

THE NIGERIAN

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“You gotta be able to smile through the bullshit.”

— TUPAC SHAKUR

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CHAPTER 1

LAGO'S STREETS WERE CROWDED; it was typical for that time of the day since everybody went to their workplace and school. The traffic wasn't helping, and Debare Balogun was late for his meeting. The city was a nice choice to live in, and the nightlife was his favourite although the large mass of people was sometimes bothersome.

He walked through the streets, his suit radiating from the busy crowd. He pushed through the crowds in a hurry, determined to get to his meeting as quickly as possible. It was a twenty-minute walk to his shop, and he could get there with only being a little late.

Walking through the doors of the Balogun Jewellery, he was welcomed by his secretary, Daraja Agu, standing behind the receptionist desk. Her hair was styled in a ponytail and she was dressed modestly as always.

“Good day, sir.” She greeted him with a smile, which he returned.

“Morning Daraja,” he replied.

“The guests are expecting you,” Daraja stated, making him speed up his steps to the room. He hoped they would accept his offer if they didn’t that meant Balogun Jewellery wouldn’t last much longer.

Debare’s reputation wasn’t blooming in Lagos. He was known as a scammer, few wanted to work with, and it was all due to his greed. Fixing his suit, he walked into his office greeting the men seated at the roundtable.

“Morning, gentleman,” he greeted.

They had disapproving looks, but Debare ignored them, setting his suitcase on the table, as he felt the burning gazes on him.

“You’re late,” one of them yelled.

“The traffic was horrendous.” He tried his best to excuse himself, much to his dismay they weren’t buying it.

“How’s our project going?” Marcel, one guest asked. He heard about the rumours of Debare’s former past dealings and wasn’t so sure about him but had given his support for Debare’s latest project.

“The gold transfer will start in a few days, sir. We have all the designs, so we just need your final transfer.” Debare spoke, hoping he wouldn’t see through his clear lie.

“We haven’t released the remaining transfer because the client has yet to receive the gold, are you aware of the reason for the delay?” Marcel’s voice said calmly but straightforwardly. He had already made his mind about Debare cheating him. Still, he thought he’d give Debare a chance. Unfortunately, the situation was alarming.

“Uh, no sir, is there a problem?” Debare said sweating heavily. Maybe they had caught him in his lies.

The other men accompanying Marcel sighed, mumbling something to each other. “The problem is you, Debare.” Marcel stated, already picking up the documents he placed on the table.

“Excuse me?” Debare tried to play it off, failing on the ground clumsily and picking himself up. “You thought you could fool me?”

Marcel chuckled showing his pearl white teeth. “I know what you’ve been doing all this time.” His tone turned serious. “All the money, I wasted on this project, went straight to your pockets,” he yelled as his fist banged on the table. The sound echoed through the office, and all everyone present including

Darja could hear the rage of Marcel through the office's corridor.

Debare was done. He knew that his company was in ruin and there was nothing he could do about it.

“How dare you do this to me?” Marcel burst out continuing to yell angrily.

Not only did he do the deal with Debare but he was renting out his shop to assist Debare's company. Never did Marcel think Debare would deceive him.

“Please forgive me, Marcel.” He pleaded taking out the last bit of his pride. “If you don't get me my money by the end of this month, Kirikiri will be your new home. Do you fucking hear me?” Marcel's warning ringed as loud as a church bell in Debare's ear.



Marcel and the others left leaving Debare to sink in his thoughts of guilt. How would Debare find fifty grand in less than a month's time? It would be only a miracle that can save him.

Debare had no choice but to leave his office for the day, thinking about what he should do to repay Marcel's debt. He

walked pass Daraja, embarrassed and pitiful, with his head down. His heart ached for his secretary, and how she would be left unemployed. He promised himself he would fix the problem as soon as possible, bring Balogun Jewellery to Its feet and correct his wicked ways.

The day passed by, and Debare paced alone in his apartment. It was not an understatement he was living in a luxurious flat, designed and done to his personal taste. The vodka bottle in his hand was half empty, and his mind was rushing with thoughts he couldn't bear.

“How could this happen?”

He slammed the bottle against the wall, pieces of glass shattering everywhere on the floor. It was the least he was expecting, disappointed at himself.

After hours of thinking and calling around to all of his friends, one of them told him to visit a man named Shakale Oni in the loan shark district of Lagos. He told Debare that Shakale would be at the Lexus Bar around 10 PM. Shakale Oni wouldn't be hard to spot because he wore an eye patch. Unfortunately, the Lexus Bar was in a neighbourhood notorious for being swarmed with drug addicts, prostitutes, and thieves. Debare felt he had no other option.

He got dressed in his casual clothes, lighting a cigarette on his

way to the bar. The location was known as the darkest neighbourhood In Lagos because there were few street lights. As he neared the place, he received weird looks from its people passing by. They knew he was a total stranger.

The neighbourhood was filled with all forms of evil which he wasn't used to seeing on a daily basis. As he treaded deeper in the area, he got used to being stared at and just focused his eyes on finding the one person he knew that might help him. Shakale Oni seemed to be his last hope out of the mess he put himself in. Debare reached the Lexus Bar and ordered himself a drink.

Hoping for the man with the eyepatch to show up, Debare started losing hope after an hour of waiting. Debare's drinking that night wasn't the plan, but his nerves were getting the best of him. While sipping on what he believed was his last drink, a group of men entered the bar, dressed in rather elegant suits that were odd for that kind of environment. He noticed in the middle of them, stood a man with a leather eye patch. Bingo. It had to be Shakale, judging from his appearance.

Debare watched the men as they made their way to the table not too far away from where he stood. Taking immediate action, he walked over and shouted, "Shakale Oni?" acting like he knew him. Catching his attention, Shakale looked up at Debare with displeasure.

“What?” Shakale answered rudely, wanting to get rid of him.

“I wanted to have a word with you if that’s possible,” he said, filled with hope.

“Not in the mood today.” He shrugged him off, scrambling him away with his hand.

Debare stood his ground in front of their table, not moving an inch. “I need to ask you something, sir.”

Shakale first looked at him with a long pause and then with a more sinister look. Tensed up, Debare’s heart began racing. He had never encountered such a situation of this heightened desperation.

“I need monies from you to lend me.”

The table sat in silence, and after a few seconds delay, which seemed like an eternity, Shakale cracked a smile.

“Why did you say that from the very beginning? Sit down,” he instructed him, pointing to the chair. Debare sat down on the opposite side of the Shakale’s men. “How much do you need?” Shakale asked him while taking a sip of Scotch.

“Fifty grand.” He couldn’t meet Shakale’s eyes, somehow ready for rejection.

The amount of money wasn’t something easy to find,

although Debare looked like he was filled with wealth. Shakale's entourage seemed focused on his drink, in suspense. After a long pause, Shakale stares at Debare.

"What do you need it for?" Shakale asked suspiciously thinking Debare could have been sent by the police.

"I'm in debt, sir." Debare lowered his head in embarrassment. He never would have thought he would end up like this, borrowing money from loan sharks.

Shakale nodded his head, being in thought. He wasn't sure if he should give him the money. Debare appeared as a man that didn't belong there, resembling someone of a higher class.

After another long pause, and longer glance from his entourage, Shakale replies, "Give me a day, you'll have the money." He continued sipping on his Scotch, turning his attention to the night scene while flashing a crooked smile. Debare finally felt at ease.

"Come first thing in the morning." Shakale gave him a salute, signalling it was already considered done.

"Thank you, sir." Debare expressed his gratitude while clumsily tripping over as he prepared to leave. Now that Debare had the money, he needed to call Marcel to make the delivery. Shakale offered him a drink, but Debare declined excusing himself to the bathroom. He locked himself in the last stall, dialling Marcel's number.

After a few rings, Marcel picked up the phone, annoyed. “What do you want!?” The angry tone ringed through the phone filling the bathroom.

Debare cleared his throat, nervous. “Uh, I have your money.” A moment of silence.

Then, Marcel spoke while chuckling on the line, “Wonder who you scammed to get fifty grand?”

“Friday, your office.” Debare cut the line, not wanting to hear from him anymore. He was fed up but relieved and was ready to call it a night.

The bathroom was empty, and Debare was glad no one heard his call. Putting the phone in his pocket, he turned on the tap and splashed his face with water. For at least this moment, he tried to forget where he was located, and what he had done to find the money. Shakale’s people were more dangerous than Marcel’s, and he was thinking of the worst-case scenarios that could happen if he didn’t return Shakale or Marcel’s money on time.

His hands gripped both sides of the sink, breathing heavily. “Fifty grand? That seems like a stretch.”

A strange voice startled him from his thoughts. He looked at his reflection in the mirror and saw a man dressed in black standing behind him.

“Excuse me?” Debare questioned confused.

The man smiled. “It seems like a lot of money.”

He raised his eyebrows as the man continued talking and carefully turned around to face the man. “Were you eavesdropping on my conversation?” He scrunched his eyebrows in confusion to why this man was questioning him.

“Not really, let’s put it this way.” He paused. “Let’s say I know a lot of things.” The man locked the bathroom door.

Debare was already preparing himself for a fight.

“Well, I mean I work for people that know a lot of things.” He corrected himself taking out a black object from his belt that resembled a gun.

“Who are you?” Debare was now alarmed. He rushed to the door, but the man blocked his way.

“Count me as your knight in shining armour,” he calmly replied.

“What? What the fuck do you want? I have nothing.”

“I’m an MI6 agent, and here to recruit you,” he explained in a serious tone. Much to his dismay the man he wanted to recruit chuckled. “Nice try now move.”

Debare pushed him out of his way, not buying his ‘joke’ although the man was speaking the truth. He tried unlocking

the door, but the man behind him grabbed his neck into a chokehold, restricting his breathing.

Unable to breathe, Debare tried his best to fight back but failed. His eyes rolled in the back of his head and with his last strengths, he tapped the man's hand signalling he was giving up. The agent released him, and Debare gasped for air, regaining his consciousness.

“What do you want?” Debare hissed struggling to catch his breath. The man kneeled beside him aiming the gun at his head, “I can turn you into the police right now, and you can rot in Kirikiri till you die.” The man's rage showed as he pushed the gun to Debare's temple.

“Please don't.” He closed his eyes shut, pleading to spare him.

“Get up, you coward!” The man instructed him with his gun not moving an inch. With his arms on the back of his head, Debare got up sweating in fear.

“Now, you do as I say no questions or funny stuff.” He sighed dialling something on his phone afterward. “Unless you want to be bankrupted or imprisoned, your choice.”

Debare went silent not muttering a word. They left the bathroom and headed for the exit. Debare looked around to see if Shakale was still there, but there was no sign of him or his entourage. Once they got out outside, he was forced inside of a black van.

After a few minutes of silence, Debare spoke. “Listen, I’m in debt sir, and I borrowed money from one of the biggest and most dangerous loan sharks in Nigeria at that bar. At least, let me take care of my business tomorrow.” He hoped that the agent would set him free.

“I’ll fix your problem, just sit back and prepare yourself for tomorrow. We have a long flight ahead of us.”

CHAPTER 2

“WELCOME, TO THE UNITED KINGDOM.” A woman dressed in a passenger service agent uniform welcomed Debare.

Just a day ago, he was getting ready to pay off Marcel for cheating him, but now he was on a trip against his own will to clear his name. Debare had no other choice but to follow the agent’s instructions. It was life in Kirikiri or death at the hands of Shakale or Marcel. He wanted to be free of debt and wasn’t sure what he was doing in Britain. The only thing Debare had with him was an address, he was supposed to go to once he arrived. How in the world did he get dragged into this situation? What lay ahead next?

The flight was nine hours, and Debare was exhausted because he wasn’t able to sleep. It was the first time in many years he boarded an airplane, and this was his first time

visiting the United Kingdom. He dragged his suitcase through airport security, passing the sensor and checking out.

He hurried and spotted a cab driver waiting for his next fare. Focusing on getting to his destination on time, Debare gave the driver the address and while on the road, he didn't utter a word. He was told not to speak to anybody.

Debare watched the beautiful but foggy scenery of London. It was surely breathtaking. He even snapped a few pictures; all satisfied with the outcome. His new phone from the agent had a few apps and only had one contact in case of an emergency. The cab driver notified him they were a few minutes away. Debare nodded, saying nothing. Curiosity was eating him inside as they were getting closer, eager to see what he got himself into.

"We're here, sir." The cab driver announced, snapping him out of his thoughts.

Debare gave the driver the exact fare and got out of the car and took his suitcase by his side. The building in front of him was huge, designed with large windows in an artistic style. He wasted no time in making his way in.

The gate was locked, leaving Debare with no clue on how to get inside. He ringed the intercom next to the gate, and after fifteen seconds, an old woman's voice answered.

“Military Intelligence, how may I help you?” Her voice was monotone leaving him to answer her quickly.

“I was sent here by one of your agents.” His response caused silence on the line causing him to clear out his throat.

“Your name?” She asked.

“Debare Balogun,” he almost proudly answered.

As he waited for her to answer, the gate opened. He stepped inside, noticing a huge driveway leading up to the main entrance. Countless black and white cars were parked, all lined up perfectly.

Debare made his way through the building as he watched its occupants running around; all engaged in work-related activities. The receptionist in the main lobby starred at him in confusion. She knew he was lost.

“May I help you?” Her shrieking voice caught his attention.

Debare looked around as if he didn’t hear her. “Oh, oh,” he mumbled. “I was instructed to come here, and I’m clueless about where I need to go.”

“You are Debare Balogun?” After scrolling on her computer, their stares met. He nodded assuring her.

“That would be me.” He scratched the back of his head. “The

general is expecting you.” She smiled at him. “Level 5, Office 230.”

He smiled back at her and took hold of the visitor’s ID that he needed to access the elevator. The elevator was packed, and it didn’t seem that anyone was headed to the fifth floor except him. A few moments later, Debare got off and walked down a dark corridor leading to Office 230 which appeared to be empty, but there were sounds of subtle whispering. He breathed in a sharp breath before knocking.

The conversations in the room had died down, and an older man yelled out. “Come in.”

Debare walked in, noticing it was swarmed with people in suits. They seemed like they were all chiefs in their lines of work and he felt out of place.

“Good day, gentleman.” He greeted them with ease.

“And who you might be?” The voice from earlier spoke again. It was an older man sitting behind a desk, he guessed he was the general.

“Debare Balogun, sir.” He stood straight like he was in salute trying to make the best impression possible.

The room went silent. For some odd reason, everybody turned their attention to him. He looked around not giving them much importance and waited for the old man’s reaction.

“We’ve been expecting you.” The general stated in a serious tone.

Debare then noticed some men and women leaving the office, but some took seats at the round table.

“I am Robert Wilson,” the general introduced himself. “Have a seat,” Robert instructed him.

