

THE TRIDENT

written by

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Revision Seven

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BLACK SCREEN

Footsteps can be heard on what sounds like a marble floor. Then, the sound of a door opening, accompanied with the soft hiss of compressed air being released.

Finally, a door shutting can be heard.

FADE IN:

INT. - SENSITIVE COMPARTMENTED INFORMATION FACILITY (SCIF) - AFTERNOON

This particular SCIF is set up like a classroom, with a few seats, and facing a projector screen at the front of the room.

Just inside the closed doorway, ADMIRAL MICHAEL GREENE (41), dressed in a Navy dress uniform

Dr. BENJAMIN PARKER (35) dressed like a college professor, stands at a podium in the front of the room.

GREENE

Are you Dr. Parker?

PARKER

I am. Can I help you?

GREENE

I'm here for your presentation.

PARKER

I thought I was presenting to Captain Shaffer, and a few others.

GREENE

Captain Shaffer forwarded the email outlining your findings to some of her superiors. Based on that email, it was determined that I be briefed first.

(a beat)

Privately.

PARKER

Oh.

(a beat)

I see. I'm sorry I didn't catch your name, sir.

GREENE

I'm Admiral Michael Greene.

Greene takes a seat in one of the classroom chairs, opens the file in his hand, and takes out a pair of reading glasses from his pocket, putting them on.

GREENE (CONT'D)

From what I understand, you're both a professor of Marine Archaeology, and a professional diver?

PARKER

That's correct.

GREENE

Forgive my ignorance, but what exactly is Marine Archaeology?

PARKER

Essentially, it's the study of shipwrecks. In addition to teaching it, that's also what I do in my spare time. I have a small company that takes tourists down to shipwrecks off of both Florida coasts. We either scuba dive or we use a submersible for deeper wrecks. That's how I came to be involved with the Navy, by bidding on this contract.

An awkward beat.

GREENE

Go on.

PARKER

The Trident dive was a bit more complicated than a tourist dive, as you probably know, but we were still able to recover a few items.

GREENE

What did you find?

PARKER

Captain Shaffer didn't tell you?

Greene gives Parker a look as if to say "Don't bust my chops."

GREENE

She gave me a 30,000 ft view.

(a beat)

I'd like you to fill in the details.

Parker grabs a clicker from the podium and starts cycling through the slides.

PARKER

First of all, we found the nukes that the Navy asked to be recovered. We matched the serial numbers, and they've been returned to the Navy's armory to ensure that they haven't been tampered with, before being reassigned to another ship.

GREENE

And for that the U.S. Government is very thankful.

A beat. Parker is waiting for Greene to tell him to continue, but Greene stays silent.

Parker decides to drop the pretenses.

PARKER

Admiral, can I speak freely?

GREENE

Of course.

PARKER

I find it hard to believe that Captain Shaffer would provide you a dossier on me, and not provide any detail about the other items we recovered from the wreck.

Greene is annoyed by this exchange, but relents.

GREENE

She said that you found three torpedoes without warheads that had been hollowed out.

PARKER

And did she tell you what those torpedoes were filled with?

Greene doesn't want to admit that he knows, but he has no choice.

GREENE

Cocaine.

PARKER

Yes, in vacuum-sealed, water-tight bags. Do you have any idea how much?

GREENE

The DEA will figure that out.

(a beat)

You do know that all of this will have to be classified. There's a non-disclosure clause in your contract that you're bound by. You can't breathe a word of this to anyone.

PARKER

Sure, because God forbid the general public ever find out the American government left nuclear missiles on the ocean floor, let alone hundreds of thousands of dollars of cocaine, that by all accounts, it had been trafficking across the Atlantic--

GREENE

That's enough, Dr. Parker.

(a beat)

You did your job, you've been paid. I will see to it that your contract is closed out as soon as possible.

PARKER

I haven't told you the rest of my findings.

GREENE

What?

PARKER

Shaffer didn't tell you?

GREENE

Tell me what?

PARKER

There are human remains down there, Admiral. Those of American sailors who deserve a proper burial, with full military honors.

GREENE

If the men and women aboard the Trident were trafficking cocaine across the ocean, then NCIS would have to first launch an investigation to find out who was responsible. That would need to happen before the Navy determined the character of discharge, and the type of burial to which those sailors were entitled.

