



Obama Sneaks a Cigarette
by Jessica Freely

Barry stood on the balcony of the Lincoln bedroom, looking out over the capital of the nation he was now sworn to lead. It was done. The inauguration was over and now he could finally get on with the work that was so desperately needed. Downstairs in the situation room his staff was waiting for him, but he'd stolen this moment to reflect... and sneak a cigarette.

He glanced behind him where special agent Parker stood just outside the balcony doors. They shared a smile. Parker was okay. He gave Barry cigarettes whenever he asked. Of course, he would have preferred to be alone in this moment of reflection, but he'd

long ago given up the idea of real privacy. If he could change the course of the country, the sacrifice would be worth it.

“Sir,” said Parker, holding out a Bic.

“Thanks.”

The first puff was always the best. Barry dragged the smoke deep into his lungs and savored the illicit rush as the nicotine rushed to the chemical receptors in his brain. Damn. He closed his eyes and swayed just a little with the rush.

He knew it was wrong. Not only unhealthy but bad policy as well. He was a role model, after all. Still, with the economic crisis, two wars and the fate of the free world on his shoulders, quitting smoking seemed like that one thing too many. He could imagine himself having a nic fit in the middle of sensitive negotiations and declaring war on Saudi Arabia or something. Or worse, selling out American interests in exchange for a smoke. No, it was better to just manage the addiction, for now. Barry took another deep drag and leaned out over the balcony, savoring the soothing smoke.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?”

Oh shit. It was Rahm.

Before he could flick the cigarette into the rose garden, his chief of staff barreled past Parker and snatched it from his hand. Rahm, half a head shorter than Barry but three times as scary, looked for a moment like he might put it out on the Commander in Chief -- or his lead secret service agent. Parker, a veteran of two wars, stood beside the French doors looking pale and watching Rohm closely.

Rohm dropped the cigarette to the ground and stepped on it. "You quit. What is this?"

Barry held out his hands. "Look, Rahm. It's just now and then."

Oops. Wrong thing to say. Rahm lowered his head, tilted it to one side and glared up from beneath his eyebrows. "Now and then? So this isn't the first time? How long has this been going on?"

Barry took a deep breath. *Transparency*, he told himself, *remember that?* "Since election night."

"Election night." Worse than the anger stiffening Rahm's handsome features was the hurt in his eyes. The shadows beneath them seemed to grow darker and for a

moment, his confusion showed. “But we won.”

Of course Rahm would see it that way. All he ever cared about was winning. Barry had known him for years and admired him. Rahm’s take-no-prisoners approach to politics was effective, not to mention hot as hell, especially when embodied in the lean, taut, former-ballet-dancer body he somehow maintained even during the most grueling months on the campaign trail. Rahm’s aggressiveness was the perfect counterpart to his own calm, rational, consensus-building image. Barry knew exactly what he was getting when he appointed his old friend and long-time secret crush Chief of Staff. He was getting a pit bull on a leash.

But he was supposed to be holding the leash. Rahm stepped even closer. Over his shoulder Barry saw Parker tensing. He shook his head. Whatever display of temper was about to ensue, he knew he was in no real danger from Rahm. Truth was, having Rahm this close -- so close he could feel the man’s heat, could smell his cologne and his breath -- was awakening a pleasurable excitement he thought he’d buried long ago. Rahm reached up and took Barry’s face in his hands. For a moment he thought Rahm was going to kiss him, and his heart and his cock leapt. But no, of course not. “You are

the most important person in the world,” he said, his breath warm against Barry’s skin. “And you are going to stop smoking. Right now.”

They looked into each other’s eyes and everything Barry had never told Rahm hung in the air between them. Possessed by that moment, Barry opened his mouth to speak.

But it was too late. Rahm patted him on the cheek and stepped back. “Now, where are you getting the smokes from?” Without waiting for an answer, he spun and pointed a finger at Parker. “It’s you isn’t it? You’re his supplier!”

Parker gawked, wide-eyed. He raised his hands. “Mr. Emmanuel, I--“

There was no hope for it. Parker looked guilty. And Rahm could scent guilt like a bloodhound could scent bacon. “Rahm,” said Barry, “It’s not his fault. I asked him for the cigarettes. How could he refuse?”

“How?” Rahm’s animated features dramatized every word he said. “It’s very easy.” He walked up the secret service agent and got in his face without a hint of fear. “You say ‘No,’ Agent Parker. That’s an N, followed by an O. They teach you

that in secret service school don't they?
Repeat it for me.”

Parker blushed bright red.

Barry put a hand on Rahm's shoulder.
“That's enough. I won't have you
humiliating my staff. If you have a problem
with my smoking, you bring it to me.”

Rahm turned and shook the hand off. “Give
me one good reason why he shouldn't be
fired.”

“He's a good agent.”

Rahm shot him a look that was half glare,
half acknowledgement of the truth. He put
his hands on his hips, his jacket bunching up
behind them, and paced the small balcony
once, twice. He stopped and leveled a finger
at Barry. “You're going on the gum.”

“Okay.” There didn't seem to be any point
in arguing.

“And you--“ Rahm leveled his accusing
finger at Parker. “If you give him one more
cigarette I will kill you.”

“Yes, Mr. Emmanuel.”

Rahm looked back and forth at the co-conspirators, waiting to make sure that obedience had been secured. Then he surprised them both by saying, quite civilly, “Agent Parker, would you please leave us for a few minutes?”

“Mr. President?”

Barry nodded. “Fine, Parker. You can wait inside. Shut the doors behind you.”

“Sir.”

Once alone together on the balcony, Rahm ran his hands through his steel-grey hair. “Okay, Barry, explain to me why the stress of *winning* sent you back to cigarettes.”

He shrugged and searched for words. “Everyone is different, Rahm. For you, losing is unacceptable. Winning terrified me.” He held up a hand to forestall Rahm’s objection. “Don’t get me wrong. I wanted to win. Needed to. And I’m glad we won. I wouldn’t have things any other way but--“ With one hand he gestured to the whole world beyond the balcony -- the world that was waiting for him to save it. “I’m afraid of what will happen if I fail.”

Rahm came and stood beside him. He put a hand on his shoulder. “You won’t fail. I won’t let you.”

Barry laughed. “I believe that.”

“If you fail, I’ll fuck you.”

“Is that a promise?” The words came without thought, so natural that it wasn’t until they were out that he realized his blunder. Barry didn’t move, didn’t breath.

Rahm didn’t say anything for a moment or two. “So, it hasn’t been my imagination all these years?”

The cat was out of the bag. No point now in anything but full disclosure. He shook his head. “No.” His voice was thick. “Not your imagination, Rahm.”

Rahm nodded. He hadn’t moved away. “Did you know that Lincoln was bi?”

“Yeah. I did know that. Not everyone accepts the theory but there’s some pretty strong indications of it.”

“And Harding was a total queen.”

“What are you saying, Rahm?”

Rahm turned and clasped Barry's jaw in his hands. He leaned up, pressing their lips together. Rahm kissed the way he did politics, thoroughly, mercilessly. His tongue plundered Barry's mouth and left him gasping when the kiss broke. "Why the fuck didn't you say something sooner?" he demanded. But he didn't wait for an answer.

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