

1. LOOPHOLE

WASHINGTON, D.C. - THE CAPITOL



*There are very few creatures on this earth matching the shameless
character of politicians.*

*They scarf down rich courses and sweet delicacies, building unhealthy
fat as the pressure applied by their ever-increasing weight is felt under
the opulent flooring patterns of their offices.*

*Down below, the frail frames of the working class keep pushing upward
to prevent the Calacatta Carrara marble from sinking in, as its beauty
and rarity requires preservation, above. The working poor are told it
matters; naturally, their conditioned selves keep the hamster wheel
spinning.*

*As the fat builds up and the oppression persists, the blinded,
misguided, and putrescent souls walking the Capitol see only one viable
solution.*

*“Bring more of the regular people. More bodies to support the
structure.”*

“MORE.”

The top two State Department officials set foot inside the Capitol's coveted spot, an urban footpath to the throne; they came to rectify an injustice, to release a war-torn country from the U.S.' increasingly repressive chokehold.

To them, this place held no other value, no significance. The polished floors across the National Statuary Hall projected a wavy reflection of the two men's silhouettes, unable to provide clarity in details. One of the two was short and heavy set, the other tall and elegantly athletic. The superior and his subordinate, their feet planted on the floor and heads swaying to the flow of synthetic smiles and rubbery eyes, stood out from the remainder of the crowd. They were visiting a deceitfully sophisticated farm whose sheep were shepherded inside the House of Representatives chamber by a seductive prospect: power beyond limits and the shade obstructive of accountability.

A charming evil inhabited this place, running on timed laughs and strategic touches.

The two outsiders looked up above the brainwashed masses and noticed patterns on the high ceiling: circles woven into a patchwork of loops; an observation that triggered complex thoughts in the tall one, a young, chiseled face of a tan complexion with wavy loose curls arranged in a sophisticated cut.

What is the definition of insanity?

His tapered fade complimented a subtle five o' clock shadow.

Dismissive of the quiet reflection, a distant voice produced a rapid-fired question. The tone was worshipping, the sound unpleasant in its squeak.

Cafe Milano, 7 PM? I have a proposition.

The State Department's subordinate did not belong to this place, a den of long in the tooth, double-chinned white men who built and acquired assets through negative leverage and corruption.

Oh, and their chained-up minority tokens used to distract the public opinion from the lack of access to wealth building for those very same minorities.

The touches intensified, shoulder taps and arm squeezes depicting a decidedly sexual ritual. A lust for political capital transpired through the forward-leaning stances, the bobbing heads, the creepy smiles. It was a spectacle of unchained genies granting each other wishes.

The athletic figure, one of understated elegance, found the wary gaze of his superior, stubby and plump. The latter seemed to fit the congressmen and congresswomen's profile yet displayed a grounded behavior the others lacked. They both kept looking up, finding the sight of well-dressed flesh-eaters nauseating.

The ceiling definitively offered a vision of dreamish gold patterns running its surface to then return to their starting points. The two men's eyes eventually met, and they agreed, in a conspiracy of silence: *This will never end.*

Click... click. Beneath them, the rare and expensive marble saw crooked figures walk its surface. They were bent, challenged by an incurable disease: the loss of their humanity.

A conversation sparked a few feet away from the two State Department outsiders. Secrecy was optional in this space; the system now openly supported debauchery and deviant practices, restricting access to those willing to break the rules or at minimum tolerate the crooks who did. There was no countermeasure in the general population, a feeble force the politicians fed off of.

An old white man whose melted porcelain skin begged to be let loose said, "They offered me thirty years. I beat it on a loophole. The rape kit was compromised."

The two parties involved in the conversation erupted in crass laughter. Their shadows were all that remained of their organic print, out here in this palatial hallway. Their diseased black eyes

blocked the path to finding anything potentially human. Gesturing was theatrical in its wide movements. The pigs did not experience stage fright, instead confident in their delivery. Some eyes turned but morals and integrity were chased out of this cursed place like invasive rodents. No one dared intervening nor recording.

