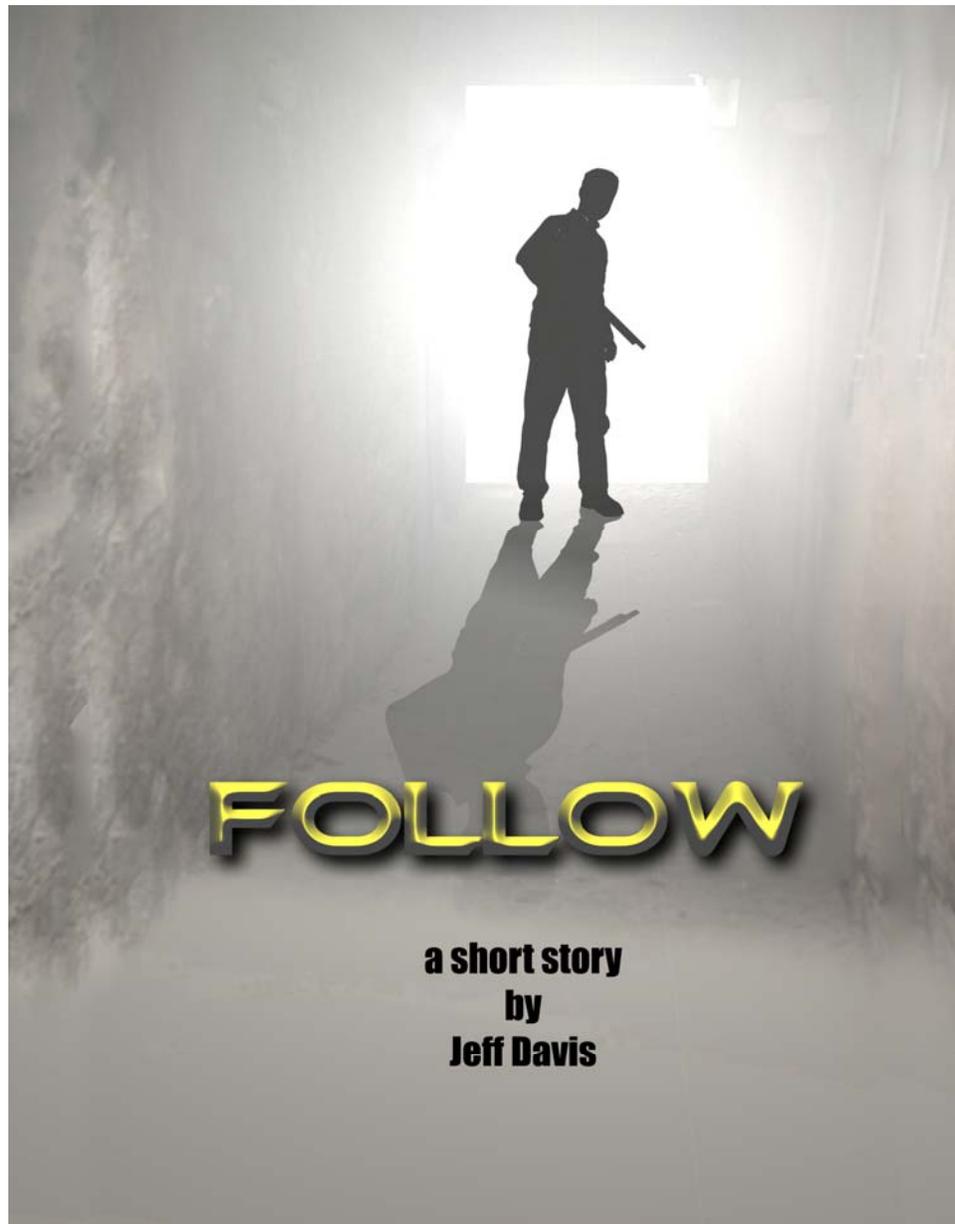


Davis/FOLLOW

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Daniel Cameron left home at about five o'clock. Having kissed his wife he waved back to her as she peered through the laced curtains draping the front picture window. The whirring sound of his hybrid vehicle went unnoticed as he backed out of the driveway. The next day he and his wife planned to head to Sedona, Arizona for a much needed and well-deserved vacation, their first in almost five years. Daniel had left earlier in the day from his work at DeSoto Business Park to take care of some last minute personal business before vacation.

