

Memories Never Die

Pages: 422

Format: pdf, epub

Language: English

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***** While I did a great deal of research for the writing of this book, it is a book of fiction. All characters in the story are strictly fictional and are not intended to portray any particular person. Any political or religious references are used only to create the story and do not necessarily reflect my opinion nor can they be construed by anybody as an accurate representation of any particular religious or political group. All Geographic locations mentioned around the globe are accurate. ***** Chapter 1 Novosibirsk, Republic of Russia: Professor Yuri Kromonov cursed the cold weather. He had walked these icy streets of the university most of his life. The University of Novosibirsk was world-renowned. The professor was proud of his work here and at the research institutes in Academgorodok. Academgorodok was about 20 km south of the city center of Novosibirsk and was a very special place with special perks for loyal Comrades. Yuri had the pleasure of living there as a nuclear research scientist for over 30 years. During the middle of the so-called "cold war" it was a very good place to be, and it still was. This was where he met and married his wife. It was also where he and 65,000 other scientists and along with their families, lived a very privileged life. With the facilities located in the middle of Siberia, they were a captive crowd, but the cage was gilded, very gilded. Academgorodok was a land of academia, with all the scientific lectures and discussions a scientist could want. It was a city within a city and in a town of academic elites, there was no end to the opportunities for scientific and philosophical debate. But if one wanted to stay in the gilded cage, it was wise not to question the motives or ways of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. All who lived at the research institute knew that the very existence of their community conflicted with the ideal of socialism. All comrades were not equal under the eyes of the politburo. Pay rates were perhaps the same, but what one could buy with that pay varied widely. Not one of the scientists would trade his apartment in Academgorodok for a miserable, small, dirty flat in Moscow. Nor would he trade his ample stores with the typically empty shelves throughout Russia and the lines a block long to buy stale bread. But then, the people in Moscow weren't contributing to the Mother Land as much as he and the other scientist did. The scientists did work hard for the good of the U.S.S.R., lest they were made an example of and kicked out of the gilded cage. Capitalism worked, but no one dared think of it in those terms.

They were just being rewarded for their extra effort and given incentives to keep working hard. Of course, that was the definition of capitalism, but it was the one debate no one dared start; they were just being good Soviet citizens. And one thing a good Soviet citizen never did, especially if he was being treated well, was to ask for more. Yuri never asked for more, until now. The research institute was just a memory since he and his wife moved from their research cottage to an apartment near the University. And while the University was technically part of Academgorodok it was more aligned with the City of Novosibirsk, the third largest city in Russia. The center of Novosibirsk was 20km north, nestled against the river Ob. It boasted of having the largest library in Siberia and the biggest opera/ballet theater in all of Russia. It was even bigger than Moscow's Bolshoi Theater. Still it wasn't Academgorodok; he missed his old home. The professor pulled his wool hat tighter against his head with his gloved hands, as if that act would somehow keep him warmer. He watched his breath freeze as he exhaled. It was -23° C. Instantly his scientific mind calculated it in Fahrenheit to -10°. He took his arms and slapped them against his rotund body to bring some feeling back. Two more blocks to go, Yuri cursed. "Vsyo zayebis!" — "Everything's fucking great!" he said sarcastically as a gust of wind blew snow hard against his exposed face. Yuri was officially retired. He and his wife lived in an apartment ten blocks from Yuri's university office. A nice walk in summer, ten blocks too far in winter. Yuri cursed some more, he should have taken the metro. It would have still been a cold ride but at least he would have been shielded from the wind. The professor hated the metro; it was filthy and full of human scum too lazy to walk. More than once he had found himself in an altercation with young hoodlums making sport of the way he dressed or trying to steal his umbrella. One good thing about the cold, the punks would be on the metro not on the street; they didn't know how to dress against the weather. Yuri and his wife, Anzhela, had been asked to move out of their lifelong cottage in the research town a few years back. It seemed the institute needed the home for an up and coming scientist. And though they were asked in a polite, official manner to move to Novosibirsk, it wouldn't have stayed a request had they refused. He was told that as a "reward" for his retirement he would receive a private office at the university to continue his research and he would be given a professorship. So reluctantly they moved to the city, away from their friends and the life they knew. The new apartment was much smaller than their private cottage. Their previous home had been grand, almost opulent by comparison. The new home was very nice by Russian standards, but to them it was bland. They were just one tenant in a building with twenty identical units. Each structure was just part of a cluster of twenty identical buildings. It was over two years since they had moved; they both knew it wasn't home and it never would be. The couple had tried to dress up the apartment with some of the nicer things they had brought along, but most didn't seem to belong here. When they were forced to move it had been difficult to choose which items to keep and which to give away. Both realized that many of their precious and most personal belongings would have to be left behind; the new place was just too small. Anzhela had been able to keep only a few of her cherished paintings. Her favorite, an impressionistic oil drawn by a then young university student, adorned one of the few small walls. To Anzhela it was an exquisitely beautiful painting, a quality that made it completely out of place on the drab wall in the dimly lit room. It wasn't a large painting but seemed to draw you into itself making it seem bigger. Staring at it long enough made you feel as if you were on the beach at the shore of the lake watching the sun go down next to the charming Swiss cottage. There was only the slightest hint of a person on the shoreline so as not to detract from the sunset and water, but Anzhela had imagined herself in the picture a million or more times. Yuri pulled open the heavy door of the great hallway. The door pushed a mound of snow over his boots as he opened it and then his red-cheeked face was greeted by warmer air as he stepped in. The professor stomped his boots hard on the tile floor and brushed off his black wool coat, which was white with snow. He made his way down a narrow hallway toward his office. The long hallway was lit intermittently by flickering florescent lighting. The air smelled stale as if it was left over from 65 years ago when the large university building had been built. The walk to his private office was undisturbed, and it too was dimly lit. The office was small but warm and it was his. Yuri hung up his wet coat, kicked off the over boots and surveyed his small domain. Any day now this small luxury of an office could be taken away from him too. Supervising classes wasn't

one of his duties anymore. He realized that his professorship would only last until someone of more importance wanted this space. Every day that went by, Yuri realized that more and more people were becoming more important than he was. Retirement in Russia was very much like everything else; you hoped for the best and planned for the worst. Only, it was difficult to plan when you had no control over anything. The monthly check would still come, and the couple had saved up some money. But it would be far short of what they would need to live comfortably anywhere in Russia, much less in a dacha in a warm climate. Anzhela earned some money giving piano lessons on their old but very well cared for piano. Besides the piano money, his wife's monthly retirement check, which was much smaller than his, helped to make ends meet. If they had any pride of ownership about anything, it was the piano. They couldn't bring themselves to leave it behind; that would have been too much to ask, even though it took up so much space in their small sitting room. Yuri Kromonov didn't play a note of music, but that didn't detract from his pride in owning the instrument. Having a piano in your residence for personal use was an oddity; it displayed class and a bit of economic superiority. Obtaining the piano would be impossible for him under his current situation, but back when he was important other important people had helped him with the ultimate surprise for his young wife. Yuri thought about another disappointment in their lives. Early in their married life, he and his wife realized that they could not conceive. That need had been taken from them much too soon. But as the years went by they learned to replace the dream of having a family with one of living a life of leisure in a place with warm weather. It didn't matter where, but it had to be near a lake that never froze. Yuri could imagine sailing on that lake a lake he envisioned, much like the lake in his wife's painting. The professor was sailing on that lake for a moment, then reality came back and he remembered his new mission. He patted his dark computer screen. "You will help me get to my lake, won't you my friend?" the warming old man said to his computer. Another perk of professorship was having a computer. The Soviets knew the power of shared information and it often worried them. The old U.S.S.R. had been fairly successful in containing the Internet world, but the genie was out of the bottle now and Professor Kromonov could not imagine it would ever be put back in. He had grown up with computers, and in Russia that meant that you practically had to build your own. When the professor searched the Internet he knew how to cover his tracks, because if the wrong person discovered what he was looking for, he would not be considered a good comrade. Yuri flicked the power switch on, his computer started to boot up. Then the Doctor of Physics turned around in the small room and started to boil some water in a teapot. He preferred coffee, good Columbian coffee, but in the last several years since leaving Academgorodok, he mostly drank tea. The scientist's mind wandered as he looked at a small glass jar of Nescafe instant coffee. It was a product he hated and was on the shelf for a colleague who insisted on coffee. The glass jar of coffee crystals made him recollect about his exposure to real Columbian coffee. At the research center there was a coffee house. It was the most popular place for the young scientists and their wives to gather and chat. Yuri could almost smell the bold aroma as he reminisced about those days. He closed his eyes and mentally tried to inhale the wonderful fragrances of the *caffelatte* and *cappuccino* delights being served over and over again. Anzhela loved to sit with a good book at an outside table and enjoy her *caffelatte*. Yuri chuckled to himself as he pictured his young wife trying to read her book while squinting and putting up with the annoyance of the bright sunshine. It was an annoyance she gladly bore. For her, the sunshine was like being bathed in a warm regenerating elixir. Yuri tried to remember the name of the barista. The particular server Yuri thought about was a master at running the ancient shiny brass espresso machine. In his mind's eye he could hear the sound of steam traveling through the bright brass piping, hitting the milk and foaming it perfectly. Yuri abruptly opened his eyes. The memories were becoming painful, though they had reminded him of why he had decided years ago that and if he couldn't have a good coffee, he would have none. The teapot looked out of place on the small hotplate that was borrowed from one of the labs. The hotplate was nestled not completely safely between stacks of paper and stacks of engineering books. The computer took time to find all its connections. During the wait his mind drifted back again to that time 35 years ago when he was young and important. The scientist had done what everyone thought was impossible. Back then it was considered something of science fiction. And even to this

