

CHAPTER TEN

Vatican City

The Vatican secretary of state and Pope Agapetus III, along with the pope's personal aide, stood in the doorway of the study. The pompous man made no obeisance upon his entry. Instead, he merely nodded to the Secretary and waved to him in dismissal.

In protest, the secretary of state looked to the pontiff who merely nodded his agreement to the other before stalking from the room. The meeting commenced.

Afterwards, despite being accustomed to the focus of attention, Pope Agapetus III's personal aide quietly returned moments after the visitor had stormed out after the meeting. He had followed the Vatican's secretary of state, still seething at being commanded to leave the guest. He had, of course, not moved until His Holiness signaled with his eyes for the meeting to end. It had lasted all of five minutes.

The three men remained silent in the dark reading room where oversized, original leather furniture and thick velvet curtains did nothing to alleviate the stifling atmosphere. The heavy, dark furniture and thick velvet curtains did nothing to alleviate the stifling atmosphere as the two men shifted uncomfortably.

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Pope Agapetus III slumped deeper into a high-back leather chair, apparently lost in thought.

In the painful silence, both men waited. His Holiness's eyes were glazed, looking away from the visitor. A tame replica had replaced the robust Tiger known and beloved by both. What could be the purpose of this meeting to have this effect?

The Vatican's secretary of state could restrain himself no longer. Breaking the silence, he told the pope to leave the meeting. He had served loyally, and never before had a head of state been expelled from the walls of the sacred city without his presence. His anger even forced him to spew words of protest.

but Pope Agapetus III appeared to hear nothing.

The secretary of state had his back to his pontiff as he strode about gesturing and confidence in me, if he believes my position does not warrant being in such meeting choose another...”

The Vicar of Vicars stared into his hands and seemed lost. He caressed not his paws, the shape of a jaguar. In recent days whenever he prayed, the pope fondled the green velvet, a few centimeters in length. The great man examined the artifact, sighed deeply, then strode to his study room.

Just Outside of Raleigh, North Carolina Richard Dunstan's Personal Life

Some liked being woken by chirping birds and the sounds of nature. Dick Dunstan, an annoying cackle and whistle of small birds greeting the day, he was happy to be here in perfection, his three-storey brick home looked more like a Harvard University library. The ivy crawled up the red bricks and hugged the two chimneys at either end of the house for a good reason. When he was a young man, he was happiest in those buildings, as he networked.

Coming from the city, it always took him awhile to grow accustomed to the country.

the acres of trees. The house itself, he found too big. Dunstan's wife knew that and Dick felt lost. However, after living here for two years, she had told him she was moving into the White House. Her garden, her volunteer charities, her friends, even the dogs appreciated her warmth, would be missed.

Dunstan was equally proud of his children. Two of their children were still attending a Tar-heel at North Carolina. All three were studying for advanced degrees, and his oldest and youngest, a daughter, was rebelliously hitchhiking around Europe.

Richard had quickly grown bored with country life. He missed the connections that he had with his children; just ask any of the reporters who got too close to them. Even though his wife was more than one reporter aside along with his personal security staff and explained it to him,

no longer be seen near his family. He'd never had to repeat that warning.

After showering, Richard cursed the birds for waking him. He chuckled to himself Michelle Yakin, had volunteered to y to the Vatican, and pouted at the end of the presidential duty. Having her picture taken with the pontiff would have been quite fatigue, or more likely those legs of hers, but Dunstan had decided to toss her a bc

“The idea of a confessional was our Michelle’s. Thank you, Michelle.” The room applauded, and her television smile and quick wink dissipated the cloud over her l because he thought she was actually going to giggle.

How could this woman manipulate the electors? She was... vacuous. Someday he that word meant.

Having shared his trip to the Vatican with the inner circle, he was pleased they fel of the Republican Party, as well as the American fifth estate, had grown accustomed. The unspoken network news policy was to ask just enough questions that viewers make the audience uncomfortable. If that happened they might change the channe had the next president of the

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United States, in the middle of a campaign, rushed to Vatican City and ‘requested No one asked.

