



TOM CLANCY  
DUTY AND  
HONOR

GRANT BLACKWOOD

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS  
NEW YORK

# ONE

## ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

Jack Ryan, Jr., would later wonder what exactly had saved his life that night. One thing was certain: It hadn't been skill. Maybe the heft of the bok choy had bought him a split second, maybe the mud, but not skill. Dumb luck. Survival instinct.

The Supermercado was neither in his neighborhood nor near his frequent errand stops, but it did have the best selection of fruits and vegetables in Alexandria—so Ding Chavez had told him eight months ago, but it had been only recently, since his forced leave of absence from The Campus, that he'd become a believer. Being unemployed had given him a lot to think about and plenty of time to broaden his horizons. The one frontier he'd so far refused to explore despite his sister Sally's exhortations was binge-watching *Girls* on

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HBO. That was his Rubicon. No crossing the river for the Roman legions, no chick TV for Jack Ryan. Soon, though, he'd have to make a decision about his loose-ends lifestyle. Another two weeks and his six-month "probation" would be over. Gerry Hendley would want an answer: Was he coming back to The Campus, or were they parting company permanently?

*And do what?* Jack thought.

He'd spent most of adult life working at The Campus, aka Hendley Associates, first as an analyst and then as an operations officer—a field spook. The off-the-books counterterror organization had been created by his father, President Jack Ryan, and had since its inception been overseen by former Senator Gerry Hendley. So far they'd had a lot of success going after some of the world's "big bads" while still managing to make a decent profit not only for their clients, all of whom knew Hendley only as a financial arbitrage company, but also for The Campus's covert operational budget.

"Seventeen fifty," the cashier told him.

Jack handed her a twenty, took his change, then collected his brown-paper sack from the glum teenage bagger and headed for the door. It was just past eight p.m. and the store was almost deserted. Through the broad front windows he could see rain glittering in the glow of the parking lot's sodium vapor lights. Accompanied by a cold front, rain had been falling in Alexandria for three straight days. Creeks

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## DUTY AND HONOR

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were swollen and the DIY stores nearest the Potomac were seeing a jump in sandbag sales. Perfect weather for homemade slow-cooker chili. He'd just put in a solid eight miles on his gym's indoor track, followed by a twenty-minute circuit of push-ups, pull-ups, and planks, and he hoped to turn his bag full of ground beef, beans, peppers, onions, tomatoes, and bok choy—his mom's most recent superfood recommendation—into a reward for all his sweat. The chili wouldn't be ready until tomorrow; tonight, Chinese-takeout leftovers.

The automatic door slid open and Jack used his free hand to pull his sweatshirt's hood over his head. It was a short walk to his car—a black Chrysler 300 and the first sedan he'd owned in a long time—and then a fifteen-minute drive back to his condo at the Oronoco. The parking lot's surface was new and its fresh coat of asphalt shimmered black under the slick of rain. Moving at a half-jog, feeling the chilled rain running down his chin and into his shirt, Jack covered the thirty yards to his car, which he'd parked trunk-first against the guardrail. Old habits, he thought. Be ready to leave quickly; know your closest exits and highways. Five-plus months of “civilian” life and still a lot of the fieldcraft rules John Clark and the rest had taught him hadn't faded. Did this tell Jack something? Was this just a shadow of a habit, or inclination?

As he neared his car, he saw a sheet of white paper stuck

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under his windshield wiper. A flyer—food drive, garage sale, voting reminder . . . Whatever it was, Jack wasn't in the mood. He leaned sideways and reached for the flyer. Sudden, it tore free in a clump, leaving a narrow strip trapped beneath the wiper blade.

“Shit,” Jack muttered.

From behind, a voice: “Hey, man, give it up!”

Even before he turned, the tone of the man's voice combined with the time of night and location had touched off Jack's warning bells. The Supermercado wasn't in the best of neighborhoods, with its fair share of crack-driven homelessness and petty crime.

Jack turned on his heel while taking two steps backward, hoping to buy time and room to maneuver. The man was tall, nearly six and a half feet, and gangly, his head covered in a dark hood, and he came from Jack's left at a fast walking pace.

