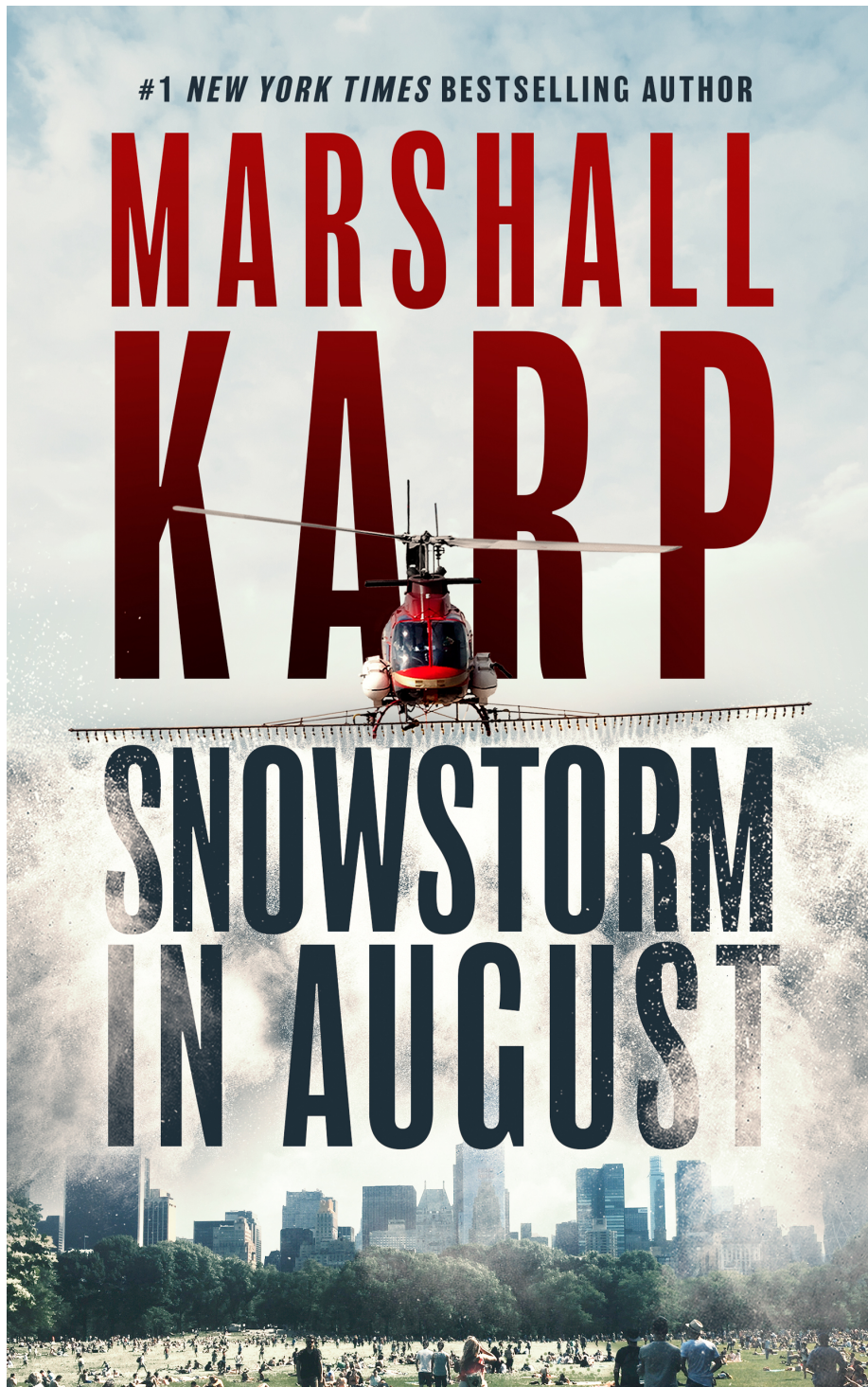


#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

MARSHALL  
KARP

SNOWSTORM  
IN AUGUST



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# CHAPTER 1

NEW YORK CITY

*August 21, 12:14 p.m.*

AURELIA GLADSTONE TWISTED HER SILVER HAIR up in a loose bun and pinned it in place. She smiled. The granny look, which she had been sporting for decades, was suddenly in. Women sixty, even seventy, years younger than she were dying their hair gray.

