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DEEP STATE

Written by **Chris Hauty**

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CHRIS HAUTY

DEEP STATE



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A lady asked Dr. Franklin, “Well, Doctor, what have we got,
a republic or a monarchy?”

“A republic,” replied the Doctor, “if you can keep it.”

—Anonymous, from Farrand’s *Records of
the Federal Convention of 1787*

Prologue

Leaving her air-conditioned quarters and stepping into the thick Texas summer night with less than forty minutes before the start of her bout, she begins to run. Humidity and air temperature persist above ninety despite the late hour, and she breaks a sweat before crossing Tank Destroyer Boulevard. Her footsteps hardly make a sound as she jogs the deserted, orderly streets of Fort Hood. Anyone who isn't already jammed into the fitness center for the monthly smoker has departed for lives off base. In this way she can enjoy the extravagance of being alone with her thoughts.

She's avoided warming up inside the venue since the beginning of her amateur career, preferring exercise outdoors until the last minutes before being called to the ring. Running clears her mind of all thoughts except those regarding the contest to come, removing her from the crowd's roar and its profanity. Rain or

shine, day or night, she jogs alone at a steady pace wearing the same clothes she will wear in the ring. With this solitary prefight ritual, Hayley Chill prolongs an imperfect control over her world before the chaos and violence to come.

She can remember every fight. Whether childhood brawls back home in Green Shoals, West Virginia, or organized bouts as an amateur fighter since enlisting in the army, physical combat is the fierce memoir of a hardscrabble life. The oldest of six children—her single mother laid low by multiple cancers—Hayley defended herself and her five siblings with savage determination. Losing her first four fights, she absorbed hard lessons with each defeat. Eight victories followed those early routs, a dozen fights in total before graduating first in her class from high school. Hayley has fought as many times as an army boxer and remains undefeated. Tonight, she defends her regimental title.

After thirty minutes of steady jogging, her muscles have become elastic beneath a sweat-drenched T-shirt and shorts. Her thoughts are as measured and orderly as her heart rate. Barely winded, Hayley stops and checks the time on a Citizen Eco-Drive Nighthawk Black Dial watch she took off an army pilot who challenged her to a barroom arm-wrestling match. At her feet is the loose stone and gravel of the construction site for a new PX. Hayley bends down and picks up one of the jagged rocks, clenching her fist tightly around it. The stone's sharp edges send jolts of pain through her body, acute and clarifying. She maintains

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the intensity of this clench for ten seconds, then twenty more. Finally, Hayley takes a deep breath and drops the stone to the ground. Studying the palm of her hand with clinical detachment, she sees blood seeping from multiple quarter-inch lacerations. There is nothing to fear. Blood has been drawn. Now she can fight.

Hayley turns, reversing course, and begins running again, faster, in a final push to accelerate her heart rate. Two blocks distant, the concrete-and-glass fitness center crouches under LED vapor-tight lighting.

Hayley, wearing mandatory headgear and gloves, follows her trainer, Master Sergeant Stanley Oakes, as he leads her toward the boxing ring at the center of a raucous crowd of mostly drunken fight fans. Oakes roughly deflects the outstretched hands of Hayley's supporters, carving a path through the throng with gruff authority. The fighter stares straight ahead, eyebrows furrowed, and fixates on the boxing ring, where her opponent calmly waits.

She leans forward and speaks into Oakes's ear, loud and firm. "What do we know about the replacement?" she asks as they press forward through the crowd and finally arrive at their corner of the rudimentary boxing ring erected on the basketball court.

Oakes scans a piece of paper given to him by organizers of the smoker when informing him that Hayley's scheduled opponent had withdrawn. He's been working the military boxing circuit for enough years to know his fighter has been set up. Her streak of twelve

straight wins is celebrated throughout ARSOUTH. A ringer is just the ticket for an upset and the ensuing wagering windfall.

“Marcela Rivas, First Armored Division, Fort Bliss. Two-time Golden Gloves champ from Camden, New Jersey. Straight puncher, like Roy Jones Jr. A lock to turn pro soon as she discharges.”

