

## PROLOGUE

**T**he Norwegians sold their secret submarine base to the Russians, and they did it on eBay.

Really.

In truth, the transaction was conducted on Finn.no, the regional equivalent of the online trading site, and the purchaser was not the Kremlin but a private buyer who immediately rented out the facility to a Russian state-owned concern. Still, the base was the *only* non-Russian permanent military installation on the strategically important Barents Sea, and the very fact that NATO condoned the sale in the first place spoke volumes about the organization's readiness for war.

And it also said something about Russia's intentions. When the purchaser clicked buy, Norway gave up Olavsvern Royal Norwegian Navy Base for five million U.S. dollars, a third of what Norway was asking and a pitiful one percent of what NATO spent building it in the first place.

With this purchase Russia won two important victories: It gave

them the strategically located installation to use as they saw fit, and took it out of the hands of the West.

Olavsvern is an impressive facility, something out of a Bond film. Carved into the side of a mountain near the city of Tromsø north of the Arctic Circle, it has direct access to the sea and contains underground tunnels, massive submarine bays with blast-proof doors, a dry dock capable of receiving large warships, a 3,000-square-meter deep-water quay, infantry barracks with emergency power, and more than 160,000 square feet of space that is virtually impervious to a direct nuclear attack because it is hewn deep into the rock.

At the time of the sale, those in favor—including the Norwegian prime minister—rolled their eyes at anyone who said such a deal was ill-advised; the buyer promised that the Russians would use the facility to service their oil rigs—the Russians drilled all over the Barents Sea, after all, so there was nothing nefarious about that. But once the ink was dry, the oil-industry ruse was quickly forgotten, and the massive mountainside submarine lair was promptly employed to house a fleet of Russian scientific research vessels for a state-owned concern run by Kremlin insiders.

And those who knew about Russia's Navy and intelligence infrastructure in the Arctic knew research vessels often worked hand in hand with both parties, conducting surveillance and even moving combat mini-submarines around in international waters.

The Norwegian prime minister who sanctioned the deal with the Russians soon left office, only to become the new secretary general of NATO. Shortly thereafter, Russia moved its Northern Fleet to full combat readiness, and it increased activity out of the Barents Sea fivefold as compared to the last of the days when Olavsvern maintained a watchful eye over them.

. . .

Russian president Valeri Volodin stood in the Arctic cold with a pleased expression on his face, because he was thinking of Olavsvern now, even though he was some 250 miles to the east.

This was an auspicious morning here at Yagelnaya Bay, Sayda Inlet, the home of the 31st Submarine Division, and Volodin had the massive base in Norway on his mind because he knew without a shadow of a doubt that if NATO still operated Olavsvern there was no way today's operation would have had a chance for success.

The Russian president stood on the bow of the *Pyotr Velikiy*, a Kirov-class nuclear-powered heavy missile cruiser and the flagship of the Northern Fleet, his Burberry coat buttoned tightly across his chest and his wool hat keeping most of his body heat where it belonged—in his body. The commander of the 31st Submarine Division hovered just behind him on the deck, and he motioned to the fog ahead. Volodin saw nothing at first, but as he peered deeper into the mist, a huge shadow appeared on the cold water, pushing out through the veil of morning vapor.

Something big, slow, and silent was coming this way.

Volodin remembered a moment from the time of the Olavsvern sale. Members of the Norwegian media had pressed the ministers responsible for approving the deal about the danger posed by their neighbor Russia. One of the more frank of these ministers replied with a shrug. "We are a NATO member state, but we are also a small and peaceful nation. America, on the other hand, is large and warlike. Jack Ryan will see to Norway's security if the day comes. Why shouldn't we use our money for the important causes and let America do the fighting for us, because they love it so much?"

Volodin smiled now as he looked into the fog hanging over the

gray water. Jack Ryan would have no time for Norway. True, the American President loved war, and the excuse of a Scandinavia in peril would be a good one for him, but Valeri Volodin knew something that few on earth knew, least of all Jack Ryan.

America was about to have much to deal with. Not here in the Arctic, but damn near everywhere else.

The silent shadow began to take shape, and soon it was visible to all on the deck of the *Pyotr Velikiy*. It was the pride of the new Russian Navy. A massive new Borei-class nuclear ballistic submarine.

Volodin knew if NATO was still operating a base here in the Arctic, the vessel before him could have been detected and it would have been tracked by Western craft, both surface and submersible, well before it made it into the safety of deeper waters. And that would have been a shame, as far as the Russian president was concerned, so it was a damn fine thing that the Norwegians sold their strategic base off for pocket change.

Volodin glowed with satisfaction. Five million U.S. was a small price to pay for Russian naval supremacy of the Arctic.

The vessel before him had a name, of course; it was called the *Knyaz Oleg*. But Volodin still liked to think of this one, as well as the four others already in his fleet, by their original code number. Project 955A had a nice ring to it; it felt like a fitting title for Russia's most powerful and most secret weapon.

The Borei was the fourth generation of what the Americans called SSBN (Ship, Submersible, Ballistic, Nuclear). At 170 meters long and 13 meters wide, it was huge, although it wasn't the biggest sub Volodin had ever seen. That would be the Typhoon class, one of the Borei's predecessors. But while the Borei might not have been as big as the Typhoon, it *was* far more advanced. It could dive to 1,500 feet and make 30 knots while submersed, and its pump jet propulsion gave it something submariners called "silent speed,"

meaning it could travel quickly with very little noise, and it was damn difficult to detect.

There were ninety crew members on board, and most all of them, including Captain Anatoli Kudinov, stood on the deck and saluted their president as they passed the *Pyotr Velikiy*.

Project 955A was no secret to the Americans, but they did not understand the full scope and operational capabilities of these vessels, nor did they realize the *Knyaz Oleg* was already in service. Soon enough, likely just north of here in the icy waters of Kola Bay, Volodin was certain an American satellite would take note of a Borei leaving Sayda Inlet, sailing away from the protection of its hangar and out into the Barents Sea.

It was no matter. It might take the Americans a few hours to be sure they were looking at the *Knyaz Oleg*, but then they would lose interest, as they had no idea it had already been assigned to fleet ops. For a few days the Americans would think the newest Borei was undergoing more sea trials, but that would not last for long, because Valeri Volodin had no plans to make this mission a secret one.

