

## Unexpected Sleepover

"Finally!" Ainsley Hayes muttered to herself as she signed the last copy and chucked the whole stack into her out box. It was Friday night, and she had plans.

Standing, she laced her hands together above her head and luxuriated in a long stretch. Slipping her feet back into the shoes that she'd removed several hours before, she grabbed the duffel bag she'd placed under her desk that morning. Moving around the desk, she turned off the desk lamp and the office light on her way out.

Making her way down the nearly empty halls, she finally came to the door nearest the parking lot where she'd left her car. She was surprised to find a Secret Service agent standing in front of the doors, clearly keeping anyone from leaving.

"What is going on here?" she asked the agent.

"Security lockdown, ma'am," was the answer. "Nobody is leaving the grounds until the all clear is given."

"That is just wonderful," she said to herself sarcastically. "How long has it been going on and how much long is it expected to take?"

"Approximately ten minutes, and how much longer is unknown."

Her lips thinned as she continued staring at the agent. For his part, he never wavered from his attitude of polite attention.

"And what, precisely, am I supposed to do in the meanwhile?" she asked in exasperation.

"The Mess has been re-opened due to the lockdown," he suggested.

Now her glare held a little more venom. Her appetite was legendary, but she didn't appreciate hearing jokes about it from the Secret Service.

"Oh, fine!" she huffed, spinning on her heel and turning back to the Mess, duffel still firmly clenched in hand.

Arriving at the cafeteria, she was momentarily rendered speechless with the number of people present. With the President, his wife, and the majority of the senior staff out of town, she expected the White House to be mostly empty, but there were over a dozen people in the room. Looking around for familiar faces, she spotted a few interns she knew vaguely, but they were sitting in a large group with other interns. Not wanting to join a group in which she didn't know everyone, Ainsley went over to a small, empty table and dropped her duffel to the floor. Making her way through the food line, she selected a yogurt and a bagel. Taking a packet of cream cheese with her, she went back to the table she'd staked out for herself and dejectedly flopped down into her seat.

Poking around the corners of the yogurt cup for the last little bit, she realized that someone was standing over her. Looking up, Ainsley saw Donna Moss looking down at her with a backpack in one hand and an apple in the other.

"May I?" the Deputy to the Deputy Chief of Staff asked, waving at the empty seat.

"Please," Ainsley agreed. Donna dropped her backpack to the floor next to Ainsley's duffel and flopped down into the seat. Eyeing her friend, Ainsley said, "Forgive me, but with Josh out of town, I expected you to either be with him or at the very least not here."

Donna rolled her eyes as she took a bite of the apple. "I wouldn't be here, except Joshua decided that he needed me to come in and find a copy of the memo from House Ways and Means on the thing. He should've taken it with him in the first place, but in typical Josh fashion, he didn't. Then he wants me to read it to him instead of faxing the thing. I just KNOW he's going to call me again and ask for some other paragraph to be read to him. As if the man couldn't read it for himself IF I COULD JUST FAX IT TO HIM." Her voice rose slightly at the end of the sentence, displaying her frustration with her boss. "And now that I'm here, I can't leave with this lockdown," she concluded sullenly.

"Maybe he just likes to hear the sound of your voice," Ainsley offered with a small smile.

"Oh, please," Donna huffed. "He just enjoys tormenting me."

The smile grew a millimeter. "It's usually called flirting."

Donna nearly choked on her bite of apple.

"Not that he's available," Ainsley covered herself. Josh's dating of Amy Gardner was open knowledge. "Josh flirts with everyone. You just get more of it. More intense I mean. Because you spend more time with him, you see," Ainsley rambled on when Donna just stared at her. "I mean, you don't get it more intensely, but that you get more flirting because you spend all day with him. Unlike me, who sees him for maybe five minutes a week. I wonder for how much time Sam sees him." Her eyes widened momentarily and she hastily added, "Not that I'm insinuating that Josh flirts with Sam -"

Donna broke into laughter, cutting off what Ainsley was about to say. Finally settling down and wiping her eyes, she said, "It's okay, Ainsley. I knew what you meant." She cocked her head slightly and said speculatively, "Though the idea of Sam and Josh flirting is certainly an interesting one." She laughed again at the look on Ainsley's face. "I was just kidding! Josh is dating Amy, and we know that Sam has dated women. Mallory and that call girl for instance."

