

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Incident is a serial thriller, which means it's a story told in a number of parts. I call those parts "Episodes," and this book contains Episode One.

Each episode costs \$1.99, but you can save 38% by buying them in bundles. [Click here to get Season 1, which is Episodes 1 through 4, for just \\$4.99.](#)

Special Agent Sam Jameson made her tour de force debut in my first novel, Devolution. If you haven't read Devolution yet, just sign up for my email list at www.larsemmerichbooks.com/free-stuff. I'll send you a free copy of Devolution for Kindle or e-Pub. You'll also receive free episodes of upcoming stories I'm working on, and great deals on new releases.

As always, if you have any story ideas, comments, or observations, or if you'd just like to strike up a conversation, feel free to write me at Lars@larsemmerichbooks.com.

Thanks for reading,

Lars

THE INCIDENT

EPISODE 1

Prologue

“I died?” Special Agent Samantha Jameson’s question was barely audible above beeping hospital equipment. Her fire-red hair framed her pinup-model face, and her brilliant green eyes blazed despite the grogginess.

“Very much. Twice, they said.” Air Force Colonel Brock James shook his head. “Such a bitch move. Did you even think about how I might feel about that? Who would pay our mortgage?”

She smiled weakly. “It blew. No angels or out-of-body experiences. I want my money back.”

Brock’s reply was interrupted by the doctor’s arrival, with nurses and orderlies in tow.

“Visiting hours are over, I’m afraid.” The gray-haired doctor was borderline obese and reeked of cigarette smoke, but was friendly enough. “Sadly, there’s more poking and prodding in your immediate future, young lady.”

“I’m a big fan of being poked, but I prefer this strapping fellow,” Sam said, reaching a bandaged arm up to Brock’s face.

The old doctor blushed.

Brock smiled. “I don’t mind an audience.”

The doctor blushed more.

An orderly unlocked the wheels on Sam’s bed. “I’m happy to watch, but we have a date with the fMRI first. Cognition over reproduction, I’m afraid. Given that you’ve been a little bit dead, we thought we’d check for brain damage.”

“I’ll tag along, given the circumstances.” Brock helped wheel Sam out into the hallway, turning right toward radiology.

She gazed up at his unshaven face, swollen eye, and split lip. “Nice shiner. Looks good on you though,” she said. He chuckled.

Suddenly Brock’s smile died, and all the color drained from his face. “Fuck. The guard is gone.”

Sam understood instantly what that meant. “Run!”

She felt Brock accelerate to a lopsided sprint, her bed jerking in time with each clump of the cast on his broken foot.

“Sir! You can’t run with her! No sudden mo-” The orderly’s chest erupted in crimson as a silenced slug tore into his back, through his heart, and out between two ribs. Gore splattered Sam’s bed sheets.

A second shot punctured her intravenous bag, and saline solution spilled everywhere.

Brock rammed Sam’s bed through the heavy hallway doors, not slowing to look behind them at

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the shooter. He knew without looking who it had to be. Though he didn't know the man's name, the visage of pure evil was forever etched in his memory.

Sam's exploding IV bag slicked the floor, and Brock slipped and fell as Sam's bed sailed through the doors. She heard the snap of another bullet flying through the space Brock had occupied fractions of a second before. The bullet shattered a picture on the wall in front of her bed, calling to her attention the fact that the hallway made an abrupt right-hand turn five feet ahead of her.

Her bed crashed hard into the wall.

Sam felt her body rocket forward, twist in mid-air, and slam against the shattered glass of the picture. The wall knocked all the wind out of her, which was just as well. She would have screamed otherwise, as dozens of glass shards embedded themselves in her back.

Dazed, bleeding, and unable to inhale, she came to rest with her left leg trapped between the side rail and mattress of her bed. Her torso dangled from the side of her bed, hospital gown up around her ears. Her bare ass pointed toward the ceiling. Blood rushed to her throbbing head, which had cracked against the floor.

Before she could even draw a breath, she felt a pair of strong arms clamp around her torso and hoist her up. Two long, hard, painful tugs pulled her leg free of the bed. Brock threw her over his shoulder and began to run. "Hold that elevator!" Brock's shout was clear and strong above the screaming in the hallway behind her. Her breath returned in

gasps, but each jerk of Brock's awkward steps made a full inhalation impossible.

As the long hallway disappeared around the corner, Sam saw the doorway burst open again.

Him.

A silenced pistol rose to point at her, but Brock clump-sprinted around the corner and into the waiting elevator too quickly to permit another shot from the attacker.

