

SATAN'S GOLD

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The idea of money being something physical is almost entirely a fiction. Sure, you can go to your ATM and pull out cash. And you can feel cash in your back pocket and have some tangible comfort there — but in reality, the majority of your money is a number on a screen.

— TYLER WINKLEVOSS, American investor

STORMS ALWAYS REMINDED Tyler Jackson of Suzanne.

The last time they'd been happy, before she'd ground up his house key in the disposal and FedExed the repair bill, they had been in the White Mountains of Arizona, with heavy black clouds throwing bolts of lightning across the roiling sky. A cool breeze drifted through the open window, bringing with it the sweet scent of rain on ponderosa pine. It had been a wonderful night, one of the best he could remember since Daemon's two slugs tore through his chest.

Standing at the Peninsula Hotel's window, Tyler Jackson watched the flashes of lightning beyond the Water Tower and out over Lake Michigan. Some made the mistake of calling Chicago America's Second City, but even Suzanne, a country girl at heart, would have loved this view.

His cell phone buzzed. He removed it from his pocket. "What's up?"

"Sorry to bother ya, Ty," Dixie Stevens' soft, Texas twang whispered over the connection, "but six more zeros just moved out of Daemon's account in the Cayman Islands. They went through the same maze of offshore corporate shell accounts. I

can get more on each hop, but I don't want to spook whoever's at the other end."

Two paths. One goal. Getting his life back.

"Where's the money going this time?"

"That's why I called. Ferguson's transferrin' the funds to the dummy corporation he set up last week in Nassau."

"The money's landing in Nassau? Not another bitcoin account that leads nowhere?"

"Yes, sir. This one's as simple as it gets. Another thing. His cell phone just started movin'."

"Now?"

"Yes."

He stared at the black steel skeleton of the Hancock Building. He had been stuck in Chicago watching Todd Ferguson for two weeks, and every minute of that time had run together in a blur of boredom, greasy food, lack of sleep, rain, more rain, and endless *when is it ever gonna stop raining*.

"All right." He massaged his forehead. "I'll take care of it."

"Be careful, Ty. You're not in the show anymore, and we both know what happened the last time you tried to corral Daemon."

The connection dropped.

Tyler went to the closet and yanked open the three cases inside. The first held his Colt automatic and two hundred rounds of ammunition. The second had a 12-gauge Browning automatic shotgun with fifty rounds of custom-load steel shot. The third contained three prepaid cell phones, his laptop, an Ethernet packet sniffer, Kevlar vest, electric razor, toothbrush, twenty-thousand in emergency cash, and a medical kit. All the comforts of home—if home was a war zone.

He scooped his good luck charm from the nightstand and put the chain over his head. After Daemon's bullet had flattened it, the tiny silver owl was barely recognizable. Suzanne had given him the owl after he graduated from Quantico. Money had been tight, and he hadn't been happy about getting

man-jewelry as a gift, but now, five years later, it was one of the few things he had salvaged from his previous life.

Trying not to think about how tired he was, he ran down the stairs to the Peninsula's lobby. His eyes stung from lack of sleep. Dixie had a point. He wasn't in any kind of shape. Despite the bulky vest, his windbreaker looked a size too large. The months of recovery had cost him muscle, and lately, he hadn't been eating right. Never knowing if death was looking over his shoulder made for an excellent diet.

He threw his equipment into his rental sedan, started the engine, and squealed out of the parking garage. He started up the GPS tracker on his phone. A map of Chicago popped onto the screen, with Ferguson's cell phone's location blinking red and his own position in green. The red dot moved west, so he accelerated onto the Kennedy Expressway. The freeway had cleared out from rush hour, but it still had a lot of traffic. Chicago, like most large cities, never slept; brake lights flashed, a chain reaction of red, slowing the car ahead.

He shouldn't panic or get his hopes up. He'd gone through this before. If Daemon was involved, it would be stupid to go after him without help. The last time he had flown solo had cost him his career and nearly his life. To be on the safe side, he could leave an anonymous tip for Chicago's finest, call in a robbery in progress. Or he could phone Bruce Lambert in New York. His old partner wouldn't be happy to hear from him, but Lambert might be able to call in a favor. Or he could turn the car around, go back to the hotel, and do nothing.

Listen to Suzanne for once. *Ty, it's not your problem. Let someone else deal with it.*

She was right, of course. The problem was him. He was not a good listener. He passed a tow truck pulling a car away from the guardrail, and the traffic broke free.

Trying to look everywhere at once through the humidity-fogged windows, Jackson sped west away from Lake Michigan, following Ferguson's signal onto Grand Avenue.

Ferguson turned onto Canal Street, and eventually into the Kinzie Park Warehousing District, the brick buildings blackened by decades of soot. The Chicago River was only two blocks away, and the swampy air smelled of diesel exhaust.

He slowed the sedan, turned off his lights, and crept through the rain until he saw Ferguson's car, parked in front of a derelict warehouse. Jackson pulled to the curb, got out, and jogged up the street, trying not to worry that his phone was getting wet. The red dot had stopped.

As he halted by the door of the warehouse, uneasiness tickled the back of his neck. He tried the knob and the door creaked open. The interior was a jumbled gloom of rusted metal and water spilling through a leaky roof. The only illumination came from a weak security light, hanging from the rafters and swinging back and forth. Gusts of wind switched it on, and seconds later, it swung the other way and clicked off. The light had an electrical short in the cord.

Why had Ferguson stopped here of all places? Could this be a setup? Jackson let go of the knob. He could turn and walk away, but then he would never know why Ferguson had gotten the money from Daemon. Not an option. Holding the Colt in both hands, he shouldered the door. An ungodly stench rose from the slippery cement. Something had died nearby. He searched the gloom, carefully placing each foot before shifting his weight. A prowling cat hissed and slunk away.

Rain smacked the metal roof and his ears rang. He had almost reached the swinging light when he noticed a white glimmer at the far end of the building. Blinking the rain out of his eyes, he carefully skirted the light. As he drew closer, he saw something swinging gently back and forth, something so heavy it made the rafters creak. The light switched off, closing everything down to just beyond the tip of his nose.

Turn around, his instincts demanded. *Get out*. With a barely audible click, the light switched back on.

He took another step. A section of the metal roof crashed

to the floor behind him. Spinning left, he looked up, shading his eyes against the rain. More metal fell, this time in front of him. He backed away and bumped into something soft. Scrambling the other way, he came face-to-face with Todd Ferguson.

Light off.

An eternity went by before the light switched on again.

Two men had been hung by their ankles from the rafters. The first man's throat had been torn open. Blood had run down his neck into his hair and eyes. His mouth had twisted into a scream.

The second man, Todd Ferguson, was still alive. He had dirty blond hair and a face swollen from hanging upside down. Though he approached his mid-twenties, he didn't look much older than fourteen. White lettering on a black T-shirt said *BUFF ME TILL I SHINE*. A CanAm Labs' security swipe-card dangled from his sleeve.

Jackson pinched off the narrow plumes of steam emerging from Ferguson's nose. The kid's eyes opened.

"Shh! I'm here to help. Who did this to you?"

The engineer blinked. "Daemon—," he began, and then started to cough.

Jackson stiffened. "What did you say?"

Ferguson shivered, the fear plain to see in his face. He looked up past his feet. Jackson followed his eyes and stumbled backward.

The rafters were full of hanging bodies.

The first bullet snapped at Jackson's coat collar. The second slammed into his vest. The darkness spun. He fell to the floor, and water splashed his face. He elbowed the cement and started to crawl. Ferguson screamed and thrashed like a puppet snarled in its strings. An approaching shadow became man-shaped. A bullet skipped off the cement and wailed away.

Jackson's shoulder struck a support post. He grasped at the metal, rust crumbling under his fingers, and lurched to his feet. The door was nearby. He could make it.

The cat darted toward a hole in the wall. Jackson veered after the animal and smashed through, into the alley. Wiping rain from his face, he put the Colt's sight on the jagged hole behind him and emptied the clip, aiming each shot towards the back of the building, but knowing he wasn't even coming close.

From down the block an engine roared to life. Tires squealed, headlights stabbing through the rain. The vehicle barreled out of sight. Jackson, bruised chest heaving, watched it disappear.

Holding his ribs, he limped back into the building. There was no hurry. The shooter had gotten away. Ferguson had been shot. Blood dripped from his forehead.

Jackson looked up. The bodies up in the rafters were only tattered sheets of plastic. He picked up a spool of networking fiber, wondering what Daemon would want with a network engineer. He checked his watch. He had been here far too long. The police could show up at any second.

Leaving through the alley door, he limped to his car and called Dixie.

"This doesn't make sense," she snapped. "Why would Daemon go after a geek like Ferguson? The government could have followed the money like we did. Why take the risk?"

"I don't know." Every word wheezed out of him as he unlocked the car. The bullet had hit him in the lower floating ribs. "I'm just tired of being late all the time. Every lead we follow ends in a dead body."

She sighed, the sound hard to hear over the rain on the car's roof. "When are you flyin' back to New York?"

"I'm headed to the hotel now. I'll let you know my schedule."

"You sound horrible. Get some sleep."

Thinking through every step that had led him to Ferguson and what he had done since arriving in Chicago, he drove through the empty streets. Had Daemon known he was being followed? Had the entire evening been a setup of some kind?

Disturbed, he stepped on the gas.

Twenty minutes later he skidded into the Peninsula's parking garage, parked illegally in a loading zone, and, ignoring the hotel staff's stares, lurched inside the marble lobby to the elevators. He was a grimy mess.

The elevator opened. He punched the button to the twenty-eighth floor. The car started up, barely seeming to move. The doors finally opened, and he staggered down the hall. Fingers fumbling, he swiped the card and snatched open the door. The suite was empty. Nothing had been touched. *Thank god.*

Behind him, the door swung shut. Was killing Daemon worth losing everything? Was Daemon worth the frustration, the gnawing fear, always a hair's breadth away, that he would die again? If he didn't stop, he was going to need a good shrink or a hole in the ground.

