

The Silent Watchman by William Wyant

Part 8. Betrayal

Special from the Euro Press Syndicate

LONDON – A senior member of the EPS team has been implicated in unethical practices regarding a network of investigative reporters that has been furnishing information obtained on background and from confidential sources to people highly placed in illegal drug and weapons smuggling and sales. The charges are rippling through the news media, and critics are leaping at the chance to break down the pedestal from which journalists observe and report, often caustically, upon those they disfavor. The criticism coming from governments whose press is tightly controlled is especially harsh. EPS promises a full investigation and, if improprieties or illegalities have occurred, to fire or prosecute all who are involved. The person implicated has been placed on extended leave and barred from access to EPS facilities and operations.

Previously

“I accept what you say,” murmured Simon Stoddard while he looked intently into the far reaches of his exquisite *Deus Ex Machina*. Amos Sanson had just finished briefing him on the current status of his watch over the performance of Joselyn Prescott and her relationship with Ariana Lentz. “I do wonder somewhat over your appearing to be a bit hesitant to say directly whether you believe Prescott’s role in this caper is as damning as I am led to believe by others whose opinions are expressed with a greater sense of certainty and whose positions suggest that they should know the story behind the story.”

“Simon, we have not yet reached the point of drawing conclusions. I believe the facts as I have related them are based on sound observations by competent observers, but all the facts are not yet known. You asked for an up-to-date situation report. I have offered no less ... *and no more*. The ‘certainty’ you speak of may exist; but, I and my colleagues are prone to probabilities and our thoughts have not yet progressed to ‘highly likely.’ Even if this were an exact science, we would not visit upon you a semblance of ‘certainty’ until we think our collective opinions pass on to ‘highly likely.’ Even then, some element of error will be present. Until then, what I have given you is our very best assessment.”

Turning to face Amos across his imposing desk, Simon replied, “I readily accept your report at face value, and as you suggested, I shall hope to take no action until you deliver a more confident finding. I am certain, however, that you appreciate that occasionally I must act on information less certain than either of us would like. Alas, the forces and vagaries of daily life. When may I expect a report having a greater expectation of certainty?”

“I believe we are close, Simon; and, I will know more when I return from the Bay of Biscay in a week or so. In the meantime, I will send you some of what I get from Ms. Jesus. But, we both know that we are safer here than through the ether, so her transmissions will be cryptic and brief, details to await my return.”

“Have a merry time, my friend. Vaya con Dios.”

“Adios, mi amigo.”

Ariana Lentz sat comfortably across from Joselyn Prescott in the arrangement of coffee table surrounded by sofas and chairs in Joselyn’s posh London office, explaining the clear and circumspect network of contacts she and Marcello Barcqe had forged in Latin America and linked with selected well-placed members of public, private, and non-profit organizations in the United States and Europe. The network was virtually invisible because it focused upon assistants and associates rather than the much more visible principals they served. Through this network Ariana and Marcello acquired intimate details of the inner workings of many organizations and agencies, generally on background and guaranteeing anonymity, and access to their principals for on-the-record interviews. A few loops in the network entered the gray and black areas where un-named “officials” authorized and oversaw “plausibly deniable” covert actions, some of them legitimate in that an “authority having jurisdiction” controlled them while some fell far below the radars of public oversight.

This was not an unusual arrangement for highly reputable reporters with channels of communication reaching into the highest levels of enterprise and capable of commanding the attention of broad swaths of the media band width. What was unusual was the nature of some of the activities into which Lentz and Barcqe delved and the stark reality of some of the principals on various sides of the blurred boundaries of legality and life. Together, they dealt with much of significance.

Joselyn Prescott knew many of the markets for much of that significance, and she was about to invite Ariana Lentz to join her in servicing those markets.

