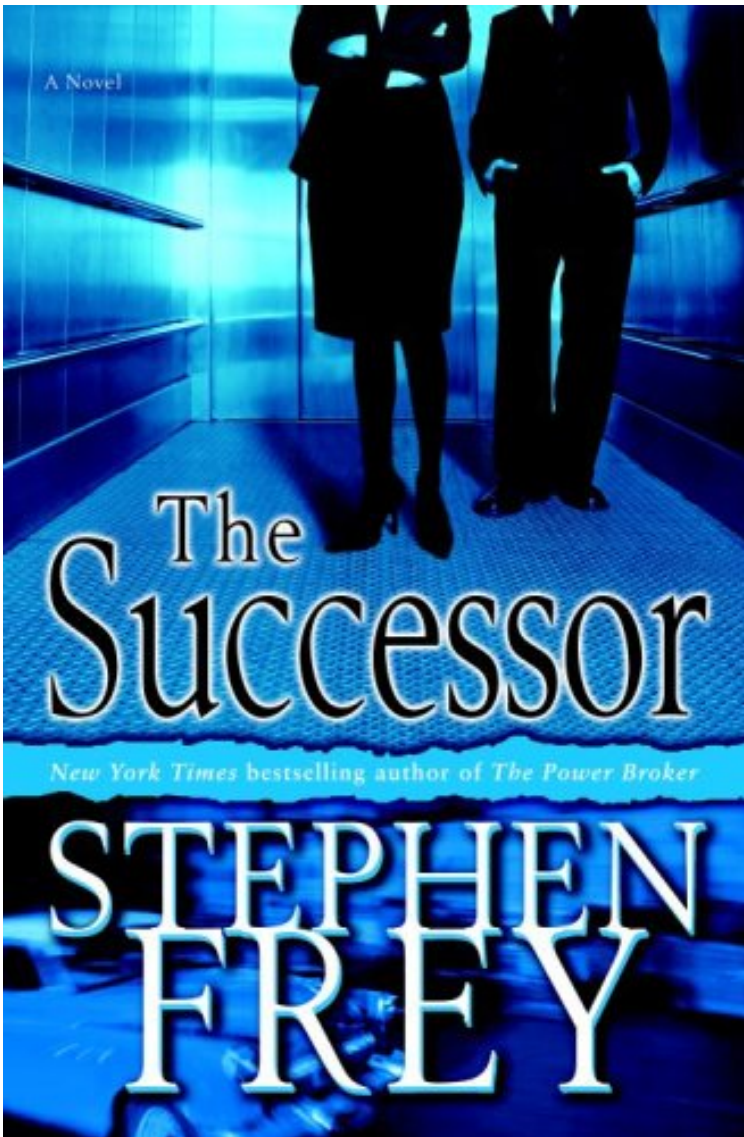


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# The Successor: A Novel



*Par Stephen Frey*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurMake-or-break decisions involving millions of dollars are all in a days work for Christian Gillette, chairman of Everest Capital, New Yorks most renowned private equity firm. Hes taken on the toughest, most powerful, and often most dangerous adversaries and prevailedall the while honing his skill for being cool under fire, literally. But now Gillette will be put to the ultimate test. Hes offered the chance to seal a deal unlike any other, one that goes beyond boardrooms, balance sheets, and even Everest itselfone that will leave its mark on history.Gillette is no stranger to Jesse Wood, the first African American president of the United States, having been Woods chosen running mate in his historic bid for the White House. Though still slightly upset over being dropped from the ticket at the eleventh hour, Gillettes not about to ignore the chief executives summons to a top-secret meeting at Camp David. There, Wood drops a

bombshell: The president of Cuba is dead. Cubas communist regime has kept the dictators demise hush while it races to fill the power vacuum. And the United States is poised to support a cabal of Cuban professionals plotting a coup. The President wants Gillette to meet with the conspirators and size up the chances for a successful capitalist revolution. But by no means can his mission be traced back to the White House. If anything goes wrong, Gillette is on his own. And if certain people have their way, something will go wrong. For the conspiracy to liberate Cuba isnt the only one afoot. Enemies in high places, who will go to any lengths to wreak revenge on Gillette and to unseat President Wood, have set in motion a campaign of deception, sabotage, and murder whose shockwaves will resonate from the streets of Havana to the Oval Office. But for Gillette, who has just named his alluring and ambitious protg, Allison Wallace, as his successor at Everest, the greatest peril may lie much closer to home. The Successor is blue-chip Stephen Frey, marshaling his flawless instincts for edgy, provocative, breathtaking suspense with a masters touch. From the Hardcover edition. Extrait ONE March Christian Gillette reached into his suit jacket and pulled out his favorite pena fifty-cent Paper Mate you could pick up at any drugstore in Manhattan. White plastic with a light blue cap and black lettering down the side. Hed been using these for twenty years, ever since Stanford Business School. He liked the way the ink flowed evenly and smoothly all the time, and when he found something reliable, he stuck with it. From pens to people. One of the army of attorneys on the other side of the long conference-room table snickered. We had special ones made for the occasion, the young man explained quickly when his white-haired senior partner gave him a mortified look from the far end of the table. As mementos. He pointed at a cardboard box in front of him. Nice Cross pens. He was younger than everyone else in the room by nearly a decade, a bottom-rung associate less than a year out of Columbia Law School whod been working on this transaction for nine months, basically since he joined the firm. That was how long it had taken to get all the government approvals from both the U.S. and Canadian governments so they could close the transaction. Theyve got the deal parties inscribed on them in gold letters, he added, babbling at this point. ExxonMobil acquires Laurel Energy. The date, too. Theyre way cool. Christian watched the associate turn beet red. Way cool had sounded way wrong in this staid fifty-seventh-floor conference room overlooking a darkened Wall Street. The senior partner looked as if he were about to explode, too. Im sorry . . . I just meant that . . . The associate swallowed the rest of his sentence, realizing that the hole hed dug would only get deeper the longer he went on, no matter what he said. The experience of being involved in such a huge deal at this tender a career age had gone from euphoric to nightmarish in a heartbeat, and he was seeing his short stint at the firm going up in flames over ink dispensers. I just wanted you to have a nice pen for the occasion, Mr. Gillette. For all of you to have a nice pen, he mumbled, gesturing around the table, unable to stop himself from talking. Sorry if I Enough, the senior partner broke in. Good God, where do we get these young people I appreciate you doing that, Christian spoke up. The kid had probably done more work than all the other lawyers on the other side of the table put together, but they still wanted to charge Exxon \$20 million. Incredible, he thought to himself. Even more incredible, Exxon would pay it. Can I have one now? Sure. The kid reached into the cardboard box and pulled out a smaller one