

CHAPTER

1

Washington, DC

Late June

MATTHEW BUTLER COCKED HIS HEAD to one side, considering the big-boned blonde in front of him. She was handcuffed and shackled to a heavy oak chair bolted into the concrete floor beneath bright fluorescent lights.

If the woman was anxious about her predicament, she wasn't showing it in the least. She was as chill as the yoga outfit she wore. No sweat on her pale brow. Beneath her warm-up hoodie, her chest rose and fell calmly, each breath measured. Her shoulders were relaxed. Even her eyes looked soft.

Butler adjusted the strap of his shoulder holster.

"I know they've trained you for this sort of thing," he said in a voice with the slightest of Western twangs. "But your training won't work against me, Catherine. It never does."

A fit, balding man with a hawkish nose, Butler had

workman's hands and wore black jeans, Nike running shoes, and a dark blue polo shirt. He crossed his thick forearms when she smiled back at him with brilliant white teeth.

"Whoever you are, you are going to be destroyed for what you're doing," Catherine Hingham said. "When they find out—"

Butler cut her off. "You know, in my many years as a professional, Catherine, I have come to rather enjoy the delicate process of breaking into hearts and minds. They are very much interlinked, you know—hearts and minds—and I have found that one is almost always the key to the other."

"Langley will annihilate you," Hingham said, studying Butler as if she wanted to remember every line in his face.

"Your operators won't help you today," Butler said, gesturing at a pile of blank paper and a pen on the table before her. "Tell me the truth and we can all move on with our lives."

"I'll say it again: You have no jurisdiction over me."

Butler chuckled, gestured around the room. "Oh, but in here, I do."

"I want to see a lawyer, then."

"I'm sure," he said, sobering. "But we're talking about a serious threat to our national security, Catherine. A few rules of engagement can and will be broken in order to thwart that threat."

"I am not a national security threat," she said evenly. "I work for the Central Intelligence Agency, with the highest clearances, in support of my country's freedoms. Your freedoms as well."

"That's what makes your traitorous actions so hard to understand, Catherine."

Her face reddened and she shifted in her chair. “I am no traitor.”

Butler took a step toward her. “The hell you’re not. We know about the Maldives.”

Hingham blinked, furrowed her brow. “The Maldives? Like, the islands in the Indian Ocean?”

“The same.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about. I have never been to the Maldives. I’ve never even been to India.”

“No?”

“Never. You can talk to my case officers about it.”

“I plan to at some point,” Butler said, taking another step toward her. He reached down to touch the back of her left hand before letting his finger trail across her wedding band and modest engagement ring. “Does he know? Your husband?”

“That I work for the CIA?” she said. “Yes. But he has zero idea what I actually do. Those are the rules. We play by them.”

Butler sighed as he gently took hold of her left pinkie with his leathery hand, thumb on top.

“Do you know the surest way to sever the connection between the body and mind, and therefore the heart?”

“No,” she said.

“Pain,” Butler said. He gripped her little finger tight and levered his thumb sharply downward until he heard a bone snap.

CHAPTER

2

CATHERINE HINGHAM SCREAMED IN AGONY, fighting against her restraints, then yelled at him, “You cannot do this! This is the United States of America and I’m a sworn officer of the Central—”

Butler broke her ring finger, then waited for her to stop screaming and crying.

“You have eight fingers left, Catherine,” Butler said calmly. “I will break them all and if you still do not tell me what I want to know, I will have your five-year-old daughter brought here and I will begin breaking *her* tiny fingers one by one until you confess.”

The CIA officer stared at him in disgust and horror. “Emily has cerebral palsy.”

“I know.”

“You wouldn’t. It’s...monstrous.”

“It is,” he said and sighed again. “And yet, because there is so much at stake, Catherine, I will break your little girl’s fingers. But only if you make it necessary.”

The CIA officer continued to stare at him for several moments. He gazed back at her evenly until her lower lip trembled and she hung her head.

“The costs,” Hingham whispered hoarsely. “You have no idea what a child like Em...” She could not go on and broke down sobbing.

“The heart wins again,” Butler said. He pushed the pile of blank pages in front of her. “Start writing. The Maldives. The numbered accounts. Their connections. All of it.”

After a few moments, Catherine Hingham calmed enough to raise her head. “I need witness protection.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Butler said and held out the pen to her. “Now write.”

