

# CHAPTER 1

## DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA

*I SHOULDN'T HAVE come*, Lawrence Rosen thought as he stared out the window of the cab. *I should have stayed home and pretended I'd never received it.*

But he had received the email. And opened it.

And read it.

Mr. Rosen—

April 12th, 2006. A flight to Portugal. You were one of the prisoner's escorts. I'm sure you haven't forgotten about the trip. I'm willing to make sure your name isn't included when the story is leaked, but only if you speak with me first.

One chance. Saturday. 8:30 p.m. Kilimanjaro Restaurant in the Majestic Hotel, Dar es Salaam.

There was no signature, and when he tried to send a reply, he received a message telling him the address didn't exist.

For twenty-four hours he had done nothing, hoping he could just forget about the whole thing. But the sender had been right. He did remember the flight, and he certainly remembered the prisoner. It was a taint he could never wash off.

When Saturday came, he boarded an early morning flight headed southwest from his current home in Dubai to Tanzania.

"How much longer?" he asked his taxi driver.

"Soon, soon. Fifteen minutes, no more."

Rosen looked at his watch. It was after eight already. Fifteen minutes would probably be more like twenty or thirty, meaning he'd barely arrive on time.

*This is a mistake. I should've ignored the email.*

Easy to say, but how could he have done that, really? If his name came out in association with what had happened, he had no doubt he'd be the one receiving a prisoner escort.

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“WELCOME TO THE Majestic,” the doorman said as Rosen approached the hotel entrance at exactly 8:28 p.m.

“Kilimanjaro’s?” Rosen asked.

“Twenty-third floor, sir. The elevator is past the reception desk.”

As hotel lobbies went, the Majestic’s was impressive—white marble floors adorned here and there with purple rugs, ultra-modern furniture upholstered in fabrics of green and pink and beige, and columns that rose to the ceiling two floors above, covered with purple and gold tiles. The reception desk was halfway back along the left wall, a black granite countertop manned by half a dozen smiling women.

Rosen walked quickly to the four elevator doors along the back wall. Only a few seconds passed before the one on the far right opened. He entered and pushed the button for the twenty-third floor. Just as the door started to close, a man and a woman rushed in.

“Ah, twenty-three. Perfect,” the man said.

Rosen smiled weakly as he moved into the back corner to give the others some space.

“Honey, do you mind if we stop at the room first?” the woman asked.

The man shrugged, and hit the button for the nineteenth floor. “Okay by me.”

Up they went, the new elevator barely making a sound as it shot past floor after floor. The car slowed on eighteen then stopped on the nineteenth floor. The doors slid open, and the woman stepped off. Rosen was too lost in thought to notice that the man with her did not leave also.

“Clear,” the woman said from the nineteenth-floor lobby.

The unexpected word jolted Rosen back into reality, but by then it was too late. The “husband” was already pointing a gun at Rosen, his other hand pressing the button that kept the elevator doors open.

He motioned with the gun out the door. “This is where you get off, Mr. Rosen.”

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MILA VOSS KNEW it would be dangerous before she even sent the email to Lawrence Rosen. She knew very little about his life now, how connected he might still be, how he

might react to her not-so-subtle threat. As it was, finding an active email address for him had been pushing things. She had to be very careful to minimize her exposure in his world, a world that had at one time been hers, too.

But it was a chance she had to take, because he could either confirm or dispel what she already believed.

After that?

*Get through this first, she told herself. Figure out the after later.*

Her first concern had been whether he would come at all. But twenty-two hours earlier, a flight had been booked from where he currently lived in Dubai to Tanzania, using an alias he'd traveled under previously. When she checked that morning, the airline listed a "Mark Walker" as having boarded.

Still, she wanted to be positive, so she took another big risk by hacking into the Dubai International Airport video security system. She located the footage of the gate servicing the flight to Tanzania, and scanned through the faces as passengers handed over their tickets until she spotted the one she was looking for.

Lawrence Rosen was definitely on his way to her.

Her next concern was that he wouldn't come to the hotel alone. To ensure her own safety, she had taken a room on the fifth floor two days earlier, then planted micro cameras outside the hotel, in the lobby, and outside the Kilimanjaro Restaurant. Her plan was to wait in her room until Rosen was seated in the restaurant. If everything seemed fine, she'd go up and join him. If not, she'd take the emergency stairwell down to the ground floor and get the hell out of there.

She began monitoring the feeds in earnest four hours before the appointed meeting time. If he'd arranged for anyone to act as backup, she was confident they would arrive sometime in that window.

At just after six p.m., she spotted two men and a woman in the main lobby who concerned her. They seemed a little too interested in their surroundings, too aware of what was going on. She labeled them as potential threats and continued looking for others.