from inside, then rose from his seat and brought it to Christian. Here you go, sir. Christian winced. He hated it when people called him sir, made him feel like somebodys grandfather. And he wasnt that old, just forty-three. But the kid was only being respectful, he knew. Nice, he said, taking the pen out and admiring it. Thanks. Well have tombstones made up, too, of course, the senior partner added in an official voice, making it sound as if the pens were cheap trinkets compared to the tombstones. Christian gazed silently at the older man for a few moments, then looked up at the kid, who was still standing beside his chair. I understand youre the one who finally got the DOJ and the Department of Energy off their asses. Probably would have been another nine months if you hadnt. Nice job. Christian smiled. You and I ought to have lunch sometime. Sure, the kid agreed, realizing that in a flash hed just regained all of his credibility and more. Christian Gillette was a legend on Wall Street the chairman of Everest Capital, one of the most powerful private-equity buyout firms in the world. Their bond had been nothing but a quick burst, but it had been real and now he was protected. That would be great. Good. Christian always checked on whod done the real work. Hed been low man on the deal totem pole a long time ago, and he knew a lot of times that was where things really happened. Call my assistant Debbie next week and set it up. Despite the senior partners condescending attitude, Christian knew the kid was good. Hed asked around. Ill let her know youre calling. Who knows? Maybe youll come work for me someday. That got a chuckle from around the table, but Christian gave the kid a nod to let him know he wasnt kidding. He leaned forward over the table. We ready? he asked impatiently, tapping his watch. Its getting late. The senior partner motioned to the young associate,

who trotted to a cart sitting at the far end of the room. On the cart were ten two-inch-thick purchase agreements detailing the terms and conditions covering ExxonMobils \$4.8 billion purchase of Laurel Energy from Everest Capital. Several years ago Christian had bought Laurela Canadian exploration and production company for \$300 million. Soon after buying it, his company engineers discovered a major new oil field on several option properties Laurel controlled, making the company worth multiples of what he had paid. Now he was about to make \$4.5 billion on the sale. When the associate had finished piling the books up in two neat stacks of five, Christians attorney reached for the top one on the closest stack and opened it to a page near the back. To a page with a long black line above Christians name, which was typed in big bold letters. ExxonMobils already signed everything, Christian, she explained. Its up to you now. You satisfied? he asked her. Mountains of documents supported the purchase agreements \$25 million worth because her firm was charging him another \$5 million but this was the only page requiring his signature. Everything okay? Yes. Christian rotated the bottom of the Cross pen half a turn so the tip extended, then stroked his signature across the black line. Nine more times and the deal was done. He grinned as he finished the last signature in the last book. He had sold lots of companies in the last ten years. To big conglomerates like ExxonMobil as well as to the public. The thrill of making a nice profit was nothing new but he had never made \$4.5 billion on a single transaction. This was like hitting Lotto. The most amazing thing about it all was that Everest got to keep 20 percent of that profit \$900 million. It was the contractual arrangement he had with his investors 20 percent of anything he earned he kept. He was going to make a lot of people at Everest Capital very happy with all that money. From the senior-level managing partners who reported directly to him, all the way down to the receptionists. And the older he got, the more important making people happy was becoming. He glanced at his watch almost nine o'clock. It had been a long day, but it was still going to be another fifteen minutes before they wrapped up everything and he could get out of here. He wanted to get home in time to watch the Oscars, but that was looking more and more as if it wasn't going to happen. He had to return that important call as soon as he was done here. There was no telling how long that call would take. Melissa Hart had been waiting what seemed like an eternity for tonight, for what she'd do if she won. Now her doubt was gone. She would win. But that wasn't where it ended, not by a long shot. Winning was predestined. Her psychic had seen the victory play out perfectly during their half-hour session yesterday afternoon. The dramatic buildup, the announcement, the thunderous applause. The real question now was, Would she follow through? The question bothered Melissa deeply because