

DON'T BET ON IT

a novel by

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## ALLEGATIONS OF AN AFFAIR

With only two weeks to go before the election, Senator Jim Collins was leading his rival, Representative Tom Brown, in presidential polls by 10%. The race had been relatively free of dirt, and that was unusual. Many people thought that there would have been plenty of mud slinging, especially since Brown was known for dirty tactics.

I turned on the television to catch up on the news to find a Kathy Pendleton being interviewed by the media. Her voice was completely drowned out by some kind of machinery in the background and, since I can't read lips, I didn't have the slightest notion of what she was saying. Fortunately the interviewer summarized the proceedings and stated that Ms. Pendleton mentioned having had an affair with Senator Collins a few years ago. It was public knowledge that the two had known each other and dated for about a year, but that had been before Collins was married. I figured that this bit of information wouldn't damage the Senator, even if it were true.

I walked into the kitchen to check on the turkey chili and found it just about ready. I sliced some fresh Italian bread and prepared a small salad and opened up the refrigerator to get a bottle of Molson Export Ale.

By the time I returned to the tube with my food, the news was just about over so I changed the station to channel 29 to watch an old episode of Seinfeld. Jerry was recalling his high school days when he beat Duncan Meyer in a sprint. The current day found him in a rematch, proving who was faster. The writers had outdone themselves again.

The chili was as hot as a summer afternoon in Tijuana but the ale helped to put out the fire in my mouth. I finished the salad and brought the dishes back into the kitchen. I would have put them into the dishwasher, but

since I am the dishwasher, they would have to wait until later.

I opened the newspaper and read about some of Tom Brown's promises if elected. He wanted a balanced budget within two years and cuts in taxes as well as building up the armed forces. He also talked about making other cuts to help the country. Rumors were about that some of the victims of elimination might be the school lunch program and all forms of welfare. Also in danger was funding for public radio and television and Brown promised to reduce term limits for those in the House and Senate, but only for newly elected individuals. What some people won't say to be president!

On the other hand, Senator Collins mentioned that since most Americans had been forced to endure salary cuts or at least concessions of some sort, it might be a good idea for Congressmen and Senators to bite the bullet by accepting a salary cut. This would set a great example for all. He also added that rushing to eliminate welfare might not be as prudent as properly administering it, and the same could be said about farm subsidies and funding for PBS. Lastly, he suggested a boycott of major league baseball so as to send a message to both management and the players that the fans were getting upset with the greed of both parties.

Tom Brown had mentioned that the public shouldn't trust Collins because of his questionable moral character. He claimed that the senator was a womanizer and that governing the country was very difficult with your pants off. Finally he suggested that the people should listen to what Collins' lady friend Kathy Pendleton was saying about him.

I didn't have a chance to turn the page of the paper when the phone rang.

“Hello!”

“Did I wake you?” It was my accountant and close friend, Tom Daniel.

“That’s OK, I had to get up to answer the phone anyway. How’s everything with you?”

“I’m doing fine. Was your contract renewed?”

“I got my notice today. At least they gave me a month to find some work, not like my previous contract.”

“Weren't you happy with a day's notice?”

“Actually it wasn’t even that much time as that contract ended on a moment's notice...and I mean that literally. We were told the contract wouldn't be renewed and ten minutes later we were out of the building, never to return. I went back to my desk before leaving and got my stuff together but I didn’t even get a chance to remove my telephone list, which I should have gotten.”

“What did you want with the phone list?”

“Oh, nothing more than the names and phone numbers of people who might have a connection to future contracts. You can’t have too many contacts in this business. Unfortunately the end came so quickly.”

“You’ll be all right, John. I’m sure you’ll find something better and soon.”

“I hope you're right.”

“If you want to stop over for a brew, come on over.”

“Thanks, but not tonight. I'm not up to it, Tom.”

“I’ll talk to you in a few days. Hang in there!”

“So long.”

Such is the life of a computer consultant. Timing is so important. Once I had three job offers but when you need just one place to work, the jobs aren't there. Fortunately I always save for a rainy day so a short stretch with no checks coming in would not pose too big a problem. I just had to make sure to find something as soon as I could. I turned to the want ads and found a few analyst jobs but they all appeared to be full time work, in which I was not interested.

I guess I was going to have to dig out Sunday's classified section. I just didn't feel like bothering tonight.

I spent the next few hours reading the paper and, as I turned the page, I saw an article dealing with the interview of Kathy Pendleton. She mentioned that she was to make a statement tomorrow regarding Senator Collins. She also stated that what she had to say would be damaging to his campaign for president. She said that all the press people would have to wait for further statements and then left with no further comment. Wasn't there a blond named Marilyn in the 60's who had intended to do just this same thing to a politician but her untimely death prevented it?

I turned on the television to see what else was happening and saw that the stock market gained a whopping two points while the NASDAQ lost almost a point. I would have to wait a couple minutes if I wanted to catch up on sports so I figured why not. When the station returned from its commercial messages the lead story was what else but the Bills and their preparations for their archrival Miami Dolphins at Rich Stadium on Sunday. Both teams were almost completely injury free and the game was sold out so there would be TV coverage in Western New York. The next story was on the World Series where game six was still being played in the bottom of the eleventh inning and the score tied at two. I had no plans to switch the channel to watch the remainder of the game so I patiently waited for the end of sports coverage and a few more boring commercials. The weather woman would be on shortly.

I hoped the forecast was better than my day had been. Little did I realize that tomorrow would not turn out much better.

## A MURDER IN BALTIMORE

I awoke the next morning somewhat tired. It seemed I got no sleep whatsoever although I probably got a good five hours worth. I shaved and showered and got ready for another day at the bank. I had toast and hot tea for breakfast and put together a quick lunch. With no contract immediately in sight I could see that I was going to have to brown bag it for now. Otherwise the checking account would soon be depleted.

