

Chapter 24: “Because of You”

Chapter 24: "Because of You" delves into the deepening relationship between John Lewis and Barack Obama, which began with a significant moment during Lewis's 65th birthday celebration in February 2005. Lewis, at the time, invited Obama, who had recently gained national attention after delivering a powerful keynote speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. Obama, still a newly elected senator, realized the importance of increasing his visibility in the Southern United States and accepted the invitation. The birthday event, which included notable figures such as Coretta Scott King and Harry Belafonte, was marked by a palpable sense of excitement surrounding Obama's potential as a future presidential candidate. Lewis had been a tremendous source of inspiration to Obama over the years, with Obama recalling a pivotal moment when Lewis had offered words of encouragement after Obama's early public speaking engagement. This mutual respect and admiration were evident, marking the beginning of their strong political and personal bond.

As the 2007 Democratic primaries approached, both Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama launched campaigns that would require the endorsement of influential figures like John Lewis. The competition between the two candidates grew increasingly tense, and both sought Lewis's endorsement to solidify their positions. One particularly intense moment occurred during a Bloody Sunday commemoration when both Clinton and Obama scheduled speeches at nearly the same time and location. This situation created significant tension for Lewis, who was caught between his long-standing relationship with Clinton and his desire for a new direction in American politics. While Lewis held deep respect for Clinton and their historical ties, he was also drawn to Obama's campaign, which embodied the values of hope, change, and progress that were reminiscent of the civil rights movement. This internal struggle became a pivotal point for Lewis as he contemplated the future of leadership and what kind of political

change the country needed.

As the primary season progressed, Obama's campaign became increasingly aggressive in challenging Clinton's political credibility, a strategy that initially caused friction among her supporters. Despite the challenges, Obama's campaign gained momentum, and he began to dominate the conversation in the Democratic race. Meanwhile, Lewis faced intense pressure from younger activists, many of whom criticized his loyalty to the Clintons, questioning whether he could truly support the future of the Democratic Party without embracing Obama's candidacy. After careful reflection, Lewis decided to switch his endorsement from Clinton to Obama, which he communicated privately to both Bill and Hillary Clinton. Though this decision was emotionally complex, Lewis felt that Obama's campaign symbolized a movement that reflected the same principles of equality and justice that he had fought for during the civil rights era. This turning point in Lewis's political journey underscored the need for generational change and the power of new leadership in shaping the nation's future.

The announcement of Lewis's endorsement of Obama was met with both excitement and controversy. While his decision was celebrated by many, it also faced backlash from those who saw it as a betrayal of the Clintons. However, Lewis's endorsement came to symbolize the evolution of political loyalty and the ability to adapt to changing political landscapes. For many, it was a reminder that political alliances are not static; they evolve as the needs and aspirations of the nation change. In the aftermath, Lewis's endorsement helped fuel Obama's momentum in the Democratic primaries, showing how even the most steadfast political relationships can shift when confronted with a vision for a better future. Ultimately, Lewis's decision highlighted the importance of standing for justice, equality, and progress, just as he had done throughout his distinguished career, and it helped pave the way for Obama's eventual victory in the race for the presidency.