



*Beyond
All
Dreams*

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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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WASHINGTON, D.C.
OCTOBER 1897

I'm begging you, please stop looking at naughty pictures in the library." It was a sentence Anna never thought she would utter, and with a straight face no less. But these boys were on the verge of getting kicked out of the Library of Congress unless she intervened for them.

"They're medical pictures," Jack Wilkerson said from his position at the library worktable. "Please, Miss O'Brien, we just want to learn."

Was there anything more frustrating than a rowdy fifteen-year-old boy? The government hired hundreds of orphaned boys to serve as congressional pages at the US Capitol, where they performed odd jobs and ran errands for congressmen but rarely had much supervision. Lately, a group of them had been causing trouble in the library, and they'd just been caught flipping through anatomy books in the hunt for drawings of naked bodies.

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Anna had an instinctive urge to protect these fatherless children. After all, she was an orphan herself, and a library could be a wonderful escape from the troubles of the world. She gathered the boys around the single worktable in the map room, which was crammed with atlases, map bins, and floor globes.

“You sounded like a pack of laughing hyenas as you ogled those books,” she said. “I don’t need a groveling show of contrition with sackcloth and ashes. A simple apology to the library’s director will be fine.”

“What are sackcloth and ashes for?” Jack asked.

“It’s a metaphor,” she said pointedly. “Metaphors are something grown-ups use when they can’t set troublesome boys on fire.”

Several of the boys giggled. “You’re funny, Miss O’Brien.”

“I’m also serious.” She hoped she didn’t sound too much like a schoolmarm, but working at the Library of Congress was the greatest privilege of her life. Even after six years, there were times Anna loved to stand in the aisles, awed by the immensity of the books towering above her. It was magical and magnificent. Amazing and inspiring. These books contained the wisdom of the ages, some of them outlasting the countries in which they had first been written. Caring for books and helping others unlock the mysteries inside them was what she’d been put on this earth to do.

She was going to miss this old library when they moved into their grand new building next month. The Library of Congress had been located in the US Capitol since 1810, when it was designed to hold a hundred thousand books. Now the collection had swelled to almost a million volumes, and they’d outgrown their space.

“The rules will be even tighter when we move into our new building,” Anna said. “The light fixtures are plated with real

gold. The floors have mosaics and precious metals in them. You can't hold footraces in the halls or slide down the banisters in the new building. You understand that, don't you?"

Jack smirked as he gave an antique globe a mighty twist to send it spinning. The ancient globe squeaked and wobbled, and Anna lunged to stop its dangerous spinning.

"Jack, you don't have cloven hooves and a pitchfork, do you? Because that would explain so much."

Honestly, she ought to give up and let Jack be banished for good. His necktie was lopsided, he'd tracked mud in that morning, and his reckless grin was entirely unrepentant. But the sight of that sloppily knotted tie . . . well, it got to her. Learning to knot a necktie was the kind of thing a father would have taught him.

Anna sighed. "Stand up and let me show you how to tie a proper Windsor knot."

She undid her own tie and tugged it flat to demonstrate the procedure. With her starched white blouse and dark skirt, Anna tried to look as professional as all the men who worked in the Capitol.

Jack pretended not to care, but he scrutinized every movement as she demonstrated the technique for tying a Windsor knot. The other boys shifted in their seats to get a better view. This might be the most important lesson they learned all day.

A bell rang over the door as a man in a naval uniform entered, his ramrod posture and commanding presence making the map room seem smaller and more crowded.

"Miss Anna O'Brien?" the officer said.

Anna's heart sped up, and she let go of her partially knotted tie. This could only be about one thing. "Yes, sir?"

The officer handed her an envelope, its wax seal bearing the hallmark of the United States Navy.

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“You are wanted downstairs in the naval affairs room. Immediately.” He gave a slight bow and left the room, leaving them all a little stunned and amazed.

“I want a uniform like that,” one of the boys said.

“Did you see his shoes? They were polished like mirrors!”

As the boys chattered, Anna wrestled with conflicting emotions. This had to be about the message she’d sent to the navy last week. There was no other reason she’d have come to their attention.

“What does it say?” Jack asked.

Anna popped the seal and scanned the message, a small smile curving her mouth. It was as she’d suspected.