"Laurie," Ainsley muttered, staring hard at the bagel crumbs on her tray.

"Yeah, her," Donna absently agreed, taking another bite of her rapidly vanishing apple. Dropping the apple core onto Ainsley's tray, Donna asked, "So why the duffel bag?"

Ainsley thought about how to phrase her answer for only a moment before saying, "I was planning on seeing someone tonight after I got off of work. But with this lockdown, I can't see that happening anytime soon." Before Donna's next obvious question, she hastily asked, "Why the backpack?"

"Oh," Donna hitched for a second before admitting, "I was planning on seeing someone tonight, too."

Ainsley opened her mouth to ask who, but snapped it closed immediately. If Ainsley asked the question, then she would be obligated to answer the same question if asked. And that was certainly something that she did NOT want to do right now. With more than a little trepidation, she looked over at Donna only to see her expression reflected there.

Once both women recognized the expression the other was wearing and the probable cause, they both smiled conspiratorial smiles and glanced down at their hands.

Neither said a word for a few moments. "Well," Ainsley finally said into the silence, "since we both seem stuck here until the lockdown is over, what shall we do?"

"You could come back to the Residence with me," offered a third voice.

Both women looked over to find Zoey Bartlet leaning against one of the tables.

"Miss Bartlet," Donna greeted her.

"Ma'am," Ainsley said.

Zoey looked slightly pained and held up a hand. "Please. It's Zoey. Calling me ma'am makes me think my mother is standing behind me." Getting two hesitant smiles in response, she said, "With this lockdown, I'm not allowed to leave the grounds, and it seems to have caught you two as well. Since all three of us seem to have been separated from our boyfriends, let's make it a girl's night in."

Both older women looked apprehensive. "Exactly how much of our discussion did you overhear, Miss Bartlet, if I may ask?" Ainsley asked.

"Now what did I just say about calling me Zoey?"

"You asked me, very politely by the way, if I would call you Zoey because calling you ma'am makes you think the First Lady is standing behind you."

Zoey turned to Donna. "Is she always this polite?"

"You should have seen her with your father," Donna remarked with a smirk.

Ainsley winced. "Please don't remind me of that."

"And then there was the SECOND time he saw her," Donna added maliciously with a wide grin.

Zoey's eyebrows were raised as she turned back to the Deputy Counselor, a question clear in her eyes.

Ainsley was nearly glowing pink by this time. In an effort to sidetrack the conversation, she said, "I don't believe you answered my original question, Miss . . . Zoey."

Zoey nodded, finally getting the flustered Republican to call her by name. "To answer the question: I heard enough to know that you both have boyfriends, and that neither of you want to admit who they are." She paused a moment and then cocked her head slightly in thought. "Well, I'll assume for the moment that they're boyfriends. And since I haven't heard any rumors of you two dating anyone, I have to conclude that you don't want anyone to know that you're dating, let alone who."

Both women steadily regarded Zoey, but neither gave any indication of the truth of what she was saying.

Letting her grin widen a bit, Zoey nodded and repeated, "Like I said, why don't you two come up to the Residence with me? We can have a girl's night in."

Donna glanced over at Ainsley only to see the Southerner shrug. "That sounds fine with me, but first I'd like to call someone and tell him that I'm hung up here." So saying, Ainsley dug around in her duffel bag for a second before coming up with her cell. Hitting a speed dial key, she waited a few seconds before talking to whoever picked up the phone. "Hi, it's me. The Secret Service has called a crash here, so I can't make it tonight." "No, it's no big deal. I was just going to spend some time with Donna when Miss Zoey Bartlet invited the two of us up to the Residence." "Yeah, you too. See you tomorrow." Folding the phone, she was about to tuck it back into her duffel when she looked up. Donna and Zoey were staring at her intently. "What is it?" she asked self-consciously, hand poised halfway to the duffel.

"Can I borrow your phone to make a call?" Donna asked calmly.

Hesitantly, Ainsley handed the phone over. Donna calmly dialed a number and spoke again after a long pause. "Hey, it's me. The White House is in lockdown over some terrorist thing, so I won't be able to make it over tonight. Call me at my place tomorrow. Bye." She folded the phone and handed it to Ainsley with a small smile. "Thank you." Standing, she took her backpack in hand and asked Zoey, "Shall we?"

