

Shadow of The Archers

and

Crossing Over: Writing Young Adult Fiction
and Finding the Contemporary Reader

Kezia Perry

A novel and exegesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Creative Writing

Department of English and Creative Writing

School of Humanities

University of Adelaide

December 2018

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Abstract

The notion that crossover fiction has changed the way books are written and the way we read has been addressed in studies increasingly since 1997, the year when the first Harry Potter novel was published. Attention and credit has been paid to the Harry Potter series as the genesis of crossover books while questioning the emergence of a standalone genre separate to young adult fiction.

As a young adult writer, I am most interested in this form and whether young adult novels have been eclipsed and impacted by this changing structure and whether the reader has also changed. Young adult fiction has been a wide and fluid category since it was first identified in 1802 by critic Sarah Trimmer who wrote of a young adult age between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one. Young adult fiction has been read and enjoyed widely since the early Nineteenth century but has not enjoyed favourable reviews from critics. However, young adult fiction and crossover novels alike have found a place in this period of digital and social change and found a large and enthusiastic contemporary readership.

In this exegesis I attempt to address the debate about what a crossover novel is and how it differentiates from young adult fiction by asking the following questions: Has this genre emerged because of certain texts and influences? What separates this genre from young adult fiction? What purpose do crossover novels have in the current publishing and writing climate? And, how did researching and investigating crossover novels affect my own young adult writing?

When I started writing my creative novel, I had one goal in mind: to create an entertaining and engrossing story. As the project grew in length and eight years passed, the work reflected this aging process. I became less sure of my original goals and determinations in the understanding of the crossover novel as the landscape had changed from 2011 to 2018. There had begun a downturn in crossover publishing and a return to purer young adult fiction. I began to examine my own changing and evolving relationship to young adult fiction. My story was not a crossover novel. It had each of the constructs I had identified as being necessary to the genre of crossover fiction but crossover fiction is unable to be determined by the page but by its readership. The story in *Shadow of the Archers* began as a spy novel for young adults. The story was written to explore the constructs I had valued in books I read growing up. Near the end of this project, I was satisfied I had written a young adult book and not achieved the interconnection of a crossover novel, as this could not be determined before the book was published and in the hands of readers. It is readers that cross read as books cannot embody a set of constructs to appeal to a wide, cross generational audience nor influenced by publishing and marketing. There have been emergent problems in books attempting to be crossover books: writers attempting to write crossover books. I have investigated the complex aspects of the nexus between young adult fiction and crossover novels in this work.

Sandra Beckett describes crossover fiction as blurring the borderline between two traditionally separate readerships: children and adults (3). This is a definition that describes young adult fiction and my approach as I explored themes and characters to guide the reader through the narrative, a specific young adult reader. In analysing

other young adult writers, I discovered my story is resolutely embedded in rich, powerful narrative and informed by conventions I have identified in young adult fiction *and* crossover fiction. By looking at crossover novels and the literary debate about these books, I was able to understand my ideas and the influence of both forms on my writing.

Thesis Declaration

I certify this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any other university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in future be used in submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any other university or tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Kezia Perry
December 2018

Acknowledgements

Dr. James Marland gave me inspiration in choosing an academic career when I began my undergraduate degree. He was an early supporter of my academic dreams and abilities.

Dr. Rosslyn Prosser has been a life-saving hero and mentor. I cannot thank her enough for her care and valuable guidance. The unwavering encouragement and support she has given me as my academic supervisor has maintained me through eight years of juggling life with academic work. There are not enough words to express my gratitude to her both academic and personal.

Thank you to Professor Williams, Pamela Cook, Dr. Mandy Treagus, Dr. Kerrie Le Livre, Dr. Susan Hosking, Administration Staff, The Graduate Centre, Examiners and the University of Adelaide. I am grateful to have been accepted into the PhD program and I have been privileged to be a part of the English and Creative Writing Department.

Deep gratitude is due to Imogen Perry who heard this story in its very humble, scrambled beginnings and encouraged it to grow and encouraged me at every doubt and life challenge. Thank you to my mother Fiona, who assisted and supported me through four degrees and thirteen years of study, both emotionally and financially.

Thanks to my family members- Heath Perry, Margaret Herring, Glennys Perry, Michal Beroun and Jackson Wreford for their assistance and support.

Thanks to Judith Beveridge for giving me generous encouragement and for being the first person that made me believe I could write something of value. I enjoyed her classes very much and appreciate her mentorship.

Thank you to my wonderful daughter Jemima. She is the sole reason I didn't give up.

And lastly, I dedicate this work to single parents who struggle to maintain full time jobs, households, parent alone and study at night and in the early mornings. There are many times during the eight years I took to complete this PhD that I did not believe it was achievable. It is now my belief that it is possible.

SHADOW OF THE ARCHERS

*Haven't you heard what we have lived to learn?
Nothing so new-something we had forgotten:
War is for everyone, for children too."*

*Robert Frost
from The Bonfire*

*If you believe they put up a man on the moon.
If you believe there's nothing up their sleeve.
If nothing is cruel.*

*R.E.M
Man on the Moon*

Preface

Early, before the office staff arrived to haphazardly vacuum tiny specks of dirt that had dared to fall on the mulberry red carpets, a tall man in a plain, dark grey suit, rushed through the tiny office spaces, frantically searching for something. He paced quickly down the corridors looking at the official nameplates and numbers etched in brass on the oak doors. He brushed past, as there was a deep sense of urgency and efficiency in the man's looking as he moved quickly and neatly between the spaces, almost a blur. When he got to the end corridor, which held the larger, more important offices- at the last door on the row, he pulled from his pocket a tiny metal stick and a pointy tool- a lock pick and wrench. With assured skill, he inserted the latter into the lock and turned it gently working out by feel and touch the way the lock turned. Thankfully, it was a cheap lock, it turned easily and he inserted the pick and felt for the pins inside. Raking the pins with a little pressure, he set the pins up and locked them into place enabling his wrench to open the lock with a tiny satisfying click. The man expelled a breath. Pocketing the tools, he opened the door and stepped into the dim office disappearing from the hall and out of sight. He had not been seen he was certain of it. His very life depended on it and the lives of others. He had not used his electronic key so no one would find out he'd been here today. Inside, a large desk and two looming brown chesterfield leather sofas took up almost all of the space. It was a grand, commanding room, expensive art on the walls and a few books but not a single personal item to tell about the person whose office it was.

Looking at his watch, the man hurried to the large wooden desk with the green felt top and began to open and look methodically through the heavy drawers. He

flicked through papers and hurriedly brushed aside trinkets, pens and coffee mugs. He pulled out manila folders fat with documents searching for particular words and phrases. When he found nothing of note, the folders tumbled onto the floor into a flap of crinkles and sharp white edges. A sudden heavy noise from the hall caused the man to freeze. Holding still and waiting, he glanced at the watch on his wrist. He'd loved that watch, the slick timepiece a signifier of wealth, status and success. *His only accessory before....* He caught himself in the tiny mistake of reminiscing. There was no time. They were coming.

Frantic now, he ran his hands over the drawers again. His fingertips touched each round copper handle. He tapped the top drawer and paused. He went to open it and then changed his mind and his fingers curled around the other handle and he pulled out the middle drawer instead, emptying the contents onto the ground. Paper clips and boxes of staples rattled to the floor, falling into the thick carpet. He placed his hand on the bottom of the drawer searching for a knot or loose seal or button. Nothing. His instructions had been vague but the threat made clear, he was starting to panic. He breathed deeply and with great effort slowed his movements and checked the drawer again. He felt along the ridges of the drawer- smooth wooden edges, nothing out of the ordinary. He ran his fingers along the bottom of the frame and that's when he felt the dial. It was an almost invisible plastic mark encased in the wooden frame. He pressed it. There came again a louder noise from the corridor. He let out a breath. The cleaners had arrived. Two women- sweet but nosey. He had to hurry. The computer on the desk, sitting idling, lit up with two words as he brushed his finger over the dial and pressed.

Admin. Password.

He looked for the keypad and typed in the word ‘**archers**’. On the screen a generic email account popped up. The man scanned the screen looking for a particular word. He clicked and opened the draft folder. There was only one email in the folder. It was dated from the day before. He clicked on it, quickly skimming the contents. The email had three documents attached. Typing quickly, he forwarded the email to an address at a newspaper. He then highlighted the email and sent it to the trash folder, deleting it from the account and from the sent folder. He knew the servers dumped data at midnight. No one would check before then and by then this would be over. He pressed the dial on the drawer again and the computer screen changed to the normal screensaver, a stock picture of dark sky and clouds.

The man checked his watch again. The cleaners would be coming in to clean this room in thirty seconds. He was out of time. He walked to the door, steadied his hands and smoothed his slightly greying hair. Composing himself, he turned the handle and walked out of the room and straight into the two women pushing the cleaning cart. The women looked at him surprised, they had been talking but stopped abruptly, the cheerful noise dying out.

The woman on the right, the slightly older one, addressed the man.

‘Good morning Prime Minister.’

‘Good morning Estelle. Good morning Sylvia,’ the man said.

‘You are in early this morning, Sir.’

‘I never left Estelle. I am afraid I have somewhere to be. I really can’t stop.

I’m...’

He paused for a moment looking back at his office.

‘I’m sorry for the mess,’ he said, addressing both women.

Estelle smiled.

‘I doubt that Sir, you’re one of the neatest we’ve had here,’ she said cheerfully.

‘It’s alright, we’ll fix it,’ said Sylvia, cheerfully. He’d always liked her.

The women pushed the cart into the office but when Estelle returned a second later to get the vacuum cleaner, the Prime Minister had gone.

Chapter One

‘This train is due to depart,’ said the soothing, audio tone of the announcement wafting over the speakers.

Heath Callahan hurried down the station’s steps, his bag hitting his legs, which would later form round little bruises on his shins. He squeezed past a mother levering a cumbersome pram down the steps and hissed under his breath at the two ninth graders swapping phones, blocking the escalator. He glared at them until they noticed and hurried onto the platform. His pathway cleared of obstacles, Heath relaxed against the mechanical rail for a moment. He looked around and caught sight of Lawson Noakes McMaha, his best friend, bobbing a few heads ahead of him on the escalator. (Noakes was Chinese- Australian and a real goof. He was lean and skinny with black hair and big teeth. He joked all the time but was really smart. Heath got annoyed because before any test, Noakes and he would commiserate on the fact they hadn’t studied and when the teacher handed the tests back, Heath would have failed or barely scraped a C but Noakes always got an A.)

Heath is smart but lacks drive and ambition. He fails to complete his homework or study for exams. Heath has so much potential if he only applied himself.

The same comments littered all of his report cards. His dad always shook his head when the report arrived in the mail at the end of each term.

‘You are trying, hey mate?’

Heath always felt a stab of shame when his dad asked that way as he nodded. Later, he’d find the report in the trash, unopened.

There was a loud whistle and hiss of pressure as the train arrived at the station. People started rushing and running down the escalator towards the open door. Noakes got in a carriage and moved out of sight.

‘Excuse me,’ Heath said gruffly to a man in front of him, who was standing on the wrong side of the lane, before edging past him. With seconds to spare Heath bounded down the remaining stairs jarring his knees before reaching the platform as the train master’s whistle blew and the doors of the train began to close. Pushing through the burn in his legs and the fact that his knees would punish him later for his mad dash down the escalator, he squished between the doors, following Noakes to the upper level of the train, bound for Central Station.

‘Cutting it a bit close ey?’ Noakes said smiling.

‘Yeah, haven’t you heard the whole word waits for me so I was taking my time?’ Heath said, catching his breath and breaking into a grin. He turned the other seat over and slumped down opposite Noakes. It meant he would be riding backwards till his stop but he had more room that way. He put his feet up on the seats. He’d been caught doing this a month earlier by rail guards but had got away with a warning. He didn’t care about that right now preferring to stretch his limbs across the chipped and faded blue vinyl.

Heath caught sight of his reflection in the train window, dark wavy blonde hair; it had been golden when he was younger, round grey- blue eyes, a straight nose and not a single freckle. Noakes always teased him by saying Heath should audition for a surfer on *Home and Away*. Heath knew he was all right looking but he couldn’t surf. *Well, maybe I could if I tried.* Heath’s face was flushed from running but he looked fine. He was thinking of a girl in his class who liked him. Everybody knew. It was

embarrassing. *When she smiled at me today, I didn't know what to do so I looked away.*

'Did you see the new teacher, Mr. Goldecki?' Noakes asked, interrupting Heath's thoughts.

'No, who?'

'The one that looks like Mario.' Noakes replied, humming along to the theme song.

'You and gaming!' Heath said, grinning.

'I can't help it. Gaming man, it's... what's the word?'

'Boring?' Heath joked.

'Awesome,' Noakes said. 'You have got to get out more.'

'Speak for yourself.'

'Can't. I say it all with gesture,' Noakes said giving the finger out of the window to a passing train.

'Anyway, Dad's grounded me.'

'What! Again?' Noakes grumbled. 'What did you do this time?'

'He found cigarette butts in one of the fig tree pots.'

'How long for?'

'A month.'

'That's harsh man. I'm lucky, my mum grounds me and then forgets, like, twenty minutes later. The other day, she grounded me for forgetting to take the bins out as we were stuck with stinky rubbish for a fortnight. She's always on me about jobs. Anyway, I wanted to go out that night, the new Marvel movie was out, and I told her I was going and she said that was fine. See, memory like a goldfish. It's the best.'

'Don't rub it in.'

‘He didn’t find your stash though, did he?’ Noakes asked anxiously.

‘If he’d found that I’d have been grounded for the rest of my life.’

‘Thank God. My mum couldn’t deal with me smoking. I mean, after dad...’

Noakes petered out.

Heath knew what he was going to say. Mrs. McMaha would be really hurt about the smoking since Noakes’ father had died of lung cancer a couple of years before and he’d never smoked. He thought about the look of disappointment on his own dad’s face when he’d confronted Heath with the cigarette butt.

CRASH!

A man’s silver suitcase fell to the ground as he dragged it up the steps to the second level. It was one of those shiny ‘super light’ cases with a metal shell and he clinked it carelessly against the metal seats as he sat down. Heath watched as the man slyly took out a flask and added something to the take-away coffee he was holding. He drank deeply from the cup and it seemed to soothe him.

The train was beginning to fill up as the peak hour crowd poured in. Heath realized that soon he would have to move and offer his seat to one of the elderly people moving up slowly and onto the level.

‘I hate these old trains,’ Noakes’s voice broke the silence. ‘They scream on the tracks. Need oiling or something.’

‘They keep the nice trains for the tourists,’ Heath said.

‘See, that’s where they’re wrong. The nice trains should be for people like us, the people that live here every day. The tourists should have...whatever.’ He waved his hand motioning the train they were on.

‘Tourists are money. That’s the government’s thinking.’ He rubbed his fingers together.

‘Still, it isn’t right,’ Noakes said, ending the conversation. Suddenly, he gave a low wolf whistle. Heath jerked his head up to see who the object of Noakes’ compliment was.

‘Check out the chick who just got on, aw she’s hot man!’

Heath turned to look at the tall blonde girl Noakes was describing but then his eye caught on something else. There was a man sitting in the back corner, he hadn’t noticed get on. Maybe they’d been on the train before his station. The man wore a dull red jumper, soft and fleecy like the ones he and his father wore camping but the person had the hood up so he couldn’t see their face. *How could anyone wear a jumper like that on a thirty-four degree day?* The train rattled over an intersection and the slight movement, caused the jumper wearer to reposition themselves against the window. Heath realized with a shock, that the person in the jumper was a girl. The girl had a tiny silver arrow piercing through her right eyebrow. He saw a lock of brown hair and then dark eyes that looked at him so sharply he turned back in his seat, towards his friend. The girl’s intense frown had unnerved him but he shrugged the feelings off as he focused again on Noakes who was still talking animatedly about the hot girl.

‘Look at those legs and those...’ Both boys watched as the pretty girl walked down the aisle and took a seat across from them. Noakes gave Heath a kick in the shin and made a lusty face. *My shins are taking a beating today.* Heath tried to look interested but he was thinking about the other girl- the one in red. *I can feel her glaring. It’s as if she knows me.* He didn’t turn around again but he wanted to, felt her watching him, felt her eyes penetrating him through the polyester of his school shirt.

No. I'm being paranoid. It's nothing. Heath repeated this as the train headed through the stifling tunnels towards the station. *Paranoia, paranoia everybody's coming to get me. Haha.*

Heath and Noakes spent the next few minutes debating the resurgence of covers and whether or not an artist should cover a song if the original was a classic.

'You've got bands like Placebo covering The Smiths and making it amazing,' argued Noakes.

'Yes, but, you've also got Avril Lavigne covering Bob Dylan.'

'That was for charity.'

'Still sacrilegious,' Heath said.

'What about Patti Smith's cover of *Smells like Teen Spirit?*' Noakes was determined to prove that covers could be as good as the original.

Heath countered quickly 'Panic! At The Disco covering Radiohead.' Noakes grimaced.

'Fiona Apple's *Across the Universe.*'

'Actors releasing albums which ruin entire discographies.'

'I've got it! I've got it! I win!' Noakes announced, yahooping with triumph.

Noakes looked at Heath, to make sure he had the other's full attention.

'Not only is this the best cover *ever*, it's better than the original which validates the need for, and existence of covers.'

'Get on with it.' *Smart ass.*

'*Hallelujah* written by Leonard Cohen, covered by Jeff Buckley on his album *Grace.*'

Noakes fist pumped the air. Heath smiled watching his friend gloat, as the train pulled up at Central. He felt better - the ominous feeling from moments ago had almost vanished. *Get a grip.*

‘Okay, you win,’ Heath conceded, picking up his bag. He glanced around but the girl in the red jumper had got off the train before him.

‘Right on mate. All those hours of listening to Triple J couldn’t have been a waste of time.’

‘Yeah, you’re really using your potential,’ Heath laughed as he backed down the stairs, still joking with Noakes, who remained seated on the train as the doors opened and commuters streamed onto the platform.

‘Get off the train, der-brain, or you’ll have to come home with me and suffer through some of my mum’s spag bol.’

‘Anything but that,’ Heath shuddered with disgust at the thought of Mrs. McMaha’s cooking skills and her gloppy sausage pasta.

‘See- ya Bambi.’

‘See-ya Toto.’

With one last wave, Heath joined the throng crowding towards the escalators. He happened to glance up and saw the girl in the red jumper making her way rapidly up the stairs. *I guess she’s late for something.* Heath made his way to the ticket gate, sliding his plastic pass into the slot and waited for it to register and let him through the red arm that blocked the exit. The ticket cleared and he made his way to the tunnel, passing the guy singing Elton John with his acoustic guitar and the regular puppet act that was always there on Thursday afternoons.

I don’t know how anyone could remain in this tunnel long enough to perform. I can barely manage the three minutes walking through here. The stuffy air and the closed-

in space made him claustrophobic. There was a nice smell of pastry puffs today from the coffee cart. Other days, the sushi bar stank out the tunnel and he had to hold his breath. *If I thought too much about the underground tunnel and the fact that cars were driving over my head, I wouldn't be able to get on another train, which would mean I wouldn't be able to go to school. Yeah, my dad would be thrilled about that.* Not going to school would upset his father and Heath didn't need any more groundings.

This was his fifth this year although he'd realized a long time ago that the best time to play up was when he was already being punished. *Noakes is going to blow a gasket tomorrow when I show him William Shatner's horrendous cover of Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds on YouTube.* Heath chuckled to himself. He was always relieved when he got to the last part of the tunnel. He quickened his pace, weaving through the crowds hurrying to catch their peak hour trains, past the Newsagents, a hairdressers and a busy McDonalds. The tunnel was buzzing with the flow of human traffic and he was just about to exit into the sunlight when he felt a burst of hot air hit him in the back, catapulting him towards the ground. The earth shuddered under his feet. There was a smell like rubber and bacon mixed together. He wondered for a second if there had been an earthquake. *Is Sydney on a fault plane?*

Lying there amid debris, Heath lost focus for a few seconds. His head hurt. Everything went black. *I'm dying.* It was an absurd thought but for a few minutes Heath felt dead. (They say your brain is still alive once you die and tells you you're dead.) *I read that somewhere.* As if there was nothing he could do- *just accept it.* He was surprised by this reaction. *I won't have to worry about anything again. Not grades, or money or getting cancer. It'll be like taking a long sleep with no school, rule or dad. Dad? Dad? My left thigh is throbbing and there's something heavy on my*

back and I don't think you're supposed to feel pain when you're dead. Really, when I think about it, I don't think I want to give up my computer, music and food. And my dad.

Heath opened his eyes. He became aware that somebody was screaming, although the sound was muffled. There was a loud ringing in his ears. It felt as if they were stuffed with cotton wool. He tried to look at his body but he couldn't turn his neck. He was lying on his stomach and when he tried to move, found he couldn't. He realised with shock that the tunnel had collapsed and he was lying under a tiled stoned wall. He ignored the panic that sprang up around him as the people who could move began to shout that the exits might be blocked off. *I can't be trapped in here.* He'd been so close to the exit, surely it wouldn't be completely shut off. Heath sighed with relief when he tried to move his toes and both his legs stretched and reacted. Very slowly he slid on his belly and clawed his way out from under the fallen wall. He had to kick aside rubble to free his right leg, his bare toes brushing something cold and wet. He flinched. He had lost a sneaker and sock. He was still on his stomach worming his way forwards slowly under heavy bits of crumbled concrete. His eyes tried to focus but it was dusty and pitch black and only an emergency light was flashing, somewhere to the right of him. He met some resistance as he tried to free his other leg and he kicked outward and his foot hit a steel beam. He bit his tongue from the pain and tried to pull himself into a sitting position. He growled and moaned as he forced his hands to push down and move his legs at the same time.

He pulled and twisted and wriggled and the heavy concrete weighing him down onto his back gave way and he sat up shaking smaller pieces of clay and tiles from his clothes. He looked around. There was debris still falling around him. He could hear people crying and yelling out for help nearby. He couldn't see anyone. He

shook his head to clear his ears but his ears were still full like he was swimming. He tried to stand up and just as he did there was a crack as some of the ceiling gave way above him. He jumped to the ground, flattening himself, bracing for impact as he put his arms over his head. The remains of the tunnel fell and Heath was splattered in insulation, cement and plaster. His face was white and he coughed and coughed. He patted the inhaler in his pocket, reminding himself it was there when he needed it. The tunnel had become silent. The light flashed off and he was alone in the darkness. He wanted to call out but something inside his head, an inner voice told him to be quiet. The light flickered on again and cast a sickly yellow light on the destruction.

Crouching, he felt blood on his hands. He didn't know where it had come from. His shirt was completely ripped at the back and hung like an apron around his neck. Reaching around with his arm, he felt the skin on his back and realized it was crinkled and sore. *Burns*. He snatched his hand back and stumbled when a woman who had lost all of her hair ran screaming past him and into the darkness. He could hear her wails growing more distant. *Where is she going? Is she alright?* There was so much dust and smoke he began to feel disorientated and could feel the panic in his throat rising up threatening to choke him. He tried again to remember which way he'd been going originally, the station layout, where the exits were. *Concentrate*.

Kneeling in the ruins of the tunnel, Heath shook his head, there was ringing in his ears again. He shook his head trying to clear it. His dad was always lecturing him about listening to his earphones with the music too loud but shaking his head only increased the high pitched buzzing. Someone tugged at his arm and he looked up into the face of the girl in red from the train. She was mouthing a word at him. There was a large gash on her head. It was bleeding and there were burns on her arms and legs. Her hair hung greasily to the side. Her jumper was blackened and crusted. Her face

was covered in dirt. Heath struggled to concentrate on her lips. He questioned her
'Burn?'

'Burn?' he repeated.

She shook her head and he realized she was crying. She said the word again and this time Heath understood. He felt it, the sick in the back of his throat, the feeling when he knew he was going to have an asthma attack and the air got hot and his chest tightened and he had to fight the back the urge to scream.

This was worse.

The girl wasn't saying burn, she was saying,

'Bomb.'

PRIME MINISTER MISSING AMID MASS CASUALTIES IN CITY TRAIN TRAGEDY

By Spencer Callahan

The Australian

PRIME MINISTER ANDREW HARRINGTON is missing presumed dead. He was last seen giving an interview at Central Station about new transport upgrades and boarded a train with his chief of staff, Keith Walters, who has also not been found.

Authorities are concentrating their efforts on recovering bodies from the rubble at Circular Quay and Central Station after Wednesday's train derailments. Federal Police and Agents from Australia's Security Intelligence Services were seen at both sites this morning but refused to comment on what media and the public are speculating was a calculated terrorist act.

On Tuesday afternoon at 4.15 EST two trains collided and derailed coming into Circular Quay causing a massive explosion which eroded parts of train station and ferry terminal and resulted in mass casualties with the death toll expected to rise. There was also a smaller explosion at Central Station from the resulting collision.

There has been no official statement from Canberra about the suspected terrorist act or the location of the Prime Minister.

Chapter Two

Heath was in his room listening to the people talking outside. He lay on his bed, the room was quiet, dark and the blinds were closed. The wounds on his back were healing but were still bandaged. Second degree the doctors had said. He could feel it itching under the gauze. *I wonder if I'll have scars.* He'd asked the doctors but they'd been unsure, careful not to get his hopes up, told him to be patient and see how he healed. His head was fine. He'd been checked for concussion but it had just been the force of the blast. Lucky, the doctors said about Heath falling forwards. *Lucky? Really?* Olivia changed his dressings, talked in a soft voice, brought him cheese toasties and Tim Tams and asked if he was all right. His dad, however, had hardly spoken to him and avoided eye contact. He was barely home and Heath couldn't help wishing his dad cared more. *Like he used to be, before he got the big newspaper job and the long hours and all the trips overseas.*

Heath tried to focus on the voices. His ears still hurt. The doctors told him he'd have the buzzing forever at times. *Tinnitus.* It was caused by the noise of the blast damaging the nerves in the ears. Some of the nerves had died but Heath didn't care. *Part of my hearing wasn't the only thing I lost.*

He listened. The voices seemed clearer when he closed his eyes. He was listening for the steady deep sound of the senior detective and government public relations agents speaking to his father. He could hear two other voices and recognized Olivia, their housekeeper, as one and the lower pitch he guessed was another police officer.

He'd spoken to them before. They'd arrived a day after the accident (*that's what they are calling it*) to question him. Asked about his injuries. He'd been lucky-

just scratches and bruises and one really bad burn. They asked him if he'd seen anything suspicious as he got off the train. Heath hadn't mentioned the girl in red. He didn't know why but he felt that the girl in red hadn't been in his carriage by accident and the more he thought about it he knew she'd been watching him the whole ride. He also knew that she had known to get off the train but why had she come back? *Why did she come back for me?* He didn't tell the police any of this. His feelings about the girl he brushed off as paranoia. *Or grief.*

Olivia checked on him from time to time, bringing him food and water, even takeaway. He ate without thinking, the food tasteless in his mouth. His phone buzzed with concern from friends and teachers. He ignored all of them, turning his phone off and going back to sleep. Olivia would tiptoe in and tiptoe out again saying nothing. Heath didn't mind Olivia. His dad hired her when his mum had left. She'd been with the family, living in, raising Heath since. He loved her like family. She knew more about him than even Noakes did.

Had.

One evening, there was a knock on his door. Spencer Callahan stepped gingerly into the room and sat down on the bed. Heath was lying down, facing the wall. He thought about the news and the stuff on YouTube. The videos people had shot as the two large explosions went off simultaneously in trains at Central Station and Circular Quay- mass casualties, unknown death toll. The news kept reporting it was a train derailment. An accident. He opened his eyes.

His dad cleared his throat, the way he always did when he was going to make a big speech. Heath sighed and rolled his eyes.

'Loss is a hard thing at any age,' he said. 'I'm really sorry about Noakes.'

'He was my best friend. I feel really guilty dad,' Heath whispered.

‘I know how that feels. Olivia and I are incredibly grateful we still have you when all those other people died, that makes us feel guilty.’

‘Why did it happen?’ asked Heath, rolling over.

His father patted Heath’s shoulder.

‘I don’t know. It’s hard and unfair. But so is life.’

He got up and went to the door.

‘Dad?’ said Heath.

‘Yeah?’

‘The news is saying it was a train derailment but it wasn’t. It was a bomb.’

‘Are you sure it was a bomb?’ asked his father.

‘I’m sure. Someone was there. They told me.’

He studied his father’s expression. It was grave and Heath saw fear pass over his father’s features for a moment and something else.

Like he had already known about it.

‘Don’t tell that to anyone. Not even Olivia.’

‘Sure.’

‘Heath, promise me. It could mean the difference between life and death.’

‘Ok dad, I promise,’ said Heath.

‘The police are downstairs. Just give them your attention for five minutes, agree with the things they ask and they’ll be gone. Olivia is making pizza.’

Heath groaned but he swung his legs out of the bed. He followed his father downstairs while he made a deal with himself. *I will tell them about that girl if they ask if I saw anyone or anything suspicious.* They didn’t. The police asked the same routine questions again about his burns, the time he got on the train, what happened when the trains derailed, *bombs went off*, how he had to dig his way out of the tunnel and the

firemen and police who were there at the exit pulling out survivors and how they had bundled him in a blanket and put him in an ambulance and given him something and he passed out and when he woke up his dad and Olivia were there at the hospital looking sad but relieved and how they told him Noakes had been on the train that exploded and how it all went black after that. The police made him sign an official statement that said that everything he'd said was true and agree that he wouldn't appear on the news contradicting his statement. They explained it was to avoid mass panic about train safety. Heath gave them the same answers. His dad nodded as the policeman spoke and avoided eye contact with him. Heath agreed that it was a train derailment that resulted in the tunnel, and parts of circular quay exploding since the tunnels and stations were old and in need of repair. It didn't add up.

'Do you have anything you wish to add to your statement?'' asked the police officer.

'No. That's everything.'

I'm lying. He signed the document. *I don't care.* His friend was dead. He was not. Heath had thought that was the end of it. But it wasn't.

Chapter Three

The day of the funeral, the sky was a brilliant blue. *Too pretty*, thought Heath for such an awful occasion. Heath and his father, dressed neatly in matching suits, found seats near the back. Noakes's mum and sisters sat in the front row, crying and comforting the little ones. Heath looked at his dad, he wasn't good at comforting. They hadn't spoken about Noakes or anything much for two weeks. *Or the bomb*. Heath's dad Spencer was a senior journalist at *The Australian* and had been writing at the paper every night since the derailments and explosions, barely making it home, and when he was home, he spent his time in his office eating, typing away on his laptop or ruffling through files and then rushing back to the office. Heath had woken up at 2.30am last night and gone into the kitchen for a drink and found the lights on. He went down the hall, standing just outside the office and heard his dad talking to someone on the phone.

"They still don't know."

'I've tried everyone I know at the Lodge and in the admin office, no one is talking,' said Spencer.

'Surely, someone knows what happened, where he is,' said the other voice. It was male, deep, old. Heath didn't recognize it.

'I'm working on a lead, my son said it was bomb.'

'A bomb?'

'More than one.'

'Jesus. Don't send anything via email. They are scanning the web-everything is hot including this phone line.'

'I assumed but you will need to see the files,' said Spencer.

There was a scuffle on the other line, as if the phone had been dropped. Then the voice clicked in again, more urgent than before.

‘Yes but don’t come in tomorrow. There were men here asking about you.’

‘Alright. I wasn’t going to. We’ve got the funeral. What men?’

‘Ah yes, that’s right. The friend. They said they were detectives,’ said the deep voice.

‘Are we in danger?’

‘I don’t know,’ the voice paused. There was another scuffle on the phone line.

‘I have to go. Take care, Spencer. Stay away from the office.’

The phone went dead.

Heath tiptoed back down the hall and into his room. A few moments later, his dad popped his head into the room, checking that Heath was asleep. Heath snored. That seemed to satisfy his dad and he went out, shutting the door behind him. Heath opened his eyes, staring into the darkness.

The funeral was a quiet, sombre affair. The church was a restored cathedral, stained glass, wooden pews and a little wooden stage with a large organ. (Lots of couples got married here because it was heritage listed but today it was the setting for a funeral.)

The coffin sat on a stand in front laid with lilies and some other flowers Heath didn’t know. *Noakes didn’t like flowers. There are a lot of people here*, Heath thought.

There were representatives and friends from school, some teachers and parents. Amid the sea of mourners, his eyes settled on the row in front of him. There was an elderly couple, a young woman with a baby and two men dressed in navy. The one on the right was stocky and strong. His suit was old, slightly worn at the shoulders and

elbows but his shoes were polished to a shine. The other man was taller, thinner with a large nose and dimpled chin. His features were fine but sort of mushed together like wet cardboard. The stocky one, turned slightly and caught Heath staring at them. He stared back until Heath looked away. Heath felt his chest get tighter as he looked at the casket. He wheezed as he fished in the inside pocket of his suit for his asthma puffer. He popped the blue lid and inhaled, quickly breathing in the slightly stale medicine. His lungs felt better. Looser. He took slow, deep breaths, concentrating on the way the air sucked in and out.

He went to put the inhaler back in his pocket but he fumbled and it fell to the ground with a sharp bounce. His dad shot him an irritated look as Heath bent down to retrieve it. Well, it wasn't his fault. He'd never worn a suit before. When he bent down, he happened to look at the seats in front of him again and for a moment saw the flash of something shiny, something steel-like glinting from the side of the stocky man.

Heath thought it was a gun but he couldn't be sure. He'd been to the shooting range once with his dad on holiday at the Gold Coast. His attempts had been woeful. The instructor had laughed at his poor aim. He had given him a basic little pistol- a girl's gun, the man had said laughing. A semi-automatic 9mm. Heath hadn't hit the target once. The guns were loud and padlocked to the table by a thick chain. There wasn't enough room to even turn your head while shooting. His dad, however, had been a natural. The instructor had given him a Desert Eagle .50 calibre handgun and it had torn the paper target in two. His dad hadn't missed a shot.

The guy had asked, 'You done this before mate?'

'Beginner's luck,' said Spencer.

‘This gun will tear a person up,’ said the guy looking impressed as he gave them the paper targets to keep. ‘It was developed for use by the Israeli Military and we call it a dezzy,’ the guy continued.

