

A few minutes after eight, Clyde Dewey slogged down the alley in his overshoes. He fished around in his pocket for the key to unlock the back door. Then he let himself in.

At fifty-four, he walked like a man in his seventies. Years of fumes had taken their toll. He was rail thin with a dowager's hump. His face was gaunt, with brown leathery skin that made him look like a walking mummy. Food hadn't had flavor in years—not since his wife died.

He pulled open the door and stepped inside. He tossed his sandwich in the small fridge in the break room before going back outside. Pulling the lid off the garbage can, he found it empty except for a satchel lying in the bottom. He began to lean in to retrieve it, but got a whiff of garbage and decided against it. He went back inside for a coat hanger.

He twisted it into a hook to snag the handle. He expected the satchel to be heavy. It wasn't. Folding the hanger into a wad, he dropped it into the can, replaced the lid, and then slipped back inside before anyone noticed what he was doing.

Clyde toed off his galoshes and hung up his overcoat before walking into the tiny office. He dropped the leather bag on his desk and fished through the drawer for the key. It wasn't much of a latch, it wasn't much of a key, and it didn't matter anyway. Someone had cut the strap. Inside were three stuffed brown envelopes, each sealed at the flap with packing tape. One of them had been sliced open at the bottom. When pictures fell out, he looked.

In the first, a naked man and woman stood in water up to their knees, startled faces frozen by the pop of a flashbulb, caught in mid-turn toward the camera. The man looked familiar. Clyde studied the face more closely. He checked the rest of the photographs, and realized they were all of the same man, but not necessarily the same occasion or the same woman.

The man in the pictures looked like Senator Randall William Stennis, chairman of the Armed Services Committee. Hastily, he shoved the photos back in the envelope and taped it shut.

Waves of nausea rolled over him. He began to hyperventilate. Holding his breath, he forced himself to calm down and think this through. Stilton had told him to put this stuff in his safe deposit box. Clyde had the only key. Who else would know? It was clear the lawyer wasn't going to touch it because he didn't want dirt on his hands.