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Homeland

Written by Andrew Kaplan

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HOMELAND™

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ANDREW KAPLAN

HARPER

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2006

BEFORE BRODY

CHAPTER 1

Ashrafieh, Beirut, Lebanon

Nightingale was late.

Sitting in the darkened movie theater, second seat, fourth row from the back, Carrie Mathison tried to decide whether to abort. It was supposed to be an initial contact only. "Passing ships," Saul Berenson, her boss and mentor, had called it during training back at the Farm, the CIA's training facility in Virginia. Get a close-up look at one Taha al-Douni, to whom they'd assigned the code name "Nightingale," let him get a quick look at her for the next time, whisper the time and location for the next meet and leave. Strictly by the book.

If the contact was late, Company protocol was to wait fifteen to twenty minutes, then abort and reschedule only if the contact provided a damn good reason why they hadn't shown. An everyday excuse such as Middle Eastern time, which could be anything from a half hour to a half day late, or the regular Friday-evening traffic mash-up on Boulevard Fouad Chehab during the *cinq á sept*, the hours between five and seven P.M. when businessmen met their mistresses in discreet little Hamra-district apartments wouldn't cut it.

Except Carrie wanted this one. According to her source,

Dima, a pretty Lebanese party girl from March 14, a Maronite Christian political group, whom you could find every night at the rooftop bar at Le Gray in the Central District, al-Douni had two things that made him someone the CIA would die to get their hands on: one, he was GSD, an officer in the General Security Directorate, the brutal Syrian secret intelligence agency, which gave him a direct pipeline into the Assad regime in Damascus; and two, he needed money. A foxy Egyptian girlfriend with expensive tastes was bleeding him dry, Dima said.

She checked her watch again. Twenty-nine minutes. Where the hell was he? She looked around the theater. It was more than three-quarters full. Since the movie started, no one had come in. On the screen, Harry Potter, Ron and Hermione were in Mad-eye Moody's class, watching him put an Imperius curse on a lethal-looking flying insect.

Her nerves felt taut as a violin string, though that didn't mean anything. She couldn't always trust her feelings, because there were times when she thought her nervous electrical system had been put together by the same idiots who built the Washington, DC, power grid. Bipolar disorder, the doctors called it. A psychiatric mood disorder characterized by episodes of hypomania alternating with depressive episodes, as a psychiatrist once recommended by the student health center back at Princeton, had described it. Her sister, Maggie, had a better definition for it: "Mood swings that cycle from 'I'm the smartest, prettiest, most fantastic girl in the universe' to 'I want to kill myself.'" Even so, everything about this contact felt wrong.

She couldn't wait any longer, she told herself. On the screen, Hermione was screaming at Moody, begging him to stop a curse that was torturing the poor insect to death. Perfect timing; lots of noise and special effects. No one would

notice her, she decided, getting up and making her way out to the theater lobby.

She stepped outside to the street, feeling conspicuous, exposed. To a certain extent, it was always that way for a Western woman in the Middle East. You stood out. The only way to disguise yourself would be to wear a full-body-covering *abaya* and veil, and hope no one got close enough to get a good look. But with her slender build, long straight blond hair and all-American face, Carrie couldn't fool anyone except at a distance, and in any case, that wouldn't work in North Beirut, where women wore everything from *hijabs* to skintight designer jeans, and sometimes both at the same time.

It had grown dark while she had been in the theater. Traffic was heavy on Avenue Michel Bustros, the headlights of the cars and the lighted windows in tall office and apartment buildings making a mosaic of lights and shadows. She scanned the street looking for watchers. Broken contacts were always potentially dangerous. And then her heart almost stopped.

Nightingale was seated at a café table across the street looking right at her. Totally wrong. He couldn't have misunderstood the instructions passed to him by Dima at Le Gray last night. Was he crazy? And then he made it worse. He beckoned her with a hand gesture that in America means "go away" but in the Middle East means "come here." Instantly the pattern resolved itself, like one of those kaleidoscopes that you shake and suddenly all the pieces fall into place. It was an ambush. Al-Douni was supposed to be GSD. A seasoned intelligence professional. He couldn't be doing something so amateurish.

