

A New World Order

by

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*This story is dedicated to
conspiracy theorists everywhere,*

Challenge Everything

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-PROLOGUE-

Denver, Colorado - 1983

Dust puffed off his desk as he slammed the phone receiver into its cradle hard enough to rattle the construction trailer's thin walls.

"Unbelievable," he muttered. "Absolutely unbelievable."

Mark Danner—project manager, twenty years in the business, never fired from a job in his life—stood there staring at the phone like it had personally betrayed him. His jaw flexed, a muscle ticking in the corner. Outside the trailer window, the skeletal frame of the new Denver International Airport stretched across the plains like some half-buried beast, cranes frozen mid-swing, workers milling around in confused clusters.

"We're the third general contractor fired from this damned job," he said under his breath. "Third." He paced, boots thudding on the plywood floor. The trailer smelled of coffee, doughnuts, dust, and the faint chemical tang of blueprint ink. Rolled plans lay scattered across the drafting table—layers of revisions, redlines, and last-minute changes that had never made sense. Not really. He'd told himself it was government incompetence. Bureaucracy. Too many hands in the pot. But now... now he wasn't so sure. He grabbed the latest set of drawings, flipping through them. "Design it wrong, bury the whole thing, start over," he scoffed. "Who does that? Who has that kind of money to burn?"

A soft knock came from the doorway. His secretary, Linda, poked her head in. "Everything okay?"

He barked a humorless laugh. "We're fired. Effective immediately."

Her eyes widened. "What?"

"Yep. Two days to vacate." He tossed the blueprints onto the table. They slid, fanning out like a deck of cards. "Tell the guys we need to meet."

She hesitated. “Mark... this doesn’t make sense. We were ahead of schedule. Inspections were clean. Why fire us?”

He rubbed a hand over his face. “Because someone wants us gone before we figure out what the hell we’re actually building.”

Linda blinked. “It’s an airport.”

“Is it?” he said quietly.

Mark didn’t mean to say it out loud. But the thought had been gnawing at him for months. He walked to the window, staring out at the vast, empty plains. The airport site was enormous, far larger than any commercial project he’d ever seen. Too large. And the underground work... the endless underground work... none of it matched the above-ground plans. “You ever notice,” he said, “how every time we finish a section of the substructure, they change the specs? Or they ‘discover’ a flaw that requires us to bury it? Not demolish. Not remove. Bury.”

Linda stepped beside him, folding her arms. “Maybe they’re just—”

“No,” he cut in. “This isn’t incompetence. This is intentional.” He didn’t say the rest: And they don’t want anyone to see the full picture. A gust of wind rattled the trailer. Out on the access road, the giant blue fiberglass mustang sculpture, still half-assembled, its head covered in a tarp, loomed like a sentinel. Its red LED eyes, installed for testing, glowed faintly even in daylight. Mark shivered. He’d laughed when the welders joked the thing looked cursed. Now he wasn’t laughing.

“Mark,” Linda said softly, “what do we tell the crew?”

He exhaled slowly. “Tell them the truth. We’re done here. Pack up everything. No one’s to take copies of the plans. They were very clear about that.”

Linda frowned. “Why? We always keep copies for our records.”

“I know.” He swallowed. “But not this time.”

A black SUV rolled up outside the trailer—government plates, tinted windows. Two men stepped out, suits too crisp for a construction site. Mark felt a cold knot form in his stomach.

“Looks like they’re here to make sure we follow orders,” he murmured.

Linda’s voice dropped. “Mark... what is this place?”

He forced a smile he didn’t feel. “Just an airport, right?” But as the men approached, their expressions unreadable, Mark felt the truth settle like a weight in his chest. Whatever they were building out here... it wasn’t meant for people like him. And it sure as hell wasn’t meant to see daylight.

-CHAPTER 1-

The Race Is On

Modern Day - Seaholm Condos, Austin, Texas

Noah “Rob” Robinson was still half-asleep when his phone exploded to life on the nightstand, vibrating so hard it nearly launched itself onto the floor. He blinked at the screen. CAPT. JACOB LOTT

He answered. “Morning, Captain.”

