



IN THE NAME
OF HONOR

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PART



The Killing

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one

THE PHONE CALL AWAKENED PAUL TERRY FROM THE DREAM OF his father.

Disoriented, he sat up in bed, staring at the wall of the hotel room. In the dream, he was thirteen, the age at which the image had first come to him. His father had just died; reappearing in Paul's sleep, Frank Terry assured his son that he was fine, just living in a different place. Relieved, Paul would awaken, and then feel more abandoned and alone. Even now, at thirty-one, the dream left tears in Terry's eyes.

His cell phone rasped again. Beside him, Jenny stirred. Groping, he found the phone on a nightstand and flipped it open.

"Captain Terry," he said in a sleep-stunned voice.

"Paul. It's Colonel Dawes."

"Morning, sir." Glancing at the drawn curtains, he detected no light. "Is it morning?"

"Six A.M. Where are you?"

"D.C. I'm spending the weekend here."

"Not anymore, I'm afraid." Dawes's southern-tinged voice was soft. "I guess you haven't seen the papers. There's been a shooting on the post. A captain's dead."

Terry tried to process this. "Are they preferring charges?"

"Not yet." The colonel's voice lowered. "The shooter is Lieutenant Brian McCarran."

Terry was instantly alert. "The general's son?"

"Yes. He's in need of a lawyer, Paul. Hopefully not for long."

At once Terry understood his superior's undertone of caution and regret. "I'll be there in an hour and a half," he promised.

When he turned the phone off, Jenny was awake, blond hair falling

across her forehead. "I'm sorry, Jen. There's been a shooting at Fort Bolton—one officer killed another. I have to go."

Jenny switched on the bedside lamp. The disappointment he read in her pretty, intelligent face was mingled with resistance. "Don't they have other attorneys? Why you, Paul?"

"The colonel didn't explain himself. Just sounded worried."

She shook her head. "I thought you were leaving the service. I mean, isn't a Wall Street firm about to pay you a ton of money?"

Terry paused to assess her mood. Six years after a law school romance had revealed them to be unsuited as life partners, they had become lovers of convenience, who connected only at the end of her sporadic business trips to Washington. For the odd forty-eight hours, they would always rediscover their shared sense of fun, their enjoyment of verbal combat, the luxury of sex without anxiety or inhibition. It was too bad, Terry often thought, that their differences prevented more. Now Terry grasped that their scattered weekends meant more to Jenny Haskell than she let on.

"They are," he told her. "But for another month I can't debate an order." He gave her a lingering kiss, then added gently, "However much I'd like to."

He sensed her regret becoming withdrawal. "I think I'll stay here for a while," she said in a subdued tone. "Order room service, read the paper. Maybe I'll call friends in Bethesda."

Terry felt his own regret, both at leaving and, as with other women, that leaving did not matter more. He kissed her again, this time on the forehead, then reluctantly headed for the shower.

SHORTLY BEFORE SEVEN-THIRTY, dressed in the uniform of a JAG Corps captain, Paul Terry passed through the main gate at Fort Bolton, headquarters of the Seventh Infantry and, for one more month, Terry's home.

Over twenty miles square, Fort Bolton was sequestered amid a wooded area of northern Virginia, an enclave sufficient to itself: shopping centers, athletic facilities, offices, a hospital, apartments, town houses, and, for senior officers, commodious colonial-style houses dating back to the fort's establishment eighty years before. Turning down its principal thoroughfare, McCarran Drive, Terry was reminded of the three generations that preceded Brian McCarran. That Brian had killed a fellow officer, whatever the circumstances, would reverberate all the way

to the Pentagon, where the family's most revered member, Anthony McCarran, served as the chief of staff of the army. Parking at the headquarters of the regional defense counsel, Terry felt edgy.

The aftershock of the dream still muddled his thoughts. But by this time, at least, he resembled the officer Lieutenant Colonel Dawes expected to brief. He had taken a large black coffee for the road, and the mild hangover he had earned through a bibulous dinner with Jen was fading. Fortunately for Terry, his life circumstances had lent him an air of near-perpetual alertness, accenting the swift intelligence reflected in his penetrant blue eyes. Jen sometimes teased him that he looked like an officer whether he meant to or not: tall and fit, he had jet black hair and strong but regular features accented by a ridged nose, which, broken during a high school basketball career based largely on determination, added a hint of ruggedness. That Terry had never fired a shot in anger did not detract from the success he'd had in the courtroom.

Taking a last swallow of lukewarm coffee, Terry went to meet Harry Dawes.

COLONEL DAWES SAT BEHIND a desk so orderly that, Terry often thought, even the piles of papers appeared to be standing in formation. For Terry, this thought was a fond one: a soft-spoken Virginian, the colonel treated Terry with an avuncular regard enhanced by the military courtesy that governed their relationship. As Terry entered, a brief smile crossed Dawes's ruddy face. "Sit down, Paul. Sorry to get you out of whatever bed you happened to be in."

