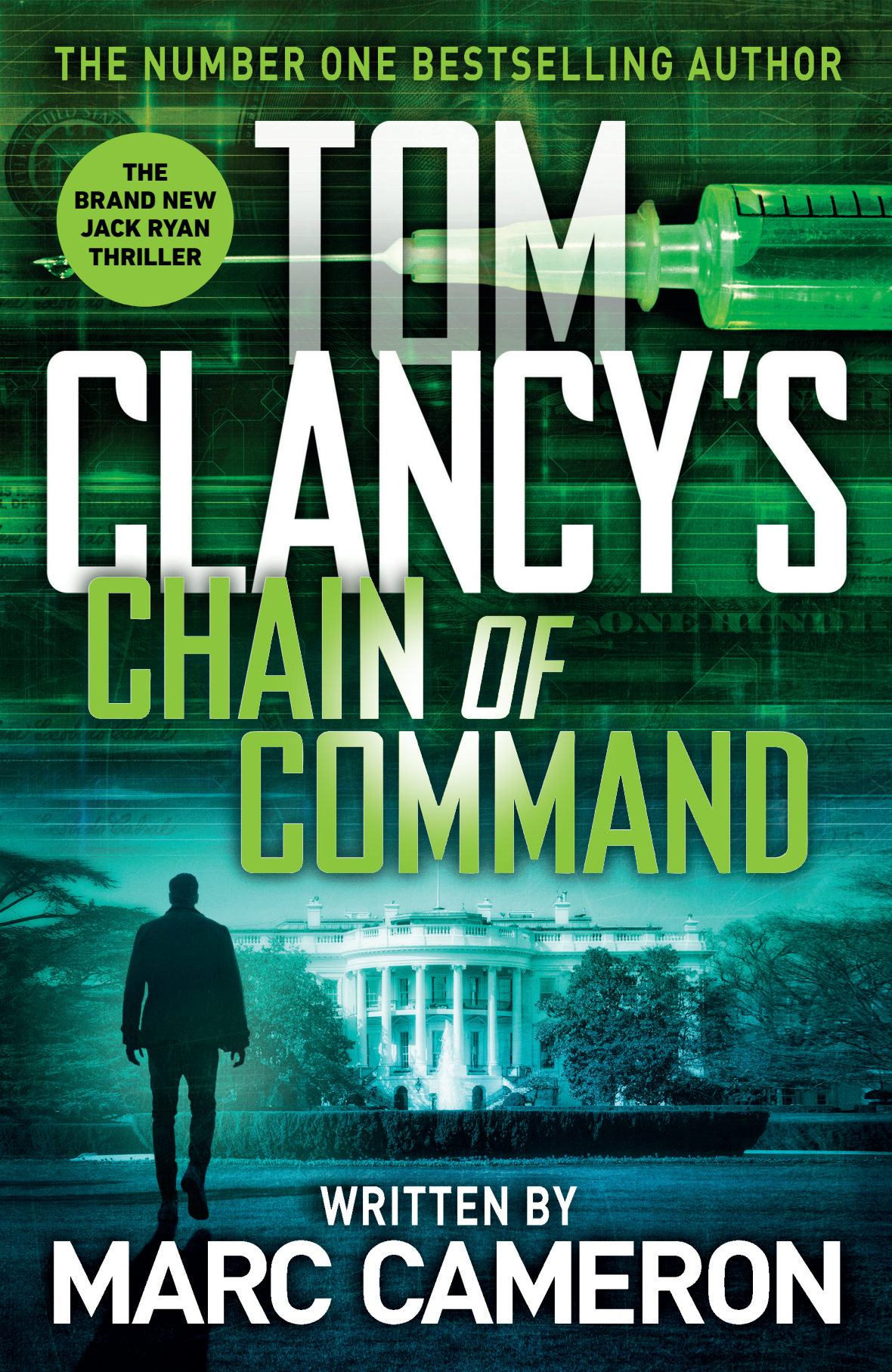


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TOM CLANCY'S CHAIN OF COMMAND



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MARC CAMERON

Tom Clancy's
**Chain of
Command**

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Red Storm Rising
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Tom Clancy's
**Chain of
Command**

MARC CAMERON



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“Special Forces is a mistress . . . She will love you, but only a little, seducing you to want more, give more, die for her . . . And in the end, she will leave you for a younger man.”

James R. Ward, OSS

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Jack Ryan: President of the United States

Anthony Hargrave: Vice president of the United States

Dr. Caroline “Cathy” Ryan: First Lady of the United States

Arnold “Arnie” van Damm: White House chief of staff

Mary Pat Foley: Director of national intelligence

Mark Dehart: Secretary of Homeland Security

Dan Murray: United States attorney general

Jay Canfield: Director of the Central Intelligence Agency

Brian Wilson: Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation

Tom Vogel: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Scott Adler: Secretary of state

Robert Burgess: Secretary of defense

Jason Bailey: Admiral of the United States Navy, chief White House medical officer

Robbie Forestall: Commander of the United States Navy, adviser to President Ryan

Carter Boone: Commander of the United States Navy, vice president’s physician, White House medical office

Marci Troxell: Commander of the United States Navy, First Lady’s physician, White House medical office

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE

Lawrence Howe: Director

Gary Montgomery: Special agent in charge, presidential detail

Maureen “Mo” Richardson: Special agent in charge, FLOTUS detail

Karen Sato: Assistant special agent in charge, FLOTUS detail

Keenan Mulvaney: Special agent in charge, vice presidential detail

THE CAMPUS

John Clark: Director of operations

Domingo “Ding” Chavez: Assistant director of operations

Dominic “Dom” Caruso: Operations officer

Jack Ryan, Jr.: Operations officer/senior analyst

Adara Sherman: Operations officer

Bartosz “Midas” Jankowski: Operations officer

SPECIAL FORCES OPERATIONAL DETACHMENT ALPHA 0312, AFGHANISTAN

Brock: 18A, Captain

Guzman: 180A, Warrant officer

Ward: 18B, Ops sergeant

Thelan: 18F, Intelligence sergeant

Megnas: 18E, Communications sergeant

1

**WASHINGTON AIR ROUTE TRAFFIC CONTROL CENTER
LEESBURG, VIRGINIA
TIME TO DECIDE: SIXTEEN MINUTES**

Tim Goode grabbed the edge of the desk and pushed his padded chair away from the radar console, rolling it forward and back, bleeding off nervous energy while he took a scant moment to study the electronic blip moving northeast. At least once a day some clueless pilot flew their little Cessna or Piper or Beechcraft across the imaginary line that fenced the United States capital.

“Bewitched, ballsy, or bewildered?” Goode muttered under his breath, rolling his chair all the way forward again. A low growl rumbled in his chest.

Seriously, dude? All you gotta do is look at the chart . . .

Dozens of blips and corresponding transponder codes moved across his scope. It wasn’t like this moron was the only aircraft he had to worry about at the moment.

