THE NATIONAL BESTSELLER

BRAD THOR

"BOTTOM LINE: *LIONS* ROARS." —*People*

THE LIONS OF LUCERNE

The president has been kidnapped.

The Lions of Lucerne

Scot Harvath [1]

Brad Thor

Pocket Star (2002)

Rating: ★★★☆☆

Tags: Mystery, Kidnapping - Fiction, Fiction - Espionage, Thriller, political, Intelligence officers - Fiction, general, Literary, Modern fiction, Suspense, Adventure, Presidents - United States - Fiction, Thrillers, Politics, crime thriller, fiction, Suspense fiction - gsafd, Intrigue, espionage, Suspense Thriller

On the snow-covered slopes of Utah, the unthinkable has just become a nightmarish reality; thirty Secret Service agents have been viciously executed and the vacationing president of the United States kidnapped by one of the most lethal terrorist organizations in the Middle East - the Fatah Revolutionary

Council. But surviving agent and ex-Navy SEAL Scot Harvath doesn't believe the Fatah Revolutionary Council is responsible for the attack. Driven by his professional code of duty and honor, Harvath creates his own rules to get some answers. But his search for the truth raises the blood pressure of his superiors...and casts his own life in mortal jeopardy. The deadly machinations have been set in motion by a shadowy coalition, comprising some of the highest-ranking officials in government and business - men who operate above the law, men who realize the threat Harvath poses to their hidden agenda...men who will do anything to stop him.

Synopsis:

In the tradition of bestselling authors such as Jack Higgins and Clive Cussler, a new

voice in thriller writing has emerged to rival any of the masters. When the president is

kidnapped during his ski holiday in Colorado, disavowed Secret Service Agent Scott

Harvath is his only hope of rescue. As the FBI and CIA chase a string of

dangerously false clues across the Middle East, Agent Harvath's

investigation leads

him to Switzerland. Throughout the picturesque towns of Bern, Interlaken and

Lucerne, Harvath plays a deadly game of cat and mouse with the real kidnappers, as

well as rogue factions within his own government that want him terminated before he

can save the president. With only the ambitious Claudia Muehler of the Swiss

Federal Attorney's Office to assist him, the pair are forced to go it alone as they

realise the kidnapping plot reaches some of the highest levels of the Swiss

Intelligence community. In a race against time, they must scale the treacherous

heights of Mt. Pilatus, uncover a hidden military fortress secreted beneath its peak,

and defeat the formidable force that stands between them and the safe return of the

president — the deadly men known as the Lions of Lucerne.

THE LIONS OF LUCERNE

By

BRAD THOR

The first book in the Scot Harvath series

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This book is for my beautiful wife, Trish —

my life, my love, and my best friend.

For reasons of national security, certain names, places, and tactical procedures have

been changed within this novel.

Fortes Fortuna Adjuvat.

Fortune favors the brave.

Prologue

“Senators,” said Fawcett as he strode across the polished floor in his

monogrammed Stubbs and Wooton opera slippers, “I’m so very pleased you could

make it.”

The study was lined from floor to ceiling with beautiful leather-bound books, most

of them first editions. Velvet draperies were drawn tight against the windows,

obscuring from view the frigid waters of southern Wisconsin’s famed Lake

Geneva.

The industrialist's eagerly awaited guests sat in two leather club chairs by the

fireplace.

Senator Russell Rolander was the first to stand. "Donald, good to see you." The

senator stuck out his beefy paw and pumped Fawcett's hand. Rolander and Fawcett

had been roommates together at the University of Illinois. The senator had been a

college football star and continued his notoriety through many years with the

Chicago Bears before going into Illinois politics. Long known as one of Washington,

D.C.'s, biggest power brokers, Rolander was a ranking member of the U.S. Senate,

held a coveted position on the Appropriations Committee, and owned a weekend

home down the road from Fawcett's.

Slower to rise was New York senator David Snyder. Snyder shook Fawcett's

hand

only after it had been offered. Described as a sneaky little son of a bitch by his

adversaries, Snyder had scaled the rocky heights of the American political landscape

by adhering to a simple mantra: *do unto others before they do unto you.* He was a

master of dirty tricks, and there were few in Washington who had dared cross

Snyder's path. Those who had, hadn't survived long politically. Snyder, a slight man

of wiry build and soft features, was the mirror opposite of the large, rugged,

blond-haired Rolander. However, what Senator David Snyder lacked in physical

stature, he more than made up in brainpower. That intelligence, coupled with a

genius for strategy, had landed him an all but permanent spot on the Senate

Intelligence Committee. There wasn't a covert operation conducted in the last seven

years that didn't somehow or other have Snyder's fingerprints on it.

Fawcett, always the showman, picked up a remote from the inlaid Egyptian box on

his desk and pointed it at a wall of books to the right of the fireplace. The false wall

slid back to reveal the entryway to a smaller room, about fifteen by fifteen feet. The

white walls were decorated with rococo trim and were lined with more leather-bound

books. The entire space was permeated with the smell of honey. The wood floor

was covered by a large oriental rug. A

small fireplace, trimmed in marble, stood in

the southwest corner. It utilized the same chimney system as the fireplace in the large

study, which helped keep this room a secret to outsiders. Several gilded mirrors

hung on the walls and reflected the room's centerpiece, an enormous antique rolltop

desk. A plush couch, with handsomely carved legs, sat opposite the desk. Fawcett

waved his guests into the adjoining room. Once all three were together, he tapped a

button on his remote and the wall slid shut behind them. With only minimal pressure

from Fawcett's fingertips, a set of faux book spines sprang forward from one of the

bookshelves, revealing a set of crystal decanters.

"Brandy anyone?" said Fawcett as he removed a large snifter and a decanter filled

with the amber-colored liquor.

“I’ll take one,” replied Rolander.

“Scotch rocks, if you’ve got it,” said Snyder.

As Fawcett began pouring the drinks, he motioned for the men to take a seat on the

couch. Rolander, very much at ease with himself, plopped right down onto the

antique sofa. Snyder lingered, wandering around the small room for a few seconds

pretending to admire the decor. The high-tech surveillance sweeper,

disguised as a

beeper on his hip, had vibrated uncontrollably as he and Rolander were led down the

long hallways of Fawcett's palatial home toward the study. An adept student of

security and surveillance systems, Snyder had noticed many of Fawcett's obvious

safety measures and had guessed at the ones he couldn't see. No doubt Fawcett had

the best money could buy. An extremely

cautious man, he never left anything to

chance. Snyder knew that much about him and that was one of the reasons he'd

agreed to become this deeply involved.

The sweeper hadn't vibrated at all since he had entered the secret room, and for the

moment, Snyder was satisfied their conversation wasn't being monitored. He took

his three fingers of scotch from Fawcett and sat down on the sofa next to Rolander.

“You know, Donald, we should have all of our meetings in this room,” said

Rolander. “I like it. In fact, this has got to be one of my favorite rooms in the whole

house.”

“What’s that smell?” broke in Snyder. He vaguely recognized the scent, but couldn’t

exactly place it, nor why it was arousing him. “It’s strangely familiar. Smells like

some kind of powder.”

“It’s honey,” said Fawcett. “Technically,

it's beeswax. The wood floors in here are

polished with it."

The minute Fawcett said the word *honey,* Snyder knew why the smell was so

familiar and so arousing.

Mitchell Conti, or Mitch, as everyone was fond of calling him, had joined Senator

Snyder's staff two summers ago. He was a strikingly handsome

twenty-three-year-old who quickly

became very popular on the Hill. He cut a wide

swath, dating numerous female aides and pages. To any outside eyes, Mitch Conti

was into women only, but David Snyder knew better and so did Mitch. There had

been constant electricity between David and Mitch from the moment they met, and

one weekend when Mitch brought papers over to the senator's town house for his

signature, long looks over drinks led them straight to the bedroom.

Mitch had been fond of a product known

as Kama Sutra Honey Dust that he'd

found at an adult novelty store. The dust was really a fine powder that smelled and

tasted like honey. Mitch would brush it all over Snyder's body with a small feather

duster and then lick it off. Not only had David liked it, but so had the many women

who'd shared his bed between visits from Mitch.

The half-empty canister of honey dust under the bathroom sink was Snyder's

only

reminder of his twenty-three-year-old lover. Several months into their affair, Snyder

had discovered that Mitch not only had been seeing another man on the side, but

also had plans to blackmail *him,* David Snyder, one of the most powerful senators in

New York history. Snyder had come too far to have it all come crashing down over

something like that.

Two weeks later, Mitch and the other man were the victims of yet another D.C.

drive-by shooting. The politicians were up in arms that this sort of thing could

happen again, and this time to someone from the Hill. But the anger quickly

subsided. The deaths became, as David Snyder knew they would, just another

unfortunate statistic on the D.C. crime blotter.

”The entire room, including the beeswax polish, is an exact copy of Louis XV’s

secret study at Versailles,” said Fawcett.

“As a matter of fact, this rolltop desk,” he

said, sweeping his hand over the smooth wood, “is Louis’s original desk. The first

rolltop ever made. The one at Versailles is just a copy, though those putzes have the

balls to try and pass it off as the real thing.

“I told you how we got it, didn’t I?” Fawcett said to Senator Rolander.

“Yeah, you used to have it in your place in Chicago.”

“Well, Senator Snyder here hasn’t heard the story.” Fawcett looked at Snyder and

raised an eyebrow as if to say, *You’re not going to believe this.* “When the palace of

Versailles was stormed by the people of France, they saved the paintings and sold

off the furniture. Those prissy academics who run Versailles now have been

scouring the world trying to buy back all of the original furniture.

“They made it perfectly clear that they believed the desk was a national treasure and

that they would go to any lengths to get it back. They claim that they were dealing

directly with the owner, but that's a load of bullshit. The owner was a savvy old bird

who used Sotheby's on the sly to mount a very discreet bidding war. I had one of

my lawyers from Amsterdam represent me as an anonymous buyer. The French bid

high right from the get-go, and we followed them straight up. There was no way I

was going to let them get it. Bill Gates

was hovering around the fringes of the

bidding, and I thought I was really going to have some trouble out of him, but he lost

interest after a while. When the other players fell out of the running and we were neck

and neck with the French, we let them win the bid."

Snyder leaned forward surprised. "If you let them win the bid, how'd you end up

with the desk?"

“I’ll tell you how,” said Fawcett, “and if I do say so myself, it’s brilliant. We had a

girl inside who handled the banking. For their deals, especially one of this size,

Sotheby’s has very strict rules. They don’t care if you’re Charlie de Gaulle or

Charlie Potatoes, if you can’t come up with the payment, you lose your place in line.

They came back to us when the French money didn’t show and asked if we would

match the bid. Meanwhile, the Frogs

were going batshit trying to figure out what

went wrong. It was beautiful. Our girl had worked it so she was spotless. It looked

like the bank in France screwed things up. We were able to get the rolltop for a

fraction of what it would have cost if there'd been an all-out bidding war. And let me

tell you this, it felt good to stick it to the Frenchies."

Rolander had heard the story before, but the guile of his old college roommate

made

him smile nonetheless. Rolander was amazed at how far sheer force of will and

personality had carried Fawcett. He sometimes wondered where he would be if he'd

been as ruthless. Being a senator wasn't bad by a long shot and Russ Rolander

hadn't got to where he was by sitting around, but what would it be like to have

Fawcett's money and power? What would it be like for him to support all of his

vices with his own money, rather than depending on the steady stream of Fawcett

deposits to his Caribbean bank account?

Well, if you were going to be in a pocket, Rolander reasoned, *it might as well be a*

deep one.

Snyder's reaction wasn't much different. He was also amazed at the lengths to

which Fawcett would go to get what he wanted. Snyder felt a bizarre sense of

camaraderie with the man. Both he and

Fawcett knew no limit to their passions, nor

to the depths to which they would descend to force the world to give them what they

wanted. As much as they had in common, though, there was one thing that Snyder

knew for sure, he was smarter than Donald Fawcett would ever be.

“So,” continued Fawcett, “that’s how my little Louis XV room came to be. How

much do you want to bet that he banged Marie Antoinette right on that couch you’re

sitting on?”

Snyder tried to suppress it, but a slight smile crept across his lips. Fawcett might

have monkey loads of money, but he didn’t know shit when it came to history.

Marie Antoinette wasn’t married to Louis XV, she was married to Louis XVI.

“I get what I want. Don’t I, Russ?”

“That’s right,” Rolander managed between coughs, as Fawcett, who had been

walking behind the couch, had smacked him hard on the back mid-swig of his

brandy.

Snyder didn't like the way Fawcett circled the room like a buzzard looking for a

wounded animal, and was glad when he finally sat down behind the desk.

"Enough small talk," said Fawcett, looking into his snifter as he swirled his brandy,

releasing the sweet, metallic vapor. "Where do we stand?"

Rolander sat up straighter, his imposing size dominating the couch, and cleared his

throat, “As you know, Donald, the deal has been moving along smoothly. We have

our foreign assets in place, and the advance information we have received fits the

equation perfectly… as we knew it would. In an undertaking such as this, the CYA,

or cover-your-ass factor, cannot be stressed greatly enough—”

Fawcett interrupted Senator Rolander. "That's what I never did like about

politicians, always worrying about covering their asses when they should be

worrying about doing their jobs."

"Listen, Donald," said Rolander, "don't you fucking patronize me. This is one

serious deal, and if you think I'm not covering my flanks, you are sorely mistaken."

"There's nothing wrong with covering your flanks, Russ. Just don't spend so much

time watching your ass that you miss what's right in front of you. Understand?"

"Yeah, I understand, all right. I just hope you do. This isn't shooting fish in a barrel.

This is serious business. The smallest detail could turn this into a major cluster fuck

and send us all running for cover… or worse."

"Spare me the lecture, Russ. I know this is serious business. I've got billions riding

on it. Jesus, with all of the power problems in California alone, you'd think we'd be

developing our fossil fuel capabilities further, not scaling back. What the fuck are

they thinking? Alternative energy sources? Not only are they dangerous and

unreliable, they're just too much of a hard sell to the American public."

"But, you forget about the greenhouse gases and global warming," broke in

Rolander.

“Fuck the greenhouse gases, fuck the Kyoto Protocol, and fuck global warming,”

spat Fawcett. “That’s all a bunch of inconclusive bullshit. I have invested tens of

millions of dollars trying to get you and your colleagues back east to see the light on

this one. God, if I never see another lobbyist or politician with his hand out again,

it’ll be too soon. But, after all is said and spent, where’d my money get me?

Nowhere, that's where. If this fossil fuel rollback happens, I don't even want to

think about how much money I'll lose. It's bad enough the government has forced

us into selling power to states like California at fire-sale prices, but now they want to

go further and whittle away our market. I have gone at this thing every way I can, and

now the buck stops here."

"Which brings me right back to what I was saying, Donald. To avoid this thing

hitting the fan, we've got to have a flawless strategy," said Rolander.

"Relax, Russ. I told you already that I have the details all worked out. You think I

want this deal to go sour? Besides, the trail goes so cold before it reaches either of

your doors that even Rudolph the fucking Red Nosed Reindeer couldn't follow it.

Got me?"

"I gotcha," said Rolander, "but you get me, Donald. I don't care how much money

you've put into this deal and I don't care how much you stand to lose. No more

changes. This thing goes off as planned. You of all people should appreciate the

value of what I'm saying. Our offshore associates are not happy with how you've

pushed up the closing."

"You let me worry about them," said Fawcett. "In fact, as I've said before, let me

worry about everything. All of the players are being extremely well compensated for

their participation. There is no reason for anyone to be getting jumpy. The closing

was moved up because the closing had to be moved up. That's the nature of the

business. We're all professionals here, so let's get our acts together and get on with

the deal. Now" — Fawcett rubbed his hands together in anticipation and leaned

forward over his desk — "what's the word from Star Gazer?" Two sets of eyes fell

upon Senator Snyder and awaited his

report.

Snyder took a deep breath and, smoothing the crease in his left trouser leg, began to

speak. “As we expected, he has agreed to become a player in the deal, but he did

have some reservations.”

“He didn’t have any objections other than those we forecasted, is that correct?”

“That is correct,” said Snyder.

This was the part of the game that

Fawcett loved, the psychology. He had known

exactly how Star Gazer would react. He would be indignant at first, considering the

proposal out of the question. Then the stroke and sting, as Fawcett liked to call

them, would begin. First his ego would be stroked and then his fears would be

stung. It was an age-old tactic, but it worked every single time. The more

self-absorbed the personality, the greater the success. Star Gazer was about as

self-absorbed as they came, although he hid it very, very well. This camouflage

ability was Star Gazer's greatest strength. Seeing people for exactly who they were,

knowing what motivated them and how to turn those motivations to his advantage,

was Donald Fawcett's.

"What are you two talking about?" demanded Rolander.

"What we're talking about," answered Snyder, "is that Mr. Fawcett read Star Gazer

like an open book. He accurately forecasted what Star Gazer's objections and areas

of concern would be. He knew which cards should be played, and in which order, to

successfully bring him on board. Star Gazer has left us with a brief list of

'demands,' our full agreement with which being the only way he will participate. The

list is exactly as Mr. Fawcett predicted."

Rolander looked at Fawcett, impressed. "He agreed to come aboard?"

“Indeed he did,” replied Snyder. “Now, as to his conditions.”

Fawcett leaned back in his chair and smiled.

“Condition number one: after the deal is closed, the president is to be returned to his

office” — Snyder paused before finishing his sentence — “alive.”

1

The exterior ice chime sounded, warning of potential ice on the roadway, and

Gerhard Miner gripped the leather

steering wheel of his black Audi A6 a little tighter.

His Gucci-clad foot pressed down harder on the accelerator. The sun was setting

over Lake Lucerne, and a chill wind, blowing since lunch, began to pick up. *Ah,*

what a lunch that was today, Miner thought to himself as the sleek black sedan

hugged the shores of the choppy Swiss lake. *It was absolutely exquisite.*

Claudia Mueller, an investigator from

the Federal Attorney's Office, had been

pressing Miner for a face-to-face meeting to discuss a cache of armaments missing

from a military base outside of Basel. Crates of special night-vision goggles, flash

bang grenades, Swiss SWAT assault rifles, antitank missiles, plastique, and a couple

of next-generation nonlethal weapons known as glare guns had all mysteriously

disappeared.

Though Claudia had insisted her questions were just routine, Miner had been putting

her off for over two months. He claimed his caseload didn't provide a single extra

moment to meet with her. Surely the security of Switzerland, which Miner was

charged with, overrode the necessity of asking him a few "routine" questions.

He half expected her to go away, but she didn't. Claudia wanted badly to talk with

Miner and for good reason.

Five years ago, he had commanded a special division of Swiss intelligence that

tested the security of military bases and weapons installations throughout the tiny

country. Miner had been so successful at breaching security at the bases that his unit

was shut down for fear of further embarrassment to the military establishment, and

he was transferred to a different department of Swiss intelligence.

Not only had Miner commanded the special division, he had also created it. The idea

for the division — known as *Der Nebel* or, most appropriately, *The Fog,* in English

— stemmed from training Miner had received while on U.S.–Swiss cross-training

exercises in Little Creek, Virginia. Little Creek was where the U.S. Navy SEAL

teams involved in Atlantic, Latin American, and European operations were assigned.

It was also home to the Navy's Special Warfare Development Group, not to be

confused with "Dev Group," the Navy's elite counterterrorist unit formerly known as

SEAL Team Six, which was based in Dam Neck, Virginia. The Special Warfare

Development Group was a SEAL think tank where new weapons, equipment,

communications systems, and tactics were developed.

The investigative affairs agent's long list of boring questions had been the last

thing

Miner was interested in sitting through, but curiosity eventually got the better of him

and he ordered a copy of Claudia Mueller's personnel file. In his position as one of

the Swiss government's highest-ranking intelligence officers, he did not find the file

hard to get, nor did his request seem at all out of the ordinary.

Miner flipped through Mueller's file with only minimal interest. As he

reached the

back, he slowed. The backs of files were always the most interesting part. Included

were her service photo, her most recent passport photo, and best of all, a magazine

photo from a climbing competition in which she had taken first prize. In sharp

contrast to the serious service and passport photos, this picture showed a proud and

energetic woman. Here, her ruddy face was flushed with adrenaline and the

excitement of competition. She was gorgeous. There was no need to put Claudia

Mueller off any longer. At that moment, Miner not only knew he had to meet her, but

he had to have her.

An hour and fifteen minutes away in Bern at the Federal Attorney's Office, known as

the Bundesanwaltschaft, Claudia Mueller was studying the file of Gerhard Miner for

the thousandth time. Out of all the people

she had spoken with during the course of

her investigation, Miner had been the toughest to nail down. Sure, Miner had his

reasons for being unavailable, and they all checked out when Claudia leaned on her

boss to speak with his contacts at the Ministry of Defense, but something bothered

her. Call it her Swiss fetish for organization. Something about Miner just didn't jibe.

Miner was fifty-three years old and

never married. He was a handsome man, tall,

about six foot two, and extremely fit. His gray hair was perfect, as were his

expensive custom-made Italian suits. In almost any woman's opinion, Gerhard Miner

would be quite a juicy catch. She was studying the photos of him yet again, glued to

his deep brown eyes, when the phone rang.

"Hello?" Claudia answered, still staring at the file in front of her.

“Fräulein Mueller, this is Gerhard Miner of the SND.” *Strategischer*

Nachrichtendienst, in Swiss German, translated to the deceptively benign sounding

“Strategic Information Service.” The highly secretive Nachrichtendienst was a

division of the Ministry of Defense and responsible for counterespionage for

Switzerland. Not much beyond that was known about it, not even by the most

enlightened and connected of Swiss citizens.

Instantly, Claudia's attention shifted from the pictures in front of her to the voice on

the other end of the phone. "Well, Herr Miner, to what do I owe this unexpected

pleasure?" Claudia asked pleasantly, masking her eagerness. After leaving messages

and being dodged by Miner for the last two months, she was excited to finally have

the man himself on the phone.

Miner leaned back in his chair and wondered what Claudia might be

wearing. He

pictured her in a highly provocative outfit, completely unlike what a woman of her

position actually wore to the office. His mind continued to wander as he answered

smoothly, as if on automatic pilot, “I should say the pleasure is all mine. I can’t

remember the last time a woman pursued me as aggressively as you have.”

“I hardly believe my repeated requests for information in a formal investigation

to be

in the same category as you are imagining, Herr Miner."

"Of course not. I apologize. I'll tell you what, I have time available tomorrow to

meet with you if you still want, but after that I will be quite busy with an ongoing

assignment."

"Done," replied Claudia. "I'll meet you at your office say—"

"Oh, I'm quite sorry once again."

"Why?"

“I won’t be in my office tomorrow. I’m taking a little time off and will be at my

home in Lucerne.”

It wasn’t unusual for government officials to keep a small apartment in the capital

and then commute home on the weekends. The Swiss were extremely loyal to their

cantons and ancestral homes. Claudia herself spent many weekends with her family

back in Grindelwald in the house that would one day pass to her when her

parents

were gone.

She paused to figure out how long it would take her to get from Bern to Lucerne and

whether she should go by car or by train.

“I’ll tell you what,” began Miner.

Again with “I’ll tell you what,” Claudia thought. After being dodged for two

months, Claudia was ready to jump down Miner’s throat, but she knew she had to

be careful. She had recently applied for a new position within her organization, and

stepping on the toes of one of the Ministry of Defense's most respected officers

wouldn't help her move any quicker up the ladder.

Life at the Bundesanwaltschaft had grown to be extremely tedious for Claudia. She

had taken the job with the Federal Attorney's Office right out of law school. She

was fluent in all four official languages of Switzerland: German, Italian, French, and

even the rarely spoken Romansch. She was also fluent in English. Her enviable

ability with languages, tenacious manner, and keen eye for detail made Claudia a

shoo-in for the Bundespolizei, the investigative affairs division of the

Bundesanwaltschaft. As much as Claudia had enjoyed her job in civil intelligence at

the outset, she longed for the promotion

that would take her out of the mundane

business of being a glorified detective and put her on cases that were much more

exciting and that she could actually prosecute.

But no matter how badly Claudia wanted to switch to another department, she would

not for a moment compromise an ongoing investigation. Worse than stepping on a

few Ministry of Defense toes, would be not solving this case. And, if she

couldn’t

solve this one, she was sure she would end up staying exactly where she was, or

worse, she would get demoted, or possibly even fired.

Claudia’s boss, Arianne Küess, had been handpicked to be head prosecutor for the

war crimes tribunal at the United Nations Court. This meant that the missing

weapons case was being led by the very disagreeable Deputy Federal Attorney, Urs

Schnell. This was Schnell's first case and he wanted it wrapped up with a ribbon

ASAP. He had placed a very high priority on this, and the weight rode chafingly on

Claudia's shoulders. The problem was that she had not made any progress and was

quickly running out of leads.

"Let's meet for lunch here. Is that convenient for you?" Without even waiting for a

reply, Miner continued, "We'll meet at

the restaurant in the Hotel des Balances in the

Old Town. Say, twelve-thirty?”

No, it wouldn’t be convenient for her to travel to Lucerne, but Claudia needed to

speak with Miner, so she agreed and hung up the phone. That evening, she agonized

over what to wear. She wanted to appear professional, but knowing Miner’s

penchant for women, she couldn’t help but want to play her good looks for all they

were worth. She was scraping the bottom of the ethical barrel and she knew it, but

she was desperate. She chose an attractive, tight-fitting navy blue skirt that rode just

above the knee and a form-fitting navy blue blazer with a funky silver blouse. She left

one button undone and then undid the second upon entering the lobby of the hotel at

twelve-twenty-five the following day.

Miner had been considerate enough to

select one of the restaurant's quieter tables.

The booth was framed at one end by a window facing onto the Reuss River.

Beyond a clutch of empty iron patio tables, a group of Lucerne's swans paddled

slowly past the city's historic, covered Kapellbrücke bridge. Miner appeared to be

watching them as they up-ended their snow white tails, plumbing the depths of the

quickly flowing current in search of

food. In reality, he was using the reflection of

the window to observe Investigative Affairs Agent Mueller's entrance, as well as the

rest of the lunch patrons who had entered the restaurant in the last twenty minutes.

Miner watched Claudia walk almost the length of the dining room, then feigned

surprise when she finally reached the table.

"Herr Miner, good afternoon. Sorry to startle you." Claudia leaned over to shake his

hand, certain that he had seen her entrance.

The game was on.

Two hours later, dissatisfied and angry, she left the Hotel des Balances. She needed

to walk a little and clear her head. Claudia made her way up the hotel's short

cobblestone driveway toward the Weinmarkt, in Lucerne's Old Town.

The Old Town, on Lucerne's right bank, was a pedestrianized area of aging

cobblestone streets and buildings from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries.

Many of the facades were decorated with frescoes depicting Swiss life. The ground

floors of the buildings housed boutiques, restaurants, and small shops. One couldn't

walk two meters in this part of town without seeing displays of watches or cuckoo

clocks. There was no question that it was geared heavily toward tourists, but its

beauty always had a soothing effect on Claudia.

She wandered aimlessly past the shops along the Kapellgasse trying to make some

sense of her meeting with Miner. He had been cordial, but cordial to the point of

condescension. It hadn't taken Claudia long to realize that Miner wasn't going to

reveal anything, at least not willingly. He was extremely uncooperative, choosing to

shroud himself in the cloak of national

security whenever Claudia put a direct question to him.

“Where were you on the night the weapons were stolen?”

“On assignment.”

“On assignment where and for what?”

“I cannot say.”

“Can’t say where, or can’t say for what?”

“Neither.”

“And why can’t you say?”

“It is a matter of national security.”

“And a large amount of sensitive weaponry missing from a Swiss defense depot

isn’t a matter of national security?”

“All I can say is, it is not my matter. It’s yours.”

“Herr Miner, is it that you can’t tell me your whereabouts on the night in question, or

is it that you just won’t?”

“It is both,” Miner replied. “I won’t tell you because I can’t.”

“Are you aware, Herr Miner, that I can get a court order to compel you to answer

my questions?”

“Yes.”

“So, why don’t you make it easier on both of us: answer my questions and I will go

back to Bern to pursue my investigation from there.”

“Fräulein Mueller, I am not in the business of making your job easy. I serve the

Federal Republic of Switzerland. I'm not at liberty to answer the questions you're

asking. Should you wish to attempt to compel me to answer, I assure you your

efforts will be met with much resistance. I do a job for the people of Switzerland that

is, shall we say, *delicate*. I have done this job for more years than you have even

been alive. My position does not require me to answer your questions. I have told

you I would be of no value to your

investigation, yet you pursued me nonetheless."

Claudia was determined to get something out of him and so, changed course.

"Perhaps, then, as you are an expert on the security of Swiss military installations,

maybe you could suggest to me how such a theft would be possible and where such

weaponry might be secreted or sold, if that was the intent."

"Fräulein Mueller, I have learned that

there are many ways to enter one of our bases

undetected. A person or persons could have done so with or without assistance

from someone inside. Were there any signs of a forced entry?”

“Not according to our investigation.”

“Were the security measures functioning properly at the time the theft was assumed

to have taken place?”

“Yes, they were.”

“You of course questioned the entire base staff to see if anyone saw or heard

anything unusual during the time in question?”

“Naturally.”

“And?”

“And, no, nothing unusual was seen or heard.”

“Fine, then, that brings us to your next question. As far as where such merchandise

could be hidden, the answer is, anywhere. And, as far as where such

merchandise

could be sold, my answer again is, *anywhere*. You simply do not have enough

evidence to even begin to formulate a hypothesis as to what happened. You are

chasing ghosts, and I frankly do not see much hope for a successful outcome to

your investigation. But, your day is not a complete loss. Since you have come all the

way from Bern, you can at least enjoy your lunch and perhaps we can take a stroll

together afterward."

Claudia spent the rest of their lunch probing for answers while Miner deftly parried

each question. Miner also had the indecency to try to seduce her. He found Claudia

attractive, and, in all fairness, she had attempted to use her wiles to goad a little more

information out of him. Instead of coughing up some information, though, he had

come on to her even more strongly.

Claudia felt she should have known better.

Though everything about him indicated he had a passion for women, passion did not

necessarily equal weakness, and gambling that it might had been Claudia's mistake.

The end of their lunch was no less frustrating than its beginning. Without even

consulting her, Miner ordered dessert for the two of them. This was a liberty that

sent Claudia's already boiling blood over onto the stove. Number one, he ordered

liquor, which Claudia didn't touch while working, and number two, he went on to

lecture Claudia on her poor taste for turning down a fabulous dessert wine that the

hotel Food & Beverage manager kept specially in the cellar for him. *No doubt,*

Claudia thought to herself, *Miner had something good on the F&B manager to*

rate such treatment. She made a mental

note to check the manager out when she got

back to Bern.

It wasn't enough that he let her know the wine was a special delicacy the hotel

reserved solely for him. No, Miner had to go on and make sure that uneducated little

Claudia knew exactly what she was missing. In a tone that was entirely haughty, and

which entirely suited Gerhard Miner, he launched into what sounded like a rote

recitation of a wine club's tasting notes.

Vin de Constance was a dessert wine from the Constantia estate in South Africa. It

was a favorite of Napoléon Bonaparte, who had thirty bottles a month shipped to

Elba to ease the misery of his banishment. The king of Prussia as well as Louis XVI

loved Vin de Constance. Dickens celebrated it in *Edwin Drood,* and Baudelaire said,

"only the lips of a lover surpassed it in

heavenly sweetness." Only twelve thousand

bottles were produced annually, with almost all of them accounted for before they hit

the market. An American colleague who had introduced Miner to the stuff helped

arrange for a case to be sent to Switzerland. No small feat, as Vin de Constance was

one of the most coveted wines in the world.

Throughout this ridiculous speech, Claudia developed a pretty good plan

for where

Miner could put his wine if the hotel's cellar ever got overcrowded. Though she had

already politely declined Miner's offer, he poured the expensive liquid into her glass

anyway. A faint sneer developed at the corner of Miner's mouth when Claudia

grabbed the neck of the bottle and repeated, "I said, no thank you." The sneer,

which Miner quickly masked with a false smile, proved to Claudia that the

man was

not completely impenetrable. She counted this as one small victory in the series of

sharp defeats that had been their lunch.

Claudia had so strongly insisted on questioning Miner because he was her last

possible lead. She had exhausted everything else. Claudia had gone back and

questioned the military base staff again and again. She had monitored their bank

accounts and purchasing patterns, hoping that if there was someone involved on the

inside, he or she would slip up and make a large deposit or a large purchase that

couldn't be explained away. To date, nothing had come to light. Nothing had turned

up in Switzerland, and nothing had turned up on the black markets abroad.

The Vin de Constance lecture notwithstanding, Claudia felt as if she didn't know any

more today than she had yesterday and

that her whole trip to Lucerne had been a

waste of time. As far as the missing weapons were concerned, Miner did have better

means than anyone else in all of Switzerland to steal them. Claudia was dead-on. But

just because Miner had once been involved in government-sanctioned exercises

testing the security of Swiss military establishments didn’t mean that he had anything

to do with her theft.

Miner was also right about something. Any attempt to try to get a judge to compel

him to answer her questions would be met with resistance from the highest ranks of

the Swiss government. Lacking any evidence whatsoever against Miner, there was no

way anyone would force him to cooperate.

With Miner refusing to cooperate, Claudia didn't even have straws to grasp at. All

she had was air. Her investigation had been marked by failure after failure. Though

her gut told her one thing, her mind told her it was a million-to-one shot that she

could have turned Miner into a bona fide suspect. Now Claudia Mueller's

investigation and her career were at a complete standstill.

As Gerhard Miner pulled into the long-term parking lot at Zurich International

Airport, he was no longer thinking about Claudia; his mind was back on his mission.

The sudden schedule change had bothered him, but such was the nature of his

business. Heads of state often shortened trips or changed plans altogether at the last

minute. As this trip was set to coincide with the birthday of the American president's

fifteen-year-old daughter, Miner had been certain that, barring any international

incident, the president would spend as much time as he could on his ski trip. The

fact that the president was now planning to cut it short by a couple of days was

inconvenient, but it didn't make the mission impossible.

Miner entered the empty first-class line and presented his ticket and passport. He

went out of his way to be extra flirtatious with the female desk staff, who wondered

why such a handsome man did not have an attractive woman traveling with him to

Athens.

While waiting in the Swissair lounge for his flight to board, he changed tack and

acted enraged when a young waitress spilled a glass of cabernet all over his trousers.

The poor young girl thought it was her fault, when, in fact, Miner had leaned his

shoulder forward and nudged her tray as she was placing a cocktail napkin on the

table. His explosion earned him an effusive apology that lasted from the first-class

lounge all the way to the gate from a Swissair airport services manager. Once

Miner

had been seated on the plane, the manager again apologized and asked the chief

first-class flight attendant to take especially good care of this long-suffering

passenger. Miner had achieved exactly what he wanted. At least five people would

be able to vouch that he had boarded the Swissair flight to Greece.

He spent the next week and a half in the popular ports of Paros and Mykonos,

spending too much money entertaining new friends and repairing repeated

"mechanical problems" on his rented sailboat. He overtipped waiters, barmen, and

harbormasters. Not only would Miner be remembered, but many would be anxiously

awaiting the return of the man and his easy-flowing money next season.

Secure that his alibi was well established, Miner sailed to the uninhabited island of

Despotiko, about three hours southwest

of Mykonos. Waiting there for Miner, just

as planned, was his cousin from the Swiss town of Hochdorf, a carpenter who bore

an incredible likeness to him.

Happy to have a free vacation and knowing the sensitivity of his cousin's

occupation, the carpenter from Hochdorf never asked any questions. The plan was

for him to continue sailing south to Santorini and then Crete, where he would leave

the rented yacht, citing a string of mechanical problems as the reason. The carpenter

would then make his way to the western port of Patras, where a first-class cabin was

booked on a Minoan Line cruise ship to Venice.

His cousin would be traveling on Miner's passport and Visa credit card. Knowing

that cabin stewards present first-class passengers' passports for them to customs

officials as a courtesy, Miner was not worried about his cousin or his passport

receiving any undue scrutiny. The carpenter was to spend a week in northern Italy

before proceeding via train to France.

Miner had booked his cousin on an overnight train in a first-class compartment. As

the train would be crossing the French border while passengers were sleeping, the

steward would gather passports as passengers boarded, present them to

border

officials sometime during the night, and then return them with breakfast in the

morning.

After a week in France, the carpenter would take a final overnight train back to

Switzerland, where the customary passport collection by the steward would once

again be conducted. When the steward delivered the passport with breakfast the next

morning, the carpenter was to place it in a thick, manila envelope with the canceled

train tickets, credit card receipts, and other odds and ends he had been told to

accumulate during his wonderful vacation. The envelope was addressed to a post

office box in Lucerne and stamped with more than enough postage. When the train

arrived in Bern, the carpenter would mail the envelope from the train station post box

before catching his connecting train back to Hochdorf.

With eyewitnesses, customs records, and a credit card trail that would lead through

three European countries all but guaranteed, Miner entered Turkey from Greece with

a false Maltese passport as part of a tour group, feeling quite confident that his alibi,

if ever needed, would be airtight.

Twenty-four hours later, the people seated in the airline's waiting area paid

no

attention to the rumpled western European businessman who sat reading a day old

copy of *The International Herald Tribune*. Disguised with blond hair, a full beard,

blue contacts, and padding that made him appear twenty kilos overweight, Miner

was now traveling on a Dutch passport as Henk Van DenHuevel of Utrecht.

He sat reading an article he had found quite by chance. It dealt with the upcoming ski

vacation United States president Jack Rutledge was to take with his daughter,

Amanda, and what it would cost American taxpayers.

As first-class passengers were welcomed aboard flight 7440 from Istanbul to New

York, Miner folded the newspaper under his arm and made his way toward the gate

thinking, *They have absolutely no idea what this trip is going to cost.*

2

“You guys having an awesome day or what?” asked the young liftie as Scot Harvath

and Amanda Rutledge shuffled up to get on the next chairlift. He was referring to the

snow that had been falling all day.

“Light’s kinda flat,” replied Amanda.

Scot had to laugh. Amanda was relatively new to skiing, but she was picking up the

lingo and the idiosyncrasies of a spoiled skier pretty quickly.

“What’s so funny?” she said as the lift gently hit them in the back of the knees and

they sat down, beginning the ride up to Deer Valley’s Squaw Peak.

“You, that’s what’s so funny.”

“Me? What do you mean?”

“Don’t get me wrong, Mandie; your skiing’s come a long way, but you’ve skied,

what, maybe five or six times in your life?”

“Yeah, so?”

“And it’s always been that east coast garbage. All ice, right?”

“And?”

“Well, it’s just funny to hear you complaining about the light when you are skiing on

snow people would kill for.”

“I guess it is kind of funny, but you’ve got to admit that it’s tough to see anything in

this weather.”

On that point, Amanda Rutledge was one hundred percent correct. The snow had

been falling steadily for a week. Hoping to indulge his passion for astronomy, Scot

had brought his telescope on this trip. The lights back home in D.C. made it

impossible to see anything in the night sky. Unfortunately, the weather in Park City

had so far refused to cooperate. Today, in particular, it was really coming down.

Visibility was extremely low, and the conditions worried Scot enough that he

suggested the president and his daughter take the day off and wait to see what

tomorrow brought. Regardless of what the head of his advance team had to say,

though, the president made it clear that he and Amanda had come to ski and that's

exactly what they were going to do.

Unfortunately for his ski plans, the coalition the president had cobbled together to

get his fossil-fuel reduction bill — the bill that signaled a financially devastating blow

for the major oil companies, but would breathe long overdue life into America's

alternative-energy sectors — through Congress was starting to crack. The

president's constant hand-holding of key "swing" voters was absolutely necessary if

he was to see his legislation through. The predicted turnover in the upcoming

congressional election spelled doom for the president's pet project. The simple fact

was that this bill could pass only in this session.

Even though he had already shortened the length of his vacation before leaving

D.C.,

the president was thinking about returning even earlier now. Scot understood the

man's desire to get in as much skiing and quality time with his daughter as possible

before returning to the capital.

"Are you dating anyone now?" asked Amanda.

The sudden change of subject caught Scot off guard and pulled his mind back from

the president's problems and the weather.

"Am I dating anyone? Who wants to know?" he teased.

Blushing, Amanda turned away from his gaze, but kept speaking. "I do. I mean, you

never seem to talk about anybody."

Scot started to smile again, but didn't let her see. He thought she must have been

building up her courage all day to ask him.

Amanda had had a crush on Scot ever

since he'd become part of daily life at the

White House, and everybody knew it. More than once, the president had had to

reprimand his daughter and remind her not to distract Scot while he was on duty.

Amanda, or Mandie, as Scot called her, was a good kid. Despite having lost her

mother to breast cancer only a couple of years ago, she seemed as normal as any

other child her age. She was smart, athletic, and would someday grow into a

beautiful woman. Scot decided to change the subject.

“That was one heck of a birthday party last night,” he offered.

“It was pretty cool. Thanks again for the CDs. You didn’t have to get me anything.”

“Hey, it was your birthday. The big sixteen. I wanted to get you a car, but your

dad’s national security advisor thought that behind the wheel of your own machine,

you might be too dangerous for the

country. So, the Ferrari will just have to sit in my

garage until we can change his mind."

Amanda laughed. "Not only were the CDs sweet, but I really appreciate the lessons

today."

Before joining the SEALs and subsequently being recruited into the Secret Service,

Scot had been quite an accomplished skier and had won a spot on the U.S. freestyle

team. Against the wishes of his father, Scot had chosen to postpone college to

pursue skiing. He had spent several years on the team, which trained right there in

Park City, Utah. He did extremely well on the World Cup circuit and had been

favored to medal in the upcoming Olympics. When Scot's father, an instructor at the

Navy SEAL training facility in their hometown of Coronado, California, died in a

training accident, Scot had been

devastated. Try as his might, after losing his father,

he hadn't been able to get his head back into competitive skiing. Instead, he chose to

follow in his father's footsteps. After graduating college cum laude, he joined the

SEALs and was tasked to Team Two, known as the cold-weather specialists, or

Polar SEALs.

Scot knew that it was not only his familiarity with Park City, but also his

background

and experience that were key factors in his being selected to lead this presidential

advance team. He also knew that was why President Rutledge had agreed to indulge

his daughter's request for Scot to ski on her protective detail today and give her

pointers.

Amanda had been overjoyed, and despite the "flat light," she felt the day had been

perfect.

“You’re an excellent student, so the lessons are my pleasure.” Scot’s radio

crackled, interrupting their conversation. He held up his hand to let her know he was

listening to his earpiece. Amanda remained quiet.

“Norseman, this is Sound. Over,” came the scratchy voice via Scot’s Motorola.

Norseman was the call sign Scot had picked up in the SEALs, which had remained

with him ever since. At five feet ten and a muscular one hundred sixty pounds, with

brown hair and ice blue eyes, the handsome Scot Harvath looked more German than

Scandinavian. In fact the call sign didn't derive from his looks, but rather from a

string of Scandinavian flight attendants he had dated while in the SEALs.

The voice on the other end of Scot's Motorola identified as *Sound,* was the head of

the president's protective detail, Sam

Harper. Harper had taken Scot under his wing

when he joined the team at the White House. The head White House Secret Service

agent, whom Harper and Scot reported to, was William Shaw — call sign *Fury*.

When you put Harper together with Shaw, you got “The Sound and The Fury,” and

anyone who had ever screwed up on their watch knew exactly how appropriate that

title was.

Communications had been fine over the past week, but for some reason the radios

had been cutting in and out today. *Maybe it was the weather.*

“This is Norseman, go ahead Sound. Over,” said Scot via his throat mike.

“Norseman, Hat Trick wants to know how Goldilocks is doing. Over.”

“Mandie,” said Scot, turning to Amanda, “your dad wants to know how you’re

holding up.”

When then Vice President Rutledge

came into office after having three times been

named one of D.C.'s sexiest politicians, the hockey-inspired nickname Hat Trick,

meaning three goals, became an inside joke among the people who knew him.

Though Jack Rutledge found the media's focus on his looks somewhat

embarrassing, he didn't object to the nickname, and so, via the Department of

Defense, which issues the presidential and vice presidential code names, it stuck.

After the president's wife passed away, word quietly spread among White House

staffers that the president would not seek to return to Pennsylvania Avenue for a

fourth time. The code name had turned out to be aptly prophetic.

Amanda's code name, on the other hand, was an obvious call. With her long, curly

blond hair, she had been called Goldilocks for as long as anyone in the White House

could remember.

“I’m a little hungry, but other than that pretty good,” she said.

“Sound, Goldilocks is shipshape, though she’d like to get into the galley sometime

in the near future. Over.”

“Roger that, Norseman. The lifts close to the public at sixteen-thirty; that’s twenty

minutes from now. Hat Trick wants to know if Goldilocks wants to keep going, or if

we should wrap it up. Over.”

Scot turned to Amanda, “Your dad wants to know if you want to have them keep

the lift open for us, or if you want to make this the last run and we'll ski back to the

house?"

"My toes are getting kind of cold. I think I've had enough skiing for today. Let's

make this the last run."

"Sound, Goldilocks wants to little piggy. Over." "Little piggy" referred to the

children's nursery rhyme where the fifth little piggy went *wee, wee, wee, all the way*

home.

“Roger that, Norseman. Hat Trick concurs. Let’s meet at the last lap. Over.”

“Last lap, roger that, Sound. Norseman out.”

When Scot, Amanda, and their security detail reached the meeting point known as

the last lap, the president, Sam Harper, and the rest of the team were already waiting

for them.

“Hi, sweetheart,” said the president as his daughter skied up, and he gave her a

hug.

“How’s your skiing coming along? Notice any difference now that you’re sixteen?”

“Sixteen doesn’t make any difference, Dad. But I have gotten better.”

“Is that so?” replied the president, glancing at Scot.

“Yes, sir, Mr. President. Amanda has come a long way this afternoon. I think she

could take us all down Death Chute if she wanted to,” said Scot.

“Death Chute?” said Amanda. “You’ve gotta be nuts. I wouldn’t even snowplow

down that thing!”

Several of the Secret Service agents laughed nervously. Death Chute was one of the

most difficult of the off-piste chutes that fed back to the area where the presidential

party was staying. The home the president was using was located in the

ultraexclusive ski-in, ski-out Deer Valley community known as Snow Haven.

The Secret Service agents' nervousness was well founded. Death Chute required a

tremendous amount of skill to navigate and would have been a nerve-racking

challenge for even the best of them. Not only were there lots of rocks and steep

vertical drops, but as the piste began to flatten out before dropping off again, there

was a wide plateau filled with trees.

Quite an accomplished skier, the president loved tackling a new chute each day on

his way back to the house. He skied easy runs with his daughter in the mornings, and

then they split up after lunch so he could ski the more difficult trails. The

superchallenging, end-of-the-day chutes he had to choose from were technically

known as backcountry and not part of Deer Valley's marked and maintained trail

system. Therefore, the chutes had not required a lot of work for the Secret Service

to secure. All of the routes feeding into

them were simply made off-limits to any

other skiers.

As the president's confidence grew, so did his desire to tackle harder chutes. The

"rush" he got was a rewarding way to end the day. All of the chutes he had tried up

to this point were grouped in one area. Death Chute stood alone, a bit further to the

east, and the Secret Service knew it was only a matter of time before the president

decided he wanted to give it a whirl.

The only person who could possibly have given him a run for his money on Death

Chute was Scot, and he was skiing with Amanda's detail today. Amanda would take

the long, easy way down, as she had all week. That was okay. The last thing the

president wanted was for his daughter to get hurt.

"So, honey," began the president, "what do you think? You take the high road and

I'll take the low road, and I'll be sippin' hot chocolate afore ye?"

"I might beat you yet!" yelled Amanda as she gave herself a push and started

shooting down the longer, yet safer of the two routes. Scot and the rest of his team

smiled at the president's group and took off, quickly catching up with Amanda. She

seemed hell-bent on beating her father back to the house, an impossibility unless she

dropped over the rim of the bowl and

shot straight down. Even with her growing

skill and confidence, Scot knew she wasn't ready to tackle something that serious

yet.

Amanda used her poles to push herself forward and picked up more speed. One of

the agents skiing to the right of Scot shot him a look suggesting, *Somebody's*

cruisin' for a bruisin' — and before Scot could return the look, Amanda caught an

edge and tumbled down hard. First she lost a pole and then a ski, then the other pole

and the other ski.

When she finally came to a stop, her gear was scattered across thirty feet of snow

uphill from where she lay. Scot caught up to her as she stopped sliding.

“Impressive! If you’re gonna go, go big. That’s what I always say.”

Amanda was on the verge of tears, her pride hurting more than anything else.

“That’s not funny,” she said, sniffling.

“I’m sorry. You’re right; it’s not funny. Are you okay?”

“What do you care?” she said, wiping the snow from her face.

Scot started to laugh.

“It’s not funny, Scot. Cut it out!”

“I know, I know. I’m sorry, Mandie. You were really flying, though. You looked

good. Right up until the point you biffed. You know, we should have tagged your

gear before you decided to have a yard

sale.”

“Stop it!” Amanda managed before breaking into a fit of laughter.

“Oh, so that was a mistake? There wasn’t supposed to be a yard sale today? Whoa,

then I better gather up the merchandise before we upset any of the neighbors.”

He told Amanda to sit still and joined Secret Service agent Maxwell, who was uphill

gathering her equipment. When Scot reached Maxwell, he saw that he was staring

into the distance at the presidential party making their way down Death Chute.

“Glad I’m not on that detail,” said Maxwell as he handed Scot one of Amanda’s

skis.

Scot dusted the snow out of the binding, checking for damage as he waited for the

next ski. “Maxwell, the reason you’re not on that detail is that when it comes to

skiing, you suck.”

“Fuck you, Harvath,” said Maxwell as he shoved the other ski at him, confident

he

was out of Amanda's earshot.

"No, seriously. I heard that Warren Miller was looking to shoot a little footage of

you for his next ski film. It's going to be a spin-off of that movie *Beastmaster*, only

worse. He's going to call it *Biffmaster*. Nothing but your wipeouts—"

"Fuck you."

"I'm not kidding. Nothing but three hours of wall-to-wall Maxwell face down in

the

snow.”

“Fuck you.”

“There’ll be some of those trademark Maxwell-fully-geared somersaults, some

awesome face plants… I think you could be up for an Oscar, my friend.”

“Harvath, which part of *fuck you* do you not understand? I mean, I’m good to go on

explaining either of the two words to you—”

Scot laughed as Maxwell lost his balance reaching over to pick up one of Amanda's

ski poles.

Looking off toward Death Chute, Scot, too, could see the president and his detail

still making their way down. The detail was doing a good job of keeping up with

him. Everybody was right on the money. As he turned to take Amanda's gear back

to her, he glanced once more at Death Chute, just in time to see the president's

group near the trees and two Secret Service agents wipe out.

Maxwell had already recovered and gone down to Amanda. He was handing over

her poles when Scot skied up.

“Well, Maxwell, it looks like the heat will be off your skiing at dinner tonight.”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“I think I just saw Ahern and Houchins bite it going into that part of the chute with

the trees. But, with all the snow falling,

it's hard to tell."

"At least I'm not the only one who bought it this afternoon," said Amanda as she

got to her feet and dusted the remaining snow off her jacket.

"I told you," said Scot, "the end of the day is when most wipeouts happen. You're

more tired than you think, and some people push it a little too hard."

Agent Maxwell took the skis from Scot and let Amanda lean on his shoulder for

balance as she put them on. “I hope nobody hit a tree,” he said.

“That’s a good point,” responded Scot as he engaged his throat mike. “Sound, this

is Norseman. Do we need to send the Saint Bernards and schnapps down for Ahern

and Houchins? Over.”

Scot’s radio hissed and crackled. There was no response. He tried again.

“If either of them blew their knees, I’ve got a buddy here who’s a great surgeon. Tell

Ahern and Houchins I'll split the commission with them if they use my guy. Over."

He waited longer this time, but there was still nothing but static.

"Sound, this is Norseman; we saw two agents go down. Can you give us a sit rep.

Over?"

Sit rep was short for "situation report." The president had probably pushed his guys

just a little too far and just a little too fast for the end of the day. This really

was the

most common time for wipeouts. Ahern and Houchins were probably all right, but

as head of the advance team, Scot felt responsible for every agent and wanted to

know for sure.

“Sound, this is Norseman. Let’s have that sit rep. Over.”

Nothing.

Scot decided to change frequencies to the direct channel with the Secret

command post. The blowing snow was beginning to pick up again. “Birdhouse, this

is Norseman, come in. Over.”

“Scot, I’m getting cold,” said Amanda as she snapped into her bindings.

“Quiet a sec, Mandie.”

Scot pressed the earpiece further into his ear, but all he got was crackling static.

“Birdhouse, repeat, this is Norseman, come in. Over.” Scot waited.

“Birdhouse, repeat, this is Norseman. Can you read me? Over.”

More static.

Agent Maxwell looked at Scot, who shook his head to indicate he hadn’t made any

contact.

“What do you think?” said Maxwell.

“I don’t know, and I don’t want to cry wolf to the rest of Goldilocks’s detail just

yet. I’ll try my Deer Valley radio. If that doesn’t work, then we harden up.”

up was the Secret Service term for immediately closing ranks and body-shielding

their assignment from any potential threat.

Scot tried three times to raise Deer Valley's ski patrol and then tried Deer Valley's

operations station. There was no response. All of the radios were completely down.

Scot let out a loud whistle, catching the attention of the rest of the detail agents,

and

gave the harden up command by waving his gloved index finger in a high *circle the*

wagons motion above his head.

In a matter of seconds, Amanda's protective detail had her completely surrounded.

There was an incredible array of weaponry drawn, from Heckler & Koch MP5s to

SIG-Sauer semiautomatics, and even a modified Benelli M1 tactical shotgun. The

men's eyes never stopped surveying the area as Scot explained that he had seen two

of the president's detail agents go down and all radio communication was dark.

There probably was a simple explanation. Ahern and Houchins could just have

wiped out, and the radios *had* been acting up all day, with the weather the most

likely culprit, but that was not how the Secret Service was trained to think.

Operating procedure dictated that they

take the fastest and safest route back to the

command center immediately. With the loss of radio contact, Birdhouse would

already have scrambled intercept teams to recover both details as quickly as

possible. But they were still a long way off. It was time to move.

Amanda saw her chance to break in and asked, “Scot, what’s going on?”

“Probably nothing, Mandie, but we need to get you back down to the house as

quickly as possible,” said Scot. “You’ve

done an awesome job today. I'm really

proud of you. Your skiing is red-hot. Now, the normal way we go home would take

us a bit too long. If we ski through the bowl, I can have you sipping hot chocolate

by the fire with your dad in fifteen minutes. What do you say?"

"This is about him, isn't it? Has something happened? Is he okay?"

"I'm sure he is, and the quicker we get back, the quicker you'll see for yourself. Do

you think you can do the bowl with me? I'll be right next to you."

"I don't know. I think I can handle it."

"Good girl."

Scot smiled reassuringly at Amanda and gave the order to move out. The detail

dropped over the icy lip into the steep bowl. The wind grew more fierce and sent

sharp blasts of snow into their faces. Amanda was slow, but at least she was moving

forward. It was terrifying for her, but to

her credit, she was doing everything Scot

had taught her — weight on the downhill ski in the turns, leaning forward into her

boots, and keeping her hands out in front as if she were holding on to a tray.

Even though Amanda's cautious skiing slowed them down, it looked as if they were

going to make it without incident.

Then the detail heard what sounded like the crack of a rifle, followed by the low

rumble of a thunderhead. Scot had been

around mountains too long not to recognize

that sound.

Avalanche.

3

Despite his formfitting winter assault fatigues lined with a revolutionary new

weatherproof thermal composite, Hassan Useff lay in his coffin of snow and

shivered. He had been one of the toughest kids growing up in his balmy, south

Lebanon village and was now one of the Middle East's finest snipers, but the cold

and being buried alive beneath two feet of snow were beginning to get to him. When

the hideous repetition of his own raspy breathing was finally interrupted by two

squelch clicks over his earpiece, the fear and cold immediately disappeared, replaced

by a rush of adrenaline surging through his stiff body.

Useff tensed and released his muscles

several times to relieve some of the stiffness

in his joints. Cradling the high-tech glare gun in his gloved hands, he heard an almost

imperceptible whine as he powered the weapon up.

Two more clicks over the earpiece and he readied himself to spring from his snowy

grave.

Buried completely from view in several more snowy crypts nearby, Gerhard Miner

and five more of his “Lions” were about to undertake the most daring mission of

their lives.

”Son of a bitch,” cursed Sam Harper to himself as his ski clipped the edge of

another rock. He loved skiing, but hated having to follow the president down Death

Chute. He had fallen a little bit behind and was glad that several of the younger guys

on the detail were able to keep up with the commander in chief.

The biggest consolation of all was that Ahern and Houchins were behind him. At

least he wouldn't be the last one to ski up when the party rested in the flat area

among the trees before tackling the final vertical drop.

When Harper reached the beginning of the trees, everything began to happen in what,

had he survived, he would have described as a split-second flash.

Three final squelch clicks came over Hassan Useff's earpiece, signaling that

the last

members of the president's Secret Service detail were entering the heavily treed area.

Springing from his icy hideaway, Useff began pulsing his glare gun as his fellow

team member, Klaus Dryer, did the same twenty meters away.

The results were exactly as planned. Even with their UV-protective ski goggles, the

entire protective detail, as well as the president, was *dazzled.*

The glare guns were Russian copies of the nonlethal weapon developed by the

American Air Force's Phillips Laboratory. First brought into action in Somalia in

1995, the purpose of the high-tech laser weapon was to temporarily blind and

disorient an enemy.

Temporarily was all Miner's team needed.

Useff and Dryer's cross-pulsing in the narrow alley formed by the trees created a

blinding laser funnel that the president's team couldn't escape. This included the

members of the Secret Service countersniper unit, known as JAR, or Just Another

Rifle, who were posted strategically throughout the trees along this leg of the

president's run.

Completely blinded and disoriented, several agents lost their balance and wiped out

before they even had a chance to come to a complete stop. Those agents who had

already been in the process of slowing down and could stop, instinctively drew their

weapons, but they had one major problem. They couldn’t see a thing.

Not knowing where their fellow agents were or, more important, where the president

was, every single agent, weapon drawn or not, had been rendered not only totally

useless, but helpless as well.

Useff gave the go command over his lip mike as he shouldered the glare gun and

switched off the safety of his silenced German-manufactured Heckler & Koch MP5

submachine gun. The pleasure of being able to freely kill so many agents of the

Great Satan was almost unbearable. He had already shot two Secret Service agents

before the rest of the team had fully sprung from their hiding places.

As the Lions' silenced machine gun rounds drummed into the bodies of the

defenseless Secret Service agents, Miner made his way toward where the

president

had fallen.

“Harp, Harp,” mumbled the president from where he lay in the snow, still blind and

disoriented but alert enough to call out for the head of his protective detail as he tried

to raise himself into a seated position.

Miner dropped to his knees next to him and removed the president’s gloves and

jacket. As he helped him sit up, he placed a copy of *USA Today* on his

chest,

pulling the president's hands in so he could feel it. Instinctively, the president

grabbed hold of it. Miner shot several quick Polaroids and slipped the slowly

developing pictures into his pocket. Then he took the paper away and, with a pair of

trauma scissors, began to cut through the left sleeves of the president's sweater and

turtleneck.

"Toboggan! Where is that toboggan?"

Miner yelled.

“Harper? What’s happening?” repeated the president.

“There’s been an accident, Mr. President,” responded Miner in perfectly American

accented English. “You need to lie back now and remain still, while we start an IV.”

“Who are you? Where’s Harper? What’s happened to my eyes? I can’t see.”

“Please, Mr. President. You need to be completely quiet and completely still. My

team is attending to the others. There you go. Let's just lie back. Good." Miner

knew the effects of the glare gun would be wearing off soon. From his pack, he

withdrew an insulated medical pouch, unzipped it, pulled out a bag of saline solution,

and began an IV on the president, who continued to call for members of his

protective detail and complain about his eyes.

Once the IV was in place, Miner filled a syringe with a strong sedative called Versed

and piggybacked it into the IV line. The effect was almost instantaneous. The

president's eyes rolled back, closed, and his body went limp.

As one of Miner's men rushed past, towing an all-white ski-patrol-style transport

toboggan, Dryer made his way over to Hassan Useff.

Without even turning, Useff began speaking, knowing Dryer was behind him. "This

is Sam Harper, head of the president's protective detail, is it not?"

Though Harper was badly injured from his fall and couldn't see who was standing

above him speaking, he knew the Middle Eastern accent didn't belong to anyone on

his team. "Yeah, I'm Sam Harper, and whoever you are, you are in a lot of trouble.

Give yourself up."

"Typical American arrogance. Even in the face of death," said Useff.

"Fuck you," snarled Harper as he attempted to draw his weapon.

“Once again, typical. Is nothing original in this country?” asked Useff as he

squeezed off a three-round burst into the career Secret Service agent and father of

two’s head.

Ever since Dryer had recruited Useff for this assignment, he had marveled at the

man’s hatred for the United States. That hate, coupled with the Lebanese man’s

intense religious fervor, made him perfect for this job. Hassan Useff was the only

non-Swiss on the team.

As he began walking away, Useff said, “Protecting the president, he should have

been the best. A pity he won’t be remembered that way. The pathetic coward never

even fired a shot.”

When Useff had his back completely turned, Dryer withdrew an empty Evian bottle

from the pack he was carrying and picked up Harper’s SIG-Sauer P229. “I think the

Americans might beg to differ,” were the last words Hassan Useff heard before

the

.357 bullet, effectively muffled by being shot through the plastic bottle, ripped

through the back of his skull, killing him instantly.

Dryer placed the SIG-Sauer in Harper's dead hand. He then withdrew a model 68

Skorpion machine pistol with a silencer and fired indiscriminately into the bodies of

the dead Secret Service agents lying around him. He blew through two more

twenty-round magazines before placing the Skorpion on the ground next to Useff

and shouldering the dead Muslim's glare gun and H&K.

The waters were now sufficiently chummed.

4

"Sound, this is Birdhouse. Do you copy? Over. Norseman, this is Birdhouse, do

you copy? Over."

Secret Service agent Tom Hollenbeck, head of the command center for the

president's ski trip, had been trying to reach both details for the last seven minutes.

Communications had been sporadic throughout most of the day. The mountainous

terrain, the secluded location of the command center just outside the home the

president was staying in, and the terrible on-again, off-again weather, made things

extremely difficult.

Hollenbeck called out to his assistant, Chris Longo. "Hey, Longo. Can't we do

anything at all to pump this up?"

"For *Chrissake,* Tom. What do you think I've been doing for the last five minutes?"

"All right, all right. No need to get pissy. Just fix it."

"Hollenbeck, if I knew what was wrong, I would have fixed it already."

"Hold on a second. We've got the Deer Valley radios. Have we tried those?"

"Yes. I already thought of that."

"And?"

“They’ve also been having trouble.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“Same as us. The radios just aren’t working.”

“Is that normal?”

“It happens, but not often.”

“Damn it. How about the Smocks, then? They transmit on a different frequency than

our radios, don’t they?”

The Smock, or Doc Smock, as it was officially known, was a new piece of

technology made for monitoring soldiers in battle. It was a skintight vest with

sensors, worn under the clothes, that transmitted the wearer's vital signs, via a small

unit in a fanny pack. It could also indicate if the vest had been breached.

Even though the technology was still experimental, two duty agents on each detail

were wearing one.

"Yeah," said Longo, "the Smocks are on a different frequency."

“Well, see if you can punch them up.”

“See if I can punch them up? Do you want me to work on boosting our Motorolas

or do you want me working on the Smock signals?”

“No, you work on the radios and reaching the teams. Who’s watching the Smocks

now?”

“Palmer is.”

“Fine. Palmer!” yelled Hollenbeck as Longo went back to trying to raise the

two

details.

“Yes, sir?” responded an attractive, young female agent from a corner of the Secret

Service command center.

“Can you give me a full sit rep on all four Smocks?”

“Not really.”

“Why not?”

“They’ve been off and on all day.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean sometimes they seem to transmit and sometimes they don’t.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Could be the weather. Could be some sort of interference. For all I

know it could be that the Nintendo in the break room is messing with them. This is

still experimental technology.”

“How were they operating yesterday?”

“Clear as a bell. I’ve even got the

printouts of vitals broken down over fifteen-minute

intervals. Do you want to see them?”

No, Agent Tom Hollenbeck did not want to see them. What he wanted to see was

the president, his daughter, and the rest of the detail agents skiing up to the front

door joking about who had eaten the most snow today.

“What’s the longest amount of time you have been without a Smock signal?”

Agent Palmer looked down at her watch. “Up till now the longest interval without

a

signal was just about three minutes. Now we're going on eight."

The same amount of time the radios had been out of commission.

"Palmer, how would you say the weather was yesterday compared to today?"

"A little better, but not much."

"Longo!" yelled Hollenbeck.

"What now?" asked Longo.

"Do we have any rovers with a visual?"

Rovers were the teams of snowmobiles and Sno-Cats that followed the two details

as closely as possible. They were loaded with what the Secret Service referred to as

CATs, or Counter Assault Teams. The CATs were heavily armed and armored

agents whose sole job was to lend the protective details fire support.

“The last rover report came in as the teams split for their final run from the last-lap

rendezvous position, right before the

radios went down. Goldilocks took the low

road, and Hat Trick opted for the high road," replied Longo.

"Which high road?" asked Hollenbeck.

"Death Chute."

"It would have to be that one, wouldn't it? What's the next potential rover or JAR

visual contact for Hat Trick?"

"There's a JAR unit among the trees in the middle of Death Chute."

“I know about that one. I haven’t been able to raise them. What about the next

rover?”

“There’s no access for a rover team until about half a mile down from the treed

plateau on Death Chute.”

Hollenbeck didn’t need to confirm where the next visual was for Amanda’s detail.

She had taken the same route home every day. There was normally a pretty good line

of sight directly from the command

center, but today wasn't normal. The snow was

blowing harder, reducing visibility to next to nothing, and Birdhouse had lost all

radio contact with any agents more than one hundred yards from the command

center.

"So," began Hollenbeck, "we have had no visual, nor radio contact with the details

for the last eight minutes?"

"That's right, boss," answered Longo.

“Okay, that settles it.”

Hollenbeck stood up from his chair and called for everyone’s attention. He slung his

lip mike back over his head and toggled the transmit switch to get the attention of the

agents on patrol outside the command center. For some reason, transmissions close

to the command center were not interrupted.

All eyes in the room, and ears outside, were now trained on Hollenbeck.

“Everybody, listen up. We have a potential hostile situation.”

5

Miner gave rapid orders to Anton Schebel when he arrived with the toboggan.

“Crack the blanket and help me lean him forward to get this sweater the rest of the

way off.”

Schebel did as he was told. In quick succession, he pounded the pockets of hot

packs lining the toboggan’s body bag

with the butt of his semiautomatic. Before he

had finished with the hot packs, Dryer rejoined Miner and was taking over.

“Useff?” inquired Miner as they removed the president’s sweater, careful not disturb

the IV.

“He left early. Cocktails with Allah. Everything is on schedule,” said Dryer as they

worked the president’s turtleneck off.

“Good. Get the bag over here and lay it

next to him."

Dryer laid the body bag out lengthwise next to the president.

"Everything else off now. Pants, socks, boots, ring, watch, even the underwear."

Miner wasn't leaving anything to chance. He knew the president wore at least one

homing device and that it was cleverly hidden. The fact that he might be surgically

implanted with another one was unlikely, but Miner had brought the special body bag

along just in case. If the president was surgically implanted with any additional

homing devices, the signal would never breach Miner's clever Kevlar-like design.

The bag had been constructed so that as they zipped it shut, the IV could be hung

on a special rail at the rear of the toboggan and the tube would still be feeding

through the bag into the president's arm.

Dryer and Schebel placed him in the warmed bag and loaded him into the toboggan.

With the lining of hot pockets, at least he wouldn't freeze. Miner's plan certainly

didn't entail dressing the president in new clothes. At least not yet.

When the bag was belted to the toboggan, Miner spoke into his lip mike. "Two

minutes."

Gerhard Miner, Klaus Dryer, Anton Schebel, and the other team members clicked

into their hybrid cross-country, downhill telemark skis. The incredibly strong men

quickly began powering their precious cargo into the trees.

“Ninety seconds.”

Dryer led the way, wearing special night-vision-style goggles. Eight days before, he

had marked some of these same trees with a special paint that upon contact with air,

oxidized and became invisible to the human eye. The goggles now allowed Dryer to

pick up the paint’s unique chemical signature and follow the escape route he

had

marked through the maze of trees.

Finally, the flat ground grew steeper and they picked up more speed. Klaus knew

they would be out of the woods in only a few more seconds.

Miner had taught his men that the plan depended on absolutely perfect timing. If the

toboggan flipped over, or one of them stumbled, all would be lost. There was no

margin for error.

“Thirty seconds.”

The team, now out of the trees, rapidly cut a diagonal path across the dangerously

steep mountain face.

Gravity and the toboggan’s smooth round bottom began causing it to slide downhill,

instead of across the face. Schebel, an experienced sled-dog driver, put his weight

on the up-mountain side of the toboggan to help it stay on course.

Snow and ice screamed from the back of the rig as it dug into the mountain and

fought against the unnatural course it was being forced to take. If Schebel lost it

now, both he and the president would be hurled into the valley.

The toboggan continued to edge out of Schebel's control. He leaned harder into the

yoke and tried to right the toboggan's course. He cursed Dryer for not computing

the grade of the mountain better and Miner for not outfitting the toboggan

with a

sharp set of runners like a bobsled.

Schebel was the biggest and strongest of the group, and that's why he had been

chosen to pull the toboggan. It looked as if he wasn't strong enough, though.

Everything they had trained for and risked was going to be lost.

Schebel tried again to put all of his weight on his uphill ski. The result was

disastrous. The toboggan careened wildly out of control so that it faced straight

down the mountain. It began to pull Schebel backward. He cursed again, sure he

was going to be killed. Schebel and the president slid rapidly down the mountain

instead of across it.

In a last-ditch attempt to get control of the sled, Schebel threw all of his considerable

bulk onto his opposite ski. For what felt like an eternity, nothing happened. The

toboggan pitched hard, as if it was going to flip over and carry Schebel with it.

Then, a miracle occurred.

As the toboggan was close to capsizing, its upper seam caught in the frozen snow

and acted like the edge of a ski, putting it and Schebel back on course. He was

downhill from the rest of the team, but he saw Dryer change direction and make his

way down toward an outcropping of rock. As long as the toboggan cooperated and

stayed on this new course, Schebel would be okay.

While Miner resumed the final seconds of his countdown, Dryer saw two enormous

boulders looming in front of them. The boulders, which looked impassable from this

distance, marked the head of a small, incredibly steep and dangerous chute.

Compared to this one, Death Chute was child's play, but for six of the world's top

mercenaries who had spent their entire lives challenging the world's most unforgiving

mountains, it would not pose a problem.

When Dryer was within meters of the small passageway, Miner reached for

something strapped to his chest. It was a small black transmitter with a strip of red

electrical tape wrapped around its rubber antenna. When Miner had a hold of it, he

depressed its only button.

A sound like the crack of a rifle, followed by the roar of a thunderhead, reverberated

from far above them as they began their arduous descent.

6

The icy snow whipped against the Secret Service's mobile command center, and

every agent inside was looking directly at their chief of operations, Tom Hollenbeck.

"We have had no visual or radio contact with either protective detail going on nine

minutes. Visibility is also severely impaired. I am upgrading the current situation to

Hostile 2 until further notice. I want the president's residence locked down and all

duty agents that are raisable to report in. The perimeter is to be locked and lit. I want

the backup tactical units on deck and ready to deploy. The rest of you know your

jobs, so let's move."

Hollenbeck finished issuing orders and then turned his attention to the window as he

tried to peer through the sea of snow. A

group of counterassault agents waited

outside for their orders, which they knew would be next to come.

For some reason, the radios within a hundred yards of the command center still

worked, so Hollenbeck didn't need to go outside to address the waiting agents. "I

want both Hat Trick's and Goldilocks's intercept teams to mobilize immediately.

You are to assess the situation and report back in person ASAP to Birdhouse unless

radio contact can be reestablished. Until then, you are to assume that we are

operating dark under a hostile scenario. Your objective is to compile a sit rep and get

it to me as quickly as possible. This is not an escort service. I repeat, not an escort

service. As soon as you know anything, I want you back here. Don’t waste any time.

Any questions?” asked Hollenbeck sternly.

“Negative. Teams One and Two,

understood. Out," came the response from the

intercept leader outside the command center. Within seconds, the two four-man

teams of Secret Service agents clad in insulated Nomex jumpsuits and

medium-weight body armor had their Polaris snowmobiles fired up and were heading

to intercept their respective "packages."

"Can we get anything aloft in this?" asked Hollenbeck of one of his operational

assistants.

“From here, no. It looks as if things are supposed to be getting worse. We’ve got

the president’s Marine Corps White Top at the bottom of the hill, but even as good

as those pilots are, this weather is impossible and their helicopters aren’t made for it.

The best we could do is scramble a Black Hawk from Hill Air Force Base.”

“How long would it take?”

“Ten minutes to get it up and twenty to

thirty more to get on site, but there isn't

much they can do searchwise with the visibility cut down to less than nothing."

"Call Hill and have them put one on standby. I want those rotors spinning until I say

otherwise."

The operational assistant turned away from Hollenbeck and patched through on the

com link to Hill Air Force Base to order up the bird.

"Longo," barked Hollenbeck, growing

tenser by the moment, “are we green yet on

those Motorolas?”

“We are still no go. Situation dark on all communications.”

“Palmer?”

“Sorry, sir. Still nothing on the Smocks either.”

Just when Agent Hollenbeck thought things couldn’t possibly get any worse, he

heard the resort’s avalanche sirens begin their low, mournful wail.

7

There wasn’t time for him to think, only to react. For most, reacting without thinking

could be a dangerous thing, but not when you were trained to make life-or-death

decisions in milliseconds.

Based on where the sound of the avalanche came from, Scot instinctively knew that

they were right in its path. The job of a protective detail in a threat situation was to

immediately cover and evacuate their protectee. Evacuation in this case was

impossible, at least for the time being, but maybe, just maybe, Scot had a chance of

covering the president's daughter. It would take every ounce of skill and strength he

had in his body.

He managed to yell, "Avalanche," he hoped loudly enough for the other agents to

hear, and then voiced a quiet, "Oh, shit," to himself. There wasn't time to tell the

other Secret Service agents what he was planning to do.

Amanda apparently didn't hear his cry of "Avalanche" or know what the loud noise

was, because she kept slowly skiing down the bowl. Scot pulled up short on his

downhill ski and, squatting deeply like a weight lifter getting ready to deadlift,

positioned himself behind Amanda. This had one chance of working.

The tidal wave of snow was already barreling down on top of them.

Assuming the

radios were still out of commission, Scot yelled for the other agents to follow him.

With the roar of the avalanche filling his ears, he couldn't be sure if anyone had

heard him.

"Don't move! Just let me take you," yelled Scot as he grabbed all one hundred and

ten pounds of Amanda Rutledge around the waist and lifted her up off her skis.

Startled, she screamed, but didn't fight

him. The severe downhill angle and their

combined mass sent them rocketing down the slope. With the diminished visibility,

Scot couldn't be sure if he had calculated right. He *had* to be dead-on. If they

undershot what he'd seen, they would be dead. If they overshot it, they would be

dead. And if the blinding snow had played a trick on his eyes and what he thought

would be there wasn't, that also could result only in their death.

While Amanda was by no means heavy for a girl of her age and Scot Harvath was in

incredible shape, carrying her as they raced downhill ripped and tore at every fiber of

his tightly muscled body. His entire back was on fire, and his thighs felt as if there

were red-hot coils wrapped around them. Every primal instinct within him shouted

for him to let her go and save himself, but he had been trained to be a master of not

only his body but his mind, which meant that fear and pain would serve him, not the

other way around.

Amanda must have known what was going on, at least on some level, because the

minute Scot picked her up, she went as limp as a kitten lifted by the scruff of the

neck.

He'd known when he heard the sound of the avalanche that outrunning it would be

impossible. He didn't even dare venture

another look back. The slightest wasted

movement could immediately put the two of them on the losing side of this equation.

The freezing ice and blowing snow tore into Scot's face like shards of broken glass.

He and Amanda picked up more speed as they traversed the face of the bowl. This

was where the simple physics of Scot's plan was working severely against them. In

an avalanche, the heavy snow chooses

the fastest path available to it. Drawn by

gravity, this path is always straight down, tearing apart anything in its way. Instead of

going straight down, Scot and Amanda were going almost straight across the

mountain. With each foot they gained in going across, the avalanche gained fifty

coming down. There was absolutely no room for slipups.

Scot had no idea if his fellow agents had heard him yell, if they had interpreted the

sound of the avalanche for what it was, or how they had reacted. For now at least,

there was no way to find out. He could only hope that they had taken his lead and

were following right behind.

The roar had become deafening, and it reverberated throughout Scot's entire body,

shaking him as he held Amanda. It seemed as if they had been traveling forever, even

though it had been only a matter of

seconds. *Where are those goddamn rocks?* he

screamed to himself.

As it turned out, Scot had dangerously undershot his target. Through the blizzard of

blowing snow, he could just make out the outcropping, further across the face and

significantly below where they were now. *Damn it!* he thought.

Knowing this was his last chance, Scot pointed his skis, himself, and Amanda

straight for the bottom.

They picked up speed at a terrifying rate. Scot's knees pistoned up and down like

jackhammers as he absorbed not only his weight but also Amanda's. He fought with

all of his might to keep control of his skis, which were furiously slapping the packed

snow like a pair of loose dock planks in a hurricane.

He and Amanda were going way too fast. One bump in their path and it would all be

over. There was no way that any skier, even one of Scot Harvath's caliber, could

keep this up.

Then, he saw it. The outcropping of rock was racing up to meet them as quickly as

the avalanche was racing down to swallow them.

Harvath put the distance at twenty yards and closing. His mind raced through the

trillion calculations necessary to gauge the successful achievement of the next step in

his plan: *stopping.*

The logical answer he received to his seemingly illogical request was simply,

"Three… two… one… Now!"

Scot wrapped his arms tightly around Amanda and threw all of their collective weight

over his left ski. He covered her as best he could with his body, acting as a human

air bag to protect her from injury, as they brutally spun and pounded out of control

toward the rocks below.

Over and over again they somersaulted with furious speed, each time crashing down

hard on one or the other of Scot's shoulders. Between the white snow of the bowl

and the blowing white of the blizzard, Harvath fought hard to keep focused on which

way was up and where their target was. It was impossible. They continued to flip

wildly out of control. The sound of the avalanche was so loud now he couldn't even

think.

As quickly as they had been rolling, they were immediately stopped by slamming

into a sheer wall of rock. Scot cried out in pain and held on to consciousness just

long enough to see a torrent of wet snow pour over them and Amanda's limp body

lying motionless beside him.

8

The first thing he noticed when he regained consciousness was the eerie silence. The

absence of noise was deafening. They had barely made it to the rock overhang in

time. The plan had just worked. They were positioned beneath a narrow stone ledge

that had formed a partial barrier to the avalanche. The claustrophobic box they were

in was about eleven feet long, three-and-a-half feet wide, and four feet high. They

were amazingly fortunate. Where there wasn't rock, they found themselves

surrounded by snow, but there was at

least some room to move around — as if they

were in a small cave. Scot hoped the other Secret Service agents had been as

fortunate, but he doubted they had.

In the dark, Harvath began to slowly make an overall assessment of his condition.

His ankles felt okay, shins were fine, knees were sore but probably would bear

weight. His thighs felt like mush and were bruised, but didn't seem like a problem as

long as he was lying down. He carefully fished his Mag-Lite out of his pocket and

turned it on. Next, he struggled to bring his knees up to raise himself into a sitting

position, and that's when the pain started shooting through every inch of his upper

body. He gave up immediately.

Covering Amanda during their fall, Scot had taken most of the beating along his

back and shoulders. From his waist up, *everything* hurt, and he couldn't tell what

might be broken. At least there were no apparent open fractures, and he was only

bleeding slightly from an abrasion on his forehead, so for that he gave thanks.

From where he was lying, he could see the outline of Amanda's left leg. He needed

to get to her and knew it was going to hurt like hell, but he pushed the thought from

his mind. With all the strength he could summon, Scot rocked his body slowly from

right to left until he got up enough

momentum to roll all the way over. He was right.

Rolling over did hurt like hell, but it was nothing compared to what came next.

When he'd been on his back, he could look straight down past his ski boots and

make out Amanda's leg as she lay on her side. Now that he was on his stomach, he

couldn't see her, because she was behind him. Scot summoned up another surge of

strength and, banishing the pain from his mind, managed to lift himself onto his

elbows. This change of position sent searing, red-hot spikes of pain up his arms and

into his battered shoulders. He began turning his body around upon the cold,

rock-strewn snow so he could face Amanda. His legs refused to cooperate, and for

a moment he was afraid he might be paralyzed. Eventually, he felt his ski boots

move.

Scot’s incredibly weakened legs were not of much use, so he went back to

dragging

himself in Amanda's direction while the incredible pain in his arms, shoulders, and

back threatened to slam him back into unconsciousness.

It took the resilient Secret Service agent over fifteen minutes to crawl ten feet. Even

though he didn't want to, Scot was forced to stop every couple of seconds to catch

his breath. He probably had cracked one, if not several, ribs in the tumble

down the

mountain. Nevertheless, he was alive, and if Amanda was too, then they both had

won, so far.

As he drew closer, he could see Amanda's chest slowly heaving up and down in the

beam of his small flashlight. Thank God, she was breathing. At least she was alive.

Harvath tried feebly to call out to her, but all he could manage was a hoarse whisper.

He would need to get a lot closer to communicate.

He continued his pattern of crawl, rest, crawl, rest, until his face was even with the

back of Amanda's head. With her face turned away toward the sheer rock wall of

the overhang that had saved their lives, he couldn't tell if she was conscious.

Scanning the top and back of her head, he didn't see any injuries, but that didn't

mean there weren't any. Scot knew that attempting to reposition her head could

worsen any spinal trauma that might already be present. He would have to carefully

support her head, neck, and shoulders, and at this point he didn't have the strength

to do it.

"Amanda?" he whispered in his hoarse, dry voice. "Can you hear me? Mandie

sweetheart, it's Scot. We're alive. We made it, but I need you to talk to me. I need

to know if you're okay. C'mon, honey, just a couple of words. Let me know if

you

can hear what I am saying."

Amanda didn't respond, and Scot didn't have the energy to keep talking. He had

resisted for as long as he could the syrupy blanket of unconsciousness that had been

threatening to overtake him. It was no use. As hard as he tried, he just couldn't fight

it. All he wanted now was to sleep. Peaceful sleep. *I'm so sorry, Amanda.*

9

“Palmer!” yelled Hollenbeck to the nearest Secret Service agent in the command

center. “Get on the horn to Deer Valley and find out if those avalanche sirens are

legit. I want to know why they’re sounding and if there has been an avalanche. I want

a full, and I mean *full* report!”

“Yes, sir,” replied Palmer, who immediately contacted the resort’s emergency

services department.

“Longo! One question. Are we green?”

“Negative. We are still dark.”

Tom Hollenbeck had been standing for the last nine minutes. He couldn’t think of

sitting down. He needed to pace. His crew knew him well enough to steer clear.

He walked over to one of the windows and watched the whipping snow outside,

racking his brain for what his next move should be. The president’s life, his

daughter’s, and the lives of no less than

thirty Secret Service agents were in his

hands.

“Sir!” cried Palmer as she came running up to Hollenbeck with her notepad. “Deer

Valley says that there was an avalanche.”

“Shit! Give me the *w’s*,” said Hollenbeck, which was Service slang for “who, what,

where, when, and how many.”

Palmer looked down at her pad and began reading off her list of facts.

“Apparently,

this was a pretty big one. Several ski patrollers heard it and, knowing what it was,

called it in to their base as a potential. Only two patrols actually got a visual and

confirmed it.”

“Why only two?”

“Look at the way it’s snowing outside. With weather this bad, you’d have to be

practically on top of anything to see it.”

“All right, so several patrols heard what sounded like an avalanche and called it in as

a potential, while only two could actually give a positive visual on it. And they also

called it in?”

“Correct, sir.”

“How? I thought their radios were down.”

“Yes, they are.”

“Then how did they do it?”

“Apparently, they used a citizen’s band radio inside one of their ski patrol huts.”

“A CB?”

“The call came through loud and clear.”

“Why do you suppose a CB would work, but not our gear and not Deer Valley’s

regular radios?”

“Apples and oranges.”

“What do you mean, ‘apples and oranges’?”

“The CB uses a different frequency than those used by the Secret Service or Deer

Valley. The weird thing is that our gear is much more sophisticated. Everyone else

should be having problems, not us."

Hollenbeck agreed and tucked that nugget away for later while he proceeded with the

matter at hand. "Okay, Palmer. Now for the ten-thousand-dollar question. Where did

the avalanche begin?"

"According to the ski patrol, it began at Squaw Peak."

Hollenbeck's hand shot through a stack of papers and laminated charts on his desk,

pulling out the topographical map the Secret Service's TAT, or Threat Assessment

Team, had prepared. It detailed all of the president's known and potential ski routes,

along with rotating postings for the JAR and CAT teams. Hollenbeck had a

photographic memory and knew exactly where Squaw Peak was, but hoped in his

heart of hearts that he was wrong. He

wasn’t.

Squaw Peak was the highest peak of Deer Valley, and it fed directly into the basin

the president and his daughter were skiing through.

In anticipation of Hollenbeck’s next question, Palmer said, “The slide was on this

side of the mountain and would have funneled a wall of snow, ice, and debris

directly along the routes of Hat Trick and Goldilocks.”

For the first time in ten minutes, Hollenbeck sat back down in his chair.

10

With almost a straight vertical drop and so much that could have gone wrong with

the descent, Miner's Lions had done an exceptional job. His men deserved their

sobriquet. They certainly had the hearts of lions. In assembling the best-trained

force-for-hire in the world, Miner had revived Switzerland's illustrious mercenary

tradition. It seemed only fitting that his men should carry a name that honored their

predecessors.

Not far from the heart of the city of Lucerne was a majestic monument carved into a

sheer rock face. It depicted a lion resting on a shield bearing the Swiss coat of arms

and paid tribute to the 786 members of the Swiss Guard who died defending King

Louis and Marie Antoinette during an

attack on the Tuileries in 1792. Even the

American author Mark Twain had called it the most “moving” piece of rock in the

world. Upon Miner’s suggestion, his men had taken the name and had been his band

of courageous and deadly *Lions* ever since.

It took the Lions ten minutes to make their descent. When they emerged from the icy

crevice, the lead skiers took off their skies and began removing a series of

snow-white tarps that hid three Ski-Doo snowmobiles.

No words were spoken, as time was still a critical element. Dryer helped Schebel

attach the toboggan to the back of one of the snowmobiles, and Miner unzipped the

bag carrying the president to make sure his IV was still firmly in place.

The rest of the crew snapped out of their bindings and placed their skis into the

specially fitted tubes on the sides of their snowmobiles. There were two riders on

each machine, one to drive and another to lay down fire if need be, though Miner

knew it wouldn't be necessary.

He climbed onto the back of the snowmobile driven by Dryer, which would pull the

toboggan, and gave the signal to fire up the machines and move out.

11

Scot Harvath's eyes snapped open as a searing bolt of pain spat him back into

consciousness. His entire body ached. The sensation ebbed away, and then

another

wave came crashing back in.

He had known pain of this magnitude before, as well as soul-chilling cold, during his

SEAL training. That training had taught Scot that what the mind believes, the body

will achieve. He and his fellow teammates had joked that in SEAL training they had

known the most horrific torture ever conceived of by the civilized world, but every

single ounce of it had been designed to prepare him for situations just like this.

SEALs absolutely, positively never give up. The SEAL motto was, “The only easy

day was yesterday,” and even though Scot Harvath’s paychecks now came from the

Secret Service, he would always be a SEAL.

Scot moved just a fraction and had to suppress the urge to cry out. It didn’t matter.

One of the benefits of the pain, if you

could look at it that way, was that his head

was clearing and he was regaining control. His body would have no choice but to

cooperate with him. Passing out again was not an option. It couldn’t be an option.

Scot was acutely aware that with each ten minutes that passed, avalanche survival

rates for those buried beneath the snow dropped like a stone.

Harvath painfully pulled himself into a

sitting position and wiggled his way over so

that he was sitting directly above Amanda Rutledge's head. He set the Mag-Lite next

to him and turned his palms upward. Carefully, he slid both of his hands beneath her

back, supporting her head, neck, and shoulders as he rolled her over. She made no

sound and continued to breathe in slow, shallow breaths.

"Mandie? It's Scot. Can you wake up for

me? Say something, honey. C'mon."

Scot removed his small backpack, placed it on the ground next to him, and retrieved

his flashlight. He opened Amanda's eyes, expertly shining the light into each one.

Her pupils didn't constrict. That was a bad sign. He focused his thoughts on getting

them to safety.

There was no way to tell how deeply they were buried. In an avalanche, the heavy

snow could set up like wet concrete, making it nearly impossible to dig your way

out.

Scot remembered his radios and gave them both another try. “Mayday, Mayday.

