

Welcome

Welcome

Introduction

Foreword

Disclaimer

Copyright

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 5

CHAPTER 6

CHAPTER 7

CHAPTER 8

CHAPTER 9

CHAPTER 10

CHAPTER 11

CHAPTER 12

CHAPTER 13

CHAPTER 14

CHAPTER 15

CHAPTER 16

CHAPTER 17

CHAPTER 18

CHAPTER 19

CHAPTER 20

Read the Conclusion!

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Quicksand

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(Version: V8.0C)

(A novel by)

I Q Cameron

Introduction

Thank you for choosing to read this free novel portion from www.killernovels.com

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As a writer, I make every effort to make available novels of the highest quality, and I sincerely hope that you will enjoy this free portion so much that you will purchase the remaining portion of the novel from www.killernovels.com for a small fee. Please remember that by doing so you will receive a fantastic novel conclusion, while also helping me to be able to continue this writing venture.

Quicksand is a gripping story of the perils of attempting to interfere with the past, when time travel is perfected in the year 2036. Following tests, and fearing that others may be close to perfecting similar technology, the U.S. government of the day send a man named Dean West to the year 1954.

When messages sent to West from the future are destroyed in transit, his own fears drive him to paranoia, and he breaks off all contact with 2036. The government of 2036 then send a second man to the past to neutralize the threat posed by the loose cannon, Dean West.

Dean West then comes to idolize President John F. Kennedy, and decides to use his knowledge of history to save the president from assassination. West sets out to save Kennedy, and is then thrust into the midst of a rogue CIA plot to assassinate the president.

The plot allows the reader to take a new look at the events of 1963 through the eyes of fictional characters. It combines many twists and secrets, and incidentally explains the hidden “truths” behind the deaths of Maralyn Monroe, Bobby Kennedy and officer J.D. Tippet, as well as touching on the Watergate scandal and much later, Princess Diana of Wales.

Quicksand combines the intrigue of conspiracy, the question of “who shot JFK?” and the paradoxes of time travel, all of which are subjects close to the heart of many people.

Wait until you see what Dean West does to prevent Kennedy’s assassination. You won’t believe the outcome! Compelling and provoking. You won’t be able to put this one away until

you've read the outcome! Truly a provocative tale!

Now, please enjoy!

Foreword

Having been a Christian for some decades, I always found it difficult to find novels that properly capture lifelike action, terror or even romance, while still maintaining any form of Christian values or the deep truth and freedom that having a *real* relationship with the living God brings. Jesus Christ died for us so that we could live forever (Heaven), as well as live fulfilling and meaningful lives right here and now – *true healing and true freedom!* So often Christians are portrayed as weak and 'just too good' to be real, in a world that we all know is *very real!* I would like to break that mould, since I believe a Christian hero or heroine should probably be one of the best examples of Godliness-meets-humanness we could ever find in this life.

Jesus Christ has a life-changing impact on the genuine believer. This, however, does not mean that our Christian heroes will ever be perfect, nor should they be portrayed that way. Indeed, the whole reason for Jesus Christ's intervention in history and in our individual lives is that we will always remain in need of His divine help, whether it be with external forces, internal ones, temptation or any other factor.

Needing His help and forgiveness will never change.

That said, *Quicksand* is my first novel, and so you may notice that it is not as well written as some of my later ones. And while there is Christian content, it is not the main thrust of the novel, and sometimes I cringe a little, not at what I have written, but how I wrote it.

Even so, I think that whether you are a Christian or a non-adherent, you will find this novel challenging, to say the least. I am attempting to fill a possible void in Christian literature, and while some may find my stories too violent or suggestive in some areas, I have tried to write about real issues without shying away from reality, and yet without glorifying sexual issues, crudity or coarse language.

These things exist. I don't ignore them, but neither do I exalt them. And in this novel, I am trying to give you, the reader, reason to reconsider all that you have been told about the John F Kennedy assassination.

I have no interest in terms such as 'have faith' or 'simply believe', which are meaningless to the one who doesn't understand them. Sometimes I may give an example, or even brutally demonstrate them. I would rather ire some readers, who judge my work as 'going too far', than to indulge in the usual '*too valiant and too true*' hero figures. Life is real, and when there is

action, it is very often brutal. The Bible, while not glorifying violence, treachery, murder or any other ugly human habit, does not hide from such horrible events either.

With all that in mind, I have decided not to pull punches, so to speak. My 'baddies' are bad, and my 'heroes and heroines' are human, and as real as I can make them. I avoid excess course language and sexual scenes, but make no apologies for realistic violence or faulty characters. These things are very much a real part of life.

Hence, perhaps you the reader, will be kind enough to show me a measure of grace (should you deem that I go too far in some of the things I write, etc.), as I endeavour to explain in my own very fault-riddled way, what salvation in Christ, God's love, forgiveness and some other key Christian values and teachings really mean to us all.

And I sincerely hope I don't fail you too greatly... ☺

Disclaimer

This is a work of fiction. No person or event described within this novel is intended to represent any real person, living or dead, or any event in history. It is purely a work for entertainment, and any similarity to any real or fictional person or event is purely coincidental.

That said, this novel is based loosely around events in history. The best of care has been taken to paint all *real persons* (named herein for a sense of reality only) in the very best light possible. No accusation or slur is intended against any person, living or dead, and indeed, historical fact has been followed as closely as possible where it applies. Perhaps most importantly, even the accused assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, is not accused in this novel, or any subsequent articles.

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"...AND YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE."

Words of Jesus Christ.

(Holy Bible – NASB)

CHAPTER 1

MAY 30, 2036. 6:30 A.M.

Lou Fredericks looked every bit the part of his role at US-TECH, one of the U.S. Government's many privately run research institutes. Fredericks was slick. No one had ever seen him dressed in anything but a suit, and always a quality one at that. He reeked of intelligence and exuded confidence. Management material.

It seemed strange, therefore, to see him eating at the cafeteria in the company of lesser-qualified staff. But he liked to eat there from time to time. The chances were better that he would not have to 'talk shop' there on the second floor.

Fredericks was a scientist, and although he spent an average sixteen hours each day laboring over his precious machines, he just didn't appear the type. His appearance was much more that of an executive.

In truth, at this critical time in US-TECH's research and development, as head of Time Travel Experiments, his opinions had often swayed even the president. Rarely in recent years had his requests been denied. At times it appeared that he was answerable only to the president himself. Such were the importance of his experiments. But Fredericks tried hard not to let his successes and power go to his head, and eating with the regular employees was a good place to start a humility program.

He placed his food tray on a plastic table in the spacious dining area. Before sitting he walked to a nearby computer terminal and pulled a neatly folded wad of shiny plastic paper from inside his jacket. Casually he passed the white wad over a scanning eye and returned to his seat.

Fredericks was one of the brightest minds of his time, but he was still a man who enjoyed some of the simpler pleasures in life, and would not give them up. He enjoyed reading the news from a newspaper, albeit a computer generated imitation of the original mode. Computers could change much about a person's surroundings, but some of the old habits could not be dispensed with.

Reading the morning paper had been a ritual of his father, and when the use of paper as newspaper had become obsolete almost a quarter of a century earlier, the old man, along with a large part of society, had turned to the computer alternative. The ritual had then been passed on to the son. While the new version was glossy and lacked a certain romance of the original, it survived because it allowed people to continue their beloved habit.

Fredericks sat down to a breakfast of bacon, eggs and coffee. In a diet conscious world, there were other habits that also proved difficult to dispense with. He opened his paper and began to read. These were exciting times for him, but even in these heady days when his team was on the verge of perfecting time travel, Lou had learned long ago the importance of rest and good eating. These were rules he adhered to.

He had every intention of enjoying his meal, even though in the back of his mind was the dread that at any moment Alan Lewis would be breaking the doors down in search of him. Yes, Lewis would be there to ensure that Fredericks was ready for the day's activities. And Alan Lewis would always want him ready at least a half-hour before he needed to be.

Fredericks ran a hand through his graying hair as he read the front-page story. For a man in his mid-fifties he was holding his own quite well, despite a few hairs that seemed to be missing these days.

News was rife lately of developments in the preparation of wonder drugs that would virtually halt the aging process. Testing was almost complete, but by virtue of the nature of the tests, a true gauging of success would be a long time off. He smiled as he wondered which story would make the biggest scoop – a drug that enabled a person to live a long time into the future, or a machine that would enable a person to travel into the past.

Of course it was highly unlikely that the public would ever learn of the latter.

The precious few moments of eating and reading in peace were lost not long after with the expected arrival of Alan Lewis. In his usual officious style he hurried in, glancing at his wristwatch, and generally buzzing around so that everyone he came into contact with might catch

his vision of the need for efficiency. At such an early hour of the morning, though, his vision was not embraced by all.

At thirty-seven years of age, Lewis seemed always to be in a hurry. This had occasionally set him against some of the staff in his care. Generally though, it did not seem too high a price to pay to gain a chief of security of his caliber. Lewis was astute and bright, and had proven himself very capable on numerous occasions. The welfare of the staff was his responsibility and that was not something he took lightly.

"I've been looking everywhere for you, Lou." Lewis tried to put enough desperation into the tone of his voice to help the scientist see the urgency of the matters at hand. Fredericks was completely unmoved, and merely smiled at his visitor.

"I'll bet Tegan and Cassie knew where I was, Alan." His calm tone and smile said 'relax Alan' and 'I won't be hurried, Alan' without ever a word being spoken.

Of course the computers knew where you were, Doc, but don't you realize what today is?" The security chief took a seat across from his charge as he continued to pester him. Manners may not have been one of Lewis' highest priorities, but keeping to the day's schedule was.

"We've gotta meet the president in forty minutes, Doc." He glanced again at his watch for effect. "Remember?"

"I remember, Alan." Fredericks would not be hurried. "Would you look at this?" The scientist slid his newspaper across to Lewis for him to see the front-page story, smirking as he did so. The lead story obviously humored him in some way. Lewis began to read and Fredericks knew that he had sacrificed his paper to be able to enjoy his breakfast. It seemed a fair price.

In large black letters, the lead story read 'ANOTHER SENATOR CAUGHT OUT'. Lewis read hurriedly, and just loud enough to be heard as he went. When finally he looked up from the paper, his lips were pursed at the thought of such ineptitude as described in the story.

"Another senator bites the dust," joked Lewis. "Wouldn't you think they'd learn that once you put info into a computer with a GEM chip, you can't ever get rid of it?"

"Obviously they are still learning, Alan."

"You know, Doc, I've tried to hide stuff on those. It can't be done. You can hide it, but someone will always find it again. These guys are crazy – I mean, this is not even a new idea."

"It's just a pity the good senator didn't know that." Fredericks continued to eat, so Lewis continued to read. It was a pleasure he rarely took time for, but it seemed acceptable since he had to wait for his colleague anyway.

The story told of how the senator had been found to have lied about funds he had received from shady transactions. By law, all government computers had been fitted with the new

Gaseous Endless Memory (GEM) chip for some years now. With its infinite memory capacity, records could never be removed once entered. At best, a clever operator might succeed in elaborately hiding information, but any other capable operator would always be able to find it again if they searched long enough.

In an era when morals and ethics were on the rise again in western countries, manufacturers had correctly envisioned that governments and businesses would eagerly embrace the chance to ensure the accountability of their members. The GEM chip ensured a non-erasable record of all entries. The chip was a ‘computer police’ dream.

It seemed that the lesson was a little slow in filtering down. This was the second senator caught out by the GEM chip in six months.

The two men didn’t talk much after that. Fredericks ate and Lewis took control of his paper. The scientist didn’t mind as long as it kept the security chief busy and allowed him to dine in peace. When he had completely finished his breakfast, and not a moment before - in spite of continual gestures by Lewis toward his watch and toward the door, Fredericks stood and told Lewis that he was ready to go.

Despite Lewis’ pestering ways, Fredericks knew that he was in good hands. Even in an age when much of building security was left to computers, the human element was always necessary. When safety and security were such premium issues, it was for the best that the human element was of the likes of Alan Lewis.

As the two men walked through the automatic doors of the cafeteria, Fredericks made a grab for his beloved paper, now safely tucked away under Lewis’ arm.

“Give me that!” Fredericks smiled, realizing that his security chief had just successfully fooled him into reacting. Then he folded it and placed it under his own arm, just as his late father had done for so many years.

The two men walked with a purpose toward yet another meeting with President Will Forrest.

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## **6:35 A.M.**

On the forty-second floor of the US-TECH building in apartment 4216, which faced east, the sun was beginning to shine in with a vengeance. While it did not warm the room at all due to the climate control, it did make for an unbearable glare that grew worse by the minute.

Clawing his way out of a deep cavern of oppressive sleep, Dean West fought to bring himself to consciousness, not because he wanted to be awake, but only to give him the strength to



curse the sun and the building's computer for not shutting out the brightness. StrikeGlass did of course cut out all harmful rays, but West would have preferred that it had remained night for a little longer.

West had gone to bed late that night, with the window completely clear so that he could watch the stars and satellites. He had dreamed of Angelina, and cried himself to sleep again. Just as he had done so many times before, he had lain on his airbed with a holographic image of his late and beautiful wife dancing on the floor before him. Only when he had been completely exhausted had West finally succumbed to sleep. In obedience to his express wishes, the building's computer had allowed the window to remain clear. The recorded image had come to an end. Angelina was now gone.

In truth, she was long gone.

"Cassie!" he barked, dreading that he was awake again, or even alive for that matter.

The female voice was soft and courteous. "Yes Dean?" West was already spitting out the command.

"Night mode, Cassie! Darken the window!" Immediately the window, which was the entire eastern wall of his bedroom darkened and the sun became as a dull moon on a clear night. The bedroom became inky black.

Cassie, US-TECH's Comfort And Security System, Identification and Environment computer was a strange beast. Capable of monitoring and maintaining the building's climate and security, of tracking almost anyone anywhere on the face of the Earth at any time, she was not programmed to make some of the simplest decisions. Since West's last conscious command had been to leave the window clear, she had not darkened it even when the light was becoming intense. Human command was required.

Dean West moaned and rubbed his tired eyes. Angelina was already back in his thoughts, and the pain was great. Eventually his thoughts roamed to what he might have to do that day. That wasn't pleasant either. He hated working for the CIA and he hated life.

Not everyone was happy living in the third millennium.

## **CHAPTER 2**

**US-TECH. 7:15 A.M.**

The elevator stopped at the top floor of the building with the number '102' in clear electronic numerals above the door. To a visitor, the sight there for the first time was awe-

inspiring. However, no visitor without the necessary clearance would ever get to see Floor 102, as Cassie would never allow such a thing. Laser beams and automatic disabling devices would cut an intruder down long before sensitive areas were reached, and besides, Cassie would simply not allow the elevator to stop on that floor. And while Lou Fredericks and Alan Lewis were well familiar with the scene before them, today was a landmark day, and the mood was electric.

US-TECH was not a large building by the standards of the third millennium. At one hundred and two stories though, it did by necessity cover a large floor area. Most of the top floor was without partition or column, with just a few exceptions. This meant that from the elevator doors, most of the entire floor space was visible with few obstructions. The huge open area could come as shock in itself, most people never realizing the area that a building of that size covered.

The room was square in shape, with the ceiling suspended some thirty feet above the floor. Each wall was almost two hundred and fifty feet in length and this meant that Floor 102 accounted for around three quarters of a hectare of humming, flickering electronics and machinery.

Between where the two men stepped from the elevator and the far wall lay an impressive array of laser pods, some reaching almost to the ceiling, and seemingly countless computer desks and terminals. To the left of center of the room was an irregular shaped black enclosure, the size of a very small house. The roof of the black room tapered into a round tube almost eight feet in diameter and then disappeared through the ceiling. On the side of the structure was printed the simple title: BLACK ROOM.

On the right was the only other enclosed area on the entire floor. The control center spanned over half the length of the enormity of Floor 102, reaching from floor to ceiling – around thirty feet. Glass panels made up the walls of the control room, separating the vast array of technology on the floor from the few swivel-chaired operators who monitored it.

At the far side of the open floor area were the only columns to be seen. Ten round, white uprights bore the weight of the rooftop swimming pool above. Apart from those, the entire roof was self-supporting.

Perhaps the one other instant eye catcher to a visitor might have been the huge sign suspended above the control room. In eight foot tall luminous letters were the initials of the project at hand, “T.E.G.A.N.” Below these in smaller letters were the words “TIME ENERGY GAP - ASTRONOMY NET”. The enormous luminous blue letters somehow seemed to invoke an extra sense of purpose and awe in those present.

Even at this early hour the room was buzzing with life. Various personnel were already at their workstations or wandering about in lab coats amid the sea of equipment. Apart from the

chemists and technicians, there was several of the ever-present security staff, dressed in regulation blue. In spite of Cassie's ability to immobilize a person or threat at will, and of a missile installation on the roof to handle external threats, one could never be too careful; least of all considering the importance of the discoveries being made in that room.

As the two men stepped from the elevator, they passed through a series of scanners. Cassie immediately registered Lewis' pulse pistol, but allowed the security chief to pass unchallenged.

"Good morning, Lou." The female voice was calm and soothing, just as she was intended to be. "Good morning, Alan."

"Good morning, Tegan." Only Fredericks answered. He smiled politely, as though addressing a person. He enjoyed a pleasant and friendly working environment, and so programmed the computer accordingly.

"How are you feeling today, Tegan?"

"I'm feeling fine, thank you Lou. All systems are functioning normally." The scientist grinned and looked at Lewis.

"How many computers do you know that can tell you they are feeling fine, eh Lewis?" Then he rubbed his hands together. "This is a great day. We should all be proud to be here today. We're going to make history – you wait and see."

Lewis remained alert as always, but stayed out of the way as much as possible. Fredericks donned his lab coat and chatted with various staff about Tegan's progress and the imminent test. He spoke at length with his second in command, Warren Kriesler. Kriesler was a bearded man of almost fifty years of age, steady and dependable. When Fredericks had been close to despair due to frustration, Warren Kriesler could always be relied upon to help him see the light of day.

"Any reservations about the test, Warren?" Fredericks asked.

Kriesler rubbed his bushy beard and stared thoughtfully around the room. "Not a one, Lou. I probably should have, but I don't. I tend to err on the side of caution – you know me. But I'd have to say I really think we're ready to do it."

"What about you, Tegan? Are you ready for the test?"

"I am ready for the test, Lou. You may initiate transfer codes when ready."

They didn't have long to wait. From one of the two elevators stepped a burly US-TECH security guard. He was clean-cut and vigilant. As he stepped between the scanners, the man turned and gestured for those in the elevator to follow. From within stepped a man and a woman, both dressed in gray and both sporting pulse pistols.

Close behind them came a large black man wearing a suit, flanked by another man dressed in a military uniform, both in their fifties. Then came two slightly younger men in suits, then

more, and finally another man and woman each carrying pulse rifles.

The entire group spent several moments looking about them. Each had their own reasons. For the security people, there was always the safety of their charges to consider, even in a building such as this. For the guests, this room always held a certain fascination.

Fredericks wasted no time before greeting his guests.

“Good morning, Mister President,” he said. “It’s good to see you again.”

Will Forrest was an impressive man both to the public and to those who dealt directly with him. The second ever Negro president, Forrest was an “Aussie Vet” - a veteran of the war between Indonesia and Australia, when Indonesia had invaded northern Australia some years before. The US had been forced to become involved, having signed the Western Countries’ Defense Alliance just two years prior. Forrest had been a distinguished soldier, a winner of a Congressional Medal of Honor and a Purple Heart.

Now he was a Christian and an ardent campaigner for social reform. He had also campaigned successfully for the change to the metric system in the US. Forrest had never lost touch with the common man. He carried an aura of honor with him that went beyond the respect that came with the office he held.

“Lou! Good to see you too.” Forrest shook hands eagerly with the scientist. “You remember General Brandon Clyde, and you already know my aides, Carl Schwartz and Phil Webberly?”

“General. Carl. Phil.” The men shook the scientist’s hand in turn before getting down to business. Many of the group were already familiar with Fredericks, his work having attracted much White House and Pentagon interest. Over some years the relationship between Forrest and Fredericks had become that of friendship.

Forrest held up a hand and smiled. “Hello Tegan.”

“Hello, President Forrest. Are you well today?”

“Very well, thank you, Tegan. Are you all ready for your test today?”

“I’m ready, Mister President.” Her voice sounded as friendly as Fredericks’.

Forrest turned to Fredericks. “Well, Lou, are we going to see some great things here today?”

