



## The Means: A Novel

By Douglas Brunt

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Tom Pauley is a conservative trial attorney in Durham, NC, who is tapped by GOP leaders to campaign for the Governor’s mansion. His bold style makes him a favorite for a run at the White House.

Mitchell Mason is the president-elect of the United States, pushed into politics by a father determined to create a political dynasty. Mason manages the White House with a personal touch that makes as many friends as enemies.

Samantha Davis is a child actor-turned-lawyer-turned-journalist, working her way up from the bottom in a competitive industry. She is determined and brilliant, and her dogged pursuit of a decade-old story could trigger a scandal that would upend the political landscape.

*New York Times* bestselling author Douglas Brunt’s “fast-paced, noirish novel” (*Library Journal*) creates an incisive portrait of ambition, power, and what it takes to win in the ruthless world of politics today.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"The twisted psyche and psychiatric instability of our politicians and our times is evoked convincingly in the new novel *The Means*. . . . [A] compelling psychic drama."—*Forbes.com*

"Gripping . . . Brunt's rousing and relentless pace keeps readers turning the pages through to a startling climax. [A] fast-paced, noirish novel."—*Library Journal*

"[A] tale of political intrigue . . . [Brunt] takes readers behind the scenes in a presidential campaign likely to interest even readers who don't have a deep interest in politics."—*The Free Lance-Star*

"A well-researched portrait of the incestuous relationships between the media and Beltway power players . . . that makes Heilemann and Halperin's nonfiction *Game Change* look sedate by comparison."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"I love this book. With great insights to the political process and human nature, *The Means* takes you into the backrooms and bedrooms of an anything-goes presidential campaign. If Doug Brunt wasn't a great novelist, he should be a campaign manager. This is a taut, thoughtful, and totally believable story of American politics at its best and worst." (Nelson DeMille)

"*The Means* is a must read for even the casual political observer." (James Carville, Chief Campaign Strategist for President Bill Clinton)

"Douglas Brunt's gripping novel starts full throttle and doesn't let up. This compelling story takes you into the harsh reality of hard-ball politics and cutthroat journalism. Some books are just for fun; some give you insight and depth about things you never knew, that you can't read in your daily paper. In *The Means*, you get it all and more." (Mike Huckabee, former Arkansas Governor, Presidential Candidate)

"Fans of *House of Cards* will appreciate *The Means* with its insider's look at a presidential campaign and a surprise ending I did not see coming."—Phillip Margolin, author of *Worthy Brown's Daughter*

"Many writers have tried but failed to capture the unique environment that is a presidential campaign, but Douglas Brunt's depiction of life on the trail is right on the money. *The Means* is a terrific, fast-paced novel that is not only entertaining but prophetic." (Bob Beckel, political analyst, former national campaign manager (Mondale), and former national campaign consultant (Clinton, Carter))

"Douglas Brunt's brilliant and evocative novel, *The Means*, draws you deep into a disturbingly believable world of immoral politics and money." (Ken Langone, co-founder Home Depot)

#### About the Author

Until 2011, Douglas Brunt was CEO of Authentium, Inc., a security company. His first novel, *Ghosts of Manhattan*, was a *New York Times* bestseller. A Philadelphia native, he lives in New York with his wife and three children. Visit [DouglasBrunt.com](http://DouglasBrunt.com).

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*The Means*

“There’s been a plane crash.”

Samantha had expected the receptionist to ask her to wait a moment or to offer her coffee. People are running in all directions around them but the receptionist sits in place, redirecting phone calls.

“Where?” Samantha asks.

“In the ocean, just beyond Staten Island. About five minutes ago.”

“Passenger jet?”

“Yes, I think it was one of the big kind. International.”

“Oh, no.”

“I’m sorry, but Mr. Mueller is not going to be able to conduct your interview today. He’s heading to the newsroom now. I can try to reschedule you.”

“Of course, I’ll just call you later. I’m sure you’re all busy,” says Samantha.

“Erica, cancel everything for the rest of the day.” A man has come around the corner from behind the receptionist at the speed of an Olympic power walker. He looks about fifty and has extra weight around his middle and face. He has a cell phone and his jacket is flapping behind him from the other hand. His tie is on but loose with the top button of his shirt undone and his hair is brown and full and looks like it hasn’t been cut for some time.

“Yes, Mr. Mueller.”

