USSS

THE BULLET LINE

A Miles Long Short



Kamary Phillips

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Imprint
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A Miles-Long Short

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Original stories. Owned worlds.

For those who serve
even when the line moves.
And for the ones who know
that loyalty without conscience
is just another kind of silence.
And For those who stand the line–
and those who refuse to cross it.

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PROLOGUE

The sound came first. A sharp crack that cut through the warm morning air like a bone snap. Then chaos.

Not for Miles Long.

Everyone else dropped. Screams rippled through the crowd, bodies scrambled to the pavement, agents finally moved like they'd just remembered their jobs. But Miles? He stood still, just watching. One hand hovered near his sidearm out of muscle memory, but he didn't draw.

He'd already seen enough.

The so-called shooter was sloppy. Too slow, too clean. The angle was wrong. No trained assassin would post up there, not with all those sightlines. And when the shot rang out, the man behind the podium didn't even flinch.

Instead, the president—yes, *that* president—raised his fist in the air. Not ducking, not running. Not even glancing at the agents now swarming him like ants on spilled soda.

"Wait! My shoe!" the man barked, bending over awkwardly as two suits tried to drag him offstage. "I dropped my goddamn shoe!"

That's when it hit Miles harder than the bullet that never came close. This wasn't an attack. It was a performance.

A message.
Or a test.

He turned away from the scene, walking back through the crowd like it was just another Tuesday.

That was the last day Miles Long wore a suit for someone else.

1

Dr. Lena Corwin's office sat above a dry cleaner in Northwest D.C., a place that smelled like steam and starch even through sealed glass. If you didn't know it was there, you'd never find it. No signage, no waiting room music, no "Wellness" bullshit in cursive.

That was why Miles liked it.

You didn't have to perform in a place like this. You didn't have to lie with your face.

Lena pressed a finger to the small recorder on the side table, and the red light blinked on like an eye opening.

"Session thirty-one," she said. "Client: Miles Long."

Miles sat in the same chair he always sat in. Not because it was comfortable. Because it placed his back to the wall and gave him sightlines to both doors. Habit wasn't something you turned off just because someone stamped administrative leave on your file.

Lena's notebook rested on her lap. She didn't open it right away.

"How's your sleep?" she asked.

Miles watched rain slide down the window. "Fine."

"You said that last week."

"It was fine last week."

“And the week before.”

Miles’ jaw moved once, like he was chewing something he didn’t want to swallow.

“Let’s do it differently,” Lena said. “Give me the dream.”

Miles’ eyes didn’t leave the glass. “It’s not a dream.”

“Okay,” she said, as if she believed him. “Then what is it?”

“A memory that didn’t finish.”

Lena let that sit. She was good at that—letting silence do the heavy lifting. Most people filled gaps because they were uncomfortable. Lena filled gaps because she wanted to control what came out of them.

Miles’ voice dropped. “I’m walking a route. Not a hallway—route. Everything’s mapped. Everything’s predictable. That’s the point. But there’s a sound behind me. Not a gunshot. Not a scream.”

“What kind of sound?” Lena asked.

Miles’ thumb tapped the armrest twice.

Tap. Tap.

Lena’s eyes flicked down to it. She didn’t mention it. She just watched him like a scientist watching an animal repeat a pattern.

“It’s a decision,” Miles said. “Somebody deciding they can do something because nobody will stop them.”

“And you?” Lena asked.

“I reach for my badge,” Miles said. “And I wake up before I touch it.”

Lena finally opened her notebook, but she didn’t write. She just stared at the page as if it helped her hear better.

“You said last time you weren’t sure who you were protecting anymore,” she said.

Miles laughed once—no humor in it. “That’s a clean way to put it.”

“Put it your way,” Lena said.

Miles turned his head slightly. “I’ve taken the oath under presidents I didn’t vote for. Under presidents I didn’t like. Under presidents I didn’t trust. But I still understood the job. The job didn’t change.”

“And now?” Lena asked.

Miles stared straight at her for the first time that session. His eyes were tired, but not soft.

“Now the job is the lie,” he said.

Lena didn’t flinch. “Say more.”