Overhead, lightning flashed, casting the man's face in stark shadow.

*Break his pattern*, Jack thought. Having targeted his prey and committed himself to the attack, the man—a crackhead or tweaker, Jack guessed—was laser-focused, confident this roll would go like all the others. Jack needed to change that.

He took a step toward the man and pointed. “Fuck off! Go away!”

Junkie muggers rarely saw this kind of victim aggression. Wolves prefer weak sheep.

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## DUTY AND HONOR

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But Jack's belligerence had no effect. The man's pace and his locked-on gaze at Jack didn't waver. His right hand, hanging beside his thigh, rose up to his waist, palm away from Jack. *He's got a knife.* If his attacker was carrying a gun he would have already brandished it. With a gun you could put the fear of God in someone at a distance; with a knife you needed to get close enough to put the blade against your victim's face or neck. And the palm-away knife grip told Jack something else: The man wasn't interested in scaring him into submission. It was easier to strip valuables from a dead body.

Jack's heart was pounding now, his breathing going shallow. He swept his right hand to his hip, lifted the hem of his sweatshirt with his thumb, his palm touching . . . nothing. *Goddamn it.* He wasn't armed; he had a CCW permit but had stopped carrying his Glock the day he left The Campus. *Keys.* His car keys were in his pocket, not where they should have been—in his hand, as a backup weapon. *Lazy, Jack.*

His attacker hadn't missed seeing Jack's flash of hesitation. He sprinted forward, right hand sweeping up and out in preparation for a cross-hand neck slash. As though passing a basketball, Jack heaved his grocery bag at the man. It bounced off his chest, the contents scattering across the wet asphalt. This broke both his pattern and his stride, but for only a moment, and did not leave enough time to create an opening for Jack's own attack. *Retreat, then. Live to fight an-*

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*other day.* There was no point getting in a knife fight if he had a choice.

He turned, sprinted for the guardrail, vaulted it, and landed in mush. Below him, a slope with patchy grass and cedar ground cover met a line of concrete Jersey barrier along the highway.

Behind him, Jack vaguely registered the man's footsteps picking up speed on the pavement. He started shuffle-sliding down the embankment, using the scrub brush for footholds.

His attacker was fast. A hand clutched Jack's hood and wrenched his head backward, exposing his throat. Jack didn't fight it, but rather spun hard to his right, into the man and toward what he guessed would be the descending knife blade. And it was there, arcing toward his face. Jack lifted his left arm and drove his forearm down, diverting the blade and trapping the man's arm in his own armpit.

With his right hand Jack reached up, fingers clawing at the man's eyes and pushing his head sideways. Together they fell back, Jack on top. They began sliding down, churning up mud and grinding over cedar stumps as they went.

The man was flailing, but with purpose, Jack realized. Trying to free his knife arm from Jack's armpit, the man reached across with his left hand, grabbed Jack's chin, and wrenched his head sideways. Pain flashed in Jack's neck.

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## DUTY AND HONOR

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One of the man's fingers slipped into his mouth, and Jack bit down hard, heard a muffled crunch. The man screamed.

Still entwined, they slammed to a stop against one of the Jersey barriers bordering the highway. Jack heard a sick-sounding thud, followed by an *umph*. Through squinted eyes Jack saw the flash of headlights, heard the hiss of tires on the wet pavement.

The man was rolling sideways, crawling on his hands and knees. Lightning flashed again and Jack could make out a bloody divot in the side of his skull; a flap of scalp drooped over his ear.

*Skull fracture.* A bad one.

Jack was crawling also, but in the opposite direction toward the embankment. He got to his feet and turned. The man was already up and lumbering toward him. Like a drunk trying to walk a line, the man crossed his feet and staggered, gathering momentum until he plunged face-first into the mud. Swaying, he pushed himself to his knees. He reached up to touch the side of his skull, then stared at his bloody hand.

"What is . . . ?" the man growled, his speech slurred.  
"I need a . . . need the . . ."

He scanned the ground as though he'd lost something.

