

# Unseen

by Chris Marks

## **Chapter 1**

“And that’s our plan.”

Richard was working late. He hated working late. The middle of June, one of the longest days of the year, and Richard was stuck at the office giving a presentation. The sun had gone down half an hour ago, but the corporate bigwigs up on the twentieth floor wanted him to close this deal today, or else. He’d never had to find out what ‘or else’ meant himself, but he’d seen enough people come and go in this company that he thought he had a pretty good idea.

“And you think this will benefit both our companies? It looks very one-sided to me,” claimed one of the anonymous voices in the back of the room. Richard had heard everyone’s names as they entered, but in the dim lights of the conference room, with the blinds closed and the projector shining light at the wall behind him, he couldn’t make out any faces or details.

The contract was simple: a sharing of intellectual property between two companies, for mutual good. Somehow, the representatives from the other company didn’t see how technology sharing was a good thing. It was going to be a long night.

Robert entered the office and closed the door behind him, with a knowing grin on his face. He turned around, and made a show of locking the door, the audible ‘click’ as the deadbolt slid into place drawing a warm sigh from the woman behind him.

He looked back over his shoulder as he loosened his tie, at Catherine’s familiar form sitting on her desk. She leaned forward as he approached, her low neckline

beckoning him as he threw his tie onto a chair. They had begun this affair almost three months ago, making what they felt was the best possible use of her private office. After all, with a view like this, there really was only one thing to do.

Catherine's legs parted and wrapped around his waist, pulling his hips towards her. She pressed herself against him as their lips found each other, tongues dancing, Robert laying her back on the desk. As she closed her eyes and arched her back, his hands explored her waist, and slid up to unbutton her blouse. He smiled as he thought he heard a moan, and went to work.

"I can't believe I have to spend my Thursdays like this. God forbid they learn how to put their own fucking files away – 'No no, that's Rachel's job.' Not like I have a fucking life or anything."

She was in the filing room. She hated the filing room. It was cold, dark, and worst of all, it was small. She couldn't stand small spaces, ever since her so-called 'friends' in high school made her climb down a well to prove she wasn't afraid. Then they pulled the bucket up so she couldn't get out, and laughed at her. She wasn't afraid then, but now she couldn't stand to be in a confined space. Her psychiatrist called it Claustrophobia, but that was for his benefit, not hers. Naming it didn't help any, it just meant Dr. Smith could tell her why she was crazy.

"Twenty-two years old and I'm filing papers. What a fucking joke." She didn't want to be here; she wanted to be out at a bar, meeting the next Mr. Rachel applicant. But she also wanted more vacation time, and the way to get time off later was to put in more time now. She knew she was doing this to herself, but that didn't mean she wasn't still

allowed to hate it.

She picked up the last two files, and gave a little thank you to the man upstairs that both files were bound for the same cabinet. Accounting had their own private cabinet, because they were oh—so—special. She put the files in their place, and just as she closed the cabinet, the lights went out.

Steven strolled through the underground parking, twirling his keys and whistling. He had it all sorted out with his boss: get in late to enjoy the morning, leave late to skip the traffic. The sales floor needed people to make calls until dark anyway, so why wouldn't they let someone do it who wanted to?

Today had been a particularly good day for him on the phone, and he was feeling mighty proud of himself. In fact, he thought, today might have been the best day he's ever had at work. He made the company a lot of money (and himself some nice big commissions), and set up a date with his girl tomorrow night. Life was good.

The lights flickered a little, and he stopped whistling. He thought he heard something beyond the usual noises of the garage, but he couldn't be sure. He slowed down to listen more closely, but he couldn't make anything out clearly. It sounded like a voice saying something, but he couldn't hear it properly.

He saw some movement to his left, and turned his head to look. There was Michelle, who wasn't usually here this late; she must have been working on a project and lost track of time. Steven had gotten lost in his work many times before, then looked up to see that all of a sudden it was dark outside. One time he'd looked up and seen Michelle pulling open her sweater; he liked the view, but Michelle wasn't Candice, and Steven

wasn't one to cheat.

He waved to her as the garage door started opening; someone must have been driving out. She waved back and he started to whistle again, but then he noticed something was wrong. He couldn't quite figure out what it was, but something was definitely off. He stopped whistling as he reached his car, and as he took his keys out of his pocket he figured out what it was; the garage door hadn't opened all the way. He'd been in and out of this garage so many times that he knew exactly how long that motor was supposed to run for, and this time it had stopped short.

He was about to say something about it to Michelle, but before he could start he heard a very loud metallic crunching sound, like something heavy being thrown into sheet metal. They both flinched, and he looked around the garage as the power went out. And then they heard the screaming.