Miles exhaled slowly through his nose. “You know how people talk about the ‘line of fire’ like it’s theoretical? Like it’s a training exercise? In my world, it’s a lifestyle. You don’t get to be surprised. You don’t get to be emotional. You step into the line because that’s what you are.”

Lena nodded. “And you don’t want to step into it.”

Miles’ voice flattened. “I don’t want to die for someone I believe is evil.”

The word hung there like smoke.

Lena's pen moved once, then stopped.

Miles leaned back, and his eyes went back to the rain. Like looking at her too long made it real.

Lena spoke carefully. "You're not the first agent to disagree with an administration."

"This isn't disagreement," Miles said. "This is… moral injury."

Lena's mouth tightened—not in pity, but in recognition.

"And your fear," she said, "is that you'll hesitate."

Miles' hand flexed. He didn't answer.

Lena waited.

Miles finally said, "In my world, hesitation kills people who did nothing wrong."

Lena's gaze sharpened. "Is that what happened?"

Miles' eyes narrowed. "That's what could happen."

"Your leave," Lena said, "was it voluntary?"

Miles' lips pressed together. "It was… arranged."

Lena sat back. "By whom?"

Miles looked at her, and for a moment something like disgust crossed his face.

“They called it a ‘fitness review,’” he said. “They made it sound like I was unstable. Like I was having some kind of… episode.”

“And are you?” Lena asked.

Miles’ laugh came again, sharp. “No. I’m awake.”

Lena nodded slowly. “Miles, you’re allowed to be angry.”

“That’s not the problem,” he said. “The problem is I’m trained not to be.”

Lena’s voice softened just a touch. “Who are you when you’re not trained?”

Miles didn’t answer right away. His eyes drifted to the side table. The recorder. The blinking red light.

“Someone they don’t want in the building,” he said.

“And why is that?” Lena asked.

Miles’ thumb tapped twice again.

Tap. Tap.

“Because I won’t take the bullet,” he said.

“Because you won’t take it for them,” Lena corrected.

Miles’ gaze hardened. “Same thing right now.”

Lena closed her notebook gently. “You’re here,” she said. “That means part of you still wants a way through.”

Miles stood. Session over. He did that when it got too close.

Lena didn’t stop him. She just said, “Miles—”

He paused.

Lena’s voice was low, almost a whisper. “Every agent has a bullet line. A line they will not cross.”

Miles didn’t look back.

Lena added, “Your line isn’t weakness. It’s identity.”

Miles opened the door and walked into the smell of steam and detergent, back into the city that didn’t care what your conscience cost you.

2

Miles' apartment was DMV survival: small, quiet, and designed to disappear.

Minimal furniture. No framed photos. No obvious trophies. The kind of place you could pack up in fifteen minutes if you had to—because somewhere in the back of his mind he still lived as if someone might knock.

A suit hung inside his closet, still in plastic. Navy. Perfect cut. Not worn since the leave.

In the kitchen, a coffee mug sat by the sink with a lipstick mark that didn't belong to him.

Evie.

He didn't keep anything personal. Not really. But Evie did. She left traces like she was marking a safe house.

His phone buzzed on the counter.

NYRA JONES

He didn't answer.

A minute later, it buzzed again.

He watched it like it might explode.

Then the screen lit with a voicemail transcript preview.

Long. I know you're screening. Call me.

Miles picked up the phone and listened to her voice instead of reading her words. Nyra sounded calm—too calm. That was Nyra's trick. She wrapped panic in professionalism and made it sound like routine.

The message cut off.

He replayed it once. Then again.

He opened his laptop. The drive booted through layers of encryption like a man walking down stairs he'd built himself. A folder labeled A.K. sat on the desktop. He stared at it for a full five seconds before clicking.

Avi Kessler's file was a ghost he kept fed. Not because he enjoyed pain. Because forgetting felt like betrayal.

Inside: photos, logs, notes, and a last voice memo Avi had sent him two years ago.

Miles didn't play it.

Not yet.

Instead, he opened Nyra's attachment.

One photo.

A building with a service entrance. D.C. glass and concrete, the kind of government-adjacent structure that housed "initiatives" and "programs" nobody could define.

Miles zoomed in. He didn't look at the building. He looked at the details.

