

Dominion

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Dedication

To Dreamers everywhere who never give up their dreams.

Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth.

Genesis 1:26

Chapter One

“Have you seen this article?” the President demanded of his Secretary of Homeland Defense. He threw the paper down on the table where it nearly knocked over the china cup of Blue Jamaican coffee. Oliver Sustain looked up in surprise, the President was normally an unflappable sort, not one to give in to his emotions but he was clearly in a rage.

Sustain picked up the Washington Post and read the screaming headlines about an offhand derogatory remark the President had made to an aide over an international figure. “How did anyone hear me?” He demanded.

Sustain said mildly, “maybe your aide sold you out.”

“No way in hell,” President Rickover returned. “He knows he’d be canned. And besides, I checked. He’s been incommunicado with my wife at Camp David.”

“Cell phones and text,” Sustain shrugged.

“No phone calls or texts went out. I checked. And this isn’t the first time, Oliver. I’ve called several other people who’ve had the same type of scenarios. Some were the only ones there, and yet someone overheard them. And don’t say they were bugged, one of them was a CIA Director, for God’s sake.”

“Are you saying we have a spy in the White House and Langley?”

“I don’t know what I’m saying, Oliver,” the President sighed. “I just know my supposedly private conversations or sometimes not so private.”

“Are there any common factors, Jason?” Sustain asked. “A common place, same room, same person?”

“No. Some occurred at home, some here in the White House, the National Museum office, the Park. One even inside the New York Stock Exchange. That one instance netted someone an advance tip on a five hundred thousand dollars stock transaction made with a thousand dollar purchase. The SEC is looking into that one.”

Sustain looked at the paper. “Well, you didn’t have to call the Secretary of the United Nations a fat dyke bitch, Jason,” he said mildly. “Are you going to deny it?”

“Well, there’s no proof.”

“Unless they track down the aide and subpoena him.”

President Rickover sighed and sat in the spindle backed chair, petting the smooth head of the golden retriever named Dusty. Almost every White House administration had an official White House dog and Dusty was Rickover’s pride and joy. A female apricot Golden retriever four years old rescued from the pound, she accompanied Rickover everywhere from jogging to trips on Air Force One. Her coat was burnished gold with feathers that Rickover kept groomed and neat by himself and he always made time for her care. She was a sweet tempered dog, well trained in obedience; fiercely protective of her master, his wife and Rickover’s two daughters.

“What do you want me to do?” Sustain asked, reaching for his coffee. He drank, staring over the rim at the president.

“Find out how the shit is getting out there. Morton himself is the one came to me with all these instances. He has over a hundred of them.”

“What are you going to do about this?” He pointed to the paper.

“Lie, lie, deny,” Rickover grinned as he reached for a cup and a bran muffin. “Besides, it’s true. She is a fat dyke bitch.”

Sustain sighed, and finished his morning coffee before the rest of the Presidents staff entered the room to discuss the day’s events. Dusty snored, turned around twice and laid down under her master’s feet, resting her nose on her paws.

Chapter 2

Dad yelled up the stairs for me to get up and I rolled out of bed to struggle and wake up. Even nine hours of uninterrupted sleep hadn't been enough, I was still logy, confused and grumpy. Padding into the bathroom, I turned on the lights and winced as it speared my eyes to the back of my brain. Squinting in the glare, I stared into the mirror seeing myself in disgust. My hair stuck up in blonde and brown spikes like the cat had clawed through it. Lines pebbled my skin where the sheets had wrinkled the flesh, one brown eye drooped and the blue one was bloodshot, full of crusted gunk. My mouth tasted like I'd died after a raw fish eating contest and my dark brown eyebrows were scrunched close to my eyes. I looked like I'd been dragged behind a street sweeper and smelled worse than my gym bag after a week of being forgotten in my locker.

Twenty minutes later, I could claim to look like a new man outside, even if the inside was still half asleep. At least my hair was combed, gelled down and tamed, my teeth brushed and my contacts in. It was a brown day, both blurry brown eyes looked back at me from my mirror.

I decided on black jeans, long sleeved tee and a Big Dog navy blue zip up hoodie, socks and soft leather laced up climbing boots. I was fanatical about my shoes, I never wore sneakers or hiking boots, steel toed or Kmart brand. My shoes were all custom-made, top-of-the-line and mail-order. It drove my Dad crazy, but I paid for them out of my earnings and he never questioned where the money came from. Of course, he never saw the bills, either. So he didn't know to ask about the thousand dollar price tag or the designer names. Besides, they were my feet, I liked to be comfortable and there was nothing worse than sore feet.

"Danny, are you up?" Dad yelled up the stairs and I could see him standing at the bottom shading his eyes as the sun blasted through the skylight from the second story Cathedral ceiling.

