

THE GOD'S EYE VIEW

Barry Eisler

For the whistleblowers

The Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form.

—Michel Foucault

Knowledge has always flowed upwards, to bishops and kings, not down to serfs and slaves. The principle remains the same in the present era . . . governments dare to aspire, through their intelligence agencies, to a god-like knowledge of every one of us.

—Julian Assange

Comrades, I must tell you again: we must collect everything! Nothing can be missed!

—Erich Mielke, leader of East Germany's Stasi

Prologue
June 3, 2013

General Theodore Anders was dreaming of marlin fishing when the secure phone rang on the bed stand next to him. He woke immediately, concerned but not unduly so. He'd been awakened plenty of times over the course of his career, and by much worse than a telephone.

He sat up and reflexively scanned the room by the dim light of the bedside digital alarm clock. His wife, Debbie, continued snoring softly beside him. She'd learned to tune out NSA's intrusions almost immediately after he'd been appointed director. If it were an internal problem, he wouldn't be able to tell her. If the problem were external, she'd see it on the news soon enough. Either way, she didn't want to know, or at least not before she had to. She was a good woman.

He cleared his throat and picked up the handset before the unit could ring a second time. In the army, he'd learned to impress his superiors with an image of constant readiness. The habit had stayed with him long since his superiors had become his subordinates.

"Go ahead," he said quietly. It was his standard greeting—a crisp, efficient command. He also liked responding to a knock with a single word: *Come*. The implication being that the extra syllable of the standard *Come in* was wasteful and unnecessary. Debbie hated it and had trained him not to do it at home. She told him it was how someone talked to a dog—*come, sit, stay*. Which, he had to admit, was probably part of the appeal.

He was expecting an immediate, succinct briefing on whatever situation had necessitated the call. So he was surprised to hear his executive officer instead say, "This is General Remar. Your access protocol, please."

Anders was momentarily so surprised he said, "Mike, it's me."

"I'm sorry, Ted. I need your access protocol before proceeding."

The access protocol was an additional layer of security for use of the secure phone, a way of determining the bona fides of the person on the other end of the line. In all the years they had worked together, Remar had never asked for it when calling Anders at home. Either something exceptionally bad was afoot, or his XO was taking extra care to cover his ass by following strict procedure. Which, Anders knew, amounted to the same thing. He felt a shot of warmth in his gut as adrenaline spread through his system.

He thought for a moment. What was the last protocol he'd been issued? "Romeo Bravo Foxtrot. Seven, three, niner."

"Victor Delta Golf. Eight, one, four."

“All right, what is it?”

“Data breach. Potentially huge.”

The warmth in his gut got hotter. “Define *huge*.”

“We don’t even know yet. Tens of thousands of documents. Maybe more. This guy had access to everything. PRISM. XKeyscore. Policy Directive 20. Boundless Informant. Upstream. Everything.”

The heat in his stomach was suddenly a frozen knot. This was bad. Unbelievably bad.

“Who?”

“We’re 80 percent sure it’s a contractor named Snowden. Edward Snowden. Former CIA infrastructure analyst, DIA counterintel trainer, full administrator privileges.”

Full administrator privileges. For a moment, Anders actually couldn’t breathe.

“Wait,” he said. He got out of bed, picked up the base unit, and padded silently across the soft carpet into the bathroom, the long phone cable snaking along behind him. He left the light off because the darkness was suddenly comforting, a hiding place, a cocoon. He cradled the handset between his cheek and shoulder, closed and locked the door, turned on the sink faucet to mask sound, and stepped inside the glassed-in shower stall. Only then did he close his eyes and say, “Tell me he didn’t have access to God’s Eye.”

“He didn’t have permissions.”

“I know he didn’t have permissions. That’s not what I asked.” He realized his tone was sharper than he’d intended.

“There’s no evidence of a breach there. But Snowden . . . this guy is extremely capable. We’re interviewing his colleagues. The word *genius* is coming up a lot.”

“We need to know if God’s Eye is secure. I don’t care what else has been compromised. That is the absolute top priority.”

“I’m working on it. But it’s slow going because I can’t bring in an ordinary forensics team.”

No, of course not. In the history of the US government, there had never been a program as compartmented and prejudiced as God’s Eye. Though he was suddenly terrified none of it had been enough.

He opened his eyes and blew out a long breath, working to calm himself. “Where is Snowden now?”

“We believe he’s in Hong Kong.”

“No. He’s working with MSS?”

The Ministry of State Security was the Chinese intelligence agency, a kind of combination CIA and FBI. If Snowden was an MSS agent, maybe this could be contained. A rival intelligence service, true, but that didn’t mean certain protocols didn’t exist, certain understandings couldn’t be reached.

“We don’t think so. Greenwald and Poitras are there, too. We think he’s giving the documents to them.”

He blinked. Was he having a nightmare? Glenn Greenwald and Laura Poitras . . . this was far worse than MSS. Unimaginably worse.

A long, silent moment went by. He’d been in Santiago in 2010, when Chile had been hit by the 8.8 quake. For three long minutes, what he’d always known to be solid ground had bucked and roiled beneath him. This was like that. Only more surreal.

He forced himself to focus. “Has the *Guardian* contacted us yet?”

The *Guardian* was where Greenwald worked. Before its management published anything, they would reach out to NSA for comment.

“Not yet.”

He felt an iota of desperate hope. They still had a chance. A slim chance, probably, but . . .

“How fast can we get a team into Hong Kong?”

“There are contractors dealing with Abu Sayyaf in Mindanao right now. We could have them on the ground in Hong Kong in six hours. Maybe less.”

“Do it. Right now. OBL rules, you understand?”

The SEALs who had taken out Osama bin Laden had understood that under no circumstances was he to be captured.

“Ted, we’re talking about . . . these people are Americans.”

Remar was a good XO, and as loyal a man as Anders had ever known. As he should be. Anders had pulled him from a burning Humvee in the early days of Desert Storm, saving his life if not the right side of his face. After which Remar had hitched himself to Anders’s rising star and relentlessly watched Anders’s back. But no one was perfect, and

Remar's weakness was a streak of squeamishness. Anders wasn't sure where it came from—some innate wiring in his personality? Childhood environment? The experience of multiple reconstructive and plastic surgeries that had fostered too much empathy with other people's pain? Some combination, probably. And while Remar's different worldview often functioned as a useful pressure check on Anders's somewhat more ruthless instincts, now was absolutely not the time.

“Just take them out,” Anders said. “All three of them. Is that clear? We'll blame it on MSS.”

“It's not going to look like MSS.”

“Why would MSS do something and make it look like their own work?”

There was a pause. Then: “There's another *Guardian* reporter with them. A Scotsman, Ewen MacAskill.”

“Then take out all four. Do we know where they're meeting? Where they're staying?”

“Not yet.”

Okay, probably that was too much to hope. “Put eyes and ears on them. Mobile phones, Internet access, hotel reservation systems, security cameras, satellite imagery, everything.”

“It's already in motion.”

That sensation of the ground roiling hit him again, this time with an accompanying wave of dizziness and nausea. He willed it all back and made himself focus. What was he missing? What else did they need? What would be their fallback? If they were forced to tell a story, they would need a narrative. And that would be . . .

“Put together briefing papers. If we can't silence Snowden, we're going to have to undermine his credibility, and we'll need our friends in the press for that. Make sure the word *narcissist* is prominent in our talking points. Be subtle. ‘I'm not saying he's got outright narcissistic personality disorder’ . . . that kind of thing. All of it on background.”

“We already used the narcissist thing with Julian Assange.”