A contractor logo on a delivery van. A parking placard. A security camera angle.

He cross-referenced the contractor logo against an old set of procurement notes—just enough to be dangerous. The same name popped up under a shell company Avi had flagged before his death.

Miles' stomach tightened.

His phone buzzed again, this time a text—unknown number, but he recognized the pattern of spacing.

DEWITT AVERY:
Heard you're awake again.

Miles stared at the screen. Then typed three words back.

MILES:
Stop texting me.

A second later:

DEWITT:
If you're getting calls from Jones, you're already in motion.

Miles' thumbs hovered over the keyboard.

MILES:
What do you know?

Three dots.

Then:

DEWITT:
I know you don't trust me. But you trust patterns. That building? Not a building. A funnel.

Miles' jaw flexed.

MILES:
For what?

DEWITT:
Money. Influence. And something you're going to hate.

Miles stared at the word hate like it was a dare.

DeWitt's final message arrived:

DEWITT:
If you want the rest, meet me where you used to breathe.

Miles shut the laptop.

He didn't like riddles. He didn't like DeWitt Avery. And he didn't like the way Nyra's calm voice sat on top of his stomach like a weight.

The phone buzzed again.

Not Nyra this time.

EVIE

He answered.

"Uncle Miles," Evie said, like she'd just walked into the room even though she was miles away. "You got food?"

Miles looked at the bare countertop. "No."

"You always have food. You're lying."

"I have coffee."

“That’s not food.”

“Then eat at home,” Miles said.

A pause. Then her voice shifted slightly—less sarcasm, more something else.

“I’m coming over,” she said.

Miles closed his eyes. “Evie—”

“I already told Mom I’m studying with you,” she said. “Also, my ride got canceled. Also, I’m bored. Also—” She lowered her voice like she was sharing a secret. “I don’t like the vibe at home today.”

Miles felt something twist in his chest. Evie wasn’t dramatic. When she said vibe, she meant instinct.

“Fine,” he said. “Come over.”

“Cool. Also—can we talk about that ‘fitness review’ thing? Because people on TikTok are saying that’s how agencies force whistleblowers out and I’m just—”

“Evie,” Miles said, flat.

She sighed. “Fine. I’ll just eat your sad cereal and judge you in silence.”

She hung up.

Miles stared at his phone for a long moment.

Then he played Nyra’s voicemail one more time and listened to the space between her words.

Something’s off.

Nyra didn’t call unless it was.

3

Evie arrived ten minutes later with a backpack, a laptop, and an attitude that could cut glass.

She kicked off her shoes and immediately headed for the kitchen like she paid rent.

“You got anything besides coffee?” she asked.

Miles opened a cabinet. “Crackers.”

Evie blinked. “Uncle Miles… are you okay?”

He gave her the look—the one that ended conversations. She ignored it.

“I’m serious,” she said. “You look like a dude who hasn’t slept. And you got the ‘I’m about to disappear for three days’ energy.”

Miles leaned against the counter. “I’m fine.”

Evie opened the fridge. “You have hot sauce and nothing to put it on.”

“That’s a strategy,” Miles said.

Evie sighed and grabbed her laptop. “Okay. I’m going to pretend your life isn’t a serial killer documentary. But if you vanish, I’m telling Mom.”

Miles’s eyes softened for half a second. “Don’t.”

Evie glanced up. “Why?”

Miles didn’t answer.

She watched him, really watched him, and the humor drained from her face.

“I heard Aunt Tasha talking,” she said quietly. “She said you ‘stepped away’ because you were mad.”

Miles’ mouth tightened.

Evie added, “She said you were mad at the government.”

Miles’ eyes flicked to her. “Don’t listen to her.”

Evie shrugged. “Hard not to when adults think kids don’t exist.”

Miles turned away. “It’s complicated.”

Evie smiled just a little. “Everything is. But you’re not the kind of person who quits because you’re mad.”

Miles looked at her, and she held his gaze.

That was the dangerous thing about Evie. She was young, but she was not naive. She saw him the way Nyra saw him—past the armor.

“Miles,” Evie said softly, as if testing the name. “Are you scared?”

