

**- CHAPTER EIGHTEEN -
POPULARITY**

January 17, 2021

Heron Lake area, Rio Arriba County, New Mexico

"The hawk's den", 10:02 p.m.

Private residence of Governor Dennis Enrique Camacho.

"Nothing is lost, everything is created, and turns into money."

The few guests who pass through the door of this villa are, in general, not well enough educated to have the slightest idea of the text of the original quotation, here shamefully mishandled in both form and content. As for Governor Camacho, the father of this literary disfigurement, he does not care.

Twenty years ago, when he demanded that his architect find him a "quotation that symbolizes his success" to be erected on the porch of his immense stone and wood ranch, the man offered him Lavoisier's famous quotation:

"Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed. Basically, it's a principle of physics and chemistry that



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governs the behaviour of matter and energy... but I'll read it another way. I like to think that starting from nothing, we transform things, a little like an architect does... or like you did, Governor. You who started from nothing. "

In less time than it took to say it, Dennis Enrique Camacho had rewritten the expression and found this motto which he now systematically posts in the postscript of his letters and which he has made his eternal electoral slogan:

« Nothing is lost, everything is created, and then turned into money. »

Money.

American cultural obsession that has become over time the only indicator of success, the exclusive marker of a man's worth. So much so that the annual income is one of the social items declined when one presents oneself, like one's address and profession. The dollar, a monetary currency like any other, was for a long time a powerful lever of influence at the international level. But on American territory, it has become an end in itself. A principle with which convictions, goods, men, forces, friendships, or elections are monetized.

Of modest extraction, son of a garage owner, Camacho's fortune was the first outcome of a life that he knew, over time, how to embellish with the two other mantras that make humanity turn: power and sex.

Concerning money, before becoming a government official, Camacho made his fortune in spas: first in Santa Fe, capital of the state, but also in Los Alamos, Corrales, Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, Carlsbad... In each of these cities, he owns as many establishments as real estate.

Concerning power, it is at 1 Mansion Drive, in Santa Fe that he receives, works, and spends most of his time: the official residence of the governor symbolizes his political success, and for nothing in the world would he show himself elsewhere.

But it is here, at Heron Lake, in his retreat two hours by car from the state capital, that he practices the ultimate distraction reserved for the ultra-rich, in front of the fantastic landscape of a



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lake whose tranquillity contrasts with what goes on inside: sex, in its most unbridled version.

Dennis Enrique Camacho remains an attentive father and a loving husband: fidelity is another matter. The power that followed his entry into politics led him into a circle that was as virtuous for his career as it was vicious in his personal life. Far away is the time when he watched with a circumspect eye the sexual orgies to which other powerful business leaders in the area invited him. At the time, he declined politely. Today, he is the organizer. For a long time, he considered this habit as the rich people's answer to boredom, but for those for whom money is no longer a problem, lust means more than filling a void.

It is the complete physical, mental, and social exercise of domination and control. In a word: power.

Camacho knows that these components are inseparable: money, sex and power are the three heads of the hydra of possession, that universal monster destined to bite - with delight - its tail.

Strangely, tonight he is alone. For the past few weeks, the Secession War has been rich in opportunities and intense fine parties: the powerful have been frequenting them on principle, in order to maintain protection and influence if he were to win against Thomasson and his old crouton of Archie Sand-will. The wannabes woo him more than rightly, their over-pricing becoming spectacular in order to make themselves visible and, finally, the penniless artists or models who have experienced the vaporization of the environments in which they hoped to break through, come to trade their performances for food and a living. Camacho pays handsomely for young men and women willing to give their bodies to survive in this world.

And in times of the Covid-21 epidemic, when group sex becomes a complicated practice, his mastery of directing in an absolute respect for hygiene becomes hegemonic in the region: Dennis Enrique Camacho may be outrageous and irreverent, but he is far from crazy. He has invested in a small laboratory that carries out the Covid-21 screening PCRs discreetly - and in case of surprise guests, has equipped himself with the necessary equipment to carry out rapid tests at home. All this in a residence now featuring giant screens in the multiple rooms, which allow a more



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realistic live broadcast of what's going on in the neighbouring rooms. He likes to say that he invented "sexual distancing".

Tonight, however, except for two housekeepers he fired after sleeping with them, he is alone. Naked in his large living room, lying on a huge couch, after having splashed around for a good hour in his jacuzzi.

Xth orgasm, he doesn't count anymore.

The governor is immersed in a state-of-the-art viral reality helmet. Glued to his forehead, the device gives off a bluish halo on the outside. Inside, this scene of an eroticism that is beyond comprehension is played repeatedly, with one hand on his half-resting genitals. A member who only wants to regain its vigour as he watches the sequence again, sublimated by virtual reality in 3D.

Everyone knew Mackto Urulala was an amazing woman. But if you imagined her well preserved for her age, her beauty defies even the most enthusiastic prognosis. Muscular, but fine, moving with the grace of a cat, once naked, she is far from the icy harshness of the fearsome businesswoman. As experienced as she is spontaneous, the passive warmth that her moving body unleashes on that of another young woman can crack the vows of chastity of the coldest and most pious of priests.

