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MYCOUNTRYTISOFTHEE_FIRST2CHAPTERS

by tarentino

CHAPTER ONE

Chapter

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- 1 -

The Van

The two of them were esconsed in the car adumbrated both by the hanging limbs of a maple tree and the fact that it was a couple minutes after nine o'clock at night. They were in a black van parked inconspicuously alongside the curb, behind a blue toyota corolla. Since the van had heavily tinted windows, no one would suspect that two persons were inside the van. One of them wore headphones listening to the sounds of the 3rd floor apartment they had bugged-up two days earlier. HIS name was Desi. His companion Stevie was relaxing on a small sofa in the

back of the van where he usually slept when he was on these nocturnal jobs. The smoke in the air from the cigarettes was worse than a bar without smoking laws.

Stevie dragged on his current nicotine stick, and found words to address some Freudian irritation as well as the need to pass the time.

"Well, fuck ... has he said anything already? Has he fucked the bitch or what?" Stevie blurted with an urban erudition that was unequal to most of his immediate contemporaries. Leaning upward from the sofa, Stevie's nearby companion Desi looked at a television screen just to the left and up from Desi's head. Desi turned easily to meet Stevie's eyes with his own passive set of black pupils surrounded by a dim, hazel glaze created by the darkness being bombarded by a few subtle and egregious lights.

"Heez moving in," Desi spoke in a spanish accent, "Doan worry Stevie. Doan worry, heez a dumb fuck, you know, like the rest."

"Yea, dumb fucks. Their whole damn miserable fucking

life," Stevie replied. Stevie loved calling others demeaning names. It gratuitously filled his own conception of self with a sense of delightful worth. If everyone else was a dumb ass, that meant Stevie could consider himself a common sense genius.

Meanwhile, on the screen, there was an image of a man kissing a very lovely young lady whose naked body was magnanimously perfect, albeit concealed by the body of what was a middle aged man of some importance. He appeared to be some type of legislator, a lieutenant governor, some CEO of a Fortune 500 company, maybe one of many lawyers in a large corporation's legal department, or one of the federal judges in those states where legal decisions needed to be manipulated and cajoled for a variety of reasons. Sometimes these beneficiaries were even well known journalists at various local, regional, or national news outlets.

Whoever the middle-aged man was, the tandem of prostitute and man had both entered the room 30 minutes earlier, and were only now ending the moment of small talk that usually preceded the sexual activity. While he was kissing her breasts, the face of the woman could be seen quite clearly. Oddly enough, she seemed to be looking directly at the tiny camera that was

concealed in one of the small mirrors that were on the wall.

Her name was Vivian. It was her third job of this sort in the last 6 months. She was getting \$90,000 for each job, the money transferred by bank deposit into a Las Vegas account from a Cayman Island bank, 10 days of 9 thousand dollars in order to avoid the mandatory disclosure limit of \$10,000. It was more money than she had ever got for a job since she made \$20,000 separately each for "dating" a basketball star and a well-known musician over separate weekends 2 years earlier. Political types were usually more expensive because they had to be kept secret, but ninety grand for 3 to 5 hours of work was a lot of money for a working girl. 3 jobs alone would be enough to pay for college or make a sizable down payment on a house mortgage. She'd be set for the entire year for just 3 nights of work, and set for life if she could keep herself into the loop for 5 or 6 years. Then she could retire from the scene and move on with her career. At least that was the thought process.

The man was on top of her now. Her legs became air-borne while she recalled that first phone call from someone named Stevie who proposed a deal that . . .

"..involves politics and flying in an airplane to Washington, D.C. You got 3 jobs, 90 grand a pop babe ... are yuh interested?" Stevie said.

She recalled thinking, why me? Why is he calling me? but Stevie almost anticipated her thoughts.

"It's because you look damn hawt, babe. And my boss, he wants only the beautiful. He won't settle for street trash, and he's fucking loaded, yuh understand. Fucking loaded for bear with lotsa cold hard cash, throwing it everywhere. So when he wants the best, he's gonna get the fucking best. You understand. You ever heard of George Steinbrenner?"