Miles laughed once. “No. And it's uncle Miles.”

Evie leaned back. “Okay, Unk. Then you’re angry.”

Miles didn't respond.

Evie tapped her fingers on the table—tap tap—mirroring his habit without realizing it.

She said, "You can be angry and still be good."

Miles' throat tightened.

He turned away and grabbed his jacket.

"Where you going?" Evie asked.

Miles paused. His instinct was to lie. His second instinct was to protect her from the lie.

He chose something in between.

"I have to check something," he said.

Evie's eyes narrowed. "Like... spy check something?"

Miles gave her a look.

Evie raised both hands. "Okay, okay. I won't ask. But you better be back before nine. Because if you die, I'm not doing your funeral speech."

Miles almost smiled.

"Eat," he said.

Evie watched him head for the door.

"You know," she called, casual but sharp, "if you're going to do secret shit, at least stop leaving your phone on the counter like a grandma."

Miles stopped.

Evie pointed at him. “See? That face. You’re doing secret shit.”

Miles grabbed his phone.

Evie smirked. “You’re welcome.”

Miles left.

4

The air outside was cold and wet, and the city moved like it always did—fast, indifferent, hungry.

Miles drove without music. Without maps. He didn't need them.

"Where you used to breathe," DeWitt had said.

There were a few places that could mean. But DeWitt was a dramatic bastard. He meant the one with symbolism.

Miles parked near the river, stepped out, and walked toward a small overlook where planes cut low across the sky on their way to Reagan National. The sound was constant—like a reminder that power always came and went, whether you wanted it to or not.

DeWitt Avery was already there, holding an umbrella like he'd been born with it.

He looked expensive, as always. Not flashy. Just… polished. The kind of man who never looked hurried because he made other people hurry for him.

"Miles," DeWitt said, smiling like they were old friends.

"We're not friends," Miles replied.

DeWitt nodded. "Correct. Friends are messy. This is cleaner."

Miles didn't move closer. "Talk."

DeWitt's smile thinned. "Nyra Jones doesn't call you unless it's real."

"I know," Miles said.

"And you don't open Avi's file unless you're bleeding," DeWitt added.

Miles' eyes sharpened. "You don't know what I open."

DeWitt held up a hand. "Relax. I don't need to spy on you. You're predictable. You're a man who thinks he's invisible while he's standing in the same rain as everyone else."

Miles' jaw tightened.

DeWitt leaned in slightly. "Here's the thing: that building Jones sent you is connected to a financial pipeline. Not normal fraud. Not counterfeit bills. Something bigger."

"What?" Miles asked.

DeWitt looked out over the water like he didn't want to say it. Like he enjoyed the theater of reluctance.

"Influence," he said. "Foreign money. Domestic donors. A web of shell entities that funnel resources toward people who benefit from chaos."

Miles stared at him. "And the Service knows?"

DeWitt shrugged. "Pieces. But the pieces are being… managed."

"By who?" Miles asked.

DeWitt's eyes flicked to Miles. "By people who think the mission is obedience."

Miles felt his hands curl into fists.

DeWitt continued, voice low. “You’re on leave because you said something you weren’t supposed to say.”

Miles’ voice dropped. “I said I wouldn’t take a bullet for them.”

DeWitt nodded. “Exactly. And for the first time in your career, that was heard as treason.”

Miles exhaled slowly.

DeWitt said, “Nyra Jones is inside something. And if she pushes the wrong door alone, she’ll be the one who takes the bullet. Not the president. Not the administration. Her.”

Miles’ eyes narrowed. “So what do you want from me?”

DeWitt smiled slightly. “I want you to stay alive long enough to be useful. And I want the Service to have someone who still remembers what the mission is supposed to mean.”

Miles stared at him.

DeWitt added, “Avi Kessler died because he noticed the pipeline early. If you want to know why… you need to look where the money meets the route.”

Miles’ stomach dropped.

“Now,” DeWitt said, stepping back, “you can pretend you’re still on leave. You can go home to your niece and your crackers. Or you can do what you always do.”

Miles’ voice was flat. “Which is?”

DeWitt’s smile faded. “Stand in front of the line.”

Miles said nothing.

