now would there?”

“I’m not a woman. I’m a man and I have my pride. Please understand that I need to make my own money for myself. I don’t see working for you as the same thing as being supported by you. I will earn my money and do just as good if not better than any other person in that position.”

“Is that what you really want? To leave the Secret Service?”

“I don’t know yet. I’ve just started thinking about it recently. What I do know is that I want a more complete personal life with you.”

“Look, let’s let it go for now, and talk about it again in say six months. Hell, you’re due to get the Medal of Valor from the Service for saving my life at the Capitol. I want to see you get what you deserve. I’m very proud of you, Shane.”

“Okay, we can let it go for now, but think about it, okay?”

“I will. I will also think about how to make you more a part of my personal life while you remain in the Secret Service.”

“If they figure out that we’re lovers, I won’t be allowed to keep my position on your protection detail. I’ll get desk duty, and I don’t want that.”

“Understood.”

After one more drink and a rerun of *West Wing*, it was time for bed. “I wanna give Mary her walk myself tonight. Why don’t you turn in and get ready to have cobwebs in your hair? The duty agents can escort me.”

“Fine with me. Just let Joel know, and he’ll have someone meet you downstairs. I’ll be waiting for you when you return.”

It was a beautiful spring night and Mary loved that I was the one walking her. She ran in and out of bushes looking for anything smaller than a bus that she could growl at and run to ground. After about twenty minutes, we headed back in. I said good night to my detail and we went into my room, where Mary took her temporary place on the sofa. Only this night, she found Shane waiting for me there also.

“It’s really nice outside. I enjoyed that quiet walk and I think I’ll do more of it. Your hair is wet; did you shower?”

“Of course. Wouldn’t want you to find me odoriferous.”

I smiled and went to take a shower too. When I’d dried off, I returned to the bedroom. Shane was waiting for me in the bed and he

gave me a look that could melt steel. “Damn, you look hot like that,” I said, gazing at his beautiful pecs.

“You say that to all the agents you sleep with.”

I dropped the towel to the floor and climbed onto the bed. I crawled up to the headboard and lowered myself onto Shane, who put his arms around me. “You are a beautiful man and you’re my man,” I said as I kissed him.

When we broke the kiss, Shane asked, “Oh? What exactly does being your man mean?”

“You know what it means,” I replied.

“No, actually I don’t. Does it mean I’m your easily accessible fuck, or does it mean more? If it means more, what is more?” Shane asked with a serious tone in his voice.

I rolled off Shane and stared up at the ceiling. “You have to admit we’re nowhere close to being a normal couple. I’m the President of the United States, and you’re an agent of the United States Secret Service assigned to protect me. We’re both men, and therefore a non-traditional pair of lovers. So, my question to you is, what kind of couple do you want us to be?”

Shane laughed quietly to lighten the mood somewhat. “What kinds of couples can I choose from?”

I turned my head on the pillow and looked at him. He was smiling and I couldn’t help but smile back. “I want us to be the kind of couple that falls in love, cares for each other, and spends the rest of their lives together. Can you deal with that kind of couple?”

“Throw lots of fucking into that scenario and yeah, I can deal with that kind of couple,” Shane said with a gigantic grin.

It was my turn to laugh quietly. “Lots of fucking is a problem at times, but we make up for it when we can. Shane, I want you to be as happy as possible. If this kind of relationship is too complicated for

you, then just say so. But it's my wish that we spend the rest of our lives together and when it's legal in this land of liberty, I would like to marry you."

"So you do love me?"

"We've known each other for over eighteen months now. We've spent most of every day together. I was deeply attracted to you when we met at the beginning of the campaign, and I grew more and more fond of you as time went on. Then we came out to each other, thanks to Gorski, who thought he would win the race by outing me. That gave you the courage to come out to me and the rest, as they say, is history. We've made love a few times now, and each time is better than the last. You're handsome, intelligent, brave, and you have a great sense of humor—a must for me. So, the answer to your question is yes. I'm in love with you. If I could, I would put a ring on your finger and proclaim you to the world as mine. But we know that's not possible yet. Short of that, we do have the best possible world we can make under present circumstances. We share the same roof and occasionally the same bed. We travel everywhere together and there is nothing that you don't know about that goes on in my life."

"I know. I just wanted to hear you say it. I have hopes that we will find a way to be a couple in all senses. David, I love you also. I had to be silent just as much as you did during the campaign. It's not like I could just come up to you and say, ah, excuse me, Mr. Candidate for President, but I've got the hots for you and was wondering if we could, like, hit the sack? The night Gorski made an ass out of himself by outing you, I almost passed out from shock. The man I wanted so badly was actually, possibly gettable! I knew I had to tell you that I was gay, or live with it the rest of my life, regretting that I didn't have the balls to tell you. Boy, am I glad that I did," Shane said as he kissed me once more. As our lips melted together, I got a strong whiff of my favorite cologne on Shane's skin and became dizzy from its effects.

Shane moved his hand down my body, grabbed my cock, and began to stroke it slowly as we continued to kiss. I felt a tidal wave of emotion roll over me as we caressed each other, thinking of our mutual declaration of love. I ran my hand down Shane's back and onto his bubble butt, kneading each cheek thoroughly. I planted little kisses down the side of his neck on my way to his chest. I searched and found one of Shane's g-spots, his nipples. I worked each nipple over slowly and deliberately, tonguing each one until it was fully erect. Shane moaned in response to my attentions and I dropped farther down on his chest as Shane ran his hands through my hair, tugging gently.

I then followed his light blond treasure trail past his navel and headed to the place that made me very happy. I breathed in the fresh, clean shower smell as I arrived at his cock. My tongue darted out, licking its way along the now hardened shaft, working my way up to the head. As I sank down on it with my mouth, Shane moaned loudly, and I looked forward to bringing him even higher into the sexual heat that we generated together. As I slowly went up and down on him, I heard him whisper, "Please don't stop!" I had no intention of stopping.

I cupped his balls with one hand and rolled them around as I continued to suck slowly. As Shane moved around on the bed in response to the pleasure, I dropped his balls and moved both hands up to his chest. I found his nipples with my fingers, tweaking and pinching them as I continued to suck his cock. Shane's head flopped back and forth on the pillows in abandon.

His hands on my head pulled me back up to his lips and I relinquished the object of my desires to give into his need for more deep kisses. Kisses that expressed our love even better than the sex that we had come to love so much. We moved our tongues in and out of each other's mouths as we reached for even higher realms of passion. When we finally broke our kiss, Shane took total control and pushed me onto my back.

Shane quickly moved between my legs and lifted them up onto his shoulders, wedging his knees under my back. All he had to do was bend his neck a little and his mouth was directly on my cock and balls. He drove his tongue up under my balls, lavishing each one with considerable attention before moving to my shaft, licking his way up to the head of my dick. There he twirled his tongue around in circles, teasing the head and sending little jolts of electricity through my body. As my hips began to jerk in response to the teasing, he gobbled my dick down his throat and began to suck me for all he was worth.

This kind of oral sex made it hard to resist giving in to a climax. When I tried to signal that he was bringing me to the edge too rapidly, all he did was increase the intensity of his sucking. In a few more moments, I climaxed into Shane's mouth. My back arched completely off the bed and I was being supported by Shane's arms under my back. By the time I finished cumming, the only part of my body still on the bed was my head.

As I began to soften, Shane let me down onto the bed where my dick plopped out of his mouth. When I could finally open my eyes, I saw a gigantic smile on his face. "Well, how was that for a blow job?" he asked.

I couldn't answer very well. I was still breathing hard and all I could do was give him a feeble smile and a low whistle. He moved up alongside of me and leaned on one elbow to stare down into my face. When I could focus, I turned my head, smiled, and said, "You really are good in bed, and you know that, right?"

"So I've been told. I'm glad my oral skills are pleasing to you."

"Pleasing? They're damn incredible!" I moved my hands down to his dick to find him as hard as the heart of a Fundamentalist. As I began to move into position to return the favor of the excellent head, Shane stopped me.

“If you don’t mind, I’d like to sit on top of your chest and jerk off on you. There is something about watching your face as I cum that really turns me on.”

“Hop on, cowboy,” I responded.

Shane climbed onto my chest and moved up until his cock was about ten inches from my face. I watched as he began to jerk off with one hand as he played with my cock with the other. After a couple minutes, he had me hard again and that seemed to please him. His chest began to heave and I knew that he was near the finish. When his head fell back and his mouth opened softly, I looked down and saw that his balls were in the launch mode. I quickly closed my eyes lest I get an eyeful of very painful burning juice.

As he began to cum, he clamped both his knees tight against my body and let fly stream after stream of hot cum all over my chest and face. I felt ten spurts of the hot liquid leave his cock before he was done. He collapsed onto my chest, panting and purring like a kitten. I was drenched in his substance and knew that we would have to shower before even attempting to go to sleep.

After giving Shane a couple of minutes to regain his composure, I suggested we shower. We got up carefully so as not to drip all over the bed and carpet and ran into the shower. We washed each other off and had one last deep kiss as the warm water ran over our bodies. I felt so close to Shane after sharing something so personal, which seemed so natural to both of us. I looked into the eyes of the man I had fallen for and said, “Shane, I love you.”

A few days later, it was time to make my first official visit to a military base, and Parris Island, South Carolina, was the lucky winner. The purpose of the trip was to build morale in the Corps after a few bad apples got into the green barrel. Secondly, I felt it was necessary that I have a good understanding of what it was like for the young men and women who serve in the modern military. I also had a meeting with the brother of the King of Jordan while I was there.

As we were getting ready to leave for Marine One, Andy came in with a file folder. "Mr. President, have you made a decision on the death sentences of the former Marines?"

I sat down at my desk once more as Andy handed me the file. Inside were five court-martial sentences of death, which had been signed by the commandant of the Corps and by law needed my concurrence. I held the final decision on whether or not they lived or died and I detested the duty.

"Have there been any appeals from the prisoners?"

"Through their attorneys, but it was the pro forma type appeal for leniency. We've also heard from the families of the five men begging you to commute."

I took the pen into my hand and held it poised over my signature line for concurrence. Before I signed, I read the details of the finding summary and saw that two of the five men were the principle leaders of the Marine part of the conspiracy. I signed those two sentences confirming the death sentence, but crossed through the sentence on the other three findings and hand wrote, "Commuted to life in prison without the possibility of parole." I then signed off on that sentence.

I handed back the file to Andy who quickly looked through the file to see what I had done. "Are you sure this is how you want to go on this, sir?"

"Yes. I think the honor of the Marine Corps demands it, and the safety of our democracy demands it. I am showing mercy where I think it prudent with the three young enlisted men who had nothing to do with the planning. We'll make sure those three men serve their time at the newly reopened Alcatraz when it's completed."

"Yes, Mr. President. Let me put this file into operation and I'll join you at the chopper."

As Andy walked out the door, I said a quiet prayer for the two men whose executions I had just authorized. The presidency was a

heavy yoke to bear in many respects. I got up and put my jacket on, preparing for the chopper. Little Mary knew something was up as she always did. I bent over, picked her up, and held her close for a moment, which brought me some comfort for what I had just done. Mary licked my face and I said, “You be a good girl while Daddy is gone, and don’t give the other Mary too much trouble, you hear?”

In response, I got a long tongue ran over my lips and nose. I was not a fan of Mary’s tongue on my lips and made a big deal out of sputtering, which only made Mary look as if she was laughing at me for my fastidiousness. I put her down and opened the door to exit the Oval Office.

“Mary, I’ll be back around noon on Tuesday. I hope—”

I was interrupted by little Mary crying at my ankle, looking up at me with the big brown eyes routine that she knew I couldn’t resist. “Mr. President, why don’t you just take her with you? FDR took Fala everywhere he went and no one ever minded. Besides, you’re the president; who’s going to give you heartburn if you take along one living being that gets to lick your face? Or am I wrong about that assumption?” she asked with a slight smile.

“Never mind who gets to lick my face. You just have to know everything, don’t you?”

“Well, I’m not totally ignorant of the ways of men, and you are a man.”

“Off that topic please. You know what? I’m going to do it. Mary is coming with me.”

As I said that, the commandant of the Marine Corps walked into the reception area to leave with me. “General, how much fuss would I cause if I brought little Mary here with me on this trip?”

“Mr. President, you could bring an elephant on the trip and no one is going to say boo to you. I have a bulldog at home that I am as

fond of as you are your Scottie. Bring her with you if that's what you want."

"That settles it. The commandant approves it!"

I gathered her leash and traveling water bowl while Mark, my personal aide, located some dog food and put all these items into a travel bag. Once that was done, we were ready to go. "How long of a flight is it to Parris Island from Andrews, General?"

"Once we're airborne, sir, it should take no longer than say forty-five minutes."

"Thank you. Mark, will you look after Mary for me when I'm occupied down there?"

"Of course, sir. That's what a personal assistant is for," the twenty-four-year-old responded.

"Great. Let's get the show on the road then."

"Condor One en route to Marine One," Shane said into his hand mic.

I put Mary on her leash and away we went. As we exited the lower level that led to the chopper, I saw that many of the people on my staff had turned out to wave goodbye and wish me a safe trip. I walked briskly to the chopper with Mary right beside me. Within a couple feet of the chopper, I returned the salute of the Marines staffing the stairway.

Once inside, we got settled quickly, and Mary took her usual place up on my armrest, looking out the window. The decoy choppers took off first with Marine One being last to get airborne. General Keens was riding in my chopper and we chatted about the pending visit. I took this opportunity to tell him what I had done in reference to his former Marines.

"I made my decision on the prisoners. I signed the death warrants for two of the men and commuted the other three to life

without parole. I'm opening Alcatraz back up as a military prison and the three will be transferred to there from Fort Leavenworth once it is up and running."

"I see, sir. Which ones did you not commute?"

"The two that planned the strike and gave the orders. How will they be executed?"

"The military opted to change from firing squad to lethal injection at the same time as most of the states switched over. The sentence will more than likely be carried out within sixty days unless the Supreme Court intervenes, which I doubt."

After just a few minutes, Marine One landed at Andrews Air Force Base and we boarded Air Force One. A short time later, we landed outside Parris Island and boarded another Marine chopper, which automatically became Marine One when I stepped inside.

Before I knew it, we were coming in for a landing at the Marine base and the general gave me a few details. "When you get off the chopper, sir, there will be four officers to meet you, including the base commander and his senior men. We'll then escort you to a stand where the troops will march in review. After that, we go by car to a hangar where you can address the assembled troops. After that, it will be lunchtime at the commander's quarters, and how you spend the rest of your visit is up to you. Whatever you want to do, just tell me and we'll do it."

"Sounds good, General. I want to visit a barracks for the recruits going through basic and a barracks for the soldiers stationed at Parris Island. I also want to visit the chow hall and other facilities. Finally, I want to talk to some random troops and hear their views."

"As you wish, Mr. President."

"Mark, please take Mary out the back of the chopper and just keep her off of people. Stay near me until you can have one of the

men show you to where I'll be staying tonight. Give her a good walk first though, okay?"

"Certainly, Mr. President."

"You'll be staying at my house while you're here, sir," the general said. "I only use it when I visit this base. Otherwise, it sits empty. I'll be staying in one of the guest houses."

The chopper landed without the smallest bump. As the rotor slowed down, the on-board Marines opened the door, dropped the stairs, and went out to assume their positions. The back stairs were also dropped and everyone but me went out that way. I put my jacket on and exited the chopper by the main door, returning the salutes of my stairway honor guard. I continued on to the group of officers waiting for my arrival and returned their salutes as well.

CHAPTER 4



“**G**ood afternoon, gentlemen,” I said after dropping my salute.

In unison, the officers responded to my greeting and introduced themselves. General Keens spoke at my left elbow. “Mr. President, after the brief schedule we’ve prepared for you, what would you like to do here on base?”

“Well, General, the first thing I would like to see is the barracks, both for the recruits and the personnel stationed here. I want to see living conditions. At some point, I would also like to watch the obstacle course briefly if you have recruits going through that. We can play it by ear from there.”

“Very well, Mr. President. First, if you would, the troops will march in review.”

“Lead the way, General.”

We walked about two hundred yards and took up our positions between two groups of lower-ranking officers. When I looked out onto the field, a Marine band struck up a marching tune and platoons of marines trooped by in review. As the colors approached our position, I placed my hand over my heart and the officers all saluted. The troops looked good and I guessed that these men had been handpicked for their precision.

“Mr. President, the last unit to pass before you is made up of recruits. They have led the other units during basic training and won the privilege of passing in review for you,” advised the commandant.

“In that case, General, let’s reward them further with a chance to talk to their CIC.”

“Yes, sir!”

The Marines who marched by us were sharp-looking, and marched well. The recruits were no exception. After a few minutes, the review was over and the general told the base commander to have the recruit unit stand by.

After chatting for a few minutes, we walked to where they waited.

“Atten-hut!” shouted the drill instructor.

“As you were, men,” I responded. “I just wanted to congratulate you on being the number one recruit unit on Parris Island. I know that achieving that status took a lot of very hard work from all of you. I’ve heard great comments about your performance and I’m proud to have seen you march in review today. This might be the only time you will ever have the chance to ask the president a question. So, if anyone has anything on his or her mind, speak up,” I urged.

No one’s hand went up. They maintained that expression that told me they had lost their individuality and thought and acted almost as one. This, of course, was the ultimate goal of boot camp: to take men and women and meld them into Marines, a force of one instead of a force of many. This was one of the purposes of a uniform.

“Mr. President, I have a question,” a young recruit announced.

“Go on, Marine.”

“Will we be in Afghanistan for a while, sir, or are you planning on ordering all of the troops out as you stated during the campaign?”

“Good question, and one that I would ask were I in your shoes. Much of our presence in that region will depend on the success of operations coming up soon. My wish is to pull all troops back to within the borders of the United States. I hope to have everyone home before another year passes, and in the future, troops like you would only be deployed when absolutely necessary. I hope that gives you the answer you’re looking for, Marine.”

“Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.”

“Very well, General. Let’s proceed.”

The recruits were called to attention and we left the area for a nearby hangar where much of the permanent Parris Island community, military personnel and civilians alike, waited for me. As we entered the big structure, the order to come to attention was given and the hangar fell silent in respect for my office.

I took the stage along with the commandant and other officers. The general talked for a moment about the last presidential visit to Parris Island and I learned that it had not been uncommon for the commander in chief to visit the base. I was introduced and made my prepared remarks, speaking for slightly less than twenty minutes. My comments were received warmly and I left the meeting with a good feeling.

At lunchtime, an aide informed me that the King of Jordan’s brother had landed in the United States and was en route to Parris Island. He was expected to arrive in less than two hours.

“General, I’ve got to clear lunch in no more than ninety minutes. The brother of Jordan’s King will be here for a private meeting with me within two hours. I’ll need a secure facility, naturally.”

“Yes, sir. I’ll have arrangements made now.”

Lunch was going well until one of the officers asked what I intended to do about the condemned Marines. “Gentlemen, I made that decision this morning before leaving the White House. I signed

off on the death sentences for two of the Marines and commuted the other three to life without parole. If that sounds like three got off easy to you, you would be wrong. I have ordered Alcatraz prison rebuilt and opened as a military facility. Once that is done, the three Marines will spend the rest of their lives on The Rock. A death sentence might actually be kinder.”

There was murmuring around the table. Some officers agreed with my decision and others thought it was unwise to leave any of the conspirators alive. When the officers began to question the decision, the general put a halt to it. “Gentlemen, the president had the responsibility to make that decision and it’s been made. End of story.”

The table went silent. Andy Carter whispered in my ear that Jordan’s Crown Prince had landed at the base and was being escorted to the place where we would meet. I asked for coffee and explained that I had an unexpected meeting while on base and would be leaving soon. I didn’t want it to appear that I ran out of the luncheon because of apparent disagreement over my decision.

After finishing my coffee, I said one final thing. “Gentlemen, I have the highest respect and admiration for the Corps and the men and women who serve in it. This will not change as long as I am President. Some of you may believe that I should not have commuted the three sentences. This was not an easy decision to make for a number of reasons, but I assure you, I took the Corps’ wishes and findings into consideration, or I would not have signed a death sentence for any of them. Now, I really must go.”

The officers all came to their feet as I left the room with my aides, Shane, and the rest of my detail. A Marine captain was assigned to wait nearby and to conduct me to the general when I was finished with the meeting.

“Well, Andy, I guess we’re about to find out what’s wrong now in the Middle East.”

As we approached a group of office buildings, I noted that one had Marine guards posted out front. This was the building where Jordan's prince was waiting. I returned the salutes of the guards and went inside, where I was shown to a conference room that was used for classified briefings by the Corps.

As I entered, the Crown Prince rose and greeted me. "I hope your trip wasn't too harsh, Your Highness."

"No, Mr. President. I found it to be quite tolerable. King Abdullah sends greetings and good wishes to you."

"Thank him for me and return my good wishes to him. I see you've been given refreshments. Shall we sit down and discuss what has brought you here on so urgent a mission?"

"As you know, sir, we have agents throughout the Middle East, even in other Arab countries. We have picked up intelligence through electronic means that has been verified by human assets in country. It saddens me to tell you that we have learned that Saudi Arabia was not only behind the attempt to kill you while in Jordan, they have set plans in motion to strike at you in the heart of Washington. They seem determined to end your presidency."

"Your people are positive about this information?"

"Yes, I'm afraid they are."

"Have you been able to determine why the Saudis are risking total destruction by attacking me? To have me killed while in Jordan is quite different from attempting the same thing inside the United States. Were you able to uncover the plans to kill me?"

"Mr. President... the Saudis believe that it is your intent to drastically reduce the amount of oil you buy from their fields, as well as to introduce certain legislation that would lead to a great reduction in the requirement for oil altogether. They see this as a direct threat to their personal as well as their national fortunes. You are a bigger threat to them than Islamic fundamentalism.

“As for how they plan to kill you, we have an electronic intercept, but it has not had independent verification, so we are hesitant to pass that part of it along to you.”

“I’d like to hear it anyway; please continue.”

“This information is so startling that we have provided you the transcripts and analysis of the intercept so that your people can verify what we have found. Simply put, Mr. President, the Saudis intend to kill you by means of biological warfare conducted on the streets of your capital.”

“Excuse me? They what?” I blurted out as I grabbed the file folder, opened it, and began to read. Shane was visibly anxious and asked the Crown Prince, “Do you know when this attack will occur?”

“No. We only know that it appears that it will be sometime in the next three to six months. They cannot afford to let President Windsor’s energy policies come anywhere near being implemented. It would eventually lead to the end of rule by the house of Saud.”

As I read the file, I found everything the prince had said broken down into transcripts and analysis. If the CIA confirmed any of this, drastic action would be required on the part of the United States. Here before me were detailed plans on launching a biological attack that would take out not only me, but also the White House and possibly most of DC.

“Mr. President, if I may continue?”

“Yes, please,” I responded.

“Your choices of response are very limited for, as you know, Mecca is revered as the most holy of cities in all of Islam. Were you to launch any kind of widespread attack, it would be viewed as an attack on all of Islam. If something were to happen to the Al-Haram Mosque in Mecca or the Ka’ba or Black Stone, all of Islam would declare war on your country. Your hands are very much tied in this

respect. You would effectively unite all Arab countries in their opposition to the United States forever.”

“And yet the Saudi ruling family is willing to risk all this and far more simply because they are afraid they will not sell enough oil to maintain their style of living? It’s almost impossible to believe.”

“Mr. President, the House of Saud has made much money for themselves over the years, and they have also spent much of it living outlandishly pampered lives that most of us can only imagine. In order to maintain that life, they must be able to sell all the oil they want. Wealth is their only key to power and you have threatened to take that power away.”

“Yes, I understand. Can Jordan do anything to avert this crisis?”

“We are doing the only thing we can: telling you of what we have found. We do not have the means to take on Saudi Arabia. After all, your country has been arming the Saudis for years now. They have your second-best weaponry and they make a formidable opponent, except to your country and a few others. America has created this monster and now you must slay it.”

After thinking over the situation for a few moments, I turned to Shane. “Let’s depart for Washington at once.”

Shane acknowledged my directive and relayed it into his hand mic. I offered the Crown Prince a ride back to DC, which he accepted. As we left the building, we found a reception committee of Marines waiting for us.

“General, something extremely urgent has come up requiring that I return to Washington at once. I regret I will have to cut my visit short, but I have no choice.”

“Certainly, Mr. President. We understand. Shall I go with you, or make my own way back?”

“You might as well ride with me. Besides, I may want to seek your advice on the way back.”

Cars arrived almost at once to take us to the chopper that would take us to Air Force One. It all happened so smoothly that before I knew it, we were airborne. After Mary made a fuss over me, she lay down in the corner of my airborne office and began to snore. I picked up the phone and the Air Force put me in contact with the director of the CIA.

“Director Dodge, President Windsor here. I need you at the White House at six p.m. today. Would you also make sure that General Sinclair of the Joint Chiefs and Director Mendelssohn of the FBI are present, as well?”

“Of course, sir; may I ask what this meeting is in reference to?”

“A matter of national security has just been brought to my attention by the Jordanians and it is going to require an immediate response.”

“Very well, sir. I’ll be there.”

After hanging up, I called for Shane. “Shane, see if the director of the Secret Service can be at the White House at six tonight for this meeting. Since another attempt on my life appears to be in the workings, he has to be up to speed.”

“Of course. I’m really concerned about this one. Biological agent? That’s damn hard to protect against around the clock, which is probably why the bastards chose it as their weapon. Until we get this under control, you might consider spending more time out of Washington.”

I looked at Shane as though he had just lost his mind. I ran both hands through my hair and looked at him again. “You can’t seriously be suggesting that I run out of my own damn White House and abandon the capital of the United States to a bunch of money-hungry tent dwellers, now can you?”

“I’m worried about your safety, that’s all.”

“Are you worried about me as your partner, or as the president?”

“Both.” Shane moved over to the side of the desk and whispered so low that I had a hard time hearing him. “David, I love you. I know that my personal feelings must take a backseat to your official position as long as I’m in the Secret Service. But, I don’t have to like it. Just consider a schedule that will keep you more out of town than usual. What about that?”

“Maybe we can decide that after the meeting this evening. In the meantime, I assume there has been an increase in security due to this information.”

“I passed along the information that we have a confirmed threat against your life and additional measures are being taken per normal procedures. It just means more agents, less visibility to the public for the immediate future, and extensive advance teamwork for wherever you go.”

“Okay, like I said, let’s talk more after the meeting tonight.”

I watched as the man I loved more than any other before him left my cabin and resumed his official duties. I put my head in my hands and began to feel sorry for myself. Why did I have all of these challenges immediately after becoming President? How was I going to be able to deliver on my campaign promises if I was constantly looking over my shoulder? Sensing that I was upset, Mary came over to my chair and sat down, looking up at me. As I stared back at this little creature with the great brown eyes, I saw the one expression that she was able to manifest so clearly: love. I reached down, picked her up, and put her in my lap where she looked in my eyes as if to say that she had my back and that I should worry about nothing.

Such unconditional love brought a tear to my eye as I kissed her on the head. She lay down in my lap and stayed there until we were

preparing to land. As I put her back on the floor, she shot me a disapproving look for disturbing her.

I punched the phone button again and told the Air Force com officer to get me the vice president. In less than two minutes, the phone lit up.

“Madam Vice President, I need you at the White House for a six p.m. meeting with the national security team. Any problems there?”

“No, Mr. President,” Victoria Wilson answered. “Has something happened?”

“You might say that. We just found out who is really behind the attempts on my life and that plans are under way to take another crack at it.”

“I’ll be there, David. Be careful.”

A military aide stuck his head in the door. “Ten minutes, Mr. President.” That was my signal to strap in and clear my head for what was to come over the next few hours.

CHAPTER 5



We landed at Andrews where I quickly transferred to Marine One and we were off again. The Marine Corps crew picked up a sense of urgency in the air through a skill well honed in transporting previous presidents. They could smell trouble and knew when to get the job done fast.

We touched down on the White House lawn, and I was back in the Oval Office within moments. Mary came into the office and asked, “What’s happened to bring you back already? Did the Marines decide not to offer you the presidential suite or something?”

“Mary, sometimes I think you secretly smoke pot around here, you know it?”

“You know what? That just might be the answer to surviving in this fish bowl you call an office.”

“Actually, it’s kind of serious. The damn Saudis are planning to knock me off for oil! Oil! Talk about the tables being turned. George Bush invaded Iraq over a need to acquire oil, and now another Middle East country is trying to kill me over needing to sell the damn stuff!”

“It seems like the fates are determined to give you a roller-coaster start to your presidency. How serious is the threat, David?”

“Not totally sure, but if the information the Jordanians passed along is accurate, they’re willing to kill thousands to get me. I have an emergency meeting in the Cabinet Room in two hours.”

