

## PROLOGUE

### BLOOD SPILLED

*The North Central Highlands, North Korea*

*Two years ago*

Jason Randolph Scott woke very quickly, something startled him.

He was alone and in total darkness.

Slowly he realized where he was although he couldn't see two feet ahead of him. He'd lost track of time barely caring anymore. He felt forgotten, alone. The perceived feeling of abandonment swept over him as it did day after day.

It was three years ago when he'd thought they'd discovered his identity; that of a spy working for the CIA while acting as a reporter for the New York Times newspaper.

They came for him in his sleep and dragged him away, beating him senseless. They struck, kicked and threatened his live-in girlfriend, a fellow reporter, Jenny Addams, when she tried to intervene on his behalf. He'd seen her all curled up in a fetal position on the floor where they left her, bleeding and crying as they dragged him away.

With the air cool and moist, it felt like almost being in a cave down in some deep hole in the middle of nowhere and no one hearing your screams. Every day they came, at least twice a day, sometimes more to tie him up by his hands and feet and stretched him on the cold floor, naked. Then they'd place a plastic tube down his mouth and filled the tube with water, until he was near drowning. They wait a few seconds and start in again; always asking the same questions over and over:

“Who do you work for?”

“What is your connection to the CIA?”

“What is your name?”

“Admit you’re a spy and we’ll let you go.”

Jason knew that last question was a barefaced lie!

They would beat him senseless, until he could only open an eye and that painfully. They would clip electrical leads to his hands and feet, and an electrical current would flow through his body, always with the same effect—total blackout—which he always welcomed like a long-lost brother.

The dungeon he had called home for the last three years was almost unbreathable. They'd beaten him over and over, compelled to confess time and time again to whatever they wanted.

Jason Randolph Scott was thirty-six when he died at the hands of his captors; never seeing the light of day.

In July, marking the three years of his captivity, they turned his body over to the Americans, during a prisoner exchange between the two countries.

His father Lieutenant General Thomas Randolph Scott, Deputy Commander, USEUCOM, received his son’s body at the DMZ, and had it transported to their home in Texas, there vowing that someone would pay for his son's death.

US Military in Germany and the White House along with the CIA did nothing to secure his release; General Scott knew who they were although *they* knew the North Korean Government held his son as a spy against their state.

— CHAPTER ONE —

*Present day – Wednesday, August 7*

*Patch Barracks, U.S. Military Installation, Stuttgart, Germany*

The sixteen-year-old blue-eyed blond-haired teenager walked toward a waiting brown Volkswagen Bug parked just outside her father’s on-post government quarters. She clutched her handbag close to her small bosom as if someone could come along and relieve her of it. Her restless eyes scanned toward the front of the two-story quarters behind her, hoping against hope her father would not catch her leaving at such a late hour.

As the temperatures hovered in the low 60s, it was a cool evening in Mid-August, with a gentle prevailing wind, just as the dying sun threw darkened shadows over the sweeping lawn to the US military headquarters in Patch Barracks, Germany. Home of the US European Command (EUCOM), where then Chief-of-Staff Brigadier General Carl C. Chapman, lived with his only child Helen Chapman. It was a picture post-card scene: as the blood-orange sky gave-in to the night, with a full moon just appearing over the horizon.

With the nascent moonbeams lighting her way, her throat felt dry and tight, and her heart beating faster as she approached the car. “Billy!” she yelled. “Start the car.”

She glanced behind her and thought she’d seen the living room curtains being pulled back. However, she wasn’t sure. Just as she reached the car, her boyfriend, Billy Ackers fired up the engine. He had the passenger door already opened for her. Now oblivious to everything else around her, Helen came around to the passenger side. And there, just for a slight second, she stood—a youthful

figure, dressed in skinny jeans, a dark blazer underneath a black top with a white scarf and ankle boots; her blond hair blowing in the wind as she once again stared at her home.

Taking in a deep breath, she arched an eyebrow, as if to say something, but shook her head.

“Get in, babe,” Ackers said in a low voice. “We’re wasting time.”

Sliding onto the car’s seat, she had second thoughts about going away for the few days, and not telling her father what she’d planned. Knowing full well he’d disapprove of it. It was giving her food for thought—but just for a second or two. This wasn’t her first time, and it always seemed to end with her father setting up boundaries with which she didn’t comply. But somehow it felt different now. She couldn’t pinpoint or explain what she was feeling. Yet here she was doing it all over once again.

