

The young traffic officer on the scene would normally open the Murder Log, but since he was a material witness, another officer took responsibility. He logged all those who entered and left the terminal during the investigation.

Detectives had taken statements from the wounded by the triage area. They caught up with their fellow investigators at the Terminal doors. They waited until cleared to go into the terminal. They all wore latex gloves and medical booties over their shoes. Each had a pocketful of paper and plastic evidence bags. They would work from the outside in until they reached ground zero where the dead killer lay. Police photographers, from the various precincts, entered first. They used Panoscan cameras to get a 360° digital photo of the area. Nikons and Canons shot the rest. It looked like a lightning storm with the flash blasts. They documented the scene. After they left, the investigators and forensics technicians went inside to comb for evidence. Every investigator became sickened when they saw the twin babies. Only a short distance away, their mother's hands reached for them from where she died.

Dr. Clifford Baker, the Chief Medical Examiner of Maricopa County, would probe and dissect the dead later in the morgue. Baker had an impeccable reputation and trained under Dr. Michael Baden. He was in the terminal and pronounced the dead at the scene. He only needed to look at the shattered clock on the terminal wall to establish time of death. Later, Dr. Baker would supervise the identification of the dead by the families. A priest found his way inside and gave the dead their last rites. Baker decided to take the job offered to him at the pain management clinic when he was done with the autopsies.

After the sound of gunfire and screams for help, the quiet was eerie. Blood covered most of the floor, some of it still moist. Blood splatters were in too many places to count. The Crime Scene Technicians collected, bagged, and tagged all evidence including victim's personal belongings. Investigators placed numbered cones where empty shells lay. The gunman's AR-15 and semiautomatic went to Ballistics. Two investigators recovered airport surveillance tapes. CSTs catalogued what they found into the Evidence Report Form. One CST carried the plastic freezer bag containing Eric Sutherland's face. Everyone paused when the gunman's body-bagged remains rolled past. They didn't know who the shooter was, or why he did it. They just knew he was stopped.

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As the ambulance ran every red light to St. Joseph's Hospital, Jake watched Fred's eyes the entire time. He couldn't remember how many times he made the same ride with ex-partners after a shooting. This time was different. He watched a lifelong friend. He held Fred's hand hoping positive energy would flow to him. Jake wasn't going to let him die. St. Joseph's had the necessary tools and skills to keep Fred alive. Their trauma care was one of the best in Phoenix. If Fred survived the shooting, and the ride to the hospital, Jake thought, he had better than a fifty-fifty chance.

When the ambulance came to an abrupt halt in front of the Emergency Room entrance, Jake felt a slight squeeze from Fred's hand. Within seconds, Fred was off-loaded and wheeled into the waiting arms of the ER doctors and nurses. Head nurse Wilma Conley pushed Jake aside and pointed to the waiting room, where he could sit with the relatives of the other victims. He stood in the middle of the hallway and watched until a rapid left turn took Fred to Trauma One. He walked up to the double doors and

watched anyway.

In Trauma Two, doctors and nurses prepared Gina for surgery. In the hallway, it looked like a cop convention. Burns, Weston, and Hart's SAU team, paced outside the double doors and waited for news about their fallen colleague. They followed when she was taken to surgery. Hart arrived and joined them. He asked if they had heard anything from the doctor. Rogne pointed at Jake down the hall. Hart walked over and stood next to Jake.

"How's he doing?"

Jake's professional detached demeanor failed him. His eyes moistened, and he tried to cover his shaking hands. It was difficult for Jake to speak. The lieutenant understood, and gave Jake some space. Before he went back, he wished Fred a speedy recovery. He got a nod from Jake.

The doctors and nurses worked at a feverish pace to prepare Fred for surgery. They intubated him. They brought the CT scanner closer. An IV needle penetrated one of Fred's veins. Several units of blood hung next to the gurney. The heart monitor showed a weak rhythm. The readout kept fluctuating. One of the nurses called out Fred's blood pressure. The doctor scanned the x-rays. Fred went into V-tack, Ventricular Tachycardia, with a heart rate of greater than 100 beats per minute. Fred was in cardiac arrest. The doctor started CPR. He called for the charged defibrillator. He grabbed the paddles and called out "Clear!" Everyone stepped back.

