

# **RENUNCIATION**

**Daniel Nellor**

## CHARACTERS

TOM

ROBERT

ADAM

### Prologue

*Two chairs, facing each other on an otherwise empty stage.*

*Tom and Robert enter from opposite sides. They sit.*

TOM: When you kill someone, what you crave, in my experience, is understanding.

Not only, Robert, are you the only other person in this world who can understand why I did it ...

But in a funny way ...

You're the reason I had to.

God, I hate ideas. We should be animals. We are animals. We should act like it.

Do you ask yourself: What fate brought the three of us, with these ideas, together?

*Tom leaves and is replaced by Adam.*

1.

ADAM: The Americans are torturing again.

Now, I'm sorry about this, but you have to understand what it means.

It happens offshore. They keep people in the dark. Solitary; naked; shackled. Sometimes, they tie a prisoner's hands above his head so if he falls asleep, the arms pull from their sockets. Eventually, of course, everyone has to fall asleep.

They do mock executions. Put a hood over your head; cock the gun. They threaten sexual violence; and occasionally, we believe, they follow through. They threaten families.

Then there's waterboarding.

ROBERT: I know about that.

ADAM: You don't want to hear this. I don't blame you. They say it simulates drowning. It doesn't simulate drowning; it is drowning. It's just that they stop it slightly before it kills you.

Anyway, it's happening again. We know that it's happening. We work closely enough with them to know that it's happening. Though of course we don't talk about it. And of course we don't do it ourselves.

But now we have a problem.

Because we have a man.

We have a man that they want.

ROBERT: A prisoner?

ADAM: Yes.

ROBERT: Are you supposed to be telling me this?

ADAM: No.

*Pause.*

ROBERT: Say no.

ADAM: There's more.

We have an arrangement. Intelligence sharing, and ... other things. I didn't sign it; I inherited it. But it's not unimportant.

ROBERT: 'Other things' includes ...

ADAM: Yes. This.

ROBERT: What's it called—'this'?

ADAM: Prisoner exchange.

ROBERT: Hm.

ADAM: What would you call it?

ROBERT: Handing a man over to his torturers.

ADAM: There's more.

These attacks—what you see in the news—these are not going to stop.

ROBERT: You know that?

ADAM: Yes we do. Do you want to know how we know that?

ROBERT: From the Americans.

ADAM: Very good.

We need them. We lost six people. We'll lose more.

I have a responsibility.

ROBERT: If they knew something ... they would tell you, wouldn't they?

ADAM: Perhaps they would. But we don't rely on them for complete assessments. We rely on them for data. They give us the data, we do the analysis. No data, no analysis.

No warning.

ROBERT: They wouldn't cut us off.

ADAM: Wouldn't they? Why not?

*Pause.*

ROBERT: Prime Minister ...

ADAM: Call me Adam.

ROBERT: I don't really understand what I'm doing here. They told me you wanted to discuss my book.

ADAM: That's right.

ROBERT: *Renunciation.*

ADAM: Yes.

ROBERT: But ... discuss it ... in the context of ... ?

ADAM: The Americans. Torture. And us.

*Pause.*

ROBERT: There may have been a misunderstanding. I don't do political philosophy. I do ethics.

ADAM: They're related, surely?

ROBERT: Yes, but—

ADAM: There's a clear ethical dimension here.

ROBERT: That's the problem. There's not an ethical dimension. It's ethical through and through.

ADAM: I think that's my point, isn't it?

ROBERT: Yes. No. But you see—

I'm an absolutist. I believe in an absolute right and wrong.

ADAM: So do I.

ROBERT: Well, then that's another problem.

ADAM: ?

ROBERT: It might make politics impossible.

An ethic of renunciation holds that it is better to suffer evil, than to do it.

Better to be the victim, than the murderer.

To be harmed, than to harm.

How does that apply here?

ADAM: That's a question for you, isn't it?

ROBERT: No. It's a question for you.

I'm sorry. I'm flattered. But I'm going to have to decline.

ADAM: Why?

ROBERT: You're a politician. You have political considerations to take into account.

ADAM: Yes.

ROBERT: Well—I can't do that.

ADAM: I'm not asking you to do that.

ROBERT: What are you asking me to do?

ADAM: Discuss it with me.

ROBERT: The Americans.

ADAM: Yes.

ROBERT: Why?

ADAM: Because I have a decision to make.

ROBERT: Yes. You do.

ADAM: And I'd like your help in making it.

ROBERT: You don't need my help.

ADAM: Why not?

ROBERT: Because you already know what I'm going to say.

ADAM (*pause*): Don't do it.

ROBERT: Don't do it. Don't do it. You cannot. You must not.

*Pause.*

ADAM: And yet I might.

ROBERT: You might. And there you have the impossibility of politics.

I'm sure you'll find someone else. There are philosophers ... more amenable to pragmatics.

ADAM: Robert, I didn't ask you here because I had any doubt as to what you might say.

ROBERT: Why did you ask me here?

ADAM: Because I was afraid you might be right.

I have a responsibility. Surely you understand I have to do what I can to prevent these attacks.

ROBERT: I agree. You have to do what you can. The question is whether there's a moral limit to what you can do.

ADAM: Well of course there is.

ROBERT: And where does it lie.

ADAM: And for you that's an easy question?

ROBERT: No. Just one with an obvious answer.

ADAM: This man—our prisoner—was involved, you know. At the highest level. The first attack, and probably the second, too. Planning. Operations.

How would I look the victims in the eye?

ROBERT: He'll be punished.

ADAM: Yes he will. But I don't mean those victims. I mean the next ones. I mean the victims of the attack we could have stopped but didn't.

ROBERT: You could tell them there are certain things we do not do.

ADAM: Who is 'we'?

ROBERT: Human beings.

ADAM: There is nothing we do not do!

ROBERT: Insofar as we do certain things, we are not being human.

ADAM: Says who? Maybe this is what we are. Maybe we hand each other over. Are you a religious person?

ROBERT: Not ... conventionally, no.

ADAM: Then says who?

ROBERT: Says the victim. Says the man in the torture chamber. Says the child unjustly harmed. We know this. To encounter—to truly encounter another human being in all their fullness is to know—to just know that they cannot, may not, must not be made a victim. It's as simple as that, really: the deliberate infliction of suffering is a violation, and a terrible one. We

might not know why it is. But we know that it is. We have to believe that we know this; we have no other choice.

ADAM: We have plenty of other choices.

ROBERT: Ins—

ADAM: Insofar as we are being human. I get it.

I spoke to the American President last night. He is a determined and ruthless man. The consequences of your being right—if you are right—are predictable: I would be consciously bringing suffering to my people; the very people who elected me to lead.

ROBERT: Have you met him?

ADAM: The President? Of course.

ROBERT: No, not him.

ADAM: Then who?

ROBERT: The prisoner.

ADAM: No. Of course not.

ROBERT: Why not?

ADAM: We don't do that.

ROBERT: Don't we?

ADAM: No. It's completely out of the question.

ROBERT: Protocols.

ADAM: That's right.

ROBERT: Policies and procedures.

ADAM: What's your point?

ROBERT: My point is that you couldn't do it if you looked him in the eye.

If I'm right about that, then you have your answer.