‘It’s a nice looking piece,’ said Spencer admiringly.

‘Argh, Dad, don’t try so hard. He’s been watching too many police shows.’ Heath had laughed, embarrassed by his poor effort and hadn’t thought about it again until today.

After the service, the attendants drifted out. Noakes’s mum, her eyes red from crying, came up to Heath and held out something to him.

‘Here, he’d want you to have it,’ she said handing him a light blue zippo lighter. Heath nodded and put it in his pocket. She started crying again and was comforted by family as she left.

Heath made his way out of the church and sat in the car park. It was hot but a dense shrub hid him from the sun. *And from my father.* He took a cigarette from his inner pocket and the blue zippo lighter. It had been Noakes’ special lighter. It had always been on him and Heath was going to keep it close. He sat there, letting the cigarette burn down, while he thought about Noakes and the girl in red. He was lost in thoughts when he heard a commotion coming from the direction of the car park away from the stream of mourners exiting the funeral. He popped his head up a little to see, and watched his dad being dragged out the back of the church by the two men in navy suits.

‘I’m not the one you want,’ said Spencer. ‘You’re mistaken. I’m a journalist.’

‘Shut up Mr. Callahan. We have orders.’

‘My son is inside. I can’t leave with you.’

‘Your son will be fine. It’s better he is left inside.’ the tall man said.

‘Plus, you don’t want to blow your cover do you?’ goaded the stocky one.

Heath watched in shock as his dad moved unexpectedly. His father twisted the arm of the stocky man and then turned and punched the tall one right in the fat of his top lip. The stout one yelled and made a grab at his shoulder but Spencer elbowed him in the face, followed by a quick jab to the ribs and another crack in the face. It was unbelievable to watch the speed of his father as he continued to smash the tall man in the face with his fist, the man’s face becoming a smear of blood and gristle. A bit of bone was left exposed on his nose. Spencer stopped fast and dropped, drawing a gun from a concealed ankle holster, a Glock 22, a standard service gun, issued to all Australian Police forces. Heath knew this from a police open day he’d gone to a few months back with Noakes for laughs. He’d considered signing up after graduation.

Before the short man could move towards him, Spencer shot him in the knee. The kneecap exploded with blood and the man let out a howling scream and a string of swear words. He thrashed and hopped before falling onto his side. He scrambled on the dirt and gravel, trying to regain his balance, grunting with the pain from the wound.

The tall man, bloodied on the ground, pulled his gun but his father kicked him in the face knocking him out, but as he turned round, the stocky one tried to shoot him in the shoulder. The first shot missed but the second hit his father in the stomach and his father fell to his knees. The stocky man, regaining his balance and his weapon, kicked his father in the stomach and took his father’s gun, throwing it a few feet away from them.

‘Uh’ grunted his father, his face twisting with pain. He looked at his gun on the ground.

‘Don’t even think about it. I’d shoot you before you reached it and then You’d be dead,’ the man said.

‘And if you are dead, we don’t get our money,’ said the tall man, now conscious and blowing his bloodied nose into his hand. He took his phone out and dialed a number.

‘You don’t want your son to come out here and find you lying here dead now do you?’

‘Yeah, we got him. Put up a fight. Arthur’s knee is shot through and the Archer is injured. Right.’ He hung up the phone and slipped it back into his suit.

‘Two minutes,’ he said to the short man who was still bleeding. ‘Is the bullet still inside?’

The thin man prodded Spencer’s stomach with his shoe making him wince.

“Clean shot, all the way through.’

To his father he said, ‘You’ve got a bit fat and out of shape for an Archer.’

Heath watched as his father lunged for the gun, even with the gunshot wound, his fingers finding and curling around the barrel. Coming from the side, the stocky man, Arthur, kicked the gun away. The tall man pulled his father up and punched him in the wound causing him to twist and moan. He hung between the two criminals, defeated. Several minutes later, a dark SUV pulled into the lot, two other men in similar suits got out of the vehicle and surrounded his father with guns pointing at his face. One of them cracked his father on the back of the head with the butt of a gun and he went limp.

Heath's fingers suddenly hurt. He'd been holding the cigarette the entire time and it had burnt down to the filter. He dropped the butt and moved to a crouching position behind a dirty old Mazda. He watched as the men dragged his father into the back of the SUV and the car screamed out of the parking lot. Heath moved from his hiding spot and ran after it shouting.

'Hey, that's my dad! What are you doing! Hey! Stop help!' Running at full speed after the car but it was no good. It had gone.

'Help me! Help me!'

The commotion hadn't disturbed anyone. Most of the mourners had already left and the car park was deserted. Heath reached for his asthma puffer but realized he had never picked it up from the ground. Moving into the church, he went back to the seat his dad and he had been sitting in a half an hour earlier when everything was normal. In the seat now, was a small petite girl with brown hair and a black dress. A mourner. *A mourner with a familiar piercing and a familiar face.* It was the girl in red from the train carriage.

'I was sitting here before, maybe you saw me. I dropped my inhaler,' Heath said, as his overworked brain struggled to make the connection. 'Do I know you?' asked Heath in a jumble.

'Later,' she said in a whisper.

Heath remembered the most pressing point, wheezing hard.

The girl to Heath's surprise handed him his inhaler. He took the lid off and breathed deeply into the device.

'Better?'

'Yes' he gulped.

‘Good. We have to go.’

‘Some men took my dad. They were sitting here. They took him. They had guns. My dad, he was punching and kicking them like I’ve never seen, he had a gun too. You told me it was bomb.’ The girl ignored him and stood up

‘You have to go home right away. Olivia will explain.’

‘What, wait? Olivia. Whatever. Olivia will explain what?’

‘You are in danger. You have to leave now. They will be coming back.’

‘Who’s coming back? Why?’

‘Clean up. In case there are any witnesses and to kill you.’

‘Me? Kill me? Why me? Who are you?’ Heath said wildly.

The girl sighed and ignored him. She pulled Heath up from the pew and pushed him behind her as she made her way to the back entrance of the church. She too, was armed and carried a gun, just like the one his dad had used. They moved quickly between the pews towards the front of the church. In one hand she held the gun aloft and in the other she dragged Heath behind her by the material of his suit. Heath heard a whistle like wind in the trees before he heard the shot aimed at his back. She threw Heath in front of herself and pushed him away toward the back of the church.

‘Go!’ she screamed as gun shots barreled through the air toward them, landing just above the doorframe and half an inch from Heath’s ear. She spoke as if to an invisible person.

‘I have him. Under attack...two maybe more. They took the Archer. There are two possible exits. Are we compromised?’

To Heath, ‘Go through the small door.’

Heath looked at the door. He tried to push it.

‘It’s stuck,’ he said.

The girl said nothing but pushed him aside as she kicked the door and it cracked as it fell off its hinges. They went through the door hurriedly. There were no more shots but it was all a blur to Heath as they darted along. The girl moved them under the cover of the second level, taking off up an old spiral staircase to the upper floor where the choir usually sat. She stopped for a moment pulling them into a crouch so anyone on the bottom levels couldn't see them from below.

'Get your breath. We have seconds,' she whispered. Heath shoved the inhaler inside his mouth and pressed it a few times.

Grabbing Heath's shoulder she asked,

'Did your dad give you anything this morning, before you left home? Did he have any files on him?'

'Who are these people? What is going on?'

'Listen to me. These people are powerful and dangerous. Answer my question. Did your father give you anything this morning?'

He could see it was very important that he know the answer. His memory strained remembering the morning. It had been pretty ordinary. He'd woken up, had a shower and checked his Facebook. Olivia had made his favourite pancakes while his father had been singing along to the radio and annoying them. No one had spoken about the funeral. His father had given him a hug as they got into the car that had taken them both by surprise. Olivia had left him alone intuitively knowing Heath needed his space today. She had sent Noakes's mum flowers but Heath couldn't recall his father leaving the house with anything except his wallet, keys and phone.

'Nothing. Just house keys and stuff,' said Heath.

The girl nodded and spoke to the invisible person again, *an earpiece*, although Heath couldn't see it.

‘22 says no files but I can’t be certain as they are still pursuing us.’

‘What’s your name?’

‘Why?’ she asked.

‘Because you’re annoying.’

‘I’m saving your life.’

‘Yeah and that,’ said Heath. She gave him a tiny smile.

She reloaded her gun with ammunition strapped inside her jacket as she tried the second door. Also locked. She braced and kicked the frame but it didn’t budge. Feet moved below them. Wasting no time, she took a step back, aimed her gun and fired at the door. The wood cracked and splintered but it didn’t open. Heath looked around. He couldn’t see the attackers, the church looked empty but he knew they were there waiting for them to move again, he could see the bullet holes in the walls below.

Heath smelt blood. He looked over himself and then he glanced at the girl. She’d been shot somewhere earlier. She was bleeding. Heath could see a black patch spreading out on the top of her clothes. The girl took out her gun and shot at the door again. This time it shattered apart as three men in heavy armour and masks came up the stairs behind them with machine guns in their arms pointing at them. The girl sprayed them with her remaining bullets as she pushed Heath through the door. Inside were old timber stairs leading up to more choir seats on the left and a small stone hallway to the right. She pointed to the right and keeled over with a groan.

‘Hurry. There is no time. The door at the end of this hallway will lead you to a service exit. There is a bike there. You don’t need a key, just put your fingerprint on the wheel and it will start. Go now!’

‘What will happen to you?’ Heath asked as she pushed him.

‘Go!’ she said again. Then into the earpiece she said, ‘22 is still free but there are three in pursuit.’ She stood and fired her gun at the armed men. The machine guns roared to life spraying the air with the thick echo of metal and bullets. The girl staggered.

Falling, she looked at him. ‘My name is Avy. Now go!’

Heath fled, his chest pounding and heaving with air. He turned back just once and saw her leaning heavily in the broken doorway, grasping her chest and holding her gun while waiting for the men who were closing in on her. She saw him looking and shouted again,

‘Run!’

Heath ran into the little hall, it was dusty and unrestored. Old. He could hear the sound of gunfire. She wouldn’t be able to hold them off for long, not with her injuries. Heath wanted to go back. *I can’t leave her. I should go back. She said not too. Where is my father? What is going on? What did the man mean about a cover? What is the Archer?* The corridor was long and went downhill. He got to a service door and opened it as fast as he could. Looking around, Heath saw the church about two hundred meters away and he was outside. He ran down the graveled path beside the buildings and into another small private car park. Sure enough, a black Honda Triumph Tiger motorcycle was sitting there. With no time to think and running on adrenaline, he grabbed the helmet that was on the seat and got on the bike, strapping the helmet down on his head. He hoped he remembered the lessons from the few times his father had taken him out.

His father loved motorbikes. Heath, however, had been forbidden to ride one until he was 18. He’d been proud when he got his learner’s permit for both cars and bikes. He had shown his dad proudly.

‘First time too!’ he said, waving the license in front of his father’s face.

His father had laughed and snatched the license out of Heath’s hand.

‘Good picture,’ Olivia said, looking over his father’s shoulder.

Heath shrugged but he was secretly pleased.

‘It was just a couple of easy questions,’ he said nonchalantly.

‘Let’s celebrate,’ his father said.

‘We need more soda water,’ Olivia said.

His father laughed and picked up the motorcycle keys. He threw them at Heath. Heath caught them mid-air, the keys jangling in his hand.

‘Good. We’ll get some now. Heath, you’re riding.’

Heath put his hands on the steering wheel of the bike, remembering what Avy had said. There was a small beep and a display on the dash registered the number 22 and the bike roared to life. Heath kicked the gears into action and sped out of the parking lot, leaving the popping sound of gunshots behind him. *I need to get home. Get home. Get home. Now.* He sped through the traffic, a little shaky on the bike and the bike bucking and swaying with his inexperience. *Embarrassing.* He stopped at a traffic light, placing his feet on the road and feeling the heaviness of the bike in his hands. He turned his head towards the pedestrians waiting to cross the intersection. He looked again. *No! No way!*

He saw Noakes standing at the intersection. He was waving his hands and shouting but the noise of the traffic was loud and Heath was too far away to hear what it was. Heath blinked. He looked again. Noakes wasn’t there. His friend, wearing the same clothes as the last time Heath had seen him on the train, had appeared to give him a message.

Go back.

The light changed to green and Heath rode on but changed his mind. He weaved over three lanes of traffic and screeched the bike to a halt, a passing motorist beeped a horn indignantly as it swayed around him. He pulled over to the curb, leaving the bike idling.

Go back.

Heath pulled out into the street again, pulling a tight U-turn and skidding back the way he had come catching the same green light. Back towards the church, back towards Avy. *What am I doing Noakes?*

Several minutes later Heath pulled up to main the church car park. It was deathly silent. Not a sound, rustle, gunshot. *Nothing.* The car park was empty except for two dark SUVs. *Still here.* Heath smirked at the stereotype. *So what? Do they get a discount if they buy more than one? Shut up, idiot. Hope you've got my back up there Noakes.*

Heath revved the bike and the bike jumped to action, he kicked the pedal and the bike sped off towards the church steps, he drove up the disabled ramp and into the church proper. He drove down the middle aisle towards the front of the pews. He looked frantically around him but couldn't take in his surroundings as the speed of the bike blurred everything. Heath knew without looking that he would not be able to get up to where he'd left her.

'Avy! Avy!' He yelled, his voice drowned by the noise of the bike. *No more bullets. Where are they?*

As soon as the thought popped into his head, he saw feet a few metres away sticking out from a pew and blood pooling around the leather shoes. *So she'd killed some of them.*

Heath didn't know how many men were left in the church, he couldn't waste time worrying as Avy was injured, going back the way he had come, he used the chancel to propel him around, his feet skimming the platform. He spun around on the front wheel, turning and leaving a burn mark on the wooden floor and tipping the lectern over. A noise. A movement in the corner of his eye, and he leaned forward on the bike straining his ears, and with that, he sped forward pushing the bike to 120 kilometers in seconds through the main nave. Avy had managed to get down the stairs to the little porch and she was slumped in the corner of the adjacent antechamber, her eyes were closed and her skin was pale and thin. Heath pulled the bike up next to her.

'Avy. Avy. It's Heath. I need you to help me. You need to get on the bike.'

She looked up with glassy eyes. She tried to move. She slumped down again. She tried again. She swung her right arm up to the handrail but the pain in her shoulder caused her to cry out and she fell backward, passing into semi-consciousness. Heath grabbed at her other arm, trying to pull her toward him and the bike. Gunshots pinged off the column beside them. Again, Heath found himself covered in cement dust, struggling to breath. Making a fast decision, he leaned off the bike, the bike barely balancing, so close to toppling over as he used its weight to get close to Avy. He half hauled her as she tried to help herself on the bike. With great effort she threw herself onto the seat behind him. She gasped with pain.

'Hold on,' said Heath.

She made no movement to confirm she'd heard him but placed her hands tightly around his waist. Heath kicked the bike into gear and it propelled them forward

towards the church's front doors. The bike splintered the main doors into shards of wood and coloured glass as they broke through and into the sunshine making their escape. Gunfire erupted behind them as Heath drove the bike down the stone steps into the car park, jumping the curb and pulled out onto the street speeding away from the church for the second time.

Chapter Four

As Heath edged the bike onto the busy intersection on Darlinghurst Road, his brain tried to compile everything that happened in the last few minutes. *Where had those men taken his father? Why had they taken him? Should he call the Police?* Avy had said to go home, she'd been clear. *What files?* He was trying to think clearly but his mind was foggy. It couldn't connect the sensors. It reminded him of a quiz he read in a magazine at Noakes' house once, one of those personality quizzes.

When you are stressed do you?

- A) Buckle up, make a list and fix your problems with clear actions and goals.
- B) Lose your temper, swear and fall into depression.
- C) Do nothing. It will work itself out.
- D) Ask for help.

C. Heath always chose C. He hated conflict, he hated making decisions, he hated being stressed, and he hated planning events like birthdays, he usually left that sort of thing to Olivia. She was great at it. A sudden pain struck his chest as he rushed along the main roads, thinking of birthdays reminded him of his father and the loss of his

friend Noakes, the friend whose funeral had just erupted into gunfire and danger, whose coffin was now being driven to the cemetery. He turned right onto the Cross City Tunnel heading back towards the western suburbs. The traffic was thick with commuters, buses and taxis competing with cars for space in the tiny roads of Sydney's transport hub. Had his dad been working on something?

Heath knew his dad had been writing all about the explosions and the Prime Minister's disappearance. *Had anything else happened lately? Anything odd?* He thought back to a little over two months ago, his father had started missing meals and staying in his home office all night even before the derailments. Heath knew when he was in there because the light from his office door lit up the hallway and crept under the cracks of Heath's door. He usually found his father's work habits comforting, knowing he was awake and everything was normal. Growing up with a journalist, Heath had come to recognise that nothing ever got in the way of his father's career, not even a son.

Heath thought harder thinking back to a memory, forcing his brain to recollect. Heath and Noakes had been standing in the kitchen having just arrived home from the train station and Heath was pouring them a glass of water each from the tap and talking about a tiny lady who had asked Noakes for directions in Chinese. Noakes didn't speak Chinese, Heath was laughing and too lazy to get the jug from the fridge, when his father came in, hair frazzled, day old shirt smudged with sweat and slapped the glass from Heath's hand, and it had smashed into the sink.

'I've told you not to drink water from the tap.'

'Yeah I forgot.'

'Only from the jug in the fridge, or from the filter- never from the tap,' he had insisted.

His father had looked crazy. He was completely over reacting to some water but Heath knew when to leave it alone. He didn't want the internet shut off again. The last time he'd been punished, he and Noakes had stolen beer from Dan Murphy's and got drunk, drinking six cans of Great Northern each and his dad had shut off everything in the house- no phone, no email, no internet, no YouTube, no Facebook. Heath had been furious but his dad was stubborn.

'It's just water but whatever, ok dad.'

Heath got the jug from the fridge. He wanted to ask more about it but he'd forgotten.

Parents!

A truck zoomed past him blowing the horn loudly, a hollow low grumble as the bike just grazed past its huge white side. Heath's concentration quickly flew back to managing the bike amid the traffic. He indicated right to change lanes and divert off but as he turned his head to check his blind spot, he noticed the black SUV curl into step a few cars behind him.

What is going on? Heath thought again. He wasn't afraid as much as he was uneasy. He decided to test out the theory that the car was following them, to be certain. Even though he knew by the knot of his stomach that it was. He changed lanes again, this time without indicating, pulling the bike in tightly behind a mini van carrying a soccer team sized family to somewhere warm and inviting. He looked in his side mirror, sure enough the car pulled into the lane a few moments later. They were coming up to the tollbooths and Heath looked for the emptiest lane, he didn't want to pause, if he could just wing through with another car the way you do at the train station when you don't have a ticket and want to get through the gate. Just follow really closely beside someone, ghosting Noakes called it and if he ghosted now he'd get away. He noticed the shiny new cameras installed at each booth and the

tightened security. The city had been crawling with police since the derailments. He hoped some of them were paying attention now. Avy was slumped on his back. She groaned every now and then as the bike hit a pothole or a corner too fast.

He moved the bike past the minivan, which was now waiting in the pay queue. He chose the next booth and pulled in behind a small pink car driven by a young woman. He observed she had an E-way Tollway tag and knew it would be mere seconds before they were on their way again. The car started forward and cleared the booth and a second later Heath kicked into gear, throttling through swiftly behind her. *Suckers!* Heath looked quickly behind him, checking his plan and for a moment, there was only routine commuters coming through on the toll and he felt relieved. He could see the car still sitting there on other side of the booths trapped by the traffic build up.

‘It’s all right. We are almost there. He’s trapped on the other side,’ said Heath. Avy mumbled something Heath couldn’t make out as suddenly the car reversed from the queue, moving ahead of the waiting traffic, jumping lanes and barreling through road blocks and the construction where council or road works were carving and pouring a new road.

The car skidded as it hit the orange witch’s hats, plastic blocks and signs sending them into the air and sputtering to all sides. Heat blistered from its tyres, leaving tread marks etched onto the ground as it chased them down. Heath took off again. He felt something fly past his ear as he moved to get away from the car. The bike was running too fast to check on Avy. *This is our best chance.* Heath screeched away from the tollbooth with the car quickly gaining speed behind them. As he rode fiercely, something ricocheted from the bike with a spark, almost hitting Heath’s foot, a bullet, hot and frightening. Heath’s instinct was to stop the bike and put his feet on the ground but as he did, he remembered something from a defensive driving article

about weaving the wheel. *Maybe it was the documentary on running away from crocodiles I watched on Netflix.* Either way, he was now dodging bullets and as he looked ahead, running out of road. He pushed the bike to 180 and the wheels barely touched the ground as the bike flew away carrying them into the city.

In his fear and inexperience, Heath got disorientated and made a mistake. He'd not been watching the street signs and was now heading to the middle of Sydney city. Anyone who knows Sydney will exclaim in disgust "you can get three blocks on foot for every metre you drive in a car," *Especially during gridlock at 5pm.* Heath gritted his teeth. The bike slowed down to a sluggish 60 while he regained a sense of direction. *I've got to lose these guys and get home to Olivia. I can't even remember where a police station is. Avy is hurt. Don't die Avy.* He looked at his shaking hands and gripped the bikes handles harder. *Get a grip!* Glancing at the fuel gauge told him the situation was going to get worse, it was low.

Out of nervousness, he kept checking in his side vision. First glance, nothing. Second glance, nothing. Third glance. He saw the car, speeding up to level with him. "Shit!" as he turned the bike left onto George Street and right into red lights. Heath had no choice, he looked around quickly at the commuters on the footpaths and drove the bike onto the gutter, between the bollards, splitting the crowd, and suddenly people saw them coming and began swearing and yelling in panic, flying in all directions but he kept the bike steady and roaring forward. This would buy time as the car following them could not fit and would have to go around. Seemingly from nowhere, an elderly man loomed up ahead of them, Heath grabbed onto Avy as she lurched sideways and then the bike unbalanced, scraping the footpath with a horrible scream. Heath clung on as the bike skidded. He saw the man lying on the ground, yelling but unhurt. Heath got the bike upright again. Assessing Avy quickly, she

looked as if she'd been sick. There was something on the collar of her jacket. Her eyes were shut and her mouth was in a grimace of pain or numbness, he wasn't sure.

'Get out of the way, get out of the way,' Heath yelled through the thickness and insulation of his helmet, veering past a street vendor and some uni students hovering near the cinema. It was then that he heard sirens. *About bloody time.* He must have set off a dozen speed cameras already let alone the security cameras and CTV. George Street was monitored at all times for terrorist activity, especially following the derailments. Everyone was already on edge. The police would be on their way. No one would recognise him under the helmet. He didn't even stop to look behind him again except to pull Avy's hood over her hair and cover her face. *Fastest route home. Think.* George Street runs slightly downhill until it becomes Parramatta road. He was doing 110km down the sidewalk when a delivery truck for Westfield Broadway pulled out suddenly from a delivery bay and Heath swerved, almost losing the bike completely. Avy fell to the ground with a heavy thump. Heath felt gravel under his skin, and his arm burned for a moment but he threw himself on his feet, picked up the spinning bike and kicked off again, dragging Avy up by the arms and throwing her back on the seat behind him.

There was no time to waste as the black car pulled out of a side street directly in front of him. Heath saw the driver through the glass before he saw the flash of a bullet coming towards him. *How did he catch up? What do they want?* Heath felt what could only be described as a needle stick or a bee sting on his neck. He swiped his neck with his hand and pulled away blood. *I've been shot* he thought with rising anxiety.

They want to kill me.

Heath was suddenly dizzy, he knew it was asthma, which would become worse as he panicked. He had lost his puffer. He had to get home to Olivia. He couldn't drive around the car. He was cut off. Locked in by a menacing driver with no escape plan. Heath was sure he saw the driver smile. They were going to be killed. He turned the motorbike engine off as a loud crack shook the air and Heath yelled because there was a large hole in the car driver's door, someone else was shooting at the car. Looking around, Heath saw a man with a cap on walk around from the side of a pulled up van about 200 metres away from them, he was holding a M79 Grenade launcher, which he held on his shoulder and fired at the car driver. The car juddered to a halt in a burst of flames.

People were screaming and running into the park. There was a terrible smell of petrol and smoke as the driver opened the car door, shielding himself as he tried to run away. Heath could see he had been burned all over the chest and arms. He toppled over, a crumpled sack, the pursuit over.

The man who had been holding the grenade launcher walked over to the fallen man. He pulled out a shiny Glock 17 from the waist of his jeans and shot the driver in the head. Heath and Avy didn't stay to see anymore. Heath had remained frigid on the bike barely moving, his asthma slowed by the tension of the scene that he had just witnessed on what had been a normal, busy Sydney Street. The place would be swarming with police and ambulance crews in minutes.

As they fled there was a hissing sound and the car exploded into a fireball as people ran from the flames, he didn't notice the motorbike, similar to his own, pull out from the curb shadowing him.

Chapter Five

Heath drove down his driveway and dismounted in the backyard out of sight of the street. He and his father lived in a rundown terrace in the back of Glebe.

‘The untrendy part,’ his father always joked.

They’d never have afforded such a suburb except that his mother had inherited the house from her parents but she’d left them when Heath was eight. He and his dad rarely cleaned and if it hadn’t been for Olivia, the house would have been buried under mounds of junk and they would have subsisted on a diet of frozen food. Olivia was the one that kept things afloat and made the house a home.

‘Spencer, it’s like living in a frat house. It is filthy, dishes in the sink and old food in the fridge.’

‘You mean no food in the fridge,’ said Heath.

‘Ha- Ha, Funny little man. You know it’s all in the freezer,’ said his father.

‘You two are in dire need of me, just look at the laundry,’ said Olivia.

His dad had laughed but he’d hired Olivia the next week. Laundry was not their finest talent. They usually just chucked things in there until they ran out of clothes and then one of them gave in and ran the machine through. Heath had turned all their clothes red once and his dad had dyed all their socks and undies black. It had been funny at the time but now through Olivia’s eyes they seemed pathetic. Heath could barely remember anything about his mother, except for her smell. She always smelled like a perfume he could never find and clean sunny breeze like laundry that dried in the hot sun. She’d worked away a lot when he was a child.

Heath had looked for that perfume for years checking out the rows and rows of little tester bottles in Myer on the sly during busy periods in the store. He always

told the nosey shop assistants he was looking for a present for his mum's birthday and they usually left him alone to smell each small decanter.

Spencer and Heath never discussed her or why she left. It was a topic that was off limits. Heath had tried when he was smaller. His father would clam up with anger and the conversation would dissolve into silence for a few days. In the end, Heath gave up. Heath searched for her on the internet, countless nights looking for her through social media and search engine pages but he always came up empty handed. It was like she never existed.

'Where do you think you're mum is now?' asked Noakes.

'I don't know,' said Heath.

'She has to be somewhere, right?'

'Yeah, somewhere. Not here.'

'Maybe she *had* to leave you.'

'What do you know about it? Shut up Noakes. You don't know anything.'

Heath snapped closing the conversation. Olivia must have overheard the talk because later buttered slices of cinnamon toast and a warm tea arrived in his room. She hung in the doorway and he knew she wanted to say something.

'I don't know why your mum left kiddo but I know it wasn't because of you. You're a great kid.'

Heath didn't reply as she closed the door to his room but he picked up the toast.

Olivia had been a lifesaver. She was the one who was there when Heath got home from school.

He felt in his pocket for his house keys. Lucky, they were still sitting there. He stashed the bike and helped Avy off the bike. She was almost lifeless in his arms. He

picked her up and started towards the house. With great effort he walked up the back steps and balancing her with one hand and his keys in the other, he grabbed the door handle and opened the back door.

Walking into the kitchen, he looked around. It was the same kitchen he and his father had ambled around that morning getting ready for the funeral, eating cereal and toast and mumbling about the ads on the television.

‘Olivia?’ he called out. ‘Olivia? You home?’

He walked into the living room and gently dropped and rolled Avy onto the sofa. She lay there stretched out on his sofa, blood crusting on her shirt. He heard a noise from upstairs- a thud, like a book falling. The sound came from his father’s office and he headed up the staircase cautiously. *A gun would be good right now*, Heath thought.

(The trick to walking silently, stealthily like an animal hunting in the forest is to slow your feet. The slower you walk, the less noise you make.) For each step, Heath placed the sole of his foot down first and then the arch, and at the last his toes, like a person walking in heavy mud or snow. It would give him the element of surprise. He stood outside the door of the office listening for movement behind the door, but everything in the house was quiet. Heath took a breath and reached for the handle, the smooth polished chrome sweaty in his hand and turned the knob.

The office was always messy, papers in piles, old yellow newspapers dating back decades sitting on stools, cups and food scraps amidst files and recordings and research. His dad’s office was lined wall to wall with books, novels, autobiographies, maps, encyclopedias, dictionaries and many other things Heath had never bothered to notice. Now everything was on the ground, the old leather chair with the cracks that

his father bought at auction in Adelaide during his university days sat upturned in the middle of the room, as if someone had sent it flying.

The large, felted desk usually hidden beneath files was clean and all the papers had been brushed to the floor. The computer monitor sat untouched on the desk but the laptop was gone. Where it had sat was a small rectangle of green, where the dust outlined its shape. Whoever it was had been in a hurry and they were looking for something very specific. Desk drawers were open, pens flung about, the windows open and books pulled from shelves. It was a scene of a crime, or a robbery and Heath felt a terrible sense of unease as he thought of the men who had taken his father from the church and the same men who had shot at him.

‘Heath.’ A female voice shook him from his thoughts as he turned to face a very different Olivia to the one he had left at home this morning. Olivia, before she became their housekeeper was a corporate consultant. She hired and fired as his dad liked to say. She said she wanted a tree change when she came to work for the Callahans.

‘It’s good for me to be here. Before you, I was unhappy,’ Olivia, said. They would both laugh while she made him toast and checked his homework.

The Olivia that Heath saw now standing next to him surveying the damage in his father’s office wore blue jeans and a black shirt. She had thick heavy boots on with the label Harley Davidson on them, which zipped on the side. Her hair usually in a bun, or slicked back in an official sort of a style was out.

Heath noticed with a small shock that she, like Avy and his father, was carrying a gun. He felt calmer than he had all day. She would know what to do.

‘Olivia. They took dad from the church. There was a girl there, Avy. She told me to come home. She gave me a bike. She was on the train with me. She’s hurt.

Downstairs. Where is dad? Dad was fighting them. I've never seen him like that.'

Everything rushed from his mouth in a chattering force of words. *Dad. I hardly call him that.*

Olivia looked at Heath sharply and put up her hand to silence his questions.

'How did the girl get here?'

'I went back, she'd be dead, I couldn't leave her there.'

'You were told to leave her there, never disobey like that again. It could mean the difference between your life and your death. The men who took your dad are very bad people. I tried to get to the church to warn your father but it was too late. He must have known they were coming if you got away and are here now.'

She walked into the office, and over to the desk.

'What's missing?'

'The laptop.'

'Anything else?' she asked impatiently.

'I don't know. It's hard to tell with the mess.' Heath said looking around hopelessly.

Olivia traced her fingers over the dust mark, erasing the outline of the laptop with her finger. She was moving so quickly, as she placed her fingers, flat under the rim of the desk, feeling for something. Heath could tell she was disappointed as she did the same thing to each drawer at the front, the back and the sides, pressing on the timber.

Nothing.

Suddenly she was moving again.

'We have to go. Right now. If they didn't find what they wanted, they'll be back.'

'But my dad, they have dad, who are they?'

‘Look, I don’t have time to answer any of this right now. Right now we are in danger. My cover is blown. You are a target and I’ve....what....WHAT... you’ve been shot? She interrupted herself looking at his neck. Heath had completely forgotten about the pain from the wound.

‘It was the men who were chasing us.’

‘It’s only a graze, it will have to wait.’

Olivia was moving again, out of the room and into the hallway. *Cover, target*, the words ran over themselves in his head. Heath followed after her. She opened the door of his room and went to his cupboard grabbing a black canvas backpack that was in there.

‘Grab whatever you need, asthma puffer, phone, important stuff.’

‘How much will I need?’ he asked. ‘I will be coming back, won’t I?’

Olivia nodded her head. *No*. The neighbourhood was so quiet, no neighbours, no television, no traffic, so the sound of a car in the driveway, made them both look up. Hearing the noise, Olivia stopped shoving things in the bag and moved towards the door.

‘We have to go, right now. They’re here.’

‘What about Avy? She’s downstairs. I can’t leave her, she can’t move!’

Olivia withdrew her gun, dropping the backpack. She took the safety off with a click and went to the door. Heath began to move, the room began to shake, he knew he was in shock but his hands worked ahead of him. *This is really serious. I’m in danger.*

Dad is in danger, Olivia has a gun. There are men here to kill us.

Olivia crooked her finger at him, in a *sshh* motion at the sound of their front door being pried open. She opened his door, put her head out into the hall and left the room. Heath took one last look around the room, grabbed his spare asthma puffer

from the dresser and followed her. When he got to the hallway, he almost ran into her as she was standing still, paused, listening to the intruders. The intruders had come to the hallway but were standing in the living room, the floor was old and had a squeak as the weight of one of the intruders pressed on it. Heath's face dropped in horror as he thought about Avy passed out and helpless downstairs. He looked at Olivia desperately. Olivia whispered in his ear,

‘Kitchen. Three seconds. When I say.’

Heath took a breath. *This is a message to my lungs cooperate right now.* Time did not freeze, there was no pause, no slow motion, no time for anything, not a thought or a moment for fear when Olivia said.

“Now!”

He stayed as close as he could behind her. They rushed down the stairs, two at a time. The noise irrelevant now as they had no time to be unobtrusive, only time to get to the kitchen and out of the house. Olivia shot first, piercing the wall of the wall of the living room with two shots, straight through the plaster. They heard a grunt and a yell and too many sets of footsteps. Heath realized *there are more than two people in there.* He started talking and trying to go back to the living room.

‘Avy! Avy! I'm coming.’

But Olivia grabbed his shirt, stopping him. Forcing Heath ahead of her, she lunged for the door of the kitchen, closing it quickly and raced for the alarm by the back door. Typing in the series of numbers 290216 and pressing the little red button which told Heath and his dad the house was alarmed. Heath hadn't even questioned when Olivia had insisted on having it installed the first year she started working at the house.