He removed his coat. The first bullet had gone through his collar. The second had hit him in the ribs. There was a pucker in the Kevlar from where it had turned the bullet. But the hole through his collar bothered him the most. Another inch to the left, and that would have been it. His hands shook.

He glanced longingly at the bed but checked available flights on his phone as he headed for the bathroom. With Ferguson dead, there was no reason to stay in Chicago. He could sleep on the flight back to New York.

He peeled off his muddy clothing and was about to step into the shower but stopped and went back to search the room.

Bad luck.

The owl was gone.

ALEC JANNÉ PULLED his BMW into a parking space off an alley. Even though real estate was pricey on Chicago's Near North Side, no other buyers had wanted the boarded-up brownstone—too much noise from the dance club next door. But, the building had suited his purposes. His men had done their jackhammering after dark. He shouldered aside the back gate. Construction debris—a bankrupt developer's failed attempt to do a quick rehab and flip—littered the backyard. The developer had left sections of rusty scaffolding, rolls of roofing paper, a cast-iron bathtub, and even a small cement mixer. A few more chunks of concrete hadn't even been noticed.

An angled, steel storm door kept rainwater from flooding the basement, and that had been important because he needed a building with a dry basement. He grabbed the rusty storm door's handle and heaved the door open. It fell behind him with a thunk. He trotted down the crumbling concrete steps. An old girlfriend had once told him he moved like a bouncer—shouldering through a crowd with his chest thrust forward. Actually, come to think of it, he was probably better at muscling his way through computer code. In crowds he didn't

have to push his way through. People shied away from his pale eyes.

He kicked open the basement door and went inside. Powerful lights were strung across the basement's ceiling. Fiber-optic cable looped across the floor and linked the computers to the network switches. Servers hummed. A cloud of cement dust hung in the air, and particles fell like snow.

He stopped at the hole his men had jackhammered through the basement floor. The hole opened to an electrical service tunnel, and the tunnel led to a manhole at the corner of Erie and Franklin. Planning was everything. If the FBI staged a raid, he and his crew could escape like Jean Valjean running through the Paris sewers. But that wouldn't happen. Now that he had Todd Ferguson's case, everything would work out.

Spikes of rebar secured an aluminum extension ladder. If they had to escape this way, the lightweight ladder would be easy to pull into the hole. Down in the tunnel, they had a six-foot wooden painter's ladder and flashlights, both purchased when they'd bought the jackhammer. Today would be the reward for all the hard work.

He turned and descended. Clamped to an overhead pipe, a halogen spotlight glared. With no working shower in the building, he saw that his two techs, Hassan Tarazi and Carl Jester, were still covered in dust. Tarazi was thin with bony arms, an angular face, and long black hair, while Jester was short, with a face as bumpy as a sausage lover's pizza. Jester always smiled, showing teeth stained from the chocolate bars that seemed to grow from the lint in his pockets.

When Janné's foot touched the damp clay bottom, he heard the click of metal. Catalina Sing flicked the straight razor in her hand. With thick black hair, a dusty complexion, and dark eyes, Sing was a striking, muscular woman of mixed French Caribbean descent. She pressed against him, the fingers of her free hand slipping inside his suit and caressing his chest.

“Did you get it, *amoureux*?”

“Yes.” Janné put the case down carefully on the tunnel’s damp clay floor.

“So, it begins,” she whispered.

Janné nodded. “Or ends.”

The case was locked, but Todd Ferguson had given him the key. Janné swung the lid aside.

Jester leaned in for a better look. “You sure this will work? Splitting light off live fiber is impossible.”

Janné glanced at the hacker’s heavy face. “I was very specific in my questions.”

Ferguson had built the optical coupler from a gutted, standard 19-inch network switch. The case was missing the top plate, but it didn’t need to look pretty. Processor boards, cooling fans, and wires jammed the interior. The RJ-45 jacks on the face plate had been replaced with small, centimeter-square optical ports. The prototype had no identifiable logos or model numbers.

Shielding his eyes from the light, Janné looked up at the numbered, plastic industrial conduits running along the tunnel’s ceiling. One of the conduits had been cut open, revealing dozens of slender fiber-optic strands. A strand of the spliced glass dangled from one of the cables. On the strands of the exposed cable were tiny, stenciled numbers.

Janné removed a sheet of paper from his pocket. “Tarazi, unfold the ladder and separate the strands.”

“I can do it,” Jester said.

“Your weight will break the ladder,” Sing said.

Unfolding the ladder, Tarazi gave Sing a wary glance. The only thing predictable about Sing was her unpredictability.

While Tarazi separated the strands, Janné carefully matched the numbers on the paper to the numbers on the strands. Then, he ordered Jester to extract the coupler from the case and it sheltering acoustical foam. “Don’t drop it, whatever you do.”

"I'm just fat," Jester said, "not clumsy." He lifted the coupler and held it so that Tarazi could slide it into the angle-iron bracket they had lag-bolted to the tunnel's ceiling. After Tarazi had screwed the case's rack rails into place, Jester plugged in a power cable and then picked up the optical cable.

"If this doesn't work," Jester said, "it'll take down their entire network, and we won't get another chance."

"I know," Janné said.

Jester pushed the connector into the input jack. The coupler's lights flickered to life.

"I'll be damned," he whispered.

"How long will you need?" Janné asked Tarazi.

Tarazi stepped into the light. The cement had turned his black hair gray. "Two minutes to route the traffic through our systems, another minute to start my code. Once we're connected, you'll need to break their encryption. The theoretical permutations of a gigabit crypt key may as well be infinity."

"It is infinity!" Jester insisted under his breath. "Even a billion processors running for a million years couldn't crack that key!"

Janné put a hand on the ladder. "Get me connected. I will handle the encryption." He motioned to Sing. "Are you ready to wish *Directeur* Byrnes a happy birthday?"

A smile lit her dark, bottomless eyes and she put the razor away.

Janné followed Sing, Jester, and Tarazi up the ladder. Then he sat in front of his computer and brought up their software. Sing handed him a list of TOR gateways and slipped her fingers into his hair. It didn't matter where they were or when, she was always touching him.

"I have something for you." He withdrew the bit of silver from his pocket and dropped it into her palm. "Another puzzle, I believe."

She lifted the broken owl to the light. Her eyes widened. “Where did you get this?”

“It was on the floor of the warehouse. I believe he dropped it.”

“Then that would mean—”

“It had to be the money. You were careless to use that account.”

“But after all this time!”

Janné nodded. “And still the Owl hunts.”

After turning back to the computer, he picked an anonymous gateway and used it to open an encrypted, video cam link.

“*Bonjour, Directeur,*” Janné greeted his former employer. “Another year has passed. What is the term you Americans use—ah, time moves quickly when I’m having fun, yes?”

CIA Assistant Deputy Director of Special Operations Marcus Byrnes was a big-boned Texan with a head large enough to mount horns on, a heavy frame, and surprisingly delicate hands that could cradle a cocktail glass as easily as break it. A shock of regal salt-and-pepper hair covered his head, the part on the side straighter than an ethics line. He sat at his desk, the Great Seal of the United States on the wall behind him.

If Byrnes was surprised by the call, he did not show it. “Alec Janné and Catalina Sing,” he growled. “I wondered if you two were going to call.”

“I have not yet missed one of your birthdays, *Directeur*. I do not see a reason to begin now. Years of preparation have come down to this exquisite day.”

A resigned look crossed Byrnes’ heavy face. “Don’t do this, Alec. I have resources at my disposal. Return my money, and I will try my best to accommodate you.”

Janné noted the worry in Byrnes’ gravelly voice. For as long as Janné had known him, Byrnes had always been at the top of his game. Now he sounded tired.

“It is a bit late for compromises, *Monsieur*. Five years is but a moment since your betrayal of me. I have not forgotten. I will not forget.”

“I’ll find you, Alec. It’s only a matter of time.”

“Yes, all good things must end, *Directeur*. Even you and I.”

“So, this is the end then?”

Janné nodded. “Or the beginning.”

The connection dropped.

Janné reached into his suit pocket and removed a slender red-and-blue metal card. A long LCD window split the card in half, displaying a string of sixteen integers. As he watched, the numbers changed. He held the time encryption card up to the light so that Jester and Tarazi could see it.

“Do you know what this is?” he asked.

Jester licked his grimy lips. “Infinity.”

Janné handed the card to Tarazi, and the long-haired, bony tech carefully typed in the sixteen numbers on his computer. A pop-up window opened—a map of the United States. The twelve Federal Reserve District banks blinked brightly on the map; a single, encrypted strand connected them.

Janné smiled. “*Joyeux anniversaire, Directeur* Byrnes.”

WITH A SHRIEK the bullet screamed through the snowflakes falling on the lake and tore through his heart. Tyler Jackson started awake. The nightmare had never been this bad before, not even in the hospital when the dream had caused him to claw at his bandages. Beyond the blinds he saw Riverside Tower's broken sign. Day already. He had thrown himself on the bed fully dressed.

Dixie Stevens glanced up from her computer, pulled out her ear buds, and pushed her keyboard away. She was slender, young, and looked more like a college coed in her varsity sweatshirt and tattered jeans than one of the best hackers in the world. He accepted the offered glass of water and took a sip, half expecting water to spurt from his chest.

"Same dream?" she asked, Texas twang bending around the vowels. "Can you remember it this time?"

"No."

She touched his hand, her dark hair falling from her shoulders to brush his cheek.

"Find the key and unlock the memory," she said. "It's the only way you're ever gonna find your way out. Did you see his face this time?"

Jackson shivered again, wisps of the nightmare already dissolving. "No. Just the snow on the lake. Same as always."

