

## Chapter 41

“John Schmidt?”

“Yes,” John responded, curious as to who had Kate’s phone.

“I have something of yours,” the voice whispered on the other end of the line.

“Who is this? Where’s Kate!” Anger drained from his voice through the cellular connection.

“Well, let’s just say I’m *not* a friend of yours but I do have something I’d like you to hear.” Hintz returned the outraged tone.

John stopped dead in his tracks, a cold sweat jumped from his skin filling the surface of his body with a clammy feeling. George narrowed his eyes inquisitively toward John. “What’s going on?” he whispered, as he moved closer to his friend.

John shook his head and held up his hand relaying the “don’t bother me now look.” Something was wrong.

“Who is this!” John repeated loudly.

“Just listen,” the voice said calmly.

Kate was just coming out of the fog that gripped her mind. Hashem positioned himself at the head of her naked body, his left knee rested under Kate’s neck, on his right thigh he positioned Kate’s right arm. With her arm stretched out, the elbow laid directly over his knee, the veins of her inner arm faced the headliner of the truck. The position they were in was cramped but he had enough room to do the job. Hashem’s left hand pushed down on Kate’s right bicep while his right hand gripped her small wrist. Using his right knee as leverage Hashem thrust his entire weight into her delicate arm. The arm snapped like a seasoned twig.

The sound of breaking bones resonated through the vehicle. The closed windows reverberated the agony back and forth. Blood spit onto the ceiling of the truck and on to Hashem’s face.

The pain seared through Kate’s mind as bone, tissue and blood burst through her soft skin. Her body convulsed in pain. She screamed at a pitch only heard in the torture rooms when Saddam held power in Iraq. Her arm fell limply bending the wrong way across the bench seat of the truck. Kate’s mind gave up. It was enough.

John heard it all. He bent over and threw-up. His body shook. Reality conflicted with his mind. The whole day conflicted with his mind, but now his wife was a victim of the attack against America. He tried to shake the audible assault to his ears, but he couldn't. *How did the world get to this point in such a few hours.*

"John! John!" Hintz yelled into Kate phone. "Are you listening to me!"

"Yes, I'm here," John responded. His voice and his entire body were shaking.

"What you just heard was a friend of mine shattering your wife's elbow. The way it sounded to me several bones were broken at the same time," he said coldly. There was a pause on the line. Hintz continued the verbal assault. "Now *you* listen to me, if you interfere or if I think you are interfering with tonight's activities, I will break every bone in her body. I'll include every knuckle on her hands, every bone in her legs and every vertebrae in her back. I'll break them one at a time." He continued, "if I see you or if I see anyone near us I won't hesitate. Do you understand me! Have I made myself clear?"

The statement was meant to demean him; it did the opposite; it enraged him. "Yes, you've made yourself clear," John acknowledged into the phone. His head was still spinning out of control. He flipped the phone closed and stared up at the large wall of the Cathedral. *Why God?* he asked.

"What in the world was that about?" George begged an answer from John, as he stood gripping the Beretta on the right side of his chest.

"They have Kate," John said weakly, trying to clear his head. "They have her," he repeated slowly. They've got her in the their truck. They broke her arm in half. I listened to it. There's no doubt in my mind it's her." He threw up again. His words stuck in his throat as anger welled up inside of him. "George, they're right here in the parking lot. All I can think is that Kate saw a black truck and assumed it was us."

Now it was George's turn to be logical. "John, how the hell would they know Kate's your wife?" He paused and thought for a moment. "Even if she walked right up to them and hi, I'm Kate, I'm John Schmidt's wife. They wouldn't know who she was. To get there you have to assume they knew we were here looking for them. How is that possible?" George wiped the misting rain from his face. "Somewhere up the food chain," George mumbled as he thought out loud, "somewhere from the NSA up, someone in the government is involved in this. Involved in the whole conspiracy. The financial attack, the murder of the Chairman of the Fed and now the two assassins trying to kill the first lady. The biggest conspiracy in history right here in our laps."

As George puzzled over the last minutes' events, John's mind tried to absorb the unthinkable. The mist soaked the back of his neck as his head hung toward the concrete.

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Kate tried to open her eyes, the left side of her face throbbed, her left eye was so swollen it refused to open. The right eye in spite of the beating still functioned. Blood still flowed freely down toward the back of her head. The searing pain on the right side of her body, however, demanded all of her attention and strength. Kate turned her head to the right to look at her arm, hoping the fresh memory was just a nightmare. It wasn't. The arm dangled lifelessly across the seat of the truck. Blood covered the entire bottom half of her limb. Amid the dim light and one barely functioning eye it was difficult to access her arm's trauma. Her mind wrestled with itself trying to figure out why her arm seemed to be in the wrong position. Something was wrong, but her mind hid the truth from her. In the state of "shock" the mind is a peculiar place. Sometimes it will divulge events; others it deems too horrific to expose to reality.

Voices, voices spoke quickly. She could hear them. Men two talking near her, so close. Kate was outside the reality of life, looking in, a spectator watching an extended episode of *deja vu*. She prayed.