‘When we leave the kitchen, make your way to the back fence and jump into Mrs. Hasted's garden, head to her shed. Stay low.’

Olivia looked at her watch. The kitchen door began to shake as the gunmen tried to get in. The door split. They had kicked the handle off. Olivia ran out the door, Heath turned to leave as well but at the last possible moment, he ran instead towards the living room but gun shots hit the wall above his head sending him back the way he had come, stopping him from going farther. *No, no, no, no!* He was forced back to the kitchen and as he ran past he grabbed the unframed picture tacked to the fridge of his smiling parents on their wedding day. He ran out the kitchen door and into the late afternoon sun. His feet skidding on the pink gravel as he ran out into the foliage of their overrun garden and towards the back fence. Olivia was already almost undercover. He could see her check her watch. She saw him coming.

‘Get down!’

‘Avy! You left her!’

They crouched in the gully just before the fence line as the house his mother had lived in, the place he had grown up, the only place in the world that felt like home, exploded into a haze of bricks, plaster, wood chips and smoke. He felt heat on his back and the all too familiar smell of fire and dust and knew he would never return. Avy.

Chapter Six

‘No one is coming to help you.’ The man’s voice was silvery, light and convincing.

‘It’s been six months- no sign of The Archers or contact. You’ve been left for dead, surely you know by now they aren’t coming.’

This persuasive voice came from a man seated in a chair in a nicely lit room. It held two fancy chairs, the kind you see in sleek banks and display homes, metal backed and solid. Artistic, three legs, almost like a half stool. The man speaking wore a crisp white shirt and black pants, like any other employee from a nondescript city office. Only on closer inspection was it visible that the shirt was flecked with blood. His hair was sleek, black, cut short on the sides, in any other circumstance he would have been considered handsome. In the other chair, sat another man. This man was in poor health. He smelled, his once white shirt was grey, his pants torn and dirty. He had no fingernails or toenails, just bloody stumps of pinkish skin where the pads had been torn out and damaged. He knew they would never grow back. His cheekbones were bruised from beatings, his eyes were sunken and hollow and the bags under his eyes were severe giving him a skeletal look. His nose was broken, where it had once been straight. Bones in his feet were broken. This worked as a punishment and made escape impossible. If he had smiled, you would have seen blood in his mouth from missing teeth. His brown hair was matted and filthy, it had grown past his ears and now hung in a mass in front of his eyes. He was not tied up or restrained but he did not move.

‘We know you work for The Archers. We know you are a spy. We know that for seven years you have been employed by our company and for that seven years you have been sending fibre optic communications to your agency about our vaccines. You discovered that our company has the cures to the most common widespread diseases including cancer, asthma, diabetes, HIV and autism and how we have suppressed these medical findings with placebo drugs, pills and even medicines that induce these diseases. Everyone knows illness is more profitable than health!’

The man laughed cruelly. The other man made no sound at all but his eyes flicked upwards towards his captor. He continued speaking.

‘It is a shame you have been so uncooperative. I’ve worked so hard on you.’

At this the man shuddered. Noticing, the man stopped talking, pushed himself away from the chair and rushed over to the man.

‘I am going to kill you. I am going to kill you today. Tell me what the key logger code is that you have installed on our system. The one you have been using to send your communications. We are concerned about other information you may have sent. Tell me.’

The man spoke.

‘You mean, Dmitri, that even after six months of torturing me, you still haven’t found it?’ There was a slight edge to his voice, an enjoyment, a small power he wielded over his tormentor. Dmitri huffed for a moment, bit his lip and then slapped the man around the head. It was a hard slap, the man arched forward and didn’t move. Dmitri walked to the side of the room where a little white box with a telephone bracket was attached on the wall, he pressed a button and the intercom crackled on. He spoke into the phone.

‘Still, he will not cooperate.’ Dmitri listened to the unseen speaker. He closed his eyes. He had heard these instructions before. He put the phone down and walked back to the man in the chair.

The man in the chair looked Dmitri in the face. Dmitri looked at this pathetic pile of bones.

‘Are you not going to beg me for your life?’

‘You and I, we are not paid enough to beg.’

Dmitri laughed bitterly. He took a pistol from the pocket of his black tailored pants. The semi-automatic gun looked beautiful in his hand. He took a moment to admire the weapon, glimmering.

‘That is true.’

He put the pistol to the temple of the man and shot him. The man slumped onto the chair, his body already beginning the transition to death and rigor mortis. *A skeleton spy.*

Dmitri put his gun away and took out a handkerchief, a white one- crisp and clean in a room filled with blood and odour. As he wiped his hands of the small droplets of blood, he looked up at the tiny blinking security camera.

‘Waste,’ Dmitri said under his breath.

Chapter Seven

‘Give me your phone,’ Olivia said, holding out her hand for the phone. Heath couldn’t speak. His mouth was dry and he tried to close his lips and the skin stuck.

‘You left her there. I left her. WE LEFT HER.’

They were standing in Mrs. Hasted’s clean and empty shed next to her shiny new-ish Hyundai. *A real old lady’s car, she never even drives it.* After jumping over the fence, Olivia had broken the lock on the big garage, easily enough. She had kicked it once, and the door had given way. They had been waiting for the last few hours till nightfall before Olivia said they could move again. Heath had barely spoken and he was moving slowly, his body in shock and shutting down. Olivia got the mobile phone from his pocket. She looked at the phone for a minute. Turning it on its right side, she

slipped a small wire from her watchband, which she used to push the little hole on the SIM tray holder. She took the tray out, removed the SIM and snapped it in half.

‘They can still trace it, so we need to leave.’

To Heath’s astonishment, she tapped in his security code, opened the phone settings and switched the phone to airplane mode, turning off his Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, mobile data and carrier signal. She passed the phone to him. Heath looked at it for a moment, that phone had been his life as he held it in his hands. Olivia was looking through the bag pack she had been carrying. She grabbed a dark navy hoodie out the bag.

‘Here, put this on,’ she said, handing it to him.

‘That’s not mine,’ Heath said.

‘The shock it will make you feel cold.’

Olivia just looked at him in a sharp don’t-even-start way and he pulled the hoodie over his head. It smelled like a deodorant commercial. Olivia drew a green cap from the bag, it wasn’t his, and he didn’t recognise it. She tossed it to him.

‘That’s not mine either.’ He put the hat on his head.

‘When we leave here, they will be waiting for us to move.’

Heath felt sick again.

‘Leave everything here. We can’t carry it- the backpack will draw attention. Emergency services will be on their way because of the house.’ She got out a pink frilly jumper for herself and a black wig. She put the jumper on first and then tied up her hair and placed the wig on her head. The wig suctioned onto her forehead as if the black short hair was real. She looked like an entirely different person standing in front of him. She put the bag down.

Heath thought about his house again, the house that didn’t exist, the house that had just blown up before his eyes. There was that pang again in his stomach.

‘You blew up our house. You killed someone.’ He couldn’t help it. Somehow all this was connected to Olivia and he felt irrationally angry at everything, everything had changed and it was Olivia’s fault.

‘Why did you do it?’

‘I’m sorry. It was a contingency.’

Heath said nothing. There was nothing to say. Olivia had put her gun away when they reached the shed, Heath knew the Glock was sitting comfortably in her waistband and that, should they need it, it would be in her hands within seconds. She opened the bag and handed him a protein bar. He shook his head. She took it back and ripped the plastic.

‘Eat.’

‘Aren’t we going to take the car?’ Heath said gesturing to the car with a mouthful of protein bar, a whole day had passed since he’d last eaten.

‘No, we need to get away from here on foot. The streets will be blocked off now and the men following us will be looking for cars on their surveillance.’

Heath took a breath, building up for the question he wanted to ask. He’d read somewhere, never ask something you don’t want to know the answer to.

‘Olivia, are you and my father assassins?’

Olivia surprised him by chuckling softly with laughter.

‘You play too many video games. Yeah, I’m James Bond.’

Heath laughed for a second too, feeling the joke, and then stopped short, guilt clouding his thoughts. He thought of the black cars, the man with the grenade launcher, Olivia checking his dad’s office for secret files and drawers. The prickling knowledge, the truth sat ready for him to acknowledge its presence. He could barely comprehend it, the reality, the understanding, and the changing of every single one of

his perceptions. He opened his mouth to say the word, but Olivia placed a hand on his left shoulder, steadying him, saying the word herself that filled him with dread and a strange sort of composure, like the dots all connected and everything made sense.

‘I’m a covert agent,’ Olivia said. ‘And we have to go. Keep your head down but not too low and don’t speak until I say. They can catch signals from any cell phone in our vicinity.’

A spy.

She disappeared around the garage door. Heath stood there holding his phone. He looked at it, the symbol of his old life- *Noakes, his dad, his mum, school, it would never be the same again. There isn’t even a choice. This is it. It’s all gone.* Heath let the phone fall from his hands and slip to the floor. It bounced once and lay still. A shiny silver slab now cracked in the middle of the screen and blinking with the last of its illuminated light. The home picture was he and Noakes at a fancy dress party last year. Heath was dressed as a ninja assassin. He had the hood deep over his face, but he was smiling so you could see the flash of his teeth. Olivia had found the costume online. It had come all the way from America. Noakes was dressed as some sort of elf. Noakes had joked that he would dress as a Pokemon.

‘I can go as a Clefairy.’

‘What’s that one again?’

‘The little pink fat one with brown ears.’

‘Does it do anything good?’

‘Nup, it’s magic, it’s cute,’ Noakes replied.

‘Yeah, you will really get laid going as something called a Clefairy.’

‘Who said I’m gonna get laid?’

‘Dude! Every girl from the three sister schools is going. They are all going to be dressed up,’ said Heath.

‘Oh yeah! It’s going to be bra’s night out,’ said Noakes.

‘Don’t call me bra,’ said Heath.

‘Okay bro.’

‘Dude, where’s my bra?’

‘Maybe you can go as Butthead, cause you’re a pain in my butt.’

Noakes laughed uproariously at his own jokes.

‘You are lame man,’ Heath said, but he was still laughing.

‘Yeah, you’d miss me if I was gone.’

The phone went dark and the photo faded into black. *A spy.*

Heath turned and followed Olivia out of the garage and into the night.

Chapter Eight

Heath and Olivia slipped past row after row of quiet houses. Nice homes, full of people sitting down to dinner, watching television, relaxing, while they passed by. Olivia started to run when they hit Parramatta Road. She ran fast. It was impossible to avoid it completely, too many dark alleyways, one-way streets and absolutely no lights. It began to drizzle with a light rain. (You never knew with Sydney, the rain would either stop or it would develop into a huge storm.) Once, Heath had set off from home, walking to the train station when it began to hail huge chunks of ice. He’d seen a basketball sized ice block hit the roof of a bus, indenting it several inches but

by the time he'd walked to the train, only a few hundred metres further, it was sunny again. The only telltale sign that there'd been a freak hailstorm was the metre of sludgy *snow* on the road.

Olivia had not said a word since the shed. Neither had Heath. He was lost in thoughts, aching, tired and distressed.

When they were nearing the main drag and a few cars whooshed past, Olivia stopped next to an old green wreck of a car. She snapped the antenna off the front right side. The cars all sat parked like dominoes close together, she moved ahead to a crimson Mazda SUV. It wasn't a new model. Heath took a glance in the window: neat and orderly, no kids. She fished in her jeans and pulled out a small putty knife. Olivia used the knife to wedge a small gap in the driver's door, creating just enough space to push the antenna into the gap.

'Can you shine your phone on the window?' Olivia asked.

'I can't, I dropped it, I mean, I left it in the garage,' Heath mumbled. Olivia fumbled around, the antenna coming into contact with the door lock a few times. Eventually, it lifted up and the lock gave. She sighed with visible relief.

'Get in, until we get to the train, we are on our own.'

She motioned for him to move to the passenger door. *What train?* He opened the door and swung into the seat. Olivia opened the small plastic compartment below the wheel.

'I should have picked a BMW or an Audi, a start button would be handy right now but you need the key nearby, otherwise the alarm sensors go off.'

'Are you really going to hot wire a car like this? Don't all modern cars have alarms?' Heath asked.

‘Yeah, this one does too. If I hotwired this car right now, it would lock down the starter and we’d be caught. We used to have to do things the old fashioned way- so called hot wiring but now we get some help.’

Olivia pulled at the winder on her watch, which pulled away, leaving a small bit of chain with a clip at the end. She attached the end of the clip to the wiring under the steering wheel, winding her watch as she did so. She waited a few seconds, and the car roared to life. *Cool.* Olivia gripped the steering wheel and pulled out onto the road, no headlights. Heath pulled his seatbelt over his body and clicked it in.

They drove in silence. The traffic getting quieter as they moved into the outer western suburbs and then further out of Sydney into the bush. They drove for several hours in silence, the night cold and empty outside.

‘You hungry?’ Olivia asked.

‘Yeah, starved.’ *Protein bars aren’t food.* Heath gulped.

‘Good.’ Olivia said as the car pulled into a McDonald’s restaurant with a rest stop and garage station attached.

Olivia parked the car in the lot. It was a 24-hour McDonalds and the restaurant was lit up with the regular late night crowds- a few couples, some travellers, and a few truck drivers getting snacks. Olivia pushed the door open for them and Heath went inside. She handed him a twenty for two large fries and big Macs. As Heath ordered the food, Olivia sat by the window watching the parking lot intently. When he sat down with the tray, she ate the fries with her fingers, wolfing them down. *In all this time, I have never seen her eat fast food.*

Heath tried to recall how his father was before, back when everything was normal, when his dad didn’t know ‘kung fu’ and Olivia didn’t carry a gun and break

into cars. He remembered something. He had known his father was seeing someone for awhile- new clothes, new cologne, a spring in his step. He couldn't imagine a 16-year-old son was a boon for dating. He'd wanted to make a good impression on her too. His dad had been alone for years. Since his mother died, there had been no one else. But his father never brought anyone home to meet him and eventually Heath had forgotten about it until today. He was searching his brain for anything out of the ordinary, anything at all.

Too much thinking and thoughts about his mother would crop up in his mind and the more he tried to think of something else, the thoughts would multiply obsessively. He had very little memory of her to remember. *I barely knew you mum. Not like I know Olivia.*

Olivia was on edge, a completely different person to the one Heath had known before. Previously, Olivia had been lethargic whereas today she was fit and moved so fast, Heath could barely keep up with her. He realised now with a jolt what having a cover really meant. Old Olivia he had known was a complete fake. An act. He and his father had been fed a story. *Why?* She still hadn't told him why. He really loved Olivia but this woman was a complete stranger to him, hard to fathom. It felt as if he had lost two people today. Heath couldn't help it, the anger and exhaustion and confusion came bubbling out of him.

'You're a liar,' said Heath.

Olivia didn't say anything. She popped a fry in her mouth and stood up. She had been watching the parking lot. Heath too, looked out the window and saw with horror that a jeep had pulled in. Three men got out and strode towards them in plain view of everyone seated in the restaurant.

'They don't look friendly,' she said.

Olivia moved like lightning. She jumped up in the booth, dumping the tray to the ground, clearing the table and sliding across while pulling out her gun and grabbing Heath's arm.

'Toilets. Now.' Heath looked around frantically, searching for the sign. His eyes focused. It was up the back, past the tables and playground, past the people who hadn't seen the men and were eating and laughing. Olivia ran past him. He picked up his pace while she crashed through the toilet door ahead of him. She veered left into the disabled toilet. He followed as fast as he could.

'Lock the door.' Olivia had started pressing on the wall behind the sink. They couldn't hear or see the men entering the restaurant but it would be mere seconds before they were discovered.

'Olivia, let's go to the car,' Heath said desperately. Olivia was pressing on each of the wall tiles. *What is she doing?* On the last press, a small section of wall gave way, springing away from the tile and mortar into a door. The gap was about half the size of Heath, Olivia crouched and crawled through and Heath stared into the gap. *Olivia just crawled into a door at McDonalds. I won't fit*, he thought. The glass and MDF door of the toilets swung open and a second later the handle of the disabled door was rattled violently. Heath got down on his knees and began to squeeze himself through to the other side of the wall. Head and shoulders first, followed by legs and feet. He used his arms to pull himself through. The space was small, Heath had to crouch in a ball, and he couldn't make out Olivia in front of him until his eyes adjusted to the dark. When they'd adjusted, he saw they were elevated on a platform leading into a tunnel. Now, with both of them on the other side, Olivia reached past Heath and pressed a handle by the door. There was a swishing noise like air suction

and the door shut. If Heath had been on the other side to see it close, he would never imagined a door there at all.

On the other side of the wall, a man with a gun burst into the toilet, ready to shoot but there was nothing, just an empty bathroom with a sink. He looked quizzically at the empty space where a moment earlier they had stood and were only now separated by a wall as the door sealed shut, closing them inside and locking him out.

PRIME MINISTER FOUND. SERIOUSLY INJURED. TERRORIST GROUP KARAS TAKE CREDIT FOR SYDNEY TRAIN ATTACK.

By Megan Woods.

Prime Minister Andrew Harrington was this morning discovered in the rubble at Circular Quay. He is the 125th survivor but remains critically injured in the intensive care unit at Sydney Royal Hospital. Members of the Australian Secret Service (ASIS) as well as police and federal agents are guarding him.

Acting Prime Minister, former Treasurer James Towning has raised the terror threat level to extreme, the first since the new levels were introduced in November last year. Security measures include increased security around landmarks, capital cities, government buildings and services including Sydney water and electricity. Citizens have been asked to avoid assembling in large groups and nighttime curfews have been imposed. Concerts, sport and large outdoor events have been cancelled in Melbourne and Sydney.

Foreign Terrorist Group KARAS has taken credit for what is now believed to have been a terrorist attack. KARAS took credit for two bombs that detonated in Circular Quay and Central Station in Sydney in a short 1-minute video uploaded to Youtube on Sunday morning EST. The group pledged that more attacks are imminent.

As this comes to light, the Australian Government stands accused of a cover up, having declared the bombings at Central Station and Circular Quay as tragic train derailments. The Australian was unable to get a response from the Prime Minister's Office at the time of print.

Acting Prime Minister James Tawning is due to give a televised speech tonight on the situation and Australia's response to further terror threats. It will be broadcast on all channels and radio stations at 1900 EST.

Chapter Nine

It was a narrow space, pitch black with no natural light. Heath could not see in front of him, he could not see Olivia; he couldn't see anything at all in the darkness. *If you can't see in front of you, what exists and what ceases to exist?*

Heath remembered something he'd learned in history class. In Greek Mythology there was a group of people described by Homer as living in a land of perpetual darkness. *The absence of light will always be associated with death.* Olivia was feeling around in her bag again. Her fingers touching the ridges of the bag seeking the little torch she had placed there earlier. Scraping the bottom, her fingers curled around its familiar cylindrical shape and she pulled it out, white muted light suddenly illuminating the constricted space and the long set of dirt steps leading down into what appeared to be a tunnel.

'It gets lighter,' Olivia said as she began descending.

‘I hope so,’ replied Heath, shaking off the eeriness of the place. He felt in his pocket for his lighter, he took it out, flicked the lid and clicked the flame alight. It felt comforting to have it on.

‘It’s a long walk,’ Olivia said as they came to a large set of stone stairs leading downwards into more darkness. She was silent as she took the stairs two at a time, kicking up dirt. The tunnel had not been used for some time, each footstep disturbing dust. Heath cleared his throat. He did this when he was about to ask a question. Noakes had teased him about it.

‘Olivia, what were we to you, a job?’ Heath corrected himself, started again. ‘I mean, it’s not a coincidence that you were at our house, you’re a spy and all this happened?’

Some things now made sense, like Olivia’s inability to fold sheets and towels, cook entirely wholesome meals and iron his school shirts correctly. Heath had caught her on multiple occasions pulling frozen pizzas out of their boxes and placing them in the oven. Olivia did not stop descending the stairwell as she replied quietly.

‘Protecting you and your father has been my job for eight years, yes but I also care.’

Heath had never heard her say that before, he was silent. He could tell she would not be pushed. A little voice told him to wait for answers. *They will come and I might not like them when they do.*

‘I have worked for an organization called The Archers for ten years. I am what they call a field technician or operative.’

‘Just a regular, run of the mill spy then?’ Heath interjected. He paid for this interruption by stumbling slightly as an old stair crumbled under his weight and he

lopped awkwardly onto the next one, his weight uneven and ungainly while Olivia never once lost her pace or her footing.

‘Not quite. I don’t have a number for a name.’

‘Have you ever killed someone with a fork?’

‘No.’

‘Do you have a shark with a laser beam?’

‘No.’

‘Have you ever killed anyone?’

‘You saw me shoot people today. I guarantee you that not all of them lived.’

‘What does a field agent do?’

“Operative,” Olivia corrected.

‘Yeah, operative?’ Heath asked.

The tunnel had widened and the steps were gradually starting to even out, the incline was becoming flat and they had almost stopped descending completely. There was still no light except for Olivia’s torch, the lighter had got too hot to touch and Heath had put it back in his pocket.

‘I collect raw intelligence so that analysts can process it into usable information.’

‘For our government?’

‘Mostly. Not always. We don’t work for the government, The Archers are separate.’

‘Not since you were with us, though, right?’ There was an awkward pause as if Olivia were not sure how to go on.

‘I used to handle agents who were at risk.’

‘At risk from who?’

‘From whom.’

‘Yeah, from whom?’

‘Their own governments.’ That could only mean that Olivia’s previous job for The Archers was killing rogue spies. Traitors.

‘Do you make a lot of money?’

Olivia laughed.

‘Gosh no! Spies get paid a moderate salary like any other public servant.’

‘Why do it then?’

‘Because someone has to.’

‘How long has The Archers existed?’ he asked.

‘Longer than you or I have been alive.’ said Olivia.

They’d been walking for several hours underground when Olivia shone the torch light about a metre ahead of them. Heath could see a modern door, metal, and thick. She flicked the torch to the sidewall, where an electric box with numbers flashed at them in green. Olivia typed a complex code into the box, the door started to move. She pushed it open further and Heath rushed to help move the heavy door.

‘We are almost there.’

They were bathed in bright lights and a calm friendly computerized voice said:

‘Good evening Agent and 22. Welcome to base 87.’

‘It’s a code for a safe house,’ explained Olivia.

The voice spoke again.

‘The Archers has been informed of your safe arrival and transportation has been arranged.’

‘Thank you.’

‘Please shower and change ready for arrival at 04:00 hours tomorrow.’

Hearing this direction, Heath looked around the room they were standing in. He was exhausted and filthy with blood and stains rusted on his clothes. His suit ruined and in tatters. They were somewhere deep underground but the room held two cosy beds made up with sheets and quilts, a small kitchenette and dining table, a desk with a computer, and a small shower and toilet off to the side.

‘I’m going to make myself a cup of coffee. Why don’t you shower while I do that?’ Olivia said tactfully.

‘There are some clothes in the backpack and another bag under the sink.’ She turned to the kitchen and busied herself with boiling the kettle. Exhausted from the day’s events Heath would have liked nothing more than to climb into one of the beds and go to sleep. He stood staring at the bed until he heard Olivia say,

‘Just a few more hours and you’ll be able to rest.’

He didn’t know why but he always trusted Olivia’s words. He’d never had any reason not to. She had kept him alive today after all and he’d known her for years.

Today was a lesson in how little you can know a person.

He walked into the bathroom and peeled off his clothes, heavy with perspiration, grime and blood. He didn’t stop to look at his shoulder or the graze on his neck but stepped right in to the shower, the hot water pouring in waves over his hair and chest. *The water is cold!* The graze stung but he ignored it. His legs were tired, his chest heaved. He had not taken another pump of his inhaler since the church. He grabbed a towel hanging behind the door and dried himself off.

He went to the bench under the sink and rummaged through it for clothes. In it was a black t-shirt and a pair of black pants. Not quite jeans, the pants were looser, the fabric had more give. A pair of boxers, black Nikes, black socks and weirdly, a soft black blindfold. He dressed quickly. He scooped up his old jeans and felt in the

pockets- pulling out the creased picture of his parents. He folded it and placed it in the pocket of his new pants. He took the lighter out and put it in his new pocket. Heath wanted to look at himself in a mirror but there wasn't one, so he went out to find Olivia.

He walked to the kitchen, Olivia was sitting drinking coffee. She had made him one as well. It smelled good, buttery and bitter. She had kept the wig on and it was realistic enough that Heath forgot it wasn't her actual hair.

'I won't change until we get to the island.'

'Island?'

'Our organisation is based on Tern Island.'

'Why haven't I heard anything about this before?'

'It's highly secretive. You can google the island and Wikipedia has a page on it but the location that comes up on Google maps is a fake.'

'Right and the million dollar question... why am I going to the island?' Heath gulped some coffee nervously.

'You need protection. And to train.'

He wanted her to say it, to confirm the thought that had dawned on him in the tunnel, the understanding he was still alive.

'To train as what?'

Olivia placed her coffee cup on the table and looking at him grimly and spoke two words,

'An Archer.'

Chapter Ten

Heath was fidgeting impatiently picking at the quilt while Olivia was calm. He had not seen her move for the last 20 minutes. She had total control of herself.

‘Olivia, is my dad still alive?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Will they know on the island?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘What will they know?’

‘Heath!’

She gave him her warning tone, usually reserved for changing the channel or playing his music too loud but now in this strange setting seemed dangerous. He had never thought of Olivia as intimidating and he was not familiar with this aspect of her yet. He changed the subject.

‘What’s on Tern Island?’

‘Training facilities.’

‘Like what?’

She speared him with a face.

‘Shooting ranges, driving courses, airport, flight school, mock hotel rooms, mock embassies, offices and labs.’

‘How did you become a spy? Ugh, I mean Field Agent?’

‘I was in jail for something I didn’t do and was given a choice, stay in jail or become an agent.’

Heath's eyes widened. She offered no more on the topic. There was a loud buzzing in the room, and the computerized voice said,

'Transport has arrived. Please prepare for departure.'

'What does that mean?' Olivia was moving again.

'Was there a blindfold in the bag?' she asked.

Heath ran over to the sink and shook through the bag, he found it and returned to her, holding it in his hands.

'That's for you,' she said. 'Rules. Until you're inducted in, you can't know the exact location of the facility.'

Heath shrugged and straightened the blindfold in his hands, holding it up and placing it over his eyes, tying it tightly at the back of his head. It was soft and comfortable but once again he was pitched into darkness. *Perhaps this is how it's always going to be from now on, in the dark not the light.* He felt Olivia gently take his arm, she would be his guide and for just a moment he felt fearful and whispered,

'Don't let go.'

'I won't,' she said.

Heath felt her moving him towards a wall but his sense of direction was already mangled. He concentrated on the sounds of his breath and keeping his balance. Olivia left him for a moment and typed something into another keyboard. It was a short number and he heard her clicking away on the keys. He heard rumbling as a metal door opened and a sort of mechanical sound, a squeak of breaks and clacking of wheels and then quiet. *The train she was talking about before.* Olivia came back and grabbed hold of his elbow.

'I'm going to place you in a seat. There is a headrest and you can lean back.

It's quite comfortable. This part of the trip takes four hours.'

Olivia undid something that sounded like a door with hinges to Heath. She lifted the door and pushed the seat into position. She went back to Heath, and helped him into the carriage. If he had been able to see it, Olivia had opened the wall behind the desk revealing a train track with two carriages shaped like round white eggs. She would be riding next to him the entire time, in a separate but connected carriage.

‘Try to sleep during the ride,’ she said as she shut the glass.

She walked around to the other side of the train, lifted a door and lowered herself into the seat. Her door made a clicking sound as it locked and the train began to buzz.

At once the seat began to vibrate and the train sped off. Heath flew back in his chair, the force of gravity ten times stronger than a plane taking off. They seemed to be flying above the ground, the sound of wind and speed in his ears settling to a dull vibration under the blindfold. He settled in for a long ride. Minutes later, he was sound asleep.

Chapter Eleven

Heath woke up, sweating. He had been dreaming that his father was dead. The dream started off normally. His father was in the distance waving to him. Heath started running towards him and trying to shout but his voice wouldn’t work. He was mute in the dream, screaming warnings his father couldn’t hear. His father kept waving at him- oblivious to Heath’s rising panic. When he reached his father, he collapsed and Heath knew he was dead.

His body was extremely stiff and sore. He peeked out of a small opening where the blindfold had slipped and could see a white outline with a ceiling above him, modern and sleek. He smelled upholstery, like a new car, which his father

always reminded him, was poisonous but he liked it anyway. He could see the dash in front of him with a few small lights and buttons. They had come to a stop. *Do I just wait here? How long have we been stopped for? Where am I?*

‘Olivia?’ he called out tentatively. ‘Olivia?’ a little louder.

There was nothing back. He moved forward but was restrained by a belt. Making a firm decision, Heath stripped off his blindfold, scrunching it in his hands and pushing it into the seat lining on his right side. He unclicked his belt, and pushed the pod open and saw what looked like an ordinary train platform. He blinked and waited for his eyes to readjust to the light.

‘Good, you’re awake.’ Olivia said behind him.

She made no mention of his missing blindfold or what she had been doing.

‘Where are we?’

‘We are at a small regional airport near the coast. It’s 8am in the morning.’

‘Right.’ said Heath.

‘Sleep okay?’

‘Yeah, like a bear in winter.’

He didn’t mention the dream. For some reason he felt mentioning his father would upset her. *Plus it was just a dream, right?* To his surprise, Olivia pulled out a small white compact phone. She spoke for a minute to someone Heath couldn’t hear.

‘Yes, arrival was safe and unencumbered.’

‘...Schedule to depart is 09.00am.’

‘.... Gate 2.’

‘....Thank you Gabe.’

Olivia paused for a moment, holding the phone tightly as she asked a question of the speaker, the mysterious Gabe. Olivia turned slightly away from Heath and lowered her voice.

‘Gabe, is there any news on Spencer?’

‘...Let me know right away.’

She turned to him, and for a minute she looked tired and scared.

‘We are catching a flight to Tern Island.’

‘From a regular airport?’

‘From a section of a regular airport,’ Olivia corrected.

‘Spies get on planes at regular airports?’

‘Yes, all over the world. You have more than likely sat next to one at some point.’

‘What about your gun, how do you get that through security?’

‘The Archers do not carry weapons, well, not guns.’

‘You are carrying a gun.’

‘Am I?’ Olivia asked spinning around for him.

Heath looked at the waistband of her jeans, where her gun had been, but today there was nothing. The gun was gone. Heath changed the subject.

‘Who were you talking to just then?’ He challenged.

‘Gabriel is my analyst. Each operator is given an analyst and it’s the analyst’s job to process the information we access and get it into the right hands.’

‘How long have you known him?’

‘The ten years I have been with the agency. Gabe and I did the training together.’

‘So he has known you were undercover this whole time with my family?’

‘Yes but I have not seen him in eight years. I have not been to the island in a long time.’

She handed Heath a small black briefcase.

‘You need to look older and as different as possible.’

She handed him a ticket with his seat number and gate number. She handed him a boating jacket, blue and white stripes. *Ugly!* And pressed something small into his hand, it was brown and hairy.

‘A moustache, you have got to be kidding?’

‘The people that took your father are looking for a blonde lady and a boy about 16. There are reports on us at every gate. You need to look older.’

Heath shrugged and peeled off the little backing stickers. He stuck the facial hair to his lip and put the jacket on. It fit him snugly.

‘Straight?’ he asked Olivia.

‘It will do,’ she said.

He caught sight of himself in the mirror, looking at his reflection- suit jacket and moustache- he looked unrecognisable. *I look like I'm going to the club for a game of Polo.*

‘When we leave this terminal, we will exit into the main foyer. Do not speak to me again until we are on the plane.’

‘Ok.’ Heath didn’t question it. He started to turn towards the direction she’d pointed at when Olivia stopped him.

‘This is very important. If I am taken, do not react. Here,’ she said reaching over to kiss him on the cheek and at the same time handing him a gun. It was a compact Sig P938, - a pistol with a nice weight single action only.

‘It has seven rounds. This is the safety button,’ she said indicating a small black clip on the side of the gun. ‘I don’t have time to give you a lesson. Point and shoot.’

Heath looked at the gun in his hand. He hoped he wouldn’t have to use it. Olivia pointed to two doors at the far of the empty platform. She walked over to the furthest one, standing in front of it as she motioned for Heath to stand in front of the other. Tucking the gun in the waistband of his jeans, *it feels heavy and uncomfortable*. He followed her to the doors.

‘Your door exits into the male bathrooms, mine, the female one. After you go through this door, you are on your own. Until you get to the island do not tell anyone who you are or where you are going. Good luck.’

‘Olivia, I won’t really have to shoot anyone will I? How will I get through security with this?’

She had already pushed through her door and left him alone on the empty platform. Heath pushed the heavy door, unsure of what he would encounter on the other side. He slipped through the door as she had instructed and found himself standing in a bathroom stall. Thankfully it was empty. *What if it had been occupied?* The door to the platform sealed behind him. He flushed the toilet and unlocked the door. There was a man standing at the urinals. He hadn’t noticed Heath and stood with his back to him. Heath washed his hands at the sink and left the bathroom walking out and blending into step into a clear, bright airport.

Looking for his gate number, he walked from the main terminal to the next smaller one. *This is so normal and yet so abnormal*. The airport was an active place with miners flying in and out. Heath had flown many times but this was the first time he was doing something illegal and possibly, dangerous. Heath was carrying a loaded

gun in an airport. *This is a federal offence with jail time.* The risk weighed on him. He hoped he was projecting a calm and innocent persona and looking absolutely normal. There was no sign of Olivia.

He found the gate to the private planes and sat down. He had no money to buy anything and no phone. There was no destination listed. The waiting area was empty. There were no flight attendants at the gate. Heath wondered if he was sitting at the right gate after all. Had he missed an announcement, a change of gate? Where was Olivia? He stood up. He decided he would walk back to the main part of the airport and find someone to ask.

Beginning to walk back, he got an eerie sensation, like yesterday, the skin on the back of his neck prickled. Heath took a casual glance behind him. Behind him was the man from the toilet. When he looked again, the man pretended to be occupied and shuffled through a nearby magazine stall. Heath did not change his pace. He continued to walk slowly away.

