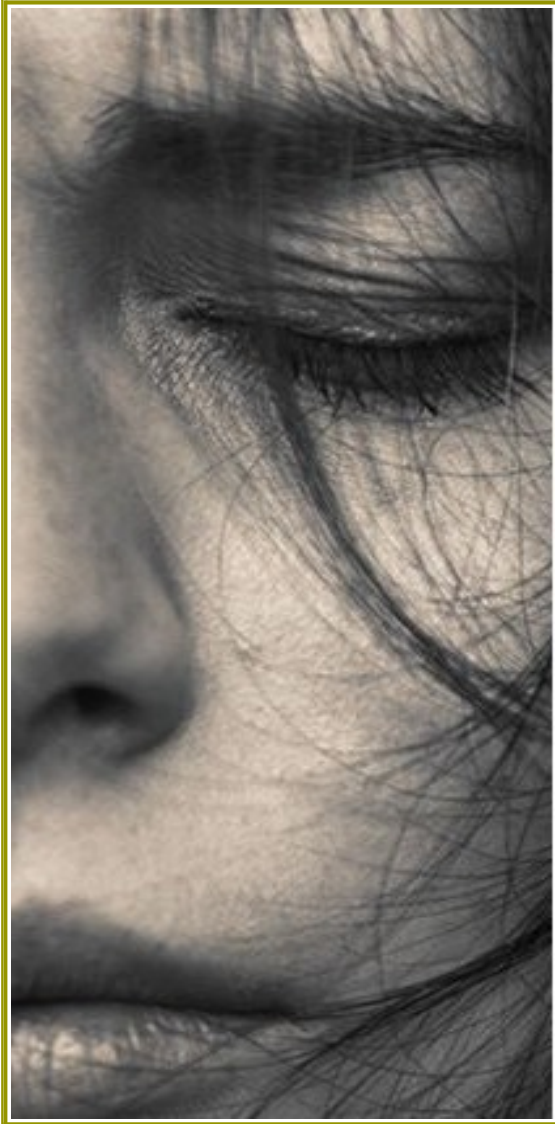


Ashleigh & Megan
Book I: Friendship



Wednesday, April 25
Can't Wait
Any Longer

Day 15 of Book I
(Thirteen Days since Megan and Christopher went
Bowling)

Part Four of Six

Authored By: R. P. Voght

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I hope you enjoy this pioneering format I call, "A Story Cast."

What the term "Story Cast" means; is this story is designed to be read in small to medium intervals. This particular story is broken up into "days." These portions are broken up into part or all of a particular fictitious "day" of the story. Each day surrounds the characters lives, relationships, adventures, struggles, mishaps and triumphs. This story is very different from a Novel or conventional story in many ways. Again, THIS IS NOT A NOVEL AND IS NOT WRITTEN IN A CONVENTIONAL NOVEL FORMAT. Instead; as the reader you are following the characters thoughts and actions during the course of this "day." This fiction story is set up like a TV series and or a third person journal. It always starts with one or more character getting up and ends with one or more characters going to bed; while during the day you experience the Characters actions, feelings, and their thoughts. On a large overview; there is a beginning, a middle, and an end to this "Story Cast"

R. P. Voght

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April 25 Can't Wait Any Longer Day 15 of Book I

(Thirteen Days since Megan and Christopher went Bowling)

Megan changed plans when a group scheduled an evening charter. She was finishing cleaning the galley after preparing individual meals for this impromptu charter.

Her: long dark blond hair was in a pony tail, she was wearing an orange colored woman's polo shirt, with the emblem of her small business named *Dolphin Tours* embroidered on her right chest. Underneath she was wearing a padded floral print brown and white padded swim top, she was wearing the matching mid scoop plain brown boyshort bottom with a white belt, covering these bottoms was a loose pair of green cargo shorts, and she was wearing brown swim shoes with a zipper on top; these shoes were great for a wet deck. She was without makeup. She was wearing small stud dolphin earrings. She was wearing the top and shorts to cover up her two piece. She correctly believed Christopher would disapproved of a woman wearing a two piece; even the very conservative two piece Megan was wearing.

This impromptu charter gave Megan the excuse to change the location of her lunch date with Christopher. She was grateful Christopher agreed to meet at the charter instead of *Lucy's*. Megan felt *Lucy's* was a horrible setting for a break up. Her heart went out to him. She knew what it was like to hope for a relationship but the guy had no interest in dating her. She never believed she would be the one breaking up with a guy who expressed his love for her. The truth was, he was a good guy and had many of the qualities she was looking for, but he was not the guy for her.

Jake opened one of the two doors to the living quarters of her charter and stated, "I just spotted him drive in."

She took a deep breath.

Jake suggested, "If Y'all would like I could tell him."

She wiped her hands with a towel hanging from a drawer.

She said, "I have to do this."

"Okay."

She answered, "Hanging around without bothering us ain't a bad idea."

"I'll check the bridge."

Megan's dimples flashed.

She stated, "Good idea."

Jake shut the door to the living quarters and went up the ladder to the bridge.

She: took a deep breath, stepped out of the galley, went through the lounge, opened one of the two doors, stepped out onto the stern, went to the edge of her vessel, leaned over, and spotted Christopher walking down the first pier. He was dressed in nice khaki colored slacks, a blue dress shirt, a matching blue and white checkered tie, and dress shoes.

