

WHAT IF IT'S EASIER TO CHANGE
EVERYTHING AT ONCE?

2063

PROJECT WEEDPATCH

DAN ANCONA



A NOVEL

Chapter 1

Julietta Collins laughed.

Their ramshackle campaign office had an ordinary bustle to it, but the usual crackle broke through a new level of haywire as half the desk and cell phones in the place rang simultaneously. Julietta had already spent too long on the phone with an unexpectedly thoughtful elderly supporter who'd sent them a check for \$25 the day before.

Her donor went on, "Oh yes, I'm fine with this talk of reparations. Never thought I'd see the day. And I just think this democratic capitalism you're talking about is exactly what we need." Then she heard the din through the phone and asked, "What is all that, dear?"

"I'm sorry, Ms Evans. It's been a pleasure chatting with you, but there's some kind of campaign mayhem occurring and I should probably look into it." Her tone remained charming as her brows scrunched together and she swept her dark brown hair off her shoulder behind the phone. Years of organizing had refined her intuition and was now crunching hard on something she couldn't identify, but that left her with a strong and unmistakable sense that something was coming at them. Their primary so far against Steve Powell hadn't been particularly contentious: it was more like a conversation between two old friends that enjoyed talking political smack and had been at it for a long time. Not surprising, since that's exactly what Julietta and Steve were.

So maybe this was the shift, or maybe it was something else entirely. A negative story in the news, or maybe worse, something exploding on social media, or even just some kind of event planning or scheduling failure or any of the million other details that a campaign was built out of? As Julietta's mind wheeled through all the options, Ms Evans politely shooed her off the phone, clucking about kids these days.

Julietta had on her usual look, what her husband Dakota once dubbed "organizer chic": a ruffled, funky skirt and a loose white blouse with a clockwork mechanism brooch. It was all locally made by a vendor she'd found on vacation at a hot springs a few hours north of Oakland a few years earlier. She noticed she was barefoot. She

had tall boots next to her desk, which was empty except for a battered laptop, this morning's coffee cup and one of the two dozen fancy phones they'd rented. She slipped on her flip flops instead and stuck her head out of her office and around the corner.

The din seemed cheerful, even faintly ridiculous, and the happy chaos contrasted with the view out the 7th floor plate glass windows and the Oakland hills sitting placidly in the late summer clarity. The interior of the office was comprised entirely of donated objects. Old computers and laptops of every lineage sat perched on a mixture of desks, mostly fashioned from repurposed office doors held together with sawhorses. A few cocktail tables had been repurposed as standing desks. Her diverse staff of a dozen or so women and a few men was crowded around them, talking to each other as much as they were focused on the machines. When they'd narrowed down their choices of headquarters, the staffer who had gone to investigate described this one as "amazing view, smell not bad, carpets horrifying, plumbing seems functional." A slightly moldy tinge had never quite left the air, even after Julietta rented a steam cleaner one night before they moved in and pressed Dakota into service to help her scrub it down, who in turn took the project over and managed to somehow recruit Elijah (their six year old) into helping while Padma crawled around, hopefully improving her year-old immune system with whatever awfulness wound up in her mouth. The posters and historic campaign paraphernalia they'd covered the walls with didn't completely cover the crumbling drywall. In a few places the wood frames of the walls and wiring was visible. Julietta's office itself barely had room for her desk, the nicest of the donated couches, and a conference table they could barely get six people around. It would only be home for them for a few months, but it was homey enough.

Julietta's mood darkened when she noticed Amarika at her desk along the wall outside Julietta's office, underneath a sign that said simply, "CHANGE" with a small rising sun Obama logo -- Julietta's framed crowd sign from the 2008 Democratic Convention. Her beloved old friend and now campaign chief had a ferocious intellect coupled with a smile that could warm a small northern city in January. But at the moment she was listening silently to a phone and boring a hole into her laptop screen with her stare.

Julietta got up, walked around the corner and stationed herself quietly behind

Amarika, peeking over her shoulder at the screen. She was scrolling down through the Sludge Report; not a site that had taken much of an interest in their race so far. Pacific coast urban Democratic primaries were often the front lines of the battle between grassroots, racially diverse and more progressive Democrats and corporate establishment forces. As critical as they were for setting the direction of the party overall, they didn't tend to garner much interest in the more extremist corners of the conservative media universe. Amarika noticed Julietta behind her and tried to shoo her away too, but when Julietta wouldn't budge, Amarika clicked on the snarky headline anyway: "Bay Area Democrat 'Family Values'... Shocking New Photographs."

