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“No more. I can’t do it anymore.”

Dying was the answer, when you ran out of options. Either someone else pulled the trigger, or you did. He had seen the ice cold, boney finger pointed at him at least a hundred times. He loved his country, and the Special Forces soldier proved it during three back- to-back tours in Iraq and two more in Afghanistan. He was their go-to-guy for explosives. The other soldiers he served with said he was the bravest man in country. His commanding officer recommended him for the Medal of Honor for his actions in one ambush attack. He alone saved his unit, but he refused to accept the commendation. He took a direct hit to his psyche sometime during his last tour. It fucked him up.

Inside his shirt, on the chain with his dog tags, was the house key. He had come home to the empty house his parents left him in North Phoenix. They were crushed to death by an eighteen-wheeler with a dozing driver on I-10 when he was in some shithole, covered in leaves and sticks, holding his sniper rifle’s crosshairs on an insurgent as he squeezed the trigger.

There was no celebration waiting for him. Eric walked around the dust-covered furniture, the kitchen table, and his bedroom that was still the way he left it before his first tour. He stopped at the photo that hung on a living room wall of mom and dad. The regret he had about not returning for his parent’s funerals ran deep. He stared at the photo until the first tear streamed down his cheek.

“I’m sorry mom, dad. Sorry for going, and sorry for not coming back soon enough.”

He never told his friends he was back. He didn’t want to hear, “I told you so.” They were against his volunteering to fight. They didn’t see any reason to fight in a two thousand year old war in the Middle East. They said it was another mistake, like Viet Nam.

For months, Eric stayed in the house day and night, except for short trips to get food from Safeway, and cases of Jack from the liquor store down the street. When his demons were angry, he’d fall into a drunken rage, and hone his sniper skills by aiming plates, glasses, and empty liquor bottles at a bullseye target he spray-painted on a plaster wall. Target practice ended when he’d pass out on the floor. When the demons were quiet, he would sit with his laptop and write disturbing rants, and manifestos about what he thought of the world.

Sometimes, at night, he would sit for hours on a kitchen chair that he dragged to face the framed photo of his parents, illuminated by moonlight that bled through the shades. The photo never spoke to him, held him, or told him how proud they were of their only son. Grasped in one hand was a fifth of Jack. In the other was a semiautomatic pressed against his lower jaw sometimes in his mouth, and other times at his temple.

Eric Sutherland made hundreds of calls to an unanswered phone in the V.A. Hospital. He left as many messages and begged to see a psychiatrist, or someone to help him quiet his demons, and nightmares. He believed he was possessed by the devil PTSD. The V.A. never returned his calls. When he walked in the front doors, he was given an appointment six months away. He knew he couldn’t keep the demons locked out that long. After another night of cold-sweat nightmares, Eric sat on the edge of the bed. He knew what he had to do. The scenario had run repeatedly through his thoughts for weeks.

He showered, shaved, and dressed in his desert combat fatigues, with boots on *his* ground. The suicide vest he had prepared days earlier went over the camo. He strapped on the shoulder holster with his nine-millimeter semiautomatic, and took the remote detonator off the kitchen table. He packed it into the pouch around his waist. The soldier walked down the hallway, and out of the hall closet retrieved his AR-15, with two full magazines taped together. Eric stopped at the photo of his parents and said goodbye. He smashed the glass with a fist, took the photo then folded it in half. He slid it between his chest and fatigues. He knew it was his last day on earth.

“I’m going to convince the V.A. to make it right.”

He grabbed the keys to his van off the kitchen counter, and walked into the garage. Besides the trips to the food and liquor stores, he had made one other stop. Before he got into the driver’s seat, he checked the explosives that filled the back of the van McVeigh-style. Having lost most of his grip on reality, he relied on a single focus to take him where he wanted to go— straight to Hell. It was 6:00 a.m. The drive to Sky Harbor Airport would take half an hour. Eric knew blowing up the airport would get everyone’s attention. Blowing up the V.A. would only get applause. He backed out of the garage slowly.

* * *

“I want you to stay here, don’t leave me.”

Caitland had seen the same puppy face many times, and knew how Jake felt.

“It’s only for a few days, Jake. I *have* to get back so Angelina can sign the contract today. It’s a multi- million-dollar deal. I have to close it this afternoon. The studio is going crazy, and Angelina has a small window of time with the kids, besides directing another film project. It’s difficult to get a few minutes with her. She’s promised to be there,” Caitland said.

“I don’t care. I want you to stay.”

“Who’s going to get Wynter and John settled in? They’ll be eaten alive in LA without me.”

“It’s just a few days, Jake. What can happen in a few days?” Wynter said.

She didn’t understand why Jake had a problem with Caitland’s leaving. He never appeared to be insecure about anything. She had a lot to learn about her new business partner.

Phoenix was never short of beautiful mornings. Cacti, hunched over from days of staggering dry heat, stood up straight after the monsoon rolled over the valley the night before. As the sun rose higher over the Four Peaks, its rays fired orange and pink beams across the jagged ridges. The sky was clear of clouds, just a canopy of deep blue. At 6:30 a.m., the temperature was pleasant for an Arizona summer day, but that would change to intolerable by noon. A hot air balloon, with vibrant colors, could be seen floating on a gentle desert breeze over the mountains to the north.

“Don’t forget, I also have the party to get ready for. I have a hundred guests coming, all A-list celebs. You *could* come with me. That way, I could get the contract closed, while you help Wynter and John settle in, then I could be on your arm at the party,” Caitland said.