Zoey looked back and forth between the two composed women for a few seconds before finally shrugging and heading out of the Mess. One of the nearly invisible service agents trailed them to the elevator leading to the Residence.

"If the lockdown lasts long enough, you two can stay in a couple of the guest rooms if you want," Zoey offered while they were riding up.

"I appreciate the offer," Ainsley said.

"Beats trying to sleep on Sam's couch," Donna agreed.

Ainsley's mouth twitched, but nobody else saw it.

Zoey led them to the Bartlet family room once the elevator stopped. Donna was looking around casually, but Ainsley was trying not to stare. Realizing that she was losing one of her followers, Zoey stopped and turned back. Smiling at Ainsley's expression, she said, "Sorry, I keep forgetting the effect on someone who hasn't been here before. Do you want a tour?"

Finally dragging her eyes and attention back to her hostess, Ainsley blushed slightly and said, "Thank you, that won't be necessary, Miss Bartlet."

Zoey raised her eyebrows and tilted her head slightly.

"Zoey," Ainsley corrected herself, smiling slightly.

Zoey nodded in satisfaction. "We have got to do something to make you relax," she observed as she started moving again towards the living room.

"I'm fine," Ainsley objected.

Zoey and Donna shared a look, but neither said anything more about it.

"I'm getting something to drink," Zoey announced once they were all in the living room. "You two want something?"

"Just so long as you don't give her a pink squirrel and a bathrobe, we'll be fine," Donna teased.

Ainsley dropped her duffel beside an overstuffed chair and dropped down into it. "Will I never live that down?" she asked the ceiling.

"Probably not," Donna said. "Josh hasn't let me live dropping my underwear in front of Karen Cahill. Why should he let you live down dancing in your bathrobe?"

"I have GOT to hear this story," Zoey said from the door to the kitchen. "Meanwhile, drinks?"

"What all do you have?"

"Beer, white wine, wine coolers."

"By any chance might you have a peach wine cooler?" Ainsley asked hopefully and then smiled when Zoey nodded.

"Beer's fine," Donna said, wandering the room, looking at pictures.

Zoey returned moments later and distributed the drinks before curling herself into one end of the couch. Seeing which picture had Donna's attention, she nodded and said, "That's one of my favorites, too." Turning to Ainsley, she said, "On the campaign trail, I joined them in Denver. We took a day off to see the mountains. It's a group photo of my family and what's now the senior staff."

Curious, Ainsley wandered over and looked at the picture over Donna's shoulder. Front and center, a relatively relaxed looking Jed Bartlet stood with one arm around his wife and the other around Zoey. Arrayed behind and around them were the senior staff. Sam and Josh both had their arms over the other's shoulders and were smiling their own brands of carefree smiles. CJ was casually leaning on Toby's shoulder and smiling at the camera. Even Leo had a small smile and look genuinely relaxed. Only Toby was not smiling. As usual, he had his solemn look plastered on his face.

"May I ask a question that I hope neither of you takes the wrong way?" Ainsley asked after studying the picture.

"Shoot," Zoey offered.

"Why does Mister Ziegler never smile?"

"He does smile," Donna corrected her. "Usually after a big victory or when CJ tells him a joke."

"I have never seen him smile, and I was just curious," Ainsley observed.

"So you think he and CJ are a thing?" Zoey asked, taking a sip of her own wine cooler.

Donna took the other half of the couch that Zoey was using and asked, "CJ and Toby?" She contemplated that while taking a drink and finally said, "Probably not. They're best friends, but I can't see it going any further than that." She noticed that Zoey was looking at her and asked, "What is it?"

"Oh, just wondering who it is that you're seeing. I know it isn't Josh -"

Donna nearly choked on her drink.

"Why is it, do you think, that you keep choking on your food or drink when someone suggests that you might be seeing Mister Lyman?" Ainsley wondered aloud.

Donna glared at her for a moment before turning to Zoey. "Josh and I are NOT dating. We never have. We never will. He's like an older brother. A very annoying older brother."

"I wouldn't know," Zoey returned. "I don't have any brothers."

"I do, and I must admit that they can be very annoying," Ainsley confirmed.