Birdhouse, this is Norseman. We need assistance. Over.

“Deer Valley, Deer Valley, do you copy? Over.”

Nothing but the crackle of static came back. Scot decided to conserve his energy

and his oxygen. There were more important things to think about now. Number one,

he had to keep Amanda warm and try to stabilize her. Number two, he had to get

them both out of this situation alive.

So far he was batting a thousand on the staying-alive part, but their fight was only

fifty percent complete. Without any radio contact or anybody knowing where they

were trapped, there was no telling how long a search party would take to find them.

With the weather the way it was, efforts were going to be severely hampered.

Harvath had opted against having the detail agents carry the avalanche-safety

transmitter-receivers so popular with backcountry skiers. The avalanche

transmitter-receiver was about the size of a small walkie-talkie and was constantly set

o n *transmit,* broadcasting a low-frequency signal, so that if someone were ever

trapped in an avalanche, like now, other people in the party could set theirs to

receive and start homing in on that person's location to rescue him or her. Scot was

completely against this equipment for several reasons.

One, an unfriendly source could potentially lock in on these signals, and two, with

JAR and CAT teams strategically interspersed along their routes, help would always

be immediately available via radio contact, if not visually. All things considered, he

thought the choice not to outfit agents with the avalanche transmitter-receivers was

still the right one. However, Scot had never anticipated that their radios would go

out.

As if they didn't already have enough problems, Scot looked at his watch and

realized it was nearing 4:45 P.M. The sun would be setting soon, and as it went

down, so would the temperature. If they didn't get themselves out and to someplace

warm, they'd be Popsicles by morning.

12

Harvath slid out of his jacket and placed it over Amanda to help keep her warm. She

was lying on snow-covered ground, so the gesture was more symbolic than anything

else. Amanda would have been better served with the jacket placed beneath her, but

he'd already moved her once and didn't want to risk it again.

Her pupils not constricting was a sign of abnormal brain function. Despite all of

Scot's efforts to cushion Amanda, she'd probably hit her head during the fall down

the mountain. Only a doctor would be able to know for sure what her prognosis

was, and that made their situation all the more dire.

As Scot's head continued to clear, he realized they probably had a little more air

available to them than he'd originally thought. He needed to begin the

dangerous

process of extricating himself and Amanda from their snowy dungeon. He crawled

back down toward Amanda's feet, dragging his backpack with him.

Confident that he was far enough away that a minor cave-in of snow or ice wouldn't

land on Amanda, Scot reached into his pack and withdrew what looked like a

telescoping ski pole. The pole was known as an avalanche probe and was used by

search parties to feel for avalanche victims beneath the snow. As Scot began

extending the device, he breathed a sigh of gratitude that he had been safety

conscious enough to bring it along.

He picked an angle that looked to be the safest and easiest to dig out from and

began feeding the pole through, careful not to disturb any unstable snow. The pole

fed out for what felt like a million miles. They had survived a major avalanche.

Shrugging off the fatigue that leaned on him like a heavy boulder, Harvath assembled

his collapsible snow shovel and prayed he wouldn’t bring the icy roof crumbling

down on top of them.

Bending his knees and putting one foot against the rock wall behind him for leverage,

Scot began the delicate process of digging out. The last thing he wanted to do was

to cause a cave-in.

When he felt he had tunneled a sufficient distance forward, he began scraping the

snow along the ceiling in front of him. It created an ice spray that rained down on his

face and hands. The process was agonizingly slow. Time and again, Scot backed

out of the tunnel, pulling the recently shoveled snow toward him, and deposited it

within their frigid cave.

On his eleventh grueling trip back into the tunnel, Scot felt the shovel break the

surface. He let the crisp plates of frozen snow fall down on him as he dug an exit

wide enough to crawl through.

A chill wind howled as he pulled himself through, and the snow was falling harder

and blowing faster than before. The sun was completely gone, and Scot couldn’t

make out anything below them in the terrible conditions. He sat on the rim with his

heavily booted feet resting within the tunnel and took two seconds to catch his

breath. It was biting cold, but at this moment he didn't feel it.

Now that they had a way out, Scot was faced with an even bigger problem. With

Amanda unconscious and unable to help him assess her injuries, moving her might

cause permanent damage. On the other hand, it was equally, if not more dangerous

to stay where they were. There was a very good chance they might freeze to death,

or even worse, be reburied in a

secondary slide. Though he was certain a massive

rescue effort was now under way, there was no way the rescuers could have known

that he and Amanda had traveled so far across the face of the mountain. It would

take them days before they started looking in this area. He thought about using his

flashlight to signal for help, but realized it wasn't powerful enough to reach any

significant distance in this weather. Scot had to risk moving her, and the sooner,

the

better.

Sliding back down on his stomach, Scot reentered the cave. With his Mag-Lite, he

checked Amanda again, only to find that her condition had not changed. Her pulse

felt weak and her breathing was still slow and shallow.

Scot used his mini shovel to move all of the snow away from the entrance of the

tunnel so he would have less trouble getting her out. After that was done, he

took off

his ski boots and removed his bib-style ski pants. Underneath his ski pants, he wore

tight-fitting Lycra biking pants, which he prayed would be enough to keep him from

suffering from exposure.

As much as he hated to do it, Scot knew he had to move Amanda to prep her and

get her out. With his knife, he cut the padded straps from his backpack and

fashioned a crude C-collar, which he

fastened around Amanda's neck to keep it

from moving. He used the supporting plastic shell from inside his pack as a short

back board. He then cut the straps off Amanda's bib ski pants and gently put her

already jacketed arms and upper body into his ski coat. Next, he removed her boots

and slid her into his ski pants, carefully threading the bib straps underneath her back.

The knife came in handy again as Scot fashioned two primitive booties out of the

large zippered compartments of his pack. Hopefully, they would help keep

Amanda's feet somewhat dry. Taking her down the mountain with her heavy boots

on was not an option. Not only would the added weight be difficult for Scot to bear,

but it could also exacerbate any trauma she might have already suffered. He put the

nylon booties over her boot liners and

pushed her feet gently into them.

Knowing he could never clomp all the way back in his own heavy, uncomfortable ski

boots, Scot pulled out his liners to keep his feet warm and then used what was left

of his pack to fashion his own booties from the waterproof nylon. Feeling like a

postapocalyptic caveman, Scot was now ready to drag Amanda out of their hole and

hopefully down to safety.

As he readied himself to go, Scot realized he had made a critical mistake. In an effort

to protect Amanda from any falling snow or ice, he had dug the entrance to the

escape tunnel at her feet. Amanda was wearing his bib pants so that Scot could pull

her by the excess length of the straps dangling next to her shoulders, which meant

she was pointed in the wrong direction to be dragged from the cave.

It was bad enough that Scot was going to

drag her anywhere without knowing how

injured she was, but now, to get her out, he was going to have to turn her around.

The cave was only three-and-a-half feet wide, so he would also have to bend

Amanda's legs to do it. *Could this get any worse?*

Ever so gently he bent her knees up. Next, he placed his hands beneath her shoulder

blades and began maneuvering her upper body toward their only way out. Scot knew

all too well that if Amanda had suffered any damage to her back, he could be making

it permanent. She was such a good kid with such energy. The thought that she could

end up paralyzed because of his effort made him sick, but he knew that he couldn't

allow his emotions to control his thinking. It ran counter to his training. He tried to

filter the thoughts from his mind, but not before he heard a sickening *pop*.

Harvath froze in his tracks. *Please, God. Please tell me that wasn't something in*

Amanda's back, he said to himself. When he looked down, he saw her ski jacket

had caught and chipped off a piece of ice on the cave floor. Scot breathed a sigh of

relief and then another when he had Amanda fully turned around and at the mouth of

the tunnel.

It was as if he'd had to go into a cold, dark womb, turn a breech baby, and now had

to pull it through the birth canal into the world. With his ski gloves back on and the

loose straps of the bib ski pants in his hands, Scot moved backward two feet and

then pulled Amanda slowly forward for one. The journey out of the icy cave seemed

to take forever. At this point, it was nothing but Scot's sheer force of will that kept

them moving.

To pull Amanda's limp body through the

final vertical portion of the tunnel, Scot

had to summon every ounce of strength his reserves had to offer. It didn't matter

how tired he was or how much pain he was in. The only thing that mattered, and the

only outcome Scot Harvath was willing to accept, was complete and total success in

extricating Amanda Rutledge, the president's daughter and one-day-old member of

the sweet-sixteen club, from that icy cave and getting her back home to safety.

After he slid Amanda onto the snow next to the mouth of the tunnel, he sat for a

moment to catch his breath and quiet the symphony of screaming muscles

throughout his body. He removed his flashlight and checked Amanda's eyes again.

They were still dilated. He took off a glove and checked her pulse. It had grown

weaker. He had to get moving, now.

Careful not to disturb her neck, Scot unfurled the hood from beneath the collar of

his jacket and velcroed it shut as best he could around Amanda's face. With the

wind and snow blowing so hard, he wanted to keep her as warm and dry as

possible.

He stood, wrapped his hands around the straps of Amanda's makeshift stretcher,

and slowly began easing her down the mountain.

The going was brutally difficult. Scot continually sank down into snow up to his

knees, sometimes even to his thighs.

There was no way to tell which snow was firm

and which would give way. And every time Scot sank into one of these unexpected

patches, the added weight of Amanda's stretcher-borne body dangerously

threatened to topple him over and send them both hurtling down the face of the

mountain.

The wind bit into Scot with a piercing cold against which neither his exertion nor the

tepid fumes from his emptying tank of adrenaline could warm him. The razor-sharp

crystals of snow tore in sheets across his exposed face like sandpaper.

Harvath fought back against the storm and commanded himself to go forward, one

step at a time. Hampering his already slow movement was the knowledge that he had

to proceed with a gem cutter's precision, so as to shield Amanda from any added

trauma whatsoever. *One foot in front of*

the other, thought Scot. *Failure is not an*

option. We will make it!

He pressed forward through the hellish wind and cold. He had now lost all sense of

time and space. All that mattered was getting Amanda back home. Scot was vaguely

aware that his body had stopped shivering in its feeble attempt to keep warm. *At*

least my legs are still moving. But what Scot mistook for his legs moving of his

own volition was actually a stumble in slow motion. In truth, his legs had given up

three yards ago, and it was only through an amazing effort that he kept moving down

the mountain without losing complete control.

Finally, he fell forward into the snow. Like the old brainteaser about a tree falling in

the woods with no one to hear it, Scot wondered, would his fall make any sound, or

any difference? After all, they were completely alone. Or so he thought.

Two hundred yards away, wearing next-generation infrared goggles, the leader of

Amanda's Secret Service intercept team picked up the heat signature of two forms,

prone in the snow. In a breakout maneuver that would have made the best F-18 pilot

envious, the agent gunned his Polaris snowmobile in their direction.

Within seconds, the snowmobile's

miles-per-hour gauge showed the needle well

over one hundred, and he quickly closed the gap with Scot and Amanda. The rest of

the intercept team was hot on his trail.

The leader pulled up next to Scot and Amanda, while the rest of the team

surrounded the two bodies lying in the snow and used their goggles to continue

searching the immediate area.

As an agent carefully rolled him over, Scot let out a low moan.

“It’s Norseman! He’s alive!” shouted the team leader to the other intercept

members. He then moved over to Amanda and felt for a pulse. It was weak, but at

least her heart was beating. “He’s got Goldilocks too! They’re both alive, but in bad

shape.”

The team leader engaged his throat mike in an attempt to raise the command center.

“Birdhouse, this is Hermes, do you read? Over.” There was no response,

which is

what he had expected. His original orders had been not to escort anyone back, but

the game had changed. Every Secret Service agent was selected on the basis of a

wide variety of criteria. One of the most highly prized was intelligence, along with the

ability to make the right decisions in a life-or-death situation.

Hermes addressed his men. “I want two pop toboggans inflated. I will transport

Goldilocks on mine and Archimedes will transport Norseman. I am changing our

status to medevac under Hostile 2. Hammer 4 and Hammer 5 will take the GPS

coordinates so we can return to this location to search for the rest of the party. Let's

move. Go! Go!"

Harvath was only faintly aware of the hissing air and of being strapped into the

emergency inflatable pop-up toboggan. As soon as the intercept team swung the

snowmobiles around to speed them all back to the command center, he once again

slipped into unconsciousness.

13

By the time the Lions reached the farmhouse of Joseph and Mary Maddux, they

were seven minutes ahead of schedule. Miner was pleased.

The farmhouse had been selected because of its remote location. It was on the

outskirts of the small town of Midway, which bordered Deer Valley. The nearest

neighbor was three miles away. The only access was via either a terribly potholed

dirt road or the narrow canyon behind the west side of the farm, which, during this

time of year, was only navigable by experienced snowmobile operators or

cross-country skiers.

Joe and Mary Maddux had spent their Sunday the same way as always. Even

though

their large extended Mormon family saw them as retired, the word didn't exist in

their vocabulary, and who could be with twenty-two grandchildren and eleven

great-grandchildren? If anything, the Madduxes had become even busier in their

golden years.

The morning had started with the elderly couple getting up before the sun. While

their faith prohibited labor on the Sabbath, there were some exceptions,

such as

tending to animals, which Joe and Mary did before having breakfast and heading off

to their ward for Sunday services.

The bishop spoke of the success of four local Mormon boys on mission in Asia and

the tragedy of two others who had been killed in the past week in an Atlanta ghetto

while they were spreading the good news of the Mormon Church. Joe's mind

wandered, as it did more and more these days during the almost five-hour Sunday

services. Mary, ever the devout follower, listened intently as the bishop spoke about

the role of a good Mormon wife and reminded his flock that it was only through a

husband's proclamation that a wife would be accepted into the celestial kingdom.

Mary smiled at Joe, knowing that after fifty-seven years of marriage to her best

friend, he was certainly going to bring

her into the celestial kingdom with him. She

was absolutely correct. What she didn't know was how soon she would be

dispatched.

For the last week, Joe had been feeling a bit under the weather, and so he and Mary

decided to forgo the traditional Sunday family supper at their oldest daughter's

home. Instead, they decided they would have a light meal and relax at the farmhouse

without the distraction of children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Had they

chosen to attend supper at their daughter's house, it would have saved their lives.

At two in the afternoon, no one really paid attention to the eighteen-wheeler truck that

rolled down Sweetwater Road toward the Maddux farmhouse. Its driver cursed the

minefield of potholes he was forced to navigate. The truck was emblazoned with the

Mormon Church's trademark seagulls and the logo of Deseret Industries so it would

appear as if it were headed out to a farm to pick up a charitable donation of

furniture, farm supplies, or canned goods, or to deliver a contribution to a deserving

family. Although the Church never did anything on Sundays, Miner had anticipated

correctly that anyone who saw the truck would just assume the Church's business

was a rare exception to Sabbath

abstinence.

Miner's groundsman turned up the long, snow-covered lane of the Maddux farm,

convinced that he had not drawn any undue attention to himself. The idea of painting

the semi truck and trailer with the Mormon seagulls and Deseret Industries logo had

been brilliant. In a state where Mormons were raised not to question the actions of

their church and where non-Mormons didn't pay much attention to Mormon

goings-on, nothing would seem out of place, and therefore the truck was the perfect

cover. Miner had also informed the groundsman that to the trained eye of someone

like a state trooper, the truck would obviously appear overloaded, but even troopers

wouldn’t pull it over for fear of the tangled web of hassles it might create in this

heavily Mormon state.

The lane opened into a wide courtyard,

which was bordered by the farmhouse, a

large white barn, two grain silos, and several outbuildings. The groundsman turned

the truck around so that it was facing the way it came, with the trailer doors pointed

toward the barn. It was parked at a slight angle so that any passing motorists who

might be curious would see that the truck was from the Church.

Having observed the Madduxes for the last several weeks, the groundsman had their

routine down pat and knew they would not be home from their daughter's before

six-thirty at the earliest, and by then the Lions would be long gone. He unlocked the

rear trailer doors and extended a long skid plate ramp. He then slid open the barn

door and disappeared into the semitrailer. As he was about to unload the first of his

cargo, he stopped and cocked his head in the direction of the driveway, thinking he

heard something. The man's keen

hearing hadn't deceived him. Faintly, in the

distance was the low rumble of Joe Maddux's truck turning up the snow-covered

driveway.

Quickly, the groundsman jumped out of the back of the trailer, closed its metal

doors, and slid the ramp back into place. A million questions should have raced

through his mind, but he was trained to react, not waste time. He managed to slide

the huge barn door closed before the Maddux's truck came into full view.

In his blue-and-white Deseret Industries coveralls, he knew he looked the part. He

struck a casual pose by the side of the semi and even managed a small grin. He

waved to Joe and Mary Maddux as they pulled into the courtyard.

"Good afternoon, Elder Maddux," said the groundsman with a slight Utah lax on the

consonants of his perfect American English when Joe Maddux stepped down

from

his pickup truck. “And good afternoon to you as well, sister.”

“Good afternoon,” replied the couple in unison. Mary climbed out of the passenger

side to get a better look at the enormous truck parked in their driveway.

“I’m sorry I’m a little bit late for our appointment,” said the groundsman as he

walked toward the couple, his right hand outstretched.

“Our appointment?” replied a confused

Joe Maddux, who shook the groundsman's

hand and then watched Mary do the same.

"Yeah, I got caught up in traffic on 215, and then with this weather and all, I almost

couldn't get up the canyon. But, being a soldier for the Lord doing the Church's

good work, I think He was looking out for me."

The logos on the truck and the uniform of the groundsman impressed Joe Maddux.

Ever mindful of pleasing the Church, he replied, “I owe you an apology. I didn’t

know we had an appointment. I feel a bit embarrassed. Can you tell me what this is

all about?”

“Oh, no. Don’t tell me. You folks didn’t hear about this either? Well, if this isn’t the

third surprise stop I’ve made today. And on a Sunday to boot. I’m gonna have to

get on the phone and give someone a good talking to,” said the groundsman,

smiling.

This time it was Mrs. Maddux who spoke. “We don’t know what this is all about,

but if it involves the Church, I’m sure they do. It’s cold out here. Why don’t we go

inside, and you can use our phone to get to the bottom of this.”

“You are both too kind.”

The Madduxes led the groundsman across the snowy drive and toward the

farmhouse. They climbed the flight of

concrete stairs, and Mr. Maddux opened the

glass storm door covered with the sun-faded stickers of his grandchildren. Joe then

opened the unlocked front door, seemingly unconcerned that he was revealing his

lack of concern for security. It didn't matter. The groundsman already knew that the

Madduxes habitually left their home unlocked. As a matter of fact, he had been

inside on several different occasions, both when they were out and when they were

home asleep. He probably knew the house and the property better than the

doddering old couple did themselves.

“So, how can we help, Mr….” began Joe Maddux.

“Baker. Brian Baker, sir,” replied the groundsman. “I am here to pick up some old

farm equipment that you offered to donate for some of the Church projects in

Mexico."

"Hmmm…" said Maddux as his wife took his coat and hung it in the hall closet. "I

can't say that I remember offering to donate any farm equipment. I mean we have in

the past, but now all we really have is the tractor for the light bit of cropping we do,

and we need that. I don't know what to tell you. Must have been some sort of

mistake somewhere."

“There probably was. Like I said, you folks aren’t the first ones today who were an

incorrect pickup for me. Would you mind if I made a quick call to the dispatch at

Deseret to let them know?”

“Of course you can,” replied Mrs. Maddux. “You can use the phone in the kitchen.

Just follow me.”

“Thank you, ma’am.”

“Not at all.”

Mrs. Maddux led the groundsman to a canary yellow rotary dial phone that looked

as if it had been mounted on the wall in the mid seventies.

“I haven’t seen one of these in years,” marveled the groundsman. “I didn’t even

know folks still used rotary phones.” He laughed.

Mrs. Maddux smiled. “We have a simple rule around here: ‘If it ain’t broke, don’t

fix it.’”

“I hear you. Too many folks spending too much money on things they just don’t

need.”

“Amen to that,” came the voice of Mr. Maddux from the other room, where he had

turned on the old color television set.

“Ma’am, I don’t want to be a bother, but we’ve got one of those tricky phone mail

systems down at the dispatch—”

“Oh, I can’t stand those,” broke in Mrs. Maddux.

“Well, that makes two of us,” responded the groundsman with his warmest smile,

“but you see I need to use a push-button phone if I want to bypass the system and

get through to the dispatch man. Seeing how it’s Sunday, all we’ve got is a skeleton

crew down in Salt Lake. There’s no operator on duty. You wouldn’t happen to have

a push-button phone, would you?”

The groundsman knew perfectly well that they did and where it was located.

“Yes, we do have one upstairs. But I think our service is just rotary. Would that still

cause a problem for you?”

“No, ma’am,” lied the groundsman.

“Okay, then. Follow me and I’ll show you where it is.”

Halfway up, he stopped and asked Mrs. Maddux, “Ma’am, do you suppose your

husband would mind coming up, just in case I need him to confirm anything to the

dispatcher?”

“Of course not,” said Mary Maddux, who leaned over the banister and called to her

husband.

“Okay, I’m coming!” yelled back Mr. Maddux, who didn’t like being pulled away

from his TV, even if it was for the Church.

Mary led the groundsman into the master bedroom. On the nightstand was a

Touch-Tone phone with oversized glow-in-the-dark buttons. It was preprogrammed

with the names of the Maddux's children and had special speed dial buttons for

Police, Fire, and *Ambulance.*

The groundsman moved toward the right side of the bed next to the phone and

unzipped the top of his coveralls. He pretended to fumble in his breast pocket for

something.

"I've got that invoice in here somewhere. Probably ought to get a clipboard one of

these days."

Mrs. Maddux smiled politely and inwardly hoped that this misunderstanding would

not put her and Joe in bad standing with the Church.

The groundsman heard the footsteps of Mr. Maddux as he came down the green

shag carpeted hallway. He stopped fumbling in his coveralls when he found the true

item he was looking for. His hand tightened around the butt of a cold Walther P4.

The nine millimeter was fitted with a

silencer, and despite its extended length, he

drew it from his coveralls in less than the blink of an eye.

This was the part that he enjoyed the most, the expressions on his victims' faces

when they knew death was only seconds away, but this couple had no telling

expressions whatsoever. They were in utter shock, and their faces were blank. This

kind of thing never happened in Midway, never even happened in Utah. It was

utterly

beyond their ability to comprehend. Not even a sniffle from the missus. They just

stood there as if they were watching it happen to someone else on television.

Then, the dam broke. Mrs. Maddux let out a wail; the tears welled up in her eyes and

began to roll down her cheeks as the reality of the situation hit her full force. They

were going to die. The mister, on the other hand, still had no clue. His instinct was to

comfort his wife, and as he reached out for her, the groundsman shot him twice in

the forehead.

Spatters of blood, mingled with slivers of bone and pulpy gray matter, sprayed

across Mary's face, and she began a repetitive mumble through her sobbing. All she

could manage was, "Oh, God. Oh, God. Oh, God…"

"Good thing you went to church this morning, eh, Mary?" hissed the groundsman,

his English now accented with his Swiss-German tongue. “In your next life, when the

kids invite you to dinner, I suggest you accept.”

He pointed the suppressed Walther at Mary Maddux and pulled the trigger.

Anticipating the end, Mary turned her head at the last moment. The bullet tore away a

huge piece of flesh and the underlying cartilage from the bridge of her nose. She fell

to the floor screaming. Angrily, the

groundsman fired his remaining rounds into her

neck, chest, face, and head as she writhed in agony on the bedroom floor. Soon, her

movements ceased, and she was still.

Mr. Maddux, unlike his wife, the groundsman mused, had been cooperative enough

to fall back onto the bed. The groundsman lifted the man's feet and placed them on

top of the chenille bedspread. Except for the bullet holes in his head, it looked as

if

he had just lain down to take a nap.

The groundsman then dragged Mrs. Maddux across the floor to the other side of the

bed and hefted her up and onto it. When she landed, her arms were upright above

her head. He toyed with the idea of stripping the old couple and leaving them in a

sexually suggestive pose, wondering what the Mormon relatives would think, but

there was other work to be done.

After he washed his hands in the small guest bathroom down the hall, careful not to

leave any fingerprints, he went outside to finish unloading the contents of the semi

into the barn.

With the truck unloaded, there was nothing for him to do but come inside and wait

for Miner and his fellow Lions.

The small family room was warm, and

its large window provided the groundsman as

good a view as was possible through the blowing snow of anyone coming up the

driveway. The television was still on, tuned to a station with an American football

game.

Halfway through the third quarter and a pack of cigarettes later, the groundsman

began to feel the telltale signs of his low blood-sugar level. Healthy as a horse since a

child, he had made his doctor in Zurich explain three times how diabetes could have

chosen him when no one in his family had ever had it. The doctor explained that

there was no specific reason but that it was quite manageable, provided he took the

right precautions. Of course the first precaution he took was never to let Miner know

about his condition.

From a pocket in his coveralls, he

withdrew a Nestlé's chocolate bar and broke it

into perfect little squares, calculating how many he might need to keep his blood

sugar up for the rest of the day. He lay the silver foil, with its purple-and-white

wrapper, on his lap and put a piece of the creamy milk chocolate into his mouth. He

sucked on it slowly, savoring it as he closed his eyes.

Then, from out of nowhere, came the sound of breaking glass from upstairs.

The

groundsman leapt from his chair and grabbed the German-made pistol from the end

table beside him. Cautiously, he moved forward toward the stairs, crept up them and

then down the hallway's green shag carpet. He inched toward the master bedroom,

which was where he believed the sound had come from. He gripped the pistol

tighter, grateful that he had replaced its spent magazine. As he neared the

bedroom

door, he inhaled deeply, applied slight pressure to the trigger, and spun into the open

doorframe.

In an instant, he had not only surveyed the room, but also the condition of the two

bodies lying atop the bed. The source of the noise was apparent at once.

He had left the woman's arms above her head and now noticed that one arm was

splayed across the nightstand and the

glass frame of a picture of seven small

children lay broken on the floor. *Post mortem reflex.*

The groundsman lowered his pistol and laughed out loud. As quickly as he started,

he stopped. His ears had picked up the high-pitched whine of snowmobiles. He

looked at his watch. Miner and the men were ahead of schedule.

He took the stairs three at a time and landed with a large thud in the downstairs

hallway. As he bounded into the family room, he found his chocolate wrapper and

bent down to gather up the pieces that had fallen on the floor. Not wanting Miner to

find him away from his assigned post, the groundsman folded the wrapper around

the chocolate and shoved it back into his coverall pocket. He used his handkerchief

to grasp the half-filled water glass he had been using to ash his cigarettes in and

flushed the contents down the hall toilet. He rinsed the glass with rusty brown water

from the kitchen tap and returned it to a drying rack next to the sink.

He made it outside just in time to pick out the first glimmer of snowmobile

headlights. Through the swirling and blowing snow, he could see them speeding

toward him at the rear of the farmhouse.

14

With Sam Harper, the Secret Service's

number one man on-site, missing in action,

Tom Hollenbeck was now in charge. When word reached him that Agent Harvath

and the president's daughter had been recovered and brought in unconscious, he left

instructions that he was to be notified immediately when either one came to.

The storm was making it impossible to coordinate search-and-rescue efforts. Even

so, Hollenbeck contacted Hill Air Force

Base's commanding officer and requested

that they locate the two closest choppers with advanced heat-seeking FLIR, or

forward looking infrared, units and have them flown to Deer Valley as soon as

humanly possible. Hollenbeck hoped that by the time they got there, there would be

no need for them, but contingency plans always had to be made.

All the officers the Secret Service had available were sent out to try and locate the

president and his team. As Longo was still having no luck getting the Service's

Motorola radios to work, Palmer had taken it upon herself to get hold of Deer

Valley's resort manager and have him send over as many portable CB radios as he

could scrounge. Communications wouldn't be secure, but at this point that was the

least of the Secret Service's worries.

Every available ski patroller and search-and-rescue volunteer from the surrounding

three counties had been called in to help with the search. At risk were not only the

president, his daughter, and their protective details, but the countless number of

civilians who had been skiing on runs affected by the avalanche.

Hollenbeck sent Palmer out with a civilian team to comb the area where Agent

Harvath and Amanda had been found. The remaining Secret Service agents took two

of the best search-and-rescue people from Deer Valley's team and as many local law

enforcement personnel as they could muster to help coordinate their search for the

president. As much as he hated it, Hollenbeck knew that his job was to stay behind

and run the operation from the command center.

When the call came that Agent Harvath was regaining consciousness, Hollenbeck

grabbed a microcassette recorder, his parka, and flew out the door.

The soft, orange glow of a bedside lamp was the first thing Scot noticed as he began

to come to. As his eyes opened further, he saw the boards of knotty pine that

paneled the ceiling and below that a wallpaper border that ran the length of the room

and depicted moose and deer in a wooded area. The blanket on top of him was

heavy. It felt as if he had on more than

one, but the one he could see was red and

gray wool with white snowflakes. As Scot looked further down toward his feet, he

noticed the footboard was carved from rough-hewn logs. He then realized he was in

one of the guest rooms of the president's chalet and it was still night.

"Well, it looks like the wee lad is finally waking up," came a voice with a mock

Scottish accent.

Scot's reflexes kicked in, and he tried to sit up. "Amanda! Where's—"

"Whoa!" came the voice again. This time the funny accent was gone and the man

spoke in his normal Texas drawl. "She's here, Scot. Just across the hall. Dr. Paulos

is taking care of her."

"How is she?"

"To tell you the truth, I don't know. My main concern is you right now, so let's

relax and let me take a look." The doctor

removed a penlight from the bag next to

him and shined it in both of Scot's eyes.

"I want to see her."

"First I am going to complete my exam; then we are going to get an update from Dr.

Paulos, and then if he says it's okay, you can see her."

The voice, bad accent and all, belonged to Dr. Skip Trawick. He and John Paulos

had been friends of Scot's since his ski team days. Scot was a pretty good

mimic,

but the Scottish accent was one he just couldn't get down, so Skip always used it as

his funny way of saying hello.

As head of the advance team for the trip to Park City, Scot had recommended both

Skip and Dr. Paulos as the on-site medical pros. Now he wondered if that had been

such a good idea.

"Damn it, Skip. Who the hell do you

think got you and John these gigs as docs for

the presidential party? Let me up; I have to see her."

"You, my friend, haven't changed a bit. You know that? Still as haggis-headed as

ever."

"Cut the crap."

"It would be my pleasure, but first the exam. Now, how many fingers do you see?"

"None, you haven't poured anything

yet.”

“So far I’m going to say your neurological function is the same as it always was, low

to subpar.”

“Yuk, yuk, yuk. C’mon, Skip. I want to peek in on her. I have to know how she is.”

“As soon as I am finished. Any areas of severe pain?”

“Yeah, right in my ass. I’m going to give you to the count of three to help me out of

this bed, or I'm going to shove you off and do it myself. One—"

"Alive and kicking. That's a good sign, isn't it, Dr. Trawick?" asked Tom

Hollenbeck as he threw his parka on a chair next to the door and made his way over

to the bed.

"Maybe. The patient, though, claims to have a pain in the ass," replied Dr. Trawick.

"The patient *is* a pain in the ass," said Hollenbeck. "What's the story? Anything

broken, concussion?”

“I haven’t been able to complete my examination, as of yet. The patient is not being

compliant.”

“Not compliant? Skip, you son of a — I’ll give you noncompliant.”

“And a wee bit aggressive,” said Skip, the Scottish accent back again.

“Jesus, Skip. You’re on duty. Could you at least pretend to be a professional for a

few minutes? On second thought, fuck this. I’m getting up,” said Scot.

“Hold on there, Harvath,” Hollenbeck said sternly. “I want you to cooperate. None

of this tough-guy stuff. You just lie there and let the doc take a look at you.”

“Fine. Go ahead, Skip. The sooner you’re finished, the sooner I can get over to

Amanda.”

“You’re not going anywhere until I get a full statement from you. Just settle down,

would ya? My God, Scot. We’ve got a very serious situation on our hands right

now, so get focused," said Hollenbeck.

"I'm sorry, Tom. You're right. If the good doctor would unplug me from this IV,

I'd be happy to get started."

"No way, José. The IV stays in. You came in severely dehydrated. I want to get

some more fluids into you first," said Dr. Trawick as he continued to examine Scot

from head to toe.

"I brought a tape recorder with me.

We'll take your statement verbally," said

Hollenbeck.

"Verbally? But what about him?" said Scot as he motioned to Dr. Trawick.

"What about me? I'm still on nonoperational Special Forces duty, Scot."

"Oh, so that's what you call shagging kegs when members of your old unit come to

town," said Harvath.

"Listen, as one of the 'Quiet

Professionals,' I know how to keep my mouth shut."

"Oh, yeah? Coulda' fooled me, 'cause it's always open."

Hollenbeck hated to break up the lovefest, but he had bigger concerns. "Dr.

Trawick, I don't have time for you to sign a National Security Non-Disclosure

Document. I am aware of your status as a Special Forces operative, and I know that

you've maintained your top secret clearance. In the interest of tending to

your patient

and the ongoing emergency, I want to make sure you understand that nothing said

within this room is to be repeated."

"No problem, Agent Hollenbeck. You have my word."

"Can you also get his word that he'll shut up and not repeat that lame-ass story of

how he served his country by treating an elephant in the Kuwaiti zoo during Desert

Storm?”

“Now who’s the comedian? Why don’t you try to sit up? I want to listen to your

heart and check your ribs.”

Harvath stifled a groan as Dr. Trawick helped him sit up. The agents who brought

him in had cut away his sweater and turtleneck, as well as his Lycra pants, placing

him in a hospital-style gown before putting him into bed. As Harvath leaned forward,

his gown was open in back and Hollenbeck saw what looked like a topographical

map of green, blue, and yellow islands, bruises that covered his back and shoulders.

“Holy shit. Are you sure you’re up to this?” asked Hollenbeck.

Trawick said, “I’m going to shoot some adrenaline into your IV, and that should

help give you a little more strength. You want anything for the pain?”

“No, let’s get this over with, and then I want you to clear me for the hot tub

downstairs so I can soak this out."

"Scot, this isn't some post-ski-competition session. You walloped yourself quite a

few times back in those days, and God knows you scared the bejesus outta me more

than once, but your body has suffered some serious trauma here. So far it doesn't

look like anything is broken. If there's no blood in your urine, I might postpone

having you to go to the hospital for further tests, but if I do, you're gonna

stay right

here in this bed for several days at least. Now shut up for a second and take a deep

breath."

Scot did as he was told, and Hollenbeck waited until the doctor had removed the

stethoscope from his ears before he launched into a series of questions and

recorded everything on tape for later transcription.

Scot ran down the list — seeing the president, Harper, and the rest of the

team at the

last lap, Amanda's wipeout and the communications outage, the decision to take her

through the bowl to get back to the house, the avalanche, getting to the outcropping,

being buried, digging out, and trying to get Amanda's unconscious body back to the

house.

Occasionally, Dr. Trawick broke in with questions that pushed Scot to reach a little

further back. Long-term memory questions like, *What's your address, your*

telephone and driver's license numbers? were easy for him to answer, but he had

problems with some short-term memory questions such as, *What hotel are you*

staying in, what airline did you fly to Utah on, and when was your last visit to the

White House?

When he was finished recounting his tale, the room was completely silent.

After a

moment, Dr. Trawick let out a long whistle.

“You know how lucky you are to be alive, boy?” he asked.

“Yeah, I know.”

“I worry, though, about the short-term memory loss. I don’t know how much is

gone.”

“Like you said, Skip. It’s just like the old days. I got whacked in the head and I’m a

little fuzzy… on some utterly unimportant stuff, I might add, but it'll come back."

"I'm sure it will, but at some point I am going to need to run some tests on you,

nonetheless."

Scot ignored Skip and turned to Hollenbeck and asked, "What's the status on the

others? The president, Harp, Maxwell?"

Hollenbeck inhaled deeply before he responded. "At this point, there is no status.

The radios are still down, and you and Amanda are the only ones we have

recovered."

Scot couldn't believe his ears. "No status? That's ridiculous. Nothing from the CAT

or JAR teams? Nothing off the Smocks? You can't even get his five cents' worth?"

Five cents' worth referred to the homing device that every president was provided

with by the Secret Service. It was an Indian head nickel containing a

transmitter that

operated on a special frequency that could deliver GPS coordinates. The president

always carried this coin on his person and referred to it as his “good luck piece.”

Although tonight, it didn’t seem to be bringing anyone any good luck.

“The Motorolas, the Smocks, everything was intermittent throughout the day.

Because it was across the entire communications platform, we wrote it off to

weather or mountain shadow anomalies. It wasn't until we were down for several

minutes that we raised the alarm. So, in answer to your question, we have no status."

"What about search-and-rescue?"

"All available agents have been sent to Death Chute with some of the ski patrol and

sheriff's department S-and-R guys. Agent Palmer is leading a civilian team back

where we picked you and Goldilocks up. I think Palmer's team is going to

have

better luck.”

“Why do you say that?”

“You were picked up in the bowl. The bowl is easily accessible. We’ve already got

some construction lamps and related equipment en route. I must have personally

spoken with every construction company within a hundred-mile radius. Any and all

heavy earthmoving equipment that exists

is trying to make its way there right now."

"But what about the president and Sam?"

"You tell me, Scot. You've skied Death Chute. You were the one who was in charge

of securing it. What kind of equipment do you think we could get onto a nearly

vertical drop face?"

"Choppers."

"Grounded."

"Not our stuff. Not those Marine pilots."

“Yes, even our stuff and even our guys. When you feel up to it, take a peek out the

window. You can’t even see your hand in front of your face. It’s a complete

whiteout. What’s more, we can’t get lights up where we need them, and we certainly

can’t get any cranes or bulldozers in there because the area is so inaccessible.”

As the severity of the situation began to sink in, Harvath pressed his palms against

his forehead.

“What we do have going for us,” Hollenbeck continued, “is that you saw the

president’s detail make it to the first plateau around the treed area. The CAT team

waiting at the bottom never saw them come out, so we have a general idea of where

they might be.”

“But that snow came roaring down the mountain. They could have been totally

swept past the CAT team."

"I don't think so. If you really did see Ahern and Houchins wipe out by the trees,

then the rest of the detail would have held up for them. I am going to assume that

they heard and interpreted the avalanche the same way you did and went into the

trees. We've got over fifty people up there right now with dogs. We have to hope

for the best. The mushers will work the pups, and the rest will link and sink."

Link

and sink was a search-and-rescue technique in which a line of people moved

forward side by side, as if linked by an invisible chain, sinking long aluminum poles

into the snow every foot, in an effort to feel something or someone underneath.

Scot looked up at Hollenbeck. “Have you called Washington yet?”

“Yeah. They told me we’re authorized for anything we need.”

Dr. Trawick cleared his throat, indicating that he was through with his examination.

Scot and Agent Hollenbeck both turned to look at him.

“There’s no question that you took quite a beating. I am still amazed that, all things

considered, you didn’t break anything. In light of what happened, your injuries are

relatively minor.”

“Good, then I can—”

“Hold on a second. I’m not finished.

When I say your injuries are minor, that

doesn't mean they aren't serious. While nothing appears to be broken, you may

have a few cracked ribs. I want to wrap you with an Ace, ice the bruised areas, and

then get you into my office for some X rays and probably a CT scan. Until then, you

are to stay in bed. I am going to keep you on the IV for another twelve hours and

monitor you. What I am most concerned about is your head trauma. So, for the time

being, you are staying put."

"Thanks all the same, Doc, but I plan on going back out there to help in the search.

They need every live body they can get."

"You're welcome all the same, but you're not going anywhere. Your body is of no

use to anyone in this condition. You go out there like this and they'll end up having

to waste time carrying you right back in again."

“I doubt that—”

“And, beyond the total fatigue and exhaustion you have suffered, there’s also some

frostbite and mild hypothermia. Any average person probably would have died out

there. Your survival says a lot about your training and will to live. I repeat, you are

one lucky S.O.B.”

“Are you finished now, because I’ve got stuff I’ve gotta do?” said Scot as he tried

to raise himself off the bed.

“Lie down,” barked Hollenbeck. “That’s an order! Harvath, why do you insist on

being such a jackass sometimes?”

“Tom, with all due respect, I was head of the advance team. The safety of the

presidential party as well as my fellow agents was and is my responsibility. You need

my help.”

“Not in this condition I don’t. Forget it.”

“I’m not going to debate this with you,

Tom.”

“You’re damn right you’re not. You are staying in that bed until Dr. Trawick or Dr.

Paulos says otherwise. You got me?”

“C’mon, Tom. Be realistic.”

A crackle, followed by Hollenbeck’s call sign over the CB radio clipped to his belt,

prevented him from arguing any further with Scot, and he raised his hand for silence.

“This is Birdhouse. Over.”

“Birdhouse, this is Hermes. We’ve got something. Over.”

“Copy, Hermes. What’s the situation? Over.”

Despite the effort, Scot sat straight up to listen to the exchange.

“Birdhouse, it appears as if we have recovered two agents from Hat Trick’s detail.

They are extricating them as we speak.”

Thank God, Hollenbeck thought to himself. “What’s their condition? Over.”

“Still extracting, hold on a sec… I’m

moving over to get a better view."

"Roger that. Birdhouse is holding."

Several seconds passed.

"Birdhouse! Birdhouse! Hat Trick's agents are down! Unnatural causes. I repeat,

unnatural causes."

Hollenbeck couldn't believe what he was hearing. Scot strained forward to take in

every piece of information. He knew that there was absolute pandemonium on the

face of Death Chute right now. All of the agents would have their guns drawn, feeling

vulnerable in the dark, not knowing if the threat was still present or long since gone.

“Hermes, this is Birdhouse. Tell your team to sweep and reap. I repeat, your team is

to sweep and reap. Do you copy? Over.” *Sweep and reap* was the command to

scour the immediate area for hostile targets. If any were encountered, the threat was

to be neutralized by taking the perpetrators into custody or by punching their tickets

as quickly as possible.

“Roger, Birdhouse. Hermes’s team will sweep and reap. Over.”

Hollenbeck had four CAT teams outside, and he got on the radio and mobilized

them next. Two headed off toward Death Chute, and the other two took defensive

positions around the house. As he completed his commands, he turned back to see

Scot trying to get out of bed. This was more than he needed to handle. He turned to

Dr. Trawick. “Sedate him. Now.”

“We can’t do that. Not in his condition.”

“Fine. I want a guard on this door tonight. He doesn’t leave.”

Harvath was only able to squeeze out a couple words of protest before Hollenbeck

grabbed his parka and ran out of the room, slamming the door behind him. Scot

knew he was licked, at least for now.

15

Miner once again looked at his watch. Everything was still going according to

schedule. Every phase of the operation brought with it new challenges and potential

pitfalls. The greatest risk Miner and his team were running right now was in

transporting their precious cargo, but even in that, he had plotted for every

eventuality.

Wasatch Front Ambulance Service had a fleet of fifteen vehicles that, in one of the

fastest growing counties in America, were always in demand. Drivers performed

routine inspections of their rigs, as they called them, before each shift. With them

driving so many steeply graded mountain passes every week, their brakes were of

the utmost importance to them. When the driver of ambulance 17 had come on duty

yesterday and found brake fluid pooled on the ground beneath his rig, he

immediately notified the dispatcher.

As Wasatch's mechanic was overwhelmed with a string of mysterious problems on

four other rigs, the dispatcher called to have the rig towed to a local garage, where it

could be repaired by an outside mechanic.

When the tow truck arrived and picked up ambulance 17, the groundsman had been

waiting across the street in a nondescript gold Ford Taurus to take down the name,

address, and telephone number of the mechanic's shop stenciled in bright green

letters on the side of the tow truck. A simple call from his cell phone to Grunnah

Automotive verified what Miner had told him to expect in the land of Utah. After

closing early on Saturday, the garage would not open again until Monday.

The alarm system at Grunnah Automotive was more for show than anything else.

The groundsman had it deactivated in no time. He spent the next half hour repairing

the ambulance and helping himself to Cokes from the refrigerator in Mr. Grunnah's

office. He then slipped into dark blue trousers and a dark blue shirt with

official-looking patches on it, drove the ambulance out of the garage, being careful to

close the roll-down door behind him, and rendezvoused with the Deseret Industries

eighteen-wheeler, into which he loaded the ambulance.

Eighteen hours later, as the stolen ambulance rocketed down Provo Canyon, passing

the Sundance Resort, Miner phoned the pilot of his chartered MediJet plane.

He spoke with the urgency of a doctor transporting a patient in very serious

condition. The wail of the sirens and the clipped British accent he affected

dovetailed perfectly with what the MediJet crew had been led to believe was their

assignment.

The refinery fire in Magna, Utah, two weeks prior had been one of the worst the

industry had ever seen. The blaze had burned uncontrollably for several days, and

the smoke had been so thick that it had shut down all but two runways at Salt Lake

City International Airport. Before the flames had been extinguished,

environmentalists from several groups had flocked to the scene with their

banners,

decrying the continued pollution of the environment by big business, particularly the

oil and gas industries. Several media outlets had run stories about the mounting toll

oil and gas disasters were taking on the planet. On television, scenes of the Kuwaiti

oil fields aflame during the Gulf War competed for time alongside images of dead

oil-soaked seabirds being plucked from

the shores of Alaska following the *Exxon*

Valdez disaster. The Magna refinery fire was worldwide news.

“And we will be able to take off?” Miner asked into his cell phone from inside the

bumpy ambulance.

“Yes, sir, Doctor. As far as we can tell from the weather reports and our information

from the tower, this window should hold for about forty-five more minutes.”

“Good, and you have informed the tower of our need for priority slotting for

takeoff?”

“Yes, sir. From the looks of it now, we’re the only ones that’ll be leaving, but as a

medical emergency we have priority anyway.”

“Good. How is the air traffic in general throughout the area?”

“This is typical mountain weather. The snow and wind have tapered off some down

here in the valley, but it's pounding the higher elevations up in the mountains. Salt

Lake International is experiencing stack-ups both in and out. Even with a medical

emergency, we still would have had our work cut out for us getting off the ground

out of SLC."

Miner had arranged for the MediJet to await his team at the Provo Municipal Airport

in Orem, forty miles south of Salt Lake City, for precisely these very reasons. First,

he could count on the weather being less severe at the lower-elevation airport than at

the one up by Deer Valley, and second, with a medical emergency out of Provo

Municipal, Miner knew that he could call all of the shots. The runway would be

plowed and the jet deiced by the time he got there. All he needed to do was load his

“patient” and they would immediately be cleared for takeoff.

The fact that the private airfield would

ask few questions and their security was lax

to nonexistent had been another plus.

The pilot spoke again over Miner's cell phone. "What is the patient's condition?"

"He's stable but still critical."

"Confirmed. Per your instructions, Doctor, we have added the extra equipment you

asked for."

"Excellent. And you are sure that there will be no problem with the stretcher

and its

oxygen tent fitting in the plane?”

“Absolutely not. Normally, we would transfer the patient from the ambulance

stretcher to our own, but when you explained that the tent’s seal couldn’t be

breached because of the risk of infection, we just off-loaded our stretcher. As long

as yours has the dimensions you indicated, our clamps will be able to secure it in

place. I just hope he’ll be comfortable.

It's quite a long flight to Stansted."

"I appreciate your concern. He's pretty heavily sedated, as you can imagine."

"I would imagine. It is such a tragedy. I think everyone was moved by the Magna

fire."

"Indeed, this gentleman is lucky to be alive, but we're just not sure for how much

longer. Have you made the arrangements for us with British customs?"

"Yes, just as you asked. I have alerted our London office, and they have been in

contact with the authorities at Stansted Airport. If you provide me with all of your

passports on the plane, including the patient's, we'll have you cleared before you

have him in your transport."

"And your office is aware of the severity of this man's injuries? Third-degree burns

over ninety-five percent of his body, including his face?"

"Yes, Doctor. The authorities will also be made aware of that fact, as well as

the

issue of the tent not being breached. To tell you the truth, I don't think you are going

to run into any problems at all. Like I said, there doesn't seem to be anyone who

wasn't touched by this story. Plus, the patient is British, correct?"

"Yes, he is."

"Well, I've found that always helps. I mean here this poor — what was his

occupation?"

“A chemist for Fawcett Petroleum.”

“Right, a chemist. Here this poor chemist is burned in a terrible fire, and all he wants

to do is be repatriated so he can die on his own soil surrounded by his family. If

there is even the slightest hiccup with the immigration folks at Stansted, they’re going

to have to deal with me, personally.”

“Thank you, Captain. I am counting on that. Our ETA is fifteen minutes. Please

contact the tower for your clearance and

have the jet ready for takeoff."

"Roger."

As Miner pushed the *end* button on his cell phone, he turned to the groundsman

working next to him. "How are we doing?"

The groundsman, not only a master assassin but also a master of disguise, sat back

and invited Miner to admire his handiwork.

"Excellent," commented Miner as they sealed the oxygen tent above the

stretcher.

Through an ingenious use of latex and special-effects makeup, the president of the

United States had been hideously transformed. One look at him, along with a

mention of the Magna refinery fire, would be all they needed to turn even the most

difficult and hard-hearted customs official to jelly. The unbreachable oxygen tent,

complete with a patient who in no way

could match his photo in the false passport

Miner carried for him, would get them waived right through the security of Stansted

Airport. Of that Miner was sure. The officials might even offer him a motorcade,

which of course, he would be forced to decline.

16

When Harvath awoke, he had no idea how long he'd been sleeping. His eyes

focused and he saw he was in the same room he had been brought to last night. At

least he hoped it had been last night. It must have been. There was no way he could

have been out for more than six hours, eight tops.

Even though the curtains were drawn, he could tell that it was early morning. The

snow was still falling, but not as hard as before. He decided from the pressure on his

bladder that he had gotten more than

enough fluids, and so he reached over and

pulled the IV from his arm.

Across the room to his left was the open door to a bathroom. Dr. Skip would be

pissed, no pun intended, that he hadn't saved his urine for him to examine, but that

was life.

Scot's stomach muscles contracted as he crunched painfully upward and used his

arms as buttresses to keep himself from falling backward onto his pillow. The

pain

not only was still in his back and shoulders, but had found new places to set up

shop.

Halfway there, Scot thought to himself. He shifted his weight onto his left arm and

with his right, reached out and threw back the covers. Breathing a little harder than

just getting out of bed warranted, he inhaled deeply and in one motion swung his feet

out from under the blankets, pivoting his body so that he now sat on the edge of the

bed.

With the weight off his arms, he was now able to stretch. His range of motion was

severely limited. He had taken some beatings before, but this one was definitely

Academy Award material. Nothing, though, that a long, hot shower couldn't help.

Harvath eased his feet to the floor and

slowly stood up from the bed. His legs were

weak, but with a concerted effort he propelled himself forward to the bathroom.

Taking the gown off was the hard part. With the straps tied behind him and his arms

so stiff, he couldn’t reach around to untie it. He walked toward the toilet, lifted the

bottom half of the gown like a skirt, and began to relieve himself. Then, ever so

slowly, Scot inched the gown over his head until it came all the way off. He

reached

inside the shower and turned the control all the way to *hot*. As he did, he caught a

glimpse of his back in the mirror. He wouldn't win any beauty pageants, that was for

sure, but it would heal.

God bless the president for having friends that can afford houses like this, Scot

thought as he sat on the marble bench in the ornate shower and let the hot water beat

down on him. After what he figured had been a good fifteen minutes, he flipped the

lever that activated the steam shower and closed his eyes. As he breathed in the

searing moisture, he replayed the events of the past twenty-four hours in his mind.

The avalanche didn't make any sense. There had been a lot of snow falling, but both

the Utah Avalanche Forecast Center and Deer Valley's avalanche-control team had

assured him that the risks were minimal. Scot himself had even made the trip up to

Squaw Peak to test the conditions that very morning.

Could more snow have fallen than he thought? Even though the UAFC had rated the

risks minimal, there still had been risks. The weight of responsibility rested heavily

upon Scot's battered shoulders. He sat in the shower in a trance and replayed

everything over and over in his mind.

Then, with a jolt, he sat upright. He had

completely forgotten about Hollenbeck's conversation with Hermes right before his

exhaustion overtook him, *Two agents down… unnatural causes.*

Scot threw the lever back to *shower* and twisted the knob all the way to *cold*. He had

learned this trick in a massage club in Hong Kong. A hot bath followed by a cold

plunge was better than four cups of coffee any day.

The shock to his system had the desired effect, and Scot climbed out of the shower

feeling alive, his senses keen, even if his body was still in pain. He promised himself

no sedatives or pain medication, no matter what Hollenbeck or Dr. Trawick said. He

hated how those things could cloud his mind, and his mind was his most important

weapon. Gumming up the works was just asking for trouble.

Not seeing his clothes lying around, and figuring they had probably been cut off him,

Scot was relieved to find a terry cloth bathrobe in the bedroom's cedar closet. He

put it on and headed for the door.

When he stepped into the hallway, he noticed the door across from his was wide

open and the room's bed was made. He searched his brain for what Dr. Trawick

had said about Amanda. Hadn't he said she was across the hall? If she had been,

she had been moved, and Scot added her whereabouts to the list of questions he

had.

There were no detail agents in the hall as he made his way toward the stairway, but

he did hear voices coming from below.

Walking in a straight line across a level surface was one thing. Walking down stairs

was another. Scot leaned heavily on the pine banister as he forced his knees to bend

and accommodate. He let out a small thanks that none of the agents in the enormous,

picture-windowed living room had seen his struggle. After three shuffling steps at the

bottom of the landing, he was spotted by Agent Palmer.

“What are you doing up, Scot?”

“I’m not paid to sleep, and I want to know what’s going on.”

“It’s bad. Real bad.”

“I heard Birdhouse talking with Hermes

about finding two agents down last night."

"From what I heard, you took a real beating. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Scot growled with a little more venom than Agent Palmer deserved.

"Would somebody just tell me what's going on?"

"Have you eaten?"

"Palmer, damn it. I want to know what's happening."

"Listen to me, Scot, just relax. A lot has

happened, and I mean *a lot*. I'll be more

than happy to fill you in. Why don't we get you some breakfast, and I'll tell you

everything. You're gonna need to sit down for this."

Palmer walked away for a moment toward the front door and returned carrying a

blue duffel bag with a Secret Service emblem on the side.

"They had to cut you out of your clothes last night. Hollenbeck figured you might

need some things, so he had one of the

agents get this stuff from your hotel."

"He's all heart." *My hotel*. Scot still couldn't remember its name.

"There's a bathroom just down the hall there. Why don't you get dressed and meet

me in the kitchen? I'll put some coffee on and see what I can rustle up foodwise."

"Thanks, Palmer."

"No prob."

Twenty minutes later, shaved and past the painful ordeal of getting dressed,

Scot

appeared in the kitchen wearing jeans, a sweatshirt, and a pair of Timberland boots.

Palmer was sitting on a stool at a granite-topped cooking island reviewing

paperwork.

She looked up from her reading and saw Scot standing in the doorway. “How are

you doing?”

“Enough about me. Let’s have some answers.”

“You know, Harvath, I’m willing to cut you some slack for what you went through,

but you’re getting dangerously close to the limit.”

“I know,” Scot said as he took the stool next to her, glad that it had a soft cushion

he could rest his body against. “I’m sorry. I just want to know what the big picture

is.”

“Fine. I can understand that. There’s a lot to go over, so why don’t I pour us each a

cup of coffee and we'll get started. I hunted up a microwave breakfast. One of those

eggs-and-bacon things. Probably doesn't taste too good—"

"Sold. I'll take it."

With a cup of steaming hot coffee and a bland microwave breakfast to keep his

mouth busy, he listened as Palmer explained what the Secret Service knew so far.

"At sixteen-ten yesterday afternoon you relayed Goldilocks's desire to call it a day.

You met Hat Trick's detail at the last lap, from which he proceeded with his detail

toward Death Chute and your detail accompanied Goldilocks toward her usual route

back here. At approximately sixteen-twenty-five your report states that Goldilocks

wiped out and while you were retrieving her gear, you thought you noticed Ahern

and Houchins fall going into the treed area of Death Chute. It was at this point that

you noticed communications—”

“Palmer,” said Scot between bites of hash browns, “can you please skip ahead to

the stuff I don’t know? Give me the abridged version.”

“You know, I could just let you sift through the reports.”

“Don’t give me a hard time. Give me the facts.”

“All right, all right. Your team didn’t make it.”

“None of them?”

“We’ve recovered five members of your detail already and are looking for the

others, who are now presumed dead. The five we’ve got were killed by the

avalanche.”

Scot hung his head and pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to fight off the

headache and emotion he felt coming on. “And Goldilocks? What’s her condition?”

he asked without looking up.

“She suffered some severe head and neck trauma, frostbite, and hypothermia.

Had

you not gotten her out of the snow and the intercept team not found you when they

did, she never would have made it. Her condition is guarded, but stable. She has

some damaged vertebrae, but they believe they can be fixed."

"Will she be able to walk? Is there any permanent damage?"

According to Dr. Paulos, there shouldn't be any permanent damage. It looks like

she's going to pull through."

“Thank God for that. What about Hat Trick?”

“That’s where it gets really bad. Every member of Hat Trick’s detail is dead.”

“Dead, how?”

“Nine millimeter, best we can tell.”

Scot couldn’t believe what he was hearing and sat up ramrod straight. “What? They

were all taken out?”

“All of them.” Palmer paused for a moment to let it sink in before continuing. “We

had several JARs, as you know, in the trees along that part of Death Chute, and they

were sanctioned as well."

"What about Hat Trick?"

"We don't know."

"What do you mean, you don't know?"

"We haven't been able to recover his body."

"Holy shit." Despite the anger and sadness he felt, his years of training had taught

him that when the time came, he would be able to grieve privately, but that for now,

he needed to filter his emotions. What mattered was not how he felt, but how he

thought.

“So,” Scot continued with amazing composure, “the entire detail and the JAR team

was sanctioned. There is no sign of Hat Trick. I can’t believe this. Somebody must

have grabbed him.”

“We’re not positive, but—”

“You found all of the other bodies, sanctioned, but not his. Sounds like he was

grabbed to me. Have there been any demands?”

“Hold on. You are getting way ahead of things here.”

“Palmer, how am I getting ahead? You found all the detail agents, but not Hat Trick.

They normally stick pretty close to him.”

“Yes, but this was an avalanche. He

could have been swept in any direction."

"Don't give me that. You know how this looks. If it was just an avalanche, that

would be one thing, but his detail was terminated."

"Scot, we're all in shock. Never in the history of the Secret Service have we lost so

many agents protecting the president. Nor has anyone ever succeeded in a

kidnapping, which *is* how we're playing this."

"So, you do agree."

“Yes.”

“Jesus, I can’t believe this.”

“We do have one lead, though.”

“What kind of lead?”

“Harper managed to get off a shot and kill one of the people we believe were

responsible for the attack.”

Good ol’ Harp, Scot thought to himself. “They left the body behind? Who was it?

What can you tell me?”

“We’re waiting for confirmation on the

identity. We've had to wire the prints and

picture off to CIA station chiefs in the Mideast."

"Sand Land? You're telling me the job was carried out by a bunch of Bedouin

Bobs? That's impossible! The only thing they know about snow is that it's spelled

with two different letters than *sand."*

"What I'm telling you is that we've got upward of thirty dead Secret Service agents,

a missing president, and one deceased

male of Mideastern descent found at the

scene of the crime with a bullet in the back of his head that I'm betting dollars to

doughnuts was fired from Sam Harper's SIG."

Scot put his elbows on the cold granite countertop and rested his head in his hands.

He had to be dreaming. Soon he would wake up and this nightmare would be over.

As he sat there with the microwave breakfast and coffee going sour in his

stomach,

the pieces began falling into place. “The failure in our communication systems

wasn’t caused by the weather, then, was it?”

“We still don’t know.”

“So, what’s the status of our investigation? Are they gridding Death Chute and going

through it millimeter by millimeter?”

“No.”

“No?” Scot asked incredulously. “What

do you mean *no?"*

"Scot, you put the pieces together just as fast as everyone else did. The president

has been kidnapped or worse, and that now makes this an FBI matter. We have been

instructed to secure the area."

"And that's it?"

"Yeah, that's it."

"Who gave those orders?"

"It came from D.C. after Hollenbeck spoke with the director of the Secret

Service.

Agents from the Salt Lake FBI field office are already on-site waiting for the special

agent in charge who is going to handle the investigation. He's due in about an hour."

Scot groaned, knowing who it would be. "Let me guess, the SAC is Gary Lawlor,

right?"

"Yeah, the FBI's deputy director himself. Makes sense. The director is gonna have

no choice but to stay in D.C. and coordinate. This is going to be one hell of a

firestorm."

17

Harvath needed to clear his head. The information Palmer had relayed was

overwhelming. Upward of thirty agents dead and the president missing, presumed

kidnapped. It was too much to grasp.

Scot grabbed a blue-and-white Secret Service parka hanging by the back door

of the

kitchen and walked outside. Three agents taking a cigarette break looked in his

direction, but didn't say anything. What could be said?

Harvath walked into the woods alongside the house, and when he felt he was out of

sight of the other agents, leaned against one of the tall trees and closed his eyes. A

million questions raced through his mind. *What happened? How could I not*

have

seen this coming? Did I overlook something during the advance?

Every whacko in a four-hundred-mile radius had been accounted for, the more

dangerous of them locked up for the few days the president would be here. There

hadn't been any pings on U.S. Immigration hot sheets, and there had been no new

threats from any extremist groups that had even hinted at this.

He breathed deeply, letting the chilly air

fill his lungs, and held it until it burned.

Slowly, he let the air escape in a long hiss. He repeated the process again, trying to

get a handle on what was going on.

Upward of thirty agents killed and the president missing. Scot began

second-guessing himself, convinced that there had been some sort of warning sign

that he'd missed. There were still agents out there trapped under the snow, but

Palmer had been right. The chances that they were alive were slim to none. Scot

fought back a surge of guilt. Many of those men had been his friends, and they all

had been *his* responsibility. *Not now,* a voice inside him said. *Turn and let it burn.*

But it was so hard. Even though he was trained to be a master of his mind and

emotions, he was still human. He had lost comrades before, but it had been on

missions to faraway places where he had been striking at threats to domestic or

international security. Those men had

fallen in battle, but this, this wasn't the same.

These Secret Service agents never had a chance, never saw what was coming. And

they had been hit on home turf.

The thought of foreign insurgents executing this attack on American soil and then

scooting back to wherever they came from, especially if it was Sand Land, really

pissed Scot off. Deep breathing out in the woods wasn't the road to the

answers he

wanted. Besides, his ribs were killing him. The answers would be found where the

action was, up on Death Chute. Until Gary Lawlor got here, the crime scene still

belonged to the Secret Service, and as the leader of the presidential advance team,

Scot felt he had not only a right, but a duty to examine every inch of it.

”What, are you nuts?” said a young FBI agent from the Salt Lake field office

when

Harvath ducked under the tape and started making his way to the scene.

Scot had hitched a ride up with a Sno-Cat that was hauling equipment as close as it

could get to the plateau, where a combination of Secret Service and FBI agents were

acting as Sherpas, walking the gear the rest of the way to the crime scene.

“Listen, Agent” — Scot looked at the identification tag hanging around the man’s

muscled neck — "Zuschnitt. I need to get in there and take a look around." The man

had about three inches and a good seventy-five pounds on Scot, but Scot had

messed with bigger guys and come out on top.

The FBI agent was in no mood to deal with Harvath. His orders were to let no one in

until Lawlor got there, and he intended to make sure those orders were carried out.

“This is a crime scene under the jurisdiction of the FBI. No one goes in there except

FBI. *Capisce?”*

Capisce? *Where did a Salt Lake Fed with a name like Zuschnitt pick up* capisce?

Scot wondered. His need to get answers turned the flame up on his anger a couple

of notches. “My name’s Scot Harvath, Secret Service. I was head of the advance

team—”

“Boy, are you going to have some explaining to do. I wouldn’t want to be in your

shoes,” snapped Agent Zuschnitt.

This guy is a real asshole. I thought this shitty treatment was reserved for muscling

in on local law enforcement jurisdictions or when the FBI got one-upped by the

CIA. Most of the FBI guys Scot had met in his career had been pretty decent. The

Secret Service and the FBI normally got along quite well. This guy, though, was

asking for it.

“Agent Zuschnitt, I know you’re doing your job, and I’m just trying to do mine.”

“If you’d done yours, the FBI wouldn’t have to be here cleaning up your mess.”

“What’s your fucking problem?”

“I don’t have one. What’s yours?”

Harvath’s *pissed-off* meter was now well into the red zone, but he fought to stay in

control and keep his cool.

“Over two dozen men probably have

died on my watch—”

“And you want me to let you in here to contaminate this crime scene? Somehow

that’s going to make everything all right? Guess again, buddy.”

“You know,” said Harvath, backing down, “you’re right. You’ve got a job to do, a

post to stand. I can appreciate that. If you couldn’t keep one lowly Secret Service

agent out, it’d probably make you look like a pretty big ass.”

A smile spread across the lips of the

beefy FBI agent as he smelled victory and saw

Harvath turn to walk away. The smile disappeared when Harvath quickly spun

around and delivered a blow to Zuschnitt's sternum. It felt like a red-hot ingot of

lead that had been fired at him from a cannon. As the air rushed from his lungs and

the agent doubled over in pain, Harvath placed his palms on Zuschnitt's shoulder

blades and drove his knee up into the man's mouth, splitting his lip open and

knocking him unconscious.

“So much for professional courtesy,” said Harvath as he ducked under the tape and

walked up the hill to where several small flags had been placed in the snow.

Blue tarps were pitched over the bodies to protect against further snow

accumulation. Sealing the scene was the right thing to do, but there was no reason

that Scot shouldn’t have been allowed in. The scene was already greatly disturbed

because of the rescue efforts. Snow was one of the biggest pains in the ass to try to

gather evidence in. This case was no exception. As a matter of fact, the difficulty

had been compounded by the avalanche, which Harvath now knew was no accident.

Scot moved from tarp to tarp, looking beneath each one, recognizing every face.

The eyes of many of the bodies were still open, staring right through him. The

pattern of precise head shots on all of the bodies coupled with random bullet

wounds on some didn't make sense. He had a feeling that before this was over, he

would be running across a lot of things that didn't make sense.

Scot was trying to process the information as he walked over to one of the final

tarps, under which lay the body of Sam Harper. He lifted the sheet of blue plastic

and saw the body with the SIG-Sauer

clasped in Sam's right hand. A flood of

memories poured through Scot's mind, and it was almost impossible to push them

out.

Whenever a president made an appearance on or near water, the Navy SEALS were

called upon to provide support. Harvath had transferred to Dev Group after several

years with Team Two and was part of a contingent of SEALs that assisted several

such protective details for a former president who loved to race his Cigarette boats

off the coast of Maine. Scot had proven himself to be extremely talented on many

occasions, but when he discovered and defused a small explosive device meant to

disrupt one of the president's outings, Secret Service agent Sam Harper stood up

and took notice. Harper had been looking for someone just like Scot to help improve

the Secret Service's protection of the president.

He pursued Harvath back to Little Creek, Virginia, where Scot was an active part of

the SEAL think tank. It took some doing, but Harper eventually succeeded in

wooing Scot on board the Secret Service team. After Harvath completed his courses

at the Secret Service advanced-training facility in Beltsville, Maryland, he joined

Harper at the White House. Not only did

Sam Harper show him the ropes, but he made him a part of his family. Scot had lost track a long time ago of how many barbecues and holiday dinners he had eaten with Sam, his wife, Sharon, and their two daughters. The thought of how they would take this news tore right through his heart.

”What the hell are you doing?” came the voice of a very angry Tom Hollenbeck.

Without turning around, Harvath walked

toward the last and final tarp, which he

knew must be covering the man Harper had shot.

“Harvath, I asked you a question!”

Scot lifted the tarp and stared at the bloody body. Half of the back of its skull had

been blown away.

“What the hell’s the matter with you? Assaulting an FBI officer? Damn it, Harvath,

look at me.”

It took him almost a full minute to tear himself away from the body of the Middle

Easterner. Silently, Scot was making a promise to Harper. He would personally

deliver the bullets that would take out every last one of the fuckers responsible for

this tragedy.

“Skorpion,” said Harvath so quietly that Hollenbeck almost didn’t hear him.

“What?”

“The machine pistol, it’s a Skorpion,”

said Scot, turning to face Hollenbeck.

“What about it?”

“They’re manufactured by the Czechs, but are the darlings of every Middle Eastern

group with a bone to pick.”

“Speaking of bones, my friend, I’ve got a big one to pick with you. I know what

kind of weapon that is, but I’ve got a couple of other questions. Just what the hell

were you thinking when you coldcocked that FBI agent?”

Scot shook off the melancholy trance that had descended on him when he had seen

Sam Harper's body. "He was asking for it."

"Asking for it? He was doing his job maintaining the integrity of this crime scene.

You know damn well that in a situation like this it becomes the FBI's purview."

"Yeah, when we call them in."

"And we have called them in, so therefore you've gotta back off. Our job now is to

function in a support capacity."

"Doesn't that piss you off, Hollenbeck? Whoever did this, breached our security,

killed our men, and took the president."

"We can't be sure that he was taken."

"Not you too. Come on."

"Of course it pisses me off, but that doesn't change the fact that the law is the law."

"We're supposed to be the best protective force in the world, none better. And yet,

someone was able to just fly in here, wipe out our team, and then take off with the

president."

"Scot, we're all in shock over this. None of us can believe it happened. *You* saved

Goldilocks, though, and you should be extremely proud of that. We are all proud of

that."

"But, Tom, they took the president. Our president. Not only are our reputations and

the reputation of the Secret Service at stake here, but so is his life. We can't just sit

back and do nothing."

"Scot, the cold reality is that he might already be dead. We have no idea either way.

They could dig four feet in another direction and come up with him… though I

doubt it. I actually agree with you. I think he's been grabbed, which is all the more

reason for us to cooperate and play the parts we've been assigned. Now, let's

get

you out of here. I'm gonna have to do some fast talking to keep your bacon out of

the fire, and I need a few minutes to think."

"Thinking is only going to waste time we already don't have. We need to act."

18

Senator David Snyder picked up the phone on the first ring, just as he had when it

had softly rung hours earlier around

midnight. Outside, a steady rain drummed

against the windows of his Georgetown town house.

Looking carefully to see if the figure next to him showed any signs of stirring, he

spoke quietly into the phone. “Yes?”

“Senator, it’s Zuschnitt. I—”

“Zuschnitt? Jesus Christ. Hold on a second. I can’t take this call here.”

Senator Snyder pressed the hold button of the black Sony phone on the oriental

nightstand next to his bed. Very carefully, he slid out of bed. He put on a white

Turkish bathrobe, a pair of Dunhill slippers, and made sure to close the bedroom

door behind him as he left the room.

Snyder tapped the switch of the ornate chandelier that illuminated the gently curving

staircase. Heavy clouds and steadily falling rain made the morning darker than it

normally would be.

At the bottom of the stairs, he crossed a marble entry hall and opened the front door

to retrieve his morning papers. Wrapped in plastic were copies of *The Wall Street*

Journal, The Washington Post, The New York Times, USA Today, and *The*

International Herald Tribune. Even though his aides would clip any relevant articles

for him at the office, he liked to get a jump on the day's news while he was still at

home.

Shuffling into his study, he could make out the headlines on several of the papers

through the plastic sleeves. They all said more or less the same thing: “Utah

Avalanche. President Missing. Feared Dead.” Snyder turned on the bank of

television monitors in his office, which showed studio newscasters in suits speaking

to reporters in the field who were garbed in heavy winter parkas with the brightly

colored logos of their respective networks prominently displayed. The sets were

muted, yet Snyder could tell the reports were coming from the site of the president's

ski vacation and the avalanche. It was the biggest story in the country, if not the

world.

He dropped his cord of newspapers on the couch next to the fireplace and pushed

the *on* switch of the Heat-N-Glo remote. The fireplace crackled to life. If D.C.

wasn’t wrapped within a damp, bone-chilling cold, it was ninety-five degrees with

one hundred percent humidity. There never seemed to be a happy medium in this

town, for anything.

Snyder moved around to the back of his desk and lit a cigarette. He didn’t care if he

kept Zuschnitt waiting.

Salt Lake City was one of the largest FBI field offices in the country. This was due

to the fact that at weapons facilities across Utah, America was honoring its nuclear

reduction and disarmament treaties with the former Soviet Union. In the political

chess game that had raged between the two countries for decades, neither had yet

grown to trust the other, and consequently, the Russians had a large number of their

people in Salt Lake monitoring our dismantling-and-disposal progress, just as we

had a large number of people in different sites throughout Russia for the same

reason.

With all of those Russians running around, the U.S. government felt it was a good

idea to keep as close an eye on them as possible, and the job fell to the FBI. Always

relying on his own “inside” sources, Snyder had cultivated many contacts in

domestic and foreign intelligence-gathering communities. While Zuschnitt might not

have been the brightest bulb in the box, he had a nasty streak that Snyder liked, and

the man had been easy to buy. Snyder now questioned whether giving him his secure

home phone number had been such a good idea, but he reasoned it was better than

having Zuschnitt call him at the office.

“You’re late,” said a gruff Senator Snyder as he picked up the phone and dragged

on his cigarette.

“I know, but—”

“Shut up and listen to me first. Where are you calling from?”

“I’m calling from the Salt Lake field office on the phone we use to route

communications through from suspected fugitives and felons. It’s the one that

records all outgoing and incoming calls… Where the hell do you think I’m calling

from? You don’t think I’m smart enough to use a secure line? I’m calling from a pay

phone at the resort."

Controlling his anger at the man's insolence, Snyder responded, "Where at the

resort?"

"Near the medical facility, but don't worry. There are no other government staff

around here. I'm the only one, and in my condition, I fit right in."

"In your *condition?* What do you mean?"

"I got sucker punched by a loose cannon

on the Secret Service. Some prick named

Harvath. I guess he was head of the president's advance team."

"Not only head of the advance team, but he was also a member of the president's

detail. You mean he's still alive?"

"Yeah, I guess he transferred over to the president's daughter's detail yesterday

morning before the avalanche."

"Who else survived?"

"As far as we can tell, only Harvath and

the president's daughter."

"Any clues as to the whereabouts of the president?"

"At this point, nothing. The Secret Service uncovered the body of a towel head with

a machine pistol, put two and three together and got seven, then called us in. The

director of the FBI has Gary Lawlor on his way out here. They are treating this as a

kidnapping."

“And the media?”

“For now, they’re being kept back from the scene. They’ve been able to piece

together that several agents and civilians were killed in the avalanche and that the

president has not been recovered, but other than that, they don’t know anything.”

“Back to your getting *sucker punched.* What happened?”

“That asshole Harvath wanted to get in and take a look around where the president

and his detail went down. The Salt Lake field office had directions to take over the

crime scene and secure it until Lawlor arrived. Nobody was to get in, including

Secret Service. Shit, you should see how bad they had already trampled it. Anyway,

Harvath insisted, and I told him no. When I wasn't looking, he sucker punched me.

That was a real pussy move."

"Yes, but he managed to get the better of you, didn't he?" Snyder didn't expect

Zuschnitt to respond. He refiled Scot Harvath's name in the back of his mind and

returned to questioning the FBI man. "Anything further to report?"

"Besides the fact that I took three stitches in my lip, my face is swollen up like a

balloon, and I'm lucky he didn't break my jaw? No, I guess there's nothing further

to report."

"Then I guess that's all we have to talk about. I expect your next report to be on

time, whether you have managed to get yourself bitch-slapped again or not. Am I

understood?”

“Yeah, I hear you.”

“Good.”

“What do you want me to do about the press?”

“Let me think.” For a moment Snyder pondered when the right time would be for

Zuschnitt to leak that the president wasn’t buried beneath the snow, but had

actually

been kidnapped. “You’re still wearing your pager, aren’t you?”

“Of course, all of the agents are.”

“When it’s time for you to share our little story with the press about what has truly

befallen the president, I’ll page you and tell you how I want you to handle it.

Understood?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” Snyder hung up the phone

before the man could say anything else.

Simultaneously, the black Sony phone in the master bedroom upstairs was hung up

by an extremely intrigued lover who hadn’t been sleeping since the first covert call

had come in around midnight.

19

Within seconds of meeting David Snyder, he could see why Mitch had found him so

irresistible.

The idea of his boyfriend sleeping with his boss to get ahead had never appealed to

André, but Mitch had assured him it would only be temporary and that it was just

how things sometimes had to be done in Washington.

André had sat by and watched what was supposed to be a onetime thing blossom

into a full-blown affair between the senator and his junior staffer. To say it bothered

him deeply would have been the

understatement of the millennium, but André was in

love with Mitch and in love with the life Mitch promised the two of them would have

together.

The fact that Mitch had dated a lot of women on the Hill was no secret, and André

had accepted that as part of their cover, but Mitch's deep involvement with Senator

Snyder began to bother him greatly, especially when Mitch disappeared for

entire

weekends or when the senator called in the middle of the night and ordered Mitch to

“hightail his little ass” over to Snyder’s town house.

It had finally got to the point where André couldn’t take any more. If he couldn’t

have Mitch all to himself, he didn’t want to be in a relationship with him. It was bad

enough that André had to hide the fact that he was gay, both at the D.C. law

firm

where he worked, as well as with his family, but to have to hide to the rest of the

world the deep love he felt for Mitch was just too much. André Martin eventually

reached his limit. He was through with living in secret, and he delivered Mitch an

ultimatum. For the rest of his life, André knew, he would have mixed feelings about

how he handled the response.

Mitch explained that he'd been trying to unwind himself from the affair for the past

couple of weeks. The more he tried, the odder the senator became; distant and cold

at times, downright inquisitorial at others. The senator's temper had begun to flare,

something Mitch had never seen before, only heard about. Sex with the senator

became rougher, almost as if the man wanted to hurt him both physically and

emotionally. Even through all of this, it

was important, Mitch said, for him to have an

amicable parting with the senator if he was to preserve his job. André felt *he* should

be more important to Mitch than any job, and so to make his point, he moved out of

the condo they shared. André knew he had done the right thing, but he was still

racked with guilt.

Mitch told André again and again how much he loved him and that he wanted more

than anything in the world to be with him. He stated that he was sure the senator was

going to let him go soon; the treatment had become so bad that he couldn't imagine

that the senator would want him around any longer anyway. Mitch even said he

would give it just one more week and if the senator hadn't ended it, he would. He

promised André with all of his heart that he would do it and asked him to hang on

just until the end of the following week.

In his heart of hearts, André believed Mitch. His spirits began to lift, and he decided

that if the relationship was in fact ended by the following weekend, he would move

back in with Mitch. André went so far as to make late reservations for that Saturday

night for the two of them at their favorite restaurant, Monroe's in Alexandria.

When Saturday arrived, André sat by himself waiting for Mitch, and while he

consumed three lonely glasses of

chardonnay, he did a lot of soul-searching.

Realizing Mitch wasn't going to show, he paid the check and left Monroe's,

convinced everything had been a lie. Mitch's job and his affair with the senator were

more important to him in the end than André.

He walked back to the Holiday Inn where he'd been staying since leaving Mitch and

convinced the bartender, who was closing up, to give him a final nightcap.

André

slugged back the Vodka and tonic, almost spitting it out when the partially astute

bartender said, “Whatever she did, you’ll get over it, pal.”

After draining a third of the tiny bottles in his makeshift minibar and cursing himself

for falling in love with someone who didn’t really care about him, André fell into a

deep and dreamless sleep.

When he awoke the next morning, his head was pounding, but at least that distracted

him from the aching in his heart. He went into the bathroom, peeled the plastic sheet

from around one of the cups, filled it with water, and chased down two Advil.

Reaching outside his door, he collected his complimentary *USA Today* and *The*

Washington Post. He threw the two papers onto the bed and returned to the

bathroom, hoping that brushing his teeth would make him feel a little bit more

human.

After brushing his teeth, André crossed the room and sat on the edge of the bed. He

quickly scanned the room service menu and picked up the phone to order breakfast.

He didn’t have the heart or the stomach to walk to one of the local cafés.

“Good morning, Mr. Martin, this is Tabatha. May I take your order, please?”

“I don’t know how good the morning is, Tabatha, but you may certainly take my

order.” He began reciting what he wanted, half looking at the room service menu and

half skimming the *Post’* s cover stories. “I would like a pot of coffee. Two eggs and

— oh, Jesus, no.”

André had gotten to the small article regarding a drive-by shooting the previous night

that had killed Mitchell Conti, aide to Senator David Snyder, and an as yet

unidentified man believed to have been a friend of Mr. Conti’s.

“Mr. Martin, are you okay?” asked the room service operator.

“Cancel my order,” was all André Martin could manage before rushing to the

bathroom to throw up.

Through some very low-key questions to close mutual friends, André tried to piece

together Mitch’s movements before the shooting. Everyone said that Mitch had been

very down lately because of his job difficulties and because of losing André.

Apparently, Mitch had been out with his friend Simon, looking for a gift for André,

when the drive-by shooting occurred.

The police assumed that it was just a classic case of “wrong place, wrong time” for

Mitch and Simon when they were caught in a hail of bullets. But what the police

failed to dig up was who the shooters were and who the assumed target was. Despite

the initial public outcry, Mitch and Simon became just another statistic. But

not to

André Martin. Something was rotten in the capital of democracy.

The whole thing smelled funny. There were conflicting accounts about the shooters,

their vehicle, and nothing solid about the intended victims. The more André looked

at it, the more he was convinced the drive-by was not an accident.

He continuously replayed in his mind the things Mitch had told him about Senator

Snyder, how he never lost and no one ever stood in his way. André also

remembered the final message Mitch had left for him at the Holiday Inn saying that

he thought he knew of a way whereby the senator would have to cut him loose from

the affair but still allow him to keep his job. Mitch had bragged he might even get a

promotion out of it, and then they both could celebrate getting their lives back to

normal.

Had Mitch been foolish enough to think that he could blackmail the senator? Had he

thought the senator would end the affair and yet still allow Mitch to keep his job and

maybe even go so far as to give him a promotion? It sounded like something Mitch

might try. He'd always thought he was smarter than everyone else. On more than one

occasion, André had told him he was too smart for his own good. No matter what

Mitch might have thought he had on the senator, any way he came up against him, he

would have lost. The more André thought about it, the more the drive-by shooting

made sense if you assumed Mitch had been the intended victim. And the more the

drive-by shooting made sense, the more André was determined to avenge the death

of Mitch Conti.

Even though it hadn’t been easy getting

close to the senator, André had eventually

succeeded. While he didn't have the political network that Mitch'd had, he was an

excellent fact finder and quickly assembled his own dossier on the New York

senator and the causes closest to his cold heart. Several months later, through a

partner's wife at his firm, André was able to wrangle an invitation to the Gold Circle

Ball of the International Diplomats'

Forum.

At the black-tie affair, André was every bit as striking in his tuxedo as Mitch would

have been. He came to the event bolstered by a couple of martinis, convinced he

would be able to seduce the senator. The senator had indeed noticed André, but it

took “coincidentally” bumping into him at several more important functions before

the two had a real conversation.

Once they had their first “date,” André wisely played hard to get, acting unimpressed

with the senator’s lifestyle and power, which only served to set the hook deeper.

Snyder was soon thoroughly taken with André and couldn’t get enough of him.

Jealous and insecure, he wanted André with him every moment.

Lately, though, Snyder had seemed tense. None of the signs would have been visible

to a casual observer, but André had been

studying him long enough to know when

something was afoot, and whatever it was, it was very big.

All of his experience as a lawyer told André that he could be in a lot of trouble

snooping around in the life of one of the country's most powerful senators, but he

wasn't after state secrets. He wanted personal secrets, and André knew the man was

dirty. He knew he was responsible for the deaths of Mitch and Simon, and André

wanted to hang him with that, if not something equally damning. He also knew that if

Snyder ever caught on to him, an accident would happen just as easily to him as it

had to Mitch and Simon.

When Snyder had sneaked out of the house shortly after receiving the first strange

phone call around midnight, André had known something important was happening.

He’d let himself out a side door and

caught the senator getting into a cab a half a

block down the street. The rain made it difficult to see, but André managed to get

the cab's number and soon thereafter caught one himself.

The senator was in a hurry and didn't take many precautions against being followed.

André had no trouble staying with him. A half hour later when the cab turned onto a

posh residential street in McLean,

Virginia, André knew where his quarry was

headed. He told his cab to stop and watched the senator's driver say something into

an intercom at the large iron gates of a brick Georgian Revival. Moments later, the

gates swung open and Snyder's taxi drove through. Satisfied, André instructed his

cabbie to take him back to the town house in Georgetown. He lay in bed awake for

the rest of the evening, pretending to be asleep when the senator came home. He

didn't stir until Snyder got out of bed to take the second phone call.

Now, in the overcast light of a rainy morning, André hung up the black Sony phone

and rolled over to his side of the bed, contemplating the implications of what he had

just heard. It was time to get up, and he thought a hot shower might steady his

nerves.

He walked into the bathroom and didn't even feel the radiant heat from the tiled floor

on the soles of his feet. He turned the shower control to *hot* and climbed in,

scrubbing himself with a lemon beeswax soap, one of the many bath products the

senator liked to indulge himself with. His mind racing, he was so preoccupied he

didn't notice his lover had entered the bathroom until the shower door swung open.

"André, I think you and I need to have a

little chat.”

20

When Harvath and Hollenbeck had hiked to the bottom of Death Chute, there was a

Sno-Cat waiting to take them back to the command center. Once they were seated

inside and were underway, Hollenbeck pulled a stack of Polaroids out of his parka

and handed them to Harvath.

“Ever seen one of these back in your SEAL days?”

Harvath looked intently at the first picture. It was a box, painted white, about the size

of the average surround-sound subwoofer. By its appearance in the picture, it had

been found buried in the snow. Scot flipped through the shots, which were taken

from different angles. In some, the box was partially obscured by the branches of a

pine tree it was under.

“I don’t know. It looks like a white

box," Harvath said, handing the photos back to

Hollenbeck.

"When our guys found it, we had no idea what it was either. Our gut said it might be

an explosive device, so we got the bomb tech guys up there right away."

"Where? Up there?" Scot asked, gesturing over his shoulder back toward Death

Chute. "I thought this was an FBI investigation now."

“It is, but we were operating outside the secured crime scene under the pretext of

discovering if any of our agents might have survived the slide.”

“But you said they were all accounted for.”

“Now they are. But we hadn’t released that information to the FBI at that point.

Listen, I don’t want to split hairs with you. I busted your ass up there because that’s

my job. I’ve heard about that guy, Zuschnitt. He’s got a reputation with the FBI for

being a real prick. That's probably why he got stuck posting the crime scene. Think

about it. That's a pretty long rotation to be standing with your thumb up your ass in

the freezing cold."

Harvath laughed at the image. It was the first time he had laughed all morning. "I

guess you're right."

"Damn straight I'm right. Now I want you to look at these," he said as he pulled

another group of Polaroids from his pocket. “Once we determined the device was

not an explosive, we were able to discover that it was encased in panels and that the

panels could be removed.”

Scot flipped through this set of pictures with greater interest. Each displayed a

different exposed section of the box’s interior, which contained densely packed

electronics.

“It looks like an air-sick bag for a supercomputer that had a really bad lunch. There

must be at least a hundred circuit boards crammed in there. There could never be

enough air circulation in there to keep whatever this thing is from overheating.

Unless—”

“It was placed in the snow?” responded Hollenbeck, who’d already come to that

conclusion. He pulled some more photos from his parka and narrated as he flipped

through them. “The alloy construction of the box probably helped circulate the cold.

There are also fans and a set of tubes with screened vents, which we think acted as a

cooling system. Any guesses yet as to what its purpose is?”

“Judging from this picture,” said Scot, pointing to the one Hollenbeck had just

revealed, “I’d say that little device there is a low-profile antenna. If you have your

guys look up into the tree above where

you found the box, at the very top you'll

probably find a camouflaged transmitter with a booster."

"Yup, that's exactly what we found."

"So, this device is a transmitter of some sort. I'd be willing to bet you may have

found the source of our communications problems."

"It was. We shut it down, and the radios and everything else came back on line clear

as a bell. What do you make of this?" said Hollenbeck as he removed a final

Polaroid from the stack and handed it to him.

Harvath studied it carefully. “The writing looks Korean. By the sophistication of the

equipment, I’m going to guess this is something from our friends in the north. Most

of the components will probably turn out to be Taiwanese, but the overall design and

assembly is probably North Korean.”

“I had our communications guy look at it, and then I slipped Jim Bates and some of

his White House Communications Agency people up to take a peek. They've never

seen anything like it, but they're all guessing it's a very sophisticated jamming

system."

"But why'd it jam our communications and not the CB radios?"

"It could be that proximity-wise they weren't close enough, or—"

"Tom, proximity had nothing to do with it. Our radios were cutting in and out when

we were on Deer Valley's main runs. If this was an overall jam, the CBs would have

been affected as well."

"The other possibility Bates and his WHCA guys are kicking around is that the

device can be tuned to jam specific frequencies and at different intervals."

"On for a minute, off for twenty," Scot said, more for his own benefit than

Hollenbeck's. "It got us used to the on-again, off-again status of the radios. Made

us think it was some sort of natural anomaly."

"Yup."

"But for that, you'd have to already know at least what frequencies the Secret

Service was using, and that's a closely guarded secret."

"Exactly. So, whoever was jamming had to have an inside line on the frequencies of

not only our radios, but also Deer Valley's and the Smocks."

