

**ONE**

"God has no need for dynamite!"

Beverly Haddad paused, her fist inches from the door. She leaned forward and tilted her head. Another voice responded, but the words were muffled through the thick wooden panels. She frowned.

She tried peering through the smoked glass, past the painted block letters that read "New York City Commissioner of Police Theodore Roosevelt." Nothing but vague shadows.

The first voice boomed back. "What do you mean, no dynamite? There *has* to be! Look again! You're a detective—*detect* something!"

Beverly jumped back as the door swung open before her. A red-faced man with a bulbous nose pushed past her as if she were invisible, then stormed down the hallway. She took the opportunity to slip into the room.

Roosevelt stood with his hands resting on a cluttered desk, his face glaring down. Pigeons flew outside the large window, briefly blocking the cloudy morning view of lower Manhattan. The sunlight glistened off his pince-nez glasses.

Beverly took a deep breath. This was the man she had come to see. She summoned up all her courage.

Roosevelt looked up with an angry face, his mustache bristling over pouted lips, but then immediately calmed upon seeing her.

"Ah, sorry, but this is a bad time," he said. "Please come back later, and don't miss the wastepaper basket under the table by the window. Also, there is a slight coffee stain on the floor—sorry, but you know how that can happen."

Beverly stood tall and took in a breath. "I am sorry, Commissioner, but I am not the cleaning lady." Her slight British accent rolled off her tongue.

Roosevelt raised an eyebrow for a split second and then immediately changed his demeanor. He gave a nod of the head and smiled broadly, showing off his large white teeth. "I apologize. How may I be of service?"

Beverly strode over to the desk, pulled out a chair, and made herself comfortable, placing her purse and coat on her lap. She noted approvingly that the Commissioner showed only the slightest annoyance. "My name is Beverly Haddad, and I am with the United States Department of Justice."

"What? You? The DOJ?" He paused, staring for long seconds. He then composed himself, brushed some non-existent lint off his jacket, and sat down in his padded leather chair. "Yes, of course. My apologies again. Are you . . . a messenger?"

"No."

She was used to people looking at her unbelievably when she announced herself. A proud, educated Negro woman in white society was, indeed, unusual.

Another few seconds went by. She took him in, recalling the information she had compiled on the man. *Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt, 38 years old. Called "TR" by his friends, and sometimes "Teddy." Degree from Harvard. New York assemblyman for twelve years. Lost a bid for mayor, later appointed to*

*current post. Fierce reformer, anti-corruption, cleaned up the force. Angers Tammany Hall often. Apparently has no fear whatsoever.*

She decided she would think of him as "Teddy." It would make him less intimidating.

Teddy finally spoke. "Of course, of course. What can I do for you?"

"As it turns out, Mr. Roosevelt, I was ordered to speak to you. I'm on assignment on the very matter about which you were yelling at your associate. I take it from your very loud conversation that evidence of dynamite may have been discovered at the scene of at least one of the lightning strikes?"

"No," Teddy said. "It has not. I was certain it would be, though. We have no idea how these explosions happen. We have found no—"

A small metal object slapped him across his face. He fell to one side, yelping incoherently.

Beverly jumped up, and her purse fell from her lap. She ran around the desk.

Teddy lay sprawled on the polished wooden floor. He blinked slowly and squeezed his eyes shut as if to deaden the pain. His hand was held against his cheek.

"You're bleeding."

"It's nothing," Teddy said. He waved off her attempts to help him rise but sat up on the floor with some difficulty. "Madam, why did you hit me?"

"I did no such thing," Beverly replied. She looked around for a second and then picked up a long piece of triangular metal from the floor. "This is what hit

you. I have no idea where it came from." She held it before him. A nameplate, the kind that sits on the desk of an important person.

Teddy squinted at it, as if his eyes were not yet ready to focus. "*William Stephen Devery?*"

Beverly sniffed. Her body stiffened. The hairs on the back of her neck stood up. She grabbed Teddy and pulled him to his feet. "We have to go. Now!"

She sprinted for the door. She could hear Teddy pause and then follow, yelling, "Wait!"

She didn't wait.

A low-pitched hum grew louder.

Dashing from the Commissioner's office led her into the main large room, where a dozen or so officers lounged around, talking and drinking coffee.

"Everyone out now!" Beverly screamed as she ran toward the exit.

A few racist comments and laughs were her response, but she ignored them and dashed toward the two large glass doors which led to Mulberry Street.

Teddy's voice, much louder than hers, echoed through the large room. "Listen to her!"

A few uneasy men began to move as the hum grew louder. She pushed her way through the front door just as the explosion hit. Hot flames singed her back as she flew forward and landed, face down, in the street.

## *Two*

As the sounds of sirens and screams filled the air, Beverly forced her eyes open and tried to focus. Smoke mixed with an acrid electrical smell that made her wince.

A young boy leaned over her. "Are you all right, lady?"

Beverly nodded and gladly accepted the lad's assistance. She took his hand and unsteadily got to her feet while shielding her eyes from the light. The entire block was aflame. Gears spun on fire trucks as they poured water onto the lower level of the building. Police tried to calm the situation and lead people to safety while nurses in Red Cross uniforms tended to the wounded.

"What happened?" Beverly mumbled.

"God struck down the police station," the boy replied, and then, seeing her skeptical expression, said, "No, really! Clear blue sky, just like always and then, boom! Lightning strike out of nowhere. Crack, pow!" He continued to demonstrate by waving his arms around and providing the necessary sounds to act out all the drama of the explosion.

"Goodness gracious, son. Why would God be mad at the police?"

"Crackle crackle crackle," he replied, still performing his little play.

Distracted by a dog, he took off in pursuit, his oversized cap bobbing on his head as he ran.

