

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES*—BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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DEAD WATCH



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Dead Watch

A G. P. Putnam's Sons Book / published by arrangement with the author

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For information address:

The Berkley Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Putnam Inc.,
375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014.

The Penguin Putnam Inc. World Wide Web site address is

<http://www.penguinputnam.com>

ISBN: 1-101-14681-8

A G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS BOOK®

G. P. Putnam's Sons Books first published by The G. P. Putnam's Sons Publishing Group, a member of Penguin Putnam Inc.,
375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014.

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Electronic edition: May, 2006

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1



Despite the mist, she spent an hour working Chica, and working herself, and she smelled of it, mare-sweat and woman-sweat, with a tingle of Chanel No. 5. They'd turned down the trail from the south forty, easing along, and she could feel the mare's heart beating through her knees and thighs.

The mist hadn't felt cold while they were jumping, but now they were cooling off, and her cheeks and forehead were pink, and her knuckles were raw. A shower, she thought, would be nice, along with a hot sandwich and a cup of soup.

They'd just crossed the fence. She turned in the saddle to watch the gate relatch behind them, and saw the face in the tree line. There was no question that it was a face—and in a blink, it was gone, dissolving in the trees.

She turned away from it, casually, tried to capture an afterimage in her mind. A pale oval, truncated at top and bottom, with a dark trapezoid beneath the oval. The face of a man who'd been watching her through binoculars, she realized. The dark shape, the trapezoid, had been arms, joined at the binoculars, in a camouflage jacket.

A thrill of fear ran up her spine. They might be coming for her.

She suppressed the urge to run the mare, but not the urge to push her into a trot. They came down the fence line and she took the remote from her pocket, pointed it at the inside gate, and it swung open in front of them. They went through, and she turned and closed the gate, her eyes searching the tree line as she turned. Nothing. They went on to the barn, Chica in a hurry now, anticipating the feed bag.

When she came off the horse she was feeling loose and athletic and was beginning to question what she'd seen. Was she losing it? Was the pressure pushing her over the edge? There'd been nothing but a flash of white.

Lon, the barn man, came over as she led the horse inside to the smell of horseshit and hay and feed, the odors of a comfortable life. She brushed a fly away from Chica's eye as she handed the reins over. "I worked her hard, Lon. She's pretty warm."

Then over the groom's shoulder, in the lighted square of the open barn door, she saw the housekeeper jogging across the barnyard, a folded newspaper over her hair to deflect the rain. Lon, an older, hook-nosed man whose skin was grooved like the bark on an oak tree, turned to look and said, "She's in a hurry."



She met Sandi, the housekeeper, at the barn door. "Sandi?"

"Two men are here."

"Two men?"

“Watchmen,” Sandi said.

She looked up at the house: “Did you let them in?”

“Um, it’s raining . . .” Sandi was suddenly afraid that she’d done wrong. “I left them in the front hall.”

“That’s okay. That’s fine.” She nodded. “Tell them that I’ll be a moment.”

Sandi fled back across the barnyard into the house. She and Lon talked about the horse for another thirty seconds, then, as she turned toward the house, Lon said, “Be careful, Maddy.”

She took her time, cleaning her boots on the boot-brush outside the door, and on the mat inside, peeling off her rain suit and helmet, shaking out her hair, hanging the gear on the wall-pegs in the mud room. Still wearing the knee-high boots, she clumped across the kitchen and up the back stairs to the bedroom. From the closet, she got the bedroom gun, a blue-steel .380. She jacked a shell into the chamber and disengaged the safety, stuffed it in her jacket pocket.

She was afraid of the Watchmen, but more than that: she was also interested in what they’d say and excited by the prospect of conflict. She wasn’t exactly a thrill-seeker, but she enjoyed a test, and the more severe, the better. She’d been a rock climber, she drove fast cars. And always the horses: the horses might someday kill her, she thought. Riding was as dangerous as a knife fight.



She took the back stairs down to the kitchen, walked out through the living room to the front entry. Two men waited there, both in leather bomber jackets, blue shirts, and khaki slacks. They’d put on their uniforms for the visit.

She knew one of them: Bob Sheenan, who worked behind the parts counter at Canelo’s Farm & Garden. He was about fourth or fifth in the local Watchmen ranks. She knew the other man’s face, but not his name.

“Been out riding?” Sheenan asked when she walked into the entry.

She didn’t answer. No pleasantries for the Watchmen: “What do you want, Bob?”

“Well, now . . .” Sheenan was a big man, with a bar-brawler’s face: pale blue berserker’s eyes, one damaged eyelid half-shading his left eye, scar tissue under both of them, a crooked banana nose, large yellow teeth. He smelled of pizza and beer, though it was not yet ten o’clock. “You’re telling people that the Watchmen had something to do with your husband.”

“You did,” she said flatly. “I want to know where he is. If you’re not here to tell me, then get out.”

