

Originally, Chapter One of *Body of Evidence* ended with the revelation that the man who was depicted on the cover of *TIME* had been selected as envoy, and he had twenty-four hours to fly to North Korea, or Mara would die. Mara had no clue who had been selected, or if he could make it to North Korea in time. This chapter immediately followed, but I ended up cutting it from the final version, because it slowed the action. But this is how it played out for Curt, even though it wasn't shown in the book.

## Chapter Two



*Washington, D.C.*

CURT DOMINICK STARED at the cover of *TIME* and wondered again why God hated him so much. The headline next to his picture was bad enough: “*U.S. Attorney Curt Dominick: Bringing Down American Government One Crooked Politician at a Time,*” but the timing couldn't be worse. The trial was scheduled to begin in two days, and thanks to the editor-in-chief at *TIME*, he couldn't cross the street to buy coffee without being hassled.

He tossed the magazine aside along with the note requesting his autograph—a joke from the Maryland State's Attorney—and faced the stack of depositions on his desk. In two days he would lead the prosecution against former Vice President Andrew Stevens, the first vice president since Agnew to face felony corruption charges.

The indictment Curt had managed to wrangle from the grand jury only charged the retired politician with the least of his crimes, but it was a start, and if any of his last-minute leads paid off, he would also present evidence to convince the jury the man had sold weapons to a war criminal in addition to the lesser charges of influence peddling and

obstruction of justice.

He had an hour to review case notes before a strategy meeting with his co-counsel, Assistant U.S. Attorney Aurora Ames. He took a swallow of hot coffee as he jotted notes on the pre-trial depositions. He loved this, the final push right before a trial began.

A commotion in the hallway managed to penetrate his work-absorbed mind, but was unworthy of attention until his office door was flung open with enough force to shake the wall. He lifted his gaze to see the president's chief of staff in the doorway, his chest heaving as if he'd run all the way from the White House to Judiciary Square.

"Dominick, pack a bag. You're going on a trip."

Curt set down his pen and closed the file, his calm movements in deliberate contrast to his visitor's. "Has someone messed with your medication, Bixby?"

"Funny." The man sucked in a deep breath. "I'm here on direct orders from the president."

"Good for you, but I'm not going anywhere."

"North Korea has finally selected a reasonable envoy. They want you."

Bixby's statement derailed his smug serenity. Surely he'd heard wrong. "The North Korean government wants *me* to retrieve Mara Garrett?" His gut twisted. "And you find this reasonable?"

"You have twenty-one hours to get to P'yŏngyang. Or she dies."

"That's crazy. I'm the *last* person who should act as envoy."

"Crazy is North Korea's modus operandi. They've made it clear: it's you or no one."

Curt stood, his feet accepting the inevitable, while his mind struggled with the consequences. "I've got jury selection starting in—" He glanced at his watch. "Forty-nine hours."

“Ask for a stay.”

“Continuance,” he corrected automatically. “And there’s no way a trial of this magnitude can be delayed this late in the game.”

“You can be there and back before Tuesday morning.”

He placed his knuckles on the desk, leaned forward, and closed his eyes. Two days to get to North Korea and back, or a woman would die. He sucked in a sharp breath, gathered the files strewn across his desk, and crammed them in his laptop case. “Do you have a plane?”

Bixby nodded. “A long-range private jet is en route to Joint Base Andrews now. You have enough time to pack a bag. A Marine One helicopter will take you to Andrews.”

“Forget packing, I need to confer with my co-counsel. Do you have any idea what this means for the trial?”

“You’ll be back in time.”

Explaining the situation to Bixby would only waste precious minutes. Laptop case in hand, he headed for the door. “Who else is on the envoy team?”

“No team. P’yŏngyang was clear on that point. Two pilots, and you. That’s all.”

Unease halted him mid-step. “You’re sending me into North Korea. Alone.”

“We don’t have a choice.” Bixby paused. “Curt, it’s important you understand, we can’t protect you once you’re there. We won’t force you to go. This is your decision.”

He didn’t hesitate. “I’m going.”



Eighteen hours later, the jet landed in Tokyo. Here the private jet, on loan from a billionaire who was eager to have his name attached to this mission, would be refueled and two well-rested pilots would take over for the two-hour jaunt to P’yŏngyang.

Curt waited inside the luxurious jet, reading an updated dossier on Mara Garrett, provided by her supervisors at JPAC. Timing remained critical. She would be executed in three hours and four minutes. P'yŏngyang had made it clear they would execute the archaeologist if he didn't arrive in time. No hesitation, no grace period.

Ms. Garrett's capture and trial had given the communist regime ceaseless press and endless joy. Unlike the other Americans detained in recent years, she was related to a high-ranking government official, making her a political prize from the start. Her employers at JPAC should never have included her in the North Korean deployment.

The emailed dossier contained dozens of photos in addition to a detailed biography. Ms. Garrett was a reporter's wet dream: thirty years old with short blonde hair cut in a simple, sleek bob, and with wide, luminous blue eyes and pert nose, she was beautiful even before one saw the warm dimples of her smile. Driven and smart, she'd graduated with honors from Stanford University and held a Masters degree in Archaeology from the same institution. Her family ties, combined with the fact that her work was physical, cerebral, and humanitarian, meant her face had graced the cover of every major magazine and newspaper in the U.S. at least once since her arrest.

Media attention had been a problem for the State Department from the start. Unlike the American reporters arrested along the Chinese-North Korean border in 2009, the press had learned of Garrett's arrest the moment her JPAC team had been ejected from the country. In 2009, Laura Ling's sister had discreetly asked news organizations to tone down rhetoric on the arrests to prevent the unpredictable regime from thinking they had a bargaining chip in the two reporters. Knowing the risk of sending journalists into hostile territory, the media outlets had complied.

Mara Garrett had no such luck. Her kin made her a political prize from the start, and low-key press hadn't been an option. Every inch of her life had been dissected, and

P'yŏngyang didn't appreciate their depiction in the drama. They were out for blood. American blood. And, as the niece of a former vice president—even a disgraced one—Mara's blood ran red, white, and blue.

The dossier added to what he'd already known from preparing his case against her uncle, and included one important tidbit: no one really knew what happened that August day when she was arrested, and there was a strong possibility P'yŏngyang was justified in arresting her.

That fact, withheld from her adoring press, changed everything.

He couldn't help but wonder if he was flying halfway around the world to rescue a woman who just might be too stupid to live. *She had gone off by herself in North-fucking-Korea?*

The secretary of state himself had flown with him to Joint Base Andrews to brief him on the situation. The president and State Department wanted answers, and Mara Garrett was the only one who could provide them.

Curt looked at his watch. If he didn't get to P'yŏngyang in two hours and fifty-seven minutes, the U.S. would likely become embroiled in a standoff with an unstable, nuclear-armed regime, and no one would know why.