“Very well. I’ll make sure the room is ready. Will you want refreshments?”

“Yes, but just soda and coffee. Will you also get the secretary of energy on the phone and ask her to be here for the meeting?”

Mary left the office to attend to business and I leaned back into my chair. I felt a headache coming on, which was never a good sign. I rarely got them, but when I did, they were usually severe. I decided to lie down on the sofa and close my eyes for a few minutes to try to stave off a full-blown headache. Little Mary jumped up on the sofa with me and snuggled down on my chest. I closed my eyes for what I thought would be a couple minutes.

One of the many good effects my little canine companion had on me was her calming presence. If she was sleeping well and I was near her, I usually slept well also. It was an hour and a half after I had lain down for a “few minutes” when someone woke me with a hand on my shoulder.

It was Shane. “Are you tired, David?”

“Well, I didn’t think so, but looking at the time, I guess I was. Look, I’m not leaving the house, so why don’t you sign off duty and go up to the residence? I’ll be up as soon as the meeting is over.”

“Not on your life, and I mean that literally! I need to hear what’s going on for professional *and* personal reasons. Nice try though.”

I smiled as I got up. “Have it your way, Shane.”

“I’ll be outside the door,” Shane said with a worried look.

The world might be giving me hell, but I was lucky enough to have some very dedicated and loving people working closely around

me. It made up a little for the aggravation of playing these cloak-and-dagger games when I should be getting on with the people's business.

I had just finished a cup of coffee when Mary rang in that the meeting was waiting on me. I went out the door, where two agents joined me, and down the hallway we went. Everyone rose as I entered and I told them to take their seats.

"Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for being here on such short notice. As you are already aware, the King of Jordan has advised us that the ruling family of Saud has decided to get rid of me. It seems they were behind the previous attempts to assassinate me, funding the groups that did their dirty work. Now, they apparently plan to take it head-on and do the job themselves. Our information is that they plan to deploy a biological agent here in DC in an attempt to kill me that would also take out everyone in the White House. They fear that I will so greatly reduce our purchase of oil from the Middle East that their house of dollars will come crashing down around their tents. They are determined that I won't succeed."

"This is outrageous; do they really expect to succeed in this endeavor? Don't they realize that whoever takes over after such an attempt would absolutely destroy them, regardless of party affiliation?" asked the vice president.

"Actually, Victoria, they don't think for a minute that we would destroy their oil fields and they feel quite safe from retaliation." I paused. "Either that or they are even more stupid than it would appear." I interjected some much-needed lightness before I continued. "I am open for suggestions on how to deal with this issue."

As I waited, I poured another cup of coffee and returned to my seat. When my advisors remained silent, I began to tap my finger on the table as a signal.

General Keens of the Joint Chiefs spoke up. "Mr. President, I urge you to remember that we have five Air Force bases inside the

borders of Saudi Arabia, not to mention support personnel, Marines, and naval forces. We have a sizable target population for retaliation.”

This set off some low-level mumbling around the table. “How long would it take to close our military bases and remove all our personnel from Saudi?” I asked.

“Well, sir, we could have our aircraft out within forty-eight hours. The next question would be where do they go? What about all our equipment, buildings, and other assets that we have in place?”

“Would Turkey take the aircraft? Or possibly, Italy?” asked Victoria Wilson.

The general replied, “We’d have to check with NATO, as well as the countries in question. Mr. President, please realize that we are talking about thousands of troops in Saudi Arabia. It would be a major project to deconstruct our presence in the desert. Additionally, a move would lessen our ability to protect not only various oil fields, but our troops anywhere in the Middle East and Israel.”

The director of the CIA spoke next. “Maybe there’s a better way of dealing with this issue. We could always set up an assassination of one of the princes of the royal household as a warning to the king. If that didn’t work, we could try and hit the king himself.”

“You want me to authorize a hit on the Saudi ruling family because they are trying to hit me? You actually think that would persuade them to back off?”

“Well, sir, it’s a lot cheaper, more efficient, and you will get an immediate response. We could arrange it when one of them travels outside Saudi Arabia.”

Immediate objections came from almost everyone sitting at the table. “Mr. President, how can we set foreign policy by using political assassination as a tool?” asked Secretary Gutierrez of the State Department. “If it ever became known that we were behind the killing, we would have more problems than we would know what to

do with. No nation would ever trust us to engage in meaningful dialogue again if they felt we might just go ahead and shoot their rulers instead of working to achieve a fair outcome.”

“I have to agree: assassination as a tool of foreign policy is appropriate in only the most extreme situations. If we could have shot Hitler and spared the world millions of deaths, it would have been an acceptable alternative to a world war. However, we don’t have those parameters with the Saudis.”

“General Keens, order the closure of all but one of the air bases in Saudi Arabia. Make it an orderly process, including removal of as many of the assets as possible. Maintain increased security for our personnel throughout the process, but get the bases closed within six months. It’s time we reduced our overseas presence anyway. We need to cut our costs in order to work towards a balanced budget, and reining in costs in overseas bases is one avenue to achieve that goal. The money is going to be needed to fund energy independence.”

“Yes, Mr. President.”

“Secretary Howell, as Energy Secretary, I want you to put a reduction in Saudi oil imports into immediate effect. Use Latin American resources to pick up the slack. How much money will you need to drastically speed up research and implementation of alternative energy sources?”

“Mr. President, I was due to report to you next month on this exact topic. I can give you a preliminary figure, but you can’t count on it as computations are still being run. As of now, I would need a budget increase of close to two hundred and fifty billion dollars to achieve your goal. Specifically, wind and solar power would be put on the front burner, turning some of the West into turbine fields with the electricity produced going into the national grid. Tax incentives would be needed to bring solar power into more favor with the ordinary citizen. Conversion of government buildings outside of

Washington, DC, could be done over the next five years. If you like, I can have a report to you early with preliminary findings.”

“Does this include the push in production of electric cars to replace gas burners?”

“Yes, Mr. President. We have a meeting scheduled with the auto industry late next week about retooling.”

“Make it clear to Detroit that this isn’t a request: it’s a matter of national security. We must have reliable electric cars in the near future. Also, give me an update next week on the new technology that’s supposed to make coal clean.”

“Certainly, Mr. President.”

“I want the FBI to place all Saudi diplomats under full surveillance immediately. I don’t want them to be able to so much as use the toilet without ten agents stuck up their asses, understand?”

“Yes, sir. What about various members of the royal family who vacation and seek medical treatment here all the time?” asked the director of the FBI.

“Same goes for them. In fact, make contact with the security agency that provides their personal security while they’re in this country and get a couple of your men in on the detail; nothing like keeping real close company with the enemy.”

“Yes, sir,” replied the director.

“Is there a way the CIA can increase port surveillance on the other end to check shipments from the Middle East for biological weapons?”

“That will be very difficult. As you know, our ports are rather porous and we only check about ten percent of what comes into this country. It’s one of our biggest security problems: lack of manpower to do it properly. Watching and checking shipments before they get

here is even more difficult as we have even less manpower in the foreign ports.”

“Are you trying to tell me that neither the CIA nor the FBI can mount an operation to monitor what comes into this country from the Saudis?”

“Mr. President, if they sent it by diplomatic pouch, we wouldn’t even know it entered the country. As far as keeping it out, we’re screwed,” replied the CIA director.

“Great. So we just sit around waiting for them to hit us? No, that won’t do. Secretary Gutierrez, summon the Saudi ambassador into the Oval Office tomorrow morning. I want to see Prince Faisal at ten o’clock. I want you there, and you, General. I’m going to stop this before it gets off the ground.”

“Are you sure that’s the best way to handle this, David?” asked the vice president.

“Unless you can give me an alternative, Victoria, I see no other way. If they know that we know, they’ll be total fools to continue with the plan. In the meantime, let’s implement other things that we’ve discussed here.”

I left the room as the other members continued to talk. In the hallway, I bumped into Andy Carter, my chief of staff, who had been up on the Hill. After briefing him on what was going on, I told him to be present at the meeting in the morning.

“Shane, let’s call it a day and eat!”

“Condor One en route to the residence for the evening,” my bodyguard said into his hand mic. I whistled for little Mary before getting on the elevator and she came running out of the Oval Office and right up to my leg. She knew the day was over and that I was now free to play if I wanted to.

We rode the elevator to the third floor and entered the residence to find Henry waiting to serve dinner. "Hello, Henry. Sorry we're late this evening."

"Good evening, Mr. President. Would you like to eat right away?"

"Might as well, so you can go home for the night," I replied with a smile.

Shane sat down in the chair next to me and we ate in relative silence as we processed what was said during the most recent meeting. So much to think about, but I was determined to fulfill my campaign pledge to break us from our addiction to oil.

When we finished with dinner, we went to our rooms to shower and get relaxed for the evening. We were going to watch a new movie tonight. Hollywood routinely sent all of the latest releases for viewing in the White House theater. For tonight's feature, I hadn't invited anyone but Shane.

Shane always put a smile on my face when he was dressed down as he was now. He entered the theater wearing jeans and a snug-fitting T-shirt with the emblem of the Secret Service over the left breast. He smiled back at me as he sat, knowing what was going through my mind. I raised my arm in signal and the movie began.

It was an action thriller and I found myself wanting to take Shane's hand and hold it as though we were a pair of young lovers. Even though I was President of the freest country in the world, I was not personally free to show even the smallest bit of affection for the man I was in love with. There were eyes on me always unless I was in my own bedroom, and even then, I wondered sometimes.

Halfway through, the butler brought us drinks and a snack, which lightened my mood somewhat. When the movie was over, the lights came on, and we left the theater for the living room where we could be alone.

“Shane, I miss not being able to show you affection whenever I want. Just now in the theater, I wanted to take your hand, but knew that I couldn’t. This is a sorry way to live in some respects. You do know I love you, right?”

“Of course I do, David. Don’t you think that I miss the little things too? Like sleeping with you every night for starters! I’m a very tactile man and would normally be giving you a kiss in the morning and things like that. We’re both restricted in our actions and there’s nothing that can be done about it unless I leave the Service.”

“You love your job; it’s what makes you tick. I would hate to see you give up something that you love so dearly. It’s not fair for me to ask that of you.”

“I thought we agreed that we would talk about this again in six months. Do you want to stick with that, or begin discussing it now?”

I grimaced. “Let’s talk in six months. For now, let’s do the best we can under the circumstances. I really want to sleep with you tonight,” Shane said with a pout.

“I’d like that too. I knew I was gay when I ran for this job, so it’s not as if I hadn’t thought about these issues. But I wasn’t in love then and that makes a lot of difference. That single fact makes this life so hard to bear.”

“Do you regret having met me?”

“Shane! How the hell can you ask me that if you believe that I love you? No, I don’t regret having met you. All through life, there are surprises both good and bad. You are one of those utterly fantastic things that can happen to a person, and you happened to me. I will be forever grateful for having met you. It has nothing to do with the fact that you saved my ass from an assassin or two, either. I’m happy because I met someone that I love, and nothing can be better than that, including winning the presidency.”

“I’m sorry, David; I didn’t mean to upset you. I’m just frustrated too. I love my job and I love you. If I had to pick one or the other, I would pick you, hands down. We’re just going to have to be grateful for our time at Camp David, and the rare occasions that you actually take a vacation. I’ll deal with it, regardless of how tough it may get.”

“Thank you, Shane. Thank you for understanding how I feel and for your willingness to make this work. Now all we have to do is keep me alive long enough so that I can leave office eventually and we can have our lives to ourselves.”

The phone interrupted us. “President Windsor,” I answered crisply

“Mr. President, Andy here. I finally got hold of the Saudi ambassador, Prince Faisal. At first, he didn’t want to meet with you, but when I insisted, he agreed. He’ll be here at ten in the morning.”

“Okay, Andy. Thank you and good night.”

“Faisal will be here in the morning,” I told Shane. “We should hit the sack so that I’m wide awake for this meeting. I’ve got a big surprise for our Saudi prince.”

I poured myself a refill on the soda, and went to my bedroom, nodding at the duty agent as he moved down the hallway away from my bedroom. I entered and locked the door, stripped down to my boxer briefs, and sat down on the sofa with Mary, fresh from her nightly walk. I gave her a little biscuit, which she devoured as though it were prime rib. I advised the communications officer on duty that I was in my bedroom for the night and waited for the click of the secret entry in the bookcase. I didn’t even bother to position the special book in the lock position anymore. Shane was free to come and go as he pleased.

After another couple minutes, the bookcase swung open and Shane walked in wearing nothing but socks and a jockstrap! He

stopped a couple of feet from me and put his hands on his hips. Cocking one knee forward, he smiled down at me.

My eyes drank in the exceptional body of the man posing for me. As my gaze moved over his incredible pecs, his washboard stomach, the straining pouch of the jock, and on down his legs, I felt my breath get drawn out of me. Incredible, beautiful male form at its best.

“Shane, you’re fucking stunning!”

“Well, in that case, I suppose I should let you see the back.” He turned around and this time my eyes went straight to his well-sculpted ass cheeks. His impressive thighs and muscled legs took my breath away once again.

“I’m a very lucky man,” I said with very little strength. Shane turned around with a pleased smile and walked over to sit next to me.

“Not as lucky as I am,” he said sincerely.

He leaned in and gave me a quick kiss on the lips. Mary looked up at us from the sofa arm she was draped over and jumped down to the floor with a look that said, “Okay, I’ve seen this movie before. I know you two are going to get busy and will need a lot of room, so I’ll just make myself small somewhere.”

We sat back on the sofa and I had to adjust myself as I had sprung a hard-on and was confined in my shorts. Shane put his arm around me and rested his head on my shoulder, saying, “This kind of time makes up for the times when we have to resist being intimate.”

I kissed Shane on the top of his head and replied, “Yeah, so we better make the most of it while we can. Stay the whole night rather than leaving my bed after an hour.”

He looked up at me and smiled. “I’m up for it.”

“Then let’s go to bed.”

We walked over to the bed and climbed in after pulling back the linens. Shane stripped off the jockstrap as I kicked off my shorts. As we sank into the richness of the presidential bed, a feeling of contentment overcame me. I felt so secure in the arms of the man I loved, in a bed that was soft and warm. Shane put his head on my chest and it felt so natural that it seemed we had been doing this all our lives.

Mary jumped up onto the bed and made her way to the far pillow where she liked to sleep. I was about to shoo her off, when Shane began to snore lightly. I guess Mary knew before I did that all we were going to do tonight was sleep.

I smiled and snuggled in even closer to my man. This was fine, just as it was. Before I knew it, I was sound asleep with my man and my dog. What could be finer?

CHAPTER 6



When Henry knocked on my door the next morning, Mary barked sharply. I sat up in a panic over Shane being in my bed, but he was nowhere to be seen and the bookcase was closed. I got up, put on my robe, and let Henry in.

“Good morning, Mr. President. Did you sleep well?” Henry asked with a smile.

“Yes, Henry. I slept better than I have in a long time, actually.”

Henry put down a cup of coffee with Sweet’N Low and cream and began to straighten up the room. As I went to the shower after taking a sip of coffee, Henry headed into the walk-in closet and pulled out a blue suit, white shirt, and matching tie. By the time I came out of the bathroom, the bed had been made, Mary was gone to be walked, and my clothes were laid out on the bed. I finished the coffee and slipped on the rest of my clothes while thinking about the very important meeting with the prince scheduled for ten o’clock.

When I opened the door to the breakfast room, Shane was there waiting for me. “Good morning, Mr. President. I trust you slept well?” he asked with a broad smile.

“Yes, Agent Thompson, I slept remarkably well for some reason.”

As I sat down at the table, Mary came running in from her walk and nuzzled my leg to make sure that I knew she was there should I desire to share any eggs with her. Actually, she wouldn't have refused anything off the breakfast menu. Mary was such a mooch—much like my two-legged Mary, I thought with a laugh. As I ate my scrambled eggs and bacon, I quickly scanned the headlines of the three newspapers that I read every morning. All three led with the headline that the price of oil was rising once more and the effect that this would have on gas prices. Home heating oil prices also crossed my mind as I worried about people being able to stay warm.

I looked at my watch and saw that it was just a little after eight. I finished my coffee and orange juice and got up from the table. Henry had brought Mary a scrambled egg, which she barely tasted as it slid down her throat. As I walked toward the hallway, she was right on my heels.

“Condor One en route to the Oval,” Shane announced into his mic. A couple minutes later, my little entourage arrived at the door to the Oval Office. “Good morning, Mary. How are you today?” I asked of my beloved secretary.

“I’m fine, Mr. President. You look unusually happy this morning. Did you finally get a date for Friday night, or something?”

“Never you mind why I appear to be so happy. By the way, the Saudi ambassador will be here at ten. Make him wait for five minutes, then buzz me.”

I heard her acknowledge my directive as little Mary and I scooted into the Oval Office, where I found a pile of paperwork waiting for my signature. Four-legged Mary took her place in her little bed with the presidential seal on it and I got comfortable in my chair. The amount of paper that flowed through my office needing to be signed never ceased to amaze me. I spent at least a solid hour each day just putting my signature on various documents, letters, and cards.

Andy came in through the door that led to his office. “May I ask how you intend to handle the meeting this morning so I’m not taken by surprise?”

“Of course you can ask; doesn’t mean I have to answer though!” I said with a laugh. I *was* in a good mood.

“Well, I’ll bring you a cup of coffee and I’m sure my kindness will be rewarded.”

“I intend to lay it out straight to him. I’m going to tell him we know of their past actions in funding the attempted hits on me, and that we know what they plan to do in the near future. I’m going to warn him that if they continue on this course of action... well, you’ll see,” I said with a smile.

“Oh, this is going to be good. This is why I would pay you to work here rather than you paying me! I’ll be back just before ten unless you need me for something sooner,” Andy said as he turned and left the way he came in.

I spent the next hour getting the signature work done so that Mary could process the documents I was signing. As I looked up, the vice president walked into the Oval Office along with the director of the CIA.

“Good morning, Madam Vice President, Director.”

They answered in unison, “Good morning, Mr. President.”

“The others are right behind us,” advised Victoria. As if on cue, the other attendees, minus the Saudi, entered into the office and took seats on the sofas. Everyone looked a little nervous and I gave each a reassuring smile.

General Sinclair looked at his watch and said, “It’s two minutes after ten; he’s late.”

“No, he’s outside cooling his heels for a couple of minutes. He’ll be right in.”

At exactly five minutes past ten, Mary buzzed in and announced the Saudi ambassador. "Show him in please, Mary," I replied.

The door opened and the Saudi walked in, stopping short when he saw the crowd that awaited him. "Please come in, Mr. Ambassador, and have a seat over here by the fireplace." I led him over to two wingback chairs and indicated which one he should sit in.

"Mr. President, your office gave me no information about this meeting so I have not prepared anything," the ambassador said.

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Ambassador. I've set the agenda for this meeting. I believe you know everyone here, including General Sinclair, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon." The ambassador looked uneasily around the room, nodded to everyone, and then looked back at me. "Mr. Ambassador, let me come directly to the point of this meeting. The United States government has uncovered information that your government was directly behind the attempts to assassinate me in Jordan when I was there for a peace conference."

"That's not—" The ambassador started to say in an attempt to interrupt me.

"Let me finish. Your government financed the Iraqi al-Sadr brigade and its attack on me in Jordan. This we have proof of, so don't insult my intelligence with a denial. Having failed in this attempt, your government is preparing to launch a biological attack on the White House that will kill not only me, but also thousands of others. Both the attack in Jordan and your planned attack here in Washington are acts of war. Mr. Ambassador, please explain to me why I should not order the launching of a nuclear-tipped Tomahawk missile at Riyadh within the next ten minutes?"

The Saudi ambassador jumped out of the chair, yelling in Arabic, propelling Shane into action. The agent quickly moved behind my chair to prevent any physical attack that might be launched.

The ambassador switched to English once he realized that no one understood a word he was saying. “This is the most outrageous insult that the United States has ever made to the peace-loving kingdom of Saudi Arabia! How can you sit there and make these foul allegations against your longtime friends in the Middle East? Have we not always been there for you? Have we not always sold you oil, a commodity without which your entire economy would grind to a halt? Why would we want to assassinate you?”

“Mr. Ambassador, it is precisely the topic of oil that causes your government to make war on the United States. You are terrified that this administration will cut so far back on oil imports over the next few years that you will suffer a dramatic decline in revenue for your kingdom. This you cannot stand. This is what you are trying to stop by killing me. Well, it won’t work, Mr. Ambassador. Our intelligence is solid and undeniable.”

“Your intelligence on Saddam and his weapons of mass destruction was also called solid and undeniable! You invaded a sovereign nation based on your *intelligence* and what did you find? Nothing! *Nothing!* Now, you sit here with your war council threatening to attack my capital based on more of this same intelligence!”

I nodded at Andy Carter and he handed me a folder. I pulled out three sheets of paper: a transcript in Arabic of telephone conversations between the brother of the King of Saudi Arabia and their version of the CIA.

I handed them to the ambassador and waited while he read them. When he was finished, his face was ashen and he sat back down as though his legs refused to hold him up. Shane moved away from my chair and back to his normal position. “As you can see, we have telephone transcripts of your planning phase of the Jordan attack and your government’s acknowledgment that they were paying the bills for the operation. I particularly liked the bonus provision of fifty

million dollars should they be successful. You should thank me for saving you that money by staying alive. Further, we have similar proof of your intent to kill me here in Washington, bringing war to American soil. So, again, I ask you why I should not eliminate Riyadh and everyone in it, including your ruling family.”

“Because, Mr. President, it would start World War Three. Do you really want that?” he replied in a low, even voice.

“Then what do you propose I do about this? I can’t just forget what we have learned. Others know of Saudi Arabia’s involvement in this plot and therefore, we must take some punitive action. To do otherwise would make America look weak to our enemies and encourage further outrages as those committed by your government.”

“Mr. President, let me call the king and try to change the course that we find ourselves upon. This is no good for either of our countries. You must believe that I did not know of these plans.”

“Very well, Mr. Ambassador. You might also tell your king the following: I have ordered the closure of four of our five Air Force bases in your country. All of the assets and personnel will be withdrawn within six months. Further, I have ordered the secretary of energy to cut back on imports of Middle East crude, and specifically, if it can be determined, Saudi oil. These are the minimum consequences of your government’s actions and may not be the only ones. You can contact Secretary Gutierrez with the results of your conversation with the king. And I urge you to make that sooner, rather than later.”

I stood, as did my staff. The ambassador got the message, bowed to me, and left to go back to the Saudi embassy.

“Well, he caved in rather quickly once he saw the intercepts, didn’t he?” I asked.

“What choice did he have? We’ve got them cold,” replied the CIA chief.

“What further action do you plan on taking, Mr. President?” asked the vice president.

“I’m not sure for the moment. I would like you all to think on this and let me know your thoughts tomorrow. State, let me know what they say after he calls you. I can’t wait for the response from the king.”

Everyone but my chief of staff left the Oval Office. “Well, boss, were you happy with the way that meeting went?”

“I just don’t know, Andy. The ambassador claimed he didn’t know anything, which I doubt seriously. He was going to fight tooth and nail until he saw we had the goods on them. We have to take some punitive action immediately, and I just don’t know what it should be. I don’t want to overreact; we’ve had enough of that in the past.”

“Here’s my suggestion: We cut off all arms sales to them. It’s something you can do at once, and there is a sale already in the pipeline that you can kill. Too many weapons floating around that place anyway.”

“That’s a damn good idea. But won’t the Russians or Chinese be more than happy to fill in for us?”

“I suppose, but we have a bad history in this government of arming our eventual enemies and then our troops get killed by American-made weaponry. Neither the Russians nor the Chinese are going to sell them their best stuff, so we can still take them out in the air or on the ground if we have to.”

“All right. Talk to the Security Council and get their feedback. If there are no objections, we’ll do that at once.”

Andy left the office and I sat down on the sofa. Cutting off arms sales would send a clear signal to not only the Saudis, but the rest of the world as well. It was nonviolent and unambiguous. I looked at my watch and saw that it was a little before eleven-thirty. I had a

luncheon to attend at the Hay-Adams Hotel, where I was to give remarks on the national sales tax that we were contemplating instituting. I had about fifteen minutes free and decided to take Mary for a walk. She'd love it and it would also help me clear my head.

"Mary, want to go for a walk?"

Her answer was immediate. She barked and headed to the doors that led outside. I buzzed the other Mary to tell her that I was going to walk her namesake and Shane came in to accompany me. Together, we went out the door with Mary off the leash, which she loved.

When we got far enough away for privacy, I looked over at Shane. "You fell asleep on me last night, young man." I said it with a broad smile so that he'd know I was teasing him. "I kind of liked that."

"Yeah, I didn't realize how tired I was and it just felt so good to be in bed with you and to have physical contact with you. Sorry about that; it won't happen again."

"We don't have to have sex every chance we get. Close intimacy and being comfortable with you almost does for me what sex usually does. I was very contented to go to sleep with you in my arms."

"I never woke up until the crack of dawn. Then I left the bed as quietly as I could and traipsed through the cobwebs once more."

"Hell, as often as we use that passage, there shouldn't be any cobwebs in there," I said with a laugh. "I woke thinking you were still in bed with me and nearly had a heart attack when Henry knocked on the door. Mary barked, and I looked around to find you were gone. It saddened me. Damn it, it would be so nice to one day wake up to find you where you were when we fell asleep!"

"Well, I'm due on duty before you get up, so I really can't stay in bed. The only time I can do that is when we're at Camp David and even then we have to be careful."

“Yeah well, I’m not complaining too much about last night. I haven’t slept so well in a week.”

Mary was having the time of her life chasing squirrels all over the tree-lined edge that faced the Old Executive Office Building. She almost caught one and for a moment, I thought I saw a piece of squirrel tail in her mouth.

“Mary came close that time!” Shane said with a laugh.

“Yeah, must have been a Republican squirrel: big, fat and lazy!” We both laughed and I called Mary back. Reluctantly, she gave up the ongoing hunt for anything that moved on four legs. She ran back to me and we headed for the Oval Office.

“Well, guess we have to get moving here shortly,” I said as a Marine guard opened the door to my office for us.

“Bring up the cars,” Shane said into his mic. I threw on my jacket and we went to stand under the green awning that provided cover while going to and from the motorcade. Everyone took their places and we got under way with the usual racket of sirens. When the president moved in Washington by car, the world came to a halt. We were at the Hay-Adams in less than three minutes.

A heavy Secret Service advance team was already on site and once Shane got the okay from the agents inside, I made my grand entrance into the ballroom. I waved to the crowd and took my place on the raised platform while lunch was served. It was a friendly gathering and the short speech went well. I made sure to shake hands with the VIPs, as well as some of those who would never be VIPs. After all, many more of the common people put me in office than important people with money.

One of those present got a little overanxious in his attempt to greet me, lunging over two people as he tried to grab my hand. The agents around me reacted instantly, and I was hustled out of the ballroom faster than a fly ball hit out of Nationals Park. The overeager

fan was pulled to the ground by other agents, but a search revealed nothing threatening. Outside the ballroom, I became a little embarrassed at my quick departure. When Shane advised me that the guest was just anxious to meet me, I asked to see him. Shane gave the directive into his mic and a moment later the now disheveled man was standing in front of me.

"I'm sorry that you were taken down, but my agents thought you were a threat. I hope you understand," I said.

"It's all right, Mr. President. I shouldn't have been so aggressive in trying to shake your hand. Only my pride is hurt, so I'm okay."

I shook his hand and posed for a photograph with him. This seemed to make his day and I left him standing there with a big smile on his face. We got into the limo and returned to the White House. Once again, a scant three minutes in transit, and I was entering my office.

As Shane and I walked, I asked, "Did the guys overreact to that situation, or was that the level of response needed?"

"No, sir, they did not overreact. The man was practically climbing over two people to get to you. We're trained to look for aggression and he presented as a potential danger. The Service did their job correctly, sir."

"Okay, Shane, I'm not trying to second-guess the guys; I just wanted to make sure that they were following protocol." I broke off to greet my secretary. "Hello, Mary. Anything earth-shattering since I left for lunch?"

"Not really, unless you count your wrestling match that I saw on television."

"You don't miss much, do you?"

"I can't afford to miss anything around this place, Mr. President. By the way, you had a rather strange phone call."

“Oh, what kind of strange phone call?” Shane’s ears had perked up.

“Well, let’s step into your inner sanctum and I’ll tell you.”

Shane followed us in. Mary looked at Shane and then at me. “It’s okay, Mary,” I said. “You can always talk in front of Agent Thompson.”

“Okay, a Phillip McEwen called for you. He said he wanted to talk to you and when I asked him who he was, he replied that you would recognize his name and want to talk to him. He says he is from Atlanta,” she said, raising an eyebrow.

