

Prologue

LYDIA AND THE SHERIFF, 2017

The window shade was drawn, giving the artificially lit room a bunker-like feeling. Outside cameras fed video of an empty porch onto a monitor above a desk, where an eighty-five-year-old man bit glumly into a meaty deli sandwich.

It was August 8, 2017. Joe Arpaio, the former sheriff of Maricopa County, Arizona, knew he would soon be sentenced for his crime. And even though a prison sentence was a long shot for a federal misdemeanor, the very idea that it was a remote possibility angered and unnerved him.

He had stacked printouts of personalized Google alerts and emails, along with a few fan letters, on his desk. They were comforting proof to him that he was still famous and his supporters had not abandoned him.

He'd long branded himself as "America's Toughest Sheriff," the guy who forced many inmates in his jails to live and sleep in uncomfortably hot tents, wear pink underwear, buy their own salt and pepper, eat gloppy, tasteless, and sometimes moldy food, and undergo other hardships geared toward getting more press.

As sheriff, he'd apprehended and jailed and sent tens of thousands of undocumented immigrants into deportation proceedings in Maricopa County. He had become known to those who opposed him as much more

than an “immigration hardliner” or “border hawk.” His critics viewed him, instead, as a twenty-first-century patriarch of the restrictionist immigration movement, which is rooted in a dark history of eugenics and white supremacy dating back at least to the early decades of the twentieth century.

As Arpaio developed his brand, it helped him keep his office into his eighties. It also embroiled him in a history-making class action federal lawsuit, in which Latino drivers successfully sued Arpaio and his agency, the Maricopa County Sheriff’s Office, for racial profiling. This lawsuit, in turn, had resulted in court-ordered reforms, including an explicit judicial order forbidding Arpaio or anyone in his agency from detaining undocumented immigrants who had not been accused of crimes and turning them over to federal authorities for deportation. Arpaio had disobeyed the court order for seventeen months, two federal judges ruled, which led to a criminal contempt of court guilty verdict on July 31, 2017, and an upcoming sentencing that October, which could include up to six months in a federal prison.

Even though the sentencing was still a few months away, people wondered what might happen. Would Arpaio get off with a fine or probation? Or would the marshals shackle Arpaio and lead him out of the courtroom? Would they distribute his mugshot on the internet? Would he be marched in front of the cameras in a perp walk? Would Arpaio be confined to a prison cell . . . with a cellmate?

He had long professed his innocence. He viewed his conviction as the end result of a conspiracy by former President Barack Obama loyalists, still embedded in the United States Department of Justice, which had successfully prosecuted him in a Phoenix courtroom.

I’m the victim, he had told us more than once.

On this August day, we were perched, as usual, in a couple of small chairs facing his large desk. Arpaio was telling us about his plan to get President Donald Trump’s attention. Two dried-out ballpoint pens commemorating his twenty-five years as a federal narcotics agent sat on his desk. A name plaque read: *Sheriff Joe Arpaio, America’s Toughest Sheriff*. He sat in a high-backed black executive office chair. His office, a corner suite on the first floor of a building he owned in Fountain Hills, the town where he lived some 30 miles northeast of Phoenix, was a museum-like tribute to himself. Shelves in the hallway leading to the bathroom were

crammed with police-themed tchotchkes—coffee mugs, hats, bobblehead dolls, and a “border wall brick”—all of which reminded him of his twenty-four years as sheriff of the nation’s fourth most populous county, now home to about 4.5 million people.

Carefully arranged framed newspaper and magazine articles, photographs, and letters of commendation dating as far back as the 1960s hung on all the walls. He’d positioned the most important photos so he could point to them from his desk—a picture of a younger Arpaio mugging with President George W. Bush, another of Arpaio with thinning, slicked back graying hair shaking hands with President Barack Obama, and several of Arpaio posing with Donald Trump as a candidate and newly elected president. He’d endorsed Trump early. Once, at a campaign event, a photographer caught a moment in which Trump wrapped his arm around Arpaio, who half-smiled, coyly. Later, Trump autographed the picture: *I Love You Joe! Donald Trump*.

After Arpaio had endorsed Trump, the sheriff had identified with him.

Trump, fourteen years younger, was Arpaio’s “only hero.” They traveled “the same highway.” They would “never surrender” as they battled forces that tried to bring them down—mainstream media, big government, leftist judges, open borders liberals, or any combination thereof.

They both understood the “immigration problem.”

Arpaio had told us once that should he be convicted, he didn’t need to be rescued with a presidential pardon. He could take care of himself.