He was coming up to one of those weird flat escalators they have in airports for lazy people. The normal people walk on the outside and the lazy people ride on the escalator for a few metres. He never understood the purpose of them- they moved slowly and were useless. He got on one. As he moved ahead, he waited for the man to follow him. Sure enough, the man got on the escalator. Heath waited and when the man moved far enough along Heath hoisted himself over the rubbery edge landing back onto the flat tiles. His element of surprise gone, he sprinted down the hallway, no longer looking behind him.

He ran by an Australiana store selling stuff to tourists. He grabbed a big floppy hat with a kangaroo on it from a display rack and kept running. Stripping off the moustache and shaking out of his jacket, he stuffed them into a bin as he passed

by. Keeping his head down, he made his way into the small food court. From where he sat he could see each exit to and from the food hall.

Heath saw the man glance into the food hall and Heath ducked his head down. When he looked up, the man had moved on. Heath got up. He had to get back to the terminal. He looked at the time displayed on the food court's departure screen.

8.45am. Olivia had said the flight left at nine. He left the briefcase there.

Heath started to walk out of the food court, when the man popped out of nowhere right in front of him. Heath looked around for something, anything. He ran over to a burly looking man wearing an airport security uniform standing near a fire door.

'Sir, that man over there, he just left a black briefcase in the food court.' Heath pointed at the man.

'Thanks for reporting that son, I will look into it.'

The airport security guard marched over to the man and started to interrogate him about the case, allowing Heath to escape. He sprinted down the terminal halls, past the seats filled with people waiting for departures, past the lounges and shops and coffee stands. His gate loomed up ahead. A flight had arrived and people poured through the terminal, pattering past him.

Heath turned into the gate lounge and ran straight into someone, he turned back to run but a second man was behind him, blocking his path. He felt a sharp sting on the back of his arm and then nothing. Fading to blackness, the last thing he heard was a voice.

'We've got him.'

Chapter Twelve

Heath felt the back of his arm. He had the worst headache, worse than a hangover. His vision was blurry, he felt for the gun in his waistband, *it was gone*. His shoes had also been removed, as had the hat. He was being kept in what appeared to be a small cargo crate or shipping container. The ceiling was two hand heights above his head. It meant he could not stand up within the crate. He tried to crawl but he couldn't move. His hands and legs were chained to a metal loop at the back of the crate. He shook them, strong chains, impossible to break or undo. Starting to shake, he felt cold and sick. *How long had he been there? Had anyone seen him leave the airport unconscious? Surely someone saw something? Surely Olivia was looking for him?*

'Help, somebody help me, anybody, help!' Heath yelled, shaking the chains. He kicked his feet on the rough metal and it vibrated but nobody came. Heath shouted for help until his voice was hoarse and dry and his body lurching forward into a fitful, twitching sleep.

'Get up.'

He was woken by a voice, a male voice- smooth and commanding. The figure stood at the entrance of the cage, about an arm's length away from where Heath sat. Heath could only see the top half of his body- strong and well built. Heath tried to blink, the crate had been dark, his eyes tried to readjust to the light, but his vision was fuzzy.

'Get up,' the voice repeated.

His hand moved so quickly, Heath barely saw it, but he felt the sting on his ear as the man's arm sliced it with a sharp cuff. Heath tried to get up but his legs wouldn't move, the man loosened the chain then used a key to open the lock. The chains fell off.

‘If you’re good, we won’t need to use them again,’ the man said, referring to the restraints. He pooled the chain in the corner and yanked Heath over to the edge of the crate.

‘Watch out, there’s a drop.’

The crate was elevated above ground level, so that explained why he’d seen only the top half of the man when he opened the door. In his bare feet and poor state, Heath wobbled a little as he dropped to the floor and the man steadied him. Heath stretched his back. It felt good to stand up straight. *The smallest of things.*

The man pushed Heath in the back, beginning to frog march him to a door. Heath started to back away, the man grabbed his arm pulling him through to another room with two chairs and behind them, two ominously large buckets filled with water. The other chair was occupied. An older boy sat in the right one. Heath noticed he was freckled and light skinned, like he spent a lot of time outdoors, his hair was a dark auburn and he had small neat sideburns. Small chested and gangly, the boy wore no shoes and like Heath, wore a black shirt and pants. *There are more of them,* Heath thought. The boy couldn’t see him, he was blindfolded and his hands tied with rope. *So much for an escape plan.*

‘Take a seat,’ the man said as he pushed Heath into the chair.

He checked the other boy’s ties, satisfied that they were secure, then came around the left side to tie Heath’s in the same manner. He bound Heath’s hands together and tied the wrists, the binds were tight and cut into the skin. Heath’s arms already ached but the way they pulled backwards now gave him instant pins and needles. Once the man was finished, he said nothing and promptly left the room through a door behind the chairs, Heath heard the click of a lock and the room was quiet. Save for the sound of his own breath and the heavy breathing of the boy seated beside him.

‘I’m Heath,’ he said to the boy.

‘No name,’ the boy said.

Stupid, of course not. No names. Don’t give them anything they can use.

Heath did not try to speak again. For what seemed like hours, they waited, the boy said nothing and Heath said nothing, too embarrassed and in shock to try again.

Suddenly the boy whispered, ‘They’re coming back.’

Heath strained to hear and sure enough, there was a noise of heavy boots coming towards them. *More than one pair.*

‘Don’t tell them your name,’ the boy whispered just as the door unlocked and two people, the man from earlier and another man but the second man stood out of Heath’s range of sight. Heath could hear him breathing but he couldn’t see him.

The first man came towards Heath but at the last moment, turned towards the other boy and grabbed him and lurched him backwards into the bucket of water. Heath looked in horror as the boy’s head was submerged. The man held him there for a few moments and then pulled the chair up. The boy sputtered and coughed. The blindfold was soaking and drenching his face and his hair plastered his forehead in a matted mess. The man was quick, before the boy took a breath, the chair rocked backward again, and his head was back into the water. The boy fought for air. Heath could see the air bubbles and the thrashing of his neck but there was nothing he could do, the man held him longer this time and when he brought him up, the boy snorted water and made a gurgling sound.

‘This one is a drowned rat, we will need more water if he keeps drinking it,’ the man sneered. The man in the corner of the room said nothing. Heath looked in horror at the casualness of the scene. The boy continued to cough. The man rocked the chair cruelly. He turned to Heath.

‘You will end up like him if you don’t tell us where Tern Island is.’

‘You’ve got it wrong. My name is Noakes McMaha, I was travelling to Byron Bay with a school holiday group. I got separated from them at the gate and was lost in the wrong terminal. I don’t know what you’re talking about.’ Heath felt the boy staring at him, aware that the boy had registered the lies.

‘You are a poor liar.’ We believe you and this boy are new recruits for The Archers and can reveal the location of the island. You are Heath Callahan, son of Spencer Callahan, a man who escaped with information we need.’

‘You have me mistaken with someone else.’

‘We are not mistaken.’

The first man nodded to the silent man in the corner and the first man moved around and grabbed Heath by the hair and began lowering his head into the water.

He heard the man closest to him take a gun from his belt. Heath knew it was a gun because it had a metallic smell and he heard the safety click off.

‘If you tell me your real name and where your father is, I will spare your life and kill him instead.’ He kicked the other chair and the boy sputtered more water.

‘I am Noakes McMaha, I don’t know what you are talking about. My dad is dead.’

‘Eventually you will break, and I kill you anyway, your choice.’

‘Let him go and I will tell you.’

‘It doesn’t work like that, tell us what we want to know and we will let your fellow Archer go.’ Heath could hear the boy gasping again.

‘I don’t know what you are talking about.’

I can’t. Something inside Heath told him to be strong. He could hear Olivia’s voice warning him not to break. Heath’s chair rocked backward and his head was under

water. It burned as it filled his nose and throat. He hadn't taken a breath. He bubbled in the salty water. He struggled to think, the water filling his ears and he was afraid. The chair straightened up and he was pulled from the water, coughing like the boy had. There was a second to grab a breath and then he was submerged in the bucket again, his heart pounding and he was drowning, his head becoming lighter and his lungs struggling for air they could not get. He was pulled up again and then dunked again, three more times. When he was pulled out he could see light, and his lungs burned as they breathed in air, cold, fresh, clean, air. He puffed and inhaled, drenched in water.

As he fought for breath, he felt the cold, steel of the gun press against his temple.

'I'm sorry you have been so uncooperative but now you have given us no choice.' Heath flinched. Heath heard the click of a gun and flinched. Nothing. The bullet chamber was empty. It was a threat.

'Next time we do this, you give us the answers or you die,' the man said as he threw Heath back in the tiny crate.

This happened over and over again. Heath had no idea of the time. He was thirsty and hungry and the men would leave them alone for what seemed days and then return to drown them again waiting for their answers to change, always asking the same questions. Heath could hear the boy screaming in the other room as he huddled in the crate.

'We know the maps are incorrect. Where is the training facility?'

They would ask after Heath had been kept awake for four days.

'I don't know what you are talking about?'

‘Who are The Archers?’

‘I don’t know!’ Then they would beat him.

Heath had been tortured and now he was going to die, alone, in this crate. No one would ever find him or know what had happened to him. He would be one of those missing kids you read about- never heard from again. The days fell into a horrible pattern. The men would return, demand answers, torture him or the other boy or both and then leave. Small amounts of bread and water were given to them but Heath was always hungry and his weight was dropping with each passing day. He knew if they didn’t kill him, lack of food and water would. The other boy never spoke to him. Heath had given up trying and kept his mouth shut. It was easier that way.

The crates were beside each other with a wall in-between. The other boy shoved some bread through the gap.

‘They are going to kill me soon,’ he whispered. Heath shuffled over and picked up the bread, it was stale but he ate it.

‘Thanks. You mean both of us?’

‘They will come for you. Hold on.’

‘Who will come for me?’

Heath heard footsteps. He heard an urgent whisper.

‘The Archers’ said the boy as the crate door opened.

Heath couldn’t tell if it was night or day. Someone grabbed him by the arm and Heath flinched, waiting for what would come. He heard the sound of punching, a hollow, slapping sound of skin crunching skin. They were hurting the other boy. The beating stopped and Heath braced, waiting in fear.

‘Don’t tell them anything. Archers shine in the darkest of places!’ the boy shouted.

There was a bang, the gun went off, and Heath recoiled as the sound ricocheted off the tinny crate walls.

Heath was removed from the crate. The first man was standing at the front of the room and Heath looked around, turning his head, he found the other boy bowed over the chair with his head hanging low to the ground, there was blood on the ground and pooling at his feet. Heath could see the outline of a large fleshy wound on the left side of his head where the bullet had entered.

Heath said nothing. They had killed him. *He was braver than me, he didn't deserve a death like that.* He was fuming with anger but there was nothing he could do. *Helpless.* The weakness of being a prisoner and at their mercy crippled him with rage. The man pulled Heath up by the torso and took him back through the door to his crate where he was thrown back into the dark.

'If you don't want to end up like your friend, you should tell us what we want to know when we come back.'

The man sniffed and locked the door. Heath was left alone in the dark, his hands trembling as he crouched in the farthest corner. He tried to sleep but whenever he was just closing his eyes, the automatic lights would flick on, depriving him of sleep. He'd read about it in the articles his dad had on the war in Iraq. It was very effective at sending people mad. He couldn't remember the last time he'd had water or food, his stomach had ceased grumbling days ago. He had difficulty concentrating. The man interrogated him several times more. He would remove Heath from the crate, and ask him his name over and over again.

'Who are you? Where is the island? Who are The Archers?'

Heath had stuck to his story... 'My name is Noakes McMaha' even as his eyelids drooped and the drowsiness threatened to overcome him. *I just need to sleep*

Sleep...Sleep...Sleep. It's all he could think about. During the last interrogation, he'd slurred his words, had trouble controlling his thoughts. He knew that it would eventually kill him.

'Please, please let me die,' he asked his captors.

The man laughed as he threw Heath back in the crate.

It was during one of these long periods when he had long ago lost track of time, day and night with the light flickering on that Noakes appeared beside him.

'How are you going mate?' Noakes asked.

'You're dead,' Heath barely sighed.

'You look deader than me.'

'Ha!' Heath said drily.

'Seriously man, you need a shower and a tic tac.'

'Noakes, I can't do this. They won't kill me, they just keep me awake all the time.'

'You don't have the answers?'

'I don't remember the questions.'

'It will be all right.'

'Are you all right?'

'Yeah you know me, I'm always laughing, wherever I am.'

'Miss you,' Heath said but Noakes wasn't there.

The door of the crate opened. Heath didn't look up. Instead, he dragged himself to the edge and dropped down, broken. He waited for them to take him to the other room.

'Something different today Spook,' the man said. He slipped a black hood over Heath's head. *They are going to kill me today.*

Heath felt his captor guide him to the other side of the crate, through another door and he stumbled as he went over it. Catching his balance, the man had to hold him.

‘Please kill me,’ Heath begged in a weak but courageous voice. ‘I can’t tell you anything.’

Heath felt a draft. The man was no longer beside him. He heard shots, exploding around him like popcorn. Heath thought he had lost his mind, he was hallucinating again, he’d been shot, killed and his mind was shutting down, conjuring memories and weird splices of daydreams into this nightmare. Unexpectedly, his hood was removed and he shielded his eyes with his hands. He could barely stand.

He heard a voice ‘We got him. He’s alive. The place was deserted except for this one, they knew we were coming.’ *They are talking about my captors.*

‘Wait a minute, I just have to get...’ said Heath. With effort he bent down leant over the dead captor and put his hand in the pocket of the man’s jeans. He pulled out his lighter. Heath stood up.

‘Get him on the plane and get the medic ready.’ Heath felt hands closing in around his waist and he was leaning on someone as they carried him out. He could hear the loud whirring of the plane, maybe a helicopter and then he passed out.

The next thing Heath knew, he woke up, clean, in a brightly lit room in a bed with white sheets and a soft cotton blanket. A woman came in and potted about the room and then asked to check his temperature.

‘Where am I?’ asked Heath.

‘Welcome to Tern Island,’ the medic said.

Chapter Thirteen

When Heath felt better he was released from the medical bay and introduced to the rest of the recruits. The group was in one of the lecture halls on the bottom level of the complex. The facility looked like a cross between an office building and a university. The group was older, everyone looked like they were in their middle to late twenties. There was a mixture of women, men and teenagers from all different backgrounds. An older man with white hair and a white beard was addressing the group on interrogation techniques in front of a large screen. Heath came into the room and slipped into a seat near the front. There was a strong sound of whispering until the older man cut in over the top of it.

‘What you have just watched is nothing compared to what really faces a spy if they are caught.’

‘The torture is worse, the degradation humiliating. You could be hooked up to an IV and made to urinate continuously. You can have your fingernails torn out and your teeth removed, you can have your fingertips dipped in acid until you scream at them to kill you or you break. The number one rule is never, never, NEVER, at all costs, get caught.’

A girl sitting in the front row put up her hand. She looked a bit older than Heath, maybe twenty. Heath was embarrassed by his appearance. He had bruises, cuts and dark shadows under his eyes. He had broken ribs and a broken nose. Not a great look for meeting girls.

‘Isn’t it old fashioned to call it torture these days, don’t we say enhanced interrogation techniques?’

The teacher stared her down ‘Thank you Moss, that is the politically correct way to describe it but don’t be fooled, here we call it what it really is- torture.’ Heath winced at the words. He’d been staring at the surrounds, but now he focused on the girl again. *Moss was it?*

She was pretty but not stunning. Wide green eyes, small nose, brown hair, the sort of girl cast in a shampoo commercial. She smiled and Heath noticed she had crooked teeth. Not a little crooked, snaggletooth crooked. It gave her a kooky grin, which Heath liked.

The fatigue and strain from the last month weighed his shoulders down.

‘Moss, can you show our newest recruit around and get him into his bunk. He’ll be no use to us till tomorrow.’

She stood. ‘Yes, no worries,’ she said.

Heath hadn’t seen Olivia since he’d been caught at the airport. He was angry with her. *She left me there alone.* He felt betrayed.

The man continued talking to the class about torture but the girl was already leaving the room, expecting him to follow her. Heath caught a reflection of himself in the glass walls. He saw gashes and cuts on his face and hollow eyes. *I look terrible and of course, she’s gonna be my tour guide.*

He followed her into a series of hallways and offices. Much like any other modern office building- nice furniture, boardrooms, desks, phones, and ordinary stuff. The building was designed with lots of glass, light, levels and steel. Following the girl into another hall, they came to a set of glass steps, which seemed to float, disconnected

from the wall. *Fancy.* They climbed up a floor and then walked down another hall till they came to a shiny elevator. The girl pressed button 4.

‘That was the main office building- all classes are conducted on level one, you’ll find the embassy and the hotel here too- simulations of course.’

Stepping out into yet another hallway, this floor had a view and Heath could see the sea through the large glazed windows. *So, we really are on a island.*

‘What’s your name?’ Heath asked.

The girl kept walking. ‘Moss. Prim Moss. No one but my parents calls me Prim. So don’t.’

‘Ok, Moss.’

‘Dorms and bunks are on the fourth floor. You are not allowed on the second and third floor. It’s the labs.’

‘How long have you been on the island?’

‘About six weeks before you.’

‘No one else arrived the way I did.’

‘You were unlucky.’

‘So, you’re saying I’m the unlucky one who got kidnapped and tortured for weeks?’

‘And Wallace.’

‘Who?’

‘Wallace, the other recruit, they caught him a few days before they caught you.’

The boy who died. Correct that. The boy they killed.

Moss and Heath got into another elevator. Moss pressed 4B and the elevator took them upwards. They exited right next to a grey door embossed with brass letters.

‘Dorms are unisex but it seems you’re in 4B with a recruit called Daniel and a guy called Gabe. I’m across the hall.’

She pointed at another door.

‘You have your own shower inside your room. Your things should be on your bed.’

‘Thanks.’ Heath went to turn away, aware of how disgusting he looked. He tried not to think of the days in the crate. He blinked and shook his head, the images disappeared.

‘They said you didn’t crack.’

She smiled at him. Heath felt a cramp in his stomach- a rise and fall of flutters. Moss turned, gave a small wave and went into her room. After she had gone and he was alone in the hall, he pushed the door open and went inside. Sure enough his stuff was sitting on the bottom bunk. There were four beds. Two seemed occupied. Heath lay down on the mattress.

As long as there is a bed, I’m happy, he thought falling into a deep sleep.

Chapter Fourteen

Heath woke to the sound of a buzzing alarm. It was emanating from the wristwatch he’d been given by the medic.

‘I don’t wear a watch.’

‘You do now buddy. Everyone here wears one of these.’

The face was silver with a thin leather band. Heath found it uncomfortable and now it was making a noise unlike any watch Heath had heard before. He shook his wrist and then clicked all the buttons on the side causing the top to flip up revealing a little screen and a lot more buttons. It was high tech. Daniel, his roommate, popped his head down from the top bunk.

‘Press the little silver button. It will stop it.’

Heath pressed the silver button. This only made the watch louder. Daniel jumped down from the bed and lobbed himself in beside Heath.

‘Hi, I’m Daniel but everyone calls me Hando,’ he said introducing himself and holding out his hand. Heath shook it.

‘Hi. Heath Callahan. Nice to meet you.’

‘Mate, your face is a mess,’ said Hando.

‘Yeah I know but you should see the other guy.’

‘Oops sorry, I meant the red one,’ Hando reached over and flicked at the watch. The noise stopped and he smiled warmly at him again.

‘What else does this thing do?’

‘You mean what doesn’t it do?’ In a hushed tone, he whispered, ‘I’m pretty sure it tracks us, records everything we say and stuff.’

Of course, everything was bugged.

‘Sorry about what happened to you,’ Hando said.

Heath shuddered remembering. He thought of the blood and the sound of the water bucket.

‘And Wallace,’ Heath said.

Hando pretended not to have heard. ‘You must be hungry.’

Heath grinned and nodded. ‘Just tell me where. I’m starving.’

‘I thought we’d go down together.’

‘Thanks. I don’t know where it is,’ replied Heath.

‘No worries. You can just thank me later, yeah. Maybe with a donut. They are my favourite,’ Hando said laughing.

They left the dorm and hurried into the elevator. It was empty.

‘The canteen is on level one, you’ll get to meet everyone.’

The elevator stopped and they got out, almost running into some girls who had just exited the elevator before them and were giggling in a group staring at Heath.

‘Why are they staring?’ Heath asked Hando.

‘It’s cause you didn’t crack. You thought you were going to die and still didn’t give up your name. No recruit has ever been captured and survived, let alone rescued. Around here, you’re famous.’

‘Does everyone know?’ Heath groaned.

‘There’s not a lot to do here besides training and yeah, everyone knows. Just be grateful because they all know who you are so you don’t have to tell them.’

Heath looked at him sideways to see if he was offended but Hando was smiling.

‘It’s not really funny you know, a boy died.’ Heath said.

‘I know,’ Hando said seriously. He spoke as they turned into the large, crowded canteen. The space was open, communal, three long tables filled with people in the middle of the room and food bars lined down the sides. Heath could see all manner of dishes- fruits, muffins, cereal bar, toast, pancakes, and bacon sizzling. His stomach growled.

‘Grab a plate and help yourself,’ Hando said.

After filling his plate with as much food as he could carry, Heath sat down beside Hando at one of the tables. Across from him sat Moss, two of her friends, Sabine, Chasely and an older guy she was chatting to. Heath figured it must be Gabe. Heath stuffed some pancake into his mouth, it was creamy with butter and maple syrup.

‘Your eyes are rolling back in your head,’ Hando teased.

‘I’m starving. So good,’ Heath said with his mouth full. His father hated talking with your mouth full. It was his pet peeve, something Heath did just to annoy him sometimes. Too late, Heath remembered. His father was still missing. *Missing? He might be dead.* The panic seized him, a bit of pancake lodged drily in his throat, which he tried to swallow and force down. *I have to find out today. Where is Olivia?* He picked up a glass of water and washed the food down, his appetite forgotten.

When he looked at the table, everyone was engrossed in their conversations except Moss, who was staring at him. Her face was serious, as if she were studying him or reading his mind. Heath looked down and picked up a croissant from his plate. *I’m sorry dad, I completely forgot about you. Sorry.* It hurt to think. *Where is Olivia? Where is she?*

He shifted his gaze away, *I’m still mad with her* and listened to Hando talking to Moss about whether cake pops were a waste of time. Hando’s argument was too little time, not enough cake. Then the conversation moved on to whether you could be anorexic in the Matrix. Boring but Heath pretended to listen while he thought about what he needed to do. He had to get to a computer, find out if his father had been reported missing. Surely after six weeks, someone at the paper would have noticed. And their house being blown up, surely someone was noticing these things.

PRIME MINISTER ANDREW HARRINGTON DIES FROM SERIOUS INJURY

By Megan Woods

BREAKING NEWS. Prime Minister Andrew Harrington has died this morning.

The former Prime Minister was critically injured in the secondary explosion at Central Station and was discovered alive, buried under rubble three days later.

Emergency crews are still excavating rubble and debris but no more survivors have been found. The number of victims in the deadly terrorist attack has now risen to four hundred and twelve.

International Terrorist Group KARAS has taken credit for the bombings.

The Prime Minister is survived by his wife and three daughters.

Chapter Fifteen

Heath woke up on his third day on Tern Island to Hando shaking him awake.

‘The new Prime Minister, Tawning is doing a walkthrough.’

‘Huh? Why would he be here?’

‘They let the Australian Secret Services train on the island.’

‘Ok, but why is he is coming in person?’

‘They were hush-hush about it this morning but the rumor is that there have been threats about more terror attacks and the PM wants all the updated information we’ve got on KARAS,’ said Hando. Heath stretched, his legs had cramped in the night, and the bed was short and lumpy, incredibly uncomfortable. He moved to get up, pushing himself to the side of the bed.

‘So what do we have to do?’

‘Well even though you aren’t a real recruit, you’re not old enough, most of us were at uni or finishing degrees when we were approached, our instructor says you are important to KARAS and they tried to kill you so you have to be trained at least to defend yourself.’

‘Trained?’

‘That’s what we are on the island for, it’s mainly for training.’

‘You mean training The Archers?’

‘Who told you about The Archers?’ Hando asked hastily. *Archers shine in the darkest of places.* Heath repeated what he had heard since Noakes’s funeral.

‘You shouldn’t even know about it,’ Hando said and he would say nothing more on the topic.

Heath skipped the shower. He wasn't precious. Smelling his shirt, it passed the whiff test and he pulled it on over his head.

'How many times has the Prime Minister been here before?' He asked.

'Not sure. The old one was here a fair bit from what Gabe says but the new guy was only sworn in yesterday- never been here at all.'

'Will I get to meet him?'

'Highly unlikely as we have self-defense and weapons training today.'

'How long is the course?'

'On the first day I got here, they told us- you're here until you pass. So I don't know. There are some people who have been here longer than others- Prim for example.'

'You mean Moss?'

'Yeah, Moss, she has been here for almost six weeks. She speaks four languages and has degrees in biochemical engineering and chemistry. She spends a lot of time down in the labs.'

'How old is she?'

'23.'

'How old are you?' asked Heath

'21.'

Heath was impressed.

'Woo-hoot an older woman,' crowed Heath. Heath watched as Hando's face turned from confident to a splotchy red.

'23 and totally out of my league.'

'You never know. Maybe you are her type after all.'

'Hands off.' Hando said. 'You're too young for her anyway, a teenager.'

‘No worries mate, she’s yours. Not my type. If she’ll have you, that is.’

Hando lunged at Heath’s head. Heath ducked out of the way laughing and grabbed his shoes and pulled them on. Opening a drawer by the bed, he grabbed his asthma puffer, just thinking about Moss made him lose breath. Taking a puff, he pocketed the inhaler and joined Hando at the door, heading straight down in the elevator to level 1 where Moss and the rest of the group were waiting for them. Heath looked around. All the recruits were older than him and fit. They were all nationalities but they were all good looking but not memorable, like the standard generic people in the pictures when you bought a frame at the shop. The teachers were standing amongst the recruits and Heath saw a familiar blonde head, Olivia. *Bitch.*

Heath felt like an imposter, a fake. He hadn’t really been accepted here. He hadn’t been picked up at graduation by a recruitment guy like Hando or sent an email like another guy in the group. He hadn’t passed the knowledge tests or the psychology tests.

I’m still in school, I can’t pass Maths A.

Heath thought miserably about the fact that he was only there because of his father and the fact that some crazy terrorists tried to kill him. *I’m basically being babysat while all the real stuff is happening elsewhere.* He followed the group out of the building where a bus sat parked just outside the glass doors. It looked like a school bus, the kind Heath used to catch to primary school before he got old enough to take the train by himself.

The recruits piled on in silence. Everyone had a seat by himself or herself except Heath. Heath was last to board and there weren't many options, he looked for Hando but he was sitting near the back talking over his shoulder to an attractive red headed girl. With resignation, Heath sat near the front, lowering himself into the aisle seat next to Olivia.

Another man got onto the bus and hauled himself into the driver's seat. The bus pulled away.

'Where are we going?' asked a recruit from a seat nearby.

'There is a proper gun range on the other side of the island. Takes about 20 minutes.' Olivia answered without looking at the curious recruit. Except for the constant gravelly sound of the wheels rolling in their hubs on the soft ground, no one spoke for the remainder of the ride.

The bus pulled up at what looked like a huge desert. Lots of red dirt cleared of trees and other cover and the only building was an equipment hut with a steel door and code machine blinking away. Stepping away from the lush surrounds of the main buildings, this side of the island looked like ground zero after a nuclear winter.

On closer inspection, Heath could see huge craters of earth about 100 metres ahead of him. They looked like ditches, but were in fact holes where the ground blown out of them by some kind of weapon or grenade launcher. He also noticed there were twenty glass booths set up in a row before traditional bull-eyes paper targets.

'You ever used a gun before Callahan?' Hando asked as he came up alongside Heath.

'At a gun range once. You?'

‘Yeah, my dad was in the army before he got discharged with PTSD and we went to live on a farm. When I was little it was my job to clean all his weapons. We would shoot the feral pigs sometimes.’

Olivia watched as the recruits each signed out a gun from the steel shed using their watch ID to swipe their code into the computer.

‘You will load your weapon, discharge your weapon at the target and then reload.’

Heath stepped into the shed behind the others. It was lined wall to wall with weapons. It drew a collective gasp from the students. The shed was a complete armoury- Glocks, grenades, assault rifles, machine guns and even a rocket launcher.

The weapons were shiny and black, new and clean. It was hard to imagine that in the wrong hands, these machines became deadly weapons capable of killing.

‘Not all spies carry guns but last year, the Government passed a law that means agents can carry weapons internationally,’ Olivia said loudly.

‘Why don’t spies have a gun like the police do?’ asked Hando.

‘How do you explain a gun to your loved ones? How do you carry a gun on an interstate flight? How do you explain a gun with your cover? Spies do not carry guns except when absolutely necessary for the sole reason that spies are invisible. Your identity is created to hide the fact that you are spy- a gun would give you away and what is the number one unbreakable rule?’ Olivia prompted the group.

‘Never get caught,’ Heath glared.

Olivia looked at Heath like she’d forgotten he was there.

‘Exactly. Never get caught,’ she said, looking away.

Following Olivia’s instructions each recruit swiped their watch next to the login computer and the computer would flash them a code linked to a gun in the armoury.

Ammunition for your gun was stowed in the cupboards directly beneath them. Heath noticed when a recruit got ammunition for an assault weapon, they were real bullets. Heath had assumed they would be using blanks. *They don't have time for blanks.* When it was Heath's turn, he swiped his watch and the computer made a shrill, indignant beeping noise and flashed. Olivia came over to see what the problem was.

'You are cleared for observing. You're a minor.' She said as way of explanation.

'Whatever.'

Heath followed everyone out in to the range. Each recruit stood in a booth facing their target, guns held in two hands- nearly all the recruits held the standard Glock but there was a few people who had been given a machine gun.

'When you are ready and feel confident, remove the safety on your gun, most guns are ambidextrous so left or right is fine. Aim at the middle of your target, I find this is easier if you close your left eye and pull the trigger firing your weapon at the target. If you need to stop or ask a question or basically move, do not leave your booth without turning the safety on. Get in the habit now.' Olivia shouted.

When they began shooting Heath could tell who had experience or talent or perhaps simply good luck. Those recruits had steady arms, steady grip on their gun and confidently aimed for the black target. Each shot tore through the same spot, their aim was straight and they didn't miss. Others were awkward, some people squinted and closed their eyes when they shot startled by the noise, others flew backwards from the kickback of their guns, others suffered injuries to their hands and face when they held the gun incorrectly and searing hot bullet casings hit them.

It was unfair to just have to stand and watch others doing it. *I know I could do better than half of them.* He also knew better to argue with Olivia. *She isn't a rule breaker.*

Later on, watching the recruits try to amble through scrub and shoot from a low position, Olivia whispered in a low voice.

'Police and fire fighters were called to a shed in Ashfield last night. There are reports that a man was seen fleeing the shed before the blaze. The description matched your dad.'

'Have they found him?'

'No, but he got away. The shed that burned up was a storage shed for factory parts.'

'Who took him?'

'We think KARAS.'

'Did anyone see him after he left the shed? Was he injured?'

'Gabe got a picture of the man from a speeding camera, he was driving a stolen vehicle, he is working on it now to restore a better quality image so we can know for sure.'

'I want to know the minute you do.'

The recruits were worn out. Heading back on the bus, Heath sat next to Hando, who had a burn on his cheek.

'Moss wasn't there today.'

'Nah, she has already been trained with guns, she was called down to help with the PM stuff before we woke up.'

'Face hurt?'

'Yeah a bit, don't rub it in.'

‘Hey, at least you got to fire one, I didn’t even do that.’

‘It wasn’t that great, didn’t miss much. This will probably scar,’ said Hando, indicating his cheek.

When they got back to the base, everyone either went to their room or straight to the canteen. People with injuries went to see the medic. Heath wasn’t really hungry so he decided to go to his room. He pushed the button for the elevator. When the door opened he was surprised to see Moss standing there. She was dressed in a black suit, very professional. She looked tired.

‘Lawyer,’ Heath blurted. *Idiot.*

‘What?’ she asked him. *Idiot.*

‘Sorry, I meant, you look like a lawyer.’

‘It was for the meeting today.’

She looked him up and down. Heath stared at the ground.

‘How was the range?’

‘Hot. I wouldn’t know though I wasn’t allowed to use a gun’

Shut up Heath. Way to go reminding her your sixteen. Really impressive.

‘Guns are awful. The first time I used one was here, on the island and I was terrified. I thought I never want to use one of these again.’

‘Why?’

‘The noise, the power, the genuine ability for such a little thing to take a life- I didn’t like having that choice in my hands.’

‘Did you get better?’

‘Did I get used to them? No, not really. Am I comfortable with them?’

Absolutely not. I check my safety a hundred times. But I respect them. And in this job

I respect the fact that there may be a time I may have to use one to take a life but there will be times when I can save lives too.'

Heath looked up then. She smiled at him and he smiled back.

Chapter Sixteen

'My name is Charlie and I'm the self-defense instructor,' said a short man with an American accent. Heath was sitting in the back of the classroom in a chair with a little arm attached for writing. Each recruit had a notepad and pen except Heath. *Notes were stupid. If you couldn't remember it, you couldn't use it, no amount of notes and studying would help you in a life or death situation.* He almost snorted.

Charlie, the instructor gave him an eyebrow. Heath shrugged innocently.

'I'm an instructor here at the farm, sorry island,' he corrected himself. 'I used to work for the CIA in the field but I retired from field work so I could stop lying to my wife about my job,' He laughed at his own joke, a sort of twangy sound. 'In all seriousness, I'm ex- CIA and now I teach self-defense.'

'How many times can you say CIA in a minute?' Heath whispered to Hando, rolling his eyes. Hando kept a straight face but Moss, who was sitting a seat away, shot him a look of annoyance.

'My job is to teach you combat skills and how to turn ordinary things you encounter in your life into weapons.'

Each recruit practiced the moves in a pair. Heath partnered with Hando to practice on the mats. The morning passed with a series of kicks, lunges, punches and quite a few times where Heath ended up flat on his back looking up at Hando panting over him.

‘Don’t even say it- you took karate lessons when you were a kid?’

Hando just laughed and said ‘another round?’

