

1

New York.

April, 1789.

"Could have been me. Could have been my father. No way to tell."

Barry leaned forward against a hickory stump, observing the preparations for the Inaugural parade. He could admit to himself that he had become bitter.

"I don't like this town anymore. I barely want to live."

"Nobody likes it, Barry. It's this freakish weather. Snow in the streets like so much spilled cocaine. Even the kids have become jaded. Everyone brings a jacket."

"People never listen to me. I'm frequently misquoted. And you know what? To hell with the Constitution. I didn't buy a copy, either. Eff this noise. I'm disappointed. I'm going back to Chicago."

Barry kicked his stump. Exited.

Senator Rip Jism shook his head and walked back to his Porsche 1985. Drove home to his farm on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

2

President Elect George Washington advanced between the Senate and Representatives, bowing to each. His ceremonial t-shirt was emblazoned with the traditional legend: WARREN ELLIS SAID THIS WOULD HAPPEN. At the podium, he spoke confidently into the microphone. For the most part, the assembly ignored him.

"Sometimes, I fantasize about going blind."

The crowd was making a lot of noise. He couldn't see them, couldn't tell what was the matter.

Raised his hands. Uttered:

"On the one."

Recognizing the traditional cue, the band brought their music to a halt. This, finally, silenced the audience.

"Less than ten copies of the U.S. Constitution have sold, to date, world-wide. The years tick by like arbitrary markers in some human system of measurement. You people don't even vote."

"*You people?*" echoed the crowd. A quick intake of breath. Outrage, disbelief. The President Elect was hemorrhaging political capital through the holes in his monologue.

"Reasonably priced speech," countered Washington, which seemed to placate the loudest objectors. Washington prided himself on thinking quickly on his feet. The copyright issue presented a neat solution to his quandary. He went with it.

Nearby, young Helen Thomas jotted down notes for her first big assignment.

3

Piotr defocused. Leveled his rifle.

"Tom, did you hear that?"

"Yeah, I got it. Politically tone deaf. His campaign won't recover."

"Sigh. He was elected months ago. Still, it's your call. Shoot, or sell?"

Thomas weighed the options as if on a triple-beam. On the one hand, perpetual union. On the other, a pile of enemy foreskins. "I tried to be you," he whispered, to no one, waving away the irrelevant screens.

"Let's give them what they want."

Piotr acknowledged, refocused his weapon. Logged back in. Squeezed the trigger.

Washington down.

4

Barry picked up after only three rings.

"Where are you?"

Barry plunged his hands into the sink.

"What do you mean, where am I? The People fired me. I went out and got a job."

"All right, deploy pedantry. What are your GPS coordinates?"

"I'm washing dishes at a Denny's."

Absinthe green dishwater lapped at Barry's manicured hands. He had rolled up the sleeves of his white Arrow shirt, but food stains across his abdomen were still apparent to anyone who bothered to notice him, standing there, hunched over the sink in the back of the kitchen. His necktie had landed in the trash. His suit jacket sat crumpled in a corner.

"Earthy. Man of the people."

"It's a living."

"Harvard's issuing degrees for anything, these days. Anyway, Washington is out. We need you back behind the podium."

Barry dropped a dish on the tile floor. Tossed his cigarette into the steel gray water. Unwadded his suit jacket.

"Hour and a half. Crosstown traffic."

"Affirmative."

Click.

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