The remark was delivered with quiet humor; a committed Christian and devoted husband of twenty-five years, Dawes never concealed his belief that Terry's rotating cast of female friends suggested an attenuated adolescence that could only be cured by marriage. "A warm one," Terry responded. "But even in my sleep, I grasped that this case is special."

Without asking if Terry wanted coffee, Dawes poured him a cup and handed a Washington Redskins mug across the desk. "It is that," Dawes concurred soberly. "In the last twenty-four hours, the media's been all over this. You must have been living in a cave."

"When I take time off, sir, I commit myself. Please catch me up."

Pensive, Dawes ran a hand through his dwindling gray-brown hair. "To say the least, the relationships surrounding this shooting are complicated. For one thing, the victim, Captain Joe D'Abruzzo, was married to General McCarran's goddaughter, Kate Gallagher—"

“Hang on, sir,” Terry interjected. “The general’s *son* killed his god-daughter’s *husband*?”

“Yes,” Dawes answered unhappily. “It seems that her father was General McCarran’s classmate at the Point. After he died in Vietnam, the families remained close. So Kate’s relationship with Brian McCarran predated her marriage to D’Abruzzo by many years. To top it off, D’Abruzzo was Brian’s company commander in Iraq. Whatever *their* relationship, this tragedy leaves two kids—an eight-year-old boy and six-year-old girl—without a father.”

Terry found himself squinting; the summer sunlight, brightening, hit his face through Dawes’s window. For a painful moment he imagined the children’s shock at learning their father was dead. “Tell me about the shooting, sir.”

Even in difficult circumstances, Dawes was the most considerate of men; noting Terry’s squint, he stood to lower the blinds. “It happened in McCarran’s apartment,” he began, “between seven and eight on Friday evening. Sometime before eight, Lieutenant McCarran called the MPs and calmly advised them that he’d shot Captain D’Abruzzo. The MPs and paramedics found D’Abruzzo on the floor of the lieutenant’s apartment. There were four wounds, including one in the dead man’s back. Despite this, when two men from the Criminal Investigation Division questioned him, McCarran claimed self-defense.”

Terry put down his mug. “He gave a statement to CID?”

“A fairly comprehensive one, I’m told. It also seems that McCarran’s the only witness.”

“What do you know about the gun?”

“It was a semiautomatic—a nine-millimeter Luger. What’s odd is that it’s D’Abruzzo’s gun.”

“So he brought it to McCarran’s apartment?”

Dawes grimaced. “Apparently not. According to both Brian McCarran and D’Abruzzo’s wife, Brian took it from D’Abruzzo’s home after he threatened her with it. Brian’s story is that D’Abruzzo came looking for the gun. The shooting followed.”

Terry took a sip of coffee. “Do we know anything more about the relationship between Lieutenant McCarran and the widow D’Abruzzo?”

“Just that they still had one. At the least, it’s clear that their families have been intertwined over many years.”

As Terry took out a pen, Dawes handed him a legal pad across the desk. “What else do we know about Brian McCarran?” Terry asked.

“Only good things. He was third in his class at West Point, a leader among his classmates, and a first-class soccer player. He graduated in 2003 and turned down a Rhodes scholarship in favor of serving in Iraq. By early 2004, Brian was a platoon leader in Sadr City, one of the most dangerous assignments in the war. He’s got a scar on his neck—three months after his arrival an RPG came within inches of removing his head. But he served out his year there without missing any time. By all accounts, he was an outstanding combat officer.” Dawes’s tone was respectful. “He certainly isn’t cruising on his father’s reputation. Even in a family of decorated soldiers, Brian has more than held his own.”

Terry nodded. “What’s he doing now?”

“He’s the executive officer of Charlie Company, his outfit in Iraq. Once again, his fitness reports are excellent.”

“And D’Abruzzo?”

“Not as stellar, clearly. He didn’t go to the Point, and his early record lacks McCarran’s glitter. But he comes across as capable—he’s been serving as a battalion operations officer, in line for promotion to major. There’s nothing on the surface that suggests any real problems.”

“Including domestic violence? That’s starting to show up among Iraq War vets, and it certainly fits with the story about the gun.”

“All I can tell you,” Dawes responded cautiously, “is that there were no reported incidents. At least before he died.”

Terry scribbled a note: “Check out DV.” Looking up, he said, “What’s happened since McCarran reported the shooting?”

Dawes gazed at the desk, organizing his thoughts. “The MPs taped the call, of course. The paramedics were there in minutes, at which point D’Abruzzo was pronounced dead. The CID man secured the apartment, called in the crime lab team, and requested that the county medical examiner come out. Then CID started questioning McCarran.”

“What do we know about that?”

“Other than what I’ve told you, very little. Nor do we know anything more about what Kate D’Abruzzo told them.”

“So where does this stand?”

Dawes’s forehead creased with worry, no doubt reflecting the level of scrutiny each step in the case would receive. “As you can imagine, it’s being handled by the book. On the recommendation of the staff judge advocate, General Heston has ordered a formal inquiry, to be carried out by CID and the office of the chief trial counsel, Colonel

Hecht. In turn, Hecht has designated Major Mike Flynn to monitor the investigation and, if necessary, prosecute the case as trial counsel.”