"Yea, I'm originally from New York," Vivian responded. Her mother still lived in Queens.

"Well, my boss, he's got 10 million times the mother fucking wealth of Steinbrenner. You want top pay, sweet-heart? You wanna make the big bucks. Well, you only get one shot at this. If you want out, I'll call somebody else. But if you want in ..." he paused, probably dragging on a cigarette, "... If you want in, then we'll arrange to meet publicly and discuss

the deal face to face. What'cha say, yes or no?"

* * * * *

The cell phone buzzed him awake. It was 4:30 am.

"Yeah, what da fuck ... yeah, everythingz fine," Stevie grogged into the receiver. His eyes squeezed together and his inner senses rose to the occasion despite the typical disgruntlement. "She fucked him good too, it was better than porn ... his face was dead pan obvious. All of the features you need to prove identification. We got his ass good Ralphie. It was fucking front page material. You got him dead fried after this bitch is put to dvd, you betcha?"

The voice on the other end named Ralph then asked relevant specific questions, to which Stevie responded, "... of course we got the fucking video bug? What the fuck, Ralph, I know what i'm doin...."

Stevie rasped. Within him grew a sense of not only being both awake but also gradually irritated at the reminder that was his life's existence. Why was he was always bitch slapped by

his superiors, having to prove his worth like a little dog has to bark at big dogs knowing it was protected by the humans holding the leash.

"Don't worry I'll take care of her too, just like the others ... yea ... yeah Ralph, fuck, yeah ... bye."

Desi was awakened by the voice of the man who was his immediate boss and the cell phone call from the unknown boss. He quietly mused about when he himself would be finished with this gig. It was his twentieth job after he had been pulled aside by an agent named "Jansen" who guaranteed he could help him when he was accused of armed robbery in an agricultural district North of Miami. "Don't worry, I know some people in the government" Jansen had said.

Next thing you know he was farmed out to this "Stevie" fellow to "work off" his bail. What could he do? He was an illegal immigrant far from his home in Guatemala who had taken an offer to pick oranges in Florida from a contracting agent in town. Along with 10 others just like him, Desi soon found himself charged with "armed robbery" when he was pulled over by an unmarked police car and escorted by four "police officers"

who told him he "was under arrest." They took him to what looked more like a large warehouse than a police station. Then he was blindfolded and handcuffed to a chair bolted to the floor boards in a room that was up a flight of stairs on the second floor. After more than 2 hours in this condition, a Gringo man came in and explained to him in fluent Spanish that he was in a lot of trouble, but that he could make some money and then be set free if he would just do what his boss wanted... and know how to keep his mouth shut.

Because if he didn't keep his mouth shut, they would not only kill him, they would also go back to his home in Guatemala and kill his two sons, Jefe and Simon, now aged 11 and 13 years each. The Gringo man even showed Desi a video that one of his "officers" had taken of Desi's two sons in the yard with his wife. The man called them by their proper names, Jefe Filipe and Simon Olivar, as if he knew them.

* * * * *

Stevie was asleep within 5 minutes of the end of the phone call, but Desi was still awake. He was thinking of his two boys, whom he had not seen in nearly 2 years. He thought of his

beautiful wife Simone, his older brother Fredo, his three sisters, his mother, his father, and various grandparents and relatives. He remembered the great events and adventures of his childhood, when he roamed the hills of his forested homeland with his friends, when his mother would cook him and his 8 siblings a feast of beef slices and tortillas and fried peppers, along with his father and most of the town, every Sunday. He thought of Anita, his first love, going through every moment of their epic 2 year youthful romance like a reel of 2,000 frames he replayed in his mind, along with other moments with his sons and wife, including the last few days , when he had decided to go with a man recruiting labor in town who would take him to Florida. It was a movie no one could take from him, a movie no one else would ever see, a movie he played for himself to forget about the now, the van he was in, the people he had to occupy his time with, the fragility of his existence.