She sighed.

This was turning out to be more difficult than she imagined. As he approached she no longer wanted to have lunch with him. She felt it would have been rude to run out on him now. She knew what it felt like to receive similar treatment from a guy; the least thing she could do was have lunch with him.

She yelled when he was close to the gate, "The gate's open."

He stepped through the gate and met her on the port side of the charter. They greeted one another. She: turned, stepped to the doors leading into the living quarters, she opened one of two doors, she waited for Christopher to step in, she carefully shut the door behind her, they stepped through the lounge, and into her galley.

He mentioned, "I've always liked how you decorated this charter."

Megan's dimples flashed.

This was frustrating, she tried to discuss her charter and business with him before, and he always changed the subject.

Megan answered, "We did a lot of remodeling to get her this way."

"Looks like it."

Megan's dimples flashed.

Megan asked, "You want to sit at the breakfast table or at the stools?"

"The stools."

Megan was grateful he chose the stools.

She: stepped behind the counter, opened the refrigerator, took out two plastic plates with dividers and a cover. She: set them on the main counter, set out utensils wrapped in paper napkins, set out a pitcher of iced tea, and two plastic cups; these cups had the emblem of her business printed on the side. She removed the covers of the plastic plates and set one in front of Christopher and one in front of her.

He was sitting on a stool as she stood on the other side of the counter.

As he removed the napkins he asked, "New cups?"

She smiled her big dimple smile.

"Ashleigh bought them for me."

He asked, "Why?"

She disliked his tone but decided to answer nicely, after all she was breaking up with him, "She was able to get a good deal on them. *Renewed Mastery* ordered cups like this for their employees."

"I'm sure she gets lots of deals."

Her dimples flashed.

She could tell he was being his passive aggressive self. A list of questions and comments ran through her mind. She decided to be nice and say nothing. She poured the two of them ice tea, she unwrapped her utensils, started to eat, took a sip of her iced tea, watched him, and wondered if he would say anything.

She was surprised when he said, "This is a very good seafood salad."

She answered, "Thank-you."

She left out the fact this was one of two choices the evening charter ordered. She just made two extra for their lunch. This was why the utensils were wrapped and the meal was enclosed in the plastic plate.

She took a sip of her iced tea.

She spotted Jake climb down the ladder onto the stern of the vessel. He stepped up to one of the windows and looked in.

Her dimples flashed.

She nodded.

He rolled his eyes and stepped away from the doors. She spotted him open a storage unit and take out a fishing pole. She focused her attention on Christopher.

She asked, "Y'all want more ice tea?"

"Yes Ma'am."

She poured him some.

They ate.

She watched him eat as she dangled her fork.

Since their bowling date he asked her out twice. She felt he was disappointed every time she procrastinated the date. This date was turning out exactly like every other date when it was just the two of them. This perplexed Megan. The last time they were together he professed his love for her. She expressed the feeling they lacked proper communication. She assumed he be opening up and talking to her.

She was again surprised when he stated, "I'm glad we're having lunch."

Her dimples flashed.

"Why?"

He gave her a curious look, "I like it when we're together."

In her mind she shouted, "*Why? You never say anything? You never tell me anything? How can you possibly believe we're a good couple?*"

He smiled at her.

All at once it became real easy to say, "I don't believe we should be dating anymore."

His countenance became a heap.

He spoke, "Oh. I assumed having lunch with Y'all meant we're moving forward?"

"I don't feel we're a good match."

"Oh."

Megan felt compelled to say, "Y'all are a good guy but I don't feel we'd be good together."

"Okay."

He stood up and finished his iced tea, "I appreciate the lunch."

Her dimples flashed.

"Okay."

He stated, "I was hoping to invite Y'all on a dinner cruise."

This was very surprising. Many couples became engaged on these cruises. She was grateful she ended their courtship today.

She answered, "I'm not interested."

He looked devastated.

Her heart went out to him.

He gained his composure, "I'll be going."

She answered, "It's a good idea."

He asked, "Would it be alright if I let myself out?"

"Of course."

She watched him: turn around, walk out of the galley, step through the lounge, open one of the two charter doors, he politely shut the door, through the windows she observed him talk to Jake, then he stepped off the charter, onto the pier of the charter, step onto the first pier, walk passed the charter, and was quickly out of sight.

She felt relieved.

She observed Jake walk up to one of the two doors, he looked in, opened the door, he stepped in, and headed toward her. She quickly cleaned the galley. She would have felt better if he would have taken the plate. She hated to waist food.

Jake was standing by the stools and asked, "Y'all alright."

Her dimples flashed.

"I'm fine."

"Y'all sure?"

When she was finished cleaning she looked at him.

"Y'all are sweet."

"Linda says the same thing."

Megan teased, "Y'all have her fooled."

"Funny."

Her dimples flashed.

They were again serious.

She answered, "I feel relieved."

"I reckon he ain't the one?"

"He ain't."

Jake's next comment was far more emotional than breaking up with Christopher, "Y'all don't be fretting. I'm sure a good God fearing guy will like Y'all."

She held in her tears and stated, "I hope so."

Megan stepped back. She leaned her back up against the cabinets.

