

Hulagu's Web

The presidential pursuit of
Senator Katherine Laforge

By David J. Hearne



SUBTERFUGE
PUBLISHING

"Predict the Conclusion" Contest Win \$1,000

Could you use \$1000.00? If you are the first individual to predict the conclusion of "Hulagu's Web - The presidential pursuit of Senator Katherine Laforge" from the prerelease of the book's first 5 chapters, you could be a thousand dollars richer. Full details inside.

Hulagu's Web

The Presidential pursuit of
Senator Katherine Laforge

By David J. Hearne



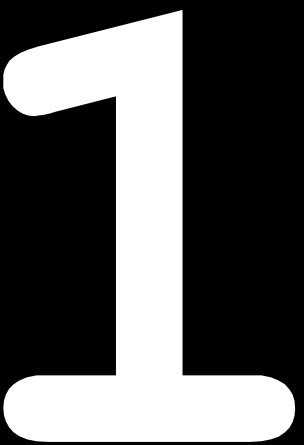
Lumberton, Texas

Copyright 2004 By David J. Hearne
For information about permission to reproduce selections from this book,
write to: Permissions, Subterfuge Publishing,
Box 8008, Lumberton, Texas 77657
ISBN 0-9755976-1-2
Official book website: www.hulagusweb.com
Book Cover Design and Art by Aleksander Milinkovic
Text design for Ebook by Martin R. Keller
Find Subterfuge Publishing on the World Wide Web: www.subterfugepublishing.com

Table of Content

Chapter One New Hampshire Primary 2004	5
Chapter Two Miss Bellows Falls	21
Chapter Three The Accident	47
Chapter Four After the Accident	68
Chapter Five ComDefC1	91
\$1000.00 "Guess the Conclusion" Contest	109

Chapter One
New Hampshire Primary 2004



Chapter One

New Hampshire Primary 2004

As the Chief squinted through the swirling snow, the large bus emerged from the gloom of that dark January morning. It sat quietly on the wrong side of Route 12 stalled in the snow bank. The steam from its cooling engine merged with the falling snow to darken the night even more. The tires on the exit side were shredded, and the large bus rested on its rims, causing it to lean precariously toward the road. Narrow beams of light streamed out of the bullet holes on the exit side of the bus, spotlighting the flakes of falling snow and the eerie, deserted road. The bus's still blazing headlights illuminated the snowdrifts and a bloody body, which was shrouded in a thin layer of glistening snow. As Chief Richardson moved closer to the bus, he could hear moans coming from inside the vehicle and smell the acrid odor of cordite. On the cold steps of the bus his flashlight revealed a frozen patch of red slush and small red icicles that had formed from the blood dripping down the steps.

The memory of January 25 is indelibly etched deep in my mind. Even before the blare of the alarm went off that morning, I lay there in that state of half a sleep and half awake, enjoying the warmth of the bed and my wife nestled close to me. I had only a scant four hours of sleep, and I wanted to savor every second of it. The wafting aroma of fresh coffee was an ominous sign that my last seconds of sleep were few before the alarm would come alive. I grabbed the top of the blankets and pulled them up to my cold nose just as WKNE FM invaded the quietness of the morning, by blasting out the morning news. I opened an eye and peered out into the still dark morning. All night long the howling wind had swept around the house, swirling the snow up through the branches of the pine tree outside my bedroom window. Little swirls of fresh snowflakes still danced about on my frozen windowpanes as the wind painted the snow over the town. The glowing red numbers on the radio read 5:00 AM, which gave me about an hour to shave, shower, dress and eat before I was due at Charlestown's town hall. I fought back that powerful temptation to just lie there bathed in the warmth of my wife's body snuggled warmly against me, but somehow found the strength to toss the heavy blankets off. I felt the chilly air hit my naked body and shivered as Stacie instinctively grabbed the blankets and, without opening her eyes, pulled them tightly around her body. It was then that the WKNE announcer's words penetrated my consciousness, and what I heard shocked me into full reality.

“Police at the scene confirm that Presidential candidate Senator Katherine Laforge’s campaign bus was involved in a serious accident. The accident 3 miles north of Walpole, NH on route 12 appears to be the result of an assassination attempt on Senator Laforge. At least four members of her campaign staff are reported dead. The

condition of the Senator is not currently known. The Senator was on her way to Charlestown, NH to reveal her Iraq Reconstruction Plan at a 7:00 AM televised Town Hall forum. If these reports are accurate, this will be the second assassination attempt on Senator Laforge in the last two years. Stay tuned to 103.7 FM for the latest developments in this late breaking story.”

I felt stunned, almost nauseous, as I grasped the gravity of the news. I had just left Senator Laforge’s company only seven hours earlier. She had invited my wife and me to her campaign bus, to celebrate her high standings in the presidential race and reminisce about our childhood in Charlestown, NH. Yesterday’s opinion polls had her on top, so the meeting was very upbeat. It just seemed unfathomable that this radio report could be true. She had been one of my best childhood friends, and I was dumbfounded but thrilled to hear that she had become a Texas Senator. I often thought of her and relived the memories of the things we had done as kids, but after leaving school we went our separate ways. I never saw her again after graduating from high school some 30 odd years earlier, until the summer of 2002.

Still contemplating the radio news, I walked into the bathroom to shave. I turned on the hot water and just stood there, studying my reflection in the mirror, as the mist from the steam slowly erased my image. It was somewhat symbolic of a ghostly face that would inexplicably emerge later that day from the mist of the snow and make me question my sanity. I did not know it then, but this brisk wintry dawn would herald in the final leg of a journey that had started innocently many years ago. Today I would experience life’s madness, as the paths I had traveled converged cataclysmically with those of others in life’s vast web.

It was two years ago in the summer of 2002 that gave birth to this maelstrom that ripped into my life on this cold January morning. It started when I received a letter announcing my high school class reunion, with the special guest of honor being my old classmate, Katherine Hanna Laforge, now the honorable Senator Laforge of Texas. I read the letter over a couple of times and vowed to attend the event. I had never been to a class reunion nor had I seen any of my former classmate, since I marched down the isle to Edgar's "Pomp and Circumstance" clad in cap and gown.

The last twenty years I had worked as a Project Manager for NARA (National Archives and Records Administration) in Washington D.C. Stacie and I lived comfortably in a nice house in Oxon Hill, Maryland, about 15 miles from my office at Capital Hill. My job was not an exciting occupation like the life of a CIA or FBI agent, but it was challenging and offered many privileged views of secret decisions and actions taken behind closed government doors. In short, I was a glorified historian of our government's policies and events. Over the years, my research had accumulated many interesting stories that I parked deep within my memory, required by law to keep secretly to myself. Often, these discoveries were quite exciting, making my job very interesting. However, my career came to a screeching halt in the winter of 1999 when I was mugged at a mall. My hospitalization and rehabilitation from the injuries forced me to take an early retirement from my profession. I was left with no major permanent damage, except occasional headaches that I managed with medication. We sold our house in Oxon Hill and moved back to Charlestown, looking for that peace and security offered by small New England

communities. The fact is, I dreaded my retirement. At the same time, I accepted it as a positive thing that gave Stacie and me the time to fulfill some of our lifelong dreams.

Being free to go to the Class Reunion was the first real positive benefit I could contribute to my retirement. I actually looked forward to this event, and a month later, July 14, 2002, Stacie and I were sitting in the Walpole, NH Country club listening to music from the sixties. In front of me were 20 of my former classmates that had metamorphosed from the youthful faces and attractive bodies that I remembered, into strangers with caved in cheeks, protruding bellies, sagging breasts and wrinkled faces. I could feel each studying my transformation with the same shock and bewilderment as we all listened to the *Shirelles* belting out “**Mama Said**”. But even through this erosion process we all had endured over the years, most of us were still recognizable as the Billy, Judy, Vince, or Steven of yesterday.

Just attending a class reunion denotes your unspoken acquiescence to be judged by your peers in a “living progress report”. The big question on everyone’s mind is where do they stand in the new pecking order of the old class. I knew nothing of my former classmates lives and certainly knew nothing of mine. With the constant wailing of songs from our youth like *Roy Orbison’s* haunting but beautiful song “*Crying*,” and the magic of a couple of cocktails, we were soon all telling jokes from our past and reminiscing about those days long gone by. Another drink or two later found each of us inexplicably divulging who and what we were now, and the progress report started to take shape.

Our class was basically like most others. We had those who had stayed emotionally and intellectually the same but just aged physically. They still thought *Chubby Checker’s* “**The Twist**” was still popular on the radio. And of course, we had those who had

become financially successful and those who still worked for minimum wage. There were those who had changed in ways we never would have fathomed, and then there were those like Senator Laforge, who had reached the top of the mountain we all once had sworn to climb, she was the shimmering star for our class, although it seemed very bizarre to refer to her as Senator. She was really Kat to all of us, and her position in the real world frankly made us feel a bit uncomfortable when we talked with her.

As a kid, she had lived next door to me and we had played together everyday. She was the ultimate tomboy then, and played only with us boys. She played army men, cowboys and Indians, went camping with us, handled frogs and snakes, and was basically my best friend. But then Mother Nature started changing Kat as we grew up, and suddenly we were not allowed to play the same with her any longer. Now my best friend used makeup, perfume and dressed in the latest fashions. Her parents started involving her in more traditional young womens' activities, and our friendship quickly changed. Older boys started to take notice of her, and it was hard for us to be around her without angering her latest suitors. In high school I once asked her out on a date, but felt so awkward trying to be romantic that I never asked again. I think she was equally uncomfortable dating her old frog catching buddy, and was glad I gave up so quickly. We still stayed friends, and she continued to share with me every detail of her life, including her most intimate dating adventures. As a senior she was probably the prettiest girl in class, and, of course, very popular with the guys. However, none of our classmates got to date her, because she started going steady with a college boy. Even though we were all a bit jealous, we did think that was really cool. For her it was probably very good, because she was able to stay focused on schoolwork and still be considered "very in" with all of us. We would all

study together, and some weekends she would enlist me to drive her to Dartmouth to visit her boyfriend. Just as high school graduation rolled around, her senior year romance fizzled. I don't think she cared much, as she was soon off to Stanford University. While in college, we corresponded back and forth for a few months, but the letters became less frequent, and then virtually stopped. Regardless, my interest in Kat continued, and over the years I eagerly followed her political ascension, watching in awe, as my childhood friend became Senator Laforge. Often, I found myself excitingly watching C-Span and other news programs, just to catch a glimpse of Kat debating world issues with other political leaders. The infrequent letters I occasionally received from her, always excited me and became treasured mementoes.

Kat was still very attractive after all these years; and I had my suspicions that a bit of her beauty and youth had been augmented by modern medical advances. She was definitely the most stunning woman at our reunion. She lost no time mingling with us and playing politics. Kat told us how glad she was to be here among her old friends. She spoke of how often she had thought of us, and how homesick she had been for Charlestown and the Manandnock valley. Her sentiments really did not appear that genuine since Kat hadn't seen most of us for over a quarter of a century. Regardless of what she was saying, we all were genuinely glad to see her again, and to be all together. Our whole class would have been labeled by most as a bit dysfunctional because few of us seemed to keep in contact with one another.

Tonight we were all searching for those nostalgic magic moments of long past. For most of us, there was really nothing significant that had happened between the time we were celebrating, and this moment we were now sharing. One thing we all agreed upon was

that Senator Laforge was now legitimately rich, famous and powerful, and to the utter disbelief of most of us, was also hinting at running for President of the United States. She was one of us, so her success felt like something we all could celebrate. The funny thing about Kat was that she never tried to be popular in school, but was anyway. She showed some traits of a politician in high school by being that rare individual who could be friends with those of the “In Crowd”, and also with those students whom others ostracized. She was always studious and was voted at graduation as “Most Likely to be a Librarian”.

Most of the night we all sat around talking and joking in large groups. Finally four of us, Senator Laforge, Tom Hester, Vince Hand and myself, broke away from the others and reminisced privately about some of our old exploits. We had been a very close group of kids and had shared many adventures. We were very proud of what Kat had accomplished and wanted to hear more about life inside the Capital Beltway. Just as Dee Clark hit one of those unforgettable high notes in his song, “Raindrops”, we all commandeered a table in the corner of the banquet room that afforded us some privacy for a few minutes. Kat ordered us all a new round of drinks, and we sat there with the candle flickering shadows across our faces. After a few minutes of raucous banal between all of us, Kat bent over the table and quietly said, “I need to confess that I did not really come here just to reminisce about high school. I came here hoping that I would reconnect with my three best old buddies and charm you into wanting to rekindle our friendships. I am drastically short of people I can talk to and trust in my life. And I really need some trusted confidants in my inner circle who are not influenced by party hacks or political job pressures.”

I think we were all surprised with her candor. “You want to employ us?” I asked.

You could see Kat’s smile and her eyes twinkle in the candle’s light. “ No, not quite, at least not openly. I just want us to be friends like we once were, when I knew you guys would welcome my phone calls anytime day or night. Running for president is going to be a lonely, confusing harsh time for me, and as I said before, I need trusted friends I can talk to and confide in. Of course, I have my wonderful husband Ira whom I love and share almost everything with, but he is afraid of being candid with me about my views and the realities of what I am involved with. I need trusted friends like you that I can divulge things to and know that they will go no further. Having politically untainted friends in my corner is very important to the success of my presidential run and for my own political protection.” She paused and took a sip of her daiquiri and then continued, “You will probably read a lot about me in the next few months, some of it good and some of it bad. I need to warn you that some things that we discuss might even put you in harm’s way. Washington can be an ugly place, as I am sure you are aware of. Anyway, I want you to think about what it might mean to your life, your plans, and your privacy to be associated with me as I run for President. Hell, you might not even support me at all as a presidential candidate, and that would certainly be understandable after all the mean things I did to you when we were kids.”

Vince interrupted her by proposing a toast, “To the next President of the US, our old friend Kat.”

We all drank to that and Tom interjected, “This will be a first for a Kennedy loving, head-in-his-ass Democrat like Vince to vote for a Republican President...wow!”

Kat smiled at Vince. “Ignore Tom’s crassness, and thank you- I really appreciated your toast!”

She sat back, and glancing at each of us, said, “I don’t want your answers now. I want each of you to think about it for a while. I will call each of you within the next few days to see if you would like to get together to let me talk your ears off about my platform, and how I envision you helping me in this presidential race. If the thought of this is at all uncomfortable to you, then your answer is easy. It should be a definite “no.” But if I have charmed you or interested you at all, I promise you a few exciting months that we all will share together!”

After she had outlined her simple needs, we all sat stone silent. Kat then broke the silence once more.

“If any of you do decide that this would be of interest to you, please understand that our relationship needs to be a sacred covenant. Breaking it could result in dire consequences for all concerned. You can not discuss my request with any one, not even your wives.”

She smiled at each of us and said, “Okay, Lets have fun again, and toast to our renewed friendships.”

With a click of glasses, the conversation ended, and we all blended back into the reunion talking about old cars, and strange diseases, divorces, kids, and how great music used to be.

My mind was racing. All I wanted to do was to hold Stacie and forget about Kat and our little discussion. Moments like these reminded me of how important Stacie is to my sanity, and how lucky yet strange it is that we are together. In the background, “Blue Moon” by the Marcel’s was playing, and the words just seemed to say it for me.

*Blue Moon, you saw me standing alone
Without a dream in my heart
Without a love of my own*

*Blue Moon, you knew just what I was there for
You heard me saying a prayer for
Someone I really could care for*

*And then there suddenly appeared before me
The only one my arms will ever hold
I heard somebody whisper, 'Please adore me'
And when I looked, the moon had turned to gold*

Stacie and I had our last dance, and said the compulsory “goodbyes” to everyone. I noticed then that Kat had already left, as her limousine and entourage were gone from the parking lot.

As Stacie and I drove north on Route 12, we knew we were back to the present as WYRY played Lee Greenwood singing, “**God Bless The U.S.A.**” I found myself emotionally pumped up from my meeting with Senator Laforge, and found conversation difficult with Stacie. This triggered an automatic fear in her that something was wrong, or that I was melancholy from meeting with all my old classmates. I wanted to tell her what Senator Laforge had discussed with me, but I was not really sure what it all meant or if Kat would even call as she had promised. I was not even sure if talking to Stacie about this would expose her to danger. I finally decided to give her a very condensed version. I told her that the Senator wanted to stay in contact, and that she invited me to call her anytime, day or night. Stacie was ”into” the political scene, so she appreciated this future relationship with the Senator. I had just finished giving her a run down on Kat, Vince and Tom, when my cell phone rang. It was Senator Laforge! “Hello, are you surprised I called you so soon?”

“Yes, but I’m glad you did.”

Kat responded back, “Are you interested in talking more about our new friendship?”

“Yes”, I hesitantly said.

“Great, well let’s meet at the Miss Bellows Falls Diner tomorrow at 2:00 PM. would that be a convenient time for you?”

“Hell, I am retired! Any time is convenient.”

The Senator chuckled and said, “Good, remember our meeting is private, just between you and me.”

“I won’t forget.”

“It was great seeing you again, and I will be thinking about you and your family tonight. See you tomorrow!”

The call ended, so I folded my cell phone and placed it back into my shirt pocket.