Whether it was GSD or Hezbollah, they weren't above killing a CIA agent or, better yet, taking one hostage for their own purposes. For them, grabbing an attractive blond female CIA spy would be like hitting the lottery. In her mind, she

could already visualize the media circus as they paraded her before the camera, denouncing yet more American interference in the Middle East while they kept her locked in a closet for years, torturing and raping her because after all, she was a spy, not to mention that many men in the Middle East believed Western women were all sluts anyway. Nightingale motioned to her again and as he did so, out of the corner of her eye, she spotted two Arab men getting out of a van on her side of the street and moving toward her.

It was a snatch. She had to decide instantly; in a few seconds she would be a prisoner. She turned and walked back into the theater.

"I forgot something," she mumbled in Arabic, showing her *billet* to the ticket taker. She walked down the aisle, squinting to readjust her eyes to the dark. On the screen, Dumbledore was announcing that Hogwarts was to host the Triwizard Tournmanet as Carrie stepped out the side emergency exit into an alley. They would be coming in after her, she thought, heading back to the avenue. She peeked out from the side of the building. Nightingale was no longer at the café. The two men must have entered the theater.

She ran out onto the avenue, making a turn around the corner and down a narrow street away from the traffic. How many were there? she wondered, cursing herself for wearing high heels. Part of her cover. Unless she was in an *abaya,* no self-respecting woman in Beirut would be caught dead in flats. There wouldn't be just the two men, she thought, stopping to pull off her heels. Not if they were serious.

The street was dark, shaded with trees. Not many people around, not that having people around would stop them. The two Arab men from the van came around the corner. One of them pulled something out of his jacket. It looked like a pistol

with an attached sound suppressor. She started to run. They had underestimated her, she thought. She had been a runner. She could outrun them.

Just then she heard a sharp ping and felt something sting her leg. She glanced down and back and saw a white scar on the sidewalk from a bullet. They were shooting at her. She dodged left, then right and touched her leg, feeling a tear in her jeans and a smear. Blood. A bit of sidewalk must have ricocheted and hit her, she thought, running for her life, the concrete hard on her bare feet. Turning the corner, she raced down an empty street. She had to do something and fast. On her left was a large gated house behind a wrought-iron fence; on the other side of the street, a Greek Orthodox church with a domed roof, spotlighted white in the darkness.

She raced to the side door of the church and yanked on the handle. It was locked. Looking behind her, her heart pounding, she could see the two Arab men running. They both had pistols with silencers now and were getting closer. Ahead at the corner, a Mercedes sedan screeched to a halt. Four men piled out. Shit! she thought, running as hard as she could for the main door to the church. She yanked it open and ran inside.

There were perhaps a dozen people, nearly all women dressed in black, in the church. They were walking around, lighting candles and kissing icons or just standing facing the altar with its arches and gold-backed icons. A bearded young man, a priest in a black robe, came down the aisle toward her.

"Christ is in our midst," he said in Arabic.

"Of course he is, Father. I need help. Is there a back way out?" she replied in Arabic.

Instinctively, he glanced to the side toward his shoulder. She ran that way, just as the main door burst open and the four men from the Mercedes ran in, two of them holding auto-

matic rifles. A woman screamed and everyone began to scatter. Except the priest, who walked toward the men.

"*Bess!*" he shouted. *Stop!* "This is the house of our Lord!" One of the men bowled him aside as he ran down the aisle toward the alcove where Carrie had disappeared behind a curtain that led to a door.

She ran outside. A walkway led to an avenue, or she could cross the walkway to a parking lot surrounded by a hedge. She ran through the parking lot, jogging right at the muffled sound of a shot behind her, then dodged through a gap in a hedge and out onto Avenue Charles Malek, a broad main street thick with traffic and people. She ran into the middle of the street, dodging cars, horns honking. The light turned green and the traffic was moving all around her. Out of the corner of her eye, she looked back at the side street and saw three of the men from the Mercedes on the sidewalk looking around for her. They would spot her in seconds.

She was in the middle of traffic between two lanes of cars barely eight inches apart. She felt a hand groping her ass from a car moving in the opposite direction. She didn't waste time looking to see who had done it; she had to do something fast to get out of their line of sight.

