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POWER TIES

The Secret Mystery of the Oracle at Yale University

A novel by

W. Bill Andrews

This book is a work of fiction.
If you believe any of it, that is your problem.
And sad.

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Power Ties:
Confessions of a Yale Law School Student

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Original paintings by T. Bill Andrews can be viewed at
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POWER TIES

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What is Yale Law School like? Something like this. Much of this really happened, pretty much as described, if that is the sort of thing that is important to you. I've jumbled up the names, and whatnot, slicing character traits and comments from A,B,C,D,E,F,G and H and then grafting them onto X or Y or Z. My best friend at Yale was a woman from my small group who quit after a semester. Again, if that is the sort of thing that matters. The main character is named for my nephew, Matt. The politics of the fictional Matt are just that: fictional. In my own life, my liberal friends think I am too conservative, my conservative friends think I am naively liberal, and my libertarian friends think I am much too moderate. The opinions expressed in this novel are, if anyone's at all, my own, or more accurately, one small facet of my own picked at random from that multi-faceted thing called truth, but, often as not, the opinions expressed are not even mine. Stated another way, Matt Jennings is a fool and anyone who thinks differently is a bigger fool than he.

This novel attempts to distill and de-mystify what going to Yale Law School is like, at least as best I know how to describe it. No one in this story is real. Historic characters, times, places, events, organizations, institutions, associations and publications are all mentioned for amusement purposes only, not for the purpose of conveying historical truth or objective fact of any sort. Yale is fairly liberal, and so Matt attempts to reflect that reality, but Yalies are an idiosyncratic lot, and thus Matt is too.

For better or worse, there are no car chases in this novel. No buried treasure. Why is it, I ask you, that Cinderella and its many permutations are the most popular stories in every culture? Why don't I take the easy way out and just feed you up a Cinderella story? It would be viscerally satisfying to you, and maybe even lucrative for me. So why can't I bend the truth and just do it? Why, why, why?

So, what is going to Yale Law School like? Well, what are you like? Because law school for you will be just like kindergarten, just like seventh grade, just like college was for you, because the one thing they will all have in common is that everywhere you look, there you are.

I should emphasize that if you are looking for truth you have come to the wrong place. If you are looking for the meaning of life you might as well ask why did the chicken cross the road. Everyone knows the meaning of life is that it ends, and the chicken crossed the road to get to the other side. And this is what Yale Law School is like. Sort of. By the way, my wife asks that I reiterate: This book is a novel, and as such, is all just a bunch of lies.

POWER TIES

A novel by

T. Bill Andrews

A First Generation College Graduate and Lawyer
now living a life of opulence and bliss
in the midst of the cornfields of Iowa
and eating way too much pepperoni pizza
who once went to school in Connecticut
and survived to tell this tale.
This is a story told by an idiot
in the manner of an idiot
for the benefit of idiots.
Enjoy.

To my wife and the love of my life, Karen,
and Stephanie Rose and Jennifer Helen,
the sparkle and sunshine in my life.

So, it's a bright, brisk Tuesday morning in mid-March of 2003. Day One of the war with Iraq. The President was on television at 8:00 last night, announcing the start of the war. My wife's cell phone rang immediately after the address to the nation, from one of the guys who helped write the speech who knew I was in town, asking me what I thought, and inviting me to the West Wing at 7:00 a.m. for breakfast.

Security in the District of Columbia is on a war footing on Tuesday morning. Pedestrians aren't even allowed on Pennsylvania Avenue to take the traditional tourist photograph in front of the White House fence. I approach the uniformed security guards manning the concrete barricades. Seeing no lanyard around my neck with a White House badge, they block my path when I reach the sidewalk in front of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. "Where are you trying to get to, sir?" one asks politely, eyeing my lapel pin. The other has his hand casually on his holstered weapon. I smile. "I'm having breakfast at the White House, fellas." They part to let me through without further inquiry.

