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## ONE

THAT MUGGY MORNING in July my partner, Rich Conklin, and I were on stakeout in the Tenderloin, one of San Francisco's sketchiest, most crime-ridden neighborhoods. We had parked our 1998 gray Chevy sedan where we had a good view of the six-story apartment building on the corner of Leavenworth and Turk.

It's been said that watching paint dry is high entertainment compared with being on stakeout, but this was the exception to the rule.

We were psyched and determined.

We had just been assigned to a counterterrorism task force reporting back to Warren Jacobi, chief of police, and also Dean Reardon, deputy director of Homeland Security, based in DC.

This task force had been formed to address a local threat

by a global terrorist group known as GAR, which had claimed credit for six sequential acts of mass terrorism in the last five days.

They were equal-ethnicity bombers, hitting three holy places—a mosque, a cathedral, and a synagogue—as well as two universities and an airport, killing over nine hundred people of all ages and nationalities in six countries.

As we understood it, GAR (Great Antiestablishment Reset) had sprung from the rubble of Middle Eastern terror groups. Several surviving leaders had swept up young dissidents around the globe, including significant numbers of zealots from Western populations who'd come of age after the digital revolution.

The identities of these killers were undetectable within their home populations, since GAR's far-flung membership hid their activities inside the dark web, an internet underground perfect for gathering without meeting.

Still, they killed real people in real life.

And then they bragged.

After a year of burning, torturing, and blowing up innocent victims, GAR published their mission statement. They planned to infiltrate every country and bring down organized religion and governments and authorities of all types. Without a known supreme commander or national hub to target, blocking this open-source terrorism had been as effective as grasping poison gas in your hand.

Because of GAR's unrelenting murderous activities, San Francisco, like most large cities, was on high alert on that Fourth of July weekend.

Conklin and I had been told very little about our assign-

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ment, only that one of the presumed GAR operatives, known to us as J., had recently vaulted to the number one spot on our government's watch list.

Over the last few days J. had been spotted going in and out of the dun-colored tenement on the corner of Turk and Leavenworth, the one with laddered fire escapes on two sides and a lone tree growing out of the pavement beside the front door.

Our instructions were to watch for him. If we saw him, we were to report his activities by radio, even as eyes in the skies were on this intersection from an AFB in Nevada or Arizona or Washington, DC.

It was a watch-only assignment, and when a male figure matching the grainy image we had—of a bearded man, five foot nine, hat shading his face—left the dun-colored apartment building, we took note.

When this character crossed to our side of the street and got into a white refrigerator van parked in front of the T.L. Market and Deli, we phoned it in.

Conklin and I have been partners for so many years and can almost read each other's minds. We exchanged a look and knew that we couldn't just *watch* a suspected terrorist pull out into our streets without doing something about it.

I said, "Following is watching."

Rich said, "Just a second, Lindsay. Okay?"

His conversation with the deputy was short. Rich gave me the thumbs-up and I started up the car. We pulled out two car lengths behind the white van driven by a presumed high-level terrorist known as J.

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## TWO

I EDGED OUR sharklike Chevy along Turk and turned left on Hyde, keeping just far enough behind J.'s van to stay out of his rearview while keeping an eye on him. After following him through a couple of turns, I lost the van at a stoplight on Tenth Street. I had to make a split-second decision whether or not to run the light.

My decision was *Go*.

My hands were sweating on the wheel as I shot through the intersection and was blasted by a cacophony of horns, which called attention to us. I didn't enjoy that at all.

Conklin said, "There he is."

The white van was hemmed in by other vehicles traveling at something close to the speed limit. I kept it in our sights from a good distance behind the pack. And then the van merged into US Route 101 South toward San Jose.

The highway was a good, wide road with enough traffic to ensure that J. would never pick our Chevy out of the flow.

Conklin worked the radio communications, deftly switching channels between chief of police Warren Jacobi and DHS deputy director Dean Reardon, who was three time zones away. Dispatch kept us updated on the movements of other units in our task force that were now part of a staggered caravan weaving between lanes, taking turns at stepping on the gas, then falling back.

We followed J.'s van under the sunny glare on 101 South, and after twelve miles, instead of heading down to San Jose and the Central Coast, he took the lane that funneled traffic to SFO.

Conklin had Jacobi on the line.

