

# 3

**C**olin Hazelton hadn't broken into anything more than a light jog in nearly thirty years, but the adrenaline in his body put enough spring in his step to get him down to the river in twenty seconds. Here he made a right on the path, the two bikers close on his heels. He thought about running across the dock and diving into the water, but he knew nothing about the current and he felt sure the younger men after him would just fish him out soaking wet, or else drown him there and take his money belt. So he raced along the path for a block, then made a right up into another dark and narrow street.

The bikes approached confidently; he could hear that the throttles weren't having to work very hard at all.

"Help!" he shouted to the apartment buildings around, his eyes scanning balconies and windows, desperate to find anyone who could save him. He thought about the gun behind him and wondered at any minute if he was going to take a bullet in the back of the neck. He knew he just had to get into a public

space, but he also knew the area. He had several blocks to go before finding any sanctuary of community.

Domingo Chavez and Sam Driscoll sprinted through the darkened streets of District 8, closing on the gray GPS beacon on their map that represented Jack Ryan. Ding glanced down at the electronic map for the first time in thirty seconds, making sure they made the correct turn off the two-lane street, when Ryan's voice came over his earpiece.

"Ding, you guys have me on GPS?"

Chavez responded, still looking at the dot on the map. "Affirmative. Looks like you're running."

"Damn right I am! Two armed bikers on my six." Chavez could hear the roaring engines through the warren of apartment buildings off his left shoulder.

"We'll catch up with you."

"I need one of you to go for Hazelton. He took off to the water. He's not over here to the west, so try to the east."

Ding called to Sam as he ran on. "You go for Ryan! I'll grab Hazelton!"

Colin Hazelton never stood a chance. The lead North Korean biker raced up behind the big, aging American, positioned his flat stiletto down by his side, and then thrust his arm out, stabbing the man from behind, once under the left shoulder blade, then quickly on the right side in the same place.

Both of Hazelton's heaving lungs began deflating almost instantly, and blood pumped into the damaged organs. He ran on a few feet, no reaction in his stride to what he thought were

just punches into his back, but soon he toppled over in the middle of the dark street, gasping. The bikers slowed and stopped, then both men dropped the kickstands on their Ducatis and climbed off, quickly but still casually. They stepped over to the wounded man, who was now trying to crawl away, and they knelt over him.

The leader began feeling through Hazelton's pockets and then his shirt, finally laying his hand on the money belt hiding there. He yanked the hem up over the man's corpulent midsection, used his stiletto to cut free the sweaty and bloody white Velcro money belt, and he quickly checked it to make sure the documents were inside. There was blood on one of the passports, but everything was there.

Hazelton lay on his side now, and he reached up for the documents weakly, his right arm extending fully and the whistling wheezes out of both his mouth and the holes in his back changing in pitch as he tried to yell.

The North Korean biker knocked the American's feeble grasp away and stood up, then he turned back to his motorcycle. His partner joined him, his handgun low by his side and his helmet turning in all directions as he scanned, making certain no threats appeared in the street.

They started their engines and turned back in the other direction to join the hunt for the white photographer.

Ryan was five blocks away now, still in the warren of darkened streets and parking lots around the apartment buildings here by the Kenh Doi. He wondered what had happened to Hazelton. He had done all he could for the man, but he feared it

hadn't been enough. He'd seen the two women step outside the apartment building and in so doing distract the bikers. To his shock Hazelton took off toward the water. Jack thought this to be a terrible idea, unless of course Hazelton had seen something that gave him no hope he'd survive the encounter with the armed men.

Or else he was just drunk and he freaked out and he went for it, decided he was smarter, stronger, and faster than he actually was.

Ryan was betting on the latter.

To give the American ex-CIA man a fighting chance, Ryan had darted into the alley, demanded the attention of the bikers, and flashed his camera as a distraction, then he turned and ran for his life, hoping to draw at least some of the men off the older, slower Hazelton.

That part of Jack's plan had worked. As he leapt over a pair of aluminum trash cans on the sidewalk he could tell from the lights and noise of the two Ducatis on his tail that they were no more than fifty feet behind. They crashed through the cans just three seconds later, sending them and their contents flying. Jack leapt over a wooden pallet lying on the curb and then turned, flicking it up into the path of the bikers, but the pallet shattered against the bikes and didn't slow the men down at all. He ducked around a tree in a planter, then changed direction again.

The Ducatis spun toward him and increased speed again.

