CONSPIRACY

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58,200 words

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As he followed Morgan down the long featureless hallway, Wilson couldn't help but wonder why he was chasing Morgan instead of the other way around. Morgan had just arrived in D.C. that morning; Wilson had been cooped up in that second-rate Washington hotel for the past three weeks. But no, Morgan must lead.

Wilson had felt impotent from the start, follower, not leader, his common sense bought off by a promise of a once-in-a lifetime opportunity. He'd followed sheepishly after Morgan's vintage car in his own battered Yugo into and through a seldom-visited part of town. He'd parked next to him amid shards of concrete in a almost empty lot, then followed passively step after step (slightly out of breath, but unwilling to admit it) up three flights of stairs in a seemingly-abandoned building. Ensconced with a dozen others on the building's top floor, he'd listened to Morgan's proposition, and found it absurd, his own role in the plan impossible of fulfillment. Why me, he'd asked himself then. Perhaps he ought to have asked himself this two or even three times before he made a commitment.

Chapter 1

The group formed a tableau of the sixties brought forward in time: Morgan, their flamboyant mid-twenties leader, with his long hair and long, thin mustache, could easily have doubled for his namesake, Morgan the Pirate. Tall, a bit over six feet, and handsome, but for a few residual acne-scars, Morgan wore his long hair down to and spread out along his shoulders like a proper sixteenth-century gentleman. The hair made a political statement just as it had both forty and four hundred years before.

Debra Gray, only a few years younger than Morgan, neatly attired in a proper white blouse and gray skirt, went braless and wore granny glasses she'd purchased at a thrift shop. With his Mohawk, nose ring, and single earring, Oscar Lahud (Lamud?) would be better identified as skinhead '90's, or maybe '80's punk. Still, a sixties love child would surely have exclaimed, "He's just doing his own thing, man."

The majority of the other faces at the meeting were also familiar to Wilson, either from his stint as advisor to the college newspaper or as former students in his journalism classes. Many subtle and not-so-subtle changes had taken place in the years intervening. Debbie's outward dress was as conservative as ever, but her braless condition was new. (Will the real Debra Gray please stand up.) Caitlin, a silent almost invisible presence in the past, now numbered among the most vocal of participants. Morgan? Well Morgan had always been

outspoken, a heroic figure the students listened to as much or more than they listened to their professors.

Making it all seem believable, Alfred Williams, Morgan's childhood friend and the group's token conservative, had shown up as always in a suit and tie. Morgan had made Alfred take off his suit jacket and put on Morgan's leather one in its place. Not so much, Wilson suspected, because Morgan wanted Alfred to blend in with the crowd, but so Morgan could show off the pirate shirt with puffy sleeves and lace at the collar he wore underneath.

The real puzzle was why Wilson himself was at the meeting, trying and failing to look like something other than a hapless academic. The answer, he supposed, was because Morgan knew, Morgan understood. While Wilson might favor the standard patches-at-the-elbows garb of an underpaid instructor at a backwater university, inside he was still an unrepentant hippie, a child of the sixties.

He did and he didn't belong with this group. He'd had a life—marriage, children, while the lives of the others had barely begun. He'd been their trusted mentor and collaborator once, a source of both wisdom and approval for some of them. But that had been four years before. Not now, not still, surely?

Surely each and every one of his former students ought already have attained their vision, found a secure niche in which to spend the remainder of their lives.

He sniffed; men's cologne; none of that in the sixties. Bell bottoms, puffy shirts, wild colors for men's clothes, sure. In 1968, the odors of

Patuoli and hemp could occasionally be discerned on the bodies and clothes of men as well as women, but never cologne. Another major difference from the era of peace and love Wilson remembered so fondly were the half-dozen youngsters of Middle-Eastern and Asian extraction gathered at the conference table. Composing at least half of the group Morgan had assembled, their real names unpronounceable, they were the true symbols of the new 21st century.

