

The Godfather Paradox

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It was a beautiful day for the beach, but terrible weather for a funeral, and Peter Daniels stood behind Hannah's family wishing he could faint, just to be away from there. The family glowered at him occasionally, maybe blaming him, maybe expecting him to throw himself into the grave à la Hamlet, or maybe wondering what he was doing there; for them, admitting that Hannah had had a boyfriend, especially a black boyfriend, would be nearly as bad as admitting that she'd OD'ed on hyper. Peter glanced at Melissa, wondering if the family had known all the details of that relationship. Probably not; Melissa had discovered the body and called the cops, which was enough to explain the hostile reception she'd received.

Melissa looked at the expensive coffin, the women's dresses, the old-fashioned three-piece suits, and the ancient memorials surrounding them. Burials were as twentieth-century as neckties - the rich were frozen, and everyone else cremated; she doubted that as many as a hundred people had been buried in New York (legally, anyway) since she'd been born. Hannah's family seemed like travellers from the 1980s, or maybe even the 1890s.

The two friends stood there until the service was over, then each took a few steps towards the family, which was folding up into itself like a fist clenching - or, Melissa thought, like a Roman garrison forming a shield wall bristling with spears. Melissa abruptly turned on her heel and strode towards the exit; Peter took another hesitant step towards the family, then sighed and followed her.

"I keep feeling like it's my fault," Melissa explained softly as he caught up to her, "and the last thing I need is a pack of sanctimonious leftovers from Edgar Allan Poe agreeing with me."

Peter nodded. "Well, they'd hardly blame themselves, would they?"

"Do you ever blame yourself?"

"No." He shrugged. "Okay, yes, a little, but nowhere near as much as I blame the slime who sold her the stuff, and I guess I'm glad I don't know who that was."

"What would you do if you did know?"

"I don't know . . . Probably nothing. I'm hardly the vigilante type; my ancestors went to a lot more lynchings than they would have liked. Besides, whoever it was, I don't think he wanted to kill her; he may have miscalculated the dose, or maybe she did, and she probably didn't tell him it was her first time. She hated admitting that, you know that."

"So you don't think it was anyone's fault?"

"You're the historian. Who killed the Kennedys?"

"What?"

"Who do you blame for the holocaust? Or the greenhouse effect? Or AIDS? Or the Hallowe'en War? No one person was responsible for any of them. Hannah shouldn't have taken the stuff. The slime who gave or sold it to her shouldn't have. The slime who sold it to the slime who gave or sold - and so on, ad infinitum. There's some blame left over for her parents, for telling her so much crap she felt the only way she could find out what was true was to try it herself . . . but I think the worst you can blame yourself for is not being in the right place at the time."

Melissa shook her head violently. "Everyone knows you can get drugs on campus, but no one does anything about it, either because they don't care or because they're scared of the Mafia."

"People have been taking drugs for millennia, Hulkower," Peter said, softly. "It's as inevitable as the weather, and like the weather, everyone complains but no one does anything about it, except maybe make it worse."

Melissa wasn't listening. She stopped suddenly and stared at the tomb at the right of the exit. "Do you know who's buried there?" she asked.

"No."

"Frank Costello."

"The comedian?"

"The mobster - 'Prime Minister of the Underworld', they called him."

Peter let her stare and sob for nearly a minute, then gently squeezed her shoulders. "He's dead, Hulkower. Hannah's dead. Everyone in this place is dead. If you try taking on the Mafia, you'll be dead. Let's get out of here, huh?"

He drove her back to her dorm, and spent the night in her room. He slept in her bed, holding her; they made love once before breakfast, and didn't see each other again for nearly two years.

The morning news shows devoted nearly half a minute to the experiment, including a few shots of the breadboard rig. None of them seemed sure how seriously to take it, but Daniels had expected that. He decided to devote the morning to marking test papers, a sure cure for over-excitement, and told the computer to record all calls unless they were from the Nobel Prize committee.

To his surprise, the phone rang at eleven. He glanced at the Caller ID; it was a four digit number, which indicated an internal call - and obviously someone who knew computers well enough to fool a Turing program, which ruled out most of his fellow physicists. "Daniels."

"Peter?"

The voice was vaguely familiar, but nothing more, and he wished that the university didn't regard videophones as an extravagance. "Yes?"

"It's Melissa Hulkower." There was a brief pause, then, "I hear you've invented a time machine."

"Well, sort of," he said. "I'm afraid it's no use to the history department - or any threat, for that matter. Anyway, how're you doing?"

"I'm okay," she replied. "What does the machine do?"

Daniels restrained a sigh. "What have you heard?"

"That you've used it to send small samples of radio-isotopes back a few weeks, and checked the rate of decay. Is that correct?"

"Basically. The results are in Nature."

"And you've found capsules that you don't have any record of sending, which have dates from several years in the future printed on them, and you assume someone is going to send."

"Yeah. That's caused the real stir. Of course, we've lost a few capsules as well, but that's hardly surprising - the damn machine can't send more than a few grams: the biggest sample, which is supposed to be from 2112, was just over 3.1 grams."

"What if you build a bigger machine?"

"We'd need a lot more power, for one thing - and it's exponential, not linear. Simone's worked it out mathematically, and she says the absolute limit's about forty-two grams and a hundred and seven years, even if you blow up the sun."