Debare did so and sat down in the furthest place possible, almost tripping over some cables on the floor. The general stood up from his position and search the drawers and picking out files. “Why am I here, sir?” Debare asked.

“With your history of committed fraud, we thought you would be excellent for this job,” Robert stated, now walking over to the table and handing files to him. Debare seemed confused as he continued to listen. “Let’s just say you’ve been appointed to a mission, a very important one.”

Debare looked over the files he was given. They were filled with numerous charts he couldn’t understand. “What are these?”

“Russia’s economic standing is the highest in Europe.”

Debare crossed his arms as if he was being quizzed.

“Russia is the foremost country with the highest economy in Europe right now,” said Robert, having second thoughts about revealing this information with Debare, who was more

focused than ever on the papers in front of him. “Isn’t it strange how their economy has skyrocketed overnight?”

The general and Debare’s eyes now met. Debare nodded in agreement, not knowing anything about the situation.

“Are you up for an investigation?”

Debare was puzzled and didn’t answer right away.

“Last week, Russia was all over the fake news networks because their people dug up two Cullinan diamonds at the Popigai Crater,” Robert explained.

Debare listened carefully, and as the story went on, he wondered how it was even possible to dig up such large rocks.

“One Cullinan diamond’s worth is estimated to be around two billion dollars.”

Debare was taken aback by the amount but still wasn’t sure as to what purpose he would be in all of this. Others at the table carefully listened to Robert; most looking at him and some typing on their laptops.

“Debare, we want you to infiltrate Russia as a refugee, see what’s going on behind closed doors, so we can unravel the truth.”

Debare’s heart raced as he heard what his role would be. He had sincere doubts about doing this mission. But deep down,

he knew if he refused, he would eat bean soup in Kirikiri for life or killed if Marcel finds him.

“Sir, I’m not so sure-.” He was cut off by Robert pestering him.

“Well let’s say that you have no other choice.” Robert made himself clear.

The other attendees stared Debare down as if they were ordered to dispose of him if he didn’t go along with it. Debare knew that he had no choice but to comply, so he nodded in affirmation and one of the men attending, signalled to follow him. It was time for Debare to change his identity and erase his past history.

“Brian here will give you all the instructions for the mission, so don’t let us down, Debare. This is what we call life or death.” Debare looked behind Robert, noticing the man from yesterday beside the door, presumably waiting for him.

From that moment onwards, he knew his life was not his any longer. This mission had no guarantees. There were hundreds of reasons he could think of why not, but he couldn’t back down. All he thought about what would happen to his office in Lagos, Marcel’s money, his secretary Daraja and what about the deal with Shakale? Lord, what am I getting myself into?

His time spent in the United Kingdom was short. Debare

could not see at least most of the city. Ever since he was a young lad, he wanted to visit London, and now when he had the chance, it was under duress. This was not a vacation. He would ruin his life if he didn't complete the mission. He was escorted out of the building by Brian, the agent who was appointed to give him the mission's instructions. Within a few hours of a briefing with Brian, Debare presumed that he was heading to Heathrow Airport. On the way, Brian gave Debare an additional suitcase that would serve him during his mission.

Debare would be travelling alone to Russia with no help from MI6, or that is what he was made to believe. He was told that the agency would contact him through one phone in his suitcase. He was ordered not to make any calls beforehand due to the fact he might be tracked.

The only family he had were all in Nigeria. Debare wasn't close to them, but he thought he would leave them a message just in case something happened. He texted his mother:

"I miss you terribly, Mama, but I hope my prolonged absence doesn't affect you. Mama! You will hear from me soon. Love, Debare."

His love for money approach made him grow apart from his family. They couldn't bear their own being a fraudster. They knew almost all of his money transactions were fraudulent, but there were times, they called, begging him to send them

monies, regardless. Debare lived for the moment, and now he was experiencing the result of it.

In fact, he was not taken to the airport, but to a military base which was odd, he thought. From there, Debare boarded a plane along with other men. The estimated flight time to Moscow was three hours and thirty-five minutes. Debare was further told not to talk to anybody. He can only drown in his thoughts for the next few hours.

What seemed like some strong patches of turbulence throughout the flight, the plane finally landed, gaining the cheers from the men he didn't know what their purposes were. Debare wasted no time embarking the plane with his carryon and luggage and noticed that they hadn't landed at the airport but at a makeshift airstrip of some sort. The snow was falling heavily, and he was confused where he was supposed to go next, but one man on the plane nudged him on his side.

"The truck," he pointed ahead of him.



It could fit fifteen persons and was camouflaged. All the passengers jumped in, and in the midst of the heavy snow, there weren't any traces of anything once they departed.

While on the way, Debare received a message on the cell

phone he received from Brian reading, “St. Hemmingway 13, a gathering of refugees get ready to speak to the Minister.”

The instructions were vague, and Debare was confused, but he knew it would become clearer as time went on. The passengers were silent, and they arrived in Moscow within the hour. Debare was dropped off at the sidewalk of the British embassy. When he saw Moscow, he fell in love with its beauty. He didn’t know where he was going but used his phone’s customized GPS signaller as a locator.

After fifteen minutes of walking, Debare was huffing and puffing as the lack of sleep and jetlag kicked in. He didn’t even know where he would sleep for the night. All he knew was that he had to proceed to the destination given. As Debare drew closer, he noticed a large group of Africans in front of a large building, protesting. He was at the right place. His appearance assimilated into the crowd as he pushed through the people; all standing in front of the Federal Assembly.

After a few minutes, a group of Russian men and women walked out of the building, standing on individual platforms prepared to speak to the crowd of protesters. One was given a microphone and started by saying: “Today is a day of celebration, I am giving out this statement to say I stand with you!” The man holding the mic raised his fist earning the respect of the crowd. All cheering in unison. “I am deeply saddened by

the fact you are compelled to flee your countries and being exposed to appalling harm, including exploitation, rape, and torture. I'm here to say you're welcomed to our country!"

As the demonstration went on, Debare focused on the people's reactions and how they were taking the speakers' words.

His phone messaged: "These are the profiles of the people standing on the platforms."

Dabare skimmed through them, seeing their positions in the Parliament. He assumed Brian was present because he knew of them. He looked around and couldn't find him, everywhere he turned. The man that spoke caught his attention in particular. He was a part of many luxuries clubs aside from his job. It was odd how he had time to be a part of them all.

His phone buzzed a few minutes later with another message. "Follow Boris Petrov." He understood it, meaning he would have to wait until the crowd cleared and he would have to follow one man in particular.

Debare waited patiently, apart from the people. Reading through Boris's bio and learning more about him. He had no further information why he was supposed to follow him. T-shirts, food, and water were being handed to them as a sign of appreciation. Again, his phone buzzed leading him to the final reason.

“Put a tracker on his suitcase.”

That wouldn't be hard, he thought. The crowd began clearing out, and Debare noticed the man along with his bodyguards moving. He wasted no time taking the tracker from his bag and holding it tightly speeding up his pace; His long steps lunged him forward catching up to them. He played the scene in his head and remembered all the steps he had to take.

Rushing to them he yelled out, “Sir Petrov!”

He tried to be as loud as possible, and it worked since the man turned around. “Something fell out your suitcase!”

The minister stopped raising an eyebrow at him. “What may it be?” he questioned, as Debare got closer, one bodyguard blocked his way.

He looked at them annoyed but then proceeded with their conversation. “This pen.” He had placed the tracker inside the pen and was pleased when Boris took it from him landing it in his suitcase. “Your work is impressing with helping the refugees, thank you,” Debare added trying to get rid of the suspicion he had earned from the bodyguards.

He had succeeded as Boris only waved at him in gratitude and proceeded on his way to the car. At the time being, he went to Moscow and experience something he never could as a child. The scenery was exquisite, and he enjoyed the

sunshine as he walked the streets of Moscow. It was expensive to foreigners, but Debare could get a taste of their phenomenal food. After his free time circling around the city, he received a call from an unknown number showing the next step of the mission. Russia to him was a country of curiosities and wonders, a place he would have to get used to.

CHAPTER 3

DEBARE'S APARTMENT was rather small to his liking. He wasn't used to living in such tight quarters but was grateful. He turned on the live stream of Boris Petkov and listened to find out possible clues. The conversations were boring, not revealing much. He sprawled his equipment on the coffee table and ate while he listened in. After, he was interrupted by a phone call. An unknown number that didn't resemble the one from earlier.

"Hello?"

There was a long pause. "You shouldn't have shown your face Debare."

It was Brian. Debare rolled his eyes and sat his food on the table.

“Well, how was I supposed to take hold of his suitcase?” Debare asked annoyed.

“Don’t give me that attitude, you dumb fuck.” Brian spat.

Debare wondered how Brian knew about the pen. Then again, he was an MI6 agent. He knew everything.

“When you give me an order, give me clear directions, or I will do it as I please.” Debare gave him a cocky answer, which set Brian off.

“Don’t you fucking ever talk to me like this again or else you’re fucking done. You fucking cunt. Do as I say and don’t ask questions.” Brian cut the line leaving Debare in a rage.

“Doko mi,” Debare screamed in Yoruba which means “suck my dick.”

He was about to slam the phone against the wall when a phone call was made on Boris’s live stream. He pressed a button on his laptop to read the English translation.

“Where did you take the diamonds? We need the money right away.” Boris asked.

Debare drew closer to the speakers.

The man on the line began counting and calculating the price of the diamonds. “Two are already sold, sir. The money went to the inventories.”

The call ended, and Boris went to the bathroom to take a shit. Debare stopped the live feed and reflected. Other two? That meant the Russians dug up four diamonds at the Popigai Crater. Speedily, he dialled Brian's number. Brian took thirty seconds to answer, and Debare hastily spoke.

"I got good news for you. The diamonds are four not two, sir."

"What?" Brian answered confused. "But there were only two reported in the media?" He seemed dumbfounded. "The other two must be going straight to their pockets."

Brian was proud of what Debare had found out and more eager to dig deeper into the case. The value of the diamonds was astronomical and being probably divided amongst the Parliament members. After a long pause, Brian spoke again.

"Hmm. Listen, tonight you need to go to the Ministry of Finance to Aleksandar Andreev's office and find out more information on their activities." Debare sat and listened while biting down his nails. As Brian elaborated, Debare wasn't so sure if he could handle the task.

"Yes, sir," he replied cautiously and hanged up the phone. He rolled the recording repeatedly looking for clues until he almost fell asleep. Tonight, he would be on an official mission.

Two hours had passed since Brian's call, and Debare was ready for his excursion. He went out on the streets of Moscow dressed in an ushanka (fur hat) and fur coat. It was cold as hell outside. His backpack was filled with equipment for his mission. He proceeded to the Metro station and looked up the Ministry of Finance's location by his customized Maps app and found it. It would be his first time taking the train because there were no trains in his hometown only cars and taxis.

While viewing the map of the city on the Metro, Debare was taken aback at how much packed it was. Everybody was pushing one another trying to get a seat. He pushed through trying to get to the back of the car. It was 10 PM, and he wondered what kind of nightlife they had if they were working so much on the weekdays.

After a few stations, he got off at Kursky Station. Debare lit up a cigarette and made his way towards the Ministry of Finance in the Siberian cold. Once the grand building was within sight, he formulated a plan to get inside. There were two guards in the front of the building, both having steady grips on their guns. Debare disguised as a homeless man walked by pretending to be talking on the phone.

Circling the building, he made it to the back door which was locked and where security cameras were overhead. Brian texted him.

"I will take care of it."

The cameras shut off and the door unlocked. The corridors were dark and empty, Debare clicked on night-vision glasses. He took a right up the stairs headed to the top floor. His footsteps were smooth and quick resembling a professional burglar while checking behind him.

Just when he turned up the staircase, he bumped into someone. His heart raced as the person looking on to him was the night janitor.

"Hey, what are you doing here?" his Russian voice growled.

Debare had no time to think. He grabbed the man and put him a choke hold right away, causing him to black out and then hit him on the back of the head with gun's butt. The man fell over, and Debare dragged him to the nearest janitor's closet.

"Get to Aleksandar's office without getting caught this time," he whispered.

Now on the last floor, it was time to find the minister's office. Brian didn't give him much Intel on the specific room number. Probably a result of the encryption of the building's security system. Debare knew he had to get those files even if it meant staying until the morning. Yeah right. After passing a couple of offices, he paid particular attention to the last one down the hall. He couldn't read the name, so he scanned it

with his phone, and it was Aleksandar's office. He grabbed the doorknob, shook it forcefully, but it was locked. Constantly looking behind him, he opened his backpack and found two metal wires. Debare was able to unlock it after a few seconds. He felt honoured. All the scamming he had done finally paid off.

The office was bigger than he expected. He shut the door not making a ruckus and searched the drawers for the documents. Every single one of them and found nothing. He put his hands on his head in a rage and blurted "Odi Oshi" which means "stupid fuck" regarding Brian's Intel. Suddenly, a lamp from the desk dropped on the floor. Someone was coming down the hallway, and Debare ducked down behind a desk, knowing it probably was a guard. The door opened slightly and inside walked a security guard.

"Is anyone here?" The guard's voice grew nearer. He circled half of the room with his flashlight, not spotting Debare, gave up even though he saw the broken lamp on the ground. "Let the maintenance workers handle this shit. Maybe it was the fucking rats," he uttered in Russian while closing the door.

Debare quick came out from behind the desk, determined to find the files. He looked around the other side of the room and spotted a safe with a code keypad.

"They have to be inside."

He kneeled down, pushing random numbers but then remembered that he had talc powder in his backpack.

He tossed it around the numbers and then brushed them upwards, leaving little traces along the buttons. After a couple of failed attempts, he code was cracked, and the safe clicked open. Rubles and documents were neatly placed. His eyes widened as he didn't expect stacks of money. There had to be thousands of rubles in there.

He scanned the files carefully but quickly checking all of them even though they were in Russian. The last page of the stack caught his eye. It was an invoice from yesterday that was in the line of 4 billion dollars. Taking a picture of the file, he sent it to Brian. Maybe it was the money from the two missing diamonds? Debare was left puzzled.

The phone buzzed, it was Brian again.

“Change of plans, their swelling transactions are the least of our problems right now. Find the individuals who are behind this and take any evidence.” Brian ended the call, and Debare now felt like a real agent.

He placed a mini-recorder under the desk and left the office. Sneaking through the corridors, Debare was able to make it out the building undetected. Now it's time to track Boris's calls.

“This guy is part of the fraud,” he said to himself.

A text message from Brian buzzed on his phone. “Meet me at City Space in fifteen.” He placed his phone back in his pocket, lit up a cigarette and followed the GPS signal. “It’s cold as a motherfucker out here.” Debare headed out.