Her computer beeped. She turned to her keyboard, fingers flying as she traversed the electronic highways crisscrossing the North Atlantic seaboard.

"How ya feelin'?"

"Fine," he lied.

She glanced at him, frowned, then went back to the screen. "Before I forget, Pavak called with another of his so-called jokes."

Jackson sat up. "What'd he say?"

"Why do you always make me tell them?" she protested. "If you want to hear it, call him."

He motioned for her to continue.

She rolled her eyes. "I'm at the doctor. He walks in and asks me what's wrong. I tell him I need help because I'm a moth."

"You're a moth?"

"Do you mind? It's bad enough tellin' it in the first person."

"Sorry. You tell him you're a moth—"

"—and he tells me he can't help me because he's a general practitioner. What I need is a psychiatrist."

"And then?"

She gave him another eye-roll. "I tell him I was on my way to see a psychiatrist but stopped when I noticed his light was on."

Wincing, Jackson swung his feet off the bed and laughed.

"I thought your ribs were fine," she said.

"Did Pavak say why he wanted me to call him back?"

"No. Of course, he knows I despise him, so our conversations leave a lot to be desired. If he looks at me one more time like I'm not wearin' anythin', I'm going to get out a pair of very sharp scissors and do nature's majority a favor."

Jackson limped slowly into the bathroom. "How long was I asleep?"

“Three hours.”

She plucked up the yellow sticky he had left her before going to sleep. “I got your note about looking at ImTech’s 911 network monitorin’ software. You really think they’re using one of the monitors to move Daemon’s money? Hackin’ the accountin’ software makes more sense.”

In the bathroom, he looked at himself in the dirty mirror and rubbed his bristled chin. No time for a shave. He settled for splashing water on his face.

“They could have changed the alerts,” he said, toweling off and grabbing clean boxers from his suitcase. He turned his back as he dressed. “Besides, we’ve gone through every line of their accounting code. It must be somewhere else. Accounting is too obvious. That’s the first place an auditor would look. Nobody would think of examining their monitoring tools.”

She grumbled something about wasting her time then cocked an eye at him. “Is this one of your crazy hunches?”

“There’s nothing crazy about my hunches—especially since most of them turn out to be correct.” He slipped a shirt over his head. “Go on. I want to hear you admit it.”

“I will not! The last time I listened to one of your nutty ideas, I ended up soakin’ wet at a bachelor party at one in the mornin’ with some pervert named Sal and his three musketeers. Yes, that is what they called themselves, and no, I will not tell you why!”

He tried not to laugh. “That was an honest mistake on the address.”

“Oh, brother! You, sir, are a horrible liar.”

“I am not!”

She scooted the desk chair back from the computer and propped her feet on the bed. “How many of these hunches did you get through before you fell asleep?”

“I got through most of the database monitors. You should probably start there.”

He picked up his jacket from a chair and holstered his Colt.

"I keep thinking about what happened to Ferguson last night. What would Daemon want with a network engineer?"

She shrugged. "The entire world is networked. Everything from the financial centers to about a billion miles of world-wide packet-switched nets. Ferguson has over forty optical communication patents. Maybe Daemon was after something he's workin' on."

"The more I think about this, the more my head aches."

"Speaking of headaches," she noted, "I glanced at Todd Ferguson's code while you were sleepin'. CanAm Labs' boy-genius really goes out of his way to make his code unreadable. I don't think he uses a single variable name over three characters in length. You should probably take a look after you meet with Lambert. You're better with iterative algorithms than I am." Her brown eyes flicked over him and her syrupy voice dropped. "You sure you're up for this? You look terrible."

"I'm just frustrated. Every time we get close, Daemon disappears."

"Wall Street is near the Federal Building. Maybe you should mention Ferguson to Bruce Lambert."

Jackson snorted. "Yeah, I'll do that. I haven't been arrested lately."

Opening the door, he limped down the hall. Even with the nap he felt tired.



NEW YORK in late August was a steam room. Humidity blanketed the city in a suffocating haze. Normally Jackson hated the heat, but today he didn't mind it. Compared to the nightmare of being shot, heat was no big deal. He just wished he could sleep through one entire night. The six weeks they had been trying to crack ImTech felt like six years. Promises made. Promises broken. All he wanted was to get back to the life he'd had. In the last few months, he had worked around the clock

more than he cared to think about, with more of the same coming.

The sidewalk led away from the Hudson River, but even though he grimaced at the pain in his bruised ribs, no one bothered to look him in the eyes. The stress of living in the city had robbed their faces of kindness. His, too, he supposed, stopping at an ATM to check his cash. He pulled out his wallet. Six twenties and change. Just to be on the safe side, he'd better withdraw another six hundred. And there, behind his debit card, was Suzanne's tattered picture: golden hair and hazel eyes. Man, that girl had a smile, sparkling and off kilter. He had taken the picture at his parents' ranch in Arizona a few days after the corn had started showing in the fields. They had just finished riding his father's quarter horses, and her hair had blown back from her face in a nest of wind-tangled curls. She hadn't wanted him to take the picture, but he had, and now, almost four years later, it was the only thing he had linking who he had been to who he was now.

Why did he keep chasing Daemon? The FBI didn't need his help. The only reason they hadn't thrown him in jail was because he stayed out of their way. On the good side, he had made a lot of money tracking down the accounts Daemon had stolen, but was it worth getting killed? Was his life worth the damned eighteen percent of whatever he found?

He removed a new prepaid cell phone and called Suzanne. A pair of skateboarders did rails off a broken bicycle rack in front of a corner grocery store. A portable stereo spat out a steady stream of rap so fast it sounded like gibberish.

"Hello?"

"Suzanne? This is Tyler. Please don't hang up."

"What do you want?"

Her soft, sweet, irritated voice knifed through him. He rubbed his eyes and turned. East Manhattan was only a few miles away, but it might as well have been on another planet.

"Are you free for lunch?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"We've already gone over this."

A snake coiled in his gut. He took a deep breath.

"I'm hoping you and I could take a few weeks off and go home. I'm trying to move on. I really am. I don't want the rest of my life to be like this. I know that. But I'm getting close. I almost got him last night."

"Tyler, an engagement isn't supposed to be this hard! You're never here, and when you are, I wake up in the middle of the night and find you gone. This isn't a relationship. I don't know what it is, but it isn't two people planning a life together."

"I love you, Suzanne. Please."

Except for the rap music, it was very quiet.

"Suzanne? Are you there?"

"Yes," she said. "Yes, I'm still here." She sighed. "Ty, can you answer a question?"

"I'll try."

"Remember when we used to laugh all the time? I used to complain to my friends that all we had were these nonsensical conversations where I would try to discuss our future and you would spring some inane joke on me. At the time I felt like throttling you because you were so frustrating, but after a while, and lots of therapy, I got used to you, well, being you. Tell me, when was the last time you laughed? I keep trying to remember and I can't. I'm not sure you're the same man I fell in love with."

He took a breath and crossed his fingers. "Yesterday, I went to the doctor's office and said, 'Doc, I think I'm a moth.'"

He finished the joke and waited. For a few seconds she didn't say anything.

"I had to ask," she finally said. "Like a fool, I had to ask..."

He closed his eyes and released his breath.

She sighed. "Lord knows I shouldn't, but I'm willing to

give you one last chance. I have to meet with a client at six, but I'm free for dinner afterwards. Meet me down at the Hat and we'll talk."

His soaring spirits plummeted. He tried to speak, but the words wouldn't come.

"Ty? Are you there? I hear music, but —"

"I can't tonight," he said, voice lifeless even to himself.

"You can't?"

"No."

There was a click and the call ended.

JACKSON CAUGHT another cab and rode it deep into the concrete and steel canyons of upper Manhattan. Crowds in their business suits and dresses, all in a hurry, rushed past as if he were a rock on a stream. He couldn't really blame Suzanne for hanging up. At least she had been willing to talk. Anything was better than the night she had ground up his key.

The cab dropped him off at a hotel. At a pay phone in the lobby, he called Lambert at his office in the Federal Building.

"Hello?"

"Is this the Met's ticket office?" Jackson asked. "I need tickets."

There was a slight pause. "You have the wrong number."

Jackson hung up and leaned against the wall to wait. Ten minutes later the phone rang.

"I have something you'll want to look into," Jackson said. "Something you'll have to be careful about. Wilkens won't like it."

"That's nothing new," Lambert replied. "Your name's come up a lot lately, and he's not happy."

"Me? Why?"

"We were watching one of the accounts you tracked down

for the Russians. Moscow moved on it, and it caused problems.”

“It’s their money. They’re entitled to it.”

“Yeah, but they weren’t happy to find out we haven’t been as forthcoming as we could have been about their stolen funds. The Russian Ambassador is demanding to know all of Daemon’s other accounts, at least the ones we know about.”

“That’s not my fault.”

“That’s not how Wilkens sees it. He doesn’t like flushing an investigation because you keep getting involved. Just talking to you right now could get me fired.”

“I’m careful. I didn’t leave anything behind on the account.”

“That you know about.”

The call dropped.

Going over what his friend had said and especially what he hadn’t, Jackson stared at the receiver before putting it back gently in its cradle. If the government had proof of how Jackson had tracked down the missing money, that could lead to serious problems. The last thing he wanted was for the FBI to be looking closely at his activities. They didn’t have to hack, and they didn’t have to break the law to get ahead. Every phone call and every data packet on the internet went through their taps. Years ago, they had gotten a lot of bad publicity for doing warrantless surveillance, but they hadn’t stopped. If anything, they had started tracking even more. The NSA had just opened a new high-performance computing center in the Utah desert. Every packet on every public network on the planet went through that center. There was a reason why it was located so far from the oversight hounds in Washington.