As eight thirty drew closer, she became more and more anxious. Though Rosen's plane had landed several hours earlier, there was still no sign of him. Had he decided at

the last minute *not* to come? If that were the case, she'd have to write him off, and employ more aggressive tactics to find out whether she was right or not.

Just before eight thirty, a cab pulled up out front, and Rosen stepped out. Mila felt an odd mixture of relief and renewed tension. He was here. She was going to talk to him.

She watched as he walked across the lobby to the elevators, and stepped into one. She was just thinking that things would go as planned, when the three people who had concerned her earlier entered the frame. One of the men stopped and gave his companions a quick nod as they stepped into Rosen's car just before the doors closed. The man who stayed in the lobby turned away from the elevators, and began casually scanning the room—looking for her, no doubt.

*Dammit! Rosen isn't alone.*

She nearly shut her laptop and sprinted out of the room right then. The only thing that stopped her was a sense of unease. There had been something odd about Rosen's reaction to the others' arrival. The view from the camera had shown him move to the back corner when they joined him, like he didn't know them. Faking it? Possibly, but she *had* worked in the secrets business for many years, and during that time had developed a strong ability to read others.

She replayed the last few moments before the doors closed.

*No, she decided. He doesn't know them. But if that's true, who the hell are they?*

She switched to the camera covering the Kilimanjaro waiting area outside the elevators on the twenty-third floor. Half a dozen people were hovering in front of a podium where two hostesses were standing. After a moment, a group of three diners was led inside, while the others continued to wait.

Mila focused on the elevators. Minus the fifteen seconds that had already passed, the car Rosen was riding in—the one she'd labeled number four—could reach the twenty-third floor as quickly as fifty-five seconds. If the other passengers got out on a lower floor, it could take as long as two minutes, maybe more.

Fifty-five seconds passed, sixty, then the door to car number one opened and a party of six exited.

Twenty more seconds and another *ding*, followed by the door to number two parting.

When the clock reached two minutes, she frowned. Number four still hadn't arrived.

That didn't make sense. It should have—

*Ding.*

She tensed as the light next to number four lit up.

There was a pause, then the doors slid apart.

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THE NINETEENTH FLOOR was only half finished. One wing of rooms looked ready to go, but the hallway leading through the other half was still in the process of being painted, and had yet to have the signature purple carpet laid down.

The man with the gun walked behind Rosen while the woman led the way down the unfinished corridor.

“Look,” Rosen said. “I don't know what you want or who you might think I am, but you've made a mistake. I'm just here for a business meeting. You let me go, I won't say a word.”

“No mistake,” the man said.

“Of course it's a mistake!” Rosen argued, looking back over his shoulder.

If the man had been close enough, Rosen would have gone for the gun, but the guy was several feet back, out of range.

“Turn around,” the man said.

*Son of a bitch. This was a trap from the beginning,* Rosen thought.

As they neared the end of the hall, the woman opened a door and walked inside.

“Keep moving,” the gunman ordered Rosen.

This was his chance, Rosen realized. As he stepped across the threshold, he reached out, grabbed the handle, then jerked the door closed behind him and engaged the lock.

The only direction Rosen could go in the small area beyond was left. He raced down the short hallway, and entered a room lit only by the light of the city flowing in through the windows. He tensed to take on the woman.

She was there, all right, but she wasn't alone. Another man stood beside her, a gun in his hand.

Rosen felt the blood drain from his face.

Behind him, the door opened, and the gunman from the hallway joined them.

“Whatever it is you want, I'll get it. Money? Is that it? Tell me how much you want.”

“Larry, don’t embarrass yourself,” the new man said.

Rosen stared at him for a moment, then his eyes widened. “Scott?” As soon as he said the other man’s name, the full reality of what was going on hit him. “No. No. I haven’t *said* anything. I kept my mouth shut. I...I’ve never—”

“Then what are you doing here?” his former colleague asked.

“Just a business meeting,” he said. But his words closed the trap completely, and he knew it. “You know about the email.”

“Of course we know about the email.”

Rosen began shaking his head. “I wasn’t going to say anything. I wanted to see who sent it, that’s all. I wanted to be able to tell you who it was.”

“You should have said something *before* you got on that plane.” The man turned and headed for the windowed wall.

Rosen stumbled forward as he was shoved from behind. Nearing the windows, he saw something he hadn’t noticed before—a door in the glass wall. Beyond it was a patio stretching the length of the suite.

“Open it,” the woman said.

He hesitated, looking over at the man he called Scott. “Please. I realize it was just a test, but I wasn’t going to say anything. I swear.”

“Test? We didn’t send the email, Larry,” the man said. “Open the door.”

“What? Then how did you—”

“You know we can do anything that needs to be done,” the man said. “Now open the door or get shoved through it.”

