

CHAPTER 1



The woman stood half-naked in front of the window.
Unsuspecting.

From where he crouched in the tropical vegetation, Cain Jones adjusted the focus of the binoculars. Mrs. Reid still wore her sleepwear—a pair of French cut, lacy panties—but she'd donned a shirt. The unbuttoned shirt draped artfully over her slender figure. A kiss of fabric covered her nipples and the hem teased the under-curve of her ass. The darker shade of her areolas showed like blurry-edged shadows behind the finely woven material. A sensual hint and a heated guess. So much revealed, and, yet, so little.

Cain's gaze moved down to the toned muscles of her stomach and the long, shapely legs before he sought out her face, again. Her silver-blond, short-cropped hair was bed-messy. The color of the shirt reflected the cornflower-color of her eyes—an unusual mix of blue and violet. The only telltale signs of her age were the fine lines at the corner of her eyes and the deeper ones etched around her mouth. At forty-five, Mrs. Reid kept her body in top shape. No plastic surgery or Botox. Hard exercise for an hour each day.

She brought a mug to her mouth. A pale shade of pink, her lips made a striking contrast to her sun-kissed skin. Like every morning, she sipped her coffee in front of the window overlooking the sea. Steam curled above the mug, misting up the glass in front of her face. In that moment, she resem-

bled the subject in *Pure Love* by Csaba Markus, one of his favorite paintings. With the open shirt ends framing her body in a casually sophisticated way, she looked like a partially unwrapped gift. Her shoulders rose and fell, her lips parting on an inaudible sigh. That sigh would sound husky, like when she tossed in her sheets. That silky skin would smell like patchouli flowers. He knew, because he'd been standing at the foot of her bed for fourteen nights in a row, watching her struggle with her nightmares.

As for what was going through her mind, he didn't need binoculars to read her. She was a complex cocktail of interwoven emotions, fear and worry always on the forefront. Discerning her exact thoughts was harder than they were supposed to be. She'd pulled up an effective barrier around herself to the extent he'd never experienced. What would he find when he broke into her ever-elusive mind? Would it be a mirror of her external beauty, or would it be filled with the darkness that defined her husband?

She blew on the mug, stirring the vapor. Melancholy radiated around her. Before he could get a deeper inclination of her mood, she turned and padded through the open-space living area toward the hallway door. She was heading for the gym. After a strenuous workout in a sports bra and leggings, she'd hit the shower. He could slip around the house to where the glass-encased bathroom would give him a perfect view—she never closed the damn blinds on any of the windows—but spying on her in the shower wasn't necessary for the information he was gathering.

Putting the binoculars away, Cain straightened. It was only seven, but his shirt already clung to his skin. He took a drink of water, gathered his backpack, and hiked back to the beach. At the shore, he used the hidden rope to abseil down the cliff. A boat was anchored in the small cove. He dumped his bag inside, started the engine, and took off to sea. Other boat taxis had already started operating. The noise of his engine wouldn't be suspicious to the sole inhabitant of the old Portuguese mansion standing on the hill of what used to be a coffee plantation. The once green sugarcane and coffee trees had been stripped to make way for the streets of the Santa Teresa suburb. The bohemian neighborhood consisted of an odd mixture of dilapidated and fully restored homes that gave evidence of the old-world wealth that had once defined Rio de Janeiro.

Cain pulled into the harbor of the Copacabana Beach and secured the boat. Josselin was leaning on the jetty rail, his dark hair tied in a ponytail

and shining glossily in the sun. He straightened when Cain approached. Wordlessly, they made their way to the street where Josselin had parked the SUV. With Cain dressed in white linen and Josselin in black leather, they stood out among the early street vendors dressed in T-shirts, shorts, and Havaianas flip-flops.

“We look more like chess pawns than holidaymakers,” Cain said. “We need to blend.”

Josselin lifted an eyebrow. “You mean disguise ourselves with beachwear?”

Cain got into the passenger side of the vehicle. “And scooters.”

Chuckling, Josselin started the engine. “Maya will be pleased.”

