

## City Boy ~ A Friday Night Club Story by Xanthe



<http://www.xanthe.org/city-boy/>

### Story Notes:

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### Chapter 1 by Xanthe

It had been a long, exhausting and logistically complex operation trans-locating half the staff from the West Wing out to the middle of nowhere – or, more specifically, Manchester, New Hampshire - along with a horde of journalists and other associated hangers on. That, coming on top of a whirlwind few weeks since the President had held the press conference announcing both that he had concealed the fact that he had multiple sclerosis from the nation and that he was running for re-election, meant that Leo was pretty tired before he even arrived at the hotel in Manchester where he was staying with the rest of the West Wing staff just up the road from the President's farm – and somehow he had the feeling that he was going to be wearier still by the time he left.

Leo slung his case onto the bed, and threw himself down next to it. They had decamped to Manchester to work on the President's re-election campaign, which they would open on Monday with a big, important speech at a local school – a speech that the West Wing staff had been working on for days and which still wasn't anywhere near ready.

Leo glanced around the little room - which was considerably smaller and more homespun than the hotel room he occupied in Washington - and then, with a sigh, he forced his tired body off the bed and got on the phone to make several important calls before hitting the

hotel bar to check on his staff.

They were grabbing something to eat and while they looked relaxed, Leo easily picked up on the tense atmosphere. They didn't like the Bruno, Doug and Connie – the people Leo had brought in to work on the campaign with them - and they were all stressed out from the pace of the past few weeks, just as he was. In addition, he knew they felt personally betrayed by the President's multiple sclerosis revelation – Leo had felt that way himself when he'd first found out. They still believed in Jed Bartlet, but they were wounded right now and Leo wasn't sure what would make everything all right again. He suspected an apology would go a long way to helping, but thus far Jed hadn't shown himself to be in any mood to apologise.

Leo spent a few minutes with them, just checking in. He didn't expect to work miracles and knew that it would take some time before the current tension played itself out. He knew he had to be on top of his game right now – what they needed was for him to be a firm, decisive presence in their midst, generating a feeling of certainty and calm. He couldn't change anything and he couldn't wave a magic wand and make the past few weeks disappear – all he could do was be a steady compass for them to take their bearings from when they were feeling as if they were all over the place. It would be so easy right now for morale to sink to an all time low, and for them to feel as if they were on a sinking ship. Leo needed to remind them that there was a firm hand still on the rudder – and that hand was his. Now wasn't a time to give into panic – now was a time to stand resolute and to make it clear that he expected them to perform to their best ability and not get mired in self-doubt and uncertainty. That was one of the reasons why he'd decided to stay in the hotel and not at the President's farm – the staff needed someone on hand to steady them right now. The President probably needed that too, but Leo figured there was only so much of him to go around and he'd deal with the President tomorrow. He had a meeting scheduled with his old friend first thing in the morning.

Leo retired to bed to work on campaign papers, before finally getting some much needed sleep. He woke the next morning feeling more refreshed but still apprehensive about his meeting with the President. As he walked down the hotel hallway he could hear Josh and Donna arguing companionably as always, while CJ was giving Toby a hard time about something. They were familiar sounds, but edged with an underlying tautness and Leo got into the car with a sigh, wondering when everything would calm down and get back to at least some semblance of normality.

The last few weeks had been so hectic that he'd had no time at all to touch base with the President – and they hadn't been able to squeeze in any of their usual Friday night sessions either, which, as Leo knew all too well, was a recipe for disaster. It was at times like this, when he was stressed and enduring some savage personal criticism from the media, that Jed needed the comfort and closeness he found in his sessions with Leo, however hard it could be bringing him down to the level where he could accept that comfort. Normally it wouldn't matter so much because Abbey had always been able to take care of Jed so magnificently, but things weren't so good between the President and the First Lady right now, so Jed was hanging in the wind just at the time when he most needed support. It bothered Leo that he wasn't sure where the President was mentally at the moment - that

was always a concern with someone as mercurial as Jed Bartlet. Leo had the nagging suspicion that if he didn't get to talk to Jed alone soon, he might be in for some nasty surprises.

The President's ranch was a beautiful property but Leo was a city boy so its rustic charm largely passed him by. The security officer at the gate advised Leo's driver that Jed was out on the farm and Leo sighed inwardly as the driver took him there. This wasn't a good sign. He wanted a focused, committed Jed, and instead he was getting a distinctly ambivalent vibe off the President. Jed had known Leo was due, but instead of meeting him in the house he seemed to have deliberately taken himself off to the great outdoors. It didn't bode well.

The car drew up by a barn, and Leo got out. He spied the President, perched on the back of a truck and Leo's heart did a little flip – Jed was dressed in faded blue jeans and a polo shirt; his hair was tousled and he was puffing on a cigarette. He didn't look like the President of the United States – he looked like a rebellious aging teenager, doing his best to shock a reaction out of whoever was around. He also looked utterly beguiling. Leo was used to the way he felt around Jed – he'd lived with his emotions for a very long time, and he was adept at handling them - but even so, nothing prepared him for the spark of attraction that he felt for *\*this\** Jed, standing moodily by the truck, looking for someone to snap at. Leo suspected that person was going to be him, but he wasn't overly concerned about it. Jed was clearly in a state of conflict right now and it was better that Leo witnessed that and dealt with it than that someone else did. As for *\*how\** he'd deal with it – Leo wasn't sure. He knew what generally worked with the President but he'd never seen Jed looking quite this moody before, and he suspected it might take a little while for whatever was troubling Jed to rise to the surface.

"You live in the middle of nowhere, you know that?" Leo grumbled amiably, opting for a harmless opening gambit to test the waters.

Jed responded with one of the many pieces of trivia for which he was famed and Leo headed him off at the pass, to avoid it getting out of hand – Jed could regale you with trivia for hours if you didn't step in there and wrest control of the conversation away from him. They talked for a couple of minutes and then Jed threw his cigarette into his coffee mug, and got up, still glowering at the world in general: Leo decided that he was going to have to tread very carefully around his friend during this meeting. Jed was clearly in a combative mood – Leo hadn't seen him smile once since he'd arrived and even his mildest enquiries were met by snapped or growled responses. They went to stand by the paddock, looking out over the acres of the Manchester farm.

"I'm going to stand for re-election, Leo, and I'm going to win," Jed told him, his eyes flaring fiercely as he declared his intent. Leo glanced at his friend surreptitiously as Jed gazed out over the farm, trying to gauge the President's mood. Jed was all fired up and he sounded so sure of himself, so confident – only Leo could see all the doubts and uncertainties his friend was struggling with right now. He wondered if Jed was even aware of what was causing his edgy mood – in his experience, Jed was someone who felt with his heart whereas Leo felt more with his head and as a result he could often interpret Jed's moods in a way that Jed was utterly unable to do. They stood there for a long time, looking out across the beautiful

scenery in companionable silence. If Jed needed to talk then Leo was here, but he suspected that Jed wasn't yet able to formulate exactly what was troubling him.

Finally, after several long minutes, Jed grunted and shifted slightly.

"I found something you might be interested in, Leo," he said.

"Yeah?" Leo glanced at his friend.

"Yeah," Jed drawled, still doing his best impression of a surly teenager. Leo was suddenly reminded of James Dean in 'Rebel Without A Cause'. Jed was all pent-up anger with no real target to take it out on and no understanding of why he was in such a foul mood either. Leo thought he knew but until Jed made a move he wasn't about to offer an opinion on the subject. Jed pushed himself away from the fence and walked towards the barn and Leo followed him, frowning, wondering what the hell Jed had in the barn that he thought Leo would be interested in. He hoped it wasn't some form of local wildlife; Leo was most definitely *\*not\** a country boy, unlike his friend. He didn't even own a pair of jeans – and his city-casual uniform of chinos, cotton shirt and blazer seemed out of place next to Jed in full James Dean mode.

Jed turned on the light in the barn and took Leo over to a large tarpaulin sheet covering a bulky object.

"What is it?" Leo frowned.

"It's this." Jed whisked the sheet away to reveal a gleaming, if rather ancient, motorbike. Leo stared at it, genuinely speechless, for several seconds. Of all the things he'd come out here expecting to discuss today, a motorbike hadn't even factored into the equation. "Isn't she beautiful, Leo?" Jed said, running his hands over the shining metallic body of the machine.

"It's a motorbike," Leo replied blankly, utterly nonplussed.

"Oh hell, Leo – were you *\*born\** old?" Jed grouched, clearly annoyed that Leo wasn't more impressed. "Didn't you ever drive a motorbike in your youth, Leo? Did the 60's pass you by completely?"

"I was flying planes in Vietnam the 1960's, sir," Leo pointed out quietly. Jed had the grace to look a little guilty for forgetting that important fact about his friend's past but it didn't last very long.

"Well then you must know how exhilarating it is to ride a motorbike!" Jed exclaimed. "It must be a similar feeling!"

"I don't know – do people try and shoot you down when you're riding a motorbike?" Leo commented, still unsure where this was going. Jed's mouth formed a hard line – he was clearly annoyed that Leo wasn't giving him the response he had been looking for. "Sir, it's a bike, and as I recall you aren't especially adept at riding bikes so I hope you weren't thinking

of riding it around the ranch," Leo said pragmatically. "I think we all remember the last time you got on a bike – I know I do but then it was my \$3000 bike that you borrowed and then rode into a tree."

"That was a pedal bike, Leo!" Jed snapped angrily. "That's a completely different thing! I was a good motorcyclist in my youth. I can still remember the way it felt; the smell of the leathers, the feel of the wind in my hair..." His features relaxed into an expression of nostalgia.

"You didn't wear a helmet?" Leo raised an eyebrow.

"It was the 60's, Leo!" Jed protested. "Nobody wore a goddamn helmet. I'm just saying – she's beautiful, isn't she? She was a bit of a mess when we found her, but I got her cleaned up, and she purrs like a beauty now."

"Please tell me you haven't taken her out for a test drive," Leo said despairingly.

Jed glared at him. "I can ride my own damn motorbike if I choose to, Leo!" He growled.

"With all that's been going on lately? The last thing we need is for our already sick President to get admitted to the hospital with a broken leg – or worse," Leo remonstrated.

"I'm not sick!" Jed snapped.

"I know. You have multiple sclerosis which we've spent the past few weeks educating the entire nation about – how it isn't fatal, how it won't affect your performance as President – so I can see how you driving your motorbike into a tree would really help convince people that your judgment hasn't been impaired by your illness at all," Leo commented grumpily.