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MILA STARED AT her monitor as the door for car number four remained open for several seconds, then closed again without anyone disembarking.

*Where the hell is Rosen?*

She stared at the screen, her mind racing through the possibilities until she snapped herself out of it, and slammed her computer shut. Whatever his reason for not showing up, the time for watching was over. Even if Rosen did show up, there was no way she’d meet with him now. The moment she set foot anywhere near that restaurant, she knew the remainder of her life would be measured in seconds.

She shoved her laptop into her bag as she scanned the room to make sure she'd left nothing behind. She then moved to the door and carefully pulled it open.

The hallway was empty.

Wasting no time, she sprinted to the stairwell entrance and headed down.

The stairs let out in the back corner of the main lobby. She moved carefully through the doorway, knowing the man who hadn't hopped onto the elevator was around somewhere.

She was positive Rosen had no idea who he was supposed to meet, so his friends wouldn't know, either. But even if they saw her, they wouldn't know it was her. She had taken the extra precaution of changing her appearance as much as possible. She was dressed in jeans and a beige men's shirt. A brown baseball cap covered her hair, cut short a week earlier. On her face was a pair of non-prescription, wire-frame glasses. With her breasts wrapped tightly, she looked like a young man of no more than twenty-one, an age that was actually several years in her past. She was just another tourist: bland, and not worth a second look.

At least that's what she was hoping.

As she passed the reception desk, she finally spotted the other man. He looked even more intimidating in person than on her computer monitor. She'd seen men like him hundreds of times before. He was a pro for sure.

She forced herself to keep walking like she needed to be somewhere but wasn't in a hurry. When the man turned his gaze in her direction, she was sure she'd done something to tip him off. Fortunately, her old training took control, and she neither hurried nor slowed down, keeping the pleasant smile on her face as she walked right by the man.

Though she could no longer see if he was looking at her, she sensed that he'd written her off as no one important.

As she neared the front, she realized she'd been holding her breath and finally let it out.

The doorman noticed her approach and opened the door. "Have a good evening, sir," he said as she stepped outside.

She nodded her thanks, and began walking down the sidewalk away from the hotel.

She'd made it. She was free. No, not free, she realized. Not until she got out of

Tanzania.

*Whoosh.*

The sound had come from behind and above her somewhere. It was strange enough to make her turn to see what it was, but she'd barely started twisting around when the *whoosh* was replaced by a loud, wet smack.

On a portion of the sidewalk close to the hotel's front entrance lay the twisted body of a man.

Without even thinking, she ran toward him.

If he'd been a jumper, she would have expected him to be lying on his stomach, face smashed into the ground. Instead, he was on his back, his eyes open and staring blankly at the night sky, terror still etched on his face.

*On Lawrence Rosen's face.*

She knelt down beside the man she had tricked into coming to Tanzania.

He was dead; there was no question about that. His glassy eyes reflected images he would never see.

She looked up the building, but could see no obvious spot from where he started his fall. The thought that this was an accident didn't even cross her mind. Nor did she consider the possibility that he'd come all this way just to throw himself to his death.

Someone else did this.

The man and the woman who had been on the elevator with him.

*Get out of here. Now!*

She jumped up.

"Do you know him?"

It was the doorman. He and several others who'd been out front had begun gathering around the body.

She shook her head. "No," she whispered.

"Is he dead?"

She nodded.

A woman gasped, then an old man started reciting a prayer.

"Please, everybody, stand back," the doorman said loudly, trying to take charge. "We must keep this area clear." He then spoke in Swahili, presumably repeating his warning.

But no one moved. Except Mila, who slipped unseen to the back of the growing crowd and disappeared into the city.

## CHAPTER 2

### WASHINGTON, DC

“THIS WAY,” THE senator’s assistant said.

He led Peter down a long hallway lined with dark wood. Hung along it were black and white pictures taken at various locations around the world. The senator appeared in every image, sometimes looking no more than thirty, and in others middle-aged. There was always someone else in the photo with him, shaking hands or smiling or just looking at something that was out of frame. Trophy shots. The powerful American helping those in need, especially if the need was military in nature.

The assistant finally stopped next to a closed door. He knocked twice, then turned the knob and ushered Peter inside.

“Senator,” the man said. “Your guest has arrived.”

A large man with a full head of hair that was now more white than blond pushed himself off a couch. The senator looked older and stockier than he did in most of the hallway pictures, but his eyes were still piercing, and there was no missing the aura of power that radiated from him. He held out his hand. “Peter. Good to see you.”

“Senator Mygatt,” Peter said as they shook.

As of just over a year ago, Christopher Mygatt was actually no longer a senator, but like many titles in Washington, his was one that would stick with him until he obtained a better one.

