

THE NARRATIVE

(BASED ON THE TRUE FACTS
OF AN UNTRUE STORY)



A SHORT STORY BY

PHILIP KRASKE

ColdType
e-reader

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Flight in February
Mockery
The Magnificent Mary Ann
City on the Ledge
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THE AUTHOR

I was born in Detroit, lived my formative years in Ohio and Minnesota, and stayed in America long enough to get in the basic rituals: high school, college at the U of Minnesota, and, at age 11, a third-place trophy in the local Ford Pass Punt and Kick Contest. If you're old enough, you may remember that the PPK national championship used to be the Super Bowl's halftime entertainment, two boys from each age category running up to the tape and heaving or kicking the balls along it as far as they could. When halftime went Hollywood, I left America, which is not all a coincidence.

I settled permanently in Madrid in the 80s and keep my bread buttered by teaching English courses on a freelance basis in Spanish companies. If you look at my web page, <http://philipkraske.com>, you'll see that half is dedicated to my English business. It's terrific work. I sit across meeting tables from millionaire executives, harried secretaries, and lonely software techies; discuss everything from company restructuring to survival strategies to the pros and cons of breast implants to rice futures to derivatives to office love affairs to the titanic struggles of the pharmaceutical market. Top managers tell me of their despair with hapless staff; talented workers enumerate the stupidities of their bosses.

I give an hour, maybe two, of class in the morning, then pack up my briefcase and leave behind my students clinched to their computer screens

And so from my perch in Spain I write about America, and try to offer the perspective of one who can see it from both inside and outside, both the trees and the woods. It is an extraordinary time in the nation's history, especially regarding the growing contempt between rulers and ruled. It will end badly. But in the meantime, what a magnificent spectacle, like one of Tintoretto's immense canvases boiling with humanity. Damn the falling rates of literacy; it's a great time to write novels. – **Philip Kraske**

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THE RAINMAKER had worked – he abhorred the term “served” – as a government employee for forty-seven years, and had never lost his raw wonder at the blockheads, both the wide- and narrow-eyed, who played the World’s Great Game. Watching the fractious bickering at the far end of the table, he resorted to his usual trick to stay awake: with one hand, he took apart and reassembled a pen – unscrewed the middle, pulled out the cartridge, pulled off its spring, held all four components parallel and flat in his palm, then put it all back together again. He could do this with either hand, and so fast that anyone who saw would stare in amazement – but he did it under the table.

That’s it, children, argue yourselves out, he silently told the arguing officials. *Then you’ll be ready for the Voice of Reason.* It was what he called his Meeting Rope-a-Dope. And did these people ever need it – Chip Bookbinder had that one right on the money.

For the hard-boiled CIA guy up by the screen, laser pointer in hand, was telling the truth and wasn’t budging from his position. This vexed the many high llamas assembled – NSA, White House, State, DoD, sundry emissaries from the far-flung empire of American security – vexed them just on general principles: in Washington, telling the actual rank truth

only showed weakness, and as to budging from a position, well, we all budged eventually. It was just a question of more access, control, or budget. All had been offered, graciously and frankly, and *still* the CIA guy was sticking to his point like a barnacle to a hull.

That is: here they were, just days away from the scheduled raid on Osama bin Laden's house in Abbottabad, Pakistan – wavelengths assigned, teams limbered up, choppers gassed -- and CIA was tossing a stick into the fast-spinning spokes of America's War on Terror.

Following White House orders, CIA, dubious yet dutiful, had trailed Osama bin Laden's personal courier right to The Man's house in Abbottabad – all this the previous September. Then CIA – methodically, delicately, discreetly – had set up surveillance of the house. Cameras in the guise of chunks of cement, arms busted off little dolls, and used condoms gazed without blinking at those four mammoth walls day after day. Listening gadgets beamed microwaves – from down the street, from across the rooftops, from a hundred miles up in the cold dentist's waiting room of space – beamed them so hard and long that, as the CIA guy put it, “everyone in the goddamn place should have been turned into roast beef by now.”

Yet not a peep was heard from Osama – not so much as a “Honey, can a guy get a clean robe around here?”

