

WORKING DRAFT: 5/21/2023

NOT THAT IT MATTERS . . .
(OR, HOW GRACE TOOK THE HELM OF OUR SHIP OF
STATE)

by
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AUTHOR'S NOTE: This alternate history novel is a family saga in which Grace Styles Hebert, the fictional central character, and her family interact with real public figures and take part in real events leading up to and beyond the 2016 general election when Grace is elected president. No matter whether you love or hate this liberal fantasy, please feel free to pass the web address on to others you believe might like to read it for whatever reason. Comments, complaints, and questions about this work-in-progress may be sent to the author by snail mail at the address above. (In other words, readers have to care enough to write a letter and put a stamp on an envelope.)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: J. R. Smith has taken part in local, state, and national campaigns in half a dozen states over the last seventy years. After holding elected office in New Hampshire, he is now both on the beach and all at sea on an island off the coast of Georgia. Among his many publications is a Pulitzer Prize nominee that ended with a sigh: "Ah, what a dream we had." This novel is yet another dream.

DEDICATION: to my very own Hannah, who has put up with me for sixty years.

EPIGRAPH: A luta continua . . .

PROLOGUE:

At their convention in the summer of 1988, Democrats chanted “U-S-Hebert! U-S-Hebert!” before and after they nominated Senator Tom Hebert of New Hampshire for president.

A few weeks later, Tom agreed to take William F. Buckley Jr., the most famous conservative intellect of his time, for a short cruise from the Wentworth by the Sea Marina to a gathering of his oldest friends and supporters at an old hotel on one of the Isles of Shoals, six miles offshore. They set out under calm conditions with the senator at the helm of his sloop, *A Bear at Sea* under calm conditions while Grace and Carter, his two children, handled the lines.

“Why are you and your kids dressed like pirates?” asked Buckley.

“It’s a family tradition,” said Carter, who was ten. “We’re descended from a famous Revolutionary War pirate and today is his birthday.”

“Not that it matters,” said Grace, aged twelve. “Pirate Pete was actually a privateer.”

“And do you know the difference?” asked Buckley.

“Privateers were pirates with get-out-of-jail-free cards called letters of marque,” explained Grace, “but pirates had much more fun. Besides, who knows what a privateer costume looks like?”

After bantering with Grace for a few minutes, Buckley turned back to Tom and tried to get him to focus on Gary Hart’s affair with Donna Rice, Bill Clinton’s long and tedious keynote speech, Jesse Jackson’s complaint that he should have been chosen as Hebert’s running mate after coming in second in the primaries, Joe Biden’s plagiarism scandal, and, most controversial of all, Tom’s choice of a black woman from Texas as his running mate.

But Tom made it clear he wanted to talk about all the things that had gone wrong over the last eight years with Ronald Reagan and George Bush in the White House—and what he would do to repair the damage and put the nation back on a steady course.

As the interview became more heated, Tom turned the helm over to his daughter to guide them through the rocky shoals while he helped his son handle the lines. When he suddenly realized how dangerous the approach to the island was, Buckley—a notoriously swashbuckling yachtsman--began to look like he was about to jump up and grab the helm like a mutineer.

“Relax, Bill,” said Tom. “Grace was born to the helm.”

“Too bad you weren’t,” drawled Buckley.

Grace laughed as she came to her father's defense: "Our ancestors were plowing the seas off this coast while yours were still grubbing for potatoes back in Ireland."

Impressed by her good-natured response and the repartee that followed as Grace steered to the dock, Buckley invited her to be his youngest guest on Firing Line, his long-running television political affairs show.

Which she did several times, debating him on a variety of liberal issues she espoused and Buckley despised.

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Tom Hebert lost his bid for the White House in 1988, but on November 8th, 2016, his daughter became the youngest person ever elected President of the United States and the youngest to hold that office. Tall and trim, Grace was an Annapolis graduate and combat veteran who had left an eye behind in Afghanistan. With a telegenic scar across one cheek disappearing under an iconic black eye patch, she looked like a pirate and sometimes acted like one.

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This is the story of how a confident woman trumped a confidence man--about how Grace and her pirate crew took the helm of our Ship of State.

CHAPTER ONE

Our story begins on a gloomy Friday morning three days after the dismal midterm elections of 2014 when Republicans took control of the Senate and increased their control of the House of Representatives. Although Republican candidates had also taken several governorships away from Democrats, Grace Hebert, unable to run for a third term as governor of Maryland because of term limits, had helped her lieutenant governor win the election to replace her and had helped other Democrats take or hold on to Congressional seats in Maryland and nearby states.

And although she had been encouraged earlier in the year to run for her father's Senate seat in New Hampshire after he decided to retire, Grace had announced she wanted to spend more time with her family. Unlike other elected officials who are forced to resign or know they cannot be re-elected, she was telling the truth: she actually looked forward to spending more time with Ricky and their two kids.

Little did she know how much time and how she would spend it.

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On this morning, Grace, Ricky, and the kids were having breakfast in the kitchen of the governor's mansion when her cell phone buzzed with a call from her mother, Hannah Styles.

"Your dad just told me you're having lunch with him. Could you swing by the house on your way to the Hill?"

"Of course. Any special reason?"

"I want to show you something Harry sent from Moscow," she said.

"What'd he send?"

"I'll tell you when you get here."

"Okay, I'll see you around ten thirty or eleven."

"Give my love to Ricky and the kids," said her mother, who hung up.

"Who was that?" Grace's daughter asked.

"Your Granny Hannah. She sends her love."

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Later that morning, after meeting with her staff and taking care of state business, Grace set out on the drive from Annapolis to the District of Columbia. At the start of the trip, she listened to an NPR report about how Democrats were reacting to their setback in the midterm election. That was followed by speculation about former or current governors in both parties who might run for the White House. Grace snapped off the radio when she heard her name being taken in vain as the "Superwoman of Superstorm Sandy", the fearless governor who had risked her life helping rescue families from the roofs of cars stuck on a flooded highway.

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Two years earlier, shortly after that hurricane and the re-election of Barack Obama, Grace's father had announced he wanted to speak with her on behalf of the steering committee for Operation Ship of State.

"What the hell is 'Operation Ship of State'?"

"The name of our plan to put you in the White House."

"Who's on this 'steering committee'?"

"In addition to me as co-chair, ten Navy and Marine Corps combat veterans from both parties who hold or once held major elective office."

"Who's your co-chair?"

"One of my old classmates at the Academy."

"An old classmate?" she frowned. "Which one?"

"My best man when I married your mother. He's always admired you,

especially the way you told the Chief of Naval Operations and the Secretary of the Navy to go piss up a rope when you resigned your commission."

"Well, you and your old buddy are both pissing into the wind if you think I want to run for president. And just for the record, who are the other ten on this so-called 'steering committee'?"

"Above your pay grade, Governor."

"Bite me," said Grace, who suddenly had another thought: "'Pissing into the wind'—that might make a good title for my biography of your grandfather. In fact, he wrote a haiku about doing just that."

"When did Big Al ever write haikus?"

"On his last visit to Kyoto before the war he wrote one that goes 'Two old sailor friends / stand side by side at sunset / piss into the wind.'"

"How did you learn about that?" Tom demanded.

"Your dad told me that his dad told him. He gave me silver pieces of eight for memorizing all kinds of things: chronological lists of presidents, the names of states and their capitals. He gave me an old gold coin for reciting without flaw the names of our ancestors and their most famous battles: Pierre de la Houssaye Hebert, a hero of the Battle of the Chesapeake, begat Lafayette Hebert, a hero of the Battle of Lake Borgne, who begat Andrew Jackson Hebert, a survivor of the Battle of Mobile Bay who served under Admiral Dewey in the Battle of Manila Bay and begat Alfred Thayer Mahan Hebert, who survived the sinking of the USS Maine in Havana Harbor and begat your father, a hero of the Battles of the Coral Sea and Midway who begat you, a hero of the Tonkin Gulf, who begat me, the only one in that long line who has never shed blood at sea."

"You've shed enough blood," said Tom.

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That was two years ago.

And now, in early November of 2014, as she drove toward her parents' home, she had no way of knowing that almost exactly two years later she would leave not blood but something else of herself in the sand of a Florida beachhead on which she would plant her pirate flag.

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During the last two years of her first term as governor, Grace had enjoyed researching and writing the book about how Alfred Thayer Mahan Hebert, her great-grandfather, became one of the first naval aviators in 1912 and spent the decade before Pearl Harbor warning his superiors that

the Imperial Japanese Navy was building more aircraft carriers than was the US Navy and developing better planes and tactics for carrier warfare in the Pacific.

“Big Al”, as he was called, had made such a nuisance of himself that he was passed over for flag rank and forced to retire as a captain in 1939, at which point he became an even greater nuisance as he pissed into the tent from outside.

Called back to active duty and promoted to rear admiral after the attack on Pearl Harbor validated his warnings, Big Al had taken part in sea battles before ending the war as a four-star admiral standing aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay.

His old sailor friend, a senior admiral in the Imperial Japanese Navy, had not survived the war.

Published by the Naval Institute Press in 2013, Pissing into the Wind sold well and received good reviews. Despite the circumstances under which she had left the Navy, Grace was invited to lecture at both the Naval Academy and the Naval War College.

And now, she was about to engage once again with her father’s unshakeable belief that she was born to take the helm of the Ship of State. But first, she had to find out what Uncle Harry had sent from Moscow.

She hoped it might be something from her Russian friend.

But as it turned out, it wasn’t.

CHAPTER TWO

“You’re just in time to give Webster his bottle,” said Grace’s mother, who was holding a chubby baby on her hip when she opened the front door of the big house near the Georgetown University campus. A psychiatrist who had kept her maiden name for professional reasons, Hannah Petrovna Styles had once recommended whether or not some troubled senior officers were fit to return to active duty. After ending her career as Bill Clinton’s Surgeon General of the Navy, she now devoted much of her time to helping her husband deal with some of his increasingly irrational Senate colleagues.

Baby Webster was the son of Grace’s brother Carter and his wife, Commander Jennie Webster Horrigan, a Navy epidemiologist at Walter Reed who specialized in diagnosing and treating strange diseases afflicting the men and women who had served in the Middle East after 9/11. Like her

mother-in-law, she had kept her maiden name and given her son her mother's maiden name.

Jennie and Carter, who was his father's chief of staff, shared the house and would continue living there after Tom left office.

"Your Uncle TeeJay's in the map room," said Hannah, handing Grace the baby and a warm bottle before leading the way through the house to the back room overlooking the walled garden.

Father Thomas Jefferson Livaudais, SJ, stood up as Grace came into the room. Known to one and all by his initials, TeeJay was the younger brother of Tom Hebert's mother. Born in New Orleans, the elderly Jesuit and former Navy chaplain was a retired professor of history at Georgetown.

"How're your kids?" he asked.

"There're fine, but they're turning into a couple of heathens."

"Must've used stale holy water when I baptized them. I'll bring some blessed by our new Pope next time we get together."

Grace had always liked the map room, what her Russian grandmother had called the karta komnaty. With its collection of antique maps of Imperial Russia that included Alaska, old globes showing the huge expanse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, framed photographs and other mementos and keepsakes, it celebrated the Styles family's long connection to Russia where four generations had served as ambassadors over the course of a century.

The current ambassador was Harry Truman Styles, Hannah's younger brother. After a long career in the State Department, he had been the US ambassador to the Russian Federation from late 1996 until early 2001, when he retired from State and became a distinguished professor of Russian Studies at Harvard. Eight years later, he had served as Obama's first ambassador to the Russian Federation until 2011 when he disagreed on policy with Secretary of State Clinton. After Putin ordered the invasion and annexation of Crimea in March of 2014, Obama had sent Harry back for his third stint as ambassador.

Grace cradled her nephew as she fed him the bottle of Jennie's breast milk while Hannah got right to the point: "That's a rough draft of the book he's been working on since before he returned to Moscow," she said, pointing to a cardboard box on the table. "Two xerox copies arrived in the diplomatic pouch on Monday, one for you, the other for me."

"Why didn't you let me know when it arrived?"

"I didn't want to distract you from the election and I wanted to have

time to read it before I told you that Harry would like us to help him edit it for publication. I called him this morning and told him that it needs a lot of trimming in places, more details in others.”

“I thought he was still mad at me because of my face-off with Putin at the Winter Olympics.”

“He got over that. He likes your books and admits he admired the way you handled Putin and wishes he could do the same thing. And he told me to let you know he believes you are the future of our family in Russia—but that you should stay away for the time being.”

“Does he have a publisher?”

“Harvard University Press published his last two books, but he says his agent has feelers out to several large commercial houses.”

Grace lifted the lid from the carton and read the title aloud: “An American Family under Three Flags from the Russian Empire to the Federation.”

“That’s a lot of prepositions,” she said, “and not enough flags.”

“I’ve already told him he needs a catchier title,” said Hannah. “One more thing: I know he wants it published in July on the centennial of the birth of our father—your grandfather—so the clock is ticking.”

“After all the help he gave me and Ricky with our dissertations, I owe it to him. Let me read this over the weekend and see what I think. And not to change the subject, how do you think I should handle Dad at lunch if he pushes me to run?”

“Is this a mother/daughter question, or doctor/patient?”

“A bit of both.”

Hannah took her time before turning to the old priest: “TeeJay, could we have the room for a few minutes?”

“Hell, no,” he laughed. “Wouldn’t miss this for anything.”

Then he made the Sign of the Cross in the air to bless the room.

Hannah, who knew her uncle-in-law rarely did anything he didn’t want to do, sighed and turned back to her daughter.

“Grace, do you want to run?”

“I’m tempted, but I’m afraid.”

“Afraid of what?”

“Afraid of losing, afraid of winning, afraid of the job, afraid of what I might do—or fail to do.”

“That about covers it,” said Hannah. “Did you know my father went through the same agony before he decided to run in ‘72, and so did your

father in '88?"

"No, but--"

"And did you know that your great-great-grandfather, the first Senator Styles, was a front-runner in 1912 before releasing his delegates to Governor Wilson after the first ballot at the convention, which is why Wilson 'rewarded' him with an ambassadorship to get him out of the country? And did you know that his son Grover, had he survived, was prepared to return from Russia to be FDR's running mate in 1944 in order to deal with the threat of Soviet expansion after the war?"

"What are you trying to tell me? That we're a bunch of losers and this is some kind of family curse?"

"No," said TeeJay, breaking his silence. "It's a sacred duty."

"Why would your god want an apostate in the White House?" demanded Grace, turning to the old priest.

"Because She's very open minded and has a sense of humor."

"Get serious, TeeJay," said Grace, laughing despite herself.

"Okay, let me tell you why you should run," said TeeJay, who began to tick off the reasons on the long fingers of one hand: "People like you, they love you, they listen to you—"

"I always get nervous when you begin to alliterate."

"—they learn from you, they look up to you, they—"

"Stop!" she groaned as he moved on to the other hand.

"—they want you to lift them up, to lean on you, to . . ." He paused, then spread his hands: "They're ready to live and die for you—and you for them."

"Jeez, TeeJay—you missed your calling."

"Which one is that?"

"Writing Hallmark cards."

"Scoff all you want, Grasshopper, but I've watched people listening to you. Your voice can be deep, soft, soothing, calming, compelling, hypnotic —"

"Did they teach you that at priest school?" asked Grace, who had been named in honor of Rear Admiral Grace Hopper, the longest serving officer in the US Navy. "And don't you dare call me 'Grasshopper' in front of the kids," she added as she placed her nephew on her shoulder to burp him. "They won't let me live it down."

Just then, little Webster burped and let loose a load in his diaper at the same time.

TeeJay took the baby from Grace and blew a raspberry against his tummy.

“Excuse me while I change this little shit machine,” said TeeJay, taking his leave.

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“Good luck at lunch,” said Hannah a few minutes later as Grace headed for the door with her copy of the manuscript, “and try to be gentle with your father. Ever since he decided not to run for re-election this year, he’s been a bit fragile. And now he’s a lame duck. On the beach and all at sea, if you know what I mean.”

Grace knew exactly what she meant. She had been there herself more than once.

CHAPTER THREE

There had once been a time when lunch with her father in the Senate Dining Room had been a treat for Grace. That was when Tom’s colleagues like Ted Kennedy and Joe Biden stopped by his table to chat with little Rusty, the nickname Grace was given as a child because of her freckles and reddish hair. The freckles had faded but the hair was still rust-colored. After she was elected to her one term in the House of Representatives in 2004, she had frequently lunched or dined with him. Sometimes they were joined by one of his proteges, the freshman senator from Illinois.

Now, as Grace crossed the Senate Dining Room toward the table where her father was sitting with the co-chair of his so-called steering committee, she was greeted by either warm smiles or cold stares from other senators and their guests. This was, she thought, like the famous TV sit-com bar: a place where everyone knew her name. She felt like a young cardinal entering the Vatican conclave to elect a new pope as jealous old princes of the church looked on.

“I just ordered for you,” said her father. In his late seventies, Tom Hebert was still running marathons and looked ten years younger. His old classmate, Grace noticed, was starting to show his age.

Now in his last months as the Senate majority leader, Tom had spent three terms in the House of Representatives and seven in the Senate. His Annapolis roommate and best friend had spent two terms in the House and was now in his fifth term in the Senate. They were both Navy pilots who

had been wounded flying over Vietnam. They both wore Silver Star lapel pins, as had LBJ, as did Grace.

“Running the gauntlet just now, you looked like a cocky pinch hitter sauntering to the plate after the first two batters struck out,” said Senator John McCain, who had struck out in 2008, twenty years after his old friend had done the same.

“Senator,” whispered Grace as she bent over to accept a hug from McCain, “why do I get the impression I’m about to be shanghaied aboard the Ship of State?”

“We don’t do that anymore,” said McCain sotto voce. “We call it recruiting—and you are a free agent up for grabs.”

“I heard that,” said Tom Hebert. “Let’s have a friendly lunch with no talk about sports or politics.”

“What else is there?” asked McCain.

“How about entertainment,” said Grace. “Ricky and the kids made me binge-watch the first two seasons of House of Cards last month.”

By the time they finished their bowls of traditional Senate Soup made of navy beans and ham, they agreed that America needed someone like Frank Underwood to get things done. Then, with the main course, they moved on to savoring the reactions of late night comedians to the midterm elections.

“Speaking about dirty jokes,” said McCain, “have you heard some of the nice things Donald Trump’s been saying about Putin, about how they might become new best friends?”

“I try not to pay attention to him,” said Grace.

“Maybe you should,” McCain suggested. “He may be the butt of many jokes, but the joke may be on us if he decides to run.”

“Do you think he’d have a chance to take the White House?” asked Grace, keeping her voice down.

McCain nodded and whispered “There’s no business like show business” as he stood to take his leave. Then he looked around the room at his colleagues, turned back to Grace, stage-whispered “Democracy is so over-rated”, and rapped his knuckles on the table like Frank Underwood.

CHAPTER FOUR

After lunch, Tom took Grace down to his SCIF—the Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility installed in his basement hideaway

when he first became a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

He sat down with his back to the old roll-top desk that once belonged to the legendary Commodore Andrew Jackson Hebert, his great-grandfather. On top of the desk was a display of Tom's battered flight helmets, each with Hannah's name in bold imitation of Cyrillic letters: "XAHHAX".

"After what happened on Tuesday," her father said, "it's clear our party is dead in the water. More than ever, we need you to run."

"You're beating a dead horse," said Grace.

"That's the best way to tenderize tough horse meat."

"Maybe so, but to quote E. E. Cummings, 'there is some shit I will not eat'."

"I'll admit being president can be a shitty job even in the best of times, but somebody's gotta do it."

"Yes, but why me? Why not Biden, Clinton, Sanders, Webb, or someone else who actually wants the job?"

"Because you don't want the job, and because you'd do a much better job than anyone who does."

She shook her head and was about to respond when he cut her off.

"You're only thirty-eight. What do you plan to do when you leave office?"

"I've been offered chaired professorships at several universities and one state university system wants me to be their new chancellor, but before I take another job, Ricky and I want to spend a lot of time with the kids."

"You can spend time with them on the campaign trail for the White House. They were a great help four years ago when you ran for re-election."

"That's because they were cute—but they've been turning into teenagers way ahead of schedule."

"You were about the same age when I ran in '88."

"Yeah, and some of my stunts probably hurt your chances."

"Don't be silly. I lost that one all on my own by not fighting back against dirty tricks."

"Get serious, Dad," Grace demanded. "How can a one-eyed, Russian-born, god-fearing atheist loose cannon get elected president of these dis-United States? And let's not forget the elephant in the room—"

"Well, nobody's perfect," said Tom, cutting her off with the last line of

a movie they both liked. "Despite that elephant, you've already been elected three times."

"But that was in Maryland where folks are used to voting for Heberts like your dad and his uncle."

"Then it's time to give the rest of the country a chance," he said.

That made her laugh: "I don't think America's ready to take a chance on me."

"Rusty, you're the only viable candidate who has the ability to stand up against Putin in his own language."

"I don't want to even think about running for anything until after my term ends in January."

Her father looked so disappointed that Grace took pity on him.

"Dad, just how long have you been plotting to put me in the White House?"

"In the spring of 2004, when I watched you running in the primary for a seat in the House, I knew you were a good candidate. That's when I decided to recommend a Senate candidate with a funny name be asked to give the keynote address at our convention in Boston in case John Kerry lost the election."

"What did that have to do with me?"

"Even if you were elected governor two years later as you planned, I knew you'd be too young and inexperienced to run for president until 2012 or '16. I figured that if Kerry lost, I could help Obama or McCain win in 2008 and that either one would be a good place-holder for you."

Grace had to laugh again. "Did you get those political genes from your mother? I don't remember your father being able to plan that far ahead."

Tom looked startled, then sighed before speaking again.

"To tell the truth, I never discussed politics with my father."

"But I know you did. I heard you arguing politics with him more than once."

Tom was silent for nearly a minute before he spoke again.

"He wasn't my father."

"What are you talking about?"

"You know the story of how he met my mother."

"They were cousins, kissing cousins, who hadn't seen each other since they were children. They met again at a dance in Washington not long after he graduated from the Academy and she was a stenographer in

the White House.”

“Love at first sight, whirlwind romance, and all the rest,” agreed Tom. “That’s the official story. But after she died, her attorney gave me a sealed letter from her.”

“What was in the letter?”

Instead of answering the question, Tom opened one of his safes, took out an old envelope, and handed it to Grace.

She took out and unfolded a handwritten letter and began to read it.

Grace stopped reading and looked at her father as though seeing for the first time the long patrician face, the heavy jaw, the toothy smile, the dark eyebrows, and the familiar tilt of the large head.

Give him a pince-nez and a long ivory cigarette holder, she thought, and the picture would be complete.

“Oh, my god,” she groaned.

“You don’t believe in god,” he reminded her.

“Did your father—your stepfather—know before he married her?”

“Yes. And he loved my mother even though the marriage was arranged.”

“If you’re FDR’s bastard, what does that make me?” she demanded after handing back the letter.

“Someone who has the right genes for the tough job at hand. And I prefer to be referred to as his love child.”

“Why didn’t you tell me years ago?”

“I didn’t want to burden you with this particular secret.”

“Why are you telling me now?”

“Because it’s time you knew. And if you run, it might come out.”

“So we’re not descended from the Hebert clan?”

“Of course we are. My mother’s grandmother was an Hebert, which made my putative father a second cousin. And I loved the old admiral and his son who loved me without reservation as they loved the president who entrusted the care and nurture of his last-begotten son to them.”

“‘Last-begotten son’,” she scoffed. “How long have you been practicing that line?”

When he simply smiled at her, she tried to stay angry but couldn’t.

“Does Carter know?” she asked.

“Not yet.”

“How about Mom?”

“She knew before I did,” said Tom. “Figured it out on her own, then

confronted my mother—and kept it to herself.”

“You know I’m going to have to tell Ricky.”

“I think your wife can handle the news,” said Tom.

CHAPTER FIVE

“So our little bastards are actually descended from a bastard,” said Ricky when she got home that afternoon and heard the news.

“My dad prefers to be called a love child.”

“I was referring to FDR,” said Ricky, “and I use the term affectionately, as I do for our own little bastards.”

Their “little bastards” were Grace’s daughter Raquel Rodriguez Hebert, known as Rocky, and Ricky’s son Tomas Hebert Rodriguez, known as T-Rod. Nearly twelve years earlier, Grace Hebert and Erica “Ricky” Rodriguez had just become domestic partners before they managed to give birth only six months apart to babies conceived with the help of sperm donated by their future brothers-in-law.

Rocky, the older child, claimed that she and T-Rod were “fraternal twins” as well as first cousins and half-siblings because her mother’s brother had fathered T-Rod and Ricky’s brother had fathered her.

T-Rod, on the other hand, had recently begun bragging that he and Rocky were real bastards because they were born a year before their moms were finally able to make honest women of each other. That happened on Cape Cod in May of 2004, soon after Massachusetts became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage, and several months after Grace announced she would be a candidate for Congress from the First District of Maryland.

“When they get older, do you think we should tell the kids they’re descended from FDR?”

“They’ll probably figure it out on their own,” said Ricky.

“How come I didn’t?”

“Your particular apple may have fallen too far from the Hyde Park tree.”

Grace thought about something, stood up, and went to one of the bookcases on the far side of her private study on the second floor of the governor’s mansion. It was where she retreated to take care of family or personal business—and where Ricky, after returning from a court appearance, had found her reading Harry’s manuscript.

“What are you looking for?” asked Ricky as Grace searched the shelves.

“One of the books Dad gave me when I told him I’d decided to run for Congress. Ah, here it is. Sailor in the White House by Robert Cross.”

Grace pulled the book off the shelf, opened it to a page bookmarked with a snapshot of a little boy being given a toy sailboat by FDR, who was sitting behind a desk that hid his wheelchair. In the background were her father’s mother and Big Al Hebert, the man who had brokered his son’s marriage to a young cousin who was already pregnant.

She handed Ricky the snapshot.

“Your dad was almost as cute as my T-Rod,” said Ricky.

Grace began to read aloud the passage her father had highlighted on the bookmarked page: “‘The skills required to be a good sailor have much in common with those required by a good politician. Both are subject to much that is beyond their control, and Roosevelt used the same skills that made him the country’s greatest seafaring president to navigate the equally treacherous waters over the course of his entire career in public service’.”

She stopped reading, closed the book around the snapshot, and returned it to the shelf.

“I feel like Oedipus trying to escape his fate,” she said.

“Rusty, don’t turn into a drama queen on me,” said Ricky. “Just decide what the fuck you want to do and do it.”

Grace gestured to Harry’s manuscript.

“What I want to do right now is help my mother edit this family saga.”

“Then let me give you a hand this weekend.”

“You know we can’t get any work done at your brother’s cabin with all the kids—“

“If you can’t work on Harry’s book, you’ll be bad company. I’ll ask Roberto to pick up the kids tomorrow morning. I’ll tell him we’re both coming down with colds and we’ll spend the weekend at the Cove.”

“You’d lie to your own brother for me?”

“I’d lie, cheat, and steal for you.”

“Would you kill for me?”

“Only if I won’t get caught. Who would you like me to kill?”

“Forget I asked,” she laughed.

“And before I forget,” said Ricky, “how’s your dad?”

“Mom says he’s on the beach and all at sea.”

“Sounds like you,” said Ricky.

“Don’t be silly,” said Grace, who knew Ricky was right but wasn’t ready to admit it.

CHAPTER SIX

After the kids got home from school, Grace took care of a last few items of state business, then drove her family across the Bay Bridge to spend the weekend at Pirate Cove, the small island settled more than two centuries earlier by Pierre “Pirate Pete” Hébert on the eastern shore of Chesapeake Bay opposite Annapolis. Connected to Kent Island by a narrow wooden bridge, Pirate Cove was where Grace and her family often spent their weekends and holidays and where they would live when they moved out of the governor’s mansion after Grace’s term ended in late January.

Modeled after a typical Newport cottage, the rambling house at Pirate Cove was built in the late nineteenth century to replace the Federal style mansion built by the first Hebert shortly after the end of the American Revolution. Grace’s father, who planned to retire to New Hampshire, had given the use of the house to Grace and Ricky as a wedding present.

Late that evening, Grace, Ricky, and the kids played Monopoly. Grace, who usually bankrupted the other three players with ruthless efficiency, did not seem fully engaged in wheeling and dealing.

“What’s wrong, Mom?” asked Rocky when Grace came in last after repeatedly failing to take advantage of opportunities to develop her properties.

“Your mom’s all at sea because she’s about to be on the beach,” explained Ricky.

“‘On the beach’ is when a sailor is between ships or can’t go to sea,” said Rocky, “but what does ‘all at sea’ mean?”

“What do we do when we don’t know?” asked Ricky.

Both kids whipped out their smart phones and went to work.

“‘All at sea’ means ‘puzzled, perplexed, confused’,” said Rocky, whose fingers were faster on the keypad.

“What are you confused about, Aunt Rusty?” asked T-Rod, who called his birth mother “Mom” but his other mother by her nickname.

Grace shook her head and smiled while Rocky typed some more, came up with the answer: “It’s a paradox: she’s about to be on the beach when she leaves office, but she’s also all at sea about what to do next.”

Grace looked at T-Rod and explained: "Not that it matters, your mom's teasing me about being in a brown study."

Rocky typed some more. "'A brown study' is 'a melancholy mood accompanied by deep thought'."

"So you don't know what to do with yourself," said T-Rod. "What's the big effing deal?"

"It's a big effing deal," Ricky told her son, "because your other mom has never been out of work. She spent four years at the Academy, six years in the Navy, then two years in Congress and eight as governor."

"Mom," said Rocky, "why don't you run for president?"

"Because I don't want to run the country," said Grace.

"Why not?" demanded one kid.

"Yeah, why not?" demanded the other.

"Good question," said Ricky, "but right now, it's bedtime."

"It's not even ten," objected Rocky, "and there's no school tomorrow."

"You know you've got to get up early because your dad's picking up you guys for the weekend," said Grace.

"You're not coming with us?" asked Rocky.

"No, not this time," said Grace. "Ricky and I have something we need to do."

"Are we going to the cabin again?" asked T-Rod, who loved his uncle's rustic mountainside retreat in West Virginia.

"Of course," said Ricky. "And I've asked him to leave you there. Now, get your butts up to bed."

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"Thanks for running interference," said Grace when Ricky came down after getting the kids settled.

"You know they're going to ask again."

"Then I'll have to come up with a better answer."

"They did ask you a good question. Why don't you want to run the country?"

"It wouldn't be fair to you or the kids."

"What are you talking about? The kids would love it. They've enjoyed every visit to the White House and Camp David and their one trip on Air Force One. And they're old enough to know that what they've seen on The West Wing is make-believe."

"What about you?"

"Don't worry about me. I'll be happy with whatever you decide. In any

case, stop fretting about whether or not you're going to run."

"I haven't been 'fretting'."

"Then what do you call it?"

"I've been in a brown study because I'm on the beach and all at sea."

CHAPTER SEVEN

In bed that night, while a storm raged outside, Ricky read the manuscript pages Grace had set aside. They were both grateful to Harry for his help reading and commenting on drafts of their doctoral dissertations when they earned PhDs in history at Georgetown. That was during Grace's first term as governor when she and Ricky took turns caring for their two youngsters or left them with Granny Hannah in the house near campus.

Using Styles family archives, Grace had written her dissertation on Wentworth Cheswell, the first person of color ever elected to public office in the Colonies and the new nation. The grandson of a freed slave and a white woman whose son married another white woman, the well educated Cheswell married the daughter of a white family and was appointed or elected to a number of public offices, including selectman in the town of Newmarket, New Hampshire. He left behind a long line of increasingly white descendants including Grace and her mother—and many others who did not know they were descended from an African slave.

In 2006, Grace had turned her dissertation into *The Selectman*, a lively biography with a foreword by Senator Barack Obama that was turned into an HBO mini-series just in time for the 2008 presidential primaries.

Ricky's dissertation was on the career of her grandfather Carlos Kellermann Rodriguez. Born in Puerto Rico to a prominent family of German descent, he had earned a law degree at Yale the summer before Pearl Harbor. Commissioned in the Navy JAG Corps, Carlos had fallen in love with and married a Japanese woman in 1946 during the occupation of her country. Returning home to San Juan, he had entered politics and eventually served four years as resident commissioner, the non-voting member of Congress representing Puerto Rico. Ricky owed her exotic good looks in large part to her Japanese grandmother as well as to her hispanic and Caribbean ancestors, the Taino. The only jewelry she ever wore, other than her wedding ring, was a gold holy medal with the image of Saint Jude, the patron saint of lost causes and desperate cases.

After earning her doctorate at Georgetown, Ricky had then taken a

law degree at the University of Maryland before becoming an unpaid volunteer on the staff of the Anne Arundel County public defenders office where she had her choice of desperate cases and lost causes.

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When lightning struck nearby and the lights went out and the furnace shut down, Grace and Ricky snuggled under the covers to stay warm as they talked about how fast the kids were growing up and how they would enjoy living at Pirate Cove. It was where they lived when they were both pregnant, where Grace's mother delivered their babies, and where they lived while Grace was in Congress for one term before she was first elected governor in 2006.

"And if you decide to run for president," said Ricky, "we can live here for the next two years when we're not on the campaign trail."

"What do you mean, 'when we're not on the campaign trail'?" asked Grace.

"You don't expect to leave us behind, do you, while you're off having fun?"

"Running for president is no way to have fun."

"Why not? You said you and your brother had fun when your dad ran."

"Yeah—we were kids and he lost."

"But not because you and Carter had fun," said Ricky as she started to get out of bed.

"Where are you going?" asked Grace.

"To get a flashlight so I can read some more."

"I think we've both read enough for tonight," said Grace, pulling Ricky back under the covers, back into the snuggle.

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A few hours later, Grace woke up to discover night-owl Ricky was reading the manuscript again.

"When did the power come back on?"

"About an hour ago," said Ricky. "I never knew your great-grandmother was related to Tsar Nicholas and the other Romanovs."

"They were distant cousins," yawned Grace, "all descended from Ivan the Terrible and Catherine the Great."

Ricky took off her reading glasses, put the manuscript down, turned off the light, snuggled against Grace, and asked: "Do you think there's any truth to the old stories about Catherine the Great and her many lovers?"

“Don’t tell me that’s in Harry’s book.”

“No, but maybe it should be.”

Grace yawned again, said “I’ll sleep on it.”

“Not yet,” said Ricky, snuggling closer.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Watching CNN while they ate breakfast early Saturday morning, the kids got excited when they heard Grace listed among governors who might run for president in 2016.

“U-S-Hebert!” shouted T-Rod and Rocky picked up the chant: “U-S-Hebert! U-S-Hebert!”

“That slogan didn’t work for my dad, and it won’t work for me,” said Grace.

“I disagree,” said Ricky. “That’s as good as the ‘I like Ike’ slogan or Goldwater’s ‘AuH2O’ button.”

“Who was Goldwater?” asked Rocky.

“What are you kids learning in school?” demanded Grace.

“Cut ‘em some slack, Rusty. Barry was dead long before they were born.”

“Barry who?” asked T-Rod.

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After breakfast, the two moms sent their kids off to spend the weekend with the family of Roberto Rodriguez, Ricky’s older brother, a Marine Corps colonel stationed at the Pentagon. Roberto, his wife Carmen, and their three daughters aged eight, eleven, and thirteen, lived about an hour away in College Park where Carmen was a professor of political science at the University of Maryland.

Free of distractions until the kids returned on Sunday evening, Grace and Ricky planned to spend the weekend reading Harry’s manuscript and making notes and comments in the margins.

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Harry’s book began in early 1913 when President Wilson appointed Franklin Pierce Styles ambassador to the Court of Tsar Nicolas II. Former Senator Styles, who spoke no Russian, had brought along his son Grover as his personal secretary. A natural polyglot who spoke fluent French and German by the time he graduated from Harvard in 1903, Grover had joined the foreign service. Assigned to several embassies in central Europe, he

had traveled widely in his spare time and began to take an interest in the political and cultural movements that were destabilizing the old empires and alliances.

In Saint Petersburg, Grover quickly picked up Russian—and used it to court and marry Anna Ulanovna, a young doctor descended from the landed gentry. Despite her upbringing, Anna had progressive ideas and became a radical while treating the wives and children of factory workers. Once the Great War began, she became even more radical as she treated wounded soldiers returning from what the rest of Europe called the Eastern Front.

By the time their son Woodrow Wilson Styles was born in the summer of 1915, Saint Petersburg had become Petrograd. Less than two years later, little Woody was sitting on his father’s shoulders in the crowd gathered at Finland Station when Lenin arrived by train from exile in Switzerland.

Following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Ambassador and Mrs. Styles returned to the United States with their daughter-in-law and grandson while Grover stayed behind as Charge d’Affaires until the embassy was shut down in September of 1919.

Back in the United States, Grover moved into his father’s former home in Georgetown and walked to work at the State Department. Satisfied with their one perfect child, Anna decided to have no more and joined the staff at the nearby Columbia Hospital for Women.

A popular couple, they entertained movers and shakers in political, diplomatic, and cultural circles. Among them were Grover’s Harvard classmate, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin Roosevelt and his wife. Anna and Eleanor (who began life as Anna Eleanor) quickly became close friends.

In 1920, Grover resigned from the State Department and was elected to the Senate from New Hampshire. Over the next twelve years he remained close to FDR while their wives became even closer and remained co-conspirators on social issues for the remainder of their long lives.

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“Let me ask you about something,” said Ricky at lunch on Saturday afternoon. "That passage where Harry describes the trip Anna Styles and Eleanor Roosevelt took to visit Georgia O’Keefe and Mabel Dodge Luhan in Taos--”

“What about it?”

“Do you think he was trying to suggest, oh, so delicately, that there was something . . . um . . . dicey going on between these four women?”

“Hannah’s mom, my Granny Polly, told me her mother-in-law insisted her friendship with Eleanor was strictly platonic.”

“So,” asked Ricky, "dicey, not dykey?”

"Does it matter?”

“Not to me, Sugar Bear," said Ricky.

