

COLLISION OF POWER

TRUMP, BEZOS,

AND THE

WASHINGTON POST

MARTIN BARON



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THE WASHINGTON POST

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In memory of my parents, Howard and Rebecca Baron

PROLOGUE

The White House, June 15, 2017

The dinner with President Trump was to be kept confidential. He wouldn't talk about it. We wouldn't either. Our reporting staff was to be kept in the dark, and to this day the meeting has never been reported. No one in the newsroom ever suggested to me they were aware of it. Reporters who had dug up many secrets about the Trump White House somehow missed this one.

The black SUV with tinted windows carrying Jeff Bezos, owner of *The Washington Post*, would be allowed onto the White House grounds at 6:50 p.m.—waved in through a wrought-iron vehicle entrance gate—so that he could enter without being observed. On that clear June evening in 2017, with temperatures in the low eighties, *The Post's* publisher, Fred Ryan, its editorial page editor, Fred Hiatt, and I as the executive editor who oversaw news coverage would walk up to a gate at the northeast corner of the White House grounds, avoiding the Northwest Gate, where we would almost certainly be spotted by journalists entering and exiting.

This was not a dinner I was looking forward to. I had not met Trump, even though our reporters had spent many hours with him. Except for natural curiosity, I didn't feel a need to. I could assess him on what he said and did. And what good could come from spending time with him that evening? Surely he would see dinner as a favor and expect something in return. And surely he would conclude from our visit as a group that Bezos had a hand in news coverage.

Although Ryan had proposed the meeting to the White House, he sought to allay my concerns about how Trump would interpret it. He assured me that

he had made one thing clear: The White House should not expect this get-together to influence coverage. And yet why else would the White House agree to have us over for dinner if Trump felt he had nothing to gain?

Ryan was taken with the idea of getting together face-to-face: Leadership of the dominant news organization in the nation's capital should meet with the new leader of the country. Ryan had even broached the idea of holding the meeting at his own home. Not likely. And sure enough the White House said no.

Trump would not be coming to us. We would go to him, five months into his position as the most powerful person on the planet. If word leaked out and there were press inquiries about the presence of *The Post's* owner, Bezos suggested just saying he "was invited" rather than, as a prewritten statement worded it, that it was appropriate for him to attend.

We must have been an odd-looking group: Bezos, the impressively fit Amazon founder who was among the richest people in the world, recognizable anywhere for his bald head, short stature, booming laugh, and radiant intensity; Ryan, an alumnus of the Reagan administration who was a head taller than my own five feet eleven inches, with his graying blond hair and a giant glistening smile; Hiatt, a thirty-six-year *Post* veteran and former foreign correspondent with an earnest and bookish look; and me, still a relative newcomer to *The Post*, with a trimmed gray beard, woolly head of hair, and what was invariably described as my dour and taciturn demeanor.

We were politely welcomed by Trump, First Lady Melania Trump, and son-in-law Jared Kushner. Ivanka Trump had planned to be with us but instead attended the annual Congressional Baseball Game, where thousands prayed for Representative Steve Scalise of Louisiana, who had been shot and severely injured the previous day during a practice game in Alexandria, Virginia. The shooter was a Trump hater.

Although Trump had visited MedStar Washington Hospital Center, where Scalise was in critical condition, he appeared at the game only on a big screen. "By playing tonight," he declared, "you are showing the world that we will not be intimidated by threats, acts of violence, or assaults on our democracy. The game will go on ... I know you all will be playing extra hard tonight for Steve."

Ivanka's place setting was removed from the table in the Blue Room—an egg-shaped reception room with blue and gold accents and a lavish chandelier—suggesting a last-minute decision on her part to attend the game (where media took particular note of her more formal wear). I wondered why Trump himself had opted to be with us rather than at the game. A strong supporter of his was in the hospital receiving blood transfusions and undergoing surgeries. A bullet had entered Scalise's hip, the hospital reported, traveling "across his pelvis, fracturing bones, injuring internal organs, and causing severe bleeding." His survival was in doubt. The baseball game provided a rare opportunity for bipartisanship. The president could have seized on the moment.

