

'Full Disclosure': Chapter 3

THE STORY SO FAR: Vasily Nikolayev, Soviet foreign minister, plotted the assassination of Alexei Kolkov, general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, and American President Sven Ericson in a helicopter over the Crimea to avert their coming up to an axis of China and Japan. Kolkov died, but Ericson was saved by his Secret Service guard when a wild boar attacked the assassins. William Safire continues the tale in the third of 20 excerpts from his novel, "Full Disclosure."

By WILLIAM SAFIRE
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"We are leaving right now, Vasily."
"Not right away."
Secretary of State George Curtilage felt a wave of fury surge in him and said nothing until it had passed. They were in the hospital administrator's office, originally a waiting room in the Czar's Palace, which the foreign minister had taken over as his command post. Upstairs, the President of the United States lay — alive, conscious, unable to see, in need of the best medical attention in the world. Down the hall from the President's room agent Bok occupied a huge ward, his condition unknown but paralysis likely; he was sedated now and out of pain but in need of a surgeon they could all trust. On the top floor being photographed were the bodies of Soviet General Secretary Kolkov, his guards and his Chinese assassins.

Curtilage looked at his watch again: 12:30 p.m. Yalta time — three solid hours since the aerial ambush, one hour since the President opened his eyes and said his first shattering words, "Am I alive?" To have him lying there attended by a couple of Soviet doctors and his own half-competent personal physician was an impossible situation.

The President's life comes first

"You cannot keep this bottled up for five more minutes," Curtilage said, his voice under control. "The President's life comes before any other consideration. You have helicopters at the airfield, I saw them when we got in." Curtilage insisted, knowing the Russian was deliberately dragging a foot. "Delay is dangerous. You — and I hold you personally responsible for this — you are endangering the life of the President."

Nikolayev rose. "Do not say what is not true. I have ordered the helicopter. I have ordered the airport sealed off and secured. But I must make absolutely certain that the men we use to fly the plane are loyal and not allied with the Chinese assassins."

"How long will that take?"
"Four hours. If it protects your President's life, the time is well spent."

"Unacceptable." Curtilage knew exactly what Nikolayev was doing. It was what he might have done in his shoes: Freeze the situation and black out all news reports until his fellow leaders in the Politburo could be informed and an immediate policy decided upon. Nikolayev was under enormous pressure: The slightest omission, the failure to act precisely as the man at the center would expect him to act, would open him to charges of misfeasance at a crucial moment. "Your formal protest is noted," said the Russian.

Every movement would be analyzed for years

"For Crissake, Vasily," Curtilage almost shouted across the desk. "this

CAUSE OF GIRL'S DEATH UNKNOWN

By JAMES NEY
Register Staff Writer

Des Moines County Sheriff Robert D. Glick said Monday he still is uncertain whether a 15-year-old Burlington girl, whose body was found near Burlington Sunday, was murdered.

He said authorities may not be sure until they receive reports of an autopsy conducted on the body of Lisa Elaine Miller and tests from the State Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) crime laboratory which he said may take several more days.

Originally authorities thought the girl might have been beaten to death, but Glick said Monday further examination of her body showed "no extreme or severe injuries."

He said authorities are continuing to investigate the case, but that there were no suspects. Though there was no precise evidence of a homicide, Glick said, "we will continue to treat it as a homicide until we know the results of the tests."

The fully clothed body of Miller, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Miller of Burlington, was found by a group of young people in a wooded area about 3 1/2 miles southeast of Burlington. The area is a popular recreation spot.

Glick said authorities are unsure how long the girl had been dead. He said there are a number of "suspicious" aspects about the case, including the remote area where her body was discovered, with no indication of a means of transportation. "There are a number of things about this that appear out of order," he said.

The girl was reported as a runaway by her parents on Oct. 3

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS IN 'FULL DISCLOSURE'

"Full Disclosure" cast of characters — in order mentioned:
Sven Ericson, President of the United States.
Vasily Nikolayev, Soviet foreign minister.
Alexei Kolkov, general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.
George Curtilage, secretary of State.
Harry Bok, the President's Secret Service guard.
Dr. Herbert Abelson, the President's personal physician.
Buffy Masterson, the President's official photographer.
Mark Hennessy, special counsel to the President.

Arthur Leigh, the President's campaign manager.
T. Roy Bannerman, secretary of the Treasury.
Lucas Cartwright, the President's chief of staff.
Arnold Nichols, the vice-president.
Dr. Hank Fowler, the President's therapist.
Preston Reed, secretary of Defense.
Emmet Duparquet, attorney general.
Mike Fong, secretary of Natural Resources.
Angelo (Andy) Frangipani, secretary of Human Resources.