Nor had a single glimpse of his six-foot-six frame lumbering past the windows been wrung from the terabytes of video streamed 24/7 over hundreds of days.

Could The Man be *that* security conscious? the CIA man's listeners wondered. After all, the compound's inhabitants burned their own trash rather than have it trucked away, lest some street urchin come across The Man's

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fingerprints on a Pakistani *Playboy*. The kids shepherded to school each morning never once let slip to classmates anything about Grandpa Osama, causing the White House guy to mutter, “Wish I had staff that reliable.” And as bad luck would have it, there was no phone line to tap, though surely the neighbors – neighbors being neighbors the world over – wondered why someone would build two million dollars of bad taste on their street and not put in a phone line.

“And that has led to our considered conclusion,” the CIA man had said after his half-hour presentation, “that the subject is not there and never was. The courier – if indeed he was a courier -- was someone else’s.”

The room was stunned. The room raised holy hell.

For two hours.

“What kinda bullshit is this, boy?” an Air Force general roared above the din. “All the time in the world, finest e-lint money can buy, and you boys can’t find one man in one house?”

“Yes! Exactly! Right! Halleluiah, it’s finally sinking in!” the CIA guy cried in exasperation. “Because he’s not there. Get it, folks? The reason we don’t see him or hear him is – watching the lips this time, right? – *he is not there*. End of story.”

For the first time in two hours, silence writhed down the lovely oaken table -- a long one, supporting the cufflinks and purses of twelve Type-A bureaucrats.

Except at the far end of it, where The Rainmaker sat in his worn black suit and wrinkled tie, one pylon-like elbow propped on the table, his crew-cut balanced on that. His hand worked fast under the table, and even with that it was hard to stay awake.

Well, looks like we're finally getting worn down. Thank god! Five more minutes of this and I'm going to turn into rigor mortis.

Halfway up the table, the White House guy – in tie and shirt sleeves like his boss, with whom he'd just played “a couple quick games of three-on-three, it being such a nice spring day” -- swatted back his chair and jumped to his feet.

“Now just wait a goddamn minute. What the hell is this?” he griped. “I've got a president looking at re-election in the middle of a recession, and he's not going to miss out on this. He's kissed the ass of every one of you guys from day one. Anybody here lacking for budget? Huh? Anybody worried about joining the legions of jobless? Anybody see anything less than a brilliant career path ahead straight through till retirement? Huh? C'mon, speak up if you do -- now's the time.”

Nobody spoke up.

And like the many presidential flunkies The Rainmaker had seen over five decades in government, this one even had his boss's gestures. He slowly put his hands on his hips to highlight for one and all the flatness of his abdomen.

Of course, that face is so bony you might not have eaten but a leaf of lettuce in six months, The Rainmaker mused.

“All right, all right, all right, so Osama's not there. Fine. *Like I give a fuck!* Then you *make* him there. The Seals are ready to go. They've been practicing on the mock-up house for weeks. So you *make* him there.”

The CIA guy shook his head – once and sharply. “No way. Not a chance. Not doing it, not going there. This is major shit and our top brass is still walking on thin public ice from Iraq and WMD and Iran and nukes. Been there,

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done that, and we're not going back. Report stands: *he's not there.*"

"He goddamn well is. The American people never got closure on this guy, and now they're going to get it. Now do it!"

The CIA man's face -- and it was a big, loose, pale one under left-parted hair -- was turning red. The Rainmaker read him as the kind of man who lost every argument with his wife; Chip had chosen him well. "And you can crawl the fuck back down off my ass. We told you guys from Day One that we had it from our best assets since the early Bush days: the man kicked it of kidney failure two months after Tora. Practically every in-theater asset we had came back with the same thing. Did we tell you or did we not?"

"Did we approve your budgets hardly changing a comma, or did we not?"

Why don't you just pull down your pants, see whose dick is bigger and get it over with? The Rainmaker wondered with a sigh.

The CIA man looked around at the unwilling faces; his opinion was not popular. "C'mon, people, he was on double dialysis, for Chrissakes. Nobody -- repeat, *nobody* -- could survive ten more years in that condition."