“How old was she, anyway? Fifteen? She craved a more experienced hand. I know she enjoyed it,” the other added.

Click ... click.

“She did. Her legs were shaking when I dug in. Her first time. I wanted more. But she lacked stamina.”

The inflated belly of the perpetrator threatened to burst in his expensive navy suit and striped shirt. His red tie bounced to the beat of a sinister laugh as both decaying monsters were engulfed in the chamber.

In the hallway, a woman passed by the two astonished State Department officials and nodded. Her skin was of an umber tone, a rich dark yellow brown that struck the face of a refined beauty.

Her smile was unsettling, however, more... artificial. Oversized veneers created a *Joker-ish* grin running from ear to ear; one frozen in time, engineered for the same purpose with each and every encounter.

She stopped before the gargantuan mouth of the chamber’s main access further down, to address an older white woman in a black pencil skirt and blazer. Her bob cut and its razor-sharp trims accentuated her narrow, penetrating stare.

A humming sound blended inaudible whispers and side conversations. The unsettling noise distracted the two standouts from a lingering fragrance opening with a note of citrus. Their sense of smell finally took notice of the heavy amber floral scent, and their eyes followed its trail to the same black woman who had just casually nodded at their disbelief.

“Should I move forward with diverting the capital?” she asked.

Malicious eyes sparkled as her Caucasian counterpart, the *bob*

cut, answered, “Yes. Report most of the revenue through the for-profit. Private companies aren’t legally obligated to disclose their financial statements. Which also means you can easily work the numbers ... to your favor.”

“And I will shout *Black Lives Matter* at these fools and use the non-profit for PR?”

The white lady let out a silent laughter and replied, “Indeed, Patrisse. Make your urban features appeal to them. A lot of these people are diehard consumers and will give to one of their own, no questions asked. They crave for representation, whether it’s purely performative or genuine allyship. Race hustling 101. I do the same with my people. Throw them a couple of bones, some community programs, maybe. Or merchandising. And watch the profits skyrocket.”

The ladies shook hands and parted ways when entering the chamber.

The two individuals from the State Department, or “Foggy Bottom”, were adjusting to the booming sounds of absurd statements, outrageous propositions, and the darkness of a place where the burning flames of justice and decency were swiftly extinguished by the whiskers running a demonic rat race. Both were familiar with the culture in Washington, D.C. but always felt foreign to it. Like a few isolated cases, they were a beacon of integrity fighting to sustain its light amidst the chaos of a cataclysmic storm.

Capitol Hill was a refuge to the scum and villainy, the men in power; those who bent the law for their own personal gains, shaped new legislation to attain more political capital and quiet the hunger of the lobbyists whose sharp teeth craved a piece of the pie. Those who feared no retribution. Those whose moral compass never accounted for the shattering of innocent souls.

There was no end to the madness, no boundaries for the parasites who leached off of a broken system that only benefited the monsters peering from above.

Tap... tap... tap.

The two public servants walked in.

The House of Representatives chamber screamed *old money*. Its blue carpet, golden seals, and dark brown leather seats, a byproduct of French influence, as well as the intricate wooden pillars fixed on its walls gave it an austere look prone to conservatism.

The room had heightened perspectives. However, the high ceilings and the half-circle seating layout appeared smaller now that it was occupied by some of the biggest decisionmakers in this country. Somehow, however, the space still carried historical significance for the two outsiders and proved almost... intimidating.

The State Department officials continued walking straight down the middle aisle and turned left to a set of tables equipped with wireless conference microphones. They dropped two black binders right next to the devices; the Saffiano leather coatings starkly contrasted with the surroundings. It was elegant, unique, and modern.

The *Foggy Bottom* superior scanned the room, his eyes dancing on the fifty-three souls attending the oversight hearing. Many of the crooks here were gauging one another, looking for something to exploit in the others' behaviors.