Ainsley was describing a practical joke her brothers had played on her as a child a few minutes later when the phone rang. Zoey answered it, "Hello?" She sighed a few seconds later. "Okay, Gina. Thanks for letting me know. G'Night." She replaced the receiver and turned to the two women who were looking at her expectantly. "That was Gina, my principle agent. The Secret Service as officially locked down the grounds for at least another five hours. Unless you two want to wait up and then go home, I guess you're staying here for the night."

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Two hours later Zoey yawned and closed the book she had been reading. She stood and started cleaning up the cards from the table where the girls had spent some time chatting and passing the time before both older women went off to bed, both claiming that it'd been quite some time since they'd gotten to bed so early. Zoey had changed into a pair of shorts and a t-shirt before coming back out to the living room and reading.

Picking up the empty bottles, Zoey grinned to herself. Keeping the Secret Service and the White House staff out of the Residence had taken direct orders. She really couldn't fault them all for trying to do their jobs, but it got to be overbearing after a while. She'd enjoyed the time with the two women, acting like they were just normal people for awhile.

Dropping the bottles into the glass recycling container in the kitchen, she made her way back out to the living room to finish her cleanup. She found Donna coming in from the direction of the guest rooms wearing a red nightgown. She crossed over to the couch where she'd spent most of the night and dropped down into it in frustration. "I can't get to sleep," she complained.

"Why not?" Zoey asked. "It's after eleven."

"That's the problem," Ainsley said, entering the room and heading for the overstuffed chair. "I haven't been to bed this early in months."

Zoey let out a whistle when she saw what Ainsley was wearing. It was a black teddy that was definitely picked out by a man, evidenced by the fact that it accentuated her figure quite well.

Ainsley stopped at the whistle and blushed.

"Oh, we have GOT to find out who got that for you," Donna observed.

"How do you know I didn't get it for myself?" Ainsley tried to defend herself.

"Are you going to try to claim that it's more comfortable than what Zoey or I are wearing?"

"Well . . ." Ainsley hedged. Trying to deflect the conversation, she asked, "How about you, Donna? Where did you get that nightgown?"

"My boyfriend got it for me, but don't try to change the subject."

"Why not? It's not like I was expecting to sleep tonight at the White House. It was either wear this, my underwear, or sleep in the nude. I came to the conclusion that this was probably a better choice."

"Be thankful that there are no male Secret Service agents on this floor," Zoey teased.

Ainsley rolled her eyes but didn't answer directly. Instead, she settled herself in the overstuffed chair and composed herself with admirable poise.

Casting a quick eye over the partially cleared impromptu party, Donna said, "I'm sorry. We're probably keeping you up, aren't we?"

Zoey waved her off. "Don't worry about it. It's been a very long time since my last slumber party. I'm having fun with you two here tonight."

"At least let us help you clean this up."

"Don't worry about it. I'll get it tomorrow morning."

Each of the three women looked back and forth among each other before Zoey smiled wryly. "We need to have a topic of conversation or this is going to become a really boring evening." Ainsley and Donna smiled and chuckled lightly, but neither suggested anything. Zoey sighed dramatically and said, "Well, since I'm the only one who freely acknowledges who my boyfriend is, that topic is out. Considering where we are, I guess politics is the only other conversation we might have. So who do you think is going to run in four years?" She didn't have to specify for which position.

"On your ticket, it'll be Hoynes," Ainsley answered. "The better question is who would you LIKE to run?"

"Sam," Donna stated definitely.

"Sam?" Zoey asked.

"Sam Seaborn, Deputy Communications Director. I'm sure you've met him," Donna teased.

Zoey mock glared. Ainsley giggled. Zoey said, "Okay, why?"

"Can I assume that Leo will both retire in four years?" Donna asked, leaving out the possibility that President Bartlet might be beaten in the upcoming elections.

Zoey nodded.

"Sam's the only one with the fire and the temperament to make it. On behalf of the Sisterhood, I would want CJ to run, maybe as VP, but Sam has the drive. Josh doesn't have the temperament, but he'd probably take Leo's job. Toby wouldn't want the position, so he'd stay where he was."

Ainsley and Zoey digested that for a few seconds before Ainsley observed, "You've thought this out, haven't you?"

"All the assistants go out together once a month. We usually end up comparing war stories, but one of the other popular topics is who we would want to be in what position in five years. Carol has said she eventually wants the Press Secretary job. Margaret knows that Leo's been grooming Josh for his position. Bonnie and Ginger both know that Toby may grumble about it, but Toby's happy where he is. And Cathy thinks Sam is aiming for the position of President eventually."