"His myth could, and that's what we're about here today," said the White House guy. "We're going to bury it."

The CIA man's forefinger leapt and stabbed. "No. That's the thing, see. You're going to ask *us* to bury it. And we've been down that road before. The heavy boys go in and it turns out he's not there, and then it's *our* people explaining to the sub-committee why we were all wrong *again*. Everyone's favorite punching bag *again*. Think we don't see the play? Forget it. The brass is *not* going there."

More writhing silence. The Rainmaker took a deep breath, and broke it.

“One man’s opinion here, but...” he said in his viscous old Midwestern drawl, all heads turning his way. Of all those present, he was the only one without a title before his blotter. “It’s all a question of narratives, isn’t it? You’re just using the wrong one.”

“May I ask who you are and what your agency is?” snapped the White House man, tie wagging as he leaned over the table to get a look at the speaker.

“Oh, what’s in a name? Chip Bookbinder asked me to step in – we’re old buddies from ’Nam. I keep an office-slash-janitor’s closet down the hall from his. I’m just kind of coasting along till retirement, to be honest,” The Rainmaker breezed, though he was aware of the effect he was having: Harrington Bookbinder was deputy director of the CIA. “People send me psy ops for critique and vetting.” *And what hare-brained ops!* he despaired silently. “NSA, CIA, just about everybody. The team that polices 9-11 Truthers calls me up when they’re in a jam – that sort of thing.”

At the mention of 9-11, several faces at the table went red.

“Now then,” The Rainmaker went on, leaning back in his chair and propping an ankle on a knee. “The problem is not the facts on the ground, but the narrative you give them. You don’t need to say bin Laden’s not there. Just say, ‘Well, there was just such-and-such a possibility that we’d find him there.’” He held up a hand before the objections started. “What kind of phrasing would we be looking at here? ‘Possibility’ needs weakening. Let me think...”

There was a skeptical chuckle to his right to his right, and The Rainmaker turned his head that way and for a long

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moment nailed an Army Intel colonel in his gaze. The man fell silent. “If you are in the mood for humor, Colonel, I suggest you go inspect your troops.”

“That was highly uncalled for, sir,” the colonel mumbled.

The Rainmaker looked at his long pale hands, which he wrung for some seconds on his knee. “Ah! Yes, the correct phrase is, ‘A *strong* possibility.’ That’s the ticket.”

“Strong or weak,” huffed the CIA man. “What difference does it make?”

“Now let’s roll the new narrative and hear how it sounds,” The Rainmaker continued. He cleared his throat and let the silence gather. When he spoke, it was with a deepened voice and the patter of a news anchor:

“As late as two days before the raid, the best the CIA could say was that there was a strong possibility that Osama bin Laden was in the mansion. They could tell the president was that they were” – The Rainmaker paused – “highly confident. The president asked for confirmation but they could not give it. They gave certain odds, they made certain assumptions -- that was the best they could do. Between a rock and a hard place, the president took a risk, gambling his presidency in the bargain. He gave the Special Forces the green light.” He stopped and looked at the CIA man at the head of the table. “On board so far?”

“Depends,” he said. “You go in, there’s no Osama. Now what? Finish it.”

The Rainmaker didn’t – not for the moment – and looked at the White House man still sprawled over the table. “And the C-in-C?”

“Yeah, yeah, sure. That’ll play. Keep going.”

“No. No, not quite,” said The Rainmaker. “You’ll

need to divert attention from the fact that it's just a house and one man hasn't shown up inside it. So you'll want a lot of moaning and groaning about how hard the op was: Taliban spies everywhere, all the neighbors around, military academy right down the road. And just for good measure, for example, for example... Yes! You red-teamed it first. There we are. CIA brought in another team of intelligence analysts and presented their findings to them. They agreed: he's there. I can bring in my own staff this evening if you'd like, just for the verisimilitude: reserve the secure room, make a fuss, order in Chinese, walk out looking grave and statesmanlike."

The rest of the people were chuckling.

God, what children you are. It's as if you're plotting to soap the neighbors' windows.