Josselin steered them through the winding streets to the house they rented in Leblon. The rest of the team were up and about, each busy with his allocated task.

“Team meeting,” Cain called as he made his way through the cool interior of the house to the games room they’d set up for their meetings.

Lann and Sean were already there, studying a hologram of last night’s recording. Mrs. Olivia Reid was tangled in her sheets, one leg thrown over the white pillow. Not liking his team members’ eyes roaming her exposed skin, he shut down the graphic from the control on his wrist pad.

One after the other, the rest of the members filed into the room—Josselin, Clelia, Maya, Ivan, Sara, and Sky.

When they were all seated, Cain asked, “Anything new?”

“Nothing via satellite,” Maya said. “Vegetation’s too dense for an aerial view.”

Lann activated a 3D image of Olivia’s house. “I’ve managed to dig up the original blueprints.” He turned the image to give them a view from all sides and aimed a laser pointer at the basement level. “A three hundred-yard tunnel connects the main house to the old slave dungeon.”

“I haven’t noticed any doors in the basement.”

“Behind here.” Lann pointed at a wooden wall panel.

“I followed Olivia to a market yesterday afternoon,” Clelia said. “She bought vegetables and had a coffee at a street café before returning home. After that, she worked in her study for two hours, cooked a meal, dined alone, and read a book in the lounge until bedtime.”

“No calls, no emails,” Sean said. “She didn’t scan the phones or computers, so your bugs are still safe.”

“How about you, Cain?” Josselin asked. “Any new info?”

Cain massaged his neck. “Nothing.” He turned to Lann. “What about the access to the tunnel?”

“From what our electronic scan indicates, the door is secured with a type pad and fingerprint recognition software.”

“Can we override it?”

“Unlikely,” Maya replied. “You’ll have to mind-read the code and cut off Olivia’s finger.”

“Or get her to open the door for you,” Sky said.

“We don’t know what’s down there for sure,” Cain mused. “It might just be an old, empty prison.”

“I doubt it,” Josselin said. “If our infrared can’t penetrate it, it must be reinforced, and it won’t be reinforced for no good reason.”

“I checked for animals.” Sara pulled up an image of three bullmastiffs. “There are only three guard dogs in the neighbor’s yard. Easy as pie to handle them.”

“Do we move in?” Josselin asked.

“Not until we know more.” Cain studied the image of the house. “I prefer to keep our presence hidden for as long as possible. It gives us the advantage of surprise. Talking of which, we’re holidaymakers. Get yourselves some swimming gear and swap the SUV’s for scooters.”

“I’m starting to like this mission,” Maya said.

“No scooters and action for you.” Cain got to his feet. “Not while you’re pregnant.”

“You’re not seriously demoting me to admin?”

“I promised Tim. Ivan, any news from Eve?”

“Still nothing.” Ivan sounded tense. “The tests look normal. Who’s on day call?”

“I’ll be watching the house,” Josselin said.

“I want to call Katherine to see how things are at home,” Lann said. “Anyone who wants to speak to their children or partners is welcome to stay.”

A chorus of agreement sounded. With the hasty departure from Thomas’ birthday party, the team had left their families at Lann and Kather-

ine's house in Santiago while they chased after their elusive archenemy in Brazil.

"I'm going to catch a few hours of sleep." Cain rubbed his eyes. "Wake me if anything important comes up."

Josselin grabbed his shoulder. "I'll do night duty. You haven't slept four hours straight in two weeks."

"I'm good."

Before Josselin could object, he left for his room. Letting anyone else watch over Olivia while she slept naked didn't sit right with him. The idea unearthed something animalistic in his chest, something that made him want to fight, claw, and mark his territory. It was the challenge she posed. The minute he cracked her mind, he was out of there. He wouldn't stand at the foot of her bed studying her like some sick lunatic once he'd broken through her defenses and stolen her thoughts. When he owned all her secrets, she'd be the instrument he needed to catch her bastard husband.