Jake missing how upset she was suggested, "Linda was saying Y'all should try online dating."

This temporarily stopped her from being upset, "Why on earth would I try online dating?"

"A couple of Linda's friends have found good guys."

Her dimples flashed.

"I ain't online dating."

"Just a suggestion."

"God will send me one..."

She was interrupted when Stan yelled in his New Jersey accent, "Megan? U's there?"

Jake turned around, Megan stepped to the side so she could look out the door window; Barbara and Stan were standing on the first pier staring at the charter.

Jake asked, "What are they wanting?"

"I ain't sure. Lets find out."

They quickly stepped out onto the stern of the boat.

Jake greeted them, "Howdy."

Stan smiled, "Hows U's doing?"

"We're getting ready for an evening charter."

Barbara asked, "Is it a late one?"

Megan answered, "It ain't real late."

Jake added, "It's starting before dinner and ended a few hours after dusk."

Megan asked, "What brings Y'all here?"

Barbara and Stan looked at one another.

Barbara asked, "We're checking to see how U's are doing?"

Jake and Megan looked at one another.

Megan assumed they bumped into Christopher on his way out and he told him they broke up.

Megan answered, "I'm relieved."

Barbara answered, "Relieved?"

Stan said, "We's figured U's be upset?"

Jake added, "Me too."

Megan said, "It wasn't working out."

Barbara and Stan looked at one another.

Stan mentioned, "U's been doing the parade for years?"

Barbara added, "I guess it was getting to be to much?"

Megan and Jake looked at one another.

Megan asked, "What's getting to be to much?"

"The parade."

Megan's dimples flashed.

She asked, "Are Y'all talking about me breaking up with Christopher or the Memorial Day Parade?"

Barbara made a face, "U's broke up with Christopher?"

Megan answered, "He's a good guy and all but he ain't for me."

Barbara waved her hand, "U's okay?"

Stan rolled his eyes, "Good for you. He was a putz."

Barbara looked at him, "They were dating?"

"They ain't dating now."

Barbara looked at Megan, "Forgive my husband for not showing any compassion."

Stan looked at her, "U's think I don't understand?"

"It ain't sounding like it."

Stan answered, "All's I'm saying is our friend here can find someone better."

"Maybe she's in love with him."

"If she's in love with him why'd she brake it off?"

Barbara turned to Megan and waved her hand, "He's a man."

Megan changed the subject, "Y'all were saying something about the Memorial Day Parade?"

Stan focused, "We's heard the city council is canceling it."

Immediately Megan said, "What?"

Jake made a noise and then asked, "Is someone pissing down your leg?"

Stan answered, "We's heard it from a good source."

Barbara added, "We assumed Ashleigh told you."

"Why would she be telling me?"

Barbara and Stan looked at one another, "We's heard the reason they're canceling it is because Bob's company ain't liking the idea of having a Memorial Day Parade."

Megan's dimples flashed.

Megan tuned to Jake, "Y'all finish preparing the charter."

"Where are Y'all headed?"

Angry, she pointed to the houseboat yacht, "I'm marching over there and talking to him."

"Y'all just can't..."

Megan was already headed of the charter, she turned, "Watch me. There ain't anybody shutting down the parade."

Jake yelled, "Y'all have to be back in four hours."

Already marching down the first pier she yelled without turning, "I ain't forgetting."

She: removed the keys from her cargo pants, started to jog, and quickly headed toward her truck.

Barbara, Stan, and Jake all shook their heads.

It was impossible for Barbara to avoid asking about Christopher. Stan acted like he was disinterested in what Jake had to say; but he was very interested.

*A*shleigh's impulse was to carry Captain's food tray. She decided it was best if she just let him carry it. Part of the reason she allowed him to do so was due to the feeling something was bothering him. This upset her because she respected him a great deal.

He was dressed professionally. He was wearing gray dress slacks, a dark blue button shirt, a brand new leather belt, a western styled tie, and his best cowboy boots. Before arriving had a haircut and was freshly shaved. Smelling his Old Spice cologne reminded her of her foster dad.

She led him to what everyone called the Green Side; it was one of two long walls of this rectangular shaped cafeteria. They just left what everyone called the Blue Side. The Blue Side was on one of the short sides of the cafeteria; the main entrance and the vending area were on this side. On the opposite side of the Green side was the Yellow side. On the opposite side of

the Blue side was the Red Side. Each of these sections were named after the double doors painted along each wall of the room.

She picked a round table near the corner of the cafeteria.

She wanted to ask him if something was bothering him. He was a leader in the community and he often times worried about his oldest son Duke. He never came out and said so but Ashleigh could tell. Ma told her a lot of the people at the VFW approached him and asked for his advice. Ashleigh assumed this sometimes wore on him but Captain would never admit this. Plus, he was an elder in their church. If he wanted to discuss something he would. Her Foster Dad had this same trait.

Along the way many people greeted them; they politely avoided long conversations.

He set his tray down on the round table. It was impossible to miss the checker board pattern on all of the round tables; what surprised him was there were four different colored patterns. He took note of people playing chess. He liked the thin wooden cover they set on the table. It was made to fit the top of the table, there was a large open square so it would never cover the checkered patten, there were clips on the side, and neatly etched on the sides was the chess formula.

