

# **BEYOND CONTROL**

**LAWRENCE VERIGIN**

## PROLOGUE

*Wednesday April 23, 2003*

His father was dead, and now he was going to take control. Hendrick Schmidt V needed a moment to collect his thoughts before joining his guests. These men had to know that he was the best person to oversee Naintosa and Pharmalin and for that matter, to lead *them*. His father had been weak, and Hendrick was strong and cunning; surely, they could sense that. If any of them didn't see it his way, he'd eliminate the ones not loyal to him. *I created this opportunity to seize control, and I must be respected for it.* Hendrick forced a grin. *I'm not afraid of them.*

The funeral had been held at the church past the edge of their property line. The mini-cathedral with its stained glass windows and domed roof had been built by a wealthy baron in 1610. The Schmidt family had made it their own, with multiple generations buried within its crypt.

The estate had been built by the Schmidt family in the mid-1800s as a country getaway not too far from the city. Now it was in a suburb of fast-growing Berlin. The buildings were fortunate not to have been destroyed in World War II, and whatever damage had

been caused by the conflict had long since been repaired. The trees of the forest had been replanted, hiding the scars of the shelling and stumps of the old growth.

After the service, many attendees had avoided both the supporters and protestors outside as they adjourned from the church. They were ushered to the mansion to toast the life of the deceased. Now only a select few mourners remained.

The butler balanced an empty silver serving tray in his left hand as he closed the double oak doors to the study with his right hand. As he turned, he paused. "I didn't see you there, sir. Would you like me to fetch you a Cognac as well?"

"Wait twenty minutes and then bring me a full decanter," Hendrick said.

The butler gave a nod and retreated down the corridor.

Hendrick took a deep breath and went into the study. The first person he saw was Carlo Da Silva, a man heavily invested in the shaping of the Internet and chairman of the *Club*. Carlo's eyes were directed toward the dark shelves lined with books on the opposite side of the room, but he turned when he heard the doors close.

There were five brown leather chairs situated around a square mahogany table.

Opposite Carlo sat Davis Lovemark, by far the largest media baron in the world. He swirled amber liquid in a snifter and then brought it to his lips. "Tasty." The light from a fresco table lamp nearby accentuated a birthmark the size and color of a penny between his chin and right cheek.

Between the two sat the banking director Malcolm Carter. His long arms draped over the sides of the overstuffed chair, making him look uncomfortable. He reached forward to take a crystal glass from the table.

Hendrick tucked in his black tie so he could button his black suit jacket over it. He'd had the suit made specifically for the funeral

and this meeting days before his father had died. He stepped forward into the room. "I hope you've been treated well." He was trying to speak English as much as he could, and his German tongue had to work hard to make the words articulate.

The three men rose to meet their host.

"Carlo ... Davis ... Malcolm." Hendrick shook each hand in turn. He had always called them by their surnames before out of respect for his elders. But that time had passed; Hendrick was to be treated as an equal now.

He knew the empty chair with the untouched snifter of Cognac placed in front of it was meant to be a tribute to his father, the late Dr. Hendrick Schmidt IV, and that he was supposed to sit in the chair next to it. But he wanted to prove a point, so he sat down in the tribute chair. "Are you hungry? Can I have anything brought in?" He smiled toward Carlo. "Remember how my father used to eat everything you put in front of him with vigor when he visited you?"

The others sat back down in their chairs.

"Yes, he had a healthy appetite," Carlo said in his thick Spanish accent that sounded like his tongue was too large for his mouth.

"Too hardy, yet not so healthy," Hendrick added.

"Our condolences for your loss," Malcolm said in his Texan drawl, stilted by a life in banking. "The service was appropriate."

"Your father was a good man." Davis's accent was American with the slightest hint of British, from his roots. "He will be missed."

Carlo nodded. "Yes, very much."

Hendrick's face went stern. "My father was holding us all back. Now that I am in charge the plan will move forward at a much more rapid pace."

Carlo opened his mouth and then closed it. When he spoke, it was in a placating tone. "Do you think you're ready for the responsibility? We can help you find someone to run the companies until you are. We can look after the project: we're on track, and 2020 is years away.

You have to finish your studies.”

