

# Excerpt

Saturday, June 5

McCoy is first through the door. She hears the man running through the house, his bare feet scampering across the hardwood floor. “Back bedroom,” she is told through her earpiece by the team at the rear of the house, looking through the kitchen window, blocking an escape route.

They flood in behind her, a team of eight agents, but she is first down the hallway. Her back against the wall, both hands on the Glock at her side, she shuffles up to the bedroom door and listens a moment. Over the sound of her team’s shoes on the hardwood, she can hear sobbing. She reaches across the width of the door and tries the knob. The door opens slightly, then McCoy pushes it open with her foot and pivots, her Glock trained inside the room, and she sees what she expects.

He is standing at the opposite end of the bedroom, near what appears to be a walk-in closet and then a bathroom. A large bed, probably king-size, separates the man and McCoy.

McCoy holds up a hand behind her, freezing the other agents in place, before returning her hand to the other, on the Glock trained at the suspect.

“Put the gun down, Doctor,” she says.

Doctor Neil Lomas is a shell of the man she has seen in the company brochures. She stifles the instinct to think of him as a victim, though a victim, in many ways, is precisely what he is. It is hard to look at this man, in a rumpled white t-shirt with stained armpits, boxers and bare feet, fly-away hair and an emaciated frame, and see the promising scientist he once was.

The doctor is crying uncontrollably, his chest heaving and tears shooting from his eyes. Part of her job is seeing the worst in people, watching them feel, first-hand, the collapse of their lives. But usually they aren’t holding a revolver to their temple.

Behind her, McCoy hears one of the agents calling for paramedics on his radio. Others are searching the remainder of the house, kicking open doors and closets.

“I didn’t know,” Lomas manages through halting breaths, but of course that statement itself means that he did know, or at least suspected. “I didn’t. I didn’t know I didn’t—”

"I believe you, Doctor," she says calmly. "Place the gun on the bed and let's just talk."

"They'll kill me," he says.

He's not talking about the federal agents swarming outside the bedroom. She knows it. Doctor Lomas seems to assume she knows it.

"There's no 'they' anymore, Doctor. 'They' are all in custody. You're the last one."

He doesn't seem to be listening. Fear of death does not seem to be foremost on his mind. No, the notion propelling his body seizures, the heaving of his chest, the trembling of the arm that tries to keep the gun pressed against his skull, is not what will happen now but what has already taken place.

The room is in chaos. The top of the dresser is littered with dirty laundry. The bed is tossed and the pillows are stained from sweat. The smell is old Chinese food, at least two cartons of which she spots on the dresser. The television, resting in a dark oak armoire, is on a cable news station. The headline blaring across the bottom of the screen is, **Muhsin al-Bakhari Captured**. Reporters are live in northern Sudan, the cameras on the assault that took place last night on a convoy of terrorists, resulting in the capture of the number two man in the Liberation Front. The story has been front and center on the airwaves since late last night.

"You know why you're the last one we picked up?" McCoy says to Doctor Lomas, as evenly as she can. "Because we know you're not a threat. We know you're not a bad person. Because we know you were tricked."

McCoy is not sure whether she is lying or not, but she is relatively sure that Doctor Lomas thinks she is. By all accounts, he is a genius, regardless of how crippled his mind and spirit have become. He would expect McCoy to whisper sweet nothings in his ear. It will be all right if you just put down the gun.

"I've got a clear shot," comes a voice through her ear piece. A sharpshooter from across the street, training his rifle on the bedroom window. "On your go, Team Leader."

McCoy motions to the television set. "You see that, Doctor? You see we caught Mushi?"

Doctor Lomas blinks, as if surprised by the change of topics. Suicides, in these instances, often go down a single track on their way to pulling the trigger or slitting their wrists. The key is to pull them away from their tunnel vision, make them think about anything at all that might sober them up.

"So what." His voice breaks, trembles. His trigger finger twitches.

She is ten feet from the doctor, but the bed prevents any interception she might attempt. If this guy wants to die, she won't be able to stop him.

"So," McCoy says, "you helped make that happen. This," she says, nodding to him, then gesturing toward the T.V. set, "was about that."

A moment passes, in which she feels sure that Doctor Lomas will drop the weapon to his side. He seems to get her meaning, which tells her, even more than before, that he couldn't have been innocent in all of this. McCoy had never thought so.

"That—." Lomas's face contorts, a hideous, trembling snarl of a mouth struggling with the words. "That's where it went? To—to them? To terrorists?"

"We intercepted it," McCoy says quickly. "We have the formula in our possession. It's over, Doctor. No one was hurt."

"Allison Pagone," he whimpers. "She's dead because of me."

"No, Doctor," McCoy says, shuffling forward two steps. Damn this bed. She would like to move while she spoke, until she was close enough to whisper, but she will have to navigate around the bed, hardly a subtle progression forward.

"Don't come any closer." Lomas presses the gun hard against his temple. "I knew she didn't kill herself," he says, more to himself. "I knew they killed her." He starts to tremble again, his whole body, like a shot of electricity.

"Listen to me, Doctor, Allison Pagone—"

"I said no closer." Lomas takes another step back and brushes the wall. With the jerk in his movement, his right elbow drops and the gun slides off his temple, pointing upward.

McCoy fires once, into the brachial nerve near the collarbone on the doctor's gun side. The doctor's hand immediately releases the gun, which falls to the floor and bounces into the closet. Two reasons for severing the brachial nerve—he can't hold the weapon and he can recover from a shoulder injury; had she gone for his hand, he'd never be able to use it again.

She is on him immediately, as he slides to the floor. Lomas makes no effort to reach the gun. He doesn't even seem to notice the wound, a red, widening stain on his t-shirt, dark at the center. His chest heaves, his breathing thick with mucous.

McCoy finds the nearest piece of laundry, a pair of underwear, balls it up and applies pressure to the wound. Her partner calls to her, paramedics on the way, while Doctor Lomas stares wide-eyed, a deep, consistent moan coming from his throat.

McCoy talks to him. She tells him to hang on, everything is going to be okay. She looks up and sees the bullet mark in the wall, which means it went through cleanly, no ricochet down to a major organ. He was lucky. Luckier than some.

She talks to him, and applies pressure, until the paramedics arrive. When she rises to let them do their work, Lomas is still speaking to her—mumbles, not totally coherent, but he hasn't gone into shock. He will live.

Luckier than some.

She finds herself backpedaling into the bathroom, as Doctor Lomas is hustled out of the room on a gurney. She splashes some water on her face and lets out a five-month groan. Her partner, Owen Harrick, is behind her, smiling at her in the mirror.

"It's over, Janey," he says. "This is the end."

"Yeah." She shakes her hands of the water.

"What you have to do," Harrick advises, "is forget about the beginning."

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