CHAPTER NINE

After lunch, Grace continued reading, picking up where she left off in 1938, when FDR appointed Senator Grover Styles to replace the grand-standing and clueless Joseph Davies as ambassador to the Soviet Union. Grover took Anna back to her mother country where she corresponded with Eleanor in code by diplomatic pouch about the horrible conditions she found as Stalin’s Great Purge spread terror, famine, and death.

Despite the objections of the Navy Department, Grover also took along his son Woody, a recent Naval Academy graduate fluent in Russian, as an assistant Naval attache. As had his father, Woody fell in love with and married a young Russian doctor. A few years his senior, Polina Petrovna was introduced to Woody by his mother, who had been impressed by her skill, beauty, intelligence, and sense of humor. They were married near Moscow at the rustic lakeside dacha belonging to the bride’s father, one of Stalin’s favorite actors. Their daughter Hannah, named in honor of her Russian grandmother, was born in 1940.

After the Germans invaded Russia in the summer of 1941, Grover sent Anna, the pregnant Polina, and little Hannah to the United States, where Polina gave birth to Franklin Roosevelt Styles, began calling herself Polly, and became a popular speaker for the Russian War Relief Fund. She and Anna travelled the country speaking to large crowds and small groups about why it was important for Americans to support the brave men and women of the Soviet Union who were keeping the Nazis busy on the eastern front.

Some of FDR’s most reactionary opponents, of course, referred to the two Styles ladies as Polly-Annas because of their cheerful optimism about the future of US-Soviet relations once the war was over.

Meanwhile, back in the Soviet Union, Woody survived the plane crash that killed his father. To allay suspicion that Stalin wanted the out-

spoken American ambassador murdered because he was often critical of Soviet policy, Grover's ashes were entombed with elaborate ceremony in the Kremlin Wall—and Woody was awarded the Order of Lenin.

In early 1944, Anna and Polly attended the Hollywood premiere of MGM's *Song of Russia*, a drama about a famous American conductor who falls in love with a beautiful Russian pianist during a tour of the Soviet Union. When the tour is interrupted by the German invasion, the movie became a celebration of Russian resistance. When the movie ended, someone asked Polly why so many Russians, including peasants in the countryside, could speak perfect English.

"Because they hope to come here after the war," she said, then assured the audience she was only joking. But those words would come back to haunt her husband many years later.

As an aide to Averell Harriman, the new ambassador, Woody was present at the Moscow conference in October of 1944 when Churchill and Stalin met for the first time. In early 1945, he was photographed standing next to Molotov behind FDR, Churchill, and Stalin at Yalta on the coast of Crimea. Later that year, Woody was present at Potsdam with Truman, Churchill, and Stalin as those three leaders began setting the stage for the Cold War.

In 1946, Woody resigned from the Navy, joined Polly in New Hampshire, fathered Harry, his youngest child, and was elected to Congress where he served with JFK and Nixon among other Navy veterans. Two years later, he was elected to the Senate. Over his years in the Senate, he sat on or chaired the Committee on Foreign Relations and was largely responsible for the selection and appointment of ambassadors to the Soviet Union. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, JFK sent Woody to Moscow as a special envoy to ease tensions. While there, the Russian-born senator began the talks that led to the establishment of the hotline to and from Washington known as the "Red Telephone" despite the fact it was a teletype link and no phone of any color was involved.

Woody became a reluctant hawk in the early days of American involvement in Vietnam. But after the death there in 1969 of Franklin, his older son, he turned against that war. As the Democratic party nominee for president in 1972, he lost to Nixon because he was born in Russia, had married a Russian, and refused to renounce or return the Order of Lenin awarded him for "promoting friendship and cooperation between peoples and strengthening peace".

Less than two years later, one of Gerald Ford's first acts as president was to appoint former Senator Styles, with whom he had served on the Warren Commission, ambassador to the Soviet Union. Woody and Polly took their two grown children with them, which is how Grace came to be born in the USSR in early 1976, two years after Ambassador Styles and his friend Andrei Sakharov were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize "as spokesmen for the conscience of mankind".

Harry, who had graduated Harvard in 1967 and earned his doctorate there three years later, was invited to lecture on American culture at Moscow State University. It was there he met Olga Izvolskaya, a part-time lecturer in the School of Journalism. They were married in the Spaso House in the summer of 1976.

When Jimmy Carter took office, he asked Woody to stay on as ambassador, which is why Grace spent the best part of her formative years with her maternal grandparents in Moscow while her mother, a psychiatrist who had completed her residency at the Bethesda Naval Hospital, travelled around the Soviet Union interviewing other psychiatrists, including more than one who told her that trying to stay sane in the USSR could drive anyone crazy.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December of 1979, it was Woody who predicted that the Soviets would repeat in that country the mistakes the US made in Vietnam. He also discouraged Carter from boycotting the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow. In a conference call with Carter and the National Security Council, Woody gave his best advice: "Let our Olympic teams go to Russia with love, not hate, and whip every damn Soviet butt."

Jimmy Carter did not take Woody's advice and lost the White House to Reagan, who left Woody in Moscow for more than a year until they disagreed over Reagan's escalation of the Cold War and the speech in which he consigned the Soviet Union to the "ash heap of history".

Hannah, and her kids returned to New Hampshire with Woody and Polly, who continued speaking Russian with their grandchildren and telling them the kind of stories and legends that Russian children grew up hearing. Harry returned as well with Olga, who gave birth to Wilson in 1982 and became a freelance journalist who travelled her new country and her old interviewing Russian immigrants and dissidents. Many of her lighter essays and articles were also published in the Soviet Union until her death in what local authorities called an automobile accident near Moscow.

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In early 1983, after Reagan called the Soviet Union an “evil empire”, Woody flirted with running for president again before giving his support to Walter Mondale.

As the Soviet Union began to fall apart in 1989, former presidents Ford and Carter recommended that the newly inaugurated Bush appoint Woody Styles as ambassador to Russia because of his understanding of the land of his birth. When her grandparents returned to Moscow, they took Grace with them.

And so it came to pass that on Christmas Day 1991, Grace, now almost sixteen, witnessed the grandson of the last American ambassador to the Russian Empire become the last American ambassador to the Soviet Union and the first to the new Russian Federation.

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When Grace and Ricky, reading side by side, got to that part of the manuscript, they found a note from Hannah: “Grace, it’s too bad Harry was not in Moscow for your sixteenth birthday a few weeks later in 1992—I think you and I should write a description for him to add.”

“Describe it for me now,” said Ricky, who had never heard the story about Grace’s sixteenth birthday party.

“The embassy cook made a big sheet cake with two national flags made of red, white, and blue icing,” Grace began. “Woody had invited a lot of Russian guests who all sang ‘Happy Birthday’ in Russian, and then I blew out the candles and everyone had a slice.

“When that was done, Hannah held up a hand-carved nesting doll and told the story about how, just before I was born, Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, and his wife Lydia invited her to a private dinner at which Premier Kosygin was also a guest. Gromyko rose to his feet and offered a toast to the eternal friendship between our two great nations. They are kissing cousins, he said, reaching out to each other across the narrow Bering Strait. He then presented Hannah with a set of antique nesting dolls—“

“The one she keeps in the map room?”

“Yes.”

“Why haven’t I heard this story before?”

“You’re hearing it now. So Gromyko claimed these dolls represented my ‘mother line’, my line of matrilineal descent from Mother Russia. As Hannah opened each doll, Gromyko identified the generation, starting with

'Mat' materi tvoyey materi mat' materi materi—your mother's mother's mother's mother's mother's mother's mother' and so on. 'And here you are,' he said when she found the smallest doll.

Grace paused for effect as she mimed holding up a doll about the size of a lemon, then continued: "When she opened this one, she found what looked like an ordinary pebble inside. And when she held it up to show the guests, Gromyko said 'Almaz v gruboy forma--a Siberian diamond in the rough.'

"What did you do with that diamond?' one of the Russians asked, and Hannah said she took it to a famous diamond cutter on Arbat Street to have it made into a pendant for me. That's when she learned it was nothing more than an ordinary pebble.

"And what do we learn from that?' asked my grandfather Woody. And then he answered his own question: 'Not the lesson you might expect. Not "never trust a Russian", nor "trust but verify".

Woody said the next time he saw Gromyko at a reception, he asked him why he had claimed it was a diamond in the rough. Gromyko admitted he knew it was not a diamond, but said it was a very rare pebble—and that it was the kind of rare pebble that can turn into a precious stone.

"How do you know that?' Woody asked. And Gromyko said 'Because I had the honor of knowing Grover Styles, your father, when I was in the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs during the war. He impressed me as carved from the granite of his state. Maybe his great-granddaughter will turn out to be—how do you say it?-- a chip off that old block.'

"What did you say in response to that?' asked a Russian guest.

"I told him I thought it was fignya—bullshit,' said Woody."

"What did Gromyko say to that?" asked Ricky, caught up in the story

"Woody said Gromyko smiled and shrugged like a clever peasant caught in a lie, which made all the Russian guests laugh."

"What happened to the pebble?" asked Ricky.

"It's in one of the sets of nesting dolls in the map room."

"Maybe you should have it made into a pendant for Rocky, that chip off your old block."

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Harry's manuscript ended in May of 2000 when Woody—who had seen Tsar Nicholas II and Lenin with his own eyes as a toddler, who had dealt in person with Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev, and Yeltsin—witnessed Vladimir Putin, the acting president of the Russian Federation,

become president. Woody was only eighty-four at the time and would live long enough to see his granddaughter elected governor of Maryland in 2006 and re-elected four years later.

Grace's last suggestion to Harry, one with which her mother agreed, was to cut all references to Putin by name—to make him a non-person. Harry took their advice.

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At supper on Saturday night, after they had both finished reading the manuscript, Ricky asked Grace why Harry rarely mentioned her time in Russia during the last years of the Clinton administration—and why he often wrote about Grace's "Russian friend" by name without mentioning her friendship with him.

"I know you met with him a number of times and even got into the Chernobyl exclusion zone with him," said Ricky.

"Harry left that out because most of my work in Russia was classified. I went places, met people and did things that are still classified, things I can't even share with you."

"I think his book should end with you and your mother's parents returning to the US after the Soviet Union falls apart," said Ricky. "Up until then, his book has been about the love affair between your family and Russia."

"You may be right," said Grace.

"Of course I am," said Ricky. "Unlike you, *mi amor*, I grew up speaking a romance language."

CHAPTER TEN

"I really liked the parts about three young Americans finding Russian wives," said Ricky as they cuddled in bed on Saturday night, "but what a strange marriage your parents had."

"Strange in what way?"

"I'm talking about your father staying behind in Washington to tend to Senate business and getting to see your mother only a few times each year—and managing to get her pregnant with your brother on one of his 'fact-finding' visits to Russia."

"You and I spent more than five years apart after we graduated," Grace reminded her. They had become secret lovers at the Naval Academy where the statuesque Grace had been called "Busty-Rusty" while her

roommate was called "Mavericky" because she wanted to become a Navy fighter pilot. Grace had played center on the varsity basketball team while the aggressive Ricky had starred on the soccer team.

After graduating in 1997, Ricky had gone off to flight training at Pensacola while Grace was assigned to the Office of Naval Intelligence. After flight training, Ricky, who spoke fluent Japanese, was assigned to a carrier in Tokyo Bay with a view of Mount Fuji. At about the same time, Grace was assigned to the American Embassy in Moscow. For five years, they managed to spend as much leave time together and as discreetly as possible during the era of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell". Not until after Grace was wounded by Taliban mortar fire in Afghanistan did Grace and Ricky come out of the closet and resign their commissions.

"And a lot of people think our marriage is strange," said Ricky as she picked up *Deadline*, the new Virgil Flowers novel she had been reading at bedtime before she turned her attention to Harry's manuscript.

"What's strange about two happily married women who don't live with the fathers of their children?" asked Grace as she turned over and closed her eyes.

"Before I forget," said Ricky, "I think Harry's book needs a catchier title. Something shorter, something that grabs both the heart and the mind."

"Hannah said the same thing," said Grace, who suddenly turned on the light, picked up the manuscript, and began searching for something.

"What are you looking for?"

"Here it is," said Grace. "What my grandfather said when he advised Jimmy Carter not to boycott the 1980 Moscow Olympics: 'Let our Olympic teams go to Russia with love, not hate, and whip every damn Soviet butt'. There's Harry's new title: *To Russia with Love*. Four words, a comma in the middle, half the prepositions, no flags, and nothing about an empire or a federation."

"I like it," said Ricky as Grace turned out the light. "That could be a good title for a cable series spread over several seasons. The first part reminds me of *Downton Abby*, but with the servants taking over the house and making a mess of things after they murder the family. The second part about Grover and Stalin takes the American version of *House of Cards* to a new level. The third part about your grandfather Woody dealing with Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev, and Yeltsin breaks new ground."

"Do you mean the kind of ground where seeds of a new revolution might be planted?" asked Grace.

“Yes—but why did your uncle stop his account just as Putin came to power?”

“That’s because Harry sees similarities between Putin’s regime and the final years of the Russian Empire. Like my mother, Harry grew up hearing his Russian grandmother tell stories about life in Saint Petersburg before, during, and after the revolution, then hearing his parents tell stories about Stalin and life throughout the Soviet Union during the Stalinist era. I think he hopes and believes there will eventually be a second Russian revolution against Putin and the oligarchs.”

“Which is why he doesn’t want to write about Putin?”

“At least not for publication for the time being. Hannah says he left his private notebooks about Putin in safe-keeping with her—and that they document a simmering stew of psychopathic, sociopathic, and sadistic tendencies. He also left her with a thick envelop marked ‘open in the event of my death’.”

“Life in Russia must be a nightmare,” said Ricky.

“It is for many Russians—and I had several bad dreams after reading Harry’s manuscript, including one about the murder of the Tsar and his family. That was a dream that plagued me as a child after a Russian servant at the Spaso House told me the gory details of how they were gunned down and bayoneted.”

“Do you have good dreams about life in Russia?”

“Not many, but I had a good one last night about when Carter was a baby and Hannah and I were playing with him in the tub the way you and I used to play with ours. Do you miss that, having babies around?”

“I don’t miss the diapers,” yawned Ricky, who then sang, “I still got you, Babe.”

“Not that it matters, which one am I? Sonny or Cher?”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Early on Sunday morning, Grace woke up from a series of dreams about being pregnant again, then about having a curly-haired newborn at her breast, then playing in the tub with an older baby and a toy boat. She tried to recapture the dream by getting up and soaking in the old cast-iron tub while Ricky was still asleep.

As she soaked, Grace remembered bits and pieces of those dreams—and the joy she and Ricky had bathing face to face with their two kids

between them in the same long tub. It had been nearly ten years since the kids were small enough to bathe with them. She thought again about how fast they were growing up. Only a few months ago, they liked to watch cartoon shows in the morning while they ate breakfast. But recently, they had started to watch local and national news programs and to ask questions or express opinions about many events and issues.

And she remembered holding little Webster on her lap two days earlier as he sucked down the bottle of his mother's milk.

Quite suddenly, in that comforting warmth, Grace knew what she wanted to do—had to do—so she would no longer be on the beach or all at sea.

Out of the tub, Grace toweled off, then stood naked beside the bed as she woke up her wife.

"Well, look at you," yawned Ricky, "showing off your fine governing body."

"I think we should have more kids," said Grace, slipping back under the covers beside Ricky, who was warm and just as naked.

"You can have as many as you like. I didn't enjoy being pregnant as much as you did."

"I only want one. I think I'd like a boy this time."

Fully awake now, Ricky took Grace in her arms and smiled. "Roberto would like a boy as well after fathering four girls."

"I know—but I have someone else in mind, another volunteer who floats my boat."

"By 'another volunteer', do you mean your Russian friend?"

"Why not? He's already had four healthy kids that we know of by three women—not that it matters."

"Hmmm," said Ricky, "I'll admit you two are an odd couple who seem made for one another. He could and should be president of his country, and you could and should be president of yours. If you really want to have his kid, you better use him before you lose him."

"What does that mean?" asked Grace.

"The way he challenges Putin," said Ricky, "he's a dead man walking. It's only a matter of time."

"I know," sighed Grace, who then smiled: "But I already have what I need."

"You do? When did that happen?"

"When he was here five years ago, I had him donate sperm."

“You did? Why didn’t you tell me?” asked Ricky.

“Do you tell me everything you and your friends are up to as you scheme to make Puerto Rico a state?”

“Of course not, but I’m not an elected official—and you need plausible deniability.”

“And we both need coffee,” said Grace, starting to get out of bed.

“Not yet,” said Ricky, pulling her back under the covers.

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“Does anyone else know about your spunky Russian donor?” asked Ricky after they made love.

“Just my mother,” smiled Grace.

“What’s so funny?”

“I was just remembering how she laughed when I told her the false name I picked for him: ‘Yuri Rozanov’.”

“What’s funny about that name?”

“It’s the name of the Alan Arkin character in that movie about the Russian submarine that gets stuck on a sandbar off the coast of New England.”

“The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming,” laughed Ricky, catching on.

“It’s just one Russian’ I told Mom when she said the same thing—and she said ‘Yeah, but that’s how it starts’.”

“So, when do you plan to get knocked up?”

“All the signs are right, so I’d like to try tomorrow or the next day.”

“What’s the rush?”

“If I do decide to run, I’d like to have my baby before the primaries begin. And I want this baby born on Russian soil, just as I was, just as my mother was, and just as her father was.”

“How do you expect to have a baby in Russia when Putin is cracking down on gays?”

“I didn’t say I wanted this baby to be born in Russia. I said I wanted it to be born on Russian soil.”

“That sounds like a distinction without a difference.”

“It’s actually a difference of nearly five thousand miles.”

“So, there’s a distinct difference—but I still don’t get it.”

“One of the problems with Harry’s book is that he didn’t pay attention to or remember some of the stories that Hannah heard from her Russian mother and grandmother and that I heard from Hannah and my Russian

grandmother—and that you heard from me.”

“The garden in Georgetown,” said Ricky, slapping her head.

“And even more at Styles Landing. Woody’s mother had tons of soil dug up from her parents’ estate and shipped from Petrograd to her new home.”

“Are you going to tell your Russian friend?”

“Maybe not until we meet again.”

“When is that going to happen?”

“Don’t know where, don’t know when,” she said softly, almost singing. And then, in a flat voice, “and don’t know how.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

Her Russian friend’s name was Boris Yefimovich Nemtsov. A tall and handsome deputy prime minister of Russia under President Yeltsin, Boris was expected to be his successor—and had been introduced as such to Bill Clinton by Yeltsin.

Grace had first met Boris in Moscow in 1998, the year after she graduated from the Naval Academy. She had been assigned to the American embassy as an assistant to the cultural attache. The assignment had been made at the request of the ambassador. A widower following the death of his wife years earlier, Harry had relied on his Russian-speaking niece as hostess at dinners, receptions, and other social events.

During her two years in Moscow, Grace had interviewed Boris at length numerous times as part of a wide-ranging intelligence-gathering operation conducted by the Office of Naval Intelligence.

Quite by chance, she had also met a rising apparatchik named Vladimir Putin, whose sudden rise undermined the career of Boris but not his status as a reformer. He had founded the Young Russia movement and was an outspoken critic of Putin and the oligarchs.

Although she had corresponded secretly with Boris through a third party after she returned to the states in early 2001, they did not meet again until the summer of 2009 when he spoke in Washington at an event hosted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

“I was sorry to hear about the death of your grandfather,” he told her before his speech. “I met the ambassador only once and admired him greatly.”

“The feeling was mutual. He told me how much he was impressed by

your work as the governor of the Nizhny Novgorod Oblast.”

“And now you are governor of Maryland and some speak of you as a future president.”

“Let’s not speak of that,” she said.

“Ah—is that a cup you would ask your father to let pass from you?”

— — — —

After his speech, Grace invited Boris to spend the weekend at Pirate Cove where he charmed and was charmed by Ricky and their two little Russian-speaking bear cubs, who promptly made him an honorary uncle by calling him "Dyadya Boris Yefimovich".

Supportive of gay rights in Russia, Boris enjoyed watching the video of the wedding on Cape Cod when Grace and Ricky held their toddlers as TeeJay performed the ceremony after proclaiming: “These two young women are not only merry and kind, they are the marrying kind—and now the merry commonwealth of Massachusetts is kind enough to allow them to marry.”

— — — —

That weekend, after Boris called Pirate Cove their “dacha”, Grace and Ricky took him with the kids for a sail on A Bear at Sea II, her smaller version of her father’s sloop, to spy on an even larger dacha about fifteen miles away: the forty-five acre waterfront compound at Pioneer Point owned by the Russian government and used as a recreational resort for embassy staff—and a covert location for espionage activities.

“Unlike another governor, I cannot see Russia from my house, but I can see Russians from my boat,” Grace told her visitor.

“What do you think of Sergey Ivanovich Kislyak, our new ambassador?” he asked Grace when they were alone after returning from spying on the spies’ nest.

“A very intelligent but vulgar toady,” said Grace.

“Toady?”

“Flunkey, lackey, sycophant.”

“Ah, ‘sycophant’, yes,” he agreed.

“I’ve crossed swords with him at social gatherings several times in the last year.”

“Have you drawn blood yet?”

“Not for lack of trying,” she told him.

— — — —

After supper that evening, and while Ricky was putting the kids to

bed, Grace had sat on the porch with her guest watching the sun setting over the bay and the land beyond.

"How is it," he asked, "that you are governor of Maryland while your father is senator from New Hampshire?"

"That's because his own father was a senator from Maryland long before I was born, which is why he ran for Congress and then the Senate from the home state of his wife, the daughter of a senator from the Granite State."

"Ah, nepotism. We have that in Russia as well."

They chatted about other similarities between their two countries until he summed it up: "Your country expanded from east to west after it threw off its king, and mine did the same after getting rid of our tsar."

"Will Russia ever stop trying to expand?"

"Will bears ever stop shitting in the woods?" he sighed.

That was the moment Grace made up her mind.

"There's something I'd like you to do for me," she said, "and for Mother Russia."

"If it is in my power to do so."

"I want to have another baby—"

"You want to have my baby?"

"It would be my baby if you're willing to be the father."

"And your wife? Is she . . . cool with this?"

"She thinks you're hot."

"Would my name have to be on birth certificate?"

"No. The father would be identified as an anonymous donor or with a false name."

"Donor? Ah, I understand."

"You don't have to look so disappointed," laughed Grace, who knew he was a shameless womanizer.

"When would you have this baby?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe not for another five or six years."

"How shall we manage this?" he asked.

"Tomorrow morning, I'm going to take the liberty of scheduling an appointment for you at a fertility clinic in Washington."

"'Liberty'--I like the way you Americans use that word. And I will take the liberty of giving you two generous donations."

— — — —

That night, Grace dreamed that after Ricky encouraged her to do so,

she snuck into bed with Boris. Although they had never made love and never would, it was not the last time she would have such a dream.

In this dream, she told him he was the first man she had been with for many years and that she suspected he would be the last.

“You look like ideal Soviet woman,” he said when he saw her naked.

“Do you mean, wide hips, hairy pussy, big tits, and unshaven armpits?” she asked.

“Yes. And strong, like Mother Russia.”

— — — —

“I’ve taken the liberty to decide I may have another little Boris if the first is as beautiful as you are,” she said, running her fingers through his thick curly hair after they made love.

“Liberty’,” he sighed. Once I have rested, I would like to take liberty with you again.”

“That would only be fair,” she said as she dreamed on.

— — — —

“How was it?” asked Ricky when Grace finally came to bed in the dream.

Grace smiled and held up three fingers.

“You slut,” said Ricky, who took the liberty of having her way with her wife until Grace slowly woke up and discovered she was making love to Ricky.

— — — —

“Tell me the truth,” said Ricky when they were done. “Were you dreaming about fucking Boris?”

“Don’t ask and I won’t tell.”

“You slut,” said Ricky.

— — — —

Grace and Boris did not meet again until early in 2014 after President Obama appointed her as one of the official US delegates to the Winter Olympics in Sochi, the city where Boris was born. She and two other gay women who had won gold medals in past Olympic events were chosen by Obama to send a message to President Putin in response to Russia’s new federal law “for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating a Denial of Traditional Family Values”.

At a press conference, Obama said he considered Grace a particularly good choice as a delegate because her solid family values had been on public display for years. She and her wife were obviously good

parents of healthy and happy pre-teens.

“You left out ‘normal’, Mister President,” she said, leaning toward his microphone.

“There’s nothing normal about your children, Governor,” he laughed, “especially your daughter. She makes my two seem almost normal.”

— — — —

Grace had left her lieutenant governor in charge of the state for two weeks and took Ricky and the kids to Russia to show off their family values. They were met upon their arrival in Sochi by Boris and his latest girlfriend, a beautiful Ukrainian fashion model more than thirty years his junior.

The next day, Grace appeared in a joint press conference with Boris about gay rights in Russia and the huge cost overruns that made the Sochi Olympics the most expensive ever. Grace managed to avoid criticizing Putin directly. Instead, she spoke politely and movingly of her disappointment as someone born in Russia and of Russian descent about what was happening on his watch regarding human rights.

— — — —

But a few days later, when she got to meet Putin in person, she was not as diplomatic as earlier and was filmed speaking down to him in fluent Russian from her greater height. Although their testy exchange was never seen on Russian television, it made news back home as a new battle of the sexes.

— — — —

Rocky and T-Rod enjoyed spending time with “Uncle Boris” again and chatting with Russian kids their own age. When a Russian TV reporter asked T-Rod if many American children could speak Russian so fluently, he explained that there was a whole generation of young Americans being prepared to manage American fast-food franchises in Russia. “We will bury you in starch and grease, drown you in Coke and Pepsi.”

“Don’t listen to him,” said Rocky, who went on to say something far more outrageous.

“Who would you most like to meet while you are in Russia?” asked another reporter.

“The girls of Pussy Riot,” said Rocky—at which point the interview was suddenly ended by one of Putin’s watchdogs.

— — — —

“Will we ever meet again?” Boris asked Grace shortly before she and

her family returned stateside.

“Of course we’ll meet again,” she said, then sang softly, “don’t know where, don’t know when, but I know we’ll meet again some sunny day.”

“That sounds familiar. Where have I heard that song before?”

“It’s what Vera Lynn sings at the end of Doctor Strangelove as the bombs go off,” she explained.

“Until we meet again,” he said, “and may the bombs never go off.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Grace and Ricky were still in bed that Sunday morning, still naked under the warm covers, still without coffee, when Grace’s cell phone buzzed. She scrambled out of bed to retrieve it from where she had left it the night before and saw the call was from her mother.

“Have you finished reading Harry’s manuscript?” asked Hannah.

“Yes—Ricky and I have some ideas about what he needs to do.”

“Could TeeJay and I discuss it with you today?”

“Here or there?”

“Chez Hebert. We’d enjoy seeing the children.”

“They’re at Roberto’s cabin and won’t be back until late this afternoon, but you can spend the night if you like.”

“I’ll tell TeeJay to bring his jammies. Can we bring you anything?”

“How about that framed photo of your dad as a toddler with his parents in front of the Winter Palace? I think it might look good on the cover.”

“I’ve already put together an assortment of photos to use at the start of each chapter: my great-grandfather with the Tsar, my grandfather with Stalin, my dad with Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Gorbachev, you and your granddad with Yeltsin. You and Harry with Putin.”

“This book isn’t about me or--”

“Maybe it should be,” said Hannah, and hung up before Grace could respond.

“Are you going to tell your mother when she gets here?” asked Ricky.

“About wanting to have a baby? Of course.”

“You know, Harry’s manuscript did it.”

“Did what?”

“Passed the buck to you: you read about two of your ancestors falling in love with Russian women—and then you fell in love with the idea of

having a baby with the help of the Russian man you love.”

“I don’t love Boris—“

“Liar, liar, pants on fire,” laughed Ricky, pulling Grace back under the covers. “Too bad we don’t have him here for a three-way.”

— — — —

When Hannah and TeeJay arrived, they had Polly Hebert, the daughter of Carter and Jennie, with them. Named for her Russian great-grandmother, Polly was sixteen going on thirty and had read the manuscript as well.

“Polly got her driver’s license last month—and she drove us all the way,” Hannah explained.

“And I prayed all the way,” TeeJay added.

Grace told the visitors she believed the book should be called *To Russia, with Love* and that it should end with the collapse of the Soviet Union as witnessed by someone who had been born in the Russian Empire.

“I think Harry will like those suggestions,” her mother said, “but what if he ended with a postscript about you and Boris confronting Putin at the winter Olympics earlier this year?”

“I don’t think Harry should mention Putin even once in his book if it ends before Putin came out from the shadows—and I don’t think he should paint a target on Boris.”

Grace turned to the old Jesuit and told him she needed some privacy for “girl talk” with her mother, wife, and niece.

Once the three women were alone, Grace told Hannah she wanted to have another baby as soon as possible and with Boris as the father.

“Hmmm,” smiled Hannah, who already knew about his visit to the fertility clinic five years earlier. “There’s a certain symmetry to that.”

“His name won’t be on the birth certificate,” said Grace, “so that must be our secret.”

“When will you be ready to conceive?”

“That window is open for the next few days. I’d like to try tomorrow—and I’d like you there.”

“What about me?” asked Polly. “I watched Mom having my little brother, but I’ve never witnessed how babies get made.”

“I’m sure you know how they get made,” said Grace, “and I already have two handmaidens.”

“Are you going to tell your dad what you have in mind?” asked

Hannah.

“Not yet.”

“And does this mean you’ve decided not to run for president?”

“No. But if I run, it will be with a baby on my hip or at my breast.”

“Now there’s a photo op,” laughed Hannah.

“This might be a good time to drop the other shoe,” said Ricky, looking at Grace.

“Why don’t you do that,” suggested Grace.

“She wants to have the baby on Russian soil.”

Hannah frowned, then caught on: “It’s a good thing we all know where there’s some good Russian soil.”

“We do?” asked Polly.

— — — —

For the next eight or nine hours, Polly listened and occasionally spoke up while Grace, Ricky, Hannah, and TeeJay combined their comments, corrections, suggestions, and recommendations to add or subtract details.

Toward the end of that long session, Grace suggested the book should end with an elaboration of Woody’s claim that “the Soviet Union was not tossed on the ash heap of history but given a decent burial after dying of natural causes”.

“What’s the ash heap of history?” asked Polly.

“It’s where Blockbuster, Betamax, and rabbit ears went to die,” said TeeJay.

“Rabbit ears?” asked Polly.

“Outdated ideas, concepts, or artifacts,” explained TeeJay. “Sort of like saying Catholics can’t eat meat on Friday or women can’t become Catholic priests.”

“Oh,” said Polly, “that ash heap.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Early that evening, Roberto and Carmen arrived with the two sets of kids. All five raced up to tackle and hug the old Jesuit, who held up his crucifix as though to ward off evil spirits. In his mid-nineties, TeeJay had entered the best part of his second childhood and was happiest when surrounded by other children.

At supper in the big kitchen, Rocky and the cousins teased T-Rod

about being kissed by a girl at a birthday party at a nearby cabin.

"He pretended not to like it," said Gabriela, the oldest of the cousins, "but he did."

"Did not," said T-Rod, who didn't sound very convincing.

To end the teasing, TeeJay asked the kids if they would like to hear about the first time a woman, other than his mother or his sisters or his aunts or his wife, had ever kissed him.

"Your wife?" asked Carmen. "You were married?"

"It's a long story," said Grace, "for another time."

"Did you kiss her?" asked Rocky, who knew the story.

"No, it would not have been appropriate."

"When has that ever bothered you?" asked Grace.

"Let me tell my story," said TeeJay. "I was five years old and Sister Mary Teresa was my first grade teacher. She was barely out of convent school, probably no more than twenty. I was one of her favorites because she had gone to school with my aunt Billie, my mother's younger sister. The week before Valentine's Day, she showed us how to make Valentine cards and told us to make one for someone we liked."

He paused to take a sip of beer before continuing.

"When my grandfather, who had a wicked sense of humor, came home and saw me making a mess at the kitchen table with scissors and paper and glue and crayons, he asked what I was doing. When I told him I was making a Valentine card, he wanted to know who it was for. When I told him it was for my teacher, he said, 'What you gotta do, TeeJay, is write some kinda sentiment on your card, you know, like "Be my sweetheart." He thought about it for a bit, snapped his fingers, and said "Here's whatcha gotta say: 'May all your sons be Jesuits.'"

"Uh, oh," said Grace, who knew the story but acted as though she had never heard it. "This cannot end well."

"Don't be so sure," TeeJay said. "So he wrote down what I should say, and I carefully printed each word in a different color, 'May all your sons be Jesuits'. In school the next day, Sister Mary Teresa opened my card and read it to herself, then smiled and gave me a kiss on top of my head."

He paused, looked at the kids, and continued: "And then she shared my card with the Mother Superior—"

Victims of Catholic grammar schools, Ricky, Roberto, and Carmen all laughed and went "Uh, oh!".

"—and the Mother Superior was not amused or charmed. She was a

nasty old 'rhymes with witch' who was born in Germany and cut no slack for cute or sweet or naive. I had to stand in the dark closet in her office during recess every day for a week. Good thing she didn't know about holy water-boarding."

T-Rod, who had pretended not to be listening, started to ask about holy water-boarding, but TeeJay held up a hand.

"Wait. That's not the end. Many years later, I came back to New Orleans for my mother's funeral, and this elegant Garden District matron came up and told me how proud my mother was that I became a priest, and then she said, 'Father Livaudais, I hope you're not disappointed, but none of my sons are Jesuits.' And she pulled my head down and kissed me on top, just like she did years before, and waltzed out the door before I could recover. Then my Aunt Billie came over and told me her friend left the convent before taking her final vows and got married."

"You made that up," said Rocky, glaring at the old priest.

Looking shocked, TeeJay demanded: "Would a man of God lie about such a thing?"

"A Jebbie would," Rocky said, using the slang term for a Jesuit.

"Ouch!" said TeeJay, who smiled at Grace as he grabbed Rocky, gave her a noogie, then kissed the top of her head.

— — — —

After supper, Rocky and T-Rod invited Hannah, TeeJay, and their cousins into the family room to watch the video they made of the Halloween costume party at the governor's mansion the week before. Because it was their last time as the First Goblins of Maryland, they had outdone themselves and had insisted their mothers be the bitchiest witches ever.

While the two couples were having coffee in the kitchen, Ricky teased her brother about the name of his big new GMC Denali. She mocked "Denali" as a misspelling of "Denial" and called it a good name for a car owned by someone who was in denial about climate change and global warming.

"Bite me," he replied, employing the standard rebuke Rocky and T-Rod had passed on to their cousins.

"Too bad we don't have a bigger SUV," said Carmen, looking at Grace.

"Why's that?" asked Grace.

"You could ride with us when we head to the Landing for Thanksgiving."

“You’re joining us this year?”

“When your mom invited us, she said something about a big family gathering.”

“What’s that all about?” asked Roberto.

“Don’t let the kids know,” said Grace, “but Dad’s upset about the midterm results and wants me to run for president.”

“Sounds like a great idea,” said Carmen. “Are you going to do it?”

“Ricky thinks I should, but I haven’t made up my mind.”

“If you do decide to run,” said Roberto, “I’ll resign and drive your campaign bus to hell and back.”

Eight years earlier, when Grace first ran for governor, Roberto had taken a month off between tours in Afghanistan to drive her small campaign bus around Maryland.

“Berto, what am I supposed to do if you go gallivanting around on a bigger campaign?” demanded Carmen.

“The same thing you’d do if I went back for another tour overseas,” said Roberto. “Find another au pair to take care of the kids while you do what you want.”

“What about what I want?” asked Grace.

“Man up, Rusty,” said Roberto, “and think about what your country needs. Oh—and think about a bigger bus.”

— — — —

After Roberto and Carmen headed home with their kids, Ricky asked Grace why she hadn’t mentioned her plan to have a baby.

“I don’t want to let the cat out of the bag until I know I’m pregnant.”

“You didn’t have any trouble the first time—it was one and done. I had to try four times.”

— — — —

That night, Hannah entertained her three grandchildren with stories about Grace and Carter as children. Some of the stories should have been rated PG-13 if not R. And then TeeJay told a few R-rated stories about Tom Hebert as a boy.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Early Monday morning, after Hannah and TeeJay headed back to Georgetown, Grace drove Ricky and the kids across the bridge to Annapolis in the old green and tan Subaru Outback she and Ricky had

purchased in 2003 because it had four wheel drive for icy roads. Although they knew Outbacks were being marketed to teachers, healthcare workers, computer nerds, and lesbians, they simply liked the shape and look of the thing.

“Maybe we should get a bigger car,” Grace now said to Ricky.

“What’s wrong with this one?” Rocky demanded from the back seat.

“Yeah—we like Rusty’s rusty lez-mobile,” said T-Rod. It had been his idea to buy a bright yellow “HOT BABES ON BOARD” sign to hang in the rear window.

“Shock your own goose,” said Grace, using the kids’ version of *chacun a son gout*.

— — — —

Grace spent the morning taking care of state business until her mother called shortly before lunch.

“The clinic will be closed tomorrow for Veterans Day, but they can squeeze you in early this afternoon.”

“Great. I’ll have my main squeeze with me,” said Grace.

“I’ll bring TeeJay. He wants to come along to bless that which you are about to receive.”

“Why’d you tell him I wanted to have another baby?”

“He’s my father-confessor.”

“Mom, you’re not even a Catholic.”

“He doesn’t want to witness the procedure. Just wants to mumble a bit of mumbo-jumbo and sprinkle some holy water around.”

“Fair enough,” said Grace, who appreciated the fact that TeeJay had officiated at her marriage to Ricky despite church prohibitions. He was, like Grace, a loose cannon. In his case, it was with a comfortably loose interpretation of canon law.

— — — —

That afternoon, Grace was flat on her back with her feet in the air and Ricky was holding one hand, her mother the other. Resting over Grace’s heart was a replica of an ancient Russian icon depicting the Virgin Mary in a scarlet robe. When the same OB/GYN who had done the honors for Rocky and T-Rod came into the room, Grace and her handmaidens began to croon like cowgirls:

“She’s back in the stirrups again,
Up where a girl needs a friend,
Where her thighs are spread wide,

And she's got nothin' to hide,
Back in the stirrups again."