The senator turned to another man sitting in a chair next to the coffee table at one end of the large office. “You know William Green, of course.”

“Yes,” Peter said, nodding a greeting.

Green was a weaselly man who’d been in the intelligence business about as long as Peter had been. Peter had done everything he could to avoid working with the man, but a few times when he was running the now-defunct organization known as the Office, he’d had no choice but to associate with Green. No matter how simple the assignment had been, Peter always felt he needed a bottle of hand sanitizer nearby whenever he even talked to the man on the phone.

“Peter,” Green said. “How are you coping?”

Keeping his tone neutral, Peter said, “Fine, thanks.”

“Would you like something to drink?” Mygatt asked him.

“No, thank you.”

The senator glanced at his assistant. “Some tea for me, if you would. William?”

“Coffee.”

As soon as the assistant left, Mygatt motioned at the couch. “Please, join us.”

Peter sat.

“So, I understand you’ve been doing some consulting,” Mygatt said.

“Sitting behind a desk, making a suggestion now and then that no one listens to.”

Peter shrugged. “I guess you can call that consulting.”

“I’d call that a waste of taxpayers’ money,” Green said.

Peter ignored the comment, and said to the senator, “I understand you’re doing well, sir.”

“Things are moving in interesting directions,” Mygatt said.

“So it seems. If the rumors are true—”

The senator waved a hand in the air. “I don’t deal with rumors. Only facts.”

“And what are the facts?”

A mischievous smile crossed the man’s lips. “Now, Peter. I also don’t talk before it’s time.”

Mygatt was no longer a senator because he’d left to serve as his political party’s committee chairman. Now that the presidential primaries were over and the convention was looming, there was talk that his sure-handed stewardship of the party might lead to something considerably more visible. Specifically the vice presidential spot on the upcoming ticket.

But Peter had his doubts about that. He was sure the vice presidency was not the kind of position Mygatt would enjoy. Too much ceremony and not enough action. He had a feeling there was another position or two the senator was eyeing. *Those* rumors, though not as vocal, had been circulating, too.

The assistant reentered the room carrying a tray with Green’s coffee, and a teapot and cup for Mygatt. He set it on the coffee table, excused himself, and left.

“Peter,” Mygatt said as he poured his tea. “I’ve asked you here because I wanted to discuss something you might be able to do for me.”

“I thought it might be something like that,” Peter said. “I’m afraid, sir, you’ve wasted your time. The contract I have with my current employer clearly states I’m excluded from doing work with private industry.”

“Like no one ever cheats on the government,” Green scoffed, himself a government lifer.

The senator raised his cup. “The project I have in mind might be better referred to as a favor.”

Peter shrugged. “You can call it whatever you want, but I’m not the man you’re looking for.”

“Actually, you are,” Green countered. “It’s finishing something you were supposed to have completed a long time ago.”

Peter frowned, and shook his head. “I have no idea what you’re talking about, and quite honestly, I don’t care. I have a job, and that’s all I need. Thank you, senator, for considering me, but I’m going to have to pass.” He stood up. “Now, if you’ll excuse me.”

“Peter,” Mygatt said, his voice sterner than before. “Whether you help us or not, you’re involved. Wouldn’t you rather be in a position to control the situation than have to deal with the fallout later?”

Peter remained where he was, but said nothing.

“I’d like to show you something,” Mygatt said. “If you want to leave afterward, you’re more than welcome to do so.”

“What is it?”

“Just sit. It’ll only take a moment.”

“I think I’ll stand.”

Mygatt laughed softly. “Fine. Then stand.” He looked at Green. “Please.”

Green picked up a remote control from the coffee table and aimed it at the television monitor on the credenza at the end of the sitting area. The screen flashed a vibrant blue before displaying a paused nighttime video.

“This is the main entrance to the Majestic Hotel in Dar es Salaam,” Green explained. “I assume you’ve never been there.”

“I’ve heard of it,” Peter said. “New, right?”

“It just opened a month ago. Watch the area close to the building about fifteen feet beyond the entrance.”

Green hit PLAY, and the still image began to move. People went in and out of the building in a steady stream—couples, a few men together, several men on their own—keeping the two doormen out front busy.

“Here we go,” Mygatt said.

For a moment, there was nothing unusual, then something flashed down from the top of the screen and whacked into the sidewalk.

“Son of a bitch,” Peter couldn’t help saying.

Where seconds before people had been walking, a body now lay sprawled on the concrete, its arms and legs jutting out at impossible angles.

“Who the hell is that?”

Green paused the playback. “His name was Lawrence Rosen.”

*Rosen?* The name sounded familiar. “A security guy, right? Does protection, things like that?”

“Very good. He went freelance a few years ago.”

“So what was he doing in Tanzania?”