Hayley doesn’t react, her gaze focused on Rivas dancing lightly at the center of the ring. The Jersey fighter stands six feet, one inch and weighs 145 pounds. Without a hint of fat on her immaculate frame, she is all muscle and pride. Even the most casual, boozed fan can see Rivas is a warrior.

“Don’t wanna bullshit you, HC. This beast could knock out half the men on base. No shame in a forfeit,” Oakes consoles her.

Hayley smirks. Oakes, a natural born worrier, always has had an odd way of motivating a fighter. The crowd erupts as Hayley climbs three steps and ducks under the ropes. Something less than five feet, eight inches and weighing 125 pounds, Hayley is every bit as lean and exquisitely muscled as her opponent, with nearly as much experience in the ring and probably more out of it. Training and prefight ritual have been rigorously observed. And, as always, she possesses an unflinching will to prevail in a just cause, in this case the honor of thousands of men and women in the Sixth Army across the entire ARSOUTH. All these factors must be folded into the calculus of predicting the fight’s outcome.

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But Marcela Rivas is pure boxer, destined to win a gold medal in the Paris 2024 Summer Olympics before turning pro, as Oakes predicted. After a stellar professional career in which she suffers only a single loss in eight years, Rivas will be a shoo-in for induction into the US Boxing Hall of Fame. Retiring from the sport that rescued her from indiscriminate poverty, she will buy a gilded multimillion-dollar home on the water in south Florida and raise three daughters, all of whom will also fight professionally one day.

If Hayley has estimated her slim odds in the handful of seconds before the first of three rounds, she doesn't show it. With clang of bell and howl of the crowd, she moves forward, workmanlike, on light feet and absorbs a fist that seemingly materializes in the void three inches from her face a half fraction of a second before breaking her nose.

Sitting on the stool Oakes has placed in her corner of the blood-spattered ring before the start of the third and final round, Hayley must concentrate to register the words Oakes shouts urgently into her ear.

“One more round, HC! Just keep dancin’! You’ve done better than anyone could expect of you!”

Hayley spits her guard into Oakes's hand and accepts the water he squirts into her mouth. Oakes starts to work on her nose, stanching the flow of dark blood with a cotton swab soaked in adrenaline hydrochloride and then pressing an ice-chilled enswell to the bruised area. While he works, Hayley stares doggedly at Rivas,

who hasn't even bothered to sit between rounds. The future Olympian is treating the bout as an extended sparring session.

Hayley's powder blue eyes clock all of this. After the punishment she has sustained, no one could predict Rivas's eventual induction into the Hall of Fame better than her. If she guts out a final round, ARSOUTH will undoubtedly survive the defeat with pride intact. Amplified by time and alcohol, the tale of Hayley Chill's valiant stand against the future welterweight champion of the world would be told again and again in barracks and officers' quarters across the US Southern Command.

But Hayley has no affinity for noble defeat. The notion of coasting to certain failure is an indignity she would never voluntarily swallow. In her entire life, the West Virginian has never backed down before a home-grown tyrant. She fights at full pitch, relentless until victory or defeat. There is no middle ground.

"She just thinks she's going to win." Hayley's soft, West Virginia drawl belies the frenzied and dire situation, recalling lazy haze-shrouded hills, sweet tea, and rusted-out pickup trucks.

Oakes can't believe the words he's just heard. If Hayley's trainer didn't fear the ensuing riot, he'd throw in the towel then and there given his fighter's apparent derangement.

"There're never any knockouts in your weight class, kid, not with headgear." Hayley glances at Oakes with an inscrutable expression. He presses the point. "It's

over. Rivas has the points. She'll cruise the last round if you do."

An old bromide admonishes a boxer in the ring to pay attention to her opponent, not herself. Hayley has always been a connoisseur of detail. In the first two rounds of the bout, she analyzed Rivas's technique and watched for patterns. The Jersey girl is an absurdly talented fighter. Her superb conditioning is the result of a religious dedication to physical preparation. But even the most skilled and committed boxer repeats herself, despite all best attempts to camouflage those patterns.