ADAM: I'll tell you who I have met. Who I have looked in the eye. I met a father whose daughter was killed by this man. She was twelve; he blew her apart in the first attack. Now that's relevant, surely. That's an encounter. That's when you know what's wrong or right.

Encounter the terrorist? Meet the terrorist? At some point do you not forfeit your right to be ... encountered in that way?

ROBERT: Why did you use that example?

ADAM: ?

ROBERT: The father and his daughter.

ADAM: That's what happened.

ROBERT: Is it?

*(pause)*: I just want to tell you that I wouldn't look kindly upon ...

ADAM: What?

ROBERT: Never mind.

ADAM: What's the problem?

ROBERT: Have you had people look into me?

ADAM: What are you talking about?

ROBERT: I lost a daughter. Same age. I wondered if you chose the example with that in mind.

ADAM: Do you think I would do that?

ROBERT: You're a politician.

ADAM: What does that mean?

ROBERT: It means you do what you have to do.

ADAM: Tell lies.

ROBERT: Sometimes.

ADAM: Hand people over to torturers. Manipulate bereaved fathers to win an argument.

ROBERT: I'm sorry if I jumped to the wrong conclusion.

ADAM: No. I'm sorry about what happened.

*(pause)* Do you mind if I ask—

ROBERT: Drunk driver. Nine years ago next week.

*Pause.*

ADAM: What happened to him?

ROBERT: It was a her. Nine months in prison.

ADAM: Long enough?

ROBERT: Please don't do that.

ADAM: Why not?

ROBERT: It's irrelevant. You know that.

ADAM: What if you could have stopped it?

ROBERT: Then I would have.

ADAM: What would you have done to stop it?

ROBERT: Anything.

Anything.

Inhuman or otherwise.

ADAM: Why is it inhuman?

ROBERT: To tear a woman to pieces?

ADAM: Surely your love for your daughter is what is most human about you.

ROBERT: This is a ridiculous conversation. You can't stop a drunk driver.

ADAM: I can. I can stop a bombing.

*Pause.*

ROBERT: It was Socrates who said that it is better to be the victim of evil, than its perpetrator. That's what renunciation means. It means we can do something, but we don't. We don't because ...

My love for my daughter has implications. You have children.

ADAM: Yes.

ROBERT: Surely part of what it is to love your child is to know that it is not just your love that makes them precious. Their value is revealed to you, it is not bestowed by you. The child just is important; she's not just 'important to me'.

This opens up the possibility that there are other people in this world who are also important in a way that is separate from their importance to me.

And that in turn opens up the possibility that people as such are important in a way that is separate from their importance to me.

So my love for my daughter leads, in the end, to a recognition of the importance even of the woman who killed her.

And of the terrorist in the cells.

ADAM: We should let all the prisoners go then.

ROBERT: No. The woman who killed my daughter was reckless; she deserved to be punished. But there is justice, and then there is violation.

ADAM: You said you would tear her to pieces.

ROBERT: That's because I hate her. I haven't forgiven.

ADAM: Do you want to?

ROBERT: ...

ADAM: Sorry.

ROBERT: I can't answer that.

ADAM: That's fine.

ROBERT: Either I don't know the answer—or the answer is I don't know.

ADAM: I have to tell you something.

It wasn't a twelve year old girl. It was a fourteen year old boy.

ROBERT: You changed the example.

ADAM: Yes.

ROBERT: Why?

ADAM: To land the point. A clumsy move. A politician's move.

ROBERT: You did look into me.

ADAM: Of course.

ROBERT: Why?

ADAM: Because we're meeting. You couldn't be ... problematic.

ROBERT: Past statements. Sympathy for Hitler, that sort of thing.

ADAM: That sort of thing.

ROBERT: Why are you telling me now?

ADAM: Because I want you to stay. I need your help. And I want to be honest with you.

*There is a knock, and Tom enters.*

ADAM *(to Tom)*: Come on, mate. *(as in, 'we talked about this')*

TOM: Sorry. Couldn't be helped. *(to Robert)* Hi.

ADAM: This is Tom, my Chief of Staff, who wasn't supposed to interrupt us.

*Tom whispers in Adam's ear.*

ADAM: Say that aloud.

TOM: ?

ADAM: *(nods)*

TOM: There's been another attack. At least three people are dead. At least nine are wounded.

We need to move quickly.

ADAM: Give me a minute, will you?

TOM: ?

ADAM: One minute.

*Tom leaves.*

ADAM: We can put you up.

Clock's ticking.

Come down from the ivory tower, Robert. This is real life. You'll stay.

You'll stay. Won't you?

*Robert leaves, and is replaced by Tom.*

**2.**

TOM: What do you mean?

ADAM: I'm just saying it's an option.

TOM: But it's not an option.

ADAM: It's on the table.

TOM: No. There's no table. Do you think you have a table?

Let's be serious. If he wants it, he gets it. That's how it works.

ADAM: 'It'? 'Him'. That's not how it works. I can't believe I'm hearing this. You're always banging on about how we have to be independent. A creative middle power.

TOM: Creative, not suicidal. Anyway, why not?

ADAM: Why not what?

TOM: Why would you not hand him over?

ADAM: You know what they do to people.

TOM: No I don't. And neither do you.

ADAM: Alright, but in this room.

TOM (*pause*): Cost of doing business.

ADAM: Say anything but that, Tom, please.

TOM: Then how about I just say there's no alternative? Because there isn't. Anyway, you've said you would.

ADAM: When?

TOM: The other night. When you spoke to him.

I presume.

I presume?

ADAM: No, I didn't make any commitment at all.

TOM: Did he not ask?

ADAM: Of course he asked.

TOM: Oh fuck. Did you turn him down?

ADAM: No. I said I'd think about it.

TOM: And how did he respond to that?

ADAM: Not well.

TOM: I'm not surprised. What the hell is going on here?

ADAM: I'm thinking about it.

TOM: Why?

ADAM: Because we're against torture.

TOM: Listen, it's fine when you're with me but don't ever use that word outside this room.

ADAM: I won't.

TOM: Anyway, it's not torture.

ADAM: Yes it is.

TOM: It's rigorous interrogation.

ADAM: Tom. It's fine when you're out of this room but don't give me that shit.

*Pause.*

TOM: I forget: How many years did you serve again?

ADAM: Are you going to pull the soldier card?

TOM: War is unpleasant.

ADAM: This is not unpleasant. This is torture.

TOM: Have you been talking to the NGOs again?

ADAM: Come on—

TOM: Which ones?

ADAM: You know exactly who I've been talking to. You have my diary.

TOM: Oh. Is this—Professor what's his name?

ADAM: Robert.

TOM: Have you told him about the arrangement?

ADAM: Yes, I have. What?

TOM: That is not something he's supposed to know.

ADAM: I can clear people.

TOM: Technically.

ADAM: Legally.

TOM: Theoretically.

ADAM: No—in real life. And I know because I just did.

TOM: The fact that you can doesn't mean that you should. We've said we don't operate like that.

ADAM: It's a one-off. He'll keep it to himself.

TOM: Will he? How do you know? He's opposed, is he?

ADAM: To torture?

TOM: To the exchange.

ADAM: Yes, he's opposed.

TOM: Then how do you know he'll keep it to himself? This is his golden opportunity to do something about it. Little word to the media.