“Somebody has to go back, or else Dad and I will be totally lost,” Wynter said.

“Why don’t you two stay at the house? You can get used to LA, and then I’ll find a place with you when I get back,” Jake said.

“That sounds like a better plan to me. You don’t have to worry about these two, Jake. I have it under control. I won’t let either of them out of my sight the entire time. I’ll make sure Caitland gets on the first flight back after the party,” John said.

Former Phoenix homicide detective, Wynter Williams, asked two airport police officers she knew to give Jake a courtesy escort through TSA. The two officers recognized Jake from the Bobby Goode shooting two days before. They had no problem bending the rules by walking him past the TSA security lines. Jake wanted to say goodbye to Caitland at her departure gate.

Wynter had resigned from Phoenix homicide after the shooting. She was one of the lead investigators on that case. John, Wynter’s dad, had retired from Phoenix PD after thirty years in homicide. Both were leaving with Caitland to LA so they could find a place to live. They were going to take charge of Jake’s private investigation company, The Roberts Agency. Wynter and John said goodbye to Jake and walked down to the plane. Before Caitland boarded the flight, while in Jake’s arms, he leaned close to whisper into her ear.

“You know how hard it is for me to be away from you for any amount of time, Cait. *Please stay.*”

“Be a good puppy while I’m gone,” Caitland said. At the gate, Jake gave Caitland a long kiss goodbye. He hated whenever they were separated. He had another good reason why she shouldn’t get on the plane. He needed Caitland to stay, because inside his head, killing Bobby was killing him. In the brief time they were in Phoenix, Jake had become friends with the megastar comedian. In his entire career in law enforcement, twenty-seven years, Jake had taken one other life. It was during a firefight. With Bobby, he was forced to kill a friend. It was hard for him.

Caitland and Jake were in Phoenix visiting his childhood best friend. Fred, and his girlfriend Andrea, had moved to Phoenix for his job as an airline pilot. Jake had to stay a few more days. He had to be there to give a deposition for the shooting. Caitland would be back after the party to continue with their mini-vacation. Jake’s backstory had many pages. Most were written with pain and sorrow, but recent pages were written with love, ever since he met Caitland.

One chapter was about his forced retirement from Atlanta PD’s homicide division. He was given a choice—retire, or face criminal prosecution. Jake went outside the law, beyond the boundaries of legal right and wrong, to capture a serial killer named Jared Hamilton. Jake retired, and left for the West Coast with Caitland. He needed the change of scenery. Caitland coaxed him into writing *authentic* crime fiction novels, something he knew well from living it. With her connections, Caitland was instrumental in helping Jake become an author on the New York Times best sellers list. She also found him consultant gigs on film lots involving police tactics. To keep his hand in investigations, Jake opened the Roberts Agency. Caitland did everything she could to keep him away from being in law enforcement ever again.

After the plane was boarded and pushed back from the terminal to start engines. Jake and his police escorts walked out from the D gates. The two officers asked if he faced any repercussions for the Bobby Goode shooting. He told them what he thought would happen, that no charges would be filed against him.

* * *

At 6:45 a.m., a burgundy Chevy utility van drove up the Departure lane to Terminal

Four at Sky Harbor Airport. Outside the terminal, cars and SUVs occupied the two departure lanes. Families and individuals unloaded and carried bags. Some checked their bags. Parents hugged their children, and gave them stern warnings about their behavior while on a school trip. Tears fell for a few of the kids. Most of them had anxious smiles because they would be free of mom and dad for a week. Two lovers stood in a timeless embrace.

With bags slung over their shoulders, the travelers squeezed through the terminal doors. They made intermediate stops at bathrooms, and the food court. After passing through the TSA checkpoint, they found their departure gates. The rusty van continued to inch forward along the congested lanes looking for a place to park. The driver saw a brief opening and went for it. He parked right in front of the entrance doors.

The traffic police kept things moving, at times threatening citations for those who tied up the lanes of vehicles. When the officer noted no one exiting the Chevy van to off load baggage, he walked from the car behind the van. He would decide if the driver got a warning, or a ticket when he observed the driver's disposition. He glanced through the tinted rear windows, as he approached the van. The figure of the driver hadn't moved, and seemed to be preoccupied as the officer reached the side window. A knuckle rap on the window drew the driver's attention.

The window rolled down slowly. Just as the officer was about to speak, he took an R.I.P. nine-millimeter shot to the forehead. The Radically Invasive Projectile had a unique hollow point design. It caused greater damage at impact. It shredded flesh as it passed through the body. The officer stumbled backwards and fell. He was dead before he hit the pavement. Blood shot straight up from the head wound, and spread from behind his head. The sound of the gunshot made passenger heads rise up like a frightened herd. They panicked when they saw the officer. Some dropped to the ground, others crawled on hands and knees toward safety behind their vehicles. Parents covered their babies and young children, willing to take a bullet to save them.

The fallen officer's partner was working the west entrance to Terminal Four. He drew his service weapon and ran toward the sound of gunfire. He wasn't sure what happened, or why. Halfway there he saw his partner lying on the ground. He skidded to a halt when he saw the driver's side door of the van open, and a man exit wearing combat fatigues. The officer drew down on the man, and shouted for him to freeze and drop his weapon, but there were too many civilians, and he was too far away to make the shot. Eric didn't care about the officer's command. Amid the screaming and panic, he displayed no emotion. With his AR-15 slung over his shoulder, he calmly walked toward the double doors of the terminal.

