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# Designated Survivor

## Chapter 23

by Jeff Somers

**23.**

Ten minutes before reflecting that they didn't make Secret Service agents the way they used to, Frank Darmity lay on the carpeted floor with his eyes closed.

It was a generic office. Just a desk, a filing cabinet, a phone. Two comfortable chairs in front, one leather chair behind. Nothing else. Small enough for a tall man to reach both walls with outstretched arms. The sort of room set aside for when a visiting dignitary brought a dozen secretaries and each one needed a desk. The sort of space that became essential if you ever *did* have to move the entire Federal Government into the facility, finding space for every assistant to the assistant vice everything.

The door had a simple lock. He'd given it a good look when they'd brought him in. Being gentler with him than they should have because he was one of them. Didn't stop them from handcuffing him, but when he'd hesitated at the doorway, pretended to be bothered about being locked away, they'd given him some latitude and he'd gotten a good look at the lock.

He could kick the door open with one shot, he was pretty sure. If he didn't mind the noise. If he was going to do some sneaking, it would take him a few minutes to pick it. He didn't

know if they'd posted a guard. First things first: He had to get the handcuffs off.

He lay with his eyes closed and relaxed. Did an inventory of every muscle and made sure each was as relaxed as possible. People didn't realize how tense they were even when they were relaxing. You had to consciously think of each muscle group and force it to go slack. You had to be truly aware of your body. He took several deep breaths. Then slowly raised his legs, bending at the knees. Lifted himself up slightly and rolled his shoulders, slowly sliding his wrists down over his hips. It took two minutes of slow contraction. The wound in his belly burned and sizzled. He forced himself to breathe deeply and steadily, straining for every centimeter until his hands slid free behind his knees. A moment later he slipped both feet over the handcuffs and sat up.

He made a quick survey of the office. Didn't expect to find anything in the drawers and wasn't surprised. He had nothing handy to pick locks with.

He stepped up to the door and pushed his ear against it. Held his breath. Heard nothing.

He seethed. Amesley. He knew the Director was a soft man. An Office Man. A fucking Paper Pusher. He'd known that going in. President Grant had known that going in. That was why Grant had given Darmity his private orders, which were to keep everything on track. He hadn't actually said that. But Darmity knew Grant was a subtle man. A man he could never hope to fully comprehend. A man beyond him. And that was okay. He was okay being Grant's inferior. Grant was the only man whose superiority he acknowledged. The President hadn't had to issue direct orders. Darmity understood anyway. Anticipated. And he

knew that an Office Man like Amesley would go Weak Sister in tight places.

His hands curled into fists. Sneaking up behind him. When he was *getting somewhere*. Making the bitch squeal, drawing Renicks out of hiding. Fucking paper pushers. He'd pressed the button, and when the Button Man had shown up he'd cowered back in terror.

Softies had to learn: If you press the Button, you're *not in charge anymore*.

He turned and walked back to the desk. Picked up the phone and dashed it to the floor. The sound of cracking plastic seemed loud and startling in the quiet, muffled atmosphere of the room. He waited, listening. There was nothing. Taking three steps back, he stared at a spot just below the handle of the door, right where the latch slid into the jamb. Closed his eyes. Reared back and kicked it. His foot connected solidly and the door jumped, the latch bent but holding. He settled himself, took another deep breath, and kicked again. With a vibrating pop the door snapped open and crashed against the wall outside. The offices had never been intended as holding cells. He nodded to himself. He was the only person on the whole operation who knew what he was doing.

Darmity waited, crouched, cuffed hands held in front of him. He listened for a moment. There was nothing. He approached the door slowly, listening. Stepped out into the hall and looked around. It was completely silent. He was just a few dozen feet from the Security Office. He might as well be in another state for all he could hear. He turned left, heading away from the office and started walking, scanning each door. The elevators were out,

though he doubted Amesley would bother to change the access codes; he didn't want to call attention to himself. He needed a weapon. He needed something to get the cuffs off. He needed a radio, so he could listen to the reports coming in.

He needed to find Renicks before the Softies did. He needed to be in charge of getting the Secretary's cooperation.

Son, I'm giving you the most difficult mission of all. I know you've had the hardest road. I know you've been unappreciated — except by me. Except by me, son. I haven't been able to give you the praise you deserve — yet. But I will. When the time comes.

