

ROBERT CULLEN

THREE AGENDAS



ONE CONSPIRACY

THE
ULTIMATE
BETRAYAL



The Ultimate Betrayal

by

Robert Cullen

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Dedication

It would be remiss of me if I didn't acknowledge the efforts of a number of people who have provided assistance through the various stages of writing this book.

Firstly, to the many who have read, reviewed and offered constructive comment, I express my appreciation. Your contributions will never be forgotten.

Next I come to the man who provided the first editing, Pat Logue. Your skills in correcting my spelling and grammatical errors ensure I will forever be in your debt. Mind you, debt repayment is not one of my better talents. Your enthusiastic support and encouragement kept this writer going.

John Fingleton, the author of *Surviving Maggie*, agreed to read and assess my writing. John provided much needed advice on the finer points of structure and technique.

I've never met Norma Howell, but she is the editor of all editors. Norma converted an over-written manuscript into a solid and well-presented novel. Norma, you make this writer look good. I only hope we get to work together again.

Gayle and Jeff, I thank you for taking the risk with an unknown Australian author. Working with G & J

Publishing has been an enlightening and professional experience.

Lastly I thank Jeanette. You provide me with what I most need, stability and love.

Reviews

When Robert Cullen asked me to read the manuscript of his novel, *The Ultimate Betrayal*, I really didn't expect to be taken on the exciting and intriguing trip that I was to experience. There are enough unexpected plot twists to keep the most discerning thriller reader happy and enthralled. I keenly recommend this terrific 'first book.'

John Fingleton,
Best Selling author of *Surviving Maggie*.

As a Flight Attendant with V Australia, I spend a great deal of my time based overseas in hotels and waiting around in Airport terminals. More often than not I fill this void with a book.

On average I read two to three books a week. Though I generally prefer biographies, I enjoy a good thriller. David Baldacci and Vince Flynn are, in my opinion the kings in this genre.

A couple of months ago, my sister handed me an unpublished manuscript titled *The Ultimate Betrayal*. It was, she said, the work of a former work colleague.

With nothing else to read, and out of curiosity, I picked up the manuscript's first couple of pages. Two hours later, I'd missed dinner and was deeply immersed in a gripping thriller. The plot, the characters and the desire to discover more had taken control. *The Ultimate Betrayal* had won its first fan.

The action moves at a frantic pace and the characters grow as the story develops. One never quite knew who could be trusted. The Ultimate Betrayal really was one of the better reads I've come across this past year and I wholeheartedly recommend it to anyone who enjoys a great read.

Mitchell Starr

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Chapter One

Washington 2009

Dempsey Hannon, the Secretary of State, sat at his desk awaiting the arrival of his guest, CIA Director Michael McAuliffe. Their phone conversation had been unpleasant and the director had made no effort to hide his anger. The ambition and friendship they treasured had degenerated into an association of necessity, two men bound by a common goal and a shared secret.

When he heard about a mole in the president's inner sanctum, Hannon was livid. While wide of the truth, it could potentially jeopardise forty years of hard work. Someone was careless, and it was up to McAuliffe to locate and seal the leak.

While he couldn't prove where the rumour started, Hannon had his suspicions. High on his list of suspects was McAuliffe himself. The director was a man of limited patience who had long agitated the need for action. Was this his way of advancing the agenda? Hannon held the alternate view. He argued for subtlety over violence and supported his opinion by citing the unprecedented American military response to the Twin Towers attack. "Our country was decimated. Violence begets violence, whereas subtlety ensures success," he'd said to a wound up McAuliffe.

In moments alone, Hannon more often than not found himself questioning his vow of allegiance to Allah. Life in America wasn't so bad. Success had provided everything he needed, a good wife, family and future. Did he really want to surrender it all?

Belief too had yielded to doubt. So many of the Koran's tenets were based on untruths and misinterpretations, as were the teachings of the Bible. Religion on both sides was at fault. Surely, God was a figure of love, a God who sought unity over division.

Hannon's thoughts vanished when the door burst open. McAuliffe didn't practice courtesies such as knocking.

"What is it this time?" The anger he'd shown on the phone worsened. Like a chameleon McAuliffe responded to his surrounds; when challenged he became aggressive, when soothed he became a lamb. In the company of women, the man possessed the charisma of Clinton, the serenity of a Buddhist monk and, at several inches over six feet, the body of an athlete. Women loved him. Men feared him. Hannon hated him.

"We need to talk, Michael. Take a seat."

"Get on with it."

Hannon wasn't surprised to see McAuliffe remain on his feet. He'd seen the tactic many times before. The bastard was a bully, devious as the devil and prepared for any circumstance. Hannon's assessment was confirmed as McAuliffe turned and employed a magician's dexterity.

