

ACT
— OF —
TREASON



VINCE FLYNN

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ACT OF TREASON

Consent to Kill

Memorial Day

Executive Power

Separation of Power

The Third Option

Transfer of Power

Term Limits



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ACT OF TREASON

PRELUDE

WASHINGTON, DC

OCTOBER

The motorcade rumbled down the cobblestone street. Three motorcycles led the way, followed by a DC police squad, two Secret Service sedans, and then two identical limousines. After the limousines came the Suburbans and more sedans. It was an impressive sight, especially when one considered that the two men being protected had yet to win the White House. However, earlier in the week a fringe terrorist group had announced their intent to disrupt the upcoming election, and the Secret Service had no choice but to take the threat seriously.

Mark Ross sat in the back seat of the second limousine and massaged his forehead. A monster headache was building from the base of his brain and slowly spreading to the front. He tried to block out the incessant chatter of the man sitting next to him, while at the same time wondering just how in the hell he had gotten himself into this mess. He would have been better off staying in the Senate where he had real power. It was power, though, that had gotten him here. Or at least the promise of it.

The relationship was cracking. There was no doubt about it. It had always been an arranged marriage of sorts. They each had their strengths and weaknesses, and for the most part they didn't overlap. It was explained to them by the power brokers and gatekeepers that they would complement each other perfectly. On paper it all looked perfect. A real marriage made in heaven. If they had bothered to read any of the classic Greek tragedies, though, they would have known that the gods could be very cruel. Especially when it came to the hubris of men.

Ross had naturally been aware of Josh Alexander all along. Alexander, the up-and-coming star of the Democratic Party, was governor of Georgia. The old white men who ran the party had finally gotten through their heads that a Northeast liberal was simply unelectable. Their only real chance of winning was to draft a Southern governor who believed in Jesus Christ. This way they could split the Bible Belt vote and steal enough red states to win it all. Alexander was the obvious choice. He was handsome, smart, and polished, and his wife's family had more money than most third-world countries. His only drawback was his relative youth. At forty-five he was deemed a touch green, and definitely weak on foreign affairs. His early polling numbers suggested that people weren't sure he would be a strong enough leader in the war on terror. That was where Mark Ross came in. A three-term senator from Connecticut, Ross was the new director of National Intelligence. He had a reputation as one of the more hawkish Democrats in Washington.

In a normal national election, the two men would have never ended up as running mates. This election, however, had been turned on its ear when the current president announced that he had

election, however, had been turned on its ear when the current president announced that he had Parkinson's disease and would not be seeking a second term. With only a year to go before the general election, the party was caught flat-footed. The primary season was upon them and the only real candidate they had was Vice President Sherman Baxter III. Everybody, including the president, agreed that Baxter would be a disaster. He was perhaps the most marginalized vice president in the history of the republic, and that was saying a lot. The man's approval rating in his home state of California was below thirty percent. A lot of things could have been ignored, but not that number. The party elders pulled him aside and told him it was the end of the road. Having been confronted with his limits and deficiencies for the last three years, the man did not put up a fight.

Ross, in the meantime, worked feverishly behind the scenes. He was well connected on Wall Street; regarded highly by his old club, the U.S. Senate; and savvy enough to know not to throw his hat in the ring too early. He waited until New Hampshire, when Alexander walked away as the clear front runner. Then he began networking, pushing the idea that the young governor needed a running mate who had some gravitas in the national security arena. He sent his surrogates to lobby on his behalf. He personally wined and dined the party's big money people and he carefully began to court the handsome, young governor from Georgia.

Everything fell into place exactly as Ross had wished. When he took the stage at the national convention, the place erupted. They hit the ground with a bounce and an eight-point lead. That had been three months ago. The pinnacle. The apogee of the campaign. Since then they'd been bleeding like a stuck pig. With two weeks until Election Day they trailed their opponents by three points, and Ross was feeling the pressure. Their pollsters kept coming back with the same problem. Voters perceived the pair as weaker than their opponents on national security. This was where Ross was supposed to step in and fill the breach, but how could he have known the president would leave them high and dry?

The man had abandoned them in their hour of need. Yes, he had endorsed them, but what in the hell else was he going to do? Endorse the Republican ticket? Campaigning on their behalf was assumed. It was all part of the battle plan. He would help them raise the millions of dollars it would take to win the TV ad race. He would step in and use that bully pulpit to announce his confidence in the young candidate and his seasoned running mate. But all they got was silence and a cold shoulder.

The press was told that the president's disease was taking a toll on him, and he simply didn't have the energy to campaign. His obligation was to his office and the American people. Ross believed the excuse for a few days, and then reality set in. Word had gotten back to him through two solid sources that the president had a real problem with the ticket. He was offended that no one had bothered to consult him as to who Alexander should pick as a running mate. Beyond that, the president made it clear that he considered Ross the wrong choice.