ADAM: He's fine. He's very principled.

TOM: That's what I'm afraid of.

ADAM: Tell me something: Would you do it yourself?

TOM: Do what?

ADAM: 'Rigorous interrogation.'

TOM: Who's to say I haven't?

ADAM: Have you?

TOM: Adam, it's not a tea party. We're firm with them.

ADAM: 'Firm.'

TOM: Yes.

ADAM: I'm firm with my kids. We're not talking about firm.

TOM: What are you asking me?

ADAM: How far do we go?

*Pause.*

TOM: Not as far as they do.

ADAM: By how much?

TOM: By a long way.

ADAM: That's what I thought.

TOM: No. We let them do it for us.

*Pause.*

ADAM: We might stop doing that.

TOM: It's a conversation to be had. In the meantime, this exchange needs to happen, and it needs to happen soon.

ADAM: Why do we keep calling it an exchange? It's us giving him to them.

TOM: That's right, in exchange for information like the information that led to the report I came in here to talk to you about.

ADAM: What report?

TOM: From Paul.

ADAM: Oh God, go on.

TOM: So. The risk assessment says there's a greater than 90 per cent chance of another attack.

ADAM: Timeframe?

TOM: Weeks or less.

ADAM: From?

TOM: Same networks, more or less. You know how these groups are in flux.

And yes—our man is connected.

ADAM: Where?

TOM: They don't know. That's why we need the Americans to ask him.

ADAM: How personally should I be taking this?

TOM: How do you mean?

ADAM: They think I'm weak. Right? That's why they're striking.

TOM: No, it's not that. They don't make calculations like that. They go when they're ready.

ADAM: So you're saying that despite the fact I am weak, it's not a determinative factor.

TOM: Who's saying you're weak?

ADAM: Paul for one.

TOM: No.

ADAM: Yes.

TOM: Well, Paul's Paul. You don't have to worry about Paul.

ADAM: What's your opinion?

TOM: I rip his fucking head off when he says things like that. Believe me. And I enjoy doing it, too, because in military terms he outranks me by maybe 19.

ADAM: I don't doubt that's what you do. I'm asking what you think.

TOM: Where is this coming from?

ADAM: No-one elected me because they thought I was a wartime leader.

TOM: It's not wartime.

ADAM: It might as well be.

TOM: Let's keep this in perspective. Ok? It's a particularly intense series of well-planned and maximally destructive terrorist attacks. That's all. It requires a firm response.

ADAM: There's that word again.

TOM: I don't think you're weak.

ADAM: There's a moral reality here.

TOM: Absolutely.

ADAM: You agree with that?

TOM: Of course. You have a moral responsibility to protect our people.

ADAM: Also not to do wrong.

TOM: It wouldn't be wrong.

ADAM: But that's the question, isn't it?

TOM: No, it's not a question. You have to protect us. You've seen what they can do. It's indiscriminate. They kill children. I know what you've seen. I was with you.

We do what we have to do.

ADAM: You didn't really answer my question before.

TOM: ?

ADAM: Would you do it yourself?

TOM: Adam, I don't say it's right that they do it. But they do. And we need them. And I'm not in a position to tell them not to do it. And frankly, neither are you. And in the meantime there's a greater than 90 per cent chance that these fucks are going to set off another nail bomb in a crowded place. So fuck 'em, in the end—just fuck 'em. We do what we have to do.

ADAM: Isn't this how it begins, though? They do evil and we say fuck it, we'll do it too.

TOM: 'Evil.'

ADAM: No?

TOM: Let's start by getting the language straight. These are criminal acts. We respond appropriately, and proportionately. We have a longstanding intelligence sharing arrangement; it's served us well. Prisoner exchange is a small part of it. It's hardly ever necessary. In this case it happens to be. So we do it, by the book.

Now: we have our ways of doing things, and they have theirs. We make our views known through the proper channels.

ADAM: And we're comfortable this all accords with international law.

TOM: Everything we know about complies with international law.

ADAM: Oh Tom, this is rationalisation, obfuscation and self-justification!

TOM: No. This is how we move from where we are, to where we need to be.

ADAM: What's that supposed to mean?

TOM: You don't have a choice. You know that, don't you? There is only one course of action here.

Can you imagine—can you imagine if you refused this and some vital piece of information didn't get through? Can you imagine if just one drop of our blood was spilled because you took an entirely novel and unprecedented approach to well-established security arrangements?

I was with you. I was with you, remember? We both saw the bodies. I served. I saw action. I've never seen anything like it.

I can't let you do this.

ADAM: Then find me another way.

TOM: What do you mean?

ADAM: Get me out of this. Find another way through. We give them the prisoner, but they don't do the torture. Or—we have someone there.

TOM: We have someone there? That makes it worse.

ADAM: Then we do it.

TOM: No.

ADAM: Then they do it, but in line with our standards.

TOM: Then we might as well do it ourselves.

ADAM: Then let's do it ourselves! Our way.

TOM: That defeats the purpose. If they were happy with our ways, they would leave us to it. Adam, you don't get it, do you? They think they're doing us a favour. We get to keep our hands clean. They think we should be grateful.

ADAM: What concerns me, Tom, is that you might be grateful.

TOM: That is a fucking insult.

ADAM: And that I might be, too.

*Pause.*

TOM: You know that out of everyone in this world I am the one who is absolutely loyal to you.

But I can't protect you if you make this decision.

It's insane.

I can't stand by and let you do it. My loyalty stops at the blood of children.

Adam, be reasonable. The attacks are coming, and as things stand we might be able to stop them. Might. But we cannot tie our hands behind our backs. I'm your friend. I can't let you be the leader who put a psychopathic terrorist fuck above our own citizens. No; you wanted the job. This is the job. This is what the job entails.

It's a privilege.

ADAM: It doesn't feel like one.

TOM: I know it doesn't. But it's what we need you to do. It's what we're asking for when we mark the ballot paper. It's how you serve.

*Pause.*

ADAM: Alright.

TOM: Alright?

ADAM: Alright. I have a couple of tasks for you.

I'd like you to get the paperwork together, and have it ready on my desk.

TOM: Good.

ADAM: And then I'd like you to set up a meeting.

TOM: ?

ADAM: With him.

TOM: Who?

No.

ADAM: Yes.

TOM: No way. Absolutely not.

ADAM: Is there any legal reason why it can't happen?

TOM: I don't care if there's a legal reason.

ADAM: There's not. So make it happen, please.

TOM: I won't.

ADAM: Tom, it's a precondition.

TOM: It's the worst fucking idea I ever heard in my life.

ADAM: I need it.

TOM: You need it. You need it in order to ... ?

ADAM: Make this decision.

TOM: It's beyond ridiculous. Where would it even happen?

ADAM: Presumably I'll go to him.

TOM: And how does this not get out?

ADAM: Isolate him. Bring me in a back way. Tom, the logistics are not what's stopping you.

TOM: You're right. They're not.

This is a necessary task. Why make it harder for yourself?

ADAM: I won't give him to them without looking him in the eye.

TOM: You won't give him to them if you do.

ADAM: Listen—if there's anyone in this world who's entitled to see me as not up to this, it's you. But I know what I'm capable of.

TOM: Why do you say that?

ADAM: You know why.

TOM: I mean, why do you say that now?

