

The Commander and the Chief

Book 3 Peacemaker

S. K. Smith

Copyright © 2017 S. K. Smith

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the author, except in cases of brief quotations embodied for the purposes of critical articles or reviews.

The characters, settings, and situations are all fictional. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, is pure coincidence.

The Commander and the Chief

Book 3 Peacemaker

Part 3 Santa Maria del Mar

Part 3

Chapter 1 Shooting Craps

That afternoon, Dr. Nova Orlovic, known as *the Chief*, scanned the vineyard, readied her shotgun. Through rose tinted safety glasses, her eyes appeared like red velvet chocolate.

“Pull!”

And Commander Reginald Barrett pressed the button. Launched a clay pigeon from the vines.

Tracking the clay’s leading edge, Nova swung her shotgun. Pulled the trigger. The saucer exploded. Its pieces rained down on the grapes.

Reggie looked up from his smart tablet.

“Another one, darling?”

“Oh, yeah.” Nova smiled with self-satisfaction. “Smoke.”

Reggie reached for the pen in his front pocket to mark her scorecard. He clicked it a few times. Gave it a curious look.

Sterling Silver. Antique. Fine writing instrument.

Yet he had no memory of where he had acquired such a quality pen. But it was among his personal effects that his son Robert and Lord Wise had collected from his East London flat. That was the end of January when he moved out permanently.

He shrugged. Marked Nova’s scorecard. Put the pen back in his front pocket and resumed reading the article on his tablet.

Nova was wearing her club’s sporting clays vest. Forest green. Embroidered with its emblem. A shooter popping out of a cluster of grapes.

A black braid looped through the back of her *Chief Rainmaker Winery* cap. High tech muffs covered her ears as well as the ears of the Commander. And that was a good thing. The protection cut out sudden loud noises. Such as bangs from shotguns.

Under the shade of a scrub oak, Reggie sat on the bench, next to Nova’s shotgun caddy. Clad in khakis, he covered his dark, wavy hair with a matching desert sun hat. Yet a gaze from his soft brown eyes as well as the sound of his posh British accent still weakened her knees.

The Chief had branded the Commander as her own. Husband number three. And he wore her cattle brand, engraved on his gold wedding band. *Bar Lazy-T 4*. That brand had been her father’s Montana cattle brand. Something she cherished.

While in London, Reggie had Nova’s wedding ring custom made. That was last month, in February, while she was in jail across the pond in California.

Now Nova’s wedding ring sparkled in the California sun. Diamonds, sapphires, and rubies. Colors of the Union Jack as well as the American flag. Symbols of their Anglo-American ties.

The Commander and the Chief had the strangest courtship ever. Short. Only a month. It began last December, after Nova had hired Reggie for her expedition into Karykistan. They married in the Middle East. Twice in January.

Once in the backside of the desert. Then a few weeks later, in the hospital prayer room of Bashan, Pisgah. With a proper UK marriage license the second time.

Today was the first day of spring. New beginnings. A new marriage. Life outside prison. And Nova and Reggie needed a holiday and had been relaxing at her cottage on the West Coast.

Nova opened up her shotgun, ejecting the spent shells into the trash by her shooting stand. She loved that gun. An over-under. It had belonged to her father. Nick Orlovic Senior.

Her dad had told her stories of growing up on the Montana homestead during the Great Depression and World War Two. He had used that shotgun to hunt rabbits and porcupines as well as other varmints. Extra meat for the family table. Much like what Jed Clampett had done, before he had struck oil, in those old *Beverly Hillbillies* TV show reruns.

“You really should try this, Reg.” Nova loaded two more shells that she had fished out from her vest.

“As you see, I’m still on the mend.” Reggie patted his right shoulder. “From being shot. With a *real* bullet.”

While in the Middle East, Russian thugs had ambushed Nova’s team. In the melee, Reggie was shot. A bullet had pierced his lung and fractured his collarbone.

Now he looked well. He had been doing exercises and recovered the full range of motion in his right arm.

“I’m sure you’ll never let me forget that.” Nova swung her shotgun into position for the next target. “And shooting guns...it can be so therapeutic.”

“But, darling. I know how lethal lead poisoning can be. Especially on humans. I can tell you from experience. It hurts like hell. Not to mention, it’s hell on the environment.”