The billionaire has taken to heart the mission entrusted to her by Thomasson: to make the American election popular. And if she continues with such enthusiasm, the participation as of February 25, 2021 will be close to 100%.

First stroke of genius: her announcement on New Year's Eve, her threats to crash her orbital ship into the White House if the turnout was too low. Then, in the three weeks she's been up there, not a day goes by without a surprise: interviews with missing personalities - including Lincoln, Jesus, Washington and Bonaparte - that her artificial intelligence on board, the famous "FRANQLIN", reconstructs in 3D and with whom she converse live. Sports sessions, weightless sleep, introduction to business management, computer coding and hacking, anecdotes about the construction of her empire and her most beautiful takeovers... But the highlight of the show takes place every weekend, when a personality gets on board his rocket to spend 24 hours in his orbital module. An extraordinary way to advertise for Mackto Urulala



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Corporation, the reusable SISTER launcher produced by MUC works like a charm. At the rate of once a week and in full panoply, the entire space transportation market is in turmoil.

The first time, it was a Hollywood superstar and true performer of the American rap scene, who went up to spend a few orbital revolutions aboard a BROTHER round-trip module, time for duet songs and other debates with Internet users on the importance of the election. Followed by a hilarious rather than heart-rending farewell, before the return to earth: for the first time in the history of the conquest of space and live, the first orbital binge was broadcast. The man, an enthusiastic lover of his own brand of vodka, emptied a bottle because he wanted to experience "space drunkenness". He returned to Earth euphoric, alternating "tears of love for Earth" with crazy, stupid laughter on the return flight.

The following week, it was the turn of a former Mexican president - the sworn enemy of the late President Warner-Lee - to climb into orbit in order to take the head of the "wall" that the madwoman had been trying to build between Mexico and the United States, imagining her as the father of all solutions, from the contagiousness of Covid 21 to the immigration problems which, according to her, were the cause of unemployment and all the misfortunes of the United States. Same planetary show and a much quieter return to earth.

At first glance, Governor Camacho didn't take a very good look at all this. But tonight, Mackto Urulala has given him two huge gifts: the first is this series of powerful orgasms in front of this captivating, weightless love scene. Tomorrow, the world was going to go crazy, idolizing or stinking the two space lovers. But the face of this young woman overwhelmed with pleasure, panting under the sometimes subtle, sometimes frantic caresses and penetrations of the billionaire would remain in the annals of eroticism - and above all, would not fail to attract even more curiosity around the election.

But this affair would not fail to concentrate the reading around its own person: to date, 37% of the American population has downloaded its famous HIOPI application, which offers 50 dollars in food vouchers and, above all, tracks feverish citizens in order to isolate them from the rest of the population. And this is



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the second gift the billionaire has given him: this video sequence can only be viewed on a smartphone, and on the express condition of having downloaded HIOPI.

Why did she decide to give him a hand? The question will require a debriefing. Especially since her sources told her of contacts between Thomasson and Urulala, including a physical meeting, a few weeks before she goes into orbit. Camacho knows this world too well to know that a gift will be paid for by a privilege.

Bitch wants to cover her ass if I ever win the presidential election... so she sucks my balls, that makes sense. I'd do exactly the same thing in her place. I'd send one of my hot tubs into outer space right now! And I'd probably have slept with a little chick like that... Lady's got good taste; I can't deny that.

No, he can't deny it. After a rapper and a Mexican president, tonight is neither burlesque nor serious.

It's magic.

Mackto Urulala had the brilliant idea of making anyone into gold dick.

Or almost anyone.

Paoletta Berria, a young, lively French-Italian doctor, is just one of the 937 million people on Earth who have applied to board the SISTER launcher to orbit the billionaire's module. The selections were completed within a week. After a first selection on file by the famous FRANQLIN, making sure of the conditions of age and physical validity, the AI simultaneously made a hundred thousand successful candidates undergo, on their smartphones, strict identification tests, then tests of intelligence quotient, emotional stability in the face of psychological stress, linguistic ability, and physical condition by imposed exercises, analysed live via the camera of their phone.

Up to a hundred of them.

What the story doesn't say is that all of the selected candidates were passed through the final filter of the president of Mackto Urulala Corporations: it was the billionaire who chose from the latest profiles.

Obviously, according to aesthetic criteria.

A few hours earlier, planet Earth saw a frail young woman arrive in orbit, both shy and assertive, on the reserve, but capable of great repartee. The alchemy worked quickly. Like the previous



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visitors, she arrived with supplies and enough to renew Mrs Urulala's wardrobe, which is made up only of suits from major luxury brands, alternating with ridiculous, colourful, and infantilizing pyjamas. The latest being a unicorn suit and a giant Pokémon suit - in this case the terrible Mewtwo, her favourite.