Later, in the afternoon, Charlie set out some objects on the desk in front of them. A kettle, a mug, shoelaces, an electrical cord with a socket, a broom, bleach, dental floss, keys, belt, pen, fork and a screwdriver. Charlie asked the group ‘which items could be used as weapons?’

‘The electrical cord,’ Moss said.

‘The bleach,’ Hando said.

‘The screwdriver,’ Heath said.

‘Anything else?’ Charlie asked.

Everyone was silent thinking about the items on the table.

‘All the items on this table can be used to kill someone.’

Charlie picked up the mug- ‘you can crack someone’s jaw with this. Boiling water from a kettle will scald an enemy. Sometimes you’re only option is to run. Something like that will buy you precious minutes to escape.’ He picked up the shoelaces- ‘great for a makeshift restraint or noose. You can use an electrical cord to kill a man- they are very strong. Ladies, you can use cords like this to gain weight advantage if you were strangling someone.’ Heath picked up the dental floss.

‘Rope?’ he asked?

‘Not quite but handy when you don’t have scissors and remarkably strong,’ said Charlie. For the rest of the afternoon they practiced the art of locks. Charlie explained to them that all spies were trained as locksmiths. They each had several different kinds of lock in front of them- a bolt, a normal house door lock, a safe combination lock and a filing cabinet lock. For tools, each had a bump key, a bobby pin, a hooligan tool and a large safety pin.

Heath hadn't been very good at combat and he hadn't shot a gun but his years raiding his father's locked liquor cabinet had taught him a few valuable skills. He was patient and had a good ear. It made opening locks a breeze. He finished first and sat there with all the locks open waiting for Charlie to inspect.

'Good work. I can see we have a juvenile delinquent among us.'

'Something like that,' Heath said.

In truth, it had been Noakes who taught him to pick locks. Heath was forgetful and constantly leaving his locker key at home. Irritated after the last forgetful time, Noakes had shown him how to open it with a couple of pieces of wire nicked from the workshop.

'Where did you learn to do this?' he asked as Noakes showed him how to rake the lock so it would open.

"Shanghai."

'When you were at the international school?'

'Yeah, some kids used to wait for me to arrive at school unlock my locker with my key and then they would spring, take the key, take my lunch money and shove me into my own locker each day and I got really good at slipping my hand through the grate and opening the lock.'

'How many times did they do that?'

'More than enough to have got really good at this.'

Heath wondered now, why Noakes hadn't carried a spare key. He'd never mentioned the international school again and Heath never asked. *Just one more thing I'll never know about him.*

He looked around the group. Most recruits were really struggling with the task. No one except Heath had managed to open all the locks, some people had

managed one and were studying the manuals Charlie had given out, explaining the trade.

Heath walked over to Moss, she had opened none of her locks and was looking like she was going to cry.

‘You know, in the real world, it takes people three years to learn this,’ he said to cheer her up.

She sniffed. ‘You opened yours in five minutes!’

‘Yeah but I’m awesome,’ Heath said.

Moss rolled her eyes. ‘Are you just going to stand there bragging or did you come over here to help me?’

Heath showed her how to gently take the locks apart and manipulate their inner workings. He showed her the lock mechanisms. It was easier once you could see the inside of a lock. See the way the key worked and pushed the locking device open. By the end of the day, she had managed the household lock. Heath made her do it again until he was satisfied. At the end of the day Moss touched him on the arm.

‘Thanks.’

When Moss had walked away, Heath did a little jump and pumped the air with his fist. A group of recruits came chattering around the corner, almost running into him. Heath straightened his shirt and pretended to brush something off his shoulder. He was embarrassed, his face flushed red and he lowered his eyes, finding a spot on the floor.

‘Bee.’

He mumbled as way of explanation and hurried away down the hall. He could hear the laughing as he turned into his room.

Whatever. It had been a good day.

Chapter Seventeen

Dmitri slipped the orange striped fluorescent vest over his blue coveralls- the standard council uniform. He had ordered it off straight off the Internet from a large work wear site. *Stupid Australians. Always taking everything for granted.* Dmitri got out of his stolen Ute which was parked by a sign that said in bold type -Minchinbury Reservoir.

The reservoir was Sydney's largest water basin, carrying water to most of the city. The reservoir consisted of huge water tanks and a saline plant. The building resembled a typical factory except with the pale yellow holding tanks filled with potable water carried from Warragamba Dam. He carried a red lunchbox- metal, small, childlike with a handle. It was five-thirty in the morning and the start of the workday. He fell into step behind two similarly dressed co-workers.

When they reached the security check in point at the large wire gates, each man pulled out his ID lanyard and handed it under the window for the security guard who typed each name and ID code into the computer. The security guard was an overweight, balding fellow who typed in the codes slowly while turning his head to watch the early morning breakfast show on the television attached to the wall of the demountable. As each man was cleared for work, Dmitri pulled out his ID badge and handed it to the guard. His picture came up on the computer. The security guard studied him.

'You new?'

'Yes, it's my first shift today,' Dmitri said.

'Welcome to Sydney water. Have a good day mate.'

The ID cleared, the security guard smiled at Dmitri and the gate slid open on its mechanical tracks. Dmitri passed through. He walked brusquely towards a large grey

building from the blueprints he knew housed the pumping station. He heard the security guard call out and Dmitri touched the gun, hidden closely in his vest. Ready for any necessary action.

‘Hey, stop, stop, hey, you there!’

The security guard came panting up to him, holding out his ID.

‘You forgot it-your badge. You need to swipe it to get into each building.’

Dmitri took the badge and placed it over his head.

‘Thank you, mate,’ he said to the guard.

‘No worries.’

The guard returned to the gate and Dmitri walked towards the pumping station. When he reached the door, he swiped the ID and it clicked green and the door opened. He stepped into the cool building, his eyes adjusting to the dimness.

He walked past twenty or more high-pressure cylinders, all generating Sydney water to the public’s taps, toilets, showers, bathrooms and washing machines. He walked past the five mechanical engines pumping 1.4 billion litres of water a day to greater Sydney. He found the pump he was looking for, a pump marked 300M. This pump sent water to the suburb of Mascot, a Southern suburb located eight kilometers from the CBD. Sydney Airport was also located in Mascot. Dmitri crouched down by the pump, he did not want to be caught, but despite appearances the security at the site was inept and lax. *Stupid people.*

Dmitri pulled from his pocket a small breathing device. He slipped this over his head and set the filter over his mouth and nose. He stretched onto his hands and fingers white heavy-duty gloves. He set the lunchbox down beside him and carefully opened the lid. The bottom of the box was insulated and covered in dry ice, on top of

this were three glass vials that at first glance seemed empty but looking closely at the bottom of the vial, were in fact filled with a very fine white powder. Next to the vials there were three syringes filled with a clear watery solution.

Dmitri unscrewed the top lid of the pump, he could see the white water twirling and thrashing on its way to a destination of a drinking glass, shower or an airport bathroom tap. He picked up the first vial and one of the syringes. He injected the water into the lid of the vial and shook the bottle dissolving the powder. He injected the next two vials with the remaining syringes in the same way. There was a noise at the other end of the building, inspectors coming in to complete their morning rounds. Dmitri had to hurry. He steadied his hand and delicately unscrewed the lid of the first vial, dumping its contents into the swirling water. He then poured the contents of the other vials into the water as well. He screwed the lid of the pump on, closed the lids on the vials tightly, removed his breathing mask, removed the gloves and closed the lid of the lunchbox in time to see the first inspector's head come into view.

'Good morning,' Dmitri said.

'Morning,' the man said suspiciously.

'I'm from Maintenance. We were called down to see about a pump blockage but it all seems to be in working order this morning,' Dmitri explained cheerily.

'Ah yes, Wayne said, you'd be down this morning.'

'Yes. First thing.'

'I haven't seen you before. You new?'

'New to this station but I've worked for Sydney water for a few years now.'

‘Very well. Right. Nice to meet you. Back to it,’ the man said, looking down at a busy spreadsheet and walking away. Suddenly, as if the thought occurred to him, he turned back to Dmitri.

‘What did you say your name was?’ The inspector asked but Dmitri had walked away. He exited the grey building but he did not hurry. He had a few days until they would know anything and by then he’d be gone. Holding the lunchbox, he walked back through the security gate, the guard had his back to him, engrossed in a television program. Dmitri sniffed with contempt. *It had been so easy.*

He got back into the Ute and drove away.

Chapter Eighteen

‘Spin the wheel to the right,’ shouted Commander Duncan Jeffery to a recruit fishtailing the Suzuki Swift he was trying desperately to control. The small car spun out skidding to a stop and leaving a long black burn out mark on the asphalt. Commander Jeffery came up alongside the car and tapped the window.

‘That’s a fail recruit.’

It was the start of the second week and recruits were learning defensive driving training and practicing evasive procedures. They had been practicing in dodgy beat up cars with loose gearboxes but today a number of successful recruits would get to try out the procedures on better cars.

‘There is a bet going with some of the boys that one of the cars is a BMW,’ said Hando.

Moss scoffed. 'As if they can afford BMW's for us to practice in. Be realistic.'

'Maybe an Audi?' said another recruit hopefully.

'Maybe a Lamborghini?' said another.

Heath laughed along with the rest but he secretly hoped for a BMW too. He had discovered that he was a natural behind the wheel. In his other life, the one before the island, he'd only just got his learner's permit, something he had not reminded anyone about. *Well if they don't ask, I don't have to tell.* He'd taken to stealing his dad's keys and driving the Prado around the backstreets on his own so he knew what he was doing. He and Noakes had been driving on the sly since they were fourteen. Each taking it in turns to steal a parent's car keys at night and go for drives. *Mostly to Maccas or to the servo for coke and cigarettes.*

Heath smiled remembering how Noakes would park his mum's Mercedes right at the front of the service station and get out with the keys jangling in his hand, all casual and adult-like. He'd stroll around looking at a few items, picking up some milk or something and then head to the counter and casually ask the bored attendant for the cigarettes. The one time Heath had tried it he'd been asked for ID. Busted. But in all the times they went on those trips, not a single person ever asked Noakes. They always served him. It wasn't that he looked older than Heath but he exuded confidence. *He would have been better at this than me. He was a natural at lying and games- the spy life.*

'You're up next Callahan,' Jeffrey yelled.

Heath groaned a little, the car was a bomb. It had stiff gears and the handbrake didn't work. He went to the driver's side and opened the door, was about to get in.

‘Not this one Callahan. That one,’ Jeffrey said pointing at the shiny car coming towards them. The car coming towards them wasn’t the latest model but it was modern, silver and sleek.

‘We have been incredibly gifted this year by a corporate donation to our training.’

‘It’s a concept car,’ said Hando.

‘It’s the car that Tony Stark drives in *The Avengers*,’ said somebody else.

‘Perfect car for a billionaire superhero or for boys with their toys,’ said Moss coldly.

Heath didn’t say anything. He just looked at the car he was about to drive as it pulled up alongside him. Olivia got out and threw him the keys.

‘Let’s see what you’ve got,’ she said.

‘It’s a two door coupe- mid engine with all wheel drive,’ said Jeffery.

‘V8?’ Heath asked

‘V6,’ Olivia told him.

‘Awesome,’ Hando interjected.

Olivia rolled her eyes a little so only Heath could see.

‘You can start the engine with the keyless button inside the car or old fashioned with the key fob,’ Jeffrey instructed.

Heath pressed the large round button on the key fob and sure enough, the engine roared to life.

‘Starting the engine with a key fob is a great way to check the car for bombs.’ Jeffrey said.

‘In an older style, we check underneath with a mirror but with the new cars, it’s a lot easier and safer to do it from a distance,’ he continued.

Heath clicked the door handle and slid into the cushioned, leather, sports seat. He adjusted it like Jeffrey had told him. He placed his wrists on top of the steering wheel to see what needed altering and then dropped the wheel so he could see all the dials on the dash clearly. He fixed the chair height and pulled himself a little closer to the wheel so that when his arms were extended his shoulders did not pull forward or overstrain. He put his hands on the wheel in the position of 9 and 3. Any other position was wrong and he would fail the course. Jeffery motioned for him to wind down the window. Heath looked for the button and pressed it.

‘Callahan, listen carefully,’ said Jeffrey.

Heath turned his head and peered out the back of the two-door vehicle.

‘Each course is set up differently, to stop cheating. One of your classmates is going to be your Principal. You need to pick the Principal up safely and return them to the start of the course to pass. Another of your classmates is going to be your pursuer and try to stop you like in a real life kidnapping or attack situation.’

Heath couldn’t see the person standing by the side of the roadblock waiting to be collected. It was too far away. He would have quite a bit of road to build up speed. The course was set up like a real street with buildings, trees, fake pedestrians, lights, gutters, shops, partitions and lanes.

‘Who is going to be pursuing me, Sir?’

‘Hando,’ Jeffery said.

‘Ok, Sir.’

Heath could see Hando climbing into a sleek olive green car.

‘Callahan, only one of you will pass. His job is to stop you by any means necessary.’

Heath buckled up his seatbelt.

‘And Callahan...’ Jeffery said.

‘Yes, Sir?’

‘Don’t scratch the car.’

Heath gulped. He didn’t like the chances with him and Hando head to head and the stakes in the course so high for his friend. Olivia had warned them a day earlier that not everyone made the cut into becoming an operative and that some people would be sent home due to failure to complete the training missions.

Heath pulled out onto the ‘street.’ He checked his mirrors. He stayed within the typical city speed limit of 60 km, this would keep him within the law and with the traffic flow. *Excess speed is the number one reason you will get caught. If you speed and crash, you are vulnerable, you might have to exit the vehicle, which makes you vulnerable, it will force you into running or an ambush.* Heath reminded himself of Commander Jeffery’s words. Suddenly, out of nowhere, the green car pulled up alongside him. Heath swerved the car, narrowly missing a pedestrian and jumped the curb. *Lucky, I wasn’t going faster than that, anything faster than 70km and I could have rolled.*

Heath drove off the footpath, swerving between the fake people and the buildings until he could speed up safely again. Hando was right behind him trying to ram him on the right side and run him off the road. Heath increased speed, leaving Hando for dust. He rushed to get to the Principal.

Heath was coming up to a roadblock made up of large styrofoam bricks and witches hats. At the last possible second, Heath reversed the car using the weight of the engine and then turned 180 degrees. The torque shot into the two front wheels and he pulled out of the turn forwards without needing the handbrake and without losing a lot of speed. He shot forward, passing Hando on the other side of the road, who

missed his momentum and smashed into the roadblock. Heath smiled watching the foam bricks go everywhere and Hando crunching the gears trying to reverse.

‘That was an excellent example of a reverse flick,’ Jeffery announced to the spectators.

Heath drove in the opposite direction for a while and then turned the car using the standard bootleggers turn, a good tactic for a small street or lane enabling him to change direction without stopping. He passed Hando again, this time swerving around the roadblock. He would’ve liked to ram the car but he didn’t have time, he still had to achieve his objective, rescue the Principal. He could see the bay coming up and checking his mirrors, he could see Hando back in pursuit behind him. He unlocked the car doors, he screeched into the bay. Moss was standing there.

‘Get in,’ he yelled.

Moss threw the door open and jumped into the seat.

‘Seatbelt,’ Heath spat out.

Moss clawed behind her grabbing the seatbelt and shoving it into the clicker. She braced herself. Heath put the car into reverse, turned his head over his left shoulder and stepped on the accelerator, reversing the car at 80km squeezing past Hando who was blocking the bay. Heath put the car into first gear and spun the wheel doing another reverse flick so that they were now facing the spectators. Moss looked like she was going to be sick. Her face was ghostly pale and she was clutching her stomach. Heath sped the car up to 120km, then to 180km, and then to 220km. The car handled the speed well as they approached the end of the course.

Heath didn’t see it coming, a determined and angry Hando slammed into them on the driver’s side, pushing the car off course and almost sidelong to the road. The car slid and slipped, the tyres straining for traction, they were freefalling until the car

stopped or they hit something. Heath felt the heavy cement bump of a curb. The car didn't roll. Moss made a retching noise.

'Moss?'

'I'm alright. Go! If you don't get me back we both fail.'

Heath didn't speak, he threw the car into gear but found the gears stuck. He tried again. The gears crunched but it kept slipping out of first.

'Don't throw up,' said Heath. She put her head down between her knees.

He threw the car into the only option he had left. Reverse. The car sped off backwards towards the end of the course. He straightened up and kept going. He could see the other car in the corner of his eye. Hando was going to attempt to ram him again. Heath sped up. He was now reversing at 180km. If he crashed now, they would not only fail but risk injury. He concentrated. The car swerved a little but remained on course. The end bay was coming into sight just as Hando made another attempt to ram Heath.

Not this time. Heath gave the wheel a hard tug and the car veered into the side of the green car. As the speed of the cars locked them together for a moment- one in reverse, one flying forward. Heath swerved again and the green car, unstable already, swung out widely and barreled into a roadblock coming to a spinning halt. Heath kept reversing the car, screamed up to the exit bay, threw off his seatbelt and tried to open the car door. It was jammed shut. He kicked it open and ran around to the passenger side door, undid Moss's seatbelt, picked her up and carried her to the curb just as Hando's green car screeched into the bay beside them.

Heath was sweating and shaking as he put Moss down. His hands were trembling. Commander Jeffery cracked him on the back.

‘That was the best evasive driving I’ve seen on the course in five years
Callahan. Well done!’

Heath turned away and immediately threw up.

Chapter Nineteen

The ambulance pulled up outside the emergency ward, the universal red and white cross, the medical symbol lit brightly at the entrance to the hospital. The driving officer jumped out and ran around the back, wrenching the ambulance doors open, to help the officer in the back with the two patients placing their stretchers onto the ground and wheeling them into the ward.

A young doctor ran out to meet them.

‘Another one?’ she said in a worried tone.

‘Another two,’ the driver replied.

‘From the same area?’

‘Yep. Neighbours. From Mascot.’

‘How long have they been in respiratory failure?’

‘Not sure. Neither can speak.’

‘Same MO though- flu like symptoms for a few days, then complete respiratory shut down,’ said the other ambulance officer.

‘Do you know anything yet? This is the fourth call out tonight?’ asked the driver.

‘We are waiting for test results. All we know at this stage is that it’s type 2 and it’s bad,’ said the Doctor.

‘Deaths?’

‘Thirteen.’

‘What the hell is going on?’ said the driver.

The ambulance drivers shook their heads in shock and dismay. As they spoke, more wardens and nurses arrived to wheel the new patients away. The driver got a call on his radio, another call out and the officers said no more, got into the ambulance and pulled away. As they did, three more ambulances arrived, their sirens screaming, at the hospital.

‘Something is very wrong,’ said the driver to his officer as they drove away.

MASS OUTBREAK OF FLU-LIKE VIRUS IN MASCOT

by Megan Woods

BREAKING NEWS

The Sydney Royal Hospital has been inundated with patients from the Sydney suburb of Mascot with symptoms of a flu-like virus. There have been a total of twenty-one deaths with more expected. Patients have been transferred to intensive care at St. Vincents and St. Barthews.

Doctor Alex Pravel was quoted saying this high death toll was ‘due to people self-medicating at home and not seeking treatment.’ The Australian reports that officials

have been quiet about the mass outbreak citing that they are looking into it. Biohazard teams have been seen setting up sites at Sydney airport and around the Mascot area.

If members of the public begin displaying these symptoms- dry mouth, difficulty swallowing, asthma attack, drooping eyelids, slurred speech, headache or muscle weakness please seek medical attention immediately.

Chapter Twenty

‘What is going on?’

Prime Minister questioned the room filled with high-ranking intelligence agents, the National Security Council and the Defense Force.

‘We have traced the source of the virus to Sydney water’s Minchinbury Reservoir,’ said a councilman.

‘Is it a virus?’ asked the PM, visibly sweating under his starched shirt.

‘No, Sir, we believe it is botulism toxin. It is highly toxic to humans. Two or three kilos have the strength to kill every person on the planet.’

‘You mean the stuff celebrities inject into their faces?’

‘Yes, Sir, but for cosmetic procedures only trace amounts are used. To kill a person, you need only an amount smaller than a flea and to kill a whole country – a few drops,’ said a scientist.

‘How many deaths so far?’

‘Fifty four and rising each day,’ said a secretary.

‘How did this happen?’

‘Sir, we think the reservoir was breached by a person claiming to work at Sydney water. We are looking into it, interviewing employees, and looking over security footage.’

‘Can the effects be reversed?’

‘No, botulism is a neurotoxin. It kills slowly over a few days with the infected person going into respiratory failure, akin to a very bad asthma attack. The person gets so weak, they can’t move or speak or breathe on their own.’

‘Sydney has 158 water stations- has this spread?’

‘It seems to be a one off attack, with the implicit message that there could be more.’

‘So we are definitely looking at a terrorist attack?’

‘Yes, Sir.’

The Prime Minister sighed.

‘Has anyone claimed responsibility yet?’

‘Not yet.’

‘KARAS?’

‘We are unable to say at this point, Prime Minister.’

The Prime Minister sat down at the long table and clumsily knocked a jug of water with his hand. It fell sideways.

‘So let me get this straight, anyone in Mascot who drank the water pumped, from the reservoir at Minchinbury, into their homes is going to die.’ The water from the jug was pooling on the table. No one touched it.

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘This is a national crisis. We are under attack.’

Chapter Twenty-One

‘What’s happening?’ Heath asked a person rushing past with a folder of files as the agency bustled with people and two helicopters arrived on the tarmac.

‘Terror attack in Mascot,’ the agent said.

‘What?’

‘You’re a recruit. You’ve been doing training. This is the real world.’ The agent rolled their eyes.

‘What will we do?’

‘They are shipping out a team today and they are setting up a new base in Sydney.’

‘What about The Archers?’

The agent laughed. ‘The Archers are fighting being disbanded by the Attorney General. The new Prime Minister doesn’t want the agency being covert and independent anymore. He wants us to close the program and move into the building in Canberra.’

‘What about the recruits?’

‘I expect you will just keep training until told otherwise, although you will lose some of the good teachers- Olivia has been asked to lead the ground team.’

‘Right. Thanks.’

The agent nodded and rushed off. Heath ran up to his room, he wasn’t noticed in the chaos. He started packing his few things. Shoving shoes, jeans, shirts into the bag, he also grabbed the picture of his parents and slid it in the front pocket. The photograph was creased and smudged now but it was the only tangible memory of his previous life.

His watch vibrated, telling him that class was due to start and he dropped the backpack near the door. *I have to find my father. What do I need training for? Hopefully there will be an opportunity between all this chaos and I can slip onto a chopper or find a train tunnel and leave.*

Heath went down to the lobby where Gabe was standing with a smaller bunch of recruits than the previous weeks. Hando and Moss were both absent. Hando hadn't spoken to Heath since the day he'd lost the driving test.

'Some of the recruits have been selected to help with our latest mission and they will be rejoining us at a later date,' Gabe said as way of explanation. 'Today we are headed to the labs for training in enhanced interrogation techniques, lying, surveillance and information gathering.'

Heath shuddered. *Torture. Again.*

The recruits piled into the elevators, some taking the first ride to the lab, others like Heath waiting for the second one. He exited onto a bare landing opposite three different white doors. All security locked. Heath could see the small flashing boxes and strips of security lights around each one. He would not have been surprised to know that on each door there was also a bright red trip wire about ankle height armed and ready to go off should an intruder misstep. Gabe and the group were outside door number 3.

'This is lab 3. Each lab holds different things- some are biomedicine, some are reserved for medics, some for experiments, some for computers. Lab 3 is our surveillance hub,' Gabe said swiping his security card into the slot on the wall. He then pressed his thumb to the little scanning grid, it clicked and the electric door skimmed opened.

‘The labs are where all intelligence monitoring, gathering and dissemination happens. Lab technicians work in tandem with the intelligence analysts to make meaning of any collected field intelligence,’ Gabe said proudly. *Kooky gook to me.*

‘What’s intelligence?’ a tall Chinese boy asked.

‘Good question. Intelligence is information. It can be an intercepted phone conversation that has to be translated or a field mission, an email or part of an overhead conversation, or even a person.’

‘Basically anything?’ asked Heath.

‘Raw intelligence becomes usable information,’ Gabe corrected. *Raw like those raw cakes Olivia used to bring home, disgusting.*

They walked into the lab filled with computers. There were at least thirty computers on benches with stools and against the walls hundreds of servers, generators and monitors all hooked up to a big broad glass screen in the center of the room. The recruits all pooled around the benches seating themselves onto the stools around the room in a sort of half circle. Gabe stood at the big screen. Heath saw it was a touch screen and responded to even a light movement of Gabe’s. *Voice activated too.*

‘I designed our computer system to be extremely efficient on collecting and analysing data. One of the biggest fears is intelligence failure. When something is missed.

‘9/11 happened because of a mistake by the CIA,’ an older girl, about twenty-six said.

‘The CIA did their job, they passed on information to the FBI about two suspicious individuals who were traveling to the United States. But the FBI dismissed the information and the report sat on someone’s desk. The two men the CIA were worried about were two of the 19 suicide hijackers,’ Gabe said.

'I bet someone's head rolled for that,' a guy from the back said breaking the silence.

'The worst thing you can see on a report is OBE,' Gabe said seriously.

'What does that mean?' Heath asked.

'Overtaken by events,' said Gabe.

'Hey Gabe, why isn't the system running to help with the crisis in Mascot?'

The brazen voice belonged to the older girl.

Gabe smiled.

'Right now while we are sitting here, the computers are analysing millions of hours of data for phone logs, internet searches, security camera data, facial recognition, known terrorist cells, emails, satellite and travel information and is sending things to our analysts upstairs, to Canberra and to our new office base in Sydney.'

'Wow' said Heath, looking at the computers.

'Of course, we can't rely on computers for everything, we need agents and operators to gather the data in real time. Everyone get out your phones.'

All the recruits pulled a variety of phones from their pockets, jeans and bags. Heath looked up at the ceiling. Of course, he didn't have a phone. Gabe went over to a drawer, pulled out a brand new iPhone and handed it to him.

'Of course, when you arrived at the island, your phones were blocked but we need them for this tutorial.' Gabe turned to his large screen and tapped a few buttons, the screen buzzed and the images flew past. He pulled up a map and a satellite picture of Tern Island. He tapped the screen again and it lit up with eleven red dots.

'There are thirteen of you in this room. Eleven of your phones just gave me

your location without being connected to the Internet. I gave a new phone to Heath just now and it isn't connected to anything but who is the other person who has cleverly removed their SIM completely?

A hand shot up. It belonged to a short, young woman.

'Well done.'

The girl beamed. Heath thought her name was Emily. There was a scramble in the room as people hurriedly tried to remove their SIM cards from their phones using bobby pins and paper clips to get the little cards out.

'Simple stuff,' said Gabe 'is the most important and the easiest to forget.'

Heath remembered why these things mattered, a mistake like that could cost you or someone you loved their life. *Never get caught.*

There was a polite knock on the lab door. The door slid open and Moss and Hando walked inside.

'Take a seat, we have lots to cover today.'

Heath waved. Moss smiled at him but Hando edged his seat slightly closer to Moss's.

Heath turned back to the front of the classroom. Gabe had brought up the Facebook homepage.

'When you got to the island, you were told to delete your social media accounts, your Tumblr's, Blogs, Snapchat accounts, all of it, how many of you did it?'

A few hands went up, not many.

Emily's profile, the girl from earlier, lit up the screen.

'From this profile how much information can I find out about Emily?' Gabe asked.

'Birthdate, Hometown, current location,' Moss said.

'Friends, social calendar, phone, email, current employment,' Hando said.

‘Photos, events, gender, relationships, family members, interests,’ Heath said.

Gabe put up his hand to stop them.

‘Facebook does a great job for us.’

He brought up another screen, typed in “people who work for ASIS” into the search bar. A picture of a boy from their recruitment class’s face came up. He blushed furiously. A quick glance over his public profile said, ‘works for ASIS.’

‘It gets worse.’

Gabe brought up the standard Gmail account page and typed in:

primmoss@gmail.com

And there, in a second was Moss’s email account for the class to see. Moss gasped and looked at her phone.

‘My password is really tough,’ she said meekly.

‘Not for a key logger which I installed remotely a day ago through your Bluetooth so that when you typed in your password, I was able to record it without your knowledge,’ said Gabe. ‘From Miss Moss’s email we can see that she likes online shopping, animal welfare and subscribes to her local Paleo café updates so if I wanted to befriend Moss for intelligence purposes or suspected she was engaging in terrorist activities I could accidentally on purpose run into her at the café she frequents. If you ever meet anyone who likes what you like and who you instantly like and trust- it’s not accidental,’ said Gabe.

He closed the screen. He pulled up a sealed court file, a juvenile record.

‘Someone in this room got busted for drug possession and intent to sell marijuana when they were fifteen.’

Gabe pulled up another screen, it was an Internet history full of porn sites. Every guy in the room shuffled a little on their seats. Gabe pulled up yet another screen. It was a grainy video of a girl toppling out of a nightclub and vomiting in the gutter. The tall bossy girl looked down in horror and embarrassment.

After this humbling lesson in surveillance and technology, Gabe gave each of the recruits an identity and they spent the day using public sources to gather intelligence- websites, Google, magazines, LinkedIn, YouTube, blogs, white pages, mail, anything they could find on their practice targets. (It was amazing what could be discovered in just a few clicks on the Internet. People either weren't aware how much of their lives were accessible and in the public domain, or they didn't care.)

'Being an agent will make you paranoid, it will be tough, it will ruin your social life because no one will ever know what you do, if you are caught they will deny knowledge of you, if you die, no one will ever know how, if you get married you will lie to your spouse every day,' said Gabe.

Heath thought about Olivia lying to his father for years. *She was somebody else every day for years. Imagine having to remember all the lies she had to tell, the stress and pressure of being a fake, a liar.* And he still didn't know why.

After class, the recruits had free time to practice skills. Most went off to the shooting range. Heath didn't feel like observing today so he went to the empty cafeteria.

Unfortunately, it wasn't empty. At the table farthest from the door, sat Hando.

He looked up, saw who had entered the rec and firmly clamped his eyes back on the little screen he was holding.

Subtle.

Heath stood awkwardly in the door. Not knowing whether to come in or go. He turned to go, changed his mind and went to go through the door again but it had closed. He waved his watch at the door pass and it opened again. *Could this get worse?*

Heath walked over to the food service area and grabbed a coke, a pastry and some kind of deli sandwich wrapped tight in glad wrap. *The food here isn't too bad.*

He looked around for a seat. He chose a table far away from Hando and sat down and heard him snort in derision.

“What?”

“Nothing,” said Hando.

Heath shook his head and unwrapped his roll, feeling foolish and awkward. He ate in silence with just the sound of Hando tapping away at the other end of the room. Heath got up to leave, throwing his trash into the nearby bin. He missed and the tightly wrapped wad of rubbish bounced off the metal and rolled neatly to the foot of his friend. Heath looked at the rubbish, bent and picked it up.

‘I did what I had to do. You’d have done the same thing Hando.’

“I failed the course. I have to repeat which means staying here an extra two months,” replied Hando, not looking at Heath. “And my name is Daniel.’

‘Sorry.’

‘Whatever. Just go away. You’re only here because they say you’re an Archer already.’

‘What?’

‘Nothing. You’re not even special. If it weren’t for Moss you wouldn’t have even beaten me. You were just showing off for her!’ The words burst out of Hando’s mouth furious and snarling. Heath felt his betrayal to his friend, slide off his skin like the slippery eel he felt he was.

‘I don’t like her. I know how you feel about her.’

‘Get out of here now Callahan before I punch you in the jaw,’ Hando threatened. Heath crushed the roll in his hand, and threw it with all his force at the bin. This time the rubbish slipped through the lid and landed inside the bin with a clang of metal as the lid swung forwards and back from the force. The door of the cafeteria beeped opened and Moss walked into the tense scene. Heath and Hando looked at her. She looked at Heath anxiously standing by the table and Hando half raised out of his seat and balled his fists. She rolled her eyes and walked out again.

‘Sorry mate,’ said Heath.

‘We are not mates.’

Heath shrugged and walked out of the kitchen. He turned into the hall, heading for the elevator to get back to his room. *Maybe I can switch rooms.* He was so lost in thought he didn’t see Moss waiting for him.

‘Callahan...Heath,’ called Moss.

Heath saw her then.

‘What do you want?’ he asked gruffly. It came out gruffer than he intended.

‘He’ll get over it,’ she said, falling into step beside him.

‘Maybe. Maybe he won’t.’ said Heath.

‘He failed a lie detector test a few weeks ago. He was already going to have to repeat.’ Hando being mad at him was not the subject on Heath’s mind but what he had said.

‘What is an Archer?’ Moss looked shocked for a minute. She opened her mouth to ask him how he knew about it but shut it again. Heath watched her brain process the information deciding what she was going to say.

‘Actual Archers are a myth. Everyone talks about them. Supposedly, they were this family of covert spies that worked for the government. Their identities were top secret. No one knows who they are or were or if its even true. It’s just a name now.’

‘Hando said I’m an Archer.’

Moss laughed. ‘You? He was just being an asshole.’

‘I don’t know. There was a girl I knew. She said something before she died.

Archers shine in the darkest of places.

‘That is the motto of The Archers. They shine light in the dark. It’s on the memorial wall in Canberra.’

‘The wall with all the gold stars and no names?’

‘All the spies who have died in service to our country.’

‘How do you get to be an Archer?’

‘Rumour has it that it used to be just one family but then too many of them died and they had to recruit people from all over the world,’ Moss was whispering.

‘How do you know who they are?’

‘You don’t. Hando told everyone last week that his grandfather told him Archers look and act like ordinary citizens. They have extraordinary powers though- more than a diplomat and a field agent. There is no way to know who is one or not. That’s everything I know. Honestly!’

She threw her hands up in the air in a mock defeat. Heath looked at her. She was really pretty but so serious. Heath crooked his head to the side.

‘Do you ever make a joke?’

‘Your parents made you,’ she said lamely, laughing.

‘That is the worst joke I have ever heard.’

‘I’ve got plenty more,’ said Moss as they walked off together laughing. They were so busy chuckling and clapping each other on the back, they didn’t notice Hando crouched around the corner of the hall, listening to every word.