“I found a mistake in an old naval report,” she said softly. “I thought they’d want to know, so I sent them a message about it.”

It was thrilling that the navy had taken her message seriously, for overlooking an error in the historical record was unthinkable for someone like Anna. Ever since becoming a librarian, she’d been feeling the vibrant golden chain that reached back centuries to other librarians, archivists, and historians, all of whom had chosen the same quest: the collection and preservation of the world’s knowledge. Was there any more noble pursuit in all of human history? Future generations would depend on the diligence of librarians like her to ensure accuracy in the record of human knowledge. When she spotted that mistake in the old naval report, she knew it needed to be corrected.

“What kind of mistake was it?” one of the boys asked.

“A big one,” she said, but didn’t elaborate. It was too personal to discuss in front of a group of rambunctious boys. She wished the navy had sent her a simple thank-you note instead of demanding her presence. Meeting with strangers was always such torture.

“I don’t even know where the naval affairs room is,” she confessed as she fumbled to knot her tie again.

“I can show you,” Jack said, springing to attention.

Anna rarely ventured outside the safety of the shabby old map room, where she was cocooned in a world of well-worn books, maps, and atlases. Everything was different downstairs in the main part of the Capitol, where the gilt and marble grandeur was like somewhere royalty gathered, because, well, royalty actually *did* gather there—along with senators, diplomats, prime ministers, and presidents. Pint-sized librarians didn’t fit in down there, but given the formality of the summons, it didn’t look like she had much choice.

She finished knotting her tie and wished she’d taken more care with her appearance that morning. Not that she could have improved it much. All her clothes were simple and plain because she hated anything that might draw attention to herself. Each morning she twisted her long brown hair into a tidy bun atop her head and fastened it with a modest onyx clip, the only piece of jewelry she owned.

She looked at Jack, wishing she had one tenth of the boy’s bravado. “Let’s go,” she said.



It didn’t take Anna long to realize the navy had no intention of thanking her for noticing an error in the fifteen-year-old report.

Oddly, it seemed they wanted her head on a platter.

“You’ve got a lot of gall,” Lieutenant Gerald Rowland snapped from behind his mahogany desk. The bullnecked man began scolding Anna the moment she arrived.

Required to stand on the carpet before his desk while the seated officer snarled at her, Anna felt like a little brown sparrow quivering before a firing squad. She cleared her throat and tried to defend herself.

“When fifty-six men disappear in the middle of an ocean,

a complete and accurate investigation should be conducted,” she said quietly.

“That investigation was done fifteen years ago.” Lieutenant Rowland banged his fist on the table, making the pens and ink bottles jump. “The USS *Culpeper* sank during a late season hurricane, all hands lost. Case closed.”

Anna was well aware of what had happened to the *Culpeper*. After all, her father had been one of the men who’d disappeared with the ship.

“That’s the problem,” she said, trying not to wilt under the blast of the man’s glare. “The ship couldn’t have sunk where the report claims. I’d like the case reopened so it can be corrected.”

“Copies of that report were sent to the deceased sailors’ families, and they were given a three-month period to file questions with the navy. That time is over.”

“I wasn’t in a position to ask questions. I was only twelve when the ship disappeared.”

“When the ship *sank*,” Lieutenant Rowland continued, “all the families received the sailor’s wages plus six months of salary, just as the law allows. If you’re trying to reopen the case to qualify for a pension, you can forget it.”

Anna raised her chin a notch. “As you can see, I am gainfully employed and have no need for an orphan’s pension. All I want is to know what happened to my father, and in light of this newly discovered error, I’d like the navy to correct its report.”

“And you think you’re smart enough to question the team of experts who wrote that report? What exactly does a map librarian do, anyway? Stack maps in alphabetical order?”

“Something like that.”

Anna knew the nautical features of every bay, inlet, and harbor on the Eastern Seaboard, as well as the depth and navigability for every port from Maine to the Florida Keys. She

could calculate longitude and latitude coordinates in her sleep. After all, she was a cartographer's daughter, and the skill came naturally to her.