“Meeting someone.”

“Looks like the meeting got cut short,” Peter said. “Is there a point here?”

“Patience,” Mygatt said. He nodded at Green.

The playback started up again. Most of the people closest to the entrance turned and stared in shock at Rosen’s body. One person, though, ran out from the darkness on the far side over to the dead man. It was a guy who had left the hotel moments before, Peter realized, the one wearing a baseball cap.

The man knelt down beside the body, checked to make sure Rosen was dead, then glanced upward as if trying to see where the body had come from. Suddenly, he jumped to his feet, and within seconds had melted into the growing group of onlookers that had started to crowd around the body. As soon as he disappeared, Green stopped the video again.

“That’s it?” Peter asked. “I still don’t understand what I’m supposed to be looking

for.”

“The man in the baseball hat,” Green said. “Did you recognize him?”

“No. Should I have?”

Green hit another button. “How about now?”

The hotel image was replaced by a close-up of the man in the hat from when he’d exited the building. The guy looked young, early twenties at best. A tanned Caucasian, maybe Latino. No way to tell for sure. He was wearing glasses and looked otherwise unremarkable.

“Still nothing?” Green asked.

Peter prided himself on his memory of names and faces. “I’ve never seen him.”

Mygatt leaned forward. “Are you sure?”

The way the senator asked the question made Peter hesitate. “Who is he?”

“Show him.”

Green once more did his trick with the remote. The shot on the monitor was replaced this time by a split-screen image. On both halves were identical close-ups of the man’s face in front of the hotel. Then, while the one on the left remained the same, the one on the right began to change. The glasses disappeared first, then the hat. After that, the hair grew until it was past the man’s shoulders, and went from sandy blond to dark brown. There was a slight altering of the cheeks and lips, and the eyes turned from brown to gray-green.

The man in the baseball cap wasn’t a man at all. Worse, the woman underneath the disguise *was* someone Peter recognized. But that was...

...*impossible*.

“So tell me, Peter,” Mygatt said. “How is it that a dead woman is walking the streets of Dar es Salaam?”

Six years earlier, the Office had been assigned the task of terminating Mila Voss by Mygatt via Green. At the time, the senator was not yet a senator, but the deputy secretary of defense overseeing military intelligence. Green was his CIA liaison. Though the project was not without its problems, the mission had been completed, and Peter reported back to his clients that the courier Mila Voss had been eliminated.

Only it was clear now that the mission had not been as successful as he’d been led to

believe.

“I...don’t have an answer for you,” Peter said.

“Convenient,” Green spat.

“Peter,” Mygatt said, his voice calm. “You need to find her for us.”

“And while you’re at it, maybe you should *finish* the job,” Green threw in.

There was no way Peter could walk out now. The fallout from this could turn extremely ugly. As Mygatt had pointed out, his only chance at controlling the situation was to be involved. He nodded, and said, “I’ll get back to you.”

“Soon,” the senator said.

“Yes. Soon.”

“I have a man named Olsen who will be back later today,” Green said. “We’d like him to assist you.”

“That’s not necessary.”

Green leaned forward, glaring. “Considering what *didn’t* happen before, I don’t think you’re in the position to determine what’s necessary or not.”

Mygatt stood up, a smile on his face. “Just consider him my personal contact, freeing you up to concentrate on the job at hand. I’m sure there won’t be any problems.”

Peter knew he had little choice. “All right,” he said. “Do you have any paper?”

“On the desk.”

Peter found a notepad and pen on the blotter, quickly wrote down an address, and handed it to Green. “That’s to an apartment in Georgetown, a remote office I’ll be using.” He turned his attention to the senator. “I need to finish a couple of things for my current employer so I can free up some time without them becoming suspicious. I’m sure you’ll agree that we don’t want anyone else looking into this matter.”

Mygatt nodded. “That would be unwise.”

Peter looked at his watch. It was nearing two p.m. “I’ll be in Georgetown by seven. If this Olsen guy is here by then, send him over.”

“See? I knew you’d want to take care of this.”

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INSTEAD OF CATCHING one of the available taxis at the corner, Peter continued on foot. Twice he doubled back, and three times he made sudden stops before crossing streets in

the middle of the block, making sure he wasn't being followed. Not until he was positive he was clean did he finally hail a cab. Paranoia was part of his DNA, and explained why he lived as long as he had.

A simple phone call to the agency he'd been working with was all it took to get some time off. A family emergency, he said. He might be gone a week or longer. As he'd known, the man overseeing him didn't care. He'd be happy not to have Peter underfoot.

Peter had the cab drop him near a metro station, then took the train—changing lines twice—out to Arlington. While he did indeed have a fully equipped apartment in Georgetown, ready to use for any kind of special operations, it wasn't the only secret place available to him. Even in his reduced role within the intelligence community, he maintained over half a dozen different locations in the DC area alone.

