

# Twenty-one

## Dinner With the Governor

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. . . Kyle received a written invitation to a dinner at the governor's mansion for Sunday evening, September 30. It was to be an informal evening in honor of a senior staff member of the White House, Harry Sheen, who was in California for business and pleasure. Wives were invited, and the invitation included a hand-written note from Jed suggesting that Kyle bring Jenny.

"Yes, I'd be honored," she told him when he asked her to attend. "How intimate a dinner is it?"

"Just six of us, I think. A Washington big shot, along with his wife and the four of us."

In her best imitation of Scarlett O'Hara, Jenny drawled, "Oh, Rhett, *whateva* shall I wear?"

"How about what you have on now?" he suggested.

Lying next to him in her black lace bra and bikini panties, she tackled him and pinned him down on the bed. He rolled on top of her, and their lively wrestling match soon turned into gentle love-making.

Afterward, Jenny decided to wear her black dress pants with a turquoise chiffon blouse. She felt comfortable with the way the slacks fit around her hips and hung, loosely pleated, down to her ankles. Her shoes matched her top. She felt elegant, and Kyle reaffirmed how classy she looked. Marilyn, Jed's wife and the first lady, greeted them at the door and escorted them to the living room. After Marilyn and Jed introduced their guests and served them cocktails, they led them to the dining room, a rectangular area with silk wallpaper. On the left wall were double French doors that opened to the porch.

Despite their different political parties, Jed and Kyle had always worked well together. But as the country was becoming entrenched in war, their differences began to show, and their bantering was more intense than before. As Jenny glanced around the room, she realized that five of the six present were Republicans, assuming that Kate was the same party as her husband. Granted, Jenny was not a party loyalist, but still she was a *registered* Republican. Jenny decided to let go of her concern. When it came to debating, Kyle could hold his own . . . even outnumbered.

While the antipasto was being cleared, Jenny talked to Marilyn. She could hear Jed

and Harry talking about what most people around the country were talking about: President Bush and his handling of matters since 9/11. "We warned the Taliban to turn Osama bin Laden over. We had no choice but to go after him," Harry said to the governor. "This man must be found and killed."

"There is no question about it," Jed agreed. "As Americans, we'll not feel safe again until we put an end to this man and those who jeopardize our way of life."

They continued along this vein for a few minutes until Kyle offered another perspective. "I agree that we need to go after him, but what concerns me is that we are sending thousands of troops into Afghanistan without even knowing where he is. And in the process, we'll take the lives of many innocent people. It seems to me that we in the West have to find a way to reach a treaty with Muslims on such issues as democracy and human rights."

"We didn't make the first attack," Bradley said. "Ours is merely a response to their outrageous and despicable behavior."

"But try to stand back and look more objectively at what's happening here. They see their actions as a response to our behavior, our injustice," Kyle retorted. "In war, it is always the other side that starts it. We can't hold ourselves completely free of responsibility here. If we're going to find any kind of resolution, we have to look at our own past actions and see what we may have done to incur their wrath."

"That's absurd," Harry responded. "Are you justifying what bin Laden and his al Qaeda forces did to us?"

"Hardly," Kyle said. "Killing is wrong for either side. But we have to search for other means of going after him than wiping out a lot of innocent lives."

"We can't reason with these people," Harry replied. "We're never going to change the extreme, radical, Muslim mentality. Their attitudes go back thousands of years. We have to take the Islamic reign of terrorism out of power and, unfortunately, the only way to do that is through warfare. This is hardly a time for turning the other cheek."

There was a lull in the conversation while salad was served. Jenny asked Harry's wife, Kate, how she liked living in Washington. She learned that, for years, Kate had served on the Board for the Center for American Women and Politics. Describing Emmy as Kyle's sister-in-law, Jenny asked Kate if she knew her. She explained she had just begun working at CAWP a few months earlier. Kate promised to look her up and make her feel welcomed. From the excitement in her voice, Jenny could hear how much Kate enjoyed her work with the center; from Kate's description, it was non-partisan and rather laissez-faire in its philosophy. It became clear to Jenny that Kate and her husband were not joined at the hip in their politics. Jenny was thrilled that Emmy was involved with such a worthwhile group and might have the benefit of working more closely with Kate.

Before long, Harry picked up where the conversation had left off. "These terrorists leave us no alternative. They're not only terrorizing us. They're slaughtering their own countrymen as well. We owe it to ourselves and to those who look up to us to stop these groups from further acts of violence."

"I thought our goal was to introduce democracy to these countries and liberate those who are living in fear," Marilyn offered.

Jenny admired the governor's wife for speaking her mind. Kate remained quiet but

appeared to agree with Marilyn's comment.