He was amazed at the artwork being painted on the walls. The whole cafeteria was section off into large equal squares; they went from top to bottom. In each square an artist or team of artists were working on or were finished with a painting. Each square was completely different. The two boundaries Ashleigh and Leah insisted on were nothing real violent and nothing pornographic. There were suggestive paintings and there were a couple war depictions but nothing Ashleigh and Leah would object too. Being practical no one was allowed to paint over the sets of doors or the exit signs over the door.

What amazed Captain was the garden area in the center of the seating area. He noticed a woman in her mid thirties sitting on a bench sketching a small palm tree. This bench was on a curvy walk way. He was correct in assuming it took effort to maintain this area.

He was amazed at the size of this cafeteria and the variety of food it served. He correctly assumed there was no profit in maintaining this cafeteria. He surmised if there were overruns someone would be held accountable for it but there was a lot of grace given. This was especially true for special meals and holidays.

Bob, Gracie, Leah, Haley, Brittany, and Ashleigh were considering food price options for employees, they were in the process of developing punch cards, and were ready to implement a program were employees could have one guest show up for lunch.

Before Captain had a chance to move the chair out she sat down herself.

Captain's impulse was to ask about the parade. He restrained himself.

Captain said, "Y'all have a nice cafeteria."

"It's come a long way."

"I ain't seen anything like it."

She smiled.

"You should have seen it in January. This side was filled with office furniture. I never thought we'd ever clear it out."

Captain asked, "I'm betting it was some of the same office furniture that ended up at the community center?"

Normally this would have been asked in a fun way. It seemed to her he was way to serious.

She tried to cheer him up by pointing to the key lime pie, "It's Nicole's receipt."

Captain replied in a serious manner, "Ma was saying Nicole was offered to work here."

Ashleigh tried to be jovial, "We'd like her to start working in the clinic across the street."

"I'm assuming this is the job Y'all offered her."

"More than once. We believe she'd make a great head nurse."

Very intense, "She's a damn good one."

This caught Ashleigh off guard. He never treated her this way before. She wondered what was wrong.

They starting eating.

Ashleigh mentioned, "I've heard she was a great nurse."

Again serious, "She has a great reputation. She was a great nurse at the Community Hospital. In Virginia she was respected by Navy and Marine personal."

"I didn't know she served?"

"In Virginia she worked at a hospital near the base."

"I suppose a lot of marines visited the hospital?"

"Navy personal as well."

"Okay."

"Shorty."

One of the few people who were able to call her this.

"Yes."

They stared at one another.

Captain wanted to ask her about the Memorial Day Parade. He held it in because of advice from Ma; he would listen to Ma.

In a polite way but not in his usual way stated, "Y'all are serving some good food."

"We try."

She looked at his plate.

She again tried to be cheery, "How's the jambalaya?"

In a serious tone, "It's good and all. But it ain't Ma or Nicole's."

Ashleigh asked with concern, "Did you select the spicy?"

Captain nodded his head, "Yes Ma'am."

She made a face and was about to leave the table, "I should have gotten the hot sauce."

"Don't be frettin' It's alright."

Upset she asked, "Are you sure?"

"Shorty, Y'all stay seated. I appreciate the meal."

She leaned over and playfully whispered, "It used to be spicy."

"What all happened?"

She rolled her eyes, "The Yankees couldn't handle it."

She chuckled.

He made a scowl.

This bothered Ashleigh. Their running joke was the differences between northern and southern customs.

Captain spotted the artist from the atrium push open a red door and step into a hallway.

Ashleigh asked, "What did you think of the listening device?"

Captain looked at her, "It should help our boys in the subs."

"It's what we're hoping for. You can't tell anyone about it."

Stern, "Honey. Y'all can trust me."

His tone and body language caught her by surprise. She answered as sweetly as possible, "If I didn't trust you. I'd have never asked for your advice."

Stern he asked, "Then why tell me I can't say anything?"

"Because I have too."

He understood this. He again wanted to bring up what he heard about the Memorial Day Parade. He reminded himself, Ma mistrusted the person they heard the rumor from. She promised to find out more before the end of the day.

Out of curiosity he asked, "Y'all have a large contract with the military?"

Ashleigh answered, "Mostly listening devices and small electronic things. We don't make all of the items we design. We outsource some of the items but we design them all."

"How did Y'all get starting making them?"

"Bob bought a company that owned another company and we've done it ever since. We've been working with the military and other agencies for a long time."

Captain made a face, "Y'all making bugs?"

She winked and smiled and was trying to lighten the mood, "We've helped catch a lot of bad guys."

Very serious Captain asked, "Ain't Y'all afraid they'd turn em' on us?"

This was something the company already considered.

She answered seriously, "We've considered this."

There was an awkward pause.

Ashleigh looked around, leaned in and whispered, "If you ever believe someone has bugged you talk to me."

Captain very seriously said, "Never tell my Son Duke."

She understood.

He then asked, "Y'all must be smart enough to protect yourselves?"

Ashleigh winked and smiled.

Captain started to eat the Key Lime Pie.

He calmed himself and abruptly said, "It's good. It tastes close to Nicole's but it ain't."

Ashleigh answered, "You didn't know?"

He was again stern, "What Y'all saying?"

