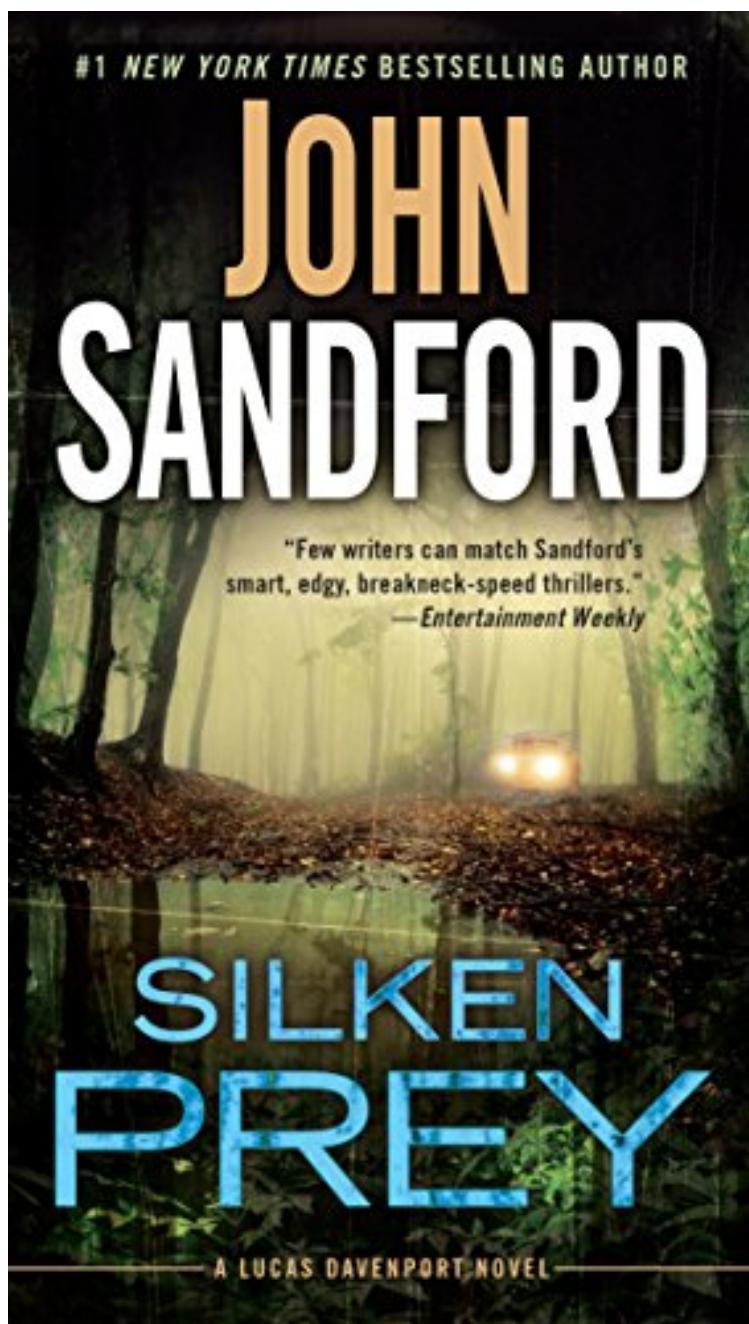


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[Free] Silken Prey: A Lucas Davenport Novel

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurMurder. Scandal. Politics. And one billionaire heiress so dangerous in so many ways. An explosive Lucas Davenport thriller from #1 New York Times bestselling author John Sandford. All hell has broken loose in the capital. An influential state senator has been caught with something very, very nasty on his office computer. The governor cant believe itthe senators way too smart for that, even if he is from the

other party. Somethings not right. As Davenport investigates, the trail leads to a political fixer who has disappeared, then troublingly to the Minneapolis police department itself, and most unsettling of all, to a woman who could give Machiavelli lessons in manipulation. She has very definite ideas about the way the world should work along with the money, ruthlessness, and cold-blooded will to make it happen. From the Paperback edition. Extrait CHAPTER 1 Squeak. Tubbs was half-asleep on the couch, his face covered with an unfolded Star Tribune. The overhead light was still on, and when he collapsed on the couch, he had been too tired to get up and turn it off. The squeak wasn't so much consciously felt, as understood: he had a visitor.