Chapter Twenty-Two

‘Everyone empty your pockets,’ Lizzie, their new instructor told them. She was a young agent who usually worked in the office as a translator and general analyst. She had bright red hair and an upturned nose but she was nice and smiled a lot.

‘She’s a fill-in for whoever was meant to train us,’ Moss whispered to Heath.

‘You’re a real snob sometimes,’ Heath said irritably.

Moss was shocked by his honesty. No one ever spoke to her like that. She was silent as she fished around in her pockets. Hando sat in another group toward the back.

Heath’s jeans were full of things. He pulled out his wallet, security ID, his passport the agency had given him, a lip balm, a few dollar coins, asthma puffer, lighter, his new iPhone, and sunglasses.

‘You use lip balm?’ Moss said sarcastically.

‘Guys need it too,’ he said defensively.

‘And you smoke?’

Heath shrugged. ‘Gross,’ said Moss.

Moss’s contents were laid out in front of her neatly. It could have been a lay out for a magazine, it was so symmetrical and fashionable. Heath noted lipstick, eyeliner,

sunglasses, keys, wallet, security ID, money, a pair of stud earrings, some coffee card loyalty cards, some blank yellow post-its and a lock pick.

Each recruit's pocket contents covered the tables. Lizzie walked around looking at each little pile.

'This stuff is called *pocket litter*. The items in your pockets say a lot about you or an asset or target. You will have heard it before, intelligence is information.'

'Nothing is too small,' whispered Moss.

'Or too miscellaneous,' whispered Heath.

'Pocket litter is carefully analysed because even the most careful criminal or terrorist usually has a wallet or a phone number or a bit of paper with a date, things we can use,' said Lizzie. The recruits paired up to determine facts and gather information about the other person from their pocket litter.

Moss determined Heath was confident in his skin, that he looked after himself (lip balm), that he liked to read (quite used library card), that he didn't care about designer brands or shopped much (scratched sunglasses), that he was a serious asthmatic (full puffer, weakness), that he didn't have a lot of money (empty wallet), that his wallet sat on the pocket on his left, (indented), he is a smoker (lighter), he worked for someone important and that his ID's could be fake.

'When looking at pocket litter your guesses have to be backed up by facts, you don't know if the passport is fake, you would need our techs to verify or to take a picture with your phone or watch to send to the lab.'

'Anything interesting?' Lizzie asked as she passed around the room.

'Not much,' said Moss. 'Except Heath carries a lighter around but no cigarettes.'

'Great work Heath! A red herring and our first misdirection.'

Next, Heath examined Moss's litter. He hypothesized that she had expensive taste (Dior makeup), that she was pretty (makeup), that she had her own car and apartment (keys), she wasn't rich (fake rhinestones in the earrings) that she had enough money (cash in her wallet), that he would find her most mornings at a certain Gloria Jeans (eight stamps on her loyalty cards), and that she was into some sort of trade work or crime as she carried what was obviously a tool for lock picking. Lizzie pounced on the lock pick, holding it up, every recruit in the room knew why before she spoke.

'Your cover is your life. This is the sort of mistake that will get you caught.'

Moss blushed.

'I was practicing. I'm not very good.'

Lizzie handed her the tool back and Moss scooped up the pocket litter and shoved it into her bag.

The recruits moved on to learning about bugs and recording devices. Some of the bugs the agency used were thinner than human hair and were engineered to start breaking down as soon as they were placed on a target so that there would be no trace of them in 24-48 hours. Other bugs were larger and the surveillance team would install them in homes, offices, hotels, cars and the data would be sent back to the computers for analysis. Lizzie showed them how to check for bugs when they entered a room, how to sweep for the devices in the lights, mirrors, phones, bed stands, even a complimentary bible. They each installed an application on their phone, similar to a scanner that would beep if a bug was detected although Lizzie insisted old-fashioned looking was still the most efficient protection.

They saw how tiny cameras were contained on badges, brooches, collars, in pens, lighters, keychains, umbrellas, lipsticks, neckties, bowties and even a glue stick. They practiced cover personas. Their names, addresses, partners, girlfriends, likes and

dislikes, past addresses, parents, birth dates, birth location, bank details, everything you need to build a complete fake identity for someone who doesn't exist. Lizzie would ask them a question about the cover and then see if the person could adequately and believably convince her it was true.

Some people crumbled, their memory giving out, or they would laugh or stumble through the exercise.

'You just blew your cover, you will be caught.' The person stopped laughing immediately every time.

She told Heath that he was almost believable except that he gave himself away after a few questions with a tell, a little sign that he did each time he told a lie. He licked the bottom of his lip.

'That is how my father always knew I'd been smoking,' said Heath.

'No, your father most likely knew you were smoking from your breath,' said Lizzie.

'But he's your dad so I assume he knew your body language well.'

Before lunch, Lizzie pulled out a large box from a cupboard behind the desks. Inside were various items- wigs, raincoats, hoodies, hair dye, glasses, caps and hats.

'Disguises are lame. They are a spy's very last resort. If you have to use one, make it count- play it for all its worth.'

Hando rummaged through the box, looking for something. Heath had forgotten he was in the room.

'What, no latex for a new nose or an entire face?' he asked disappointed.

'This is not Mission Impossible. Spies are time poor. If you are in the field and need a disguise, you are either being followed or in immediate danger. There is no time for masks.'

‘An umbrella would work well if it was raining,’ Heath said.

‘A raincoat would also work,’ said Hando, jumping in competitively.

Lizzie pulled some items from the box. She tucked her red hair under a bright basketball cap and she put on some overly large sunglasses.

‘I’m not completely disguised but if I was in a crowd this might buy me some time, especially if they were scanning for my red hair.’

‘Would it not be sensible to have a different colour for field work?’ Moss asked pointedly.

‘I’m not in the field,’ Lizzie said awkwardly.

‘So you’ve never had to use a disguise before?’ Moss said coolly.

Lizzie took off the hat and sunglasses. She looked upset. She dismissed the class for lunch.

‘That was mean Prim,’ Heath said on the way out the door.

‘Don’t call me Prim.’

‘That was mean. Moss.’

‘She didn’t have to embarrass me about the lock pick. It was just a mistake. She isn’t even a real instructor,’ Moss defended herself.

‘She was ok,’ said Heath.

‘Yeah you just like her cause she was young and smiled a lot,’ Moss said, She walked off to the canteen sort of skipping away from Heath in a showy fashion to catch up with Hando, Sabine and a few of his friends, she linked her arm through his and turned pointedly back at Heath.

Heath looked at the obvious display to make him jealous. *And it did!* He was so maddened by Moss and how she deliberately did it to rile him; he didn’t stop to question why Moss was carrying a lock pick in the first place?

Chapter Twenty-Three

After lunch, the recruits headed back to the classroom. Heath was sour. He'd spent the entire time watching Moss drape herself over Hando for his benefit. When he walked into the room, it was set up slightly differently. All the chairs were pushed back except for one chair in the middle of the room. There was a table set up next to it, with a small suitcase without wheels and a lot of dials and what looked like a blood pressure cuff. He'd seen this machine a hundred times before, in every action, spy, police movie- a polygraph machine. It was linked with wires back to a laptop that sat in front of Lizzie.

'I thought we'd up the ante a little, this is my main job here at the base. Some of you have already failed your first test and are trying again.'

Heath looked at the machine.

'Aren't there ways to beat a polygraph?' someone asked.

'Yes, we'll discuss them as we go,' Lizzie said. 'Volunteer?' she asked. No one in the room wanted to go first. Heath felt bad for her. He put up his hand.

'Yeah, I will have a go,' Heath said. *I've got nothing to hide, do I?*

Her face brightened. He sat down in the chair. Lizzie hooked him to the machine- two chords around his chest and the band around his arm. It was a blood pressure cuff. She then attached tiny little electrodes to his fingertips on his right hand.

'The machine reads stress signals so one of the tricks is not be intimidated or nervous.' *Calm, breathe. Nervous. Noakes.*

Heath tried to calm his breath by breathing slowly. He had not needed his asthma puffer since he got to the Island but he wanted it now. His airways swelled and his lungs started to hurt.

‘What does each thing measure?’ a recruit asked.

‘The chest tubes measure a person’s breathing, the increase, decrease of air and the arm band measures heart rate and blood pressure and the electrodes on his hand detect sweating.’

Heath was perspiring. His face was getting hot and the air conditioning had stopped working. He breathed deeply. *I need to remain calm.*

‘I’m going to ask you some questions. A yes or no is perfect.’ Lizzie said.

He knew from his limited knowledge that the first few questions would be control questions- the sort of tedious questions you ask someone when you meet them for the first time.

‘Is your name Heath Callahan?’

‘Yes.’

‘Are you sixteen years old?’

‘No.’ The machine beeped. Lizzie gave him a stern look. ‘Yes.’

‘Are you a spy?’

‘No.’

The machine beeped and the cuff was slightly tight around his arm. *Nothing wrong... yet.*

‘Have you ever lied to an officer of the law?’

‘Yes.’

‘Have you ever stolen something from a shop?’

‘Yes.’

‘Is your father a journalist for The Australian?’

‘Yes.’

The machine beeped differently on this question. It made a high-pitched noise. Lizzie quickly reached to shut the machine off, ignoring the beeping and addressed the class.

‘While polygraphs have been proven to be fallible, you will still find them used by most secret service agencies, the army, police, and several international companies with innovative products or patents and a competitors market such as Apple, Samsung, Google etc.’

Heath knew the test asked two sets of questions – control questions like Lizzie had asked him and relevant questions, relating to particular events, details, and people.

The door buzzed and Olivia came in, Heath had not seen her for several days, he had been told she was leading the team in Sydney on a mission about the latest terrorist attacks. *Why is she back on the Island?*

Lizzie smiled. ‘Olivia is renowned for her ability to trick the polygraph machine. She had agreed to be the guinea pig for us. Thanks Heath, you did very well.’ She began to release Heath from the cuff and tubes. Heath took his seat by the window and Olivia sat down in his place. She quickly slipped the electrodes onto her fingers and the wires around her chest. Lizzie placed the cuff on her arm.

‘Let’s get started,’ said Lizzie. She turned the machine back on.

‘Is your name Olivia Aubrey?’

‘Yes.’

The machine beeped indicating the answer was true.

‘Are you a secret agent for the Australian Secret Intelligence Service?’

‘No.’

The machine beeped normally again indicating the answer was true. Olivia did not smile or break. Lizzie grinned.

‘Have you ever been involved in terrorist activities?’

‘No.’

The machine beeped, indicating a truthful answer.

‘Have you ever lied to someone who trusted you?’

‘No.’

The machine beeped again.

‘Have you ever lied to someone who trusted you?’ Lizzie repeated the question.

‘No.’

The machine beeped red, indicating a lie. Lizzie chuckled.

‘Olivia has just demonstrated that the polygraph is unreliable and that if your life depended on it, you could easily trick it into giving results you have manipulated.’

‘How?’

Lizzie pointed at the wires connected to Olivia’s fingers, the tubes wrapped around her chest.

‘The first time she asked, I went to a calm place, a quiet lagoon with gentle waves lapping at the edge of a rainforest,’ said Olivia.

‘When I asked Olivia the second time she thought of something that terrifies her,’ said Lizzie.

‘Drowning,’ Olivia offered quietly.

‘This gave the machine a false reading of psychological distress signifying a lie.’

Someone in the class snorted. Lizzie snapped her head around looking for the culprit.

Hando.

‘So basically you want to confuse the machine so it thinks your innocent?’
said Hando.

‘Yes,’ said Lizzie simply.

‘Can I ask a question?’ piped up Moss, her hand in the air. Heath had almost forgotten she was there.

‘We have time,’ said Lizzie.

‘Have you ever killed someone?’

Olivia flicked her eyes, just for a tiny second towards Heath.

‘No’ she said.

The machine beeped. Truth.

NEW PRIME MINISTER SWORN IN AMID TERRORIST THREATS

By Megan Woods.

Overnight the Governor General and members of Parliament agreed that acting Prime Minister James Towning would be sworn in as Australia’s 31st Prime Minister.

The move comes amid growing anxiety after the latest terrorist attacks at Mascot where 1700 people died from respiratory failure after exposure to an unknown toxin while many more remain in critical condition.

James Towning has been a Member of Parliament and the Australian Liberal Party and previously held the role of Treasurer of Australia and the role of Minister for Human Services and Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations.

Before moving into politics in 2008, he was CEO of Australia's largest bank, Rimington Ames. He was CEO when Rimington Ames took over the big four Australian Banks- Westpac, National, Commonwealth and Australian and New Zealand Banking Group (ANZ) netting the company AUD\$2.66 Trillion in combined assets.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Dmitri stood in the nice, modern office again. This time, the chairs were gone and there was a large blue flag pinned to the far wall. It was painted with white symbols. And it was a fake.

The ink was still drying where Dmitri had painted on the letters. He had printed them from the Internet, blown them up at a self-serve at a nearby store and stencilled them on. *Easy.*

In the centre of the room facing the flag was a video camera attached to a stand. Dmitri put on a black hood he unfolded from his pocket. He walked over to the video camera and switched it on. He pressed record.

Walking back, he stood in front of the flag. He spoke directly to the camera in a strong generic accent.

‘We, KARAS, take credit for the attacks on Sydney Water and Sydney Rail.

Australia has been enslaved under the shadow of corruption for too long, it has strayed from the path and its people are ignorant of truth and justice.

The time for standing by and watching destruction and greed is over. We will conquer the world, and execute all who believe in democracy.

There will be more attacks.'

Dmitri walked to the video camera and clicked the off button. The video screen went black. He removed his hood.

He popped a button on the camera and removed the small video memory card and placed it in his pocket. Over by the door was a can of petrol, the type you use camping or when filling up a lawnmower. He unscrewed the lid and splashed the fuel around the room wetting the walls, the flag, the camera and stand. He took a small packet of matches from his pocket, the sticks glinting with their red heads in their coffin. Sliding it open, he picked out three, skimmed their heads along the side of the box, igniting the spark and dropped them and the box onto the floor. The room caught alight instantly, the flame catching the fuel and spread quickly up the walls. Dmitri threw the hood into the blaze, walked to the door and went out, just as the room ignited with fire and smoke burning everything in its path.

Chapter Twenty-Five

'Ow, that really hurt,' said Heath rubbing his arm where Gabe had injected him with a small GPS locator chip.

'Yeah, what did you expect? Did you see the size of the needle?' said Gabe.

Hando sat a little way off, rubbing his arm. He had not spoken to Heath since the day in the cafeteria and Heath missed his friend. *How many more friends am I going to lose this year?*

‘It’s smaller than a grain of rice, you won’t feel it after a day,’ Gabe said.

Heath left the lab and ran right into Olivia.

She grabbed his arm, looking around furtively as she pulled him around a corner and into an empty doorway. She looked at the ceiling as she got out her phone. She swiped a button and turned on a radio application. Triple J and some noisy rock guests came babbling out of her phone’s speaker filling the hallway with sound. Anyone listening in would only be able to hear the radio. She spoke just above the noise in a whisper.

‘I’m leaving the Island again today. I’m going back to Sydney.’

‘What’s that got to do with me?’ Heath asked broodingly.

‘There is a mole in the agency,’ Olivia said.

‘What?’

‘There have been secrets leaked to the press- government secrets, military intelligence, billions of dollars of intelligence made vulnerable because someone is selling secrets to the highest bidder and worse, agents have been disappearing off the grid.’

‘How do you know?’ Heath asked

‘Sometime in the last two months, files were downloaded from our servers- containing information about blueprints of landmarks, security footage and security details of Sydney Water and a list of active agents in the field.’

‘Is this person responsible for the bombing and the other terrorist attacks?’

‘We don’t know. For now stay on the Island, complete whatever training they want you to do and keep your head down. Don’t tell anyone about your father.’

‘So I’m still in danger?’

‘The men who want your father are linked to all of this and now because of a traitor, the agency is also unsafe. If they can’t find Spencer, they will try to find you, because they know it will draw him out.’

She swiped her phone again. She smiled at Heath. *Tried to smile.* She hugged him.

‘I will see you soon.’

Heath looked up at the ceiling, to the camera he knew was there but couldn’t see.

When he lowered his neck, Olivia was gone. *What about my father?*

He glanced at his watch, he was late for training, they were doing a course with recruits for the Special Air Service Regiment (SAS) and he rushed down in the lift and out into the forecourt where everyone was piling onto the buses again.

Heath saw Moss watching him from the back row, and he chose a seat at the front on his own. *Petty. I know.* He didn’t look back but he knew Moss was watching him. It was hot and he was already sticky with sweat. It had been overcast and rainy during the morning but had cleared up, in typical unpredictable fashion.

The buses drove for about fifteen minutes till they pulled off the one and only Island road into what was a lush, green oval with a red running track on the outside line like a proper sports reserve.

The twenty SAS recruits got out of their bus with absolute quiet and concentration. They were all men, they were all Army and they looked intimidating. *We look like pale computer nerds in comparison.*

Commander Jeffery got off the bus last. He did a head count and told them to

spread out in the oval where they could still hear him but could reach out their arms without touching the person next to them.

‘Strength and endurance. If you want to succeed you need to be fit, strong, capable, brave and determined. Some of you will fail this.’

The recruits looked nervous, while the SAS guys pumped their arms and flexed their muscles. *Stereotypes exist for this reason.* Heath had always been fit, played for the school teams in soccer, football and basketball. He was an excellent high jumper and active. He and Noakes had got into pumping weights at the gym a couple of days after school. His dad had insisted he play sport to help with the asthma. The Commander began the Special Forces Barrier Test, standard procedure for weeding out weakness and unfit personnel.

It was gruelling- 60 push-ups, 86 sit-ups, 50 burpees, 10 heaves on the pull up bars followed by a 3.2 kilometre run. The SAS guys thrived on the excitement and physical rewards, finishing first and then sprinting off down the track. Heath had almost kept pace, he was the first recruit to fall into line behind them on the run. It felt good to push his body again, get the high from running fast and his heart rate up. The first guy in the SAS finished in 15 minutes. Moss and Hando were somewhere behind him.

When Heath got back to the beginning of the course, there were dark brown uniforms laid out in piles on the ground. The SAS guys started pulling them on- long sleeve top, and long pants. Heath grabbed a set and pulled the thick coarse material over his head. The pants were elasticated and long. He pulled them on over his clothes and runners. The Commander opened the boot of the bus. Inside were metal cases. He opened a case and took out a rifle and handed it to the nearest SAS guy. The guy passed the gun to another of the group and so forth until they were all standing with a

gun each, the agency recruits were still catching up from the run in drips and drags. Hando pulled in, red in the face. He glared at Heath and snatched a pile of clothes from the ground. Moss was already dressed in the brown uniform, a bit too big for her. She'd rolled the legs and sleeves up. She didn't look puffed or tired from the run. Her eyes were bright and sparkling from the exercise.

'Your guns are unloaded. You fail if you drop, if you stop or if you faint,' said Commander Jeffrey.

When everyone had arrived, Commander Jeffrey took notes about who had finished last and then the group set off on a four-hour endurance march around the Island. People talked at first but as the time wore on and their legs hurt and it got hotter, the chattering stopped completely and grim determination took over. Holding their weapon and walking was hard, heavy and awkward. Heath's arms began to ache, the gun drooping against his shoulder. He saw two of the SAS guys stop for a break, they just stopped walking and leant against trees. He would have liked to sit down or have a drink of water. Heath was desperate for water, but he was single-minded when it came to challenges. *You are stubborn like a bull, his father told him often.*

Heath was walking onwards, even passing some of the SAS guys who were going slow, one of the guys- a short, blonde haired man with a crooked nose about twenty-five Heath guessed, fell into step beside him.

'Hi, I'm Keelan.'

'Heath,' Heath said, short on breath.

'SAS.'

'ASIO, ASIS, Asses,' Heath said jokingly.

'You seem young.'

'So do you.'

Keelan laughed.

‘Good point.’

‘Why did you join up for the SAS?’

‘Girls.’

It was Heath’s turn to laugh. Because of his dry mouth and lips, it came out like chaffed sandpaper.

‘Nah mate, I joined because they asked me. I was a tradie before, demolitions and they need guys with explosives experience,’ Keelan said.

They walked in silence for a while, both grunting with the weight of their weapons.

‘This gun did not seem this heavy three hours ago,’ Heath said.

‘I know.’

Heath had overheard from some of the recruits that SAS training was nearly impossible and that more men died during the training than on actual missions and combat.

Heath and Keelan talked for the rest of the walk, it made it easier as the time passed. Keelan was funny and did accurate impressions of movie stars and comedians. When they got back to the oval, they put their rifles back into the boot and went to take off their dripping uniforms.

‘Not so fast, get back on the bus recruits,’ Jeffrey said.

Keelan and Heath got on the first bus, waited for the rest of the group. The group gradually puddled in, tired and exhausted and stinking with sweat and dust. When everyone was back, the buses drove back to base and down to the Olympic sized pool.

‘All recruits line up on the side of the pool. When I blow the whistle, jump in the water and tread for 30,’ Jeffrey yelled.

The whistle blew, Heath jumped into the water, the weight of the camouflage already filling with water and weighing him down but Keelan, instead of jumping in, flipped twice before landing in the water. Heath clapped in surprise while kicking his legs.

‘That’s enough showing off recruit,’ the Commander bellowed.

Keelan laughed. Heath felt happy. Even though he was exhausted and Olivia’s warning filtered through his head, it felt good to have a friend again.

When Heath got back to his room, later that night, he found a piece of paper tucked into his bed and written on it was a note in a familiar hand:

Heath,

I can’t tell you where I am. I’m proud of you. Everything will be all right.

There is a mole in the agency. You aren’t safe there. Watch your back.

Destroy this.

Dad.

Heath looked around the room. He scrunched the note in his hand. He put it in the small waste paper bin and grabbed his lighter. He set fire to the note and watched it crinkle into ash.

He was in danger on the Island so tomorrow he was leaving.

Chapter Twenty-Six

The video of KARAS taking credit for the recent terrorist atrocities and threatening new attacks on Australia had been watched more than five million times. There were three hundred thousand comments scrawled beneath it.

The chairman of Rimington Ames was having a bad day. Stocks were down, reports sat piled on his desk and he had a meeting with the board. He was too old for this sort of thing. With the terrorist attacks, he'd briefly thought of retiring. The Rimington Ames Group were an investment banking, management and securities firm. Their clients included corporations, governments and now with the trillion dollar purchase of the big four Australian Banks, their largest client was the Australian Public. In Australia, Rimington Ames owned Hotels, all the Casinos and major shares in Energy, Oil, Mining, Restaurants, Healthcare insurance, Media, Meat processing and all the big Retail Giants. They also owned a large number of government business and utilities including Australia Post and Telecommunications. The public were unaware of this, of course. The government had selling off assets to the private sector to clear debts since early 2000.

He picked up the phone, pressing the intercom for his secretary.

'Beryl, can you put me through to my wife please.'

'Certainly, Mr. Smider.' Beryl had been his secretary for thirty years. The length of time he had been CEO of Rimington Ames. She had remained with him when he became chairman. She knew him almost as well as his wife. He had told her countless times to call him David but she insisted on proprieties.

The phone dial clicked as Beryl dialled the number for his wife Malory. She would be at home gardening or calling one of the children to discuss when grandchildren were coming to visit. They had been married for 42 years. *Not a bad effort.*

‘Malory Smider speaking.’

‘Hello love, it’s me. Can you please stock the den with food for tonight? I’ve got a few of the boys coming around to watch the footy and discuss some new mergers?’

‘Yes, do you want the little rolls from the bakery in Darlinghurst?’

‘It’s late notice but if possible, yes.’

‘I’ll see what I can do.’

He hung up the phone.

David looked at the reports on his desk. He picked up a creamy manila folder. It was the latest surveillance from last night, from their satellites. It was a highly classified eyes-only document. He opened the folder and looked at the crisp images of Heath Callahan. He picked up his private line and dialled the number 1 on his speed dial.

A man answered immediately.

‘How did the asset get away again?’

‘We don’t know. I sent good men. He had help,’ the man replied.

‘He is sixteen. He is a delinquent. It should not be this hard.’

‘Find him.’

‘We are waiting for our man on the inside to contact us.’

‘Dmitri, without that boy, I can’t draw his father out into the open,’

‘I understand Sir.’

‘And the other thing?’ David asked. He knew better than anyone to be careful of listening devices.

‘Almost ready. 24 hours.’

‘Make it 12.’

He put the receiver back and picked up another folder. In it was another handful of surveillance photographs. Flicking through, he saw black and white pictures of the new Prime Minister eating dinner, watching TV, playing with his children at the lodge.

He smiled. Beryl buzzed his intercom.

‘Sir, the board are waiting for you.’

‘Thank you Beryl. Make sure you take an extra-long lunch today.’

Beryl laughed.

‘Not a chance Sir.’

David Smider, seventy-four years old, pushed his chair back, stretched out his gammy leg, a service injury from Vietnam and limped out of the room.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Heath looked around, the group had shrunk from forty recruits to ten of them.

‘Over this course, you have learned weapons, surveillance, combat, survival, lock smithing, covers, evading capture, operation of vehicles, explosive techniques, lethal force and threat elimination,’ said the instructor.

Heath wasn’t listening. He was thinking. He knew there was only one way off the Island- by plane. He had done some training simulations flying the helicopter but

could not fly the bigger passenger jet. He would have to find time to slip away during the day, no matter what the course had planned.

‘Today you will qualify for military free fall parachuting. You will be instructed and then you will be examined.’

Better. We will already be on a plane. Maybe I can escape during the exercise.

The recruits were given 4 hours ground instruction by a certified parachute rigger.

They were told that fatalities almost never happen and that the danger is highest when a parachutist is coming in to land, with most hazards being ground based.

‘Don’t hit the ground fast, try to glide in slowly,’ said the instructor.

He explained that parachuting was requisite training because the agency used it to deploy agents into the field, especially in hostile countries and territories.

The recruits had lunch and Heath took a moment to run back to his room. He put his wallet, phone, the photograph and the lighter into his pocket. Everything else would be left behind. He couldn’t afford to arouse suspicion that he was leaving.

As he was going up to the helipad, the doors of the lift stopped on level 4 and Hando rushed into the elevator, both boys were shocked that the other was there.

‘I had to get my chip checked.’ Hando said.

‘Sure. My arm still hurts.’ Heath said.

Hando slipped something small into his pocket while Heath was speaking. From the shape, Heath believed it was a lock pick. Hando’s explanation had been almost plausible except that the labs were always closed and unoccupied during lunch.

They got out on the top floor where the plane was parked and waiting for boarding. It had been moderated for skydiving with the seats removed and the large door ready for them to exit the aircraft. All recruits were getting into their flying suits. Heath was given a black and green one with stripes down the side.

‘This is your flying suit. It is called a Raptor. It is designed for us specifically.’

Heath stretched the suit on. It was a tight fit, like a cycling outfit with spandex and lycra. There was mesh lining on the arms, torso and legs. To Heath’s relief, there was a zippered inside pocket into which he put his wallet and items. It zipped from his crotch all the way to his neck. Heath saw Moss getting into hers. They hadn’t spoken much. She was always surrounded by people or nowhere to be seen. He would see her in the hall or in the lunchroom but by the time he got to where she had been, she was always gone. Heath had got the impression she was deliberately avoiding him. *Girls*.

Each parachutist had two chutes- their main chute that would be deployed after free fall and a reserve parachute in case anything went wrong. Their helmets were installed with video cameras and an automatic activation device controlled their chutes so the reserve chute would deploy if they fell for too long without deployment of the main chute.

The group boarded the passenger plane along with the pilot and the parachute instructor. The last thing the instructor did was to check the wind conditions before the door was shut with a little hand held device.

Seemingly satisfied, he nodded at the pilot and the plane’s engines started to roar. They had been airborne for ten minutes, flying over the Island to a specially cleared zone designated for jumps.

When they reached the right altitude, the instructor opened the door of the plane. He signalled for the first two recruits closest to the door to get ready to go first. Heath felt butterflies in his stomach. He wasn’t scared of heights but he didn’t like them either. He looked out the window, the ground seemed like a tiny little green

patch from here. Moss was white. She looked physically ill. Heath tried to comfort her by smiling. *It will be all right.* He would have squeezed her hand if he could have. She looked away.

Two older men from their class jumped first, followed by two more recruits. All recruits jumped in pairs and the instructor checked his little wind reader every time. Soon all the recruits had jumped except Moss, Heath and the instructor. They were the last. *So much for escaping.* They ambled over to the door, Heath could already feel the force of the wind buffeting the plane, was it stronger than before? Heath looked out, there was definitely more cloud cover than there had been before. *Looks like rain.* The instructor checked his device, he showed it to the pilot. The pilot shook his head clearly disagreeing with something. The instructor shrugged. He gave the ok sign to Heath and Moss. Moss took a huge breath. She was still white.

Heath stepped closer to the edge of the plane. Some of the recruits had had to be pushed out. Not Heath. *I am going to jump.* Heath put his hand on his toggle ready to pull out the small pilot chute so the main chute would deploy correctly.

He took a breath.

Looked at Moss.

And jumped.

The speed and gravity accelerated him and sent him hurtling in free fall toward the ground. He held his body the way the instructor had shown him. His head felt heavy and full like it was two times its normal size. He felt light, like he was flying. At the correct altitude, his helmet buzzed and he pulled the toggle down hard, his chute deployed with a huge swoosh and caught him in the breeze. He felt himself going slightly backwards, something was wrong up above him.

He looked up. He could see Moss free falling above him but she wasn't alright. She was pulling her toggle but her chute wasn't deploying the way Heath's had. Heath could see she was panicking, struggling in the air. What Heath did not know was that just before they had jumped, the wind had changed and wind speeds had picked up. The conditions made it extremely dangerous even with two working parachutes. Heath's parachute was working well and creating drag, slowing his descent from the ravaging free fall. Moss was still falling. In her fear she had forgotten about the cut away safety. In order to deploy her reserve chute, she needed the main chute to break off.

Heath made a quick decision. He could not grab Moss from mid-air without endangering both of them if she had not released the malfunctioning chute because he risked entangling them. *Come on Moss. Release the chute*, he begged. If she fell past him, he would never reach her in time. They were too low to the ground for Moss's reserve chute to deploy in time. There was only one option. Moss's head drooped. *Had she passed out?* A second later, her head snapped up and she hit the release pad on her chest and the chute broke away. As she fell past Heath, Heath swung out his arm, braced himself and caught her. She slammed into his chest winding him. He hoped his chute would hold out with the weight of two people. He held onto her tightly while the chute glided in towards the grass and the safety of the earth. They landed feet first and the chute fell on top of them, toppling them to the ground. Surrounded by a huge orange cloud of their parachute, Heath lay on the ground, his arms still wrapped tightly around her, her head on his chest. He could feel her breathing lightly in small, shallow breaths. They stayed as they were as people ran over to check if they were hurt. Moss held on to Heath, she did not let go.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

James Towning looked at himself in the mirror. He straightened his black silk Dior tie, he attached his special gold cufflinks that had been a wedding present from his wife, into his French cuffed sleeves and he finished the look with a white cummerbund and slipped his arms into his tailored Tom Ford suit.

He was flattered when his secretary had informed him Sir David Smider, Chairman of Rimington Aimes, had sent an invitation asking James to join him for dinner at The Mayfair, an invite only private club whose members included multi-billionaires, magnates and celebrities. Public servants like him were not invited he thought bitterly. He had given his security detail a night off and was driving himself. A single guard, a loyal Federal Policeman who, before working for James, served three consecutive Prime Ministers, would accompany him.

He kissed his wife and two little sons goodnight and got into his black jeep leaving Kirribilli house behind. He arrived at the club on time at half past eight. The address had arrived by mail on embossed card. James left his security man to park the vehicle, and stood outside a florist on George Street. Surely in his many visits to Sydney he had seen this florist before but he didn't think so. The sign said closed. He checked the card again. No, this was the correct address and pushed the door open. Inside, it looked like a normal florist's shop. Empty buckets, the large fridge filled with flowers, the paper and ribbons milling on every counter. James walked towards the back.

'Hello,' he called out.

He jumped as the front door opened, but it was just his security guard returning. A small Chinese lady dressed beautifully in a silk shirt and skirt, walked into view and took up a place at the messy counter. She spoke softly.

‘Please, they are expecting you. The stairs to your left will take you to guest entrance.’

James nodded and did as she said, taking the stairs down to a heavy oak door at the bottom. As he approached the door, he did not know a camera zoomed in on him. The door opened as he went to knock. The Mayfair was grand and beautiful. Walking through to a dimly lit room, he could see many booths with soft, draped curtains sectioned off and members privately chatting together in them. Each held a table and red velvet seats in a circular setting around each one. There was an old-fashioned drinks bar with one waiter busying himself. He could see stairs leading to more levels toward the back of the room. The waiter pointed at the last booth, the biggest booth, this booth was decorated with carved wooden arches and heavy gold curtains. The elegance of the last booth told James that Mr. Smider was waiting for him.

He moved the curtain, and saw the older man sitting at the table. James did not know what he looked like. He was somewhat of a recluse. He rarely gave interviews, his staff were fiercely loyal and he travelled a lot. He was also one of the richest and most powerful men in the world, regularly making the annual *Most Powerful People* lists.

He saw a man with thinning grey hair, a crinkled face pitted with lines and wrinkles and deep dimples. His lips were thin, like paper and he was wiry, like he swam a lot. His skin was spotted and brown but his eyes were bright.

Smider motioned for him to sit so he slid himself into the opposite side of the table facing the older man, sinking into the rich upholstery. The older man pressed a small button on the table. The waiter appeared a second later.

‘Tell Mr. Towning’s man to have a seat in the pool bar, get him whatever he wants to drink.’

James opened his mouth to object, his security guard must be near him at all times but he relaxed, *he’s a harmless old man, just this once* he thought.

The waiter brought them two ball glasses filled with a very expensive Scotch. *No ice, no water.* James raised the glass to his lips. Smider spoke.

‘This is the finest single malt ever made. There are only one hundred bottles in the world. It was bottled in 2005, fifty years from when it was distilled. A bottle can sell for \$660,000.’

‘I’m not much of a scotch connoisseur.’ James said.

He drank a mouthful of the scotch. It tasted like charcoal. He grimaced slightly. Smider, on the other hand, cupped his glass and smelled it several times before putting it down.

