

The Cookie

from the

Cookie Jar

by Jacob Aldridge

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Foreword

I recently read *Primary Colours* for the first time, which may seem surprising for an Amerophile like myself, especially since it's been four years since I wrote the work you are now holding. What struck me most about that novel was just how very 1996 it was.

Sure, it was clearly set in 1992, built around the comeback kid Bill Clinton; but it was also decidedly removed from that time, passing judgement from four years into the future. It was this observation of mine, coupled with the highly publicised primary campaign between Obama and Hillary Clinton which at last seems to be over, that drew me back to *The Cookie From The Cookie Jar*.

Almost immediately I finished this novel – it ran as a weekly serial from July 2004 until Election Day in that November – I wanted to re-write it, tighten it, make it something more.

Perhaps one day I shall. The focus certainly shifted as I explored the characters, and I believe that tighter narrative focus from the beginning (coupled with a new name to reflect the shift) would make a fine read.

But this book is just so very 2004. While not as purposefully as *Primary Colours* does, *Cookie Jar* passes judgement on the earlier election. It also draws heavily on the political zeitgeist of the year it was written...at least the one I was witnessing. When I went to edit – and trust me, I have a heavily annotated copy sitting beside me right now – I realised any editing would serve only to anachronise those parts left alone.

So I shall leave it all alone, and send it once more into the world. Yes, Peter Jennings is dead. No, Wonkette ain't what it used to be. And Ralph Nader...well, the more some things change...

I give you *The Cookie From the Cookie Jar*.

It's very 2004.

But then, so were we.

Jacob Aldridge
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December 7, 1941.

August 31, 1997.

September 11, 2001.

Dates that will live in infamy.

Pearl Harbour.

The People's Princess.

The World Trade Centre attack.

April 14, 1865.

President Lincoln is assassinated in Washington, DC.

November 22, 1963.

President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

November 2, 2004. Another date for the list scarred to the collective memory.

President Edward R. Tryst is assassinated in Washington, DC.

Mary Todd Lincoln's scream resounded across the victorious North.

Footage of Jacqueline Kennedy crawling for help was beamed around the world.

But Corker Tryst's groan of anguish and despair was barely heard across the plush hotel suite where she found the newly re-elected President dead.



Meanwhile downstairs, in the crowded ballroom of the Park Hyatt on 24th Street, the victory party continued unabated. The Republican faithful waded ankle deep through streamers of red, white, and blue as the jazz band on the raised stage tried in vain to drown out the hooters that sounded from one end of the room to the other. The celebrations were overseen by portrait prints of the post-war Republican Presidents – Eisenhower, Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and Bush – affixed to the dark wood panels along the side wall.

At the southern end of the crowded room there was an array of news cameras, also raised to hide the masses of cable that linked TV cameras to the microphones on stage and back out to satellite transmission vans that filled the parking lot.

Just ninety minutes earlier, as the polls closed across the Eastern States, President Tryst had addressed this room, and the cameras had launched into action. In the time since the cameras had been largely rested and the nearby oak doors had been called to action as the Republican ranks swelled enormously.

Even the most ardent of supporters had cause to fear the worst in the lead up to Election Day. A military quagmire in Iraq and repeated terrorist attacks on US interests at home and abroad meant the current administration was largely disliked internationally. A stagnant economy and rising unemployment ensured sentiment domestically, among voters, was just as bad.

Tryst had little reason for optimism as he thanked those supporters in the ballroom before retiring to the Presidential Suite, uncertain whether it was to prove an appropriate or ironic resting place. He was perhaps contemplating what he had not yet dared state out loud: he was fated to be a one-term President who led his country into war but could not bring it back out with victory.

No sooner had Tryst finished his address, however, than a series of remarkable figures began appearing on the TV networks. First on Fox News, where they were immediately dismissed as unrepresentative, or biased, or – as one analyst in the room put it – “a Bill O’Reilly wet dream.”

Tryst had won Florida. Exit polls suggested it, and they were being supported by early vote counts across several counties.

Then CNN made the same claim, and CBS which was also declaring Tryst victor in the swing states of Kentucky, Vermont, and New Hampshire.

Even more surprising than the apparent victory was the manner in which it had been achieved. In Florida, the deciding battleground in the close-run 2000 campaign, Tryst had been expected to poll in the low 40s – an easy victory for Democrat expectant Patrick Russell.



The polls had proved correct – to a point. Tryst received 43% of the vote, a 6% drop from his narrow victory four years earlier.

But the votes had not been transferred from Tryst to Russell. Instead the Democrat vote had been destroyed in remarkable fashion. Russell has polled a meagre 37%, the lowest vote for Democrats since Dukakis was wiped by Tryst’s political mentor George H. Bush in 1988.

Edgar Morine, the Green Party candidate, had received 20% of the vote. Arguing a strong anti-Tryst, anti-war platform, Morine’s campaign had generated and spent close to \$100 million spreading the message. In many ways his campaign had worked – the Greens had polled more than any third-party candidate in a century and a half. But in the most important way it had failed – a State and nation fervently opposed to the President and his administration had been fooled into dividing its vote, and returning that President in unique political style.

This concern was not on the minds of the Republican revellers, buoyed by unexpected success, as they flocked to the Park Hyatt. They had never wavered from the calling, and had voted in their millions for a cause that had seemed lost. Now, pushed together wearing boater hats adorned with elephants and wide grins that managed communication about the noise, it seemed every voter had crammed into the increasingly hot ballroom.

But they were here for a victory address that would not come.



CHAPTER TWO

Two States away, in Connecticut, emotions at the Democrat assembly were also at the extreme. The President's approval rating had peaked after the Twin Towers fell, and had made a steady downward trek in the time since. For the last six months the Democrats, from candidate Patrick Russell down, had accepted the 2004 election as their birthright.

Tonight they had flocked to the Atrium at the Goodwin Hotel in Hartford expecting victory. Though winter was still officially a month away it was a cool night, and the view through the glass wall over the rolling lawn to the west was faded through a layer of dewy condensation. It was warmer inside, amid the crush of people, but there the similarities to the Republican party ended.

Here, forced smiles had no need to transcend the noise, as there was an eerie lack of conversation and a decided absence of hooters being employed. There were no former Presidents overseeing events, only a group of waiters uncertain about whether to break the mood by offering Applesauce Meatballs and Stuffed Mushrooms.

As the maps on the television networks slowly turned the black and white state outlines into a sea of red, it became apparent to the Democrats that they had been robbed of their birthright, without even an offer of porridge.

A cheer sounded as CBS awarded New York, the third most populous state, to Russell. It was short lived, however, based on one northern booth that proved unrepresentative. Fifteen minutes later New York belonged to Tryst on all networks.

It was in Connecticut, though, that real cause for defeat became clear. Russell's home state was his first major win of the night, and an expected 60% showing was undermined; Morine polled 26% to be only narrowly defeated by Tryst. Russell had lost the election. Tryst had won. But Morine was to blame.

Most of those assembled in Hartford this night had dedicated months to the campaign. Some had left their jobs to ensure Russell's victory. They had passionately rallied behind the cause, donated millions, pledged their life to the campaign. But they had been beaten.

There was no mass exodus when the results came in. For the most part this was not a group of swing voters, here for the victory parade. They believed in the cause – but they had been defeated because of those who believed more passionately.

The Atrium was not awash with threats against Morine or the Green party. No doubt recriminations would come later, and they would be plentiful. But Morine had fated Democrats four more years in the political wilderness, which would give them ample time.

Instead, they were dumbfounded. Silence had overtaken the once-jovial space, a bubble within the Atrium. The band, which had rehearsed 'Hail to the Chief' *ad nauseum* in the



week leading up to election day, had stopped playing. Those who showed any emotion were crying – where they sat, where they stood. But most showed no emotion at all.

At 9.15pm Russell’s press secretary Paul Pimpama took to the stage. The gaunt look on his round, clean-shaven face told a familiar story to the faithful, people who had grown accustomed to his peachy grin peeking over the candidate’s shoulder on the nightly news.

In the hotel bar earlier that afternoon Pimpama had been a celebrated guest of honour. A former political reporter for the Hartford Courant, he would not decline complimentary drinks, even on a Tuesday. But it was not the abundant alcohol that had given him new bags under his eyes, and the faint aroma of vomit.

Pimpama had prepared a speech, knowing that the bank of cameras at the back of the room would be beaming his image live around the world. But he had not anticipated delivering a speech so early, or introducing the losing candidate in the Presidential election.



Robert Attwood was standing by the bank of cameras at the back of the Goodwin Hotel's Atrium. He no longer cut the dashing figure of his youth, having succumbed to middle-age spread more than a decade ago, but a strong voice from within and a reputation for knowledge and timing within the highest of political circles had ensured he maintained some element of allure into the later years of his sixth decade. Readers, journalists, and politicians respected him, and listened to what he said.

Since the first vote tallies became apparent he had been saying a lot, and his cell phone had seldom been returned to his jacket pocket. Mostly he had been calling in copy to the *Washington Post*, where he was the chief political correspondent. Internet news had been little known and less fancied in 1996 when he had covered Clinton's re-election, and unimaginable when he had started into this business shortly before Johnson lost to Nixon in '68. Now it meant that even newspaper reporters faced rolling deadlines.

'I might as well have hacked for radio,' he thought as he ended the call giving his report on Pimpama's address. For a man who was used to the old newspaper system, regular deadlines were an intrusion that he blamed on the new editor Arthur Robinson, who took over in mid-2002.

When he wasn't filing copy, Attwood was booking flights. He had been present at every Presidential victory speech since Reagan beat Mondale in '84. In '92 he'd watched the exit polls closely, and made a last minute commuter flight to Little Rock, Arkansas for Clinton's address; in 2000 the *Post*, with several others, had chartered a plane so their chief correspondents could be in Birmingham with the big questions when the Tryst took to the victory stage.

Post readers expected Attwood to file the big political stories. On election night they expected to see his tall, strong figure rising to address the President on the evening news reports. This time Attwood had made the wrong political judgement call.

It had seemed so straight-forward. Tryst was, at best, disliked by the voting public. The media were just as unprepared for the outcome as the Democrat supporters waiting to be addressed by the man who should have won the Presidency. But Russell had not won, so Attwood was desperately trying to find a flight to DC.

Not that Attwood wouldn't get his by-line on the story with Tryst's quotes. It was just that, expecting the standard congratulatory drivel made by losers on election night, Attwood had left the actual recording of those quotes to his junior assistant Sarah Angelou. He mentally kicked himself, and dialled another airline.

* * *

In Washington DC Sarah Angelou could barely contain her good fortune. At 24 she had enough cynicism, or realism, from six years as a working reporter to accept that her



appointment at the *Post* had as much to do with her attractive appearance as it did with her ability to make the stories that mattered.

Not that the two weren't connected. The scoop that had propelled her from the small time Michigan local daily to the political round at the *Washington Post* had required her to act as a high-class prostitute. She hadn't slept with the married Mayor for the story – but she would have.

The two years at the *Post* had been a steep learning curve for Angelou but she appreciated every experience, even relished them. It had been an interesting time, politically, trying to judge whether the President actually believed in the war that seemed political suicide, or was already preparing to spend the millions in oil company shares he had earned during his single term at the head of the world's only remaining super-power.

She was as intrigued by how Tryst would act in defeat as she was about covering her first Presidential election. Now, suddenly, she found herself covering a political story she was not entitled to: a one-term President granted a political lifeline he was not entitled to. And she'd be damned if Attwood was going to take all the glory.



At 9.30pm the Democrats, Republicans, and the media found themselves united in focus. Patrick Russell, defeated, approached the podium, firmly holding his wife's hand in his and with Jack Martin, his Vice-Presidential candidate, trailing behind. The Republican celebrations at the Park Hyatt grew quiet, while the Democrats roused the penultimate cheer for the fallen leader who now stood before them. The "Russell in 2004" banner silently mocked him from behind.

A political realist, Russell had never taken victory for granted. Guarantees were hard to find in this line of work and wars, even hugely unpopular ones, could sometimes favour the incumbent. Certainly, Tryst had to take some of the blame for increased terrorist attacks in the last six months, but some voters saw strength in the unilateral retaliation Tryst had ordered against terrorist camps in Sudan, Yemen, and Eritrea.

Russell had reiterated, just days earlier, how he was not concerned by Morine's campaign. Yes, it was well financed, but the voters who really wanted Tryst out of the Whitehouse would realise that Russell was their only option.

Off the record, he was more candid. The opinion polls gave Russell such a lead that even a 5% vote for Morine, twice the Green Party's 2000 showing, would not prevent a change of administration.

But Russell knew better than to have prepared himself to only face the cameras as a victor. He'd made sure the more optimistic Pimpama had prepared a speech for defeat. And it was this speech he delivered to the watching nation.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, tonight we have been defeated," Russell began, pausing only to dismiss with a wave of his manicured hand the obligatory shouts of denial from faithful assembled.

"We have been defeated," he continued, repeating the line almost instinctively for effect not to dwell on its harsh reality, "but we must not become disheartened.

"In this campaign we fought the good fight, argued for what was fair, what was right, and made a strong case for what we believed in.

"Though our campaign was lost, our cause lives on." Muted cheers brought a smile to Russell's face, relaxed only in comparison to the forced grin he'd been wearing since the first numbers rolled in.

"I want to congratulate Mr Tryst on his victory. I ask all Americans to support their President, particularly in these worrying times, and I implore the President to act in the interest of all Americans, and to use his power wisely. May he never forget that this is the greatest democracy in the world."



The last line had come out of his mouth before his mind had properly examined it. ‘The Greatest Democracy’? Where 65 million votes against was defeated by 55 million votes for? Russell was pained by the cliché-riddled speech, and the apathetic looks of the journalists he knew had come for a victory address.

He paused and glanced ahead in his notes. More thanks. More clichés. No memorable quotes for use in tomorrow’s top stories, and nothing even a student journalist couldn’t have invented without fear of being discovered. He decided to change that.

“I am, as are you all, just as devastated by the natures of our defeat as I am by the defeat itself. There are many millions of people tonight who I have no doubt are hanging their heads in regret and shame. They were vocal in their opposition to Tryst, and yet they have rejected the only real alternative, thrown their vote away, and returned this disasterous and dangerous President to office.

“Mr Tryst may have victory, but he does not have the majority. Right now he is enjoying victory – but I doubt he will enjoy it for long.”

The crowd cheered and Russell, almost reluctantly, moved back to his thanks. Wife. Children. Jack. The speech petered out to its conclusion.

President Tryst had been declared victor by his opponent. But enjoyment is a luxury not extended to dead men.



CHAPTER 1

Sitting in his office at the State Department, only several minute's drive from the victory celebrations, Secretary of State Korte Campbell showed little emotion as he watched Patrick Russell's concession speech on CNN. His only real displayed emotion of the night had been a quiet sigh of relief when the Florida result was announced shortly after 7pm, followed by a grin imperceptible to all but those who knew him well.

One such person was the man seated opposite him at his desk, Secretary of Defence Lucas Patton Weaver. Though Weaver's reaction to the surprise election victory did not rise to the hoots and hollerings at the official Republican party downtown, it had been less tempered than his political friend. As Russell left the stage Weaver slapped the desk in excitement.

"Now that, my friend, is worthy of a celebration drink," he said.

For the second time that night Campbell expelled an audible sign of relief, turning his head away from the television just long enough to register assent to Weaver's suggestion.

Weaver rose from his chair, and crossed the room to the ornate sideboard against the far wall. The well-sized office had views of the Lincoln Memorial and out over the Potomac River, but Campbell usually kept the blinds closed. The sideboard and an adjacent grandfather clock were the only items of interest in an otherwise bland room. Weaver opened the discrete cabinet imbedded in the sideboard, where he knew Campbell kept his good whiskey.

When Campbell had taken over this office, the assistant to his predecessor had offered him several tips. The most useful had been where to hide the booze. The theory was that its presence in the open might offend visiting dignitaries, particularly Saudis; Campbell found it equally useful as it prevented him have to offer a drink to everybody invited in, especially those he cared little for politically or personally.

At times in the last four years Weaver had been one of those people. With the dramatic turn of events that had taken place this evening, however, Campbell did not mind seeing him pour two long glasses of single malt.

"I know this is more enjoyable than pressing the flesh at the Hyatt," Weaver said, hoping to draw out conversation as he placed Campbell's whiskey on the desk in front of him.

"Certainly more enjoyable than losing," Campbell replied, his grin widening as he lifted the glass to his lips. Turning back to the television he continued: "The numbers show how we did it, we probably didn't deserve it, but we won."

"You remember in 2000. The wait?"



“You, me, the Trysts, Vanguard Watson and his wife, plus about a dozen people on cell phones, all crammed into that hotel room in Birmingham waiting for the numbers from Florida.”

“The numbers in Florida. It must have been 3am when they called that.”

“Four, actually.” Campbell was always precise. “If we’d known it was going to take that long we’d have driven down to Edward’s house. It’s only forty minutes out of town.”

“But it was the waiting. Just sitting there, interminably, waiting hour after hour for the final result. And then, when it was announced, we still had to wait for Vice-President Maher to concede before we could accept the Presidency and start planning for the future.”

“They counted through the night – Tryst gave his acceptance speech just after nine the next morning.”

“And by then we were tired. We’d followed the Florida numbers like a twelve-hour Kentucky Derby. I was as grateful for the chance to sleep as I was excited about the victory.”

“Are you going somewhere with this Lucas?” Campbell’s deep voice cut into Weaver’s thought sequence, but not his mood.

“It’s barely 9.30 and already this race has been run and won. Fuck, they’re still voting in California. Hawaii will turn blue on that map like it always does, but we won’t care. Because we’ve won. We wanted it, we doubted it, but we won it. This is one of the most enjoyable nights of my life!”

The piercing shrill of the telephone on the desk stopped the high-spirited Defence Secretary. Campbell swivelled in his chair and reached forward, as Weaver took the opportunity to move back to the whiskey cabinet for a refill.

Campbell answered the phone with his name, more curtly than was perhaps necessary. No-one outside of Cabinet or his office had this line, but with a party atmosphere in the Republican air it was possible a lucky reporter had tricked somebody out of it.

It wasn’t a reporter.

“Korte. It’s Corker.” Her voice was faint. She was choking back tears. Something was clearly distressing the First Lady.

“Corker, what’s wrong. Are you OK?” Campbell asked, a kinder, gentler tone in his voice now, a rapid change that compelled Weaver to turn, whiskey bottle in one hand and the still empty glass in the other.



“He’s dead Korte. He’s dead.” Corker gave in to the uncontrollable sobbing that engulfed her body. Campbell knew he must respond, but the gravity of her news left him struggling for words. Weaver remained still. Something was about to ruin his most enjoyable evening, and he needed to know how much scotch to pour.

“What’s happened?” he asked bluntly. Campbell raised his eyes to meet Weaver’s.

“Somebody shot the President,” was all he could answer.



Patrick Russell would have been suitably impressed had he overheard Attwood calling in his latest report to the *Washington Post*. It led with a quote from the ad-libbed portion of his concession speech. But even if Russell had lingered at the Democrat wake longer than the few brief handshakes and clenched grins he would not have had the chance to overhear, for Attwood had left the building.

No sooner had Russell's obligatory thanks wound down than Attwood was out the Atrium door and across the foyer's parquet floor. Using the combined resources of colleagues at the BBC, the *Australian*, and, perhaps surprisingly, *Vanity Fair* – all of who had made the same error in judgement as him – Attwood had arranged a small charter plane to take them directly to DC.

The taxi en route to Bradley International Airport was a jumble of leads, quotes, and attributions as the various reporters called in still more copy for their internet readers. They knew it was a largely futile effort – at best their stories on Russell's speech would be savaged by sub-editors and jammed onto Page 2 of the print editions.

Attwood's story led with Russell's seemingly hollow portent of doom: "President Tryst will not find lengthy enjoyment in his second term, warned failed Presidential candidate Patrick Russell as he conceded defeat."

He had been mildly impressed with the darker undertones of Russell's speech. Certainly it indicated a far deeper melancholic anger over the defeat and the cause thereof – and even a maddening rant would not propel Russell to tomorrow's front pages – but it was nice to be able to file a report that wasn't overly laden with clichés.

Instinctively – for instinct separates the leaders from the media scrum – all four journalists checked their watches as the taxi approached Bradley's charter airfield. 8.53pm. A speedy flight and they might yet make the President's entrance, and at any rate they more interested in filing their story from the victory party than recording every word of the President's opening remarks.

The group's turbo prop King Air C90B already had its engine running as they climbed on board. On such short notice this trip, though brief, would not be cheap. Attwood and Arthur Robinson had been known to disagree on many things since Robinson had taken over. The editor at the *Post* was stingy at best, and Attwood was confident he would not approve this extraordinary expense particularly when there was a *Post* reporter already at Republican HQ. But Attwood was adamantly not going to let Sarah Angelou take any extra credit for the biggest homeland story of the year. Besides, he could always bill the other three for more than their share later.

As the King Air taxied down the runway, Attwood glanced around its interior. He had long ago grown used to flying in all types of aircraft and this one, while small, felt a lot safer than some of the planes he had experienced. No doubt designed for business trips, the cabin would host four businessmen and a small desk for an in-flight meeting quite



comfortably. Attwood was glad that this flight was not too long, however – his large frame did not fit as comfortably into the four-foot-eight cabin height.

The mood onboard lifted as the turbo prop engines raised the plane into the night sky. Years of following political campaigns meant Attwood had learnt to expect that. There was a common courtesy among journalists, at least the good ones, that all in-fighting, secrecy, and rivalry for the story or the scoop was left on the ground. In the air, as at business lunches and when faced by obstinate politicians opposed to press freedom, all media men were brothers. His ex-wife had termed it “honour among thieves”.

One could always differentiate young journalists recently graduated from those who had risen through cadetships. University papers taught the rivalry and the secrecy, but without the bonding – student journalists knew how to chase a story, but didn’t recognise that all of that was pushed aside as soon as the minibar was opened.

There was no stocked minibar aboard this flight, but the Australian had smuggled a ’96 shiraz out of the Goodwin Hotel’s Atrium.

“It’s no Margaret River, but it’s better than nothing,” he declared.

“We must be thankful for the small mercies,” Attwood thought, as the Hartford lights faded underneath.



The mood was not as jovial back in Campbell's office, nor was the alcohol flowing as freely. The scotch whiskey was open, but it had not moved since Weaver placed it atop the sideboard on hearing the news.

The time since then had been spent convening an emergency Cabinet meeting. The President's doctor had confirmed that the President was dead, almost certainly from a single gunshot wound to the head. With the Coroner's assistance they were presently confirming time of death.

Eventually the hotel room where the President's body was found would be overrun by the elite in crime scene forensic investigators. So far, however, nobody at the CIA, FBI, or Secret Service had been notified: their channels of communication were more open since 9/11, not only between agencies but out to the media. This was the last thing the Cabinet needed.

Unlike Kennedy in 1963, the current cabinet had the luxury of knowing the President was dead without it being public knowledge. They could control the release of information and, knowledge being power, maintain control over the situation.

The First Lady had contacted Campbell first. The two secret service agents who were supposed to be guarding the door were absent – an immediate question for the investigations. As per standard Presidential request, the rest of the floor was empty. Corker Tryst, not wanting to cause panic, not certain how long her husband had been dead, and fearing for her own life, had re-entered the murder room and dialled the first secure line she could think of.

Campbell had promptly ruined Weaver's night of nights, and began calling the other cabinet members he knew were in Washington. Vice-President Vanguard Watson III had been informed and re-directed as he was being driven to the Park Hyatt. A frank explanation via cell phone had been a necessary risk under the circumstances.

The clock had just passed 10pm when the Vice-President entered the office. Campbell and Weaver had resumed their previous seats, and had been joined by Attorney-General Anderton Marshall and Secretary of Homeland Security, Henry Love. Both had been plucked from their party preparations, and Watson was glad to note he wasn't the only man present dressed in black for this sombre occasion.

Weaver rose and shook Watson's hand. Campbell turned down the volume on the television just as CNN turned a string of Pacific-time states red on their map. It was clear to Watson that these four had been waiting for his arrival to begin their conversation.

"Who knows about this?" Watson began.

Campbell took control of the conversation. "The media have no idea, sir, if that's your concern. I'm not too sure how long it will be before they begin wondering why he hasn't appeared to celebrate the victory."



“So that leaves us five, the First Lady, and who else?” Watson asked, instinctively patting his coat pocket for cigarettes he hadn’t smoked for almost ten years. He began to slowly pace the length of the office.

“His doctor and the Coroner.”

“How many in the service?”

“None, sir. They weren’t there when Mrs Tryst found the body. We have yet to find out why, but the whole floor was empty and unprotected.”

“Jesus Christ! We’re fighting a war on terror, and some raghead motherfucker finds the President all by his lonesome with no-one to hear the shots.” He paused. “Fuck!”

Mumbled agreement came from the four seated men, motionless save for their eyes that followed Watson back and forth across the room. The Vice-President was prone to some aggressive and ill-conceived outbursts, and nobody wanted to be the target.

“Who do we think did this,” Watson continued. Anderton Marshall interjected.

“We have a more pressing issue here Van.”

“We have a more pressing issue than who killed the President? The leader of the free world is dead in his hotel room, and you have more pressing issues?”

“Van, since the President breathed his last, whenever tonight that was, that free world and more importantly our nation has been without a leader.”

“He’s right sir,” interrupted Campbell, realising Marshall’s meaning but steering the conversation back to himself. “Somebody has to go out to that press, tonight, and tell America they just re-elected a dead man. Now that person has to be you sir...”

“...and it would be much better if you had already been sworn into office.” Marshall wasn’t going to let Campbell take all the credit at this historical moment. His comment had stopped Watson in his tracks.

“The thought hadn’t crossed my mind.”

Campbell grinned ever so slightly. “The circumstances are not nice, but may I be the first to congratulate you Mr President.”

Watson turned to face the group. He began to speak, then stopped himself and took in a deep breath of air.

“I am not the President, Korte, and I never will be.”



“What are you talking about?” asked Weaver smiling, mentally leaping forward to the coronation without regard to the funeral of the King. “You practically run the country for Tryst anyway.”

Watson raised both hands to silence the murmur of support. “Men, I’ve done some things I’m not proud of, things that are coming back to haunt me.”

“Shit Van, relax,” said Marshall, “you’re not running for President, and besides, anything that can be found on you would have been found two elections ago. If the media thinks you’re clean, it means you’re clean.”

“I’m not clean. And I don’t mean throwing military contracts to friends of mine or drawing up a list of pardons to request in January. I’m infected, literally.”

Quizzical looks prompted Watson to continue. “The President knew about this, but he didn’t think it necessary to spread the word. With all the hits we’ve taken in this campaign he thought, and I agreed, that we needed to run into this election united.

“If we won, I would resign citing poor health next March. The media know my lungs are shit, they’d believe my story. One of you would take my position, the Presidency would carry on, and I could go and die in peace.”

The interjection from around Campbell’s desk was communal: “You’re dying?”

“I told you. I’ve done some things I’m not proud of.” Watson paused, weighing up his options. “It appears the time has come to clear my conscience.

“My first big position with Dramglean Petroleum was Director of South Asian operations. You don’t have to deal with too many rich OPEC pricks – it’s a fairly standard training ground. Molly wasn’t too keen on leaving the States for *Gooksville*, especially post-Vietnam, so she stayed behind with the boys. It was only going to be a short stint anyway, and I was home most months.

“Well, Molly was gone, but my bed was rarely empty. You can get anything you want in some of those countries, if you’re willing to pay enough. What I discovered I wanted... Christ, I’ve never come clean on this. Men. Boys. Young, Asian boys, the younger the better. I can’t justify what I did, but I did it.

“I never told Molly anything. I came back to the States after two years, and everything was fine again. Usually. I fought temptation for twenty years. It was a thing, I told myself, a phase, nothing permanent. I’m not a faggot.” Watson emphasised this last statement with a crashing fit onto the timber sideboard. He was clearly fighting back the rising shame and self-loathing that threatened to choke his voice. Nobody dared interrupt.



“In '98 I was at a big function in Manila. I wasn't the guest of honour or anything important, I'd basically been flown in for the week to have a good time on the company's chequebook.

“I was drunk. It was stupid, and when I woke up the next morning I felt a shame and anger I hadn't felt in twenty years. That cheap Filipino turd had taken all the dignity I had ever earned.

“And he left something in its place.” The Vice-President had managed to compose himself somehow, focussing the internal anger on the story he told and not the body his colleagues now realised was showing rapidly deteriorating signs of age and illness. They knew what he was about to say, but no-one dared pre-empt him.

“HIV. AIDS. At first I started getting sick, and the Doctors couldn't work it out. They had no idea what I'd done – they must have checked that fucking blood test six times.” Watson's rage was now once again palpable, holding the room's attention though directed at nobody else but himself.

“I'm fucking dying. Six months, twelve months, they can't be sure. I made one fucking mistake, and it ruined me. It destroyed my family, and now it's killing me.” Watson took a deep breath, and then another. He looked at the closed blinds, picturing the view but really just avoiding eye contact. His catharsis was over. He was a man of peace for the first time in years.

He looked back, once again facing his stunned Cabinet colleagues. “I'll be dead before the mid-terms. So, gentlemen, you can see why I am not now nor ever will be President of the United States.”

Vanguard Watson III turned, taking deliberate steps towards the door. Half-way out he turned back, and made one final remark to the men before him.

“May God bless you all, and have mercy on my soul.”



The door to Campbell's office closed as noiselessly as ever, but its lingering effects still resounded in the heads of those left behind.

The Secretary of State, Secretary of Defence, Attorney-General, and Secretary of Homeland Security wordlessly eyed each other. The news of the President's death was still raw among the personal friends in his political team. Knowing time is of the essence in a criminal investigation, they wanted to release the information to a raft of investigation bodies so the business of tracking the individual and organisation responsible could begin.

But they were not yet prepared to face the American public, inform them that the President they had re-elected was dead, and the Vice-President was not willing to accept the promotion. Campbell broke the silence, voicing the group's communal thoughts.

"Clearly we cannot announce this problem to the public without offering a solution." Three heads nodded in agreement, so Campbell continued. "But we need to get somebody onto the investigation. It has now been a little over forty-five minutes since the First Lady found the President. The perpetrator or perpetrators may still be in the city."

Attorney-General Marshall interrupted. "Who can we tell without worrying about a media leak?" When nobody offered a suggestion, he began to count agencies on his fingers. "DCPD is obviously not an option. How about the Secret Service?"

Despite being in charge of Homeland Security, Love only shrugged and let Campbell answer. "Two service agents were AWOL when the President was killed. We can't rule out inside involvement at some level."

Marshall moved onto the next finger. "CIA?"

Love shook his head, and answered this time. He was a known critic of the CIA, and had helped oust its Director General earlier in the year. "Too many layers. Information will filter through a half-dozen undersecretaries to the something, anyone of which would gladly sell their story to NBC for the scoop of the decade."

Marshall was running out of fingers. "FBI? There has to be someone in there with a police investigation background we can trust."

Love nodded. "You know Franco Martinez. He was a NYPD cop a while back, could be useful."

Weaver agreed. "He's a good man. Made some breakthroughs in German Al-Qaeda cells in 2002. Working high level counter intelligence at the Pentagon since. This would be a hell of a step up for him."

"I think he could do it," Love reiterated.



Marshall smiled, not because he had any positive feelings about any of tonight's news but because at last a firm step was being made in the right direction. He stopped abacasizing his fingers and pointed one at Love.

"Grab the phone in the next office. It's secure isn't it?" Campbell nodded, but remained silent. Marshall continued. "Call Martinez. He's probably sitting somewhere wondering why the President hasn't stepped up to graciously accept victory. Don't tell him why – just tell him...tell him to meet you in front of the Hyatt as soon as he possibly can, maybe even sooner."

Given the increased powers of the Department designed specifically for him, Love was more accustomed to giving orders than taking them. But the level tone of Marshall's voice in the face of everything that had taken place in the last hour gave him an authority Love knew he couldn't compete with.

He rose and followed the path Watson had trod just minutes earlier, though with far less drama in his wake. Marshall turned to face the other two men.

"How is Corker doing? She will certainly be in my prayers tonight, of course, but I must confess that right at this moment I'm more concerned with ensuring she isn't spotted crying in a corner by a snooping reporter pretending to look for a bathroom."

Campbell was accustomed to offering only his silent support to a discussion, but usually in the Oval Office. In his own chambers he believed he was the master of his domain, and after several minutes of silence he was ready to re-assert that this was his office, the First Lady had called him, and he was in charge of the situation.

With a controlled hand gesture he sent Weaver back over to the sideboard to pour the overdue refills. Only when Weaver had left his chair and turned his back to the conversation did Campbell begin.

"Corker was understandably distressed. Doctor Mapp sedated her while waiting for the Coroner. He didn't want to raise any questions by requesting another room, but as I understand it the President's body is in the living area of the suite and Corker is resting in the master bedroom. She won't be much help to the investigation this evening, at any rate I don't think she saw anything, and God knows she needs the rest."

Weaver mumbled assent as he returned with three drinks. He had forgotten that Marshall, a strict Anabaptist from South Carolina, had sworn off alcohol more than twenty-five years ago. Marshall, too, seemed to have a lapse in memory, but if anything could compel a man back to the demon drink it was the Devil's work that had taken place this evening.

Campbell continued. "We'll talk to Corker in the morning. Tonight, I think we should head to the suite as a group to meet Martinez. We should all keep abreast of any developments, and we will need to be at the Hyatt for an announcement at some point

this evening.” Weaver nodded in agreement, but Marshall’s eyes didn’t move from the drink he raised to his lips. Campbell continued.

“The next step is ensuring we present the American people with their new President. Now, correct me if I’m wrong, but isn’t the Secretary of State next in line for the Presidency?”

Marshall, calmed perhaps by the smooth whiskey, was nonplussed by Campbell’s grandstanding. His response was brief.

