Chapter 22

While he heated up his lunch in the microwave, Art looked forward to the possibility of seeing his family on CNN. He hoped that they would cover it live, but lately everything the President-Elect did was broadcast as it happened.

Billings and Cushman had the rebroadcast of a football game on the TV, so Art didn't say anything until just before 1:00.

"Boys, I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to pull rank on you here."

They looked at him questioningly.

"Ethyl and David got passes to meet the First Lady today and it just might be on CNN. Your football is going to have to wait."

"Yes, sir." Cushman said, in a mocking tone, standing up, snapping to attention, and saluting.

Billings looked at Cushman and shook his head. He then tossed the remote to Art.

Art tuned to CNN and saw a talk show. He switched to CNN Headline News; they were talking about the Middle East. Then he tried FOXNEWS and MSNBC, still nothing.

He tried going through those channels again, and again. Nothing, nothing, and nothing.

"How about one of the C-SPAN channels?" Cushman offered.

Art tried C-SPAN1 and, sure enough, the first thing he saw was the First Lady making her way along a rope, shaking hands. Beyond her, Art caught a glimpse of Ethyl. Next to her was David, who was holding Jamie.

From the side, Susan's head entered the picture, saying something to the First Lady. She replies something and then turned and went straight to Ethyl.

Cushman and Billings started to cheer and applauded.

Billings teased, "ain't gonna be no living with her now, Art."

Art smiled and shot back, "I just hope she can tell me who's going to pay for the new dress she's wearing."

They all listened as the First Lady talked to Ethyl, with a phony looking smile and a voice that was loud enough to make it obvious that it was meant for the microphones.

"Sally?" Art said in amusement. "She doesn't even know the names of the people on her detail. My daughter-in-law is name Susan."

They all laughed. Art laughed even harder, when the camera caught a shot of Ethyl and David, in near hysterics, in the crowd.

The camera then turned to cover a speaker, who had stepped up to the microphone and was saying something about dedicating a plaque to commemorate something or somebody.

Art wasn't paying much attention to what she was saying. He was watching the First Lady, who was apparently arguing with someone on a cell phone.

She was waving her arms around and apparently yelling, although the microphone didn't pick up any of what she said.

Finally, she looked up behind her and took the phone from her ear.

Above and behind the First Lady, about 1000 feet above the Potomac was an airliner, apparently on its final approach to the airport. Art couldn't make out the markings, but the First Lady looked terrified of it.

Suddenly, without warning, the airliner, and the rest of the scene, disappeared in a flash of white. Almost immediately, the screen was filled with static.

"What happened?" Cushman yelled. "Did that plane just explode?"

"My God!" was all that Billings could manage.

They watched the static for about thirty seconds, waiting for the picture to return. Then Art switched to CNN.

"…in an apparent bomb blast over the Potomac River in Washington, D.C.," the reporter was saying. "This just in, our San Francisco office is reporting that a second blast has occurred, at approximately the same time as the one in Washington, this one over the area known as Silicon Valley, in the San Jose area of California."

"Shit, two of them." Cushman said softly sitting back down.

Art was in tears and started punching the buttons, changing the channels. "No, no! What about D.C.? What happened in D.C.?"

All of the C-SPAN channels were off the air, as was FOX News.

Cushman got up and gently took the control back from Art, who laid his head down on the table, crying.

Billings moved over next to Art and put his arm around his shoulders. "We don't know what it was, Art. They may be alright?"

Cushman turned the TV back to CNN.

The same reporter, his eyes now moist, was saying, "reports of a third explosion, that's correct, a third bomb exploded over the East River, between Manhattan and Queens, in New York City."

"Christ!" Was all that Cushman could say.

Another reporter broke in, apparently because the first one was just sitting there, staring at the camera in shock. "CNN is receiving reports of heavy death tolls in the areas of each of these explosion, but of a relatively low amount of property damage. Disaster

response crews in the Washington, D.C. area have detected high levels of radiation several miles from the site of the explosion. No one here is sure at this time, but we hope to have some idea soon as to what type of devices may have be used in these heinous attacks."

Art raised his head and anger was burning its way through the tears in his eyes. He knew what had been used and he had a good idea where they came from. And now he was going to get to the bottom of this.