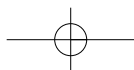
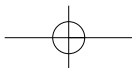
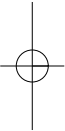
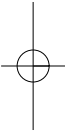




Prologue





FBI Field Office, Denver, Colorado Midnight, Sunday

The top floor of the Federal Building at 1961 Stout Street at the edge of Downtown Denver was dark except for two rooms at the end of a long corridor. Peter Ames, a twenty-five-year-old Special Agent not long out of the Academy at Quantico, Virginia, moved along the corridor quickly. He was carrying a rolled sheet of paper which he twisted in his hands as he walked.

Ames passed by the first of the lighted rooms, seeing the faint silhouettes of three men sitting around the conference table inside. He stopped at the next door, glancing at the name plate on the wall beside it that told him it was occupied by the Special Agent in Charge of the Denver field office – SAC Randall Webb. Ames cleared his throat, flattened out the sheet of paper and opened the door.

Webb did not look up at Ames as he entered the room. His chair was facing the window and Ames could see from his reflection in the glass that Webb had the phone to his ear. Ames stared out the window but could see nothing in the dark. He wondered what Webb saw out there.

‘I’m still waiting to hear,’ Webb said into the phone. ‘I don’t have that information yet.’

GJ Moffat

Ames stepped around Webb's desk until he was in his boss's line of sight and held out the sheet of paper. Webb looked up at Ames and nodded, reaching out to take the paper from him.

'Wait,' Webb said into the phone. 'I'm getting it now. I'll call you back.'

He swivelled his chair round and hung up the phone, placing the paper on the desk in front of him.

'It's there, sir,' Ames said, putting his finger on the paper next to a name on the flight passenger list: John Reece. Webb stared at the sheet for a long moment then leaned back in his chair. He was a trim black man in his early fifties. A native of Baltimore, his reputation in the Bureau was impeccable. He looked at Ames.

'Do we have any confirmation from the scene yet? I mean about survivors.'

'No, sir. It's still too early for them to make a formal assessment on that.'

Webb sighed. 'I know the official line, son. What I'm asking for is their best guess right now.'

Ames swallowed, his throat feeling dry in the air-conditioned environment.

'No survivors is what they're saying, sir.'

Webb glanced at the flat-screen television mounted on the wall to the side of his desk. The sound was on mute and the picture showed the crash scene from above as a news helicopter circled the flaming wreckage of the jet.

'Where's Coop?' Webb asked, turning back to Ames.

'He's next door with the others.'

'Go get him for me.'

Ames left and Webb picked up the phone to call the man he had been talking to before: an assistant director at Bureau headquarters in Washington. The AD answered on the first ring.

'What's the news?'

'I got the list.'

'And?'

'The name John Reece is on it.'

The AD was quiet.

Blindsight

'They're saying no survivors,' Webb added.

'I need to wake the Director and give him the bad news. We'll talk later.'

The door to Webb's office opened again and Special Agent Cooper Grange walked in, followed by Ames. Grange was taller than the six-foot Ames by a good couple of inches and had twenty years on him. His trademark black suit looked tailored to fit his athletic frame and was offset by a greying crew cut.

'Did he tell you?' Webb asked Grange.

'Yes.'

Grange was never one to waste words.

'This thing just moved to a whole new level.'

'I know. You want me to get the rest of the task force in here now?'

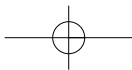
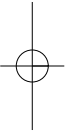
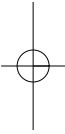
Webb put his hand on the passenger list still sitting on his desk. There was a 'Joint Terrorism Task Force' stamp in the top right-hand corner in red ink.

'Yes.'

'We need to take this guy down. Hard.'

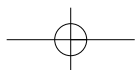
'I know, Coop. I know.'

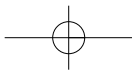
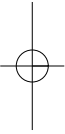
Grange and Ames left. Webb went back to staring out into the night.





Part One: Missing





1

Monday

Alex Cahill fumbled on the table by his bed for the phone that was vibrating, the light from it seeming incredibly bright in the dark of his room. His wife Sam stirred and huffed out a sigh.

Cahill grabbed the phone, looked at the screen and saw two things: that it was five a.m. on a Monday morning in April and that he did not recognise the number displayed on the screen – except that it had a US dialling prefix.

He pressed the button to answer and swung his legs out of bed, rubbing sleep from his eyes.

‘Is this Alex Cahill?’ a woman asked.

He didn’t recognise the voice.

‘Take it downstairs,’ Sam said.

Cahill stood and went out of the bedroom, past his daughters’ rooms and downstairs towards his study at the back of the house.

‘This is Cahill,’ he told the woman on the phone.

‘I’m calling about Tim,’ she said.

The woman’s voice was thick, like she had been crying. Cahill rubbed at his hair, his mind not functioning yet at full capacity.

GJ Moffat

‘Tim who?’ he asked as he padded barefoot into his study, closing the door behind him.

‘Tim Stark. This is his wife, Melanie.’

Cahill sat in the leather seat behind his large desk and swivelled to look out the window into his garden.

‘Sorry, Melanie,’ Cahill said. ‘It’s early here. What about Tim?’

‘I didn’t know who else to call,’ Melanie Stark said. ‘I mean, I’ve tried the police and the people at the airport but they won’t tell me anything.’

Cahill closed his eyes, forcing himself to think despite the fuzz clouding his brain.

‘Melanie, I haven’t seen Tim in a while. Not since I was in the US last summer. In Washington. And it’s five in the morning here. What’s this about?’

