

Excerpt from “Ripe For The Picking” by Terrence Rundle West © 2004

# **Ripe for the Picking**

**A NOVEL**

**TERRENCE RUNDLE WEST**

Ripe For the Picking  
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For Peggy  
With love and gratitude

# ONE

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## **Sunday, May 14: Mother's Day Boston, Massachusetts**

Andrew Pellow paced the empty corridor of the twenty-ninth floor, high above downtown Boston. Half a step behind him, biding his time, strode Charles Doherty, corporate raider and kingmaker. At sixty-nine, Pellow no longer punched walls or slammed doors, but on this grey morning, it would've been a better bromide than fist clenching. Had there been employees about, they would've already fled his ruddy glow and trembling chins. But employees were not scurrying for cover this Sunday morning. The only hired people about were the few secretaries working out of sight in the photocopy room and the extra security brought in for the occasion. The meeting participants, the forty-four prominent businessmen pouring over documents in the adjacent boardroom, were not aware of Pellow's rage, nor its cause. All they had seen was a disenchanted, but controlled, Andrew Pellow exit the room. They were not witness to the explosion in the hallway.

"Goddammit Charles . . . I don't understand," Pellow said, between breaths.  
"They've accepted my judgement on everything else. Why oppose me on this?"

"Stop beating yourself up, Andrew. You've put together a phenomenal concept. They're grateful. Why wouldn't they be? They're about to make a lot of money. It's just that they want the fieldwork spearheaded by someone with more experience than Simpson."

“Simpson may be young, but he’s good.”

“I know that and you know that, but he’s New Age; a ‘computer-literati’ type. They feel more comfortable with someone from their own generation. They’ve studied the dossiers on both candidates and prefer Lefebvre. He’s a genius with figures and one hell of an asset in the boardroom. He multi-tasks with the best of them. You’ve said so yourself. And he’s a good Christian family man. That’s important to these boys.”

Pellow rolled his eyes upwards to the harsh corridor lighting and ran his hand through his wavy, white hair. Neither Charles ‘Can-do’ Doherty, nor the corporate magnates in the boardroom, knew of his campaign to edge Lefebvre out of the company in favour of Simpson. Lefebvre should’ve been gone by now. But the man was either plain stubborn or his wife was bullying him into hanging on.

“You agree with them on that?” Pellow asked.

“Not necessarily,” Doherty replied, pouring on the Southern drawl, reputedly soothing to Northerners. “But Lefebvre’s a known entity. What’s the problem? I thought he was your boardroom pit bull?”

“I never said he wasn’t sharp, Charles. It’s just that he’s too much of a backroom perfectionist. We need a go-getter on point. Someone with the guts to slash and grab and worry about putting out fires later; a General Grant, not a Burnside.” Pellow immediately regretted using the Northern-generals analogy on his Tennessean associate.

Charles shook his head slowly. “But we can’t afford a young blunderer either—a Custer. Look, my sources tell me Lefebvre’s got a quiet confidence that people find inspiring. They say he *can* take charge; he’s just not . . . pushy about it.”

“What else do they say?” Pellow asked, shaking his head.

“That he’s diplomatic and fair-minded; qualities we’re going to need. Remember, we’re talking about foraging in a foreign land. We can use someone with brains *and* a bedside manner. Too much brashness could be disastrous.”

Pellow stopped and turned to the diminutive Doherty. He knew he was losing, but had points to get out for the record. “Has it occurred to anyone that a guy like Lefebvre could wind up siding with the natives?”

“Have you grounds for saying that?”

“A feeling.”

Doherty shrugged his bony shoulders. “Come on Andrew. You’ll have to do better than that.”

Andrew was about to reply, but reconsidered. He’d planted the seed and that would do for now. He resumed walking with Doherty tagging alongside. After a few minutes, his pace slowed and his breathing returned to normal. “Don’t get me wrong,” Pellow said at last. “Lefebvre’s a good employee, loyal and stable. I’m just afraid he’ll let boy-scout morality cloud his judgement when he’s up there face to face with the locals.”