“Not these shells.” Nova picked one from her vest pockets. “Fred patented them. The buckshot’s vitamins. Biodegradable. Formulated for my grapes. And the sporting clays, all made of manure from my ranch. Very good for the environment.”

“Indeed. Frederick Wise is quite wise.” Reggie chuckled. “Literally makes you money out of shite. I’d say he did quite well for himself when he left England to work for you in America. Not to mention your own cleverness. You get others to gladly pay for the privilege of tending manure in your vineyard. Now that’s what I call *shooting craps*.”

“Naw.” Nova shrugged. “It’s more like *White Washing the Fence*.”

Reggie raised a dark eyebrow.

“As in Mark Twain’s *Tom Sawyer*,” Nova explained. “When Aunt Polly made Tom white wash her fence, he bragged to his friends how fun it really was. And his buddies all bought it. They even paid Tom for the privilege of white washing his fence for him.”

“Ah, yes. Tom Sawyer.” Reggie grinned. “One of your great pieces of American literature. And all we Englishmen have are blokes like Shakespeare. Who wrote such trifles like *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*.”

“But you wouldn’t believe how many tourists...many from Europe ...they come to Wyoming and pay to work on my ranch.”

Then Nova readied her shotgun and gave the order for another clay. Reggie pushed the button to launch it. And she pulverized it into fertilizer.

The Commander was taking advantage that his wife had matriculated at Stanford. That meant he had access to the university’s extensive online library. Including its medical school. So while his bride engaged in sporting clays, he was reading up on the latest research on brains.

Then he got an alert on his tablet. Breaking news on Anglo-Broadcast News. *ABN-America*.

Normally, he’d ignore it. But the headlines grabbed him.

“Good Lord.” Reggie turned to Nova. “You won’t believe what your president has said you’ve done now.”

Nova set aside her shotgun for a closer look.

President Lincoln Todd mugged for the camera in Geneva, Switzerland. Next to President Todd, Premier Yasser Nasser, the dictator of Karykistan, flashed teeth through his black bushy mustache.

Lincoln Todd had presented a peace pipe to Yasser after signing the latest treaty between the United States and Karykistan. The President even praised Dr. Nova Orlovic for paving the way for this treaty. And as a Native American Indian Chief, Todd had said, she had wanted Yasser to have her peace pipe as a token of American goodwill.

“What the—” Nova expanded the picture of the peace pipe.

She spotted the markings in the red pipestone cup. *Bar Lazy-T 4*. Her dad’s cattle brand.

“I gave that peace pipe to Linc.” Nova squinted at Reggie. “When he was first elected president.”

“Did you?”

“It was...well...a peace offering.” Nova made a face. “You see, four years ago, I’d supported the reelection of President Boynton. While Connor was stumping for his good buddy, Linc, here.”

“And since Todd defeated Boynton, you’ve been on the warpath ever since.” Reggie smirked. “Now, it seems your president has passed on your peace pipe to another one of your favorite tyrants.”

Nova read the article on his tablet, then looked at Reggie.

“I said nothing about giving it to Yasser Nasser. But this story...it implies it’s *my* gift. What’s up with that?”

“Looks like your president has put words in your mouth. Again.” Then Reggie let out a chuckle. “Do tell. Are they really going to smoke that thing?”

“You don’t want to know what they smoke in those things.”

“Weed?”

“Close.” Nova widened her eyes. “Kinnikinnick. A mixture of leaves and bark. And sometimes they add a little bit of buffalo manure to hold it all together.”

Then Nova flashed a quick smile. “But hey, it wouldn’t be the first time Linc has blown crap out of his mouth.”

Reggie’s gazzard beeped. He got a text from Jacko. No surprise. He was expecting to hear from his old chum sometime today.

Game over.

And Nova and Reggie left the vineyard to attend to their newly arrived guests.

Part 3

Chapter 2 Circle of Trust

The Commander and the Chief retired to their cottage on the Pacific Coast. Slate blue with white wrap-around porches. Perched on a cliff overlooking the bay.

Nova parked her red pickup truck in the driveway, next to another pickup, painted in green camouflage with Nevada plates.