“Ah, yes, Phillip. He’s an old, ah, acquaintance. Did he leave a number?”

“I figured as much; old acquaintances have a habit of popping up out of nowhere when you get elected President. Yes, he left a cell number,” Mary said as she handed me a pink message slip.

“Okay. Thank you, Mary.”

“What should I do if he calls again?”

“Ah, tell him I’m in a meeting and take a message.”

“Let me guess, an old boyfriend?”

“That’s none of your business. Now shoo; back to your desk before I call the Secret Service and have you tossed out into an alley.”

“Hmpf, like you would ever do that.”

As she left, I caught a look on Shane’s face that could have melted rock. He was not happy that an old boyfriend might be calling me at the office. “That’s all, Shane. I’ve got work to do,” I said, smiling as I turned away.

“Remember, Mr. President, you can’t meet with anyone that hasn’t been cleared first.”

The door closed and I was alone with the Mary that didn't give me any indigestion. I got a handle on my rising temper that flared over the insinuation that I was not free to talk to whomever I wished, even if it was an old boyfriend.

I picked up the phone and dialed. The number that would be displayed on caller ID at the other end would be that of the White House switchboard. Very few people had the numbers to either my cell phone, which I carried on occasion, or the direct lines on my desk and living quarters.

After a couple rings, Phillip answered. "Hello?"

"Phillip, David Windsor here. I see that you called while I was at a meeting. What can I do for you?"

"David! Or should I call you Mr. President now?"

"On the phone like this, you can call me David."

"Thanks. I just wanted to call and see how you were doing and to let you know that I was thinking about you. How have you been?"

"Well, aside from the attempts to kill me, I've been just great. If you ever get asked the trivia question, what's the busiest job in America, answer the presidency and you'll be right."

"I can only imagine. Do you ever get any alone time? You know, any personal time?"

"Phillip, forgive me, but I am very busy. What is it that you want?"

"Well, I miss you and thought maybe we could have a date and maybe end the night like we used to. I can't imagine you get many chances to date and if you did, I would imagine it would be all over the press within the hour."

"Look, we had a nice thing a few years ago, but that's in the past. I have someone in my life right now and we're exclusive. I

assure you, you would not want to piss this man off by trying to get into my pants,” I said with a chuckle.

“Well, that’s rather blunt; no need to be rude.”

“I’m not being rude; I’m being honest. Look, I have a room full of people waiting for me and I really must go. Thanks for calling and I wish you all the best.”

I hung up the phone and smiled to myself, wondering how many other old boyfriends thought they could just pick up the phone and call me for a date. I decided it would be fun to screw with Shane a little bit. “Mary, will you ask Agent Thompson to come in, please?”

The door opened and my agent walked in. “Yes, Mr. President?”

“Shane, what do I have to do to get clearance for an old friend to visit me here at the White House?”

“Ah, what friend would that be, sir?”

“Oh, the guy that called me. I returned his call and he wants to get together to remember old times and end the evening like we used to, that’s all.”

“What? End the evening how?”

“Can you keep a secret? I use to screw his brains out after we had dinner. He was a blast!”

“Are you trying to piss me off? Do you really want a visit from some slut you used to bang? I doubt he would pass the security screen!”

I couldn’t hold it in anymore, and I broke out laughing. I could tell by Shane’s face that he was definitely not amused. “Relax, Shane. I’m joking. He really did want to visit and have sex, but I told him I was seeing someone and that it was exclusive.”

“The slut. You told him that?”

“Yes I did. I want no one else but you in my bed. Of that you can rest assured.”

“Well, keep joking around about your former tricks, and you won’t be getting anything from this man!”

He turned on his heel and left the Oval Office. *Oh fuck, I went too far*, I thought. Damn! What gets into me? If I weren’t careful, it wouldn’t be Shane anymore. I laughed again and Mary looked up at me as if I had lost my mind.

The phone buzzed, and I answered it. “Mr. President, what did you do to Shane? He came out of your office, announced he needed a break, and took off. Another agent is in his usual place.”

“Oh, nothing serious, Mary. I just played a little joke on him and he didn’t think it was as funny as I did.”

“Oh, I see. You always did like playing around with matches and dynamite. One of these days—”

She hung up the phone. I began to worry.

CHAPTER 7



When I decided to call it a day after my last appointment, I left the Oval Office to find Shane back on duty. When I looked at him, he glanced away, but he fell in behind me as usual. “Condor One en route to the residence for the evening,” was all I heard.

I began to get a little tense when even Mary didn’t have the usual bounce in her cadence. She was very sensitive to emotions and I took her demeanor to indicate that I had repair work to do with Shane. We entered the elevator and rode to the third floor in silence. I walked off with Mary on my heels, but Shane headed to his room.

I changed into jeans and a polo shirt. With a few minutes to spare before the usual dinner time, I went into the living room and put the television on to catch some news. After a minute or so, Shane joined me. He went to a wingback chair facing the television and actually grunted when he sat down.

“Okay, Shane, I’m sorry for screwing around with you. I thought it was funny, but I guess I was wrong. If I hurt your feelings, I didn’t mean to. You’re a tough guy and I thought you would take it as the joke it was meant to be.”

Shane looked over at me and didn’t say anything. I began to speak again to further my apology when he broke out into a big grin.

“Gotcha! You thought I was all concerned about some ole trick you once had.... Not even!”

“You mean you weren’t pissed off at me?”

“Not even a little bit. I knew what you were up to so I played you. How’s it feel?” he asked with another big smile.

“Damn you. I thought I had hurt your feelings or that you were all kinds of jealous. Was Mary in on it?”

“I can’t answer that. I wouldn’t want to get her in any trouble, so you’ll just have to figure out for yourself if she was a co-conspirator.”

Now it was my turn to get a little miffed for real. My man had played me like I had played him. Guess I wasn’t so slick after all!

“Did he really want to come by and see you?” Shane asked.

“Oh yeah, he wanted more than to just see me. He thought I was all penned up here in this chicken coop, all horny and lonely. His plan was to come here and relieve some of that tension in my loins, and then go for the gold, I imagine.”

“The damned fool. Did you really tell him you have someone?”

“Yep. Without naming you, I told him I was exclusive with you, and when he continued to push, I told him I had a meeting to go to and hung up on him. I hope he got the message.”

“Well, let me know if he didn’t and I’ll make sure he gets it.”

Shane wasn’t smiling. It made me wonder if part of him really did get pissed off over the old boyfriend. “Excuse me, Mr. President. Dinner is ready,” Henry announced.

Shane and I went into the family dining room and sat down to yet again another simple but wonderful meal. We finished with coffee in the living room while some knucklehead on television raked me over the coals for my plans for a national sales tax.

When the show was over, I asked, “Do you want to go up to Camp David this weekend?”

“You’ll never hear me say no to that question. Shall I put the gears into motion?”

“Yeah, why don’t you? Let’s go up Friday afternoon and come back Monday morning. I’ll take Andy Carter and work a little up there as well. That way we’ll have three nights together.”

Shane went to a phone, dialed the agent in charge of the White House detail, and informed him of my plans. His office would notify the division of Presidential Transportation and the other teams, and it would all be arranged within a couple of hours.

After a little more television, we went to bed. We were alone in the residence, so I kissed Shane good night in the living room where we couldn’t be seen by the duty agent in the hallway that led to the bedrooms. I went to my room and Shane went to his. One of the staff had already walked Mary, so we were settled in for the night. The bed didn’t seem as full or as nice without Shane in it and these feelings made me look forward all the more to the weekend in the mountains of Maryland.

The next day began with a phone call before I could get a shower. “Mr. President, Andy here. I just learned that the Saudi ambassador has left the country. He has flown home instead of contacting me as you instructed. The FBI notified me of his departure by private seven forty-seven out of Dulles Airport.”

“When did he leave?”

“He left at a little after eight o’clock last night.”

“See me in the office in forty-five minutes,” I directed.

Well, that was crappy news to start my day off. I thought I had the problem solved peacefully, but it looked as though I’d have to do something more forceful. I finished dressing and went out to the

dining room for breakfast. I ate quickly and barely scanned the headlines of the morning newspapers. I knew that anything serious internationally or domestically would come to me by way of my morning intelligence briefing, no matter where I was located.

As I entered the Oval Office, I poured a second cup of coffee and went to my desk. Little Mary was brought in from her morning walk and took up her usual guard position, sleeping in her presidential bed.

As I got settled, Andy came in and sat down in front of my desk. "I didn't think the Saudi ambassador would pull this kind of stunt, Mr. President. Is he really this stupid, or do you think he was ordered home by the king?"

"I'm not sure. Did the FBI tell you of anything unusual, or was it just a normal departure?"

"They said he went directly to the airport where he boarded his own seven forty-seven and took off with a flight plan for Saudi Arabia. The embassy says he is out of the country and it is not known when he will return."

"Contact the palace and see when he is expected to return. Tell them we are concerned that he left this country suddenly and request an explanation. Let's see what they have to say."

"Yes, sir. Was there anything else?"

"Where are we on the estimates for Alcatraz?"

"I believe the estimates for tearing down the old prison are in, and the bids for construction of the new prison are due in this Friday."

"Let's move forward as quickly as possible. Get rid of the old buildings and level the grounds. I intend to close Gitmo very shortly."

"Yes, Mr. President."

Andy went to his office, leaving me to ponder how to handle this very serious situation. Mary came in and handed me a file folder

of more documents to read and sign. I pushed the Saudis out of my mind for the moment and dug into the file.

A little over an hour later, Andy returned. "Mr. President, I've spoken to all the members of your national security team and they agree on terminating arms sales to the Saudis. You have their backing to implement that."

"Good. Do so at once. I understand that a sale is presently in the pipeline."

"Yes, sir, five billion in aircraft and parts for the aircraft we sold them four years ago."

"Good. Jump on that immediately. Kill it and let me know when you've stopped the sale."

As Andy once more left the office, I sat back feeling very comfortable about the action I'd just ordered. It was appropriate and would send an unambiguous message to the king of the Saudis.

The rest of the day was consumed by a series of meetings on any topic that had any significance at the moment. On all the issues, I made the final decision after listening to advice from staff members. No one else could make these decisions; that was the job of the president. The final meeting of the day was a briefing on the Alcatraz project.

"Mr. President, we can give the order tomorrow to begin the destruction of all the old buildings on The Rock, and the debris could be removed within a week using barges from all over the city. The next step is to approve the building plans and award the building contracts. I have those plans here for your perusal and approval," stated the head of the Army Corps of Engineers.

I reviewed the plans for the new prison and saw enough single-person cells to hold two hundred and ten people. There were three tiers, each controlled independently of the others by a central guard operations center. Television cameras were placed strategically

throughout the facility and monitored by the operations center as well as the military police duty officer. The final layer of security was represented by the doors that led to the outside. These mighty portals could be opened only from the outside by the MPs on duty.

The outside MPs could see who was requesting entry by looking at the camera monitor for that location. Four guard towers, each manned by four MPs with rail-mounted M60s would stop anyone from getting more than a few feet from the building. The barracks was built to house sixty-eight officers and enlisted men with full support facilities, including emergency medical. The island would be patrolled twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and, if warranted, armed watercraft would circle the island looking for anyone trying to get on or off The Rock.

The waters around The Rock were known to harbor sharks in their murky depths, which acted as a deterrent the same as it did in the days when Al Capone was housed there. I liked what I saw. It was a highly secured facility with the latest technology that could hold any criminal or terrorist without concern of an escape.

“I like these plans. Does anyone have any further suggestions for modifications?”

Everyone agreed that the plans were complete and would do the job without question. “Very well. These plans are approved, subject to modification during construction, if something comes up that mandates a change. Andy, get the award process under way for the company that will build this facility. I want it up and able to house prisoners within six months, sooner if possible.”

“Yes, sir.”

The next day, I decided to pay an unscheduled visit to Arlington National Cemetery to remind myself of the cost of presidential decisions in sending American troops into battle. I wasn’t sure where the Saudi crisis was going and I wanted a clear head when making

decisions. I advised Shane of my plans and twenty minutes later, the motorcade was ready.

As I entered the limo, a somber mood overtook me. The power that went with the White House entailed grave responsibilities that included life-or-death decisions for not only American soldiers, but also millions of civilians, foreign and domestic. As the sirens wailed and the motorcade gridlocked Washington, DC, traffic, I watched the sights go by, many of them monuments to presidents as well as those sacrificed in battle. As we drove onto the Memorial Bridge that symbolically connected the North and the South, the impressive gates of the cemetery loomed ahead of the motorcade.

We took a right just before the gates and entered into the cemetery. I had given instructions that I wanted to visit “section 61,” which was the burial section for men and women killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan. It seemed the most appropriate place to pay my respects as deaths occurred daily because of wars that I didn’t start, but was trying desperately to end.

Secret Service spread out to keep anyone from entering the area while I walked among the graves of our nation’s heroes who had fallen in battle. As I read the headstones, I paid particular attention to birthdates and saw that a good many were yet to start the main part of their lives. The old start the wars, and the young die fighting them. When I came upon the grave of a soldier who was only eighteen years old when he was killed, I knelt down and said a prayer. As I thought about his age and the sacrifice that he made, I began to weep for him and for all the dead of wars present and those long gone. Such a waste of the flower of American youth.

“Mr. President, a Marine is scheduled to be buried today, and they can’t proceed until you are secure,” advised one of the many special assistants to the president.

I stood up and wiped the tears from my face. “Daniel, write down this man’s information and give it to me later at the White House. Shane, tell the detail to let that funeral proceed.”

Shane spoke into his hand mic to the agents holding up the procession, and the Marine honor guards flanking the caisson began to move to the area where I was standing. I looked to my right, saw a freshly dug grave, and realized that this was where they were headed.

“David, we need to go,” Shane whispered.

“Find out who is being buried and who the next of kin is,” I replied. “I wish to stay for this funeral if the family will allow it.”

“But sir, there’s been no security clearance of the people in the procession.”

I turned and looked directly into Shane’s eyes. “Do it.”

After Shane spoke into his mic again, two agents approached the procession and talked first to the Marine Corps chaplain, and then to the family. The agents relayed the message to Shane. The family would be honored if I would witness the burial.

Shane and I walked over, past Marines who came to attention at my approach. The chaplain, a marine colonel, walked up to me, saluted and escorted me to the young widow of the fallen Marine. I was introduced to her and his parents. “Ma’am, I merely want to pay my respects to your husband. Thank you for this honor.”

A chair was brought and I sat down as the service began. It was all over in fifteen minutes and I rose for the playing of “Taps” and the final volley from the fire team. I said my goodbyes, gave my condolences to the deceased’s family, and returned to the limo. As I passed the now bare casket glittering in the sun, I was deeply distressed at the sorrow and grief that I saw on the faces of the family. This was what it meant to send troops into battle and I would not do it as lightly as others had done before me.

The motorcade passed yet another funeral waiting to begin, driving slowly until we hit the Memorial Bridge, and then we were back up to normal speed. I said a final prayer for both soldiers that had touched me at Arlington, and was glad when we pulled back up in front of the White House.

Shane opened the door and I got out. “Are you all right, David? I’ve never seen you like this before,” he said as we headed back to the Oval Office.

“I’m okay. I just hate what wars do to our people, to the families of the men and women killed in battle. And yet, I know there will be times when I have to order military action against a hostile force and create such sorrow as a result. I will just be damn sure it’s necessary.”

Daniel entered the office and gave me the information that he had copied down from the gravestone. I thanked him and made another request. “Please contact the Department of Defense and get the information for this man’s next of kin, and also for the man whose funeral we attended this morning. I wish to send a letter to both families before the week is out.”

“Of course, Mr. President. I’ll get right on it.”

Andy came into the office and stood in front of my desk. “You were gone a lot longer than I thought you would be.”

“There was a funeral in the section that I was visiting and I decided to attend as President and Commander-in-Chief. I’m sending out two letters as a result of my trip—personal letters to the families.”

“Well, I imagine the families will appreciate that very much. I’m here to tell you that the demolition of Alcatraz has begun. The company we contracted has men on The Rock already and it’s closed to tourists as of today. We anticipate implosion of the prison building within two days.”

“Excellent. Safety first, but get them to move it.”

“I can almost bet you that when they take away the rubble, they’re going to find something unusual underneath it all.”

“Andy, what are you talking about?” I sighed, still in a somber mood.

“Well, sir, with all the attempts to escape, there’s no telling what they’ll find when the removal of surface buildings exposes the escape tunnels and things of that nature.”

“Yes, I hadn’t thought of that. Well, if they do find something, have it added to the history of the place. Its new history will be even more important than its past.”

Later that afternoon, I had my first briefing on the Saudi situation since the departure of the ambassador. Andy Carter and the secretary of state entered the office with matching expressions that didn’t bode well.

The secretary spoke first. “Mr. President, I talked to the Saudi palace an hour ago and there have been developments. It is their position that we have gravely insulted them by the accusations we’ve made against their government. The king recalled the prince for an undetermined amount of time and they’re demanding a full apology from you personally, or they threaten to terminate diplomatic relations with the United States.”

“Incredible. Let me make sure I understand this. They have been trying to kill me because they feared that I would order a drastic reduction in oil purchases from OPEC. Now, instead of mending the mistakes they’ve made, they threaten to break off relations with us and further jeopardize our economic relationship. This would motivate the U.S. to buy less oil from them. Are they crazy, or is it me?”

“They don’t quite see it that way. It comes down to *why* they lose our business: because we dump them or they dump us,” replied Andy.

“The king further stated that he would close all of our air bases in his country. He believes this act would be detrimental to the U.S. in the immediate future, as well as on a long-term basis,” Gutierrez continued.

“Fine. Screw them. It’s time for definitive action. Take the king up on his invitation to close all of our bases there. Further, recall our ambassador at once. I’m not going to fuck around with these people anymore. Hell, they want me dead! Why should I care if their feelings are hurt? Get the DOD moving on the closures as soon as possible. Also, tell our embassy in Riyadh to prepare for closure. I don’t want a ton of classified material lying around if they decide to pull an Iran. Brief all parties that need to know. I’ll notify the Hill.”

Once my office was empty again, I dialed the number for the leadership on the Hill. After giving them a quick briefing, they offered their full support, with the exception of the House Republican minority leader. All he was worried about was oil and how it would affect the economy... and one other thing.

“Mr. President, you want and need my full support on this business. I’ll give it to you, but I want something in return.”

“Congressman, what do you want?”

“I want former Speaker Gorski and the others brought back from Gitmo. They never should have been sent there in the first place.”

“You’re playing around with the security of your country, Congressman; you realize that, right?”

“Well, sir, I believe I’m looking out for the rights of the accused, since you seem to be unwilling to do so.”

“For your information, I had already decided to bring them all back to the States. So, I take it I have your support on this Saudi mess?”

“As soon as they are on American soil, I will announce my support.”

“Good day, Congressman.” I hung up the phone before I lost my temper. What a jackass!

I buzzed Andy. “Andy, get Gorski and that bunch back to the States and into a federal facility. I’m being blackmailed by the Republican minority leader of the House. I told him we were already going to bring them back so he doesn’t think he was able to succeed by using this tactic.”

“Yes, Mr. President. You don’t have a particular place where you think they should go?”

“On second thought, transfer them to a military brig somewhere. That way I keep my promise, but continue to hold them as enemy combatants. When they finally send me legislation doing away with that category of prisoner, I’ll sign it and reclassify them.”

“Yes, sir.”

I was glad that tomorrow was Friday and that we would be leaving for Camp David. The pressure and responsibility of my office would follow me, but at least I would be a little more relaxed in Thurmont, Maryland, than in the White House. Even as I started to relax just thinking about it, the phone rang again, and it was the secretary of energy.

“Yes, Secretary Howell?”

“Mr. President, we have reached a rather quick agreement with the producers of oil in South America. They’re willing to increase their sales to us in order to replace sales from the Middle East. All except Venezuela; Chavez flatly stated that he was already selling us the maximum that his companies could produce and would be unable to give us more. The rest of Latin America was more than happy to assist us.”

“Chavez will never help the United States with anything. He’s an egomaniac with delusions of grandeur who sees himself as some sort of modern-day Castro. That’s why he’s offering air bases to Russia. If the United States ever went to war with the Russians, Venezuela would be hit hard as a result. Have you given orders to reduce imports from the Middle East?”

“Not yet, sir; we wanted to make sure our supply would not decrease first. I’ll give the order today. You should alert the State Department because I’m sure there’ll be repercussions over this policy change.”

“Of course, Margaret. Let’s move on alternative energy. I have a special meeting on the Hill in about three weeks to discuss the money needed to implement the changes that will have a direct impact on energy production.”

“I’ll take care of that first thing in the morning, Mr. President.”

“All right, Margaret. Thanks for the update and have a good weekend.”

Even if there had been no crisis with Saudi Arabia, some of these same steps would be implemented anyway. We had to break our dependence on oil at all costs.

“Mary, get me the secretary of labor, please.”

A minute later, Secretary Martin was on hold. “Mr. Secretary, how are you?”

“Fine, Mr. President. What can I do for you?”

“Would you get your assistant secretary for the Mine Safety and Health Alliance to begin talks with all of the major coal producers, and see what kind of increase in production can be made over the next twelve months without affecting safety? We need more coal, but I do not want an increase in accidents in pursuit of higher production. In fact, Mine Safety and Health Alliance should step up mine inspections

during the increase period to make sure that safety is not being sacrificed. We're going to be cutting back on oil usage and coal can provide a short-term fix while we pursue other avenues. Also, I want an update on the so-called clean coal technology that is supposed to reduce emissions from smokestacks."

"Very well, Mr. President. I'll get right on it."

"Thanks, and have a great weekend."

I was about to leave for the day when my social secretary asked to speak with me. Janice Paton took a seat and promised me it would be a short visit.

"Mr. President, we are planning a state dinner for King William of England's visit in two months. Since this will be your first state dinner, we thought we would start the preparations a little earlier than normal. Here is a tentative guest list. Please go through the list and cross off anyone you don't want and add the names of anyone you'd like to see. We are limited to one hundred and seventy-five guests, not including the head table from where you, of course, will preside. In addition, there is the matter of who will perform duties that are normally filled by the First Lady. So, if you could get this back to me at your earliest convenience, we'll make sure the occasion is flawless."

"I will indeed. William is my distant cousin and it will be nice to have him here at the White House on his first visit as king. Invite him and his girlfriend to spend a night at the White House. Put them in the Lincoln Bedroom."

"Yes, Mr. President. Unless you have any questions for me now, that is all I really have for you, sir."

"I'll get this back to you on Monday. I'm going to Camp David tomorrow for the weekend and I'll work on it up there."

After Janice left the office, I buzzed Mary and told her I was done for the day. Shane came in and I got little Mary on a leash to go to the residence.

“I’m really glad to be getting away this weekend,” I said. “It will be good to go up to Camp David, and maybe this time, we’ll pay a visit to Thurmont and have a look around.”

“Well, you already know how I feel about going. In fact, I’m packed already. What do you want to do tonight?”

“I guess the usual, or how about going for a swim after the news tonight? That would not only be good exercise, but I like being in the water. I wish the presidential yacht had never been sold. I wish we could buy her back and use her for short cruises down the Potomac, but the public would have my ass.”

We arrived in the residence and headed to our bedrooms to change. As I put on my comfortable clothes, I thought about the weekend with some anticipation. It was not just the sex that I was looking forward to, but the intimacy that simply was not possible in the ever-watchful White House.

We had cocktails in the living room and sat down to watch some television prior to dinner. It was good to put my feet up and relax, but after a few minutes, the phone rang. I answered, not knowing who would be on the other end.

“Mr. President, this is Secretary Gutierrez. We’ve heard from the Saudis again and they are not happy with us and you in particular. They got the news that you stopped the arms sale and froze future sales until further notice. They’re also aware that we’re closing all our bases in their country and removing as much equipment as possible. The conversation with their foreign minister ended with a veiled threat. They said we could expect unpleasant things to happen if we did not reverse course and restore relations to the previous status.”

“They threatened us with unpleasant things. Well, since they tried to kill the president of this country, I would say that we’ve already experienced that. The hell with them. They really have some balls objecting to our peaceful reaction to their acts of aggression. The more I hear from them the more I’m convinced we need to sever our oil dependency totally. We can’t be subject to the whims and demands of oil-producing nations any longer.”

“How do you want to handle the reply?”

“What’s there to reply to? ‘Oh, please don’t try and hurt us again’? No response. Get with DOD and expedite our withdrawal from Saudi Arabia. I want us out of there in three months. That’s our response.”

“Yes, Mr. President. I’ll contact DOD and advise them of your decision.”

I hung up the phone and looked at Shane. “The fucking Saudis have huge, heavy balls because they have black gold under their sand and they think by swinging them at us, we’ll just crumble at their feet. This has been going on for the last three decades, just not this bold-faced. They hinted around that we needed to sell them arms to protect our national interests in their oil fields, and things like that. Well, no longer. Gerald Ford started government programs to reduce oil imports that failed. We’re going to do it one way or the other.”

“Excuse me, Mr. President. Dinner is served.” Henry placed the food on the table and left.

“Let’s eat, Shane, and then get into our trunks and head down to the pool. We can relax for a bit with a swim. How’s that sound?”

“Fine by me,” he said, putting his hand on the small of my back. I looked at him and smiled.

CHAPTER 8



As I prepared to leave for the weekend, Andy Carter informed me that the buildings on Alcatraz had been leveled and the debris removed on barges. The state of decay was such that the buildings came down easily and the teams were able to quickly load the barges using conveyor belts.

“Have the contracts been awarded for the construction?” I asked.

“Yes, sir, about an hour ago. The winning company has pledged to work around the clock to finish earlier than the goal. They’ll start first thing in the morning.”

“Okay, that’s great. What about Gorski and his fellow rats?”

“They’re leaving Gitmo today, and will be in a military brig in about six hours. Their attorneys will be notified Monday that their clients are in this country, and that they will be permitted access. The justice system will now take over.”

“Great. I think it’s time to get out of here. Ready?”

“Yes, sir. Let me grab my briefcase and coat and I’ll join you.”

Mary, the two-legged one, came into the Oval Office and gave me a file folder for my briefcase. “If you have time this weekend, David, could you look those letters over and sign them? They’re the

ones that you wanted to send to the families of the two soldiers whose funerals you saw at Arlington the other day.”

“Thanks for getting them done so quickly. I’d like them to go out Monday if you’d see to that.”

“Of course. Enjoy yourself up in the mountains.”

Shane came into the office and announced that the helicopters were inbound and Mary made a request. “Agent Thompson, make sure our president here doesn’t get into any trouble up there, will ya?”

Shane smiled. “I’ll do my best to keep him occupied and doing only what he should be doing.”

“That leaves open far too many possibilities in my view,” Mary said, laughing as she left the office.

“That woman is going to come right out and say it one of these days,” I told Shane. “She’s smarter than you think and she knows what’s going on.”

“Well, better her than anyone else, right?” Shane asked.

“Without a doubt. I can trust Mary completely. She actually loves me, I think.... Like a son.”

A knock on the door and my freshly groomed, four-legged Mary came bounding into the office. “Mary wanna go huntin’?” I asked. My little girl knew the word huntin’ and she wagged her tail in response. When I got the leash, she was sure of what I meant and did a little dance. I hooked her up and said, “Okay, let’s get the show on the road, or in the air as it were.”

My little entourage made its way to one of the Marine choppers that had landed on the lawn, and I climbed in with Mary and my briefcase in tow. We took our seats along with Andy, Shane, and another Secret Service agent. This time, we took off first, with the other two choppers following. This way no one desiring to bring down the president would know which chopper held him.

As we swung toward Maryland, we followed Route 15, which would take us to the camp located just outside Thurmont, Maryland. If we continued, we would eventually come to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

After a safe landing on the helipad, Mary and I disembarked by the front stairs. I returned the salute of my Marine and then the salutes of the officers waiting on our arrival.

The camp commander was waiting to welcome us to Camp David with a crisp salute. We climbed into golf carts for the trip to the cabins. Mary was all ears now, sniffing away and looking at every leaf that blew across the grass. I could almost hear a squeal of delight as she realized we were in her newest favorite place. We were entering the presidential cabin when Mary pulled toward the tree line.

“Go ahead, Mr. President. Give her a nice walk while I set things up in the cabin,” said the Marine valet assigned to me. A new valet had finally been selected to replace the one who had committed suicide after Shane caught him trying to kill me. His betrayal had been the most surprising part of the entire conspiracy. It was disturbing that my enemies had managed to get an assassin so close to me without me having the faintest suspicion. The new valet was another twenty-something Marine with the same haircut as every other Marine at this post. He seemed like a good man, and he wore his uniform very well.

Shane and I walked Mary over to the tree line and let her off the leash so she could hunt. I was practically in giggles at her antics as she chased woodland creatures. The instinct to hunt was so strong in this little Scottie that it was a joy to watch her reveling in her true nature.

