

HOSTAGE

Bill Carver

2/21 10:37am

The President of the United States and the Vice-President were alone in the Oval Office. They each had a coffee in hand and were sitting at the opposite ends of the leather couch. The President leaned back against the arm of the couch as he faced the VP. The VP was looking at a point on the wall above the left shoulder of the President. He was holding his coffee in his right hand and the paper that he just finished reading in his left hand.

The VP said, "This certainly is an intriguing idea."

The President smiled and said, "I think that it's something that should be done. I got the idea after what happened to the Chancellor of Germany, before we won the election. I think that it can be an effective countermeasure to some of the actions that others can take toward us."

"But isn't this running away from the problem?"

"No. It's just a tactic to use. A different way of taking the initiative away from an enemy."

The Vice-President met the eyes of the President. He broke eye contact and leaned over to lay the paper on the coffee table in front of the couch. He settled back into the couch and took a sip of his tepid coffee. He looked back to his political marriage partner and started to smile.

The President returned the smile because he knew that he had gotten the VP to agree. Years of political battles in Congress had honed his senses for his inevitable victories.

The VP broke the silence, "Why don't you just order me to sign this paper and move onto the next item on your agenda?"

The President raised his eyebrows, his sign of surprise, at the unexpected question and the tone behind it. He recovered quickly and answered, "Because, if this is to work it has to be followed through exactly as it's laid out. If you don't willingly agree with me, then I could never be sure that it would be put into action when needed. You have to sign the paper because you agree with me and that you will follow through. This is a radical plan for the White House to implement and you need to see the necessity for it."

The President sipped his coffee and looked at his running mate. *Why couldn't have I got a real political animal for my running mate instead of this hotshot businessman?* The VP was a shotgun partner by the money men behind the President's run for the office. The VP made himself a hero in the business world turning around a company by shutting down his US plants and moving them to Asia. And he was seen as the man to help get the budget under control. A real politician would see the genius of this idea and wouldn't hesitate to sign. A businessman sees things as the boss being right all the time and what the boss wants should just be followed by the men under him. Not in politics. In politics agreeing to anything can

work two ways. First, if it works, it can be said you agreed to go along with my idea. If it doesn't work, blame can be spread around because you agreed to the idea.

The Vice-President smiled and said, "I see one of those political lesson speeches in your eyes on why I should sign. I don't want to get you worked up before lunch on my account. Before I sign, will this hold up legally?"

The President returned the smile and replied, "You're getting to know me better. That could start making me nervous. Yes, it'll hold up legally. I checked with the Chief Justice and what we're going to sign will hold up. In fact, after you sign your paper, I'm taking both our papers and the CJ is to going sign as a witness. He'll be involved anyway if we need to implement these papers. I'm satisfied on the legal end of this plan."

"You seem to have it covered. Okay, I'll sign my paper and I will go through with the directions if I ever need to do them if the time comes. Although, I can't imagine when that time may happen."

"I hope that it never happens. But it can't hurt to have the plan in place. You sign your paper. I've already signed mine. When I have the CJ witness the papers, I'll keep your original and you keep mine. Keep it in a safe place."

"Definitely. You mentioned a codeword you want to put into place to activate the plan?"

"I won't quote Shakespeare."

"What?"

"That's the code. I won't quote Shakespeare."

"Strange phrase."

"I'm not a fan of his. Others quote him. I don't think that I ever have. It's a phrase that can be put into a speech. It's easy to remember."

"I'll certainly remember it."

The VP reached into his shirt pocket and removed one of the pens that he always carried around. He leaned over the coffee table and gave one last reading of the paper that was laying on the coffee table. He then signed his legal signature on the line that was above his typed name. He didn't date it as he was instructed. He picked up the paper and handed it across the middle seat of the couch to the outstretched hand of the President. He leaned back while putting the pen back into his pocket.

The President took the paper and read it over. Even though he had personally typed it out earlier this morning.

The President said, "I'll get the papers back to you sometime later in the week. I meet with the Chief Justice for lunch on Wednesday. When the time is needed, just put the proper date on the paper and we're all set. Remember, not a word to anyone. There are three of us who know about this plan. No one else is to know."

"Don't worry. I won't tell a soul."

7/22 2:37pm

The network and cable stations interrupted their afternoon programming with their million dollar anchors to make the announcement.

"Today in Baltimore, the President of the United States was taken captive by terrorists after finishing his speech for the Union of Lobbyists."