Looking for his knife.

Jack spotted it a few feet to the man's left front. Too late.

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The man pushed himself to his feet and shuffled toward it. Jack charged, feet slipping in the mud as he tried to close the distance. The man bent over for the knife, almost tipping forward as he did so. Jack pushed off with his back foot, drove his knee upward. It slammed into the man's face, vaulting him backward into the barricade. Jack's feet slipped out from under him and he toppled backward into the mud. His head bounced against the ground. His vision sparkled.

*Move . . . do something, he thought. He's coming.* An image of himself flashed in his mind—flat on his back in the mud, throat slashed open, rain peppering his open eyes, the flash of a coroner's camera—

*No, no way.*

Jack rolled onto his side.

Ten feet away his attacker sat half sprawled against the concrete barricade. His head lolled to one side. The gray concrete behind him was smeared with blood. The man was white, pale, in his mid-thirties, with close-cropped light hair. Jack glimpsed what looked like white skull through his lacerated scalp.

"Stay there, man!" Jack shouted. "Don't move."

Blinking as though confused, the man focused on Jack for a second, then rolled sideways and began working with his knees like a toddler trying to crawl on a tile floor. He managed to climb to his feet.

Tough son of a bitch.

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## DUTY AND HONOR

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Jack spotted the glint of the knife a few feet away, half buried in the muck. He crawled to it, grabbed it. It was a locking folder, almost eight inches long, and hefty.

“Just stop!” Jack shouted, panting. He tasted blood in his mouth. He spit it out. His, or the muggers? he wondered. “The cops are coming!”

He doubted this, but maybe it would be enough to either drive the man off or make him sit back down and accept his fate. And a free trip to the ER. Chances were, in the darkness and the rain, no one knew what was happening, didn’t know that Jack Ryan, Jr., America’s first son and unemployed special operator, was fighting for his life with a crackhead mugger in the mud beside a highway.

*Christ Almighty.*

The man was moving now, but not toward Jack. With his left hand braced against the top of concrete barricade, he shuffled forward, stopped, kept going. A car swept passed him, honking, covering him in a sheet of water. The man didn’t react.

*Brain injury*, Jack thought. Despite himself, he felt a pang of . . . what? Of sympathy for a junkie who’d just tried to kill him? *Come on, Jack*. Still, he couldn’t the guy wander off, sit down in some doorway, and die of a brain bleed. *Ah, hell . . .*

“Just stop!” Jack shouted. “Come back—”

The man reached a gap between the Jersey barriers and

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his guiding hand dropped into free space. He stopped walking, looked down at his feet.

A few feet away a car swept past, horn honking.

The man turned left and stumbled forward onto the highway.

“Hey, don’t—”

Jack saw the headlights and heard the roar of the diesel engine a second before the eighteen-wheeler emerged from under the overpass. The truck’s horn started blaring.

Jack sprinted.

The truck plowed squarely into the man.

Jack stood rooted, staring, only half hearing the truck’s air brakes wheeze and sputter.

*Did that just happen?*

*Do something. Move.*

He turned and ran back toward the embankment.

He stopped.

Above, standing at the guardrail, a man was backlit by car headlights.

“Hey,” Jack called. “Call nine-one-one!”

The figure didn’t move.

Jack cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted again.

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## DUTY AND HONOR

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The figure turned and disappeared. A few moments later the headlights retreated into the darkness.

**A**drenaline was a hell of a thing, Jack thought. As was shock. He'd seen a lot of stuff, but something about this . . . The man hadn't even glanced at the truck bearing down on him.

Jack stood in the shower, eyes closed, forehead pressed against the tile wall, as hot water rushed over his head. His hands were still shaking, pulsing in time with his heartbeat.

He'd left. With the man's knife. He'd had the presence of mind to make sure he hadn't lost anything traceable—phone, keys, wallet, receipt, the larger items from his grocery bag—but ninety seconds after the truck struck the man, Jack was pulling out of the Supermercado parking lot. It wasn't until he was halfway back to the Oronoco that he heard sirens.