Jacob didn’t bother with greetings. “Rob, listen carefully. Be at Austin Executive in thirty minutes or you’re fired.”

Rob sat up so fast he nearly head-butted the lamp. “Thirty minutes? What—”

“Don’t argue. Just move.” Jacob’s voice was clipped, breathless. “Mrs. Ansbacher wants wheels up immediately. She’s... insistent.”

Rob swung his legs out of bed, already reaching for his jeans. “Where are you?”

“San Antonio,” Jacob said. “I’m an hour out, maybe more with traffic. She’ll have to wait.”

Rob froze mid-button. “Wait—what? You’re not even close?”

“Nope. And I haven’t heard from Krissa either. You’re on your own until we get there.”

“Captain, I’m not qualified to—”

“You’re certified to pre-flight the plane,” Jacob snapped. “And to keep her calm. Do that. I’ll be there when I’m there.”

The line went dead. Rob stared at the phone. Great. Perfect. Fired before breakfast. He grabbed his flight bag, keys, and jacket in one frantic sweep and bolted out the door. The elevator ride from the 25th floor felt like an eternity. By the time he hit the parking garage, his pulse was hammering. His black 2007 Corvette sat waiting in its usual spot—sleek, low, and still the best gift his father had ever given him.

Dad, I hope you're watching, he thought as he slid in. *Because I'm about to break every speed limit in Travis County.*

The powerful V-8 engine roared to life, echoing off the concrete. He shot out of the garage and onto First Street, weaving through early-morning commuters. The city blurred past: glass towers, food trucks setting up, joggers along Lady Bird Lake.

His phone buzzed, Jacob calling again. Rob hit speaker. "Yeah?"

"Just a heads-up," Jacob said. "She's in a mood. Something's going on. She didn't say what, but she sounded... off."

"Off how?"

"Like she's scared."

Rob frowned. Mrs. Charlotte Ansbacher didn't do scared. The woman was a monument: formal, dignified, unshakable. She'd flown with them dozens of times and never once raised her voice.

"What about Krissa?" Rob asked.

"No clue. She's not answering. Maybe her phone is off."

Rob tightened his grip on the wheel. "This isn't like her."

"Yeah, well, today isn't like anything," Jacob muttered. "Just get there."

Austin Executive Airport came into view twenty minutes later, hangars lined up like metal dominoes, the runway shimmering in the morning heat.

Rob's stomach dropped. Mrs. Ansbacher's black town car was parked directly beside their Cessna Citation CJ4 Gen2. The driver stood stiffly by the door, but she wasn't inside.

She was pacing.

Pacing.

Mrs. Charlotte Ansbacher—76 years old, widow of a former ambassador, a woman who normally

moved with the calm precision of a metronome—looked frazzled. Her hair was slightly out of place. Her blouse wasn't perfectly pressed. She kept glancing at her watch, then at the sky, then at the terminal as if expecting something—or someone—to appear.

Rob pulled the Corvette up beside her car.

She spun toward him, eyes sharp. “Mr. Robinson. Park there.” She pointed to a spot inches from her bumper. She was at his door before he even stepped out.

“We have to go. Now.” Her voice trembled—not with age, but urgency. “Get the plane ready.”

Rob swallowed. “Ma’am, Captain Lott is still en route. And Krissa—”

“I don’t care.” She leaned in, lowering her voice. “We cannot wait. Not today.”

Rob felt a chill crawl up his spine. “Is something wrong?”

She hesitated. Just for a heartbeat. Then: “Everything is wrong.”

She turned toward the jet. “Start the engines, Mr. Robinson. We leave the moment they arrive—or sooner if we must.”

Rob watched her climb the airstairs, her hand gripping the rail tighter than usual. *What in the world is happening?* He jogged toward the plane, heart pounding, mind racing. Whatever this was... it wasn't just a demanding VIP. It felt bigger. Darker. Like something was shifting beneath the surface of the world.

And he was already caught in the middle of it.

-Chapter 2-

The Left Seat

Austin Executive Airport, Austin, Texas

Rob stood at the base of the airstairs, one hand on the railing, the other gripping his flight bag so tightly his knuckles had gone white.