“Make sure Paul Becker gets in Control Four and tell him no commercial breaks until he hears from me. Send only emergency calls for me to Control Four.”

“Yes, sir,” says the receptionist.

David Mueller stops next to them but his manner keeps a hurried pace. “You Samantha Davis?” Gorgeous brunette with green eyes. He remembers hearing the deep voice with gravitas. He sees in person that she has kind of a big head with a little body and he knows from experience that translates well to TV.

“Yes.”

He looks at her for two seconds, making a decision. “Come with me.”

He moves from reception to the elevators without looking at her or thinking about her again, like she’s something he tucked into his pocket for later. Samantha follows behind.

Mueller continues yelling into his phone. “Is Ken Grant in the studio yet? Good. I want Jeffries and a crew out on Staten Island now. How far offshore did this thing go down? No? See if you can get any of our guys on a police or rescue craft. And charter our own boat. Divert our traffic helicopters out to the scene and get

some visuals on it. Get a crew to South Street Seaport, and put a crew on Ellis Island. We can get some coverage of the rescue boats coming and going. I'm stepping into the elevator, I'm going to lose you. Reach me in Control Four."

Mueller lowers the phone and they step inside the elevator. He pushes 1 and looks at Samantha. "You're going to see a newsroom in high gear. Stay next to me and observe."

"This is the best interview I've ever had." She worries this sounds insensitive but sees that Mueller, for the moment, is not as concerned with what happened as he is with covering what happened.

"Ken Grant is great on breaking news. He's also a pilot for Chrissake. He's perfect for this." Mueller is a general content with his battle plan. "It's Rolling Thunder now. News rundowns are in the trash and it's breaking news, live as it comes. This is what reporters live for. It's going to be nuts in there."

Samantha nods. They step out of the elevator and walk thirty paces to an escalator that takes them a level below ground. The security guards recognize Mueller and he and Samantha pass by into the newsroom.

The room is the size of a football field. The ceiling is about ten feet, which feels low in a room that stretches so far. Plain, square columns that are drywall around load-bearing beams look skeletal. They mark the perimeter of different pods of news teams.

The room is full of people sitting, standing, and running, holding up printed computer paper and yelling for each other's attention. Phones are ringing, everyone has one or two small TVs at their desk. Unlike usual, today the volumes are up. News people develop the ability to talk and listen at the same time.

To Samantha's left is a twelve-by-twelve-foot stage raised one foot off the ground, under studio lighting that hangs from tracks in the ceiling. It's an island of glowing TV lights in the darker newsroom. In a chair on the stage is a blond reporter in a red dress. She's reading notes and getting her makeup retouched.

Samantha has gone from the stark white lighting and quiet of the hallway to the newsroom full of spotlights and accent lights, desk lamps, and in any direction the glow of more than a hundred television and computer screens competes for her eyes. She's dazed and her senses work to catch up.

Mueller keeps power walking and she chases him. He cuts through the aisles that are created by the kind of desk furniture that connects to make rows and corners so the workers can have their own space for computer and phone but are crowded together.

A younger version of Mueller with no tie runs up to them. "CNN is reporting no survivors."

"Do we have that?"

"Jeffries is calling all his contacts at Port Authority."

"Tell him to move faster."

Thirty yards farther is another twelve-by-twelve-foot space, this one enclosed in glass walls. Standing inside under more tracked studio lighting is Ken Grant. His suit and hair are perfect. Samantha recognizes the evening news anchor for UBS-24. His makeup is more obvious in person.

They're taking a reporter hit from outside the studio and Ken Grant and Mueller exchange a nod. Mueller gives a thumbs-up and keeps walking through the pods of newsmen and women who are chasing information. In thirty yards more they reach the back wall of the newsroom and a set of doors. Mueller turns left then opens the door marked Control 4.

The hypnotic mix of the thousand noises in the newsroom behind her is cut by a single, violent voice from inside the control room. "Get that feed back now! We're taking her remote in thirty seconds!"

Samantha and Mueller enter and close the door behind them. Everyone senses Mueller has come in but goes about their work. The far wall is covered by a grid of 10" television screens, many showing live footage they can pull into the broadcast, others showing the broadcasts of competing networks. One screen is larger than the others and shows Ken Grant in the live chest-up shot that the rest of the world can see. In front of the wall of screens are three rows of six people each, seated elbow to elbow in front of computers and phones. Standing behind them all is the man who screamed and Mueller moves beside him.