"Exactly. It isn't easy to instill democracy. It may take years, but our only hope for real change is with a democracy," the governor said.

"No country has ever been liberated by destroying it," Kyle said. "You don't help a country by going in and killing thousands of innocent people. There has to be another way. When the U.S. invaded Panama, we went in during the middle of the night and plucked out Manuel Noriega. He is in prison today. Why couldn't we do that with Osama bin Laden?"

"This is much more complicated," answered the governor. "Bin Laden is well-hidden. And his loyal followers are so committed to their cause that they are willing to sacrifice their own lives. These are ruthless terrorists, and we have no choice but to go after them. And that means conducting warfare on their soil."

"I'm not sure that I understand what drives them," Jenny said. "What have we done to cause this degree of hatred?"

Putting his arm around the back of her chair, Kyle reinforced his appreciation for her raising that question. "That's exactly what we as Americans should be asking," Kyle declared. "It isn't possible for any of us to bring peace to any situation until we assume responsibility for our part in what brought about the friction."

Jenny caught Kyle's eye to see if he picked up on the profundity of his own words. *Hadn't this been part of their own growth experience in working through their relationship?*

"Assume responsibility for what?" the governor asked with mild annoyance. "These hatemongers attacked us for no reason. All we've tried to do is help Afghanistan. We came to the country's rescue when it fought Russia. We've supported its economy with our oil trade. What have we ever done wrong?"

"We say we are protecting *their* interests," Kyle responded, "but we have a knack of going into a country, consuming its resources, and leaving the country in ruins. Sure, we provided the weapons and assisted the Afghan people in their war against Russia. But why did we do that? Because there was something in it for us in our own cold war against Russia, that's why. And when we left, we did nothing to rebuild the country. We have given the bin Ladens of the world plenty to fuel their fire of hatred."

"That's just a lot of bleeding liberal bunk," the governor said. "Kyle, these men are evil. That's all there is to it."

"Damn it, Jed. You are such a reasonable man on so many issues. Why . . . ?" Kyle took a deep breath before he continued. "Dostoevsky wrote, 'While nothing is easier than to denounce the evildoer, nothing is more difficult than to understand him.'"

Jenny looked on with fascination. Kyle was one of the most well-read men she knew, and she often heard him quote people to gain power in a debate.

Just then, the entree was brought into the room. Once the plates were served, Kyle resumed his point with greater restraint. "We make up five percent of the world's population and consume forty percent of the world's resources. We have made ourselves the great nation that we are at the expense of many of these third-world countries. As long as there are haves and have nots, as long as there are people whose bellies are full and those who are starving, there will never be peace in the world. And that isn't liberal

anything. That is just the plain and simple truth.”

“That’s nonsense,” Harry retorted. “There’s a liberal body in this country that wants to blame the U.S. for everything that happens that isn’t to their liking in the world. America has a responsibility to protect and defend our people and those in Afghanistan. And it isn’t just about us. Look at the plight of the Afghan women. They’re treated like chattel; they can’t go to school; they can’t have careers; and they can’t escape. What kind of people would we be if we let them continue to have meaningless lives? We are there to capture these terrorists and to help the country rebuild as a democracy. I can’t see how anyone could disagree with what we’re doing there.”

“I agree with these reasons for our presence in Afghanistan. But why didn’t we do that ten years ago when we were ‘helping’ them?” Kyle asked. “We saw the abject poverty and dire oppression of the Afghan people then. But we didn’t stay around to do anything about it. Just look at the difference between how we dealt with the aftermath of World War II and the aftermath of the Afghan war against Russia. In the former war, we were seen as a nation who stood with the Jews during the Holocaust and with the West Germans against the Russian blockade. We were saviors to them. After the war, we stayed to help reconstruct countries like Germany and Japan, and today they are our allies. They have no hatred toward us.”

“Those were different times,” Harry responded.

“And we were a different America in the forties,” Kyle countered. “If we dealt with both situations in the same compassionate way, maybe there wouldn’t have been the intense swell of hatred that resulted in the bombing of the Twin Towers.”

“You’re going back to the past,” Harry said. “We have no choice now but to stay on the offense against the enemy. I see us doing something noble in Afghanistan and, until we have captured this evil man and the rest of his terrorist followers, the world will not be safe.”

“Today, other countries, especially third-world countries, see us as a people who will step in to ‘liberate’ them when there is something in it for us. They see America as a country that stands for profit for ourselves at any expense and that uses our military to achieve this,” Kyle said. “Why do you think the U.N. won’t cooperate with us?”

Governor Bradley was becoming noticeably worked up. “The U.N. is a corrupt but necessary organization. We have to do what we know is right. If there is any cause for people hating us, it is jealousy.”

