

TWO

Randolph Carroll like things hot only when they were television lights or a sun lamp. The two went hand-in-hand for Carroll and he knew how to take advantage of both.

Right now Carroll was watching as the Borough Council president was praising him for orchestrating a major drug bust in Queens. The Borough Council president was saying that if it wasn't for U.S. attorneys like Randolph Carroll, the whole city would be at the mercy of druggies and crooks and that the kids would have no future.

Carroll smiled, but not too much. He had to watch out so the klieg lights didn't bounce a glare off his capped teeth.

Carroll was 41 years old and looked like he was developed in a test tube. Nothing seemed out of place, even the slight dimple on his right side. He had light brown hair and 173 pounds distributed evenly over his 6-1 frame. Whatever he lost in size or weight, he easily disguised by tailoring. Today he had on a medium blue double breasted suit with a thin chalk stripe, a light pink shirt and a matching repp tie. A perfect ensemble, down to the shining gold buckle on his black Italian made shoes. The Stepford U.S. attorney, see television tube, will perform.

The minister whose dwindling flock lived in that part of Queens that Carroll knew still would be a drug infested rathole was next up at the microphone, saying how he hoped all the young men and women in the congregation would look at Randolph Carroll and see the kind of adult they should aspire to be. Carroll tried to look modest but did not do a very good job.

Why should he, Carroll thought. His FBI boys did manage to get a line on another group of Colombians who were running cocaine into the city. He did that neighborhood a small favor, getting rid of that scum

and sending it into the courts. He knew the Colombians would probably be out in a matter of days but at least the neighborhood got a little bit of reprieve. That's what he should be thinking, especially since those shithead reporters were just waiting for the minister to get through so they could start shouting questions at him. Carroll was thankful his advance man had ordered the podium moved so the backdrop would not include the theater playing "Invasion of the Brain Dead." He knew how bad that would look at 11 p.m.

" --- and I just hope that Mr. Carroll never leaves us behind, never forgets about the people who thank him every morning," the minister was saying. "Now I have heard from alot of people" -- and here the minister jokingly looked upward with a smile -- "that our Mr. Carroll may be thinking of moving on. Yes, I have heard that. But we truly hope that our Mr. Carroll, wherever he goes, will always remember us and keep protecting us."

There was some small applause from the parents and merchants who had gathered in the schoolyard. Carroll was glad the rain had slowed enough so some people would turn out. And at least there were a couple of his buddies in that group of press bastards; one guy who had been so grateful when Carroll's agents lost evidence that showed him a regular cocaine buyer, and a gal who was real popular with some of the guys.

Carroll called on the first one. He had written a real nice story suggesting Carroll should be in the U.S. Senate about a week after the evidence was lost. Carroll was curious to see if he had lost his touch.

"Mr. Carroll, this is now the fifth major cocaine bust you have successfully spearheaded in three months. Does this show a rising epidemic of drugs in the city or have you and your men just discovered something no one else in the law enforcement business has about

catching these guys and putting them away," he asked.

It was more difficult for Carroll not to smile at that question than it had been from the minister's praise. But he managed and, careful to turn his face to the three-quarters angle that looked so good on television, went into his rehearsed answer.

"It is just knowing where to look and not being afraid to find what is there," Carroll said, a small smile of assurance crossing his face. "The agents who work for me have the confidence that any crook they catch, any lead they have, any whiff of corruption they smell, will be chased down by all of us and dealt with forcefully. They know that whatever they do, I am totally behind them -- just as I am totally behind all of you. Totally. And they know that their good, honest efforts will not be wasted on some plea bargain with some judge more interested in his golf game than administering the justice that every taxpayer in this city -- and in this state -- deserves to expect."

That rolled out very nicely, Carroll thought, especially the part about state taxpayers. That can't hurt for any future political plans.

Carroll pointed to the female reporter but one of the upstarts from a weekly jumped in front of her, quickly asking Carroll if he "was so good why are about 80 percent of your convictions walking after three months?"

Carroll looked down and laughed, shaking his head in a manner made famous by schoolmasters about to switch a delinquent. That gave Carroll's driver waiting in the nearby limo enough time to use the car phone to dial Carroll's beeper. The beeper's staccato signal went off just as Carroll raised his head to pretend to begin answering the question.

"Sorry ladies and gentlemen, have to go fight some more crime," he said to the clapping of the citizens. The minister looked to heaven and smiled.

The limo raced through the streets of Queens and Carroll had no desire to look out. To him, New York began and ended in Manhattan and the only time he felt it really necessary to be in Queens was to catch a flight at JFK or LaGuardia. "This area is only good for one thing," he said to the aide sitting in the back seat next to him. "You can always be sure that about the time when arrests are low and you need a criminal to go after, you can find some street punk over here who will decide it is time he graduated from Korean grocery stores or old ladies on the street to the big time. And then we pinch him."