He jabbed a finger at her, and stepped closer. “We had nothing to do with your husband. If you keep talking that way, we will take you to court.”

She squared off to him. “Or beat me up?”

“We don’t do that.”

“Bullshit. What about that Mexican kid two weeks ago? You broke his cheekbones.”

“He was attempting to escape,” the second man said.

“You’re not the police!” she snapped. “You’re supposed to be Boy Scouts. What were you doing capturing him, huh?”

Sheenan and the second man looked at each other for a second, confused, then

Sheenan pulled himself back. “I don’t care about the Mexican. That’s got nothing to do with this.”

She bared her teeth: “Is this coming from Goodman? Or is this just some moronic crap you made up on your own?”

“This is not crap, missus.” His eyes widened and his shoulders tensed, as if he were about to strike at her. “You are tearing down our good name. I don’t know what your husband is up to, or where he’s gone, but we will find out. In the meantime, you shut your fuckin’ mouth.”

“I’m not going to shut my mouth,” she said. “I’ll tell you something, Bob: you better be here on Goodman’s orders, because you’re going to need as much backup as you can get. If you came here on your own hook, I’ll have your balls by midnight. Now: Are you going to get out, or do I call the sheriff?”

Sheenan shuffled a half step forward, looming, not worried at the threat. The security cameras were on. All this was on tape. She refused to move back, but slipped her right hand into the pocket of the jean jacket, touched the cold steel of the .380.

“Something’s going on here,” Sheenan hissed, jabbing the finger again, but not touching her. “We’re going to find out what it is. In the meantime, you stick close to the house, missus. We don’t want something to happen to you, too.”

Then he laughed, and turned, and walked out. The other man held the door, and before pulling it closed behind him, said, “We’re watching.”



She exhaled, walked into the library, out of range of the security cameras, took the pistol out of her pocket with a shaking hand, and engaged the safety. Her biggest fear was that they would do something stupid—that they would stage an accident, a mishap, a mystery killing, a disappearance. Even if they were eventually caught, that wouldn’t do her any good.

She could hear the local news anchor: “. . . and then she vanished, into the same darkness that took her husband.” She’d worked as a reporter for a television station in Richmond, and used to write that stuff; that’s how she’d do it.

She’d been planning to run for two weeks. Sheenan had pulled the trigger. She put the gun back in her pocket, headed for the stairs, and shouted, “Sandi?” Sandi came out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on a dish towel. “Yes?”

“I’m going into town. Did you pick up the dry cleaning?”

“Yes, I did. I’ve still got them in the kitchen.”

“I’ll need the red blouse and the gray slacks. Bring them up, and put them on the bed. I’ll be in the shower.”

“What about the schnitzel? Will you be back for lunch?”

“I’ll get a bite in town. You and Lon and Carl could have sandwiches. . . and leave one for me in the refrigerator. I’ll eat it cold, this afternoon.”

“Yes, ma’am.”



She took the pickup into Lexington, driving too fast, enjoying the feel of the back end kicking out in the turns, grabbing the gravel and throwing it. She was moving fast

enough that anyone trailing her would be obvious. If anyone was there, she didn't see him. The face across the fence haunted her: Had it been real? Was it imaginary?

In town, she stopped at the bank, took out five thousand in cash, returned two books to the library, filled the truck's gas tank, went to the feed store and picked up four bags of supplement for the horses. At the post office, she turned off the mail and had it forwarded to Washington. The window clerk was a Watchman, but he was whistling as he put together the temporary change of address, and smiled at her when she said good-bye.

With the chores done, she stopped at Pat's Tea House for a scone and a cup of tea. Pat was a friend, a fellow horsewoman, and came over to chat, as she always did: "How's everything?"

"Delicious," she said. "Listen, can I borrow your phone to call Washington? I left my cell at home."

"Absolutely. Stop in the office when you're done."

She made the call, thinking all the time that she was being paranoid. They wouldn't be watching the phones. Would they?



She was back at Oak Walk at one o'clock, sent Sandi to get Lon and Carl. When the three were assembled in the kitchen, she told them that she was going to Washington and didn't know when she'd be back.

"With the controversy about Lincoln and with the Watchmen visiting this morning, I think I'd better move into town for a while. So you three will be running this place. Deborah Benson will deliver your paychecks on Fridays. If you need to buy anything big, call me, we'll talk, and I'll have Deborah issue a check. I'm going to leave three thousand in cash with Lon. If you need to buy small stuff, use that, and put the receipts in the Ball jar on the kitchen counter. I'll leave the keys for the truck and the car with Lon."

They had questions, but they'd done this before.

"Any idea when you'll be back?" Lon asked.

"I'll check back every once in a while, just to ride, if nothing else. But it could be a while before I'm back full-time—probably not until we find Linc," she said.