day, though there were rumors of its existence, some being very credible rumors, nothing was ever proven. Today he was old and used up, though his designs were still being worked on and refined. In fact, the professor couldn't be sure, but he was almost certain that the United States had copied his design. A few years back, a respected source who still worked down in Academgorodok, said there was some compelling evidence that the great U.S. was improving on the supposedly secret design as was his own country. The professor was well aware of the sad state of world affairs and quite frankly didn't give a damn. He had his own problems; the man who invented the most sinister bomb the world has ever known should at least be able to afford a small cottage on a warm lake for himself and his love of 35 years to retire on. Yuri knew there were terrorists, or martyrs, depending on one's perspective, more than willing to blow themselves up. They would be willing to kill themselves in the name of God and jihad. And in the process, these men and women would strive to kill multitudes of innocents in the name of religion. Yes, he thought, these people would make his services in high demand. The world was a complicated place. Who was he to say who was right and who was wrong? His own country had placed a team of engineers and scientists at his disposal so that they could kill innocents too. Only his country didn't want to take the credit for the killings like the jihadist did. Mother Russia wanted it done covertly. But otherwise killing is killing; same difference in the end. The professor didn't have any false pretenses or moral justification to defend. When a young scientist was picked to design the special, small package, he knew that the only reason for such a bomb was to be used clandestinely. That meant any place, any time, with no warning. Innocents would be killed. But if the Mother Land decided that even the innocents were enemies, then who was to say differently? To the professor it wasn't a question if one of the many terrorist groups or even a terrorist country would want his services. Undoubtedly, they would. The quandary was of letting them know a vendor was available without exposing himself. That was a problem worthy of a scientist to solve. Yuri entered a few selected websites and Internet chat rooms looking for any sign that one of his alter egos was trying to be contacted. One of the websites he visited was al-Ekhlass. The professor didn't know what that meant, but did know it was a favorite site for militants to post messages. It was the un-official/official site of al-Qaida and it supported a forum where anyone can post comments. The trick was to keep invisible to the Russian authorities while visiting these dangerous sites. There were services that promised to keep your identity anonymous, but those were the last Yuri would trust. After all, if you were the FSB, wouldn't you monitor those sites first? The scientist cringed at the thought of being caught by the FSB, which was short for the "Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation". The FSB was every bit as suspicious of its citizens as its previous self, the KGB. Yuri went to Yahoo! and checked the e-mail in a few of his accounts. These were accounts that he had routed through a server down in Academgorodok. And that server accessed through an Internet Protocol, or IP address, another that was routed through an acquaintance's computer. Sometimes it was convenient to be the resident "computer geek" as the Americans called them. When he fixed or set up a new computer, a trap door was always left open to give him a way into it. The professor scrolled through e-mails. His heart skipped a beat, and then it started to beat rapidly. *What had he done?* he thought to himself as a particular message caught his undivided attention. Yuri had left small clues on how to be contacted in selected chat rooms such as al-Ekhlass. The scientist answered seemingly pointless questions with small inferences of having something they wanted. But someone had to put all the pieces of the puzzle together and responded with the right question for Yuri to take him seriously. Finally he was looking at a response. "Do you need a matchmaker? I specialize in matching people of unique skills with interested parties. Such work can be very lucrative for people with the right skills for my clients. Business is booming!" The professor sunk back in his chair to catch his breath and then jumped in fear, nearly startled to death by the sound of his teapot's contents coming to a boil. He whispered quietly. "Ni khuya sebe!" – "No fucking way!" In a daze, the professor turned off the hot plate and the teakettle slowly quieted. Without pouring the tea, he sat back down and pondered the situation. Why was he so surprised? Isn't this exactly what he had been waiting for? Maybe... the professor philosophized, maybe because for over a year, every day had been exactly the same until now. Every day the sly messages went out and every day the special "IN" box was empty. For the

first time, Yuri admitted to himself that an answer was not really expected, not ever. No wonder he was surprised. The old man crinkled his wrinkled brow even more; he had never actually expected anyone to get his cryptic messages. And now that someone had, he didn't know what to do. A strange thought crossed his mind. Though he had calculated every conceivable way to stay anonymous, the cunning scientist never contemplated the next move should there be a successful contact. Maybe he wasn't serious. Maybe this wasn't the right time. Yuri suddenly found that his stomach wasn't feeling that well. This was no longer a game; if the e-mail was answered, his life would never be the same. That was certain. Yuri wrote down the sender's e-mail address on a small paper that was slipped in one of the many books on the neatly crowded bookcase. Then the professor did what was always done after going on line. He securely erased his session on the server at the research center. Then he securely erased his local hard drive to delete any references to the websites visited and lastly securely erased the e-mail files. The secure erase assured that not only were references to these files erased, but each and every sector of his hard drive that was listed as available by the hard drive controller was overwritten with useless 0s and 1s to make sure even invisible files were completely erased. This had been taught to him very early in his career by the government. The concept of computer security had not been wasted on the security division of the huge government research complex, and it especially hadn't been wasted on him. That evening, when safe and cozy in their small flat, Yuri felt rejuvenated, almost giddy. He looked across the beaten up laminated surface of the dining table. There his wife sat eating slowly and silently. The long winters were hard on her, harder even than they were on him. "My little Angel, why so quiet?" The name Anzhela was from a Russian term that roughly translated to "The Angel." Yuri almost never called his sweet Anzhela anything else. Anzhela had of course aged from the twenty something smooth skin beauty that he had fallen in love with, but she still looked every bit as desirable to him. And his love for her had only grown through the ages. Anzhela smiled slightly and looked up from her plate. "Oh Yuri, you know how the winters make me feel. I don't even have the energy to read my books. You go to work and I miss you so when you are gone, but yet when you come home I don't feel any joy." Yuri had just poured more gravy over a second helping of potatoes, but instead of eating the warm meal he set down his fork, got up and walked to his wife's side. "My sweet Angel, is there anything I can do?" "Can you change the snow to a spring rain? Can you open the window and let in clean fresh summer air filled with the fragrances of blooming flowers. Can you give me summer sunshine on my back as I work in my garden?" Yuri said nothing, but he leaned over in back of her and placed one of his massive arms around his suddenly fragile wife. That said more than he ever could have voiced. Anzhela looked up at her husband with tired eyes. "My love, I'm not blaming you. It isn't your fault I miss the sunshine so much. I have had a good life, a very good life, and I owe it all to you. Without you, I couldn't have studied my precious literature and been given the opportunities to teach here at the university. But somehow I expected this part of our lives to be just as wonderful. It is wrong of me to be so selfish." Yuri couldn't bring his big frame down to his wife, so he turned her chair around, practically lifted her out of it and into both of his arms. "To want more is not wrong. I used to be important, and important people would come to see me, to see us. Remember the parties we went to? OH MY, the parties!!" Yuri's mind wondered back to those times. "Remember how we danced to live music all evening?" Anzhela smiled and hugged her husband back. "Oh I remember, you were quite the dancer." "I still am, Angel." Slowly, Yuri and Anzhela rocked back and forth, not dancing but transporting themselves back to earlier times with the gentle rocking motion. Yuri whispered. "You talk like your life is over. It is not, I promise. Have I ever let you down before?" "My Yuri," Anzhela scolded lightly, "you have never let me down, not ever! Perhaps I should get one of those lamps that help people feel better in winter. They are expensive but they are like sunshine." "Yes, yes, my love. By all means we will find one of those lights. I know a scientist who works with full spectrum lights. I fixed his computer. He owes me a favor. I, Yuri Kromonov, will bring summer sunshine to my Angel, I promise. But first you must give me a smile." Anzhela looked up at her lover and protector. She didn't have to force a smile, she was smiling already. "Just by being my Yuri, you have already brought some sunshine into my life." ***** The next morning the professor hated to leave his Angel alone again but he had some serious planning to do. His mind

had been made up; it had been easy to come to a decision after seeing his Angel so sad. Anzhela was right about herself. Living her dreary existence day in and day out was killing her. What he didn't share with his wife was that it was slowly killing him also. Today, for the first time in a long time there was work to do. It was real work, important work, and his private office was the place in which to do it. Yuri knew that he was about to play a very dangerous game. There could be no mistakes on his part. *If the mouse wants to tease the cat, it had better be a very, very clever little mouse!* he thought. This was going to take much more thought and planning than getting contacted had been.