‘Rare things are meant to be savoured.’

James blushed. Men like him always made him feel awkward and common.

‘Now, James, there is a small matter of some land. The government are blocking our takeover bid of the Walker and Co. Property. I want it unblocked.’

James knew what the old man was talking about. The Walker and Co. Property was the largest land holding in the world. It was eleven million hectares of land across four states- South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The public understood that it was mostly cattle properties but what they did not know was that the land was rich in gas, iron ore, coal and diamonds. Whoever

controlled the land, held unprecedented power because of the sheer size of the property and would privately make trillions from the sale mining and exporting its assets to the Chinese.

James shifted uncomfortably in his seat. He tried to smile, to have a little banter.

‘I’m sorry Sir, but that is out of my control. I’m only the Prime Minister after all.’

Smider didn’t flinch.

‘It is an unfortunate turn of events, this latest run of terror attacks, you must be very worried about the newest threats, considering what happened to your predecessor.’

James realised the room had grown very quiet. There was no longer any light chatter from other club members and the waiter seemed to have disappeared. He began to feel afraid, his instincts telling him he was in great danger although the old man had not even raised his voice.

‘So this is about money?’ James asked.

‘Everything is about money,’ Smider said.

There was a flash of movement as Smider sprang from his seat and stabbed something into the table. James blinked and the next moment, the old man was sitting back in his seat looking calm and serene and James looked at his hand as a searing pain travelled up his arm and he cried out. There in the middle of his palm, speared through the vein was a silver fork. The blood pooled out around the wound, the fork holding the Prime Minister’s hand to the table. James tried to pull the fork out, in shock but Smider reached out and put his hand over it.

‘You don’t think you earned the position of Prime Minister, did you?’

James didn’t speak. He was feeling quite lightheaded.

‘If I don’t remove the cutlery from your hand, you will pass out in about a minute, you will bleed out in twelve.’ Smider continued in the same composed voice.

‘What do you want?’ James whispered.

‘I want the land, I want the government answering to me and I want power.’

‘So you are blackmailing me?’

‘No, Mr. Towning, this is blackmailing you.’

Smider drew from his inner jacket pocket, a grey A5 envelope, he undid the flap, and placed on the table a series of black and white images. Inside were pictures of the Prime Minister injecting heroin. James looked away.

‘Not the sort of thing you would want to see in *The Daily Mail* or headlining *The Australian* is it?’

James groaned. Smider reached over and pulled the fork from his palm. James pulled his wrist up, draining the blood away as it spurted on the table soaking his suit sleeve.

Smider smiled. He pushed a bag of powder towards James.

‘You will want to get cleaned up before you head home to wife James.’

James got up. He grabbed the bag from the table. The meeting was finished.

‘We’ll be in touch,’ Smider said as James, holding his wrist, stumbled towards the exit.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

‘This chute has been tampered with. The reserve has been taken out and the main chute has been packed incorrectly and the deployment device cut through,’ the instructor said, holding up Moss’s defective chute.

The Commander and the instructor exchanged looks. The chutes had all been checked and inspected right before take-off.

‘I’m taking this to the director right away,’ he said hurrying off.

The recruits all departed one by one, to their rooms or the canteen. *Everyone here has been through life and death, but there are no long lasting friendships, no team.*

Everyone was kept on edge all the time, doing his or her duty. *Is it worth it?*

Moss was in the sick bay. She had twisted her ankle on landing. It was a common injury for free fall parachuting.

She had said nothing except a small whispered ‘Thanks’ to Heath as the medic attended to her. Heath wanted to say goodbye to her before he left. Heath knew that spies practiced being grey people, the people you remember for a moment but then forget. *Memorable and then entirely forgettable.* He would never see her again once he left the Island. He’d be on the run, until he found his father or his father found him.

Maybe I’m on my own now. Maybe this is it. No year twelve or university or schoolies. A life lived out on the run. Unless I’m caught and then they will kill me and no one will ever know. Heath let himself wallow for a moment in self-pity and then he pulled himself together. *I’m not a real spy but I’m not bad at it.*

Heath ate dinner in the canteen with the rest of the recruits. A lab rat with dreads left his black beanie on the table while he went for seconds from the dessert bar. Heath slipped the beanie under his tray as he walked past. He’d barely tasted the

pizza, tipping the tray in the trash. Moss was still absent and Hando was sitting at another table talking to a group of lab guys. Heath wrote a text to Keelan and then deleted it. Better not to say anything. *Who could he trust?*

He watched TV in the rec like usual and then he went up to the dorm and showered and climbed into bed after lights out. He was dressed in black jeans and black shirt, and he climbed into bed fully clothed with his socks on, only his shoes were waiting by the end of the bed. Heath felt himself drifting off. It had been a huge day. He forced himself to stay awake. He could hear Hando snoring above him. If Hando was the mole, he could not afford to wake him. He had to get off the Island without being seen. They would find out soon enough when the helicopter was missing. *Another felony to add to the list.*

Heath looked at his watch, 12.30am. He got up quietly. Sitting on the bed, he swung his legs over the side and slid his feet into shoes, tying the laces and tucking his jeans over the tops of his boots. Hando was still snoring soundly. Heath went to the door, opened it a small way wedging himself through so the security light from the hall wouldn't illuminate the room, pulling his bag after him, he closed the door, didn't look back.

He stepped out into the hall and saw the hall security camera blinking at him. Its black fish eye capturing movement and noise. Heath pulled the beanie he had stolen low over his hair and face. He put his bag down and got out a small round metallic bottle. Then he jumped, catching hold of the light fitting. The light swung with his weight. He used this as leverage to swing himself close to the camera. As he swung in, he let go with one hand, pulled the bottle of shaving foam from his pocket and sprayed the camera with the thick white foam. He dropped to the ground. Picking up his bag in one hand and holding the foam in the other he hit the elevator door and

stepped inside when the doors opened. Keeping his face down, he pressed the button for the roof.

He stepped out into the cool night breeze and saw the helicopter parked in the semi-darkness. The keys to the planes were stowed in a tower office on the roof. Heath made his way over to the office hoping the door was open. He tried the handle, the door clicked. Once inside, he looked around for the cabinet. It was down low under the desk. It was usually left open but Heath could see today that it was locked. He rummaged in his bag, pulling out his hooligan tool and a small pick.

There was only one set of keys. He grabbed them off the hook and hurried back out to the helicopter, opening the pilot's door and climbing inside.

He was about to start the engine, when he saw them. The men, three dozen or so, dressed in camouflage creeping through the grounds towards the main building. They were all armed and they were black ops. *I'm the only one awake. I'm the only one who can see them.* Heath looked around and jumped out of the helicopter, ran back to the office picking up a pile of paper from the desk and ran back to the elevator reaching into his pocket for his lighter. He could not see the men any longer, they had breached the building and were in the lobby, only a few floors away from his friends. He pressed the lift button, the doors slid open again and he dropped the pile of paper on the ground, picked up a corner and lit it. A fire started, he lit more paper. Smoke started to billow grey and heavy into the elevator. He got out. The doors shut. The lift would automatically travel back down to the lobby. He waited a moment. He counted in his head, five, four, three, two, one, and then the fire alarm went off, the siren woke the building, lights went on, people waking up to the emergency, except the danger wasn't a fire, they were under attack. It was at that moment when the first gun shot rang out.

Chapter Thirty

The building was screaming with sirens. The fire alarm had set off the sprinklers in the ceiling. Water dripped down into halls. People were running in every direction. The attacking men wore hoods, black hoods with holes for their eyes. They shot anyone in their path. Some of the buildings were equipped with panic rooms but no operators were able to reach them in time. The rooms were littered with bodies as the men went from room to room killing with accurate military shots to the head and heart. Gabe was locked into a lab as he powered down the servers and destroyed files. He set the back up security measures to erase agents' identities from the grid protecting everyone in the field and everyone at the base. He had designed a virus to eat the files and encrypt the data so they were unreadable and useless to intruders.

Heath was hiding on the roof. He had climbed up the tower and hidden between the insulation and the tin. Two masked men were guarding the helicopter from anyone wanting to escape. They were standing just below him when one spoke.

'How much are we getting for this again?'

'Five hundred thousand each.'

'He shot two of them in the face, they were begging for mercy with their hands up.'

'We were told to get the one they need and kill the rest. What do you care?'

'I don't.'

Heath was in shock. It was not a mistake. The first voice belonged to Keelan. The men dressed in black were military, properly trained killers from the SAS. He suddenly thought with horror of Moss lying sick in the infirmary. *They will kill her.*

He knew the men were looking for him. He was the one they had come for. If he was with Moss maybe he could bargain for her life. Heath waited in his hiding place.

The other man spoke.

‘Come on, there isn’t anybody coming up here. The elevator is damaged and there aren’t any keys. We are missing all the action.’

He listened to the men walk away, their footsteps growing fainter. He waited a minute more and then he crawled out of his hiding place.

Heath jumped from the tower landing onto Keelan who had forgotten his gun and run back for it. Both fell and then rolled onto the ground, Heath got to his feet first and lunged for the gun. His hand clamped down onto the smooth metal of the gun’s surface, Heath checked the safety was off and aimed it at Keelan.

‘You aren’t going to shoot me, are you mate?’ Keelan said in a half laugh as he got to his feet.

‘We are not mates. I thought you were a friend.’

‘I am. It wasn’t my choice. I’m just doing what I’m told.’

‘Said every weak man everywhere. You shot my friends instead.’

‘They are looking for you. They won’t shoot you.’

‘I know.’

‘Look, if you come with me now, they will stop shooting.’

‘That is not what your friend said. He said the instructions were to shoot them all.’

Keelan shrugged and then dove at the gun, trying to snatch it from Heath to gain the upper hand. Heath punched Keelan. His fist connected with the right side of Keelan’s jaw. There was a sickening crunch of bone. Keelan sprang back, as if he was burned, clutching his mouth.

‘You broke my jaw.’

Keelan charged. Heath took aim, he aimed a clean shot, and the bullet hit Keelan in the fat part of his leg. Keelan fell with a thud. Heath walked over to him. Keelan was hunched on the ground moaning.

‘I can’t have you alerting the others or trying to come after me.’

He hit Keelan across the back of the head, knocking him out. He’d be in agony in a few hours but until then he wouldn’t feel pain. Heath heard the other man coming back to check on Keelan.

‘What’s taking you so long?’

Heath slipped the gun over his shoulder with the strap and grabbed Keelan by the legs, dragging him behind the helicopter. He crouched down, waiting for the man to walk into view.

The man came up the stairs and Heath shot him the chest. *Look at my aim now, Dad.*

The man toppled, losing his balance, coming closer to the edge of the roof, he leaned and fell over the rail falling to his death onto the ground below.

Heath ran to the stairs, taking two at a time, looking for the mercenaries. To get to the infirmary he would have to go down to level three and use the connecting bridge to the other building that sat slightly behind the main structure. Heath came to the red fire door. It was propped open, *probably by Keelan on their way up to the roof looking for me.* Heath was in the fire escape stairwell, the cement stairs snaked down to the basement, and if he looked over the railing he could see the spiral they made. Two men in black masks with machine guns, came out of level four, ran up the stairs, opened the door to level five and disappeared from view. Heath could hear more gunshots, from where he was, in the insulated stairwell they sounded like small pops or rain hitting a car roof. He had to hurry.

He ran down, his feet barely touching ground, as he raced to save Moss. As he passed level five, the door swung open, so Heath launched his shoulder at the door using his entire weight crushing the door shut again. He scrambled for a handle to break and was surprised to find a bolt attached to the door. It was a safety precaution so a person in the fire escape could lock the door from the outside. *For a situation like this.* The men were yelling and pushing against the door. Heath pulled the bolt, it was firm and heavy, he pulled it a bit harder, frantic now as the men had slightly wedged the door open and a man's hand had appeared through the crack searching for the bolt halfway down the door. Heath threw himself against the door again and the door crashed down on the hand, a man cried out and the hand drew back and Heath pulled the bolt closed. The door indented as the men began to shoot at the door. Heath kept running.

When he got to level three, he heard the men from level five break the door and force their way back into the stairwell. They would be coming for him now. He pressed his ear to the door on his level and checked the door again. He swiped his watch on the keypad and the door electronically sealed shut. He could see the safety lights were on and strips of yellow light illuminated the way like in a plane or theatre.

He got down closer to the ground, gun ready and half crawled and crouched along the side wall. A black masked man guarding the level walked out from behind a beam and saw Heath. Heath froze. The man froze, he too did not move, instead he watched him for a moment. *He is SAS, trained to kill.* Time seemed to slow down as Heath found the trigger on his gun and hit the man cleanly in the shoulder. The man had not even grabbed his weapon. He fell heavily on a wall, sliding down leaving a long scarlet smear of blood.

Heath didn't look back. There was no time for thoughts or horror at what he had done. The bridge was the type that was built so people could walk between two buildings undercover. It was in the open but it was covered by a roof and safety glass. Anyone walking on the floors below would have a clear visual of him as he ran across. He got to the bridge. Looking down he saw no one. The men coming down the stairwell had not yet breached level three.

Taking a breath, closing his eyes for a moment, Heath prepared himself for what lay on the other side. What he could find. He sprinted across the bridge, running faster than he had ever run. He hoped that if he had been seen, they did not know it was him yet.

He swiped his watch again at the door to the infirmary but it did not beep. The unit was broken, it had been smashed from the wall with all of its silver wires hanging from the back. Heath saw too, that the glass of the door was broken. Pushed out so someone could gain access. *I'm too late.*

Heath could hear voices. He scrambled through the door and looked around for somewhere to hide. He had no ammunition left so he threw the gun under the table. Heath saw a cupboard to his left and yanked it open. Inside were three or four white lab coats hanging crisply on hooks. He got in and draped the coats over himself, concealing his presence. He'd left the door open.

The voices got louder. Heath recognised the voice. It was Commander Jeffrey. He was speaking into a radio intercom.

'F2 have you found the asset yet?'

'No, asset has not been found Sir,' a voice crackled through.

Commander Jeffrey swore.

‘F5, have you found him yet?’ No answer from F5. Heath wondered if that was Keelan’s unit.

‘F6, there is no answer from F5, please bring the hostages to me.’ Heath could hear a scuffle on the end of the line. A man’s breathless pant came through.

‘Sir, the girl is putting up a real fight.’

‘Kill her then. I don’t care. We don’t get paid if we don’t find the boy.’ He was talking about Moss. Heath was too late. Commander Jeffery walked away and Heath could no longer hear what he was saying so he crept out of the cupboard and moved quietly around the beam.

Suddenly, a man came through another part of the infirmary dragging something behind him. Heath saw it was Moss, she looked terrible. She had a cut lip and was limping on her injured leg. Heath was pleased to note the man who had captured her, had deep scratches on his face and what looked like a broken nose. *She had put up a fight.*

‘What do I do with her?’ the man asked.

‘Put her with the others,’ the Commander said.

The man walked away, pushing Moss in front of him.

‘Come on, get a move on,’ he said cruelly as he kicked her. Moss hissed.

‘Put her on the chopper. It should have landed in the courtyard by now.’

Commander Jeffery followed him out.

Heath had been concentrating so much on the scene he had let his guard down. It was a grave mistake. Heath heard a click. He turned around to see a gun with a silencer pointing directly at his face.

The man said nothing. He pointed at the stairs leading down and out into the lobby. Heath began walking towards them, the man following behind him, never once moving the gun from its position. *Aimed at my head.*

Heath started to sniffle. Like he was crying. The man snorted and dug the gun into his neck. As the man moved his arm closer to Heath, Heath swung his body around in a half turn, twisting the man's arm and wrist still holding the gun and then swung with his other elbow, directly into the man's face.

Heath connected with bone and tissue. The man stumbled backwards. Heath jumped forward, punching the man again in the face, once, twice, and a third time. The man attacked back, launching his body onto Heath's and grabbing on, all the while punching him in the ribs and then the kidneys. Heath threw him off, kicking him and then wrestling on the ground for the gun. Heath regained his footing, and stamped on the man's fingers, the gun dropped out of his grip, Heath picked it up and pointed it at the man, lying in sweat and blood on the ground.

The man's body heaved. Heath felt blood drip down his face into his eye. He wiped it on his shirt. Heath could hear the sound of the chopper.

'You're too late to save your friends.'

Heath pointed at the little radio attached to the man's belt.

'Pick it up,' he ordered.

The man unclipped the radio.

'Tell them you have found me,' Heath ordered. 'Do it!'

Heath threatened him with the gun, the man reluctantly pressed the button.

'This is F12. I have located the asset.'

‘F12, Kill the asset and return to the entrance. Orders have changed,’

Commander Jeffrey’s voice came out over the radio.

Heath kicked him, the man grunted in pain. ‘Ask him why the orders have changed?’

‘We are not trained to ask questions. He will suspect.’

‘Do it!’

Heath reached down and pressed the intercom for him, forcing the man to speak.

‘This is F12. Why have our orders changed?’

‘Tell Heath we have located his father. He is of no more use.’

The intercom went silent. Heath was about to ask a question when a small red dot appeared on the man’s forehead and a second later, a sniper shot was blown through his head, killing him instantly.

Heath moved away from the windows. He ran down the stairs. He could hear the chopper getting louder. His lungs began their warning ache but he didn’t stop. He reached the courtyard, bursting through the doors just as the chopper left the ground, Heath could see Moss sitting in a seat opposite the Commander, and she was tied up with her hands bound behind her. Heath scanned the chopper and he saw a few surviving SAS soldiers pointing guns at something on the ground. He looked, squinting his eyes as the chopper picked up speed. It was the rest of the hostages, his friends Hando, Gabe and in an unexpected twist, Olivia.

Chapter Thirty-One

It was the early hours of the morning. Heath walked slowly back into the eerily empty and noiseless main building. The destruction and horror of the night’s events was

evident, holes in the walls from the machine guns, the lift blackened with soot and ash, and worse, the bodies Heath moved carefully around avoiding looking at the faces of the dead agents and recruits. He saw a recruit he knew, her hands folded peacefully beside her. She had been shot in the back as she tried to run. *Cowards*, Heath thought bitterly. There would be people arriving soon, surely someone in Canberra knew about the attack by now and were sending help. *They don't know it was the SAS who were behind it*. Heath had to get off the Island. He could not trust that those coming were friend, when in fact they could be enemy.

Heath turned away from the charred bodies, some had been set alight after they were shot. Most had been gunned down before they had a chance to move, from their beds or from where they tried to escape. *A massacre*. Now they lay huddled on the ground or slumped over as if they were all under a spell in a hundred year old sleep.

Heath pushed a beam out of the way and opened the door to the stair well. He had taken a Glock from the body of an insurgent who had been one of the few shot by the agents. He held it now, ready to use in case there was anybody left but he shouldn't have been afraid, overnight, it had become a ghost city. He got to the roof and without a word took the helicopter keys out of his pocket. The keys fell out of his hand as he drew his gun. Keelan stood there, soiled and bloodied holding his weapon, directly at Heath. Both stood in a silent standoff, each looking at the other with anger and fear. Guns ready, aimed to kill. Neither would miss at this range.

'They are all gone Keelan. They left you behind,' Heath spoke first.

'Are you going to kill me now too?' Keelan could hardly speak, his jaw broken and his words came out mangled.

'No.'

Heath looked at Keelan and felt sorry for him. He felt sorry for everyone on the Island. Heath had killed people and had failed to rescue his friends and his dad was in danger and he did not have the strength or desire to kill anyone else, not even a rat like Keelan. Heath lowered his gun.

‘I have enough blood on my hands.’

Heath picked up the keys from the ground and walked away from Keelan. He braced himself for a bullet but it didn’t come. Heath walked over to the helicopter, opened the door and pulled himself into the cockpit. He started the engine. The helicopter whirred to life.

A message flashed on his watch.

45 Alexander Parade.

Williamsville.

Heath set the controls and the helicopter took off, clumsily hovering above the roof, and then moving into forward flight, he flew away from the Island towards Sydney and whoever had sent the mysterious message.

PRIME MINISTER SELLS WALKER AND CO. TO RIMINGTON AIMES FOR SMALL SUM

By Megan Woods

In a shocking turn of events, Prime Minister James Towing has sold the huge cattle station Walker and Co. to the Rimington Aimes Group overnight. The deal was sealed, sources report, for the relatively small sum of \$500 million.

Towing has overruled the Federal Government's bid to keep the property in the country's list of assets stating 'innovation' and 'a need to keep the country free of debt.'

Both parties are calling for Towing's resignation stating he is not operating in the public's best interest. Towing is claiming the money would be used to strengthen National Security and launch his new War on Terror campaign in response to the recent terror attacks.

Opposition leader Kenneth Hill was quoted 'This is a time when Australia is at its most vulnerable. We should be operating cautiously and protecting our resources in every way.'

Kenneth Hill was a strong opponent against Rimington Aimes's previous takeover of the big four banks in 2010.

Towning was unavailable to comment as this went to print as he was having a minor surgery at the Melbourne Hospital after sustaining an injury to his hand.

Chapter Thirty-Two

It was a rough landing, the wind and the angle combined with Heath's limited piloting experience created a vacuum effect where gravity took control and the helicopter lowered itself to the ground, unevenly with a series of sways and jerks. Heath knew that Sydney Air Traffic control would have registered the helicopter as an agency plane so there would be no problem with landing in a suburban street.

Heath had used the built in GPS to guide him to the Western suburbs. The chopper had landed in a small park opposite a terraced white cottage. It had a nicely trimmed lawn and a red slatted brick roof. There were two windows at the front, with big steel bars attached. *Not surprising in this part of Sydney.* The house had a stone fence and a small white steel gate. Heath observed no one near the house or anywhere on the street, even though there were many houses packed together like teabags.

It was only when he went to move that he realised how stiff he was. His legs were bruised and cut, his hands were bloody and he'd ripped off two fingernails sometime during the attack. He hadn't even noticed the throb in his fingers or the bruising around his knuckles from the punches he'd inflicted. He hadn't looked at himself in a mirror since yesterday. If he had he would have seen a strong jaw, dirt and ash covering his blonde hair and that he was in dire need of a shave and a shower.

With his backpack slung over one shoulder, gun tucked securely into the back pocket of his pants, he walked out of the park and over to the house. Heath pushed the little gate open, it squeaked a little and stepped onto the cement drive. *This is the correct address.* He walked up three or five steps to the front door, looking around, aware that this could be a trap. There was an intercom. He pressed the doorbell symbol and a chime echoed through the house. He waited.

The door was wooden with chipped paint. He heard someone coming. Whoever it was, wasn't in a hurry. From the knocks and sounds coming from behind the door, the person was unbolting many locks. The door swung inwards, and an older woman with short cropped greying hair, a knitted woollen jumper with a red apple on it and wrinkles around her eyes stood there. She looked to be in her late sixties.

'You are late. Come inside. You look terrible.'

'I left the helicopter in the park.' He said as he followed her into the house. She remained at the door, she poked her head outside and looked around sharply, satisfied, she closed and re-bolted the door. *She was expecting me.*

'Don't worry about it. I'll take care of it.'

The woman shuffled Heath down a long hallway with doors leading off into rooms and bathrooms. Ahead of him was the kitchen. It was old and dated, with lots of shelves and cupboards with an odd assortment of handles like they had been replaced too many times. In the middle of the room was a wooden table with white legs. The table was varnished and had been scrubbed so many times the paint had rubbed off. Heath dropped his bag and pulled out a chair gratefully sinking into the plastic seat. The woman busied herself putting the kettle on and setting out two mugs. Into both, she spooned laden teaspoons of instant coffee and a dash of sugar. She waited for the water to boil and then filled the cups finishing off with creamy milk.

She set the steaming mug in front of Heath and he cupped his hands around its warmth. It was only when she sat down at a chair herself that she spoke again.

‘I’m Philippa.’

‘You sent me the message?’ Heath asked.

‘Yes. We heard about the attack this morning. Only one survivor. You.’

‘They have taken people- they have hostages.’

‘How many?’

‘Four. I couldn’t save them, I didn’t get there in time.’

‘What happened is not your fault.’

‘I know the people who did it.’ Heath said bitterly.

Philippa took a sip of her coffee. She waited for Heath to continue.

‘It was SAS. I recognised one of them, someone I thought was my friend. We had trained with them earlier in the week.’

‘We had wondered how they got onto the Island undetected.’

Heath looked at her with anger.

‘It’s because they were already there!’

Philippa didn’t look fussed at all. She took another sip of her drink. Then she got up from the table and went to a drawer. She pulled out a needle, a scalpel and some tweezers.

‘There’s not much time. I have to remove your chip. It will hurt but I need to remove you from the tracking grid, it might be too late even now.’

Heath proffered her his arm. She slipped his shirt up exposing his upper arm. She tore up a packet removing an antiseptic wipe. Then she picked up the scalpel.

‘Sorry,’ she said as she cut deeply into his arm. Heath groaned. She dug into his arm with the tool, locating and cutting out the tracking device. She dropped the

scalpel on the table and picked up the tweezers carefully removing it and placing it in front of him.

‘Hold your arm above your head to help the bleeding. I will sew the wound closed in a moment.’

Phillipa moved quickly. She held the chip in her hand and picked up a heavy stone pestle from the kitchen bench, placing the black square on the bench, she was just about to bring the pestle down hard on the chip when Heath cried out.

‘Wait!’

Phillipa stopped. Heath was holding up his arm, staunching the blood as he walked over to the bench and looked down at the chip.

‘I will need that working so they can find me.’

Chapter Thirty-Three

‘Are you the supervisor?’ a security guard asked the driver of the large work van parked at the security station of Fullman Stadium.

‘Yes, we are from Parkton Signs, we are installing the new sponsors signage today.’

‘Yeah they told us you were coming. Got an email about it this morning.’

The guard went back inside the hut and picked up a form.

‘I need you to sign this and you are good to go,’ the guard said, holding out a pen and a clipboard. Dmitri picked up the pen and scrawled an illegible signature.

‘Have a good day mate.’

‘You too,’ Dmitri said.

Dmitri looked around at the three other men in the van, one in the passenger seat, two in the back. No one spoke as he put the van into first gear and drove into the stadium. He parked the car on the green turf. The roof of the stadium was open but the day was overcast. The grass was patchy in many areas- some of it real, some of it fake.

All the men wore beige pants and navy polo shirts with Parkton Signs logo embroidered on the upper left side. They waited, sitting in the vehicle.

Dmitri's phone buzzed with a text message.

Cameras disabled for 30 minutes.

He nodded and the men began to move quickly and efficiently. The men in the back removed the signs. They would be installing them as they were hired to do.

Dmitri and the other man got out of the truck and went around to the back of the van. They removed a medium sized cardboard box, about the size of a small suitcase. It too, was covered in the Parkton Signs logo. Dmitri opened the box very carefully. The other man took a step back from the truck.

Dmitri laughed. 'It is fine Moshi, nothing to worry about until I connect it via Bluetooth.'

The man did not move. Dmitri stopped smiling,

'Go and dig the hole then,' he snapped.

The man moved carefully to the other side of the van, sliding open the back door and taking out a large metal shovel.

'I want it deep and I want the turf to look undisturbed.'

Moshi leaned the shovel against the car and unpacked a heavy crate, lifting it out of the van and placing it on the ground. Inside was turf they would use to disguise the device.

Moshi took the shovel and walked out onto the field. He began to dig. Dmitri observed the two men putting up the new signs. They were working quickly, an efficient team. He scanned over to Moshi, sweating in the sun. Dmitri rolled his eyes and checked his watch. He moved from where he had been standing in the shade and returned to the van. Moshi saw him and stopped shovelling, waiting. He ran the shovel back to the vehicle. The other two men were polishing the signs.

Dmitri picked up the box. The chemists had assured him that the box would be stable as long as he didn't drop it or shake it. It had been sealed for safe transportation in the van. He walked over the field to the hole Moshi had dug. He slowly bent at the knees and placed the box with two hands into the hole. It wasn't as deep as he would have liked. He opened the lid, observing the several large copper cylinders and the wires connected to a phone. He swiped the screen on the phone and typed in a code.

6748.

He pulled out his phone from his pocket and paired it with the device typing in the code 6748 when prompted.

He breathed a sigh of relief as he closed the lid. He began to funnel soil back into the hole with his hands. They could not use the shovel. He noticed Moshi did not come back to help, but stood behind the vehicle watching him. *Coward.*

He filled and filled, his fingernails and palms covered with dirt. He worked the soil over the box with his hands, gently patting it down. When he was done, the soil looked disturbed but level. He moved the crate close to him and got out the new turf. He knew that Fullman Stadium replaced turf almost every week due to a combination of poor management, weather, a faulty irrigation system and damage from the four football teams who trained there.

He lay the turf down, in a brick like pattern. Filling in the holes and cracks like a professional with dirt, the grass looked fresh with no hint of what was buried beneath it. He looked at his watch. The cameras would be working again in two minutes. He picked up the crate.

‘Moshi, water,’ he called out.

Moshi pulled from the back of the van, a blue plastic water container hooked up to a sprinkler system. He ran with it bouncing against his legs to where Dmitri was crouching.

‘Wash the grass down,’ Dmitri instructed, returning to the van.

Moshi turned a button on the top of the lid and the water rained out from the oversized watering can. He wet the new turf down while the van’s engine started up. Moshi looked up in fright at the noise and pelted back towards the vehicle with the water container in his arms. The van began to move, Moshi scrambled at the door, trying to get the handle, clumsily grabbing at it, as the van picked up speed, he managed to open it and threw the water container and himself inside. He slammed the door shut, breathing deeply. Moshi shrieked in terror as the bodies of the two sign men fell towards him. The van stopped. Dmitri turned from the driver’s seat and looked at Moshi.

‘No!’ Moshi begged, putting his hands up to shield his face.

Without a word, Dmitri pulled out the gun, with the silencer attached, from where he had placed it on the front seat and shot Moshi.

Moshi’s body fell backwards over the crate sagging over the bodies of the other dead men. Dmitri cracked his neck. He put the gun down and turned on the radio, the song playing was *Sympathy for the Devil*. Dmitri hummed along as the van

pulled out of the stadium driving past the new signs installed for the new sponsor of Fullham Stadium – The Rimington Aimes Group.

Chapter Thirty- Four

After Phillipa had sewn his arm up, she showed him a room where he could shower and change and if possible, sleep.

‘If you can’t sleep, have a rest,’ she said kindly as she was leaving the room.

‘Am I safe here?’

‘They will be coming but there a few devices set up to help slow them down.’

‘How long have you been doing this job?’

‘Since I retired from active service.’ Phillipa said.

So she was a spy.

Heath lay down on the bed, he tried to stay awake but his eyes felt thick and sore and his head became to loll on the pillow with drowsiness and soon he was asleep. Curled in his hand was the tracking chip.

A few hours later Heath was woken by Philippa, she pulled him from the bed, his backpack in her hands.

‘They are coming. I’ve packed your backpack with everything you need.’

She took him by the hand and pulled him out in the hallway, she opened another a door.

‘Do you still need the tracking device?’

Heath nodded.

‘Good. This door will take you out into the garden. Follow the path all the

way to the back and into next door. From there you are on your own.'

She patted Heath on the shoulder.

'I always liked your dad. We never worked together but he has used the house a few times since I took over. He told me to tell you it will be all right. You look just like him.'

Finally, someone had confirmed his suspicion, something he had already guessed, the knowledge that had sat just hovering, uncovered in his mind until this moment: his father was a spy.

Chapter Thirty-Five

Heath moved quickly down the path, following Phillipa's directions. He had to get to the city. Heath's father Spencer had worked at *The Australian* for over ten years, but travelled a lot. He would be left at home with Olivia while his dad wrote assignments and reviews on hotels and cruises. *Or that's what I thought, all this time. The Australian's* main office was in the CBD.

He jumped the fence into a neighbour's yard and into the next street over. Heath thought about stealing a car but he couldn't risk drawing attention to himself too quickly or risk being pulled up the police. The street was empty of people as Heath continued walking along until he turned into Honeysuckle Drive. *Must be a bus or a tram somewhere?* Honeysuckle Drive was peaceful and tidy, a few corner shops opening for trade, a post office and a hairdresser. It was leafy and green. It would have been pleasant if not for the unease that spread across Heath's shoulders as he watched and waited. There was a car parked, stationary, on the other side of the road.

As Heath passed, the car U-turned and drove behind him at a slow pace. Heath kept his walking pace exactly the same, but looked at his surroundings.

Heath saw a bus stop on the other side of the road and he checked both directions as he crossed the street using those few seconds to eyeball the driver of the green car. The car was tinted and it was too dark to see who was driving.

Heath reached the bus stop and squinted at the printed timetable attached to the sign. He pretended to read the times, trying to work out which bus would take him nearest to where he needed to go, but kept an ear out for the car. It had parked a little way off and the engine turned off. *Whoever they are, they are prepared to wait. Wait for what? Instructions?*

More shops were opening up and a café was putting out chairs and tables in the sun. The waitress smiled at Heath, Heath ignored her. She went back inside, disappointed. Heath was standing, quite exposed on the curb waiting for the next bus, which according to the bus schedule and his watch was running a minute late. The bus came lumbering, grinding heavily around the corner. He could see it was the 414. *Pull up, pull up.* The bus came to a slow stop with a whooshing of air, as the bus decompressed and the electronic doors opened. Heath could see the car out the back window still parked in the same spot. He pulled some change from his pocket and gave it to the driver. He got his ticket and took a seat close to the center, near the middle doors. The driver shut the doors and the bus moved away from the curb. Heath looked out the window again but the car was gone.

The bus picked up passengers and dropped them off at various stops along the route, every now and then Heath would check over his shoulder, looking out into the traffic, but the car did not appear again. Heath began to feel silly, doubting that the car

had been following him at all. *I guess I am getting paranoid.* And with that, he relaxed into his seat, able to close his eyes for a moment and enjoy the journey.

A lady took the seat next to him, she was elderly and frail. Heath felt sorry that she had to ride the bus. They were coming up to his stop. He reached around to the button, pressed it and the bus bell went off signalling to the driver. The bus pulled into the designated area in front of Rosewood Railway Station and a ton of people emptied out, a hub of footsteps running down stairs and down to the platforms. Heath picked up his backpack and awkwardly moved past the lady. She did not move and Heath had to slide himself out of the seat and out into the aisle.