No . . . Volodin was sending this submarine out on a mission of terror, and the mission hinged on everyone in the world knowing both *what* it was and, in a general sense, *where* it was.

Also standing on the deck of the heavy missile cruiser behind Volodin, ringed by his deputies, was the admiral in command of the 12th Main Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. He was the overall commander of all naval nuclear ordnance, and he'd come along today to wish bon voyage not to the *Knyaz Oleg*, but to the twelve devices of his that had been loaded into the sub's weapons stores.

On board the floating titan passing now just one hundred meters in front of President Volodin were a dozen Bulava ballistic missiles, each one carrying ten warheads. This gave the *Knyaz Oleg*

the ability to prosecute 120 nuclear detonations, meaning this one vessel could, with only slight exaggeration, replace the United States of America with a smoking hole the size of a continent.

But *only* if it was close enough to the East Coast of the American shoreline to render America's missile defense systems irrelevant.

Volodin spoke softly in the morning cold, his words turning to vapor. "Amerika. Washington, D.C."

The men standing behind him at the bow looked at one another. If this was an order, it was an unnecessary one; everyone knew the *Knyaz Oleg* was heading exactly there—to within forty-five miles of the capital city of their adversary.

But even though Volodin was sending 120 nuclear warheads into the territorial exclusion zone of the United States, he had no plans to lay waste to the United States. He did, however, have every intention of scaring the living shit out of every man, woman, and child over there, and in so doing, to persuade the American populace that Russia's territorial integrity 8,000 miles from home was none of their goddamned business.

Volodin's scheme to be played out in the weeks ahead was wide-ranging, but the *Knyaz Oleg* was the opening move on the chessboard, and for this reason he had flown all the way up here to the Arctic, to pay his respects to Captain Kudinov, and to bestow on the mission and the men the weight and force of his presence.

The vessel Volodin liked to call "Project 955A" disappeared in the distance now, fading silently into the mist just after leaving Sayda Inlet and moving toward Kola Bay. Valeri Volodin continued to stare at the wisps of vapor left hanging in its wake, his military leaders looking on.

The emotions he wore on his face—pride and excitement—were both real, but there was another emotion welling inside, and this sentiment he would not allow himself to express.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF

Apprehension. Apprehension bordering on dread.

Today represented one facet, a single moving part of an intricate mechanism, a multifaceted operation that would span the globe.

And while Valeri Volodin was proud and hopeful and defiant . . . he also knew this *had* to work.

This had to work or he was a dead man.



# 1



The *Independence* was a ship, but its job was not to sail from here to there. Instead, it remained stationary at anchor in the port of Klaipėda, on Lithuania's Baltic coast, and it just sat there, connected to a long jetty with mounting and mooring devices, steel connecting bridges, and a massive pipeline link.

The supertanker had sailed into port to much fanfare a year earlier because everyone knew it was going to be a game changer for the Lithuanians. And although now it was, essentially, a fixed object bobbing in the water and no longer much of a ship, it had achieved its mission.

*Independence* was its name, but this was also its objective. It was a floating liquefied natural gas (LNG) storage and regasification unit, the first of its kind.

Lithuania had been dependent on Russia for its gas and electricity needs for decades. On a whim determined by the political winds of the region, Russia could either raise the price of gas or reduce the flow. They had done this multiple times over the past few years, and as tensions between the Baltic nations and Russia grew, Lithu-

ania's dependence on its neighbor's goodwill became a clear and present danger to their national security.

An LNG import facility stood to change this. With the *Independence* and the pipeline from the port, LNG shipments from Norway now could be delivered by tanker, offloaded onto the regasification facility, and turned into the natural gas necessary for the nation.

This way, if the Russians once again turned off their gas pipelines, or once again raised the prices to extortionist rates, Lithuania and its allied neighbors needed only to exercise their option to turn on the safety valve provided by the *Independence*.

The process for regasification is highly technical and precise, but surprisingly simple to understand. In order to transport a large volume of gas, it needs to be converted into liquid, thus condensing it by a factor of six hundred. This is accomplished by dropping the temperature of the gas to  $-160$  degrees. The liquefied form of the commodity is transported at this temperature in specially designed tankers, in this case from Norway to Lithuania. Here the LNG is pumped into the storage tanks of the *Independence*, where the regasification system superheats the liquid with propane and seawater, returning it to its gas form. The gas is then pumped into tubes that offload it through the port of Klaipėda and then along an eighteen-kilometer pipeline to the metering facility. From there it goes directly to Lithuanian homes, where it provides much-needed heat for the long Baltic winters.

The \$330 million project was already serving its purpose from an economic standpoint. Russia dropped the price of its gas the day the *Independence* went online so they could compete with the Norwegian gas.

But to say that the Russians weren't happy about this was a great understatement. Moscow did not take kindly to energy-export competition in Europe. It was accustomed to its monopoly and it

had used it to threaten Russia's neighbors, to enrich the nation, and, perhaps most important, to mask Russia's myriad other economic problems. Russian president Valeri Volodin, in typical hyperbolic fashion, had even gone so far as to claim that Lithuania's new natural gas facility was nothing short of an act of war.

Lithuania, like many of the other former Russian satellites, was used to incendiary rhetoric from Moscow, so the government in Vilnius just ignored Volodin's threats and imported large quantities of natural gas via Russian pipelines and small quantities of LNG from Norway via the Baltic Sea, and the *Independence* served as a model for other Baltic nations to work to develop their own secondary option for energy.

The rest of Europe had a hand in the building and delivery of the *Independence* to Lithuania. Stability in the region was in everyone's interests, after all, and NATO nations who could be pressured or controlled outright by Russia's energy exports were a weak link in the chain.

It was therefore said that while Lithuania relied on the *Independence* for its energy, Europe as a whole relied on the *Independence* for its security.

A middle-aged German electrical contractor walking along the jetty noticed the body floating in the water, and this saved his life.

He'd come to work early this morning to check some misbehaving circuits in the offloading pumping station, only to find his truck stuck behind a locked gate. Deciding it would be faster to walk to the pumping station than to wait for someone to bring a key, he'd started off along the 1,400-foot-long jetty at a pace spurred on by his annoyance that his morning hadn't started out well at all. He

was only a quarter of the way along when he looked to his left and noticed something bobbing down below in the water, at the far reaches of the jetty lights.