"Thank you, Leo. I'm really glad I showed this to you now," Jed snarled, with a savage glare in Leo's direction. Leo took a deep breath and decided to take another approach before Jed took the teenage rebellion act a stage further and stormed off in a huff.

"I'm sorry. She *is* beautiful, sir. Did you clean her up yourself?" Leo ran a hand over the motorbike's gleaming body.

"Yes I did." Jed's chest puffed out in an almost comical fashion and his mood changed immediately now that Leo was showing an interest in the machine. He bent down and pointed at something deep within the bowels of the bike. Leo peered at it in the dimly lit barn, not entirely sure what he was looking at. "See here – these are original parts. They don't make them any more so I had Charlie track me some down on Ebay."

"It's good to see that you keep Charlie gainfully employed, sir," Leo commented.

"Don't you want to ride her, Leo? Doesn't just looking at her make you want to go speeding down country roads?" Jed asked, running a hand through his hair, his eyes gleaming with excitement.

NO! Leo thought to himself, alarmed by the fact that this was clearly what Jed wanted to do with the damn bike. They had just announced the President had a degenerative disease, he was being investigated by a Grand Jury for deception, he was running for re-election - and all he could think about right now was taking his motorbike out for a spin. Leo was not at all surprised – this was Jed all over. The truth was that although Jed had decided to run for re-election, he hadn't yet come to terms with his decision emotionally – or all the ramifications that came with it. Factor in an extremely pissed off First Lady, angry with her husband for making this decision without asking her and thereby breaking the 'one term only' deal they'd made and you had an extremely volatile Jed on your hands.

"You've done a great job on her, sir," Leo said carefully, gazing at Jed intently. "But you do know she has to stay in the barn, right?"

Jed started to bristle; Leo put a gentle hand on the President's arm, and gazed at him steadily. "Right, Josiah?" He said again, in a firm tone. Jed's expression wavered for a moment and then he gave a tragic sigh and slowly pulled the tarpaulin back over the machine.

"I guess you're right, Leo," he muttered. Leo put his hand on Jed's back and stroked comfortingly for a few seconds, trying to convey his empathy but Jed's muscles remained taut under his hand and didn't relax. Leo sighed – it looked as if Jed's rebel-without-a-cause phase wasn't over yet. He just hoped that Jed would have the big explosion he was brewing before long; he had a big speech to give on Monday, and a campaign strategy to work on. He wouldn't be able to do either while he was struggling with his emotions like this.

"I've missed you, Leo," Jed muttered, glancing at Leo sideways. "How many Fridays has it been since we...?"

"Too many." Leo shrugged. "There's been too much going on. When things calm down...when we get back to Washington..."

"I told you that you could stay at the house. I don't like the idea of you in that hotel," Jed grumbled.

"I know." Leo smiled and rubbed Jed's back some more. "But I'm fine in the hotel. I'm used to hotels and I should be with the staff. If I'm not there to keep an eye on them who knows what they'll get up to." He grinned.

"You can't take responsibility for everyone, Leo," Jed grouched.

No, Leo thought to himself – Jed wanted him all to himself right now, and understandably so, but they were both grown men and they both knew it wasn't possible.

"Which room are you in?" Jed asked. "Did they put you in the one with the memorial civil war quilt on the wall?"

"I have no idea. I didn't look," Leo said with a shrug. "Although now you come to mention it I think there *\*was\** something hanging on the wall."

"I thought so. That's the best room. They gave you the best room, Leo." Jed rocked back on his heels triumphantly.

"You told them to put me in that room didn't you?" Leo sighed.

Jed grinned. "You *\*should\** have the best room, Leo!" He exclaimed, clapping Leo on the arm.

"It's a kind thought, sir," Leo said quietly. It *\*was\**, and it was typical of Jed to think of it, although Leo doubted he'd be spending long enough in the room to appreciate the sentiment.

Jed scuffed the floor idly with his shoe and glanced up at Leo from beneath his thick, dark eyelashes.

"Josh is at the hotel," he murmured.

"Everyone is at the hotel, sir," Leo replied firmly. "Don't do this, Josiah."

"Do what?! I'm just saying, you have Josh," Jed said heatedly.

"And you have Abbey," Leo pointed out.

"Not right now I don't," Jed muttered moodily.

"Sir?" Leo raised an eyebrow.

"Oh she isn't talking to me and you know it!" Jed snapped.

"Then you should talk to her," Leo said pragmatically. "As for Josh – he has his own room and I'm damn sure he'll be using it every single night."

"It's Friday at the end of the week, Leo," Jed pointed out.

"It's Friday at the end of *\*every\** week, sir," Leo reminded him.

"Yeah, but you and Josh can have Friday in your hotel while I'm stuck up here with a dozen secret service agents and a wife who can't stand me right now," Jed snapped.

"We're not talking about this, Josiah," Leo told him with a stern look. "I warned you when we started this thing with Josh that there could be some jealousy issues but you assured me it wasn't going to be a problem."

"It isn't. I'm just saying..." Jed shrugged. "I'm just saying. That's all. Why do you have to be

such a hard ass about this, Leo? I'm just damn well saying...oh I can't talk to you right now!" And with that he stalked out of the barn.

Leo watched him go, his eyes drawn to the President's jean-clad ass, wanting nothing more than to chase out of the barn, up-end the President over the paddock fence, and deliver a few firm swats to said ass. Then, finally, he gave a sigh, and with one last glance at the tarpaulin-covered motorbike, he left the barn. Somehow, he had the feeling that things were going to get worse before they got any better.

It was late by the time Leo returned to the hotel. Josh and Donna were still bickering away amiably about something or other. CJ had finished with Toby and was now having a go at Sam – Leo thought that maybe he would be next. One thing was for sure – he had to stop CJ exploding at the President when she was in this mood. With the President's current surliness, the combination could be explosive – and neither CJ nor Jed was renowned for being able to hold back once roused.

Leo ate alone in his room, still mulling over the President's strange mood as he worked his way through the re-election strategy papers Bruno had drawn up. He was interrupted half way through by a knock on the door and Josh stuck his head into the room.

"Leo...sorry to..." Josh's hair was standing on end and he looked agitated. Leo sighed and put his papers to one side. He knew what \*this\* was about.

"Come in, Josh," he said, beckoning his deputy into the room.

"Leo - about what I said earlier. I know you think I want to get the FDA to move the announcement because I screwed up over tobacco but..."

"Josh. Let me stop you right there," Leo said, holding up his hand. "We've talked about the way you screwed up over the tobacco thing and we agreed to let it go – yes?"

"Yes." Josh shook his head – his body language at odds with his speech. Leo sighed. He got up, walked across the room, and shut the door behind Josh.

"We can deal with it. Do you want to deal with it?" He said softly directly into Josh's ear. Josh jumped.

"What...you mean...?" He flushed.

"I can punish you. Will that help?" Leo asked pragmatically.

Josh swallowed hard. "What, here?" He managed to squeak. "Now? With Donna in the building and CJ roaming the hallways looking for people's heads to bite off?"

"I'll lock the door. I have a paddle in my bag and we can always stuff a handkerchief in your mouth to keep you quiet," Leo said, rocking back on his heels and gazing at Josh steadily. He suspected that, like Jed, Josh's angst wasn't yet sufficiently simmered to be dealt with in this

way but he thought Josh needed the option. He knew that he was going to have to spank Josh for the tobacco screw-up sooner or later because he could tell that it wasn't going to go away until he did – but he thought that Josh probably needed to beat himself up some more first.

"You have a paddle in your bag?" Josh frowned, his forehead creasing up almost comically. "You brought a paddle out here?"

"Sure." Leo shrugged. "You never know when it might come in handy." He smiled. Josh swallowed hard, gazing at him uncertainly, clearly trying to figure out whether it was himself or the President that Leo had brought the paddle along for. "So – what's it to be? You want me to spank you now?"

Josh's eyes looked as if they were going to pop out of his head – he never could deal with the fact that Leo could talk about this kind of stuff so easily and calmly. Then, finally, he shook his head and straightened his shoulders.

"No, I can handle this. You're right - we dealt with this. I'm over it. I'm telling you, Leo, I've put it all behind me. I've moved on." He waved his hand dramatically in the air. "I've SO moved on," he said, striding towards the door.

"Okay then. If you're sure." Leo sat back down at the table and picked up the papers he had been working on. "I'll be here if you change your mind, Josh," he said firmly. Josh gazed at him for a moment, an uncertain look in his eyes, and then he nodded and exited the room. Leo sat back in his chair and exhaled loudly, feeling as if all his skills were being mightily stretched at the moment. On the one hand he had a President who was doing his best James Dean impression – which was rather surreal of and by itself in a man of his age and position - clearly bottling up some huge storm that he was going to unleash at the most inopportune moment; and on the other he had his Deputy, unable to handle a serious mistake he'd made, and brooding on it endlessly as a result. Factor in CJ, still smarting from the stupid comment she'd made during the press briefing on Haiti, and an entire staff on edge, and you had a powder keg just waiting to go up in smoke. Between them, Leo thought they'd be the death of him – and, one way or another, he suspected that his right arm was going to be getting one hell of a work out before he left Manchester.

The week passed in a miasma of tension; little quarrels flared up everywhere. Every time Leo turned around he found Bruno sparring with Josh, or Doug with Toby and Sam; even Connie had had the occasional run in with Donna while CJ and the First Lady – never the two most placid women on the planet at the best of times - had already had at least one contretemps. Abbey had won that one but then CJ had been hampered by having to pull her punches because Abbey was the President's wife. Otherwise Leo suspected it might have been closer to a draw. The President had been at the centre of it, generating that feeling of imminent combustion that was keeping them all on edge – not that it took much as they were all pretty much on edge anyway. Leo had taken to sitting in the breakfast room at Jed's farmhouse, working his way through the campaign speeches and strategies, one ear permanently monitoring the endless quarrelling taking place in the next door room. He chose not to step in – not yet anyway. These guys had to figure out how to get along all by

themselves. No, Leo's priority was the President. Josh was a smaller problem – he knew what Josh needed and suspected it wouldn't be long before they could resolve that issue, but the President was his real worry - and he had no idea how that one was going to play out.

By Friday morning Jed was practically incandescent. Leo watched him go off like a firework, burning anyone who came within a 10 feet radius. He wished they were back in Washington so he could take Jed aside and deliver a thorough spanking to the President's rebellious ass, but they weren't and it wasn't possible to deliver that kind of corrective measure right now, however much Jed needed it.