City Space was one of the most popular bars in Moscow at the city’s highest building called the Vostok Towers. It didn’t take much time getting there by Metro, and Debare arrived early, waiting for Brian at the farthest table. There were only a handful of people dancing and chatting as he ordered a Scotch from one of the waitresses.

After some time spent on checking out the women, Brian suddenly appeared at the table making himself comfortable.

“You did well,” he admitted, not looking at Debare and calling the waiter.

Debare chuckled, “Thank you, Brian.”

“Who told you, you can call me that?” Brian blatantly asked, surprising Debare.

“Myself,” Debare said in a cocky manner, sipping on his Scotch.

“Enough blabbering and let’s get to work,” Brian stated focusing on his backpack and pulling out documents.

“Here.”

He handed him a file with a picture of a middle-aged woman on it. Alina Grekova was written in bold letters. Debare peeked up at Brian trying to find an answer to who she might be. The waiter arrived with Brian's drink.

"I'm listening," Debare said.

"This woman right here is the Minister of Education." Sipping on his drink while turning the pages for Debare. "And here are some of her criminal activities not known to the public."

The subject line "Drug smuggling" caught Debare's attention, raising both of his eyebrows.

"How could someone like her become the Minister of Education? What has this world come to?"

Brian seemed disappointed. He elaborated further: "She has brunette hair and bangs that shields her forehead. It is said that her grandmother dropped her when she was a toddler leaving a gash that is very noticeable. Alina and her family are from Poland but moved to Moscow when she gave birth to her only daughter."

Debare carefully listened while examining her file. "Her daughter is a drug addict, and before they came here, it was speculated the family lost all of their money due to her habit."

"So is it all rumours? "How do you know for sure?" Debare curiously asked.

"Our team did a little research before this case which led us to this conclusion." Brian further explained.

"She is involved in all types of shit. Believe me! Tomorrow, the Parliament will have a session, and I'm positive she will be there. Follow her afterward and find out who she will be meeting with. Prepare yourself and get some rest".

"We're done here, don't forget about tomorrow." Brian got up off his feet and strolled out of the bar, leaving Debare to pay the tab. "Omo Ale (Bastard)," Debare blurted as he left the bar to head back to his apartment.

"Who is this lady Alina?" There wasn't much on the internet about her except for some articles on how well she's done with the kindergartens and elementary school students. There were pictures of her posing with the kids, and it seemed odd she was living a dual life. "What a fraud?"

CHAPTER 4

“IT’S TOO EARLY in the morning,” Debare thought to himself as he headed inside the Metro station. “Another long ride and there are no seats.”

Debare gasped. He didn’t get much rest last night. The train was so crowded that he got off a couple of stations early.

“Fuck it.”

Debare didn’t realize it would be a twenty-five-minute walk in the freezing cold of Siberia to the Kremlin Senate which was the biggest governmental building in Moscow. Once he arrived, he sat on a bench not far from the front entrance and started snapping some photos. After ten minutes, government cars began arriving in front of the building and officials got out. All-embracing one another. Debare snapped a few more pictures and spotted his target; Alina Grekova coming out of

the last car with a smug grin plastered on her face. She hugged her colleagues while accompanying them through the entrance. Her clothes were extravagant which made Debare wary.

“Something big is going on.”

The driver of her vehicle walked away from the car, presumably taking his break. The time was now. All the drivers were on break, smoking and chatting with one another. He pretended to be a tourist walking up to Alina’s car, snapping photos and in the process, placing a tracker under the passenger’s door.

“What are you doing here?” A foreign voice startled him. “I don’t know Russian, sir. I’m a tourist just admiring this fancy car.” Debare said looking at the drivers.

The driver, who wore a black suit with matching shoes, looked confused.

“I’ve always wanted to buy one like this; do you know the owner?” Debare went on saying.

The driver now was more annoyed because he couldn’t understand Debare fluency in English, surprisingly responded in English although it wasn’t the best.

“I do. She is the Minister of Education. By the way, I like your country America. Fucking hot chicks.”

Debare chuckled. “Thank you. Thank you.”

The driver looked over at the other drivers who were looking at him and suddenly changed his tone.

“Alina wouldn’t like you hanging here, so move on.” Debare, raising his arms in defeat, slowly moved away from the car and walked off to the bench where he sat earlier.

The meeting was in progress, and Debare was told to wait until it ended to get more pictures. “What are my next steps?” he thought while pulling out a cigarette.

Suddenly, he received a message. “A motorcycle parked behind the Senate’s building is for you to use. The license plate number is H647xCC-77, and the keys are in its left jacket.”



His job had just become easier. After searching for the back exit, he found the vehicle. The keys were in the jacket as mentioned and Debare drove off to a nearby coffee shop not far from the Kremlin Senate.

Two hours later, the Ministers came out of the Senate building, exchanging their goodbyes. Alina walked to her car with another man. Debare guessed he was a minister, put on his helmet on and followed Alina’s car as it sped off. Keeping his

distance, Alina's car rode through the richest parts of the city, passing by fancy restaurants, malls, and clubs. The car, a few minutes later, had stopped at Turandot, the most expensive eatery in Moscow. Debare snapped photos of them as Alina kissed the man passionately.

"He must be her lover," Debare thought.

They entered inside, and Debare parked across the street and checked his phone. No messages.

He proceeded to the restaurant and was stopped by the host. "Do you have a reservation?" the man said in broken English.

Debare replied scratching his head, "No, I do not. "But I need to go in. I have a friend coming."

"I am sorry sir that cannot be possible. You will have to come back another time."

The man went back to work behind the desk. Debare did not give up. He pulled out a hundred-dollar bill and placed it on the desk.

"I'm sure you can find an empty table." Debare smiled crookedly.

The man looked at the money and said, "Let me escort you personally. Come right this way."

Debare nodded and followed him. There weren't many guests seated, but those who were appeared to be tycoons.

"Here you go and enjoy your time." Debare sat down looking over the menu. His table wasn't far away from Alina's. A waiter came to his table asking for his order. "The cheapest food on the menu."

He swatted him away. The waiter chuckled and left, leaving Debare to spy on the couple. A huge ring was being placed on Alina's hand, and her huge grin plastered her face as she thanked him. The man kissed her hand. Debare secretly snapped a few more photos.

Whilst doing so, a message popped up on the screen, supposedly from Brian reading, "Hack her phone, I've sent you the virus."

The ring, he gave Alina was very expensive, and she seemed grateful. She then got up and headed to the restroom, leaving the man of her dreams alone. The action had to be taken. Debare approached their table, sat down and struck a conversation.

"That is a lovely suit, sir. Where did you get it from?" staring at Alina's bag close by.

"Excuse me, who are you?" The man blurted while he sat down.

"I work in the reception." Debare pointed to his right, accidentally flipping over the bag causing everything to fall out. He spotted the phone and reached for it, hoping to upload the virus quickly.

"So sorry, sir. I'll pick everything up."

Debare ducked down and attached the device to Alina's phone. The software took a few seconds to download and then it began counting the percentage. It read, "Uploading 35%."

"What are you doing?" The man was becoming wary.

"The makeup spilled, sir. She has a lot of beauty products." His voice grew louder. Now at 50%, Debare took hold of a glass of wine on the table and intentionally flipped it over. The man called another waiter and stood up, trying to save his pants from staining. The software now at 80%. Debare could hear Alina's high heels approaching the table. 95%.

"Oh shit," Debare gasped.

She was right at the table.

"What's going on here?" Her voice worried.

The virus uploaded at 100%. Debare gave Alina her bag and straightened himself up.

"Sorry lady, I don't speak Russian. You have some fine beauty

products. Please take care and have a pleasant evening.” Debare said, not looking at her.

“Thank you,” Alina replied.

Debare left a one-hundred-dollar bill for the man to clean his suit and proceeded to the exit.

“It’s done.” He called Brian while making his way to the bike.

“Good, now you go through her history and eavesdrop on her conversations.”

“She is in love,” Debare added.

“With who?” Brian paused.

“I think it’s with one of the ministers. He wasn’t on the platform of speakers.”

“Find out with who.” With that, the phone line was cut.



Debare shook his head as he drove off.

Back at his apartment, he began investigating. He connected his laptop to begin tracking Alina’s phone history. With the help of the MI6 translation equipment, he wrote down every frequent number that appeared on her phone. Her last call was made to a person named Andrei Trubanov, who was the

acting Minister of Finance and one of the individuals who were on the platform. He also glanced through her gallery looking at more evidence on her activities. There were some pictures of her daughters and family. One of the pictures showed a picture of a diamond. “Perhaps it’s one of the Cullinan diamonds?” he thought.

“Alina is in on it. Where are the remaining diamonds? Are the ministers working together to hide them?” Debare pondered.

He replayed Boris’s tracker and reviewed his conversations. In his notes, he made mention of the following: “It looks like the last diamond was being held by Boris. The ministers appeared to sell one diamond so far and shared the profits among themselves. Alina was the first to receive a payment. Aleksandar did as well, and there are strong business ties with Alina. The first platform speech had seven speakers; Ministers and Parliament members. There are five more suspects to investigate.”

Debare glanced at all of their profiles for another hour and then headed to bed. Around 11 AM, Debare woke up from his phone’s ringer. Half asleep, he picked up.

It was Brian on the line. “I got you in one of the parliament meetings as a security guard, be there in 30 minutes, the clothes are in the janitor’s closet A.” The line then cut off. Debare jumped out of bed and got ready.

In twenty minutes, he made it to Parliament building. There weren't many people standing outside, so he knew he must have arrived early or it was cold outside. Entering the back entrance, Debare had a bit of trouble finding the janitor's closet. After circling around for nearly five minutes, he found the closet and shut himself inside. Behold, there was the security uniform folded neatly on a chair and a translation device. Although the closet space was tight, he was able to manage. He fixed his cap and placed a camera on the collar of his seamless shirt. "This shirt actually looks good," he told himself. Debare left the closet not knowing which room the meeting was being held.

"Hey! Buddy" Debare yelled, approaching a security guard near the end of the hall. "Do you speak English?"

The guard replied "Yes."

"Where is the meeting?" Debare said, barely making eye contact.

"In Hall Room B. Wait a minute. I haven't seen you before. Have I?" The guard started to get a better glimpse of him.

"Yeah, I just started today," Debare said shyly clearing his throat. The guard then paused having second thoughts. "Are you Peter from Sudan?"

"Yes sir," Debare nodded.

“Now I remember. Vladislav told me about you the other day, you can go. It’s right down the hall B.” Debare sighed in relief and chuckled while walking away. “I never heard of anyone named Peter from Africa.”

As he approached the room, Alina was spotted talking to Boris outside the door. Debare lowered his head and walked passed. A dozen of government officials was seated while Debare stood in position, not moving an inch. His job was to watch along with another guard. Alina laughed loudly as she entered with Boris. Once they sat down, they kept chatting until the meeting started. He couldn’t get a clear signal from the translation piece on what they were talking about.

The time is 10 AM, and the meeting is now in session. As the others came in, the other security guard closed the doors and instructed Debare to keep quiet. There were a dozen attendees, and an older male was seated at the front end of the table. He appeared to be the head speaker. He spoke, “Ladies” pointing at Alina and “Gentlemen” smiling at the rest. “As you may know, we are now the leading economic powerhouse in Europe. All thanks to Boris.”

A man began clapping while the others followed.

“Partly let’s say, Vlad had a massive role in transferring the diamonds successfully to the reserves.”

Did he know the other two diamonds weren’t revealed? Who

is Vlad? Debare never heard that name before, and there was no Intel on him in his records.

The speaker continued, "He will come from his trip shortly."

One man shouted, "I think we should throw him a party." The table cheered, but Alina and Boris stayed silent looking agitated.

"Anyways, let's get to work shall we?" Everyone nodded as the lead speaker continued, "With our growing economy, many companies from abroad want to invest in our country right now," declared the speaker's rhetorical statement that earned the members' undivided attention.

Debare's eyes were glued to Alina and Boris and noticed their uneasiness. He kept his head down to avoid contact with Boris.

"Altogether, twenty giant corporations want to invest in doing business here which means that there will be fifty thousand jobs for our citizens thus making our economy even stronger. We would like a twenty-year commitment from each corporation, guaranteeing that they will not take our money and just leave."

Everyone at the table clapped for a ten-second span except for Alina and Boris who appeared disgusted.

“Shouldn’t we first offer contracts for 2 to 3 years to see how they will operate?” Alina asked raising her hand.

Everyone fell silent for a few seconds until a minister responded desperately.

“We are in no position to negotiate. It is indeed a-take-it or leaves it.”

“I mean twenty foreign corporations seems like a bit of a stretch running at one time, and they will have an enormous revenue from our economy being that the taxes aren’t that high right now,” Alena stated annoyingly.

Debare wondered if she responded sincerely or just thinking of her own interests.

“Alina, look at the bright side, more than fifty thousand Russians will have jobs. We wouldn’t have to worry about them going abroad supporting other nations’ economies,” the head speaker stated while flipping through documents. “On top of this, we can control the revenues from these corporations internally making all of us much richer.” The speaker had a history of outtalking Alina.

She kept quiet while another minister stood up. “With the rising economy and these latest developments, I think we need to raise the country’s workers’ salary to about fifteen percent for the upcoming year.”

Debare recognized him from the platform. It was the Minister of Finance, Aleksandar Andreev.

Most liked the idea and clapped in agreement. Alena rose to her feet shouting in frustration. “Absolutely not, that would tarnish our economy after a few months.”

“Alina, calm down 15 percent is not that much I think we can handle it,” the minister replied.

“No, we cannot. The economic forecast of adding fifteen percent raises to our budget would crash our stock markets to the ground. There will be a recession and businesses would pack up, leaving Russia because they wouldn’t be able to pay their workers anymore. I see we are not on the same page here.” Alina said angrily and disappointed.

The president of the Parliament interjected and said, “I am in support of this idea, and I’ll leave it for you all to negotiate.”

Alina grabbed her purse and walked out of the meeting in a rage, leaving the door empty. She walked right pass Debare and not recognizing him from the restaurant incident from the other night. After Alina left, the session resumed, and there were not many agenda items on the table to discuss. A few more disagreements took place between Boris and the rest of the council members. By the meeting’s end, everyone seemed frustrated with one another.

Debare’s shift was over. It was time to leave. The supervisor

of the security guards spotted Debare approaching the front entrance.

“Excuse me. Who are you again?” His voice signalled that something was wrong. There was another man of African descent beside him looking confused.

Debare replied, “Peter, sir.”

“But, Peter is right here with me. You are an imposter. Come with me right away.” The supervisor ordered the other African guard to stand put while he dealt with Debare.

Debare needed to use a little trickery to get out. As they were walking back, he said, “Hey, look. You dropped something.”

