Last Mission

The telephone will not stop ringing. The sound can be heard through the entirety of an

empty office building. There is not a soul to be found within the structure, and so the phone keeps ringing. Suddenly, a figure appears and picks up the phone.

“Yes?” the figure says as he picks up the phone.

There is someone on the other line, although they cannot be heard.

“I understand.”

The figure hangs up the phone slowly. He walks toward the window, where the sun is

coming through. His face becomes illuminated, and we see that it is James Marlow, the famous

detective. He stares out the window for some time, perhaps considering what the person on the

phone had said.

That phone only rings when there is a mission available, and there hasn’t been one for

quite some time. That much is evident since the building it is in has apparently been empty for

some time. There are cobwebs and dust over every piece of furniture and curtain. It is clear that

the only person that has entered the building for at least a few years is Marlow.

He pauses from staring out the window and turns back to the old telephone mounted on

the wall. He is unsure that he should take the mission, as he has been out of the game for a few

years. His skills have been unused for that long, and he can’t say they will quickly come back to

him. Outside of his past life as a spy, he has built a new life. He has a family now, and he does

not think that giving them up will bode well for him.

James must now choose between following through with the mission and staying with his

family and the new life that he’s built for himself. He did always love being a spy, but a spy

cannot have a family. It is too dangerous. If one of his enemies were to find out about them, they

could easily be used as leverage. However, he knows that if he does not accept this mission, the

fate of the world as he knew it would be in jeopardy.

He picks up the phone and dials a number. Whether it’s his wife he’s calling or the

the unnamed person he just spoke with, we are unsure.

The phone rang once, twice, then an unfamiliar voice answered.

“Hello, Mr. Marlow,” the voice said, “your wife and child are safe…for now.” James

silently cursed. He had hoped that he could have warned Claire and given them the prearranged

passphrase of “go buy some orchids for the garden,” and she would grab their go-bags and head

to a small cabin on the coast of northern Maine.

“Just do what Mr. Smith has instructed and you can go back to being a PI or whatever

you call yourself. If anything changes, we have your number.”

“Fine, just don’t hurt them” James seethed, his fury at himself and his new ‘employers.’

Barely contained. He hung up and went to his office safe, entered the eight-digit code and

removed a small box with a six-digit keypad. He entered the code, his daughter’s birthday in

reverse.

Hanging in the center of the room was an old chandelier with an ornate hand-carved

wooden base that hid the modern wires leading into the ceiling. With a pneumatic hiss, the light

fixture lowered, revealing a black cylindrical weapons locker. He placed his right hand against its surface, the subsurface biometric scanner recognizing his hand and bioelectric signature. The

cabinet slid open, revealing the weapons of his former life: a compact sniper rifle, a bag with

eight different identities with their accompanying documentation, and two Glock 19s with a

variety of attachments, magazines, and spare ammo.

He packed everything into a metal travel suitcase he kept in his coat closet. This suitcase

was lined with a special material that filtered out specific metals when viewed through an X-Ray machine, perfect for traveling with weapons.

He finished packing and pulled a single pad of page-sized stickers from his desk

containing several copies of diplomatic courier labels from a variety of countries. He pulled off

the U.S. sticker and placed it on his luggage.

After sealing the weapons locker back in the ceiling, he looked himself in the mirror that

hung on the inside of the closet door. Black suit, white breathable shirt, and a thin red tie. Where

he was going, he needed to look the part of an international businessman.

He closed the closet and made his way to LAX, his mind focused on one thing: to get to

Morocco do the job and save his family. He pulled out his cellphone and accessed the ticket

purchasing app and bought a round trip ticket scheduled to leave in two hours. This would give

him plenty of time to get through security and await his flight.

Twenty minutes later, he had arrived at the airport, checked his bag, and passed through

the TSA, the bored looking officers not giving him a second glance. He sat down at his gate’s

seating area and casually looked at his phone, blending in with the other travelers that day.