Stacie turned to me and gave me her “what-did-she-say stare?” Under her withering look, I told her the truth that Kat and I were going to meet the next day at the Miss Bellows Falls Diner. Somehow she knew that she was not invited, yet blessed the meeting by telling me that she was happy that I would get to see an old friend again. Astonishingly enough, she dropped the subject and just cuddled up against me as we drove home.

While driving along Route 12 which wound its way alongside the Connecticut River, I found myself engrossed in a radio talk show. The host was engaging his listeners in a spirited debate on the problem the UN faced with weapon checks in Iraq. A lady called in and expressed her disgust with President Bush because he talked tough on Iraq, but didn’t do anything to back it up. She commented on how Clinton did not allow Saddam to snub us. She said she was glad he had bombed the crap out of Iraq in 98, because Saddam

would not allow the UN to search for Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). The next caller wanted to know what world she was from, because he felt it was obvious that Clinton bombed Iraq to divert attention from “Monicagate” or complicate the vote on impeaching him that day on Dec. 16, 1998, which did not eliminate the problem.

I was glad the program was lively, because I was fighting falling asleep and needed something controversial to listen to as I drove home. Stacie had already fallen asleep in the passenger seat.

The commentator expanded on Clinton’s attack explaining ‘Operation Desert Fox’ as a means to thwart Saddam’s ability to threaten his neighbors with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. He paraphrased Clinton as saying he recognized other countries had weapons of mass destruction, but Hussein was in a different category because he had used such weapons against his own people both, Kurds, and Iranians. The radio host explained that Clinton’s 100-hour attack on Iraq consisted of firing 415 1.5 million dollar cruise missiles and 600 laser guided bombs at pre-selected targets associated with Iraq’s WMD programs.

The show’s host cited President Clinton’s argument that the attack was necessary, because without a strong inspection system in place, Iraq could rebuild its chemical, biological and nuclear programs within months, not years.

Another person called in, stating Clinton was no better than Saddam, because he had authorized the slaughter of his own people at Waco, Texas and 82 people were killed because of allegations that David Koresh had produced illegal weapons, sawed off shotguns or whatever. The talk show host disconnected the caller. I am not sure why, because certainly the massacre did happen, and Clinton was President at the time. The

host ignored the caller's comments, and instead interjected a quotation from Clinton's speech regarding the reason he launched the attack on Iraq in 1998. "If we turn our backs on Saddam's defiance, the credibility of U.S. power as a check against Saddam will be destroyed." I wanted to call in myself and bring up the point that 'Operation Desert Fox' did not succeed, because now we have a third administration faced with the same old festering Iraq problem.

Before I could dial my phone, a nervous listener from Boston called in and went into a unique theory for the many problems in the Middle East. He said that 1998 marked the third manifestation of 666, ushering in a new coming of the demonic evil of Sorat, the true Antichrist. The caller claimed he was a priest, and wanted all to know that in the next few years, great evil would happen to test our faith. The announcer chided the caller about being a little extreme, but the priest pressed on with a dire warning that this demon's goal is to strip humans of their souls, egos and all goodness. He said, "Sorat's evil will be spread by his infernal army of soulless followers, willing to give their lives for his pleasure in subjecting mankind to horror of the ultimate magnitude." The host thanked him for his views and let out a big sigh of relief as he disconnected the caller!

The show was entertaining, but I still found myself thinking about my meeting with Senator Laforge the next day. I hoped my excitement over the Sunday afternoon meeting would not bring on one of my dreaded headaches. Kat's chance of being a major contender for the Presidency seemed such a remote possibility to me. I wondered how realistic she was in her expectations of winning the Presidency from an incumbent. The truth was, I had no idea of what I was about to become a part of. In fact had I known, it all would have been inconceivable to me that night.

A year and a half had passed since that hot July summer night. I had been standing transfixed in front of the bathroom mirror for a minute or so, watching the moisture on the glass, and getting lost deep in my many thoughts of the past. My face slowly took shape again in the mirror and I leaned forward, resting my arms on the sink, studying my salt and pepper hair stuck in matted clumps to my head. The bathroom door behind me opened, and Stacie entered. She put her arms around me, kissed the back of my neck, and silently comforted me. It was obvious to me that she had heard the news, and was not sure of what to say to me about Senator Laforge. Her silence and gentleness were more than enough.

Chapter Two
Miss Bellows Falls

2

Chapter Two

Miss Bellows Falls

I pulled my naked self away from the mirror and Stacie's encircling arms, and stepped into the shower. My eyes were now moist from the raw emotions raging deep inside of me and I wanted the water to wash away the evidence. The steaming pulsating shower hit my back and immediately started to relax me. I leaned towards the shower's back wall and closed my eyes, letting the blanket of cascading hot water sooth my body and mind. The drone of the shower blanked out the bedroom's radio still blasting out news of the snowy crime scene on Route 12. I felt Stacie kiss my wet shoulder and her soft hands move across my back, as she tried to hurry me up so we could leave sooner. She closed the shower door and my thoughts jumped back to speculating on the attack of Kat's campaign bus earlier that January morning. As the stream of warm water calmed me, my memories of my meeting with Katherine back in July of 2001 floated back into my consciousness. I remembered the excitement I felt the day after the class reunion, and

how the morning dragged on until 1:10 PM when I finally climbed into my car and drove to Bellows Falls.

The Miss Bellows Falls Diner stands on the west side of Rockingham Street. The thirty foot long diner was a favorite place that we use to frequent as teenagers. Meeting here was certainly a little nostalgic for Katherine but you could also find privacy here. The Diner had a distinctive barrel roof and porcelain enameled metal sheathing, the latter having a polychrome color scheme. The Miss Bellows Falls diner retained its original appearance over the last 50 years in spite of adding all types of modern conveniences.

I arrived about 30 minutes early to make sure I was on time for this meeting. I parked my car on the south side of the Diner and walked to the big chrome door of the entrance vestibule. Fortunately, most people were sitting at the counter leaving 3 booths open. The booths were oak with a red Formica topped table. They were designed for 4 people and had a metal clothes post attached to its aisle end. I selected a table in the far corner of the diner, which offered a clear view of everyone coming and going. I indicated that I would have company and ordered a cup of coffee and a piece of apple pie. I had not been here for quite some time and the elegance of the polychrome enameled metal panels gracing the walls and the long Formica topped counter still excited my passion for the past.

As I sat back to wait for Kat, the diner's old jukebox entertained me with a new country tune by the Jamie Talbert Band. Before the song ended, my waitress was back at my table with my coffee and a hot piece of apple pie topped with a slice of Vermont Cheddar

cheese. A coffee stained newspaper that had been left behind on the counter caught my eye and I confiscated it. The headlines read, “President Mohammad Khatami – tells Bush to stop insulting Iran” and below that was a story about “Four Boston police officers hospitalized after scuffle”. A more cheery story was a review about the movie “Road to Perdition” with Tom Hanks. I started to read the article just as I noticed a sedan pull up with a man and woman in it. The man was dressed in a nice suit and Kat was in a blouse and jeans, carrying a very elegant briefcase. Katherine was coming in alone. She waved to me for a second as she stood in the vestibule and then walked the 25 feet or so to my booth and gracefully slid into it. Katherine placed her briefcase on the adjacent seat. She told the waitress who came over that 6 others were joining us, and she wanted to order their food now, and save the table right behind us for them. The waitress took the large order and agreed to reserve the table behind us for them. Kat told her to just set out everyone’s diet cokes, but hold their food until they arrive. Before I had a chance to embarrass myself asking about who the others were she winked at me and said, “ This buys us a bit more privacy. And the citizens of Texas want to buy you Lunch also so order what ever you want.” She was good at making things work her way.

Her ploy was just in time because as the waitress left our table, a couple walked into the diner. The guy was a tall seedy character wearing a black leather vest and worn jeans. His muscular arms displayed a multitude of tattoos. At his side was a sparsely clad lady with a very sexual demeanor. They walked directly towards the tables that Kat had just reserved.

“I’m sorry, sir, but those seats are taken,” the waitress exclaimed, as the couple prepared to sit in the booth behind Kat.

“Taken? What do you mean? A joint like this don’t need no reservations,” the man angrily retorted.

The waitress nervously responded, “Um, sir, those seats are reserved for the rest of this couple’s party and they have already ordered their food.” The waitress nodded towards the Senator.

The burly man glared at the waitress and grabbed his lady friend by the arm and swung her around. He did not reply back to the waitress but shot a piercing look at me as he sauntered over to the counter just a few steps from our booth.

I watched them as they took up seats at the counter. The minor incident for some reason made the hairs on my arm stand up and a shiver ripple through my spine. On the back of his vest was the name of some motorcycle group, which was unreadable to me without my glasses. I reached for them just as Kat snapped her fingers in front of my face. I smiled at her and apologized for being so easily distracted, but those two were peculiar.

I stayed focused on Katherine now and told her how very honored I felt to be someone she still trusted and would consider as her friend and confidant. She smiled impishly and said that “friends are a hard commodity to find anymore.” She said she was even happier than I at having my friendship back in her life. Once Katherine got her burgers and fries and I had my liver and onions, she started talking quietly about the importance of our friendship. She again stressed that I should realize the seriousness of having an association with her, even a distant one, as she prepared to run for president. She portrayed our relationship as a covenant between two individuals and reminded me that once a part of a covenant, it is often difficult to walk away. If I did become involved, it could interfere in my life immensely and expose me to an invasion of my privacy and

possibly place me in danger over some of the information she might divulge. At this point, what ever she said just enticed me more to get involved. Adventure had eluded me for years and just being associated with a candidate for the presidency was exciting. I told her one more time emphatically, “Yes, I want to be involved.”

Katherine smiled and said, “Okay, great, then let’s have one more understanding. You do not discuss what I tell you with anyone, not even Tom or Vince. In fact, it is best for you not to talk about me at all with them, unless I specifically tell you to mention something to them. I will tell them myself that you decided against my offer, okay?”

Again I nodded an agreement and spat out another, “okay”.

“Great so lets get down to business. I need to bring you up to date on my campaign, what I am involved in right now, and how you can help. First, did you catch the news about Iraq today?”

“No, not really. I was just glancing at the newspaper when you arrived.”

“The news is reporting that Syria is violating the U.N. embargo and delivering to Saddam, refurbished T-55 tank engines, replacement parts for T-72 tanks, military trucks and even an anti-aircraft cannon.

I looked at Katherine and asked her. “And what should that mean to me?”

“Good question. I think it means you can count on seeing another war happening soon.”

“I take it, you don’t believe the sanctions are going to work?”

“Absolutely no.” She replied. “Saddam has no problem finding willing countries to supply him with weapons or spare parts for his military equipment. Look at it this way. If Syria, the sitting president of the U.N. Security Council, finds it perfectly ok to provide its old arch enemy with weapons and spare parts, why shouldn’t other countries?”

“Very good point!”

“Many countries do it not only for the money, but because they want other nations to fight their grudges against us. It is a crazy world. During the eighties, France, Russia, and our own Reagan Administration supplied Iraq with weapons to fight Iran. Israel was also supplying weapons to Iran to fuel the fires even more. We all made money from the arms deals and had our battle with Iran fought for us by Iraqis. Saddam served basically then as our proxy fighting Iran.”

“I am sure you are right that others would like to see us in a similar situation.”

“Most certainly, we now have our nemesis that celebrates any problems we may encounter. The Palestinians danced in the street after Nine Eleven and I feel certain that some officials in European countries privately gloated over the tragedy. We are tolerated but despised by many governments. As a Senator, I have come to learn that jealousy is as rampant between governments as it is between people. Our military power and money is what insulates us from their hate and ability to destroy us.”

“So, if you are elected President will you have a different strategy to end the crisis with Iraq?”

“The problem won’t wait until I am elected. I am convinced that war with Iraq is a near certainty. However, I do have a plan that I hope will remove some of the reasons we have for war with Iraq, or if all goes well, even prevent it.”

“What is your plan?”

“I can not divulge it all to you, but I will tell you some of it today. Unfortunately, I have to hold back some of the plans. Actually, not all of it is even known by me. Regardless, you will know way before the general public gets wind of it.

“Kat, am I going to wish I had never got involved with this?”

The senator raised her hand and interrupted me. “You will never be involved in anything that might hurt you. You might toss and turn some nights wondering what the hell is happening, but I won’t drag you into any situation that could expose you to any type of harm. I need you to be my liaison to the public and to be a trusted friend that I can count on when I need advice or perhaps a favor.”

“Okay Kat! I trust you and like I said before that 20 odd boring years at NARA makes it hard to turn down anything that hints of excitement.”

Katherine smiled at me and continued. “Good so lets continue with the business at hand. Let me tell you what I will face if I win the presidential election this time. The Nine Eleven attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and Flight 93 is our Pearl Harbor of the new century. Those attacks ushered in a new insidious war for us to fight. And, I am telling you, that this new war is as serious to our country as the Second World War was 60 years ago. This time, we are faced with a war that we just might lose.”

Kat paused, looked at me seriously and said, “As successful as we were militarily in Afghanistan in routing out the Taliban government and Al Qaeda, the terrorist movement was far from defeated. In fact, it has spread out more into an even larger global organization. Actions like Nine Eleven are viewed by many Moslem extremists as a huge recruitment event and more of a reason to join the militants. We are facing a worldwide terrorist movement funded and supported clandestinely by countries and extreme Islamic figureheads. This is guerilla warfare on a global basis. They are cunning and are as dangerous to our country as Hitler was in the WWII.” They can defeat us.”

“You really believe that? We have the best military in the world, for sure.”

“They don’t need a huge army to wage war. They only have to evoke fear in our people and divide the American public. The political climate here is so divisive that if there is a war, and the leaders of these terrorist organizations adopt the same tactics that Ho Chi Minh used against us in the Vietnam War, this conflict will be won psychologically and never hardly fought on the battlefield. We will fight ourselves. Our myopic and power hungry representatives will lose the war for us regardless of how well our soldiers fight or how many battles they win.”

Katherine dug around in her brief case and pulled out a folder. She glanced back at me and said, “A lot is going on in the Middle East. We have an undeclared war on our hands that is very hard to define to the American public. We have always been a country that stood for religious freedom, but that one tenet of our government is almost untenable now with the attacks that bin Ladin has brought to our doorsteps. Back on Feb 23, 1998 when President Clinton was busy refuting his sexual relations with Paula Jones, the Arabic Newspaper, “Al-Quds al-Arabi,” published an ominous declaration of the “World Islamic Front for Jihad” against the Jews and us, the Crusaders. The declaration was signed by Islamic militants like bin Ladin and others from Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In short, it calls upon all Muslims to kill us wherever we are. It tells them to kill anyone who is American, Christian or Jew. Their fatwah, or ruling, is to kill Americans and their allies – both civilians and military. They make it an individual duty for every Muslim to comply with this ruling, if they are true to their faith and want to be blessed by God. In essence, it was a religious declaration of war against our country and people, but at that time it was not taken seriously by the Clinton administration.”

Katherine handed me a paper, which was a copy of the declaration. She pointed to a yellow highlighted paragraph that she wanted me to read and said, "This is their call to all Muslims to attack us."

The paragraph read: "We -- with God's help -- call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim ulema, leaders, youths, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's U.S. troops and the devil's supporters allying with them, and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson."

I looked up at Katherine and said, "This is unbelievable. They claim it's God's order to kill Americans. I had never heard about this at NARA. Is this declaration still a concern?" "Most definitely it is still a concern!" She said, "You never heard about it because there was never an answer from our administration regarding this religious declaration of war. But as I said, when this fatwah was issued, Clinton was embroiled in one of his sexual scandals and did not have the time to really get involved with this threat. But there are over a billion Moslems, so we are talking about a potentially lethal situation if only a small percentage of them were to follow the instructions of this fatwah. After the Nine Eleven attacks, we did go to battle with a secular entity that we loosely defined as terrorist. But in reality, the terrorists we are battling are all Islamic."

Kat pulled out another paper and placed it in front of me. It contained a picture of an odd looking beast that looked much like a dragon but had many heads. "Do you know what this is?" She asked.

I looked at it and then back at her and responded hesitantly, “Some mythological dragon, I guess.”

“It is a Hydra. The beast that Hercules tried to kill, each time he cut off one of its heads two more grew back. These Islamic radical organizations view themselves as living hydras. As we destroy heads of their organization, more appear to continue the evil. In the Bible, the mouths of the hydra represented the gateway to hell. I often feel that the hate and barbaric brutality preached and practiced by those who head these organizations could only come from Lucifer himself.”

“I cannot agree with you more. Their acts are vile, senseless and disgusting. It infuriates me to think of all those who died on nine eleven for some obscure bull shit radical religious reasons that no one still understands. Excuse the language, but it just infuriates me.”

Kat shook her head in disgust and continued. “You can see, we have a big problem. While radical Islamic clerics preach total intolerance to anyone who is not a devout follower and sanction killing and enslaving their adversaries like in Sudan, we are shackled by our constitutional principles to tolerate all religions, regardless of how insidious their views. As politicians, we have to tip toe around when discussing this war on terrorism in order to avoid characterizing the enemy as Islamic. We also have to use the generic label of terrorist to avoid the media attacking us of being anti Islamic.”

“You think that they will attack us again within our borders?” I asked Katherine.