Then, wordlessly, she slipped a hand to her boyfriend’s outreached hand. He leaned toward her, and her apprehensions erased as she met Billy’s lips with her own in a quick kiss. As they parted, she glanced at him, noticing his intense blue eyes held her own as a slow smile curled her lips; knowing their desires, and the dangers that came along with them.

She blushed as she looked at him. He was only a year older, but much more intelligent than her, she thought. He reached over once again and caught her hand. “Helen, are you okay babe?” he asked in his slow Southern drawl.

Helen Chapman paused, frowning.

“You think we’ll be okay?” she asked, as a sense of foreboding hung on her mind. “Nothing bad will happen, right?”

“Honey,” Billy replied. “What can go wrong? The night and the weekend are ours to have fun with.”

In the semi darkness of the car, Helen Chapman inclined her head.

“I guess you’re right.”

Billy Ackers nudged the selector on the gearshift, turned on the headlights and slowly pulled away from the curb. He failed to notice the twin set of headlights that flared on behind them.

With the night barely pitched black and only moonbeams playing across the road, the late-model Lincoln Navigator flipped on its headlights, and with the vehicle’s plate lights out, it left all details unreadable. The SUV moved off at a leisurely pace down the street, gaining slightly to their intended target—the VW Bug and its two occupants.

They were in no hurry. They knew full well where the car was headed, and the route they would take. She and her boyfriend had been under surveillance for the last month—following their every move. And with the monitoring of their cell phones, they knew what their plans were. Now that the 'go-ahead had' been given, it would be up to them to bring the mission to a close.

Knowing the route they would take, it would lead them six miles through a wooded, unpopulated, unlit country road. And that's where they would make their move.

The driver of the first Navigator pulled back and slowed the pace, as did the second vehicle, just as the VW reached the main gate to the military installation and watched as the military police gate guard waived them through.

Then slowly the two Navigators inched their way forward, turned onto the gate and waited to be waived through. Rounding the turn they drove under the arch sign and through the brown and white sign of *Patch Barrack, US Military Installation Main Gate*: The only gate operational during off-duty hours.

Stopping at the intersection, they turned East on MontanaStrasse and caught sight of the VW's taillights.

Billy Ackers turned to his girlfriend. "You seem quiet: Usually I can't stop you from talking."

Helen, her eyes half closed, was thinking of her father—what would happen to her once he found out she'd gone yet again. With her mother passing away only last year, she wasn't ready to deal with her father. She still blamed him for her mother's death—not being there for her, at the crucial time when she needed him to be, instead of traveling. Helen had been with her mom just as the poor woman took her last breath. All alone she didn't know what to do, whom to call; too much for a sixteen-year-old to go through all alone. Moreover, for several months afterwards, she'd been undergoing considerable emotional stress.

But now she was here with Billy. He was the first and only person she'd called that night. It was Billy that made all the phone calls. She sank deep into her seat, still thinking of *that* day. God, I hope I'm doing the right thing, she thought. She wanted to tell him what she was feeling, but thought better.

"Just thinking of all the fun we'll soon be having," she said.

"Yeah, aha," he said with a smile. "Sure you were."

She laughed. "I'm fine. I'm—"

He cut her off by blowing her a kiss. "It's okay Helen."

The leader of the strike unit in the first Lincoln Navigator reached for his cell phone and dialed a predetermined number, waited for his boss to answer it, and said, “Made contact. We’re following target as we speak, Mr. Alpha.” They used no regular names during the operation.

Alpha said, *“Do you expect any problems with the boyfriend?”*

“There’s nothing for us to worry about.”

*“I hope not, for your sake.”*

“Yes sir.”

*“Check back as soon as you complete the operation.”*

“Roger that sir.”

They were traveling through a thick forest on a two-lane road, when Billy spied a set of headlights approaching from behind on the left lane wanting to pass, but not in any hurry to do so. He saw what appeared to be a black SUV pull up just abreast of his VW and then speed up. It passed and pulled out in front. He couldn’t see inside the SUV due to the dark tinted windows. Nor could he make out the license plate—American or German, he couldn’t tell.