“Deer Valley’s wouldn’t be hard to get, but ours? Are you suggesting a leak? No

way. Not possible.”

“I want you to stay quiet about this, Scot. Understand? I don’t want to start a witch

hunt.”

“I wouldn’t worry about starting it. Pandora’s box is going to open all by itself. I’d

be more worried about how you’re going to close it.”

21

A million things swirled through Scot's mind as he and Hollenbeck made the rest of

the ride to the command center in silence. He felt like that painting *The Scream*. The

phrase, *You're only as strong as your weakest link* kept piercing the chaotic jumble

of his mind. The idea that someone on his team had leaked information to anyone,

much less a source with hostile intentions, was unfathomable. *Maybe the*

information wasn't leaked, Scot tried to tell himself. The problem was, once it has

been suggested that you have a leak, you become focused on it. It becomes hard to

concentrate on any other possibilities.

When the Sno-Cat came to a halt, Harvath and Hollenbeck didn't wait for the driver

to get out of his cab and come around back to open their compartment. They were

on the ground and on their way to the command center before the man got

halfway

around the machine.

“Tom, can I get my SIG back?” said Harvath, who figured someone on the team

must have secured his sidearm for him when he was brought in unconscious last

night.

“As long as you promise not to use it on any FBI agents. It’s in the lockdown

cabinet in the command center. I left Longo in charge, so you can sign it out with

him.”

Scot made his way to the extra large Winnebago that had been brought in from the

Federal garage in Las Vegas to act as the primary communications and command

center for the president’s visit. While the house the president was staying in, just fifty

feet away, was also loaded with agents and electronics equipment, this was the nerve

center of the operation.

Scot found Longo in back bent over a laptop, clicking away at the keys.

“Hollenbeck told me I could grab my SIG back from you.”

“Your what?” said Longo, distracted by the report he was working on. Written

reports were the one thing Scot hadn’t ever been able to get used to. The Secret

Service loved their paperwork.

“My SIG-Sauer. It’s about this long,” Harvath said, showing him with his hands,

“blackish gray, and fires these things we

call bullets when you pull on the trigger. If

you want to find an apple you think might fit on your head, I'll give you a little

demonstration of how it works."

"Very funny. Glad to see your accident didn't damage your sense of humor. I'm

sorry, the WHCAs have been crawling all over me about how the radios went down,

and I've got to document every single thing. The report's got me hung up."

"Since when does the White House

Communications Agency give the Secret Service

orders?”

“Those guys are Department of Defense, just in civilian clothes. Hollenbeck said to

cooperate with everyone. He’s really worried about how the Service is going to…

hell, who am I kidding? He’s worried about how the Secret Service *already* looks

on this one. We lost the president. I still can’t believe it. Now the FBI’s got their

top

pit bull coming in, and he's bringing the Hostage Rescue Team with him. The special

agents in charge of both the FBI and Secret Service Salt Lake field offices have been

on the warpath around here, and I'm just trying to keep my head low so it doesn't

roll."

"Listen, Chris, you're not going to lose your head."

"You don't think so? Harvath, I hate to

break it to you, but over two dozen agents

are dead and/or missing, the president is gone, and we've got next to nothing

lead-wise. Heads are definitely going to roll. You know I like you, but as head of the

advance team on this one, it looks like you might be married to King Henry." Being

"married to King Henry" was an inside joke that referred to the British king who

beheaded several of his wives after he had grown tired of them.

Chris hadn't needed to say it. That thought was one of many flying around

Harvath's head, as well as a sense of crushing responsibility for the deaths of

his

fellow agents. Scot's only hope of getting out of this one with his career intact was

to be part of some significant breakthrough.

"Here's your weapon," said Longo as he turned from the cabinet, setting the pistol

on the table and handing Harvath a clipboard. "Sign right there."

Scot strapped on his holster, handed the signed clipboard back to Longo, and

walked toward the door.

“You know where the term *severance pay* comes from, Scot?” said Longo as he

hung the clipboard on a peg inside the cabinet and locked it again.

“No, but you’re going to tell me, right?”

Ignoring Harvath’s sarcasm, Longo continued. “It’s also from England. When

prisoners were going to be beheaded, they offered the axman a little extra money to

make sure he chopped their heads off with one, clean blow.”

“Thanks. I’ll be sure to remember that,” said Scot as he held the door to the

Winnebago open a little longer than he should have, eliciting moans and shouts from

the cold agents inside.

Crossing the compound toward the main house, Scot replayed the conversation with

Longo in his mind. He knew that the other agents didn’t blame him. Scot Harvath

had been single-handedly responsible for ushering in some of the most

significant

improvements in Secret Service training and tactical procedure in years. But he also

knew that as head of the advance team, he had to bear a tremendous amount of the

responsibility for what had happened.

Looking up at the sky and the still falling snow, Harvath felt that the agents not yet

recovered by the search-and-rescue teams were a lost cause. The president, though,

was a different story. He was probably still alive, and it was only a matter of time

before demands for his ransom would be made.

Scot thought about Amanda lying in a hospital bed in Salt Lake, glad she would

make a full recovery. He didn't dare think about what conditions the president might

be languishing in at this moment.

There was no question that Scot's career was probably finished, at least with the

Secret Service. He would be transferred to a less “sensitive” posting and would

most likely be relegated to protecting third world delegates on visits to the United

States… if even. He definitely would never be allowed to head up an advance team

again or, for that matter, work another presidential protective detail.

He could return to the SEALs. His teammates had always thought Scot was better

suited to offensive operations than

defensive anyway, but he was too proud. He

couldn't go crawling back. Everyone would know that he had been responsible for

the security arrangements for the president's ski trip. The SEALs were an honorable

operation and not something you ran back to with your tail between your legs when

you failed someplace else. *Failed* — the word tasted bitter in his mouth.

Had he failed? And if so, by whose

definition? As a SEAL, failure meant giving up,

not acting, throwing in the towel. The Secret Service might begrudgingly accept a

sidelined position while the FBI came in to run the investigation, but that didn't mean

he had to. The more Scot considered his options, the less he could see he had to

lose.

The Senate inquiry, which was bound to come down eventually, would tie him to a

stake and roast him. There would probably be other sacrificial lambs, but he knew

that back in Washington they were already engraving his invitation to the party. Even

if he resigned from the Secret Service before then, he would still be forced to testify

at the hearing and be roasted nonetheless. They would need someone to blame. It

was part of the pathological makeup of politicians.

The other thing gnawing at him was the oath he had taken to protect and serve his

country and the president. As good as the FBI was, it would take them a hell of a

long time to get everything coordinated. By then, evidence would be lost, and the

kidnappers would be even farther away. The FBI would have to wait for demands to

be made. They would continue to go through the motions of looking for evidence,

and if they were lucky, they might turn up

a lead, but Scot wasn't holding out a lot

of hope the FBI would catch a break. There was no question in his mind that the

president was still alive. If the intent had been to assassinate him, his body would

have been found along with those of the rest of his detail.

There was a lot to be said for a collective effort, but when that effort was not quickly

coordinated and executed, nine out of ten times it ended in disaster. The FBI and the

Secret Service were playing defense. Every cell in Scot's body had been trained for

offense, and offense called for action. Besides, he thought again, what did he have to

lose?

22

Scot found Vance Boyson and Nick Slattery at the edge of the perimeter, leaning

against the flatbed of a Deer Valley avalanche-control truck checking their

equipment. Vance had been a friend of Scot's from his days on the freestyle ski

team, as well as an important contact during Scot's sweeps of Deer Valley for the

president's visit.

Vance noticed him approaching and dropped what he was doing to greet him. "Hey,

Scot, how you feeling, man?"

"I've been better, fellas," replied Scot.

"We heard you really took a good spill down the mountain."

“It wasn’t anything worse than I’ve ever eaten off a jump.”

Nick stopped his equipment check and turned to join the conversation. “Is there any

word yet? There must be a thousand ambulances up here, but we haven’t seen any

of them go down. That’s not a good sign.”

“No, it’s not good,” said Scot. “Listen, I need a favor. Now that the weather’s a

little better, can we get your bird up?”

Vance looked at Nick before responding. “Sure, where do you need to go?”

“I want to go up top on Squaw Peak to get a better look at where the avalanche

started.”

Nick sucked in a big breath of air between his teeth. “The sheriff has told us that

area is off-limits until further notice.”

“I’ll take full responsibility. The sheriff doesn’t even have to know. If he says

anything, you inform him you have been directed by the Secret Service to lift one

of

their agents up there for further investigation."

"Agent Harvath, you're a cool guy and everything, but I don't—"

Nick was interrupted by Vance. "Of course you don't want to interfere with a

federal investigation. If Scot says he needs to get up to that peak, then he needs to

get up there. We were told from the beginning to provide the Secret Service with any

and all assistance they required. Well, this agent needs assistance and he's going to

get it." Vance winked at Scot and said, "Get in the truck."

Deer Valley's chopper was primed and ready for takeoff when they arrived at the

helipad off the main access road. Scot and Vance spent the short drive talking about

the equipment they would need when they got up to the peak. Most of it was

standard gear that the chopper already

carried, but when they came to a stop near

the pad, Vance shouted instructions to Nick above the roar of the rotors.

The chopper rose rapidly and looking down, Scot could make out the flurry of

activity below. Because of the route they took to get to the helipad, they had

bypassed most of the chaos. Now, though, Scot could clearly make out the

battalions of rescue vehicles and news trucks parked pell-mell along the roads.

As the chopper continued to rise, Scot

discussed with Vance the details of the

avalanche while he slid into a pair of Deer Valley yellow-and-green ski pants Nick

had brought from the truck.

Everyone had been kept away from the peak, so even the Utah Avalanche Forecast

Center experts hadn’t been able to get up there to conduct any examinations yet. All

they had been able to do was make assumptions. A lot of snow had fallen, and

avalanches were part of the natural order of things. Only so much snow can build up

on the face of a mountain before it crumbles under its own weight and falls in the

only direction it can, straight down.

“It really isn’t that unusual,” replied Nick via the microphone attached to his headset.

“It’s not the act itself that bothers me, it’s the timing and ferocity,” said Scot, who

noticed the peak looming up in front of

them. “Can the pilot get close enough to give

me a good look at the face?”

“No can do. We don’t know how unstable it is, and the rotor wash could trigger

another slide. There’s a small plateau in back, near the top. He can set it down there,

and we can work our way around on foot.” Vance turned around in the copilot’s

seat so he could see Scot’s face as he asked his next question. “You think

you’re

up to it?”

“Don’t worry about me. You just get us there.”

The hike to the face hadn’t been as easy as Scot had hoped. The wind was blowing

four times stronger at this elevation, and the chopper pilot needed three attempts

before he was able to put down on the small plateau. Harvath was losing the feeling

in his fingers from the cold, and the pain

in his muscles was increasing with each

passing minute.

As the wind grew stronger, Nick suggested they rope up for safety. While Vance

was handing the end of the rope to Scot, he asked, “What exactly are we looking for

up here?”

“Pornography,” Scot replied.

Both Nick and Vance stopped what they were doing to look at him.

"Pornography?"

"It's an expression. I can't give you a good definition of pornography, but I know it

when I see it. I'll know what we're looking for when I see it."

The group rounded the narrow ridge trail and began closing on the face of Squaw

Peak. Vance led, with Scot next, followed by Nick. Harvath kept looking high and

low, searching for anything that was out of the ordinary. He held up his hand and

called out for Vance to stop. His climbing partners closed the gap and stood on

either side of him.

“You see that?” said Scot, motioning to a small crevice that had a pocket of chipped

stone just above their heads.

“Sure do,” said Nick.

“It looks like someone has been up here doing a little climbing, and it looks relatively

recent,” replied Vance.

“This area is technically off-limits, isn’t it?” asked Scot.

Vance was the first to respond. “It always is. Especially during the winter and even

more so with the president’s visit. Heck, you were the one calling the shots. None of

our guys were even allowed up here unless one of your men was with us.”

“And did any of your guys come up here?”

“They would have needed to be cleared by either me or Nick, and as far as I

know,

there were no requests, so neither of us cleared anyone."

Scot turned to Nick for confirmation, who nodded his head in agreement.

Fifty feet below them, Scot could see the shelf of snow and ice from which the

avalanche had broken off. It wasn't hard to distinguish, as the levels of snow above

and below were so dramatically different. Vance saw what Scot was looking at and

immediately spoke. “Lemme guess.”

“Yeah, I need to take a closer look.”

Knowing he would be outvoted no matter what he said, Nick unshouldered his pack

and began laying out the coils of rope they had brought along, leaving Vance to,

hopefully, talk some sense into Agent Harvath as they untied their safety line.

“Scot, we have no idea how stable or unstable that shelf is down there.”

“All the more reason I have to get down

to it now."

"Can you explain to me what you hope to find down there?"

"I can't go into great detail, Vance, but I don't think that avalanche started on its

own. I think somebody helped it."

"What? You think somebody triggered that avalanche on purpose? Why would

somebody do that?"

"I don't have all the answers, but I'm starting to put together a picture. See that?"

Scot gestured toward where Nick had wisely chosen a new location in the rock

crevice in which to drive a piton, so as not to disturb the area Harvath had pointed

out earlier. “I think somebody was up here, not too long ago, who hammered in one

or several pitons, depending on how much support they needed, and belayed down

the face.”

“But that’s nuts. No amateur backcountry climber would have done that.”

“Who said anything about amateurs? These people were extremely professional.”

“Even so, how do you know that their climbing caused the avalanche?”

“I don’t think the climbing caused it. As a matter of fact, I think whoever was

responsible for the avalanche was long gone from here by the time it started. Are we

ready up there, Nick?”

Nick gave the thumbs-up. He had placed a couple of extra pitons just to be sure and

threw Harvath a new length of rope on which he would be belayed.

“Take this,” said Harvath, throwing Nick an orange wax crayon he had removed

from the command center. “I want you to draw an *X* next to each one of the pitons

you’ve placed, so that the investigative team can tell the difference between your

work and what was here before we got here. Nick nodded and began marking off his

piton locations.

Scot looped the rope through the metal ring in his harness and threw the coil of rope

in his right hand over the ridge and down the face of Squaw Peak. Vance tied off a

safety line to the harness and began giving Scot instructions.

“You look like you know what you’re doing, so I am going to assume you’ve

rappelled before.”

“More times and from more different objects than you can possibly imagine.” Scot

grinned.

“Well, this is going to be a little bit different. Because we have no idea how stable

the snow is, you can’t bounce down; you’ve got to walk back very slowly. Place

your feet with extreme caution and listen very carefully for any cracking sounds that

might indicate the shelf is moving or might be ready to break away. You got it?”

“Yeah, I got it,” said Scot as he turned

his back to the ridge and the valley far below.

Looking over at Nick he asked, “On belay?”

“Belay on,” Nick replied.

“Climbing,” said Scot.

Which was followed by the mountaineer’s response from Nick, “Climb on.”

Ever so slowly, Scot leaned back into his harness and allowed himself to take baby

steps over the lip of the ridge until he

was standing on the icy face itself. He gave

each of his balled fists a couple of quick squeezes to try and warm up his fingers

before slowly letting out the slack in his rope.

As Scot moved backward down the face, choosing each step with care, Nick

released the necessary amounts of slack from the line.

Harvath noticed divot-like depressions in the snow that could have been footprints

or merely small, windblown craters. It was hard to tell.

The descent seemed to take forever as he moved step by step, always stopping to

listen before lightly putting his weight on the next foot behind him. Scot's aching

body was cooperating so far, but just barely. A small smile crossed his lips as he

thought of what Dr. Trawick would have said had Scot asked permission to go

climb a mountain. He probably would have certified him insane right there.

Throughout the climb, Scot paid close attention to the strange pockmarks he was

seeing in the snow about three feet off to his left. He realized they were too uniform

to be a naturally occurring phenomenon. What prevented him from believing they

could be footprints was their small size. Then it hit him.

Scot looked up at his own marks made scaling down the face. His prints were about

half the size of regular prints, and for

good reason. When they had gotten out of the

helicopter, Vance had handed him a pair of crampons. The sharp metal teeth

strapped to his boots were the same devices that would have been worn by any

climber, even a half-wit amateur, when trying to tackle a surface covered with snow

and ice. Whoever left the tracks off to Scot's left did so knowing that by the time

they were discovered, the person who

made them would be hundreds, if not

thousands of miles away.

Scot was nearing the edge of the shelf where the avalanche had broken away. He

glanced again at the tracks left by the previous phantom climber and noticed they

had begun to veer away from him. He steadied himself on the rope and carefully

lifted his right hand to depress the talk button on the Deer Valley radio strapped to

his chest.

“Vance, do you read me? Over.”

“Yeah, I got ya. What’s up?”

“We were right. Making my way down, I can see there’s been somebody here

recently with crampons.”

“Are you sure?”

“Sure enough. Listen, the trail diverges off to my left and then over the lip. I’m going

to need to push off and swing over to where the tracks end. I’ll need some

slack.

Give me about twenty more feet."

"We'll let out the slack; just be careful you don't touch off another slide, okay?"

"I am being careful, and believe me, if you've got another way to do this, I'm all

ears. At some point I have to swing out over the lip, so I'd rather get it over with.

Out."

Scot waited until he saw a sufficient amount of the line slide down the face

and

dangle beneath him. He calculated how much thrust he would need to push himself

off the snow to reach his target and hoped that using that much force wouldn’t crack

the shelf beneath him and send it tumbling into the valley below. There were a lot of

rescue personnel and many of his fellow agents still combing the area down there for

survivors. Scot was convinced the first

slide had been no accident, but there was no

telling what instabilities were left behind.

Testing the strength in his legs, Scot bent painfully at the knees several times to get

the momentum going to launch him in the right direction. Above on the ridge, Vance

and Nick could only hope Scot knew what he was doing, because they were

operating completely blind.

On the count of three, Scot once again told himself. *One… two… three!*

The push sent him backward into the air, away from the steep peak face and hurling

toward the area beneath the shelf where the crampon tracks disappeared.

Knees bent, ready to absorb the impact, Scot's body came back hard and fast

toward its target. Judging by his speed, he thought that he had pushed off with a little

too much force and consequently was coming back in too fast. He braced

himself

for the impact.

When the shark-teeth-like crampons dug into the ice, the jolt raced up his legs, past

where it should have been absorbed by his knees. Scot had misjudged his own

strength. His knees had not yet fully forgiven him for the punishment they had

suffered over the past twenty-four hours, and they failed to take the brunt of the

shock. His legs buckled, and his whole upper body slammed into the sheer face.

Scot didn’t dare take either of his hands from the rope.

Snow and ice began showering down on top of him. He could hear Vance calling

frantically over the radio. The snow was beginning to fall faster, and Harvath knew

he didn’t have much time.

Through the shower of snow, he quickly looked above him along the ridge as best

he could, then looked down. Both above and below him there were marks consistent

with the detonation of some sort of explosive device. From the little he could see, it

had not been the type of device fired by avalanche-control cannons from the valley.

The spread and pattern were completely different.

When Scot let out a little more slack to drop closer to the area beneath him, he was

hit from above by a sheet of ice that felt as if it weighed at least one hundred

pounds, and he was knocked right off the

face.

He tightened his grip frantically on his rope, knowing that it only had a finite amount

of feet before it ran out. He cursed himself for being taken off guard by the ice sheet

and loosening his grip in the first place. Scot fell with sickening speed, all the while

fighting to regain control. He bumped his head several times, and then, with a loud

snap, everything came to a halt.

With the blood rushing to his head, Scot realized that he was hanging upside down

by his safety line. He made a mental note to kiss Nick and Vance right after he

punched both of their lights out for letting him fall so far. About ten feet above him,

he could see where his primary rope had come to its end.

Knowing, or actually hoping, Nick and Vance would be doing their best to pull him

back up to the ridge, Scot summoned

what strength he could and tried to right

himself. His body was weak and sore, but it complied. As he swung back into the

face and dug in with his crampons, Scot promised himself that very soon he'd take

that long overdue vacation.

23

Back in the helicopter, Scot accepted Vance and Nick's excuse for letting so much

slack on the safety line escape. He also

decided not to punch both of their lights out.

As Vance explained it to Scot while he lay exhausted yet safely supine back upon the

ridge, Scot's slam into the face of Squaw Peak had caused what they all feared, a

secondary avalanche. It was small and came to a stop well before it could cause

harm to anyone below in the valley, but Scot had acted like a magnet for the falling

snow and ice, which piled on top of him and exponentially increased his weight upon

the rope.

Pitons were popping left and right, and both Vance and Nick thought for sure they

would be yanked over the edge. Neither of them ever even considered letting go; that

just simply wasn’t an option. They were able to finally dig in and get control of

Scot’s fall at the very last minute. The burn marks in their gloves attested to

their

courage and Scot's extremely good fortune. He wanted to kiss the guys, but before

he could, a voice from the Deer Valley helipad came over the headset. It instructed

the pilot to return to the pad to shuttle an FBI team to a crime scene in nearby

Midway.

"Midway?" Scot leaned forward and said while tapping Vance on the shoulder.

“That’s just the other side of the mountain, isn’t it? What do you suppose is going

on over there?”

Vance was reading Scot’s mind. He radioed back to Deer Valley asking where the

FBI team was to be taken. As the information was relayed across the headsets, the

pilot nodded that he knew where it was, and Vance pointed for the pilot to go in that

direction.

“Lemme guess. You’re going to take responsibility for this one too?” queried Nick.

Scot only smiled and asked the pilot if there was a pass or anything like that

connecting the area around Death Chute to the farm they were headed toward in

Midway.

“There are a couple, but only one that could be considered a pass in the sense that it

can be completely traversed,” replied the pilot.

“Do me a favor and follow it,” said Scot.

Vance turned in the copilot’s seat and asked, “What are you thinking?”

“Just a hunch.”

“Great,” said Nick, leaning his head against the window of the chopper and staring

up at the ceiling, “another hunch. Let’s see if we can get fired on this hunch, or

better yet, maybe we can actually get killed this time.”

“Not a chance,” said Scot as he placed a

thankful and reassuring hand on Nick's

shoulder. "When the helicopter touches down, I'm getting out and you're going

back to Deer Valley."

"Too bad," said Vance, turning back around in his seat to look out the front. "This

was just starting to get interesting."

Before jumping out of the helicopter, Harvath thanked his friends and asked the pilot

to do him a favor and make sure the FBI got to enjoy some of the Wasatch

Mountains' scenic beauty on their way over. The pilot laughed and gave him the

thumbs-up.

Scot straightened up once he was sure he had cleared the rotor blades and walked

over toward the three Wasatch County Sheriff's Department Suburbans parked in

front of the Madduxes' farmhouse.

"FBI?" said a deputy sheriff as Harvath approached, digging his credentials from his

pocket.

“Secret Service. I’m Agent Harvath, head of—”

“The president’s advance team. I remember reading your name on the memo that

came around about the visit. I’m Ben MacIntyre, deputy sheriff. You working with

the FBI on this?”

“Yeah. Whenever the president is involved or we think there may be some sort of

connection, we tackle these things together,” lied Harvath right through his

teeth.

“Why don’t you fill me in on what you’ve got.”

Deputy MacIntyre removed a small notebook from the breast pocket of his coat and

started reading: “About seven-thirty this morning we got a call from the daughter of

the old couple that lives here, Joseph and Mary Maddux. Apparently, after church

yesterday, they passed up on the normal Sunday dinner at the daughter’s house

because the father wasn't feeling well. The daughter tried to check in with them a

couple of times last night and couldn't get ahold of anyone. She thought maybe

they'd turned in early and, being older folks, just didn't hear the phone.

"So, this morning she tries again, several times, and there's still no answer. Worried

that they might have been in an accident or something, she called our office and

asked if we'd swing by."

“Your office?” asked Harvath. “Why didn’t she come herself?”

“She lives down in Orem,” said the deputy, referring back to his notes. “It’s a pretty

long drive up here, especially with the weather. Plus she works and didn’t think the

boss would let her. A couple of our guys know, or I should say knew, the

Madduxes, so they didn’t mind coming out.”

“*Knew?* They’re dead?”

“Yup, Mr. Maddux was shot close range to the head, and Mrs. Maddux suffered

multiple gunshot wounds.”

“Have you contacted your sheriff?”

“Yes, sir. He’s been over with your people in Deer Valley working that avalanche,

but now he’s on his way back here with the FBI. We also have our medical examiner

on the way as well as a homicide team coming up from Salt Lake County. The

highway patrol and the state park rangers

are buttoning down all the roads around

here."

"Well done, Deputy. You did everything by the book. As I was already in the air, I

was routed here first. Has anyone touched anything inside?"

"Nope, the first officer on the scene had his winter gloves on and only took them off

to check for a pulse on each of the victims. He tracked a little snow inside, but

we've laid down some plastic, so that ought to lessen contamination of the scene."

"Good job. I trust your sheriff told you no one else was to be allowed in until he

arrived with the FBI?"

"He certainly did."

"Good. Make sure you send them in to me when they get here."

"Sir, my orders are that no one gets in until the sheriff and the FBI get here."

"Deputy, when do you think the sheriff called me?"

“He called you, sir?”

“When do you think he called me? Before he talked to you or after?”

“He didn’t know about anything till I called him, so it would have to be after.”

“Exactly, so when the sheriff told you to keep the scene secure until he got here, that

was before he knew I was already airborne and could get here faster.”

“Uh, huh.”

“Deputy, I don’t need to draw you a picture. You’re a smart man. By now

you've

figured out that if the sheriff is coming all the way over with the FBI and the head of

the president's advance team is already here, this is some pretty serious stuff."

"Yes, sir."

"Listen, I've done a lot of advance work in some very out-of-the-way places. Most

of the county sheriffs we work with would make Gomer Pyle look like an

astrophysicist. I'm not blowing smoke

up your ass. Your department does a damn

good job. I don’t want you to get in any hot water with your boss, but I have my

own boss to think about, and he’s the president of the United States. Now, if you’ll

cut me a little slack, I can get started and have a preliminary report for the FBI guys

when they get here. What do you say?”

“I guess so. We were told to cooperate with the Secret Service with anything they

needed.”

“Good man. Where are the victims?”

“Master bedroom. Second floor, down the hall on the left. Do me a favor and wear

these. We want to keep the crime scene as uncontaminated as possible,” said the

deputy, pulling out a pair of paper surgical booties from a box in the backseat of his

truck.

“Thanks,” said Scot, accepting the paper booties and a pair of latex surgical

gloves

while walking up the steps of the house. “I meant what I said. You guys are pretty

impressive.”

A piece of plastic had been laid in front of the storm door, and Scot stood on it

while he took his Timberlands off and slipped on the booties. Snapping on the

rubber gloves, he opened the double doors.

As a nonsmoker, Scot immediately detected the lingering odors of cigarette smoke.

The smell grew stronger as Scot neared the family room. He quickly turned and

walked back to the front door.

Catching the attention of one of the Wasatch County officers, he asked, "Officer, do

you know if Mr. and Mrs. Maddux are Mormon—" Scot noticed a slight change in

the face of the officer and, catching his *faux pas,* switched to the more politically

correct term preferred these days by the Mormons. "I'm sorry. I mean were they

members of the LDS church?”

Pleased that an outsider would show such respect for their faith, the officer

responded, “Yes, sir. Mr. Maddux had been our bishop for a long time. He retired a

ways back, but we still saw him at church and all the functions.”

“I see,” replied Scot. “I take it by your answer that you are a member of the Church

as well?”

“Yes, I am.”

“And you abide by all of the Church’s covenants?”

“I certainly do.”

“So you don’t smoke?”

“No, sir. Never.”

“How about Mr. and Mrs. Maddux. Did either of them smoke?”

“No, sir. I can tell you as sure as I am standing here that they were perfect examples

of what members of the Church of Latter Day Saints should be.”

Harvath turned his attention back to Deputy MacIntyre. “Ben, could there have been

any of your guys smoking in here?”

“No way. Why?”

“How about near the front door at all?”

“Not a one. What are you getting at?”

Without answering, Harvath turned back inside, closing both doors behind him.

He needed to see the bodies. How they were killed and how they were placed would

hopefully tell him something about the killers. The scenic route Scot had asked the

Deer Valley helicopter pilot to take would delay the FBI for only so long. With his

eyes wide open and all of his senses operating at their peak, he climbed the creaking

stairs to the second floor.

Talk about a time warp, Scot thought as he looked down the hallway at the green

shag carpeting. *At what point in the aging process do people just give up*

and let

time pass them by?

At the top of the stairs, he'd noticed a door ajar directly in front of him. Walking

over to it, he pushed it the rest of the way open with his foot. It smelled of strongly

perfumed soap, exactly the way a bathroom in a grandmother's house should smell.

Everything was neatly in place, except for a towel that appeared to have been hung

hastily back on the rack next to its neatly folded twin.

Scot looked into the tub, which was perfectly dry. Next he checked the washbasin,

and it too was dry except for a little pool of moisture around the drain. He noticed

that the faucet had a very slow drip. Scot tightened the handle and the dripping

stopped. Judging from the little bit he had already seen of the place, he knew the

Madduxes kept one neat and clean house. Someone other than the Madduxes

had

used this sink recently and had been careless both with turning off the water and with

hanging the towel.

Leaving the bathroom, Scot made his way down the hall toward where the deputy

had said the master bedroom was. He passed rows and rows of photographs of

family vacations, picnics, weddings, and posed Kmart shots of what must have been

the grandchildren. The whole array was hung in chronological order. What he

assumed were pictures of Mr. and Mrs. Maddux in their youth were at the beginning

of the hall, and the display transitioned into their later years as one got closer to the

master bedroom. Each night they would have actually relived their lives on the way

to bed. It gave Scot an eerie chill to think that the final posing of the two would be at

the very end of the hallway, where they lay in death.

And *posing* was a perfect word for it. Scot entered the room and saw the couple

laid out on their bed. The killer hadn't surprised them in bed, because they were

both fully clothed and were lying on a white chenille bedspread now puddled with

patches of rusty brown. There were also marks along the floor, undoubtedly caused

when one of them had fallen and been dragged and then slung onto the bed.

The damage to Mr. Maddux was consistent with a professional hit: concise, cold,

and accurate. Mrs. Maddux's injuries were anything but. With half her nose blown

away and additional gunshot wounds to her neck, chest, head, and face, it looked as

if someone had lost control or was in a complete and total rage. The gruesome scene

was going to keep the police, the sheriff, and the FBI busy for a while.

As Scot had been flown from Deer Valley to Midway, a theory had formed in his

mind. One of the biggest questions he had, outside of how the kidnappers had been

able to ambush and take out the president's detail, was how they had got away.

Everything he had seen so far served to reinforce that these people were absolute

professionals. Each precise detail had been planned and probably practiced until it

was perfect. Aside from assaulting a structure like the White House or Fort Knox, it

was hard to think of a more daring, more dangerous, or more difficult undertaking

than this. Yet, the kidnappers had succeeded.

The FBI would sweep the room for hair, fibers, and prints and would also look to

see if the killer had left any other sort of clue, such as a note or a distinctive

marking.

Scot was positive they wouldn't find any notes. Psychos who wanted to get caught

left notes, taunting the police and Feds. While Scot couldn't pass judgment on how

psychotic this killer was, he knew one thing for sure — he was professional.

Scot tried to put the killings in context. If the FBI was on their way here, chances

were pretty good that they were thinking the same thing he was. The kidnappers

would have needed a base. The only

way off Death Chute was by foot or helicopter.

With the weather the way it had been yesterday, there was no way a chopper would

have been able to get there. Plus, a helicopter would have made too much noise. The

surrounding mountains acted as one big echo chamber. Only a craft with supersilent

capabilities would have been quiet enough to get in there undetected.

Harvath thought about that for a second,

not yet ready to rule it out. Flying low

enough, a stealth helicopter could have evaded the radar monitored by the Secret

Service agents who had been posted with the FAA in the Tower and Approach

Control at Salt Lake International Airport and breached the protective “No Fly

Zone” over Deer Valley. The sophistication of the jamming device Hollenbeck had

found demonstrated loud and clear that

the kidnappers had access to some very high-tech equipment. But the one element that didn't fit was the human element — the pilots.

Even U.S. Night Stalker pilots, the best in the world, couldn't have tackled that storm last night. In normal conditions, the downdrafts around the valley were amazingly tough to handle. As Scot thought further, assembling a mental picture of the area where the bodies of the president's detail were found, he

realized there

wasn’t enough room to land any sort of helicopter. Scot ran down how it might have

happened. What if the kidnappers were able to get their hands on a helicopter with

stealth capabilities, and what if they could find a pilot crazy enough to tackle the

downdrafts, and what if the pilot was good enough to do it in a raging snowstorm,

and what if he could land in a heavily

treed area that didn't provide enough space?

Would it have been possible? *Absolutely not,* thought Scot. *That was too many*

"what-ifs."

The kidnappers would have had to *ski* down the mountain along a route they were

relatively confident would not allow for them to be spotted and then rendezvous with

some sort of transport that would either facilitate their escape or be an

intermediary

step along the way.

When the Deer Valley helicopter had flown Scot over the only serviceable pass to

Midway, the pilot had told him the other routes would be traversable only if you

brought climbing gear, plus they switched back on themselves often and would take

double, and in some cases triple, the time. When Scot had asked if a

four-wheel-drive vehicle could make it

through the pass, the pilot had said it was

possible, but why would you use a jeep when a snowmobile would be so much

faster?

Reaching the bottom landing again, his nose and the smell of cigarette smoke led

Scot back into the family room. He stood for several moments with his eyes closed,

trying to put himself in the mind of the killer. The Madduxes were not smokers, so it

must have been the killer who had lit up, and more than once. That heavy smoke

smell didn't come from just one cigarette. So, he'd had time for more than one.

Why?

Simple. He was waiting. Scot's mind began to turn faster. *Waiting for what? His*

colleagues, the kidnappers, to arrive with the president. He waited right in this

room and smoked. What else did he do? Scot looked around the room; there were

no books or magazines, but there was a television set. He walked over and turned it

on. After a few moments, the set warmed up enough and its picture popped to life.

Where would he have sat? Harvath looked behind him and spotted what must have

been Mr. Maddux's La-Z-Boy recliner. It had *man of the house* written all over it.

Knowing he was compromising the crime scene, but needing desperately to put the

pieces of the puzzle together, Scot sat down in the chair and extended the tattered

leg rest by pulling on the worn handle. The old La-Z-Boy lurched backward as the

footrest sprang up, placing him in a very comfortable position. *If the killer had been*

smoking, he would have needed an ashtray and a place to set it. He could have

rested it all on his chest as he waited and watched TV, but if he had gone to this

extent to make himself comfortable, why not use the end table immediately to his

left?

Scot scanned the items that sat on the end table. There was a *TV Guide* with a ring

on its cover where a glass had been placed, a few knitting needles that probably

belonged to Mrs. Maddux, a pair of reading glasses, and a couple of coasters.

Coasters? Why would there be a moisture ring on the TV Guide *if there*

were

coasters right on the end table? That didn't seem to jibe with the fastidiousness that

reigned throughout this house.

Scot mimicked smoking, imagining the killer had used a pop can or something

similar for the ashes, and let his left hand trail back toward the table, where he

believed the makeshift ashtray would have been. The movement was difficult. Not

just because of his sore muscles, but because of the position of the end table. The

killer would have needed to rotate his torso and actually look at what he was doing,

or he would have missed his target. Scot thought the chances were pretty good that

he had missed once or twice and jumped out of the chair to test his theory.

Examining the edges along the surface of the end table, he saw a grayish, powdery

dust that could have been cigarette ash, but only a lab would have been able to

tell at

this point. Dropping to his knees, Scot searched along the bottom of the table and

found what he was looking for. Resting in the fibers of the matted orange carpeting

were indeed cigarette ashes. The killer had obviously missed.

Then something else caught his eye. The end table was between the La-Z-Boy and a

long couch. Judging from the wear on the couch cushion closest to the end table,

that was where Mrs. Maddux sat while Mr. Maddux occupied the La-Z-Boy and the

two watched TV. Underneath the couch was something dark and square. Scot

reached under and pulled it out.

He held it up to the light coming in through the window. It was a piece of chocolate,

perfectly square, that had been broken off from a larger bar. It was stamped with a

distinct *N*, which Scot recognized as being the monogram of Nestlé, and the

almost

imperceptible word *Lieber* across the *N*. Conscious of the heat in his fingers, Scot

transferred the chocolate square into his palm and walked across the entry hall into

the kitchen, hoping the Madduxes had some Ziploc bags. He placed the chocolate

on the edge of the counter by the sink and started rummaging through the drawers

underneath. In the fourth drawer he found what he was looking for.

Scot crossed to the refrigerator, took several ice cubes from the freezer, and

dropped them into the larger of the two Ziploc bags. He then put the piece of

chocolate into the smaller bag, zipped it, and placed it into the large bag to keep it

cold. He slipped the package into his outside parka pocket and turned his attention

to the garbage can under the sink.

There wasn't much garbage and nothing that could have been used to ash a cigarette

into. As Scot was closing the cabinet door that hid the trash can, he heard the telltale

signs of an approaching helicopter. Leaning against the sink, Scot looked out the

window above it to see if he could make out the approaching FBI team. Nothing yet,

but they would be here very soon. As his mind raced through what else he should be

looking for, Scot looked down at the dish rack to his left with its three upturned

glasses. He upended them one by one, placing his nose inside and inhaling deeply.

With the second one, his hunch was confirmed. After placing the glasses back in

their original positions and running back to the family room to right the La-Z-Boy,

Scot closed the front doors behind him and put the paper booties in his pocket as he

laced up his Timberlands.

“Looks like the gang is on approach,” said Deputy MacIntyre as Scot finished

tying

his shoes and came down the front steps of the house toward the assorted police

vehicles.

“It’s about time,” replied Scot.

“You learn anything while you were in there?”

“Naw, not really. Pretty much just as you called it. I know it’s been snowing a bit,

but did you fellas find any tire tracks or anything out here on the perimeter?”

“Yeah, some pretty big mothers.”

“Really? How big?”

“Looks like maybe a big rig. Eighteen-wheeler. Came right up to the barn. There

were some others like one of them big flatbed pickups that uses the doubled-up tires

in back, but only singles in front. And some other single-tread tracks behind the

barn, probably snowmobiles.”

“That sounds like a lot of activity, Deputy.”

“Well, in the winter, the farmers get a lot

of snowmobilers across their property, so

that might be where the ones across the back of the barn came from. The

doubled-up tires could have come from any number of neighbors around here.

That's Mr. Maddux's pickup over there and he's got singles, so it wasn't from him.

Those eighteen-wheeler-looking tracks are a little more confusing. The way it was

backed up to the barn makes me think there might have been a drop off or

something."

"Or a pickup. Did you or your men look inside the barn?"

"Nope. We were going to, but that's about the time we made contact with the

sheriff, and he told us to secure the area and hold off on anything further until he got

here."

"Yeah, he was probably right. My guess is," said Scot, gesturing to the incoming

helicopter, "that they'll want to check out the victims first, then they'll look

over the

house, and then they'll start their search of the other buildings. I'm gonna get the

outer search started. After they've searched the house, do me a favor and send 'em

over to the barn, will ya? Thanks."

Scot finished with his most engaging smile and made his way to the barn. He was

walking quickly, while trying not to attract any undue attention. The roar of the

chopper could be heard from just overhead. Scot knew he'd been blessed with more

time on this crime scene than he should ever have had.

Thankfully, the barn wasn't locked, and he was able to slip inside and shut the door

behind him just as the Deer Valley helicopter touched down outside. It took Scot's

eyes a minute to adjust to the diminished light, and while he waited, he filtered

through the mess of tire tracks he had

seen leading to the door.

The snow made it difficult to perfectly identify what had made them, but Scot had to

give the deputy from Wasatch County another ten points. His interpretation of the

tracks was probably right on the money. Casts would confirm things for sure, but

what Scot was trying to do now was create the best picture he could of what

happened.

His eyes adjusted, he walked around the

edges of the large dirt floor, hugging what in

Mr. Maddux's younger days had probably been horse and pig stalls, trying not to

trample on any evidence. The floor was a maze of all sorts of different tracks. Scot

could see that the snowmobile tracks led from the back door of the barn, across the

floor, and stopped at a deep horizontal groove in the dirt floor. The picture was

becoming clearer now. Scot knew that if

the falling snow hadn't obscured them

completely, he could probably open the back door of the barn and find that the

tracks would lead all the way back through the pass, to a secluded spot somewhere

adjacent to Death Chute.

Suddenly, the barn was awash with light. It fell across his shoulders and landed on

the floor in front of him. That light, coupled with a cold wind on the back of his

neck, told Scot the FBI had decided to

take up their investigation of the barn more

quickly than he'd thought they would. Without turning around, he knew exactly who

was standing behind him.

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"Only if this farm had a woodshed would there be a more appropriate place for me

to tan your hide," came the voice of the FBI's number two man, Gary Lawlor, who

was standing between the open barn doors. “Just what the hell have you been

doing?”

Before turning to face him, Scot slipped off the latex gloves and shoved them inside

his parka.

“You can hand those goddamn gloves right over to me. That way I won’t leave any

fingerprints, and when they find your body, they won’t be able to link it to me.”

“Gary, just wait a second,” began Harvath.

“First of all, this isn’t a fucking social call, Agent Harvath. You address me as

Deputy Director or Agent Lawlor, you understand me? And secondly, *‘wait a*

second’? How dare you tell me to wait a second, boy? Who the hell do you think

you are?”

“Do you want me to answer that, or are you just going to run right over what I have

to say?”

“Shut up.”

“There’s my answer.”

“You know what, Scot? You’re a real wiseass. That’s always been your problem.

You’re a great operative, but your mouth gets in the way too often. It’s beyond me

how you ever made it through the Navy, especially the SEALs.”

“I guess that recommendation from the special agent in charge of the San Diego FBI

field office went a long way.”

“It must have. I don’t know what I was thinking when I wrote that for you.”

“You did it because you knew that’s where I wanted to be. You knew I had certain

talents and that they could teach me things that—”

“Yeah? Really? Did the Navy teach you that it was okay to assault a federal officer?

Did they teach you that it was okay to trespass on not one, not two, but three

secured FBI crime scenes and, while you’re on one of them, start an avalanche

that

not only would bury potentially critical evidence, but might also endanger the lives of

hundreds of rescue workers and investigators down below? And while I'm at it,

what are you, in the fucking tour business now? If it hadn't been for the sheriff

knowing where we were going, that fucking helicopter pilot would have gone by way

of New Jersey to get here. I *know* you

had something to do with that."

"Jesus, Gary. I lost at least thirty men. Good men. All on my watch. I was

responsible for each and every one of those guys. Most of them have families. What

do you expect me to do?"

Lawlor's incredulous voice rose to a level that could be heard well outside the barn.

"What would I expect *you* to do? I would expect you to honor the oath you took to

uphold the laws of this country. That's what I would expect you to do!"

Scot stood and stared at Lawlor. Of all people, this was someone he'd thought

would understand him, understand what he was doing. After Scot's SEAL instructor

father was killed in a training exercise, Gary Lawlor, a longtime friend of the family,

had become like a second father to him. While they didn't always see eye to eye on

things, Scot felt Gary should at least cut

him slack because of their history.

The problem Lawlor had right now went far beyond their relationship, though. Scot

needed to be put back in line. His voice calmer, Lawlor said, “Scot, you’re in a lot

of trouble. Do you understand that? You’ve completely thrown the book out the

window.”

“What would you be doing in my place?”

“Damn it, Scot, are you that thick? We’re not talking about me, and we’re not

talking about the realm of possibilities. We’re talking about what you have done and

the trouble you’re in.”

“Let me ask you a question.”

“You do realize the president has been kidnapped and I have absolutely no time for

this?”

“How did you nail the guys from the

Scripps bombing? Did you do it by your

precious book that you seem to place above everything else?”

Scot had just touched a very deep and painful nerve. Harvath was referring to a

standoff at the Scripps Howard Institute in La Jolla, California, over ten years ago,

when Gary was in charge of the FBI’s San Diego field office. A radical group had

taken over the facility and were holding several of its staff hostage. When the FBI’s

Hostage Rescue Team assaulted the building after a weeklong standoff, they weren't

prepared for what they found inside.

The strength of the terrorist group was twice what they had expected, and the

terrorists had anticipated every route the FBI would take in assaulting the building.

All of those areas were rigged with charges. Men that weren't mowed down by

automatic weapons fire were blown to pieces by the explosives.

Lawlor was the type who would never ask men to do anything he wouldn't do

himself. He had been on the winning side of several high-profile kidnappings, raids,

and assorted tougher-than-hell cases before and since the Scripps incident, but he

could never shake the feeling that somehow he should have known what was waiting

inside that building for the HRT team.

It had taken Lawlor three years, but he had managed to track down every single

member of the radical group responsible for the planning and execution of the

Scripps Disaster, as it became known. Some of the perpetrators came in peacefully,

some needed to be coerced, and some went out with guns blazing, but Lawlor's

bullets always found their targets first.

Several of the group's members fled the country, foolishly thinking they would be

beyond FBI's grasp, but Lawlor still found them. Money and time were no object.

Lawlor had made an impassioned plea to the government that it must be a priority to

bring these people to justice and that he must be in charge of doing it. Scot knew

Lawlor broke more than a few laws and trampled upon more than a few civil rights

along the way, but he got the job done. It was precisely that feeling of responsibility

that Scot was trying to evoke in Lawlor.

Gary snapped to, realizing he had been drawn into a place in his mind he didn't

want

to be.

“That was a long time ago, and it has no bearing whatsoever on what is happening

now,” he said.

“So, do as I say, not as I do? Jesus, Gary, it’s a shame you never had kids. You’ve

got all the good parental lines down pat.”

“You don’t know when to quit, do you? The SAC of our Salt Lake office wants

your ass bronzed and hanging above his desk for coldcocking one of his men."

"The guy deserved it."

"That doesn't matter. You still assaulted a federal officer and it happened on my

playing field in my investigation. Plus, there's all the other crap you've pulled. Not

only is your behavior way out of line, but according to the medical report I read on

you, you shouldn't have even gotten out of bed this morning."

“Gary, come on. You know how important this is.”

“You bet I do. I’m the one who has to feed the hourly reports back to Washington

so the director can brief the vice president. If nothing else, you should know the

importance of being a team player.”

“Yeah, but I belong on the field, not on the bench. I was responsible for those men,

and I am ultimately responsible for the president. You’ve lost guys before,

Gary.

You've gotta know how that feels… how I feel."

Lawlor had had enough. "You know what? Trying to pull my chain is going to get

you fucking nowhere, pal. Understand me? What happened at Scripps was a long

time ago. How I cleaned it up was also a long time ago. I was operating under a

federal directive that you don't have the clearance or the need to know anything

about. I have made a lot of mistakes in my life, and one of them was thinking I could

talk some sense into you and help get your ass out of the fire, but you keep on

pushing me."

Scot was growing equally angry and fired right back at Lawlor, "*Pushing you?* So

this is about you now? For as long as I've known you it's all been about you."

"That's not true, and you know it."

"Where do you think my life and career

are going to be when the dust finally settles

on this? Have you given any thought to that?”

“At this point, that’s not my problem, but I can tell you that you’re not making

things any easier on yourself with all of this fucking around.”

“That’s what you think I’m doing? *‘Fucking around?’* What’s *‘fucking around’* is

sitting on our asses for hours, burning precious time waiting for you to get here so

the investigation can be carried forward. That was a colossal fuck around."

"You know what? You've just stepped on my very last nerve. You don't know

when someone is trying to give you a hand, do you? I'm going to spell it out for

you, and you damn well better listen. We are effective because we are organized. I

don't care how many movies you watch. The rogue cowboy never helps get

anything done. He screws up the entire works. It is through cooperation,

specialization, and division of the investigative labors that any investigation

succeeds. It is not the efforts of one man that count, but of hundreds, sometimes

thousands. When you go off half-cocked because you don't like how things are

going, you not only screw things up, as in any evidence we might have been able to

uncover on Squaw Peak, but you are turning your back on your team.

"When you turn your back on your team, you forgo the rights and associations

thereto. Now, I can understand how you're feeling, but that does not, for one single

moment, excuse your behavior. You have broken the law, and, on top of your other

problems, you might have to face the music on some serious charges. You think you

were fucked before? Well, any compassion that might have been available to you

because of your heroic efforts in saving the president's daughter have been thrown

right out the window, by none other than you yourself.

“I can see your mind working, and I’m going to tell you right now, Scot, to keep

your big mouth shut. I’m telling you for your own good. You might still have a

career that’s salvageable, but if you step out of line one more time, I guarantee you I

will personally see that you get every single thing that’s coming to you. Do you get

me? And don’t open your mouth to say yes. You just nod your head.”

Anger burned within every pore in his body like acid, but slowly, reluctantly, Harvath

nodded his head.

“Good,” said Lawlor, who turned and walked out of the barn. Waving to get the

attention of Deputy MacIntyre, he yelled, “I need one of your men to drive Agent

Harvath back to the Secret Service command center at Snow Haven. I have had

about all the investigative help from him that I can stand. And, while I’m thinking of

it, absolutely no stopping for *anything.”*

Back in Deer Valley, FBI Agent Zuschnitt, feeling the vibration of his pager, looked

at the display and then fished in his pocket for quarters. He could have used his cell

phone, but this was yet another call he didn’t want traced back to him.

25

Scot fumed all the way back to the command center. The hypocritical bullshit

Lawlor was shoveling was too much. He knew damn well that Lawlor probably

bowed, bent, and broke every rule in the book during his search for the people

responsible for killing his fellow FBI agents. Nobody blamed him at all, and knowing

Lawlor, nobody probably even dared to stand in his way.

In all fairness to Gary, Scot understood that there was a chain of command and a

way things needed to be done for the sake of effectiveness. He'd been in the Navy,

after all. But, the unassailable fact here was that Scot had lost at least thirty men and

the president was missing. No matter what Lawlor said, Scot's career was in his own

hands and the only thing that would turn the tide in his favor was if he stumbled

upon something that broke the investigation wide open.

He'd assembled a few clues, but nothing earth-shattering. Lawlor wouldn't listen to

him at this point anyway, so he was back

where he'd started — on his own.

Harvath hopped out of Deputy MacIntyre's Suburban before it had even come to a

stop and, flashing his credentials at the gate, was shown through. He made his way

to the Winnebago and bounded up the stairs, hoping to find Palmer inside. She was

in back, working at the same table Longo had been at earlier.

Glancing up from her laptop, she saw Scot coming down the narrow hallway.

“Well,

someone’s been a busy boy today.”

“Very funny.”

“Who’s being funny?”

“Yuk, yuk, yuk… Any news?”

“We got a couple of breaks.”

“I’m all ears.”

“Well, we got a confirmation back on the Middle Easterner. Name’s Hassan Useff.

The Mossad ID’d him. He was a

freelance sniper who worked for many of the

pro-Palestinian-liberation groups, in particular some of the more radical splinter

factions of the PLO. He had been tied to several high-profile assassinations in

Israel."

"Hmmm," said Scot. "Well, that does and doesn't make sense."

"What do you mean?"

"The weapon he was found with was a Skorpion. It makes sense in that the

Skorpion is one of the preferred weapons of the PLO, but it's predominantly a

defensive weapon. The long-range accuracy isn't that good. And because it's so

small, on fully automatic it's more of an S and P."

"S and P?"

"Sorry, it's a term from my past. *S and P* means 'spray and pray.' The Skorpion

cuts a wide swath when it's set to full auto, and the shooter just sprays bullets and

prays he hits his target. You know, a room broom."

"But what if it wasn't set on fully auto?"

"Well, it can hold a ten-to-twenty-round magazine, but why wouldn't a sniper use a

more accurate and dependable weapon?"

"Maybe he had one and his buddies took it with them."

"And, what, left him with a weapon that screams PLO? It doesn't make sense." Scot

took a seat next to Agent Palmer as his eyes glazed over in thought.

“When you were in the SEALs, didn’t you ever carry any American-made

weaponry?”

His mind half on what Palmer had said and half somewhere else, Scot answered, “It

depended on the mission, but we would never leave one of our men or any of our

equipment behind. In and out without trace was our M.O.”

“You know, I once dated a SEAL, and if

he had applied the same policies to my

bathroom, instead of leaving behind a minefield of wet towels and toilet seats in the

up position, we might still be together." Palmer laughed, trying to help lift the intense

mood Scot had slipped into, but it didn't work.

"You like chocolate, right?"

"Show me a woman who doesn't," answered Palmer.

"And all that stuff you brought back from

your trip to Europe last year—”

“You mean the chocolate that I brought back and left in the duty room at the White

House that you piglets wolfed down and didn’t even leave me a piece of?”

“Yeah, that would be the chocolate I’m talking about.”

“What about it?”

“Where’d you get it? I mean, did you buy it at the duty free, or did you go to

specialty shops?”

“Let me see. I kind of bought it all over. I was traveling by train on one of those

Eurail passes, and it was nice to have it to snack on. I just picked it up here and

there.”

“Any place in particular?”

Palmer tried to jog her memory. “I started my trip in Belgium, and since they’re

really known for their chocolate, I think I bought a good supply at a shop across the

street from the train station. That lasted

me through France, and when I got to

Austria, I picked up some Mozart's Balls."

"'Mozart's Balls'?"

"When you say it in German, it's not as dirty."

"And, after Austria?"

"Ah, let me think, after Austria… Oh, yeah. After Austria, I went to Switzerland.

They are really famous for chocolate, but I think it's more like milk chocolate they're

famous for. The Belgians do lots of fancy things with chocolate, but not so much

the Swiss. The Belgians would put chocolate on a cheeseburger and try to sell it,

while the Swiss really seem to like milk chocolate bars. Next, I went to Italy and they

had those awesome Baci Balls—”

“Sorry, back up a sec.”

“What?”

“About the Swiss. Nestlé is a Swiss

chocolate maker, right?”

“Yeah. They make Nestlé Crunch bars and I think that Coffee-mate creamer stuff.”

“Right, those are a couple of the products we have here in the States, but what about

in Europe?”

“In Switzerland, they make tons of different products. They make chocolate, but

they also make things like baby food.”

“Let’s stick with the chocolate.”

“Fine, from what I saw in Switzerland, there were lots of different varieties of Nestlé

chocolate.”

“And if they were going to import, or try a particular brand here in the U.S., they

would probably give the chocolate a name in English, right?”

“Maybe, maybe not.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Take something like Toblerone or Baci, neither of them changed their names when

they exported to the U.S. from Europe. But those are one of those deals where the

European company has built its entire identity around that one brand. The identity *is*

the name of the chocolate, so they don't change it. If there were a Nestlé product

that was kind of known in Switzerland, but not super famous, I think they would

have their marketing people here come up with a new name for it. Let's face it, the

U.S. market for fine chocolate with

foreign-sounding names has got to be a lot

smaller than the market for something like Snickers."

"That's a good point."

"Hey, I didn't get to where I am by being stupid," said Palmer with another warm

smile. "I'm beginning to worry about you, though. Let's get off this chocolate

subject. I'm sure Nestlé has a web site. It'll either be a dot-com or a dot-Ch, for

Switzerland."

“Thanks, Palmer. I appreciate it,” said Scot, standing to leave.

“Where are you going?”

“I haven’t had anything to eat since that wonderful breakfast you cooked me this

morning. I was thinking about walking down to the restaurant at the Silver Lake

Lodge to grab a bowl of chili.”

“Want some company? I could probably take my break a little early.”

“No, thanks anyway. I need to be alone and get some things straight.”

“I understand. Stick your head in when you get back.”

“Okay.”

Scot quickly shut the door of the Winnebago behind him, so as not to let too much

cold air in and piss off the other agents inside. As he reached the bottom step, he

heard the door open behind him.

Palmer peeked her head around the door. “There was one other thing. There might

not be a connection, but an ambulance was found abandoned on the west side

of the

valley over by the Kennecot Copper Mine.”

“Really? Had it been reported stolen?”

“No, the report didn’t come in until after it was discovered.”

“Where was it stolen from?”

Responding to the shouts of the agents inside, Palmer closed the door behind her

and walked down the stairs to where Scot was standing.

“It was stolen from a mechanic’s shop called Grunnah Automotive. Apparently, Mr.

Grunnah had towed the ambulance in on Saturday—”

“Towed? What was wrong with it?”

“There was a problem with the brake line, so Mr. Grunnah towed it into his garage

Saturday afternoon and told the ambulance company he wouldn’t be able to get to it

until Monday. He was closed Sunday and claims that it must have been stolen

between when he closed Saturday night and when he opened up again this morning."

"How does somebody drive an ambulance that was in such bad shape it had to be

towed to the mechanic's in the first place?"

"Mr. Grunnah says it was fixed."

"Fixed? I thought you said Grunnah told the ambulance company he couldn't get to

it until Monday."

“That’s exactly right. Grunnah says whoever stole it fixed it first.”

“Seems like a lot of work to go through for a joyride,” said Scot.

“For a joyride, yes. But, it’s not a lot of work if you want a getaway vehicle that you

can drive as fast as you want with no risk of being stopped by the police.”

“I’m sure the FBI will come to the same conclusion. Thanks for the update.”

Palmer turned and went back to the Winnebago as Scot made his way up the

driveway toward the security gate and the main road down to the lodge. Passing

through, he saw an ambulance parked adjacent to the driveway. Scot had never

noticed before, but the body of the ambulance was very similar to a truck's, with a

high shell over the bed. Looking down, he saw that while the tires in front were

singles, the ones in back had been doubled to bear the extra weight.

Another piece of the puzzle fell into place, but the picture was still no closer to being

complete.

26

Knowing that there would be a baying pack of newshounds at the bottom of the

road, Scot turned into the woods where he could cut across a nearby ski slope and

hopefully walk the rest of the way unassaulted.

The peace, quiet, and cold air actually did him some good. His mind had been

spinning since he had awakened that morning, trying to assimilate and process

each

new piece of information heaped on top of the last. The break from not thinking was

refreshing. He watched some of the skiers coming down the slope as he walked

along its edge. Though the avalanche had claimed a handful of civilian lives, it hadn't

seemed to stop most people from pursuing the rest of their vacations. Human nature

never ceased to amaze him. People

would ski all day as if they were a million miles

away and then gather around TVs in the lodge afterward saying how terrible it was

that the president still had not been located.

Cooking aromas wafted uphill from the Silver Lake Lodge and into Scot's nose,

sending a signal to his stomach, which started to grumble on cue. Chili in a bread

bowl with a cup of hot chocolate would probably cost eleven bucks at the

midmountain resort restaurant, but so what?

Coming downhill from this angle, he could make out Nick and Vance's office on the

far side of the restaurant. There was another favor they could do for him, but it

could wait until after lunch.

Scot's training had become second nature, and he never entered a room without

scanning it completely, as he did now in the restaurant. He noted each exit, the

placement of the windows, and what was beyond them. Though the large log dining

room sat hundreds of people, he scanned the faces and builds of everyone within his

line of sight. It was habit, and it had saved his life and those of his charges more

times than he cared to admit. Harvath would walk into the rec room of a senior

center in his nineties, if he was lucky to live that long, and size up each and every

potential enemy, his mind engaged in reflex threat assessment.

Grabbing a tray, Scot fell in line behind a raucous bunch of Germans who had raced

to get into the food corral before him. He remembered a story one of the guys on the

Swedish ski team had told when they were practicing for an event in Germany. Scot

had been complaining that at the lift lines it seemed as if it was every German man,

woman, and child for themselves and that more than once he had come close to

punching someone out for skiing right over his skis or cutting in front of him while

he waited patiently for his turn. The Swede laughed and told him that was why

everyone in Sweden called the Germans the *Liftwaffa*. Scott said the word under his

breath as the boisterousness of the men in front of him grew.

When he finally got to the steam table, he

ordered chili in a bread bowl with onions

and extra cheese. Next he ordered a hot chocolate, and when the woman pointed to

a coffee bar across the room with an equally long line, he opted for a milk. That they

would make you stand in a completely separate line for hot chocolate made no

sense, but all Scot wanted to do was eat, so he paid his bill and wandered into the

sea of tables, hoping to find a vacant one for himself.

As luck would have it, a couple was getting up as Scot approached. Arguing about

some problem they hadn't been able to leave at home when they set out on their

vacation, neither heard Scot thank them for the table as he sat down.

He closed his eyes and bent over the bread bowl, inhaling the scent of the chili. With

spoon in hand, he shoveled out a large bite, placed it in his mouth, and leaned back

in the chair to savor the smoky flavor.

“Hi, there. I’m Jody Burnis. Mind if I ask you a few questions?”

It was not so much a request, as a statement. She moved fast and took Scot

completely off guard. The sparkly little blond who jumped into the chair opposite

him uninvited, had *reporter* written all over her. “I’m from CNN, and—”

“No comment,” said Scot as he took another bite of his chili.

“But I haven’t even asked you any questions yet.”

“But you will, and I don’t care what they are. I have no comment.”

“You’re Scot Harvath, aren’t you? Former U.S. freestyle skier turned Secret Service

agent?”

“No comment.”

“C’mon. I’m just trying to do my job.”

“And I mine.”

“You know, you guys don’t own the president. The American people do.”

That was the first time Scot had ever

heard that one. It was patently ridiculous, and

he had to struggle to keep from shooting the milk he was drinking out his nose when

he laughed. “Lady—”

“Please, call me Jody.”

“As I was saying, lady. No comment.”

“What can you tell me about the avalanche?”

“It was made of snow and came from the top of a mountain.”

“You’re real cute, you know that?” she asked.

“And real hungry. Why don’t you go find someone else to bother?”

“Am I really bothering you?”

“Yes.”

The young reporter leaned in close to Scot with an intent look on her face and kept

nodding her head as if she were listening to something.

“Do you have some sort of problem?” Scot asked her. At the same moment, out

of

the corner of his eye he saw the reporter flash someone a hand signal. *She must*

have a cameraman.

Scot turned and, sure enough, two tables back was a man with a Betacam over his

shoulder shooting the two of them talking. Noticing the lav microphone clipped to

her jacket, Scot leaned over and plucked it from her.

“Hey!” she shouted.

“Zip it, lady,” he told her, and then, holding the microphone as close as he could to

his mouth without swallowing it, he began making strange and very loud animal calls.

Behind him, he heard the cameraman yell, and Harvath turned just in time to see him

swat the headphones from his head. The volume at which Scot had been making all

that noise must have been extremely painful.

He turned his attention back to the reporter. “You’ll probably want a release of some

sort, so let me give you one. You absolutely, positively do not have my permission

to use me, my name, or my likeness in any activity whatsoever. If I see my face on

TV or hear my voice, I will sue your pretty little ass and your network for all it’s

worth. Am I clear?” He punctuated his last words by throwing the tiny microphone

back at her.

“Crystal,” she said, rising in a huff and going over to her cameraman. “Gene? Are

you okay?”

“What’s that guy’s problem, man?” from the cameraman was the last thing Scot

heard as the two made their way toward the exit. Unbeknownst to Scot, Agent

Zuschnitt not only had witnessed the entire exchange, but had orchestrated it. And

upon its completion, he quietly slipped

out one of the dining room's many side

doors.

Twenty minutes later, Scot had finished his chili, two large cookies, and another

milk. Feeling satiated, even a little sleepy, he left the restaurant and headed over to

the wing that contained the avalanche control office. The first person he saw there

was Nick Slattery.

"Whoa, hold on there a second, dude. The favor bank *is closed,"* said Nick.

“Hello, pal. Whaddya know?” said Scot with a broad smile.

“What do I know? I know that I’ve had my ass torn off by no less than five people

in the last two hours, four of whom were carrying guns at the time. I don’t know you

anymore, man.”

“That isn’t any way to treat our friend, Nick,” said Vance, who pushed past Scot

and entered the office carrying a cup of hot cocoa.

“Is that…?” asked Scot.

“Cocoa? Yeah,” replied Vance.

“How long’d you have to stand in line for it?”

“Stand in line? *Psssah*. I’m an important guy here. I don’t stand in line for cocoa.

Gimme a fucking break. You want one?”

“I’d love one,” said Scot.

“Nick, would you mind shagging Scot a cup of cocoa? You can leave it on the desk

in the outer office and then take a walk.

I’m happy to help this guy because he’s my

friend and we’ve got a history, but there’s no need for you to be involved any

further.”

“If *anybody* asks, I was getting the cocoa for *me* and then decided to take a walk to

the ski patrol office,” said Nick.

“Whatever you want, man. Thanks,” said Vance as Nick turned and left the office.

“Did you guys get it that bad?” asked

Scot once the door had closed behind Nick.

“It wasn’t pretty, but I did just what you said.”

“What *I* said? What’d I say?”

“To blame you.”

“Hey, wait a second. I said I would take full responsibility.”

“Same thing. I told Nick to keep his mouth shut, and I did all the talking.”

“Do you find it funny that I’m not grateful?”

“Nick needs this job a hell of a lot more than I do, as is currently being evidenced by

the fact that I am even talking to you. Now, I take it you came here for more than hot

chocolate.”

“Yeah, I need another favor.”

“As long as it doesn’t involve the helicopter.”

Scot winced. “That pilot was great. How bad they give it to him?”

“He’s working an oil-rig chopper in the

Arctic Circle" — Vance paused for effect,

looking at his watch — "starting right about, now."

"Get outta here."

"I'm just foolin'. He kept his mouth shut when the FBI guys and the sheriff chewed

him out for taking the scenic route and interfering with a federal investigation. But

when our boss launched into him, he told him to go screw himself."

“You’re kidding.”

“Nope. Technically, the guy’s retired, and he does this job during the season for

fun. He needs his job even less than I need mine, plus he hates the boss with a

passion. He told me to thank you.”

“Thank me?”

“Yeah, says it was the most fun he’s had in a long time.”

“Well, I was glad to be of service. Listen, about that favor I need,” Scot continued.

“What can I do you for?”

“Do you have a computer in here that can access the Net?”

“Of course.”

“I need to use it.”

“Sure, sit right here, and be my guest,” said Vance, motioning to the chair next to

him.

“I need to use it alone,” said Scot.

“Dude, no way. If the boss finds out that my machine has been used to surf the

porno sites, then I am definitely out of here."

"I'm serious."

"All right, I can see that now is no time for levity. How long do you need it for?"

"Probably no longer than a half hour. Forty-five minutes tops."

"I can leave you alone in this office, but I've gotta stay in the outer office in case we

get a call."

"Thanks, Vance. I appreciate it. Do me one more favor, would ya?"

“What?”

“Close the door behind you on the way out.”

27

Considering the ordeal he had been through, it was no wonder Harvath was tired.

Vance could see his friend was not only exhausted, but also still in a lot of pain.

When Scot came out of his office and thanked him for the use of the computer,

Vance handed him his now less-than-hot hot chocolate and arranged for one of the

ski patrollers to take him back up to Snow Haven via snowmobile.

Harvath had the driver go around the outside to avoid the reporters. When he arrived

parallel with the compound, he thanked the patroller as two Secret Service agents

waved him on through to the main house. His fatigue weighed on him. He had been

trained to go for days with no sleep if necessary, but he had also been taught that

sleep was a powerful weapon. Sleep helped keep your mind razor-sharp, and at this

point his wasn't.

As he approached the kitchen door, he saw several agents stomping out cigarettes,

cutting their break short to return inside. Knowing something must be up, Scot

hastened his steps and entered the house not far behind them. Most of the agents

were gathered around a large-screen TV in the AV room.

The TV was tuned to CNN, and as Scot entered, CNN's *Live Special Report* logo

was just fading down and the anchor said a few words before introducing a reporter

in the field. Scot's stomach tightened when he saw who it was. A bad feeling crept

over him, and he let out a low moan that was overheard by several of the agents

standing next to him.

"Thank you, Richard. As you know this country and the rest of the world has

been

holding its breath as the search for President Jack Rutledge continues amid the snow

and ice from Sunday afternoon's avalanche here in Park City, where the president

was enjoying a ski vacation with his sixteen-year-old daughter, Amanda. All of these

efforts, though, may be in vain."

A collective intake of breath could be heard throughout the room. The images on

screen went from Jody Burnis at the bottom of a ski hill with cranes and rescue

equipment in the background, to the interior of the Silver Lake Lodge. The camera

angle showed Jody speaking to a man whose back was to the camera and whose

face was partially obscured from view. Most people watching would not know

whom she was interviewing, but unfortunately, anyone who knew Scot could tell it

was him.

Jody's narrative continued. "According to sources close to and within the Secret

Service, CNN has learned that the avalanche that claimed the lives of over two dozen

Secret Service agents and six civilians, all now confirmed dead, and which has

sparked a massive search-and-rescue effort to recover any remaining survivors,

including the president, apparently was no accident.

“Our sources tell us that the avalanche was created as a diversion in order to

facilitate the kidnapping of the president of the United States. Of course at this point

neither the Secret Service, the FBI, nor the White House will confirm or deny these

reports, but we will of course keep you up to speed and bring you further

information as we have it….”

The chili in Scot’s stomach turned, and he could taste bile. That reporter had used

him, but why? Why him? If she was going to fake an interview with a source within

the Secret Service, why didn't she just use a production assistant or something? If

you were going to stray that far from the truth, what difference did it make? It made

no sense. Had she interviewed him actually thinking he might give her something she

could use and then, after their unpleasant exchange, decided to use him anyway out

of spite?

Harvath walked into the kitchen and poured himself a cup of coffee. A couple of

Secret Service agents who had been standing next to him in the AV room were right

behind him. The expression on their faces said it all.

Scot wasn't about to let everyone think he had cooperated even for a second with

CNN. "That interview was BS. I never told that reporter anything other than 'no

comment,' so don't come in here looking at me like that."

"Hey, Harvath," said one of the agents, "we're not looking at you like anything. We

just came in to get some coffee. That's it."

Scot shook his head in disgust and, taking his cup of coffee, walked out of the

kitchen toward the front door. He needed to check the transport roster and see when

the next team would be rotating out and

going back to the hotels. Ever since the

avalanche, all of the Secret Service vehicles had been reassigned on a priority basis.

He needed to grab just a couple of hours of sleep and then he could start making

sense out of things.

As he walked the snowy path toward the command center, he thought to himself that

the day couldn’t get much worse, but when the command center door flew open and

Gary Lawlor stood staring out at him, he knew he had been sorely mistaken.

Lawlor was flanked by two large men whom Scot hadn't seen before and suspected

were also FBI agents. Lawlor's face said everything. He was enraged but icy at the

same time. It was a frightening juxtaposition. There was no doubt in Scot's mind

that it wouldn't take much to push Lawlor into a full-on explosion. Standing here in

front of all of his colleagues, the last thing Harvath wanted was to be ripped by the

deputy director of the FBI, so he proceeded with extreme caution.

"It looks like you saw the CNN piece," said Scot as he walked toward him.

"Don't you move another inch!" yelled Lawlor, watching as Harvath came to an

immediate stop. "Saw it? Yeah, I saw it. The whole world saw it."

"I can explain—"

"I bet you can, but at this point I don't

care. You have compromised this

investigation for the last time. I told you what would happen if you stepped out of

line again, but you didn't listen to me. You had to do it your way."

"My way? You've gotta be kidding me. I didn't tell that reporter any—"

"I don't want to hear it."

Scot was losing his temper, and he began to raise his voice, "I don't care if you

want to hear it or not; you're going to."

“Not a chance.”

“Agent Lawlor, if you just get ahold of the raw tape from that reporter, you’ll hear

that I said nothing further than ‘no comment.’”

“Agent Harvath, I don’t know what you said while the camera was rolling or when it

wasn’t.”

“But what would I stand to gain by compromising the investigation?”

“I don’t know, Agent Harvath. Maybe

you don't like the way the FBI is handling

this and want to push things along because you think you can do better."

"I want what you do."

"You've said that several times, but you don't want to operate as a team player, and

you don't want to play by the rules—"

"Play by the rules? Do you think the kidnappers played by the rules when they

snatched the president?"

“Agent Harvath, I’ve had enough, and so have your superiors.”

“My superiors? What are you talking about?”

“I have cut you more than enough slack. More than I should have. The little bit of

rope you had left you just used to hang yourself with.”

“Hang myself? But I told you, I had nothing to do with that CNN report.”

“And I told you, I don’t care. As of” — Lawlor looked at his watch — “two

minutes ago, you are officially recalled

to D.C.”

“You had me yanked? I can’t believe this.”

“Believe it. Agents Patrasso and Sprecher here are to escort you back to the hotel,

where you will collect your belongings and then proceed to Salt Lake City Airport.

There will be a ticket at the Delta counter with your name on it. The agents will

accompany you and make sure that the plane takes off with you on it. After that,

you

are no longer my problem."

Scot knew he was grasping at straws, but he tried anyway. "I'm sorry about what

happened. You're right. This needs to be a team effort. I was just out of it, but I'll

pull it together. This is your investigation, and I will respect that. I've already come

up with several theories that I think are worth taking a look at, so why don't we __"

“Too late. I warned you, and *you* didn’t listen. It’s out of my hands.”

Really reaching, Scot went for the medical angle. “I haven’t gotten my CT and MRI

scans yet with Dr. Trawick. We’re supposed to do it tomorrow afternoon and then

he can clear me to travel.”

“Screw Dr. Trawick. *I’m* clearing you to travel. If you can beat the stuffing out of

one of my agents, rappel down a sheer rock face, commandeer a helicopter and fly

to Midway, plus give CNN interviews, then you're fine to travel."

"I told you, I didn't say anything to that reporter."

"And I told you, I don't care. Patrasso and Sprecher are going to take you to get

your things, and then you are going to the airport and getting on the next plane to

D.C. What you do once you're there is somebody else's problem. Now, get out of

here," Lawlor said, turning and going back into the command center.

Scot looked from Patrasso to Sprecher and realized they were a pair it probably

wouldn't be wise to mess with. He had a feeling Lawlor had instructed them to use

any means necessary to get him on that plane. Frankly, he was too tired to try to

resist.

What is the name of your hotel? had been one of Dr. Trawick's memory questions

the night before. Even seeing the hotel's name now, on the big sign outside, didn't

ring any bells. He really had hurt his head.

Patrasso and Sprecher accompanied him to his room, where he packed, and then

took him to the airport.

The flight back to D.C. was the quickest he had ever had. Despite his headache, he

slept the entire way.

28

André Martin struggled against the laundry cord digging into his wrists, then let his

muscles go limp. He had to stay calm. *Focus on your breathing,* he told himself.

The gag in his mouth tasted like shoe polish, and a strong smell of mildew rose from

the stained floor beneath him. All he wanted to do was vomit, but he knew for sure if

he did, he would choke on it and die. He kept reminding himself to be calm. *There*

has to be a way out of this, he thought. It had better come soon, though. The

uncomfortable hog-tie position in which he was restrained threatened to drive him

insane. He closed his eyes and tried to focus on what had happened.

When Senator Snyder had opened the door to the shower, André hadn’t seen the

hypodermic in his hand. By the time he did, it was too late. The tranquilizer worked

extremely fast. Considering the difference in their sizes, deception was the only

advantage Snyder had over his taller and more muscular victim.

In a strange sort of way, had he but known it, this had been André's lucky day. The

senator's schedule was tightly packed, and with all the events of the last fourteen

hours, he didn't have time for any diversions, especially a killing and the requisite

disposal of the body. This was something he wanted time to savor. He also wanted

to know how much his young lover knew.

Snyder didn't have the time to put all of the pieces together then, but lately

something about André Martin had begun to bother him. Call it a feeling. Senator

Snyder put a lot of stock in his intuition, especially when it was telegraphing danger

signals.

Snyder had tried to rationalize his fears, thinking that as he was getting older he was

getting more paranoid, but he knew this wasn't true. In fact, it was quite the

opposite. The older he got, the more attuned to his senses he had become. That

morning, not wanting to appear suspicious, Snyder could glance over his shoulder

only so many times in the taxicab on the way to Rolander's house. Although he

couldn't have proved it, he knew he was being followed.

When he returned home to Georgetown, the entry hall was perfectly dry, but the

mudroom at the rear entrance to the house was a different story. There was water

there, even though someone had done their best to mop up. Snyder knew that

person could only have been André Martin.

Snyder was also sure André had been listening in on his phone call with Agent

Zuschnitt. When he'd hung up the phone, he had done so by depressing the switch

hook so he could place another call to his office. André had not been fast enough in

replacing the handset in the upstairs bedroom, and Snyder had heard him hang up.

Those two pieces of evidence were enough to seal Martin's fate.

From inside a false champagne split stored in the wet bar fridge of his den, Snyder

removed the hypo and its potent drug. Minutes later he was at the shower door.

With the thick steam and Snyder's quick moves, André never had a chance of

avoiding the needle.

Like a cat playing with a mouse, Snyder couldn't deny himself the opportunity of

toying with André. While he waited for the drug to take full effect, he asked him why

he had followed him and why he had listened in on the phone call. To his credit,

André was quite clever.

"You've been distant lately. You seem preoccupied with something or someone

else," said André, his muscles growing extremely weak, his eyes showing his terror

despite their heavy lids. He knew what Snyder was capable of. He struggled to

gather all of his faculties to present the strongest argument he could, but the fog of

the drug was pulling him down with ever increasing speed. “I thought you might be

seeing someone on the side. Why else would you leave the house in the middle of

the night like you did?”

“What I do, my little André,” said Snyder as he yanked Martin’s hair to lift his head

from where it had slumped against his chest, “is my business. I am a senator, you

know, and have very important business at all times of the day and night.”

André tried desperately to convince him, though he knew he wasn’t buying it. “I… I

love you and I couldn’t bear the thought of you with someone else. I’ve always been

the jealous type.”

“Then why didn’t you confront me with it?”

“I was afraid. I wanted to be sure that you were really seeing someone else first. I

didn’t want to look stupid if I was wrong.”

“Is that *really* it? Or do you have another reason for following me? What else have

you seen?”

Snyder had turned off the water after he had injected him, and André now sat on the

floor of the shower stall. The drugged man’s mouth hung slack, and a silvery

stream

of drool ran from the left-hand corner.

The senator slapped him to get his attention. “What about the telephone call I

received this morning? What do you have to say about that?”

André laughed lightly and was mumbling something quietly to himself.

Snyder slapped him again, harder this time. He had used too much of the drug. He

hadn’t seen it work like this before. It

was no problem, though. When he returned

home tonight, his victim would be willing to tell him anything. Of that he was sure.

He tried slapping André one more time. “What do you have to say?”

The mumbling continued, and the senator barked at him to speak up. When he did,

Snyder was enraged.

“A little prick in the shower, that’s all it was. That’s all he was. A little prick from a

little prick with a little prick," said André as he started laughing to himself once again.

Snyder landed a blow to the side of his head, which stopped the laughing, as André

Martin fell unconscious.

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Because Scot had expected to be returning on Air Force One, he hadn't worried

about how he would get home from the airport. As usual, on his departure one of the

junior agents had picked him up at his apartment and driven him to Washington

National, and he half expected to see another agent waiting to pick him up now. But

there was nobody at the gate or outside the baggage claim. Both his beeper and his

cell phone were on, but neither was vibrating to tell him he had a ride waiting. He

knew this was because there was no ride.

Convinced Lawlor was somehow behind

it all, Scot shouldered his bags and walked

to the cab stand. After twenty minutes in line, his turn came and he hopped into a

cab and headed for his apartment in Alexandria. Scrolling through his digital phone

list, he found the number for Big Tony's and hit the *send* button.

The cabdriver waited while Scot went inside to pick up his pizza and a six-pack of

Kirin beer. Tony's had Alexandria's best selection of imported beers and

takeout

pizza. The delicious smell of deep-dish pie rising through the box was a welcome

change from the less-than-appetizing smell that had been rising off his cabdriver.

When they reached his apartment building, Scot paid the driver and asked for a

receipt. He made a mental note to put the ride on his Secret Service expenses. While

he was at it, he'd throw in the bill for the

beer and pizza too. What did he have to

lose? Besides, even a condemned man gets a last meal.

Struggling with the bags, the pizza, and the six-pack of beer, Harvath managed to

unlock the entrance door and push it the rest of the way open with his hip. The

building manager had been collecting his mail for him, but it was too late to knock on

her door now, so he climbed the old wooden stairs to his apartment. *The bills can*

wait until tomorrow.

Reaching the third floor, Harvath turned to his apartment door on the left of the

landing and looked closely at the upper-right-hand corner of the doorframe. Satisfied

his apartment hadn't been entered during his absence, he balanced the pizza and beer

on one knee, removed the hair from the doorframe, unlocked the door, and entered

his home.

Harvath had cleared his voice mail in the cab, but now he picked up the phone and

listened for the stutter dial tone just in case — nothing. A strange sense of calm

descended upon him as he placed his bags in the bedroom and fell down onto the

couch with the remote. He opened a bottle of the Japanese beer and grabbed a slice

of pizza. Every channel, just like the airport CNN TV sets, was running the Jody

Burnis story. Although careful to repeatedly state that no one had confirmed the

kidnapping of the president, they pushed the fact that it hadn’t been denied either.

When they stated that word of the kidnapping had been from a source within the

Secret Service, Scot realized he had lost his appetite and threw his half-eaten slice of

pizza back into the box.

Placing the remainder of the six-pack on the floor next to him, Scot stretched out

on

the couch and turned to the Outdoor Life Network, which thankfully wasn't

reporting anything about the president. Instead, OLN was rerunning a ski

competition from Innsbruck, and he drank beer and watched it, letting his mind go

blank. The last thing he remembered before falling asleep was kicking off his shoes

and letting them fall onto the rug in front of the couch.

At precisely seven A.M. Scot awoke to the building manager knocking on his door.

She had heard him come in last night and wanted to give him his mail. Harvath

figured as long as he was up, he would put on a pot of coffee and take a shower. He

skipped shaving and, after getting dressed, ate the last two Eggo waffles he had in

the freezer. He was out of syrup, so he covered them with butter and honey.

Being part of the president's first team

definitely had its advantages. Not only did

they get a clothing allowance, because the Secret Service had to look good on TV,

but they had better access to some highly sought after specialists in the D.C. area.

One of those people was Dr. Sarah Helsabeck, who agreed to see Scot right away.

Harvath spent the better part of the morning being poked, prodded, quizzed, tested,

and scanned. Dr. Helsabeck remarked on

the incredible bruising up and down his

back, saying it was amazing that the force that caused the trauma hadn't broken any

bones or done any internal damage. Actually, what she really said was, "I would ask

you if you got the license numbers of the trucks that hit you, but if you just tell me

what color they were, a fleet this size shouldn't be too hard to track down." As she

continued her examination and reviewed his test results, Dr. Helsabeck

commented,

“Doesn’t look like anything snapped, crackled, or popped, and there don’t seem to

be any signs of leaking.”

“So, it’s all pretty good then, right?” asked Scot.

“I’m most concerned about the knocks you took to your head. The brain is a very

complicated mechanism. Your films don’t show any bleeding, but I’m still

concerned.”

“Why?”

“Well, for starters, there’s your psychometrics. When you joined the Secret Service,

they ran a battery of tests to establish a baseline for your performance. They charted

things like your memory, concentration, and reaction time. All of which, compared

to the tests we ran today, I can see are impaired.”

“But, Dr. Trawick said—”

“No offense to Dr. Trawick, but his was an extremely subjective diagnosis. Without

the baseline that I have, he was taking shots in the dark.”

“C’mon, Dr. Helsabeck. I’ve hit my head before and I’ve been fine.”

“This time, we don’t know for sure. You’ve suffered a significant loss of short-term

memory—”

“Doc, I appreciate your seeing me so quickly and running all these tests, but can you

just give me the bottom line?”

“The bottom line is this: When you fell, you probably hit your head on something

extremely hard, like a rock, and suffered a concussion. While you haven’t forgotten

who you are, there seems to be some low-grade amnesia, which is what we were

talking about in terms of short-term memory loss.”

“How short?”

“It’s normally things that are new. You

might have trouble recalling things that

happened in the last month."

"Will I get it back?"

"Probably. There may be people you've met recently whom you've forgotten, or

bills and bank deposits you can't recall… that kind of stuff."

"Are there any other potential problems?"

"You might experience difficulty with concentration, and like I said, your reaction

time is down."

"What about physical side effects?"

"You may find yourself sleeping a lot more, or your sleep may be interrupted."

"Great."

"You might also continue to experience the headaches you complained to me about,

as well as some nausea."

"Any other good news?"

"It's not uncommon for patients who have suffered trauma such as yours to

become

irritable.”

“Irritable how?”

“Things beyond your control will frustrate you more than they would in normal

conditions. Basically, your fuse might be a lot shorter.”

Scot wondered if that was why he had decked Agent Zuschnitt, or if he would have

done it regardless of his fall. After a moment of reflection, he decided he

would have

done it regardless. Zuschnitt had been asking for it.

“Is that it?” asked Scot.

“Pretty much. Just keep in mind that all of these symptoms I’ve mentioned can

become more profound with physical exertion. Basically, your brain has been

scrambled and you need to give it, and your body, time to repair.”

Scrambled. You had to love a doctor who put things in laymen’s terms. Not only

did she know how to break it down, she was also a comedian. As he was leaving,

Dr. Helsabeck gave him the name of a good chiropractor she knew. “You’re going

to need him,” she said. Scot thanked her and headed out into the drizzly afternoon.

Successfully hailing a cab in D.C. in the rain is almost impossible. As a matter of

fact, attempting it ought to be classified as an extreme sport. Scot was tempted to

hold up his credentials and draw his gun

on the next taxi he saw, but one finally

stopped and he gave the driver the cross streets of a family grocery and deli near his

apartment.

He walked home through the rain with grocery bags in each arm, wondering why he

hadn’t been called in yet by his boss. Surely, Lawlor had made a big enough fuss

that people would be standing in line to chew him out. His pager and cell phone had

been with him all day, but no one had tried to contact him.

It was all for the best anyway. He was in no mood to deal with anything at this point.

All he wanted to do was get back to his apartment, unpack the groceries, and dig

into his Reuben sandwich.

After the Reuben and a half pint of chicken soup, Harvath thought about calling

Agent Palmer at the command center in Park City to see if anything new had popped

up, but decided against it. He lay down on the couch to rest his eyes for a moment

and quickly fell into another deep sleep.

In the darkness of sleep, he could make out what sounded like the faint drumming of

jackhammers on wet cement. The thudding was soon joined by a high-pitched

screeching that somewhere in his mind he knew he recognized. He lay in a trancelike

state in the warm void halfway between

sleeping and waking until his mind began to

assemble different explanations for what he was hearing, and he felt himself being

forcibly dragged upward toward the surface world of the wakeful.

His pager, cell phone, and home phone were all going off at the same time. Startled,

Scot reached for the cordless phone first.

“Harvath,” he said.

“Harvath, this is Shaw,” said the voice

on the other end of the phone.

Scot sat straight up, trying to shake the cobwebs from his head.

Reaching to silence his vibrating phone and the pager on the coffee table, he

responded to the director of Secret Service Operations for the White House. “Yes,

sir. What can I do for you?”

“The director wants to see you. How soon can you be ready?”

Scot looked at his watch. “I just need to grab a quick shower. I can be ready to

go

in twenty minutes.”

“Fine,” said Shaw. “There’ll be a car coming to pick you up.”

Twenty minutes later on the dot, Agent Harvath was showered, shaved, and wearing

a perfectly pressed dark Brooks Brothers suit under his lined trench coat as he stood

outside his apartment building. By the looks of it, the rain had been falling all day.

Large puddles were everywhere.

Watching his warm breath rise into the cold, damp air he saw a pair of headlights

turn the corner and slow as they approached him. The car Scot had been expecting

to take him to his meeting would have been a typical domestic four-door, like a

Crown Victoria — something that screamed *government vehicle*. Instead, a long

black limousine slowed, and the rear window rolled down as it drew even

with him.

“Get in,” said Stan Jameson, director of the Secret Service.

The door opened, and Scot did as he was told. He had met the director on only two

occasions. The man had aged incredibly since then. *The job must be taking its toll,*

he thought. As soon as Scot was in and had closed the door, the heavy,

armor-plated limo growled away from the curb and headed toward D.C.

“It’s been a helluva couple of days,” began the director.

“Yes, sir, it has,” said Harvath.

A uniformed man was sitting to the director’s right, and motioning toward him, the

director said, “Agent Scot Harvath, I’d like you to meet General Paul Venrick,

commander of the Joint Special Operations Command.”

“Pleased to meet you, sir,” said Scot as he shook the man’s hand. With his broad

shoulders, square jaw, and flattop

haircut, the general was the picture of military

rectitude.

“Likewise, Agent Harvath,” said the general with a strong Louisiana drawl, returning

Scot’s grip.

“We don’t have a lot of time, Agent, so I want to make this quick,” said the director.

“Both General Venrick and I have read your debriefing report, but something is

missing, isn’t it?”

Scot was confused. If he was going to get his ass chewed out and then fired, why

didn't the director have him come to his office? Why do it in his limo with the JSOC

commander along for the ride?

"If you're referring, sir, to what happened with the story on CNN, I was recalled

before I could type up a report and—"

"Son, I wouldn't bother betting a bicycle basket full of cow chips against what any

reporter has to say. Never have trusted them, never will. At this point, I'm not

judging whether you said anything to her or not. Although I'd be willing to guess,

after reviewing your service file, that wherever she got her story, it didn't come from

you," said the general.

Before Scot could voice his thanks, the director jumped back into the conversation.

"Yes, let's hold off on the discussion of where the information came from. It does

seem that there is a leak somewhere inside the organization, and that in itself is very

bad, but first things first. I want to hear your version of events and what you think

happened."