His phone beeped, indicating that he had received a new text. He opened the application

and scrolled to the top of his message list. The number was listed as ‘unknown,’ followed by the

message: Oh, before you fly, be sure to check in with your partner—Smith.

“I look forward to working with you, Mr. Marlow,” said a French-accented voice. He

slowly looked up with wide eyes to see a woman clothed in white dress slacks, a matching vest,

and a red blouse holding a white leather purse. Her warm-looking smile didn’t reach her cold

eyes. Eyes that held no remorse for tying off loose ends if the job was not completed as expected.

“Call me Jennifer,” she said as she extended a manicured hand. He didn’t look at it,

keeping his face impassive as he calmly took her hand in his.

“Welcome to the team,” He replied, his tone neutral, “try not to slow us down.”

“I assure you, Mr. Marlow,” she chuckled lightly, retracting her hand “for both our sakes,

it is you who will have to keep up.”

James was not used to working with a partner, much less a set of eyes scrutinizing his

every move. Regardless of his misgivings, this was the job now. The flight attendant at the gate

desk made an announcement, asking passengers on the Silver Wings Membership program to

line up at the gate. The pair of them walked to the entrance, scanned their tickets, and made their way to their assigned seats located in the comfortable Business Class section of the plane.

Fifteen minutes later after the safety brief from the flight attendant, the plane reached the

runway, the engines spooling up to a high-pitched whine before accelerating the aircraft into the

clear azure sky.

James and Jennifer arrived in Morocco on time. As they enter, they are both greeted by a man in a black suit and black tie.

“Are you Mr. Marlow?” he asked as he confirmed something on his phone.

James just nods, wary of the situation he is in.

“I am pleased to inform you that your family is safe,” he says in a reminding voice. He likely did this to remind James that they had the upper hand in this mission.

“Listen you had better leave my family out of this!” James demanded.

“Of course, Mr. Marlow, but let me remind you, you are the one who needs to carry out his mission.” said the suited man. James began to get a sinking feeling. He knew something was up.

Soon after this exchange, the details of the mission were given to James. The aspects of the task seemed a bit off to James. This hit job was not like any other he had before. Bit by bit James was getting more and more suspicious.

“You are to meet your target at the address enclosed in the file.” with this final word the man disappeared. James was getting even more suspicious.

As he and Jennifer set out to carry out the hit Jennifer stopped him to tell him something.

“Listen, there is something about this mission I need to tell you about,” Jennifer said in a quiet voice. “The man we are after is not really the threat to the world as was told in your instructions…” But as she was saying this James’ phone began to ring. It was the same voice he heard before.

“You had better not be thinking of going back on our deal Mr. Marlow.” the voice demanded. As he said this, you could hear wines in the background. It was his wife and kids. “I told you that you had better carry out your mission.” the voice continued to demand.

“You bastard!” James yelled, “What have you done to them!”

“I told you, Mr. Marlow, they are safe. Go to the address immediately or else.”

“You had better not hurt them!” James demanded. But the phone cut out and he was left to ponder what he should do. His family was in grave danger, and he needed to act fast.

ACT 3

As James and Jennifer pulled up to the address given them. James was surprised that it was a nice building with plenty of windows. Not the kind of place where you would want to perform an assassination. Anybody walking by on the street could see inside.

“Are you sure this is the right place?” asked James with worry in his voice.

“Yes,” replied Jennifer, “the target will be inside and up the stairs.”

This almost seemed arranged to James, and he didn’t like the looks of it. James and Jennifer stepped out of the car, made their way inside, and walked up the stairs. Down the hall was a man who looked like a bodyguard, standing in front of a door. James’ phone rang again, and the same voice spoke to him once more.

“Your target is in the room guarded by man in the suit. Just act natural and the man won’t suspect a thing. And remember, Mr. Marlow, your family is on the line. Just take out the target, make your escape, and they will be set free.” The line hung up. James remained cautious. As he and Jennifer walked up to the man, he greeted them surprisingly warmly.