The massive amount of paperwork he had left on his desk seemed to always increase exponentially whenever he decided to take time off. It was one of the reasons that he and Philycia rarely took vacations. His work as chief financial officer for Dorian Properties, a real estate holding company, was demanding. The countdown to freedom and a flight to the beautiful, if not mystic, Grand Canyon State, was well underway. Before he could get out of town, there were a few things left to do before he could pull the ripcord.

On the drive to his office he weaved in and out of traffic through the suburban sprawl to the office park. Coming around the circular drive he passed a small recreation park on a hill as a group of Cub Scouts were ending a day of fun. The scout leader was hurrying the children to get organized and head home. Through his open window Daniel overheard the man. "Alright boys, we've got to get you all home by seven. Chop-chop!" Two of the boys were down by the lake skipping stones, one of them out on the end of a small pier. "Hey, Mark... tell Andy to get his butt back here. Time to leave! It'll be dark in half an hour!" Daniel continued down the steep hill past the lake a few hundred feet from the front of his building, one of many structures dotting the area. The Dorian Properties building, a 32-story tower, a modern structure fronted with a stainless steel sculpture of a standing figure of a man, hands held to the sky, had been built only two years earlier. The polished chrome glistened, kissed by the golden fading light of a setting sun. He looked at his watch. "Almost seven

p.m.," he thought. A guard in front of the building looked at Daniel's car as he parked behind an electrician's truck. With a scowl, the guard was prepared to chastise the driver that he was not allowed to park there. "Oh, it's you Mr. Cameron!" Daniel waved at the guard. "O.K. if I park here for a few minutes," he asked. "I need to wrap up some business before I take off for a week." The guard was jovial. "Sure, just leave your keys so we can move your car if we have to." Daniel didn't recall seeing this guard before. "You're new aren't you," he asked. "I usually work at the Bayfront Building. Same company, different location. Summer hits and I always get the call to fill in. Extra simoleans, y'know."

Daniel handed him his car keys and proceeded to the front door where the guard inside buzzed him into the building, which seemed darker than normal. He wondered if the elevators were even working. The guard at the front desk looked up from his security monitor and noticed his bewilderment. "Elevator 6 is the only one working right now, sir," the guard advised. Daniel motioned his arms toward his car outside. "The new guy let me park in front!" The guard looked out toward his car and saw nothing. He assumed the guard outside had moved it. "It's pretty dark in here," he offered. "Got electricians in the basement trying to isolate some electrical problems, so they're disconnecting a few things." "Well," Daniel said, "That's what electricians do." He continued to the elevator. He pressed 22 and the elevator doors closed. The lights in the elevator flickered as he traveled up to his floor. Innocuous music played on the speakers overhead. He muttered to himself, "Too bad they couldn't disconnect this music." The arrival on the 22nd floor was met with a loud "ding!" and the doors parted. Stepping out onto the poorly lit floor he looked down the long corridor to see if there were others present. At the end of the long passage the floor-to-ceiling window's huge curtains were open. The hall was dead quiet. He walked toward the main door at the opposite end, emblazoned with large raised letters overhead: "Dorian

