# Non-Disclosure

Written By

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## INT. SENSITIVE COMPARTMENTED INFORMATION FACILITY - NIGHT

A man and a woman sit at a small table inside a windowless room with one door. The man is Ben Fitch, the Secretary of Homeland Security. The woman is Deborah Halleman, the Chairwoman of the National Transportation Safety Board. The only two objects on the table are a manila folder and small flash drive.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

We have an update to give you about the horrific plane crash of American Airlines flight 610, which happened last month, outside of Mason City, Iowa. As we reported, eyewitnesses say that shards of metal began falling from the sky after the aircraft appeared to disintegrate into thin air. After a month-long recovery effort, NTSB investigators found the Flight Recorder from the aircraft today, and they say that they could hear an explosion on the cockpit recording. For more on these developments, we turn to Andrea Mitchell, who is live tonight, outside of Mason City. Andrea?

The door swings open and Michael Burns, the Chief of Staff to the President of the United States enters. He carries a briefcase with him.

## BURNS:

Ben, Debbie, what can I do for you?

Burns sits down across from Fitch and Halleman.

## FITCH:

Forgive me Mike, but I thought the President was going to be with us tonight.

## BURNS:

Well, as usual, something else required his attention, but he felt that this was important enough to send me. What do you have?

## HALLEMAN:

The cockpit recording is on this flash drive. On it, you can (MORE)

HALLEMAN: (CONT'D)

clearly hear an explosion, but there's something else on here that is extremely troubling.

Halleman walks over to a computer, which has been fused to the wall, and plugs in the flash drive.

HALLEMAN:

Now, the first clip on this drive is what we released to the press.

Halleman presses play, and the sound of rushing air, along with the screams of passengers can be heard, followed by a loud explosion before the recording goes silent.

**BURNS:** 

What exactly am I supposed to glean from that?

FITCH:

That's not what raises our concern. It's what precedes that recording that makes us nervous.

Fitch nods to Halleman, who clicks on another recording.

#### HALLEMAN:

This recording includes a minute and a half of footage prior to the recording that you just heard. Keep in mind that I've listened to the entire cockpit recording, and at no point did anyone force themselves into the cockpit. The person you're about to hear is the pilot.

Halleman plays the recording, which starts with a man praying in arabic. After the man finishes his prayer, he can be heard shuffling around the cockpit, along with sounds of metallic objects clicking together, the man opening the cockpit door, and shutting it behind him. After that, an abrupt rush of air can be heard, which is accompanied by the same screams that were heard in the prior recording, followed by the explosion, and silence.

**BURNS:** 

So, terrorists are now infiltrating American Airlines?

FITCH:

We thought the same thing, but (MORE)

based on this recording, along with this data...

Fitch hands Burns the file. Burns puts on his reading glasses.

FITCH: (CONT'D)

It appears that we have a bigger problem on our hands.

**BURNS:** 

(exasperated)

Can you please tell me what I'm looking at?

HALLEMAN:

The first few pages of that file is diagnostic info from the airplane. I've highlighted the line of information that you should focus on. It's a cabin pressurization graph.

Burns takes a moment to read through the information.

FITCH:

Mike, the cabin was depressurized prior to the explosion, and oxygen masks were not deployed.

A beat.

HALLEMAN:

Which means the passengers suffocated to death. Prior to being incinerated. And it would also indicate the possibility that the pilot jumped from the plane.

BURNS:

Jesus Christ.

FITCH:

This attack shows us that the terrorists' mode of operation has changed. They no longer have to die to consider themselves victorious for their cause. Furthermore, they're willing to take out as few or as many people as they can. They're no longer going for the biggest bang for

(MORE)

their buck.

HALLEMAN:

They're going for fear factor. Bottom line, they're waging psychological warfare, and it's on our soil now.

FITCH:

(correcting Halleman)
It's on our soil again.