As the armor-plated car rolled down the rain-slicked streets, Harvath recounted his

story. Not knowing if the director had been informed of his exploits at Squaw Peak

or the Maddux farm, he glossed over

them, implicating himself as little as possible.

When he had finished, the general removed a file folder from the briefcase by his

feet.

“Agent Harvath, are you familiar with a terrorist organization known as the FRC?”

“You mean the Fatah RC?” asked Scot.

“Yes.”

“Sure I am. FRC stands for ‘Fatah — Revolutionary Council,’ also known as

the

Abu Nidal Organization. It was classified not too long ago by the State Department

as the most dangerous terrorist group in the world. They were founded in the mid

seventies by Sabri Khalil al-Banna, aka Abu Nidal, and blazed a bloody path across

the Mideast, Asia, South America, and Europe throughout the 1980s. Though the

organization has struck at targets of many different nationalities, if you're a

high-profile PLO member and aren't aggressive enough toward Israel, you move to

the top of their hit list pretty quickly.

"There was some activity up until the early nineties, but after that the organization

pretty much dropped out of sight. Nidal is rumored to be very ill, if not dead

already, and hiding somewhere in Libya under that country's protection — even

though they deny it. For the most part, they've been quiet, and it's been said by

some that they're out of business."

"That's what we thought too, until we saw this," said the general as he withdrew a

newspaper clipping from *The International Herald Tribune* and handed it to

Harvath. "On January fourteenth, the Austrian Police announced the arrest of a

high-ranking Fatah — Revolutionary Council member, Halima Nimer. They grabbed

her as she was attempting to withdraw

about seven point five million dollars from a

bank in Vienna."

"Where did the FRC ever get that kind of money?" asked Scot.

"They have always been extremely well financed. For a long time Iraq and Libya

were two of its biggest contributors, and they have always been very judicious with

their assets. That seven point five is probably only the tip of their iceberg."

"So what does this have to do with

anything?”

Now it was the director’s turn to speak. He cleared his throat and said, “We’ve

received a ransom demand for the president.”

Harvath was shocked. “From the FRC? What are the demands? Are you sure

they’re legitimate?”

“Yes,” continued the director, “we’re *very* sure. There’s no question. Even if there

were, the demands were already en route before the leak to CNN about the

kidnapping. So, we know it’s not a hoax.”

“En route? What do you mean?” Scot looked from the director to the general, who

was letting Jameson run this part of the show.

“This morning, a prepaid Airborne Express pouch arrived at my office. It had the

appropriate routing codes to bypass the usual screenings and get right to me. As the

Salt Lake City Field Office’s address was listed as the return address and its special

agent in charge as the sender, I figured the SAC had come across something that

didn’t make the courier flight or wasn’t

important enough for it. These are copies of

what was inside."

He pulled three sheets from the folder that had been sitting on his lap and handed

them to Scot.

As Harvath looked at the three photocopies, the director narrated for him, "Page one

is, as you can see, a Polaroid photo of the president. You can't tell in the

photocopy, but his eyes are very glassy

and appear unfocused. In his hands is a

copy of Sunday's *USA Today*. You notice the president is not wearing any gloves?"

Scot nodded his head.

"Well, that brings us to page two."

Scot flipped to the next page as the director continued, "This is a photocopy of the

front page of that same newspaper, which the FBI lab has verified has the

president's fingerprints on it. So far, they haven't come up with any other

prints.”

Harvath doubted if they ever would. These guys had been exceptional, right from the

start.

“And finally,” said the director, “a little love note from the kidnappers themselves. It

also is completely clean.”

When he saw the letterhead of the stationery, Scot’s jaw almost hit the floor of the

limo. Knowing what he was going to

say, the director raised his hand to stop him.

“Yeah, the Best Western, Park City. The same hotel that housed half of the Secret

Service. We’re checking into it. The FBI is tracking down the prepaid Airborne

envelope, but I’m not holding out any high hopes for that one. I’ll give you a second

so you can read the note.”

Harvath did.

Director Jameson. How small a man you must be feeling today with the

shame of

the country resting so heavily upon you and your men. After years of America's

meddling in the affairs of other countries, its deceit and treachery has now

returned home, a grown beast, to avenge the many injustices you have wreaked

far and wide. Today is a great day for Islam and one which history shall

remember as marking the beginning of the end for the Great Satan.

When Scot was finished, he handed the packet back to the director. “You must have

had the profilers and handwriting people already rip through this thing six million

ways from Sunday. Any luck?”

“It’s all inconclusive. The Middle East analysts at the CIA have taken a look at it and

say that the phrasing is not consistent with what they would expect from a Middle

Easterner, even if he or she had been schooled in Britain or over here.”

“He or *she?”* asked Harvath.

“We can’t tell. The handwriting people seem to think there are some flourishes in the

script that may suggest a woman wrote it, but then they butt up against the shrinks

who think the syntax is tilted strongly in favor of a male author.

“We’re cross-referencing the handwriting and the word choices through the threat

databases and comparing it to any and all recorded threats against the president

and

the U.S. over the last fifteen years. Because we believe Abu Nidal and his FRC

might be involved, we've sent a copy to the Mossad for their help. Our reasoning is

that the FRC was born in that part of the world and essentially remains a Palestinian

organization at heart, so the Israelis might be able to shed some light on the

authorship or the subtext of the message, if there is any. The problem is, though,

that

every move this group has made has been extremely well choreographed."

"But maybe not choreographed well enough," broke in the general.

Scot asked, "I don't understand why you tie the FRC to all of this. It could be any

Middle Eastern extremist group. Why not the PLO? I understand the body in Park

City was ID'd as a long gun who worked occasionally for them."

"You're right, and based on the

knowledge you have so far, I'd be inclined to agree

with you," said the director, "but I told you that we had received demands."

The director pulled a microcassette recorder from his inside breast pocket. "This

call came into the FBI and was received at approximately eleven-thirty eastern time

today. I think you'll recognize one of the voices. The other was encrypted to

disguise it, and the NSA is still trying to tear it apart. What's interesting is that

the

caller bypassed the switchboard and got right in on a direct line."

At this point, nothing about the kidnappers was surprising Harvath.

Jameson pressed the *play* button, and after several seconds of static hiss, they heard

the voice of Gary Lawlor. "Lawlor."

"Is this Deputy Director Lawlor?" came the cyborg-sounding voice.

"That's what I said. Who's this?"

A rustling sound could be heard, which Harvath assumed was Lawlor pushing

himself back from his desk so he could make sure he was hitting the correct button

to begin the trace on the call.

“Who we are is not important, Mr. Lawlor. Who we *have* is what is important. Do

you know who we have, Mr. Lawlor?”

“I’ve had a lot of crackpots call me today. Why don’t you enlighten me?”

He’s doing a good job, thought Scot.

Keep him talking.

"No doubt, Agent Lawlor, you are tracing this call—"

"Now, why would I do that? Traces ain't cheap, and if I traced every call that came

into my—"

"Silence!" commanded the computerized voice. "We have business to discuss, and

I will not have my time wasted with your pathetic FBI games."

"It's your dime, pal. You called me,

remember? Why don't you cut to the chase and

tell me what this is all about. I've got a lot of work to do."

"'*The chase,*' exactly. An appropriate term for what you have been burdened with.

By now you have received the envelope we sent to the director of the Secret Service

containing the picture of your president, the newspaper, and our letter.

"Before we do any serious bargaining for the return of your president, we

would like

a show of good faith from you."

"Good faith from us?" came Lawlor's voice. "What kind of good faith?"

"The United States has imprisoned two Islamic freedom fighters, Fawad Asa and Ali

Amhed Raqim. They are to be released and flown—"

"Daffy and Goofy, the Disneyland bombers? You've got to be kidding me."

"Agent Lawlor, my people do not appreciate the lack of respect you have

shown

these men by assigning these ridiculous nicknames—”

“Listen, buddy, we didn’t assign these guys anything but prison numbers. They

earned those nicknames. They bomb Disneyland, and then one leaves his wallet

while fleeing the scene and the other is actually dumb enough to join a class-action

suit against Disneyland for the damages he suffered from the bombs he himself was

a party to planting."

"Agent Lawlor, I will not repeat myself. The men are to be released and placed on a

plane to Tripoli in Libya. Secondly, the Egyptian government has frozen assets of

the Abu Nidal Organization in cash and property worth over four million dollars U.S.

These are to be released immediately. Once you have met these conditions, we will

speak again."

“This could take some time. I don’t have that kind of authority. Besides, how do I

know that the president is alive?”

“You don’t. Good-bye.”

There was the sound of the kidnapper breaking the connection, and the director hit

the *stop* button on the tape.

Scot looked at the two men sitting across from him. “So that’s it, then. Abu Nidal’s

people have the president, and they are going to use him to blackmail us into

helping

them rebuild their organization?”

“Not according to the vice president,” said the director. “He’s running the show

now. Once the demand came in, the president’s cabinet met and the wheels were set

in motion to invoke the Twenty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution transferring all

powers to Vice President Marshfield until a point at which the president will

hopefully be able to reclaim them."

"Marshfield didn't waste any time, did he? Has he set up shop at the White House

yet?" asked Scot.

"That was one of his first executive actions," said the director.

"I bet Shaw's having a hell of a time dealing with him."

Though he was widely perceived by outsiders as a savvy political reformer, those

who knew the real Adam Marshfield

knew he was nothing more than a

self-aggrandizing narcissist who had achieved his political success solely through

manipulation of the media and public opinion. The only reason he had made it onto

Jack Rutledge's ticket was that he was well liked by the majority of the uninformed

general public and his presence was considered to give the party its best shot at

securing Rutledge's bid for the White

House.

“As of right now, Agent Harvath, as much as many don’t like him, Vice President

Adam Marshfield is our acting president and commander in chief of the armed

forces.”

Harvath thought he noticed General Venrick wince.

“And of course once word got to the FBI about the package you had received,

Lawlor hightailed it back from Park City,” said Scot.

“Exactly.”

“Director Jameson, how do you suppose the kidnappers obtained the routing codes

to get a package right to your desk and also the direct-dial number straight into

Lawlor’s office?” Scot asked.

“How do *you* think they did it?” the director parried back.

“Unfortunately I think we’ve got a leak and a big one at that. I think this same leak

might have given them the frequencies

we were using so they could jam our

communications while they snatched the president."

"I'd be inclined to agree," said the director.

"So would I," said General Venrick. "Agent Harvath, like I said, I've reviewed your

service record, and it's pretty damn impressive. I know what an asset you were at

the SEAL think tank, and I can imagine how you must feel having lost so many men

on your watch."

"Thank you, sir," said Scot. "I appreciate that."

"What does your gut tell you on this one?"

"Well, General, at first, when they found that Middle Eastern guy face down in the

snow, my gut said there's no way a Middle Eastern group could be behind this.

There's no way they could get the amount of personnel and equipment they would

need into Utah without being noticed."

"Why do you say that?" asked the general.

"Sir, I saw three African-Americans the entire time I was there, and they were all

fellow Secret Service agents. Utah's about as white-bread a place as you can get.

The people there notice outsiders. Sure, there's a couple of growing minority

communities in Salt Lake City, but Middle Easterners would stick out like a sore

thumb."

"Apparently, there was at least one. We've got his body to prove it," said the

director.

"Yeah, but now he bothers me even more. Here we find this guy dead with a

Skorpion next to him. He's a PLO long gun, and he's found with a weapon that

pretty much screams *Liberate Palestine* right from the get-go. It doesn't fit. I mean,

if he's going to do that, why not have him in *'I love Yasser'* undies? Besides, I

can

think of a hundred better offensive firearms he could have been using, none of which

would have connected him to the Middle East."

"But, Agent Harvath, if you take one look at the man and can see he's Middle

Eastern, what difference does the Skorpion make?" asked the general.

"Maybe it makes no difference at all. Why would the people on his team leave him

behind? They must have known we would be able to ID him quickly and be on their

trail," said Harvath.

"But," interjected the director, "it did take us a while to dig his body out from the

avalanche."

"It's all true and it all makes sense, but you asked me what my gut says and it says

there's no way a Middle Eastern group pulled off something this complicated."

“Agent Harvath, isn’t that a little prejudiced?” asked the general.

“PC or not, Middle Eastern groups, including Abu Nidal’s, are not tacticians. They

walk into nightclubs strapped with explosives, plant car bombs, spray crowded

markets with machine-gun fire, and fly hijacked planes full of fuel into buildings.

Plain and simple, they’re cowards. They won’t confront anyone on a one-to-one

basis. They don’t have the savvy or the

courage to do in-your-face operations."

"Suppose, just for a moment," offered the general, "that the reason Abu Nidal and

the FRC have disappeared for so long is because they have been training for this

exact scenario. One of the biggest coups in the history of terrorism — something

right up there with September eleventh."

"I don't buy it. Not for a second. This kind of training would have involved years of

working in cold climates practicing

skiing, mountaineering, and winter warfare

tactics. To train and outfit a crew from the ground up on something like this would

have been exorbitantly expensive."

"The FRC has a lot of money," countered the director.

"Supposedly. All I've heard is that one of their people got caught in January trying

to pull out seven point five million dollars and that the Egyptians have got another

four that belongs to them. So, that's eleven point five they couldn't lay their hands

on.

"That Korean jamming system, the ability to get inside information, the wherewithal

to pull it off… I think we're dealing with something and someone completely outside

the realm of Middle Eastern terrorism."

"But why would the kidnappers send a note like this," said the director, waving his

photocopy, “making demands for the release of two convicted Islamic bombers

with suspected FRC ties and the unfreezing of Abu Nidal’s assets?”

“It doesn’t make any sense,” acknowledged Harvath. “But if it was the FRC, how

could they have recruited a known PLO sniper, even if he has been freelancing, when

the FRC has killed some of the PLO’s most important members? Maybe the sniper

was turned — I don't know — but it creates more questions than it answers, and

that makes me nervous."

"Me too," said the general. "How about you, Stan?"

After shoving the photocopy of the kidnappers' note back into his folder, Director

Jameson began massaging his temples. "Yeah, I'm nervous. The neatness of some

of it is what scares me. I'm beginning to think tonight might not be such a good

idea."

"What might not be such a good idea?" asked Harvath.

"The FBI trace on that phone call today locked up. We got a fix on the location of

the caller, but God help us if this is wrong," said the director.

"I don't understand," said Harvath.

The general took a deep breath. "Vice President Marshfield, in accordance with the

United States' position of no negotiating

with terrorists, has green-lighted a Special

Ops team to attempt a rescue. We're on our way to the situation room at the White

House. The mission will launch in less than two hours."

"But they couldn't have possibly gathered enough intel yet. They have no idea what

that team will be walking into," said Harvath.

"That's exactly what we're afraid of," said the general, "aren't we, Stan?"

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The White House situation room buzzed with noise, most of which came from Vice

President Marshfield's chief of staff, Edward DaFina. The VP had wasted no time

moving himself and his people into the power positions in the White House, and

DaFina had bullied anyone who resisted or resented the changing of the guard. He

was a perfect example of a man who sought power solely to lord it over others.

Because of his background and top secret clearance, Harvath had been invited to

attend a comprehensive tactical briefing with the general. He spent two hours

listening to the general and his staff discuss the makeup of the JSOC team and the

reliability of their intelligence. The insertion and extraction methods were reviewed,

and as the team would be supported by Israeli intelligence, the makeup and

components on that end were gone over

as well.

Several recent security and communications enhancements at the White House made

it possible to use the situation room as a command-and-control center for the

mission. Using the sit room, as it was known, meant that not only could the vice

president preside at the head of the table in the high-backed leather chair reserved for

the president, but all of the players would come to him. The idea of getting

the

Washington establishment used to seeing him in power greatly appealed to

Marshfield's ego, and so he was adamant that the main command center for

observing the operation be the White House.

The directors of the FBI, CIA, and Secret Service had grudgingly agreed, only with

the caveat that NSA and CIA headquarters be kept available on open lines. If the

satellite picture went down, the consensus among those truly in the know was that

the White House's redundant backup systems were not entirely fail-safe and might

not be something to count upon.

As Harvath entered the sit room behind General Venrick, he quickly glanced around,

assessing those assembled. The aforementioned directors of the various agencies

were present, accompanied by their

aides. JSOC brass who hadn't shuttled to the

Mediterranean to be on-site were in attendance. Harvath was well acquainted with

several of those present, and he nodded in their direction as he caught their eyes.

There were also other military and governmental personnel present whom no one

bothered to introduce.

Scanning the long cherry-wood table, Harvath saw Gary Lawlor and at first thought

the comment that rang out from that end of the room had come from him.

“What the hell is he doing here?” asked the voice.

As Scot focused upon a group of people who were not seated, General Venrick

said, “I believe Agent Harvath can be of service to us in this operation, and I have

asked him to join us.”

“From what I hear, the only person Agent Harvath seems to be of service to is

himself, that is, when he is not being of service to CNN. And he was considered

such an impediment that our own deputy director of the FBI had to have him

removed from the case." The man stepped away from the group and leaned on the

far end of the table. Scot could see him clearly now, Edward DaFina.

Director Jameson piped up before anyone had a chance to respond. It was obvious

that there was no love lost between the two. "That is all still under

investigation,

DaFina, and you know it."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but the Secret Service did succeed in losing the

president, didn't it? I mean, that's why we're all here, right?"

Scot had never been one to let others fight his own battles. "Chief of Staff DaFina, I

personally knew every single one of the Secret Service agents who died trying to

protect the president and his daughter. As a matter of fact, from what I saw in

Park

City, had I not been retasked to Goldilocks's detail, there's probably no doubt she

and I would be among the dead as well. So considering that you have absolutely

zero idea of what the Secret Service has been through and what we go through on a

daily basis, I suggest you get to the point. If you have one."

Gary Lawlor shook his head and began to massage his eyes with his thumb and

forefinger. He hadn't been able to believe it when Harvath arrived with General

Venrick and the Secret Service director. The kid had as many lives as a cat.

Somehow, somewhere, someone had decided to cut him some more slack, but once

again he was quickly hanging himself with it. Lawlor was still upset about what had

transpired in Park City and was not going to stick his neck out to help defend the

headstrong Secret Service agent anymore. Harvath was completely on his own as far

as Lawlor was concerned.

“My point, Agent Harvath,” said DaFina, warming to the challenge, “is that you and

your agency were charged with a task and you failed. Failed miserably, I might add.

To compound the damage, you tampered with no less than three related crime

scenes and, until I am convinced otherwise, leaked sensitive information

to the

press. *That* is my point."

"This is a bunch of bullshit," said the general. Anyone who had sheepishly been

listening to the exchange, pretending not to hear it, now turned his or her eyes

toward the man who had drawn himself to his full height. "None of this has any

bearing on why we're all here. We have asked Agent Harvath to come along because

of his vast antiterrorist experience and in

the hopes that as one of the sole survivors

of the kidnapping, he might be able to help us shed more light on what we are facing

and what we will do going forward."

"'Going forward'?" asked DaFina. "General, you don't sound as if you believe this

operation tonight will be successful. Why is that?"

"Why is that? It's because we haven't had sufficient time to gather the appropriate

intelligence to mount an effective recovery."

"General, when this whole thing blew, were you or were you not involved in our

strategic assessment meeting?"

"I was, but—"

"General, you were the one person who advocated moving as fast as we could as

soon as we had reliable information to act upon—"

"Mr. DaFina, that's the last time you are going to interrupt me. As far as what I

said,

you seem to have ignored the fact that the word I used was *reliable.”*

Unfazed, DaFina continued, “General Venrick, I don’t know how much more

specific you need your information to be. One of the kidnappers, a freelance Middle

Eastern sniper who often worked for pro-Palestinian liberation groups, was found

dead at the scene. We received proof that some organization does indeed have the

president, and then they asked for the release of two Islamic terrorists with

suspected FRC connections who are being held in this country. When their ransom

demand was phoned into the FBI, we were able to pinpoint where it came from.

What more do you need?"

"What more does he need?" interjected Harvath. "For starters, how about

intelligence that the phone that was used is actually in the same location the president

is being held?”

“Agent Harvath,” said DaFina, “I don’t really care for your opinion, but I’ll answer

you anyway. The Israeli Mossad has assets throughout Lebanon and in particular the

area we’re concentrating on. The Syrian government also has its sources—”

“The Syrians?” It was now the CIA director’s chance to interject. “You contacted

the Syrians without consulting with my office first?”

“First of all, Director Vaile, it was Vice President Marshfield who contacted the

Syrian president, and secondly, I hardly think—”

“No kidding,” said Harvath.

DaFina glared at Harvath, and the CIA director took the opportunity to continue his

attack. “You have absolutely no idea what you are doing. This whole operation may

have been compromised.”

“Director Vaile, the vice president and I

are confident that the participation of the

Syrians and the Israelis can only help this endeavor."

"Jesus," said Harvath. "That's it, isn't it? Not only will the vice president look good

if he can get the president back, but a U.S.–Israeli operation that involves the Syrians

could go a long way on the world stage in helping to begin mending their fences.

You and Marshfield are going to squeeze as much political juice out of this thing as

you can."

"Agent Harvath, you are way out of line," barked DaFina.

"Am I? I don't think there's a person in this room who isn't well aware that the

president seriously doubts whether he will run for a second term. This whole thing

stinks. This is a half-assed game to you, and you're asking good men to put their

lives on the line for it."

"Agent Harvath, you sound as if you don't want the president to be

recovered,”

continued DaFina.

“*What I want* is for the president to be recovered, but with no further American

lives lost in the process.”

“A commendable goal that I think we can all agree with. Good evening all,” said

Vice President Marshfield as he strutted in.

A chorus of “Good evening, Mr. Vice President” rang throughout the sit room. The

assembled men and women took their places around the table, and as expected, the

vice president sat at the head in the chair that had always been reserved for the

president himself.

“Gentlemen,” the vice president began, “I know we are on a tight schedule, so I

think it’s best if we turn this over right away to General Venrick, commander of the

Joint Special Operations Command. General?”

The general stood. “Thank you, Mr. Vice President. As you all know, the

intelligence we have been able to gather thus far indicates that the president was

taken hostage by the Abu Nidal organization, the Fatah RC, to be ransomed in

exchange for Egypt’s unfreezing certain assets and the return of the Disneyland

bombers. Our attempts at gaining further intel as to the health and well-being of Abu

Nidal, the group’s supposed leader, have been unsuccessful. What we do

know is

that the call the FBI received from the kidnappers was traced to a building south of

Beirut outside the town of Saïda, or Sidon, as it is better known, on the Lebanese

coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

“According to intelligence provided by the Israelis, this building is believed to be

tied to the FRC organization, though further information than that is not available,

which is troubling."

"Troubling?" said the vice president, raising his eyebrows, his hands crossed in

front of him.

"Yes, sir," continued General Venrick. "The only surveillance of the building we

have been able to run is via satellite, which took us longer than we would have liked

due to retasking and getting it into an alternate orbit. While the Mossad does have

assets in and around Sidon, there has not been proper time to conduct full-fledged

surveillance."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, General, but you were the one who said we needed to

strike fast if we were to have any chance of getting the president back," said the vice

president. Chief of Staff DaFina leaned back in his chair with a smug look of

satisfaction and stared at the general, daring him to defy the vice president.

"Yes, sir, I did say that, but—"

“Are you having second thoughts, General? I am sure you would agree with me that

this is a time for action and not indecision,” said the vice president.

“I do agree, sir, but going off half-cocked can result in the loss of not only lives on

our recovery team, but also the president’s, if he is actually in that building.”

“You have doubts as to whether the president is actually there? Why didn’t you

bring these to my attention earlier?" said the vice president, knowing full well why the

general had not been able to communicate his concerns.

"Mr. Vice President, I tried to contact you several times, but Chief of Staff DaFina

told me you were busy and that he would have you get back to me."

Marshfield looked at DaFina. "Is this true?"

Feigning contrition, DaFina said, "Mr. Vice President, the past forty-eight hours

have been absolute turmoil for all of us. If the general was having trouble getting

through, I don't know why he didn't come to the White House to share these

feelings with you in person."

Incredulous, the general answered, "Number one, I figured if I couldn't get him on

the phone, I certainly wasn't going to be able to get in to see him here, and number

two, I had an operation to assemble." Turning his attention back to the vice

president, he continued, “Sir, even with our most sophisticated technology, the

building in question has not offered even the slightest clue as to who or what might

be inside.”

“And this troubles you because…?” asked the vice president.

“It troubles me because our men will be going in blind. They don’t know how many

terrorists are inside or where the president is being kept, if he’s there at all.”

“Are we going to go through this again?” asked DaFina, pretending to be

exasperated.

The vice president silenced DaFina with a wave of his hand. “General, do you have

any information that suggests that the president is not being held at this location?”

“No, sir, but by the same token we don’t have enough to suggest that he is either.

After lengthy discussion with my staff as well as Agent Harvath—”

“Agent Harvath?” asked the vice president. “Is he now a member of the Joint

Special Operations Command?”

“No, sir, but his past experience in counterterrorism and JSOC coordinated

operations I think more than qualifies him to—”

The vice president raised his hand, this time indicating that he wished for the general

to be silent. “Agent Harvath, do you have something you wish to add to this,

because I'm sure we would all be very interested to hear it, considering everything

that has happened already."

Ignoring the vice president's sarcasm, Harvath stood as the general retook his seat.

"Thank you, Mr. Vice President. I have to admit that I am in agreement with the

general."

"And why is that?"

"There are a lot of pieces in this puzzle that don't make sense. We think we are

making progress, when the truth is, the kidnappers are three steps ahead of us. They

have anticipated every move we make and are ready for it. With the level of

sophistication we have seen on their part, I find it suspicious that they allowed the

ransom call to be traced."

Lawlor's head tilted almost imperceptibly to the left as he pondered the implications

of what Harvath had just said.

“And you enlightened General Venrick with your wisdom?” asked the vice president.

“Everything except my opinion about the trace.” Not wanting to admit that his

constant headache might be affecting his judgment, Scot offered his excuse for not

having come up with this insight earlier. “It wasn’t until I arrived here that this piece

of information fell into place. It just doesn’t feel right.”

“‘Doesn’t feel right’? You want me to forgo maybe the only chance we have to

get

the president back because *it doesn't feel right?* Agent Harvath, despite your

feelings, do we have any information that indicates the president is anywhere else?"

"No, sir."

"And have you thought about what kind of situation we might be in if we pass up

this chance tonight and the president is moved tomorrow to another location from

which the kidnappers do not make any

further phone calls that can be traced?”

“No, sir.”

“And even if the recovery team does not find the president at this location tonight,

have you thought about the intelligence we might be able to gather if we are able to

take into custody any operatives of the Fatah organization who might have some

connection to the kidnapping?”

“No, sir,” said Harvath for the third time. He could see exactly where the vice

president was going with this reasoning. It was drastically flawed, but as he was the

acting commander in chief, there was no way he could be overridden, no matter how

many holes there were in his plan. The deck had been stacked against Harvath and

General Venrick, but it had been used to make a house of cards. It wouldn't take

much to topple it, but by that time it would be too late.

"Agent Harvath, as far as I can tell, you

have not thought this mission and its

consequences out in their entirety. We proceed as planned," ordered the vice

president.

Choking on a response that would only have gotten him in deeper trouble and surely

thrown out of the sit room, Scot sat back down. He reached for the carafe in front

of him, poured a glass of water, and popped two more Tylenols. This was going to

be a very long night.

So far, the JSOC mission was going according to plan. The recovery team

rendezvoused with a small fishing boat off the coast of Israel just after 2 A.M. The

contingent of Navy SEALs had been tasked to enforce a NATO blockade in the

Persian Gulf. Since speed was of the essence for this mission, code-named Rapid

Return, they were the best qualified and most readily available choice for the

recovery.

The dark, humid air hung over the south Lebanese coast like a wet blanket. It was

stifling, yet the team members paid no attention to the heat. Their minds were

focused on their assignment and the role each would need to play for it to be

successful.

Back in Washington, D.C., safely tucked away in the White House sit room, Scot

Harvath knew exactly what the SEALs on that small fishing boat were feeling. Out of

habit, his pulse picked up and the adrenaline began to surge as a quiet

communication was relayed via satellite halfway around the world through the

recessed speakers of the sit room.

“Jonah, this is Ishmael. No bites. We’re headed in,” said the voice of the SEAL

team leader.

“Nothing on the nets either. Hope you land a big one. Happy fishing,” came the

response from the JSOC command center.

Even though General Venrick wore a headset that kept him continuously in the loop,

he had been furious that the vice president had insisted he watch the operation from

the sit room. The general trusted his people at JSOC command, but when it came

right down to it, he was in charge and should have been there, rather than in the sit

room as if it were a skybox at a Redskins game.

The general had explained the codes and call signs to Harvath as they waited for the

mission to begin. With that information, Scot was able to translate the exchange he

was hearing.

Harvath knew from experience that anywhere from one hundred to two hundred

yards out, depending on the conditions, the team would slide over the sides of their

inflatable and into the water.

Unsheathing their knives, team members would rip holes

in the craft, and its heavy outboard engine would pull it straight to the bottom.

Before any wreckage could possibly be discovered, the team would be long gone.

All eyes were glued to a series of monitors strategically interspersed across the front

of the sit room. There were also individual monitors recessed at each setting in the

table. Internal JSOC communications from the command center drifted down from

the overhead speakers. The constant narrative relayed data on the mission's

progress and would be automatically interrupted any time a member of Rapid

Return's recovery force broke radio silence.

Glancing around the room, Scot noticed that both the general and CIA director Vaile

had laptops plugged into the White House's secure communication links.

Undoubtedly, each was keeping in touch with their respective offices through private

means as well. A very smart idea.

Harvath peered at the screens in the front of the room. They were considerably

bigger than the monitor recessed within the table in front of him. Even though he

could switch from picture to picture from where he sat, he preferred the wider

panorama up front.

Each of the SEALs was outfitted with a

fiber-optic night-vision wide-angle-lens

camera that relayed back exactly what was in their field of view. The largest of the

monitors was a flat-panel device showing images collected by an NSA spy satellite

network known as Chaperone.

Chaperone was a highly sophisticated reconnaissance system designed to gather

intelligence and assist in clandestine operations occurring predominantly at night.

Chaperone incorporated night-vision capabilities unrivaled by any other

intelligence-gathering system in existence. As it utilized several overlapping satellites,

“loitering” time over a target had been greatly increased from times past.

The main flat-paneled screen at the front of the room provided a picture-in-picture

view. The largest and most prominent image was of the beach that the SEAL team

was swimming toward. In the lower-

right-hand corner of the screen was the satellite

image of what Harvath assumed was the primary objective, the FRC compound.

When the SEALs made land, they had just under a mile run inland, where a truck and

two drivers would be waiting for them. Secreted in the back of the truck, the Special

Ops team would be driven to within a few blocks of their target.

No one in the room spoke. The chatter of the JSOC command center and

intermittent beeps, presumably from the satellites, had an eerie NASA quality to it all,

as if the group were waiting for a fragile capsule to return from the dark side of the

moon and report in. Scot realized that there was nothing that could be said at a

moment like this. Besides, the general was still in charge and things needed to be

kept absolutely quiet so he could work. He had insisted that was the one condition

he would not compromise on if he was going to be at the sit room instead of JSOC

command when Rapid Return went into action.

The minutes seemed like hours as the SEAL team made their way inland toward the

truck. A monitor in the upper-right corner of the room showed a live picture of

JSOC command. Harvath's analogy of a NASA mission hadn't been far off the

mark. JSOC command looked very

similar to what he had seen of Mission Control

in Texas. JSOC operatives sat at long rows of computer terminals that tiered like

amphitheater steps as they rose upward from the many screens covering the wall in

front of them. Knowing the military's penchant for organization, Harvath assumed

that the operatives would be grouped according to their skills, such as

communications and satellite technology,

with the most important operatives being placed in the very back near the top brass.

Each member of the SEAL team wore a special set of wide-view night-vision goggles. Recently developed for Special Operations Forces, the goggles not only improved the soldiers' field and depth of vision, but also allowed for a small computer screen to be toggled on and off in a preselected part of the goggles. On that screen, a team leader could see whatever any of his men were seeing via

the

fiber-optic camera attached to the top of the goggles, and it also allowed team

members to view any information that their commanders wanted them to see, such

as directional maps or the images coming off the Chaperone network.

Harvath stared at the intent faces of the SEALs shown in night-vision green via the

cameras of their fellow soldiers sitting across from them in the truck. The detail in

the pictures was astounding. The technology Scot had used as an active SEAL had

been mind-boggling, but in the short amount of time he had been out, it had

morphed to such an advanced degree, he almost couldn't believe it.

The narrative voice from JSOC command could be heard in the sit room once again,

and everyone leaned forward into the table.

"One minute to delivery," said the voice.

The small picture-in-picture on Chaperone's screen grew, dwarfing the other as the

Rapid Return team entered an area close enough to the objective that everything

could be seen on one screen.

Entering a street of decaying buildings flanked by the ever-encroaching desert, the

truck slowed. Having used Chaperone to try to scan the immediate area for any

potentially hostile targets, JSOC command queried Israeli intelligence as to their

ground assets posted at both ends of the street. The word came back all clear, and

JSOC hailed the SEAL leader.

“Jonah, this is Ishmael. Time to enter the whale. Over.”

“Enter the whale. Roger. Jonah out,” came the response.

The team leader gave the go command. One by one, the SEALs jumped from the

truck, rolled when they hit the ground, and immediately took cover.

Except for the sound of the rapidly

receding truck, the street was completely silent.

Knowing that police and civil defense patrols were on sporadic and unreliable

schedules, the recovery team did a quick check of their equipment and moved out.

Each member of the team had memorized the satellite reconnaissance photos that

showed their delivery point, objective, the extraction point, and two backup

possibilities that would be used only if needed. Their silenced MP10s at the ready,

Rapid Return's recovery team picked their way through the rubble-strewn alley in

front of them and headed east toward their objective.

Advancing cautiously, the team froze sporadically at sounds coming from the

windows above. Even though the men were disguised in the robes and headdresses

of poor villagers, if any local got a good look at the heavily outfitted assault team,

the alarm would surely be raised.

Dangerously close to the objective, the team, as planned, readied to split up.

Although the Israelis had cross-trained with the SEALs in the past, General Venrick

had insisted they be on-site only for reconnaissance and support if needed. The

actual assault would be carried out by Rapid Return's American recovery team.

"Ishmael, this is Jonah. We are ready to enter the whale. Can you give us a sit rep?

Over."

"Roger, Jonah. Chaperone shows you are all clear."

Too clear, Harvath thought as he looked at the screen in front of him. If the FRC

was hiding the president in this location, it would be much more heavily guarded.

Maybe, though, the FRC thought posting guards would attract too much attention.

What was odd was that U.S. satellites had been able to show people coming in and

out of the FRC building, but had not been

able to penetrate to see inside. These

mud-and-brick houses were nothing for the NSA's peekaboo technology, but the

target building had been shielded with some sort of protective material, impervious

to all the NSA's gadgetry.

As if reading Harvath's thoughts, General Venrick spoke into his lip mike. "Jonah,

this is the Old Man. Are you in a position to ascertain the nature of the whale's

skin?”

The fact that the satellite hadn’t been able to penetrate the building had bothered

Venrick as well.

Speaking quietly into his throat mike, the team leader responded, “Negative. It looks

the same as all the others.”

Checking Chaperone one last time, the general responded, “Jonah, you may cast

your bread upon the waters. Over.”

“Roger that. Jonah out.”

With a flick of his fingers, the team leader sent two members scurrying around the

back of the houses toward the rear of the target building. Two more were sent to the

home just adjacent. Moving quickly and using the shadows for cover as much as

possible, the remaining four members of the squad headed toward the

ugly-crimson-colored door of a house just down the street from the target building.

As arranged by the Israelis, the door was unlocked. Weapons ready, the team

entered the house, sweeping the first and then the second floors. Satisfied that it was

clean, they carefully made their way to the roof. Slowly, the team leader raised the

trapdoor and peered out. Confident there was no immediate danger, he took off his

goggles and took a pair of more powerful night-vision binoculars from his pack.

From what he could see, everything was

quiet. He slid from underneath the hatch

and crawled along the roof to its southeast corner.

So as not to give himself away, he balanced his goggles on the parapet wall of the

roof and aimed them toward the objective. The team's second in command toggled

to the leader's vision screen and, not seeing anything in the vicinity of the objective,

flashed the leader a thumbs-up.

The man known as Jonah retrieved his goggles, crept forward toward the corner of

the roof, and gently raised himself to look over the parapet wall with his binoculars.

The objective was perfectly quiet, not even anyone on its roof. These Fatah guys

were either very confident or very stupid.

Crawling back to the trapdoor, Jonah put his night-vision goggles back on before

signaling the team's sniper that it was all

clear. Squeezing through the tight opening,

the muscular and deadly accurate twenty-five-year-old rolled onto the roof and

prepped his weapon.

He carried a silenced Walther WA2000 sniping rifle, which fired a .300 Winchester

Magnum cartridge. Even without its Leupold night-vision scope and laser range

finder, there wasn’t much the sniper couldn’t hit. With the specially designed

barrel

clamped at the front and rear, the torque from the large bullet wouldn't lift it away

from its intended target. The barrel had also been fluted, further reducing the gun's

vibrations on firing. With its pistol-style grip and customized butt and cheek pads,

this weapon would do very nicely if anybody chose to come snooping around while

operation Rapid Return was in progress.

Jonah and his two remaining team members were to make the frontal assault. Exiting

the house where they'd left their sniper, the men picked their way down the deserted

street, breathing a little easier knowing they were under the watchful and protective

eyes of one of the best long guns the SEALs had ever trained.

The key elements of the mission were speed, surprise, and overwhelming force. As

Jonah and his men neared the target building, all of its shutters were drawn.

Adjusting the fine tuning on his goggles, Jonah looked up toward the flat roof and

noticed that there were indeed sheets of what looked like lead protruding along the

edges, covered with plaster and mud. Confident that the right people back in D.C.

had seen what he had and knew what it was, he and his men carefully scanned the

perimeter. There were no signs of any

intrusion devices, not even dogs.

“Ishmael, this is Jonah,” he whispered, his throat mike perfectly picking up every

word. “It is *very* quiet. Do you detect any motion?”

“Negative, Jonah. You are all clear. Proceed when ready.”

By means of the arched courtyard, two Rapid Return members were able to scale

the common wall to reach the adjoining roof next door undetected.

Resisting the urge to make a joke about what a great haircut he could give the two

team members who had just climbed upon the roof, the sniper kept his

communication to the bare minimum and said into his throat mike, “Alpha, this is

Watchdog. I have you in my sights and you are all clear.”

“Affirmative,” responded Alpha’s leader.

Hearing that Alpha was on the next roof, Jonah said into his throat mike, “Alpha, the

whale's skin may be tougher than we thought. Get over and check it out. I want an

assessment ASAP."

"Roger," came Alpha's response.

Quietly, the two men picked their way across the roof of the adjoining house, wary

of weak spots thanks to a training story of an operative who fell through a roof in

Panama.

Jonah and his team members stayed

concealed in the shadows just down from the

front of the target building as the other team waited behind it.

Finally, Alpha checked back in. “Jonah, this is Alpha. It looks like the roof entry is

metal, pretty thick, but the hinges are on the outside. With a little bit of give glue, I

think we can breach it.” *Give glue* referred to the small tubes of specially formulated

acid paste that the teams carried with

them on missions where doors would need to

be breached and hinges couldn't simply be blown away. Once applied, it ate through

almost any type of metal in only a matter of seconds.

"Hold on, Alpha," said Jonah. "Bravo, are you in position?"

"Roger. Good to go," came the voice of the Bravo leader.

"Okay then, Alpha. Start the glue, and let us know when you're ready," said Jonah.

Creeping beneath the windows of the house, Jonah and his men made their way to

the old wooden front door. As he'd figured, it was locked, but it would be nothing

for them.

"Watchdog, you got the door in case they don't like Avon calling?" asked Jonah.

"Knock, knock, motherfucker. Just like when we did Qaddafi. I've gotcha covered,"

replied Watchdog.

“Alpha, how are we doing?”

“Almost there.”

“Good, listen up. Just like we planned. Fast and furious. Flash bangs first. Does

everyone copy?”

“Bravo. Roger.”

“Alpha. Roger… And it looks like we are ready to crash the party. On your

command, Jonah. Over.”

The men in the sit room held their breath.

“Okay. On my command. Firemen, take your positions. Pitchers, ready your flash

bangs. We go in five… four… three… two… one. Now!”

In sync, Jonah’s men breached their respective entry points, tossed in their flash

bangs, and quickly followed once the concussions had detonated.

What Rapid Return’s recovery team never had a chance to see was the white-hot

blaze that moments later appeared on Chaperone’s screen as the entire street,

and

the house they had entered, were reduced to dust. The SEALs, including their

sniper, never saw it coming.

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At the same moment Chaperone showed the building exploding, the night-vision

images from the SEAL battle cams disappeared and were replaced on each monitor

with a chilling two-word message: *Off Line.*

The shock and silence in the sit room were quickly replaced by a frenzy of activity.

Glancing up at the monitor that fed a live picture from JSOC command, Harvath

noticed it was chaotic there as well.

Every phone in the sit room was being used by people trying to figure out what had

happened. Scot was closest to General Venrick, and he listened as Venrick tried to

get a handle on things. “… We were able to figure that out from here. It looks

like it

was a very big one. At least one to two square blocks from what Chaperone is

showing us right now…

“First things first. Can we confirm the status of the Rapid Return team?… What

about the Israeli assets on-site?…My God. Only one? Have him get in there and get

a better look…. We have got to get confirmation. If there are injured men there, we

need to get them out…. I agree. We

began to worry about it as well, but it's a little

late for that now…. All right. Get on the Israelis, and get back to me as soon as you

get an update. In the meantime, I want you to roll back the tape on the battle cams to

one minute before they went off-line and feed it back here in slow mo…. Negative.

Until we know what the situation is, all teams are to stand by. That's it. Get going."

The general shook his head in disgust, feeling he should have pressed the vice

president harder to postpone the recovery attempt until they had gathered more

intelligence. Instead, a crack SEAL team had walked right into a trap. His increased

dislike of the vice president was surpassed only by the shame he felt in losing men

under his command. This had been a half-baked idea from the start and he should

have stopped it.

As JSOC command fed back the battle cam images in slow mo, the general used his

com link to give orders to freeze-frame certain images and rewind others. A team of

military experts, aided by the ATF, would be poring over these pictures for months

ascertaining whether there was one blast or several, where the blast or blasts

originated, as well as what type of explosive device was used. But for now,

the

general needed to put together his *own* picture of what had happened.

The images showed that each of the assault teams was able to successfully breach

its entry point and pitch in its flash bangs, hoping to stun any immediate targets with

the blinding white light and concussion tremors they emitted. After the teams

entered, the battle cams showed that they moved quickly and began to secure the

rooms on their respective levels. The cams showed what appeared to be sleeping

men in some of the rooms, but would the kidnappers actually booby-trap

themselves?

Before any of the men could be secured with the plastic riot cuffs that the teams

always carried, there was a bright flash and the cams went off-line. Because of the

need for his vision to be unimpaired while he looked through the night-vision scope

on his rifle, the sniper's battle cam wasn't of much help. His goggles had been

placed on top of his pack, off to his left-hand side. His images lasted for only a few

frames more than those of his teammates, who presumably were at the epicenter of

the explosion. Whatever had been used was extremely powerful. Chances were low

to absolutely nonexistent that any of the team had survived.

In the midst of the chaos, no one noticed

that the president's direct line rang and that

the vice president's chief of staff had answered it until he cupped the mouthpiece

and screamed for everyone to quiet down.

The entire room was taken aback. His face was ashen. "How did you get this

number?" DaFina asked.

Lawlor knew exactly who was on the phone and was the first one to react. He

picked up the phone in front of him and

dialed faster than he ever had in his life.

When a voice answered on the other end, he gave his name, password, and location.

He gave the orders to begin a trace and was floored by the response, “No can do.”

“What?” Lawlor hissed into the phone. “You’ve got to be kidding me. This is a

matter of national security. Now trace the damn call!”

Lawlor’s boss, FBI director Sorce put a hand on his arm and whispered, “Gary,

they can't trace any calls coming or going from the sit room. It's impossible."

"What do you mean, *impossible?"* he asked.

"When the room and equipment were updated, so were the communications. The

lines had to be tap-and trace-proof. Besides, who would have ever envisioned a

scenario like this where a trace would be necessary?"

Lawlor felt impotent. All he could do

was sit and watch. The worst of it was that

DaFina was doing all of the talking.

“He wants me to put him on speakerphone. How do I do that?” DaFina asked, once

again cupping the mouthpiece.

Two button punches later and the cyborg-style voice that Lawlor remembered all too

well clicked out of the overhead speakers.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” the voice

said.

Since the kidnappers had originally established contact with Lawlor, no one objected

as he rose from his seat to walk over to the active phone. As he rounded the table,

Vice President Marshfield held up a hand, stopping him in his tracks. Lawlor was

stunned.

The voice continued, “I trust your vice president is present?”

DaFina slid the phone toward him. “Yes, I am here. Who is this?”

“More silly games,” said the voice. “You know exactly who this is. Did you enjoy

our little demonstration?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Mr. Vice President, I will say this only once. Do not play games with me.”

“Where is the president?”

“He is quite comfortable, I assure you.”

“How can we be sure?”

“Mr. Vice President, we have already proven that we have him and that we are

capable of outthinking you and your military. The explosion was quite an

unfortunate, but necessary occurrence. So many souls called to Allah, unwitting of

the role they have played in the Jihad.”

“Is that what this is all about, some kind of holy war?”

“I commend you, Mr. Vice President. Your knowledge of foreign affairs is greater

than your critics give you credit for."

The insult raised the hairs on the back of the vice president's neck. Inwardly, almost

every member in the sit room would have congratulated the kidnapper for that jibe if

he hadn't been behind so much death and mayhem.

"You will not get away with this. I guarantee you," said the vice president.

"But, I already have."

"What do you want?"

“First, I want to be treated with some respect for my intelligence. Did you actually

think I would not know when I called the FBI that they would start an immediate

trace? Do you think after all of my careful planning I would allow this dance to be so

quickly brought to an end? By underestimating me, you may be forced to pay the

price twice.”

“Twice?” said the vice president. “What do you mean *twice?”*

“By now you should be very well aware that your men did not survive the explosion

we set. That was the first price. If we were able to slay any of the Israeli pigs that

might have been working with the U.S.A. in their feeble rescue attempt, then all the

better. But, the second price will come if you do not cooperate. Evidence will be

produced that will link this explosion back to you and the unrecognized State of

Israel. It will be seen as an act of U.S.-supported Israeli terrorism against the

Palestinian people."

All eyes in the room were upon the vice president.

"Whatever evidence you might fabricate, it will never work."

"Just as a plot to kidnap your president would never work? *Tsk, tsk,* Mr. Vice

President. I believe you are still underestimating me."

"You know, Mr…. if it is Mr. I don't even know your name," said the vice

president.

“My name is not important. What is important are my demands. I want my men

released immediately.”

“It is the policy of the United States government not to negotiate with terrorists.”

“Is it really? Is this the same no-negotiation policy that was in effect during your

arms for hostages fiasco with Iran?” asked the voice.

“That was then, and this is now. We absolutely do not negotiate with terrorists. The

two men you want killed scores of innocent Americans.”

“In our opinion, Mr. Vice President, there is no such thing as an innocent American,

and further, how many innocent people have been killed throughout the Middle East

as a result of the meddling of the United States?”

Several people at the table were

motioning for the vice president to shut up and

discontinue his hard line with the kidnappers, but he ignored them.

“I’ll make you a deal,” said the vice president, pausing for effect.

“A deal? You are in no position to make demands of us! It is we who have your

president, and it is we who will make the demands of you. As your show of good

faith, you will release our men as we have requested and you will convince Egypt to

unfreeze our assets. You will do this immediately!" said the voice, and then the line

went dead.

Lawlor leaned over to his boss. "Hell of a negotiator. Where'd this asshole learn his

technique?"

The FBI director didn't answer. He knew everyone else in the room was thinking the

exact same thing. The vice president was completely out of his league.

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After the meeting in the sit room was adjourned, everyone quietly filed out, still in

shock. They were horrified not only by the failure of Rapid Return and the loss of

top-rate operatives, but also by the way the vice president had handled the

kidnappers' phone call.

Director Jameson gave Scot a subtle cue to hang back with him. In a few moments

the only other people still sitting at the

table were the directors of the FBI and CIA,

along with Gary Lawlor.

“It looks like your instincts were right,” said the CIA director to Harvath.

“It didn’t do those men much good, though,” replied Scot.

“What could you have done?”

“I’ve asked myself that a million times. Not only about tonight, but Sunday too.

These guys, whoever they are, really know what they’re doing.”

“What I want to know,” said Lawlor, “is how the hell they got my direct line as well

as the president’s here in the sit room.”

As the lock on the soundproof door of the sit room clicked and was followed by the

hiss of it swinging open, the men fell silent.

“Don’t you men have work to do?” asked Chief of Staff DaFina as he walked

across the room to retrieve a file he had left on the table.

Vaile beat the others to the punch. “You know what, DaFina? What we’re doing and

how we’re doing it is none of your goddamn business.”

Harvath was taken by surprise. Director Vaile had a reputation for being unfailingly

diplomatic. Both DaFina and his boss, the vice president, rubbed even the calmest

of people the wrong way.

“I’m sure the vice president wouldn’t see it that way,” replied a defensive

DaFina.

DaFina was all hot air, a bully. The minute someone stood up to him, he hid behind

the vice president's skirts. Harvath let out an audible sigh of contempt, and DaFina

turned on him.

"And you. I wasn't finished with you, Harvath," he said, turning his gaze toward

Secret Service director Jameson and FBI deputy director Lawlor. "Is it or is it not

true that Agent Harvath disrupted and possibly contaminated three separate crime

scenes and assaulted a federal officer?"

For some reason, probably his intense dislike for the chief of staff, Lawlor changed

his earlier stance and chose to come to Scot's defense. "We're looking into it."

"Looking into it? From what I hear, it was *you* that had him recalled for it!" DaFina's

feigned anger was growing with each passing second, as was his satisfaction.

He

knew he had them on the ropes, and he grabbed at the opportunity to regain the

control Vaile had taken from him. “Director Jameson, why hasn’t this man been

placed on leave until a full-scale investigation can be conducted?”

“I have yet to fully debrief him. This is a Secret Service matter and will be handled

as such. I hardly think we need the vice president’s chief of staff telling us how to

do our jobs."

"Well, obviously somebody should."

"Just like somebody told you it was okay to answer the president's secure line?"

fired Harvath.

Embarrassed, but not letting on, DaFina continued. "Director Jameson, like it or not,

Vice President Marshfield is in charge and may be for quite some time. If, and I

stress the *if,* the president does not return safely, the vice president will finish out his

term. I need not remind you that your position as director of the Secret Service has

already been severely jeopardized. If, and I am stressing the *if* again, the president

does not return to his office, you will retain your directorship only by the consent of

Vice President Marshfield. Do I make myself clear?”

Jameson was up against it. As much as he hated to admit it, DaFina was right.

Before he could respond, though, DaFina

continued his attempt to roll over him. “I

want this man,” he said, pointing at Harvath, “suspended immediately, pending a full

investigation. I don’t want to see him near the White House or anywhere else for that

matter. Am I clear?”

“I’ll take it under advisement. In the meantime, I want to make sure you are

completely clear on something. Short of a horrific constitutional crisis that would put

you in the Oval Office, I am still the director of the Secret Service. I don't take

orders from you. Got me?" asked Jameson.

"Director Jameson, I warn you that you are walking a very, very fine line. I can

assure you that when I speak, I am speaking for the vice president, who, per the

cabinet's invoking of the Twenty-fifth Amendment, is now acting president and

commander in chief. Agent Harvath is to be suspended, period. Understood?"

Harvath knew he had nothing to lose and decided he wasn't going to let this

pip-squeak get the last word. "You've got more to worry about than me, you

know."

"You just won't disappear, will you? Of course we have more to worry about than

just you," replied DaFina.

"A lot more. First, you've got a leak somewhere. Someone with some pretty

substantial access. Those kidnappers had help. High-level help. And then—"

Against his better judgment, Lawlor tried to save him. “Scot, shut it.”

“Agent Lawlor, with all due respect, I’m going to listen to what Agent Harvath has to

say, because I guarantee you these will be the last words he ever utters in his

capacity as an active Secret Service agent. So,” continued DaFina as he made his

way around the table so he could stand right above Harvath, “what else do you have

to say? You couldn’t possibly dig your

grave any deeper than you have already. Or

could you?”

Standing above him was an obvious power play, meant to intimidate, but Scot

Harvath wasn’t easily intimidated. In fact, the move pissed him off. He wasn’t an

idiot, and he’d been trying to couch what he was planning to say as diplomatically as

possible, but his anger was building and quickly getting the better of him. He

fought

hard to keep it under control.

Harvath had swiveled his chair to the right as DaFina approached and leaned slightly

back, assuming a relaxed, nonthreatened posture. “Mr. DaFina—”

“That’s Chief of Staff DaFina to you, Harvath! Get it right. You know, it’s all

starting to become clear to me how this whole thing happened. Some of the people

around here might be impressed with

your SEAL background, but it doesn't impress

me. You fucked up big time as the advance man. The whole Secret Service fucked

up, and I don't give a rat's ass that you saved the president's daughter.

"The president is gone, and I don't need to go looking far and wide for somewhere

to lay the blame. It's sitting right here in front of me." DaFina punctuated his next

remark by poking Harvath in the shoulder with his pudgy finger. "So, if

you’ve got

something to say, then say it, because your career is finished!”

Harvath snapped. Grabbing DaFina’s finger, he stood up from the chair and gave

the finger a good twist, making DaFina’s arm go limp, and then bent it behind him.

He raised DaFina’s hand upward toward the back of his neck and leaned forward to

speak into his ear. “Yeah, I’ve got something to say. First, your mother should have

taught you not to point at people, *especially* a SEAL. There's nothing that pisses me

off more than when people point at me. It's not very polite. Second, you and your

boss are playing a very deadly game. His *no-negotiating-with-terrorists* line doesn't

fool anyone, especially me. You know what?"

DaFina winced in pain.

Harvath continued, "Your little call to the Syrians didn't fool me either. It was

plain

to everybody in this room. Your boss is going to milk this thing for all it's worth.

And, if the president isn't returned alive, he'll have a one hundred percent approval

rating when he bombs whomever you guys finger as the ones responsible. There's

nothing the American people like more than an all-out bombing run. Having

accomplished that, your boy will be a shoo-in for president in the next election. This

whole thing stinks!”

Scot let DaFina go and turned to walk toward the door. As he did, he noticed the

chief of staff cock his arm back with an open hand as if he intended to slap him.

Spinning, Scot just missed DaFina’s blow and brought his fist up in an uppercut to

the man’s jaw. With a crack, the punch landed and blood spurted from DaFina’s

mouth as his teeth clamped together, catching part of his lip.

Immediately, DaFina's hands flew to his face as he staggered backward. Jameson

waited a beat and then fished out a handkerchief and handed it to him. When DaFina

saw the blood, his rage was for real. "Harvath, if you had even a prayer of surviving

before, it's gone now. You are through!"

Turning to the group, DaFina said, "Do you see what he did to me?"

This time, it was the normally quiet and reserved FBI director Sorce who spoke first.

“Yeah, I saw it clear as day. You tried to strike Agent Harvath when he wasn’t

looking, and he turned just in time. Looked to me like he was raising his hand to

protect himself and your chin got in the way. Simple case of self-defense, as I’m

sure everyone in the room will agree.”

“Self-defense? Self-defense! That’s bullshit, and you know it. What about when he

grabbed my finger and twisted my arm behind my back?”

“To tell you the truth, I didn’t see that, but poking Agent Harvath is technically

assault, and anything he did would have been in self-defense.”

A very pissed-off DaFina glowered at the other men and said, “And I suppose you

all agree with Director Sorce?”

No one said anything; they just sat stone-faced.

“All in all,” continued Sorce, “your conduct is very unbecoming for a chief of staff,

even a vice presidential one. I'd hate to think what the media would do with this if it

got out."

"Look at my lip! I can feel it beginning to swell. What am I going to say to people?"

"Well, you can say what we used to say back in Chicago when a suspect got a little

roughed up. You *slipped."*

DaFina gathered his folder, and when he was a safe distance away and had his hand

on the doorknob, he spat, “This is not over, Harvath. You are going down. I

promise you.”

34

There was no telling how long he had been lying on the cold concrete floor of

Senator Snyder’s basement. What he did know was that he ached all over and

couldn’t stop shivering from the waves of cold that tortured his naked body.

André had always considered himself to be in very good shape. Being a junior

associate D.C. lawyer who specialized in international finance didn't exactly require a

hard body, but being in superlative health had always been his choice. To balance

his regime of weight lifting and cardiovascular exercise, and also to give his mind

something positive to focus on during the bleak D.C. winters, he had taken up yoga

two years ago. It was a nice way to get his heart rate up when he couldn't get to the

club or it was too dreadful outside to run. He'd never had any idea that it would one

day save his life.

The hog-tie position Snyder had left him in would have immobilized most, but not

André. From the beginning, his focus had been on controlling his mind and his

breathing, trying not to let fear overtake him. The cords around his ankles and wrists

tore into his skin, but he put the pain out of his mind and tried to focus on staying

calm. The rag stuffed in his mouth threatened to gag him with every breath, but he

knew, on a logical as well as a very primal level, that he couldn’t give in to the urge

to vomit.

With his arms drawn so tightly behind his back, any movement hurt. After struggling

against his bonds several times, only to have his mind race uncontrollably ahead to

what lay in store for him when the

senator returned, André lay still. He assessed the

situation. In his opinion, the greatest thing he had going for him, besides that he was

still alive, was that he wasn't bound even more restrictively. Despite the pain, he

could move if he *really* wanted to. And he did.

He realized that he didn't need his arms, legs, or his wrists to move. If he used only

his pelvis and his chest, he could shuffle

in a two-step inchworm process. *First, lift*

my chest and slide it to the right, and then lift my pelvis and follow.

It took André almost three hours to cross the basement floor and get to the

washer-and-dryer area on the other side of the room. It has been necessary to stop

repeatedly to catch his breath. The exertion increased his respiration, which was

already impaired by the gag and the strong odor of shoe polish that filled his

nostrils

whenever he tried to breathe deeply.

When he reached the laundry area, he rolled onto his side so that the cord on his

wrists and ankles faced the metal leg of an old washbasin between the washer and

dryer. As he couldn’t stand upright, this was his only chance. He began rocking

back and forth, dragging the laundry cord across the leg of the washbasin. The

process was agonizingly slow.

A warm, sticky, wet feeling began to spread across his hands, and he knew that he

was bleeding, but he pressed on. There was no telling when the senator would return

to finish the job, and therefore nothing mattered but getting free. An animal instinct

took over, and André rocked harder, sawing his wrists and ankles against the metal.

All control he had over his mind had vanished. He kept thinking about wolves caught

in traps who chew their own legs off to escape as he swung his body and sawed

faster.

Finally there was a muffled snap and the tension on his wrists and ankles let up ever

so slightly. The cord was fraying. He closed his eyes to try to shut out the pain. He

resumed the fevered pitch of his rocking while he applied outward pressure on the

cord from his hands and feet. Another snap. He was almost there. André

rocked his

body for all he was worth and was greeted finally with the sweet sensation of release.

The cord ripped the rest of the way away. His feet fell backward and his arms went

limp at his sides. Though he knew he needed to work on getting more circulation to

his extremities, he just lay on the floor and wept for several minutes, allowing

exhaustion to sweep through him. The only movement he made was to remove

the

gag. As he spat it out, he saw that Snyder had indeed used a shoeshine rag. He

seethed with anger but was too tired to allow it to overtake him. He had won, at least

so far, and he took his time savoring the small victory as he lay motionless on the

floor.

After giving himself a short rest, André gathered enough momentum for the painful

roll onto his back. He held his wrists in

front of his face and examined the bleeding

from the gashes in his raw, burned skin. Contracting his stomach muscles, he leaned

upward and looked down at his ankles, which were not much better. The left side of

his body looked as if he had been dragged down three miles of a highway covered in

loose gravel and broken glass. It was all painful, but he would live. *What was he*

saying? He wasn't out of harm's way

yet.

Okay, Mr. Travolta, he said to himself, *if the key words here are "staying alive,"*

then we need to get you out of here. André continued to crunch upward until he was

in a sitting position. He rolled his shoulders back and forth and also twisted his

ankles in painful circles, helping to improve the blood flow. Stripping off the

remaining cord that was clinging to him,

he blessed the Lightness of Being Yoga

Center for the flexibility he now enjoyed and made a mental note to make a donation

when and if he was completely out of this situation.

André pulled himself to a standing position. Twisting the faucet handle, he waited for

the washbasin's rusty brown water to turn clear before submerging his wrists in the

cascade. The water burned at first and then felt numbingly sweet. As much as he

wanted to stand and let the water run over his wrists for hours, he knew he had to

get moving.

As in many of Georgetown's ritzier town homes, a laundry chute fed from the top

floor of the building, where the bedrooms were, down into the basement. Not far

from the washer and dryer, André saw the laundry basket used to catch whatever

came down. Mingled with the senator's clothes were the brown corduroys and

turtleneck sweater he had shot down the chute just yesterday. He rummaged further

and found a pair of dirty sweat socks and began to get dressed.

As he finished pulling on his socks, he looked down at a bloodied piece of cord.

André wasn't stupid. He knew if he brought any charges against the senator, it

would be his word against Snyder's. For a good part of the time that he had lain

naked, cold, and scared on the moldy

concrete floor, he had wondered who would

ever believe his story. Knowing the senator would do everything in his power to stop

it from becoming public, André needed some sort of proof that he had been there.

He looked down at the piece of bloody cord again and kicked it as hard as he could

under the dryer.

He could no longer control the urge to run, and he moved quickly toward the

back

of the basement, where a small utility door led up a short flight of steps to the

garden. Not wanting to even attempt to use the front door, for fear of bumping into

Snyder, André rushed the garden door. He grabbed the cold metal handle and

turned. *Locked!*

He tried again, but no luck. The door was dead-bolted with a lock that needed a key

from either side. The glass was no

better, as it was covered with a thick wire security

mesh. A wave of nausea began to grow in the pit of his stomach. André fought to

keep it down. *Think. There has got to be a way.* He knew that all of the windows in

the basement were covered with the exact same security mesh. It seemed hopeless.

Looking up, as if imploring heaven for some sort of aid, he saw his salvation. Above

the right-hand corner of the doorframe

was a rusted nail with a key hanging from it.

Please, let this be the one.

André took down the key and slid it into the lock, his hand trembling. It fit. But as he

turned the key to the left it wouldn't budge. The same thing happened when he

turned it to the right. *Shit. It's the wrong key!*

Taking a deep breath, he told himself to calm down. The senator could arrive home

at any moment; André needed to keep his wits about him. He tried the key again,

harder. *Careful, don't break it.* Nothing.

Remembering his own trouble with the fifth-generation key for the condo he and

Mitch had shared, André applied a little English. He pulled slightly as he twisted.

Joyous relief flooded his body as the key finally turned all of the way, drawing back

the dead bolt and releasing the door. The moist smell of clean outside air flowed into

his nose and mouth.

A steady rain was falling, and a large puddle sat at the base of the concrete steps.

While trying to work the lock, he had noticed a set of gardening tools off to his right,

including a pair of green Wellington boots. By the looks of them, they were

Snyder’s. André had bigger feet, but didn’t think twice as he grabbed a pair of

shears and cut the toes off of each boot. He quickly pulled them on and crept

cautiously from the basement. The garden was cold and the night air was heavy with

the mist of the steadily falling shower. He still had no idea what time it was and

didn’t care. Snyder obviously thought he could come back and finish him at any

point. He had no reason to suspect André would have been able to get away.

Creeping slowly, using the large trees for cover, he made his way to the end of the

garden. The stone rococo fountain gave

him enough of a foothold to climb up to the

top of the wall. As he pushed with his left leg to get the final thrust he needed, a

stone cherub's head dislodged and clattered down with a roaring splash into the

pool of water below.

It made no difference. André Martin landed effortlessly in the neighbor's yard and

was off like a shot, the knowledge of what the senator would do to him if he caught

up pushing him forward.

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Director Jameson saved his admonishments for the ride home, and Scot took each

one of them without arguing. Had he been given a chance to get a word in edgewise,

he might have admitted that some of his actions had surprised even him, but as it

stood, he rode along in the director's limousine in silence.

As they pulled up to Harvath's apartment

building, it was already after ten o'clock,

and Director Jameson ordered him to be at the Treasury Building the next morning

for a full debriefing in the presence of the secretary. Jameson also warned him that

the secretary of the treasury was not a man to be fooled around with and that

Harvath had better be on his best behavior.

Thanking the director, Scot closed the door of the limo, turned the collar of his

trench coat up against the rain, and didn't bother to open his umbrella for the short

run up the pavement to the front entrance. He ignored his mailbox and took the stairs

slowly, his headache not having abated much in the past several hours. At his door,

he checked that the brown hair was exactly where he had left it. It was. He took it

down, removed the keys from his pocket, and let himself in.

The apartment looked exactly the same. Why he expected it to be any different, he

didn't know. Sometimes he mused about how nice it would be to have someone

waiting on the other side of the door when he came home, someone friendly. His

lifestyle had never been conducive to long-term relationships. In the SEALs he could

be mobilized at a moment's notice and be gone for months at a time without any

warning. He had watched a lot of

Special Operations guys go through painful and

messy divorces. The simplest answer for Scot was to just avoid getting too serious

with anyone. Casual relationships were a lot easier. And it had never been tough

finding women who wanted to be with him — temporarily.

Several women in Scot's life had liked him enough to press him on committing to a

deeper relationship. None of them ever understood why he soon thereafter broke

things off or, more often, just faded away. As difficult as it was for him, he believed

that was easier in the long run.

While his hectic life had calmed down a lot since retasking to the Secret Service, it

was still unpredictable, and after all, old habits, especially those of the heart, really

did die hard.

Scot continued to reflect on bachelorhood as he hung his trench coat and took off

his suit. Putting on a dark blue sweat suit with the word *Navy* written in yellow

across the chest and on the upper-left thigh, he decided a little light exercise might

do him some good. He put on a pair of Nikes, exited his apartment, and headed

downstairs.

With the building's history of less-than-stellar tenants and more than one break-in,

the landlady was extremely glad to have Secret Service agent Scot Harvath living in

one of her apartments. He had not needed to ask her twice about using a small

corner of the relatively empty basement as a place to set up his exercise equipment.

The workout was slow going. Harvath spent the first twenty minutes doing some

light stretching. The exercises allowed him to assess the damage that had been done

to his body and how well he was healing. While he was still tremendously sore, he

knew that a lot of the stiffness he felt could be relieved by working out. He wasn't

foolish enough to believe that he could jump right back into his routine, so he

knocked down the normal amounts he lifted to sixty percent. He remembered Dr.

Helsabeck's warnings not to exacerbate his symptoms through stress or physical

exertion, so he made sure not to push things too hard. His muscles burned. The

familiar sensation felt good and helped take his mind off of his headache, both

the

one between his ears and the one that came between paychecks — his job.

Harvath finished his workout with forty-five minutes on the treadmill. The mindless

repetition of jogging on the inclined belt allowed him to be lost in exercise-induced

euphoria for just a little while longer. Returning to his apartment, he noticed the

new-call light blinking on his caller ID box. As he crossed the living room to

pick up

his cordless phone, it began to ring.

“Harvath,” he answered.

“Scot, thank God you’re finally home. I have been trying to get ahold of you for

over an hour,” said an agitated female voice.

“Natalie, is that you?” asked Scot. Natalie Sperando was assistant to the social

secretary of the White House and coordinated most of President Rutledge’s social

appearances. While Secret Service guidelines strictly forbade Service personnel from

dating any executive staff, especially when assigned to White House duty, it never

said anything about not being friends with them, and Scot and Natalie had become

good ones during his time there.

“Yes, it’s me. Scot, I need your help,” she said.

“What kind of help? You sound upset. Are you okay?”

“I can’t go into it over the phone. I need you to meet me.”

“It sounds serious.”

“Very.”

“All right. I just finished working out. Let me grab a shower and—”

“I need to meet you now. Can you take the shower later?” asked Natalie.

“Nat, do you want to give me an idea what this is all about?”

“I can’t. Not over the phone.”

“Are you in some sort of trouble?”

“Kind of. It involves a friend of my brother’s. Please, Scot. Can you just come meet

me?”

“Sure. I’ll bag the shower. Tell me where you are.”

Natalie gave Scot the name and address, telling him to hurry. He got out of his

sweats and pulled on a pair of jeans and a denim shirt. He glanced at his holstered

SIG next to the bed and realized it would mean either another layer of clothing or he

would have to keep his jacket on all night to conceal it. He decided against it. He

wouldn't need a gun where he was going.

Harvath had the cabbie drop him at the Dupont Circle Metro stop. From there he

walked down Massachusetts Avenue toward Scott Circle. He turned onto

Seventeenth Street and walked to an upscale pub known as J.R.'s.

J.R.'s catered to a gay clientele that liked to refer to themselves as "guppies," or *gay*

urban professionals. With its long varnished bar and stained-glass windows, had it

not been for the lack of women, J.R.'s would have looked like any other D.C.

watering hole. As Scot made his way through the patrons enjoying the Tuesday

five-dollar all-you-can-drink special, he finally found Natalie in the back corner with a

man he didn't recognize.

"Oh, Scot. I'm so glad you're here," said Natalie as she stood to give him a hug.

“Anything for you, Nat. You know that, but can you tell me what I’m doing sitting in

a bar at,” he paused to look at his watch, “at twelve o’clock on a Tuesday night?”

“It’s all my fault, I’m afraid. At least to a certain degree,” said the man who was

sitting at the table with Natalie. He looked pale and drawn. Scot noticed when he

offered his hand that his wrist was crudely bandaged and some blood showed

through.

Scot took the man's hand. "It's nice to meet you, Mr…."

The man threw a tentative glance toward Natalie, who nodded her head that

everything was okay.

"Martin. My name is André Martin. We met about a month ago when I was visiting

the White House to see Natalie. It's okay, though, you must meet a lot of people in

your job."

"You'll forgive me. I'm normally good

with faces. What can I do for you?”

Before he could answer, a waiter who had been hovering close by came over to take

their drink orders.

André ordered himself another bourbon, Natalie declined, her wineglass still half full,

and Scot ordered a Heineken.

When the waiter left, André lifted his glass and finished the small bit of brownish

gold liquid that remained. His hand

shook.

“Okay, Nat, you said this was important and had something to do with a friend of

your brother’s,” said Scot.

“It is and it does. André is one of Steven’s friends. He—”

André cleared his throat. “Natalie, why don’t I just jump in here and explain? Agent

Harvath, are you familiar with the murder of Senator David Snyder’s aide, Mitchell

Conti, that happened almost a year ago?”

“Yeah, I think so. A drive-by, wasn’t it? As I remember, the kid was pretty well liked

on the Hill.”

“He was,” said André. “The papers billed it as a bad case of ‘wrong place, wrong

time,’ but I never bought that.”

“Why not?” asked Scot.

“Because,” continued André, “they were never able to find the shooter or who the

intended victim or victims were.”

“Mr. Martin, I hate to say it, but unfortunately the D.C. police are only human and

they have their hands full. There are lots of homicides that go unsolved every year.

It’s not that unusual.”

“No? Well, what if I told you that Mitchell Conti was also Senator Snyder’s lover?”

Scot couldn’t believe his ears. He looked at Natalie, who nodded her head.

“Mr. Martin, supposing this was true, how would you be in a position to come

across this piece of information? And while we're at it, what does it have to do with

the drive-by, and how, in any way, does this have anything even remotely to do with

me?"

"Agent Harvath, if you'll give me a second, I'll explain."

Scot sat back in his chair and was quiet as the waiter brought their drinks.

Once he was gone, André began again, "I know these things because Mitchell Conti

and I were lovers. We lived together. I left him because of his relationship with

Senator Snyder—”

Scot interrupted, “But I know of at least five women over the last two years that the

senator is reported to have been seeing. He’s known in the Beltway as quite a ladies’

man.”

“So was Mitch, but appearances can be deceiving. Besides, being bisexual doesn’t

make someone any less of a man, nor any less attractive to women."

Scot was going to have to take André's word on that one. He sipped his beer and

waited for him to continue.

After a shaky sip from his new drink and a look around to make sure they weren't

being overheard, André went on to tell Scot the details of Mitch's involvement with

Snyder and the possible blackmail.

"It's all a very interesting story, Mr.

Martin, and I'm sorry for your loss, but I still

don't see what—"

"What you don't see, Agent Harvath, is that shortly thereafter Mitch was killed in the

supposed drive-by shooting. I was convinced that Mitch's death was no accident

and the police weren't getting anywhere, so I decided to look into matters myself."

Wonderful. This guy is a regular Dick Tracy, thought Harvath.

“I did all the research I could on Senator Snyder, and being familiar with many of his

predilections via Mitch, I arranged for the two of us to meet. Of course I made it

look like it was quite by chance. But little by little, I began to win his confidence and

we began seeing each other—”

“Okay, Mr. Martin… I’m going to stop you right there. I have many gay friends. I

don’t want you to think for one second

that this is a problem I have with someone

else's lifestyle, because it isn't. But this is just a little too wild for my taste, and as

far as you have explained, there's no way in the world this could have anything at all

to do with me."

"But if you would let me finish."

"André, I'm going to save you the time, and please excuse me for using your first

name—"

“Not at all. It’s okay.”

“Good, listen, I like you. You seem like a nice guy. A smart guy. If you have some

concrete evidence that Senator Snyder was involved directly or indirectly with Mr.

Conti’s death, I suggest you take it straight to the D.C. district attorney’s office. But

I warn you… What do you do for a living?”

“I am an attorney.”

“Well, then I don’t need to warn you of the downside if what you know or what you

think you know gets back to Senator Snyder. He is a very powerful man and has a

lot of friends. He could make a lot of trouble for you.”

“But, Agent Harvath, what I have to tell you isn’t about Mitch’s death, it’s about the

president’s disappearance.”

Natalie spoke up, but he almost didn’t hear her. “See, Scot. This is the reason I

called you."

Scot's attitude went from boredom and condescension to rapt interest in an instant.

"If you have any information whatsoever about the president's kidnapping, I suggest

you spill it right now."

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For the hundredth time in the last hour, Scot glanced warily around the room to

make sure they were not being overheard. André Martin's story was

absolutely

incredible. Harvath now understood why Nat had brought André to him. Where else

could the poor guy go? If what he was saying was true, no one would have believed

him, and if Snyder wasn't out looking for him already, he was going to be very

soon.

The implications of what André was saying were staggering. Harvath probed for

more details, needing to paint the most accurate picture possible.

“So based on all of this, you think the senator was somehow involved in the

president’s kidnapping?”

“Exactly.”

“I don’t know, André. There’s no question after what he did to you that the guy is

one sick puppy, but do you really think he was going to kill you for what you

overheard? I mean, from what you tell me, you don’t exactly have a smoking

gun,”

said Harvath.

“Exactly again. I didn’t see or hear anything that would ever stand up in court, but

he still wanted me dead.”

“Are you positive he wanted to kill you and not just scare you?”

“Scot,” said André, having dropped the formality of calling him Agent Harvath over

half an hour ago, “I’m a lawyer, and lawyers believe that what is not said is

just as

important as what is. Snyder had no idea what I heard or didn't hear. All he knew

was what I was saying or not saying."

"I don't follow you."

"You were right, in part, that he was trying to scare me. He scared the shit out of me

and he left me in that basement to do some very hard thinking. He planned to come

back and when he did, he would want answers. He would want to hear what I

hadn't

been saying. You follow me now?"

"Yeah, I do, but this is the part of your story that scares me the most," said Scot.

"What you are alleging is pretty serious, and from the look and the sound of it, you

can back it up. If nothing else, it would be extremely embarrassing for the senator.

You're right, I don't think you were ever meant to walk out of that house alive

again."

“So, you’re convinced?”

“Enough to know that Natalie did the right thing in calling me.”

“I knew you would help us,” said Natalie.

“Us? As in both of you? No way, Nat. You need to let me help André alone while

you stay as far away as possible. This could be extremely dangerous.”

“Listen, Scot, I didn’t call you up so you could sweep in here and start giving

orders. André called me because he

didn't know who else to turn to. Now that

you've heard his story, you see why he couldn't go to the police."

"Yeah, but I'm here now, and we can help him, protect him."

"Who's 'we'? The Secret Service? From what I hear around the White House, you

guys have so many leaks Vice President Marshfield is even talking about suspending

Secret Service protection and using FBI bodyguards."

Scot's blood pressure began to rise. "First of all, Vice President Marshfield doesn't

know his ass from a hole in the ground. The Secret Service is charged with his

protection as well as the safety and security of the White House and all those within

it. We're there to stay. You won't be seeing any FBI protective details; that I can

assure you. As far as any leaks are concerned, we've yet to nail that down, but there

isn't any reason the Service can't put André into protective custody until we get to

the bottom of this. It's just going to take a little time."

"Time? But I thought you said I was in danger?" said André.

"I believe you are, but it's going to take me a couple of hours to set everything up

and bring you in. While I do that, we need to get you someplace safe."

"He can come back to my apartment," said Natalie.

“Nat, I told you this could be dangerous, and I don’t want you involved. You did

the right thing, and now I want you to walk away.”

“And I told you, Scot, that I am staying right here with André. He’s been extremely

kind to my brother over the years, and I’m not going to repay that kindness by

ditching him in his hour of need.”

Scot knew when he was licked. “Okay, have it your way, but I don’t want you going

home.”

“Why not?”

“Because if Snyder’s out looking for André and he knows the connection between

you two, he might go to your apartment. How much cash do you have?”

“About a hundred bucks, I think. I hit the cash machine after work.”

Harvath reached into his pocket and peeled off two hundred-dollar bills, “Now

you’ve got three hundred dollars. I want

you to get in a cab and head for Alexandria.

Go to the Radisson Old Town on Fairfax and pay cash for a room for one night.

Tell them you're Triple A members, but your purse and wallet were stolen and you

have no ID on you, that should knock the rate in half and stop them from asking any

questions. Register under the name Cashman. Once you get inside, don't call

anyone. I'll call you. You got it?"

“I still think going to my place is okay.”

“Nat, you asked me for a favor, and now I’m asking you for one. Go there and stay

put.”

“Okay, we’ll do it, but make sure you hurry up.”

“I’ll get to you as soon as I can. Again, I don’t think you are in any immediate

danger; we just need to be sure.”

Harvath extended his hand toward André. “We’ll get to the bottom of this, don’t

worry."

"I hope so," said André, who stood and shook his hand. Natalie was putting on her

coat. "You know, Scot, you asked me if there was anything else that seemed odd

about the senator's behavior recently."

"Yes?"

"There was one other thing I forgot to mention, but it might not mean anything."

"What is it?"

"Well, it was just another inconsistency

in one of Snyder's stories, but a pretty

major one, I thought."

Scot raised his eyebrows as if to say, *Keep going.*

"About a month ago the senator took off on an unplanned trip. We had plans and he

canceled on me. He brought me back a bottle of dessert wine. He said it was a

favorite of Napoleon or Josephine or something, but it didn't make sense. The whole

thing bothered me for a couple of

reasons.”

“Why?”

“Well, he said he was called away on a World Bank economic development

conference.”

“So?”

“Well, I specialize in international finance, and it wasn’t difficult to find out that there

were no World Bank functions at that time.”

“Maybe he told you the wrong thing or

you misunderstood."

"I don't misunderstand things that easily."

"You said it bothered you for a couple of reasons; what's the other?"

"He told me he had been in France for the conference, but there was a half-stripped

Swiss Railways checked-luggage sticker on his suitcase."

"That could have been from a previous trip."

"I thought so too until I showed the

bottle of wine to a friend of mine. He's kind of

a wine snob, and I wanted to impress him. I'd never had a dessert wine from South

Africa before."

"André, listen, you both need to get going."

"Just let me finish. This friend of mine had heard of the wine. It has a very high sugar

content, and its import is banned in the EU."

“So?”

“So, France is part of the European Union. The senator couldn’t have possibly

found this in some little French wine shop like he said.”

“I’m sorry, André, I still don’t get it.”

“Switzerland is not part of the EU, and they do allow this particular wine to be

imported regardless of its sugar and alcohol levels. So, what was he doing in

Switzerland that was such a big secret?”

“André, it might be something and it might not. I’ll look into it. Now, both of you

get going.”

“What about Star Gazer?” prompted Natalie. “You said the whole thing wouldn’t

work without Star Gazer.”

“Oh, yeah. I forgot that one.”

“Who is Star Gazer?” asked Scot.

“I’ve got no idea. I overheard the senator mention that whatever he was doing

wouldn't work without Star Gazer. Does that make any sense to you?"

"Not much of any of this makes sense. Now, seriously, you have to get going."

Harvath pushed the two toward the door and waited five minutes. He left two

twenties on the table and exited J.R.'s through the back. A strange, yet

all-too-familiar feeling began to creep over him in the murky D.C. night. As he turned

up the collar on his trench coat once again, he wished he'd brought his pistol.

Despite the confidence he had shown upon saying good-bye and packing Natalie

and André off to the Radisson, Harvath had no idea what his next move was going

to be. His credibility wasn't exactly first-rate in Washington these days, and he knew

he would have to be very careful about whom he shared his newfound knowledge

with. What he had was explosive and

could do an incredible amount of damage

whether it was true or not. The mere suggestion that a senator, possibly two, might

have been involved with the kidnapping of the president of the United States was

almost inconceivable.

Scot normally did his best thinking on his feet, so when he left J.R.'s he walked,

ignoring the light but steady rain that fell. He moved south on Seventeenth Street,

passing Farragut Square, and turned left when he reached H Street. He walked along

Lafayette Square until he reached Fifteenth, sorting and resorting everything he had

heard. He spun the name Star Gazer around and around, trying to get a handle on it.

Who or what was Star Gazer and what did the name have to do with what Senator

Snyder was up to?

At Fifteenth, without giving it any

thought, he automatically turned right. A block and

a half later he was standing in front of the Treasury Building. In less than eight hours

he was supposed to be back at this exact site for a detailed debriefing with Director

Jameson and the secretary of the treasury, Paul Feigen. He wondered if once they'd

extracted from him everything they wanted, they would terminate him on the spot.

Scot remembered what he had told himself only yesterday, though it seemed like a

lifetime ago. If he was going to have any hope of keeping his career intact, he would

need to be part of something that helped crack the case. That something might have

fallen right into his lap, thanks to Natalie Sperando. Or, so he hoped. If no one

believed André's story, or if it couldn't be verified, Scot was probably as good as

washed up. It would look as if he were grasping at straws, doing anything he could

to save himself, no matter how ridiculous it was and no matter whose name he

dragged through the mud. He had to be very careful how he handled things.

But even if André turned out to be a dead end, Harvath had taken an oath to protect

the president and he had made a promise to Sam Harper. Those commitments would

not disappear, no matter how tough things got. He knew he had to bring this

information into the open, and he now knew exactly whom he could count on for

help.

Cutting up New York Avenue, Harvath hailed a cab in front of the Presbyterian

church and gave the driver an address in Arlington, Virginia. The chances that the

man he was going to see would still be awake were pretty slim, but he was the only

person who could help Scot and potentially… the president.

The front porch lights were out when Scot climbed the stairs, and he took that as a

bad sign. He knew that the minute he rang the bell, not only would he wake the man

inside, but the man would be pretty upset. William Shaw had a very short fuse. The

Director of Secret Service Operations for the White House, and Scot's boss, hadn't

come by his call sign of Fury for nothing. Scot steeled himself and reached for the

glowing orange button that seemed to hover over the house's brick facade.

After several seconds, lights began turning on within the house, and eventually an

exterior overhead light came on, pinning Harvath against the darkness.

"Who the hell is it?" came a gruff voice from inside.

"It's Harvath, Bill. Open up."

From inside, Scot heard a chain slide

back, followed by several dead bolts. Finally,

the door opened and there stood a sleepy William Shaw. He had a face of unshaved

whiskers, bed head, and one hand in the pocket of his terry cloth robe, probably

curled around his SIG-Sauer semiautomatic.

“Harvath, this had better be very, very good. You are just bound and determined to

get on every single person’s shit list, aren’t you?”

“Bill, this is important. Can I come in?”

“Be my guest. Maybe I can cook up a little breakfast while you’re here,” said Shaw

sarcastically as he closed the door behind them and relocked his dead bolts.

“Nice place,” said Scot, and he meant it. The entry hall gave way to a room

dominated by oxblood leather couches with brass buttons and a big-screen TV.

Two walls were lined with books, and there were recessed surround-sound speakers

in the ceiling. The fireplace was trimmed with an ornate mantelpiece covered with

pictures of the Shaw family in silver frames. In the middle of the floor was a very

large and very ornate oriental rug.

“Mrs. Shaw had good taste in everything but husbands,” he said, joining Harvath at

the edge of the den. Scot knew that Shaw’s wife had recently divorced him and that

it had been very difficult. Scot decided

to change the subject and get to the point

right away.

“Bill, I think I may have some new information on the president’s kidnapping.”

“You? How the hell would you have any? You’re not even supposed to be active. I

don’t know why Jameson didn’t grab your creds and suspend you last night. The

kidnapping of the president is no longer the purview of the Secret Service anyway.

End of story.”

“Can we sit down? I think you’ll want to hear what I have to say.”

Shaw let out an exasperated sigh and waved Harvath toward one of the couches.

They took seats opposite each other, and as Shaw was rubbing the remaining sleep

from his eyes, Scot began his story. “I have reason to believe the kidnappers had

some very high placed help.”

“No shit, Sherlock. We’ve suspected all along that there was some sort of leak.”

“I’m not talking about *the* leak, Bill. I’m talking about guys with enough power and

influence to help facilitate the introduction between the kidnappers and the source of

the leak.”

“You know, Harvath,” said Shaw, glancing at his watch, “I have to be up for work

in a few hours. I am going to be able to fall right back asleep without hearing

any

fairy tales, so why don't you take yours and—"

"Bill, this is serious. I have reason to suspect that Senator Snyder and maybe

Senator Rolander were involved somehow in the president's kidnapping."

Shaw moved forward on the couch. "Snyder and maybe Rolander? What the hell are

you talking about?"

"Tonight I had a meeting with a man who claims to have been Snyder's lover—"

“Lover?”

“Let me finish and it will all become clear. I had the same reaction at first. Do you

remember that aide on the Hill who was killed in a drive-by about a year ago?”

“Yeah, so what?”

“Well, the man I met with tonight, a Mr. André Martin, was involved with the aide.

The aide worked for Senator Snyder and, according to Martin, was having an affair

with him.”

“The aide and the senator?”

“Yes. Apparently Martin got sick of the aide cheating on him and left him. The aide

tried to break things off with the senator while still trying to hold on to his job and

might even have tried to blackmail Snyder. Shortly thereafter the aide was killed in

the drive-by.”

“C’mon, Harvath. Not only is that

hearsay, but it's so thin you can see through it. It

sounds more like a Jackie Collins novel."

"I thought the same thing until—"

"Until what?"

"Until Martin told me that he worked his way in close to the senator and started

having an affair with him himself."

"We're talking about Senator David Snyder? Confirmed bachelor and renowned

ladies' man?"

"We've all got our secrets, Bill. Anyway, this Martin begins an affair with the

senator, convinced he was responsible for the aide's death and determined to

expose him. He watches, and more important, he listens. He listens to everything,

but never lets on that he's listening. He feigns he's a heavy drinker, a sound sleeper,

anything plausible that might put the senator more at ease and create an

environment

in which he'll slip up. Then, he does. Recently, Martin overheard some stuff the

senator thinks he shouldn't…"

"Overheard stuff? What did he hear?"

"Well, he not only heard things relating to the president's kidnapping, but he also

followed Snyder to Senator Rolander's house after Snyder had received some

suspicious phone calls in the middle of the night. By the way, remember that FBI

agent I had the problem with in Park City?"

"The guy you creamed? What was his name?"

"Zuschnitt."

"Yeah, you decked him, so?"

"Well, from what Martin told me, he's been calling in regular reports from Park City

to Snyder, and it seems the two of them were behind framing me as the leak to

CNN."

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“Nope. From what Martin says, he heard it all loud and clear when he was listening

on another extension. There’s no way we can prove it right now, but if I could get

my hands on that Zuschnitt again, I think I could encourage him to talk.”

Shaw’s fingers dug into the leather arm of the couch. “What about the president?”

Harvath continued to fill his boss in on everything Martin had told him and then

shared something he had not told anyone about.

“Do you remember how I went over to that Mormon farm where that couple was

murdered?”

“Do I remember? Of course I do. What about it?”

“I found a piece of evidence there I didn’t tell anybody about.”

“Evidence?” Shaw’s face was white. “What kind of evidence?”

“Well, when I entered the house, I smelled cigarette smoke. The local law

enforcement guys said they hadn't been smoking in the house, and as the couple

were apparently devout Mormons, I knew they weren't smokers. It wasn't a huge

leap of logic to figure out that the farm had been used as some sort of a base camp

for the kidnapping."

"Why did you think that?"

"The old couple was done by a professional. Shots to the head—"

"The man was, but according to the

report, not the woman," said Shaw.

"Yeah, I know. I think he did the man first and the woman tried to run or something.