“Ariana, you and I have an excellent track record together. We have scooped the competition several times in the last year or so, and your features have been received very well by our readers. Marcello’s contributions have deepened the trust in your reporting, but it has been your range of expertise dating back to the seventies and spanning two grand generations of terrorist activity that has sealed the deal with those of our readers who have risen to positions of prominence and power during the last quarter century. They are now in charge at the highest levels of private, public, and non-profit enterprise around the globe, and they want to know things about things that are beyond the view and ken of our general readership. Recently, a select group of our most prominent colleagues has offered them a special subscription service: a line of reporting and analysis that reaches far beyond today’s headlines and back-page features. As the managing editor of that group, I have been authorized to offer you membership. There are, however, very stringent membership requirements, and severe sanctions for betraying the trust and confidences of this group. So, I recommend that you think very carefully before replying to this offer.”

“Does the offer include Marcello?”

“Not at this time. This group is based on the Continent, and prefers to stay within the boundaries of the EU. It does, however, wish to reach the far ends of the earth; therefore, it intends to draw its journalistic expertise from EU-based professionals who have a keen grasp of world affairs and their impact on Continental interests.”

“How long is the offer on the table?”

“Twenty-four hours.”

“May I consult with others in coming to a decision?”

“We wish that you keep this strictly between us. Some of my colleagues get quite nervous at this stage of negotiation. The membership and work of the group are highly confidential, and the members intend that they should remain so. The offer is not ever tendered to anyone who is unfamiliar with the full nature of such *confidences*.”

“Thank you, Joselyn. The offer is intriguing; I am both honored and flattered. I appreciate the nature of this offer; and, most particularly, your trust in me. I shall reply simply yes or no well within twenty-four hours.”

Twelve hour later, Joselyn Prescott received a brief affirmative text message from Ariana Lentz.

Early on a beautiful day a few days after leaving Simon Stoddard, Amos Sanson breakfasted with Jack Kavanaugh and Lillian de Vizcaya in a familiar café overlooking the Bay of Biscay in Northern Spain. Sanson opened their quiet conversation with a cryptic overview of the concerns he shared with Simon. Irish Jack had exchanged knowing glances with Lillian throughout the briefing, so Amos was looking forward to what they had to say.

“Some close associates in London have suggested to us that certain high-level industrial and political interests are rumored to be particularly well informed these days,” began Kavanaugh. Picking up the theme, Lillian said, “Conversations among a few Basque industrialists have surfaced similar information, and a bit of concern that a small group of London insiders is stealing a march on the EU. Perhaps Jack and I should visit the English Isle for a bit of see and hear.”

Sanson interjected, “Simon is somewhat worried that you two should not be noticed in the UK just now.”

“Simon is always ‘somewhat worried’ about something or other,” replied Irish Jack with a typically Irish grin and lilt to his voice. “The lads have been pretty cooperative for a while, and folks from Madrid’s upper echelons are vacationing along the Bay with growing frequency. ETA and the PIRA appear to be out-of-sight-out-of-mind for the moment, perhaps because drug cartels and Islamic terrorists have shunted them off the stage.”

“Jack and I have not taken the boat out for a while. A trip across the Channel would be invigorating this time of year; and, as you can see from here, a goodly number of sails are decorating our beautiful bay.”

“I understand; however, as a rising tide raises all ships, their general heightened level of security may challenge your usual degree of situational awareness,” replied Amos.

“Ah,” exclaimed Jack with a quiet intensity, “a trade-craft field exercise. Are we up to it, dear Lillian?”

“How shall we know if we don’t set sail?” inquired Lillian with mock solemnity.

“Then it’s settled,” said Jack with equal mock sincerity. “Amos, we promise a heightened level of situational awareness to more than match their heightened level of security, and a thorough report at this table at this time next week.”

“Until next week then, Vaya con Dios.” With a slight nod, Amos Sanson rose and departed. They won’t listen, he thought, and they will not resist a challenge. There are some characteristics of those devoted to *the cause* that invariably prevail over caution.

For the next week, Amos Sanson disappeared into the varied landscapes of Iberia. He had not ever simply travelled for pleasure; always he was on mission, pursuing specific objectives, focused upon someone else’s desires. But, for a week, a week that passed all too quickly, he roamed along the pathways of the mythical knight-errant, Don Quixote de la Mancha, Some spots do not change.

