

*What do you do when you're given the chance to change
one of the most tragic events in history?*

THE LONE GUNMEN

IN

"Leap of Faith"

*THE HOLY GRAIL OF CONSPIRACIES
LANDS RIGHT ON TOP OF THE GUNMEN.*

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by

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HONORABLE MENTION



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And now, on to the story.

CHAPTER ONE : "Rambaldi"

"Where the hell is it?"

Langly scowled as he looked on the shelves near the couch. "Frohike, what the hell did you do with the remote?"

In another section of the warehouse, Frohike and Byers paused, and Frohike yelled back "Check in the sofa cushions."

The two were in the middle of examining an artifact that Mulder had brought by. Apparently it had been created by a prophet back in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, and the FBI agent happened to come across it during one of his investigations. The necklace contained an unusual luminescent greenish stone in the middle, and had a number of strange emblems on the back. It only had one emblem on the front which was engraved in the gem itself; the emblem of it's creator, Milo Rambaldi. Of the three, it turned out that Frohike alone had heard of the man.

Fro was sitting at a newly constructed device that, as he had informed Byers and Mulder, would perform a spectral analysis and verify the date of construction of the stone. They'd already discovered that certain emitted frequencies made the stone diminish it's odd florescent glow, and others made it glow a little brighter. Byers was at a monitor that displayed readings from the machine.

The older man glanced at Byers. The leader of the Gunmen was in an uncommonly bad mood, which was one reason why Mulder had departed quicker than normal. Byers had agreed to their looking at the artifact, but when the man was in an abnormally foul disposition the best action was to let it run it's course. Mulder had left, telling them to call when they discovered anything.

"About time, found it!" Langly's voice burst through the noise of the machine, startling Fro.

Growling, he mumbled under his breath, "And you know where you can stick it..."

Byers ignored the tirade. Though most of the time the guys got along, occasionally they rubbed each other the wrong way. Frohike and Langly often tended to do so, but never to any major degree. As different as they all were, they usually respected each other's opinions and differences. Today, however, was different story entirely. Everything was getting on Byers' nerves. "Nothing in this range of frequencies. Try the next higher bandwidth."

Frohike made an adjustment, and immediately noticed a shift in the color of the glow.

In the other room, Langly turned the TV on and sat down. He began at the bottom of the channel numbers and began working his way up, flipping from channel to channel.

The front door opened, revealing Jimmy and Yves.

"Thanks for doing that for me, Yves." Jimmy was saying as they entered.

"Doing what?" Fro suspiciously asked.

Yves was about to inform the older man that it was not his business when Jimmy piped up. "It's just a favor, nothing to do with you guys."

Shrugging, Frohike turned back to the 'viewfinder'.

Jimmy glanced at Byers. "Where's Langly?"

Byers motioned to the entertainment section of the warehouse. "Watching television. Alias, Charmed, Dark Angel reruns, whatever." he said, a bit sharply.

Jimmy looked at Byers sheepishly. Earlier, Frohike had explained to him that today was Byers' birthday, but that it was definitely not his favorite of days. At first he couldn't understand this, but after Frohike explained why, he could understand Byers' unhappiness on this particular day of days.

"Thanks." He considered wishing Byers a Happy Birthday regardless of what the guys had told him, but decided they probably knew best. He hoped the gift Yves was obtaining for him would cheer Byers up.

Jimmy wandered towards the back, while Yves sided up to Byers and perused the information crossing the screen. A frown crossed her flawless face. "What *is* this?"

"An artifact that possibly dates more than half a millennium." Byers answered.

Her eyes darted across the information over Byers shoulder and she began to look concerned. "What kind of artifact?"

Frohike looked up and over at her sardonically. "That's what we're trying to find out, peaches."

Yves rolled her eyes in exasperation. Frohike could be highly annoying, sometimes even more so than Langly. "If you hadn't noticed, this artifact of yours is glowing, has no radiation or heat; but the glow doesn't register on the photosensitive sensors."

Byers jumped in, if for no other reason but to keep Frohike from smarting off and delaying this further. "Yes, we noticed that, and there doesn't seem to be any reason why the sensors wouldn't pick up the light, but it isn't."

"Have you tried bathing it in various wavelengths? Infrared, and so on?"

Byers glanced away from the monitor and directly at her, now obviously annoyed by the interruption. "Yves, we're running it through the whole spectrum. I think we have things in hand, thanks."

Yves and Byers looked at each other coolly and unspeaking for what seemed a short eternity. Frohike mindfully kept to his own business at the artifact.

Relenting, she nodded and took a step back without snapping off a trademark reply.

While Byers turned back to the monitor, Jimmy walked in to find Langly flipping through the stations as if he were shuffling cards. "Hey, what's on?" he asked.

Langly spared him a momentary look, then returned to the TV. "Nothing, so far."

Jimmy's eyebrows furrowed. "How can you tell?"

Still flipping through channels, Langly was about to sarcastically reply when a yell came from the lab.

"What the.... turn off the power!"

Langly and Jimmy looked at each other, and heard Byers call out "Langly, turn off the TV!"

Jimmy ran to the other room, where the unit was emitting a high glow through the viewfinder like a flashlight through fog.

Still watching the monitor, Byers suddenly looked pale. "Frohike, it's...."

Suddenly a bright light began emanating from each of them, quickly enveloping the room completely.

CHAPTER TWO : “Ascension”

The room melded in a blinding light that almost as immediately recessed into a city street block. For a second or two, Byers thought a wall in the warehouse had somehow gotten knocked over, and that he was looking outside, but looking around he discovered they were no longer inside it.

Frohike was looking around, as confused as Byers was. There seemed to be a number of people around, but Langly didn't seem to be anywhere in the vicinity. Fro walked over to Byers as soon as he located him, clearly as unsettled as Byers felt.

“What the freak was all that? What happened to the warehouse?”

Byers was looking around. This area looked very familiar, yet he couldn't remember having been here.

Speechless, Frohike pointed to an old concrete sky-bridge nearby. Suddenly reason for his Deja-Vu came to him, and he knew exactly why it looked so familiar.

This was Elm Street, the block in Dallas that John F. Kennedy had been assassinated on almost forty years ago.

“Were we knocked unconscious? Do you remember who brought us here? Because I sure as hell don't.”

Byers shook his head. “I don't know... but it looks like some kind of parade is about to take place, from all the decorations. Maybe a documentary, or remembrance parade.”

The street sides were indeed decorated and the sidewalks had partition ribbons, to keep pedestrians from going too far out into the street. However, there didn't seem to be a parade happening ~in~ the street.

“Guess we showed up early.” Frohike said, still uncertain whether he should be pissed, confused or both. Then he noticed something else. “Hey, notice anything weird about the cars?”

Byers looked at the cars that were parked. Most of them were mid 1940's to late 1950's vintage. He shrugged. “Probably those are the parade vehicles. Antique cars. Since they're parked on the side of the road, I'd say chances are we missed it rather than were early for it.”