"Excuse me, sir," called a Marine general down the table. "I believe I've heard of you. Would you by any chance be the man known as The Rainmaker?"

A modest smile. "An old baseball nickname, I'm afraid, General."

More laughter. The Rainmaker dipped into his patience.

"Well then, the rest is merely decoration," he went on with a shrug. "The Seals drop in, enter the house and... what? They find one of the men. This unlucky fellow is now our Osama. The Seals terminate him along with all other males – leaving the children and females, whose account one way or the other will hold no weight in the Muslim world. They pack up the body with a lot of laptops and electronic files and then --"

"Hold on. Just hold it right there. That would never fly," said the CIA man flatly. "That won't work at all. We're going to *take down* the man who is at the center of al Qaeda?"

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Like fucking hell we are. We would haul him down to Gitmo and squeeze him like a tube of toothpaste till he coughed up every last detail of his networks. Everybody knows that, and if they don't, the *Times* is going to bitch about it the next day and remind everybody.”

The Rainmaker could not quite hide his amusement. “Interrogate him? Rather than kill him? Ask him about passwords and networks that you rolled up five years ago? Or do you have the president of the United States call a surprise press conference and announce that we put a bullet through his brain? With all respect, sir, you live in Langley, Virginia. The folks you need to hear the narrative live in Memphis and Palo Alto and Dayton.”

The CIA man puffed out his cheeks, pursed his lips, and finally said, “All right, I'll stretch a point – fine. But then what about the body? You *killed* a guy calling him Osama bin Laden. On one hand, you can't leave the guy there for anyone to discover. But on the other, what justification do you have for weighing down a chopper all the way back to Bagram?”

“Yeah. Hey, that's right,” said the White House guy nervously.

The Rainmaker had ugly, small gray teeth like a line of tenements, and the smile that now appeared was unsightly. “To check his DNA, of course.”

“We *have* his DNA.”

“Exactly. And now we check his DNA against the sample that we have. To i.d. him.”

The CIA guy stared as if talking to an idiot. “You kill him and *then* you check his DNA?”

“You would rather that we checked it before?”

Everyone chuckled.

What I wouldn't give to take a photo of you all, The Rainmaker thought. *The Gadarene swine could have not posed more beautifully before running over the cliff.*

“I think the point is, son, to have an excuse to get the guy outta there,” said the Air Force general to the CIA man.

The CIA guy could see he wasn't going to win this battle either. “All right, fine. But if that one goes sideways, we are not taking the rap, that's all I can say,” he pouted.

“All right. Now we have a body and we are ready to go,” said The Rainmaker. “The Seals pack everything up with a lot of laptops and hard drives and pendrives soon to be used to complete our narrative – and let's not ponder too deeply the fact that bin Laden had no Internet connection and never struck anyone as a computer wonk. Off we fly to Bagram. At first light, the Pakistani police swoop in and carry off the women and children. There *is* a long-standing agreement, I believe, between CIA and the Paki ISI regarding bin Laden?”

The CIA man scowled as if to concede a single point. “Yes, we have full rights on capture in Pakistan if we locate bin Laden there. I would *imagine* they'll cooperate.”

“All the same, you'll want everyone to raise Caine for the violation of their sacred territory: ISI, Congress, Musharraf, Paki media, president, the works.”

“They won't need much encouragement,” the CIA man said drily.

“Indeed – but key for the versimilitude. And for the sake of narrative, we'll need some color. For example...” The Rainmaker wrung his hands twice. “The Seals burst in just as bin Laden was reaching for an AK-47 leaning against the wall. And let's bring in a woman – that's always adds the right dabs of blues and violets. Yes, let's say a woman – a bin

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Laden wife, say -- stepped in front of Osama, who wasn't gentleman enough to object. And let's say someone tried to defend him, maybe a son – all in the fanatical spirit of defending the great man to the death. Whatever – the details needn't connect.”

See? Even you are hypnotized. The moment you enter the story, you're helpless, The Rainmaker observed, pausing for someone who was coughing.

