

EXTRA CHAPTER 2**Hart Senate Building, Washington DC****2:06pm**

'They will see you now.'

Stanford dropped the issue of Time magazine he perused, scribbled his mark on the sign-in sheet, took the badge, and followed the aide ushering him over the threshold into room SH-219. One vaulted door opened onto another in a design Stanford recognised immediately. This room was unlike any other in the Hart Senate Office Building; most were Senator's offices. Outside it looked like a thousand other office blocks. This one room, annexed from the main building, was a secured conference facility of the type usually found in embassies off American soil. It was built as a room within a room – a “bubble” the counter-surveillance technicians called it. Underneath beige felted lift-off lining, Stanford knew a protective cocoon was hidden there. A Plexiglas box had been built within the original room to allow examination of the shielding copper coils that prevented any transmissions from escaping the confines of the inner conference chamber. Any listening devices discovered in there during regular visual inspection would be given quick passage out. The room even had its own filtered independent electricity circuit. Of course it had no windows; no natural illumination could penetrate the deliberations within. Room SH-219 hosted the hearings of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

A man brushed by, in a hurry out of the hearing. Stanford recognised him as Director McConnell for National Intelligence. The two exchanged a passing cursory nod.

Stanford plonked down into the mauve witness bucket seat, swelling into it. His early fifties had deprived him of physical tautness and replaced it with a kind of mental athleticism honed over many years in the gymnasium

of espionage — the Directorate of Operations. Like an albatross would scan the ocean for prey, so too Stanford sat solus on his own prow regarding through pristine rimless spectacles the fifteen-member panel, their three assistants, and a stenographer with deft fingers dabbing out every word spoken. An involuntarily sigh escaped from his lips and into the microphone stalk. On days like these he yearned for the era before the Church report, to be unfettered by congressional oversight.

'Thank you for coming,' said Senator Rockefeller, chairman of the committee. 'We appreciate having a representative of the CIA here at such short notice, Mr. —' he lifted a page to check the name — 'Stanford.'

'Just Stanford, Mr. Chairman.' He inched near the microphone, to be properly heard. 'Directors Hayden and Sulick both send their regrets. Unfortunately they could not cancel their scheduled appointments at short notice.'

'This is the first time you've appeared before us, isn't it?'

'Yes Senator. Given the nature of my job, I prefer to stay out of the limelight wherever possible. I'm sure you understand.'

Rockefeller tried a grin.

Stanford, the Deputy Director of the National Clandestine Service, was responsible for the day-to-day management of CIA's black ops programs: everything from recruiting foreign assets, toppling dictators, to extraordinary rendition of terror suspects. He held all the secrets. Were his identity ever publicly known, he would become a target for every malcontent bearing a grudge against the American intelligence community. The DD/NCS usually kept to the shadows.

Rockefeller extended gratitude. 'In that case, your presence here today is doubly appreciated — if not a bit surprising.'

'May I now ask why the committee requested a CIA representative with just two hours notice?' Stanford enquired.

'This hearing was already scheduled, but only this morning we heard with great sadness that our esteemed colleague had died – the Democratic Senator for Ohio, Mark Olsen.'

Stanford scoffed internally at the *esteemed* part. Olsen had never been invited to sit on the Intelligence Committee panel. In fact, he'd always been kept at arm's length by the Capitol Hill establishment; his allegiances always suspected. Most members of congress believed the line propagated around DC – that Olsen's loyalties were more international than patriotic. Stanford knew the opposite to be true. Olsen's connections with foreign businesses and international research foundations made him the object of suspicion at home, but Stanford and Olsen shared the view that by looking outward, taking the pulse of the world, tapping all possible lines of information, were ultimately the best means of protecting American interests.

After a respectful pause, the chairman continued.

'Given Senator Olsen's high profile internationally, we expect his death will attract a lot of attention, and perhaps even some suspicion – so for that reason we'd like to have definitive answers readily available. The Director of National Intelligence, in our discussions today, assures us he will direct all appropriate agencies to investigate and report on any suspicious activities surrounding the Senator, up to and including his death. We will expect the CIA also to prepare a report on the Senator's activities outside our borders.'

Senator Rockefeller looked out over his half-moon glasses to gauge Stanford's reaction.

'I see.' Stanford replied flatly, disclosing nothing with his tone.