The older man nodded. “They had one in D.C. just last month.” He wasn't convinced however, but not sure what the fact might mean. “Look at the condition of the cars. Parade cars are usually polished and shiny, most of these haven't been washed in weeks, or longer.”

Now that Frohike had pointed it out, Byers noticed the discrepancy. Now they were both looking at the cars and the buildings on each side of the street.

“This is too damn weird. But it still doesn't explain how we arrived in Dallas.” He muttered.

Byers couldn't help but agree, so they began walking down the street to find a newspaper and discover how long they'd been out.

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When the brilliant light faded, Yves immediately scoped out her surroundings. Jimmy was near her, but they were obviously not in the warehouse. She recognized the landmarks of Washington D.C., as it should be, but it was immediately obvious to her that something wasn't right.

"What happened?" Jimmy's voice filtered through her attention, drawing her focus to him. "What was that?"

"I... I'm not sure." She was still trying to figure out what was different in the landscape.

People passing by started staring at Yves and Jimmy, and Yves began to feel uncomfortable with the attention. "Lets go inside somewhere, or at least get out of the open."

They walked down the street a bit and into the Lincoln Memorial Monument park. Yves astute eye caught a number of details as she walked and while the conclusion she quickly came to was impossible, glancing at a magazine stand as they passed confirmed her wild but immediate speculation. "Jimmy, we're not where we were."

Jimmy looked at her to see if she was making fun of him. He could have told her right off that they weren't where they were; one second they were in the warehouse, the next they were out in the open. It wasn't like her to tease him as if he were an idiot like the guys did sometimes, but unfortunately he really didn't quite get what she was saying. "What do you mean?"

She pointed out the newspaper on the magazine stand. He looked at it, then noticed what she was referring to. The date was November 22nd, 1963.

"It's gotta be a misprint." He said. "Hey buddy, what's the date today?"

The magazine rack attendant barely gave him a glance. "It's the twenty first." Then he glanced over at him, "Wait, sorry, it's the twenty second."

Jimmy shook his head. "No, the whole date... the day, month and year."

The man frowned at Jimmy. "What are ya, a kook? It's the twenty second of November. Niiineteeeeeeen sixteeeee-threeeeee." He pronounced the year slowly, as if Jimmy were a child. "Ten-twelve in the mornin', if you want to know that as well." The man turned back to his register, now studiously ignoring Jimmy and his perceivably bizarre question..

Jimmy looked back at Yves, an incredulous expression on his face. "How?"

Yves looked deep in thought. "There are more issues here. Let's walk, I have to think."

They began walking away from the park, and further down the street.

CHAPTER THREE : "Rubicon"

"You've GOT to be kidding me."

The guys were staring at a newspaper box. November 22nd, 1963.

Frohike repeated himself. "You've got to be kidding me.... that's insane."

Byers glanced up and around the street. The cars. The way people were dressed. The infamous layout of the street. "My god, it's true." he said, incredulously.

Fro looked at him. "You don't honestly believe..."

"...that we're back at the date and place Kennedy was assassinated?" Byers finished. "I'm open to another interpretation."

"I don't suppose it could be a set, like in that movie 'Capricorn One'?" Frohike offered, dubiously.

Byers had already considered and after careful observation discounted the possibility of some kind of conspiracy layout. "We'll have to look around some more. But I'm already convinced, as lunatic as that sounds. I really think we've somehow gone back to 1963."

"Not likely." The cynic in Frohike couldn't help but come out.

"But, what if it's true?" Byers looked at his friend. "What if we really are back on the day that Kennedy is killed?"

Fro looked around, then back at him and decided finally that Byers might not be going off the deep end. Everything around them felt real yet surreal at the same time. He didn't know why, but although his brain denied it emphatically, he was starting to believe it himself. Finally, he spoke. "If it's true, we have to stop it."

Byers nodded. "Yes. If it IS true, we have to try." Suddenly, he looked determined.

Glancing in a window at a clock, he reset his watch to the current time. "OK, it's 8:20 a.m. We've got four hours and ten minutes."

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Yves requested a small omelette, and Jimmy ordered biscuits and gravy. Yves had gone to a pawn shop and sold a necklace she had been wearing under her outfit. Whatever it was, he thought, she had gotten quite a bit for it even by 1963 standards; but then she had exquisite tastes sometimes so it didn't really surprise him all that much.

The waitress brought the piping hot food and after determining that they didn't need anything else, she smiled at Jimmy and walked off.

When the waiter left, she began. "Jimmy, today was the day that Kennedy was assassinated."

"Kennedy? You mean JFK?" he exclaimed, digging into his food.

Yves looked around, mindful of his enthusiastic volume. "Yes. In Dallas, in about three and a half hours. Right now it's almost nine in the morning there, since it's nearly eleven here. The President is already in Dallas, but hasn't begun the drive through the assigned route in the city yet."

"Shouldn't we warn him?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No, we shouldn't. First, they likely wouldn't believe us. The trip through Dallas was scheduled months in advance and the President often gets death threats."

"But Yves, we should at least tell someone." Jimmy looked distraught.

Yves frowned. Perhaps it had been a bad idea to remind him of the importance of the date, she had actually intended on their finding a hotel and watching the event in quiet solitude while they discussed their current predicament. But they had both been ravenous and passing the restaurant had made stopping for food a very enticing idea. She liked Jimmy a great deal but he tended to act on his emotions rather than thinking things through. From his reaction, her assessment was solidified. Telling him in public had been a mistake.

She glanced around again and this time noticed a man at one of the middle tables, looking at them. He seemed to be in his twenties in what at this time would be considered a fairly expensive suit. She easily recognized the look and how he held himself, however. The man was either a professional or had gone through some expensive physical training, especially for this time period.

Yves quietly spoke under her breath. "We're leaving."

Jimmy looked at her and frowned. "But we haven't finished breakfast."

She stood up. Jimmy scooped a final forkful in his mouth and followed suit. As they turned, the man at the booth was suddenly in front of them, blocking their path.

"Please sit back down, and don't make a scene." He said, quietly but forcefully. "You, sit over by her." Yves could see his hand move slightly towards the inside of his jacket. She had assumed that he had a gun when she had first noticed him. The unconscious movement confirmed this to her.

Jimmy looked at Yves. She nodded, and sat down. Jimmy sat down beside her, and the man sat on the opposite side of the booth. They stared at each other for several moments, though the individual's expression never changed. Then the man spoke. "Why do you think the President will have an assassination attempt today?"

Yves replayed their conversation in her mind quickly. "Who wants to know?"

The man smiled coldly. "Let's just say that I'm a concerned representative of our government."

"And your name?"

Quickly realizing he was falling into the verbal trap of answering instead of asking questions, he repeated himself. "You stated the President is going to be assassinated. Unless you give me a very good reason for having stating this, I'm going to have to take you into custody."

She smiled back and said, "Then I guess you'll just have to take us in."

They all got up and the man motioned to the door. Jimmy walked out first and Yves second, but as the man started through the door she slammed it back into him, knocking him back into the restaurant. The gun he had partially gripped under his coat flew into the air and Yves deftly caught it as it began to complete its arc.

