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# Designated Survivor

## Chapter 27

by Jeff Somers

**27.**

Seventeen minutes before almost dozing off, Begley opened her eyes and said, “I feel like I’m in the hospital.”

“You *should* be in the hospital,” Renicks said as he pushed her in the chair. “We should *both* be in the hospital.”

The corridors of the twelfth floor were immaculate at first glance. The carpets, however, had been tracked with dirt from several waves of people marching through. Other than that it would be easy to imagine nothing at all happening in the complex. A normal day. Boredom and inactivity.

She’d spent the elevator ride pondering options. Concluded there weren’t any. With the Security Office destroyed and a number of rogue agents still roaming the complex, the chances of making significant contact with the outside world were slim. With the implications of the conspiracy so huge, chances of accidentally contacting an enemy were high. They were both injured and her estimates on time until detonation of emergency charges were pessimistic.

Her conclusion was that their only sensible course of action would be to find someplace comfortable and wait out the last half hour or hour of their lives.

John Renicks, Ph.D., she reflected, wasn't the person she would have chosen to spend the last hour of her life with. But she also figured she could have done worse, and decided to be content.

They turned the corner and the scorched and torn-up double doors leading into the Executive Suite came into view. Equipment, including the hulking laser cutter they'd been using on the mag locks, had been dropped on the floor and left behind. Big portable lights with chrome stands and yellow metal reflectors still cast the door in a blinding white light. The walls around the door had been torn up, exposing the thick steel rods held in place by the magnetic system; only six of the twelve had been cut through. Renicks pushed her to within a few feet and she struggled up out of the chair. Approached the door. Punched in the override code she'd created just a few hours before. The magnetic locks released immediately and the steel rods snapped back into their holsters in the walls.

The suite was exactly as they'd left it. Painfully normal-looking. She pulled the door shut behind them and sealed the room again. Then dropped into the couch with a sigh and sat there for a moment, feeling more tired than she'd ever been before in her life.

Renicks dropped his bag and The Brick. Stepped out of the main room. Returned a moment later with two bottles of cold water and a small white box.

"First aid kit only had acetaminophen," he said, tearing the box open and pouring small white pills into his hand. "Here's four thousand milligrams. Your liver won't forgive me, but it'll help a little with the pain."

She accepted the pills and a bottle of water. Swallowing the pills, she drank the entire bottle. Sat gasping on the couch. Felt instantly like going to sleep.

After a moment, Renicks said “Jesus.”

She nodded. “I’m not even a Christian,” she said, “and that about covers it.”

“You think we’re okay here?”

She shrugged. “He doesn’t have the launch codes or coordinates.” She pointed at the Brick. “Those are in there. Before they had the codes and the RLI, but not you, so they couldn’t activate the launcher. Now they have an activated launcher but no codes. So they can’t do anything. We’ll shut up and barricade the tunnel. They don’t know where it leads to, I don’t think, but we’ll barricade it.” She looked at him steadily. “We only have to hold out for a little while longer.”

He frowned at her, then nodded. “The charges.”

“The charges.”

They sat in silence for a moment.

“I wish I could call my kids,” he said.

“I’m sorry.”

“How about you. Family?”

She smiled. “More than I can handle. I’ve been avoiding them as much as possible for years.” She shook her head. “Doesn’t matter. Let’s not talk about that, okay?”

She watched him pick up The Brick. As he touched it, it sprang back to life, the screen lighting up instantly. Then he dropped it and stood up. “I’m going to shut up the tunnel. It would be funny if they just snuck in here and grabbed me, after all this.”

“Jack,” she called out after him as he walked back towards the kitchen, “I do not think that would be funny *at all!*”

She sat in a daze. Felt curiously calm and contented. Her leg hurt like hell. She had a few other minor aches and sprains. She was exhausted. But she felt like laughing. On one level she knew it was just an adrenaline crash. Her brain had been soaked in all sorts of chemicals, some of which it hadn't produced in decades, and now she was enjoying their effects without the associated trauma or terror to offset them. On the other hand, it felt unreal: She was still beaten-up, still being hunted. Still charged with keeping a man she'd only met a few hours earlier alive. Until he could be killed by remote detonation of buried charges.

