

A Raging Storm

Derrick Storm, #2

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Chapter 1

Washington, D.C.

Present day, 7:15 P.M.

A dead United States senator was in his arms.

Derrick Storm had been the first to reach him and the only one who'd heard his dying words: *Midas—Jedidiah knows*. Seconds earlier, Senator Thurston Windslow had been alive and angry. He'd leaped from his chair and was about to reveal who had abducted and murdered his stepson when a bullet sent him crashing to the floor. From his crouched position, Storm could see the bullet hole in the large window directly behind the elderly statesman's desk.

It was dusk outside, and the window had turned into a mirror, making it impossible for Storm to spot the assassin. Along with the three women with him inside the Dirksen Senate Building office, Storm was a sitting duck.

"Get down!" he yelled at Gloria Windslow, the senator's newly widowed wife. She was standing in the center of the room in shock.

Storm needed to act before the sniper fired again. Springing to his feet, he dashed around the desk in a blur of motion. Like an attacking lion, he lunged at Gloria, throwing his right arm around her waist in mid-flight, pulling her down onto the thick carpet out of harm's way.

FBI Agent April Showers and Samantha Toppers were already prone on the floor. Showers was clutching her .40-caliber Glock semiautomatic in one hand. The other was gripped around a pair of stainless steel handcuffs that she had snapped onto Toppers's wrists before the shooting.

As in all Capitol Hill buildings, the senator's office had been refitted recently with bullet-resistant glass windows that were supposed to prevent the sort of assassination that they'd just witnessed. By composing them of five thick pieces of shatterproof glass, the manufacturer had guaranteed the windows would stop bullets fired from guns as powerful as a .44-caliber magnum revolver—even if they were shot at close range. But the window had offered little real protection from a professional killer using a high-powered sniper's rifle. The layers of safety glass may have slightly altered the slug's path, because it hit the senator's left shoulder rather than what was surely its intended target—his heart. That shift had kept him from dying instantly and given him seconds to whisper his dying words.

Jedidiah knows was clearly a reference to Jedidiah Jones, the cranky director of the CIA's National Clandestine Service and the man responsible for dragging Storm into this thorny mess. What the word *Midas* meant was less clear, but since Jones was involved, Storm suspected it was the name of a covert CIA mission.

"The drapes," FBI Agent Showers called out.

Storm followed her eyes to a red button on the wall next to the office window. Releasing his hold around Gloria Windslow's waist, he shot forward, punching the

button with his palm and dropping to the carpet just as another bullet pierced the glass—this one aimed at his head. The slug sailed by his left ear and smacked into the senator's desk, causing splinters of polished mahogany to spray through the air.

That was close.

How many times can a man cheat death?

"You OK?" a concerned Agent Showers hollered.

"Piece of cake," he replied. "But thanks for caring."

"If anyone is going to kill you," she replied with a smile, "it should be me—for you pushing yourself into my case."

"But we're having so much fun together, aren't we?" he called back.

With the heavy drapes now drawn, Agent Showers rose to her feet, pulling Toppers with her up from the floor. "Don't move!" she ordered Toppers, a twenty-something college student whose entire body was trembling.

Storm started for the office door just as a uniformed U.S. Capitol Police officer burst through it, followed by another. Both had their guns drawn and they instinctively divided their targets. One aimed at Showers, the other at Storm.

"Freeze!" the first cop yelled.

"I'm FBI!" Showers shouted. "Special Agent April Showers. The shot came from outside, not here. The senator is down."

Not sure how to react, one officer kept his pistol leveled at her while the other rushed over to examine Windslow's body.

"He's dead!" the officer confirmed.

"She just told you that," Storm said.

"Show me identification!" the cop with his gun aimed at Agent Showers commanded.

"Take it easy," Showers replied as she slowly holstered her pistol and fished out her FBI credentials.

"How about you?" the other officer asked Storm.

"Don't mind me. I'm a nobody—just ask her."

"He's with me," Showers declared. "He's a private detective named Steve Mason, hired to help the senator."

Steve Mason was the pseudonym that Jedidiah Jones had given Storm when he brought him to Washington to help solve a tricky case.

Looking down at Windslow's limp body and then back at Storm, the cop asked, "Is this the senator you were supposed to help?"

Storm grimaced and said, "Actually, things were going rather well—until he just got shot."

"This woman is under arrest," Showers said, nodding at the traumatized Toppers. "Watch her, seal off this crime scene, and call the number on this card." She jabbed her FBI business card at the officer. "Tell the person who answers that the senator's been murdered."

"What buildings are across from this office window?" Storm asked.

"Only one building is out there," the officer at the doorway replied. "The Capitol Police Building—our headquarters."

"That's got to be where the shot came from," Storm said, moving toward the room's exit.

“Call your dispatcher,” Showers said, falling behind him. “Tell him to lock down your entire police headquarters. Stop anyone who’s coming down from the roof.”

A bewildered look washed over the officer’s face.

“Do it now!” she yelled. “And get a doctor for Mrs. Windslow. She’s in shock.”

“Wait,” the officer said as she scooted by him. “You two shouldn’t leave, should you? I mean, you’re witnesses.”

But she and Storm were already halfway down the building’s corridor. The killing had all the traces of a professional hit. Every passing second was working against catching the killer. Storm reached C Street first, with Showers on his heels. The eight-story police headquarters was about four hundred yards ahead of them. It sat in the center of a vast parking lot and was the only structure tall enough to accommodate a sniper.

The assassin must be wearing a disguise. How else would he have gotten onto the rooftop of a police headquarters without being noticed?

Storm and Showers reached the building’s front entrance just as a Containment and Emergency Response Team, the equivalent of a police department’s SWAT squad, burst through the double glass doors on its way to the Dirksen Building. Flashing her credentials, Showers exclaimed, “A sniper fired from your rooftop!”

Speaking into his headset, the CERT’s leader said, “Dispatch CERT Two to check the rooftop. Armed suspect may still be there. No one gets in or out of our building. Lock her down. Now!”

Addressing Showers, he said, “We have jurisdiction here. You need to stand down.”

Before she could respond, his team began racing across the parking lot.

Storm, meanwhile, was scanning the area, confident that the shooter had already fled from the building. To their immediate left was a city park that separated Capitol Hill from Union Station, the main rail hub in Washington D.C. It served both Amtrak and subway lines, was always filled with travelers, and was exactly where Storm would have gone to disappear into a crowd.

“There!” he yelled, pointing a finger north toward Columbus Circle, the traffic interchange directly in front of the train station. Showers spotted the lone figure as he walked under a street lamp. They couldn’t see his face from this distance, but they could see that he was wearing a blue shirt and black pants—a U.S. Capitol Police uniform. All of the other officers either were locked inside the headquarters building or were scurrying as quickly as they could toward the Senate office building. But this officer was casually walking *away* from the action.

“That’s got to be him,” Storm said, breaking into a run.

Showers pounded on the headquarters’ now locked front doors and pressed her FBI credentials against the glass. “The shooter is getting away. Call the D.C. police at Union Station! He’s disguised as one of your officers!”

The officers standing guard behind the glass gave her blank stares. Frustrated, she used her cell phone to call the D.C. police department.

In top physical shape, Storm could run a mile in less than four and a half minutes, even in street shoes. But despite his quickness, his target entered Union Station before he could reach him. Storm eyeballed the crowd as soon as he burst inside the station’s massive lobby. No Capitol Hill uniforms were in sight.

I’m dealing with a professional, he told himself.

A D.C. cop was loitering near the entrance to the Amtrak ticket line. Storm dashed over to him.

“There’s been a shooting on Capitol Hill,” he said. “The gunman is dressed like a Capitol Hill Police officer and he just came in here. Did you see him?”

With a skeptical look, the cop said, “And who, exactly, are you? You got a badge?”

“I’m a private investigator.”

“Let’s see your ID.”

Dealing with this dolt was a waste of time. A men’s room. That’s where the shooter would go to ditch his disguise. Emerge as someone else. Someone who wouldn’t stick out. A tourist. A businessman. A janitor. A construction worker. Anyone but a Capitol Hill cop.

There was a large RESTROOM sign to his left. Storm ran past it into the room. A long string of startled men peeing at urinals glanced up. When Storm drew his handgun, they panicked and scrambled past him out the exit, some not bothering to zip their pants. There were seven stalls across from the urinals. Storm could see beneath the doors that three were occupied.

He pounded on the first stall’s door, and when the occupant let loose with a profanity, Storm stepped back and kicked it open.

“What the—” the startled man sitting on the commode exclaimed, his sentence cut short when he saw Storm’s Glock.

“Sorry,” Storm said. “You can go back to your business.”

He moved to the next stall, but when he knocked on the door, its occupant opened it and immediately raised his hands. It was a teenage boy. The last occupant was an old man. None of them had been changing out of a Capitol Hill uniform. None of them had looked suspicious.

“Drop it!” a voice behind Storm yelled. It was the D.C. cop from the lobby.

Raising his Glock above his head, Storm slowly turned to face him.

“Are you crazy, man?” the cop asked him. “What the hell you doing, busting in here, waving around a gun? You’re lucky I didn’t shoot you just now.”

“I’m looking for a sniper,” Storm said. “Like I told you, he’s dressed as a Capitol Hill cop. We need to close off the exits before he escapes.”

“Then you are crazy,” he replied. “Even if I wanted, there’s no way to shut down this building in time. We got entrances out onto the street, downstairs to the subway lines, and out back to the trains.”

A second D.C. cop came running inside with his gun drawn.

“What’s happening?” he asked his partner.

“He says he’s a private eye looking for an assassin.”

The newly arrived officer asked Storm, “You high on something?”

“Get his weapon,” the first cop declared.

Holstering his sidearm, the second officer stepped forward, took Storm’s Glock, and ordered him to “assume the position.”

Storm placed both hands flat against the wall and spread his legs. Resigned, he said, “Don’t tickle.”

Agent Showers came flying into the men’s room. “FBI!” she said, waving her badge. “You’ve got the wrong guy. He’s with me.”

“Then you can have him,” the first officer said, lowering his gun. The second officer stopped frisking Storm, who turned and said, “My gun please.”

The officer handed it back.

Storm walked over to a nearby trash container and flipped open its lid. But there was nothing inside it except crumpled paper towels and trash. He checked a second one. There was no Capitol Hill policeman’s uniform inside it either.

“We’ll check the lobby,” the first officer announced.

“Great,” replied Storm, knowing the killer was probably long gone.

“What exactly are we looking for?” the second officer asked.

“At this point?” Storm replied. “A ghost.”

Storm and Showers stepped from the men’s room together. A third trash container was a few feet away, located between the entrances to the men’s and women’s restrooms. Storm checked it. A blue Capitol Hill Police officer’s shirt was stuffed inside, complete with a badge and pair of black slacks.

Pulling the shirt from the bin, Storm said, “It’s a small. We’re looking for a man probably under six feet, about a hundred and fifty pounds.”

Together they scanned the waves of people scurrying by them in the cavernous station’s lobby. Dozens of men fit that description. The shooter could have been anyone, anywhere.

“How’d you know I was in the men’s room?” Storm asked.

“Do you think you’re the only one who can think like a fleeing criminal?” she replied.

Storm smiled. “It could have been embarrassing for you if I hadn’t been in there.”

“Not really,” Showers said.

“Oh, you’ve been in a lot of men’s rooms, have you?”

She simply smiled and said, “Let’s go. We got a killer to catch.”

Chapter 2

Moscow, Russia

Mayakovskaya Metro Station

“We are the new Russia!” President Oleg Barkovsky declared, ending his three-hour-long speech. The crowd leaped to its feet. They stomped on the floor. They hollered. They whistled. No one grumbled about the late hour. No one complained that it had been five hours since the evening’s meal had been cleared from the tables. The vodka had flowed freely all night. Barkovsky’s aide, Mikhail Sokolov, had made sure of it. The many toasts and earlier speeches had been painstakingly choreographed to build momentum for this moment.

Barkovsky’s ovation was the evening’s grand finale.

The Russian president made no effort to calm the frenzied crowd. He stretched out his arms—Christ-like—behind the podium and drunk in their revelry. In his mind, he deserved it.

Barkovsky was transforming Russia. The reforms of the past—*glasnost* and *perestroika*—were dead. Gone were the leaders who had betrayed Mother Russia by destroying the great Communist Party. Gone were the oligarchs who had raped the nation, stealing billions and billions. Like a mythical Phoenix, Barkovsky had arisen from the chaos of the imploded former superpower. He'd kicked out the money-grubbing foreign capitalists who had arrived promising reforms but had only lined their own pockets. Brilliant and ruthless, he had maneuvered himself into the presidency and reasserted the Kremlin's authority over all aspects of Russian life. Reporters who dared question him were attacked by thugs who left them bleeding and dying on sidewalks. Political enemies were arrested, imprisoned; some had disappeared. Elections were bought. After years of instability, ordinary Russians had silently fallen into line. There had been no complaints when Barkovsky started stripping away the civil liberties that the revolt against the old regime had brought them. Barkovsky's iron fist established order. For the first time in decades, it was safe to walk the streets of Moscow at night; shops were well stocked, homes were heated, people had bread, and Russia was once again demanding international respect.

"Barkovsky!" a dark-haired beauty near the podium screamed. Her cry sparked a chorus. "Barkovsky! Barkovsky! Barkovsky!" It swept through the chamber like a wave. Glancing down from the stage at the woman, Barkovsky brought his fingers to his lips and blew her a kiss.

She fainted. He was a political rock star.

The late night rally was being held not in the ballroom of one of the new, dazzling Western-style hotels that now dotted the Moscow skyline, but in Mayakovskaya Metro Station on the Zamoskvoretskaya rail line. To the unaware, it may have seemed an odd choice. But to this crowd, it was a brilliant selection.