*Come on Fred.*

The defibrillator reestablished normal contraction rhythms of the heart by electric shock. It took two shots of the voltage before Fred came back. They rushed Fred through the double doors on his way to surgery. He wasn't out of danger yet. As she passed Jake, nurse Conley pointed a finger at him, her way of saying, "I told you once." Jake complied and found a quiet place to make the call to Andrea.

"Jake, are you alright? I've been watching the news. They put your picture up and—"

Jake didn't want his picture on the news, and he didn't want reporters in his face.

"I'm fine. I'm at St. Joseph's Hospital. Do you know where it is?"

Bobby's face appeared in a reflection from the window.

"Yes, I know where it is, but I thought you just said you were okay."

"Andrea, it's Fred. They just took him up to surgery. He tried to stop the gunman. He was shot twice. Get here as soon as you can."

"My Fred? How? He's flying today."

Jake could hear Andrea fighting back tears.

"I know. Just get here and I'll tell you all about it. I have to call Caitland."

"I'm leaving now."

Jake knew if Fred made it through surgery, he would be spending time in the Intensive Care Unit. When Jake was in Atlanta, the detectives called it the Eternal Care Unit because most patients were one heartbeat closer to the next life. After he took a few calming breathes, he dialed Caitland. He knew he would get an ass kicking. She wanted Jake to stay away from danger, and leave enforcing the law to someone else. In the studio conference room, holding signed contracts, Caitland took the call.

"Where are you Jake? It's all over the news about the massacre at Sky Harbor. You're at home, right? You went back after we—"

“I’m at St. Joseph’s Hospital, Cait. It happened before I left the terminal. Next thing I know, I’m right in the middle of it. I’m fine, unhurt.”

She was worried about him after Bobby. She knew how many times he woke up in the night, sweating, and breathing hard, from the nightmares he already had. He might be unhurt on the outside, but she worried about the hurt inside him.

“Then why are *you* at a hospital?”

“It’s Fred. He took two shots trying to stop the shooter. He just left Trauma, and is in surgery. I called Andrea. She’s on her way.”

“And so am I.”

“No, wait until I hear how the surgery goes. I’ll call you when he’s out.”

“No, I’m on my way, Jake.”

Her hands were shaking. Small droplets fell from the corners of her eyes.

“There’s nothing we can do right now. Just wait until I call, then we’ll figure out what to do, one step at a time, okay?”

“What happened, Jake?”

“I’ll tell you when I see you. Fred—

Caitland heard Jake’s voice quiver. He paused. He didn’t want to alarm her any more than he had.

“I have to go, Cait. I promise to call after I talk with the doctor.”

Caitland pictured him standing in a corner of the hospital, alone.

“Jake, I’m afraid. Call me as soon as you know.”

“I will, Cait, as soon as I hear.”

Jake disconnected. He saw Bobby’s face in the glass again. It disappeared, and was replaced by Eric Sutherland’s flying face. He went to wait outside of surgery. Nurse Conley was assisting the doctor. He knew if she saw him, she’d be pissed. He saw the officers gathered down the hall where Gina was in surgery. They were not only professionals. They were also a support group. He avoided the waiting room and found a quiet place to sit. He closed his eyes as he put both elbows on his knees and cradled his face with his hands.

He knew from the job, it didn’t matter if you killed a good guy, or a bad guy, the nightmares were the same, and so was the guilt. Shooter’s remorse was the reason why, after a shooting, the department sent you to a shrink. This time he was on his own. He was glad the gunman died. He was happier still he didn’t do it. He also knew he had to keep it together for Fred, Andrea, and Caitland. He dialed Wynter’s cell phone. She and John were at Jake’s house unpacking.

“We’ve been watching the news. I leave town and the whole place goes to hell! Are you alright, Jake?”