"Run!" she cried to Jimmy, and they took off around the corner.

CHAPTER FOUR : “Perspicacity”

"Langly, turn off the TV!"

Jimmy had instantly ran back into the other room where Byers cry had come from and Langly jumped to his feet from the couch to follow and was momentarily blinded by a light from the room. After the light stopped and the spots that danced around his eyes vanished, he quickly entered the room.

Just as quickly, he skidded to a stop. Frohike’s analyzer was rapidly powering down into stand-by mode but the strange thing was that there wasn’t anyone monitoring it. Jimmy was gone, and the kid had ~just~ ran into the room; but he was nowhere to be seen.

“All right, dammit. This isn’t funny, Doohickey.” he yelled.

Nothing. The silence in the room was broken only by the sound of the television in the other room, and the hum of the analyzing sensor.

Langly walked around the machine to make sure one of them wasn’t hidden behind it, and scratched his head. His annoyance gone, it was replaced by suspicion and concern.

Where the hell were they?

He checked outside, and then searched the entire warehouse before deciding that this wasn’t some kind of prank. The van and Jimmy’s car were both still out near the entrance in the alley, so he knew, or at least assumed, that they hadn’t left.

He didn’t have the deductive mind of Byers, or the long term experience of Fro; but he had plenty of resources both online and personal. He went straight to his computer and popped into the local street cameras. A quick review of local footage showed that they hadn’t left the warehouse. ~I’ll have to remember to adjust those so they don’t record our comings and goings...~ he admonished himself, pleased that he found what he was looking for but immediately aggravated that anyone else with the right access could invade the gunmen’s privacy.

They hadn’t gone out the secret entrance, they had electronic sensors that recorded each time the door opened. He’d already checked; no one had departed through it.

If it weren’t for the outside traffic cameras, he’d wonder if they’d been kidnapped. He wasn’t ruling that possibility out but the evidence, or lack of same, didn’t point to that conclusion.

“Mystery scores 1, Langly zip.” he grumbled to himself. Not true, he told himself. He knew what hadn’t happened, he simply didn’t know what DID happen.

Sighing, he picked up the phone to make the call.

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After making a final effort at trying to find Langly, they gave up and decided that he must not have fallen into the same strange time hole they’d apparently tripped into. If he was around, it wouldn’t be long before his flippancy would up getting him arrested by the 1963 cops, especially with Kennedy’s visit today, so they’d check in an hour at the local station and see if he turned up.

Outside of that, the only thing they could really do was hope that he was able to locate them.

In the meantime, they huddled and re-briefed each other regarding the details of this day in history. Kennedy would arrive at Love Field at 11:40 a.m., then the motorcade would start about ten minutes later.

Byers finished the conversation. "You should take measures to find whomever the assassin really is, assuming it isn't Oswald, and make sure it doesn't happen. You know the layout as well as I do, and what was determined to have happened. Nobody here except perhaps Oswald and whomever, if anyone, knows what the assassination plan was." He shook his head and corrected himself, "...what the assassination plan ~is~. You and I are the only people who know what the result will be, if unchecked. We need to stop it from happening."

He looked around, and back at Frohike. "Not to the exclusion of all else, however. We don't know what's going on, or who or what caused us to be here. We cannot be blind to the implications of our actions."

Fro nodded his agreement, and Byers finished.

"Our main difficulty, again, is only knowing the result but not who caused it. It's a little past nine o'clock, and the President will be killed at twelve thirty. Little if anything we've done before is more important than how we act and what we do in the next three and a half hours. Let's move."

CHAPTER FIVE : “Ipseity”

Jimmy followed Yves through some alleys and shops in what seemed to him to be a random path until he realized they were retracing their steps.

He was just about to question her how long they were going to do this, when she abruptly rounded a corner. He stepped up his pace to catch up when his arm was grabbed and pulled to one side. Yves put her finger to her mouth in a “shhhh”-ing motion, and he stayed quiet.

She wasn't disappointed. Shortly after, the man in question came around the corner, looking around. Yves put the gun into his back. “Don't move a muscle.”

Instantly the man stopped. “There are a lot of people in here. You might hurt someone badly if the bullet goes through me.”

“You should have thought that through before you pulled it from inside your coat back at the diner. You're going to answer some questions.”

The man considered the gun at his back. “What?” he said, simply.

“Who do you work for?” Yves growled.

“Federal Bureau of Investigations.”

“Let me see your wallet.” She demanded. “Very slowly, as if your life depended on it.”

Jimmy looked at her in admiration. He only occasionally got to see her in her element, and this was just about as cloak and dagger as you could get. Well, at least if you had to hold someone at gunpoint in the middle of a department store, that is. He didn't like the fact that she was holding a gun on someone, but she had a point; the self proclaimed government agent started this.

The man pulled out his wallet, slowly as requested, and held it out. She motioned Jimmy to take it, which he did. He opened it and nodded at her when he saw the shield inside. His eyes widened as he saw the identification of the man. “Uh, Yves, you're going to want to see this.”

She took her eyes off the man for a split second and took in the identification. Then she took a harder look as the identity of the man registered in her mind.

“Special Agent B. R. Byers”

She looked at Jimmy and then at Agent Byers. Nodding, she mumbled to herself, “Of course.”, as if it made some kind of sense to her.

Jimmy looked at her, confused. “Byers never mentioned...”

“Not now, Jimmy.” Yves interrupted. Her mind raced to recall everything she knew about Bertram Byers.

Bertram looked at Jimmy, prompting Yves to press the gun harder into the back of his skull. “Hey, watch it.” He complained. “I never said what? I've never met you two before.”

Jimmy shook his head. “Never mind.”

Yves made a decision, and pocketed the gun. “Turn around, Agent Byers.”

The man cautiously turned, looking first at Jimmy and then at Yves. "Listen closely. First off, if you're VERY lucky, I won't place you under arrest. The charges would be stating an intention or knowledge of an intention to assassinate the President and holding a gun on a federal officer. Before I decide what I'm going to do with you two, I want my gun back, and my wallet."

"Jimmy, give him his wallet."

He handed the wallet over to the man, who examined the contents and satisfied, put it in his coat pocket. He then looked at her expectantly.

"Forget it. You're not going to arrest us, for three very good reasons." she stated, calmly.

Bertram Byers considered his courses of action but the intrigue was simply too much, he admitted to himself. "All right, I'll bite. Why do you think I'm not going to arrest you?"

"First, and most obvious, I've got the gun. Second, relational to the first reason, I'm not going to give it up if it means we're going to be arrested since you weren't privy to the entirety of our conversation and therefore misconceiving the entire discussion. If you play nice, I could be persuaded to give it back. And if I'm in a really good mood I might even tell you what we were really talking about, though it really isn't any of your business Agent Byers, even if you are with the government."

Bertram's expression looked unchanged, but Yves could tell in his eyes that he was reconsidering whether he could have misunderstood the conversation she and Jimmy were having.

"And the third?" he said.

