

The gate guard announced her arrival over the intercom just before three o'clock and she drove quickly up to the house. Brandon greeted her at the door himself since the staff had been let go for the week. Ali looked hot and flushed. Despite himself, Brandon could not help noticing the skirt button was still undone. Moreover, two top blouse buttons were also undone. The swell of her breasts looked clammy with perspiration. No bra top was visible.

'Sorry Prime Minister. It's been one of those days,' she had said, rolling her eyes and shaking her head in self mocking embarrassment. 'First this card thing and now the air conditioner in my car has given in to the heat. I'll just have a quick look and be on my way. I know your plane leaves at six.'

They searched both rooms in all the more obvious places without success. Ali apologized once again for being a nuisance.

'You must think I'm such a klutz,' she said unbuttoning her jacket. She flashed him the most beautiful smile and added, 'I assure you I'm better at security.'

As she spoke she slipped the jacket off her shoulders and hung it in the hall, leaving no doubt she was braless underneath. Small perspiration patches seemed to heighten his awareness of her body making her perfume even more sexy.

She slipped off her shoes and got down on her hands and knees to look under the dining room table and sideboards, and between sofa cushions and arm chairs in the lounge. The sight of her crawling around bare foot on her knees stopped him in his tracks. He watched her, hypnotized by the silhouette of her breasts swaying visibly inside the white blouse each time she blocked a ray of afternoon sun streaming in through the lace curtains. Her nipples seemed to caress the billowing fabric. Occasionally she would look up at him and smile, but her eyes would linger a few seconds on his ever growing erection.

'Found it!' she said, standing up with the card in her hand. 'It was wedged between the frame and the squab of a chair near the door to the kitchen. I remember now. I opened my case on that chair. Whew. I'm so hot.'

'I already shut down the air con,' said Brandon unable to disguise his fascination with the two hard points denting the front of her

damp blouse. 'I'll get you something wet. Cold, I mean. Water. Cold water. In the kitchen. I'll get you some,' he stuttered moving towards the kitchen door.

'No please. I don't mind. I'm a big girl. I'll do it,' she said stepping across his path accidentally colliding with him in the narrow kitchen doorway. He knocked her backwards against the wall and she started to slip, but he caught her in his arms holding her weight.

'Oh Jesus, Tom,' she whispered, giving voice to the sexual tension that had been building between them. Her body went limp and submissive when she looked into his eyes. Before he could stop himself, he kissed her. She kissed him back, slipping slowly down. He tried to lift her but she allowed herself to slip further down, holding on to him, pulling him down.

'Ali. This is... I have to... We're taking such a... Oh Christ.'

She shook her head a couple of times weakly then closed her eyes and nodded once.

'Oh God, she said. 'I feel so... I want it... so bad.'

They started on the kitchen floor but they finished it in the bedroom. His wife's bedroom.

That was two months ago. During his week long vacation with the family he had obsessed about what they had done. He also worried that she might tell someone what happened. If she did, his career was over. But on his return she continued normally as though it had never happened. She was utterly professional in every way, but occasionally, just occasionally she would hold his gaze a little longer than necessary which disturbed him. He knew she had leverage over him and he found himself over compensating by treating her with exaggerated politeness. It made Jason slightly suspicious that something might be going on between them, but to his wife, Meg, Brandon's behaviour was completely transparent and all too familiar. It was how she herself had been indulged by him when she seduced him away from his first fiancée, some twenty years earlier. For the last month or so, she had watched him like a hawk, but his time was always properly accounted for and after a while she began to doubt her own suspicions.

Brandon put the phone down and closed his eyes to calm himself. After a minute he called Jason into the room.

SATURDAY, AM. MELBOURNE. TWO HOURS TO LAUNCH

The Prime Minister and the Governor of Victoria, Sir Wallace Craddock strolled back from the gardens of Government House towards the waiting cars. Brandon and Craddock were good friends from earlier days in the corporate world, with Craddock being somewhat of a mentor to the younger Brandon. Despite this, the lunch had been strained by the unexpected absence of Margaret Brandon and the children. Lady Craddock had made special preparations for the children's entertainment and was clearly disappointed by their absence.

'Oh piffle,' she blurted out before it occurred to her there might be other reasons. 'Surely the Prime Minister of Australia can snap his fingers and arrange another aeroplane?'

Brandon responded with a lame excuse which got her wondering if Mrs Brandon might have cancelled simply to avoid lunch with her. It was true the two women were of vastly different ages and came from very different social classes, plus Lady Craddock herself admitted she had a tendency to snobbery which grated on some people. But she and Meg Brandon had always got on well enough. And she genuinely loved their children.

It troubled her all through the pre lunch chat and she made a mental note to speak to Margaret about it later. Then, during the lunch itself, she noticed Brandon glancing more than once towards the rather attractive woman sitting at one of the adjacent tables.

'I say, Thomas,' she said, reminding Brandon of the way his own mother would speak to him. 'Do you always bring your secretary along on your trips?'

The question caught Brandon completely off guard. To the others at the table it was mere idle chatter. But to Brandon it sounded like a cross examination at his trial.

'My secretary? I don't have... Oh, do you mean Jason?' he said. 'Of course. He manages my schedule. I can't imagine travelling without him.'

'No, not Jason. I mean that rather gorgeous dish sitting opposite him. She could turn any man's head.'

So few words. Such a simple trap. And only she and he understood the real meaning.

The meddlesome bitch, thought Brandon. *She's fishing, with Ali as bait.*

But he was caught whichever way he jumped. The best he could do now was to limit the fallout. If he turned his head to glance at Ali just once more, which the old hag had obviously seen him doing all through lunch, it would be such a melodramatic gesture that every eye in the room would focus on Ali, while every dirty mind in the room would slip into overdrive.