“It is very easy for them to strike virtually anytime they want within our country. We have over 8 million Muslims living in America now. In fact, Islam is the fastest-growing religion in America. We have had a large immigration of Muslims, and a great number of

African-Americans have adopted Islam. With followers in the millions, Islamists enjoy a large pool of souls to find converts to their radicalism. They certainly can and have found willing partners to attack us from within our borders.

I was astounded and I replied to Katherine, "I never realized that we had that many Muslims in the states. It is going to be very difficult for you to win this election if you are open about your feelings and beliefs."

"Well, these are more than feelings. These are facts that we have to face. Remember, John Walker Lindh was an American Muslim convert, who just pleaded guilty to aiding and fighting for the Taliban. This guy was from a nice Bay area middle class family. You have to ask yourself, how did he get indoctrinated so easily? We just have to hope that we can avoid radicalism invading the great Mosques within America and turning more Moslems against non-Moslems. With their conception of God wishing all non-Moslems killed, it makes it extremely hard to deal with radical Islamists like those that were convicted of killing Daniel Pearl. Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh is a hero in Pakistan for killing and beheading Mr. Pearl."

"I have been reading about it. It is really sick that in today's civilization, any religion would sanction such barbaric acts. This is the type of horror and savagery that went on centuries ago. I cannot fathom this kind of hate, and I find it hard to have any respect for anyone associated with a religion that promotes this type of barbaric act. These are acts of the Devil not acts of any God."

Senator Laforge looked at me for a couple of seconds and then leaned closer to me.

“You have to be careful with what you say about issues like this, or you will find yourself accused of promoting hate towards Muslims. Some Muslims don’t advocate this type of barbarism, but are afraid to speak out against it.”

“Yes, I guess you are right, but it infuriates me that we can not openly state our feeling about those who want to destroy us. It is really disgusting. This Ahmed, or Omar or what ever his damn name is, is an animal. This guy actually filmed the murder, and holds Pearl’s severed head up in a video that they released, bragging about their barbarism.”

“I understand your anger, and I must admit it also consumes me sometimes. That is one big reason, why I am campaigning for president. I feel I can make a difference in this struggle. Let me finish telling you about my Iraq plans.”

“Okay, it just makes me sick that anyone supports scum like that. When I was driving home last night, I listened to a talk show with some crack pot talking about his theory on this demon, “Sorat.” He claimed that he is here among us to destroy all humanity with the help of his followers who thrive on killing. Maybe he was not that far off, especially if we have people who are so full of hate and enjoy killing as much as these terrorists claim.”

“You have to try and not let it affect you so much, because that is what they want it to do. Now take a couple deep breaths while I go over my stand and views on Iraq. Understand that these are strictly my own views of why we must be in Iraq.” Katherine said quietly.

“We need to have an entrance into the Middle East to help rebuild an Arabic nation that can be leader in the region. We also need to help it solve problems of human life, by creating technologies of production like farming, and technologies of social order, like cities and law. We want to bring stability to the region and gain a great ally. It is not

about oil. It is about bringing modernity to their doorsteps. It is about allowing them to taste freedom and a better way of life. This is what we have to do to keep them from changing our way of life. This whole struggle is a war to save civilization, as we know it.”

“So when will this war start?” I asked Katherine.

“We won’t have a ground war with Iraq soon, because Turkey's fragile government was just crippled on July 8th when Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit's closest aid, Deputy Prime Minister Husamettin Ozkan, quit. Two other ministers and 15 legislators all stepped down which basically dismantled Ecevit’s administration. Turkey is our primary logistical ally in the region. So, until the chaos in Ankara is resolved, we will be forced to find a new ally or postpone any serious military action against Iraq.”

“I read a couple of days ago that Jordan was considering allowing us to use bases for preparation of a possible military attack against Iraq.”

Katherine looked at me and smiled. “If what you read were true, it would mark a complete reversal of Jordan's previous stand regarding our use of Jordanian territory to launch an attack against Iraq. I don’t think Jordan would feel safe exposing itself to the potential problems that could result from being openly aligned with us. Jordan is a very small country in that region. I really think there will be no war until next year. We will spend the next few months in preparation for war and enlisting other countries to work with us.

Katherine took a sip of her soda, paused for a second and then said, “I am sure that the president would like to go in now and be done with this war. Avoid all the debates, protest and drama by everyone wanting to keep the status quo. But unfortunately, it is not

going to happen that easily. We are going to play the UN game and try to align some of our so-called allies to work with us. I have my doubts that we can persuade those against this action to change their minds. If we can not, we are pretty much alone on this action.”

“There are already protest. I watched one on the news taking place in San Francisco. I am sure these are nothing compared to what will probably occur later on. You are right, we are going to have some epic arguments between appeasers and warriors on this war.”

“Katherine’s face looked serious and she said, “I don’t want to come off too cocky but my election committee has a very serious meeting planned for me with Saddam which will enhance my candidacy, and hopefully, prevent a lot of bloodshed.”

“You are going to have a face to face meeting with Hussein?”

“That is the plan, but all details are not yet ironed out. If all goes well, I can assure you the meeting will be headline news in a few months. Hopefully, a real solution to the Iraq dilemma will be the result of my negotiations. The meeting is very important to me. It will either be my entree into the West Wing, or the end of my campaign. It is a totally secret operation that only a few of my most trusted associates know about. I would hope you could use your knowledge and contacts in NARA to smell out if any one else has knowledge of these plans. You know how to research transcripts and reports without being obvious, I assume. Just try and see if any abnormal interest is being paid to my travels, actions, P2OG mentioning or with an operation called, ‘Hulagu’?”

“What is ‘P2OG’? I asked.

“P2OG is a rumored new policy created by the Pentagon’s Defense Science Board (DSB) to give the ability to fight terrorist with clandestine black ops and covert missions. The policy allows the CIA or Military elements to launch these operations. Some of my

colleagues claim P2OG is just some meme purposely contrived to keep terrorist off guard. But, others like myself, believe it is a real policy and that covert operations will be carried out under it. Do you remember the old book on Hulagu, I used to bore you guys with?" Katherine questioned.

"Absolutely, I remember that book." I responded.

Katherine said, "Saddam Hussein and I, sort of share one obsession, as we are both history buffs and have an affinity for the story of Hulagu. Saddam refers to us as the "new Hulagu", that his country has to face."

She had named the operation after a Mongol warrior that, as kids, we had heard about from an old dilapidated book. When we were kids, Kat had a fixation on this book and would hide it in our underground clubhouse behind my house. The book was a grisly story illustrated by dark images from wood engravings depicting Hulagu's soldiers slaughtering the soldiers of Baghdad hundreds of years ago. Maybe it was her way of showing us that she was one of the guys. While Tom, Vince and myself were all peeking at the panty section in the Sears and Roebuck catalogue, yesterday's version of today's Victoria secrets catalogue. Kat was hung up on history. All of us, exceptt Kat would consider it a lucky day when we would acquire a national Geographic magazine that actually showed naked breasts of women from some African tribe. But Katherine was different and found old history books with yellowing pages, her pleasure. This favorite book she would illuminate with her trusty Space Cadet flashlight and read to us the gritty story of Hulagu. I included part of the story here because of Kat's obsession for it, and that it is probably the genesis of the events, of which we all became a part.

Katherine would skip to Chapter 2 of “Hulagu the Warrior,” and tell us all to shut up as she read in her most serious scary voice.

“The last impact of the horsemen blasted the entire wall inward. The ancient stonewall crumbled with a muffled roar raining stones and dust onto the people below. Through the holes shrouded with the swirling dust clouds, horses with their mounted warriors burst forth like angry hornets into the courtyard of the city. The horses trampled over the fallen and wounded buried beneath the debris of the wall. Those still standing or protruding from the pile of rocks were put quickly to the sword. Severed heads and body parts were trampled and pulverized as the invading horsemen poured through the breach in the wall. With their snorting steeds, the horsemen gathered together near the hole, glaring at the trapped people in front of them. With practiced precision they drew their bows and methodically unleashed a shower of arrows into the crowd of screaming men, women and children pleading for their life. The arrows found their marks dropping people in the trapped crowd. Slowly the horsemen moved towards the crowd unleashing more arrows at them. Those trapped, with the arrows still quivering in their bodies, fell to the ground into pools of blood from their dead comrades. Finally the few standing knelt down among the dead and dying begging the horsemen for their life.”

Katherine would stop for a moment and take a drink of soda. We all wished she would stop reading this scary shit but none of us would dare tell her. With a little nervous giggle she would ask us, “what do you think they do next?” Without waiting for an answer, she would launch back into the next scene

“The horsemen dismounted and with swords drawn, moved forward among the corpses littering the ground. They menacingly edged towards the remaining living women,

children and men. The soldier's faces glistened with sweat and their swords and shields were splattered with the blood of their victims. The cowering women and children heaved and shook with the fear of the horror that surrounded them. As the first woman looked up at the invader, the glitter of the flashing metal was the last sight that she saw. And then the battle was just a cacophony of crying, screams and the gurgling sounds of the dying mingled with the distinct sounds of the swords, ripping into the necks and slicing through the bones and sinews of the few that had not yet been put to death.”

“Blood was everywhere. On the floors of homes and splattered on stonewalls and pooled under bodies littering the streets. Even the Tigris River became a swollen trough of blood fed by the slaughter of thousands in the city of Baghdad by the marauding hordes of Mongols lead by the scourge of God, Hulagu Khan. Hulagu was the grandson of Genghis Khan and his cruelty and love of killing was unsurpassed. It is said that the Tigris River ran red with the blood of the massacred for over 30 days as the Mongols systematically moved through the city killing everything and everyone they could find. Thousands were beheaded, burned, put to the sword, or disemboweled. Women and girls were raped; many of them were then mutilated and murdered. Some claim that up to 2 million Muslims were slaughtered at this time. The streets of the city of "Peace" as called by Arabs were littered with the rotting corpses of the dead and the air was putrid with the stench of death. The smell was so powerful that even the invading Mongols had to keep away for several days. The slaughter in Baghdad was so thorough and brutal that the atrocities are seared into Muslim's memories forever.”

The waitress came back to our table and wanted to know if we needed refills, and if our friends were still on their way. Katherine assured her that they were, and took the

waitress up on new drinks. As she stepped away from our table Kat asked her if they served the soda Moxie? The waitress gave Kat a sad look and said, “No, but it is available at the local stores.”

I smiled at Katherine as I wiped grilled onions off my lips. I remembered vividly her story of Hulagu. I also remembered drinking bottles of Moxie when I was a kid. Katherine flipped out her cell phone and called her aide who was still waiting in her car, and asked him to cruise around town to the local grocery stores to see if he could buy a case or two of M O X I E. Her sedan backed out of the parking place and merged into the Rockingham street traffic.

Katherine smiled at me and said, “I wanted to keep him busy, and I really do want to introduce Moxie to friends back in Texas and Washington. Most of the country has never tasted of it.”

Katherine returned to her views on Iraq. “I think making Iraq a friendlier country to the US will deter worldwide terrorism in the long run. Many will disagree with me, but we have to help make things better for these people who have been taught to hate us. We have to give them a reason to like us. The youth in these fanatical tribes and clans in Iraq love our technology, music, big cars, and modernization. This stuff is as mesmerizing to them, as it is to our kids. The youth of Iraq should be our target. The radical Islamists target them to use for their cause as Mujahideen or suicide bombers, so we must offer them an alternative, something better. If we do not we will end up with millions of walking suicide bombers in our midst.”

“So, it is not a quick fix in Iraq you have in store?”

“No, but it will be a very new beginning without all the bloodshed that our present direction ensures. Right now we have an elusive enemy that is as difficult to fight as my chance of winning the Power Ball. Many here in the states do not even admit that terrorism exists or poses a threat. It is like the mentality of someone with cancer when they refuse to accept that they have it. We cannot win an insidious war by avoiding the battles. Fighting a virtually invisible enemy is very difficult. They are so secretive that the names of their members are hidden, even from other associates. It will be a damn hard job. And, Islamic terrorists are even a threat to individuals like Saddam Hussein. So, making peace with Iraq will free up more resources to fight them, and perhaps even align another ally in fighting these maniacal barbarians.”

“If our plans succeed, I will announce my candidacy, and I will be in a very powerful position to win the election. I also have one more major plank in my platform that is equally as controversial and will surely make me many enemies.”

She let me hang for a minute as she took a long drink and slowly put the glass back down. “So what is this other thing?” I asked.

“I want to get rid of the Federal Income tax and replace the whole cumbersome system with a National Sales Tax modeled after the one proposed by the National Retail Sales Tax Alliance. This will help millions of Americans and make paying taxes effortless. The government will receive tax from anybody who spends a dime in our country. It will eliminate tons of regulations and everyone will be easily taxed. Aliens, drug dealers, visiting foreigners, prostitutes, gamblers, and basically anyone spending money will be taxed accordingly. A higher sales tax will be levied against luxury items and rebates given to those who are living on social security or under a certain income levels. It will

cost us much less to maintain and be fairer to all. However, lawyers, accountants and IRS agents will hate it.”

“How much will that add to everything we buy?” I asked.

“It probably will be around 14 to 17 percent. At first glance that might sound high to you but remember, no federal tax will be taken out of your pay, so your check will be much higher. Once we determine how much money we can save by eliminating the cost of existing compliance issues, we can adjust the rate. Right now it is estimated that \$300,000,000 is spent by the IRS for purely collection expenses and compliance issues. That is a tremendous waste of tax paper’s money.”

“Well, if you win, it will be like a revolution here in America,” I remarked.

“Oh yes, this will be a major change. It is not the first time it has been proposed, but it will be the first time it becomes part of an election campaign. A lot of congressmen support it. Big names like John Linder, Billy Tauzin, Collin Peterson, Max Baucus, Dr. Alan Keyes and a host of others sponsor the Fair Tax proposal. But I am not going to be able to make this work if I fail in my Iraq mission.”

“You will do great!” I offered.

“Please don’t patronize me. I won’t stand a chance in hell to win this election if I cannot demonstrate I am as tough as a man when dealing with tyrants like Saddam. It is a perception thing. With our war on terrorism and this decade old stand off with Iraq, I have to show I am a leader strong enough to deal with national security issues.”

“Seriously Kat, I am not patronizing you. When we were kids you were the toughest of all of us. We all looked up to you and we still do. Look at you, a senator from Texas, and

that in itself demands respect. People will see you as a force that has to be taken seriously.”

“I hope you are right. I will be up against a pretty strong incumbent for the primary. And if I win that, I will be up against some very seasoned tough Democrats. I need to get the women’s vote, and believe it or not, they are the hardest votes for me to win. The majority of women vote for men. They vote for the handsome guy, or it is just some old patriarchal culture ingrained into our female subconscious. I still have some very high hurdles to jump.”

“You think women have a little of the Stepford Wives syndrome when it comes to voting?”

Kat smiled and retorted, “Not just a little, a whole lot. Unfortunately women the world over easily succumb to the idea that they are inferior. Look at what happened in Afghanistan and even now in the Sudan. You have women who are treated no better than farm animals in those countries, yet they make no real effort to change their position in life. Many will even tell you that it is the way it is suppose to be, and that they are content living as chattel. It is maddening to me.”

I didn’t really know what to say to all of that and for a moment there was an uncomfortable silence between us.

Kat broke the silence, “Dealing with Saddam is a huge challenge to me. This guy has outlasted 3 of our presidents in this stand off so far. I think anyone with any knowledge of him would agree that he is cunning, charismatic, and megalomaniacal. He is a legendary figure, regardless of the evil we see in him. Without him, Iraq would probably still be a hellhole of warring tribes, clans, and feuding religions. Iraq had been in a virtual

coma since Hulagu's beating centuries ago, and I have to give Hussein credit for reviving it. With his Stalin like brutality and iron determination, he pulled these dark age feuding factions together again and turned Iraq into the center of the Arab World. He amassed a huge army to retain control and protect his people from the next Hulagu."

"I take it, he considers us the next Hulagu?"

"Absolutely, Saddam refers to the United States as the 'new Hulagu.' He also makes sure that all are reminded of the many biblical experts who believe Iraq was the location of the fabled Garden of Eden, the birthplace of Adam and Eve. That is why he refers to Iraq as the "mother of civilization." A famous quote from one of his speeches is: "It is the mother of civilization of Iraq which Hulagu of this age wants to attack. So, tell him in a clear, loud voice, 'Oh, evil, cease your evil doings against the mother of civilization.' "

Once more our cute waitress interrupted us and convinced me to try another desert. Kat decided on the same.

Katherine had another observation she wanted to share with me. She told me the story of Gilgamesh, the fabled king of Uruk Iraq who ruled that city approximately 4700 years ago. He was said to have had a dream that was described in Tablet 4 of the story of Gilgamesh and it went as follows:

The skies roared with thunder and the earth heaved,

Then came darkness and a stillness like death.

Lightening smashed the ground and fires blazed out;

Death flooded from the skies.

When the heat died and the fires went out,

The plains had turned to ash.

Gilgamesh's friend Enkidu would often interpret these dreams. This particular interpretation is missing from the ancient tablets. Most believe that Enkidu, like most political hacks, would have put a positive spin on this dream for his boss like he did on the other dreams, but was this dream perhaps more?

Katherine leaned over the red formica table with a mouth full of apple pie and asked me seriously. "Was this the vision of today's modern warfare at the gates of the cradle of civilization? Is this the Hulagu of Saddam Hussein speeches? Or is Saddam Hussein the incarnation of Hulagu's spirit which has arisen again to continue the slaughter of the Iraqis?"

