



A WP TRILOGY

POSTERITY



BHARAT KRISHNAN

POSTERITY
A Trilogy

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Acknowledgments

Writing Privilege was a surprise to me, and so was writing *Skinrafters*. But not this final piece of the WP Saga. No, I've known for decades now that I wanted to write this book. In here, you'll find the closing chapter of a series that serves as an unapologetic celebration of the strong women who've taught me everything I know. It's appropriate that it took over 350,000 words to do them justice.

Monali Krishnan: The love of my life, who gives me strength, intelligence, and resolve that WP never could.

To the mom and four sisters who taught me that vulnerability is strength and kindness is the great equalizer: thank you.

And finally, to the aunties: There are so many of you that to list you all would be ridiculous. You are my "second moms" who raised me to believe that strong women will save the world.

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PURPOSE

"Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another."

- Toni Morrison

Chapter One

January 7, 2028

Therese Johnson didn't mind the cold, thin morning air of Albuquerque as long as she woke up wrapped in the warmth of her husband. Her routine involved waking every day about five minutes before her cell phone alarm rang. That way, she could turn it off before its ringing woke Russell. Despite her best efforts, though, he whispered to her groggily as she made her way to their connected bathroom.

"Iz Saturday," he mumbled. "Come back to bed, Madame Mayor."

She smiled as his strong frame and sinewy fingers stretched out from the bed to touch her raven hair, which was as messy and tangled as her life before she'd had a chance to put a hair straightener to it. And Albuquerque was the hair straightener that'd given her life structure and order again after New York.

"Work never ends," she cooed in his ear, looking back and kissing his lips softly before entering the bathroom to start her morning routine. She left door open as she applied makeup to mask her crow's feet and popped a pill for her arthritis. Through the doorway, she saw Russell hogging the covers to himself now that she'd left their bed. She smiled, taking the opportunity to apply her dark red lipstick more fully in order to accentuate her smile—a smile she'd fought long and hard to reclaim.

What a journey it's been.

It'd been over two years since the city had elected her mayor, a fantastical idea borne out of a night of drinking too much red wine with her former boss, Alicia Wright. She'd been a babysitter when she'd first moved to New Mexico, before even President Begaye had been elected, and Alicia had been working out of the then-Senator's Albuquerque office. Therese's schedule had become crazier after Alicia had moved herself to DC to become the White House Press Secretary but left her kids here so they could remain in school with their friends and away from the bloodlust of the Capitol. And when the Mayor's seat had opened up, to her surprise, Alicia had said she'd discussed the issue with the State Democratic Party and wanted Therese to run.

I guess I'm doing a pretty damn good job, too.

She knew Jerome would be proud of her. Both Jeromes, for that had been her husband's name as well. Finally, after years of therapy and finding a doting husband and satisfying career, she could admit that to herself.

Jerome would've wanted me to not just live, but thrive. And she was.

Since she'd taken office in January 2026, she'd personally monitored the city's approach to WP legalization. Crime was down, jobs were up, and Intel had just committed to building a new WP refinery station in Rio Rancho, a \$1.5 billion investment that put her on POLITICO's list of top American mayors. Not that she cared much about her press, but she knew it helped with raising the community's profile.

President Begaye's landmark legislation had established a process for refining the drug and imposed strict penalties for buying it unrefined, and that had presented all sorts of issues only compounded by the fact that the global war for WP had ended less than six months ago in total disaster. SCOTUS had delivered the war effort a fatal blow last July when the nine Justices ruled the WP Force illegal. And as soldiers had come home, many of them had turned to unrefined WP to cope with their PTSD. On top of what Lucas Brooks had done—that joke of a president—there'd been no other recourse for America than to lick its wounds, tuck its tail, and pretend the new world order was what it had always wanted.

Therese's hands balled into fists at her side as she exited the bathroom and saw Brooks's face on her TV. Russell had decided to get up.

"Go back to bed," she said. She put her clothes on and pretended not to hear as the local news discussed Brooks's funeral. She'd forgotten it was today.

At least the whole world now knows what a piece of shit he was. She'd been taught not to speak ill of the dead, but in his case, she would make an exception.

