

## Silas

Sean stared at the bodies littering the floor, counting them. 15. Each one with a bullet in the center of their chests. Even after twenty grisly, difficult years working in the FBI Anti-Terrorism unit, 7 of those as the head supervisor, he wasn't prepared for this. Naively, Sean had figured he'd seen everything there was to see in his years with the FBI: homicides, inside jobs, murders that would have made anyone else swear humanity was a lost cause, and he had handled it all. He stared down at the Director of the FBI's lifeless body and, for the first time in his career, felt that the job was too much.

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It began the day before, on a Wednesday, with an explosion. A Christian extremist group that called themselves the New Reformation bombed Wall Street. There was panic, stocks plummeted, and soon people realized that was only the first step of the group's plan. At the time of the bombing Sean had already been working for 32 straight sleep-deprived and busy hours trying to find the second most important man in the United States. The Vice President was kidnapped the day before, and no one had seen him since. Sean didn't want another crisis to worry about, but was handed one anyway.

The Director of the FBI gave Sean a quick debriefing and dispatched more agents to his teams. That was at 9am. By mid-afternoon, the terrorist group disabled cell signal. Shortly after that the landlines stopped working, then the Internet, and finally the TV. Sean found himself handing his teams' leaders old radios in order to communicate. He sat in his office trying desperately trying to find something that

would lead him to this group. Everything had to be analyzed manually; there was no computer program to connect the dots or run probability analysis. There were only people, and as Sean knew, people were fallible. A simple mistake, transposition of words, could collapse the entire operation. Everything had to be double and triple checked. And that took time the government didn't have.

At 6pm, Sean received a call over the radio from the Director to find the nearest TV. The group was broadcasting a message. He ran to the nearest break room in time to catch the speech. On the TV, a man stood at the front of a stage in what looked like a house renovated to look more like a large town hall. He smiled and ran a hand through his short dark hair before speaking, and Sean immediately began noticing the man's tactics. He looked welcoming, friendly, even, and unassuming. It was easy for people to follow this kind of man, and Sean knew exactly how dangerous that made him. The man on the TV took a deep breath and began to talk, looking directly into the camera and into the lives of the American people.

"Hello. My name is Silas A. Davenport, and I speak on behalf of the New Reformation. It has come to our attention, over the past several years, that this country of ours is not living as it should. Look around you. You'll see people on the streets, angry, war-hungry adults, fear of attack in the souls of the people. You'll see children starving and shoeless. You'll see selfishness and disease.

"When I look around at the nation, I don't like what I see. I hope to see a world where each person is valued as an equal, where diseases are cured, where people no longer go hungry, and where God's love reigns supreme. This world is

within our reach. The possibilities are endless, our abilities unfathomable. With the help of you and I, we can change this nation. We can make this nation what it is supposed to be and bring it into everlasting glory.” Here Silas paused for a moment and Sean wondered just how many people in the country believed this man’s words. Subconsciously, he reached up and hooked a finger in the chain of his cross necklace.

On the TV, Silas licked his lips and continued. “It will not always be easy, this path to God’s ideal. There will be times when you don’t understand what’s happening, or why the plan must take the actions it does. Earlier today, bombs were detonated in Wall Street, America’s capitalist center. As the leader of the New Reformation, I would like to sincerely apologize for any innocent lives that may have been lost. Those who were killed or injured who follow the light of God will be taken care of, either in this world or the next. Those who didn’t believe, or refuse to now, will soon feel the repercussions of their choices. This was a necessary first step in achieving God’s plan.

“God has favored me: he has chosen me to lead America from the darkness into a reign of eternal light. In our nation, we have fallen away from what really matters, and have fallen into Satan’s trap. It is not your fault; rather, it is the way you’ve been taught from your fathers and the current leaders. I propose we turn away from Satan’s grasp and in return become a stronger nation, equipped with the ability to care for its entire people.

“No longer will we work for advances, in high-rises and office buildings. We will return to living the way God intended. We must grasp the idea of treating our fellow Americans as humans, of sharing what we have so they do not go without. We

must also realize that God favors those of us who work hard. I cannot believe the values we have left behind, values of loving one another equally, of living simply and working hard. This must change. We must return to a society where we put God's word above the rest, and he will reward us greatly, both here on earth and in Heaven.

"We can come together as a people in order to realize this: but there will be those who deny these possibilities. These people," he paused, "cannot be tolerated.

"There are people who will try to dissuade us, to bring us back to Satan's grip: the current societal norm. We must not fall prey to these people. We must stay strong and resilient in this fight against the power of Hell. Satan roams the earth like a lion, and we are all lambs. Jesus is our shepherd. He will keep us safe against this and keep us faithful in this Reformation of America. People in this country, with us right now, perhaps standing next to you or living in the apartment above, your neighbors, friends, and family members have the potential to fall prey to Satan's lies. He will convince them that we are wrong in our fight for a better America, that we are delusional. I can assure you: we are not.

"We are aware of the struggle we face and are aware of how to make this country better. We are aware that that this will not be easy: we pray for God's guidance in the turbulent times to come.

