

WHAT IF

By David A. Summers & Gloria L. Summers

WHY I LIKE IT: *Guest editor ROBERT STANDISH writes: What if, indeed, I can't count how many times I alone have asked that very question. Stanley is a man that has a story to tell, he has proof, there is something here that could change the free world, he has uncovered a conspiracy but perhaps is getting too close to the web itself. Albert, a friend of sorts, easily dismisses the importance through his own selfish ignorance. The layers of possibilities to what the recordings could tell lead the reader down the world of espionage, conspiracies and collusion. Is it possible for a nation to orchestrate the future of a world power? The idea is enticing. The seductive power of one over another is much the same as the idea that the Russians could create a future as they see fit through their interference. I appreciate the idea that evil or success is never left to chance and greed's agenda will always seek a way to stack the deck. This collaborative work does well to explain how a simple plan to corrupt and control the future through greed is easy to believe, we think we see things as they are but do we? We think we know the ones we confide in but do we? I appreciate how what seems clear can be missed or interpreted wrongly. The twist of a forked tongue from the seductress to change political favor is a welcomed representation. "What if she's been assigned to lure him in, and then pull some strings so that he ends up in a mental hospital again? Yeah, what if? ". As they say don't hate the player hate the game- right well what if you hate the game because you know it's really a play- WHAT IF?*

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Albert wasn't going to let Stanley bring him down. He'd done the guy a big favor, he'd taken a risk actually, by letting him hear the recording he'd made. Someone

could have been listening in, the same way he'd been listening in on other tenants' phone calls. He could be evicted, maybe arrested.

So how did Stanley show his appreciation? Did he say "great stuff" or "you really got something big" or "now there's a woman who knows what's going on" or anything like that? No. All he did was make a nasty comment when Albert said he was crazy about the woman and wanted to meet her.

To hell with Stanley, or whatever his name really was, thought Albert. You think you've found a friend who understands what's going on, but as soon as you share something really important, he brushes it off like it was nothing. You tell him you've come across someone brilliant and even prove it to him, and what does he say? "Don't get near her." Then he said some other stuff, completely uncalled for. What was his problem?

Well, Albert didn't care what Stanley thought. He was going to find out who she was, and once he did, he'd think of a way to meet her. Right now though, he was going to listen to this last recording again. He loved the sound of her voice. She knew how to generate excitement, how to keep you listening and wanting to hear more.

Her brother, the guy she usually called, was pretty much a dud, never adding anything, just telling her to be careful, to slow down and look for evidence. That was okay, thought Albert, just as long as he didn't try to stifle her, to shut her up. He sat back in his recliner, got comfortable and hit the play button.

"Hey, it's me. Have a moment?"

"Sure. What's up?"

"Okay, people are always wondering why the Russians keep outsmarting us, right? It's like they know in advance what they can get away with. So you have to wonder, how do they know? Am I right?"

"Maybe."

"Well, I think I've figured out what's going on."

"Tell me."

"Okay, everyone thinks the Russians must have something big on him, and have threatened to reveal it if he doesn't play along, right?"

"Right."

"But common sense tells us this can't be it. What could they possibly reveal that everyone doesn't know already? Fooling around with women? Orgies? Owing millions to their banks? No, we've heard it all. They could threaten to reveal more of this stuff, and he'd tell them to go ahead, nobody cares. But they're smart, smarter than he is by a long shot, so they dangle a carrot instead."

"Money?"

"Of course money, that's what he wants, that's what his crooked pals want. What if the Russians have told him they'll give him the Russian luxury resort market with zero competition? What if they've told him that as long as he remembers who his friends are, he and his pals will make billions when the time is right."

"They promise him money, that's the idea you called to tell me about?"

"No, no, that's not why I called. The money's the obvious part. Everyone knows he'd sell us out for money."

"Okay, so where are you going with this?"

"I'll tell you. Here's the part people haven't realized. The Russians know he's unstable, just as well as we do. They know he could go off the rails, and if he does, who knows what he might do? He could go rogue on them, and if he did, they might lose their advantage. You with me so far?"

"Yeah."

"Okay, now the question is, how are they going to keep him on track, how are they going to keep him from doing anything really crazy? Think about it. They've got a golden opportunity, and they don't want to blow it."

"I'm listening."

"Here it is. What if they've put someone inside, someone right beside him, someone who can feed them information about what he's thinking, what he's planning. They could anticipate his every move, and whenever he seems ready to do something really crazy, something that would threaten them, they could rely on their person inside to calm him down, nudge him back onto the right track."

"Are you saying they've planted a mole, a spy?"

"I'm saying if the Russians wanted an advantage, putting one of their people right next to him would be the smart move."

"Okay, but who would they plant?"

"This is where it gets interesting. What if it's his wife?"

"Whoa!"

"I'm serious. What if they knew years ago that someday he'd make a run for the top? What if they figured out exactly the kind of woman who'd appeal to him? What if they found the right woman and recruited her? What if they promised her she could have anything she wants if she carries out an assignment for them?"

"That would definitely get her attention, but still...."

"What if they told her she could use her modeling career as a ruse get into the country? What if they told her that after she got here, it was just a matter of getting close to the target and then stroking his ego?"

"Wait a minute. He met her years ago, long before he decided to run. How could the Russians know he was the guy they needed to target?"

"If they just left it to chance, of course it would be a long shot, but what if they didn't leave it to chance?"

"Go on."