(a beat)

For all we know, the entire crew could have all been in on it.

PARKER

So you're saying the Navy would actually dishonorably discharge a group of sailors posthumously? What if they were following orders?

Greene scoffs and shakes his head.

PARKER (CONT'D)

What?

GREENE

Do you really think this is one of those "Few Good Men" situations?

(a beat)

'Cause let me tell you something, Dr. Parker, there's no Colonel Jessup ordering these men to commit crimes. There's no truth that you can't handle here. In fact, we'll never really know the truth, because it died with those men and women

PARKER

You may be right. But the way I see it, the Navy cut their losses when the Trident went down, and they broke one of the military's cardinal rules.

(a beat)

The left men and women behind.

GREENE

I have a lot of respect for the knowledge that you bring the table. Based on your findings, it appears that you've lived up to your reputation as the best in your field.

(a beat)

But with all due respect, you don't know how the military works.

PARKER

And how exactly does it work, Admiral?

(a beat)

I appreciate the respect you have for my knowledge, but you should also have a certain amount of respect for my ability to research.

(a beat)

You can't find any information online about the U.S.S. Trident. At least not in any public databases. But when I came to the surface after we found those bodies, I did some digging, used some connections, and found at least five of the crew's surviving family members.

Greene's eyes go wide.

PARKER (CONT'D)

Imagine my surprise when I found out that the Navy still classifies those crew members as "Missing in Action."

(a beat)

I bet the Navy told the families of the entire crew that they're all "missing," just so they didn't have to pay for their burials.

Greene is clearly getting frustrated by this conversation.

GREENE

What is it that you, want?

PARKER

Oh I don't know. Perhaps a follow on contract awarded to my company to go back down there any recover the bodies.

(a beat)

I have the submersibles, and you have the receptacles to collect the remains from the ship. I know how to work the equipment.

GREENE

A follow on contract will be seen as an overstep on the Navy's part. I'll get my ass chewed out for it.

PARKER

An overstep--

GREENE

Yes, an overstep. Like I said, you don't understand how the military works. The Department of Defense has its own POW/MIA Accounting Office. They are the people responsible for finding missing military personnel, and returning remains to their families.



PARKER

I've already done half the job of finding the remains. Now all we have to do is bring them home, and what I don't want is to be transferred to another government office just to jump through more bureaucratic hoops while those sailors' remains continue to rot at the bottom of the ocean.

(a beat)

You're the one who's familiar with the situation, and I want you to be the one to give me the contract, even if you have to make a black contract, and hide its purpose.

GREENE

(laughing)

You think I have the authority to do that?

PARKER

Don't you?

GREENE

(serious again)

What your asking requires me to go to Congress, have a closed door meeting with defense appropriators and essentially beg, hat in hand, for money that will go to a project that is outside the Navy's scope. It will almost certainly be a losing battle.

(a beat)

So no, I don't have the power to snap my fingers and award you a black contract.

PARKER

There are millions, if not billions of dollars in secret government contracts awarded every year. All you have to do is be persuasive.

(a beat)

And if you don't think you can, perhaps you should consider the alternative. Like the news of dead U.S. Navy crew members trapped at the bottom of the ocean getting out in the media. Or perhaps the story of how those same crew members appear to have been trafficking cocaine across the ocean.

Greene is incredulous at this, but maintains his composure.

GREENE

First of all, Dr. Parker, I don't appreciate being bullied or blackmailed. Surely you're not suggesting that you would leak this information.

(a beat)

That non-disclosure clause in your contract currently applies, and it does not expire, even after the contract is closed out.

PARKER

That's the thing about secrets, Admiral. Once they are out, the damage is done.

GREENE

You're willing to commit treason?

(a beat)

All for something that the government has plausible deniability for?

(a beat)

The U.S. Navy has over 330,000 personnel on active duty, with another 100,000 in the reserves. If you think we know every single thing that goes on behind an officer's back, you're mistaken.

PARKER

I'd only be a traitor to half the country, and you know it.

(a beat)

The minute a president friendly to my cause assumes office, I'm pardoned.

Greene rolls his eyes and turns to leave. Without turning to look back at Parker, he says...

GREENE

If you do that, I cannot help you, and you will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law--

PARKER

And you'll be left to clean up the shit-storm that my disclosures cause.