As usual, the audience has been climbing nicely over the years, both on TV and on social networks. In order to have the right to broadcast, all media must feature the title "The Surprising Billionaire Who Will Make You Vote": exchanges, interviews, games, weightlessness training, tasting sessions at the ISSpresso coffee shop, and culinary experiments when the two friends tried to cook an egg without putting it everywhere... A scene that turned to slaughter and laughter, followed by half an hour of cleaning, and chasing pieces of egg white, which did not lack for a buzzer. Then, a surreal bikini tanning session, in which the young Paoletta, whose skin was as white as milk, refused to participate for fear of "space sunburn". But she passed the machine along the body of the billionaire, tanned like caramel, her Hawaiian origins having left more marks on her epidermis than her Japanese side.

Until it was time for her nap.

Usually, even when she's resting, Mackto Urulala broadcasts her life live. She only has two hours a day for her privacy. And everyone had seen the rapper and the Mexican president spend a few hours sleeping in weightlessness... But then the sudden drop of the curtain immediately aroused suspicion. Even more so when, three minutes later, the following message appeared:

"Dear fellow Americans download the HIOPI application if you want to see what can - or cannot - happen in the privacy of the MUC orbital capsule. And don't forget to vote!"

In his big couch, as the scene resumes, Camacho giggles.

She's going to get I don't know how many lawsuits from I don't know how many associations defending sexual dignity on the web... nobody will be able to do anything, there's no law on crimes committed in space... it'll fall on the mouths of social networks.... Fuck, she's good...



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He consults some press dispatches that fall on the screen, through social network C.E.O.'s explaining that Urulala forced them to broadcast this pornographic scene, preventing any censorship, otherwise they would be deprived of satellites and broadcasting channels for 15 days.

The scene begins slowly. In intimacy, calm, and silence.

The atmosphere has changed. It's no longer the frenzy of the live broadcast: they are in space, enjoying this moment of quietness floating above their planet, both of them in swimsuits. Without changing their clothes, the two women slip into their sheets and curl up on their own, in padded alcoves on either side of the inflatable wall of the capsule. At barely one metre from each other, they draw a small curtain between them. The tips of the fingers touch each other, half by chance half on purpose.

Then it went off like children in a tent. Unable to resist a chatting session. Like two high school girlfriends in slumber party mode, young Paoletta can no longer stand it. She asks her if, during her hours of hidden intimacy, she slept with the rapper or the Mexican president. Mackto doesn't answer, keeps the suspense going, laughs and finally confesses: the President was a serious man, and the rapper was very bad.

Muffled laughter, complicit glances. Fleeing eyes. Mackto suddenly comes out of her alcove and goes to fetch a bottle of champagne. The cork that jumps and bounces off the porthole, the moment of terror thinking of the vacuum of space, then more laughter, and finally, looks that support each other and never let go. FRANQLIN, the AI who manages the filming of this broadcast, works wonders. The capsule is lined with webcams hidden along the walls. Face, body, face, is profile, this AI has fed on hundreds of cinematographic classics, to recreate the atmosphere of the most acclaimed sex scenes.

— Mrs Urulala..I have a question.

— Of course, Paoletta, I'm listening.

— Do you... you... well...

— Will the same thing happen to you as to the rapper?

Blush, discreet laughter, but an accomplice.

— I don't think so. Young lady, I think you're a much better shot than that big loser. But we still have to unleash your potential.



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And, as far as I'm concerned, you have no idea what you'd be up to.

— Um... (Clears throat) it's, um... Terrifying. I'm... well...

— Tempted, aren't you? When you're having the most amazing times, you have to go all the way, sweetheart. In this place, my body against yours... it would be a shame to miss it, I think. But I wouldn't force your hand.

— I'm sure you wouldn't. You're sweet, I can see that... but I'm not... well, I'm not... I'm not... Never have.

The young woman's turning scarlet.

— The important thing is the pleasure exchanged. It doesn't matter if I'm a woman. Give me a second, I'll go get something.

Mackto Urulala leaves her future partner for a moment, breaks off, gives a foot pulse and flies to the cockpit. On the dashboard, she grabs a wide control lever.

And she unscrews it. The object is a white, rounded, smooth and straight handle, which she holds firmly in her hand. No doubt about what this object evokes. On the top, a discreet switch on the handle makes it vibrate and raise its temperature.

— My dear Paoletta, no loss of space. If an object can be used for two things, so much the better! I wasn't going to come up here without a minimum of company? said the billionaire, laughing and returning to her future partner.

Silence. Mackto gently stroked her face.

— I wouldn't do anything to you. I'm just going to put this on you, and let it vibrate on your pubis. My hands won't do anything to you, but I'm going to look you in the eye, and if all goes as planned, in a minute, you'll let me kiss you.

But the young lady gently pushes her away, putting one hand on her chest.

— Mrs. Urulala, I like you, but you present me as dumber and more innocent than I really am. You didn't really cut the transmission, did you?

— No, darling, I didn't... I confess. I beg your pardon. We're live. Just like this object, as long as things or events have a dual function.

