

THE LOST CLIPPER



A FICTION NOVEL BY
MICHEL POULIN

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WARNING TO READERS

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FOREWORD

THIS NOVEL WAS WRITTEN IN 2011-12, BEFORE THE NOV 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES, AND THE PRESIDENT DEPICTED IN THIS NOVEL MAY NOT BE THE PRESIDENT ACTUALLY ELECTED IN 2012. FOR THIS, THE AUTHOR ASKS FOR THE INDULGENCE OF THE READERS.

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CHAPTER 1 – FLIGHT DISTURBANCE

21:07 (New York Time)

Thursday, April 23, 1959

Pan American Boeing B707 'CLIPPER AMERICA'

38,000 feet above the North Atlantic, 560 miles east of New York

"So, Captain, happy to be home for Easter?"

William 'Bill' Cannon smiled at the question from his copilot, Denis Brayson, while keeping his eyes on the night sky outside of the cockpit's windshield.

"Sure am! This job is okay but I certainly could use more time with my family. Thankfully, George Kingsley accepted to switch with me for the Easter Monday flight to Paris, so I will be able to enjoy a full four days with my wife and kids."

Denis Brayson, an experienced pilot in his own right, sighed at that answer.

"I wish that I could say that I have been as lucky as you, Bill. I will be flying with Kingsley on that Monday flight. Still, that will give me three days with my own family."

Denis then turned his head to look at their flight engineer, John White, whose station was just behind his seat.

"And you, John? Are you flying Monday?"

"Yup! I tried to switch with Jack Kenney but the bugger refused. I even offered to arrange a date between him and Roberta to get him to switch but that didn't work."

"And what told you that Roberta would go along with whatever plans you would make, John?" Replied Bill Cannon, amused. Roberta Holmes, one of the four stewardesses on their flight, was considered one of the hottest looking stewardesses at Pan Am, which had already a high standard in that department. She was however also very choosy about her men, knowing full well the power of her attractiveness. White answered with a guilty grin.

"Let's say that Roberta owes me a favor."

Both pilot and copilot howled in appreciation at that reply.

"I wish that Roberta owed ME a favor, you lucky bastard!" Said Denis Brayson. Before White could say something, an extremely bright flash of red light from the outside suddenly made the three men close their eyes, blinding them temporarily. For a

moment, Bill Cannon, who had turned his head away from the windshield, thought that he saw Denis Brayson's skeleton, as if he was looking at him through an X-Ray machine. The red glare then faded and Brayson's appearance returned to normal. However, an external shock wave then hit their Boeing B707, throwing it sideways like a simple toy. Bill's old pilot reflexes then took over, chasing the start of a panic in him despite him being still half blind. With most of his instruments apparently knocked out, he fought with his controls with all his strength, soon joined in this by Denis. After a few, very long seconds, they managed to stabilize their plane in a level, steady path.

"What the hell was that?" Nearly screamed Denis, still pale. Bill shook his head, talking through his clenched teeth.

"Don't know but it certainly wasn't good for the plane. John, check the engines!" The flight engineer did not respond at first, taking the time to survey his instruments panel.

"Everything seems okay here, Captain. Our four engines are running smoothly at normal temperatures and I don't see any indications of lubricant loss."

"It's at least that." Said Bill before he realized something with a shock: the night sky they had been traveling in was now replaced by an early morning sky, with the Sun low and at their back. Denis, who had been checking his own instruments for malfunctions, also noticed it.

"Wait a sec! This can't be!"

A quick look at his wristwatch made him swear.

"Damn! My watch has stopped!"

"Mine too!" Said Bill after looking at his own watch. "Our gyrocompass seems to have been knocked out by that red flash, along with our radios and radar. Try to regain contact with air traffic control while I run a check of all our systems."

"Got it!"

A buzz then made Bill pick up the telephone that linked the cockpit with the stewardesses' station. The voice of Sandra Crystal, the purser, came on the set.

"Captain, this is Sandra. The passengers are nearly panicking about what shook our plane. What was it?"

"I don't know yet, Sandra. Tell them that we are in full control of the plane and that they have no need to worry. I will address them in a few minutes."

"Uh, understood, Captain." Said the stewardess in a voice that showed she was not exactly convinced. She however cut her call without asking more questions, letting

Bill free to evaluate the state of his plane. Apart of the fact that his radar set seemed to be fried and that his compass was gyrating crazily, everything else seemed to be working.

"Denis, do you have the air traffic control on the radio?"

"No, I get no radio traffic at all on their frequency, nor on the frequency of the controller in Paris."

Cold sweat then broke on Bill's forehead as he remembered his vision of his copilot's skeleton during the flash of red light. He now had nightmarish thoughts about all this meaning that they were now in the middle of a nuclear war. Maybe a stray nuclear missile had exploded prematurely near their aircraft. Urgent knocks on the door of the cockpit made his head snap around, just before Sandra Crystal stormed inside, agitated.

"Captain, it's daylight outside! Also, everybody's watches have stopped."

Bill made a grim smile to the pretty brunette.

"I certainly noticed, Sandra. Unfortunately, I have no explanation yet to offer for that. It must have been an effect of that red flash."

"But...nothing could possibly cause that, no?"

The pilot had to give her good marks for common sense.

"I know, Sandra. However, I am as clueless as you right now. The good thing is that the plane seems to have suffered no real damage. You may tell that to the passengers: it may calm them down."

"Yes, Captain."

A minute went by after the departure of Sandra. By that time, Denis had not yet been able to raise anyone on the working frequencies of the day. In frustration, he switched their secondary radio to the international distress frequency, the only frequency that never changed.

"To any station that can hear me, this is flight Pan Am 164, out of Paris and heading towards New York. Our navigation equipment is malfunctioning and we can't raise any air control center on other frequencies. If someone can hear us, please respond!"

To his relief, a voice answered him after his second call.

"Pan Am 164, this is US Coast Guard cutter SENECA. Can you hear us, over?"

"Affirmative, SENECA! We hear you loud and clear, over."

"Pan Am 164, what was your last known position, heading and speed, over?"

"SENECA, from Pan Am 164, our last known position dates from four minutes ago and was 565 miles east of New York Idlewild International Airport. Our heading was 242 degrees and our speed was 540 miles per hour at an altitude of 38,000 feet, over." This time there was a distinct delay before Denis got a response from the cutter, with the tone of voice of the operator having also changed.

"Pan Am 164, say again your last known position?"

"I say again, 565 miles east of New York Idlewild International Airport, over."

"SENECA to whoever is there, you better quit your attempt at joking." Said a new voice on the radio. "There is no Idlewild Airport in New York and Pan Am went bankrupt decades ago. You better identify yourself correctly before I alert the Air force." Denis exchanged a bemused look with Bill, who had listened on the conversation with his own headset.

"What the fuck are they talking about?"

"Don't know but I will certainly rattle their cage: I am talking over this conversation. Coast Guard cutter SENECA, this is the captain of flight Pan Am 164. We are presently in distress, with all navigation instruments out and 108 passengers aboard. If you can confirm our present position, say it or pass us on to someone who will. I am certainly in no mood to joke, over."

There was another long delay before the latest voice answered, with no trace of apology in his tone.

"Unknown contact, you may want to try the frequency of the New York air traffic control center, on 388.5 megahertz. Good luck with them, out!"

The last sentence had been said with sarcasm, something that both confused and enraged Bill Cannon.

"The prick! I'm going to report him as soon as we land. Let's try that new frequency: hopefully, he didn't give us a bogus one."

Changing himself the frequency on their main radio, Bill double-checked his list of official frequencies before talking, to make sure that this new frequency was not on it. It wasn't.

"New York air traffic control, this is flight Pan Am 164, over."

The answer came a few seconds later, as he was about to call again.

"This is New York air traffic control. Say again your call sign?"

"Are they all dumb today, damn it!" Swore Denis to himself before Bill spoke again on the radio.

"New York control, I say again: this flight Pan Am 164, coming from Paris and heading towards Idlewild International. Our navigation instruments are malfunctioning and we are unsure of both our current position and of our heading. Our last known position was five minutes ago, at 565 miles east of Idlewild International, and our heading was 242 degrees at 540 miles per hour. We are still heading roughly east, judging from the Sun, and should be about 500 miles from the coast, over."

"Pan Am 164, please turn left ninety degrees so that we can identify you on our radar screens."

"Finally, something that makes sense!" Said Bill to himself. "Turning left now, New York control."

"Pan Am 164, this is New York control. We now have you marked on our radar screens. You are 510 miles due east of New York. Be advised that your IFF transponders are apparently not working. What is your aircraft type and how many people do you have on board, over?"

"From Pan Am 164, we have 108 passengers and seven crewmembers on board of our Boeing B707-121, over."

This time, the delay before he got a response was significant, prompting Bill to talk again.

"New York control, did you copy my last, over?"

"Affirmative, Pan Am 164." Finally said the man in New York. "Continue to fly east for the moment. The Air Force will send planes to escort and guide you, over."

"Thank you, New York control. In truth, we don't have large reserves of fuel left. I calculate that, at the present rate, I have enough left to fly for about seventy minutes more."

"I copy that, Pan Am 164. Keep a lookout for your escort planes, out."

"Captain, I have a bad feeling about this." Said John White as soon as Bill cut the link. "Why would they not recognize our call sign? And what was this thing about Pan Am having gone bankrupt?"

"John, I have absolutely no clue." Said sheepishly Bill while returning on an eastern heading.

Inside the passenger cabin, uneasy whispers went around the passengers as their plane made two turns in quick succession. The voice of the pilot then came on the speakers.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We still don't know what caused that late disturbance in our flight but I can assure you that our plane is in good condition and that we will land safely in New York in less than an hour. I hope that you will continue to enjoy your flight in the meantime."

Colonel Steve Ritchie, Chief of Air Transport Services at the Supreme Allied Powers in Europe Headquarters, or SHAPE HQ in short, who was on his way to a strategic conference at the Pentagon, raised an eyebrow and looked at his seat neighbor, Brigadier General Allan Foster, who was going to the same conference as him.

"I think that we got served some good baloney, General." He said in a low voice, making Foster frown.

"What do you mean, Steve?"

"Well, I am myself an experienced transport pilot, General, and I can tell when a pilot is trying to paint things over a bad situation. The plane seems to be flying correctly for the moment, but god knows what that red explosion could have damaged. It is bad enough that the night turned literally into day in seconds. That by itself is enough to freak out."

"Yeah, I agree. I just hope that this explosion was not what I am afraid it was." Ritchie understood at once what Foster was thinking and nodded.

"Me too. I think that I will go pay a quick visit to the flight crew."

"Good idea! Keep me posted!"

Getting up from his seat, Ritchie then walked calmly towards the cockpit, only a few paces away from his first class seat. One of the stewardesses, a tall and athletic blonde, however interposed herself politely just before the door to the cockpit.

"I am sorry, sir, but the cockpit is a restricted area for the passengers."

"I understand that, miss, but can you tell the Captain that Colonel Ritchie, of the Air Force, would like to talk to him?"

"I can certainly do that, Colonel." Said the stewardess, eyeing briefly the medal ribbons on his dress uniform before grabbing a telephone handset inside the kitchenette.

"Captain, this is Jennifer speaking. One of our passengers, Colonel Ritchie of the Air Force, wishes to speak with you... yes, right away, Captain."

The stewardess then smiled to Ritchie.

"You may enter the cockpit now, Colonel."

"Thank you, miss."

Ritchie then stepped to the door and entered the cramped cockpit space. The pilot was already turned in his seat to greet him, extending a hand that Ritchie shook.

"William Cannon, at your service, Colonel. I flew B-17 bombers over Europe during the war there."

"You did?" Said Ritchie, smiling at once. "Then we should exchange our war stories later. Talking of stories, I don't want to be rude, but you kind of failed to convince me that all was well. Have you suffered some damage?"

"Unfortunately, yes. Apart of night turning suddenly into day, our gyrocompass, chronometer and magnetic compass have gone wild. We had trouble contacting air traffic control at first. When we did, they gave us a hard time, as if they doubted our identity. I was told last that the Air Force was sending planes to guide and escort us in. Unfortunately, that sounded as if they were being sent to shoot us down."

"Oh?" Said Ritchie, surprised. "But, you certainly filed a flight plan before leaving Paris, did you?"

"Of course I did! Furthermore, this flight is a regular one, leaving every Thursday evening from Paris. Yet, those idiots in New York didn't seem to believe us when I told them who we were."

"Strange, indeed! So, escort planes are on the way: that will at least help us get to New York. Do you mind if I stay here until those fighter jets show up? Maybe I will be able to soothe them down, so that they don't get trigger happy."

"A good idea, Colonel. Take the jump seat behind my seat and grab that spare headset hooked above it."

"Thank you, Captain."

Twenty minutes later, a radio call came in as two small dots appeared in the sky to their left, growing fast.

"Pan Am 164, this is Air Force call sign Blue Six. We have you on visual and are approaching from your port side, over."

"Blue Six, we are happy to see you." Said Bill Cannon truthfully as Ritchie looked through a small window to have a look at the approaching fighters. "Our navigation instruments are still out and we certainly could use your help to guide us in, over."

"Wilco, Pan Am 164. I will take the lead to guide you towards JFK Airport, while my wingman will stay behind you. Be advised not to deviate from the heading I will be on, or you will be fired on."

"You will guide us towards which airport, Blue Six?"

"Pan Am 164, I said JFK Airport, as in John F. Kennedy International Airport. Don't tell me that you don't know it!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, we don't, Blue Six."

"Then, to which airport were you headed, Pan Am 164?"

"To Idlewild International Airport, Blue Six. Hell, don't tell me that YOU don't know it!"

"Alright, buster, play silly with me if you want, but follow me once I take the lead, or you will be shot down."

"Let me talk to this young jerk for a moment!" Then growled Ritchie before keying his microphone. "Blue Six, this is Air Force Colonel Steve Ritchie, traveling as a passenger on flight Pan Am 164. You are dealing with a commercial aircraft filled with over a hundred passengers and crew, so go easy on the trigger finger, or I will make sure that you end up flying broomsticks. I..."

The sudden appearance of a fantastic jet aircraft just passing the B707 by the left side then cut him off in mid-sentence. Ritchie knew well all the planes in service with the Air Force but, while the newcomer wore the distinct markings of the US Air Force, nothing he knew even approached what he was looking at now. For one thing, while the so-called fighter was clearly a single-seat plane, it was about as big as a bomber and had two huge jet engines in the back. The voice of the lead fighter pilot then came back, harsh.

"Colonel, or whoever you are, I don't take orders from you and your plane better do as I say, or you WILL be shot down. From now on, your plane will stay off the radio unless called by us. Is that understood, Pan Am 164?"

"We understand and will comply, Blue Six." Answered Bill Cannon, discouraged, before looking at Ritchie. "I guess that we don't have much of a choice now, Colonel."

"Effectively, Captain." Said Ritchie, frustrated and angry.

CHAPTER 2 – WELCOME WAGON

09:44 (New York Time)

Tuesday, October 6, 2015

Gate A-6, Terminal number 4, John F. Kennedy International Airport

New York, United States

Lieutenant Daniel Munsen, of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE in short, already had over eight customs officers and ten Port Authority police officers waiting near Gate A-6 when he saw the chief of the Port Authority detachment at JFK Airport, Lieutenant Tom Rawlings, arrive at a run with six more police officers, a young woman with a gun and a badge visible at her belt and at least twenty heavily armed men in black assault vests, Kevlar helmets and black SWAT-like uniforms. Munsen eyed with curiosity Rawlings as the policeman stopped to a halt near him, slightly out of breath. The woman accompanying him seemed however just fine, showing that she was very fit.

“Why bring so much forces to board this unidentified flight? I understand that it gave only a long outdated call sign, but a group of terrorists would have tried to sneak past our air defenses instead of radioing for help, no?”

“Maybe,” said the woman besides Rawlings, “but we cannot take any chances with this plane. Remember our present situation with Pakistan, Lieutenant.”

“And you are?”

The woman unhooked her badge from her belt and raised it so that he could detail it.

“Department of Homeland Security Senior Agent Jane Hatfield. Once the occupants of that incoming plane are frisked and taken out of their plane, they will be bused under escort to the Brooklyn Metropolitan Detention Center, for triage and questioning. They will not be allowed contact of any sort with other people until further notice and no public announcement will be made about that plane or its occupants. That comes direct from the Director of DHS in Washington.”

“Uh, what about the few thousand persons already present in this terminal, Agent Hatfield. Or are you planning to shut down and empty gates used right now by twelve

passenger aircraft from various foreign lines? Do you have any idea of what kind of chaos this would bring to the operations of this airport?"