Goode adjusted the mic on his headset—as if that would do any good—and tried the radio for the third time.

“Aircraft on a sixty-degree south of Nokesville, identify yourself on this frequency.”

Nada. Nothing. NORDO.

Aircraft were not permitted within thirty nautical miles of the Washington Reagan Airport VOR—the SFRA, or Special Flight Rules Area—unless they met three specific criteria. They needed a flight plan. They had to be in communications with air traffic control. And their transponder had to squawk on the assigned frequency.

This inbound numbnuts was batting zero for three—and making a beeline for the capital at a hundred and twenty knots, covering two miles every minute.

Goode waved over his shoulder for a supervisor with his left hand. His right moved for the computer mouse on his desk, activating the red and green signaling lasers located around the SFRA. Aided by radar tracking, the intense beams were aimed directly at the offending aircraft, warning the pilot to make an immediate one-hundred-eighty-degree turn.

See it—flee it.

This guy continued inbound with no response, undeterred by the warning lights.

At this point, Goode reported this Track of Interest to the Air National Guard duty officer at the Eastern Air Defense Sector, or EADS, 390 miles to the north in Rome, New York. Her name was Lieutenant Mary Wong. Both were frequent fliers when it came to SFRA incursions, and the two had spoken many times before.

“Got another TOI for you,” Goode said, getting down to business with the particulars. “Bullseye two-four-zero degrees for thirty-one nautical miles. Airspeed 120 knots.”

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Bullseye was the VOR at Reagan National Airport, the center of the restricted airspace circle.

Lieutenant Wong kept Goode on and notified her commander, who had a direct line to the United States Coast Guard Blackjack helicopter crews at Reagan and the F-16s with the 121st Fighter Squadron at Andrews. Both of these units were immediately placed on a heightened state of alert.

It cost the American taxpayer over fifty thousand dollars to scramble a single F-16, so no one took the action lightly—nor would they hesitate once certain trip wires were crossed.

“Who is this guy?” Lieutenant Wong said. “He’s bullseye two-four-zero degrees for . . .” She paused, then spoke again. “Still NORDO?”

Goode tried the offending aircraft on the radio once more before answering Wong. “Correct,” he said. “Either he’s having radio problems or he’s ignoring me altogether.”

Wong was in deep conversation with her supervisor, ticking down the checklist of responses for an incursion into restricted airspace. Goode watched the green dot, expecting to see a Coastie MH-65 launch on his screen at any moment.

TIME TO DECIDE: TWELVE MINUTES.

The inbound Track of Interest met the criteria for an immediate Operation Noble Eagle (ONE) conference call. Lieutenant Wong began by contacting 601st Air Operations Center at Tyndall Air Force Base—Continental U.S. NORAD Region (CONR) headquarters near Panama City, Florida, where Lieutenant General Rhett Farrer served as the CFACC, or Combined Forces Air Component Commander.

MARC CAMERON

The commander of NORAD/NORTHCOM, four-star general Mike Hopkin, was enduring a root canal at a specialist off base in Colorado Springs at that moment, so his J-5, Major General Steven Armstrong (the joint director of policy and planning), stood in for him on the phone in the N2C2—NORAD/NORTHCOM Command Center. In this capacity, General Armstrong was armed with Civilian Aircraft Engagement Authority—a benign way of saying he'd been delegated the responsibility from the secretary of defense through General Hopkin to give the shutdown order so an F-16 Falcon could blow this little four-seater civilian airplane out of the sky.

Neither Goode nor Lieutenant Wong spoke the words aloud, but both knew that if this pilot continued on the same course, he would have his choice of the Pentagon, the Capitol, or the White House as targets.

Nine hundred miles north of Tyndall and sixteen hundred miles east of Colorado Springs, the scramble sirens sounded at Andrews Air Force Base. Captain Scott Hill and Lieutenant Rich Waggoner sprinted across the flight line to their waiting F-16s.

TIME TO DECIDE: ELEVEN MINUTES.

TWENTY MINUTES EARLIER:

Early mornings were George Cantu's favorite time for flight lessons. His wife would drop their three-year-old daughter at daycare about now, and then head to Culpeper Middle School, where she taught seventh grade—a far more dangerous endeavor than instructor pilot, to George's way of thinking. The

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air was crisp and dense enough that the little Cessna would leap off the runway when the time came. Cooler mornings meant new students didn't have to deal with much turbulence during the period in their training when they were still trying to get past the notion that the wings might spontaneously fall off the airplane during flight.

Stainless-steel tumbler of coffee in one hand, flight bag in the other, Cantu went straight from his old Toyota Tundra to the apron behind the hangar where his red-and-white Cessna 172 squatted on the tarmac, dazzling anyone lucky enough to look at it in the bright morning sun. He wanted to perform a quick preflight inspection before Mrs. Szymanski arrived.

The cell phone in his hip pocket began to buzz, shattering the reverent solitude of the flight line. It wasn't his wife or Mrs. Szymanski, or any other number he recognized, so he ignored it and shoved the device back in his pocket to continue the preflight.

Good news could wait and bad news found you one way or another.

Mrs. Szymanski would, of course, do another complete check of the airplane as part of her training, but in the end, he was pilot in command. The aircraft was his responsibility, no matter who happened to be sitting in the left seat. Besides, it gave him a few minutes alone with the 2006 180-horsepower high-wing baby he loved only slightly less than his wife and daughter.

A whisper of wind from the north brought the earthy root beer smell of sassafras from the nearby woods. The day was bluebird clear with not a cloud to be seen. Pilots called it CAVU—ceiling and visibility unlimited. To the west, the Blue Ridge Mountains were clear and bright, without a hint of their

usual haze. Once in the air, Cantu would have an unimpeded view toward Chesapeake Bay, some ninety miles to the east. This was the kind of superbly flyable day that made him yearn to get airborne as quickly as possible.

For him, the preflight of his little airplane was a labor of love, a way to connect, to let his bird speak to him, tell him about any complaints or issues.

He gave each wingtip a little tug to make sure they were still secure. The fact that only two bolts held each wing in place was always an interesting topic of discussion between instructor and any new student.

Working his way around the plane, Cantu checked the control surfaces, the tires, ran his hand along the propeller to feel for any nicks or cracks that might be invisible to the naked eye.

His cell phone rang again when he was under the wing draining a small amount of fuel into a clear vial to check for water. Annoyed, he fished the phone out of his pocket with his free hand. Same number as before. Important enough to keep bugging him, so he answered.

The glass vial of fuel slipped from his hand and smashed into the tarmac before the caller had spoken two sentences.

Cantu swayed in place. Sweat ran down his back and beaded on his forehead despite the cool air. This was all wrong. He couldn't have heard correctly.

"What did you say?"

The electronically distorted voice repeated the horrific instructions, oozing cruelty. "*Georgie, if you want your wife and child to live, get in your airplane and taxi to the south end of the runway. Do it now.*"

Cantu leaned against the Cessna, attempting to steady himself. His voice was breathy, impotent. "Wait . . . What?"

