

NOTHING AS IT SEEMS
BERTIL SCHAART



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1

Nothing but darkness. It made no difference if I had my eyes open or closed. Confused I tried to interpret my surroundings. Then it dawned upon me again. A big wave of desperation swept me away. What a cowardly way to treat the most admired president this country ever knew!

I was lying flat on my back. I touched the fabric of my clothes and could fortunately conclude I was still wearing my expensive tailor-made three piece suit. Whenever I were to face my captors, whoever they are, this fine silk harness would certainly help to re-establish my status and authority.

My legs felt numb. The wooden bunk bed was too short and appeared to have been hastily assembled from scrap material. I decided to close my eyes again. I could hear my own breath. A breath in. A breath out. Another breath in. It broke the destructive silence around me. I tried to concentrate on the sound of my own body and eventually managed to fall back asleep again.

When I opened my eyes again, I saw some light

coming in from a small high placed window. It was too high for me to reach. Even if I would have been able to get to it, it was too narrow for me to escape from. The crack in the glass nevertheless gave me some faint hope. Nothing is forever.

I stood up and sat on the bed. Perhaps there was something good spending time in forced solitary, a chance to recharge the batteries. Of course it was not my choice to be here, but I could benefit from it nevertheless and make as much of it as I could.

I had no idea anymore how many hours I had been in this cell. There was no pen and paper, just four walls, a toilet and a bunk bed. And there was me. Of course there was me. I was the reason this place existed in the first place. Apparently. If anything, now I had all the time to reflect on all the bizarre things that had happened in the recent past.

2

Elisa quickly straightened her black dress, the one from yesterday, and proceeded to rehearse the powerful catch phrases with me again. I felt confident. I had read all the documents and knew this was the right thing to do. I imagined myself to be a towering lighthouse, strongly standing in this storm, guiding everyone to safety.

Elisa had been my media manager for several years now, but she was much more than that. She coached me, she trained me. She was the first person I would go to whenever I was faced with a difficult situation. Elisa would listen attentively to me and then magically come up with a fantastic solution I would have never thought of. It was usually so cunning and clever as if she had prepared it in advance. What more could someone in my position wish for?

As she quickly applied some more foundation on my face, I was thinking about last night again. It was so sensual and exciting. Alternating domination and submission. It had aroused all my senses. But it was also very exhausting and apparently had left visible

marks around my eyes. But thanks to Elisa, both the cause and the solution of this, the nation would never notice.

The door to the media room was open and I could already see the first reporters take their seats. Considering the severity of my speech, this could very well have been the lion's den. But there was no need to worry. Elisa had only invited those members of the press who were 'our acquired friends', as she would call them. I never fully understood what she meant by that. With so many things to manage in my life, I did not have the time to find out either. I was assured of being able to deliver well prepared answers to previously agreed questions and that was all what mattered.

As I walked into the room, I greeted the familiar faces. Some returned the greetings with me a faint smile. Almost all seats were taken. The camera crew were doing their final sound and light test. Still a few more minutes before the live broadcast to the people of the nation. The press conference would announce the immediately effective new directive. We knew it would come as a shock to the citizens, but we had to. There was simply no other way. Well, more precisely put, there was no other way anymore. Exactly as we had planned.

3

One more minute before going live. I stepped to the microphone. The camera light blinded me shortly, but my eyes quickly accommodated. A quick glance over my notes reminded me I had nothing to worry. I scraped my voice and looked one more time into the room. Just as I did that, a young woman quickly ran into the room to take the last seat. I had never seen her before. She was far too young to be an experienced reporter. “Where is Jane?” I asked her directly. “She is ill, I am replacing her.” the woman said while still panting. Beads of sweat were noticeable on her forehead, highlighting acne in her face. It must have been a last minute emergency decision. The youngster didn’t seem very professional. Perhaps she was an intern. She will most likely have been briefed by Jane and ask the same questions. At any case, I had nothing to fear from her.

“3.. 2.. 1.. Showtime!”. The excited voice of our press coordinator. I put on the gravest expression on my face and looked into the camera. Elisa was in the back of the room and gave me the thumbs up. We had

practiced many different facial expressions in front of the mirror and this one was clearly the winner. By holding my mouth closed with the corners slightly hanging, I would show seriousness. I slightly lifted my eye lids to show clarity and determination. My forehead was slightly tilted forward, to be able to look straight into the living rooms of the people. By slightly looking down, it also subtly gave me the look of a superior. I felt the anticipation rising in the room.

Elisa must have felt the same. Always in for a tease, she naughtily touted her lips just like she did last night. Flashes of last night shot through my mind again. What a way to reduce my tension! I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. Focus now.

“Today is going to be an important day that will still be remembered centuries from now”. The reporter on the front row looked at me and quietly nodded. He knew the script by heart.

4

A plate with food had been delivered via a latch in my cell door. The person who brought my food, whoever he or she was, never made any noise. It was only until the slide opened that I noticed. This time I could grasp the glimpse of two brown shoes, but I wasn't sure. I couldn't even see if they were male or female shoes. The light was again too dim. And then immediately the latch was shut again.

I desperately try to talk to the person. "Why am I here? Please tell me!" I shouted against the door. Silence. "What do you want? Tell me. Anything." I pounded the wooden barrier that kept me imprisoned. It was in vain. "At least tell me what I did wrong!?"

Of course, I knew what I did wrong. I perfectly knew why I was here. But I was certain they didn't know, whoever they were. Only a handful of people knew the full extent of our plan. It was too risky to reveal my secret to these unknown people.

On the white porcelain plate I found a deep soup bowl of the same make. It looked like one we had at

home. Chicken soup. Or more correctly put, hot water with chicken flavor, probably from a sachet of instant soup. Next to the bowl I found a roll of wholegrain bread with a crispy crust. At least, that is what I thought. This piece of bread was as hard as a brick.

An old red apple which already showed small wrinkles completed this meal course. What a way to treat the most important man in the nation! Was this supposed to be breakfast, lunch or dinner? Quite a change with the rich banquets I was used to.

I dipped the bread in the watery substance and fortunately it softened its steel shell. As it soaked up the salty solution, I noticed they had given me a spoon as well. “Such good hosts...” I cynically whispered to myself. There were words stamped in the backside. I held it up to the light in order to read it. “Stainless steel”.

My eyes were fixated on this piece of cutlery. Like the spoon, I was also spotless. The team had crafted a perfect image of me. I was also the man of steel. Tough. And like the spoon, I fed the nation. With the biggest lies. And they eagerly wanted more. My mind drifted further away.

5

The press conference had proceeded as we anticipated. I delivered one of my best performances. At the end of the speech, I was even able to squeeze out a few tears. We hadn't rehearsed this, but I felt it was very appropriate to add more emotional effect. I had stopped blinking my eyes in the last phrases of my address to the nation. With the help of the camera lights, my eyes easily filled with tears. I couldn't see Elisa, but I knew she would be proud.

The first half hour of questions was entirely according the play book. I was impressed with the reporters on the front row. They were free to rephrase the questions we had given them the day before. They had done so with such eloquence, it gave the perfect impression of critical questions. In return, I provided them with equally impressive replies. This gentleman's ping pong match continued for a good while, until I noticed Jane's replacement again.

The young woman had had her hand raised for at least ten minutes. She was clearly not used to these kind of settings. The press coordinator had noticed her