‘Sorry,’ he mumbled as he slipped past trying not to bump her.

‘Kids,’ she said irritability, under her breath.

Heath jumped from the bus and immediately went to the train booth but it was closed so he had to use the last of his change to buy a ticket from the machine for the train ride, forgetting in the bustle to look around. He waited, in the sun, along with everyone else on Platform One.

It was a rundown train station with plenty of black graffiti tags painted on the concrete walls and stairs.

Ten minutes later, the train shuffled into the platform with a chugging noise and screeching of wheels on the tracks. Heath boarded the last compartment and took a rear-facing seat near the back. The train journey was uneventful but Heath had not stepped foot on a train since the bombing and he was uneasy. In normal circumstances he would have taken his phone from his pocket and occupied himself with a game but he did not. The phone stayed untouched in his pocket. He was wary of the train, waiting for a bump or a halt signalling a problem, he was alert in a way he had not been before all this started. He did not relax again until the train pulled up at Central

Railway Station in the inner city and placed his feet securely back onto the platform and walked out of the station. There were work crews everywhere and traffic was directed away from the blocked off sites. These were cordoned off with police tape and scaffolding. Heath shuddered. The tunnel was blocked off so he exited the station on the side street exit on the footpath. He could see *The Australian* building a few hundred metres away.

When he got to the building he took the closest escalator to look for the entry to the Sydney Central Office Tower. Christmas shoppers buzzed around buying last minute gifts and wasting money on wrapping paper and stocking fillers. Heath looked at the bright, colourful displays of Christmas lights and musical scenes with fake snow and snowflakes in the shop windows. He had forgotten it was almost Christmas. *The Christmas music should have given it away.* Everywhere he turned, in every shop and court, the sweeping jolly sounds of *Jingle Bells* and *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas* heralded the end of the year and the upcoming holiday.

A bank called *Rimington Aimes* occupied most of the office tower and the *The Australian* offices were on the 46th floor.

Heath walked through the shopping centre, looking at the families bickering with each other, dad's buying Lego for their children, mum's pushing trollies laden with festive food for Christmas feasts. For a moment, all he could feel was an overwhelming sense of loneliness. He pulled his backpack straps tighter across his shoulders and found the elevator. He pressed the button and waited for it. The lift was busy, dropping families at the lower level car parks and department store shopping levels. When it arrived the double glass and chrome doors opened and Heath got on. It was made of transparent glass. Heath looked down, even the bottom panel on which he stood, was glass. Looking through he saw the elevators mechanics and pulleys

working. He pressed the switch for the 46th floor and the elevator sped upwards quickly. The floor sailed away from him as the elevator rose. Looking at the ground beneath him growing smaller and more distant, Heath could appreciate the relative comfort and safety the old fashioned steel elevators felt when you couldn't see how fast you were moving or how high up you were going.

The elevator chimed, signalling the destination and the doors slid open again, depositing Heath on the correct floor. Heath got out.

Come and get me.

There were only two doors at the end of the passageway. One was marked with a sign that said fire escape and the other door was unmarked. He went up to the plain door and turned the handle expecting it to be locked but the door opened.

Chapter Thirty-Six

As he expected, the office was empty. Inside were several desks with computers on them, a photocopier and scanner against the rear wall and several bookcases with dictionaries and other reference books. He went to the nearest computer. The computer started up and the screensaver of a pretty blue sky came up first and then a prompt for login name and password. Heath didn't know them.

He turned the computer off and looked around the room. He went over to the fax machine and opened the tray. Nothing. He pressed the print button and the machine whirred up. Heath pulled the blank page from the printer. He went over to the books. They were old and dusty, out of print tomes. A yellowing, thin spine caught his attention. The title of the quarterly was Archery: Guide to An Ancient Art.

He pulled the book out. Inside the back cover, underneath the glue, was a piece of paper. Heath pulled it out. It was a picture of CEO David Smider from Rimington Aimes Group.

That's the guy who owns this building I'm in, the banking hotshot.

On the back was a list of businesses Rimington Aimes owned. The list was exhaustive. There were also family names. Smider's wife, Malory, his children, grandchildren and his personal assistant, Dmitri Kovavitch.

Was my dad writing an article on the guy? He's rich and powerful. Corrupt?

Heath remembered something he had heard on Tern Island about False Flag Operations. They were operations designed to look like they were designed and carried out by one group rather than the real perpetrators who executed and planned them.

He put the picture back inside the book and into the bookcase as he heard the elevator on the floor, chime and the door slide open. *It's them. They are coming for me! Hide!*

Heath shut off the lights. He pulled the tracking device off his backpack and left it on the desk. He hid beside the bookcase and got out his gun, clicking the safety off.

The door of the office opened. He could hear footsteps as someone crept quietly in. He heard a beeping as they checked something and walked over to the desk, finding the discarded device. The person went out into the passageway. Heath heard him open the other door and go into the fire escape stairwell. *Looking for me.* Heath moved fast.

He ran out of the office and down the hall to the elevator, frantically pressing the button. The Rimington Aimes Group were involved in this.

He decided to run. He could not help his friends, his father if he was dead. The elevator arrived just as the man returned from checking the stairwell. He saw Heath, just as Heath stepped onto the elevator. The man started to run towards the doors. The doors didn't shut. *Why wouldn't the doors shut?* Heath hadn't pressed the ground floor button. He swung his arm out, pressing the button, once, twice, three times and using his other hand he pushed the close doors button at the same time. The man was armed and running fast. Just as the doors were closing, with about five inches to go, the man's arm with gun attached shot forward through the door trying to force the doors to open again. Heath kept pressing the buttons and the doors crunched down on the man's arm and he cried out on the other side. The arm wiggled out of the gap and the doors slammed shut. Heath slumped against the wall while the elevator went down.

Heath breathed a sigh of relief as a horrific thought overcame him. *KARAS was the group taking credit for the terrorist attacks- the bombing and the poisoning. He'd seen the videos on YouTube himself. What if they weren't a foreign national group like the Government had claimed? What if they were home-grown? What if they were a false flag operation? What if my father was undercover and found out that the government bombed their own train and poisoned innocent people? That would be a conspiracy worth killing for.*

Something was wrong. The elevator had stopped. He looked at the little red screen above the door. It said Level 31. He was not supposed to stop here. His hand closed around his gun as he heard a familiar voice.

'Hello Heath. We've been waiting for you to arrive,' as everything faded to black.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

When he woke, his head throbbed and his vision was shadowy. His backpack was gone. He checked his jeans, his gun had been removed as well as his phone, photograph and lighter. He was trapped in a cage with bars. He shook the bars, pounding on them and kicking them with his feet. He shouted and yelled. Screamed for help but no one came. *No one can hear me, I'm right in the heart of their building. I walked right into it. I came to them. Idiot. Get a grip!* Heath looked around. There were other cages of various sizes. They were empty. It had been a storeroom at some point, there were boxes stacked and flattened against the walls. The room was cool, almost cold. He was thirsty. He waited in the dark airless room for a long time. He must have dozed off at some point because the next thing he knew, Dmitri was kicking his cage.

‘Wake up dog.’

Heath said nothing. He looked at Dmitri defiantly.

‘You should remember from last time that I can make you scream.’

Heath did remember. He remembered all too well but he was stronger now. He could resist more.

‘You look better on YouTube. Not so fat,’ Heath said.

Dmitri laughed.

‘Smider will like you.’

He pulled a key from his pocket and unlocked the cage, hauling Heath out by the arm.

Heath went to punch him, but Dmitri stopped him.

‘Don’t even think about it or I’ll kill your friends.’

So they are still alive. Heath didn't struggle. Dmitri pulled him out of the room and through another door into what was looked like a typical office. Lots of desks, computers and dividing walls except the office was empty. Dmitri walked him through the office and into a room at the back. It was a boardroom. Large desk with comfortable chairs and a small elderly man sitting at the head of it.

Dmitri shoved Heath down into a chair and left the room.

Heath looked at the man.

So this was Smider, *Chairman, Billionaire, Murderer, and Terrorist.* Smider looked like your typical elderly grandparent you'd see at the park or at the grocery shop. He certainly didn't look like a wealthy terrorist. *Megalomaniac.*

'Where are my friends?' Heath spat.

Smider smiled.

'Would you like some water?' he said pouring himself a glass and one for Heath. He moved it with a frail hand towards him.

Heath didn't touch it.

'Suit yourself,' he said in a silvery voice.

'Where is my father?' Heath asked.

'If I knew the answer to that I wouldn't need you,' Smider said, almost to himself. Heath understood. While he thought he was being clever and coming up with a lame plan to rescue his friends, he had walked straight into a much deeper dangerous trap.

'You need me to get him to come to you?'

'Clever boy!' Smider said, clapping his hands.

Heath picked up the water. He put the cups to his lips and drained the glass. Smider watched him.

‘Why do you want my dad anyway?’ Heath asked.

‘Your dad knows too much.’

‘You mean he found out that KARAS is a front for Rimington Aimes and that you are behind the terrorist attacks working with our OWN government.’

‘Your dad was a good spy but he is an even better journalist. It runs in the family it seems.’

Heath looked at Smider. He was the opposite of a terrorist, or what everyone pictured when they thought of one. He was old and infirm and weak. He looked harmless. No one would ever guess that he was a traitor.

‘Why?’ Heath asked.

‘Why?’ Smider mirrored him. ‘Why? They always ask why?’ He gleefully slapped the table, almost excited.

Heath waited. Smider snapped his head back to Heath and in that moment, Heath saw the man underneath, the menacing, cruel, deceptive person that Smider really was.

‘Fun. Boredom. Money. A lot of money,’ Smider answered. ‘But really, it’s all about power.’

He shook his head, ‘I have a lot of money, too much in fact but I wanted something more. It occurred to me that I am old. People have a certain amount of respect for me because of who I am and what I have built but I don’t have or carry the same amount of influence I once did. People pitied me. I could see it. I hated it. I wanted to be feared. I wanted to control. I wanted the government answering to me.’

‘I pity you old man,’ said Heath quietly.

Smider tapped a wiry little finger with a curled nail on a buzzer on the desk. Dmitri appeared seconds later, summoned by his boss.

‘Bring the first two to me.’

Dmitri nodded and hurried out.

‘It was such an effort to catch you. I’ve been so close so many times, but you always evaded me. Then today, you walked right into my building,’ Smider laughed. It was a high-pitched, childish giggle. It made Heath flinch. *He’s mad.*

Dmitri was coming back. There was shuffling and shouting. Heath could hear a woman’s voice. It was loud and fearless.

‘Where is your father? We intercepted a note sent to you so we know you have been in contact.’

‘Why does everyone want my father? What is it about him that is so special you’d risk being exposed?’

Smider chuckled. ‘No one’s told you then?’

Heath shook his head. *Only what I’ve guessed.*

‘Archers shine in the darkest of places,’ repeated Smider. ‘You and your father are special. You come from a long line of spies. You have quite a family history of saving the world, so to speak.’ Smider went to say more but was interrupted by loud noises at the door.

Dmitri shoved Olivia and Hando into the boardroom. He pushed them into chairs at the other end of the table. He pulled a gun on them. He looked furious.

‘Everything alright Dmitri?’ Smider asked

‘This one,’ (indicating Olivia) ‘Bit me,’ said Dmitri.

Smider ignored this. He looked back at Heath.

‘I do not like asking questions twice Heath. I answered your questions now it is your turn to answer some for me.’

Heath looked at Olivia. She looked terrible.

She was thinner than he'd ever seen her. The bones in her neck, stood out like little sticks. Her eyes were hollow and she had a black eye- puffy and swollen. She had a cut lip and one of her hands was curled up into a tight fist. There was chunks of hair missing from her scalp and bloody patches left. Heath looked at Hando. He was filthy and covered in grime. His long curly hair was matted and he was covered in bruises. His shoulder looked dislocated. Heath was angry. He felt himself rising out of the chair.

Smider gave him a little wave to sit down again and Dmitri pushed the gun up against Hando's temple. Whatever had happened to them, Heath realised, Hando and Olivia were afraid.

Heath sat down.

'I don't know where my father is. I have not seen him since he was taken six months ago from a funeral we were attending'

Smider brightened.

'Yes, your friend Noakes, wasn't it?'

It was Heath's turn to look surprised. He felt his mouth slacken and a terrible wall of alarm hit him with the force of a cyclone. Smider was waiting for him to ask.

'How do you know about Noakes?' Heath managed.

'Tut Tut, boy, keep up. Your friend Noakes was a nosy fellow. Never really believing his dad was dead.

'His dad died from lung cancer and you killed Noakes with your bomb. He was on the train and then he was gone, you killed him, you're a murderer.'

Smider sighed and rolled his eyes.

'Noakes died because he saw his father on the platform. His father worked for me in my labs as head scientist. For the most part, as a good and loyal employee,

except, on the day in question, he got an attack of guilt or remorse and tried to stop events from taking place. Noakes saw him and got back on the train. It was your friend's fault he died. If he had been with you, he would have lived, I guess.' Smider said all this nonchalantly as if Noakes meant less than a piece of cheese.

'So I was meant to die too, the bombing was for me?'

'NO, stupid boy!' Smider snapped. 'The bombing had to happen because the Prime Minister found out about my involvement in KARAS. I needed him gone. He wouldn't join the club.' Smider said sulkily. 'You were just collateral, to threaten your father.'

Heath leaned back in the chair. Everything began to make sense, the pieces falling into a neat cube of greed, power and death.

'So my father has information that could expose you?' Heath said.

Smider snarled.

'Yes, the damn Prime Minister faxed him evidence before I could kill him.'

It was Heath's turn to smile. Smider looked at Heath smiling and lost his temper.

'TELL ME WHERE YOUR FATHER IS.'

'I don't know,' Heath said.

Smider red in the face, nodded at Dmitri.

Dmitri put the gun against Hando's head. Hando whimpered.

Heath started to get up again.

'Please, Heath tell him, if you know. Tell him where your dad is.'

'I don't know,' Heath said.

Smider nodded at Dmitri again and Dmitri shot Hando. Blood sprayed on the table and onto Olivia. Brain matter was stuck to the table in little goblets that looked like mince. Heath gasped in horror.

Hando's body fell forward, hitting the table with a loud crack.

Heath looked at Smider again. Smider was calm. His hands were carefully placed in his lap and he looked like he was enjoying a show or an opera.

'Your father has the documents. I need them back.'

Heath got out of his seat. He tried not to look at the blood. With tears at the corners of his eyes he said.

'I don't know where the documents are. A photo of you was all I could find.'

Dmitri picked up Olivia's hand, the one that was curled up and separated a finger. He took it in his hands and broke it. There was a sickening snap of bone. Olivia moaned.

'Stop it. Stop it. I don't know,' Heath said.

Smider remained calm, in total control. It seemed impossible that a moment earlier he had been shouting.

Dmitri broke another finger of Olivia's. This time she screamed. Heath winced.

'Tell me what is the point of this and I'll give you the documents,' Heath cried out in desperation, as it was a lie.

Smider sat up. 'Get his phone,' he barked. Dmitri dropped Olivia's hand and left the room. Olivia was shaking and groaning.

'I knew you would cooperate eventually and it only took two fingers. Take a seat Heath Callahan while we wait.'

Heath sat down.

'Four generations of spies in the one family.'

'What do you mean?' Heath asked.

'Great Pappy, Grandpa, Daddy Callahan and now you.' Smider said. He was toying with Heath again.

‘I’m not an Archer,’ Heath said.

Smider chortled to himself.

‘We’ll see,’ he said.

Dmitri returned with the phone. He gave it to Heath.

‘Before I open it and give it to you, I want you to let Olivia go and tell me where Moss is.’

‘Very well, the woman can go but after I have the documents.’

‘Moss as well?’ Heath negotiated.

‘Perhaps.’ Smider said.

Heath opened his phone. There was nothing he could do. He opened his phone and it the phone of the table. They would kill them all when they found out he was bluffing.

Smider’s chair scraped back. The old man got up. Dmitri went over to help him stand.

‘ I will kill you Smider,’ Heath said.

Smider ignored him. Leaning on Dmitri, he limped to the boardroom door. There was a loud noise outside. It was a grenade. Smoke began to fill the room. Heath, Olivia and Smider began to cough. Dmitri was flat on the ground, a bullet straight through his head. Smider pushed his body against the door, opening it and found himself looking up into a pair of burning blue eyes.

‘Finally, a real opponent,’ said Smider.

Heath started to untie Olivia but looked up to see who Smider had meant.

He was shocked to see a familiar face armed with a grim expression and two Remington assault rifles.

His father.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

His father was dressed in a full Kevlar fibre suit. He wore a black combat helmet and ballistic vest. Heath was standing behind Smider when his father addressed him.

‘Is there anyone else in the building?’

‘Yes, a recruit, her name is Moss. Maybe another hostage- Gabe.’

‘Ok, find her.’

From a pocket of his Kevlar he drew a stainless steel Jericho 941, Heath recognised the gun from training as a semi-automatic pistol. One of the recruits had joked about how Bruce Willis used it in the Diehard films. He handed it to Heath.

‘Get her now. We don’t have much time.’

‘What about Olivia?’

‘I’ve got her,’ said his father.

Heath was already moving. The building was unfamiliar to him. He would have to check each room. *Be alive. Be alive Moss.* He pushed the lifeless body of Hando from his mind. *Later. Think about it later.* Heath could hear men talking and laughing in one of the rooms. He looked around the corner. Six SAS guards sitting at table playing cards. *Smider was behind the attack on the island too.* He had bought the SAS with money, paying for protection and his own personal killing team.

Heath could not see Moss in the room so he carried on without disturbing them. He passed a table in the hall, on which sat his backpack and effects that were taken from his pockets. He picked up his gun and placed it back in the waistband of his jeans. He picked up his watch, phone, lighter and photo placing them in his pockets. He left the backpack behind. He checked two more rooms. Chillingly, one

room had a cell and a chair attached to some wires. There was a tray of bloody tools. Heath shivered. He wondered which of his friends had suffered in that room.

The next room held cages like the one he had been kept in. He called out.

‘Moss, Moss. It’s Heath.’

Heath listened for a response. He called out again. This time there was a small groan from the very back of the chamber. Heath ran around the cages, knocking one over. The cage made an awful crash. He found Moss in a locked cell. He looked around for the key, remembering the ring of keys Dmitri had attached to his belt. *No time*. He got the Jericho.

‘Stand back Moss.’

Moss stood back. She wore no shoes and had a black eye. Her condition was better than the others. Heath aimed at the lock, fired and it missed. The second time, he hit the locking mechanism and the door swung off its hinges.

Heath walked into the cage. He took Moss’s hand gently.

‘Come on now, it’s alright. We are leaving.’

Moss nodded and followed him out. She did not ask about Hando and Heath was grateful that he did not have to say the words. They left the room, and ran back towards the boardroom. When they passed the SAS, the guards were still deep into their game, bickering over stakes.

When they got back to the boardroom, Smider was sitting at the head of the table but Spencer was sitting beside him, gun at hand. Olivia was slumped at the table. Heath averted his eyes from the body of his friend. Moss saw the body and stifled a cry. She began to sob quietly into her palm.

‘Your father and I were just having a chat about a few things,’ Smider explained politely.

‘Yes, about how you blackmailed a Prime Minister and assassinated another, how you poisoned thousands of innocent people including children to manipulate the government and how you have hidden more bombs so the country votes in Martial Law giving you ultimate power because you control and pay our defence forces.’

‘You can’t prove it and you can’t stop it,’ Smider said. ‘My endgame is to help people help themselves. Cure the sick and all that jazz.’ He smiled.

‘Your motivation is having the cures to diseases and then choosing who lives and dies- playing God can while charging billions so that only the rich can afford it,’ said his father. ‘Heath, give me your lighter.’

He held out his hand but he never once took his eyes off Smider. Heath dug in his pocket for the blue lighter, the present from Noakes, the lighter that never left his side. He pulled it out and placed it in his father’s palm.

‘Heath, get your gun and point it at him.’

Heath got out the Jericho and levelled it at Smider. With one hand, Spencer tapped the lighter on the table. Then he picked it up and unscrewed the refill lid. He tapped it again. Out fell the lighting fluid case and attached to the bottom was a blue microdot, almost invisible if you weren’t looking for it. Spencer peeled it off and held it out for Smider to see.

‘You were right about capturing my son but for the wrong reasons.’

Smider stopped smiling, his face became ashen and creased.

‘I knew Heath would never part with this lighter and I knew you would kill for this information so I had to make a quick decision. There is enough evidence on here to have you killed for treason.’

‘They don’t murder people in this country for terrorism, they jail them for a life,’ Smider retorted.

‘You think you will spend your days bribing guards in a low security complex?’ His father laughed. ‘My job in the agency, before I went undercover, was exterminating people like you.’

Smider gulped. His dad put the lighter back together and threw it to Heath. His dad smiled at him. Heath smiled back. Heath put the lighter back in his pocket.

His father got up. He turned to leave, and as he did so he brought the heel of his gun down next to Smider’s hand. Smider flinched. The older Callahan tied up Smider’s hands with a zip tie and locked him into the office bag and coat closet.

‘You will never get there in time,’ Smider said.

Heath, his father helping Olivia and Moss walked to the door. They did not turn back or acknowledge the words. It was as if he hadn’t spoken at all.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Heath rushed to the fire exit. Smider had put plans in place to stop them.

‘He controls the elevators.’

Moss ran down fire escape first. Followed by Heath, Olivia and then his father. There were 31 floors and over 1300 steps to the bottom.

They had just run past a door with a sign saying 28th floor when there was shout above them. It was the SAS. Moss and Heath picked up the pace. Spencer fired off a round into the ceiling above. Plaster fell down around their heads. They kept running. The SAS were gaining on them. Olivia was hurt and was slowing them

down. His father half carried her. They reached the bottom when the staircase stopped at the door to the main shopping centre.

‘In case anything happens to me, I believe the chemical bomb is somewhere at Fullham Stadium. There is a huge game happening there tonight, Eighty thousand tickets are sold.’

Heath nodded.

As they ran past a stall, he noted Moss grabbed herself a pair of shoes from a table. She had not spoken again since he found her in the cage.

There were police in the mall, they did not want to draw attention so they slipped the guns under their shirts and slowed to a walk. Heath did not know who they could trust. The agency was destroyed. There was no one to call. They were on their own. Heath looked around. He thought he saw an SAS trouper but he was mistaken. It was just a Christmas shopper hurrying past. The SAS had also hidden their weapons when they reached the mall. In plain clothes, they passed for civilians spreading out amongst the holiday customers looking in the crowd for a blonde boy in a torn shirt, a tall girl with brown hair, a lady with blonde hair and a man in a black jacket.

Spencer stole four hoodies from a Bonds display outside Myer. He threw a blue one at Heath, a red one at Moss and purple ones for himself and Olivia. Heath put it on, pulling the hood over his hair, disguising his features. Moss put the stolen shoes on, plain white tennis courts and then the red jumper. Heath looked at her. She seemed so familiar. He shook his head but the image stayed. Moss spotted the escalator first and they hurried to it, running up the electric steps two at a time, leading to the street.

Spencer took Heath by the arm.

‘It’s good to see you son.’

‘I missed you Dad.’

‘I know. There’s so much I have to tell you but it will have to wait. We need to get to the stadium.’

‘Ok.’

His father looked around. They were on a busy Sydney street in the late afternoon. A taxi with an available sign drove past them on the wrong side of the road. His father waved at it. The driver saw them and swerved, pulling up beside them. The taxi halting traffic for a moment as they piled in.

‘Fullman Stadium as fast as you can.’

The driver shook his head.

‘There is a big game tonight, the traffic is already gridlocked,’ said the driver as they drove away.

At any other time of day, it was less than a ten-minute journey. The cab crawled in the heavy traffic. They saw the stadium up ahead and his father handed the driver cash.

‘We’ll get out here,’ he said as they got out to walk the rest.

They got to the large gates on the west side of the Stadium where people were already crowded. His father dived under a service gate and they all followed running inside and straight out into the stands. There was a huge crew setting up at one end of the stadium for the half time show and the two teams doing warm up drills out on the field.

‘Olivia needs to go to a hospital,’

‘There is no time. I’m fine,’ said Olivia. ‘Just let me rest here for a minute.’

She sat down in a chair in the stands.

‘Look for anything that looks a little off, a little disturbed. Go with your gut, check every seat,’ his father said. His father swore under his breath and Heath saw that the attendants were already letting people into the stadium.

He ran quickly along the seats looking methodically. He tried to think like Smider. *He will want to make the biggest impact he can.* Heath looked out onto the field. The technicians and crew were covering the floor with stage at one end but the rest was grass. In the middle of the field, Heath noticed that the grass seemed to be two different shades of green. One was darker than the other and in better condition as if there was new grass and old grass. He blinked. Maybe his eyes were playing tricks. He looked again. No, he was certain. The grass was different. He yelled out for his dad as he ran out onto the field. His father and Moss ran over to him. He pointed at the ground. ‘It’s there,’ Heath said.

His father crouched down on his knees and began digging at the earth with his hands, carefully shovelling the earth away in handfuls. Heath and Moss copied him and soon they were all covered in dirt, their hands stained brown. About a metre down, his father put his hand up and they all stopped digging immediately.

‘You need to go now,’ Spencer said.

‘I can’t leave you,’ Heath replied. *Won’t.*

They stared into the hole, at a box sitting nestled in the ground, containing a bomb with enough toxins to kill everyone in the stadium and the rest of the city.

‘Take my phone and dial 000,’ instructed his father as he handed Heath the phone.

Heath took the phone and dialled 000. He asked to speak to an operator.

‘Fire. Ambulance. Police. What’s your emergency?’

‘There is a biological weapon at Fullham Stadium out on the field. Get the bomb squad. Get them all.’

He hung up the phone and tossed it aside.

‘I’m going to try to disarm it, Heath. I need you to go and get everyone out.’

Moss came over and took Heath by the hand.

Heath looked at her. ‘I can’t.’

‘Listen to me Heath, whatever happens, this is in your blood. Your grandpa, your mother and me, I am so proud of you. I will see you soon but right now I have to do this and you have to go. What have I always told you?’

Heath knew the motto off by heart. The Callahan family slogan-

‘The job always comes first.’

‘We say mission really, but same-same,’ his dad smiled. Heath tried to smile too.

His dad opened the lid and there were three wires hooked up to a phone mounted on a large canister.

‘Go.’

‘Dad. No.’

‘I need to concentrate so I choose the right wire. The detonator is always attached to both the contents of the bomb and the phone. You need to separate them to disarm it.’

Heath began to move away reluctantly.

‘I love you Heath. I’m proud of you.’

‘I love you too.’

Heath turned to look at Moss. She had a funny look. She dropped his hand.

‘Where are you going?’ she asked Heath.

‘To tell those people to evacuate.’

He walked past her but heard a familiar click of a gun safety switch going off.

‘I’m sorry Heath, but I’m afraid I can’t let you do that.’

Heath wheeled around. He bore down on Moss.

‘You were there, that day on the train? I knew I’d seen you before.’

‘Yes.’

‘I thought it was coincidence but it wasn’t. You were there doing something. You moved so quickly. You knew what was going to happen.’ Heath moved between Moss and his father who was working on the wires.

Heath didn’t let Moss speak, he continued.

‘And the traitor at the agency? That was you, wasn’t it? I thought it was Hando. Daniel. But it wasn’t. It was you this whole time.’

‘And you thought I was just a recruit, even when you almost caught me sending messages to my uncle.’

‘Your uncle is Smider?’

‘I’m his niece. Why do you think he didn’t kill me along with Hando? Poor stupid Hando. He was so easy to frame. Getting messages off the Island was tricky. Gabe always snooping around.’

‘The post it notes in your pocket litter. They weren’t blank, were they?’

‘No. A form of invisible ink my uncle invented. You have to heat the paper to read the message.’

There was the sound of sirens. It echoed through the stadium. Everything made sense.

‘You tried to kill me the day of the free-falls. You sabotaged the chute.’

‘Yes but that fool Hando handed out the wrong one.’

‘And I saved your life because I liked you.’ Heath rolled his eyes.

‘Yes, that just made it easier.’

‘Are you going to shoot me Moss?’

‘Yes but only after you give me the lighter?’

‘You are good at following orders.’

‘You aren’t.’

‘I wouldn’t do that if I were you Mr. Callahan,’ she said to Heath’s father as he was about to cut the wires. Heath looked at his dad crouched over the bomb. His father looked at him and smiled. It was a look full of pride and love. Heath raised his arms.

‘NOOOOOOOOOOOOO!’

Moss lifted her gun.

‘Dad!’ Heath yelled.

His father cut the white wire to the bomb, disarming it. A splotch of red soaked through the purple jumper and covered Heath’s hands as he fell towards him.

He took his father’s hand, it was warm but he did not cry. One lone tear fell down his cheek, he brushed it away.

He held his father in his arms. Moss forced him to get up. He carried his father to the stands and felt in his pocket for the lighter. He looked at it in his hand-their lives for the information on this microdot. Heath would not be parted with it easily. Could he reach back for his gun in time? *Could I really shoot her?* Moss had followed him off the field, her gun pressed against his back. He looked past Moss at his surroundings.

‘So you’re an Archer too?’ Heath asked.

‘In training. My uncle had a plan from the beginning.’

‘For you to be a mole deep inside the service?’

‘Yes. Now give me the lighter.’

As Heath was deciding what to do, the bomb squad arrived in full protective suits and helmets and began cordoning off the stadium and evacuating the public. Moss held out her hand. Heath reluctantly gave her the lighter.

Moss ran off onto the field and out a busy Stadium exit. Heath turned to look for Olivia. *Where was she?*

He saw her talking with the emergency crews and he went down to her.

‘Olivia. My dad, Moss killed. She is going to get away.’

Olivia frowned. ‘I know. But your dad knew the risks and he would feel good knowing his sacrifice saved so many other lives.’

‘Where is she?’

‘Heath, no. Revenge is never the option.’

‘Stay with my dad. I don’t want him to leave him here alone.’

Heath ran towards the closest exit. No sign of Moss. He ran past the trucks and fire engines and police crews setting up safety barriers. He ran down the steps of the Stadium into the cold night air.

He slowed to a walk and looked out across the harbour. The night was shiny with glittering stars, the waves lapping at the rocks. The twinkling lights of the city were in front of him, he could see Luna Park lit up across the bay. He knew she was there before she spoke.

‘The microdot, Heath’ Moss said. ‘I don’t actually want to kill you but I will.’

Heath pulled the picture of his parents from his pocket. He looked at the little microdot on the photograph next to his father. He turned to face Moss, holding a gun to her friend. Heath had thought he was alone but he was not as alone as Moss.

‘Do you even know why you are meant to kill me?’

Moss shrugged. 'Orders.'

'The mission always comes first.' Heath said.

Moss nodded. 'Something like that,' she said.

'Alright. Give me my lighter back and I'll give you the microdot.' He looked at his feet.

'You and this lighter. The microdot, NOW?'

Moss reached out her hand and threw the lighter towards Heath as he twisted back towards the edge, his feet lifting off the wooden boards jumping into the water. The last thing he heard was the sound of the splash as his body hit the surface and the water rushed into his ears. He heard Moss's gun go off and then nothing. He was sinking under the black water with little less than a bubble above the surface.

SECRET DOCUMENTS UNCOVER WEB OF LIES AND CONSPIRACY

By Megan Woods.

Today, Federal Police raided several buildings in Sydney with the first arrests being made on board members from Rimington Aimes Group. James Towning, Prime Minister has also been arrested at his home this morning on charges of treason and corruption.

The web of lies and deceit was uncovered when a mysterious photograph was sent to this reporter at *The Australian*. Inside were undisclosed classified documents contained on a microdot from an anonymous source. The documents contained evidence of a large government conspiracy involving the chairman of The Rimington Aimes Group, David Smider.

As yet charges have not been confirmed. There is evidence to suggest Smider is also responsible for the death of former Prime Minister Andrew Harrington and his Chief of Staff.

Members of Parliament and members of the Special Air Service have also been arrested with more arrests expected. Rimington Aimes has crashed on the stock market this morning with the company's future uncertain amid these shocking claims. CEO of the group, Mr. Alistair Henry was quoted 'I do not know what is going on, but when I got to work to morning, all the money was gone.'

Rimington Aimes was in the middle of a settlement involving a large parcel of land. This sale is cancelled and the land will be returned to public ownership at the discretion of each individual State governor. Companies owned by Rimington Aimes including laboratories, real estate, commercial enterprises, hedge funds, Insurance and banks will be sold.

On orders from the Attorney General, Smider's home in the affluent suburb Vaucluse was raided this morning by Federal Police. However, the former chairman of Rimington Aimes could not be located at this time. His family including his wife and adopted niece could not be located. There is a warrant for his arrest.

The anonymous source signed off as The Archers has not come forward.

This writer acknowledges the sad passing of our best and brightest, Spencer Callahan, a veteran journalist at The Australian. He is survived by his son.

EPILOGUE

Heath pushed and chopped through the water, stretching his lungs, the familiar burn sending him a warning as he swam toward the shore.

His body exhausted, he crawled and lifted his body out of the water onto the slimy, sharp rocks. He shook the water from his ears and hair. The night air was chill against his skin. His teeth began to shake with cold. His arm stung with the saltwater, the bullet had grazed the skin above his elbow. The silence and darkness echoing the single thought, the pervasive and thumping thought that he was alone.

He tried to breathe slowly, to suck the air into his lungs deeply when he heard a familiar beep.

Heath rolled up his sleeve and looked at the watch strapped to his arm. He began walking up the rocks towards the city with new purpose, towards the lights, the beautiful glittering lights, shining over the harbour, beckoning to him.

Heath walked into the shadows and disappeared.

Author's Note

To balance fictional 'romantic' versions of espionage popularly portrayed in film and television, I researched witness accounts, declassified information, histories of the CIA, ASIS, ASIO, M16, MI5 and FBI and memoirs and accounts by real spies. I have taken many liberties with time, place and location. None of which are depicted accurately to fit the purposes of this novel.

In focusing on my research in young adult fiction I am indebted to the works of Melina Marchetta, J.K. Rowling, Philip Pullman, Gillian Rubenstein, Robin Klein, John Marsden, Robin McKinley and many, many others.