Was it the shock of it? Maybe, or maybe he just didn't want to deal with the ten thousand questions the cops and media would start asking not just of him but of his father, his mother, his sisters, his brother, and his colleagues at Hendley. Tabloids and A-list media outlets alike would interview his ex-girlfriends and elementary school friends. The headlines would be salacious. Anyone gunning for his father on Capitol Hill would milk the story for all it was

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worth. All that aside, he was the victim; it was cut-and-dried. There was a witness, or at least a possible witness. Why had the man left?

Jack hadn't escaped the assault unscathed. Despite having trapped the man's knife arm, the blade had gotten him—three shallow stabs right below his shoulder blade, none deeper than a half-inch, but enough to leave his shoulder burning and partially numb. Jack wondered, Were the wounds collateral to the struggle, or had his attacker been trying to drive the blade home?

His slide down the cedar bushes had scratched and abraded his lower back and belly so badly it looked like someone had taken to him with a belt sander. Another worry: Had he swallowed some of the man's blood? If so, he had to start thinking about hep C or something worse.

*Guy tried to kill me*, Jack thought. *Why?* Because he hadn't gotten his high for a couple hours? For the twenty-two dollars and change Jack had in his pocket? For his car? This wasn't the first time someone had tried to take his life, but this felt different.

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## TWO

ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

Jack woke before dawn the next day, having slept fitfully. Even dozing, his mind had played and replayed the incident, half dream, half reality, but always ending the same way: The mugger dying and Jack feeling, what? Like he'd done something wrong?

He took another shower, mostly to reclean his wounds, stood under the cold water as long as he could stand it, then got dressed, put his previous night's clothes in the washer, dumped in some bleach, and turned it on.

In the kitchen, he made a double espresso, downed it, set the machine back to standard coffee, then went to the sink, where he'd placed the mugger's knife. He put it in the dishwasher, started a hot cycle, then walked into the living room and turned on the TV. He changed the channel to the local

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news. This early in the morning, hours before the morning shows, they were repeating stories frequently, so it didn't take long:

"Police say a man was struck and killed by a vehicle on North Kings Highway near Telegraph Road last night shortly after eight p.m. He is yet to be identified. If you have any information, the police ask that you—"

Jack muted the television. "Unidentified," Jack said. No mention of witnesses, which could mean something or nothing. If the figure at the guardrail had made a report, the police were just as likely to withhold the information until they could come at him with something solid. Especially someone named Jack Ryan.

For twenty minutes he paced and drank coffee, occasionally leaning over his laptop to scan online news sites for more information. There was nothing. He wanted to call someone, to confide in someone, but he resisted the impulse. He needed to think. Better still, he needed to do something.

**W**ith his mind only partially registering the pre-rush-hour traffic, Jack drove back to the Supermercado. The rain had stopped falling, but overhead, the clouds were still dark and swollen. Sidewalks and lawns were still wet, and potholes brimmed with water. Overhanging tree branches showing

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## DUTY AND HONOR

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the first hint of green buds drooped under the weight of the moisture.

It was past seven, the sun just coming up, and an hour before the Supermercado opened. The parking lot appeared empty. Jack made a second pass, scanning for police cars. Seeing none, he made a U-turn, pulled into the lot, and parked in a stall close to the front doors. He climbed out.

With his breath steaming in the morning air, he walked to the spot beside the guardrail where he'd parked the previous night. He stopped and looked down the embankment.

Aside from a string of yellow police tape looped along the line of Jersey barriers at the bottom of the embankment, the scene seemed unremarkable. In his mind's eye he'd imagined his fight with the mugger had churned the slope into a jumble of mud, grass, and shredded cedar brush. Beyond the barriers, cars on the Kings Highway streamed past at a steady pace.

Jack glanced around. The parking lot was still empty. He climbed over the guardrail and picked his way down the embankment until he reached the flat area alongside the barriers. It was a goulash of mud and patchy, green-yellow grass. On the other side of the barriers the passing cars' tires sent up billowing mist.