“I’m ninety-two years old,” she had said to Maddee at dinner last night, “and all of a sudden, I’m trending!”

“Just your hair, Miz G. Just your hair,” her housekeeper had snapped back. “But that dusty rose lipstick you insist on wearing screams World War II.”

“Jerry loved it,” the old lady responded. “The lipstick, not the war.”

That ended the discussion. Whenever Aurelia played the dead-husband card, Maddee immediately backed off.

But maybe she was right, Aurelia thought. She leaned forward and stared at her pale-pink lips in the vanity mirror. Okay, so it was a tad ghostly, but ...

That’s when she caught the first glimpse.

*Impossible*, she thought, turning around in her chair. She

stood up and walked slowly toward her bedroom window ten stories above Fifth Avenue.

And there it was, swirling in powdery funnels, leaving a white blanket on the cars below and the green trees that stretched across her beloved Central Park.

Snow.

In August.

"Maddee," she called nervously. No answer.

"Maddee!" she said again, raising her voice a notch and putting some urgency into it.

*No use*, Aurelia thought. Maddee was in the laundry room with the dryer spinning and those damned earbuds attached to her head. *There's no way she'll hear me.*

*Or believe me.*

It didn't snow in August. Hadn't in the ninety-two years since Aurelia arrived on the planet, and while she hadn't paid a hell of a lot of attention to all that global-warming business, she didn't think that glaciers melting in Antarctica translated to snow falling over New York City in the middle of summer.

But there it was. Snow. Not dust or soot or any of the usual crap you might see eddying around the yellow-gray skies of New York. This was the white, flaky stuff that everybody was hoping would arrive on December 25, and here it was four months ahead of schedule.

For a second she thought about calling her nephew, but she dismissed it immediately. Giles, with his pandering phone calls and his obsequious "How's my favorite auntie?" compliments, was the last person she should be calling. He and his odious little wife Kimberly were waiting for her to die.

Barring that, he'd be happy to tuck her away in a nursing home—correction: *assisted living facility*. Fuck him. She was old, but she didn't need any damn assistance living, thank

you very much. She had Maddee and Mr. Philips, the building super, and four very lovely doormen, and a kitchen drawer piled high with menus, which let her order whatever kind of food she was in the mood for, whenever she wanted.

*Call Giles and tell him I think it's snowing in August, and the son of a bitch would have me committed.*

"Maddee!" she demanded as loudly as her rheumy voice could go.

"For God's sake, Miz. G., I can hear ya. No need to carry on."

Aurelia turned around. Her short, squat, sharp-tongued housekeeper of thirty-seven years was standing in the doorway.

"Sorry, Maddee," she said. "I thought you were in the laundry room."

"I was. And now I'm on my way to the kitchen to fix us some lunch. I can make a nice tuna salad, or I could call down to the diner, and ..."

"Lunch can wait. First, come over here and look out the window."

"What's going on?"

"It's snowing."

"Ha!" the housekeeper bellowed. "What's *really* going on?"

"You tell me," Aurelia said, stepping aside so Maddee could get close to the window.

"Holy Mary, Mother of God. It's like a winter wonderland out there," she said.

The two women looked down at the cars, their wipers on high. A bike messenger peddling furiously and weaving in and out of traffic skidded on the slippery streets and plowed into a woman with a baby carriage who had been trying to cross against the light. People were pouring out of the park. Those who had managed to get to the east side of Fifth Avenue were ducking under awnings.

"It's supposed to hit ninety degrees today," Maddee said. "What the heck is going on?"

"I don't know," Aurelia said. "Turn on the Weather Channel. They'll know."

They didn't. Not yet. But half a mile to the west, Officer Brian Saunders of Central Park's Twenty-Second Precinct was about to find out.

He had pulled his three-wheeled scooter up to the Loeb Boathouse and jumped out of the cab when he spotted a jogger caught by the sudden storm drop to the ground. As he approached the man, a second jogger went down and, seconds after that, a cyclist. Someone at the café outside the boathouse yelled for help. A child lay facedown on the cobblestone path. Two more people were sprawled on the no-longer-green lawn.

Saunders realized what was happening. He didn't understand, but his job wasn't to figure it out. It was to call it in.

He ran back to the scooter, his uniform dusted with flecks of white, climbed inside the cab, and grabbed his radio.

"Central, this is Two-Two Precinct scooter. I need ESU forthwith. I have a Hazmat condition outside the Loeb boathouse. At least eight people down, maybe more."