— I'm not fooled, Mrs Urulala, but I want to have said it in front of everyone. If it takes the vote of the dumbest voyeuristic American, if it takes everything in my power to get people to vote



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and keep democracy alive... well, I'm willing to take the sarcasm and the scandal on the way down. I came up here fully aware. Now, why don't you try this device, look me in the eye, and we'll see what happens... or not.

In stark contrast, the 50-year-old is destabilized by the young woman with the porcelain skin. But as smart as she is, Urulala has faced many more challenges in her career.

— An idealist, says the billionaire with a carnivorous look, while guiding the vibrations of her tool against the sex of the young woman, who quickly tilts her head back and groans, gently.

—...it will only get better.

Brutal, to say the least.

It's not the ringing of one of his phones that pulls Camacho out of his virtual masturbation session.

It's a voice.

There's someone in the room.

— Hey. You okay? Are you enjoying this? Are we having a good time?

Panic. Messy. The governor rips off the helmet, tangles his feet as he rushes off the couch and wallows violently to the floor, head forward, the bridge of his nose cracking on the hard surface.

— Hold it right there! WHO ARE YOU? screams a terribly distressed Camacho, who stands on his feet, grabbing his robe and carrying a bedside lamp, in the vain hope of making it a deterrent.

— Mmm... Your cock is not uninteresting. In terms of diameter I mean, because it's not so much about length... But people like you don't understand that the only good sex you can have is with your head. Otherwise, all you do is fuck.

For a moment, Camacho's wondering if he's not just fooling around. He knows that voice. He recognizes it because he's been hearing it over and over for the last few hours.

Naked, standing in his living room, shocked, blood dripping from his fractured nose, a lamp in one hand and the bathrobe half-stuck on, he's realizing two things. First, that there's no one physically present in the room. Second, that it is from the giant screen in his living room that the voice resounds.

Mackto Urulala's gigantic face is displayed on the 2x3 meter wall screen.



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— Well, are we talking business, Governor?

— Shit. Shit. Shit. are you Sick!? Damn it! But how did you know I live here? I'm going to tear you down, you whore! How did you hack into my home...

— Tutut, let me stop you there. Dear little gentleman, I'll have to use a vocabulary that the boors of your species understand. You, you build spas where rich people get their dick sucked. I make love in space in an orbital module that I designed and built with money that you can't afford to pay for. So, hacking into this two-bit system, you'd better stop wondering about trifles, Governor.

If Camacho's no longer surprised, he's not settling down.

— HUH? Stop surprising me? But you dirty bitch, who do you think you're talking to? I'm the future president of the United States and I'm gonna fuck you, you WHORE! I'm gonna contact the generals who are loyal to me and I'm gonna have your companies razed to the ground, and see if we can't find a missile to send that'll blow up your fucking capsule, and you with it, and...

— Does the future president of the United States think he can be elected, if I go live with this the amazing conversation we're having? Or if I rewind the tape a little bit before, when you were happily masturbating that little sausage of yours?

Silence. Camacho's going from red to white. Livid, he's looking for his words.

— I'm sure Governor Camacho's dick size will make more headlines than little Paoletta's sublime orgasms. To popularize the election, it's perfect. But for the Sandwill vote, not the Camacho vote, I'm afraid.

— I... I... I forbid you... I forbid you...

— Shut up, Camacho. You're not forbidding me from anything, you put your clothes back on, and you listen to me. Come on! Get dressed!

Frightening spectacle. The man doesn't even know where his stuff is, the housekeepers have tidied up, and they usually prepare his suits early in the morning. Mackto Urulala enjoys watching him search through the cupboards that contain nothing but alcohol, books and trinkets.

— Okay, I got nothing, I'm in a bathrobe, you win. What do you want?



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— I want to send you a message. Camacho, the American people will vote overwhelmingly, despite this Secession War you've started. And with the last crazy woman to be elected, I have no illusions. A mediocre man of your calibre can be quite the winner.

— I knew it! That's why you advertised my HIOPI app, isn't it? To suck my balls? And get my favors? You're just another whore!

Mackto Urulala bursts out laughing, takes a step back, seems to press a button, and her image disappears to give way to a cosy interior: obviously a surveillance video in a bourgeois house, on earth.

— My tongue has indeed done a little trick on your balls, while one of my hands has grabbed them and the other is holding a pair of scissors wide open. Here's a video of your wife. And you'll recognize the inside of your home in Santa Fe. You shouldn't leave her like that, Camacho... she's good looking for her age. Look how well she's getting laid by one of your firm's interns. He's got her screaming the way she should be screaming... Watching her come is quite satisfying, isn't it? I'd like a taste of it myself.

Green, white, red, the governor goes through a whole range of colours.

— Fuck you, sex-wise, my wife and I have an unspoken agreement about our respective distractions. She fucks what she wants and so do I. Okay, you've got me by the balls. What do you want?

— I want your ear; in case you get elected. I want to be able to work in peace. And there's a good chance I'll go into the development and construction of guns and weapons of war, given the current demand. I would ask for your benevolence. A few government contracts, not much, really.