“Your concerns are well founded,” began Lillian de Vizcaya a few days later while Irish Jack and Amos sipped café au lait and listened intently in the pre-dawn gloom of the empty café overlooking the Biscay. “The arrangements are arcane, and the security measures broad and deep. The network is extensive, the product is very highly regarded, and the patrons can easily afford the expenses. The legal basis for the organization, an international non-profit research and education foundation, is described as ‘impeccable, owing in large measure to the quality of the work and reputation of the DC-area attorney of record.’ While the organization is highly secretive, it is legitimate and its principal patrons include leading industrialists and financiers across the globe. They can afford the best, they are capable of recognizing the best when they see it, and they will settle for nothing less. Joselyn Prescott is well thought of, but she is not at the pinnacle of the operational framework. She runs a good show. But, there does appear to be a significant and especially profitable subset of the customer base that plays on the dark side. And, Ariana Lentz has replied affirmatively to her offer.”

Sanson asked, “How confident are you in the sources and the information?”

After a brief pause, Lillian replied, “I cannot judge the quality of the information because I am not fully aware of the situation; however, the sources are highly reliable. With that in mind, I believe the report to be likely. I hesitate to say highly likely because, again, I have little

personal knowledge of the topic. Those of you who understand the situation will have the final say in the matter.”

Irish Jack leaned forward and whispered, “Lillian, explain to Amos without burdening him with too much detail, why we have such high regard for the sources.”

Lillian motioned to the gentle soul lingering out of earshot behind the bar for another cup of coffee, sweet with warm cream. After the waiter had placed it in front of her and returned to the place behind the bar from which he could see the broad avenue between the café and the low parapet overlooking the bay, de Vizcaya responded to Kavanaugh’s suggestion: “Some of us who have first-generation links to those having long-time associations in causes that remain foremost in some minds can call upon assets that have survived a lifetime in the shadows. Some of them are among those who play significant roles in current affairs both on and beneath the surface, including but not limited to the organization we have been discussing. We trust them, they trust us, our lives depend upon this trust.”

“I understand, and accept the information without reservation,” said Amos.

Looking more directly at Jack than at Amos, Lillian inquired, “Then, Amos, you will discuss with our mutual patron the importance of the pathway through Ms. Lentz?”

“And,” added Jack, “do so with discretion regarding our associations?”

“Yes,” replied Sanson. “This concludes the agenda that brought us together this morning?”

Jack smiled as he replied, “We have a bit of a bonus, Amos. While Lillian flitted from here to there, I visited a mutual friend. The special facilities in the pharmaceutical plant near Bilboa have come on line. As such facilities tend to do, they added several internship positions to the R&D activities. We do not know who is filling those positions, but Lil and I thought these photographs might interest you.” As Amos leafed through the dozen or so photos, Jack continued, “They constitute a mixed group, some young graduates of French and German technical schools featuring practical science and engineering programs, and a sprinkling of somewhat older men and women whose nationalities are yet to be identified. Some appear to be of Mediterranean descent, some may be Latino, at least two are European or North American. We are confident that you will find some use for the photographs.”

“We hope you will not think it presumptuous of us to add to this morning’s agenda,” added Lillian with a slight smile.

“Not at all, my dear, not at all. An occasional pleasant surprise brings its own gifts.”

“By the way, Amos,” asked Irish Jack, “how was your visit to our beautiful countryside while we were away?”

“Delightful, Jack, and perhaps profitable: I’ll know more when I visit Guanajuato next week.”

Rising, Amos Sanson extended a hand to each of them. Jack firmly shook Sanson’s left hand; Lillian softly touched his gloved right hand. Amos departed as the morning sun began to enter the door through which he left. Somewhat uncharacteristically, noted Jonathon Cotswold Kavanaugh, Amos Sanson, his back to them, waved his right hand. Lillian de Viscaya said, almost to herself, “The old man is softening a bit?” Quickly, Irish Jack looked her in the eyes and said, “Don’t you bet on it, dear Lillian.”