"Unit, we are receiving numerous calls about a freak snowstorm falling in the park," the dispatcher replied. "Can you confirm if—"

Saunders cut her off. "Central, be advised that it's definitely coming down hard, but it's not snow that is falling in the park. It's ..."

He took a breath, only barely believing what he was about to report.

"It's cocaine."

## CHAPTER 2

*Ten days earlier*

**LIKE MOST COPS, I HAVE TWO PHONES.** The ringtone on the one I use for the job gets changed once a month. Metallica, Black Sabbath, Slayer—I bounce around. The only criterion is that it has to be shrill, aggressive, and loud enough to bring me out of a coma.

The ringtone on my personal cell is the polar opposite. It's the telephonic version of an Ambien and a glass of warm milk, but I haven't changed it since Deirdre uploaded it to my phone fourteen years ago.

I met her on a hot August night a lot like this one. *Met* is an exaggeration. She was one of 300,000 people who poured onto the Great Lawn in Central Park for a Neil Diamond concert. I was one of about two hundred cops pulled in from the other boroughs. As a sergeant, I could easily have dodged the assignment, but I volunteered. After seven years working the crime-riddled streets of the South Bronx, I was happy to get away from the crack whores, gang wars, and housing project stabbings so I could scan the crowd of latte-drinking music lovers and look for pickpockets, drug dealers, and other Upper

East Side miscreants. And being twenty-nine and single, I was also hoping to spot something more interesting than an easy collar and eight hours of OT.

And then I saw her. A blue-eyed redhead with a mischievous smile and an infectious laugh that lit up the sea of drab blankets and vinyl-strapped beach chairs around her.

She first noticed me looking her way when Diamond was singing “Girl, You’ll Be a Woman Soon.” Deirdre was twenty-seven at the time and very much a woman, but she reacted to the lyrics as if she were just coming of age. And when the words “soon, you’ll need a man” filled the air, she looked at me and shyly turned away.

Flirty as all hell. Girls do that with cops. At least, they did back then. She didn’t look at me again until three songs later—“Sweet Caroline,” the one the fans can’t listen to without singing along. She was on her feet at that point. We locked eyes for “touching me, touching you,” and if there had been a pickpocket working that night, he could have taken my wallet, my badge, and my gun, because I was mesmerized as she moved her lithe body, pumped her arms, and cried out, “so good, so good, so good.”

I sized up the people she was with. Three other women and a guy with a 35mm camera around his neck, who was more into taking pictures than listening to the music. I was pretty sure that he was gay, which meant he was a work friend or a friend-friend, but definitely not a *boy*friend.

I was thinking about how to strike up a conversation when a loud, angry “Fuck you!” cut through the music and pierced the air. I scanned the people nearby and saw that at least a dozen of them had turned away from the stage and were looking at a hot-dog cart about seventy feet to my left.

The vendor was maybe five-six, no more than 140 pounds,



and dark-skinned. The customer, a white male in his early twenties, was nearly twice his size.

I headed toward them at a brisk pace. Walking. Nothing panics a crowd faster than seeing a cop on the run.

The hot-dog guy held up both hands and appeared to be trying to solve their issue diplomatically, but the big man wasn't interested in diplomacy.

"Why don't you learn to speak fucking English, you little shit-brown camel jockey," he yelled, bumping his disorderly conduct up to a bias charge. He then gripped the underside of the cart, jerked it up, and toppled it over. The vendor stumbled backward and fell to the ground, barely avoiding being crushed.

The bully wasn't satisfied. He bent down, reached into the overturned mess, and came up with a foot-long stainless-steel, two-pronged barbecue fork.

I ran, pulling my expandable baton from my belt as the crowd scattered.

"Goat fucker!" the white guy snarled.

I came up behind him just as he raised his arm high, and smashed the baton across his wrist.

Steel connected with bone, the man shrieked in pain, dropped the weapon, turned toward me, and, in one fluid motion that I had perfected in boot camp on Parris Island when I was eighteen years old, I put my forearm to his chest, slipped my foot behind his leg, flipped him to the ground, and cuffed him.

Five minutes later we were in a squad car on our way to the nearest precinct, Manhattan's Nineteenth. That's the thing about being a cop. You come into contact with hundreds of people every day, and invariably you get to spend your evening with a shit-faced racist instead of the sexy redhead who was so good, so good, so good.