“I have my Doctorate in Physics, and my Masters in Executive Business is almost complete,” Hendrick said. “I will contact Oxford and make the arrangements to take a leave until I have more time. They are very accommodating to my family.”

“Congratulations on the DPhil in Physics,” said Malcolm, who instructed countries’ federal reserves on how to conduct their business. “But you should finish your MBA now. It’s going to be very important.”

“I agree, Hendrick,” Davis said. “There is no need to rush. Finish your schooling and take time to mourn. This must’ve been quite a shock for you, your mother, brother, and sister. Your father was only sixty-four. As the eldest son you need to be here for your family.”

Hendrick tried to conceal the rolling of his eyes but knew Carlo had caught it. “I know what’s best, and I’m taking over now. My father was preparing me and would’ve wanted it this way.”

“Your father would’ve wanted to stay alive until after 2020 to see the plan fully implemented,” Carlo said. “He planned on preparing you for the next ten to fifteen years before you fully took over.”

“Now that your father is gone, you need to listen to our advice.” Malcolm wasn’t being polite anymore. “This is a delicate operation that we’re not going to let you be a part of until you’re ready.”

*Why do they not respect me? I just masterfully killed my father and am going to get away with it. Surely they instinctively recognize that I could and very well may decide on the same fates for them.* Hendrick reached out with stubby fingers for the snifter that wasn’t intended to be drunk. When he leaned forward, it exposed that his hair was already receding and a bald spot had formed on his crown, just like his father’s. He took a healthy swallow of the Cognac, both for effect and in hopes of calming himself. “I Am Ready ... And my companies are the most important for the cause.”

Davis rose to his feet. “We’ll tell you when you’re ready.”

Hendrick stared at him. *Davis Lovemark—done. Why do I need his media spin? In the end the people who survive will know it was me who saved them. The world will bow to me.* “I’ll go to the other members if you don’t cooperate with me.”

Carlo stood. “They’ll listen to their chairman—that being me—over you.”

Hendrick leaned back in his chair, pushing away the feeling of being chastised. *Carlo Da Silva—finished. What does Internet information compilation have to do with what we are accomplishing? And do I really need other Club members’ support anymore?*

Malcolm was the third to rise. “You need to be patient, son. Finish your studies and let us help you get the resources to learn specifically what your father was preparing you for.

Hendrick looked up at Malcolm. *Malcolm Carter, you are through as well. Wait, I need their money. Naintosa and Pharmalin cannot bear the brunt of such a large undertaking alone. I will have to bide my time. But I will begin work right away and show them that I am the leader.*

The butler entered, holding a silver tray with a single snifter and a full decanter of Cognac.



The men, all dressed in the most expensively tailored, black suits, paused after walking out into the cool spring night. Only their cars and drivers remained in the large circular driveway. It was quiet except for the gurgle of water from a nearby fountain.

“What do you think?” asked Malcolm, the tallest and oldest of the three.

“He’s not ready,” Davis said. “And he’s got his old man’s temper.”

Carlo thought for a good long moment. “Yet it’s inevitable that we must work with him. We need to find someone we can appoint in the interim, who can also help prepare Hendrick at a more rapid rate.”

"If he'll listen," Davis said.

"Did you see his eyes and facial expressions?" Carlo asked. "Something's not right upstairs."

"He acts like a stubborn little spoiled brat, if you ask me," Malcolm said.

Carlo smiled. "He suffers from overactive inner dialogue and self-absorption."

All three began to walk toward their awaiting vehicles.

"What about this Nick Barnes?" Malcolm asked. "Do you really think he killed Hendrick senior?"

"I don't think so," Carlo said. "My guess is they're going to have to end up releasing him."

"I've made sure stories discrediting Barnes are running everywhere," Davis said. "That'll make Barnes's *cause* much more difficult to achieve. It's taking the wind out of his opposition to us."

"So, who killed Hendrick then?" Malcolm asked.

Carlo shrugged. "We don't know yet, but I'm sure Plante will figure it out."

Davis nodded. "And I have a few theories."

"Should we be worried?" Malcolm asked.

"Yes," Carlo said.

"Maybe ask your brother," Davis told Malcolm.