With the bell commencing the third round, Hayley surprises Rivas, Oakes, and everyone in attendance by jetting to her feet and hurtling across the ring to confront her startled opponent. The prior two rounds were lopsided affairs, bookended by Hayley's broken nose in the first round and a brutal knockdown at the conclusion of the second. Only a fool or masochist would further antagonize her tormentor after ten minutes of such punishment.

Hayley's frenetic punches fail to land solidly. Rivas could deflect these furious haymakers and off-tempo jabs in her sleep. But the dispassionate expression she has maintained throughout the fight shifts to one of irritation and anger. What's this white girl's problem, anyway? The rapturous crowd howls in misguided delight, magnifying Rivas's annoyance. She gives Hayley a violent push backward and, departing the fight plan carefully devised by her trainer, launches an unnecessary attack.

Jab, right, left hook, right uppercut, left hook, and right cross. Jab, right, left hook, right uppercut, left hook, and right cross. Jab, right, left hook, and Rivas steps into the perfect position for Hayley's best and purest punch, a devastating phantom left hook thrown from the bottom of her feet that connects with the right side of Rivas's head as if painted by Michelangelo.

Shocked spectators fall silent. Somewhere to the side of the vast room a vending machine dispensing cold drinks rumbles to a start. Hayley steps back a pace or two and watches Rivas crash to the canvas, out cold. The partisan crowd erupts, drivers as distant as Battalion Avenue hearing the delirious celebration taking place inside the fitness center. Hayley makes no acknowledgment of the riotous acclaim. She moves forward and takes a knee beside her opponent, whose eyes already begin to flicker open. Within moments, Rivas's trainer joins Hayley and roughly pushes her away as he tends to his fallen fighter.

Hayley stands and, for the first time since it was broken, puts fingers to her nose. The subsequent pain brings her surroundings more sharply into focus. Rivas on her back. The frenzied crowd. A man in a blue suit standing just inside the entry doors to the arena, strangely expressionless and removed from the merriment. But processing it all eludes Hayley. Only the fight's result seems concrete and quantifiable.

From that day forward, the subtle crook of Hayley's nose remains as silent testimony of that momentous and

bloody night when the Sixth Army welterweight champ rose from near death to deliver a stunning victory.

Oakes wraps his arms around Hayley from behind and lifts her a half-foot off the ground. The crowd roars even louder, if that were possible. Hayley relinquishes a brief smile and pushes down on Oakes's arms, demanding release, and he sheepishly complies.

"How the hell . . . ?" The question catches in his throat. With twenty-three years in the sport, both as fighter and trainer, Oakes has never been so shocked by a bout's result.

Hayley grins and grimaces simultaneously. Her musculoskeletal structure has suffered terrible abuse; a constellation of muscles, bones, joints, tendons, and ligaments are pummeled and overtaxed. That collective pain is only now being registered by the microscopic nociceptors and neurons in her skin. She will wake up the next day suffering from a cascade of physical agonies. With a few Advils and a full breakfast, she will nevertheless report fifteen minutes early, at 6:45 a.m., for a regiment-wide, three-day open-terrain training exercise.

Winded and sweating copiously from her exertions, Hayley reveals to her trainer the secret of her impromptu strategy. "May 15, 2004. Antonio Tarver beat a heavily favored, straight-punching Roy Jones Jr. with a counter left hook." Hayley mimes the same left hook that put her opponent down on the canvas. "Tricky part was bringing Rivas to the punch."

She dips her chin slightly, a nod of her head that

seems to acknowledge simply a job done well. As Oakes marvels at his fighter's intelligence, the uproarious carnival continues around them, seemingly without end.

Southwestern Coaches sits at the corner of East Avenue C and Fourth Street in Killeen, Texas. The August sky above is cloudy and threatens a summer rainstorm. The occasional passenger car or pickup truck glides past the bus depot, but otherwise the streets at midafternoon are empty and forlorn. Without the military's presence, Killeen would have dried up and blown away a long time ago. The perpetual nightmare plaguing boosters is an intermittent threat posed by budget cuts in Washington that would shutter the army's massive installation on the edge of town.