Oscar was Lebanese. Caitlin—a sweet Irish colleen, if one were to go strictly by the name—was the child of Iranian parents. She spoke English and Farsi with equal facility. Her hair was jet black, her looks exotic, but she smelled—Wilson leaned forward his face next to hers to be sure—distinctly American.

Several of the new faces Wilson didn't particularly care for. Oscar was one, and an Ali something or other, whose face might well have headed an Al-Qa'ida recruiting poster, was another. A third Arab had gone without introduction so far. All three were unshaven, not quite bearded but far from clean cut. Wilson didn't care for Arabs, distrusted them. Who did trust them since September 11th? But they were to get along, children of all nations united in the American way. Surely this, too, had been a dream of the sixties.

What Morgan had to propose was the creation of a sixties-style counter-culture newspaper for the Tri-City area. A true alternative to the "captive" media.

Morgan would be editor and publisher. Wilson would be advisor to the publisher—with his name on the masthead if he so desired—just as

he had been mentor and advisor when Morgan was a student at Western State and editor of the college paper there.

Morgan had been a good but not a great editor. A B at best, though the new century insisted that he, like every other student, receive an A. Morgan had made few changes to the paper's contents—complaints about cafeteria and dormitory food service, names on the Dean's list, games won and lost. But he'd drastically altered the paper's style. Student columnists, Debra and Caitlin foremost among them, suddenly had opinions. And, after one unhappy incident, Wilson had been forced to read and reread each issue in advance to be sure those opinions would never again offend the powers that be.

A sudden vivid memory of one such scene came back to him. They were in the President's office, the President, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Dean of Arts and Science and Wilson. The Dean was doing all the talking: They did not want to interfere, but standards were to be upheld. Surely, Wilson as a Full Professor of Journalism must understand that. Advisor to the College Paper was no mere sinecure but an integral part of one's duties. And was his appointment as a full professor confirmed or merely temporary?

According to Morgan, the assembled group was to be both the staff and the owners of the new paper. The necessary capital was in hand, Morgan assured them—who had been the source of the monies, Wilson wondered? (He never did learn the answer.) How long would the monies last?—and they had the talent. What they needed were stories and ads.

The offices Morgan had rented in the loft of a former manufacturing plant were equipped with the necessary desks and chairs, some wood, some metal, as well as a number of early vintage PC's, two IBM Selectric typewriters, and, incredibly, a single Remington manual similar to the one on which Wilson had launched his own journalistic career decades past.

The desks were not new. Several of the wooden ones had initials carved in their upper surfaces and chewing gum was stuck beneath the one Wilson envisioned as his own. The seat of the chair that went with his desk had been mended at least once with masking tape. And though at one time the chair may have proclaimed itself "an ergonomic miracle," its adjustments now were frozen solid, and Wilson could use it just as it was or not at all.

"The TriCity Sentinel! How does that sound?" Morgan looked about him for agreement, and the answering murmurs from around the large open room confirmed that the name sounded just fine. (No discussion?! This wasn't at all like the sixties. Students then were radical, disagreeing constantly as a matter of principle, outspoken even if only a blending voice in a crowd. Today's young adult was content to lip-synch, voice no louder than the music in the background.)

They had the necessary stories and ads to carry them through an initial two issues, Morgan told them. But they needed a really "big" story if they were to have a truly successful launch. Could they do it?

Wilson wondered what Morgan had in mind—Bad Food in Local College Cafeterias? City Councilman Wins Lottery for Home in

Development He Supported? These might make attention-grabbing headlines for a single issue, but were sure to be forgotten well before the next was released. Was this editorial meeting a pep rally or a serious discussion?

"Caitlin will tell us what that story is."

Caitlin? The shyest of the shy? Wilson had found Caitlin's exotic looks attractive but off putting when she sat in his classroom. He could see there'd been a few adjustments in the intervening years. A once hooked nose now was barely recognizable as such. The pale white tops of newly implanted breasts could be glimpsed rising from a scooped-neck blouse. But the final adjustment lay in the strong voice that emerged from Caitlin's lipsticked mouth, self-assured and convincing.

