

Epigraph

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

Charles Dickens. A Tale of Two Cities

Author's note: As true today as in 1860

Prologue

June 8, Saturday.

Central North Australia.

The desert air was hot and dry as the earth cooled under a blaze of southern stars. The silence of the night was only broken by the hum of generators, the murmured voices and hushed commands of professionals at work. Outside the perimeter fence, the odd call of an animal going about its nocturnal business, as it had for tens of thousands of years, broke the peace.

The starlight reflected dully on two large objects beside a much larger, predatory shape hugging the tarmac. The larger shape appeared as a darker part of darkness – no light reflected off it, for it was a mighty B2 stealth bomber. The two other objects would have been metallic grey in daylight but tonight just reflected the stars. The smaller one had been named *Penetrator* by the not too imaginative military staff. The larger was more menacing in appearance, heavy, bulbous, and tapering to a finned tail. It was called *Savior*.

Both sat beside bat winged glide carriers, mimicking the huge aircraft that awaited them.

A figure appeared out of the darkness.

“We have authority to load,” he announced in a quiet voice. “Sergeant, load the weapons.”

A diesel engine kicked into life as uniformed people began to move. With an air of quiet urgency *Penetrator* and *Savior* were loaded onto the glide carriers and then into the cavernous belly of the B2.

Far away, under a different sky, dominated by towering cumulous clouds of the tropics, similar actions began at the massive US military base at Guam.

At 1300 Washington DC time, 0230 in Australia's outback and 0300 in Guam, the Presidential order was received. Commence Operation.

The effort to save the world from climate change had commenced.

Chapter 1

Six Months Earlier.

5:45 p.m.

Washington DC

Robert Jenkins, Vice President of the United States, stood before the mirror in his dressing room checking his appearance for the final time. At a little over six feet in height and only fifty-seven years old, Robert had retained a trim and athletic body. Age had, as it often did with some men, added gravity to his look. The slightly craggy complexion, wisdom lines around his eyes, dark hair greying at the temples and peppered throughout his still thick, slightly unruly locks, all gave him the look of who he was. Jenkins was a respected politician and law maker, a man of high morals and principles, a formidable and dogmatic defender of conservative values, and a staunch and evangelical Christian. He was also a man who believed the end justifies the means.

Tonight he was hosting his twenty-seven-year-old daughter Patty and her new beau, Professor Sampson Fogarty. He recalled with pleasure attending her graduation, her qualifications complete after finishing her final internship at George Washington University Hospital. Dr Patricia Watkins. He frowned, changing her surname still rankled. Robert checked his cufflinks, adjusted the collar of his casual button-down shirt, and turned to head downstairs.

As usual, when he descended the stairs, he was met with the many portraits of previous occupants of the vice-presidential residence, their wives, and families. Robert often avoided looking at them, knowing the sorrow they brought. But tonight, he did stop and reflect on some of the scenes.

He paused in front of a portrait of a predecessor, Joe Biden. The naturally open and friendly face of Vice President Biden was, in Robert's eyes, cloaked in sadness. Robert knew this painting had been commissioned after the death of the Bidens' adult son, Beau. Robert's instincts were to oppose and denigrate a man such as Biden, a liberal, but he couldn't because they shared common grief. The death of a son and the death of a wife in tragic circumstances. Robert held a conversation in his head with Joe Biden. *Joe, I hope Beau and Bobby are sharing a place in heaven where there are no differences between men. I envy you. You knew your son for forty-six years. I only knew mine for three months. Do you often think of Neilia like I think of my Viktoria?* The mental picture of his wife brought an unwanted pang of guilt.

Robert closed his eyes in silent prayer asking for forgiveness. He prayed like this every day. Behind his closed eyes he saw his son cold, his skin mottled blue and deathly white. Robert Jnr, was lifeless in his crib. He avoided, as he always did, from asking God why?

Unconsciously he ran his right hand through his hair, pushing it back and ruffling it. It was a mannerism he unknowingly repeated whenever he felt guilty or inadequate.

Two Months Earlier.

November 25, Sunday. Thanksgiving Holiday.

The on-duty Secret Service agent tapped lightly on the door to the Game Room on the top floor of the President's residence. Opening the door, he saw the President, a hulking, brooding figure seated in a large armchair under muted, warm light. The green baize of the large billiard table stood in stark contrast under the bright white lights. "Mister Wright to see you, sir."

"Thanks, send him in."

The agent stood to one side to allow a corpulent, grunting, and rumped figure into the room—Cameron Wright. Wright was surprised to see the brightly lit table with snooker balls neatly racked. When the President called and asked to see him during Thanksgiving holiday, he was not expecting to play snooker. The President pointed to another armchair, making no move toward the table. He avoided doing anything that revealed his lack of coordination.

