

This thriller is a story of courage, persistence, and international intrigue. It opens in the nation's capital after a well known international investigative firm moves to D.C. from Philadelphia. The firm's senior partner assigns A.J. Williams, the protagonist, to investigate a possible espionage case involving a U.S. government employee.

THE PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

By Van Tellfaster

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THE

PRIVATE



INVESTIGATOR

Van Telfaster

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Chapter 1

Southeast
Washington, D.C.
July, 1 2014

Allan J. Williams, who preferred to be called A.J., didn't sleep well at all the night before, because he worried that he was falling behind in working on several of his open cases. It was 7:00 a.m., already hot and humid, and the clouds were thin and high in the sky with no rain in sight. A.J. felt compelled to go to the office early and work on his cases. He took a new-found shortcut, skirting a lot full of idle bulldozers and other heavy equipment, from his apartment building to the firm's headquarters. A.J. hustled toward the firm at his usual fast pace when his iPhone began vibrating. "Mornin' Jerry," A.J. said.

"Where are you?" Jerry Satterfield asked.

It was unusual for A.J. to receive a call from his boss so early in the morning. *Somethin's up*, he thought. "I'm on the way to work, but I'm making a quick stop for coffee. What can I get you?"

Satterfield had no interest in coffee. Brief and abrupt, and in a heavy Philadelphia accent, said, "Go

ahead and get your coffee and get to the firm right away. We need to talk.”

The line went dead. A.J. was moments away from the Southeast Washington D.C. coffee shop located at New Jersey Avenue and M Streets SE. Often crowded in the morning during week days, the establishment catered to hundreds of U.S. Department of Transportation, also called DOT, employees who daily congregated at the shop to buy their coffee and snacks.

A half dozen youthful baristas wore the shop’s signature uniform as they took orders and served their customers with great efficiency, despite a long line of DOT employees who frequented the shop. A.J. finally made his way to the front of the line, placed his order and paid for it. He grabbed what he had patiently waited for then scurried out of the coffee shop. *What’s so important that Jerry wants to see me right away?* A.J. thought to himself.

It didn’t take long for A.J. to arrive at his destination. He stepped out of the elevator and entered the firm at 7:45 a.m. A.J. heard a familiar mellow-sounding voice ask, “You get my latte?”

A.J. came of age in an era of two-income families, rising divorce rates, and a faltering economy, although he would eventually enter the workforce during the

THE PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

healthier economic years of the Clinton administration. A.J. was in his mid-thirties, six feet tall, slightly muscular in stature, and maintained a military demeanor. He was a guy in a hurry. He rushed to the coffee shop, then to the office. However, his penchant for quickly getting things done sometimes got in his way, and he could be overly hasty in wrapping up his investigative cases.

"Yeah. I got it," A.J. said. He entered the kitchenette and saw that Michelle Winters was attempting to snatch a box of napkins from the top shelf of the cabinet. He put his briefcase on the counter and handed the hot steamy drink to Michelle. She thanked A.J. and paid him for the latte. He said, "Let me get those napkins for you. It's easier for me to reach them."

Winters, a very pretty African-American woman, joined Hutchison and Satterfield International Investigations after the firm moved from Center City Philadelphia to Washington, D.C. She was the firm's receptionist, and always punched in—like clockwork at 7:30 a.m. every morning; thirty minutes before Satterfield arrived.

She and A.J. were complaining about the humidity when Satterfield stuck his head out of his office and asked, "You ready to talk A.J.?" A.J. smiled at

Michelle—they had a running joke about the boss’s brusque manner—and stepped into Satterfield’s office.

“Close the door behind you,” Satterfield said.

This is unusual, A.J. thought. Satterfield kept the office door open during most conversations.

“I got a call from a fellow I hadn’t heard from in a long time. He went to South Philly high with me and Hutch.” Satterfield continued, “I think we’ve got a new case, and it may be a complicated one for whoever I assign as lead investigator.”

A.J. stood in silence. *What’s he mean by whoever he assigns as lead investigator? He knows I’m his best PI.*

“Our potential client is Phil Jacoby,” Satterfield added. “He’s a pretty laid-back kinda guy, but he sounded a bit panicked on the phone. He’ll be coming by the office later today to discuss his situation. So hang around.”