“Yes, and it worked. Use it again.”

“Understood.”

“Also . . . make sure to emphasize that Snowden ‘violated his oath of secrecy.’ We want that phrase picked up, too.”

There was no “oath of secrecy,” of course. The only oath government employees took was the oath to defend the Constitution. But that was just meaningless nuance. The main thing was, you could always count on the establishment media to adopt whatever nomenclature the government fed it.

“All right,” Remar said. “Who do you want spearheading the press campaign?”

“Ernest is the best in the business. Wake him up.”

“Ernest?”

“The guy who got everyone in the media to describe that Gulf of Mexico undersea oil eruption as a ‘leak.’”

“You mean the guy who came up with ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’?”

“Actually, the Gestapo invented that phrase—*Verschärfte Vernehmung*, I think it’s called in German. But Ernest was smart to borrow it. You think Snowden is a genius? Wait ’til he gets a load of Ernest. The media will have him armchair-psychoanalyzed as a narcissist and tried and convicted of treason in a day.”

“I’ll make sure he’s on it.”

“I’ll see you at headquarters in a half hour.”

He ended the call, opened the shower door, turned off the sink faucet, and went back into the bedroom. He paused for a moment, gazing at Debbie, still soundly asleep. He couldn’t say he loved her anymore, if he ever did. But there was always something satisfying about knowing he was protecting her. And protecting what was yours . . . that was a form of love, too, wasn’t it? Maybe the highest form.

He went into the closet and started getting dressed. He knew he probably couldn’t stop the *Guardian*. And he didn’t even care that much about the extent to which he could inhibit them.

All he really cared about, all that really frightened him now, was God’s Eye. In the end, everything else was negotiable.

Chapter 1

Evelyn Gallagher sat in an upholstered chair outside the director's Fort Meade corner office, knees pressed together, skirt smoothed, fingers intertwined across her lap. As always when she waited in this chair, she wondered whether the pose was too stiff, too self-consciously formal. But it was better than fidgeting. She didn't want anyone to think the director made her nervous. Well, amend that—she didn't want anyone to *know*.

Not that anyone would notice. No one else was waiting in the outer office, and the director's executive officer, General Remar, hadn't so much as glanced at her from behind his monitor since ushering her inside. Of course, Remar, with his eye patch and ruined profile, the left side of his scalp salt-and-pepper crew cut and the right an irregular mass of Silly Putty pink, always made her feel nervous, too. It was hard not to stare at the scar tissue, or wonder what horror lay hidden behind the patch. His wounds and his recovery were legendary at NSA, his suffering conferring a kind of sanctification not just on him, but on his battlefield rescuer, the director, as well. They were like a unit, a left and a right hand, and no matter what secrets she might be privy to, in the presence of their bond she always felt like an outsider.

She glanced discreetly at her watch. How long it would be, she never knew—it could be a minute, it could be two hours. The uncertainty might have been demeaning, but on the other hand, how many people had not just an invitation, but outright instructions to come to the director immediately whenever their system threw up a red flag?

So she waited, hearing nothing but the muted clack of Remar's keyboard and the quiet hum of the HVAC air-conditioning the room. No, she couldn't deny that she liked that there were no layers between her and the director—liked how special it made her feel, liked how the direct line gave her an aura of power and importance within the organization. On the other hand, the relationship left her isolated. Even within the standard compartmentalized NSA environment, the walls around her work were extreme. So far as she knew, no one other than the director himself was aware of her function, and the director had made it clear in a variety of unmistakable ways that the privilege of direct access wasn't free, that there would be severe penalties for any osmosis, accidental or otherwise.

Which, right this moment, felt particularly inconvenient. She had something on her mind, and no colleagues she felt comfortable running it by. She wanted to ask the director but was reluctant. Because what would bringing it up with him accomplish? It was so far-fetched it would just get her flagged as untrustworthy, even paranoid. And for what? She had too much to risk. The job was right for her, the work was important, the pay was decent, and the benefits were great. The health insurance especially, without which she wouldn't have been able to enroll Dash in the special school. Her ex-husband was a deadbeat, and she was afraid to sue him lest he retaliate by enforcing his custody rights; her mother was gone; and her father was in a nearby senior center with advancing Alzheimer's. So she needed her job, and it was enormously reassuring to know the job seemed to need her. As for her doubts . . . well, didn't everyone have doubts they simply

learned to keep to themselves?

She'd been sitting for close to twenty minutes, and was just thinking maybe she should have stopped at the restroom before coming and that she definitely should have thrown on a sweater because as usual the outer office was freezing, when Remar paused in his typing, glanced over from his monitor, and said, "You can go in now."

She always wondered how the director signaled him. Some kind of text message, presumably, the same way Remar had alerted the director she was waiting. That, or they'd become psychic working together so closely for so long. She stood, hesitated for just a second, and opened the door.

The director was sitting behind his L-shaped wooden desk. The wall to his left was festooned with photographs of various luminaries—presidents, prime ministers, generals, captains of industry—all shoulder to shoulder with the director or shaking his hand. The wall to his right was devoted to bookcases filled with serious-looking tomes on military strategy, business management, and philosophy. In one corner was a coffee table, a couch, and two upholstered chairs—the space for longer and perhaps more casual meetings, though she had never been invited to join the director there.

She closed the door behind her and stood silently while he scribbled notes in the margins of some papers. After a moment he glanced at her over his reading glasses, his eyebrows arching at . . . what? Was he annoyed at the intrusion? Did he welcome it? As usual, she found him impossible to read. He was a slight man of about sixty, with thinning hair and sallow skin. She'd been working with him for over a year, and had yet to see him display any real emotion beyond a periodic intense narrowing of his pale blue eyes. She'd never even caught him ogling her breasts, which had gone from a C to a D when Dash had been born and then decided to stay put even after she'd gotten back to exercising and lost her pregnancy weight. She didn't mind the extra size—in fact, as a single mother, she welcomed the attention brought by her new dimensions—but the director's failure ever to even sneak a glance was a little weird. Was he gay? She knew he was married, with four grown daughters, but that was no guarantee; even in the twenty-first century there were plenty of closeted people in the military, especially among the higher-ups. She'd wondered from time to time what he would do if she ever showed up with an extra button undone and leaned across his desk to point something out . . . would he be unable to resist a look? But she'd never tried. He wasn't the kind of man you'd want thinking you were messing with him.

He gestured to one of the chairs in front of his desk and said, "What is it?" The question a kind of challenge, a suggestion that if she was taking advantage of the direct access, of course she would have something important to bring to his attention. That she'd *better* have something important.

She sat, her feet pressed firmly against the carpet. Like the waiting area, his office was over-air-conditioned, but she could feel a slight slick of perspiration under her arms and was glad she'd worn deodorant.

“Sir, my system threw up a flag—a match for two faces on the watch list. A reporter with the *Intercept* named Ryan Hamilton. And the SUSLA in Ankara. Daniel Perkins.”

The Special US Liaison Advisor was NSA’s senior representative in Turkey, reporting directly to the director. There were only five others in the world—in Germany, Italy, Thailand, Japan, and Korea. If a SUSLA had gone rogue, it was a major breach, and she watched the director closely, curious about his reaction.

But there was nothing beyond that slight narrowing of the eyes. “What did you observe?”

“Well, as you know, sir, we’re tapped into CCTV networks all over the world. The feeds run through a facial recognition system and a Convolutional Neural Network analyzing other biometrics like height, stride length, and walking speed, and when certain people are observed together, the system sends out an alert. There are a lot of false positives that have to be screened out, but this one is confirmed. I’m pretty sure Hamilton and Perkins met in Istanbul.”