"I once again urge you to imagine the outcome if we succeed: we will live in a country where everyone goes to bed with a full stomach, where everyone is clothed, where children don't have to worry about being jumped by a gang, or recruited into one. We will live in a country where the poor are no longer poor and the wealthy are

no longer in control. We will live in a country where those who work hard will be rewarded on Earth as they will be in Heaven. Imagine the happiness of each person, the love they will feel. Each person is a gift, a creation of God, and as The Creator, he loves each person dearly. So I urge you to join the New Reformation in our struggle to create the America God would have wanted. Thank you.”

Sean had looked around the break room, at the horrified faces, and realized that Silas had given a good speech. It would convince people. He had to be stopped before he could speak again.

Sean radioed Ray, his partner, and told him to meet him in his office. . The next morning they had hardly moved, forgoing sleep in favor of trying to find something, some pattern, a mistake that would lead them to this group. On the desk in front of them were several post-it notes of all colors, each with a piece of information on it. Sean methodically rearranged them, trying to form a picture with the information. No matter how hard he tried, there was still something missing. Sean thought of those mice in an experimental maze trying so hard to find the exit but instead running into dead ends. He was one of them now, trying to figure out the maze before the scientist decided he was useless

“I don’t know how we’re going to find them,” Ray said, taking a bite of a stale office Danish.

“I don’t think we have a choice. He’s bound to make a mistake somewhere, if he hasn’t already. Look at it this way...”

The two looked over their information all night, into the mid-morning of the next day when they were interrupted. Sean's radio burst with static, causing him and Ray to jolt out of focus.

"Active shooter. Get help," the Director's voice came over the radio before there was a crunching sound and the connection was lost.

Sean and Ray immediately stood. Adrenaline giving him the energy cold coffee couldn't, Sean grabbed his gun off his desk and started running towards the Director's office. He had no idea if anyone else had heard the message, and didn't know if anyone else would come to help. But he also didn't know who was in the office, and he couldn't take the chance that the shooter could finish their job before he got there.

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Sean looked over at Ray, on the other side of the room. "Ray. The President of the United States is in here."

Ray shook his head in anger. "Why was he here? This is exactly why there's protocol in place—he never should have been in this room."

"I don't want to believe this is real." Sean sucked in a breath and let it out slowly, pinching the bridge of his nose. He had to stay in control. The Director was dead and so was the President of the United States, among others. Sean cleared his throat before speaking again. "I know how to find out what happened." The Director always carried a portable tape recorder in his pocket during meetings. He liked to listen through them to make sure nothing was overlooked.

Sean leaned over the Director's body, trying not to think about what he was doing. In his mind, Sean was already building a cage for his emotions; in his line of work he had to be an expert in compartmentalization. He knew this could be no different—he couldn't let his emotions interfere with his ability to do his job.

As he rolled the Director's body onto his side, coating his hands in his boss' blood, something on the Director's back caught his attention. Sean grabbed the recorder and rolled the Director onto his stomach. Ray gagged at what he saw.

"Fuck, Sean, is that what I think it is?" Ray grabbed at his upper arm, putting pressure on the scar he'd gotten years ago after protecting the President from being shot, a motion Sean knew betrayed his inner anxiety.

Sean bit the inside of his cheek, feeling the blood vessels burst under the pressure of his teeth. This wasn't a dream. This was happening. He rubbed his hands back over his head, realizing too late that the blood on them would leave a sticky trail across his dark skin.

In addition to the bullet hole in the director's chest, there was a cross shot into the back of his right shoulder. Four bullets long, three wide. Sean recognized it immediately as the same emblem that was sewn onto the pocket of Silas Davenport's shirt. The notion that this was so much bigger than he had imagined hit Sean in the gut. He fought back a wave of nausea at the realization and looked up.

"Ray," he managed to say around the fear building in his body, "Check the others. I'm going to play the tape." Out of respect, he rolled the Director onto his back and gently closed his eyelids before patting him once on the shoulder in a belated goodbye. "I'm sorry," he muttered.

Sean stood upright and wiped his bloody hands on his shirt, leaving twin streaks of blood down the front. While Ray walked through the room, Sean pressed play.

“The information we just received could prove to be the tipping point in this,” the Director’s voice said.

“Then what is it?” Sean couldn’t place the voice, but knew it was familiar.

“It’s a delicate situation, we have to proceed with caution. See—“

“You don’t know where he is, do you? You’re just guessing,” the same voice interrupted. Sean guessed they were speaking about the Vice President.

“Yes, we do,” said the President’s voice.

“No you don’t. If you knew, you would have already sent people out. Besides, we need to find Silas more than anything. What do you know about where he is?”

“Aaron,” the Director’s voice cautioned, “We’ll get to that. Your president is right though, we do need to prioritize finding Foley.”

“We shouldn’t waste time looking for Foley,” Aaron’s voice stated. Sean narrowed his eyes. That was odd; Vice President Foley appointed Aaron to the profiling job. They were old friends. “You shouldn’t waste time looking for Silas Davenport either. You’re not going to find him; he’s too smart for that. He’s the smartest person in the country and he knows so much more than you do—even you, President Lowood. You’re all sinners, pulling others into the same paths with no remorse. Silas was right. You need to be stopped.”