When she was satisfied that the farm would be handled, she ate the cold schnitzel sandwich, opened the safe and removed and packed her jewelry, packed a small suitcase with clothes she wanted to take to the city, went to the security room, took the tape out of the security cameras, and put in a new one.

She spent another hour on Rochambeau—Rocky—an aging gelding that had always been one of her favorites, then cleaned up, put on her traveling clothes, and wandered around the house at loose ends, until four o'clock, when she heard the gate-buzzer chirp. She looked out the front window down the lawn where the driveway snaked up from the road. Two cars were coming up the hill, a gunmetal gray Mercedes-Benz sedan and a black Lincoln Town Car.

She went out on the porch when the cars stopped in the driveway circle. A chauffeur got out of the Benz and waited. Another chauffeur got out of the Town Car and held the back door. A young woman got out, followed by a slightly older man, both

carrying briefcases. Madison met them at the top of the porch stairs.

“Hello,” the woman said. “I’m Janice Rogers, this is Lane Parks, Johnnie said to say hello for him. He will see you tonight.”

“Two cars?” she asked.

“Johnnie thought a convoy would be better,” Rogers said. “If you’re really worried . . . it would make it more complicated for anyone to interfere with us.”

“Good. Let me get my things,” she said.

The trip into D.C. took a little more than three hours. Her attorney, Johnson Black, was waiting on the porch when the Benz pulled up to the town house, alerted by the two junior attorneys in the Town Car. Black was dressed like his name, in shades of black, under a black raincoat, but with a brilliant jungle-birds necktie.

She got out, the chauffeur popped the trunk to get her luggage, and she walked up the sidewalk and Black kissed her on the cheek and said, “Quite an adventure.”

“The kind I don’t need.”

“Randall James is coming over tonight, if you don’t mind. He wants to talk about those tapes—he wants you on his show tomorrow.”

She was fumbling for the keys to the front door, found them. “You think that’d be the thing to do?”

“Well, I’ll have to look at the tapes, but so far, the press is acting like we’re just bullshitting about Linc and Goodman. This could change things. Depends on the tapes . . .”



Randall James had a noon gig as the Washington Insider on the local ABC outlet. The show got to the right demographic.

James showed up at nine o’clock, an unctuous man with careful black hair, a sharp nose, and a dimple on his chin. He would, she thought, lie for the pure pleasure of it; but he had the demographics.

He sat in the chair, watching the tapes, checking her profile from time to time. When they were done, he said, “I’ll put you on right at the top, at noon. Live. This is great shit, Mrs. Bowe.” He picked up a remote and ran back to the point where Sheenan had shuffled toward her. The threat seemed more explicit on the tape than it had in person. James froze the scene, said, “Look at the face on that fucker . . .”

Her name was Madison Bowe. Her husband was an ex-U.S. senator from Virginia, who, two weeks earlier, had vanished after a speech in Charlottesville. Vanished like a wisp of smoke.



Next day.

The governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia stood in the living room of the private quarters on the second floor of the governor’s mansion, watching the television. He was flushed, angry, but silent.

His brother was not. His brother screamed at the television: “Look at the bitch, Arlo. *Look at that bitch.* She’s ruinin’ you, and she knows it. Goddamn her eyes . . .”

“She’s good at it,” Arlo Goodman said after a moment, a small smile on his face.

“That silly ass Randall James is wearing a toupee, huh? He looks like a circumcised cock being attacked by a rat.”

Darrell Goodman wasn't amused. He sat on the couch behind the governor, wearing a tan raincoat, his hands in the pockets, a tennis hat shading his eyes, making them invisible in the already dimly lit room. His body was canted toward the TV, trembling with tension. “You want me to . . .”

The governor turned and pointed a finger at him: “Nothing. Nobody goes near her, not for any reason. I'll make a statement, sweetness and light, apologize, kick the Watchman's ass. What's his name? Sheenan. We kick his ass. But if anything happened to her, I'd be cooked. Done. Finished. Stay the fuck away from her.”

“What about Sheenan? Maybe he's working with her. Maybe it was a setup.”

The governor grunted: “If that was a setup, he oughta get the Oscar. But it wasn't a setup, Darrell. That was a real, honest-to-God barefaced threat. He thought he was doing the right thing.”

“Dumb fuck, getting on tape.”

“Let it go. I'll have Patricia deal with him. But I'll tell you what, this is no way to get to be president.”

Darrell Goodman studied his brother, his calm face, the smile as he watched the televised assassination. Sooner or later, the governor would realize that they were in a war. Then he'd do more than rave. Then he'd get angry, then he'd move. Darrell looked forward to the day.

★

The hunter knew Madison Bowe's name. He'd seen her picture, had never met her, had no idea where she lived, had no thought that she might be in his future. As she spoke to a half million people on Randall James's show, he knelt on a rubber tarp, not forty miles from her farm, waiting. Above him, the sun was a dull nickel hidden in the clouds.