The director’s expression was so impassive it looked momentarily as masklike as Remar’s burned profile.

“You have them face-to-face?”

“No, sir, not face-to-face. But I’m pretty sure I know where they met—a Bosphorus commuter ferry. I was able to go back and track them taking separate routes, though there’s no camera on the ferry itself.”

The director leaned back in his chair, the casualness of the pose, like his initial *What is it?* question, a kind of challenge. “How do you know it’s not a coincidence?”

“Well, sir, I can’t prove it’s not. But the ferry feels like tradecraft to me. And you told me to err on the side of inclusiveness, especially when one of the principals is NSA.”

If her statement came across like an admonition, he did nothing to show it. “When did this possible meeting occur?”

“Two hours ago.”

“And they’re still in Istanbul?”

“Presumably. I’m guessing . . .” She paused, thinking better of it.

“Yes?”

“Well, I know that as SUSLA Turkey, Perkins is your direct report. I’m guessing . . .

you didn't know he's in Istanbul.”

The director raised his eyebrows. “Why do you guess that?”

“Because of the way you just asked if they were still there, sir. If Perkins were traveling on official business, I'd guess you would know.”

The director looked at her silently, and she wondered whether she had said too much. But she wanted him to know she could do more than just hack networks and create monitoring systems. She wanted him to know she had good instincts, too, and that she deserved more responsibility.

“Anyway,” she went on, “I'd recommend checking customs records to determine when Hamilton arrived, and I'd look at their mobile phones, too. If the phones were turned off, or left behind somewhere else, it sure would look as though they're trying not to be tracked. XKeyscore could tell us a lot, too. I would have looked into it myself, sir, but I'm not authorized.”

It was a subtle hint that she could do her job better, more efficiently, if she had more tools.

But he ignored it. “That's good thinking. Send me the raw data. I want to know exactly where and at what time they were picked up by the cameras.”

“Yes, sir.”

He removed the reading glasses and placed them on his desk, then looked at her closely. “Tell me, Evie, you designed the camera system, didn't you?”

She blinked, surprised he had used her name. Surprised he remembered it.

“Uh, yes, sir. Well, I mean, we already knew that these days most CCTV cameras are wired into networks, meaning remotely exploitable by us.”

“Yes, but you were the one who led the team that got us into the networks and tied them together. You were the one who automated the system, exploiting new networks as they went online, like that one Harvard secretly installed in its classrooms ostensibly as part of a study on attendance at lectures. You were the one who proposed using the access not just for directed tasking, but for passive surveillance, too, by tying it all together with the facial recognition technology and the Convolutional Neural Network.”

“That's correct, sir.”

He nodded. “If this Perkins thing does turn out to be a breach, it's exactly the kind of problem we would have overlooked if it hadn't been for you. Very good work.”

She recognized she was being dismissed. If she was going to bring up what had been bothering her, it was now or never.

Just do it, she thought. Or it's never going to stop bugging you.

“Sir, can I . . . there’s one other thing I wanted to ask about, if that’s all right.”

He raised his eyebrows and said nothing.

“Sir, remember last month, the CIA sysadmin I discovered was in contact with Marcy Wheeler, the journalist at *Emptywheel*?”

“Scott Stiles, of course.”

“Yes, Stiles. Well, as usual, all I can do is confirm by access to the network that a meeting took place. I’m not supposed to otherwise task anything. So . . . I never know what the follow-up reveals.”

She waited, hoping again that maybe he would take the hint, agree that she could do her job better without the blinders. But he said nothing. Just that unnervingly neutral expression and the penetrating stare. She almost decided to drop it. But she’d come this far. The hell with it.

“So, well, just a few days after I flagged the Stiles/Wheeler connection, I came across a news item in the *Post*. Stiles had been found hanged in his McLean apartment.”

“Yes, I’m aware of it. Very sad.”

“Yes, sir, it was. And I was just . . .”

She couldn’t finish the sentence. What the hell was she doing?

The director offered her the trace of a smile. “Are you asking, was that a coincidence?”

“Uh, well, yes, sir, I guess that is what I’m asking. It just seemed—”

“You want to know whether we had anything to do with Stiles’s death.”

She swallowed. She couldn’t deny that, yes, that was precisely what she wanted to know. But she couldn’t say it out loud, either. Even just having suggested it seemed suddenly crazy. The idea itself, and mentioning it besides.

A silent moment spun out. Then the director chuckled. “The answer is no.”

She looked at him, but his gaze was inscrutable. After another awkward, silent

moment, she nodded and stood. “Thank you, sir. I . . . I feel silly that I asked.”

He shook his head. “I’m glad you asked. It’s exactly the kind of question, the kind of connection, each of us should be trying to make. It just happens that in this case, the connection was a coincidence.”

“So . . . Stiles wasn’t involved with anything . . . untoward with Marcy Wheeler?”

There was a pause. “I didn’t say that.”

“No, sir, but you said Stiles’s death was sad.”

There was the slightest furrowing of his brows. “As it was. Whatever he may or may not have intended in his contacts with irresponsible bloggers, he served his country for many years. By my lights, that makes his unfortunate, unnecessary, and untimely death very sad indeed, as I said.”

She nodded and stood, recognizing she had hit a dead end and wishing she hadn’t gone down the street that led to it. When she got to the door, he said, “Evie.”

She turned and looked at him.

He nodded as though in appreciation, or appraisal. “Very good work.”

“Thank you, sir.”

She headed back to her office, mentally kicking herself. She’d felt she had to ask, but why? What point had she been trying to prove, and to whom? If she’d been watching a movie, she’d be angry at the heroine for having thoughtlessly tipped her hand. She’d learned nothing, and in doing so had probably caused the director to question . . . she didn’t know what. Her loyalty, or something.

All of which was bad enough. But there was something worse, something she sensed was the real reason she wished she hadn’t asked about Stiles.

She thought the director was lying.

Chapter 2

The moment Gallagher left, Anders was on the phone scrambling the geolocation and customs records units. Gallagher had good instincts, which worried him somewhat at the moment, but he would deal with that presently. For now, what mattered was Hamilton and Perkins, and whether NSA had a new Snowden operating out of Turkey.

He decided not to contact anyone in Ankara. Not yet. He expected he would be able to find out all he needed from the geolocation and customs records people. And from a system set up by a computer network exploitation unit, one that had penetrated just about every hotel and other travel system in the world. If Perkins needed to be dealt with, it was better that as few people as possible knew of the underlying problem, especially with Gallagher expressing suspicions about what had happened to Stiles. The whole purpose of the compartmentalized security program—cell phone geolocation, customs, law enforcement, CCTV monitoring, satellite imagery, license plate reading, and several others, in addition to the more widely available and less walled-off metadata programs—was to ensure that no one without the appropriate clearance would have more than the most fragmented sense of who was being looked at, or why. Or what was being done about it.

Well, not the whole purpose. There was another benefit: no one but Remar and Anders himself understood all the means of monitoring NSA could bring to bear on a problem. He had a gut-level feeling it was precisely this compartmentalization, which he himself had designed following the Snowden breach, that had tripped up Perkins. If Perkins had gone traitor, the man would have known to be ultracautious about his cell phone, the sites he visited online, and a variety of other security tells. But Perkins didn't know about the facial recognition or other biometrics analysis. A mole could only avoid and evade the monitoring systems of which he was aware. Which made it crucial that almost no one be permitted to see the whole picture.

