

**President Harry S. Truman:
Puerto Rico Assassination Attempt
(Short story)
Genre: Historical Fiction**

Based on a true story

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Puerto Rico Assassination Attempt

Collazo heard Torresola speaking once again, teaching Collazo how to load and handle the handgun he had chosen.

“Load a round into the chamber, use a de-cocking lever to safely lower the hammer without firing the round, and carry the weapon loaded with the hammer down. A pull of the trigger, with the hammer down, fires the first shot, and the operation of the pistol ejects the fired cartridge case, loading a fresh round into the chamber and cocking the hammer for single-action operation for each subsequent shot.”

Torresola instructed Collazo on firing, loading, and handling the P38 that early November morning. Torresola looked at his partner, Oscar Collazo, without emotion, well, none besides a calm anger and determination.

“Go over it one more time.” Torresola told Collazo.

“Okay,” Collazo muttered as his fingers ran over the Walther P38 and he followed Griselio Torresola’s coaching on using the firearm.

Collazo let his mind wander back. He knew why he was doing this. It was for the good of all, or to be more specific, just the Puerto Rican party, in order to demonstrate that the October 30 uprising had not been an “incident between Puerto Ricans” as that was how it was put by President Truman, but rather was a sign of a war involving two countries.

Both men, Collazo and Torresola, knew what this would cost—most likely their lives. But they were willing, because they wanted the world to look and know what was really going on; the government was killing associates of the Puerto Rico, and the people needed to see the great need for independence.

It was hours later, Collazo and Torresola left on the train heading for Washington D.C, knowing what fate lay ahead... knowing that it may take their lives.

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Truman looked up from the papers that lay on his desk as he heard soft mumbling outside the large room in which he was working. He stood from his chair and walked slowly towards the door. When he opened the large door, he came nearly face to face with his wife, Bess.

“Everything alright?” he asked smoothly and stepped outside the room, closing the door softly behind him.

“It’s nearly lunchtime. You must come down and have something to eat!” Bess said and nodded once as Truman walked down the hallway with her, down the stairs, and into the vast dining room.

Later, he was sitting at the table with his wife and daughter, their voices filling his mind as he looked somewhat distantly at his plate.

Memories flashed through his mind—the battle cries of determination, anger, and pain from his men around him, the sounds of gunshots, explosions. He remembered leading them over the blood-stained ground. Although moments before, as they fled, they had been yelling, their voices filled with terror as the Germans had cascaded down the hill. After his speech to the unit, they had turned with shouts of renewed purpose and fortitude.

“Harry?” Bess’ voice pulled him from the memory. Truman looked up and blinked slowly, clearing his thoughts and waiting for her to continue. “What did the Republican and Democrat parties say to your proposition?”

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Torresola and Collazo were reconnoitering the Blair house, scoping the land, getting used to the landscape and building.

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“When we get inside the Blair house, it’s going to be too late to leave, okay?” Torresola muttered under his breath to Collazo, though he was not sure Collazo heard, but also not caring if he had or hadn’t.

Collazo didn’t respond, only kept walking silently forward and looking at the Blair house with a distant expression. He still stared vacantly at the building that was yards in front of them, not paying any notice to anything Torresola said. Torresola sighed, gave a slight shake of his head, and said nothing else to his partner for the time.

Collazo absentmindedly cracked his knuckles, one at a time while Torresola tensed and clenched his fists and jaw, letting out a low growl-like noise. He turned towards Collazo and his expression become one of complete disgust.

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Truman shut his eyes for a second than breathed in sharply, nearly instantly opening his eyes again. They darted, looking around the room. Bess put a hand on his shoulder. “Go get some rest. Margaret and I are going out for a while. We should be back by... Oh, I would say 6:00?” Truman heard her footsteps fading until the noise subsided.

He coughed quietly and ran a hand through his thin grey hair before standing up and walking upstairs. He opened the door and walked towards the bed, where he lay down gingerly after his back popped loudly.

