



Prologue

Monday, August 19

THE DIAG WAS CRAMMED TO capacity. Shading his eyes from the noonday sun, the CNN correspondent counted a cross-section of the restless crowd and made a quick mental calculation. There were at least five thousand people milling around in the midsummer heat, he estimated, with hundreds more streaming into the expanse of grass and red brick every minute. Although most were conversing calmly, a sullen tension hung in the air. In one of the stone buildings along the quadrangle, someone had draped a sheet from a window with a hand-painted message: AYN RAND WAS A SELF-SERVING FOOL.

“Our political guys have been saying all summer that Fish is on the ropes,” the correspondent muttered to his field producer. “It doesn’t feel that way now.”

“Let’s shoot the interview footage and get out of here,” the producer said, glancing around apprehensively. “I’m picking up a distinctly pissed-off vibe.”

The correspondent nodded and turned toward the TV camera. A production assistant had selected several promising subjects and was standing a few feet away, chatting with them. As the producer waved them over, a knot of curious onlookers formed.

“We’re on the University of Michigan campus,” the correspondent

began, “where Maxwell Fish supporters have turned out in force for the man who, just two days ago, became the Democratic Party’s official nominee for the presidency of the United States. Experts give him little chance of defeating the Republicans’ heir apparent, Vice President William Acton, in November—but many in this battleground state feel otherwise. Let’s hear from some of them.”

“I’m a junior here at Michigan,” said one young woman, smiling brightly into the camera. “I’m looking for change. We can’t keep going the way we have been—something has to give. That’s why I’m supporting Max Fish for president. I’ll do anything I can to help him get elected!”

“Fish is for *all* Americans,” said a disheveled-looking man in his forties. “Except for the lucky few on top, we’re all rotting on the vine. He’s the only one promising to do something about it!”

“Do you sense the energy?” said the twenty-something next to him. “This campaign is morphing into a *movement*, man.” He pointed to the front of his T-shirt, where a peace symbol was superimposed over a bloodied dollar sign. “I hear Fish is laying out his economic plan today. When he’s through, the one-percenters won’t know what hit ‘em.” Flashing a thumbs-up, he melted into the surrounding throng.

“We need help!” said a matronly-looking woman, tears glistening in her eyes as she grasped the TV reporter’s arm. “You people are supposed to be journalists—can’t you see what’s happening to us?” She moved closer to him as the crowd pressed in.

“What does he care—these TV networks are all owned by big corporations, right?” cried a balding man in Bermuda shorts.

An angry murmur rose from the crush of people around the production crew. “Fucking bastards!” someone shouted.

“This is Tim Riley signing off from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor,” the correspondent said hastily, turning back to the camera, “where the support for Max Fish is strong, and the mood is... volatile.”

“I don’t like the look of this,” the producer said in a low voice. “Let’s pack it in.” Four network security guards surrounded the camera crew and began forcing a path through the crowd. As they pushed their way across the quadrangle, a plastic water bottle whizzed past the

correspondent's ear, missing him by inches. Cursing under his breath, he tucked his head between his shoulders and kept moving.



“Sixty-four years ago, well after midnight on a cool October evening, another Democratic presidential candidate stood just a few yards away from here, on the steps of the Michigan Union, addressing another crowd of Michigan students.”

In one corner of the Diag, a group began chanting: “J-F-K! J-F-K!”

The man at the microphone nodded. “That candidate was John F. Kennedy,” he said, “and the short speech he gave that night laid the foundation for the Peace Corps—one of the greatest mobilizations of youthful idealism the world has ever seen.”

A cheer swelled up, filling the quadrangle. Maxwell Fish, ex-governor of New York State, waited for the noise to subside, then began speaking again.

“Today, my hope is to lay the groundwork for another new initiative, one that will also renew America and the world for decades to come. For the past eight years, our leaders have told us repeatedly that the only way we can succeed as a nation is to allow the very richest Americans to amass as much money, and as much power, as they possibly can. They assert that it is the wealthy, and the wealthy alone, who make this country what it is—while the rest of us, because we don't have our hands on the levers of economic power, are mere takers.”

