

Episode 4

10 / Rescue

Nehemiah strained to hear above the crack of gunfire. Above him, on the spiral staircase, Melanie sprinted for the lantern room. Cody had already disappeared around the tight corner to the entrance. At least he was safe from the gunmen below. He was trying to get the door open as he shouted about an earthquake. The way the air shook made it feel like an earthquake, but Nehemiah was sure it wasn't.

Finally, he identified the sound. It was a helicopter. He wondered what a chopper was doing up in that area with the weather like it was. Certainly not a sight-seeing tour.

The masked gunmen were shouting to each other now; they had heard the helicopter too. Nehemiah watched them for a moment. From their actions, he could tell they hadn't been expecting it. But who is it?...Only one way to find out thought Nehemiah. He cast one final glance over his shoulder and sprinted to the top of the staircase. The shouting from the gunmen increased — several shots were fired — and Nehemiah felt a searing pain rip across his left shoulder. He could feel the fresh blood seeping into his shirt. Hope that's not too deep he thought as he switched the dusty box to his right hand and tucked his gun under his arm.

Gritting his teeth, he half-ran, half-jumped up to the landing where he found the lantern room door open. Melanie apparently had shot the lock out. She and Cody reached out and yanked him inside just as another storm of bullets riddled the door frame.

It was colder inside the lantern room. The floor was stone. There was a small table on one side, but the room was dominated by a huge piece of machinery that looked like an over-sized gas lamp surrounded by several panes of glass — the lantern itself.

Nehemiah listened to the sounds of the men climbing the staircase. They were coming fast. "We have about thirty seconds to get out of here," he said. "Or we're gonna have to die trying."

Just then, the wild sound of the chopper blades ruptured the frigid air.

"I wonder who that is," said Nehemiah. He tried to see out the windows, but they were too crusted over with years of dirt and grime for him to be able to see anything clearly.

"I called for backup," said Melanie coolly. "Felt we would need it."

"Good," said Nehemiah. "Cause we do." The footsteps of the gunmen were close to the door. Nehemiah opened the largest window in the room. The draft from the blades of the light gray Seahawk helicopter whipped his face as it passed a few feet overhead. "Okay, you first," he said to Cody raising his voice to be heard over the noise. "Climb out there and hold on to the railing. Don't move till they drop down a fast rope, then grab it and hold on tight."

Nehemiah stepped back as Cody climbed out the window and grabbed the railing. He looked down. "Dad, there's more gunmen on the ground," he shouted.

Nehemiah stuck his head out and cautiously inched along the railing around the lantern. There were at least six other men outside the door of the lighthouse — all masked and dressed in black like the first six. They were pointing at the helicopter and running around the side of the lighthouse seeking a better position from which to shoot.

The chopper was now circling back to the lighthouse. A camouflage-wearing door gunner crouched in the opening and started hauling out a fast rope.

Inside the lantern room, Melanie shoved the table up against the door. It will delay them at least a little she thought. She hurried to the window and climbed out a moment later.

The helicopter ascended until it was directly above the lighthouse, then the fast rope came down swinging several times in a wide circular arc.

"You see them?" Melanie shouted pointing to the men below, as Cody grabbed for the rope.

"Yeah, they're gonna shoot when we go up," Nehemiah said.

Melanie nodded, her lips pressed tightly together, as the fast rope swung around again. "Okay, when Cody goes up, we'll both cover for him. You on that side — me on this side. When I go up, you cover for me. When you go up, we'll cover you from the crowd."

"Got it," Nehemiah nodded.

On the rope's next pass, Cody was able to grab it. He held it for a moment, then lunged forward, wrapping his arms and legs around the thick cord. At the same time, Nehemiah and Melanie went in opposite directions around either side of the lantern room, firing on the gunmen below, forcing them to take cover.

Cody was lifted up and away. Slowly, slowly, the door gunner reeled him in and helped him climb into the chopper.

Nehemiah looked over his shoulder, glad to see that Cody was safe. Just as he turned back to the window they had climbed out of, the glass shattered in front of him. The doctor, now freed, lunged out of the hole, seizing Nehemiah by the lapel of his coat and knocking him to the ground.

11 / Don't Fall

Nehemiah tried to wrestle the doctor off of him, but they rolled dangerously close to the edge of the railing.

"Give it to me!" the doctor growled as he tried to wrest the box out from under Nehemiah's arm. Nehemiah held the box tightly to his left side and tried to raise his gun with his right hand, but the doctor had his arm pinned against the metal railing. Nehemiah lifted the box and struck the doctor hard in the face. The doctor screamed in pain as a streak of blood appeared from the middle of his forehead to the end of his nose, giving Nehemiah just enough time to wrench himself free.

The door gunner was hauling out the fast rope again. A second door gunner appeared behind him aiming a machine gun.

The doctor wasn't about to give up though. His arm shot up and he knocked Nehemiah's gun from his right hand. Nehemiah tried to strike him in the head with the box again. But, this time, the doctor ducked. Out of the corner of his eye, Nehemiah saw Melanie emerging from the other side of the lantern room. When she saw what was happening, she made her way toward them ignoring the fast rope that had just swung past.

"No!" Nehemiah shouted. "Get on the helicopter. Get — " His shout turned into a grunt as the doctor tackled him again, shoving him against the metal railing. Nehemiah held the box just out of the doctor's reach as he struggled to regain his footing. His mind was intent on one thing — keeping his promise to his father which meant not losing the box — and not giving it up — at least not until he found out what was in it.

Nehemiah spun first to the left and then to the right, breaking free once again. He staggered toward his gun which lay on the railing. But the doctor was faster; he jumped in front of Nehemiah and kicked the gun on the railing. It seemed as though it tumbled in slow motion, spinning, spinning, spinning until it hit the snowy ground below.

