

Is it even possible?
Do the good guys ever win?
Based on a story that's true . . .
To the democratic ideals of America.

An Unlikely Truth

by
John
Rachel



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Chapter One

[Sample Excerpt]

Published by
Literary Vagabond Books
Los Angeles • Osaka
literaryvagabond.com



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by John Rachel

Trade Book ISBN: 978-1-304-63876-2

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Cover Art by Thelonius Fotochop

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by John Rachel

Martin Truth wasn't just an underdog. He was an invisible dog. A practically non-existent dog.

This was his fourth run for U.S. Congress representing Ohio's 3rd District, which included Dayton, Ohio, home of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and a lot of Republican farmland. His main opponent, GOP pretty boy Matt Gardner, was a sixth-term incumbent, ex-military, slick, patriotic, arrogant, always smiling and full of hot air, which voters sucked in with steadfast loyalty. The only question this time around seemed to be how big his landslide victory would be.

Things looked really bad for Martin. His fiancé and girlfriend of eight years left him. His 9-to-5 job rendered him a zombie. His campaign was broke and as the Green Party candidate, he wasn't even on the radar screen of 99% of the voting public. His chances of winning the election appeared to be less than zero.

Then a way to turn everything around arrived in a most unexpected form.

Jamila Parks was an African-American grad student from Rutgers University. She joined Martin's campaign on a practical internship required to complete her masters program in political science. Jamila had the face and body of pop music star Rihanna, and the IQ of Albert Einstein. She brought with her a unique and untested campaign strategy which had been work-shopped in a graduate seminar at Rutgers. It had been precisely designed to take on the likes of smooth-talking, two-faced toadies like Martin's nemesis, Congressman Gardner.

How effectively it would play out in this election remained to be seen. But one thing was certain.

Politics in America would never be the same.

CHAPTER ONE

Martin had never seen Alison this angry.

“But you promised. You lying bastard! Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Come on, Alison. I can’t just quit. Not yet. I was going to say some—”

“Right. When? You are a total wimp-ass. Why did I trust you?”

“It’s just this one last go at it. I think I have a chance this—”

“You are delusional! Completely and totally delusional. Why do I listen to you? Why did I ever listen to you? You’re a fool. A complete idiot. I’m sure glad we don’t have kids. They’d be retarded!”

“Okay okay. I knew you’d be upset. But let’s not go saying things you’ll regret later.”

“Now that’s something we agree on. So I’m not going to. In fact right now I’m going to say something which I will *never* regret. In fact, it’s something I should’ve said long time ago. GOOD-BYE!!”

Martin sat there listening to her pack her bags. Not ten minutes later, she was out the door.

Is this really happening? Would she change her mind? Would she be back? Maybe later this evening? In the morning?

He was in shock.

Shock but...

There was something else.

Relief?

Closure?

A bittersweetness?

A self-affirming martyrdom?

Was there a *giddiness* lurking behind the surface pain and incipient tears?

Giddiness? Hardly!...

But something. He couldn’t quite grab it.

It? It?

His head was spinning.

He stared but his gaze just floated, unfocused and inert.

There was one thing he *did* know for certain.

He had screwed up.

Martin had gotten held up in traffic and arrived home a little late. The mail was sitting there waiting, as always. Alison got to it first. And right on top sat...

The letter from the Registrar of Voters Office, approving his fourth run for Congress.

His fourth! Was it possible? Who would've thought? This all started over six years ago!

Astonishing and exhilarating as that might be, he had to face the facts.

So far it wasn't going very well.

First time, he only got 27 votes. Second time a barely measurable .3% of the whole district. Last election he came roaring into whole digits and then some, at a whopping 1.7% of the vote.

Progress. But not exactly the stuff of victory laps.

Doing some rough calculation, at this rate he might finally get a majority around his 37th attempt. He'd be 103 years old.

At the same time, winning was not the point. It was about conviction. About taking a stand.

If there was no one out there representing a real choice, what did that say about democracy? It said it was a big joke!

Then again, wasn't it? The two major parties both stood for the same things: More military, more war, more destruction of the environment, more money for the rich, more attacks on individual rights, more invasion of personal privacy, more of all the things which Martin was certain was taking the country down the road of ruin. More more more. And less of the core essential things which made it great: Equality, opportunity, peace, sense of community, compassion for the less fortunate, a good quality of life for everyone, a confident healthy citizenry, shared prosperity, clean air, clean water, nutritious food, a thriving eco-friendly economy, national pride, things to be genuinely proud of — all of the chest-thumping stuff of the American Dream.

Every day Martin reminded himself of the promise he made the day he left university life. He would try to make a difference. He would devote his life to doing things which made a positive contribution, to his community, to his country.

Alison knew this. That's why she loved him. At least that's what she used to say.

Of course, things change with time. As people themselves change.

Martin could see her side of the story. This had been building for some time now. They had had their share of up-all-night discussions, then as time went on, full-blown fights, followed by droughts of deaf-mute silence and avoiding one another. Lately these often lasted for days.

More and more they argued about what they were doing with their lives, what choices they were making, whether how they were going about things made any sense — all of which inevitably ended up pointing at his involvement in politics: Is this how we want to spend the best days of our youth? Is there any future in this? Isn't it time to grow up and be realistic? Ideals are a wonderful thing but what's the point of ideals if they never come into play? What's the point of playing the game if you know you're going to lose?

Yes, she had a point. And that point for her apparently now trumped whatever romanticized view they'd thus far shared of living a life of commitment,

of sacrifice, of dedication to a set of core values come hell or high water. Of course he would lose. Regardless, he would stand tall. They would feel proud. They would stay true to what they believed in. It was Socrates and the hemlock.

How noble.

Alison had moved on. The posturing of a principled loser just wasn't worth it to her anymore. She was finally fed up with the futility of it all.

In his lowest moments, he knew how she felt. It got to him too.

He wasn't kidding himself. He knew how this latest run for Congress was going to end. He wasn't *delusional*, one of Alison's favorite words these days.

At the same time, he knew what he had to do. Standing on the sidelines was not an option. It's like that quote by the Scottish clergyman Peter Marshall: "*A different world cannot be built by indifferent people.*"

And he had to be honest with himself. That's not where he had screwed up so badly here. Remaining true to his ideals, half-baked or not, was not the problem. The screw-up was making a promise to Alison that he couldn't possibly keep. Telling her that he would get a decent job and start making enough money to support a family, buy a house, make babies, try to live a normal life.

