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THANKS FOR LOVING DAD**

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PROLOGUE

ST. PETERSBURG, MARCH 25

The elegant columns and fabulous spires of the old city seemed to float in the pale gold light of the soft spring dawn, adrift on a sea of morning mist.

And why not, thought Kiril Davidovitch, bouncing in his seat as the armored truck lurched through yet another pothole. With Lake Ladoga to the northeast and the Gulf of Finland to the southwest and the Neva River and its many tributaries between, the buildings designed with such grace and style by Peter the Great's imported French and Italian architects almost three centuries before were in perfect position to set sail at the first high tide.

He propounded this thought to the truck's driver. The burly man with the bushy eyebrows deepened his scowl, shifted down to take the bridge over the Kanal Griboyrdova and growled, "Good Ship the whole goddamn place across the Atlantic and let the Americans buy it. They'll buy anything even," he sneered, "St. Petersburg."

Fyodor still resented the return to Leningrad's original name. It was an insult, to the state, to Communism and to Lenin himself, that poor mummified bastard. He'd roll over in his glass casket he knew.

After seven months of riding next to him, Kiril was aware of Fyodor Chirikov's deep resentment over the fall of Communism in Mother Russia. That fall had, in Fyodor's view, led directly to the loss of his subsidized apartment in the Nevsky Prospekt, which in turn compelled him to take his present job with Security Services, Inc., one of the new companies springing up like weeds all across the nation, half of which were fronts for what Bobbie Batista had taken to calling the Russian Mafia.

Kiril loved Bobbie Batista. He loved CNN, and the ten-second clips of pictures showing him living in the West. One day he hoped to travel there, and perhaps convey his respects to Ms. Batista in person.

Just past the Gostiny Dvor Department Store Fyodor swerved the truck around a shabby orange barricade with "Detour!" marked in large, hand-painted letters. Kiril didn't flinch. Nobody obeyed street signs in the city. They had a nasty habit of having been set there by thieves who had the intention of separating you from your vehicle and putting it up for sale in pieces in the city marketplace a kilometer away.

Fyodor spoke Kiril's thoughts out loud. "Lousy thieves. Stalin would have known how to deal with them."

Kiril was more tolerant. What could you expect? The only people who had any knowledge of a free market were the crooks who had been running the ubiquitous and extremely profitable black market since before Lenin was elected. It was natural that the crooks would step in to fill the gaps in supply and demand, in production and distribution.

He, Kiril, was content to wear a stiff blue uniform and ride shotgun, like John Wayne in a *Stagecoach*, to earn enough to buy black bread and sausages and the occasional bottle of vodka. It was also enough to pay for his own bedroom in a shared flat, to which more often than not he could entice a girl to share his bed. His bed was his most prized possession; a four-poster relic of a more gracious

(Fyodor would say degenerate) age, with a marvelously carved headboard and box springs, and mattress and linens he had cheerfully begged himself to buy.

Which reminded him of the little cashier in the black sedan in front of them. She was pretty, with smooth skin, velvety brown eyes and little breasts like apples pushing up the front of her suit jacket. She had been cold outside the bank that morning as they stood waiting for the branch manager to unlock the door. The little cashier had had no coat on, and the rough wool fabric over her breasts had peaked where her nipples had hardened. He would have liked to have slipped a hand beneath that jacket to see if those breasts were as firm as they looked. She had caught his appreciative glance and her smooth skin had flushed a delicate pink, the color of the dawn sky above, but she hadn't looked angry and she hadn't looked away.

The neat blond head was framed now in the rear window of the sedan, and he imagined that she could feel the weight of his gaze, enough so that he wasn't surprised when she turned to flash him a shy smile. The truck's windshield was masked with plate steel, leaving only a narrow horizontal slit through which to see and be seen, but Kiril knew she smiled at him. The branch manager next to her must have thought so, too, and must not have liked it, because he snapped something that had her obediently facing forward again. Strands of blond hair cupped her collar in a neat, shining line. Kiril imagined running his fingers through that hair, imagined the little cashier rubbing her head against his palm like a cat, purring like a cat, too. She would purr, he was sure of it. He couldn't wait to find out if he was right. That night, perhaps.

