

Tom Clancy

CLEAR ^{AND} PRESENT DANGER



BERKLEY BOOKS, NEW YORK

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*To the memory of John Ball,
Friend and teacher,
The professional who took the last plane
out*

Law, without force, is impotent.

—PASCA

It is the function of police to exercise force, or to threaten it, in execution of the state's purpose, internally and under normal conditions. It is the function of armed forces to exercise force, or the threat of it, externally in normal times and internally only in times that are abnormal. . . .

[T]he degree of force which the state is prepared to apply in the execution of its purpose . . . is as much as the government of the day considers it necessary or expedient to use to avoid a breakdown in its function and a surrender of its responsibilities.

—GENERAL SIR JOHN HACKETT

Prologue:

Situation

THE ROOM WAS still empty. The Oval Office is in the southeast corner of the White House West Wing.

Three doors lead into it, one from the office of the President's personal secretary, another from a small kitchen which leads in turn to the President's study, and a third into a corridor, directly opposite the entrance to the Roosevelt Room. The room itself is of only medium size for a senior executive, and visitors always remark afterward that it seemed smaller than they expected. The President's desk set just in front of thick windows of bullet-resistant polycarbonate that distort the view of the White House lawn, is made from the wood of HMS *Resolute*, a British ship that sank in American waters during the 1850s. Americans salvaged and returned it to the United Kingdom, and a grateful Queen Victoria ordered a desk made from its oaken timbers by way of official thanks. Made in an age when men were shorter than today, the desk was increased somewhat in height during the Reagan presidency. The President's desk was laden with folders and position papers capped with a printout of his appointment schedule, plus an intercom box, a conventional push-button multiline telephone, and another ordinary-looking but highly sophisticated secure instrument for sensitive conversations.

The President's chair was custom-made to fit its user, and its high back included sheets of DuPont Kevlar—lighter and tougher than steel—as additional protection against bullets that some madman might fire through the heavy windows. There were, of course, about a dozen Secret Service agents on duty in this part of the Presidential Mansion during business hours. To get here most people had to pass through a metal detector—in fact all did, since the obvious ones were a little *too* obvious—and everyone had to pass the quite serious scrutiny of the Secret Service detail, whose identity was plain from the flesh-toned earpieces that coiled out from under their suit jackets, and whose politeness was secondary to their real mission of keeping the President alive. Beneath the jacket of each was a powerful handgun, and each of these agents was trained to view everyone and everything as a potential threat to WRANGLER, which was the President's current code-name. It had no meaning beyond being easy to say and easily recognizable on a radio circuit.

Vice Admiral James Cutter, USN, was in an office on the opposite, northwest corner of the West Wing and had been since 6:15 that morning. The job of Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs requires a man to be an early riser. At a quarter to eight he finished off his second cup of morning coffee—it was good here—and tucked his briefing papers into a leather folder. He walked through the empty office of his vacationing deputy, turned right down the corridor past the similarly vacant office of the Vice President, who was in Seoul at the moment, and turned left past the office of the President's Chief of Staff. Cutter was one of the handful of real Washington insiders—the Vice President was not among them—who didn't need the permission of the Chief of Staff to walk into the Oval Office whenever he felt the need, though he'd generally call ahead first to give the secretaries a heads-up. The Chief of Staff didn't like anyone to have that privilege, but that made his unlimited access all the more pleasant for Cutter to exercise. Along the way four security personnel nodded good

morning to the Admiral, who returned the gestures as he would greet any skilled menial. Cutter's official code-name was LUMBERJACK, and though he knew that the Secret Service agents called him something else among themselves, Cutter was past caring what little people thought of him. The secretaries' anteroom was already up and running, with three secretaries and a Secret Service agent sitting in their appointed places.

"Chief on time?" he asked.

"WRANGLER is on the way down, sir," Special Agent Connor said. He was forty, a section chief of the Presidential Detail, didn't give a goddamn who Cutter was, and could care less what Cutter thought of him. Presidents and aides came and went, some liked, some loathed, but the professionals of the Secret Service served and protected them all. His trained eyes swept over the leather folder and Cutter's suit. No guns there today. He was not being paranoid. A king of Saudi Arabia had been killed by a family member, and a former prime minister of Italy had been betrayed by a daughter to the terrorist kidnappers who'd ultimately murdered him. It wasn't just kooks he had to worry about. Anyone could be a threat to the President. Connor was fortunate, of course, that he only had to worry about physical security. There were other sorts; those were the concerns of others less professional than he.