Ryan worried the men might tire of the chase and just open fire, so he tried to keep his sprint erratic, moving from left to right, leaping over garbage or parked scooters or boxes on the sidewalk, racing around electric poles and switching direction unpredictably.

But the bikes stayed on him, he wasn't going to shake them as long as he stayed on the road.

Sam Driscoll came over his earbud, yelling at Jack to stand still a minute so he could get a GPS fix on the map long enough to find him in the narrow alleyways. But Jack was hardly in a position to comply; he just kept running, ducking under low wires that hung over a narrow pathway next to an office building. He made a hard left, then took a flight of concrete steps that ran down to a parking lot alongside an apartment complex. The bikes took the steps down as well, and they closed to within feet of their prey.

The crack of a gunshot and the flash of sparks on the ground at the bottom of the stairs told Ryan the men behind him had been given the all-clear to use lethal force by whoever the hell was controlling them. Of course Ryan had no idea why these men were trying to kill him. He and his mates had stumbled onto something big here in their tail of Colin Hazelton, but Jack didn't have time to think about it now. He had to get out of the line of fire.

A satellite dish stuck out from a second-floor balcony at the bottom of the long flight of concrete steps. It was eye level in front of him now, but if Jack wanted to grab hold of it he'd have to make a running jump of nearly fifteen feet. Jack leapt off the stairs, using the momentum of his run, the kicking of his legs in the open air, and his high position on the staircase to give him as much distance as possible.

His hands just grasped the metal arm of the four-foot-wide satellite dish, his legs swung out below him from the momentum as if he were an Olympian on the horizontal bar.

The two riders on their bikes raced down the staircase

below him. When they reached the parking lot at the bottom of the steps, they spun around on their front wheels to face him. Their tires screeched in unison.

Jack's legs had gone horizontal to the ground during his swing on the sat dish's arm, but he was unable to kick high enough to climb up on the balcony. Instead, he swung back down, tried to pull himself up to take hold of the metal balcony railing.

Suddenly the mount for the arm gave way under the strain of Ryan's weight, tearing off from the balcony railing and breaking free, attached only by a thick band of wiring.

Jack dropped ten feet to the steps below. The satellite dish fell part of the way with him but was then caught by the wiring. Jack landed well initially but then tumbled forward and down the steps, ending up dazed on his back in the parking lot, just twenty feet from the bikers.

Jack looked up at the armed men. The bikers glanced at one another quickly, as if to marvel at their luck, then one man raised his pistol.

But before he could fire a bearded man dressed in black appeared on his right at a sprint, slamming into him like a linebacker making a tackle in the open field, and knocking both the rider from his bike and the gun from his hand.

The second helmeted man on the other Ducati spun his arm around toward the movement, but the bearded man—he was clearly a Westerner—swung his backpack off, hurled it overhand, and it connected with the biker's firing arm, knocking it down. A gunshot ripped through the night, the entire parking lot exploded with an instant of light, and the biker fell back onto the pavement. He rolled quickly to his knees, but

before he could stand the bearded man was on him, kicking him once in the visor of his helmet. The padded ballistic plastic absorbed the impact, but the blow torqued his neck back and he fell hard onto his back, slamming his head onto the unyielding surface of the parking lot and knocking him out cold.

Sam Driscoll was glad he was wearing his big Salomon boots this evening. Otherwise he was sure he would have broken his foot on the helmet of the prostrate man in front of him. Still, the top of his foot hurt like hell from the impact.

He'd been running full out for five minutes, with only a couple breaks to slow in order to check Ryan's GPS locator on the map on his mobile phone. Now that both threats were down and Ryan was safe, Sam kicked his foot out to shake away the pain, picked his backpack up off the ground, and began looking for some zip ties to restrain the two attackers.

"Thanks," Ryan said, still looking at the men on the ground.

Sam wasn't reveling in his handiwork at all. Between gasps for breath he said, "Asshole shot my backpack. The camera and spotting scope belonged to the company, but the tablet computer in here is mine. Took a round right through the screen." He looked to Ryan. "You gonna buy me another?"

Ryan had his hands on his knees; he was still heaving from the action of the past few minutes. He managed a laugh. "Sure, man. I owe you an iPad. If you want I'll throw in—"

Ding Chavez's voice came over the network now. "Clark? Hazelton is down and critical! I need wheels. Now!"

As one, both Jack and Sam hefted pistols off the pavement, left the two unconscious men where they lay, and leapt on the downed Ducatis.

Sirens filled the air in the distance as they began racing back to help Chavez.