The CIA officer reached out with both handcuffed hands shaking. She took the pen. “Please,” she said. “My family doesn’t deserve what will happen if—”

“Write,” he said firmly. “And I’ll see what I can do.”

The CIA officer reluctantly began to scribble names, addresses, account numbers, and more. When she’d moved to a second page, Butler had seen enough to be satisfied.

He walked behind the CIA officer and nodded to a small camera mounted high in the corner of the room.

A gravelly male voice came through the tiny earbud Butler wore in his left ear. “Mmmm. Well done. When you have what we need, end the interview and file your report, please.”

Butler nodded again before moving in front of Catherine Hingham. She set her pen down and pushed the pages across the table at him.

“That’s it,” she said in a hoarse voice. “Everything I know.”

“Unlikely,” Butler said, using the nail of his index finger to lift up the first sheet so he could scan the information she’d provided on page two. “But this looks useful enough for now. It will give us leverage. Was that so hard, Catherine?”

She relaxed a little and said, “Okay, then, I’ve given you what you wanted. Now I need a doctor to fix my hand. I need witness protection.”

With his fingernail, Butler scooted the confession pages to the far right of the table. “You’re a smart woman, Catherine. Well educated. Yale, if I remember. You should know your history better. We don’t protect traitors in the United States of America. From Benedict Arnold on, they’ve all had to pay the price. And now, so will you.”

The CIA officer looked confused and then terrified when Butler took a step back and drew a stubby pistol with a sound suppressor from his shoulder holster.

“No, please, my kids are—” she managed before he took aim and shot her between the eyes.

CHAPTER

3

FROM THE TIME WE'D MET as ten-year-olds, John Sampson, my best friend and long-term DC Metro Police partner, had been stoic, quiet, observant. Since his wife, Billie, had died, he'd become even more reserved and was now given to long bouts of brooding silence. I knew he was still wrestling with grief.

But that late-June morning, Big John was acting as wound up as a kid about to hit the front gates of Disney World as he bopped around my front room, where we'd laid out all our gear for a trip we'd been talking about taking for years.

"You think we'll see a grizzly?" Sampson asked, grinning at me.

"I'm hoping not," I said. "At least, not up close."

"They're in there, big-time. And wolves."

“And deer, elk, and cutthroat trout,” I said. “I’ve been studying the brochure too.”

Nana Mama, my ninety-something grandmother, came in wringing her hands and asked with worry in her voice, “Did I hear you say grizzly bears?”

Sampson glowed with excitement. “Nana, the Bob Marshall Wilderness has one of the densest concentrations of grizzlies in the lower forty-eight states. But don’t worry. We’ll have bear spray and sidearms. And cameras.”

“I don’t know why you couldn’t choose a safer place to go on your manly trip.”

“If it was safer, it wouldn’t be manly,” I said. “There’s got to be a challenge.”

“Glad I’m an old lady, then. Breakfast in five minutes.” Nana Mama turned and shuffled away, shaking her head.

“Checklist?” Sampson said.

“I’m ready if you are.”

We started going through every item we’d thought necessary for the twenty-nine-mile horseback trip deep into one of the last great wildernesses on earth and for the five-day raft ride we’d take out of the Bob Marshall on the South Fork of the Flathead River. An outfitter was providing the rafts, tents, food, and bear-proof storage equipment. Everything else had to fit into four rubberized dry bags we’d use on the river after he dropped us off.

We could have signed up for a fully guided affair, but Sampson wanted us to do a good part of the trip alone, and after some thought, I’d agreed. Six days deep in the backcountry of Montana would give Big John many chances to open up and talk, which is critical to the process of coping with tragic loss.

“How’s Willow feeling about our little trip?” I asked.

Sampson smiled. “She doesn’t like the idea of grizzly bears any more than Nana does, but she knows it will make me happy.”

“Your little girl’s always been wise beyond her years.”

“Truth. Bree liking her job?”

Thinking of my smart, beautiful, and independent wife, I said, “She loves it. Got up early to be at the office. Something about a possible assignment in Paris.”

“Paris! What a difference a career change makes.”

“No kidding. It was like the gig was tailor-made for her.”

“Maybe we should think about going into private-sector investigations too.”

“Pay’s better, for sure,” I allowed.

Before he could reply, my seventeen-year-old daughter, Jannie, poked her head in and said, “Nana says your eggs are getting cold.”