Chapter 2 West Bend, Wisconsin; Two Years Later: Scott Seaver didn't like the look of the sky; it was low overcast and no doubt filled with icy moisture. As a pilot, being aware of the sky conditions was second nature. There was a cold wind blowing in off the water from the east, a bit unusual as the prevailing winds were from the opposite direction toward the east. He also knew from sailing that with the winds from the east, the waters of Lake Michigan would be extremely rough and very cold. Scott chuckled realizing that the song on the radio was the ballad of the "Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald" by Gordon Lightfoot. *How appropriate* he thought, the skies were certainly gloomy, though the month was October as Gordon sang, "When the skies of November turn gloomy." The helicopter pilot drove down the main highway toward the 832nd Medical Evacuation Company. The fiftyish pilot started singing along with Gordon, something that would be mildly tolerated by his wife, but totally unforgivable by their fourteen-year-old daughter. Alone in the car he belted out words somewhat in tune: "When the Gales of November came slashing." Well the winds weren't exactly gale force, he conceded; just the same, nobody would want to be out on the big lake on a day like today. Every wave that came up and slammed into the side of a ship's hull would send up a screen of icy cold water. During the colder months the icy water would freeze almost instantly on contact with the cold steel of a ship. Scott sang along some more, realizing that he didn't know the tune as well as he thought he did. Wasn't it always like that though? You could hear a song a thousand times, but that doesn't mean you actually know the words. Scott respected the lake. He had grown up next to it and saw its fury and anger on many occasions. As a boy, he was drawn to it, and from the bluffs overlooking the endless expanse of water knew that it was as ferocious as any ocean. The young Seaver would marvel at how strong the outer breakwater must be to take the pounding of the waves over and over again. Maybe that was what drew him into engineering, a desire to understand such things. As a helicopter pilot, Captain Seaver had flown over the lake many times, his lake, as he liked to call it. The Army Guard Captain often had thought that calling the Great Lakes, lakes at all, was a bit under rating, sort of disrespectful. They were, in fact, huge, more like inland oceans than lakes. If he had to fly over the lake it would be done over the shortest distance, which was from Manitowoc, Wisconsin, to Ludington, Michigan. The great lake was still over 60 miles wide at its narrowest and would take him thirty minutes or more in the "Huey," depending on winds. Seaver always thought of those minutes as the longest minutes in the world. Going down in the middle of a lake the size of West Virginia, even in the best of weather, would severely ruin a person's day. When he turned off the main highway onto Chopper Drive, he stopped at the security gate. Sergeant Lenny Sidowske was on duty at the guard post. Len saluted Captain Seaver and waved him through the security checkpoint of the Wisconsin Army National Guard. Lenny was the oldest son of one of Scott's high school buddies. The young man's father, Dan Sidowske and Scott had dated the same girl, Mary Ann Martin. Dan had eventually married her and the young Seaver had felt the pain of a love lost. Ten years later, Dan and Scott were on the same bowling team, became best of friends and still were to this day. Scott knew that Lenny wasn't married yet, but the young man certainly had his eye on a gal named Patti Mills, or Pat as he liked to call her. Captain Seaver laughed a bit at the thought that his high school buddy and former girlfriend might soon be grandparents. Life certainly passes quickly. He kept his Huey at the 832nd unit of the Army National Guard. He liked to think of it as his Huey, though it actually wasn't, but then neither was Lake Michigan. He wouldn't be flying today, but was stopping by to check on his bird and make a nuisance of himself, even if today wasn't a scheduled on duty day. "Hey Randy," Captain Seaver said as Lieutenant Schmidt saluted him. The captain saluted back casually. It was more like a handshake between friends than an official salute. Things were fairly informal around the small base. "Have the bugs out of the

new sim yet?" Scott asked teasingly. "There aren't any bugs in it, sir," Randy answered, feigning being insulted. Captain Seaver liked the flight simulator technician. In a way they were kindred brothers. They both were kind of techno geeks and proud of it. "Don't blame the sim for your lack of flying skills, sir." Lieutenant Schmidt teased back. "If you fly boys would learn to fly properly, I'm sure you would find that the sim works just fine." "Yea, Yea, Yea," Scott yawned out and patted the young technician on the back lightly as he walked toward the commander's office. Lieutenant Schmidt called out and stopped the captain. "Did you get your new IT-Tech phone yet?" "As a matter of fact, I did," the captain said proudly as he pulled it out of his pocket and held it up taunting the jealous simulator technician with it. "Is it as cool as they say?" "Nope!.... Way better!" Scott volunteered. "The video capture is amazing and it takes still pictures up to 10 megapixels. If I change my contacts or calendar on my phone it instantly changes on my home and work PCs and vice versa. It has GPS and security erase. Oh, and it also works as a great phone!" Scott added as an afterthought while the technician held it in his hand gingerly playing with the touch screen. "And it has high speed Internet and e-mail functions," Randy Schmidt added reluctantly giving back the ultra high tech phone. "And if I want it to do something else, I can just download any of about a zillion different applications. It is soooo way cool!" Scott added again as he smirked and slipped it carefully back into his pocket. "What did you do with your old phone? I'll buy it from you," the lieutenant eagerly bargained. Scott was one of those guys who chased technology. His old phone was cutting edge, at least until the new phone hit the market. "Sorry Lieutenant, I gave it to my daughter. But check this out." Scott played with some buttons on the phone and pressed "SEARCH." Soon the map on the IT-Tech displayed a flashing yellow dot. "That is where my daughter is right now. I can find out where she is at any time." "I can see from a parent's perspective that is awesome. Does your daughter know you can do that?" "No, and neither does my wife; and what they don't know, won't hurt them! Gotta go Lieutenant, see you later." Scott walked past the simulator room and through the recently expanded and remodeled operations base. Its new walls were painted in the typical army drab green. The building may be brand new but once inside it looked like any other army base. Maybe that was the idea. You never knew how old or new a military base was because they all looked the same, at least on the inside. The captain knocked on Major Robert Allen's door. "Come in!" Scott gave a much more formal salute to his commanding officer as he stepped through the steel doorway and stopped at attention. Even though this was a reserve unit, army protocol was still respected and followed. And even though being in the National Guard meant that you were just part time, when on base or on duty you were always one hundred percent soldier. Scott understood the tradition and respected it, as did everyone else in the unit. Without standing, Major Allen saluted back and welcomed Scott in with a smile. "I thought you weren't scheduled in for another week?" "Yes sir, I was hoping you wouldn't mind if I gave my old bird a once over, sir." "Are you afraid that we won't take care of your UH-1 without your supervision?" The major tried to sound gruff. "No sir!" Scott replied and then saw the hint of a smile on the major's face. "Permission granted ... and Scott!" he added. "Yes sir?" "That vibration you noticed on your last flight was a dampener going on number two blade. Mark didn't find it at first. I told him to look again. I told him that if you said there was a vibration in that machine, then there was a vibration and he better find it. It took him a whole day, but he found it. You should have seen the smile on his face; you would have thought that he discovered the Holy Grail." Bob grinned at Scott. "Thank you, sir." He recognized the compliment that the commander had just paid him and Mark, the head mechanic. After all, finding a slight vibration on a five thousand pound aircraft while it was sitting in the shop hangar was no small task. "And in case you're interested," Major Allen paused for effect, "we checked out the H.S.I. you reported acting flaky. We replaced it also." "Yes sir, good to know sir. I guess I wasted a perfectly good day off." The commander laughed, "You couldn't have stayed away if you wanted to, which you don't." Bob Allen and Scott Seaver had been friends for many years. Their sons had played on the same T-ball and later little league baseball teams together. Bob had been a good friend when Scott's son Brad died. He seemed to know what to say and when to say it and he also knew when to say nothing at all, but just be there for him. "If you don't mind, sir, may I be dismissed so I can go and see my baby?" The Captain asked for the formal permission to be excused. "Scott." Bob looked up and

caught the pilot's eyes and gave him a serious look. "I love those old birds as much as you do, and as long as they are here we will take care of them like our lives depended on them, because they do. But you know and I know that time marches on and those old birds are being replaced ASAP with or without our blessing." "I know Bob." Scott dropped the sir and kept it personal; he knew when the formalities of rank were being pushed aside for a serious heart-to-heart. "I understand, out with the old, in with the new. Just like those young sky jocks that I am competing against. The old birds have been good friends and never let you or me down. I'm dreading the day when I come in and all the Huey's are gone." "So will I Scott, so will I. But you know that the Black Hawk is one hell of a bird, and two engines are better than one. And the speeds, my god, are they fast. And with the modular components it should be easier to keep them ready to go at all times." Bob tried to sell the advantages of the new copters to his friend. "Captain Fredric has nothing but praise for the UH60. I think that if I made him go on a mission with a UH-1 he would resign on the spot." "I get it Bob, the UH-1 is yesterday's news, but I still like the old birds. I know where every switch, knob, light and lever is in my sleep. And you know that there isn't a sound that bird makes that I don't know by heart. I don't need a million dollars worth of computing power to tell me if it's a good sound or a bad one." Bob changed the subject. *No sense beating a dead horse*, he thought. "Speaking of knobs and switches, how's the simulator training going?" Scott knew what the major was getting at; he undoubtedly saw the sim reports and was just looking for Scott's perspective. "Well..," Scott started hesitating. "I'll admit that it could be going better, but I'm getting it. Don't tell me about knobs and switches. The new Hawks have about a zillion more of them, and they're all in the wrong places. The controls are a bit tough to get used to for a ham handed pilot like me. Just a bit more time sir and I'm sure I'll have it down pat." Scott acknowledged that they were back to a professional discussion. Then he added. "And the sim, sir, I realize it is state of the art and costs millions of dollars, but it's still not the real thing. When I'm flying, I can feel the machine, I can sense it, and I can feel the air. To me sir, when I am flying the simulator, as realistic as it is, it is still just a simulator." "You forget that I'm a pilot too Scott. I understand what you're saying. But just the same, satisfactory simulator performance is mandatory. And the reason the Army uses the sim is because we can have you practice emergency maneuvers without killing yourself or others and destroying a very expensive helicopter in the process. And by the way," Major Allen added in a deadly serious way, "according to the reports, you did die, several times as a matter of fact. I know you're a better pilot than that. What's up?" "Like I say sir, just getting used to the simulator, it would never happen in the real machine," Scott said in the most convincing voice he could muster. "The multiple emergencies and unlikely situations that you guys cook up would never happen in real life anyways." "Scott, you need to get your sim scores up. I know there is a lot of pressure on you because you are the most senior pilot here. Just relax a little; take deep breaths if you have to, maybe crack the books a bit harder before your next flight." "Yes sir!" the captain replied respectfully and officially. Scott realized that it wasn't a request. It was an order, an order disguised in a friend's voice. The pilot also knew that his friend was right. Learning a new bird was a lot more difficult than he had imagined it would be. And, compared to the young aviators, being called the senior pilot was not necessarily a compliment. Those young jocks seemed to catch on to everything so much faster than he did. Sometimes the thought would cross his mind that it might be time to step aside and let the younger pilots be the heroes. Bob caught the slight hesitation in his friend's expression and realized that the message was being considered seriously. Major Allen's phone rang "Dismissed Captain and good luck." Scott saluted and turned around as Bob picked up the phone. "I thought Captain Fredric was scheduled. I see.No, don't call Williams, Captain Seaver is still with me." Scott was just about to close the door when he heard his name mentioned. He hesitated. Bob called out to him. "Scott, hold on, come back in. It seems that Captain Fredric was hurt in a motorcycle accident on the way in. It doesn't sound like it was too bad, but he won't be able to go on duty. Would you care to take his spot until I find someone to fill out the rest of his shift? Ted's over his service hours and it could be a while before someone else could get here. And just in case there is some sort of an emergency, we need a pilot on duty." Scott was caught off guard, but understood the question. "Yes sir, I can punch in anytime." Being given an extra opportunity to practice his skills was actually a lucky break. And being the boss at