“Chief, he’s heading toward SFO.”

Several voices crackled over the radio, but I kept visual contact with the man in the van that was moving steadily toward San Francisco International Airport.

That van was now the most frightening vehicle imaginable. GAR had sensitized all of us to worst-case scenarios, and a lot of explosives could be packed into a vehicle of that size. A terrorist wouldn’t have to get on a plane or even walk into an airline terminal. I could easily imagine J. crashing his vehicle through luggage check-in and ramming the plate-glass windows before setting off a bomb.

Conklin had signed off with Jacobi and now said to me, “Lindsay, SFO security has sent fire trucks and construction vehicles out to obstruct traffic on airport access roads in all directions.”

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Good.

I stepped on the gas and flipped on the sirens. Behind us, others in our team did the same, and I saw flashing lights getting onto the service road from the north.

Passenger cars pulled onto the shoulder to let us fly by, and within seconds we were passing J.'s van as we entered the International Departures lane.

Signs listing names of airlines appeared overhead. SFO's parking garage rose up on our right. Off-ramps and service roads circled and crossed underneath our roadway, which was now an overpass. The outline of the international terminal grew closer and larger just up ahead.

Rich and I were leading a group of cars heading to the airport when I saw cruisers heading away from the terminal right toward us.

It was a high-speed pincer movement.

J. saw what was happening and had only two choices: keep going or stop. He wrenched his wheel hard to the right and the van skidded across to the far right lane, where there was one last exit to the garage, which a hundred yards farther on had its own exit to South Link Road. The exit was open and unguarded.

I screamed to Conklin, "*Hang on!*"

I passed the white van on my right, gave the Chevy more gas, and turned the wheel hard, blocking the exit. At the last possible moment, as I was bracing for a crash, J. jerked his wheel hard left and pulled around us.

By then the airport roadway was filled with law enforcement cruisers, their lights flashing, sirens blowing.

The van screeched to a halt

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Adrenaline had sent my heart rate into the red zone, and sweat sheeted down my body.

Both my partner and I asked if the other was okay as cop cars lined up behind us and ahead of us, forming an impenetrable vehicular wall.

A security cop with a megaphone addressed J.

“Get out of the vehicle. Hands up. Get out now, buddy. No one wants to hurt you.”

Would J. go ballistic?

I pictured the van going up in a fiery explosion forty feet from where I sat in an old sedan. I flashed on the image of my little girl when I saw her this morning, wearing baby-duck yellow, beating her spoon on the table. Would I ever see her again?

Just then the white van’s passenger door opened and J. jumped out. A voice amplified through a bullhorn boomed, *“Don’t move. Hands in the air.”*

J. ignored the warning.

He ran across the four lanes and reached the concrete guardrail. He looked out over the edge. He paused.

There was nothing between him and the road below but forty feet of air.

Shots were fired.

I saw J. jump.

Rich shouted at me, *“Get down!”*

We both ducked below the dash, linked our fingers over the backs of our necks, as an explosion boomed, rocking our car, setting off the car alarm, blinding us with white light.

That sick bastard had detonated his bomb.

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## THREE

RICH AND I sat parked in the no-parking zone outside the terminal, still reeling from what had happened an eighth of a mile from the airport terminals.

We had seen J. jump from the departures lane to a service road and knew that he had detonated his vest before he hit the pavement.

We had tried to guess what he had been thinking. Our current theory was that he hadn't wanted to be captured. He didn't want to talk.

Conklin said, "Maybe he figured jumping off the ramp, he'd land safely on a passing vehicle, like he was in a Jackie Chan movie."

I jumped when someone leaned through the car window. It was Tom Generosa, counterterrorism chief, keeping us in the loop.

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He said, “Here’s what we know so far. The guy you call J. had a plan to kill a lot of people inside a crowd, that’s not in doubt. His vest was of the antipersonnel variety. Packed with nails and ball bearings and rat poison. That’s an anticoagulant. The explosion was meant to propel the shrapnel, and it did. But the only casualty was the jumper.”

I nodded and Generosa continued.

“The nails and shit shredded his body and any information he may have been carrying on his person. He left a crater and a roadway full of human tissue and shrapnel.”

“And the van?” I said.