— My ass. And I know you're in bed with Thomasson, don't deny it. You got a lot to fuck me about, OK, but if you try to fuck me over, I'll remember that, and right now I feel like you're taking my asshole for your playground.

— God, it's easy to understand you when you use words that suit you so well, Governor Camacho. No, I'm speaking in good faith. I'll even give you a gift.

— What's that? What now, goddamn it!



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— Don't swear... So... (Sighs) I believe you're looking to get your hands on the candidate who's competing against you in the presidential race? But you can't find him, can you?

No more games. Mackto Urulala's using a new, icy tone, the one she uses when she talks business. Camacho gives her a black look, ties his robe tightly, and beckons her to continue with his chin, sitting on his couch, facing the screen.

— All right. (Laughs) I'll tell you where he is, Governor.

— I'm this close to dislodging him, I know he's in Europe. Switzerland, France, or Germany, I'm not sure.

— Well, I'm telling you, Archie Sandwill is in France.

— And more specifically?

— He moves around a lot. My telecom empire is a playground in which I've given myself a lot more passes than in your... "bullet hole." I dislodged it first in the North, towards Dunkirk. Then he migrated to the Mayenne, and it's been a few weeks since he's been wandering around in the centre of France in deserted and lost corners. At the moment, he is in Auvergne. He never stays more than one night in the same place. He often cuts off his telephones for several days at a time.

— Is he escorted?

— A woman and a man, I imagine he passes them off as his children.

— What does he travel in?

— I'm not going to chew up your work either, I also do business with your competitor, remember...

— Okay, if you want Urulala, but at the very least, I don't give a shit about that info. Archie Sandwill is a loser, he hasn't got a chance. He hasn't even held a meeting, just videos on YouTube about his cheesy program. I don't give a shit if he's skiing in the Alps or sleeping in Euro Disney, we're going to find him anyway, he's visible as a great-grandmother standing in line at a sperm bank. That's not the information he's interested in.

— I'll give you the information I'm interested in, Camacho.

— Well I don't like it, go ahead, spread the pictures of my dick in the world, at least they'll see I have one and I use it, go ahead and spread the moment when I make my housekeepers squeal, it's got a nice touch, a guy my age capable of banging little asses better than a 20-year-old athlete, and...



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Without showing it, Mackto Urulala mutes the video. The vomit lasts five long minutes, during which she watches her interlocutor screaming furiously as he comes and goes in his living room, his lamp in his hand from which hangs an electric wire. Once he is calmed down and back on the couch, with a smoking cigar in his mouth, she decides to start the conversation again.

— What energy, Governor... Anyway... I think I know what you want. And I don't have it.

— Spit it out, space queen, we'll see how smart you are.

— I'm as smart as I am knowledgeable. I saw a note coming through that says you're worried and wondering who the vice president of Sandwill is going to be. Aren't you?

— Exactly. I want to know who's the ticket? This info, if you've got it, I'm interested. God damn it. You find me that, and if I'm president, I'll suck your feet, tits and even your balls because I'm sure you've got a big pair, Urulala. Otherwise, go fuck yourself deep in space!

And Camacho to throw the lamp on his screen that explodes in a thousand pieces.

Lost cause.

Urulala's face then appears everywhere in the house. Desktop computer, tablet, telephones, televisions in the bedrooms... and even the state-of-the-art holographic projector that projects a gigantic face of the billionaire into the living room, next to which she erects a fantastic middle finger.

— I'll see what I can find out for you and I'll expect a lot in return. But just know that getting my ass up in space is a done deal, Governor. I'm not putting everything I make here online either. I only keep the good stuff. Excite the animals, I'll let you do that in your trigger-happy, anti-vacationist, creationist bullshit meetings. I suggest you watch my interlude with Mrs. Paloetta again and you'll see that I have no "balls". So we do look alike, don't we?

And the billionaire hangs up, leaving a Camacho in the midst of a clastic crisis, throwing everything in his hands out the window, screaming a stream of insanity to be kept in the annals of the English language.



**- CHAPTER NINETEEN -
A LITTLE HISTORY OF USA AND FRANCE**

*20 minutes later. 11:03 p.m., Washington D.C. time.
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington,
The White House,
Executive Briefing Room, east wing.*

Mac Coy's out there again.

Held apart from the meeting in the "bunker" HQ.

That's all the White House is used for now: the fantastic building is now transformed into the real headquarters of interim President Thomasson's armies, from which the whole strategy of response to the secessionists is set up. Political, military, economic, intelligence, sabotage, special operations, foreign diplomacy, official relations with the other side? The president has literally divided the building into themes, with as many high-ranking military officers and national security agency officials in the offices. The NSA liaison officer is jealous of those of the FBI and the CIA: chance has given him the privilege of working in Lincoln's room.

Thomasson even suffered the beginnings of mutiny, with the fear of seeing Urulala fall on the White House and all that little world. Diplomatic agents warned him to set up a Task Force to



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respond to this "space risk" by threatening him with professional migration away from Washington. As a result, the atmosphere of the mythical ballroom is no longer festive: it now hosts supercomputers, soldiers and NASA personnel who are supposed to develop a credible ballistic response to the billionaire threat. Collaboration is tense, as NASA engineers are big fans of the Billionaire threat, and their habitual job is not to vaporize spacecraft into a thousand pieces, but to make them travel in one.