Four weeks to the day since her improbable victory, Hayley stands outside the terminal's door with Stanley Oakes and waits for Greyhound's 2:41 p.m. bus to Houston. The master sergeant stares across Fourth Street, his gaze fixed on J.R. Boxing Club, a storefront gym with yellow lettering affixed to the display windows: MALES-FEMALES-CHILDREN. BOXING TRAINING. AMATEURS-PROFESSIONALS. An envelope taped to the door is stuffed with handwritten flyers that flutter in a wind that blows unobstructed across the Great Plains, all the way down from central Canada.

"Guy who runs that joint is beyond clueless." Oakes pauses to spit. "Couldn't train a dog to lift its leg to pee."

Hayley glances toward the gym across the street

and says nothing in response to Oakes's random declaration. She has mustered out. Leaving the army is a life-altering event. Her worldly belongings are in the duffel at her feet. All goodbyes but this one have been made.

Oakes is plainly unhappy, his hands shoved into his pockets as if he might punch himself from self-pity otherwise. He doesn't know what to say but knows he must say something. "Wish you'd reconsider, HC. Army could use a stealth left like yours. That's a fact."

Hayley answers without deliberation. "Military was a way out, Master Sergeant, never the destination."

Oakes can't mask his hurt feelings. "What, then? Taking a year off to figure it out is not a plan."

The warmth in Hayley's eyes reveals the gratitude and affection she has for her trainer. "Don't take it personal, Stan."

"Personal? Hell, the military invested a shit-ton of money in your skinny ass. Isn't just about you. What you achieved means something, in a broader way. Ain't the boxing."

"It was never about the boxing," Hayley promises him.

Oakes frowns. As a boy growing up in Detroit, near Highland Park, he had been caught with several friends throwing rocks at cars from the Wyoming Street bridge over Interstate 96 and spent one tumultuous year in juvenile hall. He understands the impetus of escape and identifies with this twenty-four-year-old blond white girl from West Virginia in ways that often astonish him. With her sudden and surprising decision to

leave the army, Stanley Oakes now sees in Hayley the road not taken. That awareness gnaws at him, at the implacable gristle of regret and insecurity.

Oakes's expression softens. "Okay, then. Have it your way." The marvel of military life is unlikely pairings, geographic and ethnic boundaries erased by a cohesive necessity. He slowly nods as the Greyhound bus appears from around the corner on Avenue C and lumbers into the depot's driveway. He gestures toward the bus with his chin.

"Make 'em pay, champ," he says gruffly. In this way grown, childless men conceal their emotions and say goodbye to someone they've come to love like their own flesh-and-blood daughter.

Hayley retrieves the duffel bag with her left hand and briefly lays her right on the side of her trainer's cheek. "Thank you, Stanley Oakes. For everything."

She moves toward the waiting bus driver, who takes her bag and deposits it in the storage compartment under the coach. Hayley pauses on the steps leading up into the bus and turns to offer Oakes a wave.

He nods in appreciation. "When you figure out a better somethin' to all of this, you be sure to let me know. Never too late, even for old war dogs like me!"

Hayley busts a sly West Virginia grin, and then disappears inside the bus. The doors close soon enough, and a melancholic Oakes stays to watch the bus depart the brick depot.

In the years that followed, before Oakes officially retired from the army, he often thought about the best

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fighter he ever trained. It was easy to be reminded of Hayley's achievement. A framed picture of her in the ring with Rivas snapped by the base newspaper's photographer hung ceremoniously in the fitness center lobby. After a few visits to the bottom desk drawer where he kept a bottle of Old Grand-Dad, Oakes often found himself standing in front of the photo and musing on Hayley's improbable victory on that savage August night.

But when Oakes finally does leave the army, twelve interminable years on, and moves back north, to Detroit, he thinks less and less often about Hayley Chill and her powder blue eyes. Rarely does he dwell on that golden time, until another decade hence, when one Sunday afternoon he will be caught in gang-related gunplay, as if by a sudden April shower, and takes a .44-caliber round in his chest. As he serenely bleeds out, splayed on the filthy sidewalk just outside a liquor store, Stanley Oakes's last memory before he closes his eyes forever is of Hayley's otherworldly smile at the bus's doorstep.