"My aunt has told me that the President had at least six-months advance notice of the September 11th attacks."

Could be, Wilson thought. A lot of speculation had been made in that direction. Even the captive media carried regular accounts of unheeded warnings from the FBI, the FAA, and the CIA, warnings that had been in the President's hands well before September 2001. But where was the smoking gun? The proof that the President knew of the forthcoming attacks but had deliberately ignored the evidence. And who was Caitlin's know-all aunt?

"We have reason to believe," Morgan interrupted, "that the President and his advisors not only discussed the likelihood of the attacks but determined that it would be to the President's advantage if the attacks took place."

Truly, a "Big" story. If it were true. And if its details could be corroborated. Again, one had to ask, just who was Caitlin's aunt and how had she come by her information?

"My aunt is with the Iranian embassy in Washington."

The Iranian embassy? that well-known source of disinformation?

"I can see Paul is skeptical," Morgan said. (Wilson's lack of a poker face had kept him, despite a strong inclination, from participating in any card games over the years except for "Go Fish," a game the child is supposed to win.) "The Iranian embassy is a frequent source of disinformation. Which is why at least two of you are going to Washington to get the facts."

"Almost 90% of newspaper startups fail." Morgan looked right at Wilson as he replayed word-for-word one of his former instructor's lectures, "But if this story is true and we're the first to cover it, we'll have the subscribers and advertisers we need to carry the paper, our paper, through its first few months."

We might even get a Pulitzer, I might get a Pulitzer, Wilson thought, but said nothing.

Again came murmured sounds of agreement, even enthusiasm, from around the conference table. Wilson was less sanguine about their chances. Two kids barely past college age were supposed to fly to the nation's capital, out scoop Woodward and Bernstein, and get the story that had somehow eluded the Washington Post, The New York Times, the Associated Press, and CNN? Only in the movies.

But Morgan was dead serious. So was Don Quixote. "Caitlin, Debbie, Paul, I'm counting on you to get the facts and the interviews, the why as well as the what and who. The rest of us, led by Oscar, will concentrate on selling ads while you're away."

Paul? Had Wilson just heard his own name coming from Morgan's mouth? Right: he was going to use the few weeks he had free of teaching duties—his so-called vacation—on a crazy adventure. The thought of spending a week or so in Debbie's company was appealing, but common sense—she was younger than any of his daughters—forced Wilson to put that thought aside.

"I teach journalism. I don't really do it. Any more."

"What about the San Diego bomber?"

Ten pairs of eyes turned toward him. The San Diego bomber had been a long time ago. A long time, Wilson thought. But he didn't say no to the forthcoming trip, took the tour of the new offices along with everyone else and barely cringed when he learned that Oscar, boots, rings and all, was to be the TriCity Sentinel's advertising manager.

Wilson wanted that story, wanted his name on its byline, on the awards that were sure to follow. Morgan had read Wilson's mind, as always, knew him better than he knew himself.

Chapter 2

The impossibility of their getting the "big" story wasn't what bothered Wilson about Morgan's proposal; but the all-too-slim likelihood of the new journal's gathering sufficient advertising revenue, even if be-ringed and be-jeweled Oscar hadn't been its advertising manager.

Wilson had a terrifying sense of deja vu, of another alternative newspaper that had flamed and died. Its editor, a less charismatic version of Morgan, had been especially gifted at sniffing out a story. Wilson could think of one or two that could stand republication today: Where do streetwalkers get their clothes? And, who actually goes to prostitutes?

He'd forgotten the answer to the former question though the mystery still intrigued him. The answer to who goes to prostitutes, despite the blitz of newspaper coverage that always covers the occasional lapse of the rich and famous, is old age pensioners, with the peak income for the ladies of the night coinciding with the arrival of that month's social security checks.