The man leans down into the desk in front of him, presses a button then speaks into his headset. "Ken, in thirty we're going to Pam Roberts in Staten Island with an eyewitness to the splashdown." He uses an unnatural voice of forced calm.

He turns to Mueller and Samantha and nods. He looks about forty with short hair and ears so tight to the side of his head you can't see them when he looks straight at you.

Everyone talks in a hushed voice except this man. The room is lit only by screens. It is dim and closed like a submarine.

Mueller steps forward to a seated woman who just put down her phone. He taps her shoulder. "Get someone from Airbus and someone from Air France to come on with Ken. If Airbus won't come on, then get someone from Boeing and tell Airbus that's what we're going to do if they don't give us someone. It was an Airbus craft that went down so this is their chance to get their narrative out. May not go as well for them if it's Boeing doing the talking. And get someone from Homeland Security to cover the terrorist angle."

The woman has the phone back to her ear and nods yes.

"Where is Pam Roberts?" yells the man.

"Trouble with the feed. We need another minute," says a small but efficient voice.

"Shit!" Bodies shift in front of the voice as though shoved. He leans down to the same button then says, "Ken, I need a minute. Stretch."

The only screen with audio on in the room is Ken's and he starts a new thread that appears a natural transition.

"Typically in this sort of craft, the pilots will transfer control to the autopilot at four hundred feet, so at the altitude and distance traveled at the time of failure, the plane could easily have been on autopilot. Boeing and Airbus differ in philosophies regarding piloting and aircraft controls design. Boeing favors more pilot involvement. When the autopilot adjusts engine thrust, or speed, the manual controls on a Boeing craft will move while Airbus bypasses all manual controls." Ken Grant continues about cockpit design.

“Jesus Christ, get me Roberts. Grant can only do so much. We’re losing eyeballs.”

“Pam’s good.” The TV monitor marked REM 3 beneath it now shows an attractive black woman with a middle-aged white man in a flannel shirt by the Staten Island coast.

He leans in. “Ken, we have Pam.”

Less than a second later. “Right now we’re going to our own Pam Roberts in Staten Island, who is with an eyewitness to this tragedy. Pam?”

“Thank you, Ken. I’m here with Al Moses, who is a roofer in Staten Island.” The broadcast TV that had shown Ken now shows the picture from REM 3. One of the smaller screens on the wall shows the same image of Ken Grant, who is now reading papers and glancing at a live screen shot of Pam Roberts in front of him. “Mr. Moses, you were on a roof when Air France Flight 477 flew overhead.”

“That’s right. I’ve been doing the roof of this oceanfront home the last week. Three-story home and beautiful vistas. Beautiful.” Every viewer has their first experience with the word vistas in a Staten Island accent. “Sometimes I take a moment up here to watch things like birds and planes. Just for a moment, you know, but this one I watched the whole way ’cause I noticed it was at this funny angle, like.” He raises his forearm with his fingers straight and pointed up. “The nose of the plane was up the whole way, like it wanted to climb but wasn’t climbing much, just sort of plowing through the air.”

“Did you see it hit the water?”

“Oh my God, I did. It slammed right down in the water, right out there.”

“What did you see?”

“It wasn’t much of a landing. No disrespect. It just fell out of the sky. Normally, you land a plane, you’re moving forward faster than down. This thing was moving down more than forward.”

“Could you hear the impact?”

“Nah. Probably too much noise around here what with the beach and waves breaking and all. I could make out the white water kick up when it landed.”

“Could you see anything else? Flotation devices that released?”

“Nah. Once the white water settled down, it was just flat horizon from this far away. Couldn’t see nothing more then.”

She turns back to the camera. “Ken, back to you.”

“Pam Roberts in Staten Island. Thank you, Pam.”

While Pam and the eyewitness had been speaking, someone in the control room had started screaming about a statement from Homeland Security. People had gotten into the ear of both Ken and Pam to wrap the interview. Ken reads the written statement for the broadcast that says there is no evidence of terrorism as yet, that the department is investigating and, along with the FBI and NTSB, are headed to the scene to assist local

law enforcement.

“Where’s Airbus? Where’s Air France?” yells the man. Samantha has learned his name is Paul and he is the executive producer for this news hour.