He’d survived by staying out of sight. If the government had any idea how many laws he had broken tracking Daemon, they’d lock him away. He took a careful look up and down the street, then caught another cab to where Quentin Pavak had parked his van in the shadow of Melissa Nigrovic’s uptown

condo complex. The van's engine rumbled quietly, with condensation puddling on the asphalt. Jackson slid open the door. Pavak sat in the back of the van typing on his laptop and talking on his cell. As Jackson got in, Pavak looked up, grunted something into the phone, and snapped it shut.

"Yo, Tyler, 'bout time, man. How's the ribs feeling?" His nasal Jersey accent sounded like a head cold.

"I've been better. What's up?"

Pavak grinned. "Well, that all depends on if Debra's in the mood, if you get my drift."

Jackson groaned and found a spare chair. Racks of surveillance and communications equipment filled the van. It was hard to fit himself, Pavak, and all the equipment inside. For some reason, the van smelled of fish.

Wrinkling his nose, Jackson took a Snickers bar — his "go to" meal — from a sack on the floor. Maybe nuts and chocolate would overwhelm the fishy smell.

Debra, Pavak's girlfriend, was an organic herbalist with odd ideas about nutrition. Jackson never knew what Pavak was going to bring for lunch. A week ago, she'd fed him broccoli, avocado, and rose petal nutritional shakes, leaving Pavak with a lethal case of gas.

"Did Dixie give you my message?" Pavak said.

"All she told me was you'd called."

Pavak gave him his penetrating cop stare and scowled. "I comment on her rack a couple of months ago, and she never lets me forget it. I could reach a hundred and still not understand how a dame's mind works."

Jackson looked out the window. A dreadlocked street artist was setting up an easel. Innocent enough.

Quinten Pavak was easily twice as big as Jackson, most of it muscle. He had carefully combed dark hair, a handsome face, and a bleached, glittering smile that always reminded Jackson of an insurance salesman's. He was a former New York City police detective who had quit the public sector after his wife

had enough of the sewer he crawled through each working day and had left him for a man who sold advertising space in women's magazines.

Money had been tight during his divorce, and Pavak gradually lost sight of the difference between his personal life and the evil he found himself mired in. One day ran into another until, one cold winter afternoon, two detectives from Internal Affairs paid his apartment, his safe deposit box, and even Debra's garden shed an untimely visit.

It had taken every favor he had collected over the years not to get charged for possession of stolen property. He found himself busted loose and penniless at the age of thirty-nine. All he had were the clothes on his back, but he had survived over fifteen years of policing the Big Apple's rotting core, and a lot of people owed him favors. That had been over four years ago — more than enough time to exact a full measure of revenge.

"Was that Debra on the phone?" Jackson asked, sniffing the air.

"Yeah. She was just calling to see what I thought of the fish oil smoothie she packed me."

"Fish oil smoothie?"

"Non-fat yogurt, sunflower seeds, blueberries, organic cream and fish oil blended together." Pavak poured himself another shot from the thermos.

The shake had a stomach-turning yellowish tinge. "She must have you by the balls," Jackson said.

"Yeah, she does, but I'm not the only one. I have some news about Vaccaro," Pavak said after taking a sip. "You're gonna love it." He turned back to his laptop and typed awkwardly on the cramped keyboard. One of the monitors bolted to the side of the van's wall came to life. The monitor showed a grainy black-and-white video of Joseph Vaccaro, the chief financial officer of ImTech Technology, walking into a building. Vaccaro was clearly nervous and kept running his right hand across his bald, shiny head.

It had been a month since Jackson had traced a maze of financial transactions to ImTech. Daemon's holding accounts in the Caribbean had moved through multiple offshore companies before bouncing off a closed account in ImTech's receivables—which was peculiar since money was only of use if it could be spent. Considering all the accounts the money had traveled through, letting ImTech's software bounce the transfer as an error that didn't make sense.

Jackson squinted at the display. "Is that a bank?"

Pavak nodded. "The first of three. Vaccaro started pulling funds from his safe deposit boxes just before lunchtime. You should see the pile of gym bags in the trunk of his Mercedes. He's even wearing his ImTech golf shirt, if you can believe it. For the CFO of a major tech company, he really isn't all that bright. He may as well walk in with his company badge clipped to his shirt pocket. I'm surprised his wife hasn't realized he's been spreading his DNA elsewhere."

"Is he upstairs?"

"Yeah. The love birds have been celebrating for the last hour. Once I realized they were going to be there awhile, I planted a camera in the building across the street from her condo. It's the second window from the left, eight floors up." Pavak clicked his mouse. "Take a look."

Jackson unfolded a canvas stool. At first, he could see very little, but then Melissa Nigrovic, carrying an armload of clothes, walked across the condo. The windows had blinds, but they were partially open, and Pavak had gotten the wireless camera's angle exactly right. She was young, had thick, luxurious blond hair and, as always, looked like she belonged on a magazine cover. As a bonus, she was dressed only in her lacy underwear.

"Is she packing a suitcase?"

"Yes."

Jackson's cell beeped. He noted the number and hit the button. It was Dixie.

"I really hate to say it, so I won't," Dixie grumbled.

He blinked. "What won't you say?"

"I know how Daemon's movin' the money and how Vaccaro's gettin' his cut."

Jackson stood up so fast he hit his knee on the van's desk.

Over the phone, he heard the clicks of her keyboard. "As you know, the two most important questions with ImTech have always been why Daemon's money keeps bouncin' off a closed account, and how Vaccaro has been movin' his percentage into his growth funds in South America. As far as we know, nothin' has ever moved in or out of ImTech since the destination account is closed. Every time the sendin' computer tries to transfer the funds to ImTech, the transfer bounces because it has nowhere to go. It's the perfect cover. They have thousands of rejections as proof of their innocence."

"So how is Vaccaro moving the transactions through a closed account?"

"After our conversation about the alert monitoring, I started watchin' the process tables on the accountin' server. About an hour ago I noticed that every time the 911 client-error-monitor process would cycle, Vaccaro's investment accounts in South America would populate."

"I was right!"

"You and your hunches," she grouched.

He smiled. "How does it work?"

"Inside the 911 client error monitor is a small include snippet of Perl code that intercepts the money before it hits the closed receivables account. The snippet transfers the money, clears the logs, and then reverses the operation the next cycle—all of it at millisecond speeds. Vaccaro dumps his cut offshore into some Mexican and Brazilian growth funds. ImTech's accountin' software times out the transaction and bounces the transaction back to the Caymans as an error where it sits in a log file as a dead end. Unless someone was

insanely gifted," she said, typing again, "or knew what to look for, chances are they would miss it."

Jackson flashed Pavak a grin. "Hey, Q, do you think I'm insanely gifted?"

"Only with the women, boss."

Dixie snorted.

"So where does the transfer go after Vaccaro takes his cut?" Jackson asked.

"You're not gonna like it. The destination is a bank on the island of Madeira off the coast of Portugal. As you know, the Madeirans are notoriously, ah, lax with their bankin' standards."

Jackson swore. Would he ever catch a break?

"But at least we're one step closer to the end of the rainbow," Dixie said.

"How much money has been moved this way?"

"Hundreds of millions. Probably a lot more."

Shouting about Jesus, God, the end of world, and how hellfire would soon be raining down, a homeless man staggered past the van.

"There's one more thing, Ty," she said. "Something about this doesn't make sense. You pay me a lot of money to get you access where you need to go. Most of the time we're chasing overseas, which is logical. If I was Daemon, I wouldn't want the FBI involved unless it was absolutely necessary."

"So?"

"The money in Madeira is movin' to accounts here in New York."

Jackson sat up. "Why would Daemon do that? There's more scrutiny here than anywhere in the world."

"I know. It doesn't make sense. Maybe you should call Agent Lambert again and see if the Feds know anything."

Jackson grimaced. "Well, about that. I spoke with him earlier and he's not happy. We tripped over one of the accounts the FBI was watching. Moscow's angry the FBI was sitting on

it and demanded all the money and accounts they know about. As you can guess, Wilkens is upset. He wants me thrown down a hole.”

“Your old boss always wants you thrown somewhere.”

Jackson sighed. “Just another perk of being me. We’ll talk about it later. Right now, Vaccaro’s taken the day off to visit his safe deposit boxes around town. He’s at the lovely Ms. Nigrovic’s condo where she’s busy packing suitcases.”

“What!” Dixie started to type furiously. “Should I empty Vaccaro’s account? He won’t be able to go anywhere without the money.”

“Not yet. Pull the money and he’ll disappear.”

“What should we do then?”

Jackson watched Melissa carry another armload of clothes. “My guess is if Vaccaro knew he was under surveillance, he wouldn’t be letting his girlfriend parade around the condo in her underwear with the blinds open. We have enough to hand him off to Moscow. Vaccaro will probably tell all to avoid being extradited. Maybe the FBI will find something we missed.”

She sniffed. “I’ll believe it when I see it.”

“Shut everything down. Once the Bureau starts digging, I don’t want to be anywhere nearby. How much is in Vaccaro’s investment account?”

“It’ll probably break eight million sometime this weekend. Why?”

“What are the odds Vaccaro could code the account transfer into the monitors?”

She thought for a second. “If you’re askin’ me if the guy who changed the company monitorin’ system is the same fool who keeps his criminal to-do list on his phone where anyone could see it, I would have to say no.”

“He would need help.” Jackson rubbed his face, thinking. “I’m going to call Lambert again and arrange a meeting. Some advance warning on Vaccaro might calm the waters. Keep an

eye on the money, and let me know if Vaccaro pulls anything out and where it goes. Where's Doc?"

"Eating lunch."

"Text his cell and let him know Lambert's on his way so he can make sure the meet is clean. I know Wilkens. Once he gets angry, he doesn't give up. I wouldn't be surprised if he has people looking for us right now."

"Tyler, one more thing," Dixie said. "How did you know to investigate ImTech? Was it one of your crazy hunches, or was it somethin' else? Most people would look at the transactions bouncin' off the closed account and move on. You didn't."