She leaned back into her seat, and I could sense that Senator Laforge was looking at me for some sort of reaction to her last question. I looked at her and said. "Hell Katherine, I have no idea. I certainly do not understand what Hulagu of old has to do with today at all. It sounds to me like just another way to complicate, or to legitimize or to give some brutal tyrant a reason to be who he has demonstrated himself to be."

Out of the diner window I could see Katherine's sedan returning to the parking lot and resuming its old position again.

Katherine asked the waitress for the bill and to make those other hamburgers 'to go'. She locked her eyes on mine and said, "You are basically right. Hulagu of the past has little to do with today, but we do have a new Hulagu that Saddam Hussein will soon meet, and the new Hulagu will be the savior of Iraq."

Katherine reached down, grabbed her cup and finished her coffee.

I was not sure what she meant by her last statement but I could sense we were about to end our meeting. I asked, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Senator Laforge replied, “You have already started doing it. Just being my friend and someone I can safely confide in. I am beginning to know so much about things. For my own safety, I want others to know what I know. I want others to be aware. So, what we are doing now is basically all I really need you to do for me. Hopefully, I can repay you big in the future for this favor. In the mean time, I want you to have this as a reminder of our conversation.”

She handed me a small plastic container displaying an old worn coin of some sort. On the case was a label that read “Ilkhanids, Hulagu 654-663 AH.”

She said, “This is a 700 year old coin. It is not worth much today but keep it and someday it may become very valuable. You know I am still a big coin collector, and I thought a Hulagu coin would be very appropriate for our conversation today.”

I thanked her for the gift and told her that I thought I understood what she wanted, and I was glad to be there for her. We shook hands and Kat told me that she would like us to leave separately. She motioned to the waitress to bring me one more cup of coffee, and left a \$20 tip on the table.

Our meeting was over. I still had little idea of what, if anything, I was involved in, but had enjoyed the conversation with my old friend, Kat. I had the feeling that the reason for our visit was something like the old Czech proverb that stated: ‘Do not protect yourself by a fence, but rather by your friends.’

I looked out the window and watched Kat drive away. The motorcycle guy and his lady friend were paying up and heading out also. I looked at his arm covered with tattoos and suddenly he turned his head towards me, as if he had felt my stare. I glanced away from him and locked my eyes on the paper in front of me, but I could still feel his eyes glaring

at me. A rush of adrenaline surged through me as I avoided looking at him. Then I heard the sound of the motorcycle, as it roared down Rockingham in the same direction Kat had just taken. With all the thoughts that were churning in my head from talking with Kat, I was probably thinking a bit schizoid but a weird unease from his presence lingered within me as I sat there toying with my Hulagu coin.

The sound of Stacie's voice ended my interlude into the past. The shower door opened and she stepped into the steamy cubicle.

"I hope you do not mind sharing the shower, but you are using up all the hot water." She said through the thick moist air.

I felt her cool firm breast press refreshingly up against my back as I welcomed her, "Please join me, honey, I need some distraction."

Her hands reached up to my hair and I felt her squirt shampoo on it. She ran her fingers lightly through the shampoo in my wet hair, working it up to a thick lather.

With a soft sponge from the shower rack, she began to spread shower gel over my shoulders and down my back all the way to my buttocks.

A swirl of heat ignited in the pit of my stomach, as I felt Stacie's small pink tongue flickering down the small of my back. A rush of hot water crashed over my head as she lovingly slid her hands around my waist. I was now completely distracted.

"Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction." Blaise Pascal

Chapter Three The Accident

3

Chapter Three

The Accident

Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them.

Hell shall be their Home: an evil fate. [at-Taubah 9:73]

With steaming cups of coffee in hand, Stacie and I walked through the attached barn to our unheated garage. My breath fogged in the chill January air as I pressed the red button on the Garage door remote. The morning quiet was broken by the sounds of ice and snow popping off of the garage door as it noisily retreated into the ceiling. I was dressed in a warm parka but still shivered as the icy morning air hit my face. Outside the wind blew and snow floated lazily to the ground. It was a light snow flurry much less than had fallen during the night, but it still added to the 3 inches of fresh snow covering the driveway. A foot high mound of snow and slush deposited earlier by a snowplow sealed the exit. Beyond the driveway, headlights pierced the darkness and I heard the crunch of tires on snow as a car passed slowly in front of our house. Other people were already up, heading to the town hall.

I opened the car door and mentally prepared myself for the harsh coldness of the leather seat. Quickly, I dropped myself behind the steering wheel. My teeth began to chatter from the hard cold inside the car. I pumped the gas, turned the key and a plume of condensation enveloped the rear of the vehicle. The windshield was iced up from the slush left on it from the previous night's visit with Senator Laforge, so I switched on the defroster. We both sat in the car as the motor slowly warmed up. I reclined in the driver's seat, and hugged myself for warmth while Stacie huddled next to me held a scarf over her nose, already red from the cold.

When the car idled smoothly, I turned on the headlights and prepared for that lunge into our snowy driveway. Twinjets of water sprayed onto the dirty windshield as the wipers slapped the grime and ice away from my view. Peering through the streaked and fogged windshield, I searched for headlights on the road in front of our house. Convinced that no cars were approaching, I gunned the engine to make sure it would not stall. Then, pressing down on the gas pedal, I gripped my steering wheel and propelled the car out onto the driveway. The momentum of the car let me easily maneuver down the driveway and burst through the foot tall barrier of snow at its end. As the front wheels cleared the pile, I spun the wheel to the right turning us onto the road. This was always the point where Stacie would yell that she would never ride with me again.

We drove over the railroad tracks and just as we passed the old Elm's Hotel building we could see the headlights of the traffic moving aimlessly along Main Street in our little town of 4000. Cars were driving around the block some with their windshields almost opaque from frozen slush. Senator Laforge's visit had attracted many flatlanders and NEWS agencies. In fact, Main st. swarmed with the media army. Vans and satellite

trucks from CNN, FOX, ABC, CBS and NBC were all parked along the street. This morning, the eyes and ears of the world were focused on Charlestown, NH. As we neared Main Street the weather came on the radio. “Residents of Keen New Hampshire awoke to 10 degrees below zero weather. The cold snap was brought on by a fast-moving storm that blanketed the East Coast last evening with up to 5 inches of snow. The storm closed airports and some area roads. This nor'easter storm - drifted northward along the coast after forming when moist air from the Atlantic collided with the cold air over New England. The storm system will affect Maine later this morning. A chance of more snow, sleet or freezing rain is forecast for across the region for Monday and Tuesday.”

Late breaking news: New Hampshire State Police have closed the section of Route 12 where Senator Laforge’s Campaign Bus was found stalled in a snow bank. All traffic going north or south between Walpole and Charlestown, New Hampshire is being rerouted to Route 5 on the west side of the Connecticut river. Chief Richardson from the Charlestown Fire Department stated that multiple bodies have been found at the grizzly scene. Bodies have been found in the bus and in the snow surrounding the bus. The campaign bus had been hit multiple times by bullets and possibly explosives. It is still unknown who is responsible for this brazen attack or the reason behind it. Stay tuned for further updates.

The warmth from the car heater wrapped me in a soothing embrace as the chill numbness of my ears, nose, and cheeks began to recede. As I drove down Main Street searching for a parking space, I recalled the previous accident that Senator Laforge had endured. Since then, she had told me many of the details from that September evening in Iraq. There

have been many renditions of the events of that night, but I believe my version is the most accurate.

Kat had confessed to me how elated she felt when her face-to-face meeting with Saddam finally started to become a reality. As the secret diplomatic and security issues were pursued by her close's associates, Kat grappled with trying to learn everything she could about Saddam and Iraq to insure her mission's success. Her ability to win the presidency rested squarely on the outcome of her meeting with Saddam Hussein.

I had become much more involved with Kat's operation. She had discovered my innate ability to reduce a myriad of historical fragments into a logical comprehensive perspective. She liked my work because it was stripped of the pervasive bias accompanying most contemporary news. Kat's mission soon became my obsession, and I set up an office in my house that became headquarters for research, at least to me. I framed the Hulagu Coin that Kat had given me and hung it on the wall. On the adjacent wall I hung a picture of a Hydra to remind me of the evil I was involved in fighting. I hoped that these things would give me the inspiration needed to help her succeed in her mission. Deep into the morning the smell of fresh coffee and the sound of baroque music emanated from my sanctuary, as I read books and trolled the web for information on whatever I was researching.

To get the research material back to Kat, I set up an innocent Web site that began to swell with the results of my studies. I named it, "Hulagu's Web," sort of a play on Kat's fascination for Hulagu's influence in Iraq, and my craving to infuse Kat's clandestine mission and my work with more of a feeling of intrigue. My site,

www.HulagusWeb.com, provided an easy way to openly communicate with Kat but without anyone realizing its real purpose. It appeared as just another innocuous site dealing with Iraq, Saddam, Islamist or terrorist activities to any web surfers who chanced upon it.

The first task that Kat asked me to handle was an overview of Iraq's religious makeup. I immediately immersed myself in the job and went about finding everything I could regarding religion in Iraq. My first draft on Iraq's religious landscape included statistics, facts, plus examples that were representative of the bigger picture. I made it clear that ninety five percent of the population adhered to some form of Islam. Within this shared religion, an age-old deadly battle raged between two Islamic sects, the Sunnis and Shiite's. The divisiveness between these elements was sinister, destructive, and deadly as demonstrated by the numerous killings of members of one sect by members of the other.

I harbored a natural reluctance to make any statement to Kat that could be construed as a disparaging attack upon a world religion, but I concluded the darkness surrounding Islam should not be ignored. I felt the tenets of this religion had become so mutated by the religious dogma and hatred spewed by its spiritual leaders that it had reverted from an inspirational power of good into a deadly pernicious psychosis. Militancy appeared to be unbridled in Islam and it had permeated to the highest level of their hierarchy. An example exemplifying this was the Shiite revered spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khomeini statement, "The purest joy in Islam is to kill and be killed for Allah.

Another important excerpt that I felt Kat should be made aware of came from a respected Islamic scholar, Ibn Kathir who was born in 701AH. He was a favorite of Sunni Muslims, the Islamic sect which Saddam Hussein was a member. Ibn Kathir stated that,

“Allah says that the man is the leader over the woman and is the one who disciplines her if she does wrong. “Because Allah has made one of them excel the other”, this is because men are better than women, and a man is better than a woman. Therefore, prophet-hood and great kingship were confined to men, as the Prophet said, “A people that choose a woman as their leader will not succeed.” I felt, if Saddam Hussein believed this Islamic doctrine, he would most likely want Kat to become President because Allah would doom her leadership.

One other item that I felt Kat should be aware of was a passage in Hadith 3:885 regarding the Islamic story of a Bedouin who came to Allah's messenger and said, "O Allah's Messenger! I ask you by Allah to judge my case according to Allah's Laws". His opponent, who was more learned than he, said, "Yes, judge between us according to Allah's Laws, and allow me to speak." Allah's Messenger said, "Speak." He said, "My son was working as a laborer for this man and he committed illegal sexual intercourse with his wife. The people told me that it was obligatory that my son should be stoned to death, so in lieu of that I ransomed my son by paying one hundred sheep and a slave-girl. Then I asked the religious scholars about it. They informed me that my son must be lashed one hundred times, and be exiled for one year, and the wife of this (man) must be stoned to death." Allah's Messenger said, "By Him in whose hands my soul is, I shall judge between you according to Allah's Laws. The slave-girl and the sheep are to be returned to you, your son is to receive a hundred lashes and be exiled for one year. You, Unais go to the wife of this man and if she confesses her guilt, stone her to death." Unais went to the woman next morning and she confessed. Allah's Messenger ordered that she be stoned to death.

Kat had worked in the Senate on bills for women's rights and specifically measures condemning any nation sanctioning Stoning to death of its citizens for illegal sex or homosexuality. I had obtained a video of an actual stoning and linked it into "HulagusWeb.com" I wanted Kat to be totally aware of the reality of these barbaric customs and the general danger she faced if her mission went awry. She would be dancing with the devil when she visited Hussein, and I hoped she knew she should take the lead.

One thing I had often pondered while working at NARA was how a single individual gains mass submission of an entire population. No one could wield this type of power held by tyrants if we were not somehow predisposed to accepting subjugation by another. It must be some human flaw or social malaise that allows this to happen. There could not be Saddams, Pol Pots, Hitlers, Attila the Huns or similar scourges of humanity if we as a society were a bit more responsible and less sheep like. What I was now involved in made me feel a bit closer to being someone who was not simply an ant of society.

My position in life now was to provide research to help make changes in the world, not to simply archive the past as I had done for so many years. Kat now depended on me to help with her research on many issues. Problems like WMD issues, Kurdish resistance fighters, terrorist activities in Iraq, Saddam's life history, United Nation policies, political issues regarding Iraq here in the states and anything else with significance to her upcoming mission.

Finally, the last few days before Kat's planned meeting with Hussein, the focus of our research shifted to his life history. I had a small phone conversation with Kat a day or so

before her trip, and I could sense the nervousness in her voice. There was impatience and even a bit of apprehension discernible in her voice.

Saddam Hussein fit the mold for a Middle East ruler. He was one man holding the concentration of power and not bound by any constitutional framework. Right from the inception of his regime he exhibited cunning and steadfast determination to become the supreme leader of Iraq. His ruthlessness had assured his rule of the country since 1979. Saddam's humble background, amazing willpower, focus, and ability to achieve his dreams endeared him to those of his Clan. They felt there was no stopping him, in terms of what Iraq is all about, and its position in the whole world. Saddam shaped a secular government for the first time in modern Iraqi history. It was a ruthless government, albeit but one able to achieve success in forging a national community out of a country dominated with diverse social elements. This is a land where brutality is the norm. Any leader in the Middle East trying to maintain secularization, modernization and the promotion of a worldly education realizes Muslim fundamentalists will constantly oppose him.

Saddam handled his religious distracters with the same iron fisted determination that his neighbor, Hafez Assad, had applied in Syria. President Assad maintained his power by being ruthless and killing anyone or any groups opposing him. He totally annihilated 20,000 Muslim guerrillas, in the town of Hama, who referred to him as "an enemy of Allah". From that day on, Islamic fundamentalists used caution with any mention of Assad or the bath party in their venomous diatribes.

I hoped Kat understood that if her actions diminished Saddam's hold on Iraq, it could expose the people of Iraq to the fundamentalist Islamic revival vision of a global culture

under Sharia, which is the Islamic solution to all world problems. Sharia (Islamic law) promotes an implacably hostile view towards the secular world. It seeks a political effort imposed by religious laws to implement their tenants of veiling women, mutilation of thieves, execution of adulterers and anyone renouncing the Islamic religion. Fifteen hundred years ago their Islamic prophet, Muhammad, on his death bed is said to have commanded, " Behold! God sent me with a sword just before the Hour, and placed my daily sustenance beneath the shadow of my spear, and humiliation and contempt upon those who oppose me." This is the Islamic apocalyptic call to all believers to wage war through the world to convert non-believer to the "True faith" or kill them.

One of the most important transformations of religions in modern time was to abandon their narcissistic, self-perceptions and to love and be tolerant of those of other faiths. But now, this instilled tolerance practiced by these religions traps its believers into trying to accept and rationalize the zealous hatred held against them by the inflexible Islamic fundamentalist dogma.

The day had finally arrived and Senator Laforge found herself viewing Baghdad as it appeared on the horizon. Her plane circled over Baghdad as it waited for permission to land at Saddam International Airport. This Airport had lived in a virtual twilight zone for 10 years. It had sat there with deserted terminals, empty duty-free shops and an air traffic control tower, which controlled nothing.

It was now modernized, and the refurbished passenger terminal had brand new lounges and even duty-free shops. French celebrities, opposed to the UN sanctions, had been the first to break the sanctions and fly into Iraq's airport. The airport's use was still for mostly humanitarian or diplomatic purposes.

The Senator's arrival was met by a large welcoming party. Heading the group was Qusay Hussein, the president's youngest son. He was there on Saddam's request to act as Kat's escort to the meeting place and to assure her safety. A security force of armed Fedayeen guards surrounded Kat, and watched her every move while protecting her from anyone wishing her harm. In addition to Qusay and this element of the Fedayeen, the welcoming party consisted of trained actors rattling off lines riddled with pathos about sanctions. Saddam Hussein had cast the welcoming party with the most dignified, stoical looking Iraqis and the cutest doe-eyed children to help alter her perception of Iraq. It was as if he wanted her to self-flagellate herself for not doing more to help lift the debilitating UN sanctions. Any guilt she might have felt was quickly diminished as she viewed how Hussein used the current resources coming into his country. It was obvious that lifting sanctions would scarcely help Iraq's poor. In among the wretched squalor of Baghdad's bursting shantytowns, Saddam's palaces (all 65 of them) glisten smugly like giant jewels.

Finally, just as the sun was setting, Senator Laforge and her entourage left the Airport for the final leg of her journey to the undisclosed meeting place with Saddam Hussein. As their caravan of cars and armour vehicles left the Airport, the sky began to churn with angry dark clouds. At first, it was only large raindrops splattering on the pavement making tiny ringlets in the dust on the hot road, but then the clouds burst, the sky flashed and the storm awoke the night. The ferocity of the pouring rain sounded like a muffled drumbeat on the roof of the Senator's limousine. As the rain poured down faster, thunder echoed its vengeance through the dark night. The rain beat hard on the street and the trees shook from the wind. The anger of the storm sent shock waves of lightning flashing like strobe lights through the dark.