Had he really said that?

She must have drugged him.

...

Martin lit up a joint. Not so unusual. Over the past few years, at least twice a week, he and Alison had toked up, then went through their mechanized routine of lovemaking. The marijuana made what had become totally predictable at least hedonistically engaging, as each individually got lost inside the deep chambers of carnal rapture. The participation of the other made it a cut above masturbating. Even on the off nights, they often would still share at least a couple drags, then watch mindless television or vegetate on the internet. Each had their own laptop. They had all of the modern conveniences to make it easier to ignore one another.

He took his third hit off the joint. A blissful fog descended upon him.

It was time for some honesty. Some clarity.

He couldn't say with absolute conviction he would miss her. Sure, with her gone there would be something askew. But it would be more the feeling that some regular element or feature was unaccounted for or out of service. Like the fridge had stopped making ice cubes. The arts and entertainment section was missing from the Sunday newspaper. Or his favorite internet music site wouldn't let him download tunes anymore.

What a sad note. They had been together almost eight years. Admittedly, the last two had shown signs of wear and tear. Alison had been talking more and more about wanting to start a family. It got to be quite annoying. She kept saying her biological clock was ticking. Right. Like being 27 was peering into the moribund abyss of menopause.

Her disenchantment with him — or was it disengagement — really started much before that. He noticed that once she got that awful job with the bank four years ago, almost immediately her whole world view started to get skewed. As a couple they looked more and more like a random match, then a complete

mismatch, him still dressing like he was a nerdy grad student and her going for Prada.

Their fiery passion for discussing politics and what was going on in the world became more forced, less frequent, almost certain to result in them 'agreeing to disagree', if not screaming at one another. Even their agreement on things seemed tentative and artificial. Eventually they both avoided bringing up anything controversial. The critical issues of the day gave way to small talk and harmless trivia.

What *did* they talk about? Not much. Not much that Martin could actually remember. Basically he stopped trying to discuss anything he truly thought important, and quit paying attention to 99% of what Alison had to say. It seemed like whatever it was she babbled on about either had to do with banking, the lame people she worked with, the petty in-fighting and backbiting of office politics, or ... babies. Babies her friends were having. Babies her friends had just had. Babies spit out by celebrity couples. Someone at work taking maternity leave. Anonymous babies in the park, at the mall, in a passing car. *Baby On Board!*

It had to be what they called *baby fever*. A function of her hormones kicking in, or perhaps society's not-so-subtle programming for her to procreate and play her part in perpetuating the species. Whatever caused this cerebral malfunction was no excuse. Bringing children into this terrifying world, which lately seemed bent on destroying every living thing on the planet, was a monumental decision. Seven billion and counting. Let's pop another one into the pile. For what? Maybe it was time for people to stop and think about this whole making babies business.

"But they're so cute and cuddly, I want one of my own."

Get a kitten!

"It's the perfect expression of love, a couple creating and bringing new life into the world."

The perfect expression of love is to get along and to stop nagging!

"But, Martin!..."

Okay okay. He got it. That's why she left.

Now she could go look for another sperm donor.

Martin kicked off his shoes and leaned back. A thin filament of smoke still rose from the glowing ember of weed at the bottom of the bowl. He took another hit, closed his eyes. He could hear the rhythm of his blood as it pulsed through the capillaries of his ears. Warm bubbles spread through his body. His fingertips lightly tingled. He felt like he was suspended in jelly. Or was it styrofoam?

He surrendered to it, diffusing into the gelatinous limbo.

A pleasant dispassion now displaced the anxiety he had been feeling. In the ambient pool of the softly undulating void, an epiphany floated to the surface like a translucent mermaid from mysterious, secretive depths.

He imagined himself smiling. A Buddha-like apparition floated in his mind's eye.

The analgesic calm of reason had indeed come to the rescue...

Alison was gone. It actually made sense. In fact it was good. Even if he hadn't handled things the way he should have, Martin now felt certain what had happened was the right thing. Breaking up was inevitable. The writing had been

on the wall for quite some time now. Frankly, it was hard to think of a time when they had really gotten along. Nearly impossible.

Nearly. Impossible. To think of a time ...

Actually ... at this point it was impossible to think at all.

What was he trying to think of?

Usually Martin only took one or two hits, just enough to relax and enjoy a mild buzz. But tonight, lost in his deliberations and not really paying attention, he had smoked a joint and an entire bowl. His head felt like a hot air balloon. The sound coming from the television was *extremely* grating and he couldn't make sense out of *anything* anyone was saying. Was that Conan O'Brien? He was leering at some babe's cleavage like he was getting ready to bungee jump. She was trying to act indignant — or was it coy? — as in, "*Hey, what's the deal? You're not at all interested in this fascinating story I'm telling, you BAD BOY!*"

Fuck this! Television. What a wasteland. Enough brain damage for one night.

Martin crawled into bed. Before the cannabis coma overpowered him, he reached over to Alison's side of the bed.

Alright! He had two pillows.

Now that's living!

• • •

Things took a turn for the worse after that first night.

He was having nightmares.

Well, more accurately he was having *one* nightmare. The same nightmare over and over. Nightly for almost three weeks now.

It was to be expected. Guilt. Regret. Blowback.

The nightmare started innocently and pleasantly enough. He and Alison were on campus. Which campus wasn't certain. It was sort of a hybrid of Cornell and the University of Chicago. Trees and flowers in spring. Sunny skies. Things were good back then. They would meet at lunch or late afternoon after classes. Thrilled at the prospect of seeing one another. Just being together. It was rainbows and balloons as they strolled hand in hand, smiling so much it hurt.