Last week, Anna came across a new map from the weather bureau that tracked the historic paths of long-ago hurricanes. Her attention was drawn to the path of the storm that sank the *Culpeper*, and that was when she realized that the details in the navy's report on the *Culpeper* didn't correspond with this new information.

"The problem with the *Culpeper* was that it was crammed with scientists and bookworms instead of real sailors," Lieutenant Rowland said. "They could have ridden out that storm if there weren't so many useless scientists getting in the way."

Anna's father had been one of those navy scientists, dedicating years of his life to mapping the floor of the ocean. Using specially designed trawls, dredges, and thermometers, he lowered the equipment to measure the depth of the water and collect vials of sediment from the ocean floor. There had always been tension between warriors like Lieutenant Rowland and science officers like her father, but the navy owed it to the men of the *Culpeper* to ensure the report of their demise was accurate.

Lieutenant Rowland hadn't finished his rant. "Those scientists put decent sailors' lives in jeopardy, all so they could play with their test tubes in the middle of the ocean. We're not reopening the case, and you need to quit pestering the navy with ancient history. This incident is over. Is that clear?"

"I hear you, sir."

The lieutenant leaned forward. "What's the matter with your voice? You're muttering like you've got cotton in your throat. Speak up!"

Anna stiffened. She'd been teased about her voice since childhood, but at least now she had the ability to speak. As a child

her throat had been so badly damaged she was completely mute. When she was fourteen, she had an operation that helped restore her voice, though she still spoke with a low throaty tone that made her the target of schoolyard bullies.

She cleared her throat and tried to speak a little louder. "I've heard everything you said, but I'd still like the case reopened."

Lieutenant Rowland's eyes iced over. "*Women*," he said contemptuously. "The government made a mistake ever letting women work in the Capitol. They're nosy, meddlesome, and don't know how to follow orders. I heard that the Library of Congress only employed female librarians on a probationary status. When is that up for review?"

Anna's knees went weak, and she was tempted to grab the desk for support. What he said was true. The library hired women for a trial period almost a decade ago, but their probationary status had never been officially rescinded.

"Well?" Lieutenant Rowland barked. "When are the women going to be reviewed for permanent appointments? Because if you keep meddling, I want to be at the hearing for the reconsideration of employing females at the Library of Congress."

"Don't!" Anna burst out, her voice finally loud enough to get Lieutenant Rowland's attention. Eight of the forty librarians were women, and all of their jobs would be in jeopardy if she couldn't placate this man. "There's no hearing scheduled," she said in a calmer voice. "Our appointment seems to have become permanent without formal acknowledgment."

"Is that so? Let's make sure you don't call undue attention to yourself by prying into military affairs that don't concern you. Is that clear?"

Horribly clear. It wasn't only Anna's job he was threatening, but the livelihoods of all eight women who worked at the Library of Congress.

“Yes, sir, it’s clear,” she said softly.

Her limbs felt heavy as she climbed the stairs back to the top floor. She’d become complacent over the years, since the library’s director treated the women with the same respect he gave the male librarians. Mr. Spofford was like a grandfather to them, but he had never actually made their appointment permanent. Instead, his career had been spent haggling for the funding, design, and construction of the new library being built across the street from the Capitol. It had taken decades, but the palatial new library building was nearly complete. Next month the Herculean task of moving the entire library into its lavish new home would begin.

By the time Anna returned to the map room, the congressional pages were gone, but she was surprised to see Mr. Spofford at the single worktable. With his narrow frame bent by age, Ainsworth Spofford looked even older than his seventy-three years.

“There you are,” Mr. Spofford said, looking relieved. “I’ve been called to a meeting with the engineers about the new building. I need you to attend the hearing of the Committee on Fisheries for me.”

Anna winced. Mr. Spofford was good at providing support at congressional hearings, but they were torture for Anna.

The library director noticed her anxiety. “This will be an easy meeting,” he assured her. “The Committee on Fisheries is a paltry group. No one bothers to attend their hearings, so you’ll be fine. Just be on hand in case someone needs to consult these maps.”

He filled her outstretched arms with a stack of atlases and maps. It was doubtful she’d be called on to speak, but she loathed anything that dragged her out of the library. And congressmen could be so difficult. She prayed everyone would ignore her while she quietly blended into the woodwork.



