

**Loyalty**  
*Patchworks*  
From Chapter Four

Teague started up again, telling nobody in particular about his twins starting school in the fall. He hit a sour note when he said, "They'll have to recite the Pledge of Allegiance."

"What've you got against the Pledge of Allegiance?" Harcourt said.

"I don't have anything against the Pledge."

"Because it's a very patriotic thing to say."

Around the room eyes took refuge in Skilcraft stenos. Only Dvorak watched.

Teague said, "Okay, yes. There is an element of patriotism to the Pledge."

"I grew up saying it."

Teague said nothing about growing up saying the Pledge. His silence seemed to indicate he'd grown up *not* saying it. Worse, that he rejected the idea of saying it altogether.

"All my kids grew up saying it. Every day. And there's nothing wrong with them."

"Let's just drop it, okay," Teague said.

"Are you saying there's something wrong with my kids?"

"I really have nothing against the Pledge of Allegiance."

"Is that right?" Harcourt viewed

Teague with suspicion. He glared across the table, face red, hair slick. And handsome. Always very handsome, even with the deep scar across his chin. He glanced at Chloe, who blushed in her pink cardigan. He turned his attention to Karen, who stiffened beside me and firmly crossed her legs.

Dvorak, trying to appear helpful, stoked the tension. "I think what Teague is getting at is his objection to *reciting* the Pledge of Allegiance."

"Why not just let it go?" Chloe said.

"Why doesn't he want his children saying it?" Harcourt demanded. "That's what I want to know — *why*? He says he has nothing against the Pledge, but in the same breath he says he doesn't want his children saying it. So which is it, Teague? Which is it?"

"No, I... It's the recitation, okay. The blind loyalty."

"Loyalty? You're against *loyalty*? To the flag, and to the Republic for which it stands?"

"I should emphasize the blindness, not the loyalty. I've no doubt most children aren't even aware of its meaning."

"Are you playing games with comprehension over an act of loyalty?"

"No. I—"

"You're either for the Republic, or you're against it. Isn't that what we learned on 9/11? Where were you on 9/11?"

"This has nothing to do with 9/11,"

Miles said.

Teague said, "I just mean that maybe, that at age five and six, kids are too young for brainwashing."

"Brainwashing? Brainwashing!" Harcourt boiled over. "Pffft! Now the Pledge of Allegiance is brainwashing?"

Teague remained calm. "You have to admit, it's a little Orwellian."

"Isn't that a communist word?"

"In this day and age, knowing what we know about education, to have kids repeating—"

"I don't know about you, Teague, but I believe we should all stand beside our desk every morning and recite the Pledge. We work for the federal government, for crying out loud."

"But what purpose would that serve?"

"It would serve to prove that we're better than those *Jihadis* over there, many of whom are reciting death pledges and blood oaths from the Koran at age five."

"But... First of all, that's inaccurate. Second, it goes to prove my point."

"Okay, Teague. Maybe you can tell us where you stand on including God in the Pledge."

Teague looked away.

"I say it," Harcourt said. "One nation, *under God*. In God we trust. God bless America. I have no problem whatsoever using the name of God. God made America great. I'm proud to say it. And if we could just change that

television in the no-water room to Fox for a minute, for just one minute get away from the world according to Wolf Blitzer and put on Fox, you'd see that God is under attack right this very minute in America."

Miles' cough interrupted, a deep, indomitable cough that bent him double. He sat up pounding his chest and said, "I'm okay. I'm okay." But nobody asked.

"What about the moment of silence, Teague?" Dvorak spoke, instigating again from the head of the table. "Where do you stand on the moment of silence?"

"I'm all for silence," Miles said, leaning forward. "Will the top banana permit a little silence while we wait?"

Dvorak said, "You can sit in silence, Miles. I'm asking Teague here for his views on a matter of relevance to this office. Teague, what is it? How do you feel about your children taking a moment of silence at school?"

Feebly, Teague said, "This is a federal facility."

"What?"

"I said, this is a federal facility. We aren't allowed to talk about that in a federal facility."

Said Harcourt, "Liberal commie sympathizer."

Teague threw up his hands and looked around for help but nobody wanted to take on Harcourt, who wasn't quite done.