In this newspaper's second year of publication, the editor brought home a Pulitzer for himself and the paper with a story on a land fraud perpetrated by the local Salvation Army board. To raise much needed funds, the Kalamazoo school system had been forced to sell the land and buildings of an elementary school that changing demographics had left isolated and abandoned. Three members of the Salvation Army's

board had picked up the property for a song, then resold it to the Army for an instant profit of several hundred thousand dollars.

A worthwhile story of corruption and political malfeasance, an important one whose implications had placed the editor and the paper at risk and severed his ties with many members of his own family. He deserved the resulting Pulitzer. No, it wasn't the editor who'd let that newspaper down; it was its advertising manager. Though this individual lacked the combat boots and abrasive manner of an Oscar, and knew enough to wear a suit when making sales calls, he'd not been particularly successful. Not even when his paper had a Pulitzer to brag about. His one major sale had been to the State Department of Employment. They'd taken advantage of the paper's low rates to satisfy a legal requirement to advertise. That is, they had until someone at the Department discovered that X-rated movie theaters and dirty book stores were the paper's other primary source of ad revenue.

To be fair, that newspaper's advertising manager really hadn't been the salesman type. Each "no" or even "I'll have to think about it," he took as a personal rejection. Nor had he proved capable of whipping himself out of the depression that was sure to follow at least without several days spent licking his imagined wounds.

Wilson had been that newspaper's advertising manager.

Wilson had also been a physicist—four years of college, and one job, a short-lived research project in solid state physics for a professor at the University he'd just graduated from. He'd been a farmer, a husband, and a father, and more or less failed at all of these too.

According to Einstein, the path an object traverses is influenced by every other object in the universe. Wilson knew all about Einstein and the limitations of Newtonian mechanics. He'd never quite realized that the rules applied to humans as well. They may start out with a specific long-range goal, but unless they're autistic (and even then), those they meet along the way may guide them to quite a different end.

While working at the University, Wilson impregnated a young lady. Fortunately, he both loved and liked her. While their marriage lasted, she'd truly been "the wind beneath his wings."

When Wilson's father died and left them his farm, it was Kathy who suggested it would be better to live and raise a family in the ample spaces of the country, Kathy who'd pointed out they could remain in the cramped one-bedroom apartment above the book store only if they both had jobs. And they couldn't, not when one of them needed to stay home to take care of the child.

Sure the city offered plays, gourmet restaurants, and exhibits of priceless art, but when was the last time they could afford to go to any of these? Weren't they only pretending to enjoy the city's culture?

The weather would be colder where they were going, but the air would be cleaner. The schools would offer fewer electives, but the schoolyards would be free of drugs and crime. Either way, weren't they a family? Wherever they lived, Paul and Kathy would be together.

These arguments were carried out in whispers after they'd gone to bed and in more normal voices through the day until, in the end, they'd moved to the farm. Wilson wasn't pig ignorant—he'd exhibited and sold

prize hogs several times as a 4H'er, but there'd been a reason he'd left farm life for the city. Not the early morning chores, the routine part of farm life that had plagued his youth, but the weariness on his father's face, the impression that no matter how hard one worked the land, one never really got ahead. The chores one did today would have to be done again tomorrow.

The chores resumed. Wilson hired a man to help out with the animals, but drove the tractor and did the planting himself. He and his family ate fresh vegetables five months of the year, including corn, sweet and tender, that went straight from the garden to the pot. One daughter became two, then three. The daughters, too, had chores. "Yes, you have to do them, no matter that it's cold out." The voice of Wilson's father, and his father's father, too, presumably, could be heard now in his.

Then Kathy moved out and took the daughters with her. Perhaps, she didn't like the sound of his father's voice. Wilson got a job at the nearby state college teaching, not physics but journalism. He kept a small garden, but most of the acreage he rented out. He sold off the goats and chickens, but he kept the horses as long as there were daughters in town who might come out and ride them. Then the daughters were gone, first to college and then to homes of their own. He was alone.