Fyodor observed all this with a sour expression. "The Romeo of the Rentacops strikes again."

Kiril grinned and gave a modest shrug. "What can I say? The ladies, they love me."

Fyodor grunted. The heavy truck bounced again as they ran over another, deeper pothole.

"Whoa there, pardner," Kiril said in his best Duke impression, and grabbed hold of the armrest to keep from rolling into Fyodor's lap. "Watch it. Don't want to upset all those rubles riding around in the back."

Fyodor grunted again, disdainfully this time. He didn't approve of money, or currency transfers, or banks either, for that matter. Property, all property, should be held in common, by all citizens. Profit, especially profit earned by lending money at extortionate rates to those who knew no better, was an abomination.

Still, it wouldn't do to lose their escort entirely. The truck slowed almost to a halt. "Can you see the soldiers?"

Kiril bent down to peer into the rearview mirror. He laughed. "Yes. One fell off the outside of the troop truck. They've stopped to wait for him to catch up."

Fyodor swore and double-clutched into second. The gears crashed together and the armored truck began to jerk forward.

Kiril braced both hands against the dash and tried to keep his spine from snapping off at the neck. "What are you doing," he said, dutiful but not really alarmed. It was only Fyodor, rebelling against the new world order on schedule. "You know the rules, we wait for the soldiers."

"Fuck their mothers," Fyodor said, and broke another rule by opening the door to spit contemptuously. The door crashed shut again and they roared over the Nevsky Prospekt bridge, only to be brought to an abrupt halt on the other side when Fyodor cursed and slammed on the brakes.

Kiril's hat fell over his eyes and the knuckles of one hand hurt where it had slipped and hit the dash. He swore a few times himself and shoved his hat back on his head.

The square was teeming with soldiers, commanded by a tall, broad-shouldered captain in a pristine uniform with knife-sharp creases down the legs of his pants and red tabs on his epaulets. He strode toward them, an expression of sharp annoyance in his hard blue eyes. His cheekbones were high and flat in a narrow face and his mouth was a wide pair of thin lips pressed together in a

uncompromising line. Kiril, who had served thirteen hellish months in Chechnya before the pullout, recognized at a glance the look of a professional officer, one who got the job done and never bothered before the fact to count the cost in soldiers' lives. No matter what the situation was, no matter what Fyodor said, they were going to wind up in the wrong, Kiril thought glumly, and cast an anxious look at the sedan in front of them. The little blond cashier had twisted around in her seat and was watching the officer approach the truck. He hoped that wasn't admiration he saw in her eyes.

The army officer arrived at Fyodor's door and thumped it with an imperious fist. Without much hope Kiril said, "Don't open it, Fyodor, you know it's against the rules." Fyodor ignored him and opened it anyway, and Kiril gave up and sat back with a sigh.

"Captain Kakhovka," the officer said. "Fifth Battalion, assigned to assist the St. Petersburg militia in keeping the peace."

And not liking the situation, Kiril thought. The captain would rather be in Chechnya, slaughtering civilian rebels and having his own troops slaughtered in turn.

"What's the problem, captain?" Fyodor said.

The captain, still tight-lipped, said, "There were reports of violence in front of the General Staff Building this morning, a workers' demonstration gone bad."

Fyodor's lip curled. "Another one?"

The captain gave a curt nod, his field cap squared just so on his brow. "We've had information that some had weapons. You should have stopped at the barricade."

Fyodor spread his hands. "What barricade, Captain? There was no barricade." He looked at Kiril for confirmation.

Kiril opened his big brown eyes as far as they would go. "No, no barricade."