With one vehicle in the front and the other to rear, the front Lincoln Navigator slowed at first and then braking once or twice, letting the VW get close to its bumper, while the second SUV slowed tapping the VW’s bumper.

It was at that moment that Billy knew something was wrong, and he was getting scared!

He tried to swerve away to his left to pass the SUV in front, but he wasn’t given a chance, as the rear SUV bumped his VW hard.

Helen screamed.

Billy yelled, “Son-of-a-bitch!”

Billy Ackers, holding hard to the steering wheel with both hands had no alternative but to brake to a stop.

Seconds later, Helen gasped as she looked behind her and saw two men dressed all in black holding what appeared to be machine guns stepping out of the SUV and stop as they stared at the back of the VW weapons at the ready. “Oh my God, what’s happening, Billy!” Just as he dared to turn on his seat and gazed out past the back of the VW.

For a moment Billy froze. “Helen, get down in the seat and don’t come out for anyone.”

“Billy!” she yelled.

He looked at her and saw shock and disbelief written all over her young beautiful face. So he smiled at her.

“Please, just do what I said.”

That gave her pause, with eyes wide open, shaking her head she stared straight back at him.

Then stepping out of his car, Billy Ackers walked forward too scared to think straight and said a little prayer hoping against hope all this was just some big mistake. He came to a stop as his VW’s headlights illuminated him in the beams, and saw four black-clad men wearing balaclavas step out of the SUV, holding what appeared to be assault weapons.

Helen didn’t do as Billy had instructed, instead she had sat straight back up in her seat and saw Billy walking forward; saw four men standing behind the SUV holding machine guns; saw the two closest to Billy point and shoot and heard the loud gunfire; and saw Billy being driven back by the impact of the bullets striking his body, his arms flaring. And as a bullet pushed through Billy’s head, she yelled as blood splatter and brain matter splashed onto the windshield, and kept yelling as she watched Billy’s limp body slide to the ground.

She stopped yelling as she saw the killers come for her.

Helen gasped, too stunned to realize what had just happened. However, she noticed that the shooting had stopped—specifically, they weren’t shooting at *her*. Then two of the killers calmly walked toward the VW’s passenger side door. Wordlessly, the one who seemed to be the leader, opened the door, grasped her by her arm and tried to pull her out. She screamed and yelled throughout. She tried kicking at the killer to no avail. Then she was pulled by her hair and dragged to the ground and forced to her feet. Someone then came from behind her, pinned her arms at her chest, and placed a rag to her mouth. She smelled a sweet pungent scent. Moments later, she went limp in the arms of the killer. Her eyes rolled to one side as the chloroform took effect, as she blacked out losing consciousness.

The clear leader of the group threw Helen across his shoulders and carried her to a Navigator where she was sprawled in the back seat. He slammed and closed the right side door. Then the leader opened the front passenger door, pulled out a manila folder from the center console, extracted a folded sheet of paper and slammed close the door. Walking over to the VW Bug, he placed the sheet of paper on the passenger side seat, and returned to the Navigator, got in on the driver’s side and pulled away from the scene as the second Navigator followed.

He stared at his watch. It had taken them just eight minutes to secure the woman. *Eight*—two minutes shy of the time allotted.

He arched an eyebrow and nodded. “Not bad.”

Reaching for his cell phone, he dialed the same number and said, "Target in the bag sir."

Alpha said, "*And the boyfriend?*"

"He's permanently neutralized."

"*Good work. You know what has to be done next, sergeant.*"

"Yes sir."

The team had another to bag; their last *one!*

\* \* \*

*Six hours later*

The white and green Mercedes-Benz four-door sedan, with its blue light-bar and siren atop the roof, and displaying police markings on the hood, sides and back of the car, made its way on the lonely unlit country road. It was the end of his shift, and it included this part in his patrol area, though he rarely patrolled it, because few vehicles ventured out at this time of the night.

The two-lane road, with several large potholes, direly needed repairs. Large trucks were the only vehicles that traveled on it, and teenagers looking for a place to sit, drink and make out. He'd frequently had to run off two or three cars loaded with them, he thought with a smile.

Officer Karl Schultz, a three-year veteran, rolled down his window and listened for any sounds that would make him believe teenagers where in the area. Then, his headlights caught sight of a car stopped on the side of the road about two or four hundred yards ahead.