Then two strange men came up behind them. They grabbed Alison and pulled her between them. At first, Martin refused to believe they meant any harm. In fact, he seemed to feel a peculiar camaraderie with them. He joked in his typical unassuming, cordial manner. But they brazenly mocked his attempt to be friendly, and glaring at him with spitefulness, started backing away. Alison now fiercely struggled to get free. Martin took a tentative step toward her, reaching out to take her hand. One of the assailants suddenly pulled a knife and swiped it at Martin's face, just missing his nose. Alison now became even more horrified and started screaming, though in the haunting null of the dream, no sound issued from her. Martin felt the raw anguish of her desperation, as she pleaded for his help. But he retreated like a pathetic coward, more frightened than he'd ever been in life. Martin suddenly turned and ran to save himself. When he briefly glanced over his shoulder, he caught the horror and loathing in Alison's eyes as the two thugs wrestled her to the ground. One of them held her flailing body, the other stood over her, unzipping his fly. Martin just kept running, through a viscous

sludge of dread and despair, running and gasping for breath, tormented by having just abandoned his beloved Alison. Moments later, wracked with guilt and shaking uncontrollably, he found himself in a dark room, a restaurant in a musty cavern no less, lit only by the candles on the tables. Before him sat two glasses of wine. Who was he there with? He kept looking around anxiously and waiting. Finally his mother appeared in the doorway, then walked over to the table. There was a bullet hole in her forehead with blood trickling out of it, though she seemed unfazed by it. "Alison's dead. It's your fault." Martin burst into tears. It was a horrible, painful crying that hurt so deep it felt like he was being disemboweled. He cried so hard he couldn't breathe. Asphyxiation ripped at his lungs and his mother just stood there shaking her bleeding head, offering no comfort or support. "You let Alison die. You let me die." She scowled at him with contempt, then turned to leave. He would start to plead. "Mother, no. Come back!"

Abruptly the nightmare would end.

Martin woke up choking, crying, trembling, covered in sweat.

There was no way he could go back to sleep, so he always got up and got dressed.

He paced. Sucked down cup after cup of coffee. Watched bland early morning television.

He had no appetite and couldn't force himself to eat breakfast. He dragged himself to work. He was so tired it was all he could do to just show up. By lunch he was dizzy from lack of nourishment. By the end of the day he was sure his life signs had all disappeared.

Martin drove a delivery van for Future Perfect, a local courier service. Nothing like putting his college education to good use. Not surprisingly, when he finally left the comfort zone of university life, there weren't any listings in the Dayton Daily News classifieds for someone with a BA in Philosophy (minor in Peace Studies and Peace Science) and an MA in Political Science. Not in Springboro, Ohio anyway.

It was a job. Mindless. No pressure. Even being at his worst — and after nearly twenty reruns of the Alison-mom nightmare, he was physically and psychologically at his rock bottom worst — was no obstacle to his performing his simple duties.

Only one person commented on his deteriorating condition. It was the dispatcher, Evelyn. Heart of gold, face of stone, body of a rhinoceros, Evvie single-handedly kept the tobacco industry in the black. Martin could not recall ever seeing her without a lit cigarette in her hand. The inside of her index and middle fingers were the color of saddle leather. Her voice sounded like a Harley Davidson on a cold morning.

"Here are fourteen deliveries. They all should've been there half an hour ago. You look like your cat died, turned into a vampire and sucked out all of your blood. What gives? If you need a bone marrow transplant, I'll put a notice in the employee newsletter."

"I'm on a hunger strike. I'm protesting 7-11 jacking up the price of their corn dogs."

“Well damn, Marty. Good for you. Taking a stand on an issue I personally can get behind. Seriously. It’s this political stuff, isn’t it? Politics is poison. It attracts the worst and kills off the best. But don’t forget: If you do go to Washington, I’ll be your executive secretary *and* your body guard. Two for the price of one.”

Which reminded him — not that he forgot, since it was something he couldn’t help but think about despite his compromised state — he had an important meeting tonight. Well, important as they ever were. Which admittedly wasn’t very important in the grand scheme of things. In any case, the entire brain-heavy campaign planning committee would be there. They had supposedly been quite busy whipping up a whole new approach for his upcoming courtship of the voting public. This time around, they were hoping to get things started as early as possible, in order to get a leg up on the incumbent, who not only had the advantage of being an incumbent but had a ton of cash in his re-election coffers.

They couldn’t match his opponent’s 10,000 to 1 monetary advantage. Time was all they had going for them. Hit the streets early and come out swinging. At least their version of swinging, which would appear to the impartial observer more like a quadriplegic attacking a piñata with a pea shooter than a street fight.

In the past, Martin had always been right in the thick of the initial planning and there until every last detail was in place. After all, it was his campaign. It was his ass on the line. Important as it was that the campaign appeal to the public, it also had to be comfortable for him. It had to feel right, set the correct tone, be like an old familiar sweat shirt or sweater, one that felt natural and familiar. Otherwise, he couldn’t sell it. He would come off as phony as ... as ... as well, the typical phony politician.

Unfortunately this time around, at least for now, Martin was clearly missing-in-action. For what seemed like forever, he had been mostly useless at these strategy brainstorming sessions. After Alison left him, he had thoroughly fallen apart. He couldn’t concentrate. He was tired beyond words. He constantly hovered between a paralytic agitation and a somnolent stupor. He felt more numb than alive. The difference between awake and asleep was purely academic.

Everyone at party headquarters was sympathetic. They agreed he should take some time. Get his head straight. Not to worry. They would crank out some ideas and when he felt ready to come back and dig in his heels, he could fine tune things to his liking.

It was going on a month now.

His head still wasn’t straight. Not by a long shot. From the looks of things, it might not be for a long time.

But life goes on. There was work to do. He’d show up tonight and see if he could pull himself out of the mental quicksand. He’d try anyway. Sink or swim, as they say.

For him it felt like swim ... and sink anyway.

...

So.

Here he was.

But who was he kidding?

As he sat there listening to the six members of the officially titled Executive Committee and Election Strategy Council, it was all Martin could do to keep awake. His eyelids were made of lead and his brain was pure mush.

He truly respected these people. No ... he loved these people!

But he still couldn't get it together to focus on what was going on.

Phyllis Wagner, executive director for this chapter of the Green Party, ran the show. Boy, did she ever! She put the 'charge' in 'in charge'. Then there was Bill Townsend, officially his campaign manager, always there with a joke and a smile. Imogene Kurtz and Bob Phelps, who both worked for the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, were the links to all of the local progressive community organizations. The brilliant Lincoln Haskell, an associate professor and political activist at University of Dayton, rallied the youth vote and provided phenomenal insights into the political process. Least but certainly not last was Helen Bueller, secretary and gofer, responsible more than anyone else for actually getting things done.

All of them had been with him for his last two campaigns. Phyllis, Bill and Helen had been there from the very beginning, when a few months out of college he wandered into their modest office in Phyllis's home, and announced he was available as a candidate for U.S. Congress. They must have thought he was crazy! Whether they did or not, they put him on the ballot, at twenty-three the youngest person to ever run for the Ohio 3rd District U.S. House of Representatives congressional seat. If he had gotten elected, he would just be turning twenty-five — by law the minimum age for a congressman — only a few days before assuming office.