An eternity later, as if to mock Brock's frantic mashing of the "close" button, the doors began to meander together. Through the narrowing gap, the shooter's snarling face came into view. Sam felt ice cold fear pound through her veins.

The man lunged, his arm extended to catch the elevator doors.

Two of the shooter's fingers curled around the outer door.

But it wasn't enough. The doors closed. Muzak filled her ears. And Brock's panting. And the sobs of the frightened nurse who had held the elevator for them.

The elevator descended two floors before Brock pulled the emergency stop lever.

"Whatever you do," Sam gasped over the clanging emergency bell, "don't call the fucking cops."

Chapter 1

Nine days earlier

Sam heard him slip on a condom, felt him probing, felt her body yield to his thickness, felt herself shudder, and moaned as she felt his full length slowly work its way inside her. She rocked back and forth to the rhythm of his motion, moving toward another mind-blowing orgasm as he moved in and out of her.

She came. Her body convulsed. His grip on her hips became vice-like, and his feral moan turned her on even more. He rammed himself in with all of his strength, his thrusts lifting her off of her knees, his member pulsing inside her with his own pounding orgasm.

Nirvana lasted a brief eternity and left them both gasping for breath.

She felt his teeth lightly on her back, then his tongue running up her spine, then his lips on her

ear, then his cock sliding out slowly. “Woman, I can’t believe you exist,” he whispered.

“Likewise. You were a bitch to find. And catch.” She rolled over and smiled at him. He kissed her long and hard.

Her phone rang. *That* ringtone. They both groaned together.

She answered. “Hi, Francis,” she said. She listened for a second, looked at Brock, rolled her eyes, and sighed audibly. “You’re a shitty boss, you know that?” She knew that Frank Ekman knew he was a shitty boss, because she had told him so on many occasions. But it still gave her a satisfying sense of control to lash out at the man who made it a practice to systematically destroy any semblance of normalcy in her life.

She browbeat the poor guy almost daily, but he was still smitten with her. If Sam wasn’t the best counterintelligence agent on the DHS roster, Ekman often claimed, he didn’t know who was. But in a cliché midlife crisis kind of way, Ekman also badly wanted to sleep with her, Sam knew, and she used that knowledge to beat him up even more mercilessly.

At the end of the day, though, Ekman *was* her boss, and he could make her come in to work whenever an investigation demanded her talents.

Even at eleven p.m. on a Saturday night.

“Dude. Why doesn’t this stuff ever happen during office hours?” Air Force Colonel Brock James had a couple of Master’s degrees and a reputation as a fantastic fighter pilot, but he often spoke like a teenage surfer. His protest was lighthearted, but

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she knew he wasn't happy about another lost weekend.

Sam dressed, feeling a dark anger descend over her mood. Brock was a good sport about it, knew what he was signing up for, and only complained seriously when her ridiculous hours destroyed holidays and rendered Redskins and Senators tickets useless, but she knew something would eventually have to give.

Hell, she knew that *she* would eventually have to give. It really was rough work, and it took its toll. She had a hunch she would return sometime after dawn with more grisly images burned into her brain, the kind of gore and tragedy she used to drink away but now just tried to breathe through.

"Another double got rolled up," she told Brock. "Not pretty, apparently."

"Being a spy sounds like an even worse job than yours," Brock said. "Who smoked him? Good guys or bad guys?"

She answered his jaded, sarcastic question with her customary in-kind answer: "Yes." She didn't bother speaking the second half of her answer any more. *They're all the same. Only the accents change.*

She kissed him softly on the way out. "I'm sorry baby. I love you."

"Be careful. And don't be alarmed if I have one of my bitches come over to keep me company."

"Send pictures." She blew him a kiss.

There was blood everywhere. And a note, sorry to my wife and kids, etc, which clashed sharply with the ligature marks on John Abrams' wrists and ankles. It was obvious to Sam that Abrams hadn't wanted to die, hadn't slit both of his own arms from elbow to wrist, and certainly hadn't scrawled the suicide note, written in child-like script.

He probably also hadn't left his front door unlocked, given that Abrams had spent over two decades in the business of espionage. "They rang the doorbell, I presume?" Sam asked, more as a conversation starter than a real question. She already knew the answer.

"Looks that way. Security system download will tell us in a sec," said Detective Philip Quartermain, formerly an FBI special agent but lately a homicide investigator at DC Metro.