Everyone stood when the President arrived, of course, followed by his personal bodyguard, a lithe, thirtyish woman whose dark tresses neatly concealed the fact that she was one of the best pistol shots in government service. "Daga"—her Service nickname—smiled good morning at Pete. It would be an easy day. The President wasn't going anywhere. His appointment list had been thoroughly checked—the Social Security numbers of all nonregulars are run through the FBI's crime computers—and the visitors themselves would, of course, be subjected to the most thorough searches that can be made without an actual pat-down. The President waved for Admiral Cutter to follow him in. The two agents went over the appointment list again. It was routine, and the senior agent didn't mind that a man's job had been taken by a woman. Daga had earned her job on the street. If she were a man, everyone agreed, she'd have two big brass ones, and if any would-be assassin mistook her for a secretarial type that was his bad luck. Every few minutes, until Cutter left, one or the other of the agents would peer through the spy-hole in the white-painted door to make sure that nothing untoward was happening. The President had held office for over three years, and was used to the constant observation. It hardly occurred to the agents that a normal man might find it oppressive. It was their job to know everything there was to know about the President, from how often he visited the bathroom to those with whom he slept. They didn't call the agency the Secret Service for nothing. Their antecedents had concealed all manner of peccadillos. The President's wife was not entitled to know what he did every hour of the day—at least, some presidents had so decided—but his security detail was.

Behind the closed door, the President took his seat. From the side door a Filipino mess steward carried in a tray with coffee and croissants and came to attention before leaving. With this the morning's preliminary routine was complete, and Cutter began his morning intelligence briefing. This had been delivered from CIA to his Fort Myer, Virginia, home before dawn, which allowed the Admiral to paraphrase it. The brief didn't take long. It was late spring, and the world was a relatively quiet place. Those wars underway in Africa and elsewhere were not of great import to American interests, and the Middle East was as tranquil as it ever seemed to be. That left time for other issues.

"What about SHOWBOAT?" the President asked while buttering his croissant.

"It's underway, sir. Ritter's people are already at work," Cutter replied.

"I'm still worried about security on the operation."

"Mr. President, it's as tight as one could reasonably expect. There are risks—you can't avoid them

all—but we’re keeping the number of people involved to an absolute minimum, and those people have been carefully selected and recruited.”

That earned the National Security Adviser a grunt. The President was trapped—and as with nearly every president, it had come about from his own words. Presidential promises and statements . . . the people had this annoying way of remembering them. And even if they didn’t there were journalists and political rivals who never passed on a chance to make the necessary reminders. So many things had gone right in this presidency. But so many of those were secret—and, annoyingly to Cutter, those secrets had somehow been kept. Well, they had to be, of course. Except that in the political arena no secret was truly sacred, most especially in an election year. Cutter wasn’t supposed to be concerned with that. He was a professional naval officer, and therefore supposed to be apolitical in his outlook on the ins and outs of national security, but whoever had formulated that particular guideline must have been a monk. Members of the senior executive service did not take vows of poverty and chastity, however—and obedience was also a sometime thing.

“I promised the American people that we’d do something about this problem,” the President observed crossly. “And we haven’t accomplished shit.”

“Sir, you cannot deal with threats to national security through police agencies. Either our national security is threatened or it is not.” Cutter had been hammering that point for years. Now, finally, he had a receptive audience.

Another grunt: “Yeah, well, I said that, too, didn’t I?”

“Yes, Mr. President. It’s time they learned a lesson about how the big boys play.” That had been Cutter’s position from the beginning, when he’d been Jeff Pelt’s deputy, and with Pelt now gone it was his view that had finally prevailed.

“Okay, James. It’s your ball. Run with it. Just remember that we need results.”

“You’ll get ’em, sir. Depend on that.”