"Oh."

"Besides, the 2112 sample appeared in Price's office, two floors up from the lab, which seems to confirm that the further you send a sample, the harder it is to place it in a precise location. I forget how many of the bloody things we must have lost by now. Anyway, if you want to come and see it, you're welcome, but it really won't be any use to the history department . . ."

Melissa looked at the sprawl of equipment, nodding. "The glass case is the transmitter?"

"Uh-huh. It's a vacuum chamber - we can't afford to waste power sending air back into the past. And it's a receiver, too, when our future selves - or whoever - manage to hit it. There's always a burst of Cerenkov radiation when they miss, which is why we've put counters all around the building."

"And the capsules you send are radioactive, too?"

Peter nodded. "That's how we confirmed the mechanism. If you send an isotope back twenty-four hours, it arrives showing the same amount of decay as it would in twenty-four hours in, uh, normal time. The same sort of thing would happen if we sent something that was alive - assuming it could survive in the vacuum."

Melissa nodded. "Why all the security outside?"

Peter smiled. "A lot of the public think we can use it to hop back to the Cretaceous, or the Crucifixion, or whatever. A few have worked out what we could do - things like sending a list of stock market or sports results back to last year or whenever."

"Could you?"

"Yes. Of course, if you sent it back to last year, most people would just think it was a joke. The problem is going to be when people who've heard of this device start getting messages that're supposed to be from next year. We've been careful not to try anything like that, and none of the capsules we've received from the future have given us any hot tips. Maybe there's a cosmic censor out there that prevents messages like that getting through - I don't know.

"And, of course, the lawyers are worried about it being used for terrorism. It's not accurate enough to use for assassinations - you'd be lucky to hit something as small as a limo, much less a president - but in theory, they said, you could send biowar cultures into water supplies or air-conditioning ducts. We pointed out that (one) you could do that without the machine - a clipboard and a boiler suit can get you into almost anywhere, (two) the culture would have to survive the trip, and (three) the machine has a geographical range limit, too - about twenty-one miles - and isn't exactly portable, not with the power supply it needs, so anywhere outside New York is safe and even New York is still about as safe as it's ever been." He shook his head. "And for all we know, the past is immutable. If it wasn't, how would we know, anyway?"

Melissa stared at the device, thinking hard, and then smiled. "Thanks for showing it to me. Can I buy you a coffee?"

"Let's see if I've got this right," said Melissa, rolling over and propping herself up on one elbow. "You can send two grams back a hundred and seven years to somewhere in New York City. Right?"

"Hmm?" Peter turned to face her and tried to focus (he always removed his contact lenses before sex; they tended to pop out when he was aroused). "Yeah . . . well, in theory. In practice, I'd say ninety years was the best we could do."

"1938," she murmured.

"Even then, you'd need a big target area, and you could miss the slot by a month or more . . ."

"How big?"

"Oh . . . something the size of a lecture theatre, but three or four floors high."

"A library or a large law firm . . ."

"Yeah, that should . . . what?"

She bobbed her head down and bit his nipple. "Never mind. Just an idea."

"You want me to what?"

Melissa counted to three silently. "Send this back to 1938. It'll survive the trip; I checked."

"What is it?"

"Photographic negatives. 35mm, black and white, just like they used back then. No one will know where they came from. The originals were taken at about that time, or maybe a few years later . . . Four shots - well within the mass limit."

Peter put down his coffee cup carefully, and peered at the strip of celluloid. "These look like someone sucking a cock. Is that right?"

"Yes."

He peered again. "Either an ugly man or a damn ugly woman . . . Benito Mussolini?"

Melissa laughed. "Not exactly. It's J Edgar Hoover. I copied them from the latest biography - the other two show him in drag."

"Hoover? The FBI man?"

"Yes."

"I thought these were supposed to be fakes - computer-generated."

"Maybe they are, but those photos did exist. Several people admitted to having seen them, including a few CIA agents. The Mafia used them to blackmail Hoover to get the FBI to leave them alone - which they did until the old man died, nearly forty years later."

Peter shook his head. "Jesus. Who was the other guy, a Russian spy or something?"

"No, just his boyfriend - the Assistant Director, actually. Look, you remember Hannah's parents. Most people in the western world last century had the same prejudices they do; sex was disgusting, gay sex revolting, and male gay sex was absolutely abominable and usually illegal. A lot of men committed suicide when they were discovered to be gay - Alan Turing, for one. Things didn't start to get better until the late sixties, and got worse again in some ways in the eighties; it wasn't until an AIDS cure was found that what we now consider sanity became the norm. But ninety years ago, photos like this could destroy a man's career -"

"And that's what you want to do to Hoover?"

"Yes. He used to do it to his political rivals, without any qualms. If we drop these into the offices of the New York Times - they weren't scared of Hoover, and he hated them for it - then his secret would be out. He might be able to keep his job - at least three presidents tried to fire him at various stages, but he blackmailed them into changing their minds, he had something on everyone - but it'd break the Mafia's hold on him. Or at least weaken it, which would weaken them . . . It might even keep them out of the narcotics business; that was always risky politically, and without him to protect them . . ."

