

LISA BRACKMANN

Black Swan Rising

black swan \blak swän\ *n* A highly unlikely event that has massive impact, and which seems predictable in hindsight

MIDNIGHT INK
WOODBURY, MINNESOTA



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Dedication to come.

THEY'D FOUND HER NEW email address.

YOU FAT SLUTTY CUNT WHY DON'T YOU GO SUCK A TWO-INCH
COCK

She stared at her laptop screen and shivered. The headquarters' air conditioning ran so high it was like being inside a refrigerator half the time. She'd complained to Natalie, the closest thing they had to an office manager, saying, "You know, given Matt's environmental focus, this isn't setting the best example," but Natalie had rolled her eyes fractionally and told her that she'd gone to the building manager, and he'd promised to adjust the thermostat, but if they turned it up too much, then the tenants on the floor above them complained it got too hot.

The conversation replayed in her head, like a lot of conversations did.

You fat slutty...

All at once the noise of the office—the phones, the ring tones from everyone’s cell’s, the conversations ranging from muttered to shouted, the TVs droning in the background, the clatter of heavy fingers on keyboards—seemed to recede, like she’d entered a tunnel and was leaving them all behind.

“Sarah, how are we doing on the CaliBaja page?”

She looked up. Ben stood there, wearing a carefully faded micro-brewery T-shirt, his sandy hair curling at the collar.

“I... It’s... I’ll have it done by end of day.”

“Cutting it close.” He rested his palms on her desk and leaned in. Staring openly at her computer screen.

It’s not there, she told herself. It’s on my phone. He can’t see it.

“The language is okay,” he said. “It’s maybe a little dry. The images... these are too stock. Too bland. We want something a little edgy but that isn’t going to scare people.”

He wasn’t that much older than she was, but she felt like he was a lot of the time, like the line between your early twenties and late twenties was a huge divide. Or maybe he just knew how to *be* so much better than she did. Like being the Communications Director was no big thing, it was just something he deserved.

“Okay,” she said. “I’ll work on that.”

“Make sure you emphasize job creation and economic impact on *this* side of the border, okay? Because that’s what the people want to hear about.”

She smiled and nodded, smiled a little too hard and nodded a little too much. “Right. For sure.”

Her cheeks twitched as he walked away.

She realized she was breathing hard. Her back and shoulders ached.

This chair is uncomfortable, she thought, and it's too cold in here. She stood up, shoved the chair back under the desk. Grabbed her phone and tucked it in her pants pocket, which was so shallow that half of the phone stuck out of it. But she was wearing business attire, not jeans and a brewery T-shirt. No one would take her seriously if she dressed like Ben, even on Beer Friday.

She walked out of the small maze of cubicles, past the ranks of long beige folding tables where a few volunteers sat phone-banking, past Natalie at the receptionist's desk directing calls beneath the campaign banner, down the beige hall to the building's lobby, and out the door, into the blinding sun.

Too hot.

The heat waves in San Diego almost always used to happen in September and October, people told her, but the weather had changed the last few years. Sometimes there were heat waves in March. May and June used to be gray most mornings into the early afternoons, but here it was, the beginning of May, and the temperature was in the low 90s, and dry, with winds from the east and some stretched-out clouds too high up to bring any moisture.

She took off her jacket, a black blazer that matched her slacks, folded it, and sat down on the retaining wall that ran in front of the parking lot.

No one here knew who she used to be, she told herself.

The brewery across the street was rolling up its metal doors, opening for business. There were three or four breweries within walking distance of headquarters, in this neighborhood of long, flat featureless buildings, industrial parks, cheap office space. Plenty of options for staffers to grab a quick beer at lunch, or engage in more serious drinking sessions after work. "They're *tasting* sessions," Ben had said once, grinning, when she'd declined his invitation. She wasn't sure if

he was serious or not, but she did know that beer was a major business here in San Diego, “the craft brewing capital of the United States—fuck Portland, they can’t compete”—and it seemed to be okay, even encouraged, to go taste the IPAs, stouts, saisons, dubbels and sours.