“You’re wrong.”



“...tonight on *Larry King Live*.”

“I’m certainly looking forward to that interview. In the meantime, we are continuing our Presidential election coverage from the Park Hyatt in Washington DC where the Republican Party continues unabated.”

“And with good reason Geoff. This was an election that seemed out of their reach, and tonight Edward Tryst and Vanguard Palmer Watson the third have re-taken the Presidency in dramatic fashion.”

“The irony tonight Laura is that the victory celebrations behind us in the ballroom are thanks to Morine and the Greens that waged such a fierce campaign against the President. They argued about the President’s incompetency, his war record, and the rapidly accelerating anti-Americanism around the world. They told us why he shouldn’t be re-elected and then, by voting en masse for Morine instead of Russell, they ensured that he was.”

“Now we are expecting President Tryst to make his acceptance speech at any moment.”

“In fact, it’s almost overdue. It has now been just under an hour since Russell conceded, and we can only assume that the President is in counsel with some of his senior Cabinet, perhaps to do with the Iraqi situation or the continued mopping up of the terrorist camps in Yemen.”

“Well, the ‘Still at Work’ theme has been central to his campaign. He wanted the American voters to picture him as a committed President, still dedicated to the War on Terror his political opponents tried to blame upon him.”

“That’s why he’s here tonight, in Washington DC. He promised the voters he would keep working right up until election night. We saw that four days ago when US Marines overran several suspected terrorist training camps in Yemen, which is the other story we are following tonight as there remain claims that the attacks were made without the support or pre-knowledge of the Yemeni government.”

“Yes, Mister Tryst has spent a lot of the last two months implementing policy rather than just making campaign promises. The Green campaign has made much about the unilateral nature of those attacks, and the possible illegality of Tryst’s policy implementation during the campaign. Indeed, Morine has been far more vocal than Russell in recent days about those issues, which has no doubt contributed to his unprecedented showing this evening.”

“True, but many uncertain, Republican-leaning voters obviously respected those decisions, which has helped ensure the Republican vote did not completely collapse tonight.”



“Tryst spent this morning in Birmingham and Mobile – Alabama is, of course, his home state – before flying back to the Whitehouse tonight to watch the numbers roll in.”

“And what numbers they have been. President Tryst addressed the assembly here just before 7pm Eastern tonight, and then retired to, we believe, the Presidential Suite here at the Hyatt. That location was, perhaps unexpectedly, to prove particularly appropriate. We are still waiting for him to come back down and give his acceptance speech. In the meantime we are going to give you a run down of the numbers and the election night so far.”

“It all began just after 7pm when Kentucky, which had some booths close at six, was declared.”

“That’s right Laura. Kentucky has been considered a belle-weather State in recent elections, having been won by every successful President since Nixon. That aside, we were expecting Russell to take the State quite comfortably, and when he did not we began to suspect that something surprising may be upon us.”

“Similar results in South Carolina and Virginia, both Republican strongholds, were not alarming for Democrats, but a pattern was emerging. Remarkably the President, while being awarded all 29 available electoral college votes, had failed to carry a majority in any of the three states.”

“Instead, the deciding factor has been the 15-20% vote for Morine, the Green Party candidate who had spent an estimated \$100 million on his campaign, much of it in the last fortnight.”

“Once Morine’s influence became apparent, all eyes turned to Florida. In 2000 it had been the closest state, and the deciding factor in the election. Tryst won that state by less than 10,000 votes in 2000, and did not claim the Presidency until the following morning. This time the wait was far briefer.”

“Yes, this time Tryst had only to wait until a quarter after seven for the result. Despite seeing his vote drop to only 43%, Tryst defeated Russell by fully four percentage points to claim victory. Morine secured 18% - several million votes.”

“After that, the night began to grow predictable. Shortly after 7.30pm Ohio, another belle-weather state dating back to the Nixon Administration, was declared a Republican victory. Again, Morine’s 18% was decisive.”

“Booths in Alabama and Connecticut, home states for the Republican and Democrat candidates respectively, closed at 8pm eastern. So too did Washington DC, which became the first Democrat victory of the night. Connecticut, unsurprisingly, was won by Russell, but instead of polling the near 60% expected he could only manage 42% of the vote. Morine polled 28%.”



“Any hope of a Democrat resurgence was short lived, however. Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, and Michigan all turned red shortly after; none had voted Republican in sixteen years. In more than thirty years Reagan was the only Republican candidate to carry Massachusetts; Tryst managed to do it with less than 40% of the vote.”

“Behind us here, in the ballroom of the Park Hyatt, Republican ranks were swelling. Just before 9pm the Republicans carried Tennessee, taking Tryst’s electoral college votes to 280, over the necessary majority. A Democrat defeat seemed imminent, though Russell was not expected to concede just yet.”

“The straw that broke the Democrat spirit seemed to be New York. At 9pm, when the polls closed there, Tryst led the Electoral College votes 301 to 10. New York’s 31 colleges, expected to be awarded to Russell at the same time as the Democrat strongholds of Minnesota, Rhode Island, and New Mexico, had been tipped by many as the telling blow carrying him to victory.

“As one by one those states were carried by Tryst, all a result of Morine’s vote ‘stealing’, it became obvious that this was going to be a rout. Even the Democrat’s jewel on the Pacific coast, California with its 55 electoral colleges, could not add respect to the scorecard.”

“And so it was that, at 9.30pm tonight Eastern, Patrick Russell faced the Democrat supporters in Hartford Connecticut, to concede defeat.”

“That was, as we said, almost an hour ago. We are still waiting here in DC for Tryst to make his acceptance speech. We are expecting him at any moment, but in the meantime we are crossing to the ballroom floor where I believe our own Maria Robina is talking to the Washington Post’s chief political correspondent Sarah Angelou.”



“Sorry to disappoint you,” Marshall continued, “but the Secretary of State is not third in line to the Presidency.”

“Besides which,” Weaver interrupted, “even if you were this is clearly a matter of military emergency, in which case the Secretary of Defence should have Executive power.”

While Weaver and Campbell respected each other professionally they had long been adversaries and never been friends. Both had close relations with the President – Campbell had been a top attorney in New York before assuming a consultancy role in the Reagan administration; Weaver had held critical military intelligence roles during the first Gulf War, and had later helped then-Alabama Governor Tryst avoid political flack when three soldiers went on a shooting rampage near Fort Rucker in 1996.

Tryst had no doubt his administration was well served by Campbell and Weaver, but he held no illusions about their personal mistrust for each other. They respected him enough to keep their animosities out of government, but with both the President and Vice-President gone it was clear those animosities were ready to resurface.

Marshall did not know the history of their differences but he knew right now he was the only person in a position to make sure those differences did not bring down an Executive that was less than an hour old.

“Actually, neither of you are in charge.” He had their attention back. “And before you look at me with those ‘Hail to the Chief’ eyes, it isn’t me either. In case of emergency when neither the President nor the Vice-President are fit hold office, that office shall be held by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Mark Woollenston, Republican, Idaho, is the new President of the United States.”

Campbell and Weaver both leapt into the pause at the end of Marshall’s sentence. Weaver was the louder of the two. “There is no way the Constitution makes a provision for the Speaker of the House to run the country.”

Marshall was ready with an answer. “You’re right, in a manner of speaking. The Constitution makes provision for the Senate to vote on a replacement President in the event neither he nor the VP can hold office.

“In 1947 the Senate passed an amended *Presidential Succession Act*. FDR died in office in 1945, at the height of World War Two. Truman made some big decisions – he dropped the Bomb, won the war – but questions were still raised: if Truman had died as well, there would have been uncertainty about entitlement to the Presidency in the middle of a war. We couldn’t allow that to happen, so the Act was passed to clarify the chain of progression.”

Weaver was calmed. “And they nominated the Speaker as next in line?”



“Correct. Truman didn’t like the fact that Cabinet positions aren’t elected. They often don’t have a lengthy political history to draw on for support. So he pushed for the Act to be changed so that, after the Vice-President, the succession order had two elected positions of authority. First up was the Speaker of the House.”

Marshall seemed content to have made his point. But Campbell was becoming used to a night of surprises, and he had one more.

“Mark Woollenston can’t be President. He’s not eligible.”

By the looks on their faces, this was clearly news to Weaver and Marshall. Campbell continued. “There’s an email invitation sitting in my inbox to Mark’s 60th birthday dinner. Nice military motif, with the Union Jack intertwined with the Star Spangled Banner.” The look on Weaver’s face told Campbell this was not the time for anecdotes.

“What I’m saying...look. Mark’s father was a GI in Britain leading up to Operation Overlord – D-Day. I’m not saying Ted Kennedy’s choice of personal description was accurate, but there was a fairly hasty marriage between Corporal Woollenston and a local English farm girl. They didn’t reunite until several months after VE Day, and neither she nor Mark made it Stateside for another three years.”

Weaver didn’t recall requesting a life story. “Naturally born Brit to an English mother. So he’s ineligible for the Presidency.”

Campbell turned back to Marshall. “You said after the Vice-President came two elected positions. Who was the second?”

“President Pro Tempore of the Senate – Terry Johnson.”

“Then we better get President Terrence on the telephone, and hope to Christ he’s not home in Nebraska at a drunken party because he needs to be sworn in and in front of the people as soon as possible.”

Weaver and Marshall nodded agreement, but the sudden opening of the door jolted them out of a sense of complacency. It was only Love.

“Franco Martinez will be at the Hyatt in fifteen minutes.”

Campbell and Weaver were out of their chairs, eager to make a move out of this office and downtown. When Marshall didn’t move, they paused.

“We still have to call Terry, and work out a plan of action.” Weaver and Campbell resumed their seats, neither wanting to lose their place in the loop and give the other an unnecessary advantage. “Henry, we’ll meet you there shortly.”



Love welcomed the show of faith. But he was not looking forward to introducing Martinez to the President's corpse.

* * *

None of the major networks broadcast a signal that can be received in the many caves along the Afghan-Pakistani Border. Instead, seated in one of those caves, a very interested individual was following the news via radio.

He listened to the news that President Tryst had been re-elected, and smiled.

Not that He felt either of the infidels was any better than the other. But with that decision formalised, He knew it was only a matter of time before He was mentioned.

And He was looking forward to that.



She had intended the last word to be a statement, but Attwood took it as a question. “Not completely strange, but rather unexpected. The President isn’t actually commuting between here and the Whitehouse tonight is he?”

“No, of course not.” Angelou internalised yet another grimace. That had been a rhetorical question and she had leapt in to answer it. Embarrassment quickly turned to frustration, as she realised he was patronising her by thinking aloud as though she were incapable of doing so herself.

“Is he staying in the Presidential Suite?”

Angelou paused, assessing the sincerity of the question and hoping he wasn’t trying to be funny because she had cruised past the moment for laughter without registering a smile. She decided to assume it was a valid question: “He is.”

It was: “Who is he up there with?”

“I can’t tell you for certain. I could hazard a guess – First Lady, Watson, maybe Anderton Marshall, plus Chief-of-Staff, a few service agents and media advisors.”

“Why not Korte Campbell and Lucas Weaver?”

“Election promise on Saturday. After the news broke about Yemen, Tryst pledged that they would spend tonight maintaining control of the situation. Part of his ‘Still at Work’ theme.”

“Have you...”

“...called them? Of course. But I only have the main line so I go to answering service. I’d kill for Korte’s direct line.”

“You won’t get it. I’ve tried.” Attwood was being patronising again, but not intentionally. He had an idea for putting his junior assistant to good use without having her interrupt him. “I’ve also tried getting onto the same floor as the President on election night without success. But then, my face is a little more recognisable than yours in these circles.”

Angelou decided to keep quiet about her CNN appearance. Attwood must have been in the air when she went to air. She let him continue.

“You still carry that old-fashioned tape recorder?” Angelou knew he was being ironic – Attwood would never convert to mini-disk like she had been trained in, and he delighted in the fact that she, the brightest of the profession’s honest young guns, always carried around a dictaphone as backup.

“Of course Bob, and with a spare blank tape to hand over to authorities in case it’s discovered, just like you suggested.” Honesty, like many things in journalism, is relative.



Attwood smiled. He had made that suggestion to plenty of his colleagues, work-experience kids and cadets right up the chain of command, and she was the only one he knew who had listened to him. She was a good kid with a bright future in the profession, and while he was annoyed at her overly inquisitive nature at times he knew that was what would make her a world class reporter.

Well, that and her killer looks. “I’ve got a hunch and an idea. My hunch is that something’s not right. Partridge, Tryst’s Chief-of-Staff, should be with him, but instead he’s over there eating hors d’oeuvres with Senator McCain.”

Angelou mentally kicked herself again. Not only should she have seen that, she should have tried for an interview with either named man. Thankfully, Attwood had other things on his mind.

“So there appears to be a conversation happening in the Presidential Suite that has nothing to do with the President’s advisors. I want you to try and find out what it is.” Attwood shifted his weight to look over her shoulder, ensuring nobody and especially not Marigold Lewis could overhear. “If you get lucky there will be an open door – you’ll get a good look inside the suite, maybe hear a few things even if the door is closed. That’s why I want your tape recorder to be on.”

“You think I can just sneak up the fire stairs and walk on by?”

“Not the fire stairs – they’ll be guarded. But you’ll be surprised how many times they don’t even think about the lift. You won’t get far, but you might get lucky.” He paused to let her consider the option. “What do you think?”

“Can’t hurt, and like you say I might bag a scoop for Robinson’s beloved website.” Angelou was aware of Attwood’s dislike for both their editor and the website deadlines, and she wanted him to know she was on his side. She moved her head to where she could see the lifts through the slowly closing ballroom doors. It was a fairly crowded foyer, so it might take her some time to jag an empty lift.

“One more thing. These politicians know the media, and they have a long memory for reporters and papers they believe are ‘major league assholes’. Don’t feel the need to lie or cover up with some story when you get stopped because they’ll see right through it. Be honest, say you were hoping to get lucky but didn’t, then turn around and come back down. Don’t even bother trying to ask a question of anybody.” Angelou nodded her understanding. “Good job Sarah, I’ll see you back here shortly.”

Sarah Angelou stepped to the side and, as she headed out the door to the elevators, innocuously placed her hand in her jacket pocket and flicked a button from ‘Stop’ to ‘Record’.



Attwood also stepped away, taking in the crowded ballroom for the first time. Assembled dignitaries were noted, but he was more interested in staking a prime spot for the Presidential address – a position where the cameras at the back of the room would be able to see and hear him clearly.

He did not expect Angelou to have any luck outside the President's door. He was glad, even though he knew it was only temporary, to once again be the only *Post* reporter on the floor, waiting to record and report the President's acceptance speech.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

Terry Johnson *was* at home in Nebraska, but he was sober. He was also completely unaware that not only was the President dead, he was the designated replacement. In fact, Johnson had been trying to reach the President for the last hour to congratulate him, and let him know how glad he was not to have to head back to a Senate with a hostile President and Vice-President. Not having had any success reaching him, the call from Korte Campbell was a pleasant change.

“Korte, it’s so good to hear from one of you boys up there in Washington.” Johnson’s mid-west drawl had frequently left opponents, on the floor and the media, off-guard for his political nous. He would never be considered quick-witted, but was respected as a fierce political rival with tenure. Korte was glad to speak to him.

“Terry, it’s been one hell of a night.”

“It sure has. Hee-haw, we done it. Well, you done it Korte, you lot, a job well done.” He was effusive in his praise, but his mood was about to change. “How’s the President? That ol’ sonofabitch celebrating yet? We’re past done waiting for him on TV.”

“I’ve got some bad news Terry.” Korte had already had several attempts at giving this news tonight, but he was not getting any better at it. “The President’s been shot. He’s dead.”

There was a definite pause on the other end of the line, and Korte knew better than to interrupt. He hadn’t even given Johnson the big shock. After a few moments, he heard Terry swallow audibly, and respond.

“That’s terrible news Korte, I can’t tell you how saddened I am to hear that. Is Corker...how’s Corker doing?”

“To be honest, not too great. She found him, in the suite at the Hyatt. Edward’s doctor, Dr Mapp, he was down there and he’s given her something to make her sleep.”

“That’s for the best.”

A moment paused. And then another. The awkward pause crept back in. Korte had not rehearsed the next part, but Johnson was the next to speak.

“So, are you calling everybody personally? Be quicker to call Fox News, and I’m sure plenty would get a kick out of watching Bill cry.” Johnson’s sense of humour, not to mention timing, harked back to a much tougher time in America’s history. His earliest memories were rooted in the Depression-era unemployment and hunger in the farmlands he loved. With the experiences of his formative years, metonymically depicted in Dorothea Lange’s famed photographs, he knew there were far worse things than losing a President.



Like being a President.

“There’s more Terry. Vangard’s not a well man. He’s a very not well man. Mark Woollenston, well he’s English.”

“What’s happening Korte? The President’s dead so you’re running through everyone’s character flaws?”

“Terry – you ever heard of the Presidential Succession Act of 1947?”

“The Presidential Succession what? Now you know I’m not a smart man, but I got a bad feeling about where you’re going with all this.”

“You’re probably right to feel like that. The President is dead. The Vice-President is dying, and left this evening for a prolonged overseas vacation. Next in line is Mark as Speaker of the House, only he’s ineligible. After that is President Pro Tempore of the Senate.” Campbell paused. “That’s you.”

“I know who that is.” Johnson had cause for contemplation. “You’re telling me, what, that I’m the President?”

“I’m going to put you on a speaker-phone for a moment Terry, the next voice you hear will be Anderton Marshall.”

“Great Zeus, Korte, you sound like Regis. How are you Andy?”

In Washington, Marshall winced. He hated being called ‘Andy’.

“Is this true Andy, you telling me I’m the Capitol on Capitol Hill?”

“Well Terrance, that’s not how I would have put it, but yes. You’re the 44th President of the United States.”

“45th if you count Vangard’s brief tenure.” Weaver felt the urge to make his presence known, but if anybody heard his comment they chose not to acknowledge it.

“I’d also be the oldest Andy. I’m 81, that’s barely an age for a Senator let alone President.”

“Remember that Reagan presided through his seventies, and he didn’t have your tenure.” Campbell had accepted that any Presidential ambition he may have had would go unfilled this night, and his natural precision was resurfacing.

“I’ve got five more years of growing old on top of that, and with all due respect for the dead I don’t want to end up like poor Ronnie.”



“What are you getting at here Terry?” It was Marshall this time.

“Look, boys, I’m the senior Senator for a state with less than two million people. Life in Washington for me is winding down. I’m looking forward to the simple life, maybe a trip to Paris. I don’t need this.”

“It’s only temporary Terry.”

“Temporary like Truman? Temporary like Ford?”

“Hey, Terry, don’t worry too much about this. We’ll fly you in tonight, swear you in, and we’ll be there when you give a speech to the nation. Then you can have a few swivels in the Oval Office chair, sleep in the master bedroom a few nights, and an emergency Senate sitting will vote for a replacement.”

“Now don’t you ‘Hey’ me, Andy,” Johnson barked. “Lincoln slept in that bedroom, and you know, he couldn’t sleep one night, he came downstairs and saw the scene from his own death. Now we’re in the middle of a war where the latest casualty is our Commander-in-Chief, and you want me to step up to the plate? I’m flattered, for sure, but I’m not your man.”

Johnson had not intended to raise his voice with the Cabinet, but he had reached the age where thoughts of winding down were appealing. He neither wanted nor needed the pressures of become a wartime President, no matter how temporary the position.

“I’m sorry guys, I’m a little pent up. This is a lot of news to digest. Look, I’m not prepared to step up for the next four years, and deep down nobody wants me to. So, at best, I’m a temporary solution. That not only makes me a sitting duck for Osama bin Camelfucking, it’s a sign of weakness. We’re saying ‘Hey, kill our leaders and we’ll replace them with geriatrics, then we’ll fuck around for a few weeks and replace the geriatrics with someone else.’ It’s the wrong sign guys. I don’t want it – it’s not in my best interest, nor the best interest of the mighty U-S-of-A.”

Sitting in Campbell’s office, they had to concede that the self-titled geriatric made political sense.

“Now you boys listen here. You want to replace me anyway. Who are you thinking of voting in?”

Cambell and Weaver had obvious thoughts on this matter, both narcissistic. Marshall spoke loud and clear before either found his voice.

“I presume someone from the Cabinet, Terry. There are many fine Senators and Governors, but I imagine many would take the same position as you.”



“Right. Now this Presidential Succession Act of 1947. After me, I’m guessing, you either got a couple of Cabinet members or the head of the Boy Scouts of America. Assuming it’s not the latter, wouldn’t my kind refusal of your offer simply elevate the likely candidate directly into position, saving not only a sign of political weakness but also a rushed Senate sitting while we’d all rather be planning Thanksgiving dinner.”

Marshall was momentarily stunned by the logic. “That is correct sir.”

“Great. Then I kindly refuse your offer. It would only force my ulcers to play up anyway. Be sure to pass on my thoughts to Corker, but apart from that, unless questioned, let’s all just pretend this conversation never happened. Goodnight and God Bless.”

The busy tone emerging from the speaker phone merged perfectly into the Grandfather clock chiming 11pm. A long night was about to get longer, and Campbell and Weaver wordlessly turned their heads and attention from the phone to Marshall’s waiting eyes.



“I wasn’t posted yesterday you know Bob.”

“I’m sorry Sarah. You’ve been at the *Post* for two years. But I doubt he flashed his badge and so the question remains.”

“The first story I covered was a breakthrough on some Al Qaeda cells, thanks in no small part to an FBI agent working at the Pentagon. First story sticks in your mind, and tonight that agent walked right past me with the Secretary of Homeland Security, right up to the Presidential Suite.”

Attwood was impressed and, though he showed no outward sign of it, Angelou knew.

“OK, so he was an FBI agent. The President’s running late, so maybe he’s in an important meeting.”

“At the Park Hyatt?” Angelou stepped closer, almost hissing her words in an attempt to make them both audible to Attwood and inaudible to anybody who might be listening. “He’s had plenty of opportunity to meet at the Whitehouse – nobody’s seen him for hours and nobody’s seen him leave. It this was about Yemen, that’s where he would have gone.”

“You smell a hot story, don’t you?”

“Sure do.” She was beaming.

“Well, I know better than to disagree with a young nose. Tell me what you’re thinking.”

“We’ve got the Secretary of Homeland security bringing an Al Qaeda expert to a meeting with the President and, we think, the Vice President. It’s not to do with Yemen, or Sudan, or Eritrea, because they are ongoing situations and the President would have planned those meetings for the Oval Office. This must be a new and urgent threat, abroad perhaps or maybe even here.”

“Makes sense,” was Attwood’s unenthusiastic response. Internally, however, he was excited, and a scoop of this magnitude would justify the night’s earlier expenses to his tight-fisted editor. Of course, he wasn’t convinced. “I’m going to have a subtle chat with Partridge. I think you’re going to need to try once again to get near that suite.”

“I believe that can be arranged.”

President Edward Tryst was seated in an armchair, to the left of the door as Love and Martinez stepped inside. Martinez, not having met the President or either of the gentlemen having a close conversation at the other end of the suite, was waiting to be introduced when he noticed something was wrong.



Tryst's right arm hung limply beside the recliner. Martinez was compelled, almost primitively, to move around in front of the chair. What he saw forced him to gasp audibly, and step back.

The President's left hand rested on his lap, and he was slumped down in the chair with his ankles crossed in front of him. His chin rested on his chest, directing his right eye to gaze lifelessly at the floor. His left eye was caked over with blood and a substance Martinez could only assume has seeped from the gaping cavity where a bullet had entered and fragmented, gouging a wound and removing the left side of his skull above the forehead.

"Oh Christ, he's dead," moaned Martinez, taking two further steps back, away, and leaning forward to rest his hands on his knees in a desperate effort to fight the growing urge to retch.

Campbell, Weaver and the others in Cabinet had heard the news via telephone. Dr Mapp, Dr Andrews the Coroner, and Henry Love had known what to expect when they entered the room. But Martinez had been surprised, caught unawares by the sight. His reaction was the closest to that of the First Lady, though at least he was blessed with professional detachment.

Love, who had turned to lock the door behind them before giving Martinez the news, turned back around and locked eyes with his friend.

"I'm sorry Frank, I didn't realise we were going to walk in on him like this."

Dr Mapp, an aging Southerner who had been a friend of Tryst's father, had been asked by Tryst to serve as his Presidential doctor. He had accepted the position after he was assured it was largely a junket, with trips in Air Force One and the opportunity to visit Europe, Asia, even Australia occasionally, at the taxpayers' expense. Tonight he was glad his wife had not lived to see little Eddy elected to the highest office.

"Henry!" he declared. "I'm glad to see someone."

"Hey Doc," Love replied, warming to Mapp's natural Southern charm. "This is Franco Martinez, from the FBI." Martinez, still hunched over, could only manage a small wave.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance. This is Dr Andrews, DC Coroner. We've just been establishing time of death." Mapp had a way of making his every sentence sound like he was educating school children about the intricacies of his profession – that was what made him so popular at home.

His charm helped Martinez to compose himself. He was slowly becoming aware of why he had been called. "Any luck?" he asked.



Dr Andrews stepped in, his clinical tone a contrast to Mapp's natural warmth. "It's still fairly recent, so we're confident of establishing a close time. We think he was killed around 8.30 tonight."

Neither Love nor Martinez required an explanation, but Mapp was happy to provide one. "Now, that's based on a few things. There's some lividity, pooling of the blood, we can see in his ankles. That means he's been dead for more than an hour, but then we already knew that. But there's still no rigor mortis, which we would expect in the first two to three hours."

Mapp began to chuckle, jarring the emotions of those he was addressing. "Plus Dr Andrews here slit the man's pants and stuck a big, fat thermometer into his bottom."

Mapp laughed out loud. But being the only person in the room who had witnessed the farcical sight of a man he'd known since a boy being subjected to a post mortem rectal temperature examination, he was the only one who found it funny. Dr Andrews decided he should continue.

"Rectal temperature was still at 98.6 degrees. Now we can never be accurate because we don't know the President's temperature at time of death, but rectal temperature is usually slightly higher than body temperature, so it would seem it has dropped a little. The room is constantly heated to 86 degrees, so we won't expect temperature to drop too fast. But this indicates time of death was no sooner than 8pm and no later than 9pm."

Martinez and Love nodded their understanding. Love had never been to a murder scene before, but he was savvy enough to understand the process. Similarly Martinez, while never an active Homicide Detective, had been involved in enough murder cases to know the basics. Andrews continued.

"Also, we're fairly sure a single bullet wound killed him, though I won't be certain until I get him on the table."

"Dr Andrews and I found the gun in the bathroom after I sedated Corker." Mapp was now himself slightly more sedate, and pointed in the direction of the white tiled bathroom. "We've also left the body alone as best we could, waiting for the investigation team to arrive."

Martinez was standing now, once again in control of his body. "Henry, I'm not qualified for this. There are better men who know what they're doing far more than I."

"Frank, we need someone to co-ordinate this. Someone who can control those people and keep this on track. Most importantly, we need someone we can trust. I trust you."

Martinez was honoured. A little frightened, but honoured. "In that case Doctors, that team would be me."



“Well?” interjected Campbell, breaking a momentary silence that seemed an age.

Marshall was still somewhat surprised that these two high-ranking law makers were not familiar with legislation that, however dated and unused, had the potential to so suddenly re-organise their lives. He was ready with the answer, but Weaver felt his response was more urgent.

“I think tonight we have seen proved beyond any reasonable doubt that legislation signed by Truman before the Cold War even started has no practical application today. Can we be realistic here for a moment and ignore all of this succession clutter.”

Weaver was certainly not prepared to tip-toe around what he thought any longer. Campbell and Marshall stayed seated, momentarily stunned by the tirade and at the same time not surprised by it.

“By law, the country should now be controlled by a syphilitic old man, or just an old man. Does that make sense, Korte? No! Anderton? Of course not. What we need is focus.”

Cambell tried an interjection – “We are focussed” – but Weaver continued unabated.

“We are at war. Terrorists have killed the President. We need to focus not only on finding the individual fuckers and send them to their god, but on implementing hard and fast military decisions. With the emphasis on fast.

“Now the Commander-in-Chief is dead. I am the Secretary of Defence. So I am in control of the armed forces. We need to declare a state of emergency, restore some order, and let those Arab terrorist fucks know we mean business. And this clearly means ‘who’s next?’ needs to be replaced by ‘who can get control back?’. If you don’t believe me now Korte, wait until this hits the press.” Weaver paused to let his rhetoric sink in, though his premises were clearly leading to only one conclusion.

“I think I should be the person to tell them.”

Campbell had been growing frustrated at Weaver’s rant and the last comment forced him into rebuttal. “Sure, Lucas, why don’t we just ignore the Constitution as well, that’s 150 years older. Don’t get so cocky you think we don’t know what’s going to happen when this blows out, or that we need to bow to your knowledge and power to control it. We...”

“...you’re a goddamn lawyer Korte, you wouldn’t know an epaulette from an epileptic.” Weaver had been waiting to use that line for more than fifteen years. He was pleased it wasn’t wasted on pithy circumstances. “You cannot sit there and argue that this is not a military situation, and clearly a military man needs to head things up. We’re still the authority and power in Iraq, there’s the ongoing thing in Afghanistan, and we need



someone with the balls to do what we did in Yemen last week if and when we need to do it again.”

“Are you saying I don’t have the strength to run the country?”

“Oh for Christ’s sakes Korte. You’re not useless, but you’re better utilised getting the laws back on track. That’s why you’re the Secretary of State.”

“Look I opposed the Yemen invasion…”

“…it wasn’t an invasion. It was action. They drove two bombs into embassies in Africa: we caught them and had to act.”

“Lucas, we acted without talking to their government, without talking to the UN, and clearly in breach of international law.”

“See, this is what I’m saying. We are at war, in case you missed that reading case notes, and we are fighting an army that has no concern for international laws.”

“And so we should stoop to their level? Doesn’t that mean they win?”

“Oh for…!” Weaver let the sentiment finish his sentence. He was searching for support, and clearly Campbell was not going to offer any. “Anderton, surely you must realise that displaying military authority is in the best interests of this nation.”

The Attorney-General had been sitting, watching, learning, and hoping that this argument would fizzle so he could move on with the evening. He was adamantly not going to take sides in this argument until he absolutely had to. “I’m not entirely sure that’s the point.”

“Fine. Look. This action requires military intervention. I am in control of military. Even if Edward were here I’d be the real authority and now that he’s not I don’t think we should water that power down by promoting someone who will backflip on our policy.”

Campbell, sensing Weaver was arguing a lost cause, decided it was time to act like the President he almost was. “We can’t go running a military dictatorship, Lucas. Now I know that you are the military man, and I don’t want to change that. What has passed between us has passed and we need to get over that now. You are in charge of the military, but I am in charge of the country.”

“See, now, you don’t even know that.”

Marshall interrupted. “Korte’s in charge. Next in line is the Secretary of State.”

Weaver sensed a conflict of interest, his feelings ironic for someone who owned several hundred thousand units in the companies awarded contracts to re-build Iraq. “This is fucking laws by and for law makers. What did you say about the Constitution Korte, what



about of the people, by the people, for the people?” The historical inaccuracy was lost on the military man, but not so on those growing weary of his diatribe, a speech they could only hope the world would little note nor long remember.

Still Weaver continued. “I suppose, even in a military emergency, Defence is way down on that list while the Secretary of State and the Attorney-General debate policy.”

Campbell was beyond trying to reason with Weaver, beyond even trying to discover his motives. He let Marshall answer.

“The Departments are ordered by their creation. Defence is third on the list, after State and Treasury.”

“Treasury? That fucking accountant, with all due respect to Stephen Penny, gets to run the country before me?”

Marshall tried one last effort to uncover Weaver’s agenda. “Yes, basically he does. But I really don’t see why you think you need to run the country.”

“Because if I don’t then he will,” retorted Weaver, throwing his hand in Campbell’s direction. “And if he does then all the work we’ve done building up the nation will go to shit.”

He turned to Campbell now, perhaps his most powerful line of the night all but lost at the end of an unnecessary power play. “At that point, when we step back from the brink, that is when we lose.”

Campbell was done being quiet. “Listen here you arrogant little fuck. I didn’t ask for this role, but I’ve got it. I’m the President because somebody broke into a hotel room and murdered a leader you and I both admire. Now I am in charge, but there’s still a place for your experience and authority, if you want it. I won’t fuck with that if you don’t fuck with that.”

Campbell paused, expecting Weaver to break in with his retort. But the Defence Secretary seemed satisfied to have forced his new boss to break out of his calculated calm, as if by that action Campbell had ceded some power to him.

So Campbell continued. “Anderton and I are going over to the Hyatt. It’s time to do what has to be done. Are you both with me on that?”

Marshall nodded. It seemed, to him, that sense had prevailed. Clearly Weaver was not so convinced.

“So know you’re going to do this without me? What happened to putting forth a united front? One second you’re trusting my experience, the next you’re shafting me?”



“I’m not shafting you.”

“Then why are going without me?”

“For one, you’re not dressed.”

“Neither are you.”

“Yes, but this is my fucking office. I have a suit in the corner. For fuck’s sake Lucas you are not in control.”

“Fine. Fuck you. Go, both of you, tell the world. And I’ll be here, minding the fort, ‘Still at Work’.”

Campbell didn’t need to be told twice. He rose and headed for his suit. Marshall picked up the phone and let his driver know they were coming down. Then he turned to Weaver – there was an enemy on the streets of the capital, and he didn’t need another one within Cabinet.

“Lucas, you’re going to be the man who lets the authorities know about this. Get them onboard and taking action. CIA, FBI, CSI, if they’ve got an acronym or TV show you’ve got to let them know. No point having the investigators find out on TV, better tell them to head over to the Hyatt and not to expect much sleep.”

And then, as suddenly as the outbursts had begun, Weaver was alone. He locked the door. Maybe they wouldn’t let him break the news to the nation, but they had left him in control of any developments.