The crowd rumbled, and a scattering of boos could be heard.

“I'm here today to tell you that I could not disagree more with this philosophy,” Fish continued. “Thanks to Republican policies, the richest Americans now own virtually all of our nation's assets—leaving four-fifths of our population with almost nothing to their name other than the clothes in their closet, the car in their garage, and a roof over their heads—one that's all too often rented. Their jobs pay barely enough to cover their living and health care expenses. Why? Because most Americans' wages have not increased in fifty years, when measured against inflation! Well, I say *enough is enough*. A half-century is too long to wait for a raise!”

The crowd's reaction had grown into a full-throated growl by now, and Fish raised his voice a notch. "The evidence is in, and it shows just what our country's leading economists predicted—too much wealth, in too few hands, is strangling the very economy the wealthy are claiming to save!"

The thousands of listeners were on their feet now, clapping and shouting the speaker's name: "*Max...Fish...Max...Fish.*"

"I also realize that more government institutions aren't the answer to our nation's problems," Fish continued. "That's why, if elected president, my very first action will be to propose that the U.S. Congress increase taxes significantly on the wealthiest American individuals and corporations. I do *not* propose to use this money to grow the size of government, however—or to create any new government programs. Instead, I want the U.S. Treasury to redistribute that money to the working families of America on a monthly basis in the form of direct financial grants, to be spent however you see fit."

A wild cheer went up, making it impossible to hear anything for several minutes.

"The conservatives call it Leveling," Fish added after the din finally subsided. "I call it good economics. We can only grow the nation from the middle out—*not* from the top down. As your president, I will make sure that you and your family have what you need to lead our economy forward. And if the wealthiest among us can't stomach the idea of doing with less—so that we can *all* create more wealth for everyone—then they are free to leave our shores and take up residence elsewhere!"

Fish nodded for emphasis, his face breaking into a wide grin. "I invite you to follow me forward...to victory in November, and to prosperity for all Americans!" As the candidate waved his fist defiantly, the shouting increased to deafening proportions.

"Max...Fish...Max...Fish."

A few hundred yards away, inside their mobile production unit, the CNN correspondent and his producer took off their headphones. "He's talking straight redistribution," the producer said.

“I know.” Riley shook his head slowly. “Fish may have some nerve comparing himself with Kennedy, but he’s got at least one thing in common with old Jack: he’s not afraid to make powerful enemies.”



Ten minutes after the end of Fish’s speech, the crowd was drifting slowly out of the quad when the sound of a thin, insistent voice and twanging guitars cut through the humid air.

Some folks are born to wave the flag, ooh, they’re red white and blue...

As the Creedence Clearwater Revival recording floated across the campus, people began walking more quickly, trying to distance themselves from its source. An Ann Arbor policeman stood by his squad car speaking urgently into his two-way radio. Seconds later, a line of black sedans appeared, driving down South State Street.

“Homeland!” someone shouted.

People began running frantically as the cars pulled up to the quadrangle entrance and squealed to a stop. A dozen uniformed Homeland Security officers jumped out, rolls of portable orange fencing under their arms.

“Over here!” yelled the local cop, pointing to a young man and woman cowering in a building doorway. The officers unfurled their fencing and swiftly linked the ends together with plastic ties, forming a single two hundred-foot section. Stretching it to full length, they encircled the doorway, penning the couple and another thirty-odd on-lookers inside the plastic corral. The people trapped inside the enclosure stood in resigned silence as the officers began frisking them and searching their bags.

“This him?” one of the officers asked. He was gripping the arm of a young man wearing a backpack, fists pushed defiantly into the pockets of his jeans. The Ann Arbor policeman nodded. Spinning the man around roughly, the Homeland officer yanked the pack from his shoulders and rummaged inside it.

“What have we here?” he hooted, pulling out an old-fashioned

cassette tape deck. He punched a button and the tinny recording started up again, John Fogerty's voice echoing off the building's stone walls.

