



DIGITAL FORTRESS

BOOK EXCERPTS

PROLOGUE

PLAZA DE ESPANA
SEVILLE, SPAIN
11:00 A.M.

It is said that in death, all things become clear; Ensei Tankado now knew it was true. As he clutched his chest and fell to the ground in pain, he realized the horror of his mistake. People appeared, hovering over him, trying to help. But Tankado did not want help - it was too late for that. Trembling, he raised his left hand and held his fingers outward. Look at my hand! The faces around him stared, but he could tell they did not understand. On his finger was an engraved golden ring. For an instant, the markings glimmered in the Andalusian sun. Ensei Tankado knew it was the last light he would ever see.

CHAPTER 1

They were in the smoky mountains at their favorite bed-and-breakfast. David was smiling down at her. "What do you say, gorgeous? Marry me?" Looking up from their canopy bed, she knew he was the one. Forever. As she stared into his deep-green eyes, somewhere in the distance a deafening bell began to ring. It was pulling him away. She reached for him, but her arms clutched empty air. It was the sound of the phone that fully awoke Susan Fletcher from her dream. She gasped, sat up in bed, and fumbled for the receiver.

"Hello?"

"Susan, it's David. Did I wake you?"

She smiled, rolling over in bed. "I was just dreaming of you. Come over and play."

He laughed. "It's still dark out."

"Mmm." She moaned sensuously. "Then definitely come over and play. We can sleep in before we head north."

David let out a frustrated sigh. "That's why I'm calling. It's about our trip. I've got to postpone."
Susan was suddenly wide awake. "What!"

"I'm sorry. I've got to leave town. I'll be back by tomorrow. We can head up first thing in the morning. We'll still have two days."

"But I made reservations," Susan said, hurt. "I got our old room at Stone Manor."

"I know, but —"

"Tonight was supposed to be special — to celebrate six months. You do remember we're engaged, don't you?"

"Susan." He sighed. "I really can't go into it now, they've got a car waiting. I'll call you from the plane and explain everything."

"Plane?" she repeated. "What's going on? Why would the university...?"

"It's not the university. I'll phone and explain later. I've really got to go; they're calling for me. I'll be in touch. I promise."

"David!" she cried. "What's —"

But it was too late. David had hung up.

Susan Fletcher lay awake for hours waiting for him to call back. The phone never rang.

Later that afternoon Susan sat dejected in the tub. She submerged herself in the soapy water and tried to forget Stone Manor and the Smoky Mountains. Where could he be? she wondered. Why

hasn't he called? Gradually the water around her went from hot to lukewarm and finally to cold. She was about to get out when her cordless phone buzzed to life. Susan bolted upright, sloshing water on the floor as she grappled for the receiver she'd left on the sink.

"David?"

"It's Strathmore," the voice replied.

Susan slumped. "Oh." She was unable to hide her disappointment. "Good Afternoon, Commander."

"Hoping for a younger man?" The voice chuckled.

No, sir." Susan said, embarrassed. "It's not how it —"

"Sure it is." He laughed. "David Becker's a good man. Don't ever lose him."

"Thank you, sir."

The commander's voice turned suddenly stern. "Susan, I'm calling because I need you in here. Pronto."

She tried to focus. "It's Saturday, sir. We don't usually —"

"I know," he said calmly. "It's an emergency."

Susan sat up. Emergency? She had never heard the word cross Commander Strathmore's lips. An emergency?

In Crypto? She couldn't imagine. "Y-yes, sir." She paused. "I'll be there as soon as I can." "Make it sooner." Strathmore hung up.

Susan Fletcher stood wrapped in a towel and dripped on the neatly folded clothes she'd set out the night before -- hiking shorts, a sweater for the cool mountain evenings, and the new lingerie she'd bought for the nights. Depressed, she went to her closet for a clean blouse and skirt. An Emergency? In Crypto? As she went downstairs, Susan wondered how the day could get any worse. She was about to find out.

CHAPTER 2

Thirty thousand feet above a dead-calm ocean, David Becker stared miserably from the Learjet 60's small, oval window. He'd been told the phone on board was out of order, and he'd never had a chance to call Susan.

"What am I doing here?" he grumbled to himself. But the answer was simple — there were men to whom you just didn't say no.

"Mr. Becker," the loudspeaker crackled. "We'll be arriving in half an hour."

Becker nodded gloomily to the invisible voice. Wonderful. He pulled the shade and tried to sleep. But he could only think of her.

CHAPTER 3

Susan's Volvo sedan rolled to a stop in the shadow of the ten-foot-high, barbed Cyclone fence. A young guard placed his hand on the roof.

"ID, please."

Susan obliged and settled in for the usual half-minute wait. The officer ran her card through a computerized scanner. Finally he looked up. "Thank you, Ms. Fletcher." He gave an imperceptible sign, and the gate swung open.

Half a mile ahead Susan repeated the entire procedure at an equally imposing electrified fence. Come on, guys... I've been through here a million times.

As she approached the final checkpoint, a stocky sentry with two attack dogs and a machine gun glanced down at her license plate and waved her through. She followed Caine Road for another 250 yards and pulled into Employee Lot C. Unbelievable, she thought. Twenty-six thousand employees and a twelve-billion-dollar budget; you'd think they could make it through the weekend without me. Susan gunned the car into her reserved spot and killed the engine. After crossing the landscaped terrace and entering the main building, she cleared two more internal checkpoints and finally arrived at the windowless tunnel that led to the new wing. A voice-scan booth blocked her entry.

NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY (NSA)

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The armed guard looked up. "Afternoon, Ms. Fletcher."

Susan smiled tiredly. "Hi, John."

"Didn't expect you today."

"Yeah, me neither." She leaned toward the parabolic microphone. "Susan Fletcher;" she stated clearly. The computer instantly confirmed the frequency concentrations in her voice, and the gate clicked open. She stepped through.