And he was still in control of the military. Even if Korte was sworn in, a thought that seemed to have slipped his mind during the debate, he had given Weaver authority over the forces.

He picked up the phone. In addition to notifying the various agencies, he had three important calls to make. One was to his wife. One was to his mother. And one was to Admiral Fairbanks, Chief of Naval Operations at the Pentagon. Fairbanks was one man capable of readying a contingent of Marines for active Homeland Duty while simultaneously turning around an aircraft carrier three days out of San Diego.



As the oak doors closed behind Sarah Angelou the cameras in the ballroom were once again springing into life. It was nearing 11.30pm, and with the overall election result already decided even the Republican victory in California could not pad the newscasts any longer. It was almost two hours since Russell had conceded, and there was still no sign of the victorious President.

With the partygoers behind them beginning to tire, reporters were beginning to conjecture. Henry Love has been spotted by many, his associate presumed to be one of the Homeland Security minions, and the journalism rumour mills were now building on each other.

CNN quoted unnamed sources reporting rumours about a well-funded strike on terrorist guerrillas in Rwanda. Then the networks reported that CNN was reporting a well-funded strike on guerrillas in Rwanda. Somewhere in the news pipes the attribution was lost, and rumour became fact. Truth, the first casualty, was only saved from death by the sheer volume of rumours, theories, and innuendos being proposed.

Angelou was unconcerned by that. She wanted truth, and it went without saying she wanted to be the first to uncover and report it. Love and the FBI Agent, he looked Mexican but she couldn't remember his name, had recently used the elevator, so she couldn't take that all the way to the tenth floor. But there was always the possibility the stairs were being watched from below as well. She decided to ride the lift up one floor, then take the stairs from there.

Stepping into the elevator, she checked that her dictaphone was still set to record. It was. There were two other people in the lift, but thankfully both were heading higher in the car than she. The ride was brief, and as she moved along the first floor corridor to the Fire Door at the end, she glanced over both shoulders. Not entirely sure what she was looking for, but not noticing anything out of the ordinary, Angelou pulled open the heavy Fire Door and stepped inside the stale concrete space of the internal fire escape.

In case she had been observed or in case a Service Agent was listening at the top of the stairs, she decided to take it slowly. Having tried her hand at "investigative" journalism in more precarious situations than this, it was her mind and not her heart that was racing.

She weighed up the values in going undercover. Even if she had studied the hotel's layout, not to mention the uniforms, passing as a maid was not going to gain her any access to the inner sanctum of the suite. Attwood had been right about being upfront about who she was, she decided, as she subconsciously felt for the dummy, blank tape in her pocket.



A brisk walk up nine flights of stairs would take only a few minutes, but with a focus on every foot placement it would take longer. Knowing, from experience, that the slightest noise echoed and multiplied in these stairwell cavities, Angelou was attuned to every sound.

And the silence was eerie.

Finally, after almost ten minutes of a slow approach, she reached the door to the President's floor. She had never seen the Presidential suite, and wasn't certain how close to its entry she would be when she opened the fire door. If somebody was standing on the other side she might only catch a quick glimpse of the suite before the door was slammed in her face, so she had to be ready.

Breathing deeply, she ever so gently she reached for the stainless steel knob on the door. She methodically turned the knob, and carefully began applying the pressure necessary to push the door open.

It was locked.

Disbelieving, for no self-respecting hotel and certainly not the Park Hyatt would risk locking doors to the fire escape, she tried the knob again. It still would not twist. Trying hard to remain silent in the face of rising anger she applied still more pressure and weight to the door and, when it did not budge, wrenched the knob backwards in despair.

In a fleeting moment she realised, through accident or design, the door knob had been installed upside down. The heavy door flew open with her firmly attached to the knob. Unwilling to follow the door into the open but unable to let go lest she fall, Angelou hung precariously as the fluorescent lighting rushed through the opening, blinding her momentarily though barely penetrating the stairwell's sombre ambience.

Squinting now, Angelou threw back her head in an effort to transfer weight to her airborne heels, and prevent her from planting her face in the plush corridor carpet. Overbalanced she hung, attached to the door but seemingly little else, for an eternity before, finally and with great relief, gravity pulled her back to her feet.

In a split second only the grace of a gymnast had saved her from the worst secret entrance an investigative journalist had ever made.

But nobody had slammed the door shut on her fingers, so she now found herself staring down the hall. And as her eyes adjusted to the light, she could see, surprisingly, that the corridor was deserted. On the right at the far end she could make out, even though the glare off the gold tinted lettering meant she could not read the sign, what were clearly the doors to the Presidential Suite.



Exposed in the open doorway, she quickly ran through options for attack. Walking over and knocking on the door would not win her any friends, but being sprung loitering outside would likely earn her some long term enemies in this city. She took a deep breath, the rush of oxygen motivating her to make a quick decision, and her muscles tensed for her next move, the steps across the hall to the door.

But those steps were halted, her balance once again shifting though this time far less dramatically, as the elevator in the centre of the hall pinged, and out stepped Anderton Marshall and Korte Campbell.

Angelou was trapped, unable to move in any direction for fear of drawing attention to herself. So she remained motionless, exposed in the doorway, framed against the dark recesses of the stairwell at the far end of the corridor. With the weight of the fire door pushing against her raised arm, it took all her focussed effort to concentrate on what she was watching.

The Secretary of State taking a deep breath to steady himself before knocking on the door.

The Attorney-General blessing himself waiting for the doors to open.

The doors to the suite opening, and the FBI agent leaning over the seated President, gazing into his eyes.

And then, in the last fleeting moment before the doors closed, the Agent reaching forward and seemingly closing the lid on the President's right eye.

Sarah Angelou knew suddenly that something was wrong. Instinctively, her mind began processing the evening so far looking for clues. The Presidential no-show. The FBI agent. And now an Attorney-General praying when the victory was already certain.

The answer seemed to slam against her forehead from inside her skull.

The President was dead.

And she was the only reporter who knew it.



Angelou threw herself into the back of the stairwell, adrenalin levels rising so that she barely heard the heavy fire door closing behind her.

She had no way of knowing if her hunch was right, and yet she knew it must be. Breaking news on the world stage was a big step up from small town scoops, a big step she couldn't possibly be ready for. She knew what to do. Call Attwood.

Shaking ever so slightly as the realisation pulsed with her blood to the extremities of her body, her left hand reached for her pocket and pulled out her streamlined pink cell phone.

No service. "Fuck!"

It was a cry of defeat, but no sooner had the word left her lips than Angelou began sprinting down the stairs after its ever-softening echo.

Inside the suite, Campbell and Marshall had received a quick précis of the unfolding investigation. The President was definitely dead and there was now a team of experts fanning around the city to track down the perpetrator or perpetrators.

Martinez had named Gerry Grier, ex-CIA now at the Bureau, as his Second-in-Command, and he was now in the foyer meeting the teams Weaver was activating. Making the news public would hopefully slow the presumably fleeing villain down, and aid that investigation.

Campbell looked over at Marshall and Love, the men who would come with him to break the news for the final time. He shook Martinez's hand once more, aware that this was intended only to reassure himself.

"Let's do this."

Angelou, taking two steps and sometimes three with every bound, passed the fifth floor. The running gave the rushing adrenalin purpose, and its dissipation into the muscles cleared her mind.

There was no time to consult Attwood. The speed of post-millennium news meant a real scoop lasted only minutes before it was replayed on 24 hour news networks and the net. But something like this? Five minutes with her by-line was worth risking the ire of her senior colleague, and the possibility she was wrong.

Passing the third floor now. She began to bring up the copydesk on her cell phone's speed dial.



Waiting for the elevator to again ascend to the tenth floor, Campbell tried calming himself with more controlled breathing, while Love confirmed with Marshall that his tie was straight.

“Remember, we take this slow and let me lead,” Campbell reminded them as the lift doors opened. He pushed the button for the ground floor, and they began their descent into a madness they knew was their duty to try to control.

As she leapt the final steps and moved towards the ground floor Fire Door, Angelou glanced at her phone to ensure that she had brought up the correct number. She had, but there was still no service.

She moved her eyes back to the door, abruptly aware it was closer than she expected. Reflexes thrust her hands onto the emergency handle, preventing her from careering into the thick wood and tectonite door though doing little else as she hurtled through.

Balance, which had served her ten floors higher, deserted her now, and she fell forward onto her front, arms outstretched. The cell phone slipped free of her hand as she fell, skidding along the foyer past a largish group assembling in the far corner.

She first landed on her knees, shooting pain up her back, and then unable to bring her hands in front for a controlled fall, she could only turn her head and brace for impact.

She closed her eyes as her head bounced into the foyer floor, but not before she saw her phone scoot through the open door outside and come to rest beside the doorman. The elevator pinged.

As the doors opened, Campbell quickly scanned the foyer. Still more people were heading inside for the celebrations he was about to dramatically end, and he spied what he assumed was the advance party for the investigation team. He hoped Grier would allow him to break good news sometime soon.

Campbell didn't recognise Angelou as she ran passed, out the door, glancing at him briefly. He was busy moving over to shake Grier's hand, and wish him well.

“Gerry, how are you. Frank just briefed us upstairs, so I'm sure you already know to pass any and all information through him. I'm about to inform the nation. Not sure if breaking this news will help or hinder your investigations, but we can't hide the truth for much longer.”



Grier, surprised the Secretary of State remembered him from their several brief encounters, simply nodded, and let Campbell turn back towards the Ballroom.

Angelou, panting from the run down the stairs, had expected a sub-editor to take her call. When the Editor himself answered the phone her heart began to pace even faster. She had barely begun to speak when Arthur Robinson assumed control of the conversation.

“Sarah, what the hell is happening down there? Robert hasn’t filed anything since Russell conceded two hours ago. We haven’t had copy from you in an hour, and the presses are waiting?”

“He’s dead Arthur,” she almost gasped into the phone, “I saw him. He’s dead.”

“What are you talking about?” Robinson asked, emphasizing the ‘are’ to patronise her. He did not like being called back in so late of an evening to be told there was no news from the victory party. Not knowing that Attwood had flown in, he could only blame Angelou’s laziness.

“The President. Tryst. He’s dead.”

Even Robinson had to admit - *that* was news. “Who’s said this? Is it on the networks?” And then back over his shoulder to a team of sub-editors invisible to Angelou, “Mark, Brian, put that coffee down and get ready to write. And turn the TVs up. Tryst is dead.”

Angelou was not calmed by this change of heart, however. “It’s not on the networks Arthur. This is exclusive.” She had broken the biggest news story, not only of her career but probably her editor’s, yet she managed to say so with fear and trepidation in her voice. Robinson didn’t trust her. She could sense that.

“How did you find this out?”

“I saw him.”

“You saw the dead President?”

“Sort of.”

“Sort of! You expect us to run with this because you sort of maybe saw something?”

“Arthur, I know what I saw.” Of course, she didn’t know. He knew she didn’t, and worse still she knew he knew.



“I’m not even going to credit this Sarah. In case you’ve forgotten, you work for the *Washington Post* not the *New York Post*. We print fact! Now get in there, and get me some news I can print. And if you hear from Robert, tell him the same thing!”

Internally rehearsing his speech, and trying to pre-empt the inevitable questions, Campbell was blinkered to the well-wishers as he moved across the foyer floor.

Marshall pushed open the oak doors, but let Campbell – still breathing deeply – take the lead.

The sudden flash of cameras drew Attwood’s attention to the door. Peering past the glare he could see Campbell, Marshall, and Love, *sans* FBI agent it seemed. They were *sans* President as well, it seemed.

He was wondering how successful Angelou had been at uncovering something when, further on in his field of vision, he noticed her outside, talking into her cell phone with a hand over her other ear.

Attwood was about to go marching out to find out who she was talking to, and why she felt the need to do so without informing him, when his own news instinct was activated.

Korte Campbell, Secretary of State, was heading for the stage, and he wasn’t smiling as he was showered with streamers. More importantly, he was contravening a three day old Presidential promise that he would spend the night maintaining control in Yemen. Something bigger must have broken.

Campbell stepped up to the bank of microphones on the stage. His grim expression, and those on the faces of his Cabinet colleagues flanking him, confused but did not dampen the spirits of the cheering party.

They had been waiting for several hours to hear the President’s address, and they reasoned it would now surely not be too far away. In reality, it couldn’t be further away.

Campbell raised his arms to silence the crowd, inadvertently mimicking Nixon’s victory pose. The crowd roared. Campbell felt a dread in the pit of his stomach, and no relief at all that this was the last time he needed to relate the dreadful news.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I’m afraid it has fallen on me to bring you some terrible news.



“At some time this evening, probably between 8 and 9 pm, President Edward Tryst was killed.”

The ballroom, as though a single living creature, was at once silent, and then collectively groaned. From his position to one side of the room, Attwood watched the individual reactions. Against the wall to his right, a woman fell to the floor with barely a gasp. To his left, a man and a woman stood seemingly mirrored, tears rolling down their cheeks and over the hands cupped to their mouths.

He panned the room in a second, noting similar reactions among the party faithful, and even some of his media associates. Most of them were old enough to remember where they were in November 1963, but few had covered it first hand. Attwood himself was somewhat dazed by the news.

He was jolted out of the daze by the sight of Sarah Angelou, off the phone now and standing in the doorway of the ballroom.

Sarah, that rare combination of beauty, brains and ambition, often stood out in a crowd. At this monumental moment in history, she was distinguished for an entirely different reason. In a crowded room of several hundred people coming to grips with an extreme change of emotion, from elation to despair, she wore a look of fury more intense than he had seen across forty years of reporting.

Attwood knew, before even managing eye contact, that his protégé had scooped the information. But information without publication means nothing.

It was an interesting mind-shift in a man who, two hours earlier, had lamented giving his colleague a hint of a story without his involvement. Now he was impressed with her ability to find the story and depressed at her inability to tell the story first, feeling the same emotional ambiguity as she.

That anger at being beaten would stay with her longer than it should in a professional, and Attwood knew it. But he knew too, at that moment, that her talent and inner fire would make her the perfect partner for their next story. If she could scoop the President's death, then surely between them they could lead the investigation into finding his killer.

Upstairs, Martinez was assuming control of a crack team of investigators.

Unbeknownst to him, they would be pushed all the way by two reporters.



The ballroom, previously a melting pot of activity, was now occupied by two contrasting groups. The Republicans were silent, and mostly still: the media was a disorganised mess of action and debate.

News anchors wanted to break into Campbell’s speech, impose their comments and theories immediately. News producers were not convinced, believing, clearly, that live was best. The reporters on the floor cared not for those arguments – they had myriad questions coursing through their minds, and were hoping Campbell didn’t pre-empt and answer them all. Since Presidents no longer ride in open top motorcades, this was the historical footage that would be replayed for decades: they wanted to be in it.

Flanked by Marshall and Love, Campbell was continuing with his announcement: “At present, teams of investigators from the CIA, FBI and Secret Service are searching for clues that will identify those responsible, so we can track them down and apply justice to this heinous crime. These investigations are being overseen by a Franco Martinez, a terrorism expert at the Pentagon acting under the authority of the Department of Homeland Security.”

Reading the minds of the reporters was unnecessary – their not so subtle comments to each other and into cell phones were discernable over the stunned and silent crowd. Two words were rising above it all: ‘Vice President’.

Campbell knew it must be addressed: “Immediately we were notified of this saddening news, an emergency meeting was held between Vice President Watson, Secretary Love, Attorney-General Marshall, myself, and Secretary Weaver.

“Vice President Watson indicated that, due to personal medical reasons, it was not in the nation’s best interests that he take control.” He was gambling that the media corps knew as much about Presidential Succession as he had two hours earlier. “As such, I am in control of the Whitehouse. I am the President.”

This stirred the crowd some – a lot of news had been broken in a very brief time, and eventually they would find the need to discuss it. Campbell was forced to pause, the crowd was talking, and the reporters were all trying to attract his attention to ask the most pressing question they could think of.

A voice soared above the rest, such that Campbell was unable to ignore it.

“Have you been sworn in yet, Mister Secretary?” The crowd turned, Attwood among them, recognising the voice and hoping that it was his newly impassioned colleague. But instead it was Marigold Lewis of the *New York Times*. He swore under his breath – beaten again.

Campbell also had cause for cursing. In the rush of arguments and action this evening, swearing him in before putting him in front of the nation had been overlooked.



He turned his head to look at Marshall, behind him to the left. The Attorney-General had proved tonight that he knew the book of law. At this moment he was reaching into his coat pocket to reveal the other book on which he based his life.

Live to a world still shaking from the news that their wartime leader had been assassinated in a hotel suite, Korte Campbell placed his left hand on a Bible held by the Attorney-General and was sworn into office as the 45th President of the United States of America.

“I do solemnly swear ...”

“Don’t worry Admiral, I will be sure to pass on your thoughts to the First Lady. But for now, there is a more important task at hand.” Weaver was talking to Admiral Fairbank, Chief of Naval Operations at the Pentagon. Many phone calls had been made, ruining the evenings of several dozen field agents, crime scene investigators, and secret servicemen, most of who had already assembled at the Park Hyatt under Martinez and Grier.

Others were being rapidly deployed to major points on the metro system, to the Metro Centre on 13th St, to L’Enfant Plaza which closes at midnight, and as far out as Greenbelt, Rockville, and King Street.

Both Washington National and Dulles Airports were also being monitored, and were effectively closed for noise restriction curfews, thus saving the need to ground or redirect flights.

Weaver knew, however, these were largely pointless exercises – nobody knew who they were looking for, or even how many people they might be seeking.

The most important concern, as far as Weaver was concerned, was effectively coordinating a strong offensive retaliation and ensuring a satisfactory defence was in place in case this was only the first of several strategic assaults on US interests. Key to this was the current discussion with Admiral Fairbanks.

“The USS Abraham Lincoln is two days out of Everett, set to relieve the USS Theodore Roosevelt in the Persian Gulf. It was great election timing, though of course you and I would prefer to be pulling out of that money pit. Anyway, at present I am the military Commander and there is a new and clearly more pressing need for those troops.

“As such, I am requesting that the crew of that ship be immediately informed, and that the ship cease its present course of direction pending new orders. Can I trust you to make the necessary arrangements?”

“You sure can Lucas. Leave it to me.”



“Excellent. I am also requesting a contingent of Marines be dispatched to the White House tonight, to ensure the safety of cabinet and the administration.” Weaver didn’t enjoy bestowing authority on Campbell, so he didn’t.

“And finally, Admiral. For your information I will be putting the National Guard on alert. Your resources are stretched as you know – any more sign of danger and I’ll have them on the streets.” He paused briefly to allow the Admiral one last chance to speak. When nothing came, he thanked him for his support and ended the phone call.

Weaver was confident that putting the carrier on hold was the right course of action. Campbell had put him in charge of the military, and he would run it responsibly. If that meant Campbell needed to be out of the decision making process on some issues, then so be it.

That task complete, Weaver patted his pocket to confirm he was carrying the keycard that would allow him to exit the building. He finished another finger of whiskey – it could be some time before Campbell next opened up the good stuff and offered him some.

It was not until he made a final pan of the room that he noticed Campbell on television. Turning up the volume he heard, not Campbell but television commentary. It appeared to be a replay, so he assumed the news had been broken, and that the new President had headed back to the suite to be filled in on the investigation thus far.

That would be Weaver’s next destination. He picked up the telephone to notify the driver he was on his way down. He contemplated, for the briefest of moments, informing Campbell et al that he was on his way, but thought better of it.

He might be President, but he was still an asshole.



“Here’s the situation as it stands Mr President,” Martinez began. He was addressing Campbell, Marshall, and Love in Room 927 of the Park Hyatt. They had moved downstairs so as not to disturb a crime scene, leaving Edward Tryst’s quiet and private resting place swarming with photographers and fingerprinters.

“There is no surveillance on the tenth floor, in or outside the Presidential Suite. Footage from the foyer is currently being analysed, but if the killer left through the kitchen or a window or something we probably won’t have him on camera.”

“You’re assuming this was a single killer?” Campbell asked.

“Mr President, we can only work on assumptions. One killer in the room seems easiest and most likely, but there is no way of knowing how large the support base helping him was. At this early stage, of course, there’s no way of knowing much.”

“The first thing we need to know is why the President was left alone – there’s no evidence that he wasn’t, is there?”

“You’re referring to the Secret Service of course. There were supposed to be four on this floor – two in the room with the President and two in the corridor guarding, well guarding Edward Tryst.”

“And yet none were on the floor when the First Lady found him. Have they been located yet?”

“They have. They were separated immediately, and are currently being questioned by Gerry Grier and some CIA men.”

“You’re the man in charge here Frank. Is there any chance of cracking anything soon through physical evidence, or are the missing agents the best bet?”

Martinez went to answer, but was interrupted by a knock at the door. It was Grier.

“We’re basically finished with the four servicemen. Did you want an update?”

“Please Gerry. Close the door behind you, take a seat, and feel free to speak freely.”

“Very well.” Grier did as he was instructed, then pulled a notebook from his top pocket. He was the only man present not wearing a dinner suit, so he felt a little awkward being the centre of attention.



Nevertheless, this was what he was here to do, and he was not concerned to be addressing a leadership team under siege. “I’ve talked with all four agents – Curtain, Danga, Erbacher, and Farrell. This evening Curtain and Farrell were supposed to be in here with Tryst, the other two in the corridor.”

“But they weren’t?” interrupted Campbell.

“That’s correct sir, they weren’t. We knew they were with the, well with Tryst when he left the ballroom just before 7pm, but weren’t there when the body was found at 9.30. Thankfully for us, all four of the agents were most regretful and very cooperative, and their stories corroborated.

“More importantly,” Grier looked up from his notebook to emphasise this point, “their stories seemed to incriminate themselves, not in the murder but in enough for their dismissal and charges of dereliction of duty. We have no reason to suspect they are lying”

“Fill us in.”

“Very well. Firstly, it should be made clear there was no threat made on the President’s life tonight. The main risk as far as the service was concerned was addressing the crowd. Once that was done, they relaxed somewhat and, as the night went on, were caught up in the victory celebrations.

“Anyway, our four agents flanked Tryst from the ballroom to the lift. He stopped a few times, shook a few hands, thanked a few people, but nobody around seemed suspicious or out of place.

“They made it back up to the suite at about five minutes to seven. Danga and Erbacher waited in the corridor, Danga outside the door, Erbacher watching the fire exit which hotel management had refused to seal in case of emergency.

“Curtain and Farrell went inside with Tryst. The First Lady was already in there, as was Partridge the Chief of Staff. The five of them watched the early numbers roll in on the television until about a quarter after seven, when the phone rang. Partridge answered, mumbled something into the phone, then hung up. Curtain and Farrell both remembered exactly what he said to Tryst after he ended the call: ‘That’s him Sir. We better leave you alone’.”

“We better leave him alone?” asked Campbell. “They were sure he said that?”

“Yes sir, they concurred. Tryst told the First Lady he had to meet with someone – he didn’t say who – and that he would meet her back downstairs shortly. He then ordered Curtain and Farrell to watch over the First Lady in the ballroom, so they left with Partridge. That’s not unusual, but what is strange is that he asked the other two, Danga and Erbacher, to head downstairs as well. They were ordered to remain in the foyer and, this is another quote, ‘Keep an eye on the doors and shit from down there’.”



“He told the service agents to leave him alone, and they did?” It was Martinez this time – he would probably have to make recommendations to their superiors, and he wanted to be clear on what they had done.

“That’s right Frank. They were accustomed to it. Apparently it wasn’t an unusual request for Mr Tryst to be left alone for private meetings even outside the White House. And as I said, there was no threat assessment and the agents thought the riskiest part of the evening was behind them.”

Campbell would have been livid, but he knew of Tryst’s preference to be left alone. Most Presidents made similar requests – Clinton certainly didn’t get friendly with an intern under the supervision of two service agents. Moreover, Campbell himself had been known to make similar requests of service agents when he met with those the administration did not want to be seen publicly meeting, or even just large private benefactors.

Martinez, unfamiliar with the administration’s protocol, had no choice but to accept that this was not unusual. He still had some questions: “The First Lady didn’t come back up until nearly two and a half hours later, and she came without any service agents?”

“I can’t speak for the First Lady,” Grier answered, “but again it seems losing the agents was not uncommon for Mrs Tryst. They went with her downstairs, she excused herself, and Curtain and Farrell kept busy scouting the party for suspicious characters. They didn’t know anything was wrong until they were rounded up to meet me in the foyer on Secretary Weaver’s instructions.”

Grier paused, as if anticipating another question. He was disclosing a lot of information, and he wanted to be methodical about it, but he fully expected interruptions to question what appeared gross negligence on the Service’s behalf. When no interruption came, he continued.

“As for Danga and Erbacher waiting in the foyer, the first they suspected anything may be wrong was when Secretary Love showed up with Frank. They were waiting on orders from the President, so they didn’t interfere with Mrs Tryst, or Doctor Mapp and his associate.”

Martinez was learning a lot about Presidential protocol. That a man so reviled by much of the world had no fear for his own safety could be interpreted as courage, or arrogance and superiority. Without knowing the man personally, Martinez could only guess which it was.

At any rate, he was here to uncover the motives of the missing agents, not the man they failed to protect. “Three people heading up to the suite, including somebody they didn’t recognise, didn’t raise any suspicions?”



“They said they were used to it. Tryst had secret meetings, he told them to wait somewhere, and then he came and got them later.”

“Very well, but if Tryst met with someone else, why didn’t anyone see the mystery man or men or women heading into the fire escape or catching the elevator up to the tenth floor?”

“We’ve already had three suggestions for that from the men: perhaps the mystery man was in the fire escape when he called, and came in while they were all going down in the lift; or he was a guest on another floor who walked up the stairs; or,” Grier paused on the final option. “Or he was already in the room.”

“Already...he was actually in the room when they left?”

“Erbacher put that forward, he’s a quick guy. Said the room had been cleared this afternoon, but with Mrs Tryst and Partridge inside Curtain and Farrell probably didn’t do a proper sweep when they re-entered. I checked it with the others, and Erbacher’s right. They didn’t bother.”

Martinez was beginning to rise into the authority bestowed on him as coordinator of an inter-departmental murder investigation: “You better make sure every damn inch of that suite is fingerprinted.”

Grier knew his role as well. “Already on it.”

“And get Partridge up here. If this mystery man is the killer, Partridge seems to be the only person who knows who he is.”

Grier was about to respond that the request had already been made, when he was interrupted by someone walking through the door.

It was Weaver. He was flustered, but by something he obviously thought was more important than his earlier argument. “Turn the TV on. Now.”



Campbell interrupted. “Christ, now there’s another one.”

Martinez and Weaver turned back to the television where CNN, again with Aljazeera attribution, was translating the confession of another videotaped masked group. This time Martinez had to admit he was not familiar with them at all.

“What’s more, as far as I can make out, this translation is basic at best. The guy in the centre isn’t talking about a ‘reign of terror in the States’, he’s talking about a hail of bullets and taking out the President’s protectors and security as well. Now we all know that didn’t happen. I’d say this is another phoney.”

Campbell was beginning to realise that being sworn in as President did not suddenly bestow him with wisdom in regards the imminent threat on the highest office. “Are claims like this common for all attacks, but not newsworthy, or does the death of the President bring them out of the woodwork? And how do you tell?”

Martinez was ready with an answer. “Most major terrorist attacks have a readily identifiable ownership. When planes blew up in the 80s, we knew it was backed by Gaddafi. IRA, ETA, even the PLO and Hamas to a great extent, had regional focus and regional targets. Then we watched al Qaeda grow – the Embassy bombings in 1998, USS Cole, and September 11. Big jobs, with lots of planning, are usually theirs.

“Plenty of regional stuff, all the happenings this year that led to Yemen last weekend, has been linked to al Qaeda. Even when these haven’t come from the top group of strategists, just regional cells, the top echelon seems to know about it.”

“And tonight?”

“Well, another thing that makes al Qaeda good, from an identification perspective, is that they almost always come forward and take responsibility. Theses have been written on their business model, and I can tell you their marketing department has it sussed as well. In quiet times, we get a pep talk from the CEO himself, and when they do something big they follow it up fairly promptly with a statement to make sure everybody knows they did it.”

Martinez had plenty more to share with his new Commander-in-Chief, but Anderton Marshall interjected, drawing the group’s attention back to the television. “Looks like their publicist has been busy tonight.”

Campbell turned up the volume, adding sound to the caption that had caught the Attorney-General’s attention.



The commentator seemed to be thinking aloud rather than reading from an autocue. “We have some breaking news coming through right now I believe. Aljazeera is reporting to have a new tape from Osama bin Laden reporting directly on tonight’s proceedings. I have been informed that we will bring you the tape in full in moments. We are able to, ah, give you a preliminary translation right now however. I repeat, this is believed to be Osama bin Laden.”

The reporter paused, allowing another voice, presumably a translator, to envelope the room.

“Praise be to Allah for the smiting of the rogue and infidel Tryst.”



CHAPTER TWENTY

The night of November 2 passed without sleep for many across the United States. The news of the President's assassination had been broken at 11.41pm Eastern Time, but even on a school night many were tuned in to the announcement at that late hour.

Of those who had been asleep, most were woken by friends on the other side of the country where Campbell's speech and inauguration were beamed live through prime time. As had happened in the long days immediately after September 11, Americans found themselves transfixed to their television screens, almost wishing for something else traumatic to happen so they could see it unfolding live.

Those that did so were disappointed. As the sun rose, haggard-looking news anchors were once again repeating news from hours earlier. While little could be said of the assassination – details of Tryst's death had not been made public – there had been plenty of time for conjecture about the brief but powerful statement made, it was generally agreed, by al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Shortly after 7am Franco Martinez, the man appointed to lead the investigation, the networks argued, solely because he was a friend of Henry Love's brother, released a statement. The tape played on Al Jazeera and repeated across the morning's wee hours on TV and radio, had been verified as accurate. It was definitely bin Laden's voice, and the tape was being investigated for clues to his whereabouts.

That was enough to warrant replays on all the networks.

“Praise be to Allah for the smiting of the rogue and infidel Tryst. The Muslim brotherhood which he sought to destroy, the righteous truth he wanted to replace with greed, corruption, and fear, has not been defeated and instead has overcome him and those who he represents.

“May Allah shine on those who have won this great deed for him. You heroes of this fight join those of us who still fight on, and one day soon you will join the blessed martyrs who died so that those who remain can live.”

In the years since September 11 all had grown used to the sight of a tall bearded Arab, previously only familiar to intelligence communities and news buffs. As with Aljazeera, however, his voice remained recognisable only to those who spoke Arabic. Though it was suspected he may be conversant in Pashto, perhaps even French, in his addresses bin Laden had eschewed all but the language of the Koran whose message of brotherhood he corrupted for evil.

On this night, however, he shocked the intelligence communities and general public by breaking into English, leaving his message unalterable by translators and his tones of anger and retribution perceptible to all.



“Let those who follow after this evil man know that they will never succeed in breaking into our power. The dogs of America and of Israel and of their allies are fated to die at our hands.”

The message reverted to Arabic for a final ‘Praise be to Allah’, and ended.

Conjecture among the networks had been fuelled by the morning newspapers, many of which had been delayed with the assassination news and then had reprinted covers or supplements with bin Laden’s message. Blame and responsibility for the death of the wartime leader had been focused almost exclusively on bin Laden and al Qaeda. In a period of world unrest, continued bombings in Iraq and growing terrorist attacks in Spain, Qatar, and across Africa, most Americans could still not see past bin Laden’s near-mythical status.

But the more the media pushed the bin Laden angle, the more those investigating the murder began to suspect otherwise.



Stuck in the middle of those two groups – the media and investigators – were Bob Attwood and Sarah Angelou at the *Washington Post*. At 7.30am the two wordlessly left Arthur Robinson’s office and took the short cab ride to Old Ebbitt’s Grill, which had just opened for breakfast. So close to the Whitehouse, Old Ebbitt’s had been a popular haunt of politicians and media for more than a century and of Attwood for more than two decades. Though busy, it was oddly quiet this morning.

The waitress showed them to a spare table – tempting as the Oyster Bar was, it was too early to be open. She returned a few minutes later and, bleary eyed for most morning shifts but especially stretched on this day, mistakenly gave Attwood the long black and Angelou the green tea. It was only after they swapped drinks that the two broached conversation.

The meeting with Robinson had been tense, the editor unapologetic, indeed mostly unresponsive about his killing of Angelou’s scoop. The difference, as he saw it, had been a matter of minutes not of principle. A quick decision for largely egotistical reasons would not balance for him with the fear of an error to surpass the *New York Post* and *Chicago Tribune* combined.

Attwood started: “He’s not a reporter, Sarah, his news sense is in his ass.”

“I’m surprised there’s room up there for anything,” Angelou replied, her tone more caustic than the hot black coffee she sipped without flinching. Attwood, who had taken a barrage of criticism for the spontaneous plane trip, could only smile.

Robinson, though angry, could not deny that he was printing stories from two reporters at the top of their profession. They had been forthcoming about how they uncovered the President’s death, but the two had closed ranks about their plans for all but the most reactive of future stories. Any leads or contacts they had were being as hidden from their editor as if he were a rival reporter or a federal judge.

Angelou had respected her senior colleague since she was a teenager and political news had first taken her interest. That respect had only been mutual for a few hours, but once Attwood gave of his trust he was committed to it. As the eggs, bacon, sausages and sides were delivered – they had both ordered the ‘All American Breakfast’, saving the waitress from having to make another guess – Attwood began the conversation they were both waiting for.

“We had a great story,” he began, “and you did great.”

When Attwood first had a chance to analyse the events of the evening – after the stories were filed and the news presses rolling – he had felt aggrieved. Had Angelou come to him instead of calling perhaps he could have convinced Robinson to run the exclusive. But on closer analysis he realised she had no choice. Time was critical, and in fact she had both the courage and news sense to run with the story.