Following his mental map, Jack found the barrier against which his attacker had fallen. He knelt before it. There was

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no trace of blood on the gray concrete. Either the rain or a first-responder fire truck had washed it away. Jack stood up and walked along the barriers, looking for any trace of what had happened the night before. There was nothing.

He headed back up the slope. Ten feet from the top, a flash of something caught the corner of his eye. He stopped, scanned the ground. Jutting from under a scrub brush beside his foot was the corner of a business card. Jack stooped over and picked it up. Not a business card, but a hotel key card.

“Hey, what’re you doing down there?” a voice barked.

Jack looked up and saw a man in a dark blue suit standing at the guardrail, one foot resting on the post. “What’s that?”

“I said, what’re you doing? Come here.” The man removed a wallet from his suit pocket and flopped it open, displaying what Jack guessed was an Alexandria Police Department investigator’s badge. “Come on, get up here.”

*Shit*, Jack took a breath, trying to slow his heart.

With the hotel key card palmed, Jack climbed the remaining distance, then stepped over the guardrail. He stuffed his hands into his anorak’s pockets. Under his right forearm he felt the reassuring bulge of his Glock 26 in its hip paddle holster.

“Take your hands out of your pockets,” the cop growled. He was in his mid-forties, stocky like a wrestler, with wavy red hair.

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## DUTY AND HONOR

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Jack did so and the cop gave Jack a practiced head-to-toe scan.

“What’s your name?”

“Jack Ryan.”

“ID.”

Jack pulled out his wallet and handed over his driver’s license. The cop studied it for five seconds, glancing from it to Jack’s face several times before nodding slowly. “Huh. Are you—”

“Yep,” Jack replied.

“Aren’t you supposed to have a Secret Service detail or something?”

“Officially, maybe, but I complained to their boss, so they gave me a pass.” Jack smiled.

The cop didn’t reciprocate. “What were you doing down there?”

Jack had been mulling this over in his mind. The chances were even that sooner or later he was going to come into contact with the police over this. He wasn’t expecting it to be this soon, however. Had the witness come forward?

Jack hesitated, partially because he thought it would look right and partially because he’d started second-guessing his decision, then replied, “I was here last night.”

*You’re committed now, Jack.* Whether the lie was going to save him trouble or buy him more was yet to be seen.

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The cop's brows furrowed. He gave Jack the kind of hard-eyed stare that seemed to come standard-issue to all cops. "When it happened?"

"I think so."

"Tell me. From the start."

"I went to the gym—"

"Which one?"

"Malone's, on Foundry, near the DMV."

"Keep going," the cop said.

"Then I came here for groceries. Must have been around eight."

The cop held up his finger and glanced down at Jack's driver's license. "This address . . . that's the Oronoco, right? Supermercado's not exactly in your neighborhood, is it?"

"They have the best fruits and vegetables. So I paid and came out. It was raining."

"About what time?"

"Eight-fifteen or so. I walked to my car and then heard—"

"Before or after you got in your car?" asked the cop.

"Before," replied Jack "There was a flyer or something stuck to my windshield. I grabbed it, then heard honking coming from down there. It sounded like a truck, an eighteen-wheeler."

A *flyer*, Jack thought. The word caught in his head. Before he could think about it, the cop said, "Then what?"

"I put my grocery bag down—"

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“Where?”

“On the hood of my car,” Jack said.

“Peppers and tomatoes?”

“What?”

“The responding officer found some peppers and tomatoes on the ground right about here.”

“Oh. Yeah, I was making chili. Anyway, I walked to the guardrail and looked down. I heard skidding, saw headlights, then heard a crash—I think.”

“You think?” the cop asked. “What’s that mean?”

“I mean it was raining and dark and I’m not sure what it was. It didn’t sound like your standard car crash. When I got up this morning I saw the news, about the guy that was hit, and put two and two together.”

“And then drove down here to . . . what? Render aid?”

Jack didn’t take the bait. For cops, biting sarcasm was often an effective interview tool, a way to put people on the defensive: Find an inconsistency, the scab of a guilty conscience, then pick at it and see what happens. It wasn’t personal.

