



CHAPTER 70

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

AT THE NEST COMMAND CENTER, Pete Rios stood with his arms folded across his chest, his eyes once more focused on a flat-screen monitor that hung on the wall. On the screen were video images from a camera mounted atop the pistol of a CIA agent. The camera tracked the agent's path as he moved up the steps, then down the hall toward an apartment door. A hand checked the doorknob, then a foot kicked open the door. The camera moved from side to side as the man entered, checked the hallway and turned the corner. Others rushed past him and soon the room was filled with people. The sound of their voices crackled through the command center from a speaker that hung near the monitor.

"Nothing here," someone whispered.

"Bedroom's clear," a voice called.

"Are we in Innsbruck or some trash house in Reno?" Rios shook his head in disbelief. "Did we confirm this is Malenkov's apartment?"

"Yes, sir," Jeff Howell answered. "That's his apartment."

Rios threw up his hands in frustration. "And wasn't he supposed to be there?"

"Yes, sir," Howell replied. "CIA assured us he was inside the apartment."

“That’s right.” Rios turned in Howell’s direction. “Didn’t they say they had a visual on him?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I hate working with these guys,” Rios grouched. “They’re worse than the FBI.”

A voice came from the speaker by the screen. “Door was locked. No sign of forced entry. Windows are all closed and locked.”

“There was no forced entry?” Rios yelled at the screen. “You guys just kicked down the door.” He threw his hands in the air once more and pointed with his finger. “*You* were the forced entry.” He turned to the operator seated at a workstation near the center of the room. “Okay.” He ran his hands through his hair and took a deep breath. “Okay. Who’s controlling this team?”

“Langley.”

“Who at Langley?”

“Winston Smith,” the operator replied.

“All right. Tell Winston Smith I want them to collect whatever they can find. Computers, notes, papers, documents. Do a complete inventory of the place. Did they find a computer?”

The operator pointed to an image on the monitor. “There’s one sitting right there on that desk.”

Rios glanced in that direction. “Have them take it to the CIA station in Berlin. I’m sending someone over there to analyze it. I want to know everything that’s ever been on that hard drive.” Rios moved to a nearby desk. “And make sure nobody touches the power switch on that computer until our guy gets there.”

Suddenly there were shouts from the speaker. On the screen, men hurried down the hallway. The camera jostled up and down. There were images of the floor, then the ceiling, then the wall. Rios shouted at the screen again. “Can we see what’s going on? Don’t they know we need to see?” He kicked a trashcan and sent it tumbling across the room. “What’s the point of having the camera if they don’t know how to use it?”

“There,” someone called. “We can see it now.”

Rios looked up at the screen. Images of a bedroom appeared, with a woman lying in bed. She had a terrified look on her face and she held a comforter close, pulling it up to her neck.

“She’s saying something. Can we hear it?”

The woman’s voice, with a thick European accent, came from the speaker. “Wer sind Sie?” She sounded scared and nervous. “Was wollen Sie?”

“That’s German,” Rios frowned. “Anyone speak German?” He glanced around the room. “Anyone?”

Richard Weavil spoke up. “She’s saying, ‘Who are you? What do you want?’”

“Yeah,” Rios replied. “That’s what I’d like to know. Who are you, lady?” On the screen, a man appeared beside the bed. Rios pointed to the screen. “Where did she come from?” When no one answered, Rios shouted in frustration, “Can we at least get a translation of this conversation?”

The man near the edge of the bed spoke to her. “Who are you?”

The voice of a translator answered on the audio stream. “I am ... Irina Spechlovich.”

“Why are you here?”

“I stay here ... when I am in town.”

“Where is Malenkov?”

She shook her head. “I do not know any Malenkov.”

“You’re sleeping in his bed.” The man’s voice was stern and insistent. “Where is he?”

“Okay,” she nodded. “I know him, but I have not seen him.”

“When was the last time you saw him?”

“Several weeks ago. I have been away. I just got back into town last night. He was not here when I arrived. I assumed he would be, but no.”

Rios turned to the operator. “Tell them to hold her at a secure location.”

“You want the Innsbruck police to take her into custody?”

T H E P R O T O C O L S

“No,” Rios replied sharply. “Don’t tell Austrian authorities anything about it. Have the CIA hold her at one of their safe houses.”

“Very well.” The operator relayed the message. A moment later she caught Rios’ attention. “Langley has a safe house. Who do you want to conduct the interrogation?”

“I don’t want an interrogation right now. I want her out of the way so she can’t contact Malenkov. We’ll have the FBI check out her background. I want to know more about her before we let them interrogate her. Tell them just to hold on to her until they hear from us.”