Joseph Stalin promised in 1932, when construction of the Moscow underground began, that the city's railway stops would be artistic showplaces—daily reminders to the masses of the superiority of the Communist system. The Mayakovskaya station was a jewel in the Metro crown. It was such an engineering feat when it opened in 1938 that it was awarded a Grand Prize at the New York World's Fair. It was designed to calm even the most claustrophobic traveler. Buried more than one hundred feet underneath the city, the station's ceiling contained thirty-five individual, round niches with filament lights hidden behind them. The lights burned so brilliantly that it looked as if the summer sunshine were streaming through the panes. The station's steel support beams were covered with pink rhodonite. Its walls were decorated with four different shades of granite and marble. Artists had created thirty-four mosaics in the ceiling, each glorifying the Soviet Empire. During World War II, the station had served as an air raid shelter and had escaped unscathed. But it was another historic event that had caused Barkovsky to select the station for this evening's banquet. When Moscow was under siege in 1941 by the Nazis, Stalin had addressed a crowd of party leaders and ordinary Muscovites inside this very station, giving what would become known as his "Brothers and Sisters" speech. In it, Stalin predicted that although the Nazis seemed invincible, they would be defeated. Barkovsky's speech tonight had mimicked Stalin's famous remarks. He had attacked "outside invaders" who were threatening the new Russia—just as the Nazis had once done. He'd made

thinly disguised attacks on the United States and NATO. Stalin had promised that the Motherland would rise triumphant, but only if it held “true to the moral principles” that had first guided the Communist revolution. Barkovsky repeated that same cold line.

It was Barkovsky’s goal, and that of his New Russia Party, known simply as the NRP, to turn Russia backwards and, in doing so, restore it as a world superpower, capable of protecting its people from the threat of the U.S. and its newer rivals: China and India. Suspect everyone. Destroy all enemies. Use any means at your disposal.

Wooden chairs and tables had been placed on the station’s boarding platform and train service had been suspended for tonight’s rally. Blood-red and bright yellow banners—the very colors of the flag of the old Soviet empire—dangled from the ceiling. The entire station had the feel of an old time Communist rally. It was all well planned. Most of the crowd of four hundred had been members of the *apparatchiki*—the Communist Party apparatus. They had reaped the spoils of the *nomenklatura*—the party system of rewarding people who were in political favor. As a child, Barkovsky had grown up envying these privileged party members, wanting desperately to be one of them. But his parents had not been invited to join. They had been poor factory workers south of Leningrad. Because they were not party members, they had been doomed to lives of obscurity and poverty. Their only son should have suffered their same dreary fate, but Barkovsky had found a way to pull himself up from the squalor. Through sheer determination, a total lack of conscience, and an unquenchable lust for power, he had risen to become the most powerful leader in Russia since Joseph Stalin. Now he used his humble origins to his advantage. He had become a hero to the masses by pretending to be one of them. They loved him even as he was picking their pockets and constructing a palace for himself along the banks of the Black Sea, at a cost of a billion dollars. Some nights, when he was alone, Barkovsky wondered if he could be the living reincarnation of Stalin. There were moments when he imagined that he could feel Stalin’s blood pulsating through his veins.

Standing before the crowd, soaking in the hoopla, Barkovsky felt a hand gently touch his shoulder, followed by the familiar voice of his chief aide whispering.

“Senator Windslow is dead.”

Without showing the slightest glimmer of a reaction, Barkovsky cocked his head slightly to his right and asked. “Where is Petrov?”

“London.”

“Why is he still alive?”

Chapter 3

Duke of Madison’s estate Somerset County, England

The startled ring-necked pheasant burst from its hiding place in the knee-high grasses. The blood red circling its eyes gave the bird a terrified look as it flapped

its wings to gain speed. A brown-and-white spotted cocker spaniel had flushed it. Like many game birds in England, the pheasant had been bred and reared by a professional gamekeeper and then released to roam the rolling hills of the Duke of Madison's vast estate until its master came hunting.

The pheasant had flown about twenty feet above the ground when the boom of a 12-gauge shotgun broke the early morning silence. Dozens of blackbirds in nearby trees took wing, scattering in different directions.

The buckshot broke the pheasant's right wing, causing it to careen to the ground, where it flapped desperately as the dog raced toward it. The spaniel expertly snatched the wounded bird in his mouth and shook it violently, snapping its neck and ending its misery.

"Good boy, Rasputin," cried the dog's owner, Ivan Sergeyevich Petrov. The spaniel dropped the pheasant at Petrov's feet and was rewarded with both a treat and pat on its head. One of Petrov's two bodyguards took the bird and deposited it in a satchel. It was the first kill of the morning.

"Nice shooting, Ivan Sergeyevich," Georgi Ivanovich Lebedev said. He was Petrov's best friend and morning hunting companion.

Petrov opened the breech of his 12-gauge shotgun and inserted a new shell. He considered it unsportsmanlike to hunt with anything other than a single-shot rifle. If he couldn't kill a bird with one round, the creature deserved to escape.

"The next bird we see will be yours," Petrov promised.

Lebedev was smart enough to always allow Petrov the first kill. It was one reason why the two men had stayed close friends for so many years. Lebedev was content being second fiddle. It had been this way from the time when they were boys growing up in the northwest Moscow neighborhood of Solntsevo, one of city's toughest areas. When the teenage Petrov took a sudden interest in a girl named Yelena, Lebedev stepped aside even though he had a crush on her. When Petrov became best friends with Russian president Barkovsky, Lebedev gladly turned into the third wheel. When Petrov and Barkovsky became sworn enemies, Lebedev supported Petrov, eventually following him to London.

While Lebedev played the role of a supplicant well, Petrov played it not at all. It was fair to say that he never put his own wants or needs aside for anyone. It was a luxury he could afford, given his net worth of a reported six billion dollars. The fact that his fortune had come not because of hard work or brilliance but because of good timing and connections did nothing to deflate his grandiose ego.

It was his bloated self-esteem that had ultimately led to him clashing with President Barkovsky. To escape being arrested and thrown into prison, Petrov had been forced to flee Moscow at night, concealed behind a false panel inside a Russian SUV. British foreign intelligence had arranged his escape and in return had demanded that he snitch on his Kremlin friends. Petrov had done so with relish. He had known where lots of bodies were buried.

In truth, only his money made him attractive to the young women who frequently accompanied him to London's most posh clubs. A big man, standing six feet, two inches tall and weighing nearly three hundred pounds, Petrov's had a puffy, white, and round face. At age forty-two, he was balding, although his personal stylist did her best to disguise it by combing long strains of hair from the side of his head across his naked scalp. He favored loose-fitting, hand-tailored

clothes and only wore black and white because he was colorblind. This morning, a pair of handmade platinum rimmed sunglasses copied from a photograph of a bespectacled Johnny Depp sat on his nose.

His hunting partner was shorter, standing five feet, six inches, and considerably thinner. Lebedev had a full head of bushy black hair, as well as two caterpillar like eyebrows. He was both a lawyer and an accountant, two trades which served him well as Petrov's most trusted lackey and advisor.

Shortly before daybreak, they had left the forty-thousand-square-foot manor house that Petrov had purchased from the cash-poor heirs of the Duke of Madison. Walking side by side, they had crossed the lush fields and rolling hills of the Cotswolds.

With Rasputin racing a few feet in front of them, they had entered a tall grass area near a brook and trees. It was here that Petrov had killed the first bird. Afterward, he celebrated by opening a thermos bottle filled with black coffee mixed with vodka, Kahlúa, and amaretto. Lebedev had brought coffee, too, but it contained no alcohol. As the two men drank, Petrov's bodyguards walked in a circle around them, safely out of hearing distance as they scanned the landscape for possible flashes of sunlight—reflections from a camouflaged shooter's telescopic gun sight.

"The Americans will be sending people to question you about Senator Windslow," Lebedev said solemnly.

"Should I see them?" Petrov asked. "Or go to the DARIA?" He was referring to his 439-foot-long yacht that had cost one billion dollars to build and was named after his mother. He kept it anchored in the Mediterranean Sea off the French Riviera. "It will be more difficult for them to interrogate me there."

"I think you should meet with them. Otherwise, it will look as if you have something to hide."

Petrov chuckled. "I do."

"I should be present as your lawyer."

"Perhaps, it was a mistake telling the CIA about the gold, instead of my British friends," Petrov said.

"I disagree," Lebedev replied. "The Americans have longer arms and are not as timid as MI-6. It was right to tell them. The Americans also have more to gain by helping us."

Rasputin, who was waiting patiently at Petrov's feet, began to pant loudly and whine.

"You have a scent, don't you, boy?" Petrov said to his dog. He finished his drink. "Are you ready?" he asked Lebedev.

Tossing away the remains of his coffee, Lebedev put his stainless steel cup into his knapsack and said, "I'm ready."

Leaning down, Petrov gave his dog the command: "BIRD."

The spaniel bolted along a hedgerow, his snout floating inches above the ground. The sound of rustlings feathers and a cry of alarm caused both men to shoulder their shotguns. Another pheasant exploded into the sky, this one much smaller and faster than the first.

Petrov fired. His shot stopped the bird in midair. Bits of feathers blew away from its breast. It fell dead.

Cracking open his shotgun, Petrov said, "I promised you the second kill, my friend, but my instincts overruled my obligation."

Lebedev shrugged. "There will be other birds for me."

Rasputin arrived with the dead bird clutched in his mouth. Petrov petted the dog.

"You have someone watching the Americans," he said.

"Yes, of course. One of our best."

Lebedev reloaded and snapped the shotgun shut.

"Do you think Jedidiah Jones has told the FBI what he knows?"

Lebedev replied, "We can't be certain. This is why you must meet with the Americans."

Petrov grinned. "They think they are coming to interrogate me but I will be interrogating them."

Chapter 4

CIA headquarters Langley, Virginia

How many layers does an onion have? What had brought Storm to this moment?

Jedidiah Jones had called Storm back to Washington, D.C., two weeks earlier to help solve a "simple" kidnapping. But that crime had proven to be more than a kidnapping and not simple at all.

Matthew Dull, the stepson of Senator Windslow, had been abducted while he and his fiancée, Samantha Toppers, were walking near the Georgetown University campus. Four hooded men overpowered him, forced him into a van, and sped away, leaving a hysterical Toppers on the sidewalk.

When the FBI failed to find Dull, Windslow had asked Jones to bring in a "fixer"—someone who knew how to track missing persons and didn't mind coloring outside the lines. Jones had reached out to Storm and had cashed in a favor. A big favor.

Storm had been fly-fishing in Montana when the helicopter arrived. He was a man seemingly without any cares. This was because he was dead—at least to the world. He had successfully faked his own death four years earlier and gone off the grid. He'd done it to escape from Jones and a clandestine world that had tried to kill him, not once, but several times.

There had been a time in his life—before he'd met Jones—when Storm had been just another down-on-his-luck private detective with too many bills and not enough clients. He'd spent his days and nights peeping through windows at no-tell motels photographing cheating spouses and spying on able-bodied men who'd filed false workman's compensation claims citing "bad backs." Storm had scraped by. Barely.

But then Clara Strike had entered his world and turned it upside down. The CIA field officer had enlisted Storm's help in a covert operation being run on American soil. Technically, the CIA was forbidden to operate inside the U.S., so she'd needed

Storm as a front man. She'd taken advantage of his expert tracking skills, his patriotic spirit, and his *then*-trusting nature. She'd introduced him to Jones, and it had been Jones who'd drawn him further and further into the CIA's web. One of his assignments had gone terribly wrong. Tangiers! It had ended with Storm lying severely wounded on a cold floor in his own blood.

Jones had rescued him. Storm had survived, but Tangiers had changed him. After that, he'd decided that he wanted out. And the only way for him to quit was for Derrick Storm—the roguish private eye and conscripted CIA operative—to die. In poetic fashion, he'd gone out in much the same way that he'd come into Jones's world. Storm had perished in the arms of Clara Strike. She'd watched in stunned disbelief as the light in his eyes dimmed. He'd reached out for her, and she had taken his hand, squeezing it for the very last time. His death had seemed legitimate because it had been as close to a real death as possible—thanks to the wizards inside the CIA's Chief Directorate of Science and Technology. The CIA scientists had used their magic to stop his heart and show no discernible brain waves. Storm didn't know how they'd done this. He hadn't cared. Death had freed him.

Or so he'd thought.

Jones had brought him back by cashing in Tangiers. Storm owed his life to Jones, and so he'd returned, supposedly for one final mission.

He had now come full circle. He was sitting across from Jones in his Langley office the day after Senator Windslow's assassination.

"I warned you this might get complicated," Jones said.

"Yes, but you somehow forgot to mention the Russian element when we first talked," Storm said.

Jones smiled slyly. "Must have slipped my mind."

Storm knew better. Nothing slipped Jones's mind.

"Since you seem to have overlooked that part," Storm said, "why don't you tell me about the Russians now?"

"I've got a better idea," Jones said. "You tell me what you've learned about the kidnapping and the Russians."

This is how Jones played the game. Ask him a question and he answered with two questions of his own. Ask him two questions and he responded with a dozen more.

"There were actually two groups of kidnapppers," Storm said. "The kidnapppers who really abducted Matthew Dull were ex-KBG officers."

"And the second ones?"

"They turned out to be Samantha Toppers and her brother."

"She's the short blonde with the big—" Jones started to say.

Storm interrupted. "Yes, Toppers is rather well endowed. She and her brother tried to profit from the kidnapping by sending Senator Windslow and his wife ransom notes even though they didn't have Dull. It was a pretty clever scam."

"That you figured out," Jones said.

It was as close to a compliment as Jones ever gave.

Continuing, Jones said, "Sadly, you weren't able to save Dull. The real kidnapppers killed him and now someone has assassinated a U.S. senator."

"Hey, I didn't pull those triggers," Storm protested.

“True, but you also don’t know why they were pulled.”

“The men who did the actual murders were professionals. My guess is they are hired guns. The real question is who paid them? There are two likely candidates: Ivan Petrov and Oleg Barkovsky.”

Storm suspected that Jones already knew about both men. Jones always knew more than he shared with Storm. He never revealed more than what was necessary. He listened and expected his operatives to do their own digging, to develop their own clues, to reach their own conclusions. He expected Storm to dig up his own answers. It was Jones’s way of insuring that no rock went unturned.