The next day, I was back at the Four-Four in the Bronx. I

got to the precinct a half hour before my shift, and the desk sergeant stopped me on the way in.

“Hey, Doc, someone here to see you.” He nodded in the direction of the waiting area.

I turned. It was her.

“Hi,” she said. “Remember me?”

I smiled. I couldn’t have held it back if I wanted to. “It’s my job to remember people,” I said. “Some I remember better than others. How can I help you?”

“My friend Nick took about a thousand pictures last night. I thought you might like a few.”

She handed me a black-and-white photo—a close-up of me taken with a long lens. “Wow,” I said. “I don’t look this good in real life.”

She gave me a sly wink that said she disagreed. “There’s more,” she said, handing me half a dozen color shots.

It was me again. In action this time. Running, coming up behind the enraged man wielding the barbecue fork, taking him down to the ground, cuffing him, and hauling him off to jail as the concertgoers who had seen it all gave me a round of applause. “These are incredible,” I said. “Your friend Nick should do this kind of thing professionally.”

“He does. He’s got eight pages in this month’s *GQ*. I’m Deirdre Solomon,” she said, extending a hand.

“Danny Corcoran,” I said, taking it. “How’d you track me down?”

“Easy-peasy,” she said, pointing at the black-and-white close-up of me and tapping it on the brass 44 insignia on my collar and the name tag on my chest.

“Hmm,” I said, giving her my best steely-eyed TV-cop look. “You know that stalking is a crime.”

“I’m an ADA with the Queens District Attorney’s Office,”

she said. "My father is a judge. Don't try to enlighten me on the criminal justice system."

"Well, you caught me by surprise," I said. "Why don't we have dinner Saturday night, and I'll try to come up with something more enlightening?"

"For starters," she said, "you can tell me why the guy at the front desk called you 'Doc.'"

We met at a little Parisian bistro in the middle of a quiet side street on the Upper East Side. As soon as the waiter poured us some wine, Deirdre got down to business.

"So, what kind of doctor are you, or do you just play one in your free time?" she said, giving me the same mischievous smile that had knocked me dead at the concert.

"I'm afraid your version is more interesting than mine," I said. "I'm a cop in a specialized unit. We're on the radio a lot, and it's smarter to use code names instead of our real ones. So Chris Redwood is Sequoia, Dennis Wiley is Coyote, and then there's me, Daniel Orion Corcoran—D. O. C. Doc."

"Your middle name is Orion, like the constellation?"

"He was a Greek god before he was a constellation," I said.

"You're named after a Greek god? Now *your* version is more interesting."

I'm pretty sure I fell in love with her when she showed up at the precinct with those pictures, but by the time we finished our main course, I was 1,000 percent positive.

Dinner on Saturday ran into brunch on Sunday, at which point Deirdre felt she knew me well enough to program Neil Diamond singing "Sweet Caroline" as the ring tone on my phone.

A year later, we were married. Ten years after that, we were on vacation in Wyoming, and Deirdre, who grew up on horses and had been riding since she was a young girl, was on a mountain trail when her horse threw her. She died instantly.

The loss of a loved one is devastating in any form. But the suddenness and senselessness of Deirdre's death overwhelmed me with a flood of negative emotions—anger, despair, disbelief, and finally, the most crippling of all: guilt.

Some people fall into drugs, alcohol, or depression after losing a spouse. Some turn to God. I did my best to fill the emptiness with work. I've never shied away from living on the edge. I always welcomed the high-risk assignments. After Deirdre's death, I craved them. But finding that challenge, in a department bound up in bureaucracy, steeped in tedium, and hamstrung by politics, seemed impossible.

I wonder if Police Commissioner Trace Baker knew that about me when he invited me down to his office at 1 Police Plaza that morning three years ago. I walked in disenchanted, disheartened, one of four hundred captains in the department, stuck in the middle of the pack with a countdown clock on my phone that reminded me I had 753 days before I could retire. Two hours later, I walked out energized, filled with purpose, a member of the PC's inner circle, and commanding officer of a new unit that would be the top priority, and the most closely guarded secret, in his department.

With only sixteen of us in the squad, we split the workload into two shifts, eight to four and four to midnight. We're off nights and weekends, but since no other team has the training to take our place in an emergency, we're on call 24/7. That's why the ring tone on my work phone has to be as loud and annoying as possible.