ADAM: It's understandable if you think I can't do this. I get why you think it's a bad idea.

TOM: I don't think it's a bad idea because you're not up to the job. I think it's a bad idea because you're human. What are we actually talking about here?

ADAM: ...

TOM: Well, we don't talk about that.

ADAM: You've seen me at my lowest. You need to know I'm not there now.

TOM: I never for a moment suggested you were. But now you've got me worried.

ADAM: Don't be. I'm strong. I'm prepared. I can do this. But I need to meet him first.

I'm afraid you're just going to have to indulge me.

*Pause.*

TOM: I'm going to encounter significant pushback on this.

ADAM: I'm sure you are. Just don't let it be coming from you.

TOM: ?

ADAM: Don't go hunting for a legal argument.

TOM: You know me well.

ADAM: I appreciate your friendship, Tom. How could I not?

You'll save me yet.

*Pause.*

TOM: Leave it with me.

ADAM: ?

TOM: Leave it with me.

*Adam leaves and is replaced by Robert.*

**3.**

TOM: He tried to kill himself.

ROBERT: When?

TOM: At university. We were close. I found him. Took him to a hospital.

ROBERT: That sounds like information you wouldn't want to get out.

TOM: That's right.

ROBERT: So why are you telling me?

TOM: I need you to tell him he can do this.

ROBERT (*pause*): Are we talking about the same thing?

TOM: Yes.

ROBERT: He doesn't need my permission.

TOM: That's right. He doesn't.

ROBERT: He asked to see me.

TOM: I need you to tell him this can be done.

ROBERT: It can be done.

TOM: You have objections.

ROBERT: Yes.

TOM: Name them.

Go on, name them.

ROBERT: Well—it's wrong.

TOM (*pause*): Is that it?

ROBERT: Isn't that enough?

TOM: No.

No, I'm afraid it isn't.

It was a relationship. A girlfriend. They'd been together—it seemed a long time at that age—maybe a year or two. When it ended he took an overdose. We kept it quiet. Only a handful of people ever knew it happened.

But only I knew why.

ROBERT: Why?

TOM: He couldn't live with the idea he might have caused her pain.

ROBERT: And had he?

TOM: Of course he had. It was a relationship. They caused each other pain. But Adam is ... how would you put it? Pathologically empathetic. It's how he got elected. Voters think he cares about them, because he does. But it has a downside.

ROBERT: Why are you telling me this?

TOM: Because he has to hurt someone, and I don't think he can do it.

Let's be clear, Robert: I was against bringing you in. It's nothing personal, but I thought it was a bad idea. But you're in now. So I need you to understand what we're trying to do here.

ROBERT: And what's that?

TOM: Govern. You've not worked in government before, have you?

ROBERT: I'm not working in government now.

TOM: What do you think—

And forgive me if this sounds patronising but it's late and I'm tired—

But what do you think government is for?

ROBERT: Making laws. Implementing policy. Providing services. Facilitating commerce.

TOM: I'll stop you there.

You're not wrong. But actually it's more simple than that.

ROBERT: ?

TOM: Holding back the chaos.

ROBERT: What do you mean by chaos?

TOM: I mean the default position. Humanity minus government.

ROBERT: The state of nature.

TOM: Exactly.

ROBERT: But we don't really know, do we? We don't know what the state of nature is like. Hobbes thought it was a war of all against all. Rousseau thought it was paradise.

TOM: You are joking, aren't you?

ROBERT: Well, we can't test it, can we?

TOM: Fucking hell.

ROBERT: ?

TOM: Of course we can. Have you never heard of a failed state?

ROBERT: Well, yes, but—

TOM: Have you been to one? I have. I've walked the streets with a helmet and machine gun. I've patrolled the 'state of nature', Robert: it's not a fucking paradise.

ROBERT: I think we have to examine a range of factors ...

TOM: I think we have to hold it back at all costs. That's what I think. We're not immune, you know. Do you think that we are?

ROBERT: I don't think we're on the verge of chaos.

TOM: There is a psychic cost to these attacks.

ROBERT: Undoubtedly.

TOM: It ramifies outwards. The dead are just the still centre at the heart of the cyclone. It's the wounded around them. The crushed ones, writhing. Traumatized witnesses. Police, ambulance—we pay a fortune in mental illness claims. Families. Friends. And then everyone who sees it on the news. You're at a football game. You're in a church. Could it happen? Could it happen here?

It could. It has. It will.

You have to understand, Robert: there's no guarantee this holds together.

ROBERT: What doesn't?

TOM: Civilisation. They're not stupid, you know—the ones who do it. They know what they want. I don't mean the idiot with the nail bomb. I mean the people behind him. They've weaponised mental illness. They find the sickest, most disturbed individuals they can and mobilise them towards creating the chaos they seek. And they know—better than we do—that it's not that far away.

ROBERT: And what are we defending?

TOM: What do you mean?

ROBERT: What is the point of civilisation if we have to be uncivilised to protect it?

TOM: Oh, don't give me that fucking shit! That's utterly facile. This is not a fucking university lecture. Look, the fact is, Robert, you are very good at what you do. But you can only do it because of what we do, here. You need time, don't you? Order. Peace. Then you can think. Then you can do your philosophy. Well, these do not come for free. Do you think it happens by accident that most people in this country can relax for most of the time?

No. Not every place has that. There's a cost, and someone has to pay it.

ROBERT: Who are you talking about?

TOM: The Prime Minister, of course.

ROBERT: And the cost being?

TOM: Sainthood.

He wants it, you know. He's a good man. But this office doesn't have room for a saint. This job starts and ends with maintaining and protecting the conditions of community. If you don't have that, you don't have anything.

ROBERT: Someone else pays, too.

TOM: I don't deny it.

ROBERT: No-one will even tell me his name.

TOM: There's a reason for that. Just like there's a reason we don't allow our fucking Prime Minister to go and meet him in his cell.

ROBERT (*pause*): I might be partly responsible for that.

TOM: You are entirely responsible for that.

ROBERT: And what do you want me to do about it?

TOM: Compromise. He's not an idiot. You can't change your position at this stage. But I need you to get alongside him and help him to understand that he's human. Sometimes there's not an answer.

ROBERT: Sometimes we don't like the answer.

TOM: You would have him sacrifice our people.

ROBERT: So would you. What if protecting our people meant torturing two suspected terrorists? What if it meant torturing three, or a hundred? Or what if it meant killing an innocent child? Just one? Why not? Or beheadings in the public square—what if that would help?

You wouldn't do just anything. Sooner or later you would draw the line. We just draw it in different places, that's all.

TOM: No, you draw it on a blackboard. I draw it in real life.

ROBERT: I don't buy that, actually. With all due respect. There is no action unguided by an idea. You're no less driven by the life of the mind than I am. We operate out of different assumptions.

TOM: And what is your assumption?

ROBERT: That if the individual human person is not sacred then morality is meaningless.

TOM: And what is mine?

ROBERT: That the community comes first.

TOM: Community is where individuals live.

ROBERT: I grant you that. But if communities derive their value from the individuals within them, then what does it mean when we sacrifice one of those individuals?

TOM: He's not one of ours.

ROBERT: That thought's unworthy of you. The community is not a good in and of itself.

TOM: But without it, your 'sacred human person' is nothing.