The guard looked down, and Debare tripped him; causing him to fall. Heading for the exit as fast as he could, the voice of the supervisor seemed right behind him. He ran past the African and out the door. The African snickered.

“Stop him. Stop him. You fool!” the head guard said.

The African just raised his hands, and the head guard ran pass him; right into an elderly woman who just entered the building.

“Hello, I need to ask you my son for some directions. Please help me,” she said in a needy voice.

Out of respect, the guard answered her questions, which gave

more time for Debare to escape. He hopped on his bike and drove off quickly. What a close call! The road home seemed to be longer than usual. Debare kept looking back to see if anyone was trailing him. Overall, the operation was a success, and he hoped Brian would be pleased.

CHAPTER 5

“I CAN’T BELIEVE you’ve done that! Are you out of your fucking mind?” Brian yelled his guts out at Debare inside of the apartment.

Debare was down and drunk; drinking too many beers while replaying what happened to him earlier. He didn’t have the spirits to digest Brian’s lecture.

The scene with Debare was being shown on the local news channel. Luckily, his face wasn’t clear enough to identify, but the security footage showed a black male running out of the building. The politicians now knew someone was spying on them. This drove Brian insane, and if it were up to him, he would terminate Debare’s mission right away.

“Do you even have anything to say for yourself?” Brian’s fists

balled in anger as he hit the table in front of him gathering the little attention Debare had left.

“I made a mistake, don’t we all?” His words slurred as he glanced at Brian; his eyes half-closed.

“You, in particular, can’t afford to make mistakes.” The words felt like daggers thrown at his body, but he was already used to Brian’s insults.

He was worthless, just used to complete a mission.

Brian went on further: “I told you not to be seen, but you did the exact opposite.”

Debare heaved a sigh, “The head guard noticed that I wasn’t the one assigned to duty. Your Intel sucks. I was supposed to be cleared.”

“Do I look like I fucking care? You were on a mission and trained properly.” The argument seemed to not have an end.

Debare then asked a question out of the blue. “What’s my next mission? I will do a better job next time.”

“Oh! Your next mission?” Brian scrunched his eyebrows “Don’t fucking bother because you won’t get it.” Brian rudely spat in the direction of Debare. “Robert already assigned another person to carry on the mission, so you won’t be needed.”

Baffled by Brian's response, he countered by asking, "Well, give me a minor one with less importance to prove you I deserve a second chance." Debare straightened his posture as if he was taking the conversation seriously.

Brian gave it some thought but didn't answer right away. Still, in frustration, he sat down on the couch, to watch some more of the news and poured himself a drink. Debare tried to drink with him and started vomiting. Brian escorted him to the bathroom and leaned him over the toilet seat.

Brian was a person who cared a lot about his job and didn't want to experience failure. He was determined to finish the mission successfully. Briefly, he thought he picked the wrong person. He somehow had empathy for Debare even though he didn't know Debare well. Debare walked out a few minutes later, barely able to walk and sat down next to Brian. He nodded in despair.

"Sober up, I've got a job for you." Debare froze up listening to him. In a matter of seconds, he felt slightly better and delighted he got another task.

"Alina's daughter, Gala Grekova is a host at a party taking place at the Night Flight. It's a very popular club here in Moscow, and most likely you will need VIP access," Brian stated while not making any eye contact with Debare as he scrolled through his phone, searching something.

“How will I get the VIP?” Debare tried to make his questions short not to anger Brian.

“I’ll take care of it, you’ll need to look more presentable.” Brian looked at him from his head to his toes judging his appearance. “Pick out the best clothes you have, I’ll be back.”

Brian stormed out of the apartment. Debare stumbled through the apartment searching for his suitcase to pick out his best outfit. Once he found it, he picked out a black shirt with matching pants. Afterward, he took a shower, shaved, got dressed and was ready to leave. Brian returned shortly after and gave him a VIP ticket that looked expensive.

“Just don’t fuck up this time,” he said more politely.



Debare was determined to do his best and prove him wrong.

Midnight slowly came around, and it was time for him to leave. He rode his bike and could see the club already in his sight. Crowds of people were lined up, waiting to get in. Debare waited in line alone earning the stares of the rest, all of that trouble to fit in and he still was radiating the crowd. His ticket was tightly in his grip, and he walked up to the bouncers. They gave him a cautious look, but when they saw his VIP card, they instantly made room for him to get in. It

was strange; Debare being a foreigner, black, and solo but the bouncers only could do their job.

Debare liked the atmosphere. He came in along with others, and the place was getting crowded. He ignored the looks he got and sat down at the bar, looking around. The music (techno) was not much to his taste, but he accepted it.

“What would you like to order, sir?” His thoughts were cut off by a feminine voice behind the bar. “A beer.” He nodded at her answering.

“Right away.” She smiled back.

While he waited, he searched for Gala’s picture on his phone. He had to see who she was, but the real question was how was he going to start a conversation without sounding like a creep? Debare wasn’t Russian and looked older than most of the people at the club.

“Here you are, sir.” The woman behind the bar served him his beer.

He thanked her and got back to examining the people who entered the place. He spotted Gala for the first time and was amazed at her beauty. Suddenly, she disappeared into the crowd, and Debare wondered if she was on the second floor. Gala appeared again mixing with the crowd. She looked marvellous, but Debare didn’t have the eyes to look at her as a woman. She was ten years younger than him and the

daughter of the enemy. He took a sip of his beer not tearing his eyes off her.

“Do you need anything else?” The bartender asked trying to be helpful.

“No, it’s fine.” He smirked at her, his attention returning to Gala. He wondered if she knew about her mother deceiving the public in her position as Minister of Education.

She approached the bar, leaving her clutch on his side so he could smell her perfume. “A Tequila, please.”

Debare watched her chock it down as soon as the woman gave it to her. Her friends came over and started cheering afterward. Debare chuckled to himself being reminded of his old days, and how he used to go out with his friends all over Lagos. Friendships like that don’t last forever, and he had to forget them when he built his business.

Leaving his thoughts aside, Debare focused on the girl and the mere thought how would he get close to her. “Hey, bartender. Do you speak English?”

“Yes, I studied it in school,” she replied.

“Who is that girl over there?” Debare asked the bartender starting a conversation.

“Oh, believe me, you don’t want her.” She chuckled working on the drinks from the other customers.

“Why not?” Debare asked amused.

“She is the Minister’s daughter, I heard her mother was super strict, plus she only hangs out with rich guys.” She bit the inside of her cheek raising both of her eyebrows.

“So that means I stand no chance?” He tried to play it off as if he was interested. “Probably not,” she bluntly replied.

From the short conversation, Debare got to know her persona, even if that meant Gala only going after rich guys, that was still something to him. He just had to watch her, not do anything rather crazy and find out how much she spends on a single night at the club. Quite boring to be frank, but it was another chance for Debare that he was worth the headache. She danced with other two guys. Her outfit alone looked like it cost a fortune and it wasn’t surprising when she ordered more drinks to suit them. Bottles of champagne were ordered by the hour, and as the night went on, Debare secretly snapped pictures of her dancing. He needed them just in case to prove to Brian that he was working and not wasting time.

His view now was being blocked by a woman that walked in front of him. She almost pushed him to the side and ordered herself a drink. She danced and waited patiently for her drink to be served. Her figure was mesmerizing, and it left Debare captivated by her beauty. She had the figure was of a model. Was she in Victoria Secret’s 2018 catalogue? However, his entertaining was cut off when she accidentally tripped over

the big stool in front of her while her drink was in her hand. It ended up spilling it all over Debare's black shirt.

"Oh my god, I'm so sorry!" She grabbed a napkin from the counter dabbing it on Debare's shirt as she tried to wipe away the liquid.

He grabbed the napkin from her hand trying to do the job himself. She apologized for countless of times, but he focused on cleaning up the mess on his shirt.

"I don't even know what I was looking at."

This time Debare looked up at her, slightly nodding but his stare dropped down to her chest, seeing a rather strange rock. It was a diamond, a real one. It had a high resemblance to the diamond, which was odd. "What kind of rock on this girl's neck?" Debare thought to himself.

"Come over to my table, I'll make it up for you." She smiled, leaving him puzzled.

He needed to continue spying on Gala, but he wouldn't want to miss out the opportunity to see if she was the holder of the fourth Cullinan diamond. And if she was, how did she get it? She grabbed him by his hand and dragged him across the club. He was unfamiliar with where she was taking him but noticed it was in the direction of the special VIP sitting area. She wasn't alone at the table. Two other men around her age sat with her while giving Debare death stares.

“What’s your name?” She purred in his ear smiling.

“It’s Peter,” he answered almost shyly.

“I’m Nikita.” Her smile only got brighter.

“Nice to meet you, Nikita.” He offered a hand which she gradually accepted. The men at the table didn’t introduce themselves, just stared at him in disgust. “This is Evgeni.” She pointed at a man sipping on his drink not paying much attention. “And that is Nikolai.” She pointed at the man that kept staring at him.

“Pleasure is all mine.” He tried being nice, but the men didn’t care.

“Okay, well do you want something to drink?” Nikita asked enthusiastically.

“I think I had enough for tonight.” Debare looked away trying to find Gala among the crowd and was nowhere in sight. He sighed in frustration at the fact he had lost her.

“What’s wrong, baby?” Nikita scrunched her eyebrows in confusion.

“Nothing, about that drink I must’ve changed my mind,” Debare smirked at her as she handed him her vodka from earlier.

“Drink this.” Nikita watched Debare chug it down. “Why are

you here alone?” She spoke loudly in his ear over the loud music.

“My friends, they left earlier,” Debare said focusing on her necklace as it was in full view of his eyes. It was no doubt she was wearing the Cullinan.

“Well, I’m not letting you leave any time soon.” Her hands trailed on his chest, making little steps with her fingers. Debare looked down intimidated. He had never met a woman like her; driven with confidence, but classy. Her lips spoke something he couldn’t understand and seconds later, she was on the dance floor.

Seductively moving her hips, she called him over wiggling her finger. Debare looked around him, noticing everybody was dancing, so he got up and joined her. Nikita wrapped her arms around his neck, keeping him close. He could feel her breath on his skin which caused him goosebumps. He wrapped his arms around her waist, cautiously seeking Gala.

“Sorry about Nikolai and Evgeni,” she said passionately in his ear. “They’re not very nice to strangers.”

Debare didn’t give it much concern. “It’s fine, I’m here because of you.” He smiled looking right at the necklace.

The song changed to an upbeat track, and Nikita released the grip she had on him. She grabbed Nikolai and Evgeni from the table urging them to dance with her. They seemed as if

they had no choice, so they joined her. Debare sat down on the table devouring his drink as he watched. The men seemed to be blind to the fact she was wearing one of the most expensive diamonds on this earth on her chest. But then again, it could be fake.

“I’m going to go to the bathroom.” Debare could feel her hand on his back, so he put his drink down smiling.

“I’ll be back.” She nodded and disappeared into the crowd. Both men from the table who were accompanying her circled Debare.

“What’s your business with Nikita!?” Nikolai said fuming at Debare.

“Excuse me?” Debare was stunned.

“You heard him, what do you want from Nikita?” The other one got closer to him. It would be a lie if he said he didn’t feel threatened, but he played along with it and keep his answers short.

“Nothing, she wanted to pay me back for ruining my shirt.” He smirked to Evgeni while taking a sip of his scotch.

The man balled his fists, but Nikolai grabbed him by the hand, stopping a fight from erupting. “Stay away from her,” Evgeni warned, but Debare just shrugged it off.

Nobody would tell him what to do, and certainly not this

man. The two moved away from the table gathering their things. Debare didn't pay them any attention and got back to his drinking.

Moments later, Nikita rejoined him settling down. "Where are they?" She asked.

"They left earlier, didn't want to say goodbye I guess," Debare chuckled.

Nikita rolled her eyes sighing. "I didn't like them anyways, my father sent them to escort me." She explained roaming through her bag. "I'm not feeling so well, Peter." Her head was now resting on her hand, her eyes closed tightly.

He scrunched his eyebrows. "What's wrong?" He asked worried about the stranger he met an hour ago.

"I think they put something in my drink," Nikita faintly slurred her words.

The men responsible for escorting her seemed to be the perpetrators. It was almost three in the morning. The place was still crowded, and it looked like the party wasn't anywhere close to stopping.

The minute Debare got up to help her, loud gunshots were being fired from the front entrance. Everybody in the club started screaming, and the music was still playing. Nikita was

startled and tried to catch her senses. She didn't have the strength within her.

"Nikita! We know you're in here. Just give up!" The man responsible for the shooting screamed loudly. "We don't want that pretty little face of yours to get hurt now, do we!?"

The shooter's voice got rowdier, and Debare stormed to her side, leaning her upper arm on his neck. He tried his best for them not to be discovered under the lights. Unfortunately, blending in with the crowd wasn't in their favour.

"There she is! Get her!" When he heard them, Debare pushed Nikita to move, running by people and heading towards the back exit. Nikita mumbled something he couldn't hear. When they were outside, she said, "The car, my keys are in my clutch." She faintly pointed at a luxurious Mercedes Benz at the end of the street.

"Stop right there!" Debare looked back at the man screaming.

His gun in his hand was pointed at Nikita and was close to pulling the trigger. The minute Debare saw he couldn't help, he jumped in front of her in protection. The man fired his gun, and the bullet landed in Debare's leg.

"God!" He yelped in pain.

Nikita was fast enough to get her gun out of her purse and

shot the man straight in the head. "Fuck off," she yelled in Russian while lowering her gun and returned to help Debare.

They made it inside the car, and Nikita tried her best to get Debare to the closest hospital. Her driving skills weren't the best. Debare was losing a lot of blood, so she sped and swerved through the street lights through many cars, turning near the hospital. Once there, Nikita wasted no time on getting Debare out and hurrying towards the Emergency room.

"Help me, please!" Nikita screamed drawing the attention of the receptionist.

She gasped in horror calling out for doctors. The other patients seemed to be worried as some got out of their seats.

"What happened!?" A doctor came running by her side, inspecting Debare.

"He was shot, I think he is losing a lot of blood." Worry dripped in her voice.

"Okay, Nurse, prepare the operation room. This can't wait."

Other nurses escorted Debare to the operation room. Nikita was told to wait, but the sight of losing Debare was burning her alive.

CHAPTER 6

NIKITA patiently hung in front of Debare's appointed hospital room; waiting for the doctors to leave so she could visit Debare in peace. The operation was a success, and they removed the bullet, although his pain was unbearable. She went home for the night but returned first thing in the morning, not being able to sleep.

"You can go in now." One nurse informed her.

His room was empty, and she walked in seeing Debare wide awake.