I walk up to the northwest gate and hand my identification to White House security. They pull up my name on the computer and issue me a badge, which I pass over the electronic scanner, then walk through the metal detectors and pass through the door unescorted to the White House lawn. I amble up the drive. Behind the trees around the mansion, out of sight from the street, are snipers dressed in black holding high-powered automatic rifles with sniper scopes. Both of the Vice President's limousines are parked to my right.

I walk to the double doors of the West Wing. I open the door and am greeted cautiously by a Secret Service agent in the ante room, who makes eye contact as he picks up the phone. To my left, perhaps eight feet away, is the National Security Advisor laying out notes in a manilla folder on the conference table in the Roosevelt Room. Down the hallway a few feet further down, the door to the Oval Office is open and the Director of the CIA turns and stares at me, hands clasped behind his back. A marine in full dress uniform positions himself at the door I just entered, indicating the President is heading from the residence to the West Wing.

The Deputy Assistant to the President, Deputy Director of Presidential Speechwriting and Assistant to the Vice President arrive, and we head downstairs to the "navy mess" to our formal table set with an off-white lace linen tablecloth, cream-colored china with the Presidential seal, and a navy steward approaching with red tasseled embossed menus to seat us as the private dining room's only guests.

So what has me breakfasting at the White House on Day One of the war? One thing and one thing only: Power Ties. One variation of the choices that make up that story goes something like this.

—*T. Bill Andrews Des Moines*

.....Ivy Beleaguered

I had the strange feeling my first day that I should genuflect — a sort of Catholic-Pavlovian response to towering Gothic architecture, dark wood walls, and leaded stained glass windows. I kept telling myself it was just another building, just another law school. But I remained somehow unconvinced.

It was the Sterling Law Building.

It was Yale.

I hesitated, then walked in the main entrance of the law school, beneath the leering gaze of a granite gargoyle perched above the ached stone doorway.

At the far end of the hallway a dog sat beneath a tremendous, gilt-framed oil portrait of the last Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court to come from Yale Law School. I could sense that, unlike me, the dog knew the score. The dog sat silently, staring at me.

"Hey, dog. What's up?"

The dog got off his rear haunches and sauntered toward me. I scratched him behind his ear, but the dog appeared uninterested in a relationship. A wet nose sniffed both my hands, checking for food. Then, none having been found, the dog slowly climbed a curved granite staircase, past the sun beamed landing, fading off into the dimly lit upper reaches of the law school.

Why could the dog not be happy with just a little friendly attention, a scratch behind the ear? My working theory was that perhaps expectations were set high at Yale. Even for a dog.

I turned and started walking down the main hall's mammoth marble floor, gazing up at the arched ceiling and the ornate oak-trimmed walls. As hallways go, it was fairly intimidating. From an architectural standpoint, the hallway was somewhere between a mausoleum and a Gothic, triple-length bowling alley.

Of course, Yale Law School did not have a private bowling alley, Gothic or otherwise.

A private *squash court*, yes. Three floors up. But not a bowling alley. No bowling in the Ivy League.

I heard the faint sound of music drifting through the hallway and followed it. I eventually found the main auditorium just as First Year Orientation was about to begin. The room was buzzing with introductions. A string ensemble on the main stage was playing Mozart softly in the background.

Attached along the aisle seats were large signs on sticks, making the auditorium look a lot like a political convention hall. Instead of states, the placards had the names of professors written on them. I scanned the horizon, found the row marked "PROF. SILVERSTINE," and entered the appropriate aisle of seats. A guy a few years younger than me was standing in the aisle and turned to make eye contact with me as he flashed an overly big, forced smile.

"Hi," I said, holding out my hand, "I'm Matt Jennings."

"Matt, nice to meet you," he said, motioning me to go past him and take his seat as he moved around me toward the aisle. "I'm Hugh Rutledge, Matt."

That painfully well-rehearsed smile remained smiling. Smiling, smiling, smiling. The eye contact also remained unbroken, in a forced, awkward, unnatural way.

Hugh began talking but I was still focused on that smile, and Hugh's use of my first name every few seconds. Then it hit me. A reading from the Book of Dale Carnegie: "A man with a smile is always welcome. Especially one who says your name." *How to Win Friends and Influence People* p. 90 (1936).