“In summary, Simon, it may be worse than you suspected. My inquiries touched only upon the situation in London and are sufficient to cause me a bit of angst over conversations with Marcello. He has been a welcome adjunct to our work, but I and some of my associates do not wish to work with him while he is engaged with Lentz. Joselyn Prescott’s role with this lucrative non-profit research and education foundation is clear, and Ariana Lentz is in her stable. Ours is but one of the theaters in which you play your varied parts so I cannot tell you how far the system extends. Though the legal construction may seem unassailable, one can only speculate regarding its vulnerabilities to special investigations and operations in future terror, drug and crime suppression activities. Risks abound; especially on the highly charged American political stage. Savvy risk management suggests that I opt out of deals involving any connections to Lentz, including under present arrangements, Marcello Barcqe.”

“Thank you, Amos. The report, disturbing though it is, is what I asked for. I will not ask you or your associates, insofar as I know them, to work with Marcello under current circumstances.

As Sanson departed, Stoddard punched a single key on his phone, and after a moment began to speak jovially: “Marcello, Simon Stoddard here. Some very important information has come to me, and I wish to share it with you at the earliest possible moment ... no, it cannot be discussed over the phone. Will you be in my vicinity anytime soon? ... Excellent! Fredericksburg at the usual time? ... See you there. Chau, Marcello, cuidate.”

Malcolm Garfield concluded his briefing for Devon Xander on the current state of affairs in Mexico: “Turmoil along our southwestern border, increasing violence along the Gulf, upticks in the quality of their tactical leadership and operations, more and better information and decision-making: The cartels are maturing, just as the Mafia did during Prohibition, and I think they’re smarter. We take down one of their leaders, a new guy steps in; and two out of three are better than the guys they’re replacing. The new guys are better prepared for increasing operational intensities. They’re sort of like germs getting more resistant to antibiotics; we keep pushing but don’t get ‘em all, and the survivors are tougher than the ones who go down. Some of them are cop-smart SWAT veterans or PMF vets with multiple tours. More sophisticated at the top, more savvy on the streets. For sure, they have a longer reach. If we get real lucky, maybe they’ll kill themselves off.

“But, we’re getting better too. The FBI grew up during the battles over booze, and we’re growing up because we’re fighting a continuous, 24/7 war against well managed drug cartels with a pile of cash. They move, we hit, they retaliate, and the beat goes on. The drones are a big help with intel, but I wish we could send ‘em in ‘running hot.’ We could use more resources, and we have the Asset Forfeiture Program. But, it is what it is.”

“The reports out of Europe about a secret strategic think tank that may be providing high-grade information to the cartels, maybe even to terrorists, are really hard to make any sense of,” said Xander as Garfield paused. “I know we can’t say for sure that they know some of their top-grade material supposedly going to government and industry crystal ball gazers is going to the other side, but our interrogators are pretty convinced that someone with pretty rich access is serving the bad guys champagne from the best vineyards and those bad guys are at the top of the distribution list.”

Picking up the topic, Malcolm continued: “Evidence, damn it; we need hard evidence. ‘Likely’ might work in Homeland Security, but Justice still wants to top ‘highly likely’ before they’ll even ask for warrants. I hope all the hoop-la about NSA is right because without something like that, we’d *highly likely* be flying dead-eye blind. Our field guys are pretty good at the ‘grunt’ level, but they aren’t up at the levels those smart-ass groups are operating at. Are you by any chance going to talk with Amos any time soon, or is he still off chasing the ghost of Don Quixote?”

“Nothing scheduled, but I’m going to see Simon before I leave town. Maybe he’ll know something about the ‘dope’ going to the dopesters. And, I’ll talk with Rosada when I get home. Maybe she’s heard from Amos. In the meantime, don’t let what you can’t do get in the way of what you can do. I’ll call if I get anything solid ... make that anything because nothing about that think tank seems solid.”

The following day, Devon Zander advised Malcolm Garfield that he not share anything even remotely confidential with Marcello Barcqe, especially if Ariana Lentz is present, and that he give Lentz absolutely nothing.”