So that's what this is about, Peter thought wearily. He passed the negatives back to Melissa, and rested his head on his hands. "We don't even know if we can change the past . . ."

"How else are you going to find out?"

He sighed. "There has to be a safer way than this. What if the past isn't immutable, and we changed it for the worse . . . What if the Ku Klux Klan or someone like that got hold of the photos?"

"Hoover," she said quietly, "left the Ku Klux Klan alone unless they claimed credit for a murder, but spent millions investigating and harassing black power groups and their supporters. He tried to blackmail Martin Luther King; he knew he was depressive, and tried to bully him into committing suicide. Some researchers even say that he hired the man who shot him -"

Peter held up his hands. "Okay, okay. I'll need time to think about this . . ."

"Sure," said Melissa. "Take all the time you need."

Cates was sweeping in the Times's morgue and fantasizing semi-platonically about the new cashier at Bookmart, when the sudden, silent flash of blue light behind him startled him out of his reverie. For a moment he stood and blinked, waiting for the black dots to disappear from his peripheral vision, thinking of lightning, flash-bulbs, police cars and welding torches and trying not to think of the Hindenburg explosion and Lovecraft's *The Colour Out of Space*. Wielding his broom like a warhammer, he advanced cautiously towards the source of the light. Seeing nothing out of the ordinary, he took a quiet step towards the door and opened it suddenly, looking up and down the corridor outside.

Nothing.

Cates stood there for a moment, shaking his head, then stepped back into the morgue. He stared at the ceiling, but all of the lights seemed to be working as normal. He sighed, looked at the floor, and noticed something small, dark and flat, with perforated edges. He knew there were thousands, maybe millions, of negatives filed away in the morgue, and pitied the person whose job it was to return this one to its proper place. He picked it up, looked at it to make sure it wasn't merely a piece of blank film, whistled sharply, and then leaned against the shelves and studied the pictures closely. The negatives might have

come from the Times's archives, he decided, but the photographs had certainly never appeared in its pages, or those of any other newspaper. He also suspected that the subject had not consented to the shots being taken - and while he didn't recognise the face from the negatives, it was ugly enough to be someone of some importance.

Cates looked around the room anxiously, and then carefully wrapped the negative in his handkerchief and pocketed it.

"Meyer, can you do me a favour?"

"Sure. How much?"

"It isn't money," replied Cates, and then lowered his voice further. "I need a couple of prints, and I don't want anyone else to see 'em. Can you do it?"

"I'm pretty busy . . . can't you take 'em to Kodak?"

"No."

"No?" Meyer Berger stared at the younger man with exaggerated astonishment and genuine curiosity.

"What have you been up to, Chris? I wouldn't have thought you had time, what with two jobs."

Cates squirmed slightly. He'd come to New York a week before the Wall Street Crash, sixteen years old and hoping for work as an actor. A friend had gotten him a job as a copy boy at the Times in time to prevent him starving; he still worked there as a janitor three mornings a week. "I found these. I don't know who the guy is, but I thought you might . . ." He handed the negatives to Berger, who peered at them, then did the best double-take Cates had ever seen.

"You look as though you haven't slept yet." Cates shook his head. "Go and get yourself some breakfast; I'll meet you in the diner on the corner in an hour."

Cates was dozing in a corner booth when Berger walked into the diner with a newspaper under his arm. The journalist slid in opposite him and said, softly, "I'm glad you're sitting with your back to the wall. It's a good habit."

Cates opened his eyes. "Who was it?"

Berger regarded him sadly, then withdrew an envelope from the newspaper and handed it to him.

"There's two sets of prints in there, a proof sheet, and the negatives. What you do with them is up to you, but I haven't seen them."

"Huh?"

"And if I had seen them," added Berger, "I would have hidden another set of prints in a safe deposit box, with orders that they were to be opened in the event of my death. Do you understand?"

"No," replied Cates, hesitantly. "Who is he?"

"J. Edgar Hoover."

Cates half-stood, and blurted out "Jesus! J. Edgar Hoover is a -" and then sat down again, hurriedly.

"So it would seem," replied Berger.

"You could get another Pulitzer nomination out of this one . . ."

"Posthumously, perhaps," said Berger, drily. "Chris, I don't know where these came from. I know there are homosexuals in your profession; I assume one of them gave them to you." Cates shook his head.

"That's as may be. Unfortunately, the Times cannot print these photographs, for obvious reasons, and without them there isn't a story - we have no dates, no places, nothing but the pictures themselves, which might be faked.

"And then there's the question of who would want us to know this and publicise it, and why. Hoover's made a lot of enemies, and most of them aren't the sort of people you'd want to aid and abet. What's worse are the photos themselves. If they're fakes, they're brilliant ones. If not, then Hoover must have been set up - a camera behind a one-way mirror, maybe, in his hotel while he was on vacation. I had to wonder, who could do that? Even the smartest mobsters in the country would find it difficult . . . and then I wondered, what about the communists?"

"Communists?" said Cates, dubiously. "The Communist Party's a joke."

Berger shook his head. "Not the local party. The Russians - the OGPU, or NKVD, or whatever it's called now. They could have done it, and they might want Hoover replaced with an FBI Director who's

soft on communism . . .

