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Prologue:

Scheveningen Prison, The Hague

A particular independent acting unit in Scheveningen prison hosts the United Nations Detention Unit (UNDU), an UN-administered jail, as part of the facility. An elderly inmate stood talking to his legal team in front of the registry office of The International Criminal Court (ICC or ICCT) in The Hague, Netherlands. He looked tired, but his eyes sparkled, and it appeared like a lazy grin played around the corners of his mouth. A court officer walked towards him; age hadn't done too much to reduce his intimidating presence. He met the man's eyes with a calm that unsettled him. With a slightly shaky voice, he called him to come inside the room to hear his indictment:

“Joseph Leonidovich, former president of the Russian Federation, is now ordered to appear before the International Criminal Court.”

The older man stared at the officer while walking by him to enter the room. The officer looked like he would bolt, but he didn't. The older man retained the very slight grin just till the moment he turned to face the judge and jury.

The registrar of the Court, Herman von Heber, read to the older man:

“Joseph Leonidovich, you will appear before the judges of the International Criminal Court, following the actions of the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC, which conducted independent and impartial preliminary examinations, investigations, and prosecutions of the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression. The conclusions found that your case must proceed because it meets the three jurisdictional and admissibility requirements. The three jurisdictional requirements are:

(1) Subject-matter jurisdiction: what acts constitute crimes: You ordered and managed the invasion of a democratic, independent country of Ukraine, committed crimes against its people, and destroyed its buildings, especially nuclear facilities, that caused severe harm not only to that country's populations but to other countries around it.

(2) Territorial or personal jurisdiction: where the crimes committed or who committed them: While you were president of the Russian Federation, you ordered your army to invade the State of Ukraine. You called your intelligence agency to conduct secret operations against countries sharing the border with the Russian Federation. You ordered the same agency to conduct covert operations to destabilize European societies and cause physical harm to NATO and United States military bases and their civilian and active-duty personnel.

(3) Temporal jurisdiction: Your Russian Army invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022, in an escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War that began in 2014. It is Europe's most powerful conventional military attack since World War II.”

The registrar turned to the man and said in that still, slightly shaking voice.

“There is a list, the one the Court administrator gave to your legal team, of the crimes you stand accused of Genocide, Crimes against humanity, War crimes, and Crimes of aggression.” ’s eyes remained still, steady as though they were sown open. Unblinking even in the face of such accusations. He didn’t even seem to be in the room, and he stared into space and didn’t make eye contact with anyone except when he did.

The old man leaned on his legal team leader and whispered, “I face all that because of a comedian ... and a librarian? To be toppled by those two clowns, I have built the Russian Empire again?” The team leader seemed to smirk. But he didn’t give a full smile.

The old man meant the Ukraine president, who was originally a comedian/actor and who resisted the invasion for a long time, supported by the Western allies, until the Russian Generals finally decided to oust the Russian President and agreed to surround him at the International Criminal Court. By saying *a librarian*, the ex-Russian President meant the American systems librarian who discovered the revenge plot to infiltrate and destabilize the European countries and the U.S. military bases in Europe as retaliation for the way they stood by the Ukrainians until the end.

Though the Ukrainian President and the systems librarian never met in person, their brave actions marked the end of the brutal Russian dictator and sealed his fate—to spend the rest of his life in the Hague prison.

The ex-Russian President heard his indictments. Before he was about to walk to his cell, the ICC Prosecutor, Karam Khan, and his two Deputies appeared before him. The Prosecutor asked him: “Do you know where you stand now?” He added: “Let me answer: You are Inside the same building you conspired to destroy by sending your thugs. You failed; thanks to Operation Mitten’s heroes who foiled your plot, we will add your attempt to the long list of accusations you face.” The Prosecutor then gestured, in disgust, to the guards to take the former president away.

The walk to the cells was short and quiet. The older man walked straight, shoulders squared, and looked like he had no regrets.

An officer was waiting for him by the cell door, holding a book written in Russian.

"Something came for you," the officer said as he handed it over.

“a representative from the capital of the American Embassy in the Netherlands delivered the book, asked to give it to the ex-Russian President himself.”

The older man looked at the book with the same blank stare.

“The book is a gift from the United States President; he even wrote a few Russian words on its first page.” The ex-Russian dictator took the book from the officer, sat down in a nearby chair, opened it, became very agitated, and gave it to his lawyer. The lawyer opened the book and read loudly:

“I told you many times that you would end up in the dirtiest dumpster of history as the worst dictator of modern times. I told you many times that your end would be in jail, convicted of crimes surpassing what Hitler did during World War II. This book is a Ukraine fairy tale titled The Mitten. Unlike the book you used to include your secret revenge plan codes to your spies in Europe to destroy its societies and the U.S. and NATO military bases, this Ukraine book has no secret codes. Still, I send it to you as a reminder of the many crimes your sick mind and soul committed against the peaceful country of Ukraine and the rest of humanity worldwide.”

For the first time that day, the older man looked uncomfortable. He wrung his hands together and bit on the corner of his lips. He would remain there long after his lawyers were gone, just staring into space.