“Yeah, I’m good. I’m at St. Joseph’s though.”

“Why?”

“Fred tried to stop the shooter, and took two shots. He’s been in surgery for a while now. I’m waiting for the doctor. I talked to Caitland a minute ago. She wanted to come back, but I told her to wait until I heard something.”

“What do you want me to do?” Wynter said.

“Just stay by your phone. There’s nothing else to do right now.”

“Are you sure?”

“Well, you need to make a call to Vince. He’s busy right now, but try to call him in a

few hours. He made sergeant. They put him in charge of airport operations just two days ago then this landed in his lap. He did a great job. Lieutenant Hart from SAU arrived inside the terminal and ordered all officers to evacuate including Vince. I refused to leave because Fred was bleeding to death right in front of the shooter. Vince refused to leave, and stayed with me. He changed Hart's mind about my being there. Oh, and he misses you a lot."

"Wow, I didn't know. I will only say this *to you*. I miss that cranky jerk too."

"Give him a call. I have to go, just wanted you to know what's going on."

Jake disconnected. When they found him, Special Agent Kelly, and Lieutenant Hart interrupted Jake's thoughts. Jake found his game face. Kelly spoke first.

"We never had a chance to talk, it all moved fast out there. I want to thank you for your help, Jake."

"The same goes for me, and my team, Mr. Roberts," Hart said.

Jake had no reply. He accepted their thanks with a shake of his head.

"We found out more about who he was. Facial recognition made a match before the shot took his face off and stuck it to the wall. It led us to his service jacket," Kelly said.

"Special Forces. He served three back-to-back tours in Iraq, and two in Afghanistan. Explosives expert. His commanding officer recommended him for the Medal of Honor. He saved his unit during an ambush. He turned it down," Hart said.

Jake tried to process the information while he waited for news about Fred. It didn't make sense.

"His name was Eric Sutherland. He's been back in the states about six months. He's from Phoenix. His parents passed away while he was in Iraq. They found this photo inside his camo," Kelly said.

"I have investigators swarming his North Phoenix residence now. The house was a mess, broken glass everywhere. They found his laptop. It had some insights into what might have been going through his head. His phone records show he called the V.A. repeatedly, left voicemails asking for help. They never returned his calls," Hart said.

"Other than the calls to the V.A., he stayed off the grid," Kelly said.

"He never showed up in any Suspicious Activity Reports in the Intelligence Fusion Centers. He was just a pissed off soldier with PTSD," Kelly said.

Jake's pent up emotions went ballistic.

"You know, we take young men and women who are at the start of exciting lives, and we train them to kill. We send them to some screwed up country still in living the Dark Ages, and tell them to make it right. We keep sending them back. They trust us, so they believe in the mission. After the trauma and the killing, they come home stripped of their humanity, their bodies damaged, and broken. They have no limbs to hug with, no legs to walk proud on. When they come home, there *is no* home. We don't take their phone calls? He 'was just a pissed off soldier with PTSD,' Special Agent Kelly? Really? Maybe he felt he didn't fit in anymore. Maybe he felt abandoned. I know personally what that feels like."

Kelly and Hart politely excused themselves and headed back to Gina. Before they got ten feet, Jake spoke out.

"Was it worth it? Was today—the dead and the wounded—worth some bureaucrat not returning a phone call?" Jake said.

"No, of course not, and all we did today was react. Maybe, someday, Congress will

give them the help they all deserve. Maybe Sky Harbor will be the wake up call. Right now, is there anything we can get for you?" Kelly said.

"No, Agent Kelly, unless you can perform a miracle to keep Fred alive."

Standing in the hallway, Jake ran through a spectrum of emotions. He was agitated, because there still was no news about Fred. Frustrated and angry, he paced and looked down the hall for either the doctor, or Andrea. Kelly didn't answer. Hart pressed his lips together.

"I'm sorry, I'm just processing what you said, and trying to decompress at the same time. I called Fred's girlfriend, Andrea. She didn't take the news well, as you would expect."

"I can send a car for her," Hart said.