Trump's press secretary at the time, Sean Spicer, later cited security reasons for Trump's absence from the game. Maybe so, but the president's image could not have been enhanced if, at such a fraught moment, the public knew he chose to spend his time with the very sorts of media people whom he called the "lowest form of life." Away from the memorial, Trump would pass the evening with us—crowing about his election victory, mocking his rivals and even some in his own orbit, boasting already of imagined accomplishments, calculating how he could win yet again in four years, and describing *The Washington Post* as the worst of all media outlets. As we dined on cheese soufflé, pan-roasted Dover sole, and chocolate cream tart, he went on to disparage other media outlets—*The New York Times* came in just behind us in his ranking at the time—whose journalists he had labeled for months as scum and garbage.

As our visit commenced, at seven p.m. *The Post* published a report that was likely to secure our No. 1 spot for a while: Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller III was inquiring into Kushner's business dealings in Russia, part of his investigation into that country's interference in the 2016 election. The story landed on top of a previous one by *The Post* that revealed Kushner had met secretly with Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak and had proposed that a Russian diplomatic post be used to provide a secure communications line between Trump officials and the Kremlin. *The Post* had reported as well that Kushner met later with Sergey Gorkov, head of a Russian-owned development bank.

Jamie Gorelick, one of Kushner's lawyers who was also a director of Amazon, had previously called me to push back against the idea that her client was the "focus" or "subject" of an investigation. Kushner, for his part, was bristling at the attention, both from investigators and the press. He had called and emailed my boss, Ryan, fretting over what headlines might say and labeling as "jackasses" the national security reporters who were digging into his Russia contacts. He followed up with a series of agitated emails, even copying in Bezos ("Looping in Jamie who can vouch on this with Jeff since she knows him well," read one), while declining to speak directly to the reporters involved and steadfastly avoiding communication directly with me. In a meeting later that week with White House correspondents Philip Rucker and Ashley Parker as well as national editor Steven Ginsberg, he had pounded a table in fury, wailing about the good life he and Ivanka had left behind in New York and the potential injury to his reputation. As *The Post's* journalists made their exit, Kushner patted Steven on the back, declaring, "Well, that was therapeutic."

Also annoyed was Trump, who at our White House dinner derided what he had been hearing about our story on the special counsel and his son-in-law, suggesting incorrectly that it alleged money laundering. "He's a good kid," he said of Kushner, who at the time was thirty-six and a father of three.

As we were about to take our seats, twenty-eight-year-old Trump aide Hope Hicks handed Kushner her phone. Our alert had just gone out, reaching millions of mobile devices, no doubt including hers. "Very Shakespearean," she whispered to Kushner. "Dining with your enemies."

Hiatt whispered back, "We're not your enemies."

But Trump, his family, and his team had affixed us on their enemies list, and nothing was going to change anyone's mind. We had been neither servile nor sycophantic toward Trump, and we weren't going to be. Our job was to report aggressively on the president and to hold his administration, like all others, to account. In the mind of the president and those in his orbit, that most fundamental journalistic obligation made us the opposition.

There was political benefit to Trump in going further. We would not just be his enemy. We would be the country's enemy; in his telling, we would be traitors. Less than a month into his presidency, Trump had denounced the

press as “the enemy of the American People” on Twitter. It was an ominous echo of the phrase invoked by Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Hitler’s propagandist Joseph Goebbels and deployed for the purpose of repression and murder.

Trump could not have cared less about the history of such incendiary language or how it might incite physical attacks on journalists.

And it was clear from that moment, if it had not been earlier, that he saw all of us at that table as his foes—not just me as the one who directed news reporting, not just Fred Hiatt as the one who separately oversaw editorials, but also Fred Ryan, who was our superior as publisher, and Jeff Bezos. Perhaps most especially Bezos because he owned *The Post* and, in Trump’s mind, was pulling the strings—or could pull them if he wished.

At our dinner, though, Trump sought to be charming. It was a superficial charm, entirely without warmth or authenticity. He did almost all the talking. We scarcely said a word, and I said the least out of discomfort at being there and seeking to avoid any direct confrontation with him over coverage in front of Bezos and Ryan. Anything I said could set him off. Since I didn’t see any good that could come out of the meeting, perhaps at least I could avoid the bad. Why risk fireworks between us?

We had agreed to keep this meeting off the record. And yet Trump has by now said publicly largely everything he said then in private. What’s more, we were exploiting an administration policy *The Post* itself had editorially condemned: Trump’s refusal to follow President Obama’s practice of releasing voluminous records on who visited the White House.

In an April 2017 editorial titled “The Secret Presidency,” *The Post* declared that “Trump’s decision to claw the White House logs back into the shadows follows several other moves that show contempt for the public.” We were now party to one of those secrets. Trump’s public statements since render moot the confidentiality accorded his comments. And to continue maintaining the secrecy of the meeting itself would be an act of persistent hypocrisy.

