



Chapter 1

Schaffer O'Grady left his house to complete research for his latest column for the paper.

A reporter for the *Washington Post* since leaving the Secret Service three years earlier, everyone from his hometown of Kenbridge, Virginia expected him to go to law school, since that was the only thing he ever talked about growing up. He wanted to save the world by affecting the laws that governed the land. Journalism had never entered his mind.

Darkness began to overtake what was left of a busy day. The cooling air chilled him. Spring fever was returning to peoples' faces day by day, as the sun managed to extend its stay in the western sky. March ides began to roll in, bringing with them warmer temperatures, gradually longer days, and the promise of new life.

This evening, however, the winds were restless. They danced across the Potomac River, moaning in a low tone when they whipped into the center of the city. The ides' prophecy of change proved true, especially at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, where conversation always stirred, just like the winds outside tonight.

Schaffer took an unusual route to Fourteenth Street tonight. He left Georgetown on M Street, jumped on G.W. Circle and ended up on Constitution Avenue. He often enjoyed taking different routes to his assignments, but he couldn't explain what made him want to circle the White House tonight. Through the trees, Schaffer noticed the lights on in the Oval Office. Even though the day was winding down for most people, President Nicholas was still hard at work.

An untrained eye would never have noticed the eight Secret Servicemen discreetly perched on top of the White House, watching the grounds, the streets, watching the sun duck beneath the horizon. Schaffer knew persistent terrorists' threats made their presence necessary, and watched as they slipped on jackets and ski masks to shield them from the cool night air.



During his mandatory four year military career, to earn his free college education, Schaffer had served with pleasure under General Alexander Nicholas. The Three Star General once paid an unannounced visit to Korea's demilitarized zone, where Schaffer served as a Recon officer. General Nicholas had barely stepped from his jeep when Schaffer saw a flash from the scope of a sniper's rifle. Seconds before the trigger collapsed to its firing position, Schaffer had tackled him.

After his initial shock, having watched the windshield of his jeep disintegrate, General Nicholas awarded Schaffer a battlefield promotion and a place by his side for the duration of his service. Alex, the only thing the general allowed Schaffer to call him, became the driving force behind Schaffer's decision to join the Secret Service. Ten years later, when Alex became Presidential Candidate Nicholas, Schaffer was not surprised that the general requested to have Schaffer as one of the Secret Service agents guarding him. The two men had remained fast friends over the years. Schaffer supported Alex, and felt proud to serve him once again.

With only one month to go before the election, Schaffer once again found himself tackling Alex to save him from an oncoming bullet, a bullet that this time struck not its intended victim, but Schaffer. The bullet lodged against his spine, and doctors concluded he would never walk again.

Schaffer's spirit sank lower than he could ever remember until befriended by a nurse who encouraged him to pray and to journal his thoughts about the event. Nina DeApuzzo, named for jazz singer Nina Simone, seemed to be an outwardly battle hardened nurse, but who possessed a soul of a saint. She bought him his first journal and submitted his writings for publication to her husband Joe, an editor at the *Washington Post*.

Schaffer smiled, thinking how hard Joe had worked to convince him to join the *Post*. Schaffer allowed his writing to be published, and was rewarded with tons of encouraging fan mail. After taking those first steps, Schaffer never looked back on his former life as a Secret Service agent. Joe's words rang true. *It's not as dangerous as stepping in front of bullets and the pay is better.* Receiving a Pulitzer for his first story about the ordeal sealed his decision.

A cool breeze shook Schaffer from his reverie. He took one last look at the men pacing the top of the White House, and eased the car forward towards his assignment.

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Just below the Secret Servicemen, in the Oval Office, President Alexander Nicholas held a private meeting with Secretary of State Ian Mackenzie and Chief of Staff Harold Cosby. Thirty minutes earlier, a liaison to Cuba's President Castro had called and informed the White House that they were holding four men suspected of being spies for the United States. Harold had taken the call and had confirmed the identities of the men. They were indeed members of the CIA posing as businessmen on a fact-finding mission for the president.