"What do you think, Martin?"

He heard his name. It punctured the slinky scrim of his disjointed reverie.

Phyllis had said something. He looked up. All eyes were on him.

"I'm sorry. I was someplace else. Think of what?"

"We're talking about going for broke. Hiring a bona fide heavy-hitter. You know, a big league consultant who knows exactly how to play the game."

"Expensive, I imagine. Can we afford that?"

"We don't know. We're just talking about it. All along we've had good ideas. Three times running, we've given this our best shot. But it's not coming together. Something's not clicking. Last election even that Libertarian Potts guy got 5,000 more votes than you. That bozo can't even utter a coherent sentence."

"Don't remind me. Anyway, do what you think is best. I trust you guys."

Trust them he would have to. At least for now. Campaigning nine months before election day was a thankless enough task. But with Alison gone, his heart wasn't in it. And he had no idea where his head was at.

If only I had a brain.

...

Alison.

Nine months.

He had foolishly promised her that in nine months he'd be in the delivery room at her side for their long-awaited first child, not sitting in front of a television watching election returns. Yes, he had broken his word.

Big time.

He felt like a real shithead. Alison had stuck by him for almost eight years. He probably wouldn't find anyone like her again ever. Not even close. She was just about perfect for him. So it had seemed at the outset. Until failure moved in and became a permanent fixture in their lives. His failure, not hers. She kept moving forward. Maybe not the forward he would have preferred. But by any normal, accepted standards, everything for her kept getting better.

Even when she was in college, she was a winner. Incredibly attractive. Kind of a Sandra Bullock attractive. So smart. Everybody liked her. Other guys were always salivating like dogs. They would try to hit on her even when Martin was right there standing next to her.

Hmm. What did that say about him?

He and Alison left university at the same time, him with his masters in political science, her with her bachelors in business and banking. For two years she did a stint with a online stock brokerage. The guys that ran it were in their early-30s and viewed themselves as dot com dissidents. They prided themselves in not being sucked in by all of the corporate bullshit. Alison thrived on the informality. She contributed much more than what they gave her credit for or was reflected in her modest salary. But she was happy. When they unexpectedly sold their firm to a hedge fund out of Texas, she found herself out of a job.

That was when things changed.

It was right after the big crash of 2008 and the job market was tight. They couldn't live decently on what he was making as a courier, that is, without pinching pennies and obsessing over money all of the time. Finally, she landed a great entry level executive position which promised a lot of upward mobility with Bank of America.

Martin begged her not to take it. Bank of America was one of the worst of the country's mega-banks. It represented everything Martin hated about corporate America. It was implicated in all sorts of corrupt practices, it ripped off investors and customers alike, scammed the disabled and the poor, sleazed out of paying their taxes at all levels, sidestepped fees to the local communities where they did business, aggressively and illegally threw homeowners out on the street using unsavory procedures to foreclose, on and on. Against the revulsion that Martin felt in every fiber of his body...

She took the job.

She never blinked. She never looked back.

Martin tried to forgive her. He tried to ignore the changes he was seeing in her.

He was sure he hid the contempt he was increasingly feeling for her.

Probably not.

Okay. Definitely not. He was a lousy actor.

It surely was all a moot point now anyway.

She was history. Gone for good.

And that was that.

Maybe that's the only way it could be: An inevitable ending to a flawed romance. He probably should have seen it coming. But he didn't want to. Rationalization is love's best ally. Maybe she was perfect for him. Maybe not. Whatever. But *he* definitely was not perfect for *her*. Meaning their relationship had from the beginning been a time-bomb ticking.

Okay. He could accept that. He'd have to accept that. It wasn't like he had a choice.

Mercifully, against the random, sometime brutal realities of life, Martin now came prepared. He had the ultimate contingency plan. There's nothing like standing over your mother's grave, looking into the cold silence and immutability of death, to shotgun a new paradigm into the frontal lobes of the cerebral cortex.

So it now was and always would be for Martin...

Even if he was a total fuck-up in his personal life, he would make up for it in public life. Even if as in the present circumstance, he couldn't keep his word to Alison, he would make absolute certain on the remote chance he actually got elected, that unlike 99% of the politicians in office nowadays, he would keep his word to the voting public. He would keep every last one of his campaign promises. No ambivalence. No excuses. No compromises.

Which left only one critical question to be answered.

What did Martin Truth stand for? Besides keeping campaign promises.

As the Green Party candidate he obviously believed in protecting the environment. Something had to be done to stop global warming, if it wasn't too late already. We had to end our addiction to fossil fuels, especially oil. There should be huge private and public investments in renewable alternative energy sources: wind, ocean, solar. We had to reverse deforestation. End desertification. Halt the privatization of water and other basic necessities. Encourage local food production, promote organic agriculture, and reduce the use of pesticides and GMO seeds. In general, the world needed to back off corporatizing everything and return to local production and control. With bold and determined political leaders on the front lines, it needed to confront and defeat the multinational corporate juggernaut that was polluting and destroying the Earth.

As might be expected, Martin's progressivism extended broadly from his commitment to environmental causes to a number of co-related social issues. He categorically took exception to the every-man-for-himself madness of the right wing and believed that all of us through representative government should take a greater role in helping others, especially those who were less able to fend for themselves. This included the old, the infirm, victims of racism and other forms of discrimination. And those who had lost their jobs and fallen on hard times. The poor. The undereducated. Children. Most definitely children! Without a doubt, Martin would be labeled as a bleeding-heart liberal by the crass law-of-the-jungle conservatives, who he thought lacked both compassion and common decency, people who called themselves Christians but somehow missed the most obvious and critical aspects of Christ's teachings: Feed the hungry, clothe the poor, heal the sick, tend to the needs of the less fortunate.

“For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me ... Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.” – Matthew 25:35/36/40

Hardly what could be called a Bible-thumper, questionably even a Christian at all by any conventional standards, Martin had used that passage in his campaign literature last election season. Very few voters seemed to appreciate its relevance to the progressive ideals he espoused. If they did, they still managed to forget about him when it came time to vote.

Martin was also deeply committed to human rights, under relentless assault long before humankind even recognized what they were. It was ironic that now in many countries which had long had an onerous record of human rights abuses, there were significant improvements, while in America itself, allegedly champion of humane and just treatment, fairness, and respect for all, human rights was suffering dismal setbacks every day.