her psychic had seen everything up through the applause but nothing after. Her connection to the future had evaporated at that point. The sequence had come to Melissa in a dream eight years ago, on the night of her fourteenth birthday a few hours after her mother had succumbed to a long and agonizing battle against breast cancer. It had come to Melissa after her eyes had finally fallen shut from the anguish of a steady stream of tears and exhaustion brought on by being awake for seventy-two hours straight while her mother died. Melissa had been bedside constantly during those three days as her mother drifted in and out, slowly fading away. In the final few moments there had been a look of utter despair in the sunken eyes, a desperate squeeze of the cold fingers, and one last shallow gasp. For a long time those images had remained vivid, shredding Melissas heart constantly, as though her mother had died yesterday every day. The dream had recurred several nights a week since her mothers death until Melissa had received word from her agent last month that she had, in fact, been nominated. Then the dream had ceased and she had slept soundly every night since. Even the images of her mothers last few moments seemed not so clear anymore. The limousine bar was stocked full and Melissa had taken advantage of it on the ride over to Hollywood from her two-bedroom apartment in Santa Monica. She had downed three glasses of champagne in less than thirty minutes to give herself those last few ounces of courage. The Dom had tasted delicious and boosted her confidence, but she wondered if it would last. When she entered the auditorium of the Kodak Theatre she was glad she had reached for the liquid crutch. The place was intimidating even to someone who had been trained from childhood to be comfortable in front of large audiences. It was already packed as she made her way down the aisle to her seat in the second row. Thirty-three hundred people plus seat fillers in their tuxes and long dresses standing along the walls. An eerily intimate venue for such a grand event which only made it scarier. Melissa wouldn't have to wait long for everything to play out. Wouldn't have to wait during the endless parade of minor Oscars that bored the audience and viewers around the world for hours to find out if her psychic truly had the power. The award she had been nominated for would be the first presented of the evening. Best Actress in a Supporting Role for her portrayal of the sister of a borderline mentally retarded man accused of a murder he didn't commit. She was up against some tough competition a couple of the other nominees were Hollywood legends who had never

won an Oscar and she was young, just twenty-two. Under normal circumstances winning would have been an unlikely scenario for Melissa this year. But her father was Richard Hartaka Richard the Lionhearted in Hollywood and many members of the Academy owed their careers to him. As the trade papers reported when they ranked the industry's A-list producers and her father didn't appear, it was because Richard Hart was a professional and the rest were mere amateurs by comparison. He was the man in Tinseltown. By giving his daughter the Oscar the Academy members would be kissing his ring, ensuring their continued success in the movie industry as long as he remained powerful. Over the years, a few irreverent actors and studio executives had thumbed their noses at the Lionhearted, thinking they could do it without him. They all now wished they'd paid their respects. They'd been relegated to B movies or fired—no exceptions. The Lionhearted was as vindictive as he was powerful. But her father had never dealt with such a young Oscar winner before, Melissa kept telling herself. Not one who was his own flesh and blood, either. She leaned forward in her seat and glanced to the left, searching for him. She spotted him in the middle of the first row, giving the people on either side of him that disinterested half-smile she'd seen so many times as a child when she'd tried to get his attention. Tomorrow morning he was off to Washington, he'd told her last night over the phone. In a jet President Jesse Wood was sending especially for him, he'd bragged. Richard Hart was Hollywood's most dominant figure and a rising star in Washington. Melissa leaned back when her father started looking around. She didn't want to lock eyes with him yet, not until she had that Oscar in hand. She glanced down and smoothed her backless, red satin dress, then tilted her chin up and shook her long blond hair so it cascaded down her shoulders. She caught a handsome young seat filler gazing at her the way she constantly caught many men staring and she smiled at him. She was pretty and she knew it. And she didn't mind using what she had to get what she wanted. Finally the lights dimmed, the hum of conversation died away, the cameras came on and the show began. Seven