However, the people who work here were not recruited by chance and are proud, in these obscure times, to go and spend their days, nights and weekends at the White House, shamefully renamed by the secessionist propaganda press, the "Grey House".

The interim president has not yet taken over the oval office, but he continues to work in a small side office in the west wing. However, he is less present in the EEOB: chairing the two daily crisis meetings at the White House is time-consuming, one in the morning at 7:30 a.m. and the other at 6 p.m.

Mac Coy is ruminating. If patience is the counterpart of shenanigans, he knows how to manage it. However, he can hardly contain the emotional chaos that is brewing in his head. With the election approaching, in a month he will be like his country: fixed on his fate. One wonders if the game Thomasson plays with his nerves isn't part of his strategy.

The president lets him follow him like a shadow: he has entrusted him with the "surveillance" of the 465 square meters of the Situation Room, the crisis room where the conflict with the generals and officers loyal to the United States is managed. All the strategy of this curious Civil War is played out there, and he is an integral part of the analyses and decisions, drawing up the minutes of each meeting. But the Presidential Emergency Operational Centre of the bunker, located under the east wing and at the entrance of which he has been waiting for a long hour now, no way to set foot there: a state of affairs that is repeating itself at a pace that has recently accelerated and that irritates him quite a bit. At the door, confined to the adjoining Executive Briefing Room, he doesn't even know who attends these top-secret meetings.

Sitting down, Mac Coy takes a deep breath with his head in his hands. The tension is palpable: one moment he sees himself as a courageous servant of the state, forced to manage the balance,



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invested with a mission of dialogue... soon after he is faced with his cowardice and his inability to choose a side, and a second later he remembers his mission: to serve one side, he is as much asking to dialogue with it as he is to intoxicate the other.

And all this he must carry alone.

Friends, colleagues, family. Bitterly, he realizes that he hasn't had a sincere conversation for years.

The young white boy from the Republican Party struggles not to become a shadow of his former self. He admires Thomasson: he can't deny it, even his instability and unconsciousness make him unbearable. To put Archie Sandwill forward as a candidate is irresponsible, no one will vote for an invisible man. The other fact he can't deny is that he hates Camacho. Almost regretfully, because the Governor's game is one he knows so well that giving in would be almost comforting.

Mac Coy discovers a new conflict: war with himself.

For Thomasson is right.

Sooner or later, he's going to have to choose sides.

Weary, he is about to leave the room to go upstairs to get some air, when he feels a vibration in his left pocket. Pocket in which he stows the phone provided by Camacho.

Imperceptible acceleration of his pulse.

TXT – Gov Camacho – 00:23 am

What the hell are you doing? You're a piece of shit that I'd better drop! Where's Sandwill? Who's gonna be his VP? I want that information now! The election's a month away. Move your filthy snotty ass or I'll beat it.

Raising of eyebrows. He decides to go back upstairs, better answer outside on the lawn.

TXT – 00:26 am

Forgive my silence. I'm on it. One of my field agents is sending me positive signals, but I'm waiting for confirmation. I'll contact you when I know more.



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TXT – Gov Camacho – 00:28 am

All your messages end the same. Bummer. What's your agent's name?

TXT – 00:28 am

I'm faithful to you, but I'm not stupid. You won't get his name. According to my agent, there's a strong possibility Sandwill is in France. He's in the process of raising armed support. Requires confirmation.

TXT – Gov Camacho – 00:28 am

Of course he's in France, you idiot!

There, Mac Coy suddenly feels the wind of fear blowing. Supposed to be at the centre of this little game, seeing information like this slip out of his grasp is like feeling his own survival slip out of his hands.

TXT – 00:29 am

Reliable information?

TXT – Gov Camacho – 00:30 am

Do you doubt me? Directly from the space lesbian. But I don't know where he is. I'm sure Thomasson does. Find fucking Sandwill, and more importantly, find me who his future V.P. is. There're two targets, plus one. There's no room for coincidence, the election's in a month. Get moving!

TXT – 00:30 am

Copy.



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Head to the kitchens.

Mac Coy has the cellar pass. He opens it and helps himself to a large glass of white Porto which he quickly brings down, leaning against the glass of a wine cellar.

Enough screwing up. You're screwing up big time... Move it. You know how to do this. Go to Thomasson, do whatever it takes to get that information. You're his direct adviser, you need to be in the loop, that's normal.

Headind for the bunker. He goes down the stairs, determined to use his art, when suddenly he almost stumbles into an obstacle. Shoulders briefly bumping into each other.

— Damn it, watch out!

— Do the same! But... have you been drinking, Mac Coy? You reek of liquor!

Terror.

He raises his head.

And falls face to face with Thomasson's eyes, who was quietly climbing back from the bunker, flanked by two of his bodyguards. An improbable face-to-face in the staircase, for two men who nevertheless spend 3/4 of their time together.