"She's already on her way. I also called Caitland. I just saw her off this morning. She and some friends left for LA, when all hell broke loose. She was angry I got involved until I told her Fred was shot. I've only been in Phoenix a week, and I've killed one man, and came close to getting whacked in the airport. It's ironic. I *hate* to fly. I got into more trouble here than I did in all my years as a homicide detective in Atlanta, well that may not be true."

"Fred's a good friend of yours, right?" Kelly said.

"Best friend, ever since the first time I climbed out of a basement window in the orphanage. I first met him on the street. We grew up together, street kids. We've been best friends ever since then. He was always there for me. Whenever I fell down, he picked me again. He knew how much I hated the orphanage, so when I got past the nuns, he included me in his family. His moms cared for me, fed me, kept me in line, and then I'd sneak back in for bed check. I've lost too many friends. I can't let go of Fred."

Kelly and Hart laughed when Jake told them the nuns said the two of them would most likely end up doing hard time.

"Hey, is your offer of a favor still good?"

"Of course," Kelly said.

"Great, as soon as I hear from the doctor, I'm going to call his family back in Atlanta. Maybe you could fly them here with one of your Fed-jets."

"Done, just tell me when. Fred earned it today."

"Do you have a final count on how many?"

"Twenty-two all together. Three TSA agents, four uniforms, and the rest were civilians. Eighteen wounded. Some of the wounded are in critical condition. The others have already gone home. Before they left, we took statements. Thanks to you, the entire terminal is still—a terminal. You saved lives today," Hart said.

Jake bowed his head. He wanted them all saved. He doubted he would ever sleep through the night again. He just wanted to be with Caitland.

"*Your* guys did the heavy work. I was only an extra in the movie. Please tell them thanks for me. The outcome would have been significantly different if they hadn't made those shots. Oh, and someone needs to find the soldier who tried to talk to the Sutherland—Stanton."

"They'll receive commendations," Hart said.

Jake chuckled.

"You know the nuns in the orphanage were the original SWAT teams. No weapons, except for a wooden pointer, or a yardstick. They could *swat* the back of your head hard

enough you saw light bars.”

“Who do you think teaches at the Academy? I went to parochial school. I know *exactly* what you mean. I could take an entire convent of the Sisters of Mercy and wipe out ISIS in a day!” Kelly said.

The three men shared a well-deserved laugh.

“How about you, Jake? Did you have a chance to see a doctor?” Hart said.

“I’m good, thanks, not a scratch. As soon as Caitland gets here, everything will be fine.”

Hart returned a smile.

“I spoke to Atlanta PD earlier. They wanted me to tell you how proud they were of you,” Hart said.

Jake shrugged, and thought about his *encouraged* retirement.

*My ex-captain was a Hart. They must be everywhere.*

Kelly checked the time.

“Hey, I’ve got to go. They have a media briefing in about half an hour. Here’s my card. Let me know about Fred’s family,” Kelly said.

Jake took Kelly’s card. Seeing the FBI insignia on it reminded him of Mika.

“And I’m going to see how Gina’s doing. I also have a lot of paperwork to complete. Oh, I’ll need you to stop at the precinct to give your statement. I’m told you know where it is. Captain Bradley said he thought you had gone back to Los Angeles. He told me he was glad you were here. If you could see the news, you’d hear the word *hero* repeated. You’ll find guerilla reporters outside looking for you when you leave the hospital,” Hart said.

They exchanged a firm handshake.

“I’d rather remain anonymous. I only want to see my name on a novel. The press, and the city, should thank every cop, firefighter and EMT—the first responders. They’re the heroes. I just want to slip out of town when Fred gets better. Can I get a favor from you?”

“What do you need, some parking tickets, or moving violations to go away? Outstanding warrants.”

“No, unless you heard something about a warrant. Can you get me a photo of Sutherland while you’re raking his house? Preferably in uniform.”

Hart dialed the lead detective at Sutherlands house. He told him what he wanted, delivered to Jake.

“Done, but why do you want it?” Hart said.