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Anna Hunter stared from the dark window onto the grounds of the national house of prayer. The first of the two car motorcade turned into the parking area of the church. Her car pursued the rear bumper following it closely behind. The lit cathedral seemed to glow against the background of the cold wet night. A velvet Elvis flashed through her mind. The inside lighting of the church presented the stained glass windows in a way that made them look three dimensional, contrasting the cold and dark night. Both cars slowed as they approached the front doors of the building.

Anna shook her head as the radio blurted the news across the country. People beginning to riot in the cities, enormous numbers of individuals calling out of work, including fire and rescue crews. Even a few incidents of neighbors shooting neighbors protecting food and water. *Who stole the American spirit?* she wondered sadly as her car came to rest in front of the massive building. *When did we become a country where everyone fended for themselves with little or no regard for America or for the Americans who lived here? When did we stop pulling together for a common cause?* The moment gripped her in sadness as a tear fell from her gentle face.

At first Anna thought she would wait for the services to end before she entered the Nave. She only had to look at the parking lot to know that the cathedral was packed. Standing room only. She craved to be alone with God, to search his thoughts, to listen carefully to his answers. Anna needed to be surrounded by his love and the peace in the giant church. She so desperately wanted the Holy Spirit to bathe her in the answers she was seeking. *Selfish. That's what it is. That's how I'm thinking, selfishly. I'm here every night I can be, by myself to pray and meditate on the Lord himself.* "There will be time

for solitude, Anna Hunter,” she muttered to herself. *Right now Americans need to support each other in any way possible.* With that she grabbed the handle to the door and to the horror of the unprepared secret service agents she stepped out of the car onto the wet pavement.

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Hashem was the first to see the two black limousines pull into the parking lot. They entered from the left of their truck. He tapped Hintz’s leg and pointed through the windshield toward the two cars. When the two vehicles settled to a stop in front of the church they lined up directly in front of the windshield of the truck. Three men were already outside of the vehicles waiting for the first lady to depart from the car closest to their truck. Hintz estimated they were no more than one hundred yards from the president’s wife. Adrenaline spiked in both men as the first lady stepped from the car.

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In the back seat, Kate called out to John from her disoriented state. Her effort was immediately rewarded with a violent punch to the mid-section from Hintz’s left fist. Her naked body instinctively coiled and turned to the right. Her shifting position and weight sent her crashing down between the rear floorboards. As she fell her shattered right arm caught between the bottom of seat and her body, snapping it back. The bones in her arm crunched back to a normal position as cartilage and tissue twisted in her already collapsed appendage. A scream of terror echoed throughout the truck. Then silence. The pain was beyond comprehension and Kate’s entire body shut down.

“We don’t have time for her nonsense. Kill her,” Hashem said.

Hintz removed his eyes from the first lady for just a second and looked back over his right shoulder at the pile of humanity behind him. “She’s not going anywhere. Let her suffer. Leave her to die in the truck,” he said simply.

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Reverend Carmichael stood at the front of the sanctuary, his head down in prayer. Hundreds of heads followed his example and were folded down as he appealed to the

Heavenly Father for reasons and answers. He was just finishing up a fairly long winded prayer. “And, Lord, help all of us to focus on you through any difficulties we face. We know that you have great plan for each of the individuals in this cathedral tonight. And, Lord before we leave this place of worship let all of us pray for those in leadership positions in this great country. Help them, Father, bring us closer to you as we enter these difficult times. God bless America. Amen.”

Reverend Carmichael raised his hands to the heavens lifting the congregation as well. As the people rose from the pews the choir sang “Amazing Grace” ever so softly. Whispers ascended delicately from the masses as they crowded toward the three main doors from the chapel. Just as the first few rounded the corner to the right, there stood Anna Hunter hands on her slender hips and that million dollar smile on her face. Word spread instantly though the great hall that the first lady was in attendance. Few knew she had just arrived. Many guessed she had attended the service. It didn’t matter to any of them. The important thing was she was there to support them during this difficult time. Similar to fresh oxygen pumped into a casino, the cathedral’s atmosphere changed on the spot. Just like when the “good guy” gunslinger walks into the old cowboy bar to save the day, the choirs stopped singing.

Anna’s expression told the whole story. Those who could see her face read her mind. It simply said, *What in the world are you people doing with that beaten look on your face, we have work to do.* Grateful faces beamed throughout the crowd. The applause began slowly than swelled up to a thunderous ovation as word spread of her presence. Anna was there to pray, but the people had other ideas. Certainly she had come to the cathedral to provide a message, they assumed. The congregation acted as one mind, simultaneously opening a path for her as the Red Sea did for Moses. Anna didn’t have to be a mind reader to know what they wanted. She was more than happy to oblige.

Accompanied by one of the secret service agents Anna Hunter walked directly down the center of the Nave. A small number of voices spoke in low volumes as the people reestablished their seats. The only real sound was the pounding of Anna’s heels as she charged toward the podium with the Secret Service man in tow. Reverend Carmichael walked down the steps to greet her, taking her hand in his as he led her back up to the heart of the sanctuary. No words were exchanged between them. He kissed her hand and exited stage left. She was royalty as far as the nation was concerned. There she stood. The people sat in a hushed state waiting for their marching orders. Anna looked out at their eyes, soaking them in. They begged for comforting words, something they could hold on to, anything they could take with them back to their homes.