'DNI McConnell also tells us the CIA have dispatched someone to the scene. Is this correct?'

'It is.'

'May we ask why?'

'A formality; consider it due regard for the office of Senator.'

'Is that so?' asked the chairman. He removed his glasses and sighed, plainly exasperated by the paucity of information.

Another congressional interrogator took to a microphone and accosted with a Texan drawl enhanced by his frustration. The plaque on the desk identified him as Senator Tyler M. Burgess.

'We don't have time for this whitewash Mr. Stanford.'

'Just Stanford.'

'Yeah, yeah – whatever you spooks wanna call yourselves – it doesn't matter. The fact is: we don't know if this was some wacko just taking a pot shot; one of us could be next. Or maybe the Senator was just reaping the rewards of something he was caught up in – something you know about. Now there have been rumours flying about within the Beltway for a long time now that Olsen was connected with the CIA somehow. Hell, he even requested to address this committee in a hearing next month. Why would he have anything to say on the matter of United States intelligence unless he was involved somehow?'

Stanford smelt the unease of other committee members with the direct line of questioning by Senator Burgess, but they were plenty willing to hold fire and wait to see its outcome.

Stanford dissembled. 'I'm not clear on this Senator – is there some question you would specifically liked answered?'

Burgess boomed out. 'Specifically then: was Senator Olsen gathering intelligence for the CIA?'

'Let me see if I have this correct – you are asking me if Senator Olsen was a CIA asset?'

'Yes I am.'

'Well now Senator, it's not CIA practice to confirm or deny the identities of assets.'

'This is a closed hearing, for Pete's sake,' said Burgess. 'Information disseminated here is secure.'

'Forgive me Senator, but I'm intimately aware of the inherent insecurity of information when disseminated beyond a need-to-know basis, no matter how contained the environment. The reputation of the agency, and hence

our ability to recruit new assets, would diminish severely if it were known that we reveal such things. CIA is already hurting from fallout of the Plame Affair. Need I remind the committee?'

Burgess slapped his hand on the desk, causing many to jolt. 'Damn it, don't play games with us!'

Stanford eyed up Burgess with venom in his stare. 'I don't play games, Senator. My job, every day, involves serious consequences and I have the duty of care of many lives entrusted to me – not just Mark Olsen, and not just yours, Senator.'

Burgess backed down; the wheels had come off his bluster. Stanford took a slow, deep breath and addressed his next words to the chairman in an emotionless, officious tone.

'The identity of covert assets and operatives are classified subjects and, as decreed by Executive Order 13292, such matters may only be divulged to those people cleared on a case-by-case basis by the head of the agency that originally applied the classification. In this case, that would be Director of the CIA.'

'Who, conveniently, can not be here today,' said Senator Rockefeller.

'Who, unfortunately, can not be here today,' Stanford rephrased.

'Very well – might I suggest that we adjourn and that you speak with Director Hayden when he *is* available to clear the committee for all information surrounding Senator Olsen.'

'I'll be happy to Senator.'

The chairman concluded. 'Let me make this clear: this committee will have full CIA co-operation and a full report, *before* the time that Senator Olsen was due to address us. We will ensure that, by Presidential intervention if necessary. Are we clear?'

'Perfectly,' said the DD/NCS.

'Good – we'll expect you back here on the thirtieth of next month. This session is now closed.'

As the chairman gathered his papers and the murmurs rose, Senator Burgess took one last turn on the microphone.

'Before you go Stanford, I just want to say one thing on the record. Without knowing clearly what is going on, our hands are tied. Now —' Burgess gesticulated, 'you go off and take care of all the due process and legal obligations you need to cover yourself, but let me make this quite plain — by not divulging, you are quite clearly taking responsibility for the outcome of this upon your own shoulders. Are you quite clear on that Mr. Stanford?'

'Completely clear. Responsibility is something I never evade Senator; in my position, it is something I can't afford to.'

I leave that to the politicians, Stanford thought.

His real trouble was this: he was already responsible for Senator Olsen's death.

On the return to Langley, tucked in the back of a CIA motor pool limo, Stanford answered a secured call from the Director.

'How'd it go?' Hayden asked.

'They weren't well pleased, but you were right to send me there; it bought us some time.'

'Good — we'll talk about it when you're back. By the way, who did you send to Ohio? I hope they're up to the job.'

'So do I,' murmured Stanford.