DeWitt walked away, leaving Miles with the rain and the roar of planes and the familiar taste of having no real choice.

5

Nyra Jones didn't like the way the morning felt.

She sat in the passenger seat of a black SUV, comms low, eyes scanning like she was reading a book only she could see. Her hair was pulled back. Her suit was tailored to move. Everything about her screamed competence.

And yet she couldn't shake the sensation that someone had rearranged the furniture in a room she knew by heart.

"Route status?" she asked into her earpiece.

A voice responded. "Clear."

Nyra watched a delivery van roll past them a little too slowly. The driver didn't glance at his phone. Didn't fidget. Didn't behave like a civilian.

Nyra tapped her earpiece twice.

Tap. Tap.

Static. Then the line stabilized.

She hated that.

A junior agent in the back seat scrolled their tablet. "You good, ma'am?"

Nyra didn't even look back. "I'm good."

She checked her phone discreetly. A message popped up.

MILES: Your guy isn't yours.

Nyra's heart punched once, hard.

Then a second message:

MILES: Pull your detail back ten meters.

Nyra's jaw tightened.

She didn't have authority to reroute anything. Not officially. But she'd spent her life doing things "not officially" when lives were on the line.

She leaned into the comms. "Shift the perimeter. Ten meters back. Make it look like a comfort adjustment."

"Why?" someone asked.

Nyra's tone sharpened. "Because I said so."

A beat.

Then movement.

The SUV behind them slowed. The formation adjusted. The route subtly widened.

The delivery van's driver stiffened, just slightly. Like a plan had been interrupted.

Nyra caught it.

She smiled once, cold.

"Keep eyes open," she said.

She glanced at her phone again, fingers hovering over Miles' contact.

She didn't call. Not yet.

If she called him too early, he might ignore it out of spite.

She needed him irritated, not resistant.

Nyra typed one word.

NYRA: Where?

Three dots appeared.

Then:

MILES: I'll tell you when I know you're safe.

Nyra breathed out. "Asshole," she whispered.

The junior agent in the back seat looked up. "Ma'am?"

Nyra smiled without humor. "Nothing."

But inside, she felt it: the old rhythm. The two of them in sync, even when they weren't speaking.

And she knew—whatever this was, it wasn't going away.

6

Miles returned home to Evie sitting at his table like she owned the building.

Her laptop was open. A screen full of code stared back like it was judging him.

“You were gone two hours,” Evie said.

Miles hung his jacket. “I told you I had to check something.”

Evie turned the laptop toward him. “And you left your Wi-Fi password in your notes app. Which is very on brand for a man who claims he’s a ghost.”

Miles sighed. “Evie—”

“I’m not hacking you,” she said, rolling her eyes. “I’m saving you from yourself.”

Miles sat down across from her. For a moment the room felt like a trap—small, tight, too full of things he cared about.

Evie watched him. “You’re doing work.”

Miles didn’t answer.

Evie leaned forward. “You look like you’re trying not to become a headline.”

Miles’ throat tightened.

Evie's voice softened. "Is it about the president guy?"

Miles' eyes snapped up. "Don't."

Evie shrugged. "Okay, fine. The fictional president guy. The one you hate. The one that makes you look like you want to punch drywall."

Miles stared at her.

Evie lifted her hands. "Sorry. But you're not subtle."

Miles leaned back. "You shouldn't be involved in this."

Evie smirked. "I'm not involved. I'm related."

Miles' eyes hardened. "That's worse."

Evie blinked, then sighed. "Uncle Miles... you can't protect me by shutting me out. That's not how family works."

Miles stared at her. The words hit a place he didn't like.

He stood. Walked to the closet. Opened it.

The suit hung there.

Evie's eyes widened slightly. "Oh... shit."

Miles stared at the suit like it was a coffin.

Evie whispered, "Are you going back?"

Miles' voice was quiet. "Not yet."

Evie tilted her head. "Then why is that thing still here?"

Miles didn't answer.

Evie's sarcasm returned, softer. "Because part of you still believes in it."

Miles' hand hovered near the plastic.

Evie said, "You don't hate the job. You hate what they turned it into."

Miles' jaw flexed once.