Attwood paused to start his breakfast before continuing. “That shit happens, but I know you’re a good enough journalist to use that energy for motivation. And there are better stories out there, stories we can find and break without worrying that the Secretary of State is about to tell CNN.”

“Oh, I’m there. But Arthur sure isn’t.”

“Arthur may not think we’re the flavour of the month, but if we get some hard evidence even he would have to agree to run with it.”

“Fair enough.” Even if Angelou had had the energy to argue with him, she was certainly not going to now that he was being supportive.

“So now we need to develop a strategy. I’ve got more guys in more places owe me favours in this city than I could ever hope to use. Doesn’t mean they’ll tell me anything, but it helps.” Another mouthful of bacon disappeared. “You got anyone special stored up there?”

“Two years picking up your scraps? Hardly the ‘white pages’ for a contact book, but I’ve got a few.”

“Right now I’m not thinking ‘white pages’, I’m thinking ‘blue pages’.”

“Government?”

“Spot on. Know anybody good in the agencies who might know something?”

“Sure, maybe. But not as many as you.” Revealing sources is uncharted grounds. Even Angelou, the cabin boy seeking the captain’s advice, knew the map read ‘Monsters be here’.

“I’ve got a few that might help, but most of mine are guys I’ve been shepherding for 20 years. They’ve got a rank, and tight lips.” Something in common, perhaps? “So I figured you might know somebody junior enough to not care about letting something slip.”

“I know a guy who might know a few things, with some fairly loose lips.”

“Then let’s get cracking. First thing we want to know is how Tryst died. Then we follow the murderer’s path and hope we knock on his door, or cave, before anyone else.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

Breakfast complete, Attwood scanned the restaurant for familiar faces he might chat with. There were none, so he moved with Angelou to leave. Today’s edition might be on the newsstands, but to him it still felt like yesterday, and it was only getting longer.



Still, he was feeling generous to his new team mate: “Let me pay for breakfast.”

And Angelou was going to make the most of it: “Sure. I’m not Dutch.”



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Franco Martinez, though honoured to have been selected for the position, was still uncertain about his ability to control the situation. Thankfully his 2IC Grier was more capable at coordinating the various investigations underway. Indeed, he was being forced to do most of that task – Martinez had been hamstrung by the constant presence of Campbell and Weaver, a simmering duo requiring a permanent minder in Marshall.

It had been Marshall who had suggested the move from the Park Hyatt back to Campbell’s office shortly after 3am. Polite excuses were hard to create, but there were plenty of genuine reasons for the return: nothing productive was coming from their presence nine floors above a media and public crowd; suggesting sleep would not be welcomed by the new Commander-in-Chief; and moving straight to the White House would only serve to agitate Weaver.

Needless to say, a hoard of Secret Service agents had followed the group to the State Department, and they were adamantly not going to let any of them out of their sight. Martinez had instructed the Cabinet members to choose only agents they trusted – there was still suspicion of a rat in the ranks.

Campbell’s direct phone number, previously a well-guarded secret of the Administration, had now been distributed to any and all who had business contacting Martinez. Campbell was unperturbed, however – he was moving out of the office and up in the political hierarchy, and he was very pleased about it.

He would be more pleased if they had some lead on who was responsible for the death of his predecessor, both specifically and in a more general sense.

Watching bin Laden’s address for the first time in Room 927, Martinez had been fairly sure of its authenticity. Hampered as he had been, though, he had left the intricacies of voice recognition and textual analysis to the team he led in his previous incarnation at the Pentagon.

He had released confirmation that it was bin Laden almost immediately he received word. He felt it prudent to make it clear to the perpetrators that the good guys were on the ball, but he had his reservations about al Qaeda involvement. This was the current topic of conversation.

“As I indicated when it came on, al Qaeda and bin Laden take responsibility, and they’re not the only group out there. They were proud of what they did on 9/11, and they told us so. They weren’t involved in Bali, to the extent that Jemaah Islamiyah planned and made the hit, so they didn’t boast about it. Tonight they’re not boasting, they congratulating somebody else.”



Henry Love, pleased to see Martinez assuming the greatness thrust upon him, believed what he said. Marshall and Campbell were willing to acknowledge all possibilities – they were used to al Qaeda’s large scale attacks, this was not an easily placed signature, and a single political assassination both may or may not be their work. But Weaver was far less convinced of Martinez’s judgement.

“You mention these other groups, but when they pop up to claim it you shoot them down. You’re the damn expert. Don’t tell us who it wasn’t until you can tell us who it was.”

“Look, Secretary, the best we can do is investigate everything. This doesn’t have the hallmarks of an al Qaeda attack, and they’re denying responsibility.”

“Now, I’m not even sure of that.”

“He praised those who had done this,” Martinez responded, flicking through a file in front of him for a hand written transcript, “the Muslim brotherhood but not his own men. I suspect he’s guessing it was Islamic terrorists as much as we are.”

“He also said...give me that thing.” Weaver reached across the desk and grabbed the paper from in front of Martinez. “‘The dogs of America and Israel and their allies will die at our hands’. He even said it in English. ‘At our hands’.”

“But that’s not the same as taking responsibility for this.”

“If it’s not al Qaeda then who?”

“It could be any number of groups even...”

“...name one! You agree that al Qaeda is the only group able to organise a major attack against the US? That’s what you said at the hotel.”

“That’s what I said, but it doesn’t...”

“...all the major attacks. World Trade Centre in 1993, and September 11? Al Qaeda. African Embassies in 1998 and last month? Al Qaeda.”

Martinez retorted with a level tone. “And what about April 19, 1995?”

Weaver’s pause was enough to confirm Martinez’s growing opinion that the Secretary of Defence was a man who shot first and placed asking questions much lower on the priority list. The slightest hint of a grin on Campbell’s face let Martinez know that this opinion was not his alone, so he continued.

“May 19, 1995. Oklahoma City bombing. 168 dead and everyone blamed the Arabs. Who did it turn out to be? Two white guys with a grudge against the government.”



Many of Martinez's colleagues in terrorist intelligence kept pictures of the Trade Centre attacks to remind them of the importance of their duties. Those who commuted from the north-west had a daily reminder – the new section of the Pentagon and regrown lawn not quite matching the areas unaffected by the plane. Instead of those reminders, Martinez had posted the heart-wrenching Oklahoma snapshot of fire-fighter Chris Fields and the limp infant body in his arms.

In almost ten years since Oklahoma, no single image had captured man's inhumanity to man so sharply, but that was not its purpose above Martinez's workspace. It was there as a constant reminder that anybody was capable of this hatred and injustice, and that his was not a business of assumptions.

Weaver had no such reminder: "So now you think it was a local?"

"I'm saying we don't know. But I doubt it's al Qaeda, that it's even an Islamic terrorist group. We still don't know who the President was meeting. The investigation is less than eight hours old, and we can't rule out that this could be a lone gunman, maybe with terrorist links maybe not. What is more, 'maybe not' could even be the most likely outcome."

Marshall moved to once again silence a rant by Weaver. "If that's the case Frank, what's next?"

Martinez paused briefly, calming down before answering. "I believe it's traditional in a murder investigation to ask if the victim had any enemies."

He had meant the line to represent wry humour. Instead, it left silence in the Cabinet, partly due to a lack of sleep, and mostly due to the dreadful realisation that Edward Tryst's enemies were also their enemies, that his fate could be theirs.

Martinez was saved the awkward situation by the shrill interruption of the phone. He answered, but was brief before ending the call and looking up at the expectant group.

"That was Grier. They've located Partridge. He's in pretty poor shape, depressed, but ready to talk. We should know in the next hour who Tryst was meeting with when he died."



C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - F I V E

Wednesday had dawned bright and crisp, but the prevailing mood around Washington was dour. It was business as usual, though there could be little doubt the long night and its dramatic news would slow productivity across the nation's capital. Never before in its proud democratic history had America sworn in a new President on election night, but it had been tragedy that inspired such 'instant democracy'.

In the State Department, rooms were being filled with the morning's arrivals, the hum of computers and fluorescent lights signalling activity more than the muted conversation and solemn faces.

Campbell's personal assistant Elizabeth Hannigan had managed several hours' sleep in the early morning. Her somewhat aggrandising title made her sound more important than her duties imposed – Campbell had several assistants and she had few responsibilities higher than coffee making. Hannigan did not mind, however, as the absence of access to privileged documents gave her a tenure in government many of her fellow employees did not enjoy.

In her mid-30s and happily married to an insurance broker and with no intention of having children, Hannigan had spent eight years working at the State Department. She was no longer surprised by the sight of Cabinet members, unshaved, still focused on last night's meeting when she arrived in the morning.

Today, however, she had expected things to be different. Having met President Tryst and despite disagreeing with many of his policies, she was shocked at the terrible news. Even more shocking was the news that her boss, and not the Vice-President, was the new leader of the nation.

This is why she was surprised to find the Cabinet meeting taking place in the large office near her desk. Of course, there were countless reasons why they were still here, and Hannigan's surprise was short lived. She very quickly decided to turn it into opportunity.

Information could be sold, she knew from experience, and there were many willing to pay for reliable news from so high-up an anonymous source. Of course, she limited her leaks to small matters: nothing to jeopardise national security, and only to journalists she knew would print the information rather than sell it to terrorist groups.

And so Hannigan quietly sat behind her desk, turned her computer on, and ever-so-conveniently flicked the intercom switch that broadcast the Secretary of State's office into the headphone attached. The system had only failed her once, when the Secretary buzzed her to bring in coffee and had disconnected the link, but that was easily blamed on a technical glitch.

Having settled in, it took Hannigan a few moments to identify the voice speaking, modulated as it was through a phone to the room and again through the intercom to her. By the context of the conversation she assumed it was the man in charge of the



investigation, directing progress so far and clearly being brief about each of the points he was raising.

“We’ve got men positioned all over the city, following leads, stalking Metro passengers, they’ve grounded three flights and held twenty-six people for questioning so far today. But they have no idea who they’re looking for.

“So far, they’re not being helped by analysis of the foyer’s video. There’s nobody out of place, arrivals have invites or media credentials and there’s no sudden departures anytime between 7pm and 9.30.

“You said that Partridge knew who the President was meeting, which would help considerably. He’s being tight lipped about it in there, but I’ll keep you posted.

“Dr Andrews has the body, and is currently performing the autopsy to confirm time and method of death. Perhaps some physical evidence will come from that, because they don’t appear to be having much success in the suite.

“And finally, we’ve had word from Dr Mapp. Mrs Tryst is beginning to wake up. He expects her to be a little groggy, possibly still in shock, but maybe she can help us out.”

Campbell’s voice, so recognisable to Hannigan, cut into the monologue: “I was the person she called when she needed to talk to someone. I think I should be the person to chat with her when she wakes up.”

There was the sound of another person beginning to talk, but Campbell cut them off: “Before you even ask Lucas, I will do it alone.”

Hannigan had not been privy to the arguments of the preceding night, so she was surprised at the speedy interjection of Anderton Marshall’s voice: “Frank, you’re running this show. Where do you want us?”

And then another voice Hannigan didn’t know, this time in the room itself.

“We’re all tired, so those of us who can get some sleep probably should. Secretary, I mean Mr President, I’ll come with you to the Hyatt. You can talk to Mrs Tryst and I will have a more detailed conversation with Gerry.

“Anderton, you’re probably the best man here to guide us on the media campaign. Get your men together to plan something, and hopefully we’ll have enough information for a Presidential address at some point.

“The rest of you can do as you see fit, but I’d suggest at least some sleep, a shave and a change of clothes for all of us at some point this morning.”



“Well, if you don’t want my help Korte, that doesn’t matter.” It was Weaver now. “I’ve got something I need to organise. I’ll be at the Whitehouse if you want me.”

Hannigan could tell the conversation was drawing to an end. Not wanting to be caught with the headphone in, she disconnected the intercom channel and began to shuffle papers on her desk.

She missed the final comment from Grier, the unidentified man on the phone.

“Something’s just been thrust into my hands here Frank. Fingerprints from the murder weapon. I’ll fill you in on that when you get here.”



Neither Attwood nor Angelou had any plans for sleep, but after their breakfast meeting they both headed separately back to their homes. Ostensibly, this was for rest and refreshment of body and wardrobe, and no Editor or Chief-of-Staff could begrudge them that. But in reality, it was to prime their investigation angles away from the prying ears of an eager newsroom.

Angelou returned to her small but modern apartment on Swann St – near Dupont Circle she liked to tell her friends – to find the morning’s edition of the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Times* on her mat. This was how her day usually began – a quick perusal of the competition, which included other reporters at her own paper, then of Wonkette whose unique combination of politics, personalities, and porno-speak disguised her ability to find the real news others missed.

Inside, her apartment was sparsely furnished. Just inside the door, the kitchen, dining, and lounge areas were barely delineated, and though the television could be seen from each she usually abandoned the dining table for the couch. Locking the door behind her Angelou ignored all of the entrance area, pausing only to turn the CD player on as she undressed on her way to the ensuite shower.

Attwood’s extra years in the business allowed him more space in his residence, though his three bedroom house was aged and cluttered with dusty couches, unfolded clothes, and disorganised piles of books. Easing back into the single life after his wife left him had not been easy, and though he could have afforded a weekly cleaner – probably even a more modern house and car – he enjoyed reasserting his own personal authority over the house and garden he knew.

While a quick, hot shower would be welcome, Attwood satisfied himself by removing the tie he had been wearing for nearly 24 hours. There were calls to be made if he was to uncover anything about Tryst’s death, or the subsequent investigation. He and Angelou had agreed to update each other around noon, and he knew he was going to have to provide most of the contacts for the team. Robinson would have to be content with the other reporters and reworking of the wires for his website updates over the day.

Attwood checked his refrigerator, grabbing a half carton orange juice for sustenance as he mentally perused the contact book in his mind. With Angelou’s experience on the tenth floor, and the even more obvious fact that the President was dead, Attwood guessed, correctly, that something had gone wrong with Secret Service. There was no point trying to find any information that way.

But there were plenty involved with the investigation, plenty of competition between the agencies, and almost certainly plenty of noses out of joint because of Martinez’s appointment. It would require numerous phone calls to plenty of contacts, but if he could tap into one source of that sentiment then information, however off-the-record, would surely flow.



Angelou had no such ‘plenty’, so had time to enjoy the luxury of a long shower. For a small town Michigan girl the first year in DC had been a culture shock, but not one she couldn’t handle. Cementing her place at the *Post* and building a reputation for solid reporting and good news sense that would surpass names like Glass and Blair had been her focus. But it had not interfered with getting to know the night spots.

‘Club Daedalus’, ‘Dream’, and ‘Platinum’ had been regular haunts that first year, and she had made plenty of friends. Most were more than happy to hand over their business cards and credentials after a few drinks, while others were content to leave others on the kitchen bench when they left in the morning.

In this latter group was the man she was about to call. Age 28, 6’2”, dark hair and fairly good looking – at least according to the notes she had written on the back of his name, department, and business hours phone number. That was the number she was dialling now.

Attwood was not having any success with his initial calls, but he had not expected to. The easiest way to find a story was to call the people who wanted to talk. Sometimes the easiest way to find the truth was to call the people who didn’t want to talk.

Eventually someone would tell him something he didn’t know, a stepping stone to still further knowledge.

And eventually someone did.



Corker Tryst was no better when she awoke than she had been when Dr Mapp had initially sedated her. With the President's body removed for autopsy, Mapp felt safe moving her out of the way of the investigation and down to Room 927. But she remained a hysterical mess, and he had felt forced to sedate her once more. Campbell would not hear from the former First Lady, be informed of any first hand accounts of her finding the body, at least not today.

But his trip was not to be wasted. Partridge, who had disappeared during the evening and then re-emerged just over an hour ago, was being interrogated. After initially stonewalling, he had now made a demand: he would only speak if Campbell was present.

Grier, deciding this was more urgent than the gun forensics, had filled Martinez in on the request when he arrived from the State Department. As Campbell emerged from Room 927 Martinez was ready with a question, though he was uncertain if it was rhetorical or moot.

"Do you want to hear what Partridge has to say?"

Campbell merely nodded, allowing Martinez to lead him to the lift, and then down to the Mezzanine Level where Grier was watching over Partridge in a small meeting room. Martinez knocked, but did not wait for an answer before opening the door and walking in.

While the room's lighting and bright abstract art enlivened it more than an interrogation room, the atmosphere was less conducive to discussion than the meeting room intended.

Partridge was seated at the far side of the mid-sized table, but he rose to shake Campbell's hand as Martinez and Grier moved into the corner for a brief update.

"Frank, now he's refusing to speak at all with the tape recorder."

"That's all right Gerry. The main priority is finding out who Tryst was meeting that was so important he didn't even want the Secret Service knowing."

"Very well." Grier turned back to the man he had spent an hour trying to get information out of. "I'm going to leave you alone with Frank and Secretary Campbell, and I'm going to take my tape recorder with me."

Martinez moved to the table as Grier left, taking a seat to Campbell's left as the President and Partridge sat down. There had to be a reason Partridge wanted Campbell present, and Martinez was as keen to watch the new President's reaction to the information as he was to hear the information itself. He had a feeling something important was about to break.



Partridge, silent for so long, was now eager to speak. “Korte, I know you have an idea who the President was talking to. I’m happy to divulge, but feel free to stop me at any time.” If Campbell did have an idea, he wasn’t showing it and was remaining tight-lipped. Martinez was prompted to ask the obvious question.

“Who did Edward Tryst meet with after 7.15pm? Who was ‘that’s him Sir, we better leave you alone’?”

“Wait a moment. You think he met with someone in the suite?”

“Are you saying he didn’t?”

“Of course he didn’t. What made you think that he did?”

“Well, if he didn’t have someone come meet him, why send the Service Agents away? And if he didn’t have a meeting, why have you been silent for so long?”

“Tryst wasn’t meeting anyone. He had a phone conversation.”

Martinez could not help the look of disbelief. But what shocked him more was the sudden and deliberate shifting of weight by Campbell on his right. Martinez could sense discomfort; perhaps Campbell did have an idea of what had taken place after all. Would he censure the Chief of Staff?

The possibility of censure was also felt by Partridge, who glanced at Campbell before continuing. “A phone conversation with Walter Hyde.”

Martinez recognised the name but could not immediately place it. The look of dire resignation to the truth on Campbell’s face made it clear that this was not a name that should be recognisable, or at least linked to the Administration.

Close observers of politics, of all politics not just the two parties expected to contest the election, would have recognised the name immediately. At the Green Party’s National Convention in June the newly ticketed Edgar Morine had made the dramatic announcement that, for the first time, his Party would be contesting all 50 states. The cheer he had received was at least partly attributable to the stern looking man at the back of the stage: Walter Hyde.

Campbell, sensing Partridge’s unwillingness to disclose any more information, decided to fill Martinez in. If this was to prove important in the murder investigation, now would be the time to reveal the information, and besides, any man who had the sense to argue with Lucas Weaver could be trusted.



“Late last year, after the bounce in the polls from Saddam’s capture dissipated, it became increasingly clear this was going to be an election we were going to lose. And we were going to lose badly. If things in Iraq turned around, if oil prices didn’t rocket to record highs, we may have been in with a shot. But of course they didn’t and we weren’t expecting them to.”

An investigator, Martinez was more than happy to sit through a story when he understood its purpose. But he had suddenly realised he could place Walter Hyde in the political spectrum, and his association with President Tryst didn’t seem to be making any sense.

“Is Hyde who I think he is?”

Campbell answered. “Hyde is a major power broker for the Green Party at a national level. Fairly much a stereotypical baby boomer – college in the ‘60s, dedicated activist, I have a feeling he even did some time for refusing to accept his drafting after graduation. Those ‘leanings’, for want of a better term, stayed with him, but through the ‘70s and ‘80s he lived a sort of dichotomy. Green Party activist by night, but an increasingly successful and wealthy businessman by day.

“Now don’t get me wrong. He had a passion and conviction for his cause. He made plenty when greed was good, but he pumped a lot of that into the Party. It was only when things went bad that he really faced a problem.

“By that stage, late ‘80s, he was regarded at that end of politics as the sort of realist who could take the party to a higher level. He didn’t want to lose that support or that goal, but to stay afloat financially he had to make some shifty dealings.”

Martinez knew how much information could be gathered on a suspected terrorist. He knew it shouldn’t shock him that those processes could track political rivals, but it did. Campbell continued.

“Hyde and some of his associates, including others at the top echelon of the Green Party, were being investigated for a several, large, shady deals. Fraud, tax evasion, possibly even connections to some underworld organisations. Apparently the Feds were ready to pounce in 2000, but the Whitehouse asked them to wait. Clinton and the Democrats were concerned it would look politically motivated in a tight election year.

“When Tryst assumed office it was still on hold, and we thought it wise to leave it that way. Leave it, at least, until we could make use of it.”

“And late last year, the time came when you could make use of it?”

“That’s right. A few meetings here and there, some money changing hands so he knew we were serious. Actually, it took a lot less coercion than we expected.”

“He sold out?”



“Yes. Yes he did.”

Martinez had only known Campbell and Weaver outside of their public persona for a few hours, and this was his first opportunity to spend time with the one away from the other. In a room with Weaver, Campbell appeared logical and polite, a professional and ethical politician. Now it was becoming clear that he was merely the calculating side of an Administration that saw victory and power as more important than truth, honour, and justice for all.

The realisation left a bad taste in Martinez’s mouth. He was dedicated to fighting, through intelligence, America’s enemies, but what was he defending? A question for another day, he told himself, a question for when this investigation was over and the killer brought to justice. Right now, he continued to listen.

“Of course, the decision was easy for Hyde. Whether you believe he was a man of principles or a greedy man, and personally I think he was a combination of both, he had everything to lose. He was facing a lengthy jail sentence that would have destroyed him and the reputation of the Party he loved.

“So when we offered him financial support and a Presidential Pardon for him and his friends, he was always going to accept it.”

“Korte, I’m sorry to interrupt again, but I can’t see what your Administration had to gain from this? What did Hyde bring to the table?”

Campbell’s response took Martinez by surprise: “Voters.”

“Voters? But not for the Republicans. You were giving him money to take votes away from you, it makes no sense.” Martinez emphasised the last three words, but Campbell had spent several weeks mapping out this plan and months putting it into operation, so he knew that it made perfect sense. And it had been executed exactly as planned.

“We weren’t funnelling votes away from us, Frank, we were taking them off Patrick Russell, off the Democrats. For every five registered voters who turn Green, you can be sure at least four were originally planning to vote Democrat.

“And don’t forget, it’s a lot cheaper convincing stoned college students and unemployed blacks to go and vote than it is to get the Country Clubs to reschedule a golf day. That works to our disadvantage, unless those potheads vote Green.”

“Isn’t this a misuse of the donations you received?”

“Not at all.” Campbell almost chuckled. “They give to the GOP because they want the GOP to win. We made sure the Greens got those votes and not the Democrats. So when the Greens had this ‘groundswell of support’, or whatever the hell Morine told them had



happened, and raised all this money for ads and appearances, they were piece by piece stripping away the Democrats' support base. The more Morine told the public to hate Tryst, to hate me, the closer we moved to a second term.

“It was risky, yes, but when those numbers came in last night it was clear: it had worked. The Greens were never a chance, Hyde knew that, but with enough support they could put in quite a showing, enough to win us the election.”

Partridge, silent throughout the Campbell explanation he had been pivotal in executing, decided to draw attention back to the previous night.

“The first numbers were coming in by a quarter after seven. Hyde had done his job, and he was calling in his favours. Sure, sending the agents down ten floors was being overly paranoid, but he was more concerned with this information spreading too far than he was about an assassination threat that hadn't been made.”

Martinez wanted to ask how much it had cost the Tryst administration to whore the Presidency. Instead, he asked simply how much money had been transferred to Hyde, obviously on the condition of anonymity.

Campbell answered. “Over nine months, a little over \$100 million.”

Again, Martinez was alarmed, and again he vowed not to let it affect the investigation he had been called in to oversee.

“Gentlemen, it appears we have a new lead. You gave \$100 million in campaign slush funds to corrupt the entire electoral process. If anyone found out about this there would be motive galore, and murder is a far better revenge than justice when the man being targeted can pardon all involved with the stroke of a pen.

“I sincerely doubt the murderer was a terrorist. Frankly, your political processes have given motive to a disgruntled Democrat robbed of righteous success, to a Green supporter who discovers his Party is a political puppet of his enemy, even a Republican who believes you have simply gone too far.

“Now we cannot know if these, decisions shall we say, led directly to the President's death, but if word has been passed around then there are 250 million Americans with good reason to shoot Tryst and his supporters.

“Only one needed opportunity. So, who else knows about this?”

Campbell was stunned by the rebuke. He had done too much for his party to deserve such an attack for his success. But he had no choice but to accept it. “Stephen Penny, Secretary of the Treasury, helped oversee the movement of funds. But only Anderton and Weaver knew the details.”



“Then we better get them on the phone and fill them in. If Hyde was calling the Presidential Suite, who knows what else he might have been planning.”

Marshall, at home with his wife, would be easy to track down.

But Weaver was neither at home nor at his office.

Instead, he was currently pacing the corridors of the Whitehouse with National Security Adviser Sharon Hedgerosa, and Captain Anthony Sheppardton of the United States Marine Corp. They were positioning a detachment of Marines assigned solely to the protection of their new Commander-in-Chief.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

As noon approached Attwood took a break from his phone calls to examine his refrigerator for lunch. He had enjoyed the breakfast at Old Ebbitt's Grill, but knew from experience he shouldn't, couldn't, put too much more fatty meat into his ageing system. A selection of cheeses, of which he was well stocked as a matter of habit, would have to do for today.

The phone rang. Given the mostly unresponsive group he talked with, or more precisely talked at, this morning, he was not surprised to find it was Angelou and not a message being returned.

His junior partner was still sounding enthusiastic about the task at hand. "Anybody talked to you yet Bob?"

Her mood gave spirit to the senior reporter. "I can't say I've had much success this morning in terms of people talking. People not talking can provide information, but nothing Robinson will print."

"So nothing?" She didn't sound disappointed.

"I didn't say that. In fact, I'm working a good lead as we speak, though I'm not sure how much they know."

Angelou knew she should follow this line of conversation, but she was not prepared to wait for a reciprocal question: "I know cause of death."

Attwood was undecided whether he should congratulate her supportively, or treat this information as the first of many steps toward a major breakthrough. He chose the latter: "Fill me in."

Angelou was unperturbed by his response. "He was shot. Once, in the head, from pretty close range judging by the damage. If the autopsy had been completed, my source doesn't know about it so this isn't confirmed."

"Excellent discovery." A compliment. "But how good is the source?" A qualifier.

"Ryan is mid-level over at Justice," she replied. It seemed 'dark hair, fairly good-looking' had a name. "He's doing some minor communications thing as part of this all, but the news of how Tryst died isn't exactly secretive over there. That's why it was easy to get it out of him."

"Good source, but even after last night's efforts Robinson will never run it without corroboration."

"Well, that's hardly my problem is it?" she said, half jokingly. "I've done my job Bob, now it's your turn."



Attwood chuckled supportively. "I think that can be done."

"Then I'll head in and keep Robinson off your tail. Call me when you can."

Attwood ended the call by depressing the phone cradle's button, immediately releasing it to pick up the line again. A question is always easier to ask if you already know the answer.

He was calling back Earl Walker at the FBI. Earl wasn't directly involved in the investigation, but Attwood had known him since he was a DC Field Agent and knew he would be keeping himself in the loop.

The phone was answered: "Walker."

"Earl, it's Bob again."

"Bob I told you..."

"...I know, you couldn't even tell me something even if you did know something, which you probably don't."

"That's right."

"But I have one question about the murder weapon."

"You're not going to get anything."

"Maybe not. I just want to know if the gun was found in the suite."

"Bob, we go way back and you know I don't mind you calling me. But even if I knew where the gun was found, and I don't, I couldn't tell you."

"Very well Earl, I won't push it. Thanks for your time."

Attwood grinned as he hung up the phone.

It was a gun then. Two sources. Confirmation. Not the world's greatest scoop, but a *Washington Post* exclusive all the same.

In at the office, Robinson would be pleased, and that was where Attwood decided he needed to head.

But first, a hot shower he felt he had more than earned.



Korte Campbell had walked the corridors of the Whitehouse countless times as Secretary of State. But this was his first time as President, and the West Wing was a different place. The hallowed corridors of power, once filled with the power of uninterrupted authority, an energy bequeathed by a line of Presidents leading a superpower, had been soiled by an unexpected invasion of Marines.

Campbell's anger at Weaver, the only man who could and would order such a deployment, increased with every soldier he passed. A lawyer-cum-Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, he was uncertain how to respond to the soldiers saluting, choosing to ignore their presence and leaving a line of men-at-attention as he and Martinez passed.

Storming into the Oval Office he would not have been surprised to find Weaver seated behind the desk. Instead, he found the Secretary of Defence conversing with National Security Adviser Sharon Hedgerosa and Anderton Marshall.

Marshall seemed as irritated by the extra security measures as he was. "I was just telling Lucas that deploying Marines was being too paranoid."

Clearly he had, because Lucas merely snorted contemptuously at the remark without offering a response. Campbell chose to ignore the reaction.

The grand desk was strangely unpopulated at the end of the room – a sudden, solemn, and saddening reminder of the tragedy from the previous evening. The late-morning light fell on it, giving it an almost untouchable aura, as if approaching it would be an irreverent action to the memory of the man who should be there. But Tryst was not there, and Campbell had been propelled upwards as his replacement. The chair behind the desk beckoned to its new owner – perhaps it alone knew that occupation in this office was always temporary.

As Campbell sat he was overcome with the weight of Office, in a manner all previous occupants must have felt when they first sat behind the desk in this most famous of political residences. He knew power, and though wisdom is oft the strange bedfellow of power, he felt that too.

"Lucas, I thank you for your concern. Given that the man in charge of the investigation now believes there is no terrorist threat on myself or the Office, I request that you order these men be better served on the perimeter of the building and not inside its halls."

Weaver glanced at Martinez, with a tinge of contempt that perhaps indicated a deeper feeling of having been usurped. But he said nothing.

Martinez had been present while Campbell informed Weaver and Marshall of Walter Hyde's phone call. He suspected, correctly, this would be on Campbell's mind.

"At present, evidence suggests this was the work of a single individual. The motives are unclear, but it could be domestic, perhaps related to our agreement with Mr Hyde."



Martinez was glad Henry Love was not present. He had been invited to lead the investigation as a trusted friend of Cabinet, but now he had been forced to choose between this friendship and his duty to find the killer. He chose the latter.

“Frankly gentlemen, the position of America as a hated colonial force was enough motivation for political revenge.” As the only person still standing, he began to pace, reminding Hedgerosa of a school teacher but the others of the Vice-President who had chosen to pace a similar office to deliver his horrid news.

Thankfully Martinez was lecturing them on morality, not providing an example of vice. “If word of this, well, this corruption spread...” – he let the silence hang for a moment. “I’m not saying any person here passed this information on. Hyde may have known Tryst would be alone when he called, he could have organised this.

“And I am not insensitive to the politics of the situation, but I should let you know that Hyde is being investigated and may be questioned.” Pre-empting a response, Martinez raised his voice. “The same instructions have been given in regards to other political rivals, so Hyde is not identified as being special and, to hit my next point, because we still have no real evidence linking anybody with the murder.”

He was interrupted by Campbell before that next point could be made. “You do realise we still intend to pardon Hyde, and his associates?”

Martinez was stunned, stopping in his tracks and turning to face the man behind the desk. But he had no opportunity to verbalise his shock.

“Frank, you said yourself this information could bring down the administration. Hyde corrupted his soul, and should we renege on our agreement he would have nothing to lose by taking what he knows to the public.”

“And if it was implicit in the assassination? You surely cannot pardon him that, and yet again he would nothing to lose by hanging you all.” Martinez paused, not for intentional effect but more to order the words in his next statement. “I hope you realise what a web of lies, of deceit that you have all created for yourself?”

Weaver, standing to make himself heard, had an answer. “Hey, if that Green bastard had something to do with this mess, justice would be served. But I would see to it that justice would be silently done. He would have no chance of making this agreement known.”

There was no doubting the sinister intent in that promise.

“Very well,” Martinez continued, “then we must hope that those aware of your so-called agreement value keeping the secret.” There was little hiding his contempt, try as he might.



But he had some further information that he knew the assembled group would be keen to know about. “We have information from what we believe is the murder weapon.”

There was a subtle, collective, drawing of breath, those assembled waiting for the information and certainly not daring to interrupt.

“The gun, a Soviet-made TT-33 pistol, was found in the bathroom of the suite, an easy toss from where Tryst was shot. We found two clear fingerprints on the gun, and a third partial that matches neither.”

The information, the first physical evidence of the investigation, was welcome news. Hedgerosa’s tenure as Security Adviser had, by all accounts, weakened that role after successive advisers had raised its importance to the highest tier of Cabinet. She now wanted to remind the men that she was here.

“Have the prints been matched to anybody?”

“Not yet. Obviously they’re being checked against pretty-well every database we have, which will take some time. But if the people who touched that gun ever went to prison, caught a plane, or sat for the Bar in Alabama, eventually they’ll be caught.”

This was reassuring news for Campbell, Weaver and Marshall – a strength of conviction in their lead investigator that was not directed at their own political decisions.

“One more thing. I believe we should remind the public baying for justice and the perpetrator fleeing from it that we are working hard. Daily updates, with real information where possible, would help our cause.”

Marshall agreed. “I don’t think the media will argue. Frank, you can decide what needs to be said. Run with it today and tomorrow. Friday night we arrange a Presidential address to the nation.”

And Campbell concurred: “See that it is done.”



Angelou was just completing a draft of the story when Attwood arrived. It was immediately obvious to both that the other was greatly more refreshed than when they had eaten breakfast together; it was unclear how much was due to a change of clothes and how much was due to the thrill of the story.