“No surprise,” Terry remarked. “By reputation, Flynn’s the best. Where are they keeping McCarran?”

“Not in the brig. On the recommendation of General Heston’s chief of staff, Brian is living at the bachelor officers’ quarters. On Monday he’ll continue his normal duties.” Dawes grimaced. “Outsiders may feel he’s getting special treatment. But this is an officer with an unblemished record who claims self-defense. Your job will be to help him.”

“I gather that, sir. But this assignment raises a number of questions.”

Dawes’s eyebrows shot up, a sign of irritation that betrayed the pressure he felt. “Such as?”

Unfazed, Terry responded, “Why me? For openers, the McCarrans can have anyone they want, including the top defense lawyers in America—”

“Few of whom understand the military, and none as well as we do. The McCarran family knows that. And if this one comes to a court-martial, the court would have no doubt about the integrity of military defense counsel. That is *not* an assumption granted to civilian lawyers.”

Fair or not, Terry knew that this was true. With the smallest of smiles, he responded, “It’s true that our integrity is unique, sir. But not unique to me.”

Dawes was unamused. “There are other considerations—beginning with my own. Lieutenant McCarran has requested a lawyer. As regional defense counsel, it falls to me to detail one. Given that he’s from a notable military tradition, and that his father is odds-on to be the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs, everything we do must be beyond reproach.”

The same skeptical smile played on Terry’s lips. “At least for the next month. As you’ll recall, sir, there’s a law firm in New York expecting me to show up.”

Caught, Dawes allowed himself a rueful smile. “To my regret. But Anthony McCarran seems to prefer you, nonetheless.”

Terry laughed in astonishment. “Me? I’ve never met the man. How does he even know I exist?”

Dawes steepled his fingers. “The general has been very decorous—as chief of staff, he has to be. But there was nothing to keep him from visiting his neighbor in the Pentagon, the judge advocate general.

General McCarran made it clear that he didn't wish to exercise undue influence. He merely expressed the hope that his son would have the help of an able lawyer. Meaning, General Jasper assumed, the best defense counsel at Fort Bolton."

"In all modesty, sir—"

"Naturally," Dawes continued, "General Jasper responded that *all* our lawyers are highly qualified. It was then that General McCarran said that he had heard that a certain Captain Terry was particularly able.

"The judge advocate general did not inquire as to where he had gotten this information. He merely assured the general that his son would be well represented, and then made his own inquiry of me." Dawes's voice became softer. "What I told him, Paul, is that you were the best young lawyer I've ever seen. And that if Brian McCarran were my own son, I'd want you to defend him."

Though touched, Terry smiled yet again. "You're a devious man, sir."

"There's no wind so ill," his mentor answered blandly, "that it can't serve someone's purpose. In this case, mine. I assured General Jasper that, as a short-timer, you wouldn't mind breaking a little china if it served young McCarran's interests. And if it came to a trial, God forbid, I hoped you might be willing to extend your tour in the army. I generously promised not to stand in your way."

As Terry framed a droll reply, the seriousness in Dawes's face stopped him. "You know I'd like you to stay, Paul. But if this goes to trial, it could be the high-profile case of a lifetime, with all the human challenges and opportunities that involves. No matter what awaits you in your Wall Street firm, you'll likely be a better lawyer, maybe even a better man. That's part of what I'm trying to do."

Absorbing this, Terry nodded. "Thank you, sir. Unfortunately, the firm has already assigned me an investment banker to defend, with more to follow. Whatever Brian McCarran's problems, I don't think the firm will wait. But I'll go to see him, of course."

Briefly, Dawes frowned. "There's someone else you should meet first. Brian McCarran's sister."

Terry gave Dawes a puzzled look. "No doubt she's concerned," he answered. "But I should meet my client first."

"Meg McCarran's more than a concerned sister. She's a lawyer, and she came here from California to help her brother. She's also quite insistent on 'helping' you."

Terry felt himself bristle: he did not want to deal with an anxious relative standing between him and his client—or serving as a conduit to her father, the general. “Is there anything I can do about this?”

“Meet her and see.” Smiling faintly, Dawes glanced at his watch. “It’s eight-forty. I told her to be in our reception area at nine o’clock. If she’s as businesslike as she sounds, she’s already here.”

AS DAWES HAD PREDICTED, Meg McCarran was waiting outside his office.

She stood, briskly shaking hands with Terry as the colonel introduced them. Her looks surprised him. Encountering her at random, Terry might have seen an Irish beauty, a fantasy from his Catholic youth: glossy auburn hair, large blue eyes, softly glowing skin, a button nose, and a wide, generous mouth, which, parting for a perfunctory smile, exposed perfect white teeth. But her suit was the pin-striped carapace of the courtroom, and the skin beneath her eyes was bruised with sleeplessness. The effect was somewhere between trial lawyer and the vigilant older sister of a juvenile facing trouble, and her swift appraisal of Terry combined a palpable wariness with an air of command worthy of her father.

Standing to one side, Dawes offered them the use of an empty office. “Mind talking outside?” Terry asked her. “I could use some fresh air, and there’s a park across the street where we can sit.”