“It’s time those bastards were taught a lesson,” the President thought aloud. He was certain that the lessons would be hard ones. On that he was correct. Both men sat in a room in which was focused and from which emanated the ultimate power of the most powerful nation in the history of civilization. The people who selected the man who occupied that room did so above all for their protection. Protection against the vagaries of foreign powers and domestic bullies, against all manner of enemies. Those enemies came in many forms, some of which the founding fathers had not quite anticipated. But one sort that had been anticipated existed in this very room . . . though it was not the one the President had in mind.

The sun rose an hour later on the Caribbean coast, and unlike the climate-controlled comfort of the White House, here the air was thick and heavy with humidity on what promised to be yet another sultry day under a lingering high-pressure system. The forested hills to the west reduced the local winds to a bare whisper, and the owner of *Empire Builder* was past being ready to go to sea, where the air was cooler and the breezes unrestricted.

His crewmen arrived late. He didn’t like their looks, but he didn’t have to. Just so long as they behaved themselves. After all, his family was aboard.

“Good morning, sir. I am Ramón. This is Jesús,” the taller one said. What troubled the owner was that they were so obviously tidied-up versions of . . . of what? Or had they merely wanted to look presentable?

“You think you can handle this?” the owner asked.

“Sí. We have experience with large motor craft.” The man smiled. His teeth were even and brushed. This was a man who took care with his appearance at all times, the owner thought. He was probably being overly cautious. “And Jesus, you will see, is a fine cook.”

Charming little bastard. “Okay, crew quarters are forward. She’s tanked up, and the engines are already warm. Let’s get out where it’s cool.”

“*Muy bien, Capitán.*” Ramón and Jesus unloaded their gear from the jeep. It took several trips to get it all stowed, but by nine in the morning, MY *Empire Builder* slipped her mooring lines and stood out to sea, passing a handful of party boats heading out with *yanqui* tourists and their fishing rods. Once in open waters, the yacht turned north. It would take three days.

Ramón already had the wheel. That meant he sat in a wide, elevated chair while the autopilot —“George”—handled the steering. It was an easy ride. The Rhodes had fin stabilizers. About the only disappointment was in the crew accommodations, which the owner had neglected. So typical, Ramón thought. A multimillion-dollar yacht with radar and every possible amenity, but the crew who operated it didn’t have so much as a television set and VCR to amuse themselves when off duty. . . .

He moved forward on the seat, craning his neck to look on the fo’c’sle. The owner was there, asleep and snoring, as though the work of taking the yacht out to sea had exhausted him. Or perhaps his wife had tired him out? She was beside her husband, lying facedown on her towel. The string for her bikini top was untied so as to give her back an even tan. Ramón smiled. There were many ways for a man to amuse himself. But better to wait. Anticipation made it all the better. He heard the sound of a taped movie in the main salon, aft of the bridge, where their children were watching some movie or other. It never occurred to him to feel pity for any of the four. But he was not completely heartless. Jesus was a good cook. They both approved of giving the condemned a hearty meal.

It was just light enough to see without the night-vision goggles, the dawn twilight that the helicopter pilots hated because the eye had to adapt itself to a lightening sky and ground that was still in shadows. Sergeant Chavez’s squad was seated and strapped in with four-point safety belts, and between the knees of each was a weapon. The UH-60A Blackhawk helicopter swooped high over one of the hills and then dropped hard when past the crest.

“Thirty seconds,” the pilot informed Chavez over the intercom.

It was supposed to be a covert insertion, which meant that the helicopters were racing up and down the valleys, careful that their operational pattern should confuse any possible observer. The Blackhawk dove for the ground and pulled up short as the pilot eased back on the cyclic control stick which gave the aircraft a nose-up attitude, signaling the crew chief to slide the right-side door open and the soldiers to twist the release dials on their safety-belt buckles. The Blackhawk could touch down only for a moment.

“Go!”

Chavez went out first, moving perhaps ten feet from the door before he fell flat to the ground. The squad did the same, allowing the Blackhawk to lift off immediately, and rewarding each of its former passengers with a faceful of flying grit as it clawed its way back into the sky. It would reappear around the southern end of a hill as though it had never stopped. Behind it, the squad assembled and moved out into the treeline. Its work had just begun. The sergeant gave his commands with hand motions and led them off at a dead run. It would be his last mission, then he could relax.