Attwood read over Angelou's draft. It was good, crisp copy, and gave the story without clouding the issue of anonymous sources. He made several mental revisions as he pulled up a chair at her workstation, but they would be easy enough to make when they revised the story to include confirmation of the weapon used.

No sooner had he typed those in than he was interrupted – Robinson had decided to grace the newsroom floor with his presence.

“Nice of you to make it in this afternoon, Robert. I know we're only covering the most important political story of the decade, so I'm glad you didn't interrupt your morning nap.”

Wanting so very much to tell his boss to ‘shove it’, Attwood opted instead for the smug response: “We've uncovered how Tryst died. Exclusive.” The last word required no emphasis, but he gave it one and was justly rewarded by Robinson's response.

“Really. Run three copies, then you two meet me in my office.”

Robinson didn't like to spend too much time chatting with the journalists on the floor. He ran a very ‘us-and-them’ newsroom, and he didn't mind ‘them’ thinking he was an arrogant prick so long as they showed him the respect he was due.

Unwillingly or not, the speed with which Angelou ran off the copies and moved across the newsroom to his office was a sign of that respect.

Robinson cast his eye over the story. From a newspaper sales perspective, he liked what he saw. From a lawsuit prevention perspective, he had some questions.

“Who's the source?”

If he wanted a name, and he probably did, he wasn't going to get it without a fight.

Angelou answered. “Mid-level. Justice Department. Reliable.”

“Involved with the investigation?”

“Not directly, but close enough to know.”

Attwood could tell Robinson wasn't convinced. “It has been confirmed, Arthur, by a much higher source.”



“Who is not only anonymous, neither of you mention him in the story.” Robinson was annoyed, but not to the point of killing the story. “But he did confirm it? Actually confirmed it, you didn’t just count to ten with him on the other end of the line?”

“He didn’t deny it, and he wanted to.” Attwood knew it was a weak argument, and that Robinson would like another confirmation.

Angelou had the same thought, and a solution. “Don’t forget, gentlemen, that I’m the only person outside of the investigation who saw the body.”

“And I told you last night, you didn’t see anything we can run.”

“But I saw enough to say these, independent, reports make sense. Single gunshot wound to the head while seated.”

Robinson paused, glancing once more over the copy in front of him. “Very well, we run with this as is, Front Page. Two by-lines?”

Angelou knew, as the junior reporter, this was not her question to answer. She tried to make eye contact with Attwood, but he was already responding.

“Of course two by-lines. We’re doing this together.”

Angelou was relieved, as she and Attwood both rose and made for the door. But Robinson had one more surprise for them.

“Maybe I should have sent one of you along to this press conference at the Whitehouse.”

The two reporters stopped in their tracks. Attwood turned, with a look of incredulity on his face that Robinson could not miss.

“Well, neither of you were here,” he tried to justify. “You’re not the only political reporters I have, and we needed someone there right away. The guy heading up the investigation, Martinez, makes a comment at 2pm sharp.”

Attwood checked his watch. 1.55pm. He swore under his breath.

Robinson was not concerned with which journalist went where, as long as the *Post* had the stories. “Let’s just hope they don’t rain on your parade again guys, and tell the world about the gun.”

“Yeah,” replied Attwood. “Let’s.”



At the *Post*, Attwood ceased to be calm. His cry of ‘Motherfucker’ was not censored by Angelou or Robinson, both of whom felt much the same. Another hard won story, of significant national relevance, had been taken from them.

It wasn’t so much the contacts they had wasted time calling, it was wasting those contacts that had talked. People will only tell the media so much – they had tapped into a finite supply of information for no reason.

Martinez was continuing, however, and Attwood and Angelou knew they must re-focus. Every piece of information, even if it was public record, could be used as a stepping-stone to new information, a possible new exclusive.

“...details on the evidence, including that murder weapon, when they come to hand. Now are there any questions?”

There was a flurry of hands, many questions, most obvious and with obvious responses.

“How is the First Lady?”

“She’s obviously very shaken by these events, but is being cared for at the moment.”

“Do you believe bin Laden was responsible?”

“We are currently investigating all leads.”

“Is President Campbell being kept informed of all developments?”

“The new President and I have a strong working relationship, and a commitment to justice.”

But Attwood sensed something was happening with the final question of the conference, and not only because it was posed by Marigold Lewis at the *LA Times*.

“Mr Martinez. Why is the investigation tracking important representatives of the other political parties, particularly the Democrats and Greens?”

It was an assumptive question, difficult to deny, seeking an official comment that could be used in a story that had no official confirmation. Martinez’s answer further shook up Attwood.

“We are investigating all leads and possible suspects as a matter of course,” he said. “Don’t read anything into it.”

And then he turned and left the stage.

Attwood was fired up. “She’s onto something, dammit, she’s onto something big.”



Angelou was ready to rally to his call, but Robinson was more blunt: “If she is, then you two better find out what the hell it is. Or better still, find me something better.”

In less than half an hour Attwood and Angelou had lost an Exclusive and the praise of their Editor. And there were only a few short hours to deadline in which to find and confirm whatever news Lewis was working on.

Angelou was enthused about lurching once more into the breach.

Attwood suddenly felt the tiredness of a long election campaign and an election night that had already stretched beyond the 20 hour mark.

It was only getting longer.



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COLUMN ONE

Exclusive**ASSASSINATION:
CORRUPTION LINK****Why did the Republicans give
millions to a rival party?**BY MARIGOLD LEWIS
Times Staff Reporter

The Republicans funnelled \$120 million to the Green party during the election campaign.

And Green party members are being investigated for links to the President's murder, the *LA Times* has learned.

President Tryst ordered the cash transfers, which took place over nine months, in an effort to move voters away from the Democrats.

The Green party averaged 22% of the vote in Tuesday's election, with a strong showing in each State won by the Republicans.

On Tuesday night, Green party nominee Edgar Morine said this showing was the result of "a large groundswell of support".

"This support raised more than \$100 million to finance our campaign and spread the message of a true democracy," he said on Tuesday.

But sources close to President Tryst's re-election campaign have revealed much of that money had been raised for a Republican slush fund and transferred to the Greens in secret.



Senior members of the Green party are understood to have been involved with the transfers.

These members, who oversaw the Greens anti-Tryst election campaign, are being investigated for links to President Tryst's assassination on Tuesday night.

When questioned by the LA Times yesterday, Mr Morine said he had no knowledge that such transfers had taken place.

"But I was not directly in control of campaign finances. You would have to speak with Walter Hyde," he said.

"Any attempts to link our party to the assassination will be wasted.

"What happened on Tuesday night was an affront to democracy, and a heinous deed.

"That goes against every tenet the Green party stands for."

Agent Franco Martinez, the FBI agent leading the joint investigation, said yesterday his team had not drawn the same conclusions.

When asked specifically about investigating Green party members for links, Mr Martinez did not deny it was being done.

"We are investigating all leads and possible suspects as a matter of course," he said.

It is understood Tryst's Cabinet, including former Vice-President Watson and the new President Campbell, were aware of the money transfer to the Greens.

No comment was received on their possible association with those who may have been responsible for Tryst's murder.



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NEW YORK, THURSDAY NOVEMBER 4, 2004

ONE DOLLAR

NY TIMES EXCLUSIVE

KILLED PRESIDENT BOUGHT ELECTION

\$100m sent to Green Party

By Walter Raleigh and Peter Martins

The Republicans bought the Presidential election with \$100 million of slush money transferred to the Green Party, sources have informed the New York Times.

The well-financed Green campaign drew crucial votes away from the Democrats, handing President Tryst the election just hours before he was murdered.

There were no immediately apparent links to his death.

But the reliable source, speaking on the condition of anonymity, has exposed the internal corruption of the previous administration.

"President Tryst decided the only way to win the election was to undermine support for [Democrat Candidate] Patrick Russell," the anonymous source said.

"A well-financed Green campaign, and I mean really well-financed, could achieve that.

"And it did."

Edgar Morine, the Green party Presidential nominee, did not return *New York Times*' phone calls yesterday.



But it is understood the arrangements were made not by Mr Morine, but by his campaign chief Walter Hyde.

The transfers were not a re-election committee decision, but were made with the full knowledge of Cabinet.

This means many Republicans, including President Tryst's replacement former Secretary of State Korte Campbell, knew about the transfers.



“This morning you have been shamed, you have disgraced yourself and I have no hesitation in saying you have disgraced and disappointed me.”

Robinson paused for effect, as though that last remark were the most brutal and cutting of all. But when there was no objection to his criticism, he was forced to prompt the two journalists for a response.

“Are you going to give me anything new today?”

Attwood, who had not responded simply because he didn't feel Robinson was worth it, answered now, feeling the need to justify the effort he had put in their stories. He didn't like being beaten either, and he wanted to show his dedication to the story.

“Firstly, Arthur these are anonymous sources. Is there veracity? Perhaps, and we need to find out who that source is. There's a reason they haven't talked to us, and we must circumvent that...”

But Robinson had heard it all before. “So, in other words, you've got shit to go on and no hope of it changing?”

This time it actually was a question, but again Attwood decided he had better things to do with his time. There was no point trying to reason with the angry Editor, so he simply rose from his chair and headed out the office door.

Angelou, clearly taking sides, rose to follow, but Robinson interrupted her.

“Sarah, I have some advice for you.” She sat, and he continued. “Robert is a good journalist, one of the best, but you should make no mistake that he is only interested in benefiting the career of one person – himself.

“Work with him, learn from him by all means, but don't ever make the mistake of thinking you are in league with him. In time you will become the most respected journalist on this paper and therefore in Washington and this nation.

“This will not happen if, like him, you decide you supersede all authority. Even I have to answer to someone, and I trust you are better than that.” Robinson probably meant every word of what he was saying, but flattery is the last resort of the scoundrel.

“Oh I know I'm better than that,” retorted Angelou, rising now and leaning forward, a hand on each of the papers that had embarrassed her today and looking into the eyes of her editor. She had a wisdom and power beyond her few years in the profession, and enough focus to funnel this strength into two words:

“Fuck you.”



The atmosphere was just as tense in the Oval Office, where Campbell and Martinez had summonsed Weaver and Marshall. But Martinez was in control of the conversation, and he was ensuring the mood was less antagonistic than the *Post* newsroom. Indeed, with the four men seated on couches, it was almost a friendly conversation.

“Quite clearly gentlemen, somebody in your inner circle decided on betrayal. I’m here to investigate a murder, but as long as there is a possible link I think it is necessary for me to track down who this was.”

The others obviously felt the same, for none objected.

“Very well, then we need to start with everyone who knew about these transfers.”

Weaver, as could perhaps be expected, broke the friendly mood: “We went through this yesterday, Frank. Outside of Cabinet, only Partridge knew.”

“Then I have to ask – can he be trusted?”

Campbell, who had witnessed Partridge’s loyalty in the meeting room at the Hyatt, was convinced. “I do not doubt that he can be as trusted as any here, and while I doubt he or any of us called the *Times* it appears someone had loose enough lips to tell someone who couldn’t be trusted.”

Marshall interjected with his theory. “It seems coincidental that we were discussing this at length yesterday and now it’s in the morning papers. Could we have been overheard?”

It was a question meant to give pause, and it had the desired result. Each man present gave thought to yesterday’s conversation, with particular emphasis on who was present.

It was Campbell who had the first suggestion, and he glared directly at Weaver to announce it. The friendly mood had definitely ceased.

“The marines you ordered stand watch! We are in here discussing secrets we don’t even want the Secret Service to know about, and you went and invited in a group of men with no clearance at all.”

Weaver, a man true to the uniform no matter what, took umbrage at that remark. “You arrogant fuck, Korte. I never thought I’d see the day when the President showed such disrespect to the Services. ‘No clearance’? They wear the uniform with pride, and now you accuse them of, of what? Of whoring national secrets.”

“Lucas, do you think you could possibly use your brain for a moment this week? We sent them to fight a horrid war in the desert where they were blown up by the people they were fighting to protect. Should we really be that surprised if one of them decided to sell this information so he could resign his commission?”



“We would be very surprised indeed. But I can’t expect a coward like you to understand passion, dedication, loyalty, and Semper Fi.”

“You dare to lecture me about loyalty. You of all people should never have the audacity to use that word in my presence.”

“You cannot accept the past, can you Korte? That was twenty years ago and still you hold against me a wrong I never did.”

At the very mention of past wrongs, Marshall’s ears were piqued. But he would be disappointed as the argument once more degenerated.

“Lucas, you do me wrong, and I have no choice but to assume you do it intentionally.”

“It’s the least you deserve.”

“You don’t deny it then?”

“Now you’re trying to pin it on me.”

“I wouldn’t put it past you, you narrow minded fuck.”

“And I wouldn’t put it past you, Mr President.”

Campbell snorted at the suggestion, but Weaver continued. “That’s right – you get everyone thinking about how bad the last President was, so they’ll spend the next 50 years talking about how good you were.”

“You’re out of your fucking mind.”

“Well, what a bonus for your treachery, having everybody pin the blame on me.”

“Lucas, I’m going to ask you once to shut the fuck up or get the fuck out. Which will it be?”

“The sins of the father shall be revisited on the son, Korte. If it was you, in some giant act of stupidity I cannot fathom and yet cannot say is beyond you, then surely now you realise we are in this together.”

“Get out of my office Lucas. We have work to do.”

“Then you haven’t realised we’re a team. I’ll be in my office.” Weaver rose, and marched out of the office with a dignity that seemed unjustified.



Campbell moved his eyes from the closing door back to Marshall and Maritnez, still seated silently on the couch. “If anyone in Cabinet went to the Press with this, it would be him.”

But the others were not so sure.

And they were still no closer to finding the President’s assassin.



CHAPTER 11

As lunch time Thursday approached even CNN, constant companion to those in the *Washington Post* newsroom, began to grow weary of the assassination story. Tryst had been dead 64 hours – there was no resolution to the story and, perhaps even worse for the news media, no second wave of terrorist attacks.

Footage of Campbell’s announcement and inauguration had been replaced by the condolences of leaders around the world. Foremost of these had been the leaders of Tryst’s ‘Coalition of the Willing’: Mark Latham, who had been elected over John Howard as Australia’s Prime Minister; and Jack Straw, who had beaten John Prescott in a ballot for the British Prime Ministership after Tony Blair’s October resignation. The Iraq War had certainly taken its political toll.

Covering Tryst’s assassination had taken its toll as well, at least on Attwood and Angelou. They had decided to leave CNN well enough alone momentarily while they went for lunch. Nothing as renowned as Old Ebbitt’s, but this deli was more private as well.

Angelou had worked hard to add value to a partnership with a far senior and more experienced partner. She was not going to wait to be asked a question that, again, would probably not come. She could barely wait until their sandwiches had arrived to begin.

“I have more information about the gun. Good to know, but nothing we can hang a story on.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Attwood answered, through a mouthful of chicken-avocado but supportively, impressed at how much high level information she had uncovered. “Every stepping stone is important.”

“There were three fingerprints on the gun, three different people. But it doesn’t appear any matches have shown up as yet.”

“Interesting, though of course there are several reasons for that. They could be classified, foreigners, or just people who never got arrested before.”

“Actually, it’s unlikely they’re foreigners. Unless they’re European, or Australian, they’d be fingerprinted on arrival. But like I said – they haven’t shown up as yet, and may still be matched.”

“Sounds like you’re discounting everything you located.”

“Better to be safe than sorry, that way when I find something great I can really tell Robinson to go fuck himself.”

Attwood grinned. Angelou hadn’t seen that smile all morning, and she had been looking for it.



“I don’t suppose you uncovered who our mystery source was, Bob?”

Attwood’s demeanour changed quickly: “‘Mystery’ about sums it up. This is a source damn near steeped in mythology, and the information may as well have come to those reporters in a dream.” He obviously wasn’t happy with what he had, or rather had not, been able to uncover. “This isn’t organised denial I’m running into everywhere, this is sheer disbelief that anything like they claimed took place could ever had happened.”

“So you think it’s untrue?”

“Worse. I think it’s so true that nobody outside of Cabinet knew about it. So where the fuck, sorry, where did this source come from? This isn’t Deep Throat, this is a valid and consensual love-in, and you and I clearly weren’t invited to participate.”

Had Angelou been the sort of lady that Attwood needed to censor himself around, she probably would have blushed at the imagery his last comment conjured up. But she was a professional.

“Then we have two options. Either we keep badgering and irritating our contacts in an effort to verify this story and vainly identified the source, or we run a banner headline discrediting the news and move onto something more important.”

Despite her intonation, it was not an easy decision to make. If this corruption story was true, and both present had good enough noses to believe it was, then discrediting it would go against the principles of the media brotherhood. But letting it run unchecked would assault their pride, and their paper’s profits. Theorists referred to this conundrum as the ‘Janus view of the media’ after the two-headed guard dog of mythology; realists call it a ‘pain in the ass’, and dealt with it as best they could, case by case.

For Attwood, in this case, that meant attacking the story run by the *LA Times* and *New York Times*. It would be an easy story to produce, and no anonymous sources would be required.

Angelou agreed. There was a source offering unsubstantiated information, and whoever that source was they weren’t talking with the *Washington Post* anyway. Better to piss them off than irk someone in the administration willing to go on the record.

With lunch complete, and Attwood once again paying the bill, Angelou began to look forward. “So where do we move from here?” she asked.

“The fingerprints are a good lead. My contacts around the traps won’t tell me anything, but I can probably use that friendship as a conduit to somebody actually checking fingerprints.”



“Excellent,” replied Angelou, with that enthusiastic tone she developed when she had news that proved her precocious talent. “Because I know a guy in fingerprints at the FBI – should make for a fairly speedy confirmation when we find something worth running.”

“Sounds great, and the good news is I doubt unresolved evidence will be on Martinez’s agenda this afternoon.” He checked his watch. It was shortly after 1pm, and he knew the Whitehouse Press Conference had been scheduled for four. “We should probably get back to the office so Robinson doesn’t send someone else with our media passes.”



Martinez had had a real shit of morning. Waking up to the front page of the *New York Times* had been bad. Knowing that its far-flung allegations were fact had been even worse. But worst of all, he was now considered the public face of the new administration, and it was his responsibility to deflect the increasing attacks.

He had never been one to presuppose what took place at the highest levels of politics, what high level debates came before policy announcements. He'd never even seen an episode of *West Wing*. But surely what he was witnessing between Campbell and Weaver was unusual.

How was he supposed to react? He had no knowledge of what had caused the feud, and no authority to direct the decisions of the President and his Defence Secretary. But it was clear there was no sensible communication between them, and he was caught in the middle.

A statement of denial had been issued just prior to noon, and Martinez had spent the afternoon's press conference rephrasing the official denial almost as many times as the journalists had rephrased their questions. Having no new information to reveal, he had scheduled a late afternoon conference, and had spent more than an hour working with reporters to get nowhere. Now there were things he wanted to discuss with Gerry Grier away from the prying ears of Cabinet.

And so it was, shortly after 6pm, that he found himself back at the Pentagon, on home soil as it were, and safely inside a secure meeting room where he and Grier could both speak freely.

Grier went first. "I've just gotten off an important phone call with the guys trailing the fingerprints over at the FBI. They've just about given up on trying to find matches in and around the room – it's a popular hotel, there are just far too many.

"Also, they've hit an awkward point in matching any of the three persons who touched the gun on national databases."

"How so?" Martinez knew Grier would give him a straight answer, even though he himself would pick and choose what he transferred back to the disjointed Cabinet.

"As you know, fingerprint searches start with the highest priority criminals. It checks the FBI's Most Wanted, and basically spreads out through outstanding warrants, Interpol and so on down to more legitimate databases – registered lawyers, CIA agents, classified personnel."

"Where are we going with this Gerry?" It was not an accusation – Martinez just hated novels where protagonists detailed basic information for the benefit of readers they couldn't acknowledge.

"The FBI has run into classified prints. And they found a match."



“That’s great news – whose?”

“Well, that’s the awkward point. These are highly classified, and they don’t have clearance. I don’t have clearance. Frank, not even you have clearance.”

“Then who does?”

“The last three days have been ridiculous Frank, and I can hardly believe that this is a plausible request. We’d need clearance from a Joint Chief, Secretary of Defence, or the President himself.” Grier almost chuckled with the incredulity of the request and the knowledge his long time associate could speak with the President by making a single phone call.

Martinez knew the reason for Grier’s half-grin, but he was plagued by a question not of how to contact Cabinet, but who in Cabinet to contact. More specifically, who in Cabinet not to contact.

“Do you have any idea who these classified fingerprints might belong to?”

“No Frank, we don’t. Top level CIA wet-work, heck it could even be a Cabinet member. All we know is that it’s classified, and I guess that’s better than no match at all.”

“Maybe so, but it seems there’s a high level government official somehow involved with the President’s murder, and I have to call a high level government official to get clearance to find out who.”

Grier sensed Martinez’s concern: “And you’re worried what will happen if you call the wrong one?”

“Damn straight I am. I thought maybe this was domestic, you know, politically motivated, maybe even related to all this shit in the morning papers. But now it might even be someone in Cabinet. Who would want the President dead?”

“I couldn’t tell you Frank. You’ve spent close to three days with Cabinet, is anyone acting suspicious?”

“Christ Gerry, you don’t know the half of it. Politicians all have more than enough criminal intent, and their actions certainly don’t absolve them. We’ve got a Vice-President who fled the country, a Secretary of State who scored a big promotion, and a spoiled rotten Secretary of Defence who thinks he’s entitled to the top job. Any one of those three has shown signs of guilt, and they’re only the ones I know about.”

“Do you have any feelings, suggestions of one over the other?”

“God, I wish I did, but they’re all the same.”



“Then who are you going to call?”

Martinez paused, hoping silence might allow his brain to make a decision. “What time is it?”

“It’s getting close to seven in the evening.”

“I’m heading to my office. I’m going to call the one person in Cabinet I think might give me a straight answer.”



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COLUMN ONE

**CAMPBELL TOUCHED
MURDER WEAPON**

Our Source reveals crucial fingerprint evidence, with a shocking investigation twist.

BY MARIGOLD LEWIS
Times Staff Reporter

Classified evidence from the suite where President Tryst was killed has revealed Korte Campbell's fingerprints were on the murder weapon.

The gun, a TT-33 pistol, was found in the bathroom of the Presidential Suite at the Park Hyatt, near the President's body.

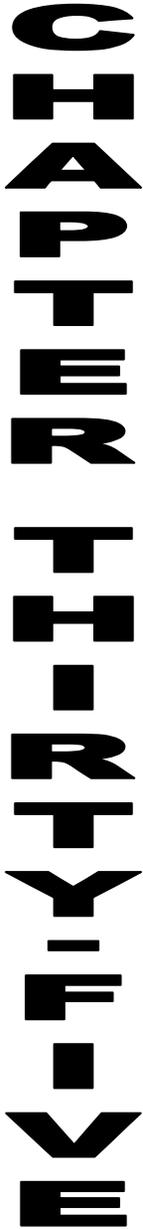
It was later confirmed that the gun fired the single bullet that killed Edward Tryst.

Evidence has shown that there were fingerprints from three different individuals on the gun.

Sources have revealed to the *LA Times* that one of those individuals was Tryst's Secretary of State and his replacement as President, Korte Campbell.

While Campbell was present in the Suite on the night of the murder, he did not have access to the weapon after the body was found.

If his fingerprints were on the gun, Campbell must have touched the weapon prior to Tryst's death.



The origin of the weapon has not been disclosed.

The identity of the other two fingerprints has not yet been revealed.

Possible reasons for Campbell's fingerprint being on the murder weapon are discussed in an editorial on page 4.

The Whitehouse did not immediately return phone calls from the *LA Times*.



COULD CAMPBELL BE TRYST'S KILLER

Prints Finger Replacement Pres

By Walter Raleigh and Peter Martins

Korte Campbell's fingerprints were found on the gun that killed President Tryst, sources have informed the *New York Times*.

The information has not been revealed to the public, but was given to the *New York Times* by a reliable source on the condition of anonymity.

Campbell had no reason to touch the weapon as part of the investigation, according to the source who was involved with that investigation.

"There were three fingerprints on the murder weapon when it was found by investigators," he said.

"One of those, initially classified, fingerprints was Korte Campbell.

"As the replacement President, Korte had the most to gain from Tryst's murder."

There was no immediate denial of this accusation by Mr Campbell, or Mr Frank Martinez who is overseeing the investigation.



Martinez was woken by the shrill ringing of his home phone, shortly after 3am on Friday morning. Barring a family emergency, he knew it could only be one person because only one other person had the number. That person was Gerry Grier, and it was he.

“Jesus-fucking-Christ Frank. Who the hell did you call last night, and what on earth did they say?”

Martinez, not surprising, was still a little groggy, and not having seen the morning papers he had no idea why Grier was riled enough to break the sanctity of sleep. The reply was still formulating in the dark recesses of his mind when Grier opted to continue.

“The *New York Times* is having a field day. Whoever told them about Hyde also told them about Campbell’s fingerprints, and they’re doing everything they can to say he’s the murderer, without defaming him, and in only eight column inches.”

Even with the time Grier took to get that out, the morning fog in Martinez’s mind had not lifted fully.

“Wait up a moment, Gerry. Campbell’s fingerprints on what?”

“On the gun!”

“Campbell’s fingerprints were on the gun?”

“Isn’t that what you found out last night?”

Martinez paused in an effort to take all of this in. On the other end of the line Grier realised his friend needed a moment, and was silent while he collected his thoughts.

Martinez obviously needed to brief Grier on what had taken place after their meeting had ended the previous evening. “After we finished last night, I told you I was going to call the only worthwhile person in Cabinet.”

“Uh-huh,” Grier agreed.

“So I called Anderton Marshall.”

Grier paused for a moment. “Attorney-General’s no good for what we need – this is classified, likely military. We want Secretary of Defence or higher.”

“That’s exactly what he said.”

“Did you fill him in about your concerns that someone in Cabinet might be involved?”

“Actually, I didn’t have to. He’s having the same concerns.”



They both paused, and had cause for that reflection. Two days ago, Wednesday morning, they were analysing the bin Laden tape with theories of international, or at least Islamic, terrorists. As the evidence rolled in, it gradually narrowed the focus of their investigation: domestic, political, access. But somebody actually inside of Cabinet? It seemed far-fetched, but now it was a question actually being asked inside of Cabinet.

Grier had a pressing question: “Who did you go to after Anderton?”

“I stopped. He said he would try and handle it – scope Weaver and Campbell out, see if he felt it prudent to fill them in and declassify the print that registered a match. In addition to my cell, I gave him the number for the guy heading up the FBI fingerprinting so he could call direct if necessary.”

Grier was expecting more: “And then?”

“And he hasn’t gotten back to me yet.”

Both men paused, the lifting fog leaving myriad thoughts and possibilities of what had taken place. Both reached the same three possibilities, none of them pleasant, and none of them a solution to the pressing problem.

If Campbell were involved with the murder then these reports may well be true. Had Marshall uncovered this and spoken to the press? Was he the leak?

If Campbell were not involved, then perhaps this was a leak by the real ‘Classified’ perpetrator. Was Marshall involved, removing the trace that it was he now that he knew the investigation was close? Was Weaver involved and, triggered off by Marshall’s enquiries, was he the leak?

And the third, perhaps most concerning possibility: this was not a Cabinet leak. Marshall had declassified the fingerprints, they had matched Campbell’s, and this information had been made public through law enforcement channels. What made this prospect most concerning was that the new President had proved implicit in the assassination of his predecessor, and this was front page news on both coasts before it even reached the lead investigator.

Grier broke a lengthy silence. “We won’t know for several hours if these reports are true. But what would you do if this were a routine murder, if this suspect were a grocery store clerk and not the President?”

“I guess we would call him in for questioning. But the fact remains, Korte Campbell is the President. We can’t just arrest the President on suspicion of murder.”

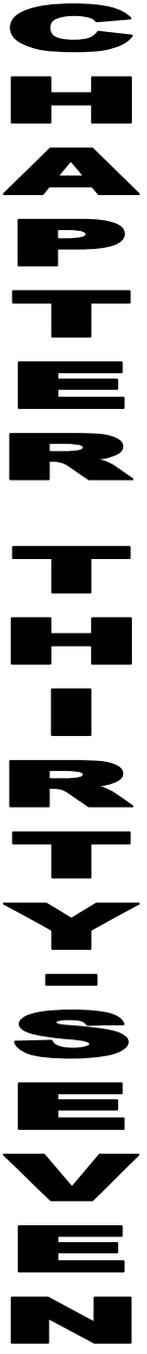
“Frank. We may have no choice.”



Martinez paused, again weighing his options. He glanced to his left, where the alarm clock showed the time as 3.22am. Campbell would be in the Whitehouse by 7am, but he wouldn't be able to contact anyone in fingerprinting at the FBI until at least 8. That was too long to leave a President who would be fuming, and with the possibility that Marshall or Weaver may have leaked this evidence to hide their own involvement Martinez knew he must contact him directly.

“Gerry, thanks for letting me know. I'll have a look at the article and contact Korte as soon as I can.”





When Martinez ended the phone call with his second-in-command, he had every intention of finding two more hours of sleep, reading the article in the *New York Times*, and calling the Oval Office around 7am. But more sleep had proved impossible.

He had thought a morning jog, a long-overlooked college routine, could provide the clarity of mind to prepare him for a difficult conversation with the President. But passing a 7/11 he noticed the arriving *LA Times*, and his mind was cluttered once more.

Arriving home, dishevelled from the effort of thought not to mention the overdue run, he slouched into an armchair to peruse both papers with the aid of the dawning sun. There was no way for him to know if the claims made in the papers were true. But both had made similar, inconceivable, claims the previous day, and he knew those to be fact.

He was still struggling with the facts, the evidence, how to uncover it, and how to approach Campbell, his President, when the phone rang.

Assuming it to be Grier once again, he mumbled a casual greeting into the receiver. But the terse voice that responded was not Grier.

It was Campbell. And he was mad.

“I thought I could trust you Frank. I thought you were a man of your word.”

Martinez jumped to his defence, or at least to attention in the recliner, but he was not fast enough to interrupt the tirade. Campbell was quietly but passionately furious.

“When I saw these papers today I knew somebody was trying to shaft me. Someone on the inside of my team, one of my friends, was slandering me in the newspapers.”

This was to be a lecture, not a story, and Campbell was more than capable of fitting every fact into a damning chain of rhetoric and conclusion. His calculating and precise manner made his power all the more palpable. “Of course I thought of Lucas Weaver. And then something occurred to me. You, the lead investigator, were his decision. He brought you in to run the show.” He ramped up his tone for a question: “Did he bring you in to cover his tracks?”

Again, Martinez wanted to answer, and again Campbell’s calculating, cruel, tone returned before he had the chance.

“For nine months we ran our agreement with the Green Party in absolute silence. And then the day after you find out, it’s all over the newspapers. I thought I could trust you.

“Yesterday you told us you were hopeful of a breakthrough in the fingerprints on the murder weapon. Now there’s a load of bullshit in the papers that I touched the gun. What happened Frank – evidence didn’t fit your story, so you made something up?”



Now Martinez knew he had to interject.

“I don’t dare presume to know your thoughts Korte, but I can assure you this didn’t come from me.” He spoke slowly, which allowed his mind to go over what he should and shouldn’t say. After all, there was no evidence that Campbell was not involved with the murder, and simply covering up.

“Now I couldn’t have made a decision about these classified fingerprints because as far as I know they haven’t been declassified. Anderton Marshall was supposed to be talking to you or Lucas about finding that out.”

He had expected this statement to calm Campbell, but the President was clearly too wound up about what was about to become the hottest talk show topic of the day. “You want Lucas to control that information? I’m really ...”

“... I don’t want anyone to control the information, I just want the truth, and it needed either him or you to uncover the truth.”

“I’ve seen the papers Frank. You call that ‘the truth’?”

“I had nothing to do with that. We have a classified fingerprint on the gun, and I want you to declassify it.”

“Well you fucked up big time there Frank. There is someone trying to bring down me and this investigation, and until we find out who that is I can guarantee that fingerprint will remain classified.”

“What are you saying? That you won’t help, you won’t declassify it.”

“There are three fingerprints on that gun. How many are classified?”

Martinez was a little taken aback by the direction of this conversation with his previously supportive ally. “To my understanding, just the one has been matched.”

“Then those other two are going to be the focus of your investigation. I’m going to seal that classification until I am sure that everyone who has access to it can be trusted not to go to these muckraking bastards. And right now, I can’t trust you Frank!”

Martinez leapt, once more, into his defence and in defence of his investigation.

But it was too late.

He was speaking to a dial tone.



She ended a little short. “But?” he prompted, reaching gratefully for what would be his third cup of the morning.

“But you’re right about us being out of a major loop, Bob. I’m sick of that, I am so sick of that, but I don’t know how we can change it.”

Attwood, staring into his coffee, knew he didn’t have an answer either. Exhaling audibly, he changed his focus, turning his glance upward to the ceiling in search of answers, and catching a glimpse of his barely dressed partner in the process. ‘Here I am,’ he thought, ‘having a morning coffee with a gorgeous woman in a bathrobe, and all I can do is worry about other reporters and who they’re having breakfast with.’

“Bob, you look worried.” She sounded concerned.

“I am worried,” he responded, making eye contact with her now, expecting to see some compassion and support. Instead he met a steely focus, suddenly brought on.

“Then you need to get over it,” she declared, emphatically, thumping her left hand down on top of the *Times* and rattling the coffee cups in the process. “You and I have a duty, Bob, and I’m not referring to being at Robinson’s call. There’s a high-level source giving anonymous information without challenge, and you can bet your ass he’s doing it with his own agenda in mind. We have a duty to the American public to find the truth without agenda – and that doesn’t leave time for you to worry.”

Attwood was taken aback. He motioned to respond, but could find nothing to say. He merely nodded like a contrite schoolboy as the scolding continued.