A Service taxi was about to pass her. There was one seat in the back available. She waved her hand at the windshield in front of the driver's face and shouted "Hamra!" The Service was already heading that way, west, and there was a CIA safe house in the Ras Beirut neighborhood not far from Hamra if she could reach it undetected. The Service stopped in the middle of traffic, horns behind him honking, and she jumped into the backseat.

"*Salaam alaikum*," she murmured to the other passengers, slipping the shoes she'd been carrying back on and pulling a

black *hijab* from her pocket and putting it on her head to help change her image. She tossed one end of the scarf over her shoulder while looking around quickly. One of the men on the sidewalk was pointing at the Service and saying something. She leaned back, so she would be screened by the other two passengers in the backseat, an older woman in a gray suit staring at her with frank interest and a young man in sweats, probably a university student. In the front seat next to the driver was a young woman ignoring everyone and talking to someone on a cell phone.

"*Wa alaikum salaam*," the student and the older woman murmured back.

"Where in Hamra?" the driver asked, hitting the gas and swerving into a gap between the cars ahead to advance a few meters.

"Central Bank," she said, not wanting to give away the actual safe house location, especially if they were still following her. Close enough to where she wanted to go. She passed two thousand-livre bills to the driver, then pulled a makeup compact out of her handbag and tried to angle it so she could see out the rear window. Nothing but traffic behind. If the van or the Mercedes was behind her, they were too far back to be seen. But they were still after her. She was sure of it. Because of her, everyone in the Service was in danger. She had to get out as soon as she could, she thought. Brushing a strand of hair out of her eyes and looking around, she put the compact away.

"You shouldn't do that," the older woman said. "Standing in the middle of traffic like that."

"There's a lot I shouldn't do." Then, realizing the woman was taking too much interest in her, she added, "My husband tells me all the time," making sure the woman saw the wedding band she always wore for contact meetings even though she

wasn't married, to help prevent what Virgil, her black-bag guy, called "Everest sex." Sex that was unwanted or with the wrong partners or the Everest part, "because it's there, Carrie."

They were on Boulevard General Fouad Chehab now, the main east-west street across northern Beirut, and the traffic was moving a little faster. If they were going to come at her in the Service, it would be now, she thought, eyes darting around. Cars and trucks all around and the teenage girl in front on the cell phone saying, "I know, *habibi*. Ciao." The girl hung up and immediately began texting.

The driver made the turn by the tall rectangular al-Mour building onto Boulevard Fakhreddine. All the buildings in this area were new; the old ones had been destroyed during the long civil war. Farther up the boulevard, she could see tall cranes where still more new buildings were going up. The Service made a left and after a few blocks, the driver slowed to find a place to let someone off.

Carrie glanced back out the rear window. They were still behind her. In traffic, four cars back in the Mercedes, looking to move over. They were waiting for her to get out, then they'd pick her up before she'd gone twenty feet. What could she do? The Service pulled over and stopped near a tall apartment building. Carrie tensed. Would they come at her now? They could stop by the Service, blocking it so it couldn't pull out in traffic. She'd be trapped. She had to do something and fast.

The older woman nodded to the other passengers and got out. After a second, Carrie got out on the street side, went around and took her arm.

"I thought you were going to Central Bank," the woman said.

"I'm in trouble. Please, madame," Carrie said.

The woman looked at her. "What kind of trouble?" she

asked as they walked toward the entrance to the apartment building. Carrie glanced over her shoulder. As the Service pulled away, the Mercedes was pulling up in its place at the curb.

"The worst kind. We have to run or they'll kill you too, madame," Carrie said, starting to run and pulling the woman with her. They ran inside the building, over to the elevators, and pushed the button.

"Don't push the button for your floor," Carrie said. "Pick a higher floor and walk down. Lock the door and don't open it for anyone for at least an hour. I'm so sorry." She touched the woman's arm.

"Wait," the woman said, digging in her handbag. "I have a red Renault in the parking lot." She held out the keys.

"Wait an hour before you report it stolen," Carrie said, taking the keys. "You know the Crowne Plaza, by the shopping mall?"

The woman nodded.

"If I can, I'll leave it there," Carrie said, already running to the side door near the parking lot. "*Shokran*," she called back to thank the woman as she stepped into the elevator.