"The third. Yes, well you'll want to check into your office about that. About now your wife will be calling in, I think. Perhaps even take the rest of the day off."

He looked at her oddly. "Why?"

She smiled sincerely at him for the first time. "You're about to become a father."

This stunned him. How did she know this?

"Assuming that's true, why should it make a difference to you?"

Yves decided the man wasn't going to arrest them, held the gun out to him butt first and sighed. "Because today is also the day you're going to die."

CHAPTER SIX : “Perquisition”

Fox Mulder and Dana Scully looked at the spectral analysis contraption that Frohike had put together. They were uncharacteristically quiet, which unnerved Langly to no end.

“Do you guys have any clue as to what happened?” he said, breaking the silence.

Mulder glanced at him. “I thought you guys were just going to do a date testing to authenticate it. What were they doing to it?”

Langly shrugged. “Byers did. Then he called Frohike in on it, and after that, Frohike got a hard on about running further tests on it.” He glanced at Scully, who ignored the crass colloquialism. Langly, unused to censoring his conversation, in turn ignored her pretense.

Scully looked at him directly. “Did he say what he was testing for?”

He nodded. “Apparently he knew a thing or two about that My-Rambo-Dee guy who made it...”

“Milo Rambaldi.” Mulder interrupted.

“Yeah, him.” He continued. “Frohike went on about how this dude that lived five hundred years ago could predict the future and that the artifact markings said it was a key to enlightenment or something. His notes on it were somewhere on one of the desks. So they began doing a spectral analysis to... well I don’t know what they were testing for actually, not really my thing. The next thing I know everyone’s taken a powder to Neverland without inviting me.”

“Lets find the notes.” Mulder prompted.

They split up and searched the tables and platforms. Finally Langly located the translation.

Mulder looked at it and passed it to Scully. “It’s in Latin.”

“Time waits for no one.” She read aloud.

Langly looked at her. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It’s a proverb. It means that you can’t change what you’ve already done, you can only act on the results.” she told him. “But why would it be inscribed on the Rambaldi artifact?”

Mulder answered her. “This particular artifact was supposed to be a key to the mystery of the past. Rambaldi artifacts have shown a predisposition to his having been able to see the future or predict it, but some experts on the man say that his knowledge of future technologies and information were based on his expertise of the past. Another famous proverb says that those who ignore the mistakes of history are condemned to repeat them. Maybe this was one of ways he could predict the future... by knowing details of the past. The only question is how?”

“How do we get them back, you mean.” The long haired gunmen reminded him.

Scully went back over to the analysis machine. “This should have some kind of read-out, or display for results.”

Langly pointed to a computer with a monitor. “Byers was monitoring from that computer.”

Mulder and Scully glanced at each other and scuttled over to it. Moments later, Langly had brought up the data that the lead Gunmen had been observing.

Scully pointed to a data set. "This shows that the artifact was not only being bombarded by various single tone frequencies which the spectral analysis was introducing but was also being hit by a low range frequency increase from an outside source. It looks like the combination caused some kind of reaction, but I'd have to study this data to figure out what the reaction was."

Langly was no science genius, but he knew electronics. "Uh-oh." Was all he said, glancing at the frequency range.

Both of the FBI agents turned to look at him. "Uh-oh?" Mulder asked.

"I was in the other room switching channels when this happened. The remote is, well, homemade. It has a booster... you can switch the channels from across the warehouse."

Mulder nodded. "Makes sense, that's probably where the frequency range came from. OK, all we need now is to figure out what it did to the artifact."

Scully got to work analyzing the data, while Mulder and Langly looked for further clues to the rest of the gunmen's disappearance.

CHAPTER SEVEN : “Vicissitude”

The woman had just told him two of the strangest things he'd heard in quite some time. First, she tells him he's going to become a father today. He didn't know how this woman could possibly know his wife was pregnant, let alone that she was near her time to give birth. On top of everything, she gives him his gun back and then tells him he's going to die. The woman must be certifiable, if not absolutely confusing.

Yves waited for him to think the situation through. She had changed her mind, mid-stream, and not only had handed his gun back but told him something that might change history. He was going to be understandably confused by her actions. On the other hand, it was possible that this would change nothing.

She had suddenly come to the conclusion that if she wanted to figure out a way to get back to the same time she and Jimmy mysteriously were pulled from, they had to elicit help from somewhere. As far as she knew, only the government or a government project would have any kind of knowledge at all on this kind of thing; or at least could lead them to the right sources of information. On the other hand, she couldn't afford to have this or any government agent arrest them or they ~still~ wouldn't be able to figure out a way back. She decided to give him a cover-story and play it by ear.

Bertram considered the woman who had just insisted she wouldn't give his gun back, then did so. Other than running from a Federal Agent, they hadn't really done anything except raise his suspicions. However, he hadn't clearly identified himself initially, though he wasn't required to under the circumstances.

Checking the weapon, he looked at her with a semi-sarcastic expression on his face.

This time she hesitated, then handed him the bullets from the gun.

Something about these two seemed very... odd. Not distrustingly odd, but more of a ghosts and goblins kind of strangeness. The woman seemed very calm and appeared to be the lead of the two. All this he took reviewed in his mind while reloading the weapon, then he put it back in the shoulder-holster and came to a conclusion. He decided to give them a chance to explain themselves. “All right. Start talking.”

“All right. We overheard someone yesterday talking about a woman by the name of Rose Cheramie who was admitted in a Louisiana hospital, badly beaten. While she was there, she apparently told the hospital staff attending her that the President was going to be assassinated.”

This was only a minor misstatement of the truth; during a common deluge of Langly's conspiracy banterings, he'd told her about a prostitute named Rose Cheramie that had been found alongside a Louisiana road severely beaten a couple of days prior to JFK's death. She'd been taken to a hospital and had told the doctors that the President was going to be killed. She hadn't been believed because she was determined to be under the influence of narcotics. Yves had been intrigued enough to check out the story and found that it was true. It had also made her reconsider the trio's obsession for the Kennedy assassination, and she did not take their passion for conspiracies as lightly afterwards.

“Who told you this?” he asked.

“I don't know who they were. As I said, we overheard them talking. I can tell you what they looked like, but that's about it. Naturally we were intrigued and concerned, which is why we were still talking about it today.”

He glanced at Jimmy, who nodded his verification. Jimmy didn't have the foggiest what Yves was talking about, but he trusted her and wasn't about to do anything to invalidate her story.

Bertram sighed. Something wasn't ringing right, but her statement was easy enough to check out. "OK, follow me to my car. I'll radio a request in to verify your story."

While they walked, he finally could contain himself no longer. "How did you know my wife is pregnant?"

Unfortunately, Yves was hard put to explain that. She had wanted to shock him into temporarily forgetting the reason of his suspicion, but now was cornered in her own intent.

"That's easy." Jimmy piped up.

Yves hid a look of surprise at his announcement as they walked down the sidewalk.

"You were talking to the waitress about your wife. Grinning to beat the band and showing her pictures. The whole restaurant could hear ya." Jimmy explained.