“Now I need to shower and get dressed, and a half decent breakfast would be nice before I can face the newsroom wrath. Can I trust you to keep yourself occupied here for fifteen minutes?”

Attwood nodded again, and turned back to his coffee, allowing Angelou to turn with precision – and not a small amount of style – before disappearing down the corridor to her bedroom.

Finishing the coffee with a sip and then a despairing gulp, he turned his attention to the small apartment. Having already read the morning’s *New York Times*, and having no desire to fetch his own paper from Angelou’s doorstep, he simply rose and moved to examine the CD collection.

Having come of age in the 1960s, Attwood was a man who appreciated the Moody Blues, Dusty Springfield, and a little Bob Seger. Anything after Creedence was a foreign language to him, so examining Angelou’s rack was like perusing a bookstore in Prague.



Coldplay. The Black Devils. Avril Lavigne. He felt like Aldous Huxley's savage finding the literature outside the Reservation – no doubt Angelou would feel he should be like a soma-fuelled Alpha discovering Shakespeare's Complete Works.

He was tempted to turn the CD Player on, experience some tunes first hand, but he was more tempted to turn the television on – less chance of a sudden shock. The couch was comfortable as he reclined into it, ignoring the bra poking up from between the cushions. He wanted to avoid political discussion at all costs, so he turned to NBC's *Today*.

Indeed, were it not for the coffees he may well have dozed as Katie Couric discussed the pressing issues of modern badminton or something similar. Al Roker was just coming on to discuss an overcast day when Angelou emerged, this time fully clothed and wearing a little make-up. She was even chirpy.

“There's a great deli on the other side of Dupont Circle, and I believe I owe you breakfast.”

Attwood pushed the remote and killed Al mid-sentence. He certainly wasn't going to refuse, and was formulating the best acceptance when his cell phone activated in his pocket.

Taking it out, he saw it was ID Withheld, and motioned apologetically to Angelou as he answered it – curt, but polite.

Angelou watched as his eyes lit up. Moments later her reaction would supersede even his. He cupped the mouthpiece in his hand to muffle his voice as he let his partner know who was on the line.

“Breakfast can wait. I'm talking to my fingerprint guy at the Bureau. And he's got some hot news.”



Friday 5th November. 8am. Elizabeth Hannigan was arriving for work as a personal assistant to a Secretary of State who had not yet been appointed. Marigold Lewis was arriving for work as a celebrated journalist attuned to the highest of sources and most reliable of information. Bob Attwood and Sarah Angelou were arriving for work to face the anger of their disappointed editor.

Robinson, expecting them, was ready, almost herding them into his office before they had a chance to socialise. Given that they were both carrying the *New York Times*, he could not explain the smiles on their faces.

Nor did he want to. Controlling and pedantic, he had spent the last two hours preparing his vitriol against the two reporters he had placed the paper's trust in. The election campaign had ended, but trust was still clearly an issue in the Capital.

"Once again I find you two here." Cool and calculating was not Arthur Robinson's style, but on his longer rants he liked to warm up. "And once again, I see my front page is a day behind the rest of the world." He paused to consider his options, knowing full well that the two grinning faces opposite were unlikely to speak up until he gave them good reason.

Attwood, sitting in front of him, could barely contain his amusement watching the smug prick consider his next move. Both he and Angelou were content to wait for the best moment to share their knowledge, throwing grand information at their editor when he least expected it, thrusting him into an unfamiliar ambivalence.

But Robinson was allowed to continue, for now, and he turned his attention to the senior partner in mediocrity. "You made a decision on Monday to head out to Hartford, and leave her here." He deliberately left Angelou nameless. "'The Greens can't dent this tank,' you said, 'Be prepared for Russell's Republican Romping.' It wasn't even 8 o'clock and you'd chartered a plane back here."

Attwood did not react, and not having the desired effect, Robinson turned to his junior.

"And you, stumbling across something that could have made your name in this profession. Of course, I don't blame you alone for not being able to make that story – you're both responsible for that, well frankly, for that failure."

Robinson was beginning to ramp up, partly getting into the mood of the power kick but really just trying to find the right buttons to properly irritate the two in front of him. The eerie silence in their eyes was unnerving him, so he increased volume in his voice, attempting to yell them into submission.

"After that you come to me apologetically, tell me you will 'do better next time', that you will 'drive this investigation'. Nothing's going to get past you two, the old man with the right connections and the young kid with the passion and drive.



“Turns out I put my trust in a has-been and his wide-eyed novice. No connections, no drive, no chance of keeping up with the investigation, let alone driving it.

“You know, you’re not the only two in the room who know how to make phone calls. I’ve been doing some myself, some would say doing your job, trying to track down this mystery source. You two set your sights too low, that’s at least one of your problems. While you were off looking for stepping-stones you never had a chance of locating this Cabinet source.”

He continued, still seated, and cutting an imposing figure. His tone was riling the reporters, even if they weren’t showing it. But the self-gratifying reaction Robinson expected was not forthcoming.

“Are you listening to me? Without sources, you can’t get any information. And without information, you two are no good as journalists. No good as journalists! I may as well put you on the shipping news, because there’s no point keeping you on this story anymore.”

Ridiculed and then threatened, Robinson was expecting nothing less than a stirring defence on behalf of the journeyman and his feisty companion. But they had timed their response perfectly, and a stirring defence would not be necessary.

Not that that would not stop Attwood injecting his own retaliatory spite into the evidence-fuelled rebuttal. “You may be interested to know that, while the *New York Times* and the *LA Times* have been running unsubstantiated bullshit, this has-been and novice have uncovered real evidence.” He assumed the demeaning tone recently employed against him: “Real evidence, and an exclusive lead.”

This statement, a well structured volley precisely positioned, had the desired effect of disorientating Robinson at the exact moment the editor thought he had them trumped.

But the disorientation lasted barely a moment, not long enough to register on Robinson’s face or shift the tone and volume in his voice. “So now, after you get beaten from pillar to *Times*, you find a ‘lead’. Not a Cabinet insider, Robert, but someone none of the other million reporters on this story can locate.”

Having expected their editor to respond with humility and rejoicing that they were finally making progress, that their paper was going to beat all comers, this was a little disappointing for the reporters. Angelou moved to add her weight, but Attwood silenced her with an almost subconscious hand movement, and continued.

“Obviously, we did not make ourselves clear, so let me spell it out for you Arthur.” Attwood was too preoccupied with what he was about to reveal for the second time that day, so he didn’t let his editor’s mood get him down.



“There were three different peoples’ fingerprints found on the gun that killed Edward Tryst on Tuesday night. The investigation trying to match them finally hit one – but it came up classified.”

Robinson, having followed the stories, read the morning papers, and seen the morning TV discussions, did not need this to be explained: “But the classified fingerprint is the topic of discussion today, Robert, you don’t need to brief me on everything. And the classified fingerprint was declassified.” He raised his pitch, as if he were speaking to a foreigner, or an infant. He picked up the paper in front of him and tossed it across the desk in front of them: “Declassified, and matched to Korte Campbell.”

“Holy shit Arthur,” declared Attwood, his straight face adding to the sarcasm, “when did you of all people start believing what you read in the papers? I’ve spoken, actually we have spoken, to the actual people matching those fingerprints. And we can tell you that the papers are wrong.

“The classified fingerprints has not been matched to a name, it hasn’t even been declassified. In fact, and this is why my source called me, yes called me, this morning: Korte Campbell has sealed the classified fingerprint.”

Robinson was not convinced: “Sounds like he’s got something to hide.”

“Or someone to hide from, but it gets better Arthur if you listen. When they arrived at work this morning there was another match in the system. Unclassified, free for all, and with a name.”

Robinson, barely impressed, could only see the flaws in Attwood’s rhetoric. A man who liked being right more than he felt it right to be right, this meeting was beginning to irritate him more than enlighten and excite him.

“A name?” He could hardly have been more droll.

“A name, and a flight number.” Attwood scrambled for his notepad, anticipating the coup-de-grace as much as Angelou who had found the right page and handed it to him.

“The fingerprint belongs to Mohammad al-Greddi, a Yemeni national who landed at Dulles on Monday, and flew out Tuesday night non-stop to Paris on Air France Flight 27.”

In the context of the investigation, this was huge. There was no clear reason why a classified individual should have touched the murder weapon, and it could have been an investigation snafu. But there was only one likely reason why a national from a country invaded by marines on Saturday should fly into Washington on Monday, touch the murder weapon, and leave on Tuesday night.

Attwood and Angelou were suitably impressed with themselves.



Robinson did not have those impressions. Instead, he was even more angered at the short-sightedness of his employees, and their insistence to argue defence with weak facts.

“Firstly, frankly, I’m not a fan of your damn sources. You’re arguing someone high up, unnamed, has an agenda, and that you have the truth. But you can’t see that your source, low down, could easily be the pawn for a power player with his own agenda. A power player like the President, perhaps, trying to cover his own foul deeds.”

Attwood went to respond, but Robinson was again heating up, silencing the news man by standing, glaring at him, and raising his voice a further notch as if insulted by the insolence of discussion.

“Secondly, you’re both thrilled with something you swear is fact, but even if it is true it’s about as exclusive as the date of inauguration day – every law man and half-arsed reporter will be on this story by lunchtime. You just don’t seem to realise the no-win net of stupidity you’re caught in.

“And thirdly, finally, because I’ve really had enough of trying to teach news sense to two people who should know better, what sort of story do you think you can build? You have a name, maybe you can rustle up a photograph. But this guy’s already left the country. Do you think you two can look up the Yemeni White Pages and bag an interview?”

At which point Attwood, also infuriated at the stupidity of the rebuttal, rose. He was not leaving the argument, but standing to face it: “We could do this, Arthur, if you trusted us to. We’re not cops, which is to our advantage when trying to talk to a murderer, and we have a jump start over every other news organisation in the world. That’s a start that gets progressively shorter with each minute you waste trying to ignore the opportunity you have in front of you.”

“Ignore the opportunity? That’s grand, coming from someone who wants me to fly him and his little friend to Paris and from there to God-knows-where, on an unsubstantiated whim and no track history for support.”

Angelou didn’t like being a little friend. Or the only one seated. She changed both: “Listen up you blind moron. Are you seriously going to stand in the way of this story and jam the facts up your ass? Because we won’t ignore them, and we will tell this story whether through you or not.”

It wasn’t helping, but it sure felt good. Attwood, though, was not prepared to make resignation threats. “Arthur, this is the greatest goddamn political paper on the planet. But where do you think it would have gone if Bob and Carl had come to you with this attitude?”



“Ha! Bonny and Clyde think they’re Woodward and Bernstein. Listen here, Robert, if I had a dollar for every reporter who’s assimilated themselves with those two I would own this paper.

“I’ll tell you what I’ve told them all – if you don’t got the story, the ghosts of *Washington Post* past won’t save you. Screw your head on straight, both of you, and face it. Your story has no legs, you’ve got nothing, and I can’t afford to waste anymore time or money on you.”

Attwood and Angelou were quiet, largely trying to find new ways to make their valid point heard by the deaf man with the purse strings. Robinson had made his point, and knowing this interpreted their brief silence as a sign of contrition. They were good reporters, and would be respected in Washington as long as he could keep them appropriately focused.

“Look Bob. Sarah. You’re trying hard, and I do recognise that. Follow this lead if you want, but don’t ignore the Campbell story. Make some calls to France, I’ll have Research trawl the books for this guy too. Feel free to turn out some copy, but don’t be disappointed if it turns out to be nothing.”

Robinson almost smiled at his own magnanimity, but woe betide the man who bestows humbleness on himself. Attwood, a political animal at the jungle’s highest court for more than two successful decades, was not finished.

““In ancient times, Arthur, the authors were men of action – travellers, architects, statesmen. They did not begin and end in a world of books. What they wrote was derived from their contact with the life of the world in which they participated, not as authors on the quest for ‘copy’, but as men.””

Robinson was taken aback by what amounted to proselytising on the virtues of a profession renowned for its decreasing ethics and increasing alcohol abuse.

Angelou, who was mightily impressed by the speech, felt the need to reply to Robinson’s stunned face. “I think what he means, Arthur, is that sitting in a room chasing copy might be good enough for you, but it isn’t for him. And it sure isn’t good enough for me either, not if I’m going to be the best reporter in this city.”

Cornered once more, this time by his own words coming to haunt him, Robinson fought back: “Keep a lid on it kid. Just because you’ve slept with more ambassadors than Marilyn slept with Kennedys doesn’t make you well-connected Pulitzer material.”

“And just because you’re more concerned with impressing one Murdoch than with doing the right thing for 280 million honest Americans doesn’t mean I have to brown nose your news sense. This ‘fuck you’ is the last.” Angelou threw him a smug grin, and turned to grab her handbag and walk out of the office, and out of the *Washington Post*.



But Attwood grabbed her arm to stop her. “You and I are in this together, remember, as partners.”

Robinson seemed pleased with that comment, and with his handling of the situation. “Robert, I’m glad a man with your experience can see what’s really going on here.”

“Oh I can see it all right. Arthur you are a toe-rag, the blight of quality journalists and journalism everywhere. You won’t take the slightest gamble with hard-hitting, old-fashioned, honest investigative reporting.

“A numbers man, who correlates circulation and advertising revenue without considering the principled base of our mandate, you represent everything that is wrong with our profession.

“I value truth, and I’ll work hard to uncover it if I have to. And when I find it, telling just one other person what the truth really is gives me far greater satisfaction than regurgitating the lies and spin you call fact for the grand honour of you regular paycheque.

“I’ve wasted too much time with you already. Run whatever story sells your paper. We won’t write it though. In fact, we won’t even read it. We’ll be in Paris, chasing the real story, the real truth, and the man who killed our President.”

Still linked, ignoring their racing heartbeats, Attwood and Angelou casually walked out the door and through the newsroom, leaving their former editor speechless, and alone.

For Attwood, it had been a calculated decision, and the end result of a slippery slope of lax journalistic standards and poor focus.

Angelou was more headstrong, and while fully responsible for her decision, she left the post trailing in the wake of her mentor and partner, in awe of his conviction, his magnetism, and his inner-power.

Neither had any idea what they were going to do next.



Friday 5th November. 9 am. Elizabeth Hannigan, under the pretence of cleaning, was rifling through papers in the State Department. Attwood and Angelou were taking their last look at the *Washington Post* building, through the rear-view mirror in Attwood's car. President Korte Campbell was opening the Oval Office door, and allowing Lucas Weaver inside.

Weaver wore a concerned, and somewhat puzzled, expression on his face. This meeting had not been his idea, but it was clear the morning papers were the reason. He was pleased to have been reinvited back to the inner fold so soon – a minor victory, it seemed, for his tactics. To reinforce his victory, he moved silently to the settee and waited for Campbell to address him.

Wanting this to be a meeting of minds, however much he felt Weaver was disadvantaged in that aim, Campbell sat opposite him and began. "I have spent this morning in reflection, Lucas, and I would appreciate if you hear me out."

Weaver, further impressed with himself by the apologetic tone, nodded in agreement with no real intention of listening beyond anything he disagreed with.

"Thank you Lucas. Now you and I have a history dating back many years, but for the sake of our Party and our nation we have been able to put those differences aside in recent times. We did it for Edward, and we kept up a good show for Anderton, Henry and the rest.

"Now I think we need to do it for ourselves."

Weaver, who felt like he was a naughty toddler caught with his hand in the lolly jar, sent back a patronising smile of innocence. Negotiation may be taught at WestPoint, but it is not practised in the field.

Campbell was a man of the law, and compromise is the nature of law in a democracy, but he was more than able to argue for his selfish end if necessary. He just hoped it wouldn't be necessary.

"This crap in the newspapers, yesterday and this morning." Weaver grinned some more – he was right about the agenda for the meeting – but he silently let Campbell continue. "It had to come from somewhere. Yesterday it was largely true; today entirely false. But it had to come from somewhere.

"Now I've been doing some thinking. I know it wasn't me. I trust Anderton, Stephen Penny, Henry Love, even Partridge. And I would like to think that you wouldn't be stupid enough to incriminate yourself one day and perjure yourself the next."

Weaver could not quite place why he was offended by that last remark. He was too busy holding the upper hand, it seemed, to question it, so he let Campbell carry on.



“I must feel that this information, and I use the term loosely, must have come from Franco Martinez. That doesn’t absolve you, Lucas, because he was your choice, but again I come back to our duty.

“We must act in the best interests of our country, and of course upholding the honour of this office is of a top priority to that end. We can’t just get rid of Martinez without clear evidence – he’d have to be crucified in the public arena so that actions made by us look good, otherwise it would look reactive.” He paused. “Reactive, and guilty.”

Weaver chose this moment to break his silence. “For a man with no clear evidence, Korte, you seem awfully assured of his guilt, and your innocence.”

Campbell, who had thought he was making some leeway with his irrational colleague, could not help but be taken back by this response. In an effort for an authoritative retort, however, this shock made him sound like he was grasping for support.

“Of course I’m convinced of my innocence. I know I didn’t kill him, and Christ, Lucas, surely you are convinced of my innocence?”

“Well...” Weaver, already convinced that he had assumed power in the conversation, now felt he had the opportunity to assert it. A noticeable pause to increase the tension in his companion, and then a well thought out answer that was neither his actual beliefs nor an outright fabrication.

“There’s no real evidence that you didn’t kill him, and no word from the investigators that this news isn’t based on evidence.”

The treasonous content or the detached tone would each of themselves be cause for anger; combined, they serve to remove the final shred of peaceful compromise from Campbell’s intent, and his tone.

“I ought to send you back to boot camp so your aging, sagging body can have its ass kicked by a soldier who does not hide behind words.”

Weaver’s puzzled face returned – there are many military metaphors, and Campbell had failed to approximate any. But Campbell was not seeking poetry – his remark was a consequence of incredulity.

“This isn’t about evidence in a, a newspaper, you dimwit, and before you leap to their defence and attack me, keep in mind that when Edward was killed you know full well I was not with him, because you and I were sitting in my office watching television and drinking the good whiskey.”



Had Weaver been convinced of Campbell's guilt, this evidence would have been quite the setback. But he was poking for his President's implication, with the main aim being infuriation, not conviction. And it was working.

"That you didn't pull the trigger doesn't mean you weren't involved. After all, your fingerprints were on the gun." He reclined further into the couch, enjoying himself.

Campbell felt compelled to counter the statement and the posturing, standing to lean over and add the power and projection necessary to convey his disgust and anger: "My fingerprints were not on the gun!"

Weaver knew there was more coming, but he rose to be on equal footing as Campbell continued. "Someone has betrayed my trust, shattered Executive loyalty, and lied, damn it, outright lied."

"Your word against his..."

"...will you not listen?"

But even as Campbell asked, the reality of Weaver's motive was becoming clear. "You want me to, to what, step aside from the Presidency?"

Weaver, growing accustomed to controlling the conversation, found himself suddenly standing rhetorically bare. He could only fumble the response. "Well, sir, it may be in the best interests of the Office, you know, the country."

Campbell was now again superior. "Once again I discover that this little arrogant twerp has tried to shaft me." Moving closer now, spittle following the carefully chosen words across the few inches into Weaver's face. "You may have tasted success last time, when I was young and thought better of you, but this time I know you for the bastard that you are, and I won't make the same mistake."

Weaver, a fighting man by nature and in history, could think of nothing better than planting a fist on Campbell's elitist jaw. And why not? He had done the same in 1983, when the two personalities clashed just as they were beginning to assert some authority in the Republican Party. There had never been a friendship, but after the events of that summer there had never been a chance.

Weaver was disappointed that he didn't tell that story, how he had outsmarted the smarmy lawyer who thought he knew it all. How that greedy, disrespectful, too-smart prick had used connections in Reagan's administration to make a few deals on the far side of the Iron Curtain. With no respect for the men who lived, served, and died protecting the American way from the evil empire, he had lunged for wealth and glory. And Weaver had been there to ensure he would not profit from that shameful action. Even if nothing could be exposed or laid bare, it would be some time before Korte Campbell worked in this town again.



Campbell was loathe to tell the story, of how a young man had worked hard with the right connections until a lucky break had come his way. How he had utilised a perfectly legal clause combined with the administration's activities in Moscow and East Berlin to invest his life's earnings for a great payoff. And then how jealousy and an unwillingness to accept his own stupidity had got the better of a career military man, who had used his connections to block the transfer back to US dollars. Or rather, how he had blocked all but \$870,000 US dollars, which had been dutifully deposited in Lucas Weaver's bank account.

The truth certainly lay somewhere in between, hidden, among many things, by twenty-one years of secrecy and simmering tension between these two successful proponents of the GOP.

Both had since forged their place in Republican success, and American history.

But neither had moved beyond those incidents, and neither would forgive the other for his treachery, his disloyalty to the American way.

Far more than erroneous reports in two newspapers, this was the tension between the two as they stood eye-to-eye in the Whitehouse.

It was time to end this fight once and for all.

Lucas Weaver raised his fist in anger.



Delayed breakfast plans finally caught up with the two hungry reporters at the end of a short cab ride to Dulles International Airport. Angelou kept her promise of paying for the tasteless egg and bacon pie, even the black slick that passed for airport coffee; besides, it was the least she could do since he paid for a trip to Paris.

Since his wife left him, Attwood had rediscovered the frugal life of a bachelor. He still sent her a regular cheque, to keep her off his back as anything, but his living expenses were now minimal – hanging on to an aging house and car, even on a salary nowhere near commensurate with his position as a national watchdog, had done wonders to his bank account.

This was good, because spontaneous tickets direct DC to de Gaulle were not cheap.

With about 45 minutes before boarding, Attwood decided to raise the issue they had been dancing around since they waltzed out of the *Post* an hour earlier. “Let’s work out how we’re going to locate Mohammad al-Greddi once we land in Paris.”

The trip from the city to the airport had not been wasted. Booking more than three grand in tickets had allowed Attwood some intrusive questions with Air France personnel. He had al-Greddi’s seat number, and now knew he had not taken another Air France flight out of Paris. Just add a further misleading motive for his request, and he could use a contact in Interpol Geneva to ‘check him out for me’.

He was counting on the official investigation to keep this matched fingerprint quiet, at least until he landed. With no connection to the assassination, it was possible a connection of a connection of his might actually locate the ‘dodgy real estate developer’ this aging journalist was chasing, or at least name the non-Air France flight he left on.

Angelou had concocted a story of her own. She didn’t know any Feds who’d gone to Interpol, but one of her college associates had gone to France in the summer of their second year, and was still on holidays.

Since al-Greddi had flown in and out of the States with his own name, it was possible he was staying near de Gaulle without a pseudonym. She had managed to avoid small talk with a promise of coffee after she landed, if only her friend could help discretely locate where her ‘jilted lover’ was sleeping.

Both journalists were aware of the near futility of their actions. In fact, though they would not admit it, had Robinson supported their information they may well have run a brief article and little more. This international visit was being driven as much by their impassioned resignation as it was by a pursuit of journalistic excellence.



Having briefed each other on their plans, however optimistic, their attention turned to detailed realities of their trip. Departing Dulles shortly before 10am Friday, the seven-and-a-quarter hour flight would land them in Paris late that evening, local time.

A reservation had been made for two rooms at the nearby Hyatt Regency – tempting fate, perhaps, but given it was inside the airport’s perimeter it would be a convenient stop for their first night. After that there were other options closer to the centre of Paris – Attwood insisted on doing this trip in style, so that if it turned out to be a professional waste he would at least have a worthwhile holiday with his money.

Unless some information accessed on their arrival spurred them into action, it was likely they would land and head directly for their room. The real investigation would begin in the morning.

Breakfast, and their immediate plans, complete, they left the café for their departure lounge. Angelou had walked out of the *Post*, her dream job, without grander plans, and it was these she now had on her mind. The walk would not be long, especially as both only had small suitcases, and buoyed by the positive energy one has when on the road forward, she broached a more distant subject.

“If a best case scenario were to transpire, and we got the story...what then?”

Remarkably, at least to those not exposed to the realities of professional journalism, both of their thoughts were on the story they were tracking, not the murderer. Certainly, truth was paramount to both, but the question – however fanciful it may be while they were still on US soil – was of where to tell the story, not what to do with a Presidential assassin who may well confess into their microphone.

Attwood doused the embers of this discussion almost as quickly as they were sparked. “In a best case scenario, we’ll be able to pick and choose our medium. I know this business and I know a lot of the people who run it – let’s focus on getting the story before we concern ourselves with that.”

Angelou merely smiled – it had been a bold question asked too early. Internally, she promised herself to focus on their first aim, to rise to the level of quality reporting she knew she could perform. Three days ago she had been impressed to be covering the losing party’s concession speech – now, if she worked hard and had some luck, she would be the by-line of the biggest story of the year.

And if things did not turn out as planned? Well, she would be sure not to waste a free trip to see the lights of Paris at night.



Weaver grunted loudly, his tightly-clenched right fist pounding into Campbell's unsuspecting side, the lack of distance mitigating the power so it stunned more than winded the statesman. Campbell had not been in a fight since his youth, and it was not until the second punch, this one better placed with just as much force into his liver, that he registered what was happening.

Sparked into action, he managed, through reflex far more than conditioning, to deflect the returning right fist. The glance put him off balance, but he was able to retreat somewhat away from the enclosure of the couches and back towards his desk.

Weaver was also out of condition, but his fighting skills were far more ingrained than his opponent's. Were it not for the emotional involvement, he would have run over the top of Campbell with ease. Anger and long-sought vindication, however, acted to over-fire his adrenal and lower his fighting judgment.

Following Campbell across the floor he threw another right. Too early. Well wide. The miss gave Campbell the opportunity to land his first punch, a glancing blow to Weaver's oversized gut.

Circling now, the President of the United States and his Secretary of Defence squared off above the official Seal of Office. Each moved to land the next blow. But speed had long since left them behind.

Weaver made several unsuccessful attempts at contact. Exasperated, he lunged forward, clumsily landing two blows on Campbell's shoulders. But he had left himself open to a far better-weighted punch under the ribs. Close to the heart. Right where it hurts.

The punch expelled a groan from the military man, providing motivation to Campbell who rounded on him. Another blow landed, this one to the kidneys, pushing Weaver away from him and adding to his pain.

The old foes were again separated. Campbell, knowing he would be beaten if this were in a ring, chose to dance rather than fight. Weaver, panting already, realised the tactic. He had characterised Campbell as a coward for so many years, so this came as no surprise.

Campbell rounded. Weaver timed his counter well, waiting until his adversary was positioned between him and the heavy desk.

He feigned with his left. Campbell was forced to step back, a distraction. He was blindsided to the real blow, a strong right to the side of his face. Powerful. Not perfect, but enough to thrust him backwards, crashing into his desk, the sudden stop positioned just under his kidneys.



Weaver followed through. Campbell needed time to find balance against the desk, and had no time to block. Weaver landed two more blows, a left again to the liver and a further right cross to the face, opening a gash above the President's cheek bone just under his left eye.

But Weaver had left himself unprotected also. Campbell, using the desk for elverage propelling himself up and forward, planted his forehead into the right side of Weaver's face.

The Defence Secretary recoiled, thrown completely off balance. His arms swung wildly, vainly in the direction of Campbell, who kept only as much distance as necessary to avoid them. Weaver pivoted slightly, and reeled back onto the couch where Campbell had been seated moments earlier.

Lying prone, however comfortable, Weaver was tempted to kick at Campbell as he approached, a dirty tactic to match the headbutt. But he refrained.

Several moments of unfettered aggression had released two decades of tension.

Men are not designed for negotiation, to be statesmen. Rather, they are controlled by the physical urges that constitute their temperament. This is a true for the world's most powerful men as it is for schoolboys.

Moreover, it is as well understood by powerful men as it is by schoolboys. Korte Campbell, a man of the law, of words meticulously ordered and arguments refined and structured, may not want to fight. But leaning over his beaten opponent, feeling the blood trickle towards his lip and seeing this matched on his foe, gave him a feeling of satisfaction rarely matched in courtroom brawling.

This was not about winning and losing a fight, or even a long-standing, never-mentioned feud. This was about finding a space to purge the unhealthy tensions imposed by the modern age.

Campbell did not feel victorious. He felt relieved. And so he extended his hand to help his new friend rise.

Weaver, a man who knew and loved the pugilistic arts, did not feel defeated. He did not, of course, suddenly believe Campbell's actions of decades prior were justified. But he felt the differences between them had been aired, and that was what was needed. He accepted the hand.

Moments later they were both seated, touching their wounds, wincing at the stinging pain still fresh, but grinning like old friends.

"That was a dirty tactic you cheating bastard," Weaver said.



“I only did it because you deserved it,” retorted Campbell.

Both men sighed. This was a rare moment, primitively cathartic, and neither wished for it to end in a hurry.

But they knew it must. Campbell checked his watch, undamaged thanks mostly to inept punching styles. “Anderton and Henry will be here soon.”

He paused, moving back to words meticulously ordered. “Are we right to move on from this?” Campbell grinned to hide the momentary concern that all was not right with the relationship.

Thankfully, Weaver nodded back with a laugh that trailed into another sigh. The moment had ended, and they would once again be forced into assuming the most powerful men status, leaving their schoolboy instincts behind.

Weaver leant forward, extending his hand now as another ancient sign of friendship.

Campbell accepted it, and locking eyes with his new found ally, shook hands with his Defence Secretary.



As it transpired Anderton Marshall was still another fifteen minutes away, arriving at almost the same time as Henry Love. Both would have been panicked by the slowly swelling bruises on the faces of those they were meeting, were they not so surprised at the grins on their faces and laughter in their welcoming voices.

Marshall and Love exchanged quizzical glances, but said nothing. Korte Campbell had convened this meeting, so they simply assumed their seats and let him begin.

“Clearly we have a problem.”

Clearly they did, though no one was certain what problem he was referring to. Weaver believed he was now above the others in Campbell’s inner sanctum, and this meeting was to repeat their earlier discussion. Marshall was unsure what Martinez had done after their discussion the previous evening, and while he doubted the veracity of the morning news he retained his concerns about Cabinet involvement. Love had spoken with Martinez shortly after reading the *New York Times*, and was the most uncertain of them all.

Campbell could sense this lack of unity in focus. He needed these men to help him make the right decision – it would not serve that end if they were confused. He needed to clarify his position.

“Yesterday we had a mole. Today we have a lying rat.” He resisted the urge to promise he would badger the issue until this toad weaselled out of the inner circles. “I have my theories, but of more pressing concern is our immediate response. An official denial will, of course, be necessary this morning. Am I correct in assuming we are to proceed with an address to the nation this evening?”

“That’s right, 7pm, crew will be here around six,” replied Marshall, almost automatically.

“Then we must have some announcement in that address to take control of the front pages and move attention away from these lies.”

Marshall again, though this time speaking out of turn: “I’m sure Frank will have something. He was close to a breakthrough last night, which may explain his delay to this morning’s briefing?” The comment was half positive assumption, half an expedition fishing for truth. It cut through Campbell’s prevarication.

“I have might concerns that Frank, perhaps, cannot be trusted...” Expecting some defence of the FBI man, especially from Henry Love, he continued straight into his next sentence. “...I do not feel it is a coincidence that our dealings with Mr Hyde were revealed so soon after he learned of them, and he is perfectly positioned to be a reliable anonymous source.”



Love moved to object, but held his lip as Campbell continued his accusation: “He met last night to discuss fingerprints, and behold we see today’s alleged news. I fear that he has corrupted this investigation, and while I hope it is not without salvation, we must treat any information from the Bureau as requiring independent verification.”

Love, who had grown accustomed to paranoia without intelligence under President Tryst, could accept Campbell’s logic in a general sense, but as it was he who had personally recommended Franco Martinez he did feel duty bound to offer some justification for his action.

And besides, he had spoken with Frank barely 15 minutes earlier, and had information he knew had not reached the others.

“Korte, I must protest, this isn’t fair.”

Campbell scoffed. “Fair? Surely you jest?” But there was no jest in his tone.

“Hear me out. I spoke with Frank in the car on the way over...” It was almost certainly not the right thing to say, but mirroring Campbell’s tactic he powered through any objection to make his point. “...He doesn’t understand why you’ve censured this classified fingerprint, but he’s over that. He has more information, he believes we’re getting closer. We can’t afford ...”

“We can’t afford to be misled.”

“We can’t afford to fragment.”

Campbell knew this was a strong point, but he was not yet convinced that Martinez was innocent. He paused, before asking the pertinent question: “What information does he want to share?”

Love was relieved, though not naïve enough to believe this issue had been resolved. “They have a match on one of the other fingerprints – I don’t know much else, cell phones aren’t that secure, and I think they’re waiting on your response. He’s also agitating for any word from Dr Mapp regarding Corker Tryst. Korte, he won’t exceed your authority, but I believe he is genuinely committed to finding this killer.”

Campbell was caught between two contrary, competing emotions. “I don’t think we can place too much emphasis on fingerprints without knowing more, and I’m not sure whether I’m ready to respond to him until this situation is better contained.”

The others had no comment.

“And on that note, I don’t think we can let Frank, or any of those agents, talk with Corker. That remains something I must do.”



Marshall and Love instinctively turned their attention to Weaver, almost disorientated by his lack of objection. In fact, he was even helpful: “Would you like me to come along?”

More remarkably, Campbell agreed. Any suspicion of involvement or collusion that Marshall had was certainly piqued – a classified fingerprint more tightly covered up and two old foes now friends was disturbing.

Campbell, now focused on finding out what the First Lady had witnessed and placing more value in that than potentially compromised physical evidence, chose to wrap up this brief meeting.

“Lucas and I will head over to talk with Corker. Anderton, keep on top of things and make sure I’m on track for tonight’s address. Henry, I know you’re caught between an old friend and your duty to the nation. Slow him down, keep him away from anything dangerous, but don’t irritate him any further.

“If I’m wrong, Frank remains the best man for the job. Let’s hope that is the case.”



Corker Tryst, former First Lady of the United States, was still in Room 927 at the Park Hyatt, being attended to by her late husband’s personal physician.