“Paul, I’ve got a call from the husband of a flight attendant who was on the Air France flight.” It’s a male voice from one of the rows in the darkness in front of them. “He has a voicemail recording from the flight attendant, recorded as it was going down.”

People in the room shout hows and wheres and expletives.

“Verify it,” says Paul.

“He says he played it for authorities who are coming to his house. He wants it out to the media to make sure nothing gets buried in the investigation.”

“He called us? We need to verify this guy first,” says Paul. “Get the roster of the attendants on the flight, see if this guy can match the names. Have the Research Room get a phone listing for the flight attendant. Call the number back and see if the guy answers.”

Mueller steps to an available landline on the desk in front of him. “I can get you the roster. Give me three minutes.”

“Thank you, Dave. If we put that guy on the air and he starts yelling Ba Ba Boeey, I’m going to kill somebody.”

Samantha looks around the control room. Half the people are on phones in low voices, lining up experts and eyewitnesses to come on the newscast. The rest are preparing graphics and data for the show, researching information, typing editorial into the prompter to be read by Ken, after Paul has read it over first, though it is mostly just the names of the upcoming guests on the show. There are no scripts for breaking news and the anchor is ad-libbing.

The door behind her is solid metal with no window, so she can’t see the newsroom where Ken is seated in the glass box but she can hear him talking about Saint Elmo’s fire. “A luminous glow appears in the cockpit. It is generated by an electric field, often due to a thunderstorm or volcanic eruption. Sailors through the centuries have talked about it as an omen of bad luck as it would throw off compass headings.”

“Jesus Christ,” says Paul. “Get me somebody from Airbus.”

All of Samantha’s senses are devoted to the absorption of events and none to calculating the passage of time. Then she remembers to tap a text message to the associate lawyer assisting her on the two cases she’s currently working. She’s a litigator and new partner at Davis Polk. She had budgeted ninety minutes for the interview at UBS and now clears more room on her schedule.

A faxed page is handed to Mueller who hands it to the woman who is speaking with the husband of the attendant. Mueller turns to Paul. “You better screen this guy yourself.”

Paul walks around the desk and down the aisle to the woman and takes her phone. He crouches over the paper with the phone to his ear.



Three seconds later he drops the paper from his left hand and raises that arm, clenched fist with extended thumb.

Mueller is standing with arms folded in front of him as though he's surveying it all from a much greater distance, a faraway hill over a battle fought in preindustrial times when no weapon can reach him. "Jesus, this is TV gold." Only Samantha hears him. She looks at him, then back to the room.

The room has a heartbeat. The newspeople are having a different experience than the people to whom they are speaking. Under pressure, there's a shorthand between them, everyone must perform and no mistakes can be made, and it's when they're at their best and love their job the most.

Paul sprints up the short aisle, around the corner, and back to his place. He presses the same button in front of him. "Ken, we have a voicemail recording from a flight attendant to her husband in the last seconds of the flight while it was going down. Tease the recording, we'll have it in one minute."

Ken responds on air like a nickel in a jukebox. Samantha can't believe how smooth. He emphasizes the husband-wife relationship and their last words on earth.

The production reminds her of the image of a duck on water. On the surface, calm and beautiful while beneath the surface the bony, orange legs are thrashing like mad.

The pace, intensity, the spoken and unspoken teamwork to make a product with instant gratification. Millions of people not only watch it, they depend on it.

Samantha has the feeling people get when they find what they think they're supposed to do. Whether the feeling is real or rationalized, it's the idea that their whole life has been a practice for this calling.

Ken Grant continues. "I must warn you that in a few seconds we will play the recording of a voice message from Sarah Friar, a flight attendant on Air France Flight 477, to her husband, David Friar, in the final seconds of the flight. This recording is tragic and horrifying and you may want to turn down the volume or leave the room."

No viewer will move and Ken knows it. The screen cuts to a photo of Sarah Friar from her Facebook page and the lower third of the screen reads "Final Words of AF 477 Flight Attendant."

David, it's me. If you're there pick up. I want to talk to you. [pause] Something's wrong here, on the flight. It might be nothing. But it might be bad. I went to deliver coffee to the cockpit. They were . . . confused in there. Some sort of fight, argument. They ordered me out right away and I couldn't tell what they were fighting about. Now the plane is flying funny and I have a bad feeling. We're only a few minutes out but we're over water.