Seconds earlier, Ding Chavez rounded the corner of a building at a full sprint only to find a large man crawling in the middle of a dark and otherwise empty two-lane street. He recognized the white shirt and bald head of Colin Hazelton, and he raced over to him. “Come on, Hazelton! Let’s move!”

Ding tried to help the man back to his feet, but Hazelton could not put weight on his legs.

Ding heard the hissing sound of air leaving the man’s lungs. The back of the ex-CIA officer’s shirt was soaked in blood. It took another second to find the wounds, but through tiny tears in the shirt his fingers felt the damaged flesh. Ding ripped Hazelton’s shirt open, exposing the man’s back and the pair of small, deep slit punctures below his shoulder blades.

“Shit,” Ding said. He knew all about deep injuries to the torso. Holding pressure on these two holes would do nothing for Hazelton, because he was bleeding internally, and his deflated lungs were far away from the surface wounds on the skin. They were behind the rib cage, spurting blood and functioning at ten percent efficiency at best. Ding needed to seal the holes and try to reinflate the lungs.

While still on his knees in the middle of the dark street, he reached into his backpack and retrieved a tiny black pouch. It wasn’t much, just a personal first-aid kit that each man on the team carried with him at all times. From it Ding pulled a pair of occlusive dressings, ripped them out of their packaging with his mouth. He used his forearm to wipe blood away from the sucking wounds, then he affixed a dressing over



each hole. He pressed them firmly on the skin, knowing he needed to completely seal the breach before he could do anything else.

Chavez rolled the man onto his back. He saw Hazelton's eyes were open and unfixed. Hurriedly he performed rescue breathing, more commonly known as mouth-to-mouth, trying to get enough lung function going to keep the man's blood oxygenated.

He stopped only long enough to shout over the comms net. "Clark? Hazelton is down and critical! I need wheels. Now!"

Clark responded quickly. "I'm on the way!"

"Are you clear of the opposition?" Clark asked.

Ding started to reply in the affirmative, but he looked up when a single headlight appeared far up the street. It wasn't moving, but he heard the revving engine of a finely tuned motorcycle.

"Negative," he said. "At least one of the bikers is back. Probably trying to figure out how help showed up so fast." Ding could run, but he didn't want to leave Colin Hazelton here in the middle of the road. The man needed attention this second. Without someone to keep his heart beating he wasn't going to make it more than a minute.

Jack Ryan, Jr., came over the net. "Jack and Sam coming to you with bikes and guns. Find some cover till we get there, Ding."

But Ding stayed right where he was in the middle of the road, continuing the rescue breathing, a valiant attempt to keep Hazelton's heart beating.

The motorcycle lurched forward and began heading up the street in his direction.

After five breaths Ding transmitted while listening to Ha-

zelton's mouth for sounds to confirm the man was still breathing on his own. "Biker heading my way. I don't know what this guy's going to do, but if I run, Hazelton's dead."

Clark said, "I'll be there in twenty seconds."

Ding watched the approaching headlight. It passed under a street lamp at the intersection three blocks away. In the light he saw a black Ducati and the biker was holding something out in front of him, pointed at Chavez and Hazelton in the middle of the road.

Ding spoke softly, a twinge of resignation in his voice. "Ten would be better."

Chavez was unarmed. His mission had been to ascertain just what a former mid-level CIA exec was doing here in Vietnam. Moving through the country with firearms didn't seem prudent, considering the threat matrix.

It was clear now, however, *that* had been the wrong call.

The bike raced up the street, approaching the intersection at speed; the rider kept his pistol out in front of him, aiming it at Chavez.

He fired, a flash of light and the gun's recoil snapped it up. Chavez could only drop low to the pavement, tucking over Colin Hazelton. He felt the round pass just high.

Another shot sparked the pavement just to Ding's left. He began chest compressions now, but he felt sure that as the attacker closed on his bike, the next shot would find its mark.

Ding saw the pistol level again, and he saw no way out of this. He was about to take a round.

A gray four-door sedan raced into the intersection from the east, its headlights off and its engine screaming at full throttle. The man on the Ducati sensed the movement on his left and turned to look a half-second before impact; he pulled his gun

arm back in and tried to turn the motorcycle, but before he could take any evasive action at all he was flattened by the sedan. Sparks and wreckage arced into the air, smoke billowed in all directions at the point of impact.

The biker was crushed under the sedan. His helmet bounced down the street. Ding was reasonably sure there was no head inside the helmet, but he could not be certain. The impact had certainly been violent enough.

Chavez winced but immediately went back to giving Hazelton mouth-to-mouth.