Nature's light-show painted patterns of flickering shadows on the faces of Qusay Hussein's Fedayeen body guards who sat directly across from Kat. They looked much more westernized than she had imagined of men from a Moslem nation. Their hair was cut in slicked back western styles and they sported well shaped waxed mustaches. They resembled gangsters from a 1940's B movie, not elite bodyguards for the heir apparent of Saddam Hussein.

Lightning flooded the gloom with light, and then the darkness would again overtake the night and their faces would fade into the blackness. As they drove along the avenue, Senator Laforge had found herself focusing on this phenomenon instead of listening to Qusay's interpreter. The storm seemed to heighten her tenseness, her stomach cramped and goosebumps seemed to sprout from her skin. She felt her arm tremble and hoped that Qusay or his bodyguards did not see her uneasiness. Senator Laforge snapped back to Qusay's words that were fading from her memory and asked him to please repeat the previous question.

The buildings that streaked by were plastered with large threatening images of a stern-faced Saddam, standing against an inferno-like red backdrop. The strobe light illumination of flashing lightning and the rain streaking the posters made his appearance as ominous as the sinister clouds sweeping over the city.

Deadly lightning etched itself across the skies and illuminated the glistening armored vehicle which rumbled ahead of the limousine. The storm was stronger now and the thunderclaps were sharp, as lightning continued to pierce the sky and illuminate the Baghdad skyline. The rain and wind whipped the antenna on the armored vehicle. The antenna bent to the might of the wind and vibrated from the pounding of the rain.

Another huge sheet of lightning spread across the Iraqi sky; it was a beautiful pyrotechnic show. Suddenly, after another thunderclap, the back of the armor vehicle pulsated with a shimmering bolt of lightning, which smashed through its hull. A huge spray of sparks followed by black smoke shot up from the vehicle as it came to a instant halt. The limo driver slammed on his breaks, and the limousine started to skid towards the smoking pile of rubble. Senator Laforge braced herself for the collision, and the car tore into the twisted smoking wreck with a loud roar. Kat's body shot off the seat and catapulted into the harden glass of the privacy partition. Her head spilt open like a ripe watermelon dropped on the ground. Blood poured down her face and onto her twisted body. Then the sounds of thunder and rain faded away into semidarkness and a few seconds later she floated into a coma.

Three Fedayeen members ran splashing through the puddling water to the smoking limousine. Moans and yells could be heard coming from the vehicles. The armored vehicle was billowing smoke and the smell of burned oil was strong. The limousine had flipped over twice and its weight had caved in its roof. The roof now looked like a wrecking ball had been dropped on it. Two of its doors had been ripped open from the impact of the accident. The passengers were heaped upon one another; some dead, some dying, some slightly injured and some unhurt, but all tightly gripped in the menacing wreckage and menaced by the jagged steel and leaking gas. One stunned bodyguard wiggled from his imprisonment and was led away from the wreck by a Fedayeen. On the initial impact, Qusay Hussein had been ejected from the limo and was spared from being crushed as it tumbled about. Two Fedayeens bent down into the doorway of the smoldering car and yanked on the Senator's arm to pull her free. The lower part of her

body was concealed under a piece of one of the limousine's seats. The collapsed roof of the limousine pressed down hard on the piece of the seat locking the Senator tightly in place. The metal frame of the seat had ripped through her dress and locked her in place. A Fedayeen guard reached under the seat and cut through her belt and sliced open the side of Senator Laforge's dress. As they renewed their attempt to pull her from the wreckage, they felt her body slip from its pinned position and heard her unconsciously lose control of her bodily functions due to the tremendous tugging on her body over the other wreckage. As her legs moved into view, they could see reds lines being carved in them from the springs or pieces of steel that had slammed into her leg and were now slicing through her skin and muscles. The combined smell of gas, smoke and feces wafted from the Senator's prison, but the Fedayeens were too busy to notice. They saw her foot slide from under the seat, and they quickly balanced her among them and moved swiftly away from the wreckage. As they rushed to safety, the slickness of rain and blood on her body made them struggle to maintain their grip on her. As one Fedayeen guard regained his grip on her arm, the expandable band on the Senator's watch gave way, and it fell to the ground, sinking to the bottom of a puddle. No one noticed, or cared, and they kept rushing back towards the other limousines at the rear of the caravan. Deep in side the watch, a drop of water found its way and a tiny blue spark momentarily flickered, snaking across the circuitry. Just as the damaged watch stopped ticking the limousines' wreckage exploded into a huge fireball scattering its pieces through the air and lifting the armored vehicle and hurling it into the near by building. People close by tumbled around like leaves blowing in the wind. The senator was heaved through the air and on to a vehicle 10 feet in front of her. Her left arm snapped as it bent behind her from the impact

of her body smashing into the vehicle. She lay sprawled on the hood of the vehicle blood spreading over her face. It trickled down her cheek paused for a moment, then plunged from her chin to the wet road below.

In the distance, sirens could be heard blaring into the rain and smoke filled night air. The faint glimmer of the flashing red and blue lights, were now visible. The smoke billowing around the wreckage and bodies was so thick, that it blocked out the bright flashes of lightning still illuminating the sleeping city of Baghdad. The sounds of the sirens grew louder and some of the injured tried to rise. Burning wreckage and smoldering body parts lay scattered over the road and sidewalk. The arrival of the wailing ambulances plunging through the darkness, smoke and rain were welcomed as saviors. Men leapt from the trucks and ran to the first person they saw needing help. The flames were still burning, as the medics searching for survivors scurried between the wounded and dead. One medic knelt at a sprawled soldier averting his eyes from the man's pleading looks as he tried in vain to dam the flow of blood. He felt death conquer the soldier and closed the man's glazed eyes.

The night was still punctuated with thunder rumbling above, and streaks of lightning raking the sky. The steady downpour of rain soaked the cast of wounded and dead, in this horrific tragedy. It was a night of bearing witness to fleeing souls, the termination of glimmering hopes, and the anguished sting of friends departed. Many souls retired that tragic night. The blowing winds, and the sirens of the ambulances seemed to morph into a soul piercing lament than even the rumbling thunder could not hide.

When the medics spotted the Senator's battered body, it still hung over the hood of the car. She was breathing, but very unconscious. It was obvious that this woman with a

cross dangling from a gold chain around her neck, was not a Moslem. The medic was about to leave this infidel, but had to fight his religious beliefs because he heard Qusay Hussein shouting at him to save the Senator. He hoped Allah would be merciful on him because he knew the wrath of Qusay Hussein was far more imminent. He knew what the Koran says about infidels "The unbelievers among the People of the Book and the pagans shall burn for ever in the fire of Hell. They are the vilest of all creatures." But he clearly understood that Qusay Hussein wanted the infidel (the vilest of all creatures) to live, and it was his job now to save lives and not help to fulfill prophecy. And most of all, he knew that his life was contingent upon the survival of this unbeliever.

As the medics lifted the Senator onto the stretcher, an injured Qusay Hussein hobbled over to them ranting of the importance of saving this woman's life. With Qusay's prompting, they quickly moved the unconscious body to a waiting ambulance and loaded it on board. Qusay pushed aside a medic and entered the ambulance along with his wounded bodyguard.

As the doors slammed closed, the ambulance instantaneously roared onto the road. Onlookers rushed about to clear the path of the wailing sirens and flashing lights. Qusay looked down on the Senator and could see her tortured breathing.

With the wail of the siren seeping into her dulled mind, she drifted further into her memories and the world inside her tormented dreams. Her mind started to replay the sights and sounds of the last few hours. Like a mist-filled dream, the visions of the day drifted through her consciousness playing deep inside her brain. She recalled the chartered jet flying low over the barren Iraqi landscape which was spotted by twisted hulks of deserted cars, trucks, and military vehicles. She had never been to Iraq before

this important clandestine trip. Like a movie, her mind replayed the views she had enjoyed earlier that morning as she flew over the Iraqi border from Syria. She could see again the rugged view of the terrain below. This region was sparsely inhabited by pastoral nomads and was covered with a wide, stony plain scattered with rare sandy stretches. Wadis or watercourses crisscrossed the terrain. This land was so desolate and uninviting, that according to many Iraqis, even a rattlesnake felt lonely living there. The sirens of the ambulance metamorphosed into the hiss from the jet of the air conditioning above her seat in the small-chartered jet. She looked out the window of her mind and could see the Iraq desert below brimming with rubble. She envisioned she was flying, over a huge rubbish dump that the two wars and endless poverty had created. For miles upon miles, the land below was scattered with junk and collapsed buildings from the wars fought on this desert.

Thunder rattled again and its reverberations echoed through her sleeping mind. Her dreams grew darker and she envisioned she was at home in Houston at a park and groups of people were gathered in a circle jeering at a woman who was buried in the ground up to her waist. Her mind swooped in closer to the woman buried to her waist. Terror ripped through her mind. She saw herself as that woman. Kat wanted to help her, to shield her but all she could do was helplessly view this horrific scene. She saw the crowd push a man who was stumbling and pleading into circle. She heard the taunting shrieks of the crowd yelling at him to cast the first stone. Her eyes filled with terror as she recognized this man as her husband, Ira. She was locked in her nightmare and could not hide from its horror. She saw herself pleading for mercy. But her pleas, just excited the boisterous leering crowd even more, and their frenzy of yelling became louder, and completely

drowned out her voice. Her eyes were full of terror and tears streaked from them. The men and women were yelling at her "Fornicator", "Whore", and "Adulterer".

A prophet appeared and faced the crowd announcing that no stone should be thrown that should kill with a first or second blow, or so small as a pebble as to do no injury to the condemned. He smiled, blessed the crowd and moved back towards the circle's edge. Reaching it, he turned towards Kat and his face suddenly mutated grotesquely into the face of Sorat. For a long moment, he stood there smiling smugly at Kat, and then his booming voice rang out and commanded his dominions to commence the stoning. Like humans void of soul or mind, they jeered and yelled as they went about selecting their most jagged stones. Kat's husband faded from her view. Then suddenly the first stone smashed into her, splitting open the skin on her left breast. She heard herself shriek in pain. As the stones mutilated her, her screams and the crowd's jeers were drowned out by the hideous sounds of Sorat laughing uncontrollably and his booming voice yelling "God is great." Another stone smashed into her head from the back, as the crowd grew bolder and louder with yells and shouts. Men rushed to the edge of the circle and spat at her as they heaved their stones at her face. A fist size rock smashed into the back of her head spraying blood across the ground and exciting the crowd even more. The blood made them bolder and their yells and shouts intensified. Now her face was pulverized from the stoning. The blood soaked her hair and splattered on the ground all around her. A spray of blood and spit now accompanied her cries of pain. Both her eyes had been ruptured and her teeth smashed. Thick dark blood oozed from her broken jaw. Her left breast was totally stripped of its flesh, and its nipple hung solely from a piece of skin. Blood streamed down her chest making glistening red spots on the ground. The gore

pleased Sorat, and he gleefully watched the proceedings to ensure that no one used a stone of the wrong size.

In Kat's dream, she saw a vision of herself raising her head and pleading for mercy from the thunderous crowd around her. A large woman, with a string of spittle flying from her mouth screeched, "God is great," as an answer to Kat's plea. Then the woman followed her chant, with a large stone violently hurled at Kat's fractured skull. The impact jerked her head backward and this woman who looked like Kat fell silent. Her agony had finally ceased. She had found her peace. The crowd was still in frenzy and continued to stone and spit at her, until Sorat transformed himself back into the image of a holy prophet and told them to stop. He blessed them and thanked them for doing Allah's bidding and they all shouted, "God is great."

The roar of their chanting got louder as her mind reeled from this vision from hell and her breathing strained. She made guttural sounds, and the medic adjusted the oxygen flow of the resuscitator. The ambulance was only a couple of miles from Ibn Sina Hospital. The same hospital used by Saddam Hussein. The oxygen seemed to calm her mind and the scene of horror and the maddening chanting drifted away.

Her agitation seemed to subside in the solitude of the new dreams that formed in her brain.

The ambulance sped down the street escorted by Iraqi police vehicles blasting the way towards the hospital.

The driver was expressionless, focusing only on his life and death task of driving. The wind had been so strong that it would shake the ambulance as it sped down the road and in some places along the road it had toppled trees.

Like the churning clouds outside, her brain was swirling with new memories invading her consciousness. Memories of her husband, daughter and her 3 cats flickered like a family slide show in the theater in her head. All of it was so real that at some times she could even hear their voices as they wished her well. She took warmth from these sights and they seemed to calm her soul. Her family was the foundation of her life. Most of the time she had led an idyllic American dream existence. But today, her life was hallucinations and dreams. A darkness full of voices, some real and some not. The shadows of this ceaseless night morphed into all she had seen and known. While she lay still and peaceful, flashes of demons and angels rattled her consciousness with confusing memories that were like umbilical tendrils hooked to the world outside her mind. But she stayed locked in its solitary, alone, somewhere between life and death.

The ambulances rushed into the docking bay at the hospital. The wailing sirens died as the ambulance doors abruptly slammed open. All around there were rushing people, the craze of a loud and chaotic emergency.

The ambulance crew lowered the Senator's stretcher gently to the ground. Now the horror of her condition was painfully obvious. She was covered in blood from a multitude of cuts and lacerations. The medics had put a neck brace on her. She was barely breathing on her own. A sickly pale pallor had consumed her face and she looked near dead. A rushing mass of doctors, nurses and fedayeens moved towards the stretcher containing the Senator who was escorted by the medics and Qusay Hussein.

I did not know this entire story on the morning of January 25 2004, when Senator Laforge was scheduled to hold her meeting at our town hall. Since then much of the

mysteries unfolded as Tom, Vince and myself sorted through the events since the meeting with Senator Laforge at our class reunion in 2002.

Allah's Messenger said: There is a remedy for every malady, and when the remedy is applied to the disease it is cured with the permission of Allah, the Exalted and Glorious.

Chapter Four
After the Accident

4

Chapter Four

After the Accident

We had not envisioned that the street would be so packed with vehicles so early in the morning. On the North end of Main Street, we finally spotted a parking place, cut into the snow bank. Ironically, it was about the same distance to the town hall as it would have been from our home. The Town Hall was about a three or four minute walk, from this location. As I backed into the parking space, the crunching sound of snow almost blocked out a special radio news update. With the engine still running, we sat in total silence listening to every spoken word. I sucked in a lung full of air and tried to contain my emotions. It was more grim news. The announcer confirmed that one of the bodies found in the bus was Senator Laforge's husband. Stacie's eyes filled with tears and she started sobbing. Ira the Senator's husband had been shot four times; three times in the head and once in his back the announcer stated. Most likely, he had died instantly. I

reached over to console Stacie. She really had not known Ira well, but having spent the previous evening with them, made this much more personal.

This was our first encounter with loosing a friend to murder. A whole array of emotions were descending on me. I felt anger, helplessness, grief and at the same time, I was in shock that such a horrible act could have happen to someone I had come to know, and been so involved with for the last year and a half.

Ira's murder made life feel inconsequential. The world continued on its path, unshaken, complete with falling snow and people walking around, chatting, and laughing, unmoved or unaware of the Grim Reaper's early morning visit.

The cold tears on Stacie's cheek moistened my face bringing on a panoply of overpowering emotions. I felt grief, a sense of loss at the realization of life's fragility.

Stacie wiped away her tears, and tried to control herself, and I had to bite my lip hard, to control my tears.

Stacie asked in a near whisper, "What should we do now?"

I just sat there quiet at first and then told her, "We should still go to the town hall, and see if anything is happening there. Maybe we will hear something more about Kat. I hate it when they spoon feed us the news."

She dabbed her eyes, and I tried to dry her face off more, so the tears would not freeze on her cheeks. We slid out of the car, and walked in silence towards Charlestown's Town Hall. As we approached, neighbors cheerfully greeted us, probably unaware of the latest news. I spotted Tom Hestler, and we walked over to him and asked if he had heard that Ira was murdered.

Tom's shocked look, answered my question.

Stacie reached out and hugged him and shed a few more tears. Tom asked me, when did this happen, and I went over the previous reports. The cold and the snow seemed trifle now as we discussed Ira's murder. Things seemed so unrealistic, and we were so worried about Kat, as we stood there, in the bitter cold, and tried to make some sense of what all was happening.

Tom reminded us of how less than two years ago, Ira stood by Kat, as she recovered from her accident in a Baghdad Iraqi hospital. For both of them, it had been truly a tenuous period. When that accident was first reported, it devastated and depressed me. We had all worked so hard, to make her secret trip to Iraq a political success, and then that terrible accident seemed to destroy everything we had worked towards. There was no escape from hearing about it either; the headlines of every media outlet in the world trumpeted the accident or assassination attempt. CNN, FOX, MSNBC, CBS, and ABC were constantly reporting, "Breaking news of the injured American Senator from Texas, and recovering in an Iraqi Hospital."

Reuters had been the first to report the incident of the Senator's automobile accident in Baghdad, but with very few facts. "Senator Laforge injured in Iraq." Blared the headlines that morning.