“But I’ve got back-to-back meetings with clients all day,” A.J. said.

“Cancel them, or, I can assign Laura as the lead investigator, and you can back her up in what looks like it’s gonna be a pretty substantial case, just based on the little info I have so far.”

THE PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

A.J. took a step back. His jaws tightened and adrenalin shot through his body. *What the hell's the matter with Jerry? Whatever it is, I can't let him assign this case to Laura—No way!*

He turned and left Satterfield's office, bolted pass Michelle without a word, and didn't even hear his fellow PIs bantering in the kitchenette. He went straight to his cubicle and sat quietly at his desk. *This is not gonna be a sure thing*, he thought. A.J. attempted to calm down, but he seethed at Satterfield's suggestion to give the new case to Laura Applegate. A.J. mumbled, "Jerry can be a real bastard sometimes. How come he can't be like Hutch, who was always kind to me, and helped me through all my challenges?"

A.J. didn't want to jeopardize losing the lead investigator role in what he understood could be a challenging case. If he solved it, his success might prompt Satterfield to consider A.J. for advancement in the firm, something that A.J. wanted so badly he could taste it. Stunned by Satterfield's ultimatum, A.J. had only one option to pursue if he wanted to secure the new case.

Chapter 4

Phil Jacoby walked several blocks in the sun from DOT to HSII. He arrived for his appointment minutes before two o'clock and took the elevator to the seventh floor where HSII had its offices. He was hot and uncomfortable, and Jacoby wiped the sweat from his forehead as he stepped from the elevator.

Jacoby, who had a boyish-looking face for a fifty-five-year-old man, felt compelled to be on time for appointments, all appointments. He developed the habit of getting ahead of everyone else during his time in the U.S. Navy. He was also a man used to getting his way in life, and thus he was totally focused on convincing Satterfield to take his case. He'd willfully given Raymond Lee, an acquaintance who had claimed to be a South Korean businessman, a thumb drive that contained sensitive DOT research information, and now he'd had second thoughts. Jacoby was desperate to extricate himself from the predicament he'd gotten himself into, and he wanted the device back. Jacoby intended to mislead his old high school acquaintance and hoped Satterfield's firm could unknowingly provide cover for him. He needed

Satterfield to believe his concocted story: that Lee stole the thumb drive from him while in South Korea.

Jacoby followed the signs to HSII and advanced at a measured pace. *This is it*, he thought. He swung open the door and entered the firm.

“Good afternoon, sir. May I help you?” the woman behind the desk asked. Her name plate read Michelle Winters.

“I’m Phil Jacoby. I have an appointment with Jerry Satterfield.”

“He’s expecting you,” Winters said. “I’ll let him know you’re here. Please have a seat.”

“I’d rather stand.”

“Suit yourself.” She rang Satterfield’s office and said, “Jerry, Mr. Jacoby’s here.”

Jacoby saw his old acquaintance step out of his office. “Hey buddy,” he brayed. I haven’t seen you in ages. How the hell are you?”

“I’m just fine,” Satterfield said. He gave Jacoby a hug and slap on the back. Both men entered Satterfield’s office, and Satterfield asked, “How’d you find me, Phil?”

“Online. I punched in private investigator, and your website popped right up. I knew immediately my old classmate had obviously made it. So here I am.”

THE PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

“Very good,” Satterfield said. Then he asked, “What can I get you? I’ve got bottled water, tea, coffee, and even your favorite, Johnnie Walker Blue.” Satterfield continued, “You know it’s still the most widely distributed brand of blended Scotch whisky in the world. And quite expensive, but I know I don’t have to tell you that.”

Jacoby had first had Scotch while he was on active duty, and although he had hated it at first, he’d gradually acquired a taste for the whisky, and now drinks nothing but Scotch. Jacoby smiled and said, “Just bottled water. It’s too early for my favorite, but I’ll take a rain check.”

Satterfield shuffled to the corner of his office to a mini refrigerator and retrieved a couple of bottles of water. “How’s the family?” he asked as he handed Jacoby his drink.

“Well, Maria and Phil Jr. are fine, but Maria divorced me.”

“Sorry to hear that.”

“It was a good fifteen-year marriage. We keep in touch for Phil Junior’s sake.”