The sedan came to rest just as Ryan and Driscoll appeared behind Chavez on the two Ducatis. They climbed off the bikes, helped their teammate to his feet, scooped Hazelton up by his arms and legs, and then carried him to the sedan.

John Clark waited behind the wheel. His airbag had deployed and his windshield was cracked across the entire length of the glass, but the vehicle remained operational.

Sam climbed in front, and Jack and Ding pulled Hazelton into the backseat with them. Clark took off before the doors were closed; behind them sirens neared and flashing lights reflected off wet streets and the window glass of apartment buildings.

Clark called out to the men behind him, "Anyone hurt?"

Ding said, "Just Hazelton."

"Is he going to live?"

Ding made eye contact with John in the rearview, and he shook his head. But he said, "Let's get him to a hospital."

The intimation was clear from the tone in his voice. Nobody was going to save Hazelton at this point, but they had to try.

Driscoll was already on the phone to his organization's Gulfstream jet. "Sherman, Driscoll. En route to airport, ETA

twenty-five mikes. Four pax in total. In extremis exfiltration, negative contraband. Negative injuries. Threat condition red. Confirm all.”

Over the phone Adara Sherman, the transportation and logistics coordinator for the team, repeated everything back to the operator in the field and let him know the aircraft would be ready for them when they got to the airport.

The men were quiet for a moment, the main sound in the sedan coming from the heavy breathing of exhausted men and the chest compressions Chavez continued on Hazelton’s thick torso, as well as the soft wheezes coming out of the wounded man’s mouth and nose. Foamy blood had formed on the ex-CIA man’s lips, and this told Chavez the internal bleeding in the lungs was as bad as he’d feared.

Ding had called this one correctly. Hazelton wasn’t going to make it.

As Chavez looked down at the man he was surprised to see Hazelton’s eyes open. Beneath a thin wheeze he made another sound, like he was trying to form words.

Chavez leaned over closer. “What’s that?”

Hazelton tried again. “Sh . . . Sharps.”

Chavez nodded quickly. “We know. You were working for Duke Sharps. Do you know who attacked you?”

Hazelton nodded emphatically, did his best to speak again, but just a pathetic croaking rasp came out of his mouth.

His arm reached out and began flailing around the backseat.

Ryan figured out what he was doing. “He wants a pen. Hurry!”

Driscoll found a pad and pen in the glove compartment and he passed them back. Ding held the pad for Hazelton, who took the pen and began furiously scratching with it. It was too

dark to discern the writing here in the sedan, but Ding was able to see that all the blood on the man's palm was also smearing the page.

In fifteen seconds Hazelton stopped. The pen fell from his hand and his head lolled to the side.

Ding put two fingers on the man's carotid artery. After a half-minute he said, "John . . . to the airport."

"Got it," said Clark, then he turned at the next intersection. No use wasting time on a hospital drop-off now.

Chavez collapsed back in his seat, the dead man lying across his and Ryan's laps. For the past ten minutes Chavez had worked as hard as he could to save the man, even risking his life to do so. Now he was wasted and worn out, both mentally and physically, from the strain of his efforts.

Ryan took the pad and held his flashlight's beam up to it. "Fucking chicken scratch."

Clark said, "Let's worry about that when we're wheels up."

# 4

Veronika Martel took one more glance into her rearview mirror before turning her two-door Hyundai through the gates of the safe house. She'd checked the traffic behind her one hundred times during her drive; it was hard enough to do in the dark, but since the rain began a few minutes earlier, identifying any vehicles that might be following her had become all but impossible. Still, she told herself she was clean, she'd seen not a hint of a tail during her circuitous drive from central Ho Chi Minh City to Thu Duc, so she pulled up the drive of the two-story villa with little concern for her operational security.

A gravel parking circle sat to the side entrance of the villa and she took advantage of this, turning around to position her Hyundai so it was facing the road and ready for a fast escape. Martel was aware of no specific threats, but she was operational, and this sort of tradecraft was second nature to her.

It had been an hour and a half since meeting with the American at the Lion d'Or in Ho Chi Minh City. Thu Duc was

only a dozen miles from the city center, but she'd been running a long surveillance detection route, stretched even longer by her control officer's orders to take her time.

She sat in the Hyundai in the parking circle, listening to the rain on the roof of the vehicle. She could have gone inside the villa but she decided against it, since going inside would have entailed being around others, making small talk with people who were neither friends nor family while she waited for a call from her control officer. Martel had no interest in this. She wasn't particularly friendly, and she most certainly could not be characterized as chatty. So she sat alone, enjoyed the patter of rain on the roof, and focused her thoughts.

