

CHAPTER 48

Wednesday morning, September 1, 2010—Washington D.C.

Senator Jacob Searle's assistant set the phone receiver back in its cradle as she told the visitor in the dark suit, "The Senator will see you now." Knowing he would be received immediately, corporate executive, Stephen S. Miles, hadn't bothered to sit down, and now he moved from the reception area toward the senator's office door. The door was opening; the senator met the executive with a wide smile and outstretched hand. They shook hands aggressively; each expressing a strong grip.

Miles meeting Searle in his office was unprecedented. The two men never met outside of golf, when they *just happened* to be in the same place at the same time; intermediaries always set up the *happenstance* meetings. The intermediaries were always from the corporation. It wasn't difficult to find out the Senator's schedule and adjust Miles' schedule accordingly. As CEO, Miles would fly on the corporate jet. Searle never realized just how carefully planned the initial meetings had been; it was better that way, Miles thought.

Searle enjoyed a good round of golf. He especially liked playing with Miles, a worthy opponent, but not quite as good as himself, Searle thought. The senator considered Miles a fair golfer, but a brilliant businessman. Searle more than respected Miles' business savvy; actually he was in awe of Miles' organizational genius, but he would never say so.

Stephen S. Miles, CEO, thought Searle was nearly a cliché, not a caricature of a senator, but certainly not unique. Miles recognized that Searle managed to get what he wanted by working within the law, usually. Miles considered the senator smart, but not very creative. Miles felt that the senator waited for projects to come his way. Little initiative and less aggressive than what suited Miles. If the senator had had any passionate reason for entering politics, it had disappeared long ago. He had learned how to stay in office. Probably has a mistress, but has been smart enough not to get caught, Miles

decided. Exposure of an extra marital affair would be a hard blow to a man who'd built his campaign on "family" values. Probably takes a few vacations on taxpayers' dollars, but nothing that his voters would find too grandiose. Miles saw the senator as having developed a mild addiction to golf, four-star restaurants, fine wine, and especially the stage and applause that came with the *speaking engagements* that indirectly paid for the golf vacations, the fine food and wine. Miles saw an opportunity and seized it.

One day Senator Searle would write his memoir; and, thought Miles, it would have little to say. His constituents liked him well enough as Searle managed to give back to the people through pork barrel initiatives; thus, he had little fear of not being re-elected, Miles thought, and that was a good thing for Miles, as well. Searle could be maneuvered, manipulated easily enough, but not naively. Not a patsy, but not a partner either, the perfect accomplice, neither a crony, nor an idiot, the kind of man that you can lead without having to tug the reins; this is what Stephen S. Miles thought of Senator Searle who now offered him a seat.

"To what do I owe this pleasure?" Searle asked in a full, throaty baritone.

"Just in town for a meeting and I thought I'd see if you had time for a game of golf, my friend."

"Oh, if only..." Senator Searle said lifting the phone receiver and pressing one button. "Lilly, would you bring us a couple of cups of coffee..." he held his hand over the receiver from habit, "Cream? Sugar?"

"Black's good."

"Black and strong, Lilly." Senator Searle hung up the phone.

"How are *things*?" Miles asked.

"*Things* are fine. Couldn't be better."

"Great. That's good to know."

"But that didn't bring you all the way to Washington D.C."

"I have another request," the CEO added.

"Which is?"

"Well, I know it's very early to be asking this, but I don't want someone else to scoop you up. You're such a dynamic speaker. I want to give a donation of say one hundred thousand dollars to my

alma mater to have you, specifically you, be there graduation speaker.”

“Stephen, I’m honored. Of course, your secretary will have to get the dates to Lilly so she can check my schedule.”

“Of course, of course. But you’ll do it?”

“I’ll certainly look into the possibility.” Senator Searle knew how it worked. Miles gives a donation to the university. The university pays for the flights, accommodations, food and lodging. In addition, Searle’s name gets added to a list of V.I.P.s each of whom receives invitations to golf outings in Hawaii in January, Florida in March, and California in April. Speaker’s fees for Senators may have been banned a decade ago, but everybody on Capitol Hill knew there were ways around that problem. He was being coy for another reason. He waited to hear Miles’ explanation.