"Well, aren't we cheerful?" said the doctor.

"We have a lot to be cheerful about," said Grace.

"That very nice old priest asked me to tell you he blessed that which you are about to receive in the name of Our Lady Derzhavnaya. He made me practice that name until I got it right."

"Ah," sighed Grace a few minutes later when the deed was done, "From a Russian, with love." Then she kissed the icon held by her mother. It had been brought to America by Hannah's grandmother after the Revolution along with tons of good Russian soil from her own mother's garden.

— — — —

After the procedure, Grace remained on her back for half an hour, twice the recommended time.

"La Donna e immobile," sang Ricky, as Hannah hummed Verdi's melody.

— — — —

When Grace and Ricky pulled up in front of the governor's mansion late that afternoon, they saw their two kids and some of their friends waving hand-made campaign signs with slogans like "Amazing Grace for President", "Put a Momma Bear in the White House", and "We're Lusty for Rusty".

All the kids were chanting the slogan used by Tom Hebert's campaign in 1988: "U-S-Hebert!, U-S-Hebert!"

Ricky picked up the chant while Grace chanted "You're no fair! You're no fair!"

— — — —

Grace took time to chat with the friends. One asked her why she wore an eye patch rather than a glass eye.

"Too much damage," Grace said. "I could wear a glass eye, but it wouldn't move like a real eye."

"Besides," said Rocky, "her eye patch looks way cool."

"How did you lose your eye?" asked another.

"That sounds like I was careless," she said. "It was taken from me."

"Why don't you show them your tattoo," said T-Rod.

"Some other time," said Grace.

— — — —

During supper that night, Grace thanked Rocky and T-Rod for their encouragement but explained she had no plans to run unless she found some compelling reason to do so.

“What would be a compelling reason?” asked Rocky, who was starting to show signs of evolving into a prosecutor or a grand inquisitor.

“I don’t know, but if one bites me on the butt, I’ll throw my hat in the ring.”

— — — —

The next morning, Grace presided at Veterans Day ceremonies in Annapolis, then went with Ricky and the kids to join her parents, Carter’s family, and TeeJay when they visited the graves of Woody Styles and Franklin, his older son, in Arlington. They also visited the graves of several Heberts and of TeeJay’s father, a member of the Louisiana National Guard who had served in the Great War to End All Wars.

Standing beside his father’s grave, TeeJay offered a short prayer, then turned to Grace: “If you become president, I hope you will change the name of Veterans Day back to what it once was, Armistice Day.”

“I know an even better name for this day,” said Grace.

“What’s that?” asked TeeJay.

“If I run and if I’m elected on November 8th, 2016, I will come here three days later to announce my plans for how we will honor the centennial of the armistice that did not end The War to End All Wars.”

“What do you mean?” asked Rocky.

“The Armistice with Germany that went into effect on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918 did not stop Germany from going back to war less than twenty-one years later, and that war begat the Cold War, which can end in only two ways.”

“What two ways?” asked T-Rod.

“Either we use all of our nuclear weapons against each other all at once, or we get rid of every last one, once and for all.”

“Ah,” said TeeJay. “Disarmament Day.”

Rocky clicked her teeth together, then announced: “That’s the sound of a compelling reason to throw your hat in the ring biting you on the behind.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

For the rest of that week and most of the next, Grace turned the bulk

of her routine duties over to her lieutenant governor and spent as much time as possible during the weekdays getting exercise, reading biographies of Lincoln and FDR, and doing her best not to think about whether or not she should throw her hat in the ring.

She spent most of her evenings and the next two weekends with Ricky and the kids.

On the Sunday before Thanksgiving, they all went to see *Mockingjay* —Part One, the third installment of the dystopian *Hunger Games* series. Although Grace did not enjoy dystopian and post-apocalyptic movies, Ricky and the kids had loved the first two episodes and had been looking forward to the latest adventure of Katniss Everdeen, the character played by Jennifer Lawrence.

On the drive home, they talked about the movie.

“Do you think that could happen here?” asked Rocky, referring to the riots and political executions.

“If we’re not careful,” said Grace. “What was your favorite moment?”

Rocky chose the tender moment in the makeshift hospital when Katniss told the wounded rebels that she had lost her baby and would join their fight.

T-Rod, not unexpectedly, liked moments less tender and complained about sappy and sentimental stuff that made Rocky get weepy.

“Bite me,” Rocky told her brother—which he tried to do until she bit him first and nearly drew blood.

— — — —

While Ricky prepared supper that evening, Grace played a fast game of Russian Scrabble with the kids using Cyrillic tiles. On other evenings, when Grace fixed supper, Ricky played Spanish Scrabble with the kids. And sometimes the two moms teamed up to play with English tiles against the two kids. For Grace and Ricky, half the fun of playing Scrabble in Russian, Spanish, or English was listening to the kids challenging one another. The other half was enjoying those times when the kids conspired to gang up on them.

As children, Ricky and Roberto had been taught to play Go, Renju, and Shogi by their Japanese grandmother. Ricky had then taught Rocky and T-Rod these abstract strategy games for two players, and the well-matched “fraternal twins” played them regularly to hone their skills.

— — — —

During supper that Sunday evening, they all watched *60 Minutes*,

their favorite news show.

“Sorry for the mess we’re leaving your generation and your kids,” said Grace after they watched a report on structurally deficient roads and bridges in the US. That was followed by a visit to the exclusion zone surrounding the remains of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor.

“Well, at least you fixed a lot of stuff here in Maryland,” said T-Rod, who had enjoyed putting on a hard hat and day-glow safety vest to inspect construction sites with the governor.

“Have you ever been to Chernobyl, Mom?” asked Rocky.

“Yes, I went there with Uncle Boris fifteen years ago. It’s worse than anything in that movie we saw this afternoon.”

“When are we gonna see him again?” asked T-Rod.

“Don’t know where, don’t know when,” said Grace.

— — — —

“Mom,” asked Rocky as she helped with the supper dishes while Ricky was helping T-Rod with a homework assignment he had ignored, “do you think they’ll ever make movies based on Poppa Tom’s novels?”

An avid reader, Rocky had read the three best sellers her grandfather had written for relaxation during the frustrations of the G. W. Bush administration.

First came Loose Cannons, a fictionalization of the actual adventures and misadventures of Tom and his best friend at the Naval Academy, then during flight training at the Pensacola Naval Air Station, where "Tim Rousseau" broke rules while his friend "Jock MacLain" broke both rules and planes with abandon before they got to fly unarmed photo reconnaissance jets over Cuba during the Missile Crisis. A few years later, they were both flying jets from carriers in the Tonkin Gulf during the escalation of the war in Vietnam before going their separate ways: one into a POW camp in Hanoi while the other returned home to protest the war while running for Congress.

In Rocking the Boat, the two former loose cannons were senators on opposite sides of the aisle who managed to steer a steady middle course to the consternation of their colleagues. The novel ended with their agreement to run for president and vice president in 2008 on the same coalition ticket. On the last page, they flipped a coin to decide who would be POTUS during their first term. If they kept switching jobs every four years, they could spend sixteen years in office until after the election of 2024.

Finally came Making Waves about two young women who meet at

Annapolis, fall in love, serve in the peacetime Navy in the era of “don’t ask, don’t tell”, then go off to war before making war with the Navy about their “lifestyle” and launching a family. That novel had ended with one of the women getting elected to Congress from Rhode Island while the other became her chief of staff as well as chief cook and bottle washer.

Grace hoped her father would not continue fictionalizing her own political career, a career that began before she even knew she would one day stand for office. But she also suspected he was now putting his fertile imagination to work plotting to put her in the White House in early 2017.

“He sold the rights to a producer several years ago,” Grace told her daughter, “but that was for a TV series, not a movie.”

“When will it get made?”

“No idea. It’s in what is called ‘development hell’.”

“Who would play you and Ricky?”

“We’re not in any of his novels.”

“Then who are Billie and Bobbie, the two gay midshipmen in the last one?”

“I have no idea.”

“Momm! You’re such a liar!”

“Don’t ask and I won’t tell.”

“Bite me,” laughed Rocky.

Which her mother did.

— — — —

When TeeJay came to Pirate Cove for a visit during the third weekend in November, he brought a DVD of Spielberg’s Lincoln to watch with Grace, Ricky, and the kids, who had seen it in a theater two years earlier. Afterwards, he and the two mothers got the kids to talk about what they had seen. Rocky was more enthusiastic about sharing her reactions, especially about Tommy Lee Jones’ portrayal of the abolitionist Congressman who takes off his wig before sharing the text of the Thirteenth Amendment in bed with his African American housekeeper.

Rocky impressed TeeJay when she noticed connections between scenes, such as when Lincoln, mounted on a horse, silently takes off his hat as he passes a pile of corpses after a battle, is paralleled when Grant and his officers standing outside Appomattox Courthouse silently take off their hats in respect to Lee mounted on Traveller, and Lee takes off his hat in silent response.

When Rocky, near tears, spoke of how she was moved by Lincoln’s

final line as he prepared to leave for Ford's Theater—"It's time to go, though I'd rather stay"—it was T-Rod who had the final word: "It sounds just like what Groucho Marx sang in *Animal Crackers*: 'Hello, I must be going. I cannot stay, I came to say, I must be going.'"

But even that stoic and dispassionate boy was moved by his memory of the very next scene when Tad Lincoln, roughly the same age, learns of the death of his father and begins to scream as he's pulled away. And T-Rod admitted that the last words of Lincoln's death scene were all that needed to be said: "Now he belongs to the ages."

"After seeing that movie, are you sure you want me to run for president?" Grace asked the kids before they went up to bed that night.

"We're willing to take the risk you may belong to the ages if you are," said Rocky.

"You're going to be a great president," said T-Rod. "And after you're elected, you should go to Russia and tell Putin, 'Hello, you must be going. You cannot stay, I came to say, you must be going'."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Early on the morning before Thanksgiving, Grace, Ricky, and the kids took the Acela Express from Baltimore to South Station in Boston. From Boston, they would Amtrak from North Station to Durham, New Hampshire for the long holiday gathering at Styles Landing.

Grace was greeted by strangers at every stage of this journey, usually as "Governor", but sometimes as "Grace" or "Rusty". Her name and face had been in the national news for more than ten years and increasingly so following her keynote address at the 2012 Democratic National Convention. Speaking flawlessly from memory as always without a teleprompter, she had impressed a national audience with her ability to hold the attention of a restless crowd.

Because both Clinton and Obama had begun their journeys to the White House as keynote speakers four years before they were elected, there had been much speculation that Grace would follow in their footsteps, but she had repeatedly and firmly denied any interest in running for the White House in 2016 or later.

From South Station in Boston, they walked through the snow less than a mile to Quincy Market for lunch. Along the way, Grace watched the kids chasing each other back and forth after being cooped up on the train.

Built closer to the ground like his mother, T-Rod was faster and stronger than the lanky Rocky, but she had better reflexes and could outmaneuver him.

“If I ran and got elected,” said Grace, “the kids wouldn’t be able to do that anymore.”

“Of course they would. And they’d have a great time running their protective detail ragged. And can you imagine the code names the Secret Service might pick for them?”

Grace suddenly laughed, remembering something. “Did I ever tell you the nickname my Russian grandmother stuck me with?”

“No.”

“I was like Rocky, tall and skinny, so she called me ‘Dylda’—it’s Russian for ‘beanpole’.”

Ricky thought about it for a moment, then caught on and laughed. “‘Dylda’ and ‘Dildo’.”

“Let’s not share that information with our raunchy little bastards--or with the Secret Service, if push comes to shove,” said Grace.

“What code names would we have?”

“I’d rather not think about that,” said Grace.

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Entering their favorite restaurant on the north side of Quincy Market, they saw Dave and Donna, old friends from Durham sitting at a large table looking at menus.

“Join us,” shouted Dave, which they did.

“Governor Hassan’s talking about challenging Kelly Ayotte for her Senate seat in 2016,” Donna told Grace. “But we’d like to keep Maggie in Concord and wish you’d run against Ayotte instead.”

“I’d rather be a governor than a senator,” Grace replied, “but I’d have to live in New Hampshire for seven years before I could run for that office.”

“That’s the problem,” said Dave. “Any damn carpetbagger can run for the Senate or the House in any state without ever having lived there.”

“That’s the way a bunch of good ol’ boys wrote the Constitution,” said Donna, a Granite State legislator.

“We keep asking Mom to run for president,” said Rocky, “but she keeps dragging her heels.”

“Yeah,” chirped T-Rod. “Rocky and I could be the First Kids of the United States. That’s pronounced ‘Fuh-KOTUS’, get it? Like ‘fuck Otis’.”

“We get it,” said Dave.

“I’m not sure America’s ready for you two,” said Donna.

— — — —

From Quincy Market, they walked less than another mile to North Station where they caught the train to Durham and were greeted by even more passengers who recognized Grace and encouraged her to run.

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When they got off the train in Durham, Hannah Styles was waiting beside “Woody’s Woody”, the wood-panelled station wagon her father had bought when he ran for Congress in 1946.

While Grace and Ricky climbed into the back seat, the two kids slid onto the wide leather front seat beside their grandmother and buckled up.

On the drive to Styles Landing, Hannah tried to debrief the kids on their school work, but they were too wound up after not being allowed to discuss family business or politics on the crowded train.

“We think Mama Rusty should run for president, but she doesn’t want to even talk about it,” T-Rod complained.

“I don’t blame her,” said Hannah, “but I agree with you. She’d make a wonderful president if only she wasn’t dragged down by you two little trouble-makers. Now, how are you guys doing in school?”

Accustomed to being teased by her grandmother, Rocky refused to be distracted: “We designed a campaign button for her on the train—the letters USA above the emoji of a bear.”

“‘USA’ over a bear,” said T-Rod, “like ‘U-S-Hebert’. Get it?”

“Got it,” said Hannah.

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A few minutes later, Hannah turned the car off a winding colonial-era road and headed down the long tree-lined drive to Styles Landing, the large waterfront property on the west side of Great Bay where the first generation of brothers named Styles had staked their claim in the mid-1600s and built a garrison in what was then called the Oyster River Plantation. After the garrison was burned by Abenaki warriors commanded by a French officer during the Oyster River Massacre in 1694, the surviving members of the family built a new central chimney house with a huge attached barn. After the American Revolution, Major Joshua Styles attached a Federal-style mansion to one side of the late seventeenth century house.

When Hannah drove around a curve, the kids saw the rest of the family standing in front of the Styles house waving hand-made campaign signs and snowmen holding other signs.

“U-S-Hebert!, U-S-Hebert!” the kids in the front seat chanted.

Hannah, Ricky, and TeeJay picked up the chant while Grace once again chanted “No fair! No fair!”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

That afternoon, while Polly entertained her younger cousins, Grace and the rest of her family sat around the long trestle table in the kitchen that was the center of life at Styles Landing. According to family legend, it was the table where Joshua Styles, John Sullivan, and other local patriots sat in 1774 when they planned to steal muskets, cannons, and gunpowder from the British troops at Fort William and Mary. Their successful attack was bloodless, unlike the bloody events at Lexington and Concord the following year when the British tried to recover the stolen weapons and powder.

Over the course of several hours, they agreed that if Grace decided to run for president, the campaign would be a family affair and that the whole family, kids included, were prepared to take part in the campaign in one way or another.

“If I do decide to run, are all of you prepared to leave your jobs early next year and come on the campaign trail with me as necessary?” asked Grace, looking around at the other wives and mothers.

“Roberto’s not leaving me and the girls behind,” said Carmen.

“Have baby, will travel,” said Jennie, holding up Webster.

“Count me in,” said one of the other wives.

They agreed that Tom would handle finances and be Grace’s trouble-shooter. Carter, her younger brother, would be her campaign manager and her chief of staff if she was elected. Harry’s son Wilson Styles, a freelance journalist like his late mother, would handle press relations. Roberto would be in charge of campaign security and logistics. And TeeJay would be their chaplain and spiritual adviser.

Hannah and the other four wives agreed they would be Grace’s kitchen cabinet in charge of everything else as needed. Like Ricky, they were an accomplished group, Grace thought as she looked around the table: Hannah, the Navy shrink; Jennie, the epidemiologist; Carmen, the poli-sci professor; and Wilson’s wife Bonnie, a civil rights attorney.

“Any questions?” asked Grace.

“Does this mean we have a candidate?” asked her father.

“No, it means I may decide to become a candidate—but not your

candidate.”

“I stand corrected,” said Tom, who was actually sitting at one end of the table opposite Grace at the other.

“What about campaign finances?” asked Bonnie.

“Hannah and I can loan the campaign enough to get us started,” said Tom.

“How about a campaign biography?” asked Wilson.

“Don’t want or need one,” said Grace, and looked around. “Any other questions?”

“When will you decide you want the job?” asked Carter.

“I don’t want the job, but I’ll let you know if I’m willing to run before we head home on Sunday.”

“And when are you folks gonna clear outta my kitchen so I can do my job?” demanded Ina Daggett, the bossy cook and housekeeper who lived in an apartment above the old carriage house that had been turned into a garage. A widow in her eighties, she had worked at the Landing for nearly fifty years after her husband was killed in Vietnam.

— — — —

That evening, after the family supped in the little-used formal dining room on pizza and other takeout to stay out of the way of Ina’s preparations for the Thanksgiving feast, Grace suggested Roberto and Carmen take her old bedroom, the one she and Ricky regularly used.

“Where will you sleep?” asked Carmen.

“In my grandfather’s old study. It has a convertible sofa.”

“Why can’t we sleep there?” asked Roberto.

“You could, but Ricky has already turned in.”

Grace didn’t bother to explain that she had decided to spend the holiday in that room filled with memories of her grandfather Styles. It was where she had listened to Woody giving her father advice about his own campaign for the White House, where she had introduced her roommate Ricky to the old man during their first Christmas holiday together in 1993, where Woody in his last years had shared with Grace the lessons of his many terms in office and his many years in Russia before and after his Senate career.

— — — —

When Grace came into the study lined with bookcases, she discovered Ricky was reading a dog-eared copy of Richard Ben Cramer’s *What It Takes: The Way to the White House*, his account of the 1988

primaries and election. "I found your dad's copy of this book. It has a couple of funny stories about you."

"Don't remind me."

"Is it true you flirted with the two Biden boys?"

"No comment."

Sorting through Woody's collection of books, she discovered he had scribbled many comments in the margins of *The Wise Men: Seven Friends and the World They Made*, the 1986 account of Averell Harriman, Dean Acheson, George Kennan, Robert Lovett, John McCloy, Charles Bohlen, and Woodrow Wilson Styles as the greatest of the Cold War warriors. Although Woody was the youngest of the Wise Men, and the only one not to have attended Harvard, Princeton, or Yale, he also took on the mantle of his father, who was born a decade before Harriman, the oldest. Of all the Wise Men, Woody had known more presidents and had probably offered more good advice than any other about how to deal with the Soviet Union.

What kind of advice would he have offered her, Grace wondered, for dealing with Putin if she took the helm of the ship of state. And even before her father began to nudge her toward the White House, Woody had charted a course for her, one she had kept to herself.

"I just realized something about Woody," she told Ricky as she held up the copy of the book about the wise men. "He was the least waspy of these WASPS. Perhaps it was because he went to Annapolis instead of an Ivy League school and met midshipmen from many different backgrounds."

"As did you. And now think of countries and regions that contributed their genes to Rocky: England, Spain, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, Africa, and the Caribbean."

"Maybe she'd make a better candidate," said Grace.

"She might if she spends eight years living in the White House."

"Must you always have the final word?" yawned Grace.

"I don't," said Ricky.

"You just did it again."

And so it went until T-Rod knocked on the door to complain the girls were planning some mischief but wouldn't include him.

"Then plan your own," said Ricky, and shooed him away.

When she turned back to Grace, she saw her wife lock her lips and throw away the key.

"That didn't count as the last word in our exchange."

Grace smiled and pulled the covers over her head.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Shortly after sunrise on Thanksgiving morn, Grace came down to the warm kitchen where Ina had already built a fire in the old wood-burning stove on which she preferred to cook instead of on the state-of-the-art gas range. As she prepared to make coffee in the big electric urn, Grace chatted with Ina about the latest local gossip, including who was sleeping with whom in Durham, Newmarket, Madbury, and Lee.

While the urn did its work, Grace did her own: checked her emails, texts, and missed calls, found nothing that needed the immediate attention of the governor of Maryland. She poured coffee for herself and Ina, then turned on CNN to catch the news.

“Morning, ladies,” said her father when he came into the kitchen from the mudroom. Ina scowled at the melting snow dripping from his boots but said nothing.

“Morning, Dad. Why were you out and about this morning?”

“TeeJay and I took a walk to check on the beaver ponds. Found a new one on Styles Creek.”

“Where’s TeeJay?” she asked as Tom poured a cup of coffee for himself.

“He took the Range Rover into town to get the morning papers.”

Tom took a sip of coffee and cleared his throat.

“Let’s take our coffee down to the new pond and bring some leftover pizza for the fish and snapping turtles.”

— — — —

When they were outside, Grace reminded her father he had assured them the house had been swept for bugs.

“It has—but I didn’t want to be interrupted while we talk.”

“What are we going to talk about?”

“A conversation I had with the president a few days ago.”

On the trail through the swampy woods to the beaver pond, Tom said no more. He remained silent as they stood on the bank above the pond and threw scraps of pizza into the water. They watched a huge snapping turtle drag itself up onto the bank and stare at them.

“Is it my imagination,” asked Tom, finally breaking his silence, “or does that old snapper look like Mitch McConnell?”

“Is it my imagination,” snapped Grace, “or are you putting off getting

to the point?"

Tom got to the point: "The president asked me if you might be interested in becoming his new Secretary of the Navy."

"I know he has a sense of humor, but what's that all about?"

"He didn't say so, but I believe it's clear he doesn't want you running for president."

"You may tell him that I have no interest in being a bureaucrat—or an ambassador if he tries to throw me another bone."

As they walked back toward the house, Tom was silent for a few minutes. Then: "Your mom told me last night that you want to have another baby."

"I wish she hadn't done that."

"Does this mean you don't want to run?"

"You already know that I don't. The issue is whether or not I will run even if I don't want to. What does my desire to have another baby have to do with anything?"

"How do you expect to campaign—?"

"—while I'm expecting?" she laughed.

"You're playing with words."

"So what? Your real father was a master at playing rhetorical games with phrases like 'lend-lease' and 'fireside chat'. He knew there was little chance of getting back the ships, tanks, planes, and other materiel he proposed to loan, and his fireside chats took place in a soundproof closet far from any fireplace. He also hid his wheelchair from view. If I run with a baby on board, I'll do so as a sign of my strength, of the strength of women everywhere."

"But why have another baby now?"

"Why not now, while I'm still young enough, healthy enough?"

"And why did you choose a Russian father?"

"Maybe it's because Mom broke a Styles family tradition when she married you instead of a Russian."

CHAPTER TWENTY

That afternoon, while little Webster was napping, the dozen adults sat around the long trestle table in the kitchen. Tom and Hannah were at either end, the other spouses across from each other. TeeJay sat across from Ina Daggett, who had insisted on preparing the entire feast as usual. At a large

folding table, Rocky and T-Rod sat with Polly and their three Rodriguez cousins.

As Tom carved the turkey and the dishes were passed around, compliments and praise were heaped on Ina. Before they began to eat, Hannah asked the old Jesuit to say Grace.

“Grace,” he said, and they all dug in without further ado—except for Ina, a good Methodist who did not approve of making jokes about saying Grace.

“I’ve never understood you Catholics,” she grouched.

“TeeJay’s probably the only practicing Catholic in the room,” said Ricky, speaking for the other fallen or lapsed Catholics.

“What are you talking about?” asked TeeJay, pretending to be offended. “I don’t need to practice anymore. I know all the magic words, blessings, and curses by heart.”

— — —

After the feast, Ricky and T-Rod joined the menfolk in the main house to watch the Philadelphia Eagles whip the Dallas Cowboys. Some of the girls played Monopoly with TeeJay while the rest chased each other around outside as darkness fell.

Meanwhile, as they helped Ina do the dishes and put away the leftovers, Grace and the other four women discussed domestic issues, the only issues that really mattered to them.

“Are you still with us, Dear?” asked Hannah when Grace suddenly fell silent.

“I was just thinking about the men who sat around this table and plotted rebellion. Where were their women, their wives, sisters, mothers, and daughters? What were they doing?”

“Feeding them and egging them on,” said Carmen, who frequently published op-eds and essays about feminist issues.

“You could write something about the women in this kitchen,” Jennie told Carmen.

“The ghosts of five women,” added Hannah, “one from each century this table has held the meals they prepared.”

““Hmmm,” mused Carmen, “let me think about that.”

“I ain’t a ghost yet,” Ina told Grace, “but I’ve listened to three generations of politicians in this room: your grandfather, your father, and now you—and you’re the only one who ever asked my opinion about anything.”

“That’s because you have so many,” said Grace, “and you share them so generously.”

“You’re welcome,” said Ina.

“Where’s Ricky?” asked Bonnie.

“Monitoring the men to keep them out of our hair,” Grace explained.

— — — —

Just as Grace’s “kitchen cabinet” gathering was breaking up, TeeJay came in and handed Grace an old VHS cassette.

“I found this in your grandfather’s collection of old movies he copied off cable. It’s Kisses for My President, with Polly Bergen as the first woman president and Fred McMurray as the first gentleman.”

“I watched that with Woody years ago,” said Grace. “It ends with her getting pregnant and resigning from office because she wants to spend more time with her family—and that’s not anything a female president would do.”

“She wouldn’t resign to spend more time with her family?” asked TeeJay, pretending to be naive.

“Of course not,” said Grace, clenching her fist. “Once we take power, we tend to keep it—and use it even more ruthlessly than men.”

“That’s why Holy Mother Church does not allow women priests,” TeeJay proclaimed. “In her profound wisdom, our church knows that women, not content to be mere mothers superior, would agitate to become bishops and cardinals until—perish the thought—one would become pope.”

“Italians call the pope ‘il papa’,” said Carmen. “Would they call a female pope ‘la mama’?”

“Oh, mama mia!” exclaimed TeeJay in mock alarm, making the sign of the cross, and babbling something incomprehensible in Latin. Then he smiled and added, “I think the proper term of address would be ‘Yo! Mama!’”

“I wouldn’t mind takin’ a look at that,” said Ina. “I always liked that Fred McMurray fella.”

“You still have a cassette player?” asked Grace.

“Doesn’t everyone?” asked the thrifty old Yankee.

— — — —

It was snowing again the next morning when Grace came down and discovered the kitchen was chilly because no fire had been lit in the big cookstove. She started the coffee and responded to emails until Tom came down in his bathrobe and announced that he had not shaved that morning.

"I'm growing a beard because I promised Rocky I would until you agree to run for president."

"You'd look good with a beard," said Grace, "like Donald Sutherland in the Hunger Game movies."

"That's what Rocky told me. She said he looked very presidential."

"Did she mention he plays the chief villain in the series?" asked Grace.

"She left that out," he said as he went into the pantry.

"That's strange," he said a moment later.

"What's wrong?" asked Grace.

"There's no cereal for the kids, no waffle mix, no pancake batter."

Grace looked at the clipboard where Ina kept her shopping list.

"She's got a long list of items. I'll make a run to the Durham Marketplace."

"No," said Tom, "give the list to Ina. She'll complain if you get the wrong brands."

Grace went into the mudroom, pulled on muck boots and a parka, and went out into the snow.

— — — —

When there was no answer to her repeated knocks on the door of Ina's apartment above the garage. Grace began to worry. But when the door was finally opened by a sleepy TeeJay wearing a long flannel nightshirt, Grace suddenly understood why Ina and her uncle so frequently fussed at one another like an old married couple during his many visits.

"Shhh," said TeeJay. "She's still asleep."

"You dirty old man," laughed Grace. "What about your vows?"

"You and Ricky worry about your vows," he said, "and I'll worry about mine."

— — — —

And when Grace returned to the kitchen and told her father that Ina was headed to the market, he asked if she was okay.

"Don't ask and I won't tell."

— — — —

"Yes, we sleep together from time to time," TeeJay told Grace later that morning. "But that's all we do—and all I can do even if I wanted to do more."

"What do you talk about?"

"We don't. We play cards, mostly. And sometimes we do jigsaw

puzzles. But last night, we watched Kisses for My President."

"So—nothing you couldn't do with a nun."

"I once knew a nun who wanted to do a lot more," he said, and waggled his shaggy eyebrows like Groucho Marx.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," said Grace.

"Would you rather I do this?" he said, and wiggled his ears.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

After a late breakfast, Tom took Grace and Carter aside and announced that he wanted to spend some time alone with them at the old Styles family ski lodge on the eastern side of the White Mountains. They would spend the night, he proposed, and climb Mount Washington in the morning if conditions were favorable on the highest peak in New England, the place where the fiercest winds were ever recorded anywhere on earth.

When TeeJay learned of the excursion, he invited himself along.

"But not for the climb," he said, "just to give all three of you the Last Rites if you get in trouble and they can haul you down in time."

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Before agreeing to make the climb, Grace consulted her mother for advice.

"If you are pregnant, as long as you keep your core warm," said Doctor Styles, "and don't wear yourself out, your friend's gift should be snug as a bug."

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Grace told Ricky about Tom's plan, and suggested she take their kids to the Fox Run Mall to see Penguins of Madagascar, the fourth installment in a franchise Rocky and T-Rod liked.

"How do I explain why it was necessary to distract them without having to fib?" asked Ricky.

"Tell them the truth: their grandfather wants to take me to the top of the Presidential Range to inspire me to run."

"Is that going to work?"

"That remains to be seen."

— — — —

While Tom drove TeeJay and his two children north for three hours through snow in his old Land Rover, he talked about what he called the practical realities of a presidential campaign, about the mistakes he and

others had made.

“If I run,” said Grace, “I’ll make a lot of mistakes—and I’ll want to do some things that you will not consider practical or realistic.”

She said she would not accept corporate donations and would rely on small contributions from ordinary citizens; she wanted the whole family to be involved; she wanted to encourage and inspire more Democrats to run, particularly women and minorities who had never run for public office; and she did not want to make any speeches full of promises, platitudes, and patriotic gore.

“And if all goes well,” she warned, “there may be a pregnant pause before the first debate.”

“What does that mean?” asked Carter.

“Your big sister may have gotten herself knocked up again,” explained TeeJay.

“Wow,” said Carter. “Some girls just wanna have fun.”

— — — —

As the quartet warmed themselves around the wood-burning stove in the rustic lodge that night, Tom revealed the secret of his paternity to Carter, who shrugged it off.

“I’m not surprised,” Carter told his father. “None of us look like those old photos of the Heberts—and you would look good with a long cigarette holder at a jaunty angle.”

— — — —

Before she turned in that night, Grace called Ricky to ask how her day went with the kids.

“I enjoyed the movie about the pengu9ins more than they did. They said it was okay for little kids, but they wanted something more interesting, so Rocky and I went to see *The Imitation Game* while T-Rod saw the *Dumb and Dumber* sequel.”

“We both liked the original one,” said Grace.

“No—you did, and so did your kid brother. I told T-Rod about how we saw the original movie when we spent Christmas of ’94 at Styles Landing and took his-father-to-be with us.”

“Did you tell him that my little brother tried to hit on you?”

“I’ll spare him that amusing bit of family history for a few more years.”

“Are you worried about his fondness for silly movies and fart jokes?”

“Of course not. Carter was the same way and look how he turned out.”

“How was the movie about Alan Turing?”

“Great. Your daughter thinks Benedict Cumberbatch is really hot. A few minutes after the movie started, she realized he had provided the voice for the suave wolf in the first movie.”

“So she had a real Cumberbatch day.”

“The first of many, I suspect.”

“Did the movie touch on Turing’s homosexuality?”

“Yes—it’s part of the framing device of the persecution and prosecution of Turing after the war. While we waited for T-Rod to come out of his movie, Rocky wanted to know why some people were so mean to queers back then—and still are. She says she wants to see it again with you.”

“Tell her I’m looking forward to that.”

And she was.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Tom and TeeJay woke Grace and Carter two hours before dawn on Saturday with the news the skies were clear overhead and that the day ahead was expected to be sunny.

“It’s going to be a perfect day to summit Mount Washington.”

Grace, who had made winter climbs with Carter and her father almost every year, wondered how many more Tom would be able to manage in future years as he entered his eighties. She wondered how long it would be before she and Ricky could make winter climbs with their kids. They had made the climb every summer once the kids were old enough to scramble up the trail and ride down from near the summit on the cog railway.

The three climbers broke fast with waffles, hash browns, eggs, and bacon, gathered their winter climbing gear, and suffered a blessing by TeeJay.

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By the time they got to the trailhead, the peaks of the White Mountains were glowing in the light of the rising sun. They left TeeJay at the Appalachian Mountain Club’s visitor center and were on the Tuckerman Ravine trail before the sun had time to burn off the morning fog. With their faces hidden behind ski masks and goggles, Tom and Grace were able to pass as ordinary climbers. But as she trudged anonymously, bent forward, her eye on the trail, Grace suddenly realized she actually liked moving

through those parts of the world where nearly everybody knew her name.

Along with dozens of other climbers strung out along the trail, they made it to the top in less than five hours. While they lunched on the trail mix Tom referred to as “gorp”, they sheltered from the wind in the lee of one of the summit buildings with a view to the south and east. But there was no shelter for Grace from Tom’s windy exhortation.

“How can you look out over this landscape and not want to be master of all you behold?”

“Get thee behind me, Satan,” she said, and prepared to start her descent.

“Run, Rusty, run!” he called after her a few minutes later. There was no way to run through the drifting snow, but she stayed ahead of Tom and her brother for the next few hours.

By the time night fell, they were protected from the wind well below the tree line and moving together as a single unit with Grace as their leader.

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They spent a second night at the family ski lodge. The next morning, Sunday, the three summiteers tried to sleep late but were awakened long before dawn by TeeJay banging pots together.

“It’s the start of Advent,” he said. “There’s a sunrise service at a nearby church. It’s not a Catholic church, but I’m easy.”

“You know we’re not churchgoers,” said Tom.

“Indulge me,” said TeeJay, “and I’ll let you in on a secret.

“What’s the secret?” asked Grace.

“Indulge me first.”

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Once the service was done, TeeJay revealed the secret: “You’re going to run, and you’re going to win.”

“How do you know?”

“I know because Jesus told me so—and would He lie?”

“No, but you would.”

“Not about this,” he said.

Grace sighed and admitted TeeJay was right, at least about her running.

“Maybe I’ll win, and maybe I won’t. But I’m going to run as hard and fast as I can.”

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Shortly after they started back to Styles Landing with Grace at the wheel, she told the others she would announce she was running for the nomination at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve and would begin her cross-country campaign tour on January 21st, the day her term as governor ended.

"You want to start your campaign tour in the dead of winter?" asked Carter.

Having made the first executive decision of her campaign on the fly, Grace was not about to back down.

"Yes—to show how tough we are."

Carter gritted his teeth, asked another question: "And how long would we be on the road?"

"As long as it takes to visit the capital of every state."

"In 1960, Richard Nixon was the only candidate to ever visit every state," said Tom, "but he didn't visit every state capital. Eight years later, he focused on the states he knew he could win and the swing states."

"Every state capital," repeated Grace, "no matter how small."

"We choose to go to Montpelier and Juneau," said Carter, imitating JFK as he named two of the smallest and most remote capitals, "not because it's easy to get to them, but because it's hard."

"Oh," said Grace, "that reminds me: I'll write my own speeches."

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"I better order a campaign bus ASAP," said Tom a few miles down the road. He told Grace he had his eye on a new state-of-the-art campaign bus that slept twelve in comfortable bunks and had seats for twenty more arranged like sofas. "And I think we should call it 'The Bear Truth Express'—that's B-E-A-R, not B-A-R-E."

"We're going to need two buses," said Grace.

"Why two?" asked Carter.

"Because one's like a single ship," she explained. "Two's a fleet. I want us to be able to spread out on two buses unless one breaks down and we have to continue on one until the other catches up with us. And I want experienced drivers," she told her father. "Find me four retired Secret Service agents who can drive and double as security."

"I can do that," said Tom.

"Who would the bunkmates be?" asked Carter.

"The four of us and everyone back at the house except Ina," said Grace.

“You sure you’re up to weeks or months on the road?” Tom asked his uncle.

“Someone has to help the kids with their book-learning,” said TeeJay.

“Not to mention their moral instruction,” added Grace.

“Bite me,” said the old priest.

“What’s that all about?” asked Tom.

“You don’t want to know,” said Grace.

She drove in silence for a few minutes until Tom said, “I think we should ask Colette and Odette Jones to film our tour.”

“I don’t think they’re going to be available,” said Grace. “They’ve got a successful cable series that’s been renewed for another year. And in any case, I don’t want anyone on board for the whole trip except the drivers and family members. We can invite a few reporters along for short stretches between stops, but that’s it.”

“Fair enough,” said Tom. “You have the helm.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

In the privacy of their roomette on the train back to Baltimore that evening, Grace told Ricky she was secretly glad the Jones twins had a scheduling conflict. She had first met them in the summer of 2005 as Hurricane Katrina headed across Florida into the Gulf of Mexico. Her father had used his clout in the Senate and her membership on the Congressional committee that oversaw the Federal Emergency Management Agency to hop an early response flight from the Patuxent River Naval Air Station in Maryland to New Orleans.

They had brought TeeJay along because he was a former Navy chaplain who grew up in New Orleans and had many useful local contacts. One of those contacts put them in touch with the young twins who had begun to make a name for themselves in local African-American circles with their gritty cinema verite documentaries about the dark underside of the Crescent City. Influenced by the work of D. A. Pennebaker, the Maysles Brothers, and Frederick Wiseman, Colette and Odette emulated Spike Lee by calling each of their films a “COJones Joint”, which is why they were often referred to as “Los Cojones”.