The recording goes silent for a few seconds.

Oh, God! David, there was a thud. Something banged against the cabin door. I'm on the flight crew phone outside the cockpit. It sounded like a body ran against the cabin door from the inside.

There is a beep as the message ends and a mechanical voice says "Next message."

David, please get this! We're not at altitude but we're standing at sharp angles to the deck. The passengers

are starting to realize something is way off.

There is a crack of hard plastic on hard plastic and many voices jump on top of each other but no words can be understood, only that there is fear and distress.

David! [She is yelling now, over yells in the background that are constant and more panicked.] The plane jolted. We're too low. We're getting . . . I think we're getting lower, it's hard to tell looking out. Mark, can you reach the captain? Try knocking on the door.

A "No" comes through more clearly than the screams.

David, I love you, I love you, I love you. Kiss our little babies for me. You kiss them, you love them. Take care of them. Help them remember me.

There are seven seconds of quiet. Nothing from Sarah, just the dull screams from the cabin around her. Sometimes a voice rises then falls back into the rest but words are never intelligible. The seven seconds feel much longer than that. There is the sound of a catch of breath near the phone then all noise cuts out. There is no sound of a crash, no explosion. Just silence.

Ken Grant holds the silence. He knows that silence propels the mind of the viewer. Cut off from sensory input, the mind is forced to become metaphorical, to conjure the scene for itself which is more powerful than to be provided the scene. The absence of noise from the television set creates a vacuum, the bodies of the viewers sucked toward the screen and the strange quiet, no longer propped up by Ken's voice.

Ken lets it run on for ten seconds. The control room is silent and unmoving. "David, are you there?"

"I am." The voice is a whisper.

"Thank you for sharing this with us. Our deepest sympathies. This is a terrible tragedy."

No reply.

"How are you holding up?"

"I'm not."

"I want to tell the viewers that you contacted us with this tape. Can you tell our viewers why you did that?"

"I want a full investigation into what happened. I want the media to make sure there is a full and open investigation."

Ken ends the interview.

"My God," says Paul.

"I have a spokesman from Airbus."

The hum returns to the control room and Paul is yelling orders again.

Mueller remembers Samantha is standing next to him. “Let’s take a walk.”

They exit the metal door and turn right to a conference room with a window out to the newsroom. Mueller opens the door and walks in. There is an oval table that seats eight and Mueller waves her to a chair. She pulls it back from the table to face him. He sits first but not because she waited for him. He raises his arms to say, Look around you.

This is her third interview with UBS News. Mueller is president of the news division and the last hurdle. She reminds herself of all the men in power she’s dealt with and impressed as a lawyer. She’s handled depositions of Fortune 500 CEOs and litigated cases in front of juries for billion-dollar settlements. She’s only thirty-four, but she’s been excelling in powerful circles for years already.

She has just told her senior partner that she’s considering a move out of the law. He’s still mounting an argument as to why a move to journalism is a mistake and waste of her talents. As gifted a litigator as he is, Samantha knows she’ll be immune to his protests. She loves the law but hates her life as a lawyer.

“I remember you from Latch Key years ago. I was too old for that show but my niece loved it. How old were you then?” asks Mueller.

She was a child actor from the age of eighteen months. First baby commercials, most of the time playing with dolls and toys. Then toddler clothes. At seven years old came her break—Sally, the seven-year-old daughter with attitude to a single, working mother of two daughters on the show Latch Key. Samantha had a deep voice that was so incongruous with her little body that the writers of the show used this voice as a tool in most episodes. Latch Key ran six seasons in prime time, made her famous, made her money, and made sure she was homeschooled by her real-life mom until she was thirteen, when Samantha insisted on a break from acting to attend an actual school for a while. “I was seven in the first season and it ran for six seasons.”

Humans form lasting memories as early as three years old. Samantha didn’t have the opportunity to remember getting her SAG membership card. Clearly it wasn’t her idea. Nor was it about her at all. It was about the nineteen-year-old girl who was waiting tables in Santa Monica and taking acting lessons who had given birth to Samantha and who then had the idea that her baby could be a child actor when she saw what a pretty face her baby had. And the nineteen-year-old former waitress turned stage mom was right. With enough force and will and compulsion, she was right.