Within ten minutes, he'd received confirmation that Hamilton had arrived that afternoon on a BA flight from London. He had checked in at the Rasha Hotel two hours after that. And his cell phone had remained at the hotel since then. Why would a reporter leave his cell phone in his hotel room while he was out, if not as an attempt to fool anyone tracking him into believing he, too, had remained in his room? And worse, Perkins had done the same: cell phone left in his Ankara apartment while Perkins was traveling in Istanbul.

And Gallagher had been right. It was unthinkable Perkins would travel to Istanbul without first informing Anders. Snowden slipping off to Hong Kong had been what had killed them in 2013. Since then, all travel, like all foreign and media contacts, had to be strictly accounted for in advance. That Perkins had violated the protocol looked bad. Very bad. But Anders needed more to be certain—certain enough to do what he sensed was going to be required.

He called Gallagher. “Evie, how many camera networks are you into in Ankara and

Istanbul?”

“Virtually all of them, sir. There are a few banks with especially heavily encrypted systems, but—”

“And the footage is stored for how long—three months?”

“At least, sir. If necessary, we can often retrieve earlier material that’s been overwritten.”

“I want you to run your system and see if you can place Perkins in or around Ankara Internet cafés over whatever time frame is available to you.”

“Sir, I think if you focus on his mobile phone—”

“I sincerely doubt he would have had it with him during the visits I’m imagining.”

There was a pause. “Understood, sir.”

“If you find anything, I want the dates, times, and locations.”

“Yes, sir.”

He clicked off and considered. Why would Hamilton and Perkins risk meeting face-to-face? If this were a simple leak of documents, no matter how massive, it could all have been handled remotely. Electronically.

But that was the answer right there, wasn’t it? Signals intelligence was NSA’s bread and butter. Perkins knew that. So he was more afraid of an electronic intercept than he was of being compromised through a meeting. It was the same reasoning bin Laden had employed in eschewing phones and the Internet and relying on human couriers, instead.

But he sensed there was more than simply that. Maybe they didn’t just need to meet face-to-face; they wanted to. Why? He thought of Snowden again. The material Snowden had leaked was recondite, practically a foreign language to outsiders. He’d spent a week walking Greenwald, Poitras, and MacAskill through it, providing background, explanations, crucial context. If all Perkins wanted was a leak, he could have just uploaded his information to *WikiLeaks*. No, what he wanted was a known journalist’s imprimatur—a way of laundering a leak into something newsworthy. Otherwise, the damage control would be too easy. The government could dismiss the revelations as vandalism, or deny them entirely.

A message alert popped up on his monitor. Gallagher had come through. Perkins favored at least four Internet cafés in Ankara. Presumably there were others, involving a kind of shell-game effect, but he’d been picked up only at the four so far. Still, that was more than enough.

He called a PRISM analyst and told her he wanted to know if any of the Internet activity at the Ankara cafés in question was suspicious. With the dates and times, it took less than three minutes for the analyst to confirm that someone was using those cafés to read the *Intercept* and *WikiLeaks* and various other radical websites. Worse, that someone was focusing on the bios of activists that read like a who's-who of international subversives: Barrett Brown, Sarah Harrison, Murtaza Hussain, Angela Keaton, that FOIA terrorist Jason Leopold, Janet Reitman, Trevor Timm . . . and that damn Marcy Wheeler again. With the attention gradually narrowing to one name in particular: Ryan Hamilton.

The beauty of the security system was that the analyst had no idea who was being tasked. She would never connect Anders's query today with the unpleasant news about Perkins tomorrow.

A call to a geolocation analyst confirmed that on each occasion Perkins had been using an Internet café, his mobile phone had remained in his apartment. He thought doing so would disguise his movements, and therefore his activity. And he would have been right—except for the camera network. He didn't know about that.

For a moment, Anders was irritated at all the trouble he had to go through just to confirm a single person's location. It would be so much easier, and better, if everyone were fitted with a microchip. He'd read an article somewhere about how a dog had slipped away from its home in Pennsylvania, and how it had been discovered months later in Oregon—all because a shelter technician had read the microchip her owners had implanted in her. There might be some resistance to the notion of doing something like this to people, of course, but he imagined if it were billed as insurance against kidnapping . . . and if a high-profile kidnapping could be arranged to be foiled—a child saved from the worst depravity, its parents from bottomless horror and grief, solely because the child's loving parents had possessed the foresight to implant a chip while the child was an infant—it wouldn't be long before all parents would feel criminally negligent for failing to implant their children. He wondered if a law could be passed, the way there had been for car seats and bicycle helmets. But no, it probably wouldn't even be necessary. The fear of a kidnapping coupled with a *Why, why did we not have the microchip done?* would be more than sufficient.

He shook off the daydream, knowing he had to work with the tools available to him today. Tomorrow was another matter.

Istanbul, he wondered. Why Istanbul for the meeting? Close enough to Ankara for Perkins to be able to slip away and travel by train or by car. No cell phone, no credit cards, no electronic breadcrumbs. Ankara would have been more convenient, but if Hamilton were on any kind of watch list—and he was—his presence in Ankara might have drawn suspicion onto Perkins once the *Intercept* published whatever Perkins was handing over.

All of which meant there might still be a chance to contain the damage. If this was the

first meeting . . . if nothing had been transferred electronically yet, or, even if it had, if no one else had the encryption keys . . . if they were planning on spending at least a little time together so Perkins could bring Hamilton up to speed . . .

He had to be careful, though. Gallagher was suspicious. Not so suspicious she was afraid to share the suspicions with him, he was glad to see. But suspicious enough. On top of which, she was smart, and observant. Another suicide—or worse, two suicides—of problems Gallagher herself had flagged would likely worsen her concern. He needed something even more deniable.

But no matter how deniable, Gallagher would have to be watched. In his experience, suspicion was like flu. Many people caught it, but only a relatively few succumbed. Given time and proper treatment, most got better. But the illness still had to be monitored. You couldn't let a fever reach a point where it threatened the health of the body.

Most of all, you couldn't take a chance on contagion.

He thought about Hamilton. For a moment, he felt . . . not bad, exactly. But sorrowful. Some of his colleagues looked at the world through a cartoon prism in which their domestic enemies hated America and loved the terrorists and other such comforting absurdities. Anders understood human nature to be generally more subtle than that, and assumed Hamilton loved his country in his distorted way, no matter how much his activities were likely to harm it. Well, there was a sort of solemn pride in knowing the reporter's death wouldn't be in vain. That the manner of his dying would actually serve to unite Americans, to bring them together in strength and common purpose. Hamilton would never know, and even if he could, would never understand, but in an odd way, Anders respected him. If the man had to die—and he did—wouldn't he want his organs to be harvested, for example, that he might give the gift of life to others? Of course he would. As would any decent person. And there was some solace in the knowledge that Anders was honoring Hamilton by making his death the occasion for an equivalent bestowal. That he was mitigating Hamilton's loss, not magnifying its tragedy.

He called in Remar, who sat ramrod-straight facing the director's desk during the briefing—the posture he tended to adopt, Anders knew, when he was resisting difficult conclusions. And indeed, predictably, Remar remonstrated about what clearly needed to be done. But also predictably, in the end, he reluctantly agreed there was no other way. Only after they had agreed on a plan did Remar ask, “Why do you think he did it?”

Anders leaned back in his desk chair, relieved the difficult part of the conversation was done. “Who knows? He had a strained relationship with his family, which I know he attributed to the demands of the job and how it took him away from them. Maybe this was his way of showing them he was one of the good guys. Or maybe it was some misplaced sense of conscience, growing like a tumor as he got older and more aware of his own mortality. I knew some of this might have presented a vulnerability. I should have taken it more seriously.”