The DHS female agent, an athletic woman in her mid thirties, hesitated and eyed sharply Munsen, a visibly experienced customs officer with gray hair.

"How many people can we expect aboard that plane, at a maximum?"

"Well, the two F-22 escort fighters positively identified it as an early type Boeing B707, which had a maximum seating capacity of 110 passengers, plus three flight crews and up to six flight attendants. The suspect plane actually bore the markings of a Pan Am aircraft and the tail registry number was that of the 'CLIPPER AMERICA', the first Pan Am jet aircraft to start the route Paris-New York in 1958. The crew of that plane even named their destination as 'Idlewild Airport', which was the name of this airport before it was renamed JFK International Airport in 1963."

Jane Hatfield rolled her eyes at those words.

"Great! Now, terrorists are spoofing a defunct television show."

"Well, if this is indeed a plane full of terrorists, maybe we should not let it approach this terminal." Suggested Lieutenant Rawlings. "If it has any sizeable bomb in its baggage compartment, it could cause a bloodbath in this terminal."

"Then we will have it parked in the open, away from this terminal, and board it via mobile stairs." Said resolutely Hatfield, getting a dirty look from Rawlings.

"Agent Hatfield, I understand that DHS is responsible for the security of American territory, but I am in charge of the police force at this airport, which is directly under the responsibility of the Port Authorities."

It was Munsen's turn to roll his eyes as Hatfield and Rawlings bickered about who would lead the operation to board the suspect plane: they certainly did not need another inter-departmental fight right now. Four more men, dressed in civilian clothes, then arrived at a run, attracting a sarcastic question from the customs officer.

"And you guys are from the FBI, right?"

"How did you know?" Replied one of the men, flabbergasted. Jane Hatfield gave the newcomer a dirty look.

"Who called the FBI on this? This is clearly a DHS case."

"Not if there are Americans on board of that plane. Then, at the least you will have to let us cooperate with you."

"Cooperate, yeah!" Said Hatfield in a less than enthusiastic tone. "I can already see how this is going to go. However, Lieutenant Rawlings, of the Port Authority Police

here, just made a good suggestion: that we keep this suspect plane away from this terminal and have it park in the open, where we will board it with mobile staircases.”

Munsen actually appreciated the way Hatfield had just somewhat mollified Rawlings by crediting him with the idea. His eyes then caught the shape of an approaching airliner accompanied by two smaller planes.

“Well, lady and gentlemen, I believe that our suspect bird is here and about to land. I suggest that we hurry up if you want to be ready to board it.”

“Right!” Said Jane Hatfield. Lieutenant Rawlings, can you have two mobile staircases ready on the tarmac near this gate? In the meantime, I will radio in our vehicles so that they can close in. ASSAULT TEAM, FOLLOW ME!”

“Quite an energetic young woman, I would say.” Said Munsen to Rawlings as the DHS agent ran down the concourse, twenty armed and armored agents at her back.

“Yeah! Let’s just pray that she has as much good sense as she has energy.”

Under the directions of Rawlings, a ground guide vehicle and four police cars escorted the Boeing B707 to the chosen parking spot, situated a good 200 yards away from Terminal 4, as soon as it landed. Blocks were then put in place in front and behind the wheels of the plane, so that it could move no further, and two mobile staircases were rolled into place, one against the port nose exit door and the other against the tail port door. As soon as assault teams had climbed the stairs and were ready to go in, Jane Hatfield, standing in the open near the nose of the aircraft, raised a megaphone to her mouth.

“TO THE OCCUPANTS OF THIS AIRCRAFT, OPEN YOUR PORT NOSE AND TAIL DOORS AND DO NOT OPPOSE ANY RESISTANCE TO MY AGENTS, OR WE WILL NOT HESITATE TO FIRE. YOU HAVE ONE MINUTE TO COMPLY BEFORE WE BLOW OUR WAY IN.”

She then lowered the megaphone and watched the movements visible inside the cockpit, hoping that her next vision would not be an AK-47 assault rifle pointed at her. To her relief, no shots were fired and the two port side doors opened after maybe thirty seconds. Ten DHS assault agents immediately ran inside, disappearing in the plane, while Port Authority policemen stayed around the plane to stop anybody from jumping out through an emergency door or from approaching the plane. Jane got a radio call on her handset less than a minute later.

"Agent Hatfield, this is Assault Team Alpha: we have encountered no resistance aboard, but the plane is effectively full of passengers, including some old people and children."

"Those passengers, do they look American?"

"Yes, maam! They however are all dressed funny, in an old fashioned way. The stewardesses, four of them, also wear old Pan Am uniforms, just like in the television show PAN AM."

"Alright, I am coming aboard."

Breaking into a run, Jane hurried to the nose door staircase and climbed it two steps at a time, her service pistol in her right hand. Once she entered, she met two of her armed agents that were keeping an eye on the occupants of the cockpit and on the plane's stewardesses, sitting in their seats with their hands on their heads, like the passengers. Jane felt bad on seeing the fear and terror on the faces of many of the occupants, particularly those of women and children. Some others however, men mostly, appeared angry or indignant but didn't dare protest under the glare of the armed agents. Jane had a quick look inside the cockpit, finding three crewmembers in white shirts typical of airline crews. She couldn't help think that the cockpit instrumentation looked nearly primitive compared to what she had seen on the airliners she used. Turning to the assault team leader, she gave him a series of short orders.

"Alright, here is how we will proceed. Have one passenger at a time rise from his or her seat and come forward here with his cabin luggage. They will then be searched for weapons and explosives, then will be escorted down the stairs and onto our buses. Once the plane is empty of occupants, I want it searched thoroughly for explosives and other dangerous substances. The unaccompanied luggage will also be inspected carefully. However, proceed without undue brutality and stay polite for the moment: these people don't strike me as a bunch of terrorists. Crazy pranksters, maybe, but that doesn't deserve a bullet. I will stay here to help search the female passengers."

"Understood, maam."

The agents started with the flight crew and the stewardesses, giving them orders firmly but not pushing them around. The one claiming to be the captain, a fairly big man with grey in his black hair, looked indignantly at Jane as he was patted down.

"I must protest such a treatment of my crew and passengers, miss. We are American citizens and we have rights!"

"American citizens flying in an aircraft from a company that went bankrupt over twenty years ago?"

That only seemed to infuriate more the pilot.

"What is it with this story of Pan Am being out of business? And this airport is nothing like Idlewild Airport. Why name an airport for a senator running for presidency anyway?"

A cold shiver suddenly went down Jane's spine as she stared at the pilot.

"And what date do you think you are, mister?"

"What date? April 23, of course!"

"Of what year?"

"Uh, 1959. What else could it be?"

Not knowing if she should be angry or afraid, Jane looked grimly at the man.

"Mister, today we are on October 6 of the year 2015. President Obama is in office and John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 in Dallas, Texas. Or will you pretend that you didn't know that?"

The look of outright shock and disbelief on the captain's face seemed real enough to Jane. So were the looks of the stewardesses, who were nearby and had obviously heard the exchange. One of them, a beautiful young redhead, even fainted, prompting her comrades to go to her help. Now full of doubts, Jane had the searches stopped for a moment and started going slowly down the central aisle of the plane, examining the passengers one by one. She didn't go very far, as she had to stop in the first class section besides two rows of seats, looking down in shock at their occupants. With sweat breaking on her forehead, she pointed the passengers in succession.

"You, you, you and you, may I see your passports, please?"

"And you promise us that your goons will not shoot us the moment we rise from our seats, miss?" Asked in a caustic tone one of the two men she had pointed.

"Don't worry, sir. Just get your passport, please."

Jane then stepped back to let the two men and two women she had pointed get up so that they could get at their luggage in the overhead bins. That prompted an old and frail woman in her seventies to touch her forearm and look at her severely.

"And what about me? Don't you want to see my passport too?" She said in a good English tainted with a French accent.

"Should I, madam?"

"For a young lady as badly dressed as you are, I believe so."

The old lady then searched quickly in her handbag, stashed in the pocket of the seat forward of her, and fished out a French passport, giving it to Jane.

“And don’t lose it, miss! I intend to travel still quite a lot.”

Looking inside the passport, the name Jane saw under the picture of the old woman didn’t tell her anything at first. Then she saw the expiry date of the passport. The four other passengers next gave her their passports and this time she recognized their names, as she had recognized their faces. Either this was the biggest, most elaborate hoax ever made, or...

“So, what do you think, miss?” Said the old woman, interrupting Jane’s thoughts. “Do you know now who I am?”

“I’m not sure, Madame Chanel.”

The old woman then did a dismissive gesture.

“Forget the name in my passport. They know me better as Coco Chanel, my dear. And don’t call me Madame: I never married and never will.”

Pale as a ghost, Jane hurriedly gave back the passports to their owners before hurrying towards the front exit door: she really needed fresh air badly.

At the end of concourse B of Terminal 4, a man in his early thirties was looking with interest at the Pan Am plane through the large bay windows. Roger Hausmann had thought at first that this plane was possibly one used as a prop for a television series cancelled over three years ago and had taken out his camera with zoom lens to take some pictures of it. However, something definitely strange was happening, with police cars all around and what looked like a SWAT team entering the plane. There were no big cameras present to say that this was simply a movie scene being filmed, so he was now thoroughly curious about all this. Then, people started coming out one by one of the plane, escorted by armed officers that made them board big government buses. Roger raised again his camera and focused on them with his big zoom lens, a tool he knew well how to use as a photo-journalist. The firsts to come down under escort seemed to be the flight crew and the stewardesses, of whom he took a few pictures. Then came the first passengers. The fifth such passenger, a beautiful blond woman in her thirties or so, made him pause. Then he saw the man behind her and he started clicking away frantically.

CHAPTER 3 – LOCKED UP

10:52 (New York Time)

Tuesday, October 6, 2015

Brooklyn Metropolitan Detention Center

80 29th Street, Brooklyn

New York, United States

The mood aboard the buses transporting the passengers and crew of Pan Am 164 was a mix of bewilderment and despair. By now, the word that they were in the year 2015 had gone around and the sights of modern cars and planes on the way from the airport had been enough to convince the most skeptical. Bill Cannon was the one feeling the worst about it. Apart of contemplating the prospect of never seeing his family again, he also felt responsible for the other 114 people from his plane, all of which had families and careers back in 1959. At least, the armed agents escorting them had not been brutal with them and had stayed polite. Cannon could see that they were themselves unsettled, many of the agents starting to believe that the Pan Am flight had really come from the past.

The bus transporting Cannon, his crew and 29 passengers, plus two DHS agents, finally turned into a garage entrance of a large, eight storey-tall grey concrete building situated near the shoreline of Brooklyn facing Manhattan. The three other buses and the five cars and three vans escorting them also entered the large garage, with the steel garage doors them coming down and closing. More armed, uniformed men were waiting inside for them, along with a big man in his fifties with blond hair. The big blond man went first to the escort cars to shake hands with Jane Hatfield, Scott Benson and Daniel Munsen.

“Leonard Sullivan, Warden of the BMDC, at your service.”

“Jane Hatfield, DHS Senior Agent. I have with me Senior Agent Scott Benson, of the FBI, and Lieutenant Daniel Munsen, of the JFK Airport customs services.”

Sullivan grinned as he shook hands with Jane Hatfield.

"I know Lieutenant Munsen well, actually: he provides me regularly with inmates, illegal immigrants caught traveling with false papers or couriers caught with drugs or contrabands. So, what do you have here? You were kind of cryptic on the telephone, Agent Hatfield."

Jane sighed, trying to decide where to start in describing this incredible mess.

"Warden, I will first ask you the utmost discretion concerning this whole case and these people I am transferring into your care. Second, I will ask you to treat them gently and politely, as I believe that most of them are genuine American citizens who probably broke no laws."

"Then, why arrest them at all?" Replied Sullivan, frowning. "I have here in this facility close to 3,000 criminals, including convicted murderers, thieves, drug dealers and rapists. And you want me to hold here over a hundred law-abiding Americans?"

"There are also complete families in the lot, with young children." Added Munsen, bringing shock to Sullivan's face.

"Children? But, I am not mandated to keep juveniles here."

"The alternative would be to separate young children from their parents, Warden Sullivan, which I would hate to see happen in this case." Said Jane Hatfield. "There is more: I will ask you to prohibit for the time being any contact with the outside for these people, for reasons of national security. That means no lawyers, no phone calls and no visits of any kind."

Sullivan's jaws tightened and he glared at Jane, while his voice became hard and cold.

"So, Agent Hatfield, you are asking me to deny all fundamental legal rights to a group of law-abiding American citizens, rights that even convicted murderers and rapists enjoy here. And you want me also to hold young children and deny them their rights as well. I'm sorry, Agent Hatfield, but this is the Brooklyn Metropolitan Detention Center, administered by the Federal Bureau of Prisons, not Guantanamo Bay or some CIA secret overseas torture center. Now, give me one good reason not to arrest you right now for illegal detention and gross violation of legal rights of American citizens."

Having expected such an outburst, Jane stared back into the eyes of the furious warden and held her ground.

"As I said, it is for reasons of national security, Warden Sullivan. It is also for the own good of these people, who may become circus freaks if word of their presence break out in the medias. Know that these people are the crew and passengers of a Boeing B707 bearing the colors of Pan American Airlines that just landed under fighter

escort at JFK. They claim to have left Paris on April 23 of the year 1959 and landed with the impression that they were still in 1959, or so they say. The problem is that I am seriously starting to believe them.”

“But, that’s nuts! How could this be possible? Couldn’t this be simply one big hoax?”

“I thought that as well...at first. Then, when I started checking them and their plane, doubts started appearing in my mind. What shook me most, though, was the presence aboard of five passengers in particular, with other passengers also being quite unsettling.”

“And who are precisely those so-called unsettling passengers, Agent Hatfield?”

“I think that I will present you to them instead, Warden Sullivan. How is your knowledge of the culture of the 1950s by the way?”

“Well, I wasn’t even born then, but I still remember the movies and music of the time. Why?”

Instead of answering, Jane started walking towards the first bus, soon followed by an intrigued Sullivan and by Scott Benson and Daniel Munsen. One of the DHS escort agents opened the door of the bus for Jane, who then climbed inside and selected six passengers, asking them to come out with her.

Leonard Sullivan was at this point nearly ready to refuse outright to accept all those people in his facility and was also furiously tempted to charge Jane Hatfield for abuse of power and illegal arrest. However, the story she had just served him was so crazy that he had to see these supposed controversial passengers before making his mind for good. The first passenger to come out of the bus after Jane Hatfield was a stunningly beautiful blond woman carrying in her arms a little girl of maybe two years of age. As Sullivan’s mind raced to put a name on the woman, a second blond woman, as beautiful as the first one, stepped down from the bus. This time, the warden didn’t need to think to recognize her and his mouth opened wide in shock and disbelief.

“Miss Monroe? Is that really you?”

“Of course it’s me, mister!” Replied the famous actress, apparently pissed and with good reasons to be. Sullivan then made the connection with the first woman and looked at her and the little girl.

“And you are Grace Kelly, I suppose?”

"For you, mister, it is Your Serene Highness, Princess Grace of Monaco. This is my daughter, Princess Caroline. I hope that this legal farce is about to end?"

Before Sullivan could answer her, a third woman and two men stepped down from the bus, lining up besides Marilyn Monroe and Grace Kelly. The warden suddenly felt dizzy. He was now looking at Coco Chanel, the fashion icon of the 20th Century, at the renown actor and comedian Jack Lemmon and at the famous journalist and TV broadcaster Edward Murrow. Jane Hatfield then had the crew of the Pan Am plane step out. The sight of the four stewardesses in their powder blue uniforms, made well known by a popular TV show a few years ago, finished unsettling him. With sweat breaking on his forehead, he eyed Jane Hatfield, his face haggard.

"I see what you meant, Agent Hatfield. I will accept these people and will make sure they are treated with utmost respect but also with discretion. I will go arrange for segregated cell blocks for them: we wouldn't want these people to have to stay with convicted criminals. You will have also full access to my facilities to interview and process them."

"Thank you, Warden. In truth, I still don't know how Washington will react to all this. I guess that I will have to hurry in documenting these people in order to support their story and identities. I hope that you have a few computers with Internet access here."

"Uh, what is this 'Internet' thing you just mentioned, miss?" Asked hesitantly Edward Murrow, making Jane Hatfield and Leonard Sullivan exchanged befuddled looks.