The young officer, with just over a year with the department, turned his attention away from the gunman and concentrated on his partner. The officer's heart beat like a jackhammer. He knelt down, looked into his partner's dilated eyes, and knew it was over for him. He then realized he was so focused on his dead partner that he failed to alert his fellow officers inside the terminal of the approaching gunman. He reached for the radio microphone on his shoulder.

“901-Hotel, officer down! I need an ambulance on the north side of Terminal Four.”

Seconds later, the call was followed by another one from an officer inside.

“All units. Shots fired inside Terminal Four. Single male suspect is in TSA

checkpoint Charlie. Multiple wounded and dead.”

After hearing the details of the call, the two officers with Jake drew their weapons, and ran toward the TSA checkpoint. Jake ran with them. He had been in law enforcement too long not to assist. As they rushed to the checkpoint, other officers who responded flanked them. Jake was the only one unarmed, but it wouldn't stop him from trying to help. The Public Address system warned passengers in the terminal to find cover, or to evacuate if possible. The sound of gunfire got louder as Jake and the officers ran to the checkpoint.

Inside Terminal Four, the gunman walked toward the line of passengers at TSA checkpoint Charlie. He unslung the AR-15 from his shoulder as he walked. The self-absorbed passengers checked their tickets as they moved forward in the line. The first one to see him was a senior TSA agent, who sat at a podium, and checked tickets against IDs.

The agent looked into the man's cold eyes, and saw the weapon pointed at him. He started a prayer before two rounds penetrated the agent's chest. The burst of gunfire turned heads. The smell of cordite wafted through the area. Passengers fell to the ground, and tried to cover themselves to prevent becoming victims. They crawled away in opposite directions leaving an irregular path for the gunman to walk through.

It reminded Eric how Moses led the Israelites through the God-parted Red Sea. The thought didn't slow him as he continued his indiscriminate slaughter of the innocents. He left behind his own Red Sea. The wounded cried for help. Others died immediately. Lying across their stroller were two-year-old twins, their bodies shredded by the gunfire. Their mother saw the murder of her children and screamed. She brought the attention of the shooter to her. He shot the mother a heartbeat later. Some of his victim's blood splattered across Eric's face. He used to wipe it off during his first tour in Iraq. After the second tour, he learned to accept the warmth of it, and inhaled the metallic tang.

He emptied the remaining rounds of the first magazine into the walls and ceiling, to alert those ahead to get out of his way. Shards of glass and aluminum rained down on the passengers. He rotated and inserted the full magazine. Everyone, including the unarmed TSA agents, ran for cover by the time he reached the screening devices. He paused in the middle of the checkpoint to see if anyone planned to interfere. There was no resistance. Still walking, he left behind four more wounded, and two more dead TSA agents, in his turbulent wake.

He knew exactly where he intended to go, but diverted to his backup plan, when he saw several officers on the run coming at him from the left. He fired a burst at them from the AR-15. They fired back until they saw he wore a suicide vest. He detoured down into the low-numbered C gates. By then, several radio calls had gone out, including the ones Jake and the others heard. The gunman stood in the center of the concourse.

Finding cover behind a pillar, a large, African- American male pilot decided to rush the gunman. The pilot knew he had to try to take the gunman down. He believed he could delay the gunman until help arrived. It was a courageous act, but a fruitless one. The gunman let the pilot come within ten feet before he fired twice. The first round ripped through the pilot's left knee. He fell to the ground and let out a scream of agony. The pilot placed his hands around his knee to stop the bleeding. A second round pierced his back and exited through his chest. Blood streamed out of the pilot's wounds. His pressed, crisp white shirt turned crimson. The First Officer lay still on the floor, not a sound passed from his lips. He went unconscious. The Golden Hour clock, a gift from his

Creator, began to count down.

The gunman stood at ground zero inside the concourse. He surveyed the cowering passengers and airline personnel. An elderly man, deaf since birth, made his way out of the men's room with his cleaning cart, unaware of what had happened. His attention turned to his next stop, when he saw the gunman holding the weapon in the center of the concourse. The gunman pointed his weapon to the ground telling the old man to get on the floor. The old man did as directed. It made no sense, because Eric knew the old man and everyone else, including himself, would die when he pulled the lanyard.

A soldier, also in desert camouflage fatigues, covered his wife, daughter, and newborn son. He, like the pilot, knew he had to do something. He knew the gunman was ex-military. His wife saw what was in his eyes, grasped his arm, and pulled hard. She told him "no." He kissed her forehead, and looked at his daughter, and his new son. He wasn't sure he would see them again. Corporal Stanton stood up, and interlocked his fingers behind his head hoping to convince the gunman he was not a threat. His wife's pleading turned the attention of the gunman to face the brave corporal. The gunman aimed, but did not discharge his weapon.

"Do you have something to say, corporal?"

"Yes sir," Stanton said.

"Say it."

"I don't know why you're doing this. The people in this concourse are civilians. They don't understand. They just want to be able to see their loved ones. I got back from Afghanistan a few days ago. I understand. I know what you're feeling. I feel those things too. There's help available for us, all you have to do is ask."

"Ask who, the V.A.? They don't answer calls."

The corporal didn't want to argue the point. He just wanted to diffuse the desperate situation.

"If you need someone to be a hostage, let it be me. I'm a soldier, like you. Please, let these civilians go."

At least his family would be safe if his request was granted.

"You *are not* a soldier like me."

Stanton unlocked his fingers from behind his head and lowered his hands.

"So, corporal, you'll take a bullet and everything will be fine?"

"Yes, haven't you had enough killing?"