The rain had come every night for the past three, courtesy of a low-pressure system stalled over the Appalachians. The night before, the rain began just after 3 A.M. He'd woken in his guest room, upstairs in the cabin, snug under the slanting tin roof. He'd listened for a few moments, the water whispering down a drainpipe, the cotton smell of the quilt around him, and then he'd rolled over and slept soundly until four-thirty.

He woke at four-thirty every morning. When he opened his eyes, he lay quietly for a moment, surfacing, then looked at the bedside clock, stretched, and got out of bed. He did fifty push-ups and fifty sit-ups on the colonial-style hooked rug from China, then a series of stretches, working hard on his bad leg. As he was finishing his routine, he heard an alarm go off down the hall.

He grabbed his jeans and a pair of fresh underpants from his bag, and padded barefoot down the hall to the bathroom. Better first than at the end of the line . . .

He brushed his teeth, skipped shaving, showered quickly. Out of the shower, he dried himself with his designated towel, pulled on the shorts and jeans, and opened the door. Peyson Carter was leaning against the opposite wall, green eyes, sleepy, wrapped in a bathrobe, holding a hair dryer.

“Morning, Jake,” she said, not looking at his bare chest. His name was Jake Winter.

“Billy’s just getting up.”

“Yeah, let me get out of your way.”

He slid past her in the hallway, careful not to brush against her. Peyson was his best friend’s wife. Since Billy Carter first brought her around, fifteen years ago in college, he’d been a little in love with her. Some of the feeling, he suspected, was returned. They were always careful not to touch, because there might be a question of exactly when the touching would stop. And she loved Billy . . .

The guys downstairs were slower getting up, but by the time he’d gotten dressed and into his boots, and gathered his coveralls and gear, they were moving around. He could hear the downstairs shower going, and the plop-gurgle of the coffeemaker, the smell of hot coffee on a cool, rainy morning.

As he left the room, Peyson came out of the bathroom, steamy and pink, wrapped in the robe, and he said, “Scrambled?” and she said, “Yes,” and shouted, “Billy, get up,” and he followed her down the hall, watching her ass, and God help him, if Billy his best friend ever died in a car wreck, he would be knocking on this woman’s door the next week.

Peyson went on to the other bedroom and he turned down the stairs.



In the kitchen, he started breaking eggs into a bowl, got some muffin-premix poured into pan-molds, fired up the oven, took a package of bacon out of the refrigerator. Bob Wilson came out of the downstairs bathroom, hair wet from the shower, and said, “Rain.”

“Mist.”

“Gonna make the woods quiet, anyway. Hope the birds don’t hunker down.”

Sam Barger walked sleepy-eyed from the bedroom and asked Wilson, “You all done in the shower?”

“Yeah, go ahead.”

“Rainin’,” Barger said. “TV says it should be outa here by noon.”

They took a little time over breakfast: the smell of muffins rising in the oven, bacon and eggs, coffee, the pine-wood walls of the cabin. Peyson Carter across from him, curly blond hair, catching his eyes. Did all attractive women keep a spare tire?



They hunted together every spring and fall, looking for Virginia wild turkeys, four men, one man’s wife. They had the routine down. Everybody knew what to bring—bows, boots, camo, pasta, booze, garbage bags, toilet paper, target faces—and everybody knew about where he or she would set up. They were all bow hunters. Between the five of them, they averaged two turkeys per season. Turkeys were tough.

All that brought him to the rubber tarp, where he knelt in the gloom, waiting for his bird to move. A little hungry now, trying to ignore it. The four-foot-square mat made it possible to shift his weight silently; he had to shift frequently because of his lame leg. The tangle of brush around him made it possible to draw the bow without the motion being seen.

He had a Semiweiss Lighting compound bow, the draw weight adjusted down to

provide for a very long hold. He was shooting carbon-fiber arrows, one-inch broadheads with stoppers. A good-sized tom hung out in the oaks behind him. And the tom would be coming out to this cornfield, and with luck, following a track along a shallow ravine below him. He knew the bird sometimes did that, because he'd seen the scat and the tracks on scouting trips.

Whether the tom would do it this day, he didn't know.

He waited, listening, straining to see in through the brush, the problems of the bureaucracy falling away from him. He'd hunted most of his life, since his grandfather had first taken him out when he was six years old. He hunted deer and turkeys in Virginia, elk and antelope out west. When he was hunting, he stepped into a Zen-space and became part of the landscape. Time didn't pass, nor did it stop; it simply wasn't. He faded away from himself and his day-to-day problems.

He'd been in place since dawn. The sun came up, rose higher, broke briefly out of the clouds, disappeared again. A breeze sprang up, played with the oak leaves, died again; squirrels ran across the ground, noisy beasts; a chickadee stopped on a branch a foot from his nose.