Fredericks’ smile was all confidence. “Yes, Sir. I believe we are. I do believe we are.”

~~~~~

Forrest and his staff sat in visitors’ chairs just behind the row of scientists whose job it was to monitor the test. Together they all peered through the large glass windows to the ‘black room’

beyond. No one roamed the floor of 102 anymore. All had taken cover inside the radiation-proof control center.

The president and his people listened with much interest as Fredericks gave a short explanation of the theories involved in the experiment about to be demonstrated.

“Mister President. Almost a century ago Albert Einstein theorized the relationship between time and the speed of light. Much of our own work began with some of his theories. Of course, it's only become possible to test them with the use of modern computers and technology.”

“What we propose to do is to subject an organic object to radiation given off by a special combination of newly developed isotopes. The process cannot be used with metals; only organic matter, a bit like one of those old microwave ovens, Mister President. This process takes some minutes or hours to complete, depending upon the mass of the subject. Once the organic mass has been irradiated, it can then be subjected to the second part of our program.”

“The major breakthrough came quite by accident some years ago, Mister President. Our physicists developed a process whereby they could send a beam of accelerated light into space. This beam actually exceeds the normal speed of light. It's been pretty useless up until now, Sir. A great discovery, but useless, nonetheless. Until now.”

“The end result is, Mister President, that we can now irradiate an organic object and then pass a beam of accelerated light right through it without harming the subject at all. We can literally beam the matter out into space. When the beam strikes solid matter at the other end, the effect of the radiation is reversed and the object materializes again. That's all a bit simplistic you'll understand, but it sums up our process well enough for today's demonstration.”

“We've been testing for some time and Tegan has proved it beyond doubt, Mister President. Tests to inanimate objects show that no harm comes to the organic matter after the process.”

“Where does this light beam go, Lou?”

“To Earth, Sir.” Fredericks worded his answer in such a way as to create intrigue in those present, and the response was forthcoming. Forrest's brow began to furrow with wonder.

“Because the beam is accelerated, it is no longer bound by the normal laws of physics – or even time for that matter, Sir. Matter carried within the beam becomes subject to new laws. We're not so much sending something back in time as we are sending it to a place where the Earth *used to be* at a given time. I know what you're thinking – it's all a bit unreal – or is the word, *surreal*?” Fredericks scratched his chin as he mused the question, and Forrest could see the eccentric mix of brilliance and strangeness that so often seemed typical of men like him. Still, the president said nothing, waiting rather for the scientist to clarify.

“You have to divorce yourself from physical laws as we know them, Mister President,”

Fredericks continued. "With modern technology we can track where Earth was at a given time and simply aim the beam toward that point. Organic matter within the beam is carried to that point where it materializes, theoretically unharmed. Suddenly whatever we send finds itself back in the past somewhere, so to speak. Matter in the accelerated light beam virtually travels back in time. That's basically how it works, Sir."

"What happens if it strikes an asteroid on the way to its destination, Lou?"

"It would materialize in space somewhere, Mister President. Instant destruction or at best, some serious harm if it was space dust or some other small matter that the object struck. But Tegan can avoid such problems. Even before the moon rockets of the last century, astronomers were compiling detailed records of planets, meteors and space matter. We are confident that she can dodge them all. She just finds a clear path for the beam; we call it 'the gap' for obvious reasons. It just means that we are limited as to what time in the past we can send an object to. Obviously we can only send the beam when we know we have a clear gap."

"What about sending something forward in time?" Forrest was captured by the possibilities.

"Can't be done, Sir. The beam can only be pointed to a place where the Earth has already been. We are limited to the past."

Forrest thought, rubbing one side of his chin as he did. "What studies have you done to see what effect sending an object back in time might have, Lou? I don't want to authorize a cataclysm back there. I don't think our goal should be to rewrite the history books."

"Mister President, I am absolutely confident that we can send a living being back in time just about anywhere from one year ago to almost a century ago, and then without harming a hair on it. That much I *am* sure of. What I am not sure of is what effect it will have back there, if any. Tegan says that there would be no cataclysm - no immediate physical harm. What we really don't know is whether history would be affected, or if it was, if it would even register here. We just don't know, Sir. All we can do is theorize. Accordingly, the team leaders meet regularly to discuss theories and developments, and we've done all we can to monitor history – because you're quite right, Sir – there is a small chance we could change history if we get this wrong. But the bottom line is, Mister President, that we just can't know until we try it."

Forrest sighed. This decision bothered him greatly.

"Need I remind you, Mister President, that if we don't test this thing, someone else will? If *we* can develop this technology, it won't be long before an enemy can. We must stay ahead, Sir."

"I'm very aware of your concerns, Lou." Forrest had heard it all before. The arguments had been circling about in his head for months. Afraid as he might be, it did seem prudent to stay ahead of his nation's enemies. "I'm a very reluctant supporter, Lou. I'm afraid of what the

results of tampering with the past might be, but at the moment I can see no other way. That's why I've given my approval for you to proceed – for now.”

“Thank you, Mister President. You won't regret it, Sir.” Fredericks looked like a child with a new toy.

“I hope not, Lou. I sure hope not.”

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As the needle was withdrawn from the tiny silky terrier, Doctor Pamela Carter took a short length of organic twine and secured a small disk around the dog's neck. As a final check, she read the inscription once more.

PHOEBE. 27836476. *SENATOR GEORGE PETERS. WASHINGTON, DC.*

With the tiny animal placed carefully inside the black room and the doors tightly closed, staff were quickly evacuated.

“Sedation is complete, Doctor Fredericks. The dog is in place and ready, and the lethal injection has also been administered. The animal will die within two weeks.” Pamela Carter's face showed genuine sadness, but then beamed with excitement.

“Very good, Pamela. That should ensure that it causes no trouble for anyone later on.”

“All staff are accounted for, Lou,” Warren Kriesler added. “We can begin irradiation any time now.”

After a quick, eager glance at Forrest and those around him, Fredericks gave Tegan the order to begin. All eyes were on the black room opposite, as though some magical event were about to occur. It did not. There was no sound, no light, and no movement. But for Tegan's assurance, it seemed as though nothing was happening. All waited eagerly as the irradiation process took place. Tegan delivered an exact dose to the animal, and because of its size, they did not have long to wait. In just under fifteen minutes, Tegan interrupted their chatter.

“Irradiation is complete, Lou. Time to gap is thirteen minutes and twenty point two-five seconds. Awaiting your order to initiate.”

Fredericks looked keenly to his president. This was the moment when he would test the nerve of his friend and his nation's leader. “Well, Will. It's all in your hands. Are you going to allow me to see the fruition of an entire life's work?” Fredericks smiled at Forrest, knowing the answer before he asked. But still the scientist's stomach was uneasy. To be refused now would be devastating. Those present were surprised at his use of the president's Christian name, but did not react. Most knew of their long friendship. In a very real way it seemed appropriate, since it truly was a moment of truth for both men.

Forrest sighed and then slowly nodded. "Go ahead, Lou. Do it."

"Thank you." Fredericks sighed quietly and turned to stare at the black room again. "Tegan, you may initiate the sending process."

All waited in tense anticipation as Tegan began arming the beam. Slowly the round tube which protruded from the top of the black room and through the roof above began to move. It arced slightly left of its original position and then Tegan spoke again.

"The beam is aimed, Lou. It will be armed in three minutes and five seconds."

"The senator will be in for a great surprise, Mister President," joked Fredericks. "And frankly, I can't think of anyone who deserved a prank played on him more than old George."

"I hope that's all he's in for, Lou," Forrest noted. "George Peters was a good friend. Still, we can't bring 'em back – or can we?"

"Maybe the question we would need to ask is - if we could, *would* we dare to do so, Mister President?" Fredericks mused the possibilities, then asked, "He was a good friend?"

"A very good friend."

"I'm sorry," Fredericks responded. "I never knew that. When you suggested that we use him as the recipient for today's test, I thought it was just because he had died some years back. I figured you were just trying to lessen the trauma to the past."

"Well, you're partly right. Your terrier has to go somewhere and George is dead now, so hopefully we'll do less harm by sending the dog to him. But old George was a bit of a joker, and I owed him a few. When Phoebe appears in the White House grounds wearing a tag with George's name on it, they're gonna wonder how he ever got it past security. Maybe this way I'll get the last laugh on the old man."

"Well, Sir, whatever happens – or should I say whatever *happened* to him, I'm expecting that we'll know very soon. Tegan has made her own copies of all known media and historic records. We are hoping that any new events which might be reported will immediately register as a change to those records. Also, we have given Tegan a copy of all pertinent White House records for that period. Tegan should detect any changes and let us know."

Tegan interrupted their conversation. "Air traffic has been diverted away from the building as directed, Lou. The roof has been evacuated. The beam is aimed. All systems are ready."

"Begin scanning all media and historic records for change, Tegan. Changes to the media records may occur at the moment of transfer."

"How so?" interrupted Forrest. Then he clarified his question. "What? Do you think a change might happen immediately?"

"Sir, we don't even know if any changes actually *will* occur. Maybe we won't affect the



past at all. But maybe the changes we make, if any, will occur at the very moment we send the dog. After all, once we send it, it's logical that we will have already set any changes in motion."

Forrest felt the familiar uneasy fear of the unknown return. Still, he felt pressured to continue. They had to press on for the sake of future national security.

"Sixty seconds to gap." Tegan seemed to be the only one present not feeling the tension. Her announcement was unnecessary though, as several large digital displays counted down the time to the moment of truth, and most eyes were glued to those screens.

"Ten seconds to gap." Still she was calm. Those present became as stone. The control room was eerily silent. Those present could hear each other's breathing as the numbers and seconds ticked away. In an age when complicated tasks were left completely in the care of computers, there was little to do but watch and wait. The displays plummeted toward zero.

"Come on, Tegan, work," whispered Fredericks. He had abandoned all care.

Zero. The digital clocks displaying thousandths of seconds rushed past the mark and into the negatives quicker than the human eye could discern. Simultaneously, there came an audible cracking sound from the black room as a single pulse of intense light was emitted into space.

"Beam is en route within the gap, Lou. All monitors indicate that the subject is no longer present in the radiation chamber. All systems are functioning normally."

All were silent for some time, different faces showing varying emotions. While there were no problems, there was a great sense of anticlimax. In the absence of evidence, there was nothing to gauge success upon, except for the fact that Phoebe was no longer within the building.

Fredericks however, was very positive. In his mind, Tegan was a success.

"Well, Will, I mean, Mister President," he blurted, shaking Forrest's hand vigorously, "If you'll pardon the pun, Sir, I believe that we just made history."

## CHAPTER 3

Dean West did not eat breakfast. He could not. In fact, he had not eaten very well at all since Angelina had died. It seemed sad and unfair to him that in an age when diseases were being cured in ways not dreamed of just decades before, that his precious wife should have died in the way that she had. Angelina had been a good person – a champion of the under privileged and the needy. On one of her many excursions with a welfare group to the less desirable parts of the city to help people who could not help themselves, Angelina and her friends had been set upon by thieves. In the struggle to steal whatever valuables the 'good Samaritans' might have had,

Angelina had been shot. Modern medicine could cure many evils, but it still could not bring back the dead.

Angelina had been killed by the very people she wanted to help. All it had taken was a few twisted, selfish people to ruin all that Dean West and his wife had, and the futility and unfairness had driven West to the edge of bitterness. Cash had been dispensed with for more years than they had been married. At best these thieves could have hoped to gain a good coat, or a better pair of shoes. His wife for a better pair of shoes...

The tears welled up in West's eyes at the thought of it. And he thought about it often. The people who had done this deed were corrupt, evil and vile – they deserved to die. They had destroyed someone whose only desire had been to help them. Dean West had grown to hate corruption wherever he saw it, no matter what shape or form it took. So many times he had put himself in that situation with Angelina, and thought about how brutally he would have dealt with those men.

West returned to reality with a jolt as Cassie reminded him of the time. Ah yes, the time. Time soon to go off to work, and another day working for the CIA – keeping America safe. He grimaced at that thought. That would be the day – when Dean West had anything to do with keeping the nation protected. After all, when did an investigations officer ever do anything of importance these days? The computers did it all. Perhaps if he worked hard, then one day, maybe, he'd be promoted to staff personnel officer, or even security chief somewhere. But until then he could watch the computers, make coffee for his superiors and never dare to complain.

He thought about his boss, Dwain Jackson. To West, Jackson was the epitome of corruption. Jackson was older than West, around forty-five. As an investigations officer and able to access most personal files, West should have known Jackson's age exactly, but for some unknown reason there was not a great deal of information on his boss. In a check West had once done, he had found that Jackson had spent time out of the country in Covert Operations.

Probably assassinating people, West decided. Jackson was a more heavily built man than West, though a little shorter. He was hard and terse and could be quite cruel. There was no doubt in West's mind – Jackson did not like him. One of the few things the two held in common was that both had been forced to undergo the same secretive initiation into US-TECH before being admitted to staff. Both had been sworn to secrecy and to his knowledge, neither had broken their vows.

In training as an agent for the CIA, West had done quite well. He was of above average intelligence, skilled with computers and electronics, and just above average in the field of self-defense. But as long as he was stuck in US-TECH and reliant on Jackson's recommendation for

any transfer that was worth having, West knew that he would be going nowhere.

West cleaned himself up for another day. It was one thing to feel like garbage, but he could never let anyone see how desperate he really was. “Corrupt,” he said out loud. “They’re all corrupt.”

Angelina had been the only pure thing, and she was gone.

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Tegan had predicted that the pulse of accelerated light carrying Phoebe would make contact with the past in 5.231 minutes. It was theorized that Phoebe would survive that time in space because she would be in a suspended state during transfer. If the remainder of Tegan’s calculations were correct, Phoebe would arrive in the White House grounds at approximately 2:25 p.m. on November 16, 2034.

The president was given a full tour of floor 102 to help pass the time, and when that was over he paced back and forth, his nervousness showing. He suffered a mix of emotions, aware of his demanding schedule, and afraid of the Pandora’s box he may have just opened. But there came no news from Tegan, whose monitors were continually scanning all known news records and White House records. Forrest was forced to leave US-TECH without knowing the results of the test.

It was a full thirty hours before any change was detected, but when it was, it was profound. There could be no doubt that the TEGAN experiment was a complete success.

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Dean West could only sit silently in wonderment as he considered again what Dwain Jackson was saying to him. In the past two years West had become a master at not showing his feelings to anyone – after all, his grief for Angelina was private, and something which no one in the CIA had a right to share. He remained poker-faced, trying to quickly analyze the offer just made to him, hurriedly searching for the hidden pitfalls – which he could not see, apart from the obvious dangers involved.

Finally he answered. “I know you don’t like me Dwain, but this is a pretty drastic way to get rid of me.”

Jackson smirked. “Listen West. If I really wanted to get rid of you, I could have done it a hundred ways. Now I’ll admit, it’ll be nice to get you out of here, but that’s not what this is about.” He never pretended friendship. “So, smart guy – do you want the job or not?”

“How long can I think about it?”

“You’ve got twenty-four hours,” came the reply. Jackson’s voice was cold. For whatever reason, West thought, the boss must have really hated him. “And don’t you forget, boy – this conversation does not go outside of this room – not ever. If it does...”

“It won’t. You know it won’t.” West cut him off. He wanted to lean over Jackson's desk and king-hit him, but he let the idea go. After all, it would not pay to ruin his best chance ever of escaping. “The government trusts me with secrets everyday. Why should this one be any different?”

West left Jackson’s office in a spin. Beneath the expressionless face he had mastered, he knew that this secret was very, very different. Jackson didn’t have to wait twenty-four hours. He had his answer in just four.

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Just forty-eight hours after the ‘Phoebe’ test, President Will Forrest returned to US-TECH to meet with Lou Fredericks and his leading scientific personnel in a conference room on the one-hundredth floor. Present of course was Security Chief Alan Lewis, and on this occasion he had brought Dwain Jackson and Dean West. The president too was flanked by his own entourage of extras.

The face of General Brandon Clyde appeared more brooding and brutal than usual, and seemed to embody the overall mood of the meeting. Even Forrest’s two senior aides, Phil Webberly and Carl Schwartz were steel-faced, showing clearly that the gravity of current events was not lost on them. Schwartz in particular had been a close friend and supporter of the president for many years and Forrest never ventured far without him. Today he stayed closer than a friend.

Dean West found it difficult to hide the hint of a smile that threatened to turn up the corners of his mouth from time to time, his poker face weakening somewhat. In the two years since Angelina’s death he had been as hard as granite, rarely smiling or showing emotion. Today, for almost the first time since the tragedy, he could see a glimmer of hope, albeit it a distant one.

Unlike his guests, Lou Fredericks’ face was beaming with excitement and success. While his body language gave the unmistakable signals of a man desperate to be heard, he contained the urge to begin until invited to do so by President Forrest.

The president cleared his throat as he sat, and didn’t wait for those present to stand and resume their seats upon his arrival. His voice was deep and calm. “Well, this is apparently quite a turn of events you have for us. What happened, Lou?”

It was all the invitation Fredericks needed.

“Great news, Mister President.” Fredericks was almost glowing. “No – it’s better than that. It’s fantastic news!” The serious faces failed to catch his vision, apparently more afraid of his discovery than elated by its success, but Fredericks persisted undaunted.

“Tegan is a success - a complete success! I thank you for coming back here. You’ll appreciate that we couldn’t tell you the details via sat-link.” He looked up and spoke into the air. “Tegan, display the altered reports, please.”

An image was immediately displayed on a large screen at one end of the room, as well as on individual personal screens beneath the glass tabletop. Fredericks could not wait for those present to read the items – his keenness would not allow it.

“Thirty hours after Phoebe was sent, Mister President,” he gloated, “Tegan detected changes to the media records and the White House records for the day in question. There can be no doubt about it, Sir – Tegan is a success! Before you is the proof. You will see that both the media and White House records are in agreement. And of course, Tegan tells us that the change to both records occurred simultaneously, just as we predicted. But the real point is - they changed. The records changed! We changed history, Mister President!”

The sullen faces around the conference table softened a little and many let out words of guarded congratulations to the scientific crew. Forrest acknowledged his old friend’s excitement with a smile. “Your years of hard work have paid off then, Lou. Please, go on.”

Fredericks ran a hand through his hair, not really sure where to begin. “As you know, Sir, we aimed the beam carrying Phoebe as accurately as we could to arrive within a secure part of the White House grounds, the theory being that when the beam struck earth, she would materialize in that place.” His face broke out into a wide grin, and he made two fists, unable to hide his elation.

“Well, she did it, Will – sorry, Mister President! You have before you the reports for November 17, 2034 – the new reports, that is. If you take the time to read them, you will see that Senator George Peters was asked to explain how he managed to smuggle a dog past White House security on that day. This did not happen in original history, Will. It happened because *we made it happen!*”

Forrest shook his head in amazement, enjoying his friend’s success. Many of those present wondered at the scientist’s ability to call the president by his Christian name, but Forrest allowed the slips to go unchallenged. Fredericks continued explaining, his voice rising with jubilation as he began quoting one of the articles.

“...Senator Peters denied all knowledge of the animal, even though it was found wearing an outdated identification disk bearing the senator’s name. No internal electronic identification chip was found within the animal. We did it, Mister President! That’s irrefutable proof. We did

it!”

With the necessary proof furnished, the mood around the conference table metamorphosed into one of elation and amazement. For more than eighty years, governments of the US had been secretly working toward this goal, but to have finally achieved it seemed almost unbelievable. After the initial shock had sunk in, Lou Fredericks used the president’s next question to begin steering him toward the next goal.

“So what happens with this new toy now Lou?” Forrest's voice hinted at his fear.

In his jubilation, Fredericks missed the subtle signal. “I’ll come right to the point, Sir. We want to send a man back. With the information she has compiled from previous testing and now from yesterday’s test, Tegan assures us that it would be safe to send a man back - even as far as the middle of the last century.”

Will Forrest’s stomach tightened at the thought, and he frowned with apprehension. “Safe for whom, Lou?”

“Sir?” So elated was he, that Lou Fredericks could barely see the risks.

“Lou, what happens if we go doing that? I’m not even talking about the safety of the individual we send back there. What are the possibilities when we do that? You know the old story Lou, what happens if you kill your old self back there, or your grandpa, or me? The list is endless.” Forrest looked thoughtful and concerned. His true feelings were quick to surface.

The smile did not leave Fredericks’ face, but inside he was reeling at the negativity. “That’s why we’ve already taken the liberty of considering a possible scenario, Sir. May I?”

“Go right ahead Lou, but make it good!”

It was. Even had it not been brilliant, Lou was as charismatic as was the president, and if anyone could sell the idea, it was him.

“We propose to send a man who is old enough to have a good grounding in CIA training, say between thirty and forty years of age. We don’t have to risk sending him back to a time when he has already existed. We can send him all the way back to the 1950’s if we want to. In fact Tegan has predicted a perfect gap will make itself available in just over a month. We could send a man straight to 1954. He would have to see himself still as an agent of the CIA of 2036 of course.”

“That’s a faithful man,” interrupted Webberly.

“A very faithful man, Phil,” agreed Fredericks, nodding. “Anyway, Mister President, assuming that there are no adverse effects due to the actual time travel procedure, by the time he is born around 2000 or 2003, his former self will already be eighty years old. Even if he was still alive at that time, a good agent could be trusted not to interfere.”

“I’d like an army full of soldiers that good,” Brandon Clyde joked. His mood showed that he was keen on the idea.

“And what would you see as the purpose of this, Lou?” Forrest asked. “What would such a person have to do back there, other than not interfere with history?”

“Not very much at all, Sir. Basically just to report about the effects of time travel on his body, any changes, ill effects, and the like. And he could do that by simply placing small ads in a newspaper.”

“Tell me you’re joking,” mocked Webberly. “Are you gonna tell me that our national security should come down to a *For Sale* in the paper?”

Forrest ignored the question, keen to know Frederick’s thoughts. “Tell me why I should allow this, Lou.”

“I can’t fully answer that, Sir. Who knows? One day we may have to interfere with the past for the safety of our nation. I mean, what if the Chinese got the drop on us? Or someone else? I don’t know. I *can’t* know for sure, Sir – not at this time. As a scientist, and as Tegan’s creator, I’d have to say that I feel it would border on criminal *not to use* such a monumental discovery as this. I mean, we can’t just leave it now that we’ve found it, can we?”

A brief look at the hesitant face of Will Forrest brought an immediate qualification from Fredericks. “Of course, I realize that you may not agree with my feelings on that, Mister President.”

He played his ace. “But then I believe there is the one obvious concern that none of us should overlook, Sir. My greatest fear is that someone else will discover this technology. If *that* happens, we may cease to exist, or at least this project might. In that case, it would be good to have an agent or agents already situated in the past. We must not deceive ourselves, Sir. If we can make this discovery, an enemy may not be far behind.”

Forrest sat back, realizing the implications of what Lou Fredericks was saying. Lou, for his part was on a roll and he knew it. His expression grew with every sentence.

“Mister President, we should face the very real threat that someone else may develop this technology. If they then learn of our own work here, we could cease to exist in a heartbeat. We have yet to discover what, if any effects a person sent into the past could have on the present, but we surely should not be caught napping – especially when experimentation *now* might save us from catastrophe *later*. As I see it, the only possible precaution is to have our own people back there *in the past*, first. We should do what we can in anticipation of such a move.”

Forrest rested his elbows on the table and placed a hand to his forehead. “Firstly, I’ll take all your advice on board, but I will not promise you an open slather.” He thought for a moment.

“What’s your big hurry, Lou?”

“Will,” Fredericks began, his slip showing again his impatience and passion. He shook his head, annoyed at himself at using the president’s name again. “Mister President – in one month we’ll have the perfect gap, the perfect opportunity. If we miss it, it will be the last one for almost two years. That’s too long – an opponent might have the technology by then. Someone else could perfect time travel by then. We have to take the opportunity while we can, and stay ahead of the competition.”

Lou’s voice had risen in intensity and his excitement was clear. He suddenly remembered whom he was addressing and toned down. “I’m sorry,” he apologized. Then he added, “I’m begging you to consider.”

His ace paid immediate dividends. While Forrest felt a natural fear at the thought of interfering with what had already passed, he did feel an obligation to protect his nation by any means. His old friend knew him well. Forrest turned to face Paul Emerson, director of the CIA.

“You have any knowledge of time experiments by our opponents, Paul?”

Emerson nodded. “Nothing, Sir. Lots of threats, but nothing like that.”

Forrest turned back to Fredericks. “Even if such a plan was deemed possible or – dare I say it, Lou – wise, where would you get such a man? As I see it, he’d basically be going back to the dark ages with no way of ever coming home.”

Lou Fredericks pointed to a slim, young looking man seated at the table, five seats down from the president.

“Mister President,” he answered, “I’d like you to meet Dean West. He’s already volunteered, Sir.”

CHAPTER 4

Training for the next month for Dean West was intensive. No one was quite sure what he would need to know, but they wanted to teach him everything they could in that short period. Customs of the day, expressions, politics, the use of cash, how to survive in a non-computerized society – he had to learn it all in just one short month.

West made an excellent student, being quick and keen to learn all that he could about the new world he might soon be sent to. He set about learning customs and culture with a consuming passion. He was not, however, a brilliant history student, stumbling greatly in the field of remembering relevant dates and names prominent in the history of the twentieth century.

West began to see a reason to live again, something he hadn't been able to see since Angelina's death. He also began to resent Dwain Jackson and the CIA more and more. With each passing day he began to see the organization as a twisted, corrupt cancer. But it did not matter to him anymore; he would soon be free of all of them, one way or another. Either he would be dead or he would be living in a quieter time where no one knew his name.

But West also knew that President Forrest had still to give final consent to his departure. If Forrest opted to abort the mission at the last moment then West's escape might never eventuate. He knew there may never be another opportunity like this, and though not a 'believer' as his wife had been, he found himself praying feeble prayers in the hope of seeing his deepest hopes fulfilled.

Just one week before he was due to be sent back, West sat before his holographic mirror combing his hair, which had been cut much shorter than he would normally have chosen himself. He even had to learn to groom differently. He sat with the comb, thinking that there was really no need to use it when his hair was so short. He watched the image before him. It was a perfect three-dimensional replica of himself. Slowly the figure was rotating so that he could see his hair from all sides. He thought about how he would miss that sort of technology when he arrived where he was going. It was a small price to pay to gain peace and happiness.

He began to rise earlier each morning. Now there was a plan, a reason to live. He looked at his pointed nose. He had always resented that nose. It just didn't seem manly to him somehow – not like the one he had been born with. Then he thought of how he always began to stutter and hesitate when he was under pressure. Many a time when a difficult and stressful situation called for a calm, unwavering voice, West had failed; the best that he could offer being a broken answer, sprinkled with nervous mutterings of 'umm' and 'ahh'. But none of that mattered now. Freedom was close, and the chance for a new start might be just days away. He smiled. Things were definitely looking up.

West looked at the color photographs he had asked Cassie to print for him from the holographs he had of Angelina. As he looked at them, he suddenly found that they didn't hold the power over him that they had done for so long. His heart didn't break at the sight of her. Though the sadness was still there for him, it didn't hurt so much to think of her. At times he could even pretend to talk to her without becoming depressed. Angelina would have wanted him to go, to escape his loneliness and the corruption of the CIA. Angelina would have smiled and sent him along with her blessing.

Dean West sat back in a chair before the image, and picked up one of his most precious model planes. It was a scale replica of a warplane of the distant past, an F117. He caressed its

long, sleek black lines.

“Might get to see one of these,” he mused. Then he looked longingly at some of his other models. There was the mighty Mustang, among the last and definitely the greatest of all propeller driven fighters. Then there was the sleek SR-71, the greatest spy-plane of its time. Those planes held a certain to him, a sense of power and mastery. West loved them all. He pursed his lips and replaced the F117 in its place. He would have to leave his beloved model collection too. There were so many. It mattered not; he would be more than adequately compensated.

Then he gave a verbal command for Cassie to record a message; he had to leave something. There was little enough to show that he had ever existed, and West thought that since he would be the first man to be sent back in time that he should at least leave *something* behind. He could never allow anyone see his true feelings, but somehow it seemed necessary to record his feelings on a computer, albeit a computer message which he knew no one would ever take the time to look at. No one would ever care enough to know how he really felt. But it was a release for him.

He closed his eyes and began to spill forth his pent up emotions.

West was recorded in a two dimensional image. He expressed his anguish over Angelina, and how he had never let anyone know how depressed he really was. During his discourse West expressed too, his feelings about the CIA and the corruption he had witnessed over the years. There was the unfairness when it came to promotions, and the lack of any real regard for fellow workers in the organization. Then he went on to express his elation at being given the chance for a new start in the twentieth century, and the irony that the very organization he was so displeased with was the one which was to give him this new chance.

In completion West sat back and paused, still being recorded, unable to hold back his tears. “If I die in transit, then I die,” he said, “and I don’t care. Life here without my Angelina has just been unbearable. I’d rather go and be with her.” He rubbed his eyes.

“If I don’t die, then I go back for the greatest thing I could ever know. Who knows, maybe I can even make a difference back there? I haven’t made much of a difference here, but maybe in a new place I can do something good. Maybe you can read about whatever it was I did.” He tried to remember some small line from a speech he had seen recently in one of his many lessons about former governments. “Like the man said, “*Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country.*” Or something like that – I don’t remember exactly. I think Kennedy had it right. Maybe I can make a difference.”

He took one more look about his apartment, remembering its intolerable loneliness and pain without Angelina. Then he simply made a face and added. “That’s all from me.”

With that he ended the recording and leaned forward, resting his head in his hands as the

tears flowed. He was not over the grief of the past after all.

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One week later the US-TECH team had not received a definitive response from the president. The only thing they were closer to was the deadline at which the ‘gap’ would appear. Lou Fredericks and his team ran numerous tests using inanimate objects, doing their best to ensure the accuracy of Tegan, as well as to determine any possible ramifications. In the absence of a human subject though, they could not be sure of the outcomes. Fredericks presented his case numerous times, trying desperately to convince the president of the need to send a man through the gap while the opportunity presented itself. While Forrest was sympathetic, he was also afraid of the consequences of this course of action since no one could predict what devastation might be brought upon the world by such an act.

The gap would make itself available to them at 1:32 on the morning of July 1. At 11:00 p.m. that night, Forrest and his chief aides were at US-TECH to inspect progress, and to make the final decision. The president was apprehensive but calm as he listened to Fredericks and his team once more. He had heard all of the arguments before, but making the final decision was still an agony for him.

The scientific staff were all present, along with a stronger than normal security presence. Alan Lewis was ever vigilant. Dwain Jackson was also there, West imagined, to see him safely off the premises, and to make absolutely sure he was gone. A final meeting was held between West and the scientific and security staff to clarify his role. West was given various papers; a birth certificate bearing his name, and suited to where he was going, a substantial wad of counterfeit, organic cash, and some written facts which would mean nothing to anyone even if they were found. All of these things were printed on specially manufactured organic papers so that they could be transported using the Tegan process.

With Fredericks’ permission West was also allowed to take the photographs of Angelina. He placed them neatly into a pocket of his specially made cotton suit. All of West’s clothing had been specially made to pass through the Tegan process, and though his clothes felt a little different to what he was used to, they were comfortable and practical. With all of the preparations done, he was ready. The scientists prepared to send him on the assumption that the president would give his approval, stopping only before drugging him for the irradiation process.

West and the rest of the team waited in silence in the final moments as Forrest and his chiefs deliberated over the possible repercussions one last time. Soon it would be too late. Soon there would not be enough time for West to be ready to meet the gap. West stood by Fredericks as the

president came over to him to give his decision. Now came the moment of truth. West would be free or he would be imprisoned in a place and time that he had grown to despise. His answer came quickly.

Forrest's tone was low and reserved. His reticence was abundantly clear, but also overcome. "I cannot pretend anything that I hold anything but great reservations about this, Lou. You know that. However, at this time I feel that I must take the advice of those about me and concur that the dangers of inaction may outweigh the dangers of what we are about to do."

He hesitated, then added simply, "You may proceed, Lou." Amid the cheers of the awaiting team, the president then turned to address West. They had spoken on several occasions during the preparation period, Forrest keen to evaluate the younger man's abilities and state of mind for himself. The president's final words weighed heavily on West, who felt his body tensing at the realization of what he had committed himself to do.

"Well, Dean, what you are about to do has never been done before. I wish you well. But remember, you could do a lot of harm back there. Please remember that. There is no telling what damage you could do if you get tempted to mess with what has already happened. You are a brave man, West. Thank you for serving your president and your country in this way. God bless you."

Dean West smiled and acknowledged his president. He could not hide his elation. He was free at last. The team began scurrying away to do their parts even before he could give his reply. "Thank you, Sir. I'll do my best."

With that he turned and walked quickly toward the waiting scientists and the black room. Before he could enter it, he was reminded yet again by Lewis about keeping in touch via the media and by any changes he could bring about to official records.

"And remember, West, with each message we send you will be the time and place of the next one. You have the complete schedule of the gaps with your other papers and money. *Don't lose it!* Remember, if we you do, then you'll have no way of knowing when and where Tegan can send the next drop. You'll be able to talk to us, but we won't be able to respond to you. Understand?"

"I understand. They told me all this a hundred times, you know." West shook Lewis' hand. He understood perfectly.

Unable to resist the opportunity of having the final word, Dwain Jackson pushed his way through the crowd of scientific personnel. He spoke brusquely to West, sarcastically remarking that he would miss him, and then added the final cut. It was meant to hurt as well as to threaten. "Make sure you've got those photos with you, West. We wouldn't want you to forget where you

