

THE QUARRY

The Back Door

Lilli de Kantzow

The group stepped out of the lift and turned the corner. They walked in pairs down the hall, two dark-suited men in front and two behind. In between was a small man of roughly thirty-five with thick brown hair and a very beautiful woman. The porter who was walking down the hall towards them jumped to the side as they passed. The two men in front stared at him menacingly, but the rest of the party barely acknowledged the porter's existence.

The door to Room 1101 swung open as the first pair of men reached it. It had been opened by another set of men in suits. They greeted each other with a nod as the group filed in. The middle-aged man and the woman headed straight down the hall and into the suite's sitting room. As they entered, the man sitting in the corner stood up.

‘Ah!’ he exclaimed, ‘Our guests have arrived!’

‘Sergey!’ the woman beamed, throwing her arms up and making a show of kissing the air either side of Sergey's bald head. The woman then gestured her companion closer. He

stepped forward and extended a sweating palm in greeting. Sergey looked between the pair disconcertedly.

‘Anthony, this is Sergey Popov,’ she said graciously, ‘Sergey, this is my husband, Anthony Wyatt.’ Anthony shuffled forward a few more steps and grabbed Sergey’s meaty hand. After a few seconds of awkwardness, Sergey freed his hand and gestured for the pair to sit down.

‘Tanya told you of our... knowledge?’ Sergey inquired of Anthony. Tanya tried to force her smile to widen, as Anthony attempted to take a cup of tea from a security guard. Anthony’s eyes had fixed on the Glock G43 under the security guard’s suit jacket, and his hand was grabbing at thin air. The security guard moved the cup toward Anthony’s hand, and he finally made contact with the china. The guard’s emotionless face flickered for a moment as he glanced up at Sergey’s unimpressed expression, and realised his boss was thinking the same thing he was.

Tanya had noticed the guard’s glance and kicked Anthony’s foot. Anthony jumped slightly, and then his brain seemed to switch into gear.

‘She has, but she made no mention of the type of knowledge you possess’, he said, and Sergey’s brows creased.

‘No, because she does not entirely know what knowledge I do have,’ said Sergey, nodding at another security guard. Tanya raised an eyebrow in Sergey’s direction, but he pointedly ignored her. The nominated security guard disappeared into another of the suite’s rooms for a moment before re-appearing with a thin manila folder. Tanya carefully watched Anthony’s expression as he opened it.

Anthony stared for a moment at its contents. He twisted his head side-to-side, cracking his neck and took a deep breath. After a few more seconds of contemplation, he slapped the folder down on the table.

‘How?’ he said to Tanya, his voice cracking slightly in anger. She looked at him quizzically, then picked up the folder. She looked from Sergey to her husband.

Tanya could feel her heart pounding through her fingers as she opened the folder. She had barely lifted the top before she let it drop shut. Her face turned bright red. She rounded on Sergey.

‘This is the *knowledge* you had?’ she growled.

Sergey smirked and nodded, clearly enjoying watching Anthony’s seething anger and Tanya’s frantic panic.

‘For seven million dollars?!’ Tanya couldn’t contain her rage as she spoke. She reached forward, pulled the photos out of the manila folder and began to rip them up.

‘They are not our only copies,’ muttered Sergey as a security guard moved forward to restrain Tanya. The guard stopped as Tanya collapsed back into the couch next to Anthony. She turned to her husband. Tanya attempted to speak, but her mouth opened and closed in frantic silence.

‘I think that was worth every cent,’ Anthony said, standing up. One of Anthony’s security guards came forward with a nondescript briefcase and handed it to Sergey. Sergey stood up in almost surprised at the speed with which Anthony recovered, and took the briefcase now being handed him.

‘The entire amount is in non-sequential hundred-dollar bills, as requested’ said Anthony. Sergey mustered a gracious smile and handed the briefcase to one of his men.

‘Perfect,’ was all Sergey could say. He looked disconcertedly from Anthony to Tanya, who was now sobbing uncontrollably on the couch. He gestured towards Tanya, trying to think of something to say.