"No, corporal, so lay down and cover your family."

The corporal remained standing a brief time, then knelt down and covered them. The look of hope on the faces in the concourse melted away. Eric surveyed the concourse. There were people huddled together behind whatever they could find. He stopped his turn, and pointed the AR-15 at a flight attendant behind a gate podium. He told her to come to him. The flight attendant shook with fear as tears fell from her begging green eyes.

"No, *please*."

"Now!"

The menacing look he gave her said he was a second away from pulling the trigger. She hesitated, stared at the weapon, and walked toward him fearing every move he made. She looked at the pilot lying face down on the floor. She was scheduled to fly with Fred in a few hours. The gunman told her to stand next to him, and get down on her knees.

After she knelt, he fired the weapon over her head, and around the entire concourse. He shredded anything, or anyone, higher than waist level. She let out a terrified scream.

When the second magazine was empty, he tossed the AR-15 to the floor. He slid the ring of the lanyard attached to the suicide vest over his left hand. From the pouch on his belt, he removed and armed the remote detonator. From his shoulder holster, he drew out the semiautomatic. He told the flight attendant to stand. She rose on weak legs. Her heart raced. She felt the weapon placed against her throat. From Ground Zero, it was time for Eric to talk to whoever was in command at the entrance to the C gates.

Every law enforcement officer had his, or her, service weapon drawn. They hunkered down in strategic positions in the main terminal. The gunman was too far away to take a shot. They waited for the Phoenix SAU team to arrive. Each officer analyzed the calm man who looked back shielded by the flight attendant. Radios were alive with calls adding to the intense confusion.

Jake, and the officers he was with, arrived. He went immediately to the senior officer, a sergeant. The sergeant had found cover out of the line of fire, and gave commands to the officers with him. The sergeant's back was to Jake, so he pulled on the man's shoulder to face him.

"No way! You sure can find trouble," the sergeant said.

"You of all people should know trouble finds me."

The sergeant was a man Jake knew well. No longer a homicide detective, Vince Farina was Wynter's partner on the Bobby Goode murder case. As a reward for his work on the case, Vince earned a sergeant slot at the airport. He planned to live out the last two years he had before retirement, *off* the mean streets—no more visits to Pablo's house with Jake.

"Why are *you* here? I thought you went back to Los Angeles to continue being a famous writer," Vince said.

"I was saying goodbye to Caitland, Wynter, and her dad off for LA in D concourse when I heard the call over the radio. What's this all about, Vince?"

"Well, we have a gunman."

Vince pointed around the corner.

"He killed a traffic cop outside then came into the terminal, and killed a few civilians, and TSA folks. On a threat level of A to Z, I'd say this one reaches M—*motherfucker*."

Vince looked into Jake's eyes.

"There's something else. A pilot in the concourse tried to rush the gunman. He's a large black man, and he was shot twice. That's him on the floor. We don't know if he's dead, or alive."

Vince waited for Jake's reaction. It took Jake a second to process what he heard then he swung around and looked down the concourse. He recognized the pilot on the floor instantly, knew him all of his life. Vince forcibly held Jake and kept him from running to his friend. He released Jake after he promised not to run.

"Control it, Jake, stay focused."

Outside, the airport police cleared the traffic lanes and established a perimeter. The Chevy van remained. Sirens heard outside the terminal got louder. A sea of blue and red light bars, with strobes, on emergency vehicles, surrounded both sides of Terminal Four. Police officers swarmed every floor, rushing everyone they could find to safety. Yellow

crime scene tape flapped in the wind. The EMTs in the first ambulance to reach the scene, removed the dead officer's body. As one of the EMTs closed the rear doors, he looked across at the dead officer's partner, sitting on the curb, next to the van. The EMT thought he might be in shock and approached him to ask if he needed medical attention.

"No, I'm okay."

Seeing the mobile command center approaching, the young officer stood up, and tried to gather his thoughts. As he did, he noticed a scent in the air. It got heavier as he rose. He followed the scent to the back of the van. It smelled like his grandfather's farm— fertilizer. The rear doors were locked. He took out his Maglite to see through the tinted windows. What he saw made him step back.

The department's mobile command center parked behind the van. Inside were Police Chief Thomas Burns, Assistant Chief Michael Weston, and Commander Richard Dawkins. The command center's computers were connected by satellite to the FBI's Virtual Command Center. Law Enforcement Online provided a state-of-the-art communications information sharing portal, they were also connected to the FBI's VICAP, or Violent Criminal Apprehension Program. As soon as the side door opened, the officer pushed his way inside.

"Sirs, the van is full of fertilizer. I saw what looks like a detonator with a flashing red light."

They left the command center to verify what the officer said. After a careful look through the van's tinted windows, the chief spoke.

"Get these vehicles out of here now. Call the experts. Let's move!"

Within minutes, all vehicles surrounding the van sped to a safer distance. A safety zone was established. Police SUVs barricaded entrances and exits to the airport. The bomb squad, and the closest operational SAU mobile unit arrived together. The other SAU mobile units in Maricopa County were still enroute. Sheriff cruisers filled in the few empty parking spaces in the safe zone. K-9 officers held tight on the leashes of anxious German shepherds.

The C958 captain, the terrorism liaison officer, maintained direct contact with the Deployment Battalion Chief and the Phoenix Fire Alarm Room. He made sure that all fire personnel remained clear of the inner perimeter, and the forward and isolated zones. Phoenix Fire CR vans and personnel were in standby. Medi-Vac helicopters set down in strategic landing areas.