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Anna's skirts made it awkward to navigate down the staircases while lugging bulky atlases and map tubes, but the elevators were reserved for members of Congress. For a nation founded on the principles of democracy, the hierarchy in the Capitol was astounding. Congressmen walked the gilded halls like royal princes, while staffers like Anna scurried after them with maps or anything else they needed. After reaching the first floor, Anna walked through an acre of marble corridors until she arrived at the designated room.

Mr. Spofford was wrong; the meeting room was swarming with onlookers. They clustered in the doorway and trailed down the hall, anxious to get inside. She wiggled through the crush of people and headed to the chairs along the back wall that were reserved for staff, grabbing the last open seat. Like all the committee meeting rooms, the vaulted ceiling was covered with elaborate paintings and hand-carved cornices. A long table dominated the center of the room, already filled with congressmen from across the nation.

"What's going on?" Anna whispered to the congressional aide sitting beside her.

"It's Lucas Callahan's first meeting since he got demoted to Fisheries," the man replied. "Everyone wants to see if he'll show up and submit to the humiliation."

That explained it. Anna had heard about the Callahan affair. Literally. Last week the shouting from the House floor carried all the way up to the top story of the Capitol. Luke Callahan was one of the most charismatic men in Congress, but he was also a thorn in the side of the Speaker of the House. The animosity between the men boiled over, and rumor had it that Mr. Callahan tried to throw a punch at the Speaker, stopped only because the sergeant at arms intervened. Speaker Jones had had enough of Mr. Callahan's temper and removed him from the prestigious

committee that controlled the budget of the United States and demoted him to the Committee on Fisheries.

Anna was secretly pleased by Luke Callahan's demotion, for he was an outspoken critic of the Library of Congress. Anyone who voted against libraries was someone she distrusted. She looked at the center table, scanning the wooden nameplates before each congressman, until she landed on Mr. Callahan's sign.

His chair was still empty. Was he going to appear? Rumor claimed Luke Callahan had a hot temper and wouldn't take the Speaker's humiliation lying down. She'd never seen the library's nemesis, but she imagined he'd probably be some stodgy old man without a trace of compassion or intellectual curiosity. What kind of barbarian voted against libraries?

Anna fidgeted, realizing she was the only woman in the room, and she always hated that. Anything that called attention to herself was to be avoided, but there was no help for it today.

"Make way, make way!" a boy shouted, his young voice cutting through the din. The crowd parted as a congressional page elbowed his way into the room, banging a ceremonial mace on the floor. "Make way for the esteemed congressman from Maine!"

Behind the boy, two pages carried a leather satchel and a folder of papers. And behind them . . .

Oh my.

Mr. Callahan was no stodgy old man. The young congressman strode into the room with the easy confidence of a man born to power. His chestnut hair was tousled with streaks of gold. He had sparkling blue eyes and the sun-chapped complexion of a man who loved the outdoors. Yet it was his smile that caught Anna's attention. It was effortless—confident and self-assured with gleaming white teeth.

"Look who is slumming with the peasants on Fisheries," a congressman from the table taunted.

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“Slumming? On the contrary.” Mr. Callahan flashed a broad smile and stretched his arms wide. “It’s an honor to be of service to this nation’s world-famous fisheries and oyster beds. The privilege is entirely mine.”

His good cheer was greeted with a rumble of laughter and foot stamping. Mr. Callahan circled the table, clapping men on their backs and trading quips with enviable sophistication. He had an indomitable sense of energy as he made his way to the benches where the journalists sat, continuing to shake hands and exchange greetings with the newspaper reporters. Amethyst cuff links winked from his wrists as he reached across to the back row to personally greet each of the journalists.

It was the flashy cuff links that gave him away. Anna’s eyes widened as the jolt of recognition hit her. She’d seen this man often, but always from the third-floor balcony looking down into the first-floor reading room of the Library of Congress. He was a frequent visitor to the library, always occupying the same spot at a table near a window as he quietly read each day during the lunch hour. From the balcony two stories above, all Anna could see was the top of his head, but he always wore those amethyst cuff links that glinted in the sunlight as he turned the pages of his book. She’d never known who he was until just now.