It ain't me...It ain't me...I ain't no senator's son.

"I'll bet you ain't," the officer smirked, silencing the song with a punch of his finger. "But what you *are*, pal, is under arrest." He reached for his plastic handcuffs.

"Please," said the woman crouched at the young man's side. Dressed in a rainbow-patterned shift, she was wringing her hands nervously, her eyes wide and pleading. "We have a newborn baby at home. You don't really have to take him into custody, do you?"

"If you don't shut up, lady, we'll be happy to detain you as an accessory," the officer said brusquely. "What about it? You want to call your babysitter, tell her you'll both be home late?"

The woman clutched her husband's arm. "You've always wanted to be the rebel," she said in a tired voice. "Well, you got your wish!"

A few feet away, a college-aged girl began weeping as another officer plugged her iPod into a device on his belt and studied its display. On the far side of the fenced-in area, a late-middle-aged man with a graying ponytail was face down on the grass, his arms pinioned behind him. Struggling to lift his head off the ground, he opened his mouth wide. "*Set the music free!*" he shouted. An instant later, a boot came down on the back of his head, slamming his face into the turf.

Outside the fencing, a teenager in a Michigan T-shirt stood holding a poster with the words "Gone Fish-ing" scrawled in marker. Through a hole inside the letter "O," he was using his smartphone to shoot a video of the scene inside the containment. "Anyone watching?" he asked his companion quietly.

"Nah. The bugs are too busy getting their rocks off, hassling the libs."

"They're having a field day, aren't they?" the first kid said. "Okay, I've got enough." He slipped the phone into his pocket. "Let's edit this baby and slam it up on YouTube. We'll see how long it lasts before they

yank it.”

“Looks like the networks have the same idea,” his friend said. A few yards away, several camera crews were filming the action.

“If ten seconds of this mess makes it onto the nightly news, I’ll buy you a pizza,” the first student snorted. “And if they *do* have the guts to show it, you can bet they’ll edit the tape to make these poor saps look like a bunch of hardcore anarchists.”

“Yeah, I know.” His friend nudged him in the ribs. “A couple of bugs are looking our way. I think the party’s over, dude.”

“I hear you. Time to go-go....”



“I can’t *believe* they had the nerve to come down on our people like that.” Fish’s press secretary stirred his glass of iced tea with a contained fury. “It was a legitimate political rally, for Christ’s sake. What’s next? Are they going to start tear-gassing the crowd in advance whenever Fish shows up to speak?”

“Start believing.” Fish’s campaign manager frowned, causing the prominent creases in his forehead to deepen further. “There’s more where that came from—you can be sure of it.”

The two men slouched gloomily in overstuffed armchairs, staring through the hotel lobby’s plate glass windows at the traffic flowing over the Blue Water Bridge between Port Huron and Ontario, on the far side of the St. Clair River. Their mood wasn’t helped by the fact that the afternoon’s itinerary was now a shambles, thanks to an unscheduled meeting their candidate was holding at that very minute in his hotel suite, twelve floors above them.

“Remind me again,” said the press secretary, “who is Fish talking to?”

“As I’ve told you repeatedly, *I don’t know*,” the other man said with a flash of impatience. “I’m as much in the dark as you are. Marshall isn’t sharing on this one.” The campaign manager shot a dark look at Max Fish’s longtime chief aide, lounging in a chair nearby. Jim Marshall had been at Fish’s side since his earliest days in politics and his allegiance to his boss was legendary.

“First he blindsides us with this meeting, then he refuses to tell us what it’s about. How does Fish expect us to help him get elected if he won’t keep us in the loop?” said the press secretary. “Besides, what if this guy he’s meeting with turns out to be a security risk?”

“Two Secret Service agents are outside Fish’s room as we speak. I’m sure they did their due diligence. The Governor isn’t going to get plugged in the chest with a .44, if that’s what you mean—at least not today.” For an instant, the operative’s chronic look of worry gave way to a grin. “You’re not getting out of your job *that* easily!”