Meg gave a fractional shrug. Opening the door, Dawes reminded Terry of an anxious parent watching two recalcitrant teens embark on a blind date. Instinctively, Terry wished that the occasion were as trivial as a high school dance, and would be over with as quickly.

THEY SETTLED ON A bench beneath a cluster of oak trees, set back some distance from McCarran Drive. Terry reminded himself that less than two days ago, this woman’s brother had called her to report killing a man she must have known well. “I understand how worried you must be,” he ventured.

“Clear-eyed,” she amended. “I know the army. Because of our father, they’ll bend over backward not to show Brian any favoritism. So whoever we engage to help him, I need to be here.”

Briefly, Terry weighed his response. “No matter whose son Brian is, there’s an orderly process. CID will investigate; Major Flynn will make recommendations; ultimately General Heston will determine

whether to refer charges for trial. What Brian needs right now is an advocate.”

Meg faced him. “What Brian needs,” she said with quiet urgency, “is for the army to comprehend what it’s done to him. I’m absolutely certain that Brian acted in self-defense. But the man who shot Joe D’Abruzzo is different from the man they sent to Iraq.” Her voice slowed, admitting a first note of entreaty. “Sadly, Captain Terry, Brian’s not very trusting anymore. He’s not likely to trust you or any lawyer but me. That’s another reason I’m here. Of all the people in Brian’s life, I’m the one who knows him best.”

Terry contemplated the grass at their feet, dappled with light and shade. “How long do you plan to stay?”

“Until Brian’s out of trouble. Whether that’s days or weeks or months.”

“What about your job?”

“I’m a domestic violence prosecutor in the San Francisco DA’s office.” She bit her lip. “I love my work, Captain Terry. But the DA can’t have a prosecutor from his office acting as a defense counsel. If Brian’s charged with Joe’s death, I’ll have to resign.”

Even under the circumstances, the depth of her resolve struck him. “We’re not there yet,” he reminded her. “Even if we were, I’m not sure Brian will need that kind of sacrifice.”

Meg shook her head. “He’s my brother. I won’t let anything happen to him.”

Something in her fierce insistence suggested the conscientious child she might have been, charged with protecting a younger brother. “Are there just the two of you?” he asked.

“And my father,” she said. “My mother’s dead.”

The flatness of her tone deflected further questions, let alone any rote expression of sympathy. After ten minutes of acquaintance, it was hard for Terry to imagine Meg McCarran seeking sympathy from anyone. She had a quality of independence as striking as her beauty, suggesting both intelligence and a considerable force of will. But Terry also intuited a trait he understood all too well—the instinct for self-protection. Facing him on the bench, Meg said in a neutral manner, “I know my father made inquiries. But I don’t know anything about you, or much about the JAG Corps.”

“It’s pretty straightforward. Every major installation has JAG offices, including a legal adviser to the commanding officer, judges,

prosecutors, and defense lawyers. The Trial Defense Service, my unit, has its own chain of command. The purpose is to ensure that our superiors don't punish us for winning—"

"That's reassuring," Meg interjected tartly. "How, specifically, was Brian assigned to you?"

Terry was determined to maintain his equilibrium. "In any case occurring at Bolton, Colonel Dawes details a defense counsel. As you suggested, your father also made inquiries. I'm the result."

Meg regarded him closely. "No offense, Captain Terry, but you're obviously young. Don't you think Brian might do better with an experienced civilian lawyer?"

Briefly, Terry had the thought that if he were to be relieved of this case, and this woman, his departure from the army would be far simpler. "It's not my call," he answered. "I can tell you the pros and cons. A JAG lawyer knows the military justice system and the psychology of the potential jurors. Most people don't trust defense lawyers; military people trust them less. If you asked the average army officer, odds are he'd say that many civilian lawyers are ethically challenged or just in it for the money.

"A defense lawyer in uniform avoids that bias. On the other hand, a civilian lawyer is less inclined to be deferential, and the talent pool is larger." Terry paused. "Military or civilian, what a court-martial comes down to is how good the lawyer is. Hopefully, you won't need one. Right now the idea is to persuade the army not to prosecute."

A light breeze stirred Meg's hair. She pushed her bangs back from her forehead, her intense blue-eyed gaze still focused on Terry. "Why did you choose the JAG Corps?" she asked.

Terry decided to be direct. "First, my family had no money, so a ROTC scholarship to college helped get me where I am. Second, I don't like taking orders.

"That may sound strange coming from a JAG officer. But a number of my law school friends wound up as gofers in big corporate firms, shuffling papers miles from the courtroom. To have the career I wanted, I needed to try cases—hard ones, and a lot of them."

"Have you?"

"Over a hundred twenty in the last six years, the first ninety as a prosecutor. I didn't always get the sentence I wanted, but I never lost a case."

"Never?" Meg repeated skeptically.

In the face of Meg's challenge, Terry stopped resisting the sin of

pride. “Means never. When the Trial Defense Service got sick of losing to me, they asked me to switch sides.”

A first sardonic smile appeared at the corner of her mouth. “At which point you started losing, too.”