Content that I had figured Hugh out, I turned my attention to what he was saying.

Hugh Rutledge quickly informed me that he was a National Merit Scholar with a Master's in Economic Political Science from Chicago who had just finished a one-year fellowship working in the basement of the White House for the National Security Counsel. Try saying that three times in a row quickly.

I would later figure out that Hugh had arrived in New Haven two weeks early and staked himself out near the front doors of the law school. He had been introducing himself to all my classmates as they

trickled into town to set-up housekeeping, having figured out that, from a psychological standpoint, all arriving members of our class would permanently bond with whoever they first met at the law school. At the end of three years there would be scores of graduates who would describe Hugh as their first friend at Yale Law School. Many would assume he was their best friend at Yale. I suppose I thwarted Hugh's plan by not anxiously arriving early in New Haven to scope out the campus, but he still managed to meet me first.

Hugh turned away from me to greet one last straggler who had just entered the "PROFESSOR SILVERSTINE" aisle. Only in retrospect would it occur to me that Hugh kept moving to the end of the aisle, so as each member of our small group arrived at orientation, he continued to be the first person they met.

I turned to greet a woman in her mid-twenties wearing an \$800 leather flight jacket who was seated to my left. It was nearly 90° in the September shade, but somehow she made the jacket work.

"Hi. Matt Jennings," I said, again holding out my hand.

"Jennifer... Jennifer Lynn VanDeVanter."

Among her numerous other accomplishments, Jennifer... Jennifer Lynn VanDeVanter turned out to be a twenty-four-year-old Truman Fellow and Rhodes Scholar with a Ph.D. in computer theory by way of Princeton. As Jennifer... Jennifer Lynn VanDeVanter worked her resume into our conversation I was also hearing bits and pieces from the other introductory biographies and personal pedigrees being exchanged all around me.

From what I was hearing, I began to suspect I was in trouble.

..... The One Mistake

The auditorium quieted as a large, bald-headed man with a nine-inch salt and pepper beard began to adjust a crackling microphone. His voice boomed. "I'm Dean Tanney, the Director of Admissions." Thunderous applause erupted in the auditorium.

We were nothing if not grateful.

"I usually break the ice by telling a few jokes about the aroma of that diploma mill next door in Massachusetts."

Unlike Harvard and many assembly-line, for-profit law schools, Yale kept each year's entering class size relatively small. At around six-to-one, Yale had the best student-to-faculty ratio of any law school in the country.

"But," smiled Tanney, "there are so many Harvard jokes — and they're all so true — that it seems pointless to bother."

Harvard bashing, I quickly discovered, was a recurrent theme at Yale, almost rising to the level of a sacred duty. Yale had been founded three centuries earlier by parents dissatisfied with the education Harvard was offering their children and friendly friction continued to be a hallmark of the two schools' relationship. Year in, year out, the hottest selling novelty items on the Yale campus were rolls of toilet paper with tiny facsimiles of Harvard diplomas printed on every sheet, each sheet emblazoned in red with Harvard's century-old unofficial logo: "You Can Always Tell a Harvard Grad; You Just Can't Tell Them Much."

"Besides," added the Dean of Thick Envelopes, shaking his head in mock disbelief, "I just finished re-reading all your admissions essays over the weekend, so I've had about all the laughs I can handle for one week."

One hundred seventy-five bodies fidgeted, amidst a sprinkling of nervous laughter, as we each remembered the interesting manipulation of factual reality that had richly embroidered our Why-I-Want-To-Go-To-Yale essays.

I noticed that I seemed to be laughing with a bit more zest than most. Was I the only one who thought the writing sample was supposed to be fictional?

"Each of you is no doubt thinking that we may have made one mistake during the admissions process... and that *you're* it." There was more fidgeting and more of the nervous laughter that accompanies uncomfortable agreement. Again, I seemed to be laughing a little longer and louder than most.

One mistake? He flattered the place. I figured it had taken a lot more than *one* mistake for me to have been admitted.