Continuing, Storm said, “FBI Special Agent April Showers believes Petrov paid Windslow a six-million-dollar bribe. But at some point, Windslow changed his mind and didn’t follow through. That’s when Petrov had him killed.”

“Do you agree?”

“I’m sure Windslow took a bribe, but I’m not sure it was Petrov who gave the order to have him and Dull killed. It could have just as likely been Barkovsky.”

“Why?”

“To stop Senator Windslow from helping Petrov. The problem is that I don’t know what either man wanted from Senator Windslow. There’s always a motive for murder. Until I figure out that motive, I can’t identify the killer.”

Jones leaned back in his office chair, which squeaked. It had needed oil for as long as Storm had known Jones. The CIA spymaster swept his right hand across his face as if he were trying to wipe away a problem. Built like a bulldog and in excellent physical shape, especially for a man in his early sixties, Jones was both Storm’s mentor and tormentor. He was the only man capable of bringing Storm back into the CIA’s world of smoke and mirrors.

“The sniper left his rifle on the roof of the Capitol Police headquarters building,” Jones said. He leaned forward, causing another squeak, and removed a photo from a desk drawer. He passed it to Storm.

Storm inspected it and said, “It’s a photograph of a Dragunov sniper rifle. Military issue, not one of the cheaper, knockoff versions manufactured in China and Iran for sale outside Russia.”

Jones smiled. “Go on.”

“Does the media know a Russian rifle was the murder weapon?” Storm asked.

“No, but it’s only a matter of time. You know how Washington is about leaks and secrets.”

Storm did. When it came to the nation’s capital, Benjamin Franklin had said it best more than two hundred years earlier: “Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead.”

“Matthew Dull was shot with Russian-made bullets,” Storm continued. “Now a sniper shoots Windslow with a Russian military sniper rifle. The killers clearly aren’t worried about covering their tracks.”

“Which is why the White House is concerned,” Jones said. “The American public doesn’t give a damn about the private war Petrov and Barkovsky are waging against each other. Who cares if a billionaire oligarch and his former best friend kill each other? But if word leaks out that an American was kidnapped and murdered and a U.S. senator was assassinated by one of them, then we’ll be facing an international shit storm.”

“How can you hide that fact?” Storm asked.

“The President is holding a press conference later today. He’ll assure the American public that the attacks were not acts of terrorism. He’ll say the FBI suspects the kidnapping and murders were carried out by a ruthless gang of Eastern European criminals. But there will be no mention of Petrov and certainly no mention of Russian President Barkovsky.”

“Which man is worse?” Storm asked rhetorically. “Petrov is an egomaniac and Barkovsky is as flaky as Muammar Gaddafi without the high heels and rouge.”

“The White House is more worried about Barkovsky. We can’t sit still and allow a Russian president to assassinate a U.S. senator. That’s why we have to be discreet.”

“Discreet?” Storm repeated. “Congress already is scheduling hearings to investigate and the media is going wild.”

Jones let out a sigh. “Yes, it’s going to be tricky, but not impossible.”

“With you, nothing ever is,” Storm said. “But I’m curious. How long before someone gets interested in Steve Mason? How long before some pesky reporter asks why you inserted a private eye into the kidnapping? How long before someone discovers that Steve Mason doesn’t exist?”

“The smart thing,” Jones said, “would be for you to disappear—to go back to Wyoming.”

“Montana,” Storm said, correcting him.

Jones shrugged. “Wherever. But the truth is that I need you more now than ever before. I need someone whom I can trust to keep one step ahead of this investigation.”

“Do you need me because you want to find out the truth? Or do you need me to help you bury the truth?”

“Probably both.”

Jones looked exhausted. The pressures from his job were clearly taking a toll. His face was becoming a road map of worry lines. There was little doubt that Jones would have had pure white hair if he weren’t bald. By contrast, Storm was still ruggedly handsome, although his body also was showing the signs of his past. Five scars in his abdomen marked where he’d been shot. There was a knife wound on his back where he’d been slashed from behind. More recently, a bullet had ice-skated across his shoulder, leaving an ugly superficial scar. Of course, the worst wounds had been delivered in Tangiers—physically and mentally.

One reason why Storm had faked his own death was because he’d quietly begun to question his own abilities after Tangiers. The couple helping him had been shot to death in front of him. He had been left for dead. Doctors couldn’t believe he’d recovered. But with his recovery had come doubts. Had he missed something? Was he somehow to blame? It was only after he had “died”—while he was alone in Montana fishing—that he had considered another possibility. Someone had betrayed him. Someone inside the agency. He had gone over every minute detail of Tangiers, over and over, and he’d reached the same conclusion each time, no matter how he twisted it. He’d walked into a trap. Storm’s first reaction had been to contact Jones and seek vengeance. But he had no proof. In Montana, he had been out of the game. What was the cost of getting back in? Now the landscape had changed. Now they’d let the fox back into the henhouse. Now he could test his hunch and expose

the traitor who was responsible for the scars—both physical and mental—that he carried. If there really was a traitor, then Storm needed to unmask him. And he could only find the truth by working from the inside out.

Jones interrupted his thoughts. “You really don’t have any idea what motive Petrov or Barkovsky might have for wanting Senator Windslow dead?”

“The senator’s final words were *Jedidiah knows* and *Midas*.”

Storm let his answer hang in the air, begging for an explanation.

But Jones didn’t immediately bite. Instead, he sat in his squeaky chair and stared blankly at his young protégé. And then, after several awkward seconds, he said: “OK, I agree. It’s time for me to tell you a bit more. Only a handful of government officials here in Washington are familiar with what I am about to say. Senator Windslow was one of them and it cost him his life. It can cost your life, too. Before I go any further, I need to ask: Do you want to take that risk?”

“You seem to forget,” Storm said. “I’m already dead.”

Chapter 5

Jedidiah Jones walked to a wall safe with a magnetic strip that had the word “LOCKED” on it slapped across its reinforced steel door. Jones flipped over the strip so that the word “OPEN” was visible in bright red letters and punched a combination into an electronic screen that simultaneously verified his fingerprint. From the safe, he withdrew a thick red envelope marked “*PROJECT MIDAS*.” He shut the safe’s door, flipped the magnetic strip to “CLOSED” and double-checked to make certain the door was locked.

Returning to his chair, he wrote the name “STEVE MASON” in quotations on a log attached to the top secret file’s front. He wrote the date, the time, his own name, and then noted that he had authorized Mason to view four photographs from the file. The photos were numbered MIDAS 001, 002, 003, and 004. He asked Storm to sign the log with his pseudonym. After he did, Jones handed Storm three photographs but held one back.

“Tell me what you see in the pictures,” Jones said.

He’d played this game before. After Storm had been recruited by Clara Strike, Jones had sent him through a training course at the CIA’s legendary facility called the Farm, outside Williamsburg, Virginia. There he’d been shown a photograph, asked to return it, and then asked about it. What did you see? Why was that important? What did you miss? What does it mean? His private eye experience had made him an expert at it.

“The three photographs show a kilobar of gold,” he said. “That’s a thousand grams of gold or the equivalent of 2.21 pounds. The markings on the bar show that it is 99.9 percent pure, which means it’s high quality. But the reason why this bar is so unique is because of where it was minted and for whom.”

Jones nodded approvingly. “And who owned it?”

“The impression in the lower center of the bar shows a hammer and sickle, which is the seal used by the former Soviet Union. Cyrillic letters under the seal form an acronym, КПСС, which, when translated to English, stands for the

Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The bar in the photo was minted specifically for the Party and belonged in its treasury.”

“It’s odd really,” Jones said, “how little knowledge most Americans have about the Soviet Union even though they grew up being told that it was an evil empire and its leaders planned on burying them. Just last week, I had to explain to a Senate committee that only a limited number of Russians were permitted to join the Communist Party during the Soviet era and that the Party had its own treasury that was completely separate from the Soviet Union’s governmental holdings.”

Storm didn’t interrupt. Jones had a reason for this history lesson.

Jones said, “I couldn’t believe U.S. senators didn’t know that the Communist Party charged its members dues—just like labor unions do here. The Party deducted a portion of each member’s monthly salary for its coffers.”

Jones stopped talking and began tapping his finger on his desk as if he were marking time.

Storm knew the drill. It was now his turn to evaluate.

“There’s another marking in the photograph,” Storm said. “It identified that individual kilobar as being number 951,951. Logic tells us that this means there were 951,950 identical gold bars minted before it was and that those previous 951,950 gold kilobars also belonged to the Communist Party, not to the Soviet government.”

“Do you know the price of gold?” Jones asked.

This was more than a simple question. It was a test. CIA operatives chosen for covert missions were expected to know the worth of precious metals. During wars, local currencies were worthless. But gold and diamonds always could be used to buy information, friends, and supplies.

“You’re wondering if I still keep track,” Storm replied. “Gold is trading today for \$1,770 per troy ounce. That means an individual kilogram bar—like the one in the photograph—would be worth just under \$57,000. If you were lucky enough to have the other 951,950 kilo bars that were minted before that bar, you’d have yourself a tidy bit of pocket change.”

“Nearly five billion dollars’ worth to be exact,” Jones said.

“No,” said Storm, correcting him. “If you want to be exact, you would have \$54,124,326,318. When you’ve been busted and had bill collectors pounding on your office door like I have, you don’t do estimates when it comes to cash. You count it to the penny.”

That was something Jones had always admired in his wunderkind operative. Even though Storm had been rough around the edges when Clara Strike recruited him, Jones had recognized that Storm had a lightning-quick mind and an amazing ability to remember the smallest details—especially when it came to money and instructions.

“Any idea where this fifty-four billion dollars in gold came from?”

Jones didn’t throw many softballs. But this was one of them.

“The failed *bathhouse* coup in 1991.”

“Exactly.”

Storm knew the story well. It had been a defining moment in history. On August 17, 1991, a Saturday, the head of the KGB, Vladimir A. Kryuchkov, summoned five

senior Soviet officials to a Moscow bathhouse to discuss how they could overthrow Soviet president and party boss Mikhail Gorbachev. Kryuchkov often held meetings in steam rooms because it was one way he could insure that his colleagues were not secretly recording his conversations. While sitting naked, they decided to put Gorbachev, who was on vacation in the Crimea, under house arrest and then use KGB troops and the Soviet military to seize control of Moscow. At first, the diehards seemed to be winning. But that had changed when Russian soldiers refused to fire at a huge crowd of Muscovites assembled outside the White House—the home of Russia’s parliament. Kryuchkov and the others were arrested. Only after they were in jail did the Kremlin discover that the KGB had secretly moved out of Moscow several billion dollars of rubles and precious metals that belonged to the Communist Party. They hadn’t wanted it to fall into the hands of Gorbachev and other reformers if the coup failed. Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, and all of the presidents who had followed them had searched for the missing billions. But none of them had succeeded in finding them. Stories began sweeping through Russia. The gold bars had been transported by Vympel soldiers—KGB special forces—to a hidden bunker. The Vympel were much like the U.S. Navy SEALs and were used by the KGB for clandestine missions. They first gained notoriety in 1979 when a team of Vympel operatives assassinated Afghanistan president Hafizullah Amin while he was sleeping in his bed inside the Tajbeg Palace in Kabul and being protected by some five hundred guards. Legend had it that the Vympel officer in charge of hiding the gold had killed all of his men and then committed suicide so that none of them would be tempted to reveal where the billions in bullion had been hidden.

“When was the photograph taken?” Storm asked. “Was it while the gold was still in Moscow or after it disappeared?”

“Ah, you’ve just asked the key question,” Jones replied.

He passed the fourth photograph, the one he had held back, across his desk to Storm. It showed three men standing together. They were Jedidiah Jones, Senator Thurston Windslow, and oligarch Oleg Petrov. They were holding the gold bar that Storm had just seen.

“Somehow,” Jones explained, “Petrov found out where the Party’s missing fortune is hidden. He brought a gold bar with him to the U.S. as proof and showed it to Senator Windslow because he was head of the U.S. Select Committee on Intelligence. Windslow brought Petrov to me.”

“How’d he find it?”

Jones threw up his hands in exasperation. “I wish I knew. Petrov wouldn’t tell us, but he claimed that he could take us to where the rest of the gold bullion was hidden.”

“All of the gold bars?”

“Actually, Petrov claimed the treasure consisted of one million kilogram bars hidden by the KGB, plus other precious metals. The total worth is about sixty billion dollars.”

“Sixty billion!” Storm repeated. “As in B?”

“Yes,” Jones said. “Now that’s a treasure worth finding, wouldn’t you say?”

Chapter 6

Jones collected the four photographs from Storm and placed them back into the thick file, which he inserted back into his wall safe.

“Why did he ask you for help?” Storm said. “Petrov’s a billionaire. Why not hire a private army of mercenaries? For sixty billion, he could buy a country.”

“If only it were that easy,” Jones answered. “Who would you trust to help you recover sixty billion in gold bars and precious metals? Guns for hire? Mercenaries?”

“Good point,” Storm said. “I remember a PI case I had. A couple murdered their parents for five grand in life insurance. Imagine what people would do when sixty billion is at stake.”

“Petrov hinted that the gold is in a remote, difficult-to-reach location. He needs the kind of manpower and machinery that we can get him. And there’s another problem: Petrov is not as wealthy as everyone has been led to believe. Barkovsky froze the oligarch’s assets in Russia after they had a falling out and he fled from Moscow. Our analysts believe he only has access to seven to ten million.”

“Only seven or ten million,” Storm grunted. “Boo hoo. Makes me want to cry.”

“It doesn’t last long if you have a palatial estate in England, an Embassy Row mansion here in Washington, D.C., and a billion-dollar yacht sitting idle in the Mediterranean.”

“So what’s in it for you?” Storm asked.

“If we help him get the sixty billion, Petrov will use it to launch an insurgency against President Barkovsky.”

“A war?”