I think he lost it and, if you'll forgive the Cagneyism, *filled her full of lead.* The

president was most likely brought to the farm via snowmobile from the scene of the

kidnapping and then transferred into whatever vehicle or vehicles they used from

there. Nothing was amiss or stolen in the house, so that's why I think it was just

used as a base."

"So, cigarette smoke is your evidence?"

"No. While the killer was waiting for the rest of the kidnappers to get back from

doing the job, he was smoking and probably watching TV in the family room. I think

he was eating chocolate too."

"Chocolate? Jesus, Harvath. First you tell me Senator Snyder goes both ways, then

he likes to tie up and torture people who may or may not have been listening in on

his phone calls and tailing him, and then your *coup de grâce* is that one of the

kidnappers may have been eating candy at a scene that has yet to be determined was

connected in any way with the president's kidnapping?"

“The chocolate was Swiss.”

“So? There’s lots of Swiss chocolate in the U.S., and around the world, for that

matter. I hate to be the one to burst your bubble, but after yodeling and watches, it’s

probably one of the biggest things the Swiss are known for!”

“I disagree. I don’t think this chocolate is an export product. At least not for the

States. It had German writing on it.”

“So? Maybe someone brought it back from a trip to Germany as a gift for the

old

couple.”

“But, the couple was Mormon and caffeine is another thing that is forbidden by their

religion.”

“Listen, you’re in enough trouble as it is. Tell me you didn’t take anything from the

crime scene. You left that chocolate right where you found it, right?”

Harvath couldn’t tell if Shaw was trying to lead him toward the answer he wanted to

hear or if he really wanted the truth. Either way, something told Scot that he should

not admit to having removed the chocolate from the crime scene. “No. I left it

there.”

“Good. Then it’s the FBI’s problem and they can decide whether it’s relevant or not

when they find it. I think, though, that you’re making a mountain out of a molehill.

You’re very stressed out. I haven’t had a

chance to read your fitness report. Did

you see Dr. Helsabeck?”

“Yes.”

“And?”

“And, nothing. She says I’m fine. Says my head may feel scrambled for a few more

days, but that’s pretty much it.”

“Are you taking any medications?”

“Only Tylenol. I haven’t been able to shake this headache.”

Shaw was quiet for a few moments while he thought. His fingertips were pressed

together in an arch in front of his nose, with his thumbs supporting his chin. Scot

could hear the ticking of a grandfather clock in the hall. Finally, Shaw broke the

silence. “All right, I think there’s enough here to bring André Martin into protective

custody while we look into this. Where is he?”

“He’s with Natalie Sperando at the

Radisson Old Town in Alexandria."

"Sperando?"

"She's the one who introduced Martin to me. He was a very close friend of her

brother's."

"How much does she know?"

"Pretty much everything Martin does."

"Okay, so they're both at the Radisson. Is that the one on Fairfax at Montgomery?"

"Yes, about fifteen minutes down from the Metro."

“I know it. Okay, we’ll send a car to pick them up and bring them in. We have a safe

house not too far from there that we can use. Were you able to ascertain whether

they had talked to anyone else about this?”

“No, they assured me that they hadn’t. I stressed to them that anyone that they might

have even hinted about this to could be in danger, and they said they were the only

ones.”

“Good. That makes our job a lot easier. Now, I can’t promise you that this is going

to help your case. At best, it’s all circumstantial and it’s André Martin’s word

against Senator Snyder’s. I think he was smart to kick that piece of rope under the

dryer. Forensics can place him in Snyder’s house and in the basement. That kid was

thinking.

“As far as you’re concerned, I am going to do this quietly. You are in enough

trouble as it is, and if this turns out to be a load of BS, you don't need any more

problems. I am going to ask you this once, and I want you to answer me honestly.

Have you spoken with anyone other than Martin and Sperando about this?"

"No."

"Are you sure that no one overheard you talking at the bar?"

"As sure as I can be."

"Okay, good. Now, is there anything else you want to tell me about what happened

in Park City? If you've got anything, now is the time to get it out."

Harvath thought for a moment. "No. You know the full story."

"Do you have any idea who or what this Star Gazer might be?"

"None at all."

"For all we know," said Shaw, "with all your astronomy gear, it could be you."

"Me? What the hell do you—"

"God, calm down Harvath. I was just pulling your chain. Cripes, you're irritable."

“I’m sorry, Bill. I’m just a little on edge.”

“Yeah, I can see that.”

“So, what’s our next move?”

“Okay, I’ll get my laptop from the den for you and put a pot of coffee on. I want a

full report, including any of the details you might have accidentally forgotten

concerning Park City. If I am going to go to bat for you, I can’t have any surprises.

I want all of it while it’s fresh in your mind. While you are working on that, I’ll

get

started on bringing Martin and Sperando in. Was there an established code for

calling so they would know it was you?”

“I had her register under the name Cashman.”

“Fine. I’ll whip up some coffee and get the laptop. In the meantime, you can use the

phone on the end table there to call them.”

Harvath did as he was told. He explained to Natalie that either he or

Shaw would be

calling back shortly with details on the pickup. He told her that they would be taken

to a nearby safe house and André placed in protective custody, pending a

preliminary investigation. She had done the right thing calling him, and she should be

proud. They were going to be all right.

Ten minutes later, Shaw appeared with a mug of coffee and his laptop. As Scot

began typing his report, Shaw headed for

his den. Closing the doors behind him, he

crossed the distance to the phone in three fast strides. He picked it up and dialed the

number in McLean from memory.

38

“Marsha?” asked Shaw, after a sleepy voice answered the number he had dialed.

“You’ve got the wrong number,” said the voice, and the call was disconnected.

Shaw sat patiently and waited behind the

thick, locked doors of his study. On a bank

of monitors next to his desk, he watched an image of Agent Harvath diligently typing

his report. The small hidden camera had him perfectly in frame. Three minutes later,

Shaw's private line rang and he depressed the button to activate the scrambler

hidden within the desk.

"It's an odd time for a phone call," said Shaw.

“This is when the rates are the lowest though,” answered the voice.

Each of the parties’ authentication codes completed, the conversation could now

begin. They spoke freely, knowing that the lines were secure and the scramblers

would prevent anyone from eavesdropping.

“You’d better have something good, Shaw, to call me this late at night. My wife and

I were sound asleep.”

“I do, Senator.”

“Well, get on with it.”

“Senator Rolander, it seems that your colleague, Senator Snyder, has been less than

discreet.”

“Less than discreet? Speak English, man. What do you mean?”

“I mean, Snyder allowed someone to overhear some of his more sensitive

conversations.”

This admission made Rolander very nervous. He gripped the handset of the

telephone tighter. “What kind of conversations?”

“The worst kind. The kind that could send us all away for a very long time, if not get

us executed for treason.”

“First of all, I don’t care how secure these lines are; I want you to watch your

language, and choose your words very carefully. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good, now run down what it is you’re talking about and give me all the

details.”

Five minutes later, Shaw’s story was complete. He had left out some of the details,

but none of the important ones. Senator Rolander had the picture.

“That hedonistic son of a bitch,” swore Rolander.

“To tell you the truth, it doesn’t matter who he was sleeping with, this still could

have happened.”

“I agree, but what does matter is that

Snyder got sloppy and now we'll have to clean

up his mess. Where is Agent Harvath right now?"

"In my TV room."

"He's in your house, and you're on the phone with me? What kind of idiot are

you?!"

"Relax, Senator, he's on 'candid camera.' I'm watching him on a closed-circuit

monitor right now. He hasn't budged in the last ten minutes, and he can't hear

us.”

“What’s he doing?”

“I have him writing up a full report.”

“That report can never see daylight. You understand?”

“Of course. There’s nothing to worry about,” said Shaw as he eyeballed a set of

books across the room that hid his wall safe. The report would never get out, unless

he needed it to. For now, it would stay in his safe and be a nice insurance

policy.

Once Harvath finished it and they printed it out, Shaw would read it over, have

Harvath sign it, and it would go right into the safe. “As soon as he’s done, I’ll

destroy it. We don’t need any loose ends that could cause us trouble, do we,

Senator?”

Rolander didn’t like the man’s tone, but he let it go. “No, we don’t. How long do

you think it will take him to complete the report?”

“A couple of hours, based on everything I have asked for.”

“Good. The last thing we want is for him to be out running around loose.”

“I agree, that’s why I’ve kept him here. Do you have any idea how lucky we are that

he came to me?” asked Shaw.

“Extremely. You’re sure neither he nor this Martin nor Natalie Sperando has spoken

with anyone else?”

“I’m pretty certain.”

“Good. I want you to keep him there until I call you back. Under no circumstances

is he to leave. Is that understood?”

“Yes, sir.”

Rolander took down the address of the Radisson in Alexandria and hung up.

After dialing several different numbers, Rolander finally tracked down Senator

Snyder on his cell phone.

“Russell, I’d love to talk right now, but I am extremely busy,” said Snyder.

Snyder could be busy with only one thing — looking for André Martin.

“Lost something, have you?” asked Rolander.

“Maybe.”

“Listen, David, quit fucking around. I need to talk to you and I don’t want to do it

while you’re on a cell phone.”

“It’s digital and there’s no one here but us mices, so go ahead.”

Senator Rolander didn’t know what nobody here “but us mices” meant, but

he

assumed Snyder was referring to some of the contract men he sometimes hired for

illegal operations.

Rolander continued, “You wouldn’t be hoping, as the commercial says, to bring a

little André home for the holidays, would you?”

Snyder remained silent. He was stunned.

“Are you still there?” asked Rolander.

“Yeah, I’m here. How did you know?”

“To quote an old friend, *‘how I know is not as important as what I know.’* You

fucked up big time. Remember how keen I was on the CYA factor? Well, my ass…

who am I kidding? — all of our asses are out in the wind right now and it’s your

fault. Digital or not, I want to have this conversation over some eggs, preferably

scrambled, so get back to your place and call me.”

“Sorry, Russell. I still have that little lost dog, or should I say bitch, I need to find.

I’ll have to call you when I get around to it.”

“Listen, you stupid bastard, I know where he is and will happily tell you, but

arrangements need to be made quickly. Get home and call me back.” Rolander hung

up the phone, severing the connection.

Turning to his driver, Snyder said, “Take me back to the town house. We

may have

caught a break.”

39

The hulking, black Chevy Suburban with its darkened windows crept quietly up

Washington Street through Alexandria’s Old Town. This late at night, there wasn’t

much traffic. Even with the windows rolled up, the scent of the nearby Potomac

filled the inside of the vehicle. At Pendleton Street and a sign for Oronoco

Bay Park,

the driver turned right. Three blocks later was Royal Street and then Fairfax. The

vehicle turned left and crept northward. The glowing sign of the Radisson was soon

visible. When the Suburban came parallel with the main entrance, it turned in. The

driver parked directly in front of the hotel's main doors and left the engine running.

At this hour only a skeleton crew was on

duty. An attractive Filipino woman, whose

name tag read “Anna,” looked up from her paperwork and smiled as the man

approached the front desk.

“Good evening. May I help you, sir?” asked Anna in her accented English.

“Yes, you can,” said the man, removing a black wallet from inside his suit coat

pocket and showing her his credentials. “My name is Agent Scot Harvath, Secret

Service. I am here to pick up a Mr. and Mrs….” The man pulled a notepad from

his

other pocket, flipped a couple of pages, and pretended to come to the name. "…a

Mr. and Mrs. Cashman. I believe you have them registered here."

The desk clerk glanced over the man's shoulder and saw the blacked-out Suburban

parked in front. It looked very official, just like the ones she had seen so many times

on TV. She looked back at the handsome man standing in front of her and thought

that he must have the bluest eyes she had ever seen. She tore her eyes away from his

and tapped some keys on her computer. “Yes, sir. They are registered guests of the

hotel.”

“Can you please tell me what room they are in?” asked the man.

“Is there a problem? Normally we are not supposed to give out that information,”

said Anna.

“I understand, and that is a very appropriate policy. This is a matter of national

security, though. As I told you, my name is Agent Scot Harvath, and I am with the

Secret Service. I have been instructed to pick up the Cashmans. Surely…” the man

said, leaning in and pretending to read the clerk’s name tag for the first time, “Anna,

you wouldn’t want to interfere with a matter of national security.”

Concerned, she answered, “No, sir. Of

course I wouldn't. The staff has been

instructed to always assist the police and other law enforcement should they ever

come to the hotel. I will need to note this in my nightly report, though."

"I understand. That's no problem. Now, would you please tell me what room they

are in?"

"Let's see…" she said, glancing down. "Room two-fifty-seven. It appears as if they

paid for the room in advance. Will they

be checking out?”

“Yes,” said the man. “I am going to go up and help them with their bags. Would you

please call their room and let them know that Secret Service Agent Scot Harvath is

on his way up?”

“Yes, I will.”

“Thank you,” said the man as he crossed the lobby toward the elevators.

Two minutes later, he knocked upon the door numbered 257.

“Who is it?” came a female voice from inside.

“Secret Service, ma’am. I am here to transport you and Mr. Martin.”

The door did not open.

“The desk clerk said that Agent Harvath was here,” said Natalie.

“She must have gotten confused. I asked her to call up to your room and tell you

that a Secret Service agent sent by Agent Harvath was here to pick you up.”

After a few moments of silence, the chain slid back and the door opened.

Both

Natalie and André had their jackets on, ready to go. They followed the man into the

elevator and down to the lobby. He had instructed them that time was of the essence

and that they must move quickly. As they reached the front desk, he placed their two

key cards on it and kept moving.

“Thank you for staying at the Radisson Old Town. We hope to see you again,” said

the desk clerk as the trio exited the front door.

The man opened the side door of the Suburban. Natalie was relieved to see an agent

sitting on the rear bench seat holding a shotgun. As they all climbed in and the man

shut the door behind them, the vehicle, even though it was under the Radisson's

brightly lit canopy, quickly darkened due to the blacked-out windows. Another man,

whom Natalie figured to be an

additional agent, sat in the front passenger seat. They

were taking this very seriously. That was good. She and André could finally relax.

The Suburban swung out of the driveway and headed back south toward the Capital

Beltway. They were on their way. For the first time since his ordeal began, André

breathed a sigh of relief. “I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you guys.”

“Oh, I’m sure, but not half as glad as we

are to see you," said the man in the front

seat. The reassuring voice put Natalie further at ease until she saw the horrified look

on André's face. He was completely still.

Natalie couldn't understand why his demeanor had so suddenly changed until the

passenger turned around to look at them.

The man in the front seat spoke again, and this time, Natalie knew exactly who it

was. “André, I was quite upset to come home and not find you waiting for me.”

40

After typing out his report and making the multitude of clarifications his boss had

asked for, Harvath was finally finished. It would have been done sooner, but Shaw

kept interrupting him with more questions. Shaw said he was going to be present at

the debriefing in the morning with Director Jameson and the treasury

secretary and

that he wanted to make sure Scot had all of his ducks in a row. After a final

read-through of the report and Shaw's okay, Harvath printed it out and signed it. He

was exhausted.

Shaw excused himself and went back to his study to make a few more phone calls.

When he reemerged almost twenty minutes later, he informed Harvath that Natalie

and André had been collected from the Radisson and moved to the safe house.

Everything was taken care of. Shaw said that he had high hopes for Harvath's

debriefing. There were some things that even Shaw couldn't help him get out of, like

assaulting the FBI agent, but given the new circumstances, a lot might be forgiven

and Scot might actually walk away with his job intact.

Buoyed by his boss's confidence, Scot allowed himself a moment of hope.

Seeing

that he was exhausted and knowing he had a big day in front of him, Shaw called

Harvath a cab. While he had fought to stay awake at Shaw's, Scot allowed himself

to nod off on the ride home.

When the cab pulled up in front of Harvath's Alexandria apartment building, the

driver had to call to him several times before he woke up. Once he shook the fog

from his head, Scot glanced at the meter and removed some cash from his wallet to

pay the driver. He stumbled up the driveway, wondering why he was so groggy, and

figured his head still wasn't exactly back to normal. Passing up his mailbox once

again, Harvath decided he needed to get as much sleep as he could before the big

meeting in a few hours. He walked up the stairs and fumbled in his pocket for his

keys.

Out of habit he glanced up to see if the brown hair was still in place in the upper

corner of his doorframe. Immediately, his body tensed. It wasn't there. He thought

back to when he had left and wondered if he could have forgotten to do it. He had

rushed out of the house for his meeting with Natalie. Had he or hadn't he? It had

become second nature to him, but then again, he had been doing a lot of things lately

that weren't exactly normal.

Well, either he could stand outside his front door for what was left of the night

wondering, or he could go in. *Which was it going to be?* Harvath decided to go in.

He opened the door slowly and moved cautiously into the apartment, letting his eyes

get adjusted to the dark. As his eyes began to focus, he noticed water on his kitchen

floor. Then a sharp pain jolted the back of his head and everything went black as

his

body fell to the linoleum.

When Harvath awoke and slowly opened his eyes, things were blurry and out of

focus. There were objects in his line of vision that were unfamiliar. He shut his eyes

tightly and opened them again. As his vision cleared, the objects began to take form

and make sense. He was lying on the kitchen floor looking at the bottom of his

refrigerator.

His head felt as if it had been slammed in a car door. As he drew his right hand

across the linoleum to help push himself up, he noticed he was surrounded by

puddles of water. His ice trays were scattered not far from where he lay, as were a

couple of once-frozen pizzas and a melted container of Ben & Jerry's Chunky

Monkey ice cream. Looking up, he could see the freezer door was wide open.

With both hands and feet, Scot pushed himself into a sitting position and leaned

against the cabinets underneath the sink. He reached up and touched the back of his

head. There was a bump the size of a walnut, but there didn’t seem to be any blood,

dried or otherwise.

Harvath would have killed at that moment for one of his SportGel cold packs for the

back of his head, but looking up once again at the freezer, he knew they would

all be

melted. *What was this all about? What was going on? Who had hit him, and*

what could someone have been looking for in his freezer?

Scot sat on the floor, his back supported by the cabinets, until he felt he could

stand. Using the counter for support, he let a wave of dizziness and nausea pass

before he attempted to walk into the entry hall. He checked the front door. It was

closed, but not locked. He slid along the

wall in the hallway, using it to help keep him

upright, and almost fell as he drew up to the living room.

He couldn’t believe what he saw inside. It was an absolute shambles. The whole

room had been tossed. Books, videotapes, couch cushions, everything had been

scattered in someone’s manic search, but for what? None of this made any sense.

He carefully searched the rest of the apartment until he was confident that whoever

was responsible wasn't hiding in one of his closets somewhere.

Scot knew he should call in immediately, but a wave of nausea began to sweep over

him again and he decided to put off any calls until he had a long shower and was

able to collect his thoughts.

In the bathroom he turned on the hot water and let it run. Before things got too

foggy, Scot grabbed a small mirror from his travel kit and positioned himself with his

back to the bathroom mirror. Angling the small mirror, he was able to get a good

look at the damage to the back of his head. From what he could see, the skin had

not been torn. It was pretty painful to the touch, but it would heal. He got into the

shower, put his hands on the tile in front of him for support, and let the hot water

pound against his body.

He didn’t know how long he had been in the shower, but it was long enough for the

hot water to start running out. Alexandria's older buildings had their charm, but they

also had their drawbacks. Scot climbed out, shaved, and dried his hair. Crossing to

his bedroom, he put on a light gray suit, white shirt, and blue tie. Hungry and

knowing he shouldn't disturb anything in the kitchen, Scot remembered he had a box

of granola bars in a hall closet. As he passed the living room, he noticed the caller ID

box was lying on the floor, blinking. It showed one new call.

When he depressed the *Call List* button on the display, a number came up that Scot

immediately recognized as being one at the Secret Service main office. According to

the time, it had come in while he was in the shower.

By following the phone cord, he found the base station for his cordless. He hit the

intercom button and was able to track

down the handset, which was buried beneath

one of the wayward couch cushions. Scot dialed his voice mail. It was Director

Jameson. “Agent Harvath, this is the director. I have absolutely no idea what is going

on or how the media got ahold of this thing so fast, but you have a lot of explaining

to do. I am sending a car for you, and you’d better be there.”

The media? I’ve got some explaining to

do? What was the director talking about?

Scot waded through the sea of upturned items in his living room and turned on his

TV. It was tuned to a local channel, and the image of a female reporter standing in a

wooded area with police, state trooper, and rescue vehicles in the background

appeared on the screen.

The reporter was speaking, and Scot turned up the sound to hear what she was

saying. "…by two joggers early this morning. Apparently the victims had both been

shot in the back of the head with a large-caliber weapon. While police say they have

no leads on the killer, the FBI's mobile crime lab appeared on the scene moments

ago, and we will keep you informed of any developments. Back to you in the

studio."

What is going on? Scot furiously switched channels until he found another

live shot

from the same scene. The reporter was saying, “Yes, Jean, it is indeed a tragic day

for the White House, as if their problems weren’t already bad enough. To

compound the feelings of loss President Rutledge’s staff must already be

experiencing, they now must add to it the murder of the assistant to the White House

social secretary, Natalie Sperando, whose body, along with that of a currently

unidentified man, was found early this morning by joggers in rural Maryland. Both

victims were shot once in the back of the head with what police are saying was a

large-caliber weapon, most likely a handgun.

“While authorities are not speculating as to the motive for the murders, no

possibilities are being ruled out at this time. Moments ago the FBI mobile crime lab

arrived on the scene—”

Scot turned off the TV. The nausea was returning, and he fought it down. Two more

people who had trusted him were dead, but how? And why Natalie, of all people?

Scot was overwhelmed with grief. She had been such a good friend. What

happened? Shaw had told him that they had made it to the safe house. *Could they*

have been followed? Both of them shot with a large-caliber weapon — Before he

could finish the thought, Harvath ran toward his bedroom.

This room had been tossed as well, but now Scot didn't care about preserving the

scene. He needed to find his sidearm. Frantically, he tore apart the already

annihilated room. *Why had he left his pistol behind last night? Why hadn't he*

taken it with him?

As Scot continued to search, he caught a flash of light out of the corner of his eye.

He thought it was his head playing tricks

on him and tried to ignore it. He went back

to searching for the gun. He was on his hands and knees now, throwing pieces of

clothing over his shoulder in a mad attempt to recover the SIG. The light came back.

Harvath stopped searching. He looked up at the repeating colors of red, blue, red,

blue, along the wall and realized they were coming from outside.

Keeping low, he scrambled toward the window and peered out through the

partially

open blinds. Pulling up to the curb below were several government favorites:

dark-colored Ford Crown Victorias with suited drivers, which belonged to either the

FBI, the Secret Service, or both. There were also several police cars.

My God, thought Harvath, *they must think somehow that I am responsible for*

André's and Natalie's murders and are here to arrest me. All things considered,

Harvath was also willing to bet that the gun used to commit the crime would turn out

to be his missing SIG-Sauer.

While Scot was a stand-up guy, all for telling the truth and cooperating, something

told him that now wasn't the time to go gentle into that good night. He needed some

answers first.

Trying to push the shock of Natalie's and André's murders from his mind, Scot

grabbed his jeans from where he'd left them on the bathroom floor and transferred

everything into the pockets of the trousers he was now wearing. He threw on his

trench coat, stepped out, and locked the door to the apartment behind him. Turning

to his left, he opened the door to the fire stairs and started down, careful not to make

any noise.

As Scot moved down the last flight of stairs and pushed open the door to the

basement, he realized that a little-known feature of his building was about to pay off

big time. He was glad he had done his homework.

The old apartment building Harvath lived in, as well as all of the other buildings along

his block, had been owned and built by the same wealthy Virginia family. The wife

had been quite the eccentric and hadn’t

wanted to deal with coal-truck deliveries

disrupting her rather erratic sleeping patterns, so the husband had connected all of

the basements by a series of passageways. The coal was delivered via the main

building's chute at the north end of the block, and servants then transported it

through the passageways to the boiler rooms of the other buildings.

While this system was no longer in use, the doors connecting one basement to

another were still there, and Scot had long since made copies of the keys that fit the

locks, just in case. It all went back to his SEAL training: a SEAL always has at least

two routes of escape, because a SEAL is always prepared. Pulling his key ring from

his pocket, he quickly opened the first door and then locked it behind him. Even

though he thought that the basement lights were probably still functional, Harvath

chose not to risk using them and drew

the small Mag-Lite from his trench-coat

pocket and used it to light his path.

He quickly made his way to the northernmost building, exited through the alley, and

two blocks later hailed a cab. He had the driver drop him on Russell Road, just

before King Street. From there, Harvath made his way to the King Street Metro stop,

just next to Alexandria's Union Station.

There were still plenty of morning commuters about, and Harvath blended

in with

them perfectly, just another businessman on his way to work in D.C. The question

was, where was he going? At the King Street Metro stop you could take either the

blue line or the yellow line. *Which one?*

He decided against using his Metro *Fast Pass*. While he doubted it could be used to

trace his movements within the Metro, he didn't trust it. Walking over to one of the

automatic machines, he inserted five dollars and seconds later pulled out a One Day

Pass.

After retrieving his pass and moving through the turnstile, Harvath headed for the

blue line bound for Addison Road. Having ridden the underground systems in both

Chicago and New York, Washington's clean, carpeted Metro system always amazed

him. People never even ate on the trains,

lest they get chewed out by a Metro worker

or, worse still, a fellow passenger. The people who used the Metro took it very

seriously, and within one visit, even tourists figured out that while you're standing on

the escalator, you always stand to your right or you risk being trampled by frenzied

businesspeople rushing to get their trains.

As the Metro passed through the austere beige stations, whose ceilings were

lined

with what looked like cough drops but were actually engineering enhancements used

to reduce echoes, Harvath kept his eyes peeled for any D.C. police or the

brown-capped Metro cops that might already be looking for him. So far, so good.

Harvath got off the train and exited the system at the Foggy Bottom — GWU

station. The Foggy Bottom area was the neighborhood just to the west of the White

House that was home to George Washington University. It was also known as the

West End.

He quickly made his way down Twenty-third toward the university and G Street.

Halfway to Twentieth Street was the Washington Bytes cyber café and bakery. The

smell of fresh roasted coffee filled his nostrils as he walked in. They had the best

bagels in town, and Scot ordered one with cream cheese and chives, along

with an

OJ, before sitting down at one of the terminals in the back corner.

The café was an easy walk from the White House and an occasional haunt of

Harvath's when he needed to get away from the high-energy pace at work. Today,

there were only a few students around, and where Scot sat no one could see him

from the street.

All of the computers came equipped with a headset and web phone software.

Scot

reached up and disconnected the camera on top of his monitor. He allowed himself a

bittersweet moment to think about Natalie once again before he took a bite of his

bagel followed by a long swig of OJ and then hopped onto the web. He entered the

telephone number for his home computer's dedicated modem line and swallowed

two Tylenols while he waited for the

connection to complete.

After two rings and some electronic cross talk between the café's computer and the

one at home, Harvath was ready. He set about establishing a routing system that

would bounce his call through several international servers. If the person he was

about to call was tracing all of their incomings, it would take them quite a while to

figure out where the call came from, and even when they unraveled the long

electronic chain, all they would be left with was the appearance that the call

originated from Harvath's apartment.

Ten minutes later, the trail was set and Scot was ready to make his call. He dialed the

number for Bill Shaw. His secretary answered on the first ring. Harvath identified

himself, and after a couple of clicks and another ring, he was put through.

"Scot, where are you?" asked Shaw.

"I don't want to talk about where I am,

Bill," said Scot quietly, cautiously glancing

around to make sure no one was listening. "What the hell happened?"

"Scot, I am sure there is an explanation for all of this. I promise we'll listen to you.

We just need to bring you in."

"Me? Bring *me* in? What are you talking about? I didn't do anything."

"Scot, I'm here with the director—"

"You are? Why is the director in your office?" asked Scot.

“He’s not. I’m in his. Your call was forwarded here. We had an appointment this

morning. Don’t you remember?”

“Yeah, I remember, but that’s not why I’m calling. I want to know what happened to

Natalie and André Martin. You said they were safe.”

“Safe? What are you talking about?”

“Last night,” said Scot, “at your house, you said you would have them picked up

and put into a safe house.”

“Scot, I’ll admit we did talk about many things when you showed up at my home in

the middle of the night, but a safe house wasn’t one of them.”

“What? What are you *talking* about?”

“Scot, I have explained to the director how you appeared at my house ranting in the

middle of the night. I attempted to calm you down. We talked about the president’s

kidnapping, your feelings of guilt, your concern that you might be fingered as the

inside leak…. I gave you my word I would do everything to help you—”

“You lying son of a bitch!” said Scot, careful to keep his voice down, but making

sure the force of the emotion came through nonetheless.

“Scot, this is Director Jameson. I am ordering you to tell us where you are so we

can bring you in for debriefing.”

“Debriefing for what?” asked Scot.

“Twenty minutes ago a SIG-Sauer three-

fifty-seven semiautomatic was found near

the Sperando murder scene with a serial number that comes up positive as the

sidearm issued to you. It is also covered with your fingerprints. If you are not

responsible, we'll give you ample opportunity to prove your innocence."

"*Prove my* innocence? What about innocent until proven guilty? Sounds to me like

you guys have already made up your minds on this one."

“Scot, we want to help you,” said Shaw.

“You know what, Bill? I think you’ve helped me enough already. By the way, you

don’t know anything about a little redecorating job that was done at my apartment

last night, do you?”

“All I know is that when you didn’t answer your door this morning when our men

came to pick you up, they were let in by your building manager and said the place

was a complete and total mess."

"But you had nothing to do with it, nor the fact that I got whacked in the back of the

head and my gun was missing when I woke up, right?"

"What would I have to do with it? You're talking crazy again, Scot."

"I'm crazy? That would be a convenient excuse, wouldn't it? I don't suppose you

gave the director the statement you had me write up at your place last night either,

did you?”

“Statement?” asked Shaw. “I didn’t have you write up any statement. Scot, this is

serious. I think your head injuries may have been graver than any of us originally

thought. If you’ve injured your head again, we need to get you to a doctor.”

“I also suppose,” said Scot, ignoring Shaw’s expression of concern, “that the

director knows nothing of Senator Snyder’s potential involvement in the kidnapping

of the president."

"He knows, all right. I told him about all of the people you thought were involved,

right down to the White House gardener. Scot, last night you were throwing

conspiracy theories around like they were going out of style. I think this has been too

much for you. We need to get you some help."

Scot was silent. Why was Shaw trying to railroad him? He was blatantly lying, but

why? There could only be one answer.

He was somehow involved.

“Scot, this is Director Jameson again. Listen, son. I want you to turn yourself in. Tell

us where you are and we’ll come get you. I promise we’ll listen to everything you

have to say. Just tell us where you are.”

“That’s a nice offer, Director, but I think I’m going to decline right now. As for

Agent Shaw, I made Sam Harper a promise that I would get the people responsible

for his death. You're now on that list, Bill. Have a nice day."

Harvath terminated the connection.

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If a full dragnet was not already out, it would be very soon. Refusing a direct order

from his superiors to come in and answer questions about a murder investigation

involving his weapon should put him at the top of every law enforcement hot sheet in

the D.C. area. Which meant he didn't have much time.

As he was preparing to log off from his home computer, Harvath noticed the little

flag that showed he had one message. Knowing he didn't have time for this, he still

let his curiosity get the better of him, and he clicked on the *new mail* icon.

Dear Sir:

Thank you for your recent inquiry regarding Nestlé S.A. chocolate products. We are

sorry to inform you that our Lieber chocolate bar is not currently available in the

United States. This candy is made exclusively for the Swiss market. We would like

to point out that Nestlé has a fine line of chocolates which can be purchased in the

United States and other countries abroad. For a full listing of our chocolates, or for

any other Nestlé products, please visit our web site at…

Scot logged off of his home computer and signed off from the cyber café's. He

paid the earthy-crunchy chick at the coffee counter for his time on line and headed

out the door.

On the pavement, he quickly scanned both directions for signs of anything that

seemed out of place. Not noticing anything out of the ordinary, Scot walked down G

Street to Twentieth, made a left, and headed north toward Dupont Circle. It had been

less than ten hours since he had gotten out of a cab in almost the same

neighborhood to meet with Natalie Sperando and André Martin. Now they were both

dead and someone was trying to hang him for their murders. There could be only

one reason: André had been one hundred percent on the money.

It began to rain again, and Scot popped into a small drugstore and bought an

umbrella and an ugly tweed Totes hat. Using the weather to his advantage, he

turned

his collar up and pulled the hat down to conceal as much of his face as possible.

After giving Natalie two hundred dollars last night, paying for his time and breakfast

at the cyber café, the Metro pass, and now the hat and umbrella, Harvath was left

with seven dollars.

He found an ATM across the street. He slid in his card and punched his code. He

selected the withdraw-two-hundred-dollars option and waited. Instead of the *thack,*

thack, thack sound of bills being metered out, he heard the printer printing a receipt;

not a good sign. The screen flashed a benign message: *Unable to complete*

transaction at this time. Please try again later.

Could they have frozen my account? Scot wondered. *There's no way they could*

have moved this fast. It had to be a

coincidence. He put his ATM card back in his

wallet and continued to head north toward Dupont Circle. When he reached M, he

hailed a cab. He had the driver hang a left on Massachusetts Avenue and go through

Embassy Row past the vice presidential mansion at the U.S. Naval Observatory.

Convinced he wasn't being followed, he then instructed the driver to change

direction and come back along Florida Avenue to North Capitol Street and drop

him

at Union Station.

The fare was more than Harvath had in cash, but he had flagged a cab from a

company he knew took plastic. He leaned forward through the partition to watch if

his card would be accepted. It was. He had been overreacting about the cash

machine. His accounts hadn’t been frozen. Not yet, at least.

Even though rush hour was over, Union Station was still crowded. Harvath kept

his

collar up and his hat pulled down close to his eyes. He tucked the umbrella under his

arm and walked with his shoulders hunched up as if he was fighting off a chill from

the cold air. His hands were shoved deep into the pockets of his trench coat. His

right hand played with a key André Martin had slipped him as they shook hands

good-bye last night at J.R.'s. "A copy of

my insurance policy," André had said.

"I've always liked trains. How about you, Scot?" Those had been the last words

André Martin would ever say to him.

As Harvath picked his way through the station toward the lockers, his eyes scanned

the room for any surveillance. Normally, he would have hung back for a while to see

if anyone was watching the locker, but there was no time for that. The longer he

hung around, the better the chances were that the dragnet would swallow him.

Harvath eyeballed a couple potential exits he could sprint to if he was made and,

with the small comfort that afforded, moved toward the bank of colored metal

lockers. He looked at the key with its number sixty-eight and wondered if Martin had

chosen it out of fondness for the old joke: “What’s a sixty-eight? It’s kind of like a

sixty-nine except you do me and I’ll owe

you one." If there was anything within this

locker that he could use, Harvath definitely would owe André one.

Moving down the row of lockers, Harvath stopped at number sixty-five and casually

glanced away toward a set of monitors listing departures and arrivals. No one

seemed to be watching him, so he moved to sixty-eight. He inserted the key and

opened the locker. Inside was a manila envelope, which he withdrew and tucked

inside his suit coat.

Keeping his head down, but scanning in every direction, Scot began to make his way

toward the nearest exit. A crowd of noisy teenagers carrying suitcases and pillows,

undoubtedly off on some school trip, cut across his path, and he had to slow his

pace. When the mob passed, he noticed two men he hadn’t seen before standing

less than ten feet away and staring right at him. They didn’t look friendly. Although

they were dressed in street clothes, their eyes and their builds were not those of John

Q. Public.

Scot's thoughts were interrupted when the men began moving toward him. "Sir, can

we speak with you a moment?" asked one.

Harvath turned in the other direction and began walking faster. He heard the men

pick up their pace. Two seconds later, there was a faint metallic click that Harvath

recognized right away as the sound of a blade locking into place. Whether it was a

switchblade, a stiletto, or some other type of knife, the message was perfectly clear:

he was not supposed to leave the train station alive. The use of a blade, rather than a

pistol with a sound suppresser, was probably to make it look as if he was the victim

of another D.C. mugging. Harvath now knew that these men were professionals and

didn’t play for the good guys.

He could sense them getting closer. He didn’t dare turn around and look. From the

direction they had approached, they had forced him into an area of the station that

was less populated than the rest. While there were several groups of people around,

they were not close enough to witness anything. Most likely, the men would come up

from behind, slide the blade between his ribs, and hold him up as if he were a

friend

who'd had too much to drink. They would lead him over to a bench and leave him

to die. Harvath's only chance was to act fast.

Quickening his pace, he pretended he was trying to put some distance between

himself and his pursuers. Just as the two men matched his stride, Harvath stumbled,

his leg appearing to twist in an incredibly painful contortion. Seeing their chance, the

two men moved in, but Scot was ready for them.

Just as he'd expected, the men had planned to engage in what operatives referred to

as the friend-in-need scenario. As he began to fall, the first man reached out to grab

him as the other man readied his blade.

In a move that seemed to defy gravity, Harvath halted his fall until he could grab hold

of man number one, who was already reaching out for him. Locking his right

hand

around the man's wrist, with his left he pinched with searing pain into the man's

elbow. He resumed his fall, dislocating his adversary's arm and sending him

sprawling across the floor with a powerful thrust of his legs.

Scot rolled in classic aikido fashion and came up onto his knees, just in time to parry

the attack of the man with the knife. The blade was not anything as refined as a

switchblade or a stiletto; it was an

extremely dangerous knuckle knife. As Harvath

dodged the man's thrust, the edge of the metal knuckles caught him across the lower

jaw and sent a white-hot lightning bolt of pain straight to his brain.

As the knife wielder prepared for another run, Scot noticed his accomplice with the

dislocated arm was moving off toward the exit. As quickly as he made this

realization, the man with the knife came at him again. This time he held it in a

manner

that suggested his plan was to stab in a downward motion, and Scot readied himself,

still with no time to get off his knees. It was amazing that no one had seen what was

happening and called for the police.

Scot focused on the blade and prepared for the way in which the man was

telegraphing his attack. Then, everything changed. Suddenly, the man had another

knife in his left hand, and it came slicing

across from left to right. All of Scot's

attention had been focused on the man's right hand. *Stupid*. He should have known

better.

Harvath was able to move just in time, but the blade caught the left shoulder of his

trench coat and tore it. The force of the man's attack threw him off balance, and as

his assailant overextended himself, he made his left side vulnerable. That was the

opening Scot needed.

Before the man could regain his balance, Scot drove his right fist up hard into his

kidney. He heard a *woosh* of air along with a deep groan. The man spun with both

knives, pivoting back in the other direction. Harvath ducked and repeated the same

punch to the man's right side, achieving the same effect. The man groaned again,

and as he prepared to come at Scot for another pass, Harvath jumped to his feet and

maneuvered behind him. He landed several swift and painful blows into the man's

back, as well as a kick into the back of his right knee, which sent him sprawling

forward onto the polished stone floor.

Before his would-be assassin could recover, Harvath popped him twice in a very

painful area beneath each shoulder blade, which caused him to involuntarily release

his grip on the blades. The one in his left hand clattered onto the ground, but his

right fingers were still inside the knuckle loops.

Harvath stepped on his right hand and pulled the man's head up by his hair. "Who

are you?" he asked.

"Fuck you," the man sputtered.

From behind him, Harvath could hear the sound of footsteps running in his

direction. He glanced back and saw two Amtrak security guards closing in fast. He

decided to cut his losses.

Standing up, Harvath kicked the man hard in the ribs, knowing for sure he had

broken at least three. He turned toward the approaching security guards and

shouted, “You guys take him. I’m going after the other one. He got my wallet!” With

that, he ran toward the door the other attacker had used.

As Harvath reached the exit, he pulled up short and carefully glanced through the

glass. *It could be a trap.* He surveyed the immediate area outside the doors

before

he slipped outside. Everything seemed quiet. There was nothing to suggest that a

man had come out only moments before holding his arm and howling in pain. Of

course that hadn't happened. These guys were professionals. There was no question

about that. The man would have done his best not to draw attention to himself when

he exited. The main question was, *Who sent these two and why?* Whoever nailed

him in the back of the head at his apartment last night could have finished him off

then. *Why didn't they?*

None of the people nor any of the traffic buzzing up and down Second Street

seemed to pay him any attention. Whoever the other man was, he was gone by now.

Careful to make sure that he was not being followed, Harvath crossed to the other

side of the street and quickly made his way toward Stanton Park. Although he

had

lost his umbrella in the scuffle, he had managed to retain his hat, and the rain trickled

from it in small gray rivulets.

Harvath tried to repair his trench coat by tucking the torn fabric underneath the

shoulder seam. It would have to do for now. He was extremely lucky that the blade

had not sliced any deeper. He rubbed his jaw, and although it was sore, he quickly

determined that it hadn’t been broken.

He would live, but he had suffered yet another

blunt trauma to his head. That was twice in less than eight hours.

Cutting south on Fourth Street, Scot arrived at the Folger Shakespeare Library. He

needed a place where he could catch his breath and gather his thoughts. This seemed

as good a place as any. Falling in with a group of older tourists who were scurrying

up the stairs to get out of the rain,

Harvath blended in with them perfectly as they

entered the building. The group checked their wet things and were led into a

recreated Tudor gallery with dark oak panels. Everyone *oohed* and *ahhed* at the

library's intricately carved Elizabethan doorways. As the group moved on, Scot

found a bench and sat down, placing his trench coat next to him.

He withdrew the manila envelope from his suit coat and tore it open. Inside he found

several strips of paper that he couldn't at first make out. Suddenly, he realized what

they were. Apparently, André had been using a handheld Xerox scanner and the

strips were meant to be put together to show a complete page. Harvath didn't have

time for puzzles, so he quickly sifted through the stack. Most of it seemed to be

journal entries, presumably from Senator Snyder's personal appointment book. But

as Harvath continued to sift, something else caught his attention.

Two strips of paper could be placed together to form what looked like a photo

negative of a note. The paper was black and the handwriting was white. The

handwriting matched the entries in the senator's appointment book, but why would

André have a negative of a note that the senator had written? Harvath pushed the

thought aside and read:

Dear Aunt Jane,

All is well here. We are looking forward to your visit and hope that everything is

ready on your end. We trust that the money we sent will cover your expenses. We

expect your trip to be a roaring success. You know how to contact us if you have

any questions.

Yours,

Edwin

Why would Snyder write a letter and sign it "Edwin"? Harvath kept flipping

through the pieces of paper. He came across something in a totally different hand

and assumed it was André Martin's.

Aunt Jane? Edwin? Switzerland? Snyder claims he has no living relatives. What's

the connection?

Stapled to it was another piece of paper that listed an address for a post office box

in Interlaken, Switzerland, written in the senator's hand. *Switzerland?* Scot tumbled

the pieces in his mind, trying to figure out how they all fit.

What was the connection? There had to be one. Snyder had had André killed

because of what he thought he had discovered. Whatever it was, it must have been

explosive if Snyder would kill to protect it. Now he wanted Scot dead. Well,

Senator Snyder had a little surprise

coming; Scot Harvath was not that easy to get

rid of.

Back outside the Folger Library, Harvath turned and headed south. Along the way he

tried another ATM and got the same message as before. If he was going to figure

things out, he would need a little walking-around money. He flagged a cab and had it

take him to the Washington Navy Yard. He gave the driver his remaining seven

dollars and got out. Checking carefully behind him, he ducked into Navy Yard Metro

station and took the train one stop to Waterfront. There, he emerged again and hailed

a cab for his bank on Twelfth Street, just south of Logan Circle.

The bank officer was polite and after comparing Harvath's signature to the one on

his card and looking at his ID, he gestured for Scot to follow him downstairs to the

vault that contained the safe deposit boxes. Scot produced his key, and in a

synchronous fashion that Harvath felt sure was supposed to impress, the bank

officer waited to turn his key at the same moment Scot did, as if they were about to

unleash a nuclear weapon.

After the box had been withdrawn, Scot was shown to a small private room, where

the door was shut behind him and he was left alone. He lifted the lid of the box and

removed the normal things one would expect to find, stock certificates, bonds, legal

papers… Once those were removed, he stared down at something he thought he

would never need to use.

43

As he exited the bank, Harvath carefully surveyed the street before stepping out of

the doorway. All of his senses were afire, filtering the stream of input they were

receiving, searching for even the slightest hint of danger. Everything looked normal,

but years of training had taught him that was when attacks often happened. Half a

block to his left was a red-and-white van with *Ziretta Carpet Cleaning* written

across the side. A long orange hose stretched from the van across the sidewalk and

into a nearby building. The generator inside the van created a tremendous amount of

noise, but that wasn't unusual; carpet cleaning vans were normally loud.

As he turned to his right, he decided not to give the van a second thought. It wasn't

out of place, he was. This whole morning had been out of place. Life in D.C. was

not magically changing because of his experiences; the real danger for him lay in

seeing threats where there weren't any. Paranoia was not going to do anything to

improve his current situation.

The flip side of Scot's reassuring self-talk was that paranoia might be annoying, but

a healthy dose of it served to keep you alive. No one ever got killed by being too

vigilant.

Quickly, Scot made his way down the street, using the reflective storefront windows

he passed to see what was happening across the street and behind him. The noise of

the carpet van began to slowly fade, but

it was replaced by something that sounded

like a heartbeat: *boom, boom, boom.* It was faint at first, but began to increase in

volume. Harvath didn't hear it so much as feel it in the middle of his chest: *boom,*

boom, boom. He realized that the sound was growing louder because it was coming

closer: *boom, boom, boom.*

It was the heavy bass from a pumped-up car stereo system. Without even turning

to

look at the vehicle, Harvath knew exactly what it would be. His colleagues at the

Secret Service called them *ghettomobiles*. Cars with windows tinted in flagrant

violation of city ordinances, the chassis lowered, and tires sticking out far beyond

the wheel wells. The drivers of these cars didn't care that bass matured over

distance and got louder and deeper as the sound waves traveled outward. All

they

knew was that it sounded cool. Harvath hated ghettomobiles and the *hey, look at me*

machismo attitude of their drivers and occupants.

The noise was almost on top of him now, and as he listened to it approach, he

couldn’t be sure, but he thought the car had slowed down. He glanced ahead, but

there wasn’t any traffic that would have caused the car to reduce its speed.

Probably not on their way to the bank, he thought. Drawing alongside another

storefront, Harvath looked in the window just in time to see the reflection of tinted

windows sliding down on the ghettomobile and a Tec 9 automatic being thrust

through.

Reflexively, Harvath hit the sidewalk and rolled. Bullets tore up the concrete where

he had stood. The window he'd used to covertly survey the vehicle shattered in a

thousand pieces, spraying him with shards of razor-sharp glass. All the while, the

stereo kept thumping its staccato beat: *boom, boom, boom.*

Harvath jammed his hand inside his trench coat and groped for his waistband. It

settled on the rubberized grip of his silenced nine millimeter Glock pistol. He thought

he heard one of the car doors opening, and the sudden increase in the music's

volume confirmed it. From where he lay

next to a parked car, the curb was too high

for him to see anything in the street. With the window of the store to his left

shattered, he had no idea which way the person, or persons, who had exited the car

were coming.

Needing a diversion, Harvath aimed the Glock and took two well-placed shots

through the rear window of the car parked in front of him. The silent spits broke the

glass and sent it showering into the street. He heard one of his assailants yell, “Gun!”

Harvath sprang to his feet and rolled along the trunk of the parked car that had been

his cover.

A powerfully built man in black fatigues and a balaclava stood swinging his Tec 9

from side to side trying to figure out where the shots had come from. Harvath didn’t

waste any time. He fired twice into the

man’s torso because the head was snapping

around too wildly to get a clean between-the-eyes kill.

The man was ripped right off his feet and thrown to the ground by the force of

Harvath’s weapon. As Harvath turned to fire at the occupants of the gray Nissan

Maxima with the thumping stereo and polished alloy wheels, the man he’d just put

down shook his head as if he had been in a daze and turned his weapon on Harvath.

Scot dove out of the line of fire as bullets ripped up the side of the parked car,

flattening both tires and blowing out all of the vehicle's glass.

There was no way the man could have survived two direct hits, unless he was

wearing *body armor*.

To any witnesses dumb enough to still be standing on the street, this looked like one

vicious drive-by, but Scot knew better. Somehow, whoever had been responsible

for the attack on him at Union Station had been able to track him to his bank. While

this group might look like gang bangers in commando outfits, there was no fooling

Harvath; they were professional hit men. The man yelling, “Gun,” had proved it.

That sealed it. Scot had absolutely no plans to turn himself in to Director Jameson

until he was able to get some answers. For all he knew, by turning himself in he

could be handing himself over to the

very people who were trying to kill him. It was

obvious Shaw was behind the deaths of Natalie Sperando and André Martin. He

could be behind this as well. And if Shaw was involved, who else might be working

with him? There was no telling. It could be anyone.

There was no time to figure things out now. He needed to focus on staying alive.

Scot's ears were too busy ringing from the explosion of gunfire to notice the

silence

that now enveloped him. The smell of cordite hung in the damp air, and he heard the

telltale sound of boots crunching on broken glass. There was a clicking sound

followed by metal scraping on metal. The shooter was reloading and coming toward

him. This might be Scot's only chance.

Not knowing how many other occupants were in the car and where they had their

weapons trained, Harvath raised the Glock above the level of the trunk he was hiding

behind and fired wildly toward where he thought the shooter and the lowered

Maxima were. He heard a loud grunt and, without looking, made a desperate leap

from between the parked cars onto the sidewalk. He broke off at a run back toward

the bank, staying as low as he could.

He heard the squeal of tires and the rapid fire of automatic weapons as he

ran. The

bullets chewed apart every car he tried to use as cover, sending glass flying

everywhere. Then, as quickly as it started, the commotion stopped with the

sickening slam of an impact.

Harvath cautioned a look back and saw that a furniture truck, its driver not knowing

what was happening, had turned left off a side street at exactly the same time his

assailants were reversing wildly down the street toward him, and the two

vehicles

had collided. The sound of approaching police sirens could now be heard in the

distance.

As Harvath turned back toward the bank, something whispered by his right ear and

tore a huge piece of stone out of the building behind him. Someone else was

shooting at him! And whoever this person was, he or she was somewhere in front of

him using a silenced weapon.

He hit the ground and rolled again; just as another muffled shot narrowly missed his

head. Using the still intact storefront window to his left, he could see a man with a

mounted rifle in the back of the Ziretta Carpet Cleaning van. Scot was pinned down.

He couldn’t go forward and he couldn’t go back. He was trapped. Or was he?

Using the storefront image for guidance, Scot raised his pistol and fired two shots

toward the red-and-white van. As soon

as the shots were fired, he rolled into the

street between two parked cars. *What were the chances the men in the Nissan were*

hanging around after crashing into the furniture truck? Most likely, they had taken

off in the car if it was drivable, or by foot if it wasn't. The vehicle was undoubtedly

stolen, and with the police on their way, the men would want to put as much distance

between themselves and the crime scene

as possible. *Those who fight and run*

away live to fight another day, Scot thought to himself.

There hadn't been any gunfire from behind him, nor any sound of someone pursuing

him on foot. Chances were the men in the Maxima had fled. *One group down.*

His problem now was the shooter in the van. From where the van was parked, the

shooter had a pretty good command of this length of the street. The sirens were

getting closer. Both Harvath and the man in the van would have to make their moves

soon.

Fours shots from the van in quick succession tore up the roof and shattered the

glass of the car Scot was using for cover.

Harvath waited, but the van showed no sign of moving. They were playing a very

deadly game of chicken. Show yourself and be shot; wait too long and be picked

up

by the police. Harvath knew the man in the van wouldn't want that and probably

knew that he felt exactly the same way. He needed to make a move, and he needed

to make it now.

Thinking back, Scot realized the shooter in the van hadn't begun firing at him until he

had run back toward his bank, which meant that if he went in the other direction, the

guy probably wouldn't have a clean shot. It was the only choice Scot had.

Harvath hadn't taken his eyes off the reflection in the glass for a second. The man

still sat in the van, its doors open, with his rifle pointed in Scot's direction. He

hadn't figured out that Scot could see him in the glass, or else he surely would have

blown it out. Or would he? Maybe the shooter was using the glass to his advantage

as well.

Fixing the position of the van in his mind, Scot turned his Glock toward the

storefront and chose several spots that would allow his bullets to break the glass, but

minimize the chances of hitting anyone inside. He fired and, as the glass came

tumbling down, he turned his weapon toward where he remembered the van to be

and began firing as he ran back up the sidewalk, away from the bank.

He managed to pin down the shooter in the van long enough to escape his line of

fire. He was now safely out of range, but didn't know what would face him in just a

few car lengths.

The furniture truck was still in the middle of the street. Scot kept his pistol at the

ready. Sliding out into the street, he glanced back to make sure no one from the van

was coming up behind him. So far, it was clear.

Harvath hugged the back of the furniture truck and moved up the passenger side.

As

he neared the cab, he could see the crumpled gray metal of the Maxima. It was

totaled. Crouching by the truck's right front tire, Harvath held the Glock in both

hands ready to swing out and search for the shooters. He took a deep breath,

applied pressure to the trigger and spun, just as he heard a noise from behind.

The truck's passenger door began to swing open. An older, gray-haired black man,

whose eyes were wild with fright, was attempting to climb down.

“Stay where you are,” ordered Harvath. “Get back in your truck, close the door, and

stay on the floor.” The man did as he was told.

Scot waited a beat and then sprang forward. He swept the Glock from side to side,

ready to take down any of the assailants in or around the vehicle who might still be

armed. There were none. The Nissan’s

trunk was completely crunched against its

backseat. The car's interior was filled with broken glass and brass shell casings, as

was the ground around it. The men had fled. The police were almost on top of the

scene, and Harvath also decided fleeing was a good idea. There was nothing to gain

by hanging around.

While sifting through the contents of his safe deposit box and André Martin's

envelope again, it had become obvious to Scot that his only chance to get to the

bottom of things was to go to Interlaken himself. After the attack outside the bank,

he knew it was the right move. *Besides,* he reasoned, *who wouldn't want a break*

from the goddamn D.C. weather? Rain, sleet, snow, and now bullets. He just

prayed he wouldn't be embarking upon on a wild-goose chase.

Three blocks away, he caught a cab that took him straight down M Street to the

tony

Georgetown Park mall. This time, he had cash for the driver.

For some reason, the mall's Edwardian interior, in green with brass touches, always

reminded him of Harrods in London. The waterfalls, which he normally found

soothing, didn't work their magic on him today. He made his way toward the J.

Crew store and paid for his purchases with bills from the twenty thousand dollars in

cash he had removed from his safe deposit box. He'd always kept an emergency

reserve, just in case, and today he was glad he had. He didn't dare use his credit

card again. He had used it for two cab rides and was sure that was how the

assassins had tracked him. With plenty of cash at his disposal, he could afford to

ditch the plastic.

Leaving J. Crew, he bent his credit cards back and forth until he could break them

into pieces. He pocketed the pieces and made his way toward Voyageur Luggage.

At Voyageur, he picked up a wheeled KIVA Designs travel bag that could be

converted into a backpack. It was big enough to hold the clothing he bought, but

small enough to fit into an overhead compartment. Next on his list was Crabtree &

Evelyn, where an attractive woman named Leslie outfitted him with a complete men's

toiletry kit and a women's Pamper Yourself gift basket. Harvath counted out the

bills, thanked the clerk, and asked where the nearest men's room was.

Outside the washrooms was a bank of pay telephones. Harvath chose the one at the

far end and, opening the yellow pages, looked up the eight hundred number for

Swissair. Knowing the quickest way to get an operator was to select the

business-and-first-class-reservation option, he pressed the appropriate

button. After

only a few seconds a polite agent came on the line. According to the woman,

Swissair had a 5:40 P.M. flight leaving Dulles that would arrive in Zurich at 7:35 the

next morning. Harvath made a reservation in the name of Hans Brauner, memorized

the record-locator number, thanked the agent, and hung up the phone. Harvath had

been keeping an eye on the men’s room. There was very little traffic, so he

decided

now was as good a time as any.

Inside, he looked under each stall to make sure they were vacant and chose one

toward the very end. He locked the door and placed his bags in front of him. The

pain in his head made it feel as if it were cracking wide open, and his stomach

churned violently with nausea. Dr. Helsabeck had been right about stress and

exertion making his symptoms worse,

but there was no time to coddle himself. Scot

faced the toilet and forced himself to vomit. If that's what his body wanted to do,

then let's get it over with, he reasoned.

He used some toilet paper to wipe his mouth, then removed his Crabtree & Evelyn

toiletry kit and hung it from the hook on the back of the stall door. Inside was a

travel toothbrush and some toothpaste. No one had come into the men's room since

he'd entered, so he left his stall, did a fast tooth brushing with the water from the

sink, then returned to the stall and locked the door once again.

Working quickly, Scot fished several Ziploc plastic bags out of his suit pocket. The

first contained a contact lens case and the other a small white tube and what looked

to be a handful of brown hair. The transformation wouldn't be huge, but Harvath

had learned over the years that with disguises, the sum is often greater than its parts.

The two keys to a successful disguise were, first, to eradicate any traces of a very

recognizable feature, which in Scot's case was the deep blue of his eyes, and,

second, to have the disguise be as natural as possible. The more elaborate a

disguise, the less chance it had of working. The final goal was not only to look like

someone else, but to become someone else.

As Scot put in the brown contact lenses and used the tube of glue to apply the

goatee and heavy eyebrows, he began his transformation. He pushed his hair

forward and parted it in the middle. With a pair of wire-rim glasses with slightly

tinted lenses and a new wardrobe in mismatched earth tones, with dark sensible

shoes and a dark suede blazer, Harvath became the man whose picture and name

were contained in the false passport he had also removed from his safe deposit box,

Hans Brauner of Stuttgart, Germany.

During Scot's time with the SEALs, he had done a lot of cross-training exercises

with some of Germany's most elite soldiers. One soldier in particular, Herman

Toffle, had become quite popular with the SEALs, not only for his bravado, but also

for his crazy sense of humor. Scot and

Herman the German, as the guys called

him, grew to be fast friends. When Herman left the military because of an injury, he

entered the private sector and began representing a German arms manufacturer. Scot

helped Herman get his weapons tested in America and also plugged him in with

former SEALs around the world who were doing military or private security

consulting and had a heavy say in their clients' weapons procurement.

Scot couldn't accept any commissions, but Herman felt his good friend was due

something for all of the business he had helped create. Once, while Scot was on

leave in Germany between SEAL training exercises, Herman led him on a

cloak-and-dagger tour of Munich which, after several stops for beers, finally ended

in a small apartment on the city's north side. Knowing his friend's proclivity for

loose women, Harvath thought Herman had brought him to a brothel and was going

to get him laid.

As it turned out, Herman had a million connections and the two men just happened

to be in the apartment of one of them, a master documents forger. Herman

introduced the stooped, balding man with thick glasses simply as Tinkerbell. After

making Scot up with the eyebrows, goatee, glasses, and contacts, Tinkerbell had him

sit in front of a tarp to have his picture taken. Two hours and five beers later,

the

man emerged from the back of the apartment and handed Scot his new passport.

When, through the fog of beers, Scot realized what Herman had done for him, he

tried to refuse the gift, but Herman said, “Men in our profession need insurance that

employers can’t always provide.”

Harvath knew that Herman was trying, in his own way, to thank him, so he kept the

passport locked safely away at his bank, not thinking he would ever need it. The

passport was filled with valid entry and exit stamps from America, Canada, Europe,

Asia, and South America. Trying to find the most recent stamp would drive an

immigration officer crazy, Tinkerbell had said, so not to worry. The old man had

also given Scot an address in Munich at which, if he dropped the passport off

whenever he was in Germany, one of Tinkerbell's people would update the

stamps

for him. Scot knew the gift had cost Herman a lot of money, and even though he

originally hadn’t wanted to take it, it looked now as if it was going to come in very

handy.

Harvath finished changing into the J. Crew clothes and put the rest of the new

clothing into his rolling suitcase. The trench coat and suit he had been wearing went

into the J. Crew bag, which he promptly tossed into a Dumpster in an alley behind

the mall. Wiping his prints off the Glock, he disassembled it and threw the pieces

into three different storm drains. Now all he had to do was make a phone call and he

would be free to go.

44

Scot Harvath, having completely taken on the persona of Hans Brauner, strolled with

a certain nonchalance through the lobby of the Ritz-Carlton towing his luggage on

wheels. When he'd walked through the main entrance, he'd noticed the cab line was

full of taxis. In his German-accented English he told the bellman he did not need any

help with his bag. Having stopped at the Georgetown American Express travel office

to buy a stack of traveler's checks under his new persona, he was confident in not

only the outward appearance of the

disguise, but his ability to pull off the complete

identity of the character.

Harvath made his way to the pay phones and, glancing at his watch, knew he would

have to make this call quickly. He picked up the receiver, deposited the coins and

dialed the number.

“Lawlor,” said the voice that answered.

“Gary. It’s Scot Harvath.”

“Scot, where the hell are you?”

“C’mon, Gary, you know me better than to expect an answer to that, and don’t

bother tracing this call. I won’t be here long enough for you to get me.”

“What’s this all about?” asked Lawlor.

“I was going to ask you the same thing. I had nothing to do with the deaths of André

Martin and Natalie Sperando. She was a good friend. I want you to believe that. For

some reason, Bill Shaw is trying to set

me up.”

“Bill Shaw is trying to set you up? Why would he do that?”

“I know you’re trying to stall me, but I’ll indulge you anyway,” said Scot, looking at

his watch to see how long he’d been on with Lawlor. “I think he’s connected to the

president’s kidnapping, along with Senator Snyder and maybe Rolander as well.

He’s trying to paint me as a conspiracy nut.”

“He doesn’t need to paint you as one; you painted yourself that way.”

“I did? What are you talking about?”

“I heard a recording of your call to him this morning. It didn’t sound like the

musings of a sane person. You’re really throwing around some far-fetched notions.”

“Yeah, well, if I’m so far off base with my theories, why did I get *hallmarked*

today?”

“‘Hallmarked’? What do you mean?”

“You know, *when you care enough to send the very best?”*

“Are you trying to tell me somebody tried to put a hit on you?”

“Twice. Once at Union Station and then again outside my bank on Twelfth Street

not long after that. They must have been tracking my credit card because I used it to

pay for cabs to both locations.”

“Hit men? Tracking your cards? Scot, this is pretty serious stuff. If you come in, I

promise I'll help you."

"No thanks, Gary. That's the second time I've had that offer today, and I feel a

whole heck of a lot safer on my own for the time being."

"Scot, I swear I don't know anything about a hit being put out on you. That's not

how we do business and *you* know it. Tell me where you are, and we'll send a car

for you right away. I'll put you in protective custody while we debrief you, and

then—”

“Yeah? And then what? Shaw had told me he was doing the same thing with Natalie

and André Martin, and look what happened to them.”

“Scot, how well did you know André Martin?”

“He was a friend of Natalie’s. I just met him last night. Why?”

“When was the last time you checked your bank statements?”

Harvath looked at his watch. “You’re

running out of time, Gary, and you're wasting

it with questions that don't make any sense."

"The Secret Service has discovered that you received several large deposits to your

bank account in the past month, the most recent being the day after the president

was kidnapped. The money came from an account in the Caribbean. A little digging

revealed a series of shell corporations, which eventually led to André Martin,

D.C.

attorney and international finance specialist.”

“What are you saying?”

“It’s not what I’m saying, Scot; it’s what everyone else is. The way it looks is that

André Martin somehow used his relationship with Natalie Sperando to get to you

and buy you off.”

“Buy me off? What the hell for?”

“The Secret Service and the Justice

Department figure you were the inside leak and

helped the kidnappers in grabbing the president."

"Me? That's insane."

"Is it? Look at it from their point of view. You had the means as head of the advance

team, money's as good a motivation as any, and you had the opportunity."

"You can't believe that I—"

"You were the only Secret Service agent to survive the avalanche. You then

interfered with three separate crime scenes resulting in the corruption of evidence in

at least one of them; you were the last person seen with Sperando and Martin

alive—”

“Yeah, at a bar in D.C.”

“No. A desk clerk at the Radisson in Alexandria said that Martin and Sperando were

picked up by a Secret Service agent who identified himself with credentials as Scot

Harvath and perfectly fit your description."

"And my gun was found near the scene of the murders. Well, someone thought of

everything, didn't they?"

"Scot, if you are innocent, running is not going to help your case. Let me bring you

in. I swear nothing will happen to you."

"Do you believe I'm innocent, Gary?"

"I need to hear your side first."

"I'm not coming in. Not now. Somebody

has gone to a lot of work to set me up,

and it looks like they're hedging their bets by trying to bump me off. I'm sorry, but I

think I stand a safer chance on my own right now."

"Scot, I can help you, but this has got to be done by the book. You have to come

in."

"Sorry, Gary. No way. You're not going to hear from me for a bit, but I want to

leave you something to think about. If someone could put this whole elaborate

plan

together to silence me, what could that same person do to keep the whereabouts of

the president secret? You're barking up the wrong tree with the Abu Nidal and the

FRC. It's a red herring. I'm sure of it. Widen your nets. I'll be in touch."

Harvath hung up the phone, went back through the lobby, and told the doorman he

was going to Union Station. Once there, he found another cab and told the driver

to

take him to Dulles International Airport.

45

“Yah, dis is a problem ven you are a businessman, no?” said Harvath in his

German-accented English.

“But it is so sweet. Your wife will be thrilled,” said the Swissair ticket agent as she

checked the passport of Herr Hans Brauner.

“Yah, I hope zo. I also bought her a little

zomething zpecial," said Harvath, putting

the women's Pamper Yourself gift basket from Crabtree & Evelyn on the counter

between himself and the agent. "Do you think she will like it?"

"I think she will love it. You are so sweet to drop everything and rush home to be

with your wife when she has the baby. Some things are more important than jobs,

aren't they?"

“Unfortunately, my boss doesn’t approve, and I am forced to use my traveler’s

checks to pay for zee flight. I vas supposed to be here for another three veeks, but

now vis zee baby coming early, vee do vat vee can, no?” said Harvath as he counted

out almost six thousand dollars in American Express traveler’s checks.

It was a risky proposition. He knew airlines were very wary of customers who paid

in cash, especially for same-day reservations, but he could not use any of his Scot

Harvath credit cards, even if he hadn't broken them all into pieces and flushed them

back at the Georgetown Park mall, because whoever was watching would be able to

track him right away. At least disguised and paying cash, he would be harder to trail.

Winning the ticket agent over would definitely help him. Had she or another agent

been the slightest bit suspicious, they could have created a lot of trouble for him

before he even got away from the desk. It had been an expensive gamble, but it

looked as if it would pay off.

Harvath continued to smile as the agent asked him the standard questions about who

packed his bag and whether it had been out of his sight at any time. With a final

glance at his passport, she thanked him, gave him his ticket, wished him and his wife

good luck, and directed him toward the business-class lounge, where he could wait

until his flight was called.

So far he had lucked out. Harvath's German was relatively limited, and he would be

extremely hard-pressed to carry on more than a brief conversation with anyone, but

that wasn't a problem with the American-born Swissair agent. He knew these agents

would converse with him in the language

he chose to use. Swissair was a thoroughly

professional outfit, and that's why he had chosen to fly with them. This airline would

respect his privacy. To them he was another harried businessman, torn between

work and family, and trying to get back home to Europe. Because of Zurich's close

proximity to the German border, there was no reason a German businessman

returning home wouldn't choose to fly

into Zurich rather than Munich, especially if

time was of the essence and Swissair's was the next flight out.

Harvath hadn't eaten anything since his bagel and orange juice that morning. While

he could have picked something up at the mall, he hadn't wanted to waste time. He

was thankful for the food in the Swissair lounge and discreetly loaded up while he

waited for his flight to be called.

When the 5:40 flight to Zurich was called in the lounge, Harvath stood with the rest

of the businessmen and made his way to the plane. A German newspaper tucked

under his arm and walking slowly, almost wearily with his bag in tow, Hans Brauner

blended in with the rest of the business travelers and boarded the plane without

incident.

Finding his seat, he accepted an orange juice from one flight attendant as another

took his coat. He felt his muscles relax as the plane pulled away from the gate and

taxied out onto the runway. When the plane's engines revved up, he felt even more

of the tension drain away from his body. Placing a *Do Not Wake Me for Meals*

sticker on his headrest, he slipped out of his shoes, donned the Swissair booties and

eye-mask from his courtesy kit, and was asleep before the plane reached its cruising

altitude.

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Scot awoke in time for breakfast and enjoyed a vegetable omelet, croissant, fruit,

and coffee. He made one last trip to the bathroom to make sure his disguise was still

firmly in place and then watched out the window as the plane made its final approach

into Zurich International.

As he walked along the never-ending

moving sidewalks toward passport control, he

grew convinced that the Swiss government was in cahoots with airport advertisers.

Why else make passengers walk so far, if not to take in the endless stream of

advertisements for Swiss watches, jewelry, pens, and chocolate?

Finally, Harvath reached passport control. It was almost eight o'clock in the morning

local time, and in an uncharacteristically Swiss fashion, there was only one

passport

control agent on duty. Being in business class did have its advantages, one of which

was getting off the plane with the first-class passengers before everyone else and

being at the head of the line for passport control, but that wasn't the case today.

Apparently, another flight had arrived just before Scot's, and there was already a

good-sized line at passport control. The grumbling of tired, cranky passengers

could

be heard up and down the queue. He stood nervously in line for only a few minutes,

before another passport control officer appeared at the next booth, and the line

began to move faster.

Scot had decided to stay with the Hans Brauner disguise and present his German

passport just in case his real one had been flagged. As the plane was landing, he

went through all of the possible

questions he might be asked by the

German-speaking passport control officials and how he would respond. As it turned

out, he didn't need any of it. Anxious to clear the backup, the passport officer just

glanced at the stamps of Hans Brauner's passport and added a new one. It was a

red rectangle with the corners rounded off. It had the German word for Switzerland,

Schweiz, with the date, followed by the words *Zürich Flughafen.* As Harvath

was

waved through by the officer, he said a small thanks for the good fortune that had

brought *Herman the German* into his life.

Harvath exited through the customs *nothing to declare* lane. Everything had gone off

without a hitch, but Harvath reminded himself not to get *too* comfortable. Pretending

to be slightly confused, Harvath purposely walked past the departure monitors and

sign boards only to turn around and come back to them, which allowed him to

check whether anyone was following him. As far as he could tell, no one was.

Following the overhead signs, he reached an information counter and picked up a

small brochure that had a map of the airport and a list of shops and services. He

found the establishment he was looking for and made his way toward the next

concourse.

Along the way, he counted fourteen more billboards for Swiss watches, seven for

pens, eleven for jewelry, and nine for chocolate. It was amazing.

Coming upon a men's room, Harvath carefully rechecked to make sure he wasn't

being followed and ducked inside. He chose a stall at the end, walked in, and locked

the door. Quickly he changed out of his earth-toned clothes and into a pair of baggy

cargo pants, boots, and a T-shirt, which

he covered with a retro seventies green

sweater with red and brown racing stripes across the chest and down one sleeve.

The false eyebrows, goatee, and glasses were all safely packed away. Scot was still

wearing the brown contact lenses, and as he pulled on a blue knit cap, he exited the

men's room. To any casual observer, Scot Harvath now appeared no different from

any of the other twenty-something

European or American youths who either lived in

Switzerland or were vacationing there for its incredible skiing and snowboarding.

This disguise, though, needed one final element to make it complete.

Harvath covered the distance to his objective in the next terminal with the slow,

lackadaisical stride he imagined his new persona would have. He found the Zoom

hair salon exactly where the airport services guide said it would be and went

in. As

the young hairstylist worked, Scot discovered she was eager to practice her English.

When he told her he was in Switzerland for the snowboarding, she launched into

reviews of the different places she and her friends had been throughout Switzerland,

France, and Austria. He had stumbled upon a real devotee.

When she was finished, Scot paid her in the Swiss francs that he had gotten at the

currency exchange in the baggage claim area before proceeding through customs. He

took a final look in the mirror and gave the stylist a thumbs-up.

She had done a very good job. While anyone looking for Scot Harvath or Hans

Brauner would be searching for men with brown hair, parted on the side or in the

middle, Scot now sported an extremely short haircut that had been bleached a bright

blond, bordering on white. While it

wasn’t the most inconspicuous hairstyle on the

planet, it would suit Harvath’s needs, and it was cold enough in Switzerland that he

could always cover up with a hat if needed. Popping on a pair of dark blue

wraparound SPY brand sunglasses, he strutted out of the hair salon and followed the

signs to the airport train station.

The first time Scot came to Europe had been with the U.S. freestyle ski team. He

smiled as he thought about how his new clothes and hairstyle would probably make

him fit right in with all the members of this year's team. Scot remembered now how

impressed he had been with the European rail system. Almost all of the major

airports had railway terminals, as opposed to America, where the airports were on

the outskirts of town and the railroad stations were right in the center, requiring some

sort of transportation in between.

Reaching a schedule board near the ticket window, Scot saw that there was a train

leaving soon that would get into Interlaken at 12:20.

He paid the equivalent of fifty dollars in Swiss francs and bought a second-class

ticket. On the platform, he noticed a group of students and casually made his way

over to them, trying to blend in. The train arrived exactly on time, and Scot boarded

with them. He placed his bag, which he had converted to a backpack, on the

overhead rack and sat as close to the students as possible. The train made a couple

of stops within and around Zurich, then began to pick up speed as it traveled out

into the countryside. Once the conductor had passed through the car and checked

on people's tickets, Scot leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes.

It would take about two and a half hours to cover the 239 kilometers between Zurich

and Interlaken, and by the time he arrived, he hoped to have made some sense out of

the last four days.

Starting at the beginning, Scot replayed in his mind everything that had happened. It

was obvious that whoever the kidnappers were, they had had inside help and it

involved William Shaw somehow. Shaw was working with Senator Snyder, and the

two had conspired to kill André Martin

and Natalie Sperando, then pin the murders

on him. They had arranged for a person or persons to steal his gun, use it to kill

Natalie and André, and then leave it behind so the evidence would point directly at

him. Then Lawlor had said there were deposits made to his bank account via a series

of Caribbean shell companies that André Martin was somehow involved with.

Shaw had admitted that Harvath had been at his house, but denied the true

reason he

was there, what he did, and what they discussed. So Shaw was unquestionably

covering for Senator Snyder and the two were definitely in bed together, but why?

How could Shaw, a career Secret Service man, be involved with something that

resulted in the deaths of so many of his own men? What was the reason? That was

where it started to break down for Scot.

Why would they frame him and then turn

around and try to kill him? Whoever had

knocked him out in his apartment could easily have finished the job as he lay

unconscious on his kitchen floor. Why not kill him right then and there? Why the

cat-and-mouse game? Unless framing him would take the heat off them, and he had

spoiled their plans by refusing to allow himself to be captured. How was Senator

Rolander connected to all this, and who or what was Star Gazer?

As Scot tried to make the pieces fit together, other images and fragments flooded his

mind that didn't seem to have a place in the puzzle. He felt his headache increase in

intensity and decided to leave alone what he didn't know for the time being and

focus on what he did know and why he was here.

From the outset, Harvath had never believed the kidnapping could have been

conducted by Middle Easterners. Call it

an ingrained bigotry he had picked up in the

SEALs or a healthy understanding of what Mideast terrorist groups were and were

not capable of, but an operation of this nature, carried out in snow, just couldn't

have been pulled off by any group from the Mideast. Harvath had discounted the

lone body found with a Skorpion as a red herring from the beginning. It bothered

him that Sam Harper had managed to get a shot off, but somehow no one had ever

heard it.

If Middle Easterners hadn't actually pulled off the job, could they have financed it?

Yes, that was definitely a possibility, but Harvath had an even harder time believing

that men like Bill Shaw and even Senator Snyder would sell their country out to

foreigners. That didn't fit.

Scot's head began to throb as his mind drifted, and he struggled to again bring it

back and concentrate on what he knew.

His gut told him that the people who pulled off the attack and kidnapping worked

very well in snow and had a lot of experience. They had access to explosives to

trigger the avalanche, money and international contacts to purchase the jammer, and

came up with incredible tactical advantages that allowed them to wipe out the

president’s protective detail and get

away leaving almost no trace at all.

Almost no trace were the key words. They had left traces at the Mormon farmhouse.

There had been cigarette smoke and that piece of Swiss chocolate. He had seen

mousetraps in the kitchen and in one of the bathrooms, so Harvath knew the

chocolate couldn't have been there long. It had to have been dropped by whoever

was watching the house, waiting for the rest of the kidnappers to return. Then there

was the e-mail from Nestlé that said the chocolate was sold only in Switzerland. Had

one of the kidnappers bought it on a layover on a flight from somewhere in Sand

Land? Not likely. It wasn't until he read the note and saw the Interlaken post office

box address in the manila envelope Martin had led him to that his hunch about

Switzerland began to seem like such a good possibility.

As the train gently rocked back and forth along the tracks, Scot glanced out the

window at the majestic, snow-covered Swiss mountains. A Swiss railway magazine

hung from a small hook above the seat opposite him with a title in German and

English: “The Eiger… Only for the Foolish?” Scot took down the magazine and

began to skim the article. It talked about one of the country’s most daunting peaks

and the attempts by teams from all over the world to conquer it.

As his eyes drifted from the photos in the glossy magazine to the Swiss countryside

speeding past his window, he was positive his instincts were correct. Whoever

arranged to kidnap the president had put together an incredible team of soldier

mountaineers. Germany, France, Italy, and Austria could also boast men potentially

up to the task, but it was the smattering of clues, hints really, that narrowed

Harvath's gut feeling down to

Switzerland.

Scot still had the same question that every law enforcement officer in America had.

Cui bono? It was Latin for "Who benefits?" Who would benefit from kidnapping

the president? The possibilities were endless. Although all the communications

received by Washington since the kidnapping seemed to point to the Fatah, Scot

made up his mind to leave the *Cui bono?*

question to the FBI and everybody back

home.

Right now *who benefits* was not as important as *who took him and where is he?*

Harvath had learned a long time ago to go with his gut. Everything that had

happened, everything he had seen and felt, told him the men responsible for taking

the president were from here. And as sure as he knew that, Scot also knew that he

would bring the president back and bring him back alive, no matter how long it took

to find him.

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The hardest thing to get used to had been the smell — the godawful smell — that

and the intolerable, intermittent wailing of people being called to worship over

scratchy public address systems. Then there was the sand. It was everywhere — in

his clothes, in his hair, even in his food.

There didn’t seem to be a single crack or

crevice in the president’s cell that the sand hadn’t made its way into. He had heard

that about the desert. It would eventually overtake anything, even if it took thousands

of years to do it. The sand reminded him of when he and his late wife had visited

Egypt and the Pyramids many years ago. He wondered where in the world he was

now.

He knew he was someplace hot. At

times unbearably hot, and very dry. The calls to

worship meant that he was close to an Islamic population — maybe a town, a

village, or even a city of some sort. His cell had no windows, so he had no idea if it

was day or night. Only the deliveries of terrible-tasting food through a sliding grate at

the bottom of the cell door interrupted his isolation.

The floor was covered with straw. There was a bed with a thin mattress

against one

wall and a Turkish toilet in the corner — which was nothing more than a hole in the

floor with two stone footrests to stand on. At first, he thought the terrible stench was

wafting up from the toilet, but gradually he realized it was coming from outside and

was being carried in by the ventilation system of his cell. He tried to memorize every

detail, as he knew there would be a very

extensive debriefing once he returned

home. *If I return home,* he thought.

Of course he would return home. He couldn't let himself think otherwise. He was the

president of the most powerful nation on earth. Right now in D.C. they would be

doing everything they could to get him back. He knew that, and had to keep focusing

on it. If the kidnappers had wanted him dead, they could have killed him already.

There was no reason to keep him alive unless they intended to return him once their

demands were met.

To take his mind off his confinement, the president tried to think about his daughter,

but that only led to more distress. He had no idea what had happened to her. The

last thing he remembered was splitting up with her detail, planning to meet back at

the house for hot chocolate. As he made his way down Death Chute, there was

some sort of accident and he lost his vision. There were strange voices, and

someone started an IV on him, and then he awoke in this cell dressed in a cheap and

uncomfortable peasant robe bearing an Arabic logo. That was all he was really sure

of.

Even though there was a huge chunk of his memory missing, it wasn't hard to figure

out that his detail had been ambushed and he had been drugged, kidnapped,

and

then taken someplace very far away. He only hoped Amanda hadn't been harmed.

He tried to convince himself that she had made it back to the house safely. Scot

Harvath was on her detail, and he was one of the best. He wouldn't have let anything

happen to her. She had to be all right. She *was* all right. Anything else was

unthinkable. Losing his wife had been painful enough, but if anything happened to

Amanda, he didn't know if he could go on living.

For now, though his body was weak and he had no sense of time, his mind was

strong and he vowed to hold on. The United States would not allow its president to

languish in a cell in the middle of some godforsaken desert. His salvation would

come. He would be getting out, and getting out alive. This would be the only thought

he would allow his mind to entertain. He had a daughter to get back to and a

country

to lead.

The president's interior pep talk was interrupted by the sound of the bolt sliding

back from his cell door. Two large men entered wearing desert fatigues and kaffiyeh

headdresses that covered their faces. One was carrying a Kalashnikov AK-47

machine gun, and the other had one hand hidden behind his back. The man with the

machine gun gestured for the president to move back against the wall.

Instead of moving, Rutledge rose to his full height and said, “I demand to speak with

whoever’s in charge here. Now!”

For a moment, both of the men stood still, shocked into immobility by the

outrageous insolence of their prisoner. The shock wore off quickly, though, and the

guard with the machine gun covered the distance across the cell to the president in a

fraction of a second. He raised the butt of his weapon and was preparing to strike

Rutledge when the other man stopped him with what sounded to Rutledge like a

quick stream of angry Arabic.

The guard lowered his weapon. The president began to breathe a sigh of relief,

which immediately caught in his throat as the other man, who had been steadily

moving toward him, grabbed him by the wrist and plunged a long hypodermic

needle

into his arm.

48

At precisely 12:20, Scot Harvath's train pulled into Interlaken Ost's tiny station.

Using the stairs in the center of the platform, he descended into the pedestrian tunnel

and reemerged two tracks over at the main station house. He fished in his pockets

for the change from the soda and bag of chips he had bought from the roaming

snack cart on the train, and came up with the right amount for a locker. He placed

his bag inside, deposited the money, and withdrew the key. On a counter with train

schedules and tourism brochures was a customer-comment form that could be

folded over and sealed. He took one and began writing in it:

If you're going to have a cocktail, you've gotta go for it. Nothing beats a

full-double-full-full martini. I'll be at the one place in Interlaken that has a lot of

soul.

Sealing the envelope, Harvath walked outside into the bright sunshine. Sitting among

a cluster of backpacks, skis, and snowboards was a group of loud American kids.

They were either travelers or exchange students off for a long weekend of fun in the

Alps. The one thing that was for sure was that they were all heading to the most

popular youth hostel in Interlaken,

Balmer's.

"Hi there," said Harvath.

"Hi yourself," said a cute blond girl with a nose ring.

"Waiting for the Balmer's van?"

"Yeah. Lucky it's such a nice day and we can sit outside. Glad I brought my

sunblock. It could be a blistering weekend if it stays this bright."

"You never know in the Alps. Listen, I was wondering if you might be able to do me

a favor."

"That depends," said the girl coyly.

"Yeah, right," said Scot, smiling. "I've been split up from my friends, and I'm not

sure if they are coming in on the next train or maybe got here earlier. The lady,

Jackie, who runs the hostel, knows us from last year. Would you mind giving this

note to one of the desk staff for her when you check in?" He handed her the sealed

note.

“Sure. No problem. So you’re staying at Balmer’s too?”

“Yeah. We’re here doing a bit of boarding. Supposed to be some really nice fresh

powder coming in.”

“Well, maybe I’ll see you later.”

“Maybe. Thanks for delivering my note.”

“My pleasure.”

Scot walked back into the station and waited for the Balmer’s van to pick up

the

Americans before heading out to the main street known as the Höheweg, where he

turned right and walked toward town.

Interlaken had always been one of Scot's favorite places in Europe. The name

Interlaken meant "between the lakes" and it was exactly that, nestled between

sparkling Lake Thun and Lake Brienz. Water surrounded the town in the form of

deep blue lakes, bubbling fountains,

rushing rivers, thundering waterfalls, and

crystal-clear streams. Harvath marveled all over again as he walked by the fin de

siècle palaces that stood as a reminder of Interlaken's role as a health spa mecca in

the second half of the nineteenth century.

He passed the Hotel du Nord on his left and the Restaurant des Alpes just after, on

his right. The next sight to greet him was the enormous expanse of park known as

the Höhematte. *If I'm lucky, maybe I'll be back here in the fall, sitting in the*

Höhematte, sipping Sekt and enjoying the jazz festival, Scot thought to himself.

At the far end of the park was the Jungfraustrasse and the Schuh Café. If Jackie was

in and received his note, this was where she would meet him. The name of the café

and its English equivalent were pronounced the same and meant the same thing,

"shoe." Knowing Jackie, she would be

quick enough to make the connection

between *soul* and *sole*. Full-double-full-full was a very difficult aerial ski jump and

was Scot's last winner before leaving the ski team. His old friend loved martinis, and

since Scot had been the one to turn her on to them, he was pretty certain she'd be

able to figure out who the note was from and what it meant.

Scot entered the tourist information office directly across the street and

pretended to

read brochures as he watched the front door of the café. Twenty minutes later, he

saw a shock of bright red hair and a face full of freckles that could belong to only

one person. Waiting first to make sure she wasn't being followed, he then pocketed

the brochure he was holding about Jungfrau region tours, left the information office,

and crossed the busy street to the café.

Jackie Kreppler had her back to him as he entered. She was scanning the room, and

he sneaked up behind her, covering her eyes with his hands.

“Quick. How do you get fifty freestylers into a shoe box?” said Harvath.

“Tell them it’s going to have a sponsor!” squealed Jackie, who spun right around to

hug him. “What are you doing here? This is amazing!”

“I was in the neighborhood and thought I’d drop in.”

“Let me look at you,” she said, pushing him away from her, but holding on to his

forearms. “Nice hairdo. So you’ve quit government work and have gone back to the

ski team?”

“Not exactly.”

“I’m sure the president just loves this hairstyle. Very understated… very subtle. Is

this some way of distracting attention away from him on assignments, because I’m

sure it works. And are those brown contacts you're wearing? Why would you want

to go and hide those beautiful blue eyes?"

The initial happiness Scot felt at seeing her was quickly fading under the weight of

the real reason he had come to Interlaken. "Can we get a table?"

"Sure," responded Jackie, who said something to the maître d' in Swiss German

that Scot couldn't understand. They were

led to a small table against the far wall,

away from the window. Jackie withdrew a pack of cigarettes and lit one.

“From elite, world-class athlete to smoker, who would have guessed?” said Scot.

“You try living in Europe for over ten years, married to a smoker, and not get

hooked. I only have one once in a while and only when I drink. I know it’s no

excuse, but hey. What do you want?” said Jackie as a waiter approached their table.

"Ein grosses Bier," said Scot.

"Und einen Kir, bitte."

The waiter nodded politely and left.

They made small talk about Interlaken and how the season was going; then Jackie

took a drag on her cigarette and launched into a rapid-fire series of questions.

"Okay, enough chitchat. I want to know *everything* that's going on with you. What

you've been doing. Who you've been dating. Why I haven't heard from you in

such

a long time, and most of all, how you are able to get time off during one of the

biggest crises to hit the United States."

Scot saw the waiter coming back and decided to hold off on answering. The man set

down their drinks along with a bowl full of heavily salted homemade potato chips

and left again. Jackie dug right in.

"Where did you want me to start?" asked Scot.

“I don’t know,” said Jackie between bites. “Start wherever you want. What are you

doing here? Vacation?”

“No, it’s not a vacation. I’m in trouble and I need your help.”

“Trouble? What do you mean, ‘trouble’?”

Scot was quiet.

“Does this have something to do with the president’s kidnapping?”

His faced must have betrayed his reaction, as she said, “Don’t look so

surprised.

It’s big news everywhere.”

The fact that the kidnapping of the president was making headlines around the world

was no surprise. What surprised him was Jackie’s ability to put it all together so fast.

She had always been able to read him so well. Even though they had been only kids

when they dated on the ski team, Scot had thought she might be the one for him.

When his father died, though, his life had been turned upside down. By the time he

had gotten his act together, Jackie was deeply involved with a Swiss skier whom she

would eventually marry. All that remained for the two of them was to be good

friends. Even though Scot had the best of intentions, he seemed to keep falling out

of touch, not only with Jackie, but with a lot of people who mattered to him. He

always blamed his work for keeping him too busy, but as he looked across the

table

at Jackie, he realized he had only himself to blame for dropping the ball. She was

even more beautiful now than during their days on the ski team. She was quite a

woman, cigarettes notwithstanding.

“How’s the hostel doing, Jackie? Every time I’m in a bookstore, I pick up

guidebooks on Switzerland and there you are. The Kreppler family must have been

real happy to gain such a shrewd manager cum daughter-in-law," he said.

"Let's not forget the lucky husband who got such a fabulous wife either."

"We can't forget the husband. How is old Rolf?"

"The same as ever," Jackie answered, taking a sip of her Kir. "Now, quit dancing

around the subject and tell me what you mean by being 'in trouble.' Were you there

when the kidnapping happened?"

“This has got to stay between you and me.”

“Of course. Who do ya think you’re talking to? I’m the same old Jackie. We’ll make

sure the tongue stays in the ol’ Schuh. My lips are sealed. Besides, you’re the one

who came looking for me.”