With the passing of years, nothing said at the meeting will still shock. Trump’s rhetoric became only more inflammatory. His self-aggrandizement became only more routine. His belittlement of senior members of his

administration became a signature of his presidency.

At the dinner, he let loose on a long list of perceived enemies and slights: The chief executive of Macy's was a "coward" for pulling Trump products from store shelves in reaction to Trump's remarks portraying Mexican immigrants as rapists; he would have been picketed by only "20 Mexicans. Who cares?" He had better relations with foreign leaders than Obama, who was lazy and never called them. Obama left disasters around the world for him to solve. Obama was hesitant to allow the military to kill people in Afghanistan; he told the military to just do it, don't ask for permission. Egypt needed a rough guy like President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi; otherwise, the country would be a disaster. And, foreshadowing Trump's remarks revealed in a book by Barak Ravid released almost a year after he departed the White House, the president said he was surprised to find that the Palestinians want a peace deal more than the Israelis. Fresh from visiting several weeks earlier with Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas in Bethlehem and Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem, Trump took note of the billions of dollars in aid the United States provided Israel and acknowledged asking early on whether it couldn't be leveraged to pressure Israel to make peace. "I was told 'there's no connection,'" he said. He was incredulous. "No connection?"

Attorney General Jeff Sessions, fired FBI director James Comey, former deputy FBI director Andrew McCabe, and special counsel Robert Mueller were slammed for reasons that are now familiar. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis was "the best." (He'd later call him "the most overrated general.") Trump went on at length about how devastating nuclear weapons could be, how the entire South would be demolished if Miami were hit, how Amazon would be turned to "shit" if Seattle were targeted. By his accounting, Russia's nuclear weapons were all new and worked well—"not like ours, but we're going to fix that." And there was no real harm in being friends with Vladimir Putin, the Russian president. No one really knew for sure, he said, whether Russia was behind the election interference in 2016.

He promised to soon deliver a better health-care plan, a big tax cut, and a major infrastructure plan. (One of three turned out to be true.)

As Trump meandered from one subject to the next, Jared sat straight,

impassive, and almost entirely uncommunicative. (So, we had that in common.) Melania was the same, only briefly interjecting to offer a thought about the investigation into Russian interference in the election: “There is no proof it was Russia.”

Two themes stayed with me from that dinner. First, Trump would govern primarily to retain the support of his base. He pulled a sheet of paper from his jacket pocket. The statistic “47%” appeared above his photo. “This is the latest Rasmussen poll. I can win with that.” The message was clear. That level of support, if he held key states, was all he needed to secure a second term. What other voters thought of him, he seemed to say, would not matter.

Second, his list of grievances appeared limitless. Atop them all was the press, and atop the press was *The Post*. We were awful, he said repeatedly. We treated him unfairly. And with every such utterance, he would poke me in the shoulder with his left elbow.

The physical jabs were annoying but harmless. Yet they were a hint of hard punches to come. Trump would move to disrupt and damage Amazon. Four days after Christmas that year, he called for the Postal Service to charge Amazon “MUCH MORE” for package deliveries, claiming Amazon’s rates were a rip-off of American taxpayers. He later intervened to obstruct Amazon in its pursuit of a \$10 billion cloud computing contract from the Defense Department. Bezos was to be punished for not reining in *The Post*.

★ ★ ★

This book will recount the years of my editorship of *The Washington Post*, a news organization that has performed a singular role in American history as it demanded truth, honesty, transparency, and accountability from powerful individuals, particularly those entrusted to govern the country. Over the decades, it faced vilification and retribution for doing work that was central to its mission. That was true as well in my eight-plus years as its top editor, with an unremittingly weighty responsibility for all of its news coverage. I joined *The Post* at a moment of crisis, when its commercial viability was in doubt and its capacity to measure up to its journalistic heritage imperiled. In short order, I would be swept into a unique confluence of events: the takeover of *The Post* by Jeff Bezos, a technology titan who had radically changed the

way Americans shop and would soon set the paper on a course of transformation, restoration, and growth; and the assumption of the presidency by Donald Trump, who would upend the political system and govern with a mix of populism, nativism, and fantastical thinking that defied verifiable facts.