“Good to see you Mr. Marlow. I see you brought a guest with you today. Your company is waiting inside.” The man opened the door, and what James saw shocked him. Inside the room, by himself, sat the President of The United States. James and the President had had good relations in the past, but now James knew what was happening.

“James Marlow,” began the President, “it’s good to see you again, friend. I must admit that Morocco was an odd place to meet, but I assumed you have some important business to attend to here, so I won’t ask about all the details.” James’ head was working at a thousand miles per hour. The President was obviously his target, but if he killed the President, he would be imprisoned for the rest of his life.

“So,” continued the President as James and Jennifer took their seats, “I trust that you would only call for me to meet with you if the situation was very urgent, so I must ask, why have you called me here today?” James remained silent as he tried to come up with a way to escape with the President. Jennifer watched James carefully. She knew he was formulating something.

“Mr. Marlow,” Jennifer said with a sleazy look on her face, “in case it has slipped your mind, there are some people counting on you to deliver your message to the President, so I suggest you tell him promptly.” James slowly looked at the President, then to Jennifer, then back to the President.

He finally spoke up. “I’m sorry, Mr. President.” James quickly pulled a gun from his suit coat pocket and fired at Jennifer. Her lifeless body splattered blood over the chair she was seated in. Before the President could react, James grabbed his arm and headed for the door. The door flew open and the bodyguard stood with guns raised at James.

“Looks like you failed your mission, Mr. Marlow,” began the bodyguard, “and your family will pay the price!”

James swiftly pulled down the President. The bodyguard shoots and misses. James tripped the man and swiped the guns from his hands.

James stared him down. “You’ll be the one to pay the price, you son of a bitch.” James fired, and the bodyguard lied lifeless on the floor.

“James! James!” yelled the President as he and James rushed downstairs.

“There’s no time to explain,” answered James. Once they reached the ground floor, James burst open the front door of the building. James was shocked to see his family out in the street being held at gunpoint by the man who greeted him at the airport.

“I knew you couldn’t do it, Mr. Marlow. Not even my double-agents could ensure that you went through with the mission. Well maybe your family can.”

James stood motionless as his wife and daughter sat tied up, pleading for their lives.

“Drop your weapon!” demanded the President. James looked at him in confusion and worry.

“Oh yeah? Or what?!”

Then man began to rub his eyes. A bright, red light was shining in his face. The man looked up and was surprised to see a sniper atop the building with sights looking directly at him. Then suddenly, large groups CIA agents rushed out from alleyways and swarmed the street, all with guns pointed at the man. One of them tackled the man and released James’ family, who immediately ran toward him and they all embraced in a family hug. James’ eyes filled with tears of relief and joy.

With a puzzled look on his face, James looked at the President. “You knew?”

“Yes, James, we knew. And apparently your spy skills have not improved since the last time we met,” stated the President with a smirky smile on his face. “I think you and your family have been through enough lately. Why don’t we get you all back home now, huh?”

Epilogue – Colin Hite

Staring blankly out into the empty street of his suburban home James sat quietly. Occasionally he wafted his hair back and took a deep breath. “That was quite some wild ride.” James thought to himself. “At any moment I could have lost it all… my family… my life…” Sitting back into his lounge chair he could hear a soft pattering of footsteps behind him. Jolting up he plastered himself against the frame of the door and waited for the footsteps to approach. By pure instinct, he leaped out and rushed the noise.

“AHHHHHHH!!!” His wife screamed.

“Oh, it’s only you honey.”

Slowly walking over to the chair, he slumped down and began rocking back and forth. Now he was furiously constantly running his hands through his hair making it into a big mess of tangles and frills. Worried his wife approached slowly and placed her hand on his shoulder.