Is an animal.

Is lost.

*Pause.*

ROBERT: You should have been a philosophy professor.

TOM: God help me.

ROBERT: I'm sorry. I'm not trying to make your life more difficult.

TOM: I know you're not.

Alright.

It's late. Let's get to the point. You're not going to shift. I accept that. I respect it. I have something different to ask of you instead.

ROBERT: And what's that?

TOM: Go.

ROBERT: What do you mean?

TOM: Go home. Leave us. Make your excuses.

ROBERT: He asked me to stay.

TOM: I know he did. He can't force you. You have things to do back home. You've said your piece. You can't hang around forever.

ROBERT: I'm meeting him tomorrow.

TOM: I know you are. And at that meeting you can tell him you're leaving. He'll understand.

ROBERT: What if he doesn't understand?

TOM: He's not a king. He can't hold you against your will.

ROBERT: Why do you want me gone?

TOM: I would have thought that'd be obvious. You're in his head now. That's not a good place for you to be, actually. He has to do this. He's going to do it. The only question is whether it breaks him or not. I'd prefer not. So I need you to go.

By the way, I know your Vice-Chancellor.

ROBERT: Oh, yes?

TOM: He's never heard of you. I think that's a shame. Because even though we disagree, Robert, I think you're a serious person. And I thought your book was excellent.

ROBERT: You haven't read it, have you?

TOM: Of course I have.

ROBERT: Why?

TOM: Because Adam did. Anyway, I think you can do better in your career. It's good these ideas are out there.

ROBERT: And you can help me with that, can you?

And this help is contingent on my leaving, is it?

And what happens if I don't?

TOM: You tell me. You're the one telling this story.

ROBERT: I'll go when he tells me to go.

TOM: I suppose we could speculate. 'The community comes first.' Your words, not mine. What might a person do who really believed that? If that's the starting point, where do we end up?

If the community is threatened, then I suppose that person would be willing to act.

ROBERT: I won't be threatened.

TOM: Don't be dramatic. I'm just following the argument where it leads. Your argument, not mine.

Look, Robert, this is not your world. You've made that painfully clear. I don't think you want to be here, if we're honest. But I think what you do is important and I'd like to see you keep doing it. I hope you can agree that what we do here is important too.

ROBERT: Maybe not as important as you think it is.

*Pause.*

TOM: Ideas are funny things, aren't they? They start in here (*taps his head*). But they end up changing everything.

Anyway. I'm sure you'll do the right thing.

Thanks for coming in.

*Tom leaves and is replaced by Adam.*

ADAM: Thanks for coming in. Actually I don't have a lot of time today. I just wanted to thank you for your help. And to tell you we can let you get back to your real job now.

ROBERT: Has there been a decision?

ADAM: There has.

ROBERT: ?

ADAM: The thing is, Robert, we need to tighten the circle a bit now. Things get a bit—legally specific—from here.

ROBERT: You don't want to say the words.

ADAM: Not to you.

ROBERT: I see.

How did you manage to justify it?

ADAM: I haven't told you what 'it' is.

ROBERT: Yes you have.

ADAM: Who says I justify it? Maybe sometimes you have to do what you—morally—can't do. Does that make any sense to you?

ROBERT: Not really.

ADAM: Then you haven't stood where I stand.

ROBERT: Resign.

ADAM: My successor would do it in a heartbeat.

ROBERT: Say no.

ADAM: Then I might as well plant the bomb myself.

ROBERT: ?

ADAM: If you stand by and let something happen, you're complicit.

ROBERT: Only if you can stop it.

ADAM: I can stop it.

ROBERT: At an unacceptable cost.

ADAM: No it's not. It's not unacceptable. I won't keep my hands clean at the expense of dead children.

ROBERT: I'm not talking about your hands. I'm talking about your prisoner.

ADAM: I know what you're talking about. But I think you think there's a right way through and we just have to find it. What if there's not? What if every way is wrong and you have to choose one anyway?

ROBERT: What if two and two make five? They don't.

ADAM: Morality is not mathematics.

ROBERT: It's real. It's out there. It doesn't change based on your political needs.

ADAM: I agree with that. But I had to make a calculation, and I made it.

ROBERT: The calculation being ... ?

ADAM: That the suffering of many is greater than the suffering of one.

ROBERT: So morality is mathematics.

ADAM: No. But politics is, sometimes.

Maybe you're right; maybe that makes it impossible.

Someone has to do it anyway.

Anyway this is all hypothetical as I haven't told you the decision.

ROBERT: What am I supposed to do now?

ADAM: Go home.

ROBERT: And just—stand by and let it happen?

ADAM: Let what happen?

ROBERT: For God's sake, stop playing these stupid word games!

I'm not sure I can just stand by.

ADAM: Then with the greatest possible respect, Robert, I can only remind you that to do otherwise would be not only a personal betrayal but quite possibly an illegal act.

Look Robert, they told me not to bring you in here. I did it anyway. Having you here was about allowing a voice into the process that would normally be absent. I don't regret it. You fought the good fight. Don't make me look foolish in front of the hard heads. They'll never let me do anything like this again.

*Tom enters.*

ADAM: Speak of the devil.

TOM: Car's ready.

ADAM: Ok.

TOM: Reconsider.

ADAM: Let's go.

TOM (*to Robert*): Tell him.

ROBERT: ?

TOM: Tell him he doesn't have to look this prick in the eye.

ADAM: Let's go, Tom.

ROBERT: Are you meeting him?

TOM: You're happy about this, aren't you?

ADAM: Leave it.

TOM: This is what you wanted.

ROBERT: Take me with you.

TOM: (*laughs*)

ADAM: No.

TOM: And how many more protocols would you like us to break for you, you arrogant cunt?

ADAM: Tom. I'll meet you in the car.

*Tom exits.*

ADAM: No, you may not come along, Robert. It's over.

ROBERT: Then why are you meeting him?

ADAM: It's the right thing to do. Unless you want to tell me it's not?

ROBERT: ...

ADAM: No. I didn't think you'd let me off that easily.

*He holds out his hand. Robert shakes it, then leaves and is replaced by Tom.*

5.

ADAM: Where were you?

TOM: With the Ambassador.

ADAM: I need you.

TOM: I'm here. Are you sick?

ADAM: No.

TOM: Then what is it?

ADAM: You can say 'I told you so'.

TOM: ?

No.

No no—

ADAM: I'm sorry.

TOM: Fuck.

ADAM: I can't. I can't do it.

TOM: That's not what this was about.

ADAM: I know.

TOM: Adam. This was not about making the decision. The decision was made.

ADAM: I know.

TOM: So what happened?

ADAM: I met him.

TOM: And?

ADAM: I kept waiting for him to give me a reason not to do it. So I could register that and overcome it and do it anyway. Because it's the right thing to do. I know it is. It's the only thing to do. But he gave me nothing. The opposite. The man is pure hatred, I've never seen anything like it. But the less he gave me the more I realised that there were no reasons not to do it, because it's not about reasons. It's not about adding up the good and the bad. It's about we just don't do this. Not: we hardly ever do this. Not: we try not to do it. No. We just don't do this to human beings. And so I won't. Because I can't. Because we don't.

TOM: God damn it, Adam. This is a delay now. This is conspicuous.