Captain Kakhovka looked skeptical. Kiril didn't blame him. "You'll have to go around. We've rerouted the traffic down Plekhanova."

Indeed, the black sedan was already turning. The little blonde was still twisted around in her seat, wide curious eyes on the truck.

Fyodor muttered a curse and slammed the door to put the truck in gear again and jerk forward in pursuit of the sedan. In the rearview mirror Kiril noticed the captain waving the truck filled with soldiers to a halt, and that the soldier who had fallen off the truck into the pothole almost fell off again. He laughed.

"What?" Fyodor said grumpily, and, when Kiril relayed the news, grumbled, "We'll have to go all the way down to Gorokhovaya, maybe even Antonenko."

Plekhanova was a narrow street lined with tall, thin buildings blocking out the morning sun. Its surface was even rougher than Nevsky, and the noise the steel plates of the truck made as they rumbled down it precluded any conversation. Fortunately there was hardly any traffic, Kiril thought, because between the narrowness of the street, the width of the truck and Fyodor's sunny disposition oncoming vehicles would have been at severe risk of winding up in someone's parlor.

They came upon an intersection with another, smaller street with no street sign and were there halted by yet another soldier. "What now?" Fyodor grumbled.

The soldier was carrying an automatic rifle over one shoulder. He waved at them, indicating a still even tinier street to their right. The black sedan obediently turned down it.

"What the hell?" Fyodor said. "This isn't the way to Gorokhovaya." The soldier looked stern and waved again, and Fyodor swore and jammed the truck into gear. "Goddamn military. Fuck all the mothers. We are never going to get our lunch."

This street was if possible even narrower than the previous one, the houses smaller and leaning up against one another like they could use the support. They weren't fifty feet down it when the taillights of the black sedan flashed six feet off their front bumper. This time Kiril had himself brace

against the dash before Fyodor stamped on the brake.

~~Another soldier was standing in front of the sedan. He, too, was armed with an automatic rifle.~~
An older-model Kalishnikov, Kiril had just enough time to see, before, in a single, practiced motion, the soldier had the muzzle trained on the black sedan.

“What the hell?” Fyodor said, startled out of his sulk.

Time seemed to slow down, enough for Kiril to notice the total lack of expression on the soldier’s face as the rifle went off with a stuttering clatter, shattering the glass of the sedan’s windshield. The branch manager’s shoulders jerked once and went still. Half of the little clerk’s blond head separated from the other half and flew back to smear against the rear window. The perfect little body seemed to relax back against her seat, as if she had decided to take a nap.

“No!” Kiril yelled and opened his door.

“Don’t! Keep the door closed!” Fyodor shouted.

“No!” Kiril yelled again, already half out of his seat when he heard the quiet burping automatic-rifle fire and felt a bullet slam into his right side. He bounced off the door, spun around and fell clumsily to the street, face down, his cheek pressed against the damp, patched tarmac, his outflung hands grasping at the cobblestones, the light layer of frost dissolving at his touch.

From a great distance he heard what sounded like a lot of firecrackers going off all at once. They weren’t firecrackers, though; he knew that sound all too well. All he could think of was the smear of red against the rear windshield of the black sedan, all that was left of the little cashier’s head. “No,” he whispered, and tried to pull himself up. His arms and legs would not obey. The right side of his cheek was warm, the warm area growing larger the longer he lay there.

A foot clad in highly polished army boots stepped over him. “What the hell?” he heard Fyodor say again, just before the shot that killed him.

“Set the charge,” a familiar voice snapped. It was the officer with the blue eyes, Kiril thought. He remembered the coldness in those eyes, and with the small remnant of reason left to him concentrated on not being obvious about breathing.

A few minutes later there was a loud *Crump!* The truck rocked forward, the right rear wheel almost rolling over his arm. The two rear doors fell into the street with loud clangs that reverberated painfully inside Kiril’s head.

“All right, bring up the truck.”