"Coming, Dad," I called back and slowly stamped down the steps as he retreated to the breakfast nook. On weekends, my Dad cooked for me, eschewing the services of the live-in housekeeper to preserve, he said, both independence and a semblance of family normalcy.

I slipped into the nook, hoisted myself onto the kitchen stool, sliding under the counter table to poke at the plate covered with pancakes and bacon. Blueberry pancakes, maple bacon and real Vermont Maple syrup. "Wow," I murmured. "What are we celebrating?" More calories here than he'd eaten all week.

"Your last stock tip netted me a forty K profit," he grinned.

I took a big bite, and swallowed in surprise. These were good. "Dad, Yum." I looked at him. 6'6", 240 pounds and all in the right places. My Dad needed a diet like I needed a pierced eyebrow. Hey, that sounded cool. I stroked my right eyebrow, the one above my blue-eye.

"No," he waved the spatula at me. "No eyebrow piercings."

Disgruntled, I stared. "No, I'm not reading your mind. You just do that whenever you think about piercings or look at piercings."

Good. For a minute there, I thought he *was* reading my mind.

“Finish your breakfast, and we’ll get going,” he ordered and I inhaled my food in minutes, while he watched in amazement. “You eat like a Marine on a three-day bender at a hot dog eating contest,” he sighed. “All right, let me do the dishes and we’ll leave.”

It was the first three-day weekend we’d had together since my Mom died and he’d promised me a trip to the National Space Museum before its grand opening. Being Senator Michael Patrick De Rosier and a former astronaut space hero, he got to be the one doing the ribbon-cutting and getting the pre-opening tour. With me.

His car was waiting out front. His car, not the official black SUV the size of a house or chauffeur driven limousine. No sign of any bodyguards either, just the gray four-door Kia SUV with extra headroom for Dad’s height. He might be a rich guy, but he didn’t flaunt it. Our house was a 3000 square ft. two-story in Chevy Chase, I went to public school and rode the bus. Dad drove a Kia to work, and most days, he was in his Senate office or on the floor. Not hiding in some fancy restaurant or hobnobbing with Washington lobbyists and millionaires.

I got in and buckled up. “How did you get away from Eastwood and Damon?” I was referring to his Secret Service guys.

“They’re meeting us on the highway. I tried to get them to meet us at the museum, but no go. What with the Olympics and all, security is extra tight.” He checked to make sure his belt was tightened before he drove off.

At the bottom of the small hill and past four other houses, he turned left, his eyes never still watching everything. We both did. Both of us were paranoid, some idiot drunk driver in a minivan had T-boned my Mom and killed her. I was still dealing with it even after nearly a year.

“You invite Felice to the opening?” He asked casually, as we meandered through the neighborhood for fifteen minutes before we hit the highway and I spent the next forty-five trying to spot the Secret Service dudes. Dad asked me again sometime later about Felice.

“Uh, yeah,” I answered, searching the parking lot for her escort. She came in a limo with her agents’ right on her heels. Looked really nice in a skintight pair of cream-colored jeans, shocking lime green blouse and a hand knit Aran sweater. Kick ass boots with heels that made her almost tall enough to reach my chin. She bounced over to the car and pulled the door opened before I could get my seat-belt unhooked.

Felice Rickover leaned in and her long, dark hair tickled my face as she smiled at me with those big, incredibly green eyes. “Hey, Downtown. Miss me?” She kissed me on the lips and Dad made hooting sounds from the front seat.

“That’s one way to get my vote, Lisi,” Dad grinned.

“Hah,” she retorted, pulling me out. “As if I’d vote for a Democrat.”

Dad slithered out, “you’re not old enough to vote. Besides, I plan on bribing you away from your Dad.”

The two agents met up with Dad and escorted us into the brand-new state-of-the-art National Space and Air Museum. Built of concrete and glass, it was designed by I. M. Pei and as cool outside, as in. Had everything from the Wright Brothers original plane to the last shuttle that retired. There weren't any reporters around waiting for the grand opening, which was tomorrow and with the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Today, the Director named Mark Hansen was going to give me, Dad and Felice a guided tour. He greeted Dad with a handshake and Felice and I with a smile and nod.

"Mister De Rosier, Ms. Rickover, shall we enter?"

Oh yeah. Did I forget to mention my girlfriend was the President's daughter?

Chapter 3

"Well, Downtown," she mumbled over cheeseburger and fries. We were sitting in a booth at Denny's surrounded by the four agents and Dad. I'd wanted to sit by ourselves, but knew that wouldn't happen. I had learned to deal with the realities of being a Senator's son and boyfriend of the President's daughter.

Had I been to the White House? A few times. There was enough for me. Plus, after watching White House Down, I was glad to stay away.