At first he thought it was just a large piece of trash, but he stopped to make sure. Stepping up to the railing and looking over, he pulled an industrial-grade headlamp out of his backpack and flipped it on, holding it in his hands and shining it out on the water.

A diver in a wetsuit, a silver tank on his back, floated facedown, arms and legs out.

The German electrician spoke little Lithuanian, but he called out anyway. "*Labas!*" Hi! "*Labas?*"

There was no reaction from the diver twenty meters from the jetty. As he looked closer he could see long blond hair floating around the body's head, the small, thin form, and he realized it was a woman, perhaps quite young.

The contractor struggled to get his walkie-talkie out, but by the time he did so it occurred to him that there would be no one else on his channel till his coworkers got in to work in another hour. He couldn't remember the security channel, so he just began running back along the jetty in the direction of the Port Security office.

And this decision, born out of panic, made the German electrician Lithuania's luckiest man of the year.

Several hundred yards from the frantic electrician, the *Independence* sat quietly on still, black waters on a cold October morning, bathed in the lights on the deck and positioned on the attached jetty and pumping station.

The ship and the jetty were not attached to the Lithuanian mainland; instead they were connected to Kiaulės Nugara Island in

the Curonian Lagoon, at the mouth of the port of Klaipėda. The waters all around were busy with port traffic during the day, but now, at eight minutes after four in the morning, the water was nearly empty from the LNG facility to the sea gate at the mouth of the lagoon, other than a pair of small rigid-hulled inflatable boats crisscrossing the water slowly and nearly silently. The security men on the boats had no clue the electrician was racing along the jetty, because the enormous supertanker was positioned between the patrol boats and the running man.

The boats passed within twenty yards of each other on their patrol. The men on the decks of the boats glanced across the water at one another, but they passed close too many times a shift to call out greetings or wave hands every time.

Security here at the port was relatively tight, and there were all sorts of impediments to a terrorist attack by land or by water. But even though the guards at the pumping station, on the island, on the *Independence*, and in the patrol boats were reasonably vigilant, nobody thought anything serious could ever happen here.

Yes, a month earlier protesters had shown up in small wooden boats and charged the facility through the sea gate. They brought along colorful signs demanding an end to globalization and they had a bullhorn through which one of the protesters shouted expletives at port workers, and they had milk jugs full of oil they planned to sling at the supertanker to demonstrate something of desperate importance.

They hadn't been altogether clear on just what that was.

It was lost on the protesters that this was a natural gas operation, not oil, and their jugs of oil would inevitably end up in the water.

Fortunately for the ocean around, the two patrol boats had

converged on the wooden boats and detained the protesters before they could get close enough to the supertanker to be any sort of a danger.

This was the main type of threat the security guards had in mind, because the *Independence* was built incredibly tough. It had a double hull of milled steel, and inside that, the hyper-chilled LNG was protected by thermally insulated membrane tanks. An RPG from the coast or Molotov cocktails or IEDs would have little effect on the big structure.

Fully loaded with six million cubic feet of liquefied natural gas, the *Independence* possessed the energy of fifty-five nuclear bombs, but there was only an eighth of its maximum capacity in its storage tanks, and again, it would take one hell of a massive bomb to breach the side of the ship and ignite the gas.

The patrol boats passed near the LNG tanker, just two hundred yards to the east or so, but it was exceptionally dark here. The two men on the decks would have required superhuman vision and focus to see the anomaly right in front of them. Instead, both boats motored on. One to the north, one to the south.

In their wake several small trails of bubbles rose to the black surface, then quickly dissipated. The security vessels had noticed nothing, and they just continued their patrols.

The electrician flagged down a security officer in a pickup at the end of the jetty and in broken English explained that he'd spotted a dead female in the lagoon. The security officer was dubious but deferential. He told the German to climb into his vehicle so he could direct him to the spot on the jetty.

Just as the electrician closed the door, a flash of light caused

both men to look out the windshield, straight ahead at the giant ship. A glow emanated from the far side of the vessel and silhouetted it, then a thin flame skyrocketed up, ripping open the darkness, and the fireball that came next turned the night to day.

The security officer behind the wheel of the pickup had been well briefed on the fact that the *Independence* was toughly built but nevertheless essentially a huge bomb. He jacked the pickup into reverse, stomped on the gas, and raced backward over an eighth of a mile, literally chased by a series of roaring explosions that rocked the jetty and sent debris and shock waves in all directions.

The pickup finally bounced back into a ditch along the side of the access road into the facility. Here the guard and the electrician bailed out of the vehicle and dove into the mud.

They felt the heat over them, they heard shrapnel sprinkle the ground all around, and they heard the sirens from the jetty, but above all they heard the thundering death of Lithuania's game changer.

The communiqué from the perpetrators arrived the way these things do nowadays: A Twitter account was registered, and a single tweet was posted. This linked to a nine-minute video that began with a nighttime shot of a group of four masked men and one woman standing together, apparently somewhere along a dark highway.

A low-quality night-vision lens on the camera gave an eerie feel to the footage as they crept through a forest, but to military experts the five subjects of the video moved less like trained special operators and more like children playing a game. A man used bolt cutters on a barbed-wire fence, then he and the others passed through, right next to a sign that read:

## ZONE PROTÉGÉ

More creeping around paved roads and concrete buildings, a shaky zoom-in on a guard sitting in a tower in the distance. Then a chain on a cargo container was defeated with the same bolt cutters, and soon all five individuals were hauling crates out of the facility, back through the barbed-wire fence.

Inside a room with plenty of light now, the five crates were shown lined up on the floor, their lids open. Inside were bread loaf-sized boxes, a half-dozen in each crate. The only writing visible on the boxes read *Composition Four*.

Again, those in the military would easily recognize C-4, a military plastic explosive.

A lot of it.

A woman with a French accent spoke English; she held up what she said was a detonator, claimed all the equipment was from the American military and it had been liberated from a NATO storage facility in France.

The scene moved and the camera was back outside in the dark again, filming in grainy green night vision. Five people knelt at the water's edge wearing wetsuits, swim masks, and snorkels. Tanks and vests were stacked next to them. Through a telephoto lens the camera recorded jerking images of the *Independence* LNG facility and the port beyond.