The tall, handsome one looked forward, seeking his audience. His fingers drummed on the edge of the brown table and finally rested on the solid wood structure, helping the man find balance in this swaying chaos.

He found *your gaze*, as you also found yourself *pulled* into the belly of this underworld, through the lens of his unique perspective. Around, time and space stilled. Quietness settled.

"This is the U.S. Capitol. The seat of *Power*, the theater for some of the most impactful decisions this country has ever made and will ever support. Inside these walls, men and women gamble with your life savings, with your taxes, with your labor. And although today's session is an oversight hearing, it will still impact your lives for

generations to come, in the upmost secrecy. Indeed, you have no idea of what is at stake, that the rumble of war already pulses through the flesh and veins of this city. You crave escapism, blinded by the lights of consumption, gluttony, lust, an unregulated capitalism and the newest form of an untreatable cancer, social networks. What have you done to educate yourselves on politics, to understand the process in which your lives are molded, shaped, transformed, bruised, cut, beaten, and violated? The pigs whose glistening skins stretch tight are crassly laughing as they sit in these chairs finding newer, more creative ways to profit off of your poverty wages and false hopes. There are no greys in this dynamic.

“You are the *Blacks*, and they are the *Whites*. In this regard, History has taught us one thing: They have failed you. Yet you keep yearning for more beatings, moaning as you reach climax in pain. Some of us try to swim against the treacherous currents of politics to warn you, since you’re feeding them upstream. But it would require an institutional shakedown and a massive shockwave to shape a new landscape. And most of you, comfortable with the established order of things or unaware of how rotten this government is, are unwilling to push or call for a change. And each year, as a reward for your obedience, you get a temporary fix, a brief release of dopamine as you spend your income tax on designer clothes and flat screen TVs, forgetting—for a flying instant—about your misery and a cost of living you can no longer afford on a single income.

“You could at least renounce to instant gratification and build generational wealth, positioning yourself in a more favorable predicament, where, as a society, you would gather enough influence to make a lasting change. But *that* requires patience and focus, and the short content pushed by algorithms on social media—surprise, a practice supported by big corporations and the government—as well as the get-rich quick schemes advertised by influencers and gurus who are themselves victims of the system

made you believe you could attain substantial wealth overnight, making a big break in an elusive viral moment. How do you feel, knowing that the rotten corpses and minds of those surrounding me are byproducts of your vices, the *people*?

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the United States of America. A broad-scale loophole.”

2. SAD PAG

WASHINGTON, D.C. - GEORGETOWN

There is nothing more satisfying than operating unseen, unheard, impervious to any form of legal prosecution. However, the Boogeyman whose shadow ran the globe began questioning the impunity he enjoyed.

Michael Hoover entered the steamy kitchen of an exclusive fine dining establishment in Georgetown, a curated experience tailored to French cuisine lovers with deep pockets.

A heat wave had struck the city a week earlier, yet the tall figure walked the deserted place in a turtleneck sweater, slacks, and creeper soles, all black, in a modern spin on the personification of death. His round-shaped reading glasses, emaciated facial structure, and rich dark skin were all contained in the coldness of his demeanor. His eyes were devoid of life, almost synthetic. There was no fog on his lenses, like those of a ghost visiting the world of the living, unaffected.

His sharp senses picked up light accents of bleach and the low buzzing of appliances in sleep mode. He examined the kitchen's

double galley layout, carefully reviewing the stainless-steel counters and custom racks running alongside the stone walls.

Voices inside his head whispered, *There are a few discrepancies*. A set of *Wusthof* kitchen knives was placed onto a hanging magnetic strip. Michael recognized the signature craft, the trident on the classic black handle, the hardened steel forming a sharp blade. But whoever had sanitized the place prior to leaving was guilty of a grave violation, a transgression yelled at by the competing voices of Hoover's split personality.