He paused. "I wish I knew. How does a cop know to call in a license plate on the freeway? How does a mother know her kid's broken his arm at school before she's told? I can't explain it. I kept asking myself why Daemon would go to all the effort of moving the money all over the world just to let it error out at the end. It has to go somewhere to be of use."

"With your instincts, you should still be at the FBI. Wilkens is an idiot. I don't know how Bruce Lambert stands workin' for him."

"My time at the Bureau is long over, Dixie."

She sighed. "We need a vacation. Someplace warm and sunny where we can sleep for a month."

"You'd go nuts after a day."

Jackson returned his phone to his pocket and sat back to think about Vaccaro's visits to the three banks. Had Vaccaro started to suspect somebody was after him, or had he decided to simply call it good at a round number? Eight million was more than enough money to take his mistress and start another life. His wife and kids would get the shaft, but judging by the surveillance they had of the man and his family, only a fool would think he had a happy home life. Jackson was surprised Vaccaro had stayed around this long. He almost felt bad about what was going to happen to him. Not only would he lose his

nasty wife and spoiled kids, but his mistress and the money, too.

He got out of the van into the hot sunshine.

"Sometimes Dixie really pisses me off," Pavak said, following him.

"Only sometimes? Not to get in the middle of your little war, but it would help if you didn't hit on her every time you saw her. You and Debra are a couple."

"A man can look around, can't he? Besides, Dixie should consider it a compliment."

"What did you say this time?"

Pavak smirked. "I just told her she had me at a disadvantage. She could kiss my ass while I couldn't." Pavak laughed it up.

"No wonder she gets tired of you." Jackson spotted a cab driving by and started to wave it over, then stopped. He elbowed Pavak and tipped his head toward a man at the other end of the block. There was nothing about the man that would normally draw attention except he was the only person in sight wearing a baggy windbreaker in the heat, and he was talking on his phone. Jackson scanned the street.

"Q, see that white Ford at the far end of the block? What kind of tires does it have?"

Pavak squinted at the car then stiffened. "BSW pursuit-rated, police issue Firestones. Let's get out of here." He ran around to the driver's side.

Jackson jumped into the van and slammed the door. Throwing the chairs out of the way, he opened a rectangular metal case sitting on the floor, grabbed the three laptops and flipped them on their sides. Fingers clawing at the eject buttons, he ripped the drives out of their bays. All three laptops, tiny speakers screeching, started spitting out errors.

"Three black and whites just turned the corner!" Pavak yelled from the front seat. "I can see at least one more unmarked Ford behind them! Damn it! A Navistar truck just

pulled behind the Ford! A hundred bucks says it's SWAT! This does not look good!"

Jackson dropped the drives into the metal case on the floor and slammed the lid. Trying to find the power cord, he groped frantically around in the dark.

"Turn on the lights back here!"

"What?"

"Turn on the lights!"

Pavak bent forward and twisted the knob on the dash. The back of the van flooded with light. Outside the van, a siren chirped. The first police cruiser skidded to a stop in front of the van; the next pinned the van from behind. Red and white lights flashed outside the windows. Risking a quick look, Jackson saw a dozen heavily armed men running up the sidewalk.

Squirring under the desk, he located the elusive cord, plugged it in, and hit the switch on the side. There was a whining hum as the inside of the case was magnetized. The lights dimmed for a few seconds before he turned the case off.

He got to his feet, cut the power to the laptops, and had just sat down when the side door was yanked open by a half dozen police in full riot gear. An ugly old man stood behind them, his bony face split by a smile.

"Tyler 'Wild West' Jackson," FBI Field Supervisor Ralph Wilkens said. "How time has flown since our last visit."

WHY HAD he even bothered to wear a suit? Alec Janné was in a bad mood, and the hot Chicago morning, combined with his pending visit to see his half-brother Adrian, only worsened his mood. Loosening his tie and undoing the top button of his shirt, he guided his BMW north along the winding road bisecting the Illinois Elgin Mental Health Center's grounds. Through clumps of drooping trees, he caught his first glimpse of the abandoned Old Center building. Above it and to the west rose two brick boiler stacks from the facility's coal-fired power plant.

Old Center always reminded Janné of something from a Dracula flick. The windows were smashed, the roof had fallen in, and rust riddled the protective wrought-iron window screens. Thick patches of ivy smothered the crumbling foundations and crept through empty doorways like cold fingers looking for something to choke.

The building had originally been designed in the late eighteenth hundreds by an architect from Pennsylvania named Kirkbride. He died around the turn of the century, and his dream of creating a model mental hospital had died with him. The decorative lakes and ponds were filled in, grass replaced the flower

gardens, and only the wind and rats moved through a building that had once housed more than a thousand patients. Since Janné's visit a month ago, the wind had carried off a few more slate shingles, but the peaked roofs and chimneys still reared into the white, ozone-laced sky.

The road cut through a grove of maples, the leaves brown from lack of rain, and ended in front of the blood-colored brick-and-glass building housing the Center's criminally insane. There was a small sign out front that couldn't be seen from the road, but Janné didn't need a sign. He'd been coming to see Adrian for five months. After the first visit there was no forgetting the way.

He parked under the oaks and walked up the cracked cement sidewalk to the only glass door in sight. Fluorescent lights lit the lobby. A handful of cheap plastic chairs were bolted to one wall, and above them hung an abstract painting. It looked like the artist had gulped a quart of chocolate milk, stuck a finger down his throat, and framed the dried mess. Two security guards watched from in front of a white reinforced steel door thick enough to stop an armor-piercing bullet. A large red sign informed all visitors they must be escorted.

Except for the rattle of an air conditioner, the lobby was silent.

"Good morning. I have an appointment with Dr. Rice," Janné told the guard on the right, handing across his old CIA-supplied government identification.

The guard lowered his eyes to check the ID against his sheet and gave Janné a red visitor's badge. Janné clipped it to his lapel and followed the second guard, who wore squeaky, rubber-soled shoes, through a door and down a hall. The door of a cramped office stood open. A window looked out on the Fox River Valley's rolling hills, but the psychiatrist in charge of the criminally insane sat with his back to the view.

Dr. Rice was a tall, middle-aged man with thinning black hair, skin the color of Elmer's Glue, and a mole the size of a

rabbit pellet near his left nostril. He looked up from his patient charts and stood to shake Janné's hand.

"Agent Janné? I'm Dr. Glen Rice. I spoke with you earlier."

Rice was almost seven feet tall, but he had a permanent stoop. The security guard closed the door. Janné took the offered chair and glanced at a sign proclaiming that mental health was a partnership between the doctor and patient. That and dancing the tango, Janne thought.

Rice folded his tall frame into his chair and opened Adrian's patient chart.

"From my review of his records," he murmured, "I see that Adrian Laroque was found comatose in January with a gunshot wound to the head. Fortunately, there's a great deal of bone above the right eye. Other than losing a lot of blood, he was very lucky."

Rice bent over the page. "He emerged from the coma six weeks later and began exhibiting delusions, hallucinations, and severe mood swings, all of which suggested an organic psychotic disorder. Five months ago, he was transferred from Cook County Hospital and has been under the care and supervision of Dr. Sorenson, but last week Dr. Sorenson went on medical leave. You've been the patient's only visitor."

Rice looked up from reading and inspected Janné's wide face and peppercorn eyes. "Why do you keep coming back?"

Janné blinked at the unexpected question. "Excuse me?"

"Security has you visiting him the last Tuesday of every month. Why do you keep coming back?"

"The man who shot Adrian has not yet been apprehended."

"So far you've been wasting your time. You've been coming out here for months and haven't learned anything."

Janné glanced at his watch. "My time is mine to waste."

"And mine also, now that Dr. Sorenson's on indefinite leave," Rice replied, an impatient edge entering his dry voice. "The last time you were here, Adrian attacked one of the staff."

It took six men to take him down. For someone who lies around on the floor all day, his muscle reflexes are quite impressive. If one of the nurses hadn't gotten a needle in him, six men wouldn't have been enough."

"Did you try and clean up his cell?" Janné asked.

"We call them rooms, not cells."

"Dr. Rice, I do not mean to agitate Adrian, but my options are extremely limited." Janné glanced at the sign on the wall and allowed annoyance to enter his voice. "Mental health is a partnership, yes? I do not have a degree in psychiatry, but Adrian and I make a pair if my addition is correct?"

Rice's jaw clamped shut, making the rabbit pellet jump. "Practicing psychology bears little similarity to a spy interrogation, Agent. You cannot demand or expect answers from someone this ill. With acute psychotic conditions, one person's fantasy is another person's reality. What my patient perceives is his reality, not ours. He may never be coherent again, especially with an underlying brain injury."

Janné noticed a fly that had somehow circumvented the building's locked windows and doors; the fly bobbed back and forth along the grimy glass. Like the fly, Adrian must want to get out of here.

Rice pushed back his chair. "You may visit this time, but when you get back to your office, please fax me a document that can prove these visits are warranted for reasons of national security."

"I meant to do that after my last visit," Janné said, "but it slipped my mind."

"Don't let it slip again." Rice opened the door to the hallway. A large male psych-tech with stitches under one eye stood waiting. His starched white shirt made his muscled arms stand out.

"*Bonjour*, Elden," Janné said. "What happened to your cheek?"

"Adrien had one of his episodes last night. The only reason

he didn't get my eye is I'm up too high. I've never seen anybody move so fast."

They rode the elevator to the fifth floor, where a uniformed security guard sat to one side of an electronically locked, double steel door. Above their heads, a wide-angle security camera recorded their presence. The guard turned the visitors' log around. Janné signed in, wondering how many pages had been filled since Adrien had arrived.