A close-up shot of the shoreline showed a coffee table-sized item completely enshrouded in black plastic next to the divers. Strapped to the plastic-covered box were several scuba vests, and one scuba tank was strapped to the top. A different woman spoke now, her voiceover narrating the scene; her accent was later determined by authorities to be from Barcelona.

“The bomb was made buoyant by the attached scuba equipment. The revolutionaries took the device into the water and sunk it to where it descended below the surface. Then they delivered it to their target, over a kilometer away.”

The five disappeared in the darkness off the water’s edge, pushing the large floating plastic item attached to the scuba equipment between them.

The camera stayed on the shoreline, then the scene cut again. Now the gargantuan *Independence* was in the center of the frame, illuminated by bright lights. After only a few seconds of calm, the explosion bloomed on the near side of the ship, the rolling flame ascended, and secondary and tertiary detonations erupted, some causing the camera operator, who must have been a very long distance from the blast, to flinch noticeably.

For the denouement of the video, the long-distance shot of the destruction of Lithuania’s liquefied natural gas facility switched abruptly to a person in a ski mask sitting in front of a small table. Despite the concealment of her face, the exposed skin around her mouth and her slight build revealed her as a Caucasian female, likely a young woman.

Behind her, a white flag had been pinned to the wall. In the center of it was a circle, clearly representing planet earth, covered by a maze of pipelines. An oil well jutted out of the top of the circle, and a red drop—presumably representing blood—hung below it.

Across the bottom of the flag were the words *Le Mouvement pour la Terre*.

The Earth Movement.

She spoke in English; investigators would later determine her to be the same woman with the Barcelona accent who narrated a portion of the video.

“You have just borne witness to the opening salvos of a war. For

too long, violent and destructive acts perpetrated against our planet at the hands of the energy industry have gone without counter-attack.

“Those days are over now. We will fight back on behalf of Mother Earth.

“There will be no peace until our demands are met. The Earth Movement will retaliate against any and all examples of greed and materialism at the expense of Mother Earth that we can find. We invite others to join us in battle as we return the planet to its natural position of harmony.

“We honor our sister Avril, who was tragically lost in the battle in Lithuania. Let the oil and gas industry know that her spirit burns bright in the fight we continue in her name.”

In the last few seconds of the video the camera panned to the other side of the room. Here four men and women, all in black and all masked, raised their fists in salute. Some held automatic weapons.

Eight hours after the explosion, the body of twenty-four-year-old Avril Auclair, a French citizen and former university student, was pulled out of a thick marsh in the lagoon. She was identified quickly, almost immediately, really, because the YouTube video had mentioned “sister Avril,” and a woman with this name had been well known to authorities keeping an eye on the sometimes-violent ecoterror movement in Europe.

Auclair had made a name for herself by being kicked out of Greenpeace two years earlier for hurling a fusillade of punches at the deputy director of the Paris branch of the organization. The police report said it was an argument over tactics. Auclair had been too radical for Greenpeace, so they’d sent her packing, and she then beat up the sixty-year-old woman in charge of the Paris branch.

The director ultimately did not press charges, and Auclair dis-

appeared from view, completely dropping off the map for the past six months.

An autopsy later determined Avril Auclair's scuba tank had a faulty pressure gauge, and although it read that she had a full tank, her tank had run out of air. It was determined that she must have passed out underwater during the mission and then drowned, although she had been found so far away from the explosion, in the exact opposite direction from the point of entry of the divers as shown in the video, nobody understood how she could have floated to the jetty unless she had been on a completely different mission from those who attached the explosives to the hull of the ship.

It was a small mystery, however, as she had been identified in the video by her mother as the first woman speaking, and she'd led a life that made her death during an ecoterror incident no great surprise to anyone.

And video of the theft of the explosives was authenticated soon after the *Independence* explosion, when French authorities revealed a previously unreported theft of hundreds of pounds of C-4 and detonators from a military depot west of Montpellier.

European police and intelligence officials immediately began the hunt for an ecoterror group no one had ever heard of.



The good-looking Dutch couple stood out here in Caracas. They were tall, the man every inch of six-five and the woman nearly six feet herself. Both of them wore identical shades of auburn hair, his styled professionally short, while her shoulder-length curls blew in a warm fall breeze.

Even here in the upscale and exclusive neighborhood of Los Palos Grandes, where tourists and well-heeled foreign business-people were common, the couple turned a few heads because they were particularly attractive and stylish. They were dressed in chic business attire that bordered on extravagant: She wielded a large orange Hermès bag that cost more than the average annual income of a Venezuelan laborer, and he wore a white gold Piaget watch that sold for twice what she paid for her bag.

They might have been in their thirties, or perhaps their early forties. He appeared the elder of the two, but this was often the case with husbands and wives, and from the band on his ring finger and the massive rock on hers, they were clearly married.

They walked arm in arm along the Parque del Este on the Avenida Francisco de Miranda, and she giggled from time to time in response to a story he was telling. Then they turned to take the steps in front of the Parque Cristal, an eighteen-story cube-shaped building that looked south over Francisco de Miranda to the park, and they continued to the lobby entrance, looking up to marvel at the remarkable architecture.

Just behind them a Lincoln Navigator pulled to the curb and two men climbed out. One of them opened the door for a backseat passenger, a balding fifty-year-old in an expensive suit. He pushed his briefcase out the door in front of him and followed behind, and as the Navigator returned to follow the traffic to the west, the three men ascended the steps to the Parque Cristal, walking just feet behind the striking couple from Holland.

In the middle of this trio of Latin men was Lucio Vilar de Alende; to anyone who noticed him, he appeared to be just any other businessman with dealings here in the large office building, with the one exception being that he was shadowed closely by a pair of serious men in suits with open coats and flitting eyes.

And then they would recognize that the man in the middle wasn't just anyone, because most people in Caracas knew bodyguards when they saw them; it's that kind of town.

Lucio Vilar had a protection detail because he was one of Venezuela's top federal prosecutors. He was moving light today—just the pair of bodyguards, the armored SUV, and the driver with an Uzi in his center console—because Vilar wasn't on official business. He'd taken the afternoon off to visit his son at his school, and now he was meeting the mother of his child to discuss his boy's grades. His ex-wife worked in a real estate office here in the Parque Cristal, and she had agreed to her ex-husband's request that he meet her in the coffee shop on the top floor for a talk.