“You can’t know everything.”

“Our *job* is to know everything.”

Remar’s expression remained frozen. Sometimes it was hard to know whether the impassivity was the result of his injuries, or whether he was trying to hide his thoughts.

After a moment he said, “This couldn’t have been . . . there’s no way Perkins could have known anything about God’s Eye, right?”

Anders shook his head at the absurdity of the thought. But he felt a tightness in his gut that was like a flashback to the night Remar had awakened him with the news about Snowden.

“It’s impossible that Perkins could have known anything,” he said after a moment. “You and I are the only ones who have full access. The only ones who even know it exists, at least on a big-picture level. But . . . let’s conduct an audit. Personally conduct it, obviously.”

Remar nodded. “Of course. But . . . would you agree that now would be a good time to call it something else?”

“You’ve never come up with anything better.”

“I know, but—”

“God’s Eye fits. It’s perfectly descriptive.”

“What I’m saying is, The Patriot Act and The Freedom Act . . . those were effective names. They made surveillance sound good. Carnivore, Total Information Awareness . . . those programs came under fire because the names sounded scary.”

“The Eye of Providence is already ubiquitous. It’s on the reverse of the Great Seal of the United States, and the back of every one-dollar bill. It’s familiar. Comforting. But none of this is even relevant. Because God’s Eye is not going to get out.”

“Of course not, but—”

“What we’re talking about now is just a precaution. No more than looking under the bed to make sure the bogeyman isn’t hiding there. Confirming what we already know.”

“Fine, but—”

“Look, God’s Eye was secure even before Snowden, yes? We know this for a certainty. Because—”

“—because if Snowden had access to God’s Eye, he would have revealed it.”

“Exactly. Just like if al-Qaeda had access to nukes before 9/11, New York and Washington would have been vaporized. In both cases, the absence of evidence—”

“—was evidence of absence.”

“Correct. And even so, out of an abundance of caution, we had Chambers increase all the security protocols.”

Remar looked at him, the old disapproval in his eyes. “Aerial was an amazing talent. And loyal.”

Anders didn’t like Remar referring to Chambers by her first name. Well, her nickname—her real name was Nicole—but that was even worse. It made what was purely a national security decision seem more personal. Worse, he didn’t like the probe. He looked into Remar’s eye. “Are you questioning my decision, General Remar?”

Remar dropped his gaze. “What’s done is done. But if you’re not worried Perkins might have accessed God’s Eye, why such extreme measures?”

“Just because there’s no way Perkins could create Armageddon doesn’t mean he doesn’t represent catastrophe. You want another Snowden? The costs of all that publicity, the distractions? That damn Greenwald, mocking NSA for being the only organization to lose the data we’ve been trying to get back?”

“No, of course not.”

“Not to mention how it’s going to make us look personally if it happens again.”

Remar nodded.

Anders sighed. “We don’t know what Perkins was up to. But we can assume if the SUSLA Turkey, of all people, thought it was newsworthy, it was going to be damaging. Exceptionally damaging.”

Remar nodded again, seemingly mollified. “Who do you want on it?”

“I’m thinking Delgado for Perkins. Manus for the journalist.”

“Perkins is the finesse job, the journalist is brute force?”

Anders shook his head. “Don’t misjudge Manus. Just because he can’t hear doesn’t mean he’s incapable of finesse.”

“I don’t know about that guy, Ted. I can never tell what’s he thinking.”

Anders looked at Remar’s ruined face, and refrained from noting that the same could be said for his XO.

“It’s not what he’s thinking, Mike. It’s what he does.”

“He doesn’t make you nervous?”

“I know how to handle him.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

“It’s what matters.”

“I know he’s loyal to you. Like a . . . I don’t know, an abused dog you rescued, or something. But a dog like that is damaged, you know? Down deep. You can never really trust it.”

“It’s not a question of trust. It’s a question of utility.”

It came out a little more bluntly than he’d intended, but on the other hand, could anyone deny the statement’s essential truth?

Remar stood. “All right. What else?”

Had he taken Anders’s words as commentary on their own relationship? The director hadn’t meant it that way.

No, Remar was all right. As loyal as Manus—though sometimes with too many questions. But at least he always knew when it was time to swallow his objections and carry out his orders.

“We’ll need a Turkish cutout,” Anders said. “Contact our guy. Manus will deliver the journalist to the Ergenekon people. They’ll smuggle him into Syria.”

“A second cutout.”

“Correct. Tell our guy Ergenekon gets paid in three tranches—when they take delivery, when they deliver to the Syrians, when the Syrians complete the transaction.”

“What Syrians are we talking about?”

“Does it matter? We’ll describe them as ISIS.”

“The ISIS brand is pretty well known at this point. Might be better to use something

new.”

Anders considered. “Well, we could attribute it to the Khorasan Group. You know, ‘too radical even for al-Qaeda.’”

“I don’t know. We claimed to have killed the group’s leader once the bombing in Syria began. Plus, the name never really caught on. Too much like ‘Kardashian.’ I’ve told you, names matter.”

Anders ignored the gambit. God’s Eye was a perfect name, and he wasn’t inclined to change it—or anything else—to something less than perfect. “Keep it vague, then. But attach it to ISIS. ‘An ISIS splinter group,’ something like that. And as far as the Turks, start at twenty thousand US per tranche, but be prepared to go up to a hundred overall.”

“They want hardware more than cash these days.”

“Tell our guy if this goes well, next time we can talk about multiple grenade launchers. They’re hot for those. But don’t let him get greedy.”

Remar headed to the door. “I’ll get Delgado. And your human dog.”

Chapter 3

Twenty minutes later, there were two firm knocks on the door. Anders looked up and said, “Come.”

Thomas Delgado entered and closed the door behind him. Five-five and fit as a ferret, he was wearing an immaculately tailored gray suit and white shirt, the absence of a tie his only stylistic concession to Maryland’s late August heat. As if in recompense, a half inch of white linen emerged from the breast pocket of his jacket. The outfit was ostentatiously stylish in the corridors of NSA, especially during shirtsleeves summer, but Anders supposed the look had its merits—chiefly that it at least partly disguised the fact that once upon a time, Delgado had earned a reputation as a technology-savvy killer for various East Coast crime organizations, foreign and domestic.

That had been ten years ago, when Anders had warned him about and ran interference with an FBI task force looking to put him behind bars. The warning had of course been part of a quid pro quo, and Delgado had proven enormously capable—imaginative, discreet, decisive. You told him who, you told him where, you gave him parameters about how. He never asked for anything beyond that, and he never failed to take care of the problem. If he had a shortcoming, it was that he enjoyed aspects of his work a little more than might be considered . . . desirable. But no one was perfect.

Delgado sat. His breathing was regular, but there was some perspiration along a row of hair plugs that seemed to be struggling to take root.

“You come from outside?” Anders asked.

Delgado nodded. “Fucking murder out there. Like a hundred degrees. Remar said you wanted to see me right away.”

Anders steepled his fingers. “We have a problem in Ankara. You’ll be leaving on a military flight from Andrews immediately. This one can’t be a suicide. Can you make it look like a car crash?”

Delgado smiled. “You know I can, especially if it’s a newer model.”

There was something about Delgado’s smile that always looked like a sneer. Well, the man wasn’t employed for his charm.

Anders thought of the fancy European car he knew Perkins drove in Ankara. “New enough. If you can’t get inside yourself, I’ll have a Tailored Access Operations team as backup.”