"Hey." He greeted her, trying to straighten his posture. He struggled with pain, but she helped him up.

"How are you feeling?" She asked setting down the chocolate, she had in her hand on the table next to the bed stand.

“Better, the anaesthesia knocked me out.” He chuckled trying to get a better look at his leg.

“You’ll feel the pain when it wears off, so good luck.” She laughed settling down on the chair.

“I’ll enjoy it, while I can then.” He replied exhaling. His mind traveled back to last night and the man who shot him. He wanted to say something about it and couldn’t sit up with his arms crossed. “Who were those men, Nikita?” He asked her knowing she would have to answer, and it would bother her.

Not sure if she could unveil her secret to him yet, she replied, “I don’t know.”

“You are lying.”

She got out of her chair, turning her back on him and shifting her gaze to the wall. “Know your limits, Peter.” She warned. Nikita feared for her own safety and couldn’t reveal too much to Debare.

“All I know is that my life is in danger, and I deserve to know who did this.” He spoke the truth, and as much as Nikita wanted to keep denying it, she knew he needed to know what is happening.

“Those men were after something in my possession.” She lowered her head. Debare listened. “It was a mistake. I

bought it with me yesterday. I somehow knew of the risk, but I thought I would do no harm by wearing it.” Nikita confessed, the last words coming out as a whisper.

“What did you wear, Nikita?” Debare acting as if he didn’t know.

She gave him a stern look.

“Don’t act like you didn’t see it.”

Shaking her head, Nikita exhaled. “The diamond.” She paused giving him a look.

“Was it real?” He kept acting clueless.

“It is one of the most expensive diamonds on this earth.” She shifted her gaze, her tone dripping with shame. All he wanted to know was who gave it to her?

“I’m not allowed to say anything more than that.” Nikita walked over to the window, inspecting the street. She looked paranoid like someone who had been following her for days. “All I can say is, they may come after me again.” She now faced him. “And I don’t know when.”

He was shocked to hear her words. Most likely, they would kill her if they got a hold of her.

“So, what are you going to do now?” Debare expressed.

“I’ll go into hiding.”

His attention shifted to her answer. She seemed gullible and unable to defend herself. Debare was close to offering her to stay at his place, but then remembered it was all a mission. He had to find out where she got that diamond and what her connection to it was.

“Frankly, I’m here to make you an offer.” Her tone became serious wasting no time on continuing. “I want you to be my bodyguard, Debare.” She added, and it wasn’t a question.

Debare froze up trying to process what he just heard. Her bodyguard? What the fuck? “Nikita, I don’t think I’m fit for the job.” Debare tried to refuse but humbled himself when Nikita sat next to him on the bed.

“Few would take a bullet for me, and you don’t even know me.” She tried to convince him.

“Don’t you want to hire someone Russian with more experience and that knows who you are?”

“I trusted no one in my life, but you proved me wrong the other night.” Her conversation wasn’t anywhere near done.

In order for him to do this, he would have to discuss it with Brian. Debare could also uncover the truth behind the diamond necklace and the masterminds behind the Cullinan. Brian would be proud if he could complete this mission and he could be a free man all.

“I will pay you a lot of money.” Her head raised, curious if he would refuse that offer.

“I’m sold, under one condition,” Debare stated, already repeating it in his head. “I don’t get killed.” He almost chuckled. “Believe me, safety is my only priority.”

They both laughed entertained. Nikita thought, at last, she found someone worth her time. Debare grew a liking towards her but kept his distance. His new job was expecting him unless Brian thought otherwise.

* * *

Debare was discharged from the hospital after two weeks. Brian had secretly come to visit him earlier in the second week to see how he was doing. He debriefed Debare’s story, told him to rest, and get closer to Nikita. He didn’t mention to Debate immediately that he had a replacement working on his mission; a British operative named Vlad with a Russian mother who been in the region for a few years. Fortunately, Brian seemed a bit sympathetic.

Leaving the thoughts aside, Debare got ready to head out at last. He got the address of Nikita’s house on his phone. His stuff was packed in a duffel bag, and a taxi was called to pick him up.

The sun beamed down on his skin as he got outside. The morning’s cold breeze seemed to overwhelm the sun being

out. He put on his sunglasses and strolled to the taxi waiting for him. His luggage was placed in the trunk, and Debare gave the address to the driver.

As they were driving through many of Moscow's neighbourhoods, Debare searched through his phone looking for any new messages. One, in particular, an unknown number differed from the others read, "I will be expecting you - Nikita." He smiled to himself, looking out the window, knowing MI6 already knew what was going on.

Twenty minutes had passed, and the taxi driver stopped in front of Nikita's house. Debare was amazed by the view and turned to pay, the driver waved to express it was already taken care of. The house looked monumental, with many windows decorating it. Before going in, he inspected the surroundings. Nikita lived in a high-class neighbourhood, which looked filled with millionaire homeowners. Debare fastened his bag around his shoulder and headed up the steps.

"Don't forget to turn on your phone's interpreter." He rang the intercom twice, hearing the voice of Nikita answer.

"Hello?" She sounded strange.

"It's me Debare." Confused he answered, not expecting her to sound weird.

"Come in!" She cut the line, and the gate swung open.

Debare entered seeing a colourful garden, grounded by expensive tiles under his feet. Loud music was coming from the inside, and she had a dozen guests over. Curiosity overtook him while he made his way to the backyard. Nikita accompanied with other two men he didn't recognize.

"Debare!" She called him over, holding champagne in her hand. He came over while the men were looking strangely at him as he approached.

"What's going on?" He asked as he got closer.

"Oh, I must've forgotten to tell you!" She placed her drink on the table. "I'm hosting auditions today!"

She seemed happy, but Debare's confusion only grew with the second. "What kind of auditions?" He questioned, wondering if he should leave straight away.

"Oh, you'll see."

He noticed a hint of nervousness in her voice. It was odd, but he acknowledged and went to the other side of the garden not bothering their little get-together. After all, he was at work.

They were all laughing together at something one man had said. Debare watched them as they poured themselves more champagne, enjoying every single drop of it. Nikita seemed happy, and some girls entered the garden, all of them dressed

provocatively. Debare watched, wondering what kind of job Nikita had to be living in such luxury.

“Your names and ages please.” Nikita turned serious as she focused on them making herself comfortable on one chair.

“My name is Tanya, and I’m 21 years old.” A tall girl with black hair spoke, smiling at Nikita. She nodded looking at the next one.

“I’m Sonya, I just turned 24.” The girl tucked a strand behind her ear.

“Calina, I’m 23 years old.” The last girl was shy to look up and made Nikita smile.

“Okay, girls tell me a little more about yourselves.” Her attention shifted to all of them, asking them countless of questions and focusing on the answers.

At first, Debare thought she was a director of a modelling agency. However he was proven wrong when Nikita forced the girls to take off their clothes. Debare was stunned but entertained. He decided not to say a thing.

The girls left the room and Nikita went to the bathroom. Debare wanted to know more about Nikita’s girls and wasted no time in talking to the men.

“Excuse me, what does Nikita do?” He tried to sound nice, but they both scrunched their eyebrows.

One said in broken English, “She hasn’t told you yet?”

The other one tries to cut him off from talking further. “She runs the biggest prostitution ring in the country.”

When those words hit him, he froze in place. “How could she? It can’t be true,” Debare thought. Nikita had deceived him into accepting the job. Now, he was being scammed, and for the first time in his life, he knew what it felt like.

“It’s weird she hasn’t told you. I mean you are working for her after all.” The man with the sunglasses took a sip of his drink getting back to reading the resumes from the girls. Debare couldn’t tell the men that this was his first day on the job, so he went back to his earlier position, startled by the news.

A few minutes later, Nikita came back from the bathroom. Debare didn’t wait for her to sit down and pulled her to the side.

“Are you the head of a prostitution ring?” He whispered in her ear, which felt like a yell to her.

“Is there something wrong with that?” She questioned freeing her hand from his grip.

“Yes, a lot is.” He stated fuming with anger.

“Listen, Peter. I don’t have time for this.” She was growing agitated and trying to suppress the situation.

“I don’t either so be honest with me, why did you hire me?” Debare’s voice became louder.

“Because I felt sorry for you, and you make me feel the exact opposite because you seem to show your real face.” Her tone copied his, and Nikita stood her ground.

“I was honest with you all of this time, and you are the one who is deceiving me.” He chuckled in disbelief, not being able to fathom the situation and why now she was accusing him.

“Look, if you want to leave then go. You’re lying to yourself if you think I can’t find a replacement right away.” Her words stung, but Debare didn’t let them get to him.

“It’s fine, I’ll stay. But don’t get us killed?” As Nikita was about to leave, he grabbed her upper arm, forcing her to listen to him. “I told you at the beginning, just keep me safe.”

With that, she forced herself free. Debare’s mind travelled back to the diamond and knew he had to stay focus because of it. He retreated to his position, examining the guests. He didn’t ask Nikita much after they left. She closed the door, and Debare took off. When he approached the exit, the groundskeepers holding weapons, signalled him to go back. Moments later, one of them gave him a room key, which was prepared for her personal bodyguards. It was mandatory for her security to stay on duty for at least half of the month.

"What the fuck?" Debare sighed as he was escorted to his quarters.

* * *

After two weeks, Debare went back to his apartment, seeing much hadn't changed. He thought Brian would have come there, but there was no sign of anyone entering. Brian didn't even bother to call him after he visited him in the hospital. Debare could not wait until the plot of the diamonds was revealed and culprits arrested, so he could finally go home.

Debare threw his bag on the couch, ready to make himself a nice cup of coffee he so much had missed. The cold weather in Russia was unbearable. He always wondered what was happening home back in Lagos.

Turning on the TV, he made himself comfortable on the couch. "Are there any Nigerian channels on here?" he said to himself as he flicked through the channels. "I guess not." There was a BBC news channel that he stopped on, turning up the volume; its voice echoing through the whole apartment.

"An unknown spy is being searched by Cheka, and we have some leads in the case," says the Minister of Finance."

Debare turned off the TV annoyed. "No more going out to the streets anymore." Debare's a suspect even if they don't have his face on camera.

"I must call Brian. This problem is way out of my hands." Debare dialled Brian's number.

"Brian, they are looking for me."

As soon as Brian picked up, he replied, "I told you that's not my problem, I can't do anything about it."

"This guy is rude," Debare whispered to himself then countering. "What? They will kill me once they get their hands on me." On his feet he walked over to the balcony and inspected the street just in case someone was spying on him.

"As you said, your face didn't show clearly, so I doubt they would go through all that trouble to find you."

Debare sighed in frustration at Brian's ignorant answer knowing he didn't care if he got killed.

After a long pause, Brian spoke. "Good you called; I need you to assist Austin tonight."

"Who's Austin? Never heard of him before," Debare replied. "Is he my replacement?" Debare's cocky tone was thrilling Brian.

"Yes, you need to keep a look out for him. Stop getting fucking caught and making mistakes." Debare listened while rolling his eyes.

"Alright fine, where?" he asked sipping his coffee. "The ball

at Winter Palace, all the Ministers will be there. Austin will need to get information out of Vlad. He is the person behind the diamonds.” Debare nodded, not having too much trouble understanding Brian.

“9 PM don’t be late.”

Then, the line cut. It would be a lie if Debare said he wasn’t satisfied with getting another job, but he was frenzied that he needed to assist his replacement. Later in the day, Brian texted him the intelligence about Austin, along with his number. He contacted Austin as soon as he got the information.

The time sluggishly reached nine. Fifteen before, Debare got dressed for the Ball. As he was leaving, he received a message from an unknown number. “Meet me at the back gate. — A.A.” which stood for Agent Austin.

He chuckled at the strange signature and proceeded to lock his apartment. Suddenly, he remembered his treasured motorcycle was left in front of the club two weeks ago. “Shit, I need to call a taxi,” he gasped.

Ten minutes later, Debare reached the Ball and made his way to the back gate, seeing dozens of expensive cars in the parking lot, probably those of the Ministers. He lit up a cigarette, expecting Austin to show up. A black van stopped right beside the sidewalk when a man stepping out of which

seemed like Austin yelled “Debare Balogun.” He buttoned his suit offering his hand afterward.

“Austin?” He accepted his hand expecting from him to continue.

“Right, your job here is clear. Do as I say. Understood?” Austin’s conceit already annoyed him, and he just nodded not wanting to get into an argument.

“We will be waiters for tonight.”

As they made their way in, Debare turned to him. “Waiters, seriously?” Disappointment was written on his face.

“Do you have a better idea?” He halted.

“I don’t,” Debare answered with an attitude.

“Thought so, now move.” Austin pushed him forward, stopping again.

“Before we enter, you will need this.” Austin handed him an earphone that was so small, he could barely hold it in his hands. They walked through the staff entrance.

Austin greeted one of the workers, Debare following behind him. The man whispered to Austin something Debare couldn’t hear, but they both ended up changing from their tuxedos into waiter uniforms.

Austin instructed him they would need to serve drinks to the

Ministers and while doing so, try to eavesdrop on their conversations. Some workers viewed them suspiciously, but Austin told them in Russian he and Debare were new on the job. After they heard Austin speak, they became convinced and laughed at a joke Austin made.

“I can’t serve Boris.” Debare pleaded to Austin before they walked through the doors of the ballroom.

“Why not?” Austin questioned with a confused face.

“He has already seen my face.” Debare looked through the circled window of the doors.

“Fine, just serve Alina. I’ll take care of the rest.”

Austin swung the doors open, revealing the ballroom filled with crowds of people; many politicians and high-level officials accompanied by their partners, laughing and talking to each other. The ballroom housed cheerful voices while music filled the air from its grand piano. Austin snapped him out of his thoughts pointing at the corner of the place. He noticed Alina with her second daughter, Tatiana who resembled Gala and her husband talking.

“Don’t get out of my sight,” Austin warned and then disappeared into the crowd.

Debare was puzzled but proceeded forward. “Champagne?” He interrupted their conversation; all of them shifted their

gazes to him. Then Tatiana agreed to take a glass from the tray, her parents followed thanking Debare.

“Get us some snacks,” Alina ordered him.

Quickly nodding, he strolled back to the kitchen grabbing the first tray with food in his sight. “Where the fuck is Austin?” Debare looked in the crowd but couldn’t find Austin.

Alina and Gala were alone, and Alina’s husband went to the lobby to take a call. Debare returned with the snacks for Alina and her family. Tatiana picked up a couple of samples and added them to her plate.

“That’s about it, thank you.”

Her mother stopped her from taking any more, and Debare backed away, hearing a sharp sound from his earphone.

“Hello?” It was Austin.

“Where are you?” He whispered trying to find him in the crowd.

“Get on the second floor now!” His loud voice rang in his ear.

