



## BOOK EXTRACT

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## Taming the Senate

The Vice-President and General G. Mandeville appeared in front of the Senate, only hours after the assassination of President Burkhart. The White House had regained its calm after the frenzied panic; now it was time for the Senate to panic. Confusion had set in as the senators converses heatedly to try to make sense of the event. They waited for news and an explanation.

The appearance of the Vice-President and the General had gone unnoticed by some of the senators because of the noise and distractions that filled the House of Representatives. The Leader of the House was trying to bring order, calm and silence to proceedings, succeeding only in part to achieve compliance. Suddenly, silence blanketed the House, not through the Leader's efforts, but at the sight of guards lining the perimeter of the chamber, which made the senators very nervous.

"Gentlemen, Gentlemen," said the Vice-President, "and ladies. Please, can we have order in the House." The Vice-President managed to get the attention of most of the senators, but some were still in discussion. He persevered, this time booming through the microphone. It caught everyone's attention. "As you are aware," he continued, "the President is dead, assassinated at the most delicate of times. I have an agenda to run through in my initial address to you all ..."

An interruption came from the floor, close to the podium where the Vice-President and General stood. A senator had raised his arm and was shouting, "Mr Vice-President, Mr Vice-President!"

The Leader of the House responded and permitted the interruption. He was aware that many such disturbances would be forthcoming.

The Vice-President looked towards the Senator. "Mr President, Senator. It's now, Mr President," he said.

The Senator emitted a short and disapproving grunt. "Well, excuse me," he retorted. "I don't, at this precise moment, recognise that fact, Mr Vice-President."

The General smirked as he stood behind the Vice-President.

"That's your prerogative, Senator," replied the Vice-President. "Now, what's your real concern?"

"I'm concerned about the presence of all these guards," replied the Senator. "Armed guards, might I add, surrounding the house."

"Oh that!" exclaimed the Vice-President. "No need for concern, or fear, Senator. They are here for security purposes and for your protection."

The General smirked again.

"We believe," continued the Vice-President, "that there are still conspirators at large."

The same senator voiced another anxiety. "And what's that doing here? Why is he stood behind you?"

The General stared at the Senator intently, making him feel uneasy. "I think you need to find some manners," he said calmly.

"Manners, indeed," replied the Senator. "Since when has a general shown manners or taken part in addressing the

House?”

Roars of agreement circulated the House.

“My presence will become apparent to you, Senator,” answered the General with continued composure.

The Vice-President glanced back at the General with squinting eyes. He then turned to face the House again. “If you would all allow me to continue,” he said, “I shall explain. The General is here because the President’s assassination is of military concern. The General has been conducting an internal investigation, which has rooted out traitors within the ranks. Lieutenant General Burrows, who as you know is our Commanding Officer in the Middle East, is the main suspect, and is currently being detained. However, his fellow conspirators are still at large.”

“Come on, Mr Vice-President,” said the Senator. “That’s hard to swallow. I know Lieutenant General Burrows ...”

“Believe it, Senator,” interrupted the Vice-President. “You obviously don’t know him that well. Reports on this matter will be despatched to each and every one of you to read and digest. The reports will prove that the claims made against Lieutenant General Burrows are justified, and you will understand the actions we are taking.”

Another senator nodded towards the Leader of the House. “Go ahead, Senator Milford,” responded the Leader.

“Thank you,” replied Senator Milford, who was a senior figure in the House and highly respected. “I’ve taken on board my fellow senator’s comments. He was right to point out the General’s presence. It strikes me, Mr Leader, as too much of a coincidence. The President delivered his address to the nation and now he’s dead. One could almost think that some quarters did not like the avenue the President was taking.” The Senator paused and waited for a reply.

The General tapped the Vice-President’s shoulder, signalling for him to move to one side and allow him to take the floor. “Senator Milford, I believe,” he said. “Am I right, Senator?”