Beverly winced at the pain as she dusted herself off. Her finest dress was ruined, ripped and sooty. She thanked the Lord—and Dr. Bouchet—for giving her

that advance warning and said a quick, silent prayer for those who may not have survived the explosion.

*The pendant! Where was it?* She panicked for a few seconds before spotting it on the pavement. The thick, red, ribbon-like string that held it in place had broken. She quickly snapped it up, tied the string back together, and placed it around her neck. After tucking it safely away under her tight jacket, she scanned the crowd for Teddy.

Firefighters and volunteers ran back and forth, helping the injured and looking for survivors in the rubble. The building still stood, but the windows had all been shattered, leaving shards of glass covering the street.

Beverly coughed and reached for her purse to get her kerchief then realized she had left it in the Commissioner's office, along with her coat and guns. She looked around for Teddy and hoped he had made it out safely. She didn't have to look long.

There he was, pushing fallen lumber out of the way, dragging survivors from the wreckage, and directing the firemen where to aim the hoses. He had taken charge of the rescue operation while limping from spot to spot, with embers glowing from his smoldering clothes.

"Thank God you're here to help, Mr. Roosevelt," said a young fireman with enormous sideburns.

"God was surely on our side, since you brave firemen were driving by just as this occurred!" he replied. "I had nothing to do with that fortuitous happenstance."

Beverly ran up to him the best she could, given the pain in her knee.

"Commissioner! We must leave!"

Teddy grabbed a fire hose and pointed it toward the second-floor window, where thick smoke still poured out through broken glass. "Nonsense!" he said, without looking at her. "I'm needed here."

She tried to meet his eyes but he refused. "You were the one they were after. While you remain here, others are in danger. They may try again."

"Poppycock. What possible reason do you . . ."

"Mr. Roosevelt, please. You have made many enemies during your crusade against police corruption. You embarrassed the Governor by investigating his staff. You angered many working-class people by shutting down their taverns on Sunday. Someone was surely annoyed at your recent investigation into the mysterious lightning strikes. Your political enemies want to stop you from possibly running for governor next year. Should I continue?"

Teddy frowned but refused to look at her.

"They wanted to quiet you permanently and used the lightning strike as an excuse. They will continue. You must come with me and hide so we can make our plans."

Teddy handed the hose to a surprised fireman, who immediately took control. Then the Commissioner turned to face her directly. "Sorry, Miss Haddad," he said, "but that is not going to happen. I never run. I never hide. That's what my enemies do." Despite the drying blood stain on his pants leg, he

began walking briskly toward an alleyway where the nurses had set up a makeshift treatment center.

Beverly limped after him. "The longer you stay, the more likely there will be another attack, and then more lives will be in jeopardy."

Teddy slowed his pace and looked around cautiously. He stopped and crossed his arms, never meeting her gaze. "You suddenly show up and warn me out of the building just as it explodes and then beg me to come with you. That was an amazing coincidence, don't you think? Why should I trust you? How do I know you're not the one who caused the explosion?"

Despite his oversized manner, Teddy was not a tall man. She stood in front of him and met his eyes easily. "Then you have even more of a reason to talk to me."

He raised an eyebrow, clearly not expecting such an answer.

"Commissioner, I assure you that we're on the same side. We need to stop these explosions. They targeted you because you're the only man who has even tried to figure this out. You're the only man who can stop them. And they know that."

"Who is 'they'?"

Beverly shook her head. "That's what we need to find out, although I think you and I have the same suspect in mind."

Teddy pursed his lips, and his moustache rose to tickle his nose. "No. I cannot leave while people need my help."

Beverly let out a heavy sigh. "Think of your wife and children, Mr. Roosevelt. You need to get to them before they do."

He snapped his head to her. "You think they'll come for Edith?"

Beverly nodded, eyes imploring him to agree. She could see the concern on his face.

"Perhaps you are right, at least for the moment." He looked around. "I suppose these people can manage this." He called over a heavy man in a ragged, still-smoldering police uniform and gave him a list of instructions. As the man ran off to comply, Teddy leaned forward, pointed a finger at Beverly's face, and said, "You and I need to talk."

Teddy trotted down Mulberry Street toward an alley next to the police station. A steam-powered horseless carriage sat, covered in dust from the explosion. Bright yellow paint decorated its large wheels and side panels, and through the dust Beverly could barely read block letters announcing that it belonged to the "New York City Police Department."

He bounded into the driver's seat, and a cloud of dust rose into the air. Beverly walked around to the passenger side. She paused for a second as she observed the dirt but quickly decided that given her current condition, a bit more dirt wouldn't matter. She slid into the seat.

Teddy pulled a lever and the engine sputtered. Frowning, he turned several dials and spun a device, and a puff of steam shot into his face. As he coughed, the vehicle rumbled and started emitting a loud, grinding noise which leveled into a constant hiss. "Bully!" he said as he reached down into the

floorboards and retrieved a pair of goggles. He slapped them on. "Try to keep your eyes covered, and hold on tight," he said. "This thing can reach speeds of up to twenty-five miles an hour!"

The automobile emitted a loud bang and began moving. People jumped out of the way as Teddy steered down the cobblestone road. Many pointed at him in recognition and he waved back with a bright smile.

Beverly had never been in an automobile before. It was fascinating. The bouncing action felt similar to being in a traditional carriage but it felt strange to not see a horse's posterior before her. "Interesting machine," she said loudly over the motor, her hands shielding her eyes. "I wish it had doors and a roof like a standard hansom."

"Couldn't afford it," Teddy replied. "We spent most of our budget on bicycles for the patrolmen. Much more efficient, too. Easier to chase down villains."