Inside the cabin, Mrs. Ansbacher sat ramrod straight in the forward seat, hands folded, eyes fixed on him with unnerving clarity.

“Mr. Robinson,” she said, “close the door. We’re leaving.”

Rob swallowed hard. “Ma’am... with respect... we can’t depart without Captain Lott or Krissa. Company policy requires—”

“Company policy,” she interrupted, “does not supersede federal law, manufacturer specifications, or the rights of the aircraft owner.”

He hesitated. “I’m not the captain.”

“You are today.”

Her tone wasn’t harsh. It was worse—calm, absolute, as if she were stating a fact of physics.

Rob stepped inside, leaving the door open behind him. “Ma’am, I’ve worked my whole life for this career. One wrong move and it’s over. I can’t risk—”

She leaned forward, eyes narrowing with a mix of urgency and something like pity. “I see the indecision in your eyes,” she said. “So let me make this clear: You are to fly this plane to Denver. Now.”

Rob felt his pulse spike. “Mrs. Ansbacher—”

“You will not be penalized in any way for this act.” Her voice sharpened. “These are the facts: This is my plane. You are qualified to pilot this plane. And by law—and by the manufacturer’s own specifications—only one pilot is required. I take full responsibility for this decision.”

She paused, letting the weight of her words settle. “It’s why I bought this specific model,” she added.

Rob stared at her. He’d always known she was powerful. Connected. But this... this was something else. Something deeper. She wasn’t just asking him to bend a rule. She was asking him to trust her with his entire future.

And the strangest part? He wanted to. He didn’t know why. But he did. His phone buzzed in his pocket. He pulled it out.

JACOB LOTT: *Still an hour out. Traffic’s a mess. Don’t do anything stupid. Wait for me!!!*

Rob exhaled slowly.

Too late.

He looked back at Charlotte. Her hands trembled slightly now. Not fear...urgency. Determination. Something was happening, something she wasn’t saying. And only one person in the world could have convinced him to do this.

Her.

Rob nodded once. “All right. I’ll get us airborne.”

Relief flickered across her face—quick, controlled, but unmistakable. “Thank you, Mr. Robinson.”

He turned toward the cockpit. Then, a car engine revved outside. Rob leaned out the cabin door just in time to see a sporty lime green sedan screech to a stop beside the jet. The driver’s door flew open and Krissa Jones sprinted across the tarmac, hair flying, bag bouncing against her hip.

“Don’t close that door!” she shouted as she bounded up the stairs, breathless. “I overslept! I didn’t hear my phone. I didn’t—never mind. I’m here. What’s happening? Why is she already on board? Where’s Jacob?”

Rob stepped aside as she squeezed past him into the cabin. “Long story. We’re leaving. Now.”

Krissa stared at him. “Without the captain?”

“Yeah.”

Her eyes widened. “Rob... are you sure?”

“No,” he admitted. “But we’re doing it anyway.”

She studied him for a beat, then nodded. “Okay. I’m with you.”

He closed the cabin door. The sound echoed through the fuselage like a gunshot.

Minutes later, the CJ4 Gen2 rolled onto the taxiway, sunlight glinting off its polished nose. Rob sat in the left seat—the captain’s seat—hands steady on the controls despite the adrenaline flooding his veins.

Krissa strapped into the jumpseat behind him, still catching her breath.

Mrs. Ansbacher sat quietly by the window, staring out at the horizon. Her expression was unreadable, but her fingers tapped lightly against her armrest—anxious, rhythmic, almost like a countdown.

Rob keyed the mic. “Austin Executive Tower, Citation Five-Four-Two-Charlie-Juliet ready for departure, runway one-three.”

The controller responded immediately. “Citation Two-Charlie-Juliet, Austin Executive Tower, cleared for takeoff. Expedite. Traffic inbound.”

Rob exchanged a glance with Krissa. “Expedite?” she whispered. “That’s unusual, isn’t it?”

Rob didn’t answer.

He advanced the throttles, the engines roared and the jet surged forward. As they lifted off the runway, climbing into the bright Texas sky, Rob felt a strange sensation—like the world below them was shifting, rearranging itself into something unfamiliar. Like a strange dream.