came from.”

Though the comment was spoken with acid, it merely served to solidify West’s resolve that escaping this place and forgetting it and its people was the best thing he could do. Besides, West could smile to himself. Jackson was just an ignorant pig – in more ways than one. He knew nothing of West’s true feelings about him or the CIA.

Preparations continued, and the entire staff waited with the president and his advisors. Tensions ran high as the final preparations were made. Forrest harbored many fears about what dangers might be unleashed by sending Dean West to the previous century, but his fear of that the Chinese or some other government might develop similar technology caused him to feel that he had no choice. He ached, convinced that it was his duty to keep the United States ahead of the opposition.

Lou Fredericks almost seemed to glow with satisfaction at the approval to send a man back through time. His face took on an elated look that could not be hidden as a lifetime of work neared its culmination. And though Tegan predicted complete success, her mathematical confidence did little to ease the churning of stomachs of all present. The stakes were considerable for all.

But Tegan proved accurate. Dean West was drugged unconscious for his radiation treatment, the computer settings were checked, and at 1:32:18 AM, there was a single and powerful pulse of light emitted from the top of the US-TECH building. Tegan then reported to a group of men and women who sweated in feverish anticipation that Dean West was no longer in the building.

## **CHAPTER 5**

Dean West struggled to regain consciousness through a heavy blanket of pain and tiredness that dragged him down again and again into the depths of sleep. Each time he surfaced from his slumber, he was immediately set upon by a stupor that he could not fight. It was like a massive hangover, which could not be shrugged off. In the back of his mind was the realization of the urgency of the situation, but foremost was the heaviness of his eyelids. He could not command them to open.

Time passed. It could have been minutes or hours. He could not tell. Eventually he felt the heaviness lifting, and though his eyes would not open at first, he realized that he was finally conscious, though deathly tired. His head pounded between the temples, adding to his hesitation

to move. As he struggled against the pain in his head, he suddenly realized how greatly his senses had been enjoying taking in the sensations of his new environment.

He was warm. That was his first realization. And there was a light breeze blowing over his aching body, bringing some relief to his stiff bones. West could hear the breeze gently flowing through his hair, and it was heavenly, quiet and gentle. He realized that he was face down. The ground beneath him was covered with soft grass, and he eventually became aware of its smell. The grass was sweet, not long cut.

In the distance there were faint sounds. One by one West was able to distinguish one from another. There was the sound of birds not very far off, and the rustling of leaves. Further away still was a dull roar which went up and down in pitch and volume every few seconds. It was a long way off so it did not pose any immediate threat to him, but still, he could not imagine what it was. And there was another sound beyond that too. It was a slightly quieter sound that also rose and dipped in intensity from time to time, and sounded like a far off wind.

Sounds! That meant signs of life! West suddenly realized that he could be found at any moment, or worse still, be run over or struck by something. He was jerked harshly from his peaceful dreaming by the sudden rush of adrenalin that came with the need for self-preservation.

West jerked his head up and rolled on to his side, opening his eyes wide as he did. Feelings came with a rush – and more pain. There was no movement anywhere near him, no danger. The adrenalin hit him with full affect two seconds later. So did the brilliance of the sun. Those sensations combined to strike inside his head with a new explosion of pain. He forced himself to look about the immediate area, and noting that there was no danger, closed his eyes again and rolled on to his back as he waited for the pain to pass. When it finally began to ebb away perhaps another minute or two later, he slowly began to sit up once more, allowing his body to move at a pace so that it did not aggravate his pains. When he completed the careful maneuver of sitting up with one arm stretched out behind for support, he rubbed his eyes with the other hand and slowly let in the brilliance. It took a while for the blurriness to wear off, but eventually the scene cleared and he was able to take in the world around him.

The day seemed like any other he had seen back home, but West had never seen such a large park in a city before. He had seen beautiful parks before but this one was greener, not burned like the ones he knew. He was staggered by its sheer size. He could not fathom such use of valuable real estate, even though it was undoubtedly the most beautiful place he had ever seen.

In the distance were many tall buildings, different to the ones he was used to. Most of the buildings were clearly made of bricks or concrete, strange enough in itself, but moreover, the windows were quite small and not connected. West was used to seeing the entire faces of

towering monoliths being reflective StrikeGlass, or shimmering holographic screen, but never bricks and mortar with small windows. The skyscrapers close by were shorter than seemed normal too, and while they appeared new, they looked strangely old.

At the far side of the park was a man sitting astride a ride-on lawnmower, driving it back and forth among the trees that bordered this park. It roared from time to time, and West recognized it as one of the sounds he had heard as he woke. He marveled at it for a time; roaring engines like that were only a memory to West, mere museum pieces. All machinery he had used ran on electricity, solar or nuclear power. West's mind marveled and spun, strange, bewildering sensations melding with the pain in his head.

Tegan had worked.

He was stunned, and sat still, staring and reveling in the fact that he was alive and that his wish for a new start in a new place had been miraculously granted.

The other sound he heard was quickly made clear to him too – traffic. In the distance West could see vehicles traveling in various directions about the city. But never had he heard the noise of them. He was so used to the almost silent running of the monorails of his own time, and to see these vehicles roaring about amazed him.

Finally his mind began to clear, though his headache continued to throb. He wondered where he was, or better still, *when* he was. Though he had trained for this moment, to suddenly realize he was no longer in his own time or place was mind-boggling. He sat for a long time, struggling against pain and disbelief. For the first time West realized that in the back of his mind he hadn't really expected to see this day.

West eventually composed himself and stood on shaky legs at the edge of the park looking for which way to go. He remembered that Tegan had aimed to put him in the center of the park so that he wouldn't strike anything on arrival, but she had missed it by about two hundred feet. He smiled painfully.

"Not a very good shot, Lou," he mocked. Then he smiled some more through a wall of persistent pain. His voice still worked, and his legs – and his sense of humor seemed to be intact too. He clarified his view of things to an imaginary Lou Fredericks. "Still," he groaned, "you seem to have got me here in one piece."

His head throbbed for an hour before the pain began to dissipate. West did his best to ignore it as he walked slowly, taking in all of the new sights around him. His head spun, no longer from pain but from the dizzying reality in which he found himself. It was like a dream to him – far more impacting than any holographic or virtual reality show he had ever seen. A new world opened up about him everywhere he walked, a slower world, and a world away from his

own. The excitement threatened to overwhelm him.

As West left the park and began to wander the streets, he began to pass his first inhabitants of the city. At first he was terrified, and stood quite still as the first one slipped silently by. Then came the next, and the next, and his reeling mind was dazed again as he saw that these ‘aliens’ were in fact looking people, pacing quickly toward their destinations just as those from his own time always did. A sudden question rose in his mind, and West wondered if in fact it might be he who resembled an alien. After all, Fredericks and his team had never tested Tegan on a human before – who knew what the process might have done to him? He made a dash to look at himself in a shop window. To his enormous relief he found his own, familiar face staring harmlessly back, barely a hair out of place. Perhaps he could forgive Tegan for her inaccuracies after all.

West’s greatest initial shock came some minutes later when he stopped to buy a newspaper. He had been sent back with a small fortune, most of it sewn into the lining of his jacket. It was easily enough to set himself up in a new life here in this new place. He found a twenty-dollar bill, the smallest he had been sent with, and approached the stand. As he began the transaction, West felt quite fearful. He had never done this before. He had seen motion pictures where money had been exchanged for goods, but to actually do it for the first time in his adult life was somewhat frightening for him.

He stood for a while, browsing and trying hard to look unconcerned and natural. Eventually the man selling the papers took the initiative. He was large and brusque, not interested in chatting, but only in making a sale. A cigarette hung lazily from one corner of the man’s mouth, and West wondered how long it had been since the man had bathed. When the man spoke West stood paralyzed for several seconds, the heavy reality of where he was smashing into his mind with full force.

“You gonna buy one of those or just read ’em, buddy?”

West swallowed, shocked not by the man’s tone or his words, but simply by the reality of the situation he found himself in. When finally West’s reply came, it was soft and hesitating. “Ah, ah, just a newspaper thanks.” The man took West’s twenty and shook his head, obviously annoyed that a smaller note, or change, had not been given. He shuffled with his fingers in a leather pouch for what seemed like an eternity to West, who wondered if he had done the deal correctly. When finally the large man handed West a fistful of notes and coins, West felt an incredible relief wash over him. He wasted no time in moving away from the newsstand.

With his paper tucked under his arm, West fumbled with the money he had been given, stuffing the notes into a pocket. Then he gazed at each coin in turn. He had seen such coins in collections, but never had he held them. He rolled each one, noting the year of manufacture of



each one. His mind began to spin again as each coin told its incredible story.

Slowly West began to pace away from the news-stand, paper and change in hand, realizing that he had just performed his first cash transaction. He sighed with enormous relief. But his greatest shock came when he unfolded his newspaper and browsed the front page. West staggered as he read, almost falling on to a park bench as he read. His eager eyes danced upon the page, and it took only a breath before he found what he was after. It was not the news which caught his eye, but something much smaller.

Dean West was stunned him to the core. He ceased to breathe for a time, paralyzed by shock. His eyes struggled to keep focus on the text before him as his hands shook uncontrollably. And then he knew – Tegan was a success.

The date on the front of the paper read August 8, 1954.

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It was almost a week after Dean West had been sent before Tegan detected any changes to the news records. When the alarm beepers sounded, indicating the change, Tegan immediately brought up the item on screen and anxious eyes poured over it. The team had been on tenterhooks since West had left, and now everyone came scurrying to see the news. They gathered around the screen as Lou Fredericks began to read, and a hushed silence fell over the group.

“TO ALL THOSE IN WASHINGTON WHO HELPED ME. THANK YOU. ARRIVED OKLAHOMA SAFELY AUGUST 8, 1954. PROGRESSING WELL. D.W.”

Fredericks was reading from a small advertisement in the personal column of the *Washington Post*. Even before he had finished reading, those present were erupting into rapturous rounds of applause and screams. There were shouts and whistles and the shaking of hands.

Fredericks himself clenched a fist and silently mouthed his approval. He took great pleasure in looking from face to face, seeing the tumultuous hubbub of glee. As the initial roar of happiness died down almost a full minute later, he was brought down a somewhat by the sight of the less than euphoric face of Warren Kriesler. While happy, Kriesler was not as exhilarated as his colleagues.

“Wouldn't you think he'd have said more? The whole idea of this thing is to find out the effects of the Tegan process, and all he sends us is a message telling us that he arrived. Nothing more, just – he arrived. We need more than that.” Warren Kriesler appeared disconsolate as he spoke, the tone in his voice rising slightly as he went on. Fredericks turned quickly to console his

friend, grasping him by the shoulders as he spoke in an excited voice.

“It’s okay, Warren! It’s okay! He’s there, don’t you see? He’s there! We did it! There will be time enough for better information later. Right now the important thing to realize is that he’s there and our work is a success! We did it, man! We did it!”

Fredericks still had Warren Kriesler by the shoulders, looking him in the eyes and trying desperately to get the man to catch the infection of his joy. Kriesler smiled, but was not completely placated. While he was excited with the rest of the team, he was particularly disappointed at the lack of real facts. Still, his smile was growing.

Feeling that his friend was satisfied, Fredericks turned his attention to the group. They were all still cheering and patting one another in victory. Fredericks raised his voice just enough to be heard over their cheers.

“I’ll be right back people. I have to make a video call.” Tears of elation were clouding his eyes. Elation and relief. All of the years of hard work and devotion had finally paid off. He could barely believe it himself. What he was about to do was sweet icing on the cake. “I have to tell the president!”

CHAPTER 6

DECEMBER 1954.

West was not a stranger to the east coast of the United States. Some of his childhood had been spent in Virginia, before his parents were killed in a car accident there. Returning now though, some seventy years before he had lived there was a strange experience indeed. He had traveled to New York and many places in between with his father, but now he found very little that he could remember. Of course there were a few of the same buildings and these were recognizable. Even in the third millennium these could not be dispensed with, though they were impractical and antiquated. Preservation societies had prevented their demise. But apart from the recognizable monoliths that still stood, there were few landmarks or structures which held any real personal value for him.

Still, it didn’t bother him. Life was good, even without such memories. Besides, West had decided that today he would make history of a sort. In the past months he had spent a small part of his fortune setting up a new identity for himself. The CIA had made all of the papers he would need to survive in his own name, and of course they were made to such a high standard that no one would ever be able to question them. They even managed to make the papers appear worn

and aged instead of new, should the appearance of brand new papers arouse suspicion. The papers were perfect.

But West had no intention of keeping them.

With his practical knowledge of CIA tactics, and in a world using archaic methods of manual data checking, it had been simplicity itself for West to manufacture himself a new identity. In his mind he had to know that the break with his past was complete and undetectable. Besides, he didn't trust the CIA or US-TECH. Rather, they had given him the best chance for a new start that he could dream of, and he was determined to protect it as best he could. At any time an agent from the future might appear from some dark corner and ruin everything by making outlandish demands of him, or even do him physical harm.

West quickly decided that all he had to do was to send them a few messages from time to time to keep them happy, and maybe even tell them that time travel had been detrimental to his health. That should keep them away. In any case, they had no way of ever finding him.

And so life was good. The pace in this new world was much slower than what he had experienced in his own time. People were more naïve in many ways, and yet wiser in others. Crime was a major factor in city life for Americans, but no more than where West had come from. Granted, it might be argued that society was mending itself in the 2030's, but much damage had been done over decades of decline in values, and this place still seemed preferable. There was a certain innocence amid the bustle. People were quite gullible in many ways, West found. They could not see where their society was headed with each concession they made, but it didn't matter to West. He had memorized the major catastrophes, so he could avoid those. He felt good.

The day was bitterly cold, with an icy wind that seemed to cut right through. West found the house number he was looking for and got out of the cab. He stood outside the house and wondered for one final time if this was a wise thing to do. He didn't think for long. The cold wind cut into him with a vengeance, forcing him on. He knew he could not endure the icy blast for long. Besides, he'd already been over and over it in his mind.

He stopped at the front door and took one last look at the driver's license in his pocket. It identified him as Dean West. West thought that if he was forced to identify himself, then better to do it with an identity he had no plans to use in the long term.

Suddenly he had a frightening thought that made him turn on the spot and search hurriedly up and down the street. The thought was confused and unclear. What if the people from the future had wanted to come for him? If West used his real identity and this meeting was ever reported and recorded, Tegan would be sure to know. He was suddenly quite afraid and unsure.

He wondered if he should knock after all. He didn't want to do anything that might jeopardize his new freedom.

West searched carefully along the street. The wind was cruel, coming in gusts, and keeping people off the streets. Then he had a thought which served to evaporate most of his fears, and he sighed with relief. If they were going to come after him then surely they would have been waiting there for him already. He rubbed his eyebrows, wondering if such logic would stand. Surely there was no danger. He shook violently, unsure whether from the cold or from fear. The possibilities were frightening and confusing.

As he turned back to the door to knock after looking up and down the street one last time, the door suddenly opened with a loud click. The wind pushed it with a little extra force than perhaps was expected by the person behind it and it was almost flung open. Someone had seen him through one of the glass panels by the door. In that second West felt sure that he had betrayed himself. Though only for the duration of a heartbeat, he was sure that it had been his own keenness to meet this man, and his unwillingness to be careful which had cost him his new life here. He jerked with fright at the shock of being caught.

But standing in the doorway was not a CIA agent. Neither was there a cop. It was just an elderly woman who held the door mostly closed while putting her head around to talk in an effort to keep out the wind. The old lady was harmless.

"What can I do for you, young man?" she asked. "Are you here to see the doctor?"

West was rattled for a few seconds, standing there in a dreadful wind, composing himself and searching for words. He shivered from nerves and cold. "Yes Ma'am. May I?" he blurted.

"The doctor is not very well. If you're a reporter then I think you'd best come back in a few days."

West replied quickly, an excitement in his voice. "No Ma'am, I'm not a reporter. I'm with the government, and it's extremely important that I speak with him. Please Ma'am, I've come a very long way." West braced himself as another cold blast caught him from behind.

The woman hesitated and then answered with a sympathetic voice, "Oh well young man, you can't stay out there and catch your death. Come on in." She opened the door and stepped aside to let him pass. When she had closed the door the sound of the wind was left outside, and West felt great relief. The old lady ushered him along the hall. After just a few paces she gestured for him to wait. It was a relief to be in out of the cold. The old lady moved on through the house talking to West as she went.

"I'll just go and see if the doctor will see you, young man."

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The two men sat together in the study. It was warm and West thought about how safe it felt. He was in a bookworm's paradise. All about him were volumes of books and papers, the heritage of a learned man, and his host looked very much at home among them. West's host belonged there amid all this knowledge; this man, this genius. Yet through it all the man at no stage showed any evidence that he was looking down on West intellectually. He was a gentleman and a good listener. The accent in his voice made it difficult for West to understand at times, and occasionally there was a word or term which was unfamiliar, but beyond that, West found Albert Einstein to be a pleasant host.

Einstein was ailing. His hair had lost its color, and the old man moved about with some difficulty. Occasionally he would cough into a handkerchief, the result of an infection, sounding quite ill. He probably sounded worse than he really was, West decided, but still he feared for the health of the man and his genius. Each time Einstein leant forward in another bout of raspy hacking it was torture for West, who was afraid that the man might fall forward, dead, at any time.

Of course, history said that Einstein would be around for another four months, so West really had nothing to worry about. Still, he couldn't get the fear out of his mind. Though he had proven to be less than a bright history student, West had made a point of memorizing the deadline for this visit. Time was running out and he knew that if he was to talk to Einstein, he would have to do it soon.

Albert Einstein sat back and eyed his visitor closely, rubbing his chin.

"But how can I know that what you say is true, Mister West? It's not that I don't believe you, but how can I be sure? And, why have you come to tell me?"

West was sitting on the edge of his chair, leaning forward to be closer to the old man. Only when Einstein coughed did West sit back. "I came to tell you because you predicted some of the founding laws upon which the process is based. You were correct about the speed of light being relative to time."

Einstein cut him off. "But I didn't really think man could ever overcome the barriers involved."

"But we have, sir. I am the proof."

"I'm sorry, but you are not enough proof, Mister West. Tell me of the future. Then perhaps you can convince me."

West launched into a spiel about history as he remembered it. He was moderately astute when it came to the history of his own time, but his twentieth century history was less than

comprehensive and at times, inaccurate. Accordingly, his impact on Einstein seemed less than convincing.

“They tried to teach me the history for this period,” apologized West, “but I just wasn’t very good at remembering it.” He rubbed his forehead, looking for excuses. “I think maybe my mind lost its edge when they sent me back.” His face became intense as he tried earnestly to convince the old man. “But everything I’ve told you is the truth.”

“Then tell me about the scientific discoveries, Mister West. Perhaps you can do that.”

Einstein listened intently as West told him of the various wars, the silicon and gaseous computer chips, the power of modern computers, man on the moon and Mars, diseases and various political events in history. It seemed only appropriate to add discoveries in aeronautics; stealth, speed, the super-jet age and anti-gravity – all subjects in which West possessed some prowess. His study of the last century’s aeroplanes proved a valuable asset.

To a man of Einstein’s intellect, West thought that the things he was saying would sound like science fiction at best. Instead, it seemed to capture the scientist’s awe and trust. West was not specific, but gave a basic explanation of chip technology and the satellite tracking which allowed authorities to track a person’s movements anywhere on the globe. Especially at that point did Einstein seem convinced.

“Could it be?” the old man murmured. He was nodding his head, beginning to believe his guest. He was suddenly in awe at how quickly the world would change. “Tell me that all of this is true.”

“It’s all true, Sir,” answered West, who ceased his discourse, realizing that he had successfully made his case.

The old man was quiet for a time, shaking his head. Then he looked up and directly into West’s eyes. His face was lined with concern. “How long ago did you come here – to this time I mean?”

“Only a few months.”

Einstein paused, thinking. “Why did you come back to this time? And why me? Why have you come to see me?” Clearly there was no longer any doubt in his mind that West was who he said he was. Now the old man was troubled.

“I was sent here to see if the theories worked – and they did. The government of the future is concerned that if somebody else gets the technology first they might try to change history. I guess you could say I am, shall we say, a safeguard against that happening. As for why I was sent to *this* particular time, it’s just that it was the only period they could send the beam to. Basically, I don’t have to do much at all here.”

Now it was the old man's turn to sit forward in anticipation on his chair. He perched on the very edge, getting in close to West, as though someone might be listening. "But why me?" he asked. "Why did you come to see *me*?"

"You are a very brilliant scientist, Sir. Some of your theories were the basis for the first work ever done on the Tegan process. You were, sorry, *are* almost a century ahead of your time in many respects. Your theories are still only really understood by the barest few." West paused, then pursed his lips as he added the more intimate truth. "In any case, I was not sent here, Sir. I chose to come. It was my idea. I just wanted you to know that bef..."

West cut himself off. Undoubtedly, there were some things that should not be revealed. "I just wanted you to know that you were right."

Einstein was brilliant. He was also intuitive. He hadn't missed it. "Before... I die?"

West did not answer. He did not have to. There was suddenly an unspoken agreement between them. West did not offer anything and Einstein did not ask again. He simply spoke a few soft words amid another rasping cough. "Death comes," he said. He did not seem near so interested in the exact date of his passing as he did with West himself.

"Young man, you must realize the gravity of your situation. Do you have any idea what damage you could do here? The future of mankind may hang in the balance because of your presence here, do you not know that?" He paused, holding up a hand to show West the rhetorical nature of the question. Then he sat back into his chair again, deep in thought. He coughed again and after regaining his composure, went on.

"Maybe not, Mister West. Maybe not. Your coming back here certainly poses extremely complicated questions, not the least of which would be, *What could a man with your knowledge do?* Since things have already happened once before for you, it may not be impossible to change history after all. It's just impossible to say. What happens if you kill your ancestors, Mister West? Do you cease to exist? What happens if you live long enough to meet yourself? These things become fields in themselves. But no matter what, certainly you must be careful. There is no telling what the consequences would be if you interfere with matters here."

"I have been made very aware of that, Sir. I am here as a spectator only."

"But can you remain one? Can you...? This is amazing, and frightening too. By merely coming to see me, you are already more than a spectator." The old man went into another bout of coughing. West knew that he would have to go and leave him to rest soon, and for that, he was truly sorry. Between the accent barrier and Einstein's sickness that day, there was no other choice. Einstein knew it too. For as long as he could he prodded West for news of the future; new creations, new scientific breakthroughs and news of the world as a whole; he was keen to

hear it all. His guest was equally keen to tell, though he did think it prudent to leave out relevant dates when he could actually recall them. There was no need though. His wise old listener possessed a keener fear than he did when it came to meddling with history. Even had he learned of some future date of importance, Einstein would never have dared tell it. He feared the price might have been too high to pay.

Einstein listened with childlike interest as West told of many wonderful and amazing secrets. He was completely captivated by every word. Truly he had been rewarded near the end of his life with a revelation which perhaps no other man would ever have. Eventually though, his body failed him and he was forced to see his guest out so that he could retire to bed for rest. As he saw West from his house, Einstein expressed his heartfelt thanks for the visit. His final words to West were a warning again not to do anything to change history. In exchange, West too swore the old man to secrecy. No one else must know of his visit.

There was never a threat of the old man ever giving away any historical facts. Had West only known, Albert Einstein was much more concerned than he himself was about the consequences of his presence. The old man rested in his bed, but his sleep was disturbed and fleeting. He dreamed, tossing and restless. When finally he regained his strength he sat on the edge of his bed for a very long time, thinking. While he could not betray West, he was desperately afraid of what the man's presence in this time might bring about. But there was something that could be done without betraying West or the world as he knew it, and he could not stand by and do nothing.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **US-TECH BUILDING. OCTOBER 2036.**

The scientific team was supremely confident of their ability to send someone or something across the time barrier now. They had received several reports from Dean West in the four months since they had sent him. These reports had been brief and somewhat disappointing in their lack of real information, but they were conclusive proof that the man had successfully been sent some eighty-two years into the past. The anticlimax now, it seemed, was that they were not allowed to breathe a word about their discovery to anyone. Like many monumental breakthroughs of the past, those who found them were denied the pleasure of telling the world of them.

The test scheduled for the day was by contrast a simple affair and with no human risk. As



part of ongoing tests to the Tegan experiments they were preparing to send another dog back to the past – this time seven years, and again to the White House grounds. A small gap would make itself available and it was considered a reasonably harmless way of further testing the effects of time travel on a living being. This time, however, the dog would not be given an injection to cause it to die after sending. Hopefully then, the dog could be tracked to see if there were any long-term effects on it due to time travel.

The dog was a one-year-old cocker spaniel named Jim. Again the tag was tied around its neck and a sedative was administered in readiness for irradiation. Fredericks acted mostly as an observer, watching on as his underlings carried out their tasks. In the past few years, and particularly as Tegan had neared operational status he had always been actively involved, lapping up the excitement of the TEGAN experiments. Today however, he was not. He stood back, allowing his second in charge, Warren Kriesler to take control.

Only at the very last moment before the dog was to be left alone in the black room, did Fredericks take an active role in proceedings, and then merely to check the animal's tag. He rolled it between his fingers, staring long and hard at the small disk.

"Are we doing the right thing here, Warren?" he asked, without ceasing to fiddle with the tag. "There is still time to change it, you know."

"It's alright, Lou. We've been committed to this program for most of our lives. There's no point in going weak on it now. Leave it, please." Fredericks nodded, his lips tightening. Deep down he was relieved, knowing that for the best results it must be done.

At the correct time, Tegan sent the dog back, and the team congratulated each other on yet another successful operation. Then all they had to do was to wait for the appropriate changes to the news records, which Tegan constantly scanned.

Tegan had predicted travel time to be approximately eight minutes, and that the dog would arrive in the White House grounds at two minutes before midday. Allowing time for the story to be reported at the end of the day, it was expected that any change to the recorded news reports of the day or to official records should come between two and three hours from the time the dog was sent.

That is why there was great surprise when the alarm beeper sounded just three minutes after Jim was sent.

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US-TECH BUILDING. 9:28 P.M.

When the alarm sounded for the second time that day on Floor 102, the team came quickly

together to hear the news. Fredericks and Kriesler had already presented all their imaginary scenarios to the team, but as usual were forced to confess that they had no idea what to expect. Tegan put the report on the computer screens for people to read, and a hush fell over the team as Fredericks read the message out loud.

DOG FOUND IN WHITE HOUSE GROUNDS - A SMALL BROWN COCKER SPANIEL MYSTERIOUSLY APPEARED IN A SECURE PART OF THE WHITE HOUSE GROUNDS TODAY. SECURITY STAFF FOUND THE CANINE AT MIDDAY, BUT JUST HOW IT ARRIVED IN A SECURE AREA REMAINS UNEXPLAINED. THE DOG WAS NOT IMPLANTED WITH A REGULATION PET IDENTIFICATION CHIP, BUT RATHER WAS FOUND TO BE WEARING AN OBSOLETE IDENTIFICATION TAG.

THIS TAG HAS IDENTIFIED ITS OWNER AS LOCAL SCIENTIST, DOCTOR WARREN KRIESLER, AN EMPLOYEE OF US-TECH IN WASHINGTON DC. THE INCIDENT IS BEING TREATED AS A BREACH OF WHITEHOUSE SECURITY AND IS BEING INVESTIGATED BY THE FBI.

The item was dated March 6, 2029.

The team murmured among themselves, trying to imagine what the outcome might be. Fredericks raised his voice above them as He addressed his old friend. “What do you say to that, Warren?”

“Well, Lou, of course I have no memory of any such thing.” He grinned as he considered his words. “If not for the fact that I trust Tegan’s ability to ensure against fakes, I’d have to say that the report was bogus. I mean – it never happened!”

“Ah, but Warren, it did.” Fredericks shook the hand of his colleague, smiling victoriously. “And we have proof that it happened. Now the question for us is to try to understand this phenomenon. Wouldn’t you agree?”

Kriesler remained thoughtful, nodding in agreement. “Yes I do, absolutely.”

Opinions were thrown about as the team attempted to understand the enigma. For many long minutes they remained locked in deep mental argument, each attempting to unravel the strange reality that history had been altered without anyone being able to recall the actual change. The diagnoses continued for almost an hour before a second alarm caused all present to cease their deliberations. Silence enveloped the group, including Fredericks who refrained from reading aloud again as Tegan brought it to the screen.

AS A FOLLOW-UP TO THE "WHITE HOUSE DOG" STORY, IT HAS BEEN REVEALED THAT SPECIAL AGENTS ASSIGNED TO THE CASE MAY HAVE ACTED OVER-ZEALOUSLY. SOURCES REVEAL THAT THE DOG'S ALLEGED OWNER, DOCTOR WARREN KRIESLER

HAS BEEN ARRESTED BY AGENTS OF THE FBI, AND THAT DOCTOR KRIESLER WAS IN FACT TAKEN IN FOR QUESTIONING, APPARENTLY BLEEDING FROM THE FACE.

AN FBI SPOKESPERSON HAS PLAYED DOWN THE INCIDENT, BUT A HOSPITAL SOURCE HAS CONFIRMED THAT DOCTOR KRIESLER WAS TREATED FOR A SMALL GASH TO HIS CHIN. DOCTOR KRIESLER WAS TAKEN FROM HIS WORKPLACE EARLIER TODAY. NO CHARGES AS YET HAVE BEEN LAID.

JUST HOW THE DOG APPEARED IN A SECURE PART OF THE WHITE HOUSE GROUNDS REMAINS A MYSTERY. THE FBI WOULD NOT COMMENT EXCEPT TO SAY THAT INVESTIGATIONS WERE CONTINUING.

Warren Kriesler stood in quiet silence for some time, as did most of the team. Eventually he shrugged and gave a wry smile. “Well,” he admitted thoughtfully, “this is a bit more than I bargained for. Any thoughts, Lou?”

Fredericks appeared as stunned as any of those present. The Tegan experiment had clearly put his friend in danger, and for the first time, the boss felt uneasy. Racing through his mind, along with a sense of guilt, was the contradictory reality that Warren Kriesler had never left the building that day, and therefore at no time had been in any danger. It seemed strange to him that at such an important time as this, that the only word which would really make itself heard inside his head was ‘myopia’.

Clearly their lack of foresight was a monumental.

Fredericks sat down by a terminal and breathed a heavy sigh. Kriesler continued looking directly at him, waiting to hear his thoughts. The team fell largely silent, with just a few muttering possible scenarios. Eventually Fredericks looked up and into Kriesler’s eyes.

“I am sorry, Warren. It seems that we may have put you in some danger.”

Kriesler shook his head. “No need to apologize, Lou. We all know the risks. Besides, I’m not hurt. The weird part of it is that I don’t remember any of it. There never was a dog. There never were any FBI agents, and they never hit me, even if there were any. This never happened. It never happened!” His voice rose just a little as he stepped through the logic of it.

“It did according to this.” Pamela Carter nodded, indicating the report on the screen before them. Kriesler looked around at the faces of the people before him, then back to the technician. “You have a theory?”

“Yeah, sure,” Pamela continued. “Warren, you never went back in time with the dog, but the dog did have an effect on your life. Isn’t it possible that history can be changed, but for those of us who never went back to do the changing, there is no memory of it? Just because you don’t remember it, surely it doesn’t mean that it didn’t happen, does it?”

“But you have no proof that anything has changed.” Kriesler was quick to answer. He did not want to believe that anyone could meddle with his past, even less if he had no recollection of it.

Fredericks addressed Tegan. “Tegan, check FBI records to see if there are any records of questioning Dr. Kriesler on this matter, please.”

The answer was immediate, Tegan’s voice soft and calm as always. “FBI records confirm that Doctor Warren Kriesler was questioned over the matter of a dog found within the grounds of the White House, Lou.”

“That’s not possible!” blurted out Kriesler. Pamela Carter approached him and held up her hands in a gesture for calm.

“May I?” she asked.

He nodded, keen to know the truth as much as anyone. “It’ll take more than theories and news items to convince me that anything really happened,” he protested. Pamela Carter ran her fingers through Kriesler’s beard, first on the right and then on the left. It was quite obvious when she found something, as her face told the story.

“Ever had any scars on your chin, Warren?” she asked.

“No,” he replied. “Not one.”

“You do now,” Pamela replied, “and it’s a pretty good one at that.”

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Alan Lewis looked slowly around Dean West’s apartment. As chief of security at US-TECH it had been no problem for him to gain entry. He had simply asked and Cassie had obliged by unlocking the door. Lewis had a naturally probing and suspicious mind, one of the attributes that made him so good at his job. He had no real evidence for a reason not to trust West, but Lewis often worked on feelings rather than facts alone. In a world run to the precision of computers, it was a rare quality and a valuable one.

Unlike Dwain Jackson who never made any attempt to hide his dislike of West, Lewis felt no ill feeling toward the man. But Tegan had detected a change to the news records just after the second dog had been sent back, and none of the scientific staff was able to explain it. The report was completely unrelated to the dog, occurring some hours before the ‘White House Dog’ reports. Some of the staff thought that perhaps there were laws at work which they did not yet understand. Perhaps the earlier story was brought about by some change made as a result of sending the dog. Perhaps it was pure chance. But none of it rang true to Lewis. He could not see how the time travel of the dog could have affected anything as far back as the previous century.

By the team's own admission, the light beam carrying 'Jim' would have still been traveling through space at the time of the first report.

Logic dictated that there could only be one reasonable explanation to Lewis, and he planned to examine all possibilities.

Looking around West's room did not offer any hints though. The room had been left neat and tidy, obviously the work of a man who wanted to leave things complete, knowing that he would not return. There were some photos of Angelina and West together, and a couple of Angelina on her own. Nothing strange there. Lewis had met Angelina many times. He thought about how sad it had been that she had died. Then he realized that he had never heard West mention a word about her death to him. Never a word. West had clearly never felt the need to talk.

"A very private man," noted Lewis aloud as he looked about. He studied again how neat the room was. "A very *neat* and private man."

West had left nothing out of place. Lewis slowly and meticulously went through drawers in search of anything strange. He didn't know what he was after, but he figured that if it was there, he would know it when he found it. He searched behind the photos for notes, under the pillows and all over the living room and bedroom. There was nothing. It made no sense to him. West had been a trusted and loyal employee of the company for his entire working life. There should never have been any reason to doubt him. And yet something gnawed at Lewis' gut.