Kyle appeared equally agitated. “If we can go across the world and drop bombs, why can’t we go across and drop food? Look at the poverty, starvation, and destitution of these people we’re purportedly going to free. Thirty thousand children under the age of five die every single day of malnutrition and disease.”

“That’s just a bunch of liberal gibberish. It sounds good, but the reality is that we have to be the aggressor,” the governor stated firmly as he lightly banged his fist on the table. “It’s been proven time and time again that appeasement encourages aggression by the terrorists as it did with the Nazis and the communists. We have two world wars and a long series of terrorist attacks that show the fallacy of pacification. This is not about root causes, poverty, starvation, or U.S. arrogance. It is about eliminating the terrorists before

they kill us.”

“Do to others before they do it to you—not exactly the golden rule by any religious standard,” Kyle said with a twinkle in his eye, attempting to lighten the conversation. Jenny nudged his foot with her own to let him know how well he had timed changing the tone of the discussion.

On the drive home, Jenny told Kyle how proud she was of him. “You’re not afraid to say what you think, even with the odds stacked against you. I love that about you.”

“Do you think any of us came any closer to hearing each other tonight . . . or, more importantly, to understanding?”

“Well, there is at least one of us who came closer to understanding *you* tonight,” Jenny said softly as she reached for his hand and held it tightly for the remainder of the ride home.

As the weeks unfolded, the pressure on Kyle continued to escalate right along with the war itself. His time with Jenny, however, was relatively stress-free. He thanked God everyday that she had not totally given up on him after the incident with Mike. Jenny’s unconditional love continued to amaze him. Above all else, he loved her because he knew their relationship had been on the brink of failing and it was Jenny’s belief that, with outside help, he could work through the problem that had saved it from utter destruction.

Kyle picked up the makings for dinner on his way home from work. He greeted Jenny with a warm kiss as she joined him on the patio. As he flipped the hamburger patties, he talked about internal struggles he was facing. “I used to be a basic, down-the-middle Democrat. But over this past year, something is happening to me.”

“I see you becoming more distressed about the war and more caught up with matters involving human rights and human dignity. You’ve helped open my mind to some of these issues,” Jenny said as she stood behind him and put her arms around him.

“Thanks, sweet pea. It’s reassuring to know that I have a positive influence on you.”

As they crawled into bed for the night, Jenny kissed him and then touched her forehead to his. “You’re so special, Kyle Anderson. Our state is fortunate to have you protecting it. And I feel blessed to have you watching out for me.”

They lay together in silence for a moment before Kyle began speaking again. “I find myself reading things I wouldn’t have given the time of day to a year ago—things that come across my desk like this.” He sat up and grabbed a *Workers Party* newsletter from the nightstand, pointing her to a headline that read, “The U.S. Government Keeps Escalating Its War Against the People of Afghanistan.”

Jenny scanned the article.

For more than two weeks, U.S. bombs and cruise missiles have rained down on people, especially targeting the major cities of Kabul, Khandahar, and Jalalabad. Savage bombardment has destroyed airports, electrical installations, and other vital infrastructure. As many as 900 civilians are reported killed and thousands injured. U.N. and other international relief agencies have repeatedly condemned U.S. bombardment as the cause of impending humanitarian disasters, including a massive

refugee crisis and the possible starvation of seven million people.

Jenny skimmed the rest of the article, learning that the Bush administration anticipated that the war was only the first round in a long-term war against international terrorism. Top U.S. officials were openly calling for an all-out war against Iraq and, the previous week, had begun talking about extending the war into neighboring countries. “In summation,” the article concluded, “the U.S. war in Afghanistan will only create greater tensions and new wars throughout the region and the world.” Jenny looked at Kyle and saw the sadness in his eyes.

“It sounds like the beginning of World War III, doesn’t it,” Kyle whispered. A tear slipped down his face. “With all of our sophistication as a nation, I don’t understand why we’re choosing such an extreme means of addressing the problem. I supported going into Afghanistan. But I had hopes that we’d go in, get bin Laden and his al Qaeda network, and get out. Why are we killing so many innocent Afghans? We are doing exactly what they did to us, and that makes us no better than them. And as long as I work in the government, I feel I am an accomplice to this.”

“Do you want out of government?” Jenny asked, turning onto her side and facing him.

“The party is asking me that,” Kyle responded quietly. “I have put off giving them a direct answer as long as I can. I’ve been a public servant for a long time now. Maybe I need a change.”

“What would you do?”

“I’m not sure . . . but something worthwhile.” Kyle spoke with more power in his voice. “I’d find a way to make a difference.”