“Actually, the more blurry the raid is, the better,” he went on. “Let one version come out, then another, then another. Let the public pick and choose. Nothing stinks more to high hell – nothing's funner to pick apart -- than the classic seamless narrative. Just look at the first moon landing: pure as the driven snow, but half the public no longer believes it happened.”

“Wow! I get the feeling you've done this before,” the White House man joked.

“C'mon – finish it. What about the body?” snapped the CIA guy.

“Simple. Once back at Bagram, Forensics checks out the body, takes photos, does the DNA, and then...Well, I suppose you couldn't just bury him – that would be sticking a hand into the hornet's nest. Better to cremate him after a moving religious ceremony presided over by an Army Muslim cleric because we...No – no, that's madness. The bin Laden family would ask for a box of ashes, wouldn't they? As would half the Muslim world. No, you...where could you....Ah! You fly the body directly out to a waiting aircraft carrier. Moving Islamic ceremony, the body lowered into the sea.” A frown. “You would want to be *very* careful with the verb there: ‘lowered,’ ‘slid,’ or ‘condemned to the sea.’ Isn't that what the sailors do?”

“I believe the phrase you’re looking for, sir, is ‘*committed to the deep*,’ said a Navy Intel man politely.

“Thank you, Captain. Yes, ‘committed to the deep.’ And as to the media, ‘lowered,’ ‘slid,’ or, or... ‘eased into the sea.’ Yes, that’s our ticket: eased. Because we’re a feeling people, even with our bitterest enemies. We’re above them. Even bin Laden gets his final ashes-to-ashes with a few bowed heads by his side.” The Rainmaker looked around. “Everyone happy?”

Silence, which no longer writhed, but slithered.

“This is great stuff,” said the White House man. “Great stuff. Hell, you ought to work on our re-election campaign!”

“And lastly we’ll need the endgame,” The Rainmaker went on hastily, to a few laughs. He stopped, looking up at the ceiling, one hand raised tensely. “No. Actually, in this case – public psy op, narrative built from the ground up -- you would do well to have *three* endgames, one for the immediate narrative, another a week or so later to reinforce, and another for the longer term, after the truthers have had their go at it. It won’t take them long get going on this, you know.”

“Fuck ’em,” said the CIA guy. “We should lock every one of those shits up and waterboard them till they’re sponges.”

“A truly counterproductive act,” said The Rainmaker, and he needed a sharp effort not to add “you fool.” “No, we *need* truthers. We need them making their angry YouTube videos and writing blogs full of bad grammar and claptrap: ‘blatant,’ ‘obvious,’ ‘utterly,’ etcetera. They are precisely the ones that make us look as if we have freedom of expression. Internet is our ally, dear ones – never forget that. Internet

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turns everything into nothing. It churns truth and falsehood together in a way I could only have dreamed of years ago when I was briefing reporters in 'Nam."

The Rainmaker felt their astonishment pulse around the table. *Why does anyone need to explain this to you? Because you've never once lifted your faces out of a computer screen to think, that's why.*

After a silence, the White House guy said, "You said three endgames. What's the first one?"

"The first, well... You'll need to release some kind of video -- like the one from Jalalabad where bin Laden confessed to 9-11? That was one of *my* jobs, by the way."

"Yeah, and that was a bang-up job if I ever saw it," sneered the CIA man, finally scoring a point. "9-11 Truthers cut that to ribbons."

"Yes, I apologize for my fat bin Laden, incidentally. You know how it is: orders came down, not in the original plan, best we could do on short notice. Our model spent three hours in makeup, and even that and a fuzzy lens couldn't do much. But at least the proper impression was made at the right time, and that's the name of the game. The Truthers arrived far too late. Now then: let's think of another video, which will be released, say, forty-eight hours after the raid -- first video from the stash that the Seals pick up. It should prove bin Laden was recently alive, and we would do well to imply that he still had some type of organization supporting him."

"How about bin Laden giving a speech to his people in the middle of the compound?" said a prim woman drenched in pearls and with the mysterious initials "ARP and E" before her blotter.