Vilar checked his watch and picked up his pace, and his bodyguards stayed with him, step for step.

Though Vilar had family matters on his mind as he entered the lobby, that didn't stop him from noticing the attractive woman just in front of him. She was a head taller than he was in her heels, so she was hard to miss. He stepped to the elevator bank just behind the Caucasian couple, who, he could plainly hear, were speaking to each other in Dutch. When the elevator car arrived and opened and the tall couple stepped in, Vilar's principal protection agent put a gentle hand on his protectee's arm. It was a suggestion that they wait for an empty car, but Lucio Vilar ignored the hand and followed the Dutch couple inside, so his bodyguards dutifully followed.

Vilar nodded to the Dutch couple as they turned around.

"Good afternoon," the woman said in English.

"Good afternoon," Vilar replied. His English was not as strong as hers, but it was serviceable. "You are from Holland, I hear. I have visited Amsterdam. Very beautiful."

"As is your country, *señor*," the woman said, with a pleasant smile.

One of the two bodyguards pressed the button for the eighteenth floor, and the Dutchman pressed the button for the seventeenth. As the elevator ascended, the woman stepped into the front corner of the elevator, and her mate stood on her right, directly in front of the doors, facing forward.

"It is always wonderful to see foreigners here," Vilar added. "Are you here on vacation?"

The woman shook her head. "Sadly, no. We are working."

"I understand," Lucio Vilar said, and he checked his watch again. But Lucio Vilar did not understand at all.

. . .

Martina Jaeger glanced up to the digital floor-number readout over the door and saw they had passed the fourth-floor restaurant without stopping to pick up more passengers. This told her the odds were good they would likely go all the way to floor seventeen without stopping.

Lucio Vilar smiled up to her, and he seemed to want to use the short ride to practice his English. “May I ask what business brings you to Caracas?”

But Martina ignored him. In Dutch she said, “On eight.”

Braam Jaeger, still facing the door, replied calmly in Dutch. “Agreed.”

Lucio Vilar furrowed his brow at being ignored by the woman, but he said nothing more.

When the elevator reached the eighth floor, Martina Jaeger slipped her Hermès handbag off her shoulder and then she lifted it, raising it into the upper corner of the car.

It took the two bodyguards less than a second to realize what she was doing. The tall Dutch woman was covering the security camera.

Braam Jaeger continued to face the elevator door and did not turn around, but just as the two younger men at Vilar’s side started to react to the woman’s action, two pistol silencers appeared around the sides of his suit coat, both pointing backward toward the guards. He’d cross-drawn them from his waist inside his coat and now his left hand pointed one gun around the right side of his body, and his right hand aimed the other gun around his left. He glanced up at the reflection in the polished metal doors.

Both weapons fired as one. Even suppressed, the bark of two automatic pistols rang loudly in the small space.

The two bodyguards slammed back against the wall, then dropped to their knees, perfect holes in their foreheads. They'd both drawn their guns, so two weapons tumbled from their hands. The man on the left collapsed a second slower than the man on the right, but they both fell facedown onto the floor of the elevator car.

Lucio Vilar de Allende stood still, his briefcase in his right hand, the bodies of his protection agents crumpled on either side of him.

Braam Jaeger turned around now, reholstered the weapon in his right hand inside his coat like an expert, and raised the weapon in his left.

Vilar spoke in a hoarse whisper. "I . . . I do not understand."

The statement was directed toward the man with the gun, understandably, but Martina Jaeger answered. Her handbag still covered the camera. "No? I think it should be obvious. Somebody out there doesn't like you very much."

And with that Braam shot Venezuela's top federal prosecutor in the right eye. His head slammed back against the rear wall of the car and he crashed to the floor, settling perfectly between his bodyguards.

Braam fired twice more into the already still form. Control shots, just to make certain the target was dead.

With the second bark of the silenced pistol, a few drops of blood splattered up and onto Martina's lavender Louboutin pumps.

*"Verdomme!"* she shouted.

*"Het spijt me"*—Sorry—Braam replied, then knelt and took the pulse of the prosecutor, who was clearly dead.

He scooped up spent shell casings—all of them still hot—while Martina Jaeger began unbuttoning her blouse with her free hand. She unfastened only two buttons below her breasts, then peeled up a black square of fabric held to her skin with electrical tape.

She raised it up under her handbag, and she pressed it over the camera's lens.

Once done, she lowered her purse and glanced up at the floor-number readout. "*Vijftien*," she said. Fifteen. She turned, watching Braam as he stood up from collecting the casings.

She said, "One in each guard, three in the target."

Martina said nothing else. Quickly Braam realized what she meant. He'd collected only four shell casings. He knelt again and found a fifth. It had rolled under the right forearm of the principal target. He pocketed it while Martina stepped in front of him to shield him from view of anyone waiting for the elevator when it reached their floor.

It opened at seventeen, which was undergoing renovations and therefore empty. Braam pulled a small wedge-shaped doorstopper from his coat pocket and propped the door open, then they exited and moved quickly to the stairwell, with Martina slipping off her pumps as she did so.

They hurried down the stairs and made it to the underground parking garage in less than six minutes. Martina put her shoes back on and they walked naturally through the lot, until Braam folded himself behind the wheel of their parked Audi A8, and Martina climbed in next to him.

They left the Parque Cristal one minute and four seconds before the first alarm bells rang.

They drove north along the Caracas–La Guaira highway in the direction of the airport, and most of the trip was conducted in silence. The pair had done this sort of thing before, so even though the fight-or-flight chemicals coursing through their central nervous system increased their heartbeat and blood pressure, they remained outwardly cool and calm.

The Audi pulled into the parking lot of the Playa Grande Ca-

ribe Hotel and Marina, on the shoreline of the Caribbean Sea. Braam parked and each of them grabbed a rolling duffel from the trunk, and with the luggage trailing behind them they walked through the hotel's entrance. Passing the reception counter, they strolled through the large facility, until finally they exited the back and continued down a winding sidewalk that led them to the marina itself.

Here they climbed into a small gray dinghy, Braam started the engine, and they motored out to a forty-two-foot sailboat moored in the marina.

Braam started the engine while Martina unhooked the line from the mooring ball, and in moments they were churning out of the marina and into open water.