After about twenty minutes, I called her back and after thinking about it, she decided to honor me by responding to my command. When we entered the cabin, she took off to sniff at everything while Shane and I took off our coats.

“Corporal, would you come here, please?” I called to the Marine.

“Yes, sir!”

“What is your name, son?”

“Corporal Ryan Jennings, sir!”

“You’ll be doing valet duty for me while I’m here, is that right?”

“Yes, Mr. President. Anything you need in addition to those duties, just ask me, sir. I also double as kind of a bar man in your cabin, if you know what I mean.”

After the experience with Jack, my former valet, I decided to set a couple of things straight at the beginning. “Very well. In the morning, please don’t enter either bedroom if the doors are closed. If I need anything, I’ll call you. Agent Thompson and I are used to looking out for ourselves, and we like it that way.”

“Yes, sir.” Corporal Jennings cleared his throat. “I know what happened with the last Marine assigned to you, sir, and I want to assure you that nothing like that is even remotely possible again. I would give my life for you.”

“I appreciate that, Corporal, but I hope it will never be necessary. Do you mind if I call you Ryan? At least when we’re in private?”

“Not at all, sir. I’d be honored.”

“Thank you, Ryan. For the moment, would you fix me up with a cold glass of diet 7Up?”

“Of course, sir.”

I wandered into my bedroom and saw that Ryan had unpacked my suitcase and put away all my things while we were walking Mary.

Shane came in and looked around. "Well, he didn't unpack my things!"

I laughed. "You're not his commander in chief, now, are you?"

"No, I guess I'm not," Shane said with a smile and a wink.

Ryan knocked on the door. "Sir, I have your soda; may I come in?"

"Yes, Ryan. Once we are up for the day, you can enter these rooms as needed. It's only in the morning that we like our privacy."

The valet handed me my soda, and asked Shane if he wanted anything. Shane declined and Ryan left. I noticed Shane's eyes following Ryan's ass as the corporal walked away. I cleared my throat and Shane quickly got the message.

"Well, you do it!" he said in his defense.

"Yes, and it's a bad habit. Besides, look where that almost took us last time."

"Us? You mean, look where it almost took *you*, don't you?" Shane said with a raised eyebrow.

A moment later Ryan was back. "Mr. President, Mr. Carter is here to see you."

"Thank you. Well, off to business, Shane."

He grumbled a little, but he followed on my heels. I sat down at a conference table with Andy and we went over the Saudi plan once more before moving on to other things. One of the other things was a CIA special brief that had arrived by chopper.

The CIA had observed an increase in surveillance of our in-country air bases by the Saudi government. The agency was concerned that this might signal an increase in terrorist activity, perhaps an attack on one of the bases. They recommended sending in more troops until we could pull everyone out.

“Andy, take a look at this report from the CIA and tell me what you think.” As he read, I pulled the two personal letters for the families of the slain Marines from my briefcase. They looked perfect to me so I signed them and placed them back into my briefcase as Andy finished.

“Well, sir, the very last thing we want is to lose personnel on the way out the door. I recommend going along with the suggestion from the CIA. If you’re sticking to your timeline of three months, it would be a very short deployment.”

“Agreed,” I said as I picked up the phone and punched a button to Communications.

“Yes, Mr. President?” the soldier on duty called out on the other end of the phone.

“Get me the secretary of defense, please.”

“Yes, sir, right away.”

I hung up and waited for it to ring back with the secretary on the other end.

“Andy, if the Saudis attack any of our bases, we will have to respond with cruise missiles and take out their air capability. We will destroy what we have sold them over the last ten years. Without air power, we have nothing to fear from them.”

The phone rang.

“President Windsor,” I answered.

“Mr. President, Secretary Penndel here.”

“Sara, as quickly as possible, I want you to move ten thousand soldiers and all their equipment out of Iraq and transfer two thousand to each of the five air bases in Saudi Arabia. I’ve received word that our bases might come under terrorist attack while we’re in the process of closing them down. How soon can that be done?”

“How fast do you want it done, sir?”

“Yesterday.”

“Very well, sir, I’ll start issuing orders at once.”

“Excellent. Advise me when personnel start hitting the sand.”

“Yes, Mr. President.” The line went dead.

“Well, Andy, let’s hope that many additional combat troops will be enough to discourage any frontal attacks on our people. If it doesn’t, we’ll take them out before they can do any real damage to us.”

“It’s the only thing you *can* do in response to the CIA report. Better safe than sorry. Won’t the Saudis start objecting to the influx of combat troops, though?”

“They might. And we will assure them that in three months, they, along with the rest of our personnel, will be gone. Do we know where the jets are going yet?”

“I understand from the State Department that Turkey and Italy will absorb them.”

“Good. I want you to spearhead a review of all of our overseas bases with an eye to closing them and bringing our people home wherever possible. For example, can you tell me why we’re still paying to keep troops in Germany? It seems to me that the majority could be brought home, with the exception of a very well-secured hospital complex for war injuries.”

“I understand, sir. I’ll get started on that first thing Monday morning.”

“Good. By the end of next year, I want a substantial portion of our troops within U.S. borders. I’ve mentioned this before and the Saudi crisis has just kept it in the forefront of my thoughts. We need the savings that this action will bring us.”

“Do you want me to head back to Washington and get a head start on this for Monday?”

“Stay tonight at least. No sense in coming all the way up here just to turn around and go back. Take the rest of the day off and enjoy yourself.”

“Good idea. I’m going to my quarters, if there’s nothing else.”

“That’s fine. I’ll see you for dinner at seven, I hope.”

“Yes sir, I’ll be here.”

The door closed behind Andy, and Shane and I were finally alone. He came over to where I sat and put his hands on my shoulders, massaging them slightly.

“Ahh, alone at last,” I said in an exaggerated tone. “What *shall* we do?”

“For now, nothing. You can never tell when someone will walk in through that door and destroy our peace and quiet. But tonight, now, that’s a different story,” he said pulling my head back to rest against his belt buckle.

“I think you have designs on my body, Special Agent Thompson?”

“Designs? Well, that’s certainly one way of putting it.”

“Well, I can be had,” I said with a broad wink.

“So I hear,” he replied with a grin.

I got up and gave Shane a kiss on the lips before going to the bar and refilling my soda. My young Marine valet was not present, as he was required to depart the cabin during meetings unless his presence was specifically requested. As I put the top back on the soda bottle, Shane came up behind me and put his arms around me, holding me close.

“I love you more and more each day, David. I can’t wait until your eight years are up and we can lead a normal life, traveling wherever we want... and without all the fuss.”

“I know, and I want to do as much as I can to repair America’s image in the world and return us to the values that made us great. Democracy can’t be toyed with as it has been in the past. The White House can’t just violate the law with warrantless wiretaps on Americans, or with any of the other invasions of privacy that we have endured as a nation. There are procedures for getting legal clearance to do those things. For our government to say ‘Well, we just didn’t want to waste the time’ isn’t good enough. Not anymore, anyway. Once we get America back on track, this country has much to contribute to the quality of life around the planet.”

“I have no doubt of that, David, but just look at the obstacles you’ve had to overcome already, just six months into your presidency. This is a dangerous world we live in, and you have to make the right decisions so as to not make it any worse.”

“That’s something I never forget. It’s one of the reasons I paid a visit to Arlington Cemetery the other day. That visit had a very profound impact on me, one I don’t want to forget.”

Shane kissed my neck and caressed my chest. “I want to make love to you right now.”

I looked at my watch and saw that it was four-forty. Over two hours before dinner. I picked up the phone, which connected me directly to Camp Communications.

“Yes, Mr. President?”

“I’m going to lie down for an hour. Please hold all but priority calls.”

“Yes, Mr. President. Enjoy your nap.”

Shane smiled as I walked over to the front door and locked it. I took his hand and we walked to the presidential bedroom with Mary's eyes following me. As I turned to close the door, Mary turned away and jumped up on the sofa. She was no dummy.

"Okay, my love. We'll steal an hour away from the world," I said as I removed Shane's coat, nine-millimeter Glock, and shirt. He pulled my shirt over my head. Before long, we were naked and lying on the bed in each other's arms. Even though we only had an hour wherein we *might* not be disturbed, we were in no rush to get to the goods. We kissed long and hard, taking our time, savoring each other's aromas, taste, and firmness.

We rolled over and over on the bed without breaking contact until I ended up on the bottom and our lips parted at last. I opened my eyes to find Shane staring down at me. I gave him another kiss and pulled him tightly to my body, just holding him. It all felt so natural, so perfect, and so right. "I love you, Shane."

He smiled down at me and said, "I never grow tired of hearing that from you. How did I get so lucky? In the last place on Earth that I would have expected, I found the great love of my life."

"Have you really found the great love of your life?" I asked with a smile.

"How can you even joke about it?" He kissed me and I felt his dick twitch on my right thigh.

I ran my hands down his back and over the top part of his ass, which never failed to make Shane tremble. When he turned his head, I ran my tongue in and out of his ear, which drove him positively wild. He rolled off the bed, grabbed my hard-on, and began to slowly stroke me while staring into my eyes. Then he lowered his head and gently sucked on my left nipple until it was totally taut, his talented tongue making me quiver with pleasure.

I had to pull away from Shane's tongue and hand or our little afternoon assignation would have been over before it really had begun. I pushed Shane flat against the mattress and kissed him passionately, allowing my hands to roam freely over his body. I was always floored whenever my hand ran over the speed bumps of Shane's abs. He was in perfect physical condition, while I could have been far better.

I ran my tongue down Shane's body, slowly inching toward the prize that awaited me. My tongue was getting dry by the time I reached Shane's pubic line. I stayed there for a moment with my head on his stomach, looking at the beauty that was my man. I continued down after being urged on by a gentle push on my head. I licked my way down Shane's shaft where his balls hung full and heavy. I came back up and finally took him in my mouth. Because he was rather healthy in the size department, I had to be lying directly between his legs in order to do any justice at all to his dick.

I moved down and got myself comfortable between Shane's legs as he spread them wide. Once situated, I very slowly continued my oral attentions, watching the muscles in his thighs tense and relax with each movement of my mouth. I felt his hands in my hair, kneading my scalp, and I heard faint little moans escape his mouth.

I pulled off his cock and went down onto his balls, taking each one in my mouth and rolling them around gently. I saw them begin their climb toward the base of his cock and knew that I was hitting all the right buttons. If I didn't stop soon, he'd shoot his load.

I pulled myself up along his body until I was lying on top of him looking down into his eyes. As we kissed once more, we began to move against each other, creating a very pleasant friction between us. I rolled over so that Shane was on top of me. As the kiss drew out, I felt my climax rise and I attempted to pull away from Shane. This caused him to gyrate faster, pushing our pelvises together even harder. I could feel Shane's heartbeat speeding up and I knew he was

ready so I let myself go. I threw myself into the feelings of our bodies writhing together in pleasure as I came.

After my second spurt, Shane began to cum too. I felt his body discharge his essence between us and by the time we were empty, we were a mess... a very happy mess. We kissed once more as Shane rolled off me and we saw the proof of our happiness in the glistening residue of our lovemaking.

“Ugh, the messy part is the cleanup.” I chuckled as I started to get up. Shane beat me to it by jumping over me and running to the bathroom where he soaked a washcloth in warm water. Once he wiped himself off, he did the same for me. After a couple minutes of serious wiping, we were relatively clean. A shower would still be needed, but not just at that moment.

Shane climbed back into bed with me and kissed me on the chest. “That was damned good. No rushing, no worry about a knock on the door, and the damned phone didn’t ring once. Incredible, David.”

“Sometimes we get lucky. I’m sure there’ll be many times when we’re in each other’s arms that the phone will ring. It goes with the job.”

“Well, our hour is almost up. We should shower and put ourselves back together, don’t ya think?”

“Yep. Let’s do it.”

We sprang up and went to my shower. Shane turned the water on full blast and we enjoyed a leisurely wash with Shane scrubbing my back. He washed every crevice I possessed and took great delight in doing so. Finally, when we’d wasted enough water, we dried off and put on fresh clothes.

Back in the living room, I notified the communications officer that I was up and back in operation. Dinner was in about an hour and the sun was beginning to go down. “Mary, wanna go huntin’?”

Shane, Mary, and I took a casual walk along the tree line. Shane and I watched her chase things both imaginary and real. It was such fun to watch her engage in her version of very serious hunting. We laughed from time to time at her antics.

As we turned back to the cabin, Andy Carter raced up to us in a golf cart.

“Mr. President, bad news, I’m afraid!”

“What is it, Andy?”

“Reports have just come in that the vice president’s son has been abducted. The two agents assigned to him were shot and killed.”

“Fuck! How in the hell did this happen?” I asked, looking at Shane.

“I don’t know. I’m off duty, so I’m not monitoring the radio. Let’s go in and I’ll get a full briefing.” Shane ran off toward the Secret Service compound.

“Andy, I’d like you to get back to Washington right now. I’ll talk to the vice president and the national security team and probably fly back in the morning. Let me know what you find out as soon as you land.”

“I’ll leave at once.” Andy got into the golf cart and left to board one of the Marine choppers.

All I could think about was that poor boy and his mother, who happened to be my vice president. And there were two dead agents on top of that! What next?

CHAPTER 9



“Come on, Mary; we’ve got to go. Come on, girl,” I called out and Mary ran to me as I hurried to the presidential cabin. I hooked her up to her leash so that she didn’t run off back into the woods and she looked up at me as if to say, “Okay, the leash is on: playtime is over. I get it.”

After just a couple of minutes, I was back and saw Andy’s chopper take off as I entered the cabin. I found that dinner was waiting, along with Ryan, my Marine.

“Mr. President, shall I have them serve dinner now?” he asked.

“Let’s wait a minute or so; something has happened and I’m not sure when we’ll sit down now. Would you feed Mary while I make a phone call?”

“Of course, sir.”

I punched the button for the com officer and asked to be connected to the vice president. As I waited, a large explosion shattered the stillness of the evening, spreading chaos throughout the camp. Ryan ran to the door, locked it, and pulled out an M16 from a hidden location. I looked at him in shock with a question on my lips, but Ryan spoke first.

“Sir, please stay here for the moment until cleared by the Secret Service. I don’t know if we are under attack or not.”

Just then, I saw four Secret Service agents running toward my location and I ordered Ryan to open the door. He pointed his weapon at the ceiling when the agents entered the cabin.

“Mr. President, the Marine chopper that just took off was brought down by surface-to-air fire from somewhere over the next ridge, along the flight path of what would have been Marine One if you’d been aboard. The Marine guard has turned out and is securing the perimeter of the camp. Until we get a better grip on what’s happening, please come with us to a more secure location.”

I scooped Mary up in my arms and followed the agents and Ryan. Shane ran up to us and joined the escort. They took me to an ordinary building that looked far less secure than the cabin we had just left. Upon entering, I was swiftly taken through a door to a staircase that went underground. After entering a code, the door at the bottom opened and I entered a very secure facility designed for just such an incident. I found a command post, living room, bedroom, kitchen, armory, and bunk beds in a separate room. Once we were all inside the bunker, the door was sealed and a ventilation system kicked on.

“Okay, will someone please tell me what the hell is going on? Is Andy Carter all right?”

The Special agent in charge of my protection detail answered. “Mr. President, we have agents and Marines en route to the location where the helicopter went down, but we don’t expect to find any survivors. Local fire and police departments already have people en route to the location. We don’t know anything else at the moment, sir.”

Ryan appeared at my elbow, minus the automatic weapon, with a soda for me. I took it and sat down in the living room. “Shane, what did you find out about the vice president’s son?”

“I have confirmed that he was kidnapped, and that two agents are dead and one wounded. All of Washington is looking for him and a national alert has been issued by Homeland Security. Every federal law enforcement agency has been put on high alert, including the Border Patrol.”

“Any indication whether he’s alive or dead?”

“No, sir, none. But even more serious are indications that the people responsible knew you were here, and that they anticipated you would fly back to Washington at once. When they shot down that chopper, they assumed you were on board.”

“This was all another attempt to kill me? Are you kidding? Aren’t these choppers equipped with missile defense systems so that something like this can’t happen?”

“The chopper wasn’t high enough yet to engage its defensive systems. They never had a chance against that missile.”

“So more than likely, the attackers think I’m dead, and an assault on this camp is a remote possibility.”

“Exactly, Mr. President.”

“Can I talk to the world from down here?”

“Yes, sir. Who would you like to talk to?”

“Get me the vice president. I was holding for her when all hell broke loose.”

“Yes, sir.”

I took a long drink of cool soda and shook my head. Darren was the seventeen-year-old son of Vice President Wilson and didn’t deserve to be caught up in all this bullshit. Adjusting to life as the gay son of the vice president of the United States was a big enough chore for him to handle as it was. If they killed that boy, I would bomb whoever was responsible should it be determined that they were a foreign power.

“Mr. President, the vice president on line one,” a Marine com officer announced.

“Victoria?”

“Yes, David. You’ve been told about Darren?”

“Yes. Not only that, but Andy Carter has just been killed.”

“Oh my God. What is happening?”

“We think that Darren’s abduction was a ruse to force me to fly out of Camp David so I could be a missile target. Instead, they got Andy because I ordered him back to Washington when I heard about Darren.”

“Who would do this? Who has the coordination and the manpower that it would take to pull this off?”

“I have my suspicions, but we’ll have to wait for a little more information to come in. Have you heard anything from the FBI or Secret Service that indicates where Darren might be?”

“No, nothing, and I am frantic. If I lose my boy, I don’t know what I’ll do. He’s so young; he hasn’t even begun to live life yet!”

“I know, Victoria. I’m coming back to the White House as soon as they figure a way to get me there in one piece. Are you able to conduct business?”

“Yes. What do you want me to do?”

“Call a meeting of the Security Council in the crisis room at the White House. Get everyone involved in this. We’ve had a kidnapping and an assassination all in one day. Make sure all federal agencies are in coordination on this and not playing bullshit territorial games, okay?”

“Okay. I need to get my mind engaged in something constructive. Let me know when they decide to move you.”

“Will do.”

I hung up the phone and went to the command post. "Gentlemen, you need to figure out how to get me back to the White House tonight. I want to be there before midnight. Any problems with that?"

Once again, the SAC answered. "Sir, as special agent in charge of your detail, I forcefully recommend that we keep you out of the air unless we fly north to Pittsburgh and have Air Force One take you into Andrews."

"What's choice B?"

"Motorcade with all battle wagons involved."

"I vote for B. Organize it and get us out of here."

"Yes, sir. It will take about two hours to arrange."

"Why two hours to drive to DC?" I asked with some irritation.

"We have to bring up your personal car along with the war wagons. Of all the times that special limo could be needed, this is it."

"No. We'll use whatever vehicles you have here. Have the Maryland State Police escort us all the way, with U.S. Park Police picking us up on the beltway. We go all the way directly into the White House."

"Sir, let us bring up the proper vehicles for you."

"No. Let's get moving in thirty minutes, Agent Martinez."

I walked back into the living room with Shane and sat down. "Am I being foolish in insisting we get back as soon as possible?"

"Yes and no. The chances of a successful attack on your motorcade are remote. But we have to pass by a lot of good cover and it would only take one accurate missile to destroy the vehicle you ride in."

“Okay, let’s do this then. Put three or four military vehicles in the motorcade and leave the Camp David limo empty. I’ll ride in one of the military vehicles. Will that work?”

“Yes, David, that will do nicely. I’ll tell them.”

Thirty minutes later, the motorcade departed Camp David under state police escort, with nine vehicles including one black White House limo that was empty except for the driver. We took over the far left lane, with police helicopters overhead, and rode it all the way into the District of Columbia where it terminated at the entrance to the White House. I got out of the Marine vehicle and shook hands with the police officers who escorted us.

Shane and I headed directly to the situation room underneath the White House and found the Security Council meeting in progress. Everyone stood as I entered and I took my seat at the head of the table.

“Okay, please bring me up to date on everything that we know for sure.”

“Mr. President, Andy Carter is confirmed dead at the scene along with the pilot, co-pilot, and a Marine aide. The remains of a disposable shoulder-launched FIM-92 Stinger missile were located by search teams, confirming that the chopper was brought down by hostile fire. Because the chopper never got high enough, the defense systems were not able to be deployed,” advised the director of the Secret Service.

“And what of the vice president’s son Darren? What the hell happened there?”

“As Darren was getting ready to leave school, four men killed both agents assigned to protect him, seized the boy, and took off in a van. The agents were shot with automatic weapons fire and no one got a plate number because they were all ducking for cover. However, security cameras caught the entire thing and we hope to have more

information on the vehicle within the hour. No demands have been made and it is assumed that his abduction was a ploy to draw you out into the open.”

“Director Stevens, is the number of agents assigned to the son of the vice president usually only three?” I asked.

“Yes, Mr. President.”

“Well, apparently that’s not enough. I want a security review of protection for children of the president and vice president with an eye to increasing it.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What else do we have? CIA, anything?”

The director of the CIA spoke up. “Our assets outside of the country are trying to locate any international involvement in either incident. We have nothing so far.”

“Well, I have to say that I am not pleased with the lack of progress on Darren Wilson. It’s been over six hours since he was taken, and we have nothing! I want maximum effort on this. If you have to, bring agents into Washington from across the country, but I want progress by sunrise. Any questions?” No one said a word. “Victoria,” I asked, “would you like to come up to the residence for a few minutes?”

“Of course, sir.”

Shane, Victoria Wilson, and I left the situation room and moved up to the residence where we all had a drink. Now that we were in private, the vice president began to softly cry. “If I had thought for one moment that I would have risked the life of my son by agreeing to take this office, I would have run from the job.”

“You have my promise that we will do everything possible to get him back safe and sound. If I don’t have progress by the time I get

up in the morning, we'll have new heads at the helm of some of our law enforcement agencies."

"That won't help Darren though, will it?" She asked.

"It may lead to finding him sooner. That's all we have for now, Victoria."

"I'm going back to the Naval Observatory to wait for news. I'll try to get some sleep, but I doubt if I'll be able to shut my eyes."

"Let me walk you out," I said, as Shane spoke into his hand mic telling the other agents to get the motorcade ready for her. As I watched her leave, I was consumed by the feeling of aloneness surrounding her. Her son was her entire world, and now we didn't know where he was or if he was even still alive.

When I returned to my living room, the news was on, with all the sordid details of the murder of my chief of staff and the kidnapping of Darren Wilson on every channel. The news anchors were asking why the White House hadn't issued a statement. That was a good question. I picked up the phone and requested that the press secretary come up to the residence. I knew he was in his office and I hoped he was working on a statement.

After a few moments, Bill Harkens arrived and I asked, "Are you working on a statement to give to the press on all that's happened today?"

"Yes, Mr. President. In fact, I brought you a copy of what I intend to give to them for your approval."

As I looked it over, I decided it wasn't strong enough. Someone had nabbed the vice president's kid and killed my chief of staff. I should be the one to address the press, not my press secretary. "Bill, this is good, but I believe I'll go to the briefing room myself in say ten minutes. Will you alert everyone?"

"Yes, sir. Do you know what you will say?"

“Your proposed statement gives me a good place to start. In fact, arrange it so that I bust in on national programming. I want everyone to hear what I have to say.”

“Yes, sir.”

Bill left and Shane came over to me. “Be careful what you say; you don’t want to irritate the kidnappers.”

“Fuck the kidnappers. If I have my way, they’ll be executed or put away for life. I’m going to put on a tie.”

Exactly twelve minutes later, I entered the White House press briefing room.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I have a short statement and then I will take three questions. Today, the forces of darkness reached out once again to try to alter the course America has set for herself. Andy Carter, my friend and chief of staff, was killed while returning to the White House in response to the kidnapping of Vice President Wilson’s son. The attackers struck without warning from a hiding place along the flight path of Mr. Carter’s helicopter. In the earlier incident, two Secret Service agents were killed and another seriously wounded when Darren Wilson was taken by unknown individuals. We assume the same people were involved in both cases.

“Let me make this clear to the people who have Darren Wilson: There will be no place on Earth for you to hide if you hurt that innocent boy. The United States will spare no effort or amount of money, and we will respect no border as we track you down. Let the boy go. Even the Mafia doesn’t strike at the families of its enemies. Turn yourself in and I promise you will get a fair trial with full legal representation. To do otherwise is to forfeit your lives.

“Mr. President, how do you know there’s a connection between the two acts?” a reporter asked.

“The attackers believed I would be the one in the helicopter. Darren Wilson’s kidnapping was just a ruse, which makes it that much more despicable.”

“Mr. President, when you say that you will respect no border, does that mean you will violate a sovereign nation’s airspace in order to get the kidnappers?”

“It means that we will work in conjunction with whatever nation they might flee to in an attempt to arrest the suspects. If that nation should deny our requests, we would be forced to use alternative means to achieve our aims.”

“Mr. President, who do you think is behind all this?”

I thought for a moment before I responded. “I simply don’t know at this point. We are examining all the evidence and will identify those responsible only when we are sure enough to take action. That’s all for now. Thank you.”

As the press continued to shout questions, I left the podium and went directly back to the residence. “Shane, I’m going to turn in now; it’s been one hell of a day.”

“Yes, Mr. President.” Shane notified the command post that I was going to bed and he was going off duty. I gave him the look that meant I would love for him to come though the bookcase if he was in the mood. He caught the signal and gave a nearly imperceptible nod of his head.

I wasn’t in the mood for sex; I just wanted to be able to hold Shane during the night. So I was relieved when the bookcase popped open and Shane came in wearing old gym shorts and a T-shirt. He walked over and gave me a kiss.

“Want to spend the night? I just don’t feel like being alone at the moment.”

“Sure. Let me fix myself a drink and I’ll climb under those covers with you,” he said with a smile.

As we snuggled up together, I began to feel a little better. Just having the arms of the man I loved wrapped around me made the world a much nicer place. As we sipped our drinks, I gave Shane another kiss. “We never know what the hell is going to happen around here next, but I can always count on you, can’t I?”

“Of course, David. Not just because it’s my job, but because I love you. Before I met you, I had the job of my dreams, looks, and a little money, but I also had a big hole in my life. It’s not as if someone in my profession can just go out to the bars and pick a guy up. It’s hard for men in the closet to have any companionship at all. I never expected to fall in love with the man I was sworn to protect, but I did. That you return my love is nothing short of a miracle.”

“I guess we both should be thankful when fortune smiles upon us like this. I’m just tired of keeping it a secret, that’s all.”

Shane finished his drink and wiggled farther down into the bed as he prepared to sleep. I did the same and tried to put the events of the day out of mind for just a few hours. We fell asleep after a couple minutes of listening to each other breathe. But the respite wasn’t to be for long.

The phone rang and I picked up the receiver by reflex. “Yes?”

“Mr. President, this is Director Stevens of the Secret Service. We have Darren Wilson back. He was found wandering around Georgetown trying to find a phone that didn’t require money. He was so disoriented that he forgot that you can call nine-one-one for free.”

I sat up in bed, as Shane did the same. “Is he hurt in any way?”

“No, sir. He’s very shaken up, of course, but he’s back in our protection with agents of the FBI as well as our people. Physically, though, he’s in fairly good shape.”

“Where exactly is he?”

“He’s been taken to the vice president’s residence and is being debriefed there. I don’t know if the kidnappers saw you on television, or just wanted to unload him, but they let him go.”

“Okay. Thanks for the notification.”

I hung up and told Shane the good news. As we slid back down into the warm bed, I returned to sleep with a smile on my face.

CHAPTER 10



We both slept so well that when James knocked, triggering the usual bark from Mary, Shane was still in my bed. As I got up and put my robe on, Shane made a mad dash through the bookcase to his own room. He should have been on duty an hour ago.

After I unlocked the door, James entered with my morning coffee and a cheerful greeting. “Good morning, Mr. President. Good news about the Wilson boy being found safe!”

“No question about that, James, none at all. Thank you for the coffee; I need it this morning.”

While James made my bed and laid out my clothes for the day, I went into the bathroom. By the time I got out of the shower, James was gone, Mary had her morning walk, and all I had to do was get dressed. As I sat on the bed to put my socks on, Mary jumped up next to me and dropped something into my lap. Picking it up, I realized I was holding a dead mouse. I reacted automatically and the mouse carcass went flying as I made a noise somewhere between a shriek and a grunt of disgust.

“That wasn’t funny, Mary! Was that supposed to be funny? Or were you trying to show your daddy that you caught a critter in the bedroom? I sure hope you didn’t bring it in from outside.” A Secret

Service agent came rushing into the bedroom, having heard my cry of disgust. His gun was out and his eyes darted around as though he expected to find a terrorist behind the drapes.

“It’s okay, Agent Durkin. Mary dropped a surprise into my lap and it grossed me out a bit. Would you ask James to come in here, please?”

