

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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**LATENT
IMAGE**

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(UNEDITED PREVIEW PAGES)

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*Revenge, at first though sweet,
Bitter ere long back on itself recoils.*

—JOHN MILTON, *Paradise Lost*

PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF CREDIBLE THREAT OF STRIKE IN US

Clandestine, foreign government, and media reports indicate that key members of the al Saif terror organization have implied in interviews their acquisition of WMD and their intention to use them in order to drive out all U.S., and U.N. forces, contractors, and diplomats from Tariqistan, in support of a recent insurgency movement called the FTM "Free Tariqistan Movement."

The identity of the video's spokesperson is yet to be confirmed, but analysts believe it to be a high-ranking member of the terror organization al Saif, which has gained prominence in the years following the death of Osama Bin Laden.

Although al Saif's founder Massoud Haashir is dead, and its only attempt to strike at the U.S., was thwarted, their attacks against the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 2011 demonstrates that the organization continues to execute operations planned years in advance, and are not deterred by setbacks.

Al Saif members—including some who are US residents—have lived in or traveled to the US for years, and the group appears to maintain a support structure that could aid attacks. Two al Saif members found guilty in the conspiracy to bomb the Superbowl in 2010 were legal residents, one, a U.S. Citizen who lived California in the late 1990s.

We have not been able to corroborate some of the more inflammatory threat reporting, such as that from a [REDACTED] service in 2010 saying that Haashir had planned on another widespread attack on US infrastructure such as power and water supplies to leverage the withdrawal of US troops from Tariqistan.

Nevertheless, FBI information since that time indicates patterns of suspicious activity in this country consistent

with preparations for such attacks, including attempts to access the security systems of various utility plants.

The FBI is conducting approximately 80 full field investigations throughout the US that it considers al Saif related. CIA and the FBI are investigating all intelligence related to Tariqistani insurgency, and demands for US withdrawal.

For the President Only [REDACTED]

PROLOGUE

WASHINGTON, DC
January 23
2:28PM EST

IN THE CROSSHAIRS OF THE SNIPER'S SCOPE the target shifted in and out of view. The motorcade drifted down Pennsylvania Avenue, Secret Service agents flanking its side, while Vice President Phillip Marsden and his wife Gwen waved to the cheering crowd on either side of the street, behind the cold 16-gauge steel tubing of the barricades.

Neither of them was the target.

The sniper swung his scope back to the west, where the glare of the sun blinded him momentarily. He grunted, blinked and reestablished his view. The cold January wind bit at his bare fingers as he felt the trigger and anticipated the diversionary strike his partner would unleash half a block away.

Tuning out the trumpet strains of marching bands, the steady drum beats, and the crowd's applause, he initiated a silent countdown just as Jennifer Bradley, the nation's newly re-elected president strode past the designated spot.

...four...three...two...one...

2:30PM EST

SHE FOUGHT BACK TEARS as she walked across the asphalt, all the while trying to maintain that dauntless smile which some claimed to have helped her win her the election. Snow and broken ice had been shoveled over to the edges of the street so as to afford a clear path for everyone and everything in the procession—the floats, the Marines, the marching bands.

This would be her second term, having by succession fallen into the Oval Office after President Colson’s shocking conviction for that Vietnam War atrocities cover-up conspiracy, and his subsequent suicide. Now, four years later, having been elected the first female president should have made this, her inaugural parade, one of the most triumphal moments of her life.

But behind the winning smile, the appreciative waves, she couldn’t fully enjoy it.

If only Ben were here.

With her left hand holding onto Mikey’s, her eyes met his—deep set and blue like his father’s. He gave her a nod and such an

austere look she might have found it endearing, had the wound not been so deep and fresh. Ben had told him just two weeks ago, *Keep your head high. You're the man of the house now. I need you to look after Mommy for me.*

She'd dealt with leaders of unstable nations, headed up a war on human trafficking and took down cartels, but none of those enemies of freedom, life, and liberty were so cruel as the one that had taken her husband, Benjamin Bradley. Cancer had no mercy. Nor was it a respecter of men.

"You okay, Mikey?"

"Michael," he growled, and continued to scan the crowd. Though only nine years old, Mikey was taking his father's dying words more seriously than any of the Secret Service agents charged with their protection today.

"Just try to smile for Mommy today, you look so serious."

"I hafta look out for you, okay? Daddy said..." he tried to hold back a sob, bit his lip, then turned away trying to cover the fact that he was crying.

"Oh, sweetie..." Jennifer stopped, knelt down and wiped his tears with a handkerchief. This drew the attention of several onlookers, and one or two of the bodyguards. Maya, Jennifer's staff photographer came around discretely to capture this poignant moment evocative of the little John F. Kennedy Jr. saluting his father's casket during that state funeral procession

nearly half a century ago.

“I miss him, Mom.”

Without a thought for the millions watching both on the sidewalk, and over television, Jennifer wrapped her arms around her son and held him as he wept. She tried to sooth him with a gentle stroking of his hair.

But a deafening boom shattered the atmosphere, sending her to the ground over her son’s body.

TERRIFIED SCREAMS PIERCED the cacophony of car alarms, cries of panic and chaos everywhere. Jennifer Bradley's first thought was for Michael, over whom she had thrown herself.

"Stay close to me!" She heard herself say, but her voice sounded like she was underwater, her ears ringing.

A pair of hands suddenly lifted her to her feet. Campbell and Jones, and several other Secret Service agents surrounded them as they rushed her and Mikey to The Beast just a few yards ahead. They pushed through a thick cloud of smoke, but not quickly enough for her to miss the severed limbs and blood strewn across the street.

Acrid smoke.

Choking cries.

Shouts of horror.

A bomb had exploded—from the sound of it, maybe about thirty feet behind them.

As they reached the armored limo, Maya was following, camera in hand. Trying her best to stay out of the way, she

yielded to the agents covering Jennifer and Mikey, as the door opened.

Jennifer pushed Mikey in first.

“Madam President, you need to get in,” Campbell said.

“Maya!” she called out.

The photographer hesitated, stopped to look around as her camera fell and dangled from her neck. Another agent pushed her forward right up to the door, but she turned around in reaction to something in the distance.

Just then, a whisking sound stopped with a dull thud which Jennifer hadn’t so much heard, but felt, as she stumbled backwards into the limo.

Maya’s head swung back.

Her back hit the side of the car just as Campbell pushed the President inside, covering the door with his torso.

But from the crimson spray and grey matter that splattered on the window, Jennifer Bradley knew.

It was too late.

Maya had been shot.

She shielded Mikey’s eyes.

Campbell leapt inside, slammed the door shut and shouted to the driver. “Go, go, go!”

The limo sped off.

In the front passenger side, Jones droned into his walkie-talkie

something about POTUS being secure within The Beast.

Secure?

Staring at the streaks of blood sliding across the window, a thousand thoughts raced through her mind—the bomb, the victims, the inevitable national panic...

Oh God, Maya.

She would process it all later.

For the moment, only one thing mattered.

Mikey's safety.

Thanks for reading this excerpt. I apologize for leaving it off here. But keep an eye out for Latent Image when it's published. If you want to be the first to be notified about all publications, please subscribe to my free newsletter here:

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