A pause.

“Details are incomplete. But our sources are reporting and video tapes show that as the President was leaving the building, smoke bombs and tear gas were thrown from within a crowd that had gathered on the street to see the President. A voice from the crowd then stated that there were human bombs in the crowd. If the President attempted to leave the area the bombs would go off. The President’s limousine is still surrounded by Secret Service agents and the local police. The crowd is still in place because the authorities will not let them leave and the terrorist spokesman in the crowd said that bombs would be set off if the crowd is broken up. Our reporters in the area are being held there by authorities and are being prevented from communicating with us at the studio.”

“To the credit of the Secret Service and the Baltimore police, no shots have been fired and we have no indication of any injuries. Just a lot of confusion.”

The anchorman looked up from his Teleprompter and continued, “We now have a latest report from our woman on the scene who has our White House beat.”

He paused to listen to the report coming over his earpiece.

He licked his lips and then said, “One human bomb carrier has surrendered to the Secret Service to prove that they are really armed. He is in custody and we have confirmation that he was actually wired with a bomb. They have ordered the President to leave the limo and go back into the lobby where they will make their demands known.”

Another pause as he listened to the voice in his earpiece.

“The President has been seen leaving his vehicle and is going back into the lobby of the hotel. We have reports that at least six people, wearing gas masks, are following the President into the lobby. The spokesman claims that there are a dozen bombers and that six of them will join the President in the lobby. There they will make their demands known.”

“We do now have some film of the attack and also a picture of the spokesman. When we come back after the video our terrorist and security experts will be with me to discuss this Kidnaping Of The President.”

On the screens of television sets appeared the artwork depicting the new logo for this latest crisis.

7/22 3:02pm

The Vice-President was hustled on a plane in Houston where he had been addressing oil executives over the energy policy that they wanted the government to put in place. Only when the plane was airborne did the agent in charge of security of the VP able to relax.

The VP sat in his favorite chair on the plane and watched the reports from four different networks on the Kidnaping Of The President.

7/22 3:22pm

The President was surrounded by his agents in the corner of the lobby. The six bombers were spread throughout the lobby. They were near the innocent citizens trapped in the lobby and the hotel’s workers. His agents didn’t allow any bombers near

the President but they understood that in the lobby six bomb blasts would cause a lot of damage, so the President was not still not out of danger.

The President sat in the soft lobby chair and looked around the lobby. He was really working on how this would affect his Presidency. Heads would roll in the Secret Service for letting this happen. He would also have the laws on crowd control changed so that people could not get this close to the President when he traveled. He figured that this was going to help his agenda because of the sympathy he could get out of this incident. It was just a matter of him not getting killed. He was not going to beg these people to talk to him. Let them come to him. It would look good to the people in the lobby to see him firm and confident. He also noted that six reporters that he knew were in the group of hostages.

7/22 6:35pm

The VP arrived at the situation room of the White House and was filled in completely on the situation as the investigators knew it. They were even able to identify three of the bombers from surveillance videos that they had taken of the crowd before the attack.

What they found out about the terrorists made everyone nervous. Those men had nothing to lose.

7/22 7:17pm

The President said, "You put together quite an effort to capture me."

The man had removed his gas mask and when the President saw his face he was surprised. The man was in his mid-fifties, graying hair and a Mid-Western accent. *He should be mowing the lawn instead of threatening me.* The man was sitting across from the President. His bomb had been removed and placed on the top of the check-in counter while he remained in control of the detonator. The Secret Service would not allow the man to talk to the President while still carrying a bomb.

The President shook his head to get his thoughts back online. He continued, "Do you have a name? Or does your merry band of bombers have a tag?"

"No. I'm sure that the media will come up with one for us. We don't care about that. I'm sure that you'll find out my name when this is all over. But we need to make our point and this is how we decided to do it. We can't get through all the shields that you use to keep away from average Americans. So we thought of this plan to get you to listen to us."

The President sighed and drummed his fingers on the arm of the chair while saying, "Okay. You have my attention. I'm a busy man. I hope your demands aren't ridiculous or way out there. Either way, I have no attention of meeting them. Are you planning to ask for money?"

The man shook his head and smiled at the President then said, "Money has no meaning to us. We have you as our captive. That's quite a statement in itself. We'll take that as a major victory and work from there."