It was two hours before dawn when the raw, distorted sounds of *Exhale the Demon*, an underground heavy-metal band I had recently discovered, jolted me awake.

"Corcoran," I said, hitting the speaker button and jumping out of bed.

“Captain, you’re mobilized. US Park Police observed six unknown subjects landing on Liberty Island. They’re armed with 9mm submachine guns, have scaled the base, and entered the statue. Pick up at Field Forty-Three.”

## CHAPTER 3

**WHEN YOU DO WHAT I DO** for a living, there are some basic rules to live by.

Rule #1: Keep your tactical gear within arm's reach. I have multiple sets—at work, in the trunk of my car, and in my bedroom closet. Less than three minutes after the call came in, I had suited up—cargo pants, shirt, boots, ceramic-plate vest, Kevlar helmet—strapped on my 9mm Glock, and was out the door.

Rule #2: Never depend on an elevator. The building I live in is twenty-seven stories high. My apartment is on the third floor. I took the stairs two at a time, forty pounds heavier than I was going up the night before.

I got to the lobby, where Tibor, the white-haired night man, had seen my ride pull up and was holding the front door wide open.

*“Legyen biztonságban,”* he said as I raced past him. It's Hungarian for “be safe”—his usual sendoff when he sees me dashing through the lobby dressed in black and outfitted with body armor.

Rule #3: Never assume your driver knows what he's supposed to do: I jumped into the front seat of the marked SUV and recognized the man behind the wheel: Larry Perkins, an ESU veteran, a total pro. It didn't matter. "Do you know where we're going?" I asked as he pulled out onto York Avenue.

"Yes, sir. Randall's Island. Field forty-three. FDR, RFK Bridge, Central Road, Sunken Meadow Loop."

"Lights and sirens," I said, punching the lights. At this hour, I doubted I'd have to hit the siren more than a few times.

Rule #4: Focus on the mission. It was impossible not to. I'd been obsessively focused on this mission since the day the PC briefed our team two months earlier.

"How hard do you think it would be for a bunch of fanatics to blow up the Statue of Liberty?" he had asked. It was a rhetorical question. We knew better than to respond. But Baker didn't say a word for a solid thirty seconds. He didn't want an answer. He wanted us to think about the unthinkable.

"Her security system is full of holes," he finally said. "During the day, the Park Police are there in force, but at night their number dwindles down to a skeleton crew."

"Doesn't make sense," Chris Redwood said. "Why would they—?"

"Money," Baker cut in. "The feds already spend twenty-five million to maintain and protect Liberty and Ellis Islands. It would cost another eight, maybe ten, to do it right, and no politician is going to ask for that kind of dough. They'd be accused of overkill and laughed out of the room."

"So you're saying the price of Liberty is twenty-five mil," Redwood said. "And not a nickel more."

The team responded, some with laughter, some shaking their heads, and one who simply grumbled, “Assholes.”

“Your job,” Baker barked, silencing the room with a steely-eyed glare, “is to plug the gaps in their security, not get tangled up in the politics that put them there.” He turned to me. “I want a live run-through in sixty days.”

“Yes, sir,” I said.

“One more thing. It goes without saying, but I’ll say it anyway.” Baker squared up and addressed the squad. “Priests, lovers, and dying mothers.”

He turned and left, his final words reverberating through our collective brain.

Trace Baker was the most hands-on New York City police commissioner since Teddy Roosevelt. And this team of thirteen men and three women was living proof of his commitment, his dedication, and the size of his balls.

When he was appointed PC three years earlier, he had made it his mission to fix what he saw as one of the department’s most glaring deficiencies.

“Our Counterterrorism Bureau falls short of what this city needs,” he said when he first recruited me. “Their website does a convincing job of making them sound badass, but it’s mostly smoke and mirrors aimed at intimidating potential enemies. The public feels safer when they see these guys with their M-4s and their Kevlar helmets patrolling high-profile targets, but in reality, the backbone of the division is an army of people sitting at keyboards, gathering intelligence.”

I nodded, clueless where the conversation was going.

“And they’re damn good at it,” he said. “But if there’s a militarized attack on this city, no amount of intelligence is going to win the day. New York is a top-tier target, and we need a corps of cops that has the resources and the training



to respond to whatever crazy shit the enemy throws at us. We need a unit that rivals the Navy SEALs, the Green Berets, or the Marine Raiders.”