He made a loop around the level, heading away from the Security Office through the empty corridors, then circling back towards it from the other direction. Everything was still and muffled by the soft carpet. The white light was harsh. The hallways seemed to get narrower as he walked. He paused at the final turn and peered around. The hallway outside the Security Office was empty. He waited. Went over the encounter with Renicks on the highway again. Had been going over it all day. Replaying it. Reliving the frustration, because if Renicks had made that call, made a formal complaint during a Continuity Event, Amesley would have been forced to pull him from the detail. Ruined everything by pushing a button.

Fucking Jumbo Softy.

Darmity watched the hall. Waited. He knew how to wait.

*Our time will come, son. Your time will come.*

It was amazing, still, he thought. Grant should have been a Softy too. A paper-pusher. He'd served in the army, sure, but he'd never seen action. And he was a fucking politician. Darmity had

expected bullshit when he'd been invited to meet the President-elect. Flew all the way from the fucking Middle East just so some rich Senator who'd won an election could shake his hand, tell him he's doing a hell of a job. But Grant was on a mission. He wasn't a Softy. He was *pretending*. To get in. To get power. And then achieve his operational objectives.

Darmity remembered that thrilling moment when reality had seemed to shift, and what Grant was saying clicked into the deep groove in his head and *made sense*. For the first time in his life, a superior officer had made sense. He felt the thrill all over again. An end to bureaucracy. And end to the paper-pushing. One final button to push, and in flames and blood Grant would seize the power to remake the country as it should be. And in that instant, Darmity had been convinced he knew exactly how Grant would remake things. Exactly the decisions he would make. And he approved.

The door to the security office opened and one of the Frat Boys stepped out. Darmity had purposefully forgotten all their names. This one was young and built — there were two of them, almost twins. A fucking queer for his own body, always showing off his arms and taking off his shirt, talking about his workouts, his women. Thought having a ripped stomach and being able to bench press three hundred pounds meant he was a bad ass.

These guys, Amesley's people, should have been doers. Instead, they were Softies, just like their boss.

Darmity watched him walk away down the corridor. The elevators, he thought, and turned to loop around towards them from the other direction. He would show him how fucking wrong he was.

Hurrying along, the wound in his belly sizzling and burning, damp with leaking blood, he paused again around the corner from the elevator bank, peering around. Seconds later, the Frat Boy emerged from the parallel corridor and pressed the call button on the elevator.

Darmity studied him. Didn't move. Waited for the indicator light to glow, for the soft sound of the elevator doors opening. As the Frat Boy moved to step into the cab, Darmity swung around the corner and jogged lightly, angling towards the wall. He arrived at the elevators just as the door began to slide shut, ducked around and through, launching himself into the cab and crashing into the Frat Boy. They fell to the floor of the cab. Darmity had complete surprise. He took hold of the Frat Boy's ears with his hands, jerked his head up from the floor, and smashed it down again. As hard as he could. Did it again. Heard a cracking sound. The Frat Boy's body spasmed and then he lay still.

The elevator doors closed behind them.

Breathing hard, Darmity climbed off the agent. He got to his knees and shuffled over to the buttons, punched five buttons in sequence. The elevator started to rise. If they saw it in the Security Office, though, they'd assume it was their boy, off on an errand.

He shuffled back to the agent and went through his pockets. Relieved him of his gun, a penknife, a set of keys, and his radio.

Two floors and ten seconds later, the doors slid open again. He stepped out and looked around. Stood and listened for a moment. Then he walked to the nearest door, opened it carefully, and stepped into another abandoned office. Turned on the

lights. Started going through the keys, searching for one that might fit his handcuffs.

He knew where Begley was, he thought. That was half the battle. Now he just had to find Renicks and get him to cooperate. Amesley's plans hadn't worked out, Grab Teams out there with nothing to grab because the old man had fucked up somewhere, gotten his research wrong. Which meant the old man, the Softy, didn't know what to do now, wouldn't let him go after Begley. because she was one of his. So it was up to him, as usual. To do the hard jobs. Which, he thought, was going to be *fun*. He smiled a little, thinking about it.

*Here comes the Button Man*, he thought.