his own company had its perks, so taking the rest of the day off from the office wouldn't be a problem. Bob was already on the phone telling Sergeant Lind that they had a pilot. "I'll go to my locker and change into uniform, sir, and then I'll report back." "Sounds like a plan Scott and thanks." Bob was a good commander and being a good commander Scott knew that his good friend of so many years wasn't intending to let him sit around and play cards until his relief showed up. Captain Seaver wished that Major Allen would order him to practice with the Huey, but they both knew that more practice in the Huey wasn't needed. And burning up jet fuel just for the sake of a joy ride wasn't in the cards. The captain quickly changed into a flight suit trying to prepare himself mentally for whatever challenge his commander cooked up for him. Scott admired that about Bob. He didn't let anyone rest on past training and often said, "I never saw a perfect training flight yet. And if I ever did, that would mean I didn't push the pilot's skills enough." Bob was right, Scott had thousands of flights under his belt and never did he do EVERYTHING perfectly. Flying was a skill with a thousand tasks. Doing them all perfectly each and every time was impossible. There wasn't a pilot alive who could say he never forgot to switch frequencies at the right time, or dialed in the wrong navigation aid or calculated a decent profile incorrectly or didn't anticipate the ground wash. Scott reported back to Major Allen's office with his flight helmet tucked under his right arm. The door was cracked open. He heard the commander on the phone. He knocked lightly and Bob waved him in as he hung up. Bob looked up at Scott. "Looks like you'll be getting a chance to show the young jocks how it's done. Here's the scenario. There's a small sailboat capsized off Port Washington's breakwater, about 15 miles out. Lieutenant Schmidt will give you the coordinates. It's a family of five. They won't survive long in the cold water and it will be dark soon. Your team is on the way to Sierra Six, Six, Six. I'm giving you an authorized emergency takeoff. The flight line is only giving you enough fuel for about an hour and a half. You won't want any more weight on board than that. And you won't need any more time, because if you haven't brought them back by then, it will be too late anyhow. As of right now, the clock is running. Lieutenant Schmidt will be your ground support and give you further details when you're in the air." "Yes sir! Has an emergency departure been filed with Milwaukee sir?" "Being done now. From here on it's your mission, Good Luck!" Scott quickly saluted and left. The clock was running as Scott rushed himself to the cockpit. *Old habits die hard*, Seaver thought as he tossed his "lucky" flight helmet behind the pilot's seat. It wouldn't be needed today. The Black Hawk had its own set of pilot and co-pilot helmets. This was high-tech time. The Hawk's helmets were actually much more than just protective devices. They were also part of the helicopter itself. The front shield housed a "heads up display" or HUD and infrared goggles were attached for night flying and rescue, not to mention the built-in microphone and ear sets and multi-channel mission radio. He adjusted the two quick adjust knobs and it conformed to his head perfectly. Well maybe not perfectly, but comfort wasn't a military prerequisite. "Guard Base, this is Sierra Six, Six, Six. Team is aboard, departing with authorized emergency take off." The last call was a chance for the base to abort a potentially dangerous departure and at the same time verify over the radio frequency that he had authorization for the risky maneuver. "Sierra Six, Six, Six authorized, frequency change approved." Even as the pilot was being cleared to start the engines, his hand was on the switch and he started number one engine spinning up. The sound of a jet engine spooling up and the building up of internal air pressure began. Though typically the Black Hawk is flown with two pilots, today the luxury of a copilot wasn't available. So Scott was twice as busy going through the mental checklist. When the engine pressure was critical, the ignition switch was flipped and the powerful turbine produced its own power. He quickly started number two engine spooling while watching to make sure that the number one engine didn't go into a critical over speed. Turbines sometimes, though very rarely, did that on startup. If it did, an immediate shutdown would have to be initiated or the engine would blow itself up. Scott glanced at the number two engine. The pressure was near critical and after another couple of seconds another switch was flipped and the second engine ignited. Temperatures immediately climbed and he had two powerful fifteen hundred horsepower engines spinning. *Shit!* he thought. He had taken his eyes off the RPM indicator for the number one engine for one second too long. It was in the red but he still had time to shut it down. It took him another second or two of staring at the cluttered instrument panel to

find the shutdown switch. *Shit!* he thought again. But before shutting it down his eye caught the RPM gauge and saw it was back in the green. The captain didn't want to make the same mistake twice and glimpsed at the number two engine. It settled in right away. It took five more long seconds to make sure both engines were secure. The time the engines needed to warm up was efficiently used to turn on the main electric power and set his radios. "Milwaukee, this is Guard Sierra Six, Six, Six off of West Bend. I need an emergency departure, runway Zero Six, easterly, three thousand." In a few short words the pilot had given the Milwaukee radar departure group the critical information they would need to get him safely away from any other traffic. They now knew exactly what aircraft was calling them, where it was, where it was going and at what altitude. The engine temperatures were still a bit cold. Under normal circumstances, the checklist would require a wait for them to warm before adding more power, but people's lives depended on every second he could save. "Guard Sierra Six, Six, Six, cleared as filed, squawk guard frequency, departure 133.85. Hold for release for aircraft on final." Milwaukee, in equally efficient radio use authorized the clearance, but because of a landing aircraft it couldn't give the chopper permission to depart the field yet. "Milwaukee, negative. This is an emergency and you get that pilot the hell out of here. I need air now!" Captain Seaver demanded. "Guard, stand by." Almost instantaneously he heard. "Guard copter cleared for departure." Scott pushed both power levers forward and watched his radar altimeter begin to move. They were airborne. *Damn!* He thought. *This thing really does have power to spare, but now wasn't the time to spare it.* The pilot put a bit more distance between the chopper and the ground and aggressively tipped the copter forward. The craft departed parallel to runway Zero Six. The aircraft would have to fly this heading a little northeast for just a few more moments, then he would turn it due east. "Milwaukee departure, Guard Sierra Six, Six, Six, three thousand, Zero, Niner, Zero" With just a small burst of radio time, he relayed the pertinent information to the radar controllers. "Guard Six, Six," the controller shortened the call sign even more to save the precious radio time. "Go to emergency frequency for further assistance." Scott retuned his radio and pressed the transfer switch to change the active frequency as he pushed the chopper into full forward motion one thousand feet over the surrounding rolling countryside. The captain realized that he was just below the cloud deck; he hoped that the ceilings wouldn't drop further before he got to the lake. "Guard Six, Six to Guard Base, looking for last known coordinates of the water craft." Lieutenant Schmidt responded immediately, "Last known position was 43 degrees and 23 minutes north and 87 degrees and 30 minutes west." Captain Seaver responded by repeating the coordinates. Lt. Schmidt acknowledged that they had been repeated correctly. This time Seaver only keyed his microphone switch twice to reply an understood response, thus saving precious fractions of seconds on the radio. Scott reached his left hand toward the GPS in his radio stack. The GPS unit was state of the art, translation.... brand new to him. After pushing a few wrong buttons, it came back to him exactly how to set coordinates for a destination rather than just picking an airport or navigation aid from an alphanumeric listing. Soon the longitude and latitude were entered. With a push of the "DIRECT" button on the GPS, the course was verified. The pilot triple checked the numbers because even a small mistake here meant that he could be led miles away from where he wanted to be and that would mean certain death to the family. Scott was starting to sweat. The pressure of doing everything just perfectly was getting to him. Not only did the GPS have to be reconfigured, a unit he wasn't as familiar with as he should be, but the course and altitude needed to be maintained. Also the engine gauges needed to be monitored and a visual watch for other aircraft was just as important, all while trying to remember exactly how to actually fly the high-tech device. The Black Hawk was still in visual conditions and that meant that other aircraft could also be flying visually, so all aircraft had the obligation to watch out for the other. *Right now going IMC could be a blessing,* the captain thought. The heading indicator needle jumped into position. If it had been programmed correctly, it should now lead them directly to the last known position of the capsized boat. Seaver didn't actually expect to find the boat there. It certainly would have drifted, but he had to start somewhere and it might as well be there. It was about fifteen miles to the lake on their current heading. Scott saw the blackness of the lakeshore approaching. The setting sun was casting a long, dark shadow over the water from the bluffs above it. He glanced at the flight timer and saw that a precious five