Beverly had much to discuss with the colorful Commissioner but didn't want to shout such sensitive material over the din of the engine, so she remained silent as Teddy hit Broadway and headed uptown. He glanced at her a few times, and it was clear that he had many questions he was refraining from asking, probably for the same reason. Finally, he spoke.

"How long have you been with the DOJ?"

Beverly gave him a glance. "Not long."

"You're the first Negro and the first woman I've ever seen working for them," Teddy said, matter-of-factly.

"Come now, Mr. Roosevelt. It's 1897. Times are changing."

"Suppose so. And next you'll be wanting to vote, too."

"Of course. Surely you are not opposed to women voting, are you, Mr. Roosevelt?"

He shrugged. "I'm not sure why they need to. After all, their husbands can represent their interests."

Beverly frowned, but before she could respond, Teddy asked, "So the DOJ is also concerned about these lightning strikes, are they?"

"I do not believe that Mr. Comstock has the ability to call upon God's anger like that," Beverly said. "And I don't think you do, either." She gave him a glance and noted that he didn't react to the mention of the name. *Good.*

Teddy said nothing else as they arrived at his townhouse near Union Square. He turned off the engine, ripped off his goggles, and bounded up the stairs to the front door. Beverly followed behind and wondered if "bounded" would be a word she would constantly associate with the Commissioner.

Pulling open the door, Teddy ran inside, calling out for Edith. Beverly took the stairs at a more careful pace but found her way blocked by a large, white woman wearing an apron.

"Yes, Miss?" the woman said, while looking down her nose at Beverly, still a step below.

Beverly assumed a calm expression and tried to look professional. She could only imagine what the woman thought upon seeing a young black woman in a ripped dress, covered with soot and bruises, asking to be let into the home of

a Roosevelt. "I came here with the Commissioner," she said. "There was an explosion at the police station."

The woman's expression showed a bit of concern and she looked inside the house for a moment. In the background, Teddy's booming voice could be heard, calling out for his wife and children. The woman turned back to Beverly and appeared to suddenly notice her injuries. She motioned her in with a rapid movement of her hand. "Come on in, dear."

Beverly smiled with appreciation as the woman led her into the hallway and shut the door. "Just stand here for right now," she said. "Don't touch anything. I'll be right back."

Beverly looked around. Gaslight gave the foyer a warm, pleasant glow. Small, framed pictures of Teddy with various politicians and dignitaries were arranged in an attractive pattern along one wall. She took a few steps to get closer and tried to identify them. There he was with Mayor Strong. And was that President-elect McKinley?

She turned as the woman came back into the room carrying an armful of cloth. "Come with me," the woman said, and she led Beverly through a pair of ornate glass doors and into a waiting room with large windows overlooking the street. She placed a cloth on one of the fancy chairs to protect it from the dirt and soot covering Beverly and motioned her to sit.

Beverly sat, pleased to be able to relax without shaking all over the place, both from nerves and a rather bumpy ride in the automobile.

The woman handed her another cloth to place on her lap. "Do you need any medicine or bandages?" When Beverly shook her head no, the woman said, "I'll be right back with a damp towel."

Beverly smiled. Many white people at the time would have never considered offering her such hospitality. She had heard of Mr. Roosevelt, read his books on American history, and knew that he was a good man who supported racial equality. It was reassuring to see this confirmed by his household.

It almost made her feel guilty for not telling him the truth.

### **Three**

"Nothing's unusual, Professor," said Declan. "I didn't find nothing that fits your standards, unless you count this."

Professor Phineas Grimsby stepped over the rubble and coughed from the smoke still pouring from the building. He pulled his tattered cloak tightly around his neck, tugging the brim of his cap lower over his forehead. He blinked through teary eyes as he peered out at the scene.

The strike happened a half an hour previously. The fire was controlled, and the injuries were mercifully limited. The smell of the fire permeated all of midtown, but at least it helped to cover up the constant stench of horse manure on the streets. The crowd lingered, interested, as usual after a fire. The professor hoped that the reporters gathered would not recognize him and would simply assume he was another local, come to gawk at the action. He held out his hand to accept Declan's offer.

"This is a telephone." Phineas sneered. "The police have had those for over five years now. And it hardly has any metal in it." He tossed it aside. "That's all you could find?"

Declan shrugged. "For a place that's been exploded and everything, it was in pretty good shape. Nothing else stood out."

"Look again. There's always something. You just missed it."

"Yes, sir."

Phineas stared down his nose at Declan, whose ill-fitting firefighter's uniform looked comically tight on his frame. Still, it was all Phineas could scrounge up on short notice. "And on top of it, the Commissioner wasn't harmed at all."

"It's Roosevelt. Don't think anything hurts him." Declan's smile faded as he saw the angry look on the Professor's face.

"And the woman? Did you see her at all?"

Declan took a step back. "Forgot to look for her. Sorry, I ran away before the lightning hit. Didn't want to be too close or nothing."

Phineas frowned. That damned woman had been asking too many questions. It was pure coincidence that she happened to show up just at this time, which caused Phineas to rush the operation to include her. He waved Declan away. "Go back and see what else you can find. And don't be stupid about it."

Declan nodded and ran back to the building.

Phineas scratched at his long, graying beard. Once, a beard like that meant dignity and prominence. All of the Presidents and men of means sported magnificent beards after the War of Northern Aggression. However, fashion now dictated a more closely-trimmed variety or even no facial hair whatsoever.

Phineas shook his head at the direction the country was heading, especially now with McKinley's election. McKinley! What a sorry choice to lead the United States. That clean-shaven moron and his reformer friends.

He stared up at the police station. This had not gone according to plan. There wasn't even a finding to compensate him for the failure. His target had escaped unharmed. Not only that, Roosevelt was not the sort of man who would be intimidated by this attack. If anything, he would renew the investigation with even more vigor.