She went out to the parking lot. The red Renault was parked in a row of cars near a low wall and hedge. She ran over, unlocked it, got in and started it up. As she was adjusting the mirrors, she saw them. Two men. The same two who had chased her into the church. She threw the car into reverse, backed out and drove toward the exit. The men ran after her; the one who had shot at her going into shooting position, aiming at the car. Instinctively she ducked as she swerved into the street, turning hard and accelerating as fast as the little car could go. A bullet smashed through the rear window, spreading a spiderweb of cracks from the hole.

She swerved again, looking toward the parking lot, where the shooter was aiming right at her. She would have to come directly abreast of where he was standing. At the last second, she hit the brake and banged her head back against the headrest. Another bullet went through the side window, slicing the air in front of her face. She stomped on the gas again, a car horn honking loudly behind her, and raced down the street, looking for a gap in traffic. Checking the rearview mirror, she saw that for the moment, the Mercedes was still stopped at the curb. Someone was running on the sidewalk toward it. God, she hoped they hadn't hurt the older woman. Why had they shot at her? What was going on? A CIA hostage was valuable for Hezbollah or Syria or whoever the hell was behind this. A dead woman, even CIA, wasn't worth that much.

Suddenly, without signaling, she edged into the right lane and turned the corner, tires squealing as she raced up the narrow street. Ahead, a man was crossing in the middle of the street and instead of braking, she slammed the horn, not slowing for a second, and just managed to swing around him as he gave her a thumbs-up, the Middle Eastern equivalent of the middle finger. She didn't slow but made the next left, checking the rearview mirror again. For the moment, there was no one behind her.

She made another left onto Rome and back toward Rue Hamra, the narrow street dense with cars and people. If they were behind her with the Mercedes or another car, there was no way to catch up to her through the traffic. The sidewalks were thick with people of all ages, many stylish, a few women in *hijabs,* the cafés and restaurants bright with neon signs and sounds of hip-hop music from the open door of a club.

She drove west on Rue Hamra, checking mirrors while the city in all its colors swirled around her. She opened a window

and heard the sounds of people and music and caught the smell of roast *shawarma* and apple tobacco smoke from the *shisha* cafés. No sign of tails. They might have switched off from the Mercedes or the van, but so far as she could tell, she had lost them. Still, she couldn't relax. They would be scouring the city for her. If they had grabbed the Service driver, he would have told them she was headed for Hamra. They might be anywhere. And she could only hope they hadn't gotten to the older woman. Time to get rid of the car.

She spotted the tall Crowne Plaza hotel up ahead, with its red electric sign at the top of the building. She drove past it into the mall entrance and, after fifteen minutes of circling, found a parking space. She left the car keys on the floor mat, got out and walked out of the parking structure into the mall and melted into the stream of shoppers, going out different exits and coming back in, looking in mirrors and going up and down stairs to ensure she wasn't followed, checking one last time as she exited the mall and walked away from the crowds and up Rue Gemayel in the direction of the American University campus.

She circled the block twice, then another block walking in the opposite direction to make completely sure she wasn't being followed. Doing it that way, even if they switched off, you could almost always spot a tail. She began to breathe a little easier. So far, it looked like she had lost them. But she had no illusions. They would be scouring Hamra, looking for her. She had to get to the safe house now.

The key was to stay away from the crowds on Rue Hamra. They might get lucky and spot her there. Instead, she headed toward the university. For cover, she fell in with a group of students, chattering about where to go for *manaeesh,* a kind of pizza. The two girls were Lebanese and one of the boys was

from Jordan, and for a second it was like being back at college. They invited her to join them at a hole-in-the-wall storefront, but she shrugged and walked on. The safe house wasn't far. Twenty minutes later, she was on Rue Adonis, a narrow tree-lined residential street, going up in the elevator to the eighth-floor-apartment safe house.

Coming out of the elevator, she scanned the corridor and the stairwell, listening to the elevator continuing on up before approaching the apartment door. She studied the doorjamb and frame for any signs of tampering. It looked clean. The peephole held a recording camera, she knew. She looked into it and gave the agreed-upon signal, two double-knocks, ready to run if something happened. There was no answer. She knocked again, then took out the key from her handbag and opened the door.