Sam had heard the rumors about Quartermain—kicked out of the Bureau for being gay, though his superiors disguised it as an administrative thing—but she knew Phil knew his stuff. Phil had Dan Gable's trust, and that was meaningful. Gable had been her deputy for three years, and was the only male alive, aside from Brock, whom Sam let herself trust. Father issues, she joked when asked, not really joking.

Sam snapped a photo. "The spy who bled himself cold?"

"Or so the evildoers would have us believe." Quartermain's flamboyant deadpan and unapologetic lisp surprised her. *He probably takes endless shit at the station*, she thought to herself.

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Cops were a lot like counterintelligence people: ritualistically homophobic.

“You mean he wasn’t sufficiently committed to slice his own arms to the bone? Maybe you underestimate the power of a bad day,” she said.

“It would have to be a really nasty break-up, combined with both sides of a Smiths record,” Phil said.

“Sounds like the voice of experience.” Sam watched Phil smile.

“Thankfully not this week. But yes, I’ve learned to stay away from The Smiths,” Phil said. “Give me a hand? I think he’s sitting on something.”

Sam helped Phil move the dead spy, pausing beforehand to put on a pair of latex gloves. They shifted John Abrams’ considerable weight far enough to the right to reveal a cheap chain looped through the eyehole of a small silver key, the kind that might open a music box or young girl’s treasure chest. “Sure enough. Impeccable instincts, Phil.”

“Well, it’s a matter of public record that I know my way around a man’s ass,” Phil said.

Sam laughed. “I knew I liked you. Any ideas on the key? Abrams doesn’t strike me as the hope chest type.”

Phil dusted both sides of the key for prints. “Easy enough to find out the lock type, but there are probably several thousand locks that would open for this key. It’s not exactly a unique pattern.”

“Guess that’s why we get the big bucks.” Sam examined the nearby windows for any signs of recent entry or exit. Nothing.

“Don’t forget the glamour,” Phil said, flat and taciturn. “Lots of people would kill to be sitting in a pool of a stranger’s blood at midnight on a Saturday. I know I’d hate to be at home watching boy porn right now.”

“Well, at least the nightmares will help keep the experience fresh,” Sam said with a chortle. “I’ll wander around and admire John’s interior decorating.”

She did. Nothing to write home about. She was pretty sure Abrams didn’t spend much time in this place. Sex pad, maybe, but probably not for the classy girls. The furniture was sparse, and two of the upstairs bedrooms were completely empty. The kitchen cabinets held few dishes, and a layer of dust on the pots and pans told Sam the decedent didn’t spend his free time trying out new recipes. At least not here.

Time for the juicy stuff. The black light revealed plenty of biologicals on the sheets in the master suite, located just off the kitchen downstairs. “Phil, it’s your lucky night,” she called out. “Lots of man gravy on the bed.”

“The crowd goes wild,” she heard him say in the next room.

Then she stumbled upon something that made her catch her breath. Her own name, written on a pad of paper on the dead man’s nightstand. And her address. “Sweet Jesus.”

“Just call me Phil,” Quartermain quipped, walking into the bedroom.

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She ignored him, dialing. The phone rang four thousand times before Brock answered, groggy and uncharitable.

“Hi baby,” she said. “Don’t say anything. Go downstairs and lock yourself in the vault. Call me as soon as you get there and I’ll explain.” She’d installed the highly secure basement room—steel door, video surveillance, weapons, rations, the whole nine—after a particularly nasty case left her with exit wounds and demons. To Phil: “you’ll have to scrape up the dried goo yourself, I’m afraid.”

Hustling out of the room with car keys in hand, she only heard part of Phil’s reply. She paused on the dead spy’s doorstep long enough to snap eight multi-spectral photos covering the entire area in front of the house. They were handy for finding all sorts of hidden things. She’d wake Dan Gable up to analyze them.

But first, she had to get the hell away from the house. She’d been in the crosshairs before, but that didn’t mean it didn’t scare the bejeezus out of her. *My name and address on a dead spy’s nightstand.* She had no idea what it might have meant, but it struck her as decidedly unhealthy. Counterespionage was always personal. That was lesson one at spook school.

She walked to her car as calmly as she could manage, starting the engine remotely with the fob. She heard rustling in the bushes behind her as she reached the door handle, and suddenly her heart was in her throat and a tsunami of adrenaline zinged through her veins.

She leapt into her car and slammed the door shut, crushing the lock with her fist while she threw the car into reverse to screech down the dead man's driveway.

She was a strong girl, five-ten in flats with a wicked left hook and a ball-kick that had sent more than one thug to the ground in a heap. But she knew that she was still human, susceptible to being scared to death. None of that stopped her from feeling rookie-like and embarrassed when she saw the source of the rustling in the bushes that had scared her witless just a second ago: a uniformed policeman.