"But that isn't the main reason I'm queasy about this. What do you think would happen if these photos were published? Hoover's not the sort to resign, so Roosevelt would either have to fire him . . . or not fire him. Now, even if the photos are real and Hoover's as queer as a three-dollar bill, does that mean he should lose his job? I'm not sure that it does - he does it well enough, and that should be the only issue that matters." He smiled thinly. "On the other hand, if Hoover isn't fired, whoever prints those photos will have made an enemy of the most powerful man in the United States. Are you sure you want to do that?"

"Well . . ."

"Think about it. Take your time."

Cates nodded. "I will. Thanks, Meyer."

"My pleasure."

Hoover returned to his office from lunch at the Mayflower in a jovial mood; less than a minute later, he was fighting not to vomit over his mahogany desk. He slammed the phone down, drew a deep breath, and made two calls - the first to his secretary, asking her to hold all calls, and the second summoning the Assistant Director, Clyde Tolson.

He was still red-faced and sweating freely when Tolson arrived and closed the door behind him. His expression, as usual, was solemn. "What is it, Eddie?"

"I've just had a call from an informant at the New York Times," said Hoover, heavily, without looking at him. "He says Meyer Berger has copies of some photographs of you and me."

Tolson narrowed his eyes. "Is that all?" He stared at his boss for a moment, and then blanched. "Oh God not those photographs . . ."

Hoover continued to stare silently through the window.

"How? Where did he get them?"

Hoover shrugged. "Berger has a lot of sources, most of them scum. I'm more concerned about his plans."

"So we bring him in and ask him. What's the problem?"

"Who do we get to bring him in? What do we tell them?" Tolson gaped at him, then swore under his breath. "Never mind, Junior," the Director continued, almost kindly. "It was my first thought, too."

"I could go."

Hoover pursed his lips, thinking hard. "That's possible. You might be recognised, but it would be better than sending an agent . . ."

"Okay."

"No . . . not yet. If we go up to New York on Saturday and drop in at the Stork Club, it won't look as though you've made the trip just to see Berger."

"What if he prints the photos before Saturday?"

Hoover shook his head, ponderously. "If he tries that, I'll know before anybody else does."

Pittsburgh Phil Strauss - Murder Incorporated's most prolific hitter and the Beau Brummel of the underworld - slouched in the back seat of a Lincoln Zephyr and watched the passers-by from under the brim of a pearl-grey fedora, careful to keep his guns out of sight. He'd been parked on Broadway for nearly twenty minutes, and Strauss (whose real name was Harry, and who'd never been to Pittsburgh in his thirty years) was beginning to suspect that the bum wasn't going to show. This really wasn't his sort of job; he didn't like having to make a hit out on a public street, even this late in the morning, and he didn't like knowing his victim's name. But he knew it was urgent - word was that the contract had come straight from Anastasia himself, and they hadn't even had time to find out the bum's address, so he had to be hit before he got to work - and it was going to be remembered, especially if they hit him right outside the New York Times like the bosses wanted.

"Is dat him, Phil?" came a voice from the front seat.

Strauss glanced at the rear-view mirror. Vito 'Chicken Head' Gurino wasn't particularly bright, but he had excellent eyesight. The man leaving the subway matched the description they'd been given - late twenties,

5(11), 150 pounds, dark wavy hair, thin moustache, handsome in a Rudolph Valentino sort of way, cheap clothes - and he was hurrying in the right direction. "Could be . . . but don't say nothing till I say okay, okay?"

"Okay."

Strauss waited until the man was close enough for him to see his profile, then muttered, "Okay."

Gurino stuck his head through the window and bawled, "Hey, Cates!" The man turned and looked at the car, and Strauss raised the Thompson and pulled the trigger.

Cates hit the ground as soon as he saw the gun and, panicking, rolled towards the Zephyr and into the gutter. Strauss, half-blinded by the muzzle flash and deafened by the roar of the gun inside the confined space of the car, peered through the smoke, baffled. "Where did the bum go?"

Gurino, also partially deafened, didn't reply. Cates stared up at the gun; part of his mind was yelling at him to get out of there, to crawl along the gutter away from the car, but his body refused to obey.

Strauss removed the gun from the window, and cautiously stuck his head out. Cates inhaled and slid further under the car. "I think we better get out of here, Phil," said Gurino. "Heat'll be here soon."

Strauss swore. It didn't matter that this was only the second contract he'd failed to hit (the other bum had escaped because it had taken Strauss too long to steal a fire axe); this was the hit that would make his reputation, one way or the other. He dropped the Thompson and reached for his briefcase. "You go," he snarled. "I'm going to find this bum."

He stepped out of the Zephyr just as Cates slid out from under the other side and ran across the road towards the subway entrance, not glancing back until he reached the sidewalk. "Dere he is!" yelled Gurino, reaching for his revolver. Strauss spun around, and began chasing the actor, inadvertently placing himself between Cates and Gurino before the other gangster could aim. Gurino watched the two disappear down the stairs, swore, and then holstered his pistol and drove back to Brooklyn.

Cates leapt the turnstile gracefully, shedding his overcoat as he ran and slowing down only slightly to drop the wadded coat into a trashcan. A few seconds later he was studying the subway map, taking care not to breathe too heavily, and concentrating on appearing stooped and old and inconspicuous. A moment later he saw Strauss charge past him, look about furiously, and disappear into the men's room. Cates stared, and allowed himself a slight smile.