Not that she did.

She caught a whiff of chili oil from the dumpling restaurant in the next complex. That was another thing you could find in the area, Asian food. Chinese dumplings, Japanese ramen, Korean barbecue. There were two large Korean supermarkets not far from here, a Ranch 99 market too, Asian strip malls that had sprouted among the car dealerships and fast food chains and gentlemen’s clubs, big box stores, parked semis and medical buildings, all of these Asian businesses moving slowly west, *pho* place by Taiwanese bakery.

You hardly ever saw people walking around here though. The landscape was oversized and empty, a neighborhood built for absentee giants.

“This a cigarette break?”

She started. Turned. She thought she knew the voice, but it had never spoken to her directly.

Her boss. Representative Matthew Cason.

He stood there, suit jacket slung over one shoulder, blocking out the sun.

“I... no,” she stuttered. “I don’t smoke.”

“Shit. Oh well. Probably a good thing.”

He was taller than average—always good for a politician—thick, dark hair shot with just a touch of gray, a square jaw with a beard that came in heavy and a nose just crooked enough to make his face interesting. She’d known that from seeing him on TV, at events, and more

recently, from a couple of his quick sweeps through the bullpen on the way to the campaign manager's office.

He sat down on the wall next to her. "I quit years ago. But I swear, if you'd had one just now? I'd be smoking it."

It was strange when someone you'd mostly seen on TV and at a distance suddenly sat less than a foot away, becoming three dimensional. The reality of the person, his body, how he held himself, it wasn't the same on a screen. She was conscious of all kinds of things: the patches of sweat under the arms of his blue Oxford button-down, how trim his waist and belly were, that his eyes were on the green side of hazel and were staring at her.

"Today's been a clusterfuck," he said.

"I'm sorry to hear that." It seemed like the safest thing to say. Or did he want her to ask why?

Why do you care what he wants?

He's your boss, she told herself. Of course you care. You wanted to work for him. He's sitting right next to you.

Close enough to smell his sweat.

Her heart was pounding.

"What happened?" she asked.

He rolled his eyes. "Flight from DC was late. Missed a fundraiser. Almost missed another one. You're in Communications, right?"

"I... yes," she said, nodding.

"I don't remember your name."

You wouldn't know it, she wanted to say. "Sarah. Sarah Price."

"Right," he said. "Sarah Price." He was still staring at her. She thought he was going to do something, like shake her hand, but his hands stayed where they were, at his sides, grasping the edge of the concrete wall.

He kicked out his legs and sprung to his feet. Now he stuck out his hand. She took it. Warm, dry, slightly callused. He held on a moment.

“Great meeting you,” he said, letting go. “I’m looking forward to your thoughts on the CaliBaja mega-region.”

He might have smirked as he said it, but he was gone before she could be sure.

Of course he had that kind of charisma. Of course. It was how he got away with some of the stands he took, the things he said. She’d been hearing about his charisma since she’d started following his career, during his first term in Congress.

It was just different, seeing it up close, aimed at her.

She hadn’t gone to work for him just because of that. It was his policy positions, that he said smart things, and he didn’t seem to measure every word by its potential to hurt or help; he just said what he thought.

And he was a vet in a military town.

You want to get into Washington, you pick your player. Matt Cason was a good bet.

But his first reelection campaign was going to be a bitch.

“I’m not going to make a speech. You’ve heard too many of them from me already, and we have a long way to go on this shit show. And believe me when I tell you that it’s going to be a shit show.”

The congressman—Matt, everyone called him Matt, even if they sounded self-conscious when they said it—sat in the middle of one of the long tables in the bullpen, hands on either side of his thighs, fingers curled over the hard rubber edge.

Same pose as when he was sitting next to her outside.

“We don’t know for sure who we’re going to be running against, but the amount of money our opponent is gonna spend on this race? We might break the record for a congressional campaign. Maybe four million by him, and that’s not even counting outside money. All of which I’m sure will be spent on positive ads talking about issues and laying out a constructive agenda to move the district and this country forward.”