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Cocktail Party

"God damn, rat mutha fucker" -- he paused -- "Fucking mother fucker" -- he paused again -- "Mother fucking, stupid mutha Fuckers ... Fuck!" Ralph Ellison bellowed after what he had heard within the close proximity of his ear -- the unwanted bad news from a cell phone call concerning events that were supposed to be controlled and managed.

Ralph Ellison was in his black limousine being chauffeured to an office in mid-town Manhattan for a brunch with a couple of chairmen who funded various political think tanks that framed the week's news-worthy relevance in ways that catered to their world views. Ralph attended to remind these patriarchs that he was still their valuable servant by showing up and tossing back a few cocktails while talking shop. Ralph didn't survive in this world without knowing how the game was played.

Stevie had just called to tell him that the prostitute they hired was in a hospital, which was not according to the plan.

"It got fucked up Rappie, what can I say." -- Rappie was Ralph Ellison's nickname to his street operators -- "Everything was go'win smooth as usual. But fuck, howz were we supposed to know some fucking other cab outta nowhere was going to show up. You don't foresee some other motha fuck doing his job. I mean fuck, this other cab came to pick the bitch up. We had to do plan B. We couldn't take the chance she would talk. I mean fuck. It's just a god damn whore and a low life cab driver. We couldn't risk the connection.... So we had to terminate the operation Rappie. Whatcha want? ... me to be calling you from jail trying explain how I fucked up and got our cover blown?"

There was a tense pause between the multiple and variegated synapses of recognition, filtering down through all of the levels to which he was prone and/or vulnerable before Stevie added : " We're at the hospital right now, sittin outside waitin in da car. We still got anonymity."

That meant they used fake documents and fake names for all the business accounts and formal introductions they used.

"The cops are involved, Rappie."

This statement by Stevie was followed by an long empty pause, like the space in time it takes for the pile driver to slowly, very very slowly, once again, pound the wooden piling into the ground.

Ralph Ellison comfortably sat in a dark limousine sipping a gin and tonic at 11 am, smoothly moving up 5th Avenue, surrounded by ominous vertical slates of 40 plus story buildings, and the other human figurines walking and trouncing on the sidewalk.

"Okay," he began, the soothing vigor of the alcohol coalescing around his forming thoughts, "Understand me now. Get the fuck outta there. Don't do a fucking thing, you hear me. Just get the fuck out. Go back to planet Zeno and wait. We can't let this develop any further. D'you understand Stevie?"

"Yea, yes boss. We're outta here," replied Stevie, pulling on the blissful smoke of the 5th cigarette in the hour. He looked at Desi -- who was driving -- and made the signal of his

index finger, shaking at the window. "Drive away. Drive away," he stated from the side of his mouth with his hand still holding the cell phone.

That was the end of the phone conversation. The last time Stevie had to flee a busted operation, he had to lay low in British Columbia for almost a year.

Desi cranked up the van and they drove away, to Planet Zeno, which was the pseudonym for a large warehouse garage in South-eastern downtown Phoenix that was used both as a safe house and a command center for various West coast operations. Last year it was used as the place where various fake voter registration campaigns first brought their registration cards so that they could be efficiently sifted, and the cards of the opposition party could be thrown away -- which might have helped the administration win in various Western states, but it was hard to tell. So few reporters actually bothered to investigate, and even fewer persons bothered to read what was reported in whatever press that was available. None of the corporate news media outlets cared to inspire an investigation beyond the little that was obviously known. One news outlet reporter even chalked up the event to a "harmless" error on the

part of a "well-intentioned" non-profit trying to increase voter participation -- rather than a deliberate attempt to purge opposition party voters under the benevolent ruse of voter registration.

So it would be a safe house for a few months. The van was already on the highway, headed south on US 93 where they would drive another 300 miles until they got to Phoenix. Stevie began sleeping in the back while Desi drove.