Behind him, Charlotte Ansbacher watched the clouds with a distant, haunted expression. Her son wasn’t answering his phone. His wife wasn’t answering. Her grandchildren weren’t answering.

Are they aware? Are they making their way to safety? She didn’t know.

But she did know one thing: Whatever was coming... they were already out of time.

-Chapter 3-

The Approach

Inflight to Denver, Colorado

The CJ4 hummed steadily at 36,000 feet, slicing through a smooth layer of cirrus clouds. Rob kept one hand on the yoke, the other resting lightly near the autopilot controls, but his eyes were glued to the GPS display. Something wasn't right.

"Krissa," he said quietly, "come take a look at this."

She leaned forward from the jumpseat, brow furrowing. "Whoa."

The Denver airspace looked like a beehive—dozens of inbound aircraft converging from every direction. But what made Rob's stomach twist was the ground overlay.

"Why are there so many planes parked?" Krissa whispered.

The airport diagram was lit up with stationary transponder returns—rows and rows of aircraft idling on the taxiways, the ramps, even the de-icing pads. It looked like someone had frozen the entire airport in place.

Rob zoomed out. Still no outbound traffic. Not one airplane.

"That's impossible," he murmured. "Denver's one of the busiest airports in the country. There should be departures every couple of minutes."

Krissa swallowed. "Maybe... maybe weather?"

"Skies are clear," Rob said. "And ATIS didn't mention anything unusual."

He keyed the mic. "Denver Center, Citation Five-Four-Two-Charlie-Juliet, requesting descent."

A pause. Then a voice crackled through, tense and clipped. "Citation Two-Charlie-Juliet, we show no active flight plan for your aircraft. Say intentions."

Rob blinked. “We filed out of Austin Executive. Should be in the system.” A flat out lie.

“Negative. No record. Advise you divert to Centennial or Colorado Springs. Denver International is not accepting inbound traffic at this time.”

Krissa shot him a look. “Not accepting? Since when does Denver shut down?”

Rob didn’t answer. His pulse was climbing.

He tried again. “Denver Center, we have a VIP passenger on board with urgent business in Denver. Request priority landing.”

“Denied,” the controller said immediately. “Repeat: Denver is not accepting inbound traffic. Divert immediately.”

Rob’s jaw tightened. “Center, can you clarify the nature of the closure?”

“Unable. Divert now.” The radio went dead.

Krissa exhaled shakily. “Rob... what do we do?”

Before he could answer, a soft voice came from behind them. “We continue to Denver.”

Rob turned. Mrs. Ansbacher stood in the cockpit doorway, bracing herself with one hand on the bulkhead. She never came forward during flight. Ever. Her presence alone sent a ripple of unease through the cabin.

“Ma’am,” Rob said carefully, “ATC has denied entry. We’re being told to divert.”

“I heard,” she said. “Ignore them.”

Rob blinked. “I... I can’t ignore ATC.”

“Yes, you can,” she said, stepping closer. “Change the radio to this frequency.” She handed him a small notecard—handwritten numbers in neat, deliberate script.

Rob stared at it. “Ma’am, this isn’t a civilian frequency.”

“No,” she said. “It isn’t.”

Krissa's eyes widened. "Charlotte... what is this?"

Charlotte didn't answer. She simply nodded at the radio panel. Rob hesitated. Every regulation he'd ever memorized screamed at him to stop. But something in her expression—fear, determination, authority—pushed him forward. He dialed in the frequency. The radio crackled instantly, loud and clear.

"Citation Five-Four-Two-Charlie-Juliet, this is Mile High Command. State your passenger manifest."

Rob's breath caught. Mile High Command? He'd never heard of it. Charlotte leaned forward, speaking clearly into the mic before he could respond. "This is Charlotte Ansbacher. Authorization code Delta-Seven-Niner-Alpha."

A long silence. Then the military controller replied, voice suddenly rigid. "Stand by."

Rob looked at her. "Ma'am... what is happening?"

She didn't answer. Instead, she pulled out her phone and stepped back into the cabin. Her voice was low but urgent. "Yes, it's Charlotte... No, listen to me. I know what Charles arranged. I know what he was promised. And I know what you owe him. Which means you owe me."

Rob exchanged a stunned look with Krissa.