At this Greene stops and turns back to Parker.

PARKER (CONT'D)

The first question people will ask is why that crew was left behind. Why didn't the Navy launch a full-scale search and rescue operation that included diving down to the wreck when it happened?

(a beat)

And they won't ask these questions of you. A reporter will pose the question to the President of the United States, during the one daily briefing a month that he actually stands up there and takes questions himself.

(a beat)

Eventually, the problem will roll downhill to your office. And you'll have your boss's, boss's boss's boss asking you what the fuck the Navy's doing, or rather, why the fuck they didn't do anything to bring those sailors home.

(a beat)

The thing about plausible deniability, is that it doesn't protect you from looking grossly incompetent, or worse criminally negligent.

GREENE

(indignant)

I don't get it. What's your angle here?

PARKER

You really don't know do you?

(a beat)

It's been staring you in the face, literally, this entire time.

(a beat)

My last name. Parker. My uncle was Petty Officer Third Class James Parker. One of the men lost when the Trident went down.

GREENE

So that line about all your research. Was it just bullshit?

PARKER

Not entirely. I did do some digging, but families of lost soldiers and sailors are a tight community.

(a beat)

There are message boards, and other ways of quickly getting in touch. It wasn't hard to figure out that the Navy lied once I spoke to a few surviving family members.

Greene shakes his head. He concedes...

GREENE

You know, for as well run an organization as the U.S. Military is, when they fuck something up, they do it big.

(a beat)

We awarded a contract to recover nuclear weapons from a destroyer to the nephew of one of the men lost on that destroyer.

PARKER

Someone didn't do their research.

GREENE

And now you're a kamikaze pilot, willing to go to jail for treason because you figured out the Navy lied.

PARKER

I prefer to be called a man of principal.

GREENE

Tomato, Tomahto

(a beat)

I want you to understand something, in the grand scheme of things, you're a piss-ant, and we don't negotiate with people like you.

(a beat)

But I'm supposed to look at the bigger picture, and when I do that, it's very clear that we have bigger fish to fry.

(a beat)

And you're right.

PARKER

Of course I'm right--

GREENE

I don't mean about the recovery of the bodies, anyone with any moral fiber can see that--

PARKER

So where's your moral fiber?

GREENE

Fighting with the orders I have to follow!

A long beat. Parker's eyes go wide.

PARKER

Were you ordered to leave those bodies down there?

GREENE

I was ordered to write the contract in such a way that the Navy only requested the recovery of the nuclear devices. Nothing else.

(a beat)

I didn't think to ask why. Why is not a question that those above you appreciate being asked.

PARKER

Unbelievable.

(a beat)

There goes the government's  
plausible deniability.

GREENE

Yeah. And the question will land  
on my desk. When I said you were  
right, I meant that you were  
right about the universal truth  
that shit rolls downhill.

(a beat)

At the end of the day, I have to  
consider the orders I've been  
given, but I also have a family  
at home that I have to provide  
for.

(a beat)

I can't do that if my superiors  
ask me to resign over the  
perception of a scandal. So in  
order to keep things quiet, and  
for me to continue to put food on  
my family's table, it would  
appear that your company is going  
to be awarded a follow on  
contract in the near future.

(a beat)

I hope you're happy.

A beat. Parker's eyes have been opened to the full situation  
now, and he suddenly finds himself sympathizing with Greene.

GREENE (CONT'D)

Do you know what happens at the  
end of "A Few Good Men?"

A beat. Parker looks confused.

PARKER

Jessop is arrested.

GREENE

Yeah, and Dawson and Downey are dishonorably discharged from the Marine Corps.

(a beat)

Sure, they're cleared of murder and conspiracy, but they're convicted of Conduct Unbecoming a United States Marine.

(a beat)

It's a fictional movie, but the shit flowed down hill, and those two boys were collateral damage.

(a beat)

That's art, imitating life.

Greene fixes Parker with a hard stare, and Parker can hardly look Greene in the eye.

PARKER

I'm sorry.

GREENE

If you want to make it up to me, just keep your mouth shut.

A beat. Greene turns to exit the room. Right before exiting he says...

GREENE (CONT'D)

I will get you your follow on contract. Don't fuck it up.

Greene exits the SCIF.

PARKER

(to the empty room)

I won't.

FADE OUT.

THE END