As Phineas stood fuming, Declan ran back. "Found this," he said.

"A purse?" Phineas wrinkled his nose. "Why would I be interested in that?"

"'Cause of this." Declan reached in and pulled out a shining pistol of a make Phineas did not recognize. A weird, glowing tube ran along its side. There was a distinctive bright green light on the handle, with an arrow indicating that it was "charged."

Phineas reached for it and gently held it, turning it over and over again to examine it from all angles, while being extremely careful not to set it off. "And . . . this was in that bag?" he asked.

Declan nodded and held out the purse.

Phineas let him hold it open as he stuck his fingers inside to inspect the contents. Another smaller pistol of a normal variety. A small map of the city. Typical women's things. And some papers.

He placed the gun back into the purse and took out the papers. Government papers identifying a woman investigator. A short bio of Teddy Roosevelt from the *Times*. And a strange document clearly in some sort of code—with an unusual logo at the top featuring a woman's face.

He placed the papers back into the purse and then took it from Declan.  
"Thank you, boy." He nodded his head politely. "I appreciate this very much. It was not what I was looking for, but it should prove to be interesting. Very interesting indeed."

**Four**

Beverly was kept waiting an hour. Mr. Roosevelt's housekeeper, who Beverly learned was named Millicent, had done everything she could to make sure Beverly was comfortable. Warm towels and hot tea were provided, and Millicent kept the fire continuously roaring on that cold March morning.

The time allowed Beverly to calm down and think about what she was doing. This assignment of hers was not exactly approved by those above her. Worse, she could not tell Teddy everything about her investigation without jeopardizing many people—yet she needed his help because he could get things done that she could not. He could talk to people who would never give her the time of day. He could access records she could not get near.

She paused in her thoughts when she realized that she was considering him as "Teddy" and not "Mr. Roosevelt" or "Commissioner." She'd have to watch herself to make sure she did not slip and call him that. He deserved his respect he had earned.

She sipped at the tea and practiced in her mind the speech she wanted to give him but jumped when he suddenly entered the room. He had changed and washed up, but his demeanor was anything but defeated. In fact, he looked invigorated by the circumstances.

"I have made arrangements for my family to go to our home on Oyster Bay," he reported. "They'll be accompanied by some of my most trusted officers. A few more have been stationed outside this home. However, first we must talk."

He took the seat opposite her, on the other side of the fireplace. He leaned his elbows against his knees so that he was hunched over, staring at her. "They remain here until I am convinced of your theory." He smiled. "You are quite an interesting woman, Miss Haddad. An agent with the DOJ? Amazing."

Beverly bristled. "I have a science degree from the finest college in Liberia and did my post-graduate studies in London."

"Impressive," Teddy said. "I should have assumed as much by your slight British accent. I certainly meant no offense; it is just quite an unusual position you are in. Do you have proof of who you are?"

Beverly expected this. One of the disadvantages she faced was that men in power treated her like a child playing in the grown-up area. The advantage was that everyone constantly underestimated her and often ignored her completely, even when she was in the same room. "Unfortunately, all my documentation was lost in the explosion, along with my guns and other personal belongings."

Teddy leaned back. "How inconvenient."

Beverly held up a finger. "I may still have something." She reached for the ribbon around her neck and pulled out a round, flat metal object about three inches in diameter. A small green light glowed in the center. She once more reached into her cleavage, dug around a bit, and then came up empty-handed.

She noted the way Teddy's eyes moved and his body relaxed. He was admiring her face, and, for a few seconds, her body, accentuated by the tight form-fitting jacket that was all the style in the gay 90s. Too often white men

ignored perfectly good-looking black women, but Teddy seemed to notice. That was good; she could use that to her advantage.

"I am sorry, Mr. Roosevelt," she said as she tucked the Morse device back beneath her clothing, "My mistake."

"Well, this all seems quite improbable, Miss Haddad, yet I'm not convinced we need the federal government sticking its nose into New York's internal affairs. We can handle this just fine ourselves."

"It appears not, given what I heard before I entered your office."

Teddy rose and poured himself some clear liquid from an unmarked bottle, which, given the Commissioner's history of shutting down drinking establishments, was probably just water. He took a quick gulp and did not offer any. Beverly took the opportunity to sip at her now luke-warm tea.

"Miss Haddad, I appreciate your organization's concern. But forgive me if I am suspicious. If this is one of Cleveland's tricks to spy on his enemies—"

"I have nothing to do with President Cleveland." She paused. "Except, of course, for the fact that technically, he is indirectly responsible for all of us in government."

Teddy looked like he wanted to spit. "I wouldn't put a trick like this past that damned Democrat. And what in the world is his administration doing hiring someone like you when they've spent the last thirty years destroying the Reconstruction? You'd think that—"

"Commissioner, if you please." Beverly spoke quickly before Teddy could interrupt. "We need to ignore politics for a moment and talk about the problem we

both face. Our organization is uniquely qualified to investigate these attacks New York City has recently suffered, and it is best that we cooperate. We want the same thing."

Teddy pursed his lips and walked slowly back to his chair, shaking his glass in a way which made the liquid within swirl. He sat and looked at Beverly.

"And now someone wants to kill you to stop your investigation," Beverly continued. "You need to get your family out of here, and then you need to come with me. We can hide you."

"I don't need the Fed's help," Teddy said with a scoff. He leaned back against the chair and crossed his arms. "Cleveland would just as soon have me disappear or go back to the Dakotas. Besides, it doesn't matter in the long run. In a few days, McKinley will be President, and you'll have to answer to him."