Angus Probin President of the United States of America, eased back in his armchair, loosened his tie, and crossed his legs - relaxing. A big man, undiminished by his seventy-two years, Probin dominated his surroundings by his size; and because he intended to. His eyes roved over the display of family photographs on the mantelpiece. His lip curled at the one picture that appeared out of place, the one of himself at just eighteen years of age, standing ramrod straight in a sharp military outfit. The look on his young face was one of cold superiority. He kept the photo on display to constantly remind him of that hated part of his life that had shaped him.

Military college made a thug of him. His lack of coordination repeatedly had him passed over for sporting teams, teams he thought he could make winners if only he could play. He barely made academic grades but found money and cheating could fix that. His only friends gravitated toward him because he was free with his money. He learned anyone could be bought, and once bought, they could be made beholden to him. The means justified the end.

The other photos contrasted sharply. They showed his children from his three marriages. All his wives were stunning women. The current First Lady, the former Swedish soap opera actress, Laurel Nordquist was perhaps the most beautiful of them all. The photos showed tall young adults, the beauty of their mothers shining through but diminished by a weak chin, inherited from their father.

Opposite him sat his overweight guest, wheezing, also loosening his already loose tie, and unbuttoning his tight collar. His slightly shabby, suit jacket stretched at its seams as he struggled with the knot. Angus watched, not liking what he saw but knowing the need. He recalled the services this unattractive man had rendered to him over the years, the secrets they held, the favors owed. He smiled inwardly. Hateful as military college had been, it taught him how to win against the odds, to be the one who chose the team, and not the one seeking to be chosen.

Angus did not believe in playing fair—he only believed in winning. It mattered little to him whether he had friends or long-lasting relationships. Everyone was disposable if they did not meet his needs. He was cunning enough, however, to know that he always needed to have a cast iron grip on the balls of anyone who could betray him. And when necessary, he achieved this with legal documents, but mostly through obligation, favors, or knowledge of deep secrets, which would hold a person's silence forever. Now as President, he had found something new. The respect for the office he held brought extraordinary silence from the most unexpected sources.

Angus Probin had a problem though. He worried that he had no grip on the balls of his Vice President other than respect for the office of President.

The President had chosen to have this meeting in the residence during the middle of holidays, knowing it was free of interruptions, recording devices, or prying eyes. He started the meeting with characteristic bluntness. "Cameron, you've pestered me since before the election to join my administration, now I want you back on the team. He doesn't know it, but I'm about to sack my Chief of Staff. I want you to take the position as soon as he leaves, second week of January, after the holidays."

Wright's rubbery lips parted in a smile. "It will be just like old times Mister President."

"Yes, I'm sure." Probin was pensive. "Speaking of old times, I never did ask you about that last problem you solved. Oh, must've been seven or eight years ago."

Wright smiled, "That would have been that nosy investigator from the Seattle Department of Inspectors or whatever they are called, looking into the union action where you were building your brewery. As I recall, we managed to get the workers to return to work and the union kicked off site, but the inspector wasn't happy with rumors about our methods."

“Yes, that’s the one,” replied Probin. “I guess you did something right because the little prick stopped bothering me.”

“Yes, sir.” Wright replied with a deadpan face.

“I heard that his daughter had a bad accident about the same time. Tough for the poor fellow.”

“I guess what goes around, comes around,” Wright replied enigmatically.

“Indeed, it does,” replied the President. “What you don’t know is that last job you did caused me more headaches than the original problem—that’s why I have ignored you for so long. You see, there was a criminal investigation started into the accident. I was interviewed by the Seattle PD. They were looking for you after you left hurriedly to go join the campaign team of that loser oil guy. Seemed they had tracked back some tampering with the girl’s vehicle and wanted to interview you about it. I thought that was getting a bit too close to home and wasn’t happy. It was sloppy. Not what I expected from you.”

Cameron went still, stopped wheezing, and peered at the President through his piggy eyes. “I ... I ... I didn’t know,” he stammered.

“See, that’s the issue, Cameron. You didn’t know. You must know. As my Chief of Staff, you must anticipate and fix problems for me in a way that protects me. I am not your protector as I was in Seattle. Now *you* must have *my* back.”

“Of course, Mister President. You don’t know how grateful I am for this opportunity. I swear to work for you in any capacity you see fit, whenever you want, whatever you ask.”

Probin smiled. “I never doubted it. I have a task for you. I want you to solve a problem for me.”

They rose together after twenty minutes, Angus personally ushering Wright to the door and toward the elevator. Neither noticed the door to the small bedroom adjoining the game room silently closing.

November 27, Tuesday.