“I remember Maria played the cello. Did she stick with it?”

“Yeah she did,” Jacoby said. “After high school, Maria went to Temple. She pursued advanced studies

at the Settlement School of Music in South Philly. When she completed her studies, she was hired as a cellist with the Philadelphia Orchestra.”

“Golly!” Satterfield said. “That’s great news.”

“I grew to appreciate good music because of Maria’s involvement in the classical music world. But you know my real love.” Jacoby briefly reminisced, and he asked Satterfield, “Do you remember listening to WIBG? You know, rock and roll, and all the music that came out of Philly?”

“God forbid! How could I forget it?” Satterfield asked. “Those were great times for us guys. My favorite was Philly soul, but I liked the Motown sound too.” Jacoby abruptly changed the subject and came right to the point. “Jerry, we’ve known each other for a long time, and I’m here because I need your help. I hope I can count on you.”

Satterfield was still standing. He said, “Phil, you know you can count on me.” Jacoby ambled to the plush dark-brown leather sofa and sat. Satterfield sipped his bottled water and joined Jacoby on the sofa and waited for his friend to speak.

Jacoby took a long drink. “Boy that’s good,” he said. “It’s pretty hot outside.” He looked at Satterfield squarely. “So here’s the story,” he began. “A few of my former military logistics buddies familiar with

THE PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

research at DOT encouraged me to apply for a contract job there. After twenty years in the Navy, it sounded like a good fit for me.”

“DOT’s only a few blocks from here,” Satterfield said. “I know a bunch of people that work there, and I can’t believe we’re workin’ a few blocks away from each other.”

“It really is a small world,” Jacoby said.

“How long you worked there?” Satterfield asked.

“Seven years,” Jacoby said. He added, “You’ll recall my background is in engineering.”

“Of course, I remember.”

“Well, when I heard about the DOT’s Transportation Advanced Research and Technology Administration, they call it TARTA. I knew I could put my engineering degree to good use.”

“What are you workin’ on at TARTA?” Satterfield asked.

“It’s great work,” Jacoby said. “It involves research on advanced intelligent transportation technologies.

“TARTA is DOT’s research and technology arm. It coordinates the department’s research and development activities and administers grants to universities. TARTA also funds advanced research like the work I’m pursuing.”

Satterfield took another swig of his water, said, “Go on.”

“My team does cutting-edge work with Intelligent Transportation Systems. ITS is the application of sensing, analysis, control, and communications technologies to ground transportation in order to improve safety, mobility, and efficiency. We capture real-time data from vehicles, devices, and infrastructure. Our goal is, you know, to enhance safety and communications between and among those components. For example, ITS has had a significant effect on transportation in applications such as electronic toll collection, ramp meters; traffic light cameras, and much more.”

“Seems like interesting work,” Satterfield said.

Jacoby continued. “It’s a big deal because the worldwide ITS market is expected to grow at a steady rate to 2020, and lots of nations are focused on this expanding technology.

“ITS also aids in reducing road accidents. It boosts safety, which can positively impact demand over the next five or six years, and this outlook dovetails well with the work I’m focused on.

“It’s a fun job. I mean, the work was right up my alley. I met new and interesting people. Did lots of traveling. Even went overseas to present papers on our

advances. It wasn't until I returned from a week-long ITS conference in Seoul back in January that things got weird."

"What do you mean?" Satterfield asked.

Jacoby squirmed in his seat, and his eyes shifted away from Satterfield, then back toward his friend. He lowered his voice and began the lie. "A couple weeks ago, I received an anonymous email that originated from South Korea, but I couldn't determine who sent it."

"What'd it say?"

"In short, it said the individual has something that belonged to me, and that I valued. That I'd have to pay if I wanted to recover my property."

"Any ideas who sent it?"

"I'm not sure," Jacoby said, "but while I was in Seoul, I saw a guy I'd met back in December 2013 at an earlier ITS-related conference in Hong Kong. He was fluent in English, and we got along good."

"Okay," Satterfield said.

"He said his name was Raymond Lee. He gave me his business card and—"

"I'll need that card, and get me a copy of the email."