“No, but he’d finance protest rallies, bribe officials, plant news stories, and make Barkovsky’s life and presidency a living hell.”

“Is getting rid of Barkovsky worth going to bed with Petrov?” Storm asked. “Why not just have him killed if you want to get rid of him?”

“We don’t really do that anymore.”

“Sure you don’t,” Storm said in a voice dripping with sarcasm. “Does that mean you turned down Petrov?”

“Absolutely, we turned him down,” Jones replied. “We can’t kill foreign leaders anymore and we can’t topple foreign governments either. Congress has passed laws that specifically forbid us from doing that sort of thing. This isn’t the 1950s and 1960s when you could put poison in one of Fidel Castro’s cigars.”

“Yeah, but if I recall, that cigar stunt didn’t work.”

“It could have,” Jones said. “Creative thinking on our part. That’s something I’ve always admired. But back to the gold. There are other reasons why we can’t get involved in searching for the gold. One reason is that it still belongs to the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. Even though the Soviet Union no longer exists, the Communist Party in Russia still does. It’s the second largest political party in that nation. All those little Commie bastards didn’t just disappear overnight. By international law, that money still belongs to them.

“Here’s another reason,” Jones said. “President Barkovsky has made it clear to the White House that any cooperation our government extends to Petrov will be

seen as a hostile act against him and his nation. The guy might be nuts, but he still has his finger on a huge arsenal of nuclear weapons and most of them are pointed at us. We don't want to encourage his paranoid hatred of the U.S."

"And finally," Jones continued, "we've got an internal problem. The day after that photograph of the kilobar was taken inside my office, the Russian ambassador paid an unannounced visit on the secretary of state and specifically stated that any attempt by the U.S. to recover the missing gold would be considered an act of international piracy."

"You got a leak. Someone tipped off the Russians."

"Exactly," Jones said. "Barkovsky knew about our private meeting in my office—this office—within twenty-four hours."

"A mole?"

"Yes, but I don't think the mole is on our side. I think it's in Petrov's camp. Only I can't be sure."

Despite Jones's litany of reasons, Storm could read between the lines. Clearly, Jones wanted to help Petrov, because Barkovsky was a dangerous loony tune. What better way to get rid of him than to have one of his former friends bring him down? Et tu, Brutus? Using the Communist Party's own wealth to destroy a pro-Communist president only made the entire scheme sweeter.

"If you aren't going to help Petrov," Storm said, "then why tell me about the gold?"

"Because you're dead, remember? No one can be held responsible for the actions of a dead man, can they?"

"But I'm only one man."

Jones gave him a sly look and asked, "Are you sure? Do you really believe you're the only man who has gone off the grid? Do you think you're the only man who has disappeared?"

"Project *Midas*," Storm said, putting two and two together. "That thick file locked in your safe—it has the names of other *dead* operatives just like me, doesn't it? You want me and the other *dead* operatives to help Petrov because our country can't afford to leave any fingerprints behind."

"No fingerprints, no footprints," Jones said. "No prints at all."

Jones pulled a large envelope from a desk drawer and said, "I need you to go to London and talk to Petrov. First, try to find out who killed Windslow and why. Second, tell him that I've assembled a team to help him. All we need to learn is where the gold is hidden."

He emptied the envelope's contents onto his desktop. "Here's a passport, cash, credit cards, a cell phone, and airline tickets. Agent Showers is booked on a six o'clock flight to London. She's being sent to question Petrov. She'll be your ticket in to meet him. You'll tag along. I've already arranged it."

Storm's mind was swirling. "What about the mole?"

"If the mole is in Petrov's camp, there's nothing we can do. Just be careful."

"And what if it is on our side—someone inside this agency?"

"I know who you are, but you always worked in the field. No one else here in headquarters knows you or that you're still alive. I've also compartmentalized Project *Midas*."

"Meaning?" Storm asked.

“Meaning that only you and I know that you are involved in it. That’s it. To everyone else, Derrick Storm is still a ghost.”

The last time that Jones had been so confident about a covert operation, he’d sent Storm to Tangiers. Look how that had turned out.

Jones continued, “Be careful when you meet Petrov. Just because he showed me the gold doesn’t mean we can trust him. I want you to find out what you can about the gold, but I also need for you to help Agent Showers solve the kidnapping and murders. Maybe Agent Showers is correct and Petrov killed Dull and Windslow because the senator had gotten cold feet about Project *Midas*. Maybe Barkovsky is behind the killings because he wanted to stop Windslow from pushing Project *Midas*. Or maybe Windslow was trying to extort a bigger share of that sixty-billion pie than what Petrov wanted to give him. Trust no one.”

“Just like old times,” Storm said.

“I’m still running covert operations,” Jones said, “because I trust only a handful of people.”

“Does Agent Showers know about the gold?” Storm asked.

“No. Only one handful of people know about it, and she isn’t one of those fingers.”

“She won’t like having me tag along with her to London.”

“She doesn’t get a vote. Everything has been arranged—although your role will be strictly advisory.”

Storm imagined Showers’s reaction. This was not a minor case. A U.S. senator and his stepson had been killed. She wouldn’t want him interfering. She was shrewd enough to know that Storm would be Jedidiah Jones’s eyes and ears. She’d be suspicious of him.

“Weapons?” Storm asked.

“None for you. You’ll be traveling on a diplomatic passport as Steve Mason. You’ll be posing as a liaison officer from the State Department.”

“Some paper pusher in the State Department told you that I couldn’t be armed?”

“It wasn’t a paper pusher. It came directly from the secretary of state. Tangiers. Remember? Ever since that fiasco, other agencies have been reluctant to let any of our people pose as one of their own, especially if they are armed.”

Tangiers. Even in death, it continued to haunt him.

“How about Agent Showers?”

“No one objected to her having a sidearm,” he said. “I’m also going to give you a personal letter to take to Petrov. He’ll know it’s from me.”

Jones gave Storm a piercing look. “You were the last piece that I needed for Project *Midas*.”

“Why me?”

“I just told you that I trust very few people. You happen to be one of them. I am trusting you to find sixty billion in gold and not let it corrupt you.”

“That’s a lot of gold,” Storm said.

“Yes it is, and if I am wrong in trusting you, then I will see to it that you really do end up dead.”

Another layer had been peeled. Jones was sending him down a dangerous path. And yet Storm still wasn’t sure that Jones had told him everything. Knowing Jones,

he doubted that he had. There were going to be more layers, more surprises, more twists, more turns, and with sixty billion dollars at stake, there were going to be more murders.

Of that, he was certain.

Chapter 7

Storm took a seat in a sports bar directly across from Gate 21 at Dulles International Airport so that his back was against a wall and he could see all possible entrances and exits. He was supposed to meet Agent Showers there at 5 P.M. He'd arrived at 4:30 P.M. In his line of work, you never wanted to walk into an area cold, even if you were simply catching a flight to London with an FBI agent.

He'd just sat down when Agent Showers entered the bar. She'd come early, too. He liked that. As he watched her scan the lounge, he was reminded of how attractive she was. Showers was wearing a dark gray pants suit with a short jacket that covered an off-white silk blouse layered over a black camisole. She was a knockout.

Showers carefully weaved through the jumble of chairs and tables occupied by travelers who were taking advantage of a two-drinks-for-one happy hour.

"Hello, Ms. Showers," Storm said, rising politely from his seat.

She was only carrying a backpack.

"Where's your luggage?" he asked her. "I've never known a woman who traveled light."

"Where's yours?" she replied. He glanced at a backpack next to him.

Both of them had checked their luggage for a reason besides convenience. They would not have been able to react quickly during an emergency if they were lugging suitcases with them.

"Whaddaya want to drink, doll?" a busty cocktail waitress, wearing too much makeup and fishnet hose, asked them.

"A diet cola, either brand," Showers said.

"I'll take a beer. Whatever you have on tap."

"Great choice, handsome," she said, winking at him.

As she walked away, Showers said, "You just ordered a draft of whatever they have on tap and she complimented your choice. You must love it when women flirt with you."

"But you don't," he said. It sounded like a question.

"I don't what? Like it when someone flirts with you? Or are you saying I don't flirt with you?"

"Both."

"Don't be a fool," she said. "That waitress is just working you for a tip."

"I'll be sure to tell her that you're paying the tab."

The waitress returned with their drinks, serving Storm first. "Here you are, cutie," she said.

She plopped Showers's cola on a napkin in front of her without comment.

“Thank you,” Storm said, beaming. “By the way, my friend here is going to be paying our tab.”

“A girlfriend who buys you drinks,” the waitress said. “Be careful, she might be trying to get lucky.”

“He’s not my boyfriend,” Showers said indignantly.

“Too bad for you,” the waitress replied.

When she was out of earshot, Showers said, “I’m tipping her zero.”

Storm looked smug. He liked Agent Showers.

She got down to business. “I’ve contacted Scotland Yard, and they’re sending a liaison to meet us at Heathrow and take us to the Yard for a briefing about Ivan Petrov.”

“Thanks, but I’ll skip the introductions at the airport and just meet you later at our hotel. You can brief me.”

“I can brief you?” she replied, bristling. “Hey, you’re tagging along with me, remember. It’s not my job to brief you.”

“You’re right,” Storm said, throwing her a bone. “But I think it’s better if I stay in the shadows.”

She thought about it for a second and said, “You’re probably right. I didn’t have a choice about notifying Scotland Yard. It’s agency procedure when a law enforcement group visits a foreign government to interrogate someone. I just hope the Brits have enough common sense to keep their mouths shut about us coming.”

“I doubt it,” Storm said.

“Why? Because they’re cops?”

“Of course not. I just love cops, especially women in uniform with nightsticks,” he said, grinning. She scowled.

He said, “I’m suspicious because this is a high-profile case and Ivan Petrov is internationally known. Your arrival in England to question Petrov will be big news if word leaks out.”

“I raised that issue with my bosses,” she said. “But they assured me that the Bureau and Scotland Yard have a close professional relationship. Actually, they accused me of thinking like someone who worked for Jedidiah Jones rather than like a cop. Cloak-and-dagger versus real police work.”

“Real police work,” he repeated. “I like how that rolled off your lips.”

“I’m not a private detective,” she said, “nor am I one of Jones’s contract *fixers*. I’m still not certain who you really are or what you are doing for Jones, and I doubt if you are going to tell me, are you?”

“A deduction made by real police work,” he replied, lifting his beer in a mock salute.

She said, “Look, there’s something I need to tell you. I told my superiors that it was a mistake sending you along.”

“I would have been surprised if you hadn’t.”

“It’s nothing personal. You’re kind of likable.”

“Kind of likable, not adorable?”

“The reason why I said I didn’t want you tagging along is because you’re a cowboy. You don’t follow the rules and that means I can’t depend on you. When we first met—when Senator Windslow first demanded that you be brought into the

kidnapping investigation—I put all of my cards on the table. I was completely honest with you and treated you like a professional. But you didn't put your cards on the table. You didn't treat me like a professional. You hid information from me."

"You're right," Storm said. "I did hide information from you."

"At least you're honest about that," she said. "My point is: How are we supposed to work together if I can't trust you? I don't know for certain if you are being honest with me right now."

"I understand," he replied, "but I work with people all of the time who are not telling me the truth and are hiding things from me. I've even worked with people who wanted to kill me."

"I can understand that," she deadpanned.

"But you find a way to get around all of that and accomplish the mission."

"How? Especially if you don't follow the rules?"

"I don't trust rules. But I do trust my instincts and what they tell me about the people working with me. Rules can get you killed."

"So can breaking them."

"Agent Showers, have you ever had a one-night stand?" he asked.

She let out a sigh. "I'm trying to have an adult conversation."

"Perhaps it's not the best analogy, but hear me out. If you meet someone in a bar and you end up in the sack, you have certain expectations, maybe even certain demands, but you don't fall in love with that person and you don't share your most intimate secrets with them, even though you are doing something very intimate. You don't necessarily trust them either. You just do your job and move on. The same is true at work." He smiled, clearly happy with that explanation.

"You're making my head spin with your logic. Is that what a one-night stand is to you?" she asked, raising a brow. "A job? And then you move on?"

Without waiting for him to answer, she said, "I guess that's one of the differences between us and why I work at the FBI and you work for Jedidiah Jones."

"Now my head is spinning," he said, mimicking her.

"When I was in college, a CIA recruiter came to see me. He told me that people who worked for the Agency were not obligated to follow U.S. laws when they traveled overseas. He bragged that a CIA employee could lie, cheat, steal, break into apartments, and even kill. The rules don't apply. That's what he said. That's the sort of folks he wanted working for him. People who think they are above the law. People like you."

"He was just being honest with you," Storm said. "As my mother used to say, 'You got to crack a few eggs to make an omelet.'" He finished his beer and waved to the waitress.

"I'm not a person whose moral code ends when I cross the U.S. border," she said. "Oh, another thing. I don't do one-night stands. So don't get your hopes—or anything else—up during our trip."

"Around you," he replied, "I'm always fully hopeful."

"I'm going to the ladies' room," she said. "I'll see you on the plane."

"Don't get confused and go into the wrong potty," he said, smirking.

"I only do that when I have to rescue you," she replied, leaving.

He noticed that she'd not left a tip.

“Lady friend troubles?” the waitress asked, returning to his table.

“She’s a bit high-strung.”

“Too skinny, too.” The waitress bent over when she served him another beer, giving Storm an eyeful. “This one’s on the house. My name’s Eve. You know, the girl who ate that nasty apple. Why don’t you stop in again when you get back from wherever you’re flying off to.” She walked away slowly, making sure that he got a good view.

The gate agent announced over the intercom that it was time to board the Heathrow flight. First class ticket holders hurried forward. Business class was next.

Storm checked his first class ticket. But he did not move. He had no interest in boarding early. If he did, all the passengers that came after him would see his face as they slowly made their way down the aisle, finding their seats and storing their luggage. Storm wanted to be the last on a flight. He wanted to sit as near the front of the plane as possible, and he wanted to be the first off every flight. This way, he could observe all of the other passengers and hopefully not call attention to himself.