* * *

The words "Mother Fucking Shit," were the first thoughts that entered Ralph Ellison's head when he ended the call. He pushed the button on the right armrest that accessed the chauffeur.

"Randall, get me the secure line."

"Yes sir."

When the green light came on, Ralph Ellison picked up the telephone in the glove compartment, and spoke into the receiver

as soon as he heard a voice.

"Tom, this is Ellison, let me speak to him."

"He's being briefed by the D.O. D." Tom, the President's personal secretary, responded mechanically.

"Fuck. Okay, have him call me A.S.A.P."

"Yes Mr. Ellison, I will."

Ralph Ellison was not appointed to any government office. He was not an aide, nor a diplomat. He was not a college intellectual with an amazing philosophical perspective. He was just a long time boyhood friend of the current President of the United States, David Michael Smith. Ralph and David Michael actually attended the same privileged boarding school in Andover, Massachusetts, and have known each other for the last 56 years. He often called the President for a variety of reasons -- which was why Tom Teachen, the press secretary, recognized his voice.

What Ralph Ellison did for a living could be described as a

cross between the manager of a very large organization and that of an extremely well-connected talkative, gregarious lobbyist. He was the go-between for highly motivated persons of vast wealth and the multiplicity of organizations and press-related operations that were themselves inundated by lobbyists, lawyers and political hacks. He was the person to call who knew how to get things done, and he also knew where the quickest application of cash would be most beneficial for his clients in the shortest span of time. It was said he could grease the legislative wheels like an auto mechanic with an oil can, perhaps because he knew the source of all the oil leaks. A patriot nonetheless, he always wore a small metal pin of the American flag on his coat lapel, which in truth was done more to reassure the patriotism of his high priced clientele than it was an expression of love of country. Indeed, if Ralph had a quantifiable ideology, it could be summed up in one short phrase, "Everyone else is out for themselves, so you might as well get yours while you can."

"Fuck," he currently grumbled to no one. Ralph was alone in the backseat of the limousine, hermetically sealed, unless he pushed a button.

The limo drove smoothly down 7th Avenue, soon entering the

parking garage of a tall skyscraper once the guard at the gate opened the gate bar. The outdoor sun instantly disappeared, completely, as the car jettisoned down about 30 yards and then made a hard right, into a designated parking area adjacent to the elevators.

This particular afternoon Ralph Ellison was meeting the shareholders of an obscure corporation called the Trinity Group, of which there were only four : Theodore A. Torrence, Adam Fahan, Ronald R. Smith (younger brother of the President), and Lawrence T. Happenshire. All of them were devious elderly men, for whom mankind had become a mere abstract notion of others who were not like themselves, if indeed humanity was ever considered at all. They were all Yale University educated, having roots that went back to the old fraternity organizations where each of them once mimicked the life of the vagabond adventurer -- minus the poverty. Larry, as Lawrence Happenshire was known, had known Ronald Smith since they were both sophomores at Yale, 51 years earlier. Theodore's brother Lewis was a roommate of Ronnie's when they were juniors at Yale. Adam's older brother Lyle was the President of the Yale Young Republicans, of which Lewis Torrence, Larry Happenshire, and "Ronnie" Smith were all members, during which they formed lifelong bonds of lasting

relationships. Which was really no different than any other lifelong groups of friends, except that this group had tons of money and access to the top tiers of owners of property, and they were spoiled to the utter core with presumptions that no one who stumbled upon less than a few ten's of millions dollars would ever have.

Each of the post-middle age men all had one thing in common. They were all second generation heirs to the great wealth of their fathers and their grandfathers. Theodore's great grandfather Alfred B. Torrence had been a London stock jobber in the 1870's that married a young lassie of British aristocracy. After moving to New York, they invested her dowry and his own lucrative profits into the nascent industries of America, becoming incredibly wealthy by the time the turn of the century came into fruition. They had eight children, 5 boys and 3 girls, one of whom was Theodore's father, Cyril V. Torrence. Cy, as Theodore's father was known, was a director, sub-director, or President of 15 boards of major corporations. Cyril V. Torrence's job was mainly to make sure nothing stupid or idiotic got into the head of anyone in the hierarchy of management, in addition to making sure that profits were maximized while the engines of commerce were kept freely

roaring. If this meant prying open the halls of government and getting favorable, preferential legislation, that was just another cost of doing business.