"There's a problem with that plan," Zoey observed after a little more thought.

"What's that?" Donna asked.

"Neither Sam nor CJ is married. Voters will never elect bachelors, or bachelorettes for that matter, to the Presidency."

"Easy," Donna waved that one off. "CJ can marry Danny."

"Danny?" Ainsley asked.

"Post reporter Danny Concannon," Donna answered.

Zoey grinned. "Have you seen her with her new agent? Donovan, I think."

Ainsley shook her head. Donna did as well, but with a raised eyebrow.

Zoey's grin widened. "She's got it bad, even if she doesn't know it yet. But that still leaves Sam."

Ainsley flinched imperceptibly.

Donna almost chuckled. "You think he doesn't have options available to him? Just among the staff I know a half dozen people who would kill for a date with him."

Zoey cocked her head slightly. "Who would make a good First Lady for him, do you think?"

"Mallory wouldn't be a bad choice. Or Connie Tate from Bruno's staff."

"Or you," Zoey added slyly.

Donna smiled slightly. She folded her arms across her chest and asked, "What brought you to that conclusion?"

"Oh, I'm still trying to figure out who your boyfriend is. That and the fact that you seem so caught up thinking about who would make a good significant other for Sam Seaborn."

"I'll admit that I think he's one good looking man. What straight, red-blooded American female doesn't? But he isn't my boyfriend."

"What do you think, Ainsley?" Zoey asked her other guest.

"Oh, he would need someone whose strong suit isn't geography," she replied steadily, trying to maintain her composure. Both Donna and Zoey grinned. "Other than that, I don't know most of the women you've mentioned, so I can't render a verdict."

Zoey continued to contemplate Donna and started talking, almost to herself, "We know she has a boyfriend. She's denied it being Josh or Sam, but she doesn't want us to know who it is. Now how to find out . . ." She trailed off.

Smiling in amusement, Donna asked, "Were you a detective in a previous life?"

"Incurably addicted to Nancy Drew when I was a kid," Zoey answered absently. Again speaking to herself, she said, "I could just ask Gina. She probably knows."

Now Donna looked scared. "You wouldn't."

"Ah, HA! It IS someone we know. Now how to find out . . ." She again trailed off, staring at Donna pensively. Donna, for her part, was trying desperately to think of a way to head off the coming inquisition. Zoey suddenly brightened, causing Donna's stomach to drop. Any plan of Zoey's couldn't work out very well for her. Turning to Ainsley, Zoey asked, "Ainsley, may I borrow your phone?"

Both women stared at her in confusion. "Yes," Ainsley answered, standing to get it.

"Who are you going to call?" Donna asked cautiously. She really wasn't going to have someone investigate this, was she?

"You'll see," Zoey answered with a diabolical smile.

Ainsley re-entered the room carrying her cell phone and moved to hand it to Zoey. Instead, Zoey shook her head and pointed back to the chair where Ainsley had been sitting.

Confused, Ainsley sat down.

"Hit redial," Zoey directed, keeping her eyes on Donna.

Donna's and Ainsley's eyes both went wide at the same moment. "No," Donna moaned, burying her face in her hands.

Ainsley hesitated. It WAS nearing midnight, after all.

"Then tell us who it is," Zoey said. "I'm not going to do anything with it. I'm just curious."

Donna parted her hands so that she could see Zoey. The First Daughter wasn't grinning at her as she half expected. She looked honestly curious. Donna sighed in resignation. "Cliff Calley."

Ainsley's eyebrows skyrocketed. "Senate Majority Counsel Cliff Calley?" Ainsley asked. Donna mutely nodded.

Zoey looked at Ainsley. "You know him?"

"I set him and Donna up on a date months ago." She turned back to Donna. "The one who was doing the depositions of the staff, yourself included, over the President's MS non-disclosure. Part of the House Reform and Oversight Committee who were questioning Mister McGarry back in December. This is the same Cliff Calley we're talking about, right?"

"Yes," Donna looked up at Ainsley and met her stare unflinchingly.

"Speaking as the Deputy Counsel of the White House, do you know how bad this could be?"