*North Korea. Christ.*

She closed her eyes and leaned her head back against the headrest.

*Have you really fallen this far?*

Veronika Martel was thirty-eight years old, an employee of Sharps Global Intelligence Partners of New York City. Duke Sharps had headhunted her after she left DGSE, the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure, French foreign intelligence, where she had spent more than a decade working as a case officer in embassies in the Middle East and Europe.

Now she was based at Sharps Partners' European satellite office in Brussels, but her work in the corporate intelligence field took her all over the globe. In the past six months she'd served on operations in Mumbai, in Osaka, in Moscow, and in Madrid.

And now Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh City was unfamiliar turf for her, but Veronika went where New York told her to go, and this assignment was similar to ops she had done in Europe. Or at least it had been until her contact this evening made the

unilateral decision to derail the operation by not handing over the documents he'd been tasked to bring with him from Prague.

She'd reported him to her New York control officer immediately—she wasn't going to take the blame for the op falling apart. New York told her to head back to the safe house, but to take her time doing so, while they did what they could to rectify the situation.

Short of arranging a street mugging to get the package from Hazelton, she didn't know what the hell her control officer in New York could do about it, but she did as ordered.

As she sat with her eyes closed her phone chirped, the sound louder than the pattering rain on the roof of the Hyundai. "Oui?"

"This is control. I'm connecting you to a local agent."

*Local agent?* As far as she knew, Veronika Martel was the only Sharps employee in the area other than the pretentious bald-headed American who had ruined her evening.

There was a delay on the line, then a heavily accented Asian voice came over the speaker. "I have the package. I will be arriving at your safe house in five minutes."

She felt certain the man was North Korean. Not a local agent, but an interested party in her mission nonetheless. She knew better than to ask any questions.

"I'll be here," she said.

The man quickly asked, "Was he alone when you met with him?"

"The contact? I only presume so. It was not in my brief to establish whether or not he had any coverage on him. Why do you ask?"

"Five minutes," came the non-response to her question, and the line went dead.



Veronika climbed out of her little Hyundai and walked up to the front door. She had a key to the villa, she'd been living here for several days, but she knocked on the door nonetheless, as per the arrangement. She waited for a moment on the porch, then heard the door unlock from the inside.

She was met by a North Korean. He was one of three security men who had been watching over the occupants of the safe house. Again, not Sharps employees, but interested parties in the operation. The three men had kept their distance from her, and she from them. This one said nothing at the door, she was certain he spoke neither English nor French, and he left the entryway, heading back into the living room.

Veronika folded her umbrella and hung her coat, then she stood alone, looking out the window at the rain, waiting to see headlights in the driveway.

Her plan was to avoid the others until the package arrived, but after a few minutes she decided that as much as she didn't want to get into a conversation with anyone right now, it was her responsibility to check on the subjects of her work here in Vietnam.

She walked into the living room and found the three security officers standing along the wall behind four men and one woman, who sat on sofas and chairs. These five were all Caucasian; they looked straight at her as she entered the room, their faces illuminated by candlelight. Even in the amber glow Martel saw the apprehension in their eyes.

She felt obligated to make some remarks to calm the group down. In English she said, "Everything is in order. I am waiting for a visitor to arrive, and then we will proceed."

Before anyone spoke, there was a knock at the front door.

The three security men looked up and started toward the entryway, but Martel waved them back into their places and went herself.

She opened the door to find a man in a black motorcycle jacket. He was Asian; she assumed he was North Korean like the others, but she sure as hell was not going to ask.

The man carried a folder in his hand. He held it out and said, "You saw no one?"

She took the folder. "You already asked me this. What is wrong? What happened?"

She looked past him and into the parking circle. Two men sat in the rain on motorcycles. A third bike, presumably belonging to the man in front of her, was parked alongside them.

The North Korean stepped into the entryway and shut the door. "The American had men with him. We were not notified of this."

"Nor was I. As I said before, it wasn't my job to identify surveillance." The man did not seem satisfied with her answer, so she added, "Call New York if you'd like to make a complaint about my performance."

The North Korean's nostrils flared. Martel presumed he wasn't accustomed to being spoken to like this, but she couldn't care less. She ignored the man's glare and began looking through the folder. Inside she found five smaller manila folders. Opening them one at a time, she fanned through five complete sets of documents: EU diplomatic passports. Czech diplomatic assignments to Pyongyang. Credit cards bound with rubber bands.