Turning on his blue emergency lights he drove a little faster, and what he saw just as he approached the scene made his blood run cold. For there, lying on the ground, and trapped under the intense glare of his high beams, was a human body.

He came to a stop, turned off the engine and stepped out of the patrol car.

"Heilige scheisse!" he said as he approached the body. "Holy *shit!*" It was his first dead body he'd ever come across.

Then he heaved.

Seconds later he wiped his mouth, and once back in control, he called it in to his dispatcher. Then, approaching the body, he knelt down and turned it over on its side, and once again heaved, as he saw that animals ate parts of the corpse away.

Getting back up from body, he pulled out his flashlight and looked inside the VW Bug. But it was empty except for a letter or a note lying on the passenger seat. Not touching it he returned to his vehicle, and waited for the Bundespolizei, German Federal Police to arrive, along with the US Army Military Police—the VW had American license plates—and Crime Scene personnel.

\* \* \*

Helen Chapman woke with a lurch, opened her eyes and saw only total darkness as she grasped for air, coughing and making gagging noises.

She didn't know whether she was alone or if someone else was with her. There were no sounds to show so. She called out, but no one answered.

She didn't know how long she'd been unconscious—her watch was missing as was her cell phone and purse.

The air was cooled and she could feel the air blowing on her face.

She had a terrible headache, and the wall against her back was cold.

Helen blinked, trying to remember what had happened to her. But it was no use, her mind was still groggy.

Billy, she thought.

“My God,” Helen said her voice breaking. “Shot dead.”

She gasped and lifted her arms. But they bound her with rope.

Her mind was still a blur, slow, dull, and her legs stretched out in front of her felt like lead.

Yet, all she knew was that she was alive and, she reasoned, they wanted her for something else besides being dead.

*What could be worse than death, Helen....? Oh— my— God!*

— CHAPTER TWO —

*10:45, Thursday morning August, 8th*

The 5th MP Battalion Criminal Investigation Detachment (CID), under the control of 3rd MP Group was the central command for the Stuttgart (CID) Field Office, at Patch Barracks, Stuttgart, Germany.

With four male agents and one female agent assigned, they were charged with investigating terrorist crimes and major crimes involving the US military and US civilian government personnel, in their sector of responsibilities. The field office was known to conduct overt and covert surveillance services and investigations.

The agent in charge or AIC Chief Warrant Officer Four Phillip Randall Jones, a 15-year veteran agent, was the top dog, responsible for directing and planning investigations. Today, he was instead taken aback when word came through channels assigning his top agent Jacqueline Sinclair to a time sensitive assignment, and they told him to have her report to the Provost Marshal's Office within the hour.

Someone had just undermined his authority, and that pissed him off.

"God damn it!" he yelled through his open office door aimed at his secretary. "Get someone over to the courthouse and get me Agent Sinclair."

CID Special Agent Jacqueline 'Belle' Sinclair's nine o'clock general courts-martial case on the 3rd floor of the Staff Judge Advocates (JAG) building in Patch Barracks ended early. As soon as the two judges left the chamber, she checked her watch. She still had enough time to get back to her room, shower, and get dressed for her late lunch date with Captain Jeffrey Cory.

This would make it her third date and she was looking forward to more. She looked out of the six large windows and saw the afternoon sun streaming in. It will be a very nice afternoon, she thought.

She looked forward to a quiet conversation that didn't include her explaining away her case or her testimony. Her Captain didn't care; all he wanted was to talk about her, and she adored him for it.

As she turned to leave, the sun through a window on her right side caught her eyes. The heat overpowered the German made air-conditioning as she noticed a small bead of sweat rolling down from her forehead. Brushing off the wetness from about her eyes, she walked toward the double doors leading out of the courtroom.

U.S. Army criminal investigator Chief Warrant Officer Belle, as friends knew her by, was just short of thirty, attractive and self-assured. Her uniform was tight fitting and spotless, which showed off her hourglass figure. She was of medium height, with short brown hair, cut to military regulation.

Belle was a confident woman, well in control of herself. And her Silver Star and Purple Heart positioned for all to see on her uniform gave credence of her dedication to her country.