"You know. I don't care what you want. You're not going to get it. You'll rot in jail for the rest of your lives. I don't care. We'll break you and we'll get the story behind this whole thing."

The man coughed weakly and then looked at the President.
Then he then proceeded to tell the President his single demand.
The President lost his composure for a moment as the man shocked him with his demand.

7/22 9:45pm

The Vice-President took the call in the Oval Office where he had set up his command center for the crisis. He had talked with the FBI and the military about a strike to take out the terrorists but they were worried about spies outside the building warning those inside of their movements. They were making plans, but as long as the President was safe and nothing was happening except the media going crazy and with no statements from the terrorists, they decided to hold off any extreme measures until the time for a rescue attempt was more ideal.

The VP picked up that phone that had rung.

The first words from the President were, "These guys are nuts!"

"That probably goes without saying. How are you holding up? Any words for the wife?"

The question about his wife threw the President off of his rant. After a moment he said, "I'm doing okay. Tell the wife that things are as fine as they could be. For some reason, I'm not that worried that they are going to do anything to me. The bombs are a threat to keep me here and to keep others away."

"Are you being monitored during this call?"

"Yes."

"Okay. I'll let your wife know what you said. So, have you found out what this is all about yet? We haven't received any message or communication that we think are legitimate. There have been some contacts, but we don't consider them as serious. We're spending all our time fending off the media and waging an Internet battle over the wild theories being generated."

"I'm sure. Yes. I have their demand."

"Just one?"

"Yes. It's a doozy."

"What is it?"

There was a hesitation.

Then the President spoke, "It's so off the charts. I'm not going to tell you or anyone now. Only I know what it is. Of course the nutjobs here also know it. I still need time to think about it. I don't want any leaks from there."

"I can keep a secret."

"I know. Not yet. I want to talk it over with them again. Any injuries or other news I should know about?"

"No. No significant injuries. There were a few ill from the gas attack and some panicked people. But gradually the terrorists let the crowd break up and leave. They've moved to the outside the doors of the hotel and are there. We're at a stalemate until you decide on what they've demanded."

"I understand. Good."

"What do you need from me or the White House for now?"

Again the President hesitated before answering. The VP waited.

"I don't need anything. You can let the media and the citizens know that I've talked with you and everyone in here is doing as fine as can be. The ball is in my court. As to specific words for the people, I won't quote Shakespeare, who had some good lines. I'll rely on you and my high-priced press secretary to put the comments together. I'm getting the wave now to get off the line. Take care of things there. Understand."

"Yes. I do. I'll talk with you later."

After hanging up the VP looked over the crowd in the room that had listened to the conversation. He held up his hand to forestall any comments from the people in the room. He said to his aide, "Get me the Chief Justice. I want him here within a half hour."

He got a nod from the aide as he got up to leave the room to complete his errand.

The others in the room looked confused at each other over the strange request of the Vice-President. He indicated for them to stay and that he would return in a minute. He then left the Oval Office.

He walked down the hallway trailed by his team of Secret Service agents. He walked without talking and reached his own White House office. He walked to his filing cabinet and removed his keys from his pocket. He used a key to open the lock on the cabinet and he pulled out the bottom drawer. He ruffled through the green folders to find the folder that he wanted. The folder held only one sheet of paper. He walked to his desk and put the paper on the top of the desk. He read over the paper one more time and then he took a pen from his shirt pocket.

He then wrote today's date next to the President's signature on the bottom of the paper.

7/22 10:45pm

The press and the Internet were filled with rumors and leaks on what the Vice-President would say about the President being held captive by the terrorists in Baltimore.

The Vice-President sat calmly behind the desk in the Oval Office when the cameras turned to him. He looked directly into the camera and later commentators would comment constantly on the confidence and the presence that the VP had held himself for his first prime-time speech.

He looked into the camera and began, "My fellow Americans. I will not take a lot of your time. I'm here to talk about the situation in Baltimore. We all hope for a peaceful settlement with no loss of life either from the hostages or the terrorists. But our President is very resourceful and always thinking two steps ahead of everyone else."

A pause.

"He has laid out a set of directions for the situation that is presently occurring. Although we in the government have received no demands from the terrorists, we do know that they have talked with the President and he has rejected their demands. But the government and the world cannot wait around while the most powerful country and office in the world are tied up in a hotel lobby. This country nor the world can afford to be held hostage and remain waiting and watching what will happen next."