‘Evans,’ said Anthony, ‘take my wife downstairs and out through the back entrance’. The blonde security guard who had handed Anthony the briefcase now stepped forward, whipped a handkerchief out of his pocket and ushered the sobbing Tanya out of the room.

Anthony watched Tanya leave and waited until the door had shut securely behind her and the sobs had disappeared down the hall.

‘You have another copy of the images?’ he asked, and Sergey produced another manila folder from the desk behind him.

‘Would you like to be informed of any more knowledge that I may become aware of?’ asked Sergey.

‘Yes, I think this could be a very profitable relationship,’ Anthony smiled, extending his now dry hand purposefully. Sergey smiled, shook Anthony’s hand, and handed him the new manila folder.

Anthony then turned on his heel and strode down the hall, opened the door and went out into the corridor. His security staff scurried out after him. He handed the manila folder to the shortest guard, who stowed it in his jacket. The four men then set off down the hall towards the lift.

‘That was a slightly unexpected turn of events,’ commented one guard slyly.

‘Yes, but also rather advantageous. I can kill two birds with one stone,’ Anthony replied.

There was a ding as the lift arrived at the hotel’s lobby. The men stepped out, walking straight into two porters. One jumped forward.

‘Oh my god!’ he exclaimed, ‘You’re Anthony Wyatt! I hope you win, I really do.’

‘Thank you, my friend!’ Anthony beamed, and reached out to shake the porter’s hand. The porter grabbed Anthony’s hand and shook it violently.

‘Could I get a photo?’ he asked, still not letting go of Anthony’s hand. Anthony smiled graciously, trying to subtly pull his hand out of the porter’s vice-like grip. The porter pulled out his phone and took a photo.

‘Good on you, son,’ said Anthony as the porter put his phone away. ‘Is there anything you’d like me to advocate for?’

The porter shook his head, still smiling from ear to ear. Anthony slapped him on the back and was ushered away by his security guards as a small crowd began to gather around them.

‘Who was that?’ asked the other porter.

‘That was Anthony Wyatt,’ replied the first, ‘you know... the Presidential candidate’.

The second porter shrugged, ‘Huh, I thought he’d be taller.’

The first porter laughed, and then began looking through the tickets on their desk.

Outside, a large black SUV pulled up in front of the hotel, and Anthony got in. Already inside were the blonde security guard, his hysterical wife, and Anthony’s fixer, Hector Baldwin. Hector nodded at Anthony and held out his hand. Anthony duly passed over the manila folder, and the car set off. Hector flicked it open, considered the contents and flipped it shut again.

‘How do you wish to proceed?’ he asked Anthony.

Anthony leant forward slightly and pulled a small brochure out of the driver’s seat back pocket. Hector flipped it open and began to read. It proclaimed the history, credentials, and benefits of *The Wyatt Clinic*, a psychiatric clinic in a remote part of Montana. It was opened by Anthony’s family after the Civil War as a hospital for shell-shocked and disabled troops, and was now run by Anthony’s older sister and her husband as a psychiatric hospital and rehabilitation centre for the rich, famous, and criminally insane. Tanya’s wails were refreshed when she glanced up to see her husband’s proposed solution. Hector gave a small, twisted smile.

‘And call Lydia. I should give her the story before someone else gets to it,’ said Anthony.

‘Already done. She’ll be waiting,’ replied Hector, pulling out his phone and dialling the number on the front of the brochure. After a few minutes of talking to a receptionist, Hector handed the phone to Anthony.

‘Samantha!’ he said, attempting to fain some enthusiasm. ‘How are you?’

‘Why are you sending me her?’ came his sister’s irritated reply.

‘Because it seems she’s been having an affair,’ responded Anthony blankly.

‘Another one? With who?’ Samantha scoffed.

‘Adam Huntington,’ said Anthony.

‘As in, *the* Adam Huntington? Your largest and most powerful political rival, Adam Huntington?’ asked Samantha. Anthony could hear her trying to suppress her laughter.

