

CHAPTER 1

Friday

THIS is how we began . . .

SUSAN Dawson—thirty-four, with pale skin and pale blue eyes—was standing behind and to the right of the presidential podium. She spoke into the microphone hidden in her sleeve. “Prospector is moving out.”

“Copy,” said the man’s voice in her ear. Seth Jerrison, white, long-faced, with the hooked nose political cartoonists had such fun with, strode onto the wooden platform that had been hastily erected in the center of the wide steps leading up to the Lincoln Memorial.

Susan had been among the many who were unhappy when the president decided to give his speech here instead of at the White House. He wanted to speak before a crowd, he said, letting the world see that even during such frightening times, Americans could not be cowed. But Susan estimated that fewer than three thousand people were assembled on either side of the Reflecting Pool. The Washington Monument was visible both at the far end of the pool and upside down in its still water, framed by

ice around the edges. In the distance, the domed Capitol was timidly peeking out from behind the stone obelisk.

President Jerrison was wearing a long navy blue coat, and his breath was visible in the chill November air. “My fellow Americans,” he began, “it has been a full month since the latest terrorist attack on our soil. Our thoughts and prayers today are with the brave people of Chicago, just as they continue to be with the proud citizens of San Francisco, who still reel from the attack there in September, and with the patriots of Philadelphia, devastated by the explosion that shook their city in August.” He briefly looked over his left shoulder, indicating the nineteen-foot-tall marble statue visible between the Doric columns above and behind him. “A century and a half ago, on the plain at Gettysburg, Abraham Lincoln mused about whether our nation could long endure. But it *has* endured, and it will continue to do so. The craven acts of terrorists will not deter us; the American spirit is indomitable.”

The audience—such as it was—erupted in applause, and Jerrison turned from looking at the teleprompter on his left to the one on his right. “The citizens of the United States will not be held hostage by terrorists; we will not allow the crazed few to derail our way of life.”

More applause. As she scanned the crowd, Susan thought of the speeches by previous presidents that had made similar claims. But despite the trillions spent on the war on terror, things were getting worse. The weapons used for the last three attacks were a new kind of bomb: they weren’t nukes, but they did generate super-high temperatures, and their detonation was accompanied by an electromagnetic pulse, although the pulse was mostly free of the component that could permanently damage electronics. One could conceivably guard against the hijacking of airplanes. But how did one defend against easily hidden, easily carried, hugely powerful bombs?

“Each year, the foes of liberty gain new tools of destruction,” continued Jerrison. “Each year, the enemies of civilization can do more damage. But each year we—the free peoples of the world—gain more power, too.”

Susan was the Secret Service agent-in-charge. She had line of sight

to seventeen other agents. Some, like her, were standing in front of the colonnade; others were at the sides of the wide marble staircase. A vast pane of bulletproof glass protected Jerrison from the audience, but she still continued to survey the crowd, looking for anyone who seemed out of place or unduly agitated. A tall, thin man in the front row caught her eye; he was reaching into his jacket the way one might go for a holstered gun—but then he brought out a smartphone and started thumb-typing. *Tweet this, asshole*, she thought.

Jerrison went on: “I say now, to the world, on behalf of all of us who value liberty, that we shall not rest until our planet is free of the scourge of terrorism.”

Another person caught Susan’s attention: a woman who was looking not at the podium but off in the distance at—ah, at a police officer on horseback, over by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

“Before I became your president,” Jerrison said, “I taught American history at Columbia. If my students could take away only a single lesson, I always hoped it would be the famous maxim that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it—”

Ka-blam!

Susan’s heart jumped and she swung her head left and right, trying to spot where the shot had come from; the marble caused the report to echo. She looked over at the podium and saw that Jerrison had slammed forward into it—he’d been shot from *behind*. She shouted into her sleeve microphone as she ran, her shoulder-length brown hair flying. “Prospector is hit! Phalanx Alpha, shield him! Phalanx Beta, into the memorial—the shot came from there. Gamma, out into the crowd. Go!”

Jerrison slid onto the wooden stage, ending up facedown. Even before Susan had spoken, the ten Secret Service agents in Phalanx Alpha had formed two living walls—one behind Jerrison to protect him from further shots from that direction; another in front of the bulletproof glass that had shielded him from the audience, in case there was a second assailant on the Mall. A male agent bent down but immediately stood up and shouted, “He’s alive!”

The rear group briefly opened their ranks, letting Susan rush in to

crouch next to the president. Journalists were trying to approach him—or at least get pictures of his fallen form—but other agents prevented them from getting close.

Alyssa Snow, the president's physician, ran over, accompanied by two paramedics. She gingerly touched Jerrison's back, finding the entrance wound, and—presumably noting that the bullet had missed the spine—rolled the president over. The president's eyes fluttered, looking up at the silver-gray November sky. His lips moved slightly, and Susan tried to make out whatever he was saying over the screams and footfalls from the crowd, but his voice was too faint.

Dr. Snow—who was an elegant forty-year-old African-American—soon had the president's long coat open, exposing his suit jacket and blood-soaked white shirt. She unbuttoned the shirt, revealing the exit wound; on this cold morning, steam was rising from it. She took a length of gauze from one of the paramedics, wadded it up, and pressed it against the hole to try to stanch the flow of blood. One paramedic was taking the president's vital signs, and the other now had an oxygen mask over Jerrison's mouth.

“How long for a medical chopper?” Susan asked into her wrist.

“Eight minutes,” replied a female voice.

“Too long,” Susan said. She rose and shouted, “Where's Kushnir?”

“Here, ma'am!”

“Into the Beast!”

“Yes, ma'am!” Kushnir was today's custodian of the nuclear football—the briefcase with the launch procedures; he was wearing a Navy dress uniform. The Beast—the presidential limo—was five hundred feet away on Henry Bacon Drive, the closest it could get to the memorial.

The paramedics transferred Jerrison to a litter. Susan and Snow took up positions on either side and ran with the paramedics and Phalanx Alpha down the broad steps and over to the Beast. Kushnir was already in the front passenger seat, and the paramedics reclined the president's rear seat until it was almost horizontal, then moved him onto it.

Dr. Snow opened the trunk, which contained a bank of the president's blood type, and quickly set up a transfusion. The doctor and the two

paramedics took the rearward-facing seats, and Susan sat beside the president. Agent Darryl Hudkins—a tall African-American with a shaved head—took the remaining forward-facing chair.

Susan pulled her door shut and shouted to the driver, “Lima Tango, go, go, go!”