“Bomb squad cleared it. The FBI is loading it onto a flatbed, taking it to the crime lab. For starters, J. stole the van from the market on Turk. Maybe his prints will be on the steering wheel, but I won’t be surprised if he can’t be positively ID’d.”

Generosa told us that federal agents as well as SFPD’s Crime Scene Investigation Unit were at the site of the explosion now, that the CSI was processing it, and that after it was measured and photographed, the remains of the man known as J. would be transported by refrigerated van, along with explosive samples, to the FBI’s and the SFPD’s forensics labs.

Of course we knew that J.’s bomb had shut down SFO.

All airline passengers had been bused to other locations. Outbound flights had been grounded, and incoming flights had been rerouted to other airfields. We could see for ourselves that the terminal buildings were crawling with a multitude of law enforcement agents from CIA, FBI, DHS, and airport security, as well as their bomb-sniffing dogs.

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Generosa couldn't estimate with any certainty how long SFO would be out of commission, but as bad as that was for the airlines, their passengers, and traffic, GAR hadn't scored a hit in San Francisco today.

We thanked Generosa for the report.

He told us, "Take good care," and walked over to the next car in the line behind us. We were about to call in for further instructions when our radio sputtered and Jacobi's voice filled our car. Both Conklin and I had partnered with Jacobi before his promotion to chief. It was so good to hear his voice.

He said, "You two are something else, you know? You cut J. off from his target. Thank God for that."

I said, "Man, oh, man. I can't stand to imagine it."

But I *did* imagine it. I pictured an airport in Paris. I pictured another in Turkey. I could easily see what might have gone down at SFO if J. had gotten into or even near a terminal. When I first started in Homicide, an airport bombing had been inconceivable. Now? These horrifying bombings were almost becoming commonplace.

Jacobi's voice was still coming over the radio.

He said, "Effective as soon as you turn in your report, you two are off duty. Boxer. Conklin. I'm proud of you. I love you both.

"Thanks from me and from Deputy Reardon and a lot of people who've never heard of you and never will. Many lives were saved. Stand down. Come home. The Feds are going to take it from here."

I was shaking with relief when I turned the car keys over to Conklin. I got into the passenger seat. I leaned back and closed my eyes as he drove us back to the Hall.

PART ONE

# ONE MONTH LATER

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## CHAPTER 1

IT WAS OUR wedding anniversary, also our first date night since Joe and I separated six months ago. Joe had surprised me, calling me up as I was leaving work, saying, “I reserved a window table. Say yes, Lindsay. I’m parked right outside.”

I’d given in and now we were at the Crested Cormorant, the hot new seafood restaurant on Pier 9, with a front-row seat on San Francisco Bay. Candles flickered on tables around us as a pink sunset colored the sky to the horizon, tinting the rippling water as the mist rolled in.

Joe was talking about his youngest brother.

“So, at age forty, Petey finally meets the love of his life at a fire department car wash.” He laughed. “Amanda was power-washing his whitewalls, and, somehow, that jump-starts his heart.”

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“You think her T-shirt got wet?”

Joe laughed again. I loved his laugh.

He said, “Very possibly. We’re invited to their wedding in Cozumel next month. Think about it, okay?”

Looking into my husband’s eyes, I saw how much he wanted to bring us back to our wedding in a gazebo overlooking Half Moon Bay. We’d vowed in front of dear friends and family to love each other from that day forward.

It had been a promise I knew I could keep.

But I hadn’t been able to see around corners, not then. Now, in this romantic setting, Joe was hoping for magic to strike again. As for me, my innocence was gone.

I wished it weren’t so.

I was conflicted. Should I reach across the table, squeeze Joe’s hand, and tell him to come home? Or was it time for us both to admit that our Humpty Dumpty marriage couldn’t be put back together again?

Joe lifted his wineglass and said, “To happy days.”

Just then there was a sharp sound—as if the world had cracked open—followed by the boom of rolling thunder and a bright flash on the neighboring pier.

I screamed, “Noooooo!”

I grabbed Joe’s arm and stared openmouthed across the water to Pier 15, the site of Scientific-Tron, a science museum, called Sci-Tron for short. It was a massive, geometric glass-and-steel structure designed for human interaction with the past and especially the future. The structure was unfolding like a bud bursting into bloom right in front of my eyes. Metal panels flew toward us, a mushroom cloud formed

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over Pier 15, and an overarching hail of glinting glass shards fell into the bay.