Jacoby cleared his throat and continued. "Lee showed a lot of interest in the paper I gave in Seoul. It

was pretty similar to the paper I'd given in Hong Kong the year before. It was based on a paper I'd written for the Pentagon, though I'd left out all the proprietary information when I delivered it. It was a sanitized version."

"Proprietary information?" Satterfield asked.

"Information TARTA won't release outside the department. You know the government considers this kind of information a trade secret, information the government keeps from the public. It can include sensitive formulas, processes, and methods used in production.

"Before I left for Seoul, I downloaded the original paper, the one with my research conclusions, including the proprietary information, onto a thumb drive. It had everything on it. I mean everything, and I took it with me to the conference—huge mistake!

"What's worrying me," Jacoby added, "is that I didn't realize the thumb drive was missing until I returned to the States. I think that strange email I received is about my missing thumb drive."

"Is it possible that Lee has your thumb drive?" Satterfield asked.

"Anything's possible," Jacoby said.

"But how?" Satterfield asked. "How did he get it? Was he in your hotel room? Did you leave it on a

THE PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

table? You think he went through your briefcase? And why would he be trying to extort you when he could obviously make more money selling it to a foreign government, like his own?”

“Good questions,” Jacoby said.

Satterfield asked, “So did you divulge the proprietary information when you presented your paper for the conference in Seoul?”

“No, no, no. I told you. I had a sanitized version of the paper with me. It contained no proprietary information. That’s what I delivered in Seoul. But the proprietary information was on the thumb drive.”

“Hmm,” Satterfield said. “What’s the significance of the proprietary information, and why doesn’t TARTA want it released?”

“That’s the sticky part of this whole thing,” Jacoby said. He took a deep breath, then another sip of his bottled water. “The research I’m doing may have national security implications.”

“National security?” Satterfield asked.

“Yeah, that’s right. I can only tell you that my work includes balancing human and computer strengths to maximize the use of ITS in real time. Our research hasn’t been duplicated anywhere else in the world, and it has caught the Pentagon’s attention.

“If results of this sensitive research end up in the wrong hands—that is, in the hands of foreign adversaries, it could prove disastrous for the United States. That’s why TARTA holds certain aspects of the research in the strictest confidence and considers the DOT information proprietary. And we don’t mention the connection to the Pentagon.”

“So this South Korean guy possibly has your DOT proprietary information,” Satterfield said.

Jacoby looked down at his hands and watched them shake uncontrollably. He took the final sip of his water and shifted his eyes back in Satterfield’s direction. “I suppose,” Jacoby said. He hesitated before he spoke again, but remained vague. “The U.S. military’s planned use of ITS research is classified; however, the raw research results remain TARTA’s property.”

“What’s the intended use?” Satterfield asked.

“Can’t discuss that with you.” Jacoby, glassy eyed, and with his voice rising in pitch like a police siren, said, “Jerry I need you to get that thumb drive back for me! It’ll keep me out of unnecessary trouble. I think I messed up.”

Satterfield seemed puzzled. “My goodness, Phil. What were you thinkin’ when you hauled that thumb drive to South Korea with you?” Without giving

THE PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

Jacoby time to answer the question, Satterfield asked, “Who else knows about the missing thumb drive?”

Jacoby hesitated once more, put his empty water bottle down on a side table, and said, “Nobody I can think of.” He again wiped the sweat from his forehead. Jacoby sat back on the sofa motionless, and briefly gazed at the ceiling.

Satterfield stared at Jacoby in silence until the intercom buzzed. The receptionist’s voice said, “Jerry, you have an incoming phone call from the D.C. Metro Police chief.” He excused himself, reached for the intercom, and said in a tense voice, “Take a message Michelle. Tell the chief I’ll get back to him as soon as possible.” Jacoby sat motionless and waited for Satterfield to resume the conversation. Still standing, Satterfield asked, “Okay, Phil, anything else I should know about your situation?”

“I’ve given you all the pertinent facts.”

The old PI sat again on the far end of the sofa. After a few minutes of silence, Satterfield said, “Phil, I don’t think I can take your case.”

Jacoby snorted, and his eyes grew as large as silver dollars. “Why not? It’s pretty straightforward.”

Satterfield summarized. “Loss of government property, and compromise of proprietary information with a possible national security nexus.” He added, “I

don't wanna touch this one with a ten-foot pole. I can't do it, Phil. I'm sorry pal."