After a delay of over half an hour caused by the necessity to urgently relocate the prisoners already occupying two cell blocks, Leonard Sullivan had the crew and passengers of Pan Am 164 move with their luggage in small escorted groups to their reserved cells. Despite being as discreet as he could make the whole thing happen, the groups still had to walk by other cells and down corridors where guards and inmates circulated. By the time all 115 occupants of Pan Am 164 were in their two cell blocks, one for men and one for women and children, Sullivan knew that rumors were already flying around the whole detention center. In order to minimize their moves, Sullivan also agreed with Jane Hatfield in processing the newcomers in their cells, which were actually large communal rooms filled with double bunk beds. That process, interrupted for lunch, took a good two hours, even with the help of FBI agent Scott Benson and his

team. In parallel, four DHS agents, helped by Sullivan's secretarial staff, started researching the Internet and various government databanks, using the names of the internees and their preliminary interviews. By four in the afternoon, Janet Hatfield and Leonard Sullivan had gathered enough evidence to dismiss with near certainty the possibility of a hoax.

18:06 (New York Time)

Oval Office, White House

Washington, D.C.

The President had been as surprised and intrigued as anyone else when he saw the six o'clock news on television this evening, just before he left the Oval Office to have supper. The problem with that was that, as the President of the United States, he had a small army of staffers and aides dedicated to preventing such surprises or at least warn him in advance of the common mortals. To see an obsolete Boeing B707 painted in the colors of Pan Am on a tarmac at JFK Airport, along with long-distance pictures of what appeared to be past celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe and Jack Lemmon, both dead for years now, was in his mind something he could and should have been told before it went in the media news. His first call was thus to his Secretary of Homeland Security but, to his irritation, he only got her answering machine. Terminating that call at once, he composed this time the number of the Director of the FBI, getting an answer after the second ring.

"Robert Mueller speaking!"

"Bob, this is the President. I just saw on the news that an old Boeing 707 bearing the markings of Pan Am has landed this morning at JFK and that its occupants were then arrested by DHS agents. A journalist's pictures of those occupants showed what looked furiously like the famous actress Marilyn Monroe, along with actor Jack Lemmon. The news report said that some official at JFK called the incident an elaborate hoax when questioned by reporters. I couldn't get in touch right away with Janet Napolitano to learn more about this. Could you check on this story and then report to me as soon as you can?"

At the other end of the line, the FBI director silently thanked his luck for this opportunity to cut the grass from under the DHS's feet.

"I will get on this right away, Mister President."

"Thank you, Bob. I appreciate that."

After the President cut the line, Mueller immediately speed-dialed another number, calling the FBI national operations center and getting hold of the senior agent on duty at this time.

"Senior Agent Martin, this is Director Mueller. What can you tell me about that old jet that landed this morning at JFK while bearing the colors of Pan American?"

"Sir, a team of agents went to JFK just before it landed, after being warned by someone at the airport. That jet, a Boeing 707, had a total of 115 crew and passengers aboard. They claimed to have left Paris in 1959 and had very convincing disguises and papers with them. The lot was then hauled away by DHS agents to the Brooklyn Metropolitan Detention Center, where they are presently being detained and processed. One of our senior agents is there with them at this time, sir."

"Did he report to you yet?"

"No sir! Shall I press him about this?"

"Yes! Uh, on second thought, have him call me right now on my personal phone. You have my number?"

"Yes sir! I will have him call you in the minute, sir."

"Thank you. You can tell him that, if I don't get a call from him within ten minutes, he can then expect to be transferred to Alaska."

"Uh, understood, sir."

Mueller then cut the line while chuckling. He was not the sort to be mean enough to make good on such a threat for so little, but some pressure often produced miracles.

He effectively got a new call less than two minutes later.

"Sir, this is Senior Agent Scott Benson, calling from the Brooklyn Metropolitan Detention Center."

"Thank you for calling me this quickly, Senior Agent Benson. What can you tell me about this supposed Pan Am jet and its occupants?"

"Uh, sir, the problem is that I believe now that we have enough hard evidence here to say that this jet and its occupants really came from the year 1959, through some kind of bizarre accident they could not explain themselves."

"WHAT? THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!"

"I know that this is hard to believe, sir, but we have positive identifications via fingerprints of many of the occupants of that plane, who are by the way in majority American citizens. Furthermore, those occupants include at least five persons well known historically. These are Marilyn Monroe, Jack Lemmon, Princess Grace of Monaco, Edward Murrow and Coco Chanel. There is also Princess Caroline of Monaco, the daughter of Princess Grace, who should have been in her fifties right now but is here a two year old toddler girl. You can add to that a brigadier general of the US Army and a Colonel of the US Air Force carrying authentic but thoroughly outdated classified documents, a TEXACO Vice-President and the American trade consul in Paris, all of whom we had old government dossiers on with fingerprints records. Our Internet searches gave us good pictures of them as they appeared around 1959: they match perfectly and none of these people had traces of surgical face lifting, except for Marilyn Monroe, who had documented facial surgery in her youth. About her, I was able to get the autopsy made on her body in 1963, when she died of overdose: her dental records from that autopsy match perfectly the dental work of the Marilyn Monroe we have now in Brooklyn. Finally, we ran voice analysis of those with public records and those match as well. We have taken DNA samples as well but it will take a while before we get any results from them. Sir, if this is a hoax, then it is the most elaborate and incredibly accurate one I ever saw or heard of. In my opinion, and that of the senior DHS agent present here, we should proceed as if these persons are who they claim to be and that they really came with their plane from April 23 of 1959."

Mueller had to sit while he digested all this, shaken to the core, speaking again only after a long pause.

"And what would you counsel that we do with these people, Agent Benson?"

"Foremost, that we treat them decently instead of locking them up like criminals, sir. Second, I believe that it would be in our interest to find a way to return them to their proper time period, if that is at all possible."

"Why?"

"Because they simply don't belong here, sir. God knows what their disappearance in 1959 will cause in that year. This may just unravel history as we know it, sir."

"Hum, you may have a point. And what does the DHS plan to do with them?"

"I don't know yet, sir. To be frank, their senior agent here, a Jane Hatfield, is a capable one and seems to be in agreement with me on how to treat these people, who

by the way include many young children. Agent Hatfield is still awaiting a response from her headquarters.”

That attracted a snort of derision from Mueller.

“Count on Napolitano’s boys to act with lead feet. Alright, thanks for your report, Agent Benson. Stay in Brooklyn but send as soon as you can a detailed report to our national operations center, with immediate priority. On my part, I will alert the White House about all this. Good work, Senior Agent Benson.”

“Thank you, sir. Have a good evening.”

“You too, Benson.”

Mueller then cut the line and took a minute to think through the implications of this incident. If that plane had really come from 1959, then it would prove that time travel, at least towards the future, was possible after all, something of possibly high interest in terms of national security. On the other hand, he agreed with Benson that innocent Americans didn’t deserve to be kept in detention incommunicado for anything but the shortest possible time. The echoes of human rights abuses committed in the name of national security during the past decade since 9/11 still brought shame to him and to many other Americans and he had no wish to commit more such abuses himself. This whole case called for delicate handling, with someone high enough in the administration put in charge to make sure that no slipups or abuses were committed. With this in mind and with a possible name for the one to be put in charge, Mueller called the Oval Office.

19h10 (New York time)

Brooklyn Metropolitan Detention Center

Leonard Sullivan put on his best smile as he entered the communal cell holding the women and children from the Pan Am flight. Four prison guards followed him in, pushing two trolleys supporting large flat screen television sets and DVD player units.

“If I may have your attention, ladies! I have two announcements to make. First, your cell and the adjacent one holding the men from your flight will be kept unlocked from now on and you will be able to freely go between your two cells to visit your husbands or other passengers and crews. Only the ends of your mutual corridor will be guarded and locked. It isn’t much but I hope that Washington will soon act and provide you with more appropriate accommodations.”

“What we need is to go home, mister.” Replied in a feisty tone Coco Chanel, making Sullivan shrug.

“I am sorry, Miss Chanel, but understand that, even in 2015, we don’t know how to travel through time. Until we can learn or figure out how you got here from the year 1959, there are precious few chances that we will ever be able to send you back in time.”

While truthful, Sullivan realized immediately that he had chosen the wrong words, as many of the women started crying or sat down, despair on their faces. He then tried his best to make out for it.

“Whatever happen, ladies, I promise you that you will all be treated decently here in this time period. Our government now knows that you are here completely involuntarily and that you are no criminals.”

“And you think that no one will try to exploit us for their own profit?” Replied Marilyn Monroe, sarcastic. “We may now be in 2015, but I don’t believe that human nature has changed this much. As for politicians, they will never change, and certainly not for the better.”

Sullivan couldn’t help mentally agree with her, especially with the way the American Congress had become a near-madhouse in the last five years. The same could be said as well about the rest of the World.

“While I agree with your opinion of politicians, Miss Monroe, I assure you that President Barak Obama doesn’t care for those who ignore or violate the human rights of others. I am sure that he will do the right thing concerning the people of your flight.”

“Barak Obama?” Said one of the Pan Am stewardesses, Mary O’Malley. “His name doesn’t sound very American to me, especially for a president.”

Sullivan didn’t know what to say to that at first. For Americans from the 1950s, Barak Obama indeed sounded most foreign as a name.

“President Obama is a Democrat, miss. He also happens to be the first-ever black president elected and is presently in his second term in office.”

That created a small storm of surprised exclamations around him, some of which could have been qualified as racist. Again, the culture of 1959 was proving to be quite different from that of 2015. The prison’s infirmary had nearly run out of nicotine patches in order to provide for the people from Pan Am 164, of which a much greater proportion than in 2015 smoked, some very heavily, like the three-pack-a-day Edward Murrow.

"A black president..." Said with a slight smile Marilyn Monroe, historically known to have been an equal rights person. "Maybe politics can improve, after all."

"Let's forget politics tonight, ladies." Said hurriedly Sullivan, trying to change subject. "I have brought with me two television sets so that you could watch recorded movies to help pass the time. One set will be reserved for your children, with an appropriate selection of films for them. The men's cell will also get two television sets. If any of you wishes to go view movies with your men, that is fine with me, as long as you return to your cell by curfew time, which for your group will be at midnight."

"What about some news, regular television programming, newspapers?" Asked Grace Kelly. "How can we be expected to behave correctly if we know nothing of this time period?"

Sullivan thought that over for a moment. He himself had just said that the chances of these people ever being able to go back to 1959 were about nil. They would eventually have to be introduced to this time period, especially if they would have to integrate it.

"A good point, Your Highness. I will send two technicians to connect your televisions to the cable service and will have a selection of newspapers and magazines delivered to your cells."

"Thank you, Warden. That will be much appreciated."

While he had acted with good intentions in mind, Leonard Sullivan had without knowing it just complicated greatly the situation of the people from Pan Am 164.

CHAPTER 4 – GOLDEN CAGE

09:18 (New York Time)

Wednesday, October 7, 2015

Brooklyn Metropolitan Detention Center

80 29th Street, Brooklyn

New York, United States

Leonard Sullivan was accompanied by Jane Hatfield and Scott Benson when he visited again the cells of the occupants of Pan Am 164, starting this time with the men's cell. All of the inmates were up or at least awake, many glued in front of their two television sets or reading newspapers.

"GENTLEMEN, I HAVE AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT TO MAKE!"

Once the volume on the televisions had been turned down and he had the attention of all, Sullivan continued.

"Gentlemen, I am here to tell you that you can expect in about thirty minutes a visit by the Vice-President of the United States. Those who have not shaved or dressed yet may want to do so now."

"Is he here to free us?" Asked at once Bill Cannon. That prompted Jane Hatfield to take over from Sullivan.

"I have not been told yet what will follow, but I can tell you that things are moving and that you can expect to be moved out of here soon, probably sometimes today. To where I don't know yet but it certainly will be a better place than this. We will now let you get ready for that visit. Be advised that the Vice-President will address all of you together, men, women and children. We will see each other in half a hour."

The trio then departed, leaving a crowd of sixty or so men hurrying to get properly dressed and shaved.

At nearly ten o'clock, the women and children from the other communal cell joined the men of the flight, just before eight men and women in dark suits and sunglasses came down the corridor, looking sharply around them and making a quick but thorough inspection of the men's communal cell. Four minutes later, a woman that

looked in her late fifties and wore a fine blue-grey female suit entered the cell, closely escorted by four men in dark suits. Jane Hatfield came to attention then and called out loud.

“LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, MADAM HILLARY RODMAN-CLINTON.”

The reaction of many in the Pan Am crowd was at first one of utter surprise. Then many of the women appeared to be thrilled, while a few men showed some skepticism. On her part, the Vice-President wasted no time going to Grace Kelly to shake her hand.

“Your Serene Highness, I am truly sorry that you have been forced to live through this, but I can assure you that we have the ultimate good of all of you in mind.”

“Does this mean that we are going to be released, Madam Vice-President?”

“I truly wish that I could say it right now, Princess Grace. Unfortunately, this is a very complicated situation that needs careful consideration. However, I came to tell you all that your conditions will improve a lot today. I will now address you as a group, if you don't mind.”

Hillary Clinton then got up on a chair with the help of a Secret Service agent, to be seen by all. She looked slowly around the crowd before starting to speak in a strong but calm voice.

“Ladies and gentlemen of flight Pan Am 164, I would like to extend to you the sympathies of the government of the United States for the harsh plight that struck you yesterday. We fully realize that you are now separated from your families, loved ones and from all that you knew, and that you wish for nothing else than to go back to your proper time. However, the circumstances in which you were transported in time are not known yet and, to be completely frank, the prospects of finding a way to return you to the year 1959 are dim, to say the least. Technology has made huge leaps since 1959, unfortunately we still know nothing about time travel, or if it is even possible to do such time travel in a controlled way. All we have right now are some far-fetched theories involving natural forces in the Universe that we most probably will never be able to control. This said, I can assure you that my government will do the utmost to research the question and find a way home for you.”

Clinton paused for a moment, looking at the anxious expressions around her and noting with a pang of the heart that some of the women and even a few men were now quietly weeping.

"Right now, my government is resolved to treat you with decency and respect and to support you all in the best way possible during your present plight. While our experts and scientists start searching for a way home for you, you will be the guests of the American government and won't have to worry about how you are going to survive in the next few days and weeks. You will all be moved this afternoon to a hotel in Washington where you will be able to wait in much more comfortable surroundings, while the government studies what to do next. I have to advise you that you will not be allowed to leave that hotel or its immediate surroundings, or to receive visitors, at least for the next day or two. This is for your own protection, believe me. Many around this country will want to exploit your stories, or even your personal situations, to make a profit or to promote their own interests. Some may try to pass as relatives of yours, to then sell your story to the highest bidding tabloid or to try to gain access to your financial estates. Others may even try to do you harm, to prevent you from claiming back what was yours in 1959. There is also the possibility that foreign agents may try to find from you how you managed to travel through time. It is a sometimes crazy world out there, ladies and gentlemen, and not everybody will have only your wellbeing in mind."

Seeing Marilyn Monroe raise a hand to ask a question, the Vice-President pointed to her.

"Yes, Miss Monroe?"

"What about those of us who are already officially dead and have no relatives left alive in this world, like me?"

Hillary Clinton thought her answer while staring at the actress, who appeared to be on a severe emotional low.

"We will help you gain back a meaningful place in our society, Miss Monroe, and this applies to all of you. The foreign nationals in your group will start getting access to consular assistance from their respective embassies tomorrow, while counselors will be available to help you all, to trace back any living, authentic relatives of yours. Financial experts and government lawyers will also be on hand to help you reclaim any estate or financial asset that you may still be entitled to. We do not however expect to let the medias near you before another couple of days, so that you may have some time to put your minds back in order after this terrible blow."

"What about my plane, Madam Vice-President?" Asked Bill Cannon after raising his hand and being pointed by Hillary Clinton.

“It will be studied in depth but will be kept intact, so that it may be available if we ever find a way to send you home. If not, I still promised you that it will not be scrapped: it represents one of the pioneering moments in our aviation history and deserves a place at our national air museum.”

Bill Cannon wasn't sure if he should be flattered to hear that his plane was considered a museum piece, but he had by now seen enough to understand that it represented a technology that was hopelessly outdated by the standards of 2015. In fact, he was starting to wonder if his own commercial pilot's license was still valid. Probably not. Hillary Clinton then spoke again.

“As I said before, you will all be moved to Washington this afternoon. In fact, you will be traveling with me in one of the jets of the presidential fleet to Andrews Air Force Base, where we will board helicopters for your last leg of the trip. I have to warn you that the medias, especially those from television networks and from tabloid newspapers, will be very aggressive in trying to gain access to you and get a story. Don't be afraid if the surroundings of your hotel in Washington look like an armed camp: the soldiers and government agents around you will be tasked to protect you, not to keep you in jail.”

“And what if we want to leave that hotel, Madam Vice-President?” Asked a man in the crowd. “Are these soldiers going to keep us in by force?”

Hillary Clinton took a breath, realizing that she no longer could turn around that issue.