Reggie glanced at the bumper sticker on the other truck. A *Minute Man* from the American Revolution brandishing a rifle alongside the words: *From My Cold, Dead Hands!*

He turned to Nova.

"I see Jacko's soon-to-be father-in-law found your place, darling."

Three visitors, dressed in khakis, were enjoying the ocean views from the cliff. Jack Sheffield. Charlie Dickerson. And Frank Dickerson. They all turned around when they heard the pickup door slam.

Reggie and Jack slapped each other on the back. Nova greeted Jack, Charlie, and Frank with hugs. Charlie cautiously embraced Reggie, asking about his injured shoulder. Then Charlie introduced the Commander to her father, Colonel Frank Dickerson, retired.

Nova invited them in. Showed them to their rooms. When rested up, the five gathered on her deck. There, they could hear the rhythm of the waves crashing into the rocks. It was primal. Soothing.

The city of Santa Maria del Mar was behind them. The point across the bay was the Presidio. Below them, a dock with a boathouse provided access to the beach and to the ocean.

Nova reminisced when sailors would pilot the launch to ferry Admiral Quinn for duty at the Presidio. It was only a fifteen-minute cruise across the bay. Quicker by sea than by land. The Admiral and his people loved it. Sailing. A very navy thing to do.

With the ocean breeze on their faces, Nova served up a round of *Sapphire Mountain Ale*.

"This ale," Nova opened up the bottles, "is made from barley grown on my Wyoming ranch. The water from the Sapphire Mountains. Jewels of the Rockies."

She explained that Fred Wise, her major-domo, had set up the Wyoming microbrewery. Between the towns of Hanging Tree and Horsethief Creek, bordering her ranch.

Reggie lifted his bottle in a toast.

"To friends on both sides of the Atlantic."

Among those friends was Colonel Jack Sheffield of the British Army Reserves, whom Reggie called Jacko. Fair haired, in his early forties, Jack was an adventurer, soldier of fortune. He had done very well for himself, especially after leading Nova's expedition into the Middle East a few months ago.

Blue eyes twinkling, Jack twitched his blond mustache to a sidelong smile when he spotted the Commander and the Chief holding hands. He had known Reg and Boss Lady fancied each other. Before either of them would admit to it.

By Jack's side was his fiancée. Former US Navy Lieutenant Charlie Dickerson. She was a slender woman in her late-twenties, with gentle brown eyes, light brown hair, tied back in a ponytail.

While overseas, Charlie got riffed—let go from the service. Yet over there, she got engaged to Jack. And she had taken Jack to Nevada to meet her dad before they would tie the knot at Nova's Wyoming ranch.

Next to Charlie was her dad. Retired Air Force Colonel Frank Dickerson. In his fifties, his hair was a progression of platinum to steel gray. His face windburn. His body lean and hard.

"So you're the British Commander that swept the Chief off her feet." Frank looked over Reggie. "And following Admiral Quinn, that was a tough act to follow, son."

Reggie shrugged. "So I've been told."

"And the British Navy allows you to wear that earring?" Frank pointed to the diamond stud in Reggie's right ear.

"It's been a long tradition among us pirates, Colonel." Reggie grinned. "And other seagoing lads."

"As well as hippies and metrosexuals."

"But Frank," Nova said. "Reggie took a bullet for me."

"I'll give you this." Frank raised his bottle to Reggie. "You got balls, son."

"And I can confirm that." Nova flashed her teeth. "I'm his wife."

"In these politically correct times, it's hard to find a real man anymore." Then Frank gave Jack a look of esteem. "Yet I understand my future son-in-law lost his spleen defending you, Chief."

"Dad had to see Jack's scar, Nova." Charlie was admiring her pink diamond engagement ring. "The Colonel may have left his spleen in Bashan. But he got my heart."

"And he saved many Americans over there. As well as my little girl." Frank punched Jack in the arm. "Jacko, you're okay. That's why you're in *my circle of trust*."

"Jacko?" Reggie gave a curious look to Jack.

"You're not the only one that calls me Jacko, Reg," Jack said. "Now that I'm in Frank's circle of trust."

As they imbibed their brews, Frank wished to expand his circle of trust to include Nova and Reggie. And wanted the scoop on Lincoln Todd.

"But Frank," Nova explained. "We're all under a gag order. In the name of national security."

