Censure

by XaviaAndromedovna

Summary

Steve and Pete go on a mission to Wyoming to investigate a string of suicides that started 60 years ago.

Notes

Prompt: Guilt

TW: Copious references to suicide.

See the end of the work for more notes

“Alright, Claud, any idea why we’re in Wyoming?” Pete asks over the Farnsworth, Steve peering over his shoulder.

“The Van Ackerman family: three attempted suicides by gun, two successful. The first, Fred, has been in a coma for thirty years. He was a member of the U.S. Senate but left after he was officially censured for his involvement in the death of another senator, Brigham Anderson of Utah. Wanna guess how he died?”

“Shot himself.”
“Of course. Since the only one we know saw this thing is comatose, I sent you with Freud’s clock. Don’t tell Artie.”

“You’re the best! See if the people who put the censure through might be connected.”

“Already on it. Good luck, don’t die!”

“So,” Steve begins as Pete closes the Farnsworth. “options?”

“I dunno, man, it could be anything. Our new friend the sinister Senator is all we’ve got.”

“Yeah, I was afraid of that.”

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They arrive at Fred Van Ackerman’s room and close the curtains. Steve informs Pete that he’ll be keeping watch while the senior agent pokes around.

“Oh no, dude, last time I got in someone’s head it was not a pleasant experience.”

“I had to face down an Artie-booby-trapped warehouse when I did it. I’m staying out here.”

“Rock, paper, scissors?”

Steve rolls his eyes at his current partner’s childish logic, but concedes. It ends up being a poor decision, because he is now tasked with navigating the man’s subconscious. Pete grins.

“Don’t worry, Jinks, I’m right here. Niiice and conscious.”

“I hate you.”

“You love me!” And if Steve doesn’t respond, it’s because he’s focusing on the mission at hand.

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Around him is darkness. This isn’t like when he was in Artie’s mind; everything’s already shut down long ago except this one room. It takes him a couple seconds to recognize it as the Oval Office. Behind the desk is, presumably, the President, although which he cannot be certain. He is old and clearly in poor health, but he has a ruthless vigour to him that sends chills down Steve’s spine. Entering the room is a young man, who looks to be Van Ackerman. Neither seems to notice his presence, and he gets the impression that this moment has played out on repeat for many years.

“You wanted to see me, Mr. President?”

“Yes, as I said on the phone, I have something that might interest you.”

“Something that’ll stop Brig?”

“In his tracks. BUT, you must promise me that you’ll be prudent about this. This is a very delicate situation and one wrong move could completely derail this nomination.”

“I know what I’m doing, Mr. President.” Lie.
“Very well.” The President hands a manila folder to Van Ackerman, which the latter promptly opens. Steve skirts the shadows to get a closer look. What he sees is a black-and-white photograph of two men on a beach. They are very close together and exceedingly happy. On the back is written, ‘Brig and Ray forever, Honolulu 1944.’ Steve feels the sudden urge to puke.

He comes to with a start and yanks his hand away as he jumps out of his chair.

“Whoa, hey, Steve. Steve! What’s wrong, man?”

“Son of a bitch,” Steve shouts. “Fucking douchebag!”

“Steve! What did you see?”

“This asshole was blackmailing Anderson because he was gay. He… he fucking—”

“Hey, calm down, okay?” Pete puts a reassuring arm on Steve’s shoulder. “I think we can all agree that this is pretty good justice. He’s rotting away, reliving that moment after trying to kill himself the same way the guy he was blackmailing did. He didn’t get away with it.”

Steve lets out a long, tense breath and closes his eyes. “I forgot how shitty the world was for people like me back then. I mean, obviously I knew it wasn’t good but… this is disgusting.”

“Well on the bright side, clearly we’re looking for a revenge artifact of some sort.”

“But what about his family? They had nothing to do with it. And what about the President?”

“We need Claudia.” They call the sassy tech-wizard, who has found some disturbing information of her own.

“Yeah, this Van Ackerman guy is bad news. I read up on the Anderson case, and it turns out Van Ackerman threatened on national television to reveal some ‘big secret’ the night before he killed himself.”

“He was going to out Anderson as gay if he didn’t do what he wanted.”

“Which apparently was to stop blocking the nomination of a Robert Leffingwell to Secretary of State. How’d the trip to ComaTown go?”

“This guy’s an asshole. Do we know what happened to the President who gave him the evidence?”

“Died of a heart attack when the nomination failed. Why?”

“I think I know what the artifact is. Okay, I need you to look for a guy named Ray who was in the Service and who was with Anderson in Honolulu in 1944.”

“Oh… kay then. That’s specific.”

“What do you think it is?” Pete interjects.

“I saw the President give Van Ackerman a picture of Anderson and a guy named Ray. I think maybe he still has it.”

“Well that would make sense, that’s a lot of guilt and grief over one photograph.”

“We’ll keep you posted, Claud. Looks like we’re visiting Casa Del Homophobe.”
Steve finds it on the floor in a pile of papers. He makes the mistake of touching it. He lets out a cry as he drops the picture. Agony. An overwhelming guilt consumes him, though he knows not for what. All he knows is that his gun is inches from his lips when he hears the neutralizer crackle and feels Pete tackle him to the floor.

“I… I felt so alone.”

“You’re okay. I’m not gonna lose you, Jinksy. Not to this.” Tears continue down Steve’s face, and it gives Pete the sudden urge to kiss the man beneath him. So he does. Because in 2013, he can, and not have to worry about it.

End Notes

Advise and Consent and Warehouse 13 are not mine.

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