Debare didn’t hesitate and rushed to the second floor. Being puzzled to what door he should enter. “Which one?” he asked anxiously. “The last on the right.” Debare hurried to the end of the hall storming in the last room.

Austin was sitting down beside a drunk man that almost

seemed like he was out of it. “This is Vlad, the man responsible for the discovery of the diamonds.”

Debare closed the door behind him. “What about Boris and Alina?” he whispered to Austin.

“They seem to have nothing with the discovery, but I’m in the process of finding out more,” Austin smirked while handing a glass of wine to Vlad.

“Now, Vlad. How did you get a hold of the diamonds?” Austin kneeled next to Vlad expecting his answer.

“The owner of the Popigai Crater gave them to me because he knew I had the highest authority of those present.” His words slurred, and then he continued. “He owed me money from before so let’s call it payback.” Vlad took a long sip.

Austin and Debare shared eye contact signalling Debare should record their conversation.

He pressed the recorder on his phone getting closer to Vlad as if he was his friend. “You are a rich man. Why would you need the diamonds?”

“They were all designated for the people, not me. I wanted to give our people wealth, but many were against it.”

Debare felt surprised at his answer as he thought to himself, “Who wouldn’t want to give money to the people? Some who wanted the money for themselves?”

“Where are the other two diamonds?” Debare interrupted. Austin gave him a look, which he shrugged off.

“Alina and Boris have them. I’m sure of it.”, Vlad confessed.

“Interesting! So, Alina already sold one diamond, but Boris wants to sell the other as quickly as possible,” said Austin.

“I’m convinced that Alina already sold hers,” Debare spoke.

Austin met his gaze. “How do you know this?”

“I heard her conversations, plus the tracker on her phone showed me she had the diamond weeks ago.”

“What about Boris?”

“I don’t know if he sold it yet.” Debare blurted a lie while he was thinking about the diamond Nikita had on her neck.

He preferred to investigate the relationship between Boris and Nikita before passing judgment.

“We recorded more than enough.”

They both looked at Vlad as Austin spoke. He was so drunk he appeared to be on the edge of passing out.

“Let’s get out of here,” Debare instructed him.

They exited the room, looking behind them as they headed to the back exit and to the parking lot.

“I have the materials I need. You are free to go,” Austin rudely said.

“Wait, what are we going to do now?” Debare asked.

“Nothing. I’m going on vacation. Brian will call you soon”, Austin said as the black van showed up again.

“Nice working with you. You cocky bastard,” Debare said under his breath.

CHAPTER 7

DEBARE WAS BACK at Nikita's residence, searching all the rooms while she was in the shower. Her place was splendid and spacious. He went straight to her drawers. They were infinite. It took time to search through all.

"What are you doing here?" Nikita walked into the room her body covered in a towel, her head wet.

"Organizing your things. It is very sloppy. I practically tripped coming in." He closed the last drawer, facing her.

"My drawers are alright. You are not authorized in here. Never come in here again without my permission. Go downstairs and stand by till I get ready." She ordered, expecting him to get out of her room and close the door behind him. Just as he was about to leave, her phone rang, and she picked up. "Boris, is our deal still on for tonight?"

Debare could hear her voice, and he froze, proceeding to listen in on her conversation.

"Should I bring the diamond?" Nikita asked lowering her voice. He strolled by the door desiring to get a sharper sound; his head leaned into the door. "I miss you."

Those words shock Debare. She was fooling around with Boris. Boris was a married man with children. He also looked like a piece of shit. "How could Nikita even fall for him?" Debare wondered. He thought Nikita liked the young high rollers from what he heard. "It had to be about the money." When he tiptoed aside from the door, a vase accidentally flipped over from the mahogany drawer stand a few yards away from the door.

"Wait a second." He heard Nikita say to Boris. Debare quickly picked up the vase fragments and hurried down the stairs. "Is anybody here?" She yelled out.

Debare exhaled in comfort knowing it was a tight call. Matilda, her housemaid, was preparing supper and the whole house smelled like pasta. He liked the smell and had continually walked in the kitchen and looking if the meal was ready. He wanted a sample, and Matilda gave him a small plate.

"Hmm, this almost tastes like Jollof Spaghetti," Debare told Matilda.

She smiled even though she couldn't understand English.

Minutes passed until Nikita made her way down. Her hair was still wet, but she seemed hypnotized by the smell of the food.

“Debare, join me at the dinner table.” She said sincerely. They went into the dining room making themselves. “Tonight, I’m invited to a special ceremony,” Nikita spoke as Matilda set the table carrying the food she had cooked. “It will be mobbed with legislators, and I need you to not leave my view,” she directed, allowing no alternative to Debare but to acknowledge in approval.

“What kind of event, if you do not resent me asking, Madame?”

Nikita, while biting her food, presented him a picture on her phone of a nude man. It’s an art exhibition for politicians celebrating the past of Russia.

“Is this tolerated?” he asked puzzlingly.

“Yes, there will not be any dirty pictures, just observing them I guess.”

Debare nodded again. “So, I presume there will be a celebration afterward?”

“Yes, at Sky City.”

Sky City was one of the most expensive and famous restaurants in Russia. He was sure Nikita would meet with Boris, and he would have a chance to capture them together. Just the simple thought of solving the truth lit up Debare's face.

Nikita and Debare continued to dine in harmony, gossiping away about living in Moscow and Nigeria. Debare opened a bit to Nikita not disclosing his identity. After an hour of Nikita getting prepared, they were set to take off. Debare was the assigned driver, and neither of them spoke during the ride. Nikita sensed something.

"Is there something wrong, Peter?" She asked breaking the silence.

"No, why do you ask?"

"You're acting strangely." She pressed.

"Just concentrated on tonight, that's all."

Debare parked in the front of the exhibit. Mic check. Nikita's dress was quite revealing in all silver. There were no paparazzi outside just officials who worked for the ministry and acquaintances. He opened the door for her, stepping out, she adjusted her dress fit to go. As they started inside, the spotlight turned to her splendid figure. The show was crowded. It seemed bizarre to Debare how they had free time to go on so many excursions.

“The diamond is in my handbag.” Nikita’s remarks startled him.

Debare didn’t foresee her carrying the jewel again, not after the last episode. “Are you insane?” He grasped her upper arm, both coming to a stop.

“What?” She yelled back in irritation.

“What if you forget it? Or worse murdered over it?” He said intensely.

“That’s why you’re here, to protect us,” she said grinning. Debare shook his head in discontent.

“Alina!” Nikita yelled out in excitement, while he sought his best to mask his face.

Moving aside, Debare was nevertheless close enough to overhear their exchange.

“Long time no see.” Alina’s voice was being picked up on the device.

“I missed you, how are the girls doing?” Nikita asked.

“Oh, they are just lovely, we are sending off Daria to college this year,” Alina stated proudly.

Daria was the youngest of three sisters and the most civil of the three.

“Send my hugs her way and wish her luck.” Nikita then hugged Alina goodbye.

Debare followed behind Nikita not raising his glare from her feet. He hoped that Alina didn't recognize his face.

Boris was obvious to spot. He and his partner were chatting with a group of husbands and wives. Nikita stopped herself from going closer.

“What's wrong?” Debare sounded concerned; watching her scowl at Boris's wife while murmuring something under her breath.

“Nothing,” she said.

There was something. She directed her mind to sharing about how she cherished the exhibit's portraits and their ancient prestige. Throughout the night, Nikita was offered champagnes from guests but being watchful about poisoning, Debare kindly declined any drink sent her direction.

After most of the crowd cleared out, Boris saw Nikita and signalled her to meet him in the parking lot. Nikita told Debare to remain behind. He didn't bother listening to her; sneaking behind her as she made her way out.

“The diamond where is it?” Boris spews in her face.

“I have it, why do you need it?” She raised her head wiping the saliva from her face.

“Pardon me?” He asked surprised at her audacity. “I need it, now,” Boris said furiously.

“Why do you need it? To give it to some other tramp?” She was now yelling in a fit. Debare watched and tuned in to their exchange.

His palm slapped Nikita’s cheek in passion, the noise echoing through the empty parking lot. “How dare you?” Boris was fuming holding himself back from slapping her further.

She grabbed him, “You told me you would divorce her!” Nikita’s eyes welled up with tears. It was the first time Debare had caught her in that state.

“Divorce my wife? For you?” Boris busted in laughter holding onto his stomach. “I would never divorce her for a low—life like you.” As he got closer, he whispered something in her ear. Nikita pushed him away.

“You won’t ever have the diamond you bastard!” Nikita punched him in the face and thus her leg connected with his groin.

It was a sight to see. She rushed out of the parking lot as quick as she could in tears. Debare couldn’t back from laughter trying not to be discovered.

Nikita was noticeably agitated as she got back inside, drying her tears aside. She ordered Debare to bring the car out to the

front so they can go right away. A few minutes later, he ushered her inside the vehicle, getting her straight home. When asked why she chose to go early, Nikita made up an excuse.

The drive to Nikita's home was quiet, and she ordered Debare to go home after letting her out. He was concerned but proceeded as instructed.

He arrived at his flat and saw the gate was unlocked. Grabbing his revolver, he moved inside searching the corridor. There were noises from the living room and tiptoed towards it. Brian saw his shadow and ordered him to put the piece down.

"You scared the crap out of me!" Debare said shaken up.

Austin was on the couch watching TV and sipping on a beer.

"What is the fuck you both are doing here?" Debare questioned.

"I have a spare key. Sometimes I can't stay at my flat. Fucking wife getting on my nerves," Brian explained while Austin was laughing.

"Where have you been?" Brian demanded.

“Running errands,” he lied.

“In a tuxedo?” Brian raised an eyebrow in suspicion, not buying his obvious lie.

“Later I went to dinner with a colleague.” Brian chuckled and went back to the livingroom.

Debare went to switch clothes and accompanied them on the lounge. The silence was awkward, but Austin started the conversation.

“The fourth diamond is still missing.”

Debare listening already knowing the truth.

“It’s missing I can’t find it anywhere, no matter how much I investigate.” Brian intervened.

“We need to go over the clues we have so far.” Austin straightened himself up. “Alina already sold hers and got two billion dollars richer. She is the richest fucking woman in Russia.” They both gave it much thought but then Brian stood up. “We need to do something; the other diamond is with that dirtbag Boris. MI6 just gave us the call to fetch the diamond. Boris is the most dangerous of all the ministers. He works with the Russian Mafia as well and known to the underworld for drug smuggling.”

“I heard he was going on a business trip this weekend,” Austin added.

"A business trip? Maybe to sell the diamond? Perfect timing with the political campaigns all wrapped up. The ministers will head on recess this weekend." Brian excitedly mentioned.

"Hey, Brian. I need to keep tabs on Alina and write up reports on my end." Austin spoke in disappointment.

Brian looked at Debare having second thoughts if he should be the one to go. "I guess you have another job." Brian breathed out, having no other choice but to trust him.

* * *

"We will be late, hurry!" Nikita rushed Debare out the door, handing him her luggage. They were heading to Novorossiysk, about 1,500 kilometres from Moscow. Boris invited Nikita on a business trip. Debare was Nikita's personal escort and bodyguard. By meeting Nikita away from Moscow and lavishing her visit, Boris hoped he would entice her to give him the diamond.

After the flight, Debare and Nikita were personally driven to an exotic hotel called the Exprompt, all paid for by Boris. The room inside was enormous, and Nikita liked it. They dropped off the luggage, locked the door and went to the elevators.

"Don't be surprised if you see something between Boris and me Peter." She said, looking Debare straight in the eyes.

He never expected her to talk like this. Debare replied, "No worries, I am here for you."

The elevator doors clicked open revealing the lobby. There was a party in the garden, and Nikita's excitement couldn't be contained. It seemed like the perfect weekend to spend viewing the Black Sea. Debare was right by her side as she walked in, getting looks from everybody.

"So where is he?" Debare asked in a cocky tone.

Nikita looked for Boris in the crowd but ended up getting drinks. A few minutes later, Boris appeared with his bodyguard. His eyes glanced with Nikita's, and his smile lit up the room.

"I see you finally came," Boris said beaming at her.

"I wouldn't miss it for the world." Nikita smiled as Boris eyed her body.

He then observed Debare. "You are?"

"Maybe he recognizes me?" Debare sensed but kept his composure. "I'm Peter, sir."

"I see you got yourself a job." Boris seemed delighted while Nikita was confused.

"Do you two know each other?" She asked as Debare started sweating buckets.

“We met a few weeks ago at the refugee protest. You were one of them. I remember. Right?” Boris recalling the moment.

“Yes, sir. I was.” Madame Nikita has been very nice by giving me this position.” Nikita didn’t know what was going on but smiled upon hearing Debare’s kind words.

“Enough of the chatter, let’s have a good time. Nice meeting you again, Peter.” Boris said as he walked with Nikita.

They move ahead a few steps talking in private, as Debare was still close enough to hear the conversation.

“We are waiting for Grigor to come. He will have the money.” Boris explained to Nikita. She was excited. It seems as if she negotiated to surrender the diamond in exchange for receiving half of its monetary value.

“Wow! A billion dollars!” Debare pictured.

The night was passing by, and Debare knew he had to prevent the diamond from being sold, even if it cost his life. He thought if not telling Brian was a mistake, but he had to do this on his own for once.

While drinking champagne in the VIP lounge, Alina and Boris were making their way out of the party heading towards the elevators. Debare put down his drink and crept behind them trying not to be seen.

Their pace was quick, and he tried his best to catch up. They were talking about something important and it looked as if they were preparing to meet with Grigor to sell the diamond.

“He is on his way here,” Boris spoke to Nikita as they walked through the hotel lobby, his hand around her waist. Debare hid behind the sliding door, listening in via translation. When Alina and Boris were at the elevator, Debare walked towards them. Nikita turned around happy to see Debare approaching.

“Debare, come here.”

“Yes?” He questioned as he stood next to them.

“You will need to greet a man named Grigor when he comes,” Nikita explained not giving many details. “We will be in room 340.” Nikita winked at Debare, walking away.

Debare knew what they were up to. He nodded in confirmation; also plotting on how he would handle Grigor once, he arrived. The meeting could not take place.

Boris and Nikita boarded the elevator while Debare waited in the lobby. The receptionist went on break, leaving the doorman to do both jobs. Grigor could arrive any second. Fifteen minutes of waiting and now Grigor arrived, standing in the hotel parking lot talking on his cellphone.

"Think fast." Debare grabbed the man from behind and choked him asleep.

He carried him to a nearby closet, locked it shut, and took his bag and hat. Debare was ready to present himself as the doorman.

Minutes later, Grigor walked through the sliding doors observing his surroundings. He looked to be in his mid-forties and was dressed sharp for the occasion, wearing an expensive Italian suit. Debare assisted him.

