



## CHAPTER 29

Claudia waited in the Prime Minister's suite. Getting the meeting proved easy. She and Jack Hepburn had taken a shine to each other. They had met on three earlier occasions, and each time their mutual respect deepened and they were both relaxed in each other's company. But today she found it difficult to stay focused.

She fought hard to keep her thoughts on track and organise them in a logical sequence. Just when she was about to give up and simply play it by ear, the PM's personal assistant announced the prime minister was ready to see her. For a nanosecond her confidence took a dive, but she recovered quickly, smiled her thanks and entered the office with her head held high, and her shoulders braced.

'Good Morning Claudia. It is good to see you again. Please sit down.'

'Thank you Prime Minister.'

'Now I thought we had an agreement that it would be Jack when we're alone.' He said in a fatherly tone.

'Thank you sir, but it's still a little strange for me to call you by your first name.'

'Nonsense my dear. Titles are like labels on the files in a cabinet; they help you find the particular person you need, but they are a huge barrier to friendship building. Titles are great for governments and corporations, but friends are just plain old Tom, Dick, Harry or Samantha. The title just gets in the way.'

'I agree sir. They do get in the way.' Jack Hepburn smiled at her. In such a short time this young woman had become the daughter he had always wanted. He was greatly impressed by her work but mostly he was impressed by the fact she was honest and open. What you saw, was what you got. He liked that. The world needed more young people who could tell it like it is, and still remain calm and focused.

'So what brings you here today?'

'Rather unpleasant business I'm afraid sir.'

'Really? Then I think I should have some tea brought in. It helps to clear the throat during dust storms.'

'I think it will be more of a hurricane than a storm, sir.'

Jack Hepburn braced himself. 'Then we must protect ourselves from flying debris Claudia, my dear.'

The Prime Minister listened to her attentively. He quickly sorted her story into key points and mentally highlighted their direct impact on his government. When she was done, he passed her a cup of tea. 'Take this, your throat needs a break.' Claudia thanked him and tried hard to gauge his reaction to what she'd just told him. It was impossible to tell if he was angry, anxious or plain nonplussed. 'The New York associate you speak of my dear has been drawn to the road of many great and powerful people end up travelling.'

'And which road is that sir?'

'The road of personal greed. It's a wide one and travelled by many famous individuals. Napoleon and Caesar are two who come readily to mind.' He looked sad, 'Your associate, Angus, has fallen into the universal black-hole. It's a deep and lonely place for any human to be in. Let's hope he finds a way out.' He leaned back and sipped his tea thoughtfully. 'Don't look so distressed my dear; worse things have happened to me this year. By comparison to terrorist attacks, this is just a minor distraction.'

They talked for an hour and then Jack Hepburn recapped. 'Christoph Zelig has arranged TV coverage for the day after tomorrow, and of course we all know that once that hits the media will start their usual tirade. It doesn't give us much time, but I think something can be arranged.' He looked at her intently. 'As long as you are certain the software is problem free, and my people agree with you, I think we can move our announcement forward a few weeks. Cabinet has all the reports they need. The minister for the environment completed his a few days ago. His department worked day and night to compare your data against all the other models we've been studying for the past two years. He is certain your projections are highly credible. I met with Minister Bellingham this morning, and he advised me to announce our relocation plan, sooner rather than later. He's hoping I will make a formal press statement within days.

I'll talk to our press people and they can work out the release details. Let's just go over the details of your friend Christoph's press conference again. Claudia explained that Christoph intended to expose the fact that the data provided by EcoLogic had been deliberately changed so that the results lessened the threat of rising sea levels. She said he was also going to tell people his partner, Angus, had formed an alliance with the Kappa Insurance group. She stressed that Christoph had a number of reports that would easily prove the data had been compromised, and he intended to show how it was done, then he would leave to the TV viewers to draw their own conclusions. He wanted to get the truth out and to start people talking.

Hepburn carefully compiled his own list of questions. Before he made any decisions he needed to clarify a few things. He wanted proof that Angus and Kappa Insurance had met. Answer: Yes; on a number of occasions. Did Christoph have proof that the data had been changed? Yes: a lot of proof, memos, meeting minutes, letters to and from the key players, as well as Andrew's cross checking. Was Christoph prepared to watch his life's work go up in smoke? Yes.

'Well young lady, I think it's time for us to speak to the nation.' He gave her a sympathetic smile, 'Of course you realise EcoLogic will suffer from the fallout. Are you ready for that?'

'Absolutely sir. If we go under as well, then so be it. EcoLogic is a small price if we save lives sir.'

The PM gave her a reassuring smile, 'It may not come to that. If I can get my people's support we should be able to handle any negative fall out. I will hold a press conference and tell the people AtmosFear modelling is accurate and release the details about our relocation plans. People will be too worried about their own properties and lives, to worry too much about any negative reports coming out of New York.' Her quiet determination touched him; he knew how much EcoLogic meant to her.



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