Joe said, “*Jesus. What the hell?*” His expression perfectly mirrored the horror I felt. *Another bomb.*

Sci-Tron was open to the public seven days a week but to adults only on Thursday nights. This was Thursday, wasn’t it? Yes. People were inside the museum.

Was this a GAR attack? Had to be.

Joe threw down a credit card, then stabbed at his phone and called his job. Similarly, I called SFPD dispatch and reported what looked to be a mass casualty incident.

“There’s been an explosion with fire at Sci-Tron, Pier 15. Send all cars. FD. Bomb squad. Ambulances. And find Lieutenant Brady. Tell him I’m on the scene.”

Joe said, “Lindsay, wait here. I’ll be back—”

“You’re kidding.”

“You want to get killed?”

“Do *you?*”

I followed Joe out of the restaurant onto the walkway that ran the length of the pier. We stood for a long moment at the railing and watched Sci-Tron’s two-story metal-frame structure crumple as the roof caved in.

The sight was devastating and almost impossible to believe, but it was real. Sci-Tron had been blown up.

Joe and I started running.

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## CHAPTER 2

JOE WAS IN the lead as we headed along the pier from the restaurant to the Embarcadero, the major thoroughfare that bordered the waterfront on the western side of San Francisco Bay.

When we reached the sidewalk, we turned right and ran another couple hundred yards, past the historic pier bulkhead, stopping short of the entrance to Pier 15. Flames leapt above the smoldering carcass of Sci-Tron.

On our left traffic was going berserk on the Embarcadero. The terrifying sight and sound of the disaster had slowed vehicles to a crawl, causing others to swerve into adjacent lanes, while screaming, freaked-out pedestrians fled from the pier and dashed into the road. Brakes squealed and horns blared like it was the biblical end of the world.

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Explosions have a shattering impact on all your senses. The cracking and ripping sounds, the stink of explosives, the terror on human faces. I knew this from firsthand recent experience, and still I found it hard to comprehend how a calm and beautiful night had twisted inside out into mayhem and inexplicable destruction.

Joe pulled me from the walkway to the railing on the bay side and kept his arm around me as crowds stampeded away from the bomb site and past where we were standing.

As I watched the movement of the chaotic scene, I was struck by an anomaly. A man was standing motionless in the middle of the sidewalk like a boulder in the raging stream of terrified pedestrians.

I'm trained to take note of anomalies, and I noticed everything about him. He was white, brown-haired, mid-forties, average height and weight, and wearing jeans, a blue flannel shirt, and wire-framed glasses. A scar cut through his upper lip, drawing my eyes to his thin smile.

He was *smiling*.

Was he shell-shocked? Having escaped the blast, was he trying to understand what had happened? Was he transfixed by the explosion itself?

Whatever he was thinking or feeling, I was having a cop reaction. In the midst of everything imaginable going wrong, he stood out. I waded across the oncoming rush into his line of sight, flapped open my jacket to show him my badge and to get his attention. Joe was on the phone, but he ended his call and joined me.

We stood close to the man in blue, and speaking loudly,

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I said, “Sir. I’m with the SFPD. Did you see what happened here?”

His expression was one of pure, wide-eyed pleasure. He said, “Did I *see* it? I *created* this—this magnificent event. This is my *work*.”

This was his *work*? He was claiming credit? I glanced at Joe like, *Did you bear that?*

“What’s your name, sir?”

“Connor Grant. Citizen, genius, artist par excellence.”

I said, “I don’t understand, Mr. Grant. Are you saying that *you* bombed Sci-Tron?”

“Exactly.”

I was already on adrenaline overload and it took all my will not to shout, *Are you batsbit crazy? There were people in there.*

Grant was manic, or drugged up, or something, because he kept on talking at high speed.

“Good job, don’t you think? Did you see the entire display? The mushroom cloud? Oh, my God. It was better than I had even hoped. I’m awarding myself an A-plus with extra points for the sundown sky. You want to know why, and I say, ‘Why ask why?’ Beauty doesn’t need a reason.”

Yes, it was a confession, but was it for real?

I asked Grant again if he had actually bombed the museum, and again, smiling like a child on Christmas morning, he confirmed *emphatically* that he had.

“You did this alone?”