At the Navy’s weapons testing and development facility, China Lake, California, a team of civilian

technicians and some Navy ordnance experts hovered over a new bomb. Built with roughly the same dimensions as the old two-thousand-pounder, it weighed nearly seven hundred pounds less. This resulted from its construction. Instead of a steel skin, the bombcase was made of Kevlar-reinforced cellulose—an idea borrowed from the French, who made shell casings from the naturally produced fibers—with only enough metal fittings to allow attachment of fins, or the more extensive hardware that would convert it into an “LGB,” able to track in on a specific point target. It was little known that a smart-bomb is generally a mere iron bomb with the guidance equipment bolted on.

“You’re not going to get fragments worth a damn,” a civilian objected.

“What’s the point of having a Stealth bomber,” another technician asked, “if the bad guys get a radar return off the ordnance load?”

“Hmph,” observed the first. “What’s the point of a bomb that just pisses the other guy off?”

“Put it through his front door and he won’t live long enough to get pissed, will he?”

“Hmph.” But at least he knew what the bomb was actually for. It would one day hang on the ATA, the Advanced Tactical Aircraft, a carrier-based attack bomber with stealth technology built in. Finally he thought, the Navy’s getting on board that program. About time. For the moment, however, the job at hand was to see if this new bomb with a different weight and a different center of gravity would track in on a target with a standard LGB guidance pack. The bomb hoist came over and lifted the streamlined shape off its pallet. Next the operator maneuvered it under the center-line hard-point of an A-6E Intruder attack bomber.

The technicians and officers walked over to the helicopter that would take them to the bombing range. There was no rush. An hour later, safely housed in a bunker that was clearly marked, one of the civilians trained an odd-looking device at a target four miles away. The target was an old five-ton truck that the Marines had given up on, and which would now, if everything went according to plan, die a violent and spectacular death.

“Aircraft is inbound over the range. Start the music.”

“Roger,” the civilian replied, squeezing the trigger on the GLD. “On target.”

“Aircraft reports acquisition—stand by . . .” the communicator said.

At the other end of the bunker, an officer was watching a television camera locked onto the inbound Intruder. “Breakaway. We have a nice, clean release off the ejector rack.” He’d check that view later with one off an A-4 Skyhawk fighter-bomber that was flying chase on the A-6. Few people realized that the mere act of dropping a bomb off an airplane was a complex and potentially dangerous exercise. A third camera followed the bomb down.

“Fins are moving just fine. Here we go . . .”

The camera on the truck was a high-speed one. It had to be. The bomb was falling too fast for anyone to catch it on the first run-through, but by the time the crushing bass note of the detonation reached the bunker, the operator had already started rewinding the tape. The replay was done one frame at a time.

“Okay, there’s the bomb.” Its nose appeared forty feet over the truck. “How was it fused?”

“VT,” one of the officers answered. VT stood for variable time. The bomb had a miniradar transceiver in its nose, and was programmed to explode within a fixed distance of the ground; in this case, five feet, or almost the instant it hit the truck. “Angle looks just fine.”

“I thought it would work,” an engineer observed quietly. He’d suggested that since the bomb was essentially a thousand pounder, the guidance equipment could be programmed for the lighter weight. Though it was slightly heavier than that, the reduced density of the cellulose bombcase made for a similar ballistic performance. “Detonation.”

As with any high-speed photos of such an event, the screen flashed white, then yellow, then red, then black, as the expanding gasses from the high-explosive filler cooled in the air. Just in front of the gas was the blast wave: air compressed to a point at which it was denser than steel, moving faster than any bullet. No machine press could duplicate the effect.

“We just killed another truck.” It was a wholly unnecessary observation. Roughly a quarter of the truck’s mass was pounded straight down into a shallow crater, perhaps a yard deep and twenty across. The remainder was hurled laterally as shrapnel. The gross effect was not terribly different, in fact, from a large car bomb of the sort delivered by terrorists, but a hell of a lot safer for the deliverymen, one of the civilians thought.

“Damn—I didn’t think it’d be that easy. You were right, Ernie, we don’t even have to reprogram the seeker,” a Navy commander observed. They’d just saved the Navy over a million dollars, he thought. He was wrong.