I put down my dry bag and went to the kitchen, where I found my youngest child, Ali, already finishing up his plate.

“Morning, sunshine,” I said, giving him a hug. He ignored it, so I tickled him.

“C’mon, Dad!” He laughed, then groaned. “Why can’t I go with you?”

“Because you’re a kid and we don’t know what we’ll be facing.”

“I can do it,” he insisted.

Sampson said, “Ali, let your dad and me scope it out this year. If we think you’re up to it, we’ll bring you along on the next trip. Deal?”

Ali scrunched up his face and shrugged. “I guess. When do you leave?”

“First thing in the—”

My cell phone began to ring at the same time Sampson’s chimed.

“No,” John protested. “Don’t answer that, Alex. We’re supposed to be gone already!”

But when I saw the caller ID, I grimaced and knew I had to answer. “Commissioner Dennison,” I said. “John Sampson and I were just heading out the door on vacation.”

“Cancel it,” said the commissioner of the Metro DC Police Department. “We’ve got a dead female, gunshot wound to the head, dumped in the garage under the International Spy Museum on L’Enfant Plaza. Her ID says she’s—”

“Commissioner, with all due respect,” I said, “we’ve been planning this trip for—”

“I don’t care, Cross,” he snapped. “Her ID says she’s CIA. If you want to continue your contract with Metro, you’ll get down there. And if Sampson wants to keep his job, he’ll be with you.”

I stared at the ceiling a second, looked at John, and shook my head.

“Okay, Commissioner. We’re on our way.”

CHAPTER

4

TENTH AVENUE IN SOUTHWEST DC goes under L'Enfant Plaza with a turnoff for monthly permit and public parking. The deceased, a big blonde in her late thirties with a gunshot wound to the head, was sitting upright in a corner of the third level of monthly permit parking.

A crude sign that said **TRAITOR** was hung around her neck.

"Someone had to have seen her get put here," I said. "Cameras, anyway."

Sampson nodded. "Maybe we *will* make our flight tomorrow morning."

Valerie Jackson, a Metro patrol officer, met us at a band of yellow tape she'd strung around the crime scene. The spy museum's director had discovered the victim when he arrived shortly after dawn.

"She has a CIA ID?" Sampson asked.

“Photo and everything. It’s still on her lap. Catherine Hingham of the CIA.”

We put on blue shoe covers and latex gloves before crossing to the deceased, who was dressed like a suburban mom out for a lunch date after yoga class. We saw how nasty the exit wound was, but we both noted how little blood there was around and behind her.

“She was moved here,” Sampson said.

“I was just going to say the same thing,” I said. “She was shot elsewhere, cleaned up a little, and put here as a message.”

“To who?”

“Other traitors?”

We saw two black Suburbans drive in and park.

“Who the hell let them in?” Officer Jackson said, moving toward the cars. Six men and women in black windbreakers emerged. One guy with slicked-back blond hair and an attitude came straight to the yellow tape and ducked under it. When Officer Jackson tried to cut him off, he flashed an ID and kept coming.

“Dean Weaver, Detectives,” he said. “Central Intelligence Agency.”

“CIA?” Sampson said, pulling himself up to his full six foot nine inches and getting in the man’s way.

“Good—you can hear, and you understand English,” Weaver said, holding up his identification. “We’ll be taking over the investigation from here. I want any and all evidence left in situ. And I ask that you kindly leave.”

I shook my head. “Not a chance. Federal law prohibits the CIA from running investigations in the United States, so I’ll have to ask you to leave *my* crime scene.”

“And who are you?”

“Dr. Alex Cross, investigative consultant to Metro PD and the FBI. And if you don’t leave, I’ll be calling my liaison, Supervising Special Agent Ned Mahoney, who I’m sure would be glad to explain how the law works domestically.”

The CIA officer looked ready to pop his cork but he kept it under control. “Catherine Hingham is—was—one of ours, Dr. Cross,” he said with clenched fists. “Can I please at least identify her?”

“After you explain how you found out so fast,” I said.

“I...can’t say. It’s...complicated.”

Sampson smiled. “Must happen like that a lot in the spy business.”

The CIA officer sighed. “You have no idea.”

“Let him look, John,” I said, and Sampson let Weaver walk a few more feet forward until he could see the body.