“Aaron! What are you doing?” The Director’s voice said.



Sean stopped the tape. He knew what happened next; he didn't need to hear it. He leaned over, gripping his knees and trying to ignore the pungent, metallic scent of blood permeating the room. He closed his eyes and willed himself not to have a panic attack. When he'd first started this job, he had panic attacks while working particularly stressful cases. He hadn't had one in years, but recognized the feeling: anxiety welling up inside, filling every empty space in his being, choking him. Now would not be the time to give into the rapidly ascending thought that this situation was hopeless.

Ray walked over to him and put his hand on Sean's shoulder. "Fuck. We have to do something. The rest of them are the same way. Same cross on the back. Definitely a message from Silas."

"Okay," Sean said, "Radio your teams, tell them to set a perimeter and find Aaron. I don't want him hurting anyone else. In the meantime, we're going to try to make some sense of this mess."

Ray made the call and sighed. "Can we at least step outside? It feels like we're disturbing them in here."

Sean nodded. He was quickly approaching the emotional dead-zone where nothing could rattle him any more. He welcomed it. "So. We know Silas has a large community around him; that was obvious from the video feed he released yesterday. That means there's probably children, and we don't know if these people are willingly following him or are being threatened into housing him. So we couldn't bomb them even if we knew where they are, which we don't. He's obviously not working alone, and has been spending years working up to this plan. So far he seems

to have thought of everything we might do to find him and stopped us, which means he's probably working with several people who had government training at one point; there's no way someone without it could have done some of these things. They knew protocols too well. We know they said they're doing good for the world by taking over, but because of Aaron we know at least some of them actually believe this; it's not just a cover...what else do we know?"

Ray twirled his wedding band around his finger as he thought. "Sean, have we considered the possibility that it was Silas's group that took Foley?"

"Only briefly, but there was nothing really tying Silas to his disappearance, why?"

"Well, it's kind of suspicious, isn't it? Foley goes missing the day before this group comes out from underground? You said they had people working for them with government experience. And then Aaron says we "shouldn't waste time" looking for him?"

"Are you suggesting that Erik Foley, *the Vice President*, is working with Silas Davenport? Why would he want to?"

"I don't know. I'm just saying, it's a little suspicious that he goes missing, and then this all happens. I mean, the only reason this meeting happened was because of Foley's possible location. And if he hadn't been "kidnapped," there wouldn't have been a meeting, and all those people wouldn't have had a reason to meet secretly. It just doesn't sit well with me, you know?"

"So you think he just decided to up and join Silas's cause after being elected? And he got Aaron to kill the president so he could take over?"

Ray shrugged. “Seems like it to me. The only thing I can’t figure out is why Silas would accept him—he made it pretty clear the wealthy aren’t worthy of salvation, or whatever he’s calling it.”

It hit Sean then, the reason this was all working so well. Everything suddenly wove together in his head, individual threads forming the picture and shifting the world into clearer focus. And though there were still some pieces missing, he could finally see the image in front of him. He found the way out of the maze.

“Oh, fuck. Shit, shit shit. I get it now. Fuck. Foley didn’t run for V.P. because he wanted to make the world better. He ran *solely* to get into a position of power. Aaron’s not high enough in the chain of command to know some of the things Silas knew. Who would? Erik Foley. Foley must have been working with them since before the beginning of his term. Think about it: before this he wasn’t a politician; he came out of nowhere. His platform was built on starting from humble beginnings and working hard, and the message that if you work hard, you’ll achieve your goals. Isn’t that the redemption Davenport is promising his followers? Which makes him one of them, the example for the rest of the followers. And he “kidnapped” himself in order to give Aaron his opportunity.”

“Holy shit,” Ray said. He leaned back on his heels and looked up at the harsh fluorescent light above him. “What do we do?”

“We tell no one. This is just a theory, right now, but if it’s true, we don’t know how deep this goes. If Foley and Aaron were working with Silas, we don’t know who else might be. We have to start looking for some evidence to connect this.”

“There’s still paper records of the last election downstairs. We can look to see if there’s an area where votes for Lowood and Foley were abnormally concentrated. If there is, that could tell us where Davenport and his followers are hiding.”

“Smart,” Sean said. “Let’s go now. We have no idea what Silas is planning next, or when.”

They walked down the stairs side by side, Sean tracking the speckled pattern of the floor with his eyes, playing a mental game of connect the dots with each step. This went so much deeper than he could have imagined. If he was right, and this went back to before the election, it might not be a battle they could win. This could be the terrorist too prepared for them to defeat.

Sean looked next to him at Ray, and Ray met his gaze. Sean saw all his fears reflected in his friend’s face. They were two of the oldest agents in the field, the most experienced, and had seen enough horrors that nightmares seemed like a relief. Nothing compared to this, though, and Sean knew Ray was thinking the same thing. There was nothing to do now except work and hope that somehow, somewhere Silas Davenport made a mistake. If not, he just might win.