

EXCERPT 2

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN JFK FIRES FBI DIRECTOR J. EDGAR HOOVER?

Two weeks to the day after the firing, Ted Sorenson and Gene Drake, Bobby's deputy at the Department of Justice, were driven to a house in Georgetown situated back-to-back with Hoover's. It was after 3:00am. Hoover and Clyde Tolson were inside, seated at a dining room table. In front of the two empty seats across from them were two manila envelopes. Hoover gestured to them as the two men sat down. "Why don't you gentleman spend a few minutes studying those before we get started?"

"That won't be necessary," said Sorenson. "What do you want?"

Hoover smiled. "Well, first of all, Mr. Sorenson, I want you to look at what we've prepared for you. I'll wager you'll find them very interesting."

"You'd lose that bet," Sorenson said. "Nothing you have interests us."

Hoover's smile looked swollen and festering. "Now if that were true, why would you be here talking to me in the middle of the night?"

Sorenson's eyes dropped to the packet in front of him and lifted again so rapidly he seemed to have blinked. Hoover's purple grin widened. Sorenson leaned forward and stared coldly at Hoover. "It pains me to disappoint you, but we have about a thousand better things to do than sort through your dirty pictures."

"I'm sure you do. Here's another bet for you, Mr. Sorenson. I have \$500 in my pocket that says the reason you're here is the Punk's curiosity. I say the President didn't want you or anybody else to meet with me but his brother talked him into it because he can't figure out how I keep pulling out more evidence," Hoover tapped the envelope between Sorenson and him, "and he can't stand it."

Sorenson's face remained calm. Hoover leaned back in his chair. "Now you're wondering if I have the Oval Office bugged, even though you've gone over it with a microscope? No, Mr. Sorenson, some things you don't need bugs for." Hoover laughed a silent gassy chortle that vibrated his jowls. "Yes, I know, you terribly important guys have all kinds of important things to do. I'd say it's important to make sure you have a certain minimum level of permission from Congress and the American people to do them, wouldn't you?"

Now Gene Drake leaned forward. "You're wasting our time, Hoover. We'll only ask once more. What do you want?"

"Justice, Gene!" Hoover's smile curdled to an ugly gash as he slapped the table. "I want justice, and I want my honor back. Sorenson, in this packet that you're so busy you can't bother to read, you'll find a statement that your boss is going to issue not later than 36 hours from this minute, 3:30 tomorrow afternoon, saying that new evidence makes it necessary to withdraw his earlier comments on my report and endorse its findings. He can say he still wants to flesh out more details if he wants, but he'll say it's clear we're all professionals who will do everything

necessary to protect this country from its enemies!”

For ten seconds the heavy antique tock of a clock was the only sound. Hoover quivered, his lips pressed tight and his eyes bulging. Sorenson folded his hands on the table. “Mr. Hoover,” he said, “that’s not going to happen. No statement, no endorsement, no new look at the report. None of it.”

“All right!” Hoover said, pouncing to his feet. “I thought maybe you’d let this be easy.” He seized the packet from the table. “I am ready to send one of these to every member of the Congress. They’re ready to go right now, sealed up, stamped, addressed, and if I don’t make a phone call stopping them, they’re in the mail before the sun comes up. Don’t have any doubts about that. You geniuses, you’re all so amazed that the more files you take away from me, the more keep popping up? Hah!” He threw the envelope at Sorenson but it veered off course. “I saw this coming for a long time. You have no idea what you’re in for.”

“Mr. Hoover—” said Sorenson.

“Shut up. There’s a set of documents, fully illustrated, the best of the best, on its way to every member of Congress. They will impeach you like that. You’ll be out on the street by Labor Day. Those two bastards will run back to Daddy’s castle and play with themselves all day and you’ll be cleaning the toilet at the Lincoln Memorial. Then you can think about the chance you blew tonight.” He nodded stiffly. “Make no mistake, Sorenson. You’re the one who’s making me play this card.”