Charlotte's voice sharpened. "My son and his family are not answering. I need confirmation they've arrived. Now."

A pause.

Then her tone dropped to something cold and commanding. "Do not forget who ensured your position. My husband did that. And I expect that debt to be honored."

She ended the call and returned to the cockpit just as the radio crackled again. "Citation Two-Charlie-Juliet," the military controller said, voice now formal and controlled, "you are cleared to enter Denver airspace. Maintain current heading. Expect vectors for priority landing."

Rob stared at the radio.

Krissa stared at Rob.

Charlotte simply sat down in the jumpseat, hands folded, eyes forward. “Thank you,” she said quietly.

Rob swallowed hard and eased the throttles forward. Whatever was happening in Denver... they were now flying straight into the center of it.

-Chapter 4-

Like Butter

The first jolt hit them without warning.

Rob tightened his grip on the yoke as the CJ4 lurched sideways, the wings shuddering in a sudden, violent crosswind. Krissa gasped, bracing herself against the jumpseat.

“Hang on,” Rob said, voice steady despite the turbulence rattling the cabin. “Denver’s famous for wind shear. We’re okay.”

Another blast of wind slammed the right wing down. The plane dipped hard. Charlotte’s voice floated from the cabin, calm but strained. “Mr. Robinson...?”

“I’ve got it,” he said.

And he did. He countered with smooth, practiced inputs—rudder, aileron, throttle—feeling the aircraft respond like an extension of his own body. The runway rushed up beneath them, the crosswind clawing at the fuselage.

Krissa held her breath.

Charlotte gripped her armrest.

Rob made one final correction—and the wheels kissed the runway ...like butter. A perfect landing in impossible conditions.

Krissa let out a shaky laugh. “You’re insane, Rob.”

He exhaled. “Let’s hope that’s the craziest part of today.”

It wasn’t. Not even close.

As they taxied off the runway, the scale of the situation hit them like a punch to the chest.

“Rob...” Krissa whispered. “What... what is all this?”

Rob didn't answer. He couldn't. Because everywhere he looked, the world was wrong.

Government aircraft lined the ramps: C-40 Clippers, Gulfstreams with federal markings, unmarked white jets with blacked-out windows. Foreign planes too—European, Middle Eastern, Asian—parked in tight rows like they'd been dropped there in a hurry.

And then—Rob saw it.

The unmistakable light blue and white paint. The presidential seal. The massive tail towering above everything else.

Air Force One.

Krissa's hand flew to her mouth. "Oh my God."

Rob swallowed hard. "This... this can't be real." But it was.

And it got worse.

Departing aircraft were lined up nose-to-tail on the taxiways—dozens of them—yet none were moving. Engines idled. Pilots gestured helplessly from cockpit windows. A few passengers had even opened emergency exits, climbing onto wings in panic.

Then, ahead of them, a regional jet tried to turn around in the congestion. It clipped the wing of a parked 737. Metal screamed. Sparks flew. People on the ground scattered.

Chaos. Pure, uncontrolled chaos.

Krissa's voice trembled. "Rob... something huge is happening."

He nodded slowly. "Yeah. And we're in the middle of it."

Behind them, Charlotte unbuckled and stepped into the cockpit. Her face was pale, her eyes sharp with urgency. "There's not much time," she said.

Rob turned. "Ma'am, what is going on?"

She didn't answer with words. She held up her wrist. A watch—sleek, metallic, military-looking—

displayed a digital countdown.

18:36 18:35 18:34 18:33...

Krissa stared. “What... what is that?”

Charlotte’s voice was low, steady, and terrifyingly certain. “I can’t explain. Not now. But if we don’t get inside before this expires... we are all dead.”

Rob felt the blood drain from his face. “Inside where?”

“The bunker,” she said simply. “Forget everything else. Rob—park this plane as close to Air Force One as possible.”

He blinked. “Ma’am, that’s restricted—”

“Do it.” Her tone left no room for debate.

Rob throttled up, weaving through the gridlocked aircraft, ignoring the frantic gestures of ground crew and the shouts from other pilots. He slipped the CJ4 between two larger jets, rolling to a stop directly beneath the shadow of Air Force One’s massive wing.