Out of the back of the SAU van, eight men in full tactical gear jumped to the pavement. They wore body armor, Kevlar vests, and helmets, with handguns strapped to their thighs. Communications with command were through earpieces with boom mikes attached. Held against their chests were rifles carried with index fingers off the triggers. The first Phoenix PD officers on the scene owned the territory. When SAU Lieutenant Bob Hart arrived, he took operational control over all other agencies.

He listened while Dawkins briefed him on what they found in the van, and that a sergeant was relaying information from inside the terminal with eyes on the suspect. Hart directed the bomb squad to diffuse the explosives in the van. His team would breach the terminal through the doors to the east, and backtrack. He radioed for an update from the sergeant.

"Is the suspect still on the move?"

"No, sir, he's standing dead center in the C gates, with a female hostage in front of

him as cover. He has a weapon at her throat. Civilians around the gates took cover. He looks like he's making his stand there, sir," Vince said.

"Is the rest of the terminal evacuated?"

"Far as I know. I'll send out a second team to take another look."

"Sergeant, SAU will be entering the terminal soon. When we're in position, I want all officers to evacuate from the terminal, and that means you too, sergeant."

"I can live with that," Vince said.

Jake looked hard at Vince. No way would Jake bail out, and let more innocent people die. Moreover, there was no chance in hell he would leave Fred. It would take another SAU team to drag him away. Vince covered his radio.

"What? They're the professionals. It's what they do—the *elite* of the department."

"My friend is down there. I'm not leaving."

Vince did not want to stay at all, but he relented for Jake. He ordered the officers who arrived with Jake to evacuate with the others then he radioed Hart they were clear. He snarled at Jake.

"Every time you show up, I'm that much closer to losing my pension."

Hart received a diagram of Terminal Four. While he spoke, he pointed to positions he wanted his team to take. The disciplined team watched. His tone was direct, but controlled. It was always better to slow things down—mistakes happened in white heat moments. The scenario they were in was fluid—*explosive*.

"We're going to treat this perp as a professional, albeit unstable. He has a mission he wants to complete. When Dorsey gets here, she can try to talk him down, but if he thinks we're playing him, he might figure— what the fuck."

Gina Dorsey was SAU's chief negotiator with a huge reputation for success. In her twenty years as a negotiator, she let people vent, until their emotional stress dissipated. They often surrendered afterwards without firing a shot. Hart was hoping that was how it would turn out in the terminal.

"Grafton, you take up a position here, and Willis you here. Let me know what you see."

Hollywood created SWAT snipers to be shooters. In the real world, they watched suspects through Nightforce scopes attached to Remington 700 rifles and relayed information. They were the last resort if authorized to take the shot.

"Let's move, gentlemen."

The team ran to the east end of the terminal and breached the entrance. As they advanced, they would split up, and cover potential threat areas. Grafton and Willis knew exactly where they needed to go.

After a brief conference with his team, an Explosive Ordinance Disposal Technician, suited up in the bulky bomb disposal suit, with the help of his partner. The suit, made of state-of-the-art ballistic materials, protected him, but he knew there wasn't any foolproof protection. Shrapnel could always find a vulnerable place in the suit. The EOD tech took along a Hammerspike XL, developed Chris Trapp, a Phoenix tactical officer, to breach the tempered vehicle glass with one strike. He could then reach inside to unlock the van's doors. The other things he brought with him were expertise, discipline, rock-steady hands, and balls.

The cumbersome suit made it difficult to move fast. He looked like an astronaut walking on the moon. He approached the rear doors of the van, and took out one of the

windows with the Hammerspike. After opening the doors, he studied what he saw. He determined any attempt to disarm it without the remote control wasn't possible. Sitting beside it was a second trigger device. He radioed back.

"What you thought was ANFO, ammonium nitrate/fuel oil, was wrong. ANFO was what they tried to bring the World Trade Center down the first time. This is ANNM, ammonium nitrate and nitromethane. It's much easier to detonate. McVeigh used it to take down the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. The amount of ANNM here will take down this entire terminal, and if reaches the underground fuel lines, it will take *everything* down for a half mile, including the fuel farm. The ANNM cannot be disarmed without the remote. Whoever constructed this knew what he was doing."

"I'm standing inside one of those Las Vegas casino implosions. This is fucking great!" Vince said.

The C958 directed the Sky Harbor airport's fire department to evacuate to a safer distance. Hart advised his men the threat alert had elevated to bright, fucking red. More ambulances and EMTs arrived. After Hart's team cleared the TSA checkpoint, a limited number of EMTs entered the main terminal to treat the wounded. As soon as they were stable, they were evacuated. Emergency rooms at all area hospitals were stocking medical carts, and preparing trauma rooms to meet any need. ER personnel stood silent while they waited. They tried to prepare themselves for the horrors they would see.

Air Traffic Controllers diverted all incoming air traffic. They separated the news helicopters from the police and Medi-Vac helicopters in the airspace overhead. Sky Harbor Airport went into full lockdown. Ground crews and baggage handlers were told to evacuate. When additional SAU teams arrived, Hart deployed them to the exterior Jetbridge stairs to evacuate passengers inside planes parked at the gates. The flight and cabin crews assisted. A flood of passengers and crew ran as fast as they could across the tarmac, taxiways, and *runways*—appropriately named in the situation. Radios squawked when the passengers had reached a safe distance.

Print and broadcast reporters from every media outlet were ordered to stay behind police barricades. News trucks with station logos occupied a far corner of the safe zone.