"We will hide in a place that only I know," Beverly responded. "President Cleveland has nothing to do with that. From our secret place, we can make our plans to capture the person responsible for these attacks."

"And who do you believe that is?"

"We believe that it's Comstock or one of his agents. Perhaps the agent is acting without Comstock's knowledge."

"Anthony Comstock is a fool," Teddy said, "but he's not a murderer. His beliefs are so strong that he would never do such a thing."

Beverly shook her head. "Strong religious beliefs are behind many violent actions—look at the Ku Klux Klan."

"Evil men," Teddy nodded. "But that's a bad comparison. Anthony Comstock and his followers are merely concerned with public morals."

"The New York Society for the Suppression of Vice attracts many who think they're doing The Lord's work, and who is to say that at least one of them has found a more dramatic way to do what he thinks is God's will?"

Teddy smiled. "You've thought this through, have you?"

"Yes." It was clear he was debating with her merely to see her reaction. "The question is how they are accomplishing this feat of apparent magic. Think about all the attacks that have happened," Beverly said. "They're all related to Anthony Comstock."

"That blowhard," Teddy said. "He sees evil everywhere. Censoring information about health issues and finding obscenity in every picture. He forced the post office to stop shipping anatomy textbooks!"

"Right, right," Beverly said. "But look what's happened now. He gave a speech about the evils of alcohol, and a few days later lightning came down from a cloudless sky and struck one of the most notorious taverns in the Bowery."

Teddy nodded somberly. "Six dead."

"Next he railed against Shaw's latest play, and the theater was struck in the same manner."

"At least that occurred when there was no performance so no one was hurt," Teddy said.

Beverly straightened her skirt and blanched at the dirt remaining. "That shows that the goal is merely to intimidate those Comstock sees as evil-doers."

Perhaps he didn't know that people were in the tavern when it was hit. It was a Sunday, after all, and the law requires all drinking establishments to be closed."

"Many people are mad at me for enforcing that," Teddy said with a frown. "I hate that law, but it's not my job to decide which laws to enforce."

"But after two similar incidents, you began to suspect Comstock and asked your detectives to investigate him. And that angered him."

Teddy sat back. "And how do you know—"

"And then he spoke against corruption in the police force—corruption you have been fighting to clean up for years—and soon thereafter, the station was hit," Beverly continued. "Surely that is no coincidence."

Teddy ran his fingers through his mustache for a few seconds. "You are suggesting that Anthony Comstock, who has no science background whatsoever, who rails against Darwinism and modern inventions in general, has created something to call lightning down from the clear sky?"

"Well, I don't think God is doing this," Beverly said. "Nor do I think Comstock has the power of Zeus."

Teddy shook his head. "This just doesn't make sense. I don't believe he's the sort of man to do this. And if he was, why wait a few days to do so? Wouldn't it have been much more effective to have the lightning strike as he spoke?"

"Someone who follows him, perhaps. Some fanatic who hears the speech and then picks his next target based on the speech. Comstock may be unaware."

Teddy suddenly stood and began pacing, as if he was uncomfortable being comfortable for any period of time. "We should go and speak to him."

Beverly reared back. "Speak to Comstock? Without any evidence? With just a theory?"

Teddy waved off her objection. "I know how to get people to talk. Besides, if he's innocent he may help us identify whoever's doing this."

"But you're a target," Beverly said. "Whoever did this tried to kill you once, and he blew up a police station, harming many within and maybe even killing some—I wasn't sure in all the madness . . ."

"All the more reason to act quickly!" Teddy bounded to the door and yelled down the hall. "Millicent! We're leaving now. Make sure everyone gets to Oyster Bay safely." And then, without looking back, he dashed for the front door.

Beverly jumped up and followed. She had the impression that if she stayed with Teddy during this assignment, she would be doing a lot of that.

**Five**

Beverly kept her head down and peered around worriedly as the automobile sped downtown. Surely the assassin would have realized by now that Teddy was safe and would be looking for him. The vehicle, being one of the few in the city, grabbed attention in and of itself, but as soon as people realized it was Teddy Roosevelt himself driving it—well, everyone had to wave and Teddy had to wave back. A few shouted obscenities or made rude gestures, but Beverly supposed that always came with being a political figure. Teddy ignored those people completely as if they didn't exist and just kept smiling, looking for the next person to wave to.

The idea of keeping him hidden and safe seemed more impossible with every minute.

"Are you certain the best way to do this is to approach him directly?" she shouted over the engine.

"Comstock may be a misguided do-gooder, but he's no killer," Teddy replied while keeping his eyes on the road. "If nothing else, he may have some ideas about who is doing this." He gave Beverly a glance. "I had considered talking to him before, but didn't want to confront him over just a suspicion. He may be more willing to speak after the attack on the police station."

"Assuming he's innocent."

Teddy didn't respond to that and instead looked around for someone else to wave to. Beverly started to wonder if seeking him out to assist in her

investigation was a good idea after all. She also started to question her own actions. How could she expect Teddy to work with her and trust her when she had not been forthcoming to him?

Her thoughts were disrupted when they drove through Astor place, scaring the horses. Teddy parked before a nondescript building on lower Broadway. It rose to five stories and appeared similar to the handsome Brownstones of Brooklyn Heights without possessing a bit of their charm. A small plaque on the left of the door proclaimed it as "The New York Society for the Suppression of Vice."

Teddy predictably bounded from the vehicle and trotted up the stairs. Hadn't she observed his leg bleeding not an hour ago? Could he just ignore the pain?

By the time she had made her way up to the building, Teddy had already pulled the bell chain twice. The heavy, arched door opened and a large, middle-aged black woman answered. She was dressed in a light-blue gown typically worn by maids, and the stained apron indicated that she probably did kitchen work as well. Her hair was pulled back and hidden by a white scarf.