"Good day sir, may I help you with your luggage?" Grigor showed his pearl white teeth, smiling. "Oh, pardon me. I haven't used English in a long time. But thank you, I have no luggage." He seemed aloof as he walked towards the elevators.

"I'm sure you are visiting someone aren't you?" Debare quizzed.

"I need to find some people here I am working with. Perhaps you could help me?"

"Give me the names please." Debare shifting to the back of the receptionist desk acting as if he worked there.

"Boris Petrov and Nikita Andreeva."

Debare looked around the lobby and noticed that Grigor wasn't alone. There were also men standing outside the hotel

wearing sunglasses and dressed in black, smoking cigarettes. Debare couldn't tell if the men were with Grigor or following him.

Debare stepped from behind the desk, motioning Grigor to follow him on the elevator. The men in black came quickly inside the hotel and followed them. The receptionist suddenly returned to the desk stopping the men.

"How can I help you gentlemen this evening?"

"Get out of our fucking way," one replied pushing the receptionist to the floor.

Debare and Grigor were on the elevator, leaving the men behind. Debare push the top floor button.

"What is going on? Where are we going? Grigor asked, scared for his life.

Debare said that he was taking him to Nikita and Boris. The elevator stopped, and they got off. Fortunately, there was only one elevator working in the lobby, so the men following them were forced to wait for it to come down.

"Where are Boris and Nikita?" Grigor asked excitedly.

"Just around the corridor, we are almost there." He lied, letting Grigor walk in front of him.

Debare grabbed his gun. He hit Grigor on the back of the

head, causing him to fall to the ground. Debare dragged him in the janitor's closet, closing the door shut. Little to his knowing the diamond problem was bigger than he had expected.

Getting rid of his tag, a call came from Nikita. "What is taking so fucking long?" She screamed on the phone in her Russian accent, making Debare cringe.

"Grigor is not here yet. I'm still waiting." Debare said heading to the service elevator on the other side of the floor.

"Check the parking lot, maybe he is lost. Hurry!"

"Okay, I'm hanging up now. I'm in the elevator." He cut the line, pressing the lobby button on the elevator. The doors swung open, and four men walked inside and roughed up Debare.

"What do you think you're doing?" He said as he tried to fight back, but they said nothing. The men blindfolded him and took him away to an unknown area.

The blindfold was removed from Debare's eyes. The men all wore masks. "Where am I?" Debare was seated while everybody appeared to be looking at him.

"You have no right to do this," Debare yelled. His voice echoed throughout the whole room.

"Shut the fuck up." Someone behind him slapped the back of his head, which made him jerk up in frustration.

Debare grew in rage while a person came out from another room.

"Brian!?" Debare said in a baffled manner. He never expected this. Let alone ordering people to kidnap him.

"How dare you, you fucking traitor!" Brian's face was red and fuming as he slapped Debare across his face making his head jerk backward. "How could you do this!? I trusted you for God's sake!" Brian threw his hands up in desperation.

"Look, it's not what it looks like," Debare tried his best to explain.

"Not what it looks like? He laughed loudly. "I see you want the diamond?" Brian's arms crossed. Debare kept his head down looking at his knees.

"I was trying to save the diamond myself to prove that I am worthy of doing the mission alone."

Regret dripping in his voice as he spoke. He never knew it would come to that point, but he had to prove Brian wrong for hiring the replacement for his mission. It would be impossible to gain Brian's trust back after this.

"You did nothing, nothing!" He flipped over the books gathered on the table. "If you wanted to tell us the whereabouts of

the diamond, you would've done it a long time ago. You despicable piece of shit. Did you think I wouldn't find out?" He strolled to him getting closer. "You're stupid; you cannot hide anything from me." His gloomy eyes starred at Debare who was hoping the earth would open and swallow him to save him from the agony of Brian.

"Is Boris with her?" Brian further asked.

Debare didn't answer. He thought if he told, Nikita would be killed without question and maybe himself. "Boris was smart to give her the diamond since she was always the smartest out of all of them. They probably already left the room." Brian said prancing the room.

"Answer me, you fucking prick!" He yelled out punching Debare in the face for the second time.

"Yes, he answered not wanting to be struck anymore.

"Where are they?" Brian was ready to hit him again if Debare wouldn't answer.

"Room 340," He did not dare look up. His sweaty hands almost slipping out of the wooden handles of the chair.

"What are you waiting for? Go to the room now!" Brian ordered the men standing around and then returned to Debare. "I swear I will make your life a living hell from now

on and I have the fucking power to wipe you off the face of this earth.”

His harsh words stung Debare. Brian turned away from Debare, ignoring him while he answered a phone call receiving more orders. Debare remained seated not moving an inch; shocked at Brian's treachery.

“For how long has the affair been going on between Nikita and Boris?” He hung up the phone turning back to Debare.

“I don't know.” Debare didn't look at Brian causing to suspect he was lying again.

“Her dearest bodyguard not knowing?” He laughed hastily. “Spare me your ignorance please.” His tone now turned serious.

“They seemed to be a thing when I first met Nikita, that's all I know.” Debare pleaded. Brian didn't mutter a single word just listening and looking at his face in disgust.

Ten minutes passed by since the men left the room to find Nikita and Boris. A group returned storming the room in a panic.

“Sir, there is no one in the room.” The group leader said nervously. Brian turned to Debare yelling, “Where are they or I will kill you?”

“I don't know,” pleaded Debare. Brian didn't say anything

else, just yelling at his men to search the entire hotel from top to bottom. Boris and Nikita were nowhere to be found.

“You will find Nikita and that fucking diamond, you clumsy fuck,” Brian pointed at Debare in anger.

There was no other choice. Debare knew there were repercussions for concealing the diamond's information from Brian but at least, he was still alive.

CHAPTER 8

THE SAGA SEEMED to have no ending, and it bothered most of the agents now set up in Debare's flat. An awkward silence was present even while the agents were scanning all of the clues. Then again, maybe because Brian wasn't around. The whereabouts of Nikita and Boris were unknown. No one had a clue on where they had gone.

After a spat on the phone with Brian three days before, Debare smacked his phone on the ground causing it to shatter and the battery to break. He was tired of Brian's bullshit. The repair shop delivered the phone to his apartment, and he signed off on it. He searched through his notifications to see if someone was trying to contact him. He had a new message. It was from Nikita.

"You disappeared out of nowhere. I'm at the house but not

staying long. We will see each other soon – Nikita.” He read the message while hiding it from everybody else.

Somehow, Brian came to the house a few minutes later. “Hey, I heard you received a package? Where is it?”

Brian noticed that Debare was holding a phone in his hand and took it from him. “What do we have here?” Brian’s smirk faded as he read the message. “She’s in Moscow?” His eyes opened wide. “Quick, go to her house right now!” Brian rushed Debare pushing him towards the door. “Inspect her fucking room to see if she hid the diamond there and track her next move.” “Take this equipment with you and don’t fuck this up.”

Brian didn’t trust Debare to go alone, so he sent Austin. They used Austin’s car and drove to Nikita’s house. The gate was locked, and the keypad was shut off, so Debare had to ring the bell a few times until Matilda came.

As soon as she saw Debare, she waved at him. He waved back greeting her.

“Nikita was here two hours ago. I don’t know why she left so quickly.” Matilda said in a saddened tone as Austin translated. Debare smiled at her comforting her. “It’s fine, I’m sure she will come back.” He replied. Austin pushed him forward signalling him to hurry.

“Listen, Matilda, Nikita forgot something and ordered me to

take it from her room if that's not a problem." He asked caressing her shoulder. She smiled at him nodding in approval. "Go ahead, but please don't make a mess." She pleaded while giving Austin a dirty look. Maybe Matilda didn't trust him.

Debare led the way, and Austin followed behind him. The room was neat and tidy except when they opened Nikita's closet. Clothes were tossed everywhere, and the safe was open.

"Fuck," Austin grumbled, as all her valuables were gone. "Brian is going to kill us."

They both didn't know what to do next but Debare ushered him to check every single drawer in the room whilst he checked under the mattress.

Austin pulled out boxes of jewellery, but there was nothing but gold necklaces inside. "It's not here." Austin paused placing his hands on top of his head in frustration.

"It's no use" Austin ordering him to stop searching for the moment.

"Think Debare! Think!" Austin turned to Debare. "Where could've she hid it?" His tone was sharp.

"She never told me anything!" Debare's frustration was showing as he sat down.

After searching the rest of the room, they went downstairs, seeing Matilda cleaning up the living room. “Matilda, did Nikita leave something for me?” Debare asked as they reached the bottom.

“Oh yes, she left an envelope for you. I’m not sure what it is.” She smiled at him while she continued doing her job. “Where is it?” He tried to be as nice as possible. “In the office,” Matilda instructed.

Austin led the way and stormed into the room, swinging the door open. There was an envelope placed on her desk. Austin grabbed it trying to open it, but Debare snatched it from him.

“It’s mine.” He stated rolling his eyes.

He pulled American dollars out of it. She left him ten thousand dollars, with a note saying.

“I wasn’t able to pay you for your services. May we see each other again.”

“She was gone forever,” Debare believed.

“Matilda!” Austin called after her. Matilda ran into the room stopping at the door. “Yes!” She answered, holding the duster in her hand.

“Do you have any idea where she might’ve gone?” He said calmly while Matilda looked down at her feet.

"I would've told you already if I knew, but that girl goes anywhere her feet carry her." She was almost hurt as she explained."

It was a heartbreakingly scene, but Austin had to get something out of her. If Nikita never comes back, Matilda would be without a job and the house would be sold.

"I know her ever since she was a little girl, she was never like this, but the way of life she was living led her to this." Debare and Austin saw the grief on her face.

They almost pitied her but regained their composure as they listened further. Matilda was on the verge of crying, sitting down on the couch.

"As much as she is grown up, she is still my little girl. Her parents were always away, I raised her," she stated wiping away her tears. "Once she got involved with the black market." Silence overtook her shortly. "She ruined herself."

Austin continued asking her questions, but it seemed like Matilda didn't want to say things that would jeopardize Nikita's life. Maybe she was lying to him. For the first time, Debare got an insight of Nikita's past as he was always curious why she chose to live the fast life.

"Matilda, thank you for your time. I think we need to get going." Austin ushered Debare.

They said their goodbyes, and as they got closer to the car, Debare's phone buzzed signalling, he received a message. It was from Brian.

"Go to the Parliament now, Alina is being arrested."



Debare's eyes widened, showing it to Austin. They wasted no time in jumping in the car and driving to the Parliament.

"How did the police know to arrest her?" Debare turned to Austin as he was driving as his eyes focusing on the road. "While you were busy attending to Nikita's fancies, Brian and I took care of it."

His tone almost as if he was humiliating Debare who stayed silent for the remainder of the ride. As soon as the car came to a halt, he was the first to jump out. The street was swarmed with folks wanting to see the daring scene.

"Stop! You have no right to do this!" Debare heard Alina's voice.

Police officers and forces were in the front line of the Parliament patrolling the surroundings as the other Ministers watched her arrest. Would she rot in prison for the rest of her life and the two billion dollars be uncovered? All questions

Debare had as he looked at Austin chuckling as they took Alina away.

“What now?” Debare questioned turning to him. “We must find out where Nikita and Boris are.”

His smirk grew wider turning into a full grin. They briefly stayed to hear Alina’s attorneys answer questions about the allegations in front of the media and then headed back to the apartment.

There was an unfamiliar car parked in the entrance of the building. Austin and Debare’s suspicion grew as they walked up the stairs, constantly glancing back at it. The apartment building where Debare lived was practically deserted, so it was strange that an expensive car would be parked there so oddly.

They opened the door finding Brian seated at the table and a man standing before him with his back turned to Debare.

“Brian?” He met his eyes, and Brian fake smiled greeting him.

The man turned around and gave him a better glimpse of his face. It was Vlad. Debare was frightened, and Austin behind him feeling uneasy.

“You have to be Debare?” Vlad stood up extending his hand.

“What was he doing in my apartment?” Debare thought.

“Yes, sir.” He avoided his gaze looking down at his feet, not clear how to answer. Vlad wore an expensive suit, and his dusty hair was receding. It appeared they both were drinking my coffee. Vlad had a suitcase with him.

“I heard a lot about you.” He said flashing Debare a smile.

Debare was confused as he thought he remembered him from the night he and Austin had interrogated him. Then again, he was too drunk to know what was happening around him.

“Oh? I’m flattered.” His gaze shifted to Brian’s, wondering what they had said before he came in.

“Austin, sir” Austin butted in, pushing himself in front of Debare. “Gentleman, we have work to do,” Vlad said making himself comfortable on the chair.

Brian instructed Debare and Austin to sit down; Austin next to Brian and Debare next to Vlad. “We have no trace of Nikita and Boris.” He sounded disappointed while Brian gave him a nasty glance.

“They might’ve just left the country by now, but our intelligence is not 100% sure,” he mentioned while searching through his suitcase. “Let’s not assume yet they have, and my suggestion is that we form search parties.”

Debare was inattentive and was cut off by Brian kicking his

leg under the table. Vlad chuckled knowing what happened and continued the conversation.

“We will capture them in due time. Their faces are known to the fucking world.” He spoke the truth, but in reality, there was no time. This worried Debare the most. “We would need to check the CCTV of the borders for the last twenty-four hours.” Vlad’s laptop was being powered on the table.

“That wouldn’t be an issue we have access to all of them –” Brian interrupted.

“I don’t see she left Russia yet. We spoke to her maid a few hours ago who said she was at the house earlier today.” Debare stated.

“Maybe she lied,” interrupted Austin.

Silence took over the table, everyone was thinking over different scenarios.

“I planted a tracker in his suitcase. Maybe we can trail him,” said Debare.

“I doubt he would carry it around.” Vlad confessed. “Sometimes, we find the trackers on dogs and cats once they discover them.”

Everyone laughed especially Debare who did the loudest.

“Ok, knock it off. We cannot be one hundred percent sure, anyway. Let’s start with CCTVs.” Vlad instructed.

“I can go over the CCTV of the borders.” Austin offered which made Vlad nod in approval. Brian wanted to assist him on whatever he was doing.

“Tonight, you all need to report your findings.” Vlad made himself clear for Austin and Debare to move.

He grabbed his laptop and other equipment and left. Austin went in a different direction taking the car. Debare was left to ride the Metro. It wasn’t cramped, so he had a place to sit. He needed to find a silent place to do his work. In Russia, people smoked everywhere.

Looking on his GPS map app for a small cafe, a call came in from an unknown number. “Hello?” He answered not sure if he was supposed to. “It’s me, Matilda. Meet me at the Red Square in 20 minutes.”

She hung up the phone. “I didn’t know she speaks English,” Debare pondered as he tracked his location noticing that he was close to the Square.

