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THE TREASON OF JOE GATES

By Ralph Sloan

YEAH, I'm the guy, I guess. Yesterday I was a White House custodian, just a happy broom and mop jockey with a Security scrubbed history and a clean conscience. Today I don't know. People I never heard of call me a traitor. The F. B. I. even asked my little girl "does daddy talk about Marx and Lenin around the house?"

And I can't figure it out. Since you're reporters I'll tell it once more, then, honest, I've gotta sleep.

I been workin' at the White House about a year now. Cleanin' the President's office and anti-room is part of my job. I think that's why I stayed on. Goin' in there and switchin' on the lights did somethin' to me. I'd look

Illustrated by Joseph Eberle



around and think, "History was made here. Right here. Today!" I'd get a patriotic lump in my throat. And sometimes I'd sit a minute in the President's chair and make like I was offerin' the Ambassador of Parkistan a cigar.

Well, last night didn't start no different. I dusted and swept around. I waxed the kitchen and finished the halls and cuspidors and was carryin' the vacuum into the anteroom when the President himself brushes past me and hurries straight on into his office. And he ain't alone neither. There's a flyin' wedge of Secret Service and secretaries right behind him. They all rush past me and for a minute it's like watchin' telephone poles from a fast freight.

No sir, I've never been a hobo. That's just an expression.

Well, I was stymied until the offices emptied. You see I always do the President's office last. He works late pretty often an' I figger it ain't good protocol to plug in the vacuum while he's squeezin' the budget. It was late and I'd already eaten lunch, so I just sat down in the hall and waited. Pretty soon I could see somethin' big was comin' off. Congressmen started runnin' in and you could tell they'd been pulled from bed and other places. And then. . .

No sir, I don't say 'other places' to slur congress. There was a Senator carryin' some cards. He threw 'em into the wastebasket, peevish like, before going into the

President. Yes sir, I did later. Full house; sixes over queens. Yes sir, canasta I guess.

Anyway, about an hour had gone when the Army huddle arrived. There were generals and colonels walking as though they had only one pair of pants: tight against this guy in the middle like a miser holdin' a dime. And he. . .

No sir, that ain't an innuendo an' I don't think the government's tight. The government's fine; its a great country. I really like my job, honest to God. Please let me finish. I need to sleep.

Now, this guy in the center was clumpin' along in what looked like a diving suit with the headpiece off. He looked tired and had a stubby beard like he hadn't shaved for a couple of days and he was carryin' a small package.

Yes sir, you're darned right I took a lot of notice. How many people do ya think visit the President in the middle of the night wearin' a diving suit? No, I'm not gettin' sarcastic. I'm just tired and my name ain't Buster. It's Joe Gates. No, I wasn't named after Stalin.

Well, after the Army went in, the Secret Service buttoned the offices up tight. Nothing I could do. I just waited. After awhile they sent out for food and. . .

No sir, I don't have no confederate tappin' wires. I figgered they'd sent for food when I saw the cook bring in sandwiches. And another thing. Anybody who says I tried

bribin' the cook to smuggle a camera into the conference is a liar. All I did was ask him for a sandwich. I think he'd of given me one too if some Secret Service guy hadn't hustled him right on in.

Two hours went by and the meeting got noisy. I was tired and hungry and I could imagine the mess they'd leave for me.

No sir, I don't mean political. I'm talking about the floor.

Anyhow, they were gettin' loud inside. I wasn't tryin' to listen, but I did hear "Rockets, phooey!" mentioned and "protective tariff". A minute later the senator from Wisconsin shouted "It'll ruin the country." He sounded real mad to me. Politicians call it "indignant," I guess.

Sir, I knew it was the senator from Wisconsin because he would say a couple of words, then stop and start over again twice as loud. Nothin' subversive about it. I remembered him from one of those radio roundtables.

Well, right after the Senator sounded off, things seemed to fly all to pieces and the conference broke up and congressmen came streamin' out and some of them were joking and lookin' happy and some of them weren't. The Army hustled off their divin' suit and I remember the Senator from Wisconsin and some congressmen from Washington and California and other states I don't remember marchin' like pallbearers. There was a fellow with them

named George something-or-other who's a big wheel in the dairy lobby. They looked worried and I heard them talk about calling congress into special session and . . .

No sir, this George ain't a pal of mine. He brought over a couple of cases of cottage cheese cartons for the White House staff once. Creatin' good will, he said. Except one of the cases broke open and made a mess on the carpet. He was pretty embarrassed, but I'd just come on work and I got it cleaned up before anyone noticed. He took my name and a week later he sent us five gallons of frozen custard. No sir, just the custard. Yes sir, I'm sorry too. We'd like to have a freezer.

Well, the President was the last to come out and he looked. . . No, never mind. I'm too tired to explain that one.

I went in and started cleaning up the office. I hoped there'd be a sandwich left, but there wasn't. Just some cheese and stale crackers. I found a cup of coffee that was still warm, then started emptyin' ashtrays and gettin' ready to vacuum. It was already two hours after quittin' time.

Now here's the part that all seems to run together. I still don't understand it myself. I've told it to the F.B.I. and the Secret Service and Special Security and the C.I.B. They even phoned the President at some dinner in New York and I told him.

Yes sir, I'll tell it, but this is the last time even if they hang me. No sir, I don't think they will. Right now the Armed Services have first call and they want me shot.

Well, I'd just plugged in the vacuum and begun suckin' the crumbs and cigar ashes off the carpet when two Secret Service men came into the President's office. They didn't say anything and I was still sore about not gettin' a sandwich out in the hall there, so I just kept vacuumin'. Pretty soon I noticed them lookin' around wild like. They started moving things about, furniture and things, and rumaging in the wastebasket. When they took to pullin' drawers outta the President's desk and emptyin' 'em on the rug, I got real sore. Here I was three hours overtime; tired and hungry and these guys were messin' things up faster'n I could

clean. I turned off the vacuum and asked them what the heck do ya think you're doing. Then they told me.

That's it fellas. I haven't had any sleep yet and I haven't eaten anything either. But I want you to know I was in this by myself.

But look, how could I know the Army diver had come off a rocket trip to the Moon? And nobody told me that package was a chunk of moon real estate? How was I to figure somebody would forget and leave it lyin' around? And who'd ever believe a thing like that in the first place?

Yes sir, hangin's too good for me, but as I said, the Armed Forces are ahead. I don't much care. They got my cell ready now and I'm pretty tired. One more thing though. The dairy lobby gave out that it was smelly and flat. It wasn't. It was pleasantly sharp. Like Roquefort.

The End