Olivia poured a second cup of coffee and carried it out to the balcony. When you'd lost everything you loved, life had a tendency of losing its meaning, but when you lived in constant fear, always looking over your shoulder, you learned to take back some meaning and own your pain. You learned to take nothing for granted and to find joy in the small pleasures, such as sipping a cup of the finest Brazilian coffee while enjoying a view of the ocean. The air was warm, but with the sea breeze it was pleasant in the shade of the bougainvillea.

She sipped the strong brew and let her gaze rest on the horizon, but she tasted and saw nothing. Today, she couldn't find peace in the moment. Goose bumps broke out over her arms. She had a creepy feeling of being watched, the same feeling she'd been having for a month. There was no evidence to back the notion, only the hair that would prick at the nape of her neck or the shiver that would ripple down her spine. The house was on a hill, the windows on angles not visible from the neighbors' houses. Still, she'd lived through enough to trust her sixth sense. Something wasn't right.

There was someone out there.

It was a given that they'd come for her, *they* being one of her husband's

men or one of his many enemies. It didn't matter who. The only question was when. She took another swallow, waiting for the caffeine to take effect. Normally, caffeine had a calming effect on her. It woke her mind, but stilled her jitters. The potent drink had lost its magic, today. Uneasy, she ventured back into the air-conditioned interior to start her chores. She changed the bed linen, loaded the washing machine, and cleaned the bathroom. She was busy with the vacuuming when her wrist pad pinged with an incoming call. She went rigid. The aftertaste of coffee burned acidic in her throat. There was no choice but to accept the call. As she did so, her husband's face appeared on the screen.

Her greeting was neither friendly, nor hostile. She'd perfected a neutral tone. "Godfrey."

"Good morning, darling." He used the term of endearment mockingly. "How's the weather in Rio?"

"Always the same."

"Mm." His smile was smug. "What have you been up to?"

It had been a month since his last call. In a month, many things could've happened, but not much he wouldn't know of, seeing that the house was under camera surveillance and his satellite tracked every step she took outside of the house.

"Nothing new."

"I'm coming home."

She swallowed past the thickness that constricted her throat. "When?"

"Please," he leaned closer to the screen, "don't sound so excited. You may combust with happiness."

"I just want to make sure there's enough food."

"Soon."

Always evasive.

"Be a darling and clean the lab."

She went cold. "I thought you were done with all that."

"Now why would you think something so silly?"

"I've lost Adam." As every time she mentioned her son, her voice broke a little. She inhaled deeply to regain her composure. "You lost Lily and Nicolas. Really, Godfrey, was it worth our children?"

"Yes," he hissed. "It's worth a whole lot more." A mistrusting look came over his face. "How's my tracker?"

She touched the cut above the hairline in her nape. A tremble ran over her body as she recalled the scene of him holding her down, his doctor injecting her with something, and waking up with a few stitches and an object inserted into her neck. Her finger ran over the tiny bump under her skin. “Fine.”

“No infections?”

“No.”

“Good. You haven’t tried to remove it, again, have you?”

Her gut clenched in alarm. Horror images filled her mind—a family, including two young children, murdered in cold blood.

“No,” she said quickly.

“Perhaps you need a reminder of what will happen.”

“Godfrey, no.” She pinched her eyes shut. “Please.”

“Open your eyes,” he said in a singsong voice.

She tried to force back her tears, but they wouldn’t stop. “Please, I beg you, don’t do it.”

“Ah, but it’s already done. I’m always prepared, you see.”

No, please God. No more. She clutched her stomach, rocking herself.

“Keep your eyes open, darling, or another family dies.”

She had no choice but to watch as his face was replaced with a video clip. A masked man with a knife, breaking into a house. Silent sobs wracked her body as he walked through the dark house, up a flight of stairs.

“This one’s for you, baby,” Godfrey cooed.

Not on her head, please.

A door in the hallway. The man pushed it open. A baby. Oh, God. She shivered, her breakfast churning in her stomach. The knife. Oh, God, oh God, oh God. So much blood. Olivia pushed a fist against her mouth to still the sounds tearing from her chest. The poor mother. God have mercy on her. The man went for the mother, then the husband. No matter how much she tried to tune out of the moment, she couldn’t help but react to the senseless, evil violence. When the video ended, she was hyperventilating with shock.