That was the man who had voted against every library bill ever brought before Congress? Whose blistering diatribes against their new building could peel paint from the wall? How strange that the library’s chief critic was one of their most frequent patrons.

Against her will, a tiny bit of resentment softened, even though Luke Callahan was the embodiment of the type of person she always avoided. A man with that sort of blinding confidence and popularity wouldn’t know what it was like to be teased or be on the outside. He never had to worry if he’d

be allowed to attend school like a normal student, or if today was the day a pack of vicious children would circle around to see what it sounded like when a mute girl cried.

Anna pushed the memories away as the meeting began. Committee meetings were usually lethally dull, and the hours dragged by while a congressman from New York tried to protect his state's struggling oyster industry. "We refuse to pay taxes on beds suffering from New Jersey's smelting runoff. It is poisoning our oyster beds and degrading our waterfront."

"It's impossible for those smelting plants to pollute New York waters," another congressman said. "The currents don't flow that way."

Mr. Callahan raised an arm and snapped his fingers. "Someone get a map so we can settle this."

That was her cue. Anna fumbled with the map tubes beside her, searching for one that charted ocean currents.

"Map!" Mr. Callahan demanded in an obnoxious outburst. His eyes met hers across the crowded room. Unbelievably, he looked directly at her and snapped his fingers again. *Snap, snap, snap*. Did he really expect her to spring across the room like a dog summoned to heel?

Of course he did. Most congressmen were accustomed to people bowing and scraping, and Anna clenched her teeth as she approached. She laid the map on the conference table before Mr. Callahan and was close enough to smell his pine-scented cologne. Before pulling away, she whispered in his ear, "Snapping your fingers works better if you wear a crown and use a scepter to point out where I should scurry."

Without waiting for a reply, she returned to her chair, holding her breath the entire way back across the room. Had she really just reprimanded a congressman? She slid back into her seat, and then risked a glance at Mr. Callahan.

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He was staring at her with a stunned expression, as if the natural order of his world had just been upended. A mouse had reached up to bat the snout of a fearsome lion. She tried not to smile, but her mouth twisted in an effort to suppress the grin.

The astonishment faded from Mr. Callahan's face, replaced by a dazzling smile that could slay a maiden at a hundred yards. He tipped his head in a tiny bow, new respect in his eyes.

Then, to Anna's horror, he rose to his feet and held an arm aloft, amethyst cuff links flashing as he gestured to her. "My thanks to the committee's research assistant, Miss . . ."

As his sentence dangled, anxiety flooded her. She'd rather face a public stoning than speak in front of strangers. But he was still waiting, and every congressman and journalist in the room turned their attention to her. Chairs creaked, men shifted in their seats, every eye in the room staring at her. She wanted to melt into the floor.

"Anna O'Brien," she mumbled, the words barely clearing her scratchy throat.

"What was that?" Mr. Callahan asked.

She cleared her throat and tried again. Her second attempt still sounded like the croak of a bullfrog.

The congressional aide next to her spared her further misery. "Miss Anna O'Brien, of the Library of Congress," he called out in a voice as loud and clear as a bell.

"Miss O'Brien," Mr. Callahan purred in a delicious voice. "I offer apologies for my caustic and inexcusable impatience. The uncouth savages from the north have much to learn from the gentle lady from Washington. She is the epitome of grace in the face of boorishness. Her wit and efficiency are a shaft of sunlight on the dreariest of afternoons. Miss O'Brien, the Congress stands in gratitude."

A low murmur and a little foot stamping greeted his state-

ment, but all the congressmen immediately returned to their work.

Except for Mr. Callahan, who still watched her with that curious glint in his eyes. Anna glanced away in mortification, heat flushing her body. She would happily go to her grave without this sort of attention.

The meeting stretched on for hours, but against her will her attention kept straying to the congressman from Maine. For the most part he was an active participant in the meeting, though every few minutes he glanced back to smile at her again. They were always fleeting smiles, but they made energy race across her skin. Did he just *wink* at her?

He did!

Anna looked away and fumed. Women could get fired for flirting with members of Congress, and the last thing she wanted was some arrogant congressman she'd never met winking at her in public. Winking! That was how rumors got started.

The moment the gavel banged to end the meeting, she bolted from the room.