The depression did not hurt the Torrence clan, nor any of their friends, since they had too many different investments and property to be affected by the economic devaluation, unlike the fly-by-night wealthy celebrated in the newspapers and magazines. These were not small businessmen, whose assets were usually tied up in one or two lines of small economic activity at most. These were multi-billionaires, for whom even the mighty sum of 10 million constituted a mere 1/10,000 th of their total assets. There was never any danger of bankruptcy or default.

As such, whereas small business persons might purchase a little insurance to ward off against catastrophe, the super-wealthy formed independent corporations of their wealth called trusts and investment firms bigger than insurance companies. They staffed them with lawyers, accountants, and business minded executives dedicated to maintaining the permanence of their multi-billion dollar assets. Exceptional and fortuitous individuals over the centuries would always rise into the upper class on a rare occasion, but it was the families of great

wealth who would last beyond the short term. The great families took the opportunity during the hard times of the 1930's to buy cheaply and increase their owning capacity, while the plethora of petty entrepreneurs were vanquished into poverty when their investments soured. These supra-wealthy organizations took the opportunity to make massive profits during the rearmament of the war years, and after weathering the war against Hitler and Japanese aggression, these families were primed to run the finances of the world into the foreseeable future once the war was over. Their offspring filled the upper echelon of the banking, corporate, and government board rooms of the 1950s and 60s and 70s. Their children, and their children's children all attended private schools and Ivy League Universities, a pattern not unlike the medieval appointments of middle lords to administer the great estates of kings and barons -- except in the modern world we ride expensive automobiles, luxurious yachts, and private jets instead of horses.

So it was on this afternoon, as with many others before and since, that these four male aristocrats would meet to discuss the most important matters that they regarded as the ongoing constant process of their accumulation and wealth consolidation which they considered to be sacrosanct and upheld by the United

States Constitution. They would dine and drink cognac or scotch or gin, reassuring themselves and one another of their thought processes, listening to their various business apparatchiks come give them reports about business and political operations, amusing themselves with carnival ideas and a bemused grandiloquence that was self-assuring and beyond impenetrable.

"Good afternoon Mr. Ellison," carped the tall thin Theodore Torrance, who was standing beside the large table in the private dining room of the upscale restaurant that was at the top of the mid-town Manhattan skyscraper. "Once again I see we have the occasion to honor your presence." In his hand there was a tall glass containing a clear liquid with a mint leaf and a lemon wedge floating astride two or three ice cubes. "You must refresh yourself promptly."

"I intend to do just that, Mr. Torrence, seeing that you yourself have already insured there were refreshments available," Ralph responded.

"But of course," chirped Theodore, "Nothing like a good drink to aide the digestion and keep the blood cleansed and free of impurities."

Ralph had already motioned to the central table where the scantily clothed female bartender smiled as he approached. Since Ralph was 59 years of age she was only being polite when she stated that he "looked very nice" while fixing him a vodka splash.

He was in a large room with one side of the room completely windowed to a view of south Manhattan. A buffet series of tables were in the middle of the room with an assortment of small edible meat sandwiches and hors d'oeuvres. Aside from Theodore "guarding" the entranceway there were only 6 other persons in the room, not including himself, the bartender, and a crew of two buffet attendants in their white kitchen outfits who stirred the food or added replacements as the need required.

Ralph spotted Larry and Adam speaking with 2 middle-aged men. Alongside the table where he first encountered Theodore, he noticed Ronnie Smith speaking with none other than his brother's chief of staff, Kit Rover.