Impressed by his first meeting with the feisty twins, and with their understanding that the City That Care Forgot was also the city that forgot to care that more than half its citizens lived below sea level and more than

half of those below the poverty level, Tom had commissioned them to make a feature-length documentary about the preparations for the coming storm, the storm itself, and the aftermath.

The day before Katrina made landfall, the Jones twins began by filming TeeJay standing beside a large map and talking as a first-hand witness about what happened in 1965 when Hurricane Betsy sent a storm surge through Lake Borgne and across the Rigolets and Chef Menteur into Lake Pontchartrain. Speaking like a native of the city he left as a teenager to enter the Naval Academy, TeeJay described how the levees broke and countless people drowned in their attics or died from the heat when the sun came out and they could not escape those attics.

“It could happen again,” he said, “because the city has sunk lower in the last forty years and more of the wetlands that should protect us have been washed away because of the mistakes made by the Army Corps of Engineers.”

The twins filmed Tom and Grace as members of Congress attending press briefings by city and state officials—and Tom let Grace ask the hard questions about Mayor Nagin’s call for voluntary evacuation of the city two days before the storm was predicted to make landfall.

“Why haven’t you ordered mandatory evacuation of the low-lying parts of the city, especially those closest to the manmade levees along the Industrial Canal and in the Lower Ninth Ward?” she had demanded as network reporters and camera crews looked on and locked in on the face of the young congresswoman with the black eye patch.

“We have never ordered mandatory evacuation of N’Awlins,” a spokesperson for the mayor explained, “and we hope ’n’ pray we will never have to.”

“Your hopes and prayers are a waste of time,” she replied, “and many who fail to evacuate will become hopeless prey to this storm.”

The next day, when Katrina became a category five storm, the Jones twins filmed Grace listening to the mayor order the first mandatory evacuation in the long history of the city. After the mayor spoke, the TV crews moved in on Grace.

“I’ve already said what needed to be said.”

That night and the next morning, while Grace, Tom, and TeeJay rode out the storm with Colette and Odette on the upper floor of a hotel overlooking the French Quarter and the river, the old priest had recounted on camera his graphic memories as a teenager helping his father recover

victims of the 1935 Labor Day storm in Florida.

“The water table was so high after the Labor Day storm, we cremated many of the bodies on piles of lumber from wrecked houses,” he said as the window wall behind him shook and rattled. “And many of those bodies were of veterans who had survived trench warfare in France and had come to Florida to work for the WPA—the Works Progress Administration.”

TeeJay then introduced one of his younger cousins, a Louisiana National Guard officer who had helped recover and bury victims of Hurricane Audrey in Cameron Parish in 1957, Hurricane Betsy in New Orleans in 1965, and Hurricane Camille on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in 1969.

Once the wind died down as Katrina headed further inland, some of their Livaudais and other cousins arrived in a small fleet of jon boats to take the senator, the congresswoman, the old priest, and the film crew around the flooded city.

Wearing a bathing suit, a black wife-beater that showed off his anchor tattoo, and a sweat-stained purple stole over his shoulders, TeeJay was filmed administering the last rites at several flooded hospitals and in crowded shelters.

Over the next six days, Tom made sure the Jones twins focused on Grace’s attention to how well and how poorly local, state, and national agencies performed the seven corporal works of mercy, starting with “to feed the hungry” and ending with “to bury the dead”.

On Labor Day, the seventh day after the levees broke, Tom and Grace had attended the press conference about the murderous police shooting the day before of an unarmed black family on a bridge in New Orleans. Following the press conference, Grace’s calm and nuanced critique of what was obviously the start of a cover-up made national headlines.

The next day, Tom, Grace, TeeJay, and the Jones twins had flown to Washington where, three days later, the twins filmed Tom and Grace as they voted in favor of a nearly fifty-two billion dollar aid bill.

Tom had installed the Jones twins at Pirate Cove where they edited a documentary that ended with the image of Grace at a Congressional hearing as she asked FEMA officials about their botched response to the disaster.

“What have we learned from this? How many more dead must we bury after the next storm comes ashore?”

With *Grace in the Wake of Katrina* had been released that December to good reviews and was a top contender for the best documentary at the 2006 Academy Awards but lost to *March of the Penguins*.

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On the train to Baltimore that that night, Grace admitted to Ricky that she was not proud of her grandstanding before and after Katrina came ashore.

“Those elected officials in New Orleans had inherited a mess they did not make. The people appointed to run Homeland Security and FEMA did not make or allow the decisions that left us with unsolvable problems. If I’m elected, I’ll inherit a far larger and more complex mess that involves the whole damn world.”

Ricky played a tiny invisible violin on the fingers of one hand for a moment, then asked: “Would you like a pass to go see the chaplain?”

“I’ve already spoken to our very own chaplain. He suggested I stop whining.”

“Good advice, sailor.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

During the first week in December. Grace and Ricky shut down the house at Pirate Cove and joined her parents and Carter’s family in the big house in Georgetown. From there, she commuted to Annapolis on the days her presence was needed. In addition to turning over more of her gubernatorial duties to her lieutenant governor, the new governor-elect, she also gave him and his family the use of the governor’s mansion.

When asked why she didn’t simply resign and let him take over, Grace explained she had never left a job unfinished.

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More than three weeks after her stint in the stirrups, Grace had not had her period. At Ricky’s urging, she peed on a pregnancy test stick. It was positive.

A few days later, a vaginal ultrasound confirmed Grace had a tiny stowaway on board.

“You should be light in August,” said the doctor, who explained she was fond of Faulkner’s novel about a pregnant girl searching for the father of her illegitimate child.

“Well, at least I know where the father of my next little bastard is,”

said Grace.

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By the second week in December, rumors began to spread that the governor of Maryland was considering a run for president in 2016. As she had the year before when she declined to run for another office in 2014, Grace claimed she wanted to spend more time with her family. What she didn't say was that she and her family were spending time together preparing to launch her campaign to take the helm of the ship of state.

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While T-Rod soon began to spend a lot of time with neighborhood kids, Rocky enjoyed spending time with Polly, her oldest cousin, and playing with and caring for little Webster, her only male cousin other than T-Rod, and the first baby she had ever encountered up close and personal.

Grace took such pleasure in watching Rocky's obvious delight in feeding and bathing Webster, changing his diaper, and helping him learn to walk, that she decided to share the secret she had shared with the other adults in the family.

"You mustn't tell your brother or your other cousins," she told Rocky. "I'm going to have another baby this summer."

"Is Roberto the dad?"

"No, it's Uncle Boris."

"When did that happen?"

"More than a month ago."

"How did it happen?"

"The same way you happened."

"You explained that once, but it was a long time ago."

When Grace began to explain that Roberto had donated his sperm, Rocky interrupted: "You mean, he jerked off in a jar, then they froze his spunk and—"

"Which is why you're a spunky little brat," said Grace, who was amused by her clever daughter's ability to mess with her head.

"Can I watch when the baby is born?"

"You can if I say you may. And you may help the midwives."

"But I don't know nothin' about birthin' babies, Miss Scarlett," Rocky whined, then laughed and hugged her mother.

"Well played," said Grace.

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Each school day, Polly drove Rocky and T-Rod three miles to Sidwell

Friends, their new school on Wisconsin Avenue. After school and on weekends, TeeJay entertained the kids while Grace and Ricky worked in the map room with Tom and Carter as they mapped out the route and schedule for the Bear Truth Express tour of the forty-eight contiguous states and their charter flights to Alaska and Hawaii.

"If all goes well, and if the buses don't break down, and if we're not blocked by blizzards on the Great and Awful Plains, we should be able to do it in less than thirty days," said Carter, "but only if you don't slow down to have rallies anywhere other than state capitals."

"Does that time estimate include the flights to Hawaii and Alaska?"

"Yes, if you flew from Phoenix to Honolulu, that would take six or seven hours, then Honolulu to Sacramento would take another five or so. Meanwhile, the buses could make it from Phoenix to Sacramento in eleven or twelve hours."

"How many miles would we travel by interstate?"

"Somewhere between fourteen and fifteen thousand, which comes out to about five hundred miles a day. Much of the driving would happen at night."

"What if we had a few midnight, sunrise, or sunset rallies?" asked Grace.

Carter agreed that could speed things up.

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At the start of one of their strategy sessions, Tom, who had begun the process of finding ways to get and keep Grace's name and face in the national news, had an announcement: "We've been invited to the bicentennial of the Battle of New Orleans in early January."

"Why us?" asked Grace.

"Because we're descendants of Lafayette Hebert, the captain of the only American gunboat to survive the Battle of Lake Borgne and turn what could have been a huge defeat into a small victory. And TeeJay has been asked to give the invocation."

"What did it take for you to wrangle those invitations?" Grace asked.

"Let's just say Senator Mary Landrieu and her brother Mitch, the mayor of New Orleans, and Moon, their father, owe me a few favors. Getting Mary elected to a third term was one of my proudest accomplishments this year."

"Can you do a favor for me?" she asked.

"What's the favor?"

“Please tell them not to expect me to attend. I’ve got too much else on my plate right now.”

“Too late,” said Tom. “I’ve promised you’ll give a speech.”

“Daddd . . .” she groaned.

“Relax. You know the kids will enjoy seeing their Livaudais cousins again.”

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At the end of the third week in December, Grace sat down with her kitchen cabinet to discuss her plan to spend nearly a month on the campaign bus. She also told them that she was pregnant and asked them not to tell the menfolk.

Hannah and Jennie, the two medical doctors, agreed that it would be very challenging for a pregnant woman, but should not be a problem if she got enough exercise and rest as well as a healthy diet of fresh fruit and veggies—and little or no fast food.

“What if you had an exercise bike in the seating area in the back part of the bus?” asked Bonnie.

“That would help,” agreed Carmen, the fitness fanatic.

“You’re just like Ginger Rogers dancing with Fred Astaire,” said Ricky, “doing everything Fred did, only backwards and in high heels.”

“And pregnant!” chirped Rocky, who had snuck into the meeting unnoticed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

On the first day of winter, the family headed north to spend the holidays at Styles Landing, where Tom hosted several large gatherings around the big wood-burning stove in the barn to introduce his daughter to the movers and shakers among the Granite State’s Democrats and independents. Grace used these events to ask the guests to encourage more neophytes to seek office.

“What about you, Governor?” she was asked again and again. “Are you going to run?”

“Ask me next year” was her standard reply.

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Tom and Hannah invited WMUR, the ABC affiliate in Manchester, to cover their huge New Years Eve party in the barn at Styles Landing. On the stroke of midnight, as planned more than a month earlier, the WMUR

reporter asked Grace if she planned to run for the White House.

“Yes, that’s why I’m throwing my hat in the ring.”

She became the first serious presidential candidate to do so by taking off the ushanka Boris had given her at the Sochi Olympics and tossing it through a literal ring: the basketball hoop mounted on one of the hand-hewn barn posts.

Having announced her candidacy, she declined to say anything else that night or the following day.

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Grace and her immediate family returned to the house in Georgetown on January 2nd, the day before the new Congress took office.

Early the next morning, a Saturday, on the first national television talk show appearance of her campaign, she was asked why she chose to make her announcement so early in the game.

“It was a pre-emptive strike designed to give the public time to get used to the idea of voting for a one-eyed gay atheist born in Russia. I’m offering Americans the chance to elect a president who knows and loves Russia and the Russian people but hates how they are being abused by Putin and the oligarchs. I’d also be the youngest president, the first female, and the first with a wife of Hispanic or Asian descent.”

“And the first to not only compete in Olympic games but to have won Olympic medals,” said one of the panelists. “Could we talk about why someone who took the gold in marksmanship is in favor of gun control?”

“I could not have won that medal had I not been in better control of my rifle and myself than the other contestants.”

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At the start of her second major interview, Grace was asked when she knew she was gay.

“When I met my future wife at the Naval Academy.”

“And when did you tell your parents?”

“I didn’t have to. They understood the first time I brought Ricky home to meet them.”

“Did you have any problems because of the ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ policy?”

“No, not because of the policy. But I had a problem with the policy and how it was interpreted.”

“Was it difficult keeping the nature of your relationship a secret?”

“No more difficult than it was for male and female midshipmen who

were attracted to each other. The only significant difference was that no one was shocked or surprised when Ensign Jack and Ensign Jill got married in the chapel at the Academy shortly after graduation. And just last year, two gay men married each other in that chapel. Ricky and I have been married for ten years and are now both serving in the Navy Reserve.”

“Do you think your sexual orientation will cost you votes?”

“I’m not going to worry about it.”

“Final question, and please forgive the air quotes: do you consider yourself to be ‘normal’?”

Grace smiled as she answered the question she had planted.

“Of course not. No ‘normal’ person runs for president.”

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As Grace’s tour of the talk shows progressed, TeeJay suggested she confront the atheist elephant in the room with something other than a wisecrack.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Why do you call yourself a ‘God-fearing atheist’?”

“Would you prefer I call myself a god-fearing member of the loyal opposition?”

TeeJay ignored her snarky question, asked another of his own: “If you’re an atheist, why do you fear God?”

“Because I’m afraid there really is a god and that she is mad at me.”

“Ah, now we’re getting somewhere: a wisecrack with the ring of truth.”

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On a major talk show the next day, when the host asked if she really didn’t believe in God, Grace was prepared: “I believe that the idea of a god or gods is one of the most significant inventions of the human race. Right up there with fire, language, plastic, and processed food. In other words, a mixed blessing. If we didn’t have the concept of a deity to explain why we are here or to praise or blame, we would still be ignorant, pagan savages. Now we are supposedly intelligent, god-fearing savages.”

“But isn’t a president of the United States expected to take his or her oath of office on the Bible?”

“You can expect the unexpected from me. If I’m elected, I’ll take my oath on a copy of the Constitution and I’ll ask my uncle, Father Thomas Jefferson Livaudais of the Society of Jesus, to offer the invocation. While I’m at it, let me quote something the original Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1822 on the subject of blind faith: ‘Man, once surrendering his reason, . . .

is like a ship without a rudder'. With me at the helm, you can be sure the helm's firmly attached to a sturdy rudder."

"Is it true you want to take the words 'In God We Trust' off our coins?"

"I won't waste my time going down that slippery slope. I'd rather slide down another slope."

"Which slippery slope is that?"

"The one that would allow state and local governments to tax church properties and revenues," said Grace. "Give me a good sled and watch what I do."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

On January 6th, Grace's thirty-ninth birthday, the small celebration was private because Grace did not want to call attention to the fact she was born on the Feast of the Epiphany, the day the Magi came calling. She was already, she reminded her family, surrounded by too many signs and portents, graced with a name that called to mind something amazing.

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The next morning, a Wednesday, Grace and her brother and their parents, spouses, and kids boarded a mid-sized chartered jet and flew with TeeJay to New Orleans to take part in the bicentennial celebration of the Battle of New Orleans on Thursday.

As the plane started to descend over Lake Borgne to the east of Lake Pontchartrain, TeeJay had the kids look out the windows and explained that the lake was either named for the LeBorgne family, early Acadian settlers who were exiled from Canada, or a description of how the lake appeared on old maps.

"This may be an omen or just a coincidence," he added, "but in French, le borgne means someone who has only one eye."

"Cut it out, TeeJay," warned Grace.

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When their plane landed at the old Lakefront Airport, Grace could see a huge crowd was waiting with "U-S-HEBERT!" banners. Many in the crowd were wearing black eye patches. And once again, she glared at her father.

"I'll get you for this," she hissed.

"Sometimes a dad's gotta do what a dad's gotta do," he whispered.

"Now, go break a leg."

As Grace came down the steps from the jet, she gritted her teeth and

smiled as a marching band struck up a jaunty version of “Happy Days Are Here Again”.

Then, trouper that she was, she accepted kisses, hugs, and handshakes from the local movers and shakers, then a key to the city before mounting a makeshift stage to give an impromptu speech that did not end, as TeeJay suggested, with “Laissez les bon temps rouler!”

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Despite her annoyance at her father, Grace got through the next three days of ceremonies and took them as a learning experience about the kind of actual campaign stop she did not ever want to have. Nor did she begrudge TeeJay and the other three kids having had a great time. Even baby Webster got into the act as the youngest Hebert on display in his little sailor suit.

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As on their earlier visits, they stayed in the home of Judge Jeff Livaudais, TeeJay’s son. In the summer of 1941, young Ensign Livaudais had married his childhood sweetheart in the chapel at Annapolis a few days after he graduated. He had fathered a son, served with the OSS in the Pacific, and was one of the first Americans to inspect the ruins of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Profoundly distressed by his wartime experiences and the suffering of the survivors on both sides of the conflict, Lieutenant Commander Livaudais had resigned his commission after the war and entered a Jesuit seminary. Once her marriage was annulled by the Church, his former wife was free to marry his older brother, who raised TeeJay’s son as his own. The son, now a judge in his early seventies, had fathered a large family of his own and now lived alone with his wife in a Garden District mansion large enough to accommodate the visitors from Georgetown.

When Judge Livaudais invited Grace and her krewe to return in six weeks to enjoy Mardi Gras, Grace explained that if all went well, her cross country tour was scheduled to end on Presidents’ Day, February 16th, the day before Mardi Gras.

“Then perhaps next year,” suggested the judge.

“That’s the day of the New Hampshire primary,” Grace said.

“Well, you can’t miss that, so perhaps you should trim a few days from your tour to get back here on time.”

Tom and Carter assured her they could finish their fifty-state tour in time to accept the invitation. The judge, who had once reigned as Rex, the

King of Carnival, offered to take charge of figuring out how best to take advantage of the festive crowds.

“Please don’t,” said Grace. “If we can make it back in time, we’d rather put on masks and let others be the center of attention.”

“In case you change your mind, don’t forget to bring your key to the city,” he reminded Grace.

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The following Sunday, when she appeared on Face the Nation in Washington, Bob Schieffer introduced Grace as a decorated veteran of the war in Afghanistan with a doctorate in history who had lectured at both Annapolis and the Naval War College years after resigning her commission.

“Governor, you’ve said some controversial things about Afghanistan. Have you had time to think about what will happen next?”

“Bob, both my father and my grandfather, warned President Bush and the Joint Chiefs of Staff what would happen if they decided to enter what may soon become the longest war in American history.

“Like my father and both my grandfathers, as a midshipman at Annapolis I studied the writings of Alfred Thayer Mahan, the architect of American sea power. Back in 1902, more than a century before the United States invaded Afghanistan, Mahan was the first to describe the countries flanking the Persian Gulf as ‘the Middle East’. That was in his famous essay entitled ‘The Persian Gulf and International Relations’. He began and ended that essay by reminding readers of George Washington’s warning in his Farewell Address that America should avoid ‘permanent inveterate antipathies against particular nations’.”

As she spoke, Grace used her fingers to put quotation marks around Washington’s words.

“Let me repeat that phrase: ‘permanent inveterate antipathies against particular nations’. That’s the problem we have in the Middle East today. In his essay, Mahan warned that if the Middle East became unstable, no nation could ‘expect to restore equilibrium’ in the region.”

“And you think Mahan was speaking about the United States?” asked Schieffer.

“Yes, and he was speaking to us when he warned there was, and I quote, ‘no sound inducement for another State to waste strength,’ unquote, in the Middle East. Russia was once ‘another State’. We are now the ‘another State’ he was speaking about.”

“I have to say, Governor, I think you’re speaking in very abstract terms.”

“No, Bob—I was quoting from a tract written by Mahan. Let me remind you that Bush Junior used abstract terms to distract us, to attract other nations to contract with us to attack Iraq and engage in a protracted war. Don’t forget that when Winston Churchill said he had ‘nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat’ he was using very concrete one-syllable words to describe what he knew would be the physical consequences of concrete threats: the Nazi invasion by sea of the British isles, the bombing of London from the air. We are under no such threats from another country. The only real threat is coming from some of the candidates lined up to be our next commander-in-chief. I’m talking about the ones who are willing to extract blood, sweat, toil, and tears from the young men and women of our armed services and their families and from far more families in Afghanistan.”

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Grace made herself available for interviews on network and cable talk shows and to reporters for major newspapers and magazines. And as she dealt with the first wave of media attention, Grace had a particularly unpleasant visit from the chair of the Democratic National Committee, a representative from Florida who had been elected to her first term in Congress the same year as Grace.

“Don’t worry about the DNC,” Tom advised her. “They’ve already decided that Hillary will be the nominee. Let me launch a few depth charges.”

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His first depth charge came at a national gathering of Navy and Marine Corps veterans when Tom introduced Grace by telling one of his favorite stories about her: “As you probably know, my father was a Navy pilot wounded in the battle of the Coral Sea and at Midway. After flying from a carrier during the Korean war, he spent more than thirty years representing Maryland in the House and the Senate. Grace was twelve when he died and was buried at Arlington. We were standing near Vice President Bush and former Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter, all good Navy men, when the Secretary of the Navy turned to Bush and asked why President Reagan wasn’t there. Before Bush could reply, Grace piped up and said, loud and clear, ‘That’s because Ronnie was never in the Navy, unless you count Hellcats of the Navy.’ That’s when I began to suspect that

while Grace might not have a great future in the Navy, she might be the future of the Navy as our Commander-in-Chief.”

Grace took the microphone from Tom and began: “My dad keeps telling me I was born to the helm. But I’m not sure he’ll like the course I’ll take if I’m given the helm of our ship of state.”

“You go, girl,” shouted a middle-aged woman from the back row, “and we’ll batten down the hatches.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The day she left office as governor, Grace began her fifty state tour in two brand new Bear Truth Express campaign buses, each equipped with a dozen reasonably comfortable bunks. The plan was to sleep on the buses some nights, spend other nights in motels or hotels where they could take showers and do laundry before resuming the tour. An experienced campaigner, Tom had mapped out a precise route and time-table that would get them to each event organized by the professional advance team he had assembled.

Divided between the two buses were nearly two dozen souls along for the entire ride: eighteen members of the family including eleven adults and seven children plus the four drivers who would also help provide security.

Grace was backed up by her kitchen cabinet: Ricky, Jennie, Carmen, Bonnie, and especially Hannah, who had the ability to maintain a basic level of sanity in what might under other circumstances be a crazy undertaking. As for the five men, Tom had solid political contacts in almost every state; Carter was her campaign manager; her cousin Wilson Styles, her press secretary, also had a contract to provide regular coverage for Rolling Stone; Roberto, her no-nonsense trouble-shooter/problem-solver would help with the security; and Uncle TeeJay, who had appointed himself the non-denominational and ecumenical chaplain to the crew, would also function as tutor for the six older kids he referred to as his "midshipmen".

TeeJay brought with him a good encyclopedia, dictionaries, a thesaurus, an assortment of biographies, histories, novels, and anthologies of poetry, Strunk and White’s Elements of Style, and Harry Frankfurt’s On Bullshit. He insisted his midshipmen keep a journal of their travels, which soon evolved into daily online posts written by Rocky and Polly and

illustrated with T-Rod's photographs and cartoons.

Wilson would quickly come to appreciate the daily blogs of the kids as good complements to his own efforts.

As for little Webster, he was along as the lone baby on board to be shared and spoiled by his two parents and grandparents and his many aunts, uncles, and cousins.

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After rallies in Annapolis and the District of Columbia, they headed south and west through the capitals of Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee, then back east to the Carolinas. Although Grace and Tom knew it would be hard to pick up a majority of votes in states south of Virginia, their strategy was to take advantage of her underdog status to gather national attention and to encourage other Democrats to run for local, state, and national offices in 2016.

"We're going in harm's way," Grace reminded her crew when they were greeted with homophobic protests in Columbia, the capital of South Carolina, "but we have to run the gauntlet to get to friendly waters out on the Pacific Coast."

As they passed under some overpasses, their buses were pelted with rocks, eggs, and balloons filled with water or piss. And in Tennessee, a rotting roadkill deer dropped from an overpass slipped off the top of the second bus and was run over by the mobile transmitter van for a local TV station.

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Once the buses left Charleston, they headed west to Atlanta for their largest rally since DC. Although she had no hope of carrying Georgia in the general election, she hoped she could win a majority of her party's delegates in the Democratic primary.

Then straight south to Tallahassee, north by northwest to Montgomery, further west to Jackson, and south to Baton Rouge, where—having spent four days rallying in the capitals of every state east of the Mississippi and south of the Ohio River—they crossed the Mississippi River and raced to Austin, where Grace shared the stage with Willie Nelson, who told her "I know you just can't wait to get on the road again, but hear me out."

"On the road again," he sang to her, "I just can't wait to get on the road again."

And she sang it right back at him as she played her own guitar.

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Then it was on the road again to Santa Fe before crossing the Continental Divide, then on to Phoenix where they spent the night in comfort before an early charter flight to Honolulu.

Grace and her crew took a few hours off to enjoy the beach, where a photo of Grace riding a surfboard under a curling wave would soon make the cover of Sports Illustrated.

The next day, after flying from Honolulu to San Francisco, they got back on their waiting buses to rally in Sacramento before spending the night in Carson City, Nevada. By the following night, they had raced up Interstate 5 to rallies in Salem, Oregon, and Olympia, Washington, before hopping a charter flight to Juneau, where they held a rally on a sunny day before flying on to the capital of Montana, where they waited for their buses to catch up with them.

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It was in a hotel in Helena, on the last day of January and after ten days on the road, that they saw the Saturday Night Live parody of their family vacation trip. Jared Leto, a few years after his Oscar as the transgendered Rayon in Dallas Buyers Club, played Grace while Cecily Strong made a full-figured and full-throated Ricky. Kate McKinnon did a spot-on impersonations of Rocky. As for T-Rod, Pete Davidson closed the age and size gap by relying on his ability to seduce the audience into a willing suspension of both belief and disbelief.

“We’re famous!” gloated Rocky.

“Not that it matters, more like infamous,” said Grace.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

At each stop along the way through the south and across the southwest and up the west coast, the Bear Truth Express had attracted increasingly larger crowds and took TV, radio, and print reporters or columnists along for the ride to the next capital. Because their progress was being tracked by local and national media, and because their schedule was constantly updated on the internet, their routes were sometimes lined with supporters who wanted to watch them pass or to fall in behind as state troopers escorted their convoy to the next stop.

And sometimes there were large groups of protestors waving identical large signs with what was meant as an anti-gay marriage emoji: a

bold red circle with a diagonal red slash between two blue astronomical symbols for Venus representing eyes above a blue curve representing a smile. This graphic design had been developed and popularized by a right wing talk show host and was quickly marketed with a line of lapel pins and buttons symbolizing opposition to gay marriage in general and that of Grace and Ricky in particular.

In time, Grace's supporters would wear blue pins and buttons with the Venus symbol eyes and the smile surrounded by a blue circle above a blue cross symbolizing the mirror of the goddess. And it would not take long before Grace and her supporters became fond of the homophobic image as a symbol of smiling through adversity.

It was TeeJay who suddenly remembered Judy Garland singing an old song called "Smilin' Through" and its final lines: "Those two eyes o' blue/Come smilin' through at me."

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Because the route of the Bear Truth Express along interstate highways had been well-publicized, the anti-gay symbol had begun to be spray-painted on the concrete pillars and buttresses supporting overpasses.

"Better than dropping dead deer from above," opined TeeJay, "not as good as endearments."

"One thing is sure," said Rocky. "America knows you're on the way."

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By the time they got back on their buses in Helena and headed southwest to Boise, Grace knew they would find smaller crowds in the next dozen or so mostly red states other than blue Colorado and purple Iowa before they reached Minnesota and crossed the Mississippi once again to enter the block of mostly blue states stretching to the Atlantic and all the way down the coast to their starting point in Annapolis.

As for the weather, the Rockies and the Plains were unseasonably warmer in February that year, but still bitterly cold. Once past Lincoln, Nebraska, it got warmer as they passed down through Topeka, and Oklahoma City, to Little Rock; colder again as they headed back north by northwest through Missouri and Iowa to the Dakotas, where the media began referring to the Polar Bear Express after their buses were snowbound for a day in Bismarck.

All along the way, betting on whether or not their campaign tour could touch every state capital before President's Day had become something of

a sporting event. Once they headed southeast again from North Dakota, the betting became heavier and the weather brutally colder as they skirted the Great Lakes and headed across New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire to Maine, then south to Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Delaware to their starting point in Maryland on Friday, February 13th, eight days short of a month and three days before their original estimate.

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“Governor!” shouted a reporter when Grace faced the press that afternoon, “aren’t you afraid your campaign may have peaked too soon? That you may go the way of Eugene McCarthy, Gary Hart, and Howard Dean?”

“Which way did they go?” she asked, looking around and pretending to look for them.

“Why can’t you give a serious answer?” demanded another reporter.

“Why can’t you guys ask serious questions?”

When they finally began to ask serious questions, she gave them more serious answers than they could handle.

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She did not explain that she had begun thinking about what became her frenetic fifty-state tour long before she agreed to become a candidate-- or that she now planned to campaign as needed in what would appear to be random bursts of energy before settling down once her baby bump began to show.

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For the most part, the articles, columns, and editorials about her campaign tour were positive: she was praised for her youth, vigor, stamina, optimism, and good humor; for her determination to stick to a grueling schedule, to plow ahead, sometimes literally; for her willingness to invite and answer hard questions; and for her ability to inspire hope and demand sacrifice without relying on platitudes or patriotic appeals.

Her family got good reviews: her famous parents for their modesty; her beautiful wife and handsome brother-in-law Roberto for their ability to attract minority voters; her good-natured children and niece for their presence and maturity; her quiet brother Carter for his organizational skills; her gregarious cousin Wilson for his press briefings; and her cheerful great-uncle for his appeal to the very old and and very young alike.

“The whole damn family simply reeks of charisma,” complained one

editorial writer. "It's as though the ghosts of Teddy Roosevelt, FDR, and the three Kennedy boys have ganged up on all the other candidates."

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The following morning, Saturday February 14th, when TeeJay arrived as usual for breakfast at the house in Georgetown, Rocky presented TeeJay with a handmade card asking him to be her valentine.

"Sorry, Rocky," he told her. "I've already agreed to be Polly's valentine."

"That's not fair," said Rocky, scowling at her half-brother's only half-sister on the Hebert side. "She knew I was making a card for you and beat me to the punch."

"Bite me," snapped Polly.

"Don't give her any ideas," warned Grace, stepping between the two girls.

"If you're going to fight over me," said the old Jesuit, "I'm going to make myself scarce."

But he didn't. Instead, he stayed and enjoyed the attentions of two lovely young women.

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Later that morning, Grace was playing with little Webster on the sun porch when she was interrupted by Hannah.

"A State Department courier just delivered a diplomatic pouch from Harry. It contained a letter for me and something for you."

Her mother handed Grace a small cardboard box with her name on it. She opened the box to find a brand new cuddly Russian teddy bear clutching a valentine. Inside the card, was a simple message written in a familiar hand: "iz Rossii s lyubov'yu!"

"From Russia, with love."

The card also contained an old black and white photograph of a naked toddler with curly hair sitting on a wooden potty chair as though on a throne, his arms in the air as though celebrating a victory—or asking to be picked up.

Grace handed the teddy bear to Webster, then showed the card and photo to her mother.

"Your friend has a serious silly streak," said Hannah, who smiled and continued reading the letter.

"What does Uncle Harry have to say?" she asked Hannah.

"Among other things, he says several excerpts from V Rossiyu s

Lyubov'yu, our family saga, have appeared in Russian magazines. He also says your Russian friend is like a pit bull snapping at the Russian bear—and that he's becoming increasingly reckless and arrogant in his opposition to Putin."

"Use him before you lose him'," mumbled Grace to herself.

"What was that?"

"Something Ricky said the morning I told her I wanted to have another child, his child."

It was the first time Grace admitted to herself or anyone else that she was carrying his child as well as her own.

And she began to wonder if the child in her womb might one day belong to the Russian people.

"All children, not just ours, are hostages to fortune," said her mother, as though reading her mind.

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After two days of rest and recuperation at the big house in Georgetown, Grace, Ricky, Rocky, T-Rod, Carter, Jennie, and Polly flew to New Orleans on Presidents' Day, also known as Lundi Gras, the Monday before Mardi Gras. They took along Roberto, Carmen, and their three kids. Tom, Hannah, and TeeJay stayed behind with Webster, who was now weaned. Costumed as pirates, a few with black eye patches, the six kids and the six adults mingled with crowds without being recognized.

On Ash Wednesday, they all returned home to rest and prepare for the next stage in Grace's campaign. While TeeJay joined Grace and Carter and their parents, spouses, and kids in the Georgetown house, Wilson and Bonnie Styles returned to their condo a few miles away. Although there was room for them in the Georgetown house, Roberto, Carmen, and their kids returned to their home in College Park. The plan was to resume active campaigning as a family once other Democrats formally announced their candidacy.

"This is not only the start of the Lenten season," TeeJay declared before they went their separate ways, "it is also our period of Grace."

"Who is no longer having her periods," added Grace, breaking the news to those in the family not already in the know.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Early in the last week of February, an ultrasound revealed Grace was

carrying a little boy. She communicated that news in code to Boris through their third party contact in Moscow as she had over the years. She told Boris she had decided to call her son Woodrow Styles Hebert in honor of her great-grandfather born in Saint Petersburg a century earlier.

She also wrote that Rocky, upon seeing the profile of the fetus, had laughed and claimed "Little Woody has a little woody".

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Late on the afternoon of the second to last day in February, a Friday, Grace's work on a speech was interrupted by a call from her uncle in Moscow.

"It's Boris," Harry began. "He was murdered an hour ago while walking across a bridge about a mile from Red Square."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm looking at his body. It's still on the pavement where it fell—and the politseys are standing around laughing and making jokes."

Grace calmly asked for more details, learned Boris had died almost instantly after two assassins got out of a car behind him and his Ukrainian girlfriend, and shot him in the back and the head at least four times before fleeing.

"It's the middle of the night here and the Kremlin's already blaming it on Islamic extremists, but it's obvious he was killed because of his opposition to the trouble in Ukraine. He was preparing for a protest march against the Russian invasion of Crimea last year—and that will probably turn into his funeral."

"I want to be there, at his funeral," Grace said.

"That's not a good idea."

"I don't care. I'm coming."

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Grace's parents agreed with Harry, but TeeJay encouraged her to go and volunteered to accompany her.

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A few days later, after Grace and TeeJay cleared passport control without incident at the Sheremetyevo International Airport outside Moscow, they took a cab to the Spaso House.

"Please remember that revenge is a dish best served cold," said Harry after he greeted her with a kiss.

"Borscht can be served either way," said Grace, who then asked: "Will Putin attend the service?"

"You don't want to meet him again, do you?"

"No. I'll meet him if I have to, but I'm not looking forward to having to deal with someone who doesn't hold office legitimately."

"While I share your opinion," said her uncle, "I do not enjoy the privilege of sharing it with others."

What her uncle did enjoy, Grace knew, was the ability to tell stories in flawless Russian about Stalin and the Stalinist era he had heard from his parents and his Russian grandmother's stories about life in Saint Petersburg before, during, and after the Revolution. Harry had, so far, avoided giving Putin any reason to declare him persona non grata.

"He won't dare show his face," said Harry, "but will probably send one or two of his deputies."

"I won't show my face either," said Grace, and I'll say nothing in public."

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The next morning, to keep from being recognized, Grace replaced her eye patch with an uncomfortable glass eye and used thick makeup to cover her battle scar, then hid her face behind the dark veil of a woman in mourning.

Before the funeral, when Grace met privately with Nemtsov's mother and one of his daughters, Grace did not plan to tell the grieving woman or the girl, who was the same age as her own daughter, about the gift Boris had left with her for posterity. But his mother took Grace aside and told her that she knew—and that she hoped Grace would one day reveal that the spirit of Boris was living in a free country.

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Inside the crowded Sakharov Center, Grace stood beside Sir John Major, the former British prime minister. Her face hidden by a thick black veil, Grace said nothing as she looked down at Nemtsov's body in the open coffin while mourners filed past. The shot to the back of his head had left his face untouched.

Later, in the cemetery, she was photographed placing a single red rose on his coffin before stooping down and collecting soil from the grave with a small silver container.

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Those images appeared on the front pages of newspapers and the covers of magazines around the world after the identity of the veiled mystery woman was finally revealed when Grace got off the return flight at

Dulles the next day.

Besieged by reporters who wanted to know why she had worn a widow's veil in Moscow, Grace gave a short statement mourning the loss of Nemtsov. She spoke of him as a gentle Russian patriot who had sacrificed himself in opposition to Putin and the Russian annexation of Crimea, a part of Ukraine.

"Had he lived, he could have become the founding father or a favorite uncle of a new Russia. He could have been a Washington, an Adams, or a Jefferson. He was fifty-five, but he seemed much younger in spirit and had a tremendous appeal to young Russians. The shots that cut him down on that bridge may not yet have been heard around the world—but they will be."

Someone shouted a question: "Do you think there will be another Russian revolution?"

"No. What we call the Russian Revolution is not yet over more than a century after it began. The so-called Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 was only part of that revolution. Nor is our own revolution over more than two hundred and forty years after the shots fired in Lexington and Concord."

Then she refused to answer any more questions or to say anything else about Nemtsov, Putin, or herself.

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When Grace got home that night, Rocky asked if she had cried at the funeral.

"No. I cried with you and Ricky before I left. And when I cried then, it wasn't for Boris or for me. It was for all the people he left behind."

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A week after Boris was murdered, Grace had another call from her uncle in Moscow.

"Putin's goons have discovered a letter your friend was in the process of writing to you about 'something' he gave you. They think he was referring to state secrets. The shit is hitting the fan here."

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The next day, a Saturday, Grace and her family watched network coverage of Putin speaking ex cathedra from his gilded chair of office in a huge empty space to declare Grace persona non grata and threaten her with arrest should she ever return to what he referred to as his country.

"You should include that tribute after your name," said Rocky. "The Honorable Grace Styles Hebert, Ph.D, LGBT, PNG."

Grace smiled at the wisecrack, picked up the phone, and called her cousin Wilson.

“Are you guys watching the news?” she asked when Bonnie picked up.

“I was about to call you. Wilson’s on another line with his dad.”