Properties.” He thought for a moment that he had heard something around a corner but, after a pause, dismissed the notion. He started to slide his keycard into the secure card reader. He heard another noise. A quick look around a corner and still there was no one in sight. The hall traveled the circumference around the elevators to the other side and another bank of elevators that traveled up to the higher floors. He called out to the vacant hall to see if an answer would come back. “Hello.” Nothing. The hall was dim and the large window was the only source of light. The door unlocked with a buzz when he heard a man, low-voiced, “Danny Boy.” He froze. Still, he could see no one. “Hello,” he called out. Nothing. “Who the hell is here?” Stepping from the shadows a man stood in front of the window with what appeared to be a shotgun. He was far enough away that it was difficult to see his face. The light behind the man made it even more difficult to discern his image beyond a backlit silhouette. “Daniel!” Daniel barely had a moment before the man pumped the shotgun and fired, shattering the frame of the door. Daniel dived toward the floor and slid in front of the elevators. “Daniel, Daniel, Daniel,” the man taunted, “Don’t cha wanna have some fun?” Daniel’s arm whipped up and slammed the elevator call button. He could hear the armed man’s two-way radio, “Are you in place?” The man answered back, “Just finishing my appointment with Cameron.” The voice on the two-way was terse, “Stop playing games. We have work to do.” Luckily, the elevator had not left the floor and the doors opened immediately. He quickly crawled in but he could hear the sound of the man’s hard heels against the granite floors coming toward him. He slammed his hand on the first floor button. All he could see was the man’s feet just as the elevator doors closed. Perspiring profusely he pulled himself up and ripped his cell phone from his pocket. No connection. He shoved the phone back in his pocket. The doors finally opened up onto the lobby and he ran to the front desk. The guard’s throat was slit and there was blood everywhere. Daniel could not compose himself and doubled

over, throwing up. Bent over he looked back at the elevator with panic. The numbers on elevator number 2 were descending from 22 down. 21. 20. 19. 18. The numbers dropped quickly. He ran to the front door. Locked. He ran back to the security desk and pushed the buzzer then ran back to the front door. Still locked. He picked up a lobby chair and threw it as hard as he could at the large window. It bounced off the window and down to the floor with no effect. The elevator continued downward. 6. 5. 4. Daniel ran to the guard and removed his sidearm. He took careful aim and fired. Nothing happened. He looked at the weapon, confused. The safety was on. He flipped the safety and fired at the glass door. "Bang!" The shattering door was a waterfall of glass. 3-2-1. The elevator doors opened. Not wasting time, Daniel stumbled through the door looking back to see the elevator doors open with its signature "ding!" No one emerged. Daniel, now safely outside, pulled his cell phone from his pocket and dialed 911. He screamed, "There's a killer at the Dorian Properties building!" Stepping back he tripped over a curb and fell to the grassy lawn in front of the building. Pulling himself up he yelled for the outside guard that had greeted him when he arrived.

Up on the rooftop, a gunman was perched with a commanding view of all below. With a high-powered rifle scope, he spotted the scouts on the nearby hill piling into their van. The scoutmaster closed the side door after checking to make sure all the kids were safely strapped inside. The shooter's low evil laugh was a muted clarion for what he was preparing to do. He watched the scoutmaster jump into the driver's seat. In his sights, he waited for the man to start the engine and then squeezed off a single shot. A half moment later, the bullet pierced the driver's side glass, hitting its mark. The scoutmaster collapsed over the steering wheel and the van began to roll backwards down the hill and toward the lake. He could hear the distant screams of the children inside the out-of-control vehicle. The van picked up speed and its crashing into the lake was imminent and unavoidable. Daniel, realizing what had

happened, leapt up and ran at full gait toward the edge of the lake. All hell was breaking loose and the sound of sirens was getting louder. The van crashed backwards through a white wooden fence and into the lake. The children in the van were still screaming loudly and struggling to get out. The van began to sink. Daniel jumped over the broken pieces of the fence and into the water. The cabin of the van began to fill. A bloody ribbon streamed from the scoutmaster's head and a cloud of red diffused the flooded driver's side. The van was then half under water but Daniel was able to open one of the doors and pull the boys out and to safety, one-by-one. He tried to remove the scoutmaster but there was no pulse and the van was beginning to sink... fast.

