

Murder Through the Looking Glass

By Michael Danese

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The sun continued to play a cat and mouse game with the clouds, and at the moment, the clouds were winning. The nervous event organizers were hoping that everything would begin on time and end early.

The crowd had begun to trickle in hours ago, and now it had swelled to capacity. They were all here to see Senator Fred Buscaglia, who was scheduled to announce his bid for reelection today. It was finally showtime, and a woman walked up onto the stage and stood at the lectern. She adjusted the microphone down to her level. She was a tall, thin woman of about 40, with shoulder length brown hair. She was wearing a smart blue suit and black rimmed glasses.

“Good afternoon everyone, and thank you all for coming out today! I’m Linda Miller, your state representative. It gives me great pleasure to introduce your senator, Fred Buscaglia, who came from Washington this morning just to talk with you. So please, let’s hear a loud round of applause for Senator Fred Buscaglia!”

The senator erupted onto the stage with a burst of energy. He raised his arms over his head as the crowd cheered. He hugged the state representative and stepped to the mic. He adjusted the mic for his height. He was a large man, about six-three and 250 pounds. His balding head was graying at the temples. He was wearing a dark pin-striped suit and looked almost regal. He leaned into the mic and said, “Thank you Representative Miller! Let’s get right to it! With your help and support I hope to be reelected next November!” again he raised his hands above his head as the crowd burst into loud cheers.

In a split second a white flash struck the Senator. He grabbed for his neck as blood spurted as a shot rang out. The stage quickly emptied, and security converged on the Senator and moved him off the stage. They also smothered a young woman in the front row who had been shot by security. She had thrown the knife that was embedded in the throat of the Senator.

Sirens were blaring, and people were screaming. Several people were injured as the crowd scattered. Ambulances arrived and removed the bodies of the senator and his assassin and also tended to the injured.

“We interrupt your local programming for this news bulletin!” was heard on almost every channel. The media played the event in slow motion and provided commentary. There were stories on Senator Buscaglia’s life and career. The policeman who shot the assassin, Harry Stone, was lauded as a hero and interviewed.

“It all happened so fast, instinct just took over.” said Officer Stone. He was a slight man with red hair, probably on the force for just a few years. “I saw the woman throw the knife and I shot her. I was only a few feet away from her. I’ll never forget it as long as I live.”

CNN was the first to announce that a murder exactly like this took place several weeks ago in Madrid. A politician was killed by a young woman who threw a knife into the victim's neck from the first row of the crowd, then the woman was quickly shot.

As mass shootings now occur on a regular basis, and, unfortunately have become the new normal, this murder of a popular politician has caused renewed outrage from citizens.

"Nothing surprises me anymore," commented a small man in his 60s with long gray hair, speaking to a TV reporter.

"How did this happen?" asked a young African American woman being interviewed on the evening news.

"How could this happen?" asked a red haired young man to another television journalist.

To delve into these questions, we need to go back to 2002, when the country was still reeling from the attacks on 9-11-01. At that time, a small group of researchers at MIT were deep into a secret government project that they had been focused on for several years. The Looking Glass project, as it was called, was of high interest to a small group in the government.

The research team was experimenting with a derivative of lysergic acid diethylamide, or LSD. Their work had evolved to a state where they were able to implant experiences into the dreams of their volunteer subjects. People had almost virtual reality like dreams of being an astronaut, driving a race car, deep sea diving and more.

Things were going well until two subjects died of heart attacks while under observation. The university was outraged and canceled all funding for the project, even though the government pushed them to continue. The research team was disappointed and tried to fight back. They argued that the unfortunate volunteers, now victims, had signed waivers and were aware of the risks. The head of the research and development group wasn't hearing any of that and the plug was pulled, and the research was sealed. The team was reassigned to other projects and went their separate ways.

A graduate student that was supporting the team had other ideas. Oleg Borov continued his studies, and the next year he earned his PhD in genetic engineering. Oleg was about six feet two with short cropped brown hair. He was in fine shape due to his dedication to working out at the gym on campus. He had dark eyes and a scar on his cheek from a childhood accident.

After graduation he returned to his home in Tel Aviv and began working for a pharmaceutical company in the R and D division. Shortly after he started there, he began studying the files that he copied from the server at MIT. He was able to abscond with the entire Looking Glass project. He spent every free evening and weekend pouring over the massive files.

