



MYSTERY AT THE U.S. OPEN

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author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Last Shot*

VANISHING ACT

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"Agent Campbell, is the FBI looking at this as a kidnapping?"

"We aren't looking at it as anything yet, but we have to consider kidnapping a possibility," he said. "We're still in the process of interviewing her family, other players, and"—he nodded at Norwood—"her agents. The NYPD did its best to seal exits and check people leaving as soon as the incident occurred, but in a place this size, if someone is trying to sneak out, they probably can do it—especially if this was a pre-planned event."

"Arlen, are you going to stop play?"

It was Collins, violating the rule about being at a microphone. No one seemed to mind.

"No, Bud, we're not," Kantarian said. "We've spoken to the Symanovs and they want play to continue. We're in agreement with the FBI that it doesn't help the investigation to stop play. If the FBI told us it would help, we'd stop, but they don't think it will." He paused and smiled for a moment, which surprised Stevie. "We get criticized by you people quite a lot because it takes us three days to play the first round. This is one time where it helps us. If we can find Nadia in the next forty-eight hours, assuming she's up to it, we can reschedule her first-round match and it will be as if this never happened. That's what we're hoping for."

Someone brought up Joanne Walsh. "We understand she and her agent think the match should have been defaulted."

"I think once Joanne understands the unique circumstances here, she will feel differently," Kantarian said. He stood up, indicating the press conference was over. "We'll keep you informed as we know more."

The babble of voices broke out again, people trying to shout questions. One voice, clearly British, kept asking loudly if anyone knew where "R.J." was and had he been informed.

"Who is R.J.?" Stevie asked.

Susan Carol rolled her eyes. "R.J. is R.J. Tenuto, the lead singer for Boys-in-Demand—they're a kind of teen hip-hop band. He's Symanova's boyfriend."

Stevie knew she was on the cover of a lot of teen magazines but he didn't actually *read* any of them. "How long has this been going on?" he asked, wondering just how out of it he was.

"Oh, not long," Susan Carol said. "At Wimbledon she was with someone else."

"Yeah," Carillo said. "That someone else was Prince Harry's best friend."

Susan Carol nodded. "I know, Sir something. I didn't think he was very cute."

"Me neither," Carillo said. "But then, neither is R.J."

"Yeah, but he can really dance."

"*Enough!*" Kelleher exploded as if reading Stevie's mind. "We need to decide what to do next." He looked at Susan Carol and Stevie. "You guys still up for working on this?"

"Are you kidding?" Stevie said. "Of course we are. Intrigue is our specialty, don't you remember?"

Kelleher nodded. "I was in New Orleans, Stevie. I remember," he said. "But down there, you and Susan Carol were the only ones who knew something was wrong. This is different. One of the most famous athletes in the world has been kidnapped and this place is going to be crawling with every kind of media you can think of until she's found."

"So it's a different challenge," Susan Carol said, smiling.

"I'd say so," Kelleher said. "But if you guys are up for it, we'll see what we can do."

"Isn't this the part where someone tells you to let the FBI do its job?" Carillo said. "If the Russians *are* involved, I don't think you should be putting yourself at risk, much less a couple of thirteen-year-olds."

"I have no intention of putting anyone at risk," Kelleher said. "But there's no harm in asking questions."

A slender woman with wavy brown hair and light blue eyes had walked up during the conversation and was now standing next to Kelleher. She was about Stevie's height and was wearing a white tennis shirt, shorts, and sneakers, almost identical to the outfit Susan Carol was wearing.

"Yeah, but what questions do you want to ask and who are you going to get to talk to you, hotshot?" she said to Kelleher.

A look of delight crossed Kelleher's face. "About time you got here," he said, giving her a hug and a kiss.

"Stevie, Susan Carol—meet my wife, Tamara Mearns."

"I know just who these guys are," Mearns said, smiling to reveal remarkable dimples. "Bobby gave me the blow-by-blow on what you did at the Final Four. I'm glad you're on our side."

“Stevie and I both read your column—I am a huge fan,” said Susan Carol.

“Can we focus on the crisis at hand?” Kelleher said. “Hold the lovefest for later.”

“Okay, Kelleher, what’ve you got?” Mearns said.

“We’ve got a big-time mystery here,” Kelleher said. “Bud and Mary have both got to go do TV stuff, so it’s the four of us for now. I think you and Susan Carol need to go work the women’s locker room. Find out what they’re saying in there. By now everyone will be talking about it. When Susan Carol, Stevie, and I skulked around earlier, a lot of people were just finding out.”

“The locker room,” Mearns said. “Oh, joy.”

“I know, I know,” Kelleher said. “But it has to be done.”

“What are you going to do?” Mearns asked.

“I’m going to talk to Arlen again. By now he’s undoubtedly heard what Misha thinks about the SVR. He’ll have talked to the FBI too. And I’m sending Stevie to talk to Ross.”

Mearns smiled again. “Little Tom? That’s a good idea. He may not know anything, but he’ll certainly talk.”

“Who are we talking about?” Stevie said.

“Tom Ross,” Kelleher said. “He’s an agent, but in spite of that he’s a pretty good guy. He’s been in tennis forever. Knows everyone. You tell him you’re working with me and he’ll tell you what he knows.”

“Send Susan Carol with Stevie,” Mearns said. “It’ll soften Tom up—he’s got daughters. One of us in the locker room is enough.”

“Good idea,” Kelleher said. “Let’s get going. We need to

find *anyone* who talked to Symanova today or even saw her. Any little bit of information can help.”

Stevie looked at Susan Carol to see if any of this was making her nervous. She seemed fine with it all.

“So *we’re* going to find Symanova?” he said to Kelleher.

“Find her?” Kelleher said. “Not likely. But find out what happened to her? Yeah, I think we can do that.”