Braam kept one eye on the sea in front of him and the other on his laptop. Open in his browser was a weather forecast for the southern Caribbean. The conditions looked fair for the next twenty-four hours, which was crucial if they were going to make it to Curaçao by three a.m. There was a six-forty a.m. direct flight to Amsterdam the next morning, and the Jaegers had tickets and every intention of being home by tomorrow night.

Twenty minutes after setting sail, Martina stepped up to the bridge with two glasses of champagne in her hands. She passed one to Braam, seated at the helm, and with it she gave him a high five.

No one was around to see this, they were miles out to sea, and if anyone had been, they would have adjusted their show of affection to tie in better with their cover for status: that they were husband and wife.

Braam and Martina Jaeger were not, in fact, married. They were brother and sister, and they were contract killers working for Russian intelligence.

# 3



Three days after the explosion of the liquefied natural gas facility in Lithuania, two well-dressed businessmen sat together at a café table in a little restaurant attached to the main hall of Warsaw's Centralna station. The older of the two was nearing fifty, short but powerfully built, with curly dark hair flecked with a significant amount of gray. The younger was in his thirties and of average height, with short brown hair and a trimmed beard and mustache.

The men drank coffee and checked their watches from time to time; the older of the two perused an English-language newspaper and the younger kept his phone in his hand, but he mostly just sat with his legs crossed, his bored eyes drifting around the station. The appearance of the two was indistinguishable from twenty-five other pairs of businessmen in the central hall, and not markedly different from any of the three hundred or so standing or sitting here at the station.

When the men spoke, they did so in English, but even that wasn't unusual at all in a cosmopolitan city such as Warsaw.

An announcement of the impending departure of the 9:55 Warszawa–Berlin express came over the PA in Polish, German, then English, and the men stood, hoisted shoulder bags and briefcases, and headed for the stairs down to the platforms.

As they walked through the middle of the crowded hall the younger man spoke softly. His business associate would not have been able to hear him if not for the earpiece transmitter the size of a hearing aid hidden in each man's ear.

"If he's a no-show, do we still board the train?"

The older man responded: "No sense sitting around Warsaw if we don't have intel on his location. This is all we've got. We'll take the train and check it out, maybe he boarded and we just missed him in the station."

Dominic Caruso nodded without speaking, but the truth was he would have preferred to stick around Poland a little longer. They'd only just arrived the evening before, but already he could tell this was his kind of town; the history of the city was fascinating, the beer and the food were good and cheap, and the few people he'd encountered seemed laid-back and nice. He'd also noticed that the women were stunning, though this was nothing to keep him here. He was in a relationship at the moment, so he told himself it was probably just as well that he was about to climb on the next train out of town.

On the platform the two men took a moment to look around before boarding. A large crowd of travelers were moving in all directions, too many for either of the Americans to positively identify their target in the sea of faces. Still, they took their time, keeping an eye out for any countersurveillance operatives watching the platform to check the scene for the target.

Neither Domingo Chavez nor Dominic Caruso saw anything that concerned them, so they found their first-class carriage at the

back of the EuroCity express train to Berlin. Here they sat in a cabin with six seats and a sliding glass door to the narrow hallway, and they both positioned themselves near the window so they could continue to monitor the platform.

Chavez said, "Lots more cops than I'd expect to see."

Caruso nodded as he scanned all the way to the stairs at the far side of the platform. "It's that thing up north in Lithuania. A new terror actor over here with the skills to pull that off has all the European governments on edge."

"Yeah, but for how long?"

"It's hard to keep an edge," Caruso acknowledged, and he also wondered if the increased police presence here in Europe, due to a completely unrelated situation, would have the unintended consequence of screwing with his surveillance mission.

He pushed away the doubt and kept scanning.

Their target here in Poland was named Yegor Morozov. He was thought to be a senior officer in the Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti, Russian intelligence. He was in his late forties, and to make the two Americans' job over here more difficult, he was just about as plain-looking as most of the men in his chosen profession.

Chavez and Caruso worked for an American private intelligence outfit that called itself The Campus; through the research and analysis shops of their organization they had managed to uncover a Cyprus-based shell corporation associated with the Kremlin and Russian intelligence. The CIA had already ID'd Morozov as a spook, but The Campus tracked him here in Warsaw after he'd used a credit card linked to the Cyprus shell that was under one of his known aliases. By the time the two Americans made it to Poland, Morozov had checked out of his hotel, but his card had been used to book a pair of first-class tickets on this morning's Warszawa-Berlin express.

The men had a picture of their target from his Polish visa application, but they didn't know who he'd be traveling with, why he was going to Berlin, or any intel at all about what he was doing here in the West.

Still, they were here; their focus for the past few months had been on Russian money networks, after all, and Morozov was a name with a face tied to one company in one of the networks. He wasn't much of a lead, but he was all they had, so they'd been sent to tail him.

And now it looked like he was going to be a no-show.

Dom Caruso said, "This could turn out to be a boring day."

"Yeah, well, this whole investigation is more analysis than footwork. Jack Junior and the other analysts are the brains; you and I are just the feet and the eyeballs, so we pulled this thrilling gig."

Caruso nodded while he scanned, then he blinked hard in surprise, as if doubting the image in front of him. "I'll be damned. I got him."

He saw the target on the other side of the window, walking along the platform in a leather bomber jacket and jeans, and holding a large leather duffel bag in his hand. There was a female pulling a rolling duffel a few feet away from him, and they walked in step with each other. She was much younger than he was, with dark hair and fair skin. To Dom she didn't look Polish, nor did she look Russian, but he told himself he had not been checking out the females over here all that much, so he wouldn't admit to being an expert.

But Chavez was thinking the same thing. "I'd say the unsub is North African. Morocco. Algeria. Maybe Spanish, possibly Portuguese."

Caruso nodded. Ding Chavez had been at this a lot longer than he had, and the older man was usually right with his first assumptions.

Caruso added, "She could do a lot better than a guy like Morozov."

"Frankenstein's bride could do a lot better than a guy like Morozov."

The Russian and his fellow traveler climbed into the same car as Chavez and Caruso, which was not pure luck. Of the six carriages in the train, only one was first class.

Dom climbed out of his seat and moved to the sliding glass door to the hall, glanced down and saw the woman following Morozov into a compartment two down from the American operatives.