Julietta mumbled "Oh, this can't be good," to no one in particular but hoping it'd land somewhere in Amarika's direction, who kept ignoring her. Amarika didn't budge or look up as she scrolled down the page past pictures of Julietta that she recognized from a party. They were old, maybe eight or ten years ago. Lovely shots that a friend of hers took, standing in front a glittery sign that said the name of the party they were at, "Sea of Kinky Dreams". There were a few pictures of her and Ayala, and then some pictures of her and Ayala and Kiyana, all in sheer lacey robes. Then a picture of her and Ayala smooching, then a picture of her and Kiyana smooching, then the three of them surrounding a sublimely happy looking Dakota. Julietta's lips were pursed, sending the camera a little kiss, her brown hair longer than and up and messy behind her, while Ayala had a slightly goofy big smile, her huge brown eyes looking out from under a dark, almost-black tangle of curly bed-head. Kiyana was between the two, somehow both smoldering and approachable, with dark skin, a big frizzy afro and a smile more deep than broad that radiated some kind of secret knowledge. Julietta had started dating Dakota just a few months earlier, and the two of them had had their first date with Ayala maybe a week before this. Then the three of them went to the party together, where they met Kiyana for the first time.

The actual visual content of the pictures wasn't that shocking, but she could see how the impression they transmitted -- the clear, unmistakable sense that these were three dangerously empowered women -- might have been, at least to certain audiences. If Sludge thought this was shocking, what happened the rest of the night would have probably required fainting couches for their entire newsroom. Julietta's happy memories collided with her shock at being so exposed. She felt a wave of

nausea.

Amarika finally hung up and looked up, and most of the tension was gone from her eyes. “No big deal, we knew this one was coming. Although...”

Julietta nodded, wanting her friend to go on.

“I don’t know Julietta. I warned you, least. The whole thing about making things more difficult for yourself, right? This is it.”

Julietta sighed. “I know, but what can I do?”

The campaign had made a deliberate decision not to try to do a thorough social media scrub for Julietta. She had planned early on her career on never running for office. It wasn’t that she’d never wanted to be out front or had some preference for working in the trenches. It was simply that growing up mostly poor with a single mom, nothing much beyond that had seemed possible.

So her social media footprint and trail of images was simply too large to deal with. When she’d decided running might actually be an option, her team reasoned that the times had changed, particularly in this district, and it would be at most a minor liability. So they did what they could: quietly tidied up the easy stuff, so at least someone would have to really put together an oppo file and spend some money to find anything, then written up an outline of a contingency plan as part of the campaign plan and hoped they wouldn’t need it. Now, six weeks out until voting started, they needed it.

The chaos bumped up another notch with a new round of ringing phones. One of the new, young staffers came over and handed her a cell phone and said, “I don’t know what this is, but I think it might be a death threat.” The young woman gulped and held the phone out. It radiated awfulness.

As their eyes met Julietta saw how scared she was—not shaking with it, but she was definitely affected. Julietta felt a brief moment of guilt at not being able to remember her name, but touched her arm and said “Don’t worry. Thank you.” She put the phone up to her ear. The voice was loud and scratchy and indistinct, ranting and

crackling in the little device's speaker. She didn't talk, just listened as it kept going. There was a lot of "fucking" and "slut" that she could barely make out. Then some graphic descriptions of what the caller wanted to do to her and Ayala. At that she recoiled, the phone falling out of her hand as she jumped back. Her stomach knotted and flipped.

"Ami, ah we need to get the police and possibly the FBI on the phone. Let's go through the procedure."

Amarika went to her desk and flipped through a notebook that they'd prepared. She kept a hard copy both out of tradition and due to a mostly justified paranoia at the possibility of online attacks. She pulled up the phone numbers they'd all hoped they wouldn't have any reason to have on file. After a brief conversation she looked up. "They are recommending no FBI just yet, let's see how it goes. They're sending two cruisers over, should be here in five minutes. They're just going to post up outside, we don't need to do anything else."

Julietta said, "Ok good." Another staffer came over with another phone. It was the same kind of rant, maybe a recording she thought, although this one was in a different voice. Another wave of stomach knots and flips hit her. As the staffer handed it to Julietta, Amarika grabbed it instead. Her and Julietta's eyes met and Julietta nodded. Amarika listened for a second, mashed the off button and glowered at it.