But nobody knocked. Tubbs was a political. In his case, political wasn't an adjective, but a noun. He didn't have a particular job, most of the time, though sometimes he did: an aide to this state senator or that one, a lobbyist for the Minnesota Association of Whatever, a staffer for so-and-sos campaign. So-and-so was almost always a Democrat. He started with Jimmy Carter in '76, when he was eighteen, stayed pure until he jumped to the Jesse Ventura gubernatorial revolt in '98, and then it was back to the Democrats. He had never done anything else. He was a political; and frequently, a fixer. Occasionally, a bagman. Several times like just now a nervous, semi-competent black mailer. Tubbs slept, usually, in the smaller of his two bedrooms. The

other was a chaotic office, the floor stacked with position papers and reports and magazines, with four overflowing file cabinets against one wall. An Apple iMac sat in the middle of his desk, surrounded by more stacks of paper. A disassembled Mac Pro body and a cinema screen hunkered on the floor to one side of the

desk, along with an abandoned Sony desktop. Boxes of old three-and-a-half-inch computer disks sat on bookshelves over the radiator. They had been saved by simple negligence: he no longer knew what was on any of them. The desk had four drawers. One was taken up with current employment and tax files, and the others were occupied by office junk: envelopes, stationery, yellow legal pads, staplers, rubber bands, thumb drives, Post-it notes, scissors, several pairs of fingernail clippers, Sharpies, business cards, dozens of ballpoints, five or six coffee cups from political campaigns and lobbyist groups, tangles of computer connectors. He had two

printers, one a heavy-duty Canon office machine, the other a Brother multiple-use copy/fax/scan/print model. There were three small thirty-inch televisions in his office, all fastened to the wall above the desk, so he could work on the iMac and watch C-SPAN, Fox, and CNN all at once. A sixty-inch LED screen hung on the living room wall opposite the couch where he had been napping. Squeak. This time he opened his eyes. Tubbs reached out for his cell phone, punched the button on top, checked the time: three-fifteen in the morning.

He had had any number of visitors at three-fifteen, but to get through the apartment houses front door, they had to buzz him. He frowned, sat up, listening, smacked his lips; his mouth tasted like a chicken had been roosting in it, and the room smelled of cold chili. Then his doorbell blipped: a quiet ding-dong. Not the buzzer from outside, which was a raucous ZZZZTTT, but the doorbell. Tubbs dropped his feet off the couch,

thinking, Neighbor. Had to be Mrs. Thomas R. Jefferson. She sometimes got disoriented at night, out looking for her deceased husband, and several times had locked herself out of her own apartment. Tubbs padded across the floor in his stocking feet. There was nothing tubby about Tubbs: he was a tall man, and thin. Though he had lived a life of fund-raising dinners and high-stress campaigns, he had ignored the proffered sheet cake, Ding Dongs, Pepsi, Mr. Goodbars, and even the odd moon pies, as well as the stacks of Hungry-

Man microwave meals found in campaign refrigerators. A vegetarian, he went instead for the soy-based proteins, the non-fat cereals, and the celery sticks. If he found himself cornered at a church-basement dinner, he looked for the Jell-O with shredded carrots and onions, and those little pink marshmallows. Tubbs had blond hair, still thick as he pushed into his fifties, a neatly cropped mustache, and a flat belly. Given his habits and his diet, he figured his life expectancy was about ninety-six. Maybe ninety-nine. One big deficit:

he hadn't had a regular woman since his third wife departed five years earlier. On the other hand, the irregular women came along often enough: campaign volunteers, legislative staff, the occasional lobbyist. He had always been a popular man, a man with political stories that were funny, generally absurd, and sometimes terrifying. He told them well. As he walked toward the door, he scratched his crotch. His dick felt sort of . . . bent. Chafed. A little swollen. The latest irregular woman was more irregular than most. They had

a strenuous workout earlier that evening, a day that had left Tubbs exhausted. Hours of cruising the media outlets, talking to other operators all over the state, assessing the damage; a tumultuous sexual encounter; and finally, the biggest blackmail effort of his life, the biggest potential payoff . . . He was beat, which was why, perhaps, he wasn't more suspicious. Tubbs checked the peephole. Nobody there. Probably Mrs.