Durkin turned and left without a word. “Guess he doesn’t have much of a sense of humor, Mary.”

I went into the bathroom, washed my hands, wiped off my trousers, and returned to the bedroom. If I didn’t know better, I would have sworn Mary was smiling at me, very pleased with her little joke.

“Yes, Mr. President?” James knocked and entered my bedroom.

“I’m sorry to ask you, but could you pick up the dead mouse that landed somewhere near the sofa and dispose of it? I don’t know if Mary caught it in here or outside, but we need to make sure we don’t have a mouse problem.”

James laughed and said he would be happy to do so. I finished tying my tie, put on my jacket, and went to the dining room for breakfast. Shane was already on duty and waiting on me.

“Good morning, Agent Thompson,” I said, in good cheer as I grabbed the morning papers from the sideboard.

“Good morning, Mr. President. Did you sleep well last night?”

“Yes, surprisingly well. You might say I overslept a bit this morning.”

The papers were full of the murder of Andy Carter and the kidnapping of Darren Wilson. Darren’s recovery occurred too late to make the presses, so there was no mention of that happy event. I ate and headed down to the Oval Office, where I poured another cup of coffee. Mary took her usual place, as the other Mary came into the office shaking her head. “David, we’re going to have to leave this job

if these things keep happening around this place. It could have been you on the chopper. And poor Andy. How tragic!”

“I know, but at least Darren Wilson had a happy ending.”

“Speaking of which, the directors of the FBI and Secret Service are waiting to see you.”

“Tell them to come in, please.”

Both men entered the Oval Office with somber looks on their faces. I stood and shook their hands before waving them to the chairs in front of my desk.

“Okay, first tell me about Darren Wilson. Is he completely unharmed?”

The Director of the USSS answered. “Yes, Mr. President, he’s as well as can be expected. Seeing his agents killed in front of him and thinking he was next shook him up, of course, but the bastards didn’t harm him physically.”

“Make sure he sees a counselor as well as medical doctors. How the hell did this happen, Director Stevens?”

“We followed all of the usual protocols for moving the son of the vice president, but it just wasn’t good enough. The kidnappers were in waiting and when Darren and his escort left the school building for the vehicle, they were hit. Before anyone could react, they were gone with the boy and our men were dead or wounded.”

“In light of this incident, Darren Wilson is to have a full detail from now on! I don’t care how you do it, but that boy is never to be touched by anyone again. Is that clear?”

“Yes, Mr. President.”

“What’s the FBI got to say about this and the murder of my chief of staff?”

“We recovered the missile launcher and were able to lift two prints off the sighting system. So far, we’ve been unable to get a match, but we’ve sent them on to Interpol and various other intelligence agencies. We’re waiting for word on the prints, but we do have another lead. We’re trying to locate two men from the Middle East who entered through normal Customs avenues and were last seen with a Colonel Omar, who’s assigned to the Saudi embassy. The meeting took place at the Lincoln Memorial about a week ago and we know about it because of your order that all Saudis be placed under close surveillance. After the meeting, they went their separate ways, but we do have photographs. The colonel holds the position of military attaché to the Saudi ambassador, and we believe that he’s really a colonel in Saudi Intelligence.”

“Director Mendelssohn, are you telling me that the Saudis are responsible for the murder of Andy Carter and the kidnapping of Darren Wilson?”

“No, sir, we can’t say that, definitively, but there is reason for suspicion and we are looking closely at that possibility.”

“I want tighter security until this entire mess is settled. I don’t want to give our enemies another avenue to hurt us. If they had killed the boy, they would have moved this crisis to an altogether different plane. Get me answers, gentlemen, and get them fast.”

Both men left the office after promising to move mountains. I would be happy if they moved the proverbial anthill. I sat back and wondered why I had run for office when my life was so peaceful, so secure.

The phone rang. “Mr. President,” Mary said, “Alex Cramer is here to see you.”

“Send him in, please.”

After shaking hands, we sat down on the sofa to talk. “Alex, I want to offer you the job of my chief of staff. Are you interested?”

“Wow. I had just gotten used to being deputy to Andy, and now you’re offering me his job. I’m honored and I’d like to accept. I will do my utmost to live up to Andy’s standards and never let you down, Mr. President.”

“Andy always said that if he got fed up and quit on me one day that you would be an outstanding replacement. So it’s really his recommendation. I want you to start at once. There are a million things going on and I need you up to speed as quickly as possible. Get on the Alcatraz project if you’re not already, as well as anything else that’s hot now. Find yourself a good deputy and let’s get moving. I’ll make the announcement of your appointment first thing in the morning.”

“I’d better get to it then, Mr. President. Thank you for your confidence in me.”

I watched Alex leave the way Andy used to and the reality struck me that my longtime friend would not be around me every day, handling the millions of details that came with the Oval Office. The bastards that killed him would pay without question. I suddenly needed to get some air.

“Mary, would you tell Shane that I want to go over to the vice president’s residence? And please get her on the phone for me.”

“Of course, sir.”

The phone rang and I had Victoria Wilson on the line. “Victoria, how is Darren?”

“He’s pretty good considering what he’s just been through. He’s still very upset over the deaths of the agents, but otherwise not bad.”

“Feel like a visit from your boss?”

“You mean you’re coming over?”

“If you invite me. I’d like to visit with you... and Darren if he’s up to it.”

“I’d be delighted to see you, and I’m sure Darren would be thrilled. He respects you a great deal.”

“Good. I’ll be over shortly.”

I hung up and joined Shane and another agent in the outer office. “Let’s go over to the vice president’s residence, please.”

Shane spoke into his ever-present hand mic and we went down the hall and out the door. The motorcade was just pulling up and I was pleased to see the sun when I looked up at the sky. I shook my head when I finished counting the number of cars it took to move me anywhere: fifteen, not including uniformed escort cars.

I climbed into the backseat and Shane shut the heavy door, sealing me into the cocoon of the presidential limousine, where hardly anything could touch me. We left the White House driveway slowly, so the limo didn’t bottom out on the street, but once out the gate, we picked up speed and the wail of sirens and the flashing of the lights commenced. There was particularly heavy traffic for some reason, and it took my escort more time than normal to move us through the city and over onto Massachusetts Avenue. As we began the turn at the entrance to the Naval Observatory, I noticed the Vatican Embassy directly across from the entrance. Some sort of gathering was going on and cars were parked everywhere. A few moments later, Shane opened my door and I exited the limo.

Victoria and Darren were on the front porch of the residence waiting for me. I gave her a kiss on the cheek and shook Darren’s hand.

“You’ve been through a great deal, Darren; are you okay?”

“Yes, sir. I’m fine, all things considered. But I’m glad to be home.”

“I bet you are. Shall we go in?”

I had never spent much time at the vice president's residence and I was struck by the warm, homelike atmosphere that engulfed me upon entering the foyer. Just inside the entrance was a beige Oriental rug that went well with the various pieces of furniture on loan from different museums and storehouses. The walls were adorned with paintings of former vice presidents, including a stunning Gilbert Stuart portrait of John Adams, the country's first vice president. Other famous landscapes were hung in key locations, the perfect complement to the surrounding trees and gardens.

"Why don't we sit in the living room?" Victoria suggested.

As we entered, a waiter approached and I asked for my usual diet 7Up. We sat down, and I turned my attention to Darren, who showed every sign of becoming a very handsome man in a few years.

"Darren, I hope that you'll be able to get your life back to normal very quickly. You should know that I've increased your protection detail, as you'll see for yourself the next time you leave these premises alone. This was a very unfortunate incident that I won't allow to happen again."

"I had never seen anyone killed before, Mr. President; it was horrible. I thought they were going to shoot me next."

"Thankfully, that didn't fit into their plans. I understand that they just turned you loose on a street corner in Georgetown and sped off. Is that right?"

"Yes, sir. I looked for a cop, but I couldn't find one anywhere. So, I tried bumming a quarter for the phone and everyone told me to get a job! I was so pissed!"

"Darren!" Victoria reacted to her son's mild curse.

"Sorry, Mom. I meant I was so *angry*."

"Darren, you do know that you don't need any money to dial 911, right?"

“Well, yeah, I do now.”

“Has your blood pressure come down at all yet, Victoria?” I asked.

“Not really. I’m not sure I ever want him out of my sight again after this!”

“Mom, would you mind if I talked to the president alone for a couple minutes?”

“Alone? Whatever for?”

“It’s guy stuff, Mom. I’d just be more comfortable talking to him without you sitting here.”

Victoria laughed. “Well, I have no problem if the president doesn’t.”

“No, not at all.”

“In that case, I’ll go see to some snacks for us all. Will ten minutes be enough alone time, Darren?”

“Yeah, Mom. That’ll do it,” he replied with a smile.

After she had left the room, I nodded for Shane to leave also. My agent nodded and went out into the hall.

“What’s up, Darren?” I asked as he moved to the sofa I occupied.

“Well, sir, it kind of has to do with the Secret Service and never being alone. I’m going to be eighteen in a couple of months and I want to date. I feel like I can talk to you about this because you’re gay and will understand.”

“Ah, I see. You’re afraid that the Secret Service will prevent you from having a good time, dancing and movies, that kind of stuff?”

“Well yeah, that too. But sir, I mean, I have needs, you know? Remember way back when you were my age?”

“Ah, not sure my memory goes back that far. You mean you want a boyfriend and you’d like to be able to behave like boyfriends, is that it?”

“Exactly! I get real horny, sir, and, well, if guards are always around me, I’m never going to have any fun. Can’t they be pulled off in a few weeks?”

“I certainly understand your position, but you have to realize a couple of things. First, you are the son of the vice president of the United States. That’s the reason you were kidnapped and almost killed. You’re a way for the bad guys to get to your mother and to me and therefore you have to be protected. Besides, where do you think you’re going to look for this phantom boyfriend?”

“Well... I kind of already have someone in mind. I’ve talked to him for hours and exchanged pictures with him.”

“At school?”

“No sir, on the Internet. I met up with this terrific guy who is eighteen and wants to do things and go places. He’s really hot-looking and has a great personality.”

“Darren, you need to be very careful. He may be trying to get you into bed just because of who you are.”

“I was very careful not to tell him who I was. In fact, he thinks I’m the son of a professor at Bard College in New York. The picture I sent him was one of me with longer hair, a hat, and sunglasses. There’s no way that he knows who I really am. He likes me for me, and for no other reason. But if I’m so closely watched, how can we have any privacy when we do get together?”

“Do you know his name or any other information about him?”

“Of course. I know his name and that he lives here in the District. I know his age, and what he wants to do with his life.”

“Okay, write all that down on a piece of paper and give it to me. I’ll have someone in the Secret Service check this boy out. You really can’t see anyone who hasn’t been cleared first. As for the rest of your problem... well, I’m not sure.”

“Great. I’ll be surrounded by men who’ll be grossed out by seeing us together. Doesn’t that sound like a great time to you?”

“You aren’t dealing with anything new, you know. Every son or daughter of a president or vice president has had to put up with the same issues that you’re facing now.”

“Yeah? And how many of these former kids were gay? Well, at least I’ll be eighteen soon, and then I can be on my own.”

“Actually, due to certain security concerns, you’ll probably be under Secret Service protection for as long as your mother is Vice President. There are things going on in the world that make this necessary. Tell you what: let me think on this and see what I can come up with. I want you to be as happy as possible with your new life and that includes your social life. Now write down that information and I’ll have your friend checked out. When are you supposed to meet him?”

“Well, he wants to meet next week, but I haven’t figured out how to actually do it yet. He wanted to just come over and get me so we could go out to the movies. Do I tell him who I am?”

“No, don’t tell him anything until we get a clearance on him, okay?”

“Sure. You’ll do what you can for me?”

“Yes, and I will have to talk to your mother about some of this so that she understands your concerns. If I have her okay, maybe the

two of you can come up to Camp David sometime with me. Would you like that?"

"Sure! That would be great."

"Are you two finished with your whispering yet?" Victoria asked as she entered with a tray of snacks.

"Oh, I think we've put a dent in the issues raised."

I spent another hour with the Wilsons and departed for the White House. The route back was much easier and we were there within six minutes. When we reached the Oval Office, I asked Shane to step in with me.

"Can you have a background check run on this guy? He's a love interest of Darren Wilson's. The boy's afraid he isn't going to have any love life with you guys around him all the time. I told him the guy had to be checked out thoroughly first."

"I wish him good luck with the love life. The guys we have are not going to be very cool with protecting a gay kid and his boyfriend."

"Well, tough shit. They have to protect a gay president, and if said gay president wasn't sleeping with his very handsome agent, he would be dating and then they would have to be involved with my love life, now wouldn't they?"

"Whoa, David. Did I strike a nerve or something?"

"I have a great deal of sympathy for Darren. He's young, gay, and in the public eye. He not only had his life turned upside down, he almost lost it. So yes, I want him to have as much of a normal life as possible. If that means the SS has to guard a young gay man in love, then so be it! Any suggestions?"

"The perfect solution would be to have gay men as his bodyguards, but honestly, David, I don't know for sure if any of the

other guys are gay or not. We just can't put up an announcement saying 'wanted: come out of the closet and move up to a new detail'."

"Okay. How long before we can get a clearance on this boy?"

"Well, he's local and that helps. Give the Service, say, three days?"

"Okay. Get moving on it, please. We'll figure out the rest once the information comes in. It may come down to tough beans for the detail agents; they'll just have to deal with it or request a transfer."

"In a way, it's kind of sweet: teenage love and all that. I sure as hell wouldn't want to come out under his circumstances."

Shane left to talk to the intelligence division of the USSS, which was responsible for such tasks as clearances. I leaned back in my chair, patted Mary on the head, and began to think about all that had happened in the past week. What was I going to do with Saudi Arabia if it was determined that they were behind all of this tragedy?

CHAPTER 11



After dinner that night, Shane and I relaxed at the pool once more. No progress had been made during the rest of the day on any of the urgent issues. Shane swam up to me in one of the corners of the pool so that we could talk without creating an echo.

“I wish we could have finished our weekend at Camp David. I was planning to turn you on so bad that you would have been begging me to make love to you. Can you see any scenario where we might get a week together? You know, like a vacation?”

“And where, my dear, do you suggest that we go where we can frolic for a week, unnoticed by all as we satiate our carnal desires?” I asked with a grin.

“Well, when you put it that way, I don’t know. Don’t you get invitations all the time to spend time on this private island or in that resort?”

“Sure, but all of those invitations come with a price and it isn’t money. People make those offers in hope of trading them for influence on or access to me. Nothing is free in this life, especially when you are the president. Let me think for a moment...”

“Surely, there must be some place.”

“Damn. You know what? There is a place and it would all look normal and positively wholesome.”

“What? Don’t keep me in suspense. What?”

“Why don’t I call up my dear cousin, the King of England, and ask if I could spend a few days or maybe a week, at Windsor Castle? Or maybe Balmoral Castle in Scotland. As a matter of fact, he’s paying us a state visit in about seven weeks.”

“That’s brilliant! Total privacy and security would make that an excellent choice. Windsor is on the Thames River so we could actually travel by water if we wanted to go back into London. I don’t think there could be a better place anywhere in the world.”

“I’ll talk to Cousin William later tonight. With the time difference, I should be able to get him just before we go to bed. However, I’d better mix some state business in there somehow, economics or something of that sort.”

“See, any problem can be solved if you just think on it, David.”

“Okay, I’m turning into a prune. Why don’t we dry off and head back to watch a movie or something?”

“Smashing idea, ole chum!” Shane said in a horrible cockney accent.

As I entered the living room with Shane and Mary hot on my heels, the phone rang. I gave Shane one of those looks that said, *Oh, shit, what now?*

“President Windsor,” I answered.

“Mr. President, Director Mendelssohn here. I thought you’d like to know that we got a hit on the fingerprints that we lifted from the missile launcher.”

“Yes, go on.”

“They belong to two Libyans who are known terrorists. They are suspected in seven assassinations.”

“And these terrorists were allowed to waltz through Immigration and run around the American countryside for what? A week or more before leaving our shores? This is what you’re telling me?”

“Apparently so, Mr. President. The system isn’t foolproof. Even though we know who they are now, we aren’t sure they were here at the behest of Kaddafi. We’re checking further.”

“Well, I guess it’s good work on getting the ID. Now. I want them both located and brought back to the United States to stand trial. If that can’t be done, have them terminated wherever the hell they are. And I want to know on whose orders they killed my friend.” I hung up and told Shane the gist of the conversation.

“Ah shit, whacky Kaddafi. That’s all we need on top of the Saudis,” was his only response.

I made drinks for Shane and myself and sat down. “Can you believe this shit? We’ve heard nothing from Kaddafi since our jets hit his palace, and now this. He might not have sent them, but he sure as hell knew what they were up to.”

“You do know that Kaddafi has been engaged in a running insult festival with the Saudi king, right?”

“I had heard something of that sort. Is it still going on?”

“As recently as two weeks ago, unless it’s a cover for this kind of cooperation between the two.”

“That sounds more like it. I’ll call my cousin in the morning,” I said as I ran my hand through my hair. At this rate, I was going to be lucky if I had any hair left by the time I left office. Shane turned on the television, and we spent a couple hours watching an old movie on Turner Classic Movies. By eleven o’clock, I was ready for bed. I gave Shane a kiss and headed off. Mary had already had her walk and the two of us turned in for the night. I was so tired, I didn’t even want the bookcase to open tonight.

I WAS able to sleep through the night without disturbance and was up early the next morning to deal with the problems of the day. As I entered the Oval Office, the phone rang and I found the commandant of the Marine Corps on the other end.

“Mr. President, I wanted to notify you that the two condemned former Marines are due to be executed today. They’ve made a final appeal for commutation to life in prison. Do you wish to see the petition?”

“I didn’t realize that the day had arrived. No, General, I don’t need to see the petition. Simply state that my office denied the request and proceed.”

“Yes, Mr. President.”

After the general hung up, I was filled with a sense of great sadness that two of our nation’s former Marines were due to be executed for treason and other high crimes. They were being executed with my blessing and that would bother me for some time to come. I said a quick prayer for their souls and turned my attention back to my desk.

The phone rang once again. It was the secretary of energy. “Mr. President, after careful review, I am advising you that the only real way to offset oil consumption from the Middle East is by using nuclear energy. We need to build at least eight new nuclear power stations around the country, and the sooner the better. The coal supplement will help until the new stations come on line, but we cannot sustain that rate of coal usage indefinitely. Without vast fields of alternative energy, we must use nuclear.”

“But Margaret, we still don’t have a proper resolution to the waste disposal problem of spent fuel rods, correct?”

“That is correct, sir. Our only immediate option is to continue disposing of the nuclear waste in the salt mines. As you know, there are certain dangers in having that waste deep in the earth, such as earthquakes and water table contamination.”

“Are the scientists working on dealing with disposal of nuclear waste?”

“Not really. America backed off nuclear plants and the subject really hasn’t risen back into priority. It will take some time to get them back up to full speed on this issue.”

“Well, you’d better get them geared up. How soon and by how much can we cut oil spending?”

“We can cut imports from the Middle East by ten percent immediately and maybe another five percent within a year or so.”

“Okay, go ahead and see to that. I’m counting on you, Margaret. Get your people working full force on these issues.”

“Yes, Mr. President. I’ll do all I can.”

I remembered my conversation with Shane last night and I buzzed Mary. “Will you see if you can get King William for me? I believe he’s in residence at Buckingham.”

“Of course, sir.”

As I waited, Alex, my new chief of staff, came into the office. “I’ve been fully briefed on the Alcatraz plans and I learned that they have begun construction on the main prison. Secondary teams are building housing for the troops. I noticed that notification has not been sent to the Pentagon informing them that they will need to staff this prison when it’s finished.”

“Right. Go ahead and notify them so they can plan for it in their manpower requirements. Good catch on that. Any finish date?”

“The construction company is telling our people that they can have the prison ready in four months and the staff housing finished in

five months. So, the entire project should be finished about one month earlier than original estimates.”

“Good. Stay on top of that. Have attorneys met with Gorski and company in the brig yet?”

“Yes, sir, and I understand that they have filed briefs in district court for bail. The hearing is tomorrow morning. The Department of Justice is handling it, of course, and they believe they can continue to have bail denied.”

The phone buzzed and Mary informed me that the King of England was on the phone. As I picked up, Alex returned to his office.

“Good evening, cousin; how are you?” I greeted William.

“Fine, cousin. I hope this phone call finds you in good spirits. You aren’t calling to cancel my upcoming visit, are you?”

“No, not at all. In fact, my staff has already started preparations. You and your lady will be invited to stay at the White House during your visit, should you desire. I would be happy to have you as guests.”

“Oh, that does sound nice. I’ll take you up on that. What can I do for you?”

“A personal matter, actually. I need to get away for a few days and I need someplace private, but secure. It won’t be until after your visit, but these things need planning. I was wondering if one of your places might be available, such as Windsor, or Balmoral?”

“Oh, I should think so, cousin. Let me work on choosing the best place possible and I’ll get back with you. Of course, you’re welcome to stay here at Buckingham Palace, should you wish to.”

“Thank you, William, but that’s one palace that’s very public, if you know what I mean.”

“Of course. Let me think about it, and I’ll get back to you. When were you thinking of coming over?” the king asked.

“Sometime after your visit, which is in less than two months. So, maybe three months or so?”

“I shouldn’t think that would be a problem.”

“Thanks so much, cousin. I really appreciate it,” I said and hung up the phone.

Well, at least my man should be happy about that, I thought.

The rest of the day passed without any more earth-shattering events and it was time to stop for the day. I decided to walk Mary before dinner, so Shane and I went out the Oval Office exit and onto the pathway between the residence and the West Wing. I was happy that Mary didn’t have to be on a leash. The White House is surrounded by fences and ground motion detectors that register almost any movement. This way she could run and work off some energy, which made for a better night’s sleep.

As we walked away from listening ears, Shane and I were able to speak openly. “I talked to my cousin about staying in one of his places for a few days and he was very open to the idea. He wants to think about it and get back with a recommendation for a location. He understands that I’m seeking peace and privacy along with security.”

“That’s good to hear. Did you discuss when?”

“Not exactly. I said sometime after his visit here.”

“So mid-summer sometime?”

“That’s what I’m shooting for, or early fall. Course, much of it depends on what happens with various world situations like the damn Saudis. Any more word from your people?”

“I haven’t heard a peep. That tells me that they’re actively working it and still don’t have all the needed information. This

situation calls for precise and accurate information before it gets to you.”

“Let’s head in,” I suggested.

After changing, we had a quick dinner and watched a new movie in the theater. Once that was over, we went to the living room and relaxed. I took a few phone calls from both friends and politicians on my plans to cut oil purchases. A little after ten, Shane leaned over my shoulder and whispered into my ear. “Why don’t we turn in a little early so we can lay in bed and talk?”

“Talk? I know you, and the last thing you want to do is talk when you’re in this mood,” I said, laughing. “Okay, let’s do it. Spend the night again, huh?”

“You’re such a sweet talker; how could I say no?” We both laughed as we went to our bedrooms and the duty agent moved away from my bedroom door.

“Excuse me, Mr. President? Here’s Mary, all walked and happy. She may be a little thirsty, though. She kind of lost her mind on the lawn and ran around sniffing everywhere,” one of the butlers said.

“Thanks. I’ll make sure she has water. Good night.”

After closing the bedroom door, I locked it as usual. Mary ran into the bathroom where her water bowl was kept and I heard her slurping water for well over a minute. I stepped into the shower, took a quick rinse off, and emerged wrapped in only a towel. Instead of going to the bed, I detoured to the sofa and stretched out. Mary jumped up on the bed and took her usual place on the pillow next to mine. I flipped through a magazine with my picture on the cover while I waited for Prince Charming to come through the bookcase and rescue me from boredom.

After a few minutes, I heard pushing on the bookcase, but Shane didn’t enter. It took me a few seconds to realize that I had not adjusted the book catch so that he could open it from the other side. I jumped

up and pulled the book out until I heard the click and it opened to reveal Shane with a look of vexation on his face.

“Sorry; forgot to move the book.”

“I’ll forgive you this time, Mr. President.”

I walked to the sofa and patted the cushion next to me. Shane sat down and gave me a look that asked *What are you up to?*

“I was lying here reading when I heard the commotion of you trying to enter my bedchamber.”

Shane just smiled and put his arm around my shoulder. “I doubt very seriously if I made any commotion. But, you call it how you see it, sir.”

“Oh, I like it when you call me sir. Keep it up, big boy.”

“Big boy?” Shane laughed aloud and quickly covered his mouth in case an agent was passing by the door.

“Honey, do you think they know yet?” I asked, motioning with my head toward the door.

“I’d be willing to bet they’re talking about it at least. They know I don’t date, don’t really go anywhere unless it’s with you. I’m not married and am considered a good catch, so they know I’m the one saying no to advances from women. Some of the guys have tried repeatedly to hook me up with friends of friends, and double dates, all of which I declined. They must have suspicions. They’re not stupid, after all.”

“Well, as long as we don’t actually admit to our relationship, all they can do is quietly speculate and take no action that would interfere with your career.”

“Yeah, well, no one has ever brought it up to me. I’m supposed to have my yearly polygraph next week, which could be interesting depending on the questions.”

“You think they would?”

“After what happened with the conspiracy to kill you.... They could very well ask me if I’m gay and if I have had inappropriate contact with you.”

“I can assure them that any contact between us has been highly appropriate!”

“Yeah, but they wouldn’t agree with that assessment of the situation. I’d be considered a risk and would be removed from the detail immediately.”

“Couldn’t I just say no, and that I want you to remain?”

“The president has often had some say over his detail, but never over an agent that he was involved with. I could see the director insisting that I either resign or take reassignment.”

“Then I would just get a new director.”

Shane smiled as if he were talking to a third grader who had just asked why the sky was blue. “A new director would not go along with our arrangement any more than the one you fire. Plus, he could very well go public and cause a scandal. Remember Bill Clinton’s little affair? Some of that mess was that he was messing around with an intern. They would see this as you messing with an employee of the federal government. It just wouldn’t fly.”

“Well, we’ll just have to make sure they don’t figure it out, right?” I lowered my voice.

“Why are you whispering? It’s not like there’s someone with an ear glued to your door. That’s against policy.”

“So you’ve heard nothing from the other agents?”

“The only gossip was why you’ve never had a boyfriend spend the night or something. They know you’re gay, but you’re a man, and

even gay men need to get laid. That's why I suspect that they might be thinking about me."

"Shall I set up a male beard to protect you?" I asked.

"Who? That old slut that called you a couple of weeks ago?" Shane asked with a look of disgust.

"He's not a slut, and yes, someone like that," I responded.

"I don't think I'd like some guy spending the night in the president's bedroom, and it would be the talk of the White House before sunrise. You want trouble? Then do something like that."

"Okay, I get it. We'll just have to be careful. Now give me a kiss."

"Now you're talking," Shane replied.

After making out for a few minutes, the action moved to the presidential bed, which disturbed my sleeping canine companion. With a look of extreme annoyance, Mary jumped down, wandered over to the sofa, and got up on the back facing the bed. That way she could keep an eye on things and continue to sleep.

We made love for over an hour when we both reached a satisfactory conclusion. "That was nice, David," Shane said.

I smiled and kissed Shane once more. "Why don't you stay? I don't want you to go. If you want, I'll have the switchboard call me at six so you can scoot."

"Nah, I'll be awake in time. I'm glad you asked me to stay because, I have to tell you, the last thing I want to do right now is get out of this warm bed and go through that creaky, dirty old passageway back to a cold bed." He got completely comfortable and I turned the light off. I turned toward him and put my arm over him to hold him tight. As I did, Mary jumped onto the bed and lay down beside my head. Before much longer, I had Mary snoring in one ear and Shane in the other. It was quite the symphony.

CHAPTER 12



After breakfast, I went to the Oval Office to tackle whatever the world would throw at me. A minute or so later, Mary walked into the office and handed me a very long e-mail.

The e-mail was from a gay rights group complaining that no one was helping a fifteen-year-old gay boy who was kicked out of his house and was living under a bridge in Baltimore. Social Services didn't seem to be doing anything for the kid, and the police weren't interested. The young man was just another faceless homeless person trying to survive on the streets.

The e-mail went on to describe how his school had revealed his homosexuality to his family and the family's reaction to the news. This was happening far too often in this country and it had to stop. How could a family love a child one minute and the next kick him or her out onto the streets because of sexuality? It was totally inexcusable, and I was not about to allow this particular situation to go unremarked by the Oval Office.

Before I could punch the button to summon Mary, the door opened and she came in with a pad and pen. "I figured I would give you enough time to read and then find out what you were going to do about it. You *are* going to do something about it, right?"