Bette Lang was dreaming that she was playing Lady Macbeth clad only in her showgirl costume, to the sound of enthusiastic, almost frenzied applause - a staccato rapping that continued after the rest of the dream faded into embarrassment. She opened her eyes, and realised that the rapping was real. She sat up, arms crossed over her large breasts, and looked around. The sound seemed to be coming from the window; it took her a moment to remember that there was a fire escape outside. Cautiously, she clambered out of bed, grabbed her glasses and a robe, then tiptoed over to the window and raised the blind. It took her several seconds to recognise Cates; she stared at him, and then raised the sash. "What're you doing out there?"

"I need your help," he said, sliding in, then quickly shutting the window behind himself and lowering the blind.

"If you think I'm too sleepy to say no at - what time is it, anyway?"

"Four a.m., I think," he replied. "And it's not that. The FBI is trying to kill me."

"Huh? I mean -"

"They were waiting for me outside the Times, with a tommy-gun." He sat down on the floor near the window, reached into his pocket for the negatives, and told the story from the beginning, leaving out the blue flash, as Bette sat on the bed and listened.

"You're sure it was a fed?" she asked, when he'd finished. "He sounds more like the guys we get at the club."

Cates shrugged. "He looked like one - tall, clean-cut, good suit . . . he even carried a briefcase."

"How did you shake him?"

"I dumped the coat, acted like I was someone else, and dropped my lighter outside the little girls' room; the guy's probably still there, screwing up the courage to go in. Then I caught the first train out of there -

it went to Harlem, so he couldn't exactly blend into the crowds, and I don't think the FBI has any black agents. Then I tried to think of someone I could still trust - and I came here."

"Are you hurt?"

He raised his right arm, showing the tear in his shirt and the graze underneath it. "Only this - he only got one good shot at me before I hit the dirt, and I guess my coat made me look bigger than I am."

"Lucky you couldn't afford one that fits," she replied. "So, what do you need me to do - apart from darning your shirt?"

"They're probably watching my place," said Cates. "I can't go back there, and I need some stuff - clothes, a suitcase, some more prints of the photos, maybe some sort of disguise. I've got to get out of town, become invisible . . ." He stared at her poster of Othello, and a smile spread slowly across his face. "Can you get me some make-up, too?"

"Invisible? Like Claude Rains?"

The smile broadened into a grin. "More like the Shadow, I guess. By the way, do you know any communists?"

"Mr Berger? I'm Clyde Tolson; could we talk for a moment, please?"

Berger looked up from his desk neutrally. "Sure. Talk."

Tolson attempted a smile. "Your editor's lent us his office for a few minutes."

Berger shrugged, and stood. He knew that Tolson, despite his stereotypical G-man looks and his nickname 'Killer', had never served as an agent, and had less experience of violence than Berger himself. Tolson led the way into the office, and sat down on the corner of the cluttered desk. "Shut the door. I won't keep you: I'm sure you're working to a deadline. I hear you gave some negatives to one of your darkroom people the other day."

"What negatives?"

"Did you?"

"I may have done," replied Berger. "I don't take photographs myself, but there are times when a picture - well, you've heard the saying. Could you describe the picture?"

Tolson turned pale. "Listen, Berger, I can have you arrested -"

"On what charge?"

"Or I can shoot you now and think of something later -"

"Maybe," replied Berger, with a nervous glance through the glass walls of the office, "but I don't think anyone will believe it was self-defense." He smiled thinly. "Maybe one of my colleagues out there knows about these photographs. Maybe they all know. Shall we ask them?" He leaned against the wall, scared that his legs were going to give way despite his brave front.

Tolson snarled. "Where did you get these negatives?"

Berger sighed. "I do have the right not to reveal my sources."

"Do you have the negatives?"

"No; nor do I know where they are."

"Can you find them?"

"Why should I want to do that?"

Tolson stared at him, and then tried another tack. "We can do a lot for your career; we can give you exclusives -"

The journalist shook his head. "No. I advised my source - who is also a friend - not to try to publish those photographs, in part because I believed that your boss's taste in lovers didn't reflect on his ability to do his job. The longer you remain here, the more I start to wonder. This might be a good time for you to leave."

Tolson flushed, and strode out, slamming the door. Berger watched him go, and then slid to the floor, his legs no longer able to bear his weight.

The sign in the barber's shop window said 'Closed', but Frank Costello knocked on the door and was admitted without question. He stood for a moment, biting the end off a Havana cigar and watching the

barber sliding a razor along Hoover's throat. Lot of people would like that job, he reflected, and smiled.

"Good morning, John."

Hoover opened his eyes and stared into the mirror. "What's good about it?" he growled.

"I heard you were having some problems."

"What sort of problem?"

Costello smiled. "Shall we say, an image problem?"

"Somebody shot up Times Square the night before last," said Tolson, who was sitting near the door. "Did you have anything to do with that?"

"Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa," replied Costello, removing the cigar from his mouth and bowing his head.

"What?"

Costello looked up again, his expression serious. "I told them to get him, not hit him, but I guess they misunderstood me."

"Get who?"

The mobster opened his mouth to answer, and then closed it again. "The guy with the negatives . . . what's his name again?"