"Mop mop mop, sop sop sop," Amando sung to himself. Washing floors wasn't the most glamorous job, but it paid the bills. And it wasn't very difficult, either; he liked that. It gave him time to memorize his lines. Most actors waited tables to get by, but Amando cleaned inside buildings. Everyone else was stressed out during the day, then more stressed out about getting acting work, and they were all nutcases from it. Amando's life was the good life.

He stepped up to the 'custodial closet' (that's what they called it; he just called it his room) and saw the light on in the server room next to it. He leaned against the door to see if he could hear movement inside, and he heard some muffled voices from behind the door. He could make out two men talking, but he couldn't hear what they were saying.

As he was about to take the mop bucket back to his room, suddenly the lights went out. He waited a moment for the emergency lights to come on, but after a good ten seconds he was still in complete darkness. "I guess the generator lights are out."

He felt in the dark for the handle to his room, announcing what everything was in his head. "There's the wall, okay that's the hinge to the server door – I hope they're not freaking out in there – that's the hinge to my door, and there's my handle."

He turned the handle to open his door, and heard a loud, terrified scream come from the server room, and lots of loud noise, like someone trying to get away. Acting on instinct, he yanked open the door to his room, knocking over the mop bucket. He jumped inside, closing the door behind him, and flung himself against the wall. He couldn't see anything, but he crouched down on the floor, trying to make himself small, as if it would somehow keep him from being detected by whoever was in the server room. He tried to be still, and listened, but he could only hear the sound of his own heavy breathing.

Robert stood beside the desk, looking down at Catherine's naked body, on her knees and looking up greedily at him. Her hand was stroking his shaft as he cupped her cheek in his palm, her tongue rolling around his thumb between her soft, supple lips. He closed his eyes as he felt her fingers working their magic, and when he opened them again the lights were out.

He looked around briefly, then down at Catherine, lit gently only by the moon. Offices didn't have emergency lights, so it was just the two of them and the stars now. She looked back up at him, grinning, and then took him into her mouth. He moaned as he entered her, and the sound seemed to carry on longer than he made it for. Then he heard

something else, and he tapped Catherine on the shoulders and pushed her back so he could listen.

“What are you-” Catherine began, but Robert put his hand out to silence her. He cocked his head slightly to one side without knowing why, and then he heard it: someone was yelling. No, not yelling... screaming. *Someone was screaming.*

He moved closer to the window, thinking if he could just see what was going on outside, he'd know why he was hearing the screams. He looked at Catherine – she'd heard it too. They both stood silently, and then heard more screaming and loud noises from much closer than outside. It didn't take a moment for him to figure out where they were coming from; they were coming from directly above them.

They both started at exactly the same moment, instinctively scrambling to get in the dark, where they couldn't be seen. If whoever was up there could hear them, they knew they'd be next. The sound stopped, and all that remained was Catherine's scared whimpers.

“Hello? Is anybody out there?”

Nothing.

Rachel made her way in the dark to where she thought she remembered the door being, feeling her way along the cabinets. Now not only was she in a tight space, but the lights were out. Wonderful. She half expected the dark to make it feel less closed in, but all it did was make it worse.

She was starting to panic. “Please?” Still nothing. If she could just get to the door, she knew she could get out. More cabinets. The room was small, how could she not be at

the door yet? Finally she found a wall, and followed it with her hands. Then she felt a raise in it, followed by something inset – the door. She felt for the handle and, relieved, turned it.

She turned it again. The door wasn't opening! She tried again – nothing. Why wasn't the door opening? Then it hit her all at once: records are important. When there's a power failure, the electronic lock resets, and the door only opens from the outside. Someone was going to have to find her.

She felt she was in the well again. Panicked, scared, cold, alone. She started banging her hand on the door, screaming for help, desperately hoping someone was out there to hear her. "Please help!" Then she heard something out in the hall – salvation! "Please, help me, I'm in the filing room!"

She forced herself to stay quiet for a moment, to hear what whoever was out there was doing. She felt her tears on her cheeks, without knowing when she started crying, and wiped them away with one hand. She listened, hoping to hear a familiar voice ask who was in the filing room.

She heard a footstep outside the door, and opened her mouth to say something. Then she heard someone scream, and a sound she couldn't identify, and felt the door move from something heavy hitting it. The door pushed in against her as it moved, a very real message to her that *something was out there, and might try to get in*. Suddenly she was glad she was trapped. Glad she was in the dark. Cold, frightened... and alone.

"...and the revenue that will be generated for both companies from this deal will increase for both of us in both the short and long term markets." Richard was still trying



to get through to these people. It's amazing, he thought, how some people are too stupid to know that they're stupid. There's probably some kind of medical term for it; no way he's the first person to encounter such a thing.

