

## **At The Center of the Storm**

### **Chapter One**

## **The Towpath**

It was like something out of a spy movie.

The date was March 16, 1997, a Sunday. I was at home, on a rare day off, when the phone rang. "Meet me by the C&O Canal, near the Old Angler's Inn in an hour," a voice said, almost in a whisper. "Come alone." That was all. He didn't have to identify himself; he knew I would be there.

The voice belonged to Anthony Lake, who had stepped down as national security advisor two months earlier, when Bill Clinton nominated him to be director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Back in 1992, at the start of the Clinton administration, Tony had made me part of his National Security Council staff. Prior to that I had served as a Senate staffer, and for the previous four years had been staff director of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Over the course of three years on the NSC staff, I had formed a warm personal and professional relationship with Lake and his deputy, Sandy Berger. Then, in May 1995, John Deutch, who was about to become CIA director, tapped me to be his second in command. We had gotten to know each other when Deutch was deputy secretary of defense and had even traveled together once overseas to deal with a sensitive intelligence matter. But now, after only a year and a half in the job, Deutch was leaving CIA, and my friend and former boss Tony Lake had been picked to replace him.

Tony had all the right tools for the job: intelligence, acumen, the confidence of the president, and strength of character. Outsiders who observed Tony when he was national security advisor assumed from his quiet composure that he was some misplaced mild-mannered professor. Not so. Amid many large egos, Tony was the unchallenged boss at the NSC, a master at process and bureaucratic intrigue. He had observed up close the dysfunctional backbiting that crippled the Carter administration and had worked hard to prevent a repeat performance under Bill Clinton. A rarity in Washington, Tony had no desire to have a high profile, and he emphasized to his staff that we would succeed or fail together as a team. None of us, he stressed, had been elected to the offices we held.

All those attributes made Tony an ideal choice, I thought, to lead CIA. Selfishly, I also knew that his arrival at Langley meant that I would be able to stay on in the deputy's job—a position I was learning to love.

John Deutch—a brilliant, eccentric, and largely misunderstood figure—had an ability to translate his technical expertise into policy in a way few people could. A gregarious bear of a man, he wanted to be respected by the Agency's workforce. But shortly after he arrived at CIA, the Agency's inspector general issued a report criticizing the professionalism of some CIA officers in Guatemala in the 1980s, and John disciplined some of those named. That got him off to a rough start with the workforce. And then things got worse.

His downfall came when he told a reporter for the *New York Times Magazine* that he did not find many first-class intellects at the Agency. "Compared to uniformed officers," the *Times* quoted John as saying, "they certainly are not as competent, or as understanding of what their relative role is and what their responsibilities are." The Central Intelligence Agency is a very emotional place, and after that, John's chances of winning hearts and minds there were pretty much shot. I know he regretted his remarks. It was a valuable lesson that I would put to use later: You have to earn your employees' trust, keep your own counsel, be optimistic, and, as I always said, lead from "the perspective of the glass being always half-full."

John's tumultuous tenure at CIA ended in December 1996 when he abruptly resigned. The conventional wisdom around Washington was that he really wanted to be secretary of defense and that when it became clear that post was not to be his, he left government for good. Whatever the actual reason, after he cleaned out his desk, I became acting director.

I thought I would have to handle the two jobs for only a short while until Lake was confirmed. But four months later, the nomination was still tied up in the Senate. I figured that the delay in Tony's confirmation was behind his request to meet with me, but I had no idea why he had insisted on such an unusual location. His instructions to come alone were especially puzzling. He knew that deputy CIA directors don't go anywhere alone. Since I'd taken the job at the Agency, a heavily armed security detail had been my constant companion. Everywhere I went, I was driven around in a big, black armored SUV with a second follow car full of guys with guns. Threats against senior CIA officials by terrorists and nutcases were very real. In the four months since I had become acting DCI, the security had been ratcheted up even tighter.

Nonetheless, I tried to comply with Tony's request for discretion. I called in the chief of my security detail, Dan O'Connor, and told him that he and I needed to go for a little ride—alone. Dan, known around the Agency as "Doc," for his initials, is a big, genial New York Irishman. He would take a bullet to save my life without hesitation, but he hated the notion of our venturing out without the usual retinue of backups. His duty was to minimize the risk to me, not maximize it. Nonetheless, he drove over to my home, and the two of us headed south toward the Potomac River.

We pulled into the gravel parking lot across from the Old Angler's Inn. From there, with Doc keeping a discreet distance, I set off down a dirt path to the century-and-a-half-old canal that once carried . . .

The foregoing is excerpted from *At the Center of the Storm* by George Tenet. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced without written permission from HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022