1

MONROE PEOPLE

The WMATA Metrobus 38B crosses the Potomac on the Francis Scott Key Bridge, turning east on M Street and traversing a fitfully elegant Georgetown. Heading southeast and transitioning onto Pennsylvania Avenue, the city bus crosses Rock Creek and fully engages the brooding, low-slung metropolis that is the nation's capital. Hayley Chill, wearing a white blouse and ruffled hem cardigan from Dressbarn with dark straight-leg trousers and functional pumps, has claimed a window seat near the front of the bus. Her straw-colored hair has grown out from Fort Hood days, styled on a budget at Diego's Hair Salon on Q Street. JanSport bag on her lap, she is barely recognizable as the triumphant and bloodied boxer in the ring or subdued soldier in crisp service uniform mustering out of the army. Whatever the metamorphic process she has undergone in the fifteen months since saying goodbye to Stanley Oakes at

the Killeen bus depot, it has transformed Hayley Chill into an accurate facsimile of a DC worker bee.

It is 7:08 a.m. in late November and the weather clings stubbornly to Indian summer. Passing sights they've seen hundreds of times before, all other passengers on the bus are engrossed by handheld devices or asleep. But Hayley has ridden the 38B only once before, one week earlier, on a test run after signing the lease on a studio apartment just across the Potomac in Rosslyn, Virginia. Despite having grown up only a six-hour drive from Washington, DC, the city and its monuments are entirely new to her. She gazes out the window, gathering impressions of the passing city with the keen attention of a cultural anthropologist.

As the Metrobus eases to the curb at the southeast corner of Farragut Square, its last stop, Hayley disembarks with a dozen other passengers. The familiarity of another workday is etched on the bored faces of those stepping off the bus. Only Hayley moves with a surplus of energy and a brisk, five-minute walk south on Seventeenth Street brings the President's Park into view. She pauses on the sidewalk to take in the iconic sight. The White House, partially obscured by fern-leaf beech, American elm, and white oak, impresses her as both splendidly grand and surprisingly modest at the same time. She knows the building's original architect was Irish-born. She has memorized the names of every senior aide and their phone extensions. Somehow she has even ascertained what flavor ice cream the president is said to prefer. Unsurprisingly, Hayley Chill

has arrived for her first day of internship at the White House completely and thoroughly prepared.

A gatehouse opposite the EEOB controls entry into the White House complex, and Hayley joins the long queue there. The majority of staffers waiting in line have green badges on lanyards. Many fewer, including Hayley, possess blue badges. The young Park Police officer who performs the initial screening accepts her driver's license and checks it against her badge. He has warm eyes and a folksy grin.

"West Virginia, huh? I grew up in Lewisburg." His voice possesses the familiar twang of Hayley's tribe.

She nods. "Lewisburg. Sure. Nice."

"Blue badge," the Park Police officer remarks with surprised regard. He hands her ID back and gestures behind him, toward the White House complex. "Ready for the viper pit?"

Hayley laughs. "I hope so!"

The policeman waves her through the gate. "You have yourself a pleasant day, Ms. Chill."

She offers her hand. "Hayley, but you already know that."

He nods, shaking her hand. "Ned." Hayley continues forward as the line of people waiting for ID check lengthens behind her.

Once cleared through security screening, she and other arriving personnel are waved through an aggressive, final series of barriers and frowning Park Police. As instructed by email, Hayley passes through the Eisenhower Executive Office Building and continues

outside, onto West Executive Avenue. Nearly all interns receive green badges, designating their access as being limited to more prosaic confines of the Eisenhower building. Hayley's blue badge allows her to breeze past the Secret Service agents monitoring access between the EEOB and the White House's West Wing.

Hayley enters the West Wing through a door on the ground floor. She is older than the typical White House intern by at least five years. Her serious expression is evidence of a life lived without favor or entitlement. Self-delusion is a luxury she could never afford. Even as an eight-year-old sitting on the lap of a Charleston department store Santa reeking of Camel cigarettes and boiled onions, Hayley could tell a fake beard when she saw one. Nor is she unduly overwhelmed here, within these historic walls of the president's house.