Still draped in their comforter, Russell rolled over to paw at her as she sat on the bed to put her pants on. His fingers brushing against her bare thigh sent a thrill up her body. The fact that he slept without a shirt on helped, too.

"I've got something more fun than work in mind for us this morning."

His voice changed her world, focused it. She sighed with contentment now, a relief from the last twenty-plus years. Even before Jerome's murder, before her husband's heart attack, she'd only ever sighed with frustration and fear in her throat. It had clawed at her insides. Paralyzed her. But now—she could breathe! And the best part about it was she didn't feel even a little bit guilty about it.

I am enough. She spent the first moments of every morning wishing she was dreaming, that she'd died in her sleep and gone home to her son. But then she realized it wasn't her time yet and committed to honoring Jerome by living her life to the fullest. The hole in her heart would never heal, and she wouldn't want it to. But through years of therapy and self-love, she'd understood after fifty-three years that the missing parts of your life could ache a little less through public service.

Zippering her pants up and draping a scarf around her neck, she gave

Russell another peck on the lips. "Wasn't last night enough?"

"Oh, with you I'm insatiable," he said, grinning ear-to-ear like some dumb teenager.

"Sleep in. Like you said, it's Saturday. I know how hard you've been working to close this Intel deal."

They were a power couple. Her in the Mayor's office, and him at Intel leading their Department of Governmental Affairs. Before that, he'd done research for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) in DC.

"Have Luke push your schedule back a couple hours," he said, referring to her assistant.

"What are we gonna do after the first five minutes?" Therese joked, prompting him to grab her legs and pull her back onto the bed. She screamed in surprise as she fell, but as always, he was there to catch her. Leaning over her body, he let his cornrows brush against her face. She wrapped her arms around his neck and they kissed as if it was their first time. She took in his raw scent and gasped when his mouth went to her neck.

"Baby, I gotta go..."

His fingers fidgeted with her skirt, and that was when she heard a knock at the door.

"Saved by the bell," Russell said, stopping and getting up to throw on a shirt to go with his sweatpants.

"In a minute," Therese shouted. Running back to the bathroom to brush her hair, she promised Russell they'd finish tonight and then opened the door. "Good morning, Luke."

"Ma'am, I'm sorry for bothering you." He nodded at Russell before finding something fascinating on his shoes to stare at.

"What's up?"

"Two big issues, ma'am."

"Luke," she interrupted him. "It's been two years. Therese is fine, or Madame Mayor if you can't stand my name."

"Yes, ma'am," he said. She rolled her eyes as Russell chuckled behind her. "Two things."

"Give me a minute," Therese said. Turning to face her husband, she asked him to try and enjoy his day off.

"Oh, I'mma enjoy myself fully," Russell said. "The Indiana Jones trilogy just came to Netflix."

She kissed her fingers and touched the bedside photo of her son, then walked out with Luke.

"You said two things?" Therese sat passenger side as Luke drove them away from her house on the Westside, mere feet from the Rio Grande.

"Chief Justice Swindell finally died."

Therese closed her eyes and said a prayer. "When?"

"I heard it from Alicia this morning. The press will probably have it within the hour."

"Glioblastoma is a death sentence. Send flowers to his wife, would you?"

"Of course."

"And the other thing?"

Luke bit his lip as he merged onto I-25 North. "The other thing is a bigger problem for us."

"Where are we going? This isn't the way to the office?"

"We're going to the Sandoval County Jail."

Therese frowned. "Luke, how many times do I have to tell you? I can't get one of your friends out of a DUI. At this point, I think it's cheaper to just find better friends."

"That's not what it is," he said. "A homeless vet was caught breaking into a city reserve last night."

Therese closed her eyes again, but this time she didn't say a prayer so much as some four-letter words. "He was looking for unrefined WP?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And he got some?"

"No," Luke said. "Cops picked him up before he could use it."

"Thank God for that."

"Ma'am, we don't have to go there today. His arraignment isn't until tomorrow."

"No," she said. "I made a promise when I was elected that I'd speak to all these poor souls, and I intend on keeping my word."

They drove in silence the rest of the way, Therese's leg moving up and down like a piston as the car navigated through morning traffic.