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The phone fell silent but then rang again a half-second later. This time, it was a video call. His wife knelt in their driveway, examining a flat tire on her Subaru. The footage was probably being shot from across the street. His little daughter stood beside her mommy, holding the fuzzy blue bath towel she dragged with her everywhere she went.

“Theresa!” he shouted. “What is happening?”

“She can’t hear you, Georgie,” the distorted voice said. *“We took the liberty of putting a little bullet in her tire, you know, to slow her down. But hey, it’s just as easy for us to put a bullet in her or the snotty kid.”* The voice darkened. *“Now get your ass in the plane. I’m not gonna tell you again.”*

Cantu moved on autopilot, quickly but woodenly, scanning the surrounding buildings and trees for any sign of watchers as he climbed into the Cessna.

“Yes, Georgie,” the voice said. *“We have eyes on you, just like we can see your pretty little family.”*

“Please—”

“Do you have an earpiece?”

“I . . . an earpiece? . . . Yes. Earbuds.”

“Put them in and keep me on the line. The wind is from the north, so I assume you’ll take off on 32?”

“Um . . . yes. Runway 32. That’s right,” Cantu said. “I’ll do what you want. Just . . . please . . . don’t hurt them.”

“It’s not up to me, Georgie,” the voice said. *“You hold their salvation. Follow my instructions to the letter or you may as well be the one pulling the trigger. That’s not what I want. But I won’t lose sleep over it.”*

“No, no, no!” Cantu said. “I’ll do whatever.”

“Put in the earpiece. You speak only to me on the phone. No matter what happens, do not use the radio. Understand?”

“Yes. I understand.”

“Then move your ass,” the voice said. *“Once airborne, assume a heading of northeast by east until I tell you otherwise.”*

“Roger, northeast by east,” Cantu said mechanically, angry with himself for speaking so calmly to the man who had threatened to murder his wife and child.

Dispensing with any run-up, he increased throttle and let off the brakes, steering with shaky legs to the south end of the runway. The voice had instructed him not to talk over the radio, so he made do with a visual check out the windows. He could see no other traffic, so his takeoff roll was short. Instructor pilots were not easy to rattle, but Cantu felt certain he was about to throw up. He was airborne in an instant. The cockpit of his little airplane, the place he’d always felt at home, was now an uncertain hell.

He gained altitude quickly, glancing down to see his student, Mrs. Szymanski, shielding her eyes from the sun, no doubt wondering why her crazy instructor had taken off without her.

The monstrous voice spoke again, jarring Cantu out of his trance. *“You’re tempted to press the mic button on your yoke. That would be a fatal mistake. We would know. And then . . . Well, Georgie, I don’t have to tell you what would happen to your kid.”*

Cantu banked quickly, leaving the undulating green of the Shenandoah behind him, heading northeast by east as instructed—directly toward Washington, D.C. His heart beat wildly, rattling the prison of his ribs.

The bright orange United States Coast Guard MH-65 Dolphin helicopter appeared out of nowhere. The surprise appearance surely on purpose to elicit fear and compliance from

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the pilot of the offending aircraft. The chopper cut a path in front of the Cessna, banking hard and coming around as if on a strafing run.

Sweat stung Cantu's eyes and glued his back to his seat. He'd known it was only a matter of time before they sent aircraft to intercept.

Heavily armed aircraft.

Air traffic control had been bending his ear on the radio without letting up for the past ten minutes. He ignored them, too terrified to answer but nauseated at the thought of what was going to happen when he did not. He pushed thoughts of exploding fireballs out of his mind and stared straight ahead, watching the ribbon of the Potomac River grow increasingly large off his nose. The warning lasers had hit him as he approached the SFRA—red and green flashes he knew were meant specifically for him.

Teaching would-be pilots in the skies around Washington, D.C., he spent a good deal of time discussing the Special Flight Rules Area that surrounded the capital with an invisible ring. He warned students of the nightmare of response aircraft and the real-world possibility of getting blown out of the sky.

Now he found himself living the scenario he'd warned so many others about.

Cantu knew exactly what the caller wanted as soon as he'd been given an azimuth. But he flew on without thinking, willing his hands to stop shaking on the yoke. Would he kill others to save his family? What wouldn't he do? He'd considered purposely crashing into the forest south of Manassas, but these monsters would probably kill his wife and daughter out of spite.

The Coast Guard Dolphin called him by tail number on the radio, direct, but much friendlier than the voice on his phone.

“. . . United States Coast Guard helicopter off your left door. You have entered restricted airspace. Turn south immediately and follow me. Acknowledge by radio or rock your wings if you hear me.”

An electronic marquee similar to a bank clock in the helicopter’s side window displayed the same instructions in scrolling red LEDs.

Cantu clenched his teeth, resisting the overwhelming urge to answer. He chanced a peek at the Dolphin’s pilot, who stared back at him buglike behind the dark visor of his helmet. The helicopter seemed close enough to reach out and touch—sleek, official, and fast. Cantu didn’t see any weapons, but fully expected the chopper’s door to slide open at any moment and reveal a machine-gunner.

The Dolphin pilot repeated his command, but the cruel voice in Cantu’s ear drowned him out.

“We can hear the Coastie, too,” it said. *“Ignore him and continue to fly. You are an American citizen. They will not shoot you down. They are bluffing.”*

“These guys . . . they’re not bluffing,” Cantu whispered, mostly to himself. His mouth was a desert, barely able to form words.

The Coast Guard chopper drifted closer, repeated instructions to follow a third time before drifting away—making room for something with bigger teeth.

TIME TO DECIDE: SEVEN MINUTES.

“Copy that,” General Armstrong said. He stood in front of one of the many computer screens in the NORAD/NORTHCOM Command Center, eyes locked on the radar signature of the

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offending aircraft. He was fully prepared to give the shutdown order if it came to that, though he would have gladly stepped aside and yielded to his boss if he'd come into the N2C2. But that wasn't happening.

Firing on a civilian aircraft wasn't the kind of decision you made peace with each and every time you faced it. Events like this unfolded at lightning speed. You had to get your head wrapped around it from the very beginning, before you stepped up and took the job. You followed procedures, listened to the boots on the ground and eyes in the sky—and then, if everything fell within a certain clearly defined box, you gave a nod of your head to blast some poor son of a bitch out of the sky. Procedures were supposed to save you, allow you to sleep at night.

Maybe.

So far, no one had pulled the trigger.

On September 11, 2001, District of Columbia Air National Guard fighter pilots Lieutenant Heather “Lucky” Penney and her CO, Colonel Marc “Sass” Sasseville, scrambled to intercept and stop United Flight 93 after the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had been hit. The pilots had no missiles, nor ammo of any kind, and resolved to ram the airliner in a suicide mission to save countless others on the ground.

Unbeknownst to them at the time, passengers had already taken control of United Flight 93 and crashed into a Pennsylvania field.

With brave men and women like that, no one was getting into D.C., not on Armstrong's watch.