Ashleigh answered, "All the ladies talk about how Nicole doesn't give out the exact recipe. She holds back. I'm still trying to figure out how she makes her sweet iced tea."

Captain smiled.

Ashleigh could tell he admired this.

Ashleigh decided to say, "Megan's excited about the Memorial Day Parade. She's was telling me how it's been a family tradition to help run it."

Captain leaned in and in angry tone said, "I never figured Y'all would be a liar."

Her eyes became large, this hurt her a great deal, she said with a gasp, "I'd never lie to you."

Angry, but calm, he whispered, "Rumor is Y'all want to shut down the Memorial Day Parade."

"I wouldn't want that."

"Does your brother?"

This angered Ashleigh and she cut off her tears, "He would never shut it down."

"I heard different."

She leaned in, "Someone's lying to you. We were..."

She stopped herself in mid sentence and stood up. Being respectful but stern she said, "Let's talk to him."

He was angry himself, "Yes Ma'am."

The two of them were silent until after they cleared off their trays and shoved their garbage into a large trash bin; Ashleigh took her water bottle. They headed toward Bob's office. Not a single person stopped them. Ashleigh noticed an open conference room, she stepped in, and waved Captain into the room. She made sure the door was securely shut.

"I want you to know we're planning on secretly funding it."

Captain studied her, "It ain't what we've heard."

"What have you heard?"

He admired her passion.

"There's a rumor at the VFW spreading like wildfire. The city council is planning on shutting it down on account your brother believes it'd look bad on this here company."

She turned red.

He felt she was like a firecracker ready to explode; he admired this.

She walked right passed Captain and opened the door, "Follow me."

He said, "Someone's been pissing down my leg."

"It isn't me."

A slight pause. "Nor my brother."

Because of life experience he became an expert at studying people. He believed her.

She said, "Give me a second."

He gave her a look when she braced herself against Captain's arm, using him as a pole she took off her shoes, and said with a lot of frustration, "I hate shoes."

She turned, carrying her shoes, and walking with determination headed to the office.

Captain smiled. He followed her because he admired her. In many ways he viewed her as an adopted daughter.

When Haley spotted Ashleigh step out into the hallway she immediately made a call to Bob.

Ashleigh walked right passed Haley.

Captain said, "Howdy Ma'am."

"Hi."

Ashleigh swung the glass door open.

Captain stepped through the door.

Brittany and Nikita looked up.

Both stayed where they were.

Bob stepped out of his office and greeted, "Nice to see you Mr. Steward."

They shook hands.

"Likewise."

Ashleigh said, "We need to talk."

She went straight into his office.

The two men looked at one another and followed her in.

Brittany commanded Nikita, "Go to your spot."

Nikita looked at her.

Brittany stood up and pointed at her spot, "Spot."

This Nikita understood and obeyed.

Brittany quickly opened one of the glass doors and approached Haley's desk, in her strong Georgia accent asked, "What's on fire?"

Haley looked at Brittany, "I have no idea."

"Who's the gentleman?"

"It's Megan's father."

Brittany with wisdom said, "He ain't the type of man to be messin' with. He's either your best friend or worst enemy."

Haley smiled, "He's a good guy. They're friends."

This made Brittany feel better.

Haley received a call from the security shack.

Haley raised a finger.

Brittany waited.

Haley said, "Give her a visitor pass."

Haley hit a button, turned toward Brittany, "Go get Megan."

"Why is she here?"

"There's a rumor Bob and Ashleigh want to shut down the Memorial Day Parade."

Brittany made a face, "Why would she believe such a tale?"

"What's important is she does. I want you to meet Megan at the entrance. I'll tell Andrea to hold her there until you get there."

"Yes Ma'am."

Brittany rushed to the front.

Haley immediately called Andrea. Then she called Bob.

When Brittany reached the front area she spotted Megan and Andrea talking through the sliding window. Brittany could tell Megan was on fire.

Megan stepped into Bob's office.

Brittany had placed pens and yellow legal pads of paper on Bob's conference table. This is when Ashleigh nodded at Brittany.

Brittany nodded in return and left by shutting the doors of Bob's office.

This was the longest office Megan ever stepped into. She would readily admit she knew very little about art. However; she was impressed with the sculptures on the long cabinet and the art work on the wall. She wanted to get a better look at the lighthouse cabinets behind Bob's desk but Bob was standing at the side of the desk talking on the phone. Megan was surprised on how well Bob was dressed. She hated to admit he looked very professional. Normally when she spotted him going to work he was dressed in business casual. She spotted several framed photographs between the cabinets. She wanted to be close enough to study them.

Megan and her Daddy greeted one another.

Megan observed Ashleigh open a cabinet, she was surprised to see a small refrigerator, Ashleigh took out a water, and handed it to Megan.

Ashleigh demanded, "Lets sit down."

This is when Ashleigh led them to the table. Megan was impressed with the wooden table; she liked how it could be extended or shortened. Megan chose to sit across from Ashleigh. To her left was an empty head chair; this is where Bob would sit. Sitting to the left of Ashleigh was Captain.

Megan felt Ashleigh's suit was somewhat boyish with a nineteen thirties gangster flare. She felt Ashleigh still appeared feminine. Megan correctly assumed if she wore the exact same suit it would support the rumor she was a lesbian. In the past this accusation would have been far more hurtful. It still stung, but within the last year Megan was coming to terms with the idea, it was impossible to stop the rumor she was a lesbian or bisexual.