Before she could leave though, the prosecuting attorney strode up to her. Ignoring the attorney, Sinclair just kept walking past her. From across the room, two male civilian dressed CID agents snickered and cleared their throats. They both knew there was no love lost between those two. They stared at each other and smiled. Sinclair noticed them and smiled too.

Pulling out her cell phone from her handbag clutched under her right arm, she checked her text messages, looking for one in particular. And there it was, from Captain Cory. She read:

*Let me know when you're finished, honey.*

Smiling, her fingers typed across the key board and pressed the send button. Not dating long and he's calling me honey already, she thought. How sweet. She wrote:

*Just did. I'll be ready in 30 minutes. Pick me up then.*

His reply was quick as she heard the pinging of the phone's return text. She read:

*Roger that.*

Agent Sinclair walked out through the double doors, and caught sight of her father as he strolled over to her. She was a little annoyed at seeing him there, but relieved that her sound testimony, as she thought, led to a conviction. But she wondered what her father was doing here.

As he approached, she noticed a small smile played across his face. Apparently, he knew of the court's outcome, or he wouldn't have been present; unless there was more to his being there. And that made her feel a little suspicious of his presence.

Her father, Colonel Richard Longstreet Sinclair, dressed in his Class A uniform, a tall man, with a six-foot-three frame, and broad shouldered was the area Provost Marshal. He was a West Point graduate and a veteran of over thirty-five years' service to his country. He had a rugged body for his age and was lean and fit. And like his daughter Jacqueline, and his family before him, a military family, all in the service of the Army, going back to the Spanish-American War.

Jacqueline, or Belle—his nickname for her—waited until he stopped in front of her before acknowledging him. She often marveled at his resemblance to an older Brad Pitt's strong facial features, and so did other women.

Stopping in front of his beautiful young daughter, the Colonel removed a pair of sunglasses, and placed them in his trousers pocket. Shaking his head ever so, he muttered, "Sounds like you had a successful conclusion to your proceedings, agent."

She replied, "Hi there Dad."

"Not when we're in uniform."

"Sorry, sir."

Smiling, he said, "I need you to—"

Then her phone rang.

Taking a step or two back from her father, she pulled out the cell phone, and made a disapproving face.

"One moment, sir," she told her father, "while I answer this.

"Agent Sinclair," she answered.

*"Jones here,"* came the response. *"I've been trying to reach you. If you're finished at the court house, get yourself over here now. Don't take any short cuts. This is very important."*

"But sir, I have—"

*"The only thing you have to do, is get over here. Sinclair, I'm warning you. Don't piss me off any more than I already am."*

His statement annoyed and irritated the agent. She was at a court martial proceeding on her day off of all things, "But why, sir?"

*"You'll know once you get here,"* was the curt reply.

Considering his terse answer, she stared at her father—who just kept looking at her—then she replied, "Yes, sir."

Pocketing her cell phone, she walked back to her father.

"I'm sorry, sir, you were saying?"

"Your AIC wants you back in his office, I gather."

She stared at him suspiciously. “How did you know?”

“I’ll explain soon,” the Colonel said. “But like I was saying, I need you to start an investigation, a sensitive investigation. And only you are qualified to undertake.”

“Can you tell me what the circumstances are?”

“I’m unable to at this point. But we’ll be seeing each other soon.”

“We will?”

“Yes.”

“There goes my lunch date and my day off,” she muttered.

Twenty-five minutes later, Agent Jacqueline Sinclair walked into her AIC’s office.

The man behind the desk was wearing a long-sleeve white shirt and red tie, over a black vest. He wore steel eyeglasses and had a very serious air about him. He didn’t look at her, not yet. His grey hair was cut short and balding at the top.

Jones was a desk-bound agent now, but once upon a time, he served as a protective service agent to some long-forgotten VIP for over three years until they promoted him to his current assignment, two years ago. He was now the agent in charge of the field office.

Agent Sinclair said, “Sorry I’m late, chief. I was meeting with my father over at JAG.”

Her AIC didn’t look up nor acknowledge her as he paged through a folder in front of him.

Seconds went by and she was still standing in front of his desk.

Then, Phillip Randall Jones said, “Sit down, Agent Sinclair.”

Jacqueline Sinclair sat down in the visitor chair next to his desk. She waited to be spoken to, instead of the other way around. Military protocol called for a strict adherence to command presence. He was her senior, and she had to respect his position of authority—military courtesy and respect were invoked, not asked just inferred.