That made sense. At her request he'd been showing Rosey, the lead gal at the greasy spoon, some recent pics of his wife who was huge in her final trimester. He hadn't realized he'd been making a spectacle of himself though.

Yves was impressed. She'd unconsciously blocked out the exchange as harmless, but Jimmy had picked up on the casual exchange and remembered it. She squeezed Jimmy's arm and smiled. The enthusiastic man was full of surprises lately.

He smiled back, putting his hand on hers for a moment before disengaging.

Agent Byers cleared his throat. "Fine. But that doesn't explain your comment about my dying..."

The agent was interrupted abruptly by an explosion that shook the sidewalk. Jimmy moved in front of Yves protectively as bits of debris flew around them.

"Stay here." Bertram called out, taking off down the street at the source of the explosion.

It was the restaurant they had been eating at.

CHAPTER EIGHT : “Breakthrough”

Byers walked to the second location that Kennedy would stop at. The first unscheduled location that the President would make in the motorcade would be to a group of people with signs asking the popular man to stop to shake hands. The second, history noted, would be to talk to a nun who were escorting some children. He knew where it would be, not a great distance from Elm street itself where the assassination would take place.

As he walked, he checked his watch. Nine forty-three. Plenty of time.

Enough time to consider the other problems at hand. How did they get here? No less relevant but more dire, how would they get back? He could try to contact his father's friend, but... his father!

His father had died on this day in history as well, the victim of some kind of bomb in Washington D.C. that was meant explicitly for him. In those days, the way his mother had told the story, his father had made a few well placed friends as well as very dangerous enemies. The day Kennedy died, his father had been the victim of one of those enemies.

Byers had never been sure that the cause of both weren't related somehow, but he'd told himself that some day he'd find evidence to support or deny that.

He noticed a park across the street, and some children playing. He saw a woman sitting on a bench near them. Recognizing the outfit the woman was wearing, he deduced that these then were the persons the President would stop for in a couple of hours.

Walking over, he sat down on the bench. The nun looked up from her book and smiled at him.

“What a wonderful, warm day it is! How are you on this blessed morning?” she asked.

Byers smiled back. “It is a nice morning, thanks. Are you here to see the President?”

“Oh, yes!” She exclaimed. “The children are very excited. Perhaps he'll be driving slow enough to wave and say hello to them.”

He nodded. “One never knows.”

* * * * *

Frohike knew that Lee Oswald would be showing up at work, leave a rifle on the upper floor, and come back to it. He'd pondered for a bit with the idea of removing the rifle. He quickly rejected this, as it would be difficult to conceal the rifle while out on the street looking for other would-be assassins. He finally had decided to sneak his way to the floor the rifle was on and empty it of ammo. It wouldn't have prevented anything if Oswald checked it in advance and obtained more rifle shells, but Frohike had decided he'd feel better about it if he did.

So he'd snuck his way in and disarmed the rifle. If he thought he'd have enough time, he'd have tried to dismantle it and take out the firing pin, but didn't know how long he'd have before someone came up to this floor. He wouldn't do anyone any good if he was arrested for trespassing, or was caught with the rifle that might eventually be classified as a weapon intended for use against the President. “That would be a bad thing.”, he told himself, as he snuck back out the rear of the store where he'd lock-picked his way in.

Back on the street, he checked the time. Ten-thirty. He had two hours to familiarize himself further with the area, check out all possible aspects of the assassination from his knowledge and compare it to the real location. He'd been here once, several years ago, and it hadn't changed all

that much. On the other hand, that had been at a tango competition. He'd been many years younger and not quite as obsessed by conspiracies as he'd become these days.

He shook his head. 'These days' were almost forty years in the future. He'd been fifteen years old in 1963. "God, that was a long time ago." He mumbled to himself. "What the hell am I doing here?"

He walked the sidewalk and surveyed the area. He walked around from every vantage point and considered every location that had been reported as possible places the multiple reported assassins had been in various conspiracy theory publications, including their own paper.

Now that he was standing there, at the time just before it was going to happen, he realized how idiotic most of the theories were. The wide open area gave few true opportunities for an assailant to have a rifle and not be immediately observed by someone... anyone.

No one that day had been absolutely sure of anything, everyone afterwards claimed to have seen someone from the "Grassy Knoll" to the "multiple overpass". But looking around, neither of those locations were ideal for the type of murder that was going to take place.

He considered. Maybe he should think about this in a different manner. How would ~he~ go about killing the president with a rifle if he wanted to do it, and escape?

He walked out to the middle of the road, mindful of anyone walking along the sidewalks down the street, and lookey-lou's in the windows. It wouldn't be smart for him to be remembered later as being observed checking the location exactly where the President was assassinated before it happened.

Automatically, he glanced up and across to the high store-window where Oswald reportedly had fired the shots. Yeah, it was a fair vantage point.

Looking around, he noticed some other spots that would be convenient. Perhaps the Knoll wasn't a bad spot after all, judging from the victim's point of view, but wouldn't give a decent avenue for escape. He continued to glance around, feeling as if he were missing something obvious. Every decent and non-decent spot had been publicly analyzed by not only the gunmen via computer, but every JFK aficionados in the world. All the high building windows, the angled shots...

He found himself staring at the sidewalk drains.

Frohike went cold and suddenly he knew. Kennedy hadn't been killed by Oswald, or anyone in the audience or out in the field. The shot hadn't come from high, as had been reported by the experts. It had come from under the street, just about foot level, from one of the sidewalk side-drains.

He felt like a moron, for himself and for everyone who ever researched this day in history. In all the literature he'd read, the debates with Langly and Byers over the subject, it had never occurred to them.

The killer would have plenty of time to wait, or he could leave immediately. He could follow the drains to almost anywhere without worry of being followed or spotted, until he surfaced.

Certain he knew what was going to happen, now he had to figure out how to spot the individual. There weren't many drains, but during the parade he'd play hell trying to see into one, let alone finding the one that held a man with a rifle. He'd have to be careful or he'd risk being shot himself.

But now he was taking steps forward instead of feeling like he was stumbling in the dark, which was a damn sight better than before.

CHAPTER NINE : "Scenario"

"All right, run the remote."

Mulder watched through the spectrometer as Langly changed channels on the television set, while Scully monitored the readout. "Definitely getting some action here..." the female FBI agent stated.

Mulder glanced at her, but let a highly provocative reply lie unstated. The artifact was in fact glowing brighter as Langly read off the channels. "Forty-eight, fifty-five, sixty...."

Scully nodded to herself. "You can stop now." she called out.

She turned to her partner. "It's somehow drawing power from the increasing frequency emission. I'll be darned if I can tell you how, though. It would seem that the single frequency from the spectrometer 'tells' the artifact what it is supposed to do with the energy. More than that, I don't know that I could tell you."

Langly looked thoughtful. "Like a microchip..." he mumbled.

Mulder looked at him blankly, then realized what he meant. "You're right. Just like a microchip. Give it a set of instructions and it initiates a pre-designed reaction."