“I told you,” said the ordinary-looking man in blue. “This is my work. I did it and I did it perfectly.”

“Are you feeling all right, Mr. Grant?”

“Yes, I *am*. Why do you ask?”

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Was Connor Grant, citizen-genius-artist, insane? I didn't know what to believe.

Joe had his gun in hand and kept it pointed at Grant as I told him to put his hands on his head. He obeyed me while staring at the destruction, still wearing a beatific glow. I patted him down, found nothing but keys, coins, and a wallet. His ID confirmed his name, and now I had an address and his credit cards.

I cuffed the smiling psycho, arrested him for the destruction of public property, which would hold him, and read him his rights.

Squad cars were screaming up to the curb, and I marched Grant over to one of them. I knew the uniformed cop who scrambled out of the passenger seat.

I told young Officer Einhorn and his partner, "Mr. Grant claims that he blew up Sci-Tron. I'm calling Lieutenant Brady now, asking him to meet you at booking. Do not let this man out of your sight until you transfer custody to Brady. I mean, do not take your eyes off him for a second. Any questions, Marty?"

After the squad car had pulled out, I speed-dialed Brady and briefed him on Connor Grant, saying that he had taken credit for blowing up Sci-Tron.

"I don't know what to make of him, Lieu. He says he did it. I'll be coming back to the Hall as soon as I can."

Joe had been taking photos of incoming law enforcement and activity around the pier. He put his phone away and said, "Wait here, Linds. I'm going to assess the scene real quick before the fire department tramples it. Be back in five."

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With that, Joe ran toward the wreck of Sci-Tron. I didn't like it. The structure was still smoking and was unstable. Joe was alone.

I shouted after him, but it was so loud on the street I honestly don't think he heard me.

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## CHAPTER 3

JOE CROSSED THE threshold of what only a few minutes before had been a futuristic science museum.

Now it felt as though he were entering a rain forest.

The sprinkler system poured water down and the air smelled of rotten eggs. That meant natural gas, maybe propane, and he picked up other odors: burning plastic, hair, flesh.

Clouds and fog blocked out the waning light.

Looking up, Joe saw only the twisted tracery of trusses and tubular superstructure. Water collected on the floor, which was littered with overturned exhibits and displays torn from the walls. And there were the lumpy shapes of the victims.

Aiming blindly, Joe took photos of the debris.

The blast had blown out the glass but left the interior standing, so the explosive device had probably not been a

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manufactured bomb. It seemed likely that the device had been improvised, a compression bomb, a gas-filled container wired with an explosive charge. The attendant flash fire had consumed available combustible materials until the heat had set off the sprinklers.

What remained of Sci-Tron was a hazardous obstacle course of smashed glass and sheared-off metal tubing, overturned exhibits and exposed wiring. Joe carefully picked out a path through the pile of rubble by the light of his phone and the low-burning fires.

He called out, "Hellooo. Can anyone hear me?"

There was an answering moan ahead to his right. Joe called out, "*I'm coming,*" and headed toward the sound, when something snaked around his ankle. Reflexively he kicked his leg free, then made out the pale hand, the arm, the upper torso, of a woman lying facedown on the floor, half buried under a display case.

She said, "I can't...move."

Joe stooped to see her.

"I'm going to help you out of this. What's your name?"

"Sophie Fields."

"I'm Joe. Sophie, are you in pain?"

"I feel numb."

"Looks like an exhibit fell on you. I'm going to try to move it. Hang on."

"Tell my husband...Robbie...I love. Him. The key is in the tackle...box."

"You get to tell him yourself, Sophie. Listen. We're a team now. I'm going to try to move this junk off you. The visibility in here really sucks. If anything hurts you, shout out."

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Sophie moaned and then she was quiet again.

Joe sized up the six-by-six-by-twelve-foot case, which was part metal, part glass, with jagged edges and what looked to be a heavy steel base. If he could get a decent angle and a good grip...if he could lift and shove at the same time...if Sophie weren't pinned by something he couldn't see underneath the display cabinet... a whole lot of ifs.

He at least had to try.

He told Sophie what he was going to do on the count of three, and then, hoping to God he could do it, Joe got his arms around the plastic backing, bent his knees under the base, and heaved.