SEMBACH

In the U.S. military base in Sembach, Germany, the IMCOM (United States Army Installation Management) director, Thomas Meise, walked to the meeting that arranged to congratulate one of its staff, Stacy Wade, for an unusual reason: That staff received from the President of the United States, in the White House, the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), the second-highest military decoration that awarded only to a member of the United States Army. Meise was a tall, broad-shouldered man with light blue eyes and ginger-colored hair. His brows were thick, and his face had a severe permanent look. He held himself with the rigid and proud stance of a military man, and when he placed his deep blue eyes on people, it felt like he could see into their souls and made them squirm.

In a short introduction of Stacy Wade, a library systems manager in the regional library office in Sembach, Mr. Meise took a long look at the crowd in front of him and then said:

“From the first time I met Stacy Wade, I knew there was something special about him. And I am not surprised that he has always been diligent. But I also noticed that he was attentive and always carried out his duty with great detail. A friend in the FBI once joked with me about recruiting Wade, and with what has happened now, I do not doubt that he will attempt to make do with that playful threat. We all know we won't let Wade wade away from us, though.” The crowd laughed as they appreciated the play on words. Most of them had never seen Meise smile, much less make a real joke.

“We gather today to congratulate this man on this honor bestowed by the president. Let all attendees rise and give a standing ovation to the staff.”

Every man and woman in the room stood up to honor the man. But, in the far-left corner of the crowd was Andy Walker, green with envy and wishing not too covertly that the honor was his. He worked with Stacy Wade in the same office as a librarian. However, nobody paid much attention to him, as they were too busy showing their love and support for the hero of the hour.

“Wade, I would like to invite you to tell the attendees how your heroic story started and what led you to discover the most dangerous Russian spy operation of the century.” The director

requested proudly. Wade stood up and walked over to the podium with a slight smile, waiting for the room to become silent before he began talking.

“I want to start by thanking everyone that came out today. It is an absolute honor to be in the same space with all of you” walker rolled his eyes at what he perceived as sugar-coated faux humility.

“I thank my wife, Briza, and amazing boys who have made life a joy for me, and my brother Steven; and his wife Norma—and finally, I’d like to thank the President of the United States for this amazing honor.” The room was silent as everyone had settled in to listen to him recount his story. Even though there had been rumors about what Stacy did, they all knew that nothing would substitute for hearing the story from the mouth of the hero.

“I was sitting at my desk one cold February, attending a mandatory online training on anti-terrorism that I had to take every year. My supervisor entered the room and told me to finish the training as soon as possible and prepare for my upcoming TDY (Temporary Duty Orders) to tour the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) libraries in Europe. I was supposed to create a report on the new unified library system that would integrate all the DoD’s libraries under one system. I remember that Lt. Walker asked if he could participate in the tour and questioned why I was the only one selected to go. My supervisor explained that I was a part of the DoD team in charge of unifying the systems of all libraries into one. He added that librarians are not needed at this point...” his voice continued to fill the room with the elaborate tale of how he came to be the most celebrated man in that hour.

The Library Regional Office in Sembach consisted of a director, two technology assistants, two librarians (Andy Walker and Sue Cox), and an acquisitions librarian (Krystyna). The Office functioned as a hub that received all books ordered by European MWR (Morale, Welfare, and Recreation) and NATO libraries from vendors, cataloging them and then shipping them to the proper library. Sue Cox was in charge of training librarians, especially the newcomers, in Europe. She organized online training programs and three in-person sessions every year, bringing all library managers and supervisors to Sembach for four training days. On the opposite side of Andy Walker, Sue was a fan of Stacy Wade. When she learned about Stacy's upcoming

recognition and awards ceremony, she invited all European library managers to attend an urgent meeting. One of those managers was Lisa Ortiz, director of Brunssum library, located in the U.S. Army Garrison Benelux. That library provides support to meet the particular international and joint environment demands for military communities in the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, the United Kingdom, and northern Germany. Lisa Ortiz met with Stacy on many occasions when he started his duties, and she also traveled to the area. Lisa was his guide, introducing him to staff and touring the facilities with him. While taking him on tours all over the Netherlands, she fell in love with him. Knowing he was married and single, she kept things to herself.

Days later, the same envious Andy asked Stacy if he could bring his wife, Ann, to visit him in Stacy's apartment to see him off and to ask him to purchase some items from the countries he scheduled to visit. At Stacy's apartment, Ann started working on Briza's ears, telling her to be careful not to lose her husband, who would be alone for a 15-day trip to many European countries and might meet beautiful women. She recommended that they rent the classic movies *The Guide for the Married Man* and *Fatal Attraction* to see what schemes could be cooked up by innocent-looking, happily married men. She added, as instructed by her husband that it might be in the best interest of Briza to convince her husband to take Andy to go with him during the trip.

Ann Walker loved to gossip and always claimed she knew all the latest news. She worked as a daycare teacher in the Kleber Kaserne Child Development Center (CDC). Originally from Alabama, she was known for her recognized southern accent, jokes, and her love for children. Ann was an expert in childrearing, even though she never had any of her own. She had her first encounter with Briza when she met her at the CDC entrance when Briza came to apply for a supervisor position at the Center. Though Briza did not get the job, their relationship continued on and off, especially when they met inside the Exchange Mall in Ramstein Air Base.