Weaver’s shoulders slumped and he stood there glumly for several minutes, looking at her. “That’s Catherine,” he said when he turned around. “And I don’t care what that sign says. She was no traitor.”

“Thank you,” Sampson said. “But again, we’re going to have to ask you to leave.”

“Don’t you want to know about her?” Weaver asked.

“I thought you guys never talk about what you do.”

“We don’t, usually. This is different.”

CHAPTER

5

TONI ALSTON, ONE OF THE district's medical examiners, arrived along with two crime scene specialists. They began photographing the area as we stood off to the side, listening to the CIA officer describe Catherine Hingham as one of the smartest, most dedicated field operatives he'd ever worked with.

"Field operative?" I said. "She looks like a—"

"Suburban housewife or a schoolteacher," Weaver said. "That was the point. She used both those covers, among others."

According to Weaver, Catherine Hingham had been fluent in five languages and worked in a variety of deep undercover settings. All the while, she raised two children, one of whom was born with cerebral palsy.

"Most mothers would have resigned immediately," Weaver

said. “But Catherine’s husband, Frank, is a speech pathologist and infinitely more qualified to be Emily’s primary caregiver. Does he know yet?”

“Not that we’re aware of,” Sampson said. “And we’d appreciate being the ones to break the news to him.”

“Where does he *think* she is?” I asked.

The CIA officer looked at me appraisingly. “Training in Los Angeles.”

“Where was she really?”

“Until the day before yesterday, she was in Nogales, Mexico.”

“Doing what?”

Weaver put up his hands. “Now, that I cannot discuss.”

I said, “But given Nogales, we can assume what?”

“Assume nothing. She was on an assignment critical to national security and I’ll have to leave it at that or risk prison time.” He fished a card from his wallet. “But if you’ve got other questions, you can call me, day or night, and whatever I can tell you, I will.”

“Was she one of yours?” I asked, taking the card. “Part of your team, like the others over by the Suburbans?”

Weaver cocked his head. “You are sharp, Dr. Cross. Yes, Catherine was one of mine and she entered the CIA with several of those officers. We were a team.”

“Were you or any other members of your team also in Nogales?” Sampson asked.

The agent’s eyes shifted; he blinked. “No. I wish we had been, but Catherine wanted to work this one solo.”

“Was she corruptible? Financially? Ideologically?” I asked.

“No!” Weaver said sharply. “One hundred percent no. Catherine was...one of the good people—”

“Dr. Cross?” Toni Alston interrupted.

“Excuse me,” I said and went over to the medical examiner.

Alston told me her preliminary examination indicated Hingham had died roughly thirty-six hours earlier from a single, small-caliber gunshot to the head. Her left pinkie and left ring finger were broken.

“Torture?” I asked.

“Possibly. Broken fingers must have been painful. But I’m not seeing any other marks on her so far,” Alston said. “I’ll know more once I get her back to my lab. And we found this in an inside pocket of her hoodie.”

She went over and retrieved an evidence bag. Inside was a white letter-size envelope. Printed on it in a large, garish red font was one word: *CONFESSION*.

The text was so vivid, Weaver could see it from twenty feet away. “Confession?” he said, coming toward us. “I want to see that right now.”

This time I stepped in front of him, my hands way out to my sides as if I were guarding him in a hoops game. “Mr. Weaver, that will not happen without some kind of waiver from the Department of Justice,” I said. “There’s nothing you or I can do without one. Now, please leave the crime scene or I’ll have you forcibly removed.”

The CIA officer wanted to paste me; I could see it in his eyes and the bunching of his muscles. But a cooler head prevailed. He nodded and said, “I’m going to see about that right now.”

Weaver walked away, shooed the rest of his team back into the Suburbans, and left.

I was about to suggest we get hold of the parking lot’s security cameras when my cell phone buzzed in my pocket.

When I saw the text on the screen, I felt instantly exposed. I looked all around and back to where the Suburbans had vanished.

“Alex?” Sampson said.

I held up a finger and then read the text again.