“Yes, General,” replied the Senator, “you’re right, and no doubt you think that your intervention is right too at this particular time.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the General. “I thought so. I’ve always had a keen eye and memory for troublemakers, especially ones who rush to formulate negative thoughts, comments and conclusions - non-supporters of America’s cause ...”

“Excuse me! Hang on a minute, General,” interrupted the Senator. “That’s a bit strong. You’re sounding suppressive. We are here to voice opinions and concerns and oppose if we deem that right. It’s the democratic way, General, or do you not agree?”

The General smiled and, after a pause for thought, replied. “At this time, no I do not. Look where it has got us. But, we have now been presented with an opportunity for strong leadership to come together in dealing with the situation. Now is not the time for opposition. We all need to rally round and get behind the Vice-President ...”

“Just as you are, General?” shouted the Senator.

“Indeed so,” replied the General.

Senator Milford laughed. “No,” he said, “somehow I don’t think so. I suspect that it could be the other way round. I get the feeling that you have fabricated another figure of terror, in the form of Burrows, to achieve your own aims.” The Senator stared at Mandeville, waiting for his reply.

The General responded with a laugh before serving up a return. Well done, well done, he thought. “Now who’s being a bit strong?” he remarked. “My aims are your aims. America stays on course, and the President lives on through death. Be assured, ensuring America’s safety is my aim; securing America’s prosperity is the aim of us all.”

The Vice-President started to panic and felt he had to interject, thinking the General was proceeding in a manner that could jeopardise their conspiracy. His passion to lead is rising too soon, he thought. “Gentlemen,” he said. “Arguments will get us nowhere. Can we call deuce and get back to business? You will be informed of developments as they arise. At this point in America’s history, I need your support. I need your confidence in me and in the administration. You must support General G. Mandeville in his quest to stabilise the internal security of America.”

The General stood back while the Vice-President continued. He was annoyed by the interruption, which he believed was turning a strong voice into a weak one. He lit a cigarette, which sparked the disapproval of the Leader of the House.

“Not in here, General,” said the Leader authoritatively. “Please respect the rules within these walls.”

Mandeville inhaled deeply before disposing of the cigarette. “Please excuse my ignorance,” he said, staring the Leader in the eyes and exhaling smoke. “I was lost in thought and was becoming bored at the sight of weakness that I’m witnessing. Besides, rules are only a guide, and that guidance may have to change.”

The Leader of the House nodded nervously, not wanting to get into any conversation with the General - that would only inflame his annoyance.

The General then refocused his attention on the discussion that was still continuing between the Vice-President and the House. He sighed. This is getting us nowhere, he thought. The illusion we have sought to create is not going to stand the test of time. I need to implement my contingency plan. Senator Milford and his supporters have forced my timetable forward. He stepped closer to the Vice-President and whispered in his ear. “We need a short recess to calm down and regain the initiative. We’re losing the plot. Make your excuses to get a recess.”

“What’s going on?” asked Senator Milford, observing the whispering.

The General stood back to allow the Vice-President to answer. “I need a short recess,” replied the Vice-President. “A development has arisen that needs my attention.”

“Mr Vice-President,” responded the Senator, “we have important issues to discuss, especially the looming election, which I feel more pressing than ‘a development’ that needs your or the General’s attention.”

“Yes, Senator,” said the Vice-President. “I understand you’re anxious. We will address that issue when we reconvene.”

“No!” insisted the Senator. “I want an answer before your request is granted.”

The Vice-President turned to face the Leader of the House. Well?” he asked.

“Answer the Senator,” instructed the Leader. “Then I will allow a short recess.”

The Vice-President angrily turned back to face the Senator. “When the situation is stable,” he said, “and only then, we’ll talk of elections and leadership.”

The Senator laughed. “That’s not good enough, Mr Vice-President.”

The General knew that the Senator was probing in an attempt to trip up the Vice-President. He will eventually succeed, he thought. The General directed another hard stare towards the Leader of the House, and then towards the hammer.