“Until tomorrow, yes! Again, that is for your own good. As soon as you are in Washington, I will be conferring urgently with the President on your behalf, in order to allow you to be able to move freely as quickly as possible. I can't promise you anything yet but, contrary to what some conspiracy theorists and doomsday prophets may already say, you will not simply disappear or be hauled away to some secret government prison.”

“Like that Guantanamo Bay Camp they talked about in the news last night?”

The pointed question shouted from the back of the crowd made Clinton mentally swear to herself. She had not been pleased on learning on arrival that these people had been given access to televised and printed news, even though she could not really fault Warden Sullivan for showing care for the detainees. If these people were to be returned soon to the past by some miracle, they would now do so while possessing some potentially very destabilizing information about the future, information that could in turn derail history as Clinton knew it.

“Our prison complex in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, is reserved solely for foreign terrorists classified as high threats to the national security of the United States, mister. Besides, that camp is due to close soon, on orders from President Obama. Where you are going to be is in fact a hotel that had been used until recently to house convalescing American soldiers and their families awaiting therapy or medical evaluations at the Walter Reed military hospital. That hotel has just finished being refurbished and is quite comfortable, apart from being near downtown Washington. It is no prison camp, I assure you. If there are no more questions, I will now leave you to go finalize the modalities of your move to Washington and to report to the President. Thank you for your attention, ladies and gentlemen and, again, do not despair: we are here to help you.”

Climbing down cautiously from her chair, Hillary Clinton then left with her escort of Secret Service agents. Jane Hatfield next took her place atop the chair.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to emphasize the words of the Vice-President: we have no sinister plans in mind concerning you. Some other people may imply it or try to convince you that we are up to no good, but I warn you to be careful about what some may say to you in the next few days. You may now want to have your bags packed for a sudden departure, as transport arrangements are still being made and any warning time may be short. For your information, I will be accompanying you to Washington, along with Senior Agent Benson of the FBI. There, we will help you trace back any living relatives of yours. Keep your hopes up, people.”

Jane then left as well, accompanied by Scott Benson and the other federal agents. The people from the Pan Am flight 164 looked at each other for a moment before breaking up in small groups and returning to their bunk beds to pack their few possessions left to them.

Hillary Clinton was not happy to see the media circus her caravan of official vehicles hit on exiting the garage of the detention center: it didn't bode well for what the people of the Pan Am flight could expect in Washington. Already, the wildest rumors and theories were circulating around the planet, from UFOs being involved to the appearance of the Pan Am flight having being caused by a supposed super-secret government program on time travel. France, which took care of consular services for the citizens of the Principality of Monaco, had contacted the State Department early this morning to demand the right for one of his consuls to visit Princess Grace and her

daughter Caroline, and demanding as well to see Coco Chanel. Delaying too much such consular visits could add diplomatic consequences to an incident that was growing quickly into a crisis.

The Pan Am detainees, as they were now widely known, were able to hear all these crazy theories concerning them on their television sets as they packed, with special coverage on them running on CNN and FOX. Most of these rumors and theories made them laugh, while some woke up some dark fears in a few of the passengers. Grace Kelly and Marilyn Monroe were particularly hit hard by these media stories, as some news director at FOX had the bad taste to show in a recurring loop short documentaries concerning their respective deaths and their aftermaths. Marilyn Monroe was shocked into a nervous depression on hearing that she had supposedly committed suicide in 1962 following a failing love affair with then President John F. Kennedy. The alternate theory presented about her death, that the Kennedy brothers had her killed to protect themselves from a looming sex scandal, only made Marilyn even more depressed, as well as suspicious of government intentions about her. In the case of Grace Kelly, apart from learning that she had died in a car accident decades ago, CNN showed recent footage of the Monaco royal family, including pictures of a 56 years old Princess Caroline, very much alive in 2015. The commentators had then wondered how there could be two Princess Caroline in existence at the same time, debating with some claimed scientific experts that this could mean the existence of a parallel world, one where the occupants of the Pan Am flight were now missing and considered long dead. Leonard Sullivan, now bitterly regretting his decision to provide access to current news to his charges, finally had enough and unhooked the cable connections from the television sets of the detainees, in order to protect their psyche from what was becoming a new sort of mental torture to them.

It was a depressed, morose and quite disturbed crowd that finally boarded buses in the internal garage of the detention center after lunch. It took over sixty policemen to keep the crowd of photographers and cameramen waiting outside the garage from rushing in and blocking the path of the buses, who were finally able to start rolling towards J.F.K Airport. Once at the airport, the buses rolled to a waiting Boeing B747 bearing the seal of the President of the United States, stopping at the foot of a mobile

staircase. Bill Cannon and his crew couldn't help gawk at the huge plane as they were about to climb the mobile staircase.

"God, I wonder what it is like to fly such a plane!"

"One thing is for sure, Bill: we will need to go back to school before being able to fly this big baby." Replied Denis Brayson before starting to climb the stairs with his hand luggage. He was met at the top of the stairs by a young and beautiful Air Force sergeant who greeted him with a big smile.

"If you will follow me, sir, I will guide you to your seat."

"Well, not everything is bad in this world." Whispered John White, who was right behind Denis, as the young woman was walking away with a sexy shake of her bum. Denis only managed a half smile in response, his mind still preoccupied by their impossible situation.

Twenty minutes later, with their luggage transferred to the holds of the big jet, the four engines of the B747 were started one after the other. With two fighter jets circling above the airport and waiting to escort the Vice-President's plane, the B747 soon started rolling along the taxiways, heading for the start of Runway 31L. Another twelve minutes and the giant plane was lifting off from the runway and climbed quickly before turning south-west towards Washington. The flight was actually quite short, the B747 barely having attained its cruising altitude before it started going down to land at Andrews Air Force Base, just outside of Washington, D.C.. There, Vice-President Clinton invited the people of Pan Am to follow her out on the tarmac, where they boarded buses with their luggage for a short, 300 yards trip to another portion of the main tarmac. Four big Air Force Sikorsky SUPER STALLION, plus a Sikorsky BLACKHAWK from the presidential fleet, then took them north-west, flying over downtown Washington and letting the Pan Am crew and passengers contemplate from the air the capital as it was in 2015.

14:25 (New York Time)

Mologne House Hotel

Grounds of the old Walter Reed Army Medical Center

Washington, D.C.

Hillary Clinton waited until all the people of the Pan Am flight had entered the lobby of the four-storey, brown and beige brick building, and had put down their suitcases and bags before speaking to them.

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Mologne House Hotel, a part of the old Walter Reed Army Medical Center. I said 'old Walter Reed' because the medical center was transferred a few years ago to the Bethesda Naval Hospital, which now serves servicemen from all our armed services. Mologne House has recently been renovated to act as a transient hotel for government personnel passing through or visiting Washington, but had not yet resumed officially its operations, thus making it ideal for our needs today. Nobody else will be using this hotel during your stay, thus you will have plenty of room to make yourselves comfortable. Mister Ramsay Weathers, to my right, and Miss Julie Collins, to my left, will make sure that you feel at home here during your stay and will take care of all your needs. If you need anything, ask for them through the hotel staff. Mister Weathers is a protocol officer from the White House, while Miss Collins is the manager of this hotel and is a retired Army logistical officer. Well, I will now let them take care of you while I go brief the President at the White House. I intend to visit you tomorrow and speak more with you on your needs and wishes. In the meantime, I wish you a nice stay in Washington."

Once the Vice-President and her escort agents had left, Julie Collins stepped forward and smiled to the crowd dressed in outdated clothes.

"Let me first also welcome you to the Mologne House Hotel. As its manager, I will be happy to cater to all your needs as much as is possible. The restaurant and bar of the hotel, along with all the other facilities, will be open to you free of charge. You will understand however that I will have to ask you to be reasonable in your use of the bar. I have seen in the past too many convalescing servicemen try to drown their medical problems with alcohol and I can assure you that it didn't work. If the barman or barmaid judges you to be too intoxicated, they will have the authority to refuse you more drinks. I will back them in this and government agents will be around the hotel to keep the peace. A doctor and nurse will also be available in the hotel if you do not feel well. Just advise the reception desk and they will pay you a visit. I will now ask the persons with children to step to the reception desk, so that we could attribute them suitable rooms."

The American Trade Consul to Paris, David Brown, stepped forward first with his wife and two young children, followed closely by Grace Kelly and her daughter Caroline. Four more families with children followed them, all getting executive suites with two rooms, a kitchenette and a bathroom. The majority of the passengers, being mostly unaccompanied men, got single rooms with bathroom. However, the Pan Am crewmembers elected to stay together as much as possible, with the four stewardesses asking for a single executive suite and the three male flight crews sharing the last available such suite. After a short hesitation, Marilyn Monroe approached Jack Lemmon and led him away from the others before speaking to him in a near whisper.

"Jack, I don't think that I possibly could stay alone by myself here without going crazy. I know that this will look and sound scandalous, but I would like to stay together with you during our time in Washington. We learned to know each other during the filming of our last movie and we both know that we each have our demons. Together, we may hold on better than if we were each on our own."

Lemmon, a divorced man that, despite his celebrity, always found time for others, contemplated the beautiful blond with surprise at first. Then his expression changed to one of understanding and he nodded his head.

"You are right, Marilyn: we will hold better together than separated. I promise you that I will not abuse the situation."

Marilyn then smiled for the first time since yesterday and she gently caressed his cheek with one hand.

"And I promise to try not to abuse the situation myself. Let's go to the reception desk together!"

Followed by a growing number of eyes, the two actors walked resolutely to the reception desk with their luggage, presenting themselves to Julie Collins, who was helping the two receptionists register the newcomers. Jack Lemmon put on the counter his passport and that of Marilyn Monroe and spoke as if all was well in the world.

"Miss, I would like a single room for me and my friend."

Julie Collins looked with big eyes at the two actors, trying unsuccessfully to hide her amusement.

"A single room for you and Miss Monroe? No problem, Mister Lemmon! I can give you Room 116, a studio suite with kitchenette and mini-fridge."

"That will be perfect, miss."

Lemmon took the two keys offered by Collins, then signed with Marilyn the guest book, which was quickly becoming a collector's item. Julie Collins had to politely remind them of the correct date then. There were more than a few whispered comments as Lemmon and Monroe walked hand-in-hand to the elevators, a bellboy pushing a cart filled with their suitcases. The couple managed to keep a straight face until the bellboy had dropped their luggage in their room and had left, then burst out laughing.

"Oh my, did you see their faces?" Said Marilyn, still giggling.

"Yeah! Maybe we should keep up the act: it could be fun."

"Deal!"

CHAPTER 5 – FALLOUT

16:52 (New York Time)

Wednesday, October 7, 2015

Office of the Vice-President, Old Executive Building

Washington, D.C.

United States

Hillary Clinton had been back at her desk in the Old Executive Building, across the street from the White House, for only a half hour after briefing the President about the Pan Am people. She now had to work double-time to take care of her other dossiers, which were still important. Too many things were going wrong around the World and in the United States, despite the best efforts of the Obama administration. Paramount were two major foreign crisis: first, the continuing financial and economic recession in many countries, including the United States; second, the apparent ongoing collapse of the Pakistani government, crumbling under the pressure of Muslim extremists, with the control of Pakistani nuclear weapons presently a big question mark. In the domestic arena, the reelection of President Obama, helped by his selection of Hillary Clinton as his Vice-Presidential candidate, had not stopped the paralysis of the Congress, still split squarely along party lines and with practically no law or budgetary measure able to pass without endless debates and filibusters. The word ‘politician’, either Democrat, Republican or Independent, was now firmly considered a dirty word by the large majority of the American population, something that Hillary Clinton regretted very much.

Her intercom buzzed as she was reviewing with growing frustration the latest budget amendment counter-proposal presented by the Republican Senate leaders: as usual, the words ‘flexibility’ and ‘compromise’ seemed to be absent from their dictionary. Making an effort to put a cheerful tone in her voice, she pushed the ‘speaker’ button on her intercom.

“Yes, Sharon?”

"Madam, I have State Secretary Burns on the phone for you. He says that it is urgent."

"Transfer him on Line One, Sharon."

Hillary wondered as she picked up her receiver if Burns' call had something to do with the Pan Am affair. The voice of the veteran diplomat quickly came on the line.

"Hillary, this is Joe Burns. I have right now with me the ambassadors from France and Monaco, who came to me with an urgent request. It is about the passengers of that Pan Am flight and they are quite firm about their request. Since you are the main person in charge of that dossier, could I slide this your way, if you wouldn't mind?"

"Let me guess: they want access to Princess Grace and to Coco Chanel."

"Uh, actually, they want more: they want their immediate release. Furthermore, their governments are considering that subject as a very serious one."

"I see! Very well, send them to the Old Executive Building: I will be waiting for them."

"Thanks, Hillary! That will give me more time to deal with this mess in Pakistan."

"Don't mention it, Joe. I will keep you apprised of the results of our meeting later tonight."

Hillary then put down her receiver and thought for a moment about how she was going to deal with those two ambassadors. Despite the minuscule size of the Principality of Monaco, its ruling family had very influential financial and diplomatic contacts and knew well how to play them. As for France, it was one ally the United States could not afford to alienate right now. Playing hardball without good reasons would be stupid of her. Her mind made up, Hillary returned to her reading.

Less than twenty minutes later, the French and Monegasque ambassadors were introduced in her office, with Hillary going to them to greet them with a handshake. In typical French fashion, the ambassadors also gave her an accolade and kisses of the cheek.

"Monsieur De Lafrenière, Monsieur Noghes, welcome! Please, sit! Would you like something, tea or coffee?"

"Thank you, but no, Madam Vice-President." Replied the French ambassador as he sat in a corner sofa pointed by Hillary. Noghes also declined the offer of refreshments, so the trio was able to sit and go down to business right away.

"So, what precisely could I do for you, gentlemen?" Asked Hillary with a smile.

The French ambassador nodded and spoke first.

“We know that you are a very busy woman and we wouldn’t want to waste your time, Madam Vice-President. I will then be direct: I came with Ambassador Noghes to secure the speedy release from American custody of all the passengers of French and Monegasque nationality that were aboard the Pan Am aircraft that landed yesterday morning at JFK Airport. Our request is particularly important concerning Princess Grace of Monaco and Miss Coco Chanel.”

“I understand your interest in this matter, Monsieur De Lafrenière, but you must understand in turn that the unexplained appearance of the Pan Am aircraft near our East Coast has raised some serious questions about what caused it and its possible implications for our national security. Both the plane and its occupants have barely started to be examined to try to find first if they are really what they claim to be, and second to find how they came here. I assure you that we are proceeding as fast as we can in this matter and that, if authenticated, the crew and passengers of the Pan Am flight will be promptly released, probably within mere days.”

The Monegasque ambassador then waded in, his face most serious.

“Madam Vice-President, you may not appreciate the full impact that this story had in Monaco, or its implications for the reigning family of Monaco. In truth, the whole of Monaco is upside down right now and it is facing a constitutional crisis of the first order.”

“Oh? Could you elaborate, please?” Said Hillary, truly surprised.

“Certainly, Madam Vice-President. To resume quickly the situation in Monaco, Prince Albert II is the present ruler of the principality, while his elder sister Caroline is for the moment the heiress presumptive until Charlene of Monaco, the wife of Prince Albert, produces a legitimate heir. Unfortunately, the first pregnancy of Princess Consort Charlene had to be terminated for medical reasons, so Princess Caroline is still directly in line for the throne.”

“I understand all this, Monsieur Noghes, but I fail to see the connection to the Pan Am flight, except maybe for the fact that there is now a possible young twin of Princess Caroline.”

“That fact has not escaped us, Madam Vice-President, believe me, but it is not the one that is our main concern in Monaco. It is Princess Grace that is now critical for the affairs of the principality. Simply said, Princess Grace is the mother of the present reigning Prince of Monaco, as well as that of the present heiress presumptive, and thus

would legitimately become the heiress presumptive herself. Furthermore, she would be able to claim back, as mother of the ruler, many if not all of the titles and estates she held until her official death in 1982. Those titles and estates represent actually a staggering amount of money and their transfer could throw the finances of Monaco in turmoil.”

“Just out of curiosity, Monsieur Noghes, how much approximately would those titles and estates be worth right now?”

“Approximately 1.2 billion dollars, Madam Vice-President.” Answered the Monegasque ambassador, making Hillary’s jaw drop.

“One point two billion dollars?! I had no idea she was worth that much.”

“Actually, the fortune of the whole Grimaldi royal family is publicly estimated at 3.5 billion dollars, Madam Vice-President. Without getting into the details, I can tell you that this figure is on the low side. So, you can see why I am anxious to meet with the Princess Grace from the Pan Am flight, as well as with the little Princess Caroline.”