There was a good deal of creaking and rocking, but the exhibit shifted off the woman's body and then stabilized. Joe was pretty sure Sophie should be able to move if her back wasn't broken.

He asked her, "Sophie, can you roll onto your side so that you're facing me?"

Joe never got an answer.

There was a small blue flash up ahead, like an arc of electricity, followed immediately by a concussive boom. Something heavy struck the back of Joe's head. Sparks flashed in front of his eyes as, weightless, he fell through the dark.

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## CHAPTER 4

I WAS IN a state of high anxiety as I stood upstream of the exodus from Pier 15, with a clear view of the halogen-lit incident scene.

Uniformed cops moved barricades into place on the Embarcadero, closing it off from Bay Street to Market, shutting down local traffic.

The incident commander, wearing a neon-yellow vest, directed ambulances toward the internal parking area inside Pier 9, which had now become a staging area for medical units.

Fire trucks with lights flashing and sirens on full blast drove over the sidewalk and up to the entrance gate. Men and women wearing EMT vests gathered and stood ready as the firefighters went in.

Joe had said, “Back in five.”

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Time was up. When he said that, had he truly believed that a quick look at the scene would take only five minutes? His estimate was off, but I resisted the fierce temptation to call him, telling myself that he was working hard and fast and couldn't take time to call me. Still, I was in tremendous conflict. Was Joe in trouble? Had something happened to him inside that bomb site? Should I just stand here? Or should I get help?

I looked at my watch. He'd been gone for twelve minutes. Now thirteen.

I phoned Mrs. Rose, my neighbor, my friend and babysitter. I yelled over the noise that I was near Sci-Tron. That I wouldn't be home until late. I was calling Brady when, as if tapping the keypad had triggered it, another bomb went off.

The force of that explosion obliterated every other sound, including my own voice screaming, "*Joe!*"

I broke for the entrance to the pier, but before I reached it, I was stopped by three firefighters, who blocked my way and pulled me off to the side and out of harm's way.

I fought back.

"Jesus *Christ*. I'm a *cop*. My husband's in there. Give me some help, would you please? I have to find him."

One of the firefighters said to me, "Officer, you can't go in, not now. Please stand back. Stand there. We'll get him out as soon as we can."

The firefighters were doing their best to control an unstable situation, and I didn't hold it against them. I stood where I'd been directed to stand, out of the path of the rescue squads and with a pretty good view of what had been

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Sci-Tron's entrance. I prayed that Joe would walk out onto the sidewalk.

*Please, God. Let Joe be safe.*

That's what was in my mind when the medical examiner's refrigerated trailer rumbled through an opening in the barricades and parked on the trolley tracks that ran down the middle of the Embarcadero.

I turned away from the mobile morgue and looked out over the bay as I called Joe's number again and again, hitting the Redial button incessantly and getting no reply.

Since Joe wasn't answering, I called my friends and my partner, and I know they heard the terror in my voice. They could do nothing but say, "How can I help?"

I said to each, "I'll call you later."

And then I was fresh out of lifelines.

For the next hour in that horrible, stinking night I watched as EMTs ran empty stretchers through the museum's shattered entrance and carried bagged bodies out to the sidewalk. There the dead were lifted into the medical examiner's van.

As for the living, firefighters helped some of the blast victims walk out of the museum. Others were carried out on stretchers.

I dialed Joe's number.

*Joe, answer your phone.*

This time I thought I heard his ring tone, five familiar notes, getting louder as EMTs rolled a stretcher through the gate and out toward the curb. I ran toward that stretcher, feeling hopeful and terrified at what I might find. I heard the ring tone again.

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“Joe?”

The face of the man on the stretcher was horribly swollen, bruised, and smeared with blood. His left arm rolled out from under the blanket that covered his body, and I saw the wedding ring I had placed on his finger when we were standing together inside a gazebo facing Half Moon Bay. We’d vowed to love each other in sickness and in health.

I gripped his shoulder and said, “*Joe. It’s Lindsay. I’m here.*”

He didn’t answer. Was he alive?

I ran alongside his stretcher, stayed with him in the triage area, where he was swiftly assessed and lifted through the open doors of an ambulance.

I fumbled for my badge and said hoarsely, “That’s my husband. I’m his wife.”

An EMT nodded and offered her hand and forearm. I got a good grip and she pulled me inside.

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