A wave of chuckles rippled through the room. Most of the senior staff was there, regardless of whether they were paid by the campaign, by the state party or were outside consultants: Jane and Presley and Angus (“the troika,” Ben called them), Tomas the field director, John the tracker, Natalie, who handled all the office stuff and answered the phones. There were a few junior staffers she recognized, Sylvia Han the constituency coordinator for one, and a couple of volunteers she didn’t know.

She was still trying to figure out how everything worked.

“Yeah,” Matt said. “Whoever ends up getting the nod, they’re going to go negative. And they’ll get the outside funding to bury us in this ... negativity. So, what are we going to do about it?”

“Raise more money!” somebody called out. Laughter.

Matt gave a little fist pump. “Always.” Then he shrugged. “You know what, fuck ‘em. We don’t put up with their shit, and we will hit them back hard. But we run our own campaign. We focus on our own game-plan.”

The stare. It was weird to watch. All this intensity, focused on someone, or something, but you didn’t know what he was really looking at. What he was seeing.

“We are going to talk about real problems and concrete solutions, and we are going to articulate a vision. We explain things clearly with-

out talking down to people. We talk about our goals, why we have those goals, and how we're going to get there. And we'll aim for the minimum ration of bullshit. Though I'm not making any promises on that one."

The obligatory chuckles.

He hopped down off the desk, the same choreography as outside.

"Right now? It's Beer Friday, and I'm in the mood for a beer. Who's in?"

"You're coming, right?"

"I'm working on CaliBaja."

"I thought you were going to be done with that by now." Ben hovered by her desk, clasping his hands.

"I'm close."

He huffed out a sigh. "Matt wants to get to know everybody better, and you need to be there. He asked about you today."

She felt a little rush of adrenaline. That's good, she told herself. It's what you want, right? To get noticed?

"Okay," she said. "I just need a few minutes."

Ben leaned over her desk. "Look, I know you want to do issues. Just don't try to reinvent the wheel. If it's any kind of policy that could be considered a part of his public role, then the congressional staffers do the heavy lifting. If it's posted to his official website, you can use it. If he's in total synch with the state party or the DCCC on something, you can pull from them, too. Most of what we're doing here? It's about crafting a message specifically for the campaign. Something that's going to pop, and get people excited. It's about creating a consistent style and voice across all our social platforms."

"Right," she said.

He straightened up. “Just wrap it up and come over, okay? We can publish the page tomorrow.”

“I will,” she said. “I’ll be there in fifteen minutes.”

Probably more like a half hour, but Ben didn’t need to know that.

There was a poster of a baseball player tacked to the wall across from her cube. A good-looking black guy with hazel eyes, wearing a desert-themed camo jersey and a cap with the SD logo on it, smiling and holding two puppies. She ended up staring at the poster a lot, when she wasn’t sure what to write.

Maybe I should go to a baseball game, she thought. A lot of people working here did. She’d heard it was fun. And Matt was a big fan.

Just save the report, print out a copy and go to the brewery, she told herself.

The phone rang.

She jumped a bit. It was the ringtone for her area, for Communications, a series of low trills.

Maybe Ben, wondering where she was. Except ... he’d call her on her cell.

The person who emailed her, maybe he’d found her.

She felt like she’d been slapped. Her gut twisted, and she was sweating in the cold, stale air.

WHY DON’T YOU GO SUCK

No, she told herself, no, don’t be stupid. It’s not him. They don’t know who I am now.

Just pick up the phone.

“Cason for Congress. This is Communications.”

“Oh, good. I guess I dialed correctly.”

A man’s voice, relaxed, maybe a hint of a drawl. Not young, not old. “Who am I speaking to?”

“Sarah.”

“Sarah,” he repeated. “Is your boss around?”

“No, I’m sorry, he’s not. Can I take a message?”

“Hmmm.” A pause.

“That’s all right. I can talk to you.”

Oh, fuck, she thought. Not someone who wanted to talk. She’d gotten a few of these calls from people who wanted to talk, about things like HAARP and vaccines and Islamic terrorists crossing over the border from Mexico.