Life goes on. Students are cute and easily fuckable, but a girlfriend is not a wife. Nor is a college branch buried in the corner of a Mid-Western state a Berkeley. Lectures once challenging become

commonplace, then wearisome. Students and their frenetic self-absorbed inquiries are as water wearing away at a stone. Next to their firm young bodies Wilson could see his own withering away. The moment came when the face in the mirror was no longer one he recognized.

A few years before, Wilson had gone to Chicago to see a performance of *Cats,* the musical based on T.S. Eliot's poetry. As Wilson bragged to anyone within earshot, he' d been the guest of his middle daughter, the hotshot attorney and her then fiancé. The cat that stuck in his memory was Asparagus:

"Gus is the cat at the theater door. . . He isn't the cat that he was years before." In his youth, Gus had turned in a stellar performance as Firefrorfiddle, the Fiend of the Fell. Received seven catcalls! Now, well past his prime, limping along on shaky legs, Gus lived on memories and handouts from other actors. As a young reporter, Wilson had tracked down the San Diego bomber. But like the old cat's success, this had been a long time ago.

Chapter 3

Is time travel a reality? Of course it is. All one must do is open the gates of memory.

"Oh, it's one, two, three, four, who are we fighting for?"

In 1968, Wilson graduated from the University of California at Berkeley with a degree in physics. Like most physics graduates then and now, he didn't have a job or any prospect of one. Late one evening, he was sitting in the Pic, a bohemian coffee house on Telegraph Avenue, staring blankly at the unswept floor. He was between girl friends. To be brutally honest, he was without girls as either friends or lovers. Maybe the reason was his clothes, most of which he'd worn through college, supplementing his wardrobe from time to time at an Army surplus store. He took little interest then as now in his appearance, seldom glancing in a mirror, even on the rare occasions when he brushed his hair. But a more likely reason was that, then as now, few if any women wanted to spend their lives with an unemployed physics graduate.

His aunts had told him he was handsome, but attending an all-male high school, and a nearly-all-male college major has provided little opportunity for reinforcement of this opinion. His lips were thin to average, his nose slightly askew from a punch received while boxing (which, on the plus side, did make him look more masculine), and his intense brown eyes were a trifle too close together.

A short balding man spoke up from an adjoining table interrupting Wilson's thoughts. The man was on his second cup of coffee and a half eaten cake sat on an adjoining saucer. Wilson had no idea who the man was, though he did recall having seen him before at the Pic, at Cody's bookstore, and at other student hangouts. But then, Berkeley was a tight-knit community (students and tourists aside) and one kept seeing the same faces over and over. As Wilson wasn't particularly wary of strangers to begin with, absent biker tattoos and a bad attitude, he decided to hear the man out. Max Scheer knew Wilson's name, at least, even if Wilson didn't know his until much later.

"Paul. You can write, can't you?" Of course Wilson could write. Couldn't everyone? (Though the truth was Wilson had been forced to repeat bonehead English a half-dozen times, passing only as a result of helping a friendly teaching assistant compose a winning betting system.)

In any event, the next thing Wilson knew he was sitting in the office of the Berkeley Barb working on a story. Fifty cents a column inch paid for gas and the occasional meal. To say nothing of the meals and lifts obtained from those who thought it groovy to know someone who wrote for the Barb. Who cared if a visiting journalism student, completing a dissertation on the inner workings of the underground press, remarked that theirs was the only newspaper whose reporters did multiple rewrites. It was still the news biz.

The Barb offices were much smaller than the loft Morgan had rented but better use had been made of the space. Stacks of newspapers

served as partitions and provided soundproofing as well as a measure of privacy. (Surprisingly, there was always a demand for old issues. Perhaps not such a demand as the editor, Max Scheer, had envisioned, for as the weeks passed and papers remained unsold, they gradually made their way from the floor to a space just below the ceiling.)