Oleg's dedication paid off when he isolated the algorithm that caused the hearts in the victims to explode. Soon he began to recruit some other scientists to join his little skunkworks team. They

mutated the drug mixture to a point where they could precisely control the dreams of the sleeping volunteers. Their goal was to introduce a new recreational drug that would make them all rich.

One of Oleg's colleagues, Svetlana Goravich was very interested in the project, and also in Oleg. She was a tall, thin pale woman with auburn hair pulled into a bun. She was a few years younger than Oleg, and he certainly didn't mind the extra attention from such a beautiful woman.

Svetlana was even more brilliant than Oleg when it came to experimentation. She suggested taking the project a step further, to use the drug to implant future actions into the brains of the subject. Oleg was skeptical at first, as he thought it came a little too close to playing God. Svetlana was able to seduce him to her way of thinking.

The next year, they had volunteers doing simple tasks, like singing out loud in a movie theater, or kissing a strange man at a bus stop. You know, the type of things that a carnival hypnotist would do. The people would have no recollection of their actions after the fact.

Two years later their project really took off. They were able to implant assignments into different people and have them carry out the activity months later via trigger words over the phone. They had three different people, in three different parts of the world, go to their local grocery store and buy blue cheese, put it in a shoebox and ship it to one of their friends. The friend thought this was some type of very cruel practical joke, which it was! But, when their friend told them about the stinky packages they had their validation.

It was around this time that Oleg asked Svetlana to marry him. It was a small ceremony and they seemed very happy to be married to their work and each other. A few months later, Oleg's true Israeli suspicious nature wondered if Svetlana slipped him some Looking Glass with a marriage suggestion imbedded. He never had the guts to ask her. Or the chance.

As you could imagine, it became difficult to keep a lid on their work. Soon the CIA saw some chatter about a dream drug. So did Interpol and the KGB, or at least what was left of them in Russia at that time.

The Russians were the first to identify the source. Being a strong Israeli ally, they had some leeway in Israel, so they quickly had agents grab Oleg and Svetlana. They threatened them with the death of their extended families to get their cooperation. Soon the whole project was in the hands of the Soviets.

Boris Valov headed the team that closely managed the young couple. He was an experienced agent with a scientific background. He was in his mid-forties, but had the physique of a man much younger. His hair was a mix of dark brown and gray, and his chiseled features and easy way made him a hit with the ladies. However, this facade hid a man with violent tendencies, who wasn't afraid to twist the arm of a woman to get his way.

Boris worked with Oleg and Svetlana to develop their drug to the point where extensive activities could be controlled and staged. They also expanded the team to add several of their top researchers.

The Russians extensively tested their new secret weapon. They used it to blow up a bridge in Poland, to cause a train to crash in Afghanistan, and to flood a town in Belgium. Needless to say, they were thrilled with the results.

Unfortunately, as the drug and related response mechanisms were perfected, Boris had no further use for Oleg and Svetlana. They were thought to know too much, and soon they were removed from the team. Their bodies were never recovered.

The Russians used their drug on several more tests, until their ultimate mission was identified, to murder the President of the United States. The Kremlin knew that this would take time, and they allowed their team adequate time to perfect their plan.

They started by developing the profile of the assassin. They decided it will be a highly intelligent American woman in her late twenties or thirties. She should be single, a loner, from a rural area. A shy introvert with low self-esteem.

They were lucky enough to identify a technology conference in Chicago that was described as a meeting of the top minds in the field. They vetted the large list of attendees with painstaking precision and identified 36 woman that perfectly fit their profile. They knew from their research that if they dosed 36, ten to fifteen percent of the subjects would follow through with the program. That would be perfect.

The Russian operatives decided to use the banquet on the closing night of the conference to administer the cocktail that would lead to their goal. Luckily the attendees wore name badges with bar codes, so they were able to track them to their seats. They had their agents hired as waiters through the agency who handled the food service for the venue. Each of the 36 received meals laced with the drug.

Later that evening, three of the women became sick, and two of them ended up in the hospital complaining of severe headaches. The rest of them journeyed to O'Hare Airport for their homeward bound flights.

The next week each of the women received a phone call. As soon as they were sure it was the women on the phone, they heard the trigger words, "The Reds will rise!"

Most of the women ignored the crank call and hung up. nine of the women replied, "Only with my help!"