She was right. Scot needed her help, although only minimally. He didn’t want her to

get too involved. He took a deep breath and then began his story. “Yes, I was

there.

I was one of the only two survivors, last I heard. Most of the agents were either

buried alive in the avalanche or…" Scot hesitated.

"Or, what? What happened?"

"Or they were shot to death."

"Shot to death? That's terrible."

"It gets worse. A woman I was good friends with and a friend of hers were killed

Tuesday night, not long after I had drinks

with them, and I'm now the number one

suspect in their murder."

Jackie would never have succeeded at professional poker playing. Her face went

from rapt attention to all-out shock. "Murder? You?" she managed.

"Yup, and it looks like my gun, which was stolen from my apartment, was used to

kill them. Also, several large deposits were coincidentally made to my bank account

right around the time of their murders and the kidnapping of the president."

"Are the two events connected?"

"In too many people's minds right now, *I'm* the connection. I have been framed

both for the murders and for being the inside leak that helped the kidnappers take the

president."

"But I thought the Secret Service thought so highly of you. The few times I heard

from you, it sounded like everything was so great."

"It was great."

"Well, what about your boss? Your superiors? They know you. They should be able

to vouch for what kind of a person you

are. Surely they know you weren't involved

with any of this."

Her vote of confidence meant more to him than she would ever know. "The problem

is that my immediate supervisor, who was also my very good friend, was killed in the

kidnapping and the next boss up is somehow involved in all of this on a very bad

level."

“Aren’t there any people higher up than him?”

“Yes, there are, but the evidence against me is pretty overwhelming. The last I spoke

with them, they invited me to come in so I could prove my innocence.”

“Prove your *innocence?* Whatever happened to ‘innocent until proven guilty’?”

“That’s why I’ve always liked you, Jackie. You get right to the point. Those were

my feelings exactly.”

“So, you fled here to Switzerland? Are you trying to avoid extradition?”

“No.”

“Well, forgive me if I’m overstepping my bounds, but I think I know you well

enough. If you are innocent, and I believe that you are, doesn’t running only make it

harder for you in the end?”

“Depends on how you look at it.”

“What do you mean?”

“You see, I know I didn’t do it, and so

do the people who are trying to frame me."

"Okay…"

"Well, they seem to have changed their minds about framing me and tried twice

yesterday to kill me."

Jackie drew in a sharp breath. "Are you okay? They didn't hurt you, did they?"

Scot smiled. "You know me. I'm bulletproof. They're going to have to try a lot

harder than that."

“They’d better not. So what now? Do you plan on hiding out over here until things

cool down? Do you need money—?”

“No, I’m okay in the money department for now, but thanks. I have a few leads I

want to follow up—”

“Leads? Over here?”

They were getting into tricky territory, and Scot chose his words very carefully.

“There are some people I need to track down and talk to who might be able to help

me out. When the time is right, hopefully I'll have my ducks in a row and will be able

to go home. In the meantime, nobody can know I'm here."

"Well, I won't say anything."

"I appreciate that. I also need to ask you a favor."

"What kind of favor?"

"I need a place to stay."

The look on her face said it all. She really wanted to help him, but what he was

asking was a major imposition. Despite the camaraderie that existed between all of

the freestyle skiers, even if they were from different countries, Jackie's husband had

always viewed Scot as competition both on and off the hill. Rolf was extremely

jealous of him and was not happy with the way Scot occasionally showed up for a

visit or a letter from him would appear in the post. Scot's last visit had not gone

well, and Jackie and Rolf had fought for

over a week when he forbade her to ever see or speak to Scot again. Rolf would prefer that he was out of Jackie's life for good.

"You know you're not Rolf's favorite person."

"I know, and I have felt bad about it ever since I was last here. I didn't mean to upset him."

"I think it's more his problem than anything else. He's always felt threatened by

you.”

“I don’t know why. He’s a good-looking guy with a beautiful wife and both a

successful business and political career. He’s still active in politics here, isn’t he?”

“Oh, yeah. More than ever. Listen, like I said, the whole thing between you two was

always his problem more than anything else.”

“Jackie, I’m sorry to put you out. If I thought there was anywhere else I could go, I

would. It's just I've got some very heavy things to work out, and I need to stay

somewhere safe. I don't think anyone would come looking for me at your place. I

know this is a burden, but I need your help."

Chewing on her bottom lip, she swirled the raspberry-colored liquid in her wineglass.

"In one sense you're lucky. First, I was around to get your message. You think

you're so smart. *Full-double-full-full?* You don't think if Rolf had gotten that

note

he wouldn't have been suspicious?"

Scot grinned sheepishly.

"Second," said Jackie, ignoring the cute look on Scot's face, "he's in Bern for a

week with his political party, so it won't be too tough to keep you hidden away."

Harvath breathed a sigh of relief as Jackie continued, "We've been rehabbing part of

the *Herberge* for the summer. I can put you in one of the completed rooms, and no

one should even notice. There's a lot of sawdust in the halls, you still have to use

coins for hot showers, and there will be no maid service, but my guess is you're

willing to accept the room under those conditions."

"You are absolutely right. I owe you big time."

"Yes, you do. Now, how do I get you the key?" wondered Jackie as she bit down

once again on her pouty, strawberry pink lip. "Ah. I'll leave it with a note under one

of the garbage cans in the alley behind the main building. We have about six cans, all

painted bright red. One of them is smaller than the others. I'll put it under there. All I

ask is that you use the back stairs and try not to draw any attention to yourself."

"Believe me, I have no intention of doing that."

"Could have fooled me with that haircut and dye job of yours."

They both laughed, and Scot reached across the table and took Jackie's soft,

freckled hand. She tensed at first and then relaxed.

“I can’t tell you how much I appreciate this, Jackie. I don’t know who else I could

have turned to.”

“Well, even if Rolf was in town, we would have found a way to deal with this. You

and I go back a long way.”

“We certainly do.”

“I just hope you can get yourself out of this mess you’re in.”

“I will. Don’t worry.”

Jackie gave his hand a squeeze and rose from the table. “I take it drinks are on you?”

“You bet. When can I look for the key?”

“The garbage was picked up this morning, so I don’t think there’ll be any problem if

you try in about an hour. You remember the back way, round by the volleyball

court?”

“You have the volleyball court going even in the cold?”

“Scot, have you forgotten the stupid stuff we used to do in the middle of winter after

a couple of drinks?”

“Yes,” he said, smiling.

“Liar. Anyway, I’ll have you know winter volleyball happens to be a huge draw with

our young clientele. I’ll have the key there within the hour.”

Jackie gave his hair a ruffle and let out a disapproving sigh. “You used to be such a

handsome guy," she joked.

"Thanks a bunch, Jack."

"I'll see you later."

She gathered her purse and coat. Scot watched her disappear out the front door and

then reappear outside the window as she made her way up the Jungfraustrasse back

to Balmer's *Herberge*.

He finished his beer and decided to retrieve his bag at the station, then wander

around town to kill some time before heading up to the hostel.

49

The key and a note were left under the smallest red garbage can, just as promised.

The little map Jackie had drawn showed that his room was in the far south end of the

structure just off the main building. Despite the fact that broad daylight made it

difficult not to be seen, Harvath managed to get inside and up to his floor without

being noticed.

As he climbed the stairs, his nose was greeted by the sweet smell of fresh lumber.

T h e *Herberge* itself looked like something out of an old Heidi movie. It was a typical

Swiss-style chalet, wood inside and out. Painted under all of the gables were scenes

of historical Swiss daily life. Flower boxes hung from every window.

Dodging assorted construction debris, Scot found his room and opened the

door.

Jackie had made the bed and left him several bottles of mineral water, cheese, a

couple of apples, bread, a salami, an electric coffeepot with coffee, dishes, a fork, a

knife, and a spoon. Next to these staples was a notepad with writing on the top sheet

that read: *"By the way, none of this stuff is free. It all goes on your bill. Enjoy your*

stay. J."

She hadn’t changed one single bit, and thank God for that. Scot didn’t know what

he would have done without her. Staying at a regular hotel would have been tricky.

They would have requested he leave his passport as a deposit. As it stood now, he

didn’t want either of the two he carried to be out of his possession.

The floor, the walls, and the gently sloping ceiling were all constructed from beautiful

blond wood. The double bed had white sheets and a red checkered comforter.

There was a sink off on one wall, and he figured the toilets were down the hall next

to the showers he had seen. Per Jackie's suggestion, Scot had changed some of his

paper money for five-franc pieces at the Interlaken post office so he could enjoy a

shower with hot water in the morning. He'd also bought a couple of envelopes and

some stamps. He set the coins on the counter next to the sink.

Feeling a bit warm, he opened the casement windows just a crack. They opened

outward like mini French doors. In her note Jackie had mentioned that the workmen

often opened them during the day but that he must remember to close them at night,

or one of the staff might come up to investigate. He kicked off his shoes and sat

down on the bed. From a blue plastic

bag, he withdrew the purchase he had made at

a shop just around the corner from the *Herberge*.

When Scot had passed a gun store called the Waffenhaus Schneider, he couldn't

believe his luck. Though he wasn't a Swiss citizen and couldn't purchase a real

firearm, something else sat smiling out at him from the display window.

Harvath entered and admired the wide range of weaponry. As he moved from

section to section, he finally settled in front of a display by the window that read,

“New from Tokyo. Airsoft!” Airsoft products were a line of authentic-looking

replica firearms that fired six-millimeter plastic balls. They were so realistic that they

were used in Hollywood movies and by several federal and local law enforcement

agencies for training. The toy guns came in revolver models, semiautomatics,

machine guns, shotguns, sniper rifles… you name it and Tokyo Marui made it.

Scot had finally settled on a Glock 17. It was an almost perfect copy of the exact

weapon, minus the silencer, he had used to save his life just the day before. He

hoped he wouldn't need to count on a toy gun to save his life in the future, no matter

how realistic it looked, but until he could get his hands on a real one, this would have

to do.

Sliding the cover off the box now, he removed the gun from the inner Styrofoam

box. It had cost him about sixty dollars U.S., but at least now maybe he wouldn't

feel so vulnerable. In a pinch, bluffing with the fake Glock would be better than

having nothing at all, but the sooner he got ahold of a real weapon, the better. Rolf

undoubtedly had one of the government-issued assault rifles somewhere in their

house, but the Swiss didn't issue their civilian army ammunition with their

rifles. That

was okay; Scot didn't want to put Jackie any further out than he already had.

Besides, how the hell would he conceal an assault rifle?

He continued to plug the little white balls into the magazine. To his surprise, they

helped bring the weight of the pistol closer to what it would be in real life and didn't

make any rattling noise when he twisted the gun from side to side. The best part was

that it would fit neatly in his waistband without being seen. Scot set it aside and

reached for the pad and pencil Jackie had left on the table with the food.

He tore off the top piece of paper with her handwriting and set the pad on the bed

next to him. Fishing the manila envelope from André Martin's locker at Union

Station out of his pocket, he began flipping through the papers until he found what

he was looking for, the note to Aunt Jane and the address in Interlaken.

Trying to copy the senator's handwriting wouldn't be necessary. He wanted

whoever read his letter to know there was a new player in the game. Putting the

pencil against the pad to begin his own little note to Auntie Jane, Harvath noticed that

he could see an impression of the note Jackie had written on the page before it. The

realization came to him in a flash, and he felt stupid for not seeing it before. His brain

really had been scrambled. It was one of the oldest tricks in the book.

The reason the note to Aunt Jane, which Scot had decided beyond a shadow of a

doubt came from the senator, looked like a negative on the photocopied page was

because that's essentially what it was. He had to hand it to André Martin; he'd been

extremely thorough. Finding the senator's pad, André had lightly sketched with a

pencil across the top page to see what had been written on the page before it.

Most

people wrote hard enough that their writing could be read several pages deep in a

pad. Martin had known this trick and had been able to salvage the letter. It was all

beginning to make sense. There was no way the senator would have engaged in his

shadowy business at his office; there were too many opportunities to be found out.

Instead, he worked from home, confident in his security. Based on the evidence in

front of him, Harvath decided the senator was either very careless or André Martin

was very clever. It was probably a combination of the two.

Scot stuck as close as he could to the language of the note contained in the manila

envelope. The key was for the reader to know someone was on to him:

Dear Aunt Jane,

You have been a very bad girl. You have taken something that doesn't belong to

you and many people want it back. I have no disagreement with you, but believe

my silence is worth something. Why don't we meet to discuss it? I will be at the

Top of Europe's Ice Palace at noon the day after you receive this.

I look forward to a mutually profitable chat.

Yours,

A friend of Edwin's

Scot read the letter several times before

sealing it in the envelope he had bought.

After addressing it with the Interlaken post office box, he stamped it and left for the

post office.

Walking down the Centralstrasse, Harvath roamed the neighborhood, and pretended

to window-shop until five minutes before the post office closed. Then, he slipped

his letter into the outdoor slot, satisfied that the letter would not make it into the post

office box until tomorrow morning at the earliest.

He walked back to Balmer's and ran his plan through his mind yet again. It was a

long shot, and he knew it, but at this point, it was the only shot he had.

50

Star Gazer hurriedly grabbed the wastebasket beneath his desk and vomited. Lying

on a crumpled piece of wax paper on his desk was a man's severed finger. He knew

whom it belonged to and who had sent it.

I can't believe they managed to get this into my office, he worriedly thought to

himself. First, all of those Secret Service agents get killed, then the Special Ops

team, and now this. This is getting way out of hand. It has to end.

Two hours later, Star Gazer sat in his study facing Senators Rolander and Snyder.

Once the doors had been closed by Star Gazer's bodyguards and it was safe to talk,

Rolander began, “I don’t think calling this meeting was such a good idea.”

“Oh, you don’t?” replied Star Gazer, anger notching his voice up as he spoke.

“Well, guess what? I am done listening to you! This is all totally out of control!”

“Keep your voice down!” snapped Snyder. “Now, just tell us what’s got you so

worked up.”

“What’s got me so worked up? I received a note today along with the president’s

finger!" he said, ignoring Snyder's request that he lower his voice.

Rolander was speechless.

"I am not going to tell you again. Calm down. What did the note say?"

"The kidnappers want fifty million dollars deposited to an account in Buenos Aries,

or the next package I receive will contain President Rutledge's head."

"Our friends are getting a little greedy," said Snyder.

"They can't do this," said Rolander.

“They are doing it,” replied Snyder, who turned back to Vice President Marshfield.

“Are you *sure* it was Rutledge’s finger?”

“Positive. It had a funny half-moon-shaped scar at the knuckle which he always

bragged about getting in a sailing accident.”

“What did you do with the finger?”

“What did I do with it? What do you think I did with it? I gave it to the Secret

Service."

"Jesus. What about the note? You didn't show anyone the goddamn note, did you?"

"The note? Of course I did. You expect me to keep this to myself? This is all so

insane. You have to stop this!" cried Star Gazer, the hysteria creeping back into his

voice. "I never agreed to all of this killing, and what's more, our deal was that the

president be returned *safely* to his office."

Marshfield was stepping on Snyder's last nerve. "Don't tell me what our deal was. I

put it together, remember? You get your big fat war chest filled with untraceable

campaign contributions and a chance to prove that you're made of the right stuff to

be president. You stand tough and don't negotiate with terrorists and come out

smelling like a rose. We know Rutledge doesn't plan on running for a second term,

so you *sail* right into the number one

position in the world. We handed you exactly

what you wanted, so don't start telling me what our deal was."

"I damn well will tell you, because your whole operation is falling apart!" shot

Marshfield.

"The only thing falling apart here, Mr. Vice President, is you."

"Me? You don't even have enough fingers and toes to count all the dead bodies on.

And from what I hear, you let that Secret

Service agent, Harvath, slip right through

your grasp!”

“I’m not going to tell you again. You do your job and we’ll do ours. All you have to

do is to talk tough to the cameras and make sure the president’s coalition for that

fossil fuel reduction bill completely collapses. We want every *yes* vote so solidly *no*

that even if he walked back onto the floor tomorrow morning, there’d be no

resurrecting it. Do you understand me? The rest you leave to us. And for God's

sake, man, pull yourself together. You certainly don't look like presidential material

to me."

"I know. The pressure is just—"

"Marshfield, I'm going to say this once. I know you're a smart man and I won't

have to say it more than that. If a president can disappear, think how easy it would

be for a vice president to vanish…

permanently. Get your shit together. This is the

last time I am going to warn you." Snyder stood and said to Rolander, "Let's go."

Fifteen minutes later, with the privacy screen raised and knowing Snyder had his

limousine swept continually for bugs, Rolander felt safe to speak. "I'm worried

about Marshfield."

"There's nothing to worry about," said Snyder.

“Nothing to worry about? The man’s falling apart.”

“He’ll be fine. Besides, he knows what will happen to him if he tries to unburden his

soul. I’ve got a pair of eyes on him at all times.”

“How deep does this thing go?”

“Deep enough to make it work. Right now, Marshfield is the least of our worries. I

never should have let you talk me into concocting that plot to set up Harvath.”

“There wasn’t enough time to sit around and think. At the time, it made perfect

sense. Killing him would have been too suspicious. Framing him solved a lot of

problems in one tidy little package.”

“And then it created a whole hell of a lot more. We should have terminated him in his

apartment when we had the chance.”

“Listen, David, there’s no use crying over spilt milk. He’s on the lam, and all that

stunt has done is cemented Washington’s

belief that he's guilty."

"But he knows too much."

"Not enough. It's all circumstantial. The rantings of a nut who has suffered severe

head trauma. It will never stick."

"He's managed to kill two of my best contract agents outside the bank and seriously

wound three others between there and the Union Station fiasco. Harvath is not

someone I'm going to underestimate again."

“From what you’ve told me, the two he killed were lucky shots. Your other guys,

especially the one that got his arm torn out of its socket, deserved what they got for

being stupid. They knew full well what kind of a background Harvath has. To try

and take him up close was a mistake. One which I’m sure your people won’t make

again.”

“No, they won’t.”

“Fine, now what about that ransom note

Marshfield received?”

“What about it?”

“What are we going to do?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing? What do you mean, *nothing?”*

“I mean just that. I’ve already been through this potential scenario with Fawcett. He

thought this might happen, especially considering how much money he’s already

paid out. It was a natural to expect our

Lions to get greedy. His decision was we do

nothing."

"But how can we do that?"

"Simple. If the president doesn't return alive, then Marshfield remains in the number

one position to finish out Rutledge's term. A couple more well-orchestrated

high-profile events while he runs down the clock for the former president and he's a

shoo-in to get reelected. Then he has the

potential to serve for two full terms and

we'll own him all the way. It makes a lot of sense, really. We can't lose."

"Except, there's a fly buzzing around that might land in the ointment."

"Who, Harvath? For Chrissake, Russ. One minute you tell me not to worry about

him and the next you're painting him as the one thing that could bring everything

crashing down around us. You think I'm going to let that happen? I already have a

lead on him."

“You do?”

“Surprised? You think being on the Senate Intelligence Committee doesn’t have a

couple of advantages? Apparently, Harvath called Lawlor at the FBI yesterday

proclaiming his innocence. Ever the thorough G-man, Lawlor put a trace on the call

and found it was coming from a pay phone at the Ritz. By the time his guys got

there, no one fitting Harvath’s

description could be found, so they did the usual,

questioned a bunch of staff and potential witnesses, took statements, and left."

"So they didn't nab him. What's that got to do with our problem?"

"It has everything to do with our problem. When the FBI questioned people and

they said they never saw Harvath there, they were telling the truth."

"Okay… But I don't follow you."

"The FBI made the same mistake with

Harvath that we did. They underestimated

him. Do you actually think with half of D.C. looking for him he'd be wandering

around without some sort of disguise?"

Senator Rolander's eyebrows arched up.

"It makes sense, doesn't it?" continued Snyder. "The Ritz is one of the city's most

security conscious hotels. They have cameras everywhere. Based on the timing of

the phone call to Lawlor and which bank

of phones it came from, it was just a matter

of rolling back the videotapes and we had him. We also had an outside camera

showing him getting into a cab. The doorman remembered that he spoke English

with a German-sounding accent. We got the number of the cab and showed the

picture to the driver, who said he took him to Union Station."

"So he hopped on a train, but where to?" asked Rolander.

“He didn’t hop on any train. He switched cabs at Union Station and probably three

or more times before he got to Dulles.”

“Dulles? What airline?”

“Swissair. We got ahold of the airport security tapes and quietly passed his picture

around. He traveled under the name of Hans Brauner and flew to Zurich last night.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. I saw the video myself. He was

still wearing the same disguise from the Ritz."

"But Switzerland. Jesus, how did he figure out the Switzerland connection?" said

Rolander, his voice taut.

"I have no idea. It must have something to do with André Martin and maybe that

envelope Harvath was seen taking out of the locker at the train station."

"I knew this was going to happen. You're right, we underestimated him. Shit! What

are we going to do?”

Rolander was sweating, but Snyder was as calm as ever. “I’ve already set the wheels

in motion.”

“What does that mean?”

“I sent a team over to silence Agent Harvath once and for all.”

“But he could be anywhere. How are you going to find him?”

“Quietly, I flagged his passport and put both his name and the pseudonym Hans

Brauner on the Swiss watch list. I've got someone manning a bogus State

Department phone line and E-mail address. The directive I sent was not to try and

apprehend him, only to keep him under surveillance and notify us if he shows up."

"If he shows up."

"Don't worry, he will."

"I think we should let our Lion know what's happening."

"Why?"

“What if Harvath tracks them down?”

“What if he does? He wouldn’t stand a chance against them.”

“I thought we weren’t going to underestimate Agent Harvath anymore.”

Exasperated at having to spell everything out for his fellow senator, Snyder took a

deep breath before drawing the picture. “First of all, the only way I have to get in

touch with them is via the post office box. It was set up that way to protect all of us.

Secondly, they're trying to screw us right now by asking for more money. If we tip

them off about Harvath, they might figure out a way to use him against us. It's better

that we stay quiet about it. He'll pop his head up at some point and we'll be there to

nail him. Don't worry. Besides, even if Harvath did locate the Lions' den, which I

don't think he has a snowball's chance in hell of doing, he's no match for these

guys. They'll rip him apart, and that's not an underestimation."

"But what about the president's finger? Even you've got to admit that's going too

far. What if they kill him?"

"If they do, then that's just the cost of doing business."

51

Harvath hated jet lag. Even though he had slept for most of the plane ride and had

forced himself to stay up late last night, he still woke up early this morning.

his eyes, he could see that it was dark, and the only indication that anyone was up at

this hour was the occasional sound of traffic from the nearby street.

He closed his eyes again and tried to force himself back to sleep, but soon realized

he was up for good. The bare wood was cold under his feet. Quietly, he padded

down the hall to the bathroom and then returned to his room. Scot began a slow

routine of stretching, testing his muscles. Although the bruises would probably take

weeks to disappear, at least the stiffness was dissipating. He chalked up his returning

muscle function and mobility to the shape he'd been in before the avalanche. As he

continued stretching, moving into a series of yoga postures, concentrating on his

breathing, he noticed his head was still aching.

From the yoga he moved into a series of push-ups, crunches, and dips using the

footboard of the bed and a chair. Covered in a light film of sweat, breathing heavily,

and with a somewhat queasy stomach, Harvath grabbed his towel, toiletry kit, and a

stack of coins and headed off for the shower.

When he returned, he had a breakfast of bread, cheese, fruit, and two Tylenols,

followed by a cup of strong black coffee. After brushing his teeth, he

dressed in

another *"hey, dude"* snowboarder outfit, tucked the Glock into his waistband, put

his jacket on, and crept from the hostel.

When the post office opened, Harvath was standing at the main doors with a *USA*

Today newspaper tucked beneath his arm. As he walked up to the window marked

poste restante, Scot noticed that the same woman was behind the counter as

yesterday when he'd been buying

envelopes and stamps.

“Good morning,” he said in English, knowing the woman was fluent.

“Ah, good morning, sir. Here to see if we have received your letter yet?”

“Yes. I hope it’s here. I need the money to buy my train ticket to Strasbourg.”

“I will check for you. What is the name again, please?”

Harvath had not wanted to give the woman his real name yesterday and so had used

the first one that popped into his head,

“Sampras. Pete Sampras.” He knew it was a

stupid choice, but once the name had crossed his lips, he couldn’t pull it back.

“Of course, like the tennis player,” she said.

“Yeah, except he plays tennis better than I do and has a lot more money.”

“Well, maybe we can change that. The money part, I mean,” she said with a smile,

writing down his name and walking to the back.

Yesterday, Harvath had completely cased the post office after his plan had come to

him. Standing outside, he would never be able to tell if "Aunt Jane" or someone

working for her had accessed the post office box. The only way he would be able to

surveil it was from inside, but how could he sit around inside the post office all day

without attracting suspicion? He remembered a con game he had seen in a movie

called *House of Cards* and decided a spin on it might work.

Post offices worldwide would accept mail for you even if you didn't have a box

with them, as long as the letter was addressed to you at the post office with the

words *poste restante*. All you had to do was keep checking in for your mail, and

when a piece arrived for you, show your passport and claim it. It was very simple.

The clerk came back shaking her head.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Sampras, we still have no

mail for you.”

“Darn it. I was hoping to catch a morning train.”

“You can check back later if you like. We have mail arriving all day here.”

“That’s very nice of you. You know, if it’s not too much trouble, it is very cold

outside this morning and I don’t even have enough money to have breakfast. Would

it be okay if I just sat over there and

waited? I'm sure it will be here at some point

today."

Harvath was pushing it. The idea of him sitting in the post office all day might not

appeal to the clerk, but he had put just enough flirt into his dialogue with her that he

felt she would say yes.

"I don't think it would be a problem." She smiled. "I will keep your name here, and

next time I go to the back, I will check

again. Maybe I'll even bring you a coffee."

"Thanks. I have my newspaper, and I will just be sitting over there."

"Very well. Next customer, please."

Scot made his way over to the wooden bench and sat down, making himself as

comfortable as possible. This could be a very long wait. There was no telling how

often Aunt Jane's post office box got checked, if at all. For all Scot knew, the mail

might get forwarded someplace else entirely.

He positioned himself and the paper at such an angle that he could see the box, but

to anyone looking in his direction, it would appear as if he were engrossed in his

paper.

Ten o'clock came and went. The friendly clerk called him back over to her counter

and handed him a cup of coffee, apologizing that his letter was still not

there. He sat

back down on the bench and waited.

At twenty past ten, a group of elderly people entered the post office en masse.

Apparently, they all liked to hike down to the post office and do their business

together. Several went to post office boxes, and for a moment Scot had trouble

telling if the slight figure in the blue quilted jacket and brown hat was opening the box

he had been watching. The group of

septuagenarians milled about in front of him,

blocking his view.

Through a brief opening in the crowd he saw a gloved hand close and lock a box…

his box! Aunt Jane, or someone connected to her, had opened the box and retrieved

the letter. He had purposely purchased a brightly colored envelope yesterday and

could tell, even from where he sat, that the one in the gloved hand was his.

The throng of elderly Swiss moved toward him as they prepared to get into the

stamp line. He politely pushed his way through the tangle of walking sticks, hiking

boots, and lederhosen.

Outside on the concrete steps of the post office, Scot looked quickly to his left and

caught a glimpse of a blue coat and brown cap turning the corner. He took off after

it, slowing only when he got to the

intersection.

A person of average height and slim build was walking just ahead of him, seemingly

unaware of being followed. Harvath followed and hadn't made it fifteen feet when

the figure crossed the street and looked into a pastry shop window. He knew what

the person was doing. It was the same maneuver he had used on many occasions —

checking the reflection in the glass to see

if anyone was following. He had no choice

but to look straight ahead and to continue down the block.

Luckily, streets in Interlaken for the most part were small and provided ample

opportunities for ducking off. The first chance Harvath got, that's exactly what he

did.

Since the person he was following had been proceeding in this direction and Harvath

was confident he hadn't been noticed, he hid himself in a doorway and waited for

him to walk by. Hopefully, his wait wouldn't be in vain.

Five minutes passed, then ten, then fifteen… nothing. Harvath had lost him. He was

certain of it. Whoever he was following either had gotten spooked and doubled back

or had never intended to take this route anyway. He was angry with himself for

losing his quarry. Now he would have to show up for the meeting tomorrow blind,

with no idea of whom to look for. That was extremely dangerous, but once more, he

had no choice. The place he had set for the meeting was known as the Jungfraujoch,

the Top of Europe. It was a tourist attraction carved into a glacier on the Jungfrau

Mountain. The Jungfrau stood right next to the Eiger. The Jungfraujoch was a

dangerous place in which to hold a clandestine meeting, but it was one of the few

locations close to Interlaken that Scot felt he knew well enough and would feel safe

in. The crowds of tourists would provide ample cover, it was next to impossible for

a sniper to set up anywhere, and there was only one way into the Jungfraujoch — by

train. Scot planned to have all of his bases covered.

As he stepped out of his hiding spot and turned up a different street to make his way

back to the hotel, a pair of steely eyes in another doorway stared out from beneath

the brim of a brown cap and memorized every feature of his face. The only thing that

prevented Harvath from being followed was his watcher's need to discover what

was inside the brightly colored envelope and return it to the post office box, before

its rightful owner arrived to claim it.

52

"Hey there. Where's your board?"

The voice caught Harvath completely off guard. He turned to see the group of noisy

Americans he had encountered two days ago walking toward him on the platform.

Leading the pack was the cute girl with the nose ring.

“You didn’t forget it, did you?” she asked.

“Nope. My friends never showed up, so I’m going to have to rent my gear,” Harvath

replied.

“Bummer. We’re heading up to Wengen. You’re welcome to board with us.”

“Thanks. I really appreciate it, but I bought this Good Morning Ticket thing so I’d

get a cheap deal up to the Jungfraujoch.”

“We did that yesterday. We took the 6:35 A.M. train. Boy, was that early. But we

saved a few francs that way.”

Harvath made small talk with the group until the older, greenish gray Berner

Oberland-Bahnen train pulled into the

station. The train had eleven cars, the front half

of which would go toward Lauterbrunnen, while the back half would go toward

Grindelwald. As Harvath was going to take the Grindelwald route to get to the

Jungfraujoch, he said good-bye to everyone and hopped on one of the cars in back.

At precisely 7:35, the train pulled out of the station and made its way toward the first

stop of Wilderswil. The steep mountains

seemed to begin right at the tracks and

shoot straight up. Even at this time of year the mountains gave forth with the bright

hues of evergreen trees, which were made even more brilliant by the contrast of the

pure white snow. As beautiful as the rugged Alpine scenery was now, Scot knew it

was nothing compared to what this region was like in spring.

That was how he'd first experienced Interlaken and the Jungfrau region —

mountains overflowing with a myriad of colors from all the blooming wildflowers.

On the Schynige Platte alone, up and to the left of where the train was now, there

were over five hundred different types of plant life visible in the spring. The

waterfalls and rivers tumbled and roared into the valleys below, fed by glacier water

and melting snow from high above on the surrounding peaks. As Scot continued to

watch the scenery, he had to admit to himself that there really wasn’t a bad

time of

year to visit Switzerland.

At Zweilütschinen, the back half of the train was joined to a new engine, which

picked up speed and headed east toward Grindelwald. Looking out the window on

the right side of the train, Scot got his first glimpse of Switzerland's famous trio of

mountains: the Eiger, the Mönch, and his destination, the Jungfrau. The mountains,

packed with ice and snow, were

beautiful and terrifying at the same time. When he'd

first visited the Jungfrau region, he had purchased a book called *The White Spider,*

about several of the earliest attempts to scale the Eiger. As he looked out the

window, he tried to pick out the area known as Death Bivouac, but the combination

of distance and the heavy snow covering made it too difficult.

As the creaky old train rolled and squealed its way up the mountain,

consulted his schedule. It was 8:03, and the train was pulling into Schwendi. One

more stop and they would be in Grindelwald.

Six minutes later on the dot, the quaint village, bathed in early morning light, rose

directly up in front of them. Its glitzy shops and sports stores were all modestly

housed in beautiful traditional Swiss chalets of varying shapes, sizes, and colors.

Early-rising Europeans garbed in brightly colored outfits clunked along the streets in

heavy ski boots with skis slung casually over one shoulder. It reminded him of Park

City. Scot envied them their carefree strides and the ease of the day that faced them

— where to ski, followed only by where to eat. He, on the other hand, had no such

luck in predicting what the day would bring.

His plan was to get up to the

Jungfraujoch early and scout things out. While he could

have taken the 6:35 train from Interlaken, he'd worried about being there too early

and not having any crowds he could blend in with. Judging from the number of

passengers on his train, he had made the right choice. A nice Saturday tourist throng

would provide cover and help keep him safe. It would also be easy to disappear into

if it came to that.

At Grindelwald, passengers were required to transfer to a cogwheel railway. The

view of the Eiger from the station was incredible. Scot had seen some pretty crazy

things in his time, but he never understood why anyone would willingly choose to

climb a mountain, especially one like the Eiger.

Harvath took a last look back at the Hotel Derby and Grand Hotel Regina, which

flanked the Grindelwald train station, as he crossed the platform toward the

cogwheel train. It was composed entirely of second-class cars divided into smoking

and nonsmoking sections. Noticing that the passengers were predominantly

European and Japanese, he knew that the biggest crowd would be found in the

smoking car and grudgingly climbed aboard. The honey-colored wooden seats were

uncomfortable, but the incredible view of the snow-covered mountains made up

for

it in spades.

The cogwheel railway wove slowly in and out between houses and small farms on

the outskirts of Grindelwald. As they drew even with the face of the Eiger, the train

stopped at Grindelwald Grund, Grindelwald's second station, whose parking lot was

filled with tour buses. The Good Morning Ticket seemed to have a lot of

cost-conscious fans. As new passengers boarded, all of the remaining seats were

quickly taken. Smoke filled the compartment, and Harvath was happy no one

complained when he reached up for the two knobs imbedded in the glass window

and pulled it down a fraction to let in some fresh air. A Japanese man, sensing Scot

was not a smoker, laughed and offered him a cigarette.

The train picked up speed, and the

chalets grew farther and farther apart. Harvath

knew from experience that in the spring and summer the fields they were now

passing would be filled with a chorus of ringing bells hanging from the necks of

grazing sheep, goats, and cows. Each group of bells had a different tone so the

farmer could recognize his own livestock, even in dense fog.

At Kleine Scheidegg, passengers changed to the final train that would take them all

the way to the top of the Jungfrau. The red crushed-velour seats were a welcome

respite from the wooden ones of the previous train. Harvath remained with his group

of European and Japanese smokers, who were upset to find that for the rest of the

ride there would be no smoking.

For this leg of the journey, Scot and his fellow passengers were traveling completely

inside the mountain. At 9,400 feet above sea level, the train stopped for five

minutes

at the Eigerwand station, where windows had been carved out of the rock face so

passengers could look out onto Kleine Scheidegg and the Grindelwald valley far

below.

The next stop was for another five cold minutes to overlook the glacier at the

Eismeer station, 10,368 feet above sea level. Harvath filed off the train and pretended

to absorb the breathtaking views with the rest of the passengers.

Back on board, his heart began to beat faster, and he felt moisture forming on his

palms. He leaned back in his seat, somewhat reassured by the sharp stab of the

plastic Glock in his waistband.

Only moments after the train began moving, the overhead speaker began playing

another tape-recorded message. It came as the others had, first in German, then

French, followed by Italian, Spanish, and finally English:

"This is Jungfraujoch. The highest railway station in Europe, 3,354 meters above sea

level. Please follow the direction signs to observation points and the restaurants.

Thank you for your visit, and we wish you a pleasant stay on the Jungfraujoch."

Pleasant stay. As the train came into the final station and the doors opened, Harvath

knew there wasn't much chance of that.

53

Harvath looked at his watch. It was exactly 9:53 A.M. The Swiss were amazingly

precise. Not one of the trains he had been on in the last three days had wavered one

minute from its timetable. He had just over two hours to survey the area and get

ready for his meeting with dear Aunt Jane.

Harvath didn’t waste time. From the station, he measured how long it took

him to

get to the Ice Palace. Thirty meters deep within the glacier, it was a

horseshoe-shaped tunnel carved completely out of the ice. Even the floor was ice.

The Europeans didn’t have the healthy fear of lawsuits that the Americans did.

Getting any traction on the floor was next to impossible. The best one could do was

a shuffle that mimicked ice-skating.

He continued on to the outdoor plateau,

then back inside to check the rest rooms,

shops, restaurants, and the exhibition hall. He passed the blue coin-operated luggage

lockers and made his way up the long hallway to the Eiger climbing wall and the

computers that let you send free E-mails from “The Top of Europe.” He was

tempted, but decided against it. Taking the fastest elevator in Switzerland he arrived

at the Sphinx observation area and weather station. After a good look

around, he

descended in the elevator and headed outside to the “Adventure” area, with its dog

sled rides, tobogganing, skiing, and snowboarding. The slopes were already packed.

The fact that almost the entire complex was buried deep within the icy mountain gave

Scot an odd feeling of déjà vu. His mind wandered to being caught in the avalanche

with Amanda. As quickly as the thought

came up, Scot slammed shut an iron door

to that part of himself and focused on the job at hand.

He suspected Aunt Jane and her people would show up on the 10:53 train, if they

hadn't come on the 9:53 with him or arrived even earlier on the 8:53. He felt certain

that they would not be coming on the one that arrived at seven minutes before noon.

That would be cutting it too close and would not give them enough time to case

the

area and make sure it wasn't a trap.

Scot kept his eyes open the entire time he was surveying the Jungfraujoch. He

looked for that same blue quilted coat and brown cap or any man that might be of

the same build. He soon found that style of jacket to be quite popular with the

Europeans and was frustrated on three different occasions when he thought he had

spotted his prey.

For his part, he kept his wool cap pulled tight around his ears and the collar of his

coat turned up. He glanced at the exhibits, picked up postcards, and looked for

souvenirs while marking in his memory each nook, cranny, crevice, and exit door

that could hide an enemy or provide a means of escape for him if necessary. One of

the biggest advantages the Jungfraujoch had presented when he was considering it

for his meeting was also its biggest disadvantage. There was only one way in or

out… by train. Scot began to realize how stupid he might have been. Whether his

head was still scrambled or he had just been too desperate to think of something

else, he was quickly beginning to realize that this was not one of his all-time greatest

plans. Control of the situation was everything. If he lost control, things would go

very bad very fast.

As twelve o'clock grew near, Scot's hopes of swarms of tourists to use as

camouflage began to diminish as many of them headed off to the restaurants for

lunch. A few stragglers were still roaming about, and there were the people who

probably got off the 11:53 train to look forward to, but he didn't hold out much

hope for the cover he had counted on.

His nerves began to crackle and adrenaline coursed through his body as he walked

down the snowy path toward one of the entrances to the Ice Palace. He figured they

would expect him to enter from the main door off the elevator from the train station,

and therefore chose a completely different approach. He stood outside, waiting for

the right moment to start walking, having timed to the second how long it would take

him to reach the halfway point. As soon as he entered the mouth of the Ice Palace,

the wind that had been whipping around his face outside immediately dropped off.

He walked ahead slowly, ever aware of the slick floor beneath his boots. One hand

gripped the railing as his other hand remained in his right coat pocket, where he'd

transferred the Glock. Pretending to admire the sculptures carved out of the sheer

ice walls, he moved from niche to niche, as if he were following the stations of the

cross in an old cathedral. He was no longer picking up his feet, but rather shuffling

them along the ice, getting a feel for the movement.

Up ahead, the corridor turned to the right and obstructed his view. He kept up his

pace — shuffle to a sculpture, stand for a moment to appreciate it, and then shuffle

to the next. He listened intently for any other sounds coming from within the cavern

of ice, but heard nothing.

A wisp of a voice, from behind the iron door he had clamped down on his mind,

asked him how he would know whom he was looking for and what he would do

when he found them. Scot pushed the thought away and focused his energy. He

would know whom he was looking for. He would be able to tell by looking in their

eyes. People accustomed to killing had a very distinct look and bearing about them,

just like the men at Union Station who had tried to kill him on Wednesday.

He rounded the bend in the corridor, a gust of circulating air biting at his earlobes.

Before he had come in, he had removed his hat, thinking his odd appearance might

fool the people he was after and thereby give him a slight advantage.

The bend behind him, Harvath now was looking at a sculpture of a large bear with a

salmon captured in its jaws. Another gust of ventilation wind blew through the

corridor, which glowed an eerie blue

from the ice. As Harvath prepared to move

along to the next sculpture, he felt a hard jab in his back and heard a woman's voice.

She spoke in English, but with a Swiss accent. "We are quite fond of bears in

Switzerland. It's a lovely sculpture, isn't it, Mr. Sampras? Or should I say, Mr.

Harvath?"

"Sonofabitch," Scot mumbled to himself. He was taken completely by surprise. He

hadn't heard her sneak up. She must have been behind one of the sculptures, waiting

for him to pass before coming after him. His body tensed, ready to strike.

She could feel it. "Relax, Mr. Harvath. This is a gun I have at your back."

"You don't say. And I thought you were just happy to see me."

"I am not amused, Mr. Harvath. Please take your hand out of your pocket. Slowly."

Scot did as he was told. "How do you know my name?"

“That is not important. What is important is your interest in—”

At once, the woman’s sentence was interrupted by flying pieces of ice. At first it

seemed as if the statue were falling apart, but as the trajectory of the chips began

changing, Scot knew all too well what was going on. Someone was shooting at them

with a silenced weapon from the bend in the hallway, and they were closing fast.

The woman behind Harvath was equally

distracted by the flying ice chips, quickly

coming to the same conclusion he had. Without wasting a moment more, Scot drove

his right elbow down hard into her stomach. He heard her gun clatter onto the ice.

With a moan, she fell backward.

Scot spun, intending to pick up her weapon, but it slid in the direction of the

approaching shooter and he would have had to climb over the woman to get to it.

His eyes locked on her face for a brief moment. *She is amazingly beautiful,* was the

last thing that registered in his mind before he took off running as fast as he could

down the corridor.

Because he couldn’t get much traction on the ice, he wasn’t able to cover much

ground. He moved into an alcove to catch his breath and drew the replica Glock

from his pocket. He heard more muffled spits from a suppressed weapon coupled

with the tinkling of breaking ice as it shattered and hit the floor. When the noise

stopped, it was replaced by a scratching noise that sounded like mice behind

drywall. Now he knew how the shooter was able to move so fast — *crampons*.

The scratching sounds stopped only feet away from where Harvath now hid. There

were two shooters, and they were listening for him. No one moved, and Harvath

dared not even breathe.

Then one of the shooters broke the silence. *"Links?"* he asked, German for *left*. His

companion didn't answer.

The man spoke again. *"Links, rechts, was?"* (Left, right, what?)

Obviously angry at his partner for talking, the other man heatedly admonished him

with something that sounded like, "Chew Tea." It didn't sound like German, but

Scot thought he recognized the word from somewhere.

The first man now responded with what sounded like, *"Yah beh say!"*

And the second man came right back with, *"Chutee!"*

Harvath now knew what he was hearing. During his travels on the ski team he had

made it his goal to learn specific phrases in as many different languages as possible.

His favorites had been the ones for *shut up* and *fuck you.* It was juvenile, he knew,

but people always said, in any language you learn the bad words first. Besides,

even

if you knew nothing else, you could always get a guy laughing if you could say “shut

up” and “fuck you” in his own language.

The “shut up” and “fuck you” he was hearing now, *chutee* and *yah beh say,* were

Serbian. Why were these men speaking German first and then swearing at each other

in Serbian?

Scot heard the resumed scrape of

crampons along the ice. They were less than three

feet from where he now stood. His hands tightened around the toy Glock. If one of

them moved close enough, he could surprise him and press the pistol to his head

while he ordered the other to drop his weapon. It might work. It would have to

work. His ears strained, trying to judge how close they were now.

Abruptly they stopped again. They had heard something. Was it him? He hadn’t

even breathed and was beginning to get light-headed from holding his breath. The

men began backing away. It wasn't him. They had heard something else, but what?

Maybe someone else was in the hallway.

The men picked up speed, tracing back along the route they had come. Scot didn't

waste any more time wondering why. He skidded out of the alcove and ran as fast as

his shuffling feet would carry him in the

other direction.

Slipping, he cracked his knee against one of the steps carved out of the ice on his

way to the elevator. He regained his footing and allowed himself to slide down the

rest of the passageway. He pressed the call button and after two seconds decided it

might not be such a good idea to hang around and wait. He turned to his left and ran

down the hallway toward the restaurants

and the exhibition hall, thankful to be off the

ice.

When he reached the other end of the corridor, another set of elevator doors was

just closing and he shoved his arm inside to stop them. They opened back up, and

aside from a few startled tourists, it looked safe. Harvath rode down one level and

exited. He sneaked into the Kino Audiovisual show and took a seat off to the side,

where it would be difficult to spot him. He glanced at his watch. The next train out

wasn't for forty minutes.

Being careful that no one would see him transferring the Glock back to his waistband

beneath his sweater, he took his jacket off, rolled it up, and placed it beneath his

seat. He put his wool cap on again and pulled it down low. He also put on his

wraparound sunglasses and slipped out of the Kino.

In the hall, he checked both ways and then ran for the stairs. He descended three

levels and walked quickly down another hall to the souvenir shop. There he bought a

red Top of Europe windbreaker and a purple Jungfraujoch knit ski cap. Neither were

his favorite colors, nor were they good for remaining inconspicuous, but he needed

to change his appearance fast and this was the best way to do it. The goods in hand,

he climbed the stairs one level and ducked into a men's room. Picking an empty

stall, he went in and locked the door.

Scot took off the hat he was wearing and shoved it into his pocket. He put on the

red windbreaker and purple hat and was about to unlatch the stall door when he

heard someone enter the washroom. Quickly, he sat on the toilet and raised his legs

off the floor. Withdrawing the Glock, he readied himself. The sound of heavy boots

thudding along the floor echoed throughout the bathroom. A grunt was followed by

someone farting and then a chorus of laughter. Scot relaxed. These weren't his

killers.

Peering through the crack in the door to make sure the coast was clear, he flushed

the toilet and exited the stall. The appearance of the young men at the urinal was pure

snowboarder, and in Scot they thought they saw a kindred spirit and nodded in

his

direction. He made small talk with them, and they told him that they had finished

lunch and were headed back out. Scot joined them. Whoever was looking for him

was looking for a lone male in different clothing, not the person he was now and

certainly not someone traveling with a group.

Keeping his head down and laughing with the group, Harvath made his way to the

Glacier exit. His new friends hopped on their boards, said good-bye, and shot off

down the mountain. He was alone and once again a target.

The thing to do was to keep moving. As far as he knew, there were at least three

people with guns who were after him. Standing in one spot for too long was not

going to pay off. Timing how long it would take him to get back for the one o'clock

train, Harvath struck off on the Glacier Trek trail, praying he would figure a way out

of all this.

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Harvath walked as long as the cold and the time would allow. Although the idea

crossed his mind, he knew he couldn’t stay up here all night; he’d freeze to death.

As he turned to walk back to the main complex, he was joined by one of the many

groups of hikers who had passed him along the trail. A plan began to form in his

mind. It wasn't a very good plan, but it was better than nothing.

When he was shot at, it had been in a relatively deserted part of the Jungfraujoch. He

had chosen the Ice Palace because he thought the tourists would give him good

cover. With practically no one in sight, the men had fired indiscriminately, almost

taking out their female partner, whom Scot had now come to accept was Aunt Jane

herself. He had counted on the fact that

whoever he was meeting wouldn't try

anything stupid in a group of people. There was no reason to think that didn't still

apply.

With a two-and-a-half-hour train ride back to Interlaken, there would probably be a

lot of people catching the one o'clock. Whoever was looking for him would

undoubtedly be at the station, but the longer he waited up here, the thinner the tourist

crowd and his cover would get. Even if he was able to get on the train without

incident, surely they were going to follow him. That hadn't been part of his original

plan. He had expected to control the situation. At this point, though, that didn't

matter. He would think of something.

Blending in casually with the group of hikers, he asked them if they were on their

way down. No luck, they were going in for lunch. Dejected, Scot scanned the

entrance of the complex as they neared it, hoping to find three or more people he

could blend in with. Up ahead, two families were readying their children, and Scot

caught snatches of conversation that told him they were on their way down.

Kids... The last thing he wanted was for any children to be hurt. He hung close

enough to the family to blend in, but far enough to one side that if someone really

wanted to take a shot at him, the children wouldn't be in the way.

Subconsciously, Scot felt crosshairs pointing at him from every angle. He had a

strange desire to rub his forehead and the base of his skull to somehow wipe them

away. As he entered the Sphinx hall, he heard the chime of the elevator and watched

as a large group of tourists clamored out. They milled around and waited for the

elevator to go back up and bring down the rest of their group. Scot abandoned his

previous cover and waited with them. When they were joined by the second half, the

group made their way to the train with Harvath nestled snugly in the middle.

As they approached the tracks, he noticed several passengers had already boarded

the train and more still were standing on the platform having a final cigarette. Harvath

realized that the only person he would be able to ID was the woman. He had no idea

what the two male shooters looked like, or if there were any others he hadn't seen.

Toward the end of the platform Scot noticed two solidly built men with wide frames

who resembled a couple of bulldogs. His back tensed, but quickly relaxed again

when the men were joined by their wives, who had gone back to the gift shop to buy

one last thing. Harvath kept scanning the crowd as his group moved closer and

closer to the train.

There! In the side passage. Those two fit the bill. Step a little farther into the light

so I can see your eyes.

It was too late. Scot's group pushed onto the train, and he allowed himself to be

swept along with them. So far, his new plan was working. No one had fired. As far

as he knew, no one had even seen him, but that was a sucker's bet and he didn't like

the odds. He needed to assume that he had been spotted and the gunmen were

waiting for their exact moment to take their shot. It would happen quickly, and they

would have to be close. Most likely, they would create a diversion to distract

people's attention from what was really happening. The only insurance Scot Harvath

had came from staying as close to this group as he could. He began committing each

and every face to memory. In nineteen

minutes they would be back at Kleine

Scheidegg and he would have to change trains.

At Kleine Scheidegg, Harvath discovered he was lucky enough to be with another

crowd of smokers. He'd never thought he would ever call being surrounded by

smokers lucky, but today it was. The nineteen-minute no-smoking ride from the top

of the Jungfrau had been more than they could bear, and as they crossed the

platform to catch the next train, they all lit up, forgoing the gift shop. Harvath was

able to stay right in the middle of them.

Even though the transfer time was only four minutes, it was the longest four minutes

of his life. He could feel the shooters close by. He knew they were waiting for their

opportunity. Harvath's group was descending via Lauterbrunnen, and that was fine

by him. Being such a large group, they

had automatically accepted him as part of

their tour. The bad hat and tacky windbreaker allowed him to fit right in. All he was

missing was a camera.

The train whistle blew and the group boarded. This compartment was larger and they

had been joined by faces that Scot didn’t recognize, but none had the eyes of a

killer. Nevertheless, he had to expect that they had seen him and that the attack

would come at any time. If it did, what would he do? He had only his plastic Glock.

He needed to be preemptive. There was only a half hour until the next stop, which

was Wengen. That's where Scot would make his move. Another plan was beginning

to form in his mind.

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Half an hour gave Harvath plenty of time to become cozy with the members of the

tour group sitting around him. A healthy dose of charm made him the darling of the

conversation while the train slowly descended from the Jungfraujoch.

As the overhead speaker began announcing the stop for Wengen, Scot could feel the

train slowing down. Timing would be everything.

He looked at his watch and then out the window to judge how much distance was

left.

"…It'd be great to have you. We'll take you out on the boat and show you nothing

but whales, seals, and beautiful Washington State scenery. Camano Island is like no

other vacation you've ever taken," Scot said as he wrote down a fictional address

with a pen he borrowed from one of the group members. On vacation, people were

so willing to give strangers personal information that they never would at home:

names, addresses, phone numbers… it was a phenomenon unique to traveling.

As Scot was about to hand the ballpoint pen back to the man he'd borrowed it

from, he made it appear as if he had accidentally dropped it.

"What butterfingers I've got. Sorry about that," he said, bending down to pick it up.

The train came to a stop in the Wengen station, and Harvath kicked his plan into

action.

From where he was fishing beneath the

seats for the dropped pen, he screamed,

“Oh, my God! There’s a bomb underneath the seats! Everybody out!”

A murmur of shock floated across the train compartment, but only a couple of

people moved. He didn’t have time for this. They were getting out whether they liked

it or not. A little added influence was needed. Scot drew the fake Glock from his

waistband and began yelling once again as he waved the pistol in the air where

everyone could see it, “A bomb! A bomb! A bomb! We’re all going to die!

Everybody get out! Run for your lives!”

Whether it was the added urgency in his voice or the gun he would never know, but

it didn’t matter. Passengers were screaming and trampling each other to get out of

the compartment and as far away from the train as possible. This only helped

Harvath as passengers began streaming out of the other compartments, shouting for

help and running for their lives. It was sheer chaos.

Using the fleeing passengers for concealment, Harvath hopped out of the train and

began running with the herd's forward direction. Tentatively, he shot a glance

backward and his stomach immediately cramped at what he saw — three very large,

broad-shouldered men standing alongside the train scanning the crowd and not

moving. Trouble in paradise.

Harvath turned around, but not quickly enough to see that a woman in front of him

had stumbled, and he fell right down on top of her. She was panicked,

hyperventilating, and clawing at the snow-covered ground to get back up and away

from the soon-to-be-exploding train. Next, a man ran straight over the top of

Harvath, unknowingly digging the toe of his boot into the small of his back. Scot let

out a groan of pain. Maybe his ruse had

been a little *too* effective.

Knowing he had to move fast, he saw a break in the people running to his right and

rolled off the woman, who was up and away in an instant. Scrambling to his feet,

Harvath dug his boots in and shot forward out of his crouch, just in time to see two

explosions in the snow where he had been lying. The killers had seen him too and

were now firing. Harvath took off as fast

as his legs would carry him.

There wasn't enough time to try to do another quick change to throw the men off his

path. His only hope was to outrun them, or lose them somehow in the village.

Wengen played host every year to the world's longest downhill ski race, the

Lauberhorn. Although downhill had not been Scot's area of expertise, he had come

to Wengen to see the race twice and cheer on the American team, as well as

competitors he knew from other countries.

The village hadn't changed much since he'd last been here. Completely devoid of

cars, it seemed frozen in time. Were Goethe to come back to revisit the

nine-hundred-foot-high Staubach waterfall, only the fashions would seem out of

place.

Harvath's breath came in quick, short gasps as he ran uphill deeper into the village.

Dodging the brightly attired skiers that crowded the narrow lanes, he didn't dare

venture a look back. He knew his pursuers were right on his tail.

He took a quick right turn, and wood splintered as an ornate balustrade on a

low-lying balcony exploded just above his head. Running hard, Harvath removed his

purple cap and threw it to his left into a narrow alley between two chalets. He then

dove right, behind a wall of hay stacked

only a few feet high.

Focusing on his breathing, he willed his body to calm down or at least to quiet

down. He strained his ears for sounds of the men coming down the small street.

Fifteen feet in front of him, a herd of mountain goats, realizing Harvath was not here

to distribute any of the hay he was hiding behind, went back to rubbing their heads

against the rough posts of the tiny paddock, their bells ringing in a disjointed chorus.

Scot continued to listen, and slowly, he began to hear the telltale sounds of heavy

boots crunching upon the snow. The shooters were close, but they weren't stupid.

Taking their time, they moved cautiously down the street, ever watchful for an

ambush.

When they were almost even with the bales of hay, Harvath held his breath, his

hands tight around the toy Glock, for all the good it would do him. He heard one of

the men speak. “Look. On the ground. Ten o’clock. That’s the hat he was wearing.

He went this way.”

“We’ll check it out. You go the other way and radio if you see anything. We don’t

want any more screwups. Get moving, and remember, he has a gun,” said another

voice. This one was obviously in charge.

These men were speaking English… American English. They weren’t the

same

voices he had heard in the Ice Palace. They were different, but the second man

sounded familiar. He knew that voice. It was the same one Harvath had heard yell the

word *gun* days before outside his bank. These were the men in the ghettomobile

with the automatic weapons who had tried to kill him. What were they doing here?

How could they possibly have followed him all this way? Harvath was sure that his

trail stopped dead in Zurich, even if someone had been sharp enough to have been

looking for Hans Brauner. Switzerland was a small country, but not that small. He

couldn't figure out how in the world they had tracked him.

He quickly did the math — the woman and at least two men at the Ice Palace and

now these three here. What was the connection? Were they all working together?

Were the woman and the two men from the Ice Palace also searching for him in the

village? There wasn't any time to figure things out; he needed to get moving again.

Peering over the bales of hay, he saw that two of the men had taken the bait and had

headed off down the passage between the two chalets, back toward the village. The

other man continued down the street in the direction his group had been heading

before they split up. There was only one option open to Harvath, and that was to go

through the paddock.

It would allow him to put a lot of distance between him and his pursuers quickly,

and that was all that mattered. Taking one more look over the bale of hay, he

decided to make his move. Tucking the Glock back into his waistband, he covered

the fifteen feet to the paddock in seconds. In hindsight, he probably

should have

brought some of the hay with him.

The minute he jumped into the enclosure, the animals started going crazy. The

neighing and jangling of their bells grew as the animals converged on Harvath. Some

of their horns were long and sharp, and undoubtedly could do a lot of damage. The

goats didn’t look happy, and Scot didn’t want to hang around and see if they were

friendly. This wasn’t a day at the petting

zoo.

The animals converged on him almost at once as he tore across the territory they

were so vigorously trying to defend. When he got to the far rail and placed his hands

on top, ready to vault over, he felt something tear through the upper part of his left

arm. He was sure one of the goats had gotten him with its horns, but looking back,

he saw it wasn’t that at all.

The commotion from the goats had caught the attention of the lone shooter, who'd

raced toward the paddock and was able to get off one silenced round before Scot

got over the fence. It connected with Scot's arm, tearing through the windbreaker, as

well as the clothes and flesh beneath. Harvath could already feel the warm spread of

blood running down his arm. He didn't want to give the guy a chance at a second

shot.

With only his right arm for support, Harvath vaulted the fence and rolled when he hit

the ground on the other side, wincing from the pain. He ran alongside a decaying

shed that looked as if it were three hundred years old and then headed to where he

could see crowds of people on a more populated thoroughfare.

He heard the muffled spits being fired from behind as the bullets tore up everything

around him. Scot ran faster.

Hitting the thoroughfare, he ran across it and saw that he was parallel with a café that

must have been popular with skiers, because there were rows and rows of skis and

poles resting on racks outside. Quickly, he grabbed a pair that were entangled with

ski poles and headed for an alley about twenty feet down.

The alley actually passed beneath an old chalet and therefore was relatively dark

compared with the bright sunshine outside. As he hurriedly unlocked the skis, Scot

glanced out the far end of the passageway and could see the peak of the Schilthorn

off in the distance.

His back flat up against the wall, he looked at his left arm and saw that it was

completely covered in blood. The blood had even run down to his hand. There was

nothing he could do about it now.

Bottom of the ninth, bases loaded… Harvath wrapped both of his hands around one

of the skis as tight as he could, the tip resting against the wall above his right

shoulder. Time seemed to creep at a snail's pace. *Where is he? He had to have*

seen me come this way.

His left arm was killing him, and holding it in this position wasn't doing it any good.

He didn't know how much longer he could keep it up.

Then, he heard footsteps from the other side of the wall. *Careful… wait for it.*

The gun preceded the shooter through the entrance to the passageway. Scot fought

against every impulse in his body that told him to swing and run. *Wait,* he told

himself, *not yet.*

Whoever the shooter was, he seemed to sense Harvath was near and chose his steps

very carefully. It almost appeared as if he weren't moving at all, but he was. Scot

could now see the hand, wrist, and forearm of the gunman. *Soon*.

The upper arm appeared, then the shoulders, a torso… *Now!* Swinging with all of

his might, Harvath nailed the gunman square in the chest with the ski, and the man

went down, dropping his gun. He went for it, but Scot kicked him hard in the ribs.

The man grunted, and instead of clutching his side where he'd been kicked, he rolled

quickly to his right and grabbed for Scot's leg. The shooter brought his feet quickly

around behind him, ready to jump up, and then there was a flash of something in the

man's hand… *a knife*.

That was the last straw. Harvath's anger raged. He didn't know what the hell was

going on, but he'd had enough and he certainly wasn't going to grapple with one

bad arm and try to fight this guy for the knife.

The man pointed his knife at Harvath.

“You know what? I really, really don’t like it when people point things at me,” said

Harvath.

The man froze for a moment, confused that Scot would address him, rather than

attack, but the confusion was only temporary.

“If it’s not a gun, then it’s a knife. Here’s the deal. I’m not playing around

anymore.”

Just as Scot finished, the man lunged and slashed at him with the blade. Harvath

turned in time and grabbed one of the ski poles from where it rested against the wall.

As the man attacked again, Scot faked left, then spun around hard to his right and

plunged the pole deep into the man's chest. The knife fell from his hand, and in

seconds, blood gurgled out of his mouth, painting his jacket a deep crimson.

"It looks like you got my point," said

Scot as he let go of the pole.

The man, still on his knees, fell forward, but only a foot before the bottom of the

pole hit the ground and he was propped up like a human pup tent. Not wasting a

moment more, Harvath went for the man's pistol.

A blanket of fire erupted in front of him as bullets ricocheted off the cobblestones of

the passageway. The gunman must have radioed his position to his two colleagues.

There was no telling how far away they were. The bullets were close enough, and

that was all that mattered. Harvath ducked and rolled toward the opposite entrance.

Snaking around the outer wall of the chalet, he jumped to his feet and ran.

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The first thing Harvath needed to do was to stop his bleeding. The next was to get

the hell out of Dodge… Wengen… whatever.

The village was situated on what the Swiss call the Wengen sun terrace: a long

westward-facing plateau that got fabulous sun in the afternoon. That was definitely

the case today.

Quickly and carefully, Harvath picked his way from chalet to chalet, trying to stay

concealed as best as was possible in the blazing sunshine. He made a makeshift

pressure bandage from his windbreaker so he wouldn’t leave a trail of blood for

the

remaining two gunmen to follow.

Seven chalets later, Harvath came upon a restaurant that was blaring techno music.

This was definitely a snowboarder hangout. Scot scanned the crowd of young faces,

hoping to find his little blond girlfriend with the nose ring and her friends. They

would be perfect cover, but they were nowhere to be seen. Scot needed to come up

with another plan.

Snowboarding was an interesting sport in that it offered a high probability for

wipeouts. And, wiping out in the strong sunshine meant that the snow you picked up

melted quickly and even the most waterproof of snowboarding outfits got wet.

A leafless tree on the side of the restaurant had become the snowboarders communal

coat rack. Why these kids never took them inside or out onto the terraces with

them

to dry out was beyond him, but right now Harvath was grateful for it. He found a

drab brown-and-gray coat that looked as though it would fit and chose a good-sized

black helmet from the pile so neatly arranged at the base of the tree. A couple of

people would be very angry to find their gear had been stolen, but at least Harvath

might have a better chance at survival. Walking away from the restaurant, he

also

grabbed the last snowboard in the line leaning against the wall.

He put the jacket on and found there was a pair of goggles in the pocket, which he

put on along with the helmet. Quickly, he made his way toward the Männlichen

gondola. The pain in his arm was almost unbearable. He didn’t think he had any

arterial damage, but he needed to get a better look at the wound. If he wasn’t careful,

he could risk bleeding to death. Spotting

a busy pizzeria, he ducked inside and went

downstairs to the men's room.

Taking off the coat, he saw the windbreaker pressure bandage was stained with

blood. Untying the knotted sleeves, Scot braced himself for a gush of blood. The

bullet had nailed him pretty good, but it hadn't penetrated an artery. A fraction more

to one side and he would have been in real trouble. He checked the injury over

thoroughly and realized it was a serious grazing wound and would definitely need

stitches, but that should take care of it.

Harvath's belt was made of woven black leather, the type whose buckle can be

placed anywhere. He removed it from his cargo pants and quickly wrapped it around

the upper section of his left arm, pulling the belt tight, his eyes pinched shut in

response to the pain. He looked at his watch and marked when he would need

to

release the tourniquet. He covered his arm with the bloody windbreaker, hoping to

prevent any blood from seeping outside of the jacket, cleaned his hands as best he

could, and left the restaurant.

With a snowboard under his right arm, the jacket zipped all the way up, and the

helmet and the goggles on, Harvath had his best disguise yet. He moved as fast as

his legs would carry him to the gondola and watched for signs of his attackers.

Before getting on board, he bought a hot dog and a couple of cans of Red Bull

energy drink. He needed to build his strength back up. A gondola operator pointed

at the no eating/no drinking sign.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” said an exasperated Harvath.

The operator wasn’t kidding.

I’ve been shot at, trampled, chased by goats, shot at again, and this guy’s

worried

about me eating in his precious gondola? What a day, he thought to himself.

After two fast bites of the hot dog, Scot threw the rest of it out and slid the Red Bull

into his pocket.

As the gondola drew up the mountain, Harvath stood facing the back, and watched

Wengen slowly recede in front of him. He had made it. He was safe, but for how

long?

Once at the top of the Männlichen, it was a short but painful walk to the Grindelwald

gondola that took him back into the village he'd been in only hours before. The only

way down from Grindelwald was the train to Wilderswil. He watched the station

carefully, letting two trains go before he decided to get on board. In the station's

bathroom, he had released the tourniquet for a moment of precious relief. The

fingers of his left hand had gone numb half an hour ago.

In Wilderswil, he caught the bus to Interlaken's Centralplatz, where he found a pay

phone and called Balmer's. He told Jackie where he was, that he was hurt and

needed her to pick him up.

The weight of the snowboard helmet threatened to crush his neck. He was

light-headed, his legs were like rubber bands, and his stomach was churning. He

stayed in the phone booth, leaning against the side until Jackie arrived twenty minutes

later.

57

"You look like shit," was the first thing Jackie said as Scot eased himself into the

passenger seat.

"And a gentle *bonsoir* to you as well, fair lady. Hey, I'm not auditioning for the

Chippendales here. I'm hurt. Did you

bring the things I asked for?”

“Yes, but I don’t have any experience in this stuff.”

“Didn’t you take that wilderness medicine course in Utah when we all used to go

backcountry skiing?”

“Yeah, but that was years ago.”

“I’ll guide you through it step by step.”

“Scot, I don’t think I—”

“Jackie, if I could go to a doctor, I would, but the doctor would ask

questions and

would probably want to invite the police to take a look. I can't afford that. You have

to do this for me."

He closed his eyes, and they drove the rest of the way in silence.

In Scot's room, Jackie produced a small bag that contained everything he had asked

for. The guys who ran Jackie's adventure-sports desk with canyoning, bungee, and

rafting trips in the summer had left behind what they joked was their Rambo first aid

kit. One of them, an American named Tony, was a certified EMT, and his partner,

Paul, had been a registered nurse. There wasn't much these two couldn't handle out

in the field, and the kit reflected that. Inside Jackie's bag, which she had dumped

onto the bed, was the first aid kit, a bottle of hydrogen peroxide, gauze, and clean

bandages.

Scot groaned as he took off the stolen jacket. Jackie gasped when she saw his entire

left side caked with blood.

“What the hell happened to you? And don’t tell me you cut yourself shaving.”

“I cut myself shaving.”

“Do you want my help or not?”

“I was shot.”

“Shot? I thought no one knew you were here.”

“Either that or it’s open season on anyone with a bad dye job.”

“But who in Switzerland would want to shoot you?”

“Jackie, I’m a little bit under the weather at the moment. Can we play fifty questions

later?”

“Of course. I’m sorry. What do you want me to do?”

“First, let’s get this windbreaker off.”

As Jackie helped him, Scot continued talking. “Now, take the scissors out of

the

first aid kit, and starting at my cuff, I need you to cut the sweater all the way up to

where the tourniquet is and then do the same with the shirt underneath."

Jackie did as she was told.

"Do me a favor and hand me that towel over there so I can use it as a compress…

Thanks. Now, when we release the tourniquet, there might be some more blood, so I

want you to be ready. Are you going to be okay? You're not going to go south on

me, are you?"

She shook her head, a few stray wisps of auburn falling into her eyes, which she

quickly brushed away.

"All right. Take the needle that looks like a curved half-moon and the coil of black

silk out of the kit."

"I got it. I suppose I thread it the same way I would a regular needle and thread?"

“It should already be threaded.”

“It’s not.”

“Great. Just thread it like a regular needle and go to town. We don’t have time to

learn how to do surgical knots.”

Jackie threaded the needle while Scot continued his directions.

“Now, when I release the tourniquet, I want you to tear my sweater and shirt the rest

of the way up to my shoulder. I’ll hold the compress on the wound to stop any

bleeding. As soon as you have my sleeve out of the way, I'll pull back the compress

and you dump the hydrogen peroxide straight into the wound."

"How much should I use?"

"Pour a little on the needle right now, and then pour about half the bottle onto my

arm."

"That's going to hurt."

"Naw, you think? Listen, Jack, I don't really have any choice. Are you ready?"

When Jackie nodded, Scot released the tourniquet and let the belt fall to the bed. He

placed the clean towel against his arm as Jackie used both hands to tear his sleeves

up to the collar. When he saw the peroxide in her hand, he pulled back the

compress. The blood flow was not as bad as he'd thought it might be. With a quick

look at Jackie to signal he was ready, Scot steeled himself for the pain.

When she poured the peroxide into the

gash in his arm, the stew of blood and ripped

flesh began to bubble and turn a mucus-looking white. Jackie felt queasy, but didn't

stop until half the bottle had been emptied. The peroxide ran down Scot's arm and

stomach, covering his pants and dripping onto the bed. It felt like hot acid, and he

clenched his jaw with a force that was one foot pound of pressure short of cracking

his teeth and sending his fillings flying

across the room.

When Jackie set the bottle on the nightstand, Scot relaxed his bite and gave her his

next instructions. “Now you need to stitch me up.”

“Oh, Scot. I don’t know if I can do that.”

“You’ve got to, Jackie. Just grab the needle and start from the top.”

“But what if I don’t do it right?”

He didn’t have the strength or the patience to argue with her. He did his best to stay

calm. “You’ll do fine. C’mon. Start here and work your way down. We’ll make sure

you draw the folds together as evenly as possible.”

“It’s going to hurt.”

“You’re such a kidder. That’s what you said about the peroxide, and I was fine,” he

lied. “Let’s go.”

Fifteen minutes later it was done. The stitches were clean, and although there would

probably be a scar, it could have been much worse.

“I think you missed your calling,” said Scot.

“What do you mean?”

“You should have been a surgeon. These are very clean. I thought you were gonna

leave me looking like Frankenstein.”

“Very funny. Now, hold still while I put this bandage on.”

This time it was Scot who accepted the orders and did as he was told.

“There, that should do it. I’m sorry I don’t have any antibiotic ointment.”

“That’s okay,” said Scot. “The peroxide should kill just about anything that might have gotten in there.”

“Is there a high risk of infection?”

“With a bullet wound there always is, but I think we cleaned it out pretty well.”

“Good. Are you hungry? Can I get you some soup or something?”

“I would love some soup, but we need to talk first.”

She gathered up the equipment and set it on the table. “I’m all ears.”

“Jackie, you have been a real sweetheart. You’ve really helped me out __”

“You don’t have to thank me.”

“Yes, I do. Not just for sewing me up, but for everything else.”

“Don’t worry. I told you I would put it all on your bill. By the way, critical care is

very expensive in Switzerland.”

Scot smiled. “I’m sure it is. Listen, I

don’t know exactly what’s going on, but I’m

starting to get a better picture. I need to ask you another favor.”

“*Another* favor? Sure, why not? What can I do for you… take your appendix out?”

“No,” said Scot, laughing, “nothing that serious. I need to borrow your car.”

“Okay, but the smoke screen and oil slick have been on the fritz. Every time I take it

in to be fixed, the mechanic says he’s got it working, and then as soon as I get it

home and need to wipe out some bad guys, it doesn't work again. It's also not

bulletproof, you know."

"That's okay; I don't intend to get it or myself near any more bullets."

Jackie gave him a stern glance, knowing he was lying. "Why don't I believe you?"

"I just need it for tonight, and—"

"Not a chance."

"Why?"

"Scot, I don't care how much of a macho

guy you think you are, you could barely

make it up the stairs a short while ago. I practically had to carry you the whole way.

You are in no condition to drive."

"I was exhausted. Being shot at has a funny way of doing that to you. It's kinda

been a bad day."

"All the more reason you shouldn't be behind the wheel."

"Okay, you're right. I'll make you a deal. Bring up some soup, I'll eat, get a little

sleep, and then I'll go."

She sat on the edge of the bed not saying anything. She just gave him the same

disbelieving look.

"C'mon, Jack. Scout's honor. I promise. I wouldn't ask you if it wasn't important."

"Okay, I'll do it, but on one condition."

"What is it?"

"I want a straight answer."

"Okay."

“What’s happening?”

“Jackie, if I knew, I would tell you. I mean that straight.”

“So you have no idea who tried to kill you today or how they found you?”

“None at all.” Once again, Scot was lying. He did have the beginnings of an idea, but

nothing concrete.

“Scot, someone knows you’re here. This is serious. I am worried about you. It was

one thing when you told me everything

was going on back in the States, but

whatever this trouble is, it's followed you here. We should get you help."

"No. No help, Jack. I can handle this."

"Scot, I know someone I think can help you."

"Jackie, I mean it. No help. I can get myself out of this."

"Before or after you get shot at again?"

"What are you talking about? This?" he asked motioning to his bandaged arm. "It's

just a flesh wound. I'll bite the legs off of anyone who tries anything else."

"Monty Python, very funny. I mean it. You need help."

"Actually, what I need is some soup and then a short nap. Everything will be fine.

You'll see."

"I wish I could believe you."

Jackie left the room and returned twenty minutes later carrying a tray with rolls,

butter, soup, and a dish of ice cream.

"The car will be parked next to the

bakery, two blocks down. I'll leave the keys

under the mat," she said.

"Thanks."

"Promise me you'll be careful?"

"I promise."

"I'm worried about you, Scot."

"Me too, Jack. Me too."

58

When Scot awoke several hours later, he was surprised that he had actually fallen

asleep. He was also surprised at the depth of his exhaustion. Apparently, Jackie had

come to collect his tray and he hadn't even heard her. Sleeping that soundly was

dangerous. Scot looked at his watch and realized he needed to get going. He had a

long drive ahead of him.

There was no blood seeping through the bandage, but his arm was still in a lot of

pain, as was his head. He pulled a couple of Tylenols from his shaving kit

and

chased them with the last of the mineral water. Next, he got out the glue and applied

the bushy brown eyebrows and goatee. With a towel across his lap in case he

dropped a lens, he sat on the edge of the bed and put the brown contacts in. Then,

he slipped on the thin wire-frame glasses. Harvath looked in the mirror, staring at the

contrast between the brown eyebrows and goatee and his stark blond, almost white

hair. Thank goodness it was cold and he would be able to wear a hat.

With his good right arm he slowly slid into a pair of khakis, but putting on a

button-down shirt was murder. The pain surged through his arm and into his

shoulder. *Slowly,* he told himself. *Take it slowly.*

Thirty minutes later, disguised as Hans Brauner, Harvath left Balmer's and made his

way toward the bakery. The car was exactly where Jackie had said she would leave

it. The keys were under the mat, and there was a Post-it note on the knob of the

gearshift that read simply, *"Be Careful."* Harvath chided himself again for ever

letting her go.

Despite the cold, the car turned over immediately. Scot signaled and merged into the

flow of Saturday evening Interlaken traffic.

The drive to Munich was long, yet thankfully uneventful. At the border,

sleepy

guards anxious to get off duty waved him on through when he held up his German

passport.

Harvath followed the signs toward München Flughafen. Driving in Europe was so

much easier than in America. The routes were perfectly marked with easy to

understand signs, and as long as you stayed out of Italy, the drivers were courteous

and knew what they were doing.

He parked his car at the Munich Airport long-term lot and caught a train for the short

ride to the *Hauptbahnhof*. Even though it was late, the city's main train station was

alive with activity. There were the requisite homeless people hitting up passersby for

spare change, a heaping helping of drunk students, some with large packs, waiting

for their trains, as well as a smattering of locals with the wide smiles and hearty

laughter that the people of this city had been known for ever since Augustiner monks

introduced *Bier* to the city over six hundred years ago. Not counting Oktoberfest, it

was said that the average Münchener consumed at least two hundred twenty liters of

beer a year, more than twice the average amount drunk in the rest of Germany. The

Bavarians were a hearty bunch, there was no denying that.

Outside the station on Bayerstrasse, Harvath caught a cab and gave the driver the

address he wanted on Pfisterstrasse, not far from the Max Joseph Platz.

When the cab pulled up, the wooden blinds of the establishment were shut tight. The

driver made a comment about the café looking closed, but Harvath paid him and got

out.

It was after 1:00 A.M. and the Kuntscafé was indeed closed, or at least that's the

message its proprietor wanted to send to anyone casually strolling by hoping to pop

in for a quick bite or one last drink. Behind the blinds, the lights were still blazing,

and Scot heard a mill of voices. Somewhere inside, a piano sprang to life and a

beautiful tenor voice began to belt out a song.

The singing continued as Scot went around to the back of the small café. He peeled

off his hat and the pieces of his disguise, then placed all of it in his jacket pocket.

Garbage was piled high in the alley, and maneuvering around a stack of bright blue

and yellow plastic beer crates filled with empty bottles, Harvath found the back

door. He knew that if Herman was entertaining, he probably would still have staff on

duty. As Harvath entered the kitchen, he surprised two rather stocky waiters. Before

they could say anything, Herman's cook, Fredrik, turned and saw Scot standing in

the doorway. Instantly, his eyes lit up in recognition and a broad smile crept across

his face.

Harvath put a finger to his lips to silence the cook, who in return gave him the

thumbs-up and pointed toward the front of the café. After all, what good was

surprising an old friend if you couldn't *really* surprise him?

Herman was still singing and had his

back to Scot as he emerged from behind a

beaded curtain down the hall from the kitchen. Herman's thick fingers crashed upon

the last keys, and the small group collected in the front of the café clapped

enthusiastically. When they stopped, one pair of hands was still clapping.

"Lovely. Simply lovely," said Scot.

Herman looked up in the direction of the voice and then roared, "First, I am going to

fire the cook, and then I am going to get the lock on that back door fixed!" His

guests sat speechless. Who was this man standing at the end of the bar, and why

was their host yelling at him in English?

It was amazing how quickly Herman moved his six-foot-four, 240-pound frame

around the piano and over to Harvath. The limp from his injured leg didn't slow him

down at all. Herman's huge hands reached out, and Scot almost flinched as he saw

them close in on his face. The beefy German gave him a kiss on each cheek and then

raised Harvath completely off the floor in an enormous bear hug. The pain in his

shoulder was written across his face, and Herman noticed. Quickly, he set his friend

back on the floor.

“What’s wrong with you? Are you hurt?” said Herman. “Did your hairdresser beat

you up when you refused to pay for that awful hairstyle?’

“We need to talk. I’m sorry to interrupt your little party.”

“Party? This? Don’t worry, they’ll only stay as long as I keep the bar open, and the

bar is now closed!” shouted Herman, who turned to the group and told them in

German to settle up their tabs.

After the group left, Herman had the cook make them each up a plate of *Würstel*

with potatoes and sauerkraut, then sent the staff home.

Herman set two large bottles of beer on the table and said, “It’s great to see you.

Why don’t I call Diana? She’s probably asleep by now, but it doesn’t matter. She

would love to see you, even with your hair like that.”

Scot responded as Herman drew a small cellular telephone from his breast pocket.

“You know what? For now, let’s not tell Diana I’m here. I need to talk to you

alone.”

Herman replaced the phone in his

pocket. “Does this have anything to do with the

face you made when I gave you the hug?”

“Kind of.”

“You’re getting soft! Look at me,” said Herman, flexing his right biceps and then

slamming his hands upon his midsection. “I am still in better shape than most men

my age, and I run a café now for a living. All this food, all this beer, and I haven’t

put on more than two kilos… three max!”

Scot smiled. “You look great, Herman, and I am sure Diana does too. You will have

to tell her that I asked about her.”

“What do you mean? You can tell her yourself. After we eat, we’ll go back to my

place. You can have the guest room.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t stay that long. I just came because I need some information and a

favor.”

Herman’s jovial expression turned

quietly serious. “Are you in some sort of

trouble?”

“Actually, my friend, I’m in many sorts of trouble.” Harvath brought Herman up to

speed on everything that had happened to him. Herman listened intently, only picking

at the plate of food in front of him. When Scot finished, Herman took a long

swallow from his beer and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand before

responding. “So, what is it you need

from me?”

“Like I said, information. I thought all of the shooters yesterday were working

together until I heard the American voices and realized that there were probably two

groups. The first, with the woman, must have been gunning for me because of the

note I sent to the post office box in Interlaken, and the second was the hit team from

D.C., who somehow managed to pick up my trail.”

“Okay, two separate groups, then. But why?”

“I have an idea who is behind the American team, but not the team from the Ice

Palace at the Jungfraujoch. That team spoke German—”

“You said that. You also said it didn’t sound like German German, right?”

“It sounded like Swiss German, but it was only a couple of words. That’s pretty

hard to nail an accent with.”

“Let’s assume for a moment that you’re correct on the accent. You said they also

spoke Serbian?”

“Yes. That I am certain of.”

Herman leaned backward in his chair. He appeared to be staring at the ceiling,

studying the wine-colored tiles that ran between the old wooden beams. Harvath

knew he was thinking, turning something over in his mind.

“You are absolutely certain that your FBI and the rest of the U.S. government is

wrong about Fatah?"

"I don't know. I do know there is no way the Fatah, if they are even involved, could

have pulled off something like this on their own. We can be sure they had inside help

from people within my government."

"And you're positive you are on the correct path?"

"Positive? I don't think anyone can be positive on something like this. All I know is

that somebody else thinks I'm on the right path."

"What do you mean, *'somebody else thinks'?"*

"I think the attempts on my life, two of them just yesterday in Switzerland, make for

a pretty strong case that I'm on to something."

"I agree. I also agree that this entire situation does not seem to fit the Fatah.

Someone is using them as some sort of smoke screen."

“So, if we’re on the same page, who do you think would be capable of an attack like

this and kidnapping the president?”

“You’re right that it would have been undertaken by a group with exceptional

mountaineering and military skills. They could have come from Germany or, like you

said, France, Italy, Austria, or…”

“Or?”

“You are sure that what you heard in the Ice Palace was two men, the same who

had

been shooting at you, speaking Serbian?”

“It’s one of the few things in this whole mess that I am totally positive about.”

“Then that narrows the field considerably.”

59

“What the hell happened?” yelled Senator Snyder into the scramble phone in his

study as Senator Rolander looked on.

“We acquired the target, but there was

another interested party already present,”

replied the hired killer.

“Another interested party? Who were they?”

“We have no idea. They made their move before we had a chance, so we hung

back.”

“What happened?” asked Rolander.

Snyder cupped the mouthpiece and addressed Rolander. “The girl led the team right

to him, but someone else made a move before they had a chance to take him out."

"Shit. Then they know about him."

"They must know something," said Snyder as he turned his attention back to the

phone. "What happened then?"

"The target evaded the shooters, and we followed him. When we tried to close out

the contract, he managed to get away."

"He got away? Maybe I haven't been

clear. You and your associates are not being

paid for him to *get away.* You are being paid to take him out! I can't believe this.

That's the third time. Harvath must be eliminated."

"He will be."

"Do you have any idea where he is now?"

"No, but we're working on it."

"What about the girl?"

"She disappeared. We had to stick with

our target. She shouldn't be too hard to find, though."

"She'd better not be. And I'd better not hear about any more failed attempts. You get that slippery son of a bitch and you take him out once and for all. Do you understand me?"

The killer didn't have a chance to respond. Snyder had already slammed down the phone.

They rode in silence toward the Munich airport as the long mono-wiper of Herman's

Mercedes beat a steady rhythm against the windshield and the steadily falling snow.

Scot was processing the information Herman had spent the last hour sharing with

him.

When NATO forces had been brought in to keep the peace in Kosovo, it had been

divided into several sectors — French, German, Italian, and so forth. Despite

the

presence of NATO, emotions and tempers on both sides still raged very hot.

Serbians had hit lists of Albanians they wanted dead and vice-versa. Much of this

involved the ordinary citizenry, but there were also very high ranking military,

political, and business people who had extremely nasty bones to pick with their

enemies, but who were being watched so closely that they didn’t dare act.

Realizing there was a need for their services, a band of highly trained killers put

themselves on the market in Yugoslavia. Nothing was beneath them. They had no

problem killing, raping, torturing, or maiming men, women, or children… *anyone* was

fair game as long as the price was right. What's more, they specialized in

assignments that were considered impossible. There was no security system they

could not breach. No hiding place that

couldn’t be uncovered. Once they had your

scent, it was said, it was time to make your peace with God.

“You’re sure the killers were Swiss?” said Harvath, breaking their silence. “And the

NATO soldiers acted as go-betweens?”

“That’s what my contact told me. Remember that much like Berlin after World War

Two, Kosovo was divided into sectors controlled by troops from specific countries.

As Swiss, the assassins were fluent in French, German, Italian, and English. They

only interacted with the people right below the top of the different military

commands. The ‘seconds.’ These soldiers were hungry for profit, and the killers

took very good care of them. If there was an Albanian, a Serb… anyone in their

sector that needed a job done, these soldiers arranged it.”

Scot had seen it before, and it made him sick. “Those soldiers were there to keep

the peace, not to facilitate murders for hire."

"What are you Americans so fond of saying, *'War is hell'?* Most of the NATO

soldiers were risking their lives daily in a country that they hadn't even heard of or

thought about since geography class in primary school. Lots of people were getting

rich. Why not them? And if a couple of bad guys want to rub each other out, who

cares?"

“I understand the mentality, Herman; I just never agreed with it.”

“No, but that’s not what we’re talking about.”

“You’re right. I’m getting away from the point. So, we know that the hired killers

were a group of Swiss. Do we know where they were from in Switzerland? Were

they military? Police of some sort?”

Herman pulled at his large nose. “My contact stated that no one seemed to know

where in Switzerland these men were from or what they looked like. No one knew

what their background was, only that they were extremely qualified."

"How were they contacted when a hit was to be ordered?"

"Through a series of dead drops."

"What else did your contact tell you?"

"Apparently, the killers were known as the Lions."

"The Lions? Why *Lions?*"

“I thought maybe the NATO soldiers gave the name to them to put more of a ‘face’

on the people they were dealing with, but my contact made it very clear that it was

how the killers identified themselves. Just a whisper of the word was enough to send

people into hiding.”

“Can you get any more information about them for me?”

“I don’t think so. The Lions supposedly stopped operating in Yugoslavia and

could

be dead for all we know."

"Dead? They might be, but I doubt it. One thing is for certain, though, if they are

alive and if these are the people I'm looking for, I promise you, they will be dead

very soon."

61

The drive back from Munich was grueling. Twenty minutes after Herman dropped

Scot at the airport parking lot to retrieve his car and he was on the autobahn, a deep

fatigue had set in. The psychological stress from the past several days and the

physical damage to his body both came calling at once. The two cans of Red Bull he

had with him and coffees at every other truck stop along his route kept him going

until he got back to Interlaken and could finally drop onto his bed and slide into a

deep sleep.

It felt as though only five minutes had passed before he drifted into a dream about

Jackie. He could hear her concern for him in her voice, but for some reason he could

not see her face. She was worried. Should she call a doctor? Was he all right? *There*

was blood, she said. *Not as much as before, but a little. Are you sure?* she asked. *I*

didn't know what to do. Yes, I do care about him.

Her voice grew louder, but Scot still could not see her. A light shone and it, too,

grew brighter. As he got closer to Jackie's voice, the light grew in intensity. He

found his eyelids opening of their own free will, even though all he wanted to do was

sleep. Soon, he was able to see through the light and make out shapes. Jackie's

voice was still with him, but where was she? He blinked his eyes through the mist,

trying to focus. There was a figure at the end of his bed. The voice continued, but

the figure wasn't speaking. The voice was coming from somewhere else. Harvath

shut his eyes tightly, trying to clear his vision. When he opened them, he was

terrified by what he saw.

It was her! The woman from the Ice Palace. She was sitting at the foot of his bed.

Was this a dream? Some sort of hallucination? Out of sheer instinct, he reacted.

He rolled to his right and reached for the nine-millimeter Beretta that Herman had

given him before saying good-bye last night. His hand fumbled clumsily along the

nightstand. It was gone. But how? He had placed it right there before he went —

“Looking for this?” said the woman, holding up the pistol. “Or maybe, this?” she

said as she raised the replica Glock. Now Harvath knew he wasn’t dreaming. “Please

tell me you didn't carry a toy to the Jungfraujoch yesterday. It will only make me

think less of you," said the woman.

Scot was trapped. There was no way he could spring from where he was and get to

her before she got a shot off. The situation seemed hopeless.

From out of the corner of his left eye he saw a hand approach his face, and

automatically he reached out and grabbed it by the wrist. He twisted it hard.

“Scot! Stop it. You’re hurting me. It’s me, Jackie. It’s okay. Calm down.”

“Jackie?” he said, confused. “I don’t understand. Are you okay? She didn’t try to

hurt you, did she? If she did, I’ll—”

“No, Scot, of course she didn’t try to hurt me. I’m okay.”