When it looked as if the last passengers were on the walkway, Storm tossed a ten-dollar tip on the table and walked over to the gate. He’d not seen Showers and was curious where she’d gone.

“Welcome aboard,” the agent said, taking his ticket. “Oh, you’re first class. You could have boarded earlier.”

“Nature called.” He bent down to tie his shoe, stalling. Where was Showers?

Storm heard the sounds of someone running toward him.

“I’ve got a ticket.” It was a woman, but not Showers. Storm noticed that she had a distinct Russian accent.

“Looks like you have three late-comers,” Showers said as she stepped to the gate.

“Yes,” the agent replied, “and all three of you are seated in first class. What a coincidence.”

“Yes, indeed,” Storm said.

Chapter 8

Storm knew the instant that he saw her and heard the Russian accent. In her late twenties, she was wearing functional shoes, skin-tight designer jeans, and a dark gray sweater pulled over a low-collared, gray, wide-striped shirt whose tail peeked out. A professional women’s dive watch was on her wrist. She wore no jewelry but did have a thin silver belt around her waist that Storm suspected could be an effective garrote in her well-manicured hands. He put her at five-foot-six and 119 pounds. She had long black hair pulled back from unblemished bronze skin. Her dark eyes were highlighted perfectly by thin brows.

Storm knew the SVR—the successor to the Soviet KGB—didn’t believe women were emotionally stable enough to be trained as operatives. Instead, the Russian intelligence service used them as secretaries, couriers, and sometimes as prostitutes in covert operations. They also sent them abroad as *illegals*, giving

them fake backgrounds and sending them into enemy countries to embed themselves in the local culture and gradually work their way into useful positions to spy. But they never used them as Vympel soldiers or on protective details.

If Storm was correct, this woman was not a native Russian but was from one of the Soviet's former republics whose intelligence services didn't share Moscow's machismo attitude. He suspected she worked for Ivan Petrov.

The overnight flight proved uneventful. Unfortunately, Storm found himself seated next to a rather plump middle-aged woman who drank four glasses of Riesling, fell asleep instantly, and began snoring with an open mouth.

As soon as the flight landed, Storm exited, keeping an eye on both the late arriving passenger and Showers. After clearing Customs and Immigration, he ducked into Heathrow's Virgin Atlantic clubhouse, where he used his laptop in one of the private rooms to send a photo to Langley of the female passenger. He'd snapped the picture with his cell phone when she'd gotten up to use the toilet after dinner on the transatlantic flight. The agency's facial recognition program identified her in less than a minute.

Antonija Nad was a former member of the Special Operations Battalion in the Croatia armed services. The BSD, as it was known, focused on airborne assault and behind-enemy-lines combat. It was one of the most respected special forces units in the world. It was also one of only two European forces that allowed women to fight in specialized units. She'd resigned from the Croatia military a year ago to work for PROTEC, a security firm based in London.

He had guessed correctly. She had to work for Petrov.

Storm checked the time. By now, Showers and Nad would have exited Heathrow. He walked to the airport's rental counters to get a car and an hour later pulled up outside the London Marriott Hotel Park Lane across from Hyde Park. Storm never understood why Americans booked rooms in American hotels when they traveled overseas. It was like eating McDonald's in Paris. But someone in the government, who had arranged the tickets and hotels, had gotten them adjoining rooms there.

Because Showers was still being briefed at Scotland Yard, she hadn't checked in. Storm decided to find a room elsewhere. He drove through the neighborhood until he spotted a cozy bed-and-breakfast a few blocks from the hotel. The grandmotherly owner at the antique reception desk said one room was available, which he rented with cash. *Jones had warned him to not trust anyone. He was taking his advice.*

The flat was on the second floor of what used to be a high-end Hyde Park row house, with huge rooms. But that had been when the sun never set on the Union Jack. Since then, the building had been divided into small units barely bigger than a double bed. He'd stayed in worse. It was clean and had Internet access. Best of all, no one would know he was here.

Before he'd left Langley, Storm had collected crime scene photographs taken by the FBI. Taking a seat at an oak desk from the 1850s that faced his room's street window, he sorted through the photos, stopping when he reached a batch that had been taken on the roof of the Capitol Police headquarters, where the sniper had hidden.

The shooter had used a bag of sugar to support the barrel of the 9.8-pound Dragunov rifle. The bag was a readily available prop that no one would consider suspicious if he was seen carrying it. The Dragunov was a gun that could easily be disassembled and hidden in a briefcase.

The Dragunov's barrel had been equipped with a flash suppressor to help hide the shooter's location. But it didn't have a silencer. This meant the sniper had not been worried about the sound of the gunshot.

Like all professionals, the assassin had known that there would be two actual sounds when he pulled the trigger. The sound from the initial bang—the muzzle blast—would be masked by the noisy, rush hour street traffic around the headquarters building. The second sound would be the sonic crack that a bullet makes as it flies through the air. The bullet would create a sonic wave behind it as it sped forward. Anyone hearing the crack would look forward in the same direction as the bullet was going, not backward where it had come from. There was no need for him to use a silencer. Only the muzzle flash mattered, especially at dusk.

Storm looked at snapshots of the Dirksen Building taken from the sniper's viewpoint. The distance was roughly four hundred yards, or the length of four football fields, the equivalent of 1200 feet. Storm knew the Dragunov was most effective between 600 meters and 1300 meters, or 1,970 feet and 4,270 feet, which meant the fatal shot actually had been taken much closer than during combat. It would have been an easy shot for a skilled marksman.

He turned to a photo of the Dragunov and examined the weapon. Ordinarily, the rifle's stock was wood with a hole cut out of its center to make the gun lighter. Someone had modified the rifle in the photo by attaching a shorter, solid wooden stock to it. *Why?*

He tucked the photos away, stretched out on the bed, and used the remote to turn on a television hanging from the ceiling. He flipped channels until he found the BBC's twenty-four-hour newscast. Agent Showers suddenly appeared on the screen with a uniformed bobby on one side and a man identified as a Scotland Yard detective on her other. The announcer said:

"The FBI has sent one of its agents to London to interview Russian oligarch Ivan Petrov as part of its investigation into the recent murder of United States Senator Thurston Windslow. The senator was slain in his Washington, D.C., office on Capitol Hill by a sniper who remains at large. The agent, April Showers, refused to comment, but sources tell the BBC that the FBI considers Petrov to be a 'person of interest' because of his close relationship with the slain senator."

As he and Showers had both feared, someone at Scotland Yard had tipped off the British press about their arrival. Showers was paying a price for playing by the rules.

Chapter 9

The cell phone that Jones had given him rang shortly after 12 P.M. London time, waking him from a short power nap.

“We’ve been invited to have tea with Ivan Petrov,” Showers said.

“He must have been impressed with your BBC appearance.”

“Did you rent a car?” she asked, ignoring his comment. “It’ll take us about two hours to get to the Duke of Madison’s estate outside of Gloucester.”

“Your buddies at Scotland Yard didn’t offer to drive us?”

“Are you going to rub that in all day?”

“Probably,” he replied. “I’ll meet you outside the hotel in ten minutes.”

“I can just knock on your door when I’m ready,” she said. “We’re in adjoining rooms, aren’t we?”

“I’m out sightseeing. I’ll pick you up at the front entrance.”

For a moment, Storm wondered if he was being too paranoid. Maybe he was overreacting because of Tangiers. But he couldn’t help himself. While he was in England, he could not afford to let down his guard. The older man sitting in Hyde Park on a bench reading the Times was not really reading the Times. The woman behind him when he was on the sidewalk was not really walking her dog. “Trust no one,” Jones had said. It was his mantra.

He’d rented a Vauxhall Insignia because the German-made car, which was similar to a Buick Regal, was as common in England as a Honda in the U.S. It wouldn’t draw attention. After Showers’s BBC debut, of course, their arrival was hardly a secret.

Showers exited the hotel dressed in an attractive gray pantsuit, carrying a light jacket and her briefcase. Storm had entered the address of the Duke of Madison’s estate into the Vauxhall’s onboard GPS. He glanced at the rearview mirror as he began weaving through London’s congested streets. Eventually, they reached the M-40, the main thoroughfare that would take them west to Gloucester. About four miles outside of London, Storm spotted a black Mercedes-Benz lurking two cars behind them.

“What did you learn at Scotland Yard?” he asked.

“They told me Petrov was having financial problems. The Russians have frozen most of his fortune in Moscow.”

Storm focused on watching the Mercedes. Showers read through a briefing paper about Petrov. When the voice in the GPS warned that the car was only a mile from the exit that would take them to the Duke of Madison’s estate, Storm suddenly pressed on the brakes and brought the Vauxhall to a crawl. Angry drivers honked and swerved around them. At first, the driver of the Mercedes slowed down, too, but then he realized that Storm was testing him. It would be obvious that the Mercedes was tailing the Vauxhall if it also came to a crawl.

As the Mercedes sped up, Showers looked up from her paperwork. “I noticed them, too, when we first left London. Nice work.”

The windows of the Mercedes were tinted, but as the car passed them, Storm made a peace sign. He envisioned the occupants giving him the finger. Showers scribbled down the license tag and then used her cell phone to enter the car’s license plate into an FBI computerized database in Washington, D.C. The vehicle was registered to the embassy of the Russian Federation in London.

“The Ruskies seem to follow you everywhere we go,” Storm said. “They must enjoy watching you from behind.”

Showers sighed.

They reached the gated entrance to the Duke of Madison's estate a minute later. Two security guards, with patches on their black berets that identified them as employees of PROTEC, checked their passports and then let them pass.

"Did you notice they were armed?" Storm asked, as the Vauxhall bounced over cobblestones toward the manor house.

"They're called *manned guards* in England," Showers said, "and yes, I saw their weapons."

"Regardless of what they are called," he said, "security guards are not supposed to be armed in Britain. Maybe we should call your buddies at Scotland Yard and report them for breaking the rules."

Ignoring the dig, Showers said, "According to my briefing papers, the manor house is about five miles up this road. The entire estate consists of ten thousand acres. The main house was built in 1532 with stones cut from a nearby quarry and was designed to show off the Duke of Madison's vast wealth."

"How'd the duke's heirs lose it?" Storm asked.

"Bad bets in hedge funds and London casinos," she replied. "Your kind of people."

The three-story mansion came into sight. A carved stag and the duke's coat of arms were sculpted in marble above each window.

A man and woman were waiting. Storm recognized Antonija Nad from their overnight flight.

"I'm Georgi Lebedev," the man said, extending his hand as they stepped from their rented car. "I recognize Special Agent April Showers from the BBC."

Showers blushed.

"Yes, she's becoming quite the celebrity here. I expect the queen to invite her over any day now," Storm said. He introduced himself as Steve Mason from the State Department.

"He's only here as an advisor," Showers added. "Seen but not heard."

Lebedev said, "This is Ms. Antonija Nad, our chief of security."

"Yes," said Storm. "We were on the same flight from Washington this morning."

"I didn't notice," Nad replied.

She was lying.

"I didn't notice you either," Showers said.

She was lying, too.

"I always notice beautiful women," Storm said.

He was not lying.

Nad gave Storm a slight smile.

He noticed she was carrying a CZ P-01 semiautomatic pistol in a holster on her belt. "I thought it was illegal for manned guards to carry weapons in England," he said.

"It is completely against the law," Lebedev said, "but under an old English law, a nobleman, such as a duke, has the authority to arm his knights for the protection of his lands and his serfs. Obviously, Mr. Petrov is not a duke, but when he purchased the estate, we were able to persuade the duke's heirs to sign a document that gives us permission to carry weapons while we are on the grounds here. Quite frankly, I'm not sure it would pass legal muster if someone complained, but no one has."

“Does this mean Ms. Nad is a knight?” Storm asked, looking at her dark eyes.

“It means I can shoot you if necessary,” she replied.

Lebedev led them into the manor house. As they walked, Showers said, “I didn’t realize Russian oligarchs made it a practice to have English tea.”

“Please don’t refer to him as an oligarch,” Lebedev replied. “It’s not a compliment in Russia. And please don’t assume that because we are Russians, we only drink vodka.”

“I meant no offense,” Showers said.

“I’d rather have a good shot of Putinka, any day, than to drink English tea,” Storm volunteered.

“Ah, you’re familiar with Russian vodkas,” Lebedev said. “I’m sure we can find some Putinka for you.”

“I suspect Mr. Petrov’s tastes are more along the line of Kauffman,” Showers said, showing off.

“First you mention the most popular vodka in Moscow and then you mention the most expensive. I’ll ask one of our servants to pour you a sample to see if your palates match your knowledge.”

“None for me,” said Showers. “When I’m working, I stick to something nonalcoholic. Tea will be fine.”

“Then I will drink her shots,” Storm said.

They walked through a massive dining room and exited the house, entering a garden courtyard.

“We’ll be having what the English call low tea, which is an afternoon snack, as opposed to high tea,” said Lebedev, “which is more of a meal.”

“I don’t see Mr. Petrov,” Showers said.

“He’ll be joining us shortly. Please be seated.”

They sat in chairs on opposite sides of an oblong table covered with a white linen cloth. The head spot was left empty. Storm noticed that it also had a chair larger than the others, to support Petrov’s girth. Three men wearing formal attire brought out silver trays with fresh strawberries dipped in chocolate, egg salad finger sandwiches, and warm scones with Devonshire cream. Nad and Storm didn’t take any. But Showers and Lebedev sampled the offerings. A fourth servant poured tea for the women, but brought shot glasses to the table for the men.

Ivan Petrov entered the courtyard through a side door in the mansion. “Don’t get up,” he said. “I apologize for being late, but when you have businesses in different time zones, sometimes it’s difficult to keep a normal schedule.” He spotted the shot glasses.

“Ah,” he said. “I’m so glad our American friends are not sticklers for English tradition. But I’m surprised that you didn’t want an imported beer, Mr. Mason.”

The reference to beer showed that he’d had Nad run a background check on him. Did they also suspect that his real name was not Steve Mason and he wasn’t a State Department employee?