A breath.

“So I have followed through on his directions to keep the country moving forward and to take away the power of the terrorists. After the President was sworn into office, he had a meeting with me and laid out a plan of action to me. I agreed to his plan that he outlined and we proceeded to put it into action with the concurrence of the Chief Justice. This is the type of situation that the President planned ahead to thwart.”

A pause.

He picked up a piece of paper from the top of the desk and held it out toward the camera.

“This paper is the immediate and effective resignation of the President. It is valid and is effective as of 10:30pm. The hostage being held in Baltimore is now an ex-President of the United States. I am now going to be sworn in as President of the United States by the Chief Justice in the next few minutes with all of America and the world watching.”

“The terrorists are now holding a man who has no authority or power to make decisions or influence the government of the United States. But we still consider him an important person and any harm or threats to that man will be swiftly acted upon by my government. My citizens, with your help and patience we will get through this. God bless America.”

The camera panned to a wide angle as the President walked out from behind the desk and joined a crowd of men.

One of the men held a bible.

7/24 2:25pm

The President and his immediate predecessor were alone in the Oval Office. The President started the conversation, “I’m surprised that they kept you so long after the resignation was announced.”

The ex-President replied, “It seemed to take them by surprised and they thought that the whole thing was staged. They thought it was a bluff to get them to release me. But after only one day in office when you asked for the resignation of and received it from three of my Cabinet team did they believe that you were now the President. It was quite a brilliant move to remove some of my people to show that you were in charge. And you moving your family into the White House was another stroke of genius.”

The President smiled and nodded.

The ex-President continued, “There was an interesting look on the terrorist’s face when he watched you in action. I enjoyed it. I was just hoping that they weren’t going to be sore losers and kill all of us. But in the end they just surrendered quietly.”

The President paused and shifted in his chair to get more comfortable. He said, “I’m not use to being on this side of the desk. This office chair is more comfortable than the one that you’re in.”

“I’ve noticed that sitting here. So I wonder if I have to have my guys go through the renomination hearings again?”

“What do you mean?”

“Getting my guys back on the job. You know, the ones you asked to resign.”

“I don’t want them in my Cabinet.”

“Wait. This was just a short term plan.” At the President’s smile he stopped and then said, “I get it. You’re yanking my chain.”

The President sat back and looked at the ex-President. A small smile still on his face.

The ex-President continued on, "Anyway. It's still a mystery to me why all this happened. There was no way that me, the country or the world was going to go along with their demand. They gained nothing except jail for the rest of their lives. Which won't be long according to the reports that I've heard. Do the initial results of the physicals confirm what I've heard?"

"Yes. The terrorists are all dying. Someone found twelve men whose lives will end within four months. Cancers and AIDS are killing them. No chance of remission from any type of treatment will save any of them."

"During my stay with them I saw them popping pills, but I thought that it was speed to keep them going. They were pills to help control their pain from their diseases."

After this they were quiet for a few moments to ponder the situation.

The ex-President starting speaking, but he was talking out loud, more to himself than to the President, "Twelve men who are dying took me hostage for some ridiculous demand. They wanted to keep me hostage to keep us and the country indecisive and let us flounder in the eyes of the world. Americans are lousy at controlling situations which catch us by surprise. We would have looked idiotic trying to handle the situation. America Held Hostage as the media would have played it up. If it wasn't for our prearranged resignations, I would still be in that lobby. We played the resignation and after some of your actions to convince them that we were serious, they then meekly surrendered. I'm told that they haven't spoken to the investigators yet and if they don't speak soon then we're never going to find out who or what was the purpose behind everything that happened."

The President shrugged and said, "I'm sure that we'll do our best to find out what was behind it. After we start the life examination of the terrorists, we should find out the answers to your questions."

The ex-President suddenly focused on the President and smiled, "As far as I can see nobody gained anything. They're in prison without their demand being met. I'm out of a job. Which by the way we have to arrange for me getting it back."

"Maybe you'll win the next election."

"Ha-ha. Seriously, there was no gain for anyone so it was just a waste. Really the only one who came out ahead was you."

"Me?"

"Sure. You are the President of the United States. You got the job, the power and you've actually begun making decisions that go with the job. Firing Cabinet members and nominating your own people for the jobs. Moving your family into the White House. The only one who got anything out of thisterroristepisodewasyou?"

The President leaned back, shrugged and smiled.

The End