Julietta tried to steady herself and for a second felt like maybe she wouldn't be able to. It only took a few quick glances from the staff for Julietta to know the team needed to hear from her now. This couldn't wait for their Monday morning staff meeting. "Everyone, listen up for a second." Her voice shook a little but she waited for the quiet and for people to get off the phone, and then continued less shakily. "As most of you know by now, our good friends at the Sludge Report have posted some pictures about me and some of my loves. And some of you have heard we're getting death threats." The staff looked around the room, some moved nearer each other. "We have a procedure for dealing with this and are going to start there. We've called the police and they are on there way. We don't need to panic. Unfortunately, as many of you have experienced, this kind of thing is not an uncommon occurrence on campaigns like ours." The fear in the room hung there, she could still feel it. "Team, I

believe in you. I believe in us. The jerks aren't going to win this one. Not today. Power yields nothing without a demand and that's what we are facing today. If any other threats come in, record the times and we'll hand the information off to the police."

Then she said, "Now, top staff: war room please." Just outside the door Julietta pulled Amarika over and asked her quietly, "This is your ship but mind if I run this meeting? Not so sure I want to," She thought for a second. "Actually I'm sure I don't want to. But I feel like it'd be better if I did."

Amarika whispered back to her. "I'm happy to handle it, I got yer back. But I see your point." And then added, "I wouldn't say yes if I didn't think you had it in you. These guys are not getting inside our OODA loop this time." Julietta laughed a little at her reference and remembered her and Dakota discussing obscure warfighting theory years ago at dinner at their house. Observe, Orient, Decide, Act: the tactical decisionmaking process that every organization engaged in any kind of conflict went through. Julietta squeezed her old friend's hand in silent gratitude, for both her in this moment and for the twenty years of their shared projects, campaigns and friendship.

The four staff—Julietta, Amarika, Lauren, their communications director, and Henry, the combination research and political director Julietta had met years ago on a living wage campaign—piled into the little conference room. Henry grew up in West Oakland, spoke with a hint of his father's Jamaican lilt, was named after Henry Louis Gates, and was as passionate about picayune policy details as he was about hearing the concerns of and holding together the leaders in their coalition. Lauren was her ebullient and disconcertingly sharp communications director. She had bright red chunky glasses and a small tattoo of a stylized Port of Oakland crane on the left side of her neck, visible below the hair she usually kept shaved on that side. She'd been promoted almost instantly after getting hired to do social media, after Julietta watched her gently but thoroughly fillet the arguments of a crusty old party insider that had suggested Julietta needed to wait her turn to run.

Julietta started out - "First, safety. Unfortunately we went through this drill in the campaign setup. We've started the first phase, the cops are on their way, not much beyond that we can do for now other than hang tough."

“Second point - anyone have evidence already that Powell or his team or anyone connected to them was behind this?” No one said anything. Josiah Carmulty, Powell’s campaign manager, suddenly popped into Julietta’s head and she wondered if he was who her intuition had been chewing on earlier. “OK, let’s assume he’s not, for now, but let’s get Carmulty on the phone and rake him over the coals anyway. Amarika, you got this? Go ahead and yell at him if you want. Try to scare him a little bit. I doubt they’re behind this, I honestly don’t think they’d be smart enough even if they were evil enough. But maybe if you put the fear of the Lord in him a bit we can scare them into overreacting. If you want to hint at some of the district family demographic research on him, do it, but don’t tell ‘em anything they shouldn’t already know. If this is Powell trying to run a play he may be making a big mistake here. This could easily backfire on them.”

Given the unusual structure of Julietta’s family and some of her social circles, the campaign started out early running polling and deep research into the prevalence of alternative family structures in their district. The topics they covered ranged from multi-family communities sharing child care to woman breadwinner households to single or co-parenting families to LGBTQ issues to open relationships. They ended up with a snapshot of the Bay Area family and sexual landscape, and even having lived it and studied it, they were shocked at the how rare the traditional family norm was. The point wasn’t ever to run on her family or get them involved in any way if they could avoid it. But Julietta had a hunch it was going to come up so they needed this data to plot out a defense.

The other tectonic undercurrent they picked up in their initial research was an overall level of abject economic misery. Unemployment was stuck at 10% district wide and 18% in the city itself, with roughly a third underemployed. But even the people with jobs were feeling squeezed. With unemployment that high, even high paid workers felt completely replaceable. The long hours, brutal commutes and widespread uncertainty that had only increased over the past few years were combining to make nearly everyone miserable.