The big block letters in silver, announcing the SANDOVAL COUNTY DETENTION CENTER against the adobe brick walls, made the jail look almost appealing, like a summer camp. Sheriff Ritter was there to greet them as soon as they parked near the back entrance and entered.

"We appreciate the cloak-and-dagger approach," Ritter said.

"Yeah," Therese muttered, "can't have the press snapping a photo of us together."

While she'd been elected with 63% of the vote, Sandoval County was a little more accommodating to Republicans. Ritter was proof of that, and he'd just as soon shoot himself in the foot than risk a photo of them together in an election year.

"You've got ten minutes," Ritter grunted. "His lawyer's already seen him and I don't need the guy getting any more face time before his arraignment."

"County attorney?" Luke asked.

"The finest representation the taxpayers can provide," Ritter said. The

scowl on his face could've had its own zip code.

"Luke, wait in the car, please."

Opening the door to a holding cell, the sheriff waved Therese in and then left with Luke.

She almost cried just looking at the prisoner handcuffed at the metal table, sitting as if he'd made peace with his lot in life ages ago. With his scrawny frame and short hair, he was the spitting image of what her son would've looked like if he was still alive. She opened her mouth, Jerome's name on her tongue, before closing it again.

"Thank you for seeing me, ma'am."

Shaking her head, she walked to his side and lay her hand on his, squeezing it. "What's your name, and why are you here?"

He gave her an answer she'd heard a hundred times over the last seven years. WP legalization hadn't changed anything. The GOP had won back Congress in 2022 and passed all sorts of liability protections that limited its distribution, that established differences between refined and unrefined WP. Everyone had come together to agree that the stuff Jerome had used, unrefined WP, was still illegal. And if you were caught with it? Mandatory minimums, just like cocaine.

Taking WP to a refinery station was no problem if you were rich. Too bad if you weren't. And even now, after years of research, security devices still couldn't detect subtle differences between refined and unrefined WP. It had become such a problem that most government buildings (including the White House) didn't even allow staffers to wear WP.

Fucking politicians.

The prisoner's name was Justin. He'd served on the WP Force in Rwanda, but when the shit had hit the fan in 2024, he'd gotten discharged and sent home with a pat on the back and a TBI. The VA had messed up his healthcare and he hadn't been able to see a therapist for weeks upon returning to Albuquerque. When he'd finally gotten an appointment, his anger had grown to such lengths that he'd decided to skip his meetings. The military had tried setting him up with a job, but he hadn't lasted long with his anger issues. He'd lost a girlfriend, an apartment. He'd been on the streets for six months when he'd finally been arrested.

Thank God he wasn't killed.

Each state treated the possession of unrefined WP differently, through a patchwork set of loosely defined laws. Democrats had won back Congress in 2024, but still, no major reforms had happened on WP legalization since then. Corporations, small businesses, schools, hospitals—they all operated as flexibly as they wanted, depending on local regulations and the whims of their senior leadership.

Are we really running the country like this? Cops were given free rein to act with deadly intent to bring down anyone they suspected of holding unrefined WP. They pulled cars over habitually to check. And, of course, those cars just happened to be driven by nonwhites. Then the cops could confiscate the drugs and sell them back to the government or a private buyer. It was a great income stream for underfunded police stations, and political leadership was generally happy to look the other way and pat themselves on the back for the added funds (delivered back to taxpayers in the form of tax cuts if you lived in a red state or teacher salaries if you lived in a blue state). Either way, no one was complaining except the downtrodden (and who gave a fuck about them).

She'd spoken with Governor Strauss (a Democrat!) about the issue more than a couple times, but his hands were apparently tied. Thinking about it made her blood boil and she forced bile down her throat as Justin continued his story.

"The president himself called me an American hero," Justin said. "Begaye! And look where I am now. You can't trust politicians for shit."

It was just the sort of thing her son would've said. Even the lilt of Justin's voice reminded her of him...

April 10, 2003

The cry of her baby boy was the most beautiful thing Therese Johnson had ever heard. Born six pounds, seven ounces, he had finally arrived. Today would be more important to her than even the day she'd married Jerome.

"We gotta name him after you, baby."

"Jerome Jr.? Shit, this guy's gonna be a killer."