"What if they used one of their assets to get close to the guy and give him the idea of running? What if they made sure their asset knew all about the guy's ego, all about his greed? What if they told their asset to use what he knew to work on the guy until he bought the idea? Sure, it could take years, and it might not pan out, but think of what's at stake."

"But he's still got to meet the woman, right? How do they bring them together?"

"We know when and where they met, right? What if their asset knew their target would be at this particular party on that particular night? What if their asset greased the wheels to make sure she could get in? What if they said to her, it's all set up, now all you have to do is make sure he sees you, then use your beauty and your charm to lure him in?"

"Yeah, but do you think she'd go along with it, once she actually lays eyes on him?"

"What if they warned her in advance that she'll find him repulsive? What if they told her it's her assignment to lure him in, repulsive or not? What if they reminded her that if she succeeds, she'll have all the money she wants for the rest of her life, just as long as she remembers she's working for them?"

"She might wonder what happens to her if he runs, but doesn't win."

"What if they told her not to worry about that, because if he runs, they'll make sure he wins."

"Okay, then what?"

"Then what? That's easy. What if she's giving the Russians everything she learns as we speak? What if she's telling them what he's thinking, what he's planning, day by day, maybe hour by hour?"

"Are you saying all this is true?"

"I'm saying what if, that's all, just what if. But if it's true, it would explain a lot, wouldn't it? Look at what's happening. The Russians do whatever they want."

"Maybe you're right, but here's my own what if. What if he figures out that his wife is a Russian spy?"

"What difference would that make? She could even tell him she's a spy, and what could he do? If he threatens to throw her out, she lets him know she'll tell the world he's been bought by the Russians, and can prove it. He'd end up in jail."

"I don't know, sis. I'd think twice before about going public with this."

"I'm just saying what if, right? Nothing wrong with saying what if, is there?"

"Just keep it under wraps for a while, okay? You need evidence before you tell anyone but me."

"I hear you. But this isn't all. I've got one more what if."

"Yeah?"

"What if she's a reptilian? She and the top Russian guy both."

"Wait a minute now."

"You want evidence, right? Okay, let me ask you this. How can you detect reptilians, even when they disguise themselves?"

"From what I've read, all you need is a good look at their tongues. They'll be forked, like a snake's tongue, sort of flicking in and out."

"Right. Now tell me if you've ever seen a photo of her with her mouth open wide enough to get a good look at her tongue?"

“Uh....”

“Exactly. You never have. What if she’s making sure no one can see her tongue? Isn’t that proof enough?”

“Listen, you’ve got to be careful with this, I mean it. Someone could be listening. The Russians maybe, or even his people. Or hers.”

“Listening? Of course they’re listening, but what can they do without compromising their operation? What if I’ve already given my lawyer a sealed envelope with all the proof in it? What if I’ve left instructions to send the envelope to all the news outlets if something happens to me?”

“You know you’re playing with fire, don’t you?”

“Hey, I can’t talk anymore. The dog needs to go out. Later.”

Albert sat for a while, savoring what he’d just heard. Jesus, talk about connecting the dots! She’d absolutely nailed it! If he could only meet her, he thought. The two of them would be great together, he could feel it.

Albert’s reverie abruptly ended when Stanley’s final words came back to him. Why did Stanley have to bring up what happened the last time he thought he’d found someone? Stanley knew he’d never forget. How could he? He’d been stuck away in a mental hospital for two months, thanks to that woman’s scheming. There’d been no need for Stanley to bring it up.

Or maybe there had been, he thought. What if Stanley was right, and this new one is just like the last one? What if she’s been assigned to lure him in, and then pull some strings so that he ends up in a mental hospital again? Yeah, what if?

FINIS

AUTHORS’ NOTE: *This story was written with Stephen King’s top twenty rules in mind, in particular, Rule No. 1: First write for yourself, which we did, amusing ourselves from beginning to end; and Rule No. 20: Write to enrich your life and the lives of others, which we tried to do, through humor. As for what inspired us, you’d have to listen in on one of our conversations. All questions would be answered, except “how do these two stay out of trouble?”*

AUTHORS' BIO: After teaching psychology for several years and practicing law for even longer, David Summers is retired and living in the Pacific Northwest where he writes short fiction, hoping he's not causing his Knox College literature professors, now long departed, to spin in their graves. His previous work, usually fairly dark, has appeared in *The RavensPerch*, *Thuglit*, *Out of the Gutter*, *Shotgun Honey*, *Red Fez* and *Trembling with Fear*. His co-author (and sister) Gloria Summers lives in a small town in the Midwest, often serving as his silent collaborator.

EDITOR'S BIO: Robert Standish is an aspiring writer and devoted father of three. After several years in the film and television industry in Canada, he has had the chance to meet some amazing people, travel and experience things, not for normal consumption. As a camera assistant and operator he has been in the line of fire on many occasions and inside explosions and crashes, just to name a few incredible opportunities. 'Chalk Outline These Thoughts 1 and 2 and a fiction novel 'The Secrets Men Keep', most recently the creator of a collection of poetry entitled 'The Passion Hidden Within'. (*Amazon and Kindle*) I have found most recent success with three poems published on *Terror House Magazine* and soon a short fiction story will be published in February, it is my hope to extend and expand my exposure and develop as many relationships as I can. Now transitioning into a creative writer who has self-published four works and counting, Robert is setting his sights on the next project. His story **IF** was published in Issue 2 (Fiction).