Jefferson, he thought, who hadn't been five-two on her tallest day, and now was severely bent by osteoporosis. He popped open the door, and, Surprise! Tubbs regained consciousness on the floor of a moving car, an SUV. He was terribly injured, and knew it. He no longer knew exactly how it had happened, if he

ever had, but there was something awfully wrong with his head, his skull. His face and hands were wet with blood, and he could taste blood in his mouth and his nose was stuffed with it. He would have gagged if he had the strength. He could move his hands, but not his feet, and with a little clarity that came after a while, he knew something else: he was lying on a plastic sheet. And he knew why: so the floor of the car wouldn't get blood on it. The images in his mind were confused, but deep down, in a part that hadn't been impacted, he knew who his attackers must be, and he knew what the end would be. He'd be killed. And he was so hurt that he wouldn't be able to fight it. Tubbs was dying. There wasn't much in the way of pain, because he was too badly injured for that. Nothing to do about it but wait until the darkness came. The car was traveling on a smooth road, and its gentle motion nevertheless suggested speed. A highway, headed out of St. Paul. Going to a burial ground, or maybe to the Mississippi. He had no preference. A few minutes after he regained consciousness, he slipped away again. Then he resurfaced, and deep down in the lizard part of his brain, a spark of anger burned. Nothing he could do? A plan formed, not a good one, but something. Something he could actually do. His hands were damp with blood. With much of his remaining life force, he pushed one wet hand across the plastic sheet, and tried as best he could to form the letters TG. That was it. That was all he had. A scrawl of blood on the underside of a car seat, where the owner wouldn't see it, but where a crime-scene technician might. He pulled his hand back and then felt his tongue crawl out of his mouth, beyond his will, the muscles of his face relaxing toward death. He was still alive when the car slowed, and then turned. Still alive when it slowed again, and this time, traveled down a rougher road. Felt the final turn, and the car rocking to a stop. Car doors opening. His killers pulled him out of the backseat by pulling and lifting the plastic tarp on which he lay. One of them said, Skinny fuck is heavy. The other answered, Hey. I think he's breathing. Yeah? Give me the bat. Just before the darkness came, Tubbs sensed the fetid wetness of a swamp; an odor, a softness in the soil beneath his body. He never heard or felt the crunch of his skull shattering under the bat. Nothingness.

CHAPTER 2 Lucas Davenport was having his hockey nightmare, the one where he is about to take the ice in an NCAA championship game, but can't find his skates. He knows where they are locker 120 but the locker numbers end at 110 down one aisle, and pick up at 140 on the next one. He knows 120 is somewhere in the vast locker room, and as the time ticks down to the beginning of the match, and the fan-chants start from the bleachers overhead, he runs frantically barefoot up and down the rows of lockers, scanning the number plates. . . . He knew he was dreaming even as he did it. He wanted nothing more than to end it, which was why he was struggling toward consciousness at eight o'clock on a Sunday morning and heard Weather chortling in the bathroom. Weather, his wife, was a surgeon, and on working days was always out of the house by six-thirty. Even on sleep-in days, she hardly ever slept until eight. Lucas, on the other hand, was a night owl. He was rarely in bed before two o'clock, except for recreational purposes, and he was content to sleep until nine o'clock, or later. This morning, he could hear her laughing in the bathroom, and realized that she was watching the built-in bathroom TV as she put on her makeup. She'd resisted the idea of a bathroom television, but Lucas had installed one anyway, claiming that it would increase their efficiency get the local news out of the way, so they could start their days. In reality, it had more to do with shaving. He'd started shaving when he was fifteen, and had never had a two-week beard. Even counting the rare days when he hadn't shaved for one reason or another, he'd still gone through the ritual at least twelve thousand times, and he enjoyed it. Took his time with it. Found that the television added to the whole ceremony. Now, as he struggled to the surface, and out of the hockey arena, he called, What? She called back, More on Smalls. The guy is truly fucked. Lucas said, Have a good day, and rolled over and tried to find a better dream, preferably involving twin blondes with long plaited hair and really tight, round . . .