"See, *Ben Ben*. This cutlery is a cultivation of refinement. Its precision, the attention to detail, the standards, the quality control, the *brand*. Everything about this particular line of products is designed to achieve the best results, to perform at the highest levels. Many world-class chefs have adopted them. *Ben Ben*, they deserve recognition, may I say *respect*. The latter is crucial," he said to himself.

Michael Hoover, a specialized skill officer for the CIA's Political Action Group (PAG), felt a tingling in his extremities. His spiderlike fingers felt compelled to approach the blades. He straightened two of them out, adjusting the angles to achieve a precise parallel. The tingling ceased.

The man, almost mechanically, turned left into a wide corridor whose neutral-toned walls housed expensive-looking abstracts in gold frames. At the end, he engaged a small private room whose surrounding glass panes floated above the herringbone-patterned hardwood floor. A single table occupied the space.

Michael retrieved a tiny circular device from underneath it and sat down. The strange object was of a matte black, a six-inch diameter disc housing a round rubber pad in its center.

The slender CIA figure reviewed the equipment, lowering his frames, his eyebrows raised. He set it down on the expensive white tablecloth projecting its damask patterns on the ceiling and readjusted his eyeglasses. Here again, the device was placed parallel

to an exquisite set of porcelain tableware with golden floral shapes. The entire setup was curated to Michael's preferences, each piece of silverware, glassware, and plate combinations positioned with a remarkable precision.

It was surgical, uncompromising. *Perfection, Ben Ben.*

A silhouette approached from across the table. Its contours took the shape of a grimy-looking man. His Mediterranean features were rough, his beard chaotic, and beads of sweat escaped through his dilated pores. He reeked of spicy bourbon. The man sat down at the table. Michael felt disgusted as well as bothered; the individual lacked symmetry, refinement, cleanliness.

"M. Charles, got ya file." The dirty face handed the CIA agent an orange folder marked *TOP SECRET//HCS*. Michael opened it, keeping the spine straight, perpendicular to the table.

Inside the madness of his sick mind, the voices quiet down, leaving space for a proper review of the document. Photographs of a young man whose complexion was of a warm almond tone drew his attention. The person of interest was at a café, delicately sipping on a small porcelain cup.

"Libyans?"

The guest cleared his throat and answered, "Yeah, or meddlin' witcha suits."

The folder also contained a written report. A single page.

HUMINT.

KFRA connection.

1st SFOD-D was ODA.

Gypsum trade with lobbyist firm.

Objective not clearly defined.

HUMINT from OP Sand Wave suggests elevated threat level.

HVT is in Washington, D.C.

Location unknown.

HVT bypassed CCTV sweep.

S&D. Title 50.

Michael redirected his attention towards his guest and asked, “Good. Drink?”

The man nodded in approval and licked the sweat flooding his upper moustache. A bottle of *Basil Hayden’s* stood in between the two.

The drunk must have exercised a considerable self-control in order not to look at it, Michael thought. He said, “Be my guest. Take a few sniffs of this bourbon before tasting and you’ll find aromas of toasted oak, creamy vanilla, and peppery rye. The first sip is filled with buttery caramel, sticky toffee, toasted marshmallows, and cracked black pepper. It all ends in a nice, warming finish with just a hint of smoke and spicy pepper. A complicated profile geared towards connoisseurs like yourself.”

The man answered, “Thanks. It’s nice o’ ya.” He poured himself half a crystal glass of the high-rye bourbon and held it in his hand, contemplating the golden treasure. A crooked smile drew wider as his chapped lips touched the liquid. His puffy face opened to the explosive flavors of a ten-year old bourbon. *Magic*. The man continued sipping, his eyes conveying gratitude and excitement.

Soon, the volatile element of questionable hygiene began tensing. He put the glass down as his eyes began rolling left and right. His neck muscles protruded from his fat frame, and his mouth expanded wide. Nevertheless, he maintained silence.

“Tetrodotoxin. A biotoxin. I managed to maintain its colorless crystalline form at a liquid state. It interferes with the transmission of signals from nerves to muscles. This one is particularly potent. Instant paralysis. I appreciate your contribution, but my employer deemed you unstable.” He paused. “And ridden with vices,” the CIA agent explained.