Hayley pauses just inside the entryway to get her bearings, the plastic encasing her blue badge shiny and unscuffed. A passing man, cowboy handsome and wearing a dark suit, perceives Hayley's plight. "New intern?"

"That obvious, huh?" Hayley's demeanor is friendly and matter-of-fact. The Secret Service agent knows from experience that most new interns are like kindergartners on their first day of school, breathless and wide-eyed. For that reason alone, this young woman impresses him. He gestures toward her credentials. "They teach us how to decipher those doodads, oddly enough."

"I feel safer already," Hayley says, smiling.

“Whose office?”

“Peter Hall.”

“I’ve heard of him,” he responds sarcastically. He indicates a nearby stairwell door, but his hazel eyes remain on Hayley. “One flight up, go right, then right again. First door on your left. Can’t miss it.”

Hayley nods curtly, signaling she’s got it from here. The Secret Service agent is disappointed their encounter is over so quickly but covers with a wink, continuing on his way.

There have always been pretty boys on the periphery of Hayley’s life. Back home in Lincoln County, a roundelay of aggressive suitors vied for kiss, grope, or better from the most desirable girl for miles. Charlie Hadden, All-Conference quarterback and proud possessor of a cherry 1964 Pontiac GTO, hung in long enough to earn the mantle of Hayley’s high school boyfriend but too much Smirnoff and a hairpin curve on Sproul Road ended his tenure, and he died before she could gain what she had at long last decided to take. Hayley wore black for two months, fetchingly so in the opinion of would-be replacements.

Enlistment followed high school graduation by twenty-four hours, a day in which Hayley relinquished her virginity to a twenty-eight-year-old drifter who wrote love songs, had a mutt dog with a face like Bukowski, and played a pretty wicked twelve-string guitar. After that underwhelming initiation to the world of sex, Hayley had chosen to never attach herself to a steady mate. Her priorities were other than

romantic love, namely seeing that there was a roof kept over the heads of her younger siblings and food on the table. Nearly every penny of her army pay was sent back home. Pay scales are higher for infantry soldiers, all the inducement Hayley needed toward becoming one of the first eighteen women to earn her blue cord.

Once she's climbed the stairs to the first floor, Hayley finds herself in a carpeted corridor that muffles the footsteps of dozens of staffers and personnel hustling to and fro as if the nation's business really is important work. None pay the slightest notice to the new intern. Hayley threads her way along the corridor, dodging other staffers, and stops outside a door like all the others. On the wall to the left is a surprisingly unostentatious placard that identifies the office as belonging to the White House chief of staff.

Pushing the door open, Hayley ventures into the suite's reception area. No one is inside the compact room. The single, curtained window boasts a commanding view of the North Lawn and Lafayette Square beyond. An oil painting of a three-master blasting through a white-capped tempest hangs above the couch. Lights blink silently across an impressive phone console on the receptionist's desk. With no receptionist to offer guidance, Hayley is unsure what to do. She hears voices drifting from the partially open interior door.

Crossing the room, Hayley stops just inside the doorway leading into the suite's primary office and observes

sixty-three-year-old Peter Hall, wearing a suit jacket and tie, sitting behind a large desk and surrounded by a nervous litter of aides and assistants. The White House chief of staff has a black phone receiver pressed to his ear, barking into it as he scans papers held before him by his courtiers. In jarring contrast to his august work space, Hall's voice possesses the timbre of a high school football coach from west Texas, which in fact he once was before running for the state's Twenty-Third Congressional District and winning in an improbable landslide.

Representation of a mostly Hispanic constituency of five hundred thousand souls offered only modest horizons for an idealistically charged, ambitious former All-American tight end and only son of a Korean War veteran. Over the years, however, Peter Hall paid his political dues and amassed influence extending far beyond the dusty Twenty-Third district in Texas, stretching to every corner of the nation and beyond. But there are limits to power and prestige even for one of the highest-ranking politicians on Capitol Hill. Congress makes laws. The executive branch makes history.