He saw it all, but didn't look at it. He was waiting . . . When the cell phone went off.



“Ahhhh . . . Jesus!”

The sound was stunning, like being hit in the face by a snowball. He rushed back to the present, out of the Zen-space to the here-and-now. He unzipped a panel on his camo, pushed his hand through to a shirt pocket underneath, and took the phone out.

“Yes.” The only people who had the number for that phone were people he needed to talk with.

A woman's voice, quiet, cultivated: “Jake, this is Gina Press. I'm sorry to bother you, I understand you're on vacation. The guy needs to see you.”

“When?”

“Today. Where are you?”

“Down in the valley. It'll be a while.”

“It's pretty urgent. Can I put you on the log for four forty-five?”

He looked at his watch: One o'clock. “Okay—but give me a hint.”

“Madison Bowe.”

“I'll be there.”



The killer could feel the pull of the .45 in his pocket, pulling down on his shoulders, and maybe his soul.

He was moving Lincoln Bowe. Bowe was pale, naked, unconscious, a sack of meat, for all practical purposes. The killer had him slung in a blue plastic tarp, purchased at a Wal-Mart, and wrestled him down the narrow stairs, under the single bare basement bulb.

He was a big man, straining with the load, trying for a kind of tenderness while moving two hundred pounds of inert human being. He wore blue coveralls from Wal-Mart, purchased for the murder, and a hooded sweatshirt, with the hood pulled over his

head, and plastic gloves. He knew all about DNA, and it worried him. A hair, a little spit, and he could wind up strapped to the death gurney, a needle in the arm . . .

He got the load down, puffing and heaving all the way, then looked back up the stairs: two minutes and he'd have to take the body back up. But he couldn't do the killing upstairs, the neighborhood was too tight, somebody might hear the shot.

He moved Bowe under the light, spread the tarp, exposed him. He was lying on his back, soft and helpless. His body was dead white, touched here and there with blemishes, pimples, the rashes and scrapes of an out-of-shape man in his fifth decade. He looked at Bowe for a few seconds, then said aloud, "Here we are. Christ Almighty."

No response. Bowe had taken an overdose of Rinolat.

The killer took the .45 out of his pocket, an old, worn gun, made in the first half of the twentieth century, bought at a weekend sale, inaccurate at any distance farther than arm's length. Which was enough for the task.

He cocked it with a gloved hand, then thought: "The phone book. Damn it." He ran up the short flight of stairs, got the phone book off the kitchen table, and went back down, closing the door behind him. The phone book already had two bullet holes in it: tests he'd done out in the Virginia countryside. He placed it on the naked man's chest.

He slipped the safety and said, "Linc . . ." and thought:
Ears . . . damn it.

He put the safety back on, ran back up the stairs, and got the earplugs. They were two bullet-sized bits of compressible yellow foam, made for target shooters. He twisted each one, fitted them into his ears, waited for them to reexpand. If he'd fired the gun in the confines of the basement, without the ear protection, he wouldn't have been able to hear for a week.

He slipped the safety again, teared up, wiped the tears away, pointed the pistol at the point where the phone book covered the naked man's heart, said, "Lincoln," and pulled the trigger.

Without the earplugs, the blast would have been shattering; it was bad enough as it was. The naked man bucked upward, his eyes opening in reflex, the pupils milky with sleep. He stared at the killer for a second, then two, then dropped back flat on the floor.

"Holy mother," the killer said, appalled. He stood staring for a second, shocked by the milky eyes, by a possible gleam of intelligence, the hair rising on the back of his neck. Then, after a moment, he stooped and picked up the phone book. The slug had gone through, and blood bubbled from a purple hole in the naked man's chest. The hole was directly over his heart. He engaged the safety on the .45, slipped the gun back in his pocket, and squatted.

The naked man wasn't breathing. His eyes, when the lids were withdrawn, had rolled up, showing only the whites. He pressed a plastic-covered finger against the naked man's neck, waiting for any sign of a pulse. Didn't find one. Lincoln Bowe was dead.

He rolled Bowe up, enough to look at his back. No exit wound. The phone book had worked like a charm: the slug was buried inside the dead man.

The killer was silent, kneeling, looking at the face of the man on the floor. So many years. Who would have thought it'd come to this? Then he sighed, stood up, pulled the

magazine on the pistol, jacked the shell out of the chamber, replaced it in the magazine. Looked at the stairs.

This would be the dangerous part, moving the body. If the cops stopped him for anything, he was done.

But they'd made their plans, and he was running with them. He had a lot to do. He stood, still looking at the dead man's face, then said, "Let's move, Linc. Let's go."

2



Jake stopped at home and changed into a suit and tie, and then caught a taxi to the White House. He checked through the west working entrance, walking first past the outer gate, where a guard examined his ID, then through the inner gate with the X-ray machines.