“I do indeed, Monsieur Noghes.” Said Hillary before looking at the French ambassador. “And you, Monsieur De Lafrenière? What is the interest of France in the quick release of Miss Coco Chanel, apart that she is a French citizen?”

“She is not only a French citizen, Madam Vice-President, although that sole fact is enough for us to treat this case with the utmost seriousness. Coco Chanel is a national icon in our country and her name still brings prestige to French culture. Furthermore, the Chanel enterprises have an annual business output in the hundreds of millions of dollars. When the first pictures of her, coming out of that Pan Am jet, were seen in France, the reaction was no less than pandemonium, especially among the fashion industry. My President has since instructed me to gain her prompt freedom and return to France, and this in no uncertain terms. Of course, the liberation and return of any other French national that was on that plane would also be greatly appreciated by France.”

“And what if Miss Coco Chanel, or Princess Grace, refuse to leave the United States right away?”

Both De Lafrenière and Noghes were shocked by Hillary’s hypothetical question.

“Why wouldn’t they want to go back to France, Madam Vice-President?”

“Because we are a free democracy, Monsieur De Lafrenière. If and when we free them from their protective custody, it will be up to them where they want to go and what they want to do. May I remind you that Princess Grace has dual American-

Monegasque citizenship, while Miss Coco Chanel was justly famous for being a woman with a mind of her own.”

“Touché, Madam Vice-President.” Conceded De Lafrenière with a forced smile. “But we won’t be able to ascertain what they want if you keep them incommunicado. At the least, we would most appreciate if you would let us visit them, ideally this evening at the latest.”

Hillary sat back in her sofa, thinking over the request from the Frenchman. She finally made a nod of the head to him.

“I will agree to your request for a visit and interview, both by you and Monsieur Noghes. In fact, we can go right now: it will give me a good excuse to put back to later the reading of some rather frustrating documents.”

“Congressional documents, Madam Vice-President?” Asked Noghes with a smile, making Hillary smile as well.

“How did you guess, Ambassador Noghes?”

“Just a hunch, Madam Vice-President. Is your husband, President Clinton, planning to visit the people of the Pan Am flight?”

Hillary gave him a knowing look.

“With Marilyn Monroe as part of that group? Not if I can help it, Monsieur Noghes.”

18:13 (New York Time)

Mologne House Hotel

Washington, D.C.

Hillary Clinton’s convoy, with the official car of the French ambassador in tow, arrived at the Mologne House Hotel as the crew and passengers of the Pan Am flight were having supper in the hotel’s restaurant. Clinton and the two ambassadors, surrounded by a close-protection detail of ten Secret Service agents, quickly found Princess Grace of Monaco, who was eating at a corner table with her daughter Caroline and with Coco Chanel. They however had to pass close to the table used by Jack Lemmon and Marilyn Monroe, who got frankly curious looks from the ambassadors. On approaching the table of Grace Kelly and Coco Chanel, Ambassador De Lafrenière’s eyes fixed with intense interest the old fashion designer, while Ambassador Noghes

eyed Grace Kelly with growing reverence, bowing deeply to Grace once besides her table.

“Your Serene Highness, I am Gilles Noghes, Ambassador of Monaco in Washington. To see you so resplendent and beautiful, along with young Princess Caroline, is an indescribable honor to me.”

“To me as well, Your Serene Highness.” Said the French ambassador. “Jacques De Lafrenière, Ambassador of France, at your service. I am happy as well to be able to meet you, Miss Coco Chanel. Vice-President Clinton was kind enough to escort us here to see you, along with the other French citizens that were on your flight.”

“That was very kind of her.” Replied Grace Kelly. “Will you sit down with us? I was introducing my little Caroline to some American delicacies.”

Hillary Clinton couldn't help laugh on seeing the face of De Lafrenière when the French diplomat saw that the little girl, sitting in a high chair, was munching with delight on a French fry dipped in ketchup.

“Well, at least we don't call them freedom fries anymore.”

The meaning of her joke, while obvious to a modern American, was totally lost on Grace Kelly and on Coco Chanel. Hillary thus changed the subject as the group sat at the table, with the escort agents forming a loose circle around their table.

“I haven't had supper yet and I believe that you didn't either, Messieurs De Lafrenière and Noghes. Even though this restaurant may not rate much in a Michelin Guide, you are welcomed to eat here while we talk.”

“If the food here was good enough for your soldiers and their families, then it would be most rude of me to refuse your invitation, Madam Vice-President.” Said diplomatically De Lafrenière, while already dreading what he would see on the restaurant's menu. The menu, when brought to them by a waitress, proved less awful than he expected and he ordered a Filet Mignon steak for himself. He however nearly gave up on the wine list before settling by default on a, for him, low quality Bordeaux.

Hillary Clinton quickly realized that the two ambassadors would much prefer talk in private with their co-citizens, as they kept at first to small talk and to the way the Pan Am plane had found itself in the future. She thus let the ambassadors go up at the end of the meal to the suites occupied by Grace Kelly and Coco Chanel. Promising to wait for their return, Hillary then approached the table occupied by Marilyn Monroe and Jack Lemmon, who promptly invited her to sit with them.

"I understand from the few news we have seen that your husband was President of the United States a few years ago, Madam Vice-President." Said Jack Lemmon good-naturedly. Hillary nodded her head, realizing that he meant no disrespect.

"That's right, Mister Lemmon. Bill was President for two terms, from 1993 to 2001. I myself ran for the democratic presidential nomination for the 2008 elections but lost to Barak Obama, who then won the subsequent presidential elections."

Lemmon sighed with genuine embarrassment at his ignorance.

"There is so much that I, all of us from our flight indeed, need to learn to feel relevant to this time. I am not even sure that my brand of comedy will be appreciated now."

"It will, Mister Lemmon, I assure you of that."

"Do you know how the latest film we made in 1958, 'Some like it hot', did, Madam Vice-President?" Asked Marilyn Monroe, who had been anxious to know that since yesterday. Hillary nodded, smiling to her.

"I do, as a matter of fact. It was a huge box office success and was decades later voted the number one funniest film in history in a survey done by the American Film Institute. It also won the prize for best comedy at the 1960 Golden Globe Awards, where you won the prize for best actress, while Mister Lemmon won the prize for best actor."

"Hey hey! That's to my liking! Hit it, baby!" Exclaimed happily Jack Lemmon, exchanging a high five with an ecstatic Marilyn. The latter then looked again at Hillary, some worry returning to her face.

"Could it take long before we know if we can return to the past or not, Madam Vice-President?"

"To be frank, and while I am no scientist, I am afraid that finding a way to the past will take a very long time, if it is ever done, short of a miracle."

Marilyn's left hand then searched for Jack Lemmon's right hand on the table and pressed it nervously.

"And, if we can't go back, what will happen to us?"

Feeling truly sorry for these two and for the rest of the people of the Pan Am flight, Hillary then decided that they deserved the truth.

"Some of you will adapt well, some others won't. It is all up to your individual strengths. I am sure however that a famous and talented young actress like you will do well, especially now that women can play all kinds of roles and are not restricted

anymore to play simple sex objects. Even if you choose not to act again, just writing your memoirs would probably bring you a fortune.”

“But, I am not only after fame and fortune.” Said the actress in a sheepish voice while lowering her head. “Love and affection, true love and affection, is truly what I need.”

She seemed embarrassed when she raised her head again to look at Hillary.

“I have heard things in the news yesterday and this morning, things about a romance and a sex scandal with John Kennedy when he was president. I had not dated him yet when I left Paris in 1959, so I don’t really know what the news are talking about. Yet, my reputation seems to have been branded by that relationship in a most negative way. What is the truth about it, Madam Vice-President?”

Hillary felt her heart melt as she saw the hurt in the eyes of the actress.

“Marilyn, I think that it is time that we have a private chat, woman to woman. How about if we go to your suite to talk?”

“I would like that very much, Madam Vice-President.” Answered Marilyn before glancing at Lemmon. “I will be back soon, Jack. Don’t raid the bar too early, though.”

“I’ll manage, baby.” Said the actor with a smile. He watched the two women go, surrounded by six Secret Service agents, then eyed Jane Hatfield, who was finishing her supper at a nearby table.

“Agent Hatfield, how vulnerable are you to dating attempts by as-been actors like me?”

Jane grinned, amused.

“Not too much but, if you promise to sign an autograph for my grand-mother, who loved your films, I will let you sit at my table.”

“That’s a start.” Said Lemmon, satisfied, before getting up and changing tables.

Over one hour later, Hillary Clinton left the hotel with the two ambassadors, with Grace Kelly and Coco Chanel staying. As the convoy of limousines and armored SUVs started rolling away from the hotel, one of two men sitting in a car on Aspen Street, in line of sight of the hotel, spoke in a cell phone while following the convoy with his binoculars.

“Clinton and the two ambassadors are leaving, without the target. All the passengers are still in the hotel... We count still eight federal agents outside and around the hotel. There are probably more of them inside... Understood!”

The man then closed his cell phone and resumed his surveillance of Mologne House. His surveillance job was made much less risky actually than he had expected, thanks to the presence of numerous cameramen, reporters, paparazzi and television crews trying to get close to the hotel and its guests and keeping busy the policemen patrolling the grounds of the old Walter Reed Medical Center. The time was however not ripe to act...yet.

CHAPTER 6 – DIM PROSPECTS

11:39 (New York Time)

Office of the Vice-President

Old Executive Building, Washington, D.C.

United States

Hillary Clinton waited until her visitor had sit before asking the question she was burning to ask.

“So, Doctor Warner, what is the preliminary verdict of your study team?”

The physicist, a thin man with balding head and thick glasses, measured his words carefully.

“First, Madam Vice-President, I must stress that what I will say is only a preliminary assessment. We are talking about a phenomenon about which we know nothing about and have next to no clues to guide us. We interviewed at length the crew of the plane, apart from examining the said plane in all ways short of dismantling it in pieces. I am afraid that, up to now, the results are meager indeed. All the witnesses agreed that an intense flash or red light and the shock wave from an explosion immediately preceded the change from night to daylight. Furthermore, the captain told us that he saw his copilot as if through an X-Ray machine during the time of the flash. This suggests to me that some sort of intense radiation was at work then. The unusual red color of the flash of light also suggests to me that this flash and explosion was not caused by a standard nuclear explosion. We checked the plane for unusual radiation counts but came blank on that. Right now, my only plausible theory is that some anti-matter exploded near the plane and projected it towards the future.”

“Anti-matter?”

“Yes, Madam Vice-President. Anti-matter is basically like normal matter, but with its atoms having a reversed electrical charge. When put in contact with normal matter, anti-matter explodes violently, converting all its mass into energy in an explosion much more powerful than a nuclear bomb. The red color of the explosion could be explained by the time shifting of the light through time.”

“And where did that anti-matter come from, Doctor Warner?”

"Probably from space, Madam Vice-President. Anti-matter could not stay inside our atmosphere without exploding at the contact of air. We think that, possibly, a meteorite made of anti-matter entered our atmosphere in 1959 and then exploded, catching Pan Am 164 in its radiation burst and projecting it through time."

"But, then we are making very good progress on this, no?" Said Hillary Clinton, brightening up. Her enthusiasm was however quickly drenched by the scientist.

"Not really, Madam Vice-President. Please understand that, while we know about the concept of anti-matter, we could not possibly control it and its effects. Using the most powerful particle accelerators in the World, an infinitesimal quantity of anti-matter has been produced to date, but for only fractions of a second before it annihilated itself in contact with normal particles. We are still a long way from being able to produce and store any appreciable quantity of anti-matter, and still an even longer way from understanding all of its properties and from controlling said properties. That work will take decades, at best, if we ever can succeed. As for what happened to Pan Am 164, my assessment is that it was a pure fluke, an accident of natural origin that we are totally incapable of reproducing. It definitely was not the result of some attack by terrorists or hostile nation shooting a nuclear weapon at that plane. My team will continue its work but, to be completely frank, I am not optimist at all about finding a way to send that plane back to the past. If I were a passenger or crew from Pan Am 164, I would resign myself to live in this time period as best I can. They will probably die of old age before we ever understand better what happened to them."

Hillary sat back, her expression somber.

"Poor people. You realize what this will mean to those who are now separated from their families."

"I do and I sympathize with them, Madam Vice-President, but I unfortunately can be of little help to them. My counsel would be to help as much as possible those people to adapt to our time and to reintegrate our society."

"I was afraid of that, Doctor Warner." Said Hillary, her head low. "I will pass your preliminary assessment to the President. Please inform me at once if you find anything new."

"I certainly will, Madam Vice-President. Have a good day."

"You too, Doctor Warner."

Hillary shook hands with the physicist before he left, then went to sit back behind her desk. She was thoughtful for a moment before picking up her telephone and calling her aide at the Mologne House Hotel, Ramsay Weathers.

"Hello, Ramsay? This is Hillary speaking. Tell the people of the Pan Am flight that I will speak to them as a group this afternoon, at two o'clock. Also, arrange a media announcement for five o'clock, where I will speak on television about the Pan Am flight. The presentation will be done in the lobby of the Mologne House Hotel but reporters will not be allowed to roam the hotel... Yes, do that."

She then cut the line and composed another number.

"Mister President, this is Hillary. I am afraid that the preliminary assessment about the Pan Am flight is not very encouraging..."

14:08 (New York Time)

Restaurant of the Mologne House Hotel

Washington, D.C.

Hillary Clinton, having delivered in the most diplomatic way possible the bad news about their prospects for returning home to the people of the Pan Am flight, then stayed silent, observing their reactions. It was mostly ones of despair and grief, with many in the crowd weeping openly at the idea of not seeing again their families. Having already promised extensive relocation help via the assistance of psychological counselors and social services workers, along with extended government assistance, Hillary could say little more, so she went to Ramsay Weathers, her representative in the hotel, and Senior Agent Jane Hatfield. Both looked grim, obviously empathizing with the Pan Am people. She took them aside and spoke to them in a low voice.

"I am afraid that these poor people are here to stay for good. President Obama has promised me though that the government will not abandon them and will do the utmost to help them relocate and rebuild their lives. Some will be able to fit in rather easily, as in the cases of Princess Grace and her daughter and for Miss Coco Chanel. Both have the strong support of the French and Monegasque governments and have natural niches they can fit in. Brigadier General Foster and Colonel Ritchie will be pensioned off but the loss of their families will be undoubtedly very painful to them. The same goes to all these married men that were traveling alone. A team of counselors will come tomorrow morning to start actively assisting their relocation and I promise you that

there will be no such thing as mindless red tape here. Mister Ramsay, if you see any counselor or social services civil servant making roadblocks by sticking blindly to regulations, yank him or her out and report to me. I will then be most happy to fire that said counselor or civil servant.”

“What about Marilyn Monroe, Jack Lemmon and Edward Murrow, Madam Vice-President? They were big celebrities in their time but may be considered too outdated now by the entertainment industry.”

“Actually, Ramsay, I believe that they will do better than most in the Pan Am group: there will be enough book editors and biography producers interested in their life stories to make them at least well off. As for the plane’s crew, I have someone I know at American Airlines that should be able to arrange for their retraining. Hell, at worst I will offer them to join the Air force!”

“What about the present security arrangements, Madam Vice-President? If these people are not considered anymore as possible security threats, then we can hardly justify continuing to hold them under tight armed guard, incommunicado.” Demanded Jane Hatfield, making Hillary nod.

“I am going to throw a press conference in the hotel lobby at five o’clock this afternoon, to basically announce publicly what I just told these people. Reporters will be able to interview Pan Am people afterwards in this restaurant, but will then have to leave for the night and will be asked to keep their distances from this hotel. If they want further interviews, they will have to call Mister Weathers, who will arrange the meetings. The present security force level can hardly be justified now, so the FBI and Secret Service presence will be removed, leaving your DHS team in place, Senior Agent Hatfield, along with minimal Washington Police support. The ambassadors of France and of Monaco should pick up Princess Grace, her daughter and Miss Coco Chanel tomorrow afternoon, which will greatly relieve the security burden on your team. Do you have any more questions?”

“No, Madam Vice-President!”

“Good! I will stay here until the press conference: that will allow me to continue to lend these people my moral support. They will need all the help they can get.”

“That is most true, Madam Vice-President.” Agreed Ramsay Weathers as he eyed a man in his forties crying while sitting at a table a few paces away.

As Hillary Clinton expected, the announced press conference at the hotel turned into a near three-ring circus, with well over a hundred cameramen, reporters, press photographers and paparazzi showing up and elbowing each other to fit in the lobby. Not surprisingly, the people the media wanted most to see and hear were Grace Kelly, Marilyn Monroe, Coco Chanel and Jack Lemmon. Edward Murrow, not surprisingly for the Vice-President, attracted few questions or interview requests. Few in the public in 2015 knew or cared anymore about the radio and television reporter that had made such a heavy mark on the American public of the 1940s and 1950s and had helped make the mighty and most dreaded Communist-hunting Senator Joseph McCarthy fall from his pedestal. Murrow didn't remark on that but Clinton was able to see that it hurt him deep inside and thought for herself that an injustice had just been done.