But we sensed his bravado failed him after he was convicted. After marching shackled immigrants in front of the media in “perp walks,” he understood what might lie ahead for himself. Only Donald Trump could rescue him. The president reportedly had asked his appointee, United States Attorney General Jeff Sessions, if he could drop the prosecution of Arpaio. Sessions had refused, and the case went to trial. The president had planned to pardon Arpaio should he be found guilty. But more than a week had passed since Arpaio’s guilty verdict, and Trump had stayed mum.

Arpaio pinned the president’s unresponsiveness on White House aides who didn’t like Arpaio and thus didn’t tell Trump about Arpaio’s predicament. So Arpaio had strategized to get the president’s attention.

A few days before, the former sheriff had spoken with Jerome Corsi, a conspiracy theorist who, like Trump and Arpaio, had repeatedly alleged

that Barack Obama had a fake birth certificate. Corsi wrote for the right-wing extremist website InfoWars.

The website ran videos featuring Alex Jones, another conspiracy theorist who maintained, among other things, that the 2012 massacre of children at Sandy Hook Elementary School was a fabricated event meant to undermine the gun rights of Americans. InfoWars also published pieces that embraced anti-immigrant views.

The president read InfoWars.

Arpaio knew this, and so likely did Corsi, who wrote an InfoWars story about Arpaio's pressing need for a presidential pardon. The piece was headlined "'Where Is Trump?' Sheriff Arpaio Asks."

"After being convicted of criminal misdemeanor contempt, former Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio has come out swinging, arguing the judge was biased and asking why President Trump is abandoning him, considering Arpaio was an early campaign supporter whose conviction reflects the determination to enforce immigration laws the Trump Justice Department is now exhibiting," Corsi wrote.

Other media took the InfoWars plea mainstream. *The Arizona Republic*, the largest newspaper in Arizona, reported Arpaio would accept a presidential pardon. So did Politico.

Arpaio sat back and waited.

Four days after Arpaio told us about his scheme to get Trump's attention, white nationalists gathered for a "Unite the Right" alt-right, neo-Nazi protest in Charlottesville, Virginia. The protesters included white supremacists and the Ku Klux Klan, who had long supported Trump and his pro-white, anti-Muslim, anti-brown-immigrant rhetoric.

They had gathered in Charlottesville to protest the removal of a monument honoring Confederate hero General Robert E. Lee.

Even after a white supremacist plowed his car into the crowd of counterprotesters, killing one woman and injuring dozens of others, President Trump caused a controversy when he said there were "very fine people on both sides."

If Trump were to choose this post-Charlottesville moment to do what he planned to do anyway—issue his first presidential pardon to Joe Arpaio, so admired by white supremacists for his unsparing immigration sweeps—

the pardon could accomplish multiple goals. It could save his friend. It could divert media attention away from Charlottesville. And the very act of pardoning a man so well regarded by the extreme right-wing of the party could signal to Trump's base that the president was still on their side.

As Joe Arpaio sat in his house in Fountain Hills, Lydia Guzman stood with thousands of protesters who'd gathered around the Phoenix Convention Center, where President Donald Trump would soon hold a rally. It was late afternoon, August 22, 2017. The hot, sloping sun tinted the white walls of Saint Mary's Basilica the color of desert honey. Guzman snapped photos with her Android smartphone. So many people had turned out to protest the president's response to the Charlottesville violence and also the possible presidential pardon of Joe Arpaio. People on crutches, on walkers, in wheelchairs, on foot, on bikes. People of different ethnicities, disabilities, sexual identities, religious faiths, political persuasions, and ages. They filled Monroe Street, sat on the Herberger Theater steps, and gathered around life-sized bronze sculptures of dancers. Some chanted. Others beat drums. They waved American flags. The thick air smelled of shampoo and sweat. People fanned themselves with baseball caps, sun hats, and signs.

THINGS ARE NOT ALT-RIGHT IN THE USA!

NO NAZIS! NO KKK! NO WHITE SUPREMACISTS!

HELL NO, DON'T PARDON JOE!

Ever since Trump's election, Guzman felt, the vitriol against immigrants and minorities once so rampant in Arizona had spread across the country. Joe Arpaio's friendship with Donald Trump had been one reason, among many others. But standing in the crowd, seeing the diversity of ethnicities and ages, she felt the Latino-led civil rights movement she had helped lead had won the narrative, in Arizona at least. Recent polling showed about 50 percent of Arizonans opposed an Arpaio pardon. Only 21 percent supported it.

Just one month earlier, Guzman had been inside the Phoenix Convention Center where Trump now spoke. She'd been one of several local Latino activists feted by UnidosUS, the national Latino civil rights nonprofit once known as the National Council of La Raza.