The message Cosby reread from Castro was short and to the point. "We have your spies. They will be tried and executed for the entire world to see. Cuba will not stand by and let the United States try to destroy our government."

President Nicholas nodded. "And what do you perceive the mood in Cuba to be?"

"Well, sir," Cosby explained, "they desperately need our help, but are unable to sidestep pride to ask for it. Taking our men was their way of crying out for aid."

Secretary Mackenzie waited impatiently for the Chief of Staff to finish speaking. At his first opportunity, he jumped in, blocking immediate discourse from Harold. "It's clear what we must do. Mr. President, we have got to hit these bastards with all our force and get our men out!"

"No." Cosby snapped to his feet. "We must attempt to negotiate with Castro first. Only if negotiations fail can we consider going in. Remember, those men weren't even supposed to be there in the first place, at least not in a secret capacity."

Mackenzie returned fire: "There is no need for negotiations. We simply can't do business with dictators, especially Castro!"

Cosby turned away from him, and looked at the president. "What about China, Mr. President? We've had great success there. Their record on human rights surely isn't any better." Cosby folded his arms in defiance and waited for Mackenzie's response.

Mackenzie jammed his finger in Cosby's direction. "You don't know what you're talking about, Harold. These are two completely different situations. China has things to offer in return for our support."

"Then why don't you call China and ask them to have Castro send our men home?"

President Nicholas listened to both sides as best he could, but soon lost patience. "Gentlemen," he said, "that's enough! I asked you both here



because you are my trusted friends and I deeply value your opinions and insights. My greatest concern is to free our boys, not debate Cuba's credibility. I can see right now we're not going to make any progress."

Cosby and Mackenzie gave the president's statement little attention and returned to their argument.

The president watched the veins rise on their foreheads, their necks swell. He puffed his Opus X and threw up his hands in frustration. He'd always welcomed strenuous debate among his cabinet members, but this one was going nowhere fast.

Cosby pounded both fists in the air. "You can't just invade a country without giving the American people a good reason. We haven't even tried talks yet! Not to mention, how are you going to explain why our men were in Cuba in the first place?"

"They are soldiers, Harold, and just like all the other men I send out, death is part of their jobs."

"That's your problem, Ian. You place no value on human life. We have to start with talks!"

Mackenzie sat near the president's desk. "We don't have to ask permission from anyone to go in, surely not the fucking Communists. We can't alert the Commies that we're coming to get our men by telling the people of the U.S. that they're there. If we do that, then we'll really have a mess on our hands. We have to keep this mission quiet." He came to his feet, poking his finger again. "While we're in Cuba we should kill two birds with one stone, and get rid of Castro. It's past time for that bastard to go!"

"Forget it, Ian! I'm not going to stay here and listen to your McCarthyism!" Cosby turned and started to leave.

President Nicholas slammed his hands on his desk. "Alright, that's it!" He puffed on the cigar, hoping it would help him calm down. "Why don't we adjourn for the evening and continue this discussion in the morning, when cooler heads can prevail?"

Cosby strode towards the door, waving the president's memo. "Whatever you wish, sir."

"Sir?" Mackenzie said.

"Enough, Ian," Nicholas said, "Tomorrow."

"Mr. President ..."

"Tomorrow." He pointed to the door.

Mackenzie hung his head, said, "Yes, sir," and left.



The president rose, puffed his cigar, and walked to the door to be sure he was alone. “Dee,” he called.

General Deidre Roseboro, chairwoman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, entered from her private room adjacent to the Oval Office.

“Did the headphones pick up all that yelling?” he asked.

“Yes, sir. You really jammed your stick in the hive this time. I don’t think I’ve ever heard Harold that upset. He’s usually a poster boy for the ‘in control’ society.”

“Yeah, Dee. I didn’t expect such a fight.” The president sat down and picked up the memo. “I knew their approach would be in opposite directions, but Harold’s reaction took me a little by surprise. I would like to have heard both sides present a logical approach, and then come down somewhere near the middle.”

Dee stood in front of the president’s desk. “Would you like me to have him watched for awhile, Mr. President?”