By Friday evening Leo was happy to escape back to the hotel and barricade himself in his room. He emerged only briefly to break up a sparring match between CJ and Josh in the hotel bar and then declared, in an extremely terse voice that he was retiring to bed for the night. Josh gazed after him mournfully and Leo was halfway down the hallway when his deputy caught up with him, grabbing at his sleeve.

"Leo – uh, you want to be alone tonight?" He asked timorously.

Leo gazed at him steadily. "Yes, Josh, I do," he replied. Josh's eyes flickered.

"Only, it is Friday," he muttered.

"Yes, Josh, it is," Leo replied. "Funnily enough the President keeps reminding me of that fact as well. I'll tell you the same thing as I told him – no."

Josh gave a wistful little sigh but nodded anyway, his face set in a glum pout.

"If you want me to take care of that thing I will – but it'll just be that, nothing more," Leo told him. "You'll leave straight after we're done."

"What? You mean the tobacco thing?" Josh stuffed his hands into his pockets and gazed moodily into the distance. "No," he said finally. "I told you - I'm over that, Leo."

"Okay then. Well, anything else can wait until we get home," Leo told him firmly. Josh clearly wasn't over the tobacco thing as was evident by the amount of times he kept mentioning it by mistake when talking about something completely different, but Leo wouldn't force the pace on that issue. Josh needed to come to him and ask for a spanking or agree to accept one when it was offered – he was completely different from Jed who often needed to be pushed a little first and who would go through hell and high water before asking Leo to give him a spanking – verbally at least. He made it clear in a hundred other ways that he needed a spanking, even if he wasn't aware of it.

"Yeah. Okay." Josh made a little face and then turned and went back to the bar, like a little lost puppy with his tail between his legs. Only then did Leo allow himself a wry smile. He loved both his subs deeply, but they relied on him to be the sane one, the one setting the boundaries and the limits, and he was doing just that. When they got back to DC he'd

ensure they both got more than enough of his attention to make up for the long weeks without any Friday night sessions.

Leo worked for several hours, before finally dropping off to sleep some time around 1am. He was, therefore, in a deep slumber when the sound woke him. He lay there, gazing blearily at the window for several long minutes wondering what noise had woken him, and then he heard it again. It sounded very much like a stone being thrown at his window – although at 2.30 am he couldn't quite fathom why anyone would be throwing stones anywhere, least of all at his window. Leo got up with a frown, shouldered himself into his robe, and walked over to the window. He twitched the drapes aside and gazed out. It took a few moments before his eyes adjusted to the dim light enough for him to make out the figure of a man standing below his window, leaning against a motorbike, but when he did his heart did an anxious flip and he grabbed onto the window sill for dear life.

"Leo!" A familiar voice hissed from several feet below. His hand shaking with a combination of anxiety and anger, Leo opened the window and gazed down on his recalcitrant sub, who just happened to also be the President of the United States.

"Sir, I swear there had better be a good reason for..." he began.

"Ssh!" Jed hissed. "You'll wake everyone up."

"What are you doing?" Leo hissed back. "Where is your security detail?" Jed gazed up at him with a grin of pure, seraphic triumph on his face.

"I ditched them, Leo!" He exclaimed. Leo shook his head wordlessly, struggling with his anger for a moment.

"Are you insane?" He hissed finally.

"Very probably!" Jed replied cheerfully. "Don't be such a spoilsport, Leo. Come down here and come for a ride with me."

"What?" Leo could hardly believe what he was hearing.

"I said, come on down. I'll show you what this beauty can do!" Jed said.

"Are you crazy? You've ditched your security detail, you're out riding that ancient machine around in the middle of the night without, as far as I can see, a helmet, and you want me to join you in this lunacy?" Leo growled. Jed gazed up at him for a moment and then grinned even wider.

"Yeah!" He replied. "Of course, if you don't want to, I'll go on my own. I just thought you might want to join me, that's all." He stepped astride the bike and Leo realized, in a panic, that the President of the United States might well decide to drive off into the night on his own with nobody to keep him safe and nobody knowing where he was.

"Wait!" He called. Jed glanced back up at him. "I'm coming, damnit," Leo hissed. "Wait there."

He got dressed hurriedly, then grabbed his cell phone and put in a call to the President's secret service chief as he walked down the stairs.

"Ron," he told the sleepy agent. "The President has escaped and is sitting outside my hotel room on a motorbike."

"Is this a joke?" Ron replied blearily.

"No it isn't. It's the god's honest truth," Leo snapped. "Now, you and I will have a serious discussion about the performance of your agents at a later date, but for now, I am going to go out there and try and persuade him to come home."

"You want me to send some agents out to escort you..." Ron began.

"No I do not!" Leo snapped. "Not until I can see what kind of mood he's in anyway. I don't want to freak him out into driving off into the great unknown. God knows what kind of trouble, I mean, uh, danger he could get into. I'm going to talk him into coming back. You have my cellphone number: give me an hour and if I haven't called you'd better come looking for us."

"Leo, I'm not sure..." Ron began but Leo cut the connection and stuffed the phone into his jacket pocket. Well, he thought to himself as he went outside, he had been waiting for the President to explode all week and he guessed the moment had come. There was only one thing to be done now and that was to give Jed his head and try and bring him safely back down to earth again when he was done.

Jed was smiling cheerfully as Leo emerged into the moonlit night.

"I'm sorry, Leo. Did I drag you away from Josh?" he enquired with overdone politeness. "It \*is\* Friday night after all."

Why did things like this always happen to him, Leo thought? What the hell had he done to deserve a hotel full of bickering staff and a President who seemed to have regressed 40 years?

"Josh is fast asleep in his own room," Leo growled back. "I told you – Friday night doesn't apply out here in this godforsaken place in the middle of nowhere."

"Oh." Jed bit on his lip, having the grace to look slightly abashed. Then he looked up again, and this time his eyes were gleaming. "You ready to go for a ride, Leo?" he said, barely able to contain his evident excitement at the adventure he was embarked upon.

"If I must," Leo muttered under his breath as he approached the bike in question.

"Hop on behind then – I'm going to show you what this beauty can do!" Jed said, turning on the engine. It sounded impossibly loud to Leo and he gave a startled gasp as the motorcycle jerked forwards. "You're gonna need to hold on tight, Leo!" Jed laughed, as he began revving the machine up. Leo slid his arms around Jed's body and realized, with some surprise, that Jed was encased in black leather. "Like it?" Jed purred like his bike. "I found them in an old closet."

"You didn't happen to find a helmet or two there too, did you?" Leo asked.

"Leo – I told you, I used to feel the wind in my hair when I was driving this baby!" Jed shouted over his shoulder, heading the bike out onto the open road.

"That was years ago though, right?" Leo yelled back, holding onto Jed for dear life. "I mean, aren't there laws about this now? If there aren't then there should be and I'll be happy to pass them the moment we get back to civilisation."

"I can't hear you!" Jed replied, which Leo was fairly certain was a lie. Leo knew he had no choice but to relax and let Jed take them wherever it was he was planning on going. In fact, once he got used to the sheer fear factor of being driven around the countryside in almost total darkness on the back of a motorbike by Jed Bartlet, a man for whom the word 'klutz' could have been invented, Leo had to grudgingly admit that it was rather pleasant. Jed's body was warm and his leathers smelled musky and rather erotic in the cool night air. Leo liked the feel of his lover's hair pressed against his cheek, and while he wasn't wearing any leathers himself, he kept himself warm by imagining all the exercise his right arm was going to be getting very, very soon. They didn't exactly go very fast so it wasn't as alarming as it could have been – for a start the machine was too old to do more than chunter along and Leo knew for a fact that Jed had never been a daredevil even in his youth. In fact, Leo was fairly certain that Jed was actually afraid of speed and he doubted that his friend had used the motorbike much when he was younger, despite all his rose-tinted nostalgia on the subject.

After about 15 minutes, Jed pulled up at a remote spot in what looked like the back of beyond.

"Isn't it beautiful, Leo?" he whispered, getting off the bike and turning back to smile at his friend. He gazed up at the sky, where the stars twinkled like a giant sparkling blanket above them.

"It is, yes," Leo said, barely sparing the heavens a second glance. Jed leaned against a tree at the side of the road and sighed heavily, a smile tugging at his lips. Leo admired the sight for a moment. It wasn't often he got a chance to witness his lover in full motorcycle leathers with wind-tousled hair and he couldn't stop himself smiling in return.

"Sir?" Leo said softly, coming to stand in front of him. "What's this about?"

"I don't know, Leo. I just couldn't sleep and I was thinking about the bike and I wanted to drive her. I guess I snuck out." He had the grace to look a little guilty.

"How?" Leo asked conversationally.

"The bedroom window." Jed shrugged. "Abbey has me relegated to the spare room right now so I didn't have to slip past her at least."

"You didn't drive the bike out of the front entrance though – there are guards all around," Leo pointed out.

"Yeah. I rode to a gap in the fencing over by the North Paddock. The guards don't know about that."

"They should," Leo muttered darkly, thinking he'd give Ron an earful when he saw him. "Sir – you didn't just sneak out. This was hard – you had to have sat down and planned it," Leo chided. Jed shrugged and then grinned.

"Okay, Leo. I admit that I planned it – it took me a couple of nights. I had to stay up and watch the shift rotation patterns and where the guards walked at what time...but I'm good at plans, Leo. The actual physical doing it was the hard part but the planning was easy."

"Yeah, I can believe that," Leo sighed. Jed was, after all, one of the brightest minds of his generation. Figuring out a way past the guards would have been nothing more than a crossword puzzle with a spin on it for Jed – although Leo wasn't fooled by how deceptively easy Jed made it sound. It wasn't – to slip out from under the noses of the most formidable security agents in the world was a remarkable feat of and by itself – not that he was going to let Jed know how impressed he was. "If you'd been seen they might have shot you not knowing who you were," Leo said grimly.

"Don't be like that, Leo," Jed said in an imploring tone. "I wasn't hurt. I just wanted to..." He shrugged again.

"I know," Leo sighed.

"It all happened so fast!" Jed told him heatedly. "First Mrs. Landingham died which broke my heart, and then I was telling the nation about the MS and the next thing I knew I was running for re-election."

"Yeah," Leo said softly, surveying his friend's troubled face intently.

"I was wrong," Jed said, hunching his shoulders defensively.

"About what?" Leo asked, reaching out a hand to caress his lover's shoulder. He hadn't yet heard Jed say he was wrong about concealing his MS and he doubted he was going to hear that right now either. He thought that maybe one day he would, but not yet.

"About Abbey – and about the kids. I shouldn't have made this decision without talking to them. It affects them, Leo. If I win the election it means Zoey and Ellie and Liz have to spend

another 4 years with security agents and journalists following them wherever they go."