“Rarely.”

This stopped her for a moment. “What about homicides?”

“I’ve defended five. Three acquittals; one conviction on a reduced charge; another on second-degree murder. In that case, the victim was a six-year-old boy, my client’s prints were on the knife, and he confessed to CID *and* the victim’s mother. Clarence Darrow couldn’t have saved him.” Terry’s speech became matter-of-fact. “I’m getting out next month, so I hope to wrap this up by then. But I chose defense work on principle—too many prosecutors lack a sense of justice. Temperamentally and professionally, I’m more than capable of helping your brother.”

She gave him a considering look. “Why do you think you’ve been so successful?”

“Simple. I hate losing.” Terry paused, then decided to finish. “Since the age of thirteen, no one has given me anything. I got here by sheer hard work, the only asset I had. Lose a case, and I’m haunted by what I might have done better.

“There may be smarter lawyers. But no one hates losing more than I do, or works harder for their clients. I’ve defended thirty cases; I’ve lost four. I still can’t shake them.”

Meg sat back, her eyes meeting his in silence. “I think I understand,” she said at length. “At least for now, I’d like you to represent my brother.”

For some reasons he could identify, and others that eluded him, Terry felt both satisfaction and a deep ambivalence. “Then let’s go see him,” he answered simply.

two

BRIAN McCARRAN, HIS SISTER EXPLAINED, HAD DISLIKED enclosed spaces since returning from Iraq. Now the quarters into which the army had moved him, both alien and confining, evoked the cramped living room in which he had killed Captain Joe D'Abruzzo. They would meet on Brian's sailboat in the Fort Bolton marina.

It was a little before ten o'clock, and the morning sun caused the aqua surface of the Potomac River to glisten. Weekend skippers in sail- or powerboats slid across the water, and a young water-skier left a spume of white. Meg led Terry along a catwalk to a trim sixteen-footer where a lone man in a polo shirt and khakis sat in the stern, preternaturally still, watching the river with the keen gaze of a sentinel.

Terry's first sight of his client surprised him. General Anthony McCarran was famously tall and lean and sharp of eye and feature, an eagle in uniform. Facing his sister and Terry, Brian McCarran was as striking as his father without in any way resembling him. He was surprisingly blond, with long eyelashes, light blue-gray eyes, and features that, though chiseled, had a refinement about them, almost a delicacy, causing Terry to wonder about how his mother might have looked. Shorter than his father, he had a fine-drawn fitness; if martial analogies applied, Brian McCarran was a rapier. Terry had heard him called a golden boy, but his appearance lent the term new meaning; hair glinting in the sun, Brian had the look of a warrior-poet, his perfection marred only by the puckered red welt at his throat. As Meg introduced them, the gaze he fixed on Terry was oddly impersonal, as though he were gauging the level of threat.

"Good morning, sir," Brian said in a cool, clear voice. "If you can call it that. Can I get you some coffee?"

"Sure. Thanks."

Terry and Meg sat next to Brian on a padded seat. Reaching for a thermos, Brian poured coffee into a mug. For an instant Terry thought he saw a tremor in Brian's hand; then Brian seemed to stare at it, willing his hand to be still, before he finished pouring with exactness. Terry noticed that the boat was spotless.

Handing him the mug, Brian again regarded Terry, his expression neutral save for his eyes, as sharp yet guarded as his sister's. Quiet, Meg watched them closely.

"So," Brian said, "Meg says you're my lawyer."

"Only for the next month," Terry answered. "But you're right to seek legal representation. If you want that from me, anything you say here will be privileged." Glancing at Meg, Terry added, "Assuming that your sister is also acting as your lawyer. Is she?"

Brian tilted his head toward Meg, a first hint of amusement in his gaze. "What about it, sis? Are you?"

Rather than smiling, Meg looked briefly sad. "Yes. I am."

Brian nodded, facing Terry again. "Meg's always represented me, Captain Terry. Years before she went to law school."

The dry remark made Terry wonder when their mother had died; with their father consumed by his duties, the two of them might have formed a family unto themselves. Whatever Terry was sensing, he felt like an outsider.

"One preliminary question," Terry said to Brian. "Under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, if CID suspects you of a crime, they have to tell you that. Did they?"

"Yes, sir. The sergeant said that it was routine."

Terry did not comment. "Then let's start with the basics. Where's your apartment?"

Brian gave him the location and address. At once Terry recognized the building: its standard unit—a living room, bedroom, and eat-in kitchen—was identical to Terry's own. And, as with Terry's, its second-floor location would offer its occupant little chance to escape from an intruder. "Where did you keep the gun?" Terry asked.

Brian hesitated. "Nowhere in particular. The gun was Joe's."

Meg leaned forward. "You have to understand the relationships," she told Terry. "As Colonel Dawes may have mentioned, Joe was married to Kate Gallagher, the daughter of our father's closest friend at the academy—Dad was best man when Jack married Kate's mother, Rose. But Jack was killed in Vietnam before Kate was even born. Dad helped

Rose cope. So our families were always together.” She glanced at Brian. “Our mother died when I was twelve, and Brian nine. Dad and Rose tried to keep things stable. When Dad was overseas, or somewhere he couldn’t take us, Brian and I lived with the Gallaghers.”