“I won’t need them.”

“Probably true, but they’ll be available in case.”

The TAO people were magicians. One team had been tasked with developing access to the checked baggage computer networks of every major airline. Now it was child's play to cause a bag, or better yet a whole plane full of bags, to be temporarily "misplaced," and, while the bags were missing, to replace a wheel or a handle or the heel of a shoe with a listening or tracking device. After a few hours, perhaps a day, the airline would discover its error, apologize, and send the bags on to their proper destinations. Airline incompetence was so universal that no one ever thought to question whether sometimes something else might be at work. Snowden had revealed a lot of these capabilities, but not all. Thank God.

Delgado wiped a bead of sweat from his scalp. "The particulars?"

"General Remar will provide you with an encrypted file on your way out. You can read it when you're airborne." He paused, then added, "You won't be able to liaise with the local field office. The problem is the head of that office."

If Delgado was surprised by that, he didn't show it. He simply nodded and said, "Well, now I know why you want a car crash. Are you going to stick me with the freak, or do I get to operate alone this time?"

"You'll be on a plane together. It's already waiting at Andrews. Manus will be in the region, but on something else."

As if on cue, there were three soft knocks on the door. Anders waited. If it was someone else, the person would leave. If it was Manus, he wouldn't hear Anders's command to enter.

The door opened, the office beyond it briefly blotted out. Then Marvin Manus was inside, the door closed behind him. Delgado turned so that Manus could read his lips and enunciated extra loudly and clearly, "Well, don't just stand there, genius. Sit."

Not for the first time, Anders wondered at Delgado's animus. The smaller man had a mean streak, that much was clear. But did he also have a death wish? Delgado was formidable, yes. But Manus . . . Manus was something else, something elemental. Anders had rescued him fifteen years earlier, when Manus had turned eighteen and was about to graduate from the juvenile correctional center in St. Charles, Illinois, to the maximum-security adult facility in Pontiac. It said a lot that Remar was nervous about him. Because Remar, who had fought his way back from wounds and endured pain that would have killed most other men, wasn't nervous about anyone.

Manus ignored the taunt and looked to Anders for his cue. Anders glanced at Delgado and said, "Go."

Delgado hesitated, then stood and sauntered past Manus, eyeing the larger man up and down as he moved. He paused so Manus could see his lips, then said loudly, "Glad

we'll be traveling together. I'd miss your scintillating conversation."

Manus watched him leave, saying not a word. Anders knew how to handle Manus, of course, but even so he sometimes found his stillness . . . disquieting. Especially when it was in response to something that would have produced some evidence of anger in an ordinary person.

Anders gestured to a chair, then simultaneously signed and said, "Marvin. Thank you for coming." The courtesy was deliberate. With Manus, it was powerful currency. And though he knew Manus was an excellent lip-reader, whenever he could he still tried to add some of the bits of American Sign Language he had learned, because he knew how much Manus appreciated his efforts.

Manus nodded an acknowledgment and lowered himself onto one of the chairs, gripping the arms gingerly as though concerned he might inadvertently snap them off.

"You're going to Istanbul," Anders said. "Same military plane as Delgado, different assignment when you get there. General Remar will give you an encrypted file with all the particulars. This is only a snatch. A journalist, presumably not security conscious, presumably unarmed. It doesn't matter if he sustains some damage when you take him, as long as he's alive and basically intact."

"What do I do with him?" Manus's voice was low and sonorous, the pronunciation slightly off because he couldn't hear himself talking. Overall, his tone offered no more clue to the thoughts behind it than did the more customary silence.

"You're going to turn him over to a group of Turkish middlemen who have contacts on the other side of the Syrian border. General Remar is arranging the logistics now, and I'll brief you in the air as soon as I have details. Any questions?"

Manus offered a single shake of his head.

Not a surprise. If there were more Manus needed to know, Anders would have told him.

Anders looked at him. "How are things with Delgado?"

There was a pause. "How do you mean?"

The tone was as neutral as a flat-lined heart monitor.

"He's got a lot of hate," Anders went on. "But he's useful to me."

Manus nodded.

Anders sighed. "I appreciate . . . what you sometimes put up with."

Another nod. But Anders sensed the loyalty behind it. The response to what might have been the only kindness this man had ever really known.

“When you’re back,” Anders went on, “I have something else for you. An employee about whom I have some . . . doubts. I want you to keep an eye on her.”

Manus frowned slightly, perhaps dubious. It wasn’t the type of task for which Anders ordinarily employed him.

“Her little boy is deaf,” Anders said. “It might provide an opening for you, a way in.”

The frown smoothed out. “All right.”

“Of course she’ll be monitored electronically, but she’s smart, she’ll be sensitive to that. I’m looking for something else.”

“What?”

Anders drummed his fingers along the desk. “I’m concerned what’s about to happen in Turkey might upset her. And I want to know . . . is she satisfied? Settled? Content? Or is her conscience troubling her? Is she a team player? Or is she starting to think of herself as an outsider? We learn a tremendous amount from SIGINT, yes, but there are people who forget the human aspect, the unquantifiable, the ghost in the machine. I don’t want to leave that out. I don’t want to leave *anything* out. Your firsthand impressions will be useful in that regard.”

For a moment, Manus looked at his huge hands, as though he might find some answer in them. Then he said, “You want to know everything.”

Anders only nodded. Didn’t everyone?

Chapter 4

Manus spent the entire flight to Istanbul in silence. Some of the time he slept; some of the time he reviewed the updates the director sent him; all of the time he ignored Delgado. The man's smell was always unpleasant—a cologne Manus didn't recognize from anywhere else, a too-strong floral soap, and some kind of hair gel, all combined with an underlying, slightly acrid odor that was uniquely Delgado's. Delgado had once caught him wrinkling his nose, and asked what his problem was. Manus had told him he didn't like Delgado's cologne. Delgado had looked surprised—Manus had been standing almost twenty feet away—and had asked how Manus could smell it from all the way over there. Manus had merely shrugged. He had an unusually keen nose—lose one sense, and the others converge to pick up the slack—and he accepted that Delgado's stink was one of the downsides.

He knew Delgado hated him, though he didn't know why. He didn't know why anyone ever hated him. People just sometimes did. The hate didn't bother him. It was only a problem if it made someone try to hurt him. That was what he watched for. When he saw it coming, he would hurt the person first. He hoped that wouldn't happen with Delgado. The director seemed to need Delgado, to value him, and Manus didn't ever want to do anything bad to the director.

The part of his life that had happened before the director was vague to him now, dreamlike, disjointed. His father had been the first person to hurt him. Usually it happened when his father had been drinking. His father came from nothing in Granite City, Illinois, got a football scholarship to Ohio State, blew out a knee his first season, lost the scholarship, lost everything. Came back to Granite City to a job in the steel mill, knocked up a girl he knew from high school, married her. The baby had been Manus.

His father didn't like Manus. He was too small. He was too quiet. He was stupid. Well, it was true Manus had been small; his size hadn't kicked in until he was sixteen. And of course he was quiet. When his father drank, anything could set him off. So Manus learned not just to be quiet but to be *still*, to be like a table or a rug or a wall, when his father was in a hating mood. It didn't always work, but he knew it wasn't stupid. Quiet was smart. Quiet was survival.

When Manus was four, his father had hit him so hard in the head that Manus blacked out. When he'd awakened, he was in a hospital. His mother was sitting next to the bed, and her mouth had formed an enormous O of joy and relief when he'd opened his eyes and looked at her. He thought she had shouted, but he couldn't hear her. In fact, everything was so quiet. It was as though he was under water.