And so began something that had not quite begun and would not soon end, with many people in many places moving off in directions and on missions which they all mistakenly thought they understood. That was just as well. The future was too fearful for contemplation, and beyond the expected, illusory finish lines were things fated by the decisions made this morning—and, once decided, best unseen.

The King of SAR

YOU COULDN'T LOOK at her and not be proud, Red Wegener told himself. The Coast Guard cutter *Panache* was one of a kind, a design mistake of sorts, but she was his. Her hull was painted the same gleaming white found on an iceberg—except for the orange stripe on the bow that designated the ship as part of the United States Coast Guard. Two hundred eighty feet in length, *Panache* was not a large ship, but she was his ship, the largest he'd ever commanded, and certainly the last he would ever have. Wegener was the oldest lieutenant-commander in the Coast Guard, but Wegener was The Man, the King of Search-and-Rescue missions.

His career had begun the same way many Coast Guard careers had. A young man from a Kansas wheat farm who'd never seen the sea, he'd walked into a Coast Guard recruiting station the day after graduating from high school. He hadn't wanted to face a life driving tractors and combines, and he'd sought out something as different from Kansas as he could find. The Coast Guard petty officer hadn't made much of a sales pitch, and a week later he'd begun his career with a bus ride that ended at Cape May, New Jersey. He could still remember the chief petty officer that first morning who'd told them of the Coast Guard creed. "You have to go out. You don't have to come back."

What Wegener found at Cape May was the last and best true school of seamanship in the Western world. He learned how to handle lines and tie sailor knots, how to extinguish fires, how to go into the water after a disabled or panicked boater, how to do it right the first time, every time—or risk not coming back. On graduation he was assigned to the Pacific Coast. Within a year he had his rate, Boatswain's Mate Third Class.

Very early on it was recognized that Wegener had that rarest of natural gifts, the seaman's eye. A catch-all term, it meant that his hands, eyes, and brain could act in unison to make his boat perform. Guided along by a tough old chief quartermaster, he soon had "command" of his "own" thirty-foot harbor patrol boat. For the really tricky jobs, the chief would come along to keep a close eye on the nineteen-year-old petty officer. From the first Wegener had shown the promise of someone who only needed to be shown things once. His first five years in uniform now seemed to have passed in the briefest instant as he learned his craft. Nothing really dramatic, just a succession of jobs that he'd done as the book prescribed, quickly and smoothly. By the time he'd considered and opted for re-enlistment, it was evident that when a tough job had to be done, his name was the one that came up first. Before the end of his second hitch, officers routinely asked his opinion of things. By this time he was thirty, one of the youngest chief bosun's mates in the service, and he was able to pull a few strings, one of which ended with command of *Invincible*, a forty-eight-footer which had already garnered a reputation for toughness and dependability. The stormy California coast was her home, and it was here that Wegener's name first became known outside of his service. If a fisherman or a yachtsman got into trouble, *Invincible* always seemed to be there, often roller-coastering across thirty-foot seas with her crewmen held in place with ropes and safety belts—but there and ready to do the job with a red-haired chief at the wheel, an unlit briar pipe in his teeth. In that first year he saved the

lives of at least fifteen people.

~~The number grew to fifty before he'd ended his tour of duty at the lonely station. After a couple of years, he was in command of his own station, and the holder of a title craved by all seamen—Captain—though his rate was that of Senior Chief. Located on the banks of a small stream that fed into the world's largest ocean, he ran his station as tautly as any ship, and inspecting officers had come there not so much to see how Wegener ran things as to see how things should be run.~~

For good or ill, Wegener's career plan had changed with one epic winter storm on the Oregon Coast. Commanding a larger rescue station now near the mouth of the Columbia River and its infamous bar, he'd received a frantic radio call from a deepsea fisherman named *Mary-Kat*: engines and rudder disabled, being driven toward a lee shore that devoured ships. His personal flagship, the eighty-two-foot *Point Gabriel*, was away from the dock in ninety seconds, her mixed crew of veterans and apprentices hooking their safety belts into place while Wegener coordinated the rescue efforts on his own radio channels.