Near the living room window the security chief saw several plastic model aeroplanes hanging from the ceiling. They were models of old planes; World War Two propeller driven fighters and some early stealth jets. Much of the avionic history of the twentieth century was represented in West's apartment. West had obviously assembled the models himself, as they were the type sold in kits. Lewis examined them, but once again found nothing strange.

Eventually he sat down at West's computer terminal and used verbal commands to begin viewing files. Had West made any serious effort to conceal files on the computer, Lewis knew that he would have to gain the services of an expert. While being quite adept himself at untangling hidden information, he knew his limitations, and guessed that his own abilities would not match those of an operator with West's prowess. However, he found no web to untangle. West had made no effort to hide anything.

As he viewed the files, Lewis discovered the reason for West's openness. There was nothing worth hiding. West's life consisted of few hobbies and little contact with the outside world if his computer memory was any indicator.

There was little to see. West clearly loved planes, especially warplanes. There were

extensive files on them, covering from earliest development to the latest. Also there were various other files which had been added to the computer's own memory, such as poetry and early automobiles and one on flower arranging. From his memory of her, Lewis guessed that this must have been one of Angelina's.

There were letters too, and personal messages they had written to each other, but once again, nothing strange. Lewis began to feel that he was prying into their personal lives as he read.

With the GEM chip computer it was impossible to erase data once entered. Lewis knew that if anything of importance had ever existed he would eventually find it. It was simply a matter of going through the menu of contents until he'd viewed it all. This was a task made especially easy since West had made no effort to lock the memory from outsiders. This fact alone tempted Lewis trust him all the more, and he found himself skimming through the contents fairly casually. Finally Lewis began to search through the various motion recordings the couple had made over the years. As before, he found nothing notable in them.

He saw Angelina, still young and beautiful as ever, talking to West in romantic tones. Then there was West's reply. All innocent recordings. Lewis felt very sorry for West. It must have hurt to lose her.

The recordings continued for some time; short and broken fragments of once happy and personal lives. Lewis noted that West had watched these recordings many times in the months before he had left, requesting that Cassie project them as holographic images. Clearly West had never truly parted with Angelina. There were no secrets from the computers.

Lewis waited patiently as the couple's personal recordings passed, trying not to pry. He found it difficult, wondering at what point it was no longer acceptable to pry into a person's deepest and most cherished memories, based on no more than a hunch.

Any such hint of guilt was soon forgotten. Lewis found the final entry so captivating that he forgot all about prying. West had recorded it less than a week before he left. Lewis sat back and listened intently as he watched West's face on the screen. The face was intense, pouring forth emotion. West was leaving his farewell message to the world.

It was obvious that West was in anguish over Angelina, and yet Lewis had never seen that in him, other than perhaps in the first weeks following her death. It frightened him that he had worked so close to West for all that time and had not seen the continuing, hidden pain. Lewis became more distressed as he saw the hatred for the CIA become so apparent in West's face as he told of his disgust at their methods. Lewis agreed that the CIA could be ruthless, but surely any organization charged with protecting the nation had to be hard. Surely West knew that?

Lewis sat in silence as he saw the sadness and bitterness at the unfairness of life in West's face. Losing Angelina had cut him to the core, deeply affecting the man. It was as though he equated the death of his precious Angelina with what he considered the 'cancer of the CIA'. Lewis became afraid. West clearly held the CIA in contempt as 'dishonesty and corruption personified'.

"You didn't mind using their equipment as a way of escaping," mused Lewis. He began to wonder just how much West could be trusted.

Lewis watched West's final words and the expression on his face with fear. He felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up, and the shock go through his body as his blood ran cold. West was displayed in life-like image before him – sad, calm and very bitter, telling the world what he was going to do.

*"Who knows, maybe I can even make a difference back there? I haven't made much of a difference here,"* sobbed West, tears of emotion pouring down his face. *"But, maybe in a new place I can do something good. Maybe you can read about whatever it was I did. Like the man said; "Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country." Or something like that – I don't remember exactly. I think Kennedy had it right. Maybe I can make a difference."*

At that point the recording ended, as did the computer's list of motion files. Lewis sat in a stunned silence, the words of a long forgotten president echoing in his head, and the fear of what it might mean shouting at him to do something.

He did not sit in silence for long.

## CHAPTER 8

### US-TECH BUILDING. OCTOBER 2036.

Lou Fredericks stood poker-faced at the head of the table, not speaking of taking his seat until all were present. The scientific staff were not due for a group meeting, so curiosity had been aroused at the request. It seemed apparent that the discussion would center on the events of the previous afternoon, but Fredericks was stern, and had not confirmed it. Alan Lewis and Dwain Jackson took their seats and waited in stony silence.

When the last had taken his seat at the large table, the entire group became enveloped in a heavy silence, negating the need for Fredericks to call the meeting to order. Without looking up from the papers he had before him, he addressed the computer.

“Cassie, have Tegan put on line.”

The reply was immediate. “I’m here Lou.” Tegan’s voice was deceptively calm, given Lou Fredericks’ obvious tension.

“Tegan, please record the following discussions and take relevant notes and prepare a copy for myself and the appropriate personnel.” Then he sighed and changed tone as he addressed his team.

“We all saw what happened yesterday when the dog arrived in the past bearing Warren Kriesler’s name. And you’re all aware that Warren now sports a scar he did not have until yesterday. It should go without saying that the implications for us are...” he searched for the best word. “...Staggering. We need to formulate and record what it is that we have learned about the effects of time travel. We must know the dangers if we are to avoid them.”

His voice was full of gravity. “I think we’re all agreed that we now have the means to affect history as we know it. I doubt that anyone here doubts that now.” The team was in complete agreement. At Fredericks’ bidding they quickly assessed the situation as best they understood it.

As the discussion progressed, Pamela Carter became agitated. “So what happens if one of us is seriously hurt or even killed back there?”

“That is not going to happen,” countered Fredericks. “Pamela, I think we’re all agreed that we need to be very careful about any further tests we might make. And as far as Dean West is concerned, we sent him almost a whole century back. You aren’t even born yet! I don’t think that you need fear being harmed, Doctor Carter.”

Pamela Carter was not easily placated. Her face became lined with deep thought as she aired her concerns. “I concur, Lou. But what if, by our experiments, either we or our ancestors are harmed – what happens then? We should consider that.”

She was met with silence, the team either daunted by Fredericks’ vigorous defense of the matter, or because they were genuinely not concerned with the possibility. In the absence of support, or of any real evidence, Pamela withdrew, guarding her comments. The team seemed satisfied that, having sent only one man back in time, the risks were minimal and acceptable.

Warren Kriesler tried to allay Pamela’s fears. “I’m sure Dean West can be trusted, Pamela. Besides, even if he did set out to harm one of us, the chances are high that he would die of old age before we were to be born. I agree that there is a need for care here, but I believe we are quite safe.” Kriesler’s words were spoken with genuine concern, though Pamela was unsure whether the doctor truly believed them, or if it was merely an effort to placate her. Either way, he was sincere and conciliatory, and she did not resist him.

Illusions of safety were smitten though, when Alan Lewis began to speak. The team ceased



hypothetical deliberations and fell into an uncomfortable silence as Lewis revealed to them what he had found. They became even quieter when Cassie played West's recording. When the holograph had vanished, Lewis sat forward and spoke again.

"I don't think that this alone is proof that West is a – defector, or even a risk, shall I say? Maybe he's just a patriot and not a threat at all. But I do believe that this recording is grounds for great care, and should be treated seriously. I think West should be warned again of the dangers of tampering with the past – especially when we are not sure of the possible repercussions here."

"I think it's just the ramblings of a man who was upset about the death of his wife and just wanted to leave a farewell message." Lou Fredericks' tone left no room for doubt.

"Would you like to bet your life on it, Lou? Or all our lives?" Pamela Carter's inference was abundantly clear. Her boss did not answer.

"Well, what does it mean then, Alan? What *are* you inferring – the end of the world as we know it?" Warren Kriesler's question was a serious one, with not a hint of sarcasm. He rubbed the scar on his chin as though to emphasize his question. Lewis made a face but did not answer, his mute reply equally as serious.

Lou Fredericks would not be swayed. "It's nothing more than the ramblings of a lonely man who wanted to have the last word!" He spoke with some force, as though to say it strongly might somehow make it more correct. Suddenly Pamela Carter found herself less alone in her concerns.

Eventually, under Fredericks' direction and persuasion the team compiled their report. Along with their newfound knowledge of the effects of time travel, they outlined what they saw as the possible consequences of West's presence in the past. Then Lou Fredericks took it to the president.

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OCTOBER 5, 2036.

"Mister President, we have compiled a list of known information and threats as we see them." Fredericks pushed a document folder across Forrest's desk, then gave his aides each a folder and opened a copy for himself. Will Forrest opened the folder and perused the papers.

"Spell it out for me, Lou. I don't want to miss anything."

"Yes, Sir. As you know, we've been able to establish that we can actually change history as we know it – at least in the history books. We were able to institute small changes to the historical records, but without anyone actually remembering the changes having occurred. As you also know, the sudden appearance of a scar on Warren Kriesler's chin is a serious

development. It would seem to indicate that we could not only read about the changes we set in motion, but see physical effects as well. I would hasten to point out that this is not yet proven beyond doubt, though.”

Will Forrest gazed through his eyebrows in disapproval at Lou Fredericks’ obvious playing down of the situation. “I’ll bet Doctor Kriesler would argue about that, Lou,” he said. “Go on.”

“While the possibilities are enormous and admittedly, dangerous, Mister President, we have warned Dean West not to interfere back there, and so the risk would seem minimal. He will need to be warned again, of course.”

“This could become frightening, Lou. Just how big a can of worms have we opened, do you think? Perhaps we had better stop this until we know more?” Forrest was merely being diplomatic, leaving the channels of communication open between them. If he had been serious about closing Tegan down it would be done at his word, and they both knew it.

“I’m not so sure, Sir,” said Fredericks, desperate to keep his project alive. “We only know what we know because we have experimented. I am convinced that we should persevere with it Mister President – as a matter of national security. I’m still afraid of what might happen if someone else gets this technology and develops it first.”

“Don’t play that card too often with me, Lou,” Forrest rebutted. He squinted as he thought. “It’s the nuclear bomb threat all over again, isn’t it? And look how long it took to get rid of that curse.”

“There is another problem, Mister President,” admitted Fredericks as he twisted uncomfortably in his seat. He knew that he was treading on thin ice, but could not deny the truth. Instead, he quickly added a qualifier, as though it might appease the commander in chief. “Although *no one is certain* that there is a problem really.” He hoped desperately that by playing down the risk, he might convince Forrest not to impose restrictions on Tegan.

“Go on, Lou.” Forrest tilted his head down a little more as he spoke, looking through his eyebrows again, but his eyes never left the scientist.

“There may be a problem with Dean West, Sir.” Before Forrest could even react to the inference, Fredericks was holding up his hands in a gesture for calm. “It really may not be a problem at all, Sir! Alan Lewis was checking through West’s personal computer records. It seems that Mister West left a message which...” Fredericks baulked. “Well it can be read many ways, Mister President. Personally I see no harm in it. Others disagree.”

Fredericks went on to explain the fear surrounding West. With each sentence the president’s face showed a little more concern. Eventually Fredericks showed Forrest a copy of West’s farewell speech. At the end of it the president sat back in his chair and rubbed his eyes.

Though his voice was stern, he remained calm out of respect for his old friend.

“Don’t your people know how to check a man’s record, Lou?”

“But we did, Will,” Fredericks countered. “His record was perfect. Everyone involved with the project knew him. We had all worked with this man for years. He had never let on that there might be any problem. Besides, there may *not be a problem*. It’s all conjecture at this stage. We have no reason to believe West is anything but faithful to us at this time.”

“May God help us if ever we do, Lou.” Suddenly Forrest could imagine his worst fears materializing.

“There is one more thing, Mister President.” Fredericks barely dared to bring it up. The desire to play down the situation at US-TECH in order to protect his project was enormous.

“What’s that, Lou?”

“Well, Sir, once again, it may be nothing, but you should know. Yesterday when we conducted the second dog experiment, Tegan found a change to the news reports just a few minutes after the animal was sent. We don’t believe the dog could have had any effect on the past at that stage because it would have still been in transit for some time when the change occurred.”

“What was the report, Lou?” Forrest tried not to let the problems ruffle him.

“Well, it doesn’t make any sense. A news team was waiting at the White House for a word from President Eisenhower and they saw Albert Einstein. There is nothing strange in that, Sir. I believe the man was a regular in political circles. The strange part is that his visit was recorded yesterday, and it wasn’t recorded originally. It’s as though he made a visit he hadn’t originally made.”

“West went back to the time period when this happened, didn’t he?” asked Schwartz. It was the first time the aide had spoken, and his inference was very clear. It was also immediately echoed by the commander-in-chief.

“West?” Forrest asked.

“Yes, he did go back there,” Fredericks admitted, fearing the president’s reaction. “Ah, he went back just prior to it, actually. But we have no proof that it had anything to do with West, and we have no record that Einstein did or said anything to anyone that he didn’t originally say. It’s very strange.” The scientist looked puzzled, but not worried. “But once again I would stress that we have no real proof...”

“What other explanation can you give?” Schwartz cut him off.

Fredericks did not answer, except to shake his head. Annoyed though he was to have his precious Tegan questioned by a mere aide, he could not explain the event away, or even offer a

possible explanation.

“This gets more frightening by the moment, Lou”. Now Webberly was joining the fray. To Fredericks’ relief though, his tone was slightly more conciliatory. “What course of action do you recommend? Do you have any ideas about what to do if this man does become a problem?”

“Only very close monitoring at this stage. If we detect a problem later then I see two options.” Fredericks watched as the president raised his eyebrows.

“We could send messages back to the authorities of the time – get them to take care of West. That’s not a good option, Sir. It shows our hand. And even if we are believed, which is highly unlikely, West may have changed his name if he was planning this.”

“And the second option?” asked Forrest.

“We send back another man.” Fredericks waited, worried about how Forrest would react.

Schwartz made no effort to disguise his appraisal of the idea. He let out a dubious grunt. “And double the risk we already have.”

Forrest shook his head and rubbed his eyes again. “That’s not even an option, Lou. It would be a last resort. Absolutely a last resort.” The president stood and walked about the room, pacing and thinking. Fredericks and the two aides watched him. The two aides had been silent for most of the conversation, but now they began to speak up.

“Let us presume that, for a moment, West is prepared to do something stupid back there, Doctor Fredericks,” Webberly ventured. “Let’s say that this man decides that he doesn’t like you or me or perhaps the president. What happens if he goes back there and kills any one of us – back there? Or maybe he kills someone’s father, what happens then? Do we just disappear or what?”

“We just can’t say at this time, Phil.” It was a question Fredericks could not, and did not want to answer. “If you are asking if we are safe, I don’t know. I certainly believe that Dean West can affect our lives, yes. If he killed any one of us in the past, I don’t know if we would fall down dead or disappear or even survive it. I cannot know at this time.”

Conversation continued in this vein for some time. It was frank and at times, tense. Lou Fredericks wanted desperately to continue with Tegan, and pressed his case like a man trying to save the life of his child. He put his case forward strongly in an attempt to keep Tegan alive, becoming more desperate as he saw the battle swing against him.

In the end he lost, though not completely.

Eventually President Forrest took his seat again and clasped his hands behind his head as he leaned back. He was still hearing West’s computerized farewell speech in his mind.

“I’m sorry, Lou. I know this project means a lot to you, but for the moment you must scale

it back. From this point forward you may not send any more live specimens, only objects. And everything you want to do must be cleared with me. Do you understand?"

"But Will, we're so close." Lou Fredericks' face was bright red with desperate emotion. Forrest's tone, however, if not his words cut off the protest.

"I won't be swayed on this, Lou. That's the end of it. I need time." The president looked at the glazed eyes of his old ally. "And so do you. No more experiments without my express approval. We need to buy ourselves more time to look clearly at this. Am I clear, Lou?"

Fredericks nodded. He hated it, but he conceded. He had no choice. "Clear, Will."

Forrest read the disappointment in his old friend's face, but felt a strong resolve that it was the safest course. For now. He thought for a time, then spoke again. His words brought first a flush to the scientist's face, and then a glimmer of hope.

"In the meantime," Forrest said, "you can do two things for me."

Fredericks swallowed, heartily disappointed at the presidential order he had already been given. "What, W... Mister President?" he asked.

"First," the president demanded, "you can stop calling me Will in front of my staff." Fredericks pursed his lips and nodded. He tried to laugh it off, but was already smarting from the order to cease all major testing of Tegan. His spirits were lifted as Forrest made his second demand.

"And second, you may prepare a man to be sent back to stop Dean West if that becomes absolutely necessary." Forrest watched as his old friend's face metamorphosed, showing traces of hope again. "Don't misunderstand me, Lou. We're friends, but I'm the president and I can't be swayed on this. What I'm offering you will be a last resort only. I have no intention of sending anyone else back. You understand?"

Forrest paused, admitting his own vulnerability. "Lou, I sincerely hope we never have to send anyone else back there, but I'd be a fool not to be as prepared as possible, and I don't know what else to do."

Fredericks acknowledged the president's reluctance. Though shattered with disappointment at recent developments, he could see at least a small glimmer of hope. His face showed the mix of emotions surging within him.

"How long before you can get a man back there if you have to, Lou?"

"Another year and a half, Mister President. At that time Tegan says we should be able to get a man back to 1960. There will be other gaps around that time but they will not be as clear. If we fire the beam through belts of dust and solid matter, we risk the life of whomever we send, and we have no way of knowing what the risks might be. Anyone we send might be injured or

killed. Our best chance is to wait. At the moment, all we can do is send messages, and even those may arrive damaged... or may not arrive not at all.”

“Make your plans, then. But remember, no more tests without my approval, okay?”

“I understand...” Fredericks’ lips twisted in a half-smile, then he added by way of apology for previous uses of the president’s Christian name. “...Mister President.” Forrest returned his small gesture, sorry that their positions brought them into friction.

He had won a possible victory after all.

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“I’m really afraid of what might happen if I send another agent back, Carl.”

“Yes, Mister President, I agree. Fortunately that is a decision you won’t have to make for quite some time.”

“Yes, but the day will come. What a mess! I thought I was doing the right thing, you know. Staying in front of some of the dangerous fanatics in the world. Now I wonder what I’ve started.”

“You made the right decision, Sir. You’ll just have to see it through, that’s all.”

“Yeah” was all reply Forrest made. He stood gazing eye to eye with his aide for many long seconds. His mind was clearly elsewhere. It was some time before he spoke again.

“Carl.” Forrest’s voice was slow and contemplative.

“Yes, Mister President?”

“Carl, I want you to find an old friend for me.”

## CHAPTER 9

### OKLAHOMA CITY. MAY 1958.

Dean West was finding his new home in a new time to be a mixed blessing indeed. He enjoyed the slower and freer way of life. He had never known the freedom of being able to spend a day in the sun. He relished many days of carefree enjoyment in the outdoors; something that people of his own time could only dream about, or achieve under the burden of protective clothing.

As a negative, he found it difficult to find employment suited to his experience. West was a desk-jockey, and moreover, a computer operator. Plying his former skills in 1958 was not possible. While he had done moderately well in field training, it was a totally different matter to

apply himself to foreign tasks for prolonged periods of time.

Then there was culture shock. Even though West was an American, there were many strange attitudes and customs he had not foreseen. Some were grotesque, such as racial separatism, but some were small. And it was the small things that caught him again and again. Handling money was foreign to him. Mastering the archaic and labor-intensive banking practices was proved burdensome. Performing transactions on paper was slow and cumbersome.

Some of the apparently simplest tasks proved the most difficult, like the trauma of laundry. Such a simple matter had proven to be a frustrating and tedious operation to a man used to the benefits of an in-house laundry service. The daily task of feeding himself was a problem too, again because of the benefits he had enjoyed at US-TECH.

With the absence of the gleaming and swift city monorail to express people about the city, the matter of driving had quickly arisen. With an abundance of mistakes and near misses, West had learned to drive a car, though somewhat precariously at best. All of these minor tasks came simply to those who had grown up around them and learned as they went, but without experience or the benefit of a teacher, West battled.

Then there was his old and all too familiar enemy, loneliness. Even here he still thought of Angelina. She was never very far away. He thought it strange to be dreaming of a woman who would not be born for over forty years. But he missed her. He was on the adventure of a lifetime and he couldn't tell a soul. Most of all he couldn't tell Angelina. His tragedy had followed him, and it nagged at him continually.

Something else had followed him too. West's most despised enemy was alive and well, even here in what he had perceived as a more innocent and naive era. *Corruption*. It existed here as much as it had in the third millennium. He had hoped so desperately to escape it. With each passing day though, he could see racism and corruption all about him. It seemed especially rife in the police and political systems. West was heartily disappointed.

Perhaps the saving grace was that this era still held a certain innocence and slowness. The air was cleaner, the pace slower. It was enough to enable him to overlook the faults of the age.

Eventually West was forced to realize that there had only ever been two fields in which he had excelled. He was quite astute in the field of electronics, though this path was excluded now. Given some of the most sophisticated chip technology of his own time, West might have vindicated himself as a student of perhaps rare potential, but faced with the challenge of understanding the simplest valve technology, he was lost.

The second field in which West wielded real aptitude was in the field of information, statistics and evidence handling. In the 2030's he had been a clever desk-jockey indeed. It

seemed beyond belief to West that after he had tried and failed at various employment attempts since arriving, the only job he might have a chance of succeeding at was the very one he had fled in 2036.

West had made up his mind though; never again would he allow himself to sink to working with the dreaded CIA. It had become a problem of phobia proportions. He could not face the same again. It did strike him as sensible though, to try to acquire a job where he could ply his skills from the future, while still keeping his eyes on sensitive information, if that was possible. If anyone from the future was ever sent after him, then perhaps he could gain an early warning if he had access to a government network. There seemed only one answer.

With his advanced knowledge of information gathering skills it was not difficult. In time West secured a position with the FBI and was soon stationed in Oklahoma City. He quickly gained respect and trust as an efficient and bright worker. While not trusted with national secrets, it was nonetheless a start. Moreover, it was a task he could handle, and handle well.

The other major decision West undertook was to take on a false identity. This he did soon after arriving. Being an expert in the field of records and the manipulation of them proved an invaluable skill. It had been simplicity itself for him to set up a complete new identity. According to his new driver's license, West was now Danny Black, a thirty year old from Maine. When he thought of how skillfully he had been able to manufacture his new identity, West smiled. Perhaps he had something to thank the CIA for after all.

West did not inform US-TECH of his new identity. He still signed any messages with the initials 'D.W.', but began sending fewer and fewer of them. Foremost in his thoughts was his own paranoia surrounding the CIA of the future. Always lurking in his nightmares was the fear that someone from the future would arrive and ruin his new life. Life was good here and he was free of the old ways – the corruption and the lying of the CIA. If US-TECH thought that he was dying as a result of some sickness induced by the TEGAN process, perhaps they might hesitate to send back a second agent. He decided that this was the story he would propagate, and so set about sowing the seeds of deception.

West's decision to break off contact with home was cemented by chance and mistrust. Messages often arrived damaged so much as to be illegible, and on occasion, they did not arrive at all. When the eighteen-month period without a clear gap began, about which Fredericks had warned both Dean West and President Forrest, West became more paranoid than ever, wondering if US-TECH had forgotten him.

In his paranoia, West became convinced that they had deserted him. When he lost the vital "gap schedule" and then was unable to locate the following message, which also would have told



him the time and destination of the next, he lost all ability to receive information from US-TECH. Communication was broken and mistrust became enormous in West's mind. He decided to break contact.

His final message to the future was placed in the small advertisements as usual, and was detected on February 15, 2037.

*TO HIS FRIENDS IN WASHINGTON:*

*MR. WEST MADE VERY ILL BY THE TRIP. THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO HELPED MAKE HIS FINAL DAYS MORE PLEASANT. HIS FINAL REQUEST IS THAT NO ONE SHOULD REPEAT HIS FOLLY.*

*SINCERELY, D.W.*

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When Lou Fredericks read the message stating that Dean West would soon be dead, he felt a mix of emotions, as did those closest to the Tegan project. A rash of small anomalies in past months had swayed the team to believe that West was having an effect on the past whether he intended to or not. West had given no hint of unfaithfulness, assuaging fears for the most part that he might become unstable or a traitor. And while Tegan had detected some small changes to the news and official records of the time, West's impact had been negligible. In fact, there was contention as to whether or not West was the cause of the anomalies at all.

News of West's death was disappointing. To Fredericks the implications were enormous. Tegan had assured the team that the process was safe, giving a dose of radiation no more lasting than standing too close to a microwave oven. And yet Dean West's final message claimed differently.

Fredericks and his team, along with President Forrest and his advisors tried in vain to determine whether West had faked his death. In the end, they realized, West had given them no reason to doubt his integrity. Tegan remained in limbo as Forrest pondered the dangers of what might have been begun by their actions. There had been so many frightening questions arise from the project that Forrest was pleased to let it remain dormant. In the absence of further testing Forrest knew he would never know many answers, but for now that seemed a reasonable trade-off.

Not the least of those questions was the fact that Tegan had detected certain changes to FBI records. Most changes were subtle, and joined the long list of anomalies already mounting for that period almost a century ago. Some, however, had raised many eyebrows, such as an unknown employee who began working for the FBI in that same period. Only the mounting list

of small changes diverted attention from the ‘unknown employee’ question, and West was eventually given up as dead.

Furthermore, since the president had ordered that no other life forms of any kind be sent using the Tegan process, Fredericks had no other specimens to observe. West had been the only one. Experiments came virtually to a standstill. Since the presidential order was given, they could only theorize and speculate. Fredericks’ concern had suddenly become wholly for his scientific project, with little or no regard for the man he had lost. It surprised even him.

And so Tegan stood almost motionless and dormant for the next eighteen months. Stellar mapping continued as always, but with an order for the equipment not to be used, there seemed little point even to that.

Team morale stagnated during this time. It was a mind-numbing anticlimax to have beaten the time barrier and then not to be able to tell the world. Worse though, the team was not even permitted the pleasure of further experimentation. Their monumental secret remained a secret. Each day became as the previous. Tegan could report no change to the news reports because there were none to report.

The only person who appeared to take solace from the inaction was Will Forrest. He felt only relief. In his mind a national crisis of possible cataclysmic proportions had been averted. While he was moved by the death of Dean West, his passing had removed a very real threat; a threat with perhaps as much destructive potential as nuclear holocaust. The president had managed to avoid having to make decisions that posed as much terror for him as the problem itself.

CHAPTER 10

WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON D.C. FEBRUARY, 2038.

“What do you mean there’s nothing there?” President Will Forrest could not believe the report. “Of course it’s there.”

The two committee representatives stood before the president’s desk looking apologetic, but full of resolve. Being the bearer of bad tidings was never an enviable task before one’s president, and this was no exception. Forrest's aides, Schwartz and Webberly stood by silently along with chief of CIA, Paul Emerson and FBI director Zechariah Massey. No one was looking particularly cheerful, least of all the two committee members. Everyone knew that this was a subject close to the president’s heart.

"I'm sorry, Mister President, but there is simply nothing new there. Of course we haven't had time to go through all the files in detail yet, but you asked for a preliminary finding, and the fact is, Sir, that we can find nothing new."

Forrest's voice lowered. His disappointment was contagious among those present. "But files of that importance can't just disappear," he argued. "There has to be *something* new there. People have been waiting seventy-five years for this." He rubbed a hand through his neatly combed hair, ruffling it.

"I've waited most of my life to find out the truth about the Kennedy assassination, gentlemen, and you tell me *it's not there*. By law we have twelve months exactly to go through these files and then we have to report to the people. What are they going to think if we tell them the files don't hold any new information? They'll say we are lying."

"I'm sorry, Sir. We'll keep looking. If there is anything there, we'll find it, Mister President."

"This can't be happening." Forrest glanced at his advisers, his heart sinking within him. Each one gave a look of uncommitted ignorance. No one was volunteering anything. "After all these years are we to be cheated?" Forrest could not let it go. "They locked up all this stuff and told the people that it would be made public in seventy-five years. So, where is it? Paul?"

The CIA chief had no answers. He simply shrugged. Fortunately, he knew he could not be held accountable for the deeds of his predecessors. Carl Schwartz interrupted, taking the heat off the nervous committee members.

"Explain just what you mean again will you, David."

"It's just like I said, Carl. There are no new facts in the Kennedy files. We've spent a month going over what is there, and so far we can't find anything new at all. It's just a repeat of all the old stuff. Believe me, there's nothing new." The committee representative glanced from one face to another, then tried to make himself feel better by repeating himself. "I'm telling you, there is nothing new. Oswald still gets the blame."

"That's a load of rot and we all know it." Forrest's face made his feelings an open book. The truth he had waited for would never be his to share. He was deeply disappointed.

"Are you quite sure that you couldn't have missed anything, David?" The CIA chief's question might have been seen as an insult to the man's professionalism, but given the circumstances and the company, it was a subject that David Pearson was not about to debate.

"Absolutely sure. There were no mistakes, Paul. However, as I said, a detailed analysis has yet to be done and may take months. Perhaps there will be something else we just haven't found yet. My personal view though, is that it isn't there."

Forrest gave a conciliatory smile. “Not your fault, David. There’s nothing you can do. If the information isn’t there, then you can’t find it. Not your fault. It’s just that I’ve waited a very long time to know the truth about it – that’s all.”

“Many of us have, Mister President.” Paul Emerson tried to offer a positive note. “Anyway, Sir, as David said, a more detailed analysis may turn something up.”

“I don’t think you believe that any more than I do.” The absence of an answer from the CIA chief clearly showed that Forrest was correct. He turned his gaze back to the committee members.

“There is something you can do.” Forrest said, looking again to David Pearson. “I want you to keep this news to yourself. Don’t let the press know what you’ve found, or rather, haven’t found. They’ll be after a result soon enough. Don’t let them know before their time.”

“Of course, Mister President,” David Pearson responded. “Goes without saying.”

When the committee members had gone, Forrest sat down and looked again to the men present with him. “We’ve been cheated,” he said. He sat back and rubbed his eyes, the disappointment sinking in. He had waited so long to know the truth. Wondering about Kennedy had eaten away at him, and would not go away. Now it seemed that he, and the world, would never know the truth.

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## **APRIL, 1962.**

Dean West was enjoying his job with the FBI in Oklahoma City. While the department still showed signs of corruption, which inevitably come with an organization of that size, West was largely insulated from the worst of it. Besides, he had seen worse corruption while working for the CIA in his own time.

With his new name, Danny Black, and his new life, he was happy. West had decided that he would be ‘one of the good guys’ – whatever that might mean. He had made a new beginning – one that Angelina would have been proud of. Now it was time for the world to see the new Dean West, or Danny Black, as the name might have it. Surely that would be enough to shake off the old bonds of loneliness and feelings of worthlessness that had dogged him.

He began doing charitable things for people. Simple things. He would open a door for a woman, as was largely the custom of the day. Something about the age of chivalry appealed to him. He gave to the poor now and then, finding that he could make himself feel better by helping people. He avoided giving to well known charities on the chance that US-TECH might detect it, and thus learn that he was not really dead.

West began to see himself in a different light, and he wished Angelina was there to see the kind of man he had become; generous, a part time helper of the poor.

As he stood on a street corner one afternoon, West watched an elderly woman stooping to help a homeless man. No longer in the prime of life herself, she struggled to help the aged man to his feet, then dusted him off and began speaking kindly to him. West was captivated.

He fought back tears. That was exactly what Angelina had been doing when she had been killed. As tears clouded his view, West imagined his dear wife in place of the aged woman. He moved closer to hear what she was saying, then listened intently to her kind words and offer of a meal. The old man swayed and listened, dazed and weak.

As the old man's bearded face began to nod in pitiful thankfulness, West found himself choking back a well of emotion. This is what Angelina had done! Seeing the helplessness of this poor, ragged old man, West could see why she had been so intent on helping the needy. He was suddenly quite overcome.

Quickly he stepped forward, not willing to miss the opportunity to help the old man and moreover, to honor Angelina's memory. West joined their conversation and began helping the two along the street. By afternoon's end he had paid for a meal for all three and then left a generous sum of money with them.

As he wandered home, smiling to himself, he thought about what a liberating experience it had been. That feeling was lost when he read a notice in the newspaper two days later. The small article was a "*thank you*" notice, placed by a woman who was herself a helper of the poor, and was addressed to "*the unknown generous man*" who had kindly donated the sizeable sum of money to the poor.

## CHAPTER 11

### US-TECH BUILDING. FEBRUARY 20, 2038.

Tegan detected the change to the news records, setting off alarm beepers that made staff come running. There had been little reason to be enthusiastic about their work for many long months, with the project put on hold by the president. To suddenly have an alarm sound was a long awaited, though unexpected event.

The message was short and simple. It was be a simple "*thank you*" notice to an unknown person, and it made no sense. On its own the message may not have been sufficient to tip the scales of logic, but in unison with other small anomalies, there seemed to be only one person who

could be responsible for the presence of such a message.

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“West is still alive, I’m tellin’ ya!” Lewis was adamant.

“The evidence would certainly suggest that you’re correct, Alan.” Fredericks’ tone was as noncommittal as he could make it. As much as he didn’t want to admit that there might be a problem, he could not pretend it didn’t exist. “But if he is alive, why did he tell us he was dying?”