“You’re damn right I’m going to do something about it! Contact whomever you need to in Baltimore and find out the exact location of this kid. Once you have it, tell Shane we’re going to Baltimore today!”

Mary didn’t respond in words. She just smiled and left quietly. I was quite angry about the situation and it took me a couple of minutes to calm down. The only way a fifteen-year-old boy or girl could survive on the street was by prostitution. Many times, prostitution meant an early death for someone that age. This would not happen in the Baltimore case.

Shane came into the office and I assumed it was about the Baltimore situation, but it was another matter I was interested in. “I’ve got the background check on Darren Wilson’s potential boyfriend if you want to hear it now, or I could give it to you later.”

“Just tell me if he checks out okay.”

“He has no prior arrests, and all of the information that he’s given Darren is true, believe it or not. He’s eighteen, lives in the District, and works part time at the Smithsonian Institute as a guide. He’s applied to Georgetown University and is awaiting a response. All in all, he looks okay for Darren.”

“Did the Service check out the family as well?”

“Naturally, and there was nothing that caused any concern. If Darren wants to hang out with this guy, the Secret Service has no immediate objections.”

“Okay, I’ll call and give him the good news. I’d better tell his mother too.”

“Mary mentioned that you want to go to Baltimore today? What’s that about?”

I handed Shane the e-mail and as he read, his face flushed angrily. “If Mary can’t locate the kid, we will,” he promised as he left.

About an hour later, Mary buzzed me to inform me that the boy, Brandon Lockwood, had been located and the Baltimore police were asking if the White House wanted him picked up. "Tell them to keep the boy under surveillance until someone from the White House arrives to talk with him. Tell Shane to get the show on the road as soon as possible."

At least the boy was reasonably safe until I had a chance to offer help. What a sorry state the world was in when it came to gay kids.

The door opened and Shane announced that we could leave whenever I was ready. "I'm ready now; let's go."

As we walked out to the car, I told Shane to ride with me. The escort cars knew the route and we drove to the Baltimore-Washington Parkway that went from the District to Baltimore just as its name implied.

"What are you going to say to this kid when you meet him?" Shane asked.

"I'm going to offer him immediate assistance in getting off the street and seeing that he's properly looked after. Situations like this cannot be allowed to continue. When we start turning our kids out onto the streets, we have failed as a society." I picked up the phone, called back to the White House, and talked to my press secretary, Bill Harkins. "Bill, contact the press in Baltimore; tell them that I'm making an unannounced visit to their city and give them the location. We should be there in about fifteen minutes, which will be just enough time for them to get to the bridge location. Don't tell them what it's about."

"Yes, Mr. President, right away."

"Transfer me to Mary, please."

"Yes, sir?" Mary said.

“Mary, contact Health and Human Services and tell them that we might have a fifteen-year-old homeless gay youth on our hands. I’m asking them to immediately provide a place for him that’s safe where he can receive proper care.”

“Oh boy, sounds like you’re getting into another one of those situations that have a tendency to go boom! I’ll let you know as soon as I have something.”

“Thank you, Mary.” I turned to Shane as we sped by ordinary traffic. “What would I do without Mary, Shane?” I asked with a laugh.

“I don’t know, but what you’re doing for this kid is a big reason why I fell in love with you. You’re passionate and compassionate when it comes to certain subjects and this is one of them.”

“What people don’t realize is that gay kids kill themselves at a rate that’s six times greater than straight kids. Homelessness would be a pretty compelling reason for a gay kid to start thinking about that option. Sure, I could have sent someone to do this, but it wouldn’t make the same splash in the press.”

Shane looked at his watch. “Well, we’ll be there in about five minutes.”

For the rest of the short ride, I thought about all the kids across the country in the same position as this boy was in. We had to try to do something for all of them, not just the lucky one that caught the president’s attention.

We turned off the parkway and headed toward an old railway bridge that had seen better days. The road leading up to it was unpaved and bumpy, although I hardly felt it in the back of the limo. After pulling up to a stop, police officers and agents swarmed over the entire site, surrounding the homeless that were sitting or sleeping under the bridge. An agent finally opened my door and Shane and I got out.

As we approached the small group, it dawned on them who I was and everyone began to stand. Before I could say anything, the press arrived, including television news satellite trucks. Brandon, the homeless teen, was quickly located and brought over to me, as the Service did not want me to wander in among people who had not been screened for weapons.

“Brandon?”

“Yes, that’s me. What did I do now?”

“You didn’t do anything. I read about what happened to you: that you’re living on the streets because your family kicked you out of your home. Is that correct?” The press closed in tighter to try to understand why the president of the United States was standing under an old railroad bridge talking to a dirty kid among the homeless.

“Yeah... yes, that’s what happened,” the boy answered hesitantly.

“Are you going to school still?” I asked.

“No, sir. I have no place to shower and no money for lunch or clothes.”

“How have you been feeding yourself?”

“I don’t want to talk about that. Why are you here? You’re the president, right?”

“Yes, Brandon, I’m the president and I’m here because I want to help you. Would you like to get off the streets and into a place where it’s warm and safe? Are you hungry?”

“Yeah, I suppose so. Yeah, I’m hungry. Haven’t eaten since yesterday around noon.”

“Would you like to leave this place with me now?”

“Are you going to turn me over to the police and put me in jail?” The tears in his eyes broke my heart.

I knelt in the mud on one knee. “Brandon, I’m not going to turn you over to the police or have you put in jail. I want to help you by making sure you get back into school, that you have clothes and food, and that you are safe and loved. Will you come with me in my car?”

Now the boy’s eyes filled with tears, which streamed down his dirt-encrusted face leaving a trail of clean skin where they traveled. “Yes, sir. I don’t like it out here.”

“Okay. Would you go with this friend of mine to the car? I need to talk briefly with these ladies and gentlemen.”

As I watched Brandon walk over to the limo with one of the agents, I turned to the media. Questions were asked of me and the theme of all was the same: Why was the president of the United States standing under a run-down bridge in Baltimore?

After briefing them on the facts, I refused any more questions, and Shane and I walked to the limo. “Ride with me again,” I requested.

“Sure. You realize that the boy is probably dirtying up the limo.”

“And it can be cleaned very easily, I’m sure.”

The boy jumped as Shane opened the door and waited nervously as the other agent got out and I got in. Brandon and Shane followed me, the door was closed, and the motorcade drove back up the bumpy road toward the parkway.

“Brandon, you’re not going to get into trouble by answering my questions, I promise. How have you been feeding yourself on the streets?”

“Men gave me money and I shared some of it with others who didn’t have any money for food. In return, those men made sure I was safe at night when we slept.”

“Why did the men give you money?” I asked with a sinking feeling.

The boy squirmed in his seat and looked out the window as we picked up speed on the parkway road surface. He looked back at me and answered with great difficulty. “I took my clothes off and they took pictures of me. I was given more money if I let them touch me. I’m sorry, but I was so hungry, I had to do it!”

“I understand, Brandon. I really do. I wanted to know in case you need to see a doctor. I think it would be a good idea for a doctor to see you. Is that all right, Brandon?”

“When?”

“As soon as possible, I should imagine. Can you tell me what these men did to you sexually? I think you can answer that question; you sound very mature for your age.”

Brandon was quiet for a long moment before he answered. “They hurt me in the ass, sir,” he said in a low voice.

“Do you mean that someone put his penis in your rectum?”

“Huh?”

I tried again. “I mean did someone insert his penis into your butt?”

“Oh. Yeah, three men did that one night... but I was able to get enough money for me and my friends to eat McDonald’s for a week!” Tears once again filled his eyes as he spoke.

“Divert us to Bethesda Naval,” I said to Shane. He relayed the message to the front compartment.

“Well, Brandon, I think we’ll have a doctor talk to you in a few minutes, and then you can see the White House. Would you like that?”

“Could we get a hamburger somewhere?”

“We can get all the hamburgers you want. How’s that?”

“Thank you. I’m so hungry. I hate being hungry.” Abruptly, he looked stricken. “Wait! Who will give food to the other kids if I’m gone?”

I didn’t have an immediate answer for him. I picked up the phone and called Alex. When he answered, I asked that he contact a food source in Baltimore and have supplies sent to the homeless under the bridge. I asked further that their cases be looked into for more substantial assistance.

“Thank you, sir,” Brandon said. After another few minutes, we pulled into the long driveway leading up to the Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland. A full emergency crew was awaiting our arrival. Since we were coming unannounced, they assumed that something was wrong with me. Once the area was secured, I got out with the boy and Shane behind me. I quickly informed the doctors that I was not in need of medical services. After the initial look of relief washed over their faces, a look of confusion replaced it.

“This is Brandon,” I told them. “Brandon has been living on the streets of Baltimore for over three months. In order to eat, he had to rent himself out to some nasty men who did things to him that were more than likely hazardous to his health. I would like you to give him a thorough examination and get him cleaned up, please.”

“But Mr. President, he’s a civilian. We don’t treat civilians here; only military and government officials,” said a naval captain who looked like the administrative type.

“Captain, is this a military facility?”

“Why yes, sir, it is,” he answered.

“Then as Commander in Chief, I order that my directives be carried out. Any further questions?”

Upon hearing this exchange, a rear admiral quickly stepped in. "Mr. President, the boy will be taken care of as if he were my own son. Captain, you're dismissed."

"Thank you, admiral. How long will this take?"

"If you want a total exam with lab work, it will take two hours for results if we rush it."

"Okay. I'm leaving him in your custody, Admiral, as I have to get back to work. When his examination is done, have him transported to the White House. Please fax the results of the examination over to my office. Obviously, look for any signs of sexually transmitted diseases. No telling what he has crawling around on his body, so alert your staff."

"Yes, Mr. President, I'll see to it at once."

"Thank you, Admiral, I appreciate the cooperation."

I turned to Shane and he had a slightly pasty look to his face. "What's the matter?"

"You said there's no telling what he has crawling around on his body, and he's been in the presidential limousine."

I spun around on my heels and yelled after the admiral.

"One more thing, please. As my agent just pointed out, the boy has been inside the presidential limousine. If he does have crabs or some other sordid bug, my vehicle might be infested. Is there a way to get a medical team to kill any bugs on the seats, etcetera?"

"Certainly we can wipe down all the seats with a disinfectant solution that would kill body lice and crabs, but the carpet is another matter. It will have to be shampooed."

"Okay. Would you have your techs do the seats and we'll worry about the rest?"

"At once, Mr. President."

“Shane, how fast can we get a chopper here?”

“Twenty minutes.”

“Do it. No one rides in the limo until the carpets and seats are cleaned.”

Shane absentmindedly scratched himself as he talked into his hand mic. I smiled, until I felt an itch on my right arm. It was no longer amusing. Twenty-five minutes later, Marine One landed on the helipad and we took off for the White House.

“Do you mind if I take a shower as soon as we get back?” Shane asked.

“No, by all means, do. I’m going to have one myself. Better to be safe than sorry.”

After just a couple minutes, we landed on the White House lawn, where we exited and went to the residence. Before I entered my room, I called for James.

“James, please put on gloves, and take these clothes, along with Agent Thompson’s clothes, and have them dry-cleaned right away. No one else is to touch the clothes. They may be contaminated with bugs of some sort. Be sure you protect yourself while handling them, and you might want to scrub up afterward.”

“Yes, sir, at once! Agent Thompson, you’d better strip here too. If there *are* any creatures on the clothes, they won’t drop off in your bedroom.”

Shane got that pasty look again and mumbled something as he began to disrobe in the hallway. The duty agent backed away when he heard why Shane and I were stripping.

“Mr. President, what about your underwear and socks?” James asked before departing.

“Good question, James. We’ll put those items into one of the plastic laundry bags and put them outside in the hallway. Collect them and get them into a washer with hot water and detergent.”

“Right away, sir.”

Shane and I entered our bedrooms, immediately took off the remainder of our clothes, and put them in a plastic bag. Once that was done, I ran to the bathroom and jumped into the shower, where I took my time washing every inch of my body. The thought of lice in my hair or on my body gave me the shivers.

Once I was satisfied that I was clean, I got out of the shower and looked to see if there were any tiny dark spots on the white porcelain. Seeing nothing, I grabbed a towel and put fresh clothes on. A knock on the door announced Henry with a vacuum cleaner. He began to vacuum the pathway between the door and the bathroom.

“No sense taking any chances, Mr. President,” Henry said with a smile.

“Thank you, Henry. I’m sorry for the extra work.”

“Mr. President, nothing is too much when it comes to you.”

When he finished, he left the room and I followed shortly. I waited while Shane emerged from his room and we went to the elevator. Shane spoke into his mic, informing the other agents that Condor One was en route to the Oval Office.

Just before I entered the office, Shane reminded me to tell the Wilsons about the clearance on the possible boyfriend. “Mary, where is the vice president at the moment?” I asked.

“She is in her West Wing office. Would you like to see her?”

“Yes. Ask her to pop over here for a minute.”

I entered the office and closed the door. I took a deep breath and thought about the kid under the bridge once more. After sitting down,

I found a note from Mary telling me that HHS was prepared to get the boy into housing right away and to look after his short-term needs. I was happy that we could make a small difference for one homeless boy.

A knock on the door came and Mary entered with Victoria Wilson. “Good afternoon, Mr. President,” she said with a bright smile.

“Hello, Victoria. Everything better today?”

“Well, I’m still in shock that my baby was taken by armed men, but I’m delighted that he was returned unharmed. I practically have the Secret Service sitting on Darren in pairs at the moment.”

We walked over to the sofa and sat down. She refused coffee or anything else to drink. “Actually, it’s Darren that I wanted to speak to you about.”

“Oh? Is there another security issue?”

“No, nothing like that. In fact, we’re trying to make sure he doesn’t have any more issues like that. Do you remember when he asked to talk to me at your residence the other night?”

“Yes. I assumed it was some kind of ‘man’ question dealing with his body or something.”

“Well, not quite. Darren wants to date a guy a tad older than himself that he has sort of met, and he asked me for help in making it happen. He’s worried that the Secret Service will kill his social life.”

“Whoa, what do you mean he ‘sort of’ met a guy a tad older than himself?”

“He met someone online who doesn’t know he’s your son, or that he lives in the vice presidential mansion. The other boy thinks Darren is the son of a college professor in New York. However, I told him that a background check would have to be run before anything further could be discussed. I had Shane do the check, and we got the

results back late yesterday. The boy is clean in all respects. There appears to be no security danger at all should Darren and this boy want to hang out together.”

“I see. You mean my horny seventeen-year-old has met a hornier eighteen-year-old and they want to get together to make babies.”

“I don’t know that to be the case at all. He wants to have a relationship with another gay male his own age. It’s really quite normal.”

“You men all stick together, don’t you? You know as well as I do that if they get together, it will lead to more. This was never an issue before as he had his own private life and I didn’t need to be involved in it as a governor. But now, it’s a whole new world.”

“Victoria, you have to learn to trust him. He’ll be eighteen shortly and there’s nothing you can do to stop that.”

“What if I lock him in the basement at the naval house? Then what?” she asked with a smile. “What are you suggesting, David? Should I call off his protection detail and just let him go with this guy that we don’t know much about, other than he has never been caught doing anything?”

“I didn’t say that. Obviously, he can’t be allowed to go anywhere without his detail. However, I would like to try to find a gay agent to supervise the detail and allow him privacy in a secure area. At least he can’t get pregnant!”

Victoria laughed until she had tears in her eyes. “You find the silver lining in every situation, don’t you, David?”

“Well, argue with the premise if you can! It’s true; you won’t have to worry about changing diapers.”

“All right. How do you want to proceed?”

"I'd like to call Darren and tell him that his friend passed the background check, and that he's free to make arrangements to get together for a movie, or something. In the meantime, I'll talk with the director of the Secret Service and find out if they have any gay agents."

"You mean like Shane?"

My jaw dropped open. "What do you mean, Victoria?"

"Oh come on, David. You positively light up whenever Shane walks into a room. I've also noticed that Shane smiles at you in a way that says he more than likes you. Now sit there and tell me that my woman's intuition is malfunctioning."

"No, I can't say you're wrong."

"I *knew* it! At first, I thought it was just my imagination, but the more I studied you two the more I became convinced that you were a couple. You are, and it's not just a casual thing, is it?"

"You know, for a vice president, you're awful damn nosy, woman!"

"I'm a mother; we notice these kinds of things. I think it's great, by the way. You shouldn't be alone in this world, let alone in this job. What better person for you than the man responsible for your life?"

"Don't tell anyone, please. It would probably cost Shane his job, which he loves very much. It's a bit sticky, but we're trying to keep it secret. You're the first to guess it. Correction: the second. The first was my nosy secretary, who thinks she knows what I'm thinking before I do."

"Okay. What about Darren?"

"Let me talk to him and fix it so that he can have a social life and, yes, a sexual one, as well, if he chooses."

"Will you make sure that he knows about safe sex and all that kind of stuff? You really are the perfect man to have this conversation

with him. I doubt his father would ever have spoken to him about this.”

“As long as he wants to talk about it, I’m happy to oblige. It seems to be the day for gay kids,” I said with a smile.

After I finished telling her about the boy from Baltimore, she wiped a tear from the corner of her eye and asked, “What will become of him?”

“Well, we’ve made arrangements with HHS to get him situated temporarily. At the moment, he’s with the doctors at Bethesda Naval, being closely examined. Since he had to sell himself to eat, I’m having blood work done to look for signs of sexually transmitted diseases, as well as anything else he might have picked up.”

“A fifteen-year-old-boy is going into the foster care system simply because he’s gay?” She shook her head, frowning. “That’s so sad and it pisses me off at the same time! What is wrong with people? Don’t they understand what treasures children are? They’ve tossed him out like yesterday’s garbage.”

“I feel the same way. I’m going to ask that criminal charges be lodged against the parents for abandoning a minor child. It’s a felony in Maryland, if I’m not mistaken.” “Well, at least he should be safe in foster care, as long as he isn’t placed with an abusive family. If I weren’t the president and gay, I would take the boy in myself for the next couple of years. But, of course, that’s impossible.”

“What if he were to live with Darren and me? We have plenty of spare rooms in that mansion, and he’d have Darren to help him grow up as a gay teen. This way we’d be sure that he’s safe and being taken care of!”

“Whoa, Victoria, do you know what you’re taking on? And Darren might not be wild about the idea.”

“Of course, I’d talk to Darren about it first, and if he had no objections, I’d then talk to the boy.”

Mary entered with a standard file folder. “A fax just came in for you from Bethesda.”

“Oh, good. I’ve been waiting for that.”

I opened the file and scanned the medical report. Overall, the boy was in good shape, although he was undernourished and had head lice. He was given vitamin injections and had his head shaved along with all other body hair. He’d showered and been declared bug free. In addition, he’d been given surgical scrubs to wear after his infested clothing was destroyed. There were no signs of HIV, or hepatitis A or B. He did have slight anal tearing, which was treated with surface antibiotics, as well as suppositories. The prognosis was good that with proper food, water, and sleep, he would regain his normal healthy status.

After Victoria read the report, she said. “Well, then, that’s settled. Let me talk to Darren tonight, and I’ll let you know. Please tell HHS not to send the boy too far away.”

“Okay, but I urge you to give this more thought and make sure you’re not reacting with emotional exuberance.”

“I promise to give it the same amount of thought that you put into deciding whether or not to become involved with Shane.” She smiled as she rose and went to the door. She turned in the doorway and reminded me to call Darren.

As the door closed, the only thought that came into my mind was *Women!*

I went over to my desk and dialed the vice president’s residence. Once Darren got on the phone, I laid it out for him.

“The security check came back on the boy you’re interested in. There is no obvious security reason that you shouldn’t become friends.”

Darren let out a little whoop and giggled into the phone. “What about the Secret Service detail, sir?”

“I’m still working on that one. One thing at a time. By the way, I’ve told your mother the whole story, and, while she is deeply concerned about your safety, she understands. She wanted me to talk to you about safe sex. Is that a conversation that I need to have with you?”

Darren laughed again. “Mr. President, no offense, but I’m almost positive that I could tell *you* things about safe sex. They drill that stuff into us at school until we can recite it in our sleep. I know all about condoms, sir, and I would make sure to use one, no exceptions.”

“I am glad to hear that. Don’t tell him right off that you are Darren Wilson. Meet him first and make sure you like him in person. But let me check on the possibility of a gay agent, okay?”

“Thank you, sir, so much. You’re making my life enjoyable again!”

“By the way, your mother has something important to talk to you about that has nothing to do with this. Make sure you see her after she gets home, okay?”

“Yes, sir. Will do.”

CHAPTER 13



I picked up the phone, buzzed Mary, and asked that Shane step in. When he did, I asked him, “Would you call the director of the Secret Service for me and ask if the USSS has any gay agents that could be assigned to Darren Wilson?”

“Oh, he’s going to love that one. When do you want me to call him?”

“How about now, before he leaves his office for the day? I promised Darren that I’d ask. Also, Victoria Wilson is going to ask Brandon if he’d like to live with her and Darren.”

“Oh, there’s another winner. A street kid rescued from the streets of Baltimore and turned over to the vice president of the United States to raise. You’re trying to make the director put in his papers to retire early, aren’t you?”

I smiled at Shane. “Please, go take care of this for me. The medical report came back and he’s clean, though they did find head lice. He’s being delivered here shortly all nice and clean. Tell the front gate, will you? When he gets here, put him in the conference room with an agent on the door until HHS picks him up. I’ll find time to pay him a visit before he leaves.”

“Yes, Mr. President,” Shane said for effect, since the outer office was full of people.

The phone buzzed and Mary informed me that Director Stevens of the USSS was on the line.

“President Windsor.”

“Mr. President, Director Stevens here. I just got off the phone with Agent Thompson. Sir, as far as I know, we don’t have any homosexuals in the Secret Service, so I’m unable to respond to your request. All of our protection division agents are professional and the fact that the Wilson boy is gay has no impact on our ability to protect him.”

“You do understand why the boy is asking about this, don’t you?”

“Agent Thompson told me that Darren Wilson wants to date and is afraid that his detail will ridicule him. I promise you that any agent who behaved in such manner would be transferred out of the protection division at once. Now, if the boy does something with another boy in front of his agents, there might very well be some static. That’s to be expected, but as long as he keeps it behind closed doors, I don’t foresee any problems.”

“Mr. Director, did the Ford sons have any problems with their agents when they were swimming naked in streams and dating girls while their father was in the White House?”

“No, sir, but that was different.”

“Oh? Why was it different, Director Stevens?”

“Well, the Ford boys were all straight.”

“So, you’re saying that because the Wilson boy is gay, his choice of dates is somehow offensive?”

“Well... err, no, sir. I just meant that his conduct would be unconventional and therefore possibly unnerving to his detail. Look, sir, any agent on his detail would give his or her life for that boy. In fact, as you know, two already have.”

“Okay, since you don’t think you have any agents who might be gay, please assign agents that have no issue with the fact that Darren Wilson is, and who will not cause any emotional distress for him if he decides to date. I don’t want anything to occur that will make it harder for Darren to accept himself and lead as normal a life as possible under the circumstances. Is that clear?”

“Yes, sir, I will review his detail now.”

“Thank you, Director Stevens.”

I hung up the phone a little pissed at the director’s attitude. He insinuated that Darren was not normal and that his agents had a right to be upset should they observe any intimacy between two boys. A lot had to change in the world for social justice to get a foothold in the soft underbelly of society.

The phone rang again. It was Shane advising me that Brandon, the homeless boy, was at the White House. I left the office with Shane and another agent. When I entered the conference room, I hardly recognized the young man waiting there. He was cleaned up, in fresh clothes, and smiling. He also had no hair.

“Brandon, you look fantastic! Did the doctors treat you all right at the Naval Hospital?”

“Yes, sir, they took good care of me and even got rid of what they found.” The boy looked down at the floor in embarrassment.

“Brandon, the important thing is that you’ve gotten rid of the hitchhikers. Have you eaten anything?”

“Yes, sir. They asked when I had last eaten, and when I told them, they had food brought up and I ate until my gut hurt!”

“Good. I’m glad that they took good care of you. Listen, Brandon, here’s what’s going to happen now. A vehicle from the Health and Human Services Agency is going to pick you up and get you into foster care for tonight at least. The White House

switchboard is ringing off the hook from people who want to take you in and provide a good home for you, so I don't expect you'll be in foster care very long. Once a suitable family is found, you'll have a chance to talk to them, and then, if you agree, you can go home with them. You won't be forced to go with anyone you don't like. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. I have a question. Why are you doing all this for me? You don't know me, and I can't help you in any way with politics, so why?"

"Not every person has an ulterior motive for helping another. I was very angry when I learned of your situation and I wanted to help you. I'm in a position to do so and I feel that it's my responsibility. I don't want anything from you in return. I just want you to grow up strong with a good, solid self-image, a good education, and a healthy life. I want you to be proud of being gay, and I want love in your heart, not hate. Do you understand why I helped you today?"

"Yes, sir, I think I do. You're gay too, right?"

"Yes, Brandon, I'm gay too. Maybe that's the other reason I did this. The thought of you living under a bridge simply because of the way God made you was too much for me to bear. I wouldn't have been able to sleep tonight knowing that I'd done nothing to help you. If I weren't the president, I would take you in myself, but I'm doing the next best thing. I have a good feeling that you're going to be very happy with your new life. By the way, do you want your parents arrested for throwing you out on the street? What they did was against the law."

"No, sir. I just don't want to see them again. I don't want them to ever be in a position to hurt me again."

"Very well, Brandon. You wait here until the car from HHS arrives, and then go with them and cooperate. Tomorrow could be a

very big day for you. I'll continue to keep apprised of your situation, okay?"

"Yes, sir, and thank you for all that you're doing for me." Brandon walked over to me, gave me a hug, and began to cry. I put my arms around him and held him close for a moment as I patted him on the back.

"You're a good boy. Don't ever let anyone tell you different, you hear?"

He looked up with tear-filled eyes and whispered, "Yes, sir."

I squeezed him one more time and left the conference room with tears in my eyes. What a wonderful boy. Whoever ended up with him would be very lucky.

When I got back to the Oval Office, I learned about the firestorm that this story had created. It was the lead on all the news programs, and panel discussions began to take place on gay youths and the hazards they faced. What started as a simple attempt to help one homeless boy was taking on a life of its own. I smiled, as I was pleased with this unexpected benefit from doing the right thing.

I decided to call it a day and notified Shane that I wanted to go to the residence and relax. Mary, Shane, and I walked the short distance to the residence on the outside path, which allowed Mary to run free for a few moments and to water the grass. Once we got up to the family floor, the three of us got comfortable in the living room as Henry brought us drinks.

"David, you really got emotionally involved with Brandon, didn't you?"

"Yes, I guess I did. I was horrified by the way he looked under that bridge and by what had happened to put him there. The fact that he had to go into prostitution to eat is disgusting. The fact that he was using some of the money to feed other homeless men is inspiring. How much more selfless can one get?"

“David, do you want kids?”

“I’ve thought about it. I would love to have a son or two. If they grew up to be like Brandon, I would be so proud of what they had achieved. I’m actually hoping that Victoria Wilson decides to take Brandon in, which will allow me to stay in close touch as he gets his life back on track. I’ll see to it that he goes to any college he qualifies for. So, yes, I guess I would like sons.”

“I thought so. You positively sparkled around that boy. I could feel how unsettled you were by his circumstances. Would you consider it while you were in the White House?”

“Ha! Now that’s a great question. It would probably guarantee that I’d be a one-term president. The right wing would go bonkers—I can see the letters and e-mails now. Of course, I would be accused of wanting the boy for sex: that’s their favorite attack lead. However, the question does make me think now that you have raised it. What about you? Would you want us to have kids?”

“Very much, David. We have the money to hire caregivers when we’re busy. It would also give us someone to spoil and love.”

“Hey, that’s what I’m for!” I said with a laugh. “But yes, I agree. We’ll talk about this subject again. I want to make sure that Darren Wilson gets to have a social life with other gay boys his age. I think that’s important; especially since he’s graduating from high school in just a few short weeks.”

“Excuse me, Mr. President, but dinner is served,” Henry announced.

Shane and I had another quiet dinner together with our thoughts occupied by the notion of having children. Considering my job was part of that analysis, as it would automatically put the boy in danger. Was that fair to him?

“Shane, I’d love for you to sleep with me every night from now on. I’ll just have the switchboard call each morning so that you’re up

in time to get ready for work. You okay with that?" I asked as I sat back in my chair.

Shane gave me a smile that was pure happiness. "I've been waiting for you to realize that we should be doing that. Of course I'm fine with it! I've wanted it all along, but didn't want to press you. I resent each time I have to sneak through the wall, have sex, and then sneak back like some kind of hooker. It felt kind of like you were using me, even though I know you love me. It's not a feeling that I like."