It had been an epic battle. After a six-hour ordeal, Wegener had rescued the *Mary-Kat*'s six fishermen, but just barely, his ship assaulted by wind and furious seas. Just as the last man had been brought in, the *Mary-Kat* had grounded on a submerged rock and snapped in half.

As luck would have it, Wegener had had a reporter on board that day, a young feature writer for the *Portland Oregonian* and an experienced yachtsman, who thought he knew what there was to know about the sea. As the cutter had tunneled through the towering breakers at the Columbia bar, the reporter had vomited on his notebook, then wiped it on his Mustang suit and kept writing. The series of articles that had followed was entitled "The Angel of the Bar," and won the journalist a Pulitzer Prize for feature writing.

The following month, in Washington, the senior United States Senator from the State of Oregon, whose nephew had been a crewman on the *Mary-Kat*, wondered aloud why someone as good as Red Wegener was not an officer, and since the commandant of the Coast Guard was in that room to discuss the service's budget, it was an observation to which a four-star admiral had decided to pay heed. By the end of the week Red Wegener was commissioned as lieutenant—the senator had also observed that he was a little too old to be an ensign. Three years later he was recommended for the next available command.

There was only one problem with that, the commandant considered. He did have an available command—*Panache*—but it might seem a mixed blessing. The cutter was nearly completed. She was to have been the lead ship for a new class, but funding had been cut, the yard had gone bankrupt, and the commissioning skipper had been relieved for bungling his job. That left the Coast Guard with an unfinished ship whose engines didn't work, in an out-of-business shipyard. But Wegener was supposed to be a miracle worker, the commandant decided at his desk. To make it a fair chance, he made sure that Wegener got some good chiefs to back up the inexperienced wardroom.

His arrival at the shipyard gate had been delayed by the picket line of disgruntled workers, and by the time he'd gotten through that, he was sure things couldn't get worse. Then he'd seen what was supposed to have been a ship. It was a steel artifact, pointed at one end and blunt at the other, half painted, draped with cables, piled with crates, and generally looking like a surgical patient who'd died on the table and been left there to rot. If that hadn't been bad enough, *Panache* couldn't even be towed from her berth—the last thing a worker had done was to burn out the motor on a crane, which blocked the way.

The previous captain had already left in disgrace. The commissioning crew, assembled on the helicopter deck to receive him, looked like children forced to attend the funeral of a disliked uncle,

and when Wegener tried to address them, the microphone didn't work. Somehow that broke the evil spell. He waved them toward himself with a smile and a chuckle.

"People," he'd said, "I'm Red Wegener. In six months this will be the best ship in the United States Coast Guard. In six months you will be the best crew in the United States Coast Guard. I'm not the one who's going to make that happen. You will—and I'll help a little. For right now, I'm cutting everybody as much liberty as we can stand while I get a handle on what we have to do. Have yourselves a great time. When you get back, we all go to work. Dismissed."

There was a collective "oh" from the assembled multitude, which had expected shouts and screams. The newly arrived chiefs regarded one another with raised eyebrows, and the young officers who'd been contemplating the abortion of their service careers retired to the wardroom in a state of bemusement and shock. Before meeting with them, Wegener took his three leading chiefs aside.

"Engines first," Wegener said.

"I can give you fifty-percent power all day long, but when you try to use the turbochargers, everything goes to hell in fifteen minutes," Chief Owens announced. "An' I don't know why." Mark Owens had been working with marine diesels for sixteen years.

"Can you get us to Curtis Bay?"

"As long as you don't mind taking an extra day, Cap'n."

Wegener dropped the first bomb. "Good—'cause we're leaving in two weeks, and we'll finish the fitting-cut up there."

"It'll be a month till the new motor's ready for that crane, sir," Chief Boatswain's Mate Bob Riley observed.

"Can the crane turn?"

"Motor's burned out, Cap'n."

"When the time comes, we'll snake a line from the bow to the back end of the crane. We have seventy-five feet of water in front of us. We set the clutch on the crane and pull forward real gentle-like, and turn the crane ourselves, then back out," the captain announced. Eyes narrowed.

"Might break it," Riley observed after a moment.

"That's not my crane, but, by God, this is my ship."