"As you can see from these graphs-" He was about to advance to the next screen, but was interrupted by the power going out. The lights went down, and the projector turned off. Richard looked around himself in darkness for a few moments, as the familiar sounds of the office died down. Sounds you don't even realize are there until they go away, he thought. The fans of the air conditioning; the soft whirr of the projector fan; the electric hum of the overhead lights. Then the emergency lights kicked in, illuminating everything in a soft, pale yellow.

"Nothing to be afraid of folks, just a bit of a power outage."

"How are we supposed to continue the meeting now," asked one of the guests in the back. Richard could see them all clearly now that there was basically even lighting in the room. A couple dark spots against the walls, sure, but overall the room was still fairly consistently lit. The man who had spoken had black hair and a very faint Russian accent, as if he was trying to rid himself of it to fit in better. Richard hated that type of person; be who you are and just live with it.

"Well, we don't have the projector under emergency power, but we still have the whiteboard, and I can draw most of the diagrams on it. I just need a little more light."

He pushed the button to raise the projector screen, and it raised itself back to the ceiling. He didn't realize until it was part way up that the emergency generator was set up to run the screen motor but not the projector, as if they'd anticipated just such an occurrence. Hell, maybe they had.

The representatives of the other company were talking quietly amongst themselves; Richard hoped they were saying good things about him. Once the screen was out of the way, he walked to the window to open the blinds. He pulled them aside, and immediately exploded into a hundred bloody pieces.

“Michelle, can you see?”

“I can’t, we’re too far away!”

Steven and Michelle were running for the large garage door. The power had gone out, but had the door stayed up? Had it come crashing down on someone’s car? If someone was hurt, they needed to help.

Emergency lights were supposed to be brighter than this, weren’t they? Steven could hardly see where he was going. He saw outlines of cars, vague shapes only, and did his best to avoid them as he tried to get to the door.

He looked to his left: Michelle was ahead of him. God, he wasn’t that out of shape, was he? “I have got to get back to the gym,” he muttered to himself. He rounded the corner and ran straight into something hard and metal. “Gah!” he yelled, gripping his knee.

He stopped to lean on the car, barely lit, as his heart found his throat. He looked up and saw the big garage door, halfway up, just like he knew it would be. No car there though, just Michelle. The lights were dim, but he could still make out her arms going up on either side of her; she was shrugging. She must be just as confused as he was, only she was closer to the door and better lit.

He rubbed his knee, and found it more tender than he was hoping – he must have

really jammed it, he thought. “Any ideas?” he called out.

“There must be an override somewhere, but I have no idea where it is.”

“You look for it; I need to make sure I didn’t break something.”

Steven bent back down to feel around his knee, to see how far the tenderness went. Side of the kneecap – yep. In behind it – that *really* hurt. Candice wasn’t going to be happy with him tomorrow.

He looked back up at the door. Michelle was closer to it now, almost fully lit. At least the lights at the exit card scanner were bright. He thought he saw something behind her, outside – probably a stray dog. Then he heard something, loud, like a watermelon hitting something hard.

The pain in his knee was starting to work its way up his leg now. He tried to put it out of his mind and focus on the door. Was something else moving beyond it? It’s a shame the lights inside weren’t as bright as the lights outside, or he wouldn’t have hit his knee.

He heard footsteps from outside, and then a loud, throaty scream, almost drowned out by another thick watermelon sound. The scream continued, and under the door to the garage he saw a pair of legs running across the ramp outside. Then the scream stopped with another loud watermelon sound, this one so close he could practically feel it.

The legs disappeared in what looked like every direction at once, and the garage door shook as something hit it from outside. Michelle fell back on her ass, pushing back with her hands and feet to get away from the door, but it was too late – it wasn’t three seconds before she burst, pieces of her going every which way right in front of him.

The pain was gone; his leg didn’t matter any more. All that mattered was getting

out of sight, before whoever it was that killed Michelle killed him too. He scrambled under the car, the only fully unlit place he could find. Whoever was out there couldn't see him under here, but if they came into the garage, Steven would see them.

He looked at his feet to make sure he was fully beneath the car, and did his best to stay calm and quiet. His leg was starting to throb again.

“Hey give me that voltmeter, would you?”

Another day, another late service call. At least he had a company tech with him this time; yesterday he'd had to rewire a data farm without knowing where anything was. It should have taken three hours, but instead it took nine and kept him working until the wee hours.

“Here you go,” the pimply-faced tech said as he passed him the wrong tool.

Carl looked at the screwdriver in his hand, and pictured himself doing terrible things to this kid with it. He shook his head. “New people.”

“What?”

“I said that's not a voltmeter. That's for measuring signal-to-noise ratio on the lines. That,” he said as he pointed to an actual bona-fide voltmeter, “is a voltmeter.”

“Sorry sir.” The kid grabbed the voltmeter and passed it to him.

He shook his head. “For the last time, my name's Carl. Call me Carl.”

The kid lowered his head, looking at his feet.

“You're new here, aren't you, kid.”