Dwain Jackson had no doubts. “Because he’s a traitor. I think he’s decided that he’ll just get along without us. By telling us that he was dying, he knew that we would let him go without a question. In his final message he told us that he was sick because of the trip back there. He’s just trying to scare us off sending anyone else. He’s alive alright.”

“Is it possible that someone else has developed the technology and has sent a man back to 1962?” Kriesler’s question came as a shock to all, and after examination was dismissed. In the absence of intelligence suggesting that other nations had developed the technology, it did not seem possible. Most did not wish to consider such a possibility.

“No! It’s West, I tell you. Jackson was confident.

“Could he have developed amnesia of some kind? I don’t know - some kind of time travel sickness, maybe? Something that is affecting his judgment?” Pamela Carter knew it was feeble and hopeful, and most unlikely.

“No.” Like Dwain Jackson, Lou Fredericks was sure beyond doubt. “Tegan is positive that there would be no effect like that, as long as the gap we sent him through was clear. And it was very clear, I assure you.”

“Well then, I think we have to assume that we have a loose canon.” Jackson managed to hide his vindictiveness beneath a veneer of patriotism. “I’m sorry folks,” he qualified. “But I think you have to consider that a very real possibility.”

“I hate to admit it, Doc, but Dwain has a point. Remember Einstein’s visit to his president? That still troubles me. What made him do that?” Lewis’ ordered and logical mind demanded sensible answers, ones which could be arrived at using deduction. Somehow he was able to remain unemotional and removed from the situation, searching for the best answer without labeling people.

“You think West?” Fredericks asked.

“It seems a strong possibility, doesn’t it? Look, let’s assume West has faked his own death. For whatever reason, it sure doesn’t look like he wanted to continue a working relationship with

us, does it? Let's presume the worst for a moment then." Fredericks' face grew black with distaste at where this path was leading as Lewis continued.

"What if Dean West really has turned against us? Maybe he hasn't. Maybe he just likes it there and doesn't want us coming after him. I don't know. But you said yourself, Lou, that much of your work was based on Einstein's own theories. What if West went to talk Einstein into making sure that his own work on the subject was destroyed?"

"Not possible, Alan." Fredericks did not want to hear it. "Our work went way beyond anything Einstein documented back in its infancy. And besides, Einstein's work was just that – well publicized. It was a matter of public record for the most part. It would have been impossible to destroy it."

Lewis ignored Fredericks' defense, continuing on in his train of thought. "And what if Einstein in turn went to Eisenhower..." Fredericks became white with fear as Lewis continued.

"The original Time Travel Trials were instituted in May, 1954 as a secret government experiment under the administration of president Eisenhower – Einstein's president!"

"Surely you don't really think Einstein went to ask Eisenhower to shut it down?" Kriesler tried to step through the logic, considering all possibilities along with Alan Lewis.

"Yes! Of course he did!" Jackson joined in the deliberations.

"That *would explain* the mystery visit." Lewis was not pleased to say it, but the truth was more important to him than covering for Dean West. Besides, it was logical to him, and to Lewis, logic was what mattered most.

Fredericks lifted his face as he made his request. "Tegan, check for any changes to CIA records as well as news media records." The response was almost immediate.

"One change detected for December 18, 1954, Lou. President Eisenhower reported to the Time Travel Trials executive to advance with care. Doctor Albert Einstein had been to see him and had asked him to cancel the project. President Eisenhower rejected the request. No further information given."

"So, Einstein *did* want the project stopped." Lewis' revelation was more than Fredericks wanted to hear. "But only after West had been to see him, we presume."

"West has cut off contact with us and asked Einstein to get the project cancelled." For Dwain Jackson there was no other explanation. "You can bet he's scared we'll send someone back there after him."

"Why would we do that? And if we did, why would he be afraid of us? We are on the same side." Warren Kriesler's question reeked of naivety in Dwain Jackson's view.

"Maybe," corrected Jackson, "and maybe not. You're presuming that he *is still* on our side.

Maybe the fact that he's broken contact with us means that he's up to something and doesn't want us to interfere." Jackson spoke the words with cold efficiency, managing to hide his dislike for West.

"No way. No," argued Fredericks. "We have told him again and again not to interfere with anything back there. He won't do that. He knows better!"

"Let's not panic here folks," cautioned Lewis. "We have no proof that West intends to do anything."

"But the risk is there," cautioned Jackson.

"There has to be a way of checking on West," Lewis said, searching for answers. "Tegan, check for any records you can where you would detect a change - FBI, CIA, NSA and police especially, but any records at all."

"Checking Alan, but without pre-existing copies of the records you want, I will be unable to discern a change."

"Try anyway," came Lewis' response. Tegan was already obliging.

"No changes detected, Alan." As always the voice was calm and feminine.

Lewis glanced at Fredericks, who nodded in the affirmative. "Continue to scan until further notice, Tegan."

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## **FEBRUARY 28, 2038.**

President Will Forrest tried all his adult life to act with honor and integrity, something which in his powerful position, that had not always been easy. There were always those who expected him to bend his principles; those for whom compromise was the order of the day. But Forrest desired to act as an honorable man, and as best he could, he did.

To be seen as less than honest was a body blow for Forrest. When the media learned that there would be no new evidence from the opening of the JFK files, they would be sure to cry foul, labeling Forrest and his administration as liars who would not release the truth. The prospect grieved him.

There weren't many free moments in the presidency. Always another engagement, another priority, another decision. He knew the role when he accepted it. Conversely, there was no point in being at the top if he couldn't demand something as simple as a few moments aside for a personal project.

All his life Forrest had waited to find out the truth about John F. Kennedy. Now he would never know. Even as president he was powerless to find out. If the facts had been destroyed,



then they could not be re-invented. In his rise to power, Forrest had endured many hardships. While these events helped to prepare him for the responsibilities he now bore, they had introduced him to the pain of disappointment many times. Going before the people and admitting that the remaining JFK files were useless would be painful.

People were naturally suspicious of politicians, even relatively trusted ones. Telling the masses that the evidence was gone would not be a popular move, but it would eventually have to be done. If only the people could know how much he wanted to know the truth himself, Forrest realized, they would not judge him so harshly.

President Forrest leaned back in his leather-upholstered chair in the Oval Office. Fredericks had shared their belief with him about Dean West being alive and well in Oklahoma. For a while he considered asking Lou Fredericks to send West to Dallas to record evidence of the assassination and preserve it for him. But when he considered West's recorded farewell message, which included a quote from John Kennedy, he dismissed the thought as impossible and dangerous. He was keen to keep Dean West as far from Dallas and John Kennedy as possible.

Forrest dreaded the thought of any further trouble being caused by the TEGAN experiments. The whole subject had become a silent, nagging fear in the back of his mind. He sat cherishing a few moments of peaceful contemplation. Though the subject was distasteful, the rare moment of undisturbed silence was not. He stared long and hard at the report in his hand. Any documents that might have shed some light on the JFK mystery were gone. The official report of its day, the Warren Commission Report was erroneous at best, and a blatant cover-up at worst. A senate enquiry some years later had also failed to shed much light on the events of 1963.

Several copies of original documents accompanied the report, the edges of which were now yellowed with age. The typing was not uniform, having been a product of a manual typewriter of the day. At any other time these documents should have represented a priceless cache of information to anyone with an interest in history, but they did not. Rather, the aura of interest seemed defiled, foul. There emanated a stench of corruption that would once more deny the world of the truth.

These papers were not the product of history, but of a vile and deceitful element of the past. It was an element which made Forrest ashamed and angry. The people would probably never believe him when he would tell them that the truth could not be told.

One document did catch the president's eye. Perhaps it was the fact that he had been thinking about Dean West and the Tegan program which brought it to his attention. Forrest studied it with great interest. He read the paper over and over, wondering if there was a greater significance than met the eye. After he had studied the copy of the aged document for a

considerable time Forrest called Carl Schwartz.

“Carl. Come in. I need you to change to my schedule as soon as possible. I want to see Lou Fredericks and the team at US-TECH as soon as possible.”

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Fredericks knew that whatever the president’s motive for the visit, it had to be serious. At first mention of the visit he felt a new spark of hope. Even if there was trouble in the making, a presidential visit might spell some action in an otherwise stagnant program. He tried to imagine the grounds for a restart.

All eyes were on President Forrest as he drew out papers from a folder. The team sat in eager silence, keen to hear of any possible easing of the presidential order that had halted their groundbreaking work.

“I’ve asked for this meeting because I’ve come up with a new piece of information which might prove pertinent – maybe life-saving. I’ll ask you to listen carefully and give any possible theories you might have. Perhaps it means nothing, but if it does matter, we need to establish that now.”

No one spoke as the president continued.

“This has just come to my attention. I have here a copy of a document dated Friday, November 1, 1963. For those who are unaware, that’s just three weeks before President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. What I’m holding is a presidential order, made by Kennedy, ordering the immediate and total end to all experiments into Time Travel by the United States. It seems that Kennedy didn’t believe the project would ever come to anything.”

“He goes on to express the high cost of the research as the reasons for disbanding it. Strange though, he also ordered the program totally dismantled and destroyed. It would seem that Kennedy thought the research too dangerous to be allowed to continue – not just too costly.”

Forrest had their full attention. He raised the paper and quoted from it. All the while, Lou Fredericks could feel an uneasy nagging in the pit of his stomach.

“It my opinion that this program should not be reopened at any time in the future, and to that effect, I hereby order the total dismantling of all associated hardware. Furthermore, I also order the secretion and storage of all research materials and documents resulting from the Time Travel program.” Forrest lowered the paper and stared from one face to another.

“This news is disappointing, Mister President,” ventured Fredericks, “but forgive me – how does it concern us? We all know that Kennedy was shot and the program lived on. It would seem that Kennedy’s successor must have rescinded the order.”

“Yes, Lyndon Johnson did rescind the order. My concern is this; why did Kennedy feel so strongly that the program should be stopped? I mean, this went beyond saving a few tax dollars, don’t you think? Kennedy didn’t just want an expensive experiment halted – he wanted it totally annihilated. He saw it as dangerous.”

Alan Lewis slowly began audibly voicing his thoughts. “Yes, and we already know that Einstein made a visit to Eisenhower, Kennedy’s predecessor. We *have* to blame West for that. It’s the only thing that makes sense. The only one who could have gotten Einstein to do it was Dean West. Then West tried to fake his own death. Could it be that now he has gone to Kennedy and tried to get him to stop the experiments too?”

“Hardly likely,” Fredericks argued. He did not want to hear of it. “And why would he?” It seemed unthinkable to Fredericks that anyone in their right mind could even think such a thing. He dismissed the suggestion as ludicrous, in the feverish hope of dousing the line of thought.

“I don’t know,” answered Lewis, “but it sure makes sense. Maybe he’s lost his mind. Maybe he’s worried. I just don’t know. But I must admit I’m having my doubts about Dean West.” Lewis tried to fathom why Dean West would have reason to fear the people from his own time.

“It seems possible to me that West’s presence back there might be more of a danger than we thought.” Forrest was clearly nervous about the matter.

“Will, I...” Fredericks desisted. To continue to defend Tegan in the face of such possibilities could only make him appear blind or unwilling to listen. He thought it better to be a diplomat. “Mister President, I think you must admit, at this stage it’s hard to foresee any real threat. We all know that with Kennedy’s death the experiments lived on.”

Lewis’ eyes widened as a grim possibility became more nagging in his mind. “I think I see where you’re going with this, Mister President. The Tegan experiments have proven that you can change the past and that it has a *very real* effect on the present, whether we remember it or not.”

“Your point, Alan?” Fredericks instinctively became defensive.

“What if West really has broken allegiance with us? I don’t know why, but what if he has? What would happen if he actually took it in to his mind to save Kennedy? What happens then, Lou? I mean, it can’t be too hard for a man with even a vague knowledge of history to save President Kennedy from assassination. What would happen then? We all heard the recording of West quoting Kennedy – I mean, just the fact that he quoted him surely tells us that he admired him, doesn’t it?”

“It’s a stretch, Alan,” Fredericks countered. “And it’s a whole lot bigger stretch to say that quoting Kennedy means West is going to try to save him – and betray us. It’s absurd.”

Fredericks' staunch refusal to consider such possibilities proved insufficient to sway those present. When weighed against logic, and with President Forrest being the one to raise the doubts, the mood of the meeting became cautiously somber. The grim possibilities shook the world of the scientific staff to its foundations as, for the first time, they were faced with the repercussions of their work. The team, along with the president and his advisors were stunned as the potential depth of the problem struck home. Faces showed fear as each person came to realize that possibly their very existence was in danger.

"Oh my..." Fredericks fell silent, struck dumb, his defense of Tegan momentarily paralyzed.

"If West saves Kennedy, then Kennedy's presidential order will take effect. This entire program could cease to exist. Where does that leave us?" Lewis asked. He continued to speak as he stepped through the logical progression. "If West admires Kennedy, then I suppose it's possible he might try to save him. If that happens, the whole time travel experiment thing will cease to exist. And if that happens..." He glanced about him, not needing to complete the sentence.

"What would happen to us?" The tinge of fear in Pamela Carter's face was clear, but she was looking to people who were equally without answers.

Fredericks placed a hand over his mouth, then said quietly, "I could lose a life's work in a moment."

"You could lose your *life* in a moment," Lewis corrected.

Fredericks wanted to debate the issue, but in good conscience knew that he could not. In principle he agreed with the logic put forth. Arguing had become impossible. He closed his eyes, trying to hope that the scenario would ever eventuate.

"Mister President, if I may," Lewis offered cautiously, "without having had a lot of time to think over this matter, I believe the threat may be very real. I'm probably speaking out of turn here, Sir, but it seems to me that you believe the threat is real enough, or you wouldn't have come to us today."

In the absence of a response from Forrest, Lewis continued. "If I may be so bold, Sir, perhaps we may need to act quickly here. Shouldn't we at least look at... a backup plan?" Lewis knew that he was standing on shaky ground, but he couldn't help himself.

"I'm listening," Forrest acknowledged. "Just what would you suggest, Alan?" The words brought a silent glare from Lou Fredericks, a mix of disapproval and hope. Somewhere deep down the scientist could see a glimmer of hope for Tegan.

"We may need to stop West, Sir," Lewis explained. "I mean, we don't even have any

concrete proof that he intends to save Kennedy, but I don't believe we can sit back and do nothing while we find out. At the very least we should initiate some kind of contingency plan. I hate to say it, Mister President, but I think we should at least consider sending back a second agent to stop West, should the need arise."

Forrest was silent, and for a while no one dared to speak. Everyone knew he was against such an action. Fredericks' scorn toward Lewis began to dissipate at the realization that his security chief might just have opened a door of opportunity for Tegan.

"We could make things worse by doing that," Forrest replied. He was fishing for suggestions, and the lack of resolve one way or another in his tone was clear. Lou Fredericks felt an enormous rush of hope.

"True, Sir, we could," acknowledged Lewis. "But the price for doing nothing may be incalculable. The penalty for not acting must surely outweigh the risks by an immeasurable factor. Surely it's a risk we must take – or at least consider, Mister President."

President Forrest was silent for a time before turning his gaze upon the team leader. "What about you, Lou? What do you think?"

Fredericks nodded long before he spoke, purposely delaying his response in an effort not to sound over-eager. "It could be done, Sir, and it *does* makes sense." He was immediately supported by others in the team, each sound off opinions in turn.

Forrest felt tense about the suggestion, but something in the calm, thoughtful opinions of those closest to the project buoyed him. Most steadying were the carefully weighed views of the security chief, Alan Lewis.

The room eventually fell silent after Forrest had given ear to a multitude of opinions and possibilities. Those present waited as they so often had done in the past while their commander-in-chief considered all things that had been offered to him. He rubbed his eyes with a large, black hand as he thought. In the end, his answer came as an offhand comment, rather than a definite answer.

"It's a dangerous thing, and for some agent it would be a one way trip," he said slowly.

"There's always someone willing to do it, Sir," Lewis assured. "I'll consider it myself if it comes to that."

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Within twenty-four hours Fredericks was visiting the president's office. Quite familiar with the oval office now, he no longer stood in awe as he had done in former days, but entered with purpose and a brisk stride. Taking a seat as the president gestured, the scientist wasted no time in

getting to the point.

“Tegan has been able to calculate the relationship between when events occur in West’s time and when we learn of them, Mister President. It seems that the relationship moves on a curve. As time goes on for West, the time lapse between when he does something and when we learn of it is ever decreasing. More study will confirm it, Sir, but it appears that eventually we’ll be able to monitor his movements much more closely than we can now.”

President Forrest did not appear entirely assuaged. “Let’s hope by then that we’re all still here,” he replied.

Fredericks nodded, having considered the situation at length and now sharing the president’s fear. “Tegan also tells us that there are just two gaps through which we may send an agent after West, Mister President. After that, it will be too late. The first gap is in thirty-five days and...”

“Thirty-five days!” Forrest interjected. “I’m supposed to make a decision which might save all of us in what – a month?”

Fredericks did not answer the rhetorical question, but continued. “In thirty-five days, yes. That’s when we’ll have the clearest and safest route. The gap will be at its best then. At that time I am sure beyond doubt that we can place a man safely in March of 1960.” He waited for a response, and in the absence of one, continued. “The second gap is in sixty-one days but is not nearly as safe. The astronomy records for this period are incomplete and there is the possibility of interference by small, uncharted dust particles. It could result in the death of the person being sent. It would give us the extra time to prepare, but the chances of a man surviving the gap are, shall I say, risky at best.”

“You think we should send a man through the first gap, Lou?”

“Yes, Will, I do. I believe we can make it if we act now.” He leaned forward in his chair and spoke in an almost hushed voice to drive his point home. “If you’re going to authorize this, thirty-five days is definitely the best time to go. And yes, I really do believe we should go through with it. It’s not just because I want to use Tegan, Will. I’m your friend, please believe me. It’s more than that. I’ve thought a lot about it, and I believe sending a man back now may be our only chance to make sure Dean West doesn’t interfere back there. If he does, then heaven help us all...”

“Quite,” agreed Forrest. His response surprised Fredericks, as did his next question. “Who would pick the man?”

“I would like to have a hand in that decision, Will, if you would permit me. I believe that it should be someone who is familiar with the Tegan project. There isn’t time to retrain someone from scratch. Besides, we have been preparing since you first gave permission, and I believe we

have just the man. He even knows West personally – he'd be a good choice."

Forrest's face showed some distaste toward the idea, or perhaps to the idea of Lou Fredericks getting to choose the agent. Fredericks was not sure which it was that made his old friend so unwilling to show his true feelings. Still, he could see that Forrest was feeling pressured over the matter. He guessed that the president would feel he had no choice but to act. He was correct.

"Very well then, Lou. You may make your preparations." Will Forrest's black face showed concern, and a business-like manner that was clearly meant to overshadow their friendship in the decision. "But be aware, Lou, I reserve the right to cancel this thing at a moment's notice. I'm not terribly happy about getting any deeper into this than we already are, but I think we both agree that there may not be much of a choice anymore. Sending someone back there may well be the best answer, I'll concede that. But if I change my mind then it's all over. I take it you understand that?"

"I understand, Will." Fredericks' face showed considerable relief, something he was unable to hide. "And thank you."

"You may prepare, but that's all!" Forrest nodded his head, aware of the toll the matter had taken on their friendship. Fredericks nodded in return. It was the best concession he'd had in over eighteen months. Unable to hide his joy, he began gathering his papers to leave.

"Before you go, Lou, I want to ask you something else." Forrest leaned back in his chair, deep in thought. "Since I've followed the advice of you and your team, and allowed you this concession, then I may as well tell you what else I'm thinking."

The small smile slowly ran from Lou Fredericks' face as he wondered what it was Forrest was balking at asking. It was out of character for the president to hesitate in this manner, and in his nervous state, the scientist could only imagine that it would be negative.

President Forrest held up two large restraining hands to show his old ally that he was not about to renege on what he had already offered. Fredericks breathed an audible sigh of relief as Forrest spoke again.

"Relax, Lou. There is another matter I wish to present to you."

## CHAPTER 12

Dean West was devastated when he saw the *thank you* notice in the newspaper, a notice clearly meant for him. There was no doubt in his mind that the people at US-TECH would see it

and would now come after him. The first few days after the notice appeared were the worst. He was barely able to eat. From behind any corner he imagined an agent from the future might spring. He became terrified.

He could see no other way to save himself. He would have to run. West knew that the people at US-TECH would need to wait for an appropriate astronomy gap; that they would not be capable of putting a man just anywhere, or at anytime of their choosing. They would only be able to send an agent to a time and place that the gap would allow. The difficulty was that the gap problem might not slow them at all. What really mattered most was *what year* they could send an agent to. If an agent was sent back prior to West's present day, that agent might already be prepared to pounce.

Still, his other best hope was the knowledge that the gap through which Fredericks and his team had sent West had taken him close to the limit of their ability. He could remember Fredericks explaining that because of the gap limitation, no one could safely be sent back prior to the 1950's. That fact was his best ally.

West had to presume that coming after him would be a priority for US-TECH. And since they hadn't already had an agent waiting for him up to now, he concluded that the necessary gap hadn't yet appeared, and probably wouldn't. Still, he dared not delay a day longer than was necessary. There was no way of predicting when an agent might be sent back for him.

He still possessed a large sum of the money given to him by US-TECH, and that would see him through. He wondered where would be the safest place to hide. He began to appreciate the fact that he had started out his new life with the fake identity, Danny Black. That was the one other factor that might give him a fighting chance.

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US-TECH BUILDING. MARCH 2038.

Alan Lewis was against the decision. Fredericks had offered the task of traveling to 1960 to him, but of course he had rejected the offer. Fredericks had always known Lewis would decline, being a family man. And while Lewis would have been a very real asset on this mission, he had only been asked as a matter of courtesy. What happened after that concerned Lewis greatly.

Limiting the choice of agents to those who were familiar with the Tegan process had of course, proven too restrictive. However, there were clear advantages to sending such an agent. With the secrecy surrounding the mission and the limited time in which to choose and prepare an agent for the approaching astronomy gap, the field was greatly limited. Several competent agents were automatically excluded due to metal implants within their bodies. Officials found

themselves with days rather than weeks to choose an agent, with the daunting task of training such a person looming before an ever-approaching deadline. The field quickly been narrowed to just two men. One was a regular CIA agent with a trusted record, the other was a US-TECH employee. Both agents shone in field experience, and wielded a considerable knowledge of history, and neither had family to tie them to the present day.

Eventually it was the US-TECH security agent who was chosen, his familiarity with the Tegan experiments tipping the scales in his favor. Added to this, he had personal knowledge of Dean West. In every way he excelled as the man to send. Security Chief Alan Lewis, however, was troubled and opposed the decision vigorously. In his opinion, Dwain Jackson may have held too negative a view of Dean West to remain objective.

While Fredericks agreed that there may have been some tensions between West and Jackson, there was no denying that Jackson was the most qualified for the job, and considering the nearness of the gap, he saw no better option. Few could compare with Jackson in field experience and ability. Most persuasively, Jackson was actually keen to go. Lewis was forced to give up his protest under duress.

Dwain Jackson was keen from the first time the possibility was offered. He maintained that it would be his greatest test yet of his ability and resourcefulness as an agent, a fact with which no one could argue. He dismissed any possibility of aggression toward West, a façade he was able to maintain given that he had never overtly persecuted the man. While disliking West, he had been wise enough not to make his feelings public. When questioned on the matter by Alan Lewis, Jackson had scoffed, noting vigorously that he would not give up life in his own time to travel to 1960 to pursue a vendetta.

Alan Lewis maintained his disapproval until the end. But in the end, he was overruled. Dwain Jackson was given every assistance to prepare for sending.

When it came time for Jackson to go, President Will Forrest and his aides and chiefs were on hand to oversee the event. Forrest talked with Jackson at length, taking much effort to see that Jackson understood his fears. Ever since the decision had been made to send Jackson, Forrest had insisted that he undergo rigorous psychological testing and training, warning him again and again about the dangers involved. In spite of Jackson's exemplary record, Forrest always remained apprehensive. In the absence of choices though, he also found his options limited.

While the president held the final power, he believed that his best chances of success lay in following the advice of those he trusted. He also knew that no matter what his decision, he would always wonder if he had acted wisely. It troubled Forrest to realize that by the time he knew the answer to the questions in his head, it would be too late to undo the damage done.

And so, Dwain Jackson was sent. There was no fanfare, no send-off. No party. On April 1 there came a single pulse of light from the top of the US-TECH building and Dwain Jackson ceased to exist in the year 2038.

Emotions ran high. Fredericks remained feverish with hope; hope that all would be rectified and his project would live on. Lewis was angry and disappointed that Jackson, a man who he believed might have been antagonistic toward Dean West had been sent back to correct a matter of such delicacy, and that his opinion had been disregarded. The president remained, for his part, concerned to the point of torment. Tegan assured safe passage for Jackson, and while Fredericks predicted that his man would be more than capable of rectifying the 'loose cannon' problem, his faith did little to appease the gnawing tension within Will Forrest.

Sleep escaped the president as he struggled with the realization of the need to deal decisively with the problem he had initiated. The real dilemma was that in attempting to bring the situation to a peaceful and safe conclusion, he may well set more destructive wheels in motion. It was a Pandora's box situation – until the lid was open, no one could know what damage might be done. It had been his decision to send West. Now it was his responsibility to do everything he could to bring West under control, and to bring the fiasco to a safe end. While he battled with the idea of sending men back in time, effectively preventing them from ever returning home, he knew it fell short of suicide missions. At least there was a good chance they could live through it.

President Forrest felt an underlying peace about the next decision he made concerning the Tegan problem. It was a difficult decision, but with considerable prayer, it seemed a wise one. Forrest began to wonder if it was the decision he should have made all along.

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After nearly two weeks of debating whether or not to resign his position with the FBI, West had calmed considerably. He had been careful in every detail to date, so he felt confident that US-TECH would not find him. West took a hotel room away from his regular apartment, telling no one of the change. He began carrying a revolver at all times, keeping it well concealed. If they ever did find him, they wouldn't take him without a fight.

His fraying nerves began to relax. Certainly it seemed that he would have to make a break if he was ever to be safe, but the desperate feeling of urgency began to die away. For the moment he was safe. He could make his preparations over the next few weeks to leave.

West was so efficient at his profession that when FBI agents from Dallas, Texas needed help from the Oklahoma office, it had often been West they were directed to. West proved very

helpful, having been assigned to them for as long as they required him. West hoped that if ever he was forced to run, that perhaps such friendships might prove a source of help. The way those agents spoke of Texas, West thought that perhaps that would be the place to run if ever the need arose.

## CHAPTER 13

### **OKLAHOMA CITY. SEPTEMBER 1960.**

Dwain Jackson was enjoying his new home to the utmost. 1960 was wilder than he had imagined. He had awoken from a deep sleep in a flat grassy field, with the worst hangover he had ever known. Dazed and lost, he had followed the directions given to him by Tegan before he left US-TECH, and as usual Tegan had been correct to the letter. He had walked westward until he came to a road as predicted, and then hitched south until he found himself in Phoenix, Arizona.

From there he rented a car, and drove until he arrived in Oklahoma City. It was logical to begin the search for West there, since that is where Tegan had placed him originally. Having arrived though, he found himself unhurried in his quest to find West, as there was plenty to see and do, and plenty of time to do it in. Everything was a new experience.

The vehicles of the day, the technology – or lack of it – everything was antiquated and slow. People were different too. Like West, Jackson found people to be gullible and unsophisticated by standards of the third millennium, and yet strangely street-wise. People were naive, especially in country areas and Jackson had never seen that anywhere. Subject to violence and the threat of treachery for much of his life, he had become hard and cold, so that when he finally did meet genuine and trusting people, they seemed very strange to him.

Like West, Jackson had been sent with fake papers and a small fortune in cash. Jackson was in no hurry – after all, he was there for life. He traveled for months, trying to get a feel for this strange place with its strange ways.

Obtaining no results from his own efforts to find Dean West, he decided to search in Washington DC, where Einstein had reported to President Eisenhower. He tried the same approach there with the same results. Still, result or not, Jackson was enjoying himself greatly. He felt very much above the people around him. They had no idea who he was, but he knew much of their nation's future. It gave him a sense of importance and power, and of superiority.

Eventually though, with no answers, and knowing that the people at US-TECH would be

waiting anxiously for results, he decided that it was time to take a more aggressive approach. Jackson had always enjoyed being a field agent for the CIA and decided that by following up on his career, he may also open the best avenue in his search for West. He traveled to Washington again, this time to apply as an agent, but was flatly denied even an interview. For a while he considered using 'who he was' as a lever, but that course of action had been strictly forbidden him by Fredericks and the government of 2038. Fredericks knew next to nothing about field operations, but in this case Jackson thought it wise to follow his advice. Jackson enjoyed his freedom, and to be constantly probed for information, as he knew he would should he reveal his true identity, would prove too stifling. He would heed Fredericks' advice, at least for now.

From there he traveled north, thinking that he would take time for a look at the northern part of the east coast – a part of America he had never been. Jackson wanted to see the big apple before it was quite so big. He tried to imagine what the city would look like with its two enormous Trade Towers, buildings, which to him had already come and gone, felled by terrorists in his youth.

On the night of September 26, Jackson lay back on his bed in the rented room of a motor inn outside Kingston, New York. Jackson watched in glorious black and white on a small television screen as John Kennedy and Richard Nixon thrashed out their differences in the battle for votes. Jackson smiled and shook his head when he considered what he knew to be the relatively short political careers of both men. He watched in wonder at the poor quality television picture and listened to the equally poor sound reproduction.

He was enjoying this century, and a large part of the pleasure came from admiring how primitive it was. In his own time such a telecast would have been a lavish affair, presented in surround sound and with life sized holographic images.

"You tell 'em boys," Jackson said in a soft voice to himself, mocking the apparent futility of it all, "but I can tell you what's going to happen." He smiled. It gave him such a feeling of superiority, knowing that he knew the future of their plans, and much more.

His enjoyment was abruptly interrupted by a knock at the door. Jackson had always been a careful and resourceful man in his former field days, and he hadn't changed. Turning the television volume down until it could just be heard, he took an automatic pistol from the bed and approached the door. He stood to one side in case a blast should come through the door, and then asked who the caller was. He was expecting no one.

"Eric Colton, CIA. I need a word Mister Jackson."

Jackson was surprised by the reply. This was not something he expected. They had rejected his application point blank. He wondered why they had followed him. "What is your

business?” he asked.

“Police tracked you for us Mister Jackson. I’ve been sent with a message for you. There’s no trouble, Sir.”

Jackson carefully opened the door, at first just a little. All the while he kept his pistol hand behind his back. Everything seemed safe, so he allowed the man to pass, never letting him see the weapon. When the man was inside, Jackson glanced across the parking lot, and seeing that all was clear, closed the door. Only after checking his guest’s identification did he reveal the automatic, which he tucked into his belt. The agent was taken back when he saw the weapon, but said nothing.

“You can’t be too careful,” said Jackson, smiling sarcastically. Colton showed faint traces of annoyance, but did not reply.

“What’s the message?” asked Jackson.

“I’ve been sent to tell you that your application has been reconsidered. Somebody from the CIA office in Washington took a look at your credentials and changed their mind.” The agent was not interested in making friends and more than Jackson was. He took a piece of paper from his suit pocket and handed it to Jackson, who unfolded it and read it.

“That’s who you need to go and see,” Colton explained. “Be there within forty-eight hours or forget it. That was the message.”

The note simply bore a handwritten name – Pierce Hunter.

“Tell ’em who you are and show them that name.” Colton nodded toward the paper in Jackson’s hand. “That’s who you want to see. I wouldn’t suggest that you be late either, Mister Jackson. You might take yourself pretty seriously – answering the door like that, but I suggest that you don’t play games like that with *him*.”

“I’ll try to bear that in mind Agent Colton.” Jackson’s face showed almost contempt.

Colton took a moment to glance about the room for any telltale evidence that might give him a clue as to what sort of man he was dealing with. Apart from the pistol there was nothing; just the television, still broadcasting the debate between Kennedy and Nixon. Jackson knew immediately what Colton was doing.

“My money is on Kennedy,” Jackson gloated.

Colton didn’t offer an opinion. His job was done and he was keen to go. He offered no reply except to repeat himself. “Be there, or the offer is withdrawn.”

“I’ll be there.” Jackson maintained eye contact with Colton until he had left the room. When he had driven away, Jackson took a walk outside to check that he wasn’t being watched. As far as he could tell, there was no one. When he returned to his room he lay on the bed and

contemplated how such a radical change could have come about. Why would the CIA change its mind about him? Why would they go to the trouble of coming after him to tell him the news?

Jackson could not fathom it. Obviously his faked credentials had impressed someone – probably this Pierce Hunter character. He wondered if someone might be onto him. Then he sneered. It didn't matter. All that mattered was that he was in.

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Pierce Hunter was brusque and to the point and clearly wielded a great deal of power. Jackson could see why Colton had warned him not to play games with Hunter. Hunter was obviously a man with field experience and a hardness that only comes with years of service. He pulled no punches and gave few warnings. While Jackson was not afraid of him, quite sure that he could hold his own against the man, he had a definite awareness of the need to show respect. There was no doubt that Hunter was tough.

Hunter was perhaps five years older than Jackson, just over fifty. He was a heavily built man, the years showing little by way of deterioration of his physique. His one obvious weakness was a badly scarred and twisted left leg. He was able to walk only with the aid of a cane. Beyond that, he bore many other smaller scars on his arms and forehead, some of them quite deep. Jackson decided that these wounds would have been received in active service as a field agent, and if that was the case then Pierce Hunter must have been some agent indeed. Little wonder that when Hunter spoke, people obeyed.