“Ask him to schedule a press conference at high noon tomorrow in front of the Russian embassy,” she told Bonnie, “and to ask his most reliable media contact to get a camera crew together and meet me here as soon as possible for an exclusive interview in the map room.”

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Less than two hours later, a small network crew crowded into the map room where Grace revealed she was pregnant with a child fathered by Boris Nemtsov and displayed an enlargement of the ultrasound image of the fetus that would one day bear the name Woodrow Borisovich Hebert. Then she displayed a container of soil taken from the garden and explained it had been transported from Russia to America nearly a century earlier by her great-great-grandmother.

“I am going to empty this good Russian soil in front of the Russian Embassy at high noon tomorrow and stand on it to respond to President Putin in his own language.”

“Governor, is there anything you would like to say to him now?” asked a reporter.

“Yes, he has threatened to have me arrested if I ever return to what he referred to as his country, so let me respond to him in his mother tongue, the language we share: Eto ne vasha strana. On prinadlezhit russkomu narodu.”

“It is not your country,” she translated. “It belongs to the Russian people.”

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On Sunday morning, as a result of the television, cable, press, and internet coverage of that interview, many elected officials, celebrities, and members of the Russian and other eastern European exile communities joined Grace at the head of the procession from M Street in Georgetown up the middle of Wisconsin Avenue to the plaza in front of the embassy. All along the way, spectators on the sidewalks fell in behind the procession.

“I’ve been asked what I propose to do about Russia,” Grace began once they reached their destination. “I will not promise to do anything about or to Russia, but I will do something for the Russian people if I am elected

president. I will do my best to inspire and help them to do what they must.”

She paused, then continued. “As a child, I loved listening to the Beatles sing ‘Back in the U.S.S.R.’ I loved that song because I was born in what was then the Soviet Union, born to an American woman born there to a Russian woman. My grandfather Woodrow Wilson Styles was born in Saint Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire, to an American father and a Russian mother. Because I love the country of my birth and of so many of my ancestors, if I am elected president next year, I pledge to show my love for the land and people of Russia in the best way a daughter of Mother Russia can: by daring Putin and his henchmen to stop me from returning there in November of 2017, the centennial of the Bolshevik Revolution, to tell the men who hold power there to respect their Mother, her children, her land, and the land of her neighbors. And I will show the Russian people my child, the child sired by Boris Yefimovich Nemtsov.”

Then she repeated her promise to return to Russia in Russian, paused, raised one fist, and shouted “Do svidaniya!”

“Those last words,” she explained to the crowd in front of her, “can mean simply ‘goodbye’, but it can also mean ‘until we meet again’.”

She looked straight into the camera and shouted again: “Do svidaniya!”

CHAPTER THIRTY

Within hours of Grace’s speech, Ambassador Harry Truman Styles resigned and returned home before he could be expelled. In response, President Obama expelled Sergey Kislyak, the Russian ambassador.

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With the public revelation of her pregnancy and the identity of the father, the fame and notoriety of Grace skyrocketed well beyond her status as a presidential candidate. When asked if she would withdraw from the race because of her “condition”, she said her condition was just fine and that she now had more reason than ever to seek the presidency.

“I’m eating for only two, but I’m running for millions waiting to be born.”

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A few days after he returned to his home near the Harvard campus, Harry called Grace with the news that although his book had been scheduled for publication in July to celebrate his father’s hundredth

birthday, the publisher insisted it include Grace's relationship with Nemtsov and that it be published on Mother's Day with an introduction or afterword by Grace. The publisher also wanted more emphasis on the love stories and a new title: *To Mother Russia, with Love*.

When Harry suggested Grace help him revise his family saga one more time and share the credit with him, she agreed on the condition that Hannah help share the work, the credit, and the blame.

Grace and Hannah looked forward to working with Harry. He reminded them of Woody and had the same lean and lanky looks of an old fashioned Yankee. Only in his late sixties, he looked older than his brother-in-law who was more than a decade older. And with his long face and thick white eyebrows, he looked like a clean-shaven version of Uncle Sam in James Montgomery Flagg's "I WANT YOU" poster. Having loved and been loved by his Russian mother and grandmother, he loved Russia, married a Russian woman, and liked and was liked by most Russians he met.

Though he had not been born in Russia as they had, Grace and Hannah knew he missed Russia—not the Russia from which he had been banished but the Russia that he visited as a child with his mother and where he served with his father long before Putin came to power.

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Shortly before the Ides of March, the occupants of the house in Georgetown relocated to Styles Landing, where they had more room to spread out, more privacy, and no close neighbors.

Soon after they settled in there, they were joined by Harry Styles. Because she was his only niece and reminded him of his bossy and beloved older sister, Grace knew he would find it easier to accept her suggestions along with Hannah's. The one suggestion he most resisted was that he provide more details about how he met and courted his Olga.

"I'm not like you and Hannah," he told Grace. "I've never drawn attention to myself."

"We're not asking you to do that," Hannah replied. "We're asking you to pay attention to what you are drawn to, why you were drawn to Olga and she to you, and how she is connected to your love of Russia, to your love of your Russian mother and Russian grandmother."

"When Harry met Olga," he sighed. "I can hear her laughing at the notion."

Working together, Woody's three descendants were able to deliver the last chapters of a new draft of *To Mother Russia, with Love* by the

middle of April, shortly after Hillary Clinton finally announced her candidacy.

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That spring and into the summer, Tom and Carter toured the country in a small private jet to recruit candidates to run for office at the state or federal level in 2016 and to vet volunteers. In three months, they hop-scotched around every one of the lower forty-eight states. In some cases, they sent or brought potential candidates back to Styles Landing to meet Grace in person.

Although some of these recruits or volunteers were former governors, senators, congressmen, mayors, and others who had either retired or lost re-election and were now ready to return to action, most were younger and had never held office. One of the youngest was a bartender and waitress of Puerto Rican descent named Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez who arrived in Durham by Amtrak on a hot afternoon and walked the three sweaty miles to Styles Landing, where she presented her ID at the new guard house by the gate and was given directions.

A few minutes later, she found an equally sweaty Grace on her knees, pulling weeds in the kitchen garden near the house.

After introducing herself, she began: “Governor Hebert—”

“Please call me Grace.”

“I was planning to support Bernie Sanders,” she said, “but now I think I’d rather work for you, Grace. What can I do to help?”

“You willing to get your hands dirty?”

While her visitor helped with the weeding, Grace asked about her age, her Congressional district, her family, her education, and her interests.

“I’ve known your congressman ever since we served together in the House ten years ago,” said Grace when she had enough information.

“When I spoke with him a few weeks ago, he told me I have no business running. He’s had a safe seat for nine terms now. How would you like to run against him?”

“Why me?”

“Why not you? Even if you can’t beat him in the primary next year, you might be able to make him work harder.”

“But I’m only twenty-five.”

“Then you’re old enough to be the youngest woman ever elected to Congress.”

“How would I start my campaign?”

“Go back to the Bronx tomorrow and tell your friends and neighbors.”

“I planned to return this evening.”

“Stay for supper and meet the family and some of the other recruits. We’ve got bunks set up in the barn. It’s just like summer camp.”

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In early May, shortly after Bernie Sanders threw his hat in the ring, Grace, Hannah, and Harry moved into a hotel suite in Manhattan to promote the release of their book.

On the night before Mother’s Day, Grace and Hannah were co-hosts on Saturday Night Live to introduce the mothers of cast members as their sons and daughters apologized for youthful misdeeds. When that was done, Hannah turned to Grace and asked if she had anything to apologize for.

When Grace began to confess in rapid-fire Russian, Hannah clapped a hand over her daughter’s mouth and warned her: “Shhhh. That big mother-bleeper is watching in the Kremlin.”

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The publication of *To Mother Russia, with Love* sparked a new round of talk show invitations that kept Grace busy. The reviews in major newspapers and magazines were almost universally positive, including those by four former American ambassadors to Russia. Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Mikhail Gorbachev, Jimmy Carter, Al Gore, and Barack Obama joined in the praise of what the *New Yorker* reviewer called a warm-hearted account of five generations of an American family falling in love with Russians and the Russian people as they and their land suffered under one kind of despotism after another.

Obama, however, made it clear his praise of the book should not be construed as an endorsement of Grace.

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At breakfast with the kids one morning, Grace called her uncle who was now back at Harvard to tell him there was an interesting op-ed in *The Washington Post* by a former ambassador. “He claims you have chewed more than you bit off.”

“What parts didn’t I bite off?”

“He doesn’t say.”

“Does he think chewing more than I bit off’s a good thing or a bad thing?” asked Harry.

“Hard to tell. But he liked learning what your grandfather Grover wrote to his old friend Edmund Wilson after reading *To the Finland Station* while

he was in Moscow shortly after the German invasion began.”

After Grace hung up, Rocky asked what her great-great-grandfather had written.

Grace picked up the newspaper and read the quote in the review: “Dear Bunny, thank you for sending me your exhaustive history of revolutionary thought. I wish you could have been there in Petrograd with me when Lenin got off the train. Had you been there, you might have had a better understanding of how electrifying that moment was—and how there could be no turning back.”

“Why did our great-great-grandfather have a friend called Bunny?” asked T-Rod.

“Every boy should have a friend named Bunny,” said Grace.

“I should start writing down your aphorisms,” said Rocky.

“What’s an ‘afro-rhythm’?” asked T-Rod, who may or may not have been joking. Given his evolving love for wordplay, it was increasingly hard to tell.

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Although Russian translations of carefully selected excerpts of Harry’s original manuscript appeared in *Novy Mir* and other magazines several weeks before Nemtsov was murdered, not until after his funeral did Russian authorities finally notice what the censors had missed: that there was not a single mention of Vladimir Putin anywhere in Harry’s book. By then, it was too late to cut off smuggled copies of a book in which Putin was ignored.

When asked why there were no references to Putin in his book, the former ambassador had no comment. Reviewers began to speculate that the three co-authors were hinting that the Russia so loved by the descendants of Franklin Pierce, Grover, and Woody Styles did not have room for a Putin.

“Donald Trump used to yell, ‘You’re fired’,” claimed one right-wing reviewer, “but these three are whispering ‘You’re cancelled’.”

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After attending Beau Biden’s funeral in early June, Grace did not stray far from Styles Landing. Now well into her third trimester, she took it easy as she continued to receive visitors from all around the country and the world.

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In mid-June, the day after he came down the escalator in his

eponymous tower in Manhattan to announce his candidacy, Donald Trump flew to New Hampshire to hold his first official campaign rally at a small community college in Manchester.

Grace delegated TeeJay to attend disguised as an old Yankee wearing a collection of Republican campaign buttons going back to the days of Wendell Wilkie, Thomas Dewey, and Ike.

Although Trump attracted only a few hundred curious spectators, his attacks on “Mexican rapists”, “hideous Hillary”, and “batty Bernie” attracted more media attention, as did what he had to say about “Rusty Hebert, the Russki from Mary-Fairyland” and her supporters, those “pinko Commie Pansies”.

TeeJay ended his assessment with “Mark my words, Grasshopper, Trump’s going to be the man to beat with your biggest stick.”

“Why do you think he’ll get the nomination?”

“Because Jesus told me so.”

“Why didn’t he tell you about the mustard on your tie?”

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Expecting Trump’s attack on Grace, Wilson Styles and his skunkworks team had already prepared media posts and print ads listing all the nice things Trump had said or tweeted about Vladimir Putin starting in the spring of 2013:

—June 18, 2013: “Will he become my new best friend?”

—June 19, 2013: “Do you think Putin will be going to The Miss Universe Pageant in November in Moscow—if so, will he become my new best friend?”

—October 3, 2013: “I think [Putin’s] done really a great job of outsmarting our country.”

—March 21, 2014: “I believe Putin will continue to re-build the Russian Empire. He has zero respect for Obama or the U.S.!”

—April 17, 2014: “America is at a great disadvantage. Putin is ex-KGB, Obama is a community organizer. Unfair.”

After one of Grace’s best-known supporters welcomed Trump to the race with a media blitz celebrating his affection for Putin, Trump railed and tweeted that Grace was too young to be president. In response, she spoke his name in public for the first time as she went Reaganesque on him: “I want Mr. Trump to know that should he earn the privilege and honor of running against me, I will not exploit, for political purposes, his lack of youth and experience.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

After Grace dismissed Donald Trump as a con-man in off-the-cuff remarks to a visitor, Grace was interviewed on Sixty Minutes in late June. Sitting in her grandfather Woody's study, she held up a copy of *The Confidence Man in American Literature*.

"This was written by Gary Lindberg, a young professor at the University of New Hampshire who died a few years after it was published by Oxford University Press in 1982. The first section takes its title from a famous quote I would like to apply to both Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin: 'It is good to be shifty in a new country.' That was the motto of Captain Simon Suggs, a fictional confidence man in Alabama in the years leading up to our Civil War.

"Trump and Putin find it good to be shifty because they live in new countries. For Trump, it is the new empire of his imagination, boundless as long as banks keep lending him money and tax authorities keep looking away or cutting him slack. For Putin, it is the new empire he has assembled by selling to his friends the resources stolen from the Russian people by their Soviet masters."

Even as the interview was being aired, Trump began tweeting his denials.

"He's just blowing his little trumpet," T-Rod told a reporter—and spelled the word.

"Who're you gonna believe," asked Rocky, "a confident woman or a confidence man?"

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"Lady with a baby! Lady with a baby!" chanted members of a local Teamsters Union in approval when Grace came onto the stage in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, a few days later and delivered her first reminders of Donald Trump's sorry history in relation to labor unions.

"And what does he know about labor," she asked with her hands on her belly, "or about making deliveries on time?"

The women in the audience got it, as did a few of the men.

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As she grew greater with child, Grace wore simple cotton, linen, or silk maternity dresses with long, full skirts gathered under her full breasts. In superb physical shape, she looked, as was widely reported, like a tall

ship under full sail. Her image graced the covers of Vogue, Elle, Rolling Stone, Cosmopolitan, O, Ms., Sports Illustrated, and every national news magazine.

Of all the covers, the most sought-after was “Grace under Fire”, Barry Blitt’s New Yorker water-color depicting the gravid Grace as a naked mermaid figurehead on a triple-masted warship sailing into battle.

“Your tits are bigger than that,” said T-Rod, whose two moms were not shy about skinny-dipping with their kids in the spring-fed swimming hole surrounded by a grove of sugar maples.

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During the three-day-long Fourth of July holiday, Grace and her entire family appeared at parades and town picnics in the seacoast area. A Phillips Exeter graduate, Grace was hailed everywhere as a favorite daughter.

“Why are you campaigning so hard in one of your home states?” she was asked more than once by Yankees who knew the answer but wanted to hear her say it like a real Yankee.

“Because I would nevah take the Granite State for granted.”

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In late July, Grace promoted Rocky and Polly to her kitchen cabinet and invited Annie Leibovitz to document them gathered around the trestle table. She also posed nude in profile in front of the Stars and Stripes for a Vanity Fair cover that inspired new levels of adoration and hatred.

Delivered by his grandmother Hannah and aunt Jennie in the warm water of a birthing tub placed on Russian soil in the middle of the cherry orchard at Styles Landing, Woodrow Borisovich Hebert was born during the first week in August. He weighed a little over nine pounds, had a full head of dark hair, and a voracious appetite which he began to sate not long after his arrival.

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A week later, Donald Trump showed up less than twenty miles away at a high school not far from Durham to complain to a crowd of three thousand about how good American soil was not good enough for the “Momma-bear”. “She had to have her little Hebert cub on Russian soil! Who does that?! Why would she do that?!”

With the witless help of Trump, little Woody quickly became the most famous baby in America and other parts of the world. Having gone from a baby bump, he became the baby bump in her campaign and drove Grace’s

poll numbers to their highest point. The number of “baby bonus” contributions to her campaign both skyrocketed and showered down.

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At a monster rally in Mobile on Friday, August 21st, Trump told a crowd estimated at somewhere between fifteen and thirty thousand that Grace’s baby was nothing more than a clumsy public relations stunt.

“She oughta be locked up for child abuse!” he shouted.

“Lock ‘er up!” the crowd shouted back.

“No, no,” said the candidate. “Save that for crooked Hillary,”

“Lock ‘er up! Lock ‘er up!”

“I’m the only candidate who can change things,” he boasted. “All Grace-the-disgrace can do is change diapers! I’m gonna clean up the mess in Washington while she’s wipin’ that baby’s behind!”

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Four days later, at a much smaller rally in Dubuque, Iowa, Trump ranted about “anchor babies” born to illegal immigrants. “These women, many of them common prostitutes, come to our country from all over the world. They come here and they drop their babies and they call them their anchors. ‘Oh, you can’t deport me,’ they say, ‘because I’m taking care of this little American baby. Oh, you can’t deport an American baby,’ they say. Well, you just wait! We’re gonna send ‘em back!”

“Send ‘em back!” the crowd began to chant, “Send ‘em back!”

Then he turned his attention to Grace in what became known as the vile “Rebuke from Dubuque”.

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Only two weeks after Grace gave birth, the Bear Truth Express, bear cub and all, went back on the road for a leisurely ramble along I-90 to huge rallies in Buffalo, Cleveland, and Chicago, then raced along I-80 to the Iowa State Fair, where Grace drew an enthusiastic crowd as she stepped aboard the little black stage of the Des Moines Register Political Soapbox with her suckling. By then, more than a dozen Republicans in addition to Donald Trump had taken the same stage, and only four serious Democratic hopefuls before Grace: Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, Jim Webb, and Lincoln Chaffee.

Grace had just begun to speak when a pair of homophobic evangelicals managed to scramble onto the stage and almost got to the madonna and child before the ever-vigilant Rocky and T-Rod sprang into action. Cellphone images went viral of the two kids jumping on the backs

of the screaming homophobes, clawing at their eyes, and biting their ears until Ricky, Roberto, Carmen, Jennie, and Carter came to the rescue of the would-be attackers.

Once the bloody intruders were led away, Grace turned to the crowd.

“As I was saying before I was interrupted . . . “

Little Woody, nestled safely on her bosom in his sling, slept through the entire event.

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Later that day, Grace announced that once she got to her Maryland home, she would not return to the campaign trail until mid-October when she would fly to the first of the Democratic party presidential debates in Las Vegas, followed by the early November forum in South Carolina, and the mid-November debate in Iowa.

“And nothing can keep me from the debate in New Hampshire the week before Christmas!”

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After spending a restful night with little Woody at the home of one of her Iowa supporters, Grace and her crew boarded their buses on the way to enjoy the end of the summer at Pirate Cove. Their first stop along the way was a second visit to Columbus, where Grace stood on the steps of the capitol with her baby cradled in her arms.

“I may not have time to come back to Ohio for the primary next year, and I may not be able to carry Ohio on election day, but my baby and I need Buckeye delegates at the convention. So, in honor of the fact that more presidents have come from Ohio than any other state, in honor of your status as the Mother of Presidents, please bear with me as this mother feeds her little Hebert cub.”

That said, she briefly bared one full breast until little Woody latched on, then continued her prepared remarks.

“You don’t see that every day at political rallies,” drawled one male network anchor, “but we’ll do our best to keep you, ah, abreast of future developments.”

His female co-anchor threw something at him.

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From there the buses headed to Baltimore where Grace and the other veterans in her family marched in the American Legion convention parade wearing caps adorned with campaign ribbons and others awarded for valor. Four of them (Grace, TeeJay, Tom, and Roberto) wore Purple

Heart ribbons. Despite a few boos and jeers, Grace and her crew were greeted with cheers.

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A week later, on Labor Day, Grace and Ricky held a cookout at Pirate Cove for their family and a few dozen nearby friends and neighbors who had been helping their part-time caretaker keep an eye on their little island.

The next day, the extended family went their separate ways until it was time to return to their campaign buses in early 2016: Tom and Hannah back to New Hampshire; Roberto, Carmen, and their kids back to College Park; Grace, Ricky, Carter, Jennie, and their five kids to the house in Georgetown with TeeJay; Wilson and Bonnie to their condo.

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With the older kids back in school and Grace refusing to grant interviews, the next few weeks passed quietly.

When it became too quiet for Wilson, Grace finally relented and agreed to do an interview with Lesley Stahl for Sixty Minutes—but only on the condition that Ricky and the kids would be with her.

Before the formal interview began, Grace displayed the three gold medals she won in the rifle competition at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta.

“Not that it matters,” she said, “but I came in first in the prone, standing, and kneeling categories.”

“Mom’s not prone to stand for NRA bullshit or kneel to pressure,” snorted Rocky.

“I’d love to get that on camera,” the producer told Leslie Stahl, “the word ‘bullshit’ and all.”

“Be my guest,” said Grace, who took a break to feed little Woody off camera.

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During the interview, Rocky revealed she was crazy about soccer and liked boys, but was not boy crazy. “At least not yet,” she added.

T-Rod said he liked playing football in the Pop Warner Junior Varsity league and Little League baseball and fully expected to become more interested in girls at some point in the near future.

“Could you talk about your fathers?” Lesley Stahl asked the kids.

“We could,” said one kid.

“But we won’t,” said the other.

“Why not?” asked Lesley.

“Because they’re not running for anything--,” began one, “--and they’re not running away from us either,” finished the other.

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The interview was a great success. Within days, media experts predicted it would be seen as a defining moment in the campaign and would be ranked as such along with Nixon’s Checkers speech, Jimmy Carter’s Playboy interview, and Bill Clinton playing the saxophone on the Arsenio Hall Show.

“You ain’t seen or heard nothin’ yet,” predicted Rocky and T-Rod, speaking with one voice when Big Bird interviewed them on Sesame Street.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

By the time the Democrats held their first primary debate in Las Vegas on October 13th, the polls had Grace close behind Bernie Sanders while Bernie was close behind Hillary Clinton. By then, Jim Webb and Lincoln Chaffee, the only other serious candidates, had dropped out of the primaries--and Grace was being blamed for scaring them off.

The day before the debate, Donald Trump tweeted that he didn’t expect the “three amigos” to say anything interesting. “But who knows, maybe a star will be born (unlikely).” Rocky tweeted back that a star had already been born: her little half-brother.

The nervous handlers for both Clinton and Sanders demanded not only that Grace leave her suckling behind when she came on stage, but that he not be in the audience. Grace was interviewed in her suite that afternoon as she let him have his fill, then pumped more.

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“Not that it matters,” said Grace as she introduced herself at that first debate, “I’m gay—and so is my wife. What does matter is that I am ready, willing, and able to serve as your next president.”

When she said no more, Anderson Cooper, the moderator, reminded her she had two minutes.

“Thank you, but I yield the rest of my time to Senator Sanders and Secretary Clinton.”

“I think Secretary Clinton will agree with me that we don’t want your time,” snapped Sanders.

“Then I’ll claim my unused time if you ask any really interesting

questions,” Grace told the moderator.

“That’s not how this debate is designed to work,” said Cooper.

“Maybe you need to hire another designer,” said Grace, drawing her first big applause of the evening as she gestured at the relentless expanse of blue behind her.

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Ten minutes later, when asked her position on gun control, Grace began to take more time: “As a former governor, I’m the only candidate on this stage who was ever commander-in-chief of a well-regulated militia. Mine was the Maryland National Guard. As President, I would not protect the right of every citizen to own and use any kind and any amount of firepower for any purpose. Why do deer hunters need automatic weapons to kill Bambi’s mother? How many homeowners actually need assault weapons to protect their families or their property?” She paused, pointed to the scruffy thug her crew had planted in the crowd, and let loose a salvo: “See that fellow there with the red MAGA hat? I might want to take away ALL of HIS guns.”

The scruffy thug stood up, shouted “You can have ‘em, Sweet Heart,” and yanked off his wig and beard, revealing a famous actor. He took a bow and tossed his MAGA hat to the crowd while Clinton and Sanders objected to the stunt.

As the laughter and applause began to die down, Grace reached under the podium and pulled out three navy blue hats, each with four big white letters. She put one on.

“Here’s my MAGA hat—and these four letters stand for ‘Mothers Against Gun-totin’ Assholes!’”

The crowd burst into laughter and applause again. While Anderson Cooper tried to take control of the event, Grace offered the other two MAGA hats to Clinton and Sanders, who both declined.

“Not that it matters,” added Grace, “but my wife, who was born in Puerto Rico, tells me that ‘maga’ can mean ‘witch’ in Spanish.”

“Do you consider yourself a witch?” asked Clinton, finally taking the bait.

“Only when my coven gathers under a full moon to brew mischief or cast spells,” Grace replied. “The rest of the time, my wife and I are just your run-of-the mill, ordinary, small town bitches with a buncha hungry kids to raise.”

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As the debate continued, Grace began to come across as the patient daughter of the two bickering front-runners. At one point, as the two older candidates snarled and snapped at each other, she was heard to murmur, “Mom, Dad . . . “

“Well,” conceded Sanders, “at least she didn’t refer to us as ‘Granny’ and ‘Gramps’.”

“Don’t give her any ideas,” snarled Clinton.

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And so it went for the rest of the debate. Grace gave no quarter, dodged and evaded all torpedoes and depth charges. She answered her opponents’ challenges cheerfully and with obvious compassion for their plight. It was clear she knew what she had to do and how to do it.

Near the end, Anderson Cooper explained that he was going to ask one final question before the closing statements.

“Here’s the question: Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said, ‘I ask you to judge me by the enemies I have made.’ You’ve all made enemies over your political careers. In fifteen seconds, which enemy are you most proud of?”

Unable to focus on one enemy, Clinton picked the NRA, insurance companies, drug companies, the Iranians, and the Republicans. Slightly more focused, Sanders identified Wall Street and the pharmaceutical industry.

And then it was Grace’s turn.

“Even if I had enemies, I’m way too modest to take pride in them. But I would be proud to have a chance to become Donald Trump’s worst enemy.”

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“Governor,” said Anderson Cooper, “I know you’d like the last word again, but I’m going to ask you to make the first closing statement.”

“As most of you know by now,” she began, “I live at Pirate Cove, a small private island on the eastern shore of Chesapeake Bay. It was named for Pierre Hebert, a former French navy officer who arrived with the Marquis de Lafayette and was granted a letter of marque by the Continental Congress to arm a private vessel to capture English merchant ships. He became famous as ‘Pirate Pete’ although he was a perfectly respectable privateer, not a pirate. If I am given command of our ship of state, I will sometimes act like a pirate when there is a political plank to be walked by uncooperative or mutinous members of the crew. And by crew, I

mean my vice president, both Houses of Congress, and my entire administration."

Clinton and Sanders, although obviously tempted to respond to her despotic tone, stuck to their prepared statements and bored their listeners.

Although Grace did not get the final word, she got the most attention in the final analysis.

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Over the next twenty-four hours, as network and cable talking heads were captivated by Grace, Wilson Styles cobbled together a video collection of quotes and played them for Grace and the rest of her crew:

—“A Navy intelligence officer wounded in Afghanistan, Grace Styles Hebert stood to the left of the other two candidates on the stage. Well to the left, which is right where she belongs.”

—“The only candidate at the debate who has never been a senator, Governor Hebert is descended from other senators, including two who were ambassadors to the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation.”

—“She is the ‘Doc Martin’ of American politics: someone who can identify the disease lurking behind the symptoms. Unlike the Doc Martin on TV, she is not afraid of blood.

—“She is the devil we know and have known for the last ten years; Donald Trump is the devil we don’t want to know.”

—“Governor Styles is as dangerous as FDR was before and during World War Two, and like that old sailor, she plays her cards close to her very impressive chest.”

—“Please excuse my fake Cajun accent, but there’s an old joke about the three Cajun presidents: Thibodeux Rousseau-velt, Boudreau Weel-sohn, and A-bear Oo-vair. Governor Hebert’s candidacy is no joke.”

—“She may be gay, but Rusty Hebert is a straight-shooter and a straight-talker. If she becomes president number forty-five, she’s fully-loaded.

—“If Grace Styles Hebert is elected, her two families will be elevated to the pantheon of America’s political royalty, right below the Adams and Roosevelt dynasties, and above those of the Tafts, Kennedys, and Bushes.

—“Rusty Hebert is the most charismatic presidential candidate since JFK. She has the biggest smile since young Jimmy Carter, the best speaking style since FDR, and is possessed of the most elegant wife since Jackie, a wife as impressive and stately as Michelle, but she has no chance

of winning her party's nomination or the White House--"

As that last talking head continued pontificating on how and why Grace was a flash-in-the-pan, T-Rod began to whistle to the tune of the Colonel Bogey March, then sang: "Bullshit, it makes the grass grow greener."

When Rocky and Polly joined in, so did everyone else in the campaign headquarters.

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As more and more charges of elitism were leveled against Grace and her family, she went on a call-in talk show to admit that "Although some of my ancestors came over on the Mayflower, others were standing on the shore to welcome the pale-faced newcomers. And my African ancestor Richard Cheswell may have arrived on a slave ship."

When one caller complained that she was misappropriating both native American and black heritage, Grace thanked him and used one of her Granny Polly's favorite Russian phrases.

"What does that mean?" asked the moderator.

"Something along the lines of 'bite me', only with more teeth."

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

A week after the debate in Las Vegas, when Joe Biden finally announced he would not run, many Democrats blamed Grace for scaring him off. Biden called Grace to say he had enjoyed the debate and hoped she would ignore the complaints.

"Ignore them, Mister Vice President? I invite them with open arms."

"And an open mouth," Biden quipped.

"Joke all you want, Joe—I'll get over it."

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A few days later, Grace was summoned to Camp David for a private session with President Obama. When they met at Aspen Lodge, Obama suggested that Grace should withdraw from the primaries for the good of the party.

"But that's one of the reasons I'm running," she said. "For the good of the party."

"I'm the head of the party, and I think I know what's best."

"You're the head of the party because you got nominated and won with the help of many Democrats, myself included. The convention

delegates will decide what they think is best for the party and the country when they choose a candidate to succeed you."

"But we don't think you can get the nomination or win this office if you are nominated."

"Who are 'we'? Or are you using the royal 'we'?"

"Let's not play word games."

Grace looked around at the large room in which they were sitting.

"This is the oldest part of Aspen Lodge. Do you know what FDR called this building?"

"Not off-hand," said Obama. "Now if we could—"

"He called it 'The Bear's Den'. I think I'll call it that when I'm president."

When Grace stood up and started to take her leave without ceremony, Obama stopped her.

"Whoa, neighbor. Michelle and I want to invite you and Ricky and your kids to our trick or treat party on Saturday."

He handed her an envelope.

"Thank you, Mister President, but we're having one at Pirate Cove that night."

"Ours is in the afternoon. Hope you can make it."

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Spoiled by their memories of eight Halloweens in the governor's mansion turned into a haunted house with ever more cobwebs and fake spiders and bats, the kids were not impressed by the outdoor White House event with its rope lines and packets of treats without any opportunity for tricks.

"A dog and pony show with a lot of dogs and no pony," said Rocky afterwards as they headed to Pirate Cove.

"After you become president, put us in charge of turning the place into a haunted house," added T-Rod.

"Now, that's a scary idea," said Grace.

Their haunted house at Pirate Cove was a huge success with every guest tricked out in pirate gear.

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Grace's performance at the first debate had received so much attention that the first candidate forum drew a huge viewership six days after Halloween. Hosted at a public university in South Carolina and sponsored by the Democratic parties of thirteen southern states, the forum

began with Grace being asked questions by Rachel Maddow, the moderator. Grace went first because the two older candidates did not want to give the upstart any opportunity to challenge their statements by allowing her to go last.

That turned out to be a mistake on their part because Grace's responses to the questions posed by Maddow were so concise, comprehensive, and quotable that Sanders and Clinton came across as loquacious by contrast. No matter the topic—voting rights, civil rights, immigration, climate change, foreign policy, gun control, drug control, education, renewable energy—Grace was on point and sharp as a tack, as in: “The stone age did not end because we ran out of rocks to throw at one other, but the atomic age may end with us reduced to picking up those rocks again.”

Grace moved so quickly through her answers that Maddow had time for a bonus question: “If you are the nominee of your party, and if Donald Trump is the nominee of his, do you look forward to debating him?”

Grace took her time and had fun with that one.

“At the Naval Academy, I was on the debate team until they kicked me off for being too rough on the other guys. I'm sure you know the etymology of 'debate': from the Vulgar Latin 'to beat, batter, battle'. I've listened to the vulgar Donald Trump. He seems incapable of holding a thought long enough to turn it into a weapon of defense or offense. Yes, he routinely gives offense, and his supporters hold their noses and come to his defense. But if the Don and this dame go toe to toe in a tete-a-tete, I predict he'll bluster and get so flustered he'll have a hissy fit and quit like a sissy.”

At that point, she stood and launched into the rap that Rocky and T-Rod had cooked up for her.

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Back in Georgetown the following night, Grace and her family stayed up late to watch Donald Trump host SNL. After he fumbled the jokes he had obviously rehearsed with the cast about Hillary and Bernie, he went totally off-script as he claimed “Rusty 'n' Rachel had a tit-to-tit last night in their lesbo lovefest.” As Trump's performance got even worse, T-Rod whooped, “He took de bait!”

Before Trump could continue his rant, boos from both the studio audience and the cast cut him off until Lorne Michaels rushed on stage with security guards and shouted, “You're fired!”

The whole cast, the band, and the musical guests took up the chant

as the producer and the guards hustled the hustler offstage.

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Trump, who had managed to live down a Golden Raspberry award for Worst Supporting Actor in 1990, claimed not to be affected by the bad press and blamed it on liberal bias. And although he would be parodied dozens of times on SNL over the following year until it was clear there was nothing funny about him, Trump was never again invited to host. The three Democratic contenders were invited to cohost as a troika before the end of the year, but declined the spurious privilege of becoming Saturday Night Specials.

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The free publicity and word of mouth growing out of the first debate and forum, and then the SNL debacle, built anticipation for the second debate. Held in Des Moines, Iowa on a Saturday night in mid-November, it gave Grace a chance to solidify her celebrity status and proved she could attract an audience during prime time even on a Saturday night.

The highlight of the debate came when Clinton touted her ability to deal with Putin—and Grace said she would not deal with him at all.

“Putin does not represent the Russian people, no more than Stalin did,” Grace explained. “No more than Hitler represented the German people, Mussolini the people of Italy, or Tojo the people of Japan.”

As the debate continued, Grace allowed Clinton and Sanders to rail at one another without interruption. She spoke only when she saw fit, and her comments were the most quoted.

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In their hotel suite that night, Grace, Ricky, and the kids watched Kate McKinnon, Larry David, and Jessica Chastain playing Hillary, Bernie, and Grace on SNL. All three actors had obviously studied the debate in Des Moines shortly before they went on the air. The result, for many who watched both performances, was surreal.

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On a talk show the next morning, one panelist called Grace “a flash in the pan” and predicted she would soon drop out of the race. He was quickly shouted down by others who claimed Grace had staying power.

“She knows how to keep her powder dry,” said one, “and I’m not talking about the kind of powder Hillary uses.”

“She’s pithy but not pissy,” claimed another.

Rocky and T-Rod turned that quote into a song on a raunchy video

that went viral.

On a chilly Wednesday night four days after the second debate, Grace and Ricky joined more than ten thousand Trump fans at a rally in Worcester, Massachusetts, the second most populous city in all of New England. On their way into the arena, they passed crowds of protesters holding “You’re Fired!” and other signs behind police barricades, and then through security checkpoints manned by some of the Secret Service Agents who had recently been assigned to protect Trump.

With her long hair tucked under a battered hardhat and wearing scuffed Timberland boots and a grungy quilted jacket, Grace looked like a working man who had come straight from his dirty blue collar job. Standing beside Ricky who was wearing a hooded Red Sox parka, Grace sported a fake mustache, a glass eye, and hid most of her face behind the large “Make America Great Again” sign she waved as they mingled with the crowd of genuine Trump supporters.

At breakfast with Hannah, Tee-Jay, and the kids at Styles Landing the next morning, Grace and Ricky watched coverage of the rally by a Boston station.

“Except for being a bit older and not as diverse,” said Grace, “the Trump crowd we saw was not all that different from the kind of crowd that comes to our rallies.”

“And if you add the protesters outside to the crowd inside,” added Ricky, “they would be nearly identical.”

“May we go to a Trump rally?” asked Rocky, indicating her cousin and co-conspirator.

“Yeah,” said T-Rod, “there’s gonna be a big one in Columbus on Monday, the day after your speech in Cleveland.”

Grace started to say “No fucking way” but stopped herself in time, then asked, “How would you two smart ass brats do that without getting yourselves beat up by Trump’s admirers?”

“We could cross-dress,” said T-Rod. “I could wear a wig and Rocky’s butch enough to pass for a boy.”

“You know if you get caught,” warned Ricky, “both Trump and Putin will claim that’s proof your two moms are perverts guilty of child abuse.”

“I could go with them,” offered TeeJay, “to make sure they behave.”

“And who’ll make you behave?” demanded Grace.

“Leave that to me,” said Hannah. “I’ll go as a frumpy granny, and we’ll stick TeeJay in a wheel chair as a pathetic old codger with an oxygen tank.”

“Don’t shave,” said Rocky.

“And don’t shower,” added T-Rod. “If you smell bad enough, that will keep people away.”

“No,” Hannah told TeeJay, “there’s not enough time for you to get really stinky. What we need to do is pour a little ammonia in your lap right before we go in.”

“How about we bring along some of little Woody’s dirty diapers?” asked T-Rod.

They schemed for another few minutes until TeeJay had what Grace thought would be the final word: “You know what they say—the family that plays together, stays together.”

But then Ina topped them all: “What if I took out my false teeth and cackled a lot at Trump’s jokes?” She took out her dentures and demonstrated the awful effect.

“Sounds like a plan,” said Grace.

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Two weeks after Trump was fired, Saturday Night Live did a cold open with Jennifer Lawrence playing Grace as a rebel warrior doing battle with her bow and arrow against Hunger Games versions of the villainous Hillary and Bernie. The hype surrounding the nation-wide opening of the second Mockingjay installment of the Hunger Games franchise the night before had helped promote the show.

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The next day, Sunday, Grace was welcomed by more than fifteen thousand supporters at an arena in Cleveland. She ended her rally with a reminder that in only eight months, the Republican Party delegates would gather in the same venue to nominate their candidate.