“Sir,” I said, “if you ever put that unit together, sign me up. I want to be part of it.”

“I don’t want you to be *part* of it,” Baker said. “I want you to head it up.”

*Head it up?* I would have let out an ear-splitting *oorah*, but he wasn’t finished with his appraisal, and I was enjoying it too much to interrupt.

“I’ve done my research, Corcoran. You’re a highly decorated marine; you’ve got three combat crosses with the NYPD, *plus* the Medal of Honor. And if that’s not enough, you haven’t taken a sick day since you joined the department.”

I smiled. “I haven’t been sick.”

“That doesn’t stop most cops from taking off time they think they’re entitled to. You’re a team player. And when you’re sitting behind this desk, that means a hell of a lot. Let me be straight with you. Not only are you my first choice, you’re my *only* choice.”

“I’m honored,” I said.

“Do you want the job?”

“Absolutely, but—”

“‘Absolutely’ is a complete sentence,” he said. “Add the word ‘but,’ and you’ve undone the absoluteness of it all.”

“Sorry, sir. The ‘but’ is a question. Putting together a unit on a par with the SEALs or the Berets won’t come cheap. My first thought was, who’s paying for all this?”

He laughed. “Well, I could ask the mayor, but he wouldn’t cough up a dime. Knowing him, he’d say, ‘You want a Special Forces unit? Call the Pentagon.’”

“So, then, to repeat the question,” I said, “who is going to pay—”

“That’s my problem,” Baker said. “Yours is to comb the department looking for candidates, run them through a battery of medical, physical, and psychological tests, and handpick the best of the best. You in?”

“Yes, sir. Absolutely.”

## CHAPTER 4

**THREE MONTHS LATER, WE HAD THE FINANCES**, the facilities, and the firepower we needed. Baker dubbed us “Direct Report One,” or, in cop shorthand, DR-1—an innocuous name that could easily get lost in the alphabet soup of NYPD bureaus, divisions, and agencies.

Everything about us was secret—who we were, what we did, and how we got it done. The oath of office was simple: Tell no one, and that included, as Baker was prone to reminding us, priests, lovers, and dying mothers.

On the org chart, we were folded under Emergency Services Unit, so we got our fair share of rescue work and emergency calls. But our real mission was to be trained and battle-ready to secure our little five-borough homeland in the event of another surprise attack.

It took us four days to come up with a master plan to storm Liberty Island. Working with a detailed schematic, we went over every inch of the statue’s infrastructure and calculated that it would take a terrorist team forty-five minutes from the time they came ashore till the moment they could detonate the Semtex

that would obliterate the iconic beacon of democracy that had stood in New York Harbor for almost a century and a half.

The second part of the mission was a lot dicier. Devise a counterattack, train for it, and do a series of trial-and-error practice runs at a three-hundred-foot tower on Randall's Island until we got it as close to perfect as possible.

Now, on a warm overcast night in the early hours of August eleventh, we were doing it for real.

Eight of us converged on Randall's Island. Seventeen minutes after my phone rang, we were in an unmarked Viper Attack helicopter flying low over the Hudson, practically skimming the water. Only when we were issued red-barrel rifles, and sidearms loaded with Simunitions that would fire paint pellets instead of bullets, did we know for sure that this was a drill.

The helicopter zeroed in on the island, rose 150 feet in the air, and lowered four of our team to the top of the pedestal. As soon as they touched down, the chopper shot up another 200 feet and lowered the rest of us to the crown of the statue.

A quarter mile offshore, Baker sat at a console aboard a thirty-two-foot customized Metal Shark and watched the operation unfold as our night-vision cameras transmitted the action in real time.

For the next nineteen minutes, he watched as our rescue team made a dynamic entry into the statue, and a daring tactical assault on the saboteurs. Thirty-nine minutes and forty-two seconds after the invasion began, five of the terrorists were dead and one had been captured.

I radioed the news. "Lady Liberty is secure."

Ten minutes later, his boat docked, and Baker, wearing the only NYPD field jacket with five stars across each shoulder, jumped off and strode briskly across the plaza. My team and I

were there to meet him, along with the six faux terrorists and three Park Police recruited for the mission.

“Great job,” he said. “Eighteen seconds under forty minutes.”

“We could have been faster,” I said. “The chopper should have gotten thirty feet closer to the crown.”