Taking shape was a collision of power: The occupant of the White House, the world's most powerful person, aiming to bring *The Post* to submission through ceaseless public attacks on our journalists and unrelenting pressure on our organization's owner; *The Post*'s owner, with ample power of his own as one of the world's richest humans, seeking to avoid open confrontation with Trump but unwilling to succumb to his censure and coercion; and *The Washington Post*, famous for its role in felling a prior president, aggressively revealing the administration's unsavory secrets, persistent lies, flagrant constitutional sabotage, and pattern of incitement.

My personal experience will be a part of the story. I led a storied newsroom in its journalism and in its arduous journey toward a sustainable business model when newspapers were on a seeming death march. But this is not strictly my memoir. I was a participant in these events but also a witness and an observer during tumultuous years when politics, technology, and media would meet head-on in a critical, historic test of strength and will. The story of that collision continues to unfold, with enduring consequences for a free press, democracy, and the future of the country.

With no delay and without pause during his four years as president, Trump and his team would go after *The Post* and everyone else in the media who didn't bend to his wishes. In December 2019, Kushner would lean on Ryan to withdraw support for me and our Russia investigation. Kushner suggested *The Post* issue an apology and there be a "reckoning of some sort"—as he advised that he himself had made a huge mistake in once standing by a former editor of *The New York Observer* and one of its stories when he owned the publication. "Standing by my editor at that time was my biggest regret in the 10 years I owned the newspaper," he wrote in the email to Ryan. Kushner's intent was clear to me. "He aims to get me fired," I told Ryan.

Trump tweeted against *Post* reporters Ashley Parker and Philip Rucker by

name, calling them “nasty lightweight reporters” who “shouldn’t be allowed on the grounds of the White House because their reporting is so DISGUSTING & FAKE,” subjecting them to even more harassment and threats. Trump had tweeted incessantly to vilify *The Post* and the press overall, and even to dehumanize us. And he piled on by saying “the Fake Washington Post” should register as a “lobbyist” for Amazon.

Over many decades as a journalist and as the top editor of three news organizations, I had never witnessed such a raw abuse of power. The mainstream press had always seen its role as keeping watch on those who had the means, motive, and might to profoundly influence the lives of ordinary people, above all politicians and policymakers. When the First Amendment was crafted, that’s what the founders of this country had in mind. If Trump even understood that elemental idea of American democracy, he gave it no weight. His objective was to bring us to heel.

A few times during that dinner, Trump—for all the shots he had taken during the campaign at Bezos’s company—would mention that Melania was a big Amazon shopper, prompting Bezos to joke at one point: “Consider me your personal customer service rep.” Trump’s concern, of course, wasn’t Amazon’s delivery. He wanted Bezos to deliver him from *The Post*’s coverage.

The effort began gently and politely but the pace quickened the next day. Kushner called Ryan in the morning to get his read on how the dinner went. After Fred offered thanks for the generosity and graciousness with their time, Kushner inquired whether *The Post*’s coverage would now improve as a result. Fred diplomatically rebuffed him with a reminder that there were to be no expectations about coverage. “It’s not a dial we have to turn one way to make it better and another way to make it worse,” he said.

Trump would be the one to call Bezos’s mobile phone that same morning at eight a.m., urging him to get *The Post* to be “more fair to me.”

“I don’t know if you get involved in the newsroom, but I’m sure you do to some degree,” Trump said. Bezos said he didn’t and then delivered some lines he was prepared to make at the dinner itself if Trump had leaned on him then: “It’s really not appropriate to ... I’d feel really bad about it my whole life if I did.”

The call ended without bullying about Amazon but with an invitation for Bezos to seek a favor. “If there’s anything I can do for you,” Trump said.

Three days later, the bullying began. Giants of the technology sector gathered at the White House for a meeting of the American Technology Council, created by a Trump executive order a month earlier. Trump briefly pulled Bezos aside to complain bitterly about *The Post’s* coverage. The dinner, he said, was apparently a wasted two and a half hours.

In truth, it was. The White House get-together and its aftermath, however, also offered some welcome reassurance. We had an owner who would neither be courted nor clobbered into submission by President Donald Trump. We would need that. And we would need him for another mission as well: to save *The Post* from fiscal failure and its inevitable end result, journalistic irrelevance.