The place where he was now headed was located in a walled-off, soundproofed section of a church basement that could only be accessed through an underground tunnel from a self-storage unit next door. He was the only one who knew of its existence, unlike the apartment in Georgetown.

Using yet another indirect route, he made his way from the station to the storage facility. The door to his unit was inside a cover hallway, itself accessed via a number-coded lock on the outside door. The code he'd been given was a generic one that all the tenants used, so it was impossible to know who punched it in. For that, the facility relied on a security camera mounted near the door. Peter wasn't worried about that, either. His years of working as a spook wrangler had given him a healthy sense of paranoia, so he never went anywhere without a portable electronic jamming device in his pocket. He switched it on before approaching the door, and knew that for the few seconds he was there, the camera would seemingly malfunction.

Inside, he made his way to his unit, and input the combination on the bottom of the lock. This didn't actually open it. Instead, it released a small panel on the surface that exposed a touch screen. He placed his left thumb against it, waited, and heard the faint click of the real lock on the inside of the door as it disengaged. The padlock remained closed, having already served its purpose. He pulled on it, and the door swung out.

The interior light came on as soon as the door was back in place. The unit looked pretty standard, albeit with only about half the amount of stuff it could have held. Peter

moved around a couple stacks of cardboard boxes, and lifted a nearly invisible trap door in the concrete floor.

Forty-five seconds later, he was sitting in his safe room below the church.

Using one of the disposable phones he kept there, he called Misty first. She had been his assistant back in the Office days, and proved herself time and again as one of his most valuable assets.

“Misty?” he said.

There was a long pause. “What’s wrong?”

“An old case has resurfaced. I need your help.”

Another hesitation. “You’ll have to get me out of my current gig.”

“You’re still at the Labor Board?”

“Yes.”

“All right. I can do that. Finish out the day. You won’t need to go back until we’re done.”

“When and where do you want me to report?”

“You remember the townhouse in Georgetown?” he asked.

“The one on the top floor?”

“Yes.”

“I remember it.”

“After work, go home, pack a bag, and head there.” He paused. It had been six months since he’d checked in with her. “You *can* do that, right?”

“Are you asking if I have someone waiting for me at home?” She laughed. “Just Harry.”

Harry was her dog, a little Westie that was getting up in years.

“Can someone watch him?”

“My neighbor. What am I supposed to do when I get to the apartment?”

“I should be there ahead of you. If not, just get everything operational and wait for me.”

His next call was to the one man who could clear up what had gone down in Las Vegas the night Mila Voss was supposed to have died.

One ring, two. After the third, a recorded voice said, “Please leave a message.”

“Quinn, it’s Peter. I need you to call me as soon as you get this. Don’t blow me off. I need to talk to you *now*.” He gave the number of the phone and hung up.

He tried to remember the last time he’d spoken with Jonathan Quinn. It had been a while. Once the Office was disbanded, Peter had no longer been in a position to need the cleaner’s talent for disposing of unwanted bodies.

While he waited for Quinn to call him back, he logged on to his secure computer, and started putting feelers out to some of the sources he had in Asia, seeing if anyone might have unknowingly worked with Mila.

At a quarter after four, his phone rang. Only Misty and Quinn had the number, so he snatched it up without looking at the display.

“Yes?” he said.

“You called?” Not Misty.

“Quinn?”

“Hello, Peter.”

Not Quinn, either.

## CHAPTER 3

### BANGKOK, THAILAND

BROWSERS AND SHOPPERS and people who had nothing better to do crowded the sidewalk, checking out the stalls and tables selling charms and tokens and Buddhas by the bucketful. Though their number included more than a few tourists, most were Thai. The sellers who offered the best wares drew the largest crowds, sometimes making the sidewalk impassible for a minute or two.

On the street itself, cars were caught in a logjam, their pace even slower than that of the pedestrians—a few feet forward, stop, wait, a few feet more.

One of the taxis veered toward the curb. Before it had even stopped, the rear door swung open, and a *farang*—a foreigner—climbed out. Dressed in jeans and a black T-shirt, he looked like just another Westerner out exploring the sights of the Land of Smiles. But he hadn't come to Thailand for the culture. He was there for only one purpose.

Those on the sidewalk seemed to sense the difference in him. It wasn't fear he invoked, but something closer to determination, a sense of mission, causing Thais and tourists alike to move to the side so that his path was unimpeded.

The clouds that had been gathering above Bangkok all morning had finally blanketed the sky, and the distant rumble of thunder warned of a change ahead. Many of the street vendors began to double-check the canopies and umbrellas that covered their goods, and those who didn't have protection began packing up.