She returned to the living room; the North Korean in the black jacket followed behind. Veronika looked at the photo page of each passport and each visa, and she took her time to

match the documents to the five sitting in front of her. They sat quietly, nervously waiting for her to say something, but she did not rush herself.

All the documents looked perfect, except for the last of the passports. The cover appeared to be stained with red ink. Martel ran a thumb over the embossed cover and she realized the color was no stain, as it came off easily.

Looking at her thumb, she saw it was fresh blood.

*Mon Dieu*, she said to herself. These men had taken these by force from the American agent.

She glanced up at the North Korean. His eyes remained on her—surely he had seen her notice the blood. She thought he was enjoying her discomfort.

“Everything is in order,” Veronika Martel said. The North Korean left without another word, and within moments she heard three motorcycles firing up and driving off.

Martel put the documents on a table and moved a lamp closer. To the entire group she said, “Your flight leaves at ninety-three a.m., arriving in Pyongyang at eleven thirty-five. I’ll go over your legends with each of you, and then you should try to get a few hours’ sleep. I will wake everyone at six.”

The one other female in the house, a redhead in her forties, stood up from the sofa and approached. Her Australian accent was obvious. “Would you mind it if I spoke to you in private?”

Veronika Martel just shrugged and moved into the kitchen. The woman followed. She was much shorter and a little heavier than Martel, and the lighting here did her no favors. Martel thought the redhead looked as if she hadn’t slept in days. It had been rough for all five of the Australians, she knew, as she had been with them all week.

## FULL FORCE AND EFFECT

The French intelligence agent said, "What can I do for you, Dr. Powers?"

The Australian closed the door all the way. She spoke softly. "Look. I . . . we agreed to come. The money was incredible, obviously, but it seemed like an adventure, you know?"

"What is your question?"

"I left a family behind back in Sydney. Six months' work, and I'm back home. That's what was agreed on."

Martel put a hand out on the counter, strummed her perfect nails on the tiled surface.

Dr. Powers continued, "I . . . I just want to make sure the terms promised me are honored."

Martel made no attempt to whisper. "Dr. Powers, my job is to facilitate your clandestine travel safely from Sydney to Pyongyang. Nothing more. Whatever agreement you have with the DPRK, it is between yourself and the DPRK."

Powers looked to the door to the living room nervously. "I don't trust them. They watch over us like we are prisoners. They won't answer my questions. I just thought . . . you are working with them. Can you help me? Maybe just ask them to be a little more forthcoming about the arrangements in place. Please?"

Martel took her hand from the counter next to her and placed it on the smaller woman's shoulder. With a little smile she said, "Doctor. I understand."

The older redhead looked relieved. "I knew you would."

"I understand that the fact I am female and I have round eyes, to you, means I should be more sympathetic than the North Korean men acting as security here. But nothing could be further from the truth. *They* have use for you, *I* do not." She

lowered her hand and headed for the door. "When you get to Pyongyang, I'm sure your concerns will be alleviated."

Powers all but shouted, "Do you have any idea how ridiculous that statement sounds?"

Martel was unfazed by the redhead's anger. "I didn't agree to work for the North Koreans. *You* did. Your decision is made, and you would do well to make peace with that decision, because they are not going to allow you to change your mind at this juncture." She returned to the living room without another word.

As she passed out the documents and went over the individual legends for each of the five, she let herself wonder what would happen to these Australians. Working with the North Koreans certainly would be fraught with legitimate concern, but she expected all five of them to fulfill their contract with Pyongyang and to return home much wealthier than when they left. It was, of course, illegal work, and they were being paid with this in mind.

Martel knew very little about what these five would be doing for North Korea, but even so, she wasn't worried about this operation from any sort of a moral standpoint. It wasn't as if these people were nuclear scientists or rocket scientists. They were geologists, that was all. No threat to anyone, certainly, even if they were working for the North Koreans. No, this was just some industrial commercial and diplomatic subterfuge, nothing dangerous.

And then she paused for a moment, thinking about the blood on the passport and the annoying American who had no doubt shed it. If the North Koreans were willing to use violence in a foreign nation to secure the travel of these geologists, perhaps the stakes were higher than she thought.

## FULL FORCE AND EFFECT

She pushed the misgivings out of her mind, a skill she had developed and honed over her intelligence career.

Right now she just wanted to get these five on the ninety-three flight tomorrow morning to Pyongyang, to sanitize the safe house, and then to go home.

Nothing else mattered to Veronika Martel.