BURNS:

(putting the file down
 and rubbing his temples)
I'm curious as to what proof you
have that the pilot didn't die with
the rest of the passengers and
crew?

FITCH:

Flip to the yellow page in the file.

Burns does and starts to read.

FITCH: (CONT'D)

This is a sworn statement from Mr. John Westman, a farmer who lives about five miles west of Mason City, Iowa. He claims to have seen an object fall from the aircraft prior to the explosion. Before the object hit the ground, Mr. Westman claims that something that looked like a parachute deployed and slowed the object's descent.

**BURNS:** 

(looking skeptical)
You're not telling me that the
pilot parachuted out of the plane?

Fitch and Halleman do not respond.

BURNS: (CONT'D)

Why did you guys call me in here tonight?

FITCH:

Westman has signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement, but we need you to (MORE)

present this information to the President, use your influence, and convince him to use his Executive Privilege to classify these documents and the full flight recording.

BURNS:

And no one else saw what Westman claims to have seen?

FITCH:

Not that we've found.

BURNS:

Ben, this is low, even for you--

FITCH:

They just need to be classified long enough so that DHS can get a plan of attack together to hunt this guy down.

BURNS:

You know what this will look like, right? It will look like T.W.A 800 part fucking two! You know the minute that these documents are classified, and we have to utter that word to the press, they'll have a field day with it.

FITCH:

This is an act of terrorism, Mike! We need a swift and calculated response-

BURNS:

You're right, but it's also a federal crime, and the FBI investigates federal crimes, not to mention that it obviously impacts our national security. I take it you told the DNI about this, right? Or did you withhold it from him too?

A beat. Burns realizes something, and shakes his head in disbelief.

BURNS: (CONT'D)

You haven't told anyone that you (MORE)

have Westman's statement, have you?

A beat

BURNS: (CONT'D)

You know Ben, you've got a hell of a lot of nerve. Of all of the agencies that protect the interest of America's national security, Homeland is pretty low on the totem pole of importance.

## FITCH:

I thought that Homeland was the best equipped to handle an investigation of this size-

#### BURNS:

Excuse me, Ben, not only is your assessment incorrect, but it's not your job to diagnose who's equipped to handle this type of investigation-

## FITCH:

Well, we needed to figure out who's jurisdiction it was, and that was a fucking nightmare, so I figured I'd just handle it myself, with my guys-

## **BURNS:**

Bullshit Ben! Westman's testimony is dated two days after the crash, and you purposely withheld it! You're playing political games just so you can score points with the president. I saw you do this last fall in New York, and now you're doing it again. I didn't say anything to the president then, because I wasn't sure, but now I Newsflash, it's the 21st am. fucking century. Terrorism falls under everyone's purview, not just Homeland's. You do not withhold information of this nature from anyone within the intelligence or federal law enforcement community. The first person you should have told about Westman's testimony was

(MORE)

the national security advisor, and let them delegate it accordingly.

A beat. Burns collects himself. When he speaks, he still does so with an edge to his voice.

BURNS: (CONT'D)

Given the information that I now know, it looks like the president is in the dark, because he is. And that is never a good thing, because when the president is in the dark, it makes the administration look weak. It makes it look even weaker when it appears that certain departments within the administration are keeping things from the president, or his national security team. Now that the DNI, NSA, CIA, FBI, and the rest of alphabet soup is in the dark about all of this, let's try to compile all of the information that we can, so that we can help the investigation when the information What do we know about is shared. the pilot?

## HALLEMAN:

Page ten of the file is a dossier about him.

Burns turns to the appropriate page.

HALLEMAN: (CONT'D)

His name is Sam Cross, an American citizen born in Minneapolis, MN in 1980.

**BURNS:** 

Well, he's obviously converted, that's for sure.

FITCH:

Apparently it was relatively recent too, within the last three years.

**BURNS:** 

And American Airlines didn't pick up on that during the interview process?

HALLEMAN:

It had to have been after he'd been a part of their organization.