Rock music always played in the background, and the reporters took turns acting as dj's, selecting records from one of several stacks. Camaraderie was intense; morale was high. We are the chosen few, free to write what we wish, our souls not yet paid for. Everyone had a double identity, a pen name they were known by. Wilson was Number Six or just Six. The Grass Prophet usually occupied the desk adjoining his. Kali, a tall blond Swede, handled deliveries and Shiva, a far-too-young, far-too-buxom female, booked the personal ads.

A year later, blessed by a high number in the draft lottery and the inability to find a job commensurate with his training, Wilson was still writing for the Barb. "Rat-a-tat-tat went the drum, come to People's Park." "I shared love with a topless commune." "Free U has new leader." In Berkeley, some trigger-happy sheriff's deputy shot James Rector during a protest over the war in Vietnam. A bomb exploded in the offices of an underground paper in San Diego. "They were killing us one by one."

Plenty of reporters were on hand to cover the action in Berkeley, dispatched from the mass media as well as the Barb. Wilson was sent to San Diego.

San Diego is 450 miles from Berkeley with plenty to see along the way, particularly when a leaky radiator requires frequent stops. An anti-war demonstration in Isla Vista, near Santa Barbara, led to the late night burning of a branch of the Bank of America. (No, the money remained unscathed.) Wilson found a friendly photographer and filed his first story as a "foreign" correspondent.

San Diego, then as now (though less so today with the vast growth of the then-unheard-of biotech industry) was a series of military bases surrounded by civilians. The police in Berkeley were all college educated. Those in San Diego had received their training in the MP's and Shore Patrol.

A friend of Wilson's with long hair made the mistake of sitting on a deserted stretch of beach in San Diego one weekday morning fully dressed. Two policemen approached demanding to see the friend's ID. Using a portable radio, they called in the details to some invisible command center. He was told to empty his pockets onto the sand. "Paranoia strikes deep," he'd sung recounting the incident.

Wilson made sure to stay off San Diego's beaches except during the heat of the day and then only if he were wearing a bathing suit. Besides, as the Barb's (only) foreign correspondent, he had business to conduct.

Notebook in hand, he visited the remnants of the hippie commune that had housed the bombed-out printing press. Later, gutsy lad that he was, he called on San Diego Police headquarters and, believe it, actually spoke with San Diego's Chief of Police.

The latter clearly had been trained in public relations, expressed sorrow about the bombing—grateful no one had been hurt; yes, the crime was still under investigation with no real leads so far—and ventured the possibility that the explosion was the result of a bomb assembly gone astray.

The members of the commune were less forthcoming. Only on Wilson's second visit did they agree to talk with him at all. He spent the intervening night in a dorm on a nearby campus, not on the floor of a vacant room as he'd anticipated but in the bed of a coed whom he'd met while walking down the hallway toward the men's room. Meanwhile, the commune had the opportunity to "check him out" and apparently was satisfied with what they'd discovered. Paranoia strikes deep.

Even so, Wilson didn't learn much from them. All had been asleep at the time of the bombing only to be wakened by the boom of the explosion. No, generally there was no traffic at that hour. Their neighborhood being primarily residential, few if any cars went by except during the morning and evening commute. "And the police car that comes by every so often to see if we're up to any mischief."

Neighbors confirmed the presence of the police car. One elderly man who suffered from insomnia had even seen the car just before the explosion.

Wood went back to police headquarters. He didn't get to see the police chief a second time, but an assistant was more than happy to give him the names of the officers responsible for patrolling that

neighborhood. (The word "officers" is used in this brief account just as Wilson would have written it in the Barb. Unlike some other underground reporters, the Wilson was always careful to distinguish between those officers who serve to protect us, and the Clockwork Orange types or "pigs" indistinguishable from the criminals they pursue, pigs for whom the policeman's badge is simply a license to push others around.)

Persistence pays. With the names of the two policemen in hand, Wilson talked to one while the other sat at an adjoining desk and sneered. Wilson soon realized neither officer had been assigned to the after-midnight shift in what was designated a low-crime area. So who had been responsible for the after-midnight drive-by?