Top of the morning, Dr. C. It's been months, hasn't it? I know I've been playing catchup these last few days. Bree's left Metro PD behind her. How exciting! Jannie's entering her senior year soon. Damon's killing it at Davidson. Ali's becoming quite the young detective. And you're on the new case of the Traitor in the Parking Garage. I swear, if I take my eyes off you for a moment, Alex Cross, your entire life changes.—M

CHAPTER

6

ACROSS THE POTOMAC RIVER, in an Arlington office tower, Bree Stone knocked on the door to the conference room and entered. Five people waited for her at the table. Four were women, two in their late twenties and two in their forties. All were dressed for business. The lone male was silver-haired, craggily handsome, and dressed impeccably in a bespoke blue suit, starched white shirt, and red tie with teal polka dots.

“Bree Stone,” he said in a British accent, standing to shake her hand. “Good to finally meet you in person.”

“Desmond Slattery,” she said, returning the smile. “When did you fly in?”

“I caught the red-eye from Heathrow,” he said.

“And here you are, not a hair out of place.”

“Got to keep the reputation clean,” he said and chuckled.

The petite, fortyish brunette at the head of the table said, “Sit anywhere you’d like, Bree.”

Elena Martin, the founder and president of Bluestone Group, was one of the smartest women Bree had ever met, a super-dynamo who needed less than five hours of sleep a night. A former analyst and investigator with the Defense Intelligence Agency, Martin was also an entrepreneurial visionary; after leaving the military, she quickly built Bluestone into one of the top private-security firms in the country by aggressively recruiting and hiring highly respected law enforcement professionals like Bree.

After taking a seat next to Slattery—a former inspector at Scotland Yard—Bree smiled at the other women at the table, whom she’d never seen before.

Elena Martin introduced the other woman in her forties as Patricia Nolan.

“Ms. Nolan is corporate counsel at Pegasus International,” Elena Martin said. “Do you know the company?”

Bree shook her head.

Nolan smiled. “Not surprising. We’re a hedge fund that prides itself on its low profile. We’re incorporated in Delaware with offices on Wall Street and in Paris.”

The president of Bluestone said to Bree, “I’ve told them you speak fluent French with a Caribbean accent.”

Bree nodded. “My mother was from Saint Martin.”

“I also told them you are one of our star investigators, and they wanted to meet you in person.”

“I’m delighted, and I appreciate the confidence, Elena,” Bree said. Nolan introduced her to the two younger women, and Bree reached across the table to shake their hands.

When she sat back, she glanced at Slattery and saw a

slightly sour look on his face. He obviously considered himself one of Bluestone's star investigators as well. For a second, Bree wondered why Slattery hadn't gotten this assignment, then pushed the thought aside. She smiled at the clients. "How can I be of service?"

Anna Tuttle, an attractive, sandy-blond young woman in a blue business suit, said, "You can help us get our son-of-a-bitch CEO fired."

Cassie Dane, a buxom redhead with porcelain-pale skin and ice-green eyes, said in a sweet Southern accent, "Or, better yet, put Philippe's ass in prison with men who will not be kind or gentle."

"There's something I should explain first, Ms. Stone," the corporate attorney said. "I am here at the request of the board of directors of Pegasus to determine whether our founder, CEO, and chairman Philippe Abelmar is guilty of sexual harassment—"

"He definitely is," Anna Tuttle said.

"And a serial abuser of women—"

"That too," Cassie Dane said, her cheeks reddening.

"And quite possibly an embezzler," Nolan said.

Tuttle looked a little disgusted as she nodded to Bree. "We appreciate Ms. Nolan being here, really, we do, but just so you understand, the rumors of sexual harassment have been flying around Philippe forever. And yet it wasn't until the suspicions about missing money surfaced that the Pegasus board decided to hire someone to investigate."

Nolan's jaw stiffened. "Philippe Abelmar is a powerful, charismatic man, and France is a different country with different moral views than our own. But I admit he held sway over the board despite the rumors about his inappropriate

activities until they saw evidence that he may have siphoned off as much as four hundred million dollars.”

“Four hundred million?” Bree said, her brows rising.

“See?” Tuttle said to Dane. “It’s all anyone cares about.”

The Southern belle pushed back a wayward lock of red hair and shrugged. “I honestly don’t give a damn what finally drug ’em to the dance, Anna. I just want that man’s testicles in a vise. And maybe some public shaming while we’re at it.”

Slattery winced at the testicles-in-a-vise comment before clearing his throat and looking at Pegasus’s corporate counsel. “My specialty at Scotland Yard was economic crimes and forensic accounting. I’ll be working the money end of things in Manhattan and London.”

Tuttle said, “London’s where I worked after Paris.”