Putting these things together — the old economic and family patterns failing, but the new ones not yet created - the campaign sensed an opportunity. They didn’t stress it explicitly, but the core messages they crafted were all around this baseline

frustration with the old system and hunger for change.

In their initial rollout and press tour they'd stopped short of getting into the exact nature of her and Dakota's relationship. They'd made a specific decision to deflect all questions on it and it hadn't even come up in any significant way. Now that the heat was on with her and Powell locked into a close race, it wasn't surprising that had shifted.

She continued, "Second question: Lauren, what's the reach of the story looking like?" Lauren looked up from her laptop and said, "It looks like the inoculation we did with our interviews with corporate media around this is holding up so far. Our Oakland Tribune contact called us and said they weren't going near it." Julietta said "amazing, nice of him." Lauren continued, "A couple California tea party blogs picked it up and twitter is on fire, of course, but you're probably getting as much of a boost from the sex positive crowd as you are getting knocked down by the tea partiers. So far that's it. We have to be careful in how we respond. If it gets picked up more widely it'll generate more secondary impressions and more chances we get knocked off our positioning — like, you are going to become the 'sexy pictures candidate' rather than the 'let's work together to make work suck less' candidate — but research will have to help you with that over the next couple of days."

Julietta said, "Yah, that's action point 2. I don't want to do a poll and make this spread but maybe we should start the tracking polls early. We still have a little dough in the budget for some more focus groups, I hope? Let's watch the tracking then quietly get inside people's heads on this as much as we can, particularly young women. I don't want to see our ones peeling off because of something we haven't thought of around this." Henry nodded. A background in field organizing was a prerequisite for everyone Julietta hired, so when she referred to their "ones" - or the strongest supporters on the standard five-point scale - she didn't need to explain it to anyone in the room.

"OK, third question: any friendly response coming in yet? Political, you hear anything, or Lauren you picking something up?" Lauren had been scrolling through the social media dashboard and looking at the custom machine learning and sentiment analysis tools that Dakota had, on a whim, cobbled together for them as an experiment. The set of programs he'd written sat on some cloud servers he'd set

up, constantly monitoring the online chatter in their district and popping up notifications and summaries for what was going on. “Not yet, but my guess is they are still crunching a response that’s not going to hit us in the back. I hope that’s what they are thinking about at least.”

Henry had been spinning a pen in his hand in a way that seemed to defy physics, and magnified how fully absorbed in listening he was. He set the pen on the table and said, “Later this evening I’ll make a couple calls but we can probably expect at least Ultraviolet to light up their local list or maybe even statewide. They might be waiting to see what kind of legs it’s got first though. I’ll come up with a list of other folks who might be willing to do a proxy counterattack.” Ultraviolet was an online community with a national list of several million at this point. They could make a lot of noise, but also had to be careful about how they engaged politically.

Amarika said, “And that, exactly, is the five million dollar question here. I lean towards shooting back, generally. I think on general principles if a campaign doesn’t respond to something like this, it looks like they can’t take a punch or give one. But we’re also going to blow this up a lot more hugely than it already is if we start making a bunch of noise and go straight back at them. There’s a very real danger of over-responding here, as Lauren flagged.”

Julietta thought for a second, her mind expanding out into all the ramifications of where this was heading. “What if we used the distributed field leadership? Amarika, I know we discussed this years ago, but have you ever tried it?”

Julietta's phone vibrated. She glanced at it and saw a text message from Dakota: "what's up, i just got a kind of fucked up google alert about you." She looked up and told the room, "Hang on a sec, it's Dakota." She wrote him back quickly: "yeah we're on it. in mtg now, don't worry, they're not in our ooda loop :) <3." She looked up and said, "OK, sorry. So, using field to respond." Her phone vibrated again but she left it on the desk.

Amarika said, “We did, once. State house race in Virginia. Late mail hit called the guy a nazi sympathizer because he’d been an ACLU member.”

Julietta made a gagging noise. “Seriously?”

“Yup. He was a vet, too. He’d been through three tours in Afghanistan. We lost, but it was the last weekend and I’m not sure we had time to diffuse our counterattack. So it might work, but it takes a while. In this case we probably have time. Let me think about it but I’d probably be open to trying something.”