“Close enough?” he asked.

Charlotte nodded. “Let’s go.”

They opened the cabin door. Cold wind blasted inside. Charlotte grabbed Rob’s hand. Krissa grabbed his other. The three of them jumped to the tarmac and sprinted toward the terminal, weaving between military vehicles and abandoned luggage carts.

Inside—

Chaos.

Absolute, unfiltered chaos.

Travelers screamed. Children cried. People shoved against barricades as armed soldiers held them back. The terminal speakers blared unintelligible announcements over the roar of the crowd.

VIPs—politicians, executives, foreign dignitaries—were being rushed through a secured checkpoint by military escorts.

And then Rob saw something that made his stomach twist. Police officers were pulling random travelers from the crowd—young adults, families with children, people who looked healthy and under forty. The selected passengers protested, thinking they were being detained.

They weren't.

They were the lucky ones.

Krissa grabbed Rob's arm. "They're... they're taking them somewhere."

Charlotte's voice was grim. "They're fillers."

Rob turned. "Fillers?"

"For the VIPs who didn't make it in time," she said. "The bunker has a fixed capacity. Every empty slot must be filled."

Krissa's eyes widened in horror. "So they're replacing people?"

Charlotte nodded once. "Yes."

Rob stared at the chaos, the soldiers, the screaming crowds, the countdown ticking mercilessly on Charlotte's wrist. The world was ending.

And they had eighteen minutes to get underground.

-Chapter 5-

Tick, Tick, Tick

The countdown on Charlotte's wrist read:

02:14 02:13 02:12...

They pushed through the terminal, dodging soldiers, crying children, and frantic travelers. The air smelled of sweat, jet fuel, and fear. Somewhere behind them, a man shouted for his wife. A woman screamed at a soldier who refused to let her through.

Rob held Charlotte's hand tightly, Krissa gripping his other. They moved as one.

Ahead, a reinforced steel door stood open — the entrance to the underground facility. A line of VIPs snaked toward it, flanked by armed guards. The line was moving fast. Too fast. People were being scanned, checked, shoved through.

Charlotte's breath hitched. "We're almost there."

But then—

A soldier stepped in front of them, raising a hand. "Ma'am, your group is not on the manifest."

Charlotte lifted her wrist. "Override. Ansbacher. Delta-Seven-Niner-Alpha."

The soldier hesitated. His earpiece crackled. He listened, nodded once, and stepped aside.

"Proceed." They moved forward.

01:32 01:31 01:30...

The steel door loomed ahead, its hydraulic hinges humming. Beyond it, a long ramp descended into a cavernous tunnel lit by harsh white lights. The air pouring out was cold — unnaturally cold.

Krissa shivered. "What is this place?"

Charlotte didn't answer because she didn't have to. The truth was right in front of them. A bunker. A real one. Massive. Alive with activity. Built for the end of the world.

Rob felt his stomach twist. “Charlotte... what’s going to happen when that timer hits zero?”

She looked at him, and for the first time since he’d known her, she looked... old. Not weak — just burdened by the weight of something she’d carried alone for decades.

“When the timer expires,” she said softly, “the surface doors seal. Permanently.”

Krissa’s voice cracked. “Permanently?”

“Yes.”

Rob swallowed. “And everyone outside...?”

Charlotte didn’t answer. She didn’t need to. They reached the threshold.

A soldier scanned Charlotte’s wrist. “Ansbacher, cleared.” He looked at Rob. “Authorization?”

Rob shook his head.

“Not cleared.”

Rob froze. “What? No—no, that’s not right.”

Krissa stepped forward. “What about me?”

The light remained red.

“Not cleared.”

Charlotte’s eyes widened. “No. No, that’s wrong. They’re with me. They’re fillers.”

The soldier shook his head. “Ma’am, only you are authorized. They are not on the list and we have enough fillers.”

Charlotte grabbed his arm. “Override it!”

“I can’t,” he said. “The system is locked. Final phase.”

00:42 00:41 00:40...

Rob felt the world tilt. “Charlotte... go. You have to go.”

She shook her head fiercely. “I will not leave you.”