There was the sound of an engine approaching. Tires rolled into Kiril’s view. Feet clad in bright red Reebok sneakers thudded to the pavement next to the driver’s door. Kiril heard more doors slam and more footsteps. Someone gave an excited laugh.

“The soldiers?” the first voice said.

“No problem,” a second voice said cheerfully.

“All right. Come on, get it out, all of it. Let’s get going before the real militia show up.”

There was another laugh. “Aren’t they getting their share?”

“This time it’s all ours.”

“America, land of the free, home of the brave, here we come!”

“Come on, move it!”

There was a flurry of furious activity between the back of the armored truck and the new vehicle. It lasted about ten minutes. For every minute Kiril lived a year. His side was beginning to hurt, but he knew enough to make no sound. He had not survived Chechnyan rebels to die at home, on a street in St. Petersburg not a mile from his apartment. He thought about the carving on the head of his bed. He thought about the little blond clerk lying beneath it, smiling and holding out her arms, before half his face slid off. A scream fought its way up his throat. He held on to it, repressing the fine trembling that had begun in his legs.

“All right,” the first voice said. “That’s all of it. Move out.”

“What about you?” the cheerful voice said.

“I’ll be right there.” There was a sound of a round being jacked into the chamber of an automatic pistol. “No witnesses this time.”

WASHINGTON, D.C., JUNE 12

“Haley!”

“Yes, sir?”

“Where the hell are Carroll and Casanare?”

Special Agent Dennis Haley looked wildly around the cramped bullpen of the Russian Mafia task force, as if his extreme need would cause the two agents to crawl out from beneath one of the dozens of desks jammed into the room. Instinctively he said, because even at his grade level deniability was a

“Uh, I don’t know, sir.”

“Well, find them, goddamn it!”

Golden slammed back into his office. Special Agent Haley’s computer monitor rocked slightly on its stand from the aftershock.

Special Agent Haley was small and thin and red-haired and harried. He was also easily cowed and in spite of the mountain of paperwork piled on his desk he didn’t hesitate to go in search of the errant agents. He found them two floors down, assisting in the sorting of evidence from the bombing of an airliner which had gone into the Atlantic off the coast of South Carolina.

Carroll looked up and saw Haley in the doorway. “We’re saved,” she told Casanare. There were only so many ways a witness could describe a plane blowing up, all of them resulting in the death and dismemberment of everyone on board. When you’ve read one eyewitness report, you’ve read them all whether they were knee-deep in the ocean off Myrtle Beach, revering or reviling the memory of John Brown at Fort Sumter, or visiting your mother-in-law under duress at Tybee Island.

“Who says there’s no god?” Casanare replied. If he had to look at one more report of a severed limb floating to shore, he was afraid he might vomit. You just don’t vomit at headquarters. In the field, yes, neatly and discreetly behind a bush, and at a crime scene no one blamed you, but not at headquarters.

Maxine Carroll was a tall blonde with deep blue, almost violet eyes. Alberto Casanare was a foot shorter than Carroll, fifty pounds heavier, all of it muscle, and as dark as she was fair.

They were key members on the task force investigating the Russian Mafia presence in the United States, recently covering themselves with glory following the successful cracking of a multinational organization controlling but not limited to credit card fraud, money laundering, illegal alien smuggling, white slavery, weapons trafficking and tax evasion, and the indictment (if not the trial and imprisonment, Haley thought regretfully), of one Pyotr Razikin, AKA Peter the Great, the alleged leader of the organization.

“What’s up?” Carroll said in the hallway.

Haley, preoccupied with watching her walk, didn’t hear her at first. Casanare, grinning, nudged him in the side before Carroll turned around and caught him. He colored and stuttered, “Uh, the boss wants to talk to you.”

“What about?”

“I don’t know,” Haley said.

Carroll halted to examine him through narrowed eyes. “Like hell. You’re worse than a Soviet mole in the CIA. You always know what’s going on.”