Jones stared at her a few seconds and said, “You spoke to the Provost Marshal, your father? What did he say to you?”

She knew something very important was about to be discussed; now he was curious as to the conversation she may or may not have had with the Provost Marshal (PM). And she surmised either Jones didn’t know why she was here, and or was fishing for information.

Playing along for now she crossed one leg over the other.

She said, “He mentioned something about a sensitive investigation, which only I could do.”

“Son of a bitch,” he said. “That’s why you were chosen. The PM wants just you on this case.”

She asked, “What’s this about, Chief?”

Chief Jones leaned forward pushing away the folder and placed his hands on his desk. “I don’t know. I thought you knew.”

“Me?”

“You. Didn’t you finish talking to the PM?”

She took in a deep breath. The questions were getting under her skin. “First, I heard about it was from the PM a little while ago.”

“Agent Sinclair,” Jones said coldly. “You’re to report to his office after you leave here. And, I expect full reports on whatever your assignment entails.”

Sinclair’s expression didn’t change. “Yes sir,” she said. “Is that all?”

“Go on now, get out of here.”

Jacqueline Sinclair rose, stood and—nodding to her chief as she opened the office door—exited without saying a word and closed the door behind her.

“The asshole could’ve just told me over the phone,” she muttered a little annoyed.

It was later that afternoon when Chief Jones reasoned what Agent Sinclair’s investigation would entail; and after reading through the military police Serious Incident Report (SIR) on the daily desk sergeant’s blotter, she would have her hands full when push came to shove. And he also knew the why she was handpicked by the PM—she was the only one who could pull it off.

Leaning back in his chair he said, “Good luck Agent Sinclair. You’re gonna need it.”

The temperatures in Southern Germany during the month of August, average between fifty to seventy-five degrees and with about fifteen to seventeen rainy days in the month, today would be a pleasant day, as temperatures would reach about seventy-five.

With no rain in sight, Belle, walked the two miles to the PM’s building. All the time thinking what the hell this was all about, and what *shit* was she getting herself into this time?

If she only knew what lay in front of her and the dangers she would encounter in the next few weeks. And it would all start the moment she leaves the Provost Marshal’s office; the EUCOM Provost Marshal hold's the same responsibilities as that of a large city Chief of Police.

A few minutes later, Agent Sinclair walked through a three-story office complex, through a set of double doors, and up a long flight of winding stone stairs. She’d been up these same stairs hundreds of times.

Sinclair could've used the elevator, but what the hell; she wasn't in any mood to converse with anyone at that moment. And as it was, she was in a grumpy mood missing out on her date. She met no one on the stairs, but there was a bevy of activity throughout the complex as usual.

At the top of the stairs, she made a right turn and knowing where she needed to go, walked down the long hallway as she passed military and civilian personnel on either side of her.

As she reached the end of the hallway, at the door on her left side, she saw two MP's standing on either end of the doors, guarding the Provost Marshal. The MPs changed every two hours, and were detailed to stop anyone from entering without proper clearances or identification.

She stopped in front of the closest MP; a dark guy she assumed was in his mid-thirties, presented her ID and said, "I have a scheduled meeting with the PM."

Both of the military policemen looked well over six-feet and somewhere around two hundred pounds. Both were wearing the new US Army Combat Uniform and armed with 9mm semi handguns strapped on; and wearing the MP silver badge under their right side pocket. They were both wearing Velcro attached Staff Sergeant Insignias positioned just center-chest.

Taking her ID, the MP checked it and said, "Yes ma'am. Please wait one."

The MP left his post, walked into the office and seconds later, returned handing back the ID, and said, "Ma'am, please go on ahead."

Agent Sinclair walked into the small lobby and stopped in front of the PM's secretary's front desk. Mary Elders had been the PM Secretary for the last three years. An attractive fortyish woman, with blond shoulder-length hair, a German born of German and American parents, she was busy typing on her computer.

Sinclair had known Mary off and on ever since being interviewed and selected for the position by her father three years ago. She was a divorcée and living with her daughter. And although Sinclair's father was a widower, their relationship was professional and all business.

She said, "Hi, Mary. Here to see my father."

"Oh my," the woman said.

