



[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
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Designated Survivor

Chapter 15

by Jeff Somers

15.

Nine minutes before he disobeyed a direct order, Frank Darmity sat spread-eagled on the floor of Level Eleven, right where he'd been dropped by the black bitch. He'd unstrapped his body armor but hesitated to pull it off completely. Every tug to the straps had sent a shock of agony up from his abdomen. He sat limply, bathed in sweat. He'd heard himself whimpering. He refused to call for help. He'd been in *charge* of the situation. And he'd been tricked by a soft yuppie and a mixed-breed cunt.

He had to clean up before reporting in.

There was blood. A lot of blood, it looked to him.

Sucking in breath, he lifted the vest up, starting from the lower right corner, where the blood was dripping. The pain smacked into him. A burning, screaming pain like he was hooked right into a nerve, yanking something out with him. The whole operation had gone to hell. Because it was riddled with people like Amesley. Pencil-pushers. Softies. People who sat behind desks and pressed a button, thought that made them men of action.

He closed his eyes and drew in a deep breath. Told himself that's where patriots like himself came into play. They would do

the hard, bloody work. And set things right. And he'd be a hero, afterwards. Once the shock wore off, his name would be up there with Washington. Jefferson. Great Men. Because he *did* things. He didn't talk and talk and talk. When assholes like Amesley pressed that button, it was men like *him* who stood up and took care of it.

Clenching his teeth, he jerked his arms and yanked the vest free.

A wave of agony swamped him, lit up his nerves. He screamed. Everything turned hot and burning for a moment. He clamped one hand down on his belly and felt the warm, wet blood. Leaking. Not spurting.

Slowly, the pain receded. He lay sprawled, panting, sweating dripping off his face. He lifted the vest up and examined it. Blinked sweat from his eyes. The vest was deformed, a shallow protrusion like a finger jutting out. A backface, he thought. The bullet hadn't penetrated the armor, but had deformed it, pushing the vest material into him with the force of a gunshot.

He pushed the vest aside and hunched over himself, examining the wound. It was shallow. The blood had already almost stopped. It was just an ooze now.

He wiped one hand over his face. Smearred blood all over himself. Steadied himself and pushed himself up on his elbows. Stiffened and grunted as the pain slammed into him. Waited it out. When it was just a dull throb again, he pushed himself up onto his knees. Waited out another searing tendril of fire.

On the floor, still in the vest pocket, his walkie-talkie squawked.

"Mr. Darmity," Amesley's crisp, flat voice barked. "Report in."

Mr. Darmity. Never Frank. Or Joe. Or whoever. Always *miss* this and *mister* that. Fucking officious little prig. Thought he was smarter than everyone else.

That would change. A whole new world was coming, and guys like Amesley, like Renicks, like his bitch agent Begley, would find themselves on the bottom, looking up. Jumbo Softies. Big titles, nice suits. But soft. They had all this rotten infrastructure set up to keep them up above everyone else. But he was there to help tear it down, even up the playing field.

The walkie-talkie crackled to life again. “*Mr. Darmity.* Please return to the Security Office immediately.”

Being a patriot, Darmity knew, was not about taking orders. Chain of command was important, of course, in the normal course of things, but all free men disobeyed orders when their intelligence or their experience told them it was the best course of action. The country had been built on the independent action of free-thinking men. The army hadn’t wanted him. Fuck the army. Bunch of brainwashed assholes, taking orders, strutting around with ribbons on their fancy uniforms. He’d found a way to serve his country. Had been in deeper shit and under heavier fire than anyone in the fucking army. The recognition — the medals and the rank — hadn’t meant anything to him. He’d just wanted to serve his country, his President.

He checked himself carefully, lifting up his clothes and probing his skin with his bloodied fingers. Just the one wound. Nasty. It would curdle and get infected, but it wasn’t dangerous in the short-term. In the short-term he didn’t have time to ward off infection, to dress and pack it properly. He was a hard man, he told himself. Other men would scamper to the Security Office,

beg one of Amesley's soft little agents to bandage them up. He was harder. It could wait.

He pushed himself up, using the wall for balance. Pain shot through his belly, but he clenched his teeth and took a few deep breaths, mastering it.

He walked around in a circle, breathing deeply. Watching the floor for blood droplets. His side burned and stabbed with every move, but it was tolerable, and he thought the bleeding had stopped. He knelt and picked up the vest again, looking it over. He couldn't put it back on; the deformity would slip right back into the wound and the pain would be intolerable. He prodded the lump with his fingers but it was immovable. He dropped the vest, retrieved his gun and the radio, and stood for a moment, breathing hard.

"Mister Darmity!"

He clicked the walkie-talkie off.

He couldn't kill Renicks. He knew that. Amesley thought he was stupid; he knew *that* too. Men like Amesley always thought the people that actually did things for them were stupid, but it was a logical fallacy. He didn't get things done because he didn't *know* how to get things done. It was the other way around: Guys like Amesley sat behind desks because that was all they were good for.

At least Amesley had the right ideas about most things. Renicks was just like him — a Softy — but on the wrong side of things. He thought back to the drive over. Renicks in his whiny little voice holding up his phone. Telling him he'd report him. Another asshole, thinking he could push a button, make things happen.

But what happened when all the Button Men went on strike?
Turned around?

The girl he would kill. Payback. She was an enemy combatant. He'd gone into this thinking that if nothing else, at the very bottom, they were all Americans and due some sort of baseline dignity. He'd believed that. People could disagree. Enemy prisoners were treated with respect. He'd intended to treat even Begley with respect. But then the bitch had gone and shot him. He couldn't kill the fancy Mr. Renicks, but he could *hurt* him, and he could kill the bitch. No loss there.

Amesley would forbid it. As Darmity moved towards the elevators, he decided not to check in. Begley was Amesley's, and he would protect his people even if she was on the wrong side. Even if she had *shot* him. You couldn't disobey orders you hadn't actually received. If he stayed offline now, he would only be disobeying the order to check in. A misdemeanor at worst. Darmity had enough experience with disciplinary actions to know that in the flush of victory it would be forgotten. Forgiven.

He pushed a series of buttons on the elevator console. The doors slid shut. He checked the chamber on his weapon and pushed it back into its holster. Took as deep a breath as his wound would allow. The elevator began to sink. He didn't need Amesley and his soft boys and girls. Everyone thought he was stupid. But he knew where to look for Renicks and Begley. Where Suits like Amesley never thought to look: The sewers. The service corridors.