She rolled down the window. "Sorry ma'am," the officer said. "Didn't mean to give you a heart attack."

"No worries. I could stand to be a little more calm and collected, but that's probably obvious by now." Then something struck her as odd. "What were you doing in the bushes without your flashlight on?"

The policeman didn't answer right away. That was weird.

He kept walking toward her car, smiling. Also weird.

Movement caught her eye: his hand moving toward his Taser.

That was all the prompting she needed. Sam mashed the accelerator and popped the clutch. The Porsche's engine roared as she rocketed away. She saw the cop in her side mirror, putting the stun gun back in its holster and talking into the squawk box clipped to his shoulder.

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This is fucked up, she decided.

She rounded the corner, alert for any cars giving chase. None appeared.

Her mind raced. Who to call first? Brock? He should have called from the panic room by now. Dan Gable? She knew she would need her deputy's help sorting this thing out. It was suddenly a colossal turd pie.

Oh shit! Phil Quartermain. He was still in the victim's house, with someone in a cop's uniform prowling around outside.

Not wanting blood on her hands, she found Phil's number first, then hesitated before pushing the call button. The cop wore a DC Metro uniform. Phil was DC Metro. Was Metro compromised? Was Phil really in danger, or was he in on it, whatever *it* was? Was the guy in the bushes even a real cop?

The clock was ticking, she realized, and she cursed herself for hesitating. She called. It rang, then voicemail. *Too late? Phil, I hope I didn't just get you whacked!*

She left an urgent message for Phil, then called Dan Gable. His customary response to Sam's all-too-frequent midnight awakenings: "I hate you."

"Likewise. Who's on the response team shift right now?"

"Lemme check." Dan's voice was groggy, and she heard Sara's voice in the background, admonishing her husband not to wake the baby and maybe consider getting a better fucking job or at least negotiate some decent overtime pay and don't bother coming back to bed if that baby so much as

peeps. Poor Dan. No wonder he spent so much time at work.

More shuffling, then her deputy's voice again. "Ainsworth, Curry, and Meyer."

"Great. Larry, Curly, and Moe. Anybody we can call who doesn't suck? There's a situation."

"Really? I thought you woke me up at midnight to talk about your feelings."

"You know me so well," Sam said. "So let's talk about my feelings. I feel largely indifferent but more than a little inconvenienced that John Abrams got smoked a few hours ago, and I feel confused about why a Metro guy just jumped out of the bushes and tried to Taser me. And despite my tough-girl exterior, I do feel apprehensive that my name and address were on Abrams' nightstand."

"Wow, boss. That *is* a situation." Dan thought for a second. "How about Williams? He's just back from admin leave but I could probably send him out."

"Yes please. To Abrams' house. Say nothing about my name and address on the notepad, and keep everyone away from my home."

"Why don't you ever trust the good guys?" Dan no longer sounded sleepy.

"Just because they're on the payroll doesn't mean they're good guys." Sam knew Dan was probably rolling his eyes at her. She'd foisted her dim view of her fellow Feds on him more than once.

She changed the subject. "I've got some multi-specs for you to analyze."

"Can it wait? Or do you want to be responsible for my divorce?"

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“Sorry, but I’m on Sara’s side. You work way too much. But it definitely can’t wait.”

Something caught Sam’s attention. Police lights in her rear view mirror. “Gotta go. There’s a police cruiser behind me.”

She hung up on Dan and immediately dialed 911. She told the operator that she was a single female alone in her car and she didn’t feel comfortable stopping for a traffic ticket in the middle of the night. The operator ran Sam’s location and queried the units in the vicinity.

None of the patrolmen in the area was trying to pull over a motorist at the moment, the operator said.

Sam felt her insides clench up. *That’s no cop.* She matted the accelerator and dove across three lanes to make a hard right turn. The cop car followed, lights flashing insistently. A voice blared at her from the bullhorn atop the police cruiser, warning her to pull over immediately. “He’s chasing me. Any ideas?” She asked the 911 dispatcher.

“Don’t stop.”

“Genius.”

“I’ve already got two units on the way. Stay calm, ma’am.”

“Great thinking. How will I know the good cops from the bad cops?”

The operator didn’t have an answer, but suggested she drive to the police station to sort it out. She suggested the operator commit an unnatural act with himself.

Then she realized she hadn’t told him about the Taser thing. Tasers were controlled items, available

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