We babbled about the planes, the Saturn rocket, and the actual console of the Enterprise where we were able to go inside and work the toggle switches and buttons. Sit in the pilot seat and pretend to know what it was like to fly one.

Felice ate like I did, not an ounce of extra fat on her body. She ran track at school. And yes, she did go to a private learning institution, even though that was a constant argument with her Dad and the Secret Service. She said it could be worse, she could have been home schooled. I rolled my eyes at that, home schooled in the White House didn't really count.

I stole her French fries and dipped one in ketchup. I'd already polished off my burger, fries and a chocolate milkshake and was working on hers. She slapped me.

"Get your own, Downtown," she grumped. So Dad ordered onion rings and I ate those, too.

"Downtown?" He asked, raising an eyebrow. His eyes were blue, his hair a dark blonde. I got my eyes and my looks from Mom, he often told me, my height and blue eye from him.

Oh, my name is Dantan Townsley De Rosier, hence the nickname 'Downtown'. I got the Townsley from Mom, named for my weird, lovable and eccentric great uncle. He had the weird eyes—one blue and one brown, like Mom. Said he was psychic, too. On the morning my Mom was murdered by the drunk driver, he tried to call her, warned her about the blue minivan and T-bone from his nursing home, but the staff who caught him wandering in the RN's office thought he was babbling about supper as if T-bones were on the menu for toothless old farts. His words, not mine. Dad and I visited Uncle Town nearly every week. Even if he did give me the creeps.

"Where to after this?" Dad questioned. "Is this an official date? You need to borrow the car?"

I slugged him. I'd just turned fourteen and no matter how I begged, he wanted me to wait to get my learner's permit. Even though Matt Damon [real name Jake James], offered to take me to the FBI closed driving course and teach me where agents learned real defensive driving.

I could understand Dad being cautious after Mom and truth is, I was a bit scared myself. I'd seen and read the statistics for teenage drivers and fatal accidents. Last thing I wanted was to put my Dad through that again. "It's seven thirty, Dad. You have an early day tomorrow. Don't you need to get in early?"

He rolled his eyes at the grinning agents and Felice. "It's almost past my bedtime," he whispered to her. "Do you think if I beg, he'll let me stay up another hour?"

"What are you doing tomorrow, Danny?" She asked finishing her last fry and looking for an onion ring, but I'd eaten them all.

"Pig," she added.

"Look who's talking. Those jeans look tight," I said staring at her chest.

She slugged me. "I weigh exactly 125," she retorted. "And I can still outrun and out leap you."

"But I can out shoot you," I sneered. "Out eat, out track and outlast you. And I'm smarter, too." I never let her forget my PSAT scores were higher than hers.

"By ten points. You spelled your name right for that. Any who, Dad's going to the farm to get some fishing and riding in. Want to come?"

"He's hiding from his bigmouth faux pas?"

She flushed red, having heard about his unfortunate words. "He said he didn't say that," she defended.

"My Dad said that the Easter Bunny's real, too," I returned. "I stopped believing that when I was eight."

"Really?" Dad inquired. "And how come I put a five dollar bill under your pillow for the last tooth you lost on Friday?"

I flushed, and said, "tips for the dentist."

"Speaking of which, you have a dental appointment on Monday at 11 AM. Ms. Penny will get you out of class and take you." Ms. Penny was Dad's secretary and stood in for errands where a full-fledged agent wasn't quite needed.

"I can take myself, Dad. The office is only four blocks from school."

"No," he said sharply. I knew he meant it. It wasn't the best neighborhood between school and the strip-mall where the dental clinic was.

"Okay," I agreed quietly. "Tomorrow, I'm going to the park and practice shooting. Tournament's coming up, and I'm stale."

I was enrolled in archery class and wanted to try out for triathlon, archery, target shooting and running sometime in the near future.

“You guys done?” Dad asked, standing up and the other agents flanked him. The waitress brought the check, Dad handed over his American Express and left her five dollar tip. He never paid more than 25%, he said waitresses deserved to be rewarded for their service, but not to make him feel magnanimous. Out in the parking lot, Felice gave me a hug and a kiss on the cheek before she was hustled away into the big limo and we got into the Kia. I sighed. Dad waited until I was seat belted in.

“You like her, Danny?”

“A lot. She’s smart, pretty and fun. Likes to read, and do the same things as me. Likes animals. You know she wants to be a vet?”

“I take it you don’t mean a war vet?”

“Daaad,” I sighed. “A veterinarian. Why can’t we have a dog, Dad?”

“We tried, Danny,” he said softly. “When you were young, several times. It made you sick. Your Mom wanted you to have a pet, too. We both loved dogs. It killed her to give Clipper up when you got ill at seven. That was the last time we tried.”