Hall's salvation came in the form of Richard Monroe's stunning victory in the previous year's presidential election. The president-elect yielded to Hall's persistent lobbying and plucked him from the House of Representatives, installing him as chief of staff of a West Wing in need of congressional expertise. The president, an actual war hero, was the embodiment of

the electorate's craving for change in Washington and possessed the necessary gravitas to inspire that political revolution. But as political neophyte, he hadn't the legislative tools to effect his controversial agenda. Every great president needs a Peter Hall, that skilled mechanic who operates belowdecks and keeps the engine's machinery running.

Hall couldn't be happier with his role of president's loyal consigliere. There are only two directions on the chief of staff's moral compass: the president's way and the wrong way. Hall's fervent opinion is that Richard Monroe is America's last and best chance for survival as a democratic superpower. Political opponents, congressional naysayers, critics in the media, and hostile foreign powers are to be methodically destroyed, ignored, or neutralized. If Monroe simplified some of the complexities on certain issues and ironed away nuance with language his base could easily comprehend, so be it. No other political leader has come close in the last hundred years to furthering the basics of a party's political agenda. The time to strike the iron was now.

"Senator, the president is in fact the leader of your goddamn party and expects the votes he needs for passage of this bill!" Hall bellows into the phone, pausing for the unfortunate recipient of this abuse to fumble a reply, then resuming his tirade with even greater amounts of venom. "Hell yes, I'm shouting, 'cause you're clearly not hearing me, Senator! The other side is throwing every fucking thing they've got into

obliterating our mandate, and the goddamn media is passing them the ammunition!”

As Hall continues to verbally pummel the unnamed senator into submission, one of his aides glances in the direction of the doorway, where Hayley stands. Karen Rey, midthirties and furiously raven haired, with a master’s in English literature from UVA and a Bedlington terrier back home named Churchill, reacts with outraged expression to the unknown young woman’s presence in the gaping doorway.

Rey stands fully erect and darts across the expansive office, a Scud missile headed directly toward Hayley. She confronts the White House newcomer, and her question is neither gentle nor rhetorical. “Are you insane or just stupid?”

Hayley’s gaze is unwavering. Her voice is firm and clear. “Hayley Chill, ma’am. I’m interning for the chief of staff’s office.”

Rey sizes up Hayley with an incredulous gawk; the intern’s West Virginia drawl is often mistaken by some as a sign of slow-wittedness and unsophistication. Rey thrusts out her hand.

“Let me see your paperwork,” she snaps.

Hayley complies, retrieving the pertinent documents from her backpack. Rey briefly peruses the paperwork, arching her eyes in mild surprise.

“Military veteran?”

Hayley is used to such reaction to her military status. With her trim build and pretty face, she could easily be mistaken for a performer with Disney On Ice or

a retired beauty queen. “Third Cavalry Regiment, ma’am. Forty-Third Combat Engineer Company,” she informs the White House aide and intern wrangler.

“No college degree?”

“Two years at Central Texas College, ma’am, on the Active Duty Montgomery GI Bill.”

Rey looks up from Hayley’s paperwork and offers it back as if it were drenched in biohazard.

“The West Wing operates at a grueling pace, Ms. Chill, especially with this administration. No disrespect to your community college, but perhaps the First Lady’s office would be a better fit.” Her condescension is not gratuitous. Peter Hall’s persecution of the slightest incompetence is of DC lore. Hayley’s first significant flub would be on Rey’s head.

“Thank you, ma’am, but I believe I’m up to the task. Mr. Hall must think so, too.” Hayley flips to the last page of her sheaf of papers and offers it for Rey to see. “That’s his signature right there.”

Karen Rey’s expression goes flat. She silently leads Hayley back into the reception room and to the entry door. Stepping out into the corridor, she points toward the near stairwell as if casting a fallen angel from the heavens. “Interns live, work, and die downstairs.” Pronouncement issued, Rey turns and retreats back inside Hall’s office suite, closing the door behind her with an emphatic push.