The smell arrived first. Rain on asphalt, perhaps a few blocks away. Then the initial drops began to fall. It started as a smattering, nothing more than a tease, but within seconds became a downpour, skipping all steps in between.

Tourists caught in the open rushed for cover, while the locals, who lived with the rain every day, went on with business as usual. The man in the black T-shirt continued walking as if the sun were still shining, and gave the rain no acknowledgment whatsoever.

It wasn't long before he came to the point where the road took a sharp turn to the

right. Instead of continuing with it, he went left into a short extension of the asphalt filled with food carts, where cars were no longer welcome. Dozens of tables were set up under umbrellas and tarps, crowded with people enjoying meals and staying dry.

Vendors called out to the man, trying to entice him to stop. Each time he put his hands together in front of his chest and bowed his head slightly in a Thai *wai*, thanking them for the offer but never once slowing his pace.

At the back end of the food area was a permanent structure. Inside were more stalls, a mixture of food and T-shirt vendors and souvenir shops. This was where the majority of the *farang* tourists had taken refuge.

The man walked all the way through the building and out the other end, onto a covered ramp that led down to a dock. Beyond was the wide and mighty Chao Phraya, the river that sliced the city in half. Its brown water was littered with green patches of vegetation floating rapidly southward toward the Gulf of Thailand. Long boats and barges and small river ferries, unconcerned about the rain, continued to move up and down it.

On the covered part of the dock, several people waited for one of the ferries to arrive. The man could see it approaching from the north. Like the others that traveled between the piers, it was long and low to the water, with rows of seats along each edge, like a canopy-covered airliner missing the top half of its tube.

The man walked all the way down to the dock, and took a position several feet from the others. He carefully scanned the river, noting at a subconscious level where each vessel was.

With a series of whistles from a man at the back of the boat, the ferry eased against the dock, then the motor was thrown into reverse to hold it in place. The whistler jumped off, and tied the vessel to the pier. As soon as he was out of the way, half a dozen passengers piled off, then those who had been waiting climbed aboard.

The only one who hadn't moved was the man in the black T-shirt. The whistler gave him a questioning look, wondering whether he was going to get on, but the man on the dock shook his head. Seconds later, with another whistle, the ferry took off.

As the man scanned the river, he resisted the urge to bend his leg. He knew the cramp he felt in his right calf was all in his imagination. He didn't *have* a right calf, only

a high-tech prosthetic attached to the few inches that remained of his leg below his knee. The phantom pains and discomforts were more an annoyance now than anything. He'd taught himself how to deal with them, and knew how to push them from his mind. After a moment, the cramp went away.

From the south, the high-pitched sound of a motor rose above the other noises on the river. Not a longboat, not even a ferry. It was a powerboat that looked like it would be more at home on a lake in the States than here on the Chao Phraya. It was racing down the center of the river. Then, as it drew closer, it veered toward the dock, where its wake rushed toward the longboats tied up nearby, rocking them against the docks and causing more than a few angry shouts.

*Not exactly subtle*, the man thought.

It had almost reached the dock when it powered down and let the river's current bring it to a stop. There were two men on board. One hopped off the back and looped a rope around the end of a pillar.

The second remained at the controls. He looked over at the waiting man and smiled. "I believe you hired boat for day, yes?"

The expected question.

"That's right. You came recommended." The expected answer.

Once the man in the black T-shirt climbed aboard, the guy who'd roped off the boat untied it and jumped into the back.

"Can go under," the pilot said, pointing at the door to the lower cabin. "No rain, and have beer and food if you want. Can sleep also. Will take us a couple hours, I think."

"I'm fine here," his new passenger replied.

The pilot shrugged. "Up to you." The smile came out again. "Welcome aboard, Mr. Quinn."

"Thank you," Nate said.

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THE RIVER TOOK them north out of the city, and away from the rain. After about an hour, they reached Ayutthaya—the capital of Siam in centuries past—and skirted around its southern edge until it bent northwest into the countryside.

Small villages and farms surrounded the river, quickly turning the craziness of

Bangkok—and, to a lesser extent, Ayutthaya—into a distant memory.

After a while, the pilot said, “Not long now.”

Nate nodded, his gaze fixed on the river ahead. Not for the first time, he played through his mind some of the possible scenarios of what was about to happen. This kind of thinking had been part of his early training when he was an apprentice cleaner to Jonathan Quinn.

It had been an invaluable tool. In a world where their job was to make bodies disappear, the ability to be flexible and immediately react to any situation was often the difference between success and becoming one of the bodies.

The problem with his upcoming meeting was that he’d already thought of at least a dozen ways it could go, and was sure there were at least a dozen others he hadn’t even considered.