“Want to know their names?” Godfrey asked in a sickly sympathetic tone.

She took a few deep breaths and wiped her eyes. “Always.”

“Amy and Henry. The baby was Emma.”

As with all the other random victims, she imprinted the names in

her mind.

“Keep your hands off the tracker and no more people will have to die. If you commit suicide, I’ll take out a whole city. You know me well enough to know I don’t bluff, so keep safe, baby.”

That much was true. The one thing Godfrey didn’t believe in was bluffing.

“Soon.” He blew a kiss at her and cut the connection.

She ripped the wrist pad from her arm and flung it aside as if it could rip the images from her mind. Rushing to the bathroom, she took another shower, scrubbing until her skin hurt. She couldn’t do this, any longer. If there was someone out there set on taking her life, would it be such a bad thing?



A quarter moon illuminated Cain’s path as he climbed over the rocky outcrop between the beach and Olivia’s house. There wasn’t enough light to find his way without the risk of tumbling off the cliff. For a terrain this rough, he needed help from the night vision goggles. Quietly, he moved across the lawn and climbed the steps to the front door. Thanks to Sara, who was working from the van parked five miles away, the dogs next door didn’t make a sound.

Punching in the code, Cain deactivated the alarm. It hadn’t been difficult to steal the code. He’d spied on Olivia with the Eye in the Sky, the team’s satellite, when she’d entered it. From in or outside the house, it would appear as if the alarm was functioning normally. The camera feed was replaced with the satellite recordings he’d taken of a sleeping Olivia. To the outside world, he was invisible in Olivia Reid’s house.

Tonight, he went straight for the basement, easily locating the wooden panel with the hidden door. Lann was right. It was impossible to open without the code and a fingerprint. If Godfrey’s lab was behind that door, they had precious little time to break in. It had taken a month to find Mrs. Reid after an informant had spotted her in Rio. A month too long. Godfrey already had six of the forbidden arts cells. With the seventh, he could render himself not only immortal, but he’d also be able to clone, populating the world with Godfrey replicas. They had to find him before he succeeded.

Cain intended using Mrs. Reid in his quest. He wasn't going to cut off her finger as Maya had suggested. There were other ways of forcing her to comply. Certain there wasn't another way into the tunnel, he made his way to the bedroom.

The woman's naked form was splayed out on the mattress. She was lying on her stomach, her long legs on top of the sheets. A flawless back and the firm globes of her ass were exposed. With one knee bent and her leg drawn up, a dark patch between her thighs hinted at the treasure sheltered between.

He was a patient man. He'd bide his time.

Godfrey had told Cain's chiromancist in Amsterdam that his wife held the six cells. It was only a matter of time before Godfrey showed up with the seventh. In the meantime, Cain planned on learning everything he could about Mrs. Reid, in particular why she was the only person whose thoughts he couldn't read. Yes, it was only a matter of time before he'd crack the code of her complicated mind that never seemed to shut down. Even now, she stirred with restless dreams. What they were, he couldn't discern. She'd pulled a veil over her thoughts so effectively it sheltered even her subconscious state. All he could tell was that they weren't pleasant.

She changed positions, turning on her side. Her arm obscured her breast, but the underside of the shapely curve peeked out. His footsteps made no sound on the carpet as he walked to the side of the bed. The smell of patchouli reached his nostrils. She moaned, the deep sound of her voice vibrating with distress. A frown pleated her brow. He reached out, tracing a finger just above the line between her eyebrows. She stirred some more.

Open your mind to me, pretty Olivia.

A closed book. He changed the direction of his hand, capturing a strand of hair between his fingers. Damp. She'd gone to bed without drying her hair again. He rubbed the rebellious curl. Silky. Sometimes, she dried her hair straight and combed it back. At other times, she left the curls to bounce around her face. She moaned and swiped at her head. He had no choice but to let the strand slip through his fingers. Turning on her back with her head to the side, she lifted one arm above her head and rested the other on her stomach. Cain stood perfectly still. His eyes trailed over her, from her straight nose and full lips to her strong chin and slender neck. Her collarbone made a beautiful embossed pattern under her skin, a vein throbbing steadily in the hollow just above. Her breasts were firm and round with

small, honey-colored areolas and delicate nipples. Her ribcage tapered to a narrow waist, and her hipbones formed an alluring valley for her flat stomach and the short-trimmed triangle of hair that lay lower. The trim exposed the shape of her pussy lips and the slit that parted them. Every inch of her was covered in sinfully smooth, unblemished skin.