“You brought the documents?”

“Right here.” Balancing his briefcase on his lap, Paul Jorgensen of the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service slid a sheaf of papers across the coffee table to Max Fish.

Fish lifted the edge of the stack and withdrew a cassette tape from beneath it. It had no case or identifying label. Silently, he slipped the tape into the inner pocket of his sports jacket. “What have you got for me?” he said briskly.

“These are photocopies of the personal journal of Rick Rogers,” said Jorgensen. “He mailed the journal together with a bunch of saved correspondence to a post office box in Canada, shortly before his arrest and subsequent escape in Minnesota. He passed along the whole trove to the Canadian authorities when we interrogated him several weeks later. As you know, Canada has never acknowledged its existence.”

“If I understand you correctly, this will shed new light on the Boundary Water Incident.”

“I can assure you that you’ll have a new understanding of what took place, once you review this material.” Jorgensen tapped his own jacket in the spot where Fish had placed the tape, raising his eyebrows slightly. Fish nodded and rose to his feet.

“I can’t thank you enough for getting in touch,” he said, grasping the other man’s hand.

“No sweat, eh?” said Jorgensen. “I’m about to retire, anyway. If my bosses find out we met, the worst they can do is screw me out of my pension.”

“I hope not,” replied Fish. “As far as I’m concerned, you’ve earned every penny.”

As Jorgensen walked out of the room, Fish picked up his mobile phone. “Jim, can you come up here for a minute? I need to talk to you.”

Fish and Marshall were finishing a late lunch in the hotel restaurant when two men in suits approached the table.

“Mind if we sit down?” the older of the two asked. He opened his wallet to reveal a Homeland Security badge.

“Do we have a choice?” sighed Fish. He put his fork down and took a sip of water. “Isn’t it enough that you harass the people who come to my rallies?” he said with a tight smile. “Are you going to start hounding me personally, as well?”

“This is a highly unusual situation,” the man said quietly. “We’re here to escort you to Washington. The Justice Department wants to meet with you—today.”

“What about?”

“You’ll be informed of the details later,” the man said. “But I can tell you that it involves unapproved contacts with a foreign intelligence agency.”

“I see.” Fish studied his water glass for a moment, then glanced across the table. “Jim, I think you’d better put in a call to our lawyers, so they can have someone over at Justice when I get there.”

“There’s no hurry—please, finish your lunch,” the man said. “We’ve got some people in your room right now, packing your things. Once you’re done, we’ll all take a plane ride.”

“Not me, thanks,” said Marshall, rising to his feet. “As the Governor indicated, I have some phone calls to make.”

“Hold on a second,” said the second man, rising also.

“I’m sorry—am I being detained too?” asked Marshall sharply.

“The answer is no...for the time being,” said the first man. “But since you were in the room alone with Mr. Fish for several minutes following his, uh, appointment, we do need to confirm that he didn’t pass along any potential evidence to you. It’ll just take a minute.” He nodded at his colleague, who unobtrusively patted Marshall down and

then riffled swiftly through his briefcase.

“Nothing here,” he said.

“Okay, you’re free to go,” said the first man with a wave. “We’ll be in touch regarding your statement.”

Marshall walked into the lobby and punched a number into his cell phone. Holding the phone to his ear, he strode out the hotel entrance and ducked into one of the cars reserved for top campaign staff.

“Jimbo! What’s up?” The booming voice caused the phone to vibrate in Marshall’s grip.

“Big news—none of it good.” said Marshall. “Can you make an emergency session at DOJ this evening?”

“Sure, if I have to. Give me a minute to clear my calendar. Then we can talk.”

“I’ll hold,” Marshall said. Covering the mouthpiece, he bent forward. “Detroit Metro Airport,” he told the driver. He leaned back in the upholstered seat as the car accelerated out of the parking lot, then turned to peer out the rear window. Once he was sure no one was following them, he casually reached down and felt the top of his right foot, where a cassette tape was wedged firmly between his instep and the leather interior of his shoe.