"Let me tell you right off, we've been doing this a long time. Yale Law School doesn't make quality control mistakes... at least not in *student* selection." Tanney cast a glance, pregnant with implication, up toward the junior faculty seated in the balcony's cheap seats.

..... Magic Numbers

"I suppose I could tell you a bit about yourselves," continued Tanney. "Most of you wisely turned down at least a dozen scholarship offers from Top Twenty law schools to come here, and dozens of recruitment letters from other law schools after they saw your LSAT rankings."

Every law school, indeed, every graduate school, granted admission to more students than they could actually handle for the simple reason that not every person admitted would ultimately choose to attend. But since the early 1980's, virtually everyone accepted at Yale Law School had chosen to attend. Even though thirty fewer students had been accepted this year for our class of 175, twenty-five more than the year before had confirmed their attendance. We had all received emergency overnight letters from the Dean of Admissions asking us to consider deferring starting for a year.

Of course Yale took pride in the fact that Harvard had, once again, taken people from its waiting list to fill out its class.

"Generally, you all scored in the top one percent on the Law School Admissions Test, and the vast majority of you graduated *summa* or *magna cum laude*. All of which isn't too surprising, since Yale consistently has — bar none — *the* highest admissions standards and highest rejection rate of any college, university, or graduate school on the planet."

"Perhaps most importantly," said Tanney, slowing the pace of his delivery, "your class weighs a total of 14.2 tons, and that's up over a quarter-ton from last year, so this year we're getting a little more student for our money."

..... Just Call Me Pinky

"On a slightly more serious level," said Tanney, as I looked at my waistline and vowed to lose a couple pounds, "all of you are here because you did whatever you were up to before coming to Yale exceptionally well. It isn't your test scores or grade point averages that got you admitted here; it was the non-numerical evidence of your drive and creativity. It's natural that many of you may be somewhat afraid of failure, but I can tell you this," announced Tanney, gazing out across the auditorium's sea of faces and pausing to sink in his point, "*none of you will fail.*"

Tanney adjusted his microphone with the sort of unscripted confidence and authority that comes from a man in his element.

"Admission to Yale is the equivalent of graduation from Yale," continued Tanney. "The only students who leave here are those who choose to for their own reasons and," he said, holding up five fingers, "I can count the number on one hand who eventually will so choose."

Tanney slowly lowered his hand.

And there it was.

Who would be among the five or so to go? And why?
 It was obviously unthinkable.
 So why was I thinking about it?
 Perhaps because I had the sneaking suspicion that I was
 doomed to be Tanney's little finger.

. Bali-Ha'i — Easy Time Versus Hard Time

"Rules here at the law school are almost nonexistent. On most subjects our policy is that we don't have a policy. What few rules we do have seem to exist primarily so that you can practice your skills of argumentation explaining why they shouldn't apply to you." The other faculty speakers on the dias sagely nodded in knowing affirmation.

"Beyond that," added Tanney, "Yale is non-graded."

A year earlier, back when I had first seen the term "Non-Graded" in the Yale Law School Bulletin, it had beckoned to me, whispering sweet nothings in my ear, hinting that here might be a place where getting a legal education would be a bearable three-year ordeal. "It doesn't matter how good a law school you get into," a law professor at my undergraduate school had told me, "you'll still have to work your ass off to get the grades if you want your degree to do you any good." Then he had paused a moment, smiled, and added as an improbable afterthought, "Unless, of course, you can somehow find a way to get into Yale...."

I viewed law school as a means to an end, and found it hard to regard law school as an intrinsically rewarding end in and of itself. So I found myself wishing that I could go to Yale, not nearly mindful enough of the Chinese proverb warning one and all to be careful what you wish for, lest your wish be granted.

By the time I finally chose a law school, the phrase "**Non-Graded**" was looming ten-feet tall, a beautiful sight to a loving eye, standing like my own personal island of Bali-Ha'i, framed against an emerald sea in a warm, diffused golden glowing light, wafting palms swaying in the misty, ethereal breeze of my mind's eye. Law school utopia. "Come to me, my special island, come to me, come to meeee...."