But she had to hear what he wanted to say before she could figure out how best to get him off the line in a hurry.

“How can I help you?” she said.

“This is more about me helping *you*. I know some things about your opponents that you might find interesting.”

“Oh.”

Oppo research was under Presley, who had a voice mailbox here but only came into the headquarters for meetings. “He’s a consultant,” Ben had told her.

“I’m not really the right person for you to talk to,” she said. “I can transfer you—”

“That’s okay. Tell you what. Why don’t you check the LA Times tomorrow? There’s going to be a story in it you’ll like.”

“Okay,” she said. “I’ll be sure to do that.”

He laughed, one solid chuckle. “Good. I’ll give you a call tomorrow, after you’ve had a chance to read it. I’ll be interested to hear your thoughts.”

I can transfer you to a better person, she wanted to say, but he hung up before she could get the words out of her mouth.

Oh well, she thought. Odds were he wouldn’t call back. He was probably just another crank who got off on punking people. He

didn't sound like one of those, but then, yesterday she'd fielded a call from a guy who'd sounded totally sane until he told her that California's drought was caused by geo-engineering.

"Why would anyone want to do that?" she'd asked.

"Because they want us all to starve! It's all part of Agenda 21, don't you get it?"

"Right," she'd said.

God, people were crazy.

“WHERE’VE YOU BEEN?”

Sarah slipped onto the open space at the end of the bench next to Ben. “Finishing the report.”

Giant fans blew hot air through the little brewery, one of many that occupied industrial parks like this one, behind roll-up steel doors. They’d left the ceilings open, silver ductwork and electrical lines running from one end to the other. Large metal tanks and plastic barrels and kegs lurked behind the bar and taps.

“You need a beer,” Ben said. There was a small goblet-style glass in front of him. The beer that was left in it was a deep, thick caramel, like maple syrup. “Belgium quad. It’s really good. You want to try it?”

“I... that’s okay. I’ll just get something light.”

“They do great Belgiums here. Good sours too. And the IPAs are awesome, but this is San Diego, you have to do a good IPA.”

He was talking a little fast, a little loud, three fingers of one hand tapping out an arpeggio on the base of his glass. Probably not his first beer, Sarah thought.

She didn't drink much when she went out. Of course, she didn't go out much any more either. Sometimes she'd buy a bottle of wine and take it home and open it up in front of the TV. Drink more of it than maybe she should. She drank a whole bottle the first night she slept in her new apartment. But she was safe at home, at least.

"Maybe the Saison—good fruit, nice spice, not too strong—"

"Why don't you share mine?"

It took her a moment to recognize him. The congressman—Matt—stood there, holding a long paddle-like board with small glasses stuck in a line of holes. He was wearing a T-shirt and shorts, which was so out of context that she hadn't been able to place him at first.

He didn't have to ask. Ben slid over to make room for him. She hesitated for a moment, then shifted to the outside of the bench. Better to have Matt in the middle. It would make Ben happy. She wasn't sure she wanted to sit between the two of them, anyway. Matt and Ben would either talk over her, or she'd be the focus of too much attention.

As soon as he sat, Matt turned to her. "I just got here too. I really needed to change."

He was wearing a faded T-shirt, like Ben. But not advertising a brewery. It was for the Padres, the baseball team, and it looked like a cheap shirt that had gotten a lot of wear.

"How goes the CaliBaja mega-region?"

No doubt this time, he was smirking.

Or maybe it was just a smile. Like it was their own private joke.

"I'm working on it," she said. "Trying to get it to pop."

Was that a strange thing to say? Did he get that she was joking back?

"I'm sure it will," he said.

She still couldn't tell.

Matt lifted up the first glass in his rack. "So this is supposed to be their flagship IPA. I've had it before. Have you tried it?"

She shook her head.

"Here." He held out the glass.

Don't. You never take a drink, ever, from a stranger.

Or even from a friend.

He was staring at her, smiling, all that intensity aimed at her, and if she hesitated a moment longer, it was going to look strange, awkward.