“So they became your family?”

Meg seemed to hesitate. “As best she could, Rose replaced our mother. Kate is six years older than me, and nine years older than Brian. So she helped look after Brian, too.” She turned to Brian again, as though explaining their own past. “She and Brian have always had a special bond. And when Joe and Kate were married, all of us were there. At the wedding, my father gave the bride away—”

Interrupting, Terry asked Brian, “What was your relationship to Joe?”

Brian’s gaze became opaque. Softly, he answered, “The shooting was about Kate.”

As Terry registered the evasion, Meg placed a hand on Brian’s arm. “Tell him how you got Joe’s gun.”

Prompted, Brian briefly closed his eyes. Gazing past Terry at the water, he began in a toneless voice, as though reciting a scene by rote. But the detail and precision with which he spoke summoned, for Terry, a vivid picture that Brian portrayed as truth.

WHEN KATE CALLED HIM, it was evening, and Brian was alone. “It’s Kate,” she said in a tight voice. “I need help.”

Brian tensed. “What’s wrong?”

“Just come—before Joe gets back. I’m afraid of him.”

In the twilight, Brian drove the ten minutes in his convertible, a tension in his gut. Kate opened the door of the town house before he could knock.

Dark and pretty and refined, Kate was the youthful replica of her mother, Rose, and the young boy Brian’s first image of feminine beauty. Kate was usually the picture of self-possession; tonight, her face seemed frozen, her eyes stunned.

Pushing past her, Brian looked swiftly from side to side. “Where is he?”

“At the Officers’ Club,” Kate said quickly. “He’s already been drinking.”

Crossing the living room, Brian searched the hallway. “And the kids?”

“With my mom.” Her tone became wan. “Joe and I were supposed to go out for dinner.”

He joined her in the living room, his tone softer but still urgent. "What happened?"

She sat on the couch, awkwardly and abruptly, as though the adrenaline that propelled her had evaporated. "Joe hits me," she said. "Ever since he came back from Iraq."

Brian felt a jolt of anger and surprise. "He hit you tonight?"

"No." Her voice became brittle. "He threatened me with a gun. I can't go on like this."

Brian sat down beside her, covering Kate's hand with his. "You should go to his battalion commander. He'll put a stop to this."

Kate slowly shook her head, a gesture of despair. "That would end Joe's career and destroy our marriage. The kids—"

"What if he kills you? Where would the kids be then?" Brian made himself speak slowly and firmly. "Get help, Kate. Or I'll get it for you."

Tears misted her eyes. "Please, Brian—"

He put his arms around her, Kate's hair brushing his face. "If Joe won't stop," he said softly, "we don't have a choice."

She leaned her face against his shoulder, saying in a muffled voice, "I can't yet."

"Then I'll talk to him myself." He paused, then asked in the same insistent tone, "Where's the gun?"

He felt her swallow. With seeming effort, Kate stood, then walked toward their bedroom like an automaton.

Following, Brian saw Kate's nightgown thrown over a chair, the black dress she'd meant to wear lying on the bed. She opened the drawer of the nightstand, drawing back from what she saw.

Taking her place, Brian withdrew the gun. Black and freshly oiled, it was a nine-millimeter Luger semiautomatic, perfectly balanced in his hand. He checked the safety, then snapped it open to scrutinize the magazine. "This is loaded, Kate."

Pale, she sat on the edge of the bed. "Does he have more bullets?" Brian asked.

"In the closet, I think."

Brian found the box of cartridges on the top shelf, next to the cap of Joe's dress uniform. He stuffed the box in his pocket and the gun in his waistband. "What are you doing?" Kate asked.

"Taking it away. If Joe wants his gun back, he'll have to talk to me." Brian felt his anger stir again. "Don't worry, Kate. I won't forget to call him 'sir.'"

Kate gave her head a vehement shake. "Please, Brian—you have no idea how he'll react. If he loses control, he could kill you. Even without a gun."

"Because he's the Karate Kid? So he's told me."

Gripping his wrists, Kate looked up at him, fright filling her eyes again. Brian kissed her forehead. "Get help," he repeated softly. "Before this spins out of control."

He left with Joe D'Abruzzo's gun.

MEG, TERRY NOTED, HAD listened with taut alertness, as if hearing Brian's account for the first time. "Between that night and the shooting," he asked Brian, "how many days passed?"

"Three."

"Did you talk with D'Abruzzo?"

"No."

"Did you know he was coming to your apartment?"

Once again, Brian glanced at Meg. "Kate called to warn me."

"Tell me about that."

With the same detachment, Brian recited his version of events.

WHEN HIS LANDLINE RANG, Brian was emerging from the shower. The ringing stopped before he could pick up his bedroom telephone. He dried himself, dressed, then listened to the message.

"He's coming over." Kate's recorded voice was high-pitched with anxiety. "If you're there, don't let him in."