“My daughter calls them the Grand Old Party animals. Unless they wake up from their nightmare and find a better candidate, they are going to pick Donald Trump. If you’ve never attended one of his big rallies and you have nothing better to do, I suggest you think about showing up at his rally in Columbus tomorrow night. Don’t go to protest. Get there early and sit or stand inside with the crowd to bear witness. Look at their faces. Talk to them while you wait. Agree with them about how awful the Democrats are. Join in their chants. You know the one: ‘U-S-A! U-S-A!’ Just remember to leave out the ‘bear’ word.”

In response, the crowd, her crowd, began to chant “U-S-Hebert! U-S-Hebert!” as Grace waved goodbye and left the building.

On Monday, the Trump rally at the Greater Columbus Convention Center was filled with an overflow crowd. He bragged about how high his poll numbers were and that “We’re winning big in New Hampshire! Really big!!” He claimed that he drew an even bigger crowd of thirty thousand in Mobile back in August. He complained that the network cameras never panned the crowds to show how big they were. He complained about anchor babies and about Grace’s speech the night before until the crowd began to chant “Lock ‘er up! Lock ‘er up!”

“No,” he said. “No, no. Save that for Horrible Hillary. Russki Rusty wants to live in the White House. If you don’t want her in the White House, then whatcha need to say is ‘Lock ‘er out!’”

“Lock ‘er out!” the crowd began to chant. “Lock ‘er out! Lock ‘er out!” And no one yelled any louder than the little family group around the smelly old man in the wheelchair.

Wearing his red MAGA hat and standing not far away in the crowd, Roberto had captured video of his daughter and nephew with Hannah, TeeJay, and Ina. The following night, when Roberto premiered the video on The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, he was joined by the five members of the special reconnaissance team that had infiltrated the Trump rally.

“Did you come back with any useful intelligence?” asked Colbert after they watched the highlights of the video.

“There warn’t no intelligence to be found,” said Ina, who showed off her teeth with a big smile.

“We did learn one thing,” said TeeJay. “If you go to a Trump rally, get there early. That’s when you’ll get to meet the groupies who travel around the country from one rally to another. It’s like old home week for them. They swear they don’t really care what he says—they just like to hear him say it.”

Except for the camera crew from one of the networks covering the event, Thanksgiving at Styles Landing later that week was less eventful and more restful than the previous year. They went nowhere that weekend, then back on the road on Monday, the last day of November.

Although Trump had twice as many rallies around the country than Grace over the next week, Grace drew larger crowds.

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On December 7th, the editors of Time magazine placed Grace on their shortlist for “Person of the Year” alongside Angela Merkle, Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump, and the leader of ISIS. Two days later came the shocker: there would be no Person of the Year. Instead, the editors had chosen Grace, Ricky, and their three kids as “The Family of the Year”.

“This is a DAY OF INFAMY!!” tweeted Donald Trump. Hillary and Bernie had no comment.

Grace had only one comment, and only to her immediate family: “Now it’s official: the nomination and the presidency—those are now ours to lose.”

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On December 19th, the Saturday before Christmas, the three Democrats had their last debate of the year at Saint Anselm College, about an hour’s drive from Styles Landing on the west side of Manchester.

A few days earlier, after the handlers for Clinton and Sanders complained that the New Hampshire venue would attract more Hebert groupies to fill the auditorium with applause for Grace’s best lines, Grace’s campaign paid for local TV, radio, and newspaper ads asking her friends and neighbors to watch from home to make more room for supporters of the candidates “from away”.

In one interview that went viral the day before the debate, Grace herself explained that her fellow candidates were embroiled in a kerfuffle about data breaches and the way the Democratic National Committee favored the Clinton campaign. “I’ve offered to take the podium in the middle to keep them apart, but I suspect the other two candidates want me way over on the left side, the far left side.”

That night, Grace was indeed on the left side as seen by the audience and the cameras, with Sanders on the right and Clinton smack dab in the middle. When asked to make the first opening statement, Grace spoke about how she and her wife and kids had gone to see the new Star Wars movie that afternoon.

“It’s called The Force Awakens. On the way home, the kids agreed that Harrison Ford’s Hans Solo stood in for Senator Sanders, but they disagreed about whether General Leia, the former princess, represented me or Secretary Clinton. In any case, they both agree that the three of us here on this stage are the Force versus the Farce, whose name I will not speak tonight. Any one of us can use our individual Force against the

Farce, but I hope once one of us is nominated next summer that we will combine our use of the Force for the good our planet."

The moderators—ABC's John Muir and Martha Raddatz—did a good job of keeping the candidates civil and the two older ones within their time limits. In the case of Grace, she typically used less than her allotted time, which made room for a few more questions than planned.

The last topic before the closing statements had to do with the roles each spouse would play in a Clinton, Sanders, or Hebert White House. Grace had the last and fewest words on that topic: "I haven't asked Ricky what she would like to do. She's a lawyer. I'm sure she'll think of something useful."

Bernie Sanders had the first of the closing statements. After speaking about his father, the penniless immigrant from Poland, and his mother who dreamed of moving out of their rent-controlled apartment in Brooklyn but never lived long enough to own her own home, he began his peroration: "I am pledged, if elected president of the United States, to bring about a political revolution where millions of people begin to stand up and finally say enough is enough. This great country belongs to all of us, not just a handful of billionaires."

Grace began by confessing she had not prepared a closing statement. "But I want to thank Senator Sanders for his last words. Yes, enough is enough. Yes, it is time to bring about a revolution, not just a political one, but a cultural revolution. His words echo my own more than nine months ago when I returned from the funeral of the father of my son in Russia. I reminded listeners then and I remind you tonight that what we call the Russian Revolution is not yet over nearly a century after it began, nor is our own revolution over two hundred and forty years after the shots fired in Lexington and Concord."

She paused, then went on. "Senator Sanders spoke movingly of growing up in a rent-controlled apartment. He spoke of his mother's dream to own a home. During the administration of the last Republican president, that dream was exploited by developers and bankers and mortgage 'originators' and realtors and hedge fund gamblers. If you haven't seen *The Big Short*, see it next week when it goes into general release two days before Christmas. If you elect me your president, and if you elect enough progressives from both parties to the House and the Senate, I will ask them to introduce legislation that will provide meaningful rent control from sea to shining sea and all the way to Hawaii."

She smiled, looked toward Hillary. “Your turn, Madame Secretary.”

“That’s our job,” said one of the moderators.

“Thank you,” said Hillary, and launched into a rousing closing that ended with “Thank you, good night, and may the Force be with you.”

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Back stage after the debate, Hillary took Grace aside and glared at her. “How did you know I planned to close with ‘May the Force be with you’?”

“I didn’t,” said Grace. “I don’t usually prepare formal statements.”

“You want me to believe you just make things up as you go along?”

“No, I don’t ‘make them up’. I have a rough idea of what I might say, depending on the circumstances or what others say.”

“Tell it to the Marines,” sneered Hillary, then smiled and waved at someone else coming their way.

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Instead of driving home on the icy roads that night, Grace, Ricky, and the kids checked into a motel in Manchester in time to watch the Saturday Night Live cold open. The surprise guest star that night was Eddie Redmayne, who was being spoken of as an Oscar contender for his performance in and as The Danish Girl. It was clear the cast had prepared by watching the debate and that video clips of Redmayne’s Grace with a Princess Leia wig would go viral.

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Both the last Democratic debate and the last SNL episode of 2015 had the highest ratings of the year. Within a day or two, Howard Dean and many other movers and shakers endorsed Grace.

Barry Blitt’s last New Yorker cover of the year showed Grace as a pirate making Hillary and Bernie walk the plank from a pirate ship flying the Jolly Roger.

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Grace and her First Family of the Year were hounded by media on their Bear Truth Express excursions to a ski resort in the White Mountains and to do their Christmas shopping in Maine at the Kittery Trading Post and L. L. Bean.

Back in Durham, they settled down to spend the holidays at Styles Landing where a small media pool crew filmed them ice skating on one of the beaver ponds, putting on a talent show with their kids and the kids of friends and neighbors in the barn, dancing around a bon fire under the full

moon on Christmas eve, and exchanging presents in the morning.

“Where is Norman Rockwell when we need him?” demanded Oprah.

“She doesn’t even believe in Jesus!” roared Trump.

“Of course she does,” said TeeJay the Jesuit. “She believes in the historical Jesus. She just doesn’t believe in the Virgin Birth or the Resurrection or all the miracles in between as anything but part of the greatest story ever told.”

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In early January of 2016, Grace and the family escaped media attention when they returned to the house in Georgetown to celebrate her fortieth birthday.

A few days later, Grace and Ricky could not escape the media when they went to Arlington National Cemetery to attend the burial of one of their Naval Academy classmates killed in Afghanistan. Because they were able to join the Navy Reserve in 2011 after policies were changed to allow gays in the military, Lieutenant Commanders Hebert and Rodriguez, USNR, wore dress uniforms with three rows of ribbons. Tom, who had ended his naval career as a commander, wore even more decorations and badges. But the most were worn by TeeJay, who had served in the Navy during WWII, then as a Navy chaplain in Vietnam and the First Gulf War before becoming chief of the Chaplain Corps during the Clinton administration and retiring with the rank of rear admiral.

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“Fake medals,” said Trump, attempting to swift-boat Grace. “She did nothing to earn all that fruit salad. The Navy gives that stuff out like candy. I know heroes. Real heroes. Take my word for it, this woman is no hero.”

Asked to comment on Trump’s latest attack, Grace had nothing to say. But two of the men and the one woman who had witnessed Grace’s baptism of fire in Afghanistan had a lot to say. A whole fucking lot.

At that point, Michael Flynn, a retired three-star general who had served in military intelligence with the Army in Afghanistan, but not until after Grace was wounded there, wrote an op-ed for the Wall Street Journal asking exactly what her assignment was.

“Exactly the kind of general I want on my team,” tweeted Trump.

The very next day, Flynn’s op-ed was challenged by Jim Mattis, a retired Marine Corps four-star general who had recommended Grace be assigned to accompany the first wave of combat Marines transported from aircraft carriers into southern Afghanistan.

“I chose her to write a first-hand history of this effort because I had read her account of the first significant land-sea operation by colonial patriots when one of her ancestors and his friends used their shallow draft gundalows and other watercraft to attack a British fort and steal weapons and gunpowder. That she was wounded within a few weeks robbed us of her skillful storytelling.”

Trump counter-attacked: “I had given serious thought to asking General Mattis to be my Secretary of Defense, but it’s clear he has no ability to judge the qualifications of his subordinates. He’s not gonna be hired!”

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A week later, Uncle Harry arrived for a short visit with interesting news for Grace and her crew: “One of my colleagues at Harvard is a woman who specializes in the history of children’s literature in America. She provided me with xerox copies of three long-forgotten books written by Ingersoll Lockwood in the late nineteenth century. Two are children’s books involving the adventures of a German boy named Wilhelm Von Troomp, who calls himself Little Baron Trump and lives in Castle Trump. The third is a short political satire entitled 1900: or, the Last President. That one deals with the downfall of the American republic after a populist candidate is elected in 1896.”

Hannah skimmed through the first of the two adventures of Little Baron Trump and rendered her professional judgment: “I find it hard to believe that it’s only a coincidence that Trump named his youngest son Barron with two Rs—or that the Little Baron Trump has an adventure in Russia, where he brags about how big his brain is and plays fast and loose with women. Oh, and let’s not forget he lives in Castle Trump long before there was a Trump Tower.”

“Do you think it’s possible our Trump’s mommy and daddy owned copies of those books and gave them to little Don to read?” asked Grace.

“As one of my learned colleagues might say,” replied Hannah, “oy vey.”

“How are we going to use this information,” asked Wilson Styles, who was in charge of media relations.

“The way porcupines make love,” suggested Grace. “Very carefully.”

“Let me take a stab at it,” offered Hannah, a former president of the American Psychiatric Association.

When the meeting broke up, TeeJay took Grace aside and whispered

in her ear: “In the lost boyhood of Judas, Christ was betrayed.”

“Who said that?”

“I just did.”

“Who wrote it?”

“An Irish poet named George William Russell who called himself AE. He could have been talking about the lost boyhood of Trump—and his potential to betray what America stands for.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Grace didn't do quite as well as Clinton and Sanders in the Iowa caucuses on February 1st, but she was not far behind. Because of her family ties in New Hampshire, no one was surprised when she came in a solid first in that first-in-the-nation primary eight days later.

Then came two more debates with Clinton and Sanders, one in South Carolina in the third week of January, then another at the University of New Hampshire a few miles from Styles Landing. Before, in-between, and after these debates, there were a slew of candidate forums in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, and South Carolina.

After Grace's unexpected first place in the Nevada caucuses on February 20th, it was no surprise on March 1st, Super Tuesday, when Hispanics turned out for her in Texas and Colorado. Campaigning in those states, Grace, Ricky, and the kids had moved easily between English and Spanish to capture almost as many delegates as each of the other two candidates.

In the days leading up to Super Tuesday, she had looked so good riding on horseback in parades in Houston, Austin, Dallas, and Denver that Tom began planning a string of equestrian events before the June 7th primary in California.

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As Trump began to understand the threat Grace posed, he warned his supporters to “Stop worrying about ObamaCare! Start worrying about what this lesbo harpy will do if she's elected: HebertCare!”

Grace's blue-MAGA-hatted supporters started showing up at both Hebert and Trump rallies with Teddy bears dressed like doctors or nurses. The media called them “HebertCareBears”. When Trump called on his supporters to chase them away, even more showed up. As did ambulances to take care of the wounded on both sides.

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When Trump demanded a copy of Grace's birth certificate, Hannah sent him one. When he complained the next day that it was filled out in Russian, she suggested he have his good friend Putin translate it for him.

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Asked on a live cable panel show to comment on Trump's espousal of the "America First" slogan and his promise to withdraw from international treaties and organizations, Grace began with: "I believe America should be first in many endeavors. Because we were the first to develop and deploy nuclear weapons, I would like us to be the first to give them up. America should be the first major nation to give up the internal combustion engine, the first to help poorer nations deal with the terrible effects of global warming and sea level rise that we and other industrial nations have triggered . . . "

Before she had even finished listing the ways America should be first, Trump was the first American to tweet his opposition.

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The next big test came two weeks later in mid-March when nearly eight hundred delegates were up for grabs in five states. When she went to bed the night the polls closed, Grace found Ricky reading a set of galley proofs.

"What's that you're reading?"

"Someone leaked an advance copy of *Extreme Prey*, a new Lucas Davenport novel about an attempt to assassinate the front-runner among the Democrats at the Iowa State Fair."

"Are we in it?"

Ricky turned back to a dog-eared page and said: "The front-runner is described as 'a tall woman, thin, ramrod straight, brown hair with copper highlights, attractive in a front-office way'."

"Is that supposed to be me?" asked tall and trim Grace, whose coppery auburn hair was flecked with gray.

"No, that's a version of Hillary, a secretary of state with strong ties to the establishment. You're more like her chief competitor, Elmer Henderson, a womanizing governor who's 'left wing crazy' and is aiming for the VP slot."

"That's not my aim and I'm not a womanizer. You're woman enough for me."

"Goes without saying, but I'm always glad to hear it."

Grace kissed Ricky, then yawned. "Let me know how it all turns out in the novel."

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In the morning, when Ricky finally woke up, she reported that the novel's fictional secretary of state held on to her lead in the polls after a bomb killed a dozen and injured scores.

Grace, who had been up for several hours, reported that she had picked up almost as many votes as Bernie, who was still well behind Hillary.

"So you're still in third place," said Ricky.

"I'll get over it."

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Grace slugged it out with Clinton and Sanders in the last of the primary debates and forums through the remainder of March and into April. In early May, there were signs the Democrats might be headed into a brokered convention for the first time since 1952 when Adlai Stevenson came in third on the first ballot behind Estes Kefauver before eventually winning the nomination and losing to Eisenhower.

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In mid-May, not long after the presumptuous Donald Trump was declared the presumptive GOP nominee, a group of prominent psychiatrists held a well-attended press conference just before the start of the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in Atlanta.

Among the questions they posed at the press conference were:

— Whether or not Donald Trump knew about the novels involving Little Baron Trump and his adventures in Russia and underground civilizations unknown to the rest of the world?

-- Was it simply a coincidence that Trump named his youngest child Barron, or had he read Lockwood's fantastic novels as a child, then forgotten them or sublimated the memory?

Although the subject of their press conference was not on the formal agenda of symposia, workshops, and lectures taking place during that four day event, it caused a sensation that resulted in more reporters showing up to interview any shrink who would not shrink from commenting on the bizarre coincidences.

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Donald Trump's reaction was that this was all fake news. When digital copies of the original novels spread like wildfire on the internet, he and his

supporters came up with conspiracy theories more fantastic than the Lockwood novels.

Try as they might, at no point could anyone connect Hannah Styles or the Hebert campaign to the controversy. It was, Trump screamed, just the kind of slander that the "Crazy, Crooked, Heartless, and Nasty Hillary" would cook up to hurt him.

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On June 6th, the day before the last of the fifty states were scheduled to vote in Democratic primaries and caucuses, many pundits declared Clinton the presumptive nominee. That all changed the next day. After California, Montana, New Mexico, New Jersey, and the Dakotas had their say, Clinton had more than two thousand delegates but needed 2382. Sanders and Hebert split the remainder, with Grace still slightly behind Bernie. What had made Grace the lone Horseman of the Apoplexy of the Democratic Party establishment was that Californians had split their votes in three nearly equal shares—but Grace's share was more equal than the other two.

Grace had broken the back of the DNC Donkey and there would be a brokered convention haunted by the ghost of Adlai Stevenson, a two-time loser.

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When the weather cooperated a few days later, Grace, Ricky, Carter, Jennie, Roberto, and Carmen took the oldest kids with them to the Presidential Range in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. They spent a single day from before sunrise until after sunset hiking from north to south up, down, to, and across the seven summits named for presidents. They did so without fanfare or alerting the media and asked other hikers they met along the way to keep their trek a secret. But by the time they got to the midpoint of their traverse, the summit of Mount Washington, they were greeted by a small mob who had arrived by way of the steep auto road or the steeper cog railway.

The mob that greeted them as they came down after dark from the summit of Mount Pierce was huge, as was the media coverage for the next few days of the cellphone and videocam footage assembled by other hikers.

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A few days after their traverse of the Presidential Range, Grace and her family marched in the Capital Pride Parade in the District of Columbia

on Saturday, June 11th. Around two a.m. the following morning, nearly fifty patrons were killed and more than fifty wounded by a single gunman in Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Grace and Ricky spoke at the vigil in front of the White House before dawn.

Two weeks later, the whole family flew to San Francisco to take part in the annual gay pride parade. Riding with the Dykes on Bikes and mounted on a Harley flying the gay pride rainbow flag, Grace and Ricky wore black wife-beaters that displayed fake tattoos on their bare shoulders. The rest of the family marched in the PFLAG contingent made up of parents, families, and friends of lesbians and gays.

In that family contingent, TeeJay stood out in drag as a nun in a black habit with a white wimple under a rainbow flag canopy held aloft by Polly, Rocky, T-Rod, and Roberta, the oldest of the three Rodriguez girls.

By then, most impartial polls agreed that Grace's sexuality was no longer a major issue and that her family values were a significant left branch tributary to the more traditional mainstream.

The usual suspects on the far right were, of course, less tolerant.

"A disgusting display," tweeted Donald Trump. "An insult to the memory of our Founding Fathers."

"How come that Floundering Father forgot about the Founding Mothers?" tweeted Rocky in response.

Grace's monster rally on the morning of the Fourth of July in Philadelphia and her even larger evening rally in the District of Columbia were more traditional events. They were also the last events that were not under the overly cautious protection of the Secret Service.

A week before the convention, and under conditions as carefully screened from public view as secret peace talks or a tricky corporate merger, Grace and Ricky escaped the unwanted attention of their new Secret Service detail and met at a marina on the Potomac. It was there, aboard her father's whimsically named Uncle Tom's Cabin Cruiser, that they met with her prospective running mate and his wife to negotiate terms proposed by Tom and approved by Grace.

"Let's start with what the two of you have in common," Tom began.

"I know what we have in common," snapped the other man, who ignored Tom and glared at Grace, "so let's cut to the chase: why would the

delegates at the convention want to have me on your ticket?"

"They don't. But as much as they might not want you, they want to keep the White House. What they want doesn't matter because I want you," said Grace, "and I want to be the nominee when the dust settles next week."

"So this is what my career has come down to," groused the reluctant recruit. "I get to say 'I'm with her'."

"Not until I get the nomination," she reminded him.

"You know what Trump's gonna say. That I'm a basket case in a basket of deplorables."

"And now," said Tom, "we'd like to show you the pair of campaign buttons we've had made in advance: one for Grace, the other for her running mate."

"Why don't they have any names on them?" asked the prospect as he looked at the two buttons.

"Because you're not the only fish in the sea, Dear," explained the prospect's better half.

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A few days before the Democratic party convention in Philadelphia, Bernie Sanders, who had come to like, respect, and fear Grace during their debates, offered to pick her as his running mate if she would release her delegates to him after the first vote. Grace thanked him but made it clear she was running for president, not vice president, and suggested he was much more useful in the Senate.

"Are you offering me the second spot?" he nearly shouted.

"No. I need a balanced ticket."

"And you think YOU'RE more qualified to be president?" he shouted.

"I wouldn't be running if I thought otherwise."

"What makes you think you're electable?"

"I will be with the right running mate."

"And have you found him—or her?"

"Yes, I've found him or her."

"And who will he or she be?"

"He or she will be a great VP."

"Stop with the games!"

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Depends on the secret."

"Then forget about it," said Grace.

“All right, already. I’ll keep this secret.”

“Cross your heart and hope to die?”

“Yes!” he shouted, and crossed his heart. “Do you need a pinky-swear as well?”

“It wouldn’t hurt.”

As they did the pinky-swear, she told him who she wanted as her running mate.

Bernie laughed in disbelief at first, then thought about it.

“You know, that might work. Has he agreed?”

“Yes. But if you tell anyone else, I’ll never trust you again.” Grace paused, then looked Bernie in the eye. “Who are you backing in the gubernatorial primary back in Vermont next month?”

“I don’t have time for that!”

“If I get the nomination, you’ll have time to back Sue Minter in the primary and then in November.”

Bernie frowned, then suddenly smiled as he understood.

“You’re looking for an understudy in case your leading man drops out. But I don’t want to be your vice president.”

“And I didn’t want to run for president, Senator. But in case your president needs you to resign from the Senate in order to become president of the Senate, I want to be sure the governor of Vermont is a Democrat.”

“You’re leaving nothing to chance.”

“Chance left town a long time ago, along with Slim and the horse he rode in on.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

On the morning of the first day of her party’s convention in the City of Brotherly and Sisterly Love, Grace watched television coverage of Hillary Clinton, still the presumptive nominee, trashing Donald Trump in a long speech at the convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Charlotte, North Carolina. Although she had been invited to speak to the VFW, Grace had declined the honor because she wanted to spend the day meeting and greeting delegates in Philadelphia.

Before that long day was over, she had shaken hands with or hugged more than a thousand delegates. That night, after Ricky complained that Grace reeked of their cologne and perfume, they took a shower together.

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At the Democratic convention the next day, Clinton was nominated by Senator Barbara Mikulski of Maryland, Sanders by Representative Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, and Grace by Jimmy Carter, who spoke about how the Naval Academy prepared leaders. By the end of the first ballot, Clinton was ahead of Sanders and Hebert but did not have a majority of votes.

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On the third day of the convention, Sanders, shocked almost everyone when he released his delegates and asked them to vote for Governor Hebert. After a bruising procedural floor fight, the vote was finally held and Grace captured more votes than Clinton and became the party's nominee. Flanked by her extended family, she accepted the nomination of her party and thanked the delegates for their trust.

"Before I announce and introduce my choice for a running mate, let me remind you about a tradition in our party that began in 1944 when FDR chose a senator as his running mate. Truman did the same. JFK chose LBJ. LBJ chose Senator Hubert Humphrey, who chose Senator Edmund Muskie. My grandfather chose Senator George McGovern. Carter chose Senator Walter Mondale. Mondale broke tradition and chose a woman who was not a senator, as did my father four years later. Clinton stuck with tradition and chose Senator Al Gore. Gore chose Senator Joe Lieberman, John Kerry chose Senator John Edwards. And I think you all remember which senator President Obama chose."

She paused as more and more delegates began to look at and point to Joe Biden, who shook his head and pretended he was trying to hide.

When the laughter subsided, she continued: "It makes a crazy kind of sense, doesn't it? Senators know how to work with or against other senators in that old boys and new girls club."

She paused again as more and more delegates began to look at or point to her father. Tom shook his head and stepped away from the family group.

"No, I'm not talking about that former senator, either. I've chosen as my running mate someone I have known most of my life, someone I like and respect. And in the tradition of Abraham Lincoln, the great Republican we all love and respect, I would now like to do as he did in 1864 and cross party lines to name as my running mate another great Republican we should all respect: Senator John Sidney McCain of the great state of Arizona."

There was stunned silence for a moment as McCain and his family came out from the wings and embraced Grace, her parents, and Ricky. And then despite a few boos, cheers and applause erupted as the two running mates stood together flanked by their mothers and their wives. A single photograph of the two happy families became a defining image of that election year.

When the roar of approval subsided, McCain stepped to the microphone and began to speak . . . in Spanish . . . until Ricky chided him: "En ingles, Juan, por favor!"

"Primero llegaron los espanoles, los anglos luego," he reminded her, but continued in English before switching back to Spanish.

After McCain spoke with precision and passion in both languages about why he crossed the aisle to stand with Grace Styles Hebert against the threat posed by Donald John Trump, there was happy pandemonium as he was nominated by acclamation in both English and Spanish.

While Grace was speaking again to thank the delegates for their support, scores of Hebert volunteers passed out little plastic bags each holding a pair of the campaign buttons that Tom had made in secret. One displayed the presidential seal surrounded by a blue symbol for the hand-mirror of Venus, the other had the VPOTUS seal surrounded by the red symbol for the shield and spear of Mars.

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Leaving the platform after his speech, McCain whispered to Grace and Tom: "Well, after getting burned running with another woman eight years ago, I'm feeling a little warm again."

"Lo siento, amigo," said Tom. "If this doesn't work, you can always try running with another woman in four years."

"I should live so long."

"We hope you will," said Grace.

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"How do you feel, Governor?" a network reporter asked the nominee later that night.

"A bit like David Copperfield," she replied.

"You mean like a magician?"

"No, like the Dickens character."

"Which one was that?"

"The one who didn't know whether or not he would turn out to be the hero of his own life."

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“She’s not the one I wanted to have the honor and privilege of running against me,” said nominee Trump the next morning. “Defeating her will be like shooting fish in a barrel.”

And then he tweeted to dismiss John McCain as the "McChurian candidate".

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By that afternoon, fast-moving hucksters around the country had come up with bumper stickers and tee-shirts that ripped off the pair of official campaign buttons distributed at the convention. Some of the tee-shirts had the blue and red POTUS and VPOTUS icons positioned side by side across the front, others had the blue POTUS on the front, the red VPOTUS on the back.

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It took a few more days for Hillary Clinton to congratulate Grace on her surprise victory. She did so by showing up at the house in Georgetown with a former president in tow—and the media not far behind.

The meeting was brokered by Tom and mediated by TeeJay, who had first encountered Bill Clinton as a freshman running for class president at Georgetown fifty-two years earlier. TeeJay had been impressed that a Baptist from the deep south was able to win that election at an elite Catholic university on the East Coast.

“Thank you for putting yourself at risk. Now tell us how we can help you the most,” said Bill after his wife confessed she was relieved she would no longer be in danger of losing the White House to someone as dangerous as Trump. “Should we endorse you or denounce you? Which would you prefer?”

“The former, of course,” said Grace, “and sooner rather than later.”

“Mr. President,” said TeeJay, “might I suggest that you and former Vice President Gore plan to have rallies in Florida in support of Governor Hebert? You might use that as an opportunity to apologize to voters there for abandoning them in 2000.”

Bill Clinton held his breath and got red in the face, then let out a long sigh. “Do I have to make a good Act of Contrition and say a bunch of Hail Marys and Our Fathers as well? Or would it be enough if I just kiss your holy ass?”

“Much as I’d enjoy that, Bill, sending you to Florida is our Hail Mary pass.”

At that point, Tom, TeeJay, and Bill Clinton began the serious negotiations while Grace and Hillary went down into the garden to be filmed and photographed chatting about the Clintons' grandchildren while little Woody splashed in a plastic pool at their feet.

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"I'm with her," said Hillary to network reporters as she and Bill posed with Grace on the front steps of the Georgetown house a short time later, "and so is Bill."

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"It just goes to show," said TeeJay as the Clinton motorcade departed. "you can take the boy out of the Jesuits, but you can't take the Jesuits out of the boy."

"Why do I suspect I've been sold a bill of goods on a great used car?" asked Grace.

"Oh, ye of little faith," said her faithful uncle.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

In the first week of August, the family celebrated little Woody's first birthday. By then, he was weaned, toilet trained, and fast on his feet. He was also beginning to understand simple instructions and questions in both English and Russian.

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The following week, Democrats around the country held well-attended unity rallies to heal the wounds the three candidates had inflicted on one another.

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In mid-August, the two running mates and their families got together at John McCain's ranch near Sedona. It was, Tom explained to the press, just two old classmates and friends getting together. Both sons and grandsons of admirals, he and McCain had been at opposite ends of the academic and disciplinary spectrum at the Academy. McCain had stood as Tom's best man when he married Hannah in 1964, and Tom had returned the favor as a groomsman when McCain married his second wife in 1980. With Tom's encouragement and help, McCain ran for and was elected to the House of Representatives in 1982. They travelled together to Vietnam in 1985, the year before McCain was elected to the Senate. Later, as senators on opposite sides of the aisle, they had co-sponsored several

successful bills.

What Tom did not share with the press, as Grace knew, was that he had worked behind the scenes to help McCain win the New Hampshire GOP primary in 2000. That was pragmatic on Tom's part: if there was any chance a Republican could beat Al Gore, Tom preferred McCain.

Grace also knew that although her father had supported Obama for the Democratic nomination in 2008, he had helped McCain win the Republican primary in New Hampshire that year just in case Obama couldn't take the White House.

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Rocky and Polly were impressed by one of the photographs taken at the wedding of John and Cindy McCain thirty-six years earlier: Rocky's mom as a flower girl and Polly's dad as a ring-bearer barely old enough to walk,

"When I get married," Rocky told her grandfather, "I hope you and Roberto can both give me away."

"We'll do our best to get rid of you," said Tom.

"I'm never getting married," said T-Rod. "I just wanna sow my wild oats."

"Do you even know what that means?" demanded Rocky.

After T-Rod answered his sister's question in graphic terms, McCain asked Ricky, "Do you need some soap for washing out his mouth?"

"Not if he invokes the First Amendment in time," said T-Rod's mom, a public defender.

McCain shook his head sadly. "You fucking liberals."

"He said the eff word," laughed T-Rod, "in front of us innocent children."

"Bite me," said McCain, who invited Grace to take a walk with him.

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"I wish you had been old enough to run with me in 2008," said McCain, looking up at Grace, "but you were a couple of years short of thirty-five and much too tall."

"Is that why you chose Sarah Palin—because she was shorter than you are?"

"Don't remind me," he sighed, then continued: "And now I'm running at the bottom of your ticket."

"But you still get to spend your days with senators."

"My last days," he said, and got to the point.

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Back on the road to a rally in Phoenix where she planned to make her entrance on horseback, Tom asked Grace what she and her running mate had talked about.

“That’s above your pay grade.”

“Thanks. That answers my question.”

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After Phoenix, Grace and her family flew to Des Moines to make a brief appearance at the Iowa State Fair. While they were there, they learned that five identical statues depicting a nude Donald Trump with a huge gut hanging over a tiny penis had been installed in public places in Manhattan, Cleveland, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle. “The Emperor Has No Balls” was engraved on a plate on the base of each statue.

“Your belly wasn’t that big when you were pregnant with little Woody,” said Rocky when she saw the images that went viral of the naked MAGA-man.

T-Rod was delighted by the official statement released by the New York City Parks Department that it “stands firmly against any unpermitted erection in city parks, no matter how small”.

“The erection on that statue’s pretty damn small,” he said, then added, “Even little Woody’s got a bigger dick.”

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By late August, after a string of successful rallies around the country, it began to seem possible that the Hebert/McCain bi-partisan coalition had a good chance of being swept into office on a rising tide that would lift enough Democratic boats to take back control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate. If that happened, it would give Grace a clear mandate (or, as some of her opponents feared, a queer woman-date).

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On the morning of September 1st, Trump spoke at the annual Convention of the American Legion in Cincinnati, Ohio. After thanking the delegates, he led some of them in an “Americans First!” chant.

When that was done, he talked about the importance of making sure the children of Americans learned about the history of their country in schools. “And by the way,” he said, “we want young Americans to recite the Pledge of Allegiance at the start of every school day. My opponent refuses to take the pledge. She claims she pledged her first day in school and

never broke her pledge. Imagine that. Never broke her pledge! But where was that school? In the Soviet Union or here in America? But let's give her the benefit of the doubt. Let's say she pledged here in America. Why won't she pledge again? What's she afraid of? Being caught in a lie? Is that it? I'll bet you that's what it is. I bet you know that's what it is."

He managed to get a large part of the crowd to join him in chanting "Take the pledge, Russki Rusty! Take the pledge, Russki Rusty!"

"Now let's talk about how she and her roommate at the United States Naval Academy became illicit lovers right there in that sacred place knowing that they would be kicked out if anyone knew they were homosexuals. Don't get me wrong. I don't hate gays. I feel sorry for them. But I'm even sorer that Rusty and Ricky got a free education at the expense of American taxpayers because Bill Clinton told the Pentagon to look away. He said, 'don't ask, don't tell'.

"Rusty and Ricky—they were living a lie. Such a lie. And only when they got sent overseas to defend our country did they decide to come out of the closet and come home to where it was safe. But Rusty-the-dis-Grace knows it's not safe for her here, which is why she has refused to honor you by coming here today."

When Trump finished his rant, the moderator came out from the wings and explained that the next scheduled speaker was yielding his time to someone else.

"Please welcome Governor Grace Hebert."

Wearing an American Legion cap adorned with some of the ribbons she had earned, Grace crossed the stage to a mixture of boos and cheers, stood at the podium until the crowd quieted down, tapped the microphone, then leaned close and spoke in her deepest voice: "Bone spurs? Really?"

With that, she had the crowd on her side as she pledged to reform the Veterans Administration.

Afterwards, she explained to the press that she had wanted to speak all along but her staff had not been able to resolve a conflict until the last minute.

"Which conflict was that?" asked a reporter.

"One of many," she said, imitating Trump. "One of so many."

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Despite the enthusiasm of Grace's supporters, by late September,

most of the polls and pundits agreed: Donald Trump was unstoppable because America, still recovering from the shock of having elected and re-elected its first president descended from a black African man and a white American woman, was not ready for a kick-ass gay woman as president, especially one who was proud of her own descent from the first elected official descended from an African slave in what would become the United States.

Some polls indicated many liberal and even some moderate voters had been turned off by Grace's choice of McCain as her running mate. And some of the talking heads began to predict that if enough voters shifted to the third party candidates, and especially to the two former governors on the Libertarian ballot, the election might be thrown into the Republican-controlled House on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December to elect the president and to the Republican-controlled Senate to elect the vice president.

"That would give Trump the trump card," said more than one, some in jest, others in horror.

Grace, who paid no attention to polls and did not view the Oval Office as a game prize, did not dissuade her supporters from waving "NO TRUMP" signs at her rallies.

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As Tom helped Grace prepare for the first of her three debates with Trump, she suddenly flared out at him in anger at one of his suggestions, then apologized.

"If that's PMS," said Tom, "make the best of it."

"If you were any other man, I'd tell you where to stick that advice," she said.

"And if you were any other woman, I'd mind my fucking business, Grasshopper. Moving on, remember the constant homophobic attacks on your 'lifestyle' when you ran for Congress in 2004?"

"How could I forget?"

She had won the Democratic primary despite those attacks. When her opponent, the incumbent Republican, sneered about her "lifestyle" at their first and only debate, she had replied calmly. "I married a woman. So did you. So what?"

When her opponent mumbled about the difference between his "kind" of marriage and hers, she asked "So effing what?" Unable or unwilling to explain on television exactly what the effing problem was, he stumbled and

fumbled the rhetorical ball so badly that late-night comedians had fun with his disarticulation of the effing issue.

After her effing question went viral, many of Grace's supporters showed up at rallies wearing tee-shirts with the slogan "SO EFFING WHAT?" And her opponent refused to debate her again.

"So effing what?" she asked her father twelve years later.

"When the Trumpster tries to engage you on your 'lifestyle', see if you can enrage him about something else."

"I can do that. Should I hit him with the Pee Tapes?"

"Let's save that little surprise for the last debate in October. But find a way to piss him off tomorrow night."

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The following night in late September, Grace walked out on the stage at Hofstra University wearing a bright yellow hard hat.

"I was afraid you'd be wearing one of your blue MAGA hats, Governor," said Lester Holt, the moderator. "Why a hard hat?"

"For when that glass ceiling in the White House breaks and the shards tumble down," said Grace, who took off her hard hat and flipped it back into the wings like an un-airworthy frisbee, then patted her hair back into place.

Standing six foot two in her bare feet, she was almost the same height as Trump, but wore high heels that made her seem taller. Although she had been tempted to pile her long hair into a towering bouffant, she decided to let the master of Trump Tower have the fancy hair.

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During his opening statement at the start of the debate, Trump claimed he alone knew how to deal with Putin.

When it was her turn, Grace said she would not deal with Putin at all—and that the Russian people would have to deal with their new "Ras-putin."

"Then what policy would your administration take toward Russia?" asked Lester Holt.

"Forty-eight years ago, Nixon promised he had a secret plan to end the war in Vietnam. I have no secret plan regarding Putin—and if I did, I would not discuss it with Mr. Trump, not even in secret. I do not believe he can be trusted with secrets."