“Well, good. You look into it and get back to me. I know how busy your schedule is. We’ve been busy, as well. Very exciting things happening at corporate headquarters. Have I told you about our latest project?”

“Latest project? No, I don’t think so.”

“Well, you know we took some heat for our genetically-modified seed that included a genetic sequence that, well, finalized fertility.” Miles never called it the terminator seed.

“Yes, from Greenpeace ... and others. But you promised not to use it anymore.” Senator Searle was becoming quite curious as to where CEO Stephen S. Miles was taking this conversation. After all, Searle had just assured him that *things* were taken care of. No one would find out about the zombie seed having been tested in U.S. fields. Ruby had managed to get the transcripts and he had burned them himself.

“Yes, and organic farmers,” Miles pointed out.

“You mean in addition to Greenpeace?”

“Yes. It has come to our attention that perhaps we should revitalize the V-GURT seed program. We’re concerned about the organic farmers.”

“How so?” Searle controlled his urge to laugh or to use sarcasm in his response, but his head was nearly exploding with commentary like: *Stephen S. Miles concerned about organic farmers, that’ll be*

the day. He thinks they're idiots trapped in a narrative of nostalgia and technophobia.

“Well, as you know, we’ve been sued a few times for having herbicides, pesticides and genetically-modified seeds contaminate organic farmers’ fields when the wind blows.” Searle kept an unemotional countenance as he thought, *a few times, you mean nearly fifty times*. The tables had turned; RichField was now losing the courtroom battles as more farmers were proving the contaminated seeds had blown onto their property. Miles continued, “We can hardly be held accountable for an act of God—the wind,” Miles added with feigned sincerity. “But these kinds of courtroom interruptions are becoming quite a nuisance. Honestly, no one likes lawsuits,” Miles determined.

“Except the winners,” Senator Searle added. He paused before adding, “And you’ve won quite few, as well, haven’t you?”

“We did win some, but the sympathy is leaning toward the small-holder farmer, right now. But, we think we’ve come up with the perfect solution.” Miles paused for effect. “A win-win situation for everybody.”

Senator Searle leaned forward, also for effect.

“Even better than win-win; it will be phenomenal for everybody.” Miles looked excited. He continued, “We bring the V-GURT with a T-GURT twist to market on the grounds that it will keep organic farming safe. That is, if the wind blows our genetically-modified seed into the organic farmers’ fields, the seed, whatever kind of genetically-modified seed, won’t grow until it is allowed to do so via an application of a specific spray. Say we genetically modify corn to be healthier, you know add nutrients to it, then we will add what you call ‘the terminator technology’ *and* we’ll add what’s referred to as the ‘zombie technology’ to it so that the modified seed can never contaminate the organic fields. It won’t grow until we supply the special fertilizer.”

“Fertilizer?”

“It’s very technical,” Miles told him.

Senator Searle was not stupid. The room went quiet. Searle sat back, taking in the idea as well as its implications. The terminator seed had caused massive suicides in India. It had wreaked havoc,

politically and socially, in underdeveloped nations. It had bankrupted a number of farmers in the U.S. and had put seed cleaners out of work, some of whom lived in Searle's state; plus it had put other seed manufacturers out of business. Miles had been actively creating a seed monopoly and Searle knew it, even if no one else did. Searle had to walk a fine line. Currently, he was receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars-worth of perks via the *speaking engagements* from RichField, but he had no other connection with them. If this plan went belly up, he could easily detach himself from the seed giant. On the other hand, if it worked it could be a billion dollar idea. *It might be worth it*, Searle mused. He knew where Miles was headed with this.

"You'd be helping the organic farmers," Stephen S. Miles interrupted Searle's thoughts. Searle dismissed this as ridiculous, and read between the lines. However, it could help his image, Searle thought; that is, both that he cares about all farmers and he could build an eco-friendly platform while supporting big business. *This might not be such a bad idea. But would the farmers fall for it?*

"You could mention it in the graduation speech at my alma mater," Miles added.

At first, Searle had figured the speaking offer of one hundred thousand dollars had been a thank you for taking care of *things*—destroying the interviews about the zombie seed—now he realized it represented an *advance* connected to Miles' most recent scheme.