The words had stung Ross to the core, but he had since written them off as the musings of a bitter old man at the end of his journey. True to his never-quit attitude, Ross redoubled his efforts and stayed positive. This morning, however, he was feeling a sense of dread. There were only two weeks left, and the polls could move only so far in such a short period of time. They needed a real October surprise to put them over the top, and then Ross would take great pride in sticking it in the president's face on Inauguration Day.

As the motorcade slowed, the lead vehicles began peeling off. Ross looked through the tinted bulletproof window at the media who had gathered in front of the mansion. The heavy black iron gate

bulletproof window at the media who had gathered in front of the mansion. The heavy black iron gate opened and the two limousines pulled into the narrow circular drive. Dumbarton Oaks was a twenty-two-acre estate in Georgetown that was noteworthy for hosting a conference in 1944 that led to the formation of the United Nations. It was Ross's idea that they host a national security conference at the estate and bring in the greatest minds to discuss the issues that threatened the country. A former chairman of the Joint Chiefs was on hand, as well as two former secretaries of state, a former secretary of defense, several retired CIA directors, a few lesser-known generals, and a smattering of Middle Eastern experts and Muslim clerics from around the world.

After the three-hour event they were to head to the vice president's house at the Naval Observatory. The vice president was set to host a diplomatic reception on their behalf. All of the important ambassadors would be there, and both Ross and Alexander would present them with their vision for security, peace, and prosperity in the twenty-first century. The event should have been held at the White House, but they had been denied. The entire election—hell—his entire political career was going to come down to this one afternoon. If he believed in God he would have said a prayer, but he didn't, so he cursed the president instead.

The limo came to a stop and Ross looked his yammering campaign manager in the eye for the first time in five minutes. "Stu," Ross checked to make sure his tie was straight, "shut up. You're giving me a headache."

With that, Ross stepped from the back of the limo. He buttoned his suit coat with one hand and waved to the reporters and photographers with the other. He was about to comment on how beautiful a day it was when the whole gaggle swung their lenses and microphones away from him. Ross turned to see the tanned and slender legs of Jillian Rautbort Alexander emerge from the other limousine.

The press loved her. They called her America's Diana. Her likeability number was in the seventies. Far higher than either of the candidates. She was a stunning beauty in every conceivable way. She was five foot nine with shoulder-length blond hair and a body to die for. She'd been raised among the super elite. Schooled in Switzerland and then Brown, where her father had gone. The family's fortune was in real estate and lots of it. New York and Florida was where they had made the killing. There were homes in Paris, Manhattan, and Palm Springs. At thirty-six Jillian was one of those rare women who got better with age. She drew men into her orbit without having to bat an eye or flash a smile. She was gorgeous, classy, and hot all at the same time. Ross had thought about taking a run at her on more than one occasion. She was no vestal virgin, that was for sure, but a real opportunity never presented itself.

Josh Alexander joined his wife, and the flashes erupted once again. He was six-one with black hair and the tanned skin of a low-handicap golfer. He was polished in that southern televangelist sort of way. His suits were always a bit shinier than everyone else's, his hair a bit longish and perfectly styled, and his teeth a few shades too white. This appearance, of course, fit the master plan to split the southern Christian vote, and the polling numbers told them it had worked. A little too well in fact. Their real problem now lay with the base. They felt betrayed, and were threatening to stay home on Election Day.

Ross watched the presidential candidate and his wife pose for the cameras. They stood there smiling, those same forced smiles that Ross had grown to hate. Even so, he kept his own fake smile going and acted like he was admiring the sheer beauty of the super couple. Ross's wife was back in Connecticut at the bedside of their daughter who was about to give birth to their first grandchild at an

Connecticut at the bedside of their daughter who was about to give birth to their first grandchild at a moment. It was just as well. She had grown sick of the campaign. It was no joy being outshined at every stop by a woman twenty years her junior.

Alexander finally left his wife's side and came over to Ross. He stuck out his right hand and clapped Ross on the shoulder with his left.

"How you feeling today, Mr. Vice President?"

"Good, Mr. President." Ross strained to keep the smile on his face.

Calling each other president and vice president had been Alexander's idea. The week after the convention, when they'd had their eight point lead, it had been fun. Now it just seemed delusional and childish. Ross still thought they had a chance. He just didn't think the power of positive thinking was what was going to put them over the top. Five key states were up for grabs. The negative ads were in the can and if they didn't shrink the gap in the polls by Monday morning, things were going to get ugly. Ross knew they'd be using those ads against their opponents. It was just a question of whether they started this week or the following. This was going to be a street fight right to the bitter end.