**BURNS:** 

So, we've got a pilot who decides to convert to Islam after earning his wings, thus turning himself into a ticking time bomb.

HALLEMAN:

It would seem that way, yes.

FITCH:

And, in this case at least, appearances are reality.

HALLEMAN:

He'd been flying for American for two years before he converted.

FITCH:

He was probably instructed to blend in, appear as a westerner.

BURNS:

On hell of an actor.

FITCH:

Exactly. He became a con-man of sorts.

BURNS:

Of sorts? He became a con-man, period. End of story. Do we have any idea of the pilot's whereabouts?

FITCH:

No, Westman just said he saw the shoot deploy and whoever it was touchdown far off in the distance.

**BURNS:** 

So we need to initiate an international manhunt? An Osama Bin-Laden type of manhunt?

FITCH:

Yes.

BURNS:

(standing up to leave)
 (MORE)

Okay. I'm going to recommend that this information be shared with all entities concerned

FITCH:

(in disbelief)

All of it?

BURNS:

Yes. All of it.

Burns slips the file into his bag, walks over to the computer, takes the flash drive, and slips that into his bad as well.

FITCH:

Even Westman's statement?

BURNS:

Yes, even Westman's statement.

FITCH:

Mike, that's going to make for some very awkward cabinet meetings. Please reconsider-

**BURNS:** 

Ben, you should thank God that Westman didn't break the agreement and go to the press. At least now we have some control over keeping this shitstorm in house. Not to mention the fact that it appears that Westman is the only witness. I mean, what are the odds of that happening?! Let me share with you what you did by withholding this information. First, you made it look like the president's national security team is made up of a collection of village idiots. me remind you that the president hand selected those advisors, just like he hand selected you to run Homeland Security. That means that the president trusted you, and you violated that trust. Secondly, your actions tarnished the president's legacy. Sure, I debated on recommending that Westman's statement be classified, but it doesn't matter either way.

(MORE)

Either it makes the president look weak now, or it makes him look weak when the information is eventually declassified ten years down the road. I'd personal rather the president weather the storm sooner rather than later, so that he has the opportunity to make up for this disaster later in his term. Bottom line, by not sharing his statement with the appropriate personnel, you took a shit on President Charles F. Jeffery's chapter in the history books.

A beat.

BURNS: (CONT'D)

And for that, you can start looking for a new job.

A beat. Fitch's attitude abruptly changes, and he looks insulted, staring at Burns with indignation.

FITCH:

You've got a hell of a lot of nerve speaking to a cabinet secretary like that. What the fuck does that mean?-

#### **BURNS:**

It means Ben, that I'm going to use my influence over the president, influence that you will never obtain; to convince him to ask for your letter of resignation. And if you refuse to give him your letter of resignation, I will use my influence to convince him to fucking fire you. You may work a few metro stops away from the White House, but I'm the one who works down the hall from the Oval, and I'm the one who has the president's ear.

Burns exits, leaving Fitch and Halleman in silence. After a moment, Halleman gets up to leave.

FITCH:

(pissed)

Thanks for watching my crucifixion, (MORE)

Deb. Really helpful.

## HALLEMAN:

Don't turn this around on me. We might work for the same government, and fight for the same team, but we were never on the same page on this issue-

## FITCH:

We had an agreement. You were supposed to pull me out from under the bus if I started to get run over-

HALLEMAN:

Fuck our agreement, Ben!

A beat. Halleman stands in the doorway.

HALLEMAN: (CONT'D)

You know the difference between two of us? I know that in the grand scheme of things, I'm a pretty small fish. More importantly, I know what kind of body of water we're all swimming under, which is more than I can say for you. We don't operate in a pond, or a lake. In Washington, we operate in an ocean. Quit acting like a blue fucking whale, and start updating your resume. Good luck in the private sector.

Halleman exits.

FADE TO BLACK.

ROLL CREDITS.

THE END.