ADAM: Which Ambassador were you with?

TOM: Which do you think?

ADAM: How did it get to him so quickly?

TOM: Do you really have to ask? Serious people are sitting in a fucking interrogation room wondering where their fucking prisoner is. Word filters up.

The Ambassador is polite. The President will be less so.

ADAM: I understand.

TOM: So?

ADAM: I'll wear it.

TOM: You'll wear it? No, you won't wear it. We'll all wear it. Adam, you don't understand. You don't get to do this. People are dying. The country's on a hair trigger. We can't take any more of these attacks. People will not tolerate it. Things will break down. They are breaking down. I've seen this. I've seen it before. There's a tipping point, and we're at it.

ADAM: That's an exaggeration.

TOM: How would you know? You're safe. You go from a car, to an office, to a house. Protected every step of the way. Most people are not safe. They're on the street. They're vulnerable. And they know it.

ADAM: I haven't always been protected.

TOM: You've always had money, which is much the same thing. Look. Adam. Enough. This is an indulgence now. You have to pull yourself together.

ADAM: Vulnerable is being led in handcuffs to people who want to do you harm. Vulnerable is being placed in the hands of your torturer.

TOM: I'm not here to argue with you. We're not at university. I'm here to advise you. Sometimes that's difficult. In this case it's easy. This has to be done. You'll do it. Because this is everything we worked for. We're here now, we made it. You are the right person for this moment, I really believe that. But this is what the moment demands. It'll be difficult. But you'll get over it. The odd bad day. Like a veteran. And like a veteran, you'll have served. You'll have done what was necessary.

ADAM: Maybe the moment requires something different.

TOM: Like what?

ADAM: Renunciation.

TOM: Of what?

ADAM: Of the power we have to crush this man. If not now, then when? This is when it matters: when it's costly.

TOM: We didn't take power to renounce it. No. If you want to renounce something, renounce your fucking ...

ADAM: What?

TOM: Pretensions to sainthood. You're a good fucking man. Alright? Which is more than most people in this world can say. Be satisfied. Don't be a martyr. And don't make other people martyrs for you.

ADAM: That's not what's going on.

TOM: Then what is going on?

ADAM: It's wrong, Tom! It's the wrong thing to do! It's not how the world should work. We're not supposed to treat each other like this. And how does it change? It only changes if someone changes it. Someone has to get to a position of power and then say I will not use my power in this way. Or else the whole thing just keeps ticking along and if you get out in front of it it runs you down. As always. As it ever has been. We always said we would do things differently.

TOM: He planned the attacks.

ADAM: You know that's not the point.

TOM: He picked the kinds of bombs to use. He went for the ones that would lacerate the skin and cause the most blood to flow. He recruited the psychopaths to wear the vests. And he picked the locations. Where there would be children. Where there would be families. The ordinary places of human happiness. To poison them for all of us. He is not weak. He is not a victim. And by the way, he expects us to do it.

ADAM: I know he does.

TOM: Well?

ADAM: I want to surprise him.

TOM: He'll laugh at you.

ADAM: Maybe.

TOM: They all will. And they'll be right. Adam, listen, we will do things differently. In any number of ways. But sometimes you come up against an immovable force. This is one of those times. I told you this. I told you if you went down this path I couldn't protect you.

ADAM: I'm not asking for your protection.

TOM: No?

ADAM: Or your permission.

TOM (*pause*): It might be worth thinking about why you have me here.

ADAM: I value your counsel. Doesn't mean you win every battle.

TOM: A thousand people can give you advice. Why am I here?

ADAM: I hope you're not talking about what I think you're talking about.

TOM: Maybe we should talk about it.

ADAM: This is not—

TOM: It's a deathwish. It's a political deathwish. Things get difficult. You feel morally compromised. You have a choice. You can live with the tension, or you can pull the whole thing down on your head.

Sound familiar?

ADAM: I'm not pulling the whole thing down. This is one decision.

TOM: No it's not. It's not one decision. It's the only decision. If you get this wrong, you don't get to make another one.

ADAM: ?

TOM: Adam, one of three things is going to happen. You'll hand this man over. Or you'll resign. Or I will.

ADAM: Resign?

TOM: Yes.

ADAM: Why would I resign?

TOM: To make way for Jeremy.

ADAM: Jeremy would reverse the decision.

TOM: Correct. If you can't do what must be done, you have to make way for someone who can.

ADAM: Have you spoken to Jeremy, by any chance?

TOM: From time to time, when it can't be avoided, I speak to Jeremy.

ADAM: What am I looking at here?

TOM: One of three things.

ADAM: Jeremy can't knock me off.

TOM: Not by himself.

ADAM: Is he going to have some help?

TOM: I hope it doesn't come to that.

ADAM: Tom, are you sure?

TOM: My loyalty stops. At the blood. Of children.

You know it breaks my heart to do it.

ADAM: What makes you think you can do it? Jeremy doesn't have the numbers.

TOM: Not yet.

ADAM: The kingmaker.

TOM: I didn't say that.

ADAM: Has it occurred to you it might have something to do with the quality of the king?

TOM: Believe me, I wish it was anyone but Jeremy.

ADAM: This overrides everything, does it? Health; early childhood; the financial reforms in which Jeremy has shown not the slightest bit of interest?

TOM: Yes, and you know it does. This is how you get permission to do those things. Physical security is the first box you tick. And by the way, health is not the tragedy here. The financial stuff is not the tragedy.

ADAM: Us.

TOM: That's right.

ADAM: So don't do it.

TOM: I have to do it.

ADAM: No you don't. It's my decision. I'm the one making it, not you. You tried your best. You made your case. You lost this one.

TOM: It doesn't work like that.

ADAM: That's exactly how it works.

TOM: Then why don't you resign? Let someone else make the decision.

ADAM: That's different.

TOM: How?

ADAM: Because I'm in the job! I'm in the job, and you're not. You advise. You have advised. I note your advice; I thank you for it. I'm going in a different direction. You live with that.

TOM: I can't live with that.

ADAM: I know you can't. And I know why.

TOM: Why?

ADAM: Because you think it should be you.

TOM: What?

ADAM: You think it should be you.

TOM: No.

ADAM: Do you need me to remind you why it isn't?

TOM: Be careful.

ADAM: They don't like you, Tom.

Remember?

They just don't like you. Voters; party members; supporters; MPs.

Your strength was you knew that. Which is why you supported me. Which is why we went from being competitors—

TOM: To partners. I remember.

ADAM: Well it doesn't come with a veto.

TOM: Do you think that's what this is about? Wounded pride?

ADAM: You tell me.

TOM: I shouldn't have to.

ADAM: Then what is it about?

TOM: Innocence! Protecting the innocent. Our innocent. By sacrificing one—just one—of the guilty. Yeah. Yeah. Let them rip his fucking throat out. It's cheap at the price. I don't need to be liked. I need to be right. And I'm right about this, I know I am.

I'm sorry, Adam—I'm coming after you.

Say you know it's not jealousy.

Say it. Say you know! For God's sake, Adam, at least give me that.

It doesn't have to be like this.

*Adam leaves and is replaced by Robert.*

6.

TOM: Thanks for coming in.

ROBERT: What do you want?

TOM: Can I get you a drink?

ROBERT: No.