On her part, Grace Kelly didn't surprise many when she announced that she would leave next afternoon with her daughter Caroline to go back to Monaco, where Prince Albert was waiting to see again his long-dead mother. That piece of news however was all a man who had entered the hotel under a false identity as a press photographer wanted to hear. Shortly after asking Grace Kelly who would pick her up, which she answered good-naturedly enough, the man left the hotel lobby and walked out of the old medical center's grounds, returning to a car parked far enough not to attract the attention of the police. Once sitting in the front passenger seat, the 'photographer' nodded to the man sitting behind the wheel.

"Tomorrow afternoon. The ambassador of Monaco will pick her up."

"Good! We are ready."

CHAPTER 7 – KIDNAPPING

13:52 (New York Time)

Friday, October 9, 2015

Main entrance of the Mologne House Hotel

Washington, D.C.

United States

Jane Hatfield, escorting Princess Grace and her little daughter, was glad to step in the fresh October breeze outside of the main entrance. After two days of occupation by the people of the Pan Am flight, the hotel now reeked of tobacco smoke everywhere, even though the regulations of the establishment prohibited smoking inside, except when in your room. Jane however encountered more cigarette smoke outside, finding herself downwind from a group formed by Edward Murrow, Jack Lemmon and Marilyn Monroe, to the left of the main entrance. Another group, formed by a male passenger and one of the stewardesses, stood to the right of the main entrance, smoking near one of the exterior ashtrays placed a few paces from the swinging glass doors. The man was apparently attempting, with some success it seemed, to date the young and pretty redhead. Smiling at that, Jane looked around sharply to check the security situation outside and was mildly satisfied. Two armed DHS agents in assault vests and Kevlar helmets stood close by, one on each side of the main entrance, while two pairs of similarly equipped agents were visible at each of the front extremities corners of the hotel. Jane knew that there was also another pair of armored agents near the back entrance, while she had two plainclothes agents inside, in the lobby. The Washington D.C. police presence was now however down to a single patrol car watching the entrance to the old medical center's grounds from Georgia Avenue and to another patrol car on the corner of 16th Street. It was a bit meager to her taste but she had to live with that.

Princess Grace, wearing a nice but outmoded ensemble, came out behind Jane, holding the hand of little Princess Caroline, with a bellboy following her and pushing a cart full of suitcases and bags. The ambassador from Monaco had promised to be here

at about two o'clock to pick up the two princesses and bring them to JFK Airport, where they would take a flight to France and Monaco. Prince Albert of Monaco had already announced on television from his palace that a great celebration would greet Princess Grace and her daughter and masses of reporters and photographers, along with many European royals and aristocrats, were already descending on Monaco and its surrounding countryside, fighting for the hotel accommodations available.

At about three past two, Jane got a short radio call from the police car at the entrance on Georgia Avenue, telling her that they had just let pass a black limousine with diplomatic plates flying the Monaco flag and escorted by a black SUV. The report did not say however if the policemen had checked the identity of the newcomers. Frustrated by that, Jane called back the patrol car in question but, by the time the Washington policeman, who seemed to be a rather lazy type, started answering her, the SUV and limousine were in sight of the hotel.

"Car 084, did you check the identity of the occupants of these two vehicles, over?"

"Uh, no. The vehicles were expected and wore diplomatic plates, over." Swearing to herself, Jane concentrated her attention on the approaching vehicles as she spoke again in her hand-held radio.

"Car 084, forget that: they are at the hotel now, out." She was about to tell her two nearby agents to be sharp and ready when Grace Kelly approached her with little Caroline, stopping just besides her.

"Are you coming with us to the airport, Miss Hatfield?"

"Uh, no, Your Serene Highness. Once you are with Ambassador Noghes, he takes charge of your security on the way to the airport. You should step back with your daughter now, until I have verified that this is Ambassador Noghes arriving."

"But, who else could it be? I can recognize the flag of Monaco on the limousine." Before Jane could answer, the black SUV leading the limousine rolled past her, stopping a few paces after the entrance and letting space for the limousine to stop in front of Jane and of the two princesses. Instead of the right-side front passenger of the limousine coming out to open the rear door for Princess Grace, the right side electric windows of both vehicles started coming down simultaneously. An alarm lit up in Jane's brain and she went for her pistol while stepping in front of Princess Grace to protect her.

"WATCH OU..."

Four shooters then opened fire from inside the two vehicles, while two armed men came out from the rear left side doors of the limousine. One of the shooters shot single, aimed rounds at Jane, obviously trying not to hit accidentally Princess Grace, but the other shooters were less discriminate, firing savage bursts of automatic fire from their assault rifles at the two armed agents standing besides the entrance. Both men came down without being able to fire a single shot back, with Edward Murrow and Jack Lemmon also hit and falling down in cries of pain. Marilyn Monroe, along with the stewardess and her date prospect, were luckier and were barely missed by the hail of bullets, flattening themselves to the ground to avoid more bullets. Jane was hit first near her right clavicle, then in her right upper leg, making her fall down on the concrete while dropping her pistol. One of the two men that had come out of the limousine ran to Princess Grace and brutally grabbed her by one arm before dragging her towards the nearby limousine. The second man then stopped for a short moment, taking the time to fire a long burst through the glass doors of the entrance and downing the two DHS agents that were about to rush outside. Jane, through the pain and red haze and while trying still to cover the crying little Princess Caroline, could hear more weapons firing, heavy caliber ones firing deliberate shots from a distance. The second gunman, coming to grab little Princess Caroline, stepped in front of Jane and pointed his assault rifle at her with a mean grin on his face.

“MUERETE, HIJA DE PUTA¹!”

Jane could do nothing but stare with blurred eyes at the man and his gun, expecting to die very soon. A pistol shot from behind and to the right of her then rang. The gunman, a bleeding hole now in his forehead, slowly collapsed without firing at Jane. More pistol shots rang in quick succession, aimed at the shooters inside the SUV and the limousine. The unknown shooter proved then to be an expert shot indeed, killing or wounding in a mere five seconds the three gunmen pointing rifles from inside the vehicles. With the place becoming hot and with Princess Grace now inside the limousine with her abductor, the attackers decided that it was time to go and accelerated away. Just then, as Jane was about to pass out, she saw in a red blur Marilyn Monroe, fear on her face, bend down quickly besides her to pick up little Princess Caroline and then run inside the hotel. Then, everything became dark.

¹ Muerete, hija de puta!: in Spanish ‘Die, daughter of a whore!’

22:40 (New York Time)

New Walter Reed Defense Medical Center (old Bethesda Navy Hospital)

Washington, D.C.

Jane woke up slowly, her throat dry and her eyes still unfocused, to find herself lying on a bed and with intravenous tubes plugged into her. She also found it difficult to concentrate and think at first and decided that she must have been given some painkillers. The white shape of what must have been a nurse appeared from the left of her bed and looked at her for a second before leaving the small room Jane was in. A look to her right revealed a window that gave a view of a large building complex. Her room was obviously at some height, maybe third or fourth floor level. So, she had survived and was now in a hospital, thought Jane to herself. She tried to raise her left arm to look at her watch but a wave of pain from the area of her right shoulder stopped her at once. Looking around her small room, she belatedly saw the wall clock hooked facing her bed and swore when she realized that she had been out for more than eight hours. Eight hours that the abductors of Grace Kelly were able to use to get away!

More movement from her left then made her turn her head in that direction, in time to see her supervisor at DHS, John Simpson, and FBI agent Scott Benson enter her room. By now her vision had regained its focus and she could see that both men wore grim expressions. John Simpson nodded his head and smiled to her, but there was little joy on his face.

"I am glad to see that you got out alive from this shootout, Jane. How do you feel?"

"Awful, to be truthful. I suppose that I underwent surgery."

"Correct! One rifle bullet went under your clavicle and pierced the top of your right lung before exiting through your right shoulder blade. Another bullet went through your right leg but luckily missed the femoral artery and the bone before exiting. The doctors however say that you won't be able to return to full service for at least five weeks."

"Five weeks! But, I can't lay helpless this long: Princess Grace was kidnapped on my watch."

"And it is not your fault, Jane." Replied firmly Simpson, not wanting her to cultivate a guilt feeling. "You did things by the numbers with the resources given you but

the bastards who did this came in with an incredible amount of firepower and with utter savagery. Apart of the shooters that were in the limousine and in the SUV, snipers with high-power rifles fired from cars parked along Aspen Street and took out our agents as they ran past the corners of the Mologne House Hotel. Then, as their four vehicles were fleeing, they shot indiscriminately around them, intentionally hitting civilian drivers to create obstacles behind them for pursuing police cars. Apart of nine of our agents killed and four more, including you, wounded around the hotel, a total of six civilians were killed and another nineteen others wounded by these maniacs as they fled. Unfortunately, their tactic worked and we have lost trace of them.”

Jane reflected bitterly on this bloody account: her whole security team was down, most of them dead, agents she knew well and had worked often with in the past. The 25 civilian victims were also a bitter pill to swallow.

“Do we know something about these bastards, sir? One of them was killed in front of me as he was going to finish me off and then take Princess Caroline.”

“We did get something from examining his body, actually.” Said Scott Benson, jumping in. “He wore a number of tattoos that are known to be worn by members of the Los Zetas Mexican drug cartel.”

“The Los Zetas? He did swear at me in Spanish just before being killed.” Simpson and Benson exchanged a quick look before Simpson continued.

“The methods used certainly correspond to those typical of the Los Zetas. These bastards are about the most savage, brutal and sadistic criminals known and their cartel was formed by ex-Mexican Army special forces soldiers that went rogue. They have proved too often already that killing innocent civilians by the dozens means nothing to them. Even by the bloody standards of the Mexican drug cartels, the Los Zetas stand out. They control half of Northern Mexico via a reign of terror and corruption and nobody there is safe from their violence. Unfortunately, it seems that they have now decided to extend their violence to the United States. President Obama is justly enraged by this attack and so is the American public. The President has ordered that all agencies be on the lookout for them and Princess Grace. Since they will probably try to return to the safety of Mexico with their kidnap victim, orders have been given for all airports, heliports and marinas and ports to be closely watched and for all ships and aircraft to be searched before being allowed to depart.”

“Then, at the risk of offending some State Department lawyers, may I suggest that we extend that watch to planes and ships bearing Mexican colors, even those who

would normally have diplomatic immunity? The Los Zetas are known to have bought off many Mexican officials, including state governors and army and police senior officers. Having a Mexican diplomat in their pay would not surprise me one bit.”

That attracted a nod from Simpson.

“Agent Benson, who is now in overall charge of this case, had the same idea. While discreet, a surveillance of all Mexican diplomatic personnel and their transportation means has been initiated, with the express approval of the President.” Jane felt better on hearing this and relaxed a bit.

“I am glad to hear that, sir. May I ask who saved me and shot that gunman, if my agents were all down, sir? I did not see who shot back at the bastards.”

“You may thank one of the Pan Am passengers for that, Jane. His name is Antony Mancini and he was standing just outside the main doors with one of the stewardesses when the shooting started. He was able to grab the pistol of one of our agent after our man was killed in the first bursts of fire, then shot back at the kidnapers.”

“A passenger? But, he shot like a real pro, sir.”

“That’s because he is a pro, Jane, or at least was.” Replied Simpson, smiling. “Mister Mancini is in fact a veteran of World War Two and fought with the Marines in the Pacific, where he was decorated for bravery. So, you owe your life to a war hero, Jane.”

“Hell, I will have to thank him when I have a chance to.”

Simpson’s expression then changed, becoming grim again.

“I am afraid that not all of the Pan Am people got out so well, Jane. Edward Murrow, the celebrated journalist, was killed outright in the shootout. Jack Lemmon was on his part wounded in a leg but will recuperate from it.”

“And Marilyn Monroe? She was also outside of the main entrance at the time of the attack.”

“She is safe. She also showed she had guts then: she picked up little Princess Caroline under fire and ran with her inside the hotel, thus potentially saving her from being abducted along with her mother.”

A musical tone then made Scott Benson search one of his pockets, taking out a cell phone and putting it to one ear.

“Scott Benson!... How were they killed?... I see! Thanks!”

Pocketing his telephone, Benson looked somberly at Jane and at Simpson.

"The Washington D.C. Police just found the bodies of Ambassador Noghes, his driver and his bodyguard: they were garroted to death. A preliminary examination indicates that they were most probably killed before the kidnapping of Princess Grace."

"Damn!" Swore Simpson. "That will cause a diplomatic tempest of the first order, apart from sending the medias into hyperboles."

"Those Zetas bastards are known to respect nothing, sir." Reminded Scott Benson. "If we ever get to corner them, I am afraid that a standard police SWAT team will not be up to the job."

The DHS supervisor thought that over for a moment, then nodded his head.

"You may be right, Agent Benson. I will call right away to get some, uh, higher-level tactical help."

Before leaving the hospital room, Simpson patted gently Jane's left hand.

"Don't worry about this case anymore and concentrate on recovering, Jane. We will take care of the rest."

"Me, not worry? How could I, with all the dead and wounded around me?" Simpson did not reply to that and left the room without another word, leaving Jane with Scott Benson. The latter gave her an apologetic smile.

"Well, I am afraid that I will have to leave you as well, Jane: I have a case to investigate."

"I understand, Scott. I have only one request for you."

"Oh, which one?"

"Show no mercy to the bastards who did this, Scott. Too many good people died because of them."

"I promise!" Simply said Benson before leaving. Jane, now alone with her thoughts, looked through the window of her room at the lights of nocturnal Washington, feeling totally useless.

01:17 (New York Time)

Saturday, October 10, 2015

**Tree line bordering a private estate on the Chesapeake Bay
Area of Annapolis, Maryland**

The two FBI agents, wearing dark informal clothes and hiding behind a big bush along the tree line parallel to the perimeter fence of the mansion, tensed up on seeing a

small van approach along the coastal road. One of the agents raised his night vision scope to one eye, while his companion pointed a digital camera equipped with a light intensification lens. Their interest intensified when the van slowed down and turned into the driveway leading to the mansion. One of the two armed men standing inside the steel gate went out via a small side door and spoke briefly with the driver of the van before unlocking and opening the large gate. As soon as the van drove inside the property, the guard closed again the gate and returned to his original post, his submachine gun at the ready. The FBI surveillance team watched as the van drove to the front entrance of the mansion and stopped. One man came out from the front passenger seat of the van and went to the rear doors as three armed men came out of the house.

“Damn! This place is like an armed fortress.” Swore quietly one of the FBI agents. “I have counted up to now at least nine armed men standing outside watch. You think that a simple consul rates this much protection, Ed?”

“A normal consul, no.” Replied the agent holding the camera as he took a number of pictures of the van and the men around it. “However, this Guerrero character seems to have way too much money for a simple diplomatic consul. Wait! They are taking something or someone from the van.”

“Make it a someone.” Said his companion, watching through his scope. He then felt excitement rise in him. “It’s a woman! A blond woman! She is wearing a large blindfold and I can’t positively identify her, but I could swear that this is Princess Grace. Make sure to take good pictures of her, Ed. I’m calling this in.”

As the senior agent was taking out his cell phone to call the command center of the special task force formed to find Princess Grace, he eyed the big yacht moored at the private quay of the mansion. If those bastards managed to leave with their prisoner in that boat, stopping them without putting Princess Grace at enormous risk would be very difficult indeed. On the other hand, assaulting this well-guarded mansion would be no easy feat either, especially considering that it was the official residence of a foreign diplomat.

A big, mean-looking man with brown skin standing on the porch of the mansion swore when his men took two plastic body bags out of the van after Grace Kelly was brought inside.

"Madre de Dios! We have lost two more men?" He asked to one of the men transporting the body bags. The latter, straining to carry the body, gave him a grim look.

"Pedro and Juan died from their wounds while at the Washington safe house, Jefe. That bastard who shot us up at the Mologne House Hotel knew how to shoot."

A flash of anger lit the big man's eyes for a moment before he calmed down and spoke.

"If I learn his name, I will make certain that he pays one day, slowly and painfully. Alright, go put the bodies aboard the yacht: we will leave in less than a hour. The quicker we leave American territory and get to the open sea, the better."

"Yes, Jefe!"

Letting the four men pass first with the two body bags, the burly man then reentered the mansion and went to a very nervous-looking fat man standing in the main lounge. The latter watched the body bags go by before looking angrily at the leader of the Los Zetas team.