Evie stood and walked over, careful. She didn't touch the suit. She didn't touch him. She just stood close enough for him to feel that he wasn't alone.

"That's your bullet line, isn't it?" she asked.

Miles looked down at her. "Who told you that phrase?"

Evie shrugged. "I'm smart. Also, your therapist probably says dramatic stuff."

Miles almost smiled.

Evie added, "If you're going to get dragged back in… do it for the right reason."

Miles' phone buzzed.

NYRA JONES

This time, he answered.

"Long," Nyra said, low and direct. "Tell me what you saw."

Miles looked at Evie. Then away.

"Not on the phone," he said.

Nyra exhaled. “Miles—”

“I’m not in,” he said.

Nyra’s voice sharpened. “I didn’t ask if you were in. I asked if you were alive enough to help me.”

Miles closed his eyes.

Evie mouthed: Help her.

Miles spoke into the phone. “Meet me. Same place you used to make fun of my coffee.”

Nyra didn’t hesitate. “Thirty minutes.”

The line went dead.

Evie stared at him like she’d just watched him step into the line.

Miles looked back at the suit.

He didn’t put it on.

Not yet.

7

They met under a highway overpass in Arlington where the noise made eavesdropping pointless. The kind of place you chose when you didn't trust walls.

Nyra Jones stood with her arms crossed, rain on her shoulders, face sharp with restraint.

She looked at Miles like she'd been holding her breath for months and didn't want him to notice.

"Nice of you to answer," she said.

"You called twice," Miles replied.

Nyra's mouth twitched. "I called once. I left a voicemail. That's not twice."

Miles stared at her. "It is when it's you."

Nyra's eyes flicked—just a fraction. The unspoken landed between them like a file folder no one wanted to open.

She stepped closer. "What did you see?"

Miles handed her his phone. A photo. The delivery van. The driver. The placard.

Nyra's eyes narrowed. "He wasn't on our list."

Miles' voice dropped. "Because he's not yours."

Nyra’s jaw tightened. “Trude?”

Miles didn’t say the name. He didn’t have to. The shadow was enough.

Nyra looked up. “You’re telling me there’s a parallel detail.”

Miles nodded once. “And it’s tied to money.”

Nyra’s eyes narrowed. “This isn’t just protection.”

Miles’ mouth tightened. “It never is.”

Nyra stepped closer, her voice quiet. “Why did you really leave?”

Miles stared at her.

Nyra added, almost angry, “Don’t give me the ‘fitness review’ line. I know the paperwork. I want the truth.”

Miles’ voice was low. “I said I wouldn’t take the bullet.”

Nyra’s eyes flashed. “For him?”

Miles’ jaw flexed. “For anyone tied to it.”

Nyra’s face shifted—hurt, anger, understanding all tangled.

“You’re not a coward,” she said.

Miles’ laugh was bitter. “Tell that to the file.”

Nyra’s voice softened, dangerous. “Miles… if you hesitate on a route, people die.”

Miles’ eyes burned. “I know.”

Nyra stared at him like she wanted to shake him and kiss him and slap him all at once.

She didn't do any of it.

She just said, "Then don't hesitate for them. Hesitate for the lie. But not for the people."

Miles stared at her. The words hit the exact place he'd been refusing to look.

Nyra stepped back. "I need you," she said. "Not in the building. Not in the suit. I need you as you are right now—off-book, eyes open, no leash."

Miles' voice was quiet. "You're asking me to work without protection."

Nyra smiled without humor. "Welcome to my week."

Miles held her gaze. "If I do this… it won't be for them."

Nyra's eyes softened. "I know."

A long beat passed, the kind of beat that in another life would have turned into a confession.

Nyra broke it first. "We have a window. Tonight. That building gets a 'private briefing'—no press, no guest list."

Miles' eyes narrowed. "Who's inside?"

Nyra said, "People who shouldn't be."

Miles nodded slowly. "Then we watch. We don't touch."

Nyra tilted her head. "Since when are you the cautious one?"

Miles' mouth tightened. "Since the world stopped making sense."

Nyra watched him, then said softly, "Long... I missed you."

Miles' throat tightened.

He didn't say it back.

He didn't need to. She could see it in his eyes.