"Yeah," Leo murmured. "But they're proud of you, sir. They know you're only doing this because you believe, fiercely, that you can make a difference. And you can. You already have."

"Half the nation thinks I'm a liar who can't be trusted," Jed said moodily.

"So we'll convince them otherwise." Leo shrugged.

"Hell, my own family think I can't be trusted," Jed said, kicking his boots in the earth.

"They don't think that. They're just a little mad at your right now, that's all. It'll pass," Leo told him. "They think the world of you. You've done a great job as President – of course you want to continue."

"When I saw the bike...it just reminded me that if I hadn't made that announcement about running for re-election then I could be looking forward to a normal life again, Leo," Jed said. Leo nodded slowly – this was the crux of it. "I'd forgotten what a normal life was like until this evening. I wanted to taste it, to feel it," Jed whispered fiercely. "I needed to remind myself what I was missing before I go back and shoulder that great weight again."

"Yes. I know." Leo nodded sympathetically. "When you ran for President the first time you spent the first few months being monumentally bad tempered to everyone on the campaign team," he commented.

"Yeah." Jed grimaced. "I remember."

"That was because you needed to be ready, sir. You needed that 4 years ago and you need it now. It's just a little process that needs to go on in your head. Everything's happened so fast the past few weeks that you haven't had time to make that adjustment."

Jed gave a tired little smile and nodded, looking relieved to find that what he'd been saying made sense and that Leo knew where he was coming from. "Yes, that's it. Thanks, Leo," he whispered in a heartfelt tone.

"You're welcome." Leo leaned forward and kissed Jed firmly on the mouth. Jed smelled of leather and cigarettes and some indefinable sweet smell all of his own. The President melted against him, and Leo wrapped his arms around him and squeezed his lover's leather clad buttocks firmly. They kissed for a long time and then Leo drew back regretfully. Jed gazed at him in the darkness, his hands still resting on Leo's hips.

"I knew you'd understand, Leo," he said.

"I do." Leo nodded, his own hands still caressing Jed's leather-clad behind.

"You're still going to spank me to hell and back for this though, right?" Jed asked wryly.

"You bet your ass!" Leo replied.

"When?" Jed asked.

Leo raised an eyebrow. "I'll let you know," he said, partly because he needed time to think this through properly and partly because Jed had been setting the agenda all evening and he thought it was time he reasserted his own authority. Jed gave a little pout.

"Now?" He asked in an anxious tone.

"Now would be great except for the fact that I told Ron I'd get you home as soon as possible and I intend to do just that," Leo replied amiably.

"Oh man! You called Ron?" Jed glowered at him.

"Yes I did. I was worried about your safety." Leo treated Jed to his fiercest 'don't mess with me' glare and his lover's expression faltered.

"Yeah. Of course you were. I'm really sorry, Leo," he said in an abject tone.

"I know you are – and you're going to apologise to Ron too, just as nicely, as soon as I get you home."

"Do I have to?" Jed grumbled as they walked back over to the motorbike.

"No." Leo shrugged. Jed turned to him in surprise. "Well, not unless you wanted to sit down again any time soon," Leo clarified. Jed shot him a wryly amused look.

"I guess I asked for that. Okay, Leo. Let's go back and face the music," he sighed. "And I promise to be my most humble and apologetic self."

"I don't think I've ever seen that particular self," Leo commented as he got on the bike behind his lover. "It'll be an education."

Jed elbowed him in the ribs by way of rebuke, and then started the engine again. Leo pulled out his cell phone and informed Ron they were on their way and then they set off.

Jed was true to his word; the moment they arrived back at the farm, he handed the bike over to an aide with a wistful glance, and then strode purposefully into the house. Ron met them in the breakfast room, the look on his face as stern as Leo's was right now.

"Sir – you remember that little chat we had when you first got elected – the one about us working together," Ron began.

"Yeah." Jed shook his head. "And Ron I gotta tell you – I'm so sorry. I did a stupid thing tonight. You have every right to lecture me into the ground – although I would point out

that Leo's done the exact same thing already and I don't think he's finished with me yet so you might like to save yourself the effort."

Ron cast a glance in Leo's direction and their eyes met knowingly for a moment. Leo wasn't sure what Ron's agents reported back about what they heard going on in the Blue Bedroom on a Friday night but Ron certainly didn't seem at all surprised that Leo had given the President a hard time about his nocturnal adventure.

"I'll apologise to the agents guarding me tonight," Jed continued. "I know they could have got into real trouble and I promise this won't happen again."

"We can't protect someone who doesn't want to be protected, sir," Ron said. "I know it chafes at times, but it comes with the territory."

"I know." Jed sighed. "I know that, Ron."

"I thought we agreed – there are ways we can be more unobtrusive, if you want some privacy...I thought we'd liased with you well on that."

"You did. You do a great job, Ron. I'm really sorry," Jed said again.

"Okay. Then let's leave it there." Ron nodded.

"Thanks, Ron. You know – when I was 15 I stole my father's car and drove it to Vermont with some friends. He shut me in the garage until Easter for that prank. Now I feel the exact same way as I did back then." He gave a little grimace and glanced uncomfortably at Ron, then over to Leo, and then back to Ron again. Ron gazed at Jed for a long moment and then his serious face broke into a little smile.

"How did the bike handle, sir?" He asked. Jed looked up, an expression of sheer delight on his face.

"Like a beauty, Ron!" He exclaimed.

"I'm glad to hear it, sir. Well, I think that's all. Good night." He nodded to Leo and then to the President and exited the room.

Leo considered Jed thoughtfully when they were alone, reflecting on the story he'd just told – he'd heard the President tell this particular anecdote before and he thought it might be important. Jed glanced over at him.

"You're looking mighty serious, Leo. I'm guessing that doesn't bode well for my backside."

Leo shook his head wryly. "Sir – that story you just told about taking your father's car; you always end it the same way – you always tell everyone that he locked you in the garage until Easter but that wasn't how he punished you was it?"

Jed stiffened slightly and Leo knew this was very delicate territory. Jed had told him how his father regularly hit him as a kid, and he knew that in some way their current disciplinary relationship was Jed's way of recreating that relationship with his father in a non-abusive way. Where Mr. Bartlet had been a cold, unforgiving figure, Leo gave Jed the boundaries he needed with the love he also craved. When you were President of the United States there wasn't anyone to tell you if you went too far, or screwed up, or did something wrong – Leo knew that Jed needed him to be that person, and that his friend trusted him to do whatever it took, with both affection and responsibility.

"No, Leo, he didn't," Jed said with a wince. "He gave me a lecture that I swear lasted 2 hours solid, with me standing in front of his desk the entire time wondering just how long it was going to go on for, and all the time he had that damn cane of his on the desk right in front of me. It was all I could look at during that lecture, all I could think about."

He stared glumly into space. Leo walked over to him and put a hand on his shoulder, squeezing gently.

"How many did he give you?" He asked.

"Twelve." Jed gave a grimace.

"Sounds like a lot," Leo commented neutrally. Twelve strokes of a heavy school cane from a man like Jed's father had to be almost beyond endurance – but it was giving him an idea.

"Yeah. Twelve was pretty unheard of, even for my father. He was really pissed with me though. I still remember it like it was yesterday," Jed winced. "I think it was the sound that got to me – I heard it before I felt it – but when the pain kicked in." He winced again. "I guess I deserved it though."

"I don't think anyone deserves what you went through as a kid, sir," Leo said softly, still squeezing his friend's shoulder.

"I stole his car and took it out joyriding!" Jed protested. "I deserved it, Leo."

"Sure you deserved a punishment – but you and I both know there are different kinds of punishment and different ways in which they can be delivered," Leo told him softly. Jed glanced at him sideways and then gave a little smile, his expression softening.

"Yeah," he agreed. "Yeah. On that subject, Leo, when...?"

"Don't worry about it," Leo interrupted him. "It'll be fine."

"Are you going to wait until we get back to DC?" Jed asked.

"No – there's no way you're going to be able to give this speech if we don't deal with this first," Leo told him firmly. "That's partly what this evening was about anyway."

"It is?" Jed looked surprised.

"Yes. You wanted my attention – and you got it." Leo smiled. "Otherwise why else would you have come throwing stones at my window in the middle of the night, sir?" He pointed out. "If this was just about you sneaking off for a trip down memory lane you could have done that without taking me along for the ride."

"I guess." Jed looked confused.

"I said don't worry about it," Leo told him again, in a gentle tone. "You got my attention, Josiah, and you made it clear that you can't wait until we get back. You're antsy, my friend, and you won't be able to start this campaign until I deal with that so I will."

"And you still aren't going to tell me when?" Jed asked with a mournful expression in those deep blue eyes.

"No." Leo smiled. "I need to sort something out first. In the meantime..." He pulled the President around, held him in his arms, and gave his friend a deep, soothing kiss. Jed sighed and some of the tension went out of his incredibly taut shoulders. Leo released him and smiled at him tenderly for a moment. "I love you, old friend," he murmured. "And everything is going to be just fine."

Jed gave him an uncertain smile in return and Leo brushed his cheek gently with the back of his hand. "Trust me, Josiah," he said, and then he disengaged himself reluctantly from the President's warm, leather-clad body, and left.

It was 5.30 am by the time he got back to the hotel. Leo paused outside Josh's room for a second and then knocked – he figured that he was up this early so there was no reason why his Deputy shouldn't be up as well. Josh opened the door, squinting sleepily. He was wearing pyjama bottoms and nothing else and his unruly hair was standing up on end.

"Leo?" He said blankly. "What time is it? Did I oversleep?"

"Morning, Josh!" Leo said in a bright, cheery, utterly annoying tone. "It's 5.30." He stepped past his deputy into the room, closing the door behind him.

"Okay. I think my ears aren't working properly because I could have sworn you just said it was...5.30?" Josh shot him an incredulous look. "I think we agreed a breakfast meeting with Bruno for 7.30 so that gives me..." He paused for a moment, his sleepy mind trying to do the math, "Uh...a whole 2 hours more of sleeping time. Yes?" He frowned at Leo.

"No." Leo smiled at him pleasantly. "Josh, something has come up and I need you to do something for me."

"Okay." Josh nodded and sat down on the bed, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

"I want you to buy me a cane," Leo told him. Josh's hands stopped their rubbing and he sat

there for a moment, completely still.

"Okay, I think I heard wrong again," he said finally. "Did you just say a cane?"

"Yes. A cane." Leo nodded patiently.

"And you didn't mean a walking cane right?" Josh checked.