ZZZ. Just before he went back to dreamland, he thought about Weather's choice of words. She didn't use obscenity lightly, but in this case, she was correct: Smalls was really, truly fucked. Lucas Davenport was tall, heavy-shouldered, and hawk-faced, and, at the end of the first full month of autumn, still well-tanned, which made his blue eyes seem bluer yet, and made a couple of white scars stand out on his face and neck. The facial scar was thin, like a piece of pale fishing line strung down over his eyebrow and onto one cheek. The neck scar, centered on his throat, was circular with a vertical slash through it. Not one he liked to remember: the young girl had pulled the piece-of-crap .22 out of nowhere and shot him and would have killed him if Weather hadn't been there with a jackknife. The vertical slash was the result of the tracheotomy that had saved his life. The slug had barely missed his spinal cord. The tan would be fading over the next few months, and the scars would become almost invisible until, in March, he'd be as pale as a piece of typing paper. Lucas rolled out of bed at nine o'clock, spent some time with himself in the bathroom, and caught a little more about Porter Smalls. Smalls was a conservative Republican politician. Lucas generally didn't like right-

wingers, finding them generally to be self-righteous and uncompromising. Smalls was more relaxed than that. He was conservative, especially on the abortion issue, and he was death on taxes; on the other hand, he had a Clintonesque attitude about women, and even a sense of humor about his own peccadilloes. Minnesotans went for his whole bad-boy act, especially in comparison to the stiff who usually got elected to high office. Smalls was rich. As someone at the Capitol once told Lucas, he started out selling apples. The first one he bought for a nickel, and sold for a quarter. With the quarter, he bought five more apples, and sold them for a dollar. Then he inherited twenty million dollars from his father, and became an overnight success. Weather loathed Smalls because he advocated Medicaid cuts as a way to balance the state budget. He was also virulently pro-life, and Weather was strongly pro-choice. He was also anti-union, and wanted to eliminate all public employee unions with a federal law. Conflict of interest, he said. Payoffs with taxpayer money. Lucas paid little attention to it. He generally voted for Democrats, but not always. He voted for a nominally Republican governor, not once but twice. Whatever happened, he figured he could live with it. Anyway, Smalls had looked like he was headed for reelection over an attractive young Minnesota heiress, though it was going to be close. Her qualifications for office were actually better than Smalls; she looked terrific, and had an ocean of money. If she had a problem, it was that she carried with her a whiff of arrogance and entitlement, and maybe more than a whiff. Then, on the Friday before, a dewy young volunteer, as conservative as Smalls himself, and with the confidence that comes from being both dewy and affluent seemed like everybody involved in the election had money had gone into Smalls campaign office to drop off some numbers on federal aid to Minnesota for bridge construction, also known as U.S. Government Certified A-1 Pork. She told the cops that Smalls computer screen was blanked out when she walked into the office. She wanted him to see the bridge files as soon as he came in, so she put them on his keyboard. When