The next day, each of the women who responded correctly received a mysterious package. They were confused surely with the contents. They looked for a return address, but there wasn't any. Each box contained fifty specially crafted throwing knives. Each knife was a small work of art. It was about eight inches long and made of porcelain. It was perfectly weighted for throwing.

The phones rang again. This time the voice said, "And now it begins."

Like clockwork, they brought their boxes to the area that they prepared for practice. They paced off about thirty feet and began throwing the knives. As you can imagine, none were very good at throwing knives! For the next several weeks they spent considerable time perfecting their technique.

Boris and his team never referred to the women by their real names, only by code names. They kept close tabs on the women with regular phone calls. When they were sure they had the women on the phone they would say, "Women of the world..." and if the women responded with, "Will rule!" they know they were still on board. If they didn't get the proper response, they were eliminated from the program. The Russians even had a pool going where they bet on their favorites.

The four remaining women were prime candidates for the task at hand. They were each rewarded with two more boxes of knives. They received phone call triggers to up their game in practice. They each developed into expert knife throwers. They could hit two-inch target thirty feet away, nine out of ten times.

Several months later, the team decided it was time for the first test. Janice Barnes, who the Russians called белый кролик, or White Rabbit, was chosen for this mission. Janice was a software engineer from Mississippi. She was 32, about five feet eight, with short blond hair. She was a runner and had the expected thin muscular body.

She received a phone call and when she answered she heard a single trigger word, "España." She knew exactly what it meant. She quickly packed her clothes and soon a driver picked her up and drove her to the airport. Before she got out of the car he handed her a packet with her passport and tickets. She boarded a plane for Madrid.

Janice was met at the airport and driven to a modest hotel. No words were exchanged between the driver and her. She was brought directly to her room. She had no interest in leaving the room until she received a phone call that consisted of a single word, "Hora!"

That signaled her to proceed to the lobby and wait. Before heading down, she slid a porcelain knife into her bra and pulled on a large sweatshirt. Soon a man arrived, and she went with him in his car. Again, they rode in silence. When they arrived, the driver handed her a pair of large dark sunglasses a ball cap with the logo of the Real Madrid Club de Fútbol. Janice slipped on the glasses and pulled down the cap brim. She exited the car and it sped off. She joined a large crowd slowly funneling into an arena.

Janice passed through the metal detectors and since she had no bag, she proceeded quickly. You see, the porcelain knife doesn't show up in detectors. She arrived early enough that she was able to get right up front, a few feet from the stage.

Soon the festivities began. A large bald man in a fine suit was speaking in Spanish to the crowd. The crowd responded with cheers and applause after each sentence. In a few minutes that man introduced another well-dressed man wearing a dark suit and a white wool overcoat. Janice

locked eyes on this man. The two men hugged, then the second man raised his hands above his head as the crowd cheered.

Janice already had the knife in her hand, and as the crowd cheered she threw the knife with laser speed and precision. It lodged in the man's carotid artery and his hand quickly went there as blood erupted from his neck and turned his white coat to scarlet.

At the same time, a security policeman shot Janice in the face, almost at point blank range. Janice and the man on the stage hit the ground at about the same time. The frenzied crowd headed for the exits as sirens screamed.

A few moments later, the policeman discreetly pulled out his phone and sent a text. "Mission completed. The test was a success."

So that, dear reader, brings you up to date on the events that led up to the assassination of Senator Buscaglia. You will recall that Officer Stone, the policeman that shot and killed the Senator's assailant was now being lauded as a hero. The truth is that moments after the shooting he also secretly sent a text that read, "Test successful." You see, Officer Stone is really a Russian agent that was installed in the police department several years ago with the express purpose of carrying out this particular task.

With two successful tests, the Russian team now had the confidence to put the wheels in motion for their long-held objective – the assassination of the President of the United States.

The next week a phone rang in rural Iowa. "This is Alicia," said a tall thin woman with short brown hair.

"The game is afoot," said a voice on the phone.

Alicia, whom the Russians called *безумный Шляпник*, or Mad Hatter, was their star performer. Through the cameras that they installed in her home and in her yard, they knew that, like the other women, Alicia had little or no social life. She didn't even have a cat or dog. She worked her tech research job from home, all online. She also spent many hours practicing her knife throwing, even when she was supposed to be working. She was an amazing thrower, and almost never missed.