"No. Definitely not a walking cane," Leo agreed. "Here's some cash..." He got out his wallet and handed a wad of notes to Josh. "I have no idea how much these things cost but I'm sure that'll cover it. Be discreet, Josh – and make sure you get your job done as well. This isn't an excuse to disappear for the rest of the day."

"No...because I'm likely to be able to buy a cane in the drugstore down the road so it'll only take a couple of minutes," Josh said sarcastically. "Leo...!"

"So it's a hard assignment. That's why I pay you the big bucks," Leo told him calmly.

"Well, you don't actually pay me, Leo, the government does, and if you could see my pay check you'd realize the bucks aren't that big and I'm sure as hell that I don't get paid for buying implements of..." He lowered his voice, "discipline," he finished.

"That's why I woke you early," Leo told him implacably. "So you can work on it in your own time."

"A cane?" Josh exploded. "You seriously want me to go out somewhere and buy a cane?"

"Yes I do." Leo nodded. Josh's expression changed abruptly to one of panic.

"It's not...?" He began. Leo shook his head and put a hand on Josh's shoulder.

"No, calm down - it's not for use on your butt, Josh, although I might change my mind on that if you say 'a cane?' in that tone of voice one more time."

"Thank god." Josh sat back on the bed, and then looked up at Leo again, his eyes just as alarmed as before. "But seriously – a cane...? Uh...I mean...what the hell did he do, Leo?"

"I'm not talking to you about that," Leo told him firmly.

"Okay." Josh nodded thoughtfully. "What kind of cane?" He asked. Leo thought about it for a moment.

"A heavy one – it has to look as much like an old school cane as possible – you know the kind that might have been used back in the 50's in one of those exclusive private schools - and it has to look mean," he said. Josh shivered but Leo noticed that his pupils were dilated and his expression one of fascination.

"You know how much damage one of those things can cause, Leo?" Josh asked softly. "I mean, I know he's been difficult to work with lately but he does have a pretty important speech to deliver on Monday."

"Did you think I'd seriously hurt him?" Leo snapped. "The reason it has to look mean is because he has to think it's much worse than it is – I have no intention of giving him the kind of punishment he's got it into his head that he deserves but I have to do something or he'll be useless on Monday."

Josh nodded, very slowly, and then broke into a grin. "You are *\*so\** good at this, Leo," he commented.

"I know," Leo replied without the faintest hint of modesty. "Now go find me a cane, Josh." He gave his other sub a firm look and then left the room.

Leo spent the rest of the day dealing with the usual 200 difficult things he had to deal with in any one day, on top of pondering how to play out the scene with Jed. He meant what he had said to Josh – he had no intention of giving his adored friend the kind of treatment he had received at his father's hand as a kid – but at the same time he knew that Jed had certain expectations of the event that had to be fulfilled or he wouldn't feel he'd had the catharsis he needed. Leo didn't mind being the bad guy or the hard ass when a situation demanded it but he needed to think it through first to make sure he did the right thing by his friend; Jed meant too much to him for him to get this wrong. It didn't help that time was so tight – Leo decided in the end that the only time to slot this in between everything else that was going on was to schedule it for the following afternoon when the senior staff would all be at the school preparing for the President's rehearsal there later that evening. Leo wished he had more time to spend with his friend, helping him come to terms with all the demons currently plaguing him, but those few hours would have to do.

Josh reappeared and disappeared at various intervals during the day and, late that evening, he knocked on Leo's door and then entered the room, triumphantly bearing a package neatly wrapped in stripy red and white paper.

"That's it?" Leo asked.

"Yup." Josh looked absurdly pleased with himself.

"I don't even want to know where you got it or why it's wrapped up like a giant piece of candy," Leo commented, taking the parcel from his Deputy. He ripped into the paper, drew out the cane, and examined it carefully. Josh had done well, he thought to himself as he slid his fingers along the wood. This was a most exquisite implement – clearly it had been lovingly hand-made and polished – there wasn't a single snag in the wood that could give splinters and it had a springy feel. It also looked the part and that was the main thing. It looked heavy but was surprisingly light to hold and its very solidity gave it a threatening air.

"Is it okay?" Josh asked anxiously, his eyes never leaving the implement. Leo swung it through the air a couple of times and Josh closed his eyes, moaning slightly from between

his parted lips. Leo grinned, shaking his head – if he'd waved this cane around when Jed had been in the room he knew his \*other\* sub would have reacted in a very different way. It amused him how Josh and Jed, who had such similar needs, expressed them in such unique and individual ways. Luckily he understood them both and was more than able to give them what they needed.

"It's fine, Josh," Leo told him.

"Sounds...kind of scary," Josh commented, opening his eyes and gazing at the cane again.

"Mmmm." Leo glanced at him thoughtfully and then couldn't stop himself teasing his sub. "Perhaps I should try it out first – get some practice," he commented. Josh's eyes widened in alarm.

"On me?" He asked, in a voice akin to a squeak.

Leo grinned at him, and then burst out laughing. "Don't worry about it," he chided. "I was messing with you. Any time you want to feel this beauty just ask – you know I wouldn't whale into you with this unless you asked."

"Did Josiah ask?" Josh asked softly, managing to wrest his gaze away from the cane for long enough to give his top a searching look.

"Yes he did, Josh," Leo told him. "He might not have realized that was what he was doing, but yes. He did."

Josh nodded. "He must really be in a bad way then, huh?" He said softly.

"Yeah." Leo shook his head. "But he'll be fine, Josh – and he'll be ready for this re-election campaign - I can promise you that."

Leo set the scene carefully the following day. He called Jed and instructed him not to go anywhere later that afternoon, and then called Ron to clear a couple of points with him, before setting off bearing the re-wrapped cane which he also put in a large bag to conceal it. Instead of going to the President's house, Leo went straight out to the barn where the motorbike was stowed. He removed the tarpaulin and then retrieved the cane from his bag, unwrapped it, and placed it on the motorbike. He glanced around the barn and rearranged a couple of things, and then left, closing the door behind him. He met Ron outside.

"Nobody goes in there," he told the security agent. "And nobody follows us down here, Ron. I need a couple of hours alone with the President – and I \*mean\* alone. You can watch the place from the house or over by the paddock but nobody comes in and nobody gets close. I don't care what happens or what you hear - \*nobody\* comes close until the President walks out of that barn. Understood?" He didn't think they'd overhear anything – they'd be too far away and the barn door would be well and truly shut, but he wanted to be safe.

Ron nodded, his face thoughtful and serious. "Is this about what happened the other night –

or is to do with the speech tomorrow?" He asked.

Leo gave a wry smile. "It's kind of a combination of both, Ron," he said and Ron nodded again.

"Well, you know best, Leo," he said.

"Yeah." Leo nodded and began walking back to the house.

"Don't be too hard on him – but make sure he knows not to sneak off again," Ron murmured as he went. Leo paused and glanced back, unsure if he'd heard the agent correctly. Ron would have made a good poker player he thought to himself – it was impossible to read his face correctly but Leo wouldn't have been at all surprised to find that Ron knew exactly what was going to take place in the barn.

Leo walked back to the house and found Jed waiting for him on the porch. His old friend was smoking a cigarette – clearly not his first of the day either judging by the little pool of stubs on the floor around his chair. He got up when Leo approached and gazed at him sullenly.

"Do we have to do this, Leo?" He asked, in a tetchy tone of voice. "I need to run through the speech again and there's no time for this."

"We'll make time," Leo told him firmly. "And yes, we have to do this, sir." He knew that this was precisely what Jed had been pushing to happen for the past few days, but he also knew that now it was imminent Jed wanted to be anywhere but here. That was Jed all over. "Come with me," Leo ordered.

He watched as Jed strode down the steps, all jerky, edgy movements and sullen sighs. His friend was wearing a pair of faded jeans and a polo shirt and was clearly doing the full James Dean impersonation again. Leo wished that Jed's mood would stay where he'd last left it sometimes. Yesterday morning Jed had given Ron that charming apology and been conciliatory and regretful – today he'd clearly regressed a few days.

"Where are we going?" Jed asked testily as he fell into step beside Leo. "I really don't see the need for all this cloak and dagger stuff, Leo. Why does it have to be such a big production number?"

"I thought it would appeal to your sense of drama, sir," Leo said calmly, taking no notice of all Jed's little complaints.

"Well it doesn't," Jed snapped. "It just puts my teeth on edge."

"But your teeth would be on edge anyway, right?" Leo pointed out. Jed gave him a bitter little sideways look and Leo put a soothing hand on his friend's shoulder as he guided him down the path towards the barn. Jed jumped as Leo's hand made contact with him but Leo left his hand on his friend's shoulder, keeping the touch firm and resolute. He knew that Jed needed to know that Leo was in charge right now and that Jed didn't have any choice about

what was going to happen.

"This feels suspiciously like the traditional trip to the woodshed," Jed commented.

"It *is* a bit like that," Leo agreed easily.

"It's not a good thought, Leo!" Jed snapped. "There's no reason to agree so cheerfully!"

"Hunker down, Josiah. You're in enough trouble as it is," Leo warned him in a low voice. Jed glared at him – but Leo took no notice whatsoever. He reached the barn, opened the door, and pushed Jed inside, still keeping a firm hand on his sub's shoulder. He shut the door behind them and escorted Jed to the centre of the barn, and then waited while Jed got his bearings. Jed glanced around, clearly not entirely sure what he was looking for or what was going to happen, and then his eyes lit on the motorbike – and the cane that was perched on the saddle.

"Oh shit, Leo," he hissed. "I don't believe you! Where the hell did you get a thing like that out here?"

"I'm a man of many talents," Leo said modestly. "Or at least Josh is. I told him to go buy it and he did. I didn't ask too many questions as to where he got it from."

"You told him about what happened the other night?" Jed asked, in an angry tone.

"Of course not," Leo reprimanded sharply. "I told him to go buy a cane. He obviously figured out that you're going to be on the receiving end but he doesn't know why or any other detail and he sure as hell won't hear it from *me*."

Jed glared at him, obviously still wanting to stay angry about something in the face of what was about to all too imminently take place.

"I don't like him knowing even that much," he growled.

"I don't care," Leo replied firmly. "All this complaining is simply a distraction from the main event and you know it. Get your jeans and underwear off please and arrange yourself over that hay bale over there." He pointed to the stack of hay that he had already covered in a blanket. This might be uncomfortable for Jed but he didn't want to make it worse than it had to be.

"You're really taking the whole woodshed thing way too far, Leo," Jed grouched. "I think you're getting off on this. You're on some kind of weird power trip. I mean a cane for god's sake!" His eyes flickered over to the cane again and then back to Leo. Leo crossed his arms over his chest.