Brian's cell phone was on the nightstand, the D'Abruzzos' number on speed dial. Within seconds Kate answered. "He knows about the gun," she blurted out at once. "He was hitting me, and I had to tell him—"

Jittery, Brian interjected, "It's okay, Kate—"

"He's drunk and crazy. Please get out of there."

"This has to end." Brian drew a breath, calming himself. "I need to tell him that."

Kate's voice rose. "You can't reason with him, Brian. He wants his gun back."

"He can't have it," Brian answered, then heard the shrill bleat from the building's outside door, the signal to admit a caller. Steadying his voice, he said, "He's here, Kate. I can handle it."

Hanging up, Brian removed the handgun from his dresser drawer,

then walked to the living room. The buzzer sounded again. Quickly, he concealed the gun beneath the pillow on his overstuffed chair. After a moment's hesitation, he buzzed Joe in.

It would take less than half a minute, Brian calculated, for Joe to climb the stairs to the second floor. Opening his door, he backed into the room, standing beside the chair.

Thudding footsteps echoed in the stairwell. In Brian's hallway, they slowed, and then Joe D'Abruzzo filled the door frame.

Dressed in a sweatshirt and jeans, Joe looked like a day laborer emerging from a bar. His face was flushed, his forehead shiny with sweat, his eyes—the mirror of Joe's vitality—darting and unfocused. The living room felt claustrophobic. At once Brian was viscerally aware that Kate's husband was four inches taller, heavier by thirty pounds, and trained to kill or disable an opponent. *This is like Iraq*, Brian told himself. *Think and feel nothing.*

Joe entered the room, hand outstretched, eyes focusing on Brian. In the tone of a commanding officer, though thickened by drink, Joe said, "You have my gun, Lieutenant."

To Brian's ear, his own reply sounded faint. "You threatened Kate with it."

Joe moved the curled fingers of his outstretched hand, signaling that Brian should fill it with the Luger. "She's none of your business."

Brian shook his head. "This is about family. In all but name, Kate's a McCarran."

Joe gave him a sudden sarcastic smile. "And I'm an outsider—I've always known that. But I'm her husband."

"You don't have the right to beat her." Brian inhaled, fighting to slow the racing of his pulse. "I can ruin your career—"

"You little shit." Joe's broad face was a mask of anger, his dark eyes wild with unreason. "If I want to, I can shatter your windpipe. Or gouge your fucking eyes out."

He took another step forward, closing the distance to perhaps three feet. Stepping back, Brian hit the chair, briefly stumbling before he righted himself. D'Abruzzo emitted a bark of laughter. Brian felt the room closing around them, his enemy's distorted face filling his line of vision. Without thinking he reached for the gun.

It was aimed at Joe before Brian knew it. Joe flinched, eyes widening with surprise as he took one step back. "Get help," Brian said quickly. "Or I'll protect her any way I can."

D'Abruzzo tensed. In a tone of forced bravado, he said, "Going to shoot me, McCarran?"

"Get out—"

In a split second, Joe spun sideways, hands raised to attack. Brian's finger twitched, the gun jumping in his hand. Joe's outcry of surprise and pain mingled with the popping sound Brian knew too well.

HE STOPPED ABRUPTLY, STARING past Terry as though at something on the river. "What happened next?" Terry asked.

At first he thought Brian had not heard. Seconds passed, and then Brian answered in a voice so distant it struck Terry as dissociated. "I don't know, sir."

The military formality made the words sound even stranger. Terry saw Meg's lips part, but she made no sound. "Did you fire more than once?" Terry prodded.

"Yes."

"How do you know that?"

Still Brian did not face him. "I could tell from the body."

Terry thought swiftly. "Where was it?"

"By the wall."

"Which wall?"

"Near the door."

Meg leaned forward to intervene. "He was in shock," she told Terry.

"You weren't there," Terry reminded her softly. As Meg's eyes widened at the tacit rebuke, he asked Brian in the same quiet voice, "How many feet was his body from your chair?"

The CID, Terry knew, would have measured this. Vaguely, Brian said, "Ten feet, maybe twelve."

"How did he get there?"

When Meg tried to speak again, Terry held up his hand, his gaze fixed on Brian's profile. Brian closed his eyes. His tone was less resentful than perplexed. "I can't bring it back. The whole time before seeing his body—it's just gone . . ."

His voice trailed off. With the same dispassion, Terry asked, "What position was the body in?"

Brian's gaze seemed more focused on a powerboat scudding across the water, the rhythmic thud of its motor punctuating the silence. At length Brian said, "He was lying on his side."

"Facing you or the wall?"

Meg, Terry saw, had clasped her hands, her interlaced fingers tightening. “The wall,” Brian answered.

“Was he dead?”

Brian swallowed, rippling the puckered welt on his neck. “He didn’t move.”

“After you saw him on the floor, what did you do next?”

Brian did not answer. “Look at me,” Terry ordered quietly.

Silently, Brian turned to face him. “Did you call the MPs?” Terry asked.

Brian blinked. “He called *me*,” Meg admitted in a low, flat voice.

Surprised, Terry remained focused on Brian. “Is that right?”