She felt her Daddy was dressed well.

They observed Bob finish a conversation and hit a button. While holding onto the receiver he hit another button. He spoke to someone briefly and hung up the phone.

Ashleigh whispered, "He's calling in reinforcements."

Megan asked, "I'm assuming Y'all ain't shutting down the parade?"

Bob pulled out the empty chair and in an angry tone stated, "No."

Megan hated to admit she was impressed with his body language and tone.

He first said, "Mr. Steward and Megan I'm glad you are here."

The door to his office opened and Jimmy stepped in.

Ashleigh said, "Grab a drink."

"Yes Ma'am."

"Howdy Sis."

He turned, "Captain."

Captain nodded his head.

Jimmy stepped over to the refrigerator and grabbed himself a bottled water. He sat next to Megan.

Bob looked at Jimmy, "Someone is trying to stop the Memorial Day Parade."

With a shocked look, "Who?"

Captain said, "We aim to find out."

Megan informed everyone, "Stan and Barbara told me the city is shutting her down on account of *Renewed Mastery*."

Bob very seriously said, "*Renewed Mastery* was planning on sponsoring it."

Jimmy said, "Sounds like Y'all have a fox in the hen house."

Captain added, "We aim to do some fox hunting."

Megan glanced at Bob to see how he would react to these southern sayings.

Bob pushed up his glasses and said, "There is more than one way to kill a fox."

Megan glanced over at Ashleigh.

Ashleigh winked.

Megan was surprised when Bob turned toward Megan and asked, "I've heard you run the parade?"

"It's a team effort."

Jimmy clarified, "In the past it's been run by the VFW and towns folks. Over the years people have been allowing Megan to run it."

Megan insisted, "A lot of people pitch in to help. I wouldn't be able to run it myself."

Jimmy stated, "Y'all are downplaying what goes on. Whenever there's a squabble or trouble Y'all are the one settling it. We can't forget all of the organizing Y'all do."

Bob turned to her, "I'm assuming you have started to organize it."

"I start soon after the last one ended."

"I wouldn't expect any less."

This comment surprised her.

Megan's dimples flashed and she brushed her hair behind her ear.

Bob added, "I've been told there is a dinner and dance."

Captain answered, "Yes Sir. It's been held at the VFW for as long as anyone can remember. There's a lot of fundraising and tall tales."

Bob pushed up his glasses, "I'm sure there is."

Megan recovering from the surprised compliment, very seriously said, "During the weekend establishments hold fundraisers."

Jimmy reminded everyone, "Y'all can't forget during the weekend many of the veterans talk about what they've all gone through. There's guest speakers who give talks on the concerns of veterans and their families."

Bob commented, "I'm sure politicians get in the act."

Megan's dimples flashed.

In a serious tone Megan stated, "We ain't always liking them or the establishments these events are happening in. But they're passionate about helping our veterans."

Bob asked, "Have you had protesters?"

Captain said very seriously, "Not here in Eastbank."

Ashleigh then asked, "Has there been groups in town who've wanted to shut it down?"

Megan's dimples flashed.

She thought of some of the letters and editorial comments in the newspaper, "There has always been a group of artists and professors who dislike it."

Jimmy was quick to point out, "Not all of the artists."

Megan added, "Jimmy's right. There's an art fair where the proceeds go to the VFW. Plus there is a group who believe art is good therapy for PSD. They try to make it fun for the veterans and the children."

Bob looked at Ashleigh, "You get with Leah."

"Okay."

Bob looked over at Megan, "Leah is the Vice President of the Art Division."

Ashleigh was already jotting down a list of ideas.

Bob asked in general, "Does this parade involve other communities?"

Megan jumped at this, "It's been growing."

Captain said, "We've always allowed other VFW's and other veteran groups from neighboring towns and counties to join in. Like we've already told Y'all we allow many charities to participate."

Bob asked, "You have bands and floats?"

Megan answered, "Most of the floats are built by charities and churches in the area."

Captain added, "People get excited about the contest."

Megan added, "The group who has the best float wins a blue ribbon."

Captain mentioned, "As well as second and third prize."

Bob smiled, "Has there ever been a trophy and a cash prize?"

Captain answered honestly, "We ain't ever considered someone would sponsor a prize."

Bob looked over at Ashleigh.

Ashleigh answered, "Megan and I will work out the details."

Captain and Megan looked at one another.

Jimmy mentioned, "The mayor and some of them politicians like to ride on them floats."

Megan added, "Car dealerships are always eager to donate their cars for them folks. As long as we allow them to advertise their dealership on the side."

Bob said with a sarcastic tone, "I'm sure they do."

Megan made a point of saying, "We can't be excluding them."

Bob answered, "I wish we could."

Captain brought it around, "It's plain to me Y'all ain't shutter her down. But why are we discussion what happens in the parade if the parade ain't happening? Shouldn't we all be discussion how we should save the parade and find out who's trying to shut her down?"

Bob pushed up his glasses and looked at Captain, "The parade is happening."

Ashleigh smiled.

Bob turned to Megan, "I want you to be the official marshal of the parade."