"Anthony Comstock, please," Teddy said. "Tell him Commissioner Roosevelt is here."

The woman nodded and motioned them in, giving Beverly an unusual second look. She then waddled out of sight down the hallway.

"So this is his headquarters?" Beverly asked.

"Yes. And I heard the tone in your voice." Teddy leaned forward and spoke quietly. "Apparently, the preaching business pays very well for him to stay here."

"He lives in New Jersey," Beverly said. "Quite the mansion. This is just his base of operations."

Teddy raised his eyebrows and tilted his head, indicating that he was not aware of that piece of information.

They stopped speaking as the sound of heavy footsteps echoed down the hall. Beverly looked over Teddy's shoulders. A large man with an expansive smile headed their way. His bald head poked through a small tuft of hair around his ears, and a massive set of sideburns snaked around his cheeks and met to form a mustache, leaving his chin clean-shaven.

"Commissioner Roosevelt! It is an honor to finally meet you in person." Comstock held out his hand, and Teddy stepped forward and grasped it tightly.

"Bully! A pleasure."

Comstock gave a passing glance at Beverly, and his eyes tightened. She wasn't sure if it was because she was a black woman daring to intrude on a meeting with two prominent and famous men or because of the shabby and dirty condition she was in. Possibly a combination of both.

Teddy noticed Comstock's look and placed himself between them.

"Anthony! This is Miss Beverly Haddad. She is assisting me right now. She— good gracious, woman! You're a mess. I hadn't realized you had not been able to . . ."

"Yes, Mr. Roosevelt," she said, "You didn't give me much of an opportunity to clean up and change after the explosion."

"Explosion?" Comstock said. "Mr. Roosevelt, you were there? I have just heard."

"Indeed," Teddy responded. "We were quite shaken up. Perhaps one your servants could assist Miss Haddad so she could make herself more presentable?"

"But of course," Comstock replied. Before Beverly could object, he had stepped into the hallway. "Polly! Where are you?"

Teddy turned to Beverly and held a finger to his lips. "Perfect! You go with this Polly and see what you can learn while I battle wits with Anthony."

"But Mr. Roosevelt . . ."

Teddy shushed her as Comstock came back into the room with the woman Beverly had met at the door.

"There, my dear," Comstock said as he motioned for Beverly to follow Polly. "Miss Polly will help you, and we will thank the Lord that you came through that explosion safely."

Beverly shot an angry look at Teddy, who smiled broadly in his trademark fashion. She turned and followed Polly down the hallway.

"Polly, I must thank you for this hospitality."

"Think nothing of it, miss," Polly replied. "Mr. Comstock is a good man who does the Lord's work, and would never think of turning away someone in need."

The wallpaper, with its bland yet soothing lines, made Beverly think of a hospital, but the gaslight illuminating them deadened the colors to a dull and sickly green. She pried her eyes away to see Polly pushing open a hinged door that led into a kitchen.

"Now you just have a seat and tell me about the explosion," Polly said. "We've just heard about it, and Mr. Comstock is quite upset." She went to the sink, turned on the water, and tested it for warmth with her left hand while her right reached for a small towel.

Beverly pulled her skirt to the side and slipped into the wooden chair. "I'm not certain if anyone died, but there were injuries. I'm hopeful everyone escaped before the damage was done. But I would think Mr. Comstock would call this justice," she said, looking at Polly from the corner of her eye, "wouldn't he?"

Polly turned around, a frown on her face. "Justice? Wasn't this the police station?" She carried a bowl of soapy water to the kitchen table, set it before Beverly, and then placed the towel next to it. "Here, you wash up while I get you something to change into. We've helped women in trouble before and I know there are some extra clothes up in the attic. Should be something your size. Just give me a minute." Before Beverly reply, Polly had waddled off back down the hallway.

Beverly stood up quietly and peered around the corner as Polly opened a door near the sitting room and walked up some stairs. Teddy's loud voice echoed down the hallway but she could not make out the words.

She reached for the ribbon around her neck and pulled out the Morse device. The green light caught in a glass on the other side of the room and made her jump for a second before she realized it was a reflection. Licking her lips, she slid her fingers along the edge, found the clip, and popped it open. Breathing slowly, she touched the button in the center of the flat circle and began sending a short message. She finished just as the sound of footsteps came from behind. She slapped the device shut and hid it under her clothing just as Polly walked into the room.

"Here we go. This should fit you just fine until you can get home and get your own clothes," Polly said. She held out a simple yellow dress of the type that had been out of fashion for twenty years. It reminded Beverly of the sort of thing her mother would have worn.

"Thank you, Polly," Beverly said. She stood. "Would you be so kind as to watch the door while I change? It certainly would not be proper for any gentleman to come in hoping for a tasty meal and instead find—"

"Say no more, Miss Beverly," Polly said, and she went to the doorway and stood facing away, giving Beverly as much privacy as possible.

Beverly pulled out the Morse device, hid it under the yellow dress lying on the table, and began to unlace her tight, fitted jacket. "I thought Mr. Comstock had recently spoken out against the police force," she said.

Polly nodded without turning back. "Yes, ma'am."

Beverly removed her jacket over her head and placed it on the chair. "Why would he do such a thing?"

"I believe he was upset with the police corruption. There had been that incident with the whorehouse . . ."

"Yes, but Mr. Roosevelt had disciplined those men. The matter was being taken care of."

Polly shrugged. "I don't know, ma'am. The Lord works in mysterious ways and so does Mr. Comstock."

Beverly unbuttoned her dirty, ripped dress and slipped out of it, leaving her standing there in her undergarments. They were not as clean as she would have liked, but a new dress would be more presentable than what she had previously worn. "Did someone tell Mr. Comstock to speak out against the police station?"