Richard Dunstan looked across at Michelle Yakin’s legs, and she gave him her sp nothing. There was only one reason why he went to confession, and Michelle Yak position of running-mate, Dunstan had explained to her why he needed to see the of the few times in his entire life that he had been genuinely surprised. Instead of only requested that it be her that saw the pontiff. He had lied and told her that woi knew the decision had already been made.

When told that it was a presidential duty, she had actually sulked, but Dunstan ha the information through one perspective—how did this affect her getting to the W good team player. Michelle Yakin could keep a secret, as well as any person in th interest.

Dunstan then attempted to wink back but knew he looked more as if he was having a moment. Michelle snuggled into her seat, content that she was one of the boys.

Having pacified the inner circle, Dunstan continued. “Now let’s get back to the real world.” He still relished the memory of the Pope’s shock.

In a positive frame of mind, he went to join his wife in the spacious yet surprising breakfast room. The room itself was crammed with the best European antiques, while the nook was sparsely furnished with a heavy-planked table and chairs. The glass sliding doors were open and the morning sun was streaming in.

His wife rang the solid silver, antique serving bell, a twentieth wedding anniversary tradition. Breakfast was to be served outside. Dick despised this habit because it meant she would have to get the maids around. He preferred to read his paper and catch up on the latest stock market news.

Richard also despised the cantaloupe and fresh fruits served. All he wanted was a pot of black coffee. His

His wife made sure he had fruit, cereal, skim milk, and orange juice. He wasn’t allowed to leave without her presence.

With the maids dismissed, he and his wife sat in early morning perfection. Civility was shared between them. Richard loved his wife. Her tiny frame, perfectly coiffed hair, and warm blue eyes belied a steel will. Richard had lost too many arguments, even to her, but he respected her in the utmost respect.

“How was your meeting with the Pope?”

Richard glanced around, making sure no one was close. “Meeting, yes, it went well. I spoke before colleagues or national television and say one thing while doing the exact opposite of what I was trying to say convincingly to his wife.

“Dick, I’m not an idiot. That was no meeting you had with Pope Agapetus III.”

Richard looked up from toying with his cantaloupe. Damn, she was smart. “How

She smiled contently. “I haven’t seen a single TV report about you and him together in the middle of the campaign to seek guidance and spiritual insight. You? What a lot of bible-thumpers, but not me. You’d never miss an opportunity for those sound-bite interviews, intimate and private, but I know you. If you had the choice, you would have the power to tell me, why did you really go?”

A shadow passed quickly across his face. He looked into his wife’s eyes and slowly drew a line that in their entire marriage he had never drawn before. No one had a right to

Clearly unsatisfied, she apparently begrudgingly accepted his non-answer. Richard

“Our daughter, is still ‘finding herself’ in Europe?” he said.

“Yes, the last letter indicated that she and some friends were thinking of changing to Paraguay, places like that. She might have also mentioned Peru.”

For one of the rare times around his wife, Richard Dunstan lost his composure. He stood on the patio’s Italian

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glazed tiles. Juice splashed and glass shattered everywhere. Immediately a maid appeared to clean up the mess.

“Leave it. Get out of here.”

His wife immediately scolded him. Years ago, she had laid down the ground rules for behavior to be aimed at the help. Richard ignored his wife’s response and stomped out, into the

A few minutes later, Richard felt her hand slip into his. When he was in this mood, he would quiver. He admired his wife’s courage, but she had the advantage because she knew how to do anything to harm or hurt her. His pace slowed.

“What’s wrong, my love?”

Whenever she used that phrase even his draconian heart softened. “Uruguay, Para

American countries, our daughter must not go there... none of them... She said Pe

“Why, my love?”

He turned and tried to look lovingly into her eyes, but his anger overwhelmed him
talisman in his pocket.

“She must not... she must never go to Peru. Please keep her out of South America

His wife nodded. “Then I’ll do all I can to dissuade her.”