Slowly, Brian nodded. “What did you tell her?” Terry asked.

More silence. At length, Brian said, “That I’d shot Joe D’Abruzzo.”

“That’s all?”

“Yes.”

“How did Meg respond?”

Now Brian sounded weary. “She said to call the MPs.”

“How long did you talk to her?”

Brian shrugged, a gesture of helplessness. “I don’t know. I wasn’t keeping time.”

Abruptly, Terry turned to Meg. “Where were you?”

Meg met his gaze. “My office. It was before five o’clock in San Francisco.”

“There’ll be a record of the call,” Terry said. “How long was it?”

“Maybe five, six minutes.”

“Of silence?”

“Brian was disoriented,” Meg answered for him. “It took time for me to get a fix on this. I also told him not to talk to CID, and to ask for a lawyer right away.” Her fingertips resting on Brian’s shoulder, she added with resignation, “Obviously, he didn’t hear me. When you’re in shock, conditioning takes over. Brian is conditioned to tell the truth.”

For Brian’s sake, Terry nodded his understanding. “How long, Brian, until you called the MPs?”

“I don’t know that either.”

“When they arrived, did someone pronounce D’Abruzzo dead?”

“I don’t remember—one guy took me to the bedroom, and we waited for the CID.” Brian’s puzzled voice suggested the strangeness of the memory. “I told them everything I could remember, just like I told you. But a piece was missing.”

“What else did they ask you?”

“Random stuff. Who my friends were. What hours I work. What I’d done that day. If I was dating anyone—”

“Are you?”

“No.”

“Did they ask if you were dating Kate D’Abruzzo?”

Brian seemed to stiffen. “Yes.”

“What did you say?”

“That it was a bullshit question.” Brian shifted his weight, his thumb and forefinger rubbing together. “I love Kate like a sister. Her kids call me Uncle Brian.”

“Before Kate asked for help,” Terry asked, “how was your relationship with D’Abruzzo?”

Brian sat straighter. “He was Kate’s husband. Sometimes he talked about himself too much. But he was the guy she chose.” Pausing, he seemed to search for an easy summary. “When all of us were together, we got along fine. Mostly I felt neutral.”

“Including when you both served in Iraq?”

Brian shrugged again. “Joe gave orders. I followed them.”

Terry wondered whether he heard, or imagined, a note of buried contempt. “Was he a good company commander?”

Suddenly Brian seemed to withdraw; he was as still as, the moment before, he had started to seem restless. Leaning forward, Terry asked, “Did something come to you, Lieutenant?”

Brian’s eyelids flickered. “Iraq’s got nothing to do with this. Joe beat Kate; I took his gun; he came for it; I shot him before he attacked me. Now he’s dead.”

Meg squeezed his shoulder in support, watching Terry closely as she did this. Quietly, Terry asked, “Why didn’t you unload the gun?”

Brian eyed him with renewed calm. “The guy was beating Kate—I didn’t know what he might do. But I knew that he could kill an unarmed man. Once she called, I figured I might need it to protect myself. That’s what I told CID.”

For the moment, Terry thought, he had pushed this man far enough. “About CID,” Terry said, “from now on, you should discuss this only with me. If CID contacts you, give them my number. Otherwise, as hard as this situation is, do your job. If there was ever a time to be an exemplary officer, it’s now.”

Brian considered him. With such mildness that it could have been sarcasm, he responded, "I always try, sir. It's genetic."

Terry smiled a little. "Have you spoken to your father, by the way?"

"Not yet," Meg put in. "I told Dad to give Brian a couple of days."

"When you do," Terry told Brian, "remember that heart-to-hearts between father and son aren't privileged. Familial concern doesn't buy you confidentiality."

Brian gave him a quizzical look. With the same soft voice he said, "Don't worry, sir."

Standing to leave, Terry said easily, "Try to call me Paul. At least in private, we can bag the military courtesies."

This induced the trace of a smile. "Habits are hard to break, sir. Even when I should."

Terry headed for the catwalk. Only when he reached it did he realize that Meg had lingered with Brian, talking softly before she kissed his cheek. A fair distance away, he stopped to wait in the hot noonday sun.

As she came toward him, Terry was struck again by her distinctive presence, self-possession mixed with an aura of solitude. At length she joined him, walking in contemplative silence. "Is he always like that?" Terry asked. "Or is it that he just killed the father of two kids who call him 'Uncle Brian'?"

She gave him a cool sideways glance. "Joe D'Abruzzo isn't the first man Brian has killed, Captain Terry. As I said, Iraq changed him."

"We should explore that. But next to Brian, the most important witness is Kate. I need to see her."

"When?"

"Now, if she can handle it."

They stopped at the end of the catwalk. "I'll have to feel her out," Meg replied. "If she's able to talk, I'll call you in an hour or so."

It was not a suggestion, but a statement. Meg, Terry thought, was cementing her role as go-between. But he needed Kate D'Abruzzo, and only Meg knew her. So here he was, stuck with the most attractive and intelligent woman he had ever wanted to be rid of.

"Fine," he said. "I appreciate your help."