“You’ve played it already,” Sorenson said. “It may be hard to believe, but we know one or two people on the Hill ourselves. You’ve been sending garbage over there for a week now. The fact that you’re sitting here threatening us tells me that’s not working real well for you, Mr. Hoover. No, that card’s been played, and it just wasn’t high enough, was it?” Sorenson stood up and so did Drake. “For a long time, they were afraid of you over there. Your ‘friends’ there, the Chairs who made sure you always got your budget? They were afraid. We all were. Now someone’s finally stood up to you and amazingly enough you’re just not that scary. Go see how many friends you can find today.”

All four men were standing now. Sorenson leaned slightly towards Hoover from across the table, bracing himself with both hands on the back of his chair and speaking softly. “You’re a bully, Mr. Hoover. After bullies fall they don’t have friends. You don’t quite seem to understand that. You don’t quite seem to understand change. You don’t see it until it’s too late. You don’t understand that everything changed last November, especially the size of the President of the United States. He’s the hero now of nearly every man, woman and child in this country, regardless of what they thought before. And here you are, with your smutty snapshots.” Sorenson shook his head. “I have to tell you, it’s kind of pathetic. And just by contrast, just by being who you are, you’re making him even a bigger hero. Do you understand what I’m saying, Mr. Hoover? You’re making us stronger, not weaker. Everyone in this town you’ve had cowering in the dark now sees you in the daylight, and it’s...pathetic.”

Hoover was holding himself, his arms crossed with each hand grasping the opposite shoulder. “No,” he said softly. He swayed forward slightly.

“Yes,” said Sorenson. “Oh, and I nearly forgot what we brought you.” He reached inside his coat and withdrew a tan envelope from his breast pocket. He tore open the seal and pulled out a thin set of 3 x 5 black and white photos, stretching to hand them across the table. “Just a little token of our esteem,” he said, reaching a little further.

Hoover didn’t move. After a moment Sorenson swiveled his arm towards Clyde Tolson. “Well, why don’t you just take them, then?” said Sorenson. “I’m positive you’ll recognize them, too, Mr. Tolson.” Tolson took them. He looked at the top picture and then the next two. He stopped at the third and lifted it into Hoover’s unmoving field of vision. Sorenson watched Hoover’s eyes flick to the picture and then back to him. “Really, now, Mr. Hoover, did you think your boys were the only ones who knew how to work a camera in tight places?”

Hoover’s face was blank. With a backhand sweep he slapped the photos in Tolson’s hand away from him and backed one step away from the table. He jerked a snub-nosed revolver out of a shoulder holster under his jacket and fired one shot before Clyde Tolson threw an arm around his chest and slammed him back against a china cabinet. At the impact a second shot went off. Sorenson heard a soft phfft and a surprised gasp from Drake standing one foot to his right. Hoover bellowed wildly as he broke from Tolson’s grasp and ran from the room. Tolson chased after him.

Sorenson helped Drake sit back down and pulled off the tablecloth to press it against a slow steady flow of blood from the top of his right shoulder. “Are you okay?” he yelled. Drake bit hard on the inside of his mouth and nodded sharply. Sorenson ran into the kitchen and found a telephone to call an ambulance. He ran back to the dining room to find Drake peeking beneath the clenched tablecloth, examining his wound. “I think he busted my collarbone,” he said with an exasperated shake of the head. “Stupid son of a bitch.”

Sorenson looked quickly at the wound and pressed a fresh section of tablecloth to it. “Don’t stop pressing on that. You’re a lucky son of a bitch.” Then he went out the doorway Hoover and Tolson had just used.

He followed the sound of voices to a small hallway near the back door. There in very dim light he saw Tolson leaning against a bathroom door with his ear pressed against it. Hoover had locked himself inside. “No, it’s not, Ed,” Tolson was saying. “I promise you it’s not.” Sorenson could hear the barest murmur of Hoover responding.

Then Sorenson heard the doorbell and three crashing beats on the front door. He ran to the entryway and reached the door a step ahead of Drake, who dragged the bloody tablecloth behind him. Three D.C. police rushed into the room, followed by two paramedics who pulled Drake towards them. “Down here!” Sorenson said, waving the police to follow him towards the back bathroom. “He’s been locked in there for maybe—”

The sound of a gunshot crackled through the house.

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