"Do as you're told, Josiah, and do I need to remind you of the rules about how you address me?" Leo asked firmly.

"It isn't Friday night, Leo," Jed snapped. "The rules don't apply."

"Sure they do," Leo said.

"Why?" Jed growled.

Leo shrugged. "Because I say so," he replied with a sweet smile. "Pants DOWN, Josiah, and get into position, or after I've finished with the cane I'll use my paddle as well."

"You brought that damn paddle with you from Washington?" Jed asked incredulously.

"Sure. I knew I'd be out in the middle of nowhere with you. I thought the paddle might come in useful – I didn't realize we'd need a cane too but she's a beauty so I'm pleased to add her to my collection." He picked up the cane and handled it thoughtfully.

"It's not a 'she', Leo," Jed argued. "It's an inanimate object. It's an 'it'."

"Yup – in the same way as this bike is an 'it' and not a 'she', Josiah," Leo replied, tapping the motorbike.

"The bike is an entirely different thing! You can't even compare the two!" Jed protested noisily. "The bike is definitely a 'she'."

"I'm standing here thinking you still aren't over that hay bale minus your pants," Leo commented smoothly.

"Leo, I don't like the look of that cane," Jed said warily, still prevaricating. "Hell, Leo, this is all because I told you that thing about my father isn't it? If I'd known you were going to do \*this\* as a result I wouldn't have told you. I'll know better than to tell you anything in future. I'm not going to say a word to you from now on in case it gives you ideas. You're clearly not to be trusted. I'm going to know in fut..."

Leo swiped the cane through the air, cutting through Jed's tirade with an elegant swish. Jed stopped in mid-sentence, his eyes radiating both panic and uncertainty.

"I'm waiting," Leo told him firmly.

"It's a cane, Leo," Jed muttered miserably. "I don't..." He trailed off with a look of abject misery that would, under other circumstances, have melted Leo's heart. "Please," he whispered softly.

"There's only one way this ends, Josiah. Over the hay bale please," Leo said, standing steadfast because Jed needed that from him right now. Jed gave him one more mournful look and then his hands went to his jeans. He undid them, and stepped out of them unsteadily.

"Couldn't you use the paddle, Leo?" Jed asked softly. "The cane scares me."

Good, Leo thought to himself, swishing it through the air again. He needed Jed to be scared of the cane if this was going to work.

"I'm still waiting," Leo said.

"What about the speech...?" Jed said hoarsely. "Leo – sir - you don't understand...I have to give the speech tomorrow. I can't...you don't know what it feels like...that time I told you about...I didn't sit down for days afterwards. I couldn't even walk properly."

Leo felt his gut clench at that news. He hated what Mr. Bartlet had done to his son and the manner in which he'd done it. If Jed came to him tomorrow and told him he didn't need to be spanked ever again, Leo would happily give up the entire discipline element of their relationship without missing it in the slightest, but he knew that wouldn't happen. He knew Jed needed this kind of catharsis – it wasn't possible to undo the part of Jed's psyche that craved this - and all he could do was provide it in a completely different way to how his father had gone about it and hopefully heal a few old wounds in the process.

"Josiah, you premeditatedly devised a plan to deceive your security detail. You snuck out on this ancient piece of metal when you hadn't driven a motorbike for years, and you caused everyone, including myself, a lot of worry."

"I know." Jed shook his head and scuffed his feet on the floor. "I know that, sir."

"You will be punished," Leo said softly but firmly, "but not for any of those reasons."

Jed's head jerked up sharply. "Why then?" He asked in a hoarse tone.

Leo went up very close to his friend, invading his personal space, and looked into Jed's wide blue eyes. "Because you could have been killed," he said quietly. "And *that* is unacceptable, my friend. It's unacceptable because too many people love you and too many people need you – and I'm one of them." He caressed the side of Jed's face gently and then leaned in for a soft, sweet kiss. Jed clung to him and Leo could feel all the resistance leave his body.

"Leo..." he whispered when Leo released him.

"Go on. It'll be okay," Leo reassured him. Jed thought about it for a moment and then he turned, with a sigh, and walked over to the hay bale. He paused when he got there, removed his briefs, and bent over the bale.

Leo let him wait for a long time, giving his friend a chance to get used to the position he was in and prepare mentally for what was going to happen to him, before finally going over and taking up his own position. He rested the cane against Jed's buttocks for an equally long time, until he could see Jed working himself up into a frenzy of anticipation, and then he tapped Jed lightly with the cane. Jed almost jumped out of his skin and it took him a moment to settle down again.

"Please, sir, just get on with it. I can't bear the wait," he said.

"We don't begin properly until you're warmed up, Josiah. You know that," Leo reminded him gently. Jed nodded and swallowed hard, his knuckles turning white from where he was gripping the hay bale so tightly. Leo swung the cane again – tapping the President's ass just hard enough to warm it. He continued doing this for several minutes, gradually building up into a tempo until Jed's butt was glowing a rosy pink, and then, finally, he judged that Jed was ready.

"How many, Josiah?" He asked. Jed was silent for a moment and then he sighed.

"Twelve, sir," he said.

"Very well. Count them please," Leo ordered. He raised the cane and swung it forward – hard, but with nothing like full force. He'd practiced on the pillows in his hotel room and he thought he had gotten used to the feel and swing of the cane. It made a satisfying swishing sound and connected with Jed's buttocks with a snapping noise. A split second later Jed gave a little gasp of pain. "That was an easy one to start with – it's going to get much tougher," Leo warned and Jed nodded and his hands grasped at the hay bale even more desperately. Leo had no intention of going much harder, but he needed Jed to think that he would. He paused, and tapped his friend's bottom. "The count please," he instructed.

"One, sir," Jed said softly.

Leo raised the cane again and brought it down once more – with more bite this time. He figured that three strokes that meant business would be enough to fool Jed into believing that every single stroke was of the same intensity, when in reality most of them would be nothing more than sharply stinging. It would still *\*hurt\** but Leo was damn sure that Jed would be able to walk out of here without any trouble at all. He might find sitting a bit uncomfortable for the next few days but Leo would have taken his own life rather than inflict the kind of pain on Jed that his father had. Having felt the way the cane swung and sliced through the air, he shuddered to think how much damage a thing this solid could do when applied with as much brute force as a man had in his shoulders.

"Two, sir," Jed said, his voice sounding slightly choked. Leo examined his handiwork carefully – there was a faint red line across Jed's buttocks but he suspected that would disappear relatively quickly. Judging that he was walking the tightrope between giving Jed what he needed and not going so far to inflict a real injury on him, Leo continued. He kept the next two strokes hard but after that he eased up considerably – although Jed clearly wasn't aware of that as his hands clutched at the bale and his entire body was shaking. "Four," he whispered, his voice barely audible. Leo upped the tempo from there on in – going faster but not nearly as hard, although he was pretty sure that Jed hadn't realized he'd reigned back the force of the strokes as they fell so fast his friend barely had time to give the count before the next one fell. Jed was as uninhibited as ever during the caning – he growled and mewled to start with and then finally gave huge bellowing cries. Leo didn't let up until all 12 strokes were delivered though, and then he put the cane down and helped

Jed to stand. His friend turned and buried his face in Leo's shirt, sobbing gently. Leo stroked his back comfortingly, and kissed his hair and face until Jed was calmer.

"I never let him see me cry," Jed told him.

"I know. I know that," Leo replied, smoothing Jed's damp hair away from his eyes.

"I didn't make a sound when he caned me – not even that time, when it was so bad. I gnawed on my knuckles rather than let him know he'd hurt me so bad," Jed whispered.

"You don't have to keep quiet any more. It's safe to holler all you like now," Leo told him, knowing that Jed already knew that.

"I'm so sorry, Leo." Jed hung on tight and Leo just held him, rocking him back and forth gently.

"What are you sorry for, Josiah?" He asked softly.

"For not telling the staff about my MS sooner. For getting us all into this mess," Jed sighed.

"It's not me you should be telling," Leo said. "You already apologized to me a long time ago and I punished you for the deception back then. I've had a long time to get used to the idea. The staff hasn't."

"And I haven't apologized to them – right? Isn't that what you're saying?" Jed sighed.

"Yeah." Leo continued rocking him. Jed was a proud man and this was something he really didn't want to do – and Leo wouldn't make him in this instance. This was Jed's call, but he thought that maybe his friend would feel better if he did.

"You think I should?" Jed asked.

"I think you're the only one who knows the answer to that," Leo said gently. Jed sighed, again and then looked up, nuzzling at Leo's face, searching for his lips. Leo gave him the kiss he so badly needed and Jed melted into him, needing and craving the warmth, affection and comfort that he would only accept so completely after a spanking.

"Do you forgive me, Leo?" Jed asked when their lips parted.

"Always," Leo told him firmly. "You've been punished, Josiah. The slate is clean."

"Yeah." Jed nuzzled into him happily, utterly relaxed in his arms. "Yeah," he whispered. "My father never forgave me anything," he murmured.

"I know. That's why you're never able to forgive yourself," Leo told him. He suspected that was why Jed always needed to be spanked before he'd accept any kind of absolution. It was an absolution he had never got from his father, but Leo made sure that he gave it as an

absolute condition of these sessions. It was the only way he could justify spanking Jed at all, however much his friend wanted and needed to be spanked.

"The last few weeks..." Jed began.

"They've been tough on you," Leo interrupted, drawing Jed down onto the blanket and holding him tight in his arms. "First with telling the staff, and then with Mrs. Landingham's death, and the MS announcement and the re-election campaign and Bruno's people...I know it's been tough. I wish you could ask for my help sometimes before it gets this bad, but I guess you always did like to do things the hard way." He grinned and kissed Jed again. Jed grinned back at him stupidly.

"Thank god you always have me figured out, Leo," he said.

"Yeah – now d'you want me to make love to you?" Leo asked softly. Jed usually liked that after a spanking but he wasn't sure on this occasion as it was so far outside the realm of their normal Friday night sessions.

"Here? In the barn? Sounds...kinda kinky," Jed grinned.

"Because the caning wasn't, right?" Leo quirked an eyebrow at him. Jed laughed out loud.

"No, that was kinky too! I can't believe you made Josh go out and buy that damn thing!" He exclaimed. "Hell, Leo, yes I want you to make love to me. Abbey's been giving me the cold shoulder for weeks and you and I haven't taken a trip to the Blue Bedroom since god knows when, so yeah! I want some action!"