The Coast Guard MH-65 pilot reported a single person on board the TOI, looking bewildered and lost, crying.

Crying.

MARC CAMERON

Well, hell, Armstrong thought. Tears were a bad sign, particularly when combined with a thousand-yard stare.

Armstrong leaned forward, both hands flat on the counter. This situation was turning to shit right before his very eyes. Dangerous for people on the ground, and, General Armstrong thought, deadly for the little Cessna if it did not deviate. He checked the red clock above the radar screen.

TIME TO DECIDE: SIX MINUTES.

2

Anna Kapoor, commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, perched at the edge of the couch across from President Jack Ryan, clutching the leather folio in her lap until her knuckles turned white. He couldn't blame her. It was nerve-racking enough just being summoned to the Oval Office at any time of the day, but an early-morning meeting to discuss the President's pet Pharmaceutical Independence Bill prior to his daily intelligence briefing put her on the spot with two of Ryan's closest advisers—his chief of staff, Arnie van Damm, and the director of national intelligence, Mary Pat Foley. Both were astute pros, tough customers—though, as usual, Arnie looked like he'd taken a nap in his clothes.

Ryan had appointed Kapoor FDA commissioner six months earlier, and by all accounts she was doing a terrific job. Some in government felt the Food and Drug Administration, under the Department of Health and Human Services, was one of the more mundane cogs in the massive wheels of bureaucracy—until there was an *E. coli* outbreak on their favorite green salad.

Armies needed three basics to fight: bullets, beans, and bandages. No matter on which side of the fence Americans fell regarding the Second Amendment, in everyday life most spent

far more time thinking about the latter two components of that equation. Beans and bandages fell under the purview of the FDA.

Short and round, Commissioner Kapoor appeared much younger than her fifty-six years, and privately joked that the few extra pounds filled in all her wrinkles. She wore a royal-blue suit and large glasses with gaudy red frames that might have looked unprofessional on some, but suited her olive complexion and gave her the look of a friendly university professor. Her stage fright notwithstanding, Kapoor was direct in her initial presentation, as well as in her answers to questions. When it came to all matters FDA, she was a subject matter expert, having come up through the ranks straight out of Harvard, a welcome relief from the many professional bureaucrats that kept the wheels of Washington turning.

“There are some realities we must address as we move forward, Mr. President,” Kapoor said. “The pharma bill you’re proposing will definitely impact Indian and Chinese markets. There is no question we have a problem with supply. From the past issues with heparin to bad antibiotics, the list of generic drugs that have been either tainted or nearly inert is a lengthy one, and, frankly, that list grows weekly. The sheer amount of raw pharmaceutical ingredients the United States imports from China is staggering, and growing exponentially every year since 1992. Manufacturing plants in India produce the vast majority of the generic drugs we consume in the United States.”

Mary Pat Foley met Ryan’s eye and gave him a little nod of approval. “I think you picked the right person to push this bill.”

Kapoor nodded softly in thanks and then continued. “Frankly, Indian manufacturing companies depend on the

higher prices the United States pays to subsidize the cheaper prices at which they sell product to the rest of the world.”

Ryan rubbed his chin. “I’m not trying to be protectionist here, at least, not to the detriment of other countries, but the fact remains that it is nigh unto impossible for your people to properly inspect plants in China or the subcontinent. There is without a doubt corruption and shoddy manufacturing everywhere in the world, including facilities in the U.S. But we can clean up our own house easier than someone else’s eight thousand miles away.”

Van Damm chewed his bottom lip. “It wasn’t that many years ago that a whistleblower won something like ninety million bucks for exposing a pharma plant in Puerto Rico, the very place we’re trying to resurrect manufacturing.”

“Ninety-six million,” Kapoor said. “But you are right on point, Mr. van Damm. I would assure you, the FDA has changed since that time. We are more aware.”

“If companies want to move offshore,” Ryan said, “let’s make it palatable for them to move off of our shore. There was a time when Puerto Rico was the medicine cabinet of the United States. We’d certainly have an easier time inspecting plants there.”

“Much easier,” Kapoor said. “The simple fact that diplomacy requires my team to give lengthy notice before inspections to Indian manufacturing plants makes such inspections not only burdensome, but, for the most part, near worthless as compliance tools. You see, Indian culture runs on workarounds or ‘jugaad’ for very nearly everything—similar to what we call ‘hacks,’ but much more pervasive. Actions we would certainly view as cheating in American culture are simply shrewd business practices there. But I have to say, this phenomenon is not

unique to India. Most of the rest of the world operates by cheating and cutting corners as a matter of course. In India, we just have a word to describe it.” Kapoor shook her head. “Now, I am in no way saying that everyone in India is dishonest. For heaven’s sake, much of my extended family remains there and they are quite successful and happy. But do you know what? When they are ill, they pay the extra money to purchase name brand medication from the United States.”

Van Damm bounced a fist on his knee, eyeing the commissioner. “Are you ready to testify to all this in front of congress, knowing that parts of that testimony might upset members of your family?”

Kapoor was quiet for a long moment, then took a deep breath. “Mr. van Damm, I was raised by Indian parents to do what is right. I do not blame some worker or even a manager who is trying to feed his family for coming up with the most lucrative way for his company to do business. I do, on the other hand, blame the business owners, the fabulously wealthy men and women who care nothing about the efficacy of their product and focus only on the bottom line. I would speak the hard truth about food and drug safety if that truth cast a shadow on India or Indiana.”

Foley smiled at that. “She’s good, Mr.—”

Ryan had just lifted his favorite Marine Corps coffee mug to his lips when four United States Secret Service agents burst into the Oval Office. Freshly on shift, they wore pressed suits, had perfectly cut hair, and not a single smile among them.

Ryan stood immediately, as did the other three in the room.

There was no need for a code word or a lengthy explanation. When Secret Service agents barged in mid-meeting, something serious was going down.

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Gary Montgomery, special agent in charge of Presidential Protection Detail, or PPD, appeared in the door half a second later and gave Ryan a curt nod. He was a big man, a collegiate boxer for the University of Michigan, imposing but light on his feet. Just the sort of person Ryan wanted running point with his protection. He was backlit by the hall lights, and his sudden presence added to the urgency of the situation.

“Mr. President,” Montgomery said. “I need you to come with me to the PEOC.” The PEOC (pee-yok) was the Presidential Emergency Operations Center, often referred to as “the bunker.”

Foley held her notepad to her chest and beckoned the startled FDA commissioner closer.

Kapoor looked around the room. “What should I do?”

“Come with us,” Ryan said. “We can talk down there.”

Van Damm gave a slow shake of his head and loosened his tie, even more than it already was. “What manner of bullshit are we dealing with today?” he whispered to no one in particular.