People in white jackets did tests. He could hear a little, but only when people were talking very loudly directly in front of him. They told him his hearing might come back, that it was impossible to say. And that he had to be more careful near the stairs, because he had hurt himself falling down them. That seemed strange. He remembered his father yelling at him—in fact, his father yelling was the last thing he remembered hearing

ever—but had he also fallen down the stairs? He wanted to ask, but it was hard to make himself understood. And anyway, what did it matter?

After that, his father didn't drink for a long time, and he left Manus alone. A teacher came to the house and taught him and his mother something called American Sign Language. Manus liked it—a way to talk without making any sound. His mother worked hard to help him with it, but she also insisted that he watch her talk because most people didn't know sign and he had to learn to read lips.

Manus went to the public school. It was hard. Some of the teachers remembered to face the class when they were talking so Manus, who always sat in front, could read their lips. But others didn't remember, or didn't care. There was a speech therapist who was nice, but Manus hated meeting with her. The drills she made him do were boring, and he didn't understand the point. Why did he even need to talk? Early on, when the other kids made fun of him, he'd answered, and something about his voice only made them laugh harder. Silence was better. His mother told him he had to practice his speaking as much as he did lip-reading or he wouldn't be able to make friends. But no one wanted to be friends with the deaf kid, the kid they called *idiot* and *doofus* and *retard*.

When he was ten, his father broke a hand at the mill and got something called disability. He started drinking again. And hurting Manus again. His mother tried to protect him, taking the hurt so he wouldn't have to. Afterward, when his father was passed out, she would sign to Manus that it was all right, it hurt less than it seemed, less than seeing anything happen to her beautiful boy. He remembered she liked to call him that. And the smell of her perfume.

One night when Manus was fourteen, his father came home very drunk. Manus was doing homework at the kitchen table. His mother was cooking dinner, spaghetti and garlic bread, the sauce with mushrooms and sausage simmering in a big pot on the electric stove. Enough for lots of leftovers.

He could smell the alcohol the moment his father walked in. He looked up and watched his mother say, with a falsely cheery expression, that his father's timing was great, the sauce was perfect now, it had been simmering all afternoon. His father said he wasn't hungry. He looked around. Then he said the food stank. The whole place stank.

Manus thought the food smelled good. Spaghetti was his favorite. And his mother had worked hard to make dinner. For one tiny second, he forgot to be smart, to be a table or rug or wall. He glanced at his father. Only for that tiny second. But a second was enough.

“Don't you fucking look at me like that!” his father had shouted, so loudly Manus could faintly hear it. “Who do you think puts the food on the table in this house? Who?”

It was bad when his father asked questions. Manus had learned there were no satisfactory answers. And once his father was asking questions, it was hard to be like furniture. Once his father had noticed you, not answering could make him feel like he

was being ignored. Which he didn't like. Manus didn't know why. Manus preferred to be ignored.

So he did the best he could. He glanced down at the homework in front of him and kept very still.

"You look at me when I'm talking to you!" his father roared. He strode over to where Manus sat. "Look at me!"

His mother jumped between them. Manus craned his head to see her face. "He's just doing his homework, Dom," she'd said, her expression frightened. "How about some garlic bread?"

It was horrible when she intervened. Manus was always grateful for it, relieved to have his father's rage diverted. But with the relief came shame, more and more so as he was getting older. And suddenly, instead of feeling afraid, he felt something else. He felt . . . angry. Which instantly frightened him more. What if his father noticed? He had to be still, really still, like always. Until his father was tired and went away.

But his father was looking for something, and he'd found it in that tiny flash of anger. He shoved Manus's mother out of the way and swatted Manus open-handed across the head, blasting Manus and the chair he sat in to the floor. Manus saw stars. He saw his mother scream, "Dom, stop!" Manus looked up and saw his father cuff his mother across the face, saw her stagger back into the wall with a *boom* he could feel through the floor. His father moving toward her, bellowing, his fists clenched. And the anger he'd felt flare a moment earlier—an anger he realized years later had been building and building beneath his efforts to suppress it—suddenly detonated.

He lurched to his feet and leaped onto his father's back, yelling something, not words, just yelling. His father tore him off like a scab and shoved him two-handed so hard that Manus actually flew through the air and slammed into the wall next to the stove. He saw stars again. Things became fragmentary. His mother screaming, "You leave him alone!" His father advancing on him. His mother, yelling something, picking up a chair and raising it, stepping in and bringing the chair down hard on his father's head. A loud *crack*. A shiver running through his father's body. Then his eyes narrowing to slits, his head rotating like a reptile's, the huge body swinging around behind it.

"*You little cunt,*" Manus had seen him say as he turned, and though he couldn't hear it, it felt like a whisper, which was so much worse than any shouting, so much scarier. His mother tried to raise the chair again and his father snatched it from her hands like it was a child's toy and flung it across the room, then grabbed the edge of the table and upended it out of the way. His mother was terrified now, Manus could see that, she was backpedaling, her eyes wide, her mouth aghast. His father moved in like a dog on a cornered squirrel. He grabbed the back of her neck with one hand and drove his fist into her face with the other. Blood burst from her nose and she staggered. His father grabbed her shoulders, not letting her fall, and smashed her backward into the wall, pulling her

into him and then smashing her into the wall again, the back of her head slamming into the plaster and ricocheting off each time.

Everything seemed to slow down. Manus looked at the stove. The fat cook pot of spaghetti sauce, the bubbles rising through the viscous red amid mushrooms and chunks of meat. He felt hate blossom inside him. It was a supremely beautiful feeling, enormous and clean and focused.

He took hold of both handles of the pot and pulled it off the stove as he advanced on his father, aware the metal was burning his palms but hardly feeling it. “*Hey!*” he roared in a voice he had never used before, never imagined. A voice his father had never heard. It startled him. He released Manus’s mother’s shoulders, and as she slid to the floor, he started turning toward Manus, flinching as he did so, his head turtling in, his arms coming up, something in Manus’s new voice having reached past the drunkenness and warning a primitive, animal part of his mind of danger.

But too late. Manus was only a few feet away, and as his father’s head continued to come around, he flung the pot violently forward, keeping his grip on the handles so the pot stopped at the limit of his reach. An enormous red blob emerged like a dragon from its lair, seeming to float through the air as his father kept turning, turning toward him in slow motion . . .

The boiling sauce caught his father directly in the face and neck, smothering his features. He shrieked and collapsed to his knees, his body shaking, his hands clawing at his eyes. For a moment, Manus thought his father was wiping away mushrooms, and then realized what he was seeing instead was melting skin.

Manus ran past him and knelt next to his mother, who was lying on her back, her legs folded weirdly underneath her. Her eyes were open but rolled up in her head. He shook her and patted her cheek, whispering “*Mommy, Mommy, wake up*” again and again through a constricted throat. It had been *Mom* for years at that point, but his terror at her unresponsiveness was childlike and she was suddenly *Mommy* again.

He kept shaking her and patting her face. He could faintly hear his father howling, but soon there was no sound at all, and when he looked up, his father was lying still. He realized he should have called 911, how could he not have thought of that? He ran to the phone and dialed. He couldn’t hear if anyone picked up or what they were saying so he just kept repeating that he was deaf and needed help, his mother was hurt, please he needed help.

An ambulance came. Police. Everyone went to the hospital. His mother was dead. Something called a subdural hematoma, a doctor explained. Bleeding inside the head. His father was unconscious. They bandaged his face like a mummy and doctors said he wouldn’t be able to see again even if he woke up. But he didn’t. He got pneumonia and died two weeks later.