Jack replied, “I don’t know why. Wish I did. Guilt, maybe. If what I saw was—”

“It probably was. Why didn’t you call it in?”

Jack shrugged. “I wish I had.”

The cop took this in, then nodded slowly. “Well, it wouldn’t have made any difference. He was dead on scene. Just parts. Did you know him?”

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"I don't know. Who was he?"

"We're trying to figure that out."

"What'd he look like?"

"You mean before?" the cop said with a grim smile.

"Yeah, before."

"Tall, thin, white, mid-thirties."

Jack shook his head. "Don't think so. He didn't have any ID? Nobody's come forward?"

"Nope. So, tell me: What's it like? The Oval Office, I mean."

The question caught Jack off guard. Perhaps as planned. "Like you see in the pictures. I'm not there much anymore. Dinner once a week, parties here and there."

"You don't like being First Son?"

"It's okay," Jack replied. "I prefer my privacy. Luckily, I don't go to bars, don't forget to put on underwear, then get out of cabs in front of the paparazzi . . ."

The cop let out a belly laugh. "Yeah, that wouldn't be a good look for you. Your mom as nice as she seems on TV?"

"Every bit of it," Jack replied with a smile.

"So, tell me the truth. What were you really doing there? If it's nothing too bad I can try to keep it under wraps."

"I already told you. You think I'm lying?"

"I've been a cop for twelve years. I think everyone's lying. Except for my dog. He never lies."

Jack smiled. "Dogs are good like that. What's your name?"

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“Doug Butler.” He stuck out his hand.

Jack shook it. The motion set off a flash of pain in his shoulder blade.

Butler saw the wince: “You okay there?”

Jack nodded. “Weighted pull-ups. I’m starting to think I should give them up.”

“What, you’re into that CrossFit stuff?”

“No, just fighting the ticking clock. Listen, Officer Butler, I know it’s odd, me coming here. Even if I couldn’t have done anything for the guy, I should have called it in. I don’t know how to explain it.” This was the unvarnished truth.

“Nah, I get it. It’s a form of survivor’s guilt. You might not have actually seen it, but, in essence, you saw a guy die last night. That’s a hard thing.”

Jack resisted asking if there were any other witnesses. Cops had many different kinds of radar, including one for people who were too curious—or too helpful.

Butler said, “You know I’m going to need a statement, Jack.”

“I understand. Will it end up in the media? If so, I should probably let my dad’s press guy know.”

“Not likely. Just between us, the truck driver said the guy just stepped out of nowhere. Didn’t even look up. Probably never knew what happened. It’s not a bad way to go, all things considered.” Jack detected no facetiousness in the statement. Consciously or subconsciously, Butler had given a lot of thought to how people died. A cop thing.

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“No idea who he was?”

My guess is he was homeless, maybe high. It happens. Why he was walking around in the rain . . . who the hell knows.”

“Why are you out here? Investigating, I mean.”

“Standard practice for an unexplained death. We have to tick the boxes, make sure we don’t miss anything. Plus, we’re about five miles from the White House.”

“What’s that mean?”

“Nothing, forget it.”

Butler pulled a business card from his wallet. “Write your number on that.” Jack did so, then Butler handed him a second card along with his driver’s license. “I’ll call you tomorrow for that statement. Over the phone should be good enough.”

Jack was pulling into the Oronoco’s garage when his mind again looped back to the word *flyer*. He pulled into his parking spot, climbed out, then stood, hands in pockets, thinking.

“What is it?” he muttered.

*It had been blank.*

The flyer on his windshield had been a blank piece of copier paper.

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# THREE

ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

Muggers are opportunist criminals, Jack knew. Their planning is limited. Their ambushes usually consist of blindsiding their victims. They didn't use delay-attention tools. Another thing: Who passes out flyers in a rainstorm? Thinking back, Jack didn't recall seeing flyers on any of the other cars' windshields.

Was he overthinking this?

*No. The knife.*

He got up from the couch, walked into the kitchen, and opened the dishwasher. Using a dish towel, he pulled the still-hot knife from the utensil rack and laid it on the counter. He studied it, from the tip of the blade to the end of the haft, but found no markings save a lone, six-digit number beside the thumb stud.