‘Yes,’ said Anthony, his voice turned hollow. ‘We’re going to say that the miscarriage she suffered in August caused her to fall into deep depression. She lost all self-confidence, and when Huntington heard about this, he used this knowledge to seduce her to try and weaken my position in the race to the White House.’

Samantha promptly stopped laughing, ‘Okay. Send her here, and I’ll look after the rest.’ Samantha paused for a moment, ‘I’m sorry Tony... I know this can’t be easy for you.’

‘Thanks, Sam,’ He cleared his throat and straightened up in his seat. ‘I’ll send her with Hector. There’ll be press. I’ll do my best to keep them away from the clinic,’ he said, looking at Hector for his approval. Hector nodded.

‘If the Press harass any of my patients or staff, I’ll string you up by your belt and feed your body to the pigs,’ Samantha’s voice returned to its usual abruptly stern tone.

‘Message received,’ said Anthony, nodding in compliance. Hector looked at Anthony with a bemused expression, he had clearly heard Samantha’s vivid threat.

The moment Anthony hung up and handed the phone back to Hector, Tanya flung herself on him. She began pleading with him not to send her to the Clinic. Anthony brushed her off. She quickly got angry, punching Anthony’s arms and chest.

After a few more seconds of abuse, Anthony grabbed Tanya’s wrists and held them until she stopped screaming and calmed down enough for him to speak.

‘How could you think I would not find out? I’ve found out about all the others, what possessed you to believe this one would be any different?’ Anthony’s voice was calm, even, and completely void of any emotion. Tanya stopped struggling against his grip and stared at him in shock. She slumped defeatedly back into her seat.

The car rounded a corner and pulled up out the front of the Wyatt’s townhouse. Tanya moved to get out, but Anthony put a hand on her leg to stop her. He kissed her on the forehead and quickly got out of the car. Tanya’s voice escaped her entirely as the tears poured down her face. She watched her husband walk up the steps to the front door where a tall, very beautiful young woman in a simple maroon business dress, black heels and long black coat waited for him. He opened the door and ushered Lydia into the hall. Anthony turned to close the door but avoided stealing one final glance at his wife as she was driven away.

The next morning, Anthony woke up to the breaking news of his wife’s affair. His phone was ringing off the hook. He sat down in bed with a steaming cup of coffee and switched on the TV. The photos of Tanya in a hotel room in bed with his most significant political rival, their clothes, empty bottles of French champagne, and small bags of cocaine strewn across the floor were plastered across every news channel he could find. His lead in the race was increasing exponentially as everyone was waking up to one of the biggest political scandals of the century.

The sound of the doorbell pulled Anthony’s attention away from the television screen. He wrapped himself in a dressing gown and peeked out the window. On the street below, hundreds of people were milling around, news vans, camera crews, and journalists had completely blocked off the street. He looked at the front door and saw two heads of frizzy, fiery red hair. A huge smile crossed his face as he dashed to the front door.

His niece and sister burst through the door the second he flicked open the lock. Natalie threw her arms around her brother’s neck and held on tight as the door slammed behind them.

Anthony let a few tears roll down his cheeks as he hugged his sister, before turning to his niece and picking her up.

‘And how is my Princess?’ Anthony asked of the 6-year-old. She smiled and wrapped her arms around Anthony’s neck.

‘I’m very well, thank you, but Mummy says Aunty Tata is sick,’ she said, her glittering emerald eyes staring into her uncle’s hazel ones.

‘Yes, my little Harriet, she’s gone to stay with Aunty Samantha until she’s better,’ he replied, his voice cracking for the first time.

‘How will you be President then? If you don’t have a First Lady?’ she asked innocently. Anthony smiled as he set her back down and walked with her into the kitchen. Natalie too started at Anthony, clearly wanting an answer.

‘You can be my First Lady,’ he said, leaning down to kiss Harriet on the head and putting the strength back into his voice. ‘Now, who’s for pancakes?’