Krissa stepped between them. “Charlotte, listen to me. Your son. Your grandchildren. They might be inside. They need you.”

Charlotte’s face crumpled. “I don’t know if they made it.”

“Then you have to find out,” Krissa said. “For them.”

The soldier pointed inside. “Ma’am, you must enter now.”

00:22 00:21 00:20...

Charlotte turned to Rob, tears welling. “I’m so sorry.”

He forced a smile. “You got us this far. That’s more than anyone else did today.”

Krissa squeezed Charlotte’s hand. “Go.”

Charlotte stepped backward into the bunker, her eyes locked on theirs until the last possible second. The soldier hit a control panel. The massive steel door began to close. Rob and Krissa stood side by side, watching the gap shrink. Charlotte raised her hand in a trembling wave. Rob raised his.

00:07 00:06 00:05...

The door sealed with a thunderous boom.

Silence.

Suddenly, a deep rumble shook the floor. The lights flickered. A shockwave rolled through the terminal like distant thunder.

Krissa grabbed Rob’s arm. “What was that?”

Rob stared at the sealed door. “I think,” he said quietly, “that was the world changing.”

-EPILOGUE-

Six Hours Later

The terminal was quiet now.

Not peaceful — just empty, like the building itself was holding its breath. The fluorescent lights flickered overhead, casting long shadows across rows of abandoned luggage and overturned stanchions. Somewhere in the distance, a single alarm beeped in a slow, dying rhythm.

Rob sat with his back against a pillar, legs stretched out, staring at the darkened runway beyond the glass. Krissa sat beside him, knees pulled to her chest, her head resting lightly against his shoulder.

The sky outside had changed. It wasn't blue anymore. It wasn't gray. It was... wrong. A muted, swirling haze of red and copper, like the sun was bleeding behind the clouds.

Krissa broke the silence first. "Do you think she made it?"

Rob didn't answer right away. He wanted to say yes. He wanted to believe Charlotte was safe, deep underground, reunited with her son and grandchildren.

But something gnawed at him. The shockwave. The tremor that rolled through the airport after the bunker sealed. The way the soldiers vanished afterward. The way the sky changed.

He exhaled slowly. "I don't know."

Krissa nodded, accepting the honesty. "Whatever happened... we're still here."

"Yeah," he said. "We are."

They sat in silence for a long moment, listening to the faint hum of emergency generators. Then, a low rumble vibrated through the floor.

Rob straightened. "Did you feel that?"

Krissa looked up. "Another aftershock?"

"No," he said. "That came from below."

They both turned toward the far end of the terminal — toward the sealed steel door that led to the bunker entrance. A plume of dust drifted from the seams, illuminated by the flickering lights.

Krissa stood. “Rob... what does that mean?”

He rose beside her, heart pounding. The dust thickened. A metallic groan echoed up the access tunnel. Then a deep, hollow boom shook the floor.

Rob swallowed hard. “Something happened down there.”

Krissa’s voice was barely a whisper. “Something bad.”

They watched as another tremor rippled through the building. A crack snaked across the tile floor, splitting the grout.

Rob took a step back. “The bunker... could it withstand whatever that was?”

Krissa looked at him, eyes wide. “Rob... are you saying—”

He didn’t want to say it. But the truth was already settling over them like ash.

“The people down there,” he said quietly. “Charlotte. The VIPs. The world leaders. I don’t think they survived.”

Krissa covered her mouth. “But... that bunker was supposed to be the safest place on Earth.”

Rob shook his head. “Maybe that was the lie.”

Outside, the strange red sky pulsed faintly, like a heartbeat. Krissa stepped closer to him. “So what happens now?”

Rob looked out at the empty runways, the silent planes, the horizon glowing with an eerie, unfamiliar light.

“I think,” he said, “the world starts over.”

Krissa slipped her hand into his. “Then we start with us.”

Rob squeezed her fingers gently, grounding himself in the only certainty left.

The old world had sealed itself underground.

And died there.

Up here, on the surface — battered, shaken, and stripped of its leaders — humanity had a chance to begin again.

Not with power. Not with privilege. But with the common people who were left.

Rob took a breath, steady and sure.

“Yeah,” he said. “We start from here.”