Polly took a breath. "I . . . I don't know, ma'am."

Beverly picked up the yellow dress, opened it, and stepped into it, pulling it over her shoulder. She began buttoning it up the front. "Surely he has advisors. People he talks to."

"Yes, ma'am."

Beverly frowned, then finished buttoning up her dress. She slid a hand around her neck, found the ribbon there, and pulled out her pendant. Rubbing it slightly for good luck, she said, "Very well, Polly, perhaps you could help me get back into my jacket?"

Polly turned around with a smile. She walked toward Beverly for a few steps and then stopped, eyes wide. She stared at Beverly's pendant, and Beverly smiled, allowing Polly to get a good view. The pendant featured a woman's face

that would be familiar to some, but even those who did not know the face might know the pendant.

"Auntie!" Polly said.

"Yes," Beverly replied, placing the pendant back into her undergarments and buttoning up the last of her dress. "Auntie would very much like to know who Mr. Comstock talks to and what they talk about."

## Six

Professor Phineas Grimsby's laboratory took up an entire block in Brooklyn, not far from the Navy Yard. There, down the cobblestone streets below the Brooklyn Bridge, his workers could experiment free from the congestion and politics of Manhattan—at least for another year.

Phineas stepped from his automobile—one of his prized possessions—and crossed the street to the front door, where a large sign said simply "Grimsby, 218 Plymouth Street, Brooklyn." The foul smell of smoke from nearby fireplaces and furnaces assaulted his nose, and the noise of boats traveling the East River a block away made the location unpleasant, but not as bad as the lower East Side where he had once worked. The setting sun danced in reflections off the water glimpsed between buildings. He coughed and struggled his way up the iron stairs to the door, grumbling under his breath about how it wasn't fair that age brought pain without obvious cause.

He stepped in and squinted. Bright electrical lights bathed the room in an unnatural glow. Workers suddenly sprang into action, and he hid a smile, knowing that his presence caused such anxiety.

Tables lined the refurbished warehouse, and Phineas observed his accomplishments. Some of the brightest men in science and engineering tinkered in his lab, trying to develop the next big invention that would bring more riches his way. At least that was the plan. In reality, other than the discoveries he brought forth himself, his workers did little but make improvements and

variations. Sure, those kept the income steady, but where were the geniuses who were supposed to be spouting their own ideas?

He sneered. Of course. Those people all worked for Edison or Tesla. He got whatever was left over—those who didn't make the cut elsewhere.

He marched slowly to his office in the back, observing the progress being made at various tables but saying nothing. A few of the men offered a "Good afternoon, Professor," but Phineas merely nodded back in return. It's always a good thing to keep your workers scared, Phineas thought, because that gives them the incentive to try harder for that breakthrough. And those who do not find themselves jobless.

He was just about to open the door to his personal office and lab when a high-pitched "Professor!" reached his ears. He glanced back to find a young man in a bright green bow tie running up to him, his unbuttoned lab coat flapping behind like a cape. His mop of reddish hair fluttered around him like a stubborn halo that refused to follow directions.

Phineas raised an eyebrow. "Yes, Thayer?"

"Professor! I have something I think you should see," Thayer said, slightly out of breath. He paused, eyes aglow, as he held the device before him like an acolyte presenting a holy artifact to a high priest—a black box about five inches on each side. It had six legs poking out, making look for all the world like a square spider.

Phineas' mouth widened. "Yes? And what is it?"

"I call it metaleater!"

He placed it on the ground, where it sat perched on its legs. He then reached into a pocket and threw some nails and a tin can before it. Reaching down, he flipped a small switch on the metaleater's side.

The thing immediately started scampering around, making a pulsating buzzing noise. The pulses quickened as it approached the nails. Its two front legs ran themselves along the length of the nails and then it stepped forward and sat on top of them. Steam hissed from vents near the top for a few seconds, and then the metaleater stood and scampered off toward the tin can where it repeated the process, only this time using its sharp legs to rip the can into smaller pieces before once more sitting on them. When it was done, it scooted off, looking for more metal to eat. Thayer scooped it up and turned it off, then opened a side panel. Holding it in one hand, he tilted it backwards and a small pile of ball bearings fell into his other hand.

A sharp burst of laughter came from one of the men. "It shits metal!"

Phineas glared at the man and the laughter was replaced by nervous coughing. He spent a few seconds staring down everyone else to make sure there would be no further outbursts and then said, "Thayer, Hawthorne, and Galloway, into my office."

He opened the door to his office and walked in, knowing Thayer and the others would follow. His desk was just as he left it and just as he liked it—covered in papers, books, and unidentifiable electrical parts and gadgets.

He picked up some papers from the desk, eyed Thayer warily, and then gently placed them in a cabinet behind the desk, which he then locked with a

small key on a large ring. As he took his seat behind his desk, Thayer stood before him, holding his hand over his eyes to shield them from the sunny glare coming from Phineas' window. Within seconds, two more men in lab coats entered, looking rather nervous.

"Have a seat," Phineas said.

Benjamin Thayer smiled broadly and made himself comfortable, obviously pleased that the angle of the sun coming in through the windows was no longer blinding at that level. Taking the chair to his right was Nigel Hawthorne, a British emigrant who specialized in weapons and who seemed to be constantly popping Smith Brothers cough drops and rattling them around in his mouth, much to Phineas' displeasure. To his left sat Shamus Galloway, the manager of the floor, a bookish sort who actually liked working with numbers and making sure that projects were completed on time and under budget. He squinted behind his spectacles and looked askance out the door as if he wasn't sure he should have brought the file he had been carrying into the room with him.