Despite his appearance and reputation, Cameron Wright was a very thorough individual. For many years it was how he had succeeded as a fixer for Probin in the backrooms of politicians. He had a huge capacity to read and devour information, and the analytical ability to break it down for the consumption of his masters; to tell them what they wanted to hear.

He set to work on the President's problem. He had six weeks clear before he took on his new role and would use the time effectively. He started online on his home computer with a simple search title—how to get rid of a Vice President. Before he hit the enter key however, his long-ingrained caution and ability to cover his own trail kicked in. He deleted the search phrase. He could not leave any sort of electronic trail. With a sigh he checked his diary, found a clear two hours in the afternoon, then made a call to the Library of Congress to ask for some selected texts and a copy of the US Constitution. He included a variety of texts so that if ever he was questioned about his research, the real reason would be easy to disguise.

Two days later, near his home in Alexandria he stopped at a coffee shop that offered free internet services and terminals. He dressed in a very loose set of track pants and a hoody. He ordered a coffee and muffin while looking down at the display cabinet and took his purchases to a spare computer. The server paid little attention to the nondescript, large man but his nose did wrinkle up as Wright wafted away.

After an hour of 'in private' web browsing, the Chief of Staff designate knew as much as he needed to. He didn't look forward to telling the President what he had found out or what his options were. He needed a Plan B by the time he assumed his new position in January. In his long experience of solving problems Wright knew that methods, unconscionable to many, could be highly effective. He dialed a number which was answered immediately but without greeting. "I need to see you. Dinner at The Capital Grille Thursday night?" The request sounded more like an instruction.

Two days later.
November 29, Thursday 8.30pm.
Capital Grille Washington.

Sampson Fogarty emerged from the subway entrance at Federal Triangle onto Pennsylvania Ave, bent his head into the freezing, wind driven rain and pulled his beanie down over his ears for the five-minute walk to the Capital Grille. He looked forward to having dinner with Cameron Wright, a rare treat and the first time in such an upscale location. Cameron had reserved the very private standalone dining room for the two of them. He was met at the door by the polished maitre'd who, after checking his reservation, quietly called over a waiter.

"Manuel, please take Professor Fogarty to the red room. Mister Cameron is already here sir," he added to Sampson.

They weaved their way past tables of well-dressed patrons who paid no attention, absorbed in their own Washington intrigues, leaning towards each other, and conducting whispered conversations. The waiter opened the door into an opulent room with crimson wall coverings, gilded artworks, and an unusual inverted triangle light fitting of leaded glass. A glittering table was set for two. Cameron Wright sat at the head and Sampson, after greeting him and shaking his hand, took his place in the middle of the table to Wright's left, his back to the door. Wright nodded at the waiter.

"Thanks Manuel, we will start with the soup and salad straight away." He turned to Fogarty. "So, how are things at GU Sam, settling in OK? Have you made any new research breakthroughs since our last chat?"

Fogarty smiled. "So far so good. I've hardly had time to make any breakthroughs. Not that I need to. The theory is thoroughly professionally researched. Volcanic Winter will cool the planet, no doubt about it. You don't want to hear about me though when we are here to celebrate your success. Chief of staff to the President, that's awesome. Congratulations."

Manuel entered with their starters, and they waited to be served. He poured the already opened wine and quietly departed.

Cameron Wright rumbled. "Thanks, but let's not be premature. President Probin doesn't seem to hold on to his Chiefs of Staff for long. This meeting is more than just congratulations, I want to talk to you about Volcanic Winter. I think I can help you get the theory recognized and at the same time make myself indispensable to the President. You see the President has asked me to solve a problem for him. I think you and I together can solve two problems for him."

Fogarty paused his soup spoon. "You've lost me already but I'm sure you are about to explain."

"I know after what we have been through that nothing I say here will get outside of this room, but just had to say it anyway," cautioned Wright. Fogarty inclined his head in acknowledgement not needing to say anything.

"The President wants to get rid of his Vice President but the dumbfuck won't go. Believes he has a God given role to perform at Angus' right hand."

"Just sack him," said Fogarty around a mouthful of salad greens.

"Ain't that easy. The President can't sack him, he has to resign. Of course, he could die, become mentally or physically incapable of doing his job or be impeached by Congress, but they are all highly unlikely."

Fogarty gave Wright a searching look, wondering was there a hidden message in his words.

"So, the President wants me to find ways to force him to resign but I have a better idea. That's where Volcanic Winter comes into it. The President has another problem that is only going to get worse. He doesn't believe in climate change, won't do anything that remotely even acknowledges it, let alone attempt to do anything to slow or stop global warming. I think I can convince him otherwise. But I need your help. Your payoff will be international recognition of your research. You will have the opportunity to be talked about in the same breath as Einstein or Da Vinci."

Fogarty sat up straighter, twisted his head as if to ease a crick in his neck and smiled at Wright. "I am all ears."