FOUR BLOCKS AWAY Gavrilo Gazich paid for his espresso with cash and was careful to keep the brim of his red Washington Nationals baseball hat tilted down so that the security camera mounted above the teller couldn't get a good shot of him. He was also wearing sunglasses to help conceal his features. It was a sunny, fall morning in Georgetown, and the killer fit in perfectly.

Gazich preferred to operate in Africa. That was where he had made a name for himself after years of training in his war-torn homeland of Bosnia. The corrupt politicians and generals of the subcontinent made it an extremely target-rich environment. The billions in aid that were simply thrown at the impoverished region by foreign governments and international relief organizations provided an extra incentive for them to slaughter each other. The prevalence of graft from the national level all the way down to the smallest village was astounding. Of every dollar in aid, it was estimated that only ten cents actually made it to the people who really needed it.

The men at the top—warring heads of political parties, tribal leaders, gangsters, military commanders, and thugs—all fought for their piece of the action, and little value, if any, was placed on civilian life. A half a million people dead one year, a million the next. The level of carnage was mind-boggling. Respect for human life nonexistent. The lawlessness staggering. It made the civil war in Yugoslavia look like a skirmish. A simple dustup between a couple of neighborhood gangs.

During the siege of Sarajevo, Gazich had witnessed some horrible things, but nothing that compared to the sheer scope of suffering that existed in the war-torn areas of Africa. He used it to his advantage, though. The mix of chaos, corruption, brutality, and lawlessness created the perfect working environment for him. The warlords of Africa were constantly looking to expand their hold and increase their plunder. They operated under the principle of market share. If you weren't growing you were on your way out. The most difficult part for Gazich was keeping all the players and their shifting alliances straight.

He had a simple rule in this regard. Work only for the most ruthless, and never meet them face-to-face in their own backyard. If they wanted to hire him they had to send someone to Athens or

to take in their own backyard. If they wanted to hire him they had to send someone to Athens or Istanbul. Occasionally, he would travel to Cairo, but since the towers had fallen in New York, he no longer felt safe in the Egyptian capital. Their president was too close to the United States, and his security service was far too efficient and brutal to toy with.

Cyprus had been his home now for more than a decade. It was where he went to find the solitude that he needed between jobs. To get in and out of these war-torn countries he'd posed as a reporter, an oil company engineer, even a mercenary from time to time. More often than not, though, he was acting on behalf of international relief organizations. He had a small business in Limassol, Cyprus, called Aid Logistics Inc that specialized in cutting through the red tape in the war-torn areas of Africa. He'd even been recognized by the International Committee of the Red Cross for his services. The business turned a tidy little profit on the side, but more importantly it gave him legitimacy. It helped him build up his contacts and keep track of the ever-changing players in the subcontinent's continuing saga.

Now, here in America he was simply a tourist. A Greek tourist at that. Somewhere in his family history there had to be a few drops of Greek blood, or at a bare minimum, a healthy portion of Macedonian. He'd traveled Greece extensively and knew the language well enough, since it was also the national language of Cyprus. The customs officer at JFK had waved him through with a smile, which seemed to confirm Gazich's belief that the Greeks were well liked by mostly everyone with the exception of the Turks.

As with pretty much any job, Gazich had his reservations, but with this one there were more than usual, in part because he was operating in America, a country that was on high alert for terrorist attacks. Their border controls and linked computer systems made traveling under false identities very difficult. In Africa he rarely had to worry about being picked up by a surveillance camera. Here in Washington, though, they were everywhere.

This was a rush job, which was never good on the nerves. He had been given one hour to accept or decline the job without even knowing what it was. All he was told was that he would have to travel to America, the hit would take place this coming Saturday and he would be paid two million dollars. This was double the most lucrative contract he'd ever landed. His initial thought was that it was a trap, but after he analyzed it for a moment he dismissed that possibility. He had done nothing to offend the Americans. There would be no reason for them to go to this effort to capture a man who'd made a living in the killing fields of Africa.

Pretty much without exception Gazich dispatched his targets in one of two ways. He either shot them in the head from a safe distance or blew them up with high-powered explosives. Simplicity was at all times his primary objective. Having grown up on a farm outside Sarajevo, Gazich and his older brothers had been raised to hunt. They were all expert marksmen by the age of ten. When he was sixteen, his father sent him and his three older brothers off to fight with the Bosnian Serb forces who had laid siege to Sarajevo. That was when Gazich turned his crosshairs from wild game to man for the first time. In certain ways, he found hunting man less of a challenge. In other ways he found it far more exhilarating.

Today would be one of the most thrilling kills of his career. His only regret was that he hadn't been given more time to plan the hit. Killing a man with a single shot from up to a mile away was the biggest rush he had ever felt. Killing the target by remote detonating a bomb was a distant second, but a thrill nonetheless. That's what it would be today. There simply wasn't enough time to prepare for a

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