FBI Special Agent, John Kelly arrived with agents in FBI windbreakers from the local office. He told Hart the FBI's Hostage Response Team was already on its way from Quantico and would arrive in just over three hours. Hart expressed his appreciation for their help then he told Kelly it was a Phoenix jurisdictional matter. Hart received a radio call from Grafton saying both he, and Willis, had sights on the suspect.

"He's wearing a suicide vest. His right hand holds a semiautomatic, and it's against a flight attendant's throat. His left hand has a lanyard and remote," Grafton said.

"Do either of you have a clear shot," Hart said.

"Negative," Grafton said.

"Negative," Willis said.

"All right, I'm coming in, I need updates."

Hart added a Kevlar vest over his shirt. He secured a semiautomatic holster to his thigh. The temperature, outside reached one hundred degrees. The EOD technician sweltered in his protective gear, as he moonwalked back to the air-conditioned command center as fast as possible. He remained in the armor in case he needed to return to the van. He drank several bottles of water. Gina Dorsey arrived and was briefed by Hart. She was already in tactical gear. They were going in as close as possible to where the gunman

was.

“Sure hope you can talk this guy out, Gina, he’s about to bring Armageddon down on Sky Harbor.”

They exchanged looks and understood the severity of what they faced. They entered where the gunman had, and started toward the concourse. Both monitored every update Grafton and Willis made. They walked passed the last EMT’s finishing up with the wounded then through the TSA checkpoint. On the other side of the checkpoint, standing behind a wall, Hart saw Vince and another man.

“Why are you still here, Sergeant? I told you to evacuate. It was an order.”

Hart pointed at Jake.

“And who’s the civilian?”

“I understand, Lieutenant, but this man refused to leave. I stayed with him until you arrived,” Vince said.

“Arrest him! Drag him the fuck out of here if you have to,” Hart said.

He looked straight at Jake.

“You’re interfering in police business,” Hart said.

“Detective Roberts shot the perp in the comedy club shooting last week. He saved my ex-partner Wynter. I know you’re in command, but I recommend he stay, sir. It would be a mistake to make him leave. He’s a real asset.”

Hart and Dorsey evaluated the civilian.

“I’m retired from the job, twenty-seven years as a homicide detective in Atlanta. I’m on vacation.”

“Then you should know how this works. Sergeant, take this man out now!”

Jake interrupted.

“Sir, the pilot lying on the floor, covered in blood, is my best friend. I’m not leaving without him.”

Hart sized up Jake who reached out a hand for Hart to shake. Dorsey saw the look in Jake’s eyes for his friend. Before Hart could say another word, Dorsey interrupted.

“Bob, he’s ex-law enforcement, one of us. I’ll keep him with me and out of the way.”

Hart was reluctant, and thought he would regret allowing Jake to stay.

“Okay, Roberts, you can stay, to *observe*. Stay back as far as possible with Gina. She’s our best negotiator. You don’t have any weapons do you?”

“No sir.”

Hart looked down the concourse at the gunman. A radio call came. Those standing around Hart heard the report about the explosives in the van.

“Did everyone hear that?” Hart said.

“Sir, those planes parked around the concourse are full of jet-A,” Jake said.

Hart radioed to Grafton and Willis.

“Have you seen any confederates? Are we certain he’s alone?”

“We’ve been watching for a while now. He appears to be a lone wolf,” Grafton said.

“Jake’s from Atlanta, he’s the only *Confederate* here,” Vince said.

No one laughed. Vince looked at his shoes.

“Whose move is it, sir?” Vince said.

Hart, Dorsey and Jake exchanged looks.

“Ours, he’s waiting for us,” Hart said.

He turned to Dorsey while he spoke to the two snipers.

“Gina is here, we’re right behind you. I want you to stay on the gunman. Has anyone got a shot?”

“Sir, if we take a shot, he could reflex, and press the remote trigger. He’s also wearing that vest. If he moves a pubic hair, we might hit the vest then everything blows,” Grafton said.

Jake could see Hart’s stress level spiking.

“He hasn’t blown it yet. He wants something. Gina, we need to talk to him, find out what he wants.”

The gunman stood disciplined and defiant, with his gun still pressed against the flight attendant’s throat. An unknown number of cowering passengers, airline and airport workers, surrounded him.

“What’s your name?”

Her hands shook. She was breathing so fast, she could have hyperventilated.

“Wendy Moore.”

“Stop crying, Wendy, I need you to do something for me. I only want you to deliver a message to the men you see up there.”

He pointed his weapon at the small army at the top of the concourse. She thought she could reach freedom, if she did as he said.

“Okay.”

“I want you to tell them I want a news crew to come to me.”

Wendy hesitated, and searched his cold eyes for the truth.

“Just tell them you want a news crew, right?”

“The sooner you tell them, the faster this will end.”

Wendy knew she had no choice. Eric gave her an obligatory smile. She knew she had to get moving, so she turned away from him, and walked. She kept her eyes on the rescuers. Dorsey had to stop her, because there was no doubt in her mind the gunman would kill the flight attendant to make a point.

“I’m going down there,” Dorsey said.

“Wait,” Hart said.

“I can’t, she’ll be dead in a second.”

She pushed past Hart and Jake. The gunman saw the movement, and told Wendy, only a few feet away from him, to stop and come back. He saw a female SAU officer walk toward him down the long hallway. Along the way, she laid down her semiautomatic on the floor to be retrieved on her way back.

“Hold fire!” Hart said.