Julietta said, “Lauren and Henry, can you two get together and draft an email to the neighborhood team leaders? I’ll call some of the top folks myself to let them know what is up and help refine it from there. Actually - hang on a second.” She stopped and stared at the ceiling. “Something is bothering me here. Why is this happening?”

Blank stares from around the table. Julietta went on, “As far as conservative elections go, we’re not even a backwater. No GOP candidate has a shot here, not even with the open primary. Why would somebody want Powell over me?”

The question hung in the room until Amarika said, “It’s not about the election. This is a worldview play.”

Julietta said, “How so?”

Amarika said, “I’m as big a fan of the economic plan that we’ve built as anyone, you know this. Linking reparations to universal basic income was a brilliant idea. Democratic capitalism is every bit as radical as we can go and would make a lot of people’s lives a hell of a lot better. And you are delivering it with just the right amount of fire in the belly now.” Julietta smiled; she didn’t start out as a confident speaker and the part she was least confident about was their economic agenda, despite how central it was. She and the staff had put a ton of work into this over the past few months. “But none of that is a bag of chips compared to the family stuff. If the way you and Dakota live starts to catch on, it’s a direct threat to the parts of the economy feeding the 1% that’s backing guys like Sludge.” She nodded towards the campaign office. “Hell, the racial composition of the people in that room are threat enough.”

Amarika kept going. “In fact now that I think about it, these attacks could be about to get much worse. We need to be really careful here. It’s easy to forget how radical your life is because you two make it seem so easy, and because of how you come across as

so ordinary and approachable. I know it's hard for you both sometimes like it is for everyone. It just doesn't look that hard, and that makes you dangerous. The fact that you are connecting the family stuff with the economic plan and racial diversity, even in a vague way, even though we've made an effort not to go there too explicitly... just having these things connected might be scaring these guys on a fundamental level anyway."

"In fact never mind what I said about worldview." Amarika leaned back, thinking it through. "The family stuff is beside the point." She waved her hand, brushing it off. "It's really just about the bottom line, just about the bling. This stuff about investment in society, the stuff about culture and art and becoming a people oriented, not thing oriented society... they know their only way to make that happen is with big, democratic investments. Putting more wealth under democratic control. Which means taxes on them, and the only thing holding back our coalition is internal racism. We know this and they know this. Every last bit of their argument comes back to keeping taxes low on rich folks and the only way to keep people focused on that is by playing them off each other. And the fact, is Powell is a hell of a lot less scary to them than you are. So someone, somewhere is willing to get ugly on us."

Julietta looked a little ashen and exhaled slowly. "I agree with all of that. But what do we do?"

Amarika said, "Well, whether we respond directly at this juncture or not is your call. I'm up for trying responding through the field campaign. Henry? Lauren?" They both nodded assent.

Julietta said, "Let's do it. Can you two draft something? And Amarika, glad you're on our side. I'm so grateful for all of you today. Don't make me say the Seneca line." Lauren smiled at her and cut her off: "fate leads the willing and drags the unwilling!" Julietta laughed. "This is why we built this campaign the way we did. Let's see what it can do. Can you two give Amarika and me the room?"

As Lauren and Henry filed out, Julietta slumped into a chair. Amarika gave her a concerned look as Julietta said, "Ami this is really freaking me out. I'm worried it hasn't even really hit me yet."

“Yeah, I get that. You were great with the staff, and with Lauren and Henry, though.”

“Thanks. The outsides sure don’t match the insides.” She groaned quietly and the stress and anger seemed to hang hazy in the air, but then dissipated. At least a little.

Amarika said, “Well, sometimes that’s how it goes. Want to talk more?”

“I’m not even sure what I need. I just can't wait to get home and hug Elijah and Padma.”

Ami nodded. "How are they doing through all this?"

Julietta said, "Oh you know. They miss their mama. Well, at least Elijah does. Being six is hard. It's kind of killing me. Padma doesn't really seem to notice, she mostly just giggles and sings to herself."

At that moment Lauren knocked and Julietta gestured for her to come in. “Ami, it’s one of the media buyers. Want me to brush him off again?”

Amarika looked at her friend, “You good for now?”

Julietta said, “Yeah yeah. Go deal, I’m ok.”

