

Chapter Eighteen

"Senator?" Tammy, John Raymond's secretary, called over the intercom, "there is a Mr. Sergei insisting upon seeing you."

"I don't know anyone by that name. If he's a constituent, make an appointment for another time."

"I have already tried that approach, he is very insistent and," she whispered, "I don't like the way he looks."

"Then call security."

Seconds later, the door to the senator's inner office burst open. Sergei entered with a swagger followed closely by Tammy. "I'm sorry," she said, "he was at your door before I could respond."

"That's OK, Tammy."

"Do you want me to call security?"

"Not right now. So, Mr. Sergei . . .," he said, as Tammy closed the door to his office.

"Sergei will do," he interrupted, while extending his hand.

"What was so important that you had to barge into my office?"

"How are you finding your first year as an elected official?" Sergei inquired, while taking a seat without being invited.

"Who are you?" the senator demanded, with audible concern.

"Just an interested citizen," he replied, with a hint of a Russian accent.

"And what is it that piques your interest?"

"I believe that a Mr. Howard has been attempting to meet with you but you have been avoiding him."

"So, that's what this is about, he sent you?"

"He did not send me but his superiors have."

"Superiors? I thought that he was the head honcho."

"Come now, John, you know better than that. Even his superiors have theirs."

"I've heard quite enough of this," the senator shouted, incensed by Sergei's familiarity, "if you do not leave right now, I will have to call security."

"Calm down, John," Sergei directed, while opening his jacket slightly, revealing the butt of a semiautomatic pistol.

"You have the hubris to threaten a state senator?" he cried out, indignantly.

"I meant only to get your attention," Sergei replied, while closing his jacket.

"No, sir, your intent was quite clear and I will not be intimidated," the senator said, while reaching for the telephone.

With lightening speed, Sergei left his chair, extended his right arm and applied a viselike grip to the senator's wrist. The telephone receiver fell noisily to the desktop as the shocked senator fell back in his chair.

"Now, I believe I have your attention," Sergei growled, as he theatrically placed the receiver into its cradle.

"Who are these superiors of yours?" the senator asked nervously, his hands trembling beneath the desk.

"People who are not accustomed to being refused."

"The legislation that you desire is not in the best interest of my constituents and I cannot, in good conscience, put my pen to it."

"Your conscience may be in even greater turmoil if you do not."

"What do you mean?"

"John, John, use your imagination. We have far reaching powers and who knows ... one of our people might even take a liking to your beautiful wife. I believe her name is, Constance?"

"You leave her out of this," the senator shouted, while banging his fist on the desk, "you people are nothing more than common gangsters."

"She is," he said, with a wry smile and a flamboyant wave of his hand, "as you Americans say, very hot."

"She has nothing to do with this!"

"That will be up to you," Sergei commented, while running his hand through a lock of greasy hair.

"I'll think about it," the senator responded, while fidgeting with his tie.

"What is there to think about, unless the consequences excite you?"

"Get out of my office!"

"And your decision?" Sergei asked, as he rose to leave.

"You'll know when I have one."