The remaining gunmen suddenly looked excited. "Which means that different instructions might initiate a different reaction. What made them vanish might bring them back from wherever they are."

"Maybe. You may have something." Scully said, deep in thought. "Assuming the artifact is responsible, these readings definitely show something happened at the time they... vanished." She said the word hesitantly, but as she wasn't at the warehouse at the time it occurred she couldn't rebuttal the claim. She and Mulder had witnessed too much and had received help from these three too often to dismiss Langly out of hand.

Langly stood up. "All right then. Let's get on this and bring them back. Or find them. Or whatever we're going to do.

"Hold on a minute." Mulder cautioned. "Improperly activating it is what probably set it off to begin with."

"Absolutely." Scully concurred. "We'll want to take precautions if we want to avoid another mishap."

"You're talking to the man who can make it happen." Langly nodded.

* * * * *

While the firemen were putting out the fire from the explosion and Bertram investigated, Yves and Jimmy waited. During the wait, Yves pondered the situation.

"This is turning into a very strange situation." she said.

Jimmy looked at her solemnly but silently. So far the firemen had found 3 bodies in the decimated restaurant.

Yves elaborated. "Bertram Byers was killed on this date in 1963."

Jimmy nodded. "That's right, Frohike told me about it. He said it was some kind of bomb."

The revelation hit him solidly. "Oh, Yves... do you think that was it?"

"Yes. And because we were there and he chased after us, he escaped being killed."

"What does that mean for us?"

"I'm not sure, I'm not an expert on time travel. I don't think anyone is, really."

The young man thought about this for a minute. "I would have thought that if things changed that we'd have different memories or something. Would we even know it had happened?"

"I don't know, Jimmy. It could mean this isn't the only bomb or explosion and that he could be killed later today. We have no real way of knowing."

"Do you think if we keep him from being killed that we might reappear back in our own time?"

Yves gave serious consideration to the question. "I'm not sure how things would work out. I hate to say it, but we might be stuck here permanently. That being the case, we could use an ally. But not knowing if there's another bomb somewhere, how do we protect him?"

"Byers was born today, right?" Jimmy asked.

She looked at him, and the train of thought that he was starting to lead to was reached by her in an instant. "Jimmy, as I've said before, you're definitely the smart one of that group. Since we know Byers was alive when whatever happened to us occurred, therefore we know that the hospital Byers was born in didn't explode. It will be the perfect place to keep him safe, assuming of course that nothing else happens."

Agent Byers walked back over to them. "They found the explosive device. It's been there for over a week. If I hadn't called you out, you might have been killed there too. So, if your other story checks out, then..."

"Hey, Byers!"

Both Jimmy and Yves turned to the car that pulled up nearby. Bertram walked over to it. They could see the man inside the car talking to the agent, but not hear him. Bertram looked over in their direction with an odd expression on his face, then said something back to the man.

The individual inside the car grinned at him and drove off.

Walking over to them, his expression changed from puzzled to wary. Yves had a hunch she knew what it was about and if so it could only work to their advantage.

"How did you know?" he said.

Yves' expression was the vision of innocence. Jimmy asked, "How did we know what?"

"Cut the crap. How did you know my wife was going to go into labor today?"

"I'll tell you what. We'll explain everything once we're at the hospital, assuming you're going there?" she replied. "I can't say you'll like it, but we'll explain."

Debating briefly on the wisdom of bringing unknowns into a hospital his wife and child were in, Bertram nodded. "It better be good. In the meantime, you're not going out of my sight."

CHAPTER TEN : “Proselytion”

Byers could feel it. The sense that something was not familiar, was in fact very wrong to what he knew to be right. He couldn't shake the feeling, it was in the background like a radio in the next room. Just out of audible range but loud enough that it got on your nerves.

One of the nuns had offered him an ice cream cone, and he accepted it gratefully. It was a sunny, warm day out and sitting deep in thought about what he'd say to the President turned out to be more nerve-wracking than he would have thought.

“There he is!” one of the nuns cried out. Byers looked down the road and stood up. The infamous vehicle had just come into view. Gathering on the sidewalk, the nuns and children started waving to them. As it approached, Byers could see Kennedy lean forward to speak to the driver, who pulled over to the nuns. John F. Kennedy got out of the car with his wife and walked up to the nuns, shaking hands while Jacquelyn spoke with the children.

As the man began to turn back to the car, Byers called out, “Mr. President!”

The President of the United States turned towards Byers, waved his wife towards the car and held his hand to Byers.

Shaking it, he began.

“Mr. President, I have something urgent to impart but I won't waste any of your time. I've become aware of a conspiracy to end your life.”

The handshake did not change, but Byers noted a fractional change in the intelligent eyes of the man. He quickly continued, “I am not personally part of that conspiracy, sir. In fact, I would do anything I had to in stopping it from happening.”

After their hands parted from the greeting, President Kennedy rested his hands in front of him. “Rest assured, Mister...?”

“Byers, sir. Bertram Fitzgerald Byers.”

The President smiled, and continued. “Rest assured Mister Byers, that my security is aware of any intended attempts on my life and have taken full measures to anticipate all contingencies.”

“Sir, with all due respect, there ~are~ events your security simply cannot anticipate. The absolutely unknown and intentional obsession to a cause is extremely difficult to act against. I know that it's difficult to believe it could happen, but I can tell you with every certainty...” he paused.

“Yes, Mister Byers?”

“If you continue this motorcade, there will be an attempt on your life. It will succeed, unless you cancel your luncheon and go back to the airport.” Byers knew how it sounded, but didn't know how to tell this man he would be killed in less than fifteen minutes unless convinced to take measures against it.

The President looked at the oddly dressed civilian. He didn't look to be a nutcase, in spite of his attire. Glancing at his watch, he spoke. “Mr. Byers, in ones life the one thing that determines the kind of person we are is how we deal with problems and crisis. We can run from them or we can meet them directly. It's the same for every citizen of America. No matter what they face, we will survive. And if what you say is true, I will meet that crisis in the face, and America will triumph.

We all make a difference, and we all make our own destiny. Thank you for your message, and good luck with your mission in life, son."

The President smiled at him confidently, then nodded his appreciation, turned and walked back to the motorcade. Byers eyes followed him, knowing he'd failed.

* * * * *

Bertram, Yves and Jimmy walked through the hospital's emergency entrance. "Where can I find Mrs. Bertram Byers?" he asked the admissions nurse. Looking the information up, they were directed to the appropriate floor. They walked over to the elevator and the expectant agent pushed the button.

Bertram looked distracted while waiting for the elevator to arrive. "All right, what's your real story. How did you know this was going to happen today? How did you know EVERYTHING was going to happen today?"

"If I'm going to tell you, Agent Byers, you'll have to promise to keep an extremely open mind. What I'd tell you will be without a doubt, as an acquaintance of ours would say, the most complete load of bull you'll have ever heard. But you won't be able to claim that we didn't warn you beforehand." Yves didn't even look at him, staring straight ahead.