"You mean Berger?" asked Tolson, before Hoover could speak. The Director swallowed a groan and rolled his eyes.

"Nah," replied Costello, lighting the cigar. "Any lunkhead knows not to go after a reporter."

"Where is he now?" asked Hoover, blandly, keeping an eye on the mobster's hands. Costello had one of the best poker faces in the country, but his hands were much more expressive.

"I don't know. He disappeared into the subway, could have taken any one of a dozen lines. He hasn't been home since, or to either of his jobs: the photos weren't in his room, either. He could've gone anywhere."

"You lost him?" said Tolson.

"Hey, you never even found him," said Costello, yawning, and sat in the chair next to Hoover's. "And now you want me to tell you his name? What's in it for me?"

"Neither of us wants those photos made public," snapped Hoover. "Who do you think Roosevelt will get to replace me?" Costello's hands shook slightly. "And imagine what the scandal would do to his re-election chances. Do you want Dewey as your next Pre sident? He made his reputation putting -"

Costello raised an eyebrow, and Hoover faltered. "- uh, some associates of yours, in jail . . . Do you want to risk that?" His tone changed to a wheedling whisper. "We can help each other. We can find him f or you. Just tell me his name."

It was nearing midnight when Melvin Purvis, once the FBI's most famous agent, strode along the corridor to Hoover's office (known to agents as the Bridge of Sighs) for the first time since resigning three years before. He handed his revolver to Helen Gan dy, Hoover's long-serving secretary, and chatted with her for a few minutes before being ushered into the great octagonal office. His carefully neutral expression soured when he noticed Tolson sitting beside the mahogany desk. "Hello, Mel," said Hoover. "How're the memoirs coming along?"

"Fine."

"And the Melvin Purvis Junior G-Man Corps?"

Purvis rolled his eyes. "You didn't bring me all the way here in the dead of night to talk about a breakfast cereal gimmick. What do you want?"

"We're looking for a man named Christopher Cates."

"I've never heard of him."

"He has some confidential information that could greatly embarrass the Bureau," said Hoover, spitting the words out with obvious disgust. "He's disappeared; we need to find him, and you were always good at that. We can put you back on a SAC's salary -"

"Hold on a minute," said Purvis, looking intently at Hoover's neck. "It's about you, isn't it?"

"What?"

Purvis glanced at the stony-faced Tolson, and smiled. "He's picked up some dirt on you, and you don't want it to get out. Right?"

Hoover glowered silently. "Do you want the job?"

"Work for you again? After the stories you've been spreading about me? If someone's blackmailing you, you son of a bitch, then maybe there is some justice in the world -"

"Do you want to sell cereal for the rest of your life?" asked Hoover.

"Hell, no." Purvis leaned across the enormous desk until he was close enough to Hoover to smell his perfume and the whiskey on his breath. "I want an endorsement from you - I'll write it, you just have to sign it."

Hoover pursed his lips. "Is that all?"

"No. I want to make sure you can't have me blacklisted without risking your own neck: I want to know what this Cates has on you." Tolson stumbled to his feet, his face ashen; Purvis ignored him. "I'll have to know about it if I'm going to find him - Ja yee."

The two men glared at each other for nearly a minute, and then Hoover asked, "Is that all?"

"That, and the freedom to work without either you or Beady-eyes over there breathing down my neck."

"Can you start tomorrow?"

"Fine." Neither man offered to shake hands. Purvis walked out of the room, retrieved his gun, and escorted Helen Gandy back along the Bridge of Sighs to the outside world. A janitor watched them leave together, filed the fact for future reference, and then returned to work.

A year passed. Pittsburgh Phil made the hit that would eventually send him to the electric chair, Orson Welles panicked thousands of Americans with his broadcast of War of the Worlds, hundreds of synagogues were burnt in Germany, Franco captured Madrid, and Hoover ordered his staff to begin compiling a Custodial Detention List of both Communist and Nazi sympathisers. Bette Lang went to Hollywood for a screen test, landed a role as a gangster's moll, and became a regular in Republic serials - usually wearing a low-cut dress and a lot of rope. And Melvin Purvis and a small cadre of agents tapped phones, intercepted mail, and interrogated more than a dozen people without finding Christopher Cates.

"He was somewhere in Washington last December," he told Hoover, as Tolson sneered. "He sent Christmas cards to his family - no return address, of course, but postmarked Washington. He's probably still writing to his zoftig girlfriend, but she's getting so much fan mail nowadays that I had to give up reading it, and my secretary embarrasses too easily. He always types the envelopes, using a lot of different typewriters. He hasn't asked anyone for money, and we know he's worked as a waiter, a dishwasher, and a janitor at various times, so he could probably find a job almost anywhere. My guess is that he pushes a broom in some offices somewhere and uses their typewriters when no one's listening."

"What about the photos?" growled Hoover.

"Same problem. It's too easy to hide photos, especially in a newspaper office. It's a lot like 'The Purloined Letter'; the best place to hide a letter is in a sack of mail." He noticed the puzzlement on Hoover and Tolson's faces, and rolled his eyes. "Didn't you guys ever read any Edgar Allan Poe? Never mind. I'll bet Cates did. He may even be working for another newspaper, thinking that's the last place we'd look . . ."

"Have you looked?" asked Tolson.