He was especially concerned about the intrusive levels of officially unacknowledged surveillance, and the constant push for locking up more and more citizens. There seemed to be a new mentality taking over which destroyed any sense of proportion and reason with respect to incarceration. It certainly was destroying justice and equality before the law. The operating principle was: *If we build it, they will come*. Or more to the point: *We’ve built a helluva lot of these prisons, now we’ve got to fill them!* They were filling the prisons all right. Mostly with people of color.

Admittedly, there was a lot on his wish list, a substantial catalog of action items which embraced the things Martin thought had to be done immediately to reverse the downward, self-sabotaging course of the country. It was a daunting set of tasks requiring the energy of the whole nation working together, unified and determined in their dedication to rebuild a great America.

Daunting or not, these were the things which drove him to seek a seat in Congress.

These were the things he thought crucial for a better world.

These were the things he felt passionate about.

Even if right now he felt no passion.

Right now Martin didn’t feel much of anything. He was ambling aimlessly through each featureless day like some malfunctioning automaton or decaying zombie.

Life right now sadly lacked an urgent and profound sense of purpose.

Six days a week he reported to Future Perfect and rush-delivered everything from legal documents to machine parts, gift packages to electronic devices, butterfly collections to family photo albums. Once he picked up at a home then dropped off at the airport some forgetful university professor’s passport. Another time when a medivac transport vehicle experienced mechanical problems, he delivered a kidney packed in ice and locked in a thermal carrier. Then there was

the time he rushed some sexy lingerie from Victoria's Secret to an upscale hotel near the business center of town.

Whatever the cargo, every day was pretty much like every other as he crisscrossed the 250 square miles of metro Dayton. At least before, weaving through endless traffic and piling up more parking tickets, he used to daydream about how all this would change if he somehow miraculously won the coming election. But now his daydreams felt like stale reruns. He was feeling like an old man on life support.

One of the few positive things he could say about his job was that they used environmentally-friendly natural gas powered vans. Otherwise, it was nothing much to write home about. The pay was pretty bad. He had no benefits to speak of — no health insurance, no paid vacation, only a handful of sick days, the minimum number of paid holidays.

He couldn't relate to anyone who worked there. He had nothing in common with the line employees, the drivers, maintenance guys, office help. It was a strain trying to keep up his end of conversations on television shows he never had seen, sports teams he couldn't care less about, and celebrities whose names he recognized but wouldn't know if they knocked on his door and offered their autographs.

Of course, he glad-handed everyone and put on his best smile, mostly because he generally liked people and tried to get along with most everyone in any situation. But he also was holding out for the unlikely prospect that at some point he might get to share with them what was truly important to him and what he spent his *quality* time on, which of course were his political ideas and his candidacy for the district's congressional seat.

Fat chance.

No one there took him seriously.

No one seem capable of registering, much less grasping his deep commitment to politics. When he tried to explain that he was the Green Party candidate for the district's congressional seat, from the looks he got he wondered if he had inadvertently started speaking in some obscure Chinese dialect. His fellow workers typically got a glazed look of bewilderment, as if he were telling them what life was like for him and his pet octopus on the fourth moon of Neptune. The management team, which because it was a small company of only thirty-seven employees consisted of three executives, a line manager and an accountant, all looked at him with undisguised disdain and mistrust. Martin assumed they were politically ultra-conservative and just the mention of the Green Party got their hackles doing a St. Vitus dance. They probably thought he was Che Guevara.

As a result of the indifference, if not outright antipathy there, it had been quite some time since he mentioned anything remotely related to politics or public policy. No sense adding anxiety to confusion. He showed up, did his job, smiled, collected a paycheck.

From another perspective, he really had no right to complain. It covered the bills. And because he lived so minimally, his salary even left over a decent surplus for his two "luxuries", his addiction to buying books and his support for a

number of charitable non-profits. He bought a couple new books each week, then contributed what he could afford to causes. He sent modest but regular sums to a few environmental groups, Doctors Without Borders, Southern Poverty Law Center, and participated in two child sponsorship programs, one in Africa and the other Central America.

The truly laudable aspect of the job was that it only occupied forty hours of his week. Exactly forty hours. Future Perfect was too cheap to pay overtime. He did have to report six days. He worked seven hours Monday through Friday, then five hours Saturday. Regardless, this still left him plenty of time to work on his campaign. Every weekday he was free from 4 pm on, then had a fair chunk of the weekend, since on Saturday he was done at noon.

"He said he can meet with us on Saturday, Martin. Martin? Are you with us?"

Phyllis pulled him out of his trance. What was she saying?

"Uh yes ... Saturday. What about Saturday?"

"While you've been channeling Helen Keller, Bill got hold of a campaign consultant who comes highly recommended. His name is Charles Montgomery and he's out of Cincinnati."

"Wow. Cincinnati."

"He'll be here at 4:30 on Saturday. I promise we won't commit to anything until everyone is completely satisfied he's right for you. But he's got a great track record."

"Wow. Great track record."

"Okay. See you then."

"4:30 Saturday."

"Splendid."

...

He hated him immediately. The guy was wearing suspenders. Suspenders!

Martin had arrived on time. In fact, he was there at 4:25. Then he sat and waited until the self-important dickweed blew in at 5:05.

Not that the rude son-of-a-bitch showed one iota of embarrassment or remorse.

As soon as he stepped in the door, Martin wanted to cut his losses and run. The guy dumped his briefcase and a pile of file folders on the table like he was body slamming Hulk Hogan. Then, smiling a rapturous 'America's Next Male Supermodel' smile, his salon-tanned face beaming as if this was the greatest day of his life, his hand shot out like he was breaking cement blocks with the tips of his fingers.

"Well well! Martin Truth. The man of the hour. Boy, am I glad I finally get to meet you! Charles Montgomery. But everyone calls me Monty."

Martin hesitated. He knew what was coming. He tentatively extended his hand.

Yup. As expected, it ended up on the wrong end of a metacarpal bone crushing. *Monty*, eh? What a typical Type A-personality raging asshole!

"I'm Martin Truth. But everyone calls me a liar."

“Ha ha ha. That’s priceless. I love a good sense of humor. Unfortunately, Martin, others before you have tarnished your noble profession. In terms of public confidence, politicians rank somewhere below the Mafia and slightly above child pornographers. But I gotta tell you, in it’s offbeat own way, Martin Truth is perfect. I like it!”

Martin Truth. Monty *liked* it. Wonderful. Martin wanted to think of it as just another name but no one ever would leave it alone. It started in elementary school and never slowed up.