“No one else’s pets bother me. I can be around Dusty all day and I’m fine.”

“Outside. Not in the house,” he pointed out.

“What is it, do I have asthma or something?”

“No, Dantan. Worse than that. You passed out and were in a coma for days. We had to take you to Crowley Trauma to a Specialist. Four times.”

I rubbed my forehead and squeezed the temples, as a sudden headache accompanied by nausea hit me. “Dad, pull over,” I managed and he stared at me in the rear view mirror.

“What’s wrong, Danny?” He asked sharply, putting on his right blinker. “You’re green!”

He pulled to a stop and unlocked the doors. I headed for the grass along the wood line as his escort pulled over to park behind, hurrying up to Dad with their hands on their hips. I leaned over and puked as Dad kept his distance. One thing he hated was the smell of vomit.

Voices babbled in my head. I saw pictures of a man putting together a rifle and a fat tortoiseshell cat was watching him from the table covered with a purple-flowered plastic tablecloth in a large dining room wainscoted walls and an overhead five-bladed fan light. Three windows and a door covered with paisley drapes in the picture window opened into the narrow kitchen, a window frame sized opening but no glass. The floor was carpeted and on top that was one of those braided rugs in green.

A small pendulum clock ticked on one wall between the windows and on the other was a really nice pencil drawing of a red setter.

The man was in his 30s with a bland generic face, blue eyes and dark hair. You’d look at him twice and not see him. He was not tall, but it was hard to judge his height sitting in

the Captain's chair at the table. There were four other chairs around the table, each one different. A portable phone lay at his right side near the cat that purring away.

I was seeing it all through the eyes of the cat, could hear and smell what the cat did.

"Danny?" Dad's voice came from far away and I vaguely felt someone's arms around me.

"Gonna get that bastard with one shot," I said, echoing the man in front of me. "Oh yeah, President Jason Rickover's gonna be splattered all across the front of the Museum of Space and Science."

"Danny?" Dad shook me. "Danny, what?"

I looked up, no longer in the cat's mind, but back on the side of the interstate with five worried faces staring at me. Dad sent the other guys back to the car to get help.

"Huh?" I asked, wiping my mouth of vomit.

"Danny, what did you say about President Rickover?"

I swallowed. "Dad, remember when I gave you that stock tip, and told you not to drive that day the accident happened on the expressway?" He nodded. "Well, tomorrow some guy's going to shoot Felice's Dad in the head at the museum's grand opening."

"Danny," Dad said helplessly.

"Dad, you've got to do something. Don't tell them, they won't believe me."

"You know who he is?"

"Some guy with a cat. A tortoiseshell. Dark hair, blue eyes. He looks like everyone. He has a rifle."

"What kind?"

"Like that short sniper rifle made of composite so it doesn't show up in x-rays or metal detectors. Is Felice's Dad supposed to be there tomorrow?"

"Yes," Dad said. "A last-minute change of plans... How did you know this, Danny?"

"He told me. The guy with the rifle."

"Danny, you telling me you read minds?"

"No, Dad. I can't read minds. I hear things see things, sometimes. Like through their eyes."

"The people's eyes?"

"No, Dad. Through their pets' eyes. Dogs, cats, birds. Even wild animals. It's like I'm in their heads, seeing through their eyes, hearing through their ears."

He started to say something, stopped and then said, "The stock tip?"

"I heard a broker, talking on the phone to his partner. His dog was in the room, a big black lab."

“How do you pick the animals, Dantan?”

I shrugged. “Sometimes, they just suck me in. No rhyme or reason. Doesn’t usually make me sick either.”

Dad said, “Hush,” as the agents came back over.

“Hey, Danny,” Damon asked. “How are you? We called an ambulance, Senator. Just in case. Food poisoning, you think?”

Dad said smoothly, “I’ll take him home. I think he’s okay now. Cancel the ambulance, please.” Dad held onto me back to the car and made me lie down in the back seat. Halfway home, I passed out. Don’t remember being carried into the house or the subsequent pandemonium when they couldn’t rouse me.

Chapter 4

I woke up disoriented in a strange place. I knew it was a hospital after few minutes, it had that smell. Although I was in a private room, it had a BP machine, O2 and EKG scanner at the side of the hospital bed. In a padded armchair with his feet up slept my Dad, still in the suit he’d worn to the museum tour. Outside my closed door I could see an agent in a neat blue suit, and coming through the door was Ms. Penny carrying a plastic bag from which dangled Dad’s gray pinstripe, what he called his power suit.

“Hey, Danny,” she said softly so as to not wake him. “How are you?”

“What am I doing here?” I grumbled.

“You don’t remember?”

“Naw. How long’s Dad been asleep?” I asked.