Byers didn't answer, just waited. The elevator arrived, and they entered it. Yves took his silence as consent. As the elevator door closed she went on, "We found ourselves unannounced and unwilling travelers into our past. We seemingly arrived in Nineteen Sixty-three from where we started from, which was the year two thousand and one."

"Yves..." Jimmy said her name cautiously, wary that she might be lining up a trip to the funny-farm from the government agent.

"As such," Yves continued, "We're privy to certain events that occurred in our past. Your possible death was one of them. The assassination of President Kennedy is another. In fact, the son that is about to be born to you was to have your name. In lue of Kennedy's assassination, your wife will ask that his middle name match the President's as well."

"You're right," he replied. "That IS the biggest load I've ever heard."

Yves smiled. "As I told you."

"And that's your final word on it?"

The elevator door opened and they walked out onto the floor. "Yes." She said.

Bertram sighed. This couple seemed harmless enough, but the story was impossible to believe.

Jimmy piped up. "Look, Mr. Byers. It doesn't matter if you believe it or not. All we care about right now is making sure you stay alive."

Bertram nodded at Jimmy. "I don't think that will be a problem. The man who drove up to me at the bomb scene was my partner. He had gotten a tip just minutes prior about the bomb, they caught the individual that planted it. Not soon enough to stop it or warn me, but fortunately for me that wasn't necessary. The guy they caught was a lone wolf, mad because I put away some pal of his. He was so confident that I'd be killed that he told them everything. Including admitting he did it on his little lonesome. Which means you're in the clear as long as your story about the woman in the hospital checks out."

CHAPTER ELEVEN : “Dominoes”

Impulsively, Byers called out, “President Kennedy!”

Pausing at the car, the famous man looked at him.

“On November Twenty-Second, in the year Two Thousand and One, I will be thirty-eight years old.”

The President looked at his wife, then back at Byers.

The man in the park suddenly began to do something both unusual and astounding. He was beginning to glow.

The man named Byers was being enveloped in a brilliant light that actually seemed to be emitting from him. The growing light was so bright and blinding that for a second he couldn't see the figure of the man within it and when the light faded, the emphatic individual had vanished.

For several long seconds, John Fitzgerald Kennedy gazed at the spot where the man had stood.

Secret Service agent Frank Horrigan was the only man looking in that direction when the individual had vanished. “I'll be damned. Do you want an investigative clean-up team brought out, sir, and do you want to cancel the trip?”

President John F. Kennedy sat down in the vehicle. “No, on both counts. Normally I'd say yes, but somehow I don't think the team would find anything. Brief the agents, this incident stays in house.”

“Yes, sir. Nobody breaths a word.” The experienced Secret Service agent moved off to brief the men.

The inoffensively handsome man glanced at his wife and pondered the words of the mysterious visitor as the motorcade began moving again towards its fated destiny.

* * * * *

After inquiring as to the location of his wife, he discovered that she was just up the hallway on a gurney. He walked up to her as a man approached him. “Mister, could you take a picture of my wife and I?” he pointed to a woman on a second gurney, also very pregnant.

Apparently used to this, he took the camera and snapped a shot as the obviously proud father stood by his wife. “Thanks so much! Here, stand by yours and I'll send you a copy!”

Bertram leaned over and kissed his wife on her forehead, then smiled for the picture. The flash went off, and the man paused long enough to get Bertram's mailing address.

As the man walked off and followed his wife on her gurney, the FBI agent glanced at Yves and Jimmy, who were apparently in discussion. It was a whopper of a story, which he naturally didn't believe. They seemed harmless enough however.

Something looked strange about the two, and as he watched he saw them being enveloped by a glow that seemed to emit outwards. Pulling his gun, he watched as the light nearly blinded him.

When it faded, they were gone.

* * * * *

As the time for the President's indicated approach, Frohike kept an eye on as many of the under street vents as he could, but the growing crowd made it extremely difficult. Some were standing directly in front of some of the grates and might possibly block a shot, but history told a story of the assassin's success. As a result, Fro wasn't going to take anything for granted.

So far he hadn't seen any indication at all of anyone suspicious along the street either, but he knew from experience that the old adage regarding looks being deceiving was absolutely true. You couldn't trust anyone and therefore everyone was suspect.

At twelve-thirty exactly the motorcade rounded. Though unmarked, Frohike recognized the lead car, an undetailed police car. The second vehicle was the infamous Presidential 1961 Lincoln convertible limousine with the top down which was flanked by four motorcycles, two on each side. He could make out the President riding on the right hand side of the rear seat. Following the President's car was a 1955 Cadillac eight-passenger convertible carrying eight secret servicemen; two in the front seat, two in the rear and two on each of the right and left running boards. These cars were followed by a number of additional cars including one containing the Vice President.

He had seen this scene in vintage footage hundreds, possibly thousands of time and it never failed to impress him. But the fact that they came around the corner told him that Byers must not have been successful in convincing them otherwise. What was about to happen would occur in seconds if he didn't figure out which grate or grates the shots would come from. He knew that his chances were slim in stopping this, but at least if he knew for certain where they had come from and could get a glimpse of the individual, he'd have a better chance of finding the identity of the real lone gunmen.

Instinct more than anything else caused him to turn to one grate in particular. So suddenly did the face appear that he almost didn't realize he was looking at. He turned to draw attention to the man in the grate when he was knocked to one side by an enthusiastic heavysset woman in the crowd trying to get a glance at the President, waving and calling out.

Shots rang out, and people started screaming. Frohike got to his feet and looked straight into the drain. The man inside didn't appear to be looking out, but then his head turned and Fro looked directly into his eyes.

The man's eyes bore into his own and Frohike knew without a doubt who the shooter was. His jaw dropped as people scrambled around him, but he was oblivious. The individual was almost forty years younger and his face less experienced, but it was him. The Cigarette-Smoking Man.

The man in the drain looked startled. A man had fallen down and for a fraction of a second he almost thought he'd hit the man instead of Kennedy. But then he'd gotten up again and looked directly at him. How could he know? Everyone else was either looking at the President or looking up at the buildings as he had planned, but this man was looking directly at him.

Quickly he reloaded his weapon. The light seemed to get brighter and then dimmed in a couple of seconds. He brought the rifle up to target the man, but just as quickly the man had vanished. His accurate eyes scanned the scene, but the mysterious man was nowhere to be seen.

He knew he'd never seen the man before in his life, but the look on the man struck him as recognition. He took a brief but necessary moment to burn the face of the man into his memory, then began scurrying back down the pipe to his destination. He'd deal with the lone witness when he'd discovered the man's identity.

And eventually, he always did.

CHAPTER TWELVE : “Meliorate”

Bertram Roosevelt Byers came back to his wife. There was nothing on the radio except commentary regarding the shooting of the President and the two individuals had vanished.

It was after 3pm in Washington D.C., and the President had been announced dead at the Parkland Memorial Hospital, at 1pm Dallas time only minutes ago.

Tears rolling down his cheeks, he gave his wife the terrible news. Both of them had admired President Kennedy and Bertram had often indicated that he would serve such a man and country without question. They cried together for a minute, then when the shared grief subsided, she looked up at him.