He left his chair, retrieved the black device he had left at the table, and closed the folder in his left hand. Three individuals

erupted from where the victim came from, a backdoor access to a killing trap designed by the most powerful intelligence agency in the world. They wore blue Hazmat suits with integrated ventilation circuits. A hissing beat accompanied their steps. Michael nodded at them and turned around, gracefully walking back to the kitchens.

His steps followed a strange pattern. He was skipping. *Left... right... right... left... left.*

His face remained of clay, cold and smooth, polished and devoid of imperfections. Life seemed to have left his shell, now only driven forward by the momentum of a delirious craze.

Outside, the sun radiated power. It was bright, penetrating, viciously hot. Vehicle traffic was minimal in the mainly residential street, but afar, the city called with muffled honks and comical shouts. The bleach scents and the dry bourbon smells left room for delicate floral fragrances and the distinctive print of freshly cut grass. Brick houses extending to both sides of Hoover's peripheral vision produced a visually stunning patchwork of colors; the personalities caged *within* fought to observe the spectacle, requesting access to his lens.

Michael ignored the mind parasites and crossed the small paved street and its tree lines to reach a three-story row house. The white façade was smooth and elegant, complimenting the massive windowpanes that begged for natural light on its surface, swallowing the sun in their enormous mouths.

To the neighborhood residents, Michael Hoover was an eccentric artist with a signature look à la *Steve Jobs* enhanced by colorful variations. His strangeness offered the best covert identity: Who would suspect a rich bizarro in such a culturally charged area?

The agency had arranged a past, and the specialized skill officer had an acquired taste for art. He was also proficient at painting. His visual treatments and brush strokes suggested those of *Lubaina Himid*, the British prodigy whose work took the world by storm in the 1980s.

Michael unlocked the entrance door of his residence with the slight pressing of his thumb and traversed a large vestibule whose white walls amplified the sun rays shining on the structure. The interior design was artsy, minimalist, and purposeful; it was a blend of traditional, mid-century, and contemporary influences.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

His carefully manufactured stride led to a greenhouse in the back of the property. He slid the access open. The glass roof towering over the lush jungle that occupied the space remained surprisingly cold in its conveyance as the sweet scents of the passionfruit trees and the banana shrubs poured indoors.

At the center of this wild development, the CIA agent stopped and allowed his creeper soles to sink in the soft evergreen grass. His round-shaped frames and glacial eyes found *you*. There was a strange beauty to his perspective: He saw the world through a mosaic of squared frames.

Some panned out, others zoomed in.

“Most of the general population, *you*, tends to believe that the intelligence community and law enforcement agencies are benevolent forces driven by public servants of unquestionable ethics and effective checks and balances. Ah. Many of our people, the melanated skins who die by the hands, soles, or knees of police forces and covert groups only trigger short-lived reactionary movements with no sustainable impact. Then, you quickly move on as the next casualty awaits in the streets, or inside their own home, car. This indifference, this ‘numbness’ to the killings committed by the country’s most powerful institutions ... well, it serves me. My agency benefits from the lack of oversight, from the disinterest in our operations and practices. Creative mediums paint us as superspies infiltrating high-rises abroad, equipped with fancy Walther PPQs or HK45s, mounting a suppressor onto a threaded barrel while approaching our target in the concealing shadow of the

night. The reality is far more concerning. We operate on U.S. soil and shape the dynamics of *your* world, unseen, unheard.

“Sometimes, I rapidly shift between emotional states, and my distorted self-image begs to join the regular people, the lesser ones, *you*. It suggests I should educate the zombified masses, the corpses who lost faith in life. As I reach the edge of a mind that feels foreign, looking down into a dizzying void, I remember. I have medication engineered for my particular condition. And as the chemicals pour into my system, I find myself again. The Boogeyman in a zoo.”