“I was so careful. I thought I made sure no one was following me. I must have led

them here. Jackie, I’m sorry. I never intended to get you this involved.”

“Scot, relax. This is Claudia Mueller. She’s a friend of ours.”

“What do you mean, she’s a friend?” asked Scot warily.

“Rolf and I know her from Bern.”

“What’s she doing here?”

“I’ve been worried about you,” Jackie said as she tried again, this time without

meeting resistance, to apply a cold compress to Scot’s forehead. “I knew you

didn't want me to call a doctor, but I didn't know what to do. You have been asleep

for so long."

"Jackie, you're not answering my question."

"Remember when I said I thought I knew someone who could help you?"

"Yes, and I told you I didn't need any help."

"But she can help you. She helped me and Rolf, and it was the same kind of help

you need now."

"What are you talking about? She's a killer."

"Scot, listen to me. During the last election there were some threats against Rolf.

Claudia works with the Federal Attorney's Office. She was part of the investigation

into the threats and helped arrange security for us. We spent a lot of time together.

You *can* trust her."

Scot stared at Claudia. “Jackie, I want *you* to trust me. There is absolutely no way

this woman is on our side.”

“Scot, you’re delirious. You haven’t moved since last night when I came in to pick

up your tray.”

“Jack, I’m okay,” Harvath said as he pushed himself up into a sitting position with

two pillows propped behind his back. “I was gone all night. I got back early this

morning and was exhausted. I guess I was so out of it I didn't hear you come into

the room."

"And wherever you were," began Claudia, "I assume that's where you got this,"

referring to Herman's gun.

"Hold it just a second," said Scot as Jackie offered him a glass of juice. "I'm going

to be the one asking questions here, okay? Being held at gunpoint by the same

person twice in less than twenty-four hours allows me that privilege. So, first, who

the hell are you?"

"You have already been told that. I'm Claudia Mueller of the Federal Attorney's

Office."

"And you just happened to be up at the Ice Palace yesterday at the same time I was,

and just happened to stick a gun in my back, and just happened to have two men

with you who tried to kill me?"

"I had nothing to do with the men who were shooting at us in the Ice Palace."

"'*Us*'? What do you mean?"

"You do understand English, don't you?"

"Enough to get by," he replied smugly.

"I mean," said Claudia, who ignored Scot's sarcasm, "they were shooting at us.

You and me. I have no idea who they were."

"And you probably have no idea about

who was then shooting at me in Wengen

only an hour later?”

“I know one thing: it wasn’t the men from the Ice Palace.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“Because those two were still at the Jungfraujoch an hour later.”

“How do you know?” Scot asked as he continued to look her over. She was

gorgeous, but he couldn’t shake his first impression of her. Funny how a gun

jammed in your back could do that.

“I know because I was there too. I was trying to find you while avoiding them. It

wasn’t easy. I don’t know how you managed to slip away. You must be quite

clever.”

“I have my days, but yesterday sure wasn’t one of them. Someone else managed to

find me, and they turned Wengen into a shooting gallery. I was lucky to get away

with only this.” Harvath pointed to his left arm and noticed that a small amount of

blood had seeped through the bandage. He started to unravel it, but Jackie quickly

sat down next to him and took over.

“Do you have any idea who it was that tried to shoot at you in Wengen?”

“They weren’t *trying* to shoot at me; they actually *were* shooting at me; and besides,

I said I would ask the questions here. What were you doing at the Ice Palace in the

first place, and why did you pull a gun on me?”

“You know what, guys? I have got a ton of stuff to get done,” said Jackie. “I think I

am going to leave you two alone.” Catching the look in Scot’s eye, she added,

“Don’t worry. You’ll be perfectly safe with Claudia. She’s extremely tough. She

climbs mountains in her spare time for fun. Did you know that?” Beckoning to

Claudia, she said, “Why don’t you finish changing this dressing for me. There’s

only been a little bleeding, but the

stitches are all still intact. It looks like he'll mend.

Another toughie. You two'll get along fine."

Getting up, Jackie patted the place on the bed where she'd been sitting next to Scot.

Claudia stood up and set the guns from her lap onto the chair and made her way to

the bed. She took a roll of clean gauze from Jackie and began wrapping Scot's arm.

Jackie closed the door behind her.

“As I said, I work for the Federal Attorney’s Office in Bern, which is called the

Bundesanwaltschaft. I was following a suspect in an ongoing investigation who had

been using a post office box in Interlaken __”

“Wait a second, are you or are you not ‘Aunt Jane’?”

“I am not.”

“Then what the hell were you doing at the Ice Palace?”

“I think I can make the situation somewhat clearer if you’ll allow me.”

“Be my guest.”

“Once a week, my suspect travels to the post office to check for mail. He is a

creature of habit, typical Swiss, very methodical and always comes on the same day

at normally the same time, so I have a certain window in which I know I can check

the box to see if he has received anything that might help me in tying him to my

case."

"*Tying* him to your case? Is he a suspect or not?"

"I haven't been able to gather enough evidence yet, but I know he is somehow

involved. I have what you Americans refer to, I believe, as a *hunch.*"

"Yes, *hunch* is the correct word. But that's legal in Switzerland? Reading

someone's mail? Please, not so tight on the bandage."

"I know what I am doing, Agent Harvath."

“How do you know who I am?”

“Which question should I answer first?” she said, giving Scot a little slack in his

dressing before taping the gauze in place.

“Lady’s choice.”

“Pardon me?”

“It means you choose, lady.”

“I see. Like my suspect, I am also somewhat methodical and of course am Swiss,

so I’ll take your questions in order. As

far as the legality of investigating the

suspect's mail, it depends upon the severity of the charge and the investigator. And

as for knowing who you are, Jackie told me everything."

"Everything?"

"She cares about you a great deal and is very worried about you. Don't be upset

with her. She did the right thing in calling me. I was just as shocked to see you lying

in that bed as you were to see me. I

thought you had brought those two men to the

Ice Palace to kill *me.”*

“You? Why would I do that?”

“Why does anyone commit murder? I’m sure the motivations are no different in

Switzerland than they are in America. All I know is that after I picked up what I think

I can correctly assume was your letter from the post box, I noticed I was being

followed. I engaged in an evasive tactic __”

“Crossing to the bakery.”

“Yes, and then I secluded myself in a doorway and waited. As it turns out, I was

more patient than you were.”

“In the Ice Palace, you called me by the name I had used in the post office and by

my real name. How did you figure those out? Wait… the Sampras one is the easiest.

You went back to the post office and asked if anyone had seen someone matching

my description?”

“You are quite charming, Agent Harvath. The woman at the *poste restante* window

remembered you perfectly. She also had your alias written down on a piece of paper

to check for your envelope, which still hasn’t come, by the way.”

“I’ll have to tell her not to hold her breath.”

“I already did. She was quite disappointed she wouldn’t be seeing you again. Now,

as far as getting your real name, that was a little more difficult. I had seen you on the

street, but was able to get a better look at your face from the post office surveillance

tape. The female clerk told me you were American, so I went back to my office and

started doing some searches on the computer, starting with our watch list.

“Two names had recently been added — a German and an American. The

description of the American sounded

like it could fit you. I E-mailed a request to the

authoring agency and not long after received a picture of you. The hair is quite

different, of course, but that only made it more obvious."

"Authoring agency? What do you mean by you *E-mailed them a request?"*

"They are the people who put your name on our watch list. Sometimes it's an

Interpol request; sometimes it's a local or federal Swiss agency; sometimes it's

another country… There is often a wide array of agencies who add to a watch list

for a wide variety of reasons."

"I know about watch lists, thank you very much. What I want to know is who put

me on yours? It was an American agency of course."

"Yes. It was your State Department. The man who called me mentioned—"

"Called you? Who called you?"

"After I requested the picture, I received

a phone call. A man identified himself as being from a particular division of the State Department and said that he was responding to my E-mail request for your photo. He asked me a lot of questions and was frankly not very polite."

"What did you tell him?"

"Basically, I told him nothing. I said we had a lot of ongoing investigations involving tourist crimes, and I wondered if you might somehow be involved. I wanted

your

picture so I could compare it against some recent witness descriptions we had

received in several resort areas."

"And you didn't tell them you had seen me, or thought you had seen me?"

"No. I told them exactly what I just told you. Of course he reminded me several

times about informing them immediately if I even thought I had seen you, and not to

try and intercept you."

“But you had seen me. Why didn’t you say something?”

“I didn’t say anything because if the U.S. State Department wanted you that bad and

you were somehow associated with the case I was investigating, then I wanted you

as well. I have been waiting for a break in this case. I’m certainly not going to sit

back and turn it over to the Americans. No offense.”

“None taken, but I think you did turn it over.”

“What do you mean?”

“Was the German added to your watch list at the same time?”

“It was listed in the same update, which meant they had both been added in the same

time period, yes.”

“Do you remember the name of the German?”

“I think it was something like *Brunner,* but I don’t remember exactly. At the time it

wasn’t important. I’m normally pretty

good with names, but I was so focused on

you and what your involvement was and is—”

“Could it have been *Brauner?”*

“It could have been. Yes, it was. Hans. Hans Brauner. I knew I would remember it.”

Harvath put his head in his hands and massaged his temples. “Can you be absolutely

certain you were not followed here today?”

“Followed, why?”

“Just answer me, please,” said Scot.

“After I finally evaded the two men from the Jungfraujoch, I was extremely cautious,

even paranoid. I am positive no one followed me here. Why?”

“I think I finally know how the shooters in Wengen picked up my trail.”

“Picked up your trail? Who are they?”

“They’re an American hit team that tried twice to kill me in Washington several days

ago.”

“How did they track you here? Have you been using your real name to travel?”

“What am I, new? Please, Ms. Mueller, I don’t know how the Swiss do things, but

trust me, we Americans are a lot more thorough than that.”

“So are we Swiss, Agent Harvath, but the only way someone who doesn’t want to

be found gets found is if they make some sort of mistake.”

“Or if someone tips off the people

looking for you, which is what I'm afraid you did

quite unknowingly."

"Me?"

"Yes, when you sent that E-mail asking for my picture, it started a whole chain of

events. When I left the U.S., I was traveling as *Hans Brauner,* so the people who

were after me had enough pull to get both my real name and my false one put on

your watch list in case I turned up. Just asking for the picture was enough to make

someone suspect that you knew more than you were telling. My guess is that as

soon as they had figured out I was Brauner and had come to Switzerland, they sent a

hit team over here. They got both the names on the watch list, and then it was just a

waiting game.

“When you sent your E-mail, it got people thinking, and they decided to tail

you.

Either they didn't see me follow you from the post office, or they hadn't begun to

tail you until you went to the Jungfraujoch the next day."

"But what about your letter? After I resealed it, I put it back in the post office box.

Maybe I am not being followed at all. Maybe your letter drew the shooters. That was

your intent, wasn't it? Someone was supposed to read that letter and be

sufficiently

interested to show up, right? Why were you setting up a meeting at the Ice Palace in

the first place, and what do you know about ‘Aunt Jane’?”

“At this point, not enough. I do know, though, that our paths have crossed for a

reason, and I intend to figure out why. We need to talk more — you and me — but

not here.”

“Then where?”

“Someplace else. Anywhere else. Having you here has made me realize how much

danger I’ve already put Jackie in. She’s too much of a good friend. We need to find

someplace safe where we can sort this all out.”

“I think I have just the place.”

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“Just the place” turned out to be the nearby elegant yet vacant summer residence of

Claudia's boss, Urs Schnell, which they unceremoniously gained entrance to when

Claudia kicked in one of the small windows in back.

"Okay," said Scot, taking a pen and pad from the ornate desk in the far corner of the

living room and walking back to Claudia at the fireplace, "let's get started. Why

don't we begin with your investigation. What's it all about, who were you following,

et cetera…"

“That would be fine, except that is classified information and I am bound by my

oath to—”

“What? Are you saying you don’t trust me?”

“I hardly know you—”

“Hold it. A little over twenty-four hours ago you had a gun jammed into my spine;

yet here I am alone and defenseless with you.”

Claudia gave him a look that said, *You, defenseless?*

“Okay, I’m not defenseless, but I am here and you did have a gun on me yesterday.

I mean, why else would I come to a deserted love nest with you and lock myself

inside for the evening?”

Again Claudia shot him a look.

“Okay, you’re not that bad looking, but I am not going to let that get in the way of

some other mildly important things — like saving my life and the president’s.”

“You’re right. I’m sorry,” said Claudia,

becoming more businesslike. “We need to

work together. Our two cases seem to merge based upon who sends and receives

letters via the post box in Interlaken.”

As Claudia shared the details of her case with Scot, he took copious notes that

would be tossed into the fire once they both had looked them over and digested the

information.

Hours passed, and they ate from the bags

of food they had purchased on the way to

the house. When the bottle of mineral water was finished, they moved to a bottle of

wine. It was a nice white, a Côtes de Russin from just outside Geneva. Claudia bent

her own rule about drinking while she was working.

Scot liked the wine and laughed when Claudia explained that the reason he couldn't

find any Swiss wines back home was that Switzerland didn't export wines, it

imported drinkers. That reminded him of something, but he couldn't remember

what. His mind was still not firing on every cylinder. He let it go, figuring if it was

important, it would come back. He drank his wine slowly and looked down at the

pages of notes spread out on the floor before them.

"So, let's go over what we know. Senator Snyder, according to the documents I

received from André Martin, wrote a letter to someone he called Aunt Jane,

signed it

with the name Edwin, and mailed it to the post office box in Interlaken. The box is

owned or at least used by this man Gerhard Miner, whom you have been trying to

link to your investigation of the weapons theft from a depot outside of Basel. How

am I doing?"

"So far so good," she said.

"Because of Miner's involvement with this group, Der…"

“Nebel. It means ‘fog’ in German.”

“Right, fog. So Miner, many years ago, after cross-training with U.S. Special

Operations Forces, returns to Switzerland and establishes this unit which is designed

to test the security of Swiss military installations. He’s so successful with breaching

security at the bases that he quickly earns a lot of enemies and his unit is shut down

for fear of embarrassing the military establishment and he is moved higher in

your

intelligence sector.”

“Yes.”

Scot paused, tapping the pen against his chin. “I can see why you suspected him.

He certainly has the credentials. What about the weapons? What can you tell me

about those?”

“It depends. Which weapons in particular do you want to know about?”

He looked at the notes he’d taken. “A lot

of what you've described is standard

military hardware. Because the Swiss never had in their possession a jamming

device, that item isn't part of the theft you're investigating. The kidnappers I'm

looking for could have purchased it on the black market or directly from the North

Koreans. What stands out on your list are the glare guns. Tell me about those."

"They were Russian issue. Dostov was the name of the company that created them.

There were two in the Basel depot. They were brand-new, and the army hadn't even

had a chance to fully test them yet. The manufacturer had only produced a limited

number and was loaning them to different governments in hopes that they could

create large-scale orders for the device. These were prototypes in a sense, so even if

an individual wanted to buy them, they weren't available for sale."

“What were you planning to use them for?”

“At this stage, I don’t think we planned on using them for anything. My government

had acquired them strictly to test their effectiveness.”

“Effectiveness against what?”

“Switzerland is a relatively peaceful country, despite your experiences in the

Jungfrau,” Claudia said with a smile. “As such, we have been looking into a series of

nonlethal weapons. Over the next two years we will be hosting several high-profile

economic and diplomatic summits. After the WTO and World Bank disturbances

the U.S.A. experienced, we decided we needed to be better prepared to handle civil

unrest."

"But why the Russians? Why buy equipment from them when we have a very strong

alliance with your country and are developing similar technology?"

“From what I understand, your testing of nonlethal laser weapons has not been very

successful. The Russians seem to have it more finely tuned. Also, I have no idea if

this is a technology that the Americans are sharing. Besides, we were only going to

test it. We had not yet decided if we were going to buy it.”

“So, this shipment of weapons arrives at the Basel depot, and before your people

get a chance to use it, it’s stolen. How did the thieves know it was coming and

where it would be?”

“We suspect there was a leak.”

“Could Miner have had access to this information?”

“Yes, and knowing this, I had both a motive and the means. Motive was easy —

money. I tried to check his alibi, but he claims he was working on a classified

assignment at the time of the theft.”

“What about his superiors? This guy has to answer to someone.”

“He’s very clever. Whatever he was up to, he had his tracks well covered.”

“It looks that way.”

“What is it about the glare guns that interests you so much?”

“You know, for the longest time I have been wondering how one of the finest

protective details in the world could be ambushed and killed with only one man

getting a shot off.”

“You are referring to your president’s team?”

“Yes. It didn’t make sense to me until I began thinking about the glare guns. If Miner

is connected to the president’s kidnapping and he brought the glare guns with him, I

can see how the Secret Service agents were taken out. Blinded and disoriented, they

wouldn’t have been able to safely evacuate the president or take any shots. But…”

“But what?”

“How did one of the agents get a shot off

and manage with that one shot to kill a

bad guy?”

“Maybe he wasn’t as affected as the other agents.”

“Or maybe that’s just what somebody wanted us to think.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“It never sat well with me that the kidnappers would leave one of their own behind. I

also never liked it that this guy was found holding a gun that directly tied him to

where he was from. For such a carefully planned assault, it seems very careless, and

therefore very suspicious."

"If the one body was left at the scene on purpose, what does that say?"

"It says that somebody really wanted us to believe that a Middle Eastern group was

behind the kidnapping."

"And what about the demands of the FRC?" said Claudia.

What about them? Scot thought. Today

was Sunday, a week since the avalanche.

He had been on the run since Wednesday. Just four days, but it felt like a lifetime.

America might have already caved in by now, or a whole new set of demands could

have been made. All he knew he got from looking at an occasional newspaper — the

vice president was refusing to deal, and the president had not yet been returned.

“That’s a big question mark. Everything points away from a Mideastern

organization, except the demands," said Harvath.

"Maybe who committed the kidnapping and who paid for it are two separate

groups."

"That's the direction I am taking, and it's the only thing that could explain the

Fatah's involvement. So, if you find one of the groups, you should be able to find

the other."

"What else do we have?"

"Well, we have the two shooters in the

Ice Palace speaking Serbian and my source's

confirmation of a Swiss assassination team working in Yugoslavia in recent years."

"And they called themselves the Lions, right?"

"Yes. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Kind of, but it's really just a feeling."

"Coming to Switzerland was *just a feeling* for me, but with every gun that gets

jabbed in my back or bullet that whizzes

past my head, I'm learning to trust my

feelings even more, so, please, share."

"Well, when you first mentioned the Lions, it made me think of words like 'proud'

and 'arrogant.' Those words remind me of Gerhard Miner—"

"The lunch you had with him."

"Yes, which seems silly, but there was another picture that came to mind when you

talked about the assassination team being Swiss and being named the Lions. There

is

a very famous monument in Lucerne of a dying lion. It was carved out of a rock

ledge as a tribute to the men of the Swiss Guard who died defending King Louis and

Marie Antoinette during the revolution."

"You think there might be some sort of symbolic connection?"

"Why not? Switzerland has always been proud of its neutrality, but also very proud

of the ferocity and courage of its

mercenaries. Ferocity and courageousness, just like

a lion.”

“This monument is in Lucerne?”

“Yes.”

“And where does—”

“Miner live?”

“Yes.”

“He has an apartment in Bern, but his main home is in Lucerne.”

“The Lions of Lucerne. You might not

have been reaching very far at all."

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The next morning, Scot used the color kit Claudia had bought with their groceries

and dyed his hair once again. He wanted to return to his sandy brown, but he needed

two applications to cover up the white blond and subsequently ended up with a

much darker shade than he'd hoped for. At least it didn't all fall out, which had been

a definite possibility with all of the

chemicals it had been subjected to in the last

couple of days. With his hair short, yet conservatively colored, hopefully no one

would bother to give him a second look.

After straightening up the house and boarding up the broken window as best they

could, Scot and Claudia left to pursue the only other lead they had, a package mailed

from a small village north of Lucerne called Hochdorf.

“Do you think he’ll tell us anything?” asked Scot.

“We won’t know until we try, will we?” Claudia responded.

“And you’re sure he’s somehow connected?”

“Of course, I’m sure. When Miner had refused to meet and answer my questions, I

began following him. That’s how I learned about the post office box in Interlaken. I

also found he had one in Lucerne. After he and I had lunch, I thought there was

little

chance I would be able to get anything on him. He went on vacation, but I kept

watching both of his post boxes hoping to get lucky. A few days ago, a package

arrived for him in Lucerne."

"Which of course you borrowed, steamed open, copied the contents of, and then

replaced."

"You're very smart. Yes, I made copies of the contents. It held his passport,

canceled train tickets, and credit card receipts. They showed that he had been in

Greece, Italy, and France before returning home."

"Was he out of the country during the time of President Rutledge's kidnapping?"

"Yes, but according to the stamps in his passport, he was in Europe, not America."

"Of course not. That would be too obvious. What's the connection with the cousin

in Hochdorf?”

“I don’t know. I’m hoping he will tell us. Who else would send Miner a package

from Hochdorf if not his cousin? My files show he’s the only relative Miner has

there. It has to be the cousin. Miner wouldn’t go up to Hochdorf just to mail himself

a package.”

“What if he left it there while visiting and the cousin just mailed it back to him?”

“And what were you saying about going with your gut? At this point, this is all we

have to go on.”

An hour outside Lucerne, Claudia pulled into a rest area.

“I need to call the office and let them know I won’t be in.”

“Don’t forget to see if you can get someone to look a bit deeper into Miner’s file to

see if there are any links between him and Yugoslavia.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

Scot got out of the car and stretched his legs while Claudia went inside to use the

phone.

At a pay phone by the washrooms, she inserted her telephone card and dialed her

office.

“Christina, hello. It’s Claudia. I’m not going to be in today; I have some outside

work to do. Do I have any messages, please?”

“Herr Schnell has been looking everywhere for you. Hold a moment. I will connect

you.”

Schnell? What could he possibly want? she wondered.

Ten seconds later a gruff voice roughened from years of cigarette smoke was on the

line. “Where are you?”

“Good morning, Herr Schnell,” Claudia politely replied.

“Don’t *good morning* me. Where are

you?”

“Why, what’s going on?”

“Where were you on Saturday?”

“I was pursuing leads in my case.”

“Where was that?”

“The Jungfrau area.”

“And did you stay at your parents’ farm in Grindelwald?”

“Yes, but—”

He cut her off. “And where were you all day Sunday and Sunday evening until

now?”

Claudia was getting very suspicious. He couldn’t possibly know already that she had

been in his house. She wanted to explain things to him, but decided she wouldn’t

give out any more information until she had some of her own. “I was with a friend.”

Quickly, before Herr Schnell could fire off another question, she asked one of her

own. “What is this all about?”

“What this is all about is that for the longest time I couldn’t understand why you

were not making any progress on the weapons case.”

“It has been extremely difficult. There are not many leads.”

“I spoke with Arianne Küess in the Hague. She had some very interesting things to

say about you.”

“About me?” Claudia had no idea where this was going.

“She says you volunteered for this case.”

“That is correct, but I don’t understand __”

“So, you don’t deny it?”

“No, of course not. Herr Schnell, I must respectfully insist that you get to the point.”

He did. They had a brief exchange of words, and when Schnell was finished

speaking, all Claudia could do was set the phone down and walk back out to the car

stunned.

Scot sensed something was wrong right away. “Are you okay? What happened?”

Claudia started the car and backed out of their parking space faster than safe driving

dictated.

“Claudia, hold it a second. What’s wrong?”

She gripped the steering wheel with all of her might as if somehow it could purge the

anger from her body. “Yesterday, the police raided my parents’ farm in

Grindelwald."

"Raided? What happened? Are they okay?"

"Physically, I'm sure they're fine, but they are probably very shaken. They are much

too old for this."

"For what? Why were the police there?"

"They had an anonymous tip."

"Tip about what?"

"After a thorough search of the barn, the police found two ADATS."

“ADATS? As in Swiss antitank missiles?”

“Yes.”

“Let me guess. The serial numbers on the missiles—”

“Match the ones that were stolen from the weapons depot outside Basel.”

“Claudia, I don’t know what to say.”

“I do. Someone is going to pay.”

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Even though she was stunned, Claudia had still been able to think on her feet. If

Deputy Federal Attorney Urs Schnell hoped to have any sort of future with the

Bundesanwaltshaft, the last thing he needed was a scandal that would engulf his

entire office on his very first big case. Seeing the logic of Claudia's argument and

trusting her promise that she would not go to the press, Schnell agreed to give her

forty-eight hours before turning herself in. She assured him she would have answers

by then. If only she could assure herself of the same thing.

“I never did like anonymous tips. They always smell bad,” said Scot.

“From what I can tell, I don’t think my boss likes them either and that’s why he

agreed to hold everything for forty-eight hours.”

“That and the fact that he doesn’t want a scandal on his hands.”

“There’ll be a scandal, all right, but it won’t involve me or my office. It’s going to

have to do with Swiss intelligence and Gerhard Miner."

"Well, you better do some fast thinking. You've only got forty-eight hours."

"And what about you?"

"Me? I have no idea how much time I have left. You forget, there are people with

guns looking for me."

"I'm not convinced the shooters in the Ice Palace weren't there for me as well.

Someone might have seen me putting your letter back into the post office box

after I

made a copy of it."

"Don't tell me we're actually going to fight over who's going to die first?"

"No. We need to be serious. Why were the weapons planted in my family's barn?"

"That one's easy. You're getting too close to the truth."

"We both are, and the closer we get the less time we have."

Before driving into the village of Hochdorf, Claudia explained to Scot that

she would

need to question Miner's cousin in German. Harvath would not be able to open his

mouth, but his silence would make him very intimidating. Kind of a Swiss spin on

good cop, bad cop.

Wilhelm Schroeppel Carpentry was not hard to find. Claudia parked her Volkswagen

across the street, and they entered the small shop. A set of diminutive cowbells rang

above the door, announcing their presence. They looked around the showroom as

they waited for the shopkeeper to come up front. Harvath traced his finger across

one of the shelves and lifted it up to show Claudia the dust.

“Not much of a housekeeper, I’m afraid,” came a voice in German. Harvath and

Claudia looked up to see a tall, handsome man with gray hair and a fading tan appear

from the back wearing an apron. Claudia

was immediately struck by how much he looked like Miner.

“I have just returned from vacation and haven’t gotten caught up with my housework,” he said.

“Vacation?” said Claudia. “That sounds nice. Where did you go?”

“Southern Europe.”

“Really? Where exactly? I love southern Europe.”

“I was in Greece for a bit.”

“Greece. Now, that’s a nice spot. How long were you gone?”

“A little bit. I’m sorry, but can I help you with something? I’m quite busy today.”

“I hope you can,” said Claudia presenting her credentials. “I’m Claudia Mueller, and

this is HansPeter Sampras. We’re from the Bundesanwaltschaft, the investigative

affairs division, the Bundespolizei.”

“The Bundespolizei? What do you want with me? I haven’t done anything.”

The man was obviously nervous.

“Let’s talk about your recent vacation,” said Claudia. “Did you go anywhere else

besides Greece?”

Schroeppel might have been nervous, but he wasn’t stupid. Why hadn’t Gerhard

warned him about the possibility that this might happen? Was it his fault? He had

done everything his cousin had told him to, right down to the very last detail

except… the package. Miner had told

him to mail it when he changed trains in Bern,

but Schroeppel had desperately wanted a coffee and to buy some cigarettes. It

wasn't until he had boarded his new train that he realized he had forgotten to mail the

package, so he sent it from Hochdorf when he got home.

He'd talk to the Bundespolizei and then call Gerhard and let him know what took

place. Gerhard would be able to fix it. He could do anything. There was nothing he

needed to worry about; after all, he had been on an official state mission helping his

cousin and, in his own small way, his country. The Bundespolizei were just too

stupid to know it. They were messing with the wrong family. When he called

Gerhard, though, he would conveniently forget to mention that he had not mailed the

package from Bern as he was instructed.

“No, just Greece,” he said. “Everything else is too expensive.”

“I see,” replied Claudia. “So, just Greece.”

“Yes.” The man eyed the woman’s silent partner nervously.

“And of course, your passport will show the appropriate stamps for this vacation?”

“May I ask what this is regarding?”

“This is just a routine investigation, Herr Schroeppel. It’s nothing for you to be

concerned about. Would you be so kind as to show us your passport?”

“I would be happy to, but first I would

like to see your warrant."

"Surely, Herr Schroeppel, you don't have anything to hide and don't wish to

complicate our investigation. If you would be so kind as to show us the passport,

we will be on our way."

"I think maybe I would like to call my attorney first."

"Why would you need an attorney?"

"If the Bundespolizei came to your place of business and asked for your passport

without an explanation, wouldn't you want to call your attorney? I work hard and

mind my own affairs. The last time I checked the federal constitution, Switzerland

was still a democracy. I don't much care for you, or your questions. Until such time

as you obtain a warrant, I suggest you leave me alone. Good day."

Claudia was stumped. He had her. What could she do, put a gun to his head and

demand to see his passport? She had

nothing, but felt the need to leave him with

something that would diminish his superior attitude.

“Herr Schroeppel, one more question before I go. You look quite similar to your

cousin, Herr Miner. I know him. The resemblance is uncanny. I will be back and I

will have a warrant for your passport. While I am at it, I will get one for his too. You

were both on vacation lately, and

something tells me comparing your two passports

is going to be quite interesting. Have a good day."

She turned and walked out of the shop followed by Harvath, who didn't take his

eyes off the man until they were on the street.

"What was all the passport stuff about?" asked Scot.

"Remember when I said I hoped he would be able to tell us something?"

“Yes.”

“Well, just seeing his face told me a lot. He’s a dead ringer for Miner.”

“What’s that got to do with his passport?”

“Everything. Think about it. How closely do busy passport control officers study

passports?”

Scot remembered how he had been able to breeze through two different passport

controls with his Hans Brauner papers. “I don’t know. It must vary.”

“Well, think about a nicely dressed, middle-aged man on holiday.”

“I guess it wouldn’t warrant too much scrutiny.”

“Even if it did, Schroeppel so resembles Miner, I think he could pass the test.”

“Let’s say you’re right. What does it mean?”

“I think Miner bought his cousin a nice vacation, and all he had to do for it was be

seen, get a passport stamped, and charge things on a credit card, all under the name

of Gerhard Miner."

"But what does Miner get for all of this generosity?"

"The most priceless thing of all, an almost airtight alibi."

"You're right!" Scot finally grasped what Claudia was saying. "And Miner's got one

big problem now."

"Yes. The airtight alibi is starting to leak."

"A leak can be so drawn out and painful. Why don't we see if we can help tear it

open?”

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Forty-five minutes after she left a message on his voice mail, Claudia’s cell phone

rang.

“Mueller,” she said.

“Fräulein Mueller, what a delightful surprise it was to get your message,” said

Gerhard Miner.

“I doubt that.”

“Why would you doubt that? I’m flattered to have the ardent attentions of such an

attractive young woman.”

“Well, then you won’t mind meeting me for lunch today.”

“I’m sorry. I’m much too busy. We’ll do it soon, though.”

“I think that would be a mistake.”

“And why is that?”

“I have some very special information I think you might be interested in.”

“That’s hard to imagine.”

“I can tell you, or the deputy federal attorney, or maybe even the press.”

“Fräulein Mueller, I’m surprised you’re even free to walk the streets. Are you not

being brought up on charges by the deputy federal attorney?”

“Well, he’s funny like that. He doesn’t much care for anonymous tips. He says

they” — Claudia shot a sideways glance at Scot — “He says they stink.”

“Stink?” The Americanism was lost briefly on Miner.

“Yes, he much prefers firsthand accounts of things. Eyewitness testimony is so

much more powerful, especially in court. An anonymous tip versus, say, the

testimony of a carpenter from Hochdorf, is so much more effective. Wouldn’t you

agree?”

There was absolute silence over the phone.

“Herr Miner? Are you still there?”

Quietly, Miner responded, “Yes. I’m still here.”

“You haven’t called him back yet, have you? You figured his message wasn’t

important enough. You’d wait until you felt like it to call him back. It’s funny, but I

could almost hear his fingers dialing your number the minute I left his shop.”

“What time?”

“What time did I leave his shop?”

“No, lunch. What time do you want to meet for lunch?”

“I’m quite busy today. Being framed for a major weapons theft creates all sorts

of

demands. Let me look at my book. Can you hold?”

Claudia held her hand over the mouthpiece and waited several moments. She hoped

he was good and pissed off. She enjoyed being in control for once.

“Yes, Herr Miner. Sorry to keep you waiting. Let’s say three o’clock where we had

our lovely lunch last time, the Hotel des Balances. I’ll see you at three.”

Claudia punched the *end* button and severed the connection.

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Setting the lunch appointment for three allowed Claudia and Scot plenty of time to

surveil the Hotel des Balances and check for anything out of the ordinary. So far, it

was clean.

Claudia went in to get a table, and Scot stayed concealed in a shop across the

courtyard from the hotel. From his

vantage point, he would know if Miner came

alone. Having already met the ringer of a cousin and knowing what kind of car Miner

drove, it wasn't hard to spot him when he pulled up.

Miner got out of the black Audi and went into the hotel. Scot waited and, satisfied

that he was alone, followed him inside. The hostess showed Scot to the table he had

reserved earlier — not too close, but not too far away from the action if he was

needed. Claudia and Miner were already deep in conversation when he passed.

"…as lovely as ever, Fräulein Mueller."

"You'll forgive me if I dispose of the pleasantries and get right to the point."

"Of course I will not forgive you. It isn't every day I get to enjoy lunch with a

woman as beautiful as you, and I intend to do just that," said Miner as he called the

waiter over. "Are you serving the roast duck today?"

"Yes, sir," said the waiter.

“Good, that’s what I will have,” said Miner. “How about for you, Fräulein Mueller?

Do you like duck? It’s quite good here.”

“I’m more of a fish person.”

“Excellent, then I highly recommend the lake trout caught right here in our very own

lake. What do you say?”

“Sounds fine to me,” said Claudia.

“Wonderful. Now, what do Americans like to eat?”

“Americans?” asked a startled Claudia. “What do you mean, what do they like to __”

“Steak! That’s what they like,” said Miner, snapping his fingers, very pleased with

himself. “And we’ll have a nice filet, medium-rare, for our friend.”

“For your friend?” said the waiter.

“Yes, he’ll be joining us in a minute. How about some wine, Fräulein Mueller?”

It was their first lunch all over again. “I’ll be fine with a bottle of mineral

water.”

“Well, I hope I’m not being rude — you did after all invite me to lunch — but

there’s nothing that complements a good meal better than a good bottle of wine.

Let’s see, I’m having duck and certainly our American friend is a drinker — they all

are, you know — and he’s having steak. Why don’t you bring us a nice Saint

Emilion wine. The Chateau Quercy is quite good. I’m sure Fräulein Mueller is on an

expense account, and I don't want to get her in any more trouble with her superiors,

so make it something at least seven years old, but not much more than that. Thank

you." The waiter smiled, took their menus, and walked off for the kitchen.

If nothing else, Miner was consistent. Even when the chips were stacked against him,

as he must have known they were now, he still was bold enough to try and assume

control of the situation.

“By the way, Herr Miner. I meant to ask you how you knew I was in any trouble in

the first place.”

“You know what? I would hate to start this conversation without your colleague.

That’s him, isn’t it? The one dining alone, pretending to read the paper on the upper

level. Not exactly the table I would have chosen, but it provides a good view of the

action. Why don’t you wave him over,

and then we can start."

The fact that Miner had spotted Scot shouldn't have surprised her. He was good.

Reluctantly, she gave in and kept waving until Scot understood his cover had been

blown and he made his way toward them.

"Mr. Peter Sampras, I would like you to meet Gerhard Miner," Claudia said in

English as Harvath reached the table.

"Come, come now. That hardly seems fair. Let's use one of Mr. Sampras's

more

endearing names like Hans Brauner or better yet, Agent Scot Harvath of the United

States Secret Service."

Claudia's eyes showed her surprise, something Miner never missed in his

adversaries. "Why so shocked, my dear? Our office receives the same updates to

the watch list that yours does." Turning back to Scot, he said, "Please, Agent

Harvath, have a seat. I have taken the liberty of ordering a nice steak for you.

You

do like steak, don't you?"

"I do indeed. Thank you."

"So, before I begin any conversation, there is a little formality… well, more like a

habit really, that I like to indulge." Miner reached inside the right side of his blazer,

but Scot was faster reaching into his.

"Not so fast, Gerry," said Scot, ready to draw his Beretta.

Miner laughed. “You Americans are so, how do you say it? Quick on the trigger? I

can assure you it’s nothing. Completely harmless. May I?”

“Slowly,” Scot said, watching the man for any hint he was going to pull a gun.

Miner withdrew a small silver box that looked like a fancy holder for a pack of

cigarettes and put it on the table between them. He depressed a button, and a row of

tiny colored lights flashed along the top. He then pushed the right-hand side of the

box flush with his palm, and a piece of the silver plate popped out, which he raised

like the antenna on a portable GPS system.

“Sometimes it gets some stares, and I explain it away as a designer cell phone.

Technology is changing so quickly these days. People will believe just about any

answer you give them.

“Actually,” continued Miner, pointing as he spoke, “this device is quite ingenious.

Right now it is telling me via the green

light here that neither of you are carrying any

active recorders or transmitters. The yellow and blue lights here indicate that the

device itself is currently emitting both a high-and low-frequency signal that will

disrupt any eavesdropping equipment that might be placed within the restaurant or

outside, such as a long-range parabolic microphone. It allows me to speak with a

certain measure of confidence."

“That’s funny, Gerry. I wouldn’t have figured you for a man who needed any help

with his confidence.”

Miner laughed again. “You have a good sense of humor, Agent Harvath. I like that.”

“And I like your little gadget. Where would someone find something like that?”

“Actually, these are quite difficult to lay your hands on. I don’t think you would

have much luck, even if you tried.”

“Well, I’ll tell you what. I have something quite similar, except it wouldn’t fit in your

coat pocket. It’s snow white and about this big,” said Harvath, making a show with

his hands. “About the size of a subwoofer. Made by the North Koreans. I don’t like

carrying it in my pocket because it ruins the line of my suits, being so big and all.

Maybe we could trade?”

“I doubt it,” said Miner.

“Ever been to North Korea, Gerry?”

“No, I haven’t had the pleasure. I hear their women are quite subservient. Very much

into seeing to the needs and the pleasures of their men. Much like the Japanese or the

Chinese. What wonderful cultures the Asians have, but that’s not why you asked me

to lunch, is it?”

“It’s part of it. You see, I’m very interested in your travel habits. There are some

other destinations I wonder if you've visited lately. How about Greece?"

"Of course, I was just there on vacation."

"Along with Italy and France as well?" asked Claudia.

"You've done your homework. Yes, along with Italy and France as well. I took a

lovely cruise from Greece to Venice and then—"

"Rode the train up through France and back home. First class all the way,"

interrupted Claudia. “Of course you have all of the appropriate stamps in your

passport to prove it, as well as canceled train and boat tickets and credit card

receipts.”

Miner was surprised by what they knew, but he didn’t let on. He forced himself to

smile. “Yes, I do. I’m curious, Fräulein Mueller, are you contemplating a job

change? Maybe employment as a travel agent?”

“That depends, Gerry. I think arms

dealer might be a better job for her. You keep

supplying her with the stolen goods; we'll sell them and cut you in. How does that

sound?" offered Scot.

"It was most unfortunate to hear that part of the same cache of missing armaments

turned up in the family barn of the case's lead investigator. It must not look very

good."

"If you want to talk about something that won't look very good, it's you and your

cousin," said Scot. "Somehow, I don't think prison uniforms will flatter either of

your figures. The fall of the cloth is all wrong these days, and prison tailors just

never can keep up with the latest trends from Milan."

Miner's smile became very strained. "Agent Harvath, one phone call and I can have

you immediately taken into custody. Your government is very anxious to have you

back. I'm not sure what for, but it must

be serious."

"Do you want to talk *serious*, Gerry? Serious is you using your cousin to pose as

you around Europe while you're actually in my country kidnapping our president.

How much did you make? A million? Five million? Ten maybe?"

"Kidnapping your president? Agent Harvath, don't be ridiculous. I was nowhere

near America when the kidnapping happened. As a matter of fact, I haven't been

there for several years."

"Not since cross-training at Little Creek?" asked Scot. A slight pulling back of

Miner's head told Scot that he had surprised him. He pressed on. "Oh, yeah. I know

a lot about you too, Gerry. I know, for example, that they won't put you and your

cousin in the same cell. No, two handsome guys like you — they'll want to make

sure you both have a chance to share

your love. You seem pretty tough, though. My

guess is that you'll get to be the husband, but you never know. They put a big

enough guy in there with you and you might have to be the wife."

"Agent Harvath, this is hardly the kind of talk that we as gentlemen should be

exposing Fräulein Mueller to."

"You see, that's where you and I are going to have to agree to disagree, Gerry. My

career and my life are basically through.

It’s funny how being a gentleman doesn’t

seem so important when that happens. I have nothing to lose, and that makes me

very, very dangerous. Not to mention, unstable. I’ve got you and your friends in the

States to thank for that. Now let’s talk some more about you.”

“Agent Harvath, there is no question in my mind that you are a disturbed individual. I

think the best thing for us to do—”

“Chutee!” hissed Scot. The command

stopped Miner in midsentence. “That’s

right, you slimy son of a bitch. You know, you are one dumb motherfucker. Who

do you think you’ve been playing with? Did you actually think we weren’t going to

nail you and the rest of your little pussycats? Whoops, I’m sorry, it’s *Lions,* isn’t it?

“Your men are a disgrace. What kind of a sorry-ass unit are you running? If they’re

not leaving clues at the farmhouse you

used as a staging ground for the kidnapping,

they’re running their mouths off at the Jungfraujoch in Serbian while their bullets

were hitting everything but the intended targets. You might want to work with them

on that. And while you’re at it, I’d seriously think about how long Senator Snyder

will hold out before he rolls over on you. You think you have him over the barrel as

an accessory, but if he asks to cut a deal before you do, you're out of luck, my fine

Swiss brother. How's all that sit with you? Or do you want to hear about the

photographs and evidence we have relating to your little assignments in Kosovo and

thereabouts, as well as how my country is going to have every PLO whacko on your

ass for the murder of Hassan Useff? You really know how to bury yourself, don't

you?"

Miner was absolutely silent. For once in his life, he had nothing to say. Every single

element had been planned… each and every piece of the equation calculated,

weighed, and anticipated. Everything had been thought out, except this free-floating

rogue Secret Service agent that had somehow managed to connect with Claudia

Mueller. *How in a million, trillion years did these two ever find each other?* he

wondered.

“What’s wrong, Gerry? Cat, I mean, Lion got your tongue?”

Miner composed himself. “You know, Agent Harvath, Fräulein Mueller has been a

little too quiet and you have been a little too vocal. Do you know what this tells me?”

“No, what does it tell you? I’m dying to know.”

“It tells me you have nothing. You have no concrete evidence at all. You dragged my

poor cousin into this to try to intimidate me. I came here to meet with you and you

have nothing but spurious accusations grounded in fantasy. If you really had

something, you would have used it. Why bother coming to me?

“I also think Fräulein Mueller is in very serious trouble and will undoubtedly be

facing an inquiry and most likely a trial. Somehow in all of this, she got connected

with you, which is not going to help her career. I think you are a deeply disturbed

individual and she would do well to get as far away from you as possible."

Miner reached across the white-linen-covered table and retrieved the silver box.

Turning it off, he retracted the antenna and put it back in his blazer pocket. Looking

at Claudia, he said, "Fräulein Mueller, I am very sorry for your circumstances. I am

also sorry that this man was able to cloud what I had thought was sound

investigative judgment on your part. A

word of advice. Enjoy your lunch together. It

will be my treat, but walk out of this restaurant and never see this man again. You are

in enough trouble already. Good-bye." Miner placed his napkin on the table, slid his

chair back, and stood up.

"You know, Gerry, there's one thing that bothers me… humor me for a moment.

How is it that you can kidnap, smuggle out of the country, and then hide one of the

most recognizable men in the world?"

"Well, Agent Harvath, I once again maintain my innocence and can only say that in

my life I have learned that under God all things are possible. It is my sincere hope

that we do not meet again."

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"It appears as if we are no further along than we were when we started," said

Claudia.

"C'mon, Claudia. You don't believe

that. Of course we are. We aren't exactly

where we want to be, but we certainly have made progress. We talked to the cousin,

and we know he's involved. We can be sure Miner used him as cover so he could

be out of the country with a perfect alibi. Why else would he have to come to meet

us for lunch if he didn't want to find out exactly what we know?"

"Well, now he knows. I think it did him more good than us."

“Maybe, maybe not.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Say what?”

“‘Maybe, maybe not.’ Why don’t you just say what you are thinking?” Claudia

sounded irritated.

“What’s bothering you?”

“The way you talked to him.”

“He was taunting us.”

“What were you thinking? You sounded crazy. And the language you used was

awful. Is that standard law enforcement practice in America?”

“It can be. I didn’t mean to offend you. Miner is used to being in control and having

people follow his orders. We needed to send him a message.”

“If the message was that you are unstable, I think he got it.”

“Actually, that was the message. I wanted him to know what he’s up against. He

needs to understand that I’m convinced he’s responsible and that I’ll stop at

nothing

to nail him. He knows we're on to him and it's just a matter of time before we have

enough to get him."

"So we sent him a message. Are you happy?"

"No, not completely."

"Why not?"

"It was the last thing Miner said. It didn't make sense to me. I don't know. Maybe it

was just the translation."

"What thing?"

"When he said *'under God* all things are possible.' In English, we say with God, not

under him, except in our Pledge of Allegiance. In Spanish I know they say *vaya con*

Dios, 'go with God.' It's normally *with* not *under.* Is it different in Swiss German?"

"No, we say 'with' as well. Maybe he made a mistake."

“Miner’s act is a little too polished for me. But anything’s possible.” Scot started to

laugh.

“What’s so funny?” asked Claudia.

“Look who’s grasping at straws now.”

Claudia smiled, more out of a feeling of defeat than anything else.

At that moment, the waiter reappeared at the table and presented Scot with a bottle

of Saint Emilion Grand Cru. Scot waved him off, saying, “We’ve changed our

minds. We won't be having lunch."

"But," said the waiter in halting English, "you are Herr Miner's guests. He has invited

you. It is all paid for."

"Then I'll tell you what. Are you married?"

"No, sir."

"Girlfriend?"

"Yes."

"That's a nice bottle of wine. Take it home tonight and share it with her; she'll

love

it."

"And the meals?"

"You and the staff can have them. We'll be leaving shortly."

The waiter removed the bottle and retreated to the kitchen.

"You know, I'm beginning to associate wine with unpleasant moments in my life,"

said Claudia.

"Why?"

“Well, at the end of the first lunch I had with Miner, he ordered dessert for me, a

sweet wine that he made a very big deal about. It was foreign, but not from France.

He said an American friend of his had introduced him to it. It was supposedly very

famous and very hard to get. This hotel keeps a private reserve for him. He was

unbelievably pompous about it and practically insisted that I drink it. The whole

experience made me extremely angry.”

“Wait a second. Back up.”

“Back up?”

“A dessert wine! Now I remember. Last night there was something about what

André Martin had told me, something connected with Switzerland that I couldn’t

remember. It was a small piece of information that I had let go of as inconsequential,

but it might not be. You said an American friend turned Miner on to the wine?”

“That’s what he said.”

Scot racked his brain for everything André told him about the wine. *It was a gift*

from Snyder, who had lied to him about being in France when he really was in

Switzerland. The wine couldn’t have come from France because… because why?

Because the sugar content and therefore the alcohol level were too high for EU

standards. It wasn’t made in the EU. It was made in —

“Claudia, was the dessert wine from South Africa?”

“Yes. How did you know?”

“When Senator Snyder returned from his trip to Switzerland, he brought André

Martin a bottle of wine. Snyder said he had been in France, but André found out that

this type of wine wasn’t available in the EU. Snyder was obviously lying to cover his

tracks. We’ve got to be talking about the same wine. Let’s get the waiter to bring us

a bottle so we can check it out. After all, we are Herr Miner's guests."

"I have a better idea. Follow me."

A front desk clerk pointed Claudia and Scot toward the office of the Hotel des

Balances' food and beverage manager, Johanus Schepp. After a short walk down

the cream-colored marble hallway, they arrived at a door marked "Schepp." Claudia

knocked, and a small voice from inside told them to enter.

Schepp was about the same size as his voice, balding with bifocals, and looked

around sixty years old.

“How may I help you?” said Schepp, looking up from a pile of papers on his neatly

arranged desk.

Claudia replied in English, signaling to Schepp that the conversation would not be

continued in German. “Herr Schepp, I am Claudia Mueller of the Federal Attorney’s

Office, and this is my colleague Peter Boa of the South African Bureau of

International Fraud." Claudia flashed her credentials, and Harvath stood still with his

hands at his side, but tilted ever so slightly so Schepp could see the butt of his

Beretta protruding from inside his jacket.

"We have reason to believe," continued Claudia, "that your hotel has been

trafficking in illegal goods smuggled from South Africa."

“Illegal goods? This is a most serious accusation. I must call the manager about this.”

Scot stopped the man as he reached for the phone. His South African accent was pitifully off, but he figured it would be enough to fool Schepp. “I don’t need to speak with your manager. If I did, I would have gone to see him first. Instead, I came to see you. Just because I come from South Africa doesn’t make me stupid.

Okay?”

“Yes, sir. Of course. I didn’t mean to suggest—”

“Enough yammering. If you cooperate, there’s a chance you can get yourself out of

this, and neither the hotel nor your manager need suffer any embarrassment.”

“But, why would I hide something from them?”

“Mr. Schepp, if you only knew how many times your name has come up in our

investigation.”

“My name? But, I have not done anything illegal.”

“That’s what you think,” said Scot as he pulled a piece of paper from his inside

pocket, completely revealing the gun this time, and pretending to read from it, “Have

you ever heard of Tommy the Torch also known as Top Shelf Tommy?”

“No, I have not.”

“How about, Patrick the Ace?”

“Once again, no.”

“Jeff the Matchmaker?”

“Herr Boa, these names sound more like they come from an American gangster

movie,” said Schepp, whose upper lip was beading with sweat.

“They might sound funny to you, but my government takes them very seriously.”

They actually sounded funny to Harvath too. Sometimes his ad-libs were

spectacular, and sometimes his warped sense of humor got the better of him.

Harvath had always been the type of person who would laugh in church and,

knowing he was not supposed to, couldn't help laughing harder.

Claudia saw the need to draw the interrogation back into the realm of not only

respectability but believability and took back control. "Herr Schepp, each of these

men have mentioned you when questioned in South Africa. They work at a rather

exclusive winery that, among other

things, has been violating international customs

regulations with their shipments. Is any of this sounding familiar?"

"Well, we do have several South African wines in our cellar, but we purchase those

through a Swiss distributor."

"No, these men specifically stated that the wine was delivered here to the hotel in the

name of a certain individual." Turning to Harvath, she said, "Mr. Boa, do you have

the name on your notes there?”

“Yes, the name is Gerhard Miner. Ring any bells, Schepp?”

“Yes, I do know Herr Miner. He is a regular customer. We keep a case of dessert

wine for him, Vin de Constance. Has the hotel done something wrong?”

“That depends,” said Claudia. “Why does the winery name you as their contact in

Switzerland?”

“I would imagine because the wine was

shipped here for Herr Miner, but to my

attention. Had I known the transaction was illegal, I would have politely refused Herr

Miner's request."

"Ignorance of the law, Mr. Schepp, is no excuse. This could reflect quite poorly on

the hotel and your career," said Harvath.

"Herr Schepp," said Claudia, easing comfortably into the good cop role, "I think

your participation in this affair can be

minimized, if not forgotten, if you would be

willing to offer us a few moments of cooperation.”

The man was definitely eager, and his head nodded up and down so quickly that

Claudia was afraid it would snap right off his neck.

“Now, you state that you only received the wine. You didn’t order it?”

“Yes, that is correct. From what Herr Miner explained, a friend of his arranged it as

a gift. It is extremely difficult to get. The estate only sells this wine in a limited

quantity."

"Herr Schepp, we would need something to corroborate your story. A receipt, a bill

of lading. Do you have any paperwork that came with the wine?"

"I have a file for Herr Miner," said Schepp as he moved from behind his desk to a

row of file cabinets. "Sometimes the wineries will include special handling or storage

directions with the shipments. I always keep all of this information together."

Claudia looked over at Scot, who rolled his eyes.

It took Schepp no time at all to find what he was looking for. "Here it is. This is the

shipping and order information that came with the delivery. I don't know if this

would be helpful for you, but some tasting notes and a small promotional piece

about the wine was included as well."

Schepp showed Claudia and Scot the paperwork.

“Herr Schepp,” said Claudia, “this may prove to be very helpful. We will need to

take this with us, but you are free to make a copy of it if you like, to retain for your

records.”

“That is very kind of you. I would hate for my records to be inaccurate. I don’t

need the promotional piece, but the other things I should copy. The machine is at the

front desk. Do you mind waiting a moment while I make the copies? I'll do it very

quickly."

"Very well, Herr Schepp. We appreciate your cooperation."

In a flash, the man was out the door, and Scot was half scanning, half reading the

promotional piece out loud. "'In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Vin de

Constance was the most celebrated wine to come out of the southern hemisphere….

Napoleon Bonaparte had thirty bottles a month shipped to the island of Elba to ease

his confinement….' It seems the king of Prussia used to knock back a few glasses

every night after dinner, as did Louis XVI, Frederick the Great, Bismarck, and a

busload of Russian czars."

"Now I know why Miner's lecture to me about the wine seemed so knowledgeable;

he memorized the tasting notes," said Claudia.

“Wait a second,” said Scot.

“What?” she asked, drawing closer to try and read over his shoulder. “What is it?”

“In *Sense and Sensibility,* Jane Austin apparently recommended Vin de Constance

as a cure for a broken heart.”

“So?”

“Guess who else wrote about it? Charles Dickens in *Edwin Drood.”*

“Dear Aunt Jane; Yours, Edwin,” said Claudia. “The code between Miner and

Senator Snyder."

"Bingo!"

When Schepp reappeared, Claudia accepted the originals of the documents and told

him that if he didn't hear from either her or Herr Boa again, it would mean they had

decided to let him off the hook. They thanked him and quickly left the hotel.

68

"When they come out, kill them both! And this time, no mistakes," commanded

Miner over the radio once he was in his car and had driven away from the hotel.

Klaus Dryer and Anton Schebel were both waiting outside the Hotel des Balances

for Scot and Claudia to appear. Klaus carried a nine-millimeter Walther P4 pistol

with a sound suppresser, and Schebel carried his favorite H&K MP5 SD1

submachine gun, which was also silenced. Both weapons were compact and easily

hidden beneath a jacket. Schebel and

Dryer made a decidedly deadly duo.

Miner had indicated to his men that the wait might be at least an hour, as he had

purchased a last meal for the condemned couple. The shooters were taken by

surprise when Claudia and Scot exited the hotel less than twenty minutes later. They

turned right and walked along a narrow, relatively deserted passageway that hugged

the hotel’s service entrance. Scot had thought it best to leave Claudia’s car in the

parking lot by the Matthäuskirche and walk the five minutes to their rendezvous with

Miner.

The passageway turned to the right, and as they began to follow it, a hail of sharp

plaster rained down on top of them while a small utility window in the building in

front of them shattered in an explosion of glass.

“Move!” yelled Scot, grabbing Claudia’s arm.

The shots came from behind, and instinctively, Scot steered them in the opposite

direction. When he came to the Rathausquai, the pedestrianized area bordering the

Reuss River, Harvath pulled up and looked around the corner before pulling Claudia

out with him. They ran as far as the Hotel Schiff and then ducked into its old stone

colonnade.

“Who’s after us?” Claudia demanded

while she panted for air.

“I’ll give you two guesses. Either it’s the American hit team or Miner’s men. My

money’s on Miner’s guys, but they’re both equally capable. I don’t want to wait to

find out. Let’s keep moving, shall we?”

They walked quickly forward, and Scot glanced behind him to see if he could spot

the shooter or shooters.

“Claudia, look behind us. See the two women with the baby carriages? To their

left

is a tall guy in a long, dark coat. That's our man."

Another quick tug on her arm and Claudia turned back around and moved faster.

They were out of the colonnade and getting ready to cross the bridge when a series

of spits came from uphill to their left. Scot whirled and pulled his Beretta. A man

dressed in a blue ski parka was making his way toward them from the direction

of

the Kornmarkt. He melded into a group of people and prevented Scot from getting a

clean shot.

“There’s a second one! Run!” he said to Claudia, and the two of them took off

down the quay.

They ran past the *Rathaus,* the Zum Weissen Kreuz, the Pickwick, the Hotel des

Alpes, and at St.-Peters-Kirche, steered a hard right and ran up the creaky stairs

of

the covered wooden bridge known as the Kapellbrücke. Scot looked over his right

shoulder as they ran across the bridge and saw Blue Coat coming down the quay.

The man in the long coat was nowhere to be seen, but Scot knew he couldn’t be too

far behind.

The man in the blue coat looked around and quickly drew the pistol from his parka.

The suppresser looked as if it was a foot long.

Reflexively, Scot pushed his hand down hard on Claudia's head while yelling, "Gun!

Get down! Get down!"

Claudia dropped to her stomach on the damp wood. Because the side of the bridge

was about three feet high, they were now completely hidden from view, but they

were far from safe. Scot yelled, "Keep your head down and move!" just as splinters

of wood began flying, only inches behind them. The man in the blue coat had seen

where they'd ducked and was firing blindly into the sides of the bridge, hoping to

get lucky. Had the man been using a machine gun, he could have cut a much wider

swath. Harvath had caught one break; he didn't expect to catch another.

It was only a matter of moments before the man in the blue coat would be on the

bridge, closing in on them from behind.

Scot urged Claudia on, and the two ran as

fast as they could, crouched beneath the shield of the bridge's outer wooden wall.

Halfway across the river, the bridge edged to the left. They had put enough distance

between them and the man behind. What they needed now was speed to increase the

gap. Scot stood up, and Claudia did the same. They were both breathing heavily, yet

they pressed on, their feet thumping along the wooden planks as they raced for the

other bank.

When they drew alongside a small series of gift shops and the bridge's tower,

Scot's heart seized. Coming around a bend from the other direction, the direction of

their hoped escape, was Long Coat. Harvath saw him pull out a piece of weaponry

he knew very well, an H&K MP5.

“Shooter at eleven o’clock! Down! Down!” yelled Scot. Both he and Claudia

literally hit the deck. Startled shopkeepers had no idea what was happening until they

saw the pair draw their weapons. Scot’s was first out, and he let loose with a

booming volley of three rounds.

Long Coat disappeared somewhere where Scot couldn’t see him.

“Check our six!” he now yelled to Claudia.

“Six?”

“Behind us! Six o’clock. Check for the man with the pistol!”

Claudia spun just in time to see the man in the blue coat coming around the turn in

the bridge. She fired four shots from her nine-millimeter SIG-Sauer P220, which sent

the man running back in the direction he had come.

“Are you okay?” Scot asked.

“Yes. He took off, but I don’t know for

how long."

"I don't know either. I think they thought they'd surprise us. I doubt they were

expecting such a fight. They're probably in radio contact, so it won't take them long

to regroup and come back."

"If they're going to, they'll have to do it soon. The police will be here any minute."

"Yell to the shopkeepers in German and ask if we can get out through the tower."

Claudia did, and then responded to Scot.

“No, the only way out is by either end of the bridge.”

“Can you see the man in the blue coat from where you are?”

“No, I can’t. Do you see the other man?”

“I don’t see him, but they’re close.”

The roof of the Kapellbrücke was a series of posts and rafters covered with wooden

shingles. He wasn’t going to win any awards from the Lucerne Historical Society,

but he didn't care.

What I wouldn't give for a nice sawed-off shotgun right about now, thought

Harvath. Rolling onto his back, Scot raised his pistol and aimed at the roof, trying to

avoid the overhanging paintings the bridge was famous for. He squeezed off five

rounds. Half of his magazine was now empty.

The bullets ripped through the brittle wood shingles, filling the moist air with dust

and exposing small bits of sky. The pigeons and white seagulls that had remained on

the roof were now flapping their wings as hard as they could to get away.

Scot and Claudia had the slight advantage of being in a crook in the bridge where

neither of the shooters could see them very well.

“When I count to three, I want you to hop up on the sidewall there and hoist

yourself into the rafters toward where I shot those holes in the roof. It shouldn’t

be

too hard to peel those shingles away. Start making a bigger opening the minute you

get up there. I'll cover you."

Claudia squinted up. "Okay, I understand," she said.

"Do you have an extra clip of ammunition?"

"No, I don't. Had I known I would be doing so much shooting when I left my house

on Saturday, I would have stolen a crate

of bullets to go with those missiles in my

parents' barn."

"Very funny. We need to conserve our ammunition. If you see the man in the blue

coat, I only want you to take two shots at him, no more. Do you understand?"

"Two shots. I've got it. Ready when you are."

Scot rolled back onto his stomach, facing where he had last seen Long Coat coming

up the stairs. There was still no sign of

him. He took a deep breath and then began,

“One… two… three!” He swept his pistol from side to side expecting Long Coat to

show his face, but there was nothing. He glanced quickly over his shoulder and saw

that Claudia was already hoisting herself up onto the lower rafter.

He knew she could no longer be his eyes for the man in the blue parka, so he rolled

sideways against the wall and looked

behind him. While the bend in the bridge was

an advantage, it was also a disadvantage. Without standing up, he couldn't tell how

close or how far away either of the shooters might be. Above, Claudia was

beginning to tear at the latticework, pulling away loose shingles and opening a wider

hole.

With his back against the wall, Scot ejected the magazine from his Beretta partway

and verified how many shots he had left. Slowly, he slid himself over to the place

where Claudia had been. He pulled the slide back just a fraction to make sure there

was a round chambered and got ready to make his move. Glancing overhead, Scot

saw that Claudia had opened the hole wide enough and was now beginning to wiggle

through. It was his turn.

Using the wall to support his weight, he pushed himself upward. His head was

almost at the level where it could be seen. In the distance, he heard the braying of

European police sirens. Time was running out, and the shooters would be

emboldened to make one final push. Scot was sure of it, because that's exactly what

he would do. He took a couple of deep breaths and raised the Beretta.

He fired in quick succession; two shots toward where he'd last seen Long Coat and

in the direction of the man in the blue

parka. Tucking the pistol into his waistband,

Harvath vaulted onto the edge of the wall and prepared to grab hold of the rafter

when muffled spits started coming at him from both directions. Long Coat and Blue

Coat were returning fire.

From their positions, they hadn’t been able to see him when he was on the bridge

floor, but now that he was standing on the wall, he was completely exposed. A

bullet

missed his forehead by a whisper and crashed into the rafter he was reaching for.

Without thinking, Scot jerked his hand away and, before he could steady himself,

lost his balance and began to fall backward.

If he landed on one of the pilings below, he knew the result would be fatal, so he

used his powerful leg muscles to give himself one big push outward. Sailing over the

water, he saw the look of horror on Claudia's face as she stood on the sloped roof

of the Kapellbrücke. Pulling his knees into his chest like a child cannonballing into a

swimming pool, Harvath braced himself for impact.

69

The shock of the frigid water stunned him into immobility as the swift current

grabbed him and rapidly pulled him beneath the bridge.

After the first few seconds, his body's natural instinct was to struggle to the surface,

but Harvath fought it. He needed to stay as deep as possible. The men on the bridge

would be waiting for him to appear on the other side, their side, where they would

begin firing.

As he looked up, Scot could see on the surface of the water the shadow where the

bridge ended and open sky began. Just as

he suspected, as soon as he was out from

beneath the bridge, the men started shooting.

He heard the *ploonk, ploonk, ploonk* of bullets hitting the water all around him. He

saw the rippled air-bubble tunnels as the shots drilled their way toward him from

above. He swept water past him with his arms in a desperate attempt to get closer to

the bottom. Suddenly, the bullets stopped, but there was no time to try and figure

out why. The current was sweeping him along even faster now.

Glancing skyward again, Harvath saw the shadow of another bridge as he passed

beneath it. Knowing it was important to preserve as much of his core body heat as

possible, he slowly pulled himself upward. His lungs took in huge burning gasps of

air as he broke the surface. He saw that he had passed the second bridge and was a

sitting duck in the middle of the river. Taking another large gulp of air, he submerged

himself. Kicking his feet and pulling himself forward with a breaststroke, Scot

steered himself underwater toward the north bank.

When he came back up for air, he noticed that he had passed the Hotel des

Balances. The river was too fast. He needed to grab hold of something… anything.

The cold was numbing, his fingers

refused to move, and it was all he could do to

ball his hands into fists. His head pounded both from the shock of the cold and the

exertion.

Another bridge was coming up fast. It was anchored in concrete islands, and there

were what looked like iron rings attached in places close to the water level. If he

could get ahold of one of those rings, he could at least rest for a moment and

figure

out what to do. He set his sights on a ring and allowed the current to carry him

toward it. It was only a few yards away. He stretched his right arm out of the

freezing cold water, willing his fingers to obey and grab hold when his hand made

contact. He knew his fingers wouldn’t know when they were touching the iron, he

would need to watch and tell them when to close around it. He was closer now, only

a yard away, maybe less.

Ploonk, ploonk, ploonk. The shots were wildly inaccurate, but they came in rapid

bursts, tearing up the water in all directions around him. The shooters were back.

Their inaccuracy told Scot they must be firing from the other side of the river. He

heard the roar of two shots being fired from a nonsilenced weapon somewhere

behind him, and he prayed it was Claudia. Bullets kept splashing around him, and he

knew he had no choice but to forget the ring and submerge himself once again. His

strength was ebbing at an alarming rate, and he felt that despite his awesome training

in deep cold, there was only so much more he could take. Scot sucked in another

huge breath and once again swam for the bottom.

He knew that in cold water, the key to survival was to move as little as possible, as

swimming took desperately needed heat away from the center of the body and

radiated it out to the limbs. The body cooled four times faster in water than in air of

the same temperature. The effects of extreme cold could take over very quickly.

The river continued to sweep Scot along at an awesome rate of speed. He counted

to five and, not seeing any rips of bullets carving into the water around him, decided

to surface. He needed to find someplace

to get out. He swam slowly upward, ready

to dive again if anyone began shooting. Strangely, the water seemed to have an even

stronger pull on him now. His arms felt like limp noodles, and he was worried that

the cold was beginning to adversely affect his mind. *I have to get out,* he told

himself.

As Harvath once again broke the surface, he quickly scanned the opposite bank.

There was no sign of the shooters, but at this moment, that was the least of his

problems. His mind had not been playing tricks on him. The river was pulling him

with much greater force. It was picking up speed as the water was sucked into a

small pumping-and-generator station next to Lucerne's other covered bridge, the

Spreuerbrücke.

The speed at which he was traveling doubled, and then in an instant tripled. Half of

the river's force was being funneled into a set of iron grates fifty yards ahead.

Harvath didn't care about the shooters anymore and focused all of his concentration

on the grates that were rushing up to meet him. The white froth and level of the water

told him that there was a drop-off right before the metalwork. If he didn't find a way

to break free from the river's hold, he would be pulled under and pinned against the

grates, where his lungs would fill with the icy water and he would drown.

Summoning every last ounce of strength he had, Harvath began to try to paddle

across the current, closer to the north bank and safety. His muscled arms pumped

like giant pistons, and he didn't give a single thought to the stitches or the pain

radiating from his left arm. Again and again, he pulled and stroked, trying to break

free of the frigid grasp that hurtled him toward certain death. For a moment, he

thought he was making progress, then came to the crushing realization that the

current had only adjusted itself to the right as it entered a directional chute of

concrete. The chute narrowed, and the water picked up even more speed.

Harvath pulled with all of his might and kicked his legs frantically. Suddenly, a new

pain shot through his body. Something had come racing down the river and

slammed into his hip. Before Scot could take stock of what had happened, he felt

the pressure of the river growing on him. It was bending him almost as if he were a

twig. *Bending instead of pushing? The only way you can bend something is if*

there's resistance! As the river swirled and pushed against him, sending sheets of

water shooting up and over his head, he realized what had happened. He'd come to

a stop.

Twenty yards before the pumping station was another grate submerged just below

the water line. Its function was to keep large objects such as trees, oars, and other

waterborne debris from being sucked in. Thankfully for Harvath, it had worked. The

pain he'd felt had not been something hitting him, but rather his hip and the rest of

him crashing into the grate. For the moment, he was safe, but the water was crushing

his chest. The cold already made it so hard to breathe that the added pressure from

the water was now making it impossible. He wouldn't die from drowning, but

suffocation was an all-too-new and all-too-likely possibility.

Ten feet away was a concrete embankment that jutted out from the pumping station

like a finger into the river. Scot tried to shuffle toward it, but in his weakened state,

he was pinned too tightly to move. He fought to breathe in slow steady breaths. He

couldn't see a way out. *But there must*

be. He closed his eyes and tried to think. A

splash nearby startled him, and he opened his eyes just in time to see a huge,

neon-yellow object racing toward his head. Instinctively, he threw up his hands to

protect his face.

“Don’t let it go by! Grab it! Scot, do you hear me? Grab onto it, and I will pull you

in. Hurry, they’re coming. We don’t have much time!”

It was Claudia's voice. The object was a life ring with a line attached. Claudia was

standing on the embankment holding the other end. He wrapped an arm around it.

"Good. Listen to me. I need you to put your right arm and shoulder through and

then your head. The water is moving very fast, and I don't want to lose you. Do you

understand?"

Scot fought to regain control of his body. His arm didn't seem to want to cooperate.

Finally it did, followed by his shoulder and then his head. Half his body was now

safely in the life ring, and he found he could move against the current with Claudia

pulling from the embankment. She guided him to a short ladder he hadn't seen

before and kept the rope taut as he climbed up.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

Was he okay? Sure, a swim was just what today needed to make it perfect.

Scot

could only shake his head. He was too cold to speak. He had lost all of his color,

unless you counted the blue in his lips, and his teeth were chattering.

“Here, put this on,” said Claudia as she removed the life ring and draped her coat

over his shoulders. “I hate to do this to you, but can you move? We have to get

going.”

Scot nodded, and they made their way up

the embankment.

As they reached the top, the ground in front of them erupted in a volley of muffled

pops. The shooters were charging down the *Spreuerbrücke* right at them.

Claudia shoved Harvath down and reached for her SIG. She faked left and then

jumped and rolled hard to her right, trying to draw their fire away from Scot. The

trick worked, and the shooters turned their attention in her direction.

The bullets tore up the ground around her, and Claudia continued to roll, aiming as

best she could at the figures closing in on her. She had long ago lost count of how

many shots she had fired and had no idea how many she had left. Only two thoughts

raced through her mind: stop these two men and protect Scot. Over and over she

pulled the trigger and finally she saw one of the men drop his weapon and fall

forward. It was the man in the long coat.

Claudia had managed to hit him square in

the chest. He dropped his H&K and fell forward, his momentum causing him to

slide across the frozen ground like a runner stealing third. *Only one left*.

Claudia turned her sights on the man in the blue parka and pulled the trigger. She

heard a sickening click. *Nothing*. She was out of ammunition. Not only that, but she

had rolled as far to her right as she could. Claudia was trapped against the wall of the

embankment. The man knew it and closed the gap fast.

As he moved in for the kill, there was a smile on his face. Claudia wondered if it

would hurt to die or if it would be instantaneous, like turning out a light. She saw a

muzzle flash and closed her eyes waiting for the projectile to shatter her skull and

tear through her brain, but it didn't happen. Slowly, she opened her eyes.

Three feet away, the man in the blue coat was on his knees with both hands clutching

his throat, trying to stem the gurgling tide of blood. Ten feet farther, she saw Scot

drop the heavy Beretta from his hands and fall back onto the ground.

Claudia ran over to the man in the blue parka and kicked his pistol away. She then

ran to Harvath. “I thought for sure he was going to kill me,” she said.

“Not on my watch. I hear sirens, the police are getting closer. We’ve got to move.”

“You’re right. I have to get you out of here and into some dry clothes.”

“Wait,” said Scot. “Search both of the bodies. Don’t bother looking at anything,

just shove everything you find into your pockets. Hurry up; it’s a bit nippy out

here.” Scot managed a grin for a fraction of a second before his teeth began

chattering violently again.

Claudia went right to work. Neither of the men had a wallet or very much else on

them. She put everything she found in her pockets and then rushed back to Scot.

Her car was on the other side of the old

town. *How would she get him back to it?*

Any minute now the police would be swarming all over. Then she saw it. About two

blocks up the St. Karli-Quai from where they were was a sign for the Tourist Hotel.

Claudia got Scot on his feet and urged him forward. She hoped the exercise

wouldn’t do him any further harm.

When they reached the hotel, a group of people were standing in front. They had

heard the gunshots and come outside to investigate. They had no idea from which

direction they were fired. There was a line of three taxicabs, and Claudia rushed with

Scot up to the driver of the first one.

“Please, sir,” she said in German, “I need to get my brother to a hospital. We heard

something that sounded like gunshots, and he lost his balance and fell into the river. I

think he has hypothermia.”

Before the cabdriver could answer, the manager of the hotel, who was standing in

the doorway, said to the cabdriver, “Heinrick, wait!” and he disappeared inside.

Claudia had no idea what was going on. All eyes, including the cabdriver’s, were

turned to where the manager had stood just a moment before. As quickly as he

vanished, he reappeared with a thick wool blanket, which he wrapped around Scot.

“Now you go!”

Claudia thanked him and climbed into the back of the cab with Scot as the driver

peeled away from the curb. She spoke softly with Scot for a few moments and then

addressed the driver. “My brother says it’s not as bad as I thought. He says I’m

overreacting. My car is parked at the Matthäuskirche parking. Please turn right here

and take Diebold-Schilling Strasse along the Musegg Wall to Brambergstrasse.”

“But he is soaked through. Are you sure?” asked the driver.

“He was only in the water for a few moments before I helped him out. I think the

most important thing is to get him home to a warm bath and some *nudelsuppe*. Our

mother is a nurse. I’ll call her and have her come over straightaway to look at him.”

“I can take you to the hospital. It’s no problem.”

Harvath managed a feeble, but

believable, *"Nein, danke,"* from the backseat.

"As you wish," replied the driver, who turned right at the Geissmattbrücke bridge

and headed along the Musegg Wall toward the Old Town section of Lucerne, where

Claudia and Scot had parked her car.

"Please turn up the heat," Claudia asked the driver.

Scot smiled to himself as two police cars sped past. *Could it possibly get any*

hotter?

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Claudia got them out of town and onto the auto route for Bern as fast as she could.

The heater was turned up as high as it would go. Scot stripped out of his wet clothes

and remained huddled in the wool blanket until Claudia found a roadside café, where

she bought containers of piping hot soup and coffee. Scot drank down everything

she gave him and, when he was finally feeling up to it, reached into the backseat and

pulled some clothes from his suitcase. Although Claudia should have been watching

the road, every once in a while she sneaked a guilty peek at him getting dressed.

The color began to return to Scot's face, and his shivering lessened.

"How are you feeling?" Claudia asked.

Even though he was fully dressed in new clothes with heavy wool socks, Harvath

wrapped the blanket back tightly around his body. “Very pissed off.”

“Good. The way you were shivering, I thought we had made the wrong decision.”

“No, we made the right one. If we’d gone to the hospital, there could have been

police, questions, and who knows what. Miner probably would have found us, and

that would have been the end of the story.”

“I guess so, but if we had been wrong

about the severity of your condition, that could have been the end of the story as well."

"I know my limits. You don't ever need to worry about me."

"Thanks, Scot. I'll remind myself of that next time I see you looking like a flipped turtle."

There was a touch of hurt in her voice.

"Thank you," said Scot.

"For what?"

“For saving my life.”

“You mean when I drew the fire of Miner’s men and pulled you from the river?

That? That was nothing. Sorry I didn’t have a towel ready when you got out.”

Scot thought about what a gift she had for pissing him off while at the same time

making him want to laugh out loud. They made quite a pair.

“How do you know the men were Miner’s?” asked Scot as he brought his mind

back.

“They weren’t wearing any American brand-name clothes, and the man you shot in

the throat was mumbling in German as he was dying. I just assumed Miner had sent

them.”

“Seems like it.”

“You were also right about something.”

“What was that?”

“They were in radio contact. They each

had an earpiece and a sleeve mike. The

radio was a German brand."

"Was there anything in their pockets?"

"No wallets, which doesn't surprise me. These men would not be carrying ID

around with them. That's not the way it's done."

"I agree. Anything else?"

"Cash, cigarettes, and each had one of these," said Claudia, who pulled out what

looked like two playing cards from her

pocket and handed them to Scot. He was

getting warm now, and with his free hand he turned down the VW's heater.

Harvath examined the cards. They had a magnetic strip on the back and a red dragon

on the front, under which were the words *Mt. Pilatus* and some other lines written in

German.

"What are these?" said Harvath.

"They are kind of like lift tickets for Mount Pilatus."

“What is it?”

“Pilatus is a mountain not too far from Lucerne. Normally, on clear days, you can

see it from the city. According to legend, the body of the Roman governor Pontius

Pilate is buried in the lake near the top, and supposedly this was the only place his

soul could rest. Every year on Good Friday, he is said to rise from the water to wash

the blood from his hands. The mountain is named after him.”

“That’s just charming. What about this dragon on here? What’s that all about?”

“That is the logo for Mount Pilatus. It comes from something different. Starting in

the fourteen hundreds, the people of Lucerne began to think they saw dragons

around the mountain, and the image stuck.”

“Tell me more about the mountain.”

“There are two hotels on the top. One is called the Bellevue, and it is completely

round like the Schilthorn in the Jungfrau

region. The other is a more traditional hotel

called the Hotel Pilatus Kulm."

"What's the attraction up there?" asked Scot.

"The views mostly. Although some people come for hiking, rock climbing, and

paragliding as well."

"So it's kind of like the Jungfraujoch?"

"I guess that would be a fair comparison, but the Jungfraujoch is actually carved into

the glacier and the mountain, while the hotels at Pilatus are basically built on top of

it."

"But, why would these two guys be carrying lift tickets for Pilatus?"

"Maybe they were hikers," said Claudia.

"C'mon, Claudia, think. They don't carry wallets with them, but they do carry these

lift tickets? Why would they need them?"

Claudia focused on the road in front of her while she toyed with Scot's question

in

her mind.

“Do you suppose,” Scot continued, “that they were going to kill us and then go off

for a nice little hike?”

“Don’t be stupid.”

“Then why have the tickets?”

“To get up to the top of Pilatus.”

“Right. And if they were carrying the tickets with them when they attacked us, that

probably means they were going to be using them afterward, right?"

"I guess you could be right."

"How many ways are there to get up Pilatus?"

"Well, you can hike it. That takes about five hours. Then there is a series of two

gondolas and a cable car from the town of Kriens, or you can take the cogwheel

railway from the town of Alpnachstad."

Scot opened Claudia's glove compartment and started rummaging around.

“What are you looking for?” she asked.

“Do you have a map of the area around Lucerne?”

“Yes, it’s in my Swiss atlas, underneath your seat.”

Scot fished out the atlas and found the pages he was looking for.

“Okay, I’ve got the towns,” said Scot. “So the cogwheel train is direct, no

transfers?”

“Right. Why? What are you thinking?”

“Would it be possible to hide someone

in one of the hotels up at the top of Pilatus?

Let's say maybe Miner knows the owner or is blackmailing him? Could he do it?"

"I suppose he could, but it's not very likely."

"Why not?"

"The staff of those hotels are much like others all over the country. They're very

chummy and they talk. They all know each other's business and everything that goes

on in the hotels. It is hardly likely Miner

could hide your president there."

"Good point. What about someplace else, maybe only halfway up the mountain?"

"From what I could see on the tickets, they are good for travel all the way to the top.

Why would they pay for full trips and not use them?"

"To throw anybody off if they ever came across the tickets?" Scot speculated.

"If they ever thought anyone would find the tickets, why not leave them at home in

their wallets? Or better yet in their car?”

“I was thinking about that. If for some reason the two men got separated or couldn’t

get back to their car, they would need to know they could still get up the mountain,

so they would have to keep their passes on them at all times.”

“Why not just carry enough cash to be able to buy a new ticket?”

“That means dealing with a cashier… maybe standing in a line. There’s too much

chance of being remembered or seen on a security camera. If Pilatus is where they're

staying, they'd need to get up and down as easily as possible. Hence the need for

keeping the passes on them at all times. Now, if they aren't using the hotel, where

else might they be?"

Claudia twisted her lip and frowned. "Aside from the gondola and cable car stations,

the mountain only has scattered cowsheds and yurts that are used for

hikers….

What are you thinking?”

“There is a small airfield on the map here at Alpnachstad. It would be a piece of

cake for Miner to get in and out from here with relatively little interference. Do you

know if it’s a private airfield?”

“From what I remember, it’s mainly for civilian aircraft, but there are one or two

military hangars…. That’s it!” cried Claudia, thumping her palms against the

VW's

steering wheel.

"What?" said Scot. "What's it?"

"I was wrong," said Claudia.

"About what?"

"About Pilatus."

"How so?"

"I was wrong when I said the attraction, the tourism infrastructure such as the hotels,

was built on top of the mountain, unlike

the Jungfraujoch."

"So, either it is or it isn't."

"Actually, it is and it isn't. All of the things the tourists see are pretty much sitting on

top of Pilatus. The final cable car ride up and the cogwheel railway each approach

the summit from different sides of the mountain. Normally the tourists go up one

side and come down the other. The marketing people at Pilatus call it the Golden

Round Trip. The cable car and the cogwheel railway arrive and depart beneath the

Hotel Bellevue, which is partly recessed within the mountain."

"So?"

"So, when I first started climbing in competitions, I did some around Pilatus. My

grandfather was a climber and he was my coach. He had done a lot of climbing on

Pilatus itself. Do you know what my grandfather did for a living before he

retired?”

“No, but I hope it has something to do with what we’re talking about.”

Claudia ignored Scot’s crack. “He was an engineer with the army.” She looked at

Scot as if where this was leading should be obvious. Scot looked right back at her

with a blank stare.

“Scot, have you ever seen a Swiss military base in all your visits to Switzerland?

Ever seen any piece of military

hardware except for a jet that might have flown

overhead?”

“No, I never have. I always heard that despite their continuing stance of neutrality,

the Swiss had a pretty good army. Nobody ever saw it, though, because…” His

voice trailed off.

Claudia finished the sentence for him. “Because everything is hidden away in the

mountains. When I was accepted into the Federal Attorney's Office, my grandfather

was very proud of me. I was his only grandchild. With my security clearance and

role with the Bundespolizei, he began opening up to me more, telling me about what

he did with the army. Do you know now what he did?"

"He was involved with the construction of the military mountain fortresses."

"Very good, Agent Harvath. Yes, he was

one of the engineers on the primary design

team. From what he told me, they were involved with constructing these incredible

fortresses throughout Switzerland. Oftentimes they used the development of ski

resorts or other tourist attractions as a cover for all of the military activity. If you

were building some sort of resort or something to boost tourism, who would

suspect the real reason for gondolas,

cable cars, or—”

“Cogwheel railways!” Scot broke in.

“Yes, again,” replied Claudia. “How can someone so smart not have the good sense

to stay out of the water until spring?”

“A good swim relaxes me and helps me to think. Much like a well-placed gun in the

back. So Pilatus is one of these Swiss military fortresses?”

“No.”

Scot's heart sank. The pieces had all seemed to finally be coming together.

Then Claudia spoke again. "It isn't one now. It used to be, but my grandfather said

it had been decommissioned."

Scot's hopes began to rise. "Decommissioned, meaning it was abandoned?"

"Sort of. It was sealed off and put on the inactive list."

"But it wasn't destroyed?"

"No, nothing like that. The Swiss are

pragmatists. You never know when we might

need something like that again. It was just sealed off and left alone."

"So theoretically, if Miner knew about this place, which in his position with the

military there is a good chance he did, all he would have to do is figure out a way to

unseal it?"

"It might not even be that difficult. According to my grandfather, there were several

ways to access these fortresses. They needed to circulate air, so there were

ventilation shafts. There were also escape passages. Cargo bays for delivering

materials and supplies…”

“I’m liking your grandfather more and more. Do you think there’s any chance he

might be able to help us? A person with that much knowledge could be very useful.”

“I think my grandfather would have liked nothing better. But, he passed away two

years ago."

"I'm sorry," said Scot, and he really was — sorry for Claudia, sorry for himself,

and most of all, sorry for the president.

Claudia seemed not to hear him. "He told me that every structure you saw on Pilatus

served a purpose."

"What do you mean?"

"For example, Pilatus already had the very large Hotel Pilatus Kulm, but they then

built the little Hotel Bellevue."

"What was the Bellevue's purpose?" asked Scot.

"That he couldn't share, even with me, but he said nothing happens by accident.

Every structure serves a purpose. There's the purpose the tourist appreciates and

then the purpose the military appreciates. Those engineers were some of the greatest

minds Switzerland has ever known."

"Claudia, from what you've told me, it

seems reasonable that Miner might be using

this inactive fortress as his base. The question is, though, which way did he get in?

You said there are many ways in, and all of the structures serve a purpose, right?"

"Right."

"So there are the two hotels, and the cable car and cogwheel railway come and go

from just beneath the Hotel Bellevue. Are there any other important structures on top

of Mount Pilatus?"

"Let me think. The hotels, a small weather station, a radar station, and a…"

Claudia's voice trailed off.

"And a what, Claudia? What is it? What else is up there?"

"A church," she said, looking at him with wide eyes.

Harvath repeated the words that Miner had said when they last saw him, which at

that point seemed to make no sense at

all, “Under God, all things are possible.”

Claudia pressed down hard on the accelerator, and the pair sped toward Bern.

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Harvath saw pictures and symbols of bears everywhere as they entered Bern.

Claudia explained that the bear was the emblem of the city and the canton. They

passed signs and coats of arms with bears, bakeries with bear-shaped cookies, and

even a bear pit with a couple of live frolicking bears.

Claudia was careful to make sure that they weren't being followed. She crossed

back and forth across the Aare River several times and chose small out-of-the-way

streets where it would be obvious if someone was behind them. This was Scot's

first time in Bern, and he marveled at the ancient sandstone-and-mahogany buildings,

the covered arcades of the Old Town, the brightly colored fountains, and the spire

of the Münster church, which Claudia told him was the highest in Switzerland.

Far below the Münster, at the foot of an enormous retaining wall, was Claudia's

neighborhood. It was called the Matte. Once a workers and artisans' quarter, it was

now very popular with the young Bernese in the city's various creative fields. While

Claudia couldn't exactly classify what she did for a living as creative, it did demand

certain amounts of creativity from time

to time, and besides, she really liked the

area's energy.

They agreed that since Scot needed to make a phone call and use a fax, she would

drop him at her friend Fabia's travel agency, which was only a couple of blocks

from her flat. Claudia's apartment was on the fifth floor of a typical European

walk-up. As much as Scot protested to the contrary, he needed to rest and five

flights of stairs would have been murder

on him after everything he had been through

today. The thing Scot didn't like was that there was no doubt the American hit team

had followed Claudia from Bern to the Jungfrau and they probably had her

apartment under surveillance right now. She was convinced, though, that she could

get in and out without being seen. After getting Scot set up in Fabia's private office,

Claudia told him she would be back as

soon as she ran a couple of errands and got

the rest of what they needed from her apartment.

One of Fabia's staff was sent to a small restaurant on the corner to get Scot

something to eat. She returned with typical Bernese favorites, fried veal and

sauerkraut. To top it off, there was a little bar of Toblerone chocolate.

Scot thanked the woman. Once she had closed the door, he took a couple bites of

his food and spread his paperwork in front of him. He picked up the phone and

dialed a number by heart.

“Lawlor,” came the clear, curt voice over the line. The connection made it sound as

if he were only across the street, rather than thousands of miles away.

“Gary, it’s Scot.”

“Harvath? Where the hell are you?”

“All in good time. What’s going on at your end? Any luck getting the president

back?”

“Why should I tell you?”

“I guess that answers my other question. I’m still persona non grata, correct?”

“You are much worse than that, my friend.”

“Gary, I think I may be able to help you out, but you have to share with me what

you have first.”

“Jesus, Harvath. I don’t know why I bother with you.”

“Because we’ve got a history together

and you know I wasn't involved with the

president's kidnapping and I had nothing to do with Natalie Sperando and her friend

being murdered."

"History or not, I'll tell you what I know, but after that, you tell me where you are."

"Deal."

"We're maxed out. The FBI, CIA, DOD… we've got every agent from every

possible law enforcement agency

working on this, and we still haven't come up with

anything. The kidnappers cut off the president's finger and sent it to Vice President

Marshfield with a ransom demand of fifty million dollars. We're convinced they will

kill the president if we don't give in to their demands."

"You're sure the finger was his?"

"DNA and print positive."

"That's barbaric."

“You’re telling me. It really shook Marshfield up.”

“How’s he handling this?”

“He’s hanging tough on the no-negotiation-with-terrorists policy. Other than that,

he’s falling apart. He looks like shit and hasn’t slept or eaten in days. He doesn’t

even consult with DaFina anymore. Every time someone comes to him for a decision

on what the next move should be, he kicks them out and presumably hops on the

horn to someone outside his office. There's a rumor he's in touch with a psychic."

"I hate to say this, but I could have told you this would happen. The man has no

balls."

