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Chapter 1

Kristina Lansing, a slender young woman wearing a snappy silk blouse and shiny black slacks, pushed the button and waited for the elevator on the twelfth floor of her condo building. She took a step toward a small marble statuette and gazed out the window at a few boats already docked early in the season at a private pier on Boston Harbor. Treetops lined walking and jogging paths below.

The elevator door dinged. She turned and greeted a man she knew.

“Good game last night,” she said as she walked in and stood next to Bryan Mackey.

At six-four he towered over her. “Thanks.”

He had close-cropped dark hair with a hint of curls, and blue eyes that mirrored the sea and sky she had just admired.

She tucked a lock of her shoulder-length blond hair behind her ear. “The umpire squeezed you a few times... glad those bad calls didn’t rattle you.”

“They were borderline,” he said, “could have gone either way.”

The bell rang again at the mezzanine. He put his hand against the door to hold it and said he was going for breakfast in the condo café. “Care to join me?”

She glanced at him and hesitated for half a second. “I’ll get a coffee to go. It’s already after eleven, and I have a dozen calls to make to confirm arrangements for next week’s road trip.”

Bryan opened the glass door to the café and she walked in with an easy glide. They’d played this scene before. “What would your father do without you?”

She stopped at the self-serve coffee bar. “He’d hire someone else in one day. Anyway those pitches in the seventh looked good to us and he was impressed you were still throwing 92.”

Bryan stood by the hostess podium as Kristina put a cap on a medium decaf. “Always good to impress the owner,” he said.

Kristina raised her cup to the hostess indicating it could go on her tab. “Enjoy your breakfast,” she said to Bryan and continued on her way to the underground garage. She beeped open her BMW coupe, slipped the coffee in the console holder, and maneuvered her way toward the exit and Arborway Park, home of the Boston Bobcats.

John W. Lansing had made a fortune in investment banking, and as an early retirement gift to himself, he purchased the Bobcats. But managing the daily affairs of a professional baseball team was not exactly leisure. He hired a crew of executives at six-figure salaries and gave them each a title. Their tasks included scouting other teams, acquiring

young talent, investigating new revenue streams, and packaging trades.

The actual deals, however, he controlled himself, seeking advice from a small group of confidants which included his only child, Kristina. She had an MBA from Harvard Business School and had taken a keen interest in the Bobcats since her graduation four years ago. He'd made her Vice-president and put her in charge of all personnel needs. Her duties included managing all team travel and occasionally warranted use of the private jet they leased.

Kristina sat in her office that overlooked a pristine stadium, perfectly maintained. Two high-definition video screens dominated an emerald centerfield, while the original manual scoreboard gave leftfield the dignity of history. She was on the phone with the manager of the InterContinental Hotel in Baltimore when her father walked in without knocking. He paced by the window while she finished her call.

"Glad to see you finally came in," he said after she hung up. "I've been looking for you since nine."

"Good morning to you too, Dad." She motioned to a nearby leather chair. "Sit down and relax. When people work until after 11, as I did last night, we don't normally go to work at 8 a.m. like you."

"That's why I'm the boss here." He sat down and ran his fingers through thick white hair. "And since when is watching a baseball game called work?"

"Since you hired me for Boston Bobcats, Inc. and made it clear you expected officers to attend games and take mental notes of all significant details."

He picked up a gold pen from her desk and tapped it against his other palm. "I was there in the box with you. What did you think of the chorus of boos after Nate Jackson struck out?"

"I think you should think about moving him before he loses trade value. He's a weak link in the lineup and

meanwhile Krepski's spending most of his time sitting on the bench."

"Krepski's too young... unproven. The opposing pitchers don't know him yet. Next time through the rotations he might not be so lucky."

"He's got a real sweet swing. Not so sure it's luck. He's had success at every level he's played since college."

"I'll talk to Buddy and feel him out on the matter."

John Lansing never made a personnel move without consulting the field manager, Buddy Thompson. Not only did he consider it polite, he had respect for Buddy's evaluation of player performance and his knowledge of the game.

Kristina put out her hand to stop him as he began to rise from his chair. "Can you stay a minute? We have another issue. The Baltimore InterContinental is facing a serious room problem next weekend. A Congressman's daughter is getting married there next Saturday and the President has decided to attend. That means they need extra rooms for Secret Service. They've asked our cooperation in moving some players and staff to the Renaissance. I'll be the first to agree to stay there and will take care of asking others to volunteer. What do you and Mom want to do?"

"Elizabeth likes the InterContinental. I don't think she'd want to move."

"No problem. I should be able to get twenty people to cooperate."

Mr. Lansing stood up quickly. "Twenty rooms for Secret Service! You must be joking."

"Well, the First Lady has her staff too. Actually, I don't think it would be a bad idea to move everyone. There will probably be times when areas of the hotel are blocked for security. If you explained to Mom about the inconvenience, she might agree to move."

"Are you kidding? Nothing would give Elizabeth more excitement than catching a glimpse of the Prez. As soon as she hears about this she'll ask you to get us a room on the same floor as him."

“Maybe you should remind her I work for the Bobcats, and as such, my responsibilities are for their well-being, not hers. But she’s your guest, so I’ll try to accommodate you both. Hope you make the Saturday night game by eight o’clock. Should be about the same time they start serving champagne and hors d’oeuvres for all the Washington elite.”

Mr. Lansing tossed the pen on her desk. “Let me know the outcome,” he said, then he turned and went out the door of her office as quickly as he’d come in.