Megan's dimples flashed, her forehead crinkled, and she brushed her hair behind her ear.

"If it means saving the parade I'll take the title. But I want Y'all to understand it ain't just me."

Bob answered, "Whatever you need you talk to Ashleigh, Leah, or myself. You have our complete support."

He turned to Ashleigh, "I want as many volunteers representing this company out helping the parade."

"I'll get with Brittany and Gracie."

Bob added, "I want Ms. Ericka involved."

Ashleigh clarified, "Our new press secretary."

Bob pushed up his glasses, "Remind me to apologize to her for not inviting her."

Bob answered Ashleigh, "It was an oversight on my part."

Megan was surprised by this exchange.

Haley opened the door, "Mr. Bob. You have guests."

In stepped Susan King and her Daddy, Mr. King.

Immediately Captain and Bob stood up.

Everyone else followed their lead.

Bob signaled to Haley to wait.

Bob said, "I appreciate both of you arriving in short notice."

Mr. King shook his hand, "It's our pleasure."

Everyone started to converse and greet one another.

Bob said, "Excuse me for one second."

Bob stepped over to Haley and whispered a few commands.

She: nodded, stepped out of the office, and gently shut the office doors.

Glancing at Susan, Megan all at once felt under dressed. Megan felt Susan was dressed perfectly for the situation. She was trendy, was professional, and avoided upstaging Ashleigh

or anyone else who happened to be at the meeting. She was wearing a brown colored cropped swing jacket, underneath she was wearing an oatmeal colored feminine button up blouse with ruffled flounce cuffs and lace trim, she matched this with a suede skirt with a bandless waist, she was wearing homemade brown beaded earrings, a matching brown and cream beaded necklace, healed brown shoes, her blond hair was pinned up, her glasses were spotless, she had a brand new purse, and a very expensive watch with a brown band. Megan believed, based upon how Susan was dressed, she had visited the company before. Megan was certain the purchase price of the purse was half of the cost of all her clothes.

Megan felt Susan was a very beautiful woman. She felt her oval shaped face was perfect, she had beautiful lips, Megan admired her smaller mouth, and felt her blue eyes were far more prettier than hers. She felt when Susan slipped on her glasses it made her appear even more distinguished. Megan for the first time in her life noticed Susan's breasts were smaller than hers. Megan took note on how Susan's breasts were the same size, unlike hers with one slightly larger than the other, she assumed Susan's breasts were more appealing than hers. At five nine Megan felt her legs were long for her frame. For the first time in her life Megan wanted to know what a woman's backside looked like.

Susan made a point to acknowledge Megan.

Megan was polite in return.

Ashleigh felt the tension between these two. She wondered if Bob noticed.

Megan sat back down in her chair.

Megan watched as Susan set down onto the table a leather business notepad and an expensive pen. Megan observed how careful she was when she removed her jacket and hung it on the back of her chair. She sat down very lady like.

While this was happening Bob asked Susan how she was doing.

They smiled at one another.

Megan's dimples flashed and she brushed her hair behind her ears.

Susan made a point of reminding Bob of their scheduled dinner date. Ashleigh noticed Susan give Megan a glance.

This is when Brittany: opened the right side door, she quietly shut the door, and quickly took a chair at the end of the table; she was trying to avoid any attention.

Bob ruined this by saying, "I'd like all of you to meet our new assistant Brittany."

She smiled, "Hi Y'all."

"Ms. Brittany I'd like to hear your suggestions."

"Yes sir."

Captain asked in a quiet manner, "Y'all like your apartment?"

"I'm delighted."

She was unable to contain herself, "I'm so thankful for understanding the situation with Momma."

"Y'all are welcome."

Bob stopped all of the small conversations taking place by saying, "Someone is trying to shut down the Memorial Day Parade."

Megan out of the corner of her eye glanced over at Susan. She noticed Susan quickly turn from looking at Megan and focus on Bob.

Mr. King spoke, "This is simply unacceptable."

Bob answered, "I feel the same."

They looked at one another.

Mr. King asked, "Young man do Y'all have a plan?"

"That depends."

Mr. King leaned forward and folded his hands together, "On what?"

"If by some chance. You know who is trying to shut this parade down and why they're implicating my company?"

This is when Susan tapped her Father. She pointed to her yellow legal pad of paper attached to her business notepad.

He then looked up at Bob.

Bob pushed up his glasses.

Mr. King turned, "Captain."

"Yes sir."

"We've known one another all of our lives."

"Yes sir."

"Y'all are a straight shooter."

"Y'all know this to be true."

"Would these folks want to shut down our parade?"

Ashleigh was about to answer. Megan quickly, so quickly only Bob and Susan noticed, glared at Ashleigh.

Ashleigh listened.

"No sir."

"They're strangers in our midst."

Captain looked at Bob and then Ashleigh. He turned toward Mr. King, "It's a fact they are Yankees and ain't from here. But it's my experience we'll have more things in common than we have things uncommon. Y'all can trust their word."

Mr. King looked at his daughter.

Everyone at the table knew there was something behind this look.

Mr. King looked over at Ashleigh, "You must be Ms. Ashleigh."

"Yes Sir."

She felt like she was being addressed by a principle.

"I've heard good things about Y'all."

She answered, "I'm happy you've have heard good things."