Fuck! My little Mac Coy, you won't look like a fool in front of this man. I won't.

— Yes, Mr. Chairman. With my apologies. I confess. I don't smoke, I couldn't stand it anymore. I couldn't stand it anymore. I know there's a better way to get a breath of fresh air, I just... snapped.

— Apology accepted. Of course, oxygen, we're all short of it, aren't we gentlemen? said Thomasson, turning to his close guard. Give me back the cellar pass, however.

Head down, contrite, Mac Coy took the pass out of his bucket-hole and handed it to the president.

— Phew... I don't know who to give it to anymore! This damn pass is more cumbersome than the bunker access authorizations! You're not the first, Mac Coy... And if I keep it with me, people will say I've fallen into alcohol. Anyway, only the head cook will get his and basta. Soliman?

A young, bald man comes forward, respectfully.

— You're a practicing Muslim. Here, I'm sure you won't steal anything, so I'll leave this key with you until the election, or



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until death do us part... Fine! Mac Coy, you're up to your neck in nonsense, why not, but I know you well. Need to talk? Don't you?

He's really good.

— Indeed, Mr. President. I have some things to say to you, and in private, if possible.

— That's truly fortunate, because I have things to tell you too.

10 minutes later,

*President Thomasson's office,
West Wing of the White House.*

— It's upsetting, what you're telling me now, Mac Coy... very upsetting... So Camacho knows Sandwill is in France.

— He told me so, Mr. Chairman. You confirm it yourself?

— I confirm it.

It's an understatement to say Stanley Thomasson is concerned. He's alone, without his guard, staring at a corner of a wall gravely, elbows in his lap and hands folded under his chin.

— It was I, who arranged for Sandwill's departure for Europe. We decided that on the day Warner Lee died. We met with Sandwill, we had dinner, we had a very long discussion, late... and he left a few days later, I don't know how.

— Why Sandwill, Mr. Chairman?

— Because I can trust him. Haven't you realized by now that it's priceless? Look at you, Mac Coy. I'm not talking about your little sneaky drink. But I know exactly what information I can give you and what I must keep to myself... and you must admit I've been generous in the degree of trust I place in you. Camacho also knows this, which is why he is releasing some information to you, which I thank you, however, for sharing with me. But, in any case, that he knows that Archie is in France is very worrying.

Thomasson said all this as if nothing had happened, with a factual and disarming naturalness. Mac Coy tries not to blush to keep his composure.



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— Mr. Chairman, he's going to put people on the spot and try to flush him out.

— Yes, I know he will. I wish him courage. Even I don't know where he is... even though I have him on the phone regularly. He's constantly on the move. And he's not supposed to show up before the election. Curious campaign, isn't it?

Oh, shit. That's done... information that I could never get...

— But why France?

— Long story. It was Archie who insisted on leaving the American continent. I was against it. He found it "Romanesque", to give himself a dimension of persecution, of "exile" for freedom... whatever one thinks, he was right, but not for that reason. Did you see his last rib? At the briefing, this morning?

— I did. On the Dark Net, the bounty on his head is over \$150 million.

— Which is another reason why I'm glad I'm not running for office. The secessionists are crazy... What a sad, sad world... If only his popularity could go up that fast!

Sighs, thoughts. Thomasson gets up, brushes his cigar cellar with one hand and goes behind his desk to open a drawer. He pulls out a glass and a bottle of whiskey.

— Wouldn't want you to be the only one drinking, would you, Mac Coy?

The young assistant laughs, sincerely. Affable and cheerful, Thomasson sits down and gently titillates him:

— Yes, young man, I assume, and I won't apologize... But I'm doing this on my own dime. With my own bottle! And not in the cellar stock paid for with American money, right?

Mac Coy giggles, embarrassed, looking up at the sky.

— Besides, I like these people. The French are as sick of equality as we are of freedom, you know? They see inequality everywhere, we see inequality everywhere, we see our rights being violated everywhere... Everything is subject to discussion, they constantly feel "persecuted", they constantly demonstrate, without realizing all the opportunities they have. It's the same in the workplace, it takes them months to decide, but I'm beginning to believe that this constant whining strengthens the foundations of their democracy. And their system of redistribution of goods is much more efficient than ours. No matter how ungrateful they are



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to their country, at least they have a country that seeks to take care of them.

— If you draw the comparison with us, we are a pioneer people, Mr. Chairman. That's why we don't have it in our genes to complain. That's why we're used to living with what we have...

— Bullshit, Mac Coy. That's a load of crap. You know what the Germans say about the French? That they're the "only people on earth who think they're in hell while they're in paradise". We're the other way around. We don't revolt, because we are the smiling slaves of a system defended by the Camachos, who lock us up in derisory liberties. To have the right to buy "a gun to protect ourselves" is a senseless illusion that does not protect us from under-education, diabetes or oxycodone overdoses. Complaining is not a nice way to be heard, but it's a start, Mac Coy! And then the USA and France share a long story, isn't it? What's up? What do you think about it?