He was sick of it. Now that he had been commodified for public consumption, the word plays had reached truly annoying new heights. He had never thought puns were especially clever or fun. Being assaulted on a personal level confirmed his worst suspicions. As campaign slogans, they seemed to guarantee that no one would take him or his candidacy seriously.

We hold this Truth to be self-evident . . . it had a nice ring to it but the only thing that soon became self-evident was that no one was going to vote for him.

The whole Truth and nothing but the Truth . . . as if he was being sworn in to testify in his own insanity trial. What else could explain his running for office on a third-party ticket?

Truth in politics! — which morphed into — *Truth in government!* . . . certainly had promise except no one figured out it had anything to do with him. His brand recognition was zero.

Nothing but the Truth! . . . turned out to be anybody but Martin Truth.

Truth will triumph! . . . proved to be not accurate in any sense.

Honesty + honor = Truth . . . what is this? New math?

He was sick of gimmicks.

Hopefully this bozo would have some amazing new ideas. After all, he supposedly got the big bucks. He *was* from Cincinnati. *And* he had a great track record.

“So, Martin, I don’t know if you’ve ever thought about doing something with your name, but I was thinking of something along the lines of, *The Truth will set you free!* Whaddya think? I mean just for starters.”

OMG! What an idiot! If this joker was working for free, they were paying him too much.

“Well gosh, Monty. It’s certainly original. I think if this were 1856, we’d have a real winner.”

“1856? I’m not following you.”

“No problem. I entirely understand. I got this from a program on Comedy Central. Do you get satellite? Anyway, 1856 was before they abolished slavery. So, you know . . . *set you free*. As in give the slaves their freedom. But hey! Maybe it would still work now. You’re the expert here. You *are* from Cincinnati.”

Martin winked at Monty, then glanced over at Phyllis to see how she was taking this. She wasn’t easy to read. It wasn’t clear whether her face was the color of Red Bull because of the humiliation she was feeling for having brought in this Slick Willy to spew this kind of drivel, or furious at Martin for wasting no time yanking Monty’s chain.

The rest of the meeting was a blur. Everything Monty said was a blur or caused blurring in the eyes of everyone in the room. One thing could be said for sure. His enthusiasm was beyond question. The guy was in a perpetual state of hosting *Deal Or No Deal*.

It dragged on for nearly three hours. It seemed like months.

Monty had the final word, which wasn't much of a surprise, since up to this point he had done 99.9% of the talking.

"Okay! Gotta go. But I have to tell ya, I'm very excited. *Very* excited. We got a lot done tonight. A *lot* done! A good beginning. A *damn* good beginning. Alright now. See ya!"

Monty's head was still bouncing up and down like a dashboard bobble head doll, as he retreated out the door with the strut of a gladiator who had just slaughtered everything in sight.

Martin wearily looked over at Phyllis. She was ready for him.

"Listen, Martin, don't start."

"What? I was just going to tell you how brilliant I think Monty is. How perfectly he fits in with our team."

"Give me a break. You don't cut anyone any slack. Like you've got something better? Where's *your* plan? He was just ... just a little nervous."

"You have to be human to be nervous. The guy was a hologram."

"Enough, Martin. You've said your piece. Your obvious disdain hardly comes as a surprise. You're becoming so predictable. All I'm going to say is give the guy a chance. We have a lot of money tied up in this gentleman. Let's see what he's got. Everyone raves about him. Everyone I've talked to anyway."

"Money? I thought this was just an audition."

Phyllis, never at a loss for words ... was at a loss for words. Solid, forthright, implacable, unshakeable, she actually looked a bit sheepish.

Apparently two days ago, she had cut a check. Monty had talked her into a sizable retainer. It was non-refundable.

The conversation had gone something like this: *"I've been checking out your Martin Truth. Excellent candidate. We've really got something here. Let me tell you, Phyllis, this type of campaign is exactly my cup of tea. I don't give a damn what happened before. I can take your Truth guy over the top. This is absolutely a match made in Heaven. So let's not waste any time. I'll be there Saturday. I'm bringing my whole bag of secret weapons. No reason to hold back anything at all. We'll hit the ground running. Phyllis, I'm feeling really good about this. I mean really good!"*

Monty was such a cyclone of bullshit, he was so insistent and obnoxious, even Phyllis's carefully crafted fortress of defenses crumbled in the onslaught. She agreed to a tidy sum.

"How much, Phyllis? What's left in the bank?"

"He assured me that the retainer was small change. It was pennies on the dollar compared to what we'll be hauling in once his fundraising kicks into full swing. Martin, it was only a tenth of what he usually charges!"

"Do we have *any* money left?"

"Actually I had to go into my own savings."

“Your savings? How much did you personally put into this?”

“\$5000. But don’t worry about it. If this doesn’t work out, I’ll ... it’ll be my problem.”

So that’s where it stood. They were broke *and* they were stuck with Monty Motor Mouth.

Martin spent every evening for the next week meeting with Charles ‘Monty’ Montgomery. He did exactly as he was told. He forced himself to keep an open mind and gave Monty every opportunity to show his stuff. Martin did it, for lack of a better reason, to make Phyllis happy. Then too, there was the remote possibility some good would come of it.

It was easy to see what Monty was up to. There was a method to his madness. But it was still madness. The very same madness that had turned politics into a big game and emptied it of any substance. It was the sound bite and bumper sticker insipidness that had made unlikely, if not entirely impossible, any meaningful communication between a candidate and the people he would be representing.

Beyond constantly wrestling with the feeling that he was being manipulated and sucked into a mind set that was craven, mercenary, irresponsible, and lacking in any semblance of intelligence, there were personality issues.

Monty certainly had a way with words. He was like Howard Stern but without the polish.

“I’ve been looking at your stump speeches. We need to hone them a bit. Trim the fat. People want things cut and dry. Clean and easy.”

Actually, Martin in principle agreed with the idea. He did prefer simple and straightforward, within reasonable limits.

“As long as I don’t end up spouting empty platitudes, I’m fine with that. And, of course, I refuse to misrepresent my position on anything.”

“Right. Whatever. Listen, Truth. I don’t think you get it. It doesn’t matter what the voters *think* you believe in. It doesn’t even matter what *you* think you believe in.”

What I think I believe in?

“All that matters is getting elected. Then you can go in there and do whatever turns your crank. Fuck yes! Do the right thing. Take whatever holier-than-thou stance you want. Mother Theresa and all that shit.”