There were certain events that the Secret Service believed demonstrated the mood of the moment around D.C. And if that mood approached anything at all close to violent, even if the threat or action was not aimed directly at the White House, it precipitated a trip underground. If a demonstration got out of hand in front of the Pentagon, the Secret Service hustled POTUS to the PEOC. If the Supreme Court Police mixed it up with rowdies on the SCOTUS steps, it meant a trip to the PEOC.

Montgomery took up a position directly behind Ryan’s left shoulder, within easy reach. Two more agents led the way, with two others behind. Van Damm, Foley, and Kapoor followed, with two agents bringing up the rear.

“The First Lady?” Ryan said before they’d even made it out the door of the Oval.

“She’s fine, sir,” Montgomery said. “I just spoke to Special Agent Richardson. They’re almost to the Institute.”

Ryan nodded as he walked. Thankfully, Dr. Cathy Ryan, one of the world’s leading ophthalmic surgeons, had two procedures to perform that morning and was already out of the White House. She wasn’t fond of these little trips to the PEOC. Perpetually on the move, doing surgery, jogging, cooking, Ryan’s wife of more than four decades turned into something of a caged cat if she was kept bunkered up for very long. She loved to read, but wanted the option of getting up and going outside if the mood struck her.

Trips to the PEOC were an annoyance for Cathy, but they were soul-crushing for Arnie van Damm.

Located below the East Wing, the PEOC was first constructed during the Truman administration. It had received constant upgrades since that time, but the long hallways and subterranean odor made sure it retained a musty Cold War ambience. Van Damm made it clear virtually every time they took the trip that it felt like the KGB was taking them down a dead-end hallway to put a Makarov bullet in the back of their skulls.

Van Damm pointed out on countless occasions that if a coup ever happened, this was where it would go down.

“*Et tu, Arnie,*” Ryan would say, every time.

A series of conference rooms and spartan living quarters, the PEOC was staffed twenty-four hours a day by the White House Military Office. Essentially a smaller version of the Situation Room with flat-screen televisions and sophisticated communications equipment, the PEOC allowed the President a

CHAIN OF COMMAND

safe haven from which he could continue to see to the business of the country during a threat to the White House.

“Inbound civilian aircraft has violated the SFRA . . . just a precaution,” Montgomery said as he ushered the little group quickly down the hallway.

“And he’s flying directly for us?” van Damm asked.

“Yes, sir,” Montgomery said over his shoulder.

“Fighters?” Ryan asked.

“F-16s on station now,” Montgomery said. “He’s still refusing to yield.”

“There’s an airplane coming toward us?” Kapoor whispered to Foley.

Ryan answered for her. “Looks that way.”

“He’s refusing to yield with tactical fighters crawling up his ass?” van Damm said, shaking his head, incredulous. Everyone in the hallway had been around long enough that they knew there was no easy explanation for human stupidity—or violence.

3

Two F-16 fighters blew past off the left side with a full-throated roar, heading north, tossing the little Cessna and making George Cantu feel like his chest would surely explode. He was a bug on the fighter's windscreen, puny and insignificant. Capable of speeds over 1,500 miles per hour, the Falcons had to significantly rein in their speed to stick with Cantu's single-engine Cessna for even a short time. They rolled slightly away, a display of the AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles on their wingtips.

Short-range air-to-air missiles.

"Cessna pilot, Cessna pilot, this is United States Air Force armed F-16. You are in violation of restricted airspace. Acknowledge by radio or rock your wings if you understand."

Cantu stared at the mic button on his yoke, but left it alone.

The Falcon pilot's voice crackled over the radio again. *"Cessna pilot, I say again, this is United States Air Force armed F-16. You have been intercepted. Rock your wings to acknowledge."*

Fifteen seconds ticked by. Cantu licked sweat off his upper lip. Then came the demand, direct, but icy calm.

"Cessna pilot, follow me or you will be shot down."

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Pulling ahead, the jets split, the one to the right dropping a brilliant array of orange flares directly in front of the Cessna. Cantu gasped. For a split second, he'd feared a missile launch.

"Please . . ." Cantu said to the lonely cabin of his little airplane. His shoulders shook so dramatically he feared the yoke might snap off in his hands. "Theresa . . ."

The voice in his earpiece prodded him on, reminding him of the deadly consequences to his family if he deviated from his instructions.

The fighters came around again, executing a sudden snap roll in unison. They banked left, accelerating in a great arc, one trailing the other to disappear behind him.

Cantu's little red-and-white airplane poked along, alone in the clear blue sky, flying directly for the bone-white LEGO sets of government buildings on the far side of the Potomac.

He thought of his wife. His little girl. And prayed it would be over quickly.

The resolve in the fighter pilot's voice had been unmistakable. He was coming around to shoot.

Cantu saw the plane a millisecond before he heard it. It flew straight up from below like a rocket, a scant five hundred feet off the nose of the Cessna. Afterburner scorching a path, the jet shot upward, GE turbofan engines providing over thirty thousand pounds of thrust, and creating enough wake turbulence to shake the smaller airplane as if it had been seized by a giant hand. Cantu was an experienced enough pilot to know the powerful fighters could have worked together to create turbulence much worse. No. This was a warning. A head butt to let George know they were serious. The last thing they would do before they blew him and his airplane into tiny pieces.

TIME TO DECIDE: TWO MINUTES.

“What is with this guy . . .” Armstrong muttered.

There was zero doubt that the Falcon would splash its target when the order was given, but winning this kind of one-sided battle still contained an aspect of great loss. The fighter’s AIM-9 Sidewinder would do a number on the puny Cessna, blasting it out of the sky with little effort, but there would be fallout; burning metal pieces the size of a microwave could do a lot of damage to people and property on the ground.

Vehement curses died on General Armstrong’s tongue, never seeing the light of day. Every word spoken on the radio and in the room was being recorded for future dissection by Monday-morning quarterbacks for months and years to come. The transcript of the shutdown would become part of some congressional record, Air Force Academy textbooks, and dumbass memes on the Internet.

Without commentary, General Armstrong issued a simple order to the lead F-16 pilot and gave code-word clearance.

“Roger that,” Captain Hill said in his soft, unflappable Kentucky drawl. *“Comin’ around now. Weapons hot. He should splash over Rock Creek Park. Missiles in twenty seconds . . .”* He paused. *“Stand by, NORAD . . . TOI is complying with my order. Turning south, away from the capital.”*

Moments away from shooting down a civilian aircraft or rolling away for an escort, it didn’t matter. Captain Hill’s tone of voice never changed.

A smile of relief crept over General Armstrong’s face, relaxing for the first time since this shitshow started.

The Cessna pilot finally broke radio silence, his words gushing out as if a dam had burst. He blubbered his name through

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sniffs and gulps, breaking down in hopeless sobs. He stammered out an address in Culpeper, Virginia, and begged someone to help his family, screaming that that they were in danger from some madman.

Captain Hill answered in the ever-steady voice. *"I'll pass that along,"* he said, and then directed the pilot to proceed southwest and follow the U.S. Coast Guard Dolphin to Davison Army Airfield.

The pilot acknowledged amid more pleas to save his family.