Dr Mapp had plenty of experience with bereaved individuals, and several years growing accustomed to a demanding and intrusive media, but this was the first time he had combined the two. His preference was to move Corker back home to Alabama, but until she had recovered, or at least calmed somewhat, that was out of the question. Moving her into the atmosphere of a Whitehouse in mourning would be equally detrimental to his patient, and so she had remained in the hotel suite.

She had woken intermittently across Thursday afternoon and evening. On Friday morning, tired and grieving but feeling considerably better, she felt well enough to skip any further drugs. Having Dr Mapp, a familiar face, with her was helpful – she had been uprooted from her friends in the South, and the commitments of her duties had prevented her from forging new acquaintances in Washington. In the rarefied air of politics, the loneliness of losing a spouse could be multiplied exponentially.

She certainly did not feel like reliving the events of Tuesday night. She knew at some point she must, she was a key witness, but she did not wish to re-experience the trauma of finding her husband with a bullet wound to the head, especially with an anonymous investigator. When Dr Mapp asked if she felt up to discussing it with Korte Campbell and Lucas Weaver, she decided the time was right.

Not having been exposed to the news following her husband’s death, she was not aware that Campbell had replaced him as President. Or that the nation’s best newspapers accused him of that murder.

Dr Mapp did read the papers. But he never believed them anyway.

It was mid-morning, and Dr Mapp was helping his charge eat a meagre breakfast. It was better than nothing – but only just. Rising to answer the knock on the door, he greeted Campbell and Weaver solemnly, and indicated that they should sit by Corker’s bed.

As they had agreed in the car on the short trip here, Weaver was silent while Campbell began. “Corker, I want you to know how sorry we are, we all are, about what happened. We all loved Edward, respected him as a good man, and this tragedy has affected us all on many levels.”

Behind every good man is a strong woman. Corker Tryst knew her husband for who he really was – a not-too-bright political pawn unable to think too far ahead – but she loved him anyway. And she had seen his defaced corpse, it had haunted her lucid moments for three days, so she didn’t need any eulogising or comforting.

“Korte, I thank you. But I know you came here with a purpose.”



“Certainly. I’m not sure how much you know about what has been happening since you called me Tuesday night, but I can assure you that our focus has almost solely been on the investigation and finding whoever did this to Edward.”

Lying in bed, Corker grimaced at the memory still so raw. Campbell was being as gentle as he could, but her important information had been delayed two days already. He had little time for pleasantries.

“We know how painful this is, going over it. But it really is necessary.”

“I know Korte, and I appreciate you doing this. I’ll be happy to answer any questions.”

“Thank you Corker, we will try to be brief.” He paused, ordering the handful of questions he wished to ask. Start at the beginning, he told himself. “After you both addressed the crowd at the ballroom, what then?”

Corker paused, taking a deep breath before beginning her tale of a glorious election night gone so horribly, horrible bad. She spoke slowly, with carefully measured purpose – this was a story she did not wish to repeat for some time.

“Both of us headed back to the suite. I think there were four secret service agents – two stayed outside, two came into the room where Partridge was waiting. Edward was expecting a call. He wasn’t sure when it would come or how long it would take – actually, he was fairly secretive about it, but I’ve long grown accustomed to that.”

Campbell and Weaver exchanged a quick glance, but they were not about to interrupt with an explanation.

“Not too long after seven the phone rang and he sent us all away.” She was growing angry, at him, at herself perhaps, but definitely angry. “God, why did he send us all away? Who was he talking to that needed so much secrecy, and why did we listen?”

She knew they had no answers, and even if they had it would not have soothed her. She accepted a glass of water proffered by her doctor, and collected her thoughts once more.

“Of course,” she began, “none of us knew anything was wrong. It was all fairly routine – I took two agents downstairs, excused myself, and continued doing what I do best: smiling.” As if to prove the point she grinned weakly and without sincerity at Campbell.

Campbell’s response was another probing question: “Why the delay before you returned?”



Corker Tryst had asked herself this question already, though this was the first time she had answered it. “I suppose, after all those months campaigning, I had grown accustomed to being the polite person hanging around, waiting for him to make the decision. And with all the results rolling in it was becoming a crowded party – I just assumed he was around somewhere.

“It was a little after 9pm, there was all this talk about concession speeches, and a few people mentioned he wasn’t around yet. I didn’t want to disturb him, but it had been two hours – again, I assumed he was caught up in celebrations.”

She paused once more, her mind having moved ahead to the fateful moment she opened the door.

Campbell knew well enough to give her time. But Weaver felt compelled to ask “What then?”

A woman hardened through years of political battles, Corker needed no prompting, though the stupidity of the irrelevant question allowed her to answer it with detached spite: “And then I found my husband of twenty-seven years dead, shot, in the head, your President murdered while I smiled and you watched television in the State Department.”

While the spite continued through every word, the detachment did not last that long. In a fragile state the brutal resurrection of that sight, that moment, that realisation, once again descended Corker to shudders and tears.

Campbell could tell there was not much time. “Was there anyone, anything else, suspicious or otherwise that may help?”

It was a muddled, vague question, but Corker wished she had a specific answer. Unable to offer one, she merely shook her head, as a sob escaped her mouth.

Dr Mapp moved to usher Campbell and Weaver out, away from his deteriorating patient.

But Campbell had one final question: “The gun. Did you see the gun?”

Corker had no response. Now sobbing audibly, she turned away from her interrogators. And they, with many questions left unanswered, rose from their seats, thanked Dr Mapp, and left the Park Hyatt for what they hoped would be the final time.





Contrary to the explicit directions of Air-France personnel, both journalists turned their cell phones on well before they entered the terminal at de Gaulle. Being out of communication with the world for seven and a half hours was almost surreal in an age where satellites could directly feed live video from a Baghdad bombing to simultaneous bulletins in Sydney and New York.

Even worse than having heard nothing for so long was the disappointment as they collected their luggage: neither lead had left a message. In fact, their message banks were empty – no leads, no loving mothers, no editor filled with regret demanding they return with a pay increase that matched their brilliance and determination.

Nearing midnight in the city of love, there was little else to do but check into their hotel. The Hyatt Regency was only two miles from the terminal, a short cab ride that allowed Angelou her first look at the Parisian lights in the distance, but little more.

The rooms were stylish, neat without being excessive, and unlike every Parisian hotel room in the movies, there was no view of the Eiffel Tower. Convening in Attwood's room, with him sitting comfortably on the edge of the bed and her seated awkwardly at the nearby table looking down on him, Angelou made this light-hearted point.

Attwood hadn't been to the cinema in many years, and DVD sounded to him like a sexual disease, but he felt impressed to be able to offer a response. "You are familiar with Casablanca, aren't you?"

Angelou nodded. "Sure, black and white. 'We'll always have Paris.'" Not surprisingly, given she had never endured a black and white film in her life, her Bogart impression was terrible.

Attwood didn't mind. Their bodies still thought it was late afternoon, too early to sleep, but there was no progress to be made on the story. He was glad to experience a conversation with Angelou that was not work related.

"You are correct. And there's a great scene in a hotel in the heart of Paris, just Bogart and Bergman, she, of course, wearing blue." The reference was lost on one so young, so he made his point: "Despite the setting, the romance, there is no Eiffel Tower across the balcony. It was 1940, before Pearl Harbor, the US wasn't at war yet, but the Germans were occupying France at the time the film was made. And so, if I could be so bold as to dismiss your generalisation, that most famous Parisian scene disproves your hotel-view hypothesis."

The point was lost Angelou. She didn't really care for her companion's impressively detailed database of knowledge, but she did take notice of the timidity, displayed through verbosity, with which he had shared it. Bob Attwood was a charismatic man, usually filled with ample self-confidence to support his arguments. But she had been around enough men to sense why his approach had changed.



She turned ever so slightly toward him: “So you think this setting, even with no Eiffel Tower in the background, is romantic?”

Attwood walked into the trap before he even realised it had been laid. “Definitely, this is the most romantic city in the world. You may not sense it here, but in the heart of Paris you are surrounded by the aroma of love.” He was getting excited by the prospect of breakfast on the Riviera, chocolate from Michel Chaudun, a quick peek inside the Musee D’Orsay. The story they were chasing was paramount, but culture was permanent, and he wanted to convey this to the virgin-Parisian.

Angelou loved chocolate and culture as much as the next 24-year-old Avril fan. She had other things on her mind.

Cocking her head ever so slightly, creating a shimmer of movement through her blonde hair, she rose slowly, cautiously from the chair. She tried to prevent a slight grin from expanding by biting, ever so gently, on her lower lip. She knew this added to the allure, not that she needed anything extra in that area as she silently straddled herself across Bob Attwood’s lap. She threw her arms casually, but with purpose, around his neck, and leaned forward.

Attwood, already feeling the pressure of this unusually situation, was further disorientated. Seated on the bed as he was, still dressed for a day at work that never eventuated, he had not planned to seduce his colleague. Not that her actions surprised him – they hadn’t registered yet, to be sure, but this was a move he had considered within the realm of possibility. No doubt she was a head turner, out of his aging realm perhaps, but he could argue the case she might be attracted to him.

Indeed, he had argued the case to himself many times, including every night for the last week. But now that it was actually taking place, and in France for chrissakes, France, it did not feel as he had imagined. That emergent warmth in the groin region was either not present, or completely overpowered by the spontaneous desiccation of his insides. He was quivering, certainly the sexual prey despite his superior age.

Angelou, sensing this, knew that she would need to control this situation. She moved, closer, leaning down to kiss his neck, and bypassing the uncertain, instinctive lips of his that tried to meet hers like a magnet. Rolling forward ever so slightly, she ran her hands down off his shoulders, and brought them together at his navel. Very slowly, she began to undo the buttons on his shirt.



On reflex as much as anything, he moved his hands under her top, brushing the small of her back. The uncertainty was still overpowering as he fumbled with her bra. He had no trouble popping it open, no fear that he would not perform, or forget how to do it despite the years of enforced abstinence. But he was not in control of this situation, and he wanted it so much, he wanted it too much. And he knew, he knew there were a million ways he could blow this by coming on too strong, or too weak. He had to let her set the tempo, take control.

Her lips, moving ever so softly, finished their ascent of his neck and reached his ear. They were powerful communicators by themselves, but she wanted to make her message absolutely clear.

“Let’s fuck.”

Sitting there, on a hotel bed in Paris, holding the gorgeous young body in his arms, Attwood knew he could not resist even if he had wanted to. He wanted her. He needed her. He loved her.



The mood in the car returning to Pennsylvania Avenue was solemn, but these two political allies had too many pressing issues to wallow in that sadness.

Korte Campbell, staring out of the window but not noticing anything, remained plagued by concerns about the investigation. Was it compromised? Would they find the killer? Could a modern Administration survive without an Oswald to divert the nation's conscious?

He could not properly commence his Presidency, indeed he could not in all good conscience even bury his antecedent, without concluding this investigation. But if he could not trust Martinez, was that a doomed fixation? He could only hope that this day would last long enough to provide guidance to his concerns.

Weaver knew prolonged daylight would not ease his guilt. It would require addressing the issue that plagued him, not just internally but aloud, and now, while this new friendship was strong.

“Korte.” He broke the silence, and the solemnity, inside the vehicle. Campbell turned his head back to his ally, making eye contact but not speaking.

“Korte, I feel it only fair that you should be aware of something.

“The anonymous source to the newspapers, the person who shook things up a little, got the media all confused and all that.

“It was me.”



CHARACTERS

“My fellow Americans, good evening. I am certain you will join with me in acknowledging that the events of these past days have saddened us all.

President Edward Tryst was a much-loved and well-admired family man, business man, and servant of the people. In Alabama, his boyhood home and the State he took so much from and gave so much to, he will be missed.

A defender of truth, of peace, and of democracy, he made difficult decisions in upholding justice here and around the world. The liberated people of Afghanistan and Iraq mourn with us today – he defended them as he defended us, and they will long remember his affect on their countries.

I know that to me as for many of you, Edward Tryst defined his Presidency and the content of his character in the aftermath of that dreadful September day three years ago.

When those that would wish to harm us struck at our heart, Edward embodied what we each individually and collectively felt. He showed us that it was acceptable to cry, to mourn, to grieve in our own way. And then he gave us the strength to rise, to redouble our defences and then, when a lesser man would have declared ‘mission accomplished’, he powered ahead.

Edward Tryst showed the world that Americans do not lie down, do not go quietly into the night, that we fight back, and that we do not just fight for ourselves but we represent the downtrodden, the abused and mistreated people of the world.

This was not the easy decision. But this was the right decision. And, while the investigation continues, it appears he may have paid the ultimate price for that nobility.

A true soldier, he will be missed. His legacy will continue through the strong American tradition of doing what is right no matter the cost. It will continue. We will not be defeated. Edward Tryst will not be forgotten.

Next Friday, November 12th, will be a national day of mourning. Funeral plans have yet to be finalised, but will most likely take place in President Tryst’s home State on that day. In the meantime, I sure you will all join us in prayers for this great man, and for the family robbed of his presence.

Meanwhile, the investigation continues. Led by FBI Agent Frank Martinez, this wide-ranging investigation is successfully combining the resources of the FBI, CIA, and local law enforcement. The cooperation and transparency of this investigation is a testament to the lessons we learnt after our nation was attacked.

Literally thousands of leads have been pursued, hundreds of witnesses have been interviewed, and many, many man hours have been exhausted. This is a team that will not rest until those responsible for this crime are brought to justice.



And progress continues to be made. Physical evidence has already given us a time of death, which has greatly narrowed focus, and fingerprints found on the murder weapon, contrary to what you may have read today, are bringing us ever closer to the culprit.

To those involved, we say ‘You cannot hide. We will find you and bring you to justice’.

And to our other enemies, those who wish to weaken our spirit, we can be equally clear. This act of terrorism has not weakened our resolve or defeated our firm approach to liberty.

Our operations around the world, especially our duties to the liberated people of Iraq and Afghanistan, will not be affected by this. Nor will we hold back on the defence of our citizens around the world.

Terrorism, wherever it occurs, will not be tolerated.

At home, we have a duty to all Americans, those who Tuesday returned our administration, who backed the policies and strength of President Tryst.

While, tragically, President Tryst will not fulfil his promises personally, myself and my administration certainly will.

Increased expenditure on Defence, Education and Health, as well as the largest tax cuts ever, will be delivered as we continue to drive down the deficit.

In conclusion this evening, know that your government has not been halted nor even interrupted by these tragic events. The investigation continues, and we expect a major breakthrough shortly. And we feel confident that you, as with us all, will remember President Edward Tryst as the noble servant of the people that he was – that is his legacy, and it will remain.

Good night. And God Bless America.”



Bob Attwood slept soundly and without trouble for the first time in many years. He did not dream, and rose with the morning sun still wearing a grin on his face. After so many years in a doomed marriage, and despite a near-blind dedication to the job, he still needed a companion in his life.

Sarah Angelou represented that for him – a vibrant, energetic beauty who understood the passion journalism would always hold for him. She would make him a better person. She would make him a better professional. And he knew, as he slowly realised where he was this fine day, that she would make him happy.

But the other side of the bed was empty. And as he stretched his arm across, he realised it was cold.

Rolling over, wincing at the sunlight, the grin began to fade. How was he supposed to interpret this? After all, he'd heard the stories of her promiscuity, and he knew kids these days got away with so much more than he did in the 60s. But just because they could sleep with *anyone* didn't mean they slept with *everyone*. Did it?

Of course not, he reassured himself. She might have some temporary fun with young athletic types now and then, but that was fast, furious and physically-motivated. He offered none of that, none at all, so this could only mean she had a different reason for going to bed with him. Yes, he offered something more. For perhaps the first time in his life he was actually relieved that he offered no sexual prowess.

But that feeling didn't last long. He was a journalist – a professional doubter. If this was actually something more, if she reciprocated the feelings that were welling inside him, why had she left him during the night? Not that he was dwelling on the point, but she obviously hadn't stayed long enough to leave remnants of the enticing aroma that he associated with her.

He hadn't been expecting, you know, to return to the States as a married man or anything. But surely what had taken place the previous evening had merited waking up together and a little breakfast. If it wasn't worth that, then it meant nothing.

It meant nothing.

The thought stung. More than the gnawing loneliness resurrecting itself at the core of his being, there was the stinging rebuke of rejection.

He felt naked – he was naked, but not the warm, comfortable intimacy that he wished he could have woken with. This was the stark, exposed nakedness, a drunk Noah or a fallen Adam.

He felt cheated. And wasted. A strong, professional relationship with this driven individual, the opportunity to mentor the next generation of quality journalism, that would have been enough.



Intimacy was a late-night insomniac's dream, and what makes perfect sense then should never be realised in the cold light of day.

And as that light streamed over him he felt he had ruined a wonderful, realistic partnership in pursuit of nothing more than a quick fuck. The Fourth Estate can serve no master, and he knew this morning he had served a degrading purpose that would forever tarnish the integrity so essential to who he was.

He did not, in this moment, feel cheated in the way a teenage girl might when she wakes up the morning after Prom. He felt cheated the way an addict might when he wakes up to discover he drank his life away.

He had cheated himself.

Of course, that didn't absolve the chirpy, perky blonde from any of the blame. He was just about to consider what to say to her, when she walked through the door.

Feeling as he did, and still lying naked under the covers in bed, the last thing he needed was her cheery presence arriving.

But she was not here to inject laughter. She was as satisfied with her morning as he was jilted by his evening.

"Good morning sunshine. You know I hate to rush a man, but we have to move."

She translated the confused look on his face into a question.

"Mohammed al-Greddi is staying at the Holiday Inn. That's only half a mile from here, but we need to hurry. He's checking out this morning."

Bob Attwood required lengthy personal time to address his emotions. But he needed no time at all to analyse the strength of a lead.

He leaped out of the bed without any lingering embarrassment or exposure. Duty called.



“... it will remain. Good night. And God Bless America.”

“Ugh.” Campbell killed the television feed and turned away from the set. His disgust was insincere – he liked seeing himself on TV, and thought he had waded through the necessary bullshit with a level of dignity. But Weaver, Marshall and Martinez didn’t need to know that.

Lucas Weaver was in a positive mood: “How many times do you think they are going to repeat that?”

“Too many times, and not nearly enough.” They laughed.

Martinez was still treading carefully, having been reinstated into the inner circle only moments ago. He had yet to push for details, and he did not understand the sudden friendliness between Campbell and Weaver. A day is a long time in politics.

Marshall was also happy – the administration was moving forward, away from the quagmire of the election campaign and Tryst’s death. But he also knew there was much that still needed to be done – and the investigation could not be stalled any longer.

“We’ve lost a day, gentlemen, and it’s late. While the obfuscation tactics in the press may have gone too far, we seem to have stopped that. So where to from here?”

A day earlier Martinez would have jumped in to answer that question. Now, however, he waited until all eyes were trained on him before deciding he was expected to answer.

Even then his answer was tentative: “Well, uh, we do have this fingerprint.”

Campbell, sensing the trepidation, sought to apologise. “Frank, I’m sure you understand the confusion. Lucas has tried to justify his action, and I think we’re all ready to move on.” For a politician, this was considered sincere.

Martinez, who had not yet received a full explanation of his dismissal and restitution, wanted to pursue this point, uncover Weaver’s role in his poor treatment. Instead he acquiesced to addressing Campbell’s misconception.

“Actually, we have another fingerprint. And this one appears linked to a more plausible motive.” He was warming once again to acceptance in this echelon, though his place as a necessary intruder was now clear.

“We have a name and a flight out of Washington, Tuesday night.”

He had attention now, in content as in tone. But he had spent the day questioning the motives of the men before him, not pursuing this lead. He had no more to offer, and worse still, this was obvious to those men.



Campbell was the first to speak. “How new is this information?” he asked it with intrigue, and surprise. Surely this would have come to his attention immediately?

Martinez responded sheepishly. “Actually, the match came in this morning. But there’s, er, been a few disruptions around the fingerprints today.”

This accusation was directed more to the newspapers than the President’s actions, but Campbell took offence. “I had hoped, Frank, that you understand my actions. But it is clear you do not, and now you want to pin a delay of, what, 12 hours or more, you want to pin it on me?”

Martinez was quick to defend: “No sir, not at all. It was just ...”

“... just what? It was just what?”

“Enough, please. Mr President, Korte, I am in control of this investigation. When you stepped in you did so with reason, but also with disruptive effect. You are not to blame for this delay, but certainly neither am I.”

Marshall, growing used to the Campbell-Weaver camaraderie but sensing a further breakdown in the group dynamic, was quick to move the conversation on. “Again, I remind you of the hour. We have information, so if we are to act on this we should do so now.”

The nodding heads indicated consent, but Marshall again had to prompt a decision he could not make alone. “This person, this man who touched the gun, presumably killed Edward, and then fled the country. Who is he, and where did he flee to?”

This information Martinez had – it had been festering in his lack of action all day. “His name is Mohammed al-Greddi. As best we can tell, he fled to France and there he remains.”

It was clear what would happen next. Not even the sovereignty of France, America’s close ally of late, would stand in the way of a forced, unannounced, extradition out of Europe for this murderer.

Indeed, for Campbell, Weaver and Marshall the only question was whether he should be brought back to the crime scene for arrest, or for holding at Guantanamo Bay where his part in any larger scheme could be more rapidly ascertained.

Martinez had another matter pressing him, but he did not wish to raise it. Fear of retribution remained. And yet ... well, one fingerprint from three was not enough to reach a conclusion, especially when another remained protected from the investigation.

What if this were an international red herring?



CHAP TER NINE - FIFTEEN

“...so that is recording now. Now you are...”

“My name is Mohammed al-Greddi. I am a Yemeni national.”

“And yet you speak English very well.”

“I studied at Cambridge. Did you come to quiz me on my life? I think not, two American reporters in France have a reason for being here.”

“Actually, um, an insight into your life could be interesting. But we are here because you killed the President.”

“You arrogant Americans, deciding to be judge and executioner. Hush – you want to come into my room and ask questions. You want truth. Then listen. I am happy to tell you why I did what I did.

“I tell you, when Americans talk of terror, I want to laugh and I want to weep. Who are you to talk of terror?”

“I guess a Yemeni would know.”

“Hush – let me talk. You Americans have one day, one day. I was born in Palestine, and I can tell you people that terrorism is not a suicide bomber anymore than it is a man who kills his wife. Terrorism is a nation persecuting a people for no reason, and for generations.

America was settled by those fleeing persecution in Britain. Israel was granted to those fleeing persecution of the Nazis. But now both have forgotten their dream of tolerance, and it is my people that are suffering from this terrorism.

This is what I told your President Tryst.

And don’t think I do not understand what I talk of. Some Palestinians, and your politicians do not realise this, fight terrorism in other ways.

I am not a fighter. I am a thinker, and I wanted to show the world that we can be thinkers as well. It was not easy – PLO, Lockerbie. In 1988 I was recently married to my beloved wife Maram, and celebrating the birth of my daughter Ne’ma, when I was offered a position to study at Cambridge.

It was my opportunity to represent my people, a chance to prove to them that I, and all Arabs given the chance, could be an intellectual in their world. And so, at Cambridge University, I read in English literature – Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens. For four years I studied diligently, and not once did they allow my wife and child into the country.



Even with a degree and job prospects, my family were considered aliens. Why? Because they were Palestinian. Further studies? Tenure? Even Harvard was interested, but only if I worked in Mid-East studies, and only if I left my family at home.

So I returned to the West Bank. I had work, I had my family, I was unfulfilled but I was happy. We had two boys – Hamad and Samer, I taught them to play chess – and then my angel baby Suhaila.

My family was the most blessed thing. I was almost willing to give everything else up for them. Almost. But there was this constant portrayal in the media, your media, and the belief in the hearts of people that Arabs, Muslims, were all brainwashed, radical, fundamentalist murderers. I was dedicated to proving otherwise. I will regret that ‘almost’ for the rest of my life.

October 22, of the year 2000. I should have been happy – I had an article printed in *Studies in English Literature*, which was something considering I’d never been to the United States, and never met the people at Rice University. But I was not happy - there was so much violence happening around the place.

October 22 – it was a Sunday. Ne’ma was twelve. The boys were seven and six, and Suhaila was two. I don’t take sides in war – few combatants are without blame. But I tell you Palestinians do not drive American-funded tanks into residential areas.

There was a bomb on a bus in Tel Aviv. The bomber was an Iraqi-Arab, not a Palestinian, but Barak and Sharon didn’t care – we were all the same, barely human.

And that’s how they saw us – animals, meat. They pricked us, and we bled. My sons were first – out in front of our house, curious about the noise. Jewish soldiers shot them both - Hamad in the head, Samer twice in the back as he ran away.

Four of those uniformed thugs, enfranchised murderers, came into the house, a captain with a few men. I had Maram and the girls, huddled in the lounge. She was calling for the boys, screaming, the baby was crying, and in they marched.

I pleaded with them – I’m an intellectual, not a fighter, I wasn’t going to harm them. But they were not after me.

They grabbed Ne’ma, dragged her toward a bedroom. Maram screamed, so they tried to grab her too, but she wouldn’t go, she was clutching Suhaila. One of the Jewish pigs grabbed the weeping child from my wife’s arms and shot her. Right there, in front of us. They show dogs more mercy than my child.



They knocked me to the ground, and dragged my wife away. They didn't rape her, but they took turns raping my daughter while she watched. Maram's screams mixed with Ne'ma's screams, it was unbearable.

And when they'd had their way, they bludgeoned my wife to shut her up, and they left.

They killed my boys, my angel, my wife, and impregnated my child. For nothing. For fun.

Ne'ma and I tried to move on, continue with our lives. But who could forget that day, especially with her child, my granddaughter, as a constant reminder of the horror?

I tried England, America, even France and Germany. But none would grant asylum – if I was under threat from Israel, it must be with good reason.

So we moved to Yemen. A fresh start, and a new nationality. My article had generated some publicity in America, and I was invited to speak at a forum the following September.

I landed at JFK on September 21, 2001. Those who did not understand real injustice, continued terror, were still in shock at what had occurred in that city ten days before.

I was an academic. My visa was good, but I was an Arab and a Muslim. They turned me away. Worse still, I let them. I returned home, and I thought I had lost everything.

My dreams were shattered. The fire, the drive was gone. I had only my daughter and her baby, and I wanted only to protect them.

Until last Saturday, I did just that. Yemen may not be an SUV democracy, but it is a nation of respect. Respect. Sovereignty.

I doubt your President Tryst knew the definition of sovereignty – he certainly didn't last Saturday.

When the Jews killed my family they fought for land they thought was theirs. When the Americans came, they came for no reason.

There was no one to fight, camels cannot match tanks. They shot a few people – they killed the old man who delivered bread in the mornings.



But that was not enough. Maybe they were looking for me, who knows? But they found my daughter. If your Marines treated all Jews like they did my bastard grandchild, the Middle East would be a much happier place.

My daughter knew what was coming. She tried to flee, but they wouldn't let her. And one by one, your soldiers on a mission of peace, upholding justice and opposing terror, raped my little girl to death.

When that Israeli captain took his men out of my home to do more foul deeds to my people, he turned back. He looked me in the eye, and he apologised.

When the last American left, unhappy that my daughter could offer no more, he also looked me in the eye. He looked me in the eye and he spat on me.

Nothing can prepare you for that emptiness. I wanted to weep, but I could not. I wanted to fight, but I cannot fight. I am a man of words, and of books.

I was not thinking, but I made decisions. In America it was the last days of a close election. I wanted to tell your President what he had caused, and I wanted to scare him into...I don't know. I wasn't thinking.

I flew into Washington. They let me in this time, and I tried to track down your President. I was not thinking – he was not even in the city.

I bought a gun. \$200. Soviet – I found that interesting. Understand that I did not buy a gun to shoot your President – I just wanted to scare him.

On election day I went to his hotel. I wanted the world to know my pain, but I wanted to tell only him. In the end, I didn't care. I just marched up to his room.

I was going to ambush him, them, whoever. It was just before seven – there was someone inside, and whoever it was they had left the door unlocked and had gone to the bathroom.

But there was no President and I, well I was confused, emotional. I went into a bedroom, and sitting there I asked myself what I was doing. What was I thinking. A man of books, handling a gun in a hotel room. I thought of my wife, my children, my wasted life. And then I cried. I cried.

For how long I do not know, silently sobbing. And I gave up. Wanting to be with them all again I stormed into the room to meet my fate.

And there I met your President, alone, hanging up the telephone. Honestly, I was as stunned as he was, but I had a fire, a passion reinvigorating me. And I had a gun.



He just put his hands up, backed away, and sat down. No fight, no argument – he was happy to send other sons away to fight and die, but he was a true coward even when his own life was at stake.

And with the tears of bitter memories flowing down my cheeks I told him. I told him how America funded a nation of terrorists because they were Jewish, because they were white. And I told him of my pain, my hatred for America and Americans.

I told him how, because of his cowardly imperialism, his elitist arrogance, my daughter had died a more horrible death than any of those in New York or Washington on September 11.

And I told him how this was not a result of history, not an inescapable fate of presidencies past. This was not his intelligence advisors, his Congress, or his allies. This was him, all him.

I told President Tryst that if he had intelligence, he could have avoided his mistakes, and prevented all this anguish. How if he had morals, he would never had ordered what he ordered. How if he had courage, he would have fought racism and prejudice in his government, not the poor and downtrodden in a far off land.

I told him how my daughter was dead, how countless other sons and daughters were dead. And he was to blame. Many more would die for no purpose. And he was to blame.

None of this brought my family back. But I felt I had ensured they had not died in vain. I had said my piece, and made my peace.

I threw the gun at his feet. I walked out of the hotel, caught a taxi back to the airport, and flew back here. I was going home ... but I realised, without my family, there was no home. So I stayed here, I ...”

“Wait a moment. Sorry. Did you shoot the President in rage at the memory of your family, or was it a calculating statement timed at your discretion?”

“Truly, you Americans get the President you deserve. You have not listened, have you? Like a Hollywood feature, you missed the subtleties. I am not a fighting man. No matter my rage, my hatred, at him and all he stood for, I could not kill him.

“The first I knew he was dead was when I landed here in France. Someone shot him around 8.30, when I was gone and on my way. Somebody else shot your President.

I did not want him dead. I wanted him to face the truth of his actions, and be a better man for it. I can only hope that those who follow in his path, learn his lesson.”



The flight from DC to Paris had been one of nervous optimism and eager anticipation. The flight home was even more nerve-wracking, a shaky race against time.

Bob Attwood and Sarah Angelou had perhaps the hottest interview of their lives recorded on both mini disc – stowed away in the belly of the plane – and on dictaphone tape – secured in Attwood’s jacket pocket. They had beaten the investigation into a President’s murder to talk with the prime suspect, and they believed they had exonerated him. As they flew out of de Gaulle they knew al-Greddi’s identity had not yet been released. It was barely midnight at home – though early Saturday morning in Paris – and that would hopefully delay any news release until their arrival.

Certainly, they could have sat in a Parisian internet café and seamlessly transferred the interview digitally around the globe for an instant exclusive. But both journalists had put in too much effort, risked too much professionally, to simply hand this over to the networks.

Attwood had been at the pinnacle of political reporting for decades – when he was covering Reagan in the Whitehouse, Rupert Murdoch was still trying to break into the Brisbane market. He had built on his newspaper respectability to become a valued political commentator on cable and free-to-air TV, the literal press in ‘Meet the Press’.

All of this meant he had fast access to news program Producers across the board. He could almost pick and choose the time and station he wanted even without revealing the exact nature of his breaking broadcast news.

The two had briefly discussed which medium to choose, but Angelou had proposed an answer that was daring yet elegant. Any other source would be ‘radical’, ‘biased’, or ‘pushing a liberal agenda at the expense of national security’.

There was only one option when presenting an interview with the man who could have killed the President. That medium was Fox News. And there was only one choice of interviewer when you wanted both sides of politics to take notice of the scoop. That man was Bill O’Reilly. It was a red rag to a bull, a combination of interview and forum that could become media legend.

Attwood had placed the call just before they checked out of their room, waking O’Reilly’s producer with a promise, and a demand. It had all been arranged, a noon interview, not exactly prime time but then news, much to the chagrin of Dan Rather *et al*, was no longer a prime time event. This would give them enough time to brief O’Reilly so he could do his version of an objective job, and hopefully ensure no one else got the story.

With that settled, the two had boarded their flight home. And now, in the rarefied cabin air and hours away from contact with anyone else they knew, Attwood’s mind turned to other matters.



“About last night.” It was concerned, quizzical, and open-ended. He had reached no conclusions about the ramifications of what had taken place between them, and he did not want to force a response on the attractive blonde in the seat next to him. But that didn’t mean he had no preference for her response.

“Right,” Angelou responded, slowly, “last night”. She had not forgotten, but thought the consequences were clear. “It was fun, wasn’t it?”

“Sure, yes, sure. It was fun.” It was a fumbled response. Attwood could interrogate the most powerful people in the world, but he could not ask a girl what he meant to her. He told himself this was the nature of the topic, of sexual conversations in general, but he knew it was the nature of his personality.

Sarah Angelou had met plenty of men with this nature. She knew her response by rote, but felt this time something extra may be required. “It was fun. It was Paris, you know, all that talk about romance, love in the air.”

Knowing what was coming, and wanting to be the one to say it, Attwood interrupted. “But it means nothing more?”

He had intended it as a statement, but the question was obvious. Angelou politely ignored it. “Right, it was fun, nothing more.”

“Well,” he started, turning back to the in-flight magazine in his lap. “Well, I’m glad we cleared that up.”

It wasn’t cleared up, and he wasn’t glad. But he had ended the conversation without doing too much damage to his self-esteem.

Angelou was glad. She cared for him, there was no doubt about that. And last night had meant more to her than most of her one-night friends. But surely he had realised it was a casual thing and nothing more?