He reached for Leo's shirt and began unbuttoning it. Leo let him – he leaned back on the hay bale and pulled Jed astride his body so that his friend was facing him, gazing at him the entire time. Leo wasn't surprised Jed was so eager – his friend was an incredibly tactile man who needed regular displays of physical affection just as much as he needed, occasionally, to be spanked. Jed finished unbuttoning Leo's shirt, smoothed it away from his shoulders and lowered his head to flick his tongue at Leo's nipples. Leo put his hands on Jed's buttocks and rested them there, enjoying the feeling of heat coming off them. Jed squirmed, but his cock was now fully erect so Leo guessed he was enjoying the sensation even if it hurt a little too.

"You sure you're okay with this?" Leo asked. "Not too sore?"

"No...in fact..." Jed glanced over his shoulder at his glowing, slightly striped buttocks. "That's not anywhere near as bad as I was expecting, Leo!" He exclaimed after he'd examined the damage.

"I'm extremely skilled," Leo replied with a grin.

"But that cane's vicious!" Jed frowned, gazing at the item in question with a puzzled expression on his face. "It should have left more of a mark than that."

"Maybe you just have a very tough hide," Leo said, pulling Jed back and distracting him with a series of heart-melting kisses. He had no intention of explaining his caning strategy to his friend – it wouldn't be such a good idea for Jed to know all his toppy secrets. Leo took lube and a condom out of his pocket, and, pulling Jed closer, he inserted a lubed finger in Jed's ass, while at the same time plundering his friend's mouth in earnest. "Think you can ride me?" Leo asked when they parted. Jed looked down on him thoughtfully. "It'd be something new," Leo said. "Might go easier on your ass – you can decide the pace – although I'm still gonna be in charge." He gave a quirky grin which Jed returned. Jed liked for him to be in charge during these sessions and Leo enjoyed it too much to want to relinquish control in any case.

Jed nodded eagerly, and Leo put a condom on his ready cock, and gently parted Jed's buttocks. Jed slid down on his hard cock, his hands resting on Leo's body, his legs astride Leo's hips. Leo loved watching Jed during love making and he was transfixed by the sight of his friend, his head slung back, his lips slightly parted, going down on him like this. It excited him and he grabbed Jed's hips and thrust up into him, making Jed moan. He took Jed's cock in his hand and pumped it in time to Jed's movements on his own cock, until they came, almost in unison, several minutes later. Jed sat there for a moment, still impaled on Leo's cock, sweat dripping off his face, looking utterly sated and at peace for the first time in several weeks. Leo grinned up at him and Jed grinned down, lazily, and then lowered his head to kiss his lover firmly on the lips. They sat like that for a long time, Jed still astride Leo's body, Leo's hands resting comfortably on Jed's ass.

"Well this is one roll in the hay I don't think I'll ever forget," Jed murmured at long last, breaking the mood. Leo laughed out loud and Jed got up with a groan. Leo sighed – missing the warmth and closeness of Jed's body. He rearranged his clothing, watching as Jed dressed, then packed up the cane in the bag while Jed picked up the discarded tarpaulin. He gazed at the bike with a long, regretful sigh.

"She'll still be here in 4 years time," Leo told him calmly.

"Yeah." Jed nodded. "I'm going to win this election, Leo," he said firmly.

"I know. I'm going to be right there with you," Leo replied. Jed nodded, and Leo helped him cover the bike in the tarpaulin once more. They walked towards the barn door and Jed stopped Leo when they got there, and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Leo," he said softly.

"Mmm?" Leo glanced at his friend. Jed had a smile on his face that stretched from ear to ear.

"I'm ready, Leo," Jed told him. Now it was Leo's turn to smile. He could remember the last time Jed had said those words to him, back during his first election campaign. It had marked a turning point for them all, and had led directly to Jed's victory. Leo didn't need to do anything but smile by way of reply. He opened the door for Jed and they walked out of the

barn and back to the house together, and this time it was Jed's turn to put his hand on Leo's shoulder as they walked.

"I need to make a couple of calls," Leo told his friend when they arrived back at the house. "Why don't you go take a shower and get ready for this evening and then we can go through the speech together."

Jed gave him a grateful smile and scooted off upstairs, looking remarkably happy for a man who'd just had his ass thoroughly caned. Leo wandered into the kitchen – the comment about the calls had just been an excuse to get Jed out of the way while he had a quiet word with Abbey. Leo didn't like to interfere in the relationship between the President and the First Lady but this current estrangement had gone on long enough. He knew they both loved each other very much – but they were two of the most stubborn, mercurial people he'd ever met so their relationship had never exactly been a placid one. He found Abbey slamming doors noisily in the kitchen as she bottled some cider. She was dressed, like Jed, in jeans, with a loose shirt over the top. The entire Bartlet family seemed to have this whole country living thing down really well, Leo thought admiringly, at the same time thanking god that he got to spend most of his time in the city, where he belonged. Country farms were full of alien sights and smells – there were horses, and hay bales and snakes and old motorbikes lurking beneath tarpaulins. The country was definitely a scary place.

"Hey Abbey." Leo pressed a little kiss on the First Lady's cheek. He and Abbey got along extremely well – they had an understanding about Jed that worked for both of them and they were each secure in the knowledge that the other loved and cared for Jed and that gave them a lot in common.

"Leo." Abbey replied sharply, bustling around the kitchen and clanging a lot of pots and pans around in the process. The First Lady had never exactly been a particularly domestic creature – Leo knew for a fact that Jed had always done most of the cooking in the family – but Abbey clearly needed to blow off some steam right now and this was her way of doing it. "Did you spank his ass?" She asked, glancing at Leo as she worked.

"Yeah." Leo leaned against the kitchen table and gazed at her.

"Good!" She said, slamming down another pan. "When I heard that he'd snuck off like that..." She slammed the pans around some more.

"Abbey, there's no way either you or I could punish him more than he punishes himself. You know that," he told her softly. She stopped throwing pans around and stood there, her eyes bright with tears.

"He's a jackass," she said, in a choked tone.

"Yeah – but he's our jackass right?" Leo said with a little smile. "He's really sorry, Abbey – there's just that damn stubborn pride of his getting in the way of him telling you so himself. Give him an opening and he will."

"He knew I'd never agree to him going for a second term," she said, turning to face Leo. "He knew it and that's why he didn't talk to me about it. He knew I'd talk him out of it."

"He's a good president, Abbey - no, he's a \*great\* president," Leo told her. "You know what it feels like to do something you're great at and that you enjoy - and in the process also to do some good in the world. If someone told you that you couldn't be a doctor any more..." He trailed off with a shrug. She gave a long sigh.

"Damn you, Leo for always being the voice of reason," she said with a shaky laugh.

"I know. It's annoying, isn't it?" He grinned. She shook her head.

"If I hadn't made him sleep in the spare bedroom he'd never have pulled that stupid stunt with the motorbike," she sighed.

"Oh he was cooking up this storm way before that," Leo told her. "Don't beat yourself up about it – if it hadn't been the motorbike thing it would have been something else. The past few weeks have been rough on all of us but it's been worse for him. He doesn't like to show it but it eats at him."

"Yeah," Abbey sighed. "So, what do you want me to do, Leo?"

"I want you to introduce him when he gives the speech tomorrow," Leo told her.

"I thought you were going to do that?"

"I was – but CJ thought it might be a good idea if you did it and I agree. Will you do it, Abbey? It'd be nice if the country thought you were behind him in this."

"It'd be nice if \*I\* thought I was behind him in this," she grouched.

"You are." Leo smiled at her. "You always are. You know that."

"Yeah." She sighed again.

"But he doesn't," Leo pointed out.

"No."

"So..." Leo shrugged. "Will you do it, Abbey?"

She gazed at him speculatively. "Did you spank him hard, Leo?" She asked. "Really hard?"

"Yeah." Leo shrugged.

Abbey thought about it for a moment, as if considering whether her honour had been satisfied sufficiently by her husband's spanking, and then, finally she gave a little grin.

"Well, if he's been punished then I'm not about to go on punishing him, am I?" She said lightly. "Yes, I'll do it, Leo."

"Good." Leo grinned at her, and walked over and gave her another little kiss on the cheek.

"Do I have time to get changed?" She raised an eyebrow at him.

"Sure. There's a car waiting for you outside to take you to the school for a rehearsal whenever you're ready." He opened his bag and handed her a pad. Here's a draft of what you might like to say – change it if you want and run it past CJ or Toby."

"How did you know I'd agree?" Abbey asked him suspiciously, smoothing her hair back away from her face.

"I know everything." Leo grinned at her.

"You know, sometimes, I really think you do," she replied with a wry shake of her head, heading for the door with the pad in her hand.

Leo watched her go and then waited for the President to come back. Jed emerged ten minutes later, in chinos and a light sweater having lost the James Dean rebel look altogether. They worked on the speech together and Leo was relieved to find that Jed was much calmer than he had been – he'd lost that edgy feel and, although a little subdued, was clearly in a much more peaceful frame of mind. They worked for about an hour and then went up to the school where Jed took a look around and then put the finishing touches to the speech. Leo watched him carefully – he always liked to keep an eye on Jed after a spanking and his friend always needed to be close to him afterwards too so he stayed near Jed throughout the evening and only sent his friend home when he was satisfied that Jed was well on his way to being in the right mood to deliver his speech the next day.

It was late by the time Leo got back to the hotel and he sat down on his bed with a weary sigh. He went through a mental checklist of things he still needed to do, grateful to be able to cross Jed off that list. Josh still needed his attention though – he had noticed his Deputy had been looking increasingly stressed over the past few days and he wasn't the only one who had also witnessed one of Josh's Freudian slips of the tongue that showed the tobacco issue was still on his mind. Still, Leo thought as he got ready for bed, maybe that could wait until they got back to DC, which, thankfully, would be tomorrow, after the speech. Leo had had his fill of the country and all its dubious charms; whoever thought the country was more relaxing than the city needed his head examined Leo thought wryly to himself as he cleaned his teeth. He had dealt with one crisis after another since arriving out here and he was exhausted. He would be grateful to get back to the peace and quiet of city life. At that moment, a knock on the door broke through his reverie and he opened it to find CJ standing there, looking distant and strained.

"Leo – I really needed to talk to the President today," she told him.

"He was busy," Leo said with a shrug.