Kristina opened her laptop and found the phone number of the Renaissance Hotel. Before she could ask anyone to move, she had to secure the rooms. They had enough to accommodate the overflow, but not enough for everyone. Without missing a beat she began typing a letter to all travelling personnel. She explained the hotel situation and asked people to call or email her if they’d be willing to volunteer to stay at the Renaissance.

If she didn’t get twenty people, she’d move the least senior staff and players. Bryan Mackey called as soon as he reached the locker room and read her memo.

“I like the Renaissance,” he said. “Their bar stays open late and serves a great sauce with the fresh steamed crabs.”

“How would you know that?” Kristina asked, both curious and amused. “We’ve never stayed there before.”

“I ended up there one night with friends when I was in college and we played University of Maryland.”

“Sounds like a pricey eatery for college students.”

“It was, but we were in training then so there was no drinking. Four of us chipped in for an order of crabs. It wasn’t much food for hungry athletes, but one of the guys claimed they were a ‘must’ in Baltimore. Plus we tried to fill up by asking for extra cole slaw and bread.”

“I’ll be sure to give them a try next weekend.”

There was an obvious pause, so Kristina thanked him for being flexible and hung up her phone with a smile. She couldn’t imagine Bryan Mackey, the Bobcats’ ace right-handed pitcher, and bearer of a twelve million dollar

contract—and incentive package—close to broke in Baltimore.

But she wasn't surprised he'd been the first to call. They'd developed a friendship of sorts during spring training when routines were more relaxed than during the season. The team had hosted its annual 'Welcome Back' dinner in Florida and Kristina had enjoyed getting caught up with players and their families at the event. But Bryan, still single at twenty-nine, attended alone. He and Kristina had found themselves sitting beside each other when the meal was served. They also found the Southern-style pork roast to be the best they ever tasted.

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By the end of the next day Kristina had more than enough players volunteer to move to the Renaissance. Not only did they wish to avoid the commotion of the President, they would've gladly helped her resolve any problem. She was always sensitive to their family needs and accommodated special travel requests more often and willingly than most professional team managements.

Her mother called her at home that night.

"What do you know about the President and First Lady?"

"They live in the White House," Kristina said only a tad sarcastically. "He's in a budget battle with Congress, and she's worn Marc Jacobs at least once."

Elizabeth Lansing had a self-serving agenda in most everything she did. "How do you know that?"

"The first two points are common knowledge. As for her clothing, I saw a picture of her in a retro outfit hanging on the wall in Jacobs' Newbury Street store."

"Don't test me, Kristina. Just tell me what you know about them being in Baltimore."

"I already told Dad everything I know. It sounds like he already told you too."

“Give me every detail.”

“The older daughter of Representative Sloane of Maryland is getting married at the InterContinental Hotel next Saturday evening. Sloane and the President served on some of the same committees in Congress and are friends.”

“Do you know what floor they’re staying on?”

“No.”

“What floor did they kick you off?”

“I don’t know. I never make special room requests like you do.”

“I want to be as close to the President as possible.”

“I’m not doing that. I requested your usual room for you.”

“Kristiiiiinnnaaaaaa.”

“Mothaaaaaa.”

Elizabeth was like the rash of poison ivy. “This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and I don’t want to miss it.”

“We’re arriving Thursday night so that gives you more than enough time to scope out the hotel and find the best vantage point for gawking.”

“Really, Kristina. You act as if it’s shameful to want to catch a glimpse of the First Family.”

“You’re welcome to do whatever you wish, Mother. I’m going to Baltimore on business and would rather not encounter any hindrances to performing my job.”

“You take everything so seriously. Your father gave you that job; it’s not like you’re going to get fired if you take a few minutes for your own pleasure.”

Kristina thought she’d swallowed a bone. She took a few slow breaths—deep. “Is there anything else I can do for you tonight?” she asked through taut lips.

“I don’t see that you did anything for me yet, so I’m still waiting.”

“You have a seat on the plane, departure from Logan one hour after the end of Thursday night’s game. Your driver has been alerted and you have a reservation in your usual

room at the InterContinental. Whatever else you want to do is up to you.”

“But that’s so late and inconvenient. It could be two o’clock in the morning by the time we check in. Why can’t we fly at a normal time like normal people?”

“Because you’re flying on Dad’s plane and that’s the time he wants to go. After the game. We’re not normal people. He owns the Boston Bobcats and he takes his work seriously, like me.”

“He’s just playing with that team. He doesn’t have to act like it’s his livelihood.”

“The Bobcats generate solid revenue. If you took more interest, you’d realize that.”

“I take interest. I go to a lot of games. I travel to a lot of the cities.”

“I’m glad, Mother. It’s nice of you to keep Dad company.”

“Isn’t that what a good wife should do?”

“Yes, Mother.”

“And I didn’t try to block his purchase of the team.”

“You could support him a little better by taking a more than superficial interest. You could participate in fund-raising charitable activities.”

“I participate.”

“You accompany Dad to the events he commits to, but you could do even more on your own. You have name recognition, charisma when it pleases you to use it, and dogged determination. You could make a difference to society.”

“That sounds so boring. Besides... I *am* society.”

“Yes, Mother. See you Thursday night on the plane. Save room for the shrimp cocktail and other delectable snacks I ordered for the flight.”

“That’s too late to eat, makes no sense at all.”

“Mother. You’re welcome to either eat or not eat. Come or not come. Why can’t you try to be cheerful every so often?”



“Temper temper, Kristina. Not very becoming.”

“Is there anything else?”

“Ta-ta, dear. Don’t forget the blanc de blancs.”