Kit Rover was another good ole boy from the old days, way back 30 years earlier when the Smith family clan first began the

dabbling into politics that seemed to be yet just another flowering of the great American political aristocracy. Kit had been the name suggested for a deputy director position in the state department, on account of his reliable willingness to interpret the law and his knack for crafty distortion of the truth on behalf of his bosses and cronies. Back in the early days, Kit had been instrumental in the translation for writing into federal code all of the laws passed by Congress. Exuding a genius for infinite regression referencing. For example:

-- by section A of subsection 1 the word "legal" shall be understood to be the definition stated in subsection 3 provided that all restrictions placed thereupon are sufficient conduits of meaning as defined in section C subsection 4 of the same said such legislation therein --

Thus "legal" came to redefined out of meaningful existence. In this sad way all laws became drilled with holes, and the ropes which were meant to bind were now rotten and brittle, waiting to be exploited by some witty lobbyist, slick manipulative corporate lawyer, or sly well paid think-tank expert with a silver tongue and a knack for subtle provocative prevarication.

Yet, in addition to this talent, Kit Rover came to be known as "the tabulator," because he refused to be defeated in an argument, and would rattle list item after list item whenever he thought he was confronted by someone of another viewpoint. Like a machine gun he would berate his opposition until the opposition would eventually just gasp at the rate of inaccuracy, getting further defeated while desperately attempting to defrock one or two of the numerous half-truths, but Kit Rover would just relentlessly move onward with more specious deceptions, thoroughly enjoying the ease and effectiveness that dishonorable debate could achieve. Which was always the point. To overwhelm. To divide and conquer. To sow confusion and doubt. To leave traces of fear. To give substance to speculation. To make facts seem imaginary. Through these tactics, Kit Rover had risen up the ranks. The sophistication of opinions that he would write, and the anti-democratic advice he would provide as a political consultant gave him another edge or useful trait for the mega-rich patrons who promoted him.

"People must be free to make their own decisions and they must be free of government meddling if they are going to make those decisions successfully. That is why I believe in small

government," was one of his more famous lines. Of course he really meant "no government" but you could not say that to the plebs. You had to pretend that "small" or "less" government was something natural that had special powers, that was free of manipulation, while never quite explaining how freedom was actually based upon decisions and interpretations of the very law that was the foundation of government. And of course it ignored how government and justice could easily be bought and corrupted by the status quo. The mantra of "small" government was a slogan in name only because the power vacuum created by shrinking "government" would always be filled, and it was how the filling occurred that really mattered, because "small" meant just "different" -- as in a different set of scavengers and sycophants who made the important social decisions and skimmed the fat of the tax revenues for their friends.

There never was anything small about the government against which Kit Rover preached. That was just another hijacked slogan from which he built a long career of political sophistry that traversed 3 decades. Currently he was the gate keeper for the President, but despite what Mr. Kit Rover might ever tell you, his real job was to carve up the legal system and stack the government bureaucracy with the names given to him by the

political barons who had anointed him. No doubt it was upon these matters that Kit Rover and Ronnie Smith now conferred in the midtown Manhattan skyscraper while cuddling shrimp appetizers and drinking scotch.

Kit Rover would be the first person with whom Ralph would have discourse after the pretty young bartender handed Ralph the vodka splash that he had requested.

"Christ Ronnie, I was about ready to hit the bitch, but well," he chuckled, "you know there are laws against that, especially when the cameras are rolling."

"Yes that is the trouble with press conferences," Ronald R. Smith chimed, "There always seems to be a fiesty one in the bunch. But we'll see about that soon enough." Noticing Ralph approaching them from behind Kit Rover, Ronnie Smith moved slightly to his left in anticipation of the ritual that was the rendezvous with the hired jackals who wore suits and rode in limousines.

"Ronnie. How have you been?" Ralph began, almost methodically. He was a little tense. The afternoon's events

unnerved him. When your moral code is negligible, every moment is necessary to prove your self worth.

"Fine." But Ronnie could sense something. "What's up?"

"Oh, nothing." he paused. "Nothing but another day in the equivalent of the-shit-is-about-ready-to-hit-the-fan," he chuckled.

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