His left hand rose to cover his mouth as a raking cough erupted. At the same time, the right hand slipped into his trouser pocket. Hannon observed the right hand.

McAuliffe was a man of habit, and Hannon had seen the manoeuvre before and knew its purpose. McAuliffe came prepared. He carried some form of electronic jammer to ensure their meeting couldn't be recorded.

"Don't try that bullshit on me," Hannon said. "It doesn't work. I know enough about you to bring you down, but for the moment let's put animosity aside and work together."

McAuliffe's eyes blazed with hatred and Hannon understood. Given the chance, McAuliffe would have him killed.

"As much as you dislike me," Hannon said, "you know my participation is vital. That's why I scheduled this meeting. I'm to meet with the president in one hour and I believe it is imperative we present a united front, particularly if he raises questions about the rumour floating around the Capital this past twenty-four hours."

"And what rumour might that be?"

"The suggestion there is a Moslem sleeper occupying a prominent position within the corridors of power. Would you care to accompany me to the White House?"

"Are you incapable of handling the situation?" McAuliffe hurled the insult with the compassion of a striking cobra.

"My capabilities extend far beyond your imagination, Michael. I could, for example, institute proceedings to curtail your directorship at the CIA, and we both know I would have no difficulty in securing the president's signature. You are not the most popular man in Washington."

“When are we leaving?” His surrender was complete and Hannon enjoyed the moment. Victory against McAuliffe was a rare occurrence. Triumph came at a price, though; their mutual hatred now exceeded the point of reconciliation.

“What do we tell him?” asked Hannon.

McAuliffe lowered himself onto the seat adjacent to Hannon’s desk. “The president has a nose for deceit, so I’d suggest we adhere to a sanitized version of the truth. I’ll speak with Dexter over at the Bureau to request an immediate computer search of all government personnel files including FBI, CIA, military and all the service bodies.”

“Isn’t that dangerous? Who knows what might turn up?”

“As long as we’re both clean, Dem, nothing else matters.”

“Have you any idea who might have started the rumour?” asked Hannon. “It’s way too close to the mark to be coincidence.”

“Are you implying Agency involvement?” The snake was back.

McAuliffe realised the gravity of his error. Anger never worked with the Secretary of State. The man’s demeanour was ice cold, beyond intimidation, so different from his physical attributes. Overweight by at least fifty pounds, Hannon displayed a total disregard for personal appearance. His receding hairline always looked in need of brushing and his attire seemed several sizes too large. His manner of dress was regularly lampooned in cartoons. One cartoonist labelled him the Secretary of Scruff.

“I’m sorry, Dem. I guess I become oversensitive when I hear the Agency being attacked. You could be right. I tend to wear blinkers when it comes to my staff.”

While his words offered concession, McAuliffe’s mind condemned. He questioned his colleague’s commitment. Hannon had grown weak, become too comfortable in the ways of Western culture. The plan could tolerate no flaw. It was time to look elsewhere for assistance.

“Let’s get back to this meeting with the president. Who else will be in attendance?” asked McAuliffe.

“No one, it’s just a fifteen minute chat.”

“You know my feelings about him.”

“That’s why I want you there. He may not like you, but he respects your ability to manage the agency. You take so much heat off him.”

“He has no right to be president.” Like many of his friends, McAuliffe would never forgive the man for defeating the female senator. “Dealing with a woman would have been so much easier.”

“Sexist rants like that will one day get you into trouble.”

“Allah’s truth is the truth, not this patronising western bullshit called equality. We both know God made women to serve men, not rule them.”

“Have you discussed that with your wife?”

“She’s not my wife, never will be. She’s only a point of convenience on my path to fulfilment.”

“And your daughters? How do you define them?”

“Mere necessities required to boost my all-American credibility.”

McAuliffe knew he had achieved his purpose when he saw Hannon couldn't contain his disgust. Why hadn't he noticed the man's weakness before? Silently, he cursed the day they'd been introduced; an occasion he now realised was far from coincidence.

"What assistance do you need from me?" Hannon asked.

"Nothing, leave everything to me." McAuliffe interpreted the secretary of state's question as insincere. The man had lost the will to fight. "The less you know the better. Tidying up has always been one of my better talents."

'...a fantastically written story....an amazing job with your characters, it had my attention the entire time.

'Adrenalin is charging in my veins. This is great. Fantastic. I had to check to see if this was fiction...!'

'Characters are lifelike and very believable.'

'...the characters are awesome. I feel like I'm there in the book.'

'I love to read good fiction, Bob Cullen. Excellent'