After the accident, Ira kept us all well informed of Kat's medical status. In fact the morning after the incident, he held an impromptu news briefing at their home in Houston. Outside their home, hundreds of people waited around for more than four hours to hear Ira's news briefing. The weather in Texas had been very rainy the previous few days. So much rain had falling, that the president had declared parts of Texas a disaster area, due to the flooding from the torrential rains. But luckily, that morning of November 6, it was

clear dry and warm. Kat's supporters did not have to brave the rain, only the press Corp that milled about jockeying and bullying for the best positions in front.

The news briefing had been promised for 10 AM (CST), and precisely at that time, Ira's front door opened and two of the Senator's aides ushered him to a makeshift podium. He looked terribly distraught, but maintained control of himself as he welcomed the reporters and his wife's many supporters.

Ira stood there and gazed out at all of the people on his front lawn. Many were reporters but there were also many neighbors and friends there also. Ira started reading from his prepared statement:

"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am here to give you as much information as I know about my wife's current situation at this time. Yesterday, my wife, Senator Katherine Laforge was admitted to Ibn Sina Hospital in Baghdad, Iraq, suffering from a concussion, a broken arm, and various other injuries. Her caring physician, Dr al-Janabi, said my wife would remain hospitalized for a few more days. He added however, that my wife was out of immediate danger and would only continue to improve."

A cheer went up from the crowd and people started chanting, "Get well Kat".

Ira waited for the noise to subside and then he continued with this briefing.

"Thank you for your concern, and the love you show you have for my wife. Let me continue. I was told that in her current medical condition, she is also showing signs of elevated blood pressure and treatment is being done at Ibn Sina Hospital, to avoid any bleeding complications.

The Senator has undergone what was described as an extensive examination of her multiple injuries, and she will need to remain immobile for several days. They want to

insure that the gains made so far in her recovery continue. The Senator will receive limited visitations, to allow needed rest and a quicker recovery. She is currently on medication and will undergo treatment at the hospital as she continues to recuperate. The doctors are very optimistic about her complete recovery.”

“Another roar of approval forced Ira to stop and wait for quiet.”

Ira waived his hands for quiet and then said, “I want to quickly dispel any notions that my wife is dead, or is a prisoner in Iraq. As many of you have already heard, this was not just a simple car accident. It seems, from the preliminary examination of the wreckage, that this was an attempted assassination on Mr. Qusay Hussein or on my wife. A bomb was apparently placed in the limousine, which both my wife and Mr. Hussein were riding in. Numerous men were brutally killed in this attack, but my wife, Qusay Hussein, and a few others were spared death.”

Tears welled up in Ira’s eyes and he paused for a moment to regain his composure.

“Excuse me!” he continued, “But our priority now, besides the quick recovery of my wife, is to exert the utmost efforts to identify the person or group responsible for this attempt on my wife’s life. Senior officers from the Fedayeen headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq spent hours examining the scene, and assured us that there would be no cover up. Although, Al-Jazeera News reports that this attempted assassination was the work of a splinter faction of Kurds, no opposition groups have made claim to this attack. The spokesman from Qusay Hussein's office also has denied that there is any proof of the Kurd's involvement in this attack. Essentially we do not know at this time who is responsible for this terrible incident. Any new revelations as to the perpetrator of this horrible act will be reported to you as the story unfolds.”

Ira paused for a moment and looked out at the forest of cameras staring at him, and then locked his eyes on his wife's adoring supporters and said,

"I know all of you are wondering why my wife was in Iraq? Her trip was kept as a total secret, so no one could jeopardize it. She had hoped as a Presidential Candidate to establish some sort of trust and good will between Saddam Hussein and herself. With this trust, she felt she could mold a peace plan that would prevent hundreds of our men and women from dying in the deserts and streets of Iraq."

"This is not the first time in history a Presidential hopeful has sought a peaceful resolution with a foreign adversary. Former President Reagan is said to have worked out an agreement with Iran to free the 52 American Embassy hostages if and when he was elected over the incumbent Carter. The day of President Reagan's inauguration, Iran agreed to accept \$8 billion in frozen assets and a promise by the United States to lift trade sanctions in exchange for the release of the 52 Americans. They were released a few hours after Reagan took the oath of office. My wife had hoped to accomplish something similar. She felt that if she were elected as president, her presence on the international scene would defuse some of the animosity between our two countries. She was willing to offer Saddam Hussein certain minor concessions and promises, if he would agree to disarmament, immediately after my wife's inauguration. Many of you will criticize my wife for doing this, but her intentions were honorable. She desired to save American lives and to resolve this bitter conflict between two great nations. She was on her way to Saddam Hussein's Presidential Palace accompanied by his son Qusay Hussein, and bodyguards, when a bomb exploded in the vicinity of her limousine. By the grace of god, my wife had just been removed from the vehicle, because of an automobile accident that

happened seconds before the bomb detonated. At the present, this is all I know about my wife's situation. As more information is received, it will be reported. I hope all of you will pray for her tonight and wish her a speedy recovery.”

“Now if you have any questions, I will attempt to answer them.”

“Sir, we have been told that the Senator is in fact in a coma. Is that true?”

“Yes, she is in a coma, but we anticipate her to recover from that very soon.”

A reporter from CNN immediately got Ira’s attention and asked.

“Will you be visiting your wife in Baghdad soon?”

“No I will not. I think under the circumstance that I should wait for my wife to recover and be returned to us. Some of her aides will be joining her there. We have a daughter, who needs to have one of us here, to comfort her during this crisis.”

Ira's eyes started to get blurry from the tears welling up. He stopped for a second and dried his eyes and said: "Ladies and Gentlemen, I think I will have to end this briefing now. I want to thank you for your attention and your concern. Thank you all and have a good day."

Ira was led away from the podium among the roar of the reporters clamoring for more and the well-wishers yelling God Bless Senator Laforge.

The rest of the morning, self-proclaimed experts in car accidents, Iraqi culture, Saddam Hussein's life, and even Senator Laforge’s life, monopolized the talk shows.

On CNN, a brain specialist was asked about future problems that Senator Laforge might experience from her head injury. His response created a new concern for the Senator's office and Ira to challenge. The Doctor implied that a common effect of brain injury is behavior problems. The most common of which involves a diminished ability to interact

appropriately with other people. This was not the type of prognosis that would enhance the Senator's bid for the presidency. The Doctor went on to predict that other less frequent problems would probably include aggression, property destruction, verbal abusiveness and tantrums. Now for many Presidents the majority of the last four symptoms are common natural traits of their personality, so the Senator's aides joked that Kat's head injury really made her that much more Presidential. If anyone continued to listen to the Doctor's summation of the problems, they would have heard that if these injuries were addressed immediately after the damage, the symptoms could be very much diminished or even eliminated. And even more important he concluded, "Not all head-injured people develop these problems.

The Senator's accident became the major news story on TV and in every newspaper across the country. Many political factions were praising Senator Laforge as the most peace seeking Senator. Peace rallies in the US had individuals marching around with signs that pictured Kat Laforge and Saddam Hussein cheek-to-cheek, and read "Peace comes from understanding your neighbor".

Saddam capitalized on this event, and used the publicity to promote and enhance his image as a benevolent leader. Qusay Hussein made it a true photo opportunity. The Iraqi Information minister included pictures of Qusay standing or sitting near the comatose Senator with virtually every news release of the Senator's condition.

To counter the constant US government demand to release the Senator to their care, Saddam Hussein argued convincingly that the senator was a guest in his country and her welfare was his responsibility. Even more important Kat's condition was too grave to allow her to be moved to another location.

Saddam campaigned to provide the most advanced medical attention available. He enlisted a renowned Chinese doctor, who was famed for pioneering and successfully using skin regeneration technology, by stem cell culturing in the treatment of deep burn victims. Other doctors, who were involved in the creation of man-made tissues or organs, known as neo-organs, were also invited to Baghdad to assist in the senator's recovery. The physicians needed cell regeneration methods, to restore cells that had suddenly failed and died, due to the shock to the system or other complications from her accident. The US government also sent doctors to help with the Senator's care. Saddam's biggest concern was the real possibility that the Senator might die in Iraq, and he would be held accountable for her death by denying her proper care. However, if she survived, it would have created major positive publicity for Saddam and his regime.

While Senator Laforge remained in a coma, numerous celebrities capitalized on the public's curiosity and the Iraqi desire to keep the limelight on the situation. Her bed became a magnet to many of the media whores. The TV constantly showed footage of individuals standing by her bed, like a reverend, claiming he would get the Senator home, and a foul looking Michigan movie producer, venting his hatred for the evil of America, while wishing the Senator a speedy recovery. Some luminaries were actually there to put pressure on the Iraqi government to send the Senator home. But, the majority of them came simply for the publicity it provided for them. Throughout the world, however, people really did pray and support the Senator's unfinished peace work, which she had come thousands of miles to accomplish.

The Iraqi information ministry relished the cast of characters that entered into the media frenzy. He ordered, with Saddam's blessings, total celebrity treatment for any visiting

American icon that was known for their anti US government views. The minister also made sure that every visit was announced to the media, so their views would be broadcast worldwide.

President Hussein immensely enjoyed the insults and anti government comments provided by the American visitors. Not only did they help his cause in the Arab world, but since they were American celebrities, their fans would also listen to them. He and his Iraqi informational minister, Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf, joked often about how these naïve Americans were his most effective and inexpensive PR people for the Baath Party. And best of all, America was completely impotent with its own stupid laws to stop its vocal radical fringe groups from assisting al-Sahhaf propaganda needs. The Senator had become such hot propaganda property that great care was placed on her appearance. Nurses changed the bandages on her face prior to each visitor and everything in her room remained perfectly arranged. The room had large windows to provide natural lighting for cameramen filming the visits. Two attractive nurses dressed in immaculate uniforms were assigned to take care of her and one was present in the room at all times to observe her and provide answers to any visitor's questions about the Senator's health. Being monitored by two nurses was part show and part Saddam Hussein's genuine concern for the Senator's well being. Hessa al-Nasere was appointed head nurse and was given the responsibility to represent Iraq, as a peace loving, country to all NEWS people that she encountered, as she cared for Senator Laforge. She was fluent in English, very attractive, and came from a very respected Baath Party family.

The nurses followed a checklist of medical and appearance requirements prior to each celebrity visit. On the third week of the senator's coma as the normal checks were being

performed, a nurse was viewing the Senator's (ICP) Intracranial Pressure Monitor when she noticed her eyes blinking. She turned to call for another nurse and when she turned back, Kat's eyes were wide open and appeared to be following her movement. She moved her hand back and forth in front of Kat's eyes causing her to blink, but then Kat closed her eyes once again. This was his first real sign of Kat's recovery. As the two nurses checked her nasogastric tube and check her caloric supplement, they noticed Kat's head twitch to the left. Their eyes lit up knowing that these were good signs of recovery. They rang for a doctor while continuing to adjust the IV sugar/saline solution that had helped Kat's dehydration problem. An American doctor named, Benoit was the first to step into the room and seemed shocked that the Senator was showing these signs of recovery. Dr al-Janabi arrived next and seemed immensely happy when he learned what the nurses had seen. The doctor turned up the volume of the American music playing in the room. This was a part of their Coma Stimulation program for the Senator. They felt that the music would make her feel more at home and stimulate more of her senses to prompt her out of the coma. The doctors stood there for about 5 minutes waiting for more signs, but finally gave up and went back to their previous work.

President Hussein made the Senator's recovery a very personal thing and spoke of her as his friend and a friend of the Iraqi people. He awarded medals to the fedayeen, which helped save the Senator and proclaimed their family as heroes of Iraq. As part of a good will campaign, friends of the Senator were openly invited to Iraq. I was tempted to go but decided to decline. Actually no one accepted, but the gesture got reported on all news outlets. The Press Corps reported that, everyone who was invited, declined the invitation, because of pressure put on them by Washington. War protest, in some left wing bastions,

made the Senator's image become part of the symbols of peace, which were displayed on banners and signs.

Another few days went by without any visible sign of recovery. But the doctors patiently, and confidently continued their treatments using every means available to maintain her comfort and to assist her recovery. The Senator's concussion remained serious enough that they had to relive some of the pressure on the brain by draining some of the fluid. The INTRAPARENCHIMAL WAY (CAMIRO) was the Intracranial Pressure Monitor method used to maintain the pressure of the cerebrospinal fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord. That morning they relieved the pressure again and the Senator actually responded by moving and speaking slurred words that sounded like "Ira, Ira". Her eyes blinked open and she attempted to move her right arm. Her left arm felt heavy from a cast. The doctors spoke to her and asked Kat if she heard them. She moved her head and stared at them with blank eyes but did not respond. She did yawn, stretch and then closed her eyes.

Once again, Senator Laforge slipped deep into a terrifying night of sleep. In the twilight of her dream a large glass panel materialized in front of her. As it took shape, it seemed like a large window, with her image reflecting through it. Her body began to shake with fear. The feeling of desperation surged through her mind as she recognized this vision before her. Her eyelids fluttered, trying to pull herself out of the dream, but the darkness held its vice like grip on her consciousness. Her buried fears seemed to float from deep within her mind to the center of her dream, filling her with terror. And then, her own face emerged, trance like, from behind her reflection in the glass. It wasn't another reflection, but her own face, gazing at her, and watching her every move. Silently, she

screamed, but not a sound came from her mouth. And there she remained, frozen in fear, between consciousness and a nightmare that would not end. She felt she should recognize the scene before her, but her thoughts were scattered and chaotic. Her likeness seemed to spiral downward into a dense, pitch blackness that made her heart freeze in mortal terror. She saw her reflection turn red, and she felt that she was dying, but no one would heed her yells or pleads for help, not even the woman wearing her face, who sat outside the glass watching her every move. She felt like she was being consumed from within and shook uncontrollably. The glass panel began to dissolve along with the images of her self and then Kat's forehead broke out in sweat. She jerked violently about in her bed and then awoke suddenly, with her eyes wide open, trembling from the nightmare. As she lay in bed and gazed around the room the terror slowly ebbed away from her consciousness. She could see images around her, images that looked like people, but they were hazy and she could not form the words to ask for help. She closed her eyes and slowly sank back into her sleep.

One rule the Information Ministry had set for the nurses was to insure that none of the actions of a visitor or their presence agitated the Senator in any visible way. This agitation occurs as a result of the frustration and inability of a semi-aware comatose patient to communicate or express their self. At the bedside of the Senator, an antiwar activist escorted by some Iraqi children was filming a commercial of his heartfelt feeling of the horror that the US was about to unleash on Iraq. The Senator started to rhythmically scream and thrash about and then suddenly opened her eyes and looked straight at this person next to her bed. The nurses looked at the monitor and notice that Kat was showing very good signs of awareness. The senator still staring at the group by

her bed, waved her right hand at the entourage to leave and labored hard at pronouncing, "go" to them. Immediately, the nurses ushered the entourage out and called for the doctors.

The Senator's eyes peeking out from her bandaged head followed every move of her nurses. Twenty-seven days had slowly ticked by and finally she seemed to be coming out of the coma. In a broken and almost incomprehensible voice she asked for her husband "Ira."

As Kat's eyes focused on her room, she notice the crowd of unknown faces staring at her from the backdrop of flowers and cards surrounding her bed. She heard the dim voice of one doctor greeting her with a "Hello Senator". She glanced at the doctor speaking to her but did not recognize him. Who are you?" She tried to ask but only a raspy whisper came out. The doctor introduced himself "I'm Doctor Benoit from Bethesda Navel Hospital. The President requested that I be here to assist in your treatments. The President sends you his warmest regards and hopes that you have a very speedy recovery."

Senator Laforge felt a new wave of panic as she tried to put together her situation. She knew she was in Iraq and she knew she had been in an accident. "What day is it? She rasped.

Doctor Benoit told her it was Monday Dec 2nd. You have been with us a few weeks now, but all is going well.

Kat could not believe she had been unconscious that long. She wanted to talk to Ira because she felt he could help her understand what was going on. She felt afraid. As Senator Laforge consciousness slowly returned, she started feeling even more confused. The President would be very disturbed with her mission to Iraq to see Saddam Hussein.

Why was an American doctor here in Iraq? Was the doctor here really to help or was he here to perhaps create an international crisis.

An Iraq Doctor introduced himself and told Senator Laforge how thrilled he and his staff were to see her conscience. "You have had us very concerned for a few weeks. But you are a fighter Senator and our President Hussein and all of us are so happy to see that you are recovering. As soon as you feel up to it, President Hussein still wants to meet with you. But now you should rest." A glimpse of a smile flashed from the doctor's bearded face as he grasped Kat's good hand firmly. He rubbed her hand, said something in Arabic and then he and his staff left the room. The Senator was alone again with only the two attractive nurses hovering over her and smiling.