“I’m awake,” he said without opening his eyes and Ms. Penny hung his plastic bag up on the hook near the bathroom and then she put a super-sized coffee in his hands. He opened his eyes and smiled. “Oh God, thank you,” after a few sips, he sat up. “Danny, how do you feel?”

“I got a headache,” I complained. He raised an eyebrow at my grammar. “What am I doing here, Dad?”

“You passed out in the car after you puked up Denny’s,” he explained. “Brought you home and we couldn’t wake you up. I called the ambulance, but Jake said it would be quicker if we took you so he drove to Crowley.” He shivered. “Danny, you were limp and boneless. I thought you were dead. Your heartbeat was so slow, I could barely find it, and your breathing was sporadic. We thought you might’ve had food poisoning but Felice was fine and then you wouldn’t wake up.”

“You called Felice?” I interrupted.

“To see if she was sick,” he explained patiently. “She’s concerned, too.”

“Ms. Rickover is on her way over to see how you’re doing, Dantan,” Ms. Penny told me.

“So what’s wrong with me?”

“I don’t know. The Doctor wants to do a bunch of tests today. They did blood, urine, and EKG last night when you came in. Today, they want to do a spinal tap, MRI and CAT scan.”

“Why?” I asked suspiciously.

“To rule out epilepsy, stroke or brain tumor,” he returned grimly.

I stared, my mouth hanging open. Swallowed.

“Dantan,” he started. “About what you said yesterday–.”

“Dad, you have to go to the opening and make sure nothing happens,” I said urgently. “Wait a minute, then.” I held up a hand, the one attached to a finger lead and reached for the tortoiseshell cat. Found it sitting in the window sill, staring out at a silver gray Ford Escape with Maryland license plates. “5DUX – 8894, Dad. Silver gray Ford Escape. 2013.”

“You sure?”

“The plates aren’t his. They’re stolen. I see another set on the table. Virginia MLB 6656P. Don’t know if these are his or not. He’s in the driveway, it’s a circular drive, two houses across the street, blue with black shutters. Mailbox says 7729 Manassas. Does that help?”

Dad bolted out the door, leaving Ms. Penny and me staring at each other.

“Where’s he going? He has to be at the Museum opening in two hours!”

“He knows, Ms. Penny,” I said, and the Doctor came in while Dad was doing some fast talking with Jake James.

“Hi there, Mister De Rosier,” this dude said. He was young and talked with a New York accent. Introducing himself as Doctor Greg Kujowski, he shook my hand and asked me what was up. My answer was a shrug.

“You tell me. I remember puking my guts out on the Interstate and then waking up in here.”

He checked my heart, lungs, and when he headed south for my belly, Ms. Penny left the room. Poking around, his hands were cold and tickled but didn’t prompt any painful reactions. Next, he examined my balls, which made me both uncomfortable and creped out.

“Sorry,” he apologized. “But sometimes, young boys your age get a herniated testicle.” He went on to explain, and I interrupted him.

“I know what that is. No, I haven’t hit my head or been around any of those encephalitis prone schools. I had a headache, felt nauseous and puked. End of story.”

He shook his head. “No, Dantan. You were unconscious and unresponsive when you were brought in. We ruled out drugs and alcohol, trauma or accident. And your Dad said you weren’t emotionally upset. You had an EKG when you came in and that was strange, abnormally slow but your scans are normal now.”

“I have you scheduled for a CAT scan, EEG and MRI. That’s a lot of tests for one day so you’ll be spending a few days here until we can find out what’s going on.

“You will also have a spinal tap and I will warn you, that one hurts even with the numbing medicine and a spinal headache is no fun. You can’t move during or after. Are you claustrophobic? The MRI and CAT scan are in tight tubes so I can give you a tranquilizer if you think you need one.”

“My Dad Okayed this?”

He nodded. “Your father is very worried about you, Dantan. He told me once, he wants the best care we can give you, whatever it takes to get you well.”

“I’m not sick,” I complained. “When can I go home?”

I hated hospitals. That’s where I’d seen my mother last and associated the place with everything bad.

“We’ll see after the tests, okay?”

Ms. Penny poked her head in. “Dantan, the Senator says stay, behave and he’ll take care of your little problem. He’ll be back after the opening. Rest. Do you want anything?”

“My clothes. My Nook, my laptop.” Although it never worked right around me. After a few days, the motherboard fried itself. “On second thought, leave the laptop and bring my notebooks. I’ll work on my homework.”

“On your desk?”

“Book bag on the chair.” I yawned, suddenly sleepy, didn’t see or hear them leaving my room.

I woke up as they were wheeling me down the hallway and grabbed hold of the railings, yelling at the two dudes pushing me and saw that the doc was with them.