the packets hit the keyboard, the screen lit up . . . with a kind of child porn so ugly that the young woman hardly knew what she was seeing for the first few seconds. Then she did what any dewy Young Republican would have done: she called her father. He told her to stay where she was: he'd call the police. When the cops arrived, they took one look, and seized the computer. And somebody, maybe everybody, blabbed to the media. Porter Smalls was in the shit. Sunday morning, a time for newspapers and kids: Lucas pulled on a pair of blue jeans, a black shirt, and low-cut black boots. When he was done, he admired himself in Weather's full-length admiring mirror, brushed an imaginary flake from his shoulder, and went down to French toast and bacon, which he could smell sizzling on the griddle even on the second floor. The housekeeper, Helen, was passing it all around when he sat down. His son, Sam, a toddler, was babbling about trucks, and had three of them on the table; Letty was talking about a fashion-forward girl who'd worn a tiara to high school, in a kind of make-or-break status move; Weather was reading a Times review about some artist who'd spent five years doing a time-lapse movie of grass growing and dying; and Baby Gabrielle was throwing oatmeal at the refrigerator. There were end-of-the-world headlines about Smalls, in both the Minneapolis and New York papers. The Times, whose editorial portentousness approached traumatic constipation, tried to suppress its glee under the bushel basket of feigned sadness that another civil servant had been caught in a sexual misadventure; they hadn't even bothered to use the word alleged. Lucas was halfway through the Star Tribunes comics when his cell phone buzzed. He took it out of his pocket, looked at the caller ID, clicked it, and said, Good morning, Neil. I assume you're calling from the Cathedral. Neil Mitford, chief weasel for the governor of Minnesota, ignored the comment. The guy needs to see you this morning. He should be out of church and down at his office by ten-thirty or so. He's got to talk to a guy at ten-forty-five, more or less, until eleven-thirty or so. He'd like to see you either at ten-thirty or eleven-thirty. I could make the ten-thirty, Lucas said. Is this about Tubbs? Tubbs? No, Tubbs is just off on a bender somewhere. This is about Smalls. What about Smalls? That's being handled by St. Paul. Hell tell you. Come in the back, Mitford said. We'll have a guard down at the door for you. Lucas checked his watch and saw that he would make it to the Capitol right on time, if he left in the next few minutes, and drove slowly enough. Wait, Weather said. We were all going shopping. It's hard to tell the governor to piss up a rope, Lucas said. Even on a Sunday. But we were going to pick out Halloween costumes . . . I'd just be bored and in your way, and you wouldn't let me choose, anyway, Lucas said. You and Letty will be fine. Letty shrugged and said to Weather, That's all true. So Lucas idled up Mississippi River Boulevard, top down on the Porsche 911, to Summit Avenue, then along Summit with its grand houses, and over to the Capitol. The Minnesota Capitol is sited on a hill overlooking St. Paul, and because of the expanse of the hill, looks taller and wider than the U.S. Capitol. Also, whiter. Lucas left the car a block away, and strolled through the cheerful morning, stopping to look at a late-season butterfly that was perched on a zinnia, looking for something to eat. The big