EMT and police came screaming in with ear-splitting sirens. Daniel yelled at the unit captain, Don Stafford, "Someone tried to kill me, killed the guard inside and shot the driver of the van. I think he's still in there! There's another guard but I don't know where he is... probably dead." One of the medical technicians gave Daniel a blanket to cover himself.

The captain rushed into the building. He retrieved the two-way radio which was sitting on the marble counter of the security station. He keyed the microphone, "Hello... this is metro police. Anyone there?" After a moment of silence, a voice answered. "Captain, you'd better come down to the basement. All the electrical workers are dead." The captain answered, "How do you know my rank? I never told you my rank?" Silence. "I repeat, how do you know my rank?" A low sinister voice responded. "I know who you are Captain Stafford." The voice changed from a taunt to angry insistence. "You need to check the basement." The captain motioned for a few of his men to follow him down the stairs.

In the bowels of the building three armed men convened in a corner: Lucas Walker, the man who confronted Daniel Cameron, Darius Mondrian, the shooter on the roof and Charlie Stock, the leader of the group and the "new" guard that greeted Daniel when arrived at the

building. “Lucas, why were you farting around on the 22nd floor with Cameron,” Charlie demanded. “Christ, can’t I have a little fun? Besides, we want attention, right?” Lucas fired back. Darius leaned in and added, “We can’t have fun right now, man, we’re working and the job ain’t done! Stick to the plan, you psychopath.” Lucas tapped him on the shoulder, “Hey, there’s always time to have fun!” Charlie was direct, “Listen, they’ll be down here in about,” he looked at his watch, “thirty seconds. Lucas, you wanna have some fun? Go up to the roof and take out a few cop cars and stop shooting at children. Darius, you’ve got the trips armed and set?” Darius nodded affirmatively. “I’ll take up a position on the backside of the building to guard our flank. You’ve got exactly eight minutes from my mark... now... to get to the roof. You don’t make it to the roof, you don’t make it home. Alright, let’s go!”

Outside the building television crews had arrived. Tandy Tandberg from Channel 2 already had mic in hand and was reporting that there was some belief that the building had been taken over by terrorists. She quickly grabbed a soaking wet Daniel to ask him about his encounter with the terrorists. “How many terrorists did you see inside?” Daniel told her that he didn’t believe they were terrorists. “But how many terrorists did you count,” she pressed. “I don’t know, maybe two, but I don’t think...” Before he could finish his sentence she interrupted, “So you only saw two terrorists? What did they look like?”

Before she could get his answer another police captain, Thomas Petrelli, came over and intervened. “We need to speak with Mr. Cameron. You can have him later.” He marshaled David away.

“So there you have it,” Tandy continued her live report, “A true hero, Daniel Cameron took it on himself to go up against an unknown number of terrorists and, risking his own life, saved a busload of children on a summer outing.”

On the roof, Lucas was in position with a rocket launcher, swaying back and forth to decide which target to

acquire. Sure, he'd been ordered to take out a few patrol cars but a fire truck or two would make a more spectacular explosion. "That," he thought, "would be fun." He followed orders and fired at two cars parked close together causing a spectacular explosion. Several officers were leveled from the concussion.

Captain Petrelli screamed for everyone to fall back. His men followed his lead and all the vehicles moved back as the searing flames of the police cars threw billowing smoke skyward. Petrelli barked at Tandy and her camera crew, "You too, sweetheart!" Everyone moved back a few hundred yards.

Down in the basement where the electrical workers were said to be, the three police officers made their way through the darkness. Near an electrical panel, they saw some ripped wires and a horizontal layer of blue smoke. It was a diversion. One of the men tripped a wire and a powerful explosion ripped through the basement and the bottom floor of the building.

Outside, flames and debris were so forceful that it toppled the giant chrome statue out front. Tandy was bending down in fear but admonished a camera man to keep shooting. David, talking to his wife on his cell phone, looked up in disbelief. "Oh my god, they just blew up the building," he gasped.

Seconds later, a helicopter landed on the roof of the building and collected the three armed men and took off.