“Where we all worked after Paris, hon,” Cassie Dane said.

CHAPTER

7

THE THREE WOMEN EXPLAINED TO Bree how it worked at Pegasus. Recruiters in the company's Wall Street offices tended to choose pretty Ivy League co-eds for their internship programs.

After a year of training in the science of modern finance, the young women were rotated to Paris, where Philippe Abelmar oversaw their continuing education in the art of making money.

Anna Tuttle said, "For six months it was all about the philosophy, beauty, and inherent goodness of capitalism. And the value of knowing numbers—whether we were up or down and how we were going to take advantage of subtle changes in the markets. If you were particularly bright, you were made special personal assistant to Philippe."

“Nothing to do with brightness and I know it,” Cassie Dane said. She gestured at her chest, saying, “Sure, I went to Penn, but that pervo Frog just liked my girls.”

Both women described the Paris office as a culture where conversations were often laced with sexual innuendo. Abelmar encouraged the behavior, believing that tension between coworkers was a good thing, especially if it was rarely or never relieved.

“He flirted with me for months,” Anna Tuttle said. “I tried to keep it professional, but Philippe made it impossible. Being his personal assistant meant I was always at his side or on call—at work, at his apartment, or on his jet.”

“Or the yacht in Cannes,” Cassie Dane said. “That’s where Philippe drugged me and then forcibly raped me after I’d worked for him for six months.”

“For me it was also roughly six months, but at his Paris apartment,” Anna Tuttle said. “He held me there several days. The things he did were...unspeakable.”

Bree said, “Did you file police reports?”

Both women looked at each other, embarrassed.

“He filmed it all,” Dane said. “He showed me a video where I was acting only a little drunk and giving him verbal consent to take off my clothes and make a recording. I have no memory of that. Zero. And I usually remember everything!”

“That’s all it takes in France,” Tuttle said. “Evidence of verbal consent between adults. Except Philippe didn’t take chances. He has signed documents, release forms, although neither of us remembers signing anything.”

“No one tested you for drugs?”

“If I had it to do over? I’d give a quart of blood to figure

out what he stuck in my drink,” Dane said. “But he told me he’d release the videos on a porn site. Ruin me.”

“And then you were transferred out of the Paris office?”

Tuttle said, “No. That happened after Philippe blackmailed me into having sex with him until my year as his personal assistant was over.”

“And a new one was chosen,” Cassie Dane said.

Bree frowned. “You didn’t try to warn the new personal assistant?”

Patricia Nolan said, “In their defense, Bree, they had no idea at the time there were other complaints about Philippe.”

“But *you* knew?”

Nolan swallowed. “I’ve been with Pegasus only two years...but yes, I knew of Philippe’s reputation, if not the specifics of his actions.”

“Until the four hundred million went missing,” Anna Tuttle said coldly. “Then you were all about it after Pegasus ignored me and then drove me out of finance.”

“Same,” Cassie Dane said.

“No one’s sued?” Bree asked.

The corporate counsel said, “There were several attempts over the years. All of them were settled privately with significant payments made to the women.”

Anna Tuttle said, “He shuts you up with threats to release videos or with lawyers or with money. Philippe’s put himself above the law because he can. Harvard undergraduate. Yale Law. Sorbonne for business school. Billionaire before he turned forty.”

Cassie Dane pushed back that stubborn lock of red hair and gazed at Bree, smiling easily. “That’s who we’re up

against, Ms. Bree Stone, fricking Goliath Pervo. So, girl to girl, please tell me true: Are you up for putting Goliath's nuts in a vise and then letting us turn the handle tight? Or is this all too much for you to see through?"

Bree smiled and looked at her boss. "When do I leave for Paris, Elena?"

Elena Martin nodded. "There's a business class seat for you on this evening's Air France flight out of Dulles. Be on it."

CHAPTER

8

TRAFFIC HAD SLOWED TO A CRAWL on the Beltway toward Dulles Airport. Bree kept checking her watch. I was still dealing with the aftershock of knowing that M was back in my life. Again.

M was the name I knew him by, though John Sampson referred to him off and on as Mastermind. Over the years, M had alternately helped and hindered us as we investigated various murders and criminal enterprises and his roles in them.

For a time, M had tried to make me believe that Kyle Craig, an old, dead nemesis of mine, was actually back among the living. He'd done it to mess with my head and with Sampson's.