“Relax, Dantan,” he said. “We’re just taking you to CAT scan. You had another episode.”

“Episode? I didn’t puke,” I protested trying to sit up. “Let me out of here!”

I saw that the dude in the blue scrubs and he ducked, grabbing my hands while I tried to slide off the gurney. I made it to my feet by using his shoulders and my feet as a fulcrum, swinging over his head. The angle forced his hands to release so I took off running down the corridor, sliding on the slick floors with no socks on just those paper booties. I could feel my ass hanging out the back of that nasty gown. Voices yelled to stop, to catch me but I wasn’t a track star for nothing. I turned the corner and bypassed the nurses’ station heading for the nearest fire doors and stairs with a growing cavalcade behind me. Hit the fire doors and smashed them open, taking the steps down three and four at a time.

Twelve treads down, landing, then another twelve to a floor. I emerged on the lower floor and opened the exit to peer out on the atrium midst a bunch of flowering plants and

honest to God trees growing in the lobby. Four elevators faced me, North and South Towers and I still had seven floors more below me.

Heard an alarm in a woman's voice over the intercom calling for code 7 as the elevator dinged. I pushed the one for South Tower and jumped inside as soon as it opened, regardless of the people in it. Two men, two women, all visitors from their clothes and baskets of food and flowers. They carefully pretended not to look at me as I danced from 1 foot to the other holding my gown, back closed.

"Going down?" I asked and pushed the 'G' button. The elevator doors opened on Four and standing in the doorway were two security guards, the Doctor, and two huge orderlies.

"Dantan, just relax," Kujowski said slowly as he approached. The orderlies motioned for the other people in the car to exit and they bolted out quickly. I tried to dodge past them, and the big orderly grabbed me by the arm and bear hugged me. Kicking, I walked up the wall and pushed off, flipping myself behind him but he dropped backwards, landing on me crushing the air out of my lungs. I wheezed, saw spots, and felt someone stab me in the butt with a needle. Melted.

Went flying upwards onto a flat padded surface, my arms and legs strapped down while fingers pried my eyelids up.

"2 ml of Ativan," the voice announced. "Vitals?"

"Heart rate is one fifty, BP is 145/80. Respirations twenty-four, temp is 99°," a nurse announced.

"He'll sleep for a while. Let's get him to Imaging, get these tests done before he has another panic attack. Anyone hurt?"

There were all negatives. "Dantan, you're okay. We're going to take you for these tests. Someone call the Senator and let him know what's going on."

I mumbled about the opening and the men after the President, but my mouth didn't work right so my words never made it past my lips.

The rest of the day was a blur, voices telling me to stay still, roll over, bend, and was I cold until it all merged into a buzzing that turned black and seamless. I was asleep.

Chapter 5

Woke up back in bed in the same room only now, there were balloons, cards, flowers and candy piled everywhere. Dad was watching to see if I was awake and Felice was there looking worried.

"Hey," I mumbled.

"Hey, kiddo," Dad smiled, his eyes lighting up.

Felice looked like she was crying, "hey, Downtown. Wuzup?"

"You tell me."

"What was with the Great Escape?" She queried. "You breaking out of here?"

“Dad?”

“The cat’s name is Harry Turtledove,” he said and I understood what he didn’t say. He didn’t want to alarm Felice. “Danny, why did you bolt?”

“I dunno. Scared.”

“Of the tube?”

“Naw. I’m hungry.”

“You missed lunch, dinner and breakfast,” he told me. “You slept nearly 16 hours. It’s Tuesday afternoon.”

“Yikes. Can I go home now?”

“After the Doctors check out your scans,” he said carefully.

“What did they find?”

“We’ll talk to the Doctors together.”

My stomach lurched and it wasn’t because I was hungry. I threw the covers back, sat up and froze as I realized I was nearly naked in front of Felice, so I pulled the sheets back up to my chin. She grinned.

“I’ve seen you naked before in second grade, Downtown, there’s got to be some improvements.”

I blushed. Mumbled as Dad laughed. “Lisi, you are a bad influence on me. Shall I leave you two alone?”

“He’s perfectly safe with me, Mister D,” she grinned. “I promise not to look under his skirts.”

I turned beet red. Was saved when the doc came in looking all serious and Felice took that cue to exit gracefully. He cleared his throat and looked at Dad.

“Dantan’s CAT scan showed a lesion in the area of the brain called the limbic region, deep inside.”

Dad said, “A lesion? A tumor?”

“Not a tumor, an area about the size of a lemon that is thickened like a bruise. It can affect memory, balance and speech. Part of it extends to the optic nerves and there is pressure on those nerves, which will cause vision degeneration.”

“You mean I might go blind?” I burst out.