minutes had gone by. The old Huey would have taken twice as long to get this far. At this speed, they would arrive at the scene ten to fifteen minutes sooner than in the Huey, which could easily mean life or death to the victims. Not hard to guess which aircraft any potential survivors would want. Scott looked up from the moving map display on the GPS just in time to see a red flashing light coming quickly toward him. Instinctively pulling back on the joystick in his left hand the helicopter shot almost straight up. He didn't even know if the other pilot saw them as it took no evasive procedures. The small single engine plane shot past and under the Hawk. They probably wouldn't have collided but betting on "probably" wasn't good enough. Trying to be a hero and chancing a collision just to save a few seconds wasn't worth it. Flying and rescuing was all about risk management. Any potential survivors would no longer be survivors if the helicopter never got there at all because the pilot took a stupid risk. The timer clicked six minutes just as the chopper crossed the bluffs overlooking the lake, which was quickly losing its shimmer. He wished that there were another set of eyes helping to look for the survivors. The rest of the team in the back of the helicopter including the "swimmers," would be getting ready at this time and wouldn't have time to help the pilot watch for survivors. "Swimmers prepare, ETA five minutes!" the pilot announced over the onboard radio as he continued to scan the water's surface. Scott used a wide scan, assuming that the westerly wind would be pushing the capsized sailboat toward the shore. The time from the initial distress call and position report to their arrival could easily be fifteen to twenty minutes. A boat adrift could cover a lot of water in that time, and its passengers would be very cold and tired, probably near exhaustion. The captain scanned the entire windscreen in front of him until he spotted something white in the distance. It could be a white cap, a nautical term for the crest of a wave breaking, or was it something else. The small movement was further north and would take him off course. Scott made the almost instant decision to investigate. The odds of the vessel being at its last reported position were slim to none anyway. Banking the copter instinctively to the left, the chopper turned too fast and he lost the line on the spot of white. With a smaller, careful correction to the right all they could do now was to fly with his best guess in the general direction of the last target. The sun was setting fast and the constant breaking waves made everything below look the same. Scott felt the tension in his right hand as it gripped the flight stick way too tightly. Usually adrenalin helped him in a situation like this, but right now it was causing him to over fly the aircraft. What was it that he had said to Major Allen, something about "a ham handed pilot like me?" Scott took a deep breath and let it out slowly. He had taken a big gamble by going after a small glimpse of white. It could have been just another wave breaking, or nothing at all. Scott tried to keep up the scan of instruments in front of him and the water all around him. A copilot wouldn't be a luxury right now he reasoned. Another pair of eyes was desperately needed. Could he have missed something while he scanned the instruments? "Shit!" the pilot cursed. "I don't have time for this crap." Their course was due north and they were getting closer to the shoreline. Captain Seaver banked right again a bit more aggressively and dropped the chopper a thousand feet. It was still a thousand feet above the water according to the radar altimeter. If he descended much farther his scan would be compromised, but the darkening skies were forcing him lower just the same. It was time for another decision. If the pilot donned the infrared goggles, they might help him spot contrasting temperatures such as a warm hull or possibly even body heat against the cold water. But it would also severely limit his scan and the chance of glancing just past such an object would increase. *DAMN! Where are they?* he thought. "TEAM PREPARE TO JUMP." Scott practically screamed into the helmet mic. Was it just dumb luck or did his search pattern finally pay off? He didn't care right now; the rescue was on. An instant later the pilot switched to his military frequency and reported to Lieutenant Schmidt that they had located the capsized sailboat and were beginning the rescue operation. The captain hadn't dared turn on the searchlights before now for fear of taking away his night vision and restricting the field of view. But right now, the search team would want all the light they could get. Scott, much more carefully this time, pulled back on the flight stick with his wrist and cut power slowly to settle the chopper over the water just above the capsized boat. "Crew Chief, your chopper!" Captain Seaver instructed. From the pilot's position he couldn't see exactly where the rescue swimmers wanted to go or where they wanted the cable and winch to be centered. It was now the crew chief's job. "Keep the chopper stabilized!"

the crew chief cautioned. Scott wanted to call back that he was doing his best against the gusting wind, but the crew chief didn't want someone doing his best. The chief needed the chopper steady. If this was a land rescue, Captain Seaver would be able to engage the autopilot. The autopilot was a marvelous device that would use the current GPS coordinates down to the foot to keep the chopper in place. Over a land target, it worked great but their target was drifting with the wind and currents. It would take all the skill and luck the pilot had to keep the copter drifting with the survivors as he fought the gusting wind. Scott focused on the bow of the turned craft and decided that he would keep his Hawk in line with the boat below. It was at least some sort of reference. As the small boat drifted, the captain could assume so would the survivors below. That seemed to work to the crew chief's satisfaction. "OK, let it drift left, but keep it steady. Now take her lower!" Scott elected to keep the power up, but he changed the pitch of the rotating blades. They cut into the air less aggressively and the copter descended down to twenty-five feet above the water. He held it there. With the waves below swelling, he had better not settle down any lower. Soon Seaver heard, "Swimmers away." Scott tried to keep his heart from pacing too fast and did some slow deep breathing to calm himself. Now there were two more persons he was responsible for in the frigid water. "Cable going down; we're going for the children first." Scott could only picture what was happening directly beneath the beating thumping blades of the Black Hawk. He imagined the downwash whipping and pelting the people below with cold icy crystals of water. Captain Seaver struggled to stay both focused and as strange as it may seem, relaxed. A tight pilot wouldn't feel the buffeting and be able to correct for it. This was no time to be "ham handed" with the touchy controls. The experienced chopper pilot had the aircraft trimmed out as best as possible. That meant the aircraft was aerodynamically balanced and he could fly it all day without becoming physically tired. But the mental strain of keeping the aircraft essentially motionless, hanging in the air by the beating blades, took all the concentration he could muster. "We have a new passenger on board, Captain!" the crew chief informed him in a matter-of-fact calm tone. A third member of the rear rescue team would be administering medical help and getting each passenger safely positioned before the next rescued person would be brought on board. "Cable going down!" He heard over the headset. *Well I wanted practice*, Scott told himself. And, he was getting it! The team was trained to work quickly and soon the team leader announced that the second survivor was onboard. As one survivor was being hoisted onboard the big chopper, the divers would prepare another with the bright orange combination floatation ring and lifting sling. Not a second could be wasted. Suddenly the chopper listed violently to the left. A big gust of wind had given the rotating blades, or more accurately the rotating wings, uneven lift. This caused the Black Hawk to tip left, which caused the chopper to make an aggressive sideways motion away from the bobbing hull and toward the churning waves below. At this low height, the rotor blades could quickly catch the top of a swelling wave. The huge blades had over a fifty-three foot span which meant that a sideways tilt could put the tip of his blades within feet of the water. But the chopper didn't maintain altitude. It had lost lift with the uneven slant. In a blink of an eye the blades came dangerously close to the churning water. In another instant, they would catch on a wave with disastrous results. Scott was glad he left the power up. The over sensitive controls were thankfully quick. Scott righted the copter while simultaneously pointing the copter into the gust. With a flick of his wrist the rotating wings took bigger slices of air and the copter shot up. It was a wild ride, but it worked. "Nice catch!" were the calming words over the radio headset. "Settle her down to twenty feet and let it drift left slowly," the crew chief said calmly into the onboard communication system as he repositioned the big chopper for the final rescue. The pilot concentrated on not letting another gust catch him off guard and tried to keep the center of the copter directly over the rescue position. He then attempted another plan of letting the entire fuselage weather vane with the gust; it was something he should have been doing sooner. The new technique was helping. He thought that he must have been in some sort of trance when he heard from the crew chief, "All survivors aboard Captain; lowering cable for the dive team." Scott didn't know where the time had gone. He was undoubtedly so focused on keeping the chopper steady that he had missed the other three calls, or had he, he wondered. Just then the chopper shook; it was only twenty-five feet over the water. The chopper started losing precious altitude. With his right hand, which had been oddly

idle for most of the time, the pilot pushed in full power on both engines. The chopper jerked and shot up forty feet in an instant. Scott repeated to himself an old flying adage. *Just fly the plane!* The saying was an automatically rehearsed response to an emergency situation in an aircraft. Many an airplane and crew were lost not to the emergency situation directly, but because the pilot became so transfixed on fixing the problem that he quite literally forgot to keep flying the airplane. A stall or bank would ensue and before he knew it, a perfectly flyable aircraft wasn't flying anymore. The rescue swimmers were still in the water, but for now they were safe. The guard members had been trained in water survival and had on protective gear. The protective gear would help them last much longer in the icy water than if their bodies were unprotected. *Fly the plane!* the pilot told himself once more as the chopper steadied at five hundred feet, giving just the least bit of safety. "Manage the risk," Scott repeated softly. A quick glance at the instruments told him that it was the number two engine. It had shut itself down for some reason. If he had been flying his Huey he and his passengers would be swimming right now. Secure it or restart it, there were only two options. There was no time to waste. Losing an engine caused a cascade of events, all of which a pilot was suppose to be ready to deal with. But it happened so fast. Not only did the chopper lose the thrust of fifteen hundred horsepower but at the same time the aircraft picked up an extra eight hundred pounds of dead weight from that same non-working engine. The combination of negative lift factors could be and often was fatal. The copter was stable at five hundred feet. Captain Scott Seaver was feeling more confident that he had the aircraft under control with each passing second. *Thank God it wasn't carrying a full load of fuel.* He realized that he needed to make another life or death decision and needed to make it quickly. The whole point of two engines, besides giving more power, was the fact that if something happened to one of them, the Black Hawk could still fly home. Nobody ever promised it would fly well, but a competent pilot could or should get it out of harm's way and to safety as soon as possible. This pilot had five civilians onboard for whom he was responsible. They were possibly injured, but definitely suffering from hypothermia. There were also three other lives including his own. The decision was whether it was worth taking the risk of hovering over dangerous water with only one engine operative. Could he risk seven lives to save two more, even if they were his people in the water? If another gust came along, there wouldn't be the power this time to save it and the passengers on board. The Black Hawk was still hovering five hundred feet above the floundering boat and the remaining team members in the frigid water. Every second of inaction over action was dangerous, wasted time. A glance at the timer showed that forty-five minutes had already gone by. Over half of the fuel was already used up, and no pilot wanted to make his landing with only minutes or seconds of fuel left. So that gave him one-half hour of flying time left at best. "Sir!" A call came over the onboard radio. These people are in trouble; all of them are experiencing severe hypothermia and need to get to a hospital." "DAMN!" Captain Seaver swore out loud to himself over his dilemma. The numbers weren't coming to him fast enough, if at all. *How much weight can the Black Hawk carry with one engine? Would lifting another four hundred pounds of swimmers below make them too heavy? Damn! I should know this.* The rescuers were in the water for approximately onehalf hour already. *How much longer could they stay there?* "Base, this is Sierra, Six, Six, Six! How far out is the coast guard cutter out of Milwaukee?" "Sierra, Six, Six, Six. They left port at the same time you did, E.T.A. ten minutes." "Base, we have an emergency; engine out, survivors all onboard, swimmers in the water." Scott was glad for government procedures and glad the government didn't mind burning up extra fuel. His rescue swimmers would be OK. Scott radioed his exact position; the Coast Guard Cutter's own GPS would guide them directly here. Scott thought about his training. *Manage the risk! Can we wait ten more minutes?* Scott glanced at the fuel gauge; fuel reserves were OK. *SHIT!* Now he knew why the number two engine quit. *SHIT! OK, OK, Fly the plane!* He calmed himself. *Don't do more harm.* That was more of a doctor's mantra, but it worked here too. The chopper was stable. Scott decided to secure the dead engine. That meant that he wouldn't attempt an air restart, which could be potentially dangerous. "Medic, can the survivors hold on for another half hour until we are at the hospital?" "Don't know Captain. They don't seem to be getting any worse. The young boy is in the worst shape and needs immediate care." *DAMN!* Scott didn't want to leave the area until he was sure the coast guard could find his men. He didn't want to leave them in the frigid water