‘Sorry, I forgot about the time difference. It’s just . . .’

Cahill switched on the desk lamp and reached for a pen, writing ‘Tim Stark’ at the top of a blank page in his notebook. He could hear Melanie sniffing back tears and felt a knot of anxiety form in his stomach. Tim was a good friend and something was clearly wrong.

‘Okay, listen, Melanie. I need you to slow down. I mean, let’s start with the basics. You said something about an airport. Which airport?’

‘Denver International.’

Cahill jotted that down underneath Tim’s name in the notebook.

‘Are you there right now?’

‘No. I’m at home in Kansas City.’

‘I’m not following you, Melanie.’

‘It’s the crash,’ she said. ‘It’s all over the TV. Haven’t you seen it?’

The knot in his stomach twisted inside.

‘Give me a minute.’

Cahill got up, still holding the phone to his ear, and went to the couch where he lifted a remote and pointed it at the TV. The screen came to life and he switched to a news channel.

Fractured images showed onscreen in a loop: firefighters tackling a huge blaze and ambulance crews rushing in and out of frame while the blue lights of their vehicles filled the night.

Cahill muted the volume and looked at the info bar scrolling along the

Blindside

bottom of the screen, describing a plane crash outside Denver, Colorado. His home town.

He sat on the couch watching the screen.

'I see it now,' Cahill said into the phone, his voice sounding hollow.

'Tim said he was going to be on that flight,' she said. 'He was in Denver and called me to say that he had business in Washington and that he'd got a late cancellation on the flight. He took it and—'

She was speaking in a rush.

'I'm not sure I understand why you're calling me,' he said. 'Or what you think I can do to help you. I'm based in the UK now. In Scotland.'

'I know that,' she said. 'I found your contact details in Tim's desk. You were in the Service together, weren't you? The Secret Service.'

'We were.'

'He talked about you and the other guys a lot. About what it was like back then. Said you were the best.'

She stopped talking and sobbed. Cahill didn't know what to say. The info bar on the TV screen continued to scroll, telling Cahill that there were no survivors expected from the crash.

'Melanie, I'm real sorry about this. Tim was a good man. A friend.'

Cahill ran a hand over his face and up through his hair, feeling like all he wanted to do was sleep. But he knew that he would not get to sleep with images of the plane wreckage seared into his mind.

'Tim got fired from the Service in the Fall of last year,' Melanie said. 'Didn't even get his pension.'

'I didn't know. He seemed fine when I saw him.'

'He wouldn't tell me why he got fired. Then he got another job. Said it was something he couldn't tell me about but that it paid well.'

Cahill's antennae started to twitch.

'But it didn't pay well,' Melanie went on. 'I mean, not so far as I could see. It didn't pay at all. Not officially. But there were always cash deposits in our account. Nothing huge, just enough for what we needed. Like he was being careful not to put any more in the account. I was worried and I looked for something, anything, to show me what he was doing. I mean, a payslip or a contract. Anything.'

'And you couldn't find anything, right?'

GJ Moffat

‘Yes. There was nothing. And he was away for days on end. Sometimes more than a week.’

‘You do know what that sounds like, Melanie.’

She said nothing.

‘It sounds like he was involved in something bad,’ Cahill said. ‘Something criminal.’

‘I know,’ she said.

She sniffed loudly and when she spoke her voice wavered.

‘But I can’t believe that about him. Not Tim. It’s not like him, you know?’

Cahill did know. Stark had been such a Boy Scout – joining the Secret Service from the FBI after receiving a bunch of commendations for his work there. Mr All-American, a smart, tough operator. And he hadn’t changed in all the years Cahill had known him.

‘It doesn’t sound like the man I know,’ Cahill told her.

‘Thank you,’ she said, sounding genuinely pleased.

‘What’s the problem there? Why are the police not talking to you?’

‘Oh, it’s not that they haven’t been talking.’

A man appeared on the TV. The onscreen caption identified him as a Colorado official of the NTSB – the US National Transportation Safety Board. The NTSB would normally be responsible for investigating the cause of the disaster.

‘I don’t understand, Melanie,’ Cahill told her. ‘I thought you said that they wouldn’t tell you anything.’

‘They won’t.’

Cahill sighed.

‘I know he was on that flight, Alex. I mean, he called me from the airport before he boarded and told me the flight number, when he’d get to Washington, the name of his hotel there. But he sounded weird. Not like himself.’

Cahill wasn’t following her at all now and said so.

‘They say they don’t have any record of him on the flight,’ Melanie said. ‘His name isn’t on the passenger manifest.’

2

Now Cahill was wide awake.

‘Have you called Tim’s cell phone?’ he asked.

‘Yes, of course,’ Melanie replied. ‘It defaults to voicemail.’

‘What about his car?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Is it at the airport somewhere, maybe in a long-stay car park or something?’

‘I don’t know. I hadn’t thought of that.’

‘Look, get back in touch with the police and tell them that he said he would be on the flight and that he’s ex-Secret Service. That should get their attention. Ask them to check for his car and call the airline as well.’

She took a few deep breaths.

‘I’ll do that.’

‘They’ll have access to security cameras covering every inch of the airport so if his car is there they’ll find it. But you realise that will just confirm he was at the airport. Not that he got on that flight. Or any flight.’

‘It would be better if he wasn’t on it, you know. They’re saying that there are no survivors.’

‘Take small steps right now. Find out what you can.’

Cahill was about to end the call when something jagged into his mind, a shard of mental glass.