Haley's red face darkened to purple and he very nearly wriggled with pleasure. "Really. He just said to find you, he didn't say why."

"But your best guess would be—?" Casanare said.

Haley only shook his head and marched determinedly to the elevator. Casanare raised an eyebrow at Carroll, who shrugged and followed.

The lack of windows in Samuel Golden's office was disguised by the blizzard of memo department communiques, ten-most-wanted lists, crime reports and handdrawn, crudely lettered cartoons scatological and profane dealing mostly with Senate oversight committees tacked to the walls. Golden himself was an intense, wiry man of fifty-two years, smart, tenacious and a Bureau man down to his toes. His family was Jewish, originally from Minsk, and he was fluent in Russian. He had been a twenty-year veteran when tapped to head up the Russian Mafia task force. At first the task force had been him and one administrative aide. After the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Republic broke up, the power and global reach of the Russian Mafia expanded exponentially, and eventually he was allocated his pick of the personnel roster. His first choice had been Alberto Casanare. On Alberto's recommendation, his second was Maxine Carroll. As they settled into their seats, he ran a mental review of their jackets, which were very nearly as colorful as his own.

Maxine Carroll's great-grandfather had been born Anatoli Chernofski, which became Carroll on his way through Ellis Island in 1899. He had traveled by train across the country to Dawson City where he met a dance-hall girl named Norma Swensen. They married and moved to Seattle, where Anatoli used Norma's savings to establish himself in the timber industry, gradually diversifying into paper products, soon landing a lucrative and apparently infinite contract with the Department of the Interior and thereby ensuring the security and comfort of his family well into the next century. In the fullness of time, Anatoli and Norma had children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, of which Maxine Carroll was the third. At her great-grandfather's insistence, his children had grown up speaking both Russian and English, a tradition passed down through the generations. When Carroll graduated from the University of Washington in 1989 with a degree in economics, she was recruited by the FBI. She was thirty-four years old, single, with no children. Golden looked at her beneath drooping lids. If he could have said the same, and if he weren't her superior officer, she wouldn't have been for long.

Carroll's family was one generation up on Alberto Casanare's, whose grandfather had waded across the Rio Grande in Texas, picked lettuce until he had enough money to send for his wife, and who, by the time the Immigration and Naturalization Service got around to asking, had sired nine children, all born safely north of the Rio Grande and the eldest of which was an attorney specializing in civil rights. Al, the sixth of the grandchildren, had grown up speaking Spanish and English, which facilitated his talent for linguistics. He majored in foreign languages at the University of Texas specializing in Russian and Japanese and, like Carroll, was recruited by the FBI on graduation. He spent four years in El Paso, that black hole of the FBI, intercepting drug shipments, before his fluency in Russian got him seconded to Golden's task force. He was four years older than Carroll, happily married and the father of three, all of whom called Carroll Auntie Maxie, which she said made her sound like a Southern spinster, but that was all she said, so Golden figured she didn't mind that much.

They'd been partners for five years, and speculation was rife in the Bureau over the possibility of an ongoing affair. Golden knew better. Casanare was married to one of the smartest, prettiest women Golden knew, not excluding Carroll, and Carroll had all the moral flexibility of Carrie Nation. Not that they were partners, and friends, no more. He approved. There was nothing worse than sex to fuck up a relationship, not to mention the job site.

Carroll moved restively in her seat, and Golden tried not to admire her legs, displayed to advantage beneath a slim skirt and a jacket that made everything else nip in and stick out the way it was supposed to. The woman was a first-class clotheshorse. "You wanted to see us, sir?"

Golden got his overactive imagination back under control. “Yes.” He chucked a file across the desk and she caught it neatly. Casanare rose to read over her shoulder. “Couple of reports out of Russia. First one’s a bank robbery. The ruble equivalent of \$10 million. First National Bank of Commerce and Trade, St. Petersburg, March 25. They were transferring the rubles from the branch to the main bank.”