The apartment appeared empty. That was wrong. There was always supposed to be someone there. What the hell was going on? Checking that the drapes were drawn, she locked the door behind her and explored the two bedrooms, one filled with cots, the other with equipment. She went to the chest of drawers where they kept an assortment of guns. She took out a Glock 28 pistol and four magazines. Perfect for her. Small, light, with low recoil, and the .380 cartridges would go through anything. She loaded the pistol and put it and the magazines in her handbag.

She went to the window and peeked from the side of the curtain at the street below, lit by a single streetlamp. If there were any watchers, they were hidden in the shadows of the trees and parked cars on the dark street.

"Hell, I need a drink," she said aloud to herself, and went to the living room liquor cabinet, glancing at the laptop on the coffee table showing multiple views from security cam-

eras in the door peephole, the corridor and the street from the roof outside. It all looked okay. She found a half-full bottle of Grey Goose in the cabinet and poured herself a quarter glass, knowing she probably shouldn't and thinking that at this point, she really didn't give a damn; took out one of her clozapine pills from her handbag—she would have to get more from the black market pharmacy in Zarif, she thought with a frown; and washed it down with the vodka. She checked her watch: 7:41 P.M. Who would be manning the Beirut Station exchange at this hour? she asked herself. Linda, she thought. Linda Benitez; on till midnight.

Except before she called, she needed to think this through. What had just happened didn't add up. The contact with Nightingale had been arranged by Dima. The party girl wasn't one of the pigeons, the agents Carrie had recruited since she'd been in Beirut. She'd inherited her from Davis Fielding, the CIA Beirut Station chief. She was one of his. There'd be hell to pay, she thought angrily. Except she couldn't be sure if Dima was playing both sides or if she'd been duped by Nightingale too. In fact, she might be in danger or even dead already.

Except Carrie had no way of reaching her. She couldn't just call. The two safe house phones were off-limits. The normal one was for taking calls only. The scrambled one was strictly for communicating with the highly secure exchange at the U.S. embassy in Aoukar in the northernmost part of the city. And using a cell phone could give away her position if they were GPS-tracking her. Figure it out, she told herself. Assume either GSD or Hezbollah is behind this. How did they get onto her? Dima. It had to be Dima, and that could mean there was something Fielding didn't know. He'd encouraged her to make the contact.

"We'd kill for someone inside GSD," he'd told her. And

he'd also told her she didn't need any backup. "Dima's solid. She hasn't given us a lot, but what she has is strictly twenty-four-karat stuff." Son of a bitch, she thought. Was he doing her? Was sex the twenty-four karats she was giving him? She'd wanted to take Virgil Maravich, the station's resident black-bag genius, the best technical guy for surveillance, bugs and break-ins she'd ever met, but Fielding said he needed Virgil for something else. "Besides," Fielding had told her, "you're a big girl. You can handle it," implying that if she couldn't, she didn't belong in Beirut, the big leagues.

"Beirut Rules," Fielding had told her that first day in his office on the top floor of the U.S. embassy, slouched in a leather chair, behind him a window overlooking the Municipality building with its arched windows and entryway. He was big, fair haired, starting to go to fat. Touch of rosacea on his nose; someone who liked his food and booze. "No second chances. And no one cares that you're a girl in the Middle East. You screw up, you make a mistake, a hundred to one you die. Even if you don't, you're out of here. This looks like a civilized city—plenty of clubs, beautiful women in designer clothes, great food, the most sophisticated people on the planet—but don't be fooled. It's still the Middle East. Put one foot the wrong way and they'll kill you—and a minute later go on to the next party."

What the hell is going on? she thought. It was Fielding's Joe who set it up, Fielding who encouraged her to make the pitch and Fielding who'd made sure she went into it without backup. But Fielding was a longtime station chief in Beirut. It was a standard first contact. He hadn't expected anything to go wrong. She'd almost been kidnapped or killed. Clearly, he didn't want that. She took a deep breath. This was crazy.

Did she feel a little buzzy? Could it be that the clozapine, the medication for her bipolar, wasn't working?

She stood up. She felt she had to do something, anything, but she wasn't sure what. Her skin was tingling. Oh God, not that. She wasn't starting on one of her "flights"—what she called the manic phase of her bipolar—was she? She started to walk around the room, then went over to the window, feeling an irresistible urge to throw the curtains open and look out. Go ahead, take a look at me, you bastards! Don't be stupid, Carrie, she told herself. You're fine, just give the clozapine and the vodka a second to kick in. Although maybe it was crazy to mix the two. She reached for the curtain. Careful, careful, she told herself. She pulled the corner of the curtain and peeked out at the street.