The guard buzzed them in. Two more psych-techs and a nurse joined them on the other side. The door clanged shut. A single long hallway stretched ahead, interrupted only by numbered doorways. As they marched down the hall, no one spoke. In one room, a patient stared dreamily at the light. In another, a heavysset man had difficulty negotiating an invisible maze. A steady stream of expletives burst from his mouth as he tried to find his way out. In room seventeen, a naked man stood admiring himself in front of a dented, stainless steel mirror.

Janné ignored the patients and dropped his eyes to the floor. The vomit-green tile had been polished to a high luster.

Rice stopped in front of Adrian's room.

"You have three minutes," Rice said. "If he shows the slightest violent tendency, you are to leave the room immediately. Do you understand?"

"He will not harm me," Janné said.

Elden gave him an appraising look. "Then, maybe we should give you a mop."

Rice withdrew his keys and unlocked the door. The tumblers clicked. He pushed the heavy steel aside. Janné took a deep breath and followed Elden's burly figure through the doorway.

Even though Janné had been there before, it was always a shock to enter the cell.

Using chalk, Adrian had turned his room into his own private tropical paradise. The room's light fixture glowed like a

sun. Against the far wall and halfway down each sidewall, a beach rolled toward a powder-blue sky. At one end of the beach, a vendor hawked cold drinks under a palm tree. Janné read the neatly lettered sign:

COROLAS DEL MAR BEACH RESTRICTIONS
NO GLASS BOTTLES

Drawn across the middle of the floor, a narrow reef and a band of surf split the cell in half. From the edge of the water to as far as Adrian could scratch under the door when it was locked—including the walls, the ceiling, and the door itself—the cell was black. The only part that wasn't black was where the janitor had started mopping, and he hadn't cleaned up much of it—just enough to make Adrian violent.

"One of the techs Adrian put in the medical ward said Adrian pounced on him like a cat," Elden said, cracking his big knuckles.

The taste in Janné's mouth turned bitter. Of course, Adrian pounced. He wanted out.

"Three minutes," Rice told him flatly.

Janné used the reef to cross the water. Adrian, muttering up at the clouds, lay on the floor. When Adrian saw Janné, he sat up. At one time Adrian had been one of the meanest men Janné had ever known, but now his half-brother's brown eyes were empty. He wore gray cotton pants, a thin shirt that hadn't been white for a long time, and enough chalk dust to stir up a cloud when he moved. He was barefoot. Where the bullet had entered, a thumb-shaped scar puckered his right eyebrow. At the sight of Dr. Rice, a smile that did not reach his eyes split his dirty face. Adrian's lips moved, but Janné could not make out the words.

"What is he mumbling?" Janné asked Rice.

"He probably wants out of here," Elden said. "I know I do."

Adrian lay back down. His eyes went to the clouds on the ceiling. Janné took off his suit coat and tossed it to the male nurse. Elden caught it, but nearly dropped the tranquilizer.

“Comment allez-vous ce matin, Adrian?”

Adrian moved his head slightly toward Janné’s voice. His eyes were unfocused, as if he were staring at Janné from the bottom of a swimming pool.

Janné glanced around him at the drawings and switched to English. “You have gotten Corolas Del Mar exactly right, my friend. Remember the times we spent drinking cocktails on this beach?”

Adrian didn’t answer.

Janné crouched and touched his brother’s scar. “Who did this to you, *mon ami*? Tell me his name, and you and I will take *un avion* to Corolas tomorrow.”

“Two minutes,” Rice said.

Janné felt a surge of anger. Removing a piece of chalk from a small box by the mattress, he drew a crude picture of an owl on the floor.

“You know who this is, yes?”

Recognition stirred in Adrian’s eyes.

Janné tapped the owl. “Give me his name, and I will remove you from here.”

Adrian examined the bird, and then his head rolled to one side. Janné followed his eyes to a tree on the wall. Near the top, and almost invisible in the branches, perched a white owl.

“Qui est-il, mon ami?” Janné coaxed. “You found him eight months ago. Tell me his name.”

A thin line of saliva trickled from the corner of Adrian’s mouth, cut a furrow through the filth, and plopped onto the chalky floor. His body started to shake.

“You know who he is,” Janné urged. “Give me his name.”

Rocking back and forth, arms around his knees, Adrian gulped for air.

“You’re pushing him too hard,” Elden warned.

Janné glared up. "I must know who shot him."

"Back off or you will never come back," Rice said.

Janné threw the chalk against the wall and stood. Elden stepped forward. Janné patted Adrian's arm.

"I must leave now, Adrian. I will visit again soon. *Au revoir.*"

Adrian sprang up, but instead of attacking them, he grabbed black chalk and obliterated the owl.

Rice leapt for the door. Elden clamped onto Janné's shoulder and dragged him out of the cell. The door clanged shut.

"What's with the owl?" Rice said.

Janné ignored him and walked away.

RALPH WILKENS WAS GAUNT, wrinkled, and had silver hair that looked as if it had been riveted to his bony skull. Three years earlier he had weighed almost three hundred pounds, but a heart attack and triple bypass had carved away half his weight. He glanced distastefully at the fast food wrappers, empty soda cans, and discarded newspapers.

“Nice place you have here, Jackson.”

“Why thanks,” Pavak answered from the front. “I like that lived-in look.”

Wilkens glanced at Pavak as if the former cop was something that had ended up on the bottom of his Florsheims. “I need a word with Jackson. Get out.”

Pavak left, following two agents over to a waiting police cruiser. Wilkens ducked inside and took the other chair.

“What insanity would possess you to work with that scum?” Wilkens demanded. “You realize he’s under investigation in the disappearance of three government witnesses?”

“If memory serves, weren’t all three under indictment?”

“Two were. The third was cooperating against the other two—and your friend. Only the Grand Jury knew who was talking and who wasn’t.”

"I guess the point is moot now," Jackson said.

Wilkins looked like he had bitten into a lemon. "I'm disappointed. It wasn't that long ago when you first arrived here in jeans and cowboy boots. Top of your class at University of Arizona Law. Passed the bar your first time through. Nothing but good things from your superiors. Now look at you."

"I guess it'd be pointless to ask if you have a warrant," Jackson said.

"Relax. This is a social call. I just want to ask you a couple of questions and maybe enlist your services toward the greater cause."

"I'm not going to re-up if that's what you're thinking."

Wilkins shrugged and sat down. "You haven't heard what I have to say yet. You could change your mind."

Jackson glanced at the men on the sidewalk staring at him from under their Kevlar helmets. "I would feel more comfortable without all the hardware."

"I'll need your weapon first."

Jackson removed his pistol, thumbed out the clip, and handed both across. Wilkins inspected the .10 mm. "Not a lot of these cannons around. What do you use it for, killing cattle rustlers on your parents' ranch?"

Jackson ignored the question. "What's this about?"

Wilkins gestured to the police and they stepped back from the van. "Right to the point, I see. I like that a lot better than the fishy smell in here. You guys gut a carp for breakfast?" He glanced at the disassembled laptops on the table, his old eyes missing nothing. "I heard you're helping the Russians track down Daemon. I'm glad to hear you moved on."

"So, you decided to drop by and congratulate me. You should have called first. We would have cleaned the place up."

Wilkins snorted.

"My people tell me you've made a lot of money finding the money Daemon stole," he said. "What are the Russians paying for each dollar you find?"

“I would rather not comment on percentages.”

“Maybe you’d prefer to comment in front of a grand jury? All it would take is a phone call.”

Jackson shrugged. “I perform a service for a customer who feels they have been underserved by the authorities of this country. I have a letter of understanding from the Russian Federation if you wish to review it.”

The old man smiled. “We can do that later if necessary. I didn’t come here to lean on you. I really don’t care about the Russians. I just wanted to ask if you know a man named Hugh Dobrowski?”

“Should I?”

“Judging by the number of questions he’s asking about you, I thought you two were acquainted.”

“I haven’t had the pleasure.”

Wilkins stared, sharp eyes unblinking, before he leaned back. “See, there’s the problem. I believe you, but that doesn’t help me.”

“I take it you know him?”

“Of course, I do. I’ve known Hugh for years. We go back a long time.”

“So, you want to know why your good friend is asking about me. Maybe I’m missing something here, but wouldn’t it be easier to ask him?”

“We’re not that kind of friends.”

Jackson relaxed slightly. “Ah, a typical government urinary contest—which, by the way, is one of the truly excellent benefits of not having to worry about a pension. Thank you very much.”

Wilkins ignored the barb. “There are a lot of things going on right now, Jackson. Hugh Dobrowski is just one more question among many that have me concerned. Daemon’s moving a lot of money through a handful of accounts we know about. He’s moving assets into the States. We could close the

accounts, but we think they're the tip of the iceberg. That kind of money has a lot of people worried."

"What does this have to do with me?"

"Quite a lot, actually. I may have made a mistake three years ago in kicking you out of the Bureau, but that doesn't mean I'm stupid." He glanced around again. "I was hoping Dixie Stevens would be here. I have a warrant in my pocket with her name on it. Arresting her would have made my day. You realize aiding and abetting a felon is a criminal offense?"

"You have a funny way of asking for cooperation."

Wilkins' droopy face flushed. "We've been after Daemon for years, and we're no closer to finding him than you were when you got shot. Every time I take a step forward, doors slam in my face. Who does he work for? Who's protecting him? And most of all, why can't we get close?"

"I seem to remember asking those same questions."

Wilkins lifted his homely face. For the first time, Jackson saw worry in the old man's eyes. "Every hacker and terrorist and foreign government wants into the financial district. We've known for years that Daemon's wanted to go after the financial district. Think about the kinds of numbers that go through those systems. Billions of dollars cross those networks every day. Computer automation has gotten so tightly integrated into our lives that a computer hiccup can easily become a global disaster at mainframe speeds. A butterfly beating its wings on Wall Street really can start a financial hurricane in China. I don't even want to think about what would happen if Daemon were to gain access."