short minutes later and it was time for Best Supporting Actress. She smiled for the camera when her name was announced third, then glanced down at her thank-you list one more time. The auditorium went silent after the presenter read the fifth and last nominee, and the scribbled names on the creased paper in Melissa's lap blurred before her eyes against the red satin. The only sounds in the theater were the ripping of the envelope and the presenter's anxious laughter as she had to try a second time to pull the envelope apart so she could read the winner's name. Then Melissa heard her name, as she knew she would, and for several minutes the world was nothing but loud music, deafening applause, smiling faces, hands touching her back and shoulders, and the sensation of floating up the stairs onto the stage. Finally, the crowd quieted and retook their seats as she held the Oscar up—cold and slightly damp with condensation from the air-conditioning. She gazed at it for a few seconds, then put it down, still careful not to catch her father's eye. He knew her face like the script of one of his big-budget movies. If she made the mistake of glancing his way, even for a moment, he might understand and be able to stop her. He was that powerful. . . . Im just overwhelmed, she began softly, trying to remember all the people she'd planned to thank. But the names wouldn't come and suddenly she couldn't focus on anything except what she wanted to do, what she had to do. As she gazed out at the thousands of expectant faces, she asked herself once more if she was really ready to do this. It was such a risk. The answer from inside was still a resolute yes. She touched the statuette gently, then deliberately brought her gaze to her father. He was smiling proudly behind that gray beard, beneath those piercing eyes. She pointed at him and smiled back. My father, Richard, is sitting down there in the front row. There was a smattering of applause from those around him who hoped he might notice. Im sure hes expecting me to thank him for this. She held the Oscar up again, already sensing a sudden unease racing around the auditorium. Probably expects to be first on my list. People were shifting in their seats and glancing at each other with raised eyebrows. But Im not going to. Her smile transformed into an expression of steely determination. Thirty-three hundred people and it was as if the ceremony had suddenly been transported to the surface of the moon. There was no sound at all inside the huge theater. This was going to be one of those moments that would go down in Hollywood history, she realized, blood pounding in her brain. The clip would be played over and over. Not just tomorrow, but down through the years. In fact, Im going to tell him in front of the whole world what a piece of garbage he is for leaving my mother and me eight and a half years ago. Her voice rose as she sensed the shock wave burst through the audience, heard the collective gasp, watched hands cover mouths, saw her father's face twist in rage. Right after my mother got sick! she shouted over the growing noise. Just so he could move in with another woman. Just so he could— Like a peal of thunder, the orchestra cracked the room in two, breaking into a deafening fast number and drowning Melissa out. She smiled triumphantly down at her father despite being cut off. He was beside himself, standing now, waving his arms wildly, pointing at her and yelling something she couldn't hear over

the music even though they were less than thirty feet apart. Hed try to screw her career now, no doubt, but what was he going to do? She was an Oscar winner, one of the youngest of all time, one of Hollywoods hottest properties. She was untouchable. The woman in the long black dress whod handed Melissa the Oscar when shed first come onstage grabbed her arm and began tugging her to the right. Melissa resisted at first, then relented. Shed done what shed come to do, said what shed come to say. It was over. She raised the Oscar above her head one last time, waved to the crowd, and trotted offstage. The vision had been fulfilled. Her mother could rest in peace. From the Hardcover edition. Revue de presse Praise for Stephen Frey The Protg When it comes to high-finance intrigue, this series continues to look good on the bottom line. Booklist Fast-paced thrills, chills . . . The Protg wont disappoint. San Antonio Express-News The Chairman [Freys] best yet . . . twists galore, great action and crisp dialogue. With his lively writing and cynical humor, this author . . . is a captivating tour guide to a Wall Street wonderland of greed, folly and deceit. Forbes High-stakes power play at its most ferocious level. Read it! Donald J. Trump Shadow Account This is the sort of fiction that skates dangerously close to truth. Los Angeles Times Action-packed . . . Big-business conspiracies abound. The Wall Street Journal From the Hardcover edition.