“When everything is stable here, I’m going to walk it into the V.A., and tell them what they caused by not talking with Sutherland.”

“Good thought. We’ll see you at the precinct.”

“I’ll be there. Thanks for believing, Lieutenant. You took a big chance on me out there.”

Hart smiled and walked over to the other officers outside Gina’s ICU room. Jake sat down and rested his head against the wall. He closed his eyes and pictured Fred lying on the floor covered in blood. He was grateful Fred made it to the ER. Then it started. The list was long. Chief of Detectives Edward Fairchild, Jake’s mentor, killed in the line of duty. He thought about Mika, his first love, and first partner. She died taking a bullet for him from Jared Hamilton in the graveyard. He thought about the teenage girl he shot and

killed during a firefight under an I-75 overpass in Atlanta one night. He saw Chipper's face contort from the shotgun blast, while taking on the prison guards on Death Row. Chipper wasn't going to walk from his cell to a lethal dose of anesthetic followed by a lethal dose of Pentobarbital. Then he saw Bobby's face again, the pained frozen look, when Jake killed him only days ago, suicide by cop. He'd add to his collection of the dead—Eric Sutherland.

Jake heard Andrea's voice asking a nurse if she knew where he was. Jake got up and ran to the nurse's station. Andrea ran the last few steps and threw her arms around him. Jake felt her tears on his face and the shaking of her entire body. He knew he had to be strong for her.

"I can't believe this! He went flying and was supposed to be back home by tonight. He told jokes and stories about when you were kids. I never heard him laugh so loud! Thank God you were there."

"No word from the doctor yet. I held his hand in the ambulance. When they were ready to take him inside, he gave my hand a slight squeeze. He's strong. I watched him through the windows of the trauma room. They had to use the defibrillators to bring him back once then they rushed him to surgery. He's going to get through this, Andrea. We're all going to get through this."

"How could someone be so cold and heartless— those poor babies!" Andrea said.

Jake didn't have an answer for her. He had spent his entire career in homicide trying to find an answer, one so *he* could understand, but there wasn't one.

"FBI agent Kelly was just here. They were able to identify him. He was a soldier. He did three tours in Iraq, and two in Afghanistan. He was Special Forces, and an explosives expert—recommended for the Medal of Honor for saving his guys."

Andrea tried to comprehend what he told her.

"Sounds like he came home with a lot of demons, and didn't know how to excise them."

"Why here? Why Sky Harbor?"

"He was from Phoenix. Long story. He tried to get for help from the V.A., but they ignored him."

"Does Caitland know?"

"Yeah, I called her right after I called you. She wanted to come right back, but I told her to wait until we knew more."

"I turned on the television and walked to the kitchen to make a sandwich. Everything was good. Out of nowhere 'Breaking News' flashed across the screen.

They went to a camera shot from some news helicopters, and explained what happened. Why would anyone want to kill all those people?"

"We live in a universe that's in a constant state of violence and chaos—black holes, quasars. It's no different with people. We're made from stardust. Did you want something to eat, or drink?"

"I could use a strong margarita, but a bottle of water would help," Andrea said.

"There's a machine down the hall. I'll get you one. Just sit in here, it's the safest place right now from the hoard of reporters."

Jake took a right turn toward the vending machine. One reporter saw Jake from outside of the ER doors. He made a break for him. Two Phoenix uniforms tackled the reporter. The bottle of water fell to the bottom of the machine. It was cold when he

grasped it. He bought another to hold against his neck. His hands had tremors, which made it difficult to open the bottle. He tried to hide them when he handed the bottle to Andrea sitting on the sofa. He sat in the chair closest to her.

“Tell me what happened out there.”

He didn’t want to talk about it. He hesitated then thought it might help to get his thoughts organized for his statement. He began with saying goodbye to Wynter and John, kissing Caitland. He ended with Andrea’s arrival. Jake’s head dropped.

“I’ve lost too many in my life. I can’t lose another. Fred has to make it through this. It’s wrong they’re all gone, and I’m still alive.”

