

Chapter 9

What a day, and oh boy, what a night! Cindy couldn't wait to tell Mercy all the juicy details of her date in the morning.

She closed the door to her studio apartment and dead-bolted it, listening to Jesse's sure-footed swagger as he walked back to his truck. Even with the window unit AC set to an icy sixty-five degrees she felt hot. And bothered. That was a goodnight kiss like none she'd ever felt. Almost good enough to invite him in to share her bed, but that was the old Cindy (or rather, the younger and stupider Cindy).

She put her back against the cool paint of the door and hugged herself with crossed arms, savoring the pressure on her breasts, closing her eyes as she slid down into

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a deep squat, remembering how damn good his pecs had felt when he'd lifted her right off her feet instead of leaning down to align their lips.

She had to get out of these clothes. She walked to the foot of her bed, a futon she rarely bothered to fold up, and turned to face the full-length mirror overlooking it. Maybe a first-night shag was out of the question, but where was the harm in a little private fantasy? She smiled coyly at her reflection, pretending it was Jesse smiling expectantly back at her.

She masturbated, taking her time to climax, hovering right at the brink two or three times before finally deciding to jump.

“Oh yes,” she whispered to herself right before she was about to cum.

But she didn't cum. Might never again.

“Hello Sinnn-deee.”

She spun around to face the two men who must've been hiding in her bathroom all along, the only other room in her apartment. She started to scream, but the transition from near sexual release to the panicked fear of imminent capture took too long for her brain to navigate. They were on her fast, one trapping her arms in a bear hug while the other suffocated her with a chemical-soaked rag, stifling the pleas for help she finally mustered.

She convulsed in their grip like she'd been hit with a tazer, propelled by a certain fear of death. But her struggle only made consciousness more brief. The sweet, burning, eye-watering scent of the ether quickly exterminated her will to fight. The last thing she saw before blacking out was the strange clothing of her assailants: white robes, heads covered in white silken hoods.

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Chapter 10

“Tell me again why we’re relyin’ on the expertise of a certifiable crazy?” Not even Yale was able to remove the Texan drawl from his speech.

The Senator from Boston turned away from the one-way glass. “He’s perfect precisely *because* he’s ‘crazy,’ as you put it, though it would be more accurate to say he’s lacking in credibility. He has no refereed venue to publish what he translates, and if he wants to use what he learns from us in a few of his sermons...well, who cares? It’s not like he’ll be naming names.” He kept his voice low—not because anyone would be able to hear their conversation inside a moving limo—but because he’d found people listened better when he talked softly.

“And he’s good?”

“He’s proven that, hasn’t he, with what we’ve already given him? He’s beyond good.”

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“And the girl...our butt is covered there, right?”

The Senator nodded repeatedly to the affirmative. As the President knew, it wasn't their ass on the line anyway. Conspiracy theorists liked to think some secret organization pulled the strings: the Trilateral Commission, the Bilderbergs, the Illuminati—that the dominant world governments were just a façade—that these cabals of wealthy elites were really in control. Maybe in the old days. Maybe in some other country. But not the U-S-of-fucking-A. Not now. We make the rules. Sometimes, interests just happen to coincide. The SOJ would take the hit if anything broke.

Or so went the Senator's pitch.

“No ties?”

“None.”

“Good.”

Surely the President realized that they'd needed leverage with this Henry Whitmore character, but the Senator understood he didn't have to be happy about kidnapping someone to get it. Morally, the senator knew, it didn't sit right with him.

“She won't be harmed,” he added, though they both knew her safety wasn't something which could be absolutely guaranteed; only Henry's continued cooperation could ensure that. If he were to become obstinate in any way—if his obsessive curiosity were to become quenched before the translation was complete...well, perhaps her screams would keep him motivated. That was up to the discretion of her captors, whom the Senator knew from personal observation of their expertise, were well trained in such matters.

They rode in silence a couple of blocks. When the Washington Monument came into view, the Senator returned his thoughts once more to the President. Tomorrow, he would sign his name to his very first veto of legislation since holding office. A bill promoting stem-cell research.

“Big day, tomorrow. You excited?”

The president flashed him his trademark shit-eating grin. “As Castro on Viagra.”

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