It was a critical moment. Jake, Vince, and Hart watched Dorsey raise her hands, as she got closer to the gunman. He held the semiautomatic against Wendy, and used her as a shield. He let Dorsey get to within fifteen feet then commanded her to stop.

“You must have read my mind, officer.”

“I’m Gina Dorsey, chief negotiator for Phoenix PD. What should I call you?”

“The Hand of God.”

Dorsey tried to slow her breathing, and appear calm. She had been in many hostage situations before but had never acted on impulse. She, and the team, had always coordinated before she approached a suspect.

“Officer Dorsey, I’m not here to negotiate with you. I have one demand. I want a

news crew. I have something to say. I want them in fifteen minutes, or we all die.”

Dorsey never took her eyes off him. She spoke into the radio on her shoulder. She told the command center to send in the requested news crew as Eric asked. Hart decided to send two undercover tactical members as the news crew. Eric heard over Dorsey’s radio that they would comply, but it would take longer than fifteen minutes. The reason they gave was the distance to the safety zone.

“Tell them again. You now have fourteen minutes.”

She relayed the information again, and the urgency of the situation.

“Thank you, Gina. Now walk back.”

“Can we just—”

“No, we can’t.”

She turned to walk back.

“Does anyone have a shot?” Hart said.

Only Willis thought he might, but as Gina walked, she crossed his line of sight.

“I authorize the use of lethal force,” Hart said.

There were two loud bursts of gunfire. Both rounds struck Dorsey, one in her right shoulder, and the other in her lower back, just below her Kevlar vest. She fell forward to the floor. Her blood flowed over and down into a pool along the contour of her body.

Eric placed the still hot weapon against Wendy’s throat. It burned her neck. Wendy tried to push his arm. He pressed it harder into her neck and positioned her in front of him.

“Fuck!” Hart said.

“Sonofabitch!” Vince said.

Jake continued staring at the gunman. He came up with a plan and grabbed Hart’s arm.

“Not now, Roberts!”

“Listen. Can your snipers sever his wrist with the remote?”

“What?”

“Can they do it?”

“Why?”

“I’m going down there.”

“No, you’re not!”

“Yes, I am, and if I can distract him as long as Gina did, your snipers can take off his hand, and end the explosives threat. Send one of your men up the Jetbridge behind him. He can call ready and coordinate the kill shot.”

Hart had seen Grafton shoot a gun out of a suspect’s hand at one hundred yards during another SAU operation. He asked both snipers to target the gunman’s wrist with the remote. Hart thought a moment then radioed for tactical officer Rogne. In less than a minute, Rogne stood next to Hart.

“Sir?”

“Get down to the tarmac. Come up on a Jetbridge behind him. When *you’re* ready, call the shot. All three of you will take the shot together.”

He received confirmation from all three. Vince interrupted.

“Rogne, the door code from the Jetbridge into the terminal is 7-5-3, got it? 7-5-3. If you open the door to the terminal, and it’s not disarmed, the alarm will go off, and he’ll have a chance to pull the rip cord!”

“Understood, 7-5-3.”

“Jake, are you ready?” Hart said.

“I’ll distract him by checking on your officer, and then Fred. Tell your men not to fire until I bend down to check on Fred. He didn’t give us much time.”

Jake knew he was taking a big chance. He hadn’t worked with the SAU. He’d go down into the concourse, and do his best to distract the gunman, maybe negotiate a way out, or hug the floor while the bullets flew. He did it in Atlanta more than once.

“You are *way the fuck* out of your mind,” Vince said.

“So I’ve been told. I’d do the same for you, Vince.”

Vince was surprised by Jake’s remark. Jake looked back at him.

“Tell Caitland, I—”

“You tell her yourself. I don’t make domestic house calls any more,” Vince said.

The more Hart thought about it, the more he knew Jake was right. It was the only play. He waited to hear that Rogne was in position.

Jake looked at the gunman and took a deep breath. He tried to slow his breathing. He wiped his sweating palms. He gave a half-smile to Hart then started toward the gunman.

What are you thinking, Roberts? I’m thinking Fred’s down there.

The EOD technician, still suited up, rode inside the protected tug marked Bomb Squad. The trailer behind the tug carried the bomb disposal unit. The tech entered the terminal, while Jake and Hart debated Jake’s plan. He was close to them when Jake started his death march. Vince saw the EOD tech, and briefed him.

Inside the Jetbridge, Rogne squeezed the door handle and rotated it. He stayed low. Once inside, he crawled behind a gate podium. He held a finger to his mouth when several passengers stared at him. He scoped the back of the gunman’s head.

Bobby Goode’s face flashed in Jake’s thoughts then disappeared. As he got closer to the gunman, he stopped to check on Dorsey. He felt for a pulse, it was weak. He acted indifferent toward her. He wanted the gunman to notice his disrespect for the cops. Rogne heard the gunman’s unwavering voice talk to Jake.

“Far enough.”

The gunman told Jake to raise his hands in the air, interlock his fingers behind his head, and to turn 360°.

Jake complied.

“Who are you? A reporter? Where’s the camera? I’m down to the two minute warning.”

“I’m a reporter for Fox 10 News. The cop standing up there in the Kevlar vest is in charge. He sent me down here, because I got to the terminal first. My man went back for an extra battery pack he left in the cop car that drove us here. He didn’t want to piss you off in the middle of taping over a dead battery. He’s a minute, or two, behind me. I came down here to find out what you want to say so we can do it right the first take. Our broadcast conversation could get me an anchor spot with a major news outlet.”

“Are you serious? You risked dying, so you could be on network news?”