I got to work and things were the same as usual. I finished doing some changes to my program and was ready to resume testing when the phone rang.

“Systems...John Kuzinski.”

“Is your desk still there?”

“Yeah it is, but just barely. I didn't expect to hear from you so soon, Tom. What's the occasion?”

“Have you read the morning paper?”

“I didn't have a chance. Why? Is there something of importance?”

“A certain Kathy Pendleton was found murdered in her Baltimore townhouse early this morning. Wasn't this the day when she was supposed to make a statement to the media regarding presidential hopeful Jim Collins? Do you realize what this might do to his campaign?”

“Wow! That just might put Brown in the oval office. And Collins seemed to be a shoe-in, at least according to the polls. His political career may be over.”

“Why not stop over tonight for the beer you missed yesterday? If you want I have an extra steak to throw on the grill for you.”

“I can't pass that up. See you then.”

I hung up the phone and went back to testing my program. The day seemed to really drag on. I had plenty of work and no reason to be anything but busy. Somehow time stood still or appeared to do so.

Finally it came time to quit and until then I really believed the day would never come to an end. I drove home and checked my phone messages. The machine's blinking indicated someone had left a message but on playback I heard only an old one. Apparently someone was trying to sell me something. I changed into jeans and a sweatshirt and left for Tom's.

It was unusually warm for a Buffalo evening in October. The sun looked like a pomegranate and I had not seen a sky like this one in some time.

I drove into his driveway and Tom handed me the newspaper heading about the murder. I could smell something out of this world on the grill.

“Hmmm. At this rate I may eat both steaks!”

“You better check your nose. The steaks are on the counter. I forgot to clean the grill from my last cookout. I thought I'd torture you. Would you care for a beer or some juice?”

“I'll have a beer later with the food. So how are things at the office?”

“Same as usual. I should be getting that promotion that was promised me.”

I sat down on a deck chair and asked, “Is there anything new about Kathy Pendleton?”

“I haven't heard much since I talked to you earlier. But the polls indicate that Brown picked up two points today alone. At this rate Brown will overcome Collins in less than a week. What do you know about Pendleton's alleged affair with Collins?”

“If I’m not mistaken Pendleton dated Collins for about a year, but that was long before he and his wife Fran were married. That came out a while ago but there were no ties after the wedding and certainly no affair that was made public. Up until two days ago that was the extent of their relationship and then Pendleton unexpectedly comes out with the acknowledgement about an affair and something even more damaging. That news was so fresh that Collins hadn't even had a chance to refute the claims.”

“Even if it were true that there was an affair, I don't believe that it would have affected the presidential race, unless it was still going on. Heck, even if the affair happened after Collins' marriage a while ago or even just recently, he could still win the election.”

“I have to agree with you.”

“Let me clean the grill and get those steaks going. Can you fix the salad?”

“Sure enough. And I'll put on a CD. Any preferences?”

“You make the selection. Anything you select should be fine.”

The steaks were coming along nicely and Tom had put two potatoes in the oven about an hour ago so they would be ready too. To our delight Candy Dulfer was filling the night air with her magic sax, accompanied by the Tower of Powers horns on the song, ‘Funky’.

The strip steaks were sizzling so we sat down to indulge. The taste was even better than the aroma while they were on the grill. We didn't let the last two days' events interrupt our enjoyment of these culinary delights.

Once dinner was over we piled the dishes into the dishwasher and switched on CNN. The news revealed that Kathy Pendleton was shot twice with no trace of a struggle and no murder weapon found. Two empty glasses were



found at the scene and they were being checked for fingerprints. There were no signs of a break-in to the townhouse, so it appeared that the murderer knew Ms. Pendleton. The police had no suspects yet but were asking for any leads in the case.

Senator Collins was interviewed and said he was shocked to hear of the murder. He sent out his condolences to her family and friends. He seemed quite shaken by the death of Kathy Pendleton. He declined any further comment. After this interview it was time for the latest sports.

I had a glass of cranberry juice and Tom and I talked for a short while and then it was time to leave. The evening air was sixty degrees and I didn't mind it in the least. I drove home, undressed and hopped into bed and made up for the previous night.

## COLLINS THE SUSPECT

Two days later NBC broke the news. Fingerprints on one glass found in the townhouse of Kathy Pendleton belonged to her. That wasn't too startling. The fingerprints on the other glass belonged to none other than Senator Collins. Perhaps the affair had not ended until Kathy Pendleton died from a bullet. Maybe the Senator had permanently silenced her. It didn't look good for Collins and that was reflected in the polls, which now showed the candidates about even. Collins had been in the lead for the entire race and now this one tragedy had suddenly propelled Brown ahead.

Ms. Pendleton was a well-established business executive who lived life to the fullest and commanded a six-figure salary comparable to that of males in the same position. She had been married once but her husband had died of lung cancer five years ago and she remained single after her marriage of ten years. Both she and her spouse had been heavy smokers and that's probably what had killed him. It did set an example for her as she quit shortly after his death and never resumed the nasty habit.

Meanwhile Collins would not comment on any of the events of the previous two days, saying only that he would hold a press conference that evening. NBC did state that the Senator was campaigning in Baltimore and stayed overnight at a hotel in the city on the evening of the murder.

I finished dinner and washed the dishes and let them air dry. The evening paper didn't shed much light on the Pendleton murder but I noticed a small article that had comments from the wife of Senator Collins. Fran Collins mentioned that her husband had never been unfaithful, and she knew of his past relationship with Kathy Pendleton. As

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