“I mean, Dantan, you might die,” Kujowski said bluntly.

“Do we need to bring a Neurosurgeon?” Dad asked, his hands gripping the arm rests until his knuckles turn white.

“I consulted with Doctor Anton Soong, he is the top Neurosurgeon on the Eastern seaboard, but you’re welcome to speak to any others. He’s agreed to see Dantan tomorrow

on my recommendation, which is a tremendous favor, Senator. Most neurosurgeons are booked 6 to 8 months in advance.”

“And according to your findings, Danny needs to be seen that quickly?” Dad seemed to have trouble speaking, he swallowed often as if he had a dry mouth.

“In my opinion, yes,” Kujowski said. “There’s definitely something neurological in there that shouldn’t be. I’d like to arrange a biopsy, but that runs a significant risk in itself, although it would definitely determine what we are dealing with.”

“Go ahead,” Dad decided. “Make the appointment.”

“I’d like to keep, Danny, is it? Here for another few days, he’s had a few episodes of fading in and out he isn’t even aware of. We’ll hook him up to some EEG leads, so we can monitor his brain waves while he’s awake and asleep.

“I’ve put him on anti-anxiety meds and a mild tranquilizer to prevent a re-recurrence of Monday’s unfortunate mishap.”

Dad gave me one of those looks. “I thought I told you to behave, Dantan?”

“What did I do?” I spread my hands in dumb innocence, which usually worked to get me out of trouble. Trouble was, I really didn’t remember doing anything bad. “Lunch?” I asked, looking hopeful.

“I can order that. Any restrictions, Doctor?”

“As long as you don’t feel nauseous.”

“I’m starving. Can I have a meatball sub with mozzarella and Parmesan? Garlic bread and a salad? Oh, and honey barbecue wings. With ranch dressing. On the side. Pepsi.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Dad told me. He looked at me sternly. “Don’t move out of this bed.”

“What if I have to pee?”

“Wait.”

“Dad!”

“You heard me.”

“Yes, sir.” He got up and left the room with the Doctor. I looked around, snagged a basket of Ghirardelli chocolates and ate two bars, dark chocolate with almonds and sea salt. My favorite. The card was from Ms. Penny and read ‘Get Well Soon.’

The big basket of fruit was from Dad’s peers at the Senate. The Secret Service dudes had sent me a horde of Dove bars, word search, crossword and Sudoku books along with chewing gum and beef jerky. Felice had left me a bag of rice crispy treats and chocolate chip macadamia cookies which she’d baked herself, just the way I liked them – soft and gooey.

I put two of them in my mouth and savored the deliciousness of white chocolate, macadamia nuts, and cookie dough. Took another bite out of the third one, and felt the twinges of the headache coming on...

Harry Turtledove was winding his body around the legs of men dressed in crime scene jumpsuits with blue windbreakers labeled FBI, HS and US marshals. It was a cluster fuck inside the house and the cat decided to leap onto the table where it was safe. He sat, watching as the agents bagged and searched. The noise they made was negligible, the cat and I heard every word, but it was me that translated.

They had apprehended the owner of the house, four blocks from the museum, with Presidential passes that allowed him inside the building, found the armor-lite sniper rifle in pieces with a full clip of armor piercing bullets. He was driving a gray vehicle with the stated MD plates and how the hell did the Senator come by such exact information when even the Secret Service hadn't a clue. He had even given the State Cops the perp's home address and warned them not to hurt the cat.

"Speaking of which," the Director of HS top agent said. "We're supposed to bring the cat to the Senator."

"Not animal control?"

"No. Senator De Rosier was explicit. The cat goes to him."

"You hear his son's in the hospital? Some kind of brain tumor. Poor kid. He's just fourteen. This will kill Mike, after losing Evangeline in that drunk driving accident."

"You saying the kid might die?"

It's weird to hear people talking about your death when they don't know you're listening. I knew that agent, his name was Mark Andrews and sometimes he was on Felice's detail.

"Does Canary-bird know?" The other HS dude asked, referring to Felice by her Secret Service nickname.

"She's been to the hospital, but I doubt they've told her. How long till the Grand Opening?"

"Twenty minutes. I wanted it canceled, but both the President and Senator said no. Said he owed it to Downtown."

"Danny, his Dad calls him Danny. Maybe, the cat's for him."

Harry Turtledove was scooped up in Mark's arms, and he called out, "anyone see a cat carry case in here?"

Shoved inside, my/our vision was limited as seen through the bars. Harry meowed plaintively, both of us hated the confines of the crate. Being dangled from the handle and bumped against his legs on the way out to his SUV made both of us sick. The HS dude followed him out. "You hear about the stock brouhaha? The SEC is all over that broker on insider trading. Seems the Senator made a killing on a minor thousand dollar trade."