The X-ray tech, a new guy, spent five minutes looking at his cane, until an older guy came by, glanced at it, and said, “It’s okay. Mr. Winter’s a regular.”



Once through security, he was slotted into a waiting room that offered coffee, newspapers, and high-speed Internet. The room had recently been redecorated—the walls painted blue, the First Lady’s favorite color, and hung with portraits of former First Ladies.

One of the formers, Hillary Clinton, smiled down on the bald spot of John Powers, a Georgetown professor and sometime advisor to the Department of Defense. Powers was sitting in an easy chair reading the *Wall Street Journal*. He and Jake knew each other as consultants, and as denizens of Georgetown.

“I’m much more important than you are,” Powers said to Jake, folding the paper as Jake limped in. He was an urbane man, who looked like he might have run an art gallery. His over-the-calf socks were dark blue with ladybug-sized smiling suns on them. “I publish in *Foreign Policy*.”

“That may be true, but my neckties are from Hermès,” Jake said, dropping into a chair across from him. “Wait’ll the faculty senate hears that you were reading the *Journal*.”

“They all read it, in secret, greedy little buggers,” Powers said. He probed: “Are you over for the boat review?”

Jake shook his head and lied. “Nope. I don’t know why I’m over. Probably the convention. History stuff, working it into the program, successor to John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, William Jefferson Clinton, great Americans all, blah-blah-blah.”

“The convention.” Powers smiled, showing a set of glittering teeth. Campus rumor said that he’d had them veneered for television. “I’m here for the boats. Vice President Landers is leading the charge.”

“Good luck with that.” Jake opened his case and took out his laptop, balanced it on his knees, turned it on.

“You don’t mean that,” Powers said, tilting his head. Few people at Georgetown would have.

“I do,” Jake said. “I hope they build them all.”

Powers brightened, remembering. “Ah. That’s right. You were in the military.”

“For a while.” The boats were five atomic-powered attack carriers that would cost twelve billion dollars each. “With the budget as it is, and the old people loading up behind Social Security, I don’t think you’ve got a chance in hell.”

Powers frowned, said, “The Chinese and Indians . . .” A tall man in shirtsleeves stuck his head into the room and nodded at Powers. “Whoops, here I go. See you at school.” Powers took a step away, then said, “Really? Hermès?”

“Yup.”

“What do they cost now? Two-fifty?”

“Yup.”

When Powers was gone, Jake plugged into the Net, did a search for Madison and Lincoln Bowe. He got sixty thousand hits, filtered them to the last three days, and caught a reference to a Madison Bowe interview on Channel 7’s *Washington Insider* with Randall James.

He called it up from the station’s news cache and watched Madison Bowe do her thing: “They’ve got him, I know it.” The camera made love to her face. “They’ve got Lincoln. If they don’t, why are they so worried about me? They did everything they could to shut me up. I’ll be honest, I’m very worried. I’m worried that they’ll kill him when they’re done with him . . .”

She had tapes of a big shambling man threatening her in her own house. The tapes were made more effective by their security-camera, cinéma-vérité quality. “This is how they work,” she said after the tape ran out. She was appealing, with a nervous lip-nibble that made a male hormone jump up and shout, “*I’ll take care of you.*”

“This is what they’re doing to our America,” she said, speaking directly to the camera.

They, Jake mused, were *us*.

★

He was moving fast now, scanning the Net news, learning as much as he could about her, and about Lincoln Bowe, and the circumstances around Lincoln Bowe’s disappearance; and about their friends, their political allies. Lincoln Bowe had been a conservative Republican, faithful to the party and to the conservative cause, and an aristocrat. Madison Bowe was a lawyer’s daughter, smart, media-wise, good-looking, the perfect mate for a rising Republican star.

Then the star had fallen, brought down by Arlo Goodman.

The fight had started with Goodman’s run for the governorship, through the rise of the Watchmen, and then into Bowe’s reelection campaign. Bowe had been the big stud in Virginia politics, Goodman coming up in the other party, a threat to Bowe’s eminence. A fight that started out as political quickly became personal.

Bowe: *Have you seen him with his Watchmen? Just like Munich in the 1930s, a tinpot dictator with his political thugs, a little Hitler without the mustache . . .*

Goodman: *Did you ever see that picture of him during Iraq I? The baby-faced bigshot lawyer with his aristocratic chums, with his friends from Skull and Bones, playing poker and smoking Cuban cigars. Let the poor boys die; but none of our*

precious little richies with their snowy white sweaters with the big blue Y on the chest . . .

Bowe must have rued the day he'd worn that Yale sweater, let himself be shot in the sweater and shorts, sockless with tasseled loafers, a big cigar and playing cards on the table, the unruly hair falling over his forehead—a harmless, attractive photograph at twenty-four that would be shoved up his ass at forty-six . . .

★

Goodman had won the gubernatorial race. Two years later, with a lot of help from the White House, and a nationwide money-raising campaign, he'd spearheaded the campaign against Bowe. Bowe had lost his Senate seat to a Goodman crony.