"Yes, not bad," said The Rainmaker. "And that would

give us the extra plus of extended jihad after bin Laden dies.” He tipped his head to either side. “But that would also involve an extended frontal view of him, and then we run into identification issues again. We really must avoid that this time. And then there’s the background inside the compound. We have no idea what it looks like. We don’t want anyone sneaking in there after the raid comparing our video with the cracks in the walls. No, we’ll do best to keep it to an enclosed room with an absolutely plain background. And anything in it would have to be moveable.”

The prim woman wasn’t going to give up. “He could harangue people in a closed space in the house, and you could keep the camera behind him, trained mainly on the followers.” She grinned suddenly at the others. “Hey, this is kinda fun.”

“Uh-huh – better.”

“He could be have a Pakistani newspaper from last week in is hand,” the man from DoD Intel tossed out. “We could have one flown over tomorrow.”

“You would run into the problem of specifying exactly what day it was, though. Not good. Ambiguity is our ally, dear ones.”

For ten minutes, everyone contributed ideas and The Rainmaker fielded them, rejecting, honing, approving, modifying. *You’re like a lot of happy college freshmen in a bull session. ‘This is government at its finest!’ you’re thinking. I shudder to think what a Doonesbury comic strip would make of you.*

At the end, he said, “All right, I think we’ve got it: a from-behind quartering shot of Osama watching a video composite of news items put together by his team. It should show President Obama, a few current events around the

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Middle East -- the Arab Spring and so on. Can you put that together?" he asked the CIA man.

"I guess," he said, not inclined to given in too easily. "But hell, it's going to look pretty damn funny, a video of a guy watching a video. I mean, if you take video, you shoot a guy playing with his grandchildren or -- well, this is Islam -- the guy praying on his rug or something like that."

"Only if people think outside of the TV box, which is not likely," said The Rainmaker absently. He was wringing his hands again. "Ah, may I ask a favor at this point?"

The CIA man flapped his elbows piously. "Have I ever told you no?"

"When you shoot the scene, would you use a skinny little hard-to-use remote control and tell the model to hold it in his right hand?"

"Bin Laden is left-handed," said the CIA man impressively.

"Precisely. You see, the Truthers caught me out on that one. I had our Osama filmed writing a note and the pen was in his right hand. It simply slipped my mind. I'd just like to give those bastards a little jab so they know that I don't really give a pig's pod for their investigations. Do you mind?"

A shrug. "You got it -- right hand it is."

"Thank you. Now then, the mid-range endgame. Bits and bobs from the laptops and pendrives should come out -- most of it very hush-hush, TS/TCI, but pornography should figure prominently -- nothing dirties an image faster, even among men. And you'll want someone to mention hair dye -- Grecian Formula, Just for Men, whatever -- a receipt of some sort. Vanity deflates the image too, and besides our latter Osamas were a bit on the youthful side."

"But you've gotta have some pictures somewhere,"

said the White House guy. “If there aren’t photos, people think it didn’t happen.”

The Rainmaker shook his head. “Yes, though for the life of me, I don’t know why; the camera always lies. But I think, in this case” -- a long pause -- “the best we can do is the *impression* of photos, the *news* of photos, rather than the photos themselves. Photo-Shopping some old photos is but the work of an hour, and then we release them on a limited, official basis. We send --”

“Forget it,” said the CIA man flatly. “The Truthers will go through ten thousand photos of bin Laden till they find the one we used.”

“I said release them on a *limited, official* basis,” The Rainmaker said patiently. “You circulate them among White House staff, perhaps to the top level of State and DoD, everyone mulling and weighing and splitting hairs and debating like real adults: to release or not to release? That is the question. Because these photos are grotesque. Horrible. Gory. One of the president’s staffers spent fifteen minutes in the Oval Office bathroom puking his guts out after seeing them. Now: I think we can count on these good people not to check if the pictures are just Photo-Shopped old photos of Osama.”

“Sure. Hey, we’re on board, count on it,” said the State Department Intel guy.

“And at the end?” The Rainmaker asked, settling back again. “As one these sensitive elites shout no. The photos are just too awful to be released. Osama with his brains hanging out one ear. Osama missing a nose. Osama with half his face gone. Decency-in-media associations would protest if we released them. Local PTAs. The AARP. Then the Pentagon weighs in: these photos would play right into the propaganda

hands of our enemies. No, the solemn determination is made: these photos will not come to light till well after The Second Coming.”