Donna made a noise somewhere between amusement and exasperation. "Yes, Josh has made that abundantly clear. He's aware of Cliff's and my . . . relationship. We're trying to keep it quiet."

"Who else knows about this?" Ainsley asked, fully the Deputy Counsel.

Donna rolled her eyes. "You two, Josh, me, and Cliff. That's why I didn't want you two to find out."

"Understandable," Zoey noted as Ainsley frowned.

"After the censure, there's no reason for you not to date him. It's just that it could look . . . bad. Especially if you were dating before or during the investigations," Ainsley said. She took a deep breath and continued, "That was officially. Personally, I'm glad you two are getting along." She glanced down at Donna's nightgown and added, "If he's picking nightgowns out for you, then I would guess you are getting along very well indeed."

Donna smiled. Zoey stifled her laughter.

"Can I borrow your phone to tell Cliff that the cat's out of the bag? At least where you two are concerned."

Ainsley handed the phone over. "Please say hi to him for me. Oh, and congratulations."

Donna smiled as she took the phone. "Thanks." She stood and walked to the far end of the room to have a modicum of privacy while she was talking.

While she was making her call, Ainsley told Zoey, "I'm glad it's working out for her. He'll be good for her, and she deserves a little bit of happiness."

"Having to put up with Josh all the time like she does," Zoey said with a small smile.

"Having to put up with Josh all the time," Ainsley agreed with a matching smile.

"Even if it IS with a Republican," Zoey continued, letting the smile blossom.

Ainsley's smile transformed into a mock glare. Zoey was still laughing when Donna returned. She made to hand the phone back to Ainsley, but Zoey asked for it instead. After Ainsley's confused permission was given, Zoey regarded the phone for a few seconds before looking up at Ainsley. "If I hit speed dial one, what would happen?"

Ainsley looked at her in continuing confusion. "You'd get my answering machine."

"It was speed dial two she used earlier," Donna supplied helpfully with a grin at Ainsley.

Ainsley's face paled. She looked at the phone in Zoey's hand. Donna and Zoey could almost see her estimating the distance.

"Are you going to tell me, or do I have to find out the hard way?"

Ainsley didn't answer.

Donna said, "Maybe we can figure out who it is anyway."

"How do you mean?" Zoey asked.

"When she was talking to him earlier, she called me Donna. So it's probably someone who knows me. Now who do I know that has the bravery to go into Victoria's Secret by himself?" She mentally searched through the list of acquaintances she had in common with Ainsley. While several of the interns could have done it, none of them had the financial means.

"It doesn't necessarily have to be someone who knows you," Ainsley pointed out calmly.

"Why's that?" Zoey asked.

Ainsley turned to Zoey. "It could be that I mentioned several of my co-workers to this person."

"But you called the lockdown a crash. Only someone who works here would understand that."

Ainsley paled.

Donna's face broke into a room-brightening smile.

Ainsley paled even further.

"Oh, Ainsley, you didn't, did you?" When Ainsley didn't answer, Donna's grin got wider. "Oh, Josh is going to love this . . ."

"No," Ainsley stated flatly. "As you can imagine, we don't want anyone to find out. Especially Mister Lyman."

"But -" Donna started to object.

"You don't want me to mention you and Cliff, and I don't want you to mention me and . . . On the surface it would appear to be a fair trade. Don't you agree?"

Donna nodded grudgingly.

Zoey was still holding the phone. She waved it a little. "You going to clue me in, or do I have to hit speed dial two?" she threatened.

Ainsley sighed and buried her face in her hands. "Go ahead, but just promise you won't tell anyone."

Looking back and forth between Ainsley's resigned attitude and Donna's smug grin, Zoey keyed the phone and held it up to her ear.

"Sam Seaborn," she heard. She felt her mouth fall open and her eyes become huge as she stared at Ainsley. Still not having said anything, she heard rustling on the other end before Sam's voice came back. "Ains, it's you on the caller ID. Are you okay?"

"Sam?" Zoey croaked out through her astonishment. Donna's smile looked like it could break her face at any moment.

There was a pause before Sam said sternly, "Who are you and how did you get this phone?"

"Sam, it's me, Zoey," she said, getting her voice back under control.

There was a slightly longer pause. "I can explain."

"I'm sure you can," Zoey said in amusement. "Nice taste in lingerie for Ainsley, by the way."

The pause got longer still. "This is bad on so many different levels."