"You don't deserve to have that book," the doctor said holding one hand to his face and snorting as the blood from his wound seeped between his fingers. "You don't even know its value."

"Maybe not," said Nehemiah. "But, I'll be dead before you steal anything of value from my family." He turned slightly to catch a glimpse of the helicopter. Melanie was just taking the rope in her hands. What's taking her so long she thought as he began inching his way back to the spot where the fast rope would swing closest to the railing. He continued backing away from the doctor until he was back in front of the window.

The doctor, clearly weakened from the knock to his face, made a desperate lunge. He threw himself against Nehemiah knocking him to the ground. The box flew loose, skidding against the floor of the balcony.

Nehemiah found himself on the very edge of the railing. He turned his head, and all he could see was open space and a long, long way to the ground. Don't fall. Don't fall she thought over and over.

Melanie screamed something at him from midair where she clung to the fast rope. The door gunner wasn't reeling her in — not yet.

Suddenly, the doctor's weight left him, and Nehemiah realized he was heading for the box. An image of Eli flashed in his mind. Can't let that happen. His arm shot out, grasping the doctor's ankle and jerking him to the ground. The doctor tried to kick him off, but Nehemiah held firm. He rolled away from the edge of the railing, jumped up and scooped the box off the ground.

Melanie yelled at him again, but he could barely hear her over the sound of the chopper blades. She was still clinging to the fast rope, coming with it as it swung around again. Finally, he understood.

There would only be one chance.

Melanie reached out towards him with one hand, and he tossed the box with the other. It spun in mid-air — once, twice, three times — until Melanie's fingers gripped one corner of it. She tucked it under her arm, and the door gunner hauled her up into the helicopter.

The doctor was on his knees, his face bloodier than ever. Nehemiah didn't know if he could see that the box was now out of his reach. But, he didn't care. The next time the fast rope came around, he grabbed it quickly, and was gone.

12 / Airborne

Nehemiah looked down from the helicopter window at the lighthouse below. The doctor was gone from the lantern room balcony, and he could see the dozen or so gunmen gathered in front of the lighthouse. They were not so dangerous now that he, Melanie, and Cody were airborne — they were just black dots against the snow. Nehemiah hated having to leave his Hummer behind. He was pretty sure the gunmen — whoever they were — wouldn't be nice enough to drive it home for him. But, he was sure they knew where he lived, and that caused a sick feeling to turn his stomach. He thought about his daughter, Tanya, who was at home alone.

Besides the pilot, three other personnel occupied the cabin. They were each dressed in camouflage; two of them sat on the long bench on one side of the cabin while the other disconnected the fast rope and put it away. Finally, he closed the helicopter door, which shut out most of the noise from the blades. Nehemiah and Cody sat on the other side of the cabin on a rough, leather bench.

The dusty box sat safely between them. He had done it. He had kept his promise to his father to retrieve the book — which he had yet to confirm was actually in the wooden box. Now, he had to decide what to do with the book — begin a search for the Thirteen, or tuck it away somewhere safe.

"Dad, you're bleeding," Cody said.

"Oh... yeah," Nehemiah suddenly remembered. The pain of the bullet wound slowly came back. As his adrenaline faded, his left shoulder began to feel weak.

One of the personnel pulled a large first aid kit from a compartment underneath the bench where he was sitting. He examined the wound. "The bullet just cut your flesh. It's not deep. You shouldn't have to go to a hospital," he said. He poured some ointment on Nehemiah's shoulder and placed a bandage over the wounded area. In a few minutes, Nehemiah was sitting back against the bench. He didn't know if it was the adrenaline wearing off or the vibrations of the helicopter, but he started to feel sleepy.

Melanie had squeezed into the co-pilot's seat and put on a headset.

"Madam Secretary, what was that all about?" the pilot asked.

"I have no idea," Melanie said.

"Well, somebody's going to want to know what's taking us so long to get back and why I had to take this helicopter in the first place."

"Just tell them it was a civilian rescue mission. I'll vouch for you. The rest of this needs to stay off record," Melanie pursed her lips as she thought of everything that had happened that day. "And," she quickly added to the pilot, "I need for you to get some men down there to check out who those guys are — where they come from, what they're up to."

"I'll get right on it once we land," the pilot assured her.

The helicopter touched down at Naval Weapons Station Earle in New Jersey.

Seeing that their vehicles were left behind at the lighthouse, both Nehemiah and Melanie had to wait for rides to take them to their destinations — him to Trenton and her to Washington D.C. As they waited in an empty mess hall, Nehemiah decided that for the time being it would be best to keep the box closed — in safe-keeping. Before he decided what to do, he wanted to find out who the doctor was and who those men who had attacked them were. Those were essential questions, and he didn't want to get too deep into something that he couldn't get out of. As he saw it, after a gunfight and a narrow escape, he was in too deep already.

He slid the box across the cafeteria table to Melanie. "I think you should take it," he said. "Put it somewhere safe... You obviously have access to better security than I do."

Melanie looked down at the box, then opened her mouth, and shut it again. "N-no," she said slowly. "Dad said specifically for you to find it."

"I'm not sure we should do anything with it, though," said Nehemiah. "I mean — this business about the Correction — it's been hundreds of years. Do we really want to pursue this?"

"Maybe," said Melanie slowly, tracing the strange markings on the box's surface with her finger. "It might be worth it." Her eyes glazed over, and her mind seemed to be on something other than the present.

They both fell silent as a base employee stepped into the cafeteria.

"There's a taxi here for one of you," he announced.

Nehemiah sighed as he pulled the box back across the table. "Let's go, Cody," he said.