Jackson started to protest, but Wilkins held up a veined hand. "The financial markets are built on trust every bit as much as actual currency. For high-speed electronic systems to work, you and I and everyone else must trust the automation. Billions of transactions happen every day—all of them networked through tens of thousands of routers and switches pushing packets across electronic highways. Our networks

have gotten so sophisticated and reliable that moving currency has become routine—so routine, in fact, that no one thinks about it anymore.”

Wilkins held up his phone. “With this, I can walk into a store and instantly purchase anything. With nothing more than the touch of a finger, I can buy a new car or even a house. Think about the trust, Jackson. Then think about what will happen if it stops.”

A car backfired nearby. The team on the sidewalk jumped as if a bomb had gone off. Jackson had a very bad feeling.

“Why are you here?”

Wilkins’ smiled. “That’s the one good piece of news I have. I’m here to offer you your job back. I might not agree with your approach, but you get results. We both want the same thing. Find Daemon while there’s still time to stop him.”

Jackson’s heart skipped a beat. If he took Wilkins’ offer, he and Lambert would be partners again. He could reconcile with Suzanne and work normal hours. Instead of risking his life every time he stepped onto the street, he’d have someone to go home to every night. He would have the government helping him instead of always wondering if they were going to crush him like a bug. He would have paid time off, medical benefits, and an office where he could put up pictures of his family. Everything he had dreamed about would come true.

But then he noticed Wilkins’ sneer. He had seen that look on the old shark before. Something else was going on.

“You don’t need me. You have a decent team. Bruce Lambert’s a good agent. The CIA and NSA are tapped into the world’s financial and communication networks. You’ll get him eventually.”

“Your former partner has talent, but he doesn’t have your instincts. Nobody’s better at following money than you are. I want the two of you back together again.” Wilkins leaned forward, voice dropping into a leaky hiss. “What would you say if I could get you unrestricted access to the NSA’s PRISM

data? Think about it. Every phone call, every e-mail, every dime that moves worldwide, all of it will be at your fingertips.”

“But what happens after we get him?” Jackson asked. “PRISM data isn’t admissible in court. Without probable cause, a judge will throw the evidence out. Daemon will walk.”

A leer twisted the corner of Wilkens’ mouth. “All those rules are out the window, boy. There won’t be a conviction. Find him, and someone else will figure out what to do with him.”

Jackson stared at Wilkens. “No insult intended, but I just can’t seem to get past nearly dying for nothing. I’m sorry.”

“I don’t see you having a choice in the matter.”

Jackson stiffened. “Don’t make this ugly. I’m grateful for the market tip, but I’ll never work for you again.”

“Then you give me no choice.”

Wilkens removed a folded sheet of paper from his shirt pocket and handed it over. On the paper were three typed columns listing bank names, account numbers, and balances. Jackson scanned the list and stiffened.

“My accountants tell me that is most of what you have, Jackson. Quite an astonishing sum, I must say. You’ve been very busy. As of five minutes ago, every cent has been locked down, pending government investigation for wire fraud, tax evasion, and whatever I care to dream up.”

He leaned forward, eyes shining. “I want Daemon, and you’re going to gift wrap him in paper and a red bow. Anything else, and the Treasury Department will take every dollar you have. Then they’ll move on to your parents’ home in Arizona. After that, they’ll target your fiancée and your brother. I’ll make sure your family will be in tax court for years. Your parents will end up bankrupt and broke—which is not how I would like to be going into my golden years. And while all of that is happening, I will send Dixie Stevens down the deepest, darkest hole I can find in the Federal penal system. And finally, I will go after you. You think getting two

slugs through the lungs was fun? Just wait. I will make you my career.”

“You can’t do this.”

The old man snickered. “You and the rabble you work with exist because I allow it, boy. You have one week before I have the pleasure of destroying your life. Or give me what I want, and everything will quietly go away. Your choice.”

He beckoned to the waiting men on the sidewalk. With weapons trained on Jackson, they shuffled forward. “Now get out. I don’t know if you would be stupid enough to leave anything of interest in this wreck, but I’m not going to chance it. You have a lot to do and a long way to go to get there.”

Holding his ribs, Jackson stumbled into the sunshine.

Wilkens held out the Colt. “Welcome back to the show.”



JACKSON HAILED A CAB. Pavak got in. Downtown, standing in the cool air of an office building’s lobby, Pavak watched the street through the window while Jackson called Dixie. Wilkens hadn’t gotten all their money, but she confirmed that most of their funds were locked.

“I can’t believe I didn’t see them comin’!” she snapped, her syrupy voice so angry that her words ran together. “We must have gotten careless!”

“We were too busy watching Vaccaro to see if anyone was watching us.”

“Do you think Wilkens got our information from Lambert?”

Jackson frowned. “I don’t think so, but I’ll find out.” He pinched the bridge of his nose. “It’s times like this I ask myself why I didn’t just give up and go home after Wilkens forced me out. Now I don’t have anything to go back to.”

“You don’t believe Wilkens will keep his end of the bargain?” she asked.

“Of course not. He’s never done a good deed in his miserable life. Pack everything up. As soon as I finish meeting with Lambert, we need to get out of the city. If we can’t get Daemon, I want Wilkens instead. Something where we can put an apple in his mouth and serve him up like the pig he is.”

“Ah, yes, a challenge. I like that. What about Vaccaro? With our accounts locked down, we’re gonna need funds.”

“Good point.”

He put his cell away and motioned for Pavak to come over.

“Q, shake the love bird. I’m going to empty his account, so he should be eager to chat. Get everything you can on where Daemon’s money came from—account numbers, transaction amounts, dates, names, places. If he cooperates, I’ll return seven digits. Anything else, and I’ll burn him. That kind of money is more than enough to run off with his mistress in style. He’ll sing.”

“And if the threat doesn’t work?”

“Find a way to convince him.”

Pavak smiled around his perfect teeth.

JACKSON HAD a taxi drop him off a few blocks from where he had asked Lambert to meet him. Running late, Jackson limped up the walk. What should he do? His options were extremely limited. The old man had known exactly how to hit him.

He found the alley. Something sticky had been dumped onto the asphalt, and every step stirred up clouds of flies. Halfway down the alley, past an overflowing dumpster, Tracy O'Connell waited by an open freight door. O'Connell had a linebacker's build and flame-colored hair cut close to the skull, making his rough features look even bigger than they were. He had been a military combat medic for twenty years and held a .9 mm automatic in his left hand.

"Hey, Doc, what's with the weapon?" Jackson asked.

"We have a visitor. Showed up about ten minutes ago. White male about sixty. No identification, and he won't say anything except Lambert isn't coming."

Jackson stopped. "Did he give a reason?"

"No."

"Is he armed?"

"Revolver in his right pocket. Spare shells in his left. No

wire. Some pocket change, and a pack of gum. He didn't like the wait."

"One of Wilkens' men?" Jackson asked.

"He doesn't fit the type."

Jackson looked left and right and nodded. Jackson unzipped his windbreaker and tightened the straps of his vest. "I'll see what he wants."

"Just to be safe, I'm going to see if he brought company," O'Connell said, stepping aside so that Jackson could enter.

The building had once housed New York Paint & Pigment until a vengeful employee had doused the sales floor with lacquer thinner and torched the place. The owner had taken the insurance money, put the building up for sale, and retired to Florida. It had never been sold, and now there was nothing left but the empty shell of a once-thriving business. Even after a decade, the heavy odor of smoke hung in the air. The charred studs that surrounded three blackened oak desks had once boxed off an office. After his look around, O'Connell returned and took up a position by the door.

In the darkened interior, an old man with a broken nose, white hair, and flat gray eyes stood puffing a cigarette. Despite the heat he wore a stained black raincoat, Brooks Brothers suit, and soft-soled Doc Martens that looked older than he was.

"Hey," Jackson said.

"It's about time." The man took a last drag and flipped his cigarette onto the ash-covered floor. "Waiting for you is worse than standing in line at the DMV."

Jackson eased his butterfly knife from the sleeve of his windbreaker. He snapped his wrist, letting the knife's steel catch the light. The blade made a pleasant click.

"Looks like you've gotten a bit more cautious than you used to be," the stranger added, nodding at the weapon. "Course, most people aren't all that willing to crawl headfirst

down a hole after a snake more than once—especially after they got bit the first time.”

“Who are you?”

“My name is Hugh Dobrowski, and I’m looking for Tyler Jackson. He used to work for Ralph Wilkens in the Bureau’s New York office until he took two of Daemon’s slugs through the chest.”

“What do you want?”

“Daemon’s head. Same as him.”

“The day my walking papers came in was the day I left. One way, without looking back.”

“Good story. Too bad it’s not true.”

“Believe what you want.”

“Even if I can give you a better than even chance of getting him?”

Jackson scowled. “Tell it to the FBI. Wilkens isn’t much to look at, but he has decent people working for him.”

“You’re better. You came closer than anybody ever has.”

“You still haven’t told me exactly what you want.”

Dobrowski loosened his tie and unbuttoned his shirt to reveal a bloodstained bandage taped high on his shoulder.

“A few days ago, I made a career move. Let’s just say that instead of a gold watch, I got this.”

He removed a crumpled pack of cigarettes from his pocket, then seemed to realize what he was doing and put them back.

“Do you know how Daemon got his name?” Dobrowski asked.

“No.”

“Your client, the Russians, gave it to him. Daemons are divine beings. Half mortal, half god. Their knowledge and power make them almost untouchable. The Russkies gave him that moniker because he was so good at cracking their banks. His specialty was currency manipulation. He drove them nuts until he vanished with over four billion US. Nobody’s seen him

or the money since—which is quite a feat since Moscow has a sizeable reward on his head.”

Dobrowski coughed, the sound low and deep in his lungs. Although his chest moved, very little noise escaped. He opened the cigarettes and withdrew one. As he lit it and inhaled, the tip glowed a fiery red. His voice regained its gravelly strength.