Jacoby, stomach clenched, rose from the sofa and tried to keep his voice under control. "I'm disappointed in you, Jerry. I thought we were friends. Hell, we went to school together, and I thought you'd have the decency to take my case." Jacoby abruptly turned away and started for the door. He halted in the doorway, turned, and glared at Satterfield, before shouting, "You've always been a selfish son of a bitch, Jerry." Without another word, the former Navy commander stormed out of Satterfield's office. He rushed pass the reception desk, not even glancing at Winters as he bolted for the elevator.

"Have a nice day, Mr. Jacoby," Winters said.

After encountering this setback, Jacoby needed to figure out the way forward, perhaps without his old friend's help. He knew he was in a jam. His eyes fully dilated, Jacoby held his head high as he left HSII, but inwardly, he felt his world was crumbling. Jacoby didn't imagine his actions might one-day lead to his downfall. *What next?*, he thought. Jacoby had to do something—and fast.

Chapter 6

Satterfield reached into his center desk drawer, removed a small worn-looking pocket knife, and placed it on his desk. Satterfield had a big decision to make. He took a deep breath, then buzzed Michelle Winters.

“Yes, Jerry?”

“Michelle,” he said, “Tell A.J. I want to see him.”

“You got it,” Winters said.

While he awaited A.J.’s arrival, Satterfield grabbed a large red apple he’d stashed in his lower right hand desk drawer. As he carefully peeled the apple’s skin, Satterfield’s mind raced. *I got two issues to address: determine if Phil gave me the straight skinny about his situation, and decide who gets to lead the new case.*

Winters strolled to A.J.’s cubicle, stuck her head in, and said, “Jerry wants to see you.”

A.J. looked at his office mate and said, “Thanks Michelle.” A.J. asked, “Is he in a good mood?”

“I’m not sure,” Winters said. “He’s been pretty quiet.” She returned to the reception desk while A.J. headed for the boss’s office.

The door was wide open when A.J. approached Satterfield's office. He looked in, and asked, "You wanted to see me Jerry?"

Satterfield took a bite out of his apple. "Yeah, come on in," he said. "I met Phil yesterday afternoon, you know, the fellow I told you about. We have a new case, and now I need to pick the lead investigator."

A.J. looked at his boss and said, "Thought you wanted to talk about this yesterday."

"Didn't work out quite like I thought it would," Satterfield said. "Had to work on a couple things before this meeting."

"I'm ready for the challenge," A.J. said.

"That's good," Satterfield said. "But before we talk about the particulars of the new case, let's talk about Laura. Shut the door and have a seat."

A.J. pushed the door to. He sat on the sofa in front of his boss.

Satterfield paused. He asked, "Did you know that Laura is upset about not getting the lead in any of our more substantial cases?"

"She'd mentioned something like that to me in passing the other day. I told her to speak to you about it."

"She did, and she's pissed. Laura wants to be the lead investigator for our new case." Satterfield took a

deep breath. “I told her I hadn’t made up my mind on which of you would take the lead.” Satterfield watched A.J. fold his arms and slowly sit back on the sofa. A.J. became motionless, and his body language signaled to Satterfield that A.J. was not happy.

Satterfield shifted the conversation and recounted the preliminary information he learned in his initial conversation with Jacoby. *He seems distracted*, Satterfield thought. A.J. sat stiff as a board in front of his boss. “Are you tracking with me?” Satterfield asked.

“I’m followin’ you,” A.J. said.

Satterfield continued to lay out the facts for A.J., not missing a single detail that Jacoby imparted during their forty-five-minute meeting. He said, “You know, I still have doubts about my old classmate’s account of what happened in Seoul, but my lead investigator will need to sort all that out.”

“So are you gonna give me this case or not?” A.J. asked.

The room fell silent for several seconds. Satterfield, who had finished eating his apple, wiped his hands on a napkin he’d placed on his desk, opened the center drawer, and dropped in his pocket knife.

What would Hutch do in this situation? Satterfield thought. Then he spoke again. “I told Laura that you

had been around here at the firm for quite a long time, and—”

“Is that it Jerry? A.J. blurted. “It’s only my longevity at the firm?” he asked. “I’ve been around here for almost a decade, and I’ve solved lots of cases, and brought in lots of money for HSII. I deserve to be the lead investigator.”