“Mr. Lebedev has proposed a challenge,” Storm explained. “One shot glass contains Kauffman and the other Putinka.”

“I’ll play,” said Petrov. “But first, are you a sporting man?”

“What are the stakes?”

"I'm extremely wealthy and you, sadly, collect a government salary," Petrov bragged. "How can we make this fair? Here's what I suggest. I will bet whatever British pounds I have on my person against whatever pounds you have in your wallet. This way neither of us will know the true value of the prize until we win. It will be part of the fun."

"Okay," Storm said.

The two men reached for the first shot of vodka simultaneously and swallowed the contents of the glasses in front of them.

Smacking his lips, Petrov said, "I believe the first glass was the Kauffman."

"I agree," said Storm.

Petrov ordered the servant to pour another round.

Again, Petrov went first, downing both shot glasses. "This time, it's the second glass," he said.

Storm followed. "And this time, I disagree."

Everyone looked at the servant. "Which glass did you pour the Kauffman into?" Petrov asked.

A glint of fear sparked inside the man's eyes.

"C'mon, man," said Petrov. "Be honest. You won't be fired. Or horsewhipped." He grinned. "Tell us which glass had the Kauffman."

"Your guest is the one who is correct, sir. I poured it into the first glass. The second was the Putinka."

Petrov laughed. "And so, my friend, you win." He reached into the jacket of his stylist coat and withdrew a leather wallet. "Unfortunately," he said, "I never carry money. No British pounds, no American dollars, no Russian rubles. Nothing. Look for yourself." He opened his billfold, exposing a dozen top-end credit cards but not a single bill. "This is because I have people who pay all of my bills whenever I leave the estate. It is one of the perks of being rich. You never touch cash. I apologize, but you win nothing."

"Only bragging rights," said Storm.

"And what would I have won?" Petrov asked.

Storm removed his own wallet. Unlike Petrov's, it contained a thick wad of bills.

"Ah, you are lucky," Petrov said, eyeing the cash.

"Not really," Storm replied. He extracted one of the bills. "Our wager was British pounds against British pounds and all of my currency is U.S. dollars. It appears as if each of us was trying to trick the other."

"Touché," Petrov said. He lifted a third glass of vodka and said, "*Za vstrechi!*"

"It means..." Lebedev said, starting to translate.

Showers interrupted. "To our meet-up."

"Ah, do you know much Russian, my dear?" Petrov said.

"Just a few words. Enough to be dangerous."

"Indeed," Petrov said.

Storm noticed that Nad had not taken a drink. "You don't like vodka or tea?" he asked. "Perhaps a shot of rakija?"

"Now, that's a drink that I'm not familiar with," Lebedev said.

"It's popular in Croatia, especially in the military," Petrov said. "Our State Department guest has done his homework."

"Drinking slows the reactions," she said.

Petrov said, "My Nad is very, very dedicated." He glanced at his diamond-studded watch and said, "You have come here to question me about my relationship with Senator Thurston Windslow. At least that is what the BBC reported today."

He looked at Showers, whose cheeks began to blush.

Continuing, he said, "My lawyer, Mr. Lebedev, has reminded me that I am a British citizen and can claim certain protections as such. But I have nothing to hide, so I am willing to answer your questions."

"We do have one proviso," Lebedev announced. "Mr. Petrov's schedule is extremely hectic today, and as you know, English is not our native language. Therefore, we would like for you to tell us in general what information you require now, and then tonight, perhaps, you could submit your questions in writing? We can reconvene tomorrow."

As if rehearsed, Petrov chimed in, "I can tell you this. I was not in the United States when this terrible tragedy happened. I also considered Senator Windslow to be a close friend. I had absolutely no reason to wish him or his family harm."

"I'd like to learn more about your personal relationship," Showers said. "How often did you get together in Washington? Did you engage in any financial dealings?"

She was being purposely vague. She had no interest in tipping her hand.

"In Moscow," Petrov said, "we ask direct questions when we want direct replies. You want to know if I paid him a bribe."

His candor seemed shocking. But was it really? Petrov and his attorney had had plenty of time to plan their defense. Mentioning the bribe was clearly part of their strategy. But to what end?

"There have been rumors," Showers said, "of a six-million-dollar payment going from your London bank to the Cayman Islands and then to Senator Windslow."

"We can discuss this tomorrow," Petrov promised. "However, if that money was withdrawn from my bank, it was not authorized by me."

"You allow your employees to transfer six million dollars out of the country without telling you?" Storm asked.

Petrov glanced at Lebedev and said, "Only one or two of them. But the point is that I certainly never offered the senator a bribe. We were good friends. And there is no need for good friends to bribe each other. You do favors out of friendship, not for cash."

Petrov paused and then said, "If you like, I can save you considerable time by exposing the man who committed the crimes of kidnapping and murder in your capital. The man with bloody hands is Russian president Oleg Barkovsky. He is the villain you should be investigating, not me."

"Let's set a time to meet tomorrow," Lebedev said. "In the morning, Mr. Petrov will be delivering a speech at a student rally in Oxford."

"You should attend," Petrov announced. "I will be speaking about the murder of Svetlana Alekseev, the Russian journalist who was found dead in the elevator of her Moscow apartment building last month. She had criticized Barkovsky, and it is common knowledge that he ordered her killed. Just as he had your senator murdered."

“If you attend,” Lebedev said, “you will see for yourselves how much loved Mr. Petrov is by the British people.”

“Isn’t it a dangerous for you to appear at a public rally,” Storm asked, “considering there have been attempts here in England to kill you?”

“Especially,” Showers added, “since your security detail is not allowed to carry weapons anywhere outside your estate.”

Petrov replied, “I have full confidence in Ms. Nad’s ability to keep me safe. She is an excellent marksman.”

“Besides,” Petrov said, “I’m not going to let that miserable bastard in the Kremlin keep me from speaking about atrocities being committed against my fellow oppressed Russians.” He stood from the table and said, “Thank you for coming this afternoon. I will leave you to work out the arrangements for tomorrow.”

“Before you leave us,” Storm said. “I’d like a word in private with you.”

Showers gave him a surprised and irritated look.

“I’m sorry, but this is impossible. I always include Mr. Lebedev in my private conversations.”

“Then maybe the three of us can step into the main house,” Storm offered. “It’s a State Department matter, not related to the FBI’s investigation.”

“If you insist,” Petrov said.

“Just a minute,” Showers said. “I’m not entirely certain what my colleague has to say, but please know that he doesn’t speak for the FBI or the Justice Department.”

“Thank you,” Petrov said. “This is rather unusual.”

Lebedev fell in behind them as did Nad, leaving Showers alone at the table. She was furious.

“Do you really need a security officer with you?” Storm asked.

Petrov said, “You’re right. I have nothing to fear from our guest. Please keep our FBI friend company in the courtyard.”

As soon as the three men entered the house, Storm removed an envelope from his pocket and offered it to Petrov.

“A mutual friend asked me to give you a personal letter.”

Petrov made no effort to accept it. Instead, he asked cautiously, “And does this friend have a name?”

“Jedidiah.”

“You can give it to Mr. Lebedev,” Petrov said.

“I’d rather give it to you.”

“I will take it,” said Lebedev, reaching up.

Storm flipped it aside, stopping him from snatching it.

“Jedidiah wanted you to take it personally,” he said to Petrov.

The Russian hesitated and then took it from him.

Before Storm could say another word, Petrov turned and started to walk away.

“After you read it,” Storm said. “We can discuss the gold.”

Petrov stopped and looked over his shoulder.

“Perhaps. After I read it. Tomorrow then.”

“Only this time in private—just you and me,” Storm said. “Jedidiah believes you might have a leak in your organization.”

A concerned look appeared on Petrov's face. "I see, and did he identify this leak for you?"

"Not by name," Storm said.

Petrov left him and Lebedev alone.

"I'll show you and Ms. Showers to your car," Lebedev said, opening the door to the courtyard.

Showers stood and Nad fell in behind as Lebedev guided them through the mansion to their parked rental outside.

"I will telephone you later tonight, Ms. Showers," Lebedev said. "Perhaps you can fax us your written inquiries. Will you be attending the protest in the morning at Oxford?"

"I wouldn't miss it."

As soon as Storm and Showers were in the Vauxhall, Storm said, "Well, I thought that went just dandy."

Showers was so angry she couldn't speak until they had driven down the cobblestones and exited through the gated entrance. When they reached the main highway, she exploded.

"You rotten son of a bitch! I knew I couldn't trust you. How dare you pull that stunt. You embarrassed me. You went behind my back again. Every time that I think you're an actual human being, you prove me wrong."

"I was only following orders," he said.

"Oh, so now you're the one who suddenly is following rules. When it suits you. And what was all that macho crap with the vodka. I think this glass is the one, oh no, I think it was this one. My god, I felt like I was in some old spy movie."

He started to reply, but she held up both of her hands. "Just don't speak to me," she said. She reached for the radio. "The last thing I want to hear is your voice."

Chapter 10

As soon as their guests were gone, Georgi Lebedev hurried to the manor house's extensive library, where Ivan Petrov was sitting behind an enormous, hand-carved desk reading the letter that Jones had sent him. The CIA director had written a personal note on a copy of the photograph that showed Jones, Windslow, and Petrov holding the gold bar: "We accept your proposal. Mr. Mason is my envoy and will handle all arrangements."

Lebedev said, "What did Jedidiah write? Is the CIA going to help us get the gold?"

"As we suspected, Mr. Mason is not a State Department liaison," Petrov said, avoiding the question. "Has Nad been able to identify him?"

"Not yet. She is taking his fingerprints from the shot glasses as we speak. She should have an answer shortly. But what of Mr. Jones and the CIA? Is it going to help us?"

Petrov said, "I will learn more tomorrow, but today, it is enough for me to tell you that Barkovsky's days are limited, and when the time comes, I will be the one who puts a bullet into the back of his head."

“*Vyshaya mer*,” Lebedev said, which translated to “the highest measure of punishment.” It was when a condemned man was taken into a room, made to kneel, then shot in the back of the head so that his face was blown away and made unrecognizable. It was part of the Stalinist tradition.

“You have not even told me where the gold is located,” Lebedev said, “and we are like brothers, closer than brothers. Why would you share your secret with some stranger just because he arrives with a letter?”

“Do you take me for an ass?” Petrov asked.

“No, my friend.”

“Then don’t treat me like one,” Petrov said. “I will talk to this Mr. Mason tomorrow, but I will tell him little, or nothing, until I learn what he has come to offer us.”

“I say we screw the Americans. Nad is loyal to you. Let her get the gold. Do this on your own.”

Petrov patted Lebedev on his shoulder. “And what happens when her loyal hired guards see mountains of gold before their eyes? Billions within reach. Can they overcome the temptation? Only men who believe in a greater cause can be trusted to recover the gold. You can’t buy honor or loyalty. That’s why I need the Americans. They will not betray their own country.”

Chapter 11

Novo-Ogaryovo (President’s Residence) Moscow, Russia

President Barkovsky generally ate after nine o’clock Moscow time, in the company of his closest friends and young female playthings. But tonight he was dining alone and watching two men slugging and kicking each other in an Ultimate Fighting Championship event on cable television, in a private dining room adjacent to his bedroom. He’d just finished a pirozhki stuffed with boiled meat and sautéed onions when his chief of staff entered.

“We’ve just heard from our friend,” Mikhail Sokolov said.

Barkovsky motioned Sokolov to sit, which he did, as the president refilled his wineglass and poured one for his guest.

“These American fighters are nothing,” Barkovsky said, pointing to the television screen. “One of our Vympel soldiers could kill any of them with one quick blow. If I were not a president, I would fight in the ring myself and show these American bastards what real men are made of.”

He took a large gulp of wine and asked, “What does our friend have to tell us?”

“Petrov had visitors in England today. An FBI agent and a man posing as a U.S. State Department employee.”

“CIA?”

“Probably. But we have not been able to identify him.”

“And what was the purpose of this visit?”

“The FBI suspects Petrov of assassinating Senator Windslow.”

Barkovsky gave his aide a toothy grin. "This is excellent."

"The CIA man, however, asked to speak privately with Petrov."

The president put down his fork and wiped his fingers on a satin napkin. "And what did this stranger tell Petrov?"

"Our source did not know specifics. But it was about finding the gold."

Without warning, Barkovsky slammed both fists onto the dining room table and uttered an expletive. "Do the Americans understand what this means?"

"I'm certain the CIA will cover its tracks if it helps him. There will be no evidence that we can use."

"How is that possible? Aren't our officers as clever as Langley's drones? Tell London that we must identify this stranger. Now!"

Barkovsky let out a loud sigh. "Why do we still not know where the gold is hidden?"

"Petrov refuses to tell anyone, even Lebedev, his closest friend and advisor. And no one knows how he found where the treasure is hidden. Our friend says that Petrov is going to meet with the FBI agent and stranger tomorrow after he speaks in Oxford at a rally."

"What rally?"

"About the journalist killing."

Barkovsky waved his hand threw the air, dismissing it. "Let them demonstrate—in Oxford. Who cares about the goddamn British?"

For a moment, he didn't speak. He was considering his options. "No one knows how Petrov found the location of the gold. He has refused to tell anyone where it is hidden. But now it appears that the Americans might be about to help him find it. This changes everything. We cannot risk having it fall into Petrov's hands."

He was pensive for a few more moments and then added, "If we kill the Americans, they will simply send someone else. That leaves me only one other option. If Petrov will not talk, then he must be killed. Better that his secret dies with him than to have the Americans learn where the gold is hidden."

"There have been attempts on his life already and all have failed."

A smug look appeared on Barkovsky's face. "Do you think I am that inept? If I wanted him dead, he would be dead. Those attempts were meant to make him share his secret with someone else in case he was killed. But I underestimated his ego. Petrov is willing to go to his grave with his secret. So now it is time to let him!"

"If Petrov dies," Sokolov said, "you will never know where the bullion is hidden."

"That's not true," Barkovsky replied. "If he discovered it, there must be a way for us to learn it, too. It will simply take more time."