1

“TAKE THE GIFT”

Washington, D.C., was deep into its swampy summer weather when the publisher of *The Washington Post* asked if I could make myself available for drinks. She proposed five p.m. at Loews Madison Hotel, diagonally across 15th Street NW from our drab but imposing headquarters, a landmark that acquired a certain glamour after the Academy Award–winning movie *All the President’s Men* celebrated the newspaper’s Watergate investigation that brought an end to the presidency of Richard M. Nixon.

Late afternoon is no time to be ducking out of a newsroom, with stories piling up on deadline. Reading journalism, not sipping cocktails, was how I was supposed to be spending my time. But when the boss calls, you go. And the timing of the invitation suggested a surprise might be in the works. As a veteran of endless upheaval in my profession, I had learned to sense when to expect the unexpected.

Katharine Weymouth was the fifth member of the Graham newspaper family to hold the title of *Washington Post* publisher. When named to the position in 2008, she followed in the path of the widely revered family patriarch Don Graham, her uncle and CEO of *The Post*’s parent company, who was now also her boss; her grandmother Katharine Graham, famed for her role in overseeing the paper through Watergate and the Pentagon Papers; her grandfather Phil Graham, who helped persuade Democratic presidential nominee John F. Kennedy to select Lyndon B. Johnson as his running mate in

1960; and her great-grandfather Eugene Meyer, who bought *The Post* at a bankruptcy sale in 1933.

Smart and tough with a cutting wit, Katharine was as direct a person as I knew. Though she had grown up in a life of privilege in Manhattan's Upper East Side, she was devoid of pretense and bullshit. A graduate of Harvard College who got her law degree at Stanford, she worked as a litigator at a top-tier Washington firm before joining the newspaper her family controlled, first as a lawyer and later as the head of advertising. Katharine would be a different sort of publisher. She was divorced and a single mom, managing a household of three kids, and she was now preoccupied with a daughter who had fallen while horseback riding and undergone more than a dozen surgeries to her left arm. Even so, she welcomed casual get-togethers at her unpretentious home in the Chevy Chase neighborhood of Washington.

I had been at *The Post* for only seven months, but our relationship was easing into a comfortable groove. To my surprise, she trusted me implicitly from the start, almost to an unsettling degree. The day I began in the newsroom, she was on vacation, anticipating that I could make my debut in *The Post's* culture entirely on my own. Helping to shore up my relationship with the news staff, she cut me slack on first-year budget constraints. When I appeared exhausted months into the job, she insisted I take time off for my physical and mental well-being. Our meetings were conversational and crisp, without a list of agenda items. We both preferred plain talk, informality, and brevity.

On July 30, 2013, Katharine got straight to business: *The Washington Post* was going to be sold. The buyer would be Jeff Bezos, the megabillionaire founder of Amazon. It would be announced after the weekend, on Monday.

The Graham family had held dominion over *The Post* for eighty years, and in two months they would relinquish control. One hundred percent of a famed news organization would be entirely in the hands of one of the planet's richest people. The buyer's home was 2,300 miles away, near Seattle. And, of particular interest to hired hands like me, the internet shopping behemoth he ran was fast acquiring notoriety for high-pressure working conditions.

There was another reason for me to be wary. Amazon also sold cloud

computing services to the U.S. government, most notably the CIA. That happened to be one of many intelligence agencies that were livid over *The Post*'s publication less than two months earlier of the government's most highly classified documents, leaked by Edward Snowden, that revealed unprecedented surveillance of individuals' digital communications. *The Post* had assumed giant risks in publishing those documents. There was no shortage of officials who felt we had aided and abetted treason. What would become of such stories with Bezos in charge?

Katharine explained the sale plainly: *The Post* was in a bind. It couldn't find its way out. Revenues would continue to slide as print advertising vanished in the internet era, online ad rates would wilt, and getting people to pay for digital subscriptions was more something to pray for than something to count on. Costs would continue to be cut. Our news coverage, continuing to atrophy, would become unrecognizable to anyone with memories of *The Post*'s proud record of ambitious journalism. We were in the same fix as every other American newspaper except *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. The company had run dry of ideas for salvaging itself. CEO Don Graham had looked for someone who might figure things out, and Bezos had the very qualities we might need: brains, tech savvy, and money.

Katharine was struggling to keep *The Post* profitable. Don had decreed she must, even as he pressed her to spare the newsroom from major budget cuts. At the same time, she had to find new revenue from digital advertising, which sold for pennies. "I often felt like the miller girl in Rumpelstiltskin," she later told Bezos in a memo summarizing our financial condition, "being asked to spin gold out of straw—the straw being our digital business—only I could not find the little man to magically do it for me."