“Then pay him enough to swallow his squeamishness. Or wave the flag at him like you’ve been doing with us.” Doherty cocked his head, broke into a little smile and tried to catch Andrew’s eye as he shuffled along beside him. “Your little spiel about this venture being in the best interests of the USA was a masterful touch. Won a lot of the old boys over.”

Pellow stopped and turned to Doherty. “I meant every word of it,” he said.

Doherty dropped the smile. "Face it Andrew. The others are more comfortable with Lefebvre, so why fight it? Get the guy over here and let them have a look at him. I'll give him the once over and if I don't like what I see, I'll push for Simpson. How's that? And if we do go with Lefebvre, you can still keep Simpson up-to-date and in the wings, just in case.

Pellow shrugged. "Lefebvre had better not screw this up," he said. "It's too important."

"Where would he be now?" Doherty asked.

"That's easy," Pellow said, checking his watch. "The guy's as regular as a rabbit in heat. Sunday mornings it's tennis. As a matter of fact, his wife's conned him into a big match against the club pro. She's on the executive. They're using the event as a fundraiser."

"He's that good?"

"Used to be, but this morning he's not a happy camper; doesn't relish the prospect of losing."

Puzzlement flashed across Doherty's brow. "Sounds okay to me," he said.

"Nothing shittier than a good loser."

"It's not the losing. It's losing in public. He has a phobia about looking foolish in front of people."

"Nothing wrong with that either," Doherty said, "unless it happens often. Does it?"

Pellow thought for a second. "Mostly in his mind," he said.



“You sure?”

“Jesus, he’s worked for me for thirty years. I know what makes him tick. Okay, I’ll phone him, but it’s going to be an awkward call. He thinks I’m at the World Bank meeting in Frankfurt. You get back to the boardroom and see how the others are doing. I’ll handle Lefebvre.”

Pellow started down the hall, but Doherty stuck with him. “If you don’t mind,” he said, “I’d like to hear how it goes.”

“You don’t trust me?”

“I know you,” Doherty said, pouting in mock chagrin. “I want to be sure you make an honest effort and don’t just come back to the meeting saying he’s not interested.”

Pellow flashed a look skyward as he opened his office door. “You do realize Lefebvre might turn this down on his own,” he said.

“Un-huh,” Doherty nodded.

They entered. Pellow moved behind the desk and sat down. Doherty stood in the middle of the room, scanning for changes since his last visit years earlier. It was exactly as he remembered. Andrew was still a neat freak; not a paper or book was out of place on his desk. Even normal cluttered things—pens, stapler, paper weights—were out of sight. Doherty knew where to find them too; in the top desk drawer, along with the cigars and a half-filled ashtray. Not that Pellow was ashamed of smoking. On the contrary, he loved to blow smoke in people’s faces. The wall decorations hadn’t changed much either. The corporate trophies—citations for public spiritedness, the nickel-plated spade used to turn

the sod of his new office tower, pictures of him shaking hands with presidents and business prominents—were still there. Only one change caught Doherty’s eye. The samurai sword and bullet-ridden rising sun, prized trophies sent home with his father’s effects after his death at Tarawa, had been removed from their place of honour. They’d been a shrine to Pellow’s distrust of foreigners. Doherty hoped he hadn’t gone soft. A little xenophobia was going to come in handy.

Pellow cupped the phone while waiting for the clerk at the tennis club to fetch Lefebvre. Doherty moved to the desk and leaned over. “We want this guy,” he whispered. “If he balks, scare the shit out of him. Threaten to blackball him from boardrooms with his sex life or something. Whatever it takes. Just see that the son-of-a-bitch complies.”

Pellow shook his head slowly. “Won’t be easy,” he said. “He’s your friggin’, quintessential do-gooder. Devoted to family, doesn’t cheat on his wife, poor bastard, doesn’t line his own pockets; a little vain about his looks and athletic abilities, but no vices that I’ve been able to uncover.”

Doherty’s face exploded into a grin. “You’ll come up with something. I’ve seen your work.”