Mac Coy nods. The President is looking for him nicely. He's testing him, as he often does. The young councilman gets up and stands in front of a window with his hands in his pockets.

As for talking, Thomasson talks, but not at all about what he'd like to hear.

Never mind, let's go merrily! And this kind of conversation is not unpleasant, he knows his subject, the bugger.

— I know that our nations have supported each other in many conflicts. But I wouldn't get into a discussion of history with someone who's a graduate on the subject like you, Mr. Chairman. I don't know much about it. I know that the architect in Washington was French, Pierre Charles something...

— Pierre Charles l'Enfant, who was unsufferable, by the way. And?

— And if I look over there, I see Lafayette Square, named after the French revolutionary who boarded the Hermione to come and train Americans to fight, and helped us considerably in our battles against the British.

— That's right, sir. He was convinced that we should help us in our war of independence. But, at the time, he was not yet a revolutionary. George Washington made him a general at the age of 19. And the first ship he came in with, with 6,000 guns on



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board, was called the Victory. He came back with the Hermione, and then it was long after the French Revolution.

— You see? No need to play with you, you're too good!

— We're not playing, we're talking! It takes men who are quick to be indignant to win real freedoms, Mac Coy. An amusing anecdote, by the way. When I was working on my thesis on the American revolts, I drew parallels with the French, trying to understand their ability to demonstrate every week... I came across translations of writings dating back to a few years before Christ, which spoke of the Gauls. By Strabo, an eminent Greek geographer... He said of the Gauls, "As for the ease with which they form these tumultuous gatherings, the cause lies in their frank and generous character which makes them feel the insult of their neighbours as their own and become indignant with them".

Mac Coy nodded his head and smiled.

— What, you think the French have been trade unionists since Jesus Christ?

Thomasson bursts out laughing.

— What I'm trying to tell you is that we're running out of history. America's a teenage country! And I say this with pride in my country. Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East... and now this Civil War... we're doing all the teenage nonsense. But we'll learn. And we'll grow out of it, won't we, Mac Coy?

— To do that, we're gonna have to reunite our country, and then we're gonna go vote... Forgive me for going back to more mundane matters, but as such, while I understand and respect Sandwill's choice, I don't approve of it, as you know. That's why I'd like to know one thing, as would all the press who are seriously questioning...

Now Thomasson's ticking. And raises his eyebrows.

— Mac Coy, you're about to ask me who will be Sandwill's vice president. Is it you, or is it Camacho asking me?

Do not shake.

— It's me, Mr. President.

— That's great timing! Didn't you imagine for one moment that Archie and I hadn't considered making you our future Vice President?

Thunderclap. Stunned, Mac Coy opens a mouth ten feet long. Ten thousand things jostle in his head. What he's gonna tell



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Camacho, what he's gonna tell his family... Thomasson's used to bluffing, but he's never seen him lie before.

— Of course, it'll depend on your choices... But the possibility is real. We'll see what events have in store for us, won't we?

— It's, uh... forgive me, but... uh... are you serious?

— Absolutely! Note that this is not a gift! These days, it's not so much a job as it is a home office...

— Mr. President... I'm sorry, but somehow, if you say that, you're putting me... in danger.

— Mac Coy, we're all in danger right now. Yes, I know who Sandwill's vice president will be. It's up to Camacho to find out for himself if it amuses him. I won't tell you who it is. Right now, it's not you. But I'm asking you to act accordingly when you have decisions to make. In fact, call Camacho and set up a video conference for tomorrow night.

— What are you gonna tell him?

— We're going to negotiate a cease-fire. We're a month away from elections. Enough with all these skirmishes between the secessionist states and the faithful. The press is getting excited and not talking about the vote! It's a good thing Mackto Urulala's getting laid up there! At least she's got an audience and keeps talking about the elections... And I'm fed up, fed up with calming down every day my generals who "dream of going there", taking themselves for General Ulysses Grant. There's one who compared me to Lincoln yesterday, just to make me lather up, it was a bad move. The world is watching, and history will judge us by the number of Americans who died on our own soil. We must make it, Mac Coy.

— In fact, if I may say so, as far as Urulala is concerned...

— Yes?

— She's the one who let the cat out of the bag. Regarding Sandwill in France... She found out somehow, but... she brought him back to Camacho.

Thomasson blows long. He rubs his face, takes a sip of whiskey, swirls the liquid in his glass.

— What a game of chess... sometimes I wonder if I'm gonna keep my advantage... That's not surprising. I asked her for something, she's very good at it, but I didn't expect this kind of bill. Good! I'm glad to see you can't keep your mouth shut, so I'll



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ask you a favour before we go to bed, because... I can't take it anymore! Go to sleep!

— Yes, Mr. President?

— Sandwill's price tag on the Dark Web... Try to keep it a secret, do everything you can. A hundred and fifty million dollars, it would be a shame if it fell on the ears of Camacho's field agents. Otherwise, the Sandwill hunt might be on in France. And the hunters will be very, very numerous.