She tried to stay conscious but quickly she felt herself falling back into darkness again. Her mind replaced reality, with a new vision of herself sitting in a room with a man directly in front of her, who looked liked Saddam Hussein. They would talk and laugh for a while, but then the discussions would turn serious. This man would lean over towards her and mumble incomprehensible words. And then fear raced through her as the man stood up and turned away from her while talking loudly to unseen men. Silence replaced his voice. When the man turned back around towards Senator Laforge, the unseen figures moved into view surrounding him. They were shadowy figures, dressed in military uniforms and they seemed to move closer to her. A dull roar unheard by her ears reverberated through her mind replacing the previous silence. Suddenly the walls of the room became crimson red. They appeared to turn into liquid and then collapsed like walls of red water. The roaring red liquid swirled around her and then she felt a terrific heat. Suddenly fire erupted from everywhere inside the room. A hand reached out to pull her

back from the fire and she grabbed it tightly. She opened her frightened eyes and was greeted by her guardian angel nurses hovering above her. One was holding her right hand trying to sooth her. She gazed at them and tried to form a “thank you”. She was not sure if they really understood her words but she knew she was communicating in some way because they smiled warmly at her.

Now she was awake and her mind raced with questions like; why was Ira missing from her bedside? Where was her long time friend and best Aide Paul not here? She focused on a new face appearing above her and tried to remember the man's name. It was Doctor Benoit. “Good morning Senator, I hope you are feeling better this morning so we can chat for a few minutes about your situation and how we can get you better.

The Senator nodded her head and attempted to utter a simple "Okay"

Dr Benoit continued: "You have been in a coma for 27 days. We are grateful that you have pulled through. You had us scared at first. Initially, it wasn't clear whether you would even survive. You have to expect that some of your memories might be confusing sometimes. Senator, brain damage is a thief, you will probably be unable to remember parts of the last month. Actually, you are probably suffering from retrograde amnesia, but now, that you have regained consciousness, we are going to move forward on the road to recovery. "

Senator Laforge’s lips moved in the white maze of bandages covering her face and she weakly said, "Thank you Doctor. I am still in a state of confusion.”

Dr Benoit questioned,” Do you remember the accident and the events immediately preceding it?”

Senator Laforge hesitated and then quietly said: "No, I do not really remember much at all. I am confused as to what is real and what is a nightmare, or a dream that I experienced in my coma." Dr Benoit said, "Well, one thing that is very real, is the President wants me to tell you that he is counting on you to serve your country, and to try and do the right things by remembering who you are, and what you as the Senator have learned about situations like this. America is counting on you. Don't let us down.

The Senator did not really understand what all that was supposed to mean, if anything. She did feel honored that the President was thinking of her and still talking to her. The Senator asked Dr. Benoit if her husband had been notified of her recovery?

Dr Benoit replied, "Yes, he has been, and we have a letter for you from Ira. If you would allow me, I will read it to you."

"Yes, please go ahead," the Senator, replied.

Dear Kat,

I know you are probably very confused by your ordeal but I hope you can understand why I cannot be with you at your bedside. You have had a terrible accident and things are just coming back to you. Try to understand why I cannot be there and trust Dr. Benoit to help you have a speedy recovery. You have done a great job and it is time for you to come home. As soon as they release you, we will be together again, and we will work at putting this crisis behind us.

Love always,

Ira

The Senator listened to his words and a deep feeling of depression descended over her. Ira was always much more loving in his letters than this. This was not even a letter, it was a short note. Did he not love her any longer? Something was being unsaid in this letter. Ira had always stood by her in every situation that she had been in, both good and bad. Something was just not right for him to not be here and for him to not say more about himself or how bad he was missing Kat.

Dr Benoit could sense her depression and offered, "Senator you are in a foreign country and in a very odd situation, so try to understand, that it is natural for you to feel mentally confused and occasionally depressed. But things will get better. Senator, most victims of car accidents suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which includes physical, cognitive and emotional symptoms. I am going to work with you and use some techniques specifically adapted to treat car accident trauma. These techniques should help you recognize and trust the innate healing wisdom of your body to hasten your recovery. However, I have to warn you that you are going to experience more headaches, irritability, mental confusion, lack of mental acuity, and temporary memory loss before you are better. Physically you are still facing days that you will experience flu-like symptoms, but these are expected and we can control them. Your biggest problem will probably be with your short-term memory, but that will continue to get better each day, so hang in there."

"You and I are going to attempt to mentally, walk through each of the activities that happened to you before your accident. Prodding your memory this way, may enable you to recall what happened to you and give you full recollection as to why you are now here. Initially, the left side of your body was paralyzed.

But very soon you should be able to stand up and walk around the hospital unaided. Your left arm will be noticeably weak for a while. Your muscles that atrophied during your coma will improve quickly with daily physical therapy.

In the immediate future, I am going to spend much of our time with your speech therapy, physical therapy, and mental gymnastics to help you relearn things and recover your memory as much as possible. By us proceeding slowly with this treatment plan, moving from events prior to your accident and understanding where you are now we will gradually work towards the center and transform this terrible experience from fragmented images to total awareness of what happened. Once we are there, you will have total continuity of your memories and be able to place this traumatic event in your past where it belongs. We do not want to leave gaps in your memory. We want you to remember everything.”

Thousands of miles away, Ira had become very busy preparing News Releases about the prognosis of his wife. Her campaign had been derailed by the event and he hoped that he would be able to repair some of the damage. Ira had been in constant contact with the Senator's campaign committee chairman trying to assure them that the cause was not in vain.

As Ira was writing notes for his daily news briefing, his cell phone rang. He hoped it would not be media hounds that had discovered his private cell number. The caller ID displayed ‘Unknown’ which infuriated Ira. He closed the cover in disgust, letting the caller get his voice mail and then returned back to his notes.

The reports of the Senator’s retrograde amnesia was very detrimental to Kat’s run for the presidency and Ira wanted to find information that would refute that this condition would

have any effect on Kat's duties as President. The phone rang again. He flipped his cell open and again the caller id displayed no number. Concerned that it might be his daughter calling, he pressed the call button and his most irritated voice said, "Hello?" It was not his daughter. A woman's voice said, "hello, Ira?" Ira's voice froze for a second. And then the caller asked. "Are you there?"

The voice was unmistakably that of Senator Laforge's.

Ira blurted out, "Oh my God, Hello!"

Her reply was quick. "I have missed you so much Ira. I think about you and Lyndsey everyday."

In a soft voice, Ira responded, "I pray everyday that you will be released and come home. You are always in our thoughts."

"Ira, I need your support right now more than ever before."

Ira stood silent for a moment as a well-manicured hand reached up to the cell phone and removed his grasp and purposely closed it.

Two soft arms wrapped their self around his waist and he felt lips kiss the back of his neck. Ira's eyes were solemn, wide with what seemed like horrific fear. Ira pushed the arms away and turned around, facing the woman who had embraced him. His heart swelled, from the raging emotions he felt as he tried to catch his breath. The call had reached into his soul and Ira asked God to help him find the solace and the strength to continue on. Ira squeezed his eyes shut, forcing a couple of tears to dampen his cheek, and then hugged his wife back. The Senator looked up into Ira's eyes and she tried to think of what words to say that would comfort him. There were none, but she pressed her

lips against his damp cheek and kissed him. Even she was trembling now as they both embraced.

She knew he was scared and her heart raced with her own fear of what had happened. No matter how irrational it all seemed, this was her new reality and Ira and her would have to find a way through it.

With an almost trembling voice Ira asked her "How much longer do you think this will go on?" Kat squeezed Ira's hand and quietly said, "I just do not know!" Now, there were tears running down her cheeks and there was nothing Ira could do to stop them.

In a dark hospital room in Ibn Sina Hospital in Baghdad, Iraq, another woman sat on her bed with a phone receiver in her hand, rocking back and forth, trying to contain her swirling emotions of having finally heard her husband's voice and kind words after this terrible ordeal that she had survived. She could still hear his voice saying, "I pray everyday that you will be released and come home. You are always in our thoughts."

I did not know before that cold January morning in 2004 that two Senator Laforge's existed. This startling revelation came about as Tom, Vince and myself broke our solemn pledges that frantic morning as we talked to each other about what we each knew about Senator Laforge. The prospect that she was dead compelled us to break our oath of silence. We had sworn that we would not share anything Kat said with anyone or discuss it among ourselves, but the events of this morning seemed to invalidate that pledge. The evil that erupted this morning, made us all feel compelled to divulge our knowledge to each other. Perhaps some of what we knew would help solve why this attack happened.

As Tom, Vince and myself began to discuss what we knew, it became very apparent that we were talking of different incarnations of the Senator.

If you pledge an oath for something and a better alternative comes your way, break the oath and atone for it and do what is better. (*Bukhari, Kitabu'l-Iman wa'l-Nudhur*, No. 6622)

Chapter Five
ComDefC1

5

Chapter Five

ComDefC1

Large menacing icicles hung from the cornice of the old brick and granite town hall. Their deadly pointed tips shimmered 40 feet above in the bright beams of the spotlights that swept across the façade. Dark ice sprinkled with fresh snow cloaked the rusticated brick pilasters rising two stories from the granite foundation. The town hall had served little purpose for quite sometime, but in the last few weeks workers had wiped away the film of grime, cobwebs, and dust obscuring its stately magnificence. Now, a new radiant look emanated from her thick brick walls, despite the cold and snow. The 1872 landmark seemed to gleam in the dark cold morning with its new mission. It use to be the place where the town would show movies, sponsor dances for teenagers, host shows for the area craftsmen and of course hold New England town meetings. The building's prominence over the years and all the memories and dreams that it shared with those in Charlestown made it the perfect choice for a campaign stop. This morning it would reclaim its eminence even if but for a moment in time.

A large gathering of people milled about in the frozen slush in front of the town hall. The crowd was clusters of groups huddle together for warmth and companionship with their breath plumed out around them like misty blank cartoon speech balloons. Those who had come early had raw noses from wiping them in the cold wind and snow. Drifting in on the wind was the distinct smell of smoke from a wood burning stove or fireplace. The tantalizing aromatic trace of fresh brewed coffee floated along with it to tease the senses. Across the street from the town hall, a group of children played on the frozen, wind-crusted snow throwing snowballs at each other and laughing as they enjoyed nature's beauty. Mixed with their laughter were the constant clamor of people coughing and the murmur of voices. On the east side of the hall, a group of young protestors huddled, waving their signs and chanting their little jingles and taunting those that dared come close to them. Their signs declared Laforge an enemy of the poor, a liar and a destroyer of the economy. One sign said, "Laforge robs the poor. Vote for Dean he's not mean. Some towns' people were very angry that these individuals had the nerve or stupidity to even appear here in Laforge's hometown this terrible morning. The sun was still 45 minutes away but the crowd was well illuminated by the lights from the town hall, nearby homes and streetlights.

From within the town hall, the morning came alive with the celestial sounds of the Keene State College choir. Finally, the doors were about to open. The choir's hypnotic harmonics drifted tantalizingly out into the milling people. The music's mesmerizing arrangements subdued the clamor of the crowd with its beauty and feelings. The town hall's doors swung open and like a mass of lemmings we all trudged towards the inviting light streaming from the entrance. My feet were so numb from the cold that every step I

took was faltering. When we entered the building, Vince Hand joined us. This was the first time we were all together since the 2002 High School reunion. After a few cursory hugs and handshakes, we all headed to the auditorium on the bottom floor. TV sets had been hastily mounted in the auditorium to show any breaking reports about the attack on Laforge and her entourage. New information had been temporarily stifled by the police, and investigators who had cordoned off the crime scene on Route 12 from reporters and camera crews, until all bodies and evidence were collected and documented. The morning TV shows still focused on the Laforge story filled with the constant rehash of the morning events, commentary on Ira Laforge's murder, and what Senator Katherine Laforge stood for. A good number of police and armed security guards milled about the crowd observing everyone and chatting on their little phones. Booths had been set up selling souvenirs and books about Senator Laforge and other political luminaries. Even more important were the concessions stands that were selling hot coffee and pastries. The aroma of fresh brewed coffee was exciting and soothing to our frozen noses and helped us forget the discomfort of the rest of our face, fingers, and feet as they slowly thawed out.

With fresh cups of coffee warming our hands, we grabbed a table near a radiator and set down to discuss the changing events. I was glad we were inside out of the cold and had a half an hour yet to go before any of the impromptu tribute for Senator Laforge would begin. I think all of us were convinced that the Senator was dead or mortally wounded by that time. The news had not mentioned her specifically as being dead, but nor had they stated the opposite. You could just feel that something evil had happened – a strange warmth, an unsettling flitting presence, like the flick of a feather brushing across the back

of your neck. Everything seemed like a sign to me, even the snowflakes falling on the adjacent window, that melted instantly into little beads of moisture, had to mean something. As I watched the beads of condensation turn into a tiny trickle of water, I noticed how oddly our images trembled as reflections in the large window. They were like wavering apparitions in a fog. Perhaps I was witnessing that wispy tenuous point where perceived reality merges into the world of dreams or even into another dimension. The constant waiting, with little information on the events of the morning was taking its toll on me. The voices of my friends, the roar of the crowd in the hall, and the perpetual derisive chanting of protestors outside were muted, by the loudness of the thoughts that now consumed my mind. Ira's murder and the probability of Katherine's death made me so conscious of how transient and short life really is. Life is such an energetic race of futility. Ira's final moments, I envisioned, had to have been like a video that God suddenly put on fast forward hurling him to the end of his mortality until there was only the quiet hiss like a tape makes when it ends with its snowy blank screen of nothing. Inside of me, bitterness and a feeling of helplessness raged. We are told that death is simply a transition from one spiritual form to another, but that morning I doubted it. I probably looked like I was in some sort of trance. But even in that cacophony of noises playing in my head, I could still discern the voices of my friends talking to me and trying to snap me out of it.

I looked at them wide-eyed and gathered my thoughts. My conscious thoughts were the desire to talk about everything that I knew about this situation. The sound of my own voice startled me as I impulsively blurted out, "I know something that probably no one else here knows about Katherine." I wanted to tell them about my trip to Texas. I had

kept most of the details of the trip a secret from everyone, even my wife for over a year. But that terrible morning, I felt the need to share it with them. It was something they definitely should know.

Vince and Tom looked at me *inquisitively* and before they could ask me anything, my wife said, “What is it, you think we need to know? Tell us, don’t hold it back now.”

I reminded them of my trip a year and a half ago to Houston, Texas. The trip occurred about a month after the death of my father and at a time when I was still trying to settle his estate. My father had owned a small coin collection, which I now found impossible to liquidate at any reasonable price in the Charlestown area. Senator Laforge had invited me to her home in Houston to help me sell this coin collection. Katherine was an avid coin collector and owned a collection worth around 3 millions dollars. She had acquired her coins over her entire life and for the last decade with the assistance of a numismatist named Mike Fuljenz. She had read about Mike, the president of Universal Coin and Bullion, in some articles published in Coin World and sought him out to assist in her collection of rare Type Two Double Eagles. She had become enamored with collecting coins when she read about the Howard Bedford one million two hundred thousand dollar coin collection that was assembled over a 7 year period at a cost of about \$13,000. Mike had told Katherine about other collections such as the Garrett family collection of Gold coins that sold for more than 25 million dollars and the Eliasberg collection that sold for \$11,000,000 in 1982. Fuljenz stories and her weakness for history hooked her and she aggressively went about collecting rare gold, platinum and silver coins. Mike took the Senator under his tutelage and helped her become a savvy coin collector, steering her towards the best and rarest coins, and constantly searching for the most exotic finds in the

coin world. Over the years their trust grew to the point where the Senator maintained a bailment agreement with Fuljenz and gave him the right to buy and sell her coins at his discretion.

Senator Laforge was going to introduce me to Mr. Fuljenz and guaranteed me that I would get royal treatment.

Katherine had scheduled my introduction to Mr. Fuljenz at a restaurant called Tuffy's Eatery in Mariceville, Texas, which is about 90 miles east of Houston. Tuffy's Eatery was one of those off the beaten path places that had become famous for its great food, pies and its celebrity packed list of patrons. When we first arrived at the restaurant, the proprietor, Mike Hamilton was waiting to welcome us. Mr. Hamilton was not only a restaurant proprietor but also the local Texas Representative for his district and a good friend of Senator Laforge. Always the politicians, Katherine and Mike Hamilton immediately delved into discussions about H.R. bill this and H.R. bill that. I listened in amazement as Katherine discussed one Senate bill that included big names from both parties as sponsors. It was called the SCNT (Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer) bill and it had been introduced by Republican Alan Specter and Orin Hatch and Democrats Dianne Feinstein and Edward Kennedy. This was a bill to prohibit human cloning, while still preserving important areas of medical research, including stem cell research. Katherine said that those opposing it felt that Congress was trying to define a sub class of unborn humans who are simply legislated to be used as research material and then destroyed before they can become full term. Just as the conversation started getting interesting, a man with a well-manicured beard walked up to our table and flashed a big smile at Katherine. It was her good friend Mike Fuljenz. He sat down with us, and Katherine

introduced us to each other. Mr. Hamilton exchanged greetings with Fuljenz and then excused himself so he could return to the work of hosting his large lunch hour crowd. Mr. Fuljenz was a gregarious kind of guy, who was very animated in his conversations. He told me that Katherine had informed him of the death of my father and he offered his sincere condolence. I asked Mr. Fuljenz how long he had been involved in the coin business and he told me practically all his life. He gave me a quick overview of his company Universal Coin and Bullion that he had molded over the last decade from a dream into a world-class operation that now held the respect of the numismatic community. Fuljenz and his company had become an icon in the precious metal world and collectors and investors treated his market predictions as gospel.