“Slow down,” Satterfield said. "Of course, you’ve been around here for a long time, and God knows how capable you are. Applegate’s also a competent investigator, and she does her job well. Still, I’m leaning toward giving you this case.”

“But what?” A.J. asked.

Satterfield didn’t answer immediately. He hesitated for a moment, and said, “You know, we may have more in common than you think.” Satterfield saw that A.J. had a puzzled look on his face.

“How so?” A.J. asked.

“Even though my hair is gray, and I’m old enough to be your dad, both of us are passionate about our work. We’re focused investigators.”

A.J. asked, “You mean ’cause, like you and Hutch; I've always followed all my cases to their logical end, and 'cause I'm detail oriented, and meticulous about recording all the pertinent facts of my cases?”

THE PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

“That’s what I mean. But sometimes, you rush to solve your cases.”

“Maybe,” A.J. said, “But you know I’ve always gotten results.”

Satterfield changed the subject and said, “I got my Bachelors of Arts Degree from Temple, and you chose not to attend college, but Hutch must have seen your potential when he hired you. I never understood why you didn’t seek higher-education—”

“Because I wasn’t interested in goin’ to college, even though I’d gotten good grades in high school—it wasn’t my cup a tea.”

Always deliberate and cautious, but sometimes spiteful, Satterfield returned to the topic at hand. “Let me sleep on it tonight. I’ll give you my decision tomorrow.”

The following morning, Satterfield visited A.J.’s cubicle. A.J. stood when his boss entered. Satterfield calmly asked A.J. to be seated, and he sat in the chair beside A.J.’s desk. Satterfield wore a light-gray pinstripe suit. He sported a white shirt with a dark-blue bow tie, an unusual combination for Satterfield. He usually wore dark suits and light colored neckties.

“I don’t want to waste time here,” Satterfield said as he cleared his throat and continued to speak. “You definitely have a solid track record with this firm, so

it's logical for you to take the lead role in what we're gonna call the Jacoby case. I'll find other challenging cases for Laura."

Satterfield could see the look of relief on A.J.'s face as it lit up like a Christmas tree. A.J. said, "You won't regret selecting me to lead this case."

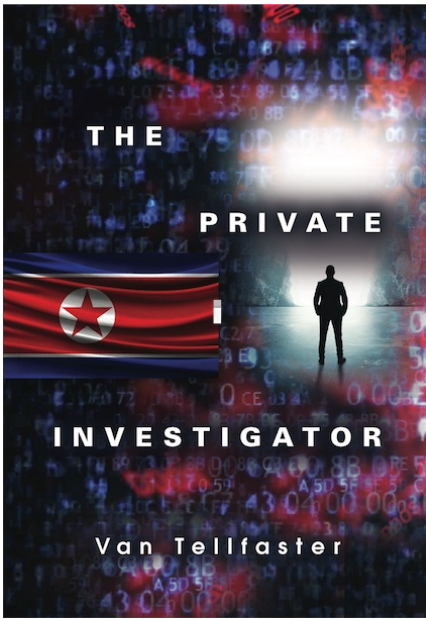
"I want you to set up an appointment with Phil," Satterfield said. "Have him go over the facts with you. After that, write an investigative approach plan and let me take a look at it as soon as possible."

"I'm on it," A.J. said.

Satterfield stood and prepared to leave A.J.'s cube, but he turned around again. "A few more things," Satterfield said. "Press Phil on the nature of the DOT proprietary information he'd talked about. Moreover, find out as much as you can about the, you know, national security connection to this case. Further, learn as much as possible about this South Korean fellow whom Phil befriended. He could be the key to solving the case."

"Got it," A.J. said.

As Satterfield sauntered out of A.J.'s work space, he noticed out of the corner of his eye that A.J. wore a grin on his face as wide as the Grand Canyon. *This ought to motivate him to give his all in solving this case.*



This thriller is a story of courage, persistence, and international intrigue. It opens in the nation's capital after a well known international investigative firm moves to D.C. from Philadelphia. The firm's senior partner assigns A.J. Williams, the protagonist, to investigate a possible espionage case involving a U.S. government employee.

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