"Do you realize the kind of risks you are making me go through by coming here like this?"

The criminal eyed the diplomat with cold, unmitigated contempt.

"We are the ones who took the risks while you cashed in our money, Señor Guerrero. Now, shut up and let us handle this!"

What he didn't say was that he would have gladly killed this coward if not for the fact that his status as a diplomat made him a precious asset to the organization. Looking next at their prisoner, he walked to her and forced her chin up with one hand. Fear was evident on her beautiful face and she was shaking but she clenched her teeth in order not to whimper. That impressed the gang leader, who liked women of character.

"Listen, and listen well, Miss Kelly. As long as you don't make trouble and stay quiet, you will be well treated. If you cause trouble or scream, you will be beaten. The more trouble, the more pain for you. Understand?"

"Ye...yes. What do you want from me?"

"From you, just your cooperation. From your son, Prince Albert of Monaco, a reasonable sum of 200 million dollars will convince us to let you go. Pray that he is sensible and pays up quickly."

"Two hundred million dollars? But, that would bankrupt the Principality. How do you expect him to be able to pay such a sum?"

The gang leader laughed out loud before answering her with a mean smile.

"He will pay, and for two reasons: first, he made a lot of money since 1959 and is now easily a billionaire; second, if he refuses to pay, then we will start sending you back to Monaco...one piece at a time, until he becomes reasonable."

Grace paled visibly at that threat but didn't reply. Satisfied, the gang leader pointed Grace to two of his men.

"Bring her on the yacht and lock her up in a cabin. Don't be rough with her for the moment, unless she acts stupid."

"Yes, Jefe!" Said one of the men before grabbing Grace Kelly by one arm. "Come with us, gringa²: you are going on a cruise."

The men laughed at that as she was led out of the lounge.

01:39 (New York Time)

White House, Washington D.C.

The President had been in bed for barely an hour when he was gently shaken awake by a Secret Service agent.

"Mister President... Mister President, wake up!"

"Uh, what is happening?"

"Princess Grace of Monaco has been located, Mister President. However, she is now on a yacht moored to the private quay of the Mexican Consul's residence on the shore of Chesapeake Bay. The FBI needs your authorization to act on diplomatic territory."

"The Mexican Consul is involved? The bastard! Okay, I'm getting up. Give me a minute or two."

"Yes, Mister President."

With the agent leaving his bedroom, President Obama slipped quietly out of bed in order not to wake up his wife, then put on a robe and slippers. He was still chasing away his fatigue when he stepped out of his bedroom and faced the head of his protective detail.

"Okay, who called?"

"Director Mueller, Mister President. He is at the command post of the special task force handling the abduction of Princess Grace."

² Gringa : Mexican slang for white woman.

“Alright, I will go to the Oval Office. Transfer his call there and get hold of Vice-President Clinton, Secretary of State Burns and Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano. I want to be able to make a conference call with all of them in fifteen minutes.”

“Understood, Mister President.”

Barak Obama walked quickly to the Oval Office, sitting down behind his desk less than three minutes later and picking up his telephone.

“Director Mueller, this is the President. What is the situation?”

“Mister President, one of our surveillance team watching the residence of the Mexican Consul, situated on the shoreline of Chesapeake Bay near Annapolis, saw about twenty minutes ago a van bring Princess Grace to that mansion. Ten minutes later, my men reported that she was being put aboard a big yacht moored at the private quay of the residence. Both the yacht and the residence are heavily guarded by armed men.”

“Are we sure that it was Princess Grace that your men saw, Director Mueller?”

“Completely sure, no, Mister President. However, armed men took out of the van a blond woman with her hands tied and with a large blindfold over her eyes. These men also took out of the van and put on the yacht two body bags. If this isn’t the gang that kidnapped Princess Grace, then I would call this sighting an incredible coincidence.”

“And the Mexican Consul, is he in that house as well?”

“Yes, Mister President. He was seen briefly standing outside the house with one of the armed men, discussing with him. I also have to tell you that all signs are that the kidnapers are probably going to leave soon on that yacht, Mister President. If we want to act, we will need to do it quickly and with sufficient force to overcome these criminals before they can hurt Princess Grace.”

“That yacht, does it belong to the Mexican Consul?”

“Yes, Mister President. Unfortunately, that makes it technically Mexican territory.”

Obama felt a brief wave of anger go over him: he was in no mood for technicalities and diplomatic niceties after the bloodbath those kidnapers had caused in Washington.

“We will deal with such technicalities afterwards, Director Mueller. What has priority is the rescue of Princess Grace. Can your men take out those kidnapers with a good chance of saving Princess Grace unhurt?”

There was a noticeable pause at the other end of the line before Mueller answered.

“Mister President, while I am proud of my agents and would wish to be able to answer yes to your question, I must honestly say no. Those kidnapers are too numerous, too well armed and too professional for my tactical response team to be able to guarantee that any rescue attempt would not end up badly.”

“Director Mueller, I must commend you for your honesty: I get bullshit too often as it is. So, what do you propose?”

“Mister President, only the very best could pull successfully such a rescue operation. I know that you have already ordered the Pentagon to put a Navy SEAL team on high alert. In my opinion, that SEAL team should handle the rescue, and that as quickly as possible.”

Obama needed only a short moment to make up his mind.

“I approve your suggestion. I will call the Pentagon right away and tell them to put our SEAL team under your operational control. Make sure however that these commandos are left free to plan their operation and that none of your agents tries to double guess them. Tell them what you want done but then let them do their job. And while we are on this, know that I will tell them to give no quarters to the kidnapers. The only thing I care is to see Princess Grace freed alive and well.”

“What about the Mexican Consul, Mister President?”

“Well, if that bastard tries to interfere during the rescue operation, then I can’t guarantee that he won’t catch a lost bullet fired by one of the kidnapers, if you see what I mean. And if the Mexican Ambassador has the gall to protest our actions afterwards, I will then ask him to explain how his consul got mixed up with these Los Zetas. Keep me posted on any new developments from now on: I will stay up and will be in the Oval Office until this operation is concluded, one way or the other.”

“Understood, Mister President. My men will continue the surveillance of the yacht and of the residence while awaiting the SEAL team.”

Obama then cut the line before calling a number at the Pentagon.

“Commander Nicholson, this is the President speaking. As of now, your alert SEAL team is put under operational control of Director Mueller, of the FBI. The task of your men will be to effect a hostage rescue mission and free unhurt Princess Grace of Monaco, who is presently held on a yacht moored near Annapolis. Your commandos are free to use all the force necessary to secure her freedom. Anyone, and I say

anyone, who gets in the way will be shot, period. Director Mueller will brief your men on the details of the present situation. Do you have any questions, Commander?"

"No, Mister President! Your orders were very clear."

"Then, I can only wish good luck to your men, Commander."

"Thank you, Mister President."

Putting down his telephone receiver, Obama sat back in his chair, hoping fervently that all would go well.

01:55 (New York Time)

Yacht YUCATAN, Chesapeake Bay

Grace Kelly felt a pang of despair when she heard the powerful engines of the big yacht come to life with a roar. She knew too well that her chances for being rescued would diminish drastically once out of the United States. In 1959, the Mexican government had been a stout ally of the United States, but what she had learned in her few days in this century told her that the relation was now both complicated and tense, with Mexico being nearly a failed state if she could believe some media sources. The power and brutality of the various drug cartels from Mexico and Colombia had shocked her as well as most of the other passengers from Pan Am 164. Even the powerful Italian mafia families in the United States of 1959 would never have dared to commit brazen atrocities of the sort the Mexican drug cartels seemed to commit routinely, like the nearly gratuitous mass killing of 53 people reported from Mexico two days ago. While no innocent sheep, the Italian mafia had at least some sense of restraint and had been careful about its public image, in order not to attract unwanted publicity to its affairs and thus renewed police pressure. In contrast, the Mexican drug cartels of 2015 seemed to actually want to shock, in order to reinforce their reign of terror. Such behavior in 1959 would have probably gotten those cartels to feel the full force of the American military, with the American public pushing the President for tough action. However, and unfortunately, thought Grace Kelly, the World seemed now to be a more violent and savage place than in 1959. Edward Murrow had remarked to her just yesterday that the old Cold War of the 1950s, with its nuclear arms race and its struggle for power between the United States and the Soviet Union, had at least the merit of having stabilized many other factors of violence around the World through the game of alliances. Now, with the Soviet Union dissolved since the 1990s and with a succession of economic crisis

shaking the World, every little petty dictator or head of criminal organizations seemed to feel free to act as they wished. One example of such behavior was the acts of high seas piracy off the Horn of Africa, an activity that would have been crushed swiftly by the US Navy in 1959 as soon as it would have started to threaten the all important oil traffic passing via the Suez Canal. Instead, a few ragged bands of primitive pirates were boarding merchant ships nearly at will in order to ransom them and their crews, while the international response was uncoordinated and sporadic at best. Grace was thus most pessimistic as she felt the yacht starting to move from the quay it had been attached to.

Unknown to her and to her Los Zetas captors, a PREDATOR drone of the United States Air Force was turning overhead at medium altitude, silent and invisible in the night sky. Its surveillance cameras and infra-red sensors had been transmitting for over twenty minutes pictures of both the yacht and the Consul's mansion, pictures relayed instantly to the command post of the FBI task force in charge of the kidnapping case and to the base of the Navy SEAL team preparing for action. The very savagery and brazenness of their operation was now playing against the Los Zetas commandos, having attracted the universal revulsion and anger of the American public. That had pushed its elected officials into taking unprecedented measures in response to what was now qualified as a terrorist act rather than simply a criminal one. Unfortunately for Grace, something as delicate as a hostage rescue mission took some time to prepare if one didn't want it to end up in a bloody disaster.

Two hours after the yacht had left the quay of the mansion, Grace heard her captors exchange cheers and congratulations around the yacht. Knowing some Spanish, she understood that their enthusiasm was caused by the fact that the yacht was now in international waters, something that would reduce greatly the chances for the yacht to be challenged by an American ship. The leader of the gang then sent most of his men to their bunks to sleep, judging probably that the worst was over. Herself exhausted by nervous tension and fear, Grace decided that she might as well also go to sleep and took off her shoes before lying fully clothed on the bunk of her cabin. There was no way she was going to undress and thus risk tempt any of those animals if one entered her cabin unannounced. Sleep however took some time to come to her.

Fifteen minutes later, two MH-60H combat rescue helicopters of the US Navy started approaching the yacht from downwind, guided by the PREDATOR drone still flying over the boat. The images from the drone, apart from being sent to the FBI task force command post, were also being monitored carefully by the sixteen men traveling in the two helicopters. Wearing neoprene wetsuits and combat web gear and with their faces blackened, the sixteen men carried an assortment of automatic weapons, grenades and explosives. Each of them also carried night vision goggles attached to their helmets. The leader of the SEAL team, sitting in the lead helicopter, grinned with satisfaction on seeing most of the Los Zetas gunmen go below the main deck, leaving only one man at the rudder of the yacht and two gunmen on the open rear deck. He waited another ten minutes however before telling the pilot of his helicopter, who had kept some distance with the yacht, to start his final approach. He next turned his head towards the two snipers sitting by the open starboard side door of the helicopter.

"We are about to go on autorotation descent for the final approach. When you will have a clear view of the two gunmen on the rear deck, kill them, then get the man at the rudder. We need those three men dead before our pilot can restart its engines and drop us off, so don't take your sweet time, guys."

"Got it, Lieutenant." Replied the senior sniper, cradling a silencer and night scope-equipped semi-automatic precision rifle.

Having approached as much as he dared from the yacht without risking his engines being heard from upwind, the lead helicopter pilot carefully calculated his glide path, then cut his engines. With its main and tail rotors still turning from their momentum, the helicopter started losing altitude, gliding nearly silently in the dark night sky. The two snipers in the cabin had to wait a tense minute before their glide path put them behind and above the yacht, at an angle at which they could see their targets.

"There are our targets, Jack." Said the senior sniper while pointing his rifle. "Start aiming now and shoot two seconds after my mark... three, two, one, mark!" The senior sniper then started squeezing gently his trigger. His rifle barked just a fraction of a second before the weapon of his comrade. The shape of the gunman he was targeting collapsed to the deck, followed shortly by the second gunman. Without wasting any time, the senior sniper then aimed at the yacht's pilot, shooting him in the back three seconds later. The man collapsed on top of the rudder wheel and instrument

dash, his body holding the wheel in its present position and thus holding the yacht on a nearly steady course.

“ALL TARGETS DOWN!”

His shout made the team leader pat firmly the shoulder of the pilot.

“RESTART YOUR ENGINES! LAND US ON THE YACHT!”

“COPY THAT!” Replied the pilot. While he started his engines, his copilot sent a brief radio message to the second helicopter, warning it that they were going in. To the relief of all aboard the helicopter, the engines restarted without a hitch or hesitation, allowing the pilot to control again his flight path. Approaching the yacht from behind and lowering to an altitude of a mere fifteen feet above the waves, the pilot slowed down as well, matching his speed with the yacht once above the rear deck of the boat. He was now tense and fully concentrated, as his main rotor blades were cutting the air a mere few feet above the radar antenna of the yacht. One mistake or moment of inattention and his craft would collide with the yacht and then most probably crash in the sea.

“IN POSITION! GO! GO! GO!”

The SEAL commandos were already in position and ready to slide down from the skids, using short ropes barely touching the deck of the yacht. As one, four commandos slid down and landed on the yacht in a single jump, then immediately took hold of their silenced submachine guns and walked forward, freeing the rear deck for the other four commandos still in the helicopter. Two of the soldiers were already going down the ladder leading to the cabins when the second group of four SEALs landed on the deck. Its job now mostly accomplished, the pilot of the helicopter put on more power and rose while sliding sideways, leaving room for the second helicopter to drop its own load of eight soldiers.

Grace Kelly woke up with a startle when someone screamed loudly in Spanish outside her door. A strange, burping noise followed, with the sound of running feet next. Then mayhem ensued, with automatic fire and loud explosions resonating in the restricted space of the lower deck. The fight was however surprisingly short, a few seconds at most, before silence fell again. Still lying in her bed and too terrified to move or scream, Grace suddenly felt her heart jump in her chest when someone kicked in the door of her cabin. An all-black silhouette stood in the hallway, a weapon pointed at her. Before Grace could do anything, the man in the doorway shouted loudly in English.

“I HAVE THE HOSTAGE!”

That attracted another man in black, form-fitting suit, who entered the cabin and lowered his own weapon, a short and nasty-looking thing, before presenting his left hand to Grace.

“Princess Grace, we are here to rescue you. Your captors are now all dead and we will bring you back to Washington and your daughter.”

“Thank you! Thank you all!” Could only say Grace, still in shock.

04:46 (New York Time)

Grounds of the Mologne House Hotel

Washington, D.C.

Scott Benson was on hand with six armed FBI agents to greet the MH-60H helicopter when it landed on the grass near the hotel. He helped Grace Kelly, still shaken by her adventure, to jump out of the helicopter, then shook hands with the commandos inside the cabin.

“A hell of a job, guys. We owe you a big one.”

“It was a pleasure, mister. Don’t hesitate to call the Pentagon again if you need us, especially if it is to deal with those drug cartel jackals.”

“I sure will. Thanks again!”

Scott then stepped away with Grace Kelly, both bent over, to allow the helicopter to depart. Once the machine was gone and the whirlwind from its rotors had died down, the FBI agent looked at Grace Kelly, who seemed to have regained some composure now that she was back near the hotel.

“Your daughter Caroline is inside the hotel, waiting for you, Your Serene Highness. I will lead you to her.”

“Thank you.”

Grace noticed the numerous armed agents surrounding the hotel as she walked to the front entrance of the hotel with Benson.

“I could not see what really happened when I was being kidnapped. What happened to Miss Hatfield and her agents?”

Scott’s face became somber as he answered her while still walking.

“Senior Agent Hatfield was seriously wounded and is in hospital, while all her agents were either killed or gravely wounded. Edward Murrow was killed as well, while Jack Lemmon was wounded in one leg. Innocent passersby were also killed and

wounded by those bastards as they shot wildly around them during their escape. If not for two other passengers, your daughter would have probably been kidnapped as well, or shot in the crossfire.”

“Oh? Who?”

“A man called Antonio Mancini, a war veteran who served with the Marines in the Pacific, was able to grab the pistol of a fallen DHS agent and returned fire, saving Jane Hatfield from being killed and also stopping one of the kidnappers from grabbing your daughter. Miss Monroe then grabbed Caroline and ran inside the hotel with her.”

“Then, I definitely want to thank both of them profusely. I will also mention their actions to Ambassador Noghes, so that Prince Albert can be informed.”