“Well now, I don’t know here,” said the Marine general. You don’t release any photos, sir, and you’re not going to convince your grandmother. With all respect.”

The Rainmaker sighed, let a beat pass, then said to everyone, “Let’s remember, dear ones, that our job is not to convince, but merely to give people one or two good reasons *not to believe any other version*. And we have done that. This is a distinction that I’m always having to explain to various agencies; now sometimes, as in an espionage op, you need to convince. But this is a public psy op. Here we play with a natural advantage” – a tiny chuckle – “and I would imagine it drives the 9-11 Truthers nuts: the American people naturally believe their government. That is our political culture. Europeans naturally suspect, Americans naturally believe. Just look how long it took for people to believe Nixon was actually involved in his staff’s Watergate shenanigans.”

“Fine and well, but what if some State Department flunkie leaks a photo or two?” asked the CIA man.

“I take exception to your inference, sir” said the State guy.

The Rainmaker held up pious hands. “In that case, the White House’s response is simple: ‘Those are not official photos. We are not responsible, we do not stand behind them. All the official photos have been gathered up, not to be released until 2050.’”

The CIA man shrugged. “All right. So we’ve got this thing tied off for the short and medium. What was the long?”

“Not much – just a little something to reinforce the

basic idea. By then the Truthers will have found a few cracks in the official story, and it's not a bad idea to head them off at the pass. A year or so on, you have a book put out by one of the Seals that witnessed bin Laden being killed -- the guy assigned to take photos, say."

"That's going to stink a bit, isn't it?" asked the colonel with operational charge of the raid. "There'll be twenty soldiers in-compound. And it's just a coincidence that one of the two or three guys who actually go upstairs is the one that writes the book?"

The Rainmaker shrugged his concession. "Point taken, Colonel. But an eye-witness account will be essential."

"No, no: wrong fuckin' tree you're barkin' up there, sir," said the Air Force general. "A Seal -- who is that? Dyed-in-the-wool military man, that's what. He would naturally go through channels to publish something like that. He'd need the fuckin' Good Housekeeping seal from the Pentagon -- in spades -- and believe you me they'd fine-tooth-comb it. He'd have to say something about the months of surveillance. One word about e-lint, and they'd blow any book out of the water."

The Rainmaker nodded. "That's an excellent point, General. So the book would be published as an *unauthorized* account. Pentagon up in arms, threats of lawsuits, threats of cancelled pensions, CIA wailing about how their tricks of the trade are being revealed. There's nothing like scandal to bring out credibility."

"Bul-l-l-lshit," moaned the Air Force general. "I said, 'a dyed-in-the-wool career military man' -- *a Seal!* -- and he's going to go off the ranch and publish unauthorized? Total bullshit."

"Again, it is for *you*," said The Rainmaker tiredly. "But in

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Dubuque nobody makes those fine distinctions. The moment people hear that the book is the unvarnished, unauthorized version, they won't even need to read the book. They'll hear it confirms the official version and does a little fan dance around the tricks of e-lint, revealing a little curve here and a dark crevice there, and that's that. Modern government, dear friends, is the laying of narratives. The assassination of Osama bin Laden's house in his house in Abbottabad will soon form part of American history."

Silence again, complacent and drowsy like a reptile in the sun.

Why don't you all yawn and scratch and take a nice splash in the manure pile? The Rainmaker wondered.

"So are we ready to go?" said the White House guy, looking around the table.

"I guess," said the CIA guy grudgingly. "We'll get started on a bin Laden video." He looked at The Rainmaker and held out his right hand as if holding a fencer's épée. "Right-handed."

The White House guy strode over to The Rainmaker and stuck out his hand. "Hey, really: you've *got* to come work for us."

The Rainmaker took the hand and rose. "That's very kind, sir. But I work in narrative – a nice Dickensian pastime. The Orwellian stuff – 'ignorance is strength', 'some animals are more equal than others,' all that – I leave to more mature minds."

The End

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