“Or cable news. My station is a Fox affiliate, so I might get to report the news sitting next to one of their hot, leggy anchors with big tits. Now *that’s* worth taking a chance for I’d say. I covered ISIS in Iraq. I could have been killed over there, and end up with no hot blond co-anchor.”

Eric tried to determine the sanity of the reporter while his own sanity was teetering

out of control. Jake pointed at Fred's body.

"The lady cop is barely alive. Can I see if the pilot is alive?"

"Go ahead."

Jake knew the knee shot wouldn't kill Fred. He wasn't sure if the shot to his back went through his heart. Jake lowered his hands, and walked to where Fred lay.

"Make it quick, and how long does it take to get a battery?"

Jake maintained strong eye contact with the gunman. He saw the man becoming more impatient, and agitated.

"You've got two fucking minutes for your camera guy to get here, or you will take a bullet to the head and they can get someone who has batteries."

Jake had delayed the gunman as long as he could. He knew he was out of time. Fred's breathing was so shallow it looked like he wasn't breathing at all. If the snipers weren't able to take the shots, it was over for him, and everyone else. He stooped down to check Fred's pulse. Fred twitched and surprised Jake. He saw Fred open his eyes then go unconscious again. Fred's Golden Hour was at half past almost dead. The pain was unbearable. He needed medical attention immediately. Another ten minutes and he would be dead from the loss of blood.

Three shots rang out, and the thunderous blasts reverberated throughout the concourse. The huddled passengers screamed. Jake saw Eric's face fly off followed by brains, blood, and skull fragments. He also saw the severed wrist. Jake ran to cover the lanyard and remote isolating them until the bomb squad got there. Wendy ran up toward the main terminal until she ran into the arms of Vince. The rest of Hart's team descended into the concourse. They still had weapons ready and verified the remaining hostages weren't confederates. The team evacuated the passengers down the Jetbridges. Stanton made sure his wife and children evacuated then he ran toward Jake to help.

"I have this, sir, please help the wounded."

Jake placed a hand on Stanton's shoulder then went to Fred. On his way down into the concourse, Hart radioed for the EMTs and stopped at Gina to apply first aid. She was a strong woman and he didn't want to lose her. The EOD tech waddled to the dead gunman. The EMTs arrived and went to work on Gina and Fred. Once they were stabilized, they were placed onto gurneys and evacuated. Hart approached Rogne who stood over the gunman, rifle still on target.

"Good work, Jeramy."

Grafton and Willis came up behind Hart.

"Good work, gentlemen."

The team cleared the area. Keeping the area uncontaminated for evidence collection was impossible. It didn't matter. The gunman wasn't going to a trial. He had a non-stop ticket straight to Hell.

"Area's secure, Lieutenant," Willis said.

"Good work, clear a path for the EOD tech to take the explosives out of here."

The EOD tech took the lanyard and remote from Stanton then disarmed the vest, and removed it from around the gunman. He was all too familiar with suicide vests having disarmed many in Iraq. He took the bloody lanyard still held by Eric's hand and laid it on the vest. He analyzed the remote before he turned off the switch. He radioed to his partner outside by the bomb disposal transport.

"Is it still illuminated?" he said.

“Lights out, boss. I’m going to cut wires now.”

The technician told Hart they would still treat the vest as if it was hot. Hart told him there was a clear path to the transport. Jake thanked Stanton for his help then told him to go find his family. As Stanton moved toward one of the Jetbridge doors, he heard his name.

“You’re a brave man, soldier,” Jake said.

Vince sent Wendy off with one of the EMTs then sat down on a chair while he waited for his pulse to slow. Hart walked with the technician and Jake out of the terminal. Rogne, Grafton, Willis followed. The tech’s partner, also in protective gear held the pressure lid open. After the vest was carefully placed inside, he locked the lid down tight. The EOD tech that brought out the bomb remained standing on the rig, and held on to a side handle. His partner got into the tug and drove to an isolated area on the airfield where planes parked when they received bomb threats. The tech on the transport waved goodbye. A third bomb squad vehicle, a tow truck, took the van away. The threat level dropped from bright, fucking red, to chill out.

Jake and Hart stood together and watched the transport. Two ambulances were preparing to take Fred and Dorsey to the hospital. All the rest of the emergency vehicles returned to the terminal. Special Agent Kelly radioed Hart that the FBI’s Hostage Rescue Team had touched down on Runway 8.

“The cavalry’s finally here,” Hart said.

Jake smirked at Hart. No one in law enforcement liked the FBI.

“Where do you plan to go on your *next* vacation, Roberts?” Hart said.

“Thanks for letting me go to my friend.”

“Wasn’t any way to stop you, was there?”

Jake smiled.

“Looks like they’re ready to transport Fred, I’m going to ride along with them.”

Jake climbed into the ambulance. The driver turned on all the exterior lights, and added an annoying wailing siren. As they pulled away from the terminal, the pain in Jake’s neck and shoulder muscles increased. The EMT sitting next to Jake did a quick evaluation of him. Jake looked through the rear windows. He was glad he didn’t have to take part in the investigation. As he rode in the ambulance, Jake’s thoughts wandered. It seemed like there were more psychopaths loose in the world. They were different, not organized crime wiseguys, or gang members. The latest ones had delusions of self-righteousness. Some deranged individuals hid behind their own twisted versions of right and wrong, or religion. Still others felt life had cheated them. Then there were psychopaths like Jared Hamilton. Jake hadn’t classified the killer with no face yet. He placed his hand over Fred’s. He heard a groan.