change-of-season cold front had come through the week before, but, weirdly, there hadnt yet been a killing frost, and there were still butterflies and flowers all over the place. At the Capitol, an overweight guard was waiting for him at a back door. He and the guard had once worked patrol together on the Minneapolis police force. The guard was double-dipping and they chatted for a few minutes, and then Lucas climbed some stairs and walked down to the governors office. The governor, or somebody, had left a newspaper blocking the doorjamb, and Lucas pushed open the door, picked up the paper, and let the door lock behind him. He was standing in a darkened outer office and the governor called, Lucas? Come on in. The governor was a tall, slender blond named Elmer Henderson, who might, in four years, be a viable candidate for vice president of the United States on the Democratic ticket. The media said hed nail down the left-wingers for a presidential candidate who might prefer to run a little closer to the middle. Henderson might himself have been a candidate for the top job, if he had not been, in his younger years, quite so fond of women in pairs and trios, known at Harvard as the Henderson Hoagie, and cocaine. He certainly had the right pedigree: Ivy League undergraduate and law, flawless if slightly robotic wife and children, perhaps a half billion dollars from his share of the 3M inheritance. He was standing behind his desk, wearing a dark going-to-church suit, open at the throat, the tie curled on his desktop. He had a sheaf of papers in his hands, thumbing them, when Lucas walked in. He looked over his glasses and said, Lucas. Sit. Sorry to bother you on a Sunday morning. Its okay. Lucas took a chair. You need somebody killed? Several people, but Id hesitate to ask, at least here in the office, on the Lords Day, the governor said. He gave the papers a last shuffle, set them aside, pressed a button on a box on his desk, and said, Get in here, and asked Lucas, Youve been reading about Porter Smalls? Yeah. You guys must be dancing in the aisles, Lucas said. Should be, said a voice from behind Lucas. Lucas turned his head as Mitford came through a side door, which led into his compact, paper-littered office. This is one of the better political moments of my life. Porter Smalls takes it between the cheeks. What an unhappy expression, the governor said. He dropped into his chair, sighed, and put his stocking feet on the desktop. But appropriate, I suppose. Hes certainly being screwed by all and sundry. And it kills the Medicaid nonsense, Mitford said, as he took another chair. He was carrying that on his back, and anything he was carrying is tainted. You want to pass a bill sponsored by a kiddie-porn addict? What kind of human being are you? Grossly unfair, the governor said. He didnt seem particularly worried about the unfairness of it. Hed been looking at Mitford, but now turned to Lucas. You know what the problem is? What? He didnt do it. Wasnt his child porn, the governor said. I talked to him yesterday afternoon, over at his house, for a long time. He didnt do it. I thought you guys were blood enemies, Lucas said. Political enemies. I went to kindergarten with him, and knew him before that. Went to the same prep school, he went to Yale and I went to Harvard. His sister was a good friend of mine, for a while. He paused, looked up at the ceiling, and smiled a private smile, then recovered. I tell you, from the bottom of my little liberal heart, Porter didnt do it. He couldve gone off the rails somewhere, Lucas suggested. The governor shook his head. No. He doesnt have it in him, to look at kiddie porn. I know the kind of women he looks at. I can describe them in minute detail, and nobody would call them kid-dies: he likes them big-titted, big-assed, and blond. He liked them that way in kindergarten and he still likes them that way. Go look at his staff, youll see what I mean. Cant always tell. . . Lucas began, but the governor held up a finger. Another thing, he said. This volunteer said she walked into his office and put some papers on his keyboard and up popped the porn. If it really happened like that, it means that he had a screen of kiddie porn up on his computer, and walked away from it to a campaign finance meeting, leaving the door unlocked and the kiddie porn on the screen. The screen blanked for a while, but was still there, waiting to be found. Vile stuff, Im told. Vile. Anyway, thats the only way her story works: the screen was blanked when she walked in, and popped back up when she put the papers on the keyboard. Porter was near the top of his class at Yale Law. Hes not stupid, hes not a huge risk-taker. Do you really believe he would do that? Even smart people. Oh, horseshit, the governor said, waving him off. Suicidal. . . Porter goes to the emergency room if the barber cuts his hair too short, the governor said. He wants and expects to live forever, preferably with a big-titted, big-assed blonde sitting on his face. Lucas thought for a moment, then conceded the point: That thing about the volunteer it worries me. It should, the governor said. He kicked his feet off the desktop and said, I want you to look into this, Lucas. But quietly. I dont want to disturb anybody without. . . without there being something worthwhile to disturb them with. One more question, Lucas said. This guy is a major pain in your partys ass. Why. . . ? Because its the right thing to do, mostly, the governor said. Theres something else, too. This sort of shit is going too far. Way too far. Most Republicans arent nuts. Theyre perfectly good people. So are most of us Democrats. But this kind of thing, if its deliberate its a threat to everybody. All you have to do is say kiddie porn and a guys career is over. Doesnt