A few minutes later, the river bent to the right and straightened again. As it did, a temple came into view on the left bank about a quarter mile ahead. Like with all Buddhist temples in Thailand, the upside down, conical stupa—or, as the Thais called it, *chedi*—rose prominently in the middle of the temple grounds. This one, unlike some others he’d seen, was not covered in gold. Its pitted surface had been white once, but dirt and mold had worked their way into the nooks and cracks, dulling its long forgotten brightness.

The temple building itself was undergoing renovations. An intricate, clearly makeshift wooden scaffolding had been erected around most of the structure. A small group of men was spread out along it, working on the temple walls.

The boat’s engine began to throttle back, and the man at the wheel steered the craft toward the small pier that served the temple. Through the bushes at the edge of the bank, Nate thought he could see movement on the temple grounds. When the boat was only a hundred feet away, three monks wearing bright orange robes, their heads shaved bare, stepped onto the dock and watched them approach.

The boat’s pilot eased them forward, and with a perfect touch, brought the side of the vessel up against several old tires that buffered the dock.

“Wat Doi Thong,” he said, announcing the name of the temple. “How long do you think?”

“I don’t know,” Nate told him.

“I don’t want to spend night out here.”

“Neither do I, but you’re being paid enough, so if it happens, it happens.”

Nate stepped onto the dock.

“Mr. Quinn.”

Nate looked back. “Yes?”

“You like one of us come with you?”

“That won’t be necessary.”

The pilot seemed relieved. “Okay. No problem. We be here.”

Nate walked over to the monks and gave them a deep *wai*. “*Sawadee, krap.*”

The monks returned the *wai* and the greeting, almost as one.

“*Khun phood phasa Angrit, dai mai?*” Nate said, asking if any of them spoke English.

The middle monk seemed to think for a moment, then said slowly, “Sorry. Only Thai.”

Nate was about to call to the boat pilot and have him do some translating, when a new voice said, “I speak English.”

A man was standing on the shore just past where the dock ended. Nate was sure he hadn’t been there a moment before. He, too, was wearing a saffron robe, but unlike the other monks, he sported a goatee and had a full head of black hair that fell almost to the base of his neck. On his exposed shoulder, Nate could see a tattoo of a tiger peeking up over the top, like it was ready to pounce off the man’s back.

Nate walked toward him. “Great. I believe I was expected. My name’s—”

“I know who you are,” the man said. Surprisingly, though he looked Thai, he sounded as American as Nate did. “I’m afraid you’ve wasted the trip, though.”

Nate stopped at the edge of the dock. “He’s not here?”

“He’s made it clear he has no desire for visitors.”

“This isn’t a social call.”

“I’m sorry,” the man said, then glanced at the boat. “If you leave now, you might get back to Bangkok before it gets too late.”

Nate stepped onto the shore. “If he doesn’t want to see me, he can tell me that himself.”

A wry smile appeared on the long-haired monk's face. "That would be defeating the purpose, don't you think?"

"I don't care about the purpose. I'm not leaving until I see him."

"Then I think you should make yourself comfortable. You're going to be waiting a long time."

"Yeah?" Nate said, taking another step forward. "Well, I don't have time to wait, either."

The man laughed. "You're playing right into the American stereotype. Always in a hurry."

Nate walked up the short path, straight toward the monk. When he neared him, he said, "Excuse me."

The man, still smiling, stepped to the side, but just as Nate passed him, the monk grabbed him from behind and twisted him around, intending to knock Nate to the ground.

Nate was ready for it. Since the first moment he'd seen the monk, he knew the man would not simply back down. There was a roughness to him, a spark in his eye, and a set to his stance that spoke of a life not unfamiliar with violence.

Nate shifted his weight, bringing his shoulder under the monk's chest then heaving him upward and tossing the man to the side. Freed, he continued toward the temple.

But the monk was not through with him. Before Nate had gone ten feet, the man came at him again, slamming Nate in the back and knocking him off the path into a knee-high, white stone fence.

Off-balanced, Nate jumped as best he could over the obstruction, scraping his left shin on the top, but maintaining his footing as he landed on the other side. He whirled around, sure that the monk would come at him again.

The man hit Nate in the chest like a linebacker, and together they fell onto the ground with a thud. A dull ache throbbled for a moment in the upper left of Nate's chest. About nine months earlier he'd been shot there. The wound had healed well, and he'd done everything he could to regain the strength he'd had before, but on occasion, the injury would still remind him of its presence.

The monk wrapped a leg over Nate's waist, and attempted to pin the cleaner in place. With all his strength, Nate pushed the man to the side and spun after him.

“Nate! Daeng! Enough.”

Both men stopped struggling, and looked over at the man standing twenty feet away.

“Get up,” Jonathan Quinn said. “You’re making fools of yourselves.”