Hill's voice crackled over the radio again. *"We're checking on them, George, but I need you to understand. You must maintain your present heading and land without delay at Davison. ATC has been notified. Every airplane in the area is holding just for you. Do you understand?"*

"Okay . . . Roger . . . Davison . . . Airfield . . ."

"You're going to see us pull away," Hill continued. *"But we are still here. You need to start communicating directly with air traffic control again and do not deviate from this course unless specifically instructed by them . . ."*

In the N2C2, General Steven Armstrong gave a stoic nod and said a quiet prayer of thanks. He'd dodged the history books—this time.

4

The vice president had stumbled getting on the plane.

Karleen Lynch, a fifty-eight-year-old retired investment banker and the United States ambassador to Japan, had raised four children. She knew sick when she saw it.

The ambassador walked briskly, pondering Anthony Hargrave's health as she made her way up the broad sidewalk along Sakurada Dori in concert with her small protective detail of Diplomatic Security agents, one in front, one alongside, and one in a black Toyota sedan trailing slowly. The agents often referred to her among themselves as the "ambo," as if *Lynch* was too long a word.

All of them walkers, Lynch and her team outpaced small knots of uniformed high school students, dark-suited Japanese salarymen, and local Tokyo residents who were on their way to walk the grounds at the Imperial Palace. Long-legged and fit, Ambassador Lynch preferred to be moving when she chewed on a problem.

The President—through the SecState—had tasked her with a very specific mission for this trip. To that end, she needed the vice president to be on his A game the moment he arrived in Japan. That shouldn't have been a problem. Tony Hargrave was

normally the picture of vitality, strong jaw, perfect hair, and an honest, toothy smile. On any other day he could have graced the cover of an outdoor adventure magazine, but when she'd watched the news footage of him trudging up the stairs to board Air Force Two, he'd looked pale and lethargic, like he needed a healthy dose of homemade chicken and dumplings—Lynch's remedy for almost any malady.

That was hours ago. She hoped he'd gotten some rest on the plane ride over, because they had much to do and almost all of it would be under the scrutinizing eyes of people who didn't exactly have the best interests of the United States at heart.

The reception that evening was going to be hell. Pranjal Varma, the Indian foreign minister, was already in Tokyo. He'd been gunning for her for two days—and she'd been deftly avoiding him. His chief of staff had called her office no less than six times, insisting on a meeting to discuss India's grievances toward the Ryan administration's Pharmaceutical Independence Bill.

Lynch skirted a small queue of government workers, young, lower ranks, all in dark suits or dark skirts and white shirts. They were lining up at a food cart to pick up stacks of bento, lunch boxes of rice and fish or plum or scant bits of meat, to carry back to their senior staff inside the offices along white avenues. She caught the odor of curry, and found herself wishing she had time to stop.

Not today.

She was under instructions from State to keep off the radar until the vice president and secretary of state arrived. That evening, they would all sit down for a friendly dinner with the Japanese prime minister, who had agreed to host a meeting. Indian Foreign Minister Varma could vent his spleen there.

Cordially. With a referee. Over sushi. And many cups of warm sake.

It wasn't as if Varma was going to breach the walls of the embassy, but it felt wrong to Lynch for her to hide behind a couple of strapping young Marines and an iron fence. Diplomacy was an art, and sometimes that art required one to take a long walk.

The Sōri Kōtei, as the Japanese prime minister's residence was known, was a scant two thousand feet away from the United States embassy in Tokyo. It was close enough that if the CIA wanted to aim one of their fancy listening devices in that direction, they could sit at their desks and easily pick up conversations among the uniformed guards patrolling lush gardens of sago palm and Himalayan cedar. Considering the guests in attendance tonight, the Agency, along with Diplomatic Security and advance agents of the United States Secret Service, had been doing just that for the better part of a week.

The reception was scheduled to begin at six p.m. It was now half past noon. Ambassador Lynch could have waited five hours, put on her walking shoes, and hoofed the short distance up Sotobori Avenue and arrived at the prime minister's residence early enough to change into more fashionable heels. Instead, she wore those walking shoes and made her way northeast, skirting the great stone walls and mossy moats of the Imperial Palace, and crossing busy Daimyo-Koji Avenue to reach the palatial red-brick façade on the Marunouchi side of Tokyo Station.

Inside the cacophonous, teeming maze of levels that went down and down and down, Ambassador Lynch and her Diplomatic Security agents boarded the surprisingly uncrowded Ōme rapid service train directly to Fussa, the front door to United States Yokota Air Base. A DS agent in the black Toyota

sedan paralleled her route on surface streets just in case the ambo needed him.

The agent driving the Toyota met Ambassador Lynch at the Yokota south gate with a change of clothes more suitable to meeting the vice president of the United States. The base security commander let her use his office to change.

She arrived on the flight line as Air Force Two touched down. Foreign Minister Varma had known she would be there and sauntered over to stand beside her, extending his hand.

He was young for such a crucial government office—equivalent to the U.S. secretary of state—early forties, wearing a red silk tie and an expensive midnight-blue wool suit that would have fit right in on the top floor of a Wall Street investment firm. Lynch had often thought that neckties were a construct of powerful fat men who wanted to distract attention from their ponderous bellies. Not so with Foreign Minister Varma. Everything about him looked perfectly chiseled—broad shoulders, coiffed hair, piercing hazel eyes. He could have been a Fortune 500 executive or the captain of a baseball team. They were on opposite sides of this pharmaceutical issue, but Lynch couldn't help but like the guy—which was, she supposed, the reason he was in this particular job.

The two of them exchanged greetings while their respective protection details eyed each other coldly like warring factions parlaying under a flag of truce—swords sheathed, but within easy reach.

“Your President is making life difficult for all of us,” Varma said after pleasantries were exchanged. “I do not have to tell you—”

Fortunately, a Boeing 757—white with a powder-blue belly—turned off the taxiway, twin Pratt & Whitney engines preempting all conversation. Since Vice President Hargrave was on board, it was designated Air Force Two.

Varma clasped his hands in front and gave Lynch an amused smile, conceding that she'd eluded him again for the moment. She suspected he'd only wanted to practice his objections anyway, before he moved on to the big leagues—the vice president and the secretary of state.

Unlike Lynch, Secretary of State Scott Adler was a career Foreign Service officer. As such, he had a reputation for looking down his nose at political appointees. They were, he felt, hacks who'd been gifted positions for which he'd worked his entire life. Somehow, Lynch had won him over, likely because she was a better than average poker player, a game at which Scott Adler excelled.

Diplomacy, indeed.

A DS agent who was part of SecState's advance team spoke into the tiny flesh-tone mic clipped to his lapel, alerting his cohort around the perimeter that "EAGLE is on the ground." A nearby Secret Service agent on the VPOTUS detail followed suit.

PAINTER, he said, was planning to work the ropes immediately after he got off the plane.

Casual onlookers might think the area around the flight line was a circus, but in truth it was a well-choreographed dance.