“It is good to see you again, my friend,” said the old book seller in Guanajuato as he looked up from the manuscript on his desk, recognized the man standing in the doorway with the mid-day sun at his back, and rose to grasp lightly the extended gloved right hand. “I have looked for you each noon since receiving your letter describing your days in Spain. Come, let us walk to the café where you can delight me with an account of your journey, and I can offer you some refreshment.”

The accounting and the refreshments were shared with the delight of comrades resting from labors they loved. After a while, however, Amos Sanson guided the conversation toward other topics. Engaging somewhat reluctantly, Senor Alvaria-Iverson listened intently to each question posed by his companion, and replied with such detail that only occasionally was a follow-up clarification required. Alvaria-Iverson knew Sanson’s reasons for asking the questions, and his devotion to Rosada Angel Jesus prompted him to cooperate as best he could. He carefully supplied only the facts as he knew them, with caveats where appropriate. He stated his opinions only when Sanson solicited them; often Sanson did. Both men knew the importance of separating fact from opinion, and the value of sound opinions.

After a couple of hours, as the shadows cast over the narrow street by the buildings on either side lengthened, Don Quixote brought the conversation to a turn: “From Hawaii near the close of the Nineteenth Century to today, US *interests* have justified regime change in many places outside the Euro-American liberal democracies. More directly, the interests of such regimes seem to be of little consequence to those *interests* enshrined first within Manifest Destiny, then Imperialism, and now Exceptionalism. I hear it often in the streets and plazas, stated more simply so as to be understood by the common people you understand, ‘We’ll help

you do it *our* way; we'll let you do it *our* way; otherwise, you're on your own as long as you don't get in *our* way.' When Americans intervene – or as some are saying, 'invade' – they send a message that is often *clarified* on their behalf in terms unintended by them, thus becoming a message that the common people grasp and sometimes to the surprise of the Americans, the people's leaders grasp as well. It reminds me of the old parlor game in which a message is passed from player to player, changing a bit even with the best transmissions and changing dramatically when a player chooses to distort it.

“As we are both men of books, are old men in the modern information age, allow me to offer this from a source I'm sure you will recognize: 'Since the fall of the Soviet Union, most left-wing radicals, save for some in Latin America, have become disillusioned with Marxism. This has helped foster the growth of anarchism, which is seen by many radicals as a system that is less prone to corruption and is therefore a more viable alternative to the capitalist imperialist system.' I suggest that many radicals today as were many Marxists yesterday are more interested in their own than in someone else's interests. They must fight with what they have, take their few comforts in the shadows, and live with their hate.

“I know how the pressures of living in the present bear down upon us; but, we must not lose sight of the lessons from the past, or that the present may be prelude to the future. What we do today is often a consequence of something done yesterday, and what we do today may lead to consequences we will have to struggle with tomorrow and the days after.

“But, let us move away from such topics and return to your journey along the hero's path, the path of El hidalgo ingenioso Don Quixote de La Mancha.”

With that, the affectionados spent the next hour chatting, sometimes leaning forward intently and often leaning back to laugh quietly ... two old friends enjoying a light red wine of local vintage, and the companionship of books.

Ariana Lentz and Marcello Barcqe finished briefing each other on their most recent forays abroad. They were satisfied with their findings and seemed confident that they had enough to go to press. After a pause, Marcello laid one more item on the table.

“Ariana, our very fruitful and I might add financially rewarding association must come to an end.”

Incredulously, Ariana responded, “Come to an end? Why? Why should our association, our ‘fruitful and financially rewarding association’ as you put it, come to an end? I don’t understand. Have I missed something?”

“A couple of things have come up recently. First, I am leaving journalism for a while. The new government in Mexico City has asked me to join our embassy staff in Washington, and I have decided to accept their offer.”

“You have decided? Without so much as a heads-up, you decided a matter in which I have a major stake?”

“The opportunity came my way out of the blue, and they were quite persuasive in pressing for a quick decision.”

“I’d like, in fact I insist upon, an explanation.”