Jackson was to learn in later times that people knew little of Hunter's active service. His operations had been so covert that no one could even find records on him. Rumors were rife about the man. Some said that Hunter had a direct line to the president. Some said that he had been an assassin for the government before his injuries finally put an end to that. One rumor even said that Hunter had been injured while storming the White House to prevent some kind of political uprising and that he had been responsible for hospitalizing many security people in the process. Whatever the truth, no one knew, and it mattered little. Hunter was a powerful man with powerful allies and was not, as Eric Colton put it, "to be played around with."

Jackson admired Hunter for his obvious strengths. He could never understand why this man would have gone to the trouble of reviewing his application and especially why Hunter would have sent a man after him as he had done. But he had. Probably just a good judge of character, Jackson arrogantly decided. Or perhaps it was simply because Hunter considered Jackson to be an enigma just like he was.

For whatever reasons, Pierce Hunter leant a sympathetic ear to Jackson and helped him to

become established in time as a field agent for the CIA. Surprisingly enough, eventually Hunter even asked Jackson where he would like to be posted. When Jackson requested Dallas, Texas, Hunter simply replied, "I'll see what I can do."

Jackson was posted there within two weeks of asking.

CHAPTER 14

US-TECH BUILDING. JULY 2038.

Tegan had been given access to records dating from 2000 back, though with some exceptions. There remained many dark secrets within those records despite their age; secrets considered too dangerous and divisive to warrant revealing. Even forty years on, many countries would look less than favorably on the United States for its interference in their political affairs, albeit of the previous century. There seemed little point in giving US-TECH employees access to matters of such sensitivity. Just the very secret knowledge of other nations' covert operations may have proven destructive.

Because of the sensitive nature of the records, information revealed to Tegan was limited. In turn, because Tegan might report on changes to such sensitive material, access to such reports had been limited to Lou Fredericks, Warren Kriesler, Alan Lewis, President Will Forrest and his aides and chiefs. Only when information had been declassified was it passed on to the scientific team. Even changes to the news records were scrutinized before allowing the team to see them. The team was largely in the dark concerning what was happening. That was how the president wanted the situation to remain. It suited him to use the need for maintaining secrecy as an excuse for not revealing other information about the project. It seemed prudent at this time to maintain secrecy.

Fredericks was spending more and more time in the president's office than ever before. Plans seemed to be progressing well. Information had been trickling in from the past. Changes to the news records were keeping them informed, though even some of these had been kept from the scientific staff. President Forrest was still nervous about the situation, but was sure that the decisions he had taken to rectify the problems would eventually prove to be prudent. It felt right to him, and in spite of his fears, he was generally pleased with the progress made.

Fredericks reported to Forrest the progress of Dwain Jackson, who was now stationed in Dallas and was still searching for West. There remained no sign of the loose cannon, but at least if he tried to interfere with history by saving Kennedy, Jackson would be close at hand. All they

could do was to monitor and wait.

One item which concerned these men during one of their meetings was brought to their attention by a change to the CIA records. Tegan reported that on January 30, 1961 former president Eisenhower visited the new president, John F. Kennedy at the White House. No details about a reason for the visit were available, and in original history the meeting was never reported. Of course there could have been any number of reasons. Possibly it was to do with Einstein's earlier visit to Eisenhower, though there was no proof. Possibly, the wondered, it was something West had set in motion. That was unlikely though as he was clearly keeping such a low profile. The only issue beyond any doubt was that whatever the reason for the visit, it surely had to be related to the TEGAN experiments.

Eisenhower had been very much in support of the Time Travel Experiments. It didn't seem likely that in the end he had a change of heart. Could he have gone to the new president to try to talk him into canceling the project? Was this the reason why Kennedy had commanded the end to the program in 1963? The questions were baffling and frightening and did little to strengthen Forrest's confidence in a peaceful outcome to the dilemma.

In time Forrest found his confidence eroding, rising and falling like a vessel on the ocean. With each effort they made to rectify the potential problems they had already set in motion, with each step they took, and each move they made, President Forrest feared that matters would simply become more complicated and dangerous. By struggling to make amends it seemed at times that they were getting deeper and deeper into a quicksand from which they might never be able to escape. Forrest found himself praying more and more for a good outcome, his confidence battered.

In the end, after struggling for some months, taking decisive actions, then pondering the wisdom of those actions, Forrest found himself abandoning the problem to God. Clearly, it seemed to him, it was time to do less struggling and to leave the men of that bygone era to sort out the problems.

As he sat in the oval office, discussing the fiasco with Carl Schwartz, the president found himself remarking, "When this thing buries us all, Carl, you can have it put on my tombstone: Buried in quicksand of his own making."

Schwartz gave a half smirk, thinking for a time before responding. "Maybe, Mister President," he quipped, shrugging, making light of the situation. They had spoken of nuclear holocaust, unforeseen terrorism, and other possible scenarios which might develop if the past was substantially changed. "But maybe there won't be anyone left to bury any of us."

But somehow his aide's words struck Forrest as being possibly more prophetic than

humorous.

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#### **OKLAHOMA CITY. APRIL 1962.**

Dean West had calmed somewhat since his initial scare when the newspaper had printed the *thank you* advertisement. He remained cautious as always, but his spirits had lifted. Having taken time to think about his predicament, it still seemed wise to him to move on. He enjoyed his work, but if he was caught the price would be very high. West made plans to leave.

Leaving the FBI, even as a mere desk jockey did not happen without checks and questions. To save unnecessary attention, West chose to do it by the book. It was bad enough to think of some one from US-TECH coming after him, but he did not want the FBI, CIA or police of 1962 searching for him as well.

The night after submitting his resignation, West watched the news on television. The first ever international satellite carrying British experiments was sent from Cape Canaveral that day. It all seemed so archaic to West. He smiled and jokingly saluted the TV set.

“I’ll bet you guys could go to the moon if you tried,” he mocked. Later, when he felt his fears surrounding him again, he wondered if he would still be alive to witness the event.

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MAY 1962.

West was sorry to be leaving his new found home and occupation. He resented having to leave because of the CIA or US-TECH, but as much as he felt strongly about those organizations, he felt even stronger about being caught by them. Leaving was painful, but it was the only way he could have peace of mind.

During his lunch break West left the FBI offices and went downtown to sort out details of his banking in preparation for leaving. He still hadn’t decided exactly where he would go, except to say that he though Texas sounded a good place to start. If he didn’t like that, maybe he would try California. Perhaps time at the beach would do him some good, especially since the ozone layer was still intact – for now. Maybe he would put to use a little of US-TECH’s money on a paid holiday there for a while. Surely they owed him that? All he had to do was to keep his name out of the newspapers.

When West returned to the building where he worked, he was stopped on the way in by a fellow staff member who told him that there was ‘an agent from the deep south’ looking for him. This term had become an office joke, referring to one of the visiting agents of the Dallas FBI,

James Hardy, who had often engaged West's services. West moved on through the building, looking for the Hardy, with whom he had developed a good working relationship, if not an actual friendship.

Just before the stairs, West stopped. His mind suddenly raced. Perhaps the agent was not Hardy. West felt sure that US-TECH would be on to him. What if this was an agent from the future? West felt a chill of fear race down his spine as he thought frantically about what to do. He had been told that the man was waiting for him upstairs.

Carefully he climbed the stairs, searching every corner in case the man had come down looking for him. But who was he to look for? West might have spoken to him and never realized. He felt for the concealed revolver tucked in his belt. This was his worst nightmare.

Stay calm, he decided. He must stay calm no matter what. Panicking would not help him. He had to see who this man from the 'deep south' was.

Lunchtime on the second floor was a quiet. It gave West the opportunity to move slowly without attracting attention. Eventually he reached a place where he could sneak a look into the very large office area, which occupied much of the second floor. Peeping through a window, West could see the main desk where a heavy set man dressed in a tan suit paced slowly back and forth.

The man was clearly waiting for someone. West could not see his face, but from his build alone he could tell that it most certainly was not James Hardy. Hardy was taller and not as heavy. Yet the build of this man looked strangely familiar.

West felt the hair on the back of his neck stand on end as a member of staff approached the man to speak with him. As the visitor turned to face the staff member, West could clearly see him. A bomb exploded inside West's head as Dwain Jackson's face became clearly visible.

CHAPTER 15

When Dwain Jackson realized that West had managed to slip away, he spent some time checking around Oklahoma City for him, but West was nowhere to be found. Jackson did not expect him to be. If West was on the run, and there was no doubt about it now, he would be long gone.

Jackson informed US-TECH that West had eluded him. He knew that they would be less than impressed, especially since they had given him the information that should have guaranteed West's interception. When West had submitted his resignation to the FBI, Tegan had detected it

as a change to the history records. Though she couldn't recognize the name 'Danny Black', she certainly had picked up the resignation. West had been a very lucky man.

Jackson's orders came back when the gap allowed, two months later in a park in Dallas. The paper was damaged in transit, Jackson surmised, probably by matter in space, but he could still read what was written. He was to continue searching for West while US-TECH would continue to monitor. If he could not find West by November of 1963, he was to "keep watching on the home front." This was a reference to when John F. Kennedy would be in Dallas at that time.

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Dean West, for his part, had been shaken to the core. Seeing his despised rival Dwain Jackson in the building where he had worked so happily made him first frightened, then bitterly angry. After all those years of bearing the filth of corruption in the CIA and of putting up with the arrogance of Jackson – the very product of corruption, West reasoned, now to have Jackson chase him down in his new home was nothing less than an invasion of privacy. They had no right to pursue him! In his view he had done no wrong.

West thought about killing Jackson if he had the chance. In a fit of rage he did consider it, and had Jackson arrived at that time West might have done it. But in time he calmed and became the more mild man that he was. He didn't want for anyone to die. What he wanted was peace. He had little doubt, however, that US-TECH would leave him in peace.

One thing that seemed certain to West was that he would have to keep his name out of the papers and off the television news too. For a while he wondered how Jackson had found him. US-TECH could have obviously narrowed down his whereabouts when the *thank you* advertisement was placed in the newspaper, but he was not sure how Jackson had known to wait for him there at the FBI offices? Moreover, because Jackson had asked for Danny Black, it was obvious he knew of West's false identity. West became more paranoid.

West was bright though, and eventually he came to understand. It had to have been when he resigned from the FBI. In trying to do everything by the book, and therefore keep the FBI and police off his back by giving proper notice, West had alerted US-TECH of his location and his false name. Again he felt bitter.

The only positive note West could salvage from the fiasco was that Jackson was probably acting alone. If US-TECH had gone to the trouble of tracking him down across time, surely Jackson would have used any help he had once he thought he had West cornered. A second agent outside the FBI building would surely have caught him as he ran. Fortunately for West, there had

been no second man. Jackson was obviously alone, and at least he would recognize Jackson next time – if there ever was to be a next time. West had every intention of making sure that there would not.

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JANUARY 1963. DALLAS, TEXAS.

Dwain Jackson kept a vigil for West, but the fugitive was long gone. In truth, he knew that West would have to be a fool to have stayed around. As much as he disliked the man, he had to admit to himself that West was not a complete fool. Not that much anyway.

So, Jackson kept a lookout for any strange occurrences and used his free time to check them out. Pierce Hunter had been helpful to the cause without being aware. Hunter apparently felt a certain respect for Jackson, and he ensured that Jackson could act with a large degree of freedom in his work. It seemed logical to Jackson – in a way they were very similar men. They were both tough and resourceful. Hunter could no longer act in the field because of his injured leg, and, Jackson reasoned, perhaps the older man imagined Jackson could live on in that capacity for him. They were both aging, and clearly Hunter wanted Jackson to have every advantage. Jackson was quickly promoted.

For many years the CIA had shown a keen interest in what it called ‘subversive elements.’ Basically this simply referred to people whose political beliefs and activities gave the authorities reason to keep a close eye on them. Files on such people would be kept by the CIA, and random checks made. Sometimes the only action taken against such individuals or groups would be that they would receive a visit by CIA agents, warning them against subversive actions. Such ‘visits’ were designed to act as deterrents, and for the most part, were quite effective. Subversives were usually harmless enough, often acting out of the recklessness and impulsiveness of youth. Given a gentle warning by a few gun-wielding agents of the CIA – a few threats and such, the majority would either change their political stance or at least voice their opinions somewhat more quietly and carefully.

In an exercise that was designed to be just such an outing, Dwain Jackson was part of a three-man team sent to, in Jackson’s own words, “re-educate some undesirables.” Despite the fact that such operations usually required little or no use of force, and met with even less resistance, agents always approached their targets with care. Usually the waving of automatic pistols would act as an effective way to invoke fear, as well as ensuring their own safety – after all, some radicals did occasionally prove to be the genuine article.

When Dwain Jackson rose that morning he had no idea what an effect he was going to have

on the history of his nation that day. At 11:26 that morning, Jackson confronted one such radical, who, being disturbed while planning an assault on a senator, began waving his own .45 automatic in the direction of the agents. The two agents with Jackson saw the surprised man as a dangerous, but one who would likely surrender without a firefight. Dwain Jackson did not.

Two things had not changed since Jackson's earlier field days. He was still as ruthless as ever, unwilling to yield, and he was still a crack shot. Erwin Cain lay dead on the floor in seconds. To Jackson, it was simply a question of survival.

To others it was to mean far more.

CHAPTER 16

Forrest teetered somewhere between fury and anguish. Fredericks knew that on this occasion it would be impossible to placate the president. There remained nothing to bargain with. It would be wiser to allow him to vent his feelings than to interrupt prematurely with feeble words of comfort, especially when there was so little to offer.

"Of course I blame myself for this, Lou," the black man boiled. "In the end it was my decision to send them back, and I'll wear it." Even through the dark tint of his skin, the redness of an angry face was unmistakable. "But don't think for a moment you're going to get out of this unscathed!"

It was the first time Fredericks could remember his old ally sound so threatening toward him.

"What did I tell you, Lou? What was the specific order I gave?" Forrest's words spilled forth painfully in a mix of anger and disbelief. He boiled within, large veins visibly pumping on his brow and temples. "Jackson was told specifically not to do anything which might interfere with history. What are these people, Lou, deaf? *I gave a specific order!*"

For a moment Lou Fredericks had a mental picture of his president's words churning forth as though from a mincing machine, like so much shredded meat. It made a powerful image in his mind; a machine he wanted neither himself nor Tegan thrown into. He remained seated as Forrest rose and paced back and forth about the Oval Office. Fredericks knew better than to respond to a rhetorical question. Even with all the respect and privilege of his own position, Fredericks knew that the president was still the president. He kept his head down and quietly repeated several times, "Yes, Sir."

"First West and now Jackson, Lou. Is there no end to it?" Forrest held up two large

restraining hands. It was another question he did not wish to hear the answer to.

Lou Fredericks waited for several long seconds, and when he thought it safe, he spoke quietly. “With respect, Mister President, Dean West is without doubt a traitor. Dwain Jackson made an error, but at least we still have him. We can still trust him.”

“Trust him to do what?” Forrest shot back, the sarcasm etched into his words. “What’s he going to do next in the line of duty?” Forrest paused again. He turned his back on the men in his office and appeared to be studying the flag. In fact, he was using the privilege of rank to obtain a few moments of silence to compose and calm himself. He was silent for possibly ten seconds, but it was an eternity for Fredericks. When he did turn, he was calmer than before, though still visibly tense.

“Look, Lou,” Forrest said, his voice lower and more reasonable. “I take the blame for what happened because I’m the one who gave the go-ahead for it. And later today I’ll have to face the American people and try to explain what has happened.” His voice was almost sympathetic, and Fredericks could not help but see his chief’s predicament. But then Forrest’s tone hardened slightly.

“But Lou, when I put my trust in you to choose the best man for the job, I expect you to perform – with the same degree of competence you would if you were building another Tegan. What are you doing, Lou? Twice your people have let – loose canons run rampant on us. It’s not acceptable. The man was told over and over not to interfere – but I think you’ll agree he’s done more than that. The man was supposed to be a professional. That’s why I trusted the job to you.”

Fredericks did not reply, but felt the sting of having his own competence questioned.

The president returned to his seat and took a deep breath. Also present in the room were his aides, Schwartz and Webberly, CIA chief Paul Emerson and Alan Lewis. When the president spoke again, his voice was calm again.

“So, now we’ve got twenty-nine people who simply dropped dead across the country without any apparent reason. I just can’t believe it.” He rubbed his eyes. “What are we supposed to tell people?”

“Ah, Mister President, we don’t need to say anything.” Webberly knew it was his cue to venture what he considered the administration’s best defense. He would protect his president’s image at any cost, even at the risk of alienating his boss as he tried to force his point home. “There’s nothing at all to tie this administration to those deaths. There’s no proof. No one knows, Sir. That’s how we should keep it.”

“I’ll know,” Forrest whispered thoughtfully. His voice was quiet and deep. “We can’t just cover up something like this, Phil. I authorized the use of Tegan – you and I both know it. We

can't just walk away."

"Yes, we know it, Mister President." Webberly would not desist. "But that doesn't mean we need to tell the world. No one else needs to know."

"The press'll crucify us once the truth gets out, Phil, and rightly so. We can't hide from this." Forrest sighed heavily as he thought about his options. "Trouble is that I need time to think about this, and time is something we don't have. People all across the country will know by now what's happened. They'll be looking for answers."

Webberly nodded silently in grudging acknowledgment.

"We did some checking, Sir," offered Paul Emerson. "Mister President, we found that the dead man, Erwin Cain, had one child; a daughter, born before the date when Jackson shot him. According to original records, one was born after that time, a son. Anyway, Sir, we checked and there can be no mistake. It would appear that offspring born to Cain's daughter, who was born before January of 1963 are all unaffected. Only heirs of the son, who was himself born after that date, are affected."

"Affected?" Forrest raised his eyebrows at Emerson, who nodded his head in acknowledgement of his chief's point.

"*Dead*, Sir," Emerson corrected.

Forrest nodded his head from side to side in disbelief. He sighed. "What's the official count?"

"Twenty-nine that we are aware of, Sir." Emerson's answer was matter-of-fact. The president lowered his head, rubbing his eyes again.

"Well," offered Carl Schwartz, "at least now we all know what happens if you go back and kill your own grandpa."

Lou Fredericks tried to put a positive slant on the situation, his dread of what might happen to Tegan, now feverish. "Maybe we should be thanking Dwain Jackson," he offered. "If not for his stupidity, we would not know just how dangerous West's presence back there really is."

"And Jackson's" corrected Schwartz.

"The possibilities are staggering," said Lewis. His observations were pertinent, if not new. "They're never-ending. Once this thing gets started it just can't be stopped. Until the men we have sent back have died, they will always remain a threat to the world."

"It really *is* worse than the nuclear threat," Phil Webberly said somberly.

They all remained silent for some time, the true depth of their situation sinking in. With every move they had made, the problem had grown greater. The tragedy of the Cain family deaths pointed as a dire omen. The son's life had been extinguished, and in so doing, the lifeline

had been severed.

“Masses could die in a moment.” Forrest’s anger had given away to disbelief and deep concern. “No bombs, no chemicals. Just death, without ever seeing it coming. It’s a nightmare.”

“The media are calling it all kinds of things, Mister President,” Phil Webberly announced, persisting with his agenda. “They’re saying it’s everything from a mob vendetta to a supernatural phenomenon. They have no idea of the truth as yet.” There was just a hint of hope in his voice, and he could not let go of the slender possibility that Forrest might be dissuaded from making the truth public. Forrest disregarded the barb.

“Did they all die at the same time, Paul?”

“Precisely, Sir.”

“The media will have a field-day with this, Mister President.” Webberly pushed on despite Forrest’s obvious reluctance. “We need to consider this carefully. I know you want to tell the people the truth...”

“Phil, I’ve made a policy of telling the people the truth,” Forrest countered. “I can’t go changing that now.”

Webberly would not be dissuaded. “Yes, Sir, I know. But if you tell the people what has happened, we’ll end up with a riot on our hands. We’ll be lucky if they don’t end up with a mob calling for our heads...your head, Mister President.”

President Forrest lowered his head and viewed his aide through his dark, bushy eyebrows, causing Webberly to clarify his position quickly.

“Sir, the last thing you want is to be so swamped with controversy that you can’t deal with this thing.”

“You mean, the last thing I want is to be out of the presidency,” corrected Forrest.

Webberly conceded the point by reluctantly nodding. “Exactly, Sir. I know you want to tell the truth, and we all admire that. But this is not the time. Tell them the truth later! For now you need to be firmly in the presidency – not fighting off an angry mob. Keep the peace, deal with the problem first, then tell them the truth – if you still feel you must.”

“Mister President, may I make a couple of suggestions, Sir?” Lewis’ offer broke the tension of the moment, and Forrest could not help but welcome another view.

“You were against sending Agent Jackson, weren’t you, Alan?” Forrest asked the question as he moved his stare from one face to another within the room.

“Yes I was Mister President, but...”

“Then let’s hear what you have to say.” Forrest cut Lewis off in mid sentence.

“Sir, I agree with Phil. Perhaps if we keep a lid on it just for now. I know that you... I

think that you..." Lewis danced around the idea, choosing his words carefully. "I know that you don't want to cover this up in the long term. But if for now, we could just leave it alone, it will keep the media at bay. Leave them guessing, Sir. I think it's clear that every time we try something, things get worse. It is approaching November 1963 for the men Tegan sent back, Mister President. If the media get hold of this, then the people will be insisting that we shut it down, Sir. For safety's sake we should at least keep it functional and undisturbed until that crisis is over."

Fredericks did not know whether to thank Lewis or to arrange for his transfer. In one sense Lewis had just suggested that Tegan be kept alive, but in the other, he had hinted that Forrest should eventually close her down.

Forrest sighed again, wrapping his chin in a large, black hand as he thought. To the surprise of those present, he nodded soon after. "Okay," he agreed. "I'm not afraid of the people. You treat them with respect and tell them the truth, and they'll accept it, even if they think we're as stupid as we've proven we are." He paused for effect, happy to show how livid he was at the agents US-TECH had sent to the past.

"The media will be left to speculate then," he continued. Still bitter about the mess, and determined not to exacerbate it, he added quite brusquely, "And Tegan will be left idle."

CHAPTER 17

DALLAS, TEXAS. THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1963.

Dean West approached the FBI building with stifling apprehension. He knew he had to speak with his old acquaintance, James Hardy, but he was intensely fearful. Although there seemed to be no apparent way that Dwain Jackson could trace his movements, the terrifying potential remained. West knew he might not be so fortunate the next time they met. He felt behind his back for the revolver, the small, cold weapon giving him a small sense of security.

Inside the building however, there was no Dwain Jackson; just office staff and agents of the FBI. West wished that he could have contacted Hardy by phone, but his distrust of the CIA and FBI had grown to an extent where even that seemed unsafe. Overriding his fears, however, was a new feeling. It was a good feeling, a feeling that he was about to do something right, something brave and honorable. West had always thought of himself as being small in physique, with courage to match. In his view he had never done anything noteworthy or which might have impressed people. For the first time, however, he was about to make a difference and when he

had done it, people would remember his name.

James Hardy was not expecting West. When the agent came to see who the caller at the front desk was, he was surprised. Hardy was no fool. He had heard of West's flight from the Oklahoma office and had wondered about the reason for it. In the following months there had been no news of West though, so the mystery remained unsolved and for the most part, forgotten. West was afraid that Hardy might ruin his cover the moment he saw him, but Hardy didn't flinch or make any sign. He approached without reacting and ushered West to a quiet corner of the office.

"What happened to you?" Hardy's tone was inquisitive, with a hint of tension. "What are you doing here?"

West also spoke in hushed tones. All the while he and Hardy spoke, he continued to search the office for Dwain Jackson.

"Keep looking over my shoulder for me," said West, almost speaking in a whisper. "If a man about forty-five comes in, let me know. I'm in trouble, Jim."

"Oh, no kiddin'?" whispered Hardy. He began checking behind West for the man he had described. "What the hell have you done?"

"Jim, I can't answer any questions. Just trust me, please. There's something really big going on and I need some help if I'm going to stop it. It involves the president, Jim."

Hardy pursed his lips hard together. He paused looking around and stared directly at West. "How?"

"It just does. I need you to trust me. Have I ever failed you before?"

It was a fair question. Up until now, West had been a source of help. Hardy knew he owed West.

"What do you want?" Hardy's voice remained hushed and tense.

"I need you to do some searching for me, Jim. I need some information on a man. You'll need to be discrete – *very* discrete." West slid a piece of paper into Hardy's hand. Hardy looked at the paper but never unfolded it to read it, as West forced Hardy's hand closed around the information.

"He lives right here in Dallas, I think. His name is on the paper, Jim. The man's name is Lee Harvey Oswald."

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The very next day West was back to see Hardy. As usual, he was careful, but once again Dwain Jackson was nowhere to be seen. West had spent a great deal of time thinking about how

US-TECH might track his movements through changes to existing computer records. The realizations that he had arrived at were very helpful to him. There was no doubt that US-TECH could trace him, but they could only pass this information on to Jackson when the gap allowed. This could take days or even weeks, so logic suggested that as long as West didn't return too often to any place where US-TECH might have detected his presence, he would be safe. Besides, as long as Hardy was discrete, there was nothing to suggest that US-TECH would be tipped off. Despite this new and comforting information he remained highly on edge.

"This fellow you're looking for – I can't find anything on him." James Hardy's tone was resolute, and West knew his friend was telling him the truth. "According to the FBI files that I was allowed into, Oswald was a marine who defected to the USSR, then came back. He's just small time. He hands out papers for some save-Cuba organization, but that's it. He's not even on our hot-list."

"Then you need to check further, Jim!" West's face became twisted with disbelief. "I'm telling you, Jim, you need to be all over this guy. There has to be a mistake if you can't find anything."

"Danny, I've checked every avenue that I can without making a big deal out of it. He's just a one-time marine with too much to say, that's all." Hardy twisted up one corner of his mouth. "Unless you want me see if can get a look at the CIA records perhaps?"

"You can do that?" West looked as surprised as he did worried.

"Can I what?"

"Can you check the CIA to find out what they have on Oswald? Without making waves, I mean. Jim, this is more important than you can imagine. *You've got to believe me.*" The tone in West's voice was desperate.

"Okay, okay," replied Hardy. "It goes against every rule in the book to look up information across departments for an outsider... and I'll probably do jail time... and lose my pension..." Hardy smirked. "But I trust you, so I'll do my best. Okay?" Then he shook his head.

"You know how hard it is going to be to get information on this guy without raising eyebrows? This sure better be real good, Danny."

"It is," West replied. "Trust me, it is, Jim. And thanks." He began to hesitate as he so often did when he was nervous. "You've ah... you'll ah... you'll have to trust me. This ah... involves the president. It's extremely important. You won't be sorry you helped me."

"I sure hope not, Danny."

"Whatever you do Jim," West urged. "You must be very discrete. Don't tell anyone what you are doing."

“I get the point, Danny.” Hardy nodded. “I’ll be careful. I have a contact I can trust in the CIA. Maybe he can check without anyone knowing. But you’ve gotta realize that if anyone else finds out... well there’s no telling what’ll happen. We won’t be able to keep it from them, you know.”

“We’ll have to risk that. And Jim, there’s one more thing.” West hesitated, looking around for Dwain Jackson again. “I can’t risk coming here again. This is very dangerous for me. I will explain it all to you when I can, but for now you’ll just have to trust me. Can I have a number where I can contact you directly?”

Hardy shook his head. “You’re nuts, Danny,” he said. He wrote a number on the corner of a page of a notebook and handed it to West.

“I’ve got to go, Jim,” said West, apparently growing more nervous by the minute. “I’ll be in touch. Find out what you can about Oswald. It’s life and death, Jim.”

“Can I find you somewhere?” came Hardy’s reply.

“Best that you don’t know. I’ll be in touch. Call you on Monday or Tuesday.” They acknowledged each other with a nod and West was gone. He did not wish to remain a moment longer than necessary.

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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1963.

James Hardy continued his investigations into Lee Harvey Oswald. His own discrete source in the CIA owed him some favors, so it did not strike him that it would be unduly difficult to gain the information he was after.

Hardy was surprised that Danny Black had not phoned the previous day. He had been sure that he would, as he was so keen to know about Oswald. Neither had he called so far today. Hardy began to think that all of the cloak-and-dagger routine might have been somewhat melodramatic.

Hardy was called into Graeme Shelton’s office just before noon. When he entered he saw two other men speaking with his boss. Shelton introduced the two men as CIA agents, Colt Wallace and Felix Curtman. Hardy felt something churn in the pit of his stomach.

Shelton glanced at Curtman, who was the senior agent, just as Hardy sat down. Curtman gave a small nod and Shelton left the room, closing the door behind him. Neither of the two CIA agents sat at the table with Hardy, but remained standing, one on either side of him. They were menacing, and Hardy knew the reason for the visit without asking. Still, he knew it was safer to play dumb.

“What can I do for you gentlemen?” he asked.

When Felix Curtman spoke his voice was calm, but far from pleasant. “You have been making inquiries about a certain individual – a former marine, Agent Hardy.”

“Yeah,” admitted Hardy blankly, doing his best to look surprised. He decided that it was best not to try to hide, since they obviously already knew what he had done. “Lee Oswald, that’s right. Is there a problem?”

“What made you look at this man, agent Hardy?” There was ice in Curtman’s voice.

“An anonymous tip, would you believe,” Hardy offered in return, trying to make it sound genuine.

“Anonymous?” It was bitter ice.

“Yeah. It’s the truth. Some guy phones up and says I should look into what this Lee Oswald character is doing. That’s it.”

“And so you take some stranger’s voice on a telephone as enough reason to use CIA resources to look into some unknown marine?” Curtman circled the table, something akin to a prowling shark, Hardy thought.

“Former marine,” corrected Hardy. “And yeah, I’ve done searches because of less – we here in the real crime world call it using a hunch. What? Is the CIA going to have to cut someone’s pension because I used some of their precious resources?” He was being purposefully facetious. Upon seeing their disdain, he thought it best to ease the tension. “Look, it was the way the guy said it – I thought it sounded like Oswald might be a trouble-maker. That’s all.” Hardy tried going on the defensive to throw them off. “What’s all this about anyway?”

“What you are looking into is, shall we say, *sensitive*,” replied Curtman coldly. “You will desist immediately, Agent Hardy.”

“Why should I?” The question was more of a statement from Hardy that he didn’t like them telling him to stop, rather than a genuine inquiry. Moreover, Hardy was hoping that such a response would give them the impression that he was more annoyed than afraid. Unfortunately for Hardy, the response which was meant to help throw them off the scent only inflamed the two agents.

In a fraction of a second, Curtman’s superficial veneer dissolved, revealing his true nature; a voracious and vicious carnivore, ready to tear Hardy apart if given the opportunity. Curtman spun Hardy around in the chair and breathed heavily in his face. When he spoke it was like the hiss of a snake, the words spitting and seething between gritted teeth.

“It’s classified, that’s why,” spat Curtman. “And you’ll stay away from it. If you go near it again *I’ll bury you!* Do you understand?”

There was no doubt about it, Hardy understood. He was not easily frightened, but he knew a warning from the top when it came. Hardy decided that it was probably a time for caution, and did not answer the irate man before him. Curtman wasn't in the mood to listen anyway. He wanted to talk.

"You will make no more inquiries, Agent Hardy. In fact, you will forget the name – is that clear? You are butting into things that are best left alone. The name you have inquired about is classified. We have been watching this individual and don't want him spooked. Leave *the marine* alone!"

The fact that Curtman would not use Oswald's name was an indication of something deep and probably sinister in itself, Hardy decided. He dutifully nodded in acknowledgment, shrugging his shoulders as if the matter was of little interest to him anyway. Immediately Curtman metamorphosed back into the cold, albeit quiet man he had been only seconds before and straightened up, neatening Hardy's jacket as he did so.

"This is not a matter in which we can allow any flexibility," said Curtman. "Do we understand each other, Agent Hardy?"

"Oh, I think I understand you perfectly," mocked Hardy. Even in defeat he had to let his displeasure known.

"Who do you think it was who asked you to find out about this matter, Agent Hardy?" It was the first time Colt Wallace had spoken.

The temptation to answer, "That's classified" was enormous, but Hardy resisted it. There were more important things to be considered, other than making sarcastic comments. Safety, for instance. Danny had been right to be so careful.

"I told you it was an anonymous caller," he answered. "We get a lot of those. I can't just ignore them. What did you want me to do?"

"Ignore it," Wallace shot back. Hardy shrugged again.

It was the safest answer he could think of. He knew they didn't believe him, but it would be difficult for them to argue with.

Curtman most definitely did not believe him, but as the discussion continued, it was very clear that Hardy would say no more. Curtman knew that he had succeeded in warning Hardy off, so it did not matter anyway. He left the matter.

When the two CIA men had gone, Hardy remained seated in Shelton's office for some time. He had to recover, to think. Sheldon returned soon afterward, as though he had been waiting for the duo to leave, and realized in a moment that the agent under his command had been intimidated. He expected as much when the two CIA agents had asked to speak with Hardy

alone.

Hardy showed Sheldon West's note and told him what had happened. He thought it best not to tell his boss about West's visits. Officially Oswald did not seem like much of a problem, but the name had certainly made these two CIA men nervous. Sheldon spoke with Hardy for a while and eventually warned him off any further investigation in the matter.

He also kept the note.

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Dean West initially phoned James Hardy late that same afternoon on the number he had been given. Instead of Hardy though, it was Graeme Shelton who answered.

Shelton announced to West that he was Hardy's superior and that he had sent Hardy away on an investigation. Hardy's return date was indefinite, but it would not be for some weeks. When West asked if Hardy had left any messages for him, Shelton simply replied that Hardy had said to tell him that there was no record anywhere on the item he was after.

West hung up the phone and wondered what it could mean. It was disappointing news indeed, since clearly knowing the identity of Kennedy's assassin was not enough. He couldn't understand it. Surely history had shown that Lee Harvey Oswald had assassinated President John F. Kennedy? West pondered the problem, distraught that having warned his friend James Harvey about Oswald's existence had not been enough to trigger the alarms.

As much as the idea distressed West, he knew there was another option open to him, and now it seemed to be the only remaining answer. West knew that he had less than ten days to prepare.

## CHAPTER 18

### US-TECH BUILDING. DECEMBER 18, 2038.

Tegan discovered the change to the CIA records; FBI Agent James Hardy had been searching for information on Lee Harvey Oswald. This change to the history records was the clue US-TECH had both waited for and dreaded. Originally, there had been no such search.

Hurriedly a message was compiled and sent through the next available gap to Dwain Jackson. Though the gaps were poor at this time, and therefore information might arrive damaged, they were desperate to try. The situation had just become critical.