alone. With his light on the small boat below, the coast guard would be able to spot the divers much faster, and time was everything. "Coast Guard to Sierra, Six, Six, Six. We have you in sight." "Roger that Coast Guard, they're all yours." With that, Scott peeled away carefully, realizing that he only had half the power with twice the weight. Saint Joseph's was the closest hospital with a heliport and was thirty-five miles from their current location. Fuel was running low and they would be much slower going back in than going out. It was just a matter of time now before the victims would be safely on the ground and under a doctor's care. Scott reminded himself not to get complacent; the Hawk was still overloaded for only one engine and it needed to be flown very cautiously. With Murphy's Law, anything that can and will go wrong still could. The pilot punched in the preset GPS coordinates for Saint Joseph's Hospital. At the speed they were flying the GPS calculated that it would be twenty-five more minutes to the hospital. "Base, Sierra Six, Six, Six, please notify Saint Joseph's that we are twenty-five minutes out." "Roger that, Sierra Six, Six, Six." Scott could only imagine the ass chewing he would be getting. The only good news is he didn't crash the helicopter, at least, not yet. Before long, the blue lights of the hospital helipad were in sight and Scott did a perfect one-engine landing. Captain Scott Seaver took a few very deep breaths as he shut down the simulator just as he would a real Black Hawk. The winding sound of a jet engine stopped as did the sound of the gyroscopic instruments. It was uncanny how real the simulator was once the back door was closed and all you could see were the instruments in front of you and the high-resolution projection across the lifelike windscreen. Not only did the simulator look exactly like a real Black Hawk inside, the entire structure of the sim was mounted on huge hydraulic arms that mimicked every motion of the controls so the simulator handled identically to the real thing. But that was the point. Once a pilot saw the ground below him fade away and an exact replica of the West Bend Airport projected all around him on the windscreen as he departed the field it all became very, very real. And with the database in the computer it could simulate almost any airport in the world and quite a bit of the terrain surrounding it. To say that it wasn't a real experience would be a lie; everything about it was real. Flying a real helicopter was mostly fun; the simulator was never, ever fun. That was why the pilots named it Sierra, Six, Six, Six. Sierra stood for S as in Simulator and the 666 signified it was the simulator from hell, and Lieutenant Schmidt was the devil in charge. The lights flicked on and Lieutenant Schmidt opened the back door to the simulator. "Nice flying Captain!" The lieutenant complimented sincerely. "I tossed some pretty wicked winds at you for a while there." It was also Lieutenant Schmidt who played the part of traffic control, crew chief, Coast Guard, medic and anybody else who interacted with the pilot during the session. "Thanks, but why do I think I'm going to get my ass chewed out anyways?" "It wouldn't be a sim session if you didn't, sir." "RIGHT!" Captain Seaver drawled out, then remembering his helmet. It felt strange to not have it in his hand as he left the cockpit. He reached back, grabbed it and held it wearily in his right hand. The cold air of the outer sim room felt good against his wet brow. Captain Seaver realized that his hair was matted from sweat. That wasn't unusual because the physical and mental workout was real. Scott had often thought that if he could convince himself that the entire sim experience was just a game, he would relax and do better. But once the programmed session got underway, it was all but impossible to not feel totally involved. It was just minutes ago that he had been focused on saving the young boy, even though the whole scenario was made up by Lieutenant Schmidt. "Major Allen asked me to tell you that Lieutenant Mayor is on the way in to relieve you and he told me that he appreciates you sticking around, and that the sim session is on the house." "Does that mean you will be burning the report Lieutenant?" Scott asked. "Sorry sir, can't do that. But it won't go onto your official record and that might be a good thing sir. Your score wasn't real high." "I know, I know," Scott walked away wearily to the showers as he said to himself sadly, "I know, I know!" Captain Seaver went directly from the sim room to the washroom. First, he took a piss; it was something he seemed to need to do more often lately. Then the worn pilot splashed some cold water over his face. Scott looked in the mirror at himself as he wiped his face dry with a paper towel and saw every line of his considerably wrinkled face; the crows' feet around his baggy eyes were deep and furrowed. "Where did you come from old man?" the reflection asked. Mostly, Scott didn't feel old. He kept himself in great shape, even for a man his age, he reminded the man in the mirror. Sometimes the

captain even felt young. But more and more, he didn't have to remind himself of his age. His body did, in one way or another. Scott knew that Lieutenant Mayor wouldn't be in for another hour or so. That meant there was just enough time to get his ass chewed out by Major Allen. Captain Seaver slowly straightened up and combed his still full head of hair neatly to make himself presentable to his commanding officer. He took in a great gulp of air and exhaled it slowly. He lifted his six foot frame tall and braced himself for the coming simulator debriefing. "Sit down Captain," Major Allen gestured with his hand warmly. "How about we go over the 'Good, the Bad and the Ugly,'" he joked. It wasn't a particularly ominous suggestion. He had used the saying many, many times before to anyone who might be sitting in the hot seat after a sim session. "How about we do the good first?" It was of course a rhetorical question by the major. "I didn't know there was any?" Scott answered back with a bit of selfdepreciating humor. Bob just smiled slightly and started his review. "Liked the way you handled the Milwaukee departure controller. A more inexperienced pilot might have let a controller get away with delaying an emergency flight." Scott had forgotten about some of the good things he had done during the simulated rescue. "Yes sir, thank you sir." Scott knew that this was a very formal time between them. This was all business and his career in the guard was dependent on these types of reviews. "Also your flying instincts are still well honed. Your evasive action prevented a probable mid-air collision. You missed the small plane that was coming right at you. Lieutenant Schmidt didn't give you much time to see it and respond. Good job." "Yes sir," Scott responded quickly, not filling in the part that he had been looking away just before he luckily spotted the approaching light in time to dodge it. "You could have been quicker with the GPS. As I said before a little more book time would help. I would also suggest that you take the portable GPS home and practice with it in simulator mode for a while. That will help a lot." "Yes sir, I will do that sir," Scott replied respectfully. "Your search and rescue instincts are still remarkable Scott." Captain Seaver was getting a bit more comfortable in the chair as his commanding officer complimented him, but that didn't mean he was out of the woods yet. Scott knew better than that. The "Bad and the Ugly" were sure to come, but it was encouraging to hear that as a pilot, he wasn't a complete failure. "Finding a capsized boat in that damned, rolling washing machine called Lake Michigan is more art than science, and more instinct than skill. I can honestly say that I don't know how to teach it to somebody. I truly wish I could. You have the instinct and always did. Even in Desert Storm you always knew where to fly and more importantly where not to." "Almost always, sir!" Captain Seaver quipped back, correcting his commanding officer. Both of them clearly remembered the one time his instincts failed him, and nearly got the captain and his crew killed. Scott reflected back to the failed reconnaissance mission. Scott thought he saw a missile battery and flew toward it. It had just been a decoy. Soon, a ground to air missile was headed toward them from behind. Scott realized his blunder and turned just in time to see the weapon coming right at them. On instinct he gyrated the Huey in time to save them, but the missile caught the edge of a runner, and when it exploded, shrapnel pierced the engine. The jets on patrol with them saw what had happened and immediately took out the missile site and its occupants. The Huey went down hard, and the team was captured. They were locked in some sort of steel equipment container. The desert was hot that day, and the inside of the container was like an oven. Scott didn't remember much more than that. He had been injured quite severely during the crash. The report says that not only was the captain injured but he was tortured for a period of days along with the rest of his crew. It took another team from the Special Forces to rescue them. Even that, he didn't remember. The last thing Scott did remember was waking up in the field hospital. His cracked flight helmet was sitting on the stand next to his bed to remind him of how hard his head had hit against something. Bob Allen was the commanding officer for that mission; it was his face that Scott saw when his eyes finally opened. It had been Bob's job to do the debriefing of the crew for the official report. He immediately assured Scott that he had done a masterful job of landing the damaged aircraft and had acted heroically during the entire ordeal. Scott was brought back to current debriefing when he heard Bob's voice say. "Sometimes even the best instincts aren't good enough," the Major found a way to break into the "Bad and the Ugly" part of his review. Captain Seaver quickly lost his smile with that warning. The commander's voice changed to a quiet somber tone that sounded ominous to Scott. Bob looked away for a second or