The Mercedes sedan that had been chasing her was double-parked in front of the safe house building. Three men were walking to the front entrance. Fear shot through her like electricity. She felt a terrible urge to urinate and had to squeeze her thighs together to control it.

It was impossible. This was a safe house. How had they found her? She hadn't been followed. She was sure of it. She'd lost them in the red Renault and made doubly sure going around the city streets in Hamra. No one on foot; no one in a car. And what was she to do? They were coming into the building. She only had seconds to get away. She picked up the secure phone to the embassy and dialed. The phone was picked up on the second ring.

"Good evening. U.S. Cultural Services Offices," a voice said. Despite a faint distortion from the line encryption, Carrie recognized Linda Benitez's voice. She didn't know her well, just enough to say hello.

"Amarillo," Carrie said, using this week's code word. "Nightingale was a setup."

"Confirm opposition?"

"I don't have time. Achilles security has been breached. Do you copy, dammit?" Carrie almost shouted. Achilles was the safe house.

"Confirm Achilles. What is your location and status?" Linda said, and Carrie knew she was not only recording but following a memorized text and writing down every word, asking whether she was still mobile and operative, or whether she was calling under duress or capture.

"I'm on the move. Tell you-know-who I'll see him tomorrow," Carrie snapped, and hung up. For an instant, she stood poised on her toes like a dancer, trying to decide which way to go. She had to get out fast, but how? There were three of them. Plus at least one outside in the Mercedes sedan. They would be coming up both the stairs and the elevator.

How was she supposed to get out? There was no contingency for something like this. It wasn't supposed to happen in a safe house.

She couldn't stay where she was. They would find a way in. If not through a door, then through a window, a balcony or even a wall from an apartment next door. If they did come in, they would be shooting. She might be able to shoot one, maybe even two, but not three. There weren't going to be any shootouts at the OK Corral. Nor could she go out into the corridor, try for the stairs or the elevator. They would be waiting. In fact, they would likely be outside the door any second, she thought, crossing to the apartment door and throwing the dead bolt.

That left the window and the balcony. As she headed toward the bedroom, a shock went through her at sounds in

the corridor. She went over to the laptop. The three Arab men were in the corridor, going methodically and listening at each apartment door with some kind of hearing device. They'd be at her door in seconds.

She ran back to the bedroom closet, where they kept the gear. She opened it and began tearing through it, looking for rope or anything she could use to let herself down with. No rope. Just changes of men's clothes. Some suits, shoes and leather belts. Belts! She grabbed three belts and hooked them together to make a single long belt, then ran back to the laptop.

The screen showed the three men right outside the safe house apartment door. They were affixing something to the door. Explosives! she thought. She raced to the bedroom and opened the door to the balcony, looping the belt to the wrought-iron railing. She peeked over the edge. The Mercedes was still there, but no one had gotten out or was looking up this way. She looked down at the balcony below, unable to tell if anyone was in that apartment or not. What does it matter? she screamed inside. They were going to blow the door and maybe the whole apartment. She could be dead any second.

She tightened the belt on the railing and pulled at it hard. It felt like it would hold. It would have to. Climbing over the edge, she let herself down hand over hand on the belt. The glass door to the balcony of the apartment on the floor below was dark. No one home. Arms straining, she reached with her toes for the lower balcony's railing. Don't look down, she told herself as her toes touched the railing. She pushed forward, letting go as she fell forward onto the balcony. A deafening explosion above shook the building.

They'd blown the safe house door. Ears ringing, she smashed the glass in the balcony door with the Glock, then put her hand through the jagged hole and opened the door.

Putting her shoes back on to avoid stepping on broken glass, she ran to the apartment's front door, unlocked it and raced out into the corridor and down the stairs to the ground floor. Another few seconds and she was out the service door to an alley in back. She went cautiously down the alley to a side street. It looked clear. No watchers from the Mercedes around the corner. Taking off her heels again, she ran as hard as she could, her slender figure disappearing into the darkness.