"Indeed. Now you know what I know. It's your turn. Where are you?"

"Before we start, I want you to record this. I've got a lot to cover and I know there

are people you will want to play this back for, so get the tape rolling."

“I didn’t ask for your life story. I want to know where you are.”

“I’ll tell you, but I strongly advise that you do not trace this call.”

“Why not?”

“For one, I won’t be here after we hang up, and two, if you trace it, the information,

as secure as you think your agency is, might fall into the wrong hands. Just trust me.

It’ll all be clear after I’m finished.”

“All right, Scot. Go ahead. It’s your

dime."

"First of all. Give me your fax number. I'm going to be sending several things

through, and I want to know they are going to a secure line."

Lawlor gave Scot a number.

"And you're in your office right now, alone?"

"Yes. What is this all about?"

"I think I know who actually kidnapped the president and where he is being held."

“You what?” Lawlor couldn’t believe his ears. “Where the hell are you? What

evidence do you have?”

Scot filled Lawlor in on the entire story, starting with how he thought the kidnapping

happened, all the way to his swim down the Reuss a couple of hours ago.

“I’m faxing the contents of the envelope that was in André Martin’s locker at Union

Station. If you send a man to my apartment, you’ll find the piece of chocolate I

recovered from the Utah farmhouse buried in the planter box outside my bedroom

window. I'm also faxing the shipping invoice for Gerhard Miner's wine. I think when

we find out who paid for it, we'll have the connection between Miner and Senator

Snyder. Can you put one of your people in South Africa on it right away?"

"Of course. I just hope it shakes out in time."

"Then wish me luck."

“Luck? What the hell are you talking about?”

“My job was to protect the president, and I didn’t do that properly, so now my job

is to get him back.”

“Scot, if you’re right, you could only make things worse by storming that mountain

alone.”

“First, I won’t be alone. Second, I’m tired of being on the defensive and getting

shot at every twelve hours. And third, if the kidnappers intend to make good on their

threat, the president doesn't have a whole lot of time left."

"Scot, just take a second and think about the situation. If they kill him, they'll never

get the money. They're not going to strangle the golden goose."

"You don't know that for sure. Who knows what they'll do next. The longer we sit

around on our asses, the worse his odds

are.”

“You can’t just John Wayne your way through this. Give me time to look into what

you’ve told me.”

“So you think I’m right about all of this?”

“If what you’ve uncovered is true, you’ve made a hell of a lot more progress than all

of our agencies combined. But we’re talking *if*.”

“Well, *if* you add up all the bullets that

have been fired at me since Wednesday, I'd

say this whole thing is as far away from an *if* as you can get."

"I agree, but this is a hostage situation."

"And the clock is ticking. Listen, Gary, no matter what you say, the president was

snatched on my watch and a lot of men died. I was responsible for them, and I let

them all down. The only way I can make it right is to see to it that the president is

returned safely and that the people behind his kidnapping pay. I won't allow my men

to have died in vain. Keep playing defense if you want, but the smart money's on the

offense."

With that, Harvath hung up the phone.

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It took Claudia twenty minutes to run her errands and gather most of the equipment

she and Scot would need. As she crept through the back door of her apartment

building, his words still echoed in her mind. The fact that her apartment would be

watched was a given. There was probably a person or persons watching her office

as well.

As she crept quietly up the stairs, she wished she hadn't talked Scot out of coming

with her. It was a silly thought and she knew it, but she felt safe around him. When

she got to the top landing, she turned and

walked toward apartment 5B. As her left

hand trailed along the iron railing, her right gripped the butt of her SIG-Sauer. She

was grateful that Scot had given her his remaining three nine-millimeter rounds.

At the door, she examined the locks closely for any signs that they had been

tampered with. There were none. She pulled her keys from her pocket, selected the

correct one, and gently slid it into the lock. Quietly, she turned back the upper lock

and then repeated the process on the lower. The door slid noiselessly open on its

hinges. Claudia pushed it the rest of the way, to make sure no one was standing

behind it. Scot had warned her not to turn on the lights, because it might alert anyone

watching the front of the building that she had returned home. She took a moment to

let her eyes get accustomed to the darkness that was growing outside her windows

and filling the apartment.

Her weight distributed evenly between both legs and her feet in a wide stance,

Claudia reached out with her left hand for the brass doorknob of the hall closet. She

twisted, but it wouldn't budge. *Piece of junk,* she thought to herself. You always

needed to put your weight against the door and lift up on the knob to get it open.

Claudia didn't like having to get that close, but she had no choice. She took a deep

breath and in one quick movement leaned against the door, twisted the handle, and

popped it open.

She immediately jumped back, not quite sure of what she expected to come flying

out at her. Nothing did. She saw two of the items she was looking for and, without

setting down her pistol, removed them from the closet and placed them on the

entryway floor.

Her heart was beating as she prepared to

close the door, afraid someone would be

standing on the other side when she swung it shut. She knew she was being too

cautious, but somehow that didn't seem like a bad thing. Moving backward toward

the front door, she raised her pistol to chest level and nudged the closet door closed

with her foot. There was nothing behind it except her living room.

Claudia quickly swept the living room and the kitchen. Both were empty. It was

the

same in the bathroom and the linen closet. She gathered some extra medical supplies

so she could change Scot's dressing and, entering the bedroom, tossed them on the

bed. She walked along its edge, toward her closet, and let out a scream as a hand

reached out for her ankle.

Like an arrow being released from a bow, Claudia sprang away from the bed and the

hand beneath it. Her back slammed into

the wall, and she pointed her pistol at the

figure that any second would emerge from underneath the bed and come for her. She

waited, but whatever was under her bed refused to come out. She peered down the

barrel of her SIG, the iridescent night sights illuminating the direction the bullet

would take when she pulled the trigger.

Slowly, she focused beyond the gunsights to the underside of her bed.

There, where

she expected to see a sinister gloved hand, was the black nylon handle of one of the

many bags she stored beneath the bed. Claudia exhaled in exasperation and laughed

at herself for being so keyed up. She got down on her knees, placing her right hand

on the mattress and her left on the floor for balance. She and Scot had decided they

would each need a midsize backpack,

and Claudia had two that would work

perfectly. If only she could pull them out.

Claudia left the gun on the mattress and with both hands dug deeper into the tangled

mess of bags. As she dug, she brushed against something that didn't feel like it

belonged… *the hand!*

In the blink of an eye the powerful hands encased in black leather were wrapped in a

vise grip around Claudia's wrists, and she was yanked off balance. Without the

use

of her hands to break her fall, she hit her head on the wooden bed frame and was

instantly dizzy.

The stranger quickly kicked away the bags and slid out from beneath the bed. He

was dressed completely in black.

Claudia shook her head to escape the fog that had enveloped it. Before the man

could get on his feet, Claudia flipped onto her side and lashed out with a strong kick

toward his groin. It missed, and she scored only a glancing blow to his upper thigh.

"Fucking little bitch," the man growled.

English. Not one of Miner's. Scot was right. The American hit team is watching

my apartment. That means they don't know where Scot is. He's safe —

Before Claudia could finish her thought, the man was on his feet. He jerked her to a

standing position and twisted one arm hard behind her back.

“Where is he?” the man snarled.

“Who?”

Still keeping her arm held high behind her back, the man grabbed a handful of

Claudia’s long brown hair. Wrapping it around his hand, he whipped her head back

and then slammed her face forward into the mirror of her armoire. The glass

shuddered, but didn’t break. Claudia, though, felt as if her face had been broken into

a million pieces. She could feel a warm

trickle of blood begin to run from her nose.

Then she tasted the coppery essence in her mouth.

“Do you want to play stupid? Or do you want to cooperate?”

“I don’t know what you are talking about. Please.”

With one hand tangled in her hair and the other pinning her arm behind her, the man

dragged Claudia from her bedroom. She tried to resist, but he tightened his grip,

causing even more excruciating pain to shoot through her body. Despite the pain,

she tried to make it as difficult as possible for him to pull her down the small hallway

toward the… *Oh, no, please! Not the bathroom.*

Claudia had always harbored a terrible fear of drowning, ever since she'd been a

little girl. If they were going toward the bathroom, it could mean only one thing. He

was going to torture her with water.

He kicked the door open and flicked on the light switch with his elbow. Releasing

Claudia's arm, he punched her hard in the kidney, and she dropped immediately to

her knees in front of the toilet. He threw open the lid with such force that it snapped

off the hinges and clattered onto the tile floor.

"Last chance. Where is he? Where's Harvath?"

Claudia was paralyzed with fear, but she

knew she could not give Scot up.

“Go to hell,” she spat.

“Fine, have it your way,” said her torturer as he locked her slim neck in his powerful

grasp and plunged her face into the bowl.

Claudia struggled wildly, her arms flailing in all directions. *What a horrible way to*

die. The man was showing no mercy. She felt as if she had been held under for five

minutes, even though she knew that was impossible. Finally, he pulled her face from

the water. Claudia breathed as deeply as she could and then began coughing and

sputtering.

“Feel like talking now? Tell me what I want to know and I’ll let you go.”

“Like hell you will,” said Claudia. “Fuck off. I’m not telling you anything.”

With a sigh the man said, “Women,” and shoved her head back down into the water.

Claudia tried desperately not to struggle this time. She needed every ounce of

strength she had. She let her arms go limp next to the bowl. When the man had

pulled her out the first time, he had pulled her head so far back she thought her neck

would surely snap. He had placed his face so close to hers that she could smell his

fetid breath.

Not struggling seemed to make the time she was under water drag on for twice as

long. He was not going to let her up this time until she was dead. The plan she had

begun to formulate was all for nothing. She might as well try struggling again. At

least she would go out fighting. Then she felt the pressure on her neck let up ever so

slightly and her head was yanked violently from the toilet. Now was her chance.

“Are you done playing games, you stupid little bitch, or do you really want to be

drowned? Is that what you want? Huh? Huh?" With each *H u h ?* the man emphasized

his point by jerking her head back even farther and harder. Claudia was seeing spots.

The man's face was pressed right against hers. She could taste the rotten onions on

his breath and feel the stubble of his whiskers against her cheeks. Her fingers kept

groping forward. *Where was it?*

"It would be a shame to kill you, you

know. You are one nice-looking woman. I'd

much rather you and I have a little fun, but you're not making it easy on yourself.

Tell me what I need to know and we'll have a party. If you don't, I'll simply have to

drown you, but—"

Claudia had found what she was looking for. Behind the toilet was a stainless steel

toilet brush that had a decorative plastic ruby on top. The point of the plastic gem

was sharp enough that she was able to drive it right into her assailant's left eye.

The man roared in pain. He let go of Claudia to free his hands, which shot directly

up to his face. She slid away across the tile as quickly as she could. He pulled the

long-handled brush from his eye and grabbed for a towel to try to stem the flow of

blood.

"You fucking bitch! Now you're going to pay! Do you hear me?! Do you hear

me?!" he raged.

Claudia certainly did hear him. She was already on her feet running for her

bedroom. *The gun? Where is my gun?* Frantically she searched for it. It wasn't on

the edge of the bed where she had left it. Somehow during their struggle it must have

gotten knocked off. She could hear the man's incessant screaming as he came out of

the bathroom down the hallway, "Where are you, you little bitch? I'm going to

make

you wish you were never born!”

Come on, where is it? Claudia scrambled wildly under the bed, her arms sweeping

out in all directions. She had only a few more seconds before the man would be right

in the bedroom with her. Her mind shuddered at the possibilities of what he might do

to her, and she searched with an even greater frenzy. *It isn’t here! Could he have*

taken it? He didn't have enough time. His hands were busy holding me. Where

could it have gone? Why can't I find it?

Then Claudia realized maybe it hadn't fallen off the bed at all. She swept the

remaining few bags out of her path and shot for the other side. Crawling out from

under the bed, she almost froze as she heard the sound of the man's voice in the

doorway. "There you are. Trying to hide from me? Well, it's too late. Time to die,

lady!”

The man began firing wildly with a silenced Russian PM, Pistole Makarov. Claudia’s

bedside lamp shattered, as did a picture on the wall behind her. The damage to the

man’s left eye had ruined his aim. Claudia ducked her head. *The gun? How do I get*

my gun? It must still be on the bed. It has to be.

Grabbing the comforter with both hands, Claudia pulled down hard, stretching it

taut. Preferring a hand be shot rather than her head, she raised one above the level of

the mattress and swept it from right to left. She felt something cold and hard. *The*

g u n ! She grabbed it and quickly removed her hand from the bed.

“You know what, bitch? I’ve got a nice little knife here,” said the man.

The shooting had stopped for the moment, and Claudia heard the unmistakable click

of a blade locking into place.

“I think you and I are going to have that party first, and then I’m going to let you

watch while I cut you up. And then, you know what I’m going to do? I’m going to

let you watch as I pluck each of your eyes from your head. Now get out here and

take your medicine!”

Claudia pulled the slide back on her SIG and saw that there was already a round

chambered.

“I told you to go to hell!” she shouted as she rose from behind the bed and put

two

slugs into the man's chest.

He dropped the knife from his hand and slumped to the floor.

From the corner of her eye, Claudia saw the barrel of another gun in the doorframe

of her bedroom. She whirled and fired, sending splintering pieces of wood flying.

That was her last shot. She vaulted over the bed and landed on the corpse of the

man who had intended to kill her. She

grabbed for his pistol and fell back on her

haunches ready to fire at the figure in the hallway.

“Claudia? Claudia? It’s me, Scot. Hold your fire. Don’t shoot. It’s only me. I’m

going to come into the doorway. *Don’t* shoot.”

As soon as she saw it was him, shock took over and she began to sob

uncontrollably.

The first thing Scot did was to pull the comforter off the bed and wrap it around

Claudia, whom he'd moved into the living room. Next, he went to the bathroom and

retrieved a towel to dry her hair.

"He didn't hurt you, Claudia, did he?" Scot asked as he held her close and began

drying her off.

"Oh, Scot," she said, breathing in short gasps. "It was… It was horrible. He was

trying to… to kill me. He was trying to

drown me in the… the bathroom. He told me

if I didn't… didn't tell him where to find you, he'd kill me."

Harvath wrapped his arms around her. "You're going to be okay. You killed him.

He's gone."

"I can't stop shaking," she stammered.

"You're in shock, but it'll pass."

Scot hated to do it, but he had to let her go. He moved quickly around the

apartment, gathering up the things Claudia had set out for them.

“How about the backpacks, Claudia? Where are they?”

Her eyes moved toward the bedroom and that told Scot everything he needed to

know. Inside, he found two that looked as though they would do the job. While

there, he went through the dead man’s pockets, but didn’t find much. The man did

have a radio, which now sported a nice hole from one of Claudia’s shots. It had

passed through the radio and into the man's chest. The radio told Scot what he

already knew — the man wasn't working alone.

Scot picked up the nine-millimeter Russian Makarov pistol and checked the

magazine. There was one round left in the clip and one up the pipe. The assassin

wasn't carrying any extra ammo and the nine-millimeter round used in the Makarov

was an intermediate, falling somewhere between the nine-millimeter Parabellum

and

the nine-millimeter Short. None of Claudia's ammunition would work in this weapon,

but at least two silenced shots were better than none. Scot dropped it into one of the

backpacks.

Harvath returned to the living room and saw that Claudia was still shaking.

"Do you have any brandy?" he asked.

She nodded her head yes, and he went into the kitchen in search of it. He

returned a

moment later with a small bottle and a coffee cup. Scot poured some into the cup

and handed it to her. “This will help steady your nerves a little bit. I’m almost done

packing things up, and then we need to go. The police will be here soon.”

Claudia nodded.

On the floor in the entry hall, Scot had everything laid out. He quickly fieldstripped

Claudia's civil defense force assault rifle. The difference between Claudia and most

of the rest of the standing Swiss citizen army was that she was authorized to have

ammunition for the weapon. Scot loaded the triple magazine into the pack and

followed it with a box of nine-millimeter rounds for their pistols, as well as two extra

clips for Claudia's SIG.

Carefully, Scot wrapped the Swiss SG551 SWAT assault rifle's telescopic

night-vision scope in a towel and placed it at the top of the pack.

He helped Claudia to the door, where he got her into a warm coat and then slung the

two packs over his shoulders.

When they reached the alley, he was very careful to check things out before exiting.

The man upstairs would have partners, any or all of whom could be lying in wait for

them.

The distant wail of police sirens grew louder, and Scot had no choice but to pick up

his pace. With his left arm around Claudia's waist and his right hand holding his

Beretta, Scot made it through the alley without incident. On the street, he tucked the

Beretta away beneath his sweater and began the two-block walk to where Claudia

had parked her car.

Scot forced himself to walk at a casual

pace, so as not to draw any undue attention.

Claudia's VW was now only a half a block away. The ruse had almost worked.

Leaving the Federal Attorney's Office, where he had been waiting for Claudia

Mueller to return to work, the leader and last remaining member of the American hit

team was now speeding toward Claudia's. The final transmission he'd had was that

someone was entering her apartment.

There had been no further transmissions since

then, and his man in the apartment had not responded to his repeated hailings.

Something was wrong.

When he saw Claudia Mueller and Agent Harvath trying to appear casual while

walking down the street two blocks from her apartment, he knew what had

happened.

Instinctively, the man reached under the newspaper on the passenger seat for his

weapon. He slowed his car to a crawl, as if looking for a parking space, to make

sure he hadn't been noticed by Harvath and the girl. So far, so good. It would only

be a matter of moments and he could complete his assignment, collect the rest of his

money, and get Senator Snyder off his back.

If Harvath was on to him, he gave no indication of it. The couple maintained their

forced leisurely pace. It was only a matter of meters now. The black Opal rolled

forward and he was so close that if he'd known German, he would have been able to

decipher the writing on the two backpacks Harvath had slung over his shoulder.

It would all be over in less than a minute. The assassin removed the gun from

beneath the newspaper and cradled it in his lap.

Despite his request to the contrary, the car rental agency had given him a vehicle with

manually operated windows, not power. Harvath and the girl were on his right side,

which meant he would need to lower that window. He didn't want to risk the

potential problems that could come from shooting through the glass. He let go of the

weapon and leaned over to roll the passenger side window down. He grunted from

the pain in his bandaged ribs and wondered how long it would take for him to fully

recover from the shots he had taken in DC.

His eyes were off them for only a second, but when he straightened back up, two

Bern police cars were careening down the street toward him at full speed, with lights

and sirens blaring. Harvath and the girl had disappeared. There was no sign of them.

A side street loomed only feet away. *Did they go this way? Maybe they're behind a*

parked car? The gun in his lap, the assassin had no choice but to make the quick

right turn and get out of the way of the oncoming police cars.

Scot threw the backpacks on the backseat of the VW, slid the driver's seat back,

started the car, and eased out of the parking space.

Claudia told Scot where and when to

turn. They were taking the fastest route out of

Bern. Harvath checked his mirrors occasionally, but as he didn't know the city that

well and didn't want to get caught in any possible police dragnets, he forwent his

usual evasive driving procedures. He was confident there hadn't been anyone else at

the building from the assassin's team. If there had been, the man would have come

to investigate the shots. Whoever was in

contact with the assassin via radio was

most likely watching Claudia's office and was therefore nowhere nearby. He was

sure they were not being followed.

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Scot chose to drive around Lucerne rather than through it to get to Mount Pilatus.

By now, all of the city's policemen would be carrying descriptions of him and

Claudia, courtesy of the shopkeepers on

the Kapellbrücke. The way they were going

took more time, but it gave Claudia a chance to get some sleep. She had finally

nodded off a while ago, and Scot had no desire to wake her. He needed her to be as

fresh as possible for what lay ahead.

It was pitch black outside. Headlights blurred from one set into the next,

indistinguishable as they zoomed past in the opposite direction. The VW's dash

lights glowed an eerie green. Scot was

tempted to turn on the radio, but decided

against it. The heater was turned up high, and he glanced over at Claudia, who was

wrapped in the same wool blanket he had been in only this afternoon. It was funny

how quickly roles could change. It also made Scot aware again of how painfully

alone he was in life. Claudia stirred, and he was happy to find that she was awake.

“Hey there,” he said. “How are you feeling?”

“Pissed off.”

Scot laughed. “That’s good. Now I know I don’t have to worry about you.”

“How did you know I was in trouble at my apartment?”

“I made my call and used the fax at Fabia’s, then waited around for you for about an

hour. When you didn’t show, I started to get a bad feeling.”

“That man. He wasn’t one of Miner’s men.”

“No?”

“No, he was an American.”

Scot had guessed as much when he’d retrieved the shattered Motorola radio from

the man’s pocket.

“You should have told him where I was,” he said.

“What, and let him kill you? Besides, he was going to kill me anyway. That I’m sure

of. Why would I want to make things any easier on him?”

“You’re right. Here,” said Scot, pulling

the Toblerone chocolate from his pocket,

“one of Fabia’s staff gave this to me. I thought you might like it.”

“Thanks,” she said as she unwrapped the chocolate and began to eat.

A light snow had started falling outside, and Scot turned on the windshield wipers.

“This ought to make things fun,” he said.

“If it keeps up, it will give us added cover. Don’t complain,” replied Claudia, who

finished the chocolate and leaned over

into the backseat.

“What are you doing?” asked Scot.

“Taking inventory and deciding how we’ll pack the gear so the weight is evenly

distributed.”

“Don’t you want to do that when we get there?”

“I’m just getting organized. I don’t want us to be out in the open any longer than we

have to.”

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Forty minutes later, Harvath began seeing signs for Alpnachstad. Claudia showed

him where to pull off. The snow was falling harder now, and she made Scot drive

through the village twice before she found the road they were looking for. It led back

toward the lake and the cogwheel railway station. Fifty meters before the entrance to

the station, the road branched off into a

clearing beyond a large grove of pine trees.

Claudia instructed him to park all the way at the end of the clearing, as far away from

the road as possible.

“The cogwheel station is normally jammed with tour buses and they use this lot for

the overflow. The hikers use it because it provides better access to the trailhead,”

she said.

Scot just nodded. His mind was on what lay ahead of them at the

seven-thousand-foot summit of Mount Pilatus.

Claudia raised the VW's hatchback and worked with extraordinary speed. Items

were packed in the order they would most likely be used. The later it would be used,

the farther down in the pack it was stowed. Claudia had already loaded the three

magazines of her SIG-Sauer before Scot had maneuvered into his snowsuit. He

had

given Claudia his sizes, and she had done a good job of finding something that fit

him. The snowsuit was warm and, judging from the fabric, relatively waterproof. It

was made by a commercial ski manufacturer, and he didn’t much care for the

brightly colored stripes around the wrists and pockets, but overall it was

predominantly white, and that was the most important thing.

As if reading his mind Claudia said, “Catch,” and threw him a large roll of white

tape. “I’m sure you know the proper way to wrap the weapons as well?”

Winter camouflage wasn’t something Scot Harvath, formerly of SEAL Team Two,

needed help with.

They had agreed he, as the more skilled marksman, would carry the two-shot,

silenced Makarov along with his Beretta. When they were close enough to their

objective, he would remove and assemble the assault rifle from his pack. Claudia

carried thirty-six rounds of ammunition in the clips of her SIG-Sauer, plus one in the

chamber. Her role was strictly support, and Scot would be the point man. If things

went well, Claudia would never even have to fire a shot, but they knew things seldom

went exactly as planned.

Scot pulled on the climbing boots

Claudia had purchased for him during one of her

errands. They were snug, but hopefully wouldn't be the cause of any blisters.

Claudia had purchased the Swiss equivalent of moleskin and would have it ready at

the first sign their boots were causing either of them any discomfort. They had a

long trek in front of them, and they could not afford to compromise their feet in any

way.

The weapons and gear packed up, they put on their headsets and tried the link

between their commercial walkie-talkies. A-Okay. Claudia gave the thumbs-up, and

they zipped up their suits. Normally, now would be the time to tape over the zippers,

but with such a strenuous climb in front of them, they would need to vent their body

heat often. Once they reached the top, they would finish taping up. They slipped on

their white gloves, white balaclavas, goggles, and looking like a pair of phantoms,

headed off into the woods toward the trailhead.

Two hours into the climb, Scot and Claudia stopped to take a rest. They each ate a

PowerBar and polished off a liter of water between them. Scot applied moleskin to

the inside of his right foot, which had been rubbed slightly raw by the new climbing

boots. He leaned back on his elbows and breathed the cold air deep into his lungs.

The snow had picked up in the last half hour. Judging by the altimeter on Claudia's

sport watch, they were making good time. Scot was carefully searching for any early

warning devices Miner might have planted along the trail to alert him of an assault,

but so far he hadn't seen anything. He also frequently withdrew the assault rifle's

nightscope from his backpack to scan the terrain above them. He never felt

compelled to look behind.

After their break, the pair got back on the trail and continued their hike toward the

summit. The winds were fierce and bit at any exposed pieces of flesh. The snow

blew from almost every direction, cutting visibility and forcing Scot and Claudia to

move more slowly, choosing their steps with more care. One wrong move and they

could tumble down the mountain. Scot took a length of rope from his pack and tied

it between the two of them, so neither lost the other.

They stopped to rest two more times, finishing off their water and two more

PowerBars. Because of the frigid conditions, they were happier when walking, their

bodies burning more calories for warmth. Despite the high-quality suits, gloves, and

boots, the cold found its way in

everywhere, and each of them was feeling numb.

Not a good situation, considering they hadn't even faced the hardest part of the

ascent yet.

Half an hour after their last rest stop, Claudia gave a tug on the rope and Scot

stopped. When he turned to face her, she was pointing up. He removed the

nightscope and peered through the green light to see what she was pointing at.

Between gusts of snowy wind he could make out two buildings, which he knew

from

Claudia's diagram would be Pilatus's two hotels. Several hundred feet above the

larger hotel, he made out the faint lights on top of the Pilatus radar station.

It had taken them over five hours to hike to this height. They came to a ridge hidden

from above by a wide plateau. Had they been normal hikers, the plateau would have

signaled the final part of their journey with plenty of cold beer and *Würstel* to

be had

only twenty minutes away in one of the hotel bars. But, Scot Harvath and Claudia

Mueller were anything but normal hikers.

The plateau allowed Scot and Claudia to maneuver their way around the mountain

without risk of being seen by any sentries above. The idea, which had been

Claudia's, was to come from a direction Miner would never suspect — right up the

icy face below the church. To have attempted to infiltrate the perimeter by one of the

typical tourist routes would surely have been to invite early detection and probably

more than a few bullets. Scot had had enough of those.

Because of Miner's comments, Scot and Claudia believed the church was the most

logical point of entry into the fortress. Any other choice might have meant days of

searching for entrances that were either impossible to find or impossible to access.

It took them over an hour to round the ridge and arrive at the base of their climb.

Looking up, Scot saw only snow, rock, and ice. There wasn't any sign of the

church, but he trusted Claudia's judgment.

They slid into harnesses, strapped on crampons, laid out their ropes, and taped each

other the rest of the way up. As Claudia

was the more experienced climber, it was

decided she would lead this part of the ascent. She warned Scot again about the

dangers of climbing with the assault rifle fully assembled, but Scot's mind was made

up. He had climbed more difficult mountains with bigger weapons before. Besides,

the need to be prepared for what might lie waiting for them when they reached the

top far outweighed all other

considerations.

Scot assembled the rifle while Claudia removed the pickaxes from their packs and

finished laying out the rest of the gear.

They checked each other's rigs, and satisfied that they were completely ready, or as

close thereto as possible, Claudia started to climb the face.

She moved with extraordinary skill and agility. Climbing was normally viewed as a

man's sport, requiring lots of upper-body strength, but Claudia was obviously very

strong. She swung the axes with great force and had no problem hammering in the

pitons as she worked her way up.

Scot was sure the climb could have been done in half the time if he hadn't been

working with an injured left arm. There was no other way to covertly assault the

mountain, so they had decided this would be it, but that they would take it slow.

His left arm throbbed, from both the fatigue of the climb and also the cold. Scot was

glad that Claudia was on point, chipping out toeholds and hammering in the pitons.

He had no idea if he would have been able to do it. He was breathing heavily and

appreciated Claudia's frequent stops to rest. He knew she didn't need to. She was

stopping for him.

The climb was slow going, and the wind

tormented the pair with every step,

threatening to rip them from the face of the mountain and cast them into the valley far

below. Scot was growing more tired and started initiating the breaks himself, and

with greater frequency. Claudia never said a word. She waited for him to give her the

thumbs-up and only then would continue.

Finally, the sound in his ears of his own heavy breathing was replaced by the sound

over his headset of Claudia clicking her tongue twice against her teeth. That was their

signal that they were approximately twenty meters away from cresting the top.

Claudia froze where she was and waited for Scot to join her. When he did, he rested

for ten minutes without saying a word. He was exhausted.

He couldn’t ask Claudia to go straight to the top and put her life in danger by

peering over the edge toward the church.

What if there was a guard stationed there,

or some sort of motion detector? The fact was that because Scot knew what to look

for, he needed to be the first one over. When he felt he had sufficiently regained his

strength, he began to lead the climb.

Hammering in the pitons and cutting out the toeholds was excruciating. Scot hadn’t

realized how much he had demanded of his right arm while he favored the left.

He

wasn’t a quitter, though, and they were so close now. Just a few more meters.

Claudia hung back, monitoring his progress and giving him plenty of space, as he

had requested. She was to have her weapon drawn when he went over the top, just

in case he was taken by surprise and one of Miner’s men should happen to peer

over the edge to see if anyone was behind him. Scot didn’t want Claudia to be easy

pickings, unprepared on the face all by herself.

Harvath continued to cut his toeholds and hammer the pitons. Reaching above his

head, he readied to hammer another home, and the unthinkable happened. An

enormous gust of wind peeled him right off the face and sent him shooting

downward. Although he knew he had set his pitons properly, this was the moment in

which every climber fears he will discover his safety measures hadn’t been

set as

well as he thought.

Scot kept falling, his hands flailing, knowing there was nothing to grab on to, but

trying nonetheless. Then came the snap of being jerked to a slapping halt, but instead

of feeling it in his harness, where he should have, he felt it hard along the left side of

his ribs and dangerously across his windpipe. It took a few moments for him to

realize what had happened.

He had not been stopped by his rope and safety harness, but rather by the shoulder

strap of the assault rifle. Somehow it had gotten caught on a piton and, with the

downward weight of his body, was threatening to cut off all of his oxygen and

strangle him. Scot clawed at the strap, trying to free himself, but it wouldn’t budge.

His legs were completely out of energy, and he couldn’t muster enough strength to

even push himself away from the frozen wall of rock behind him. Harvath's eyes

drifted out over the dark valley below, and he wondered if this was how it would

end.

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Claudia scrambled up the icy face to where Scot hung choking. In a flash, she had

unsheathed her blade and was preparing to cut away the strap of the assault rifle

pinned against his throat. As she brought

the blade down toward the strap, what she

saw amazed her; Harvath was shaking his head *no*.

He didn't want her to do it. Choking was okay, but God forbid the soldier should

lose his assault rifle. *Men!*

Claudia frantically assessed the situation. If Scot didn't want her to cut away the

strap, maybe there was another alternative. She raced up to just about his shoulder

level and tried with all her might to lift the strap and untangle him from where he was

caught. As strong as she was, Scot was too heavy. It didn't work. Time was running

out.

She thought about trying to wedge herself between Harvath and the face, using her

legs push him out and off the piton, but there was too great a danger of them both

becoming entangled and then falling with

a combined weight that their equipment

couldn’t handle. No, there was only one solution. Scot had to be lifted up, and that

could only happen with Claudia off the face and anchored on the crest.

After wrapping an extra length of rope around Scot’s chest and under his arms,

Claudia shot upward. There was no time to dig proper toeholds or hammer pitons;

safety was forgotten as she focused on the man slowly choking to death below her.

The wind continued to buffet her body as she climbed. Twice the gusts threatened

to rip her from the face, but she dug in deeper and refused to be beaten. Claudia's

axes swung and cracked into the ice, delivering bone jarring *pings* through her arms

as she scrambled up the mountain. With each swing of the ax came a synchronized

kick of the foot; her crampons sending shards of ice and rock flying in all directions,

until she was just below the snow-covered crest of the face. From here, it would be

two to three more ax holds, and then Claudia could swing herself over the top. This

was the spot where Scot had said they would most likely encounter the first signs of

danger — an intrusion-detection system or worse… a sentry.

Claudia thought about unholstering her SIG, but realized that her death-defying free

climb had left her with no nearby pitons to snag her if she should fall. She would

have to go without.

The wind howled with a ferocious intensity. It was so loud that even if someone was

standing directly above her, they probably would not be able to hear the sound of

her axes digging into the last of the ice. Claudia held her breath and tried to

concentrate on what she was about to do. Traversing the last two meters as if it were

only two feet, she prepared to hoist herself over the lip. Digging in her crampons,

she gave herself a count of three and then swung her body with dangerous abandon

over the top.

Unbeknownst to her, the other side of the crest sloped at an extremely steep incline,

and Claudia lost control as she began rolling down the slick snow-covered surface.

She dug in her heels as hard as she could and was able to stop rolling. The last

thing

she had expected was that the crest would give way to such a steep hill.

Claudia's mind raced with more pressing concerns. *Had there been any intrusion*

detectors? There was no way of knowing. The incline took her by such surprise that

she didn't have time to look. *Scot could be on his last breath,* she reminded herself.

I have to get to him. But what about sentries? Claudia took a quick look

around

and saw nothing. *Time to get Scot.*

Hammering with a vengeance, she placed two pitons a few feet back from the lip of

the crest and anchored herself in. Scot had insisted on total radio silence, but

Claudia decided to break it, if only briefly, to let him know she was about to pull on

the rope. She didn't want him to give up.

"On belay," she said into her microphone.

There was no response.

What if I'm already too late? Once again, Claudia dug in her heels, leaned back into

her harness, and began pulling hand over hand with all of her might.

The rope instantly became taut, but wouldn't move. *He's more tangled than I*

thought. Claudia leaned farther back and pulled harder. She willed Scot Harvath to

live, and to move. Her arms ached, her back and shoulders burned, but she

wouldn’t

give up. Slowly, she felt herself making progress. *He’s free!*

She kept pulling, hand over hand, an inch at a time. The pace and strain were

excruciating, though Claudia didn’t care. Scot was free. She continued pulling him

toward her. The rope piled in a twisted coil as she fed the slack off her waist. *Not*

too much longer… almost there.

“Halt, stehen bleiben!” (Stop, don’t move!)

The voice came from behind her right shoulder and took Claudia completely off

guard. She was so frightened by it that she almost let go of the rope.

"Stehen bleiben!" the voice commanded again.

The man was dressed in all white, much like them, and carried an automatic weapon,

which was pointed right at her. Claudia stopped pulling on the rope, but held it taut

with her left hand.

"Was machen Sie hier?" (What are you doing here?)

"Auf halber Höhe wurden wir von einem Sturm überrascht. Wir haben auf

besseres Wetter gewartet und uns entschlossen, den Absteig nicht mehr zu

machen." (We are climbers. We were stuck by the storm halfway down. We waited

for it to get better, and when it did, we decided to finish the climb.)

"Mitten in der Nacht? Das glaube ich nicht. Komment Sie mit!" (In the middle of

the night? I don't think so. Come with me!)

The man had been steadily closing in on her. She wrapped the rope twice around her

left hand for security.

"Ich habe die richtige Ausrüstung. Schau!" (I have the right equipment, look!)

With that, Claudia grabbed one of the ice axes with her right hand, spun to her left,

and with a *snap,* let it fly. The ax hit the man square in the chest. His throat let out a

dry rasp of a death rattle as his winter white combat fatigues went red with the gush

of blood pouring from his body.

“I don’t know if you can hear me,” said Claudia over her headset as she began

pulling furiously on the rope, “but I’m not alone up here. We’ve got to get moving.”

Claudia was able to pull in several more meters of rope and thought surely he was

almost there when the snow around her exploded in a hail of gunfire. There wasn’t

time to warn Scot. If she stayed where she was, she was a dead woman. She reacted

with the speed of a cat who'd stepped onto a hot stove.

Tying off the rope on one of the anchor pitons, Claudia rolled hard to her left toward

the shelter of a small snowbank. The bullets fell like a hailstorm as the second sentry

ran toward her with his weapon blazing. Claudia fought to pull the gloves from her

hands. She needed to remove the pistol from inside her suit. The gloves came free

and next was the tape that covered her zipper.

The sentry was getting closer. She could hear his boots crunching in the snow as he

rushed in her direction, continuing to fire. Claudia pulled part of the tape away and

then yanked down on the zipper. It opened a couple of inches and then stopped.

What's the problem? Looking down, Claudia saw the tape had become caught

inside the zipper. *Damn it!* The opening wasn't large enough for her to get her hand

in and retrieve her gun. She pulled frantically. *Come on… come on!*

The man was almost all the way up the slope and in only a matter of seconds would

have her perfectly in his sights. Claudia kept pulling on the zipper, then remembered

her knife. She could cut a hole in the suit

and pull her pistol out that way. She

unsheathed the blade, pulled the material away from her body, and plunged it in. She

ripped in a downward stroke and was about to reach in for her gun when she saw

the sentry appear at the top of the slope. She was too late.

As the man stood in front of her, his weapon rising to fire, it was preceded by a little

red dot. *Laser sight.* Claudia watched helplessly as the dot traced up her leg,

then

her chest, where she lost track of it before it flashed once in her eyes and then came

to rest on her forehead.

Suddenly, the sentry's body tensed and a red dot appeared on his own forehead.

For a moment, Claudia didn't understand, then the sentry's dot darkened and began

to drip. *Blood!*

Looking to her right, she saw Scot precariously perched half over the lip of

the

crest. He was still aiming the silenced Makarov at the sentry, who slumped to his

knees and fell face first into the snow, a lake of blood forming beneath his head.

Claudia ran to Harvath as he hoisted himself onto the crest and unslung the assault

rifle. For several moments he didn’t move and didn’t speak. He just lay in the snow,

staring upward.

Finally, as Claudia leaned over him, he spoke. “Wow, talk about a cliff-hanger, eh?”

“Are you okay?”

Scot rubbed his throat and continued to breathe heavily. “I’ll probably be wearing

turtlenecks for a while, but I’ll live. How about you?”

“Scared, but I’ll live too. You know that’s the second time you’ve done that?”

“Done what?”

“Saved my life.”

“You pulled me out of the water and off this mountain, so I’d say we’re even,” said

Scot.

“Speaking of mountains, I thought you said you were a *good* climber.”

“I used to be. I don’t know what’s happened. Maybe I’m getting old.”

In most other circumstances, Claudia would have laughed at that. Instead, she just

looked down at him, so happy he was alive.

“What happened to your suit?” said Scot referring to the slash Claudia had torn with

her knife. “Were you hit?”

“No. I did it myself.”

“What were you going to do? Distract the guy by flashing him?”

“Very funny. I guess I can stop worrying about you now. You’re one hundred

percent intact, bad sense of humor and all. Should we check the bodies?”

“Yeah, I guess my little nap time’s over. Where there’s two sentries, there’s

bound

to be more. We've gotta get moving before they figure out we're here."

"If you want to rest a few moments more, I'll check them."

"No, you take the one I just shot. I think I'd better take the other guy. He looks like

he might have an ax to grind with you. Look for anything that might tell us how to

get inside."

They searched the sentries, patting down

all of their pockets.

“Anything?” Scot asked.

“No. Just cigarettes. Nothing else useful.”

“My guy’s still warm, like he hasn’t been outside for that long. How about yours?”

“Same thing, I think.”

“Good, they probably just came on duty. Hopefully no one will be expecting them

to check in for a while.”

“But this one has a radio. What if he

called in?”

“There’s nothing we can do about it anyway. Let’s get going. Grab his weapon.

You know how to use it?”

“H&K MP5. It’s a common weapon for the Swiss police. We don’t normally use

silencers, but I can handle it.”

“Good, let’s move.”

Claudia pulled the weapon from the dead sentry and rolled him to the edge of the

crest. Harvath counted to three, and they pushed both sentries over and threw the

climbing gear along with them. They kicked up as much snow as they could to cover

the blood and headed down the slope.

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The trail was well marked, even in winter. It twisted and turned as it wove upward

around high outcroppings of rock. After a final bend, Scot and Claudia came upon a

small ridge that sloped downward, and in the distance she could just make out the

church.

“That’s it,” she whispered into her headset.

“Excellent. Let’s see if anyone’s expecting us.”

The pair lay down in the snow, and Scot affixed the nightscope to the assault rifle.

He scanned the ridge and the area surrounding the little church. While Scot did that,

Claudia emptied the nine-millimeter Parabellum ammunition from two of her SIG

clips and loaded up the H&K submachine gun.

“It looks quiet. Doesn’t seem like anyone’s raised the alarm,” said Harvath, rising to

a crouch. “Follow me.”

He picked a careful path, off the trail, down to the small plateau that held the church.

Several times he raised the SG551 to his shoulder and peered through the scope,

scanning the area to make sure they were not walking into a trap. *So far, so good.*

They reached the back of the church, and Harvath tried to look in through the

stained-glass windows. It was completely dark inside. He signaled Claudia to stay

low, creep around the other side, and meet him in front. He slung the rifle over his

shoulder and removed the Makarov from inside his snowsuit. Cautiously, he crept

around his side of the building. By the time he got to the front, Claudia was

already

waiting for him.

“Anybody home?” he whispered.

“Some footprints in the snow. They look new.”

Claudia shined her small Mag-Lite on the ground, illuminating the prints. After

examining the door of the church for any wiring or alarms, Scot tried it. It was

locked. He signaled Claudia what he wanted her to do and then got into a crouched

position. His eye against the nightscope and his finger on the trigger, he nodded.

Claudia flipped the firing selector on the MP5 to single shot and positioned the

weapon where Scot had indicated on the lock. Scot nodded again, and she fired,

shattering the lock into a mass of hot, broken metal. Claudia gave the door a kick

and quickly jumped back as Scot ran into the dark room, scanning every corner with

the night-vision device mounted on the rifle.

Harvath signaled Claudia to join him as he continued to sweep the room. This time

she understood what it meant to cover someone's six and she did just that. The

church was very small. There were about ten wooden pews on each side of a narrow

aisle. The whole room took only moments to clear.

Suddenly and without warning, Scot put his right hand up in a fist and Claudia came

to a halt where she stood. He had taped

his Mag-Lite to the underside of the assault

rifle and now twisted it into the on position. He scanned the floor all around them.

Claudia wanted to know what he was looking for, but she remained deathly quiet and

didn’t move a muscle.

Confident no one was within earshot, Harvath finally broke the silence. “Do you see

the floor?”

Claudia nodded *yes*.

“We dragged a lot of snow in here, and it’s already starting to melt. You see there

and there?”

She nodded again.

“Now look over there.”

Claudia looked in the direction Scot was pointing, and on the gray flagstones she

could make out the imprints of two pairs of stocking feet. “What is it?” she asked.

“I think our friends don’t want to make

the same mistake we did and track in tons of

snow, especially if this is one of the ways into the underground fortress. They take

their boots off at the door and carry them in. But after standing around during a

watch rotation, your feet get pretty sweaty. Believe me, I know."

"So they walked through the church in their socks, not knowing they were leaving a

trail?"

“Yup. Time to follow the yellow brick road.”

Claudia fell in step behind him.

The footprints led across the floor to a raised stone platform that held the altar.

Harvath scanned the flagstones for any sign of pressure plates, making sure to

follow the prints step for step. They ended at an enormous stone baptismal font,

above which hung a statue of the crucified Christ.

“A lot of folks come up here for

baptisms?” asked Scot.

“Marriages mostly.”

“Seems kind of a pain in the butt to haul the kids and everyone up here to baptize a

baby.”

“You would bring all the same people for a wedding, wouldn’t you?”

“I guess, but it seems awfully out of place.”

“Remember, everything has a purpose.”

“Your grandfather’s words, right?”

“Right.”

“Well, the footprints end right here, so there must be a door of some sort. We just

need to find it. But first, let’s get out of these suits. I’m burning up.”

Scot and Claudia removed their snowsuits and hid their gear as well as they could at

the far end of the church. Harvath then traded Claudia her assault rifle for the H&K

submachine gun. It was a weapon he knew extremely well, and it felt good in

his

hands. While the SG551 with its night-vision scope was excellent for taking out

targets at a distance, for close quarters' work in tight spaces, nothing beat an MP5.

Scot also gave Claudia the silenced Makarov pistol with its one remaining shot.

Back at the baptismal font, they looked for hinges or any indication of where a door

might be concealed. Almost an hour had passed since they'd entered the church.

Finally Claudia whispered, “Scot, look at this.”

Harvath came over to Claudia’s side, where she was using her Mag-Lite to examine a

series of stone reliefs above the font. “What is it?”

“See these?”

“Yeah, what about them?”

“They represent the original cantons of Switzerland, but there’s something wrong.”

“What’s wrong?”

“There’s an extra. It doesn’t belong,” said Claudia.

“What is it?”

She moved her hand over the worn stone. “It looks very old, but it isn’t. It’s been

made to look that way, to match the rest of the church.”

“Great, but *what* is it?”

“It’s the crest for the army corps of engineers. It was on a ring my grandfather used

to wear.”

“Are you positive?”

“It’s hard to tell exactly, but I think that’s the point. If you were looking specifically

for their crest, you would eventually find it, even though it’s been worn down. But, if

you didn’t know what you were looking for or didn’t know enough to make the

connection, you would pass it right by.”

“So what do we do now?”

“Let me move over here and stand where the footprints end….” Claudia moved as

she spoke. “From here, my arms are too short to reach the emblem, but a taller

person, like those sentries, would have no problem.”

“Do you think the crest springs a door?”

“There’s only one way to find out.”

“You’re right,” said Scot. “Stand back over there and have the Makarov ready.”

Claudia stepped backward and used the altar for cover. Scot transferred the MP5 to

his left hand and reached up with his right for the emblem. The stone was cold

and

rough beneath his fingers. He took a deep breath and tried to push it in. Nothing

happened. He then tried pulling it out — nothing. *Think,* he told himself. He tried

turning the crest clockwise, and it began to give.

There was a heavy grating sound of stone scraping against stone as the entire

baptismal font slid back to reveal a narrow spiral staircase leading straight down.

Open sesame, said Scot to himself.

Small flickers were followed by a series of lights beginning to illuminate. Scot

flinched, and his finger tightened around the trigger, ready to fire. After nothing

further happened, he realized that there must be an automatic mechanism that turned

on the lights when the hatch was sprung. Whoever designed the stairway was quite

ingenious. The first fixture was far enough down so that it wouldn’t cast any light

whatsoever into the church. Scot signaled Claudia, who slung the assault rifle and

followed him into the stairwell.

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Scot quietly descended the metal stairs with Claudia directly behind him. He

delicately placed one foot in front of the other, careful not to make any sound. They

were inside the Lions' den now, and there was no telling when or where the first one

would appear.

When they reached the bottom, Claudia could see that the energy it took to move

with such stealth was depleting what fragile reserves Scot had left. She gave him that

same *you are going to be okay* look he himself had given wounded colleagues and

kidnap victims he had been tasked with rescuing over the years as a SEAL. In

response to her glance, Harvath simply flashed back a thumbs-up.

He knew there was probably a mechanism to trigger the closing of the secret door

above, but he didn't have any time to waste looking for it. A small hatchway led

from the bottom of the stairs into a deserted corridor. The whole scene was eerily

familiar.

He remembered visiting one of the last remaining Nazi bunkers in Berlin. Everything

he now saw was exactly the same —

vintage World War II. The walls, which had

been painted a utilitarian gray, were amazingly smooth considering they had been

carved right out of the rough stone of the mountain itself. With it located this far

below the surface, there was no doubt how solid the compound was. Even the

hatchway they had just passed through was made from thick sheets of steel capable

of withstanding an incredible blast. The bare bulbs that lined the walls and lit the

corridors were enclosed in rusty wire cages, which only added to the feeling of total

isolation that the Swiss bunker exuded at every turn.

“Where do we start?” whispered Claudia.

A series of three different hallways branched off from where they now stood.

Squares of lighter-colored paint with holes in the corners were on the wall at the

beginning of each hallway and probably

marked where evacuation plaques had once

been. It would have been extremely helpful to look at one of those right now and

ascertain the bunker's layout.

"Eenie, meenie, miney… We'll take this one."

"What about more sentries?"

"The way I figure it, Miner doesn't have a lot of men he can spare."

"Why not?"

“We killed two of his men in Lucerne and two more outside. That makes four.

There’s a finite number of men he would have risked bringing in on this assignment.

They would have to be men he could trust, men he had worked with before, and just

enough to do the job. More men means more people to split the money with and

more chances of word leaking out and getting caught.

“We’ll take this tunnel first.”

The entire structure looked deserted. The only noise came from the overhead

ventilation system, which creaked and moaned as it circulated air. Someone was

here, somewhere. It was just a matter of finding them.

Scot and Claudia passed room after room… all empty. There were barracks, a

mess, and even a communications room with its equipment covered by locked metal

panels. No Smoking signs were posted

every three feet, and the tunnel seemed to go

on forever. When they finally reached the end, they had the choice of going right or

left.

“What do you think?” whispered Claudia.

“I think someone around here doesn’t much care for smokers.”

“What?”

“Never mind. All the other tunnels turned left, so I say left.”

“I agree.”

Carefully, the two moved forward, checking each and every room for signs of life.

The fact that they had yet to see any gave them both the chills, though neither would

ever have admitted it.

They came upon another room. This one appeared to be an infirmary or operating

room of some sort, and it didn’t look deserted. It had been used recently. They

entered and swept the room with their

weapons, Scot on point and Claudia watching

his blind spots. She was quickly getting the hang of this.

Medical instruments, saline IV bags, empty vials, and surgical equipment were

scattered everywhere. A stainless steel table stood in the middle of the room. Scot

depressed the foot pedal of a nearby garbage can and found a mass of bloody

gauze, gloves, and paper wrappers.

“Well, now we know someone’s been here for sure,” said Scot, beckoning Claudia

to come see what he had found.

Claudia looked inside as Scot dug around the can with the muzzle of his H&K. She

never learned whether he was looking for something in particular or just out of

curiosity, because a stocky man with a military flattop strode into the room at that

very moment.

The man's first reaction was surprise. The last thing he expected to see standing in

his surgery room was an armed couple going through his trash.

In one smoothly executed move, Claudia let go of the assault rifle and drew the

Makarov from her waistband. She had only one shot and she used it perfectly. The

bullet entered the nurse's brain, just above his left eye. He was killed instantly and

dropped straight to the cold tile floor.

Harvath was on the man in a heartbeat, dragging him inside, where his body couldn't

be seen from the hall.

"Where'd you learn to shoot like that?" he asked.

"Growing up on a farm in Grindelwald, you find lots of ways to amuse yourself."

"I doubt you learned that kind of shooting on a farm. Help me get him all the way

inside."

Claudia was just as amazed as Scot at

her own deadly accuracy because, in fact, she

hadn’t aimed at the man’s head; she had been aiming at his chest. Either he moved

or she moved, or they both did just at the last second. It really didn’t matter. What

mattered was that the man had been neutralized before he could sound an alarm.

“We must be getting close. They wouldn’t have spread themselves too thin. There

are probably three or four rooms that

they're using. They will be as close together as

possible. Let's get moving before anyone comes looking for this guy."

Harvath checked the hallway, twice, before signaling to Claudia that it was safe to

come out. They continued in the same direction, hugging a flat wall with no further

doors. A group of crates were pushed up against the left-hand side, and they had to

swing out to the right to get around them.

As soon as they stepped into the middle of the hallway, a yell broke out behind

them. *"Eindringlinge! Eindringlinge!"* (Intruders!), followed by a spray of

automatic weapon fire.

Scot grabbed Claudia and threw her behind the crates for cover and then landed

right on top of her.

"I guess they know we're here," she said.

"You think so? Listen, I'll take care of the guy with the big mouth, and you make

sure nobody comes from the other direction."

Harvath flipped on the laser sight, swung the MP5 around the side of the crates, and

rolled out onto his stomach. The man at the other end of the corridor was on full

auto, and the bullets sent pieces of gray-painted rock everywhere. Despite how close

the shots were falling, Harvath focused his concentration, gently squeezed the

trigger, and fired. The spray from the other end of the corridor came to an

abrupt

halt, and the man fell to the floor, dead.

That's one down, he thought, *but how many more to go?*

"Scot, I think you'd better get back here," said Claudia, immediately answering his

question.

He rolled behind the crates and began hearing what Claudia had heard — footsteps,

and lots of them, coming fast from the opposite direction. Claudia had the

assault

rifle ready to go. When the first of the men appeared around the corner, she let loose

with a deafening round of fire. Everyone's weapons to this point had been silenced,

so the unsilenced SG551 Swiss SWAT assault rifle sounded like a rapidly booming

cannon. The men retreated back around the corner.

"Now's our chance. Let's go."

Harvath jumped up and pushed Claudia around the crates, in the direction they had

originally come. Scot ran as best he could backward, guarding their six, as Claudia

ran as fast as her legs would carry her forward. They came upon and passed right

through the T intersection where they had been five minutes ago. Now they were

running down the corridor to the right, opposite of all the other tunnels.

Only sporadic doors were visible along this passageway, and they were all locked.

This hallway was carved much rougher than the others and seemed to be some sort

of access or service tunnel. Eventually, it began to curve back around to the left.

Scot and Claudia kept running.

Fifty meters later, the tunnel opened up onto a large cargo bay complete with

overhead winches. Huge pallets stacked with food and bottled water sat in the

middle of the otherwise empty room. Scot walked over to examine the pallets.

“Evian,” he said.

“There’s also French wine and Italian pastas,” said Claudia.

“Somebody’s got good taste.”

“But, how’d they get it in here?”

“That way,” said Scot, pointing to a set of railway tracks on the far side of the bay

that led into a dark tunnel. “I’ll bet you a year’s worth of water that those tracks link

up somehow with the cogwheel railway."

At the far end of the pallets was a smaller pallet covered with a green canvas tarp.

Scot walked over to it and drew it back. Underneath were crates of ammunition and

wooden boxes filled with various weapons. The look on Claudia's face said it all as

she stepped closer.

"Let me guess," said Harvath. "Your stolen weapons."

“Yes. I don’t know why I’m going to say this, but I can’t believe it.”

“Well, that takes care of everything on your Christmas list. Now for mine. Where’s

that U.S. president I asked for?”

From behind the pallet closest to Claudia, the groundsman sprang up and placed the

point of his pistol against her temple. “That is not part of the tour, I’m afraid,” he

said.

Harvath's eyes bored into the man, and he tightened the grip on his MP5.

"I suggest you drop your weapons," said the groundsman.

Claudia hesitated until he grabbed her left arm and gave it a good, strong jerk. She let

her assault rifle clatter to the floor.

Scot also hesitated, but then set the H&K down gently.

"Very good," the groundsman said, as he ran his hands along Claudia's body. He

found her holster and removed the SIG-

Sauer. “And what about you?” said the

killer, indicating he was speaking to Harvath. “You American cowboys never only

have one weapon. I should expect at least five or six, no? Let’s go. Out with the rest

of them!” He kept a firm grip on Claudia’s arm as he pointed his pistol at Scot to

emphasize the seriousness of his point.

“You know,” began Harvath, “I really hate it when people point things at me. It

doesn’t matter whether it’s guns, knives, or… now, Claudia!”

Harvath dove for the deck on the off chance an involuntary spasm might cause the

pistol the killer had trained on him to go off. Claudia clumsily drove the blade of her

knife deep into the side of her captor’s throat and stepped back. He clutched

ineffectively at the blade, falling to his knees in agony. As the blood gushed from his

neck, all that was visible of the knife

was the bone handle.

Claudia rushed to Scot, who pulled her into his arms. “You okay?” he asked.

“I think so.”

“Not bad, but remind me to teach you sometime the correct way to use one of those

things.”

Claudia stared at the man, who had killed so many in his lifetime, lying on the floor

dying. “My grandfather gave me that knife. I never climbed without it.”

Scot was about to say that he liked Claudia's grandfather more and more with each

passing minute, but he didn't get the chance. A group of men emerged from the

access tunnel and began shooting.

Claudia tried to reach for her assault rifle, but Scot pulled her away.

"There's no time. Let's move!" he yelled, grabbing her hand and running toward the

opposite end of the cargo bay. The pallets provided some cover at first, but

the

bullets got closer and closer as they broke into the open and ran for the nearest

hallway.

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Between the two of them, the only weapon they had left was Scot's Beretta. Out of

habit, he examined the clip and drew back the slide to check the chamber. He had

sixteen shots, semiautomatic. Not much

against a group of men carrying submachine

guns, but it was better than nothing. He and Claudia kept running.

They came to another intersection, and before they knew what was happening, two

men with H&Ks appeared from around a corner. Scot dropped to one knee, and

Claudia hid behind him. He fired three shots at each man, taking them both down in

a roar of gunfire that echoed throughout the tunnel. Scot and Claudia were

deafened

by the blasts from the Beretta and couldn’t hear the men from the cargo bay coming

down the hall behind them, but Scot sensed it.

He whirled, and managed to keep Claudia protected as he fired again from his

crouched position. The bullets didn’t find their targets as quickly this time, and he

pulled the trigger repeatedly until, finally, one man fell and then another.

Scot yanked

Claudia to her feet and pushed her down the corridor. They came to another

intersection.

“Which way?” she yelled.

Scot pointed left and they ran. Thirty meters later they hit another intersection. Scot

glanced quickly behind them and motioned for Claudia to go right. They did, and

Claudia stopped dead in her tracks.

She wasn't sure what she noticed first, the man or the smell. Fifteen feet in front of

them was a man dressed in desert fatigues with an Arabian-style headdress. Only his

eyes were visible, but even then, they were shaded by the fabric. In his right hand, he

held a model 61 Skorpion machine pistol, and it was pointed right at them.

Scot, who was right behind Claudia and had almost bumped into her when she

stopped so suddenly, reached his left

hand out for her waistband, knowing the man

in front of them couldn't see it.

"Drop your pistol on the floor!" Scot yelled.

Harvath hoped Claudia understood what he was going to do, or they were both dead

for sure. He gave her waistband the first tug as if to say, *one*. Then came another

tug, *two*. Claudia nodded her head ever so slightly as if to say she understood, and

on tug three she let her legs go limp, and the two of them dropped.

Scot's first shot went off just as he was hitting the floor and missed the man's head

by a fraction of a centimeter. His next shot was dead-on, right between the eyes, and

the man went down. Scot's pistol was empty, and he let it fall where he lay.

The man had been sitting at a small wooden desk across the hall from a large metal

door. On the desk was a ring of keys.

Harvath stepped over the man to grab the

keys and almost had to pinch his nose from the stench of body odor. *Fucking*

Middle Easterners. Why hadn't some of them ever heard of showers?

Scot had been convinced that neither Abu Nidal, nor his FRC was involved with this

whole mess, but now it looked as though he might have been wrong. Or had he?

Harvath reached down and yanked off the headdress. Underneath was the head of a

man with blue eyes and blond hair who looked more Swiss than Heidi of the

mountains herself. Scot glanced at Claudia, whose face was registering the same

bewilderment as his own. *Why pose as a Middle Easterner? What's the point?*

With the keys in his hand, Scot motioned to Claudia to pick up the Skorpion.

"Cover me," he said.

Claudia nodded and looked both ways up and down the hallway.

Approaching the door, he noticed a shelf

had been built directly to the left and on it

sat a box. Wires ran from the box up the wall and above the door. *Booby trap?*

Very gently, Harvath opened the box and looked inside. What he saw made

absolutely no sense at all — a tape recorder. He pushed the *play* button and he

heard a faint wailing sound coming from the unit's built-in speaker. It was a Muslim

call to worship. Even more bizarre.

Above the door, was another box with some sort of fan unit pointing toward

whatever lay on the other side. Scot dragged the creaky wooden desk chair around

the body and beneath the box so he could check out this other mysterious item.

Once again, he eased off the lid. Immediately he was sorry. It was like being

punched in the face. The stench was horrible. There was only one thing in the world

that smelled like that — camel shit.

The two boxes were not booby traps. They were meant to annoy the hell out of

whoever was on the other side of that door, and Scot was finally sure of one thing.

He knew exactly whom he'd find inside.

He gave the door a last once-over and also checked beneath the desk for any hidden

wiring or switches. There were none. Claudia stood ready with the machine pistol as

Scot found the correct key and turned it in the lock.

As the door opened, Harvath was greeted with a hot gust of air and the terrible smell

of camel feces. The temperature had to be at least thirty degrees higher than in the

hallway. The room was dark, and it took his eyes a moment to adjust. The walls had

been treated to look like sandstone, the floor was covered with straw, and there,

sitting in the corner, his hand in a dirty bandage, was the president.

He was dressed in the simple robes

Harvath had seen on so many Arab peasants

during missions in the Mideast. The same type of robes the members of operation

Rapid Return had been wearing when they were all killed. The light from the open

door hurt the president's eyes, and Scot maneuvered himself in front of it to help

shield the glare.

"What do you want? If you've got my food, then leave it. If you're going to take

another finger, then get it over with!" said the president. His voice reflected how

drained he was.

"Nobody's going to hurt you anymore, Mr. President," said Scot.

Rutledge lifted his hand to his forehead and tried to peer into the light. "Who is it?

Who's there?" he asked feebly, too forlorn to even hope that a rescue had been

achieved.

“It’s Secret Service Agent Harvath, sir. You’re going home.”

“I seriously doubt that,” said a voice as Claudia was struck in the back of the head

and thrown in a heap across the floor, landing next to the president.

Scot spun just in time to see Gerhard Miner bring the machine pistol down hard

across the top of his head.

Harvath’s knees buckled and gave out. He fell to the ground and before he could

catch his breath, Miner kicked him hard in the jaw, sending him reeling backward.

“Do you know how many of my men you have killed? Do you have any idea what an

incredible inconvenience you have been?”

While he ranted, Miner kicked Harvath repeatedly in the ribs. “Some of the finest

men I assembled for this mission are dead. I worked tirelessly, thinking of

everything, and then you come along and

ruin it all."

The blows fell again and again. Scot was unable to breathe. The man was going to

kill him, and then Claudia, even Rutledge. Scot was seeing stars, the blow to his

head had been incredibly painful. He needed to do something now, or it would be

too late.

As Miner drew his foot back and came forward for the next kick, Scot was ready

for him and grabbed at his ankle in mid-strike.

“Do you honestly think I am that stupid, Agent Harvath?” said Miner, who’d

anticipated the move, avoided it, and now pointed the Skorpion right at him. “You

seem to have more lives than a cat, yet this is how it is going to end for you, and

your president will be able to watch you fail him yet again. I would like to say it has

been nice knowing you, but it hasn’t. As I said last time, I hope never to see you

again. Now I will make sure that happens."

Harvath started laughing.

"What's so funny, Agent Harvath?"

"Ah, Gerry. If you only knew how much I hate having things pointed at me."

Miner's smug look of satisfaction was quickly replaced by fear as he was barreled

sideways into the wall of the makeshift cell. Claudia had taken advantage of the fact

that Miner was distracted and thought

her unconscious to surprise him. He fell to the

floor with the machine pistol in his hand, rolled, and struck Claudia full across the

face. Once again, she fell in a heap along the floor, and this time Harvath knew she

wasn't faking.

Without wasting a moment more, Harvath fought back his dizziness to pounce on

Miner. As Scot fought to subdue him, Miner struck him repeatedly with the gun.

Harvath returned the favor with a knee to Miner's groin, an elbow to his face, and an

uppercut to his jaw. Harvath hammered at the man's shoulder and reached for the

hand that held the gun, which was once again swinging dangerously toward him.

Scot caught Miner by the wrist and drove it with incredible force into the area where

the wall met the floor. He heard a snap as Miner let out a scream and his finger

squeezed the trigger. The twenty-round magazine emptied in the blink of an eye.

Bullets showered the room. Scot could only pray that neither Claudia nor the

president had been hit. As he continued his assault Miner began to weaken, and Scot

knew he had hurt him… badly.

He pounded the man relentlessly, the blows falling faster and with more ferocity. He

pounded him for Agents Maxwell and Ahern and Houchins. He pounded him for the

betrayal he had suffered at the hands of William Shaw and for the lives of his

friend

Natalie Sperando and her friend André Martin. He pounded Gerhard Miner for all of

the innocent lives that had been lost, especially that of his best friend, Sam Harper.

Miner was going to die, and Harvath was going to send him to hell an on express

train, all expenses paid.

Scot’s hands were covered in blood. He heard bone shatter as he landed his blows.

His rage, guilt, and remorse drove him on like a madman. In the middle of it all,

something called out to him, urged him back toward the shores of sanity. There was

a hand on his shoulder, the president's. He was speaking to him.

"Agent Harvath, that's enough," he rasped. "We need him alive. Come on now. He

can't hurt us anymore. Let up on him."

The president was right. Scot slowly rolled off Miner and looked at the badly beaten

body lying before him. He couldn't tell if the man was breathing or not, and frankly,

he didn't care.

The president had begun to regain his equilibrium. Despite his haggard appearance,

some of the stately confidence was back in his eyes.

"Are you okay, Mr. President? Can you make it on your own?"

"I'll be okay. Let's get her up."

To Scot's relief, Claudia was coming

around. Her lip was split and bleeding, but at

least she was responding. He put his arm around Claudia's waist and struggled with

her to the door. He was beyond the point of exhaustion. *We're almost there. Don't*

give up, he told himself. *Don't give up.*

"Mr. President," said Scot, motioning toward Miner, "unless you've got an idea on

how to get him out of here, we're going to have to leave him. My mission is your

safe evac, period."

"You called the man Gerry. Do you know who he is?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. President. He is a high-ranking member of Swiss intelligence."

"Swiss intelligence? What's he doing over here in the middle of the godforsaken

desert?"

"Actually, sir. You are in a mountain in Switzerland."

"Switzerland?"

“Yes, sir. For some reason — I don’t know why — they wanted you to believe you

were being held by a Mideast terrorist group.”

“Fine. We’re in Switzerland; we’ll let the Swiss handle him. Let’s get out of here.”

“Yes, sir!”

Scot steered Claudia out the door and to the right. The president followed behind.

Harvath had no idea if any of Miner’s men would be in front of them, but he knew

they had to chance it. Going back the way they came didn't seem like the best idea.

Not even five feet down the hallway, they discovered the direction Scot had chosen

wasn't such a hot idea either.

A tall man, with the build of a linebacker, stood blocking their way with a

submachine gun. Unlike Miner's men, he was dressed in street clothes. The minute

he spoke, Harvath knew exactly who he

was.

“No gun, eh? What a shame.”

It was the hired killer who had been after him since D.C.

“You know what?” the man continued. “You are the biggest pain in the fucking ass I

have ever encountered. I’m going to charge double for you and waste your girlfriend

for free. Good men, talented men, died trying to nail you, and I guess that makes me

the best because I finally got you." The hit man raised his gun for a better firing

angle. "I took two rounds from you in D.C., and my ribs are so fucked up, I can

hardly breathe. If I'd had a clean shot, I would have nailed your ass before you led

me up this godforsaken mountain. You know, you actually lost me for a bit. You

almost got away. While you were climbing up the side, I took the easy way up and

eventually saw you going into the church. That's when I knew I had you.

It’s been

fun, but now it’s time to meet your maker!”

The assassin’s finger had just begun to apply pressure to the trigger when his head

exploded. His lifeless body lurched toward the wall and then fell to the ground.

Standing behind him was his killer. He was quickly joined by a group of similarly

dressed figures in black Nomex fatigues with goggles and black balaclavas. *My*

God,

how many men does Miner have? Harvath thought desperately.

He had no idea what to do. His mind raced for options. He knew he had to protect

the president at all costs, but what could he do against a group of six heavily armed

men when he had nothing? He and Claudia had almost made it. Almost.

The man who had killed the assassin reached across his weapon and pulled a piece

of black material from his arm. Underneath was a red, white, and blue flag along with

the symbol for the army's elite Special Forces. He then removed his balaclava,

revealing the face of Dr. Skip Trawick.

Using his favorite mock Scottish accent, the first words out of his mouth were,

"Surprise, surprise."

"You guys sure took your time," deadpanned Harvath.

"We were on our way for a pint and heard ya needed a wee bitta help," said

Trawick

still in character. “Where’s the president?”

“Right here,” he said as Claudia and Scot parted to let him pass.

Trawick dropped the accent immediately and identified himself.

“Glad to see you. Hell, I’m glad to see all of you. Is the area secure?” asked the

president.

“Yes, sir. It is now.”

“Thank God you got here in time.”

“If you don’t mind, sir, I would like to check you out before we evac.”

“Absolutely not. First you check on the young lady, and next it’s Agent Harvath.

Then I want your men to—”

“I’m sorry, sir, but these are not my men. I just happened to be first down the hall

and got a clean shot. This is a JSOC op. These men are from SEAL Team Two.”

As the men started removing their balaclavas, Scot recognized almost every one of

them. Their commander shot Harvath a

thumbs-up and several others followed suit.

It was finally over.

80

Geneva, Switzerland — two days later

Scot Harvath awoke slowly. The room took a few moments to come into focus.

Looking down at his arm, he saw that he was on an IV. The sunshine streaming in

through the window bothered his eyes. A shadowy figure loomed at the edge of his

bed.

“How ya feeling, buddy?” a voice said.

Scot recognized the voice, but it took him a few moments to focus in and clearly see

the face.

“Dr. John Paulos. Well, I’ll be. This is getting to be like old home week around

here,” said Scot, struggling to sit up. John helped him adjust the bed.

“Yeah, the kid told me he found you,” said John.

“Who, young Dr. T? Skip knows better than to share classified information. I’m

sure this mission has big red stamps all over it.”

“He only told me he was part of the team that picked you guys up. He wouldn’t say

anything he’s not supposed to.”

“Well, why don’t you tell me what the hell you’re doing here?”

“First, tell me what you remember.”

Scot closed his eyes and thought back over what had happened and what he’d be

able to tell without revealing too much. "You're doing a diagnostic and checking my

memory, right?"

"Yeah, that's all I'm doing. I've been cleared to a certain extent, but why don't we

start from when Skip gathered you all up."

"Is that how he's putting it? He gathered us all up?"

"The kid's a cowboy. You know how those guys from Texas are."

“Okay, so Skip gathered us up. We took the cogwheel to Alpnachstad, where a

couple of jets were waiting to bring us to Geneva. I assume the president is still

here?”

“Nope, they brought him in for the complete once-over and then zipped him back to

D.C. They want to do the hand surgery back there. You’ve made a lot of people

very happy and very proud of you.”

“Thanks, John, but what the hell are you doing here? Last time I saw you, you

were

back in Park City."

"There was a lot of concern about what condition the president might be in, if and

when they found him. You know about the finger?"

Scot nodded his head. The fact that they'd done that to the president still made him

sick.

"Well," continued his friend John, "there were big-time fears that these guys might

go even further and that he might be in pretty bad shape once they found him."

"So, they had the world's greatest orthopedic surgeon standing by, right?"

"I don't know about the greatest. One of the top ten, how about that?"

"Plus, you already had security clearance, so that didn't hurt. But if they were flying

Skip over, why not let him do it?"

"Like I said, the kid's a cowboy. He's good, but don't forget who discovered him.

He still has a way to go before he can take the old man."

"I don't doubt it," Scot said, chuckling. "What confuses me, though, is how you all

knew the president would be here in Switzerland."

"That is information that I am not on a need-to-know basis on. You'd have to ask

your buddy Lawlor at the FBI; he put this thing together from what I hear."

"So if the president's gone, why are you still hanging around?"

“Scot, just because you’re not on the ski team and don’t live in Park City anymore

doesn’t mean I don’t still care about you.”

“You’ve gotten friendly with one of the nurses, haven’t you?”

“Maybe.”

“John, some things never change.”

“As far as you’re concerned, you were suffering from exhaustion and got beat up

pretty good. They’ll want to run some more tests here and at home, but I think

you'll make it."

"Thanks."

"Don't mention it. Is there anything I can get for you?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact."

"Whoops, I forgot. I left something outside. Can you hold that thought for a

second?"

"I guess," said Scot, who watched as John jogged out of the room.

A minute later he heard the door open and John say, "Here we are." He entered

pushing Claudia in a wheelchair. Her faced was bruised, and Scot could see that she

had received some stitches to her swollen lip, but she was as beautiful as ever.

Scot didn't even hear John say, "I'll leave you two alone," as he graciously slid out

of the room.

She stood and walked to the side of Scot's bed. Wordlessly, she reached out and

took his hand. Scot pulled her to him,

and as carefully as he could, so as not to hurt

her injured lip, he kissed her. Claudia wrapped her arms around him, holding him

tightly. They both ignored their pain, happy it was all over and that they were

together.

81

Lake Geneva, Wisconsin — 04:30, next day

Two pairs of white Mercury Villager minivans pulled into the driveways of

the

houses bordering Donald Fawcett's palatial estate. A fifth van waited out on Snake

Drive, ready to apprehend any vehicles that might try to escape. At precisely the

same moment, a Boston Whaler with quieted outboards was waiting for the *go* code

to beach in front of Fawcett's home and assault the house from the lawn.

Gary Lawlor watched the seconds tick by on his watch. The team of heavily armed

FBI HRT and support agents had practiced the raid over and over again until Lawlor

was confident they could do it in their sleep. Only then did he okay the actual

assault. Based on what he had gleaned about Donald Fawcett and his involvement

with the president's kidnapping, he didn't expect him to come willingly.

Lawlor had been provided with the details of a Swiss intelligence officer's

confession, given from his hospital bed in Geneva. Despite the Chinese wall that

served to hide who took the confession and how it was obtained, Lawlor knew it

had been done by the CIA. Supposedly, Gerhard Miner had willingly provided the

confession and named names in exchange for a reduction in the charges. Whether

certain methods had been used to extract the confession was anybody's guess, but

they probably had.

Despite Lawlor's leads and a quickly closing net on Donald Fawcett, the

White

House wanted a quick end to the situation and had agreed to the deal. Gerhard Miner

would probably show up somewhere with a bullet in the back of his head within a

month anyway. Just as long as whoever did it wasn't dumb enough to use one that

said, "Made in the U.S.A."

The information delivered to Lawlor also came with a special FYEO — For Your

Eyes Only. The reason Gerhard Miner was in the hospital was because Scot Harvath

had beaten the shit out of him, almost killed him with his bare hands. Lawlor

couldn't help but smile.

He looked once again at his watch. Thirty seconds. He told his teams to stand by.

"Five… four… three… two… one. Go!"

Fifty-five agents moved in from their assigned positions. All of the utilities were cut,

and the security system disabled. Within a minute, agents had breached the front

doors and were sweeping the house. There was no sign of Fawcett.

A call came over the radio that agents clearing the study had found two bodies.

Lawlor got to their position as soon as he could. What he saw turned his stomach,

even after all these years. The bodies of two men, shot execution style, lay in a pool

of congealing blood on the hardwood floor. Retrieving their wallets and

seeing the

names on their IDs made him even sicker. The bodies appeared to be those of

Senators Russell Rolander and David Snyder.

After a thorough search of the property, Donald Fawcett was still nowhere to be

found.

82

Washington, D.C. — one week later

After five days in the Swiss hospital,

Harvath was flown home to the United States,

ostensibly to recuperate and undergo further tests. In reality, a whole host of people

including the Justice Department, the CIA, the FBI, and the Secret Service wanted

him back for debriefing. After a while, the questions grew to be monotonous and

repetitive, but it was all part of the job. Director Jameson had an authorized agent

transcribe Scot’s debriefing and only

asked him to read it over and sign it if it was

correct. Mercifully, Scot had no typing to do.

He attended a private ceremony at the White House after the funeral of the vice

president. The story in the press was that the cause of death had been injuries

suffered in a freak accident at home, while in reality Marshfield had finally cracked

under the pressure of what he had done. Knowing he would soon be caught, he'd

realized he couldn't face the music and took his own life.

Harvath was shown into the Oval Office and was soon joined by the president, who

was accompanied by the attorney general, Gary Lawlor, and Secret Service director

Jameson. Scot stood as they entered.

"Here is the man I've been waiting to see," said the president as he strode across the

blue carpeting.

Seeing the president's right arm in a sling, Harvath immediately offered his left hand.

The president grasped it warmly.

"I cannot thank you enough," the president said. "Once the full story of what you

went through was relayed to me, I couldn't believe it. You risked everything."

"That's my job, sir," said Harvath.

"Well, I don't know how to repay you."

"It's not necessary, sir."

“Sir, if I may interrupt?” broke in the attorney general.

“Of course.”

“I know your time is limited, and I also know you requested that this meeting with

Agent Harvath function as a wrap-up.”

“A wrap-up?” asked Scot.

Director Jameson cleared his throat. “Kind of a final debriefing. We know the overall

facts are a bit fuzzy for you, and the president felt you had earned the right to

the full

story.”

“I see,” said Scot.

“Why don’t we all take a seat?” said the president. The guests divided themselves

among the couches and assembled chairs.

“Since Deputy Director Lawlor was responsible for such a large part of the

investigation,” said the attorney general, “I think he should be the one to fill you in.

Agent Lawlor?”

“Thank you, Attorney General. Agent Harvath… Scot. On behalf of all of us, I

would like to apologize for the way in which we treated you,” Lawlor said.

“That’s not necessary,” said Scot.

“No,” continued Lawlor, “it is. Your instincts were right on the money every step of

the way. It’s because of you that we have the president back in one piece.”

“Well, maybe not exactly one piece,” the president said, holding up his sling.

Everyone in the room laughed politely. Lawlor waited for the laughter to die down

before continuing.

“To a certain degree, the real linchpin was the wine invoice you sent me. The Vin De

Constance that Miner had cellared at the Hotel des Balances was actually paid for by

Donald Fawcett.”

“The industrialist?” Scot was amazed. Yet another twist. “What does he have to do

with all of this?”

“The president had put together — and you will excuse me for saying so, sir — a

rather shaky coalition to pass a new piece of legislation. It is an alternative-energy bill

that would cut our dependence upon fossil fuels dramatically over the next twenty

years. Do you know how Fawcett Industries makes most of their money?”

“Lemme guess. It has something to do with fossil fuels?” asked Scot.

“Right, their mining, extraction, refinement, distribution, and sale, to be exact. His

commercial empire is based on it. Even passage of part of the president’s bill would

have cost him hundreds of millions of dollars. If the act passed in full, it would cost

billions.”

The president broke in. “There were strong lobbying efforts for and against this bill.

There were lots of jobs and related

issues at stake. It's no secret that I am not

seeking another term. This bill was going to be my legacy, and I was bound and

determined to get it passed. As Deputy Director Lawlor noted — and no offense

taken, by the way — the coalition of votes I had established was shaky at best.

Without me there to cajole and handhold, the whole thing would have fallen apart."

"So — if I may?" asked Scot.

“Certainly,” replied the president.

“Fawcett’s goal was to get you out of the picture long enough to have the bill stall

and fall apart?”

“The deputy director is the best one to fill in all the details.”

“Thank you, Mr. President. Apparently, that was the plan,” said Lawlor. “But it went

bad. I’ll remind you, Scot, that nothing we talk about can ever leave this room.”

“Yes, sir. I understand completely.”

“Star Gazer turned out to be the vice president.”

“Vice President Marshfield?” Scot was sickened by it, but not completely surprised.

“Yes. Unfortunately, the vice president, being of weak character, was drawn into this

mess along with Senators Snyder and Rolander.”

“What was in it for them?”

“It was the same across the board for all of them — money. Rolander and Fawcett

had been pals since their college days, and I think Rolander had always been envious

of Fawcett's wealth. Rolander got in his pocket early on, and then at some point in

this process, when and how we may never know, he brought Snyder in. They wooed

Vice President Marshfield with promises of a huge campaign war chest filled with

untraceable contributions."

"And," said Scot, "with the president not

running for reelection next year, this

scenario gave Marshfield a chance to get out in front of the cameras and show

American voters how he could operate in a tough situation."

"That's right. The thing he wasn't expecting was for the situation to get tougher.

From what we've been able to uncover, the deal had been that the kidnappers would

hold on to the president long enough for the bill to collapse, and then he would be

sent home."

"So the FRC angle was just a front all along, wasn't it?"

"Exactly. The kidnappers knew Marshfield would never authorize the release of the

Disneyland bombers, nor would he put pressure on any other countries like Egypt to

release any funds or other prisoners the kidnappers might ask for. It was all one big

ruse."

“Just like the president’s cell in Switzerland. When he was returned home and

debriefed, everything he would describe would be consistent with having been

kidnapped by the Fatah. Right down to the lousy smells, desert heat, and calls to

worship.”

“That was the plan, but then the kidnappers got greedy. They already had the

president, why not demand more money? Fawcett didn’t care what happened, so he

wasn't going to pay up. He'd already paid them enough and even if they did kill the

president, Marshfield would take his place and Fawcett would own the new

president lock, stock, and two smoking barrels. When the kidnappers turned their

sights on Marshfield for more money, that's when he began to fall apart."

"How did Bill Shaw fit into all of this?"

"Marshfield recruited him. Shaw had been involved in a couple of small things he

shouldn't have been. He was helping to rig security contracts for old friends, and

when Senator Snyder gave this information to the vice president, it was pretty easy

bringing Shaw on board. He was offered money and a good chance at the

directorship of the Secret Service once Marshfield took office."

"But you didn't put all this together from the wine invoice, did you?" asked Harvath.

"No. A lot of this was the result of Miner's and Shaw's confessions. The

wine

invoice led us to Fawcett, which led us to the refinery fire in Magna, Utah, just

outside of Salt Lake. When we realized the president had been kidnapped, we

checked and triple-checked every flight that left the Salt Lake area. There had been a

MediJet flight supposedly repatriating one of Fawcett's British chemists terribly

burned in the fire back home to England to die. The problem was, the deeper we

looked into it the harder the chemist was to find. He was a ghost. He never existed.

“We got ahold of the plane and had our forensics people go over it for everything.

The MediJet people said that because of an oxygen tent that was needed to transport

the terribly burned patient, the patient used his own stretcher. We found small pieces

of mud that must have been on the wheels of the stretcher that matched the mud

from the farm where the Mormon couple had been murdered."

Scot remembered how badly Lawlor had chewed him out at that farm and let it pass.

That was behind them now. "So, the farm *was* a staging ground and they loaded the

president into an ambulance there and simulated the burns before leaving on the

MediJet flight?"

"Yes, and all of this has been confirmed in Gerhard Miner's confession."

“That’s why I needed you to let him live, Scot,” said the president. “We needed to

know who was behind all this.”

“So, what now? I understand Fawcett is still at large,” said Scot.

“With his kind of money, it’s easy to disappear,” said Lawlor, “but we’ll find him.

We already have a couple of leads. By the way, I have a message for you from my

boss, FBI director Sorce.”

Scot’s eyebrows raised.

“He was needed at the office and was sorry he couldn’t be here to give it to you in

person. You can imagine how busy all of us still are.”

“Of course I can.”

“Director Sorce wanted me to tell you how proud he is of you. He says you are a

credit to the Secret Service and to your country.”

“Hear, hear,” said Director Jameson.

“Secondly, he knew the tremendous

burden you felt losing so many men. He wants

you to know his thoughts are with you."

"That's very kind of him. Please tell him I said thank you."

"But, that's not all."

"No?"

"No. He is very aware of how William Shaw betrayed you and the rest of the Secret

Service. He wants you to know that Shaw will be standing trial and that he apparently

‘slipped’ several times as agents took him into custody. The director knew you

would appreciate this last bit of information.”

Scot looked at the president and the attorney general, who acted as if they didn’t

comprehend the reference, and then let a small smile creep across his lips. “Thank

you.”

“You’re welcome,” said Lawlor. “So, that’s about it. Any questions?”

“I have one for the president.”

“Go ahead,” he said.

“How’s Amanda?”

“She’s wonderful and is mending quite well. That’s another thanks I owe you. You

saved my daughter’s life.”

“I’m just glad she’s going to be okay.”

“If you have time after this meeting, she’s recuperating in the residence and would

love to see you.”

“That would be nice. I’ll make sure I stop by.”

“Director Jameson, I believe you have something else to say?” said the president.

“Yes, sir. Scot, the Secret Service is extremely proud of you. We know what has

happened over the last almost two weeks has not been easy for you at all. It also

goes without saying that you have been cleared of all allegations of wrongdoing, and

we apologize that you were ever placed in this situation to begin with. We know

you'll probably need a little more time off for R and R, but the president has

authorized me to offer you the position of chief of White House Security. We have a

lot of rebuilding to do, and none of us can think of a better man to do it."

"I don't know what to say."

"Say *yes,*" said Lawlor, and the room broke out in another polite round of laughter.

“Yes, I’ll take it.”

Everyone in the room stood and applauded, and Scot rose to shake their hands.

“Before you go,” said the president as a hush fell over the room, “I would like to ask

you, Agent Harvath, if there’s anything else I can do. You saved my life and my

daughter’s. I’ve given you a new job, but that’s hardly enough. If there’s anything

else I can do for you, say the word and it’s yours.”

“Well, Mr. President, there is one thing.”

Epilogue

Caspian Sea — one month later

"Dahling, if you don't hurry, you will miss sunset," drawled the beautiful blonde

woman in her thick Russian accent. Her tan body was a stark contrast to the white

cotton hammock in which she lay. Their sleek sailing yacht sat peacefully at anchor

off the Russian coast, with only an occasional ripple across the warm, dark

water to

disturb yet another otherwise perfect day. "*Dahling*, are you bringing drinks?" she

said in that voice that had captivated him when he first met her in Minsk.

"*Da*. A little more tequila and I'm going to show you the best margarita you've ever

had. Even the fucking Mexicans don't make 'em this good," shouted a man's voice

from below deck.

“Well, hurry. Light is going!”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Keep your perestroikas on. If you knew how to do anything else

but lie around, I’d be up there enjoying it instead of down here!”

From the quiet water, eight wet-suited men with rebreathers broke the surface. Four

swam forward to the bow of the vessel, while the remaining men boarded from the

stern.

With his MP5 at the ready, Scot Harvath crept quietly into the bowels of the yacht

and searched for his target. As he rounded on the galley, he could hear the sound of

a blender working on crushed ice.

Ten feet away, his target was dressed in madras Bermudas and a white linen shirt.

Harvath conspicuously cleared his throat, and Donald Fawcett spun to see the MP5

pointed right at his forehead.

“Who the fuck are you? What do you want on my boat? I paid some pretty big

people a lot of money for protection. If you don’t want to have the Russian Mafia

crawling up your ass, I suggest you turn around and get off my yacht immediately,”

said Fawcett, incredulous even in the face of death.

“I’m operating on a little higher authority than the Russian Mob,” said Harvath.

Fawcett hadn’t expected to hear English. Whoever this was, he was American,

and

that could mean only one thing.

“I have a special delivery for you from the president,” Harvath continued. He

lowered his weapon, took aim, and shot the finger of Fawcett’s right hand that still

rested on the blender’s *pulse* button. The blender exploded, sending margarita mix

all over the galley as Fawcett reeled back in pain. He staggered and moved backward

toward a row of drawers. Shock and

disbelief was written across his face as he

clutched his bleeding hand.

“You have no authority here. These are Russian waters,” cried Fawcett. “There is no

extradition deal here. You can’t just come and take me.”

Fawcett let go of his bleeding hand and reached for something behind him.

“You see, that’s where we have a problem due to lack of communication. I didn’t

come to take you back," said Harvath. He saw the fear in Fawcett's eyes quickly

turn to hate as he pulled a gun from behind his back and pointed it at Harvath.

Reflexively, Scot squeezed the trigger and sent a volley of bullets into Fawcett's

head.

Before the lifeless body had slid to the floor, Scot engaged the throat mike beneath

his wet suit and spoke the four words he

knew the president, Gary Lawlor, and

everyone else watching and listening in the White House situation room were waiting

to hear. “Tango down. Mission accomplished.”

He then disengaged the microphone and said into the quiet space, “That was for

you, Sam. I’ll miss you.”

Harvath looked at his watch and figured he would be able to make the morning flight

to Zurich. He knew Claudia would be

more than happy to pick him up. It was finally

time for that vacation.

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Seven years ago, my good friend Jill Thevenin and her family opened their small flat

to me in Paris and let me live with them while I started work on my first thriller. I

wrote about three or four chapters of a promising novel (that I may still finish and

have published) before I decided writing was too solitary a life for me. I shelved the

manuscript and shipped my “slab” top back home to the States so I could travel

“lite” throughout Europe. To be honest, writing a book was one of the most difficult

challenges I had ever faced.

I eventually made it back to the Greek island of Paros, where I had lived and worked

two summers before. I was having a good old time until I met someone, not

far in

age from me, who was writing a book of his own. The encounter made me realize

how deeply I wanted to be a writer. So, what did I do? Did I grab pen and paper and

get back to it? Nope. I had another idea. The writing could continue to wait. I

wanted to create my own television travel series. Whether that was avoidance

behavior or not, I don’t know.

In a five-year odyssey that saw me

bloodied, battered, and bruised, I made my

television dream a reality. *Traveling Lite* now numbers twenty-three episodes and is

seen across more than eighty-five percent of the United States, as well as in Canada,

Europe, South America, Asia, and the Middle East.

Even though that was a wonderful feeling of accomplishment, I still felt something

was missing. That something was

writing. I knew it was the one thing I would regret

on my deathbed not having done. So, with my wife spouting Arnold

Schwarzenegger's words of advice to his author-spouse, "Don't talk about it, do

it!" I plunged into what I have always wanted to do since I was a child — write

books.

That being said, I want to thank the people who have shown me that an author's life

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