make any difference what hes done, what his character is like, how hard hes worked, it doesnt even matter if theres proofonce it gets out in the media, theyll repeat it endlessly, and theres no calling it back. You could have the Archbishop of Canterbury go on TV tomorrow and say he has absolute proof that Porter Smalls is innocent, and fifty other bloggers would be sneering at him in two minutes and CNN would be calling the bishop a liar. So were talking about dangerous, immoral, antidemocratic stuff .Youre saying the media is dangerous, immoral, and antidemocratic?Well . . . yes, Henderson said. They dont recognize it in themselves, but theyre basically criminals. In the classic sense of that word.All right, Lucas said.And, of course, theres the other thing, the governor said. The less righteous thing.Lucas said, Uh-oh.Mitford said, Were already hearing rumors that he was framed. That there were hints before anyone found the porn that something was coming on Smalls. If it turns out that some overzealous young Democratic hacker did it, if this is a campaign dirty trick . . . then there could be a lot more trouble. If thats what happened, we need to know it first. The elections too close to be screwing around.The governor added, But the preliminary investigation has to be quiet. Invisible might be a better word.Mitford said, Totally quiet. That fuckin tool over in the attorney generals office wants to move into this office. He thinks prosecuting Smalls is one way to do it. If he finds out that youre digging around, hell paper your ass so fast youd think you were a new country kitchen. Youll be working for him.You dont sound as offended as the governor, Lucas said to Mitford. About Smalls being framed.Im paid to keep my eye on the ball, so thats what I do, Mitford said. Short term, theres no benefit to us, saving an asshole like Smalls. If we get a reward, its gonna have to be in heaven, because we sure as shit wont get it now. If the party found out we were trying to help Smalls, then . . . well, you know, were thinking about the vice presidency. On the other hand, if we did this, meaning we in the all-inclusive sense, and if that comes out, say, the Friday before the election . . . I cant afford to lose the state House, Henderson said. He wasnt running. He still had two years to go on his second term.But Smalls is in the U.S. Senate, Lucas said. How could that affect the state House?Because our majority is too narrow. If it turns out that we tried to sabotage a U.S. Senate race, with child porn, Smalls will eat us alive in the last few days before the election. He could pump up the Republican turnout just enough that we could lose those extra three or four close-run seats. If we lose the House, and the Senate stays Republican, which it will, theyll spend the next two years dreaming up ways to embarrass me.We cant have that, Mitford said. I mean, really.But. If Smalls owes us, even under the rose, hell pay up, the governor said. Hes that kind of guy. He wont go after us . . . if he owes us.All right, Lucas said. He stood up. Ill do it.Excellent, the governor said. Call me every day.But what if he did it? Lucas asked.He didnt, the governor said.Lucas said, Im going to tell Rose Marie about it. I cant . . . not do that. Rose Marie was the public safety commissioner and an old friend.The governor was exasperated: Jesus Christ, Lucas . . . I cant not do that, Lucas insisted.The governor threw up his hands. All right. When you tell her, you tell her to call me. Ill need . . . Wait. Hell no. Ill call her right now. You get going on this. Id like to get something pretty definitive in, say, mmm, three days. Two would be better.Man . . .Go. Henderson waved him away.Rose Marie Roux had been a cop, then a lawyer and prosecutor, then a state senator, then the Minneapolis chief of police, and finally, the commissioner of public safety under Henderson. She had jurisdiction over a number of law enforcement agencies, including the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. She viewed Lucas as both a friend and an effective tool for achieving her policy goals, not all of them involving crime-fighting. Shed gotten him his job at the BCA.Rose Maries husband was ten years older than she was, and when hed retired, he talked her into dumping the suburban Minneapolis house in favor of a sprawling co-op apartment in downtown St. Paul. Lucas gave the governor a few minutes to talk to her, and then, as he walked back to his car, called her himself.You at home?Yeah, come on down. Ill buzz you into the garage.Lucas had been to the apartment often enough that he knew the routine; buzzed into the garage, he parked in one of the visitors slots and took the elevator to the top floor. Rose Maries husband opened the door; he was holding the Times in one hand and a piece of jelly toast in the other. Shes out on the deck, he said.You raked the leaves off the deck yet?Thank God for the penthousenot a leaf to be seen, he said.Rose Marie, wrapped in a wool shawl, was sitting on a lounge chair, smoking a cigarette; nicotine gum, she said, was for pussies. She was a short woman, going to weight, with an ever-changing hair color. Lucas liked her a lot.When Lucas stepped out on the deck, she said, I appreciate what you did, bringing me into it. This will be interesting, all the way around. Although it has a downside, of course.She crushed the cigarette out on a ceramic saucer by the side of the chair. As Lucas sat down facing her, she asked, How much do you like your job?Its okay. Been doing it for a while, Lucas said.If this kind of thing happens too often, youll get pushed out, Rose Marie said. Its inevitable.Lucas shrugged. I do it because its interesting. This assignments interesting. If I wasnt doing this,