“They hired me last month. This is my first time working with an outside contractor. I'm... a little nervous.”

“Relax, you’re doing fine.” *Almost as bad as having nobody here at all*, he thought to himself. “Just pretend that you’re-”

He stopped talking as the lights went out. The emergency lights came on, hanging on the wall attached to a rectangular box, just like all the others. The servers didn’t miss a beat. There were servers stacked between Carl and the kid and the emergency lights, so Carl had to strain his eyes to see, but the kid was clearly shaken. *New doesn’t even begin to cover it*, Carl thought to himself. He looked around for something to take the kid’s mind off of the power outage and saw an air compressor and a nail gun in the corner. He pointed at it. “They’re renovating the room too?”

“Uh– I guess. This is really my first day in here, I’ve mostly been working on people’s computers so far.”

“Well, make yourself useful and go look out the window. Tell me if other buildings have lost power too, or if it’s just us.” The kid stood up and started walking towards the window. “I’ll see if I can find my flashlight.”

The kid stepped in front of the window, lit fully by the emergency lights. Some of his pimples were so big they actually cast shadows on his face. “It’s not just us.”

“What do you see?”

“Lights are out all over. Lots of places look like they’re on generators. There’s some people out there– OH MY GOD!” Carl looked up to see the kid recoil from the window, almost falling back into the room. He looked at Carl, his mouth moving but no sound coming out, and then he popped, sending parts of himself flying everywhere.

“JESUS CHRIST!” Carl dropped his bag and scrambled to get away from the window, knocking over a server stack as he bumped into it. Pieces of computer hardware

went sprawling over the floor, making a loud ruckus behind him as he threw himself against the base of the wall, crawling into full darkness behind a server cabinet.

He tried to gather his wits, tried to focus on himself rather than what he'd just seen. What *had* he just seen? There's no way that kid just exploded like that, was there? Something must have hit him. Something *big*. Had the window broken? He didn't know. It must have, he thought, but he didn't hear any glass break. One thing he did know was that he wasn't about to look.

"How are we supposed to continue the meeting now," asked Sasha. The meeting couldn't have gone better if he'd planned it. He and his team had used the same strategy dozens of times before, and it always worked: fluster them, make them think you don't understand, and frustrate them, and they'll settle for less without even knowing they're doing it. This 'Richard' fellow in front of him was going to give him everything he wanted and more; he just didn't know it yet.

Then the lights had gone out. How perfect was that? They already had him on edge, and now technical failures were adding to his temper. The emergency lights only lit most of the room, leaving two small gaps on adjoining walls; Sasha would move into one of them while Richard was looking away, to obscure his features.

"Well, we don't have the projector under emergency power, but we still have the whiteboard, and I can draw most of the diagrams on it. I just need a little more light."

Sasha could practically taste the frustration coming off him, and his vocal tone meant he was almost at the point of giving in. The man next to Sasha leaned over to him: "He doesn't even know."

“They never do. That’s the beauty of it.” Another meeting, another gold star. Everything was orchestrated, even the number of people in the room: five from his company, two from the other, though you wouldn’t know it from how silent the other one had been; it may as well have been Richard alone against an army. Inexperienced people are so easy to manipulate.

The screen was all the way up now, and Richard was moving to the window. Sasha excused himself from his coworkers and pushed back his chair to get up. As he stood he looked across at Richard to make sure he was still looking away, and then all at once Richard wasn’t there at all any more, replaced by small red chunks flying away from where Richard had just been standing.

Everyone in the room stopped and stared in amazement, unsure of what to do or what to make of what they’d just seen. Sasha finished standing up, because there was nothing else to do, and the back of his leg pushed his chair back further. The chair leg made a scratching sound against the floor, and then the man next to Sasha exploded.

Chaos. Everyone in the room scrambled to get away. Two of Sasha’s partners tried to run for the door behind them, and one of them burst, pieces of him knocking the other off balance into a wall. Richard’s nameless associate ducked under his table, and Sasha saw a wet spot growing on the front of his pants as the man literally shook, whimpering as he looked around with a panicked look on his face.

Sasha dove for the unlit area he’d originally staked out. He hit the ground hard, his shoulder taking most of the impact. He looked up from the shadows to see pieces of his other partner flying across the room. He tried to make himself as small as possible against the wall, curling his legs up to his chest as he looked out at the room.

He heard a loud splattering sound to his left, and turned to see an overturning table where the nameless associate from the other company had been hiding, with nothing but red surrounding it. Sasha looked at his last remaining partner by the door, who was trying to reach the doorknob. All of a sudden she stopped and looked at Sasha in the shadows. She must have seen a reflection, because their eyes locked. Sasha had never seen so much fear as he saw in her eyes, and then she exploded in front of him, pieces of her flying everywhere, including onto him.

He screamed.