Returning old ladies' purses was not going to get Carroll ahead and he knew that. The drug thing was good, but sooner or later the public was going to demand more from him. They were like kids wanting new and better toys. And he also had to watch out for the press. Most of those guys loved him now and felt part of the team. But there were always hungry loners poking around court records, checking his past statements, ready to buy some malcontent FBI agent a few beers for a few juicy quotes. They could be a nuisance.

So Carroll knew he needed to find some new targets. One good scandal that could carry him into the new year and the beginning of that election scramble. He also knew that his successes so far made others in the U.S. attorney's office less inclined to help. No one wants a nova in a constellation. They had their own political agendas.

So fuck then, Carroll thought. They don't have to like me. As long as he finds bigger and better game -- squeezing his lackies to find the right targets -- a judgeship or a Senate seat will be just a matter of time.

As a matter of fact, those public servants might help him get there. If a few of them could manage to take the fall, thanks to Carroll, that would make the public delirious.

Carroll laughed out loud. The aide, who did not know why he was laughing, joined in anyway. This was a guy who had been at the top of his class at Yale law school and here he is laughing for a reason he does not know, Carroll thought. It was a shot of reassurance that the department was full of fools. Carroll resisted a urge to pat the guy on the head; instead; he smiled back and the aide beamed and sat up like a dog awaiting a treat.

"What do we have next," Carroll asked the Yalie.

"Well, sir, you have a lunch with the mayor to discuss a press conference regarding Operation Big Broom. That's at 12:30. You have an appointment at 3 p.m. with your barber, after which you are supposed to spend some time talking with the different pollsters and consultants about your campaign."

"It's called learning about public perceptions and about public concerns, not talking about a campaign."

"Oh, right, public concerns. But between now and lunch there is some down time of about an hour, er, actually about 90 minutes since you cut that last event short. So I thought we could go over a few pending cases."

Carroll sighed. He just wasn't in the mood to hear about long range legal prospects. And he didn't like the fact that the Mayor was calling for a joint corruption sweep. The Mayor was struggling in the polls and the operation was already mired in bureaucratic muck before it even got started. He was in the mood to celebrate and plan ahead and the Mayor was not the person who he wanted to have lunch with.

"Where's Pomo," Carroll asked. He knew that whatever cases the Yalie had to offer, FBI agent Salvatore Pomo would scrounge up something a little more colorful. Pomo was the one that put Carroll on line to the Queens bust, which judging by the number of cameras and photographers was a successful idea.

Pomo was a round, red faced man who had easily crossed the line from a poor FBI field agent to bureaucrat suffering from a bad case of the busies. He usually left his radio tucked in his hip pocket with the volume up high enough so that any communications were easily heard by persons nearby on the street. Those who thought him a fool -- and there were several -- called him the Man With the Talking Ass.

Even though Pomo talked loud and was best at being a lout, he had proven invaluable to Carroll in the past with his ties to mobsters. A few gangs had been so conveniently and accurately fingered by Pomo's sources that they actually ceased to be much of a problem. And Pomo almost always had good gossip on public officials, the press or others that Carroll liked to know had vulnerabilities. Finally, Pomo quaked before authority, especially someone he deemed important and on the rise like Carroll.

That all added up to Carroll's kind of agent.

"Sal, what do year hear about some cops moving drugs through Wall Street kids," Carroll barked through his car phone when Pomo answered. He heard the squeak of Pomo's desk chair and a thud that sounded like Pomo's knee slamming into the desk.

"Ah, well, sir, that rumor's been out there. I mean, we've been closing in on a few leads but this is one tough nut to crack. I think everyone is laying low because they know you're on the march."

"That's nice Sal, but it doesn't do me any good. And if doesn't do me any good, it doesn't do you any good. All these people today were so happy that we helped them out, but do you know each one said to me. What about your house? Do know what that means Sal? They want us to clean up our house first. And I agree with them, don't you Sal?

"Ah, yeah, sure."

"Yes Sal, but words aren't enough. We have to act Sal, and act fast and act sure. I want you to get me together all you have on Wall

street sales and any other word of law enforcement involvement in drug sales. If they can hear about it across the East River in Queens, for God sakes man I would hope to hell you have heard something more. You keep telling me how these guinea thugs trust you because you speak their language. Well, it is time you start to prove that."

"Ah, yeah, okay. I'll get back to you by next week."

"Clean out your ears, Sal, then clean out your files. Be in my office in an hour."

Carroll shut off the car phone. The limo was starting across the Williamsburg Bridge and Manhattan was only a few seconds away. He looked at the Yalie, who sat straight up and gave a perky smile again. Carroll wondered if he could roll over. ####