And even though this had been going on for years, we still didn't understand his motivations, which was infuriating. M

liked to taunt me, and I knew better than to respond to his texts.

But it was still bugging me.

“Alex, we haven’t moved in five minutes,” Bree said, breaking into my thoughts.

“We’ve got two hours to get there, and it’s only six miles away,” I said. “According to Waze, there’s an accident about a mile up the road. We’ll make it.”

“I better make it. It’s only my career and Bluestone’s reputation at stake,” Bree said. “Can’t you throw up your bubble and turn on your siren?”

“Do it, Dad!” Ali cried from the back seat.

Jannie laughed. “I’ve never been in the car when you’ve done that, Dad.”

I glanced in the rearview and said, “That’s because I don’t make a habit of using the bubble and siren to get around traffic jams on personal time.”

Bree said, “If this goes on another fifteen minutes, I’ll take the heat and do it myself.”

Seeing I wasn’t going to use the siren and lights, Ali and Jannie quickly got bored, put on their earbuds, and retreated into their phones. Bree started to do the same before I said, “You haven’t asked me about my day.”

She frowned. “Oh? I guess I didn’t. I’m sorry. I was so preoccupied with packing for Paris.”

“I get it.”

“You’ve got my undivided attention for the next fourteen minutes. But if we haven’t moved, then you’re lighting up that siren.”

“Deal,” I said, then described the scene beneath the spy museum, the arrival of the CIA officers who’d worked with

the deceased, and Sampson's and my subsequent trip to see Catherine Hingham's husband and two children.

We'd found Frank Hingham feeding lunch to Emily, their birdlike young daughter, in her large, elaborate wheelchair. He was awaiting the arrival of a nurse's aide so he could take their son, Luke, to a soccer game. After the aide arrived, we took Hingham aside and told him his wife had been found murdered, was last seen alive in Nogales, Mexico.

After glancing in the back seat to make sure our kids weren't listening, Bree asked, "How'd he react?"

"Like we'd put a spear through his heart," I said. "He literally fell down, crashed against his desk. He was shocked and then sobbing. He said he didn't know how he was going to do it."

"Do what?"

"Tell his kids, especially his daughter. Emily and her mom were very close."

"Did you get the family computers?"

"*And* we searched her office. Hingham gave us permission before taking his son to the soccer game. He said he'd tell Luke and Emily afterward at home."

"You let him go?"

"If you'd seen him, you'd know he wasn't involved."

"You mentioned a confession," Bree said. "You ask him about it?"

"Not yet," I said. "It felt like it might be too much, too soon for him."

"You've read it?"

"Scanned it. But we'll be taking a close look at the family finances before we talk to the husband again. Or a forensic accountant will."

Bree said, “I’m working with one of those on this case. He’s a Brit, former Scotland Yard, looks like he walked out of *Downton Abbey*.”

I laughed. “Your life *has* changed.”

She looked at her watch, said, “Yes, it has, and that’s fourteen minutes and we haven’t moved twenty feet.”

Knowing better than to argue, I leaned over, pulled out the bubble, slapped it on the roof, and threw the siren switch.

Ali and Jannie cheered when the siren started whooping and the bubble started flashing neon blue and red. The cars in front of us moved aside just enough to let me into the breakdown lane, where I hit the gas.

Bree clapped and smiled. “Now I am definitely on my way to Paris!”

I dropped her at the curb at Dulles fifteen minutes later. After hugging her goodbye, telling her I loved her, and wishing her good luck, I watched until she was inside, heading toward the check-in counter.

I’ll admit it—as I got back in the car to take the kids home, there was a small part of me that was envious of Bree’s new and exciting life. And another part that was a little worried about who my wife might be when she returned.

CHAPTER

9

THE FOLLOWING DAY, I CALLED Bree at six a.m. DC time, knowing it was noon in Paris and her plane should have landed a few hours earlier. She answered on the second ring.

“I just got out of the shower and was going to call you,” she said.

“How’s Paris?”

“I took a walk after checking into my hotel and it’s as beautiful as my mother said.”

“No problems with the language?”

“None. I fit right in. The cabdriver, the clerk at the front desk, and the waiter where I ate breakfast were all surprised I was from the U.S. with my accent.”

“Bluestone picked the right detective. A full day in front of you?”