Phineas leaned back in his leather chair and placed his fingertips together. "Mr. Hawthorne, what do you think of this little invention of Mr. Thayer's?"

Hawthorne frowned and tumbled a cough drop around for a few seconds before answering. "Well, I suppose it could be quite useful in clean-up operations, although you'd need many of them working at once. There's only so much that little bugger could do, pardon my language."

"It's perfect as it is." Thayer pouted. "It even uses some of the metal to create fuel for itself so it can keep going."

"Nothing is perfect as it is."

"I've worked on this for months—look, it walks and everything."

Phineas sighed. *Look at this as a teaching moment.* "Come now, gentlemen, what have I told you about Mr. Edison?"

Thayer practically bounced in his seat, anxious to answer. "I know! You said that he really never invented anything, just took things other people invented and found ways to make them work better."

"And?"

Thayer furrowed his brow. "And . . . and that he was also good at taking different things and putting them together to make something better?"

Phineas smiled, and Thayer let out a sigh of relief. "Exactly. So think this through—imagine what uses we could have for this invention of yours? Put it together with other things. Imagine you're Edison trying to take advantage of your invention. Think military uses. That is where the money is."

Hawthorne jumped out of his seat. "Brilliant! I see! We get hundreds of these things onto a battlefield—scampering around all over the place, there's no way to stop them all." He paced the room, looking at no one but talking to everyone, his words coming so fast that they practically ran over each other. "There's always plenty of metal on the ground—broken weapons, bullets, helmets—but these things aren't just gathering the metals, they're processing them, and they're not making ball bearings, they're making *bullets!*" He raised his hands. "But not only that—they're *shooting* the bullets! We can combine this with

the new steam-powered pistol I've been working on, and we won't even need gunpowder. Well, a little, but not as much as guns do now—"

"Have you read Mendleson's latest treatise on combining gunpowder into the bullets themselves?" Thayer asked, eyes aglow. "Perhaps I could add that as a feature . . ."

"Brilliant!" Hawthorne said again. "We could send the metal-eaters into battle with enough ammunition for them to get started, and then they can keep going, creating ammunition along the way, without any of our men in the way of getting harmed! Casualties for the enemy and none for us!"

Phineas smiled. He couldn't believe his luck. The timing was perfect. "Mr. Galloway, I want everyone to stop whatever project they are on and begin working on making as many of these as possible within the next few days. Hire temporary workers if need be. I have a wonderful idea of how we can present these to gain maximum publicity. Thayer and Hawthorne: if this works like I think it will, there will be very nice raises and promotions in your future."

Both men beamed with pleasure while Galloway looked horrified at trying to arrange for such a sudden massive undertaking. He gulped a few times, got up from his seat, started to walk out, turned around as if he was going to say something, paused, then ran out of the room, clutching his folder to his chest like a shield.

Phineas spoke quickly before either of the two left in the room could get started on another spiel about the possibilities of this new device. "Now, both of you, look here. I want to show you something I . . . found today." He reached into

his carry bag and pulled out the purse. Rummaging around uncovered the unusual pistol, and he withdrew it slowly to gauge the reactions of the two. He was not disappointed.

"What is that glowing green light?" Hawthorne asked.

"I was hoping you could tell me," Phineas responded, turning the pistol in his hands to give the expert a better view. "I assume it indicates charge."

Thayer let loose a long whistle. "An electric gun? What does it shoot?"

Phineas suddenly jumped up. "Let's find out." He walked around the desk with an energy he knew the two scientists had never seen before and strode purposefully to the door. Throwing it open, he marched briskly to the center of the lab. Galloway gave a little cry, and the other employees that had gathered around the bookkeeper near his office backed up to give Phineas room—or perhaps they were looking for an escape route. Phineas took a stance, raised the pistol, and aimed it at Galloway, who shrieked uncontrollably, dropped his folder, and threw himself to the floor. The others tumbled over each other to get out of the way.

*Pop!*

A small pellet burst from the chamber and hit the wall with a thud, then instantly expanded and grew, like a mold. Within seconds, an area measuring a yard in any direction was covered with a gooey substance that began to slowly drip and melt away.

"What the hell?" someone whispered.

Phineas looked at the gun with eyebrows raised. With his left hand, he stroked his beard.

"You—you could have killed me!" Galloway said, rising from the floor.

"Nonsense," Phineas replied. "I knew you would move, and if not, I could always get another bookkeeper. But more importantly, it was clear that this isn't a traditional gun. It apparently shoots a glue-like substance that stops your foe in place, ending the battle without harming your enemy. Absolutely fascinating. I know some pacifists who would love this." He gave a slight smile. "Besides, Galloway, the press is always calling me a 'mad scientist.' I have a reputation to uphold."

He handed the gun to one of the men, whose eyes widened. "Mr. Fletcher, I expect you to figure out how to make more of these without destroying this one in the process." Fletcher nodded his head excitedly.

He then addressed the rest of his men, most of whom had gathered their wits by that point, quite a few of them looking very enthused about this new find. "As Mr. Galloway may have already told you, we have a new project that will take all our time for the immediate future. I expect extra work out of you all and if this is successful, there will be rewards. This metal-eater of Thayer's still has a few adjustments that we need to make, and I am putting Mr. Hawthorne in charge of that. Obey him as you would me." He nodded to Hawthorne who smiled and addressed the crowd.

"Yes, we need to incorporate the steam-gun I've been working on into the device," he said. "And we'll still need a way to stop these little buggers from

going on forever. If we can combine Marconi's new radio technology into them, we may even be able to send them signals to turn themselves off after the battle is over. Don't want them to keep moving on into civilian territories, what what?"

"Yes," Phineas said quietly to himself. "Yes, we certainly wouldn't want that to happen."