"Leo – it's important. I need to talk to him," she insisted. Leo looked at her steadily. He knew what this was about – CJ was going to offer to resign and if she'd spoken to the President before his session with Leo this afternoon Leo was pretty sure that Jed would have accepted her resignation as well. Jed placed a high premium on loyalty and it would have looked to him as if CJ was bailing out on him just when he needed her most. Leo knew that wasn't the case – CJ thought she'd let the President down by her mistake in the briefing room a few weeks ago, and she didn't want to be a liability either to him or the campaign. Before this afternoon, Leo would have done anything to prevent CJ having this conversation with Jed, but now he thought that the President would be able to handle it the right way. He knew CJ wasn't going to be deflected until she'd done what she'd set out to do. He also knew that there was no way that Jed would allow her to walk away from them. In addition, Leo thought it would do the President good to be reminded that other people were having a hard time right now too – and that other people besides Presidents made mistakes.

"It's too late to bother him now," Leo told her. "But I know he's going to run through the speech again tomorrow morning before leaving for the venue. Why don't you go out to the farm first thing and speak to him?"

"Okay." CJ nodded. "Thank you, Leo," she said formally, and then she left. Leo shut the door behind her with a sigh. What she needed to hear had to come from the President or he'd have said it himself. Still, at least he could cross one more thing off his mental checklist. That left only Josh.

The entire hotel was buzzing early the next morning – there was an air of definite excitement in the Bartlet campaign. Leo was so busy making calls and organizing people that he almost forgot about Josh until he realized that he hadn't seen his Deputy all morning. He called Donna over and asked her to go check on her boss. She returned a few minutes later with a troubled expression on her face and he drew her to one side to talk to her in private.

"Leo, he's in a bad way," she confided. "He isn't even dressed or shaved or anything. I asked him what this was about and he slammed his fist into the wall and began shouting about screwing up that tobacco thing. He just can't seem to forgive himself about it," Donna told him.

"Okay," Leo sighed, deciding that Josh had just moved up to the top of his mental checklist. "I'll go and talk to him."

Donna nodded. "I think you should. I tried but... I don't know if he was really listening."

"Oh, he'll listen to me," Leo said in a heartfelt tone. He walked upstairs to Josh's room and, finding the door unlocked, pushed it open and stepped inside, closing the door and locking it behind him. He found his Deputy in the bathroom, naked save for a towel round his waist, water dripping from his hair onto his chest. He had showered, which seemed like a positive step at least, but now he was staring absently into the mirror, his razor in his hand, still unshaven.

"Joshua," Leo said firmly, breaking into the younger man's reverie. Josh swung around.

"Leo...I was just coming...I was just...going to shave."

"Come with me, Joshua." Leo took one step forward, and whipped the towel away from around Josh's waist, then he grabbed his sub's arm and propelled him bodily into the bedroom.

"Leo – I know I'm late but I was just getting ready!" Josh protested as Leo yanked him across the room towards the bed. Leo took no notice of him, and instead grabbed Josh's hairbrush from the dresser, sat down on the bed, and swung Josh across his knee in one smooth, steady motion. "Leo!" Josh protested.

"We talked about this, Joshua and you said you weren't going to do this. You said you'd put it behind you and moved on but instead you've been doing nothing but obsess about it all week," Leo told him firmly. "Well I've had enough. Either you stop obsessing right now, or I'm going to spank your ass until you do. What's it to be?"

Josh lay there, dumbstruck for a moment, and then rested his arms on the bed with a sigh. "I guess you're going to have to spank me, sir, because I tried, I honestly did try to stop thinking about it, but I can't."

"Okay then." Leo put one hand firmly on Josh's back to hold him in place and then delivered a round of deliberately placed swats with his other hand to Josh's smooth, white, still damp buttocks. Josh squirmed a little, but remained in position. Leo spanked him for a few minutes, and then picked up the hairbrush. The first swat from that made Josh jump and he gave a little squawk of surprise. "Talk to me, Joshua," Leo ordered as he peppered his Deputy's ass liberally with hard spansks from the hairbrush.

"Ow! It's hard to...ow! When you're doing that, ahh!!! Sir!" Josh replied.

"Then try harder," Leo told him in a no-nonsense tone, not letting up for a second.

"Bruno said...if I hadn't screwed up...I could have...oh shit...I could have brought over Pennsylvania, Michigan and Ohio. Three swing states, Leo, and I could have brought them over!" Josh wailed, the pain in his ass forgotten as he dwelled on the pain of having made such a monumental error in his work.

"Okay," Leo said, keeping up the tempo, guessing that Josh was nowhere near done yet.

"It's going to be a close election, Leo. Supposing he loses because of me? Because I screwed up over this?" Josh said, his long legs scissoring wildly as Leo increased the pace and force of the swats.

"You screwed up, Joshua – nobody is denying that but let me tell you one thing," Leo said firmly, as he continued spanking. "Nobody either wins or loses this election on their own. If

we win, it'll be because we worked together as a team and we did a good job and if we lose it'll be because we didn't. D'you think \*he's\* going to win this alone? Of course not. It isn't all down to him and it isn't all down to you, or me, or CJ or anyone else. You – are – not – in – this – alone - Joshua." He punctuated each of those 7 words with an extremely hard swat and then put the hairbrush to one side, and stroked Josh's now glowing bottom lovingly. Josh lay there, his body stretched out over Leo's lap and on the bed like a feast.

"Now, Joshua, we don't have time right now to finish this in the way I'd like," he said in a gentler tone, soothing Josh's body lovingly with smooth strokes of his hand. "However, both Josiah and I will make that up to you on Friday in the Blue Bedroom. Understood?"

Josh nodded, hazily. "He still wants to...I mean, he still wants me along on Friday nights – even after a screwed up over this?" He asked. Leo sighed, and picked up the hairbrush again. He delivered two more sharp swats to Josh's ass making the young man cry out in surprise.

"Don't make me angry, Joshua," Leo told him. "Now, I want you to get up, get shaved, get dressed and get downstairs within 15 minutes or I'll come up here again and give this hairbrush even more of a work out. Understood?" He helped Josh off his lap, and the young man knelt on the floor in front of him and wrapped his arms around Leo's waist.

"Understood," Josh said, burrowing his face into Leo's chest. "Thank you, Leo," he added in a heartfelt tone. Leo sighed and stoked Josh's damp hair lovingly, before putting a finger under his sub's chin and lifting his face to look at him.

"We should have done this several days ago when I first suggested it," he said. "In future, be honest with yourself about what you need, Josh. It's easier in the long run."

"Yeah." Josh gave a rueful sigh. "Yeah," he said again. Leo nodded and then leaned forward and kissed the young man on the lips. Josh opened up sweetly, willingly, to let him in. Leo tore himself away a few seconds later, got up, and replaced the hairbrush on the dresser. "15 minutes," he warned in a stern tone before striding out of the room and back down the stairs.

Josh appeared 12 minutes later looking immaculate in a light coloured suit, his unruly hair flattened into some degree of neatness by the same hairbrush that had ironed out his rump. He gave Leo a wry, heartfelt smile, and then they were plunged into the maelstrom that was the campaign's opening speech.

Leo surveyed his staff with some pride as they waited in a classroom at the school for the President's arrival a couple of hours later. Toby and Sam were still squabbling with Doug, but it had calmed down into more of a mild nitpicky thing than the full blown quarreling they had been doing recently. CJ had turned up looking as if the weight of the world had been lifted from her shoulders so Leo guessed that Jed had, as he had known he would, refused her resignation and told her how invaluable she was to the team. Josh was looking refreshed and at ease with himself, and, outside, Leo could hear the ringing tones of the First Lady as she gave the speech introducing her husband to the enormous crowd that was

gathered out there.

At that moment the President breezed in, looking utterly pumped by the emotion of the day and the cheers from the crowd outside. He sent Bruno's people out of the room, which Leo thought was a masterly move, emphasizing that his team were the people here, the people who had been with him all the way, and not the newcomers with whom they'd been arguing all week. Leo crossed his arms over his chest and waited to see what Jed had to say. The staff all stood there, anxious looks on their faces, and Leo knew that the speech Jed gave next would be even more important than the one he was about to give to the crowd outside. He wondered if Jed knew that. Jed perched himself cautiously on a desk, grunting slightly as he did so and his sore ass made contact with the hard wood. Leo kept his face utterly impassive although he noticed that Josh's eyes flickered in sympathy with the President. Then Jed puffed himself up, and began to speak.

"Churchill and FDR – serious men using big words for a big purpose..." He began and then stopped and surveyed the worried faces gazing at him so hopefully. Leo knew that Jed wouldn't blow this – he wouldn't give the staff the speech he'd clearly planned, the impersonal one about Churchill and FDR. No, he'd give a far more intimate and heartfelt speech – a speech that he needed to give and that the staff needed to hear.

"It occurs to me that I never said that I'm sorry," Jed told them and Leo felt a warm sensation in his gut. No matter what happened between them, this man never failed to do the right thing. Never had and never would as far as Leo was concerned. "I am," Jed continued. "For the lawyers, for the press, for the mess for the fear. Bruno, Doug, Connie – these guys are good; they want to win – so do we. The only thing we want more is to be right. I wonder if you can't be both. There's a new book and we're going to write it..."

Leo smiled to himself as Jed continued – the atmosphere in the room had become noticeably less tense, and Jed had his staff back in the palm of his hand again. It hadn't taken much – they already adored their President; they had just wanted to hear those two words: "I'm sorry" and now they had, and the tension had started to slip away from their faces, leaving them smiling and happy.

Jed finished his little speech and now it was time to go outside and make his big speech to the crowd. Jed got up and then he turned and looked at Leo for a long moment. Leo gazed back at him, his face utterly impassive, only his eyes conveying how proud he was of his friend for what he had just done and what he was about to do. Jed gave him a little smile, and then he walked outside. The staff followed him, and Leo followed along behind them all, humming to himself contentedly. The crowd started to bellow and cheer as Jed took the stage from his wife and Leo watched benignly as Jed kissed Abbey soundly, and she kissed him back. It seemed that something had given there as well, and the Bartlet marriage was back on track – or at least it was well on its way to being so.

Leo stayed back and watched as all the characters who had played out their dramas over the past week took to the stage. He was proud of what he'd accomplished here. Everything had come together much better than it looked as if would when they'd first arrived a week ago.

He watched for a little while and then turned and walked back into the classroom – he'd listen to the rest of the speech from here. He sat down with a sigh and let Jed's words wash over him. Jed – great big extrovert that he was – loved talking to a huge crowd; you could hear the verve and sheer joy in his voice – he belonged on the podium. Leo smiled to himself, feeling happy but incredibly tired.

Jed, Josh, CJ, Abbey, the staff – it hadn't been easy, but somehow he'd managed to bring it all together and make it work the way it was supposed to – and now he was extremely glad that his work here was done, the election campaign had been successfully kicked off, and that this particular city boy was finally going to be heading home.

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