"What kind of plan do you have?" asked Holt.

"That's for me to know and America to learn after I'm elected. Could

we move on to the next topic?”

“Sounds like you have a secret plan,” blurted Trump.

“You’re not as stupid as you look,” said Grace, adopting a Mona Lisa smile.

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Within a few minutes, Trump managed to stray off the new topic. “When it comes to family values, Grace Hebert is the dis-grace from Mary-fairy-land. She calls herself ‘Rusty’, but I call her ‘Red Russki Rusty the Pinko’.”

“Lester,” said Grace, “may I respond to those kind words?”

“Be my guest,” sighed Lester.

“Mr. Trump, let me remind you that the so-called 'red states' are those that vote Republican. And you’re the one who opened the door to family values, so let me point out that you have been unfaithful to three wives while I have remained faithful to my only one. My wife and I value our only marriage more than you have valued any of yours, so could we turn away from my gender and that of my wife to your agenda?”

“What agenda are you talking about?” demanded Trump.

Lester Holt tried to get the debate back on his agenda, but Grace was on a roll.

“Four years ago, when President Obama was re-elected, you tweeted that ‘The Electoral College is a disaster for America’. You also tweeted that we could not allow the second inauguration to happen. Quote: ‘We should march on Washington and stop this travesty. Our nation is totally divided. Let’s fight like hell and stop this great and disgusting injustice.’ Unquote.”

“What’s your point?”

“If I’m elected in November, will you call for a march on Washington to stop me from being inaugurated?”

“You’re not gonna be elected.”

“But if I am, will you concede?”

“Not gonna happen!” he shouted.

“What’s not going to happen? My election or your concession?”

“Neither!” he shouted again, then demanded: “Will you concede when I’m elected?”

“Not gonna happen,” she said, “but I will if you manage to con the American people into electing you, which you can’t.”

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When the moderator moved on to the Border Wall issue, Trump

repeated the promises and claims he had made over the last two years: that his proven experience as a builder and developer would guarantee success and that Mexico would pay for the wall.

Grace quickly disposed of the matter by challenging Trump to explain how he was going to make Mexico pay for a wall that would be nearly two thousand miles long. "As for your experience as a builder and developer, we know you've gone bankrupt and that your contractors and creditors have trouble making you pay your bills."

When Trump doubled down on his claims about his accomplishments, Grace burst into song: "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious, your mendacious superficiality is really quite atrocious."

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After Trump denounced Grace as a puppet of the "Deep State", she demonstrated there were no strings attached to her and explained that a deep state would provide better sailing conditions for a full-rigged Ship of State than a shallow state.

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And so it went for the remainder of the evening until Trump ended his final rant by calling Grace "a desperate woman, a woman so desperate that she picked a loser as her running mate!"

"This is not the first time you've called Senator McCain a loser, but never to his face. If you do it again, right now, to my face, I will come over there and bitch slap your silly face on his behalf."

Loud cheers and applause as Grace waited for Trump to take the bait. Loser that he was, he stalked off stage.

"You're fired!" she called after him. Then she turned back to the audience, and smiled. "Poor man's been dis-Graced."

When the second burst of laughter subsided, Grace leaned into the microphone and confided in her deepest voice: "I guess you could say, Trump's been dumped and America's getting Rusty."

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A country and western singer who had backed Trump for months flipped his allegiance and topped the charts with "America's gettin' Rusty".

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

One of the more alliterative of the liberal talking heads summed up her first debate with Trump as "a pro-gressive, pro-choice, and pro-vocative

policy wonk versus a proponent of propaganda, profligacy, profits, and prostitution”.

Another opined that “Trump just doesn’t get it. Grace Hebert does. With apologies to those old enough to remember Clara Bow, Grace is the new ‘It Girl’.”

George Soros endorsed Grace and a consortium of veterans groups endorsed the Hebert/McCain ticket.

When Hugh Hefner endorsed her and offered a million dollars for a Playboy interview about the men and women other than Ricky she lusted after in her heart, Grace turned down the offer but volunteered at no charge to be his first fully-clothed centerfold on a faux bear skin rug. When Hannah learned of Grace’s counteroffer, she pulled out an old snapshot of a naked baby Grace on her tummy in a Moscow park with the Kremlin in the background.

Countless celebrities thanked her for speaking truth to tantrum and endorsed her without reservation.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, another former governor, endorsed Grace as he growled, “Come vote with me if you want to live.”

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At his rallies and in his tweets, Trump played the elite conspiracy card.

Grace welcomed his comments and reminded her listeners that FDR was the most elite and privileged of modern presidents and did the most for the poor, the homeless, the jobless, and the dispossessed. She handed out copies of the tax returns she filed with Ricky and their financial statements, then invited Trump to do the same.

At his next rally, Trump waved their documents and pointed out Grace and her wife claimed to own no real estate, stocks, or bonds. “Why haven’t they invested in America?”

When he still refused to release his own tax returns, Rocky and T-Rod made up catchy little ditties about “Donald Duck-the-Question” and “Donald Duck-and-Cover-His-Ass”.

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On October 4th, John McCain calmly flew circles around Mike Pence at the only debate between the vice presidential candidates. Pence interrupted McCain dozens of times. McCain interrupted Pence not once.

After the debate, McCain explained that he had spent years learning patience in the Hanoi Hilton.

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Three days after that debate, the Access Hollywood tape became the first October Surprise. “When you’re a star,” Trump had boasted, “you can do anything. Grab ‘em by the pussy. You can do anything.”

“That’s what we should be worried about,” Grace told reporters who asked for a comment. “That he’ll do or say anything if he’s elected—and may say or do anything twice as awful if he’s not.”

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The following morning, the second October Surprise came when WikiLeaks released the Moscow “Pee Tapes”. How Julian Assange came into possession of the tapes, and why he released them at that exact time, was never revealed. Grace suspected Uncle Harry may have been the culprit, but she kept that to herself.

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The next day, at the start of a press conference on the eve of her second debate with Trump, Grace announced she would not comment on the breaking news about the Pee Tapes.

But one reporter shouted louder than the rest: “Governor, how do you feel about Mr. Trump’s allegation that the Pee Tapes are fake news cooked up by your campaign?”

“Please don’t ask me what I ‘feel’ about something. Ask me what I think, know, or suspect.”

“Then a follow-up question,” shouted the same reporter. “Do you think, know, or suspect that the Pee Tapes were cooked up by your campaign?”

“I don’t think so, but have no way to know with absolute certainty that these so-called ‘Pee Tapes’ are not real or that my campaign did or did not create a video showing Russian prostitutes hired by Donald Trump peeing on a mattress on which President and Mrs. Obama may or may not have once slept, but I suspect you’re not going to be happy with that response,” she deadpanned, and pointed to another reporter.

“Governor Hebert, are you willing to comment on the Access Hollywood tape?”

“Yes, you may quote me as saying this kerfuffle has been about what Shakespeare would call ‘country matters’ and ‘much ado about nothing’-- and that I will address this matter at our debate tomorrow night.”

“Governor,” asked a third reporter, “will you do whatever it takes to win?”

“No,” replied Grace. “But I’ll do whatever it takes to keep Donald Trump’s sweaty little hands off the nuclear football and off the bodies of women who don’t want to be manhandled by a dimwit who believes he’s a bright and shining star.”

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More than halfway through their second debate in Saint Louis on October 9th, when Trump began to allude to her sexual orientation, Grace interrupted him, apologized to Martha Raddatz and Anderson Cooper, the moderators, and looked straight into the camera: “All you moms and dads watching at home, this might be a good time to send the kids to bed . . . unless, of course, they’re old enough to vote for me.”

Then she turned to Trump. “You’ve said you like to grab women by the ‘pussy’. Why don’t you come over here right now and try to grab mine with your itsy bitsy, teeny weeny, sweaty little hands? Do you have the balls to do that, Donald Duck-the-Challenge?”

Trump stayed where he was, frozen like the proverbial deer caught in the headlights.

The moderators tried to get back to their format, but Trump wasn’t interested in what they wanted to do. He glared at Grace and demanded, “How can decent Americans vote for a dyke who uses that kind of language on national television. Families are watching. Children are watching. Families with children are watching.”

“But you’re the one who bragged about how you’re entitled to grab pussies.”

“Not on national television. Everyone knows that was a private conversation. Everyone who knows me knows I would never use a locker room expression like that on television or—“

“So, if we can’t use what you call a ‘locker room expression’, let’s see if we can find a way to talk about what Shakespeare called ‘country matters’.”

“We’re supposed to be here to talk about policy, about our plans for America. I have great plans. The best plans.”

“For our country, you mean? Is that what matters to you?”

“Yes, our country matters!”

“So you do want to talk about ‘country matters’.”

She said “country” so carefully and distinctly this time, and with emphasis on the first syllable, that Trump finally caught on to what Shakespeare meant by “country matters”.

“What I’d like to do is kick your cunt out of this country,” he shouted.

“Come on, Donald,” she beckoned, “come over here and take your best shot.”

But he stormed off the stage instead.

“Was it something I said?” asked Grace, who was left alone on the stage with time on the clock—time she put to good use.

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“Aunt Rusty, do you know what a pussy willow is?” asked T-Rod that night when Grace returned to their hotel suite, then answered his own question: “A cunt-tree.”

Ricky slapped the back of his head, then protected him from Rocky.

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The next morning, Trump denounced Grace for her vulgarity and announced he would not take part in the scheduled third debate with her despite the fact it was supposed to be moderated by Chris Wallace of Fox News, his favorite source of information. And so began the curious ten day period that would come to be known as SurrogateDebateGate.

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When the dust first cleared after Trump’s defection, most of the polls and pundits agreed: Grace had done a much better job in the two debates than Trump. But she had also alienated many moderate voters by refusing to suffer an arrogant fool gladly or even sadly. Fox News reported that many Democrats were saying they could not and would not vote for Grace, that they were simply going to sit out the election or vote for one of the independent candidates.

“I don’t think that’s what Trump calls ‘fake news’,” Grace told her crew. “I think we need to hit back even harder to lure him into that swamp he wants to drain.”

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And then came the next October surprise: a tsunami of emails and social media posts created on Russian troll farms attacking Grace and Ricky as sexual deviants who had preyed on their own children. Even worse, in Grace’s opinion, they attacked John McCain as a traitor who had collaborated with his North Vietnamese captors in exchange for more food, better medical care, and gentler treatment than the other POWs got. Although the mainstream media dismissed such charges, Trump’s supporters treated them as gospel.

The kids assured their moms that they were not bothered by those

slings and arrows of outrageous fiction—and that they felt sorry for poor Barron Trump, the gangly ten year old son of the other candidate.

“He’s the one who’s probably gonna be the most fucked up by what his dad’s doing,” said T-Rod, who had become increasingly kind-hearted.

Grace flashed a smile at Ricky who was doing her best not to show how proud she was of both their little bastards.

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A few days later, a Russian woman seeking refuge in Turkey claimed that she had escaped from one of Putin’s troll farms disseminating lies on social media about Grace and her running mate. Both Fox News and sources in Moscow counterclaimed that the defector was an impostor recruited and coached by Harry Styles, the former ambassador. When the defector suddenly disappeared within a few hours under murky circumstances, Trump and his supporters took advantage of the confusion—and wound up creating even more until the Russian woman reappeared for interviews in Manhattan.

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On October 15th, Grace played herself when she debated Alec Baldwin’s Donald Trump on Saturday Night Live. The focus of their debate was the missing Russian defector and her claims.

“It’s just another witch hunt!” insisted the SNL Trump.

“Which witch hunt do you mean,” demanded Grace, “and which witch is being hunted in which country?”

“There she goes again with her obscene cunt-tree matters,” shouted the fake Trump.

The debate quickly degenerated into a twitchy parody of or homage to Abbott and Costello’s “Who’s on First?” routine.

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The “real” Donald Trump was not amused—but unintentionally amused late night talk show hosts by sounding like Alec Baldwin making fun of Trump.

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On Sixty Minutes the following evening, Grace reminded Lesley Stahl that when Teddy Roosevelt called the American presidency a “bully pulpit”, he meant a superb or wonderful platform or soapbox. “But that adjective has come to have another meaning. Today, Vladimir Putin is a bully on a bloody pulpit trying to put another bloody bully on our bully pulpit.”

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The New York Post tabloid headline the next morning proclaimed “HEBERT CALLS PUTIN BULLY ON BLOODY PULPIT”.

“That’s not up to the standards of their most famous headline,” Grace told the kids at breakfast. “It was all in caps, ‘HEADLESS BODY’ on the top line, then ‘IN TOPLESS BAR’ on second line.”

“Cool,” said T-Rod.

“How about this for a headline,” said Rocky, sketching it out in the air on two lines: “TRUMP TAKES DUMP/SHIT HITS FAN”.

“Putin’s his biggest fan,” said T-Rod, “so does that mean Trump took a dump on Putin?”

With that, the kids were off and running, competing with one another for new crowning achievements in crappy scatological humor.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

On Monday, October 17th, three weeks before election day, Trump gave what many pundits considered his best and most dynamic speech at a monster rally in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Furious at Grace, he referred to her as “Godless Gracie”, “Lusty Rusty”, “Lusty Lezzie”, and “Nightmare Hebert”. He warned his supporters to “Beware Hebert” and to avoid “Hebert Despair” by electing him. He lamented that America had gone from “I Like Ike” to “I Like Dyke”.

Even T-Rod was impressed by Trump’s performance. “See how he pauses to let his supporters yell ‘Lock ‘er up’ or ‘Build the Wall’ or ‘Drain the Swamp’ on cue while he remembers the next line, or just makes it up.”

“If you really want to drain a swamp,” said Rocky, who had watched her grandfather pump mud and silt from the bottom of an abandoned beaver pond to enrich a meadow at Styles Landing, “what you need is a really BIG mudsucker. And Trump sucks big time.”

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Early the following morning, Grace flew to New York to appear on the Today Show where she spoke about and displayed slides she took of some of her favorite swamps: the Great Cypress in the Delmarva Peninsula, the Great Dismal in Virginia and North Carolina, the Atchafalaya Basin in Louisiana, the Okefenokee and Everglades in Georgia and Florida, the Pripyat Marshes in Belarus, and the vast Vasyugan Swamp in Siberia, the largest in the northern hemisphere.

“Swamps are beautiful and useful places, but despite what my

opponent says, there are no swamps in the District of Columbia and never were any other than a few wetlands that were filled long ago. Even so, the metaphorical notion of Washington as a swamp is worth discussion. Katie, let me ask you this: why would anyone want to drain a swamp?”

“To get rid of mosquitoes?” suggested Katie Couric.

“Yes, but why get rid of mosquitoes? After all, the only ones that bother humans are females in search of blood for their larvae. And mosquitoes warn humans to stay away from their habitat. If we consider our capital city as a metaphorical swamp, then the ‘mosquitoes’ are those pesky bureaucrats who protect our natural, environmental, cultural, economic, and other resources. That’s the swamp Donald Trump wants to drain.”

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From Manhattan, Grace flew west with her mother, wife, and daughter to prepare for the third presidential debate on Wednesday evening at the University of Nevada, Los Vegas.

Because Trump refused to appear on the same stage as Grace, and because Fox News had spent a fortune promoting the event to be moderated by their own Chris Wallace, Grace had agreed to debate three female surrogates chosen by Trump’s handlers: Nikki Haley, the governor of South Carolina and the daughter of Punjabi parents born in India; Liz Cheney, the frontrunner in the race for Wyoming’s only seat in the House and the daughter of a former vice president; and Sarah Palin, the former governor of Alaska and John McCain’s running mate in 2008.

Both sides also agreed that each Trump surrogate would debate Grace on one of the key issues chosen by the moderator and pulled at random from a Lincolnesque stove pipe hat by a member of the audience.

Endowed with a sense of humor, Chris Wallace did a good job moderating the debate, which went smoothly. Even as Grace disagreed with her older political sisters, she treated them with respect. And she scored the most points with the live audience and those polled later when she spoke softly of meeting Liz Cheney’s sister Mary and her wife and children.

“I know you must love your younger sister and her children and admire her courage, and I’m sure you know she’s going to need even more of your love and support if my opponent is elected.”

Grace, who was allowed to have three surrogates to respond to no more than one question each, handed off questions to her mother, wife,

and daughter.

Hannah protected health care from Nikki Haley, Ricky shot down Sarah Palin on gun control, and Rocky earned special praise for handling Liz Cheney with grace. “I had my first period only a few months ago, and I look forward to having my first baby,” she began, “but not until I’m ready, willing, and able to have that baby. Every woman on this stage except my other mom has chosen to have more than one baby—but why should any woman not have the right to chose whether or not to carry a fetus to term?”

Rocky took a deep breath and continued: “Ms. Cheney, you were healthy enough, wealthy enough, and lucky enough to have five healthy children with the help of a loving husband. Do you really want to see Donald Trump have the power to immediately name two new justices to the Supreme Court so there will be five ready to reverse Roe v. Wade next year? You have three daughters of child-bearing age—“

“Someone’s done her homework,” said Surrogate Cheney.

“—and I’m sure you’re looking forward to having grandchildren,” said Rocky without missing a beat, “but what if one of your daughters, or one of your daughters-in-law, had to make a hard choice? Who are you going to trust with the responsibility to name new justices?”

Liz Cheney, an attorney, took a deep breath and did her best to stand by her man—but it was clear her heart was not in it.

Nor was Nikki Haley’s heart in it when she tried to explain how Trump would do a better job than Grace dealing with Putin. Grace threw her a lifeline by agreeing that Trump might make a few lucrative real estate and financing deals with Putin and the oligarchs.

“If enough wealth stolen from the Russian people is tied up in Trump’s hotels, casinos, and golf courses,” Grace conceded, “Putin might be more reluctant to nuke the East Coast, and with Trump hotels in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and elsewhere in Russia, Putin will feel safer. Yes, let’s take the acronym ‘MAD’ and change the meaning from ‘Mutual Assured Destruction’ to ‘Make another Deal’.”

The low point for the surrogates was Sarah Palin’s explanation of how Trump would make Mexico pay for the border wall. Grace and the adult surrogates managed not to roll their eyes, but Rocky was heard to giggle.

Each of Trump’s surrogates made a closing statement on behalf of her candidate. The event ended with with Grace’s closing statement in which she said nothing about herself. Instead, at the risk of being accused

of damning by faint praise, she declared that each of her opponent's surrogates had more and stronger qualifications for the office of president than the other candidate whose name she never spoke over the course of the evening.

The surrogate debate ended with six women and one girl exchanging hugs and handshakes.

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Early the next morning, Grace and Liz Cheney met privately for coffee with their fathers, men who had crossed swords when one was his party's leader in the Senate and the other was the president of that body.

Afterwards, the two women born ten years apart agreed they could work together if they were both elected in less than three weeks.

Which, as it turned out, they would do for the next eight years, especially after Cheney replaced the obstructionist Kevin McCarthy as House minority leader in 2021.

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Later that morning, Grace flew home to Washington, where she played with little Woody before taking a long nap that afternoon. That evening, she and her entire family watched the annual Al Smith dinner broadcast from the grand ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria in Manhattan. Every four years, nominees for president had toasted and roasted each other at the charity event named for the first Catholic to be nominated for president by one of the two major parties.

Because Trump refused to appear in public anywhere near Grace, Hillary Clinton agreed to stand in as her surrogate.

After Trump savaged Grace as a fallen Catholic living in sin, Clinton returned the favor. Among her zingers, two stood out:

—“Donald calls his opponent a sick woman, whereas he is as healthy as a horse. You know, the one Putin rides around on.”

—“Most people look at the Statue of Liberty and see a proud symbol of our history of immigrants like his ancestors, the Drumpts. But poor Donald, a second generation American who has married two immigrants, looks at the Statue of Liberty and sees a ‘four’ or maybe a ‘five’, but only if she loses the torch and tablet and does something about her hair. Now, when I look at the amazing Grace, I see a forty-five: our forty-fifth president!”

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A few days later, Tom took Grace aside for a private strategy session.

“Between the polls and the trolls, this election could go either way,” he warned.

“Then, let’s steer it in our direction,” said Grace.

“Which direction is that?”

“How about spending the last week of the campaign in Florida? The whole family on our two buses along with my running mate. The two of us should speak at every stop.”

“Why Florida?”

“Because we have California and New York locked up. We can’t do anything about Texas. Let’s hit some beaches in the Sunshine State.”

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Grace left Tom and Carter to plan their Florida rallies while she went to Vermont to campaign for and with Sue Minter, the Democratic candidate for governor. Patrick Leahy did not need her help holding on to his Senate seat, nor did Peter Welch, Vermont’s lone representative to the House.

After campaign in Pennsylvania, the swing state next door to Maryland, her home state, she flew to Arizona to campaign with her running mate. McCain campaigned for their joint ticket but also for the election to the Senate of the Republican who had been appointed to his seat when he resigned to run for vice president. Grace, meanwhile, campaigned on behalf of other Democrats running for the House and Senate in Arizona, including Anne Kirkpatrick, the four-term Congresswoman. For the most part, the crowds who came to their rallies were charmed by the agreeable way the two members of the McBear team disagreed on many issues, especially which candidate should replace McCain in the Senate.

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Invigorated by the fun he was having in what he claimed would be his last campaign, John McCain built his nationally televised speech in Phoenix around a story he heard from Barry Goldwater.

“Before Barry ran for the Senate in 1952, he had never held or sought statewide office. He was just a city councilman running as a Republican against the incumbent Democrat, Ernest McFarland, the powerful Senate Majority Leader. Up to that time, only one Republican had ever been elected to Congress from Arizona in the entire history of the state.

“In late October, when polls were favoring McFarland, a Navajo war veteran made a prediction that got widely reported and quoted. He took his old uniform out of mothballs and wore it at rallies around the state with Goldwater. He was wearing what was called an Ike jacket, the waist-length

olive drab wool jacket worn by enlisted men and popularized by Ike. And what this Navajo said was that Ike was no longer wearing an Ike jacket. Now he was wearing a regular suit jacket with coattails—and Barry Goldwater was hanging on to those coattails for dear life.”

McCain paused as his audience laughed and clapped.

“Sixty-four years ago, Barry Goldwater won his first Senate seat by less than seven thousand votes. I predict Grace Hebert will win by more than seven million votes on November 8th. And let me remind you that although she doesn’t wear a coat, her skirts are longer than Donald Trump’s coattails and strong enough to pull other Democrats and a few moderate Republicans to victory!”

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Then came yet another October surprise: viral rumors that Grace was the granddaughter of FDR and that if she was elected president she would do whatever it took to repeal the Twenty-second Amendment limiting her to only two terms.

Although Grace refused to comment on rumors about her relationship to FDR, she did promise she would serve no more than two terms. In response, the Trump people floated rumors that Grace planned to make Ricky her running mate in 2020 so Ricky could be elected in 2024, giving Grace eight years as FLOTUS and the power behind the throne. That would give them a grand total of sixteen years to repeal the amendment adopted in fear of another president being elected three or four times, as had FDR.

“Just think,” said Trump, “in 2032, she could be elected again at the age of only fifty-six!”

Grace surprised Trump by agreeing there was the danger her family might want to hang on to the White House. “But there is no need for us to repeal the presidential term limit. After my wife has two terms, my brother could run in ’32 and ’36. Rocky and T-Rod would both be old enough to take turns starting in 2040. After that it would be Woody’s turn.”

“And let’s not forget our grandchildren,” added Ricky.

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Less than two weeks before election day, Grace returned to Styles Landing to relax for several days until it was time to head south for the final push in Florida. Escorted by her Secret Service detail one afternoon, she took little Woody with her when she went to a campaign event for Governor Maggie Hassan, who was running for the Senate seat held by Kelly Ayotte.

On the way home, she had the agents stop at the dairy bar at the train station in Durham for an ice-cream cone.

Grace was standing in line waiting to order when a shabby old man with an unkempt beard and disheveled hair pushed through the admiring crowd surrounding Grace and tried to hand something to her.

Before the Secret Service agents could pounce on him, Grace waved them off and took what he offered: a cone with a scoop of strawberry ice cream.

“Thanks, Henry.”

When Grace started to let Woody lick her cone, one of the agents tried to stop her.

“Ma’am,” she began, “are you sure—?”

“It’s okay,” said Grace, “Professor Cooper’s an old friend.”

“Sorry, Ma’am,” said the agent. “He just seemed to be—“

“Let be be finale of seem’,” said Henry, licking his own cone, “The only emperor is the emperor of ice cream.”

“Did Wallace Stevens leave any advice for me about how to deal with Trump?” asked Grace.

“Hmmm,” mused Henry, “how about this?: ‘The final belief is to believe in a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly.’”

“Do you think Trump actually knows his fictions are fictions?”

“The poor soul has nothing else to believe in, and neither do his faithful,” said the old professor. “That’s what makes him—and them—so exquisitely dangerous.”

That said, he turned to the two Secret Service agents. “I recommend you order rocky road cones for the road ahead.”

CHAPTER FORTY

On the last weekend in October, Grace and her crew gathered at Pirate Cove to prepare their two buses for the assault on Florida. By then, they had voted early or by absentee ballot. On Monday afternoon, they joined the Obamas for their final Halloween celebration on the South Lawn. Acting on the insistence of the kids, the former First Family of Maryland came costumed as Pirates of the Chesapeake with Grace wearing a mustache like Johnny Depp’s Jack Sparrow and Ricky looking like Penelope Cruz playing Angelica. Rocky and T-Rod, looking and acting like

zombie pirates, lurched around handing out souvenir black eye patches with the skull and crossbones emblem.

John McCain came as himself, which he claimed was scary enough.

“We’re setting sail for Florida,” Grace told reporters. She did not tell them she was already planning to plant her Jolly Roger flag at Mar-a-Lago.

“We’re going to put Grace in the state of Florida,” promised TeeJay, “and Florida in a state of grace.”

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That night, Grace and her crew slept on their buses as they headed south along I-95. Emblazoned with their new Pirates of the Chesapeake logo, the big campaign buses were escorted by a convoy of media vans and Secret Service Chevy Suburbans. The media strategy designed by Tom Hebert and Wilson Styles was to promote the Pirates of the Chesapeake raid of Florida as a surrogate vacation for families all across America.

Claiming he feared rallies for Grace in Florida would turn into bloody riots, Rick Scott, the Republican governor, a harsh critic of everything Grace stood for, ordered the state police and the National Guard to stop the Bear Truth Express convoy once it crossed onto Florida soil and escort it back across the border to Georgia. Before that could happen, President Obama nationalized the Florida National Guard and sent more Secret Service Agents to Florida to protect the Hebert Campaign.

At a pre-dawn breakfast stop in south Georgia, Father T. J. Livaudais, SJ, held his own press conference and told reporters that he was taking part in a pirate raid not for gold but for the soul of America.

“The Jesuits are a militant order,” he reminded them, “and I’m no stranger to combat. Some of you may have heard the old axiom that ‘no battle plan survives contact with the enemy’—but our enemy may not survive contact with our crew.”

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Shortly after sunrise on Tuesday morning, as they crossed the bridge between Georgia and Florida over the St. Marys River, the driver of the lead bus flipped the switch that turned on the loud speakers blaring “The Ride of the Valkyries”. They had never before announced their approach with such Wagnerian swagger, but this last week of the campaign was no time for modesty or restraint. It was no time to avoid cliches in a state that was itself a cliché resting on the thick bed of calcium carbonate that geologists call caliche.

Coming off the bridge onto the soil of Florida, Grace saw crowds lined up along both sides of the interstate. And side by side were peaceful groups welcoming them with signs and banners either supporting or attacking Grace or her opponent. The groups became larger but no less peaceful the closer they got to the site of their first huge rally in Jacksonville.

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Grace began her first speech in Florida quietly, but steadily increased the volume: “Sixteen years ago, my party lost the White House by a few hundred votes because it abandoned all hope of winning Florida. Today, and for the next week, I refuse to abandon hope. I refuse to abandon Florida. I passed through Florida early last year as I circumnavigated all fifty states. For the next seven days I will circumnavigate Florida not as an island but as a symbol of this nation. I will not abandon this state to Donald Trump. Nor will I abandon America!”

She paused for and got the reaction she expected before continuing: “I’ve been asked why I want to be your president. That’s the wrong question. The right question is why should you want me? Let me tell you why . . . “

She also told her audience why she was supporting Democratic Congressman Patrick Murphy in his Senate race against Marco Rubio, the Republican incumbent.

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After Jacksonville, the campaign headed straight west across north Florida along I-10 to a rally in Lake City to help her hand-picked candidate, an underdog, take the Third District from Ted Yoho, the GOP incumbent who opposed everything Grace stood for.

Two hours later, she rallied in support of Gwen Graham, the incumbent in the Second Congressional District who had been reluctant to run again because her district had been redrawn to make it harder for her to be re-elected. With Grace’s encouragement and help, Graham had run again and kept her seat.

Three hours to the west, they held a floodlit rally in Pensacola, where John McCain had been Tom’s best man when he married Hannah. Tom, John, and Ricky were the focus of the rally near the Naval Air Station where they had trained as combat pilots.

More than a year earlier, when Grace had learned that Pensacola was located in the First Congressional District, the most conservative in the

state of Florida and one of the most conservative in the entire country, she had asked her father to make a special trip there to recruit several potentially strong Democratic candidates. Tom found an ideal candidate: a recently retired Navy pilot who had grown up on the Gulf Coast, had played football at FSU, and had a photogenic family.

In her speech that night, Grace made it clear how important it was to elect the Democrat instead of letting a young state legislator named Matt Gaetz take that seat. "Not that it matters," she said, "Mr. Gaetz has no wife or children and has never served in the military. Now, let me tell you what does matter." Which she did.

A week later, the voters in that district would elect the family man.

Tuesday night, most of the family slept as their buses headed southeast to morning and afternoon rallies on Wednesday in Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Cape Coral, the largest cities along the central Gulf Coast where Grace helped her party hold on to Congressional seats and John McCain helped her steal seats from his party.

All along the way, Grace attracted ever-larger crowds, some larger than the crowds Trump drew on his returns to Florida in between his frenetic schedule of rallies around the country.

Many commentators, pundits, and experts were perplexed by the difference between the two campaigns. Most wanted to know why she had abandoned the rest of the country and was focusing on a state she could not possibly carry. Others predicted that Grace's strategy of challenging Trump on his home turf would turn out to be exactly the right thing.

"Watching what's going on in Florida is like watching the end of a big-budget action movie," said one, "like watching James Bond in the belly of the beast and knowing he's going to find some way to save the day."

Grace's supporters always outnumbered the protesters, and in time there were relatively fewer protesters. At every rally, Grace challenged Donald Trump to debate her one last time. He never accepted the challenge nor did she expect him to.

And at every rally they handed out free pirate tee-shirts with "U-S-Hebert" on the front and a sacred promise on the back: "The beatings will continue until morale improves". Asked to explain what the slogan meant, Grace pulled no punches: "America has been taking a beating from the two Houses of Congress controlled by the Republicans. These beatings will

continue until your morale improves and you not only elect me but give me a solid majority in the House and the Senate.”

“Speaking of improving our morale,” said Carmen late that afternoon as they were along a stretch of old scenic highway just north of Naples, “the guidebook says there’s a nude beach up ahead. Maybe we could have a naked rally there.”

“I don’t think America is quite ready for the ‘Bare-ass Express’,” said Tom. Although he was not the official campaign manager, he sometimes stepped to the plate before Carter had a chance.

Grace exchanged a look with Ricky, who smiled.

“What I’m ready for,” Grace told her father, “is a run on the beach while we look for the flash of green.”

“What’s the flash of green?” asked Rocky.

“It’s said that when the conditions are just right at sunset along the Gulf Coast, you can see a flash of green light.”

“We don’t have time for that,” said Tom who had insisted on sticking to the schedule he had worked out with Carter long before they left Washington.

“Maybe we need to make the time,” said Ricky.

“Maybe you and John should do the honors at the next few rallies,” the candidate told her father.

After Grace and Ricky consulted privately with Carmen, Bonnie, and Jennie, their sisters-in-law, the five women put on running shorts and hoodies.

“This is not a good idea,” said Tom when Grace ordered the Secret Service driver to stop at the next rest area.

“I think it’s an excellent idea,” said Hannah, who knew what mischief was afoot. “There are a lot of retirees between here and Naples where John and I have speeches we’d like to give.”

Rocky and T-Rod begged to come along, but TeeJay reminded them they had not finished their reading assignments.

“What reading assignments?” demanded T-Rod.

“I’m about to read you the riot act,” said TeeJay.

Rocky caught her mother’s eye, kept her mouth shut.

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Shortly before sunset that unseasonably warm fall day, the five sisters-in-law put on jogging outfits, snuck off their bus, and climbed into a big Chevy Suburban with two young female Secret Service Agents. Grace

took off her eye patch and put on a pair of mirrored sunglasses. They left the buses behind and drove a short distance to a nearby public beach area where they parked and began to run along the beach. When they passed a sign warning “BEYOND THIS POINT YOU MAY ENCOUNTER NUDE BATHERS”, the five protectees pulled off their hoodies and running shorts, stuffed them into a bag held by one of the agents.

“I’d join you ladies in the flesh,” said the other agent, “but I don’t know where I’d hide my SIG.”

“‘Oh girls, girls just wanna have fun’,” sang the first agent under her breath.

“I heard that,” said Grace, and they all began to sing.

They ambled along the beach, five healthy naked women in their prime, not a bikini wax job in the bunch, and looked for the legendary "flash of green" as the sun began to sink into the Gulf.

But the only flash of green they saw was courtesy of one Kelly Greene, a young blonde from Minnesota who had dyed her bush to match her name.

“Are you who I think you are?” asked Ms. Greene, staring at the only person still wearing sunglasses as the sun sank below the horizon.

“I’ve often been asked,” replied Grace mildly, then raising her voice as though offended, “just who the fuck do you think you are?”

“I knew it,” laughed Ms. Greene, “it is you.”

“In the flesh, so to speak,” agreed Grace.

“Can I take your picture?”

“You may if you come to one of my rallies.”

“I mean, right now, Governor.”

Grace did not bother to answer as one of the two Secret Service agents suddenly moved between Ms. Greene and the cell phone on her beach chair.

“Catch you later,” said Ms. Greene.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

After their last Gulf Coast rally in the Naples area on Wednesday evening, the Pirates of the Chesapeake napped as their convoy headed straight east along I-75 across the Big Cypress Preserve and the Everglades to the hotel where they spent the night at a beachfront hotel in Fort Lauderdale.

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As the sun rose out of the Atlantic on Thursday morning, Grace addressed a huge crowd: “Enjoy this beach while you can. Enjoy the view from those condos. But one day not long from now, this beach will be further inland, and those condos will be gone. Maybe not in your time, or even that of your children. But that time is coming. Climate change is real. Global warming is real. Sea level rise is real. Science is real. And we really need to wake up and smell the future. It’s going to stink unless we do something now, and stop doing other things. When I’m done here, I’m going down to Miami to say that. Then I’m going to turn around and say the same damn thing all the way back up the coast to Jacksonville, where I started this campaign for the hearts, minds, and ballots of Florida. Now, do YOU have the guts and balls to put ME in the White House?”

“Yes we do!” shouted a task force of retired nuns recruited, coached, and costumed in traditional habits days earlier by one of TeeJay’s Jesuit friends. And other women turned “Yes we do” into a chant. After befuddled hesitation, most of the men in the crowd began to chant as well.

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From Fort Lauderdale, they headed south to join former governors Bob Graham and Charlie Crist at a monster rally in Miami. Jeb Bush, the former Republican governor who refused to support Trump, stood with the other two.

Before the rally, a reporter shouted a question: “Governor Hebert—is there any truth to the rumor that you and your wife and three other ladies frequented a nude beach yesterday?”

“Let’s set the record straight: we have never ‘frequented’ a nude beach, but we did visit a suit-optional beach on the Gulf Coast in the hope of seeing the legendary flash of green.”

“Did you actually see a flash of green?”

“We certainly did. It was a lovely shade of kelly green.”

“Not that it matters,” shouted another reporter who had been coached by TeeJay to use that phrase, “were you nude?”

“You’re right,” Grace agreed, “it doesn’t matter.”

“Well played,” whispered the casuistic old Jesuit as Grace moved on to other questions.

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From Miami they travelled further south to the Twenty-seventh Congressional District where Grace surprised the media by asking voters to

re-elect Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the Cuban-born incumbent who had served for fourteen terms. The first Republican woman ever elected to Congress from Florida, she was also the first Republican in the House to support same-sex marriage.

Then Ricky gave a rousing speech in Spanish asking the crowd to vote for “mi amiga, mi amor, mi esposa y tu futura presidenta”. Switching to English, she asked her listeners to split their ticket by voting for Kathy Castor, the five-term Congresswoman who was running for the Senate against Marco Rubio, the Republican incumbent. Ricky reminded them that Kathy was the daughter of the legendary Betty Castor, the Democratic nominee for the Senate in 2004 who lost to Cuban-born Mel Martinez by only one percent of the vote.

“Why should Cuban Americans listen to an American from Puerto Rica when she tells you that you should vote against another Cuban American? Because we’re all Americans who want the same thing for America. But Marco Antonio Rubio wants Trump. A year ago, he was against Trump. A year ago he said he would not run for re-election to the Senate if he did not get the the GOP nomination. And now he is running with Trump and for the Senate seat he said he did not want. Do you want someone who doesn’t know what he wants from one year to the next? Do you want someone who lied about when and why his parents left Cuba?”

For another five minutes Ricky compared what Marco Rubio wanted for himself to what Kathy Castor and Grace Hebert wanted for Florida and America.

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Ricky’s speech was, analysts later claimed with the benefit of hindsight, what sealed the political fate of Marco Rubio and put Castor in the Senate.

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Grace and her crew spent all day Thursday and most of Friday holding rallies in the seven congressional districts crowded together along the southeast coast of Florida between the Keys and Palm Beach, where they spent the night at a luxury hotel on the beach.