"We could kidnap him. We could torture him."

"And the world would condemn me. They would demand his release."

"If you kill him, the world will also know, will it not?"

"Not if I give them a patsy."

"But who?"

Barkovsky said, "His guests—the FBI Agent who was on the BBC. And the mystery man from the CIA. Let them appear to kill him and the world will blame them and the United States."

"And the gold?"

“We will keep searching. What is important now is to stop the CIA from helping Petrov. Send word to London. We want Petrov killed and we want it to appear that the Americans did it.”

Barkovsky raised his wineglass and tipped it against Solokov’s. “To the success of the scheduled tasks!” he said. It was one of the first toasts that both men learned after they joined the Komsomol, the young Communist league. “A bullet in Petrov’s head,” Barkovsky said, raising his glass for a second toast. “And a pistol left in the hands of the Americans.”

Chapter 12

London, England

“I’m filing a formal complaint against you as soon as we get to the Marriott,” Showers said. “I no longer wish to work with you.”

“I understand why you’re upset,” Storm said in an understanding voice. “I would be furious, too. But you’ll be wasting your time if you complain to your supervisors. Trust me, it will be you who will be called home to Washington.”

“Trust you?” Showers said. “That’s a joke. And what makes you so smug that you think I’d be called home? They sent me here to solve the murder of a U.S. senator.”

“You don’t want to complain. This came from the top.”

“The top of what?”

“The White House.”

“Then tell me what you and Jones are doing, so we can work together. You owe me that much.”

“It’s above your pay grade.”

Showers took a deep breath and said, “At this moment, I would love to shoot you.”

He stopped in front of the Marriott.

“How about a Taser?” he said. “If it really makes you feel better.”

“Just go crawl into whatever hole you’re sleeping in in London,” she said. “I wish I’d never met you.”

Storm actually felt sorry when she slammed the car door and disappeared inside.

When he reached his room at the bed-and-breakfast, he removed the false fingerprints that he had applied earlier that morning. He had used his computer to download a copy of someone else’s prints from the database at Langley and had copied them onto the flesh-like material that he’d been given from the CIA’s science wizards. When Petrov’s chief of security, Antonija Nad, checked the shot glass, she would discover the identity of someone else—someone she already knew.

Herself.

His cell phone rang.

"Someone's been in my room," Showers said, in an exasperated voice. "While we were with Petrov. I thought you should know in case someone followed you and searched your room too."

"Thanks for caring enough to call," he said.

"I told you, I play by the rules," she said. "Even if you don't."

"Where are you calling from?"

"The Marriott lobby. I assume they bugged my room. I didn't bring anything with me to check. Since you're a private eye and part-time spook, I thought you could come over and remove them. Either that or I've got to call in a team from the embassy."

"I'm coming over."

Storm grabbed his backpack and made the five-minute walk to the hotel. He waved her out of the lobby onto the street.

"Let's walk," he said. "It will be safer."

For fifteen minutes, they crossed through a series of streets, often doubling back and then going down a different route. When they were convinced they were safe, he asked, "How do you know someone was in your room?"

"I left papers on the desk in a loose-leaf binder. They were FBI press releases about the senator's murder. I put a penny on page six."

It was an old trick. When the intruder picked up the binder, the penny fell to the floor. Even if he spotted it, there was no way for him to know what page it had fallen from.

"Are you certain the maid didn't move the papers?" he asked.

"Haven't you insulted me enough today?" she said.

"I'm sorry."

"I've been thinking while we were walking," she said. "Should we clear it of bugs or use it to misdirect them? Whoever *them* is."

He was impressed. She was thinking more like an intelligence officer than a cop.

He saw they were passing by a pub. "Let's go inside and get a drink. It's been a very long day. I'll pay."

"Do you really think buying me a drink is going to make me feel better about what you did today? About cutting me out and going behind my back?"

"A couple drinks might be the only things that do help," he said. "Besides, I'm hungry and thirsty. C'mon. What happened wasn't personal. If there'd been a better way to handle it, I would've."

"Just one drink," she said with a sigh. "And only because I could use it."

It was a neighborhood joint with dark wood paneling and a regular crowd who noticed strangers. He ordered fish and chips and Showers had a chicken poppy-seed wrap. He told the waiter to bring them drafts of London Pilsner.

She seemed to relax after she'd finished her first beer.

"First time someone's bugged your hotel room?" he asked.

"They taught us about it in the academy," she said. "But this is the first time."

He raised his second glass of beer and tapped it against hers. "Welcome to the cloak-and-dagger side."

"I can see why you enjoy this. It's more entertaining than writing down questions for Petrov and faxing them to him tonight."

“Why are you bothering to send him anything? He’s not going to admit he was involved. He’s playing you, trying to find out what you know.”

“And what makes you think he’s not playing you—in whatever you’re doing?”

“Oh, I’m sure he is. Everyone is after something.”

“I don’t expect Petrov to confess,” she said. “That’s not how the game is played. My goal is to get him to say something that I can later prove in court was a lie. Then we can indict him for lying to a federal agent and for being part of a criminal conspiracy.”

Storm shook his head in disbelief. “April,” he said tenderly, calling her by her first name, which he’d never done before. “Do you really think the Justice Department is going to charge Petrov with a crime? He has influential friends. He’s an oligarch. He lives in London.”

“I know you think I’m naïve,” she said. “But I told you before and I’ll say it again because I genuinely believe it. No one is immune from justice. Yes, our system is flawed. Yes, it is much harder to bring down wealthy and well-connected criminals. But it can be done, as long as there are people who believe in our system and don’t give up. As long as we fight for it. Truth eventually triumphs.”

Storm smiled.

“Do you think this is funny?” she asked.

“Oh no, I wasn’t laughing at you. I was thinking about how the words ‘And the truth will set you free’ are inscribed in the lobby of the CIA.”

“Saying those words and believing them are two different things.”

Storm said, “Why are you so sure that justice triumphs in the end? Who taught you that: a Sunday school teacher, a minister?”

He suddenly noticed tears welling in her eyes. “Actually, my father did. He was the most honorable and bravest man I’ve ever known.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you. What was he like?”

“Why? So you can make him the butt of some half-witted joke?”

“No,” he said. “Because I really would like to know.”

“My father was a Virginia Highway Patrol officer,” she said. “I adored him. I was a daddy’s girl. One night, he pulled over two men who were hopped up on drugs and speeding in their car. He could tell something was wrong with them and then he heard someone whimpering. He made the driver open the trunk and there was a naked ten-year-old girl in it. The men had followed her from a convenience store, kidnapped her, and both repeatedly raped her. The passenger came out of the car with a handgun and shot my dad. Even though he was mortally wounded, he managed to kill them both. My father died saving that girl’s life.”

“Then your father was a brave man.”

“He’s why I decided to go into the FBI. People like those two men are monsters, predators. They destroy the weak, the innocent. People like my dad are all that stand between the public and the predators. They’re the real heroes. They put their lives on the line every day helping others.”

Storm raised his glass and said, “A toast to your dad.” She could tell he was serious, so she joined him.

They ordered another round.

“What about your father?” she asked.

“Actually, this might surprise you,” Storm said. “In fact, I know it will. Are you ready?”

She gave him a puzzled look.

“My father is a retired FBI agent.”

“Oh my god!” she exclaimed.

The pub’s owner appeared at their table with two shot glasses and a bottle of whisky. “You two are Yanks, aren’t ya?” he asked in a booming voice that echoed throughout the pub.

Storm nodded and the owner said, “We got a bit of a tradition here. You Yanks are always on the telly with your fingers pointed up at the sky screaming you’re lungs out about how your number one—when you don’t even know what real football is. So when we get a good-looking Yank couple like you in my fine establishment, I feel obligated to give you a taste of real English whisky, not that horse piss they serve in the New Country.” He laughed loudly and so did the pub regulars.

“Now,” the pub owner said, “this here is a bottle of whisky distilled in England to commemorate the royal wedding of Prince William and Catherine, and we’d be much obliged if you joined us in a toast to the royal couple and would take great umbrage if the two of you refuse.”

He slammed down the two shot glasses and filled both to the brim. He filled one for himself, too, and hoisted it in the air.

“Will you drink to them with me?” he asked, good-naturedly.

“It’s the least we can do,” Storm said, “given that you lost a war to us.”

The pub owner faked an angry look and announced: “To Prince William and the lovely Catherine, his bride!”

Storm downed it, but Showers hadn’t lifted her glass.

“What’s this?” the pub owner declared.

“C’mon,” Storm said, encouraging her.

She reached for the shot glass and, much to his surprise, downed it easily.

Everyone applauded.

“It would be impolite for me, as host, to let you leave my establishment without also raising a glass to your lovely lady here,” the pub owner said, glancing at Showers. He refilled the shot glasses and quickly lifted them. “To the beautiful young, red-haired maiden sitting here who has to have a bit of Irish in her—judging from her green eyes and fair skin.”

Showers smiled, and the three of them downed the shots as the other pub patrons continued to look on.

“And now,” the pub owner said, “I’m going to leave you alone with a final word.” He broke into a huge grin and said, “Them shots of whisky is five pounds a piece, so I’m adding an additional thirty pounds to your bill. Welcome to London, you Yanks!”

The crowd erupted into laughter and clapping as the pub owner bowed and walked back to the bar, where he declared that it was time for karaoke. A thin man from the bar immediately leaped onto a small platform in the pub’s corner, turned on a portable karaoke machine, and began mangling, *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*.

By the time Storm and Showers left the pub three hours later, they had consumed more shots of whisky sent over by friendly bar patrons in admiration of various British royalty and American presidents. At one point, Showers had seized control of the karaoke microphone and belted out a surprisingly good version of Lady Gaga's *Born This Way* that left the crowd clamoring for more.

As they made their way to the Marriott, they locked arms to support each other.

"I didn't know you were a Lady Gaga fan," he said admiringly.

"Some of her lyrics are poetic," she replied. "Have you ever even heard one of her songs?"

"What sort of music do you think I listen to?" he asked.

"That's easy," she said. "Country Western."

Storm replied, "It's not that I'm dishonest, I loathe reality." It was from one of Lady Gaga's videos.

A stunned Showers began clapping.

Storm raised a finger to his closed lips. "Let's keep this our secret."

When they reached the Marriott, she said, "So where is your hiding place?"

"Are you asking me if you can come up to my room for a nightcap?" he said hopefully.

"Maybe," she replied. "Or maybe I'm just interested in where a spy goes to hide out."

"I'm not a spy, remember? I'm a private detective."

"Is that true? Is anything that you've told me tonight true?"

Before he could reply, she put her finger against his lips and said, "Just take me to where you're staying."

When they reached his room, she collapsed onto the double bed. He shut the door and tossed the room's key onto the nightstand. She waved him over. He sat on the bed's edge.

"I do find you reasonably attractive," she said. She reached over and ran a finger over his hand.

He'd bedded many women. All had been easy conquests. He couldn't remember most of their faces. The only one who had mattered had been Clara Strike. She had been more than a one-night stand. And she had broken his heart. How did he feel about April Showers? Did he want another broken heart? Where could this lead? When he had finished his job and found the traitor, he would be going back to a life of anonymity.

She leaned up and kissed him on the lips. He kissed her back, hard and passionately. He followed that kiss with another and felt the heat that always surfaces when a man and woman anticipate making love for the first time. The sheer joy of discovering a new body. Exploring each inch of flesh. To touch and to be touched.

"If we are going to do this," she whispered seductively, "I need you to do me a favor. I saw a coffeepot downstairs. I want you to go get me a cup of coffee."

"You want a cup of coffee?"

"Actually," she said, "it's an excuse. A polite way to get you out of the room because I've got to pee and I'd rather do that in private. It's a woman thing."

He rose and started for the door.

She sprang up, and as he stepped out of the room, she slapped him hard on his butt and laughed.

The moment he was in the hallway, she shut the door, locking it behind him. He realized that he'd left the key on the nightstand.

He gently rapped on the door and said in a quiet voice, "I can just go down and wake up the owner. She'll let me back in my room."

"Do you really want to disturb her at this hour?" Showers replied from behind the door.

He'd thought she was drunker than she obviously was. She'd outfoxed him.

She said, "Think of the scandal! A woman in your room. A woman who has been drinking. Who knows what I might say? It might even make the BBC since I'm so famous. What did you tell them? The queen was going to invite me over?"

With his training, it would take less than a minute for him to force open the door. But he didn't want to force himself on her.

"You should sleep at the Marriott," she whispered. "You can use my room if you want. Just be careful, they might have installed secret cameras as well as hidden microphones. Your naked butt could end up on some Internet site. Good night!"

Chapter 13

Someone knocked on her door. She heard Storm ask: "Are you awake? I brought breakfast."

She slipped on a terry-cloth robe and let him inside.

"I got this from downstairs," he said. "It's an English breakfast. I've got scrambled eggs, sausage, black pudding, baked beans, and a slice of tomato." He waved the tray under her face.

She suddenly felt nauseous. And that made him smile.

"Since I spent the night elsewhere," he continued, "I took the liberty of ducking into your room at the Marriott and grabbing you some fresh clothes. There in the hotel bag." He dropped a plastic bag on the bed.

"How come you're so bright and cheery?" she asked.

"I had to take a very cold shower after you locked me out."

"Just one cold shower? I figured you'd need a couple."

"The shower was enough to lower my expectations."

"Cute," she said.

"I'm going to fill up the rental with petrol," he said in a mock British accent. "We need to leave in an hour in order to get to the protest rally. Enjoy your breakfast."

Showers was nursing the worst hangover she'd had since college as they rode to Oxford. She kept her eyes closed under her sunglasses and fought the urge to vomit each time the car hit a bump or pothole.

The anti-Barkovsky rally was being held in the grassy fields of Oxford University Parks, on the northeast edge of the thirty-eight independent colleges that made up the school. Storm parked on a dirt road near the Old Observatory, and they walked toward a stage that had been constructed specifically for the protest. The platform rose only two feet above the grass and was only large enough for a

podium and four chairs. There were about a thousand protesters mingling around it. A young girl told them that everyone was waiting for Petrov, who was running late.

