

Also like the government to be blind to its own indifference, completely unaware of how capricious its actions could be from one moment to the next. By furloughing Chloe and putting dear Teague's neck on the line, the government had become for me an agent of darkness. Then I got a phone call from a sweet-voiced OMS in the basement of our building and the government almost seemed helpful again.

"Can I speak to Gabriel?" she asked, a wobbly voice that had me thinking of my grandmother.

"This is Gabriel."

"Oh, Gabriel. So nice to talk to you. You have such a lovely name."

"Thank you."

"I see your name here on my form and I think only of heaven and angels."

"What form, ma'am?"

"Have you met with our technician yet?"

"I'm sorry, ma'am. I don't know who this is."

"Oh, dear. Of course not. My name is Regina. I'm calling from the Bureau of Administration, Management and Facilities."

"BAMF?"

"That's right, young man. Have you met with our engineer yet?"

"No, ma'am. Nobody's contacted me."

"Well, please just hang in there. It should be soon enough. Have a nice day."

If I hung up in wonder at the strange call, I turned with even greater wonder at the sound of keys ringing against the tools on a

carpenter belt behind me. Standing in my cube, a building engineer in jeans and a blue tee shirt.

“You Gabriel Dunne?”

“Yes.”

“Show me what the problem is.” He looked around in confusion.

“What in Sam Hell is all that racket?”

I told the engineer to look behind him. “It’s the shredder.”

“In there?”

“That’s right. Can we put a door on it?”

The man scratched his head and looked. “Has there been a door on there before?”

“I don’t know.”

I knew how important the answer was. If I said yes then two things might happen: BAMF *could* install a door because a door had once been there; or conversely BAMF *could not* install a door because a prior effort had been made to remove one. And if I said no, two other things might happen: BAMF could install a door because there was no precedent for having removed it; or BAMF could not install a door because there was no precedent for putting one there in the first place.

The building engineer solved the riddle for me. Or so I thought.

“We can’t put a door on it if there hasn’t been a door on it before,” he said.

I looked closely at the doorjamb. “It looks like there’s been a door. See the hole for the lock? See where the hinges would’ve been?”

He scratched his head. “Well, that’s a whole other problem. Now we’ve got to ask why the door was removed in the first place.”

I began to feel angry and frustrated. “Don’t tell me. You can’t put on a door if there wasn’t a door before. And if there was a door before, we won’t be allowed to have one again. Is that right?”

“Well, sorta. But there’s a way around it.”

“What?”

“There’s a form. What’s the problem here? What are we trying to fix?”

“I can’t work with all the noise from the shredder.”

“How about headphones?”

“There’s also an odor.”

The engineer sniffed, wiggling his walrus mustache. “Roger. You’ll have to get in touch with the cleaning crew. That’s a dirty fridge. Form for that, too.”

“Listen, is there an argument I can use that gets a door?”

“Sure. Security. Just prove there’s some kind of security value to adding a door.”

“There is,” I said. “Can you wait just a minute?” I pulled up all my research on large-scale gun violence, four dead or more, and showed the building engineer the most recent incidents: the army base in Texas, the movie theater out west, the Navy Yard, and the post office in Northeast DC. “Those last two should be close enough to home?”

“Sure are, son. Against federal facilities no less.”

“Do you want our latest showing that workplace shootings are on the rise?”

“Shoot, man, don’t jinx me. Mind if I take this with?” he asked. “Should speed up the procurement process for getting a door.”

“Thank you. Anything else I need to do?”

“Just make sure you fill out the form.”