She looked over at him, pretending to be engrossed with tips on laundering in airport terminals. He was hurting. Obviously her intentions had not been clear enough.

She did not regret what had taken place. But she could not change that, and now she had to focus on her professionalism. This was the story that would make her as a world class journalist, and she couldn’t let a man get in the way of that.

Even if she did respect him.

Even if he was kind of cute.



CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

Last Saturday, October 30, Franco Martinez had slept late, and done some yard work. The previous night had been a late one - he had played an important role linking terrorist camps in Yemen to consulate bombings in Africa – and he deserved some down time.

Campbell, Marshall, and Weaver had each had a week of light campaigning, and were catching up with family and friends in the final days before the election. They had been summonsed back to work early, when Cabinet had decided – not without dissent – to destroy those camps and those who supported them. Even this close to the election they were *‘Still at Work’*.

This Saturday, November 6, there had been no thought of sleeping in or seeing the in-laws. It was barely 8am, and the four men were assembled in the Oval Office. While Martinez and his team had worked through the night tracking down their culprit, the others had slept soundly in the knowledge of the proactive lead.

Knowledge being power and power being control, they thought they held the upper hand. The lead man in the investigation was about to take that control away: they knew nothing.

“We lost him. We tracked the suspect to Paris on a flight Tuesday night. We don’t have him leaving again – that’s through Interpol, incidentally, the local authorities and Homeland Security don’t really get along. It has taken a while, basically cold calling, but we discovered he stayed Tuesday night through Friday night at the Holiday Inn near the airport.

“Only problem is, he checked out this morning, shortly after midnight our time. We haven’t found any more records of him anywhere. The team is still looking, but we lost him.”

“Could he have switched to an alias?” As usual it was Anderton Marshall directing conversation toward a solution.

“Unlikely. He hasn’t used one yet, and we haven’t tipped him off that we’ve discovered his identity.”

There was a collective silence as the disappointment registered. They were hunting a killer on behalf of a nation, and perhaps more importantly on behalf of their own political agenda. Letting their suspect slip through their fingers was a very bad thing.

Again, Marshall verbalised what they were all thinking. “Do we have any choice?”

The others, after a moment’s consideration, each shook their heads. The delays had been great – brought on by misleading newspaper sources, and mistrust in the investigation. They needed to once again take control, or at least let the nation think they had the power. There was now no alternative but to go public with Mohammed al-Greddi, the fugitive wanted for the President’s murder.



It was a gamble – once he knew he was pinned he would probably go into hiding, but splashing his face across the world’s front pages would make hiding particularly difficult. Innocent until proven guilty was not a tenet of international terrorist prosecution. All men were created equal, except those suspected of assassination.

President Tryst had been loathe to give press conferences. Since he had been replaced, the Whitehouse was averaging one a day, even it seemed on weekends. While scheduling an 11am media event was a little earlier than they may have hoped, time was not on their side.

That having been agreed, another pause loomed. Martinez was definitely not in charge, was not going to change the subject, and the others were still growing accustomed to Cabinet meetings without Tryst in control.

They were spared the silence – and shocked out of it – by the ringing telephone. It was the Oval Office’s direct line.

Motioning to the others that they should remain, Campbell crossed the floor and answered the phone curtly from the wrong side of the desk.

“Korte, It’s me.”

With those three words, Campbell forgot about the others and took a seat.

“Van? Is that you?”

At the sound of the former Vice-President’s name, the others began to listen closer. Though they could only hear Campbell’s half of the conversation, the meaning was clear.

“You sound faint, Van. Maybe it’s a bad phone connection? Where are you?”

“Huh. Actually, I’m in town. I’m in the George Washington, Korte.”

“In the hospital? Are you all right?”

“It’s been a bitch of a week. Election night, Edward’s death, coming clean and all. I had a turn, Korte.”

“So you came back for...” Campbell trailed off. He couldn’t bring himself to ask about AIDS treatment for his friends and political associate.

On the other end of the phone, a willingness to discuss these matters was a forced matter of acceptance. “I’m dying faster than I thought. Weeks, maybe only days. I came back to finish a few things off, close some loose ends.”



“Van, is there anything I can do? Anything we can do?”

There was a lengthy pause. The former Vice-President was no longer the tower of strength he enjoyed being, and he was not rapidly adjusting to a position of subservience and politeness. Still, he had made the mistake, and now he had to live with it.

“Korte, you all know how much I respect you. I think the country’s in good hands. But there is one thing I want to discuss with you and the boys.”

“Anything, Van, anything at all.”

“It’s to do with Corker. I had a talk with her before I was admitted, and ... well, let’s leave it at that over the phone. Can you get over here some time today?”

“Will not be a problem at all. We are just finalising one last thing here, we’re having a press conference around 11, and we’ll be over after that.”

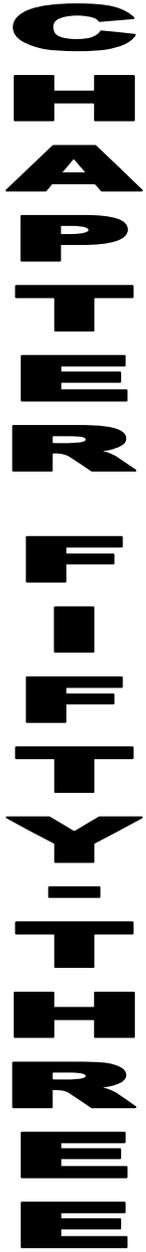
“After lunch then. I’ll see you soon.” He paused again, trying to put into words something he would not say naturally. “Thank you Korte. Thank you.”

In a private room at George Washington University Hospital, Vanguard Watson III ended his last phone call.

Campbell returned the receiver to its cradle, and slowly turned to the rest of the group.

He knew he had to remain focused on al-Greddi, on tracking down the prime suspect in the President’s murder. But he could not help but feel for his friend, and wonder what he had to say.





The rest of the *Air-France* flight was spent in silence, but as soon as the luggage was collected, and the other copy of the interview found safe, conversation between Atwood and Angelou resumed. Their noon appointment with Fox News was the natural topic.

Attwood was trying to train his less experienced partner – developing a steady argument was essential in front of Bill O’Reilly, even when they were there as media partners.

This was about truth. This was about the public’s right to hear all sides. This was about an investigation that, perhaps for its own reasons, was too inept to track down a potential murderer. And this was about Mohammed al-Greedi’s motives, his hate, and his desire despite all hardships forced upon him to teach the world a lesson, not to kill.

At least, that was what it was about until they jumped into the cab. The taxi driver noted their destination, Fox affiliate WTTG on Wisconsin Ave, but asked them to keep their conversation low. There was big news coming out of the Whitehouse.

“What are they saying?”

“That’s what I’m trying to find out. Something about Tryst’s killer – they’ve got proof that some Mid-East guy did it. Mohammed something – damn Muslim terrorists, take our jobs, kill our politicians. Anyway, now they can’t find him.”

Suddenly, this was going to be a very different interview. It was timely, impossibly so – every American would know their source, but there was evidence he was the killer, evidence from the Whitehouse. Would one interview change their minds?

Public opinion, especially for those who loved and supported the dead President, was now swinging against their source. And Bill O’Reilly liked being onside with public opinion.

This was going to be a hostile reception.

The fundamental difference between newspaper and television journalism can be expressed with one figure – more words are used on the front page of one paper than can be squeezed into a half hour TV bulletin.

As a necessary consequence, television – even current affairs programs – must focus on impact and headlines without depth. Each news medium is a specialised field, with its own demands and requirements. To excel in one does not aid success in another. Most journalists contend that written news, especially online when ‘newshole’ is unlimited, is capable of better reporting. Yet more people get their news from television.

Sarah Angelou did not care for the excesses of cable news. She wanted to make a lasting mark on her country's political landscape. Newspapers had Watergate; TV had the National Guard Memos. But she had walked out of the *Washington Post*, and today she had a lifetime exclusive that needed airing immediately. Four days ago she had been a talking head on CNN. Now, shortly before noon, she found herself in a studio preparing for her Fox News debut.

Bob Attwood had done the rounds many times, but never with such an explosive interview. They were about to override even the investigation into the President's murder, take directly to the American public an interview with perhaps the last man who talked to the President alive.

They had trusted al-Greddi, taken him at his word. The public was being told otherwise. Would the actions of two journalists prove justified, or would they become the focus of a vengeful nation's misplaced anger?

"There is that picture one more time, everybody. Mohammed al-Greddi, the man who may have assassinated our President.

"I say 'may have assassinated', because joining me now on a very special *The O'Reilly Factor* are two people who claim that the Whitehouse is wrong, that they have spoken with al-Greddi, and he is in fact innocent.

"Bob Attwood and Sarah Angelou, welcome."

"Thank you Bill."

"Now you two used to be at the *Washington Post*."

"That's correct."

"And, what, you got a lead on this terrorist, your editor wouldn't support you, so you trekked across to France and tipped him off that the investigation was after him."

"This was about truth, Bill. The public has a right to know, and why was the investigation dragging its heels?"

"Sure, yes. Now you spoke to this man."

"Yes."

"And he, what, he claimed he had nothing to do with it?"

"That's correct. If we play ..."



“Wait a moment, exactly what did you expect him to say? If he shot the President, is he going to put his hands up and say ‘hey you got me’?”

“If you play the tape ...”

“... we’ll get to that in a moment. But, really, what else would he say?”

“Are you going to report or decide?”

“Are you going to answer the question?”

“We had a frank and open discussion with Mr al-Greedi, and we have no reason to doubt ...”

“Sure, okay. Let’s roll the tape.”



Weaver had his mouth already open to respond and defend when he realised the offer before him. Grasping for words, he ended his goldfish impersonation by clamping his mouth tight.

Campbell had successfully silenced his former rival, now political partner. He was happy: “Take the time to think about it Lucas. We’re pulling up now, we’ll see what Van wants to tell us, and you can let me know your answer in good time.”

Weaver, surprised by the offer and impressed at what he saw was support for his political fundamentals, remained silent, nodding ever so slightly as the car approached the hospital drive.

Any positive feelings the two leaders had were quickly swept away when they entered the hospital.

Vanguard Watson III, former Vice President, successful businessman, respected family man, and personal friend, was in intensive care. By his bedside were his wife, Molly, and his eldest son Jake; his younger boy, Tommy, was stationed in Fallujah.

The mood was sombre; respectful, but resigned to the inevitable. It was clear as Campbell and Weaver entered the room followed by a Secret Service entourage that Watson had slipped into this coma away several hours earlier, and was unlikely to wake up.

With all they had learnt of the man’s character and the reasons for his illness it was hard to make polite conversation with Molly. They had each known the family for years, but the revelations of Tuesday night and their subsequent decision to leave the country had acted to strain the friendship.

And besides, they had come here with a purpose. Watson had important information to reveal, something he felt was too important to risk over the telephone. That news, it seemed, had come from the former First Lady. That was who these two needed to see.

They could only offer futile best wishes as they excused themselves from the room and bid their former ally a fond farewell.

“Is Corker still in Washington?” Campbell asked, with some urgency, as they headed back to the car.

“No,” responded Weaver, surprising even himself by being on the ball. “Dr Mapp took her home to Alabama this morning while we planned the media thing. But, Korte, you still think this Arab was responsible don’t you?”



“Of course he’s responsible, it was his fingerprint on the gun. But he may not have acted alone. Maybe that’s what Van needed to tell us. We need to get to Alabama. Now. And we need to get that other fingerprint. Now.

“I think Corker Tryst has a confession to make.”

Vanguard Watson III, Vice President of the United States of America 2001-2004, died late Sunday evening. He made many men wealthy, first as an oil company executive and later as an overseer of military contracts.

But the media would attack his death, its cause, and the ramifications those actions had on the man and those around him. Few of his millionaire friends would attend his funeral.



Blogosphere made for attacks like this

Online News has rushed to attack the two reporters. But political blogs have held nothing back.

[Schroeder: "Blood on their hands." \(Schroder\)](#)

[Marks: Like letting "Oswald flee to Mexico." \(The Target\)](#)

[Anna Marie-Cox: "I bet they fucked." \(Wonkette\)](#)

Posted at 2:51:51 PM

[E-mail this item](#) | [QuickLink this item: A73153](#)

Lone voice supports assassin duo

Vanity Fair Newsflash

Bradley: "I don't usually care for breaking news. Vanity Fair is not that kind of publication. But I'm sure our readers won't mind if I defend two fine, courageous journalists for daring to find this interview and trusting their instinct and news sense in front of a media become dependent on releases and anonymous sources."

[Lewis:When did stupidity become courageous? \(VF Forum\)](#)

Posted at 2:52:06 PM

[E-mail this item](#) | [QuickLink this item: A73154](#)

US Most Wanted Lies About Everything

Ha'aretz

While he denied killing President Tryst, Israel's leading daily has accused al-Greddi about lying about so much more. "In the face of terrorist attacks, our troops are admirably upright in the defence of liberty."

[Later: "If only the same were true of US Press."](#)

Posted at 2:54:06 PM

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Additional Items for November 6, 2004

> [Dan Rather: We all make mistakes \(CBS\)](#)

> [Geraldo: Good reporting is good national security \(CC\)](#)

> [Acronym Attwood, Angelou = "Goat went O aloud"](#)

> [Send link suggestions, letters, etc. to jromenesko@poynter.org](#)

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> [The news is strange at the Obscure Store & Reading Room](#)

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NOV
06

A Good Week Keeps Getting Better

And to think, I used to spend Saturday nights binge drinking. After this week, regular life is going to be boring.

In case you've had your head up your arse the FBI, CIA, NSA, and Blockbuster all want **this guy**. Ugly creep, looks like he could kill my President. And hey, a grateful nation thanks him.

But these two, **Bob Attwood** and **Sarah Angelou**, talked to him. He said he didn't do it, blamed Israel for something, and being good honest citizens with no job they believed him.

[\[more...\]](#)

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You decide

For reasons I don't pretend to understand, they took their story to **Bill O'Reilly**. Maybe they wanted sympathy from the vast minority who voted Republican. Maybe Sarah Angelou felt like a **Caribbean shower** or tips on **vibrator technique**.

Anyway – the Fox News interview is **here**. **The Smoking Gun** ripped it off – for a real no spin **go here**.

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My theory

So Attwood and Angelou quit their jobs at the **Washington Post** to track down a lead, and come back with the hottest story since the assassination.

My theory? I reckon they fucked. Totally. Totally. **These two, Paris**, the “thrill of the chase”. They totally fucked.

(And I, for one, can't blame her. Y'all know I'd jump his bones right after **Chris Matthews**, **Peter Jennings**, and **the guy from that commercial**.)



Now they're being bagged, well pretty much every where. Even their old boss is slagging them **off here**. The only place still talking to them is **Vanity Fair**. No comment. [\[more...\]](#)

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O'Reilly's CUMuppance?

And this just in – Apparently **Bill O'Reilly** has bagged an interview with **Frank Martinez** tonight at 8.

There's a threesome I don't want to be wedged in the middle of ... maybe Miss Angelou has different thoughts? [\[more...\]](#)

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Duo Left Post With Treasonous Lead

We said think; they broke the moral codes of the profession

by *Arthur Robinson*

Editor-in-Chief

Saturday, November 6, 2004

We editors don't usually step out into the open, but growing attacks on irresponsible reporters and their former associations with this paper have made it necessary.

For 20 years Robert Attwood was a respected member of the *Washington Post* team, Sarah Angelou was maturing into a reliable newsman. But blinded by a lead they have crossed the line of responsible journalism: at least we saw it coming and cut our losses.

As Editor, both reporters came to me with the lead. They were committed to tracking Mohammed al-Greedi, regardless of his innocence or guilt or the effect it may have on the most serious investigation this country has seen in a generation.

Faced with that choice, the *Washington Post* gave two clear alternatives: take the lead slowly and without risk, or hand anything they had over to the investigation.

They chose a third option, to pursue the lead independently. So I had no choice but to have them both leave the Post.

Our news service and our loyal readers deserve better.

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CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT RECORDS SECTION SERIALS X-01-11-01

“It’s 8pm and you’re tuned to cable’s highest rating news program *The O’Reilly Factor*. I’m Bill O’Reilly. Thankyou for joining us.

“The maxim here at Fox News is simple: ‘We Report. You Decide.’ Earlier this afternoon we reported on one of the biggest stories since President Tryst’s murder. Two journalists, Bob Attwood and Sarah Angelou, interviewed the man the Administration tells us is responsible for that murder. We had the exclusive interview with them, and their source.

“Now depending on whom you believe, these journalists either quit or were fired from the *Washington Post* in pursuit of this interview. Was it responsible journalism like they claimed? Or did they overstep the bounds of national security in pursuit of their egos, as others have claimed?

“More importantly, were they wrong to believe a man who himself claims was not thinking when he waved a gun at our President? Did they ruin the investigation? Impede the course of justice? Commit treason?

“You my viewers have let me know what you think. We’ll talk about that later in the program, and address some pinheads who blame me, yes me, for their mistake.

“But first, we have another very special, exclusive interview here, for you. Joining me now is Mr Franco Martinez, FBI Agent and the man leading the investigation for Homeland Security. Mr Martinez, welcome.”

“Thank you.”

“No, we thank you sir. The first question everyone wants answered – is this tape genuine?”

“Well, we have still not yet been able to locate the individual in question, but I think it’s fair to say we’re assuming this is a genuine interview.”

“Then I have to ask you – how did these two journalists find out about this man, and get to him before you did?”

“An investigation like this, especially one like this, has to undertake due process, and properly check the information. We can’t go off half-cocked like these two did.”

“Even if they were right.”

“We aren’t trying to interfere with the press, but the law can’t rush in like this. What if we were wrong?”

“But they were right, sir.”



“Now you know I have been nothing but forthright and honest with the media over the last few dreadful days in our nation’s history, even where national security is an issue.”

“Forthright and honest, Mr Martinez? The newspapers have been filled with stories about Cabinet leaks, even claims President Campbell was responsible.”

“All of which were completely denied. They were untruths.”

“So you say, but the interview we aired exclusively here today. This is true?”

“Well, as I said, we have to assume...”

“I’m sorry – I didn’t mean true as in the suspect in question. The claims that your prime suspect did not kill the President - are they true?”

“Our evidence, which is not complete, shows that this individual touched the gun that killed President Tryst. That may be consistent with his version of events, but we would really need to speak with him and ask some more questions before we can reach a conclusion.”

“Do you believe Mohammed al-Greddi killed Mr Tryst?”

“Do I...? I believe what the evidence tells me.”

“And you say the evidence is lacking because the investigation has been unable to talk with this individual.”

“That would certainly help.”

“Did these two journalists scare him away? Did they tip off a probable murderer and therefore prevent your investigation from finding out all the necessary facts?”

“I guess you could say that.”

“Then you must agree that these journalists have over-stepped their bounds and threatened an investigation that impacts so dramatically on our security?”

“I’m sorry, what are you asking?”

“You agree, do you not Mr Martinez, that these journalists prevented your investigation from finding the truth.”

“I’m not sure if that’s true.”

“Remember, Mr Martinez, this is a ‘No Spin’ Zone. A simple yes or no?”



“No. In fact...”

“I’m sorry, Mr Martinez, we’re going to have to take a break for a moment.

“Folks, don’t go away. There’s more *Factor* on the other side of these messages.”

Bill O’Reilly usually tried not to talk with his guests during the brief commercial or news breaks. It made better television if he let them fester under the studio lights, and then drag out his re-introduction while they were geared to respond.

But no sooner had they cut to commercial than his producer came yabbering in, ignoring him and talking to the talent.

Evidently there was a Gerry Grier on the phone. He had some tapes, and there was something that needed to be shared with Martinez and, if it suited the lead investigator, with the nation who were surely tuned in.

It suited Martinez fine. He was a man of truth, unaccustomed to playing politics and uncomfortable doing so, especially in order to defend a group of men he retained little respect for.

And so O’Reilly, instead of teaching in his own way, was forced to listen and learn.

“Thanks for staying with us on the *Factor*. We were talking with Mr Franco Martinez, leading the investigation into the President’s murder. We have since been joined, by telephone, by Mr Gerry Grier, who I believe is also assisting with that investigation.

“When we went to the break we were discussing how the journalists you saw on this program today were wrong for believing the prime suspect for this heinous crime, and how their pursuit for self-indulgent glory may allow that murderer to escape.

“Once again, *The O’Reilly Factor* brings you breaking news. Mr Grier, thank you for joining us.”

“No problem.”

“I understand you have some new information from some tapes.”

“Yup.”

“Right. What information is that Mr Grier?”



“Sure, sorry. The tapes we have viewed this evening were from Dulles Airport on Tuesday night. They show Mohammed al-Greddi arriving for his flight out of the country around 8pm.”

“What exactly are you trying to tell us, Mr Grier, what does that prove?”

“Actually, I can answer that Bill, Gerry. As I said earlier, this investigation is an ongoing process. When I listened to the interview this afternoon, I realised the suspect claimed to have left before President Tryst was shot, and gone directly to the airport.

“This seemed easy to verify, so I set that task for Gerry. Now the President was shot sometime between 8pm and 9pm on Tuesday night. What Gerry is saying here, and correct me if I’m wrong, is that the surveillance tapes at the airport clearly show Mr al-Greddi arriving at the airport at that time.”

“That’s correct Frank.”

“In which case, it would appear, Mr al-Greddi’s alibi, the story he told Mr Attwood and Ms Angelou, was correct. He did not shoot the President.”

“OK, OK. Hold up a moment, this is my program. You’re now saying, conclusively, that this man did not kill President Tryst?”

“The evidence appears to suggest that, yes, though conclusively will require verification...”

“With all due respect, Mr Martinez, what does this say about your investigation? Two reporters kicked out of the *Washington Post* stumble on evidence you overlooked or put to the side for ‘verification’.

“They head to France, and actually manage to find and interview this man, with enough time to make it back to America before you, claiming to be forthright and honest, decide he is not only a person of interest but the prime suspect in the murder of our President.”

“I think that’s a little...”

“...please let me finish Mr Martinez, I think you’ve had your chance. But you did miss this Mr al-Greddi until the moment Bob Attwood and Sarah Angelou landed.”

“Within a few hours, perhaps.”

“Perhaps, sure. But without that interview, you would still be tracking this ‘Prime Suspect’ instead of discovering he couldn’t have been the murderer and now exonerating him on this program.”

“That’s a little simplistic.”



“Simplistic, sure. Accurate, probably. Probably. I want to thank you for your time tonight Mr Martinez, and you Mr Grier. You’ve really cleared things up for us.

“And folks, you heard it here first. This afternoon two brave journalists beat a hapless investigation to the truth. Our program, all of us here at Fox News, have taken a beating today for airing that interview, and so have those two reporters.

“But they, and we, have proved justified, proved correct. The truth, no spin, that’s what we try to bring you here. Today we succeeded.

“A quick break now. While we’re away, here’s something to consider. If Mr al-Greddi did not shoot the President, then who is the assassin? There’s still a story around that Korte Campbell may be involved. You decide.

“We’ll be right back.”



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Air Force One, at least the Boeing 747-200B popularised by Harrison Ford films, is a versatile behemoth. Designed to act as the President's office in the sky, it cannot help but draw attention wherever it goes. In reality, Air Force One is the radio call name given to the plane the President is travelling in – any plane. When he tries to travel without fanfare and announcement – like a quick trip to Alabama for an important yet private conversation – the Blue beast is dispensed with.

By far the most preferred alternate is Marine One – again, a radio call sign rather than a specific helicopter, though more often than not the Sikorsky VH-3D Sea King operated by the Marine Helicopter Squadron One. It was these Marines that were now flying the President south over West Virginia.

Korte Campbell and Lucas Weaver were growing accustomed to the additional Marines and Agents surrounding their every move. It wasn't that there were too many more for the President compared to the Secretaries of State or Defence - but the Service had been shaken up by their failures, and were clearly more attentive since Tuesday night.

That was fine when you had them looking for John Hinkley in a crowd; not so when you were on a plane wanting to discuss conspiracy theories that could only be verified by the former First Lady. So instead, buoyed with the information Martinez had called through, they ran down the theories so far. Much had happened since that fateful call four days prior.

The threat of terrorism had been omnipresent for this Presidency. National Security had been a key campaign issue, and one of the few where Edward Tryst had scored better than Patrick Russell, the Democrat hopeful. It had seemed immediately clear as they sat in the State Department office that the President had fallen victim to the forces that defined his Presidency and re-election.

Al Qaeda had denied it, though. Sure, several groups had stepped forward, but the experts concurred that was mere grandstanding from militant pretenders.

So focus had turned to more domestic reasons, especially when it transpired that the Secret Service agents had all followed orders, albeit longstanding tacit orders, to leave the President alone in a hotel suite. It seemed anybody could have walked in and shot him – though the investigation would need to be more specific.

Instead, the first discovery of the investigation had exposed the creative campaigning of the Republicans. It seemed Green votes, especially those siphoned from Democratic support bases, were not cheap. The contention had been that plenty would have killed on the basis of that damning action – but there was no evidence anyone had, or even that the information was known outside of the Administration that denied it.



Then a breakthrough, a fingerprint match. Classified, however, and requiring release authorisation from the highest level. Campbell did not blame himself for keeping that unrevealed – with stories in the paper, scuttlebutt on the TV news, he needed to take control of the investigation, give it focus.

It had not been that re-classification that had been damaging, but rather the internal confusions and miscommunications that had prevented the real evidence, an Arab fingerprint, from being properly pursued.

Besides, even that had not been an issue. There was still much verification work to be done, but it seemed clear – at least in a CSI world view – that Mohammed al-Greddi, despite having motive and opportunity, did not kill the President. At least, he was not the person who pulled the trigger.

But triggers, it is generally agreed, do not pull themselves. And there had been three fingerprints on that gun.

Korte Campbell felt he now knew who the classified fingerprint belonged to, and while Martinez would bring up the match fairly quickly on return to the Pentagon, he wanted the truth from the one person who could tell it.

That person was Corker Tryst. She alone had returned to the hotel suite where the President died. She alone had raised the alarm.

And she had spent the interim as a hysterical mess, unable or unwilling to answer all but the most routine questions.

Corker Tryst was hiding something, something terrible. Time to find out exactly what that was.



The Tryst family residence on an Alabaman farm resembled many of the other upgraded cotton mansions in the South, until you look closely. On further examination there was much to distinguish it – from bullet and shatter-proof glass to remote video sensor security. Of course, the stable of Secret Service guards prevented any such examination.

Campbell and Weaver were not here to see the security detail. As Dr Mapp led them in, they made sure their additional protective entourage remained close, but not too close.

And as they sat in the welcoming arm chairs that embodied this styled and finished home – despite being early evening it was still too warm for a Christmas fire – they made sure they spoke softly. This was certain to be damning information, and they alone wanted to control it.

“You’re looking much better, Corker.”

“Thank you Korte.” She looked terrible, still, and she knew it. She also knew why she remained distraught, and knew this was the reason these two had flown across four states to see her.

Campbell wasn’t as sure his motives were clear, though it was obvious he had come here with a purpose, seeking a firm answer to a hard question. Small talk is not easy under these circumstances.

And so Campbell moved in to test his theory. “Yesterday was, understandably, cut short. We were discussing...” As I said, it wasn’t easy. “We were discussing what happened that night.”

“I think you know what happened that night.”

“So do we, Corker. Please, we don’t have to make this worse than it has to be.” He knew he was asking a difficult question of a caring woman who deserved better. Thankfully, at least for him, he was not called upon to ask it.

“We were talking, well you were asking, about the gun.” For four days she had held a deep secret – acknowledging it even to herself was near impossible. To explain, out loud to the others, what had taken place on Tuesday night would require courage she was not sure she even possessed.

So instead she thought of her husband, in happier times. When he had been elected Governor. When he had been inaugurated President. That night so many years ago, when he had proposed to her and they had their whole future together spanning the years still ahead of them.

She must now face that future alone. Telling this story would mark the beginning of that new life.



“He did it. He did it. I don’t understand why, but he did it.

“I came up to the suite, at that time, wondering what was keeping him. And there he was.” Crying now, but even Dr Mapp knew to leave her alone, let her tell the story and release the burden inside her.

“I didn’t realise at first, he was just sitting there. But I knew, I knew, I knew something was wrong. And there he was.

“The gun was in his lap, still in his hand. I think I noticed it first, or more, or maybe I just couldn’t bring myself to look...Why? Oh Christ, Korte, why?”

Surely that was the hardest question of the night. But there was no-one present who could answer it, no-one who dared interrupt the silence. There was more to come.

“I just grabbed the gun, I threw it away, threw it as hard as I could and as far as I could. I don’t even know why I did it. He was gone, gone, but I just had to get it away.”

Perhaps she had reacted out of instinct. Perhaps she had sought, consciously or not, to uphold her husband’s integrity in the end, or to protect the Party they had both worked so hard for. In the end she didn’t know, and it didn’t matter.

“He’s dead, that’s all that matters. And for the rest of my life I have to live with the sight of him, the gun in his lap, and that smile, that godawful smile.”

She was not composed, the release was uncontrolled. But it was as if she had suddenly remembered that powerful detail and it focussed all her energy.

“That smile that seemed almost pleased to have accepted what he did as the best option.” The smile, she knew, was the release from every pain, every compromise, every lie. But he had made those decisions – why then did he decide against the sea of troubles.

“He hated himself, but it seemed he loved the solution.

“Don’t forgive him. I never will.”



The Washington Post

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 13, 2004

Edward Tryst and Felo-de-se

*by Bob Attwood and Sarah Angelou
Chief Political Correspondents*

Why would the President kill himself?

That is the question most asked since Tuesday's announcement that the investigation had concluded, and suicide was the Coroner's verdict.

After yesterday's moving funeral and National Day of Mourning, and having spent ten days working with and ahead of that investigation, some conclusions can be made.

While it was no accident, it is clear Edward Tryst did not begin the evening with his end in mind.

He shot himself at sometime after 8pm. The gun he used had been left with him by activist Mohammed al-Greddi at least thirty minutes earlier.

The time of death was critical for the investigation, and these disparate times explain why, in their search for a suspect, Mr al-Greddi was originally overlooked.

Indeed, this information only became clear – and the truth uncovered – after these two journalists interviewed Mr al-Greddi before his identification by the investigators.

That identification was based on fingerprint evidence from the murder weapon. Mr al-Greddi admitted to talking with the President immediately prior to his suicide, and to leaving the gun with him.

The conversation centred on the involvement of US Marines authorised by President Tryst in the brutal death of Mr al-Greddi's daughter.

But did those revelations alone cause the President to suicide? Unlikely, though they almost certainly contributed to his decision.

There are many reasons why he may have killed himself, not least the unilateral decisions he made regarding Iraq, which condemned many thousands to death based on false information.

It is estimated, through stock holding figures disclosed during the week, that contractual decisions made by Tryst's administration earned him close to \$25 million.

A successful single term in office.

But few, almost certainly including Mr Tryst, expected him to be returned to office last Tuesday.

Unpopular as his policies were internationally, growing economic crises made him a fiscal villain, even among conservatives, domestically.

Rising consumer debt, record trade imbalances, and a slumping economy were the consequent of largely unnecessary tax cuts for the wealthy, and military over-spending.

Faced with the political impossibility of being elected in a one-on-one battle with Patrick Russell, the lateral Republican strategists devised an unholy alliance.

Despite initial denials, the body of evidence seems to indicate almost \$100 million was secretly transferred by the GOP to the Green Party.

This money was used to fund the largest and most successful third - party campaign in Presidential history.

The success of the Green Party was directly related to the failure of the Democrats – allowing President Tryst to be re-elected with barely 40% of the popular vote.

Had President Tryst lost the election he would have avoided facing the quagmire he alone had created, and had ample opportunity to enjoy his ill-gotten fortune.



By 8.30pm last Tuesday, it was clear to him that easy life would not be forthcoming.

Into that realisation walked the emotional and impassioned al-Gredden.

Perhaps he offered a human reality to the casualty numbers on the other side, and gave Tryst an image that did not reconcile with his invasion plan for imposed democracy.

Did this combination of factors – and a loaded gun at his feet – fill the President with such guilt and self-disgust that he chose not to face four more years?

We can never be sure.

But no-one denied it.

New Editor Named

Bob Attwood was yesterday named interim editor at the *Washington Post*.

The position was vacated last week when Arthur Robinson stepped down, citing ideological differences.

Bob Attwood has served the *Washington Post* for more than twenty years, and is a respected political commentator.

Last week he was crucial in tracking the prime suspect in the President's assassination, and proving his innocence.

He was the most likely choice to fill the position.

And he made his agenda clear.

“For too long, at this paper and others, news has taken a secondary position to finance,” he said in a statement to the news team yesterday.

“In an era of circulation fabrication, too much emphasis is placed on selling newspapers to the public and far too little on serving that public.

“From today, that all changes at the *Washington Post*.

“From today, we will be journalists first and journalists second.

“We will sell our objectivity to no-one.”

January 20, 2005.

Inauguration Day.

The scars of a nation have begun to heal. The time for mourning has passed.

The Washington day had dawned bright, as if to give optimism to a new Administration, one that began in such despair.

And it was a new era in the Capital. Those who were at its heart recognised it. The mistakes made by President Tryst would not be repeated.

There was a Press unafraid to ask the tough questions. There was a President, now, unafraid to answer them.

As President-elect Korte Campbell strode onto the stage, flanked by his wife and Vice-President designate Lucas Weaver, he cast his eye over those assembled.

Unavoidable in the crowd was Sarah Angelou, chief political correspondent for the reformed *Washington Post*. She was as obvious a figure in a crowd of thousands as she was grilling him on decisions he hadn't even made yet. She was good, but that just made him better.

And better he had to be. He had inherited a Presidency under strife, a country faced with crises on many, nay most, political fronts.

Inauguration Day, though, is not one of concerns, of harbouring thoughts about that November night.

It is, instead, a day of hope, of looking forward, and of seeing a future better than the present.

“I do solemnly swear ...”