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Jack pulled out his phone, took several pictures of the knife, uploaded them to his Dropbox account, then sat down at the dining table with his laptop. In his browser he went to tineye.com, loaded the images, and hit the search icon. The results appeared instantly on his screen.

The knife was made by Eickhorn Solingen, a model called *Secutor*. Jack Googled the company. It was based in Solingen, Germany, with plenty of online retailers. Jack clicked on several of them and found a price: \$175.

What was a crackhead doing with an expensive knife? At the first sign of withdrawals a real junkie would have sold it for a couple rocks. Jack zoomed in on the knife. Along the blade's swedge was the word *Secutor*; beneath it a four-digit number. Near the thumb stud was Eickhorn Solingen's logo, what looked like an upright squirrel holding a sword.

"Same knife, different markings," Jack said to himself.

Jack picked up his phone and scrolled through his contacts until he found what he was looking for. He tapped Dial.

"Shiloh River Gun Club," the voice on the other end said.

"Is this Adam?"

"Yep. Who's this?"

"Jack Ryan."

"Hey, Jack. Haven't seen you around for a while. You need to come in, put some rounds down range."

"I know. Listen, I need a favor. A buddy of mine is looking at buying a knife on eBay, an Eickhorn Solingen—"

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“Nice blade.”

“—but the markings look odd. Can you take a look?”

Adam Flores was the co-owner of Shiloh River Gun Range, a private shooting club John Clark and Ding Chavez introduced him to. Outside of a military base, Shiloh River had one of the most realistic combat ranges on the eastern seaboard. He and Adam, a militaria aficionado, had become passing friends. If it went boom or was sharp, Adam knew about it.

Caps? This was normally a question Gavin Biery, The Campus’s director of information technology, would field, but that avenue wasn’t open to Jack. Gavin had stuck his neck out for Jack countless times when he was an employee, and he’d probably do it now, but Jack wasn’t going to put him in that position.

“Sure,” said Adam. “E-mail the pics and I’ll have a look around.”

“Thanks.”

Jack disconnected. From the pocket of his anorak he pulled the hotel key card he’d found at the scene. Emblazoned on the card’s blue front was a large red 6. Motel 6, Jack realized. But which one? He turned the card over, looking for markings. He found several, all number sequences. In turn, he typed each one into Google alongside the search term “Motel 6.” The third sequence—1403, the franchise identifier, apparently—found a match belonging to a motel in Springfield, about eight miles west of Alexandria.

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This, too, made no sense. While Motel 6 wasn't exactly a five-star hotel line, it was branded, mid-priced, with what Jack thought was a decent reputation. Assuming this card belonged to his attacker, it wasn't the kind of dive motel a junkie would choose, or could afford. And why Springfield? Why not one of the half-dozen motels within walking distance of the Supermercado?

Jack realized his scalp was tingling. Someone had tried very hard to kill him last night, and that someone was looking less and less like a crackhead mugger. Having someone hunting for his head was nothing new, but this felt different. He realized his separation from The Campus had lured him into a comfort zone.

*Ysabel.*

Jack snatched up his phone and dialed her number, a flat owned by her father in London. Jack checked his watch; it would be midafternoon there. Before the line started ringing, he changed his mind and disconnected. Until he knew more, he didn't want to tell her what was happening. She would worry. She would be on the next plane out of Heathrow.

He dialed Ysabel's father's direct line. He answered immediately.

Arman Kashani was no fan of Jack's. Rightly or wrongly, he held Jack responsible for an assault on his daughter. In an attempt to get to Jack, Yegor Morozov's people had nearly beaten her to death. She'd spent three weeks in the hospital

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before moving first to a private-care rehabilitation facility on London, then to her father's flat. Jack didn't begrudge Arman's animosity. If and when Jack had a child of his own—especially a girl—God only knew how he'd react if that child was threatened. For her part, Ysabel had been slowly but steadily working to change her father's mind about Jack. It seemed to be working.

“Good afternoon, Jack. What can I do for you?” The man's tone sounded almost pleasant. Almost.