“Illegal?”

“Can’t prove it. Besides, he’s already rich, and his reputation is one of the most stable on the Hill. Hell, he doesn’t even get parking tickets.

“You know, that’s the third weird coincidence surrounding the Senator,” Andrews mused.

I could see the other dude’s face, especially after Mark shoved the crate in the backseat of his Denali and belted it in. He slammed the door. I did hear the other dude make weird noises and then what sounded like–‘interesting’. We were left alone in the parked vehicle. He did leave the window open and it was cool enough out that the cat wouldn’t overheat. He meowed, curled up and went to sleep. Me too.

Chapter 6

Faces gradually became clear. Leaning over me. I felt out of it, like my body didn’t belong to me anymore. I wanted to move, but I couldn’t. Tried to speak but my mouth was so dry my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth, and my lips were sewed together. My eyes burned as my eyes wandered over the funny shaped people. She adjusted my pillow, my sheets and pulled my arms on top of the covers. My head felt weird. Sticky. Itchy. I turned it slightly and saw thin leads coming up from my neck and down to a machine that recorded colored lines, and came out on graph paper.

A BP cuff inflated on my arm, but I couldn’t see the results. That Doctor and another one that looked Chinese-American were standing near my Dad and Ms. Penny, Felice and holy cow, President Rickover was there, too.

“Dantan,” he said formally. “I had to thank you in person. For saving my life,” he started.

“I’m still not voting for you,” I mumbled past the dryness.

Dad understood me and laughed. “Just take it easy, Danny. You just had surgery on your brain. You’re going to feel weird. Doctor Soong did a biopsy. You had a seizure two days ago and it was on the EEG, gave the Doctor something to work with.”

“Epileptic?” I managed.

“No, Danny,” the Chinese Doctor said in perfect English. “You’re not an epileptic.”

“Am I gonna die?” I heard Dad and Felice’s gasps.

“In about seventy years, Danny, I hope. The biopsy isn’t cancerous. Frankly, we don’t know what it is, but it’s not normal brain tissue. These seizures or episodes are indicative of something wrong in your brain, and trigger a circulatory shutdown. Do you remember when it started?”

“Don’t remember even doing it,” I mumbled. Looked at my father and Felice. “Daddy, I’m scared.” Felt my eyes brimming with tears and the two of them hugged me. I felt wetness on my neck and cheeks, never heard the rest of them, leaving as I burst into sobs on my Dad’s chest, unable even to hug him back. I was enfolded in their arms and was not comforted.

I lay in bed in the room darkened to give my eyes some respite as bright lights triggered those massive headaches with nausea. The slightest movement would make me hurl. My appetite was gone, I no longer wanted to eat anything.

Felice stayed with me as well as my Dad. The orderlies had brought in a spare bed where he could sack out and I could see him when I woke up.

They had me on drugs. It made me sleep most of the time, had me hooked up to IVs and I'd overheard them telling Dad, if I didn't start eating, they'd be forced to put me on IV food or a gastric tube down my nose.

"Dad?"

"I'm here, Danny," his voice came instantly.

"How long is this going on, Dad?"

"Till you're better, Danny."

"Not gonna get better, Dad." I paused, struck by a certainty. "Dad, go talk to Uncle Town."

"Why, Danny? He's got dementia. He can't tell us anything."

"Dad, please. Tell him. Ask him for help. He knows." I felt myself fading away again. "Dad, he's like me."

Wasn't sure if he heard me. Felt Felice tug on my arm and say something. Couldn't hear her either. Saw an electrical sheet in front of my eyes, as if fireworks and welders torches were playing a musical score. Felt a warmth on my tongue, a brassiness give way to velvet darkness.

Danny? Dantan Townsley? Time to wake up, boy. I knew those names, that voice. Forced my eyes open, struggled at the horrible fullness in my throat that made me want to gag. Looked around as tears pooled involuntarily down my eyes.

"Danny, relax. There is a breathing tube down your throat, helping your lungs. I can feel you struggling to breathe on your own. Your O2 levels are up so we can remove the breather. Cough and on three we will pull it out."

I coughed violently, wanting it out NOW. He removed it smoothly and the gagging sensation left but my throat was really sore. I couldn't speak, just flailed my arms at them in anger. Someone grabbed them and held me down. "Relax, Danny or I'll sedate you," Doctor Kujowski said sternly.

Dad's terrified face. Doctor Soong. Two nurses, two orderlies. No Ms. Penny, no Felice. Uncle Townsley. He shuffled forward, dressed neat and clean with a visitor's badge on his lapel. In a suit.

"Uncle Town? You going to a funeral?" I asked. The last time he'd worn that suit was at Mom's funeral.

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