“Across the Atlantic, just off the coast of Portugal, is the island of Madeira. About ten years ago, the Portuguese government started selling off pieces of their banks and eventually got out of finance altogether. Coincidentally, this was about the time Daemon went to ground. The major player on the island now is a company called the Espírito Santo Group, which is mostly made up of relatives and friends of the local politicians. They’re big into short- and medium-term credit with anyone or anything that breathes. They don’t care where the money comes from, and they care even less about where it goes. Best of all, every cent is exempt from taxes and capital gains until the next century. That means none of their transactions need to be accounted for publicly, and with no external audit, they’re almost impossible to track. They’re big with the Mexican cartels.”

Dobrowski glanced over at the door. O’Connell, apparently seeing something he didn’t like, pulled the door almost shut and raised his weapon. Looking through the charred studs, Jackson saw nothing but mixing equipment, steel drums, and scattered cans. If Dobrowski had brought anyone with him, they would have made their move by now.

“So, it’s a money laundering operation?”

“Not exactly,” Dobrowski said. “For the past few months, a lot of money has been bouncing from Madeira into the States. The accounts change day-to-day, but the pattern is the same. Sort of makes you wonder what Daemon is doing with all that money, doesn’t it?”

“Get to the point. I’m a busy man.”

Dobrowski chuckled, the sound more of a rasp than a

laugh. “I see hanging it up hasn’t helped your sense of humor. ’Course, I’d be pissed too if somebody told me I was chasing the wrong end of the tiger.”

“You’re getting on my nerves, old man. If you’re trying to say something, then say it.”

Anger flashed in the back of Dobrowski’s eyes before he took another hit of nicotine. “I need your help.”

Smoke wheezed in and out of Dobrowski’s lungs.

“Why me?” Jackson said.

“Have you ever stopped to wonder why the Feds have never gotten Daemon?” Dobrowski asked. “You’d think he’d be pretty high up on their list. The last time anyone got close was you, and that was right before Wilkens decided you didn’t fit the mold and cut you loose. Did he really have you go through a complete psych evaluation before you got out of the hospital? It must have been tough to return to work for him with all that in your file. You guys don’t like each other too much, do you?”

Jackson thought about the day he’d packed up his office and said goodbye to friends and coworkers. It had been a good day until Wilkens had him searched on the way out of the building, and then had New York’s finest pull him over and ransack his car on the way home.

“I don’t plan on inviting him over for dinner anytime soon, if that’s what you’re saying.”

“What does Bruce Lambert think about working for Wilkens?”

Jackson shrugged. “He puts up with him—the same as anyone who has to look at him every day.”

Dobrowski smiled and slid a hand into his raincoat, but stopped when O’Connell, guarding the door, whistled a warning. Dobrowski eased his hand into the inside pocket of the coat and withdrew a folded yellow piece of paper. On it Jackson saw a handwritten IP address.

“When in doubt, follow the money. That’s where Daemon

is pushing it from. You wouldn't believe how much work went into finding that number. Just be careful because it isn't a pot of gold, but a beehive, and those bitches can sting."

Jackson took the paper and unfolded a street map ripped from a phone book. The map was crinkled, but the roads were still readable, as was the IP address written on the back.

"How do you know Daemon's there?" Jackson asked.

Before Dobrowski could answer, a chunk of ceiling plaster broke free and landed on a rusty barrel. A pencil-thin ray of sunshine fell on the floor.

Dobrowski swore, pulled out a Smith & Wesson .38 revolver, and rushed over to O'Connell. "I need to get out of here," Dobrowski said.

O'Connell put a hand on Dobrowski's chest. "Wait a sec."

Dobrowski looked back at Jackson. "You have thirty-six hours until I go to the Bureau in Chicago!" he hissed. "The agent there is Dan Harris. If he moves on Daemon, then you'll know you've run out of time." With that, he pushed past O'Connell and darted from the building.

After closing the door behind Dobrowski and throwing the slide bolt, O'Connell put a finger to his lips, grabbed Jackson's elbow, and pointed up. Another chunk of plaster fell from the ceiling and puffed into the ash.

"Two minimum. Probably more. Use the back exit. I'll stay here." He disappeared behind a tangle of galvanized water pipes.

Jackson moved along the blackened walls and passed mounds of heat-mangled paint cans. Ahead, he saw a large, ill-fitting double freight door, secured by a rusty deadbolt. Just as he reached the doors, they creaked slightly apart, and a pair of bolt cutters slid through. The cutters settled on the bolt and bit down. There was a quiet *snap* of breaking metal. The broken bolt fell to the floor.

Jackson looked for a hiding place. The interior walls had collapsed long ago, and the stub walls that remained wouldn't

hide him. His eyes fell on the frame of a metal stairwell. He moved behind it just as the door scraped the ground.

Three men wearing body armor and carrying silenced assault carbines slipped through. Eyes moving back and forth, they separated without a word. The closest man looked directly at the broken stairs. Jackson froze and held his breath. The human eye, like that of most predators, is attracted to movement. If he stayed where he was, his dark windbreaker and the gloom of the building would conceal him.

The leader made a hand signal, and the men advanced slowly into the darkness. Jackson released the air in his chest. Were they Wilkens' men? Had they followed him to the building, or had Dobrowski brought them?

He slid through the open door into the back alley, the sunshine blinding after the darkness. No one shot at him or sounded the alarm. He waited for O'Connell, but the other man did not appear. Should he go back and try to help? At least two were on the roof, and three had come in through the rear. He didn't want to get into a fight. That bordered on suicide. But he wasn't willing to leave O'Connell either.

"C'mon, Doc!" he whispered through the door. "We have to get out of here!"

No answer.

Jackson switched off the safety on his Colt and started to go back inside when a man stepped around the alley's corner. Chin down and talking into a radio on the shoulder of his vest, the man had a government-issue SIG automatic on his hip. Their eyes met, neither moving, before the man went for his gun.

Jackson dove sideways against the alley wall. The Sig boomed. A bullet tore past. The Colt kicked twice in Jackson's hand. The first bullet caught the man in the hip, the second under his armored vest. The man spun backwards, catching at the brick with his free hand. The Sig barked, bullets rico-

cheting off the pavement. He lost his grip on the brick and fell face down on the pavement.

Jackson scrambled to his feet, and, Colt on the fallen man, scooped up his shell casings. Who had he just shot? What was going on? Running footsteps sounded in the warehouse, and O'Connell grabbed him by the back of his vest.

"Move! There are three behind us. Two on the roof and four out front!"

Jackson lurched into a run. Crashing against the wall hadn't helped his ribs. They turned into another alley, sped by a dumpster, dodged through a broken gate, and ran past an empty loading dock.

Five blocks later, he gasped for O'Connell to stop. His ribs were on fire. He sagged against the corner of a building to catch his breath.

"What just happened?" Jackson said. "Who were they, and what did they want?"

"They're some kind of covert unit. If they were SWAT or FBI, they would have locked down the block and had NYPD standing by in case we got past their perimeter. So far we haven't seen any police."

"Did we bring them or did Dobrowski?"

"Since we've never had trouble there before, my guess is Dobrowski. Funny how we show up for a face-to-face with Lambert and get Dobrowski instead. You think your partner's changing the rules without telling us?"

"I spoke with Lambert an hour ago. Wilkens is angry. My name's come up a lot."

"In a good way, I'm sure."

Jackson snorted. "Do you think Dobrowski got away?"

"No way to tell. But I don't think he ran very far. He's only a few steps shy of a nursing home."

Jackson unfolded Dobrowski's map. "Does any of this look familiar to you?"

O'Connell examined the circled spot on the map. A rare

smile creased his dirty face. “How many places do you know about has a river named after the city of Chicago?”



BY THE TIME Jackson reached the Riverside Tower Hotel, the adrenalin had long since worn off. The wind had changed direction and blew off the Hudson River, bringing with it the smell of mold, oil, and garbage. He turned the lock to his room, limped inside, and shut the door. His suitcase lay open on the floor, and next to it sat a brown cardboard banker's box, perfect for carrying cable. Equipment and clothing covered the bed. Behind him, he heard a metallic click and froze.

Dixie lowered her pistol and stepped forward to give him a hug. She was shaking, but his arms felt too leaden to hug her back.

“You could've let me know you were okay,” she said.

“I broke my phone diving into a wall.”

She knelt and went back to stuffing cable into the box. “What a terrible day.”

Jackson scooted one of the room's chairs next to her. He told her about Dobrowski and the unexpected visitors. “I don't know if this means anything or not,” he said, taking the map out of his pocket and putting it on the desk, “but maybe it's the break we've been waiting for.”

Dixie put a lid on the box and, holding the arm of his chair, stood. She fingered the bullet hole in his windbreaker and gave him a doubtful look.

PRAISE FOR MICHAEL RAY EWING

Readers looking for a complex, rich story of international plots and gambles that ultimately challenge and pay off will find *Satan's Gold* well deserving of its prize-winning status. It's an intricate, well-detailed, compelling, action-packed story that grips from the first page and doesn't let go.

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— PIKASHO DEKA FOR READERS' FAVORITE

*To my long-time editor, Donna Hoagkemp,
and to my family for giving me time to write*

AFTERWORD

Thank you for reading this excerpt of *Satan's Gold*. I hope you enjoyed meeting Tyler Jackson, Dixie, and their friends and that you'll want to find out what happens next.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Michael Ray Ewing has spent his career working as a High-Performance Computing engineer. His workflow automation software, Rhapsody, is the winner of two awards from *NetWorld* and *Lotus Magazine*.

Characters, like the writers who create them, need a deep and tangled past. Because of the ups and downs in his industry, he writes about people whose lives are roller coasters. *Satan's Gold* won the Emerging Writers Gateway award for best crime thriller.

Learn more at www.michaelrayewing.com.

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