The police brought in an interpreter who knew sign, and they asked Manus a lot of questions. He didn't want to talk about it, but he told them the truth. Someone who called himself the district attorney explained that Manus wasn't going to be prosecuted. But his grandparents didn't want him. His deafness had always been a barrier between them, and now it was only worse—his father's parents didn't believe his story, while his mother's wanted to know why he hadn't done something sooner. Manus didn't have an answer for that. He'd been too afraid, and look what had happened.

They put him in a special school. He got in a lot of fights. He had teeth knocked out, his nose was broken, he fractured knuckles. No matter what happened, he always learned. What parts of the body to hit with. What parts to hit. How to read people's intentions, to know when it was coming and how. When to attack beforehand, when to attack back.

The other boys spit threats and cursed and shouted when they fought. But Manus never said anything, never made a sound. When someone was trying to hurt him, hurting them back came to feel like a job, just work to be done. The thing he found best was to get the other boy on the ground and then stomp his pelvis or face or neck as though he was crushing a can or breaking a log. But it was also good to bite, and attack the eyes. Even the toughest boys forgot everything except trying to get away when Manus dug a finger into an eye socket.

The people who administered the school made him take a lot of tests. They told him he was intelligent but that he was wasting it. He didn't care. They told him if he didn't stop fighting, they would have to send him to another special school, one "for boys like you." But people kept trying to hurt him, and he kept going to work on them in return, so eventually they sent him to the other school, which was actually more like a prison.

One night during his first week there, he was awakened by a weight on his back. He tried to get up but couldn't—someone was pinning him to his cot. He struggled and the somebody held something cold and sharp against his throat. He realized it was a knife. Two pairs of strong hands pulled at his pants. He knew what was happening and struggled, but the knife pressed harder. He froze. The hands stripped off his pants, then gripped his legs and spread them. He wondered why none of the other boys in the dorm was doing anything, then realized: they were just glad that this time it wasn't them.

Three of them, and a knife—there was nothing he could do. So he relaxed. He wasn't submitting. He was waiting. They were going to hurt him and he had to let them. Until he could go to work.

As his body relaxed, the one on top of him began to shake with laughter. The hands on his legs gripped less tightly.

It hurt. The boy who was doing it was trying to make it hurt, too. It wasn't as bad as some of his father's beatings, but it was worse, too, because it was inside him, inside his body. Manus gritted his teeth, tears spilling from his eyes, and waited.

The boy shuddered and Manus could feel him finishing. Manus hadn't resisted. They were holding him only loosely now, thinking he wouldn't fight, thinking he just wanted it to be over.

The hands came off his legs. The knife started to come away from his throat.

He grabbed the blade with his left hand, his right hand seizing the wrist of the boy holding it. The edge cut deeply into his palm, but he didn't let go. He thought the boy might have yelled, but he wasn't sure and anyway it didn't matter. Manus pushed hard on the blade and the leverage broke the boy's grip. Manus grabbed the handle with his right hand. The boy tried to grab it back. Manus got his mouth around the boy's thumb pad and bit down on the meat there.

The boy howled and tried to pull away. His hand came loose, something remaining in Manus's mouth. Manus spat it out and twisted toward them. They tried to pin him, but he was slashing with the knife and they couldn't get hold of him.

One of them had fallen to the floor and was getting to his knees. Manus stomped the back of his neck and flattened him. He stomped the same spot again and felt something shatter under his heel.

The second one started to run, but tripped over something in the weak light. Manus tried to grab the boy's hair, but his hand was bleeding and the fingers wouldn't close. He shoved the boy's face onto the concrete floor and stabbed the knife into his neck. Blood erupted from the cut. The boy screamed and thrashed.

The third boy, the one who had hurt him, had made it to the locked dormitory door. He was pounding on it, screaming for someone to help. Manus moved in. The boy glanced back and saw him coming. Manus could see a guard through the thick glass in the center of the door, fumbling with his keys.

He didn't know how long it took the guards to get inside. Long enough. Manus went to work on the boy. By the time the guards had used their batons and dragged Manus off, the boy's face was mostly gone and he looked like a giant rag doll soaked in blood.

Two of the boys died. The one whose neck Manus had stomped lived, but he couldn't move his arms or legs, and they sent him somewhere that knew how to take care of people like that. They made Manus take more tests. There was a hearing, and Manus was transferred to what they called the Special Ward. The boys there were scary, but there were no gangs like the one that had attacked him. And people heard about what he had done. Killing two boys and paralyzing a third inspired respect.

A few times, another boy would try to hurt him. When that happened, he would go to work. It wasn't long before nobody wanted to try to hurt him anymore.

There were a few other boys like him in the Special Ward—quiet boys who left other

people alone, and who other people had learned were better left alone themselves. Those boys knew ways of hurting people Manus hadn't figured out yet. They exchanged information. Manus learned a lot.

There were some classes on math and English, but Manus didn't pay much attention. There was one class he enjoyed—carpentry. He liked working with his hands, even the bad one, the one he had used to grab the knife blade. He was good with tools. Everything was a tool, really, if you knew how to use it.

When Manus turned eighteen, he knew they were going to send him to a real prison because of the boys he'd killed. He didn't care. He didn't think it would be any different.

But something else happened. A soldier came to see him. The soldier told him he understood what Manus had been through. The soldier even knew a little sign, and though his efforts were almost comically clumsy, Manus sensed he had learned it because he thought Manus was important. He'd never felt important before. He didn't know what to make of it.

The soldier told Manus he thought Manus had ability, that he was destined to do something special, that it was his misfortune to be stuck with all these ordinary people who couldn't recognize the extraordinary talent in their midst, who didn't know how to harness that talent and put it to its proper use. He offered Manus a deal: he'd get Manus out of prison if Manus would train with the army.

Manus explained he couldn't join the army because he was deaf. Surely the soldier knew that. Besides, he'd hurt too many people and had a criminal record. The soldier told him not to worry about the deafness, he knew doctors who could help with that. And that those records could go away. Manus showed the soldier the hand he'd used to grab the knife from the boy who had hurt him. The hand was frozen into a claw; how could he join the army with that?

The soldier had looked at him and said, "I didn't say join the army. I said train with it. And some other training, too. If I can get that hand fixed so it works again, will you follow my lead?"

Manus said yes. They flew him to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where there were doctors who knew how to repair injuries like his. There was surgery, then a lot of physical therapy, and his hand got better. They fixed some of his other injuries, too—the missing teeth, the messed-up nose. They fitted him with hearing aids, which made some things audible but which he never really liked. He'd become accustomed to a silent world, and preferred it to the noisy one.

And then he went through the training the soldier had spoken of: short- and long-range weapons; edged weapons and unarmed combat; demolitions and improvised explosives; surveillance, counter-surveillance, counter-terrorism. Sometimes he worked with civilians who were themselves obviously former military; sometimes with elite

military units. There was a course called SERE, for Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape; and another called MOTC, the Military Operations Training Course, taught by the CIA at a place known as the Farm. The soldier, who had been a colonel, became a general. He used Manus for special assignments, assignments that Manus, grateful to the point of awe for all the general had done for him, always did well. Eventually, the general became the director. Manus continued to work for him. The director was the only person he'd ever known who seemed to truly appreciate Manus, to value him, to use him for what he was good at.

He didn't know what this journalist had done to make the director assign him to Manus, but he didn't care, either. That the director wanted it was enough. Manus would make sure it got done.