"Sure. No one remembers anyone who matches his description, but Hell, he's an actor; he could've changed his appearance so much his mother wouldn't recognise him. He might even be passing himself off as a woman," he added blandly. "It's a pity we don't have any female agents; a lot of people will tell a woman things they'd never tell a man."

"Women aren't strong enough to shoot straight," fumed Hoover. There had been three female agents in the Bureau when he'd become director in '24; he'd fired all of them.

Purvis didn't comment. He was tired of Washington, tired of after-dark meetings, tired of an investigation that was slowly leading nowhere, and overwhelmingly tired of Tolson and Hoover. He excused himself, walked out of Hoover's office, sat down at Helen Gandy's desk, and began writing his resignation. He

had torn up two drafts before he noticed that the typeface was familiar. He stared at the typewriter, an incredible idea slowly blossoming in the back of his mind, then hurtled down the Bridge of Sighs and ricocheted from office to office, examining every typewriter he saw.

The idea was pounding now, threatening to split his skull from within. He rushed back to Hoover's office, but the Director had already left. He swore, then grabbed Helen Gandy's phone and called Hoover's home number.

"Listen," he said, as soon as the phone stopped ringing. "This is urgent. What time do the janitors leave the building?"

"What? I don't know -"

"Get some agents in here and stop them leaving. One of them is Cates."

There was a moment's stunned silence, and then Hoover exploded, "That's ridiculous! All our janitors are niggers!"

The four men sat in a room at the Mayflower - Hoover and Tolson natty and tense, Purvis reclining on the bed with his eyes half-closed and his .357 Magnum close to his hand, and the dungaree-clad Cates handcuffed to a chair. "Where are the negatives?" asked Hoover.

"I told you; I gave them to a friend for safekeeping."

"Meyer Berger?" asked Tolson.

"Meyer might or might not have a copy; he doesn't have the negatives."

"Bette Lang?"

"Bette hasn't even seen the damn things." Cates shook his head; sweat was running down his face, streaking his brown make-up. "And if you go near her, I'll make sure everyone sees that damn picture if I have to carve it into Mount Rushmore myself. For the twenty-seventh goddamn time, I'm not going to tell you who has the negatives. I didn't ask to find them in the first place; since I did, I've been shot at, I've had to give up my friends, my family, my job, I've had to work like a slave and live in houses that you wouldn't keep your dog in. If you hadn't sent one of your goons to shoot me, I might have -"

"We didn't send him," said Hoover. Cates glanced at Purvis, who shrugged. "We wouldn't have risked killing you -"

"Until you had the negatives and knew there weren't any more copies?" asked Cates. Hoover flushed.

"So who was it?"

"I can't answer that."

"Okay, so maybe it wasn't you then, and you haven't tried to kill me today - yet - but the bottom line is I don't trust you. So, if I don't get back home by Monday morning, my friend will start sending copies of those photos out to politicians and newspapers here and overseas. Even you won't be able to intercept them all." Cates smiled: he'd never had a captive audience listen to him so intently before. "Okay. I've had enough of being black; I've made some friends and had some good times, but the pay is lousy, the housing stinks, I hate being called 'boy', and I'm sick to death of having to make love with the lights out. Give me a thousand bucks to live on till I find a job, and I'll catch the first bus to L.A. If I outlive you, you've got nothing to worry about."

Hoover looked thoughtful. "He's lying," snapped Tolson. "Sending out that many photos would cost a fortune, and we could trace them back to their source: no one would dare do it. Shoot the son of a bitch and that'll be the end of it."

Purvis shook his head. "There are people who could and might do it - or it might be a company. Berger works for the New York Times, the Lang girl sends out hundreds of signed photos in a week . . ."

"They wouldn't dare; they'd be fired in a -"

"Some people aren't as scared of losing their jobs as you are, Clyde," replied Purvis, softly. "I know some of them hate your boss enough to risk it."

Hoover looked at all of them in turn, uncertainty in his eyes. "He's right," said Cates. "My friend's a member of the YCL."

Hoover and Tolson stared, and then Hoover began to chuckle. "The Young Communist League?"

"That's right."

A grin spread across the Director's face. "We have dossiers on every member of the YCL, Cates, every red sympathiser and every subscriber to the Daily Worker and New Masses. We have agents in every communist front there is: we have so many agents in some of them, our membership dues are their main source of income."

Cates looked away from him, and glanced at Purvis's revolver. From six feet away, the muzzle seemed big enough to crawl into. "I had wondered about that," he said, softly. "That's why I gave it to one of their women."

The chuckles stopped suddenly, followed by a stunned silence that filled the room. Then Purvis began to giggle.

"Well, they do most of the office work," explained Cates. "They run the mimeograph machines, stuff the envelopes, that sort of thing. And I knew she couldn't be a Fed . . ."

Purvis was rolling on the bed by this time, laughing uncontrollably - but when Tolson reached into his jacket, he sat up and drew a bead between the Assistant Director's eyes as though everyone else was in slow motion. "Don't be stupid, Junior," said Hoover wearily, getting up and walking out. "Give the rat his money, and let him go."

"You wanted to see me, Edgar?" FDR smiled encouragingly; he had never seen the FBI Director so obviously distressed. He hoped it wasn't just another rumour about his wife.