The Leader of the House quickly picked up the hammer and banged it down, instantly engaging everyone’s attention. “It was good enough,” he said. “The Vice-President has answered. We are now in recess.”

A roar of disapproval came from the floor as the Vice-President and General left the stage and retreated to an office away from the bustle of the main auditorium.

The General invited the Vice-President to sit at the desk and then stood behind him, resting his hands on the back of the chair. He leant forward, aligning his head with the Vice-President’s right ear. “Benjamin,” he said softly, “the time for illusion, confusion and conspiracy has passed. The President was easily conned in order to remove him, but Senator Milford presents us with an entirely different scenario, particularly after proffering his assessment of the situation. He aims to take advantage, take the initiative. Burrows has served his purpose and outlived his usefulness. We can’t continue this façade. The time is here and now among the flock of rulers. The world knows our Commander in Chief is dead. Let us give the world a new one, ordained by God. A military takeover cannot be a peaceful one, no matter how hard we try. A swift strike to impose authority is needed. The time for confusion is over.”

The Vice-President became concerned and scared, preventing any clear train of thought. “This was not the plan, General,” he whispered forcefully. “You can’t expect them to accept an announcement of military rule.”

The General moved away from the Vice-President and sat on the edge of the desk. “The time for whispering is also over, Benjamin,” he said. “Being a General means that you plan ahead for every event. It’s not a General’s way to execute too much political deceit and get bogged down with so much conspiracy. That’s what your lot are here for. A General will only stick to the game for so long, because in the end the target cannot be missed. It’s my time to deliver the fear of God. Believe me, they will accept. They will embrace it and stand before their new Commander in Chief. Don’t worry, Benjamin. I know what I am doing. It’s time to deliver ...”

“Deliver what?” interjected the Vice-President suddenly.

“Never mind, Benjamin,” responded the General. “I can hear shouting coming from the floor - no doubt complaints regarding our absence and extended interruption to the proceedings. Not all of us like an interruption. You see, Benjamin, disorder is spreading: knowing they have no leader ...”

“Enough! General,” declared the Vice-President. “They have seen their leader. We proceed as planned.” The Vice-President stood up from the chair and confidently started to make his way back to the waiting crowd of unsettled senators. “Come, General,” he said, “we have our work cut out. We stay on course.”

“Indeed I ... sorry, indeed we do,” said the General. I’m right behind you. I just need to make the quickest of calls.”

The Vice-President arrived back on the platform and positioned himself in front of the microphone. “Order please, order,” he exclaimed.

Senator Milford raised his arms. “Silence,” he ordered. “Let the Vice- President speak the General’s words. Let us hear what is to come as they make it up as they go along ...”

A ripple of laughter spread through the House. “Hear, hear!” voices trumpeted.

“Where is he?” continued the Senator.

“A call of nature, I think,” answered the Vice-President.

“Oh!” responded the Senator. “I thought you might have banished the General to a corner like a naughty boy.”

Another peal of laughter rang out just as the General reappeared and stood away from the podium, his brewing annoyance almost reaching boiling point. Silence prevailed on observing the General’s return.

“Gentlemen,” continued the Vice-President, “I need to finish presenting my agenda and my proposal.”

The General listened to the Vice-President waffle on. God, he thought, history is repeating itself: he sounds like his predecessor. Politicians just don’t get it. Once a politician, always a politician. He’s not listened to a word I’ve said. He appears desperate and weak, not to mention disrespectful towards my cause. He’ll lose a vote of confidence. The floor will demand a new leadership, an instant election. We’ll miss the damn target and not even get close to it. The General’s patience had run out - he was unable to listen any longer. As usual in these times of decision making, his godly anger came to the fore. He was clear in his mind: the time to silence the critics, and the enemy, had come.

The General raised his eyes to the galleries, which overlooked the great hall, and stood up straight with his hands behind his back. Then he nodded and waited. Seconds later, gunshots cried out from the gallery above. Hit by a succession of bullets, the Vice-President instantly fell backwards to the floor.