“Seems like a hell of a lot of money for a provincial bank,” Casanare observed.

“A hell of a lot,” Golden agreed. “But then they do a hell of a lot of foreign trade. Finland, the Baltic states, like that.”

“Over or under?”

“The table?” Carroll nodded, and Golden shrugged. “That’s up to the Russian cops. Anyway, it’s about eleven-thirty; there are three vehicles: a four-door sedan with a driver, the bank manager and a clerk, an armored truck with a driver and a guard, and a troop truck with twenty soldiers on board bringing up the rear.” He paused.

“Let me guess,” Carroll said. “A detour sign.”

Golden nodded. “Except they didn’t take the detour.”

“Figures,” Casanare said.

“Yeah, but it didn’t help them, the crooks knew they wouldn’t, and a couple streets on they were met by an army captain with a detachment who directed them down a dead-end street, ambushed them with automatic rifles, blew the doors off the truck with a handful of homemade C-4 and got away with all the marbles.”

“Job inside or outside?”

“Outside.”

Carroll made a face. “Everyone dead?”

“All but one,” Golden said coolly, ignoring Casanare’s wince. “Which won’t surprise you.”

“Why not?” Carroll demanded.

Golden jerked his head at the file in her hands. “Check out the description of the police captain.”

She skimmed through the pages and came to a halt, her eyes running rapidly down the page. She went very still. “Ivanov.”

“Ivanov?” Casanare said, sitting up.

“Ivanov,” Golden said, nodding.

“Back in business,” Casanare said.

“He was never out,” Carroll said.

Ivanov, the only name by which he was known, had been the missing person in the Peter the Great case. There was no clear file photo of him, only a description of a tall, broad-shouldered blond with blue eyes, Slavic cheekbones and a thin-lipped smile that one terrified informant had described as “a fucking throat-cutter, and happy in his work. I mean, Jesus Christ, if Ivanov smiles at you, you know you’re dead.” Ivanov had sat at Peter the Great’s right hand, had been his enforcer, had been literally on one memorable occasion, Pyotr’s hatchet man.

Carroll’s gaze was narrowed and fierce. “You said there were two reports.”

Golden tossed her a second file. “This one’s a theft. A military base near the Ukrainian border was hit. We have reason to believe Ivanov was involved.”

“What reason?”

“A description of one of two men in a white van that drove into the base late the night of the robbery. Tall, broad-shouldered—”

“—blue eyes—” Carroll said.

“—Slavic cheekbones—” Casanare said.

“—and a smile you could cut yourself on,” Golden said, nodding.

“Two men?”

~~“Two. The other man didn’t seem to make much of an impression on our witness, other than being shorter, heavier, older and with less hair. Of course, he was covered with Russian prison tattoos.”~~

“Mafia.”

“Looks like.”

“And who is our witness?”

“Was. He died after he gave a statement.”

“How’d he die?”

“He was shot. At point-blank range.”

Casanare said grimly, “That sonofabitch doesn’t like to leave any loose ends lying around, does he?”

Golden shook his head. “Wasn’t Ivanov.”

“Bullshit.”

“Our witness was one of two guards on the gate that night, both of whom had been alerted by the base commander to expect company, with full descriptions of both so they could be passed through. The guards followed, as per instructions. Ivanov went into the general’s office and stayed there, coming out only once, the guard thought while the general was on the phone.”

“What general?”

“The base commander. Armin Glukhov. Four stars, much-decorated veteran of Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and on loan for a dozen little insurrections around Africa and South America.”

Carroll’s brows twitched together. Casanare said, “What did they steal?”

“Ten kilograms of plutonium.”

Silence. “Plutonium?” Carroll said.

“Plutonium,” Golden confirmed.

Another silence. “They make bombs with plutonium,” Casanare observed.

“Yes.”

“Nuclear bombs.”

“Yes.”

