

OBLIVIOUS BY GWYN PLUMMER

OBLIVIOUS is the first book in the Peace Givers series, a series about a group of members of different branches of law enforcement who use their combined skills to secretly investigate closed cases they believe resulted in the wrongful conviction of innocent people.

ALEX

Usually, this sort of thing went a lot smoother. We'd go in, get the witness, and get out. But this was no ordinary situation. David had a way of getting himself into the worst possible predicaments, so as far as I knew the woman in the bed could've been working with the people trying to kill him; which was why I'd instructed him to give her the sleeping pill I'd slid under the door. I found it difficult to believe that the guys we were protecting David from had just *coincidentally* wound up in Harborview and checked into the same hotel. Sure, the city drew in a lot of tourists with its white-sand beaches and frou-frou restaurants; but, as a vacation destination for mobsters? I thought not. The situation was so suspect I could taste the deceit. But then again, with David's rotten ass luck coincidence definitely had been a possibility. But even if the woman was totally oblivious to the mess her fuck-buddy had gotten himself into, the last thing I needed was to come face to face with some broad with a thousand questions - none of which I could answer. I wouldn't even go there and risk revealing David's true identity, even though he seemed to have no qualms about it. Somebody had to be responsible; and since I'm the one with the badge, it had to be me.

US Marshal Alexander Girard.

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Not only did I not need to put our witness at risk, but I didn't need to piss off my superiors again. Yeah, that hadn't gone too well last time. Not that I'd screwed up on purpose. Unfortunately, however, when all hell broke loose my intent hadn't meant shit.

I heard a thump. My eyes shot straight to David and I could see him rubbing his right leg with one hand while he balanced himself against the desk chair with the other. He's a couple of inches shorter than my six feet one-inch frame and is about twenty pounds lighter than my two hundred. His life's a lot more interesting than his plain black suit and usual white button-down shirt had let on; and although his hair was as dark as mine, his was a lot thinner on top. More than likely the result of stress rather than his age would be my guess.

"Quiet," I hissed.

He scowled at me as if to say 'shut the fuck up'. I should've been irritated about his misplaced belief that he had a right to be mad, but I let it slide. His life was screwed up enough. We stood still. I glanced over my shoulder at the mysterious woman lying beneath the covers, her blond locks covering her face. I breathed in the flowery scent given off by the arrangement perched on the oak table underneath the window sill. I couldn't help but give a quick thought as to how she'd managed to get herself mixed up with someone like David. Hopefully, for her, this had been nothing more than a one-night stand, but I doubted it. The crystal chandeliers, silk sheets, forty-two inch HD TV with Blu-Ray, ocean-front view, and at least eight hundred square feet of plush carpeting spoke volumes about the price.

Sleeping Beauty was still out, so I continued to gather David's belongings. The room was dark. Depending on the sliver of moonlight from the partially opened blinds, David walked to the table and picked up his wallet and a key card. I grabbed his wrist right when he was about to put it in his wallet. Damn, what part of "it needs to be like you were never here" did he not

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understand? It wasn't like it was our first time. He knew the drill. He looked up at me, still oblivious. I glanced at the key he still held in his now gloved hand and shook my head. Revelation struck. He grabbed a tissue and wiped the card free of prints and inserted it into the plastic sleeve. After wiping it clean as well, he dropped it onto the desk. I wasn't sure if Sleeping Beauty would really ask them to check for prints, but we couldn't take the risk. Considering how much David craved attention, I was sure there were many people who'd remember him, but I was determined to leave them all scratching their heads. And I would, thanks to one Mr. Oliver "Ollie" Stovall—our genius computer hacker- who, as soon as we exited, would erase all videos from the hotel cameras.

I slowly opened the closet. The iron, which hung on the rack fastened on the other side, lightly bumped against the wooden door. I paused. After giving a quick glance to the motionless figure on the bed, I bent and lifted a small black duffle bag. David nodded. We headed to the doorway. As we passed the nightstand, I noticed a bottle of champagne. I looked back at David, my expression conveying that I was wondering where the glasses were. David slowly turned his head to face the opposite side of the bed.