His other option was to simply acknowledge whom Lady Craddock was talking about, and thus keep the secret of his wandering eye between the two of them. He chose the latter.

'Oh, you must mean Alison Carmel. Yes she is quite attractive,' he said, a little too indifferently without turning. 'But no. Ms Carmel is not my secretary, she is Head of Security. A very important job and one she does most competently.'

Lady Craddock smiled and nodded, glancing first in Ali's direction, then back at Brandon.

'Yes, I can imagine,' said Lady Craddock.

While lunch was concluding at Government House, the Melbourne Cricket Ground was filling quickly. Amil Khorshid had already instructed Yanni to open the beer cartons so they could commence the mixing process, but as Yanni opened the first one he cried out.

'Amil. Come quick! Something wrong! This not beer bottle! Is Coca Cola! We have wrong stuff, I think.'

He ripped the other three cartons open while the three men ran into the cool room.

All the bottles were labelled Coca Cola.

'No. No,' said Khorshid, grinning. 'Do not worry. Is alright. Police look for VB beer bottles. Not care about Coke. Understand?'

Yanni and the others nodded their heads and laughed.

'God is great. We do His work,' said Khorshid.

After the forty eight bottle bombs had been mixed, Khorshid screwed on the detonator caps and instructed his three friends to each take two six packs of Coke and wander through the stadium as if they were watching the cheerleaders.

'Find empty seat,' he told them. 'Sit for one minute and do like other people do. Watch what other people watch. Pretend to drink, then leave bomb under seat. Walk one hundred paces and do again'

It took just twenty minutes to distribute the grenades around the ground while the chemicals reacted quietly until their transformation was complete. When the job was done the four men went their separate ways but remained in the stadium to see the results of their work.

While they waited, the PM's luncheon had ended. No further cryptic messages had passed between Lady Craddock and the Prime Minister. Brandon decided to forget all about the matter and put it down to the ramblings of a dotty old woman pricking his own guilty conscience. When Jason gave the word, the party broke up and they began getting into their cars. The Prime Minister was the last to approach his limousine. As he said his goodbyes, Lady Craddock gave him an uncharacteristically long hug. When they broke she looked straight into his eyes. She gave him a look that sent a shiver down his back.

'Thomas,' she said sternly. 'I'll be in Sydney next week. I'm looking forward to seeing your lovely children and having a nice long chat with Meg. Be a good boy, now. Won't you?'

Brandon said nothing as he nodded and stepped into the limousine. He could feel her watching him as he raised the darkened

window, glad to be finally out of her accusing stare. The cars moved off slowly and made their way out the gate. He breathed easier.

At that moment, the first bomb went off.

SATURDAY, PM. FOUR MINUTES TO IMPACT

The pilot of the Super Hornet gave up trying to get a reply from the rig. The voice on the radio had simply stopped answering. He disarmed his air to ground missile and buzzed the yacht once to send a coordinate fix back to base. East Sale confirmed that HMAS Sheean was thirty miles east of the rig, just over the horizon and well within range to put a wire guided torpedo under the yacht and the Deep Drill Nine if necessary. Then East Sale ordered the Hornet back to base.

On his way back the pilot listened to the chatter on the air waves as the two other Hornets continued their search for the missile. It was clear from the signals they were too far off course, having made the incorrect assumption that the missile was heading for Melbourne. By the time Bailey's message got through that the target was Canberra, the Hornets were too far away to intercept it.

But there was one other RAAF aircraft in the sky, the Hornet which had escorted the PM's jet to Canberra.

After the PM's plane had touched down, the Hornet had been ordered to Richmond RAAF Base near Sydney to refuel. It was half way to Sydney when the pilot picked up the Scud on radar. Despite his low fuel, he turned the jet around to head back towards Canberra and switched his head-up-display into attack mode. Small green numbers scrolled in front of his eyes, reflected from a projector in his helmet onto his face shield in perfect focus as if they were written in the sky. Everything he needed to know about the jet's functions were displayed, but the numbers he paid most attention to were in

the bottom right hand corner of the HUD. They were labelled DTT and POS. They told him distance to target, and the probability of success of a direct hit at any instant he chose to launch a missile. As he lined up the jet with the radar image, distance to target was fifty miles and reducing quickly, but the POS was sixteen percent and increasing slowly. He was too far away for a confident kill. If he fired now, it would be a long shot. Literally. A wasted missile.

SECAR's computer finally confirmed Bailey's prediction that Canberra was the target and had commenced broadcasting data continuously to the jet's computer. It had calculated the time to impact to be one minute and ten seconds. At full normal power the Hornet would never get close enough, so the pilot engaged the afterburner, dumping precious raw fuel directly into the exhaust nozzle. It would buy him a few seconds in a game where seconds meant everything. The fuel ignited in the exhaust plume and slammed him back into his seat, propelling the jet forward at 2.5 times the speed of sound. Within ten seconds he had trebled his speed and was covering thirty miles a minute.

The Scud was by then thirty miles ahead and coming straight towards him but also falling at ten miles a minute. The POS changed erratically as the Hornet's onboard computer struggled to keep pace with the rapidly changing variables. After thirty seconds the POS flickered between sixty five and seventy five percent so he cut the afterburner to slow the plane, giving the computer a chance to take in more reliable data. The number stabilized at sixty eight percent then it started increasing steadily but the pilot realized it would never get to the preferred ninety five percent. The Scud would have impacted long before he could get close enough. During his training and combat simulations, a POS of seventy percent had delivered him a one in three success rate. It was something. Better than nothing. He waited as long as he dared.

At seventy eight percent he fired his air-to-air missile.