Moments later the conductor stepped onto the platform just ahead of where Caruso and Chavez were sitting and blew his whistle, then he climbed back aboard and the massive Siemens electric locomotive began pulling the six carriages out of the station.

Once they had been on the way for a few minutes, Chavez and Caruso decided they'd recon the entire train to look for any countersurveillance before they decided how to get a closer look at their target and the young woman with him. They left their compartment and passed Morozov's compartment without glancing in, then they moved through the vestibule to the dining car. On the other side of the dining car, the vestibule was open to the first second-class carriage. Here a group of a dozen or so men, all in black track-suits with red piping, sat together. Chavez and Caruso had seen them in the station a short while before boarding, and they assumed the men to be members of a soccer team. Most of them wore earbuds, but a few of them chatted. A couple of their number looked like they could be the team's coaches, but the rest were the right general age and build of athletes.

Chavez and Caruso continued on to the next car, where they saw no one but tourists, a couple of men and women in business attire, and several senior citizens.

In the second-to-last car, both Americans took note of a trio of men in their thirties. Two were white and one was black; they sat together, wearing jeans and North Face jackets. In the lap of one of the white men was a high-end backpack with military-style webbing on the outside. The black man wore a tactical diving watch, and the other white male had a Panasonic Toughbook, a rugged-case laptop computer used commonly in the world of military and security contractors.

The final car was full of tourists, families with small children, and senior citizens.

Back in their compartment, the men talked about what they'd seen on their recon. Dom said, "The three dudes in car five were definitely in the biz."

"Yeah," said Chavez. "But our target is FSB. No way a follow team for Morozov would outfit themselves like that. Way too conspicuous."

Caruso thought it over and agreed with a nod. "What about the soccer team? I can't read Cyrillic like you can."

"Yeah," Chavez said. "Their logo said they were FC Luzhany. Not sure who or what that is."

Dom looked them up on his phone. After a minute he said, "Here they are. A competitive amateur soccer team from Ukraine. Down south, near Odessa."

"Can you find out what they're doing here?"

A little work on his phone gave Dom more information. "There is an amateur tournament in Leipzig next week."

"Okay," Chavez said. He wasn't really thinking there were a dozen bad guys on his train dressed as a soccer team, but he wanted to check them out anyway. He said, "Ruling out the team and the three G.I. Joes, I didn't see anyone else on the train worth a second glance. Other than Morozov and his lady friend, that is."

“Right,” Caruso said. “You want to get closer?”

Chavez nodded. “We can sit at a table in the dining car and have lunch. From there we can get eyes on their compartment through the windows in the vestibule doors. The angle isn’t perfect, but at least if anyone comes or goes we’ll get a look. If the girl makes a trip to the john, I’ll try to get a picture of her. That’s about all two of us can do.”

“I could plant a bug on her or Morozov.”

Chavez shook his head. “We can’t expose ourselves like that. Back when there were more of us, maybe that would have been an option, but with just two of us, we need to play this soft and smart.”

Caruso knew Chavez was right. The team was smaller now than it used to be, and every day in the field something reminded them of this fact.



John Clark felt the enormous impact of Arlington National Cemetery—he appreciated the majesty of the 624 acres, and the sacrifice of the 400,000 buried there. But the truth of the matter was . . . John Clark wasn't much on visiting graves.

It was no sign of disrespect to the departed; on the contrary, he saw those who worshipped tombstones to be the ones who failed to remember the fallen as they wanted to be remembered. He'd lost many friends over the years, and it was important to him that he remembered them all, but he told himself he did not need to go to their final resting place in order to do it.

But despite his reservations, he was here today at Arlington, in the cold rain, his umbrella forgotten in his car, and he stood over the grave of a friend.

The headstone said very little, and much of what it said was untrue.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF

SAMUEL REID DRISCOLL

ISG

U.S. ARMY

JUNE 26, 1976–MAY 5, 2016

PURPLE HEART

AFGHANISTAN

The name was right, though he went by Sam. The rank and service were correct as well, but Sam had left the Army Rangers years before he died. The birth date was accurate, though his actual date of death was a few weeks off from the one hewn into the white marble. Clark was absolutely certain of this, because Clark had been just fifty feet away from Sam when he died.

And unless Afghanistan had been somehow picked up and moved south of the U.S. border, the location of his death was incorrect as well.

Sam Driscoll had been shot dead by a North Korean intelligence agent in a dark hallway of a luxury villa an hour outside Mexico City.

No, the marker didn't mention any of that.

And while it was true that all the misinformation and errors of omission on Sam Driscoll's tombstone bothered Clark a little, he knew they were for the best. The marker could not have said Sam was an operations officer for an off-the-books intelligence shop called The Campus, and it sure as hell couldn't have stated the fact that Sam had been down in Mexico hunting the people behind the nearly successful assassination attempt on the President of the United States.

Sam had been good, no doubt he was a hell of a lot better than the North Korean who killed him—a man who, in the same instant, died at Sam's hand. But Sam had been dealing with multiple

attackers, and while he got them, *both* of them . . . one of them got lucky in his last breath.

There are no promises in combat. When men are in fierce battle for their lives, fighting hand to hand and slinging hot lead at one another with a muzzle velocity of a thousand feet a second, bad shit is bound to happen, and to Sam, bad shit did.

John Clark stood there in the rain and thought about that night in Cuernavaca for another moment, but then he thought about his own life, his own mortality. It was hard not to do, standing here in a massive garden of stone, each white slab of rock representing another man or another woman, each with his or her own story about how the end came.

A hundred thousand ways to die; the only constant to these markers was that virtually everyone buried beneath them had, in some way, served the United States of America, and many of them, a great many, had lost their lives while in that service.

Just like Sam.

It wasn't fair.

John Clark was sixty-seven years old. Sam Driscoll had been twenty-seven years younger than Clark, and many of the other men and women buried here at Arlington had been half Sam's age when they'd met their maker.

Nope, not fair at all.

If he could, Clark would have taken the bullet to the heart that dropped Sam Driscoll, but Clark had been in harm's way the vast majority of his lifetime, and if there was one thing he had learned, it was that there wasn't one damn bit of sense involved in any of this, and even with all the skill in the world, there is a pervasive randomness to a gunfight.

John looked around at thousands of white tombstones.

Anything can happen; the good guys can die, too.

Slowly, *very* slowly, he remembered the flowers in his hand.