Andrea put her hand on his tight fists.

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The crime scene investigation was about to end in Terminal Four. The Airport Authority set up detours for passengers to get to their gates. The airport received inbound flights again, and the transportation system worked to recover revenue flights. A podium, with a cluster of microphones, stood at the doors where it all started. The scheduled time for the press conference had passed. Reporters made certain their smart phones had battery life while they waited. The news cameras focused on the podium. People across the country stayed glued to their big screen HDMI television sets. Finally, the news anchors stopped their commentary, and the press conference began.

Mayor Sanchez spoke first. He wanted to assure everyone Sky Harbor was safe again. He said police snipers killed the perpetrator then he gave the totals of the dead and wounded.

Chief Burns commended the work of his police force. The Chief praised Vince’s heroism, and said he would receive a commendation for valor and bravery. Vince didn’t care about a piece of paper, unless it had a picture of a dead President on it. He was ecstatic to hear he would receive another step in pay grade. The Chief continued with as much information as he could.

Finally, FBI Special Agent John Kelly spoke. He told the anxious public who the shooter was and what they found inside the van. He described the valiant efforts by the officers to stop the man. He knew Jake wanted out of the spotlight, so he highlighted the first responders.

The Mayor, Police Chief and Agent Kelly took turns answering questions. The public fed on every detail. The twenty-four-hour news cycle repeated every horrific detail with disclaimers. Survivors who had used their cell phone cameras during the assault called in to CNN, MSNBC, and FOX News. Pundits debated who was to blame. Sutherland was from Phoenix, and had been an All-American on the ASU football team. That surprised everyone. They were stunned to learn he had been recommended for the Medal of Honor for a heroic action in the heat of battle, and turned it down. Then the story blurred. They did not know about the traumas he suffered in Iraq and Afghanistan. They heard the acronym PTSD, and assumed it explained everything.

Andrea, sitting next to Jake, noticed the slight tremor in Jake’s hands, and he couldn’t sit still. He would sit, cross his legs then uncross them. He paced, stood by the only window in the room, and stared out at nothing in particular. Fred had been in surgery for over two hours. One of the fluorescent lights overhead had a failing ballast and flickered. It became annoying enough Jake wanted to rip it out of the ceiling. Andrea walked over to where he stood, and reassured him Fred would be fine.

“Yeah.”

Experience had taught him nothing was for sure. Nothing would stop the way the world turned. It was luck, or chance, that ruled life, not certainty. He thought about the faces of the children he saw, some bloodied from the assault, and others with frozen wide eyes. He saw the terror in the eyes of adults who never could have anticipated the assault. They're thoughts were about Disney World and other vacation destinations to celebrate life, not mourn it. He saw the bodies of the dead TSA agents, and police officers unable to react fast enough to stop him. He continued to stare out the window. He was uneasy. As a homicide detective, he arrived at the crime scene *after* the killing. He wasn't part of it, except for the girl one tragic night in Atlanta. Vince appeared in the hallway. Jake turned from the window and walked to him. Jake held out his hand and got a firm grip returned.

“Sorry it took so long to find you. There's still a lot of activity out there. I was sure glad to see *your* face there. You doing okay?” Vince said.

“I was glad to see *you* there. Thanks, Vince.”

The two looked at one another. They both knew they existed at opposite ends of the spectrum, but this time, they had bonded while they faced death together.

“I hate to say this, but I have to get back, there's a lot of work to do. I couldn't leave until I found you. We'll talk later at the debriefing.”

He started to walk away, but turned back.

“Would you tell Wynter I miss her next time you talk to her?”

Jake smiled because he knew what partners meant to one another. Vince was never overtly sentimental. He always hid behind his smartass remarks. He didn't have any this time. He walked away down the hall, while Jake watched him get something out of his eye. Andrea came up behind Jake.

“He's a good man, Vince. He looked out for our Fred,” Jake said.

Three hours had passed since Fred went into surgery. There still had been no news of his progress. Jake asked if Andrea wanted to get something from the cafeteria.