When he received the trigger words she packed a bag. Soon a man came to pick her up. They drove the two hours to the airport in total silence. When they arrived, he handed her an envelope with a passport and tickets.

As with the women who carried out the first two tests, as soon as they left their homes, agents entered and removed all of the surveillance, the remaining knives and even any broken white shards that were in the practice areas. They left no signs of their connection to the women.

Alicia was met at Dulles International Airport in Washington DC by another driver. As you can tell, the Russians practiced their precision and each step was perfectly programmed. Alicia was delivered to a small hotel in suburban Washington.

At exactly 2:00 pm the next afternoon, the phone rang. She again answered, "This is Alicia."

A voice simply said, "The sky is red."

Alicia hung up the phone, picked up her knife and stashed it into her bra. She slipped into a bulky oversized sweatshirt. She walked to the lobby where her driver was waiting. She silently climbed into the car and it sped off. Thirty minutes later they were at a large park. The driver handed Alicia a phone, a Washington Nationals baseball cap, and a pair of large, oversized sunglasses. She pulled the brim of the hat low and slipped on the glasses. She tucked the phone into the back pocket of her jeans.

This phone is a key part of the Russia scheme. After she kills the president and her body is recovered, the phone will be turned over to the FBI. The FBI will find that it contains encrypted texts. The code will be difficult to break, but they will do it. They will find that the phone contains several texts between Alicia and a phone that is located in North Korea.

This operation is extremely important to Russia. The highest level of The Kremlin is carefully monitoring it. They know that when the US discovers that North Korea is behind their president's murder, the retaliation will be swift and with extreme prejudice. North Korea will strike back with all of their might, and when the smoke clears, Russia will be in the perfect position to rule the world, or what's left of it.

Alicia slowly passed through security and found her place at the rail in front of the stage. About an hour later the rally began. The first speaker was Senator Jennifer O'Malley from Virginia. She is up for reelection and this rally is key for the campaign. She is an attractive woman in her early fifties with a medium build and blond hair. She is wearing a blue pants suit and a large smile. "Thank you all for coming out today! I am so touched and appreciate it very much!"

She spoke for about fifteen minutes about her policies, accomplishments, family, and her promises for the future. Then she finished with, "Thanks again to all of you! I'm gonna shut up now because I know that you really aren't here to see me, you're all here to see our president! And it gives me great pleasure to introduce him to you now. Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States, Richard Wagner! Good afternoon Mr. President!"

President Wagner appeared on the stage. He oozed charisma as he hugged the senator. His blue suit was dazzling. With his movie-star looks, wavy salt and pepper hair and big smile, he already had the crowd won over.

Alicia already had the knife in her hand.

“It’s my extreme pleasure to be with you here today!” said President Wagner. As the crowd cheered, Alicia’s arm quickly raised to hurl her blade. At the same time a shot rang out and Alicia was shot in the temple at point blank range by a policeman.

Secret Service enveloped President Wagner and hurried him off the stage. Senator O’Malley shrieked as her face was splattered with blood. The frenzied crowd stampeded in all directions.

As soon as the policeman shot Alicia he cradled her and lowered her to the ground. He reached into the pocket of her jeans and slid out the phone. He left her on the ground and walked towards the exit. He discreetly dropped the phone to the ground, stomped on it twice, then kicked the pieces away. He took a few more steps as the panicking crowd jammed all around him.

As he walked, a gun was jammed into his back and fired. The policeman went down and was trampled by the crowd.

The Russians knew that their plan was dependent on every detail being in place. They certainly didn’t think that the weakest link would be one of their long-embedded agents. As it turned out, this agent, Officer Sullivan, at least that was his cover name, was in America long enough to become sympathetic to the country. He didn’t have the heart to allow this president to be killed and to disrupt the balance of power in the world. He knew that his partner, another embedded agent, would not let him get away with disrupting the plan. He knew he would pay with his life, but he did it anyway.

The Kremlin was furious, Boris and the entire team were being held accountable.

The FBI made the connections to the two other assassinations that used young women and porcelain knives, but they could never put the story together. They certainly had their theories and suspicions, but no evidence. The assassins were never identified. They carried no identification, their fingerprints were not in any registry, and their faces were destroyed in the shootings.

Senator O’Malley was reelected in a landslide and thanked President Wagner for risking his life to endorse her.

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