"What?"

Susan answered, "She's glad Y'all heard good things about her."

Mr. King turned back to Ashleigh, "What do Y'all think about shutting down the parade?"

A hundred answers flashed in her head.

She said, "It pisses me off."

Bob already sitting in his chair smiled.

Mr. King commented, "Ain't you a whipper snapper?"

Captain stated, "It's one of the reason I trust her."

These two men nodded at one another.

Ashleigh stood up, she pointed at the table, "For anyone to think we'd shut down this parade is simply. Horse do do. I'd like to use another word but people around her aren't used to a woman swearing."

Mr. King encouraged, "Go on."

"My brother has told me since I was a little girl. Without our military we wouldn't be able to do the things we do. To suggest we'd be part of shutting down this parade is stupid. In fact Bob and I were talking about sponsoring the parade. We were just trying to figure out how. Now some group of donkeys are trying to shut it down and blame us. It just isn't right. Like you guys say. Proper."

Everyone looked at her.

She then said, "I'd personally like to know what donkeys are trying to shut it down."

She glanced over at Captain.

He winked.

With this she sat down.

Susan tapped her father and pointed at her notebook. Susan knew it would be difficult for her Daddy to catch everything Ashleigh said, because of her strong Midwestern accent and how fast she talked, so Susan wrote down some key points.

Megan observed Susan's father nod his head toward Susan.

Mr. King looked over at Bob, "Mr. Waller."

He pushed up his glasses and said, "Yes sir."

"Is it true Y'all wanted to sponsor the parade?"

"Yes. But I want Ms. Megan to be the marshal of the parade."

Megan jumped in right away, "I ain't asked for the title."

Mr. King stated, "From what I've understood Y'all have been running it without a title for years. Why would Y'all object to the title now?"

Megan's dimples flashed.

"I was telling Mr. Bob before Y'all arrived. The whole community helps with the parade. This parade was started way before I was even born. The only reason I started helping was on account of Captain and Ma. I grew up around all the guys at the VFW. I've watched their struggles. I ain't deserving to be the marshal but if it's the only way to keeping the parade I'll take it on."

Mr. King turned toward Captain, "Y'all believe Megan should be the Marshal of the Parade?"

Captain replied, "Y'all said it yourself. My daughter has been running it for years."

He turned toward Bob, "I agree with Y'all. Ms. Megan will be the Marshal of the Parade. Would you agree?"

Bob answered, "It's still up to Megan."

Megan's dimples flashed.

Megan reluctantly stated, "I agree."

Mr. King turned toward Bob, "Mr. Waller. I'm a bit curious. Why did Y'all ask Susan and I to this meeting?"

They all studied Bob.

He pushed up his glasses.

"Because Captain and Yourself represent this town. I know of other leaders within Eastbank. But nothing in Eastbank passing by the two of you. I wanted both of you to know I had no part in trying to shut down this parade. I'm well aware without the blessing of you two I'd never be able to clear my name. I suspect whomever is foolish enough to try and shut down this tradition it will still go on. More important I strongly believe the two of you will find out

who these foolish people are. I want to make it clear. I want the parade to go on. I'm just offering my help to make sure it continues."

Mr. King looked at Captain.

Captain said, "Ms. Ashleigh."

"Yes Sir."

"Y'all will help my daughter with the parade?"

She became real excited, "Of course."

Megan produced her big dimple smile.

Mr. King looked at Bob, "Young Man what plan have Y'all got cooking?"

"It depends on who's trying to stop the parade."

Susan tapped her Father.

He looked at her.

Again everyone noticed he looked down at her notes.

Mr. King asked, "Captain. Y'all suspect who's the traitor?"

Captain answered, "I have an inkling."

Mr. King asked, "Mr. Bob you have any ideas on who is trying to shut her down?"

He pushed up his glasses.

"I've made enemies along the way."

Ashleigh and Megan glared at one another.

Mr. King stated, "May I talk to Y'all over yonder."

"Lets step over by my desk."

Bob asked, "Captain would you be so kind and step over as well."

"Yes sir."

They did so.

Megan looked at her watch.

She whispered at Ashleigh, "I have a charter in a couple hours."

Susan said, "We ain't staying much longer."

Ashleigh reassured her, "We'll get together and start working it all out."

Brittany jumped in and in her Georgia accent asked, "May I help?"

Megan answered, "Of course."

Brittany forced back tears.

Susan asked, "Honey. What's the matter?"

"My Daddy believed he caught cancer while serving in Vietnam."

She paused and wiped her tears from her eyes.

She continued, "My Granddaddy on my Daddy's side served in World War Two but lost his life in Korea."

Nothing more needed to be said.

This is when the three men sat back in their chairs.

Bob simply said, "Ashleigh and Megan. You two are in charge of the parade. Like I said earlier this company has your full support."

Ashleigh answered, "Okay."

Megan answered, "Yes Sir."

Bob with focus said, "From this moment on. Whatever is said here stays here."

They all agreed.

For the next hour they discussed who was shutting down the parade and how they were to proceed with the parade and the festivities surrounding Memorial Day. Megan was surprised at many of the ideas passed around the table.

Megan was reluctantly impressed with how Bob handled everything.

April 25^h, Can't Wait Any Longer Part Four of Six

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