Captain Petrelli alerted headquarters that the police copters, already in transit, needed to monitor and pursue the helicopter instead of coming directly to the site.

The copter carrying the three men who executed the assault disappeared over a bank of trees. Moments later a fireball could be seen in the direction of their egress.

Captain Petrelli called it in. "Did you guys do that? We just spotted a fireball in the direction of their helicopter!" One of the pilots informed the captain that the ETA was still a minute out but they could see the smoke on the horizon. "If they hit the ground, captain, we can chalk

that up to poetic justice.” The captain answered, “Not much justice for the people they killed. Three of my men were lost when they blew out the buildings lower floors, including Cap' Stafford. Death would be too good for those bastards.”

A half a mile away in another part of the DeSoto Industrial Park, John Sawyer was just getting off work as a guard for AU/AG Investments Corporation. He could feel an earthquake-like shudder from the Dorian Properties building explosion. He went outside to see the smoke rising blocks away. He wondered if there was anything he might be wary of at his own building. He had seen, moments earlier, the TV report on Channel 2. He knew there was a possibility it could be more widespread. He called the police department for guidance and they told him to stay put.

In the back of the building a cleaning crew van was parked and a few men had entered the building an hour earlier. There was nothing suspicious there and all their papers were in order. Besides, there was no large amount of cash at AU/AG Investments and the only gold they traded was on paper with the real gold bullion stored at an impenetrable vault in San Antonio over a thousand miles away.

He was still watching Tandy's continuing coverage, shaking his head. “What a dumbass. Beautiful, but stupid,” he muttered.

The security phone rang. It was the head of security Albert Franks. “John, I've been watching what's going on over at Dorian. Is everything locked down at AU,” he asked. “Well,” John replied, “We're all quiet and secure. Cleaning crew's here but they're square with their papers.” Albert told him to get them out of the building and put the building in a secure lockdown. “Thank the Lord, there's nothing much but furniture to steal in our building,” John exclaimed. “That's not entirely true. In the building's central vault is a single gold bar,” he contradicted. “What's that worth, Albert, a thousand bucks,” he asked. Albert answered grimly, “The world's largest gold bar is worth about nine million. This weekend AU/AG will be promoting

it's achievement of being the biggest bullion company in the world by unveiling a six hundred pound bar of solid gold." John's mood changed. "Are they nuts!" Albert was calm. "Just get the cleaning crew out when you leave and just tell them to come back tomorrow. Things are too hot right now for anyone to be on the property. I'm sending over several other men, just in case. Jason will be there in a few minutes so tell him to make sure to keep the building clear." John told him he would batten down the hatches and get Jason in the loop.

Almost immediately, Jason showed up right on time to take over. John advised him that he would go out back on the way to his car to tell the cleaning people to leave. Jason clocked in and John left.

In the back, the men were loading up cleaning equipment. "We need to get you guys out of here. There's been an explosion over at the Dorian building and we're going to lock things down," he ordered. A large jovial man named Sid laughed and told him that it was OK, they were just about done anyway. "There's nothing funny about it, sir, some people died over there. We're just trying to keep everyone safe," John admonished. One of the other men chorused, "Yeah, that's bad stuff. We'll be loaded up in less than five minutes."

John walked to his car nearby. The hot summer day had baked the air inside his '68 Barracuda, a car left to him by his father. John was in Iraq with the Rangers at the time of his father's passing, so the car was a connection to his dad. When he got out of the service there weren't many jobs available so he felt lucky to have gotten in with Triple-S Security.

The Triple "S" stood for "Security, Service, Safety." Albert Franks, the owner, was a large, good-natured man of German descent who had a warm heart for men who served the country. He had been in Vietnam in 1968, the same year John's 'Cuda was born. He always hired ex-military and said that he knew they at least had respect for their side-arms and knew better than anyone how to use them.

John sat in the Barracuda, letting the air conditioning blow out the stale air. He also wanted to keep tabs on the workers to make sure they left in a timely manner. One of the men noticed him watching them, smiled and waved.

