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# Designated Survivor

## Chapters 50

by Jeff Somers

### 50.

Forty-five minutes after shooting Frank Darmity in the back of the head at close range, Jack Renicks sat in the back of an ambulance, handcuffed to a gurney.

He didn't feel so bad, all things considered. There had been shouting and running when the EMTs had seen all the blood, but they'd quickly figured out the true extent of his injuries. His ankle was swollen to about three times its normal size. His shoe had to be cut off. They'd wrapped it tight in an athletic bandage, shoved IV fluids into his elbow, checked his pupils with a tiny flashlight. And left him there.

Begley had been another matter altogether. She'd been choppered off the mountain minutes after being brought up from below. Renicks hadn't heard anything since, mainly because he'd been summarily arrested by some humorless military types, cuffed to the ambulance interior, and left there.

The mountain was swarming with people. And equipment. Helicopters touched down, disgorged more running people, and took off. Cars arrived by the minute. The crowd was a chaotic mix of civilians, blank-faced Intelligence types in suits, Army, Marines, and bureaucrats. Cell phones were everywhere, most of

them failing to find a signal. Satellite phones sprouted in increasing numbers, some connected to mysterious square boxes that bristled with antennae. Troops arrived in neatly ordered squads and double-timed off into the surrounding wilderness.

Renicks sat in the ambulance, watching it all. Exhausted. He lifted his arm and stared down at the handcuffs. They looked formidable: Bright steel, a long chain of thick links that gave him a few feet of movement. Tried to remember anything his uncle Richie had told him about restraints. Couldn't think of anything.

"Well, the Federal Government is here. It'll all be sorted out some time before the next century."

Renicks looked up at Stan Waters, who looked, if it was possible, more exhausted than before. "Stan," he said. "I think you just saved our lives."

Stan looked down at his muddy boots. Pushed his hands into his pockets. "I spoke to Emily. She's fine, the kids are fine. Your parents got a scare when we flushed a goddamn rape van out of the shadows across the street from their house, but they're okay too. Agent Begley's in surgery," he said. "Good people working on her. No prognosis yet. I'll try to keep you updated."

Renicks nodded, a sudden wave of emotion swelling inside him. "She saved my life, too," he said thickly. "There was a point where it stopped being her protecting me, you know. Stopped being a Secret Service Agent and the Acting President, and it was just two people trying to survive something. And she stuck by me."

Stan nodded but kept looking at his shoes. Then he looked up and nodded at the handcuffs. "Sorry about that."

Renicks waited a beat, settling himself. “I guess you’re not here to take them off, then.”

Stan shrugged. “This is what the Intelligence Community calls in technical terms a fucking mess, Jack. You have to appreciate what just happened. Multiple members of the United States Secret Service were involved in a deep, long-term conspiracy to seize control of the government for the express purpose of launching nuclear arms against their own country.” He hesitated, shaking his head and looking away. “And it appears ... it appears the President was ... involved.” He firmed up again, looking at Renicks sideways. “And the fucking Attorney General, and *who knows who else*. We’re pulling prints from some of those bodies down there, and a couple are in the servers. Mercenaries, wetwork types.” He shrugged again. “We got a couple of suicides in D.C. on this. Shit, Jack, we’re fucking poleaxed here. Nobody saw this, and this is *organized*. This is *deep* inside the government. I’m afraid the password for today is *trust fucking no one*.”

Renicks nodded. Intellectually, he knew this made sense. But he burned with anger. He’d spent the last few hours abandoned by everyone who was supposed to be protecting the country, protecting *him*, and now he was under *suspicion*. He swallowed his emotions with difficulty. “So you’re here to question me.”

“I’m here to *debrief* you,” Stan said, stepping forward. “You melodramatic asshole.” He pulled out a small ring of keys and stepped in close to work the handcuffs. “I spent months having drinks with Melodramatic Jack during your divorce. I don’t need to relive it now.”

Renicks didn’t smile, but the anger ebbed. “I *was* kind of depressed, wasn’t I?”

“Depressed? To this day whenever I hear the name *Emily* I start crying, uncontrollably.” Stan inserted the key, nodding. Paused and looked at Jack. “You’re not going to, like, try to overpower me and steal a helicopter or something, right?”

Renicks tried to stay angry, but burst out laughing. “Jesus, Stan, no.”

Stan nodded. “I ask because you have displayed heretofore unsuspected levels of kickassery. You sure you weren’t recruited by the NSA or something under sealed orders?” He unlocked the handcuff from the gurney, slipped it onto his own wrist. He reached up and took the bag of IV fluids from the pole and held it up. “Come on.”