After taking a long nap, Grace and Ricky evaded their Secret Service detail with Roberto and climbed into a non-descript van driven by one of his Marine Corps buddies, then took a short midnight cruise with the driver aboard his black Zodiac inflatable with a quiet electric motor.

The waxing crescent moon had just set in the west when the Marine

stationed his raft well off-shore from Trump's private beach at Mar-a-Lago. In two-piece wet suits with scuba gear, Grace, Ricky, and Roberto slipped into the ocean and swam underwater to Trump's beachhead where Grace and Ricky planted their Jolly Roger flag while Roberto used a night vision camera to document the event.

"Turn off the camera," Grace told Roberto once the flag was secure, "and turn your back."

Then Grace and Ricky, who had gone commando style, pulled down the bottom halves of their wetsuits, squatted, and pissed on Trump, so to speak.

Emission accomplished, they hauled ass back to the Zodiac with Roberto.

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On Saturday morning, TeeJay and an elderly rabbi he served with in Vietnam conducted an ecumenical sunrise service on a beach near Port St. Lucie.

At several beaches as they headed north along the Atlantic coast, the sisters-in-law played volleyball against each other or celebrity challengers, male and female. Some talking heads opined that these telegenic events probably did as much as speeches to capture votes, as did the images of little Woody and Webster playing on the beach with their older cousins. Others predicted that John McCain's outreach to veterans and active duty voters might well be the deciding factor.

As for himself, McCain joked that he sometimes felt he had been "rode hard and put away wet" by his running mate. Despite that, he seemed to be thriving in what he predicted would be his last hurrah.

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At every press opportunity, Grace challenged Trump to debate her on his own turf. He ignored the challenges.

"Governor," said a local anchorman, "some of your supporters are showing up at Trump events and chanting 'Debate! Debate!' until they get roughed up or worse."

"Is there a question lurking there?" asked Grace.

When he couldn't pose one, she pointed to someone else with a microphone and got an actual question.

"Rusty—have you encouraged your supporters to risk life and limb by attending Trump rallies?"

"No, but I am encouraged to learn they are brave enough to do so."

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Clint Eastwood, who shared some of Grace's opinions on gun control and same-sex relationships, finally climbed down off his right-wing high horse and stood beside Grace to endorse her. Afterwards, when the man who had debated an empty chair four years earlier asked if he should put on an orange fright wig and play Trump in a debate, Grace thanked him but said she thought that might be seen as gilding the lily.

"I would never gild a lily or geld a stallion," growled Clint, "but I'd like to dare Dirtbag Don to make my day."

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On Sunday, they continued further north along the coast before jinking inland to several large rallies in the heavily populated greater Orlando area, where they helped three Democrats take or hold house seats. After returning to the coast, they spent the night in a large motel near the beach.

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On Monday morning, they watched the sun come up over Cape Canaveral. By then, the weekend media coverage of their progress west, south, east, and north across the Florida peninsula, along with detailed schedules of where they would be at any time of the day, had inspired both tourists and locals to flock to the coast north of Cape Canaveral to witness the passing or the brief stops of the Pirates of the Chesapeake aboard their two Bear Truth Express buses followed by several rented tour buses carrying the press, support staff, and volunteers.

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That Monday, the day before the election, while Grace was campaigning in northeast Florida, Donald Trump began the day with a rally on the southeast side of the state, then flew on to North Carolina and Pennsylvania before ending his day at the Southern New Hampshire University Arena in Manchester, where he called Grace "the most corrupt person to ever run for president" and mocked her for wasting her time in Florida.

"Lock 'er out," he shouted, "and give me the key to the White House!"

"Lock 'er out!" his faithful chanted for what seemed like five full minutes.

And then he led them in chants to "Drain the Swamp!" and "Build the Wall!"

After more attacks on Grace, her wife, and their kids, the rally began

to end with chants of “Lock ‘em up! Lock ‘em up!” before a single air-horn went WHOOP! and well-organized and well-disciplined he-bears and she-bears spread throughout the audience began to chant “Dump the Trump! Dump the Trump” and the riot began.

Not a single Hebert supporter raised a fist or struck a blow as Trump shouted “Drag ‘em out!” and “Beat ‘em up!” until Ivanka, his daughter, got her two brothers to help her pull him from the stage before he whipped his camp followers to an even more bloody frenzy.

Trump, who had planned to have one final midnight rally in Grand Rapids, Michigan, left Mike Pence holding the bag there while he retreated instead to Trump Tower.

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After their last big rally near Daytona Beach, the Pirates of the Chesapeake ended their day by traveling north along the coast another twenty-five miles to gather around a bonfire in the unpaved parking lot of the old-fashioned motel where they spent their last night on the road. While TV cameras rolled, Grace and Ricky sat side by side on the thick low-hanging limb of an ancient live oak and kissed while their kids chanted prematurely: “POTUS and FLOTUS, sittin’ in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G”.

“Low-hanging fruit!” scoffed Donald Trump as he watched TV early the next morning with a group of reporters and supporters in Trump Tower.

“Yes, we’re low-hanging fruit,” Grace agreed. “That means we’re easy to pick when you go to your polling place today.”

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After one last sunrise beach rally on Tuesday morning, Grace and McCain campaigned inland through the rest of the day with the good-natured and compassionate Gulf War veteran running in the Sixth Congressional District against Ron DeSantis, the incredibly ambitious two term Republican incumbent who had flirted with a Senate run for the seat held by Marco Rubio in 2015. A Yale graduate with a Harvard law degree, DeSantis had begun to attract national attention in conservative circles. Grace’s father and her running mate had both identified DeSantis as a potential presidential candidate in 2020 or 2024.

“Let’s nip this sucker in the bud,” advised McCain.

Even though the Sixth District had the largest land area on the east coast of Florida, Grace and her running mate chose to hold their last rallies in the small cities and towns miles from the coast. A descendant of one of the eighteenth century settlers of north Florida known as Crackers, the

candidate recruited by Hannah had grown up hunting and fishing on his family's large cattle farm near Palatka and had played basketball at the University of Florida before going to medical school and training as a combat surgeon at the Bethesda Naval Hospital when Hannah was Surgeon General of the Navy. After several tours in Afghanistan and Iraq following 9/11, he had returned to the states, married a nurse, started a good-looking family, and commuted to the VA hospital in Gainesville from the farm where he grew up.

It was Rocky who came up with the notion of introducing their candidate as "the Cracker doctor from Palatka".

Tom put a Yankee spin on the title: "The Crack-ah doc-tah from Palatka."

With his southern country boy accent, the doctor was, said Tom, one of the best natural stump speakers he had ever known and might one day make a good candidate for even higher office. Much higher.

"Far better," said Rocky, "than the sanctimonious law-yah he's runnin' against."

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Once the polls closed on the East Coast that evening, Grace and her crew checked in at the huge Jacksonville hotel where they planned to rest before what they hoped would be their victory celebration that night.

All across the country on election day, many voters who lined up at polling places wearing pirate gear or eye patches or holding low-hanging fruit in one hand were forced to divest themselves of those partisan symbols. In incidents that made national news, one-eyed men and women proudly bared their empty eye sockets in order to vote.

"The half-blind leading the half-wits," snarled the front-runner from his perch high in Trump Tower.

"Trump seems to have half a mind about just about everything," said Grace when asked for a comment. "Some genius should offer him the other half."

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By midnight, the results were clear: Grace Styles Hebert had carried Pennsylvania and Florida by more than one-half of one percent of the ballots cast—not close enough to trigger a recount. She had captured the popular vote by a large margin and the electoral college vote by more than enough.

Her success in Florida had been particularly impressive as she helped

Kathy Castor take Marco Rubio out of the Senate and helped take or keep Ron DeSantis, Matt Gaetz, and four other Republicans out of the House of Representatives. Florida had flipped from seventeen red and ten blue to sixteen blue and eleven red seats in the House.

And if she carried the west coast, Nevada, and Hawaii as expected, and Arizona as hoped, it would be a no Trump game.

By 2:30 AM, it was all over.

“It’s been fun,” Grace told her crew, giving them hugs and kisses all around. Then she went out on the stage of the auditorium packed with her tireless supporters, tapped the microphone, and asked “What’s next?”, a famous line she stole from Jed Bartlet, the fictional president from New Hampshire in *The West Wing*.

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Within minutes of finally hearing the results reluctantly confirmed on Fox News, Donald Trump began shouting and tweeting that the election—his election--had been stolen. He refused to concede that night.

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“We stole it fair and square,” Grace admitted at a press conference that morning, “and we stole it the good ol’ American way by working harder and getting more votes than the other guy. And now it’s time for the other guy to concede.”

Which he never did.

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Along the way to capturing the White House, Grace had helped other Democrats take back both Houses of Congress. That meant she would have enough clout to secure the confirmation of two new justices to the Supreme Court, creating a six to three split in favor of progressives. This spectacular achievement fueled conspiracy theories about fraud and stolen ballots, especially because she had won the electoral college vote with such slim margins in swing states.

She also helped increase the number of governors’ mansions held by “her” party, including New Hampshire where “her” candidate beat a Sununu.

What she did not say was that she did not consider the Democratic party to be “her” party and that she saw the two-party system to be at the heart of the problem she had inherited.

And she told herself that she must never again preface a statement or remark with “Not that it matters . . .”

From this time on, and especially once she took the oath of office, everything would matter.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

On Wednesday morning, Grace and her family flew back to Washington, where Grace had lunch at the National Press Club and gave her first press conference as president-elect. After answering many questions, she announced that John Kerry had agreed to stay on as her secretary of state. Then she introduced her father and announced he would be in charge of recruiting other members of her cabinet.

Tom came to the podium and spoke in his most avuncular manner: “Many of my friends and colleagues call me ‘Uncle Tom’ because I’ve been around so long. After more than forty years in the Senate, I took part in advising and consenting on hundreds of cabinet nominations. So, I guess you could say I’m gonna help put together ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabinet’.”

Once members of the press stopped groaning, he took their questions and got serious. Very serious.

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Donald Trump gave press conferences as well—and got more and more headlines with his wild claims the election had been stolen.

— — — —

On Thursday evening, Grace and her transition team watched Tom’s appearance on The Rachel Maddow Show.

“Senator,” Maddow began, “let’s talk about some of your whimsical ideas for your daughter’s cabinet. For instance, you suggested she appoint a Secretary of War and Peace rather than a Secretary of Defense.”

Tom stuck out his jaw, scrunched up his craggy face, and did his imitation of a Cranky Old Yankee: “When I was a boy, little lady, we had a Secretary of War.”

“Yes, but why a Secretary of War and Peace?”

“You have a problem with peace?” he demanded, still in his Cranky Old Yankee persona. Then, not waiting for a reply, he returned to his normal voice, one that was both challenging and reasonable: “The job of a Secretary of War and Peace would be to oversee a military prepared to help keep the peace around the world until it’s absolutely necessary to go to war if that’s what Congress decides and declares.”

“Don’t you think that smacks of colonialism and imperialism?” asked

Maddow.

“Let me ask again: do you have a problem with peace?”

Once again, Maddow ignored the question and moved on.

“You’ve also suggested this Secretary of War and Peace should be a woman who has served in the military and preferably in combat. Do you have someone in mind?”

“Yes,” he smiled, “I have several in mind but I’ll keep their names to myself until the right time.”

— — — —

On Friday, the day formerly known as Armistice Day, Grace returned to Arlington where she thanked the many veterans who had voted for her, then gave the first of many speeches about her plans for global nuclear disarmament.

“We were the first to develop and deploy nuclear weapons. Let America be the first to disarm.”

— — — —

Within an hour, there were the first calls for her impeachment.

“I can’t be impeached until I take office, and by then I will be unimpeachable. To paraphrase Richard Nixon, let me say this about that: bite me.”

— — — —

By Saturday, Grace and her crew were finally back home at Pirate Cove, which the Secret Service had identified as the most defensible location convenient to Washington for her to relax while Trump continued to urge his supporters to “stop the steal”. Grace and Ricky let the kids stay up late for the Saturday Night Live cold opening. They were all puzzled at first as a somber Kate McKinnon played a grand piano on a dark stage and sang Leonard Cohen’s “Hallelujah” to the end:

“ . . . And even though it all went wrong

I’ll stand right here before the Lord of song

With nothing, nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah . . . ”

McKinnon offered nine more Hallelujahs before turning to the audience and saying, “I’m not giving up, and neither should you.” Then she smiled and explained: “That’s what we rehearsed earlier in the week, fearing for the worst. But then it all went right.” She paused before shouting “Hallelujah! And live from New York, it’s Saturday Night!”

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Barry Blitt, whose steady stream of New Yorker covers had helped to

obliterate Trump, depicted Grace as a nasty little girl stealing candy from Trump depicted as a fat crybaby in a droopy diaper.

And speaking of babies: Grace did not tell her mother or her wife she planned to return to the clinic for another insemination. Instead, she told her daughter.

“Rocky—it’s time to let you in on a little secret.”

“What secret?”

“I want to have another baby.”

“Can I . . .” Rocky started to ask, but then caught herself. “May I tell Polly?”

“You may.”

— — — —

Grace was in place on the examination table and Rocky and Polly were holding her hands when her OB/GYN came into the room.

“She’s back in the stirrups again,” Grace and her two new handmaidens crooned.

“Up where a girl needs a friend,
“Where her thighs are spread wide,
“And she’s got nothin’ to hide,
“Back in the stirrups again.”

“Ah,” said the doctor, snapping on her gloves, “once more into the breach, dear friends. And who are these young ladies?”

“My daughter, Raquel, otherwise known as Rocky, and Polly Horrigan Hebert, my niece.”

“I’m very pleased to meet you, Rocky. I’m the doctor who helped your mother get pregnant with you. And Polly, I know your mom.”

The doctor turned back to Grace.

“Are you ready to take a break, Madam President-elect?”

“Yes, and I’m completely stress-free, at least for the next two months.”

“But are you sure you can avoid overreacting to events?”

“I’ll try not to have an ‘ovary action’,” promised Grace, putting air quotes around the last two words.

“‘Ovary action’,” said the doctor, shaking her head. “I know you’ve gotta be kidding.”

“That’s why she’s here,” said Rocky.

The doctor frowned. “I don’t understand.”

“She means it’s time for me to have another kid,” explained Grace.

“Well, then,” said the doctor, “let’s knock ‘er up.”

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

That Thanksgiving at Styles Landing, Grace pre-emptively pardoned one turkey and helped her kitchen cabinet and Ina stuff and cook two more: one for the family, the other for the Secret Service detail camped in the barn. It was the first time Ina had allowed others to meddle in her kitchen, but three turkeys were more than even she could handle.

Uncle TeeJay said an actual grace, thanking the good lord for giving Grace the opportunity to appoint two new justices to the Supreme Court.

“Three,” said Grace, correcting him. “The Notorious RBG’ has offered to retire soon after she swears me in.”

— — — —

In early December, after Donald Trump spent nearly a month denying he lost the election, the editors of Time announced they had chosen him as “The Sore Loser of the Year”.

“I wish they had not done that,” said Grace. “It’s an unnecessary provocation.”

“But he started it,” said Tom, “and he refuses to stop.”

“Jeez, Louise,” Rocky told her grandfather, “you’re starting to sound like T-Rod.”

“What’s wrong with the way I sound?” demanded her brother.

“Try listening to yourself,” his sister shot back.

“If anyone says ‘bite me’,” warned Grace, “I’m calling the Secret Service.”

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In mid-December, Grace did not tell Ricky, Rocky, Polly, Hannah or anyone else that she had not had her monthly visit from Aunt Flo.

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The family spent Christmas back at Pirate Cove. On New Year’s Eve, incited to mischief by TeeJay, the kids celebrated the centennial of the assassination of Grigori Rasputin, the self-proclaimed Russian holy man, by building and burning a large effigy they called Ras-Putin.

The next morning, Grace, her brother, and their wives and kids settled down with Tom and Hannah in Georgetown to begin the first week of the New Year—the week it would all go wrong for one crazy day.

On that cold and sunny January 3rd, convoys of heavily-armed, red

MAGA-hatted supporters of the delusional sore loser-of-the-year flooded into Washington and surrounded Capitol Hill on every side. Having been whipped into a frenzy by Trump's coast-to-coast "Take Back America Now!" tour, they chanted "Stop the Steal!" and "U-S-A! U-S-A!" They were blocked by unarmed and mostly peaceful groups chanting "Seal the Deal!" and "U-S-Hebert! U-S-Hebert!"

Protected by the Secret Service in office space provided by the General Services Administration half a mile from the disturbance, Grace and her transition team watched on TV as Capitol Police and troops from the National Guards of Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia tried to keep the two groups apart. They watched as the great riot of 2017 began. They watched as it ended that night with parts of the Capitol building in flames and scores dead, including half a dozen members of Congress from both parties.

"Rusty, do you remember what Lincoln is supposed to have said to Harriet Beecher Stowe?" asked her father.

"So this is the little lady who started this great war'," said Grace. "But she didn't start that war, nor did Lincoln. And I didn't start this one—but I'm the little lady who will have to end it."

"You're not a little lady," said her father. "You're a great lady, taller than me—and getting taller every day."

"I stopped growing more than twenty years ago. Maybe you're just shrinking after carrying me around on your shoulders for so long."

Grace watched network coverage of the riot, then sighed in disgust: "This is like something out of The Hunger Games."

"What are 'the hunger games'?" asked her father.

"Jeez, Dad—don't let the kids hear you ask a question like that."

— — — —

Despite the riot and bloodshed, Joe Biden, the fearless vice president, was able to certify that Grace Styles Hebert would indeed and in fact take the helm of the ship of state.

The Secret Service wanted Grace to stay out of sight until the dust settled and the smoke cleared, but she insisted on speaking from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at dawn the next morning.

Before her speech, as the huge crowd chanted "Rust-ee! Rust-ee! Rust-ee!", a commentator on a nationally televised panel quipped: "They may call her 'Rusty', but Grace Hebert is crafted of the finest stainless steel."

“Have you forgotten that Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvilli changed his name to Stalin,” demanded an angry commentator on loan from Fox News, “and that Stalin means ‘man of steel’ in Russian?”

— — — —

In her speech to the nation that morning, President-elect Hebert began with these words: “In 1787, eleven score and ten years ago, Thomas Jefferson, who was then our minister to France, warned that ‘The people cannot be all, and always, well informed’. Yesterday’s events remind us of those words. Jefferson went on to proclaim that ‘The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants’. Patriots shed their blood yesterday. The impudent would-be tyrant must be prepared along with his followers to shed their blood if he continues to persevere in his lies and his calls for violence.”

She paused, then continued: “In his second inaugural address, as the Civil War ground to a close, Abraham Lincoln spoke ‘with malice toward none’. But at the very place where Lincoln spoke those words, great malice has been done. As your next president, I will have Donald Trump and his minions brought to justice for their false words and fatal acts.”

“The bloody purge has begun,” cackled a talking head from Fox News.

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Following Grace’s speech, Donald Trump and some of his most vocal co-conspirators and enablers, facing the certainty of indictment, arrest, conviction, and imprisonment, fled the country, never to return. And as credible reports of Russian interference in the election surfaced, the Russian embassy in Washington and all Russian consulates in the US were shut down and the diplomats and staff fled before they could be arrested or interned.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

A few days after her election was certified, President-elect Hebert, President Obama, and their wives visited injured victims of the attack on the Capitol, then went to Arlington for the first of many burials. Waiting for them there were Vice President Biden and VPOTUS-elect McCain and their wives.

At the end of the burial services, McCain asked Grace and Biden to take a walk with him.

“Joe and I have had several long talks, and he is reluctant to take my place in the event my health deteriorates,” said McCain.

Grace didn't say she had no intention of offering Biden the job. She liked Joe well enough and had worked with him on several matters, but she had her eye on Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, whose father had served in the Senate with Tom, as a possible replacement. Although the pro-choice Murkowski had originally been a staunch supporter of the Defense of Marriage Act, she had begun to soften her position after TeeJay, one of her old professors at Georgetown, introduced her to Grace, Ricky, and the kids. Over the last two years, the Murkowskis and the Heberts had enjoyed duck hunting together on the bays Great and Chesapeake.

“Thank you, John,” said Grace, who turned to Biden. “Mister Vice President, do you have any reservations or caveats?”

“Only one: don't expect me to run in 2024.”

“Then I'll expect you to help me find a good candidate.”

— — — —

A few days before their inauguration, the POTUS- and VPOTUS-elect met with Senator Murkowski, who thanked them for thinking of her as a potential vice president, but declined the honor. At McCain's suggestion, they reached out to the independent Bernie Sanders, who reluctantly agreed to assume the mantle if necessary.

Which he eventually had to do.

— — — —

Shortly before dawn on Inauguration Day, Grace woke up beside Ricky in the Georgetown house. She let her partner sleep and went down to the kitchen where her parents and the kids were having breakfast and watching the MSNBC morning show.

“The Metro has been running all night bringing in people with sleeping bags who camped out in the huge tents surrounding the Washington Monument,” warned one reporter on the scene, “but very few are able to sleep because of all the parties and fireworks.”

The soon-to-be most powerful woman in the world poured two cups of strong black coffee, and took them back upstairs to her First Mate.

“Wake up, Commander Rodriguez. No time to sleep late today.”

Ricky woke up, yawned, stretched.

“If I hit the deck now, may I sleep late tomorrow?”

“I suspect I may do that as well,” said Grace. “It's gonna be a long

day.”

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

With the badly damaged Capitol still a crime scene following the bloody riot on January 3rd, Grace became our forty-fifth president on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. The Secret Service had objected to any public ceremony, but Grace insisted she trusted the good sense and good will of her fellow Americans.

After Chief Justice Roberts administered the oath of office to John McCain, Grace placed her hand on a copy of the Constitution held by Associate Justice Ginsburg.

President Hebert’s inaugural address was the shortest since the first by George Washington. She built it around the simple idea that there was work to be done and that those who did the work were entitled to a living wage, good health care, meaningful education, and respect.

The blessedly brief inaugural prayer was offered by her uncle TeeJay: “We thank Thee, oh Lord, for this, our Grace, and we ask Thy blessing on her work. We also ask Thee to bless our Ship of State and all who sail on her. Amen.”

A Nuyorican poet recited her short inaugural poem in English, then in Spanish, and ended the inaugural ceremony by shouting “Vamanos a la Casa Blanca!”

Then, as the Marine Corps Band began to play “Anchors Aweigh”, the new First Family walked to the White House between rows of Marines through a light drizzle and past the largest and most diverse inaugural crowd ever recorded.

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At each of the casual dress inaugural balls that evening, Grace thanked her supporters, then danced with Ricky before moving on to the next venue. She saved the last dance of the night, a slow waltz, for her father.

As they danced, a chorus sang “What the World Needs Now, Is Love, Sweet Love” softly, sweetly, and slowly.

“I’m not going to thank you for this new posting,” she said quietly as they danced alone surrounded by the admiring crowd, “at least not yet.”

“I don’t blame you,” he said, “and I thank you for taking the helm, Skipper.”

“Don’t call me that,” she laughed. “It’s bad enough your hand-picked Veep does.”

“You know what he called Ricky tonight?”

“My ‘first mate’.”

“Which is true,” her father said, “your first and only.”

— — — —

Back in the White House long after midnight, Grace helped her daughter get settled in her new bedroom.

“Did you have a good time, tonight, Rocky?”

“It was the best time of my life. I danced with so many cute boys.”

And kissed at least one, Grace thought, but kept that to herself.

“Who was that really tall boy? The one who looks like a young version of Poppa Tom--”

“Ewww, Mom! Don’t make it sound like incest—“

“Well, he does—and he was the only one you danced with more than once.”

“Daniel DeLeon,” she said, pronouncing the first name Dah-nee-el.

“His dad is some kind of judge in Texas and he’s a senate page sponsored by Ted Cruz—”

“Nice company he keeps.”

“Don’t roll your eyes, Mom, Danny’s a good Democrat.” Rocky paused, then dropped her voice. “Mom, did you ever do it with a boy?”

“Do what?” asked Grace, stalling for time.

“You know what I mean.”

“Yes, I had several male lovers before Ricky and I became partners.”

“How about other women?”

“Never. Ricky was the only one for me.”

“And how old were you when you, you know, lost your virginity?”

Grace looked at her thirteen-year-old. I’m the fucking president, she thought to herself, and I have to deal with this on top of everything else. But I’m a mother first, she told herself.

“I didn’t lose it,” she finally said. “I was seventeen and I ‘gave it away’ to a really nice boy who tried to give it back.”

Rocky laughed. “He tried to give it back? Why?”

“He suspected he might be gay.”

“Was he?”

“I don’t know. We never ‘did it’ again. I went to Annapolis, he went to West Point. Last I heard, he was commanding a Ranger battalion outside

Kandahar.”

— — — —

After promising herself to have The Talk with her daughter, Grace spent a few minutes alone in the Oval Office. She sat at the Resolute Desk and pulled open the drawer where she found an envelope with a handwritten note from her predecessor. “Dear Madam President,” it began. “Congratulations on your remarkable victory. Although you were not my choice as the candidate of our party--”

She stopped reading and returned the note to the envelope, then to the drawer. She would read the rest tomorrow, she told herself.

“After all,” she said aloud with the soft southern accent she rarely used, “tomorrow is another day.”

But then, in her head, she heard the memory of another voice, perhaps that of Orson Welles or Lawrence Olivier, murmuring: “To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow . . .”

And she remembered that it was now already tomorrow, the first of many tomorrows she would have to endure in this office, an office that was not merely an oddly shaped room, but a duty and responsibility that would shadow and burden her for years. And perhaps beyond her tenure.

Would hers be a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury? Would it signify nothing?

— — — —

“Well, Ricky,” she sighed as she finally slid into bed beside the new First Lady, “now comes the hard part.”

“Which one is that?” asked Ricky, pausing the scene on her laptop and taking off her earphones

“How to avoid having to run for a second term.”

“You do half the things I know you’d like to do, your own party will help run you out of the country.”

“It’s a good thing I have a vice president who scares ‘my party’ more than I do. What’s that you’re watching?”

“The Crown. It’s a new Netflix series about a young woman like you who’s stuck with a job she doesn’t really want.”

“What job did she get stuck with?” yawned Grace.

“Somebody died and made her queen of England. Hope our kids turn out better than hers did.”

“Don’t think we need to worry about our little ‘bastards’,” said POTUS as she kissed FLOTUS, then turned over and closed her eyes.

“Sleep tight,” said Ricky as she replaced her earphones and resumed watching.

Waiting for sleep to take her at the end of the first day of her shakedown cruise, Grace thought about something she had overheard her daughter saying to Polly that afternoon: “My mom’s like a pioneer woman exploring new territory after leaving men behind.” And then Rocky had laughed and chirped “Far behind, where they belong.”

As she drifted off to sleep, Grace told herself she would need to have a talk with her not-so-little loose cannon in the morning. She would remind Rocky about the brave man she left behind to die in Moscow—and his legacy in the larger scheme of things.

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Early the next morning, they were served breakfast in bed. Halfway through the meal, Grace suddenly clapped her hand over her mouth, jumped out of bed, ran into the bathroom, fell to her knees, and threw up what she had just eaten and what remained of the formal dinner the night before.

When Ricky came into the bathroom, Grace looked up at her, nodded, and smiled.

Ricky knelt beside Grace with a damp washcloth, held it to her forehead.

“When were you going to tell me?”

“Not until I was sure,” said Grace, “And now I’m sure.”

“And when do you expect—?”

“If all goes well, I’ll be light in August again.”

“Ah,” smiled Ricky. “Just in time for you and the baby to rest up before visiting your mother country for the centennial.”

“Let’s not mention that to the Secret Service, at least not yet.”

“Whatever you say, Skipper,” laughed Ricky

“Don’t call me that.”

When Ricky continued laughing, Grace asked her what was so fucking funny.

“Just thinking about the photograph of the First Family on the Christmas card we’ll send out at the end of the year. The two of us standing side by side, you nursing your new baby; Roberto standing at your other side with Carmen at his side; Carter standing next to me with Jennie at his side; all our kids sitting at our feet.”

Grace did the math: “That’s fifteen in our extended family. I wonder if

there's ever been a First Family that large."

"FDR and Eleanor had five children and thirteen grandchildren by the time he began his fourth term. I doubt either of us will have any grandkids by the time you end your second term."

"Which reminds me: I really need to speak with Rocky this morning."

— — — —

After showering and dressing for the day, President Grace Styles Hebert went down to the Oval Office and gave her first order to her chief of staff.

"Carter, please have someone ask Rocky to come see me."

"Your first cabinet meeting is about to start, Madam President."

"Belay the 'Madam President' crap, little brother. What I have to say to Rocky won't take long."

EPILOGUE: THEN AND NOW

What Grace had to say to Rocky that morning and over the next eight years could fill a book--and did. Published shortly after Grace left office in 2025 and illustrated by Barry Blitt, *Coming of Age with Grace in the White House* was Rocky's best-selling account of how she gracefully became her own woman as she witnessed the great events of her mother's two terms: helping pass the Equal Rights Amendment; sunsetting daylight savings time; weaning America away from carbon-based energy; amending and disarming the Second Amendment; replacing the electoral college with the direct election of presidents; ending reliance on the two-party system; welcoming the new states of Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia; dividing California into four states, Texas into three, New York and Florida into two each—and more, so much more.

After inspiring the relatively bloodless transfer of power that swept Putin and the oligarchs into the dustbin of history and earned Grace a Nobel Peace Prize, she worked with the United Nations to help form the Union of Slavic and Russian Republics. Today, the USA, the USRR, and Canada along with Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden form the Union of Arctic States.

Rocky's account began on the very first day of her mother's first term when Rocky learned she was going to be a big sister again. It paralleled the development of the child in Grace's womb with the accomplishments of her first months in office.

“My little sister Ursula Borisovna was born in the White House that summer,” she wrote, “and delivered by my grandmother Hannah with my help. Not that it matters, she was only the second child of a president ever born in the White House. As a child, Grace actually met the first White House baby. But that’s another story.”

— — — —

The dust cover for Rocky’s best-seller had the stick-figure drawing of the first family done in 2020 by little Woody when he was five years old. Hannah liked it so much she used it for the official White House Christmas card that year. It showed Grace and Ricky standing side by side between Rocky and T-Rod in front of the White House. Sitting at the feet of the two mothers were Grace’s two smaller children with a stick-figure dog between them.

“We had no dog when Woody drew that picture,” Rocky explained. “When Grace asked him why he included a dog in his picture, Woody said that was what his little sister wanted for Christmas.”

“Before she could ask him what else they wanted, he asked her what she wanted.”

“‘Whirled peas,’ she told him, making a vigorous stirring motion.”

“‘I know you mean world peace,’ he said, ‘but if you get us a dog, we can call it Whirled Peas.’ Which is why we went to the pound and brought back the official White House mongrel called Whirled Peas.”

Rocky’s book ended with her account of the birth of another child in the White House. After majoring in history at Georgetown and graduating at the age of twenty, Rocky married Danny DeLeon, the handsome young Congressman from the Third Congressional District of the new state of Pecos. Danny represented the same district that Beto O’Rourke represented before defeating Ted Cruz in the 2018 Senate race with the help of Grace.

Rocky was already hugely pregnant at the time of her wedding on the White House lawn. She soon gave birth in the Lincoln Bedroom to Abraham Hebert Rodriguez DeLeon. Little Abe was delivered by his great-grandmother Hannah and his great-aunt Jennie, the Navy virologist who led the successful response to the Covid pandemic.

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In early 2025, Rocky and her toddler moved into her grandparents’ house in Georgetown, where she is hard at work on her first novel. Her working title is Skipper and the First Mate, the code names the Secret

Service gave her two moms. A literary agent offered her a seven-figure advance to allow James Patterson or one of his ghost-writers to help her turn it into a real page-turner, but she said, in effect, “bite me”.

Rocky tells interviewers she hopes to have another baby before she turns twenty-five and is eligible to run for Congress in the First District of Maryland, the seat her mother once held.

The first few times she was asked if she would ever run for president, she burst into song like Doris Day in the finale of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*: “When I was just a little girl, I asked my mother, what will I be . . . ?” After a while, they stopped asking.

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Shortly after the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico became new states in 2024, Carter was elected governor of the first and Ricky was elected to the Senate from the other. Since then, Grace and Ricky have lived apart but spend their wedding anniversaries and most holidays together.

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T-Rod, highly intelligent but far too clever and mischievous for his own good, graduated near the bottom of his class at Annapolis in 2025 and married the Cuban-born Mariel Obregon, one of his top-ranked classmates who grew up in what is now the new state of South Florida.

Following their honeymoon at the popular Guantanamo Bay beach resort, they were both assigned to the Naval Air station near Havana, the thriving capital of the new US territory. Unless the territory of Baja California, comprised of two former Mexican states, gets there first, Cuba is expected to become the sixtieth of what some call the United States of the Americas.

“And now there’s talk of annexing Panama,” T-Rod recently grouched on *The Today Show*. “If we keep adding states, we’re gonna need smaller stars.”

— — —

Uncle TeeJay continued serving as White House chaplain even after being elevated to the College of Cardinals by Pope Francis despite (or perhaps because of) his advocacy for extending the priesthood to women. Although that has not yet come to pass, TeeJay is confident it will. After Grace left office, he moved into humble accommodations in the Vatican where a small cadre of cheerful nuns now take care of him. Carefully selected for their ability to be teased and to tease in return, they treat his

eminence as they might a mischievous schoolboy.

The oldest living cardinal at the time of his elevation, he is now the oldest cardinal who has ever lived.

— — — —

Although Grace was criticized for nominating Jennie Hebert, her sister-in-law, as Surgeon General of the United States, the Senate quickly confirmed her appointment. Doctor Jennie, as she was commonly known during her eight years on the job, promptly led the drive to ban the sale of all tobacco products and to permit the consumption of the home-grown variety by the growers themselves. As surgeon general, she was also given authority to issue non-binding recommendations over the discharge of any and all pollutants into the soil, air, and water. Many of those recommendations resulted in the passage of binding legislation.

Her efforts to restrict the amount of sugar and other sweeteners added to food and beverages resulted in the Surgeon General's warning on packaging and advertisements—and in a decline of infirmity and death caused by sugar in the diet. After that, she went after salt and fat.

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Polly, the daughter of Jennie and Carter, followed in the footsteps of her mother, grandmother Hannah, great-grandmother Polly, and great-great-grandmother Anna, by going to medical school. A classic product of nature and nurture, she chose a spouse of Russian descent, an American naval officer she met while visiting T-Rod and Mariel in Havana shortly after the birth of their first child.

— — — —

Awaiting the arrival of their newest grandchild, Tom and Hannah spent the first year of Grace's first term together in Georgetown. To avoid the temptation to spend too much time looking over Grace's shoulder in the White House, Tom returned to New Hampshire in 2018 and was elected governor. He has been re-elected every two years and hopes to die in office. He lives at Styles Landing, an hour away from Concord, the state capital, which he visits only when necessary.

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After Grace moved into the White House, Hannah enjoyed the house in Georgetown, her grandchildren in the White House, and her many friends nearby. In late 2024, she bought her Russian grandfather's rustic dacha beside a lake not far from Moscow and set up housekeeping there in preparation for when Grace left office and returned to the country where

she was born.

— — — —

As for Grace: although she is now once again on the beach, she is no longer all at sea.

After helping another very independent woman take the helm following the tumultuous but otherwise peaceful election of 2024, Grace and her two younger children now divide their time between homes at Pirate Cove, Styles Landing, and Hannah's dacha, which will one day be theirs.

Grace, Woody, and Ursula frequently visit former ambassador Harry Styles, their uncle, and his new Russian wife, at their home in Moscow near the construction site for the Grace Styles Hebert Presidential Library and Museum not far from the Kremlin.

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As curator of Grace's archives, Harry is busy polishing what he promises will be his last book: *To and from Russia with Even More Love*.

"You need to sleep on that working title," Grace recently suggested at a family gathering to celebrate Hannah's eighty-fifth birthday.

"Bite me," he snapped. Then, smiling like the loving great-granduncle he is, he turned to the two children he and Grace suspect are destined for greatness.

"Kids, what do you think about my new book?"

"I like the part about when I was a baby and Mama came to Red Square and held me up and told the crowd whose daughter I was," said Ursula, who was now nine. "Are you going to use the photograph of her breastfeeding me while other dissidents spoke?"

"I think that picture should be on the cover," said Harry, who turned to his nephew. "What part did you like?"

"I like what you wrote about how Mom 'weaponized' both of us to start the Second Russian Revolution," said Woody.

"Always remember," Harry told the kids, "a revolution can be a terrible thing, but sometimes not having one can be far worse."

— — — —

Grace wishes she had been at liberty to give birth to her two younger children in Russia, where she was born, where her mother was born, where her mother's father was born, where the ashes of her great-grandparents Grover and Anna rest in the Kremlin Wall. Her two grandfathers-of-record were buried at Arlington. And she knows her mother and father will one day

join them there under good American soil.

She will leave it to her two children by Boris--who have dual American and Russian citizenship and who love both countries--to decide where she will rest. She is only fifty now and sometimes suspects her real life is just beginning.

For the time being, she most enjoys teaching her two bear cubs how to sail their dinghies on the lake near Hannah's dacha. Soon, she will take them out on Great Bay and then the Chesapeake in larger vessels. And one fine day, she and her father will take them out onto the Atlantic in A Bear at Sea.

They are growing fast--and both, her father agrees, were born to the helm.

NOT THAT IT MATTERS, THIS IS NOT THE
END . . .

AUTHOR'S POSTSCRIPT: If you care enough to write me a letter, please include your email address or phone number if you would like to hear directly from me. And please let me know if you would like to be acknowledged as having contributed advice.

Not that it matters, I would particularly like to hear what you think about these questions:

- What real woman might be elected president in 2024?
- What should happen to my alternative version of Donald Trump and the assets he left behind when he became a man without a country?
- What new territories should be added to the United States of the Americas?
- How can I improve my use of Russian phrases?
- Should Grace, Ricky, and their kids have a dog when we first meet them in 2014?
- If so, what kind of dog? What's the dog's name? How does it help elect Grace?
- Would this family saga make a good movie or TV series?
- What are the more important questions I should ask?