The absurdity of it finally made her burst out laughing. She grabbed and hugged a pillow to herself. Peals of it escaped her, uncontrolled. When Renicks walked back into the room he stood for a moment, studying her. She pointed at him.

“Is that a bottle of wine?”

He nodded, holding it up. “It is. It is not a bottle of *good* wine, but I have decided to be good and drunk when ... when this ends.”

She nodded. “Saddle up.”

He sat down and twisted off the cap. Held it up. “Twist off caps used to be a sure sign of your federal government saving money by purchasing its wine by the ton, but no more. Twist-offs are becoming common.” He held the bottle out towards her. “Under other circumstances drinking with the amount of acetaminophen in your system would be a bad idea, but I'd say we have little to lose.”

She accepted the bottle and took a swig. It wasn't bad. She

had an idea that she would love anything right then. “You learn all this from your Dad?”

She remembered his file. Small town doctor, used to take young Jack to the office on weekends, let him help out a little. Had hopes his son would follow in his footsteps.

Renicks nodded, taking back the bottle. He looked right at her. She found that invigorating. So many men didn’t look at you. They either looked at your chest and took mental snapshots or they looked at their shoes, all *aw shucks* and *yes ma’am*. She liked how Renicks just *looked* at her.

“I learned a lot from Dad,” he said, taking a swig. “More or less by accident. I remember things easily. I’m not really so smart. I just remember things.” He picked up the Brick and it lit up again.

“I have a good memory,” she said. “But not for information. Numbers. Directions. If I read a book, I can’t tell you anything about it a week later. But give me a keycode to remember, and I have it for life. I still know my high school locker combination.”

They fell silent. They passed the bottle back and forth a few times. Renicks appeared absorbed in something he’d found on the Brick. Feeling much more drunk than she should have after approximately one glass of stale white wine, Begley studied him dully and wondered if he’d happened across a secret document entitled WHAT TO DO IF SECRET NATIONWIDE CONSPIRACY TRIES TO HIJACK THE NATIONAL SECURITY AND HOMELAND SECURITY PRESIDENTIAL DIRECTIVE. Fought back another attack of what she suspected was inappropriate laughter.

“What are you reading?”

He looked up. Leaned forward and relieved her of the bottle. Swirled the contents around a bit and offered her a raised-eyebrow, then took a long pull. His clothes were torn up and he was filthy. His hair stood up in odd directions, stiff and sticky. But he still looked put-together, somehow. It was the confidence, she thought. He was a man who always seemed to know exactly who he was.

“I’m translating a file President Grant placed here personally. A private memo to AG Flanagan. Written in ... not *code*, but something meant as a code. An artificial language.” He grinned. “I’m a bit rusty.”

She raised her own eyebrow. “*That* is how you’re spending your —” She hesitated over *last hour alive* and substituted “— time here? That sounds like the most boring shit *imaginable*.”

He nodded. “Most of my career is the most boring shit imaginable. If I was going to start a rock band, our name would be *Most Boring Shit Imaginable*.”

She laughed. Thought this was not a terrible way to spend your last moments. Her leg was throbbing and her head was pounding. But it was peaceful. Quiet. And, she decided, she *liked* Jack Renicks.

Silence again. She lay back and tried to think of everything she loved. People, things. Trips. Feelings. Every memory she savored. She told herself she’d done her job. She’d protected the asset and served the interests of her country. She closed her eyes and felt sleepy, enjoying the sensation of being still and calm. She hoped —

Renicks suddenly sat forward. Hissed a curse. Knocked the bottle to the floor, where lukewarm wine chugged out onto the

carpet.

“What?”

He looked back at her. “We’ve got a problem.”

She sat up, wincing as her head gave her an extra-deep throb, like she was having an aneurysm. “With what?”

Renicks stood up. “Darmity. He doesn’t need this for the codes,” he said, gesturing at her with the Brick. “He already has them.”