Ambassador Lynch's protective agents melded with the dozens of other men and women in suits—the Diplomatic Security secretary of state detail (EAGLE), the U.S. Secret Service Vice Presidential Protection (PAINTER), and a healthy contingent of Air Force law-enforcement personnel.

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For now, Japanese Security Police stood at the outer perimeter. Lynch counted a half-dozen—but their presence would grow exponentially as soon as Hargrave and Adler departed Yokota Air Base.

SPs from Mobile Security Squad 3 were tasked with the protection of foreign dignitaries and were there to meet their counterparts. Tokyo Metropolitan Police officers with at least five years of uniformed experience and a third *dan* in at least one approved martial art, these were steely-eyed men with dour expressions and suits that matched down to their neckties.

And they saw everything.

The Japanese government gave permission for a very limited number of firearms to be carried into their country. Their own protection officers often carried a diminutive SIG P230 in .32 caliber, which, according to Lynch's detail agents, was akin to not being armed at all. At best, her agents said, it was a passable gun for fighting one's way to a larger gun. The Japanese government adopted a don't ask, don't tell policy when it came to U.S. agents bringing in weapons, clearly stating their rules but knowing full well that virtually every agent had a SIG or a Glock under their jacket. Lynch suspected the higher-ranking SPs were present not only to liaise with arriving protective details, but to make certain no one caused embarrassment with a pistol that was easily spotted by the public—or by one of their bosses.

As it turned out, the Americans and the Japanese were all cops at heart and found common ground immediately, despite the language barrier.

The vice president appeared at the door of Air Force Two first, wearing a charcoal-gray jacket that accented his perfectly styled gunmetal hair. Flashing his trademark smile, Hargrave

was greeted by the Air Force band, the Yokota Base commander, local city leaders, and the governor of Tokyo—who had his own protection detail, SP Mobile Security Squad 4.

Smile notwithstanding, Hargrave's shoulders sagged as if carrying some unseen burden. It was worrisome, but Lynch was placated some when he trotted down the steps.

Secretary of State Adler followed, balding, older than Hargrave and considerably frumpier. Both men wore tailored suits, though Hargrave's was clearly newer, where Adler's was road-worn, as befitting the wardrobe of a globe-trotting secretary of state. The men walked the receiving line together, shaking hands, bowing. As the Secret Service agent had warned, Hargrave took a couple minutes to work the ropes, pressing the flesh with a few onlookers, who were for the most part Air Force families stationed at Yokota.

Secret Service personnel in an armored limousine eventually whisked Hargrave away to a waiting UH-1N Iroquois a hundred meters down the flight line. This particular bird comprised parts from several helicopters that had seen service during the Vietnam War. The sleek new MH 139-A Grey Wolves that would replace the aging "Twin Hueys" were still months away from delivery. The governor of Tokyo was well aware of the chopper's history and opted to return to the city via the longer route with his motorcade.

Old and leaky as they were, if the Hueys were sound enough to assign to personnel of the 459th Airlift Squadron, then Vice President Hargrave, a former U.S. Army Apache pilot himself, insisted that they were good enough for him. He invited Foreign Minister Varma and one of his security agents to ride with him. Secretary Adler had asked Ambassador Lynch to

accompany him, and since he was riding with the vice president, so was she.

The helicopter was extremely loud. Unfortunately, because the crew chief provided each passenger with a headset and mic, Varma was able to talk their ear off during the entire fifteen-minute journey to the helipad on the roof of the Sōri Kōtei, the Japanese prime minister's office.

Lynch closed her eyes while the Indian foreign minister gave full-throated voice to his country's numerous grievances regarding President Jack Ryan's "disastrous, protectionist, and ill-conceived plan."

The vice president listened patiently, offering no excuse or rebuttal for his boss's agenda. Perhaps he knew that the best form of diplomacy was keeping his mouth shut.

Or maybe, Lynch thought, he was just too sick to argue.

Scott Adler's late mother (*of blessed memory*) would have said poor Tony Hargrave looked like he was about to plutz (collapse) and, as Jewish mothers were prone to do, she would have recommended a healthy meal of chopped liver.

Adler and the VP were old friends from the days when Hargrave came aboard State after leaving the military. He'd always been one to have an easily upset stomach—odd for someone who flew attack helicopters.

Adler was a detail man—and an expert poker player, much to the chagrin of his cohort at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, where he'd graduated first in his class. He'd worked his way up the ranks of career civil servants at State. Fluent in the language, culture, and politics of Russia, he was naturally

drawn to the Soviet side of the department—a busy place during those halcyon days of the Cold War. He spoke enough Japanese to converse and had done some negotiations a few years earlier when the two countries teetered on the brink of war. At the moment, he was making a miserable go of trying to give up cigarettes for the . . . eighth time in his adult life, which made him at once jittery and hyperaware of his surroundings. The subtext in the vice president’s conversation—or lack of it—told Adler something was wrong.

Hargrave spoke Russian as well, and had worked for Adler in the beginning. Even then, it was easy to see that this smooth-talking former Army chopper jock was one of “those guys” who was destined to rise above his peers. The limelight followed him, and nobody seemed to mind it, because he was a genuinely good soul. Hargrave had moved on to politics, winning a House congressional seat in his home state of South Dakota—and eventually catching the eye of Arnold van Damm and other Party elders to replace an ailing Richard Pollan as vice president.

Hargrave bummed a Roloids from Keenan Mulvaney as soon as the Huey touched down. The Secret Service special agent in charge of his detail could always be counted on for an antacid. Mulvaney gave him the Roloids, along with a wary side-eye, but said nothing.

Foreign Minister Varma stood a few feet away with a pinched expression, looking as though he might need something for his stomach as well.

“You okay?” Adler asked Hargrave when they were standing side by side on the plush red rug in the grand foyer of Prime Minister Mori’s residence. The vice president was the boss here, but Adler was the senior man and in many ways thought

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of Hargrave as a favorite nephew. “Maybe you should get with Carter, let him check you out.”

Hargrave mustered a wink. “I’m good to go, buddy.”

Dr. Carter Boone, commander, United States Navy, was one of the White House physicians who routinely traveled with the vice president. As with physicians who traveled with POTUS, Commander Boone remained within quick access in case of emergency, but just far enough away that he wasn’t as likely to be injured in the event of attack or catastrophic accident. If all went well, Dr. Boone would spend the entire evening dressed in a tuxedo, doing paperwork in a nearby office.

Hargrave beamed as Prime Minister Mori and his wife came down the stairs to meet and greet the visitors.

“Seriously,” he said out of the corner of his mouth, eyes focused on the prime minister as he gave Adler a playful nudge with his elbow. “Don’t worry about me. I’m just as tired as you look, that’s all.”

But it turned out to be more than that.

Much more.