two and said, "My god Scott, this isn't easy for me. You're a damned good pilot, one of the best." The major looked back at Scott. "Those heavy gusts of wind that Schmidt tossed at you have crashed many pilots doing the same simulation. Others couldn't keep it over the target like you did and others would never even have found the target in the first place." Scott couldn't contain his silence. "If all that is true, what are you trying to tell me Bob?" Out of place or not, Scott made it personal between them. "Damn it Scott!....., Damn it," Bob said more quietly the second time. "If Lieutenant Schmidt wouldn't have reset the engines you never would have gotten off the ground in the first place." Bob looked down at his shiny black shoes for a moment and took a deep breath. "What do you mean?" Scott demanded. "The Ugly Scott, the Ugly." Calmly the commanding officer continued. "On start-up, the number one engine over spooled. It red lined. You took it out. Mission canceled before it began. All the instincts in the world won't help if you can't get the damned thing in the air." "What are you talking about?" Scott asked calmly but confused. "I watched the video of you in the cockpit. It's like you froze on startup; you looked right at the gauge as it climbed and did nothing, nothing. I don't understand it myself. Then you calmly started number two engine as if nothing had happened. You didn't even *try* to shut it down." Bob emphasized the word "try." Scott tried to remember the start-up sequence, but for some reason it was a blank. The captain couldn't even argue with his commanding officer because for some reason he couldn't remember that particular string of events. Did the gauge red line? For some strange reason he couldn't remember starting either engine or remember watching the gauges at all. "Sir, I've been starting turbine engines for as long as I can remember. Waiting for the catch is something I don't even think about any more. It is automatic. I just can't believe that I could possibly miss something like that." "It's not just that Scott. Do you know why your engine quit when you were out over the lake?" Scott pressed his mind to remember the details of the simulation, gradually starting to remember parts of the flight. It was like the simulated rescue flight was playing in slow motion in his mind. He couldn't remember starting the engines, but did remember missing the small plane, so he tried to fast-forward his mind from that memory to the engine going out. Major Allen waited for a response, noticing a blank look on his friend's face. "Scott, Scott..., what's the matter?" Seaver heard his name just as the simulator flight came back into focus. "Of course, I know sir; I lost fuel to that engine." Scott felt his palms sweat, but yet his body felt suddenly cold. "Yes, you lost fuel to that engine, but the point was you had plenty of fuel on board. You never checked the fuel once, not even on start-up. You didn't know which tank your fuel was in or you would have switched tanks." Scott suddenly felt disorientated and dizzy; his face felt flushed. He looked up at Bob and saw him talking but nothing was making sense. Major Allen saw his friend's head bob and weave a bit. "Scott, Scott! Are you all right?" he asked, suddenly very concerned. Scott looked up slowly and said. "May I please be dismissed? I am not feeling so well." Bob picked up his phone and hollered into it. "Schmidt, Schmidt, get in here immediately. Something is wrong with Scott." Any sense of formality was gone. Something was wrong with his friend and the calm, cool commander was feeling a bit of panic for one of the few times in his life. Chapter 3 The lieutenant rushed in without knocking; he was just in time to help his commander guide a limp Captain Seaver to the side couch. Lieutenant Schmidt was an emergency medical technician and took charge of the situation after helping his wobbly friend drop onto the couch. "Let's get his legs elevated; he seems very light headed. What happened?" Major Allen quickly explained how the captain's eyes had started rolling and how he seemed disoriented. "He wouldn't be the first pilot who got sick from the simulator," the lieutenant explained. The commander disagreed with the assessment. "Scott never got motion sickness in a sim or anywhere else. I've seen him do things with an aircraft that, well, shouldn't have been aerodynamically possible and he never got sick. I did, but Scott just laughed at me." "Doesn't matter. Things change. People change. He isn't the young pilot you used to know anymore ... sir!" Schmidt thought he had better add a "sir" at the end of his statement when he saw his commander's annoyed expression at the reference that neither of them was as young as they once were. As Lieutenant Schmidt checked the captain's pulse he added, "The simulator is high work load, high stress, and its motion, though simulating the movements of a real aircraft, are somewhat unnatural. Even the best can get sick from a tough simulator session." "Not Scott," the commander said quietly, "not Scott." "Look, he's

coming around; his color is coming back," the medic observed. "Captain, Captain, can you hear me?" he asked quietly as he knelt down next to the dazed pilot. Scott realized he was lying down and his feet were propped up. Rather quickly he was gaining his senses. "What the hell happened," he asked somewhat woozily. "Take it easy," Bob explained. "You fainted or something." Scott tried to get up but the medic stopped him by using his flat palm to press gently on the captain's chest. "Just take it easy for a few more minutes, sir." "Oww!" Scott grimaced and pulled his hand away from the EMT. "What are you doing that for?" "I just had to prick your finger for a small blood test, sir. I need to do a blood sugar test." "I don't remember what happened." "That's not unusual," Randy reassured. "People seldom remember what happened immediately before a black out. The mind doesn't have time to file it away before things go blank." "I think I'm OK. Let me sit up. I promise I'll be a good boy." "OK slowly, and if you feel lightheaded I want you to tell me. Could you please get the captain a glass of water, sir?" The lieutenant wasn't used to asking his commander's help, but in this case he knew that the ranking officer would be more than glad to do something to be of assistance. When Major Allen returned with the water, Scott took it and joked, "Maybe I'm pregnant?" just to let the two concerned friends know that he was back to his old self. "Let's hope not, Captain," Bob quipped back. "There are flight rules against that sort of thing." "Yes sir!" Scott added smartly. "Besides, my wife would start wondering who I've been with." "Doesn't seem to be anything wrong with your blood sugars," the EMT announced. Scott stood up slowly as his nervous friends looked on. "I feel fine, honest. I don't know what happened but I feel much better now." "Scott, I insist on giving you a ride home and I won't take no for an answer," the base commander said firmly. It wasn't an order and didn't need to be. Scott was more wise than macho at this point of his life. A ride would be welcomed, and he realized a doctor's appointment was inevitably in his future too. Bob helped his friend pack up his civilian clothes. Normally Scott would have showered and changed out of his flight suit, back into his civilian clothes before leaving the base. But today things were anything but normal. He continually insisted that he was OK to anyone who asked, but the truth was he felt weak in the knees. Still in his flight suit, he climbed into his commander's personal car. The ride home was uncomfortably quiet for both of them, though to Scott the car ride seemed to have passed rather quickly. "I'll walk you to the house if you don't mind," Bob suggested. "Really that's not necessary, I feel fine," Scott insisted. "I'm sure you do. But I would feel a whole lot better if I knew that Elizabeth got an explanation from me about why you didn't drive yourself home. Remember you weren't even scheduled to be on the base today." Scott realized that he would have a hard time explaining everything to Elizabeth by himself and actually welcomed the backup. "Yea sure!" Scott agreed. "And driver, don't forget my bag," Scott wisecracked to his commanding officer. "You're getting close to insubordination, Captain," Bob scolded with a smile as he grabbed the bag from the back seat of his car. Scott walked through the front door of their brick two story home. "Honey I'm home," Scott announced as casually as usual. "Hi hon!" came a voice from the other room. "You're home early." "Well something came up at the office; Bob Allen is here with me." Just then Elizabeth came around the corner from the kitchen where she had been preparing supper. As soon as she saw her husband in his flight suit she said, "Oh. That office! I didn't know that you were on duty today," Elizabeth said in a sweet voice. A long time before they got married, Elizabeth had learned that flying was an important part of her new boyfriend's life. It was over twenty years ago when Elizabeth Marie London had first seen her sexy aviator in his green flight suit. She fell in love with him on the spot and was never afraid to admit it. It didn't take long for her to realize that if she truly loved him, she would have to accept his penchant for flying. Flying was his mistress and Liz knew that she would have to share Scott with her. "To what do I owe this unexpected pleasure Bob? I hope you can stay for supper; we have plenty." Elizabeth shot a sincere smile at their mutual friend. Major Allen could be as friendly as ice cream and apple pie if he wanted to, but right now it was business, serious business, and there was no point in putting it off. "Sorry Elizabeth, not tonight," said the commander declining the dinner invitation. Scott turned back to look at his friend and gave him a look that invited him to tell his wife what had happened. Bob caught his gaze. "Something happened at the base that I think you should be aware of," he started. Elizabeth suddenly turned her smiling inviting face away from Bob and toward her husband, showing