“Thanks, but no. I'm staying right here until we hear from the doctor.”

They both prepared to wait as long as it took. Andrea sat back down on the sofa, and pulled out tissues from the box on the table. Jake walked to the window again. He needed to see open space. He felt the room close in on him. It had been two years since Jake left law enforcement a tarnished hero. When a man reached fifty, his view of the world began to change. Native Americans described it as changing from the warrior, to the wise man. Jake knew it was time to get out of law enforcement in Atlanta. The events of the day confirmed it. Caitland walked away with him. He was good with it. He loved her and didn't want any more traumas in his life. Caitland was his lover, companion, and healer.

The sound of her voice from the hallway spun Jake around. A look of surprise filled his and Andrea's face. They reached her at the same time. Jake threw his arms around Caitland and buried his face in her neck. Andrea stroked Caitland's arm until Caitland's hand pulled her into the embrace. The three didn't want to let go.

“I thought you were staying in LA until I called you?”

Caitland held his face with both hands.

“I can't leave you alone for a minute, Puppy.”

A long kiss followed. Caitland then hugged Andrea and told her everything would be all right with Fred. He would get through it, because the greatest aviator who ever lived

couldn't stop flying. And, Jake needed all three of them to keep him out of trouble. Caitland's statement brought a needed smile to both of them.

"How did you get here? The airport is shutdown," Jake said.

"They reopened it several hours ago. You must have lost track of the time," Caitland said.

"But the airlines were diverted because of what happened."

"I got a ride in a private jet."

"What?"

"I was in the middle of signings when we heard the news. Angelina offered me her private jet to fly here. I took her up on it. In fact, Angelina rode with me along with her kids. She was on her way to a meeting with some investors for another film she wants to direct. She said to say hello, and to tell you she gets first bid on your life story."

"How many kids?"

"A handful, but she handles them well."

Having Caitland with him was exactly what Jake needed. He was glad the wait was over. His world burned since she left. She returned to put out the flames. He didn't want to let go of her. She sat next to Andrea, her arm around her shoulder. Jake pulled up a chair and sat down in front of them.

"What can I do to help, Andrea?"

"I just want to see Fred. I want the doctor to come here, and say he's going to make it."

Caitland looked at Jake. She saw something in Jake's eyes she had never seen before—fear. He was always the one who took control and fixed everything. She would ask him about it later, when they were alone.

"So, Jake, start from the beginning. Don't leave anything out," Caitland said.

The doctor found them. He wore his scrubs from surgery. He had streaks of blood on his shirt. His untied surgical mask hung from his neck, green booties covered his shoes. All three stood up to hear the news.

"Mrs. Campbell?"

Andrea didn't want to explain she was not the missus.

"I'm Dr. Greene. Mr. Campbell is in critical condition. It took some doing to get one of the bullets out, a lot of muscle to cut through to get to it. The other round left a gaping hole when it exited his chest. He lost *a lot* of blood."

The doctor looked at Jake.

"You know we lost him for a minute in Trauma."

"Yeah, I watched through the windows. Listen, doctor, if he needs *anything*—blood, a kidney, a foot, I'll donate it, except my...you know, he's used to a larger—"

"I think I understand. Well, we won't need anything yet. All of his parts are good. We weren't sure if he would make it *to* surgery much less *through* it, but we have an excellent staff here. They did everything possible to make the surgery a success. Dr. Carter will speak with you when Fred is moved out of Post Op, and into the ICU. Nurse Conley said to say hello to you. Before I go back, I wanted to ask you about something he said to me, just before the anesthesiologist put Mr. Campbell under. His eyes flickered, and he could only whisper. He said not to tell Andrea what happened. He said the letter 'Z' then was out cold. Do you know what he meant?"

The three of them laughed, and explained it to the doctor.

“Funny, you’re quite a group. Anyway, he’s in Post Op.”

“Can we see him?” Andrea said.

“I think I can arrange it. Are you two family?” Andrea jumped right in and said yes. They followed the doctor down one hall and into another to Post Op. You couldn’t see Fred buried under the tubes, wires and monitors.