Alone again, Julietta kicked off her flip flops and leaned back in the creaky old wooden chair they’d found in the storage unit a local party club had let them browse through. She thought back to the Burning Man years ago where she’d first met Steve Powell. The long rambling, dusty conversations they’d had about visions for the future, about how to connect the explosively creative and positive energy they felt out there back into the reality of what was happening in the reality of their country. Back in 2000 it all seemed impossibly far apart, incredibly distant. Later that year they both worked on a living wage campaign, before Powell went off to build a startup that turned out successful enough that he was able to almost self-fund his campaign, along with a few of his venture capitalist pals. These weren’t bad guys, mostly; Julietta knew a lot of them and they at least kept a veneer of being open minded and forward looking. But she had certainly run into a nasty vein of privilege and sexism right below the surface in some of them at times when their paths had crossed.

Running had forced them both to define their visions, and those visions diverged. They started out without much daylight between them, but as the nature of the campaign forced them to draw contrasts, she was disappointed to watch Powell give up so much of what his core vision had been. He almost gave up arguing for it at all, even. He went beyond just tamping down the original more fiery vision of economic transformation that Julietta knew they shared and veered into making arguments that were downright counterproductive. She understood the bet that the electorate would, yet again, lean older and more conservative, but she thought it was hollow strategy. The point of leadership for her wasn't to just meet people where they were at and leave them there. It was to move them.

Powell had always been somewhat moved by the kind of progressive sounding libertarian arguments that another of their campmates from back then, Peter Dixon, had made. Dixon had also gone on to build a successful banking startup. Julietta wasn't sure, but at times felt like she could hear Dixon's arguments in Powell's message. She'd read that Dixon had been working with a libertarian Republican presidential campaign but wondered if he and Powell were still in touch.

Julietta hadn't made concessions so much as she'd honed the language and refined her argument, instead of giving up anything substantive. The arguments about language weren't her primary expertise - she was much better at the tactical stuff - but her campaign staff, Dakota included, relished this process, and stayed up many nights arguing the finer points and boiling down arguments to their most potent essences. But through all the sophisticated machinery she still allowed the fire to come through at times. Their message of antiracism as the path resonated. It worked. They needed that fire to reach young people. By coloring inside the lines of the older electorate, Powell didn't. Powell's was an easier path to victory, but for Julietta, winning the easy way wasn't worth the trouble of running.

The possibility of taking the harder path and having it result in a victory was ultimately what persuaded to her to make the run. Like the rest of their staff, Dakota and Julietta started their political careers years ago doing field organizing: the volunteer recruitment, knocking on doors, personal contacts and long term relationship and organization development that had, along with social media, gradually replaced print mail and TV ads as the meat and potatoes of the campaign

world over the past few cycles. Dakota had worked in the political technology world for years so knew who was building the most interesting tools and how to hook them together.

And they'd started the campaign out by seeding and helping build up existing Democratic Party clubs throughout the district. The hope was that this would be a more resilient, agile and powerful structure for a campaign, but they also felt that, even if they lost, their hard work at engaging these voters would leave the East Bay structure of democracy better off and more participatory than it was before. When Julietta and Dakota first got involved they'd thought a campaign as a tool for improving democracy was at least a theoretical possibility, but here they were, building and running just such a thing, built on the principles of respect, empowerment and inclusion that the Obama campaign had started out with in 2008.

This combination of distributed field and technology gave their campaign an unusual feel. "Futuristic," a friend of theirs called it: futuristic and nostalgic at the same time. They were really getting to know the people who were leading their teams in the neighborhoods. They'd built up a degree of trust. The volunteers down to the block level felt like they were part of the team since they had inside knowledge of what was going on. Her campaign was essentially recreating a vastly more inclusive version of early 20th century of American democracy with fancier communications networks, and in the most gloriously diverse piece of political turf anywhere. Just over 300,000 Democratic voters: white folks up the hills, people of color down in the flats, a few more integrated neighborhoods but more races and creeds were represented in this district than anywhere else in the country. And unfortunately, vast barriers of inequality that separated their lives so far from each other. But her campaign was built to smash those barriers: the whole thing was built to drive power, dignity and respect down and out into the the community she'd adopted twenty years ago and grown to love so deeply.

Amazingly, it was all working. But the screaming, nasty voice on the phone from the afternoon came back to Julietta suddenly. She wondered about what she'd missed, about what larger forces might be in play that could have leaked the pictures and led to this. Amarika once told her that her superpower was the ability to understand the motivations of everyone in the room at once, and to pick the right path through all of them.

She started thinking about the motivation of the person at the other end of the line screaming obscenities at her but quickly stopped, shivering a bit at what else someone like that might be capable of. And wondering if they were going to find out.

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