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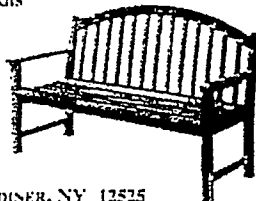
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came on the scene. A menu of tripps from the Bush Administration says Linda was offended by what she perceived as the oversexed atmosphere of the Clinton White House. As a floater, she was sometimes stationed near the Oval Office, Tripp told her friend, where she claimed she could see Clinton flirting. "It knocked her for a loop," the friend says. "She just couldn't tolerate what she saw as misbehavior." Tripp talked often with F.B.I. agent Gary Aldrich, who left the White House in 1995 and later published a controversial book accusing Clinton of numerous incidents of sexual misconduct. Aldrich, who says he had "maybe seventy-five or a hundred conversations" with Tripp, recently told Gerardo Rivera that "Linda Tripp and I and about two thousand other permanent White House employees shared a scorn for what we were seeing."

Despite her disapproval of the Clinton Administration, Tripp wanted to stay on. Her job performance was good enough so that the Clinton team was willing to keep her. In 1993, she was offered a permanent secretarial position in the White House counsel's office, although it is unusual for even an exemplary civil servant to be carried over from one party's White House to the other's in such a sensitive job. Clinton's then White House counsel Bernard Nussbaum, who gave Tripp a staff job in his office, was a savvy New York lawyer but a Washington novice. Colleagues say he hoped to benefit from her institutional memory as a White House veteran. But soon enough Tripp began to criticize her new bosses. She sometimes worked for Vincent Foster, and complained to colleagues that he was spending too much time on the President's personal legal problems. When Foster committed suicide in July, 1993, she told one friend that she was traumatized. She was also privately critical of the investigation into his death. In a notorious E-mail written during the search of Foster's office, she derided Nussbaum and two other White House lawyers as "the three stooges."

This was the beginning of a period of intense scrutiny of White House operations, with the Foster suicide, Whitewater, and Travelgate all running together into one big contentious mess—a tangle

of special investigations and convoluted conspiracy theories. Tripp was called as a witness in some of these inquiries. A few White House colleagues began to suspect that she was talking to the press. A White House official says that ethics officers received "repeated complaints" that Tripp was leaking. One such complaint, a former staffer says, involved



Tripp's talking loudly on the phone to CNN's Wolf Blitzer. There is no hard evidence of Tripp's leaking to the press (there rarely is), but she did tell friends that she suspected that Foster had been driven to despair by knowing too much about the Clintons' machinations. She also had a preliminary conversation with the literary agent Lucianne

Goldberg and her son Jonah about collaborating on a book about Foster's death. Tripp did not want to write anything herself, because she didn't want to jeopardize her job. Goldberg's plan seemed to be to develop the topic for one of her authors, such as former L.A.P.D. Detective Mark Fuhrman. The project never went anywhere. Still, the idea of doing a possibly lucrative exposé had been planted. ("Did she daydream a little?" Jonah Goldberg asks. "I won't say no.")

According to one former co-worker, Tripp was the kind of person others confided in, and she often befriended younger women on the staff, soliciting confidences and offering career advice. "She was fun," says a staffer who occasionally went out for drinks with Tripp and, like Monica Lewinsky, found herself involved in many gossipy phone conversations. But several of the women who trusted Tripp ended up feeling betrayed. They discovered that she spoke disparagingly about them to other staffers, and in one case spread unsubstantiated rumors about someone's supposed drinking problem.

Tripp was also close for a time to Kathleen Willey, the Richmond socialite who was a White House volunteer and the wife of Edward Willey, a Democratic Party donor. Colleagues say Tripp was drawn to Willey's glamour and piqued by her apparent closeness to Clinton. In November of 1993, Willey confided in Tripp that Clinton had made a pass at her, which Clinton denies.

Tripp schemed with Willey to get her a permanent staff job. Together, they went in March of 1994 to Lloyd Cutler,

and requested that Cutler put her in charge of administering the counsel's office. (Cutler declined to do so.) Willey then discovered that Tripp had been telling others in the office that she was "useless." She broke off the friendship, according to another friend, and stopped taking Tripp's phone calls. In August, 1994, reportedly without so much as a job interview, Tripp moved to a public-affairs job in the Pentagon that paid twenty thousand dollars more than her job at the White House. Some in the White House say that by then she was regarded with suspicion, but she received consistently outstanding performance evaluations there, and this has been true at the Pentagon as well. It was at the Pentagon, in the spring of 1996, that Tripp met Monica Lewinsky, a former White House intern half her age. Lewinsky, too, had been exiled to the Pentagon, and by the summer of 1996 she had begun to confide in Tripp.

IN January, 1997, an anonymous source told one of Paula Jones's lawyers about the Willey incident. The Jones team, in turn, tipped *Newsweek* reporter Michael Isikoff. By March, he was talking to Tripp about the incident. Eventually, Tripp confirmed the story, adding a detail embarrassing to Willey: that Kathleen had been flattered rather than distressed by the President's attention. The *Newsweek* story ran in August, 1997, and included an angry denial from the President's lawyer Robert Bennett, who declared that "Linda Tripp is not to be believed." According to Lucianne Goldberg, Tripp was insulted by the remark and afraid that she would be entangled in the Clintons' legal problems. That, Goldberg claims, is why Tripp began to tape her new friend Monica: to get "proof" of Clinton's misbehavior. But there is evidence that she had been thinking for quite some time about exposing what she considered misdeeds at the White House.

As early as the summer of 1996, Tripp had moved closer to accusing Clinton publicly. It was then, the syndicated columnist Maggie Gallagher told me, that Lucianne Goldberg approached her about ghostwriting a tell-all White House memoir for Tripp. The book would cover many topics, and include a chapter called "The Pres-

ident's dilemma," about the President's alleged philandering, Gallagher recalled. The project was expected to be "very big" financially. There was a sense of urgency about getting the book done, Gallagher says, presumably so that it would come out before the 1996 election.

Gallagher and Tripp met for the first and only time at a restaurant in New Jersey on August 6th. Tripp had been with her mother earlier in the day, and struck Gallagher as a dutiful daughter and "a good girl." The two women talked easily about sex and the White House, though Tripp was concerned about appearing too tawdry in print. It was clear to Gallagher that Tripp was torn about the project. "She had all of these conflicts," Gallagher says. "It's the lying that really bothered her," she adds, apparently referring to White House statements about various investigations. "She wanted to be loyal, but she also wanted to get her story out." Six weeks into this second book project, Tripp lost her nerve. She told Gallagher that she had received a raise and had two college-age children to support. Gallagher's sense, though, was that "it might take time, but in the end staying silent was going to be too hard." This, then, was the frame of mind in which Linda Tripp played confessor to Monica Lewinsky.

A year after walking away from the Gallagher collaboration, in August of 1997, Tripp again phoned Lucianne Goldberg. She wanted advice on how to handle *Newsweek*, which she said had been pursuing her ever since she spoke on the record about Kathleen Willey. She could refuse to say anything more, but she was tempted to talk, because she had some new information.

"It sounds like you're on the Bimbo Beat," Goldberg recalls saying.

"That's why I'm afraid," Tripp replied nervously. "Can you help me? He's got a girlfriend."

Over the next few weeks, Tripp spoke to Goldberg numerous times about her conversations with Monica, and the possibility that the President was sexually involved with her. One of these conversations took place at Jonah Goldberg's Washington apartment, and he recalls that Tripp seemed especially upset that Monica was only slightly older than Chelsea Clinton. Linda Tripp, in other words, viewed the President through the eyes of a daughter. ♦

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