"Yes, Mr President." Hoover sat down, leaned back, squirmed slightly, and then grabbed the arms of the chair and leaned forward. "It concerns, uh . . . national security and . . . civil rights . . . and, uh, the morals laws." Roosevelt raised an eyebrow. "To be specific, the laws against sodomy."

Oh God, thought Roosevelt, who is it this time? "Yes?"

"For reasons of national security," Hoover continued in a staccato monotone, "at a time when war seems not only likely but inevitable . . ." FDR nodded; Hitler and Mussolini had signed their 'pact of steel' a week earlier, and England had just re-introduced conscription. "You are aware that the number of espionage cases the Bureau now handles has more than quadrupled in the past two years . . . It is well known that homosexuals in important positions are very often subjected to blackmail by agents of foreign powers . . . and because we cannot afford this to continue . . . I believe that our laws against, uh, sodomy, should be, uh . . . repealed."

Roosevelt gaped. He'd heard rumours about Edgar before, but this was the last thing he'd expected.

"Repealed?"

"Furthermore," Hoover continued, "I believe that a Federal Act should be passed making it illegal to discriminate against homosexuals in questions of employment, including military conscription and other government service. And, uh, immigration. Apart from closing an escape hatch for able-bodied men wishing to avoid military service, it will enable the FBI to concentrate on far more important matters."

Roosevelt stared at him, then blinked. "Is that all?"

"Mr President?"

"Not that I'm disagreeing with you," the President assured him hastily, "but even if you could get an act like that through both houses, well, you can change the law, but what about public opinion? It might inspire a worse witch-hunt than the one you're trying to avoid; lynchings, bombings, especially if we're seen as turning this country into a haven for homosexuals and -"

"I think," said Hoover, with a slightly crooked smile, "that we both know the worth of a good public relations staff. Most importantly, if we can present the public with some suitable, uh, role-models, some homosexuals who are also already public heroes and heroines, that it will do much to overcome prejudice of this sort. There may be some backlash at first, but given time . . ."

Roosevelt considered this. "Did you have anyone in mind?"

It was a beautiful day for the beach, but terrible weather for a funeral, and Peter Daniels stood behind Hannah's family wishing he could faint, just to be away from there. The family glowered at him occasionally, maybe blaming him, maybe expecting him to throw himself into the grave à la Hamlet, or maybe wondering what he was doing there; for them, admitting that Hannah had had a boyfriend,

especially a black boyfriend, would be nearly as bad as admitting that she'd had an illegal brain-boost. Melissa looked at the expensive coffin, the women's dresses, the old-fashioned three-piece suits, and the ancient memorials surrounding them. Burials were as twentieth-century as neckties - the rich were cyborged, and everyone else cremated; she doubted that as many as a hundred people had been buried in New York (legally, anyway) since she'd been born. Hannah's family seemed like travellers from the 1930s, or maybe even the 1390s.

The two friends stood there until the service was over, then each took a few steps towards the family, which was folding up into itself like a fist clenching - or, Melissa thought, like a Roman garrison forming a shield wall bristling with spears. Melissa abruptly turned on her heel and strode towards the exit; Peter took another hesitant step towards the family, then sighed and followed her.

"I keep feeling like it's my fault," Melissa explained softly as he caught up to her, "and the last thing I need is a pack of sanctimonious leftovers from Edgar Allan Poe agreeing with me."

Peter nodded. "Well, they'd hardly blame themselves, would they?"

"Do you ever blame yourself?"

"No." He shrugged. "Okay, yes, a little, but nowhere near as much as I blame the slime who sold her a counterfeit brain-boost, and I guess I'm glad I don't know who that was."

"What would you do if you did know?"

"I don't know . . . Probably nothing. I'm hardly the vigilante type; my ancestors went to a lot more lynchings than they would have liked. Besides, whoever it was, I don't think he wanted to hurt her; he may not even have known he was selling shoddy goods."

"So you don't think it was anyone's fault?"

"You're the historian. Who killed the Rockefellers?"

"What?"

"Who do you blame for the holocaust? Or the greenhouse effect? Or Apollo 34? No one person was responsible for any of them. Hannah shouldn't have had the boost. The slime who sold a counterfeit to her as a genuine Apple shouldn't have. The counterfeit shouldn't - and so on. There's some blame left over for her parents, for telling her so much crap she felt the only way she could find out what was true was to try it herself . . . but I think the worst you can blame yourself for is not being in the right place at the time."

Melissa shook her head violently. "Everyone knows you can get cheap brain-boosts on campus, and they know the Mafia is selling counterfeit cyberware, so they know there's a risk, but no one does anything about it, either because they don't care or because they're scared of -"

"Cyberware's big business, Hulkower," Peter said, softly. "It was inevitable that the Mafia would muscle in on it."

Melissa wasn't listening. She stopped suddenly and stared at the tomb at the right of the exit. "Do you know who's buried there?" she asked.

"No."

"Alan Turing."

"The Alan Turing? The cybernetician?"

She nodded. Peter let her stare and sob for nearly a minute, then gently squeezed her shoulders. "He's dead, Hulkower. Hannah's dead. Everyone in this place is dead. If you try taking on Silicon Valley, you'll be dead. Let's get out of here, huh?"