The men were loading the last of their cleaning equipment, and would soon close the doors and drive away.

“Something was not quite right,” John thought. It seemed odd that they weren’t very curious about the events at the Dorian building. Certainly they felt the shudder of the building when the explosion happened or heard the sound of many police cars and fire engines.

The cool air in his car was finally cool enough.

John thought something else was odd. The rear of the van seemed to be lower than you would expect, unless it was either carrying something very heavy or had some busted shocks. He knew that commercial vehicles had to be regularly inspected, so he eliminated the shock issue.

In a field two miles away, the police copters had arrived at the site of the getaway helicopter crash and were investigating. Billowing smoke rose thousands of feet into the air and the heat from out of control flames kept the police from getting too close to the helicopter. Nowhere could they see evidence of the three men or a pilot. They did see evidence in the grass that a vehicle had been nearby. The tire tracks were heavy like those of a truck. Captain Petrelli had arrived on-scene. “These guys are long-gone. It looks like they torched the ‘copter and took off. No bodies, near as we can tell,” Petrelli told one of the officers. “The helicopter’s stolen, no doubt.”

John watched the men close the doors and drive away. At one point the muffler scraped a rise in the parking lot pavement, scattering sparks across the ground. That was a sure sign that something heavy was causing too much play in the suspension. He made up his mind he would follow them, just as a matter of caution. He had a hunch and he was mulling over some things that were nagging him as just not being right. It could have been all the training or the

same instincts that kept him alive in Iraq. Then again, it could be nothing.

John let the van get out of the lot and followed at a distance, never letting them out of his sight. He decided that he would call Albert to let him know that something was not kosher and to check the vault at the AU/AG building but his cell phone battery was so low he couldn't make a call. He threw the phone in the back seat. "Useless," he whispered. He continued to follow the van onto the highway. He remembered the sign on the side of the van said, "Clean 'N' Green, Sterling Hill," but the van was headed in the opposite direction. They were either on their way to another job or their destination was a rendezvous with their fellow thieves. It was one or the other.

John debated if he should double back to check on the vault... but it wouldn't matter if the gold bar was gone. The van exited the highway at the Everest exit, an area of town where the only buildings were warehouses and storage buildings.

The sun had already disappeared twenty minutes earlier and the twilight of the setting sun had left the golden hour and the sky began to traverse to darkness. John parked his car off the small seashell and gravel road leading to a row of warehouses and freight storage containers. He would need to be on foot from this point. The car would certainly be spotted, even in the dimly lit storage yard.

John thumbed the safety of his gun, still holstered, and climbed over the barbed fence. He could hear the men laughing. Rounding a corner, he could see three vehicles and seven men. They used a lift to bring a container down to ground level. The men were excited. "Holy crap, that's the biggest chunk of gold I've ever seen!" Another man wailed, "Six hundred pounds, baby! At today's prices, damn near nine million buckaroos!"

John's suspicions were true but there wasn't much he could do about it. He couldn't call for help. He couldn't leave. All the training in the world wouldn't help with these odds.

He noticed that one particular man stood out as the leader. Thinking of some way to thin the herd, a better idea came to him. The gold was there to be tucked away for a later time and, at six-hundred pounds, not likely to walk away. He decided to not confront the men but make note of the storage area where they would stash the gold then follow the Alpha Male back to his man-cave.

John slid out of the yard under cover of darkness back to his car, waiting for the men to come out. A few minutes later three cars emerged. The lead car was Alpha, along with a passenger. John followed them, staying out of sight and with headlights off. When they reached the highway, two of the cars went right and the Alpha car went left. John followed the car to a nearby neighborhood and a house on the corner of a busy street. This seemed an unlikely haven for the mastermind behind a nine million dollar heist.

John entered a nearby Mini-mart to buy a car charger for his cell phone. He decided that he would go up the street, make a U-turn and get a better look at the house and possibly any additional perps.

