

Chapter 55

The package arrived the next day, a discreet, high-end courier box with no return address. Inside, nestled in black foam, was a sleek, encrypted satellite phone and a first-class ticket to a private airfield in the south of France. Beneath them was a single, laminated file.

Connor's hand shook as he opened it. The file contained a detailed dossier on a man named Julian Croft, a disgraced art appraiser who had once been on the Roy family's payroll. According to the file, Croft had helped Harold Roy create fraudulent provenances for a number of paintings, allowing Harold to use them as collateral for illegal loans. Croft had fled the country years ago, but the mysterious benefactor had found him.

The encrypted phone buzzed. A text message appeared on the screen.

Croft is your first target. He knows where the bodies are buried, figuratively speaking. Your job is to convince him to speak. He has a weakness for rare cognacs and desperate young men. Use it.

A wave of revulsion and excitement washed over Connor. This wasn't just about revenge anymore. It was a game, a dark and intricate chess match, and he was being given a piece to move. For the first time since his exile, he felt a surge of power.

He looked at his haggard reflection in the mirror again. The pathetic, broken man was still there, but now, a new, cunning glint had appeared in his eyes. The old Connor Snow was dead. This new creature, fueled by a benefactor's resources and his own bottomless well of hate, was something else entirely.

He walked over to where his mother was sleeping, a half-empty bottle of pills on her nightstand. He looked down at her tear-streaked face, and felt nothing. She was a relic of the life that had been taken from him.

He packed a small bag, taking only a change of clothes and the new phone. He left the hotel room without a backward glance, leaving his mother to her ruin.

As the taxi sped toward the airport, he studied the file on Julian Croft. He was no longer a victim. He was a weapon. And he was being aimed directly at the heart of Anissa's past. He didn't know who was pulling the

< Chapter 55



+120 Points at most

trigger, and he didn't care. All that mattered was the beautiful, destructive impact he was about to make. The game had begun.

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