He might ask questions.

The beer was fine, she told herself.

"Thanks," she said, smiling back.

She took a sip. An explosion of citrus and pine supported by a bitter bite.

"What do you think?" Matt asked.

"It's good," she said. "I mean, I like it."

"It is good. They won an award for it."

"Mosaic and Simcoe hops," Ben blurted.

Matt smiled at him. "So how many breweries do you think you've hit in San Diego?"

"I think it's eighty-three."

Ben's turn. Good. She'd have a little time to think about what she wanted to say to him. To Matt.

It was always best to ask a question. Take the attention off yourself. People were usually flattered when you asked them questions.

Something about his legislative priorities for the next term, maybe?

Maybe he really was interested in promoting cross-border economic development. That one was tricky. If you weren't careful how you said it, people thought you were shipping their jobs to Mexico. Which sometimes you were.

"San Diego's majority minority just like every other big city in California," Ben had told her. "But there's a strong nativist sentiment here. There's people who hate living on the border. All they care about is building higher walls. They'll tell you it's to keep the illegals and the drugs out." He'd laughed at that.

"Which is your favorite so far?" Matt asked.

"What?"

"The beers. Which one do you like best?"

She still clutched the first glass he'd given her, nearly finishing it without thinking. "I'm sorry," she said. "I just drank this one."

For the first time, something in his eyes looked different. Like he'd turned off the high-beams for once.

Maybe he actually *saw* her.

"Don't feel bad. It's a great beer. Let me get you another one."

It's okay, she told herself. It's just a beer.

She watched Matt wind his way through the barrel tables, someone in a Padres cap stopping him on the way, a huge smile on his face as he recognized Matt. The two clasped hands.

She couldn't see Matt's face, but she knew the lights were back to bright.

"So what do you think?"

She turned to look at Ben. He was just raising his glass to his lips.

"About what?"

The campaign? The beer? The CaliBaja mega-region?

Ben swallowed hard. Wiped his index finger along his lips. "Matt. What do you think about him?" His voice sounded nervous around the edges.

Was this some kind of test?

"I think he's great. That's why I'm working for him."

"Yeah. Yeah, me too." Ben lifted up his goblet and took a slug of beer, sweat beading on his forehead. Swallowed. "He likes you," he said, his voice flat.

She shivered a little. Managed a smile. "I think he likes everybody."

But she didn't think that was what Ben had meant.

"Hey, looks like Lindsey's entered the building," Ben muttered.

Lindsey, the finance director. Matt's wife.

She stood just past the entrance of the brewery, backlit by the early evening sun. But her figure was unmistakable: A little taller than average, long-limbed, with an athletic build. She played some sport in college, but Sarah couldn't remember what. Soccer, maybe? She looked like someone who spent a lot of time running up and down a field, anyway. Her head swiveled from side to side, scanning the room.

Matt had finally made his way back to the table, two beers in hand. "Here you go," he said, handing one to Sarah.

Behind Matt's back, Lindsey approached their table. "Hey," she said, giving Matt's shoulder a squeeze.

He flinched, turned and smiled. "Hey." They briefly hugged, with a quick kiss on the lips.

Was it real, the affection? Sarah couldn't tell.

"Lindsey, I know you've met Ben," Matt said. "This is Sarah. She's also in Communications."

“Nice to meet you, Sarah.” Lindsey smiled and extended her hand. Sarah took it. A hard grip, for a woman. She held on a moment. Sarah took in her hair, its layers and highlights, carefully styled to look natural, her face, slightly long and angular like the rest of her, a light sheen of makeup covering skin that had spent a lot of time in the sun.

Lindsey let go of her hand.

“You want a beer, Linds?” Matt asked, starting to rise.

“I’ll get one,” she said. “I need to check out the menu.”

So fucking typical.

“This would be a good time to roll a few calls,” she’d said.

He’d flopped on the couch with a wave of his hand. “Let’s not. It’s late.”

“It’s 8:15.”

“It’s late. I’m tired. And I’ve had a few beers.”