"Great," I mouthed. I pushed the bag into his stomach. He let out a soft grunt. Fucker just better be glad I hadn't used my fist, which had still been an option. Lowering to my knees, I stretched out and army-crawled around the foot of the bed. I focused on the area of her hidden face and the small arm hanging from the side of the bed as I made my way to the nightstand. As I reached up to grab one of the glasses, I heard a small sigh and the rustling sound of the sheets. The arm disappeared. My heart raced. Without moving my head, I looked at her. She went still. Carefully taking the half-full glass by the base I slowly slid it from the table. Instead of turning around I backed up, and immediately came to a halt, my foot entangled in the bedspread.

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Damn it!

I lifted my leg and lightly shook my foot, trying my best not to jostle Sleeping Beauty.

She stirred.

The spread moved.

I stilled.

Was she waking up already? What kind of sleeping pill was that?

I held my breath while I awaited the answers to my questions. She exhaled softly and settled back down. Once she settled, I reached back to free my foot, and I felt the warm liquid spill over my hand. Continuing my retreat, I wiped my hand on the bed spread and turned, increasing my speed when I reached the foot of the bed. I waved my hand to get David's attention and then pointed at the doorway. David gave a quick nod and headed into the living area. I stood and followed close behind. The low wattage lamp on the table next to the sofa provided enough light to continue our mission. Searching for forgotten items, my eyes wandered over the tan-and-burgundy-striped Queen Anne sofa and antique chair. Nothing but a glass vase filled with an assortment of flowers remained on the rectangular oak dining table.

David put the wallet and socks in his jacket pocket, pulled the bag's strap over his shoulder, and gripped the door handle. When he opened the door, in poured the dim light from the hallway. Believing we'd gotten everything, we quietly slid out the door. I surveyed the hallway. It was quiet. There was a cleaning cart parked in front of the room four doors down, evidence that someone would soon return. I grabbed David's arm and headed for the stairs.

"Stay in front of me," I barked in a stage whisper as he fell behind. After a quick peek, we entered the stairwell. Concentrating on nothing but our escape, we raced down the four

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flights of stairs, joined by cool air, the faint smell of disinfectant, and the sound of our own footsteps.

“It’s about time,” said Wil, who was waiting for us at the first-floor exit.

“He hadn’t packed up anything,” I said.

“Well, that was smart and not a waste of time at all,” replied Wil, a muscular, blond-haired man with light brown eyes. He was dressed in a khaki Dickie’s uniform and stood next to a large cart loaded with cleaning supplies. He reached into the cart and pulled out a black jacket matching the pants we both knew David would be wearing. If nothing else, the guy was predictable, which made it easy for us to catch him in the first place.

“Put this on.” He threw the jacket to David. David yanked off the black jacket he was already wearing, pulled his wallet from the inside pocket and tucked it into his back pocket. He handed the jacket to Wil who placed it and the duffle bag, along with the champagne glass I’d given him, into the cart.

“Why am I changing? It looks just like the one I had on?” asked David.

“Looks like it, but it’s not like it,” explained Wil. “This one has a tracking device. If shit goes downhill, and you get grabbed, just sit tight. We’ll be close behind.”

“Good idea.”

Wil and I gave each other the ‘can you believe this guy?’ look.

“Keep your head down at all times,” continued Wil, ‘and, no matter what happens, don’t say anything to anyone. You know the drill.’”

David nodded.

“We’re going out through the kitchen.” Wil peaked into the hallway. “Let’s go.”

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We hustled our way down the narrow hallway. It was 2 am. Other than the one overnight front desk clerk who was paying more attention to us than the magazine he was pretending to read, the lobby was empty. Avoiding the clerk's line of sight, we made sure to stay close to the wall, dodging behind a large potted plant obtaining a better view of the hallway that led to the kitchen. Noticing the coast was clear; we picked up the pace and headed toward the double doors ten yards away. When we got halfway down the hall, the doors opened. Out came a young man wearing a white polo shirt with the hotel logo on the left side of his chest, right above his name tag.

“There you are,” said the young man looking squarely at Wil. “Our guest in room 506 requests immediate assistance. Since you’re going up, take this with you.” He held out a silver platter with a dome lid.

The expression on Wil’s face was enough for me to jump in, and good thing I had otherwise Mason—as his name tag revealed- would’ve been tasting a sample of Wil’s skin cells delivered hot off his fist. No matter how much I explained that he couldn’t break cover out of anger, Wil just didn’t get it. He hated being told what to do; and unless someone had a direct power over his career or life, he’d waste no time telling them where to stuff their orders.

“I’ll take it,” I said, reaching around Wil to take the dish.