“Their reasoning goes something like this: They need an ‘astute,’ their word, observer who knows the Americans, who knows the issues between our countries, and who has enough special operations military experience to understand both covert action and the militarization of law enforcement, in addition to our trade and anti-drug relationships. Caught in a trap of my own making, Ariana, it is the success of my, and our, investigative reporting that brought them to my door. I fit the suit they have tailored, and I want to try it on.”

“I can understand that, Marcello. What I’m having trouble with is you not giving me so much as a hint that this was coming.”

“That, Ariana, brings me to the second topic in this couplet.”

“Pray tell while you are in a sharing mood.”

Pausing, a bit to gather his thoughts, a bit for emphasis, Marcello spoke, a shade of bitterness discernible in his voice. “I have been apprised of your deepening association with Joselyn Prescott, an association that treads upon the boundaries of journalistic ethics and, very likely, legality. The role of the press is, as you well know, protected in America by the first Amendment to the Constitution. That protection is based in part on the expectation that freedom of the press is vitally important for democratic governance and that the press is obliged to honor that right – they define it as a right, you know, not a privilege – ethically, and is given legal dispensation in return. Joselyn Prescott directs a strategic information service that not only provides expert analysis and operational advice but shares information obtained through mutually agreed confidences and background information gathering. In my professional opinion,

and in a growing number of legal opinions, the information she provides to a select few suspect clients is obtained and transmitted in violation of the sanctity of the press. She is an intelligence agent motivated by money and ego, serving interests inimical to society.

“I don’t mean to be pedantic; but, God damn it, Ariana, stuff we’ve put together has appeared in some highly questionable insider reports that have landed on the desks of some highly questionable players in some highly questionable enterprises, with our names on them and our reputations substantiating them, and without so much as a heads-up or a hint that you were selling us, me, out to Prescott’s side business.

“I don’t insist upon an explanation. The *betrayal* has gone far beyond mere explanation. You’ve killed the goose that lays golden eggs. People I’ve known for years have closed doors in my face, some politely but a couple with a rather vehement slam. So, for a while at least, forever perhaps, my journalistic goose is cooked. Hopefully, our book is not tainted; only time will tell. But, as a team of investigative journalists, our goose or should I say our geese are cooked, deep-fat fried, boiled and broiled ...”

Continuing in a more subdued manner, Marcello ended the revelation: “I am happy to have been offered the post in Washington. I need time to get back on track. For a while, I’ll just be an analyst inside the trade, a consultant to those who still trust me but furnishing information and conclusions within a controlled system of facts, verified and edited, working for others but hopefully still thinking for myself.

“That’s it, case closed, bon voyage.”

“That’s it? Case closed? Bon voyage? Who? Who told you this? How can you be so sure you can you trust ...”

“Trust,” Marcello exclaimed. “My sources top ‘highly reliable.’ My advice to you, Ariana, if you’re open to anything I might say, is to take your money and disappear for a while. All manner of shit is going to descend upon Joselyn Prescott. Don’t be around to share in it. She has already been tarred by those she thought would protect her, and the tar could stick to anyone close by.”

Sadly and in a lowered voice, Marcello Barcqe concluded, “Get out of that game, Ariana, while you still can.” He was already walking away.

“By the way, Marcello, the apparently rogue operation at the London station of EPS appears to have been closed down,” whispered Simon Stoddard as he stepped close, laid his left hand on Marcello Barcqe’s right shoulder, and shook Marcello’s hand while adding his own to the many kind “welcomes” at the close of a reception honoring new diplomatic officers to the Mexican Embassy in Washington. “It seems that the agent in charge was found in her apartment, deceased by way of a 9mm bullet entering her brain through her left temple as I understand it, though she was widely known to be an accomplished right-handed amateur tennis player. She generally kept such a pistol in the center drawer of the teak desk in her study where she often worked long into the night. Someone cleaning the stables, I imagine; and sending a not-too-subtle message down the line? Her job as managing editor of the EPS London station has been given to your old partner, Ariana Lentz; reward for a job well done in the excellent work the two of you shared in, I suppose. Again, old friend, welcome back to our capitol. I shall look forward to seeing more of you during your time in Washington.”