TOM: To talk. That's all. To talk.

ROBERT: I've been hearing ugly rumours.

TOM: Have you? About who?

ROBERT: About you. About the bombing.

TOM: Which one?

ROBERT: Today's!

TOM: Oh. Well. Rumours, eh? Welcome to politics.

ROBERT: They say you went to the site. They say—

Tom, did you kneel in the blood?

My God!

It's a crime scene. They had to pull you out. What were you thinking?

TOM: He was right, you know.

ROBERT: Who?

TOM: Adam. I couldn't do it. I thought I could, but I couldn't. Couldn't get the numbers— couldn't get anywhere near the numbers. They fucking love him, and I don't blame them. How can you not love a saint?

ROBERT: Tom, listen, the stories. In the press. About his mental health. They didn't come from me. You said you'd never told anyone else. So where did they come from?

TOM: I think you've answered your own question.

ROBERT: Look. I don't know much about politics. And I don't really want to. But I respect your position. I understand that you think the morally correct action in this case is to sacrifice one prisoner for the common good. Now, I disagree with that position, but I know you hold it sincerely. But I am genuinely worried about you. You appreciate blunt talk. Ok: what you did today was unhinged. So let me introduce another philosophical concept into our discussion: 'Ought implies can.' Do you know what that means? It means that if something is impossible, then it cannot be morally required of you to do it. You only ought to do something, if you can do it. So if I see a child drowning in a swimming pool, I'm morally obliged to try to save him. But if I see a plane falling out of the sky, it's awful, it's catastrophic, but I am not morally obliged to fly like Superman and put it right. I can't do that, so it makes no sense to say that I should. You think Adam is profoundly morally wrong. Fine. You tried to convince him, but you couldn't. Fine. You tried to replace him, but you couldn't do that either. So it's over. It's over now. Ought implies can—and you can't. So you need to stop. That's what I'm saying to you. You need to stop this now.

TOM: And what is the limit of 'can'?

ROBERT: What do you mean?

TOM: What do we mean by 'can'? What if you can do something—what if it's physically possible—but it's just really, really hard?

ROBERT: None of us are saints.

TOM: People die for what they think is right.

ROBERT: Sometimes.

TOM: Or sometimes, they kill.

*Pause.*

ROBERT: I don't think that's ever justified.

TOM: I know you don't. But not everyone agrees with you. It's about starting points, isn't it? If you start out saying you can never kill, then certain things follow. But if you start out saying that you sometimes can—well then you've opened a door, haven't you?

ROBERT: You can't do evil in the service of good.

TOM: Of course not. If a certain kind of action is always evil, then the decision is easy. But what if it's not? What if sometimes it's the right thing to do?

ROBERT: Tom—what are we talking about here?

TOM: Nothing. We're just talking.

ROBERT: I believe killing is wrong. Full stop. It's too easy to move from saying that we may do it, to saying that we must. That's how wars start.

TOM: Do you want to talk to me about war?

ROBERT: I know you've served. Which is why you of all people should know that violence is never an answer.

TOM: And you of all people should know what it means to fail to protect our children.

ROBERT: What a despicable thing to say. What a horrendous thing to say to me.

TOM: I did. I knelt in the blood. I put my hands in it. And you'd have done the same.

ROBERT: No I wouldn't. Who are you to say what I'd do? You don't know anything about me.

TOM: Ever put flowers at the site?

ROBERT: I'm not going to answer that.

TOM: I'll take that as a yes. It's the same thing. It's an acknowledgement. It's a duty. It's a prayer.

ROBERT: It's not the same thing at all. You interfered with a crime scene, Tom. They need the forensic evidence.

TOM: Do they? Why? We know who was behind it. We know where he is. We have him.

ROBERT: I'm not going down this path with you. Not anymore. You need to talk to someone.

TOM: I'm talking to you.

ROBERT: No—

TOM: Yes, I am. I'm talking to you. I'm sorry, Robert. You're in this now.

ROBERT: I don't want to be in it.

TOM: Then you shouldn't have come here.

ROBERT: Maybe I don't like where it's going.

TOM: Maybe I don't either. But isn't that what philosophy is all about? Following the argument where it leads?

ROBERT: And where does it lead? Tell me that. What's the end point here?

TOM: An old mentor of mine used to say that politics never ends well.

Eventually, we're all taken out in a box.

Funny old game, isn't it?

Thanks for coming in.

*Tom leaves, and is replaced by Adam.*

7.

ROBERT: Is there any way Tom can get to the prisoner?

ADAM: Is that what you came in here to ask me?

ROBERT: Yes.

ADAM: No.

ROBERT: Are you sure?

ADAM: Yes. Why?

ROBERT: I think there's a logic at work in his mind. I think—

Is there any chance he could he try to—

ADAM: What?

ROBERT: It seems absurd to say it.

ADAM: What was he talking about?

ROBERT: The ethics of killing.

ADAM: Hm.

ROBERT: Do you think Tom would ever be willing to do that?

ADAM: Kill?

ROBERT: Yes.

ADAM: Yes.

ROBERT: Really?

ADAM: Of course. He has done.

ROBERT: On the battlefield.

ADAM: Correct.

ROBERT: Outside of that?

ADAM: Robert, he can't get to him.

ROBERT: Is that the only reason? What if he wants to try? What if he wants to go down in a blaze of glory?

ADAM: The Americans need the prisoner alive.

ROBERT: Oh—yeah. That's right, isn't it? See, that's what doesn't make sense ...

ADAM: I think you need to take a deep breath.

ROBERT: There's no way he can get into that prison.

ADAM: No. He doesn't work for me anymore.

ROBERT: And he would know that.

ADAM: Yes. He would know that.

ROBERT: Then what was he talking about?

ADAM: I don't know. Maybe he was just talking. I'm sorry, Robert, I have quite a busy day. Was there anything else?

ROBERT: No. There's nothing else.

There's a storm off the coast.

ADAM: We're prepared.

ROBERT: The communities in its path.

ADAM: We'll help them.

ROBERT: I'm going to leave.

ADAM: Ok.

ROBERT: I mean—go home.

ADAM: I understand.

ROBERT: Are we doing the right thing?

ADAM: In what respect?

ROBERT: Keeping the prisoner.

ADAM: No. Im doing the right thing. You're not doing anything.

ROBERT: I told you to do it.

ADAM: You offered an opinion.

ROBERT: You took it.

ADAM: It's my responsibility.

ROBERT: I'm having doubts.

ADAM: I know you are. That's because it's real. What can I say? Welcome to politics.

ROBERT: Tom said the same thing.

ADAM: Did he? Sounds like something he'd say. Thanks for coming in.

*He offers his hand. Robert shakes, leaves, and is replaced by Tom.*

*Sound of a storm, then silence.*

8.

TOM: Why would you not revoke my security pass?

ADAM: Didn't like the way it would look. Didn't like what it would say about us.

TOM: What can we say about us?

ADAM: I know it wasn't jealousy.

*Pause.*

TOM: Thank you.

*Pause.*

Bad storm.

ADAM: (*nods*)

TOM: Casualties?

ADAM: Just houses.

TOM: The warnings worked.

ADAM: (*nods*)

TOM: That's good.

*Pause.*

I couldn't get the numbers.

ADAM: No.