“We can go over the video later this morning,” he said. “TARU’s been filming the entire exercise.”

I looked up. A second, smaller helicopter was hovering over the torch in Lady Liberty’s outstretched right arm.

“Someone should tell them the exercise is over,” I said as a series of flashes went off inside the chopper.

“What the hell is going on up there?” Baker asked.

I took my binoculars and peered at the aircraft as another barrage of flashes went off. “I’m not sure,” I said, “but it looks like DCPI Walton is having a photo shoot.”

“I told Tony to travel with the film crew. If anyone from the media got wind of what we were doing here, his job was to kill the story,” Baker said, training his binoculars on the open chopper door. “Jesus F. Christ. Who is that idiot, and what the hell is he doing out there?”

A young man dressed in black had stepped out onto the skid of the chopper and was posing for pictures with the statue below him.

“Is he out of his tiny fucking mind?” Baker bellowed.

And then, as if to answer the question beyond any shadow of a doubt, the man in black did the unthinkable. He detached his safety harness and spread his arms heroically.

Baker keyed his mic and exploded. “PC to Aviation One. Get all personnel inside the chopper and return to base forthwith!”

Through my glasses I could see the pilot turn around and

shout an order. DCPI Walton immediately reached out in an effort to grab the man and pull him aboard. But the young daredevil wasn't ready. He turned and waved at the onlookers below.

I knew him. In fact, everybody knew him. Brady Lebeck, an Uber driver/wannabe actor from Brooklyn, had lit up the screen four years earlier in his first movie, a summer blockbuster. He had followed it up with three hit action films and was now a bona fide megastar.

Lebeck gave his audience a mock salute. The PC returned the gesture with an angry arm pump that said *get the hell inside that bird*.

Lebeck stood up, waved again, and took one more step. His last. Misjudging the height of the doorway, he stepped into the open space between the skid and the helicopter.

Arms flailing, his screams lost in the drone of the rotors, he plummeted through the predawn sky and landed with a bone-crushing thud on the statue's crown.

NYPD's top-secret nighttime maneuver would be public by sunrise.

## CHAPTER 5

**WE FROZE.** THE LOT OF US, warriors all, armed to the hilt, trained to handle every possible emergency, and we just stood there. Speechless. Motionless. Powerless.

Two high-intensity searchlights—one from the helicopter above, the other from the patrol boat below—swept the sky and zeroed in on Brady Lebeck, the twenty-nine-year-old Hollywood golden boy who, only heartbeats ago, was convinced he was king of the world. Now he lay draped between the third and fourth rays of the halo of light on Miss Liberty's head, his body broken, his neck twisted at an angle that left no doubt.

"He's dead," Baker said, his voice barely a whisper. "And so are we."

He radioed the chopper, and the pilot set the aircraft down on the plaza.

Trace Baker had two choices. He could have gone ballistic and stormed the helicopter, screaming questions to which there could never be answers that would change the outcome. Instead, he took the high road.

The pilot killed the engine, and Baker stood there, his body ramrod straight, waiting for the silence.

DCPI Tony Walton stepped from the helicopter and walked toward us. He was in his mid-forties, good-looking, outgoing, charming, funny, and if that weren't enough, he had the key to the innermost circle of the premier police force in the country.

Everyone wanted a piece of Tony. He was the deputy commissioner of public information, the top cop's guardian at the gate. If a reporter, an editor, or a politician wanted to know what was going on behind closed doors at 1PP, Tony was their man. He knew it, and so did Baker. But they also knew that the conduit of information flowed both ways, and Walton was skilled at getting more information than he parted with, at placing more stories than he gave up.

A job like that can go to a guy's head, and those of us who knew him had watched it happen. Tony was a star-fucker. He enjoyed rubbing elbows, clinking glasses, and occasionally bumping uglies with the rich, the famous, and the powerful. They in turn loved rubbing, clinking, and bumping back. I had no idea what the quid pro quo was between Brady Lebeck and DCPI Walton, but I knew I was about to find out.

Walton, head down, shoulders slumped, approached us and didn't look up until he was in front of the PC. His eyes were red-rimmed from crying.

"I'm sorry, Trace," he said. "Sorry beyond words. You'll have my letter of resignation within the hour."