Juice was flowing into John's cell phone like oil in the gulf and only took about a minute before he could make a call. He decided to call Albert Franks to let him know what was happening and that he had located the gold and those who had stolen it. When he dialed an odd thing happened. There was a phone in the house ringing at the same time. Through an open window he saw Albert pick up the phone. John hit the "end call" button on his cell phone. He saw Albert looking annoyed, dropping the phone back down on its cradle.

"So my boss is in on this," he thought. His next call was to the police. They patched him in to Captain Petrelli. John told the captain his name and the location of the gold and that he was at the location of at least three of the perpetrators. "Don't you go in there with guns blazing," Petrelli cautioned. "They only do that crap on TV and the movies." John said he had seen enough action as a Ranger

in Iraq and that he would just observe and wait for backup. After he hung up with the captain he dialed another number. "Yes, connect me with Tandy Tandberg."

At the storage yard, FBI agents were crawling all over the place. Two helicopters overhead bathed the yard with bright light. A man with a large bolt cutter popped the lock and the door squeaked open. He shouted over the loud noise of the helicopter engines, "And this, my friends, is what six hundred pounds of gold looks like!" He whipped off a black tarpaulin revealing the huge glistening block.

In front of the perp house, John was trying to keep a low profile when one of the men came out and appeared to be leaving. John cranked up the 'Cuda and pretended to be trying to make a three-point turn while, at the same time, he blocked him in. The man shouted, "Hey man, cut the crap. I gotta leave." It must have dawned on him that he had seen the man before but it took a moment for him to place the face as the guard at the building that he had helped rob. "Hey, I seen you before," he charged. "You followin' me?" John was certain this man had more girth than brains. "Me? No! I'm not a follower. Believe it or not I live a few blocks away on Maple." John had never been to that neighborhood before but was sure just about every neighborhood has a Maple Street.

The stalling maneuver was just enough time to for Petrelli's men to arrive. Tandy Tandberg and her Channel 2 crew came in right behind them.

John saw Franks run out a side door and into an alley. He jumped out of his car and ran after him.

Tandy yelled at her cameraman, "Go, go, go!" The Channel 2 camera followed John running after Franks. Albert Franks was not in the best shape so it was no huge task to catch up with him. He wouldn't stop so when John was close enough, he made a leaping tackle and the men crashed to the ground. John flipped him over and cuffed him. Tandy caught up with them, screaming, "Did you get that!" Petrelli's car, siren screaming, roared into the alley. His car

skidded barely a foot from the two men. Petrelli's men took Franks into custody.

Tandy straightened herself and the camera swung to her face. "Today, we have witnessed two acts of unparalleled heroism against terrorists in our city. What's your name, sir?" "John Sawyer. And, by the way, these were just plain thieves, not terrorists. Every time you hear a loud noise it's not a terrorist!" Tandy stuttered, "Well... I..." John took her hand and pulled her close and gave her a kiss. "For instance, in some societies that means hello... but this time you can report it as a kiss." Tandy was stunned while John turned his attention to Petrelli and his men. "I always wanted to do that."

Petrelli just stood there, laughing. "You OK," he asked. "Yeah, I've been off the clock for a few hours so I'm tired," John replied. "Y'know in some circles kissing a stranger could be considered assault instead of a 'hello'," Petrelli said. "In that case," John said dryly, "You'll have to arrest everyone at the Garden after a Celtics win." "What's your name, son," Petrelli queried. John extended his hand, "John Sawyer, sir." John backed away and turned to leave. "Make sure the prosecutor throws the book at these guys!" Petrelli called out, "Hey Sawyer. Why are you a rent-a-cop?" John walked back. "Well, to tell you the truth, after I got back from Iraq, they were the only one's hiring." Captain Petrelli pulled a card from his shirt pocket. "Here, call me tomorrow and we'll see about getting you into a different uniform." Petrelli's wicked sense of humor was given away by an odd smirk, "Consider it a 'golden' opportunity." John took the card. "Oh, brother," John laughed as he walked away holding the card over his head, "I'll call you!"