Bowe had lost, but he hadn't shut up. He had the money and the family to re-create himself as the administration's most prominent critic, able to say what sitting members of Congress, too worried about maintaining their share of the pork, could not. Some thought he might run for his old Senate seat again. Some thought if the Republicans came back in, he might be in line for an ambassadorship, the Court of St. James's, or Paris.

Then he'd vanished. Stepped into a car, and was gone, moments after making a vicious attack on the administration's Syrian policy, and, domestically, on special-interest groups who supported the president.

The media had gone crazy. And the longer Bowe was gone, the crazier it had gotten.

ABC had compared his disappearance to Judge Crater's and Jimmy Hoffa's, with hints of organized crime. CNN had done a special that spoke darkly of Nazi, Middle Eastern, and South American politics. They'd intercut the film with shots of the Watchmen, in bomber jackets and khaki slacks, meeting in a football stadium in Emporia, with Goodman on a stage in front of a huge American flag; the implication was clear.

Fox had won the ratings war with a show on even crazier theories, including alien abduction and spontaneous combustion.

★

Jake had been waiting for forty minutes, and was still paging through media commentaries, when his cell phone rang. Gina. "You're on the log. Come on up."

★

Jacob Winter was thirty-three years old, six feet two inches tall, rangy, bony, with knife-edge cheekbones, a long nose, black hair worn unfashionably long, arty-long, and pale green eyes. His ex-wife referred to him as Ichabod-in-a-suit, after Ichabod Crane. He did wear suits: a saleswoman at Saks had once taken two hours of her life to coordinate neckties and shirts and suits with his eyes, and to explain how he could do it himself.

"Your eyes are the thing," she'd said. "The right tie brings them out. Frankly, you would not normally be considered a great-looking guy, too many bones in your face, but your eyes make you *very* attractive. Your eyes and shoulders . . ."

Yes. The kind of guy who attracts saleswomen from Saks. Not a bad thing; her

comment had cheered him for a week. *A man of style . . .*



Jake had been born in Montana and raised on a ranch. His mother was an engineer, his father a rancher's son and a lawyer and eventually a congressman. Jake came late in their lives. Since his parents were both Catholic and pro-life, and politics were involved, the pregnancy was tolerated, but they weren't much interested in raising another kid—Jake's siblings were fifteen years older than he.

When he was two, his parents, moving between Billings and Washington, began leaving him for longer and longer periods with his grandparents. By the time he was five, they were out of his life. His grandmother died when he was nine; his grandfather followed when he was fifteen. His parents didn't want him. After a year of prep school, he went to college at the University of Virginia, a lonely sixteen-year-old with a history book under his arm.

He graduated at nineteen and could afford to do as he wished—when his grandfather died, his will specified that the ranch be sold, and that the money go to *Jake*, rather than to his father . . .

Two weeks after graduation, he was in Army Officers Candidate School. He spent eight years with Army Intelligence. The first two years had been in training. The third, fourth, and fifth he'd spent in Afghanistan with a series of Army special forces teams.

At the beginning of the sixth year, he was standing too close to a roadside bomb when it went off on the outskirts of the town of Ghazni. A piece of shell the size of a softball cut through his hip. A medic had stuffed Stop-Flo padding into the hole in his leg and butt and on the medevac chopper, said, "Shit, man, you're lucky. If you'd been standing ninety degrees to the right, that would've been your balls."

The rest of the sixth year was spent at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Bethesda, getting his leg to work again.

Then, still in therapy, he was posted to the Pentagon, where he discovered an uncanny ability to navigate the world of bureaucracy. While his military colleagues worked on assessments of Chinese special-forces training or the electronic characteristics of Indian shoulder-mounted missiles, Jake's work had been done inside the Pentagon, the various limbs of Congress, and the rat's nest of bureaus and departments that surrounded the intelligence agencies.

He found things out; became the Sam Spade of the circular file, the Philip Marlowe of the burn bag.

And though he could eventually run five eight-minute miles, in a hobbled, windmilling way, the Army would never consider him fully rehabilitated. That career was gone—he could stay in, take staff jobs, and someday retire as one of the colonel-intellectuals who argued war theory. Not interested.

Instead, as he worked through rehab and then in the Pentagon, he'd gone to graduate school at Georgetown, with the idea that he might teach at the university level. He'd written his PhD thesis on twentieth-century modernist ideas as they'd bled into politics, and had then rewritten the thesis as a book, *Modernism & Politics: The Theories That Changed the World*.

He'd gotten solid reviews in the important journals, and followed the first book with

New Elites, a study of professional bureaucracies. That had nailed down his status as a political intellectual. He didn't do television. Television, he thought, was sales. He was research and design.