Martin froze.

He couldn’t say anything.

He couldn’t *let* himself say anything. Because one thing would lead to another and then he’d have to *kill* the guy!

He just sat there. Biting his tongue. Was there steam blasting out of his ears like he was one of the Three Stooges?

That exchange, unfortunately, pretty much set the tone for everything that went down for all of the subsequent evenings.

Monty kept telling Martin it’s all about winning. If he didn’t win, end of story. Game over. No chance of doing all of those wonderful high-minded things he wanted to do. He’d be swept under the carpet. Forgotten. Losers don’t just lose. They vanish into thin air.

If Martin had to venture a guess, he decided that if Monty had ever been to college, he had studied at the Joseph Stalin School of Diplomacy.

Miraculously, the evenings passed without Martin committing a homicide. The week with Charles Montgomery constituted the greatest exercise in self-control in Martin's entire life, greater than he could have *ever* imagined himself capable of.

Of course, he knew that present-day politics was a lot of PR blather at the expense of substance. But Monty's ideas were appalling. Crude. They were so ruthless, so unprincipled, so baldly rapacious, so detached from and anathema to institutional democracy, Martin felt like he was being dragged through a Franz Kafka story. At one point, Monty even hinted — take that back, he outright said — that since a substantial number of voting places in the district were using the Diebold electronic voting machines, as soon as the campaign came up with enough money, he'd hire a hacker to switch a number of votes their way.

"We'll win this goddamn thing by hook or crook! Are you with me?"

Phyllis was there when Monty proposed the voting machine fraud and was so mortified by the underhandedness of the idea, she couldn't even respond. She'd gotten them into this mess. Now all she could think about was how to get rid of this barbarian and get their money back.

Then the inconceivable happened.

Monty tendered his resignation.

Actually, it wasn't so much a tendering as having a hysterical tantrum and mental breakdown, seemingly provoked by nothing more than the lock on his briefcase jamming.

Martin again was early. Monty again was late. This had become the drill.

When Monty finally bolted through the door, something was different. The guy looked like he had just been impaled with Dante's vision of Hell. Again he dumped a giant stack of folders on the table, peculiar in itself because he had never referred to any of the reams of material in them, at least not so far.

Then he tried to open his briefcase. He seemed a bit frantic about it. The briefcase wouldn't cooperate. Monty started pounding it with his fist and yelling.

"Open up, you motherfucker!"

For the first time since these meetings started, Martin smiled. Then he burst out laughing.

Monty picked up the briefcase and threw it against the wall. It still wouldn't open. Then he noticed Martin laughing, joined by Phyllis doing her own bit of smirking. At that moment, Bill arrived and poked his head in the door. He had been wanting to sit in on one of the sessions. From what he had been hearing, they were too good to miss.

"What's going on, guys?"

Monty went ballistic. With one sweeping motion of his arm, he pushed all of the file folders off the table onto the floor. Papers and pamphlets went flying. Then he picked up the briefcase with both hands as if to clobber Bill with it.

"I'll tell you what's going on. I'm outta here. This is a waste of time." He looked at Martin. "You're a fucking loser. You don't stand a chance in China." He turned to Bill, then to Phyllis. "I don't want my name on this. I don't want to

be anywhere near this when it goes down in flames. ‘A’ is for asshole. ‘Z’ is for Zanzibar. I *hope* the polar caps melt. Fuck you very much!”

He was out the door before anyone had time to take a breath.

Martin looked at Phyllis doing his best to look serious.

“How are we polling in China?”

The three of them spent the next fifteen minutes in hysterical laughter, as they recounted not just what had happened this evening, but the ridiculousness of the entire six days Martin had spent trying to work with this lunatic.

Phyllis was not usually one for knee-slapping belly-laughing. Tonight was an exception.

But soon a sobering reality reared its ugly head.

The money.

Over the next few days, Phyllis repeatedly called Monty’s office but only got an answering machine. Eventually she resigned herself to the fact that the retainer was gone. This meant the war chest for Martin’s campaign was down to nickels and her \$5000 had just gone up in smoke.

The more they talked about it, the more they agreed that Charles Montgomery had hustled them and probably had done so right from the beginning. He never had any intention to follow through till the end of the campaign. He was likely between jobs and saw an opportunity for some easy cash from some desperate and gullible people.

Phyllis just couldn’t believe it. Not that she was naïve. But she found it inconceivable that someone like Monty could sit across the table from decent human beings like themselves, knowing full well that it was all just a show and that he was intentionally ripping them off.

Smarting from the callous assault on her faith in her fellow human beings, she turned to Martin for comfort, for his validation of her core belief that people were essentially good.

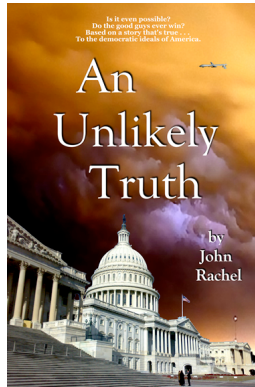
“Can you believe this kind of behavior, Martin?”

“Yes. You saw how he was acting.”

“Which means what?”

“Bath salts.”

“An Unlikely Truth”



In this political drama, a bright, young, idealistic, Green Party candidate in his bid for the congressional seat of a very conservative district in Ohio, teams with a beautiful, fiery African-American intern to combat the slick deceptions and ruthless tactics of a sweet-talking right wing incumbent.

Amazon (Kindle): amzn.to/1jetpiY

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Kobo: bit.ly/1PTaKeG

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“The Man Who Loved Too Much”

Trilogy



Billy Green is bright, enigmatic, and lost. He spent his first 28 years trying to figure out who he is and where he fits in. His life has been a wild, unpredictable quest to attach himself to some reality he can grasp and live with. He grew up in an abysmal suburb of Detroit, escaped to university life at Cornell, got married and divorced before being thrown headlong and entirely unprepared into the insanity and social chaos of New York City.