I had a good feel for what she was going through. I arrived at *The Post* that January from *The Boston Globe*, where I had been the top editor for more than eleven years. Near-death financial losses were still fresh in mind. Over time I had to slash the number of *Globe* journalists by 40 percent. Bureaus in Berlin, Bogotá, and Jerusalem were closed, ending a proud legacy of foreign coverage since the 1970s. Losses by 2009, in the midst of the Great Recession, were so catastrophic that *The Globe*'s owner, the New York Times Company, threatened to shut the paper down unless thirteen unions

immediately agreed to massive sacrifices in compensation.

When the unions ultimately yielded after bitter protests, the Times Company seized the moment by putting a “For Sale” sign on *The Globe*. Months later, apparently dissatisfied with the bids, it took *The Globe* off the market. Within two years, word was out that the Times Company was again earnestly shopping *The Globe* to the monied class of Boston and anyone else who might be interested. The controlling family of the New York Times Company saw *The Globe* as a dead weight on *The Times*’ grander ambitions. No doubt it was.

The Times Company addressed rumors of a sale in its customary rote, nonresponsive manner: It could “neither confirm nor deny” them. But intentions were unmistakable when Vice Chairman Michael Golden told me in a private lunch that the “flesh, blood, and bone” of the New York Times Company was *The New York Times* itself. It stung to hear it stated so bluntly, and yet Golden was telling me what I already knew. The paper once so coveted by the Times Company that it shelled out \$1.1 billion to purchase it in 1993 was now a burden best rid of, if even for a pittance.

Prospective buyers were no mystery. One possibility was a private equity firm that was likely to slice staffing by a third or more. A previous bidder had already confided its view that investing in quality journalism was a fool’s errand. Another possibility was a local power broker, putting our journalistic independence at risk. The top editor was often the first casualty of a sale. Time to leave, I figured.

I was already one of two finalists for a job outside daily journalism when Katharine called in late 2012 to inquire whether I might be interested in leading *The Post*. Relations with her editor of four years, Marcus Brauchli, the former top editor of *The Wall Street Journal*, had suffered from budget pressures and a breakdown of communication and trust, rupturing in part over disclosure of *Post* plans to allow lobbyists and association executives to pay large sums to attend off-the-record “salons” with Obama administration officials, members of Congress, and the paper’s journalists at Katharine’s Washington home. That was a perceived breach of ethics guardrails for journalists.

Katharine’s overture intrigued me. Perhaps the homestretch of my career

could be at *The Post*, in a newsroom that occupied an exalted position in American journalistic history. While *The Globe* could never have been the heart and soul of an outfit named the New York Times Company, I felt confident that *The Washington Post* held that treasured position in an enterprise called the Washington Post Company. No matter how rocky the future, I couldn't imagine *The Post* being sold. Not by the Graham family. There were few certainties in journalism any longer, but that had to be one of them. *The Post* and the Grahams were ostensibly inseparable. Don loved *The Post*, spending almost his entire adult life there after a brief stint as a Washington policeman—he could identify just about everyone by name—and the people at *The Post* loved him back.

Now, seven months after I was hired as *The Post*'s executive editor, Don was selling it out from under me. Katharine swore me to secrecy and instructed me to call Don later that evening. He wanted to talk. After dinner at the Blue Duck Tavern in Washington, D.C.'s West End neighborhood with Sally Quinn, wife of legendary *Post* editor Ben Bradlee—where I offered no hint of the momentous events about to unfold—I called Don. It was getting late, about nine p.m., but he invited me to swing by his brick Dupont Circle town house.

Don was gracious, as always, promptly apologizing for selling *The Post* just as I had started there. He volunteered that he had been shopping *The Post* even before my arrival. "That's okay, I understand," I told Don, assuring him that I wasn't naive about the way business works. Don twice repeated his apology, I repeated my answer. An exasperated Don said, "Would you let me apologize?"

In truth, I wasn't upset. I had my worries, not least for my own career, but I took the sale as a sign of hope. It was the only one I knew of. As much as I admired Don and what he and his family had accomplished in building *The Post* into one of America's most distinguished and fearless newspapers, no one had a plan other than managing decline. Sale of *The Post* was a reckoning with the facts. I found that refreshing and overdue. It was only after my retirement that I reconstructed how the Graham family came to part ways with *The Post*, asking its top executives to recollect conversations and key details that had yet to be published.