Renicks stood up, wobbled for a moment as he got dizzy. “Where?”

“I’m not debriefing you, kiddo. You moved past my pay grade sometime around three hours ago. Hell, we’ve been waiting for someone at the *right* paygrade to show up so we could hand you over.”

Renicks dropped from the ambulance to the muddy dirt with a little help. His legs felt weak and unreliable. The handcuffs seemed ridiculously heavy.

Stan led him through the maze of milling people and haphazardly parked vehicles, everything from domestic sedans with tinted windows to helicopters and army trucks painted in forest camouflage. People gave him plenty of second glances as he walked slowly, a bloody mess, handcuffed, with Stan holding his IV bag up over them. His ankle now seemed unbelievably tender. Every step hurt like hell, and he wondered how he he’d managed to run with it this bad. Adrenaline, he decided. He’d

been living on adrenaline for hours.

Stan led him down the slope for a few hundred feet, to where the road curved up from down below. A black Town Car sat by itself. Three men in dark suits, white earbuds and sunglasses in place, watched them approach. When they were within ten feet, one of them stepped forward, holding out a hand.

“I’m sorry, sir, this area has been restricted.”

Stan nodded and fished in his pocket, pulling out what looked to Renicks like a passport. He flipped it open and handed it to the man.

The suit reached into his own pocket and produced a small black device that looked like a flash drive with a glowing red end. He swiped it across Stan’s ID and nodded, handing it back.

“All right, Mr. Waters. You’re expected.”

The three men stepped aside, suddenly interested in other things. Stan led Renicks towards the car and stopped just next to it. He handed the IV bag back and took out the keys.

“They’re jumpy, Jack,” he said conversationally as he unlocked the handcuffs. “So don’t do anything crazy.” He looked up at him from under his eyebrows. “Which is my way of saying, don’t do *anything*.” He slipped the cuffs off and pulled open the door. With a jerk of his head he indicated that Renicks should get in. “I’ll be right here unless they order me off, Jack.”

Renicks studied him for a second, then nodded and ducked into the back seat awkwardly, juggling the IV bag. Froze instantly.

Sitting there, jotting notes on a digital tablet with a stylus, was Vice President Mallory.

Renicks corrected himself. *President* Mallory.

“Dr. Jack Renicks,” she said without looking up. “Glad you’re alive.”

Renicks blinked stupidly. In person, she was even more striking. Her skin was dark and smooth, completely without blemish. She might have been forty or sixty. She was skinny, her hair was bigger than it looked on TV. She wore delicate half-glasses on the tip of her nose which were secured to her by a pretty little silver chain. She smelled expensive. Jasmine. Her suit, he noted without trying, was Versace, though when she was on TV she almost always wore something from a chain store.

A dozen things occurred to him simultaneously. Before he could concentrate on any of them, Mallory began verbalizing the most important one.

“You’re wondering if I was in league with Charley,” she said, still jotting on her tablet. “I was just as shocked as anyone, though, between you and me, Charley had been acting strangely for months and a crisis was beginning to form around it.” She finally looked up. “No, I was not, Dr. Renicks. I realize you may not believe me. Still, I’d like you to do your best to give me the benefit of the doubt.” She smiled. It was a powerful expression, and he smiled back without thinking.

“You had never met Martin Amesley before today?”

He shook his head. He felt dopey.

“Marianne Begley?”

He shook his head again.

She nodded and glanced down at her tablet again. “Dr. Renicks, I believe you are an honest man, and I believe you had nothing to do with this conspiracy. Because if you had been part of it, a backup Designated Survivor, we would all likely be dead

right now. This has been planned for years, and its actors came from long histories of service.” She looked up again. Her gaze was unblinking. Intelligent. Renicks was reminded of some of the tougher professors he’d had as a kid.

“These people — like Gerry Flanagan, like Martin Amesley — were trusted. Long-term. No one would have ever suspected they were part of what is possibly the biggest conspiracy this country has ever witnessed. So you understand that there are still those who urge me to treat you as a hostile.”

Renicks nodded. He was falling asleep again.

The new President suddenly turned to face him, twisting herself around. “Mr. Renicks, have you ever heard the phrase *La Flava Regxo?*”

He nodded slowly. Remembered the tinny voices from the studio, Darmity taking command. “The Yellow King.”

The President nodded back, once. “So have I. And we don't think it refers to President Grant.” She tapped her tablet one last, authoritative time and set it on the seat between them. Closed her eyes and leaned back, lacing her fingers across her belly. She was, Renicks thought, the best damn looking sixty-year old woman he’d ever seen.

“Start at the beginning,” she said. “And tell me everything.”