“James I know that it has been hard on you lately. What we went through was quite the ordeal. You know I have been talking to my sister whose husband was a GI. She said that it took him years to get back to normal and not be so twitchy. Even had a hard time turning the lights off at home for the first month he got back.”

In a trance, James continued to look out into the street. Now worried his wife got closer and sat next to him holding his hand clasped between her own. With a scowl, she looked him dead in the eye as he continued to watch time go by.

“Celia it is hard to explain but I don’t believe that this is PTSD like your sister’s husband.”

Perplexed she gave him one more looks over and asked; “What do you mean?! You have been out here for hours staring into the road! James, you really are having a problem!”

Looking over at her with glassy eyes James responded; “Celia your sister’s husband has peered into the depths of death and clawed his way back up through its slimy thorn covered walls. I have looked into the image of life and seen the greatness of the world around me.”

Now thoroughly confused and panicked she grabbed his arm and pulled at him yelling; “James normal people don’t say things like that! You really have to seek help! Talk to me anything!”

Standing up James’s twitching stopped. He grabbed a butter knife off of the table from a plate Celia prepared earlier. Without moving more than his arm he hurled the knife across the street. It flew sheering the air as it buried itself in the neighbor’s tree pinning a butterfly to its trunk wings spread out wide.

“2,332 flaps.” James whispered.

Turning to Celia he gave her a bright grin. “Celia I could not be more alive right now! Not only do I have my lovely family back I also have what I have been missing for so long!”

Holding onto his arm more tightly she starred out across the street and looked around nervously to see if anyone was watching. James now smiling from ear to ear began turning around into the house. There he could see his kids playing out in the back yard with a soccer ball running and having fun.

“Celia let me tell you a story of the time we met. As you might recall it had been raining for weeks in LA. No one could get in or out of the city. So as a result people were often held up in café’s and stores waiting for the rain to ease up. That’s when I met you. You came into that little dinner soaked to the brim and panting from a long sprint. It was beautiful. Never had I seen such a lovely sight. However, what you might not know is that I was actually on the job when I met you. I had a target who was a corrupt tech company executive to kill that day. I was supposed to lace his coffee with poison, but I couldn’t bring myself to do it. Instead, I made my way over to your table and the rest was history. That day I lost everything I knew about work. But now it is all back, and I can use that skill to protect you and our kids.”

Still unsure of the situation Celia placed her hand on his chest and watched as their kids played in the backyard. In a quiet voice she uttered; “That really was a lovely day wasn’t it.” Slowly a smile came to her face as the two made their way to the kitchen.

Six months later.

Perched upon a branch James slowly swayed as the vines from his ghillie suit wafted in the breeze. Latching the chamber of his rifle shut he backed up onto the trunk of the tree and wrapped his legs onto the branch. Swinging upside-down he scoped up onto a villa overlooking a gulley. Focusing in he could see a man in a white suit counting money on a small gold clad table with women swooning him. Taking a deep breath James aimed the rifle and gripped the trigger. Suddenly his phone began to ring. Pressing his ear he picked up the phone.

“Agent 574 here.”

On the other end of the line, a couple of voices could be heard. Then without warning a little girl’s voice filled his ear.

“Hellooo Daddie! Whem are you coming hone?”

With a slight chuckle James responded; “Oh honey I’m on a business trip right now I’ll be home tomorrow. When I get back we can make up some spaghetti tacos together. Those are your favorite right?”

“Yayyyyyyy!!!” A couple of voices could be heard over the headset as the line went silent.

After another brief silence, a mechanic voice came on. “Device has lost connection.” With a smile, James pressed his ear one last time and looked through the scope. Now drinking furiously, the man in the white suit threw up a stack of cash into the air raining down bills all over his balcony. With one final measurement James squeezed the trigger. Finally, James could be seen in a dark room with beams of light leering into the room. An old phone sits on the desk ringing out into the open. Turning around James grasped the phone and picked it up.

“James here.”