instant concern. This was highly unusual and that wasn't good. "Scott passed out in my office this afternoon," Bob blurted out, as if saying it quickly would make it less painful to hear. Immediately, Elizabeth Seaver took a position by her husband's side and held his hand. "Smooth Bob, real smooth," Scott groaned. "I'm fine Liz. Something didn't agree with me and I passed out for just a second. No big deal." Scott for some reason was the only one who got by calling his wife Liz. "No big deal?" Elizabeth protested. "Tell me exactly what happened." She wanted to know every last detail. "I stopped in at the base to check on a few things; I was talking to Bob and passed out for just a minute." Elizabeth became more concerned as the news started to settle in her mind. "Scott!" she ordered. "Sit down before you say another word." Scott didn't have a choice, as he was immediately pulled toward the living room couch, almost falling onto it. Elizabeth sat down next to Scott holding his hand concerned. How such a petite, gorgeous woman could so easily overpower him, he still didn't understand. The fact that she could control him so easily whenever she wanted was spooky. It was as if his free will was instantly neutralized and he was subject to her will whenever the love of his life insisted. It wasn't that she was demanding, because she wasn't, not of him, but when she got serious like she was now, lookout! It was times like this that she took charge, and when Mrs. Seaver took charge, there was no negotiating. Elizabeth reasoned that Scott would probably not be the best source of information in this case, so she held his hand tightly but asked her questions of their friend. "Robert, tell me what really happened. And don't you dare leave out a thing." "Scott stopped in to check on a few things, you know, some squaks on the Huey." Elizabeth was familiar with the flying term; it meant unoperational items that needed repair. "While he was talking to me about them, I got a call that Captain Fredric was in an accident and couldn't come in. I asked Scott if he could fill in until I could get a replacement." "And that's when Scott fainted?" she asked. "No, not exactly," Bob hesitated, suddenly feeling guilty for sending Scott into the simulator. "You see, I thought that as long as Scott was hanging around he might as well get some sim time. You know, he needed, I mean wanted, the practice anyhow." Elizabeth was quite familiar with the simulator training also. She had heard plenty of stories about tough simulator sessions, not only from Scott, but also from all of his pilot friends. Many of the stories were of course funny in hindsight, but often revolved around pilots who had actually for a second or two forgotten that they were safe inside of a simulator as they prepared to "land" for the last time of their life after having lost control of their aircraft due to some simulated failure. Bob continued, "Scott flew the Black Hawk on a simulated mission. After he was finished we were reviewing things and that was when he passed out, right on the chair in front of me. Lieutenant Schmidt, who is a trained paramedic, looked after Scott until he felt better. When Randy thought it was OK for Scott to leave, I insisted on driving him home." "That's all of it, Bob? Don't lie to me!" Elizabeth looked deep into Bob's eyes convinced that she would know if he were lying, but asking anyways. "Elizabeth, I promise, that is exactly how it happened." Then Bob asked suspiciously. "Has this ever happened before?" Without giving it a second thought Elizabeth said, "Never!" Then she looked at her husband with a bit of doubt. She realized that pilots who loved flying weren't always the first to mention a physical ailment that might ground them. "Scott..!" she warned with her most threatening voice. "Has this 'ever' happened to you before?" And Elizabeth emphasized the word "ever." "Hey, don't look at me that way." Scott felt like a little child caught in a lie by his mother. "You know that I could never lie to you. This is the first time this has happened, honest. I skipped lunch today and I think I just got a bit light headed because I was hungry or something like that." "You often get so wrapped up in your work that you skip lunch. Why would you faint today?" she quizzed back. "I don't know, Lieutenant Schmidt said that I probably got sick from being in the motion simulator." Scott tried to make another excuse. "Bull!" Elizabeth disagreed bluntly. "That's a lot of bull and you know it. I am calling the clinic right now and you are going to see the doctor immediately. We're going to the emergency room." Bob felt compelled to reassure Elizabeth a bit. "Lieutenant Schmidt took his pulse and blood pressure, and did a few simple tests. He didn't feel that there is anything life threatening going on." Scott was now really glad that his commanding officer had come home with him. Going to the emergency room wasn't something he thought he could argue against by himself. "See Liz, I'm fine." So much for getting lucky tonight, he realized. There was no way that his wife would let him make love to her until she

was satisfied such an effort wouldn't kill him. "Bob..." she pleaded. "Are you sure?" "I'm not a doctor, but I've watched plenty on TV, and I think he'll be fine until morning." Bob tried to lighten the situation. "I agree with Bob, and I'd stake my life on it," Scott quipped back. Bob muffled his chuckle but Elizabeth didn't think it was very funny. "I am calling the clinic, and you will do whatever 'they' say." This time she emphasized "they" and there was no question that she meant it. Bob felt obliged to stick around until after Elizabeth was satisfied everything was OK. The hospital nurse agreed that since a medic had already examined him and that he was otherwise in good health, they could wait until the next day when his family doctor could see him. Elizabeth had made the rules and now had to abide by them. "I am watching you like a hawk tonight, and if I get a hint of even the slightest complication, we are going straight to the emergency room." As Bob excused himself, he gave Scott a firm handshake, a strong pat on the back and assured him that he would be in touch. But he didn't get to leave until Elizabeth had given him a very thankful hug. As soon as Bob was out of the house, Scott asked his wife with an impish smile, "Do you want to make love tonight? I think you are so sexy when you act all worried about me." "That's not funny Scott." Elizabeth wasn't amused. "This is no act, you have me very worried." "I'm sorry, but think about it. People faint all the time. Heck, it happens so often they even made a television show out of showing people fainting at weddings and things." "Maybe people do faint, but you don't, and that's what worries me. The emergency room nurse is leaving a message with Dr. Mooney's office and tomorrow we are going to be there at 9:30 sharp, and that's that." Elizabeth went about her business in the kitchen while Scott showered and changed out of his flight suit. As Elizabeth was setting the table, the side door flew open as it usually did at this time of day. "Mom...! Mom...! I'm home.." Fourteen-year-old Avery Rose Seaver burst through the door. "Hi honey." Without acknowledging her mother's greeting, Avery continued into the room and slung her school backpack off her shoulders and into a corner on the kitchen floor. Elizabeth couldn't remember at what age Avery had claimed that small piece of real estate as hers, but it was, and her backpack lived there for nine months of the year. "You wouldn't believe what stupid Jeff Winfield did today. It was sooo...gross. And in gym, I was captain and I had to pick and I didn't want Julie Adams on my team in the worst way. I hate her. She is such a bitch." "Avery!" Elizabeth scolded. "Well, she is. But Debbie Ames was the other captain and she didn't want to pick her either, so on the last pick I had to take her, but then she got creamed on the first pass and I laughed. Then Miss Holden got mad at me." Without explaining more or skipping a beat, she continued. "What's for supper? I'm famished. It smells like meatloaf. It better not be meatloaf. We have to work on a lab project tonight so Kelly is going to come over." Scott came down the hallway. "Hi princess." "Please Daddy, don't call me that." The youngest Seaver protested, though not too seriously. Dad was quickly reminded that his little girl was turning into a woman. He had called her by that pet name since she was a little girl, always knowing that some day it would be out lived. Scott came up to her and gave her a big hug, which she still tolerated as long as no one else was around to see. "OK Rosie." Scott teased; his daughter hated being called by her middle name even more. Scott knew that his little princess was growing up, and though there were days when the young teenager's hormones gave him a headache, for the most part he felt as close to his daughter as he ever had. He also accepted the fact that he had better relish every second of it, because one day soon, she would be a young lady, gone to college, married, and before he knew it, would be having a family of her own. Then Avery Rose realized that her father's car wasn't in the drive. "Where's your car Dad? I didn't see it." Scott wouldn't have expected the average teenager to have noticed such a detail. Mostly they were so wrapped up in their own small but ever so important lives that the details of life surrounding them were considered too unimportant to even notice, but not his princess. He was constantly impressed how she seemed to absorb the world around her and almost on a subconscious level know and understood things beyond her years. Scott took a quick glance at his wife, looking for advice. He didn't want to worry his young daughter with the events of the day. But after a few uncomfortably silent moments, it was clear that Elizabeth wasn't going to be of help, at least not quickly enough. Liz she gave a slight shrug of her shoulders indicating that she didn't know what to answer either. "It wouldn't start." Scott came up with a protective lie. "Bob gave me a ride home from the base." Scott thought he caught a slight knowing sign in his

daughter's eye that Dad was lying, but if she did she let it go after giving her mother a quick glance just as Elizabeth turned away and busied herself at the sink. "If you get right to it, you still have time to get some homework done before we eat," her mother coached. That changed the subject, which was Elizabeth's hope. "Dad, Miss Salmon wants to know if you are going to help in Tae-Kwon-Do class. She says you are getting a bit rusty and should practice more. Mrs. Jacobson gave us two chapters to read, and she knows that we have to work on the lab project for tomorrow. She is such a bitch." "Avery Rose!" her dad scolded her this time. "A young lady doesn't refer to her teacher as a bitch." "Well, she is!" Calmly Scott lectured, realizing he was talking to a teenager and his words were going in one ear and out the other. "She is doing her job, and I thought you liked Mrs. Jacobson?" "Last year I had her for math and she was OK, but this year she's teaching English literature and she, like, became this book Nazi and thinks that we have to like all these books just because she likes them. She is such a bitch." Both parents echoed at the same time. "Avery!" Not wanting to hear another lecture, Avery grabbed her backpack off the floor and trounced to her room. As soon as she was out of sight the two parents looked at each other and laughed. Raising teenagers was a rough gig and even rougher if you took them too seriously. Elizabeth took the opportunity to ask again for the fourth or fifth time since Bob had left, "How are you feeling?" "I feel Miss Salmon should mind her own business. I don't think I'm getting rusty at my Tae-Kwon-Do skills," Scott defended himself sulking a bit. "And I can't help at practice this week; I have too much to do." "You know what I mean, and don't change the subject," Elizabeth scolded. "I'm fine Liz. I'm just fine and you will see tomorrow that the doctor will agree with me."

A family already in crises is the country's best hope to stop a terrorist bomb on the move, if they are not killed first.

War hero and current businessman Scott Seaver has always pushed his own limits. He struggles with the demands of running a business, raising a family, and finding time for his other love, flying a helicopter for the National Guard. While on the other side of the world, a nuclear bomb is being built to strike at the heartland of the United States. After years of careful terrorist coordination, the bomb is finally delivered to Chicago. Soon Scott finds himself fighting for his family's survival as terrorists take them hostage. Scott, on his own, must find a way to save those he loves and stop a bomb on the move.

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