Boston was a great town to raise a boy. They actually lived in Tewksbury, but close enough. And with her husband as the hot-shot lawyer, they'd give their son opportunities the two of them could've never dreamed of. Maybe she wouldn't even go back to work.

Later, after Jerome had left and the lactation consultant had gotten her set up, when it was just her and her baby in the hospital, she closed her eyes and focused on her baby drawing life from her. They said it would hurt, but his mouth against her bosom filled her with warmth. She was his everything, and he was hers.

"Nothing I did before today mattered, and nothing I do tomorrow will matter if you aren't there with me."

For now and forever, her life belonged to him.

July 2, 2009

No wonder Nancy Pelosi was such a great leader, Therese thought. Managing one six-year-old was driving her insane. If you could handle five of them, you should be elected president automatically.

"You're gonna slip and fall down the stairs!"

Bath time had ended, but before she'd been able to drape her boy in a towel, he'd taken off with a toy lightsaber in one hand and his underwear in the other. As he made the crackling energy noises his father had taught him, Therese tried to seize him and at least wipe his feet down so he didn't break his neck. Luckily, the door opened before Jerome Jr. made it to the stairs. The boy stopped to watch his dad stumble inside, dropping his briefcase to the ground unceremoniously, giving Therese a chance to wrap him in a towel.

"Hey honey!"

She saw the pain in his face before he made that sound, that horrible guttural groan that ripped something out from her body.

"Baby!" Holding her boy, she took the stairs two at a time until she was by her husband's side. He was grabbing his heart, telling her he loved them both so much, telling his son to be strong. She grabbed her phone, called 911, but it was too late. He died in the arms of his loved ones, at least.



January 7, 2028

And then before her son's eighteenth birthday, before he had a chance to become a man, she'd let the world rip away the last part of Jerome Johnson Sr.'s legacy.

What could I have done?

Something. Surely, something.

"Ma'am?"

Still cuffed to the table, Justin did his best to nudge her from her nightmare, shaking her body. When she woke, Therese found herself sitting on the floor, shoulder slumped against the table.

"Why'd you pass out? Do you need anything?"

His voice made her want to kiss his forehead and rip her eyes out.

Ignoring his question, she picked herself up and forced calmness into her voice. "I'll talk to the DA on your behalf. Maybe we can get you into some classes while you're in jail, get you some skills for when you're released early on good behavior."

"Good behavior?"

"You remind me of someone." She bit the inside of her cheek to keep from crying. "Someone who would've shook the world if he'd gotten a second chance."

Justin smiled and it almost brought her to her knees again. "I'll do my best, ma'am."

She turned and left without another word.

Therese could've heard a pin drop as Luke drove them back to the office.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

Using the mirror on the passenger side to block out the sun, Therese re-applied her lipstick and put on some makeup to mask her crow's feet, a warrior putting her armor back on. "I'm fine."

Afterword

All authors have their own distinct style. So here's mine: great storytelling should be able to be summarized in a sentence or two. The story of *Privilege* was "happiness and power are two separate things, and you have to choose." Rakshan and Sadiya started at the same point, as two ill-fated lovers with enough money and education to establish decent lives, young enough to do something meaningful with their considerable resources, and it was their selection between those two choices that defined the rest of their lives. Because you're never too young (or too old!) to determine the rest of your life, that decision is always in front of you.

With *Skingrafters*, you saw that story examined on a microscale, with Maadhini and Aditya. Happiness can be messy at times, but if you're lucky, your life goes on long enough that you come to a time where it seems like you've always been happy. And power? Well, you saw the tradeoffs Aditya made for it throughout the rest of the *WP Saga*.

That brings us to *Posterity*. After decades of sacrifices, of social change on a global scale, what do we leave behind for others? For our children? What do we leave behind in a world that refuses to bend so we have to break it in order to make progress? The story of *Posterity* is that "you are more than your worst moment." These three women, who've been through some of the worst traumas imaginable, all deserved a happy ending. I've tried to give them that, but also one that is realistic for the world they live in. Because that world, the world of the *WP Saga*, is broken.

Ours isn't yet. Ours can still be bent. So let's get to it.