"You've heard the latest spin." Frank bit his lip. "They say those smears about you, Chief. Just cover for your secret negotiations with Yasser Nasser. All to pave the way for Todd's new peace treaty. Which he sealed in Switzerland with your peace pipe."

Nova rolled her eyes. "All I can say to that is *white man speak with forked tongue*."

"And I remember after your trial. The White House plastered that picture all over the news where you presented Yasser with a dream catcher to seal the deal."

"Yet I really did give Yasser that dream catcher. But for other reasons."

"And thanks to Jacko here, I know what those reasons really were." Frank punched Jack in the arm again. "You were *counting coup* with that evil bastard."

"More like counting coup 20 million times." Reggie gave a knowing look to Nova. She knew he was referring to the number of CyBytes recovered from the ring on the Admiral's cold dead hand.

"Be careful, Chief." Frank squinted at her. "Or you may get gagged permanently. Join the *Dead Friends of Linc Society*. If you get my drift."

"But Colonel," Reggie said. "As we've seen with the late Admiral, dead men do tell tales."

* * *

As the sun was getting low, Nova and Reggie barbecued on the deck. Buffalo burgers from bison raised on Nova's Wyoming ranch. And they enjoyed their dinner in the open air.

Frank licked the juice off his fingers. "One of these days, I'll have to give the Commander a tour of my doomsday prepper compound."

"It's impressive, Reg." Jack took a swig of ale. "Near Deadman's Basin. Between Death Valley and Area 51. Definitely could survive *the big one*."

“So I understand you actually worked at this mysterious Area 51, Colonel.” Reggie raised a dark eyebrow. “And you can tell us that?”

“Now that parts of it are declassified,” Frank said, “and you’re in my circle of trust.”

Then Frank winked at Nova. “I’m sure you’ve got your own impressive doomsday shelters on your ranch. Right, Chief?”

“What do you mean?” Nova asked.

“I’ve maps of where all those *Peacemaker Missile Silos* were. In Montana and northern Wyoming.” Frank grinned at her. “During the Cold War those nukes were pointed over the North Pole. Right at Russia.”

Nova took a breath. “There’re no nukes on my ranch, Frank.”

“Sure about that?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I might’ve looked over those silos with my own little eyes and seen what’s there and what’s not.”

“Ah-hah! So you admit it.” Frank flashed a smile to Reggie. “It’s not just any man whose wife has her own nuclear missile silos.”

“Indeed, not, Colonel.” Reggie opened wide his eyes. “Only in America.”

* * *

When they finished their burgers as well as a few more beers, Frank expressed more fears about Lincoln Todd’s anti-American shenanigans.

“From sources I can’t disclose...even to my circle of trust...I’ve an inkling of what Todd gives up in this new treaty with Yasser Nasser. And I can tell you this. It’ll be catastrophic for the free world. And only you, Chief, have the power to stop him.”

“How?” Nova asked. “The American people totally ignored my nephew’s stories about the Admiral’s death. With pictures, eyewitness reports, everything. Not to mention the cover-ups from the highest level in the White House. And the obvious meddling of Konstantin Popov in our elections.”

“Yet there’s something you can do, Chief,” Frank continued. “As the widow, you can give the order to exhume the Admiral’s body in Arlington. Do your DNA test. That should prove to the world that *Stinkin’ Lincoln’s* a liar.”

Nova rubbed her forehead. “But my man Fred Wise told me special ops had recovered Connor’s body. Knowing Linc, he had the *Todd’s Twits Task Force* do some grave digging. So if I had the body exhumed and the DNA checked and it matched?”

“Stinkin’ Lincoln would be bullet proof,” Frank conceded. “That evil bastard.”

Reggie grew a sidelong smile. “When things looked dark during World War Two, Sir Winston Churchill once said, *Never give up. Never give up. Never. Never. Never.* And we never did. And we defeated an evil bastard. Adolf Hitler.”

“But remember, it was American nukes that won that war, son,” Frank got the last word.

For more about this series, *The Commander and the Chief*, please visit: <http://smithsk.com/cc.htm>

And please feel free to check out the previous books in the series:

Book 1: His Tribe of One

Book 2: Counting Coup

Your readership is most appreciated.