Nyra stepped away. "Be ready," she said.

Miles watched her go, rain swallowing her silhouette.

His phone buzzed.

A message from DeWitt Avery.

DEWITT: You're close. Don't stop now.

Miles shut the phone off.

He wasn't doing this for DeWitt.

He wasn't doing it for the administration.

He was doing it because Nyra was right.

You don't get to quit protection just because the people at the top are dirty.

You protect the ones who never asked to be in the line.

8

That night, Miles stood in his dark apartment bathroom, staring at himself in the mirror like he was meeting an old enemy.

The suit still hung in the closet.

He didn't touch it.

Instead, he dressed like a man who wanted to vanish: dark jacket, plain shoes, no tie, no shine.

Evie sat on the couch, knees pulled up, eyes too awake.

"You're going," she said.

Miles nodded.

Evie swallowed. "You coming back?"

Miles hesitated.

Evie's eyes sharpened. "Don't do that."

Miles looked at her. "Do what?"

"Hesitate like you're already gone," she said. "If you go out there, go out there like you're coming home."

Miles stared at her.

Evie's voice softened. "And if you're going to die for something… make sure it's not for a liar."

Miles' throat tightened. "Go to bed."

Evie smirked. "No."

Miles looked at her, and the hardness in his face cracked just enough.

He crossed the room and pulled her into a brief hug—awkward, careful, like he didn't trust his own tenderness.

Evie hugged him back like she'd been waiting for it.

When he stepped away, Evie said, "Text me if you're alive."

Miles almost smiled. "Go to bed."

Evie pointed at him. "Alive."

Miles nodded once.

Then he left.

Outside the building, Miles and Nyra watched from separate positions. Not together. Not obvious. Two shadows running the same math.

Nyra's voice came through a secure channel, low in his ear.

"You're late," she said.

"Traffic," Miles replied.

Nyra snorted. "Liar."

Miles watched a black SUV arrive—different from the official fleet. The driver was the same man as the delivery van.

Miles' blood cooled.

"There," he murmured.

Nyra's voice tightened. "I see him."

A second car followed. Then a third.

People entered through the service door. No flags. No press. No record.

Miles' mind clicked.

Route meets money.

Avi's ghost stirred in his gut.

Miles whispered, "They're running an off-book briefing."

Nyra's voice was quiet. "For who?"

Miles watched a man step out of the last car—clean, confident, the kind of face that belonged on a donation list.

Miles said, "For influence."

Nyra's breath hitched slightly. "We can't prove anything."

Miles' voice was calm. "Not yet."

Then—movement.

A figure on the roofline. Too still. Too patient.

Miles' instincts screamed.

"Nyra," he said sharply. "Move."

"What?" Nyra asked.

Miles's eyes stayed on the roof. "Now."

Nyra didn't question him. She shifted her position, subtle, like a ghost sliding behind a pillar.

A beat later—a muffled pop from above.

Not loud. Not cinematic.

A suppressed shot meant to be invisible.

It hit the concrete where Nyra had been standing.

Miles' pulse went ice-cold.

Nyra's voice came through, tight. "What the—"

Miles didn't answer. He moved.

Not toward the building. Not toward the shooter.

Toward the line.

He sprinted across the wet pavement, eyes locked on the roofline, his body moving before his mind finished the sentence.

Another suppressed shot popped—this one closer.

Miles slid behind a concrete barrier near Nyra, breath controlled, eyes scanning.

Nyra was crouched, weapon drawn, face furious and alive.

“You just saved me,” she hissed.

Miles’ voice was quiet. “Don’t talk.”

Nyra’s eyes burned. “You said you wouldn’t take the bullet.”

Miles’ eyes stayed on the roof. “Not for them.”

A third shot popped. Then silence.

The shooter was gone.

Nyra exhaled, shaking with anger. “This was a test.”

Miles’ jaw tightened. “Or a warning.”

Nyra looked at him, eyes wide now. “They’re willing to shoot US to protect whatever this is.”

Miles stared at the building. The service door. The shadows.

Then he said the sentence that made the whole night snap into place:

“We’re not protecting the country anymore.”

Nyra swallowed. “Then what are we doing?”