“Mr. Kashani, I may have a”—Jack paused, searching for the right word—“problem you need to be aware of.”

“Which involves my daughter?”

“Probably not, but just in case—”

“As she has been since the day she arrived, she's well protected, Jack. I have two former SAS gentlemen who are never far away.”

*That would do the trick*, Jack thought. He hoped. If, in fact, last night's attack had something to do with Morozov and some loose end Jack had missed, he'd prefer Ysabel have all of Hereford there. Thinking of this, Jack felt a knot of anger in his belly. They came after her and now him. They'd missed him, and he was going to turn that to his advantage.

“I'll bet she loves that,” Jack said to Arman.

“She does not love that, not even remotely, but I love her, and until she's fully recovered I will—”

“I wasn't disagreeing with you, sir.”

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“Good. You will keep me posted on this trouble of yours?”

“I will. As I said, it’s probably nothing. I’d suggest you don’t say anything to her until—”

“I wasn’t planning to. Take care, Jack.”

The line went dead.

Jack laid the phone down on the table and walked to the balcony windows and looked out. Below, the Potomac River was swollen. Its calm surface hid the strong spring current. A pair of yellow racing shell, their crews heaving and leaning in unison, glided past the mouth of the bay. Jack watched until they disappeared from view.

*Who wants me dead?* he wondered.

*And why?*

And had the mystery figure been a part of it?

He got an answer to his second question, at least a partial one, an hour later, when Adam Flores called back. “Jack, you’ve got yourself a pretty unique blade there. “It’s Eickhorn Solingen Secutor, all right, but not a commercial model. The blade’s thicker, there’s a lanyard slot—”

“Give me the condensed version, Adam.”

“Right. Eickhorn Solingen supplies the German *Heer*—the army—with all its combat knives, but most of those are fixed-blade KM 2000 models. The one you’ve got is a spe-

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cial issue, a lot of one hundred issued to the KSK, probably for special commendations and whatever.”

“KSK?” asked Jack.

“Kommando Spezialkräfte—Special Forces Command. In 1997 the Bundeswehr rolled all its SpecFor units into one. KSK is the cream of the elite, Jack. Think SEALs, Delta, Green Berets, and Marine Force Recon all rolled into one.”

This explained a lot, but also raised more questions.

It explained why his attacker hadn’t behaved like your typical mugger. It also explained, at least fuzzily, the figure he’d seen standing at the guardrail. The backup man in case his attacker failed. If so, why didn’t he finish the job?

On the other hand, why a knife at all? Why not a gun and a noise suppressor? He could have dropped Jack from thirty feet away and kept walking.

Knives were silent, and perhaps the man’s command to Jack—“Hey, man, give it up!”—answered this. A cover story. If anyone happened to overhear and/or witness Jack’s murder, the details—from the man’s appearance to his language to his choice of weapon—would fit, and for an ostensibly homeless crackhead the trade-in value of a gun outweighed its usefulness. They’d chosen the right neighborhood for the attack. Finally, though the murder of the President’s son would trigger outrage and a massive law enforcement re-

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sponse, a mugging gone bad would, if staged correctly, lead nowhere substantial. But a professional killing would see the government turning the country upside down.

Someone had gone to a lot of trouble to assassinate him. If this had something to do with Yegor Morozov, the sophistication of the op made sense—but not the timing of it. Why wait so many months to come after him?

The choice of knife, a rare and expensive Eickhorn Solingen Secutor, was also curious. What did that mean? Jack knew plenty of special operators who felt attached to a particular piece of gear, whether it was a knife or a plastic army man his son had given him. In this business you took good-luck totems wherever you found them. Was this the case with his attacker?

Either way, one thing was certain: Whoever this was, they weren't going to stop at one attempt. And he had to assume Ysabel was in fact on their radar. He had a choice: Hide and call in reinforcements or handle it himself? Hiding was a nonstarter. Even if it was in his nature, given the lengths to which his attacker had gone so far, lying low would do no good.

For now, he was taking the latter route.

He'd take the fight to them.

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