President Forrest fought a war that raged unseen within him. His sense of honor and

honesty – his very fiber and faith was being tested by the actions he had taken, and in fact must still take. The question of when he would reveal to the American people the truth about the Cain family tragedy ate constantly at him. Perhaps, he wondered, the people had a right to know the dangers involved with Tegan.

And then there was the team at US-TECH. There were now so many secrets – each of which the gravity was astounding. So many things were hidden. While it was his responsibility and his duty to make the decisions which he thought would best serve his nation, it seemed difficult to him to be able to hope for success.

Forrest began to wonder if he could carry the responsibility of what he had begun through to its terrifying end. He began to question whether he was the right man for the presidency. People trusted him in his sacred office. But there were now so many secrets.

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DALLAS, TEXAS. FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 1963.

President John Fitzgerald Kennedy and his wife Jacqueline had arrived at the Hotel Texas in Fort Worth from Houston around midnight. Trusting the Secret Service agents outside the door, they retired not long after.

On assignment from the CIA was special agent Theodore Brown. His presence generated considerable confusion regarding who was really in charge when it came to protecting the president. Brown was on loan to the Secret Service, and assumed a leading role in proceedings. Secret Service agents had loyalties to their own people. The chain of command had been disrupted by Brown's presence.

After the president and his wife had settled, Brown dismissed the Secret Service agents, stating that he would see to the safety of their charges. They would have their hands full the next day and should take the opportunity to get some time off while they could. Secret Service Agent Clint Hill was one of the few to raise serious objections. In his view, the men should have been staying. He would stay.

However, he was dismissed by Brown. Brown affirmed that he and some 'local enforcement' would mind the president. Brown took full responsibility and gave his personal guarantee that no charges would be brought against the agents for leaving their posts. They had worked hard and deserved a night off. Clint Hill, who found the order distasteful, continued to voice his disapproval.

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Outside the room where the president and his wife slept, Theodore Brown was paced back and forth, vigilant. To an observer, he would have appeared the way one might imagine a devoted guard to be.

Brown saw the man coming at some distance and recognized him immediately. He signaled for the man not to be concerned, and the two met halfway down the hall. They stood for quite some time, two secret agents dressed in suits, watching every shadow as they spoke in low tones. The second man was Felix Curtman.

“Have you seen the threat list?” Brown whispered tensely as he took a folded paper from an inside pocket.

“I’ve seen it,” came the reply. “Don’t be concerned – it means nothing.”

“But it’s endless!” The first cracks in Brown’s hardened facade were beginning to show. “With this many warnings of possible hits on the president, there’s bound to be questions later, Felix. We’ve had warnings from our own agencies, from civilians and even one from some big shot businessman in Texas. They’ve all been warning of a possible attack on the president in Dallas. We can’t just ignore this.”

“Forget the list. Everything will go just fine,” was Curtman’s reply. He looked up and down the hall. “We’ve taken care of everything. Just relax. It’s a no-risk operation.”

“You’ve taken care of everything?” Brown could not shake off his nervousness. The question held a strong scent of sarcasm.

“Yes, everything. We even got the Mayor to agree to change the motorcade route at the last minute. Hell! Even the papers know the new route!” Curtman paused a moment, then smiled. “I wonder if the Mayor’s brother will be watching today?”

Theodore Brown smirked at the comment and it helped momentarily break the tension for him. “I doubt he watches anything Kennedy does since he sacked him from the CIA.”

“I sure hope he’s watching today,” remarked Curtman. “I’ve got to go. I’ve got phone calls to make. You just relax and do your part, Theo, and make sure the president’s minders don’t get too close at the wrong time. Okay?”

Brown handed him the threat list. “Get rid of this, will ya?” he said. “I’ve got a president to baby-sit.”

At that moment Clint Hill appeared, walking toward them. Before the two men parted, Curtman quickly spoke a few more words to calm his nervous friend. “Just keep your head. Everything will go all right. Remember that people are depending on you. Everyone is ready to go.”

With Clint Hill drawing near, their conversation came to an abrupt end.

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The next morning inside the hotel was warm and pleasant, in stark contrast to the outside, which was cold and miserable in the early hours. Only the rising of the sun began to lift a heavy, sluggish and forbidding blanket of fog. President John Kennedy rose early. He was used to a hectic schedule and knew that there was no time for resting. There were always pressing matters at hand.

Kennedy's close friend and personal aide, Larry O'Brien was on the job too. He had been awake for some time, preparing the final details for the day. In his efficient style he readied Kennedy for the many functions he would have to perform. O'Brien expected that if there was a place in the United States where the president might meet with trouble, it would likely be in Texas. This did not inspire him with confidence, but he would do everything he could to try to make the president's visit a success.

John Kennedy looked out of the window again at the fog. He thought about the pressures of his job. Then he looked at the fog. If it did not clear soon, it would be a lousy day for an open limo motorcade.

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### **9:30 A.M.**

The taxi turned right at the corner of Main and Houston Streets and proceeded north for just a short distance. When it stopped, West got out and leaned up close to the passenger's front window as he paid the driver. When the car had gone, West lifted the strap of the small overnight bag he carried, and placed it over his shoulder. Then he proceeded to the grassy area in the center of Dealey Plaza.

Many people traveled to work, and the streets were busy even at this hour. The plaza itself was quiet, though far from deserted. It was still too early for most people to wait for the presidential motorcade that would pass later that day. There was dew on the grass, and this made it uncomfortable enough to deter most who might have waited. West felt fortunate that he was not alone in the plaza.

As he walked slowly across the grass, he looked westward towards the triple underpass, where three snaking lanes of traffic converged and disappeared into the world beyond. To his surprise there were three men on top of the concrete structure, one carrying what appeared to be a rifle. The Secret Service was making an early start today, he thought.

"It didn't help you to save him the last time, did it?" West said quietly to himself. Then a

strange thought occurred to him; was *this* the first time? It was a paradox, and certainly a question he could not answer. He smiled at the depth of his question, then shook his head. It didn't matter. He knew that this time things would be different.

West loved his new home in the past, but there was an extra special buzz in the air this morning. This was perhaps one of the most important mornings to ever dawn. It could be compared to few moments in modern history. This infamous day had been the subject of countless discussions down through the ages, even in West's own era; the day when Lee Harvey Oswald would gun down President John F. Kennedy in the streets of Dallas.

"Not today," he whispered.

It struck him as strange that the people he passed by could not sense the monumental significance of the day. This day – which had once changed people's lives, and in fact the world, forever.

His senses were electric with anticipation. Today would be different! John Kennedy may have had his faults, like any man, but he held an office which should be honored and respected and not assaulted in the way in which it had been. That office would not be assaulted today, West resolved. He could feel a sense of destiny overtaking him. He felt sure that the hour for which he had been born was almost at hand.

The fog was silently and slowly retreating. A cool breeze blew across the grassed area where West walked and he shivered for a moment. Was it the coolness of the breeze or his knowledge of this day that sent the shiver through him? He walked on, watching everything as he went.

As West approached Elm Street to cross, he stopped and looked up at the Texas School Book Depository building that stood just across the road in front of him. He counted the rows of windows. He was no history expert, but everyone knew that Oswald had fired from a window of the easternmost end of the sixth floor, overlooking Dealey Plaza.

West pursed his lips when he saw the windows of the sixth floor. The sense of awe and anger at the injustice of what would happen was overwhelming. He silently cursed Lee Oswald as he looked up at where the sniper would later act.

"Not today you won't," he whispered. Today would be the start of a new history, no matter what the cost. Finally, good would prevail over evil.

In the distance a train horn sounded. Carried by the westerly breeze and in the relative quiet of the moment, West was wrenched from his historic stupor. He quickly crossed Elm Street near the corner with Houston and then continued to walk east on Elm away from the sniper's nest.

"Later," he mused. "Later there will be plenty of time for the righting of wrongs."

Meanwhile there was work to do.

## CHAPTER 19

Less than an hour after Dean West arrived at Dealey Plaza by taxi, a meeting was in progress at the Dallas County Sheriff's Department. Looking almost west from inside, one could see across the grassed area of Dealey Plaza to the triple underpass in the distance. Beyond that lay railway lines and installations. The Sheriff's building was situated at the corner of Main and Houston Streets, and originally the presidential motorcade should have passed by it without turning, continuing along Main Street and through the center lane of the overpass. At the last moment though, the route had been altered.

Inside the building, Sheriff Bill Decker was passing on a request. The meeting he had called with his deputies was brief and to the point, the message simple; he and his men were to be spectators-only during the motorcade. His voice was firm, and possibly portrayed that he was not pleased with the order, but to Decker, an order was meant to be followed. The president's security was to be left in the hands of the Secret Service, with Decker's office to take no part in it.

The mumbles of dissent rose audibly among the crowd of lawmen, only concurring with Decker's own misgivings. But it was a matter beyond his control.

By the time Bill Decker had finished addressing his people and stressing their role, or rather the lack of it, John and Jacqueline Kennedy had already left the Hotel Texas at Fort Worth and were on their way to Caswell Air Force Base to catch a flight to Dallas. The cool of the morning was slowly giving way to pleasant warmth. The fog was lifting.

The sun was shining and a gentle breeze had risen. In spite of previous fears, it was going to be a beautiful day for an open-vehicle parade after all.

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Behind a wooden picket fence on the grassy knoll on the northern side of Dealey Plaza, two men were waiting. They were positioned about half way between the Texas Schoolbook Depository Building and the triple underpass. Considering their activities, they were amazingly calm, even joking with one another. They had good reason to be calm.

There was little chance of them being disturbed. The many parked cars afforded generous cover, and since most belonged to workers, it meant that their owners would not be back for some hours. Furthermore, people would soon begin to mill about in readiness for the presidential

motorcade, so two men would draw little attention. Two of the cars in the crowded lot had been parked there since the previous night.

The white picket fence was over four feet in height, with very little gap between the palings, making it difficult to see the men from the plaza side of the fence. Several trees on either side of their position added to their concealment, hiding them to some extent from eyes which might look down from any of the tall buildings in the distance. Their greatest sense of security though, came from the knowledge that they were protected from any real threat by the various agents who patrolled the entire northern side of the plaza.

What the men were waiting for was not long in arriving. Just before 11:00, a pick-up approached driving slowly west along Elm Street in the right lane. It passed the Schoolbook Depository building and when it was just in front of their position, pulled over, parking half on the sidewalk and half on the street.

A man moved quickly from the passenger's side of the vehicle, not wishing for it to be parked any longer in traffic than necessary. The young man took a long package wrapped in paper and hurriedly took it to the two men behind the fence. A car approached quickly behind the pick-up, it's young female driver more annoyed at the inconvenience of a vehicle obstructing traffic than interested in what these men might be doing.

In the pick-up, Jack Ruby accelerated hard, not wishing to congest traffic. In his years as an undercover contract operative for the FBI, he had not been asked to do much for the generous rewards he had received. Though it seemed strange to him to have been asked to deliver a package to the Secret Service men posted there in Dealey Plaza as part of the president's security, he could hardly complain.

He did not see the hidden cameras which snapped his presence and his fate forever.

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It was just a few minutes after 11:00 when Dean West returned. Again he entered Dealey Plaza from Main Street, but this time he was walking, and the bag over his shoulder had a slight bulge in it. West knew that the time for action was near, and while he was afraid of being caught with the bag by the Secret Service, he knew the price for not acting would be far greater.

Standing across Houston Street from Dealey Plaza, he stopped and took a deep breath, composing himself.

"If ever you're going to make a difference, this is it," he said quietly to himself. The sound of his own voice inspired a little more confidence. "It's time to do what you were born for, Dean."

He crossed Houston Street when he could, following the same route he had earlier. There were more people about now, some standing, some sitting, all waiting on the president and the first lady. This too gave him a little more confidence, as it was becoming easier to blend into the crowd.

The grass had dried now with the warmth of the sun, and with each step West knew that he one step closer to his greatest test. Fear caused his body to tremble, though the warmth of the day kept the shivering to a minimum. All the while he kept reminding himself that he had been born for this day. Surely, it was his destiny.

West walked slowly across the northern of the two grassed center areas towards the Schoolbook Depository building. On the sloping bank of the grassy knoll he could see men dressed in suits. Close study revealed that these men were armed with what appeared to be small machine-guns. Clearly, West decided, they had to be Secret Service men ensuring that everything was ready for the presidential motorcade. The sight of their weapons caused a chill to pass through him, and he calmed himself. As long as they were on the other side of Elm street he was perfectly safe.

He closed his eyes for a brief moment, gathering his thoughts. If the Secret Service did manage to stop him, then all he would have to do is to warn them about Oswald's plan to shoot Kennedy. Surely they would listen! Then, either way, Oswald would be stopped and Kennedy would be saved.

Just for a moment West considered crossing the street and telling these men of Oswald's plan. But what if they arrested West and did nothing about Oswald? Kennedy would be shot and all would be lost! No, he could not risk it. There was only one sure way to stop Oswald now, and West was prepared for the task.

The agents on the knoll paid West no attention. He approached the northern edge of the grassed area in the center of the plaza. Now only Elm Street lay between West and his destiny; between him and the building where Oswald lay in wait for his president. He saw the open window at the eastern end of the sixth floor line of windows. He swallowed as a chill ran through his body. Yes, that was surely it! He remembered it from all the old photographs he had seen on the subject. The small dark opening seemed so innocent as he stared up in disbelief, but that window would change the world in a very short time. West felt his anger burn. It was the sniper's nest!

But history was about to be changed forever – because this time it would be different. West looked down at the bag suspended from his shoulder. He swallowed hard again, suppressing the nerves which welled up within him, then he blinked several times and spoke slowly to himself for

reassurance.

“It’s now or never. Be a man and do something right,” he told himself.

As West opened his eyes again and raised his head to look toward the Schoolbook Depository building – and the destiny of the world, he was frozen in his tracks. Just a moment away from stepping on to Elm Street to cross, he felt his heart skip and then pump so hard that it sounded inside his head. The ringing in his ears became audible and would not be quieted.

Terror and disbelief welded him to the spot where he stood.

On the other side of Elm Street, walking toward the Depository building was West’s archenemy, Dwain Jackson.

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Dwain Jackson fitted into his new home very well. He kept his hair cut in the style of the day and dressed so as not to attract attention. He played the game very well indeed – a fact he was always proud of, but his task was made easier on this assignment by the fact that he greatly enjoyed his role.

Gloating to himself about his own prowess and plans of visiting retribution on Dean West for even daring to exist, Jackson walked with purpose toward the Elm Street entry of the Schoolbook Depository Building. So preoccupied was Jackson with all these thoughts that he totally missed seeing his target standing in clear view on the opposite side of Elm Street.

Jackson reached inside his jacket to release the safety of his automatic, without ever withdrawing the weapon.

“You just show yourself, West, and I’ll truly make you a part of history.” Jackson’s smile gave air to the hatred within.

Once inside the Depository building, Jackson found himself confronted by an employee. A simple flash of his CIA ID was enough to gain access without further question.

“I need to look through the building!” Jackson’s demand left no room for refusal.

“Oh, another one,” retorted the annoyed employee, tired of the intrusions. “Make yourself at home, like the rest of your buddies!” It was all the reply Jackson got. The man’s voice was filled with sarcasm and frustration. With a wave of his hand the man gestured to Jackson to venture through, pointing to the stairs just to the right of the front entrance. Jackson did not reply, but the warning was not lost on him. Others had preceded his visit.

He ventured through the building as quickly and carefully as he could. He knew that West might be at any turn. So might others. While the need for care was evident, Jackson felt a time pressure, and was lax to make too detailed a search for his enemy.

Much of the second floor was comprised of office space. It was a simple matter of wandering through to the far corner of the building to the stairwell. At one point Jackson could see a lunchroom and coke machine. As expected, West was not there.

Then he noticed a freight elevator. He wondered whether to take the elevator or the stairs. It was a chance, he knew, but if West was searching for Oswald then he would more likely search using the stairs. In the north western corner of the building was the stairwell. Jackson knew that this would be West's most likely route.

Once past the second floor Jackson saw few people. Knowing history well, there was really only one floor he was interested in.

Jackson peered out of the stairwell carefully on the sixth floor. This is where Oswald had supposedly fired from, so this is where West should be. Removing his automatic from his jacket, he looked about. At first he saw no one. Worst of all, he saw no Dean West.

Still peering around the corner of the stairwell doorway, Jackson suddenly heard voices. He saw two men moving about at the southwest corner of the building. One carried a rifle. After a few seconds they disappeared between piles of cardboard boxes. Then there was silence again.

An evil, knowing smile crept across Dwain Jackson's face again. Perhaps the rumors had all been true. His cynical mind expected no less. In fact, he had never doubted. Cautiously he proceeded, but not towards the men. Rather, he moved quickly toward the southeast corner, perhaps one forty yards or more from them. All the while Jackson was careful not to be seen.

As he approached the corner where Oswald should supposedly be lying in wait, Jackson moved stealthily, more slowly, gun at the ready. Again there were piles of boxes; excellent cover for a sniper's nest. Finally, with only one pile of boxes separating him from the corner window area, Jackson paused. Pulling back the hammer on his automatic as quietly as possible, he slowly and carefully peeped into the hidden area, hoping desperately not to be seen by anyone who might be hiding there.

Anyone but West, that is.

For a few stunned moments, Jackson stared almost spellbound at the sight before him. There was no assassin. Neither was Dean West there. But what was there was completely awe-inspiring.

Dwain Jackson was a hard man, with little capacity to experience or appreciate emotions. However the sheer magnitude of the historical significance of this small place was overwhelming, even to him. *This* was the place. From Jackson's perspective of history, almost eighty years had passed since this monumental event had transpired, and it was now silently portrayed by this small niche among these boxes. And yet, there he was, like a thief or a visitor who didn't belong,

witness to the truth, steeling a glimpse at what millions throughout the years had sought to gaze into.

Jackson stared wide-eyed at the scene before him. The mute witness of a few inanimate objects struck heavy blows into his hardened mind. Leaning against the wall beside the open window were two rifles. On the windowsill were three cartridges. Jackson was mesmerized by them for a brief moment. The rumors had all been true.

He lowered his automatic. Walking between the piles of boxes, he then moved to the left of the open window, which overlooked Elm Street. He could see the growing crowds below. His eyes searched Dealey Plaza. With his knowledge of history and his own theories, it was not long before he found what he was after. Again he was captivated by the scene before him.

Just within his field of view he could see the grassy knoll with its white picket fence running along much of the top of it. In two places Jackson could clearly see the tops of the heads of men who were crouching behind the fence.

“It *was* true!” Jackson whispered, elated. “Son of a gun! *It’s all true!* They really *did* kill him!” Suddenly he was snapped back to reality. He had to find West. West could ruin everything! Moreover, he had to get away from this place. He could not be found in the sniper’s nest.

Jackson set off diagonally across the sixth floor to the stairwell, and then down. He moved quickly, keeping a searching eye for the man who could ruin it all, Dean West. He was equally keen not to meet any Secret Service or CIA agents. Even though he was technically on the side of the conspirators, not wishing for their plans to be disturbed, Jackson did not want to have to answer any awkward questions.

Down through the building he went, checking always for Dean West. Racing through his mind was the realization of what was about to happen. What was arguably the most infamous moment in the history of the twentieth century was about to unfold, and he was going to witness it. In fact he had just witnessed a large part of it.

Strange though it was, it felt to Jackson as though he was watching a replay of one of his beloved Super Bowl games. Even though he already knew the final outcome of the game, the excitement was still present. In like manner, the assassination had become a game to him, and his part was to prevent West from upsetting the proceedings.

Jackson’s senses were functioning at full alert now. He was ever vigilant for West or any other threat. The game was at its peak. On the second floor he began to cross the building in a roughly diagonal path towards the Elm Street entrance, retracing his path on the way up. With the likelihood of encountering employees at that point, he decided that it would be prudent to

holster his weapon.

As Jackson turned a corner near the lunchroom, he collided full on with a younger man. Both men stood back and stared at each other, both annoyed at the carelessness of the other. Had Jackson still carried his weapon in his hand, the young man would have been dead in a heartbeat. Staring back at Dwain Jackson was the face of Dean West.

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Jackson stared intently at West, his right hand immediately embracing the weight of his automatic, his index finger caressing the trigger. And yet something caused him to wait. His trigger-finger played in the darkness, rubbing the coldness of the metal – but still Jackson did not shoot. He studied West, his own eyes boring into the smaller man, almost daring him to make any move that might give him reason to react, and to shoot West dead.

It was not West's face or even his movements, however, that triggered Jackson's reappraisal of the situation. He wanted to shoot; he had spent many months preparing himself for just such an opportunity to end West's life. Surprisingly, though, he did not shoot the man before him. As he continued to stare, Jackson realized that it was not West's face which tipped him off, but rather his target's actions that caused him to hesitate.

The face seemed to belong to Dean West, that was almost certain. But the secret to the man's survival was in his actions. Instead of running from Jackson, the smaller man stood still, more surprised than afraid. It was not the reaction Jackson expected.

"This ain't right!" Jackson spat. "What are you doing here? Who are you?"

The younger man examined Jackson's face with similar interest to his own, and it was abundantly evident that he was surprised at Jackson's presence. "Who are you?" the younger one asked defiantly in return.

Jackson released his grip on his automatic, and instead of withdrawing his weapon from his jacket, it was his CIA ID which he held forth. Then he demanded again, this time louder and more arrogantly. "Who the hell are you?"

The young man did not seem perturbed by Jackson's volume or presence at all. His answer was very calm.

"My name is Hidell. Alek James Hidell." Then the younger man relaxed. "Sorry to stare like that," he explained. "I thought I knew you for a minute there."

The name may have changed, Jackson thought, but the face was now quite recognizable. The moment was surreal, almost amusing. Then slowly it became annoying. Why had Jackson never seen it before? How could he have missed it? Anger rose within him as he viewed his

visitor. The truth had been there all the time, and he had never seen it.

Standing before Jackson, calm and composed and in no hurry, the younger man simply stared back. He was not aggressive or brutal. In fact, he seemed pleasant and inoffensive. It was not the face of Dean West staring back, although it looked entirely like him. The resemblance was astonishing.

Nor was it the face of Alek Hidell – whoever that was.

Lee Harvey Oswald seemed completely unmoved by Dwain Jackson's presence.

## CHAPTER 20

As Dwain Jackson left the Depository building his mind was in a spin. He was swarmed by thoughts on several fronts.

On the first front was the enormity of the situation unfolding about him. The rumors had all been true! Jackson had always expected as much. He was paid to be suspicious – he was CIA, after all. Of course he had suspected!

More importantly was Dean West. Where was he? Jackson had been sent almost eighty years into the past to prevent that troublemaker from interfering with the events of today, and now West was not to be seen. It made no sense. If West was to play a part he should have been here by now!

Also causing Jackson's mind to reel was the fact that Lee Harvey Oswald looked so much like Dean West. It had been some years now since he had laid eyes on West, and yet such similarities seemed too great to be normal. He remembered West! He had despised the man – how could he ever forget him? And yet the man on the second floor had resembled West so much that it was as though they were twins. It made Jackson's mind spin with questions.

Then there was another problem troubling Jackson's mind. He needed to get a message to US-TECH. To make the deadline for tomorrow's newspaper, Jackson knew he would have to go now. The Dallas Morning News office was only four blocks away. As much as he hated to leave the scene, he knew that if he hurried, he could place his advertisement and still return before the motorcade had passed by.

He would have to risk it. Jackson needed to send the request to the future immediately if he was to have what he needed in time.

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When President Kennedy and his wife arrived at Love Fields in Dallas, Police Chief Jesse Curry was there to meet them. This was a big moment for Curry. He was hoping everything would go smoothly today.

If Curry had any fears about how the people of Dallas might greet their president, these would have been quickly dispelled. Political feelings ran high in Dallas, but there was no cause to fear – crowds of fans and onlookers had gathered early so as not to miss a chance to see their nation's first family.

The king and queen of Camelot walked slowly down the stairs of the aircraft, the people waving and cheering. There was no question about popularity. The day was turning out beautifully and so was the reception.

John Kennedy looked his usual well-presented self. He was neat and confident, and appeared to be enjoying the day immensely. He wore a dark steel-blue suit with steel-blue resolve to match. Jacqueline wore a skirt and light blue blouse, a pink jacket and hat. In her hand she held a bunch of red roses, spoils of the popularity the two enjoyed. She was a fitting queen for Kennedy.

The couple shook hands with the people as the crowd pressed in on all sides. People relished the opportunity of meeting their president and first lady, arms outstretched, jostling for position in their bid for just a touch or a glimpse. People who were fortunate enough to meet the Kennedys this day would remember it forever.

Certainly Jesse Curry would remember it.

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Standing among the crowd on the grass across from the Texas Schoolbook Depository Building was a very nervous Dean West. The initial shock of seeing Dwain Jackson enter the building was upset him greatly. Worse than that by far though was the knowledge that with each passing minute the motorcade would be fast approaching, and with it, the deadline for any action West might take to save John Kennedy.

He stood motionless, always watching the building. West may have appeared to be perfectly still to anyone who was watching, but inside he was churning.

“How could you have known I'd come here?” he murmured. Questions raced through his mind. Why was Jackson inside the very building where West wanted to go? Was he there to stop West? More importantly, what was West going to do in light of this problem? He knew that if he didn't act very soon it would be too late. Oswald would probably be lying in wait already. He looked nervously at the open window at the right side of the sixth floor row of windows.

West waited, his stomach churning as each second passed. His eyes remained riveted to the Depository building across Elm Street. If Jackson appeared again, West would need to know. Then he'd need to act. The icy fear in his veins caused him to shiver in piercing terror.

Somewhere in his fear though, West found his resolve strengthening. He had grown to love living in this bygone era, and had certainly never considered dying for it. But the more he thought about it as he stood there, the more he realized that he was in fact, prepared to die if that was the cost required. The thought struck him hard, strengthening him. If that was what it would take to save John Kennedy, then that is what he would do.

So be it. He would risk it. Suddenly even the daunting thought of facing Dwain Jackson lost much of its sting. For the first time ever, West realized that if Jackson got in the way, he was prepared to kill him too. These were desperate moments, and West was becoming more committed to his task by the minute.

The adrenalin rushed again through West's body as he saw Dwain Jackson emerge from the Elm Street entrance of the Depository building. Almost as though on cue, his enemy appeared at the very moment when West had finally come to the place where he was prepared to face him. It felt like an eternity since Jackson had gone in. West glanced at his wristwatch again. 11:55. There was still time to stop Oswald, provided Jackson didn't linger.

Fortunately Jackson didn't. He stood for just seconds outside the building's entrance. He rubbed his hair, clearly thinking hard, and looking all around as he did so. West covered his face with one hand and turned to one side, keeping his eyes trained on his enemy.

He needn't have bothered worrying about Jackson recognizing him. Jackson was far too preoccupied to notice West hiding among the crowd on the other side of the street. To West's extreme relief Jackson left the scene in an obvious hurry.

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There was no time to waste. West wanted to wait longer in case Jackson returned, but he could not afford to. If he was to make a difference, it had to be now. Quickly he crossed Elm Street and entered the building, holding the overnight bag close to his side as he did.

Once inside, he too encountered staff members. They were becoming used to intrusions now, and at first paid little attention to their latest visitor. West for his part began to withdraw his FBI identity from a pocket, fearing that he would surely attract someone's attention, dressed casually as he was.

For a few moments two of the staff stood face to face with him, apparently annoyed or surprised by his presence. West attempted to show his identification, but before he could display

it, the two men turned away. It seemed that they had absolutely no interest at all in him. West thought it strange, but took the opportunity to move through the building unchallenged.

Once inside, West was running on pure adrenalin. His nerves were screaming at him, but his resolve had become immovable. He would not turn back until the job was done. His fear was almost overpowering, and suddenly he realized why he had chosen to become a desk jockey and not a field operative. Only his complete resolve would enable him to carry out this terrifying task, and had it not been for that resolve, West knew he could not have faced his fear. He continued on.

When he reached the second floor he was to have his resolve tested even further. The floor was considerably quieter than it had been where he entered, with the only people present were slowly making their way down through the building. They gave West little more than a glance, talking together as they passed.

As West heard their voices disappearing inside the stairwell, he thought that perhaps he had the floor to himself. Walking vigilantly, he passed various offices, proceeding toward the stairwell at the opposite corner of the building. Just forty feet from the stairs, West heard sounds from around a corner.

First came a shuffling sound, then a clear metallic 'click'. West was sure he recognized that sound – that of the hammer being drawn back on a pistol. He halted and blinked hard as he thought about what to do. He took a deep breath and reached inside the bag that still hung from his right shoulder.

Inside the bag was a folded pillow, the fold facing forward. Inside the pillow was a loaded .22 revolver. West was no professional killer. He didn't know where to begin searching for a proper silencer, so, clumsy as it was, the folded pillow was his next best option.

The revolver was cold to touch, but of enormous comfort. West had to push his hand down between the folds of the pillow before he could grasp the weapon firmly. Only when he knew he had a proper grip and full control did he proceed. There came a tiny muffled click from inside the bag as West drew back the hammer. He was ready.

Carefully he approached the source of the sound. Perhaps it had been the click of Oswald's rifle, he wondered. As West turned the corner and entered the hallway, he could see the freight elevator doors and a coke machine just ahead of him. Beyond that was an open doorway. He moved on, shivering with fear. Stopping by the doorway he firmed his grip on the revolver and peeked cautiously into the room.

Suddenly West felt an enormous rush of relief wash over him. Inside the room, which was apparently a lunchroom, was a man seated at a table. Gripped firmly in the man's left hand was a

small bottle of Coke. As West peered in, the man was taking a long drink, and he only lowered the bottle when he saw his visitor.

West looked immediately at the bottle. The lid! Of course! There had been his mysterious and sinister clicking sound! There was no rifle. No pistol. No evil.

West's gaze moved from the bottle to the man's face as he slowly entered the room. His momentary relief suddenly began turning to a twisted, perverted disbelief. His eyes widened, as did his gaping mouth.

The man at the table was stunned too.

To have a double, or a twin was possible, but this went beyond that – and both men knew it. Each stared at the other as though gazing in disbelief into a mirror. The similarities in their faces seemed to go far beyond chance, and each man was stunned into silence for several seconds.

Some long forgotten words began echoing inside Dean West's head. Somewhere in his past he could hear Lou Fredericks speaking to him on the day he began work at US-TECH. He struggled to recall the reasons for Fredericks' strange request, but could not. Besides, there was no time for memories now. West knew he had to concentrate.

For several seconds neither man spoke. They simply stared in amazement at each other, neither able to believe how alike they were. Even their clothes were similar. It was the seated one who broke the stalemate.

"Can I help you?" The man's voice was soft and pleasant, with somewhat of a southern drawl. Even this seemed to resemble West's own voice, adding to the enigma.

West for his part was disgusted in himself. His knowledge of history, or rather, lack of it, had triumphed again, enabling him to blunder ignorant and unprepared into a strange and probably avoidable situation. Although West had seen the photographs of this day's infamous events, he had never studied them closely. Though he could recognize the face before him, he had never before noticed the similarities between this individual and himself. For a few surreal moments West tried to blame the poor quality of the historical photographs, but he knew better. The truth was that he had simply never studied the photos. He cursed his own shortcomings.

"You're Oswald, aren't you? *Lee Harvey Oswald?*" West spluttered out the words, his voice rising with nervousness. The intensity of West's voice was not lost on the man, who responded with some caution in his own voice.

"No sir, I am not." The voice was once again very calm. "But there was another man came through here just fifteen minutes ago and asked me that same question. My name is Alek Hidell. Who are you?"

"I'm FBI. Show me some identification please."

The man stood and stepped away from the table, both hands reaching behind his back within an instant of the request. Instinctively West countered by tightening his grip on the revolver in the bag and holding up a restraining finger.

“Slowly.”

The man seemed surprised, but obliged. West suddenly realized that had this man been a professional killer, he might have disarmed West in that instant of carelessness, or even shot him. Perhaps Oswald was not a professional killer after all. West took comfort from the revolver in his grasp.

When the man returned his hands from behind his back he presented West not with a weapon, but a folded piece of paper. When West read it, the paper testified to the fact that the man’s name was in fact Alek James Hidell. West dismissed it immediately as a fake. West himself was an expert at forging IDs, and he expected nothing less of an assassin.

West’s mind raced, the tension almost too much for him. Surely there could be no doubt about the identity of the person before him. This had to be Oswald! But this man was pleasant and calm, and had made no attempt to run or to fight.

The problem for West was that this line of thought left him with only one option. He glanced again at his watch. It was 12:03.

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Dwain Jackson left the office of the Dallas Morning News with considerable speed. Time had become a premium. It had to be if he was to be in position before the presidential motorcade passed.

He drove quickly back towards Dealey Plaza, but rather than parking where people were now gathering, he drove to a quiet place near the railway lines, just near the triple underpass. There were people in the distance on both sides of the underpass, but no one close to him. Checking that no one was watching, Jackson leaned over to the back seat of his car and retrieved a long wooden case. When he opened the case, the evil smile appeared grew wide.

Still seated in the front of the car, Jackson began to assemble the components of a high-powered rifle, complete with telescopic sight, standard CIA issue.