“With, like, fallout and radioactive poisoning and nuclear winter and all the other modern conveniences.”

“Yes.”

Another silence. “And you’re telling us Ivanov stole ten kilograms of it? What’s that in pounds?”

“Twenty-two,” Carroll said.

Of course she would know, Golden thought, she knew everything, or thought she did. “And you only need about a pound to make a bomb with a one-mile blast radius, according to the mad scientists in the lab. Even a marginally competent design would fit into a suitcase, they say. Imagine a dozen suitcases placed strategically in bus-station lockers around Israel. Or India.” He paused. “Or the United States.”

“Jesus Christ,” Casanare said, shaken out of his sangfroid. “I know things are bad over there, but ___”

“But nothing,” Golden said. “The Russian Mafia and the government pretty much run the country now, and business is along for the ride. People are making millions selling off government property, a dozen tanks here, a battery of ground-to-air missiles there. Everyone’s involved; government business, and they’re both in bed with the gangs. Yeltsin’s own minister of defense was caught hiring a hit man from a local gang to take out some undersecretary who didn’t hand over the minister’s share

on a deal. Hell, Al, they are averaging a little under a hundred contract killings a month in Russia right now. There are five, almost six thousand separate criminal gangs in Russia, at last count. It's worse than Columbia, Venezuela and Bolivia combined. At least the drug cartels aren't electing presidents and appointing judges and misappropriating government funds. Yet."

"I hadn't heard that about the defense minister," Carroll said, affronted, as though the defense minister should have apprised her in advance before taking out a contract for a hit.

"You know how they do business over there nowadays? Say a ministry needs a million dollars to fix a road. They apply to the Russian parliament for the funds, the lawmakers—hah!—approve them, and then the ministry takes three percent off the top and hands it back to the lawmakers. Who then bank it in Switzerland or the Bahamas or Macao, or launder it through the Bank of New York." Golden wasn't telling them anything they didn't already know, but they also knew that it was useless to try to derail him. "Christ, I miss the good old days when all we had to worry about was a KBG mole bugging the men's washroom at Langley."

"Why didn't Ivanov just buy the plutonium from the government? If everything's for sale, why not that, too?" Carroll said with a frown.

Golden grunted. "He doesn't believe in bribes."

After a moment they all realized how funny that sounded, and the three of them burst into a round of laughter that jolted Dennis Haley at his desk in the office outside.

"So how did it go down?" Casanare said, sobering.

"Report says the driver handled the actual trade, while Ivanov and Glukhov waited it out in Glukhov's office."

They considered this. "Glukhov nervous, wanting insurance," Carroll said. "He keeps Ivanov with him while the transaction goes through."

The stakes had just gone through the roof, but both agents were maintaining, although Carroll's fair skin was a little flushed and Casanare tugged at his tie. "Yeah," Golden said, "that's my take on it, too. The whole thing's pretty slick. There's a forklift warmed up and waiting, one of the workers rides one of the forks into the plant, I guess pointing the way. They weren't inside more than twenty minutes. So, maybe an hour all told later, Ivanov comes out, walks past the two guards to the outside office door. They turn to escort him out, and the general shoots both men in the back, bang, bang, and they walk in the park."

Carroll examined him with a shrewd eye. "They were in on it with Glukhov, weren't they, the two grunts."

It wasn't a question. "Yes. But—"

"But what?" A crook was a crook, in Carroll's book. She had no sympathy or regrets to waste on a crook.

For the most part, Golden agreed with her. Still—"One of the guards had been with Glukhov since Czechoslovakia, the other since Afghanistan."

"Cold," Casanare said with distaste. "When he decided to go, he decided to go all the way."

"Price of entry into the brotherhood," Carroll said, curling her lip. "Ivanov would require it."

Golden smiled inwardly, anticipating their reaction to his next news. "He's been seen. Two days ago."

Carroll's voice was tense with excitement. "Ivanov?"