As was his practice, Storm surveyed the crowd and immediately spotted three men who seemed to be out of place at the rally. They were Eastern European and in their thirties. Most of the others in the crowd were younger students or older professors.

“Did you bring your Glock?” he asked Storm.

“Yes,” she said. “You don’t have to yell.”

“I wasn’t.”

Just the same, he lowered his voice when he said, “I’m going to point out three men. If my hunch is correct, you may have to shoot them. If you can’t, give me your gun.”

“I’m not giving you my gun,” she said. “And you don’t have to point them out. The fact that they are wearing London Fog overcoats and the sun is out and it is hot makes them stick out. How do you want to handle this?”

Two black Mercedes-Benz S-Class 600 sedans with tinted windows appeared on a road to the right of the park, about two hundred yards away. When they came to a stop, Petrov and Lebedev stepped from the first car. Security Chief Nad stepped from the second. The two cars’ drivers fell in behind the group, and Petrov and his entourage began walking toward the stage.

“I’ll intercept Petrov and Nad,” he said. “You keep an eye on those men.”

“Do you think Nad and the two security guards are armed?” Showers asked.

“I sure as hell hope so.” He started making his way around the crowd.

Storm had gone about twenty feet when he saw two golf carts speeding from behind the platform. Driven by two students, the carts were decorated with anti-Barkovsky placards and were en route to give the guest and his attendants a ride to the stage. Storm realized it would be impossible for him to reach Petrov and his entourage in time.

One of the golf carts delivered Petrov to the stage. Lebedev and Nad stayed in the back of it. The two bodyguards positioned themselves at the front of the platform, on either side of it.

Nad had only brought two men with her! Both wore PROTEC security badges on their dark blazers and berets. If they were any good, they would notice the three interlopers.

The three Eastern Europeans separated. One positioned himself directly in front of the speaker’s podium. The other two moved to the left and right of the stage, taking spots directly in line with the two PROTEC bodyguards. Showers was on Storm’s left and was keeping an eye on the suspect closest to her.

Storm zeroed in on the suspect in front of the podium. He would be the one responsible for shooting Petrov. The others would be tasked with killing his two bodyguards and then backing up their friend. Storm searched for Nad and noticed that she was not studying the crowd as she should have been. Instead, she was watching Petrov, who was now behind the podium being introduced.

The crowd began clapping as Petrov began to speak.

Picking up his pace, Storm began shoving spectators out of his way. “Move! Move!” he yelled. He was trying to start such a commotion that Petrov and his

security guards would notice. Both guards did and slowly reached under their jackets. Nad spotted him, too, but Petrov was too preoccupied with his speech to take note. "Hey, Petrov!" Storm yelled. The Russian stopped mid-sentence.

Everyone was looking at Storm, except for the three attackers in their trench coats.

Storm yelled: "Duck!"

The Eastern European directly in line with Petrov screamed, "Traitor!" and pulled a .45-caliber pistol from under this jacket. He began firing just as Storm tackled him from behind. Petrov collapsed on stage.

The shooter's two companions drew Heckler & Koch MP5 submachine guns from under their coats and killed both PROTEC bodyguards with sprays of bullets.

Antonija Nad ran across the stage to Petrov, who had blood coming from his chest. Panic erupted. Some protestors hit the ground; others bolted in different directions, while some stood petrified with fear.

Storm was now lying on the back of the downed gunman. He grabbed the shooter's right hand, pinning his pistol against the grass. But the gunman was stronger than Storm had estimated. With his free left hand, the shooter pushed his body upward, knocking Storm from his back, but not before Storm was able to break the gunman's hold on his pistol.

Both men sprang from the grass to face each other. The shooter reached under his coat for a Russian military-issued knife, which he jabbed at Storm. In an expert move, Storm dodged the blade, grabbed the attacker's hand, and twisted the blade backward, plunging it into the man's chest. In a move known on the street as "running the gears," Storm jerked the blade upward, then sideways, then sideways again and finally down into his victim's stomach before releasing his grip. The shooter's lifeless body fell limp onto the ground while Storm reached for the gunman's discarded .45 handgun.

While Storm was subduing the first shooter, Showers had drawn her Glock and fired at the the assailant nearest her. One of her rounds had struck him in his skull, killing him instantly. That had left only one assassin alive, and when he'd heard Showers's pistol fire, he'd shot a burst in her direction from his submachine gun.

One of the rounds hit its mark, smacking into her shoulder. Her right arm became useless, her Glock falling from her fingers as she grabbed her wound with her left hand and fell to the grass for cover.

Storm fired at the gunman with the retrieved .45. *Rap. Rap.* Two rounds fired at the attacker's head. *Pop. Pop.* Another two at his chest. As he fell, the gunman's finger pinched the trigger of his submachine gun, emptying what remained of its thirty-round clip into the air and ground around him.

Storm ran to Showers, who was fighting to catch her breath. He got her to her feet, put her Glock into its holster, and looked for help.

"Hang on!" he told her.

During the melee, Lebedev had commandeered a golf cart and driven to one of the Mercedes. He was now racing the sedan across the park toward them. A wounded Petrov was being helped off the platform by Nad.

Leaping from the driver's seat, Lebedev opened the car's rear passenger door and yelled. "Bring Petrov here!"

Nad screamed, "He's still alive! We must get him to a hospital!"

Together they shoved Petrov's huge body into the sedan's backseat.

With his right arm wrapped around her waist, Storm hurried Showers toward the Mercedes.

"I'll take her, too!" Lebedev yelled.

"We'll follow in my rental," Storm said. "It's closer."

Lebedev pressed the accelerator and the giant Mercedes spit a rooster tail of grass and dirt from under its back wheels, leaving Nad and Storm behind.

Storm ran to the parked Vauxhall and had already buckled in and started the rental by the time Nad joined him in its passenger seat. The Mercedes was nearly out of sight as he drove south toward St. Cross Road.

"Turn left," Nad ordered.

Storm glanced at the illuminated GPS screen in car's dash. Downtown Oxford was to his right. He hesitated but then spotted the Mercedes on his left just cresting a hill less than a mile away. It was heading away from Oxford, too. Away from the nearest hospital.

Storm felt a pit of dread in his stomach. He pressed the gas pedal, causing the Vauxhall's engine to scream. The speedometer registered 136 kilometers per hour and was still moving forward.

The Mercedes was now a half mile ahead, but Storm was making up ground. Without warning, the black sedan suddenly slowed and turned off the main highway onto a dirt path. It disappeared into a patch of woods.

Storm pushed the pedal harder.

"Slow down," Nad commanded.

He looked to his left in the English-made car and saw that she had drawn her CZ P-01 semiautomatic pistol and was now pointing it at his chest.

"I told you to slow down," she said. "And turn where Lebedev turned."

Georgi Lebedev pulled a pistol from under his jacket and leveled it at Showers seconds after he parked the Mercedes under the row of trees.

"Give me your gun," he told her.

Already in intense pain and holding her wound with her left hand, Showers grimaced and Lebedev realized that her right arm was useless. He reached across the car seat and snatched her Glock from the holster on her right hip.

"It's time for the truth!" he hollered at Petrov, who was sprawled across the sedan's backseat, moaning and clutching his abdomen. Blood dotted his white dress shirt.

"Where is the gold hidden?" Lebedev yelled.

"Gold," Showers repeated. "What gold?"

"Shut up!" Lebedev yelled.

"Georgi Ivanovich," Petrov pleaded. "Take me to the hospital! I'm dying."

"Tell me where the gold is hidden, then we will go to the hospital."

"But we are brothers," Petrov gasped. "Why are you doing this?"

"No, Ivan Sergeyevich," Lebedev said. "I'm your lapdog. You feed me scraps. But no more. Never again. Where is the gold?"

Petrov cut loose with a string of expletives.

Without flinching, Lebedev fired the Glock into the back car seat, near Petrov's head. The shot made a deafening sound inside the sedan, but it was not loud enough to drown Petrov's screams.

"The next one will be in your foot," said Lebedev. "And then your balls."

"Slow down or I will shoot you," Nad said. "Slow down and turn right at that stone house ahead."

The abandoned farmhouse was next to the dirt road where the Mercedes had turned moments earlier.

Instead of slowing, Storm jammed the car's gas pedal against the floor.

"I was wrong. I thought you and Lebedev would not show your hand until later," he said calmly.

"How long have you known?"

"When I saw the shortened Dragunov's stock. It had been cut down for a woman. But I should have known earlier. The moment I found the Capitol Hill Police officer's disguise hidden in a trash can outside the women's room, not the men's."

"You have made your last mistake," she said. "Slow down. You can't make the turn at this speed. You're going too fast."

She was beautiful. He had wanted her to be something other than what she was. But she wasn't and now he would have to kill her.

The car's speedometer topped out at 180 kilometers.

"You betrayed Petrov for gold?" Showers asked, fighting to remain conscious. The pain in her shoulder was excruciating and she was losing blood.

Lebedev replied, "Not just for gold. But for love."

"You bastard!" Petrov sobbed from the rear seat.

"Shut up," Lebedev said. "I have been telling Barkovsky about your every move for more than a year. Nad and me. We made a pact. We are going to be rich and together."

"Are you responsible for the kidnapping in Washington?" Showers asked. "Did you have Senator Windslow killed? I need to know if you're planning on killing me."

"Yes," Lebedev said triumphantly. "With Barkovsky's help, Nad and I arranged everything. I wanted the Americans to blame Petrov. We did not want Windslow to help him find the gold. We did not want the CIA to trust him."

His words sounded to Showers as if they were coming from a great distance. She fought to concentrate.

"I will never tell you where the gold is located, you bastard," Petrov yelled from the backseat.

"Oh really, comrade," Lebedev replied. He fired the Glock, sending a round into Petrov's foot, causing him to scream in agony.

With the turn from the main highway approaching, Storm looked confidently at Nad and broke into a huge grin. "Good-bye. Bitch," he said.

She gave him a confused look and tightened the grip on her pistol. But it was too late.

Storm jerked the Vauxhall's wheel to the right, sending the car speeding across the oncoming traffic lane. Its tires hit a slight hump at the asphalt's edge and the Vauxhall took flight, rising several feet above the ground, aimed directly at the farmhouse's old stone walls.

"This is your final chance," Lebedev yelled at a terrorized Petrov. "Tell me where the gold is and I will spare your life. I will drive you to the hospital. For all the years that I kissed your pompous ass, I deserve to know. Now, tell me, or the next shot will be in your crotch."

A crying and defeated Petrov spat out a series of numbers.

Lebedev punched the longitude and latitude coordinates into an app on his cell phone.

"It's near the Valley of Five Caves in Uzbekistan?" he said, making the statement sound like a question.

"Yes," Petrov cried. "I swear it. Now, save me, my brother, I'm dying."

Lebedev pointed the Glock directly at Petrov's forehead. "I believe you, my brother," he said. "If there is one thing that I have learned because of our years together, it is when you are telling the truth and when you are lying. This is my reward for wiping your butt."

He fired the Glock, spattering his best friend's brains across the sedan's back window and seat.

Satisfied, he turned his attention to Showers, who was now so weak and groggy that she could barely comprehend what was happening. Her body was in shock. Without emergency help, she would die.

"I will tell the police that you forced us at gunpoint to come here after the rally and that you shot and murdered my friend with your Glock. I had no choice but to kill you with my own pistol." He rested her Glock on his lap and picked up his own gun.

"You're insane," Showers responded, her voice a whisper. "No one will believe you."

"I will tell them that you shot him in the foot to torture him, trying to make him confess. I will tell them you went crazy. It will be the word of Petrov's oldest and dearest friend against a dead FBI agent who came here to avenge the murder of a U.S. senator. The British press will love it."

"My partner," she uttered.

"Don't worry about him. He'll be dead, too. Nad will see to it."

Lebedev leveled the gun at her chest.

"Good-bye, Special Agent April Showers," he said.

It was at that very moment that Lebedev heard the sound of a loud explosion coming from outside the Mercedes and momentarily turned his face to look out the driver's side window.

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The flying Vauxhall nose-dived into the stone wall of the old farmhouse with a tremendous roar. It hit with such force that the vehicle seemed to burst into pieces of shattered glass, busted chrome, twisted plastic, and crumpled metal. The trunk of the sedan flew upward upon impact, and for a moment it appeared that the

Vauxhall might topple end over end, but the rear axle crashed back onto the ground with a loud boom. Flames, smoke, and steam poured from under the demolished front hood.

The car's crumple zone, driver's side air bag, and the driver's seat belt had saved Storm's life. But Nad had not been so fortunate. She had not bothered to put on her seat belt and Storm had flipped off the car's passenger side air bags. Nad had not noticed and it had cost her her life.

The impact had launched her from the car's passenger's seat, rocketing her through the windshield, ripping her unblemished face to shreds. Her head had hit the farmhouse's wall like a melon hurled at a hundred miles per hour. Her skull had burst open. Her spinal cord had been telescoped. Her broken body was now lying in an unnatural twisted position on the ground next to the burning Vauxhall.

Storm pulled himself away from the wreckage and fell facedown onto the long grass. He could not hear from one ear. There was blood dripping from it and from his nose. His right knee was throbbing. But he was alive.

Gathering his senses, his first thought was of Showers, and the black Mercedes parked a hundred yards down the road, under a clump of English oaks.

Much like a drunk staggering from a bar, he tried to steady himself as he slowly plotted a course to Nad's body. He spotted her pistol about eight feet away, next to the stone wall. He reached it and with great effort bent down and examined the handgun. It looked undamaged.

I must save April, he thought. I must get to her.

With tremendous willpower, fighting the intense pain that was streaking through his limbs, Storm began making his way from the farmhouse toward the parked Mercedes.

He had gone about fifty yards when he heard a loud crack.

It was the sound of gunfire.

And it had come from inside the parked car in front of him.

[To be continued in *A Bloody Storm*]