“Next stop: Red Square,” the train announcer broadcasted.

When Debare arrived, he hurried. Many families were at the Square were taking pictures and commending the architectures. Most appeared to be tourists, but some were passing by

coming home from work. Matilda hadn't arrived yet, and Debare waited in the cold, blowing his hands hoping she'd come soon.

He was about to call her when she came up behind him. "Come on, let's sit down elsewhere." Debare lagged behind her moving past through the bystanders to a nearby coffee shop inside of a plaza. Matilda ordered a cup of tea while Debare declined.

"I don't trust that Austin boy, so I needed to tell you this in person." Matilda seemed serious which worried him.

"Nikita is in Moscow." She exclaimed. It was crazy how she wouldn't leave right away knowing the situation.

"Where in Moscow?" Debare asked. The waiter brought the tea, and she paid him turning her attention to Debare.

"I'm not sure, but I think she is staying at one of her old flats that are up for sale." She sipped on her tea.

"Do you know the addresses?" Debare asked.

"I have mailing addresses, but I'm not sure if they are correct. She never told me where they were."

"You've done more than enough. Do you know if Boris is still with her?" Debare resting his elbows on his knees focusing on Matilda.

“I’m positive. Yesterday, his wife called screaming because she found out about Nikita.” Matilda said biting her lips worrying about her little Nikita.

“Why is she doing all of this for him, Matilda?” Debare wasn’t sure why.

“Her feelings for him are real, even beside the fact he’s married. He fancied her with gifts and over time, she fell in love with him.”

Debare thinking to himself, “How the fuck she fell in love with that ugly piece of shit,” but he continued listening.

“They met two years ago, I remember him coming back to the house with her. They had a few bottles of wine and spent the night together.” Matilda was looking at one spot as she talked. “It was the first time I ever saw her smile like that, and it was strange.” Her hands are now shaking. “She runs away for him. I never liked her being with a married man, but she was happy. Nikita poured her heart out to him, and he listened. I even was surprised Nikita was attracted to him. He’s an ugly motherfucker,” she laughed somewhat.

“I know right,” said Debare in agreement.



Their conversation seemed to go on for a long time, and

Matilda left, pardoning herself saying she had work to do at the house. Debare hugged Matilda and told her he would find Nikita and promised to protect her. After Matilda left, he hurried out of the coffee shop in search of Nikita.

Debare had a few hours left before meeting with Brian later that evening, so he visited the two addresses Matilda gave to him. He hoped she might be in those places. Even if he found her, he wasn't sure if she still had the diamond. He had never seen the diamond except for the night they first met.

The Metro ride was short, and the cars were fairly empty. Once he got off at his desired stop, he saw the area was quiet and mediocre for her likings.

"Why would she buy an apartment here? It's not like her." Debare pondered but knew the addresses were the only chances he had in tracking her down.

Once Debare went into the building, he took the elevator he got up to the seventh floor. The floor appeared to be vacant with only a few residents living on it. "Apartment 57" was written on a wooden door where he believed was the location. Matilda had given him the passwords to both locations, so he entered it in and went inside.

Inside, it was small, which was unusual because Nikita preferred bigger places. Debare walked around, noticing it was vacant. Nikita wasn't there. The whole flat was arranged.

He closed the door and left as his patience was fading in finding Nikita.

The other apartment complex was more lavish as it was overrun with millionaires and tougher to get inside. After many attempts at trying to convince the security guard, his supervisor let him in. Likewise, she wasn't there. Debare didn't know what to do at that point. If he returned to his apartment nothing, he would get another tongue-lashing from Brian.

The time was nearing 9PM, and Debare was already back at the parking lot of his building. Soon as he went inside his flat, everybody was already seated.

"Where were you?" Brian was vexed as he raised his eyebrows. "Matilda gave me two addresses of Nikita's two other apartments, but she wasn't there."

Debare looked at Vlad which looked dissatisfied.

"We will never find them!" Vlad was angry and stood up from the table walking over to the balcony. Brian exhaled in frustration. "Earlier, I found nothing on the CCTV, so they have to be still in the country."

Austin turned up the news channel. "Hey shut up. There's something on TV."

"Please return our father to us! We will pay any amount of

money possible!” The girls sounded like they were the daughters of Boris. The question was: “Did they think he was kidnapped?”

All the men’s attention shifted to this latest development. “What is this?” Brian spoke eager to know.

“Sounds like the world thinks he is kidnapped,” Vlad added not being very surprised. Debare listened but the broadcast ended, and there was a commercial break.

“Debare, quick give me the IP address of the tracker.” Debare took out his phone and kept scrolling through and dialling endless codes. “Hurry the fuck up.”

After a minute, Debare gave it to Vlad who took his time setting up his equipment. The room was in silence waiting for him to announce what he had been doing.

“Gentleman, we have the location.”

Everyone froze, not believing what they heard. Debare yelled “yes” while pumping his fist in the air.

CHAPTER 9

"WE ARE GOING to St. Petersburg, fellas, so bundle up. It will be cold out there. Meet back here in thirty." Vlad told Brian, Austin, and Debare.

Within thirty minutes, everyone was loaded, prepared and boarding. They will take Vlad's black van through a snow-storm for 634 kilometres (9 hours) to enter St. Petersburg from Moscow. Debare desired to see the beauty of Russia but wished under better circumstances. If they get back the diamond, he believed Brian wouldn't kill Boris and Nikita. Nikita was such a wonderful person, just suppressed for her love of money. These thoughts raced through Debare's mind as they were taking off from his apartment.

Nine hour journey by road because the weather was so awful that all the flights in Moscow were cancelled. Vlad in the

meanwhile, hacked Nikita's IWatch when the tracker placed in Boris's suitcase stopped sending a signal.

"Apartment 10B. Dernov Apartment House. I found them." Vlad screamed. "Maybe Nikita is making love with the watch on. There's a bunch of movements. Hahaha."

Everybody laughed. The arrangement was for Debare to go to Nikita and persuade her to surrender to MI6 before the Russian forces found them and executed her in cold blood. If Nikita and Boris kept running, the KGB wouldn't waver to execute them until they had the diamond. Brian threatened Debare that if he didn't capture Nikita that he would kill him himself and the mission would be over.

"How far away are we from the place?" Austin asked, seated next to the driver.

"About fifteen minutes," Vlad answered not being sure himself.

Debare rolled his eyes and went on looking out the window. He dozed off for most of the trip while Brian seemed to have many discussions with Robert, the division chief of the MI6 Anti-Terrorism Unit. Brian assured him the mission would be a success.

The natives on the streets seemed to settle in simplicity and the markets appeared to be crowded with merchants brushing past each other. These scenes reminded Debare of Lagos. If

the mission goes smoothly, Debare would be back there, rich and on his feet. He had vowed to never cheat again.

The car made a sharp turn, and then abruptly stopped on a quiet street a few blocks away from the marketplace.

“This is your stop, Debare. We will communicate messages in your earpiece. Pay attention to every detail we went over and remember don’t mess this up.” Vlad pushed him out of the van as he spoke.

Debare assured the squad by giving a thumbs up. This was his chance to be autonomous, and he would not let it slip away.



They rode off, and the operation was left entirely in Debare’s hands. He walked two minutes until he arrived at the parking area of a towering building which resembled the Victorian architecture from the 18th century.

Walking up to the doorstep, Debare was met by a security guard with an old gun. “May I help you?” the man responded in English. His old and wrinkly face showed that he had been working this position for most of his life.

“I forgot my key in my condo, I moved in yesterday.” Debare faked a laugh. The man didn’t smile, remaining serious. “I

don't remember ever seeing you," he scratched the back of his head.

"The other security guard helped me up with my stuff."

"Oleg helping someone out?" The guard replied letting out a heavy laugh. "That's a first." He motioned him to continue forward, opening the door for him. "Go on the fellow, nice to meet you."

Debare nodded and rushed upstairs bypassing the escalator. He braced himself as he came near the suite. Making his eyes watery, he tapped on the door of Apartment 10B on the third floor. Waiting for what seemed like ages, Nikita herself swung the door open revealing herself.

"Nikita!"

He made his eyes welled up with tears as he embraced her in a hug. Her hair was trimmed short and dyed brown. He loved it, but he had to remain focused.

"Peter?" She looked puzzled as she took a step backward.

"Do you know how hard it was to find you?" His voice was nervous, and he wasn't certain if she would buy it. She was paranoid as she glanced behind him pushing the door closed. "Let's go to the living room." She grinned at him motioning him forward.

“Where were you all of this while?” he said sounding as concerned as possible.

“Around.” Her answer was brief which infuriated him. A call came in through his earpiece. It was Vlad.

“What the fuck? Not now.” Debare whispered enough for Vlad to hear him.

“Debare can you hear me” His voice interrupted his thoughts.

“Nice.” He delayed his answer, partly responding to her but signalling to Vlad that he was inside.

“How did you find me, Peter?” She gave him a bemused look but then smiled afterward.

“Your maid Matilda told me you were in trouble. She gave me a few addresses to locate you, and I heard on the news that Boris was kidnapped.” She wasn’t buying his story but nodded as she sat down on the lounge.

“Matilda, of course.” She inspected her nails, attentively checking them.

“She cares for you, Nikita and I do too. You gave me a chance to help myself by giving me this job. I am forever grateful.” Debare pleaded, resting his elbows on his knees and his hands clutched together.

“Yes, I see. She told you one of my secrets.” Debare didn’t

know Matilda knew of her whereabouts but just went on listening.

“How is she managing?” Nikita asked smiling.

“Great! She continues taking care of the house and sad because you are not around. She calls you her little girl.” He gave her a smile back.

“That’s what I’m paying her to do.”

Startled by her answer, Debare regained focus on the mission.

“Debare, Debare. Are you there? Is Nikita with you? We are waiting for your confirmation,” Brian said through the headpiece.

“Now, Peter. You must be thirsty, right?” Her smile grew wider. “Care for a drink?” She got up waiting for an answer.

“Sure.” Abruptly, Vlad spoke in his earpiece. “Tell her you to need to go to the bathroom and run the water. We have confirmation that the diamond is inside the safe in her room. Get to her room. I’m working on hacking the safe now. Hurry!”

Debare cleared his throat as an answer.

Nikita was already in the kitchen, returning with two glasses of wine. “Here you go.” Her stare at him, watching closely. Debare took the glass from her and took a slow sip. As she

plopped down on the couch, she smiled not breaking her stare.

“I’m going to go to the bathroom, be right back.” He smirked at her. “Take another sip before you go. This is the best wine Russia has to offer. Don’t let it go to waste.”

Her words were slurred, but he embraced her, taking a few more sips not leaving a single drop to remain. She lifted her glass in triumph, and he disappeared down the hallway.

Debare focused on her room, seeing it next to the bathroom. Doing as Vlad told him, he turned on the water and crept into Nikita’s room. Being clumsy again, he forgot to close the door behind him. There was a big trunk on top of the drawers. He tiptoed over and wasted no time in opening it, going through everything inside. There was nothing but necklaces and rings. In a hurry, he got on his knees going through the drawers, and there was no diamond again.

Debare stood up slowly, seeing a reflection in the mirror; it was Nikita holding something that resembled the Cullinan diamond.

“Looking for this?” Her grin was wide as she bore the jewel in her palm.

He turned around facing her ashamed. “No, I- I seemed to lost my way.” He stuttered stroking the back of his head.

“Save it. You treacherous fool. You are a bad man. I trusted you.” She puckered her lips at him whilst she drew closer.

Debare felt his eyes blurring. Suddenly, he couldn't focus and was losing consciousness.

“What have you done? You are making a big mistake. I'm here to save you.” Debare pleaded as he was losing his senses.

Nikita simply ignored his words. “Did you really think you and your agents could take the diamond away from me?” She shoved him to the ground. Debare felt a sharp pain in his heart and now realized Nikita put something in his drink.

“Call a fucking ambulance. I don't want to die. I have a mother who needs me.” Debare muttered as the poison rushed through his body.

“We all do, Peter. I only gave you something that would put you to sleep,” she said pausing. “I mean ‘Forever’.”

As the words left her mouth, Debare's breathing was sporadic, and his pulse slowed down as blood rushed to his brain.

“May we see each other again,” Nikita said staring at his pale face while kissing his forehead.

Debare's heart stopped.

His body laid lifeless on the floor of Nikita's chamber. She

picked up the earpiece that fell out his ear and said, "You killed your fucking agent. Fucking Americans."

Brian screamed. "You fucking bitch. I will-"

As soon as he tried to say something else, it was cut off. Vlad, Austin, and Brian could not reveal their identities. The mission was a failure.

Nikita's obsession for the Cullinan diamond was more than all she ever wished. Its beauty and glare mesmerized her, and she would do anything to protect it. The orders came down from the Kremlin to poison Debare after she was ordered to kill Boris a few hours earlier. He was electrocuted in her bathtub. Being the sole owner of the last Cullinan diamond, Nikita became the top Russian female billionaire. She never married or had children. Matilda asked her about Peter's whereabouts. She only replied that he had gone back home.

Weeks had passed since Debare's death. His family in Nigeria kept coming to Debare's shop asking the secretary Daraja about his whereabouts. She said he was away in China expanding the business. It was all a lie that Brian had told her when Debare was forced to go to Russia. If her monthly salary was given to her, she believed her word of Debare's absence.

Vlad stayed behind in Russia, but Austin and Brian went back to Britain. They later were interviewed by the BBC after a WikiLeaks discovery tied them to Debare's death. They denied all allegations and said it was fake news.

Although they publicly denied the report, Debare would forever be remembered by the MI6 even though he was a clumsy motherfucker. Brian and Austin often spoke of him as they drank in solidarity holding up their glasses to the Nigerian who gave his life to regain his freedom.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eric Reese was born and raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and attended the Community College in the city. He works as a community organizer and is an advocate for social justice, particularly for youth of color and was the recipient of the first Mayoral Scholarship of Philadelphia (1993) and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers Human Relations Award (1989).

Eric has always been interested in writing and it was no surprise when he began producing books, many of them on African American culture and social issues, with a smattering of fiction, poetry and mystery thrown in. His first offering was *There and Now (Volume 1)*, in November 2016, and since then his prolific nature has seen him now with more than 20 titles in print, with e-book and audio versions also available.

When he has some time to himself, Eric loves to read and writes across numerous genres. He also enjoys traveling, playing video games and is a huge fan of many of the most popular sports. He once lived on a rooftop in Beirut until he

could somewhere more suitable and wherever he has gone in the world his lively and energetic character has made him many friends.

In the future, Eric would love it if one of his books was to be made into a movie. In the meantime, however, he is content to keep writing great books that people love reading. He now lives in California, where he loves the warmth of year-round sun.

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