“You can look for now, but no talking. He’s still out of it, and intubated, so it will be a while until he can speak. When we move him to ICU, we might be able to remove the endotracheal tube in his throat, and then you should be able to talk to him. I’m sure he’ll be happy to see you.”

Greene smiled and walked over to Wilma the nurse. He gave her some instructions, and told her to page him as soon as Fred started to wake. Greene was exhausted. Fred was the last of the critical patients he had worked on all day. He hadn’t lost one. Jake caught him before he went out the doors.

“Thank you, doctor.”

“You’re the guy in the news, right—Roberts?”

Jake nodded and stared into Greene’s eyes.

“I should be thanking you, Mr. Roberts. My wife and kids were there when it happened. They were going to visit their grandmother. They were leaving out of the A concourse, but from what I understand, if he had set off the bomb, they wouldn’t have made it.”

Jake looked at the floor and swung his head. He never took “thank you’s” well. Greene’s statement bothered him. All through the assault, Jake never thought about the others who were there. He never saw them, because he focused on staying alive, and the shooter. His mentor, Ed Fairchild, taught him if he was safe, then everyone was safe.

“I’m glad they made it out, doctor. I only wish they all did.”

The doctor placed his hand on Jake’s shoulder.

“Yeah, well we can only do so much. The rest is for God to decide.”

Greene walked away to find a quiet place to close his eyes for a while. He wanted to decompress, in case they needed him, in the ER again. Jake wasn’t a religious man. He thought about “The rest is up to God” remark made by Greene. He couldn’t accept it, because it put the Great Maker at the *end* of the equation. After what he had seen in his lifetime, he couldn’t believe *any* god would let such horrible things happen to the creatures roaming the earth. None of them asked to be born, or to die. They were made the way they were. None of them could be expected to pass a test when all the questions, never had answers. They were gamed from their first breath. Jake was okay if people wanted to believe, if believing made them feel better. He thought they should believe in themselves more.

Andrea had just kissed Fred’s forehead when Jake walked back into Post Op. Caitland’s hand slid into Jake’s, and she squeezed tight. He thought about holding Fred’s hand in the ambulance, and the weak squeeze Fred gave him.

The three of them stood as close as they could get to Fred. Post Op was dark, except for the LEDs flashing on the monitors. A hissing sound came from the respirator, which helped to regulate the airflow in and out of Fred’s lungs. Jake found himself breathing with the rhythm of the respirator. There were pads with wires on every part of Fred’s body. A small patch of blood had soaked through the sheet above Fred’s knee. A spotted red bandage was over the chest wound where the bullet exited an inch from Fred’s heart.

“I thought he was dead,” Jake said.

Andrea and Caitland looked at him.

“When I first saw him on the floor, there wasn’t any movement, *no* sign of life. We concentrated on the shooter. The paramedics arrived and worked on him. I stayed to assist the bomb squad tech.”

Jake blinked a few times, and touched Fred’s arm.

“After we got the bomb outside, I saw him in the ambulance—”

Caitland put her arms around Jake.

“And he’s here, and he’s safe. He’s going to make it, Jake,” Caitland said.

“Can you believe it? My Fred wanted a pizza before he went under for surgery,” Andrea said.

She made them laugh. The worst was over, they hoped. The three stayed with him until he went from Post Op, into the ICU. There were more cardiac monitors and the hissing ventilator. Attached to his finger was a pulse oximeter that monitored the saturation of oxygen in Fred’s blood. Sutures secured the CVC that administered frequent medication. The IV in his arm supplied fluids, medications, nutritional preparations, and blood.

Jake left to go to the men’s room. After a *long* stop at the urinal, he looked at the man in the mirror as he splashed water in his face, and washed hands. He studied his face to see if he had a new lifeline from the day. He checked to see if what happened had turned his salt and pepper hair completely white. He dried his hands with a paper towel after a wave of his hand in front of an electronic, motion-sensor dispenser.

*If only you could fix life with the wave of a hand.*