“Uh, I’m sorry to have to tell you this, Your Serene Highness, but Ambassador Noghes was killed by your kidnappers, along with his chauffeur and bodyguard.”

“Oh, my God! These Mexicans were truly blood-thirsty savages. Talking of Mexicans, my captors brought me to the house of the Mexican Consul, where I boarded a yacht. I had a blindfold on but they didn’t seem to realize that I could understand Spanish and spoke around me. You may want to know that the Mexican Consul was a full accomplice to these men and was taking payments from them. I am telling you so that he could not pretend to have been a simple victim in all this.”

A satisfied grin came to Scott’s mouth on hearing that.

“I will certainly take later your statement on that subject, Your Serene Highness. That consul is going to pay for his role in this, I assure you.”

“But, he must have diplomatic immunity because of his position, no?”

“He does, but his government can still revoke his diplomatic cover. The bloodbath caused by these savages has enraged the whole nation and has also united the positions of President Obama and of the Republican opposition on this subject. The Mexican government may find itself having to explain a few things to us. If they don’t, I wouldn’t be surprised if Mexico is then hit by severe economic counter-measures.”

“To be frank, Mister Benson, I would have a lot of difficulty to feel any sympathy towards those people right now.”

They were by now entering the lobby of the hotel and walked to one of the elevators, with Scott calling a cabin. A minute later they were on the first floor and heading towards the suite loaned to Grace Kelly. Two armed agents stood in front of the

door, with two more agents near the elevators and stairway cage. Scott knocked lightly on the door of the suite, attracting a female response.

“Who is it?”

“Agent Benson, Miss Monroe. Please open up.”

The door opened a few seconds later, with a Marilyn Monroe in a bathrobe and pajamas beaming with joy at the sight of Grace Kelly. She then shared an emotional embrace with the princess.

“Grace, you’re safe, thank God! We were so scared for you.”

“Agent Benson told me what you did to save Caroline. I cannot thank you enough for that, Marilyn.”

Marilyn Monroe made a small, embarrassed smile at those words.

“No need to, Grace: many would have done the same. You must be anxious to see your daughter. Come: she’s sleeping in the secondary bedroom.”

Grace didn’t have to be told twice and followed Marilyn inside, going to the second bedroom of the suite and opening cautiously the door. Seeing her little daughter sleeping in the large bed brought tears to Grace’s eyes. Seeing that, Marilyn patted her shoulder and whispered in her ear.

“Go sleep besides her, Grace. I will leave you now with Caroline.

“Thank you, my friend.”

Closing the door of the bedroom behind Grace, Marilyn then returned to the suite’s entrance and faced Scott Benson.

“Since Grace is back, I suppose that the bastards who did that massacre at the main entrance have been caught?”

“In fact, they are all dead, Miss Monroe.”

“Better still! Well, I suppose that I can now return to my own room and leave Grace alone with her daughter.”

Marilyn was about to turn around to go get her day clothes and the few hygiene items she had brought from her room when Scott Benson touched gently her shoulder while smiling at her.

“Miss Monroe, if I may, I would like to say that what you did to save Princess Caroline was very brave. You are a woman to admire in many ways.”

Marilyn, touched by his words, smiled with appreciation.

“Thank you, Mister Benson. Maybe we could have supper together tonight.”

"I would like that very much, Miss Monroe. I will see you later, then."

With Marilyn then closing the door, Scott turned around and started walking towards the elevators but hesitated and stopped after a few steps, thoughtful. There were a few things that had bothered him since the bloody kidnapping, things concerning one of the Pan Am passengers. Taking a decision, he went up to the large second floor lounge that was used to search for information about the passengers and crew of the Clipper America and to interview them. At this early hour, with the Sun still hours away from rising, he found only a lone agent there, watching the lounge to prevent the files there from being tampered with. Nodding to that agent, Scott then went to the file cabinet that contained the files made on each passenger and crewmember, searching for and pulling out a specific file. Sitting at a nearby desk which supported a computer linked to the Internet, he started reviewing in detail that file, soon making a few Google searches on the computer. After maybe fifty minutes of work, he sat back in his chair and blew air lightly: if his reasoning was right, one passenger had a big secret indeed to hide. He was certainly going soon to have to confront that passenger about it.

CHAPTER 8 – NEW LIVES

10:19 (New York Time)

Monday, October 12, 2015

Main entrance of the Mologne House Hotel

Washington, D.C.

Scott Benson, along with Grace Kelly, her daughter Caroline and many other passengers of the Pan Am 164, was on hand to say goodbye to Marilyn Monroe, who was waiting with her luggage under the covered porch of the hotel. On her part, the actress was both anxious and hopeful as a big white limousine was approaching the hotel, escorted by two police patrol cars. She had been contacted on Saturday by the famous millionaire and playboy Hugh Hefner, now aged 89, who had offered her a place to live at his Playboy Mansion in Los Angeles. Hefner had also promised to support the revival of her acting career. Having in fact been the first ever centerfold girl for Hefner's then new 'Playboy' magazine, Marilyn already knew the millionaire and had readily accepted his offer. With nothing left of her estate and with little money on her, Marilyn had realized quickly that she would need some serious support if she wanted to restart her career as an actress. What today's public expected from actresses was quite different from the 1950s, while Marilyn's type of beauty was not considered the ideal anymore. She in fact had found most modern actresses to be either too skinny or overly muscular in comparison with the plump looks favored in her time. Marilyn was however resolved to gain again a place of prominence in Hollywood.

When the limousine stopped in front of the porch and the driver came out to open the rear door for her, Marilyn saw that Hugh Hefner, thin and frail, was already sitting in the back. The old playboy stared at her with gleaming eyes from the back seat, admiring her youth and beauty while smiling at her.

"Hello, Marilyn. It has been a very long time since we saw each other."

"It has, Hugh." Said softly Marilyn, shocked by his age. "Could you just give me a minute to say goodbye to some friends here?"

"Anything you say, my dear."

The first one Marilyn turned to and hugged warmly was Grace Kelly, who was also going to leave the hotel this morning.

"I wish you the best in Monaco, Grace. I will write you often, I promise."

"And I wish you a successful return to acting, Marilyn. Good luck to you in Los Angeles."

"Thanks!" Said Marilyn, moved, before crouching in front of little Caroline to kiss her on her forehead.

"Goodbye, my little Caroline. I will miss you."

"Me too, Marilyn." Said the toddler in her tiny voice, her face sad.

Her heart heavy, Marilyn got back up and exchanged kisses on the cheeks with Antonio Mancini, who was due to leave with Grace Kelly and Caroline.

"Good luck with your new life in Monaco, Tony. You are a brave man and a true hero. I promise to write to you too."

Antonio Mancini, trim and fit-looking in his elegant but outmoded suit, smiled down at the actress.

"Knowing you was a true honor, Miss Monroe. I will be looking forward to go see your next movie."

Marilyn grinned happily at those words, then faced Scott Benson, also kissing him on both cheeks.

"Tell Jane Hatfield that I wish her a prompt recovery, Scott. As for you, be careful! You deserve a good woman in your life."

"Why? I already have such a woman in my arms right now."

Marilyn's smile widened and she gave him a quick kiss on the lips before stepping back and turning to get in the limousine. The big car rolled away a minute later, once all her luggage were aboard. Scott sighed with regret while watching the limousine go: Marilyn Monroe certainly had not lost the aura of sexiness that had made her so popular in the 1950s.

Not even ten minutes later, another limousine, this time escorted by no less than four vehicles full of heavily armed federal agents, rolled to a stop in front of the hotel. This time, it was the turn of Grace Kelly to say goodbye to the ones staying in the hotel. After exchanging accolades with Grace and little Caroline, Scott shook hands vigorously with Antonio Mancini. The Italian-American had received on Saturday a proposal by a representative of Prince Albert of Monaco to become the personal bodyguard of

Princess Grace. With his job as a wine buyer for a now long-closed wine and liquor store gone and with no relatives left alive, Mancini had jumped on the offer and was now going to accompany Grace Kelly and little Caroline to Monaco. Scott spoke in a low voice to him while looking him in the eyes.

"You have proved to be a brave man indeed, Mister Mancini. You also certainly lived by the old rule: no women, no kids."

While nearly imperceptible, Scott saw the slight reaction of the hit man when he said the old mafia rule about not touching women or children and not killing someone in front of his family. He however added a few words quickly.

"Don't worry, Mister Mancini. This will stay strictly between you and me and you may leave for your new life in Monaco without worrying. Your prompt actions saved the life of Agent Hatfield and prevented the kidnapping of little Princess Caroline. Whatever you did in the past will stay in the past. Have a good trip to Monaco."

Sighing with relief, Antonio smiled to the FBI agent and also spoke in a near whisper.

"Thank you for your comprehension, Agent Benson. You have my word of honor that I will from now on stay on the right side of the law. Protecting Princess Grace and her daughter will certainly be a job I will be proud to do."

"And I am sure that you will do an outstanding job worthy of a Marine."

Antonio puffed up his chest at those words.

"Once a Marine, always a Marine! Goodbye, Agent Benson. Give my wishes for a prompt recovery to Agent Hatfield."

"I certainly will, Tony. Again, have a good trip."

Mancini then went to the limousine with his suitcases, loading them in the trunk before going to sit in the back with Grace and Caroline of Monaco. As the limousine started to roll away, Scott wondered to himself if he should or not tell Janet Hatfield about Antonio Mancini. After thinking for a moment, he decided against it: he had given his word to Mancini and he was going to abide by it. With the limousine now out of sight, Scott went back inside the hotel. With Coco Chanel having left for France on Sunday and with Jack Lemmon still in hospital, all the V.I.P.s were now gone from the hotel and Scott would soon pull out his agents. There would still however be a number of federal civil servants, led by Ramsay Weathers, who would stay to continue to help the remaining passengers and crewmembers of the Pan Am flight adapt to a new life in 2015. That job was in no way looking like an easy one right now. One unfortunate male passenger had committed suicide on Sunday after his children from a wife he had divorced in 1958 had

refused to help him. Those children, now in their sixties, had even refused to take his subsequent calls. What had caused such animosity was unknown to Scott, but the grief and pain of being turned away like that had been too much for the poor man, who had then hung himself in his room. Scott was hoping that no other similar tragedies would happen, but he appreciated fully how difficult rebuilding one's life was in a world that was quite alien from what one had known.

14:30 (New York Time)

Thursday, October 15, 2015

United States Air Force recruiting center

Washington, D.C.

Things had been slow, to say the least, at the recruiting office today. In fact, the whole week had been rather quiet for Master Sergeant Jason Terlecki and his two other recruiting NCOs. While the Air Force had not been hit as badly as the Army by past federal budget cuts, it still had to limit its enrollment goals. However, with the economy picking up in the last few months, few young and technically qualified people were looking for a military career. Most of the prospective recruits that Terlecki had interviewed in the last weeks had proved to be rather poorly educated, with many of them having criminal records and with a few having even tested positive for drug use on initial medical examination.

The opening of the entrance door of the office made Terlecki look up from his computer screen, where he had been reading his latest official emails. His eyes opened wide and he straightened in his chair at the sight of the four young and beautiful women who had just entered. All four wore powder blue air stewardesses uniforms and were carrying each a pair of suitcases and a travel bag. Terlecki got up from his chair and walked around his desk to greet the newcomers, who were looking around with intense curiosity at the various recruiting posters on the walls.

"Good day, ladies! I am Master Sergeant Jason Terlecki, head recruiter for this office. What may I do for you?"

The one that was apparently the oldest of the lot, a splendid brunette with grey eyes in her late twenties, answered him while delivering a killer smile.

"Is the Air Force recruiting air stewardesses these days, Master Sergeant?"

Terlecki then saw the Pan Am insignia on their uniforms and understood who they were, making blood rush to his brain.

“Uh, I certainly can answer you quickly on that, miss. You are the stewardesses from that Pan Am flight that came by accident from the year 1959, right?”

“Correct!” Said the brunette, extending her right hand. “Sandra Crystal, purser on the Clipper America. My friends are Roberta Holmes, Jennifer Woods and Mary O’Malley. We all speak at least a second language and have high school diplomas, plus have already a few years of experience as air stewardesses.”

Terlecki beamed on hearing that: this was already better than the curriculum of much of the prospective recruits he had interviewed recently.

“Well, ladies, with such qualifications, I am sure that we can find something of interest for you. In fact, we can probably offer you many more job specialties than just air stewardesses, if you are interested.”

“You can?” Said Sandra Crystal, while the three other stewardesses showed joy on hearing Terlecki. The latter sat back behind his desk and showed the desks of his two NCOs to the women.

“If you may sit in front of my desk, Miss Crystal, my two colleagues will be pleased to take care of two of your friends. Your last friend may sit beside you, so that she could listen to the information I will give you. Let’s see first the list of specialties that are opened to recruitment right now.”

Calling up a specific program and file on his computer, Terlecki reviewed quickly the list now on his screen and nodded with satisfaction.

“The air stewardess trade is effectively still opened for recruitment, miss. However, I see many more trade specialties that are opened and that could interest you. Do you have skills in a particular domain, Miss Crystal?”

“As I said, I am a trained air stewardess and I speak fluently French and Italian. I am also qualified in first aid. Uh, I was told that they now let women pilot aircraft in the Air Force these days. Is that true?”

“It certainly is, miss. If you would have the right qualifications, you could even become a fighter pilot, miss.”

“A fighter pilot? Oh my god! Things have certainly changed since 1959.”

“They sure did, miss.” Said Terlecki with a smile. “I suppose that you would prefer a flying specialty, rather than a ground support one.”

“Definitely! What is open right now in terms of flying specialties, Master Sergeant?”

“Quite a few things, miss. Even without having technical or engineering diplomas, you could apply right now for a good dozen flying specialties, including helicopter pilot, cargo master, cargo aircraft pilot, helicopter door gunner and, of course, air stewardess.”

Sandra Crystal, like Mary O’Malley, who was sitting beside her, opened her eyes wide in disbelief.

“My god! I was not hoping for such a wide choice being available to women.”

“Welcome to 2015, miss!” Said Terlecki with a grin.

22:37 (New York Time)

Sunday, January 31, 2016

Golden Globe Awards ceremony

Hollywood, California

“Ladies and gentlemen, it is now my pleasure to present to you two outstanding actors who unfortunately had to wait a very long time to receive their awards. Despite all that time, however, nobody will dispute the true talent shown by those two actors, whose fame has only grown with the years. Please applaud the 1960 recipients for respectively the best actor and best actress in a comedy movie, for their work in ‘Some like it hot’. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: JACK LEMMON AND MARILYN MONROE!”

The huge crowd of spectators and guests facing the large stage applauded with enthusiasm as Jack Lemmon and Marilyn Monroe appeared from one side of the stage, waving happily at the crowd while walking towards the presenter and the two young women carrying the two prizes. Once in front of the presenter’s microphone, the couple accepted their prizes from the presenter and shook hands with him or, in the case of Marilyn, exchanged kisses on the cheek. Jack Lemmon then took the microphone and spoke in it while throwing a faked look of annoyance at Marilyn.

“Gee, Marilyn! I know that you are always late for your scenes, but being 56 years late?”

Marilyn, like the crowd of spectators and the presenter, burst into laughter at Lemmon’s joke. She then approached the microphone and spoke in her sensual voice.

“Well, at least you are wearing a suit instead of a dress for this scene, Jack.”

There was more laughter around the hall. When it died down, Jack Lemmon spoke again in the microphone, this time while facing the spectators.

“I can’t say how happy receiving this prize makes me, ladies and gentlemen. I am however also sad to see that so many talented actors and actresses, giants of Hollywood that me and Marilyn knew, are now dead. I was particularly sad to learn of the death in 2010 of our costar in the film ‘Some like it hot’, Tony Curtis. These men and women will always live in our hearts and I thus dedicate my prize to their memory. TONY, WE WILL NEVER FORGET YOU!”

As the crowd applauded again, Lemmon gave the microphone to Marilyn but also spoke in a low voice that was amplified by the speakers.

“You do remember your line, Marilyn?”

Marilyn pulled out her tongue at him, causing more laughter before she spoke to the crowd, a smile on her beautiful face.

“Don’t mind him, folks: he’s just a grumpy old man.”

This time, Jack Lemmon laughed with the crowd. When she spoke again, Marilyn had become serious, holding her prize in front of her.

“I must thank you all for making this possible, ladies and gentlemen. This is like a dream come true for me and your love and support has helped me become what I am now. Be assured that I will work hard to produce more films that you can enjoy. I LOVE YOU ALL!”

The true emotion and happiness on Marilyn’s beautiful face, caught by the cameras zoomed on her as she said those four last words, sent shivers of desire down the spine of most male television viewers. She then left the stage with Jack Lemmon under thunderous applauses.

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