“Just three calls. They want to talk to you.”

“Look, I’ve raised my quota for today, okay?”

And Matt had turned away, picked up the remote and put on the baseball game.

“God dammit.”

Lindsey didn’t think he heard her. “Padres lead the Mets, bottom of the 4th, with an add-on run just waiting out there on third...”

The TV took up half the living room wall. Matt had wanted it. One of their compromises. Funny, she couldn’t remember what she’d gotten out of the deal.

She didn’t want a fight, not now. But there was some sick part of her that couldn’t help it. She stepped around the side of the couch, where he’d see her.

He looked up and muted the TV.

“That girl. That intern.”

“Oh come on, Linds.” He sounded tired. “I just met her. I don’t even know her.”

“Don’t fuck this up, Matt.”

She’d seen the body that girl tried to hide, beneath her Gap blazer and white blouse.

NEIGHBOR2NEIGHBOR/CLAIREMONT/NEWS_FEED

GUNSHOTS FIRED? 3 MIN. AGO

George Morales, Bay Park Morena

ANYBODY HEAR GUNSHOTS? LIKE A BUNCH MAYBE A DOZEN?
I’M SOUTH CLOSE TO OLD MORENA.

Reilly James, Clairemont Drive

DUDE ITS FIRECRACKERS LOL

Kate Czerny, Bay Park Western Hills

AGREE ITS GUNFIRE

George Morales, Bay Park Morena

HEARING COPTERS AND SIRENS NOW

Jessica McDonald, Overlook Heights

ME TOO, A BUNCH OF POLICE CARS JUST HEADED DOWN THE
HILL.

Reilly James, North Clairemont Drive

LONG AS THEIR NOT SHOOTING AT YOU ITS NOT SERIOUS

Sarah heard the helicopters first, then the sirens. They seemed to be coming from different directions, converging down the hill from her. She grabbed her iPhone and opened Twitter.

She'd started following San Diego-related accounts when she'd first become interested in Matt: his account, of course, then the accounts of other local politicians, news outlets, government agencies, tourist attractions like the San Diego Zoo. By the time she actually moved here, she'd added restaurants and breweries, sports teams, local influencers. That last category was the hardest to compile, but she thought she'd done a pretty good job, and she added new names every day.

If something was going on down the hill, it would turn up in her feed.

Hop Head @hophead 7m
IM AT @CROOKEDARROWBEER SOMEONE IS ON A ROOF
SHOOTING PEOPLE OUTSIDE

Brett Untamed @BrettUntamed 6m
WE WERE GOING TO OUR CAR AND A GIRL GOT SHOT IN THE
HEAD RIGHT IN FRONT OF US AND THIS GUY TRIED TO HELP AND
HE GOT SHOT

@hophead THERE'S 1 GIRL HURT PRETTY BAD IN HERE SHE
GOT SHOT BY THE DOOR AND WE CARRY HER IN AND ARE
APPLYING PRESSURE 2 SLOW BLEEDING PLS SEND HELP

@News9SanDiego ACTIVE SHOOTER ON MORENA
BLVD.; MULTIPLE FATALITIES REPORTED.

Now a hashtag—#MorenaShooter

A couple of photos by Hophead and Brett Untamed: Barrels stacked against the double doors, bloody towels pressed against a woman's stomach, blood staining the pressing hands. Now a few photos from outside, flashing blue and red police lights, what looked like a body lying in the street. It was hard to make it out, in the dark.

Who would be crazy enough to take pictures, with someone out there shooting?

She opened Campaigner, clicked on the new post box, titled it "Morena Shooter." Wrote: "There's an active shooting incident going on not far from my apartment, down on Morena Blvd, near the Crooked Arrow Brewery. Supposedly there are several fatalities. The hashtag is #MorenaShooter."

She copied the links of a few of the best tweets. Pasted them in the post. Hesitated a moment, her finger hovering over the priority box.

Some people probably knew about it already. They must. But no one had posted about it yet.

Has to be Code Red, she thought. It's a mass shooting, in his own district.

She labeled it "Red" and hit "send."