"No, not really," Zoey assured him. "Ainsley tried to keep us from finding out, but Donna pieced it together from the clues."

"Donna knows?" Sam asked in resignation.

"It's okay. Ainsley knows who Donna's dating." Donna glared at Zoey. Ainsley started to smile for the first time since the phone had made it into Zoey's hand.

"Donna's dating someone?" Sam's voice perked up in interest.

"Yes, but nobody knows that. Kind of like you and Ainsley."

"You're learning this blackmail stuff kinda early, Zoey," he observed, not sounding particularly upset.

"I've had some of the best teachers around," she returned the backhand compliment. "And this isn't blackmail. It's trading one silence for another. Call it mutual self-interest."

"Whatever. Assuming she's there, can I talk to Ainsley?"

"Sure. Oh, and congratulations."

"Thank you," he said sincerely.

Zoey held the phone up. "Oh, Ains," she sang out in a teasing tone, "it's for you."

Ainsley glared and took the phone. "I'm sorry, Sam," she began.

"Don't worry about it," he consoled her. "I'd rather not sneak around anyway."

"Me neither, but you know the possible ramifications at least as well as I do."

She could hear his sigh. "Yeah," he admitted. "The crash still on?" he asked in a change of subject."

"Yes it is," she said. "Zoey is letting Donna and me stay in the Residence, so it isn't like I don't have a place to sleep."

"I'd rather you keep my bed warm, but I guess this'll have to do."

She blushed. "Me, too. Anyway, see you tomorrow."

"Love you. Bye."

"Bye." She pressed the 'End' button and calmly folded the phone. Putting it down on the end table, she crossed over to the loveseat and picked up one of the pillows sitting there. Crossing back over to the two women watching her curiously, she unceremoniously hit Donna with the pillow in her hand.

Donna glared and asked, "Hey! What was that for?"

"For figuring it out and enjoying it so much."

Donna grinned. Standing up, she casually grabbed the pillow that she'd been leaning against. Turning back to Ainsley, she took a swing at the standing woman. Ainsley stepped out of the way in time, having seen it coming. Instead of pursuing that target, Donna hit Zoey in the side of the head.

"What was that for?" Zoey grumped.

"In the words of our favorite Republican, 'For figuring it out and enjoying it so much.'"

"You have a favorite Republican?" Ainsley teased.

Donna turned to answer her. While her back was turned, Zoey hit her with a thrown pillow and came forward with another pillow in hand. Donna screeched and turned back to defend herself from Zoey. That gave Ainsley a chance to get a clean hit in on both women. It quickly degenerated into a free- for-all pillow fight.

It only lasted for about twenty seconds. The door burst open and two Secret Service agents rushed in with drawn weapons. All three women froze in their tracks, breathing hard. A bit of stuffing from the burst pillow in Donna's hand drifted down and came to rest in Ainsley's hair.

Fighting back their smiles, the two Service agents holstered their guns. The senior one turned to Zoey and asked, "Is everything okay in here, Miss Bartlet?"

"Just fine, Samantha," Zoey replied with considerable aplomb considering the pillow clenched in each hand.

Nodding, the agent valiantly fought her twitching mouth. She spun in place and exited the room. The other agent looked Ainsley over from head to toe and said, "Very nice outfit." Without waiting for a reply, she too left the room, closing the door softly behind herself.

The three women looked back and forth among each other in silence for a few seconds before Ainsley asked, "Did she just proposition me?"

That was too much for Zoey and Donna. They both broke into laughter and collapsed back onto the couch. Wiping her tears, Zoey finally said, "Yes, I think she did, Ainsley."

Calming down some, Donna looked around the room, taking note of the overturned card table and the playing cards scattered around the room. Fortunately, nothing seemed broken.

"I'd call this a successful night," Zoey said, having also looked around.

"Next one's at my place," Donna offered with a smile.

Zoey smiled back. "If the SS will let me, sure."

"I'd suggest we invite our boyfriends, but somehow I don't see that happening," Ainsley observed.

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Sam caught up with Ainsley the next evening just as Ainsley was leaving the White House. Casually falling into step beside her, they headed out into the staff parking lot. "Did you have a nice night?" he asked.

"It was fun," Ainsley said with a small smile.

"May I ask what you three talked about?"

Her smile widened. "Politics, guys, and pillows."

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