"It was the same car," the insomniac told him with some irritation when questioned for the second time, he even read off its license number. Wilson found a policeman who would talk—off the record—about his colleagues and soon had a story for the Barb.

Alas, his story didn't make the front page. Part of the problem was timing. Wilson had a habit then of taking shortcuts that didn't always pay off. Not willing to risk several days' delay in transit, he'd driven to the San Diego airport and waited by the departure gate until he encountered two groovy looking types who were headed for Berkeley to whom he entrusted the envelope containing the story. The necessary special delivery stamps were already affixed to the package, so Wilson told them just to drop it in the nearest postbox once they reached their destination.

Instead, equally resourceful, they carefully steamed all the stamps from the envelope and delivered it, stampless, to the Barb Office in person three days later, and three days too late to be included in that week's issue. The following week, "Pigs Bomb Commune," was displaced from the Barb's front page by a letter from Dr. Timothy Leary. Only the truly persistent were likely to find Wilson's detective work inside, straddling pages 4 and 7.

The mass media did not pick up on Wilson's story. Nor were any arrests made. At least not for four more years, until Nixon resigned. When the Civic Leader who'd requested the bombing, a heavy contributor to Nixon's campaigns, could no longer provide protection, the police officer responsible for the actual dirty work was hung out to dry. Four years later, Wilson's scoop was two column inches on an inside page of the San Diego Union-Tribune.

Things were pretty much the same way today, Wilson felt. Criminals with friends in high places were protected. Or convicted, but never sentenced. Once in place in his nation's capital, he would do what he could to ensure their day of reckoning would come, too.

Diary I

At last, an opportunity to do something more exciting than book classifieds. Professor Wilson says the beginner should take any job they can get on a paper to get a foot in the door, but classifieds, yuck. People who can't spell or even pronounce the words they want to use in their ad and blame you for getting things mixed up. Women who resent you and men who ask for dates solely because yours is a female voice.

I only went back to the Gazette's offices after the meeting to pick up my cosmetic case. Even then a fuss was made and I had to wait while a check was issued. "Just mail it to me, please," I asked, but still I had to sit through a pre-departure interview with a boss I'd never met before.

Anyhow, Debbie and I agreed we would use our Washington assignment to show everyone just what we could do. Which is why we showed up together at the Sentinel's offices at eight the next morning. I had mimicked Debra's clothing, wearing a plain grey skirt and a white blouse (though with a few feminine ruffles down the midline), and heels rather than flats (a new pair of Anne Klein's that went well with my simple outfit). We were the only ones to come in that early, actually, so we had to have a janitor let us in.

Our desks were assembled and our PC's up and running before anyone else put in an appearance. Alfred appeared at the top of the stairs about 11:30 in sports coat and gray flannels, only to wander around the loft for several

moments as if he were in a daze. When we asked him where a broom was, he took off like a scared rabbit.

The telephones were working, but we weren't sure we were allowed to use them. I had my cell of course, so we used it to make our first appointment, a Mr. Robert Croft at the Department of Justice. He wasn't the person we'd telephoned originally, but he was the one we were connected with after several transfers. He didn't pretend to be busy or not to understand what we were talking about. I think he will be a good source of information.

The secret of good journalism, Professor Wilson often told us, is to be persistent. Well, we have been and we will be.

The two Arab boys, Ali and Achmed—Ali neat in pressed corduroys, but Achmed as always in torn pants and an un-ironed shirt—showed up in the early afternoon and began making phone calls, too. I wonder who they were calling or whether their calls really had anything to do with the paper.

They didn't talk to us, which was just as well. To be honest, they really creep me out.

I made a few more telephone calls and Deb continued to search the Internet but the office was just too creepy with Ali and Achmed hanging about, so, finally, we left.

We ran into Morgan on the way out of the building. He had the nerve to look down at his watch and say, "Leaving so soon?" Deb, who is more demonstrative than I, punched him in the stomach. The "oof" sound he made was quite satisfactory.

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