"Why the hell didn't you say something? We could have talked it out and arrived at this conclusion weeks ago. Promise me that we will always have open communication from now on."

"Sure. Can I put a couple things in your room?"

"Of course. I'm still of the mind to tell Stevens that I'm in love with one of his agents and that we're a couple. Then we could live openly together in the White House."

"If you want to end my career in the Service, then go right ahead and do that."

I searched Shane's face for a clue as to whether or not he was serious and would grieve over the loss of his job. His face was as blank as an unpainted canvas. He was, after all, trained not to show emotions, which made it difficult at times for me to read his mood or intent.

We finished dinner, went back into the living room, and put the television on to watch various news programs. Shane took a seat next to me on the sofa with Mary lying next to him. Four-legged Mary was becoming as fond of Shane as the two-legged one, which wasn't always the case with my former boyfriends. One boyfriend in particular was afraid of Mary because every time he tried to put his arm around me, she growled protectively. I took it as a sign that the guy was no good for me and eventually had to agree with my

companion. The fact that she was becoming fond of Shane only confirmed for me that this was the right man for my life.

The phone rang and I answered it. "David, this is Victoria. I just wanted to let you know that I talked with Darren about Brandon and he thought it would be really cool to have a younger brother. Will it cause you any problems if I take Brandon in?"

"I have no problem either politically or personally. I think the boy has a lot going for him and it will make a loud statement about foster care and adoption. Are you going to try to talk to him tomorrow?"

"That's my intention. If you support the idea, I really want to do this. Darren has agreed to try and mentor Brandon and show him the ropes."

"I think Brandon might be able to show Darren the ropes! Just because he is younger doesn't mean he's naive about the ways of the world. The doctors gave him a clean bill of health so there are no issues in that area, but remember, you have to keep him away from anything remotely classified until you really get to know him. Work closely with the Secret Service in both protecting him and protecting him from himself."

"I understand. Thanks for what you did for the boy and for your support in my plan. I hope the right wing doesn't make a big deal out of it."

"Victoria, to hell with the right wing. I don't care what they say about this. If this is what you and Darren want to do, then do it."

"Speaking of Darren, he thinks you walk on water. He really appreciates your talk with him about this other boy and for getting clearance. He's going to meet the boy this weekend."

"I'm glad I could help. The agents assigned to Darren should be more sensitive now to the issues involved. I had a chat with the director today about it. Of course, Brandon is going to have to have a

detail also. His life is going to change dramatically. If you're still sure you want to do this then I say go for it."

The rest of the evening was, thankfully, quiet with no more phone calls. When it was time for bed, Shane and I walked Mary for a good twenty minutes and then we all went to sleep in the same bedroom. As we lay in bed, we talked about kids again and what it would be like for Brandon living with the vice president of the United States. He could go from under a bridge to a mansion, all in seventy-two hours.

CHAPTER 14



The switchboard rang at 6:30 a.m. so I could wake up Shane, but he was nowhere to be found. When I rolled over, Mary was staring me in the face and, quick as lightning, her tongue shot out, scoring a direct hit on my lips. I blew out several breaths, spitting out anything Mary may have left behind, and went into the bathroom. I showered and got dressed even though I wasn't normally up for another thirty minutes. I decided to use the extra time to walk the dog with the fastest tongue in the East.

When I left my room, I ran into the duty agent instead of Shane. "Good morning, Mr. President," he stated.

"Good morning. I'm going to walk Mary."

"Yes, sir. I'll have two agents meet you at the bottom."

True to his word, when the elevator door opened, two agents greeted me and out the side door we went. It was a beautiful morning that promised a great day to follow. The sky was bright blue and a gentle, warm breeze blew across the lawn. I let Mary off the leash and she ran and jumped after a butterfly. I could hear the faint noise of cars traveling the streets and knew that official Washington was beginning to arrive at their offices. After a few more minutes, I returned to the residence with Mary and had breakfast. Shane was waiting for me, knowing my whereabouts from listening to the radio.

“Good morning, Shane; it’s gorgeous outside. Makes me wish we were back in the Maryland mountains.”

“Well, we can go back anytime you like,” he said with a smile that meant that he wanted to go as badly as I did.

“It would be nice to breathe that fresh air up at Camp David. Maybe once we get a handle on the Saudi situation, we can do that. Right now, some things are coming to a head. The oil reduction takes place today and once the Saudis become aware, they’ll be screaming to anyone who will listen.”

Alex entered the dining room, and I invited him to sit with us.

“Thank you, sir. I just wanted to let you know before your busy day starts that I’ve heard from Alcatraz. They’re moving right along and tell me that we could start housing prisoners there in six weeks. That would be a full two months ahead of schedule.”

“Are we sure that they’re building this prison correctly? Are we going to have fifteen escapes in the first month?”

“Sir, we have inspectors monitoring the work very closely and, according to reports, they’re doing everything right. Alcatraz will be even harder to get out of than it was before.”

“How are they doing it? Every other government contract is usually late and over budget. What’s their secret, Alex?”

“They’re working around the clock with night-shift employees earning the same wages as the men on the day shift. Somehow, they got the men working nights to agree to do it for regular pay, rather than time and a half. That’s how they’re doing it. The company wants the bonus provided for in the contract.”

“What are the terms of the bonus?” I asked.

“If they finish at least two weeks earlier than the completion date and stay under budget, they get an additional two million dollars. They’re required to maintain strict quality control or the bonus

provision is voided. So far, they're doing exactly as required. I think they'll finish four to five weeks early, if they can maintain the current schedule."

"Well, this has to be a first in government contracting, I should think. If they do all that and maintain quality construction, they'll have *earned* the bonus. I bet the company will use a good chunk of that money to pay bonuses to the men working the dark hours on this job. Pretty damned smart. We should make sure they get to bid on all future construction contracts in that area of the country. Rewarding them by giving them more work would be a good move on our part."

"Yes sir, I'll have the Contracts Office put them on a bid list so that they get a chance for more work."

"I don't want any prisoners transferred there until the military personnel have a safe work environment. Let's not take any shortcuts with the type of prisoner destined for The Rock. Any estimate on when the housing for the Marines will be ready?"

"Well, sir, they've been working on that along with the prison construction. There are fewer men on that section of the job, so they're not as far along as the prison itself. It will take another two months after the prison is finished to be able to house the military personnel on The Rock."

"Okay. Keep me apprised of the progress. We have about a dozen men awaiting transfer to that facility as soon as it's certified for use."

Alex left the table after smiling pointedly at Shane. Shane shot me a look that said *What was that about?*

"Oh, Shane, you just make men smile, that's all," I said with a grin. Shane hated when I referred to him as a pretty boy, or anything close to it, so I insinuated it every chance I got. It drove him a little crazy.

I greeted Mary at her desk and she smiled broadly. "You're in a good mood again this morning; something must be agreeing with you during the night," she said with a look at Shane.

"Yes, you're quite correct. They have wonderful mattresses here in the White House."

"I wouldn't know, I assure you," she replied.

Before I could sit at my desk, Mary had followed little Mary and me into the office.

"Don't forget you have a short trip this afternoon that'll keep you out until late."

"I do? What's on the schedule for today?" I asked with a puzzled look.

"You are scheduled to give a short speech at a fund-raiser in Richmond, Virginia, this evening at six o'clock. You're raising money for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, so that you can have all sorts of allies in the next Congress."

"Damn, I'd forgotten all about that. Find out from Shane if we're going by Air Force One or Marine One. And would you please see if the political office has prepared remarks for me?"

"Of course, David. I'll be back shortly."

I went over to the small table that held fresh coffee all morning. Mary eyed me lazily from her doggie presidential bed and went promptly back to sleep when she saw that I wasn't leaving the office anytime soon. I went to the sofa to read a briefing book on piracy off the Somali coast and what the United States wanted to do about it. Before I could get too far into the material, Mary came back into the office with the prepared remarks I was to give later in the day.

"Shane says it's too far to go to Richmond by Marine One, so you fly to Andrews and get on Air Force One. You should be back here no later than nine o'clock or so."

“Thanks, Mary. Other than this fund-raiser, do I have anything on the schedule today that I need to prepare for?”

“An hour from now, you have an update report from the FBI on the investigation into Andy’s murder and the kidnapping of Darren Wilson. They’ve requested an hour’s time for the meeting. Other than that, you have a ton of policy memos to read and approve. You’ll need to leave the office by four o’clock so you can freshen up and dress for Richmond.”

“Okay. Thank you.”

Some presidents hated policy memos and briefing books, preferring instead to rely on their staff to tell them what they should have read. I got along very well with written material and found that I had a better grasp of my subject if I read the information for myself.

The rest of the day was spent doing exactly that. Energy policy took up most of the reading pile as it related to the Middle East and the budget. The coal industry had answered our questions, indicating coal production could be increased without substantial danger to the miners. An increase in oil imports from South America would begin in the next day or so and I felt we were very secure in cutting back on Middle Eastern oil.

Instead of going to the residence for lunch, I ate a sandwich at my desk and worked straight through. Just before three o’clock, the phone buzzed and Mary informed me that Victoria Wilson was on the line.

“Hi, Victoria. What can I do for you?”

“Hello, David. I wanted to tell you that I’ve spoken with Brandon, and he has agreed wholeheartedly to become my foster son and part of the Wilson family. The Secret Service wasn’t pleased at first, but they’re adjusting. They’re doing another, very meticulous, background check on Brandon to make sure nothing was missed the first time since he’ll be living with Darren and me. As soon as

Brandon's cleared, he'll leave the temporary home and come to live with us. I'm so excited by this I've even surprised myself. Darren is looking forward very much to having a little brother, even if Brandon isn't so little, or even that much younger."

"That's wonderful news, Victoria. It really is. I'm happy for you and Darren, as well as Brandon. This boy really has a remarkable second chance in life, and I hope he uses it to the best advantage to succeed in life."

"We're talking further today. He'll be dropped off at the residence within the hour, and then the three of us are going to a quiet restaurant in Virginia for dinner. They have private rooms where the three of us can all talk comfortably."

"I'll be in Richmond tonight on the rubber-chicken circuit raising money for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. I hope you have a great dinner and when the three of you get settled into your new life together, I'll have you all over for dinner at the White House."

"Thank you for your support in this. Say hi to Shane for me." The phone went dead in my hand as I thought about her parting comment. "Say hi to Shane for me" was the kind of thing one said relating to another's spouse.

I began to wonder just how many people had caught on that Shane was more to me than a bodyguard. I would have to pay more attention to people's reactions.

I buzzed Mary and asked her to come into the office.

"Would you find out where the executive order is that grants same-sex benefits to partners of federal employees? I want to sign it within thirty days."

"I don't have to check, sir; it's sitting on my desk as of five minutes ago. The order has been prepared and the attorney general and director of the Office of Personnel Management have opinion

statements in the file for you to read before you decide whether or not to sign.”

“Bring it in, please. I’ll read it on the way to Richmond. I want to implement that order soon. It’s time to give the gay community a signal that I haven’t forgotten about them.”

“Yes, sir. Anything else?”

“No. In fact, Mary, why don’t you take the rest of the day off once you give me the file? You work tons of overtime and with very little extra compensation. I don’t like that. You really do work too hard.”

“I’m glad you finally realize that without me you would not be able to function!” She smiled, turned, and left to get the file folder.

At four p.m., I left the office and went to the residence to take a quick shower and dress for the evening speech. It wasn’t formal, so all I needed was a fresh suit. Shane didn’t bother to change, and we were walking to the helicopter at exactly 4:21 p.m. Three choppers had landed on the White House grounds, and we entered the one that had Marines at the bottom of the steps. Little Mary could sense that I was going on a trip and she bugged me to come, but to no avail. Once she realized that her big brown eyes and cute little smile weren’t going to get her what she wanted, she jumped up on my pillow and pretended to be asleep.

After the short flight, we landed at Andrews Air Force Base and took off for the short flight to Richmond. I pulled out the executive order and opinions and began to read. The attorney general was of the opinion that the order was legally enforceable and did not need the consent of Congress to institute the benefits. This issue fell entirely into the hands of the executive branch of the government. The director of the OPM also saw no reason not to implement the order. I didn’t like the estimates of increased costs for the benefits, but I knew

that if the affected employees were straight and married, we would have the expenses regardless. It was the right thing to do.

After about twenty minutes, Air Force One began her descent into the Richmond area with all other flights barred from entering the airspace while we were in the air. After we landed, I entered the motorcade and traveled to the hotel. I was slightly late, but we would make up the time as long as we didn't hit any snags with the traffic.

A large crowd had gathered outside the beautiful Jefferson Hotel in Richmond and I waved as the motorcade entered the underground garage. Once the area was secured, Shane opened the door and I emerged from the dark depths of the limousine. We didn't have to worry about the press because the news about my presence at the fund-raiser was not released until about five minutes before I arrived at the Jefferson.

We entered the elevator and went directly to the banquet hall on the third floor. As I stepped out, local and state dignitaries were waiting to officially welcome me to Richmond and to the Jefferson. I shook hands with the governor, mayor, and several other Democratic politicians who were important in a state that had recently moved back into the Democrat column.

As I entered into the banquet hall, the band struck up "Hail to the Chief" and the crowd roared its approval. I waded through a sea of hands, doing my best to shake them all as I took my seat at the head table. My speech wasn't required until after we all ate, so I could relax and enjoy my meal.

I was happily dining on prime rib and chatting with Governor Maxwell when the hairs on the back of my neck stood up. I swallowed and looked to my right. Shane, another agent, and Alex were moving quickly toward me. Alex bent down to whisper in my ear.

“Mr. President, we’ve been alerted that chemical agents have been detected in the air in DC and that the air currents are carrying it toward the White House.”

It took me a moment to process what Alex had told me. I stood and turned to him, putting my arm around his shoulder and walking him away from the governor. “Are you telling me that a chemical weapon has been used in Washington?”

“Yes, sir. As best we can tell, Sarin gas has been released by hostiles. Sensors deployed throughout Washington are picking up the gas and alerting security forces.”

“Mr. President, we have to move you to a safe location without delay,” said Shane.

“Shane, radio the White House command post and get Mary to the situation room underground with as many other employees as possible. Do it now!” I ordered.

I quickly informed Governor Maxwell of the situation and left the dais surrounded by agents. Swiftly, we moved down to the basement and into the motorcade. As we accelerated out of the garage, I picked up the phone and told Communications to get me the vice president. I hoped that she was in Virginia with Darren and Brandon. A few moments later, I had her on the line.

“Victoria, we’re under chemical attack in Washington.”

“Yes, I know; my detail has me in the motorcade trying to figure out where to take us.”

“Tell them to get a chopper in there and get you and your kids down to the Greenbrier. That’s where I’m going now. We should be there in a half-hour or so.”

“I’ll tell them. Stay safe!”

“Let me know when you’re airborne!”

I hung up the phone and buzzed the agent in charge of my detail. I told him I wanted to go to the Greenbrier and to alert the facility to expect incoming personnel. I then called the White House switchboard, but got no answer. I hoped that meant everyone was underground by now. I couldn't help but think of my little canine companion and hope that she was safe as well.

The phone rang and I found my deputy chief of staff on the other end. "I have an update for you if this is a good time!"

"I have about another four minutes, and then we'll be airborne."

"As nearly as we can determine, four weapons were set off in Washington, all except one containing Sarin gas. The fourth contained a biological weapon consisting of bacillus anthracis, or anthrax. This means that we're under attack with both chemical and biological weapons. A car bomb went off near the Naval Observatory releasing Sarin, another near the Capitol, and a third near the White House. The fourth, with the anthrax, was also set off near the White House. It appears that you and the vice president were the primary targets."

"Casualties so far?" I asked.

"As of this time, we have a confirmed death toll of one hundred sixty-nine people. This figure will undoubtedly increase."

"What about White House staff?" I asked with some trepidation.

"We lost two uniformed Secret Service personnel at the gates, but everyone else is in the underground situation room. This of course means that no one is guarding the White House at the moment."

"Was Mary taken underground too?"

"Yes, sir. I went and got her when the first alarm came in. She's safe with almost all of the personnel on duty when the attack began. We're very thankful for the early-warning detection system."

"Okay. I'm at the plane and will call you back shortly."

I jumped out of the limousine and ran up the stairs into Air Force One with everyone behind me. As soon as my feet hit the steps, the captain began engine turnover and we were airborne in less than two minutes. The order was given to fly us to the Greenbrier Valley Airport. The runway was large enough to handle Air Force One, since the Greenbrier had been the designated facility for government operations during a nuclear war before its location was exposed by the media. From there, it was only a matter of minutes until we arrived at the property and went underground.

Greenbrier's one hundred twelve thousand square-foot bunker was constructed on orders of Eisenhower during the late 1950s and was designed so that the American government could continue to function even if Washington, DC, was leveled. The facility could hold up to 2,500 personnel, so it would have no trouble meeting our immediate needs.

As we flew toward the bunker, I reconnected with the White House situation room for updates. Since it was the end of the workday and I was not present, there were almost no senior officials at the White House when the attack began. This meant that the level of personnel now in the situation room was lower than normal. They were unable to locate the director of the FBI and a couple of other senior officials needed to deal with this crisis.

The phone buzzed and I was told the vice president was standing by.

"Victoria, where are you?"

"We're airborne in one of the Marine choppers with secure communications en route to your location. Any change in orders?"

"No. Just get here safely. What's your ETA?"

"They tell me about an hour, but that we can land directly at the facility so that will save a few minutes on the ground."

"Okay. How are the boys?"

“They’re fine. *They* think it’s neat!”

“Yes, well let them enjoy their innocence while they can; it won’t last. I’ll see you after you land.”

I turned on CNN and watched in horror as cameras relayed the scene from Washington. Some shots included bodies lying in the streets and on sidewalks. The gas had blown clear of the area already and the main concern was now the biological agent. Speculation about who had attacked America once again ruled the airwaves. It was a question that I very desperately wanted an answer to. It was time to use military force to answer this attack. Whoever our enemies might be, they would not survive.

Shane came into the cabin and sat down. “I can’t believe this is happening. Is it all worth it? Why don’t we just say to hell with it, and retire to the mountains out west someplace? Why live like this? You don’t need the money, or the power, so why continue?”

“I understand what you mean and why, but I was elected to do this job, a job I ran for and asked the American public to give to me. I can’t just walk out and leave the country with this shit going on! Who would take over? Victoria Wilson? She’s capable or she wouldn’t have gotten the nod for the VP slot, but no one should have this mess dumped on him or her. No, I’ll stay and handle this. To do otherwise is to let the attackers decide who will run America. Well, the American people have already decided that question and they chose me. I’ll be damned if I betray their faith.”

“I’d have been shocked if you had given me any other answer. I guess we’ll find out what it’s like to live in a bunker.”

“I’m concerned that the FBI director can’t be found. He needs to be on top of this situation immediately. Can your people find out where he is, if he’s even alive?”

“I’ll check. When we land, SUVs will be waiting for us. Get down the stairs quickly and get into the SUV without wasting time. They want you underground within six minutes of landing.”

“Yeah, okay; in the meantime, talk to your boys about finding the director.”

The crew prepared a hamburger for me. I was grateful as I hadn’t eaten much at the dinner and didn’t know what to expect in the way of food once we went underground. As I finished eating, I got the five-minute alert that we were about to land. I threw on my jacket, and buckled in.

As soon as the plane came to a stop, the door was flung open and we went down the staircase. We entered the waiting cars and left for Greenbrier. Within the allotted time, we arrived at the bunker’s massive blast doors and continued on foot. I was amazed at the size of the bunker until I remembered that it had been built to house all three branches of the government in case of war. Fresh air flowed through filters and sensors, bringing freshness to the stale atmosphere. I was escorted to the command room and my seat. Air Force personnel were setting up open circuits and securing lines of communication with the Pentagon and NORAD. Within moments, I was able to talk to any military command office anywhere in the world. The president was in control of the Armed Forces of the United States.

The vice president arrived with Darren and Brandon. After they entered the facility, the doors were closed. The population of the bunker now consisted of the president, the vice president, two minor boys, twenty-two Secret Service agents, fourteen military personnel, one chief of staff, and a doctor. Additionally, per prior arrangements, a chef was quartered with us to prepare the stores of food kept stocked for emergencies.

CHAPTER 15



After a little over an hour, the Air Force had arranged the communication systems to match the ones in the White House situation room. I could therefore look at the same maps and same information that I would have had access to in the White House.

An incoming communications video link was brought to my attention. I nodded and it went up on the central screen. It was from Langley, Virginia, home of the CIA.

“Mr. President, Director Englemann here. We’ve conducted an initial screen on persons of interest in the Washington, DC, area over the last two weeks and we’ve located seven men who might be the perpetrators of today’s attack. Since the CIA is restricted from acting within the borders of the United States, we relayed the information to the FBI, and they did.”

“Who are the seven suspects?” I asked, rather annoyed.

“Five Saudis and two Libyans that came into the United States through four different ports of entry. They all ended up in Washington, where they’ve been for over a week now. We have them on tape eating together at a Middle Eastern restaurant in downtown DC. Four of them were spotted entering foreign embassies during the

last week. Both the Libyan and Saudi embassies were honored with their visits.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes, sir. Let us just say we plugged into the Metro Police security cameras for today and reviewed key area tapes. Six of the seven suspects were spotted in the following areas: The Naval Observatory, Capitol Hill, the Mall, and a restaurant near the White House, across from the Treasury Building. They spent about fifteen minutes inside each location and left just after one o’clock this afternoon. We’ve pulled their immigration forms and found that they entered on tourist visas that are good for another two weeks.”

“So, to sum it all up: These men are Middle Eastern, entered this country a couple of weeks ago on tourist visas gathered in Washington where they were seen entering the Saudi and Libyan Embassies, and were recorded at the attack sites. Your conclusion, Director?”

“My conclusion, Mr. President, would be that these seven men carried out the attack today. I further suspect that you, the vice president, and all other senior government officials were the targets. I believe they hoped to catch you at your residences having dinner. Instead, you were out of the District. That news has already been on the airwaves, so they know they missed you both.”

“Do you know where these men are now?”

“We’re tracking five of them. We suspect they’ll end up meeting the other two tonight.”

“Coordinate with the FBI and take these men into custody. If they resist, kill them. Once you know where they’ve been staying, have the federal hazmat teams search the location. Under limited National Security authority, I am empowering the CIA to operate anywhere it deems fit. This means you are free to put your personnel

on the streets in cooperation with any other law enforcement agency. Get these enemies of America off our streets, Mr. Director.”

“Yes, sir. I’ll keep you up to date.”

“By the way, do you know where the hell Director Mendelssohn of the FBI is? No one can seem to locate him.”

“I spoke with him a few minutes ago. He’s in the air on the way back to DC from a meeting in Ohio. However, he was diverted to New York City. Once he gets to the FBI field headquarters, I expect that he’ll be in immediate contact with you.”

I ended that call and contacted my situation room once more. The question I wanted answered was how much of a remaining threat the released anthrax was.

“Mr. President, we can’t tell much of anything until the spores are examined under an electron microscope. We don’t even know if this is weapons-grade anthrax, only that the security devices that monitor the air around Washington detected and confirmed that anthrax was present.”

“How soon will we have that answer? I can’t hide in a bunker for the rest of my presidency!”

“Air samples have been collected from confirmed sites and are in the labs now. We hope to have an answer for you in the next couple of hours.”

“Put the duty CIA on,” I requested.

A camera switched and I was now looking at the CIA duty man, who turned out to be a duty woman. “Get me the status of the Saudi royal family as of most recent intelligence. I want to know if any of them are in this country.”

“Yes, Mr. President.”

I disconnected the link and sat back in my chair. *What a freaking mess!*

Alex asked the next important question. “Mr. President, what are you going to do if we confirm it was the Saudis? We have about half of our personnel out of their country and all but a handful of planes. The combat troops you ordered into place on our bases have been transferred and they are now heavily guarded.”

“What would you suggest?” I asked.

“Any attack on Saudi oil reserves will affect the entire world. If you take out the family, they will likely be replaced by Muslim fundamentalists, which wouldn’t be good for anyone. The only safe place to hit them is in their bank accounts. I’d determine how much money they have in U.S.-controlled banks, and then I’d freeze those monies.”

“That would be one good response. We can also cut off all future arms sales for at least ten years. Their U.S. equipment would soon be worthless without spare parts, unless they can find a second source. Contact Treasury and find out about Saudi assets in this country and tell them to prepare an order freezing all of them.”

“I’ll get right back to you on that.”

After Alex left the room, I was alone until Shane entered. “How you holding up, David?” he asked.

“Not bad considering the bullshit we have to put up with from the Middle East. Why has so much of our misery come from that area of the world lately? Why can’t nations act in concert with each other for the betterment of men and women everywhere, instead of in rabid self-interest?”

“I don’t know. Maybe we would all do better if we minded our own businesses for a while, let things cool down, and then take a fresh look at the problems of the world.”

“What? You’re saying that the U.S. should become semi-isolationist in order not to aggravate the bad guys? When has that ever worked? Did it work with Hitler? The U.S. stayed out of it for a while

trying not to make a bad situation worse, and all we really accomplished was to make Hitler bolder. We could have insulated ourselves right into oblivion if Hitler had developed the atomic bomb before us. He would have dropped that thing right in the middle of our European Army; then what?"

Shane frowned and looked away. "I'm not saying that; I just meant that sometimes we and our allies get a little too nosy or involved in situations that maybe would be better left alone. But, I'm not the president: you are. America trusted you when they put you into this position and now they look to you for leadership and safety. Will they get it?"

"That's a pointed question. Sounds almost like you've been listening to some pill-popping, cigar-chomping windbag on the radio. Well, this isn't the time for philosophy, but for action and reaction. We've just been attacked by someone and, shortly, we'll know by whom."

The door opened and Alex walked in as Shane took up his post outside the door once again. "Mr. President, the Treasury says the Saudi royal family has about two billion in cash in U.S. banks and owns another ten billion in property. The orders to freeze and seize are being prepared and they say they'll be ready by tomorrow morning."

"Well, that's a start... if we have to use them. I'm not deciding anything until we get some reports in from the labs. What's the latest on deaths in DC?"

"As of about ten minutes ago, we confirmed the deaths of five hundred and sixty-four men, women, and children due to either Sarin gas or inhaled anthrax. Death figures are expected to climb even higher."

"I guess there isn't much else to do until we have lab results. I'm going to bed. Wake me if something happens."

I found the president's bedroom in another area of the bunker, but before I could actually get into bed, the phone rang. Alex told me that the Saudi/Libyan team had reassembled in a garage in DC and that federal law enforcement was about to take them down.

I left the bedroom with the on-duty agents and went to the situation room. After looking at the main screen, I saw that they had put a live feed on the garage. As I took my seat, the assault began. Half a dozen flash-bang grenades went off; there was a lot of shouting and some automatic-weapons fire before all went silent again. As the haze of smoke from weapons and grenades lifted, the scene cleared and I saw about forty armed law enforcement personnel.

Ambulances arrived for the injured and dead as the survivors were brought out in handcuffs. I counted five prisoners with dazed looks pinned to their faces, which meant that two of the seven had been killed or wounded. The prisoners were shoved into vans, which departed the scene immediately with lights and sirens blaring. The other two were brought out on stretchers, their faces covered with sheets.

The camera went dead as the phone rang. I answered it and spoke with the FBI commander from the attack on the garage. "Special Agent Turner here, sir. If you were watching the camera feed, you saw that we took seven men out of that garage, five of them alive. Our side sustained no casualties in the raid. The prisoners are en route to FBI headquarters, where they will be interrogated."

"Did you find anything in the garage linked to the attacks earlier today?"

"No, Mr. President. Only weapons and cell phones, which are being examined now. As soon as we find out something, we'll notify you at once."

“Thank you and good work.” I hung up the phone and sat back, reflecting on what the arrests would mean. Would they talk or remain silent? What clues could they give as to who sent them?

“Mr. President, Doctor Langston from the FBI lab at Quantico on line one,” announced an aide.

“President Windsor.”

“Sir, this is Doctor Langston at Quantico. We’ve examined the initial sample of anthrax that was released in Washington and determined that the spores are coated with silica nano-particles, which makes them easier to inhale. That’s the answer we’ve been looking for.”

“Fine. Now what does that mean in plain English?”

“Sorry, sir. It means that we’re dealing with weapons-grade anthrax, which was processed by a foreign power and is definitely not of the domestic terrorist variety. Washington was attacked with the aid of another government.”

“Can we tell where that aid came from?”

“No, sir. There’s no way of telling who processed the spores into a weapon. For that answer we must rely on interrogation.”

“Thank you. Keep me up on any new developments.”

“Well, Alex, it’s official. Another government has attacked us. Put me in touch with the FBI team interrogating the prisoners,” I ordered somberly.

A moment later, I was handed the phone. “Sir, this is Special Agent Remoras. What can we do for you?”

