

Designated Survivor

Chapter 31

by Jeff Somers

31.

Five minutes before finding Renicks in one of the empty offices, Frank Darmity stared at the suddenly dim Remote Launch Interface. A second before, it had been lit up green, accepting his keyed-in data. He'd been frustrated at how slow entering the codes by hand was proving to be. But at least it was progress. Then the tiny screen had flickered, gone blank for a second, and was now displaying the bright-red OFFLINE graphic, the Presidential Seal in the background.

One second after that, the lights had gone off. The emergencies had flickered on for one baleful, yellow moment, and then the regular lights had come back on again.

He sat back and let out his breath. Stared at the RLI. Then leaned forward, took it in both hands, stood up, and dashed it against the floor. It bounced. A single piece of plastic broke free and flew off into the shadows of the ruined Security Office. The box-shaped RLI bounced again and rolled a few more feet, then stopped on its side. Still lit up. Still, he thought sourly, completely functional. American-built, no doubt.

He could hear his own breath whistling in and out of his nose. He could feel his heart pounding. So *close*. So fucking close. And

that stupid cunt and his pet agent had fucked it up.

He only indulged himself for a few seconds. A few seconds of rage. He wanted to tear all the consoles from their bolts and hurl them around the room. He wanted to set the place on fire. He wanted to break bones and inflict some goddamn *suffering*. Instead he took a deep breath, wincing slightly at the pinch in his side. Then he exhaled and relaxed. Worked through each muscle in his body and consciously relaxed them until he was standing at ease.

Then he picked up the automatic on the console in front of him and started walking through the debris. The overall mission had failed. But *his* mission had one last component.

So did everyone else's, he reminded himself.

He stepped slowly through the wreckage and around one of the console banks. Martin Amesley sat on the floor with his back against the wall, a few feet away from the shattered front doors. He'd been shot twice in the same leg, which was stretched out in front of him like a burst sausage. Darmity could tell at a glance that the bullets had somehow missed the arteries — else Amesley would have bled out by then — but he'd lost a lot of blood in any event. The old man was surprisingly calm, though, and Darmity gave him some grudging points for that. He'd imagined Amesley as the type to cry like a baby if he got a scratch.

The old man was watching him as he turned the corner and approached. His watery eyes behind the thick lenses flicked to the gun in Darmity's hand, and then back to his face.

"Mr. Darmity," he said with a curt nod.

Darmity stood for a second, then knelt down on one knee right in front of the Director. Stared at him.

“You know what just happened,” he finally said.

Amesley nodded again. “We’ve failed.”

Darmity nodded, keeping his temper. “*You* failed, Mr. Amesley. I could have run the shit out of this operation. You tippy-toed it. You fucked it up. You should have stood aside and let a Field Man run a Field Operation.”

Amesley smiled. Darmity didn’t like it. It was a soft smile. A secret smile. A fucking Cheshire Cat. The old man thought he was smarter than everyone else.

“As you say, Mr. Darmity.”

Darmity leaned forward. “You thought you were my boss.” He tried to mimic Amesley’s subtle smile.

The older man’s face remained exactly the same: Slight smile, blank eyes. “As you say.”

Darmity felt his control slip. *As you fucking say*, he thought. Fucking talks like an asshole. He mastered himself. Just to show he could. There was no reason to. But he wanted Amesley to know that he was a man you had to pay attention to.

Outside, in the hall, he heard the elevator’s light ring as it arrived. Heard the doors split open. He paused, turning his head, and listened. Heard the voices of Amesley’s people. Turned back to Amesley, who was still staring back at him with that still life of an expression. Like nothing bothered him. It made Darmity *want* to bother him. Just to see his face change.

He stood up and pointed the gun at the old man. Amesley looked back at him. No flinch. No expression. Darmity felt anger rising in him. He wanted to think of something to say. Something devastating. Something that would make Amesley collapse.

“Well, Mr. Darmity?” Amesley said without moving. “Clean up your mess, son.”

Rage filled him. He shook with it. *You pressed the button*, he thought, and took one step forward. Squeezed the trigger. Again. Once more. Stood over the body. His breathing like sandpaper.

“What the fuck!”

He spun. The three of them outside the office. All of them looking haggard. Sweaty and defeated. He’d thought about them all. Nothing in-depth. He hadn’t had time to do any research, any social engineering. He’d had to observe them in tiny bursts and form assessments based on very little data — the way they took orders. The way they interacted with each other. The way they carried themselves. The way they responded to a mild insult.

That was Darmity’s favorite tactic. You learned so much from the ten seconds after you pushed someone *just a little*.

In any group of three or more, there was a leader. Unspoken, usually. Darmity knew without hesitation the leader was the one he thought of as the other Frat Boy. The only one left, now. Frat Boy had the easy build and good hair of the youngster who’d never been in a situation he couldn’t charm or fuck or fight his way out of. His body had never failed him, had never failed to respond to his needs.

Darmity shot him first.

Nothing fancy. He wanted to put them down; he could make sure of a kill later. So he aimed for the torso. The biggest target on the body. Frat Boy tumbled backwards, belly exploding into a geyser of blood.

The other male agent Darmity had dubbed The Monk. A ring of dark hair on his head. Should have just shaved it, accepted his

fate, but was clinging to his hair like it was a life preserver. He was staring at Frat Boy. Mouth open. Frozen. A fucking moron. Darmity swung the gun in his general direction and fired. The Monk dropped.

The female agent he'd named Plumper. When he spun to put the gun on her, she shot him in the left shoulder.

He was spun around and tripped over Amesley's outstretched legs. He hit the wall and went down onto his back. There was no pain. His left arm was numb, but there was no pain.

He propped the gun on his chest and lay still. Thinking, *stupid cunt shot me*, over and over. But he didn't move. He waited. Heard the pop and scrape of glass being stepped on. Waited. When she appeared around the edge of the nearest console, gun held out in front of her in a way she probably thought was professional and badass, her free hand wrapped around her wrist, he squeezed the trigger and sent her flying backwards.

He sat up, and the pain hit all at once. He grit his teeth and examined his arm. He couldn't see the wound through the fabric, but it was soaked through with blood. He moved the arm experimentally and found it flexible enough, checked the fabric on the back and found the exit hole. A through-and-through. The bullet had busted right through his shoulder and missed everything vital. Painful, but not immediately worrying.

He stood up. Felt dizzy for a moment, then steadied. Blood loss, he thought. He stepped over Plumper, who stared up at the ceiling with yellow, filmy eyes. He could hear someone gurgling pathetically in the near distance. Stepping back out into the hall, he found Frat Boy trying to hold his intestines in with his arms. His face was white as marble and his arms were bright red. He'd

pushed himself up against the wall and kept opening his mouth and swallowing air.

Darmity felt hot and slow. Weak. He stood for a moment in the hall looking down at Frat Boy and watching him open his mouth and make this weird sucking noise, then shut it. A bloody spit balloon had formed on his lips. Darmity sympathized. Frat Boy, Amesley, all of them had been told that Cleanup meant making sure witnesses like Renicks were dead. But *he* had been ordered to make sure *everyone* was dead.

He knelt down on one knee and put the barrel of his gun against Frat Boy's forehead and tilted his head back. The agent swiveled his eyes slowly, finally focusing on Darmity.

"Renicks," Frat Boy managed to wheeze. "Renicks and Begley."

Darmity nodded. "In one of the offices?"

Frat Boy nodded back. A slow, deliberate up and down.

Darmity glanced down at the floor. Blew out a little breath. Squeezed the trigger.

It was time to clean this shit up. But he wasn't going to have to do it alone.