Samuel Zophar, a columnist.
Gregor, a Soviet agent.
Marilee Pinckney, assistant press secretary.
Melinda McPhee, the President's secretary.
Trumbull, the President's speech writer.
James Smith, the President's press secretary.
Zack Parker, who becomes secretary of the Treasury.
Mortimer Freilinghausen, speaker of the House.
Albert Hay, undersecretary for monetary affairs.

is no formality, this is —" he groped momentarily before settling for "— life and death." More than that, Curtilage's reputation rested on his ability to negotiate them out of here posthaste with the news blackout lifted. Every action, every movement, every moment's delay would be analyzed by reporters and historians for years, and the blame, he was determined, would not be laid at his door. He felt a twinge of conscience at thinking of how he would look in this situation later and returned to his pressuring: "Every moment you sit on this powderkeg, the worse the explosion will be when the story breaks. Don't you see?"

You're making it worse."

"The general secretary is dead," said the foreign minister. "What could be worse?" Curtilage thought it best not to make a quick reply, and Nikolayev answered his own question:

"It could be worse if your President were dead, I know. But he is not dying. In terms of his own life, which as you say is paramount, the needs of security are greater at the moment than the need for medical specialists."

"We're not sure we're safe right here," Curtilage pressed, a sense of helplessness mounting in the face of Nikolayev's rigid line. "What about an attack on the hospital? It could happen. They could burst in at any moment; you don't have 20 men guarding this place." It was hopeless; this was fencing, Curtilage knew. The Russian was operating on a timetable of communication; after he knew the initial power lines were laid, the story

would be made known and the President permitted to leave. The delays were "unavoidable"; any objections would be listened to politely but not heard. And Nikolayev had an edge; America's first black secretary of State had to show himself as calm and cool, with no bombast. The explosion that might be allowed a white would be criticized in a black; it was a subtle edge, but one the Soviet foreign minister was ready to exploit.

He would be savaged by the American press

Nikolayev, he knew, would not be pushed further, but four hours would not satisfy Lucas Cartwright, the President's chief of staff, or Ericson, and he was beginning to worry about how he would be savaged by the American press for concealing the biggest news of the generation. Curtilage could think of no other way out. He told himself he was acting in the interests of getting the wounded President adequate medical care and of making public the facts. He played his hole card.

In a different voice, he said, "I have just come from the bedside of the injured Secret Service agent, Bok." Curtilage walked to the window and reminded himself that his words were probably being recorded, so he chose them with care. "Agent Bok is not sure of his memory of the moments on the ground as the attackers charged his position. His uncertainty is understandable, since he was bleeding from the grenade wounds and everything was happening so fast." Curtilage paused to let that element of uncertainty sink in.

"He is not sure," Curtilage said slowly, "but he indicated that he

thinks he remembers Secretary Kolkov crawling over to the President, who was unconscious in the ditch. He thinks he recalls the secretary lying on top of the President, shielding him with his own body."

"He remembers that?" Nikolayev was weighing the possibilities in his mind.

"His memory is hazy — after all, the agent is in pain, partly sedated. When he's better, it could be he will remember that Secretary Kolkov died an heroic death saving President Ericson's life. Or," Curtilage shrugged, "he will remember that the secretary just died."

He let the Russian think it over. Curtilage knew that the card he was playing was attractive to the foreign minister. If Kolkov died a hero, then Nikolayev, Kolkov's chosen successor, would be strengthened inside the Soviet Union. The American secretary of state could not pretend to know what machinations were going on in Moscow at that moment, or the relative weight of the need for time against the introduction of the fact of Kolkov's heroism. Maybe, he allowed himself to worry, Nikolayev wanted to discredit Kolkov; maybe no heroism was desired.

"Ninety minutes," said Nikolayev.
"Immediately," snapped Curtilage. He had won.
"Thirty minutes."
"Done."

NEXT: The President's latest injuries revive the spectre of a scandal that was hushed up during his campaign.

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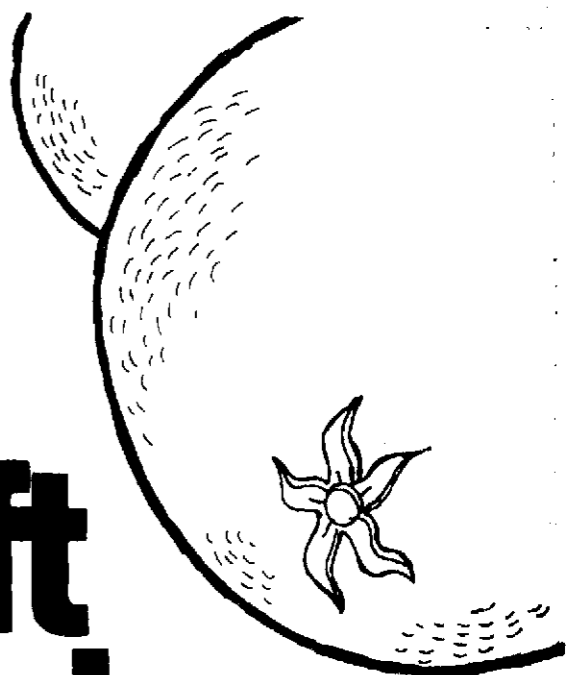
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