Riley let out a laugh. "Goddamn, it's good to see you again, Red—excuse me, Captain Wegener!"

"Mission Number One is to get her to Baltimore for fitting-out. Let's figure out what we have to do and take it one job at a time. I'll see you oh-seven-hundred tomorrow. Still make your own coffee, Portagee?"

"Bet your ass, sir," Chief Quartermaster Oreza replied. "I'll bring a pot."

And Wegener had been right. Twelve days later, *Panache* had indeed been ready for sea, though not much else, with crates and fittings lashed down all over the ship. Moving the crane out of the way was accomplished before dawn, lest anyone notice, and when the picket line showed up that day, it had taken a few minutes to notice that the ship was gone. Impossible, they'd all thought. She hadn't even been fully painted yet.

The painting was accomplished in the Florida Strait, as was something even more important. Wegener had been on the bridge, napping in his leather chair during the forenoon watch when the growler phone rang, and Chief Owens invited him to the engine room. Wegener arrived to find the only worktable covered with plans, and an engineman-apprentice hovering over them, with his engineering officer standing behind him.

"You ain't gonna believe it," Owens announced. "Tell him, sonny."

"Seaman Obrecki, sir. The engine isn't installed right," the youngster said.

“What makes you think that?” Wegener asked.

The big marine diesels were of a new sort, perversely designed to be very easy to operate and maintain. To aid in this, small how-to manuals were provided for each engine-room crewman, and in each manual was a plastic-coated diagram that was far easier to use than the builder’s plans. A blow-up of the manual schematic, also plastic-coated, had been provided by the drafting company, and was the laminated top of the worktable.

“Sir, this engine is a lot like the one on my dad’s tractor, bigger, but—”

“I’ll take your word for it, Obrecki.”

“The turbocharger ain’t installed right. It matches with these plans here, but the oil pump pushes the oil through the turbocharger backwards. The plans are wrong, sir. Some draftsman screwed up. See here, sir? The oil line’s supposed to come in here, but the draftsman put it on the wrong side of this fitting, and nobody caught it, and—”

Wegener just laughed. He looked at Chief Owens: “How long to fix?”

“Obrecki says he can have it up and running this time tomorrow, Cap’n.”

“Sir.” It was Lieutenant Michelson, the engineering officer. “This is all my fault. I should have—”
The lieutenant was waiting for the sky to fall.

“The lesson from this, Mr. Michelson, is that you can’t even trust the manual. Have you learned the lesson, Mister?”

“Yes, sir!”

“Fair enough. Obrecki, you’re a seaman-first, right?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Wrong. You’re a machinist-mate third.”

“Sir, I have to pass a written exam . . .”

“You think Obrecki’s passed that exam, Mr. Michelson?”

“You bet, sir.”

“Well done, people. This time tomorrow I want to do twenty-three knots.”

And it had all been downhill from there. The engines are the mechanical heart of any ship, and there is no seaman in the world who prefers a slow ship to a fast one. When *Panache* had made twenty-five knots and held that speed for three hours, the painters painted better, the cooks took a little more time with the meals, and the technicians tightened their bolts just a little more. Their ship was no longer a cripple, and pride broke out in the crew like a rainbow after a summer shower—all the more so because one of their own had figured it out. One day early, *Panache* came into the Curtis Bay Coast Guard Yard with a bone in her teeth. Wegener had the conn and pushed his own skill to the limit to make a fast “one-bell” approach to the dock. “The Old Man,” one line handler noted on the fo’c’sle, “really knows how to drive this fuckin’ boat!”

The next day a poster appeared on the ship’s bulletin board: PANACHE: DASHING ELEGANCE OF MANNER OR STYLE. Seven weeks later, the cutter was brought into commission and she sailed south to Mobile, Alabama, to go to work. Already she had a reputation that exactly matched her name.

It was foggy this morning, and that suited the captain, even though the mission didn’t. The King of SAR was now a cop. The mission of the Coast Guard had changed more than halfway through his career, but it wasn’t something that you noticed much on the Columbia River bar, where the enemy was still wind and wave. The same enemies lived in the Gulf of Mexico, but added to them was a new one. Drugs. Drugs were not something that Wegener thought a great deal about. For him drugs were

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