~~~~~

West’s mind was in a spin. He had no idea of how to proceed. Having come prepared to shoot down a vile and ruthless assassin, he had not expected Oswald to be calm, or normal, and certainly not pleasant. And yet the man before West was clearly no killer. West knew he was not

cut out for this work, and his weaknesses were showing more than ever. Deep in his heart he valued and respected life – so how could he dispense with this man?

Neither was West an historian. At best he could remember that President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated at Dallas in November of 1963 by Lee Harvey Oswald. He had always been able to remember the killer's name, just as most others had. He knew the correct building and even that the shots were fired from the sixth floor. Beyond that, the history of that day was a haze. West struggled, squinting as he tried to recall any pertinent fact that might help him.

He remembered that Oswald had been caught shortly after the assassination, probably within hours. Then just two days later he had been gunned down while in police custody. But as far as the events surrounding the actual assassination, West could recall nothing else. His mind spun.

Thinking logically had become an almost impossible task for West now, such was the tension within him. He took a deep breath and tried to calm himself, to concentrate and focus. The stakes were too high to turn back now, this he knew. But was this really Oswald?

"You show *me* some identification, ha?" The man's voice was still pleasant enough, but West's nervousness was infectious.

Never releasing the pressure of his grip on the revolver, West reached his left hand into a pocket and held up his own FBI ID, never letting go of the man's own paper. The answer that West sought was not long in coming.

Suddenly the man seemed to relax.

"Alright, alright," he said. "Alek Hidell is just the name *they* told me to use whenever I thought I might be in trouble. Yeah, I'm Lee Oswald. I just had to check that you were – well, you know – someone from CIA or FBI. Relax, I'm kinda on the team – when they want me, that is." Oswald smiled as he handed West yet another paper, this time testifying to his proper name. West shuddered inside at the revelation.

As Oswald removed the second paper from his pocket, a key fell to the floor, its tag having been caught in the folded paper. It skidded over near West's feet. Oswald made no effort to collect the key, his eyes remaining glued to his tense visitor.

"I'm one of you, you know?" Oswald tried to assure West.

West was dazed. This wasn't possible. He immediately dismissed the claim as a lie. Surely this lunacy only proved Oswald's insanity. West backed up to the doorway, never taking his hand from the bag. He hardly dared take his eyes off Oswald, glancing quickly down the hall and then returning to the real threat.

He stepped back into the room. Oswald stared at him, sensing that all was not right, but he

said nothing. West approached Oswald again, his hand still in the bag, his grip on the revolver so tight that he could feel his sweat making the weapon slippery. In his other hand, he still held both of Oswald's IDs. His senses were screaming at him. He hated this. But then, he hated what Oswald was about to do. Surely Oswald was a ruthless killer? Surely he was the cruel individual who would so coldly assassinate the president?

West's forehead became lined as he tried to understand. The man before him was in no hurry, and certainly did not seem bothered about making his way to his sniper's position near the top of the building. And yet, he was Oswald – Oswald the killer.

West knew that there could be no backing out now. A sense of fair play forced him to tell Lee Oswald what was about to happen. Oswald, West decided, should know why he was about to die.

"Lee Harvey Oswald." West's voice was shaking and the words were disjointed. As always, when the pressure was on, his speech began to fail him. "I have come from the future. I, ah, I know... that you are about to... to go upstairs and shoot, ah, shoot the president. I'm sorry, but ah... I can't let you do that!"

A hint of wetness began to creep from the corners of West's eyes. The moment of truth had arrived.

The young man's face became lined with concern. "Wait a minute," he began to protest. "I'm not trying to kill Kennedy – I'm part of a plan to protect him..."

"This time it is going to be all different!" West argued, cutting off Oswald. He blurted out the words, drowning out Oswald's claims of innocence. West's pent up fear and emotion burst out with that statement.

So did his revolver.

West fired four times into the chest of the would-be assassin from only a little over three feet away. With each shot came a small puff of feathers from the folded pillow within the bag, and a small coughing sound. The shots were perfectly muffled, but the destruction heralded by the bullets no less effective.

West's victim fell almost silently to the floor, a look of horrified surprise and disbelief on his face. Oswald writhed and gasped for a short while, but West knew that he would soon be dead. There was not even a scream. Nor would there be. For the second time in history Lee Harvey Oswald was shot dead without realizing his killer's intentions, nor understanding the reason why.

West watched as Lee Oswald's movements slowed. Soon he was still.

There! It was that simple. And it was done! West crumpled to his knees, those words

buffeting about inside his head. He had done it. The assassin was dead. West was shocked and in awe that the task could have been so simple. He felt no remorse, no guilt. It had been just so easy. In fact, if anything, he felt a great relief wash over him. At last the president's killer was dead.

President John F. Kennedy was safe...

(Continued...)

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Please consider for a moment: If President John F Kennedy is safe, what will that do to history as we know it??? And what becomes of those who were sent to that turbulent past? Moreover, if perhaps Lee Harvey Oswald was not guilty of the assassination plot, then why are we led to believe he was? I invite you to find out the answers, and to remember that even though *Quicksand* is a work of total fiction, the question of Oswald's innocence is a particularly valid one.

You'll never guess the outcome, and you won't believe the stunning conclusion!!!

I would like to remind you that as a writer, I try to present to you the very best quality novels I can, so I would **appreciate it if you would resist the urge to copy this novel and pass it to your friends**. While being illegal (violating copyright laws), it will also detract from my ability to maintain the service of delivering quality novels to you, the reader, since I rely on sales of novel conclusions to remain on-line.

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The Penthouse (Terror, Suspense)

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*Some titles may be due for release soon

The Kennedy Assassination

Quicksand was my first attempt at novelling, and I think that shows. Some parts make me cringe just a little nowadays, but we all have to start somewhere, right?

Just the same, I find the idea of time travel to be intriguing, even if I don't actually believe it can be achieved by man. And like so many others, I completely dismiss any notion that Oswald was solely responsible for the assassination of President John F Kennedy.

Indeed, I don't believe he had any part in it.

Before you judge or dismiss, please just consider this. Can I quietly present a few thoughts for you to consider? So much hatred was directed at Oswald for taking away a president who had basically been heralded as one of the best and most popular in history. But could the flames of hatred have been intentionally fanned at the time to help hide what might actually be so obvious under careful consideration of the facts?

Oswald had connections to the CIA (This was revealed in the decades after 1963). He supposedly renounced the US during a time when the communist threat was a very real issue, and such affiliations could land a person in serious trouble. So, he travelled to Russia, took a bride and then somehow managed to return to the US – unopposed – during a time when Russia was considered very much the most dangerous enemy of the US.

The question begs; how could such a misfit pull that off?

Then there are all the convenient photos of Oswald: Handing out pro-Cuban propaganda, and posing with the weapons he supposedly needed to carry out 'his' horrible acts that day in 1963. If one considers how quickly he was arrested and then posed as the indisputable 'lone assassin', it should at least give us pause to be cautious.

If, as the conspiracy theorists suggest, the CIA (or similar government agency, or combination of agencies) conspired to assassinate Kennedy, then logic says they would need a patsy. After all, an outraged society would demand quick and harsh punishment. Wouldn't it? And you couldn't blame the Russians, could you? No. Given that the entire world had held its breath just a year earlier during the Cuban missile crisis, it is doubtful that anyone wanted to risk that scenario again. So they dared not blame the Russians...

No. If such a plot really was in play, the conspirators would need a homegrown, believably radical patsy. Someone who would not be missed, and certainly not worth going to nuclear war over.

And so they groomed Lee Harvey Oswald.

Oswald was placed in the Texas Schoolbook Depository building undoubtedly believing that he was part of a secret undercover venture to *save* the president, not to kill him. If one considers the ludicrous ‘investigations’ that took place in the immediate aftermath of the assassination, as well as later (Warren Commission etc.), it makes perfect sense that if there was a CIA (or any other agency) plot to assassinate Kennedy, the simplest way to implicate a patsy for the crime was to put him in place so that he believed he was part of an heroic plot to thwart such an action.

Consider the possibilities.

The CIA tells Oswald at the very outset that they want him to go undercover and help expose some secret communist plot to assassinate the president. But first they will have to help him take on the appearance of a radical communist so that those who are supposedly plotting the crime will believe he truly wants to be part of it.

Then Oswald’s bosses send him off to Russia, assisting him to look and act like a communist sympathizer before and after he goes. And after he marries his Russian bride, during a time when the US government and society alike were completely paranoid about the Russian communist threat, this rank amateur, this supposed outspoken pro-communist lunatic somehow manages to return to the US, with no questions asked.

Such a scenario is a farce. So here’s how he did it.

Oswald had help from high places.

Otherwise, how could Oswald have returned to the US unopposed, especially then?

Having been groomed as the communist radical, Oswald then returned, and the CIA gets him a job in Dallas, and on the morning of the assassination, the presidential motorcade is rerouted to pass right by where Oswald had been placed. Add a little further communist red to the plot by continuing Oswald’s supposed communist ties and sympathies with Cuba, and then get him to run a small errand where he can be seen toting a suspicious parcel on that very morning, and the ploy is complete.

And all the while, Oswald believes he’s some hero patriotically serving his country.

When the riflefire ceases to echo in Dealey Plaza, the CIA simply feeds the media exactly what they want to hear. After the assassination they were simply ravenous for answers, and most swallow the prepared line without so much as a hint of scepticism.

But then consider the real evidence.

The Zapruder film doesn't lie. The deathblow to the president clearly came from in front of him, and from the direction of the grassy knoll. And the authorities agree that at least one bullet came from behind JFK. That makes for at least two shooters. Moreover, witnesses on the day reported gunshots from the grassy knoll, and some even ran to investigate, but were turned away by 'law enforcement', who it was later stated that they were not present on the knoll at that time.

As for Oswald's 'interrogation', in a modern court it would be laughed at and likely dismissed as the ridiculous farce that it was. Oswald's rights were violated from start to finish. And then there is his own most obvious shock at the questions reporters asked him regarding *his role* as the assassin of the president. Oswald was clearly taken back at the accusation.

Indeed, if Oswald had been a CIA plant all along, believing that he had been placed in the Depository building and mixing with communist sympathizers to infiltrate and break such a conspiracy, wasn't it likely that he was waiting to be exonerated by those who placed him there, and even congratulated for at least having *tried* to prevent the assassination?

If so, an accusation of having *actually participated* in the shooting would have been the very last thing Oswald would have expected, and the footage certainly seems to indicate this.

And indeed, if he really was a CIA plant, he would have no doubt confidently expected to simply wait for his minders to come forward and lay out his heroic role in the attempt to thwart the sad occurrence of November 1963. Perhaps he had failed to prevent the assassination of the president, but at least he had tried. And that was surely the story that his minders, his CIA groomers would come forth and tell.

Wasn't it? But they didn't.

Take another look at Oswald's face as the media question him. He is shocked and taken back at the accusation that he might have had something to do with the assassination of the very man he was attempting all along to save. His face and demeanour have the calm responses of a man who knows he has simply been mistaken for a perpetrator, and will shortly be fully exonerated by those who placed him there.

Indeed, as an undercover protector of the president, he may even have been something of a hero rather than a cowardly gunman.

All this certainly gives us reason to pause and think...

Rest assured that whatever happen in Dealey Plaza on the fateful day in 1963, it had nothing to do with Lee Harvey Oswald having his finger on a trigger, and everything to do with him having been set up as a patsy by his minders from the very beginning – a patsy so that the United States would not be morally required to take action against the dreaded Russian threat for having

shot its president. Does that mean the communists shot John Kennedy? Most definitely not!

What happened in Dallas that dreadful November day was nothing less than a clandestine, homegrown coup. A brave leader was eliminated and replaced, all to suit the agenda of those who were meant to be protecting the interests of the president and the nation.

Whether we agree or not isn't the issue here. I believe one more thing is certain, and this gives me hope. I have no doubt that somewhere, perhaps in more than one place, evidence exists that will finally put an end to the most public and far-reaching conspiracy of the twentieth century. And such evidence will eventually come forth. As those who have/had vested interests in keeping the truth hidden slowly die out, along with their agencies and agendas, in time the truth will surface.

And the world will be better for it.

As for God, He is not mocked. I rather suspect that God wants the truth to be told, even if it takes time. After all, a home-grown coup or some other equally sickening conspiracy it may have been, but Oswald the patsy *still was* instrumental in averting a nuclear war with Russia, had the people of America been lead to believe that that country was responsible for the president's assassination.

So perhaps Lee Oswald didn't die in vain after all...

And even if Oswald *was* guilty, you should know that God still forgives the worst offender who genuinely turns to Him and asks for forgiveness. God loves sinners, and *that* is the message to take away from this book. No matter what you are guilty of, Jesus Christ (God in the flesh) came to live in his own creation, and then to die for it. Ask Him to forgive you, and He most definitely will.

Thank you for reading and considering,

I Q Cameron.

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