"This is a crime scene," Baker said. "Investigations before resignations. The District Attorney's Office will be up your ass for the foreseeable future. Their primary goal will be to blame that man's death on you, so being out of a job will be the least of your problems. They might not charge me, but the press, the mayor, the City Council, and Lebeck's family will be



coming at me with a vengeance. They're going to have a lot of questions, and there's one I can't answer: What the fuck was a civilian doing on board that chopper in the middle of a highly classified counterterrorism operation?"

Walton closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and let it out slowly. I recognized the tactic. I'd seen it from hundreds of perps who have their alibi rehearsed and need a few quiet moments to pull it out of their head. Truth cascades from people's mouths. Lies ooze like beads of flop sweat.

"A couple of months ago, I got a call from the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment," Walton said, opening his eyes and gazing intently at Baker. "Brady Lebeck was going to be starring in a remake of *Dirty Harry*. The original was shot in San Francisco, but Lebeck was thinking it would be much grittier if they shot it in New York. Lebeck is a cop junkie, and NYPD versus San Francisco? No contest. So I sent him on a couple of ride-alongs with some uniforms from the Nineteenth. I told you about that."

"And you spent July Fourth weekend at his place in Easthampton," Baker said, tripping him up immediately. "You forgot to tell me about that. Cut to the chase, Tony. A ride-along on the Upper East Side is ho-fucking-hum to someone like Lebeck. He wanted more action. So you thought, I've got just what he's looking for: a simulated terrorist attack on the Statue of Liberty. He probably shat his pants when you dangled that. And what was the payback? A weekend in Malibu? A stroll down the red carpet at some Hollywood premiere?"

There was no dodging the question. "He said he had two empty seats at his table for the Golden Globes next January," Walton said, opting for the truth. And then he tried to spin it. "I thought, what's the harm? I took his cell phone away so he

couldn't record it, and all I did was agree to take a few pictures of him on the skid with the statue in the background. Nobody could connect it to our operation. Plus, he was harnessed. Who knew he'd be crazy enough to unhook himself?"

"And you did all that so you could sit next to some asshole actor at a fucking awards show?"

"You're making it sound like it was only about me. There are five Dirty Harry movies in the franchise. If they shot them here, it would be worth millions to the city."

"Well, I can guarantee they won't be shooting any of them here," Baker said, "and by the time the lawyers are done, it'll *cost* the city millions."

"I'm sorry, Trace."

"You're sorry? Oh good," he said taking out his cell phone and punching the speed dial. "I'll be sure to pass that along."

"You calling the district attorney?" Walton asked.

"Not yet. First I've got to call the man who's going to pay for all the damage you've done. Also, now seems like as good a time as any to give him the opportunity to fire me." He turned to his cell phone. "Hello, Mr. Mayor. This is Commissioner Baker. Yes, sir, I know what time it is. We've got a situation."

Baker didn't try to sugarcoat it. He spelled it out, detail by grisly detail. About thirty seconds in, a voice called out. "Commissioner!"

It was Detective Jeff Fowler, the helicopter pilot, double-timing it across the plaza. "Commissioner," he repeated as he reached us.

I put a finger to my lips. "Keep it down. He's on the phone with the mayor."

Baker had stopped talking and was listening now. He held the phone just far enough away from his ear that I couldn't quite make out the words, but I could make out the tone. The

mayor, bombastic at the best of times, had kicked it up a few notches to all-out batshit crazy.

Baker rolled his eyes, hit the mute button, and looked at me. “We’ve got a movie star with twenty million Twitter followers, hanging like a side of beef off the Statue of Liberty, and all the mayor cares about is how much time he has for damage control.”

“Sir,” the pilot blurted out.

“Just a second, Mr. Mayor,” Baker said into the phone. He muted it again and turned to the pilot. “What have you got, Jeff?”

“Sir, I’ve been monitoring the radio traffic. A helicopter is on the way here. He’s four minutes out.”

“One of ours?”

“No, sir. It belongs to Channel 7 Eyewitness news.”

“Mayor Richardson,” Baker said into the phone. “I don’t know what you have in mind for damage control, but you’ve got four minutes to get it done.”

Hi,

It's Marshall.

I hope you like SNOWSTORM IN AUGUST so far (and I didn't even get to the best parts).

If you'd like to read the other 63 chapters, you can buy the book or the audio on amazon, bn, or from your favorite indie bookstore now. Or look for it at your local library.

Thank you for supporting my life of crime.

Marshall

PS – If you hate it, please tell me. If you love it, please tell everybody you ever met on social media.