“No. Harold’s just upset. He would never do anything to harm this office. By morning, it’ll all blow over. I think I’ll have you here in plain sight tomorrow. I may need your help keeping Ian corralled.” He sat back in his chair, closed his eyes for a second, and exhaled.

“Just let me know what time, sir.” Dee paused. “Sir, do you think we should tell them what our agents were doing in Cuba?”

Alex never opened his eyes. “No, not yet. They’ll find out in time. Have we received any info about what they found?”

“Not yet, sir. There was one transmission. I’ll have the transcripts later.”

“God, I hate having to compromise those men like that. I hope letting Castro take them won’t come back to bite me in the ass.”

“They’ll be fine. Castro won’t blow it. He has too much to loose. I’ll be in my office waiting to hear from you.” Dee turned to leave.

“Thanks,” Alex said. “And Dee?”

“Yes, sir?”

“Thanks for the advice. I’m glad I can depend on you.”

“Yes, sir,” she replied, and left the Oval Office.

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Secretary of State Mackenzie darted into his office and slammed the door. He reached for the cell phone on his desk and punched seven numbers.

“Cordell! Get your ass over here right now! Harold Cosby is about to leave the grounds. Follow him and report in with all information about his whereabouts. Be ready in case we have to take action.” Mackenzie sat back smiled and thought *Cuba is just the opportunity I’ve been waiting for.*

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Harold wanted to build support for his position before morning. He decided to visit a long-time ally of President Nicholas, Florida Senator Hector Hernandez. Hernandez delivered the Hispanic vote to the president in the last election. In Florida, the Hispanic population was comprised of several Spanish-speaking communities including Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Honduran. But the Cuban exiles embodied the largest segment, concentrated especially in Miami.

Hernandez asserted that the Cuban exiles didn’t want the United States to reenter Cuba by force. Internal unrest leading to civil war was the best scenario. Negotiations were fine, as long as the exiles were included in them, and resulted in Castro’s removal from power. The exiles’ vote was the key to any candidate winning Florida. Hernandez knew this, as did the president.

Harold walked into the senator’s office and was immediately shown in. Hernandez ended a call after finalizing plans for lunch tomorrow. Harold strained to catch the name Hernandez spoke, but his attempt proved unsuccessful. He couldn’t help but wonder if Ian had beaten him to the punch.

Hector cradled the phone and stood, taking Cosby’s hand. “Harold, good to see you. How can I help you this evening?”

Harold was well aware of Hernandez’s sympathetic position towards Brothers for Freedom, the group of Cuban exiles dedicated to returning to Cuba and repossessing property seized when Castro took power. Fulfillment of that pledge required Castro’s overthrow by anyone other than the United States, even by means of civil war, allowing Brothers to reenter Cuba undetected. Harold knew all this. Once there, they would wield power in the form of more money than most of the mainland Cubans had seen in a lifetime. They felt the economic starvation suffered by the Cubans for so long would allow their dollars to buy all the power they desired.

Hernandez was up for re-election next year and for the first time



facing stiff competition. His opposition, a Cuban-American businessman whose platform consisted of lifting the embargo against Cuba could be a threat. Harold counted on Ian's position infuriating Senator Hernandez. If successful, Hernandez would contact the president, buying Harold the needed time to implement a peaceful return of the agents.

Harold discussed the meeting he'd just left, concentrating on Secretary Mackenzie's approach to freeing the four CIA agents being held in Cuba.

"I can see we really have a problem here. Let me give it some thought and I'll call you in the morning, Harold." The senator stood and walked Harold to the door.

Less than fifteen minutes after entering the senator's office, Harold was on his way back to the White House. Another idea hit him and he signaled to his driver to pull over. "I need a little fresh air. I'll walk from here."

"Sir, I wouldn't recommend it."

"I will walk from here, driver," Cosby said again.

"Sir, this area of town can be a bit dangerous especially during this time of the evening."

"I've walked here a thousand times at night without incident. I'll be fine. See you tomorrow." Harold patted his driver on the shoulder and exited the car.