Id be chasing chicken thieves in Black Duck. Rose Marie said, I keep thinking about what Im going to do when this job is over. If Elmer makes vice president, hell take care of both of us. If he doesnt, then Im unemployed, and you probably will be, too. Thats a cheerful thought, Lucas said. Gotta face facts, Rose Marie said. Weve both had a good run. But I dont feel like retiring, and youre way too young to retire. Were both financially fine, but what the fuck do we do? Become consultants? I dont feel like running for anything. I havent spent a lot of time worrying about it, Lucas said. You should, Rose Marie said. Even if Elmer makes vice president, Im not sure youd want what he could get you. Id be fine, because Im basically a politician, I could work in D.C., or for his office here. But you . . . I dont know what youd do. I dont think youd want to wind up as some FBI functionary. Or Elmers valet. No. Well. Sooner or later, your name will be connected to this job, Rose Marie said. Whether or not it pans out. If the attorney general doesnt jump you for the prosecution, Porter Smalls will come after you for the defense. A lot of people in the Department of Public Safety and over at the BCA dont like this kind of thing, the political stuff. And youve been doing a lot of it. When Im not here to protect you, when Elmers not here . . . Ah, its all right, Rose Marie, Lucas said. Ive been fired before. Stop worrying about it. Yeah. She peered at him for a moment, then asked, What are you going to do? About Smalls? Try to keep it quiet, as long as I can, Lucas said. How are you going to do that? she asked. Havent worked it out yet. Ive got a few ideas, but you wouldnt want to hear them. No. Actually, I wouldnt. So. Moving right along . . . Lucas stood up. Rose Marie said, Ill talk to Henry. Make sure he has a feel for the situation. Henry Sands was director of the BCA and had been appointed by Henderson. If he knew Henderson was behind Lucass investigation, hed keep his mouth shut. Unless, of course, he could see some profit in slipping a word to a reporter. He didnt much like Lucas, which was okay, because Lucas didnt much like him back. Good, Lucas said. And hey relax. Gonna be all right. No, it wont, she said. I can almost guarantee that whatever it is, it wont be all right. Lucas started back down to the car, still thinking it over. Rose Marie was probably right about the political stuff. Even if you were on the side of the Lord, the politics could taint you. Which created a specific problem: there was at least one man at the BCA whod be invaluable to Lucass investigation. Del Capslock. Del had contacts everywhere, on both sides of the law, and knew the local porn industry inside out. The problem was, Del depended on his BCA salary, and all the benefits, for his livelihood. He had a wife and kid, and was probably fifteen years from retirement. Everybody in the BCA knew that he and Lucas had a special relationship, but that was okay . . . as long as Lucas didnt drag him down. Lucas didnt particularly worry about himself. Back in the nineties, hed been kicked out of the Minneapolis Police Department and had gone looking for something to do. Hed long had a mildly profitable sideline as a designer of pen-and-paper role-playing games, which had gone back to his days at the university. After he left the MPD, hed gotten together with a computer guy from the universitys Institute of Technology. Together they created a piece of software that could be plugged into 911 computer systems, to run simulations of high-stress law-enforcement problems. Davenport Simulationsthe company still existed, though he no longer had a part of it had done very well through the nineties, and even better after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Instead of one simulation aimed at police departments, they now produced dozens of simulations for everything from bodyguard training to aircraft gunfight situations. When the management bought Lucas out, he walked away with enough money to last several lifetimes. He was rich. Porter Smalls was rich. The governor was really rich, and for that matter, so was Porter Smalls opponent; even the volunteer whod started the trouble was rich, or would be. Rich people all over the place; gunfight at the one-percent corral. Anyway, he was good, whatever happened. If the Porter Smalls assignment turned into a political quagmire, he could always . . . putter in the garden. Del couldnt. Lucas popped the doors on the 911 and stood beside the open door for a minute, working through it. Del was out of it. So were his other friends with the BCA. Which left the question, who was in, and where would he get the intelligence he would need? He had to smile at the governors presumption: get it done, hed said, in a day or two, and keep it absolutely private. He didnt care how, or who, or what. He just expected it to be done, and probably wouldnt even think about it again until Lucas called him. *Revue de presse* Praise for John Sandford: 'Wry humour, a fully realized lead, and tense atmospherics . . . Sandford effortlessly conjures up the rhythms and personalities of a small town in one of his best outings to date' Publishers Weekly 'Crime writer John Sandford is one of the best around' Sun 'Tough, engrossing and engaging, Sandford writes superb thrillers' Literary 'Delivers twists to the very last sentence' Daily Mail 'That rare beast - a series writer who reads like a breath of fresh air' Daily Mirror 'Few do it better than Sandford' Daily Telegraph 'An exciting and superbly elegant demonstration of the intelligent crime writing that has helped John Sandford sell an

estimated 33 million books' Guardian