When Samantha was a child, her face was rounder and people called her very cute. In her last seasons of Latch Key her bones started to show up as the flesh melted away. Bones in her cheeks and jaw made her face seem longer and less girly, bones in her shoulders and hips pushed aside her youth and prepared for the transition from child actor to real actor. Her mother controlled her exercise and her nutrition, brought in a special breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and Samantha ate with her mother by the set and not the other actors so that her mother could critique the acting skills and weight gain of the others.

Her mother didn’t complain about the bulimia in her twelve-year-old daughter until Samantha’s weight dropped below what was attractive on screen and the show’s director asked if Samantha was sick. But by that point the disease was caught. The years of psychological damage had taken hold. Her mother could find equal success in mentioning to a person with diarrhea that he ought not to crap so much.

“Any acting after that?”

“Just some smaller stuff, commercials mostly. By the time you become a teenager, you need to decide

whether or not you're all in. I wasn't." Samantha takes a breath. She didn't expect to be nervous for this interview.

By seventeen, Samantha had left acting and gone to college. From college it was law school. Three more years to prove she was more than a child actor. With each year, her relationship with her mother was more estranged.

Her first seventeen years in acting were about her mother. The next seventeen years in law were a reaction to her mother. This is her first choice driven neither by her mother nor by the damage her mother inflicted.

"Columbia Law. Impressive." Mueller smiles. "Partner at Davis Polk?"

She nods.

He leans back in his chair, interlocks his fingers, and rests his joined hands on his belly. "Samantha, why are you here?"

She knew this was coming. Lots of lawyers turn to journalism but most don't turn their backs on a successful law career in order to take an entry-level news job. But this question had been asked and answered by herself. "I want this job and I'll be great at it."

"You're a partner at Davis Polk. You're probably making a million bucks a year. In a few years, maybe two million. For a first-year news correspondent at UBS, I can maybe pay you six figures, barely. And that's if I think we're going to use you a lot." He pauses. "That's a big salary change. How are you going to pay your bills?"

"I'll manage." She has no family money, modest savings since she only just made partner, and a mortgage on a new apartment that is too big for a hundred-thousand-dollar salary. "Let me worry about that. All I'm asking is that you make a bet on me. A small bet."

"I've seen your tape," says Mueller. With TV broadcasting, it doesn't matter much where a person's degree is from. It's the resume tape.

Samantha paid a thousand bucks to a cameraman who is an old friend from L.A. to shoot her doing a fake news story. She scripted a hurricane disaster site and got herself in the mode of delivering closing arguments and appealed to the viewers of her tape to relate to the plight of the victims in the way she would appeal to the jury to award damages. "I'd appreciate your advice. What did you think?"

"It's rough as hell but there's something there." Mueller knew after watching it the first time that he wanted to hire her. She has that intangible star quality. You never know what makes it come across. You just know it when you see it.

He wants her and he'll pay more than a hundred grand if he has to. His mind was made up by the end of the initial handshake, as it is in all his interviews.

Mueller's manner changes as his internal timer for the meeting has gone off. "Anything else?"

"No, thank you. If I have any questions I'll email your assistant."

“Great.” He stands and they shake hands. “I’ll walk you out of the newsroom.” He leads her through the hive and to the security guards.

“Thank you.” They have another handshake which is an awkward one because neither feels it is necessary or is sure it will happen until Samantha decides it will just be easier to get it over with and she sticks her hand out.

He walks back toward the control room.

She takes the escalator back up to ground level and steps outside into the heavy, wet July air. She decides she wants a drink to celebrate and contemplate whatever the hell just happened in there. Whether it leads to a job or not, it was a moment. It was a step toward change. Real change to make her life happy again.

Heavy drinking is the one thing about a lawyer’s life that sits well with her. As is too often the case, it will be drinks alone. Sometimes to blow off steam or after a good verdict she’ll get drinks with the legal team. But if it’s something personal to celebrate, she has no one to go to.

I want this job, she thinks. Litigation to broadcast journalism is a proven path. If it isn’t UBS, it’ll be someplace else. I won’t stop.

She cabs to the Time Warner building, walks past the statue of the fat man and up the escalator to Stone Rose. It’s 4:30 p.m.

A waiter comes right over wearing a starched white button-down shirt and black pants. He’s deciding whether or not to flirt.

“Vodka martini up, slightly dirty.”

He nods. He decides to hold off on flirting until he has a better read.