Ogling her in her sleep was no different than spying on her in the shower, but he couldn't tear his gaze away. His dick grew thick and hot. The erection didn't surprise him. How long it lasted did. She had a strange effect on him. He'd had many hard-ons after his wife's death, but he'd eased them effectively with a hand job. Something told him a hand job wasn't going to do for this ache that persisted in her presence.

Carefully, he pulled the sheet from the foot of the bed up to her shoulders, as if hiding her lustrous physique could eliminate his need. They shared a dark, one-sided relationship. How could they not? After studying her for the better part of a month he knew her as someone who met her in normal circumstances couldn't know the reclusive Mrs. Reid in a year. She kept to herself, had no friends, and almost no contact with the outside world. She got up every morning at six-thirty for her first cup of coffee and hit the gym in the basement level of her house at seven. At eight, she had a shower, followed by a breakfast of fruit at nine. From ten to twelve she did the laundry and cleaned the house. From twelve to one, she ate a salad on the balcony. In the afternoon, she painted in her studio. He'd researched all the paintings she'd ever exhibited and sold. They were all dark and disturbing. At sunset, she enjoyed a cocktail in the lounge or on the veranda, and then she'd cook while listening to music before retiring to bed with a book. Whatever lived in her head was haunting. Her dreams and paintings were evidence of that.

Since he'd first broken in, he'd been through the house from top to bottom searching for the six forbidden cells. Sooner than later, she'd have to give him what he wanted or he'd have to force it. Hurting her wasn't something he looked forward to. She was an enigma he failed to understand. He admired her lonely perseverance, artistic mind, and brilliant talent that had won her several art awards. Everything she did, she did flat-out, which was why she had a body most young girls would die for. He admired the self-control he sensed, and pondered the sensuality he felt hidden under the layers of her self-induced isolation.

Who are you, Olivia?

He lingered another few minutes, and when her mind didn't open up for him, he left the same way he'd come.

Yes, he'd bide his time. Just a little bit longer.



In the dusty light washing through the stained-glass windows, Olivia knelt in front of the altar. The church interior was cool in the heat of noon. A dark veil hid her face, even if the church was always empty at this hour. She lit three candles—one each for Amy, Henry, and baby Emma. Claspng her hands together, she said a silent prayer. Then she lit another three and prayed for Adam, Lily, and Nicolas. It was probably wise to light one for herself—her time was running out, after all—but she didn't deserve the mercy or forgiveness that went with prayer. Glancing over her shoulder, she ensured she was still alone.

She pushed to her feet and dusted her knees. After making the sign of the cross, she ventured back into the bleached-out daylight and heat. On her way home, she stopped at the market to stock up on fresh produce. There would be consequences if she weren't prepared when Godfrey arrived. Back at the house, she went for a run on the treadmill, pushing her body to the brink of collapsing before having a shower and a salad for dinner.

To put off the nightmares for another couple of hours, she curled up in bed to read, but the words didn't sink in. Her mind wasn't on the poems. Giving up, she shut the book and turned off the lights. If she were lucky, sleep would take her for a few hours.

Sometime after dosing off, she woke with a start. A glance at the backlit alarm clock on the nightstand told her it was just after midnight. She couldn't be sure what had woken her, but her gut waved red warning flags at her. With unquestionable certainty, she became aware of a presence in the room. Her scalp prickled, and her hands turned clammy. Her heart worked painfully, every beat a punch in her ribcage. With the moon being in its first quarter, it was too dark to see into the shadows that obscured the corners of the room, but she could feel another human being's energy. Swallowing her fear, she sat up. Slowly, the shape of the shadows changed, morphing into the outline of a man.