Prime Minister Mori was a gracious host, regaling his guests with the bloody history of the official two-story residence, which was built in 1929. His wife, a quiet, birdlike woman who said little with her lips but much with her eyes, squirmed uncomfortably as Mori recounted with vivid descriptions the two bloody coups that had occurred within these very walls, the murders being the apparent birth of the ghosts who walked the carpets at night and had kept many prime ministers from occupying the residence at all over the years.

For the most part, Foreign Minister Varma ate quietly, handing out periodic verbal jibes to demonstrate his mood. One of them—Adler didn't hear it—must have been aimed at the ambassador.

Hargrave cleared his throat, his smile vanishing. "I understand your government is upset about President Ryan's proposal, but—"

Varma shot a playful wink at Lynch. He dabbed at his lips with a linen napkin and got down to business now that he had the vice president's full attention. "Forgive me, but the United States speaks of such matters much the same as I am told ancient samurai did in this beautiful country. When one warrior killed another in battle he might say '*kiri sute gomen.*' *I cut you, I throw you away, I am sorry.*" Varma glanced at Prime Minister Mori, making his case. "Please excuse my pronunciation. It is extremely glib for the vice president to say that India is merely *upset*. Much of the world outside the United States of America depends heavily upon affordable generic pharmaceuticals manufactured by companies in my country. President Ryan's plan to subsidize plants in Puerto Rico is nothing less than protectionist. These businesses will undercut Indian companies, killing a vital market and cutting off access to the poor around the world."

Scott Adler struggled to hold his tongue.

"Mr. Foreign Minister," Hargrave said. "I can assure you, the United States has no wish to keep vital medication from the poor. We do, however, assert our need for pharmaceutical independence, preferring to get our medications from plants that are available for monitoring and inspection."

Varma chewed on that for a long moment, then said, more darkly than before, "We deeply resent any implication that our plants do not cooperate in the fullest."

"I'm not implying, Mr. Foreign Minister," Hargrave shot back. "I am speaking frankly. It is almost impossible to get inspectors into your facilities without giving them so much notice that those inspections are virtually worthless—"

Prime Minister Mori raised an open hand, smiling softly like a wise grandfather. "Gentlemen," he said in perfect English. "My wife has prepared a delicious custard for our dessert. These matters are quite weighty. I fear talk of them now will sour the experience. I urge you, let us postpone this discussion until afterward, for the sake of—" He stopped mid-sentence, the sparkle vanishing from his eyes. "Hargrave *Dono*," he said, speaking as much to his own aides as to the vice president. "*Otsukaresama desu. Daijobu desu ka?* Are you unwell?"

Adler turned to see his friend had gone chalky white. Sweat beaded along the vice president's forehead and dotted his upper lip. His eyes fluttered. He swayed in his chair, listing sideways. He would have toppled over had Adler not caught him.

Hargrave's special agent in charge who'd been seated along the wall sprang to his feet, speaking into his lapel mic. "Medic, medic, medic," he said. "From Mulvaney. Dr. Boone to the dining room for PAINTER. Immediately."

Special Agent Mulvaney helped ease the vice president to the floor and put him on his back, elevating his feet with a cushion Mrs. Mori gave him.

Ambassador Lynch pushed away from the table and moved in to assist. "Is he choking?"

Foreign Minister Varma crowded closer and asked if he could be of any help, shrugging off his own security until they all but hauled him away.

"I'm fine," Hargrave said, breathless, moving his jaw from

side to side like he might be sick at any moment. He was far from fine.

Secret Service agents seemed to materialize out of the curtains, forming a human shield around the vice president, who now blinked up at Adler and Special Agent Mulvaney. As secretary of state, Adler was one of the few people on the planet who wasn't summarily dragged away by agents during such an event.

Hargrave grabbed his hand. His grip was weak and unsettlingly cold, but he held on. He turned his head slightly, looking at Mulvaney. "Let him . . . stay . . . He is . . . my friend."

There was something so incredibly moving about the way he said the words. Tears welled in Adler's eyes. Tony Hargrave, one of the strongest, most vibrant men he had ever met, one heartbeat away from the presidency of the United States, had turned into a frightened little boy.

Mulvaney gave Adler a wary nod while he notified the motorcade outside to get ready to move. Agents were already en route to Toranomom Hospital, just across the parking lot from the U.S. embassy less than a kilometer away. Advance agents had spoken with the surgical staff weeks before, as they did at hospitals in every venue POTUS or VPOTUS visited in preparation for a medical emergency. Trauma staff would be ready—whatever this turned out to be.

Prime Minister Mori's close-protection agents escorted him from the dining room out of an abundance of caution. Japanese Security Police assigned to the VPOTUS detail remained nearby, vigilant but out of the way. The lead SP relayed a play-by-play of events to his command post over radio, alerting marked police cars to prepare for an escort to Toranomom.

Adler's own Diplomatic Security agents rushed in and

attempted to cajole him out the door, but he shrugged them off, still holding Hargrave's hand.

Dr. Boone pushed his way through the knot of agents and dropped to his knees beside the stricken vice president.

"Stand by for PAINTER to be on the move to the ambulance," Special Agent Mulvaney said into his lapel mic. Then to Dr. Boone, "Paramedics are on their way in now."

"Copy that." The doctor gave a curt nod, then focused on his patient. He kept his voice calm and low.

"What's up, Mr. Vice President?" He gave a reassuring smile as he searched his patient for signs of trauma. "Tell me what we have going on here."

Hargrave pointed to his belly, wincing at a new and sudden pain. He swallowed hard. "I feel like shit, Doc."

Boone pressed his fingers alongside Hargrave's neck. "Your pulse is rapid, Mr. Vice President. We're going to get you to a hospital and check things out. Could be appendicitis. When did this start?"

"The flight . . ." Hargrave whispered, wincing again. "I don't know . . . Maybe before." A tear creased his temple "My gut feels all . . . I don't know, shaky, like it has a mind of its . . ." His face twisted into a mask of pain, mouth opening and closing like a gasping fish. His eyes fluttered and then closed.

Dr. Boone lay a hand against Hargrave's abdomen, high at first, under the rib cage. He paused for a moment, then moved it lower. All pretense of calm drained away. He cursed under his breath, then turned quickly to Mulvaney.

"Inform Toranomom Hospital the vice president has a triple A rupture," he snapped. "Abdominal aortic aneurysm. Let's go!"

Adler loosened his grip and Hargrave's hand fell away, thudding against the carpet.

The muscles in Boone's jaw tensed like cables.

It was standard Secret Service procedure to have an ambulance staged on standby outside. Three Japanese paramedics hustled in moments later with a rolling gurney. Boone gave them a rundown while they lifted Hargrave together.

"Triple A?" Adler whispered, half to himself.

"A major artery has burst in his abdomen," Boone said. "*The* major artery. He has massive internal bleeding."

"But you can fix him?" Adler felt himself go cold. "Right?"

"We have to take him to the hospital, per protocol," Boone said, looking as if he'd been kicked in the gut. He leaned in closer so only Adler could hear. "Someone needs to inform the President. I'm sorry, Mr. Secretary, I have to go."