It never hurt to be first, either.

A video from @CaseyChengNews9

"We're told the shooter is on the roof of a building behind me." The reporter, a slight, pretty Asian woman with long, glossy hair, seemed very calm, her face pixilating and then coming back into focus. "The police have instructed us to take cover, and my photographer and I are crouched behind a car right now. You can hear gun-

fire in the background. We've had reports of multiple fatalities but have not been able to confirm—"

A sharp metallic spat. The reporter flinched. "That was close."

A male voice in the background. "We'd better move." The video panned to the cameraman briefly, a big Latino guy, then back to the reporter. She was the one taking this video, Sarah realized, holding the phone or the camera or whatever she was using in her hand, her arm stretched out enough to show the street behind her, beams of red and blue light sweeping over it.

"All right," the reporter said. "We'll keep you posted with the very latest on News 9 at 11."

Sarah sipped a glass of the beer she'd brought home in a small growler from the brewery—Ben had bought it for her, "Since you didn't get to try the Saison." It tasted pretty good, but she liked the IPA Matt had given her better. She flipped through the local channels on her TV. Two of them were doing live coverage of the shootings. The others were late to the show.

"The suspect has taken position on that roof, and the police have asked us to stay back, they say he is armed with a high-powered rifle, and unfortunately that's making it very difficult for paramedics to reach the injured safely—"

While she watched, she checked Campaigner. There were several replies to her post now: "This is horrific." "Praying for the victims."

And then Angus: "Assume Matt will be making a statement."

Presley: "Yes but suggest we wait until there's a resolution."

Jane: "Agree."

She checked the "Seen" button. Most of the staff had checked in, with two notable exceptions: Matt and Lindsey.

There was a stream of new tweets with the #MorenaShooter hashtag.

One of them, from @Haraguro93, caught her attention. “My POV,” it said. “Good night for hunting Chads and Stacys.”

Below that, a nighttime photo, it looked like. A photo of a rifle, looking down the barrel to a street below.

HAHAH, DREAM ON BETA FAGGOT, someone replied.

HOPE YOU GET A HIGH SCORE, wrote another.

TOTAL SHITPOST YOUR STUPIDITY GIVES ME ASSPAIN

REEEEEEEEEEE

GO CRY ABOUT IT ON /R9K/ FAGGOT

Haraguro93 @Haraguro93

HAHAHA FUCK OFF NORMIE CUCKS WISH I COULD KILL MORE OF YOU #MORENASHOOTER

PacManButt @PacManButt

DON'T JOKE ABOUT THIS SHIT THE LIBCUCKS ALREADY TRYING TO DISARM US DON'T GIVE THEM MORE AMMO

Haraguro93 @Haraguro93

NOT JOKING ASSHOLE JUST WATCH TIME 2 RISE & SHINE

She nearly dropped her phone when the trumpet fanfare that announced a Campaigner alert went off, and a black banner dropped over her screen.

THANKS SARAH FOR BEING ON TOP OF THIS. MATT.

She felt a brief flush of gratification that she'd done a good job, that it had been recognized. That she'd been seen, by Matt. The thought of what was happening on her Twitter feed quickly pulled

her out of that mood, but she couldn't tell what she was feeling now, whether it was anticipation or dread.

What if Haraguro93 was for real?

He's probably full of shit, she thought.

She clicked out of Campaigner and went back to Twitter.

There was a new tweet from Haraguro93. A video. #More-naShooter.

Her heart thudded hard. She almost didn't want to press "play."
What if ... ?

But of course she did.

That same shot of the rifle again. Except now, you could hear things. Some kind of loud, pulsing motor—a helicopter? Indistinct shouting. And there were lights. Blue and red lights that swept over the scene, almost lazily.

The shot panned around to a face.

"Hey, robots."

Young. Thin. Pale. The changing colors lighting up his features and then receding, leaving them shadowed.

"This is the best thing I ever did," he said. "I just wish I'd gotten closer, so I could've seen their faces."

The video ended. Sarah realized she'd been holding her breath.