Book 1: Archipelago

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Smashwords: [bit.ly/1w62HOX](https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/51111)

Book 2: Entendre

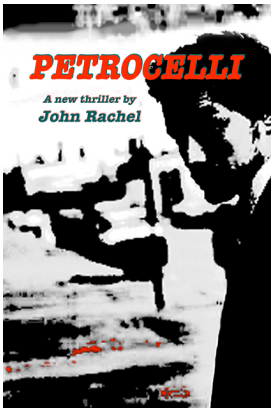
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“Petrocelli”



Lenny Petrocelli had it made until his gangland bosses decided to set him up as the fall guy for a child prostitution ring. This crime thriller confronts the horrifying and taboo topic of sex slavery and human bondage. There are over 35 million slaves in the world today. It's a multi-billion dollar business, subjecting females, many of them barely in their teens, to the worst kind of savage exploitation. If this gritty novel rings true, it's for good reason. Petrocelli is based on actual stories from the violent and gruesome world of human trafficking.

Amazon (Kindle): amzn.to/1XIWg2I

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Apple iBook: apple.co/1S7P6F7

Smashwords: bit.ly/1RntW2h

Kobo: bit.ly/22PZogH

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“Blinders Keepers”



In this dark comedy, a young man who escapes his hopelessly hayseed home town in Missouri is mistakenly labeled a terrorist and must survive a manhunt by government security agencies, as the President of an America in chaos and collapse perpetrates an end-of-the-world hoax, in a desperate attempt to regain control and get himself re-elected.

Amazon (Kindle): amzn.to/1IiodLp

Amazon (Print): amzn.to/1Ohf9T7

Barnes & Noble: bit.ly/1mPC6a5

Apple iBook: apple.co/1JmzENG

Smashwords: bit.ly/1kb5Axx

Kobo: bit.ly/1OET2qg

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“11 - 11 - 11”



Noah was turning 23 and desperate to get out of town. Pulnick, Missouri had always been bland and soporific, but now it was now being invaded by white supremacist meth heads, plagued by an unprecedented crime wave, exploited by spiritualists and local politicos, and driven to hysteria by paranoid rumors that the world would end on November 11th.

Amazon (Kindle): [amzn.to/1RQzupo](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B000APR000)

Amazon (Print): [amzn.to/1krreNU](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B000APR000)

Barnes & Noble: [bit.ly/1nlgS2Z](https://www.barnesandnoble.com/?i=11-11-11)

Apple iBook: apple.co/1JeJITb

Smashwords: [bit.ly/1PwjEN8](https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/111111)

Kobo: [bit.ly/1JIdpRQ](https://www.kobo.com/us/en/ebook/11-11-11)

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“12 - 12 - 12”



Welcome to the parallel universe of "12-12-12". This not what actually happens during 2012. But what unfolds is not more implausible. Nor is it less implausible. It is dark satire, a portrayal of reality with healthy doses of surreality and comedy, spawned by the tragic absurdity of our times. One reviewer calls it "laugh-out-loud brain food for hungry minds."

Amazon (Kindle): amzn.to/1R75rYT

Amazon (Print): amzn.to/1UfOpHb

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About the Author

John Rachel has a B.A. in Philosophy, has traveled extensively, been a songwriter and music producer, and is a bipolar humanist. He has spent his life trying to resolve the intrinsic clash between the metaphysical purity of Buddhism and the overwhelming appeal of narcissism.

In October of 2008, while visiting Japan, he completed his first novel, *From Thailand With Love*. It's a thriller about the trafficking of adolescent Asian girls for prostitution in America. Unfortunately, it was hijacked by an unscrupulous New York publisher and never released in its entirety.

In November of 2009, he completed his second novel, *The Man Who Loved Too Much*, written over ten months, as he lived in and traveled through Japan, China, Nepal, India Thailand, and Malaysia. It follows the convoluted life of a young man from age 4 to 28, as he tries to find his place in the world. The story is set in Detroit, upstate New York, and New York City. At 800+ pages, it is an epic. This encyclopedia of white trash pulp fiction plotlines has been split into three volumes, the novel you have just read being the last book of the series.

While writing his third and fourth novels in 2010 and 2011 — *11-11-11* and *12-12-12* — which track two years in the life of a young man, a hapless victim born in a hopelessly hayseed town in Bible-belt Missouri, the author hopped around between Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia, South Korea and the Philippines. Those two efforts evolved into the short and snappy adventure, *Blinders Keepers*, both as a novel and a screenplay. Combining plot elements from *11-11-11* and *12-12-12*, *Blinders Keepers* is social-political satire in the tradition of Jonathan Swift, Kurt Vonnegut and Joseph Heller, but revved up and spit-shined to take on the historical new levels of absurdity and dysfunction of the 21st Century. *Blinders Keepers* was published as a novel in 2013, after which the author

bounced between Japan, South Korea, the U.S., and nine countries in Europe.

He then became somewhat rooted in a small traditional farming village in Japan near Osaka. It was there, immediately after poking himself in the forehead with chopsticks, that he was inspired to plant soybeans and sweet potatoes in his small but promising vegetable garden, and to write *An Unlikely Truth*, published March of 2014. In this political drama, a bright, young, idealistic, Green Party candidate, in his bid for the congressional seat of a very conservative district in Ohio, teams with a beautiful, fiery African-American intern to combat the slick deceptions and ruthless tactics of a sweet-talking right wing incumbent.

A non-fiction delineation of the political strategy embedded in *An Unlikely Truth* appeared in June 2015 as *Candidate Contracts: Taking Back Our Democracy*. This manifesto offers a detailed, step-by-step plan for cleaning up the corruption in Washington DC, replacing the current crop of pay-for-play politicians with progressive, independent, minor-party candidates, who will be bound by legal contract when elected, to faithfully serve the interests of the voting public. Author Rachel expects the impact of this work will result in his being put on international no-fly lists and perhaps his becoming a target for drone assassination.

With the publication of the *The Man Who Loved Too Much* trilogy, he now has two more novels in the pipeline: *Love Connection*, a drug-trafficking love story set in Japan, and *The Last Giraffe*, an anthropological drama involving both the worship and devouring of giraffes. It unfolds in sub-Saharan Africa.

The author's last permanent residence in America was Portland, Oregon where he had a state-of-the-art ProTools recording studio, music production house, a radio promotion and music publishing company. He recorded and produced several artists in the Pacific Northwest, releasing and promoting their music on radio across America and overseas. John Rachel now lives in a quiet, traditional, rural Japanese community, where he sets his non-existent watch by the thrice-daily ringing of sonorous temple bells, at a local Shinto shrine.

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*You can follow John Rachel's adventures
and developing world view at:*

<http://jdrachel.com>

• • •

*Since the open mind recognizes no borders, you are also
invited to join us in the ongoing dialogue about
the writing arts here:*

<http://literaryvagabond.com>

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