"Just think of how it would protect organic farming. We could make the terminator seed and the zombie seed legal, mandatory even." Miles' excitement got away from him, he actually used the terms—terminator and zombie—aloud in a sentence.

My god, Searle thought, *he's not only talking about legalizing the terminator seed and the zombie seed, but actually forcing anyone who is not organic to be required by law to use his product.*

"Who would it hurt?" Miles added. "It would provide people with the knowledge they've been demanding—a right to know if their crops are genetically-modified. It will be the most commonplace practice. People will accept it as normal in no time at all. Plus, it will protect farmers. I think Bradford should announce the benefits of the

V-GURT and T-GURT technologies *and* I think you should propose the legislation. This is an opportunity for you to take the lead.”

Perhaps, he’s right, Searle thought. *It could be an opportunity. And if I don’t do it, he’ll move it ahead with someone else.*

“But not Bradford.”

“No?”

“Of course you need a Senator like myself to move the legislation forward, but as for who came up with the idea—you need somebody from Greenpeace or maybe a professor from a university, someone less connected, more innocent. I’m afraid people would see through Bradford’s connection too easily.”

“But the Department of Agriculture is a perfect—”

“Bradford and I play golf. He’s helping with the *other matter*. I think I know a researcher I can get on board, but really if you could sell the idea to some Greenpeace advocates, make them think it’s their idea ...”

“Senator, you surprise me,” the CEO said smiling. Truly, this did surprise Miles as he hadn’t thought of Searle as being smart enough or devious enough to contribute to the plan. He liked the idea of using a professor or an activist, but felt getting someone from Greenpeace on board would be too much of a stretch. *A professor, on the other hand, now that might work*, Miles nodded. Miles could hardly control his enthusiasm, if this works every farmer in the country will be required to buy *parch*, *parch-prepped* seeds and the latest products that Richfield was rolling out.

“What about the *other thing*?” the senator said, shifting his posture and the topic in order to mask his hubris over his own clever idea of bringing a professor on board. The senator knew better than to crow over his own contribution. First, Miles was always far more clever than he; and second, people who look pleased with themselves betray their own surprise that they’d come up with a good idea. Good ideas should appear as second nature. But he did feel as though he had just dropped a hole in one for a championship match.

“Nothing like having this sort of thing supported by a university,” Miles complimented Searle and then addressed the *other issue*.

“Now on the *other matter*—”

“You mean T-Gurt technology as weaponry?” Searle wanted confirmation.

“Yes. Absolutely, I think you should proceed as planned, take the idea to the committee on biological weapons. Do you still have your friendly expert on T-GURTS.”

“Yes, she’s ready to support the use of the zombie-seed technology.”

“Good. Sounds like everything is falling into place.”

“You don’t think launching two projects would appear suspicious?” the Senator reconsidered his collusion, had he jumped in too fast? He wondered, suddenly feeling a bit wary, would promoting the latest invention by RichField be a bit dangerous for himself. Sometimes, his brain moved with a detrimental swiftness.

A knock at the door jarred his thoughts. “Come in,” the senator called out.

Lilly opened the door with one hand and held two cups of coffee on a tray in the other.

Turning his wrist over and glancing at his watch, Stephen S. Miles, CEO of Richfield, announced, “Oh, I didn’t realize the time. I wish I could stay, but I have to be off. Great catching up with you, Senator. Do think about that speaking engagement. We’d love to have you. And there are a lot more of those engagements in your future. You, my friend, have a way with words, not to mention novel ideas,” Miles proclaimed with a smile as he saw himself out. “Lilly,” he nodded, “sorry to have to rush off without the coffee, especially after you went to all that trouble.”

“Oh, no trouble at all,” she said. Miles took large, confident steps as he exited. Calling over his shoulder, “Golf next time, Senator.”

“You bet,” the senator added. But Miles was out the door.

“What a nice man,” Lilly commented, enjoying the attention he had given her, and then she smiled at the thought of the executive’s compliment of her boss. She handed Senator Searle a cup of coffee. “You do have a way with words,” she added.