His mind trailed off, thinking about el presidente stuff. Well, until finally falling asleep, then his mind left into the dark, dreamless, indescribable place where one is asleep but not dreaming, can’t tell time, and can’t think, it is a simple, literal nothing.

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Collazo and Torresola walked from opposite sides towards the Blair house, Torresola approaching the building from the west side, and Collazo sauntered towards the capitol police officer who was standing on one of the steps of the Blair house.

Collazo shot at the police officer, (the police officer being Donald Birdzell), but knew he had done something wrong as it had done no damage, nothing. He forgot to chamber a round. Oscar (Collazo) fumbled with the handgun trying to make it work, making odd grunting noises. Birdzell started to turn towards Collazo, and finally Collazo had recalled everything Torresola had taught him about the Walther P38, succeeding to shoot Birdzell in his right knee. Birdzell cried out in pain and stumbled, nearly falling over but propping himself up against railing, holding his knee, blood running between his fingers from the wound.

Secret service agent, Vincent Mroz, heard the gunshots and ran through the basement corridor, coming out of the ground-level door on the East side of the Blair house. He drew his weapon and opened fire on Collazo, stopping him with a bullet to the chest.

Meanwhile, Torresola advanced towards a guard booth at the west corner, taking Officer Leslie Coffelt by surprise, firing at him four times from close range, and inevitably wounding the police officer fatally as three of the bullets from his 9mm German Luger struck Coffelt in the chest and abdomen. Coffelt toppled over groaning in agony, coughing out blood and gasping for air.

Torresola then shot police officer Joseph Downs in the hip, Downs though forced himself to start off towards the Blair house entry, limping, hobbling towards the door. Torresola fired again, shooting Officer Downs in the back and neck (not mortally), but still, he kept going and got into the basement door, disallowing Torresola access into the building.

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Torresola turned his attention towards the shoot-out between his partner and several police officers. He stood on the steps to the left to reload. Now thirty-one feet away from Truman's window, he aimed at the window just as he saw Truman look out with a confused expression.

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Truman flinched and jumped out of bed, looking wildly around as he heard gunfire, he ran as fast as he could manage, to the window and looked out, he saw a man standing feet away from the window aiming a handgun at him.

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Coffelt exited the guard booth, leaned against it, aimed at Torresola with his 38-caliber service revolver, and took the shot from approximately thirty feet away, hitting him two inches above the ear, killing him instantly. Coffelt fell over, trembling, a darkness swallowing him up.

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The gunfight with Torresola lasted twenty seconds, while the one with Collazo had gone on thirty-eight seconds. Torresola did most of the shooting, whereas Collazo had only taken one effective shot.

The wounded officers were taken to the hospital, where Coffelt passed away just four hours later.

Cressie Coffelt, now widowed, was asked by President Harry Truman and the Senate of State to go to Puerto Rico, where she received condolences from various leaders and Puerto Rican crowds. She responded with a speech that released the blame from the Puerto Ricans of what Torresola and Collazo had done.

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Oscar Collazo was convicted in federal court and sentenced to death, which Truman then converted to merely a life sentence.

In 1979, President Jimmy Carter changed Collazo's sentence to the time served, and the once revolutionary was freed. He went back to live in Puerto Rico, where he died in 1994.

At the time of the assassination attempt, the FBI arrested Collazo's wife, Rosa, on suspicion of having plotted with her husband in the plan. She spent eight months in prison but did not go to trial. Upon her release, Rosa continued to work with the Nationalist Party, where she gathered 100,000 signatures in an effort to save her husband from execution.

Acknowledging the importance of the question of Puerto Rican independence, in 1952 Truman allowed a plebiscite in Puerto Rico to determine the status of its relationship to the U.S. The people voted 81.9% in favor of continuing as a Free Associated State, as established in 1950.

Injured (Non-fatal): Donald Birdzell, Joseph Downs, Oscar Collazo.

Deaths: Leslie Coffelt, Griselio Torresola.

Psalm 23:4 "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,"

Psalm 1:

"How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of

scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."