Mary Elders looked up, paused, stood and came around her desk and hugged Belle Sinclair.

"You're looking wonderful as ever, Belle. I'm glad to see you again. It's been too long."

"Thank you. Yes, over a month now."

"Oh my God, that long, we—"

Then from inside the inner office of the PM, they heard his voice, as he asked, "Is that my daughter, Mary?"

"Yes sir."

“Please send her in.”

They stared at each other and shrugged.

Sinclair moved toward her right, took several steps and stopped at the all wood door that was slightly ajar.

Agent Sinclair knocked.

She heard her father’s low voice sounding as if he was far away; Enter, was what she may have heard, but wasn’t too sure. So, taking a little breath, she opened the door, walked through and closed the door behind her.

Looking around the office, she noticed nothing changed since the last time she was there over a month ago. A glass chandelier hung over the center of the office. The walls still adorned with his certificates, citations, awards and an old Calvary sword presented to him by his men, when he served with the First Cavalry Division—the old horse soldiers of yesteryear.

Remembering the event as if it was yesterday; while stationed in Fort Hood, Texas, her father served as the assistant operations officer for the division. Those were good times with her mom and her father. She was only twelve and on that day she knew what she wanted her life to become—a military officer. Belle graduated from the University of Maryland earning her Bachelor’s degree in criminal justice and aspired to be a police officer in the Army.

Agent Sinclair strolled up to her father’s desk; coming to attention, and saluting, she said, “Sir, Warrant Officer Sinclair, reporting as ordered.”

“Stand at ease, Belle. Take a seat.”

Taking a seat in one of two visitor’s leather armchairs on the other side of the office window, it was the same chair she sat in whenever she came to visit. And it was at that point, she’d realized he’d used the nickname he’d given her years ago; not agent, but Belle. She surmised this would be a father and daughter meeting.

The Colonel said, “What did your AIC ask of you, Belle?”

The question brought a slight smile to her lips. She said, “The same cryptic message you spoke about at JAG; a sensitive investigation.”

“Did he add anything else?”

“Well, he said he wanted to be kept in the loop regarding any investigation.”

A short pause; the Colonel frowned, but said nothing to that.

She shook her head, leaning slightly forward in her seat. “What’s going on Dad?”

The Colonel stared at her and said, “What I’m about to say will stay in this office. In the last few days, someone has kidnapped two American dependent children. They left notes behind warning

of any police involvement or the children would suffer with their lives. And that further information would follow. How or when, wasn't said."

The Colonel waited for her to speak. All she did was nod, so he continued.

He said, "they discovered two bodies. The first body was Billy Ackers, identified through his military dependent ID found in his wallet. They found him at the scene where Helen Chapman had been kidnapped. They identified the second body as Dennis Jackson also a military dependent, also from his ID. They also discovered his body at the kidnapping scene of Lisa Shaffer."

Both young men were dating the two kidnapped subjects. Leaving of the bodies at the scene suggest whoever is responsible are serious. The German police crime scene investigation revealed little." He paused. "No witnesses, no one hearing anything. Considering that they conducted the abductions and murders in secluded areas, suggests prior planning and or surveillance. We speculate the children were the prime target. Answer why them, is simple. All the parents are high-ranking military members in the command."

Colonel Sinclair went on. "Like I mentioned, the German police conducted the crime scene investigation, and although both bodies discovered were riddled with bullets, they retrieved no casings. This would show a high level of professionalism and coordination. The bullet holes on the bodies are suspected to be of small bore ammo, not yet identified. It would seem the German police are slow in providing us that information. I'll have their report sent over to your office in an hour."

He continued. "The EUCOM commander has tasked me through the CID command at Quantico, to use local professional agents to handle the investigation going forward. Besides you, I had two other agents considered. I gave the Commander all personnel folders, and he recommended you, with my final approval."

She leaned back in her seat, took a deep breath, and closed her eyes. This was big, she thought, and could get involved.

"What convinced Command," he said, "were your qualifications. You received the Silver Star and Purple Heart for actions in Afghanistan; black belt in Japanese karate since the age of fourteen; close quarters combat expert; counter surveillance training; proficient in covert communications; jump qualified; expert in unarmed combat; expert in small arms and automatic weapons. I could go on and on, Belle, but as your father I know you better than most, so I won't. And as much as I hate doing this, I have to place my daughter in harm's way."