He'd gotten married before he'd been wounded; the marriage hadn't survived rehab. Wouldn't have survived anyway, he thought. The woman was a crocodile. Although, he thought, if she'd known that he would wind up at the White House . . .

His most influential publication had never seen hard covers. At the urging of a military friend, he'd written *Winter's Guide to the Inside*, a map and guide to the military/intelligence complex. It had become the best-selling Pentagon samizdat.

The *Guide* had also gotten him a part-time job with the second most important man in the country.



Ten seconds after Gina called down, Jake met a Marine Corps captain on the indoor side of the waiting room, and followed him into an elevator, up, and then down the eggshell white halls to Danzig's office.

Going to see *the guy*. The guy was Bill Danzig, the president's chief of staff. Danzig had been a deputy secretary of Defense two administrations back, then a Pentagon consultant when the party was out of power. He'd been given a copy of *Winter's Guide*, and when he moved to the White House, Jake went on his consultants list.

Jake had done twenty jobs for him in three years, tracking down problems in the bureaucracy. As Danzig came to trust him, the problems became more difficult, the assignments more frequent.

Not quite a full-time job, but lucrative. The job also gave him access to some interesting government computers. Interesting, anyway, for a man who wanted to know what really happened.



A Secret Service agent was standing in the hall outside Danzig's office door, wearing the neat suit, crisp shirt, and a burgundy necktie, with ear-bug. He nodded at Jake and the jar-head, stepped into the middle of the hallway, blocking a farther walk down the hall, toward the president's office, and politely indicating the entrance to Danzig's office.

Jake nodded and took the turn. The Secret Service man said, "Nice to see you again, Mr. Winter."

"Nice to see *you*, Henry," Jake said. Jake remembered everybody's name; it was part of his talent.

Danzig's outer office was twenty-five feet wide and twenty feet deep, with a small room to one side for printers and copy machines. He had three secretaries. Two sat opposite each other against the side walls, at identical cherry-wood desks, peering at computers.

A third sat behind a broad table, an antique with curved, carved legs pressing into the deep-blue carpet, under a portrait of Theodore Roosevelt, beside the door to the inner office. The table was littered with paper, bound reports, a few family photographs, and a vase of cut cattleya orchids, large yellow blooms dappled with

scarlet.

The third woman was Gina, the important one, the one who'd called him. She was in her forties, with a dry oval face and close-cropped hair, bright blue eyes, wrinkles in the skin of her neck. She nodded and smiled, as though she wouldn't cut his throat in an instant if her boss asked her to. She said, "Great tie," and touched a button on her desk. Danzig now knew Jake was waiting.

"Great halter," Jake said. "Is that new?"

Gina touched the ID halter at her neck, from which her White House ID dangled; turquoise cabochons set in Navajo silver. "I just got it—my husband bought it for our anniversary."

"Nice antique look," he said. "I like it."

ID cards separated Washington insiders from the tourists. The elite-insiders were now separating themselves from the clerk-insiders with gemstones: the sale of jeweled ID halters had been booming.

Gina glanced at her desktop, where a diode had gone green. She said, "Go on in. He's waiting."

Bill Danzig was tying his shoe. He looked up as Jake came through the door, grunted, and said, "Don't buy round shoelaces."

"I'll make a note," Jake said.

Danzig pointed at a chair and Jake sat down. "What's your schedule?" Danzig asked. "Do you have any time?"

Jake shrugged. "I can always make time. We're on Easter break this week, so I've got a week and a half clear."

"Excellent. Now. What do you know about Madison Bowe?" Danzig asked, settling back. He was a fat man, with shoulders slanting down from a thin neck. He had small black eyes and thinning, slicked-back, dandruff-spotted black hair. The odor of VO5 hung about him like the scent of an old apple.

"What I've seen on television and been reading in the papers," Jake said.

"Give me a one-minute version."

Jake shrugged: "Madison Bowe, thirty-four years old, married money in the shape of former U.S. Senator Lincoln Bowe, forty-six. Tells the networks that Lincoln Bowe gave a quote *moderately hot-tempered speech* to a group of Republican law students at the University of Virginia."

Danzig made a farting noise with his lips; Jake paused, then continued.

"Afterward, she said, he was seen getting into a car with three men in suits, and disappeared. Witnesses told her that the men seemed to be law-enforcement personnel, complete with short haircuts and ear-bugs. Mrs. Bowe says she was told by a highly placed source that the Watchmen picked him up. She fears for his life, since they would never be able to admit afterward that they actually did that."

"That's true," Danzig said.

"She also says that she was being watched on her farm near Lexington, and had been threatened by Watchmen. She has a videotape to prove it. The intimidation part. If the tape isn't a complete fake, I'd say she had reason to be frightened. The guy, the Watchman, acted like he was in the SS or something . . . and that's about it. I mean, there are more details . . ."

"Fucking media," Danzig said. He picked up a yellow pencil and began drumming