"No," Golden said, still smiling. "Glukhov."

Her enthusiasm waned noticeably. "Oh. Where?"

"Anchorage, Alaska."

"Alaska?" Casanare said blankly. "You mean like the Arctic?"

"Yes, Al, the Arctic, with dog teams and Eskimos and blubber," Carroll said, but then she wa

from Seattle, which was practically a suburb of the Last Frontier. "Where in Anchorage?"

~~"Outside the midtown post office," Golden said, enjoying himself. "To be precise, he was spotted standing on the curb, talking Ukrainian into a cellular phone."~~

"Who spotted him?"

"Remember Alex Kornbluth?" He waited.

Carroll's frown cleared. "That's right, Kornbluth, he's from Fairbanks. He transferred up when they opened the new office in Anchorage. They needed someone who spoke Russian because of the border's opening up between Alaska and Siberia. Alaska Airlines is flying between Anchorage and Magadan and Providenya nowadays, and they've got Russian trawlers docking at Dutch Harbor and other ports during the fishing season."

"Lot of trade, lot of immigration," Golden agreed. "Anyway, Kornbluth was coming out from checking his mail and there was General Armin Glukhov, chattering away on the cellular. He said Glukhov was letting his hair grow and he was wearing a suit that would have cost Kornbluth a year's pay, but Kornbluth recognized him right away from that file we've got on all those generals Yeltsin keeps firing."

"What did Kornbluth do?"

"He climbed in his car and pretended to read his mail. Pretty soon, Glukhov climbs into his car, brand-new Cadillac El Dorado, I might add, and drives over to a bank about twenty blocks north. Kornbluth says, although I find it hard to believe they have ten blocks in Anchorage, Alaska, let alone twenty. He meets another guy, Kornbluth didn't recognize him, big city business type with a Michael Douglas duck's ass, they have some conversation, in English. Kornbluth got close enough to hear something about shipments, and then they split up."

"What happened then?"

Golden sighed. "The battery on Kornbluth's cell phone was dead, and he had to go find a pay phone to call in. When he got back, they were gone."

It happened. "So Ivanov's recruited Glukhov," Carroll said in a dreamy voice. "In effect, Ivanov has become Pyotr, and Glukhov has become Ivanov. Right down to the hatchet, or in this case, the gun."

There was a brief silence. Casanare broke it. "Ivanov wouldn't turn him loose this soon without a keeper."

"No," Golden said, still smiling.

"So he'll be there, too," Carroll said, sitting up straight in her chair. "Up to his neck in whatever Glukhov is fronting."

"Yes," Golden said. He held up an admonitory finger. "One thing. We don't talk about the plutonium. It's zirconium we are officially looking for. That's what our people in Anchorage will be told, too."

"What's zirconium?"

"Hell if I know. I'm told it's used in nuclear reactors to make plutonium, so we've got a legitimate reason for looking for it. That's good enough for me." He grinned. "It's only worth about five hundred a short ton."

"At five hundred a short ton, who's going to believe anyone could smuggle enough to make a profit?" Casanare said skeptically.

"Who's going to know? What any of us knows about the stuff could be written on the head of a pin. Us and ninety-nine percent of the rest of the world, especially in this country, in which our educational institutions are barely managing to graduate students who can read, let alone tell one element from another. Nobody knows what zirconium is. Plutonium, on the other hand, is a hot button. Everybody knows what plutonium is, or does. So we don't talk about it. No need to start a gener-

panic.”

~~“Do we get a tap?”~~

“When we find a phone to listen to,” Golden said dryly, “you’ll get a tap.”

Without knowing it, Carroll and Casanare were on their feet. “This time,” Carroll said, “we nailed the bastard,” and she met Casanare’s high five with a stinging slap that echoed around the room.

Golden sat back in his chair, linked his hands across his belly and gave a contented sigh. He loved the sound of agents on a mission in the morning.

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