“Bert, what would you think about giving our child that great man’s middle name?”

He looked at him in surprise, not because of the suggestion but that Yves had told him this was exactly what she would suggest. But Bertram was not a man to follow destiny blindly.

“My dear, I think that’s a wonderful idea. More than that, I think we can better honor him. If it’s a girl, we’ll name her Jacqueline Kennedy Byers, and if a boy we’ll name him.....”

* * * * *

“John Fitzgerald Byers?” Langly repeated. “Damn straight you can put the call through.”

He put his hand over the phone and called out. “You’re not going to believe it. Byers is calling us collect.”

Jimmy and Yves had walked in the door mere minutes ago, unwilling to elaborate on where they had been. “You wouldn’t believe us if we told you,” was all Jimmy would say.

Scully and Mulder walked over to Langly. They had just been about to fire up the machine when the duo had traipsed in. Langly had figured out a way to transmit brief spurts of individual frequencies and as a result they’d decided to reverse the wave sequence to see if it would bring the group back.

Langly looked perplexed. “Texas? What the hell are you doing in Texas?”

Scully could hear Byers voice from the phone. “It’s a long story. Just buy a ticket and put my name on it. You may get a call from Frohike from here somewhere as well, but wait to buy one until you hear from him. I’m not sure where he’ll end up.”

She looked at Mulder, who shrugged. Without more information, he was as much in the dark as she was. “I guess we’ll find out when they get back.”

* * * * *

For the first time in a while, Mulder had been dead wrong. When Frohike, who had called just ten minutes after Byers did, and he returned to Washington D.C., all they would tell Mulder was that if he was smart, he’d put the artifact somewhere safe. Yes, it was five hundred years old. No, they didn’t want to talk about it. Their memories of what happened were just fuzzy enough that neither were sure it had actually occurred. Langly knew the look on Byers’ face well enough to let it go for now.

The FBI agent respected his friends enough to let it go at that, though curiosity was killing him. They boxed the stone up and took it with them, after wishing Byers a happy birthday. The next morning, there was a buzz at the door. Langly looked at the door monitor, and called out, "Hey Byers, it's your dad!"

He opened the door, and let the elder Byers in. "Byers, uh... I mean... your son'll be out in a minute."

The man always seemed to look like he was about to audit someone, not that it made Langly nervous but the fact that this was Byers father somehow unsettled him. He didn't know why, but attributed it to the fact that he hadn't seen eye to eye with his own father in some years.

Bertram Byers nodded. "Thanks." was all he said, looking around disapprovingly at the warehouse of what he had once called "an abode of garbage".

Byers came out from the other room. "Hello, Dad. Sorry, I was on the phone. What brings you to our neck of the woods?"

The man looked at Langly, who mumbled something about the microwave overheating and left.

"I just came by to wish you a belated happy birthday."

The announcement took the gunmen by surprise. "Thank you...are you all right?" Immediately realizing how that sounded, he looked slightly sheepish.

"I'm fine. I have to go, but wanted to stop by." He handed Byers a large envelope.

"What's this?" he inquired.

Bertram turned to look at him. A strange expression of amusement crossed his face, and stranger yet, it broke off with a rare and real smile. "Let's call it payback and leave it at that. You'll understand when you open it. Happy Birthday, John." The man departed. Though knowing his father wasn't vindictive enough to bring eviction papers or something similar personally for his own amusement, he was still hesitant in opening the envelope.

Going back to his room, he closed the door and sat on the bed. He opened the manila envelope, finding that it contained a photograph, another envelope, a note and a newspaper clipping.

Unfolding the note, it simply said; "Read what's in the envelope first. Dad."

Ignoring the note, he took the picture and looked at it. He saw what looked to be a very old picture of his father and his mother. From the surroundings he realized it was a hospital and that his mother was pregnant. He smiled, understanding that this was likely the day he was born.

Then he stood up in surprise. In the background, just slightly out of focus were a couple who were unmistakably Yves and Jimmy.

Until now, he'd wondered if he and Frohike hadn't suffered some kind of combined induced hallucination. Though he had told Frohike he'd been convinced it had been 1963, in the back of his mind and certainly Frohike's, the idea that they were being tricked was never far behind.

But unless his father was involved in this somehow, he had to accept that it had happened. Jimmy and Yves had appeared in Washington D.C. in 1963, and he and Frohike had materialized in Dallas.

He laid the photograph on the bed and opened the envelope.

CHAPTER TWELVE : “The Letter”

November 22nd, 1998

“Dear John Fitzgerald Byers;

“I am certain that you are as surprised by this letter than I was by your appearance two years ago today. My only regret from that day is that I didn’t take your warning seriously enough to completely cancel the luncheon; instead I promoted a common protocol of having a double take my place and I was disguised and put in a rear vehicle. As even ‘drills’ are common, only my wife was aware of my switch. I am dismayed and horrified to have put her through that ordeal, as am I saddened for the families of the man who replaced me.”

“Imagine my surprise when I discovered that a man was working in our government with an unusually similar though not identical name as your own, yet your own name is not as you declared on that day. In your parting statement you gave me the date you were born, and was a most clever addition to allow my search for you to conclude successfully. Bravo, sir!”

“It was my intention some day to come forward and explain to the public what really happened that day, but more had come to my attention as to the motives of the individual whom I will address in this letter as “the rifleman”. From that day in 1963, I have had to remain in hiding, under a guise not my own. The day I wanted for so long, to clear Mr. Oswald of his wrongfully stated role has never come about. Perhaps one day it will come, but that day is not here, that time is not now. Yet.”

“John, for me that time will likely not come. My doctor has recently diagnosed me with cancer. It’s probable that I won’t survive the turn of the century.”

“I have followed your career in the FCC with interest, and your change in profession with intense admiration for your loyalty, honor, courage and steadfast commitment to the truth. You have every reason to be as proud of yourself and your friends as I have been of you.”

“Continue to do the right thing, John. When it comes down to it, all we have left in the world when everything is boiled away is how willing we are to stand up for the rights of others. People like yourself will save the life of this country, as you saved mine. Have faith.”

*Gratefully yours,
Jack F. Kingsley*

Stunned, Byers glanced at the obituary. Non-descript, it told of a man with an uneventful life who died of lung cancer. The date of his death was less than a month ago, on Halloween.

“He almost made it, to the turn of the century.” He said aloud. He knew the name Jack Kingsley. It was the name of one of the Lone Gunmen subscribers in Trout Creek, Montana.

He sat on the bed for a long, long while. Then, putting the contents back in the envelope, he put it in a drawer and walked out to the guys. Frohike was cooking breakfast, something with chili’s apparently. “What’d the old man want?” he asked. “Came by to say Happy Birthday?” he scoffed.

Byers smiled. “Yeah.” Frohike watched as the smile turned into a grin. “That’s exactly it.”

“He came by to wish me a Happy Birthday.”

**“In memory of the great John F. Kennedy,
for the inspiration he left us in our lives, imagination
for our stories, and hope for our future.”**