Miles looked at her, rain dripping off his brow like a baptism he didn’t ask for.

“We protect what’s left,” he said.

Nyra stared at him.

And something shifted.

Not romance.

Trust.

The kind of trust that made you walk into fire without needing a speech.

Nyra’s voice softened, just for a second. “Long… you’re back.”

Miles didn’t answer.

Not yet.

9

The next morning, Miles sat in Dr. Corwin's office again, suitless, eyes sharper than they'd been in weeks.

Lena listened. Didn't interrupt. Didn't blink.

When he finished, Lena asked, "Did you hesitate?"

Miles stared at the window.

"No," he said.

Lena's pen moved once. "Then your fear isn't that you'll fail to protect."

Miles looked at her.

Lena said, "Your fear is that you'll succeed."

Miles' jaw tightened.

Lena leaned in slightly. "Miles... you're in a moral war. Not a physical one. Your conflict isn't courage. It's allegiance."

Miles' voice was flat. "I don't have allegiance to corruption."

Lena nodded. "Then where is your allegiance?"

Miles didn't answer right away.

He saw Nyra's face in his head—furious, alive.

He saw Evie on the couch, brave in her own way.

He saw Avi's file, unopened, waiting like a wound.

"My allegiance is to the mission," he said finally.

Lena said softly, "Then define the mission."

Miles' throat tightened.

"Protect people who didn't choose this," he said. "Stop threats before they happen. Follow what's real—money, patterns, behavior. Not optics."

Lena's eyes softened. "That's your bullet line."

Miles nodded once.

Lena's voice was calm. "So what happens now?"

Miles stood.

He didn't want to say it out loud, because saying it out loud made it official.

He walked out into the smell of steam and detergent again—but this time, he wasn't leaving as a man on leave.

He was leaving as a man on a mission.

10

Back home, the apartment felt smaller than ever.

Evie was at the table with her laptop. She looked up the second he entered.

“You alive?” she asked.

Miles nodded.

Evie exhaled. “Okay. So you’re back on your spy shit.”

Miles didn’t deny it.

Evie watched him go to the closet.

“You’re not putting that on,” she said.

Miles paused.

Evie added, “Not for them.”

Miles looked at her.

Evie smiled, just a little. “But maybe for you.”

Miles stared at the suit. The plastic. The weight.

Then he opened the closet fully and pulled it out.

He set it on the bed.

He didn't put it on yet.

But he smoothed the fabric with his hand, like he was waking it up.

His phone buzzed.

Nyra.

He answered.

Nyra's voice was low, blunt. "Long. You good?"

Miles stared at the suit.

"Yeah," he said. "I'm good."

Nyra exhaled. "Trude's moving. We don't have time. I need you in the building."

Miles' jaw tightened.

"That's not what we said," he replied.

Nyra's voice sharpened. "I know. But it's happening whether you like it or not."

Miles stared at himself in the mirror—shirt sleeves rolled, eyes tired, soul awake.

"Where?" he asked.

Nyra's answer was immediate. "Downtown. Briefing room. Off-books."

Miles exhaled slowly.

“You know,” Nyra said, and her voice softened, “you clean up nice.”

Miles almost smiled.

“Depends,” he said.

Nyra’s breath hitched slightly, like she was smiling too. “On what?”

Miles looked at the suit. The mirror. The line.

“On who I’m standing in front of,” he said.

Nyra was quiet for a beat. Then she said, steady, “Stand in front of the right thing, Miles.”

Miles ended the call.

He stared at the suit one last time… then pulled it on.

The mirror changed him. Not into a hero. Into a weapon.

He put the earpiece in—
not for the administration,
not for the lie—
but for the line he still believed in.

The one he would not cross.

END



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kamary Phillips is a writer, producer, and storyteller whose work spans fiction, audio, and screen-based narratives. His writing often explores power, loyalty, identity, and the moral fractures that emerge inside institutions meant to protect.

He is the founder of **Audible Publishers**, an independent imprint dedicated to original, creator-owned stories designed for cross-media adaptation. *USSS: The Bullet Line* is part of an ongoing narrative universe developed under the USSS banner.
Phillips lives and works between Baltimore and the Carolina coast.