“You’re interrogating the prisoners taken in the garage raid in DC?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, hear this. The anthrax used today was weapons grade. That means your prisoners are agents of a foreign government. Get them to name which one as quickly as you can without torture of any kind; this isn’t George Bush’s government.”

“Yes, Mr. President. We’ll do our best.” The line went dead.

I pressed a button on my phone and got Alex. “Get everyone in here now, please.”

“Yes, Mr. President.”

I got up, poured some coffee, and processed the knowledge that we had been attacked by a foreign government in a way far more dangerous than flying planes into buildings. This was a vicious, insidious attempt to kill innocent people. They had released weapons of mass destruction in the capital of the United States.

The door to the center opened and the crises team filed in. When everyone was seated, I contacted the White House situation room and left it on speaker.

“Yes, Mr. President?” responded the duty officer.

“Put the Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs on the line.”

Moments later, “Yes, Mr. President?” the Chairman asked.

“We’ve just been notified that the anthrax is weapons grade. Have you been told the same thing?”

“Yes, sir. We got the word a few moments ago,” replied the chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

“General, has any information come in on the location of members of the Saudi royal family, either in or out of this country?” I asked.

“We have preliminary information that there are nine second-tier family members in Los Angeles at this time. The son of the Saudi

defense minister is in Cedars-Sinai hospital. They've taken over an entire floor of the hospital," answered the general.

"What's he in for; do we know?"

"Yes, Mr. President. He's having surgery to remove a hemorrhoid."

"A hemorrhoid?" I responded and then laughed aloud.

"Yes, sir. He's due to have the surgery tomorrow afternoon. They're under guard by private security retained in this country."

"Round them up and put them in holding at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement center in Los Angeles. I don't care if they have diplomatic immunity or not; take 'em in and hold them until I say otherwise. I'm sure they'll have their lawyers in court tomorrow, but we'll deal with that then."

"Yes, sir. Do you want that done now?" the general asked eagerly.

"Yes. ICE centers are not known for their gourmet food or soft sheets. It'll do them good to see how the other ninety-nine percent of the world lives. Let me know when they are in custody."

"Yes, sir."

"Do we have a location on the secretary of state?" I asked.

"The secretary was transported to Maine when the attacks occurred," the deputy director of the situation room responded.

"Patch me through to him, please," I requested.

As the secretary was being located, I looked around the room and said, "Well, we've confirmed that a foreign government supplied the weapons used today. All indications are that it's the Saudis. It's time to let them know that we know and that there are consequences."

“Mr. President, the secretary will be patched through to you in about five minutes. They’re getting him to a secure line as we speak,” the deputy director informed me.

“Okay; put the general back on.”

When he came on the phone, I gave another order. “Get the rest of our planes out of Saudi now, tonight, and get our people out as soon as possible. Blow up anything of value that we can’t take with us. But, under the circumstances, I want us out now.”

“We’ll do our best, sir.”

I disconnected the line and waited for the secretary of state to connect. “Alex, I’m going to order the secretary to break diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia and Libya. We may not be able to blow them off the map, but we can make it damned uncomfortable for them. It’s hard to hit them where it hurts without hurting ourselves and the rest of the world. I’m sure that figured into their plans.”

“Are you contemplating any other actions, Mr. President?” Alex asked.

“I’m open to suggestions. As of tonight, we will be cutting relations, abandoning our bases in their country, freezing and seizing any Saudi assets under our control, and making it plain by rounding up the LA group that they are no longer welcome in this country. There aren’t any further military actions that we can take against them. If we remove the House of Saud from power, the fundies will move right into the vacuum and we’ll have another Iran on our hands. We’re also cutting our oil purchases from the Middle East and, beyond that, I can think of nothing else we can do to hurt them without wounding ourselves.”

“Have you considered the possibility that OPEC will cease to sell us any oil whatsoever?” a presidential assistant asked.

“I think that’s a two-edged sword for them. Yeah, that would hurt us badly, but it would hurt them equally. They’ve just killed six

hundred people in Washington because we're cutting back on imports and they're afraid we'll find our way to energy independence."

The phone buzzed and I was notified that the secretary was on the phone.

"Secretary Gutierrez, please notify the governments of Saudi Arabia and Libya that they have engaged in an act of war against the United States and we are severing all diplomatic relations with them. Recall our ambassadors, and close down Saudi and Libyan embassies and consulates in this country."

"Yes, Mr. President. Do we have proof that they're behind the attack today?"

"Enough proof to take this step, but not enough to drop a nuke on them. Their agents are being questioned now and who knows what we'll find out."

"All right, sir. I'll make the notifications," Gutierrez said and hung up.

"Gentlemen, I'm beat and I'm going to bed or at least I'm going to try to once again go to bed and get a few hours' sleep. Make sure I'm notified as soon as any new information comes in."

I left the command center and smiled at my ever-present guardian. "Time to hit the sack for both of us," I said as we walked to my temporary bedroom.

"I wish I could join you, but that's impossible in here," Shane said with a frown.

"I hope we'll be free of this bunker by this time tomorrow. Good night." I nodded to the duty agents that took up a post outside my door as I closed it behind me. Shane headed off to get some rest and it only took me a few minutes to fall asleep.

CHAPTER 16



A knock on my door woke me at 0700 hours. I showered and dressed in a running suit that had “U.S. Army” printed down the side. Shane was not on duty when I left the bedroom and one of the other agents accompanied me to the chow hall for breakfast.

As I arrived at the command center after eating, Shane joined me. Inside, the room was buzzing with activity. All of the morning news shows were reporting nothing but the attack on Washington. One of the questions constantly being asked was “Where are the president and vice president?” Frankly, I was surprised that our location had not been leaked by some news hound.

At my place at the conference table, I found a written report on the breaking of diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia and Libya. Both nations vigorously denied any involvement in the events of the past twenty-four hours.

“Would someone get me the senior agent in charge of the bombing suspect interrogations, please?” I requested. A few moments later, I was on the phone with the agent. “Give me a briefing on what you have so far.”

“One is talking, but the other four are sticking to the story that they were not involved in the attack. The one that’s talking has agreed

to cooperate, if we promise not to execute him for his part in the attacks,” the agent said.

“Well, who’s behind it?” I asked with noticeable impatience.

“According to the Libyan suspect, he was loaned to the Saudis by order of Kaddafi, but supposedly, Kaddafi didn’t know what the agents would be doing for the Saudis. Kaddafi is trying to mend his relationship with the Saudi royals who he’s been insulting for the last four months. Apparently, they made him feel very uncomfortable in return, and thus his newfound cooperation with the desert kingdom.”

“So, the Saudis are behind the attacks?”

“Sir, he says that he has no direct knowledge of who ordered him here, but he had specialized training in the handling of anthrax in Saudi Arabia. He also said that he saw boxes during training that had Chinese writing on the sides. He also tells us that there were at least two Chinese military officers present. We’re not sure what to make of this new connection and we need CIA to provide assistance.”

“Chinese? That makes no damn sense at all! Libyans, Saudis, and Chinese? What the hell is going on?”

“As I said, sir, we need to do a lot more checking. We’re still hoping we can get the others to talk,” the agent finished.

“Okay. Keep at it and keep me advised.”

I hung up the phone and put my face in my hands. Just when I thought I had it all figured out, the Chinese popped up out of nowhere and added a new element to the chaos. *What the hell was going on?* I needed answers, and fast.

As I was considering these new implications, a phone call came in from the Centers for Disease Control advising me that both the Sarin gas and the anthrax had ceased to be a threat in Washington. The total number killed to date was nine hundred and forty-six, with just under three hundred hospitalized in various states of health. It

was the opinion of the CDC and security agencies that it was safe for me to return to the White House. It was their belief that the winds had carried the remaining gas and anthrax spores out of Washington. The gas was expected to cause no further harm but the same could not be said for the spores.

“Well, ladies and gentlemen, shall we return to Washington?” I asked.

There were no objections and I told Shane to get us moving. Within forty minutes, the SUVs returned to pick us up and take us to a refueled Air Force One. Once we were airborne, I made several phone calls advising key officials of our return to Washington. I was told there would be an update from the interrogation of the foreign agents that had been arrested earlier. I would wait to find out if there was anything new before contacting the Chinese.

Upon landing at Andrews Air Force Base, we entered Marine One and took off with one other Marine chopper and headed to the White House. While we were en route, it was confirmed that there were no new detections of any harmful airborne hazards and that it was safe for us to land.

Within a short period, I was back in the Oval Office with a full staff waiting for my orders. The director of the FBI had returned from New York and was in the Oval Office.

“Begin the briefing. Anything new, Mr. Director?”

“Yes, sir. A Saudi agent was promised asylum in exchange for full cooperation and he stated the following: The Chinese sold the anthrax weapons to Saudi Arabia. The Saudis trained the Libyans as well as their own agents in the use of the anthrax along with the Sarin gas. The plan was set in motion about two and a half weeks ago, and they received the final green light yesterday. It was anticipated that you would be in the White House and killed because of the attack. If you escaped harm, it was the hope of the Saudis that you would be frightened enough to halt any further threats to their financial security

and that you would reverse the present course that the United States is on,” replied the FBI director.

“Were the Chinese aware that the Saudis were going to use the weapons in the United States?” I asked.

“They say they weren’t, but we can’t be sure. Our informant says he overheard one of the Saudi princes tell a security official that the Chinese were stupid for selling the bio-weapons to the Saudis. He said his impression was that the Chinese were duped.”

“So the FBI believes that the Libyans were used without Kaddafi’s direct knowledge and that the Chinese sold the weapons to the Saudis but didn’t know their intended use?”

“Yes, Mr. President, that is our belief based on the available information.”

“What about the royals that were seized in LA? Are they putting up much of a fuss?”

“Yes, sir, the Saudi king has placed all kinds of calls to the State Department demanding the immediate release of his relatives. It was hinted that our personnel overseas would not be safe if Saudi family members were not released quickly,” the FBI director continued.

“Well, I don’t want them released just yet. I want everyone to think about any other actions we can take against the government of Saudi Arabia for this insanity. As you must realize by now, they have been our enemies since I took the oath of office. The fact that their ambassador was present at my swearing-in makes me believe they wanted to be present for the first attempt on my life. Well, they have failed and they have to understand that if they ever take hostile action against the people of the United States again, we will be forced to take military action.”

Mary walked into the office in a hurry. “Mr. President, the FBI agent in charge of the interrogations is on the phone and demands to speak to you immediately. He used the code word ‘Blackjack’.”

I ran to the phone. “Blackjack” was intended for use only when a severe national security threat was imminent. It existed to cut through layers of gatekeepers to get to the person who needed the information. Those in the room who knew what the code word meant were on their feet as I picked up the phone.

“Windsor.”

“Mr. President, we have new information. There’s another Saudi-backed team in Washington with the sole mission of eliminating you. The plan was to follow the bio-weapon attacks with an assault on a White House with weakened defenses. Our reports indicate that the uniform division of the Secret Service is down by sixty percent due to casualties in the earlier attacks. It’s my belief you are in immediate danger at the White House.”

“Copy.” I hung up the phone and swung into action. I punched the button that connected me to Mary.

“Mary, tell Shane ‘Switchblade’.” I hung up and a moment later Shane and two other agents burst into the office with guns drawn.

“Agent Thompson, we have a ‘Blackjack’ from the FBI. They believe we are under threat of imminent attack here at the White House.” As Shane gave the code word into his hand mic to alert the rest of the Security detail, shots rang out on the lawn, some of them hitting the glass doors of the Oval Office. Men had apparently come over the fence at a hidden location and before the alarm could be spread, they were in full attack mode. I bent down and grabbed little Mary to protect her.

Shane and the other agents literally lifted me off my feet as we exited the Oval Office and trotted down the hallway with another six agents with automatic weapons at the ready. Before we could reach the elevators, two hostiles appeared from a side room and opened fire. All agents returned a withering blast of automatic fire, cutting the assailants down where they stood.

We reversed course in case there were others waiting to come at us. The only way out of the immediate area was through the Oval Office doors that led to the walkway around the residence. We were back where we started; only now the office was empty.

Under the circumstances, the directive of the Secret Service was to get me into a secure location as quickly as possible. Outside, a fierce firefight was under way between the attacking group and the Secret Service. Calls had been placed to Metro Police, who were now responding to our location.

I heard Shane yell into his mic, “Get the beast to the side door, NOW!” Two more assailants were cut down as they tried to enter the Oval Office. I was moved into the chief of staff’s office just off the Oval while the “beast” was brought up. I was surrounded by agents so that it was impossible for a bullet to hit me unless it went through one of the men. I looked at Shane and saw an expression on his face that I had never seen before.

Shane, the beautiful man I loved, had become a fierce, dispassionate warrior before my eyes with a face as hardened as marble. His eyes were fixed on the only point of entry as he stood his ground with a Heckler & Koch MP5 in his hand. Time was briefly suspended as the sound of gunfire continued outside the White House.

Shane and the other agents jerked into action when they received a message over their earpieces. I was moved swiftly to a little-used side door, through which we exited. I found the presidential limousine waiting; it had suddenly become the safest place to store a president. As we ran to the limo, more shots rang out, and all the members of my detail opened fire in the direction of the muzzle flashes. The sound of multiple automatic weapons being discharged was deafening even though I was lying on the ground covered by Shane. Mary had panicked at the gunfire and taken off back into the White House.

When a lull came, I was picked up off the ground by three agents and flung into the back of the limo. Shane and the other agents entered right behind me. There was one battlewagon with the limo and we tore out of the White House driveway at full speed with the heavily armored limo raking the street concrete as we cleared the White House driveway. Four bullets managed to hit the limo with no penetration whatsoever.

“Shane, where the hell are we going?” I shouted, though you could hear a pin drop inside the security cocoon that was the limo.

“We’re heading to Eighth and I Streets, to the Marine barracks, which has been alerted to turn out the guard to defend you and their post.”

As I sat back, I noticed a severe pain in my left shoulder. I put my right hand on my shoulder to rub it and drew it back covered in blood. “Shit. I’ve been hit,” was all I said.

Shane helped me out of my jacket to see how bad the wound was before deciding if we needed to divert to Georgetown Hospital. He took out a stiletto that I never knew he carried and cut away my shirt. The injury was just a flesh wound, but it was bleeding a lot.

“David, do you want to go to the hospital as regulations would normally insist?” In his concern for me, Shane used my first name in front of the other men.

“Are there any medics at the Marine barracks?”

“Yes, sir, and we’ll be there in under two minutes. We don’t have our usual escort, of course, just one battlewagon and this limo. If we go to the hospital, we’ll be exposing you to the public. I recommend we continue to the barracks, and if we have to import medical personnel from Georgetown, we will.”

“Agreed. Let’s get behind a few dozen well-armed Marines,” I replied.

Shane spoke once again into his hand mic, advising the security network that the president had been hit, but not seriously, and that we were proceeding to a secure location. He did not release the location over the network again.

The lead vehicle clipped a civilian car as we swept through an intersection, but continued moving. A few moments later, we arrived at the entrance to the Marine barracks, which had two guards on duty at the main gate and a half-dozen more running toward us with M16's at the ready. We didn't stop to identify the passengers in the presidential limousine, but continued into the post. Once inside, agents sprang out of the two vehicles as Marines came running up to our mini motorcade. They were told that the president was inside the limo and that I was injured and that we required medics immediately.

Shane asked that I stay in the limo until I was seen by a medic and the guard was fully turned out. A few moments later, a Marine colonel and two medics ran toward the limo and entered into the back. The colonel introduced himself to me as the duty commander.

"Colonel, prepare to defend the post against possible hostile action by foreign enemy combatants that have attacked the White House and damn near killed me," I ordered.

"Yes, sir!" he said and began hurling orders at junior officers and NCOs.

"Mr. President, the wound is not serious, but it needs antibiotics and bandaging. Do you want us to do that here, or do you want to come into the medical ward, which is sterile, since this vehicle isn't?" asked the medic who had sergeant's stripes on his uniform.

"Let's go inside." We got out with Shane practically on top of me and with all of the agents following. We entered the barracks while the cars were moved and placed under guard by a Marine detail.

My wound was cleaned and bandaged and the medics administered the proper medications. As I was being treated, Shane received an updated report on the battle at the White House.

“Mr. President, the White House is secure. We’ve lost thirteen agents and uniformed personnel, with a total of twenty-two hostiles killed. No one on the attacking force survived, so there are no prisoners,” Shane reported.

“What do you recommend? Do we return to the White House?”

“No, sir. We have to make a complete search of the property before we can declare it secure and safe for you. An investigation has already been launched to determine how security was breached. This will take a few hours so I suggest we remain here until it’s done.”

“Well, find out what happened to both Marys and make sure they’re okay,” I said with great fear in my voice. I was hoping that I wouldn’t be told that one or both had lost their lives to the criminals who had attacked the people’s house.

“Mr. President, would you care to lie down in one of the guest rooms?” the post commander asked. “The last president to do so was Thomas Jefferson.”

“Yes, I think I would like that. My shoulder hurts and maybe lying down will help it,” I replied.

“Sir, do you want a shot to ease the pain?” the medic asked.

“No, Sergeant. I think I need to keep a totally clear head at the moment.”

As the commander led the way, Shane and five agents followed us to an upstairs room that by Marine standards was the Ritz-Carlton. Shane gave his approval and everyone but him left the room.

“David, I want to talk to you privately when this Saudi bullshit is settled once and for all,” Shane said without any hint of a smile.

I nodded and he left the room to do whatever he thought was best. Two fully armed agents were outside my door. I was able to fall asleep for a few minutes until a knock on the door brought me back.

“Come in,” I said.

Shane entered. “Good news. Both your Marys are just fine. Shaken up, but fine. In fact, Mary ran back to her bed in the Oval Office and shit on the presidential rug on the way.”

“Well, after today, I may just go back to the Oval Office and shit on the rug myself!” We both broke out laughing. It was the first time in two days that I’d felt like doing so. I laughed until my shoulder began to hurt again. “So how long are we going to be the guests of the Marines?”

“A grid search for any leftover terrorists is currently under way in Washington. The FBI advises that their prisoner claims there are no more attacks lined up against you. All hostiles have either been killed or caught. We just want to make sure before we move you again... under full security this time,” Shane answered.

“And what of the vice president? Has she resigned yet?” I joked.

“No, sir. In fact, she was demanding to be brought here to see you to make sure you were all right. We forcefully, but politely, denied her request. Her residence is currently an armed camp.”

“Are you confident in the security of the Naval Observatory?” I asked.

“Completely. I assure you that she is safe.”

“Good. Get a proper motorcade together, and let’s head to her house for the night. That way, you can take your time searching the White House and I can be within reach of communications with anywhere in the world. Also, have little Mary transported over there.”

“If you’re sure, it’s fine with me. I can have us on the road in thirty minutes.”

“Do you think sending over some Marines is necessary?” I asked.

“Might be a good idea until we’re sure that everything is secure.”

“Colonel!” I shouted as he passed by the doorway to my room.

He came in and stood at attention. “Yes, sir?”

“I’m transferring my flag to the Naval Observatory on Mass Avenue. Can you place some of your Marines on duty there until things are fully secured?”

“Of course, sir. I can send over two platoons or sixty men, sir. Will that do?” he asked.

Shane answered. “That would be great. But how do we tell that they’re the good guys?”

“I will personally review the Marines when we arrive and sign off on them. Is that good enough?”

Shane looked at me.

“Yes, Colonel, that would be more than fine. We leave in thirty minutes,” I replied.

A LITTLE more than thirty minutes later, a full presidential motorcade was formed, including two trucks carrying two platoons of marines, and we were ready to leave. As I exited the building, the grounds were called to attention by the sergeant of the guard and I entered the limousine feeling a lot calmer than I had a couple of hours ago. My shoulder ached, but considering everything, I was in good shape. As we left the post in a hurry, my phone rang and when I answered it, I was told that the lady of my life was safe and happy at

the home of the vice president. With Shane sitting in front of me and Mary at our destination, I was happy for a few moments at least.

The motorcade traveled at approximately sixty miles per hour through the streets of Washington, which was faster than normal. I was worried that we would have another incident of a vehicle being T-boned in an intersection with loss of life. All of the vehicles that made up a presidential motorcade had some level of armor.

Before I knew it, we made the difficult turn into the vice president's residence, which had been designed to make it difficult for a car to ram its way in. This time the vice president was not waiting for me on the porch as I pulled up to the front door. The Secret Service remained concerned that the second-floor windows of the Vatican Embassy looked over the grounds of the observatory. It was within the realm of possibility that snipers could be placed in the embassy to take out any targets of opportunity.

As I got out of the limo, I saw the Marines jumping down from their trucks and reporting to the agent in charge of ground security. Shane and four other agents walked with me up to the house and the door opened before I could put a hand on it. As I entered, I saw the very happy face of a little Scottish terrier named Mary as she ran toward me and jumped up into my arms. After much fuss, a quick tongue ran itself over my lips followed by Mary's very special smile. I hugged her and put her down on the floor as I greeted Victoria.

"David, I'm so glad you weren't hurt worse in the attack. When is all this going to end? It's like being at war, for God's sake," Victoria said.

"I believe it's over for good now. We need to get some intelligence in on the Saudis and take final action against them, and then maybe things can get back to normal," I said as we walked into her living room. "I'm putting you in charge of energy independence. You'll work with the secretary of energy in accomplishing this goal. I want this country to be able to provide for itself within twenty-five

years. No foreign dependence for energy of any kind. Make it your number-one priority.”

“Yes, Mr. President. I’d be happy to carry out that directive,” she replied.

“Do you mind if I have a private talk with my bodyguard?”

“No, of course not. Use my office,” she said with a smile. She gestured toward her office, and I motioned for Shane to follow me.

When we were alone, I said, “Okay, what is it that you wanted to talk to me about? I don’t want to wait to hear it, so please tell me now.”

“After the last two days and especially after your injury, I want to resign from the Secret Service and take a job as a special assistant to the president. That way we can more fully share our lives as a committed couple. No matter what job I have, I will always be there to give my life for you if necessary.”

“Are you sure you want to do this? You just received the Medal of Valor for the Capitol Hill incident and now you want to give up your career?”

“David, I love you; do you understand that? Do you really understand? I’m tired of being one thing at night and another thing in the day. It’s time the world knew that you’re not alone in your private life. I don’t care one damn bit what they all say once the truth comes out. If anyone says anything derogatory around you or me, I’ll deck ’em. This is important to me.”

I was taken aback by the suddenness of his decision. It had been a rough two days; was Shane making this decision rationally or with his emotions?

“If you’re absolutely sure you want to do this and just as sure that you love me, then I will support you and we can live our lives as normally as possible in this fishbowl.”

“I’m sure, David. I’ve been thinking hard on this and the last forty-eight hours only brought it to the forefront. When you were wounded today, it hit home just how easily I could lose you. Will you have me fully in your life now?”

“I *want* you fully involved in my life. When do you propose to resign?”

“As soon as possible, but I want to wait until the Saudi situation is settled. Can I have a staff position with you? I really don’t think I would like the role of househusband,” he said with a smile.

“Of course you have a position in my office. You have valuable insight into many things, and I respect your intelligence. You’ll be a key advisor on any matter involving law enforcement issues, as well as others. In fact, the first thing you can take on is the completion of Alcatraz. I want that facility opened as quickly as possible, as there are prisoners waiting to take up residence.”

Shane came over to me and looked down into my eyes. I saw tears spring up in his eyes as he knelt and put his arms around me, holding me tight. “David, I love you so much. I never want to be away from you.”

I kissed him on top of the head and held him even tighter. “I know you do, Shane, and I feel the same way about you. We can make it and be even happier than we have been. All we need is for the damn Saudis to stop trying to kill me!”

CHAPTER 17



The next day, my return to the White House was a press event. It was meant to show me reclaiming the people's house and I was depicted inspecting damage inflicted during the firefight with the Secret Service. I gave a short press conference in the rose garden where I placed the blame squarely where it belonged: on the government of Saudi Arabia.

I also announced cutbacks on oil imports from the Middle East and outlined the aggressive program I'd launched to promote alternative energy under the direction of the Energy Department, personally supervised by the vice president. I also announced the breaking of diplomatic relations with the government of Saudi Arabia and told the full story about the conspiracy to keep us dependent on Middle Eastern oil.

When the news conference was over, I reentered the Oval Office and found no sign that anything had ever been out of place by one inch. Before I could sit down, Mary entered the office and put her hands on her hips.

"Well, do I need to wear a flak vest to work or are you done pissing off the Arab world?"

"Mary, you're perfectly safe and I wouldn't want a dirty old flak vest to ruin that spectacular figure of yours. As for the Middle East,

time will tell, but I have a feeling that they'll be playing nice from now on. So, try and get us back into normal operations mode, okay?"

"You're the boss! Well, you and Shane, that is," Mary said with a smile as she left the office. She stopped before shutting the door, and turned to look directly at me. "I want a damn raise!"

I never could keep anything from that woman!

Shane came in and sat down. I noticed he didn't have the Secret Service pin on his jacket anymore. I was used to seeing that pin change color, hourly some days, for increased security, but seeing him without one could only mean one thing.

"Have you resigned?"

"An hour ago. That's why I wasn't on duty when you came into the office. I decided not to put it off and phoned the director. He was surprised, but he understood. He said he didn't know that the Service had any gay agents," he said with a laugh.

I buzzed Mary to come back into the office. "I see you two are up to something," she noted.

"Nothing much. Would you please get White House credentials issued to Mr. Shane Thompson, my newest special assistant in charge of law enforcement matters for the White House?"

"You mean credentials for your spouse, right?" Mary asked with a smile.

"Oh, Mary, you've always been trouble, but trouble I couldn't live without. Yes, Shane and I are now officially a couple, and he'll be taking up space in the presidential bedroom," I replied.

"You mean he doesn't have to sneak through the Truman bookcase anymore? Thank God for that. I felt so sorry for him!"

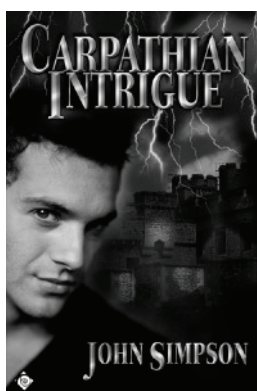
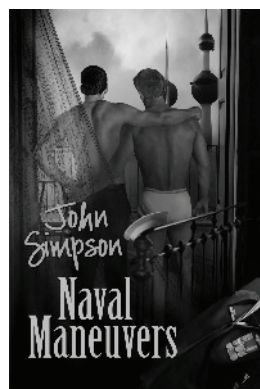
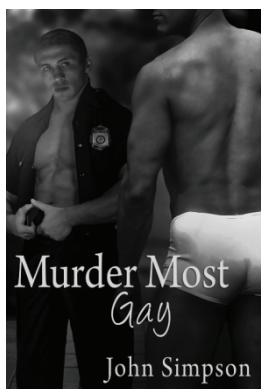
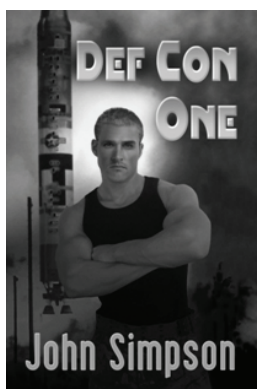
I shot up from my chair. “How in the hell did you know that the bookcase passage even existed, let alone that Shane might have used it? I demand to know!”

“Well, I signed off on a maintenance request for repairs. Seems that passage between the presidential bedroom and the room that Shane was in was seeing a lot of action that it wasn’t used to. The hinges snapped and had to be replaced. With me, two plus two equals a happy president and friend. You were smiling on way too many mornings not be getting a little *somethin’ somethin’* the night before! Now, is there anything else I can do for either of you?”

The Oval Office was full of laughter as Mary walked out. I went around my desk and hugged my new assistant.

“Well, Shane, welcome to a different side of the nuthouse!” A bark from Mary put the seal of approval on Shane’s new job as well as his official position as the president’s First Man.

Don't miss these other titles from John Simpson...



Available from Dreamspinner Press

www.dreamspinnerpress.com

JOHN SIMPSON, a Vietnam-era Veteran, has been a uniformed Police Officer of the Year, a federal agent, a federal magistrate, and an armed bodyguard to royalty and a senior government executive. He earned awards from the Vice President of the United States and the Secretary of the Treasury. John has written articles for various gay and straight magazines. John lives with his partner of 35 years and three wonderful Scott Terriers, all spoiled and a breed of canine family member that is unique in dogdom. John is also involved with the Old Catholic Church and its liberal pastoral positions on the gay community.

Visit his Web site at <http://www.johnsimpsonbooks.com/>.



For more of the
best M/M romance,
visit

Dreamspinner Press

www.dreamspinnerpress.com