Samantha’s cell phone rings. It’s Robin Paris, her friend and college roommate. “Sam, if I didn’t call you we’d never speak.”

Samantha laughs. This is not said with judgment, just an observation. “I swear I’ve been meaning to call you.”

“Thank God one of us is a pampered housewife,” says Robin.

“I knew I chose the wrong major.”

“Did you get the job?”

Samantha says, “I don’t know yet. He seemed to like me but it wasn’t much of an interview because they were busy covering the plane crash. It was more like an introduction to the news business and he was challenging me to like it.”

“What’s next? Another interview?”

Samantha says, “There’s no one left to meet. He’s the one who decides. Now either I get it or I don’t.” She

sips her martini, drawing the vodka up from the glass more than pouring it past her lips.

“You’ll get it, Sam. You’ll be the smartest, prettiest badass lawyer on TV.” Robin is the only daughter of a wealthy Boston family and she went to Andover, so admission to Harvard was not as significant as a rejection from Harvard would have been. She married a childhood friend and managing director at Goldman Sachs. She’s the rare person who’s taken advantage of an easy draw in life to be a happy person and not expect even more of the world.

“I may not get this one, but I’ll get something.”

“When are you giving your notice at the law firm?”

“Tomorrow. I’m sad but certain about it,” says Samantha.

“Good, Sam. We get one go-around on the planet. Don’t spend it filing legal briefs.” Robin plays tennis, goes to lunch, shops, manages two nannies for her two kids, and has the time to be a considerate friend. She carries the bigger part of the burden for nurturing the friendship and does it without real complaint because she loves Samantha. They have a curiosity for each other. There is the unusual combination of a separation of their lives mixed with institutional knowledge of each other’s lives that makes them perfect confidants.

Call waiting beeps on Samantha’s phone. She holds the phone back to look in case there’s an emergency legal filing required of her at Davis Polk, which is probable. The caller ID says unknown.

“Robin, I need to take this. I’ll call you later.” She presses to hang up and accept the incoming call.

“Samantha Davis.”

“Samantha, it’s David Mueller.”

“David, hi.” She pauses while her brain runs scenarios of why he could be calling and prepares her answers. Legal training. “Nice to hear from you.”

“Well, Ms. Davis. Do you always get what you want?”

“It feels like never, but that may be a neurosis of mine.”

“I’m calling to offer you a job.” Mueller knew he was going to hire her. He just wanted a few minutes to decide on the salary and terms. “It’s a three-year deal. One fifty year one, one seventy-five year two, two twenty-five year three. General assignment news reporter based in New York.” Mueller had upped his number because he wants to put a condition on it. He knows there are still people smart enough at his competitors to hire her if they see the resume tape. “One more thing. I need to fill this spot, so you have forty-eight hours to accept.”

“Okay.” She decided earlier that she would take any offer without pushing a negotiation on terms. Now that she has an offer, her instinct to drive a better deal is kicking in. She knows she’ll be a success. She can push either for more money or fewer years. “Is the three-year commitment negotiable?”

“We like three-year deals.” He pauses. “You don’t have an agent.”

“No.”

“Friendly piece of advice. Get one.”

I tried, she almost says and doesn't.

“I've got a forty-eight-hour window for you, so it won't matter for this deal, but you should get one soon. He'll tell you that three years is standard.” He continues. “Today was a plane crash. That's newsworthy but not consistent. The only consistent news we do is politics. Are you political?”

“Not really.”

“Bone up. Get steeped in the news, especially politics. I'll email you a few websites that you should read every day, and watch cable prime time. Bounce between channels and start with ours.”

“Got it.”

“Alright.”

“David, I appreciate the call. Can I call you at close of business tomorrow?”

“Sure. One more thing I want you to think about. This is UBS News. You can work packages for the network morning show and for the network evening news. No show has bigger ratings. Bigger exposure. Nobody. I also have UBS-24. Twenty-four-hour cable news where you can do legal, political, and general news reporting. There's a lot of real estate to cover here. Nobody has more real estate than I do. That kind of opportunity for growth and exposure is an important thing for you to think about as you start your career in this business.”

He's selling me! I can't believe this, she thinks. “I appreciate that, David. I also appreciate the opportunity.”

“Talk to you tomorrow, Samantha.” He hangs up.

“I got the job,” she says to her martini.

## **Users Review**

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