Mr. Fuljenz told me it was an honor to have the Senator recommend his services. He assured me that whatever coins my father had acquired, he would offer me the best prices for the collection. His demeanor and wealth of knowledge in the precious metal market made me feel comfortable that I had finally found someone that could help me liquidate my father's coin collection.

Glancing at her watch, Katherine ask Mr. Fuljenz if he would take me back to his office in Beaumont, Texas and give me an appraisal of my father's collection, while she took care of some other business. Mr. Fuljenz seemed more than happy to accommodate her wishes to entertain me for the afternoon. She told Mike Fuljenz she would send a car or personally pick me up in Beaumont around 5:00 PM.

The lunch meeting was over and we all got up to go our separate ways. Mike Hamilton was still at the front door greeting the lunch crowd, but took a few moments to say good-bye to us. With a hearty handshake, he thanked us for visiting, wished us well and

solicited our promise to return. It was at this moment, when I realized that Katherine had seemed to vanish on us. Mike Hamilton winked and simply said, “She went to take care of some of her business. Don’t worry about her she will catch up with you later.” I looked at Mr. Fuljenz quizzically and he replied, “ Time for us to get back to Beaumont”

Mike Fuljenz showed me to his car and 30 minutes later I was in Fuljenz’s conference room watching him categorize my father’s coin collection. He made little piles of coins from the collection and added up a few numbers on a pad of paper. Suddenly, his deep voice blurted out, How does \$85,000 sound for your collection?”

I looked at him to see if he was serious and waited for a scintilla of a second before I quietly said, “Great, thank You!”

While I was basking in my good fortune, Senator Laforge was speeding along Highway 69 towards Lumberton, TX. Her destination was a 10-minute jaunt north of Beaumont. She had driven this route on Highway 69 to Cooks Lake Rd. a hundred times. The final leg of her clandestine journey always gave her an eerie feeling of foreboding as she drove down the narrow road shaded by low hanging branches. Cooks Lake road was unlighted and was alive with the sounds of the bordering swamp. Her final destination was in sharp contrast to its surroundings. Almost exactly 2 miles down the road to the left, a small house could be seen from the road and Senator Laforge turned into the dirt road leading to it. Blending in with the trees bordering the approach were CCTV security cameras mounted on poles perpetually scrutinizing every movement made as she drove down the short road. There whirling sound as they tracked you, blended in with the cacophony of spring peepers, cricket frogs, cicadas, other insects and birds of the nearby swamp. The house was unassuming and set back over a hundred feet into the densely forested yard. It

had the appearance of a folksy starter home that intentionally understated its true size, the bulk of the complex stayed hidden underground. It was made to blend into the landscape of this Texas road. Four large mastiffs sat menacingly drooling and panting in front of the building. A large man with a shaven head stood guard in the doorway. He was dressed in a tee shirt and Jeans with a pistol strapped to his side. The Senator smiled at him and greeted him with a hearty "Hello Tony" Tony opened the door and let the Senator into the poorly furnished house, and nodded to her to proceed into the next room. The room had one door on the opposite wall that had a small box on the side of the door which the Senator inserted her thumb. She waited for a couple of seconds for the fingerprint scanner to recognize her thumb and then the door quietly swung open. It was a massive 4-inch solid steel door that was covered on one side with cheap paneling to camouflage it. As she stepped through the door, it automatically began to close in a quiet smooth and steady arc. Another armed guard sat at a table by a second door 10 feet ahead of her. He smiled at the Senator and greeted her with his thick South East Texas drawl. The Senator smiled back and asked him how his Solitaire game was going. She did not wait for an answer but went ahead with inserting her security card into the lock. She heard the audible click and grabbed the handle to pull the door open and stepped into the freight elevator. Outside it was a hundred degrees, but now as she rode to the laboratory five floors below she felt the coolness and it relaxed her. The laboratory door was straight ahead of her as she got off the elevator. Katherine quickly strolled over to it and looked up at the eye scanner mounted above the door. She stared at it, unblinking as her iris was interrogated and checked for a match in its database against the eyes staring into the scanner.

Suddenly, a green bulb began to flicker above the steel door and it silently began to slide into the wall. As it inched open, the bright light of the laboratory flooded the dark hallway washing away the gloom. Inside was a labyrinth of cubicles and rooms alive with the work of the best physicist, scientist and computer programmers that the CIA could hire for this clandestine mission. The Senator always felt Goosebumps on her arms as she entered through these doors. It might have been caused by the 65-degree coolness but more likely from the excitement she felt for the work being done there.

Before going into politics she had been very much interested in physics. If she had not become Senator Laforge, she would have most likely become the physicist Laforge. Some how these two career desires had merged, and now she were exposed to the most awesome science, since the work on the atomic bomb.

Watching a living likeness of yourself instantly materialize in front of your own eyes is an emotional mind-altering experience. At first it feels like an eerie dream or a drug induced hallucination as you view this replicate of yourself. But, you wake up from dreams and hallucinations are illusions you do not expect, but these visions were expected. Senator Laforge knew what she was about to see and was even in control of when the vision would start.

Her first few exposures to the cloning experiments were extremely frightening and emotionally disturbing. The Senator would struggle with her own sense of reality and how to cope with what inevitably would appear before her in the glass observation booth. Each time as she was preparing for total molecular analysis and memory recording, she would feel highly agitated and nauseous to her stomach. The biosensors attached to her

body and her molecular imaging on the observation screens would reveal her confusion and reactions to her fears.

When the bays of electron guns started glowing red, beads of sweat would appear on her forehead. This moment would mark the point when the transformation of her biodata and molecular mapping was about to begin. The flooding of specifications, the trillions and trillions of details were spewed from the computer by a massive optical vortex that delivered the data at light speed. The control panel in front of her would turn into a blur of blinking green and red lights culminating with the distinct hiss of the electron guns firing in perfect unison. Then instantly in front of her, her mirror image materialized inside the glass observation booth. This apparition was referred to as ComDefC1 (Combat Defensive Clone) and named Hulagu. At this very instant it shared and displayed the same fears and anxieties that Katherine had just experienced seconds earlier as she endured the bio scan.

Albert Einstein is quoted as saying "Only a life lived for others is a life worth while." The Senator had burned this saying into her mind and she hoped that Hulagu would use this shared memory to understand its destiny. Life's call to die, demands tremendous courage to accept and she knew that Hulagu still feared death, just as she did, because they both shared the same consciousness and personal biography that lived within her. As odd as it may seem, the Senator felt the deepest compassion and respect for Hulagu and its destined sacrifice. Although they both shared the same memories and secrets of Katherine's past, from this moment on, each of their futures would be unique. Hulagu and Kat both knew what the immediate future held and the psychological chaos that ComDefC1 must be experiencing as it resisted the inevitable, but at the same time

acquiesced to it. Definitely it was a far greater emotion, than most of us could ever imagine.

The creation of each version of ComDefC1 was a precisely planned variation of the accuracy of the unique position, velocity and spin of each particle making up the subject being cloned. The twentieth century Quantum Physicist, Werner Heisenberg, had discovered that certain pairs of measurements have an intrinsic uncertainty associated with them. When we attempt to measure anything at the subatomic level, we are constrained by these laws. The very act of *measuring* depends upon light, which itself is a stream of photons. These photons have enough momentum, and mass, that when striking a particle being measured, they alter its course or velocity. Another obstacle to overcome in the process of quantum cloning was the calculation of the spin of each particle making up the subject to duplicate. In 1922, Otto Stern and Walther Gerlach discovered that atomic particles possess an *intrinsic* angular momentum, or spin, and that this spin is quantized (that is, it can only have certain discrete values). The "Spin" of every particle to be recreated was calculated and stored along with all of its other properties.

At first the Heisenberg uncertainty principle seemed to be a major obstacle to the creation of ComDefC1. But soon they realized that the accuracy and the method of calculating the various properties of each particle of the host subject would actually allow them to better control the degree and speed of apoptosis in the clone. Apoptosis is cell suicide, which is orchestrated by T cells, normally associated with the immune system responsible for detecting foreign invaders. The goal of the physicist was to create clones that would live for only a predetermine time and then die in what would appear as a natural death. They wanted the death of each clone to mimic nature's natural disruption of

cellular function or tissue destruction. The clone would likely die of a heart attack, stroke, or some other common condition where critical cells are lost to nature's destruction of tissue.

Katherine had sat transfixed, as she watched ComDefC1 gain its consciousness, and recognize its situation. The Senator's concentration was shattered by the voice of Dr. Sawtelle saying "Hello" to Hulagu. Its head turned and looked at Dr. Sawtelle and responded back with a simple Hello. It was Katherine's voice heard coming from the speakers of the observation booth. Air washed lightly in and out of Hulagu's lungs. It was the first breaths of air that its lungs had ever experienced. Its likeness and matters were so much like Katherine's that even her modesty was reflected in its actions. The overhead monitors exhibiting ComdefC1's biosensor readings clearly displayed its nervousness to its nakedness. This at first seemed to trouble ComDefC1 more than the realization of its questionable existence.

Dr. Sawtelle asked Hulagu if it felt it would have any problems following the program that it had been taught through the Senator's mind. The Senator had trained her own mind to accept that her thoughts, experiences, and fears would all be shared by Hulagu. ComDefC1 glanced at Katherine strapped into a control chair directly in front of the observation booth, and gave her a smile and nod of agreement. "

At first ComDefC1 was asked to see if it had any problems with mobility. Hulagu walked to the glass separating itself from the observers and then proceeded to stretch itself in various ways. ComDefC1 said it felt nothing odd about its physical being or its ability to move about. On the Senator's computer console the observation cameras scanned every inch of Hulagu's naked body. Doctor Randall directed Hulagu to sit down in the

examination chair. The chair was complete with additional monitoring devices designed to measure normal human vital signs and the degree of decay or instability the clone was experiencing. Hulagu sat down on the chair, and strapped the various devices to itself, and the monitors came alive with the new stats. Its blood pressure and heart beat rate was comparable to Katherine's stats also displayed on the screen. Both were monitored in unison to help detect abnormalities in Hulagu's vital signs.

Dr. Sawtelle continued on with the program by requesting that ComDefC1 tell us of its remembered past.

ComDefC1's memory was vivid with the visions of what the Senator had done in the past 58 years. It talked of remembering its mother and its childhood and finally talked about the recent pass, about the feelings of love for Ira and Kat's children. The development of ComDefC1's auto-noetic awareness was very important to give it the ability to subjectively recollect experiences from memory, introspectively applying them to current thoughts and emotions to predict a future outcome. Memory in a very real sense is reality. What the brain's limbic system decides to "see" and store away becomes the life we have lived. It is the smells, the music, the pain, the loves, the places you have been and all experiences that were recorded by the brain. Memory is the core of what we accept as reality. ComDefC1 remembered companions who enriched Kat's life, family, the folks at the office, neighbors, friends, and even people of whom Senator Laforge haven't talked to in years. ComDefC1's memories disturbed the Senator emotionally. She felt more connected to it then ever. She felt sorry that its existence would be so temporary.

Dr. Randall continued testing ComDefC1's noetic awareness by talking about things and facts that were not present, but should be readily available in its mind to retrieve, visualize and understand their significance. Its anoetic awareness was also tested and graded by presenting situations that would cause ComDefC1 to react to certain stimuli. The success of these innate responses would define how human it would appear to others. They went about discussing the mission as the Senator had trained herself to perform, and how Hulagu would participate in it. They discussed its understanding of its inevitable demise and that it should consider itself as an extension of the Senator. Doctor Randall asked ComDefC1 if it felt fear or problems controlling its emotions. Hulagu responded with the fact that it dreaded its own destruction. Hulagu said that it was hard for it to imagine that it was not real and did not have a past, greater than the last few minutes, in the glass observation booth. A table with food on it rose through a hole in the floor. Dr Randall asked Hulagu to drink the glass of water on the table. As Hulagu drank the water, his vital signs were watched by all.

A Spike in its blood pressure stats appeared on the monitor, and Hulagu stared straight through the glass wall into the Senator's eyes. It had felt the change in its body and its eyes looked desperate.

Dr Randall and Dr Sawtelle started to console Hulagu. The monitors focused in on a lesion that opened magically down the left side of its back. Hulagu blurted out to us that it was in pain and that it was afraid of what it was experiencing. The Senator felt so connected to ComDefC1 that she wanted to do something to protect and help it with the obvious pain it was experiencing. Dr Sawtelle told ComDefC1 to use all its remembered experiences, and training to help it accept this phase of its existence. Its temperature shot

to 104 degrees, and you could hear it gasping for air. Its body shuttered and bloody saliva bubbles appeared from its nose. The pores around the lesions started to bleed profusely and scarlet stains appeared upon its body and face. This was so macabre, the Senator was actually going through the throes of her own death, hearing the exhaling of her last breath, experiencing the sound of her last heartbeat. Seeing exactly what her death will be when she dies. For Katherine, this was the worst sight of all, to see - your likeness still alive, but dying slowly, and desperately in front of your very own eyes, without a hope for survival.

Hulagu's body began to tremble in anticipation of imminent death. Its face turned red, spittle dripped from its mouth, its stomach heaved, and Hulagu's bladder and bowels emptied simultaneously, filling the receptacle beneath the examination chair. Hulagu didn't feel it happening, as it kicked spastically, and jerked in its restraints. The monitors showed that its mucous membranes were also hemorrhaging. Its skin turned purple, and Hulagu's mortality ended and it returned back to the darkness it came from. Hulagu had live barely an hour, but its physical death, the end of its life in bodily form had somehow or other had been a success in their quest to control life and death to our advantage. Its death to Katherine was much more of a transformative experience, it was the baby that she had remembered, the toddler, the adolescent and the young adult that they both had been that had now died and finally her own being that she saw die before her today.

It is ironic that in Islam it is destined that non-believers will not die. They will not be allowed to die or live but like Hulagu will be locked in a revolving existence of life and death over and over. They say that:

Death will come from all angles, yet they will not die. Therein they will neither die or live. Every time they seek to get away, they will be driven back. Their skins will be burnt off then replaced with fresh skins. Their abode will be the Fire - the torment of the Fire that they used to deny. And it will be everlasting.

Kat wondered if there was a heaven, did the Angel of Death come for Hulagu, did the doors of heaven open for it? Did it share her soul?

As I concluded the chronicle of my summer trip to Texas, a gust of wind, sounding like giant wasps, whined through the icicles and window frame next to where we sat. It's ferocity caused me to tremor or perhaps I shook due to the thoughts surging through my mind. Even with the chill hanging over the town hall, beads of sweat appeared on my brow betraying the calmness my voice attempted to convey. I felt like I had just betrayed a friend, and opened Pandora's box to the world. I hoped I could reconcile this ill feeling of exposing this secret intrusion into nature and God's domain.

I could tell from the expressions on the faces of my friends and Stacie that they were as dumbstruck as I had been, when Senator Laforge had first told me of these experiments.

Tom was the first to comment. Is this for real?

A thud sounded as a snowball hit the window next to where we were sitting. The snowball burst into a spray like a dandelion gone to seed with the wispy flakes scattering harmlessly in the wind. The protesters were not receiving the attention they wanted and were now becoming more brazen and annoying. Outside, the glow of dawn spread across the ashen sky and soft snow continued to float lazily about.

Inside, at my table, harsh words floated about as my friends and I tried to reconcile feelings with the events that I had just revealed to them.

\$1000.00 “Guess the Conclusion” Contest

We hope you enjoyed the first five chapters of Hulagu’s Web – The presidential pursuit of Senator Katherine Laforge. Sometime between Jan 15th 2005 and March 15th 2005, the entire novel of 12 chapters will be released. In the mean time, if you found the story interesting and entertaining, then you should enter our \$1000.00 “Guess the Conclusion Contest.” The first person to most accurately describe the actual conclusion to the story of “Hulagu’s Web” will win the \$1000. The catch is your entry must be received before the actual release of the complete story in Book, Audio or any other format. The money will be rewarded to the winner on April, 15th 2005.



For those book readers who always figure out the ending before they read the last page, this contest should be a breeze. We hope you will accept the challenge and grab our money. You can enter more than once, but there is only one first place prize. If you are just an occasional sleuth, don’t despair, just put on your thinking cap and predict how you think the story should unravel at the very end.

Between Oct 15, 2004 and Jan 15, 2005, we will provide other clues about the ending either on the novel’s official website www.hulagusweb.com or by surreptitious postings signed by KatLaforge@yahoo.com on various Internet boards. You should make it a point to occasionally troll the Internet for information about “Senator Katherine Laforge” or “Hulagu’s Web” and you might find some of the new secret clues. You might even find one or two more chapters from the novel “Hulagu’s Web” secretly hidden somewhere out on the World Wide Web before the contest ends.

We wish you luck in your attempt to solve the mysteries surrounding the story of “Hulagu’s Web – The presidential pursuit of Senator Katherine Laforge.”



The contest winner will be the earliest postmarked entry with the most accurate description of the conclusion to the novel “Hulagu’s Web – The presidential pursuit of Senator Katherine Laforge” by David J Hearne.

Your entries should be mailed to:

Subterfuge Publishing
Attn: Conclusion Contest
PO Box 8008
Lumberton, Tx 77657

Anyone entering the “Guess the Conclusion Contest” will receive a \$5.00 off coupon, towards the purchase of the complete edition of “Hulagu’s Web – The presidential pursuit of Senator Katherine Laforge.”