

## Chapter 12

### Harcourt

Brad Harcourt laughed the loudest when Marci Apron made a rare appearance at the all-hands to announce that furloughs would begin for us immediately. She used the phrase “non-essential staff,” adding the insult of being deemed non-essential to the injury of losing a salary.

Even the contractors, all of whom were deemed essential, turned up for the news. Essential and non-essential staff alike filled the room with a hot, anxious air that popped at the sharp bark of Harcourt’s sudden callous laugh.

“Let’s see my wife sue me now!” he said, when he’d finally caught his breath. “Let her take a percentage of my income. Zero dollars a month!” He twisted his scarred chin into an Al Pacino face and said, “You want a percentage of my salary? How about a percentage of my asshole?”

“Harcourt,” Apron said.

“Goose-egg!”

“*Mis*-ter Harcourt, that kind of talk-”

“-Goose. Fucking. Egg. Taste my asshole.”

Marci Apron stared, eyes frozen wide at the horror. Chloe blushed and the rest of us looked away. Harcourt, liberated by the thought of being furloughed and elated at the prospect of sticking it to his wife in yet another way, rose from his chair and left the room laughing all the way. Silence followed as Marci Apron invited the group to ask their questions, share their thoughts, and prepare themselves for an indefinite period without salary.

Teague and Chloe looked stricken. I've no doubt Teague himself would have gladly lived in a cardboard box if doing so would protect his children from the same fate. But it wouldn't, and not even the prospect of spending more time with them while laid off presented an upside to the prospect of putting them through the hardships he'd heard Graves describe before.

As for Chloe, her blonde innocence was spoiled by alarm at the thought of incoming wedding bills without the benefit of an incoming salary. A few months earlier I'd have called these woes petty compared to Teague's. But I'd put so much of my own labor into designing her wedding program, licking envelopes, interviewing DJs, and tasting pate, that I knew there were no costs she could trim that wouldn't diminish the value and glory of her wedding, thereby diminishing the value and glory of her marriage to Tommy the IT guy.

We interns were viewed with distrust after the announcement. Our positions weren't up for furlough: our work for the Republic cost the Republic nothing, our meager stipends funded instead by our universities. The same was true of Miles, whose salary largely came from the pension he already drew. Miles' main disappointment about the ongoing furloughs, it seemed, was based on his assumption that a

smaller workforce would mean a narrower selection at the fed buffet.

So Harcourt's glee was unique among the staff, and not for the first time I found myself contemplating the life that had led him to this point.

What differentiated Brad Harcourt from Ralph Dvorak was that Dvorak won by scheming while Harcourt simply won. Harcourt *deserved* his wins. He was born for victory. And as a winner he viewed his downfall at the old firm not so much as a downfall, but as a new point of departure for better things to come. Surely a prestigious job awaited somebody as popular as himself, perhaps in advertising. His time in G/PAP was to be endured, a mere interval while The Next Big Thing lined itself up for him. Justin admired this in Harcourt, but Karen saw him for what he truly was: a washed up old lawyer whose time had passed him by while he told sour jokes about prostitution in the no-water room.

"Hey Teague. You tell these guys the difference between you and me?"

"Not today, Harcourt. I've got work to do and a family to get home to."

"Awww, don't be shy, Teague. It'll only take a second—just like you."

"Funny."

"No, seriously. I'm the kind of guy if, finding myself with a prostitute, I tell her, 'Look honey, my penis is so big I'm only going to use half of it. Gimme a discount, will ya?' Teague here, he's the kind of guy who tells a prostitute he's sorry to have such a small one, and pays her double for the disappointment."

“The real difference between you and me, Harcourt, is that I wouldn’t visit a prostitute in the first place.”

But Marci Apron put an end to Harcourt’s joking when she dropped by his cube to give him some bad news. She told him that while the Republic could get by on old *paper* copies of our reports, our electronic reports were another matter.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, Mr. Harcourt, that if our electronic reports aren’t made available in publicly searchable form, the hue and cry from the press will be such that Congress won’t stand for it.”

“So?”

“So, you are responsible for our electronic filing.”

“I-”

“And your e-filing is essential.”

“But-”

“Therefore *you* are essential, and your absence will not be permitted.”

This knocked him back.

“You’ll be reporting as usual through the length of the shutdown, even if they cut power and the rest of the building goes dark.”

“But without power we can’t file electronically.”

Marci shrugged, enjoying herself. “Well, you’ll still be here. Just in case some clever fed rubs two sticks together to create fire.”

Not to be outdone, Harcourt lifted his own spirits with a crack Apron lighting a candle for him. “I know a neat little trick with the wax,” he said to the sound of her retreating heels.