TOM: I used to be able to count. Can't count anymore.

I told people. About university. About the overdose. About you.

That was a betrayal.

ADAM: Yes.

TOM: Guess what? No-one really cared that much.

ADAM: It's not what it used to be, mental illness.

TOM: I had to try.

ADAM: I understand. Tom, when I was unwell, you helped me. I'll always be grateful for that. For a long time I wondered how I could ever return the favour.

I think the moment might have come.

TOM: You've spoken to Robert.

ADAM: I have.

TOM: He probably thinks I want to get to the prisoner.

ADAM: He does.

TOM: You know better, don't you? Adam ... why the fuck did you let me in here?

ADAM: You're my friend. I'm not going to shut the door to you.

TOM: Layers of security. Even more since the attacks began. And the only one who gets to walk in here without any checks, any wave down—is the one with the knife in his pocket.

ADAM: You're not going to do it.

TOM: Why not?

ADAM: You're my friend.

TOM: That's what makes it almost impossible. I agree. But that's what makes it possible, too. That's why I'm the only one who can do it. It's the logic. It's relentless. If you're not here, Jeremy has the numbers. And Jeremy will do the right thing. And it is the right thing. I can't make this not add up.

ADAM: Tom, listen. You helped me. Let me help you now.

TOM: Don't pretend you think this is madness.

ADAM: Even for a soldier, mental illness is not what it used to be.

TOM: Do you think I'm mad?

ADAM: Tom—

TOM: Do you think I'm mad?

ADAM: Think what we're talking about here!

TOM: Do you think I'm mad?

ADAM: You brought a knife into my office! You pushed your way through a fucking police cordon and knelt in the blood of a dead child! Thank Christ there were no media there. Do I think you're mad?

No. I don't. I think you really would do it, if you thought it was the right thing to do. But you can't possibly think that.

TOM: Why not?

ADAM: Because we're friends.

TOM: But that's not enough. People think soldiers can only do what they do because they dehumanise the enemy first. They think if it was your mother, or your child, or your friend, there's no way you could do it. But that's not true. Only a psychopath could fail to realise that the enemy is someone's child, someone's friend. And we weed out the psychopaths. No. No soldier really wants to kill. Even on the battlefield we look for alternatives. We do what we have to if there's no other way.

ADAM: But there is another way.

TOM: Then tell me what it is! I can't convince you. I can't make you resign. I can't remove you. What can I do?

ADAM: You could go home.

TOM: Yes, I could. I could sit in my house and watch the bombings on TV. I could have my pension, and my freedom, and my best friend ... even as the blood continued to flow in the streets. But I'd know, wouldn't I?

ADAM: Know what?

TOM: That I had a chance to stop it and I failed. I deserted the battlefield when it mattered most. That would be unforgivable. Don't you see? I could never forgive myself.

ADAM: Then here's how I'm going to help you. I'll reconsider. I'll get the intelligence and the military and everyone into this room—including the Americans—and I'll let them make the case directly. But you won't be here. You'll go home. What you've already done is fucking outrageous, Tom. It's a long time in prison—I don't need to tell you that. But no-one will ever know. Neither of us will ever speak of this to anyone. You'll get some fucking rest. You'll pull yourself together. And then you'll find yourself a new career. Because this game is not good for you anymore.

TOM: Why are you lying to me?

ADAM: I'm not.

TOM: We said we would never lie to one another. That's the one thing we said we would never do.

ADAM: What am I lying about?

TOM: You can't reconsider. You can't!

ADAM: Why not? Why can't I?

TOM: Because we're not arguing over facts. We agree on the facts. The Americans don't have any new information to give you. They don't have any new arguments. You made up your mind based on one single idea: renunciation. That it's better to suffer evil than to do it. You think political power can behave like a saint. Of course you're wrong. But you won't be swayed by facts. You won't be swayed by anything. Because in a way, Adam—you want this. You've always wanted it.

ADAM: What do I want?

TOM: To be a martyr. I've seen this before. I can't save you this time.

ADAM: I don't want you to save me. I want you to stop this fucking game.

TOM: Why aren't you calling for help?

ADAM: I'm not going to do that.

TOM: Because you want this.

ADAM: No. Because there's no-one there.

TOM: What?

ADAM: I sent them all home. The nearest person is the security on the door downstairs. And they can't hear us from here.

TOM: Why would you do that?

ADAM: Because we were finished for the day. I was meeting my friend. And I'm not in any danger from my friend, Tom, am I?

TOM: Then press your panic button.

ADAM: No.

TOM: It's in your pocket. I know you've got it. Take it out and press it.

ADAM: I won't.

TOM: Press the fucking button!

ADAM: I won't.

TOM: Then I was right. You're determined. This is suicide. It's suicide by virtue.

ADAM: You're not going to do it.

TOM: Did you lie to me before? When you said you might change your mind. Did you lie to me?

ADAM: Yes. I did.

TOM: We don't do that.

ADAM: I'm sorry. I shouldn't have lied.

TOM: We don't do that.

ADAM: You're right.

TOM: Which means I am not lying now. Take out your button. Give yourself a fighting chance.

Take out the fucking button now!

*Adam take a panic button from his pocket. Holds it up, then throws it on the floor at Tom's feet.*

ADAM: Do what you think is right, Tom. But whatever you're going to do ... do it quickly.

*Tom hesitates, then turns away.*

ADAM: That's right.

*Tom turns back and rushes at Adam. They embrace for a moment, then crumple slightly. A freeze, or a blackout.*

## Epilogue

*The two chairs, empty.*

*Tom and Robert enter from opposite sides. They sit.*

TOM: When you kill someone, what you crave, in my experience, is understanding.

Not only, Robert, are you the only other person in this world who can understand why I did it ...

But in a funny way ...

You're the reason I had to.

God, I hate ideas. We should be animals. We are animals. We should act like it.

Do you ask yourself: What fate brought the three of us, with these ideas, together?

ROBERT: It happened anyway.

TOM: Yes.

ROBERT: The prisoner was handed over. The Americans did what they do. It happened anyway. Last week's bombing was the worst so far.

TOM: It was worth a try.

ROBERT: Was it? We're nowhere. The bombs will stop eventually. Or they won't. And a good man is dead.

Don't kid yourself that I understand you.

TOM: They let us watch the news in here. I noticed the security arrangement between us and the Americans is public now.

ROBERT: Yes, I noticed that.

TOM: That was you, wasn't it?

ROBERT: Will the intelligence stop?

TOM: No. They can't stop it now. They'd be betraying his legacy.

ROBERT: So we don't have to hand people over anymore—and we still get the intelligence we need?

TOM: Looks like it.

ROBERT: He couldn't have had that in mind, could he?

TOM: I think he just thought if he did the right thing—good things would follow.

ROBERT: Did you have it in mind?

TOM: Do you think I'm that clever, Robert?

ROBERT: Yes, Tom. I think you might be.

Hell of a price to pay.

TOM: I'm going to do a degree while I'm here. They let you do education.

ROBERT: Don't tell me.

TOM: Philosophy. I could use your help from time to time. Sort of a private tutor.

Will you come again?

ROBERT: It's not easy, philosophy.

TOM: I've got a lot of thinking time.

*They stand and shake hands.*

TOM: Thanks for coming in.

*They leave. The end.*