If Clark wasn't one to stand at gravesites, he *really* wasn't the sort to walk around carrying flowers. But this wasn't his idea. No, it was the fulfillment of a promise.

At Sam's funeral he met Edna Driscoll, the mother of the deceased. She knew nothing about how her son died; in fact, she knew only that her son had left the Army and had taken a job for a private contractor involved with homeland security. She understood his work was top-secret and he could not discuss it, but she did not know it would prove to be even more dangerous than his time in the 75th Ranger Regiment.

At the funeral, Clark expressed his condolences seriously and solemnly to the gaunt and drawn woman, but when she'd asked for details of her son's death, all Clark could tell her was that he'd died for his country.

It was the God's-honest truth, and he hoped it would be enough, but he'd been through this before, and he knew.

It was *never* enough.

Clark's wife, Sandy, had come to his rescue, as she had done at so many funerals in the past. She stepped into the conversation, introduced herself, and then directed Edna Driscoll away. She commiserated with her, and after the service, Sandy asked the woman if the two could stay in touch.

It was an act of kindness, a chance for a widow from Nebraska who lost her son to have some small connection to those he served with, although she did not understand who or what they were.

Sandy contacted Edna a few days later and told her an account representing her fallen son's pension had been established as part of his compensation package with the private security contractor, and

it was all hers, and when Sandy told her the amount in the account, Edna Driscoll was even more confused about her son's employer.

She found \$3 million to be a shockingly large sum, but still, it was no replacement for her loss.

And then, a few weeks after Sam was buried and the account was settled, his mother e-mailed Sandy Clark with a request. She said she was overcome with sadness by the fact she was sure the flowers she'd left at her son's grave had by now withered and died, and she wondered if Sandy wouldn't mind placing a fresh bouquet on the headstone from time to time.

Sandy and John lived in Emmitsburg, Maryland, which wasn't exactly next door to Arlington National Cemetery, but this was lost on the woman from a little town outside Omaha, so Sandy agreed, promising Edna she'd take care of it.

John Clark would have loved for his wife to do just that, to take care of it—cemeteries were not his thing, after all—but Arlington was on the way to his office in Alexandria, so it made no sense for Sandy to make the drive when he could do it so much more easily.

And now he was back again for a third delivery of flowers. John placed them on Sam's headstone, feeling the weight of the deaths of Sam and all the others around him, but soon he shook out of it. He wasn't too sentimental about all this. He missed Sam and felt the same amount of responsibility for the man's death as he had for others who had died under his leadership, but Sam wasn't here, lying under this headstone, under this dirt.

This was just an earthly memorial.

And it occurred to Clark that Edna Driscoll's realization of this just might help her heal in some small way.

His phone rang in his jacket, and he welcomed the distraction, even though it was a struggle to answer in the rain.

“Clark.”

“Hey, John. It’s Jack.”

Jack Ryan, Jr., was in Italy, this Clark knew because he’d sent him there two weeks earlier. Clark looked at his watch and saw it was afternoon there.

“How’s the girl, kid?”

There was a slight pause. “You mean Ysabel?”

“How many girls do you have over there?”

Jack laughed uncomfortably. “She’s fine, thanks. You *do* know I’m working, don’t you?”

“Of course I do. Just giving you a little grief.” He looked down at Sam’s grave. “Nobody wants to deprive you of your personal life. There’s little enough of that as it is.”

Jack paused before speaking again. Then, “You okay, John?”

“Absolutely.” The connection was silent until Clark said, “You called *me*, remember?”

“Yeah. Wanted to see if you could get the guys in the conference room for a ten-minute talk. Nothing earthshaking, just wanted to give everyone a progress report on what I’ve found over here.”

“You learn anything interesting?”

“Yeah. I learned Russian financial shenanigans are complicated.”

Clark turned from Sam’s headstone and began to walk back to his car. “We paid for a first-class seat on Alitalia and a month lease on a furnished apartment in Rome for you to figure that out? Hell, I knew that sitting on my back porch.”

Jack laughed again, more naturally this time. “Well, yeah, I’ve managed to piece together a bit more than that. You guys have time for a briefing?”

Clark said, “Not at present. I sent Dom and Ding on a quick trip to Poland yesterday.”

“Lucky guys.”

Clark snorted. “Says the lucky guy shacking up with his girlfriend in Rome.”

Ryan chuckled awkwardly again, then said, “Okay, how about I just brief you and Gerry?”

Clark replied, “Actually, I’m out of the office at the moment.”

“Really? It’s nine-fifteen in Virginia. Not like you to sleep in.”

“Do you *really* think I slept in?”

“No, I was just trying to get you to tell me where you are.”

Silence on both ends of the line, until Jack Ryan, Jr., said, “And, apparently, I failed.” Still nothing. “Okay, we can do the call tomorrow.”

“Let’s, but give me the five-second version,” Clark said.

“I’ve identified a lawyer in Luxembourg who is definitely involved in this scheme. When I’m done here, I’d like to go to Luxembourg City to look into him a little more closely.”

“Do you need me to send you some help?”

The answer came quickly. “No, I’m good. This is straight analytical work, nothing dicey. Ysabel and I have it covered here in Rome, and I don’t think I’ll need any more resources in Luxembourg than I do here. I will need another week or so here to finish the job before moving on.”

“Right,” Clark said. John Clark was no fool, he knew what was going on. Jack’s girlfriend was an Iranian national named Ysabel Kashani. She was assisting him there in Rome, and Rome was closer to Tehran than Luxembourg City.

It was also several orders of magnitude more romantic.

Clark almost admonished his young operative. He considered telling him to get his head in the game, but he stopped himself. He’d go easy on Ryan, for a day or two. This operation was important, but this wasn’t a matter of life or death.

The kid could enjoy himself a little bit more. It wouldn't hurt anybody.

"Okay, kid. I'll get a conference call set up for this time tomorrow and you can fill us in on what you know." His voice turned louder and more commanding. "And don't get complacent over there. I want you practicing your proper OPSEC twenty-four/seven. No excuses, no compromises. Got it?"

"Roger that. Hey, you sure you're okay, John?"

"I'm outstanding, kid. Talk to you tomorrow."

Clark hung up the phone, gave one last look to the hillside full of identical white stones, then he bent his head into the rain and climbed into his car.

Jack was right; Clark was late for work.