Her expression remained almost blank, with just the hint of an arched brow. "Will I be able to choose a partner?"

'No.'

“Why?”

“We have already chosen one for you.”

She took in a deep breath. “Damn, Dad.”

“I considered it prudent,” he said, “to have an outsider join up with you.”

Sinclair shrugged. “It’s your party Dad, so far.”

Just then, a knock came from the door, and Mary peeked her head in. “Sir, the second person is here,” she said. “Should I send him in?”

“Please do.”

She watched as the man walked forward and stopped in front of her father’s desk.

The man was a lean individual with a tanned face, wearing a black two-piece business suit with a white shirt, no tie. He seemed to be well muscled as suggested by the bulging outline of his suit jacket; a very stocky chest, she thought. He had long blond hair tapered at the back, about her age and tall, not as tall as her father—but not by much.

“Sir,” he said. “I’m Agent Tom Price, reporting.”

She noticed as he spoke he had a Mid-western accent, maybe she guessed, from Minnesota somewhere. And the Agent bit wasn’t lost on her either.

The PM said, “Agent, please pull up a chair.”

Agent Price slumped in the vacant chair as he inclined his head toward Sinclair, like he was just maybe noticing her for the first time.

Sinclair shrugged and averted her eyes from him. She already thought he was an asshole—first impressions and all.

“Agent Belle,” the PM said. “Meet Agent Price from military intelligence. He has already been briefed by his command. He will join you in your investigation. Price is a twelve-year deep cover agent and knows his way around the intelligence side of things.” He paused. “Tom Price will help in case your investigation turns up any suspicion of terrorist’s action or information to suspect the act of terrorists. We don’t think it will, but we plan for the worst and hope for the best.”

Price rose and walked over to Sinclair offering his hand, which she took. He smiled. She didn’t. She glanced back at her father and saw a faint smile play across his face.

Now she felt a little annoyance that was aimed at her father.

Her father asked. “Well, ah, now will you proceed?”

Agent Price said, “Well sir—”

“I was speaking to my daughter, Agent Price. Not you.”

“Yes sir, oh . . . your daughter, sir. Geeze, I didn’t—”

“Relax agent.”

Agent Sinclair was smiling as her father turned his gaze on her.

“Yes sir,” she said. “Well you mentioned the fact that the perpetrators acted professionally. Well, as you know, Father, professional hits or snatch jobs are the hardest to investigate and to close, because of the anonymous nature of the murders. The usual rules like motive and relations to victim don’t apply. So, I would like to visit the crimes scenes and get a feel of the areas, see what I can dig up first. Then I’d like to interview the parents and take it from there.”

“Good. You two get going then,” the Colonel said. “And I’m the only one you report to. All chain of command starts and ends with me. That goes with you too, Agent Price. No one, I repeat no one is to know we are investigating. And no outside agency’s are to be contacted for any reason, unless it comes through me. Is that clear?”

Sinclair stood. “Yes sir.”

Agent Tom Price also stood and snapping the fingers on his left hand said, “Um, what about my—?”

The Colonel turned to face him and stared into his soul, “No one, Agent Price!”

And the Colonel added, “The German authorities have given us full rein on this investigation. They have offered their help in any way if we have need of it.”

“One more thing, Agent Sinclair,” the PM said, staring at his daughter. “Do what has to be done.”

Agent Jacqueline Belle Sinclair nodded.

The man in military uniform glanced at the door which led to the Provost Marshal’s office just down the hallway.

He watched as he saw two people, a man and a woman, whom he identified as the Provost Marshal’s daughter, CID Agent Jacqueline Belle Sinclair, and the other he suspected of being Agent Tom Price from MI step out of the office. Then, he palmed his cell phone, and surreptitiously pointed the camera at the pair and snapped their photo.

Then, dialing a predetermined number on his cell phone, he waited and let it ring three times, hung up and dialed once again and waited for it to be picked up at the other end.

*“Alpha here, report please.”*

He said. “Made contact with both agents coming out of the PM’s office. They have placed both of them on the case. The bug in the PM’s office came in loud and clear.”

Alpha said, *“Good. We knew they would put someone on the case. Get your men to shadow them and have them report to me.”*

“Roger that Sir.”

END