

Extract from *Blindsided* by Paul Anders  
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## Chapter 1: Surf's Up

The big wave curled but held its edge. "Take it!" Noni had cried, and I had, cutting to the left and away from the pier, gliding down at a 60-degree angle to the wall with only the feel of the wave to guide me.

I bounced forward along the board, toes almost but not quite to the front edge, hanging five as the top of the wave gradually curved above my head. Ten seconds, twenty, a hundred yards out along the wave and fifty yards closer to shore, the curl died above me and the sun broke through the collapsing roof of spray, dazzling to the eye. I smelled the wind, felt incredibly exhilarated and alive.

"Hey! You almost hit my kid," a hoarse man with a New York accent cried out indignantly.

A series of seal-like blobs surround me in the shallow waters just inside the sand bar. Tourists, probably, swimming in a surfing area. Time to head for home.

I undid my leash as soon as I hit the beach but continued walking to the top of the dune before pausing to strip off my wet suit. The hot sun felt good on my back and feeling was gradually coming back into my toes. "Hot on top and cold on bottom," I said to no one in particular. I began to think about a tall glass of water with a single slice of lemon, followed by a slowly drunk cup of dark black coffee.

When the chimes in the tower across from the pier sounded nine a.m., giving me a direction to follow, I headed across the sand at a brisk pace, then up the stairway, my board under my right arm on the wall side so that I wouldn't hurt anyone. The hard part began at street level. Too many people were already moving about on the edge of the pier. I had only a block to travel to Surf 'n Sea, the shop where I normally leave my board, but the traffic increased rather than decreased as I pressed forward.

"Watch it," hollered by some would-be tough guy, probably deserved a poke in the ribs (you shoved me first, mister); his "Sorry," followed by a whispered "dude is blind, did you see that?" definitely did. I dislike pity. If tough guy was put off by my milky white irises and the raw ugly scar tissue that surrounds them, so be it. I have to live with and inside this face, have had to since Sunday morning, July 20th 1996, 1:30 EDT when the bomb went off at the 100th Olympiad.

"Hey Paul," a young woman cried joyously. The cry might have been for anyone named Paul, but the "Dad" that followed was most definitely for me.

"Hey Kim," I said and hugged her tightly when she obligingly came into my arms. She wasn't my daughter, but had come very close to being so, to being my stepdaughter, anyway. Twenty-four years old, a head shorter than her mother, darker, and just on the verge of stout, she affected a rolling walk and a hoarse voice reminiscent of a drunken sailor on leave. Our affection had outlasted the decaying relationship with her model-like mom, and once every week or so, we would meet after surfing and have coffee together.

"I saw you out there by the pier this morning, Dad; you looked awesome."

A second hug was the appropriate reward.

She pulled my hand, "C'mon, meet the Congressman."

The Congressman, her employer, was not exactly a friend of mine; he and I were definitely from different parties, and, invariably, of differing points of view. Still he was the only Congressman I knew and, in theory, could influence. (I still haven't figured out *how* I might influence him. Our conversation usually consists of "Oh, you're Kim's friend," or "bodacious surf, today," this being the surfing Congressman who represents my district, though, as I've already indicated, not necessarily me).

The Congressman and I shook hands. I could tell the cameras were rolling, and tomorrow some photograph in the paper might well picture the blind surfer with the ever-caring Congressman beside him. What the

hey, he was Kim's friend and boss and she was all that really mattered to me.

My real problems began after the handshake. The footing is treacherous enough just trying to get me and my board through an ordinary crowd, but with loose wires from the cameras that were there for the press conference and lights trailing all over the place and those big reflectors they stick up on posts, untrammelled movement was virtually impossible. I was about to ask Kim to get me the hell out of there, when I heard the click.

You can't forget a sound like that, not when you've heard it as often as I have, when the gun has pointed right at you and an instant later the bullet has creased your head with its passage. I shoved the suit and board into Kim's bewildered arms and was bulling forward past the cameraman, through half a dozen "What the fuck!"s and "Watch it!"s, when the gun went off. I didn't feel or hear the bullet. Instead I heard a second muffled bang, then the thud of a falling body, the sound of two guns hitting the pavement, one behind the other, and a triumphant voice, a cop's voice, announcing with a slight but unmistakable foreign accent, "got the bastard."

Footsteps were walking away from the body as I drew near, but then footsteps were going in every direction around me as the people near at hand tried to get away and those further back pressed forward to see what was happening.

"Get back people, get back." Another police officer's voice, kinder, gentler than the first.

I was bending forward to see if I could help the injured gunman when the same cop's voice that had announced triumphantly, "Got the bastard," told me to "get the fuck out of the way." I stood up; when I didn't move in the right direction fast enough, he manhandled me against a wall, mashing my shoulders against the brick, and started to cuff me. The pressure against my wrists hurt like hell.

"Howie, there's no need for that."

The first officer's voice, gentle, relaxed, was followed by that of the beast, "Helmut, I told you to call me Helmut." I recognized the accent—German. I didn't care how long he'd been in this country; I wanted him to go back.

The good cop spoke again, endorsing me apparently. "He's a blind guy, lives in the neighborhood, surfs here all the time. Hell, he knows the Congressman. He's not a suspect."

"Should have moved when I told him." Though the German's voice was still hostile, the pressure eased on my arm and my wrists were once again free.

"I'll talk to him Howie, O.K."

"Helmut."

A woman's hip bumped against my thigh, the smell of long dark hair still wet with salt water filled my nostrils, and Kimberly pushed herself forward. "What do you want with my Dad?" she asked. I liked the sound of that word.

"This is your father, Miss Kramer?" The good cop sounded incredulous; the bad cop simply walked away.

"Almost," she said linking her arm with mine, "You came close didn't you, Dad?"

"Close as that guy came to killing the Congressman."

"Jeff wasn't," she began and then stopped, my own blood chilling at the instant revelation. I tried to grab her hand, to get her to talk to me, but she'd already stepped aside.

"I'll need to talk to you both," the good cop said. "Separately, if you don't mind Miss Harmon."

"Jeepers Mark, call me Kim, what is this?"

The police officer chuckled and tapped his foot. Their idle chatter was driving me nuts. I needed to find out about Jeff, now, immediately. "Kim, I've got to talk to you."

"I'm afraid that will have to be later, Mr. Harmon," the police officer said, making the natural mistake given Kim's introduction. "I need to talk with your daughter, now."

"If you don't mind, I'd like you to stay around and wait for me to talk with you, also. I'm responsible here this